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I. Executive Summary

The post-election to inauguration period—the 11 weeks from Wednesday November 4, 2020 to Wednesday January 20, 2021—is a unique period of the US electoral calendar. Data on political mobilization and violence from this period tell us something both about what we might expect in the post-election period of future elections, and also offer a first glimpse of what we might see in terms of more immediate political violence in post-Trump America.

January 6 was the highest-profile act of political violence in this period, a confluence of violence and an attack on our democratic system. By contextualizing it within broader trends of political mobilization during the election season, and especially post-election period, the data demonstrate how key elements of January 6 were patterns of behavior established well before the date: the timing, the topic, the location, and the increased presence of unlawful paramilitary and armed actors were all trends of political mobilization that foreshadowed the insurrection. The data also reveal, however, that other events could trigger contentious or violent behavior in the more immediate future.

Key findings: Trends in this period tell us about future elections and the more immediate future of political mobilization and potential political violence in the United States:

Timing: What were procedural moments in previous elections were instead rallying points and even flashpoints for political violence in 2020, even when accounting for lower overall levels of demonstrations around the holidays. Future elections may see a continuation of this trend.

Increased presence of unlawful paramilitary: Compared to pre-election demonstrations, post-election demonstrations more often involved unlawful paramilitary or armed actors. While this was especially true of “Stop the Steal” demonstrations, it was not limited to these types of demonstrations, with implications both for future elections and the immediate context.

Topics: Post-election mobilization was dominated by election and COVID-19 topics at a national level, in contrast to the pre-election period where a combination of election-related, social justice, and COVID-19-related mobilization showed week-to-week variation similar to trends earlier in the year. The remarkable growth of “Stop the Steal” events as a topic in the post-election period is a portent for future elections even as it continues to undermine confidence in this current electoral outcome. The pandemic and social justice are topics of persistent mobilization that are likely to continue in the more immediate period.

Locations: Multiple contested states stood out as places with a greater number of overall demonstrations, of contentious demonstrations, and of higher rates of paramilitary activity—especially during the post-election period—while some states with large populations and sustained mobilization around social justice also maintained this activity throughout the election period. Several key swing or contested states saw greater numbers of counter-protest immediately before or after the election than otherwise expected—in particular Michigan, Wisconsin, Georgia, and North Carolina—confirming that narratives around the election directly affected the nature of demonstrations in specific states and resulting in key implications for future elections.

Places of decision-making around electoral processes, state capitals, and the nation’s capital, had high numbers of demonstrations. From January 5-7, in addition to the activity at the U.S. Capitol, 39 states had “Stop the Steal” protests in their capitals.

Additionally, official residences were locations of particular focus both before and after the election, with the presence of unlawful paramilitary and armed actors increasing post-election and COVID-19-related issues remaining a driving factor in the more immediate term.
II. Context and Methodology

Context

The post-election to inauguration period, this year — the 11 weeks from Wednesday November 4, 2020 to Wednesday January 20, 2021 — is a unique period of the US electoral calendar. Data on political mobilization and violence from this period tells us something both about what we might expect in the post-election period of future elections, and also offers a first glimpse of what more immediate political violence we might see in America following the Trump presidency.

While the focus of this brief is on recent events, political violence in the United States is not a new phenomenon, but rather one we have lived with throughout our history. Political violence today can look like partisan violence, or violence targeted at groups because of race, religion, or other group factors, perpetrated by the state or non-state actors. Electoral violence is one subset of political violence. In highly tense elections like the 2020 cycle, models for post-election mobilization and even violence often focus on the losing candidate and their supporters. Had Joe Biden lost the election, the post-election mobilization would undoubtedly have looked different. With Donald Trump’s loss, however, increased mobilization during the post-election period of 2020 and 2021 was expectedly concentrated within his supporters. However, the nature, tenor, and ultimate actions of both Trump and his supporters merit specific attention.

The attack on the US Capitol on January 6 during the certification of the 2020 election looms large — as it should — in any analysis of political violence during this period. It represents a overlay of political violence and a direct attack on our fundamental democratic underpinnings, an indication of how fragility can be exploited, and a wake-up call for many Americans and political leaders alike. Even as the repercussions continue to play out, the day itself lays bare how various factors — polarization, inciting political rhetoric, diminished trust in the election, mis- and dis-information campaigns, and the various disruptions caused by the pandemic context, among others — can come together to breed political violence and, in this case, insurrection.

The red flags leading up to January 6 were not merely contextual. January 6 was the third Million MAGA March event in Washington D.C., following contentious and violent activity recorded at earlier events, and, at best, a mixed response from law enforcement. Key figures in the events were active in other contentious activity throughout the year, and especially leading up to the election.

As with previous right-wing coordinated events throughout the election cycle, there was significant online planning ahead of time, with organizers telegraphing meet-up locations and organizing car caravanning options on public websites in the weeks ahead. The President called for a “wild protest” on Twitter and made his own plans to attend the permitted event on the White House Ellipse. As the physical location of national certification of the elections, Washington D.C. naturally attracted protests, but the timing of January 6 was a particularly volatile confluence of political events, including the announcement of the Georgia runoff election results, which coincided with the President’s remarks to protesters gathered in support outside the White House. The outcome of the two Senatorial campaigns confirmed that the Democratic Party not only won the Presidency and held the majority of the House, but flipped the Senate as well.

