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“The Campus Law Enforcement Web”

How Campus Policing Capacity Expands to Suppress Student Free Speech



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I. Abstract

Campus policing is often excluded from broader analyses of law enforcement, despite the fact that nearly one-third of U.S. police agencies operate on college campuses. This research investigates how campus police departments, in coordination with university administrations, municipal police, and state or local governments, form a multi-jurisdictional law enforcement web, which increasingly functions as a politically dominant, coercive power. Drawing on theories of institutional design and decision-making, I argue that policing capacity has expanded, while routine arrests decline, resulting in campus police retaining latent coercive power. This power is expressed via high-intensity interventions in student demonstrations, framed as crises.

Using data from the Survey of Campus Law Enforcement Agencies (SCLEA), the Campus Safety and Security Survey, inter-agency Memoranda of Understanding, and case studies of the 2024 encampments at UCLA and Columbia University, I employ a mixed-methods approach combining longitudinal analysis with process tracing. Data shows that arrest rates have declined over time, while policing capacity is increasing and is deployed during moments of protest to suppress students. At the same time, institutional decision-making shifts away from involving students in governance and towards centralized actors already embedded within the law enforcement web. Together, these findings suggest that student free speech is constrained not through constant enforcement, but through the combined effects of selective policing and the lack of institutional channels for student dissent. This study contributes to broader debates on policing and institutional power by demonstrating how organizational structure and capacity, rather than enforcement frequency alone, shape the limits of political expression.

II. Introduction

Most work on policing tends to overlook the importance of college campuses, despite the fact that approximately 32.6% of U.S. law enforcement agencies operate in universities (Miller and Russell-Brown 2023). The relationship between campus police, university administrations, and external law enforcement agencies varies across institutions, shaped by differences in governance, geography, and institutional structure. However, these actors converge to form a multi-jurisdictional law enforcement system that plays a central role in regulating student life.

Campus policing has been a focal point for political conflict and limiting student free expression. In 1970, during protests against the Vietnam War at Kent State University, the National Guard shot and killed four students (Kelly 2024). More recently, in May 2024, the Los Angeles Police Department and University of California Police Department mobilized against pro-Palestinian protests at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), resulting in at least 25 severe injuries (Rappard 2024). At Columbia University, dozens of students were arrested by the NYPD following the occupation of Hamilton Hall (Allen 2024). These events illustrate the recurring role of campus law enforcement in shaping the boundaries of student political action.

At first glance, such incidents suggest an expansion of campus policing through increasingly frequent enforcement. However, the data reveals a different pattern, as arrest activity on college campuses has actually declined over time. This presents a paradox: if routine law enforcement is decreasing, why do campus police agencies appear to have more resources and legitimacy?

This paper argues that the campus law enforcement framework has become more powerful not through increased frequency of enforcement, but through the expansion of policing capacity. As campus police become more professionalized and more deeply embedded in

inter-agency networks, they are able to deploy coercive force selectively and at scale during moments of crisis. As a result, student free speech is constrained not through constant repression, but through the framing of student demonstrations as crises necessitating policing. This thesis contributes to existing literature by constructing a new theoretical framework for campus policing (the law enforcement web), developing a causal explanation for crisis-driven and overall trends of campus police expansion, and using both quantitative and qualitative data to link policing capacity to student suppression.

I begin by developing the theoretical framework of the campus law enforcement web and outlining my argument, drawing on scholarship on policing, rights, and bureaucratic decision-making. I then describe the mixed-methods research design that I employ, combining process-tracing case studies with longitudinal data. Next, I examine the expansion of policing capacity through changes in authority and ability of campus police departments. I then analyze how this capacity is deployed during moments of crisis, using process tracing of the 2024 encampments at Columbia and UCLA. The following section shows how these responses are justified and institutionalized through narrative construction and policy codification. Finally, I evaluate the implications for student free speech, demonstrating how selective enforcement constrains protest even as arrest rates decline.

III. Theoretical Framework

Past Literature

This review conceptualizes campus policing as a web of interlinked institutions—campus police, university administrations, municipal departments, and the local/state government—each operating with distinct but interdependent logics. Each institution within the web has their own internal motivations and organizational norms yet, together, they pose consequences for student

rights. I will begin by establishing theoretical groundwork for the web and then develop an external logic and consequences created as a result of the convergence of these diverse actors.

New institutionalism, introduced by March and Olsen (1984), helps explain how campus policing actors converge into a broader institutional web. They argue that institutions like universities and law enforcement are not just passive but autonomous actors that shape behavior through internal norms, routines, and identities. Rather than responding solely to incentives, these institutions create meaning and enforce roles that influence how rights and civic responsibilities are interpreted. Building on this, Searing (1991) emphasizes that roles within institutions—such as a campus chancellor or municipal police chief—are not merely functional but deeply embedded in normative expectations. This perspective deepens the understanding of institutional behavior by highlighting how individuals internalize their roles, acting according to what is deemed appropriate rather than what is rational or efficient. Understanding institutions as autonomous and role-defining shapes the model of campus law enforcement frameworks as a dynamic, interdependent web of various institutions, each with its own internal logic and role structures that impact responses to student actions.

Extending this theoretical lens, we can turn to how key actors—namely, campus administrations and municipal police departments—are analyzed using bureaucratic theory to explain institutional behavior and outcomes. Research demonstrates that individual characteristics influence how bureaucrats interpret their institutional roles, such as personality (Callen et al. 2015), community ties (Bhavnani and Lee 2018; Haim, Nanes, and Davidson 2021), and shared identities (Ba et al. 2021; Blair et al. 2022; Meier and Nicholson-Crotty 2006; Mosher 1968; Pfaff et al. 2021; White, Nathan, and Faller 2015). This is crucial for the fragmentation seen in the campus law enforcement web: decisions are shaped by differing and

individualistic actors, leading to different outcomes. Thus, similar webs can make different decisions, especially around student protests.

Another actor in the web, local/state governmental institutions, significantly influence campus police jurisdiction, enforcement power, and oversight. Sloan (1992) discusses how campus departments, once informal, were granted state-recognized authority, creating legal ambiguity over their scope of power. Cook and Fortunato (2023) argue that a state with higher legislative capacity (budget, resources, etc.) has higher police department transparency. However, Knott and Payne (2004) provide a contrasting perspective to the degree of state involvement in higher education: when statewide higher education boards are decentralized and have less regulatory power, universities demonstrate higher productivity and resources. This reflects opposing interests that manifest within the campus policing web. Campus administrators prefer less state involvement, which comes at the expense of police accountability.

This tension invites a critical counterargument: treating the campus law enforcement web as a single, politically dominant institution may oversimplify what is, in reality, a fragmented and negotiated system. Scholars of multi-level governance, such as Hooghe and Marks (2003), emphasize how institutions differ in authority, interests, and function. From this perspective, campus law enforcement is not a monolith but a negotiated power among university administrators, local and state governments, municipal police departments, and campus police themselves. University administrators may prioritize risk management, while state legislators may act based on ideology that appeals to constituents—these are not necessarily aligned. Thus, suppressing student speech is an outcome of negotiated governance between multiple stakeholders.

Adding to this view, criticisms arise from my exclusion of students from the web, as they arguably possess agency to influence policy and reform. Universities regularly respond to student activism through task forces, advisory boards, and student associations. These mechanisms, however flawed, demonstrate that students have the capacity to reshape institutional priorities from within. For example, after a 1984 walkout in UC Berkeley, student activism influenced the UC Regents to divest \$3.1 million from investments involved in South African Apartheid (One Bold Idea 2018). This would imply that students have some power over campus decisions and maintain their free speech rights.

Yet, this optimistic portrayal of student inclusion under multi-level governance fails to capture how structural power operates across fragmented institutions. To examine this more deeply, we can turn to the Garbage Can Model of organizational decision-making, developed by Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972). They assert that in complex institutions, like universities, decisions emerge not from active planning but from the coincidental convergence of problems, solutions, participants, and choice opportunities. In this model, power flows not through formal structures of debate or accountability, but through access to decision-making abilities and the capacity to frame problems and solutions. Decisions about campus policing emerge not from rational planning but from the chaotic intersection of problems (like protests or security incidents), ready-made solutions (such as increased policing or surveillance), shifting participants (administrators, police, legislators, and students), and scheduled decision points. Within the campus law enforcement web, those with access—primarily administrators, police departments, and legislators—consistently define student protest as a “problem” and enforcement as the “solution,” sidelining student voices and dissent. Throughout this paper, this argument will be expanded upon and traced through specific cases.

Viewed through this organizational lens, we see that, although the institutions involved may appear distinct, they often align functionally around shared priorities: risk minimization, protection of institutional property, and reputation management. This convergence is what I term the campus law enforcement web. While institutionally diverse, functionally, their actions directly impact student speech and shape how policing is enforced. These actors have power due to their ability to control resources (policing budgets, legal expertise, disciplinary processes) and shape the discussion around safety and legitimacy.

Students, in contrast, face institutional barriers: procedural delays, unclear disciplinary codes, and surveillance, all of which decrease their power to mobilize meaningfully within the web. Additionally, student-backed decisions only reflect a convergence of student interests with the campus law enforcement web, as evidenced by the violence that non-sanctioned student protests are met with. Avelino (2021) presents power as a series of debates, one of which being enabling vs. constraining. Thus, I define the campus law enforcement web's functional power as the external expression of its power which enables campus police to enforce standards of behavior, while constraining student action.

Prior campus policing research mostly centers around the origins and evolutions of campus police departments. Sloan (1992) chronicles the shift from basic "watchmen" roles in the early 20th century to fully professionalized police departments by the 1970s. These modern campus police closely resemble municipal police in structure, authority, and duties, but operate in a legal middle ground. Peak, Barthe, and Garcia (2008) use empirical data to demonstrate the increased legitimacy of campus police departments over time and the integral role they play in local law enforcement. From a reform-oriented lens, campus policing research discusses the need

for community-oriented policing at campuses (Sloan, Lanier, and Beer 2000) and the model for a student bill of rights and effective policing (Lepawsky 1972).

To understand the significance of reconceptualizing campus policing as a web of institutions, it is crucial to recognize that the campus policing web functions as an extension of broader state power. In historically marginalized or race-class subjugated communities, policing is a central mode of governance, using methods of coercion, surveillance, regulation, and violence to control communities (Soss and Weaver 2017). Campus police agencies have their roots in racial profiling, with officers protecting the primarily White student body in campuses like Yale University (Miller and Russell-Brown 2023). Given this context, Miller and Russell-Brown (2023) argue that police presences on campus only serve to reproduce and reinforce racial hierarchies and state control.

This institutional framework ultimately shapes the everyday reality of student rights on campus, with direct consequences for free expression and political participation. Prior research on student attitudes towards campus police assert that students expect police to protect them from harm without interfering in student lives (Jacobsen 2014). Student rights must be interpreted in the same institutional framework as before: rights on campus are constructs, shaped by the interpretations of bureaucrats (Dowding and van Hees 2007; Searing 1991). As Brigham (1997) and Moore (1996) argue, constitutional rights operate within institutional power, often balancing individual freedom against collective governance. This becomes especially evident when student rights are at odds with institutional goals, such as security or reputation. Protest becomes a central political resource for students, particularly marginalized groups, who lack institutional standing and must engage in visible disruption to increase bargaining power (Lipsky 1968). However, the ability to protest is unevenly distributed, as policing systems

disproportionately surveil and discipline students of color, echoing broader patterns of racialized governance (Soss and Weaver 2017; Miller and Russell-Brown 2023).

Past research minimally focuses on the various actors involved in regulating and conferring duties to campus police departments, focusing on police as a unitary actor. Additionally, there is limited quantitative analysis on the consequences of campus police policies. My research supplements this existing work by reimagining campus police as a web of actors with competing interests and jurisdictions, as well as causally linking developments in campus policing over time with the suppression of student free speech. By delineating relevant actors but also acknowledging their convergence as an expression of “constraining/enabling” power, I am providing a new theoretical framework for understanding campus policing decisions.

Argument and Theoretical Background

The campus law enforcement web created by the intersection of university administration, local and state governments, municipal police departments, and campus police departments has transformed into a politically dominant, coercive power that suppresses student rights. The campus law enforcement web consists of university administration (who hire and regulate campus police departments), local and state governments (who authorize and limit campus police departments), municipal police departments (who collaborate with campus police and negotiate jurisdictions), and the campus police departments themselves. These actors can be divided into three categories: policymaking actors, the campus police department, and mutual aid actors. By delineating between these institutions but also viewing their intersection as an institution in and of itself, I allow this argument to trace and accredit sources of power to the relevant institution but also analyze the impact of this web in function. Framing campus law

enforcement as “politically dominant” emphasizes the functional power that this web has to constrain and punish student actions.

