

# Analyzing Crime Displacement from Baltimore's Group Violence Reduction Strategy

*Crime and Justice Policy Lab, University of Pennsylvania*

---

## **Executive Summary**

*The University of Pennsylvania's Crime and Justice Policy Lab team investigated the potential for crime displacement associated with strategic violence prevention work using four complementary approaches. Specifically, the analyses were designed to determine whether the focus population moved from the Baltimore Police Department's Western District into adjacent districts as a result of the implementation of the Group Violence Reduction Strategy.*

*The team found no evidence of displacement. This finding is consistent with broader research in the area and prior scientific inquiries on this strategy.*

---

## **Introduction**

Situational crime prevention efforts, such as focused policing programs, that do not address the underlying causes of crime are often criticized as ineffective because they are thought to simply move crime and criminals elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> This effect, known as crime displacement, might take various forms, including: spatial displacement (moving crime to other locations); temporal displacement (to other times); target displacement (to softer or less guarded targets); *modus operandi* displacement (to other tactics); offense displacement (to other types of crime); and perpetrator displacement (to other/new offenders).<sup>2</sup> However, systematic reviews of rigorous evaluations of crime prevention programs in general, and police-led crime reduction efforts in particular, have found that displacement usually does not occur.<sup>3</sup> And, when it does, displacement is limited in scope (i.e., never "one for one"). The reverse of displacement – diffusion of crime control benefits, the unexpected reduction of crimes in locations not directly targeted by the preventive action – seems to be a more likely outcome of crime prevention and focused policing. In particular, a systematic review of focused deterrence evaluations found little evidence of displacement associated with the implementation of these programs with some suggestion of diffusion effects.<sup>4</sup>

In Baltimore City, the Group Violence Reduction Strategy (GVRS), a focused deterrence strategy to reduce group violence, began implementation in the Baltimore Police Department's (BPD) Western District (WD) on January 11, 2022. The strategy directly engages those most intimately involved in and affected by violence, leveraging an intentional collaboration between law enforcement partners, social service providers (Youth Advocate Programs and Roca), and community members, who deliver an anti-violence message to stop the shooting and support that message through focused action. As of September 22, 2022, the strategy has targeted and served over 130 group members and has shown promising results to date – a 26% observed reduction in homicides and non-fatal shootings. However, some skeptics suggest that this strategy is simply displacing these incidents to other districts.<sup>5</sup>

## Methodology

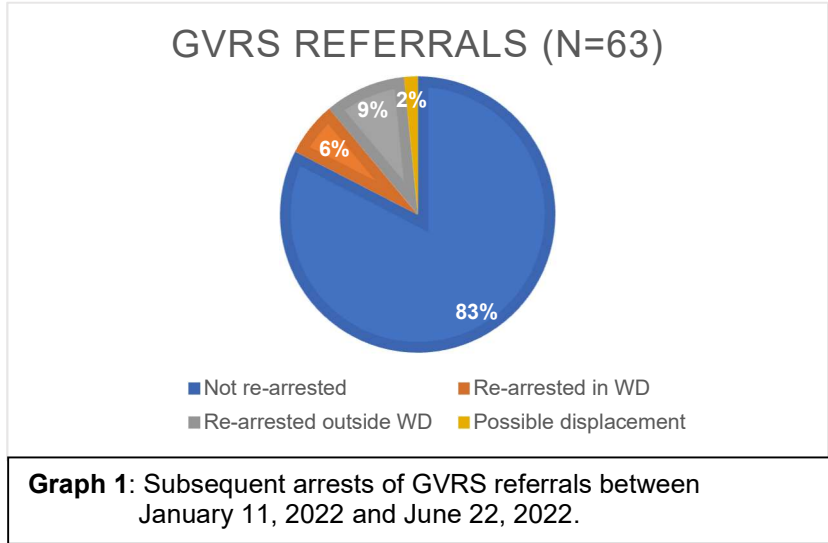
The GVRS is focused on changing the violent gun behaviors of specific people – members of criminally active groups. The University of Pennsylvania’s Crime and Justice Policy Lab (CJP) team designed research strategies to assess whether individuals experiencing the GVRS intervention moved to other districts to continue their violent behavior elsewhere. It is important to note that the CJP team has not yet examined other modes of displacement, such as changes in targets, offense type, or tactics.

