



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on June 3, 2026

National Guard in D.C.: Little Crime Benefit, Big Constitutional Cost

Last August, President Donald Trump sent the National Guard into Washington, D.C., under the banner of public safety. Now, as the administration has [requested](#) up to 1,500 additional Guard members in the capital for America 250, bringing the total to 5,000, emerging research points to a harder conclusion: the deployment did nothing to address violent crime.

[Trump's order](#), "Additional Measures to Address the Crime Emergency in the District of Columbia," built on [Executive Order 14333](#), which had declared a "crime emergency" in the capital. It did more than send troops into D.C. It directed federal agencies to create "specialized" public-safety units, ordered the Pentagon to build a specialized D.C. National Guard unit, prepared Guard forces for use in other cities, and called for a quick-reaction force for "rapid nationwide deployment."



AP Images

That was the official story: crime control, public order, safer streets. Left mostly unspoken was the constitutional problem. The American system has long treated domestic military policing as a threat to liberty. [The Posse Comitatus Act](#) reflects that principle by barring federal troops from civilian law enforcement unless Congress or the Constitution clearly authorizes it.

The new Niskanen Center study makes the official story harder to sustain. Its data show that the Guard did not solve D.C.'s violent-crime problem, explain the city's broader crime decline, or transform policing. It produced one narrow result: visible troops helped deter some opportunistic property crime in public places.

Yet, the real achievement may be the part officials do not advertise: making soldiers in the streets feel "normal."

What the Study Found

The Niskanen Center study, titled "[Washington, D.C.'s Crime Decline and Its Lessons for American Policing](#)," examined crime, arrests, deployment patterns, and the August 2025 National Guard deployment.

Its central finding cuts against the administration's sweeping claims of an overwhelming success:

[The National Guard deployment], which added roughly 2,000 uniformed personnel to D.C.'s streets virtually overnight, ... produced a real but narrow improvement: a 24 percent



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reduction in opportunistic property crime in the first six months, with no measurable effect on violent crime.

Apparently, the deployment matched optics better than crime geography. Per the study:

The Guard was not a substitute for MPD [the city's Metropolitan Police Department]: Guard members had no power to arrest, operated largely independently, and were placed mostly in highly visible commercial, transit, and tourist areas rather than high-crime neighborhoods (U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, 2026).

The report put the point plainly: "Violent crime was unmoved."

The Crime Decline Was Already Happening

The study also undercuts the political story that federal forces rescued the city from collapse.

D.C. crime had already fallen sharply from its 2023 peak. The report found that MPD became more effective even as its sworn workforce shrank. The number of officers did not drive the recovery. Strategy did.

The authors wrote:

Fewer officers, deployed more deliberately, were doing a different kind of policing, and the evidence suggests it was working.

The shift came through proactive enforcement, including narcotics sweeps, traffic interdictions, and warrant executions. These efforts targeted conditions that often precede more serious crimes. That work began before the Guard arrived.

The study emphasized that point:

The Guard arrival did not accelerate or redirect the long-term improvements in MPD's arrest statistics. MPD was already moving in that direction on its own.

That is devastating to the administration's narrative. If violent crime was already declining, and if MPD's improvements predated the Guard, then the soldiers were not the reason D.C. became safer.

A Costly Symbol

The "cost-benefit" analysis is striking, especially for anyone who claims to care about fiscal restraint.

According to the study, the Guard deployment cost about \$607 per Guard member per day. With roughly 2,000 personnel deployed from August through December 2025, the federal outlay came to about \$185 million. For comparison, the study estimated the cost of a D.C. police officer at about \$384 per day.

The report asks what that money bought. The authors wrote:

To reiterate: Guard personnel are not police officers. They can detain but not arrest. Their deployment locations were chosen for visibility and symbolic significance, and much of their



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work was not related to law enforcement.

The conclusion was blunt. The Guard deployment “was not a waste.” It produced a property crime reduction. However,

it was an expensive tool deployed in the wrong places for the wrong types of crime, at a daily cost per person 60 percent higher than an MPD officer, with a hidden productivity cost to the civilian economy.

A targeted, data-driven MPD strategy could have produced far greater value, the study found. The authors argued that the same money, spent on smarter local deployment, could have delivered social benefits “an order of magnitude larger.”

That is the policy lesson. But it may not be the political lesson the administration wanted.

Other Deployments and Court Battles

The D.C. deployment came amid a broader push to send National Guard troops into American cities under overlapping claims of crime control, immigration enforcement, civil unrest, and protection of federal property. All of it fit Trump’s language of an “[invasion from within](#).” [Los Angeles](#), Portland, Chicago, and [Memphis](#) became part of the same pattern: federal power moving into local civic space under emergency language.

The legal resistance followed quickly. In California, a federal judge [ruled](#) that Trump’s deployment of federalized Guard troops in Los Angeles violated the Posse Comitatus Act, finding that the administration had crossed from protecting federal functions into ordinary law enforcement. Courts in [Chicago](#) and Portland also scrutinized the administration’s claim that the president could mobilize Guard troops over state or local objections whenever he said federal law could not be executed.

The pattern also raised concerns about the midterm elections. Early this year, Trump repeatedly [threatened](#) to invoke the Insurrection Act, which allows the president to federalize the National Guard to suppress insurrection, rebellion, or domestic violence. Those threats came amid clashes between federal immigration agents and protesters in several cities, most visibly in Minneapolis, which the administration framed not merely as obstruction, but as “insurrection” and “domestic terrorism.”

Yet that rhetoric exposed its own weakness. If the mayhem was truly organized at that level — [and it was](#) — the public should expect serious investigations, evidence, indictments, and punishment of those who planned and financed it. Instead, the administration’s answer moved quickly toward troop deployments and emergency powers. The masterminds remained untouched.

That is the larger context for D.C. Each deployment creates a precedent. Each lawsuit comes after the public has already seen troops in the streets. Finally, each “emergency” teaches citizens to accept military presence as an ordinary tool of domestic governance.

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