This claim is inspired by Soss and Weaver’s (2017) analysis of policing as a governing force. I argue that campus police serve a similar function, as the primary expression of university governance over students, which is practically seen in responses to student protesting. The ultimate effect of the creation of such a web is an active constraint and suppression of student free speech activities. My argument has two strains: I argue that campus policing has transformed in function over time, becoming more legitimate and retaining more policing capacity but I also argue that perceived crises (like large student demonstrations) expedite this process, creating bursts of expanded policing capacity and power.

Overall Trends in Policing. I assert that the function of campus policing has shifted over time, becoming more and more like municipal police departments. This is triggered by a shift in perceived function of campus police agencies. As argued by Miller and Russell-Brown (2023), campus police originated as “watchmen,” primarily concerned with the security and protection of students and campus property. As a key caveat, this duty was incredibly racially charged as Miller and Russell-Brown highlight the implications of a security force tasked with protecting a wealthy White male population against primarily Black poor community members (68). However, the original function of “security” eventually transformed over time for campus police to become a method of controlling students. With increased student dissent and protests in the 1950s-1970s after the Vietnam War and Civil Rights Movement, university administrators and legislators needed an alternative to municipal police departments or other methods of law enforcement to dissuade student protests. For example, in Kent State University in 1970, as a

response to student protests, the university administration relied on the National Guard to suppress the protest, resulting in four deaths. This created vested interest for university administration and governmental officials to create mechanisms that maintain order, without having to outsource or expend too many resources. This same logic is mirrored later in my paper, with Columbia University expanding their campus police capacity to include arrest jurisdiction, to minimize reliance on the New York Police Department.

Thus, universities professionalized their campus police departments by authorizing increased use of force and weaponry, raising standards for recruitment, and increasing the amount of duties agencies must complete. This creates a stronger focus on students, rather than community members, resulting in changing officer attitudes towards students and perceptions on who should be policed. Following this logic, a campus police department that has undergone professionalization has an increased emphasis on constraining and punishing students, rather than acting as a security force. The changed purpose of campus police departments creates multiple avenues for the campus law enforcement web to both limit and suppress student free speech. Limiting student rights can be seen through policies like Time, Place, and Manner restrictions and changes to codes of conduct. Suppression is primarily seen in the use of arrests, surveillance, and weaponry to deter student activists from protesting.

Thus, while Miller and Russell-Brown (2023) outline a similar temporal outline of campus policing developments over time, my focus on the law enforcement web underpinning motivations (and resulting actions) provides a new frame for analysis. Professionalization was triggered by university administration and legislative interest in risk management, which created an incentive to militarize and train campus police. My use of quantitative data to illustrate the shifting function of police departments over time, in conjunction with my work to identify

jurisdiction and delegation of power from each institution within the web, will provide a clearer understanding of the role campus police departments play in campus culture and student life.

Crisis-Triggered Institutional Expansion. My second argument is that student demonstrations, framed as crises by institutional actors, trigger expansions in campus police capacity. This is why I theorize campus law enforcement as a web. Each institutional actor makes decisions reactively, as problems emerge, consistent with the Garbage Can Model of decision-making. When waves of student protests arise, they generate a stream of loosely defined “problems” that trigger institutional responses. Actors with vested interests—such as university administrators concerned with reputation, or police departments focused on order—intervene by advancing pre-existing “solutions,” like heightened surveillance or disciplinary measures, regardless of whether they directly address the root causes. Each actor has existing incentives to deprioritize students within their decisionmaking: local/state governments prioritize constituents with more legislative power, campus administration prioritizes university reputation, and police departments prioritize the expansion of their jurisdiction and duties.

Where Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972) present decision making as “organized hierarchies” where decisions occur as a random conjunction of the problems, solutions, and decisionmakers, I propose a framework that accounts for the asymmetries and resource disparities inherent within the campus law enforcement web. In this setting, not all actors are equally capable of translating problems and solutions into action. For example, the mutual aid actors are largely reactive: they respond when called upon but do not initiate responses themselves. The policymaking actors and campus police department possess both the resources and institutional authority to act on student demonstrations.

I term this dynamic the “crisis response executive” logic. Unlike a singular decision-maker in a classical hierarchical model, in my web, the actor with the greatest combination of capacity, authority, and knowledge can effectively set the agenda and determine how problems are handled. Essentially, whoever has the resources and ability to make quick decisions will deploy campus police resources on student protests. Crucially, this ultimately results in increased power and capacity for campus police, regardless of whether the campus police department actor was the one who triggered the response. This approach shows that while the garbage can model allows for opportunistic decision-making, the resulting actions are patterned rather than random, frequently taking the form of campus policing expansion.

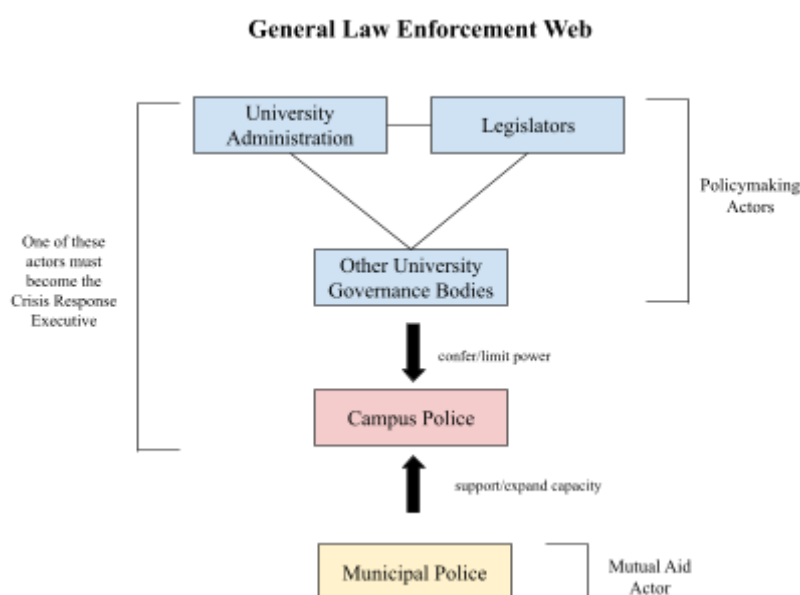


Figure 1: General Law Enforcement Web Diagram

Concept Specification and Operationalization

This study focuses on three key concepts: the campus law enforcement web, the expansion of policing capacity over time, and the impact on student free speech. The campus law enforcement web consists of campus police departments, university administration, municipal law enforcement, and state or local authorities. Policing capacity is conceptualized along two dimensions: authority and ability. Authority refers to the formal scope of decision-making power

and jurisdictional control granted to campus police, including their autonomy to initiate and coordinate crisis response. Ability refers to the practical means through which that authority can be exercised, including resources, use-of-force capabilities, surveillance technologies, and access to mutual aid through inter-agency agreements. Together, these dimensions capture both who controls crisis response and the scale at which that response can be deployed.

The impact on student free speech is operationalized through patterns of police intervention in student demonstrations. Intervention is defined broadly to include arrests, multi-agency deployment, dispersal actions, and other forms of enforcement. This approach allows me to delineate between crisis policing and routine policing, which is not accurately captured by arrest data. The primary independent variables are agency capacity and professionalization, while the dependent variable is the likelihood and intensity of police intervention during student demonstrations. Arrest data is used to capture trends in routine enforcement, representing the need for the policing of crimes on campus.

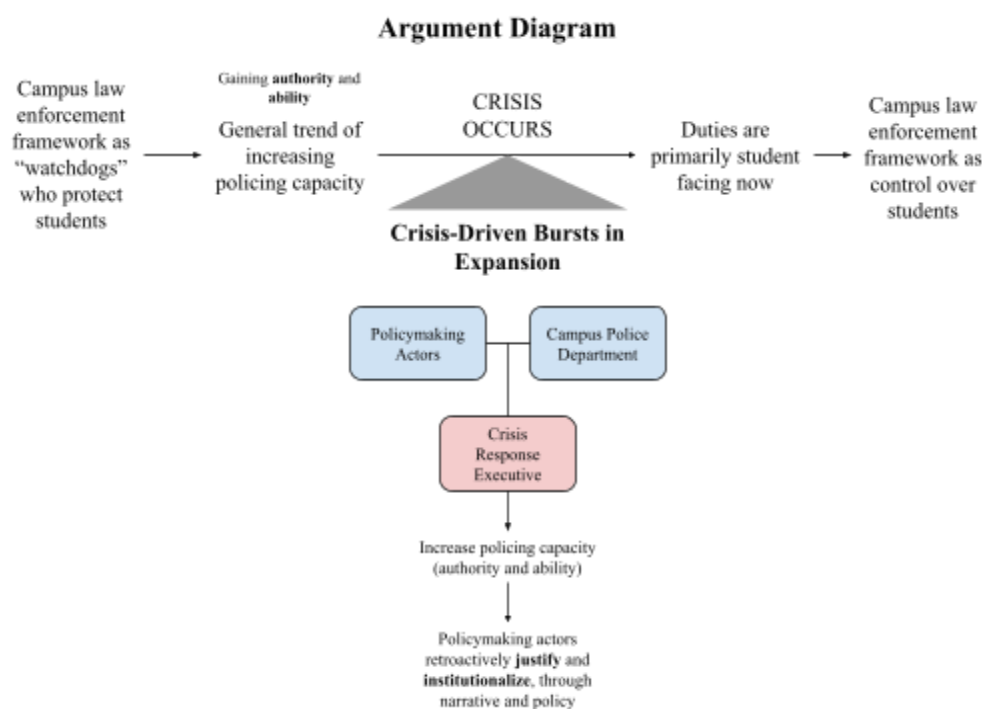


Figure 2: Diagram of Argument

IV. Methodology

To examine the expansion and political dominance of campus police agencies on U.S. college campuses, I employ a mixed-methods research design that combines theory-building case studies with a longitudinal dataset. The case studies of Columbia University and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) trace how and why policing capacity expands during moments of crisis, using process-tracing to develop a causal mechanism that ties bureaucratic impasse to repression of student free speech. In contrast, the quantitative analysis through a dataset that spans 17 years captures broader structural trends, including the professionalization of campus police and the expansion of jurisdiction, despite decreases in arrest activity.

This design is motivated by both data constraints and theoretical considerations. Quantitative data captures long-term shifts in campus policing but cannot account for the bureaucratic dynamics and inter-institutional coordination that shape enforcement decisions in practice. Conversely, case studies offer limited generalizability and cannot determine whether observed patterns reflect broader national trends. By integrating both approaches, I link gradual changes in policing to crisis-driven expansions, providing a more complete account of how the law enforcement web operates. Although the encampments are high-visibility cases, they are analytically valuable because they reveal dynamics that are otherwise difficult to observe. Pairing process-tracing with quantitative evidence grounds these mechanisms in broader institutional trends, strengthening both the theory and the argument.

Case Studies

Columbia University and UCLA serve as my primary case studies, with my analysis centering on events from April to June 2024. During this period, both campuses experienced

large-scale student demonstrations in the form of Palestinian Solidarity Encampments, prompting police responses and public visibility. Furthermore, each campus demonstrates significant jurisdictional overlap so I am able to analyze how actors within the campus law enforcement web interact in practice. These cases are significant as, in the fallout of Columbia University's encampment, more than 100 students were arrested on April 18th, with at least 80 students facing disciplinary consequences such as suspension or expulsion due to their participation (Alonso 2024; Al Jazeera 2025). At UCLA, over 200 arrests were made during the May 2nd police clearing, with subsequent demonstrations in June met with immediate arrest and dispersal (Mikhail Zinshteyn 2025). These are dramatic numbers which reflect a massive increase in student suppression capacity.

Through the collection of Memoranda of Understanding, campus policies, media coverage, student journalism, audit reports, and administrative communications, I trace a full causal chain of events linking large-scale protest to the expansion of policing capacity, policy justification, and the repression of student speech. These cases are selected as theory-building cases that allow for the identification of causal mechanisms. Rather than testing a pre-established hypothesis across a large sample, this analysis uses Columbia and UCLA to trace how the campus law enforcement web operates in moments of crisis, when its dynamics are most visible. The scale, visibility, and intensity of the 2024 encampments allow me to observe the interaction between fragmented institutional actors, the activation of policing capacity, and the subsequent consolidation of authority.

Additionally, these cases are best analyzed together to compare key variables. UCLA, as a public university embedded into a unique statewide system of schools, operates through an entirely different governance structure than Columbia University, a private institution with less

state support. This variation allows me to distinguish which dynamics are consistent across the broader campus law enforcement web and which are context-dependent.