By contextualizing these events within the broader political mobilization during the election, and especially post-election period, the data demonstrate how key elements of January 6 were patterns of behavior established well before the date: the topic, the timing, the location, and the increased presence of unlawful paramilitary and armed actors were all existing trends. The data also reveals, however, that other events could trigger contentious or violent behavior in the future.
Methodology

Data for this brief looks at hate incidents, unlawful paramilitary trainings, and political violence specifically, but much of it also covers peaceful demonstrations and more generally contentious demonstrations, including counter-demonstrations, arrests at demonstrations, armed people at demonstrations, and violence at demonstrations (both against demonstrators and by demonstrators). Within a context of polarization and a contentious election, these data taken together help tell a story of escalating behavior.

The data used in this report draw from multiple sources, including: the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Crowd Counting Consortium (CCC), Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab), Election Incident Reporting (EIRUSA), Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), Political Research Associates (PRA), the TRUST Network, Virginia Tech Sanghani Center for Artificial Intelligence & Data Analytics, and independent media scanning.

The main period of analysis is the 11 weeks from Wednesday November 4, 2020 to Wednesday January 20, 2021 —called the “post-election period” throughout — though we may often include a broader period. For “pre-election period” comparisons, we analyzed the 11 weeks prior to the election, including Election Day: from August 19, 2020 to November 3, 2020. Exceptions to this rule are explicitly noted.

With the exception of “Percent of Demonstrations in State Capitals” (page 16), none of the graphs include the 52 events recorded on Inauguration Day (January 20), as data in the graphs is displayed on a weekly basis with the week ending January 19th. The state capitals graph displays Inauguration Day as a single day because it represents a rate versus a total count, with less visual distortion. In the written analysis, however, Inauguration Day is added to the week of January 13, creating an 8-day week. Any exceptions are otherwise explicitly noted.

While this brief will focus on the contentious aspects of the post-election period, it is important to once again recognize that the majority of political demonstration activity continues to be peaceful across the political spectrum, throughout the pre- and post-election period. The majority of Americans chose to engage in the political process and express political preference through peaceful means, making the disruption of the peaceful transfer of power jarring not only for its violence, but also for how it undermines that engagement.

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1 The US Crisis Monitor was a joint project between the Bridging Divides Initiative and the Armed Conflict Location Event Data Project (ACLED) concluded at the end of January 2021, any references to US Crisis Monitor in graphics refer to ACLED data, acleddata.com.
III. Overall Demonstration, Hate Incident Trends, and Key Dates

Overall demonstration and hate incident trends

The US Crisis Monitor recorded 2,790 demonstrations following Election Day from November 4, 2020 to January 20, 2021, with 94% of all demonstrations recorded as peaceful. In contrast, the 11 weeks pre-election, from August 19 to November 3, recorded 5,075 demonstrations, 93% of which were coded as peaceful. On average, this post-election period recorded just above 250 demonstrations per week, well below both the 460 weekly average recorded in the pre-election period and the 517 weekly demonstration average recorded from March 4 to November 3 — a period which includes the large number of BLM and social justice demonstrations in May and June. While overall counts of contentious demonstrations declined in the post-election period — consistent with an overall decline in demonstrations overall (from 360 recorded during the pre-election to 167) — contention rates nation-wide remained steady, with 7% of all demonstrations (360 of 5075) in the pre-election period recording some type of contention, compared to 6% (167 of 2790) in the post-election period.

This drop in mobilization is generally consistent with drops around holidays in previous years. Data from Crowd Counting Consortium (CCC) show a similar reduction in the number of demonstrations around the December 24-30 holiday week, and, to a lesser extent, Thanksgiving, in multiple years. Importantly, however, this drop in numbers of activities can obscure significant variations in levels of contention within protests. For example, increasing percentages of armed participants at demonstrations during this lower period of mobilization in 2020.

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2 “Contention” includes any peaceful demonstration met by state (police, other law enforcement) or non-state (active counter-proesters, citizens) intervention, as well as any demonstration with violence by or associated with demonstrators.

3“Demonstrations” and “protests” are used interchangeably and indicate any public demonstration about a political entity, government institution, policy, group, tradition, business or other private institution, including peaceful protests, protests met with state or non-state intervention or force, and protests where demonstrators engage in violent or destructive behavior. Source: ACLED and CCC

4“Peaceful demonstrations” include any demonstration that does not record violence or rioting behavior and is not faced with any sort of state or non-state intervention or engagement. Source: ACLED

5Data from 2018, 2019, and 2020 all recorded over 70% decrease in demonstrations from the second week in December to the week of December 24-30. The data also suggests that demonstrations taper off around Thanksgiving. In 2020, CCC recorded only a 28% drop in demonstrations leading into Thanksgiving, while in 2018 and 2019, this drop was over 50%. The drop in the number of events does not reflect the level of contentious activity at those events. Source: CCC
While previous studies have often examined post-election spikes in hate incidents based on rhetoric from the election and candidates, existing data from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) show several categories of hate activity remained more consistent throughout the 10-month period. In the 2 months leading up to the election (September 1 to October 31), ADL recorded 919 events (average of 115 per week), just below the 121 weekly average recorded for the 10-month time period. In the 2 months post-election (November 1 to December 31), overall counts increased to 1159, pushing the weekly rate to 145 events per week. As data from 2018 and 2019 suggest incidents tend to be higher at the close of the year, and a more detailed study would be needed to examine the potential impact of political rhetoric on rate of individual hate incidents during this period. Whether the election further exacerbated existing anti-Asian COVID-19 rhetoric, for example, should be an area for further examination.