To assess the possible presence of spatial displacement, CJP performed the following four complementary analyses:

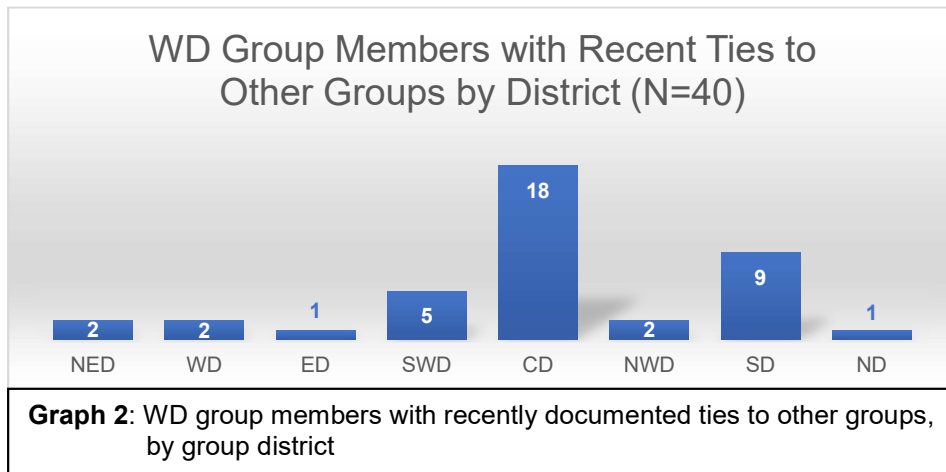
1. **Review of Subsequent Arrests for GVRS Referrals:** First, CJP conducted a review of subsequent arrest records for every service and law enforcement referral in order to examine whether individuals, who were directly touched by the strategy, continued to engage in criminal activities outside of the WD. This analysis was performed using 63 referrals that were originated and completed between January 11, 2022 and June 22, 2022.
2. **Focus Group with BPD Intelligence and Proactive Enforcement Officers on Group Behaviors:** Second, CJP held a focus group with BPD intelligence officers and District Action Team (DAT) representatives with the best street-level intelligence from all districts neighboring the WD – the Northwestern, Northern, Central, Southern, and Southwestern Districts – as well as from the Anti-Crime Section’s Group Violence Unit (ACS/GVU). The purpose was to discuss and share any information that may be indicative of changes in groups’ behaviors, particularly as they relate to where they conduct their criminal activities.
3. **Review of Homicide and Shooting Incidents in Neighboring Districts:** Third, CJP performed a review of homicide and non-fatal shooting cases in districts bordering the Western to determine if any of the incidents involved group-involved victims, suspects, or persons of interest from the WD. Each case involving a group member from the Western was discussed with the assigned detective to determine the circumstances surrounding the case and whether it was indicative of displacement.
4. **Review of Changes in NIBIN Matches between 2021 and 2022:** Fourth, CJP examined year-to-year changes in the number of Integrated Ballistic Information System (IBIS) leads linking the Western District to incidents in other districts via crime gun tracing in the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN). Specifically, changes in yearly counts and year-to-year percent change in total hits connecting WD to another district; total hits that originate in WD and end up in another district; and hits that begin in another district and end up in WD.

## Results

Findings from the first analysis, reviewing arrest records, revealed that out of sixty-three (N=63) referrals from the WD between January 11, 2022 and June 22, 2022, eleven individuals (17%) had been re-arrested after their GVRS contact. Of those eleven individuals, seven (11%) were arrested outside of the WD. A review of the circumstances suggested no evidence of displacement in six of the seven cases (9%). In other words, individuals did not appear to shift their activities to other areas as a result of GVRS implementation. For example, in a few cases, individuals were arrested after being served a warrant at their out-of-district residences. In another, a pursuit that began in the WD resulted in an arrest at a location outside the WD. One case (2%) was undetermined (labeled below in **Graph 1** as “possible displacement”) because it occurred outside of Baltimore City in Catonsville, for which reason it was not possible to investigate the circumstances of the arrest.



In the second analysis, a focus group with BPD intelligence and proactive enforcement officers was convened to review recent changes in BPD’s group intelligence database, *Flowchart*, for possible indications that Western group members were found in other districts in larger numbers after experiencing the GVRS program. CJP identified forty (N=40) WD group members with documented ties to other groups in the Northeastern (N=2), Eastern (N=1), Western (N=2), Northwestern (N=2), Southwestern (N=5), Central (N=18), Northern (N=1) and Southern (N=9) districts,



whose *Flowchart* entries had been edited (either updated or newly added) between January and September 2022 (see **Graph 2** below). All forty individuals were reviewed to determine whether or not these edits denote a shift in their activities to other areas or an increase in their collaborative activities with allied non-WD groups during this period. The session revealed that all forty WD group members had known ties to other groups and BPD districts that preceded

the GVRS intervention. Participants noted that many of these group members have long tended to hang out in more than one location (usually nearby) and/or have associations with more than one group. This does not indicate displacement, but rather captures their usual behavior of moving around various Baltimore neighborhoods. The next analysis examined if they were behaving violently in these alternate locations.

