

In Brief: Pennsylvania

According to the [Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project \(ACLEd\)](#), Pennsylvania has the 4th highest number of demonstrations in the country with 1197 recorded from January 1, 2020 to April 16, 2021. In terms of demonstrations per capita, however, Pennsylvania ranks 19th. Of the 1197 demonstrations recorded, 96% (1144) were recorded as peaceful.

37% (440) were related to the Black Lives Matter movement, of which 94% were peaceful. 17% (205) of all demonstrations addressed COVID-19 issues; 2% (26) were associated with the “Stop the Steal” movement, and 3% (35) were “Back the Blue” or “Blue Lives Matter” related.

Demonstrations have been concentrated in a few counties, with Philadelphia, Allegheny (Pittsburgh), Dauphin (Harrisburg), Lancaster, Berks, and Erie Counties accounting for over half of all demonstrations. 61 out of Pennsylvania’s 67 counties (91%) have recorded at least one demonstration since January 2020.

Just over 4% of all demonstrations (or 53 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 or associated with demonstrators. Though significantly less in number, these events may be potential flashpoints for further contention.

Of the 53 contentious demonstrations, 77% (or 41 events) were met by some form of state intervention, of which 15 recorded the use of tear gas, pepper spray, or other “less-lethal” munitions by the police as a crowd control measure. In one notable instance, on June 1, state and city police repeatedly used tear gas on over 100 pro-BLM demonstrators who were trapped against an embankment.

All contentious demonstrations occurred in 1 of 14 counties, with Philadelphia, Allegheny, and Lancaster counties accounting for just under 70% of all contentious demonstrations.

Political Violence & Other Risk Factors

6% of all recorded demonstrations recorded the presence of counter-protesters — these 75 events were spread across 31 counties. While the majority (93%) of counter protests recorded no contention, 23% (or 17 events) saw the presence of armed or militia actors.

The state recorded at least 37 demonstrations with armed or paramilitary actors — just under a quarter (9) recorded some type of contention.

Pennsylvania saw at least 41 police-involved deaths in 23 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.

The state recorded at least 8 white supremacist events, 240 occurrences of white supremacist propaganda, and 81 anti-semitic events over the past year,² with the majority occurring in the greater Philadelphia area (Philadelphia, Montgomery, and Bucks Counties), Lehigh, Northampton, Monroe, and Pike Counties. Preliminary analysis suggests these events are 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
Adams	Yes	12	8%	8%	42%
Allegheny	Yes	186	7%	5%	4%
Beaver	Yes	19	5%	-	5%
Berks	Yes	45	2%	2%	2%
Dauphin	Yes	79	4%	4%	5%
Delaware	No	37	3%	3%	11%
Erie	Yes	45	7%	4%	13%
Juniata	Yes	3	33%	33%	67%
Lancaster	Yes	49	12%	10%	4%
Mercer	No	12	25%	8%	8%
Philadelphia	Yes	234	7%	6%	4%
Pennsylvania	-	1197	4%	3%	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

Pennsylvania has recorded over 36 paramilitary-related events in 13 counties since January 2020. Prominent [unlawful paramilitary](#) or militia-related organizations active in Pennsylvania include: [American Contingency](#), [Proud Boys](#), [Boogaloo Boys](#), [III% Originals](#), [Patriot Front](#),

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

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

[Civilian Defense Force](#), as well as more localized groups like PA Pure Patriots, Mountain Top Watch Militia, [Pennsylvania Light Foot Militia](#), Pennsylvania Volunteer Militia, Carlisle Light Infantry Militia, and IronCity CRU.

The Southern Poverty Law Center has [mapped 36 hate organizations in Pennsylvania](#), across roughly 5 ideologies: white nationalist,³ general hate, anti-Muslim, radical traditional Catholicism, and anti-LGBTQ. 15 of the 36 organizations are statewide, 6 are based in Philadelphia, and 6 are in Allegheny. The other 9 organizations are spread across 8 counties.