Database

In order to examine how changes in campus police capacity influence responses to student demonstrations, I draw on multiple complementary datasets. My primary source is the Survey of Campus Law Enforcement Agencies (SCLEA), administered by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in 2004–2005, 2011–2012, and 2021–2022 (Davis 2021). SCLEA provides detailed information on campus police structure, including jurisdictional authority, inter-agency agreements (e.g., MOUs), personnel, and available resources. These variables are used to measure changes in policing capacity over time, particularly along the dimensions of authority and ability.

To capture trends in enforcement activity, I incorporate data from the Clery Act Campus Safety and Security Survey, administered by the Department of Education (2019). Clery data provides institution-level counts of arrests and disciplinary actions in four location categories: residence halls, public property, on-campus, and non-campus. In this study, arrest data is used to measure routine enforcement activity, allowing for the identification of longitudinal trends. Importantly, this data is not treated as a comprehensive measure of policing capacity, but rather as a baseline against which shifts toward more selective, high-intensity intervention can be interpreted.

To account for institutional variation, I also integrate control variables from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), including campus size, geographic location, and public versus private status (National Center for Education Statistics n.d.). These datasets are linked at the institutional level using IPEDS, Office of Postsecondary Education

(OPE), and ORI identifiers where necessary. For further data and to merge all the datasets, I also incorporated the Civilytics Campus Police Data (2016) and Universal Crime Reporting data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (2023), even though neither are used in the data for this paper due to data constraints. After merging all databases, I created three datasets to analyze, only preserving responses for institutions present across all three SCLEA surveys: 2005, 2012, and 2022. See Appendix III for a more thorough description of the database and variables used.

This allows me to combine longitudinal information on policing capacity with measures of routine enforcement and institutional context, enabling my analysis of how structural changes in campus policing relate to patterns of intervention over time. Furthermore, the database also allows me to reconcile a key paradox in the data: while arrest activity declines over time, policing capacity expands, enabling more intensive intervention during student demonstrations.

Hypotheses

My central hypothesis is that the campus law enforcement web has, over time, produced a steady expansion in policing capacity along two dimensions: authority and ability. Authority expands through the increasing density and diversity of memoranda of understanding (MOUs), which embed campus police within a broader inter-agency system capable of mobilizing external actors. Ability expands through internal transformations, including rising professionalization and expanded authorization to use force. Together, these developments generate a growing reserve of policing capacity.

However, this capacity is not exercised uniformly. Instead, I argue that it is selectively activated during moments of crisis, such as large-scale student demonstrations. Under conditions of bureaucratic fragmentation, decision-making authority consolidates in the hands of actors with the greatest available capacity, enabling rapid, coordinated intervention. As a result, campuses

with greater authority (more extensive MOUs) and ability (higher professionalization and use-of-force authorization) will be more likely to engage in multi-agency responses and deploy force more intensively during protest events.

These crisis-driven deployments have both immediate and long-term consequences. In the short term, they produce high-intensity interventions, characterized by mutual aid, concentrated arrests, and use of force. In the long term, they contribute to the political dominance of campus law enforcement: policing capacity remains elevated after the crisis, and enforcement actions are retroactively justified and institutionalized through new policies. Crucially, student suppression operates through a logic of crisis-driven coercion rather than increases in routine enforcement. Thus, suppression is expected to manifest as more rapid and intensive interventions during protest activity, alongside a diminished role for students in decision-making, even as overall arrest rates may decline over time.

To falsify this argument, one would need to observe campuses that expand authority and ability without corresponding increases in coordinated, high-intensity intervention during student demonstrations. Evidence that crisis-driven expansions do not persist or are not codified into policy would also challenge the claim of political dominance. Finally, if increased policing capacity were associated primarily with routine enforcement, rather than selective, crisis-driven deployment, it would undermine the proposed mechanism linking the law enforcement web to student suppression. The concepts and variables in the table below structure my empirical strategy.

Concepts and Methodology		
Concept	Variables	Method
Expansion of Policing Capacity (General Trend)	Authority: Types and Frequency of Memoranda of Understanding	Quantitative (Survey of Campus Law Enforcement Agencies)

	(MOUs) Ability: Minimum Education Requirements (Professionalization), Authorization of Use of Arms	
Expansion of Policing Capacity (Crisis-Driven)	Authority: inter-agency mutual aid Ability: Deployment of force (use of arms), arrests, scale of personnel mobilization	Qualitative (Process-Tracing of Columbia University and UCLA)
Political Dominance	Durability: campus policing capacity after crisis-triggered expansion Policy: campus policies passed after crises	Qualitative (Process-Tracing of Columbia University and UCLA)
Student Suppression	Arrests: number of arrests made by campus police agencies Intervention intensity: how campus police respond to subsequent student protests Student Input: whether existing pathways for student input in governance are considered	Quantitative (Campus Safety and Security Survey) Qualitative (Process-Tracing of Columbia University and UCLA)

V. Expanded Policing Capacity

Authority for Decision-Making

As previously established, campus police departments are not unilateral actors, but are embedded within a multi-jurisdictional law enforcement web. This web is not simply a collection of actors, but a structure through which policing capacity is produced and expanded over time. Capacity emerges both from the consolidation of authority within campus police and from the density of inter-agency relationships that enable coordination and mutual aid. To examine how this capacity develops and operates in practice, I first provide institutional context for the case studies, diagramming their law enforcement webs, then describe the overall trend of increased inter-agency partnerships.

Institutional Context for UCLA and Columbia. The University of California was established in 1868, starting with the Berkeley campus and later expanding to a Southern California campus, now known as the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Due to worries of political influence at the state level, the University of California was declared a “public trust” in 1879, granting constitutional autonomy with “full powers of organization and government” to the Regents of the University of California (Douglass 2015). The state legislature retained power over the UC’s budget, selling of property, and purchasing. The Board of Regents manages the ten UC campuses, as well as four national laboratories and six academic health centers (UC Academic Health Centers n.d.). Due to the scale of the University of California, individual campus administrations play a larger role in policymaking at specific campuses. This creates a unique relationship between the policymaking actors at UCLA (the State of California, the UC Office of the President, the Board of Regents, and the Chancellor/UCLA Administration).

The University of California Police Department (UCPD) was created in UC Berkeley after World War I, to be watchmen primarily for security functions, mirroring the campus policing trends that Sloan (1992) discusses (Jones 2024). After trends of professionalization and increased legitimacy, the Regents granted UCPD the designation of a police agency with authority in the California Education Code §92600. State law grants statewide jurisdiction to UCPD within a 1 mile perimeter of UC campuses and in other properties managed by the Regents. In practice, each campus has their own UCPD branch. In FY 2024-25, UCLA Police Department reported a budget use of \$28,587,289 and 140 full-time employees (Community safety: UCPD budget and workforce 2024; UCLA PD Organizational Chart 2026). Other key actors in UCLA’s law enforcement web include the Los Angeles Police Department, the California Highway Patrol, the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, and the Santa Monica

Police Department, all of which have existing mutual aid agreements with UCLA PD (Patrol Division n.d.; Steinman 2024). Additionally, Chapter 13 of the University of California University-Wide Police Policies and Administrative Procedures created by the UC Office of the President establishes a mutual aid policy between UC campuses, allowing the temporary travel of staff, equipment, and resources between UCPD jurisdictions (UCSD Police Department 2026).

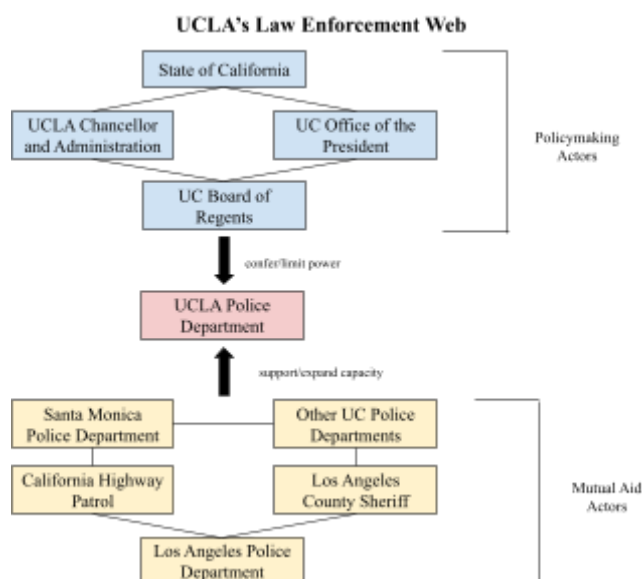


Figure 3: Law Enforcement Web Diagram for UCLA

As a private university, Columbia University has a different model of governance. The University was founded as a part of British colonial expansion in 1754 as King's College (History 2022). After the American Revolution, Columbia was renamed and reopened in 1784. Via the Charter of 1810, which was created by the New York State Legislature, the Columbia University Board of Trustees has ultimate authority and independence to govern the university, selecting the President, overseeing faculty, managing finances, and protecting the University's property (Board of Trustees n.d.). The Board of Trustees delegates power to the University's President, maintaining authority at all times but transferring many administrative and policymaking responsibilities to administrators (Stand Columbia Society 2025). Columbia

currently owns and operates three campuses (Morningside Heights, Manhattanville, and Washington Heights), the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, the Nevis Laboratories, as well as Columbia Global Centers across the world (Maps & Locations n.d.). The university receives funding from tuition, government grants, patient care, endowments, and private donations (Financial Overview n.d.). Most government funding comes from the federal government, not the state, changing the way the University interacts with state policymakers (Zuloaga, Chien, and Holcomb 2025). Thus, the policymaking framework at the University functions a little differently than UCLA, with the Board of Trustees having a lot more power to make unilateral decisions.

Before 2024, Columbia University's Office of Public Safety did not have the power to arrest and solely served patrol and administrative security functions (Columbia University Public Safety 2026). After student demonstrations in 2024, the University utilized New York law to hire additional Peace Officers that have arrest and patrol jurisdiction within the privately owned Columbia property (Meyer 2025; Cherukuri and Vasishtha 2025). This expansion of power will be explored in a later section.

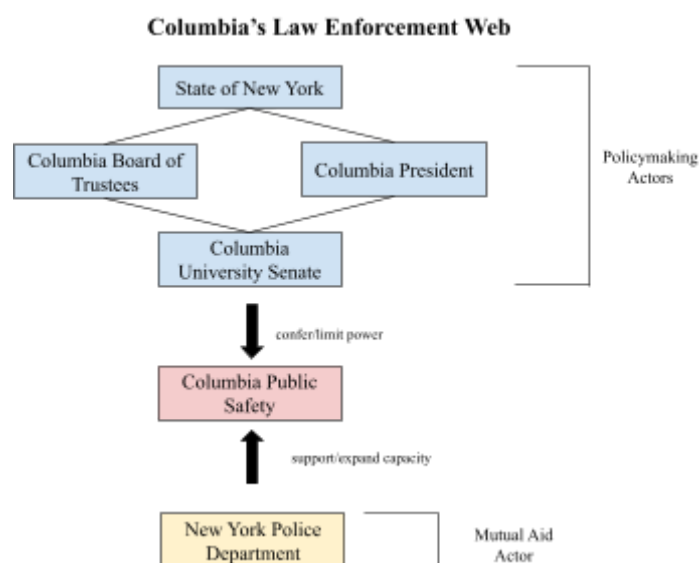


Figure 4: Law Enforcement Web Diagram for Columbia

Both institutions illustrate a key baseline for the law enforcement web. Actors can be separated into policymaking actors, campus police agencies, and mutual aid actors (see general diagram below). Through policies giving more responsibilities and justifications for campus police action, the policymaking actors can increase campus police capacity. Similarly, through providing assistance/resources and formalizing communication pathways, mutual aid actors can also increase campus police capacity. The key difference between UCLA and Columbia's webs are their overall complexity: UCLA has significantly more actors, so bureaucratic impasse is more likely to occur, while Columbia's policymaking power is relatively centralized to the President and Board of Trustees. In moments of perceived crisis, whichever policymaking actor has the capacity to make unilateral, quick decisions becomes the Crisis Decision-Making Executive, usually using that power to deploy and expand policing.

Increase in Memoranda of Understanding. To examine changes in the expansion of campus police authority over time, I analyzed the change in frequency of memoranda of understanding (MOUs) between campus police agencies and a range of external partners in the 2012 and 2022 SCLEA data. The 2005 SCLEA data did not include survey questions about MOUs, already indicating a change in the normalcy of such agreements. A documented rise in MOUs between campus police and external partners indicates not only an expansion of mutual aid capacity, but also a concurrent increase in authority through explicit delegations of power. If MOUs increase, campus police are more embedded and powerful within the campus law enforcement web.

For each year, agencies were coded as having (1) or not having (0) an MOU with seven partner types: state law enforcement agencies, local police departments, sheriff's offices, other campus law enforcement agencies, other campus agencies, state or local courts, and "other"

partners. I then constructed two summary measures: a binary indicator of whether an agency had any MOU and a density score representing the number of distinct partner types with which an agency had an MOU.

