

In Brief: North Carolina

According to the [Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project \(ACLED\)](#), North Carolina has recorded at least 849 demonstrations from January 1, 2020 to April 2021 - ranking 9th in the United States and 29th in terms of demonstrations per capita. Of the 849 demonstrations, 92% (or 747) were recorded as peaceful. Over 42% of demonstrations were related to the Black Lives Matter movement, and 14% were related to COVID-19. North Carolina has seen 31 demonstrations with actors supporting police forces, including Back the Blue or Blue Lives Matter. Demonstrations are concentrated in a few counties, with Wake, Mecklenburg, Forsyth, Durham, and Buncombe counties accounting for 184 demonstrations.

12% of all demonstrations in North Carolina were contentious, nearly twice the national average. Contention includes any peaceful demonstrations 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 or associated with demonstrators. Though significantly less in number, these events may be potential flashpoints for further contention.

10% of all demonstrations in North Carolina were met with state intervention. 7% were met with counter-protesters. Of the 102 contentious events, 7% 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, 16% (or 57) were contentious.

Political violence and other risk factors

Wake, Mecklenburg, Buncombe, Guilford, and Durham counties appear to have the highest likelihood of violence of several kinds: demonstrations being met with force, excessive force, and the presence of militias or non-state actors. North Carolina has nearly twice the national average of demonstrations that were met with state intervention.

Nearly a quarter of the demonstrations in Mecklenburg, Guilford, and Buncombe counties have been met with state intervention or excessive force against protesters - a rate approximately three times the national average. Wake County has by far the greatest rate of demonstrations met by counter protesters.

North Carolina saw 69 police-involved shootings in 45 (of 100) counties since March 2019.¹ 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.

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
Buncombe	No	64	17%	14%	6%
Cumberland	Yes	24	8%	4%	4%
Durham	No	59	15%	5%	-
Forsyth	No	49	10%	10%	-
Guilford	Yes	45	18%	16%	-
Mecklenburg	No	91	20%	19%	7%
Orange	Yes	44	-	-	2%
Pitt	No	14	7%	7%	-
Wake	Yes	131	15%	14%	11%
North Carolina	-	849	12%	10%	7%
National	-	26,636	7%	6%	5%

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

Fifty-five counties in North Carolina (55%) have at least one confederate monument or symbol, with New Hanover county leading by far with 35 monuments. Mecklenburg and Buncombe have 7 and 3 monuments, respectively. With increased protests and dialogue around confederate monuments, these icons have the potential to serve as flashpoints through and beyond the electoral period.

North Carolina recorded 14 anti-semitic events and 182 occurrences of white supremacist propaganda over the past year.² With white supremacist propaganda occurring mostly in Wake and Carteret counties; anti-semitic events occurring mostly in Mecklenburg, Buncombe, and Wake counties; and a white supremacist event occurring in Chatham County. Preliminary analysis suggests that the presence or activity of extremists groups, like white supremacist groups, can be associated with violence.

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

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

Actors of concern

The Southern Poverty Law Center mapped [29 hate groups in North Carolina](#) in 2020, across roughly four ideologies: white nationalist,³ Black separatist, Neo-Confederate, and general hate. Nine counties have seen militia activity since January 2020. Prominent unlawful paramilitary or militia-related organizations include the Proud Boys and III%ers. The highest militia activity has been recorded in Guilford and Wake, each with 6 demonstrations with militia presence.

Incidents and trends of note

Between May 24 and June 14, 2020 North Carolina recorded 175 demonstrations, of which 26 were contentious. These contentious demonstrations occurred mostly in Charlotte, Raleigh, Durham, Asheville, and Greensboro. Twelve contentious demonstrations were recorded between mid-June and mid-September. These events included rioters throwing rocks, bottles, and explosives at police and firefighters, looting, arson, and damage of property, including dozens of police cars and private buildings. Police employed rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse crowds.

