

In Brief: Michigan

According to the [Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project \(ACLED\)](#), Michigan has recorded 775 demonstrations from January 1, 2020 to April 16, 2021 — ranking 12th in the United States (and 31st in terms of events per capita). 96% of all demonstrations (or 741 events) were recorded as peaceful.

Wayne (Detroit), Ingham (Lansing) and Washtenaw (Ann Arbor) counties have seen the bulk of activity, accounting for just under 45% of all demonstrations in the state. While the majority of demonstrations have occurred in a handful of counties, over 75% of all counties in the state (63 of 83) have recorded at least 1 demonstration since January 1, 2020.

Of the 775 demonstrations, 50% (387) were related to the Black Lives Matter movement. 17% (135) of all demonstrations were COVID-19 related, 3% (24) were associated with the Stop the Steal movement, and 3% (21) were related to Back the Blue or Blue Lives Matter.

4% of all demonstrations (or 34 events) were recorded as contentious. 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.

All contentious demonstrations occurred in a cluster of 8 counties, with Wayne and Kent accounting for over 65%.

Of the 34 contentious events, 32 were met by some form of state intervention. Of those 32 events, 11 (34%) saw the use of tear gas, pepper spray, or rubber munitions by the police as a crowd control measure — all were against racial justice protesters.

Political violence & risk factors

6% of all demonstrations (or 47 events) saw the presence of counter-protesters. Almost a third of all counter-protests (15) recorded the presence of paramilitary or armed actors.

Michigan saw at least 27 police-involved deaths in 14 counties since March 2019.¹ 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.

¹ Includes all events from 14 March 2019 to 14 March 2021 from the [Mapping Police Violence \(MPV\) data](#).

The state recorded 44 anti-semitic events, 69 occurrences of white supremacist propaganda, 1 white supremacist event, and 4 extremist events over the past year, with the majority of these events occurring in Genesee, Kent, Oakland, Wayne, and Washtenaw counties.² Preliminary analysis suggests that the presence or activity of extremists groups, like white supremacist groups, can be associated with future conflict.

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
Genesee	No	30	3%	3%	3%
Ingham	Yes	102	2%	2%	13%
Kalamazoo	Yes	41	7%	5%	2%
Kent	Yes	50	20%	20%	4%
Macomb	Yes	38	11%	11%	16%
Oakland	Yes	54	-	-	-
Ottawa	Yes	21	-	-	24%
Saginaw	No	18	6%	6%	-
Washtenaw	Yes	79	-	-	3%
Wayne	Yes	152	8%	7%	4%
Michigan	-	775	4%	4%	6%
National	-	26,612	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

Michigan has recorded at least 29 paramilitary-related events in 11 counties from January 2020 to April 2021. Prominent [unlawful paramilitary](#) or militia-related organizations active in Michigan include: [III% American Patriots](#), [Boogaloo Boys](#), [Proud Boys](#), Michigan Liberty Militia, Michigan Militia of Love, Michigan Wolverine Watchmen, Michigan Home Guard, and Michigan People's Defense League.

The Southern Poverty Law Center has [mapped 25 hate organizations in Michigan](#) across roughly 4 ideologies: white nationalist,³ anti-Muslim, general hate, and anti-LGBTQ. 5 of the 25 organizations are statewide, while the remaining 20 are spread between Ann Arbor, Charlotte, Dearborn Heights, Detroit, Ferndale, Grand Rapids, Lansing, Mount Clemens, Petoskey, and Wyandotte.

² Includes events from 31 Jan 2020 to 31 Jan 2021 from [ADL HEAT Map](#).

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

Incidents & Trends of Note

54% (416 of 775) of all demonstrations in Michigan were related to racial justice issues, of which 22 (5%) saw some form of state intervention. Michigan has recorded [mass arrests](#) and excessive use of force against [protesters](#), [journalists](#), and [legal observers](#) during the summer protests following the killing of George Floyd.

On May 30, [demonstrators gathered in Grand Rapids](#) in support of the BLM movement following the killing of George Floyd. The demonstration turned violent, [resulting in property damage and looting](#). During the demonstration, a non-violent protesters was [pepper-sprayed and shot with a "Spede-Heat" round by an officer](#) — a [video of the incident went viral](#). On May 31, hundreds of peaceful demonstrators in Detroit were met by upwards of 100 police officers in riot gear. Protesters reportedly threw bottles and fireworks at the line of officers; the police responded with "less-lethal" munitions, including rubber bullets. Multiple people were arrested, including [a journalist with Detroit News](#).