Descriptive comparisons show meaningful shifts in the pattern of MOUs over time. Between 2012 and 2022, the proportion of agencies with MOUs increased for several partner types. To determine statistical significance, I computed an MOU density score for each agency, defined as the number of partner types (0–7) with which the agency had an MOU. A Welch two-sample *t*-test comparing MOU density between 2012 and 2022 indicated a statistically significant increase over time. Agencies in 2012 had an average of 2.22 MOU partner types, whereas agencies in 2022 had an average of 2.46. In order to examine within-agency change, I constructed a two-wave panel of agencies observed in both 2012 and 2022 and calculated a density change score for each agency. On average, agencies increased their number of MOU partner types by 0.39 between 2012 and 2022. This within-agency result corroborates the cross-sectional *t*-test and demonstrates that the increase in MOU density reflects genuine expansion of partnerships rather than changes in the composition of the sample.

Changes in MOUs by Partner Type						
	State Law Enforcement Agencies	Other Campus Law Enforcement Agencies	Other Campus Agencies	State/Local Courts	Local Police Departments	Sheriff's Offices
2012	31.8%	21.2%	6.9%	7.7%	81.2%	61.4%
2022	40.1%	33.5%	11.3%	18.7%	77.9%	59.9%

Crucially, the share of agencies with any MOU decreased from 86.1% in 2012 to 80.2% in 2022, while the proportion reporting no MOU increased from 13.9% to 19.8%. Several explanations may account for this pattern. Agencies may be increasing internal capacity and

relying less on formal agreements, shifting toward informal coordination not captured in the survey, or strategically avoiding documentation of partnerships due to political or legal concerns. Campuses increasing the internal capacity of the police agencies aligns with the patterns seen in the data as all partner types show significant increases, except for local police departments and sheriff offices. I explore this possibility throughout the paper, with Columbia University Public Safety gaining arrest jurisdiction as a strong example.

This data indicates that campus police agencies have, on average, expanded and diversified their formal interagency relationships over time. Although a somewhat larger share of agencies reported having no MOUs in 2022, those that did maintain agreements tended to have MOUs with more types of partners, particularly state law enforcement agencies, other campus law enforcement agencies, other campus units, and state or local courts. This pattern suggests a shift from reliance primarily on local police and sheriff's offices toward a broader network, consistent with my theory of the campus law enforcement web. Thus, campus police agencies are constantly expanding their policing capacity through more formal partnerships with other entities, increasing their decision-making power and resources.

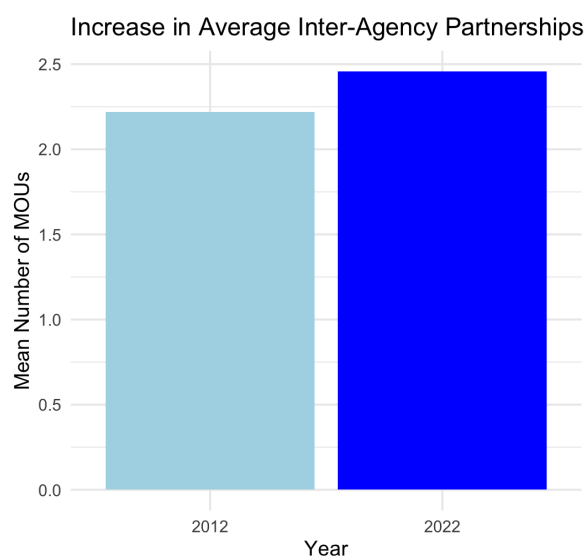


Figure 5: Increase in MOU Partnerships Over Time

Ability to Police

The expansion of memoranda of understanding (MOUs), particularly across a diverse set of partners, indicates that campus police are embedded within broader inter-agency systems capable of mobilizing external *authority* during moments of conflict. While the law enforcement web expands the scope of available authority, its practical impact depends on campus police *ability*, or the resources, training, and tools that agencies possess. To capture this, I analyze minimum education requirements, indicating professionalization, and weapons authorization. Professionalizing police officers and authorizing them to use more weaponry reflects increased operational capacity for police departments. As campus police become more professionalized and better resourced, they are increasingly equipped to act autonomously and deploy force more intensively within these inter-agency networks. Together, these internal developments strengthen the ability of campus police to exercise coercive power when enforcement is activated.

Professionalization. One dimension of this transformation is the increasing professionalization of campus police forces, reflected in rising educational standards. These shifts enhance not only the technical capacity of campus police, but also their legitimacy as governance actors. This mirrors the process-tracing that Sloan (1992) as well as Soss and Weaver (2017) argue, with campus police transforming from security “watchmen” to formal police agencies that are more student-facing.

I analyzed whether minimum education requirements for campus police personnel changed over time. Education requirements were measured on an ordinal scale ranging from 1 (“four-year degree”) to 5 (“no requirement”), with lower values indicating more stringent education standards. A Welch two-sample *t*-test was conducted to compare the mean level of required education for sworn officers between 2012 and 2022. The results indicated a statistically

significant difference, $t(4102.8) = 11.49, p < .001$. Agencies in 2012 reported a mean required education level of 3.71, whereas agencies in 2022 reported a mean of 3.43. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from 0.23 to 0.32. Because lower scores reflect higher education requirements, this decrease in the mean indicates that sworn officer education standards became more strict over time.

To examine within-agency change, I constructed a two-wave panel of agencies observed in both 2012 and 2022 and calculated a change score for each agency by subtracting the 2012 value from the 2022 value. The mean change in sworn education requirements was -0.17 , indicating that, on average, agencies moved toward higher minimum education levels for sworn officers between 2012 and 2022. This within-agency result corroborates the cross-sectional t -test and demonstrates that the observed increase in education standards is not due to changes in sample composition. Additional descriptive analyses using a binary indicator for “college-level requirement” (coded 1 for at least some college and 0 for high school or no requirement) showed a similar pattern: the proportion of agencies requiring at least some college for sworn officers increased between 2012 and 2022. Therefore, campus police agencies have raised formal education standards for sworn personnel over the past decade.

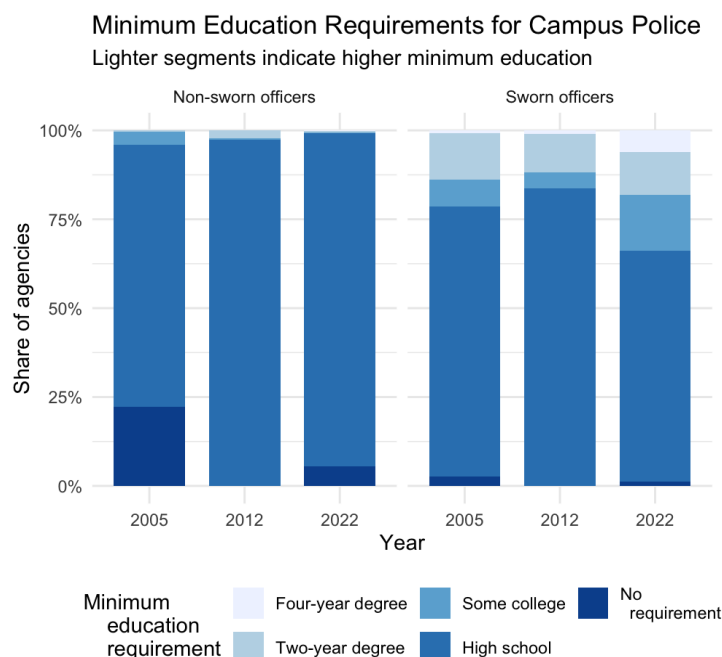


Figure 6: Increased Educational Standards Over Time

Arms and Suppressive Capacity. I narrowed analysis to four weapons that are present in 2005, 2012, and 2022 SCLEA data: flash bang/grenades, semiautomatic side-arms, tasers, and traditional batons. Across all shared weapons, descriptive statistics reveal a clear upward trend in authorization over the 17-year period. For each weapon, the proportion of agencies authorizing it increased from 2005 to 2012 and again from 2012 to 2022. Semiautomatic sidearms, already common in 2005, approached near-universal authorization by 2012 and 2022. For example, agencies were 12.10 times likely to authorize the use of tasers in 2022 relative to 2005. These descriptive patterns suggest a broad shift toward greater arms authorization among campus police agencies.

However, descriptive statistics alone cannot determine whether these changes are statistically significant or whether they reflect meaningful within-agency shifts rather than differences in sample composition. To address this, I estimated fixed-effects logistic regression models. This modeling strategy isolates within-agency changes and controls for institutional

characteristics such as size, governance structure, or regional context. All four regression models demonstrated increases in authorization that were statistically significant, both between 2005-2012 and 2012-2022. The only exception was traditional baton authorization, whose increase was not statistically significant between 2005-2012, but showed the largest increase between 2012 and 2022, with nearly all agencies authorizing baton use. Thus, across all weapons seen in all three datasets, there is a clear trend towards higher arm authorization. In 2012, rubber bullets, beanbag rifles, rifles, and shotguns were added to the questionnaire also indicating a shift in campus police arms. These results enable the campus police department to have greater capacity to suppress students.

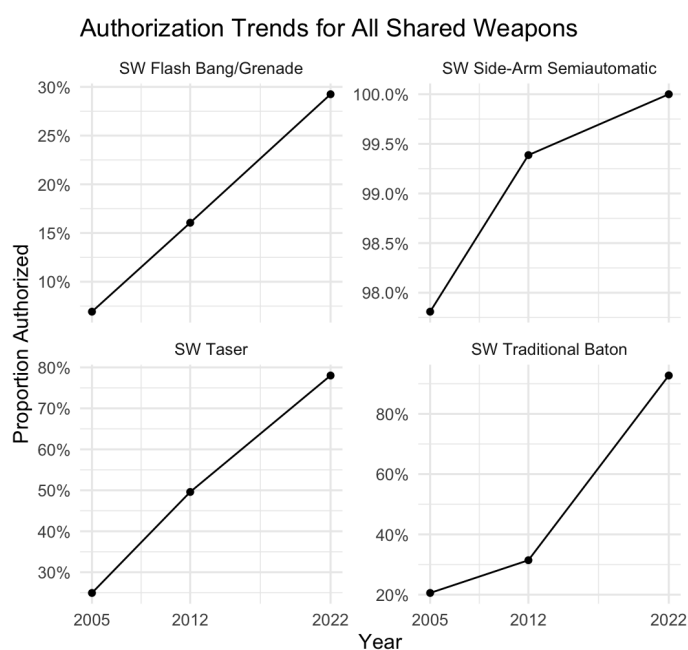


Figure 7: Increased Authorization for Weapons Over Time

These trends demonstrate a clear expansion in the *ability* of campus police to act within the law enforcement web. Rising educational standards reflect increasing professionalization, while the widespread authorization of weapons and tactical equipment indicates a substantial growth in coercive capacity. Importantly, these changes do not necessarily imply more frequent

enforcement, but rather enhance the capacity for rapid, coordinated, and intensive intervention when activated. As campus police become more professionalized and better equipped, they are increasingly positioned as the primary actors capable of responding to moments of institutional crisis.

Thus, over time, campus police have expanded along two dimensions: authority and ability. The second component of my argument is that this growth is not purely gradual, but marked by sharp increases during moments of crisis. In these situations, an actor with decision-making power intervenes and expands campus policing capacity in order to respond quickly and decisively. This leads to the next stage of the argument: how this expanded capacity is selectively deployed during student protests. Under conditions of ambiguity and bureaucratic fragmentation, enforcement decisions are concentrated in the hands of actors with the greatest available capacity. These moments of crisis not only produce immediate, high-intensity interventions, but also generate lasting increases in campus policing power over the long term.

VI. Crisis-Driven Bursts of Expansion

Empirical Context: 2024 Palestinian Solidarity Encampments

I utilize the 2024 Palestinian solidarity encampments at Columbia University and UCLA to provide a critical empirical context for how campus policing operates during moments of crisis. These encampments were organized by student coalitions demanding university divestment from companies linked to Israel, greater institutional transparency, and broader political accountability. Across both cases, large-scale student demonstrations prompted responses from multiple institutional actors, including university administrations, campus police, and external law enforcement agencies. While the specific sequences of events differed, both encampments illustrate how protest activity generated institutional ambiguity, triggered

coordination challenges across the law enforcement web, and ultimately resulted in large-scale police intervention. I will provide some brief context for both demonstrations, see Appendix I for a more detailed timeline with analysis.