In Charlotte, a violent demonstration on May 31, 2020 led to two officers being hospitalized, 30 protesters arrested, 6 of which were in possession of firearms, [including a man seen wearing an Antifa shirt](#). [Thirty-one businesses were damaged in Greenville](#) (mainly broken glass). In High Point, [a person threw a Molotov cocktail](#) that failed to explode, and was arrested. [A journalist in Fayetteville was beaten and left with a concussion](#), after shooting a video of the looting. [Three journalists in Raleigh were injured](#) when police threw tear gas to disperse crowds.

In July, 2020 7 demonstrations were held against Senate Bill 168, which would keep information related to unnatural deaths in police custody confidential - [Governor Roy Cooper vetoed the bill](#).

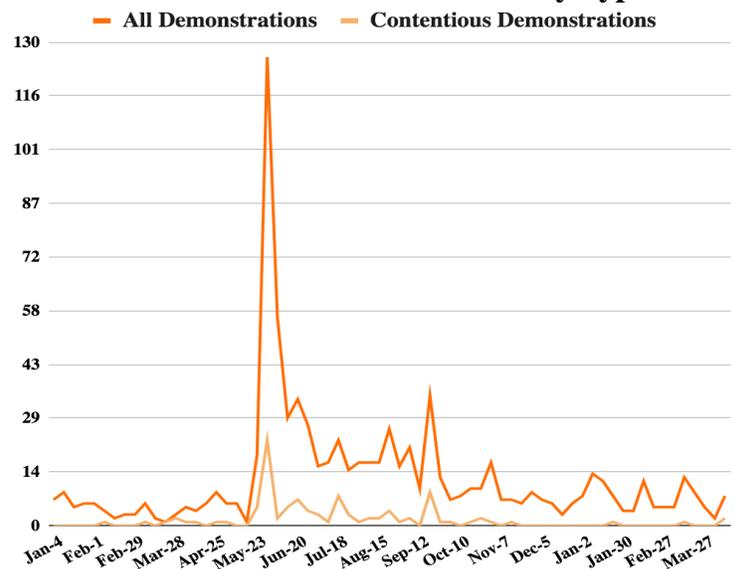
From May to September 2020, 20 demonstrations were related to Confederate monuments. In Raleigh, on June 19, [demonstrators pulled down two Confederate statues](#) outside of the Capitol building. In June, a peaceful protest demanding removal of a Confederate monument in Graham was met with [counter-protesters, who assaulted two peaceful protesters and were arrested](#). In Fayetteville, there was a peaceful protest demanding the Market House be torn down, since it was once used to sell slaves - [the](#)

[Historic Market House had been set on fire](#) in an otherwise peaceful demonstration in late May.

There have been events in which protesters were arrested for carrying guns during a demonstration on public property, which is illegal in North Carolina. In Asheville, [three BLM counter-protesters were charged for carrying weapons](#). Earlier in June, [six armed Black protesters in Greensboro were arrested](#).

On August 21-24, 2020 demonstrators in Charlotte protested the Republican National Convention. On the 4th night, [demonstrators lit an American flag on fire](#), and protesters and counter-protesters obstructed traffic and confronted each other. Police deployed pepper spray to disperse the crowd after a demonstrator pushed an officer off of his bicycle.

Total Demonstrations Per Week by Type



On October 31, 2020 in Alamance County, [sheriffs' deputies repeatedly used force and made arrests at a peaceful march to the polls](#) on the final day of early voting. Demonstrators marched and held a moment of silence, after which law enforcement told people to clear the road before using pepper spray, including against young children. Law enforcement also began dismantling speaker systems set up near the courthouse, where George Floyd's sister was scheduled to speak, again using pepper spray to clear the crowd. [A reporter for the Alamance News](#), campaign manager for county commissioner, and march organizer [Reverend Greg Drumwright](#) were among at least a dozen people arrested. In a statement released following the event, the [Graham City Police Department justified the use](#) of pepper spray to clear the road.

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