Key dates and trigger events

What in previous elections might have been procedural moments — tabulation during the week of November 4, certification of votes in state capitol/the electoral college during the weeks of December 2 to December 15, and certification of votes in Congress on January 6 — became rallying points for demonstrations and, in some cases, political violence. These key dates often drove overall mobilization during the election period, and much like specific issues and descriptive trends discussed below, featured a complex mix of state-specific dynamics driven by national discourse. In the pre-election period, peaks in mobilization included election-related topics: USPS mail-in ballots and political rallies, as well as social justice mobilization in response to the Grand Jury decision in the killing of Breonna Taylor. In the post-election period, however, all peaks coincided with key election-related procedural events.

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**Election Tabulation Week (November 4-11):** While election officials were in the process of tabulating the votes, there were 496 demonstrations with 25 recorded as contentious. This week recorded the highest counter-protest rate (12.3%) in the data, and the highest count (61) since the week of June 3 during the peak of BLM protests. Throughout the United States — especially in contested or swing states — guns were carried near tabulation centers, bomb threats prompted the closure of government offices, and law enforcement closed down streets in preparations for contentious counter-demonstrations.

For example, on November 6, armed men were arrested in Virginia for carrying guns near the convention center where votes were being tabulated. In Michigan, there were bomb scares, threats to government buildings, and the Michigan State Police closed down streets where armed protesters rallied and made claims of fraud outside the central counting center. Meanwhile in Georgia, there were anti-Trump, “Stop the Coup” marches at Atlanta’s City Hall and a pro-Trump “Stop the Steal” protest at Georgia’s State Capitol, both protests organized around persistent and baseless allegations that the election was stolen by then-candidate Biden. On November 7, a “Stop the Steal” demonstration was met with a small counter-protest at Georgia’s State Capitol. More than 500 supporters of President Trump gathered at Michigan’s Capitol, claiming that the election was rigged. Unlawful paramilitary members and other armed demonstrators gathered at Pennsylvania’s State Capitol while other armed demonstrators protested in Philadelphia. Several hundred protesters and counter-protesters clashed at a “Stop the Steal” rally at Oregon’s State Capitol, with armed protesters involved. Two groups gathered on the steps of Arkansas’s State Capitol: one celebrating victory for Biden and another organized by “Stop the Steal” pro-Trump protesters, who were joined by heavily armed protesters.

**State Certification of Votes/Electoral College (December 2-15):** Looking at the two-week period that encompasses state certifications, the safe harbor deadline, and certification of presidential results—covering the broad process of the Electoral College—654 demonstrations occurred nationally, with 40 recorded as contentious. Activity varied state by state, as several states experienced one-day rallies from bus tours, and rallies featuring elected officials as guest speakers.
For example, on December 8, a Trump bus tour gathered for a “March for Trump” rally at Michigan’s State Capitol building to protest the results of the 2020 presidential election. In Wisconsin, an election commissioner spoke at a “Stop the Steal” rally, where he continued to tout unsubstantiated claims of voter fraud. On December 9, police arrested a suspect in Washington State who caused a fire in the building housing the Spokane County Democrats office and who carried a politically-framed manifesto. Women for America, a pro-Trump bus tour, stopped in Ohio for a one-day rally against the 2020 presidential election results.

For the second time, between December 12-13, Washington, D.C. saw thousands of demonstrators in a “Million MAGA March” supporting President Trump and allegations of voter fraud, with members of various unlawful paramilitary groups in attendance. Several hundred Black Lives Matter members and anti-fascists groups organized to defend memorials at BLM Plaza, where sporadic confrontation occurred on December 11-12 prior to the rally. The Million MAGA March rally turned violent in the evening as 4 demonstrators, at least one of whom was a member of an unlawful paramilitary group, stabbed. There were also larger brawls, documented incidents of Proud Boys chasing and attacking individuals, 8 police officers injured, and a total of 39 arrests made on Dec 12-13, including at least 11 individuals from outside the District, and from as far away as Maine and Utah. Historic D.C. Black churches were attacked in the evening of December 13, with pro-Trump and unlawful paramilitary members tearing down a Black Lives Matter sign and burning it outside of a nearby bar used as a rallying point.

Senate Certification of the Election in Washington D.C. (January 6, 2021): January 6 saw the single most notable spike in events in the post-election period. In conjunction with the Senate certification vote on January 6, “Stop the Steal” and pro-Trump protests took place in capital cities across the U.S. Social media posts and data from CCC and CountLove indicate pro-Trump demonstrations occurred in at least 39 states. On average, demonstrations recorded upwards of 200 protesters, with some cities seeing up to four times that number of attendees. The week of the national certification of the election (January 6-13) recorded an additional spike in counter-protest activity, with 9.4% (33) of all demonstrations recording counter-protestors.

In at least 12 states, events prompted evacuations, disrupted business at the capitol or office buildings, or saw crowds threatening or breaching government buildings. In 6 states, Pro-Trump groups engaged in direct threats or some form of violence at events, and in 21 states, demonstrations appear to have remained largely calm. In at least two of these states—Iowa and Kansas—there were permitted demonstrations inside capitol buildings. Some participants in the Iowa events were affiliated with an Iowa State student group accused of inciting violence.
GEORGIA RUNOFF ELECTION ON JANUARY 5, 2021

The Georgia runoff election itself became a key event of note, as all eyes turned to the state after the November 2020 election, and President Trump and other Republicans pushed unfounded claims of fraud to explain his loss in the state. When Republican state officials disproved those claims, they were met with armed demonstrations at their homes and threats of violence. At the same time, Georgia saw an influx of campaign spending and organizers mobilize to support their respective candidates in the state’s twin Senate runoff elections, held on January 5, 2021, the day before the attack on the US capitol.

