

## In Brief: Arizona

According to the [Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project \(ACLED\)](#), Arizona has recorded at least 332 demonstrations since January 1, 2020 - ranking 27th in the United States. Arizona ranks last out of 50 states in demonstrations per capita. Of the 133 demonstrations, 90% (or 299) were recorded as peaceful. Over 33% of demonstrations (or 111 demonstrations) were related to the Black Lives Matter movement, and 20% (or 68) were related to COVID-19. Arizona has seen 10 demonstrations with actors supporting police forces, including Back the Blue or Blue Lives Matter, particularly in Maricopa (6) and Pima (3).

Demonstrations are largely concentrated in Maricopa and Pima counties, which accounted for 204 and 63 demonstrations, respectively. Coconino County had the most demonstrations per capita, with 12 demonstrations.

10% of all demonstrations in Arizona were contentious in this period. Contention includes any peaceful demonstration met by state (police, other law enforcement) or non-state (active counter-protesters, citizens) intervention, as well as any demonstrations with violence by or associated with demonstrators. Though significantly less in number, these events may be potential flashpoints for further contention.

9% of demonstrations were met with state intervention and 6% were met with counter-protesters. Of the 33 contentious events, 9% saw the use of tear gas, pepper spray, or rubber bullets by police to disperse or control crowds. Of the demonstrations associated with the Black Lives Matter movement, 21% (or 23 demonstrations) were contentious.

### Political violence and other risk factors

Maricopa and Pima counties have the highest incidents of demonstrations met with force, excessive force, and the presence of militias or non-state actors. Arizona has higher rates of demonstrations with contention, state intervention, or met by counter-protesters than the national average. Arizona saw 85 police-involved deaths in 11 (of 15) counties since March 2019, most in Maricopa County (52).<sup>1</sup> Police shootings have not only been salient flashpoints for large-scale protests but also undermine community trust in and cooperation with police, further impeding the ability for the state and community to respond to contentious events.

Arizona recorded 26 anti-semitic events and 67 occurrences of white supremacist propaganda over the

<sup>1</sup> Includes all events from March 14, 2019, to March 14, 2021 from the [Mapping Police Violence data](#)

past year, also predominately in Maricopa County.<sup>2</sup> Preliminary analysis suggests these incidents can be associated with violence.

### Select Counties with State & National Comparison [January 1, 2020 - April 16, 2021]

County	Militia Recorded at Demo or Other Event	Total Demonstrations	% Contentious (Protesters, State, or External)	% With State Intervention	% Met with Counter-Protesters
Coconino	No	12	8%	-	-
Maricopa	Yes	204	11%	10%	7%
Mohave	Yes	13	-	-	8%
Pima	Yes	63	14%	13%	7%
Arizona	-	332	10%	9%	6%
National	-	26,636	7%	6%	5%

Total demonstrations include all peaceful and contentious protests. Demonstrations with state intervention are police force intervention. Source: [ACLED \(2020-2021\)](#)

### Actors of concern

The Southern Poverty Law Center mapped [26 hate groups in Arizona](#) in 2020, across roughly four ideologies: white nationalist,<sup>3</sup> Black separatist, Neo-Confederate, and general hate. Over half of Arizona counties have seen militia activity since January 2020, including III%ers, an unidentified communal militia, and an unidentified armed group at at least three Maricopa events. Most militia activity has been recorded in Maricopa.

### Incidents and trends of note

Seventy demonstrations occurred in Arizona in May and June, overwhelmingly in Phoenix. Eleven of the 70 events were contentious demonstrations, mostly in Phoenix, but also in Tucson and Scottsdale, between May 28 and June 5. These events included rioters throwing rocks and water bottles at police, property damage (police cars, vandalization of a police station, severe damage of public and private buildings), and looting. Police employed tear gas, pepper balls, and rubber bullets - injuring protesters and [two journalists](#). Hundreds were arrested and [dozens of people not associated with the violent demonstrations were arrested](#) and charged with rioting. Judges have been dismissing charges against these protesters due to lack of probable cause. [Four undocumented individuals were also](#)

<sup>2</sup> Includes all events from January 1, 2020, to January 21, 2021 from the [ADL HEAT Map](#)

<sup>3</sup> including neo-Nazi, neo-Volkisch, racist skinhead, Ku Klux Klan, anti-immigrant, anti-muslim, and hate music organizations

[wrongly arrested](#) and screened by ICE, as Phoenix allows ICE to operate in county jails.

Several demonstrations in July called for justice for Arizonans who were killed in police-involved shootings. On July 4th, [James Garcia](#), a homeless Latinx man was killed by Phoenix police during an encounter. City residents protested his murder on July 6, during which [a demonstrator pointed a laser into a police officer's eye](#) and was arrested. He faces a felony aggravated assault charge. On July 7, a protest was held calling for [justice for Ryan Whitaker](#), a 40-year-old man shot and killed by Phoenix police in front of his own home.