Incidents & Trends of Note

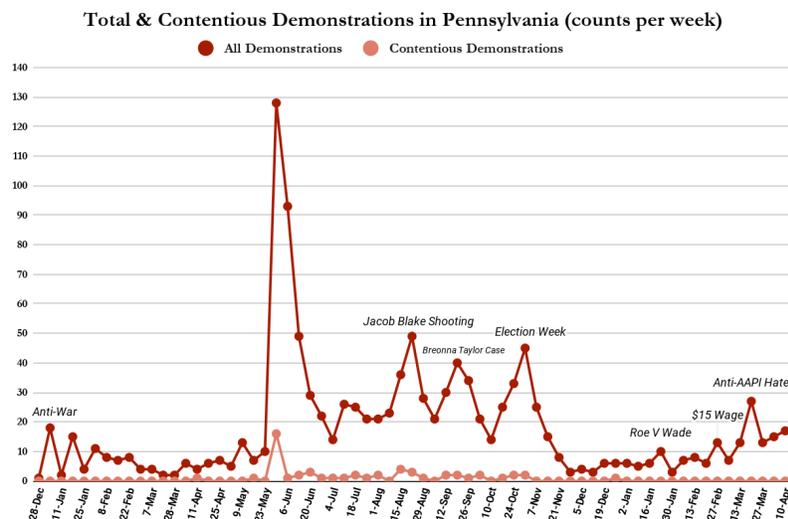
Of Pennsylvania's 1197 recorded demonstrations, 42% (506) were racial justice demonstrations, driven in large part by the police-involved shootings of [Ricardo Munoz in September](#), [Walter Wallace Jr. in October](#), and [Christian Hall in December](#), in addition to large mobilization in response to the killing of George Floyd, Jacob Blake, and Breonna Taylor.

Philadelphia saw 71 demonstrations calling for racial justice or police accountability. In 2019, the Philadelphia Police Department placed 72 officers on administrative duties pending an [investigation into racist social media activity](#). At least [15 officers were ultimately suspended with intent to dismiss](#). Pennsylvania recorded high paramilitary mobilization throughout the summer in response to BLM protests.

Elizabeth (Allegheny County) has seen at least two instances of armed residents and militia members showing up at pro-BLM demonstrations to "protect property" ([September 12](#) and [June 6](#)). Similar events have occurred across Pennsylvania, including in [Wyomissing](#) (Berks County) and [Philadelphia](#). The Lightfoot Militia have also shown up at several pro-BLM rallies in Mifflintown (Juanita County) to "[prevent violence](#)" ([July 25](#) and [Sept 25](#)). On July 4, [hundreds of armed far-right groups gathered at Gettysburg](#) in response to a rumor ([purposefully seeded as a hoax](#)) that Antifa organized an American flag burning. Additionally, upwards of 50 pro-BLM activists [marching from Milwaukee to DC](#) were [confronted by armed individuals in two separate incidents](#) on August 25 in Juanita, with one activist [struck in the face and side with bird shot](#) requiring medical attention.

Pennsylvania also recorded at least 4 car ramming incidents at BLM-associated protests, with 1 incident

carried out against a police officer by looters in



[Philadelphia](#) ([Allegheny](#), [Beaver](#), [Mercer](#)).

Paramilitary organizations have also mobilized in support of Back the Blue, against COVID-19 restrictions, and in support of the Stop the Steal movement.

On July 9, upwards of 10 Proud Boys were present at a Back the Blue rally in Philadelphia, attended by Vice President Mike Pence. Following the rally, the Proud Boys allegedly [attended a party organized by the Philadelphia Fraternal Order of Police](#). On September 26, an estimated 60 Proud Boys gathered for a "Back the Blue" march in Philadelphia.

Pennsylvania saw high mobilization against COVID-19 restrictions in April-May 2020, including multiple "Reopen" demonstrations with armed and unlawful paramilitary actors in [Pittsburgh](#), [Philadelphia](#), and [Harrisburg](#). Additionally, on July 31, [a man fired shots at a clerk after being asked to wear a mask in Bethlehem Township](#). When confronted the next day, he reportedly fired an AK-47 at police before being arrested and charged.

Following the election, thousands of demonstrators, including members of III%ers, Proud Boys, and other armed demonstrators, [held multiple Stop the Steal demonstrations](#) at the State Capitol while other armed demonstrators protested in [Philadelphia](#). The state also recorded armed voter intimidation in Bethlehem by a man with an AR-15 and [Williamsport by an armed constable](#), as well as [death threats against election officials in Philadelphia](#). Police also [arrested two armed men](#) with possible paramilitary ties in Philadelphia where ballots were being counted.

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