# New York plan to monitor Labor Day parties with drones prompts outcry

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oral sessions with C. Hamard

# Maya Yang, [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com), 2 Sept. 2023

# New York City police plan to monitor large gatherings and noise complaints over Labor Day weekend with surveillance drones, officials have announced, prompting outcry from privacy advocates.

# “The drones are going to be responding to non-priority calls and priority calls,” Kaz Daughtry, an assistant New York police department (NYPD) commissioner, said. “For example if we have any 311 calls on our non-emergency line, we’re going to be utilizing our assets to go check on the party to make sure if the call is founded or not.”

# Daughtry added: “We’ll be able to determine how many resources we need to send to that location for this weekend.”

# Privacy advocates were not assured by Daughtry’s explanation. Daniel Schwarz, the privacy and technology strategist at the New York Civil Liberties Union, said: “Deploying surveillance drones over New Yorkers gathering with their friends and families to celebrate J’ouvert[[1]](#footnote-1) is racialized discrimination and it doesn’t make us safer.” Schwarz also accused police of “playing fast and loose” with New Yorkers’ constitutional rights to due process and to freely hold peaceful gatherings. He added that the drone ploy was also antithetical to the 2021 Public Oversight of Surveillance Technology Act, which requires New York police to publish impact and use policies on its surveillance technologies.

# “As the NYPD keeps deploying these dystopian technologies, we must push for stricter guardrails – especially given the department’s lengthy history of surveilling and policing Black and brown communities,” he continued.

# Albert Fox Cahn, the executive director of the Surveillance Technology Oversight Project, said “we see that there’s a real pattern with the NYPD and with Eric Adams (the New York City mayor) – whenever there’s a risk of bad headlines, they’ll turn to the next technology gimmick,” Cahn told the Guardian.

# Cahn went on to explain the difference between airplanes and helicopters compared to drones, which he said are “even more invasive because they can fly at such low altitudes”. “I’m also worried about not just video recordings but potentially audio recordings,” he said. “No one should have to worry that they’re going to be surveilled by the police on their own.” A staff attorney at the nonprofit digital rights organization the Electronic Frontier Foundation, said drone surveillance should require warrants. “Drones are smaller, easier to maneuver, and cost a minute fraction of the price to purchase and operate. It’s also much harder to surreptitiously spy on people with manned aircrafts because of their size and the amount of noise they make.”

# Earlier this year, several state Democrats introduced a bill in the New York state senate to impose limitations on drone use for law enforcement purposes, as well as prohibit drone use by law enforcement at concerts, protests and other events. (481 words)

1. The name J'Ouvert originates from the French words "jour ouvert,” signals the start of Carnival. Carnival is the traditional street festival honoring the vast heritage and culture of the Caribbean diaspora. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)