

SAFETY, SECURITY, AND ACCESS WITHIN WINNIPEG FOOD SPACES

BACKGROUND

This survey was part of a larger research project – *The Food Police: Carceral Food Spaces in Winnipeg* – that sought to identify and examine modes of surveillance and policing that operate in Winnipeg food spaces, namely grocery stores. This project wanted to understand how food spaces are made carceral through surveillance and policing, the implications of surveillance and police presence in grocery stores for safe access to food, and the implications of securitized and policed food spaces for individuals to maintain food security.

Our larger project aimed to 1) determine the multiple modes of surveillance and policing used within Winnipeg grocery stores, 2) to increase understanding of the extent of policing and surveillance in Winnipeg food spaces to better understand the negative impacts on food security for people who are criminalized in these spaces, and 3) to determine the legal implications of increased surveillance in grocery stores, including privacy law violations that occur through the posting of surveillance images of suspected shoplifters, and human rights violations that result from the criminalization of shoppers.

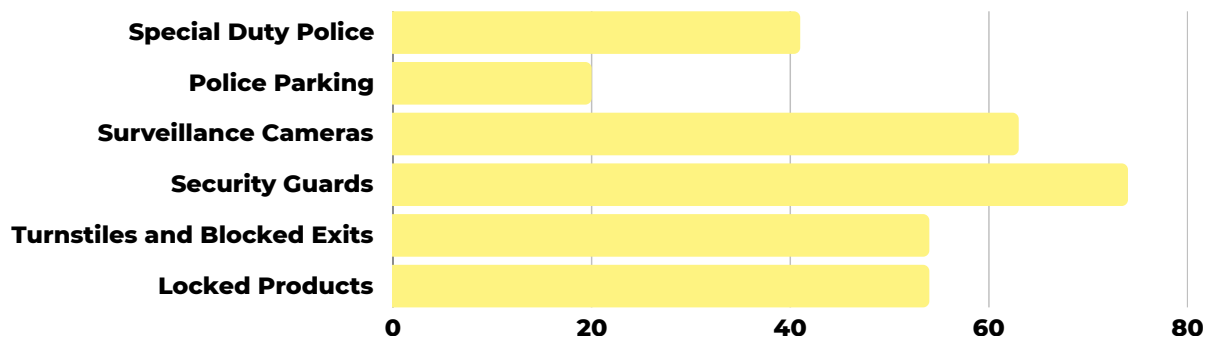
The survey – *Safety, Security, and Access within Winnipeg Food Spaces* – addressed the following questions: How are Winnipeg grocery stores surveilled and policed? What are the experiences of citizens who encounter surveillance and policing in grocery stores?

METHODS

The survey was available online and participants were recruited through social media and posters at community organizations across Winnipeg. The survey contained a series of standardized questions relating to types of surveillance implemented in Winnipeg grocery stores, as well as open ended questions that offered participants an opportunity to share more in-depth reflection on issues pertaining to policing and surveillance in grocery stores. The survey recruited participants who were over 18 years of age and purchase groceries in Winnipeg. In total, 46 people completed the survey. Reflective thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative survey data.

RESULTS

Participants were asked to report on the types of surveillance and policing features they noticed at their most frequented grocery store:



43%

of participants have been followed by a police officer or security guard while shopping

60%

of participants identifying as First Nations have been followed by a police officer or security guard while shopping

91%

of participants think that racial profiling is present in Winnipeg grocery stores

74%

of participants do not think that incarceration is an appropriate response to food theft

RESULTS

01. Safety

When asked whether the presence of security or police in grocery store makes participants feel safe or unsafe, 46% felt neutral, 39% felt unsafe, and 15% felt safe.

When asked whether participants avoid shopping at grocery stores if they have police officers working as security 34% participants indicated that yes, they will avoid those grocery stores, while 52% indicated no, they do not avoid stores. However, some participants who indicated no were critical of the cost of such measures, that they are privileged to be unharassed by police, that police presence makes them uncomfortable and they don't want to support stores who use this tactic, and that they think police escalate situations. One participant also noted that while they would prefer to shop without the presence of police, there has been such an expansion of police and private security that it makes it practically impossible to avoid.

02. Security

When asked whether participants think food theft is connected to food insecurity, 80% of participants agreed that food theft is connected to food insecurity, and a further 26% of participants specifically indicated that they think poverty and the cost of food causes food insecurity and leads to food theft.

Only 7% of participants indicated that they think food theft is the result of individuals reselling food to support addictions, or 'boosting.'

03. Access

When asked whether participants think security and police presence in grocery stores impacts how individuals are able to maintain food security and have safe access to food, participants were concerned that grocery stores would follow in the steps of liquor stores and that grocery shopping will become "unattainable for those without ID." Participants also noted concerns about police presence increasing the chance of violent escalation, criminalization, or death. One participant noted that police disproportionately target Indigenous people, which will make it more difficult for people to feed their families and police presence will make grocery stores a hostile environment.

SIGNIFICANCE

The study findings highlight how participants are thinking about and experiencing the increased securitization of grocery stores.

Based on the findings and what participants shared, three areas of significance emerged: investing in food security, divesting from policing, and critical conversations. Future policy and advocacy efforts should consider these three themes.

The key findings highlighted in this summary of findings are representative of the major themes. However, there are other minor thematic areas, such as support for vigilante justice (e.g., sharing photos of suspected shoplifters) over paid Special Duty Police in grocery stores, which will be explored in future publications.



01. Invest in Food Security

Affordability is a key factor when choosing where to grocery shop. Investing in food security, and lowering food costs across the board, will increase food security for everyone.

02. Divest from Policing

Concerns that police presence in grocery stores escalates violence (especially for Indigenous people), increases grocery costs, and makes grocery stores inaccessible and unsafe is a critical finding. Future inquiry should interrogate whether divesting from police promotes vigilante justice and citizen policing in its place.

03. Critical Conversations

Participants offered critical reflections on rhetoric used by retailers and police regarding food theft, food insecurity, and the need to increase police powers. Critical conversations should be facilitated in our communities to challenge rhetoric and misconceptions about food theft and increasing the powers of police.