Bridging Divides Initiative

In Brief: Ohio

According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Dataset (ACLED), Ohio recorded more than 767 demonstrations since January 1, 2020 - ranking 10th in the United States (and 40th in terms of demonstrations per capita). Over half of these demonstrations occurred in the counties containing Columbus, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Dayton, Toledo, and Akron, with 137 demonstrations (18 percent of the total) occurring in Columbus's Franklin County.

Just over 50 percent of demonstrations (397) were related to the Black Lives Matter movement. 34 percent (258) of all 767 demonstrations occurred in June 2020; of these, 94 percent (242) were Black Lives Matter events protesting police brutality and the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020.

16.9 percent of demonstrations (130) were related to COVID-19, and 3.8 percent (29) were related to the Back the Blue, or Blue Lives Matter, movement. Ohio has also seen 11 Stop the Steal demonstrations, despite voting with a clear majority for former President Trump.

Of the 767 demonstrations, only 5.3 percent (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 any demonstrations with violence by, against or associated with demonstrators. Though significantly less in number, these events may be potential flashpoints for further contention.

4.6 percent of all demonstrations were met with state intervention, and 3.7 percent were met by counter protesters. 36.6 percent of the 41 contentious events involved the use of tear gas, pepper spray, or rubber bullets by police to disperse or control crowds.

Political violence and other risk factors

Columbus's Franklin County has seen 14 contentious demonstrations, over one-third of Ohio's total of 41 contentious demonstrations. Montgomery County (Dayton) and Hamilton County (Cincinnati) have seen 5 contentious demonstrations each. Clermont County has seen only 4 demonstrations, but half of those were contentious, and 3 involved counter-protests.

Ohio has seen 53 police-involved shootings in 22 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.

Ohio recorded 2 extremist-police shootouts, 1 extremist murder, 36 anti-semitic events, and 144 occurrences of white supremacist propaganda over the past year.[2] These incidents were spread across the state but primarily concentrated around the Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati metro areas.

Select Counties with State & National Comparison
[January 1, 2020 - April 2, 2021]

County	Militia Recorded at Demo or Other Event	Total Demonst-rations	% Contentious (Protesters, State, or External)	% With State Interven-tion	% Met with Counter-Protesters
Franklin	Yes	137	10%	9%	4%
Cuyahoga	Yes	94	2%	2%	3%
Hamilton	Yes	46	11%	11%	2%
Montgomery	No	45	11%	11%	4%
Lucas	No	43	2%	2%	5%
Summit	No	42	7%	5%	5%
Clermont	No	4	50%	-	75%
Stark	Yes	20	15%	15%	5%
Ohio	-	767	5%	5%	4%
National	-	25,908	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 21 **hate groups in Ohio** in 2020, across roughly five ideologies: white nationalist,[3] anti-LGBTQ, Neo-Confederate, radical traditional Catholicism, and general hate.

9 Ohio counties have seen recorded militia activity from January 2020 to April 2021, and over half of demonstrations in Ohio with militia present occurred in Columbus's Franklin County. Militia groups active in Ohio include Proud Boys, Patriot Front, Ohio Militia, Ohio State Regular Militia, Columbiana County Unorganized Militia, 45th Regimental Ohio Volunteer Infantry, Boogaloo Boys, and NFAC (Not Fucking Around Coalition).

---

[1] Includes all events from March 31, 2019 to March 31, 2021 from the Mapping Police Violence data

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

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

Incidents and trends of note

At the height of BLM organizing, Between May 26 and June 14, 2020, Ohio recorded 238 demonstrations, of which 24 were contentious. These contentious demonstrations occurred mostly in Columbus and Cincinnati. These events included rioters throwing rocks and bottles at police, looting, and damage of property, including police cars and buildings. Police employed rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse crowds.

At a demonstration in Columbus on May 30, 2020 police used pepper spray on demonstrators, while protesters threw rocks and bricks at police and set off fireworks. A Black Congresswoman and the City Council President were pepper sprayed by police; a journalist was also pepper sprayed by police. Five people were arrested. On June 1st, police used tear gas and rubber bullets. Three Ohio state University student reporters were pepper sprayed despite showing press passes.

On May 30 in Cleveland, demonstrators threw food, rocks, and bottles at police, set fire to 10 police cars, and broke into a business; 99 people were arrested. Twenty people were hospitalized.

In June, two Pennsylvania men were arrested by the FBI in connection to these events and charged with bringing a weapon and fire-starting materials to demonstrations, demonstrating some out of state participation. In Cincinnati, police arrested more than 100 people in violation of the curfew on May 3. On June 1, arrested a journalist and assaulted another.

On June 14, 2020 around 550 pro-BLM demonstrators were met by upwards of 250 counter-protesters in Bethel, a town of under 3,000 people. The counter protesters, armed with rifles and baseball bats and clubs, intimidated and attacked the BLM protesters. At least one BLM protester was punched, ten altercations were reported, and at least five people were arrested.
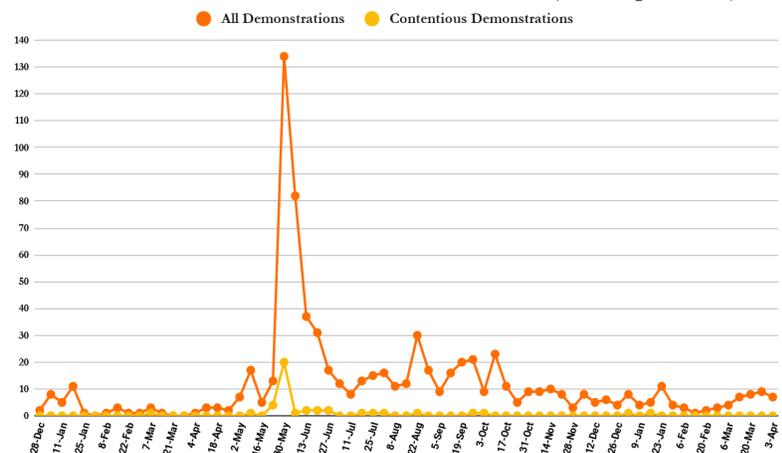
- Following the protest, a village council member thanked the "Second Amendment followers" for assisting police during the protests to "prevent the chaos that could have prevailed".
- The situation escalated on June 15, as rumors spread that people were "being bussed in from around the state". Mayor Jay Nobel imposed a curfew citing "the threat of continued and escalating violence".

On December 4, 2020 in Columbus, Casey Goodson, a 23-year-old Black man, was fatally shot by a Franklin County SWAT deputy. Family members say that Goodson was coming home from a dentist appointment and was carrying a Subway sandwich when he was shot in the back 3 times by the officer as he arrived at the door of his home. Franklin County law enforcement say Goodson was waving a gun at officers. A Sheriff's office spokesperson stated that officers do not have body cameras, only dash-mounted cameras on vehicles. On December 9, 2020 Casey Goodson's death was ruled a homicide, according to a statement by the Franklin County Coroner.

- On December 6, a small group of demonstrators gathered in the evening outside of the sheriff's headquarters Downtown to protest Goodson's death.
- Demonstrators gathered for two days on December 11-12 outside the Ohio Statehouse to demand justice for Goodson. On December 11, more than 300 people led a peaceful march from the Franklin County Government Center to the Statehouse. The following day, upwards of 350 people gathered in front of the Statehouse where Casey Goodson Jr.'s siblings and mother expressed

Total & Contentious Demonstrations in Ohio (counts per week)

their grief over the shooting.