At Columbia University, the Columbia University Apartheid Divest coalition was the primary actor on the student organizing side, representing student demands in bargaining sessions with administrators. During the encampments, President Minouche Shafik was the primary spokesperson for administration, with Provost Angela V. Olinto, Trustee David Greenwald, and Trustee Claire Shipman also involved in statements. The first Columbia encampment was established on April 17th in South Lawn and cleared by the New York Police Department (as authorized by Shafik) on April 18th (Ventura 2024; Banerjee 2024). For two weeks (April 19th-28th), students maintained an encampment while negotiating with administrators. On April 30th, after not reaching an agreement, students occupied Hamilton Hall, resulting in a massive sweep of the encampment by the NYPD in riot gear. Columbia ultimately arrested 112 protestors, 80 of which were students (Shimon Prokupecz, Morales, and Tebor 2024). 22 students faced disciplinary charges, which were later overturned in court (Otterman 2026).

At UCLA, key student actors included UCLA's Students for Justice in Palestine chapter and the UC Divest coalition. On the administrative end, multiple policymakers with conflicting assertive authorities were involved: Chancellor Gene Block, various Vice and Assistant Chancellors, Chief of UCLA PD John Thomas, UC President Michael Drake, and various Regents. On April 25th, students established an encampment in Royce Quad, which remained unimpeded by law enforcement for multiple days (Winton et al. 2024). However, many counter-protesting demonstrations emerged in close proximity to the encampment. On April

30th, clashes between the two groups became violent, with a large group of counter-protestors attacking the encampment over several hours (throwing fireworks, spraying tear gas, physical force). UCLA police signalled for mutual aid but no law enforcement intervened in this confrontation. The next day, police from UCLA PD, LAPD, and CHP cleared the encampments in riot gear, using rubber bullets and sponge rounds. Police arrested over 200 protestors, with disciplinary notices issued to all arrested students (Winward 2025).

Process-Tracing of Encampments

To move from descriptive narrative to causal inference, I employ process tracing to evaluate whether the observed sequences at Columbia and UCLA are consistent with my proposed mechanism that links protest activity to the deployment of policing capacity. This mechanism consists of three core stages: (1) crisis emergence, (2) bureaucratic impasse within the law enforcement web, and (3) intense deployment of high-capacity policing. This framework generates clear observable implications. If the argument is correct, I should observe: (1) ambiguity or backtracking among institutional actors in the initial stages of protest response; (2) delays, contradictions, or breakdowns in coordination; and (3) the eventual dominance of actors with the greatest operational capacity, resulting in large-scale police intervention.

(1) Crisis Emergence. In both cases, the establishment of encampments produced immediate institutional pressure, forcing university actors to respond to competing demands of free expression, safety, and maintaining campus operations. At Columbia, this pressure triggered rapid escalation through early police involvement, while at UCLA it produced an initial strategy of minimal enforcement. Despite these differences, both cases exhibit the same underlying condition: protest activity generates uncertainty regarding the appropriate institutional response.

(2) Bureaucratic Impasse Within the Law Enforcement Web. Consistent with the expectations of the law enforcement web, this uncertainty translated into coordination challenges across institutional actors. At Columbia, impasse was seen when administrators were simultaneously negotiating with student organizers but also increasing law enforcement presence, producing contradictory policy outputs and delaying resolution. At UCLA, impasse was more visible, manifesting as fragmented decision-making between UCLA administration, UCOP, the Regents, and UCLA PD leadership. These dynamics are consistent with a Garbage Can model of decision-making, in which multiple actors advance competing solutions without clear coordination. In both cases, institutional actors were unable to produce a stable, non-coercive response to the encampments.

(3) Selective Deployment of Policing Capacity. Bureaucratic impasse was ultimately resolved through expanding policing capacity. At Columbia, President Shafik enabled rapid deployment of external law enforcement multiple times (but most visibly at Hamilton Hall). At UCLA, delayed coordination resulted in a more abrupt and large-scale deployment in the police clearing of the encampment, following the counter-protester attack. Crucially, policing capacity was not continuously applied throughout the encampments. Instead, it was deployed selectively at moments of perceived crisis, where it operated at high intensity through multi-agency coordination and the use of tactical equipment. UCLA chose not to deploy police while counter-protestor violence occurred, but did when protestors did not follow a dispersal order. This pattern supports the argument that expanded policing capacity enables crisis-driven, rather than routine, law enforcement.

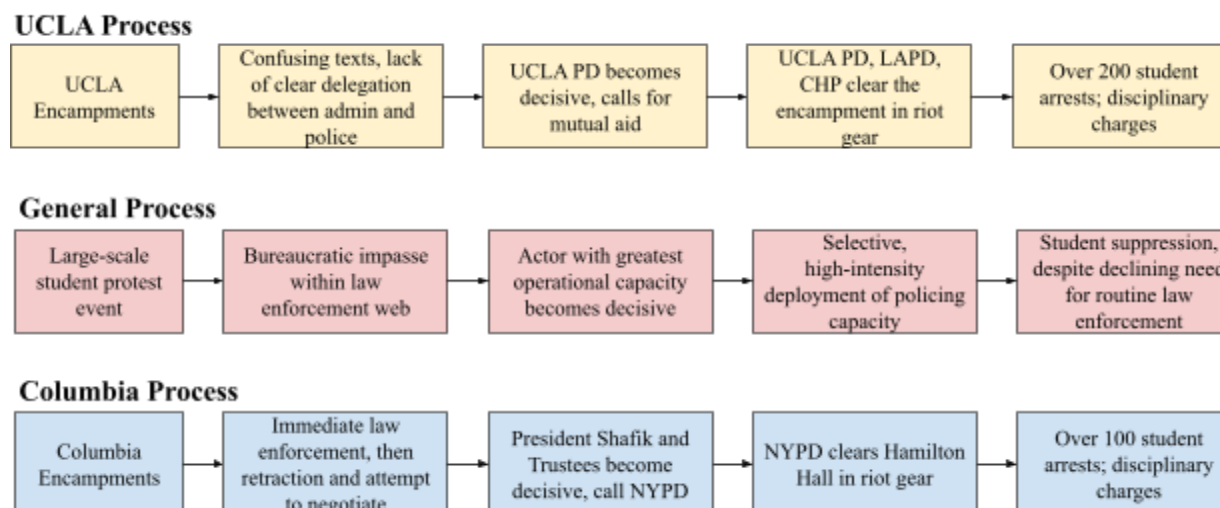


Figure 8: Process-Tracing Diagram

Crisis Response Executive

Columbia. At Columbia University, law enforcement was the first approach to containing and deterring student protests. In a Statement on April 18th, President Minouche Shafik described her decision to authorize NYPD to clear the initial encampment as “a decision that [she] hoped would never be necessary” but was precipitated by “extraordinary circumstances” (Shafik 2024h). Due to Columbia Public Safety’s lack of arrest power, they served as initial intermediaries, delivering a written warning to student protestors at 7:15pm (Banerjee 2024). Ultimately, this was never treated as a viable solution as police had already been contacted ahead of these warnings, and officers arrived in riot gear, signifying a strong escalation from unarmed public safety officers.

Given the University’s autonomy as a private university with significantly less policymaking actors, the President of the University (Minouche Shafik for the duration of the encampments) and members of the Board of Trustees (David Greenwald, Claire Shipman) served as primary decision-makers. This enabled them to make quick decisions and set the solution amidst the garbage can of institutional confusion. This is best demonstrated in the events

between April 19-28, where for two weeks, the encampment was active amidst constant clearings, counter-protesting action, and negotiation with administration. The administrative policymakers attempted to quell student demands by engaging in bargaining, but law enforcement remained a constant and credible threat throughout the negotiation period. While deadlines were repeatedly set and extended, and administrators publicly emphasized dialogue, the continued presence and prior use of NYPD signaled that coercive enforcement remained the ultimate fallback. This produced a controlled form of institutional impasse: unlike UCLA's fragmented paralysis, Columbia's leadership maintained centralized authority but cycled between negotiation and enforcement without resolving the underlying conflict.

This dynamic culminated on April 29, when the University declared negotiations at an impasse and issued a final ultimatum for protesters to vacate the encampment. When students refused, and particularly following the occupation of Hamilton Hall on April 30, administrators reauthorized NYPD to enter campus, resulting in mass arrests and the dismantling of the encampment (Banerjee 2024). Crucially, the building occupation was framed not as a continuation of student action, but as a shift into illegality, allowing the University to justify escalation as both necessary and inevitable.

Throughout Columbia's response to the student encampment, my argument of a crisis response executive can be seen via administrators having the power to act decisively, but lacking a viable non-coercive solution. Campus police had very low capacity and were not used to de-escalate but rather communicate and enforce administrative policies. Similarly, negotiation with student protestors functioned less as a genuine alternative than as a temporal strategy that delayed enforcement while constructing the legitimacy of an escalated police response. When

conversations failed, policing was validated as the only remaining solution, reinforcing and expanding the role of law enforcement within the university's governance framework.

UCLA. At UCLA, initially, systemwide policymakers and UCLA PD pursued an approach of minimal law enforcement intervention with the student encampment. These actors strongly emphasized defending the 1st amendment rights of students, and published multiple statements discussing the "community's right to free expression." This initial approach was complicated by counter-protestor clashing, with tensions between the two groups escalating gradually. Instead of clear communication and an emphasis on de-escalation, campus administrators, campus police, and systemwide officials instead miscommunicated and failed to establish a response plan. This bureaucratic impasse produced a situation in which no actors could effectively intervene, allowing tensions to escalate into violence and ultimately resulting in a large-scale, multi-agency police response.

In a report created by 21st Century Policing Solutions, an organization commissioned by UCOP to conduct an independent review of UCLA's response to the encampment, audits of administrative communications and actions found that UCLA's failures during the encampment were driven less by a lack of resources than by organizational breakdown, unclear authority, and the absence of operational planning (21st Century Policing Solutions 2024). Decision-making structures were fragmented across multiple bodies, including the Incident Response Team and Emergency Management Planning Group, with no clearly defined roles, leadership, or process for translating deliberation into action. Campus police were also not in many of these conversations, resulting in parallel action being taken (i.e. multiple calls for mutual aid). As a result, decisions were delayed, revisited, or left unresolved, producing what the report

characterizes as a chaotic decision-making environment, consistent with a Garbage Can decision-making environment.

These problems were compounded by failures in command and communication. UCLA did not implement a clear Incident Command structure, and during the April 30 attack there was no unified authority directing the response. Although multiple law enforcement agencies were present, UCLA PD did not effectively coordinate them, leaving officers without clear guidance or a shared operational plan. Communication was similarly fragmented, relying on text chains, random meetings, and loosely connected groups, resulting in missed messages and inconsistent situational awareness across decision-makers. The report also highlights confusion surrounding mutual aid: UCLA PD relied on informal requests rather than established state systems, and its agreements with external agencies were unclear and underdeveloped, contributing to delays in deployment.

Critically, the report identifies the failure of UCLA's tiered response model. While the university aimed to rely on non-police actors in the early stages of protest, these actors, such as Student Affairs Mitigators and private security, were too limited in number, authority, and training to manage large-scale or potentially violent situations. They were particularly ineffective when dealing with non-students or rapidly escalating conflict. This left UCLA without a viable intermediate option between inaction and police intervention.

Thus, UCLA illustrates the dynamics of a crisis response executive. University leaders confronted the encampment without a clear command structure, without codified response plans, and without a viable intermediate response. The result was institutional impasse: communication was fragmented, and responsibility was diffused across overlapping bodies. When violence escalated, administrators lacked credible intermediate tools and turned instead to increasing

policing capacity. Campus police, alongside mutual aid agencies, were the quickest to act and, thus, imposed their response to the encampment on the policymaking actors, fundamentally resulting in a massive increase in campus police political and functional power.

VII. Retroactive Justification of Policing

As a result of the expansion of campus policing capacity that occurs in moments of mass protest, policymaking actors in the campus law enforcement web create post-hoc justifications for police action. This creates a different model of policy, where the policies do not precede policing but rather create rationalizations for expanded capacity, ultimately making campus police politically dominant. I justify this argument through an analysis of administrative statements from Columbia and UCLA from before, during, and after the student encampments, as well as policies implemented by both universities after the encampments. Drawing on the theoretical background of the Garbage Can Model, each university's response to the 2024 encampments reflects the dilemma of the campus law enforcement framework, in which solutions (expanded policing tactics and capacity) are deployed before the problems are formally defined. These justifications are the mechanism through which temporary policing action is institutionalized.

Narrative Justifications

In order to explain policing action that both university police departments and mutual aid actors took, policymaking actors must construct narratives that retroactively justify the expansion of policing. They must argue that this action was necessary and, in the process, depict student protestors as deserving of the policing they received. Columbia and UCLA approached this narrative differently, with Columbia strongly condemning students and the organizations that

orchestrated the encampments, while UCLA maintained content neutrality. Both approaches mirror the dynamics of escalation in each case.

