

Increase in National Guard Deployments

September 2026

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Key Takeaways

- + Beginning in June 2025, President Trump ordered the National Guard and other federal law enforcement agencies to conduct patrols and serve as an increased law enforcement presence in cities the administration claimed were high-crime locations.
- + The available evidence from studies in six cities shows no significant effect of guard deployments on violent crime and homicide, though there is some evidence of deterrent effects on opportunistic crimes, including those that are auto-related.
- + Crime, especially homicide, was already declining throughout 2025 in the majority of U.S. cities, including those with and without guard deployments.

Theoretical Mechanism

The potential crime-control logic of National Guard deployments is centered squarely within deterrence theory, which would suggest that an increased presence of law enforcement would serve both a specific and general deterrence function. Specific deterrence could occur through the arrest and incapacitation of offenders, while general deterrence could occur if would-be offenders perceived an increased likelihood of detection and punishment.

Historical Context and Established Evidence

Historically, the National Guard has been activated when “disaster strikes in the homeland” to “serve at a moment’s notice to protect life and property in our communities.”¹ Famous deployments include the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the response to Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, and the Martin Luther King, Jr. assassination riot responses in 1968. The National Guard also supported states with their early responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

The Trump Administration’s use of the National Guard to deal with crime in certain American cities was an uncommon activation. Beginning in the summer of 2025, President Trump ordered or sought to deploy the National Guard and other federal law enforcement agencies in six cities: Chicago, Los Angeles, Memphis, TN, New Orleans,

Portland, OR, and Washington, D.C. Only one of those cities—Memphis—was ranked among the nation’s ten most violent cities at the time, according to Stateline.²

The purpose and scope of these deployments varied across cities. In Los Angeles and Chicago, deployments were closely tied to immigration enforcement and protests; in Washington, D.C., Memphis, and New Orleans, they were more explicitly framed around crime, public order, or public safety. The deployments also varied in timing, duration, legal status, and the extent to which guard personnel operated alongside other federal law enforcement agencies.

In theory, National Guard deployments could reduce crime by increasing the perceived certainty of detection or by supplementing local and federal law enforcement capacity. Whether that theory applies depends in part on where guard personnel were deployed, what activities they performed, and whether those activities were connected to the places or behaviors most associated with serious violence. Yet, given the situational nature of homicide, it is difficult to expect guard presence alone to decrease homicide, either nationally, locally, or under certain conditions. Prior research has not found that police presence alone consistently affects homicide to any large degree.³

Because National Guard deployments for crime control are uncommon, there is limited direct evidence on their effects on homicide. The closest relevant evidence comes from research on deterrence, visible police presence, hot spots policing, federal law enforcement surges, and other supplemental enforcement strategies. That research suggests that targeted, well-implemented enforcement strategies can reduce some types of crime under certain conditions, especially when they are focused on high-risk places, people, or behaviors.⁴ However, those findings do not necessarily generalize to National Guard deployments, particularly when deployments are not concentrated in places, activities, or people most directly connected to serious violence.

Assessing the recent deployments is also difficult because public information about the number of personnel, precise deployment locations, duration, and day-to-day activities is incomplete and inconsistent across cities. Some reporting indicates that guard personnel were concentrated in particular areas or assigned to specific activities, but detailed operational information has not been released publicly, likely for operational or security reasons. This limits the ability to determine whether deployments were positioned in ways that could plausibly affect homicide.

Recent Evidence and Relevance to Current Trends

Given the recent nature of guard deployment and the time it takes to gather the data, conduct research, and publish it, there has been very little research undertaken to assess the impact of guard deployments on crime and homicide.

