

In Brief: Pennsylvania

According to the [US Crisis Monitor](#), Pennsylvania has the 4th highest number of recorded demonstrations in the country from May 24 to October 17, with 654 demonstrations. This is partly a reflection of Pennsylvania’s size; in terms of demonstrations per capita, Pennsylvania ranks 21st.

Of the 654 demonstrations since May, 93.7 percent (or 613) were recorded as peaceful. 57 percent were related to the Black Lives Matter movement, of which 93 percent were peaceful. 11.2 percent of all demonstrations were COVID-19 related, and 4 percent were “Back the Blue” or “Blue Lives Matter” related.

Demonstrations have been concentrated in a few counties. Philadelphia, Allegheny (Pittsburgh), Dauphin (Harrisburg), Berks, Lancaster, and Erie Counties account for just under half of all demonstrations. 60 out of Pennsylvania’s 67 counties (90%) have recorded at least one demonstration since May.

In the broad category of contentious demonstrations, 6.3 percent of all demonstrations (or 41 events) were contentious. Contention includes any peaceful demonstration met by state (police, other law enforcement) or non-state (active counter-protesters, citizens) intervention, as well as excessive use of force by the state or violence by/associated with demonstrators. Though significantly less in number, these contentious events may be potential flashpoints for further contention.

Of the 41 contentious demonstrations, 80 percent (or 33 events) were met by some form of state intervention. 32 percent of those (or 13 events) saw the use of tear gas, pepper spray, or rubber munitions by the police as a crowd control measure. **Just over 40 percent of all contentious demonstrations (17 events) occurred between May 30 and June 6**, following the death of George Floyd.

All contentious demonstrations occurred in one of eleven counties, with Philadelphia, Allegheny, and Lancaster counties accounting for 73 percent of all contentious demonstrations.

Political Violence & Other Risk Factors

Six percent of all demonstrations recorded the presence of counter-protesters — these 38 events were spread across 25 counties. While the majority (95%) of these demonstrations remained peaceful, 18 percent (or 7 events) saw the presence of armed or militia actors.

Pennsylvania saw 38 police-involved deaths in 25 counties since September 2018.¹ Police shootings have not only been salient flashpoints for large-scale protests but may also undermine community trust in and cooperation with police, further impeding the ability for the state and community to respond to contentious events.

The state recorded at least six white supremacist events, 190 occurrences of white supremacist propaganda, and 87 anti-semitic events over the past year. Preliminary analysis suggests these events are associated with future conflict.

The majority of the propaganda and anti-semitic events occurring in the greater Philadelphia area (Philadelphia, Montgomery, and Bucks Counties), Lehigh and Northampton Counties (Easton, Allentown, and Bethlehem cities), Monroe County (Stroudsburg and East Stroudsburg cities), and Pike County.²

Select Counties with State & National Comparison

[May 24 - October 17, 2020]

County	Recorded Militia Present	Total Demonstrations	% Contentious (Protesters, State, or External)	% With State Intervention	% Met with Counter-Protesters
Allegheny	Yes	102	11%	9%	2%
Beaver	Yes	6	17%	-	-
Berks	Yes	31	3%	3%	3%
Dauphin	No	43	5%	5%	2%
Delaware	No	18	-	-	22%
Erie	No	26	8%	8%	12%
Lancaster	Yes	27	22%	19%	4%
Luzerne	Yes	21	-	-	14%
Mercer	Yes	9	22%	-	11%
Northampton	Yes	13	-	-	8%
Philadelphia	Yes	107	12%	10%	3%
Pennsylvania	-	654	6%	5%	6%
National	-	14752	9%	7%	5%

Total demonstrations include all peaceful and contentious protests. Demonstrations with state intervention are police force intervention. Source: [US Crisis Monitor, ACLED \(2020\)](#)

Actors of Concern

Pennsylvania has recorded over 25 militia-related events across 12 counties since June. Prominent

¹ Includes all events from 6 Sept 2018 to 6 Sept 2020 from the [Mapping Police Violence data](#)

² Includes all events from 31 Aug 2019 to 31 Aug 2020 from the [ADL HEAT Map](#)

unlawful paramilitia or militia-related organizations include: Light Foot Militia, Pennsylvania State Militia, Pennsylvania Volunteer Militia, Carlisle Light Infantry Militia, Civilian Defense Force, PA III%ers, Proud Boys, and Boogaloo Bois.