At Columbia, the administration (consisting of the President, Board of Trustees, and Provost) issued a series of statements that progressively reframed student protest as disorder, harassment, and ultimately a threat to campus safety. Early communications emphasized dialogue and tolerance, but simultaneously introduced a framework in which protest became acceptable only if it remained within institutional rules and did not disrupt university operations (Shafik and Mitchell 2023; Shafik 2024b). Over time, the framing became stricter: administrators repeatedly emphasized that the encampment “violated a long list of rules,” “disrupt[ed] campus life,” and created a “harassing and intimidating environment” for other students (Shafik 2024h). This language explicitly turns student demonstrations into a policy violation and safety threat, thereby justifying police action.

Following the escalation to the occupation of Hamilton Hall, Columbia’s narrative shifted from managing protest to justifying police intervention. Administrators distinguished between “peaceful protest” and “acts of destruction,” framing student actions as having crossed into illegitimate conduct (Shafik 2024a). Simultaneously, they invoked “outside actors” and antisemitic harassment to construct a broader crisis environment (Shafik 2024a). This framing legitimized the use of the NYPD while displacing responsibility for escalation away from university decision-making.

Crucially, Columbia’s most important narrative work occurs *after* the encampment is cleared. Because policing was deployed against students, the administration must retrospectively construct those students as deserving of that intervention. Thus, policymaking actors

systematically reframe protestors, especially student organizations, as harmful actors rather than legitimate political participants.

This is most evident in repeated condemnations of Columbia University Apartheid Divest (CUAD). Across multiple statements, Columbia labels CUAD an “unsanctioned” group, emphasizes that it is not recognized by the University, and condemns its messaging as promoting disruption or violence (Columbia University 2025h; Columbia University 2025i). By associating the encampment with an illegitimate and dangerous organization, the administration recasts the protests themselves as threats rather than political expression. At the same time, post-encampment statements collapse the distinction between protest and violation. Less extreme demonstrations are framed as “disruptions,” “harassment,” or threats to the academic mission, which serve to justify discipline and enforcement (Columbia University 2025l; Columbia University 2025m; Armstrong 2025b). Even as Columbia reaffirms commitments to free expression, those rights are deprioritized in favor of institutional order and safety.

Together, these narratives perform a clear function: they align the problem with the solution already deployed. Police intervention comes first while justification follows. In line with the Garbage Can Model, Columbia retroactively defines protest as harm, thereby normalizing and institutionalizing coercive policing within the university’s governance framework.

UCLA, by contrast, constructed a narrative grounded in neutrality, safety, and institutional values rather than explicit condemnation. In the months leading up to the encampment, Chancellor Gene Block and university leadership consistently framed campus tensions through the language of safety, mutual respect, and opposition to bigotry. Statements repeatedly condemned antisemitism, Islamophobia, and violence while emphasizing that UCLA must remain a space for “free expression” and “peaceful protest” (Block 2023b). At the same

time, the administration took a firm stance against divestment demands, arguing that such measures threatened academic freedom (University of California 2024). This pre-encampment discourse establishes the dual commitment to free expression and safety that later structures UCLA's justification for both inaction and intervention.

When the encampment formed on April 25, UCLA explicitly articulated this balancing framework. Administrators emphasized that their approach was guided by three principles: protecting safety, supporting free expression, and minimizing disruption to the university's teaching mission (Osako 2024b). In line with UC systemwide guidance, UCLA initially avoided law enforcement intervention, instead relying on private security and unarmed personnel. Even as tensions escalated and clashes between protestors and counter-protestors emerged, official communications maintained that "regular campus activities continue" and reiterated a reluctance to involve police unless "absolutely necessary" (UCLA Campus Protests 2024).

This commitment to minimal intervention becomes central to UCLA's narrative problem. On April 30 and May 1, when counter-protestors launched a violent attack on the encampment, administrators condemned the incident as "horrific," "appalling," and "utterly unacceptable," explicitly acknowledging that "instigators" had targeted students (Block 2024c). However, despite this recognition, law enforcement did not immediately intervene in a meaningful way. The absence of police action in the face of clear violence stands in stark contrast to the subsequent large-scale police response against the encampment itself.

To resolve this contradiction, UCLA's narrative shifts from neutrality to necessity. Following the attack, administrators emphasized that the events had "shaken our campus to its core," fractured community trust, and made it impossible to maintain a safe learning environment (Block 2024c). The focus moves away from who initiated violence and toward the

broader breakdown of campus order. By May 2, the clearing of the encampment was justified as a decision made “to preserve campus safety and the continuity of our mission,” with repeated emphasis that protestors were given warnings and opportunities to disperse voluntarily (Block 2024e) . In this framing, policing is a necessary response to escalating disruption and uncertainty.

Importantly, UCLA maintains formal neutrality throughout this process. Administrators continue to affirm that many protestors were peaceful and that protest remains a protected right. Rather than criminalizing student protestors outright, UCLA constructs a narrative in which enforcement is a reluctant but necessary response to institutional breakdown. This allows policymakers to justify both the earlier absence of police intervention during counter-protestor violence and the later presence of overwhelming police force against students, without directly reconciling the disparity between the two.

Despite these differences in tone, both universities ultimately converge on the same logic. Each constructs a narrative in which policing is necessary to protect the broader campus community, uphold institutional rules, and restore normal operations. Columbia achieves this through explicit condemnation and rule-based framing, while UCLA does so through appeals to neutrality, safety, and crisis management. In both cases, however, these narratives function to legitimize the same outcome: the expansion and institutionalization of policing capacity.

Policy Codification

Formalization of Policing Expansion. The expansion of policing capacity during the encampments is not temporary. Policymaking actors formalize campus police power through new personnel, institutional restructuring, and routine enforcement practices. This serves to embed campus police more deeply into university governance and decisionmaking. In both

Columbia and UCLA, post-encampment reforms convert crisis-driven policing into expanded campus police departments.

At Columbia, this process is most clearly visible in the expansion of Columbia's Public Safety Department by introducing Special Patrol Officers (Allen 2025). Following the encampments, Columbia announced the addition of officers credentialed under New York State law with the authority to issue citations and make arrests (N.Y. Crim. Proc. Law § 2.10, 2025). While these officers are unarmed, they possess formal arrest jurisdiction, marking a significant shift from Columbia's prior reliance on the NYPD for enforcement (Columbia University Public Safety 2025b). Framed as a means of reducing reliance on external law enforcement, this change functionally internalizes coercive capacity within the university itself. Public Safety is no longer limited to monitoring and communication, but is also empowered to directly enforce the law and university policy.

This expanded capacity is quickly reflected in subsequent protest responses. In January 2025, a classroom disruption resulted in the immediate suspension of a student, increased ID enforcement at campus entrances, and coordinated responses between Public Safety and the NYPD (Armstrong 2025b). Similarly, during protests in May 2025, Columbia disciplined more than 70 students and authorized police to clear Butler Library, where student protestors were gathered (C. Shipman 2025). These incidents demonstrate that policing capacity, once expanded, becomes routine. Columbia decreased the bureaucratic impasse time, creating quicker, more direct law enforcement that is intertwined in everyday campus governance. Their previous model of relying on mutual aid actors for law enforcement shifted to expanding internal policing while still utilizing mutual aid.

A parallel process occurs at UCLA through a different institutional pathway. Since UCLA PD already has arrest authority, UCLA formalizes policing capacity through administrative restructuring and the consolidation of interagency coordination. In May 2024, the university created a new Office of Campus Safety, led by an Associate Vice Chancellor with direct oversight of UCLA PD and emergency management (Watanabe 2024). This restructuring centralizes authority over campus security and reflects a clear institutional response to the failures of fragmented decision-making during the encampment.

At the same time, UCLA demonstrates a marked increase in visible and preemptive policing. On May 6th, a couple days after the mass arrests and encampment clearing, protestors blocked entry to a campus parking lot, resulting in immediate UCLA PD intervention and 43 arrests (Patel, Garcia, and Rand 2024). Similarly, in the year following the encampment, large-scale police presence on campus became normalized even in the absence of major protest activity. On the anniversary of the encampment in April 2025, officers from multiple UC campuses were deployed to monitor and restrict access to Royce Plaza, where a screening of a documentary commemorating the initial demonstrations was meant to take place (Gillette 2025). When the screening was moved to another area on campus, it was cleared within six minutes by UCLA PD officers in riot gear (UCLA Newsroom 2025; CAIR Los Angeles 2025). These responses indicate a shift from reactive to anticipatory policing, where the mere possibility of protest justifies immediate enforcement.

This expansion is also reflected in the continued use and normalization of crowd-control technologies. Reports indicate repeated deployments of pepper-ball projectiles, sponge rounds, and long-range acoustic devices in non-training circumstances (Kaleem 2025). The repeated use

of such weaponry signals an increased readiness to deploy force in managing campus demonstrations.

Across both cases, policing capacity expanded during the encampments, whether through arrest authority, more mutual aid resources, or use of weaponry. However, this capacity is not reduced once the crisis subsides. Instead, these developments are codified into new administrative structures and routine law enforcement practices, contributing to the trend of overall professionalization seen in campus police agencies. This transformation reflects the broader logic of my crisis response executive theory: in moments of crisis, policing emerges as the most readily deployable solution, and in the aftermath, institutions restructure themselves to make that solution more readily available in the future. As a result, campus police gain enduring political and functional power within the university.

Codification of Policing in University Policy. Beyond personnel expansion and administrative restructuring, universities formalize increased policing capacity through the revision of protest policies themselves. These changes, often framed as neutral “time, place, and manner” (TPM) regulations, translate the discretionary policing practices observed during the encampments into codified rules that expand the authority of campus police and constrain future protest. In both UCLA and Columbia, policing precedes policy.

At UCLA, this process is most clearly reflected in the transition from an interim to a permanent version of Policy 852 on Public Expression Activities (UCLA Administrative Vice Chancellor 2025; UCLA Administrative Vice Chancellor n.d; UCLA Administrative Vice Chancellor 2BC.). While the policy reaffirms a commitment to First Amendment rights, it simultaneously creates extensive barriers to protest that narrows the circumstances under which

protesting can occur. Public expression is limited to the hours of 6:00 a.m. to midnight, effectively banning overnight activity and making sustained encampments impossible. Spatially, the policy divides campus into distinct categories: a limited number of “Designated Areas for Public Expression” that do not require prior approval, a much larger set of spaces that require advance authorization, and areas where protest is entirely prohibited. Notably, highly visible and symbolically central campus spaces, like Royce Quad and Bruin Plaza, are either regulated through scheduling requirements or excluded altogether, redirecting protest into controlled and administratively manageable zones.

The policy also imposes detailed restrictions on the *manner* of protest. Marches must remain in motion rather than stationary, amplified sound is capped at specific decibel levels, and any physical structures (including tents, tables, or displays) require prior approval regardless of location. This policy directly addresses every strategy that students used during the encampments, making explicit prohibitions against them. Even activities within designated areas are conditional: if they are deemed to “disrupt” campus operations or conflict with scheduled events, participants may be ordered to disperse or relocate. The explicit targeting of encampment tactics suggests that these policies operate as post hoc institutional rationalizations, codifying policing decisions after the fact.

Crucially, enforcement authority is explicitly embedded within these rules. Campus safety personnel and designated university officials are empowered to determine when an activity becomes “disruptive,” to issue directives to participants, and to enforce compliance through discipline or arrest. The policy further expands this authority through identification requirements, allowing officials to demand ID from participants and penalize refusal. In effect, the ambiguity of terms like “disruption” and “interference” grant campus police significant

discretionary power to interpret and enforce policy in real time. Thus, the indecision that occurred during the encampment is codified into a decisionmaking structure that centers and empowers campus police.

This codification is reinforced at the UC systemwide level. Following the encampments, a letter from UC President Drake (2024) to campus chancellors explicitly requires campuses to prohibit camping, encampments, and unauthorized structures; to ban obstruction of movement across campus spaces; and to restrict masking intended to conceal identity (Watanabe and Kaleem 2024). These directives standardize the prohibition of the very tactics that defined the encampments, ensuring that future protests can be immediately classified as policy violations. Rather than responding to protest as an emergent political event, the university is now structurally positioned to take stronger, undoubtedly justified action if they were to occur again.

A parallel process unfolds at Columbia through revisions to the Rules of University Conduct and related Public Safety policies. Here, too, protest was narrowed through formal rule changes that expand enforcement capacity. Demonstrations were framed as violating anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, with future protests needing to comply, allowing administrators to frame protest as a form of harm rather than a right to free speech. Protests within academic buildings are prohibited, eliminating a key site of disruptive student action. Masking policies similarly restrict anonymity, prohibiting face coverings used to conceal identity during rule violations and authorizing Public Safety officers to demand identification from any individual on campus (Columbia University Public Safety n.d.; Gal-Oz 2026).