In Gilbert (Maricopa), a late-August [pro-police demonstration was met with dozens of BLM protesters](#); the demonstration turned violent, with demonstrators shouting at each other and a BLM protester swinging a baseball bat before it was snatched by a pro-police demonstrator, who subsequently punched two people. Police formed a buffer between the two groups with a SWAT tank.

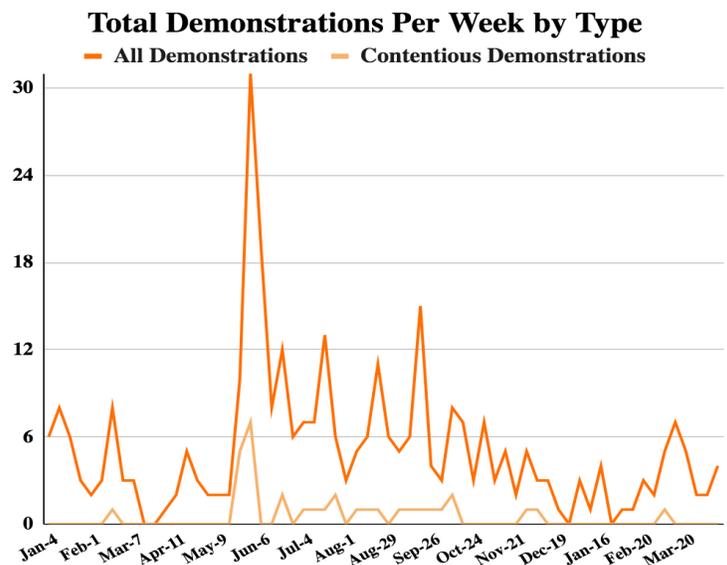
From August to late September, 2020, there were 54 demonstrations, only 12 of which were related to the BLM movement. Peaceful demonstrations were held for several issues, including: against COVID-19 restrictions (["Not Our Last Call"](#) for bars reopening), for economic relief, and [for reopening Arizona schools](#); against the U.S.-Mexico border wall and [against Immigration and Customs Enforcement](#); and [in support of the USPS](#) and against budget cuts.

BLM demonstrations in September focused on justice for Breonna Taylor and [Dion Johnson](#), who was fatally shot by a state trooper. On September 21, 2020 the Maricopa County Attorney's decision to not criminally charge and the trooper was released.

On September 21, 2020 demonstrators led by [women of the Tohono O'odham tribe staged a blessing and prayer demonstration](#) against the desecration of ancestral tribal lands and the wall's effect on land and wildlife - the group halted construction after getting past security at the site. Park rangers issued several verbal warnings before 25 Border Patrol agents carrying AR-15's and paintball guns arrived. No injuries or arrests were made.

On October 31, 2020 [a protester was released from jail](#), two weeks after the initial arrest. Suvarna Ratnam was [arrested along with 17 others on Oct. 17 during a protest](#) against police. The demonstration was met with a counter-demonstration attended by unidentified militia members. That marked the highest number of people arrested at one time during a Phoenix protest since June 2020. On November 4, attorneys and community advocates condemned a Maricopa County prosecutor who brought ["gang-related" charges against 15 people protesting police violence](#), arguing the charges were too

harsh and intimidate people from exercising their free-speech rights.



In the days following the election, Arizona and especially Maricopa County had significant protest activity that garnered national attention. Supporters of President Trump, [some of them armed](#), gathered outside the Maricopa County election office and Phoenix City Hall to protest early election results. The demonstrations continued throughout the week, with upwards of 1,000 Trump supporters attending a rally on the Saturday following the elections. A number of far-right and militia groups, many armed, including [Proud Boys](#), [AZ Patriots](#), [III%ers](#), QAnon supporters, and [Boogaloo Bois](#) attended the rallies. While the rallies remained relatively peaceful, there were several reports of demonstrators [harassing journalists](#) and [counter protesters](#).

In Phoenix, [as many as 1,500 demonstrators gathered for a second Stop the Steal rally around the Arizona state capitol](#), with a smaller Pro-Biden celebration nearby. Police ultimately required demonstrators to move [away from the capital for lack of proper permits for loudspeakers](#), while at least one QAnon supporter and others protested the relocation while shouting at police.

On November 30, 2020 a member of the Proud Boys [threatened armed revolt](#) during a "Stop the Steal" rally in Phoenix that was held outside of the Hotel where [Rudy Giuliani was meeting with Arizona state legislators](#).

On January 6, 2021 pro-Trump supporters, including members of the [Oath Keepers and III%ers](#), gathered by the hundreds outside the Arizona State Capitol in Phoenix. Protesters [banged on the locked doors and broke a window](#) of the State Capitol building; they also [set up a guillotine](#).