In the third analysis, CJP reviewed all persons associated with 106 homicide and 178 non-fatal shooting cases in contiguous BPD districts – the Northwestern, Central, Southwestern and Southern Districts—between January 1, 2022 and September 1, 2022. Of the 548 people involved in these selected cases, 64% were victims (N=353), 22% were suspects (N=118) and 14% were “persons of interest” in the investigations (N=77). Through consultation with the WD and ACS/GVU intelligence officers, it was determined that there were only two homicide and three non-fatal shooting incidents that took place outside the WD in that time period that also involved a victim (N=3), suspect (N=1), or person of interest (N=2) with known ties to WD groups—a little over 1% of all persons involved in the reviewed cases. Subsequent interviews with the detectives investigating these cases on the circumstances involved suggested that individuals had been frequenting these alternate locations long before the GVRS was implemented in the WD. It is unclear whether additional police attention to the WD increased the amount of time these subjects were spending at these alternate locations or whether the violent event was an unfortunate outcome of long-standing behavior patterns that preceded the intervention. Nevertheless, the minute share of people with ties to the WD involved in the reviewed violent events suggested there was little to no evidence that gun violence in adjacent districts was intensified by violence prevention action in the WD.

Finally, in the fourth analysis, CJP examined year-to-year changes in the number of leads linking the Western District to incidents in other districts between 2021 and 2022. Over the same January 1 – September 26 time period, the total number of IBIS links connecting violent gun crimes to the WD increased by 6% from 152 in 2021 to 161 in 2022. The percentage of IBIS links with guns connected to violent gun crimes originating from the WD and ending up in another district remained essentially the same across the years with 49% of 2021 links and 50% of 2022 links following this pattern. The percentage of IBIS links with guns connected to violent gun crimes originating in another district and ending up in WD also remained essentially the same across the years with 51% of 2021 links and 50% of 2022 links following this pattern. This simple analysis does not support a noteworthy shift in violent gun offending patterns from the WD into other districts.

## **Conclusion**

The preliminary analyses suggest that the GVRS has not been associated with widespread gun violence displaced from the WD into surrounding BPD districts since January 2022. The official data and investigative intelligence used in these analyses represent the best current available information. Like all official criminal justice information and intelligence sources, the information is limited to what the BPD documents in its data systems and what is known to its investigators. For instance, group membership in Baltimore City can be fluid and rapid short-term changes in individual affiliations and collaborations with other groups may not yet be known to the BPD. Nevertheless, these four analyses provide solid

empirical evidence that the January 2022 GVRS implementation did not result in noteworthy changes in WD group behaviors, especially as it relates to group members' criminal activities, including engagement in homicides and non-fatal shootings, in adjacent districts. This is consistent with the broader research in the area and prior scientific inquiries on focused deterrence. The research team will continue to look at this issue through other methodological lenses as the implementation moves forward.

## **Acknowledgements**

The University of Pennsylvania's Crime and Justice Policy Lab would like to thank the Baltimore Police Department and its dedicated personnel for all of their support. We would also like to thank Dr. Cristina Layana of the Crime and Justice Policy Lab team for leading data collection and analysis.

## **References**

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Bowers, Johnson, Guerette, Summers, and Poynton (2011). Spatial displacement and diffusion of benefits among geographically-focused policing initiatives. Campbell Collaboration. <https://www.campbellcollaboration.org/better-evidence/geographically-focused-policing.html>
- <sup>2</sup> Johnson, Guerette, and Bowers (2014). Crime displacement: what we know, what we don't know, and what it means for crime reduction. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11292-014-9209-4>
- <sup>3</sup> Cornish, D. B. (1994). "The Procedural Analysis of Offending and its Relevance for Situational Prevention". in *Crime Prevention Studies*, Vol. 3, ed. R.V. Clarke, Monsey: Criminal Justice Press.; Braga, A. A., Papachristos, A. V., & Hureau, D. M. (2012). The effects of hot spots policing on crime: An updated systematic review and meta-analysis. *Justice Quarterly*, (ahead-of-print), 1–31; Telep, Cody W., David Weisburd, Charlotte E. Gill, Zoe Vitter, Doron Teichman (2014). Displacement of Crime and Diffusion of Crime Control Benefits in Large-Scale Geographic Areas: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Experimental Criminology* (in press).
- <sup>4</sup> Bowers, K., Johnson, S., Guerette, R. T., Summers, L., & Poynton, S. (2011). Spatial Displacement and Diffusion of Benefits among Geographically Focused Policing Initiatives: A Meta-Analytical Review. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 7(4), 347–374.
- <sup>5</sup> Expert: Violence reduction strategy 'isn't a success if more people are dying elsewhere' <https://foxbaltimore.com/news/local/expert-group-violence-reduction-strategy-isnt-a-success-if-more-people-are-dying-elsew>