At the same time, Columbia expands the scope and flexibility of enforcement authority. Public Safety officers are granted greater power to act as University delegates, enabling them to directly enforce rules that were previously mediated through administrative processes .

Disciplinary procedures are also restructured to favor enforcement: timelines for resolving cases are made indefinite, transparency is reduced through limits on access to evidence and closed hearings, and sanctions become more flexible and potentially more severe (Beck, Paracha, and Han Wei Luo 2025). These changes shift the balance of power toward the institution and away from student protections, making the consequences of protesting more unilateral and less contestable. Columbia also codified explicit bans on encampments. Post-encampment policy from the Office of Public Safety states that tents and temporary structures will be immediately removed, access to affected areas will be restricted, and participants who refuse to disperse may face discipline or arrest (Columbia University Public Safety 2025). As at UCLA, tactics that previously required discretionary enforcement decisions are redefined as automatic violations, enabling rapid and predictable policing responses.

Across both cases, the key dynamic is the institutionalization of coercive capacity through formal policy. Time, place, and manner regulations, which could serve a neutral purpose of balancing free expression with campus safety, function as mechanisms for expanding police discretion and constraining protest. By codifying when and where protest can occur, defining broad categories of prohibited conduct, and embedding enforcement authority within these rules, universities transform crisis policing into a lasting expansion of power.

VIII. Student Free Speech Suppression

However, contrary to patterns of increased policing capacity, overall trends in campus policing suggest a decline in routine enforcement. Arrest data from 2005 to 2022 show consistent decreases across agencies, indicating that campus police are making fewer arrests over time. This pattern appears to contradict the expansion of policing capacity documented in the previous

sections. If campus police are becoming more professionalized, better resourced, and more deeply embedded in inter-agency networks, why are they arresting fewer people?

This section resolves that tension by arguing that the coercive capacity of campus police has not decreased, but rather been reconfigured. While policing capacity expands along the dimensions of authority and ability, its effects are not reflected in routine enforcement. Instead, campus policing capacity is latent until increased intervention intensity during moments of crisis. Together, these dynamics constrain student free speech not through constant repression, but through selective, high-impact enforcement and the decline in institutional pathways for student input in decision-making.

Declining Arrests

Using the panel of agencies observed in all three survey waves (2005, 2012, 2022), I calculated within-agency changes in total arrests across each time interval. The results show consistent declines in arrest activity over time: from 2005 to 2012, agencies averaged 86.7 fewer arrests; from 2012 to 2022, arrests declined by an additional 64.5; and across the full period, agencies reported an average decrease of 151 arrests. Because these values represent within-agency differences, they indicate that the same institutions reported substantially fewer arrests in later years.

Initially, this pattern might imply a reduction in coercive enforcement. However, when interpreted alongside the documented expansion of policing capacity, the decline in arrests instead reflects a transformation in how coercive power is exercised. Overall capacity is being increased, which is seen in moments of institutional crisis, but not evident in routine law enforcement practices. As demonstrated in the case studies, policing capacity is deployed selectively and at high intensity, after student demonstrations are perceived as crises that warrant

higher capacity policing. In this context, arrest counts function as an incomplete measure of coercive power: they capture everyday enforcement activity, but not the episodic, high-impact deployments that shape the boundaries of student protest.

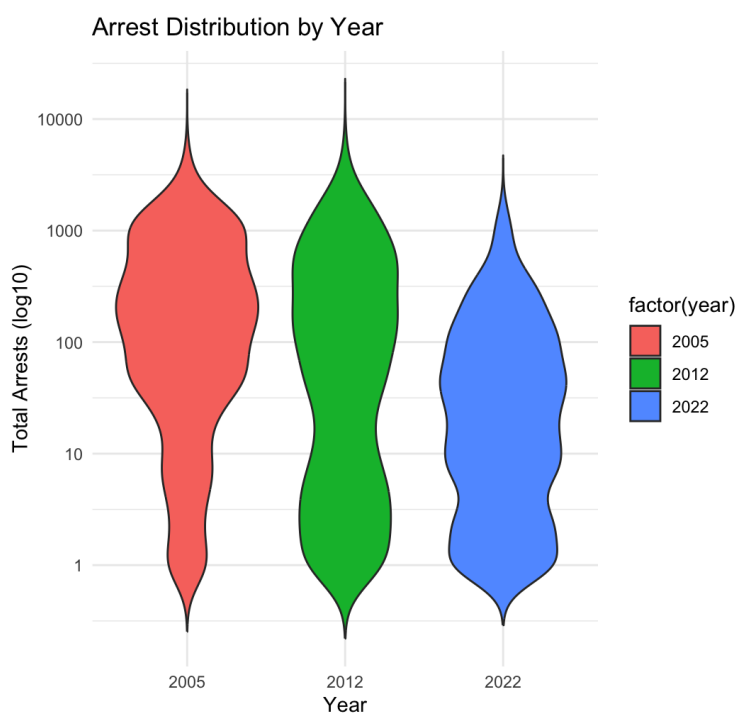


Figure 9: Decrease in Arrests Over Time

Intervention Intensity

If arrests capture routine enforcement, then the intensity of intervention during protest events provides a clearer view of how expanded policing capacity is actually deployed. The case studies of UCLA and Columbia demonstrate that campus police increasingly rely on high-intensity interventions in response to student demonstrations, particularly following initial moments of unrest.

Columbia has issued over 70 disciplinary punishments to students who participated in the May 2025 Butler Library disruption, including probation, suspensions, degree revocations, and expulsions (Laviates and Butts 2025). The university attempted to impose similar sanctions following the encampments and the occupation of Hamilton Hall, though a state judge later

vacated these punishments as “arbitrary and capricious” (Otterman 2026). At UCLA, subsequent protests, such as the documentary screening, were met with quicker and more forceful policing responses (UCLA 2025). Rapid dispersals, preemptive coordination with mutual aid agencies, and immediate authorization of arrests became standard practices. While these strategies first emerged during the encampments, they were subsequently reinforced and normalized through institutional support.

This pattern indicates that expanded policing capacity enables more forceful and coordinated responses, especially in subsequent protest activity. Policing capacity becomes latent during routine enforcement until another student demonstration prompts intervention, where rather than increasing the overall frequency of enforcement, campus police are increasingly able to intervene rapidly and at scale. Intervention intensity, therefore, reflects the selective activation of policing capacity, rather than its continuous use.

Student Input

In both case studies, existing channels for student and faculty input were sidelined in favor of centralized, enforcement-oriented responses. At Columbia, the University Senate cautioned against police intervention and advocated for alternative approaches, but President Shafik ultimately overrode these recommendations and authorized NYPD deployment (Lewis 2024). This prompted the Columbia chapter of the American Association of University Professors to call a no-confidence vote on President Shafik in May 2024 (Otterman 2024). Additionally, the University Senate originally controlled the “rules process,” which approves changes to codes of conduct and university policies. On May 7th, the Board of Trustees issued a resolution transferring this power to the Office of the Provost, effectively removing students and faculty from the revision process (Columbia University Board of Trustees 2025; Bordoff 2025).

Similarly, at UCLA, the Undergraduate Student Association issued statements urging divestment and engagement with protester demands, yet these recommendations were not meaningfully incorporated into administrative decision-making (UCLA Undergraduate Student Association 2024; Hamilton 2024). UCLA Professors, as a part of CFT and UC-AFT, also called for the resignation of Chancellor Block (Union of Educators and Classified Professionals 2024).

These cases make a crucial point: students are not a part of the law enforcement web. Despite student input being incorporated into campus governance and decision-making, in crisis and ambiguity, students are sidelined in favor of policymakers and campus police. This can be explained with the same logic as the crisis response executive. As policing capacity expands, decision-making authority becomes increasingly concentrated among actors capable of rapid, unilateral action (administrators, campus police leadership). Deliberative bodies, which traditionally serve as mechanisms for incorporating student and faculty input, are structurally disadvantaged in moments of crisis due to their slower, consensus-based processes.

This shift has important implications for student free speech. Suppression does not operate solely through arrests or direct enforcement, but also through the narrowing of institutional pathways available to contest administrative decisions. When participatory governance mechanisms are bypassed, students are left with fewer formal avenues to influence university policy, increasing the likelihood that protest becomes the primary mode of political expression. At the same time, the expansion of policing capacity ensures that such protests can be met with rapid and overwhelming force when deemed necessary.

Taken together, these findings resolve the apparent contradiction between declining arrest rates and increasing constraints on student free speech. Campus police agencies are not becoming less coercive; rather, coercion is being reconfigured. Routine enforcement declines,

while the capacity for selective, high-intensity intervention expands. Simultaneously, institutional decision-making shifts away from participatory processes that engage students toward actors embedded within the law enforcement web. The result is a system in which student speech remains formally protected, but substantively constrained.

IX. Conclusion and Synthesis

Thus, campus policing has shifted from a security force for students to a system of selective, institutionalized coercive power that reshapes the conditions under which student free expression is possible. This argument is visible in how the campus law enforcement web is expanding policing capacity along both dimensions of authority and ability over time. Institutional decision-makers are consolidating authority by positioning campus police and administrators as crisis response executives, while increasing ability through professionalization and resource expansion. This process accelerates in moments of perceived crisis and is subsequently institutionalized, allowing crisis-driven expansions to persist beyond the events that produced them.

Despite declining rates of routine enforcement, campus police agencies are becoming more politically dominant within campus governance. This dominance is expressed not through constant intervention, but through the capacity for rapid, high-intensity enforcement when activated. At the same time, students are systematically excluded from these decision-making processes and suppressed through the framing of demonstrations as crises, intensified interventions in protest activity, and the overriding of institutional pathways for student input.

My empirical analysis supports this framework. First, campuses with greater authority and ability are more likely to engage in coordinated, multi-agency intervention during student demonstrations. Second, this capacity is selectively activated in moments of crisis: as shown in

the UCLA and Columbia case studies, protests framed as crises produce rapid escalation, including large-scale mobilization, use of force, and concentrated arrests. Third, these crisis-driven expansions persist beyond the events that produce them, as elevated capacity is institutionalized through policy and administrative change, reinforcing the political dominance of campus law enforcement.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study, which could be expanded upon in future work. First, the quantitative data used in this study do not directly measure intervention during student protests. While arrest data provide a useful indicator of routine enforcement, they cannot capture the crisis-driven, high-intensity deployments that are central to my argument. As a result, the analysis relies on qualitative case studies to identify and trace these mechanisms. Although this mixed-methods approach strengthens the overall design, it also limits the ability to generalize specific crisis dynamics across all campuses. Second, the case studies focus on highly visible protest events at UCLA and Columbia, which may not be representative of all institutions. These cases are analytically valuable because they reveal dynamics that are otherwise difficult to observe, but they may overrepresent moments of extreme escalation. Future research could examine lower-intensity protests or institutions with less developed policing infrastructures to assess the scope conditions of the argument.

Third, measures of authority and ability are necessarily imperfect proxies for policing capacity. While memoranda of understanding, education requirements, and weapons authorization capture key dimensions of capacity, they do not fully account for informal practices, discretionary decision-making, or variations in enforcement culture across agencies. Similarly, student input is assessed through qualitative evidence of governance processes, which

may vary in visibility and documentation across cases. Finally, this study does not directly measure student outcomes beyond protest suppression, such as intimidation on speech or long-term changes in student organizing. While the analysis demonstrates how policing capacity constrains protest activity and institutional participation, further research is needed to assess how these dynamics shape broader patterns of student political engagement.

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Appendix I: Detailed Timeline of the Encampments

The encampment at Columbia was a key example of how the campus law enforcement web creates bureaucratic fragmentation when responding to student demonstrations. Ultimately, this results in a rapid expansion of campus police capacity. Below, I synthesize multiple sources to create a timeline of the encampment, the counter-protester violence, and the police sweep that occurred in April-May, 2024. I then explain why these events are relevant to my argument.

- **December 2023-April 2024: Pre-Encampment Statements**

In the months preceding the encampment, President Minouche Shafik and university leadership issued statements emphasizing antisemitism, campus safety, and the need for civil discourse, while reaffirming commitments to free expression. At the same time, Columbia strengthened protest regulations, including interim demonstration policies and disciplinary enforcement mechanisms.

These statements establish the administrative lens through which protest would be interpreted: legitimate in principle, but increasingly framed as a potential threat to safety and campus order. Administrators construct a tension between free speech and safety in advance of the encampment.