The Southern Poverty Law Center has [mapped 36 hate organizations in Pennsylvania](#), across roughly six ideologies: white nationalist,³ Black separatist, anti-Muslim, radical traditional Catholicism, general hate, and anti-LGBTQ. 12 of the 36 organizations are statewide, eight are in Philadelphia, and seven are in Allegheny. The other nine organizations are spread across nine counties.

Election Factors

Pennsylvania is one of seven battleground states in the upcoming presidential election, and may be the target of significant attention that could intensify local incidents of voter suppression, intimidation, or violence.

In 2016, President Trump won Pennsylvania's 20 electoral votes with 48.6% of the vote (to Hillary Clinton's 47.9%). Philadelphia County voted overwhelmingly (i.e. >75%) for Hillary Clinton, while 7 counties in Western Pennsylvania voted overwhelmingly for Donald Trump.⁴

Philadelphia, Forest, Lehigh, Dauphin, Monroe, and Delaware Counties all have minority populations of greater than 30 percent — at possible increased risk for targeted violence and/or intimidation ahead around the election. Berks, Montgomery, Northampton, and Allegheny counties also have significant minority populations (>20%).

Incidents & Trends of Note

On September 13, a police officer fatally shot Ricardo Munoz in Lancaster after the victim's sister called the police to involuntarily commit him. [Demonstrations occurred across the city following the shooting](#).

On July 31, [a man fired shots at a clerk and outside a shop after being asked to wear a mask in Bethlehem Township](#). When confronted the next day, he reportedly fired an AK-47 at police before being arrested and charged.

³ Includes Holocaust denial, neo-Nazi, neo-Volkisch, racist skinhead, Ku Klux Klan, and hate music organizations

⁴ Fulton, Bedford, Jefferson, Juniata, Mifflin, Potter, and Somerset Counties voted overwhelmingly (>75%) for Donald Trump in the 2016 election.

Pennsylvania has seen multiple militia-related or armed groups showing up at demonstrations to counter-protest or "provide security"

Elizabeth (Allegheny County) has seen at least two instances of armed residents and militia members showing up at pro-BLM demonstrations to "protect property" (on [September 12](#) and [June 6](#)). Similar events have occurred across Pennsylvania, including in [Wyomissing](#) (Berks County) and [Philadelphia](#). The Lightfoot Militia have also shown up at several pro-BLM rallies in Mifflintown (Juanita County) to "[prevent violence](#)" ([July 25](#) and [Sept 25](#)).

On August 25, upwards of 50 pro-BLM activists marching from Milwaukee to DC were [confronted with armed individuals in two separate incidents in Juanita](#).

On July 9, upwards of 10 Proud Boys were present at a "back the blue" rally in Philadelphia, attended by Vice President Mike Pence. The Proud Boys reportedly harassed pro-BLM demonstrators. Following the rally, the Proud Boys allegedly [attended a party organized by the Philadelphia Fraternal Order of Police](#).

On July 4, [hundreds of armed far-right groups gathered at Gettysburg](#) in response to a rumor ([purposefully seeded as a hoax](#)) that antifa had organized an American flag burning.

Four incidents of **car rammings at BLM associated protests** have been recorded since late-May, with one incident being carried out [against a police officer by looters in Philadelphia \(Allegheny, Beaver, Mercer\)](#). Following the incident in Allegheny, [individuals on the scene were frustrated](#) that the police focused on clearing demonstrators off the road before arresting the driver.