From after the election on November 3, 2020, to Inauguration Day on January 20, 2021, Georgia saw 86 demonstrations. 62% (53) occurred in Atlanta or its metro area. Clusters of demonstrations also took place in Savannah (8), Macon (6), and Athens (6).

Foreshadowing and paralleling events in Washington D.C. on January 6, demonstrations focused on entering the capitol and hate directed towards incumbents. 19 demonstrations, 22% of the total, took place at the Georgia State Capitol in Atlanta. These demonstrations were overwhelmingly related to “Stop the Steal” (17 demonstrations, 89%). “Stop the Steal” demonstrations, in turn, attracted unlawful paramilitary groups, who were present at 11 demonstrations (58%) at the capitol. 10 demonstrations at the capitol with unlawful paramilitary groups present were related to “Stop the Steal”. On November 18, far-right media personalities staged a rally inside the Georgia State Capitol. On January 6, white supremacist leader Chester Doles roamed the halls of the capitol looking for Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, who was subsequently evacuated.

IV. Trends

Though fewer in number when compared with both pre-election and overall year averages, post-election demonstrations featured unique key trends in unlawful paramilitary and armed actor attendance, including how these actors related to counter-protest trends at a national level. There was also a substantial post-election shift in topics of mobilization, specific states impacted most, and other unique features of the physical location of demonstrations. While some of these trends began long before the election itself, others strengthened or emerged markedly post-election.

7 Unlawful paramilitaries include over 140 named “militia” organizations, including III%ers, Proud Boys, Boogaloo Boys, and NFAC, as well as makeshift “community watch” groups and other vigilante groups.
Unlawful paramilitaries & armed actors at demonstrations

In the 11 weeks from November 4 to January 20, 6.6% (184 of 2,790) of all demonstrations recorded the presence of armed or unlawful paramilitary actors. Compared to the 11 weeks prior to the election (from August 19 to November 3), only 2.5% (125 of 5,075) saw armed actors or unlawful paramilitaries. While this percentage increase is driven partially by a lower number of total demonstrations across the post-election period, it nonetheless represents a 47% increase in the overall number of demonstrations with armed and/or unlawful paramilitary actors. When comparing the number of named or identified unlawful paramilitary activity only, the increase is 96% (from 78 to 153) from the pre-election to post-election periods.

The presence of armed and unlawful paramilitary actors at counter-protests also increased after November 3: 38.5% (84 of 218) of all counter-protests in the post-election period recorded the presence of armed or unlawful paramilitary actors, over double the pre-election rate of 17% (56 of 334).

In the post-election period, unlawful paramilitary activity was driven in part by “Stop the Steal” events: 22% (100 of 456) of all “Stop the Steal” demonstrations recorded unlawful paramilitary actors, compared to 5% (125 of 2,334) of all other demonstrations recorded over the same time period.

The week of January 6 recorded the highest rate (10%) of unlawful paramilitary and armed activity at demonstrations since the start of the data (March 4), and the highest count since the first week in June. A total of 35 demonstrations recorded the presence of unlawful paramilitary or armed actors across 24 states and D.C. Armed and paramilitary activity also spiked immediately post-Election Day — in the 7 days following the election, 32 demonstrations recorded armed or unlawful paramilitary activity.

While the events on January 6 attracted a higher level of national attention to the issue, total numbers of armed and unlawful paramilitary activity actually peaked much earlier in the year in late-May to early-June, largely in response to the high number of social justice and Black Lives Matter protests recorded in those months. See graph below for more details.8

8 “Unlawful paramilitary training, recruitment, and other events: includes activity by unlawful paramilitary and armed actors largely outside of demonstrations, including recruitment drives, training exercises, and the creation of new groups or splinter
Unlawful paramilitary activity was also concentrated more in certain states in the post-election period. Arizona (8), Idaho (5), Nevada (7), Oregon (22), Georgia (17), New Mexico (2), South Dakota (1), Washington (18), District of Columbia (11), and Michigan (10). All of the same states also recorded armed or unlawful paramilitary rates above 14% in the post-election period — double the national average during that time, indicating that demonstrations in those states were over twice as likely to have armed or unlawful paramilitary members in attendance after the election than other states.

Of these 8 states and Washington D.C., 4 were presidential swing states (Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, and Nevada), and 1 was not officially a swing state, but was cited often as one by the President (New Mexico). Oregon, Idaho, and Washington have historically seen high levels of unlawful paramilitary activity and are home to prominent militias, like III%ers, Patriot Prayer, Boogaloo Boys, Proud Boys, and People’s Rights.

Topics of mobilization

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This subset also includes instances of violence against civilians carried out by unlawful paramilitary or armed actors outside of demonstrations. Given sourcing limitations around militia recruitment and training events, such events are almost surely underreported in the data and should be assumed to be a conservative estimate.
Topics of mobilization

In the 22 weeks from August 19, 2020 to January 20, 2021, 27% of all demonstrations (2,129 of 7,865 demonstrations) were related to the election. In the 11 weeks of the pre-election period, at least 23% of demonstrations (1,178 of 5,075) were election-related, and in the post-election period, at least 34% of demonstrations (941 of 2,790) were election-related. In comparison, BLM made up 13%, and COVID-19 made up 32% of all demonstrations in the post-election period.

