

Community Reaction to Increasing Police Presence and Surveillance in Columbia University's Morningside Heights Campus

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Introduction

Historical Context:

- Post-9/11 surveillance measures, such as COINTELPRO and other NYPD policies, such as Stop and Frisk, disproportionately target minorities ("NYCLU;" U.S. District Court). These policies are initially defended through national security and community safety but are later deemed unconstitutional.
- Implications: Surveillance is often ineffective in counterterrorism and crime intervention but has significant negative effects on targeted communities (e.g., stigmatization, restricted speech, damaged law enforcement relationships).

Research Focus:

- How does a typically empowered community, like Columbia University, respond to the early stages of intensified surveillance?

Theoretical Framework

Lemert's Labeling Theory:

- "Regardless of whether a person is objectively deviant or not, if that person is defined as deviant, negative consequences will result" (Matsueda 14).
- Communities, once labeled as deviant, can become entrenched in an endless cycle of increased policing and surveillance.

James Wilson and George Kelling's Broken Windows Theory:

- This theory argues that low level crimes or physical displays of disorder within a neighborhood signify that the area is at risk for higher level crime and disorder (Wilson).
- Columbia University Administration and the NYPD frame peaceful Pro-Palestinian protests as the "broken window," or the initial signifier of minor deviance within the community, that must be addressed by an increased police presence in order to prevent more extreme deviance.

Foucault's Panopticism:

- Foucault argues that constant visibility ensures that individuals regulate their own action, internalizing the control exerted over them.
- When a neighborhood experiences heightened policing, community members are likely to internalize this surveillance, significantly affecting their behavior.

Methods



Mode:

Online surveys with a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions.

Participants: Columbia and Barnard students sampled from student groups and in-person at Butler Library

Sampling Method:

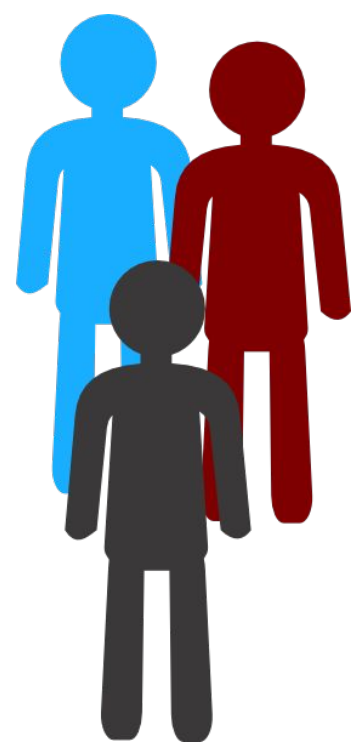
Systematic Sampling: Contacted every fourth student group from Columbia University's Student Organization Directory to distribute the survey.

In-Person Distribution: Surveys were made available at Butler Library to include a broader range of students.

Sample Size:

Total Responses: 67 respondents.

Timing: Survey conducted during summer break, potentially impacting the response rate.



Statistical Analysis: Survey results are coded to allow for statistical tests to identify patterns and relationships.

Results and Discussion

01 Protest Response

Law enforcement's response to protests heightens residents' awareness of police misconduct and over-policing, leading to a more critical evaluation of policing strategies within their communities.

02 Safety

A moderate negative correlation between protest participation and perceived safety suggests that heightened police visibility contributes to decreased feelings of safety around law enforcement.

