Regional Overview: The United States
15-21 November 2020

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Last week in the United States, the demonstration rate remained constant compared to the week prior. The largest number of demonstrations were related to the coronavirus pandemic, followed by those in support of President Donald Trump. Pandemic-related demonstrations doubled compared to the previous week. Meanwhile, demonstrations in support of President Trump decreased by more than half. Demonstrations associated with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement decreased by a quarter. In several states, including in Texas, Utah, and South Carolina, militia recruitment and training activities were also reported.

Last week, 40% of demonstrations reported in the US were related to the coronavirus pandemic. As the number of new cases and deaths surged in the US — with an average of over 100,000 new cases and more than 1,000 deaths reported daily since the beginning of November — demonstrations linked to government measures to curb the pandemic increased sharply (Washington Post, 25 November 2020). In El Paso, Texas, the state government mobilized 36 service members of the Texas National Guard to help with morgue operations amid a rapid increase in coronavirus cases and hospitalizations in the city (CNN, 22 November 2020). In Kentucky, the government mobilized 50 service members of the Kentucky National Guard to 10 non-clinical teams across the state. Both mobilizations were designed to support long-term healthcare facilities responding to the pandemic. In addition, various labor unions, including the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), and National Nurses United (NNU), took to the streets to demand stronger government measures to protect essential workers during the pandemic. However, despite the surge in COVID-19 cases, some parents and students continued to call for reopening schools and in-person learning. Protesters in Texas, Ohio, and Minnesota held demonstrations in defiance of state mask mandates and fresh restrictions on mass gathering and social activities ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday.

As President Trump continued to claim electoral victory and began legal battles over allegations of voter fraud (Washington Post, 19 November 2020), numerous pro-Trump demonstrations were held across the country. Many of these events occurred in states that were viewed as vital to President Trump's re-election, including Georgia and Wisconsin. In Atlanta, Georgia, hundreds of Trump supporters, accompanied by armed militia members, held a 'Stop the Steal' rally from 18 to 21 November. Several

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heavily armed militia groups, including the Proud Boys, Groypers, Oath Keepers, and the III% Security Force, were reportedly present throughout the demonstrations. Demonstrators also held signs in support of the QAnon conspiracy theory movement. Members of Refuse Fascism, the Democratic Socialists of America, Antifa, and supporters of the BLM movement counter-protested. On 20 November, Georgia’s secretary of state and governor certified Joe Biden’s win following a hand tally confirming the margin of difference between the presidential candidates. On 21 November, the Trump campaign formally requested a recount of the five million presidential votes in Georgia (Washington Post, 21 November 2020). Similarly, around 500 to 600 Trump supporters gathered for a ‘Make America Great Again (MAGA)’ rally on 21 November near the Mayfair Mall in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin (Urban Milwaukee, 23 November 2020). During the demonstration, members of a militia group, the Wisconsin Proud Boys, were also present to “provide security” for the rally — a recurrent claim by militia to explain their presence at demonstrations.

Demonstrators additionally took to the streets to call for President Trump to concede to President-elect Biden and for the presidential transition process to begin. The transition process was delayed by the General Services Administration (GSA), which is in charge of administering the process (The Atlantic, 23 November 2020). This has meant that crucial briefings relating to national security have been withheld from the president-elect’s team. It has likewise undermined their ability to coordinate with health officials, potentially delaying the future distribution of a coronavirus vaccine (NBC News, 16 November 2020). Members of Refuse Fascism protested in Michigan, New York, and Ohio calling for the transition to begin, and the ‘Rise and Resist’ movement held a demonstration on 21 November in Manhattan, New York, urging GSA Administrator Emily Murphy to sign off on the presidential transition as soon as possible. Earlier this week, on 23 November, Murphy declared President-elect Biden the apparent winner and approved the beginning of the transition process (Washington Post, 23 November 2020).

Last week, demonstrations associated with the BLM movement continued but decreased by a quarter compared to the week prior. On 19 November, in Omaha, Nebraska, two Omaha police officers shot and killed Kenneth Jones, a Black man (NBC News, 23 November 2020). The incident occurred during a traffic stop initiated by the two officers after they spotted a car with four occupants stopped in the middle of the road without emergency flashers activated. According to police, after Jones failed to comply with verbal commands to put his hands in the air, the two officers forcibly pulled him out of the car (KETV, 24 November 2020). One of the officers then reportedly saw a gun on Jones, prompting the officers to fire four shots at him (NBC News, 22 November 2020). In the following days, demonstrations were held in front of Omaha police headquarters to condemn the shooting incident and to call for transparency in the subsequent investigation. On 20 November, demonstrators hurled eggs at police, blocked roadways, and vandalized several properties. Two demonstrators were arrested, one for assaulting an officer and another for destruction of property and disorderly conduct. Two other demonstrators were taken to the hospital after being maced and struck with a baton. Police also deployed tear gas to control the crowd. On 21 November, people staged a demonstration for justice for Jones in which two demonstrators were arrested for assaulting two pro-police supporters. Police deployed pepper balls and pepper spray to control the crowd.

On 19 November, in Oregon, two dozen BLM demonstrators clashed with pro-police Back the Blue demonstrators (KATU, 19 November 2020). The violence erupted when a Back the Blue demonstrator shoved a BLM demonstrator and pepper spray was deployed by members of both groups. At least one
Back the Blue demonstrator was briefly detained by police. Additionally, a pro-police demonstrator bear maced a demonstrator associated with the BLM movement from his car when leaving the event. He was pulled over and cited by police.

In other developments, militia groups continue to be active across the country. In Texas and South Carolina, the American Contingency held training events, including street combat, survival, and evasive driving exercises. The group additionally held a recruitment drive in Heber City, Utah. A local militia group, the Utah Constitutional Militia, also held a pistol training in Santaquin, Utah. Armed militia groups have actively participated in pro-Trump rallies as they refuse to accept the election results (Independent, 15 November 2020).

Data on political violence and demonstrations in America are made available through the US Crisis Monitor, a special project launched by ACLED and the Bridging Divides Initiative at Princeton University. For more information about the project, click here.

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