In the 11 weeks leading up to Election Day, election-related, social justice, and COVID-19-related mobilization showed week-to-week variation similar to post-June trends earlier in the year. In contrast, the 11 weeks between Election Day and the inauguration were more clearly dominated by election and COVID-19 topics at a national level.

* Election-related demonstrations include STS, CEV, pro-Trump, pro-Biden, and Other election-related demonstrations.
**Other issues include demonstrations about a wide range of social justice and public policy topics that are not associated with the BLM movement, driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, or directly related to the election.**

*Note: The increase in demonstrations in Other Issues during October is attributed to 138 demonstrations, many which were part of the Women’s March and/or protesting the confirmation of Amy Coney Barrett to the U.S. Supreme Court.*

Election-related events include demonstrations for and against President Trump and President Biden, other public officials, and political parties, as well as protesting voter suppression, voter rights, and USPS funding to ensure the delivery of mail-in ballots. During these 22 weeks around the election, 7% of demonstrations (577) were in direct support of President Trump (omitting “Stop the Steal” events), 471 of which occurred in the pre-election period, before “Stop the Steal” became a prominent driver of mobilization.

During this same period, less than a percent of demonstrations (57) were recorded as in direct support of President Biden (omitting “Count Every Vote” events, which were a mix of celebratory pro-Biden events and more general “pro-democracy” demonstrations post-election), over half of which (36) occurred in the post-election period. Demonstrations in support of USPS funding and against budget cuts made up 4% of demonstrations (278), most of which occurred in mid-August.

*Other election-related demonstrations include protests for or against public officials (including calling for resignation), political parties, voter suppression and voter rights, and USPS funding, among others.*

The higher activity for President Trump in the post-election period is consistent with expectations for a losing candidate, and in this case, was also bolstered by persistent baseless claims of a stolen election. Between November 4 and January 20, 16% (453 of 2,790) of all demonstrations were related to “Stop the Steal” events, and 5% (150) of all demonstrations were related to the “Count Every Vote” events.
Following the insurrection in the US Capitol, there was a sharp increase in election-related demonstrations during the week of January 6. These demonstrations were overwhelmingly pro-democracy and in opposition to President Trump, and some called for the resignation of public officials that did not strongly oppose the insurrection.

Between November 4 and January 20, 3% of election-related demonstrations were contentious (71 of 2,790), the majority of which were related to “Stop the Steal” or were pro-President Trump. The breakdown of these contentious demonstrations by topic is as follows: 40 “Stop the Steal” demonstrations, 13 pro-Trump demonstrations, 5 “Count Every Vote” demonstrations, 3 pro-Biden demonstrations, and 10 Other election-related demonstrations.

Among states with at least 25 election-related demonstrations between November 4 and January 20:
- Michigan, Georgia, Florida, and D.C. had the highest rates of “Stop the Steal” demonstrations in the post-election period. 60-66% of all demonstrations in each state were associated with “Stop the Steal.”
- However, a different set of states had the highest rates of pro-Trump demonstrations (not specifically linked to “Stop the Steal”) in the same period: California (25%), Oregon (22%), Washington (15%), Texas (13%), and Florida (12%).
- The states that had the highest rates of “Count Every Vote” demonstrations in the post-election period were Pennsylvania (43%), Massachusetts (36%), Michigan (31%), and New York (18%).
- The states that had the highest rates of pro-Biden demonstrations in the post-election period were California (12%), Texas (10%), Oregon (4%) and D.C. (3%). California and Texas experienced significantly higher percentages of pro-Biden demonstrations than the national average of 2% in the post-election period.
“STOP THE STEAL” EVENTS

A defining feature of the post-election to inauguration time period was the presence of “Stop the Steal” events rallying around persistent and baseless allegations that the election was stolen by then-candidate Biden. In the post-election period from November 4, 2020, to January 20, 2021, the U.S. saw at least 453 “Stop the Steal” demonstrations recorded by the US Crisis Monitor.

Just over half of all “Stop the Steal” demonstrations occurred in the week following the election (November 4 - 10, with 127 demonstrations) or in the week of Congress’s certification of Joe Biden’s victory (January 6 - 12, with 106 demonstrations).

“Stop the Steal” demonstrations were more likely to include armed actors and militia presence than other demonstrations during the same period, with 22% (100) recording unlawful paramilitary (armed or unarmed) compared to only 5% of all other demonstrations during the same period.

28% (125) of “Stop the Steal” demonstrations were met by counter-protesters, or were counter-protests themselves. By comparison, only 8% (218) of all demonstrations since the election involved counter-protests. In the time period from March 4, 2020 through January 20, 2021, just 5% (1,140 of 20,896) of demonstrations involved a counter-protest.

“Stop the Steal” demonstrations occurred in all 50 states, while capital cities with falsely contested results largely saw the highest number and most persistent events. Indeed, 43% of all “Stop the Steal” demonstrations occurred in state capital cities, and 29% occurred at state capitol buildings. An additional 18 “Stop the Steal” events were recorded in Washington, D.C. as well as: Atlanta, GA (21 “Stop the Steal” events, 3 of which were in January 2021), Lansing, MI (14, including 2 in January), St. Paul, MN (10, including 4 in January), Phoenix, AZ (9, including 1 in January), Harrisburg, PA (8, including 1 in January).