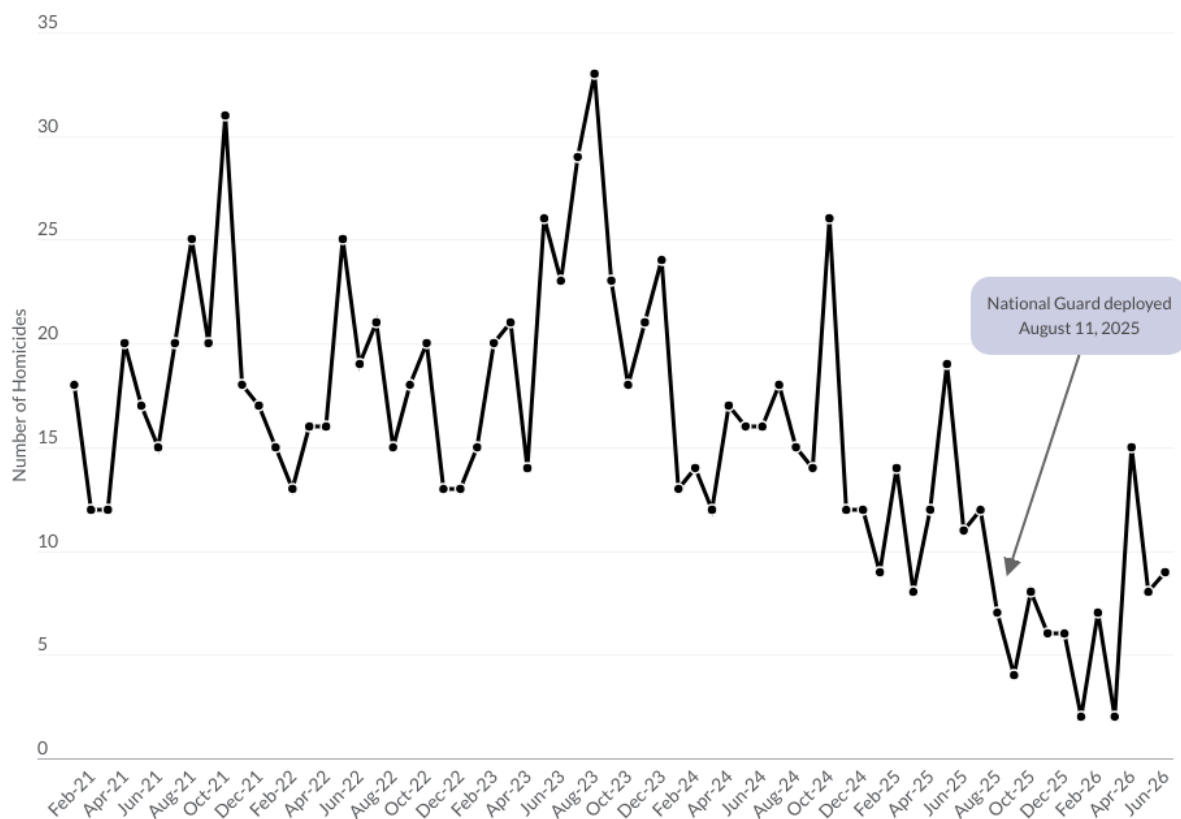
In June 2026, the Niskanen Center conducted a study examining crime in Washington, D.C., with a focus on the August 2025 deployment of about 2,000 uniformed National Guard personnel.⁵ The report found that deployment was associated with reductions in some property crimes and may have accelerated the already declining crime trends. However, because deployment was concentrated in tourist areas as opposed to high-crime areas, the report found no evidence that deployment affected violent crime. The authors did not conduct a separate analysis of homicide.

Jeff Asher examined crime trends in Memphis following a deployment that started in late September 2025 and included more than 150 National Guard personnel as well as roughly 1,500 federal personnel from other agencies.⁶ Although the analysis was descriptive and did not include statistical analysis, it showed that crime was already declining before the deployment, that there was virtually no change in murder levels after the deployment, and that the deployment may have accelerated declines for some crime types that were already falling, especially shootings.

In perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of the effect of guard deployments on crime, the Center for American Progress conducted an interrupted time series analysis across several cities (Los Angeles, Memphis, Washington, D.C., and Portland, OR)⁷ using weekly and monthly data between January 2023 and February 2026 from the Real-Time Crime Index, Gun Violence Archive, and officially reported city data sources.⁸ After performing a series of analyses, and with one minor exception, the totality of the results across all methodologies show that the deployments had no or very small effects on crime outcomes, including homicide, overall violent crime, and gun victimization.