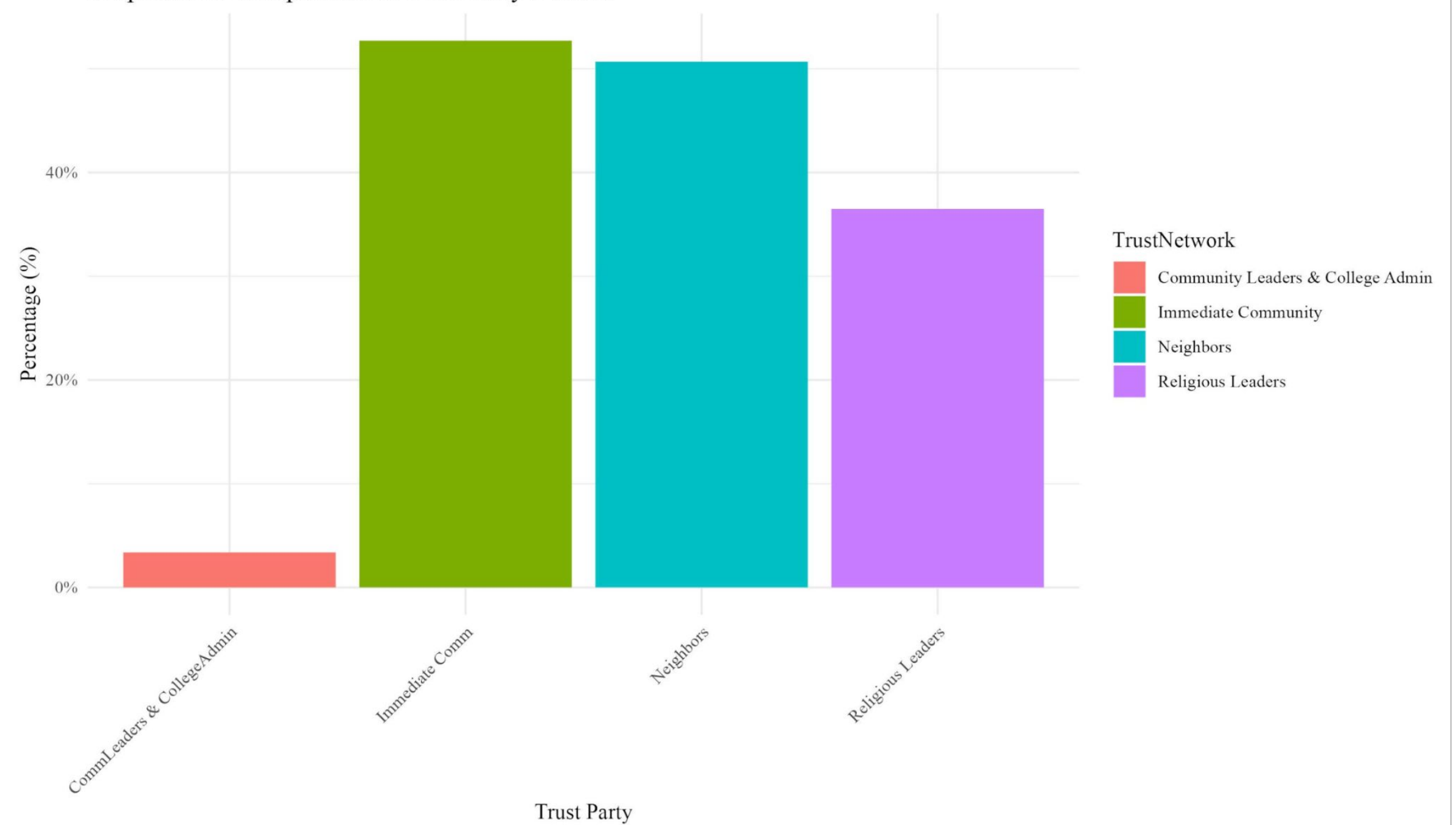
A moderate positive correlation indicates that higher protest participation is associated with a stronger belief that police surveillance disproportionately targets communities of color.

03 Trust, erosion, and community

The significant increase in policing and surveillance not only erodes trust between community members and law enforcement, but also between their institutional leaders.

Approximately 39% of individuals respond that they know of someone in the community who has taken off their headscarf, shaved their beard or stopped wearing religious clothes in the past year, signifying distrust within the community that leads to precautionary measures.

Respondents' Composition of Trust Party Sources



04 Use, Claim, and Reconfiguration of Space

Several students indicate a desire to leave Morningside Heights due to the heightened police presence, reflecting ongoing discomfort within the community.

Law enforcement's presence in Morningside Heights not only alters the physical landscape of the neighborhood, but also leaves a lasting emotional and psychological impact on residents.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Findings:

Heightened enforcement measures can erode trust within the community, alter perceptions of safety, and compel residents to change their behaviors, including modifying their appearance and reconsidering their engagement with public spaces.

Future Research:

Future research will continue to explore how the Morningside Heights community relates to increased surveillance, while also comparing their reactions against residents in neighborhoods that have been historically overpoliced and surveilled.

References

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