Other state capitals and key cities in states less directly targeted by election disinformation also saw high and persistent numbers of “Stop the Steal” events through at least early January, including Salem, OR and St. Paul, MN specifically. Miami, FL; Austin, TX; Raleigh, NC; Denver, CO and Sacramento, CA recorded similar trends.

While well over 100 cities across the country hosted at least one “Stop the Steal”-affiliated event in January 2021, nearly all the cities listed above specifically recorded attacks or other disruption around state capitol buildings on or around January 6.
Locations: Stand Out States

To best understand how these national trends impacted local dynamics following the election, it is also useful to examine which states saw differences in the character and nature of mobilization. While several state-specific trends present during 2020 continued through the election period, analysis suggests some states saw disproportionate demonstration activity or change in demonstration behavior around the election itself, specifically in the post-election period.

- **Ongoing Mobilization:** The Pacific Northwest, specifically Washington and Oregon, continued to have more demonstrations—of all kinds—than predicted by population alone, a trend consistent with earlier and consistent mobilization throughout the year, and increased percentages of paramilitary activity.
- **Large Populations:** California and New York, two of the most populous states, also continued to have disproportionately high numbers of demonstrations of all kinds even for their size, likewise continuing trends in significant COVID-19-related, social justice, and other large local mobilization in both states.
- **Swing States:** Two swing (but not heavily contested) states of Minnesota, after the election, and North Carolina, before the election, saw more contentious activity than expected based on their populations, driven both by electoral and state-specific issues.
- **Contested States:** Contested states saw counter-protest and paramilitary activity, including Michigan in particular, as well as Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, which saw greater presence of counter-protests than otherwise expected. Pennsylvania saw greater counter-protest activity before the election, while Michigan saw greater than expected counter-protests later as one of the most hotly contested states. Unlawful paramilitary activity was also higher as a percentage of all demonstration activity in Arizona, Nevada, Georgia and Michigan.
- **Nation’s Capital:** The nation’s capital, and center of election decision-making, Washington D.C., saw higher counter-protests than expected based on population and higher paramilitary activity.

Given that populous states are more likely to have greater numbers of demonstrations in almost any given period, analysis below of numbers of overall demonstrations, contentious demonstrations, and counter-protests takes into account both 1) overall population and 2) overall number of demonstrations in the election period in order to highlight important deviations from the national average.9

**Ongoing Mobilization: Washington and Oregon**

Washington State saw far more demonstrations than expected based on population size in the post-election period, driven by issues extending well beyond the election period — of the 114 demonstrations recorded from November 4 to January 20, for example, only 16% (18) were election-related, and the plurality (47%) were associated with COVID-19 issues. Washington also saw far more counter-protests than expected based on population in the post-election period. Of the 9 counter-protests recorded in Washington since the election, 4 were election-related and 7 recorded armed or unlawful paramilitary actors.

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9 These calculations are based on states’ residual values from a linear regression for total counter-protests by state population (2019 population estimates) and numbers of protests recorded in the US Crisis Monitor. States are flagged as standing out if their residual was at least one standard deviation above zero. States stood out for paramilitary activity if they met the bar of having more than double the national average of paramilitary activity and more than seven events in the post-election period with unlawful paramilitary.
Oregon, with events in Portland and Salem throughout the year and this period, recorded more demonstrations in general than we would expect based on population alone — confirming the anecdotal observation that the state remains in the national spotlight for high levels of mobilization.

Both states recorded contentious demonstrations above predicted levels both pre- and post-election. Oregon recorded total counter-protests above what is predicted based on population both pre-election (August 19 to November 3) and post-election (November 4 to January 20). Additionally, these two states recorded the highest number of unlawful paramilitary events and more than double the national average rate of paramilitary activity in a state during the post-election period, including at least one armed or paramilitary demonstration at a residence.

**Large Populations: California and New York**

In the post-election period, the states with the highest number of demonstrations were California (413), New York (267), Florida (142), and Pennsylvania (114), unsurprisingly four of the five most populous states. In addition to being populous states, however, California and New York still recorded more demonstrations than expected based on population alone for both the pre- and post-election weeks, given overall national levels of demonstrations per capita during that same period.

California also recorded contentious demonstrations above predicted levels both pre- and post-election, while New York was above predicted levels for overall contentious demonstrations in the pre-election period alone. Additionally, California recorded total counter-protests above what is predicted based on population both pre-election (August 19 to November 3) and post-election (November 4 to January 20).

**Swing States: North Carolina and Minnesota**

Minnesota, after the election, and North Carolina, before the election, saw more contentious activity than expected based on their populations, driven both by electoral and state-specific issues. North Carolina recorded contentious demonstrations above the population predicted average in the lead-up to the election, including above average counter-protests ahead of the election and throughout the year (March 4 to November 3). Local events were partial drivers of this higher level of contentious events in North Carolina, including longer standing demonstrations and contention around a Confederate monument in Graham, including direct involvement of the sheriff's office in Graham that escalated in the immediate election period and rose to national attention.

**Contested States: Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Arizona, Georgia, Nevada**

Ballotpedia tracked 13 swing states in the 2020 election, including Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wisconsin. President Trump’s campaign filed dozens of lawsuits, the majority of them in six of these swing states: Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, every one of which had notable demonstration activity. Four of the six of these recorded higher percentages of paramilitary activity in the post-election period. Half recorded a higher presence of counter-protests than were otherwise expected.