The limited research that exists suggests that National Guard deployments had little effect on most crime types—especially violent crime and homicide—but may have accelerated declines in some opportunistic crimes, such as auto-related offenses. Importantly, crime was already declining in cities both with and without troop deployment, such that the U.S. crime decline, especially homicide, was a rather universal phenomenon.⁹ Figure 1 shows the monthly homicide trend before, during, and after the guard deployment in Washington, D.C.

Figure 1. Monthly Homicides in Washington, DC, January 2021 – June 2026



Note: Data are subject to revision. Source: Council on Criminal Justice.

Emerging Questions and Future Directions

Given the limited research to date, much remains uncertain. First, since deployments varied across cities in timing, scale, and coordination, it is difficult to isolate a single “National Guard effect.” Second, it is unclear whether there was any potential crime displacement due to deployments. Third, it is unclear the extent to which the deployments led to differences in reporting victimization to the authorities. Fourth, the effect of the deployment on homicide has only been systematically studied in one city or a few cities. Finally, it remains unknown whether deployments affected perceived safety, trust in law enforcement, or community cooperation, though there is some evidence that high-profile incidents in Minneapolis were met with backlash against other federal law enforcement, specifically U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents.

Future research should make use of localized data to better isolate the effect of National Guard deployments in specific locations in the treated cities, and to focus on both reported and unreported crime. It should also assess the extent of involvement across

the range of federal law enforcement and National Guard deployments to examine their impacts on reported crimes, arrests, calls for service, victimization, and community perceptions. In addition to assessing standard criminal justice outcomes, future work should include cost-benefit analyses in treated cities, as was undertaken by the Niskanen Center. That analysis showed the large cost associated with the Washington, D.C., deployment, as well as ancillary disparate impacts on businesses and communities.

Prepared for CCJ Homicide Decline Research Summit

The United States has experienced a sharp decline in homicide since the middle of 2022. This dramatic and largely unexpected shift has sparked a high-stakes debate about what is driving it. To examine the plausibility of dozens of potential factors, CCJ convened a two-day summit in September 2026 with about 50 researchers from criminology, economics, public health, psychology, sociology, and related disciplines. This brief was prepared to inform discussions during the convening.

Endnotes

¹ National Guard. (n.d.). *About the guard*. <https://www.nationalguard.mil/About-the-Guard/>

² Watford, A. (2025, October 17). Trump isn't sending troops to cities with highest crime rates, data shows. *Stateline*. <https://stateline.org/2025/10/17/trump-isnt-sending-troops-to-cities-with-highest-crime-rates-data-shows/>

³ Spelman, W. (2017). The murder mystery: Police effectiveness and homicide. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 33, 859-886. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-016-9315-8>; Rosenfeld, R., Fornango, R., & Rengifo, A.F. (2007). The impact of order maintenance policing on New York City homicide and robbery rates: 1988-2001. *Criminology*, 45, 355-384. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2007.00081.x>

⁴ Sherman, L. W. (2013). The rise of evidence-based policing: Targeting, testing, and tracking. *Crime & Justice*, 42, Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.1086/670819>

⁵ Battistin, E., Hahn, R., Pérez-Dávila, S., & Sunn, B. (2026). *Washington, D.C.'s crime decline and its lessons for American policing*. Niskanen Center. <https://www.niskanencenter.org/washington-dc-crime-decline-and-its-lessons-for-american-policing/>

⁶ Asher, J. (2025, November 10). *Walking in Memphis crime data*. Jeff-Alytics. <https://jasher.substack.com/p/walking-in-memphis-crime-data>

⁷ New Orleans was also included, but since the deployment did not occur until December 2025, there was not enough post-deployment data available for analysis.

⁸ Hall, C. (2026). *Interrupted time series analysis of the effect on crime of the National Guard deployments to American cities*. Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-trump-administrations-1-7-billion-national-guard-deployments-fail-to-reduce-urban-crime/>

⁹ Gelb, A., & Piquero, A.R. (2026, February 19). The top five crime and justice stories of 2025. *Vital City*. <https://www.vitalcitynyc.org/biggest-crime-justice-stories-america-2025/>