On July 10, 2020 [upwards of 300 protestors gathered in Detroit](#) to demand further information about a police shooting that occurred earlier that day. Police used tear gas to disperse the crowd, and 8 arrests were made.

In late-May, a series of peaceful protests occurred in Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, and Pittsfield (all cities in Washtenaw County) following the forceful arrest of a black woman and her husband on May 26. A social media video shows a [police officer repeatedly hitting the woman in the head](#).

Michigan recorded at least 3 car ramming incidents against BLM protesters or counter-protesters, with 1 incident [carried out by a police officer in Detroit](#) ([Ingham](#) and [Jackson](#)).

Contention across the state has also been driven in part by high levels of paramilitary and armed actors. Michigan recorded 34 demonstrations with paramilitary or armed actors since January 2020.

On June 12, 2020, hundreds of BLM protesters gathered in Lambertville [against a gun store owner over racist social media posts](#). The protesters were met by armed community members and supporters of the business who were "mak[ing] sure no looting or property destruction took place". According to the local news, the police contacted the gun store owner earlier in the week to inform him of the protests and note that police would be present.

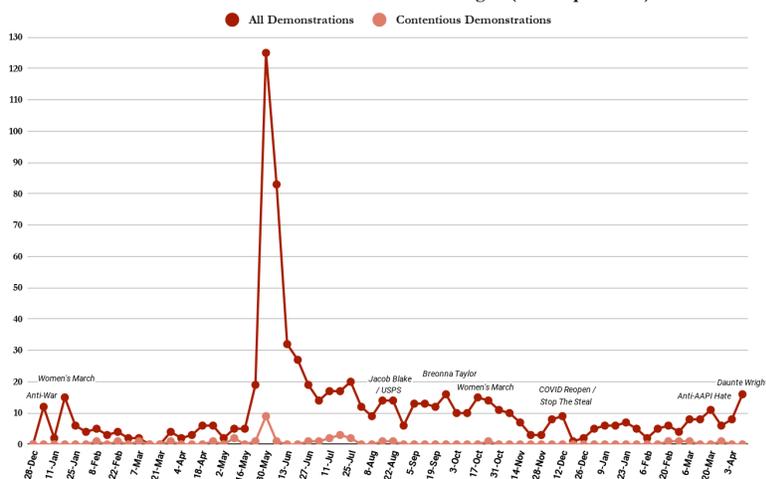
Paramilitary and other contentious activity has also been high around the election and COVID-19 issues.

In the days following the election, demonstrators and counter-protesters [gathered at the ballot-counting area in the Detroit TCF Center](#) following [false claims of voter fraud](#). The state also recorded a wave of threats to [government buildings](#) and election officials, including [Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson](#), [State Representative Cynthia Johnson](#), and [Wayne county canvassers](#).

The Michigan [legislature closed](#) based on [credible threats of violence](#) and [recommendations from law enforcement](#) during the Electoral College vote on December 14, 2020.

On January 6, 2021 upwards of 300 demonstrators, including [members of the Michigan Liberty Militia](#) and [other armed actors](#), gathered at the State Capitol for a Stop the Steal rally. On January 7, Michigan State Police [temporarily closed Capitol Buildings](#) due to a [bomb threat](#). Additionally, Stop the Steal demonstrators, including

Total & Contentious Demonstrations in Michigan (counts per week)



[armed members of the Boogaloo Boys](#) and III%ers, [gathered at the State Capitol](#) in the lead up to and on inauguration day on January 20.

COVID-19 restrictions have also acted as a mobilizing force for protesters and paramilitary groups.

14 men, many members of the Michigan Wolverine Watchmen, have been charged with [conspiring to kidnap Gov. Gretchen Whitmer](#) in retribution for her COVID-19 policies. Many of the men facing federal and state charges were among [armed demonstrators who entered the Michigan Senate gallery on April 30](#) following a larger protest outside the Capitol against the governor's stay-at-home order. On September 17, 2020 [upwards of 1000 protesters gathered at the State Capitol](#) with multiple armed paramilitary groups present in Lansing in support of open-carry gun rights.