Michigan and Wisconsin saw far more counter-protests than expected based on their population sizes in the post-election period. Of the 11 counter-protests recorded in Michigan post-election, all were election-related and 5 recorded the presence of unlawful paramilitary or armed actors. In Wisconsin, 7 of the 8 recorded counter-protests were election-related, 1 of which recorded the presence of armed or unlawful paramilitary actors.

Pennsylvania recorded total demonstrations above the population predicted average only in the 11 weeks before the election — 30% of all demonstrations recorded between August 19 and November 3 were election-related, driven in part by the state being a campaign priority, paired with the police shooting of Walter Wallace in October. While Pennsylvania did see high demonstration counts immediately following Election Day, activity soon tapered off: of the 114 total demonstrations recorded from November 4 to January 20, 44% (50) occurred in the 7 days following the election. Pennsylvania recorded counter-protests above the population predicted average in the 11 weeks before the election (August 19 to November 3).
Arizona, Georgia, Michigan and Nevada had concentrated unlawful paramilitary activity, detailed further in the paramilitary section. These states all had more than double the national average of paramilitary activity and eight or more events in the post-election period.

**Nation’s Capital: Washington, D.C.**
The District of Columbia (D.C.) remains in the national spotlight for high levels of mobilization. D.C. recorded total demonstrations above what is predicted based on population both pre-election (August 19 to November 3) and post-election (November 4 to January 20). D.C. also recorded total counter-protests above what is predicted from its total population in both the pre-election and post-election periods. In addition, DC recorded contentious demonstrations above predicted levels both pre- and post-election, which may have been partially driven by the killing of Deon Kay in addition to spikes associated with election activity.

**State capitals and state capitol buildings**
Because of the importance of state governance in capitals to the electoral process, “Stop the Steal” demonstrations often focused on state capitals and their capitol buildings. From November 4 to January 20, 43% of “Stop the Steal” demonstrations occurred in a state capital city. In comparison, only 10% of Black Lives Matter demonstrations from February 1 to January 20 occurred in a state capital.

Since April 1, 2020, the US Crisis Monitor recorded at least 620 demonstrations specifically at state capitol buildings or grounds. However, since the election, demonstrations at state capitol buildings increased in parallel to the “Stop the Steal” events. Of the 239 demonstrations at state capitols between November 3 and January 20, 54% (130) have been “Stop the Steal” demonstrations.

Since the election, Georgia and Michigan have seen more demonstrations at their state capitols than any other state, with 19 and 15 demonstrations respectively. Prior to the election, California, Tennessee, and Massachusetts saw the most demonstrations at their state capitol buildings or grounds.

Demonstrations at state capitols increased dramatically during the week of January 6, 2021, with 56 demonstrations during the week coinciding with the attack on the US Capitol on January 6. Previously, demonstrations at capitols also spiked in the two weeks following the November 3 election and during the first weeks of June 2020 following the police killing of George Floyd.
As a percentage of all demonstrations since March 2020, demonstrations at state capitol buildings spiked twice. First, during the week of April 8, demonstrations responded to states’ imposition of a major wave of coronavirus-related restrictions. Second, “Stop the Steal” demonstrations drove an increase in demonstrations at capitol buildings in the period between the election on November 3 and inauguration on January 20. The percent of demonstrations at capitol buildings generally tracks with the percent of demonstrations in capital cities, but the week of January 6 is an important exception. During that week, nearly 75% (56 of 76) of demonstrations in capital cities occurred at a capitol building, as “Stop the Steal” demonstrators focused their efforts in parallel with the demonstration at the US Capitol in Washington.

Threats and demonstrations at homes or residences

_BDI published an issue brief examining trends in demonstration at homes from May-December 2020. Since the report was released, the US Crisis monitor has added additional data, bringing the total number of demonstrations at homes to 529 (March 4, 2020 - January 20, 2021)._ 

Demonstrations outside personal homes and official residences of state and city officials have occurred persistently in the past 11 months, though the post-election period has seen an increase in both the number of demonstrations outside homes and recorded presence of armed and unlawful paramilitary actors.

The period immediately post-Election Day recorded an increase in the number of protests outside homes — 36% of all demonstrations at homes recorded occurred in the 11 weeks following the election. Overall, 22 of the 32 demonstrations at homes with armed or unlawful paramilitary actors occurred since the election. Since November 4, over 11% of all demonstrations at homes (22 of the 193) have recorded the presence of armed or unlawful paramilitary actors. All but 1 were either “Stop the Steal” (12) or against pandemic restrictions (12). In comparison, prior to the election (March 4 to November 3), less than 3% of all demonstrations at home (10 of 336) recorded armed or unlawful paramilitary activity — marking a concerning feature of current demonstrations outside of public or private homes.

Of the 10 armed or unlawful paramilitary demonstrations at homes recorded from March 4 to November 3, 4 were against pandemic restrictions and 1 was in support of President Trump. 2 occurred in Baton Rouge — 1 against the Kentucky grand jury’s decision in the fatal shooting of Breonna Taylor and 1 calling for a deeper investigation into the shooting of Trayford Pellerin — 1 in Oklahoma City in support of Black gun rights, and 2 in Richmond, 1 outside a local Councilwoman’s house calling for the case of Marcus-David Peters to be re-opened, and 1 at the Mayor’s residence following weeks of protests against police brutality, the use of tear gas against protesters, and Confederate monuments.