- **April 17-18: Encampment Formation and Immediate Police Use**

On April 17th at 4am, students established the “Gaza Solidarity Encampment” on Columbia University’s South Lawn, pledging to remain until the university divests. Columbia University Public Safety, university employees with no arrest powers, are present, communicating university directives to student protestors. Within 24 hours, President Minouche Shafik authorized the New York Police Department to clear the encampment, resulting in over 100 arrests. 3 Barnard students were suspended due to participating in the initial encampment. Protesters quickly repopulate the encampment, maintaining a continuous presence on campus.

Columbia introduces external policing immediately, from a unilateral policymaker, President Shafik.

- **April 19-28: Encampment Persistence and Managed Tolerance**

For nearly two weeks, the encampment remains active on South Lawn, even as the university attempts to maintain normal operations (including admitted students weekend) and restricts campus access. Tents are repeatedly removed and re-established, while students organize, expand participation, and sustain visibility. Simultaneously, Columbia engages in ongoing negotiations with protest leaders, extending deadlines and publicly emphasizing both the right to protest and the need to preserve campus functioning. University statements emphasized both the right to protest and the need to address disruption, harassment, and safety concerns.

The result was a prolonged institutional impasse: administrators relied on dialogue while simultaneously signaling increased law enforcement presence. This produced contradictory policy signals and delayed de-escalation.

- **April 29: Negotiation Collapse and Disciplinary Shift**

On April 29, Columbia announced that negotiations had reached a stalemate and issued a firm deadline for protesters to vacate the encampment. Students refused and instead consolidated the encampment through picket lines and continued occupation.

This moment marks a shift from negotiation to ultimatum, narrowing the range of administrative responses and setting the stage for enforcement.

- **April 30: Hamilton Hall Occupation and Police Re-Entry**

In the early hours of April 30, protesters occupied Hamilton Hall (renamed Hind's Hall by students), escalating the conflict. The university framed the occupation as a severe safety and operational crisis, restricting campus access and authorizing NYPD intervention later that evening. Police arrested over 100 individuals and dismantled the encampment.

The occupation served as the key justification for large-scale policing, allowing administrators to present enforcement as the necessary outcome of failed negotiation.

- **April 30–May 1: Encampment Clearance**

Following the police sweep, Columbia dismantled the encampment and emphasized that protesters had violated university policy and the law. Administrative statements highlighted prior efforts at dialogue and the necessity of restoring order.

This marks the consolidation of policing as the final mechanism of governance, reframing the preceding weeks of protest as a problem requiring coercive resolution.

UCLA's encampment follows a similar pattern to that of Columbia's but with one key divergence: at UCLA, counterprotestors instigated violence with encampment protesters before police intervened. This provides an interesting supplement and a point to investigate: why was police action and arrests centered around student protesters, rather than counterprotestors who were mostly not members of the UCLA community.

- **October 2023–March 2024: Pre-Encampment Statements**

In the months preceding the encampment, Chancellor Gene Block and university leadership issued a series of statements condemning violence in Israel and Gaza, emphasizing campus safety, and reaffirming opposition to divestment initiatives. These communications consistently framed the conflict through the lenses of safety, antisemitism, and institutional neutrality, while reiterating commitments to free expression.

These statements establish administrative interests and how protest actions were interpreted. They constantly emphasized neutrality and refused to engage with protesters' demands for divestment of university investments. These statements also underscore a key conflict between free speech and public safety that later structured how administrators approached the encampment.

- **April 25–27: Encampment Formation and Initial Response**

On April 25th, Students established a pro-Palestinian encampment in Royce Quad.

University officials emphasized a commitment to both free expression and campus safety, deploying private security who could not make arrests. According to guidance from the UC Office of the President to protect student free speech rights, UCLA Police Chief John Thomas attempted to avoid law enforcement intervention.

The initial policymaking by UCOP and UCLA PD reflects a deliberate strategy of minimal enforcement, limiting policing capacity and emphasizing student free speech.

- **April 28-30: Counter-Protestors and Miscommunication**

On April 28th, a counter-protesting rally emerged alongside the encampment, producing intermittent clashes. Campus leadership asked Thomas for a security plan, with no response. On April 30th, the university declared the encampment illegal. Throughout all of this, mutual aid requests for additional law enforcement are initiated and then rescinded as administrative plans shift.

The constant reversals of mutual aid requests are a key example of miscommunication and institutional fragmentation: actors were not working together and were, in parallel, seeking solutions. This exemplifies the randomness of the garbage can model, with each actor attempting to assert control over the other.

- **April 30-May 1: Violent Attack and Collapse of Non-Police Strategy**

At 10:30pm on April 30th, a large group of counter-protestors attacked the encampment over several hours (throwing fireworks, spraying tear gas, physical force). Crucially, the police did not intervene. The private security watched and did nothing as the confrontation happened. UCLA PD called for mutual aid from LAPD but, once they arrived, did not take any action for several hours, citing that it takes officers a while to fully assemble.

The crucial point is the lack of law enforcement intervention despite expanded policing capacity: even amid clear violence by outside actors, police failed to act. The attack then served to justify subsequent large-scale policing of students, even though it was itself the product of bureaucratic impasse and miscommunication.

- **May 1-2: Mass Police Deployment and Encampment Clearance**

Following the attack, at 6pm the next day, UCLA shifts to remote operations and police declare a dispersal order for the encampment. They mobilize hundreds of officers from the UCLA Police Department, LAPD, and CHP. In riot gear, using flood lights, rubber bullets, smoke grenades, and zip ties, officers arrest more than 100 protestors.

This marks a rapid and substantial expansion of policing capacity, enabled by the crisis framing produced by the prior night's violence.

Appendix II: Dataset of Statements from Campus Administrations

In order to construct my process-tracing and narrative justification sections, I compiled 40 administrative statements and messages from Columbia University and 22 from UCLA between 2023-2025. This allowed me to trace unfolding developments, any changes in messaging, administrative opinions, and more. I have summarized some key developments in these tables below, but all statements are cited in my References.

Columbia: Summary of Administrative Statements			
Date	Actor	Key Content	Analytical Role
Dec 2023–April 2024	Columbia Administration	Emphasis on antisemitism, safety, and civil discourse; tightening protest rules	Pre-crisis framing (safety vs. speech)
April 17–18, 2024	President Shafik	Encampment formed; NYPD called within 24 hours; 100+ arrests	Immediate mutual aid, NYPD
April 19–28, 2024	Columbia Administration	Ongoing encampment; negotiations + safety concerns; restricted campus access	Managed impasse (conflicting messaging)
April 23, 2024	President Shafik	Encampment framed as safety threat; deadline for removal introduced	Shift toward enforcement framing
April 26, 2024	Columbia Administration	Avoid immediate NYPD return but emphasize disruption	Strategic hesitation and continued justification
April 29, 2024	President Shafik	Negotiations fail; ultimatum issued; protest framed as violating rules	Collapse of negotiation, pivot to law enforcement
April 30, 2024	Columbia Administration	Hamilton Hall occupation framed as major safety and operational crisis	Escalation trigger for mutual aid, once again
April 30, 2024 (night)	Columbia + NYPD	NYPD re-enters campus; 100+ arrests; encampment dismantled	Full enforcement action
April 30–May 1, 2024	Columbia Administration	Protesters framed as policy violators; enforcement justified as necessary	Post-hoc justification of policing
May 2024 (post-encampment)	Columbia Administration	Protest groups framed as illegitimate/disruptive; emphasis on order and safety	Narrative consolidation and normalization of policing

UCLA: Summary of Administrative Statements			
Date	Actor	Key Content	Analytical Role
April 25, 2024	UCLA Administration (Strategic Communications)	Monitoring demonstration; emphasizes safety + free expression	Initial framing: neutral monitoring
April 26, 2024	UCLA Administration	Encampment established; law enforcement only if “absolutely necessary”	Non-intervention baseline
April 27–28, 2024	UCLA Administration	Encampment ongoing; safety personnel present; no police escalation	Managed tolerance phase
April 28, 2024	UCLA Administration	Reports physical altercations between protest groups	First disruption signal
April 29, 2024	UCLA Administration	Increased security presence; additional safety personnel deployed	Beginning of capacity expansion
April 30, 2024	Chancellor Gene Block	Encampment labeled disruptive; increased law enforcement + enforcement framing	Shift to enforcement justification
April 30, 2024	UC President Michael Drake	Encampment declared unlawful; disruption justifies intervention	System-level rationalization
May 1, 2024	UCLA Administration	Violent attack; requests mutual aid from external law enforcement	Crisis trigger which resulted in policing expansion
May 1, 2024	Chancellor Block	Condemns violence; signals investigations and accountability	Crisis consolidation
May 2, 2024	Chancellor Block	Encampment declared unlawful; police clear encampment; mass arrests	Full enforcement action
May 5, 2024	Chancellor Block	Creation of Office of Campus Safety; restructuring policing authority	Institutionalizing and codifying expanded capacity
May 6–7, 2024	UCLA + UC System	External review + law enforcement investigation	Narrative consolidation and normalization of policing

Appendix III: Database Methodology Expansion

For replication purposes and to expand on my methodology section, I am also including some more detailed information on the dataset I created. I plan to expand this dataset for further analysis and to be published in an open-access website.

Data Sources

I draw on multiple datasets to examine changes in campus policing capacity and enforcement over time.

- **Survey of Campus Law Enforcement Agencies (SCLEA)**
Administered by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in 2004–2005, 2011–2012, and 2021–2022, SCLEA provides detailed agency-level data on campus police structure, jurisdiction, inter-agency agreements, personnel, and use-of-force policies. This dataset serves as the primary source for measuring changes in policing capacity, particularly along the dimensions of authority (memoranda of understanding) and ability (educational requirements and arms authorization).
- **Campus Safety and Security Survey (Clery Act)**
Collected by the U.S. Department of Education, this dataset provides institution-level counts of arrests and disciplinary actions across multiple categories. In this study, arrest data is used to capture trends in routine enforcement, serving as a baseline against which shifts toward selective, high-intensity intervention can be interpreted.
- **Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)**
IPEDS provides institutional characteristics, including enrollment size, geographic location, and public versus private status. These variables are used as controls to account for structural differences across campuses.

I also used the Civilytics Campus Police Data and FBI Uniform Crime Reporting data to clean and merge the data, but they were not relevant for my final analysis due to limitations in data cleaning.

Unit of Analysis and Sample Construction

For the SCLEA and Campus Safety and Security data, the unit of analysis is corresponding campuses and their police department. For IPEDS, the unit of analysis is a college campus. For UCR, the unit of analysis are police agencies. To examine changes over time, I constructed a panel of institutions observed across all three waves of the SCLEA survey (2005, 2012, and 2022). Restricting the sample to agencies present in all three waves ensures that observed changes reflect within-agency variation rather than differences in sample composition.

Datasets were merged at the institutional level using IPEDS identifiers, supplemented by Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE) identifiers and institution names where necessary. Observations with missing or inconsistent identifiers across datasets were excluded.

The final analytic sample consists of a balanced panel of institutions with complete data on key variables across all three time periods. This approach allows for consistent comparison of policing capacity and enforcement trends over time.

Variable Names and Coding Key				
	Variable Names (2005)	Variable Names (2012)	Variable Names (2022)	Coding
Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs)	N/A	Q63_A, Q63_B, Q63_C, Q63_D, Q63_E, Q63_F, Q63_G, Q63_OTHER	MOU_NA, MOU_SW, MOU_NSW, MOU_STATE, MOU_LOCAL, MOU_SHERIFF, MOU_CAMPUS, MOU_OTH CAMP, MOU_COURTS, MOU_OTHER_OS, MOU_OTHER_OS_OTHER	1 if yes 0 if no
Minimum Educational Requirements	SWPREFER, SWWRTREQ, NSPREFER, NSWRTREQ	Q38_A, Q38_B, Q39_A, Q39_B	SW_MIN_ED, NSW_MIN_ED	1 if Four-year degree 2 if Two-year degree 3 if Some college 4 if High school 5 if No requirement
Authorization of Arms	SWSEMI, SWTRADBAT, SWTASER, SWFLASH	Q47A_A, Q47A_E, Q47A_L, Q47A_I	SEMI_AR, FLASHBANG, BATON, TASER	1 if authorized 0 if no
Arrests	Sum of 42 columns; Combination of four location categories: residence hall, public property, on campus, non-campus Combination of three crime types: drug, liquor, weapons Combination of year: 2005, 2006, 2007	Sum of 43 columns; Combination of five location categories: residence hall, public property, reported, on campus, non-campus Combination of three crime types: drug, liquor, weapons Combination of year: 2011, 2012, 2013	Sum of 43 columns; Combination of five location categories: residence hall, public property, reported, on campus, non-campus Combination of three crime types: drug, liquor, weapons Combination of year: 2021, 2022, 2023	Summary variable was TOTAL_ARRESTS Numerical variable reported