

Overwhelming police presence used to intimidate Northwestern University protest

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On Monday night a large police force was deployed to downtown Evanston, Illinois, to intimidate and suppress a demonstration by a small group of students from nearby Northwestern University (NU).

The students were calling for the abolition of Northwestern's police department.

The protest was organized by a group of students known as NU Community Not Cops, which has been leading calls for the abolition of the university's police department since the summer. The group planned to march from the campus to the downtown area to read statements speaking out against police violence.

As they made their way to their destination, students were surrounded and corralled by armed police in riot gear and shields. The *Daily Northwestern* reported that protesters were threatened with arrest if any of them stepped off the sidewalk into the street.

In addition to the Evanston Police Department, additional officers from the Northern Illinois Police Alarm System (NIPAS) were deployed to bolster the police presence and create a larger show of force. NIPAS is a system that local police chiefs in the area use to call in detachments from neighboring departments.

Reportedly, 70 or more police officers followed and surrounded the students. In comparison, the protest never exceeded 60 people. Estimates from Twitter suggested the protest consisted of 30-45 students most of the time.

David Rosen, a local resident who passed by the protest, told the *Daily Northwestern*: "It doesn't look very dangerous to me. ... [The police] look more dangerous than [the protesters] do."

The deployment of such an overwhelming force for a relatively small student protest is an attempt to intimidate students into ending their protests and

discourage similar demonstrations. It also reflects the fear that protests taking place during broader social unrest over the Trump administration, the election and more, could grow into a broader movement.

At least two police officers were photographed hiding their names and badge numbers with tape, a common tactic before a police riot to protect officers who employ unlawful violence. No students were arrested at the protest.

Less than two weeks earlier, on Halloween, NU Community Not Cops held a protest in the same downtown Evanston area during which a sit-in was held.

When police surrounded a student to arrest her for having moved onto the sidewalk, students and police clashed, with police using pepper spray being on the crowd of protesters. Students were shoved back with batons. A PhD student told the *Daily Northwestern*: "My friend got hit in the face, so she starts crying and freaking out. ... So I'm holding on to her, trying to move back, shouting for a medic ... and then [the pepper spray] got in my contacts and I had to rip them out."

Police justified the violence with the claim that students were destroying property. The only reported damage was a broken window at a Whole Foods and a handful of plants that had been pulled from their pots.

After the incident on October 31, Evanston Police Chief Demitrous Cook told reporters that the police response to the students was to "send a message that we're not going to let people just come in here and tear up the City of Evanston."

Student protests calling for the removal of Northwestern's campus police began this summer in the wake of the protests against the murder of George Floyd. NU Community Not Cops and other organizations circulated a petition calling for the

abolition of the school's police department and the funds to be redistributed to student resources. The petition has gained over 8,000 signatures.

Since then the group has staged regular demonstrations looking to gain a hearing from the university. Many protests have taken place outside the home of Northwestern University President Morton Schapiro calling for him to resign. On October 19, Schapiro issued a statement condemning the protests.

“The University has every intention to continue improving NUPD, we have absolutely no intention to abolish it.” Schapiro said student protests have “moved well past legitimate forms of free speech” and that he was “disgusted” by the demonstrations. As president of Northwestern, an important Big 10 school, Schapiro is paid \$1,590,081 per year.

The increase in police presence and brutality, on campus and off campus, against students and workers is a marked escalation of the authoritarian actions being taken by governments as class tensions reach a fever pitch.



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