In the month immediately following the election (November 4 to December 5), the swing states of Georgia, Michigan and Minnesota, as well as Nevada, which was late to declare a victor, all recorded at least one armed or unlawful paramilitary demonstration at state officials’ homes. All were associated with “Stop the Steal” events.
Findings and Conclusion

The following conclusions emerged from analysis of this period with implications for future elections and immediate potential for political violence in the United States:

*Timing:* What were procedural moments in previous elections were instead rallying points and even flashpoints for political violence in the 2020 election cycle, even when accounting for lower overall levels of demonstrations around the holidays. This set the stage for and foreshadowed January 6 and may have implications for future elections.

- Tabulation recorded the highest counter-protest rate (12.3%) in the data and the highest count (61) since the week of June 3 during the peak of BLM protests.
- Looking at the two-week period that encompasses state certifications, the safe harbor deadline, and certification of presidential results, 654 demonstrations occurred nationally, with 40 recorded as contentious.
- The single day of January 6 saw the most notable spike in events in the post-election period. In conjunction with the Senate certification vote on January 6, “Stop the Steal” and pro-Trump protests took place in capital cities across the U.S. Social media posts and data from Crowd Counting Consortium and CountLove indicate pro-Trump demonstrations occurred in at least 39 states.

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3 were hybrid “Stop the Steal” / Reopen protests

11 California, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New York, and Ohio, Oregon and Washington all recorded armed or unlawful paramilitary demonstrations outside of homes.
Increased presence of unlawful paramilitary: Compared to pre-election demonstrations, post-election demonstrations more often involved unlawful paramilitary or armed actors. While this was especially true of “Stop the Steal” demonstrations, it was not limited to these types of demonstrations, with implications for both future elections and the immediate term.

- Compared to the 11 weeks prior to the election (from August 19 to November 3), only 2.5% of protests and demonstrations (125 of 5,075) saw armed actors or unlawful paramilitaries. While this percentage increase is driven partially by a lower number of total demonstrations across the post-election period, it nonetheless represents a 47% increase in the overall number of demonstrations with armed and/or unlawful paramilitary actors and a 96% increase (from 78 to 153) in unlawful paramilitary activity at demonstrations from the pre-election to post-election periods.
- The presence of armed and unlawful paramilitary actors at counter-protests also increased after November 3: 38.5% (84 of 218) of all counter protests in the post-election period recorded the presence of armed or unlawful paramilitary actors, over double the pre-election rate of 17% (56 of 334).
- The week of January 6 recorded the highest rate (10%) of unlawful paramilitary and armed activity at demonstrations since the start of the data (March 4), and the highest count since the first week in June.
- “Stop the Steal” demonstrations were more likely to include armed actors and militia presence than other demonstrations during the same period, with 22% (100) recording unlawful paramilitary (armed or unarmed) compared to only 5% of all demonstrations during the same period.
- Though protests at homes were recorded throughout the year on multiple issues areas, 22 of the 32 demonstrations at homes that involved armed or unlawful paramilitary actors occurred since the election.

Topics: Post-election mobilization was dominated by election and COVID-19-related topics at a national level, in contrast to the pre-election period when a combination of election-related, social justice, and COVID-19-related mobilization showed week-to-week variation similar to trends earlier in the year.

- The remarkable growth of “Stop the Steal” events as a topic in the post-election period, gives warning for future elections even as it continues to undermine confidence in this current electoral outcome. While these levels of direct election-related demonstrations are unlikely to continue to dominate in coming months, the distinct period of mobilization and the actors involved likely signals a break and will influence the next phase of mobilization — even as much longer trends in social justice issues and other topics re-emerge.
- The pandemic and social justice are topics of persistent mobilization that are likely to continue in the more immediate period.

Locations: During the post-election period, specific states stood out, as did capital cities, and capitol buildings. Residences also increasingly became the locations of protests, including armed protests. While the preference for capitol buildings was driven by election-specific decision-making, state government-focused demonstrations may continue in different forms and degrees in the near future.

- Multiple contested states—Contested states saw counter-protest and paramilitary activity, including Michigan in particular, as well as Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, which saw greater presence of counter-protests than otherwise expected. Pennsylvania saw greater counter-protest activity before the election, while Michigan saw greater than expected counter-protests later as one of the most hotly contested states. Unlawful paramilitary activity was also higher as a percentage of all demonstration activity in Arizona, Nevada, Georgia and Michigan.
- States with large populations, like New York and California, and sustained mobilization, like Washington and Oregon, around social justice also maintained this activity throughout the election period. Washington and Oregon also had the highest counts of paramilitary activity consistent with historically high levels of unlawful paramilitary activity, and are home to prominent militias, including III%ers, Patriot Prayer, Boogaloo Boys, Proud Boys, and People’s Rights.
• From January 5-7, in addition to the activity at the US Capitol, 39 states had “Stop the Steal” protests in their capitals.
• Several key swing or contested states saw greater numbers of counter-protest immediately before or after the election than otherwise expected — in particular Michigan, Wisconsin, Georgia, and North Carolina — confirming that narratives around the election directly affected the nature of demonstrations in specific states and offering some implications for future elections.
• Additionally, residences were locations of particular focus both before and after the election, with the presence of unlawful paramilitary and armed actors increasing post-election and COVID-19-related issues remaining a driving factor in the more immediate term.