

## In Brief: Virginia

According to the [Armed Conflict Location & Event Dataset \(ACLED\)](#), Virginia has recorded at least 676 demonstrations from January 1, 2020 through March 2021 - ranking 13th in the United States and 26th in terms of demonstrations per capita. With 130 demonstrations, or 19% of the state's total, Richmond has seen far more demonstrations than any other single location in Virginia. Aside from Richmond, demonstrations were relatively dispersed throughout the state. Six other Virginia cities, along with Loudoun and Fairfax Counties in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, each saw more than 20 demonstrations.

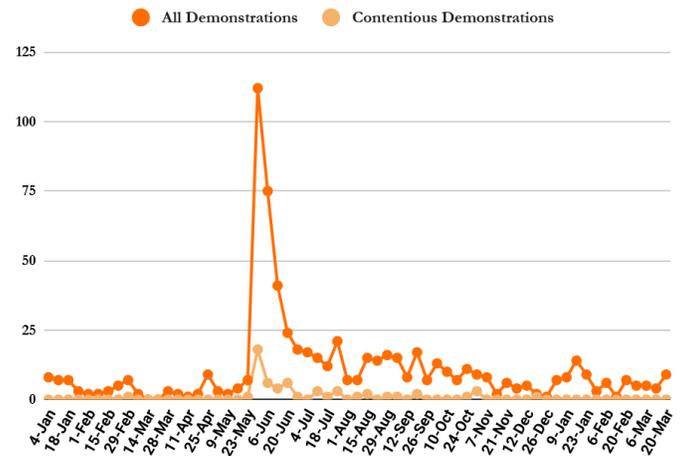
Just under 50% of demonstrations (337) were related to the Black Lives Matter movement, of which 87% were peaceful. 35% (234) of all 676 demonstrations occurred in June 2020; of these, 88% (206) were Black Lives Matter events protesting police brutality and the killing of George Floyd in May 2020.

16% (105) of all 676 demonstrations were related to COVID-19, and 22 (3%) were related to the Back the Blue or Blue Lives Matter movement. In spite of being categorized as a "battleground state" in the leadup to the 2020 presidential election, Virginia only saw 4 demonstrations related to the Stop the Steal movement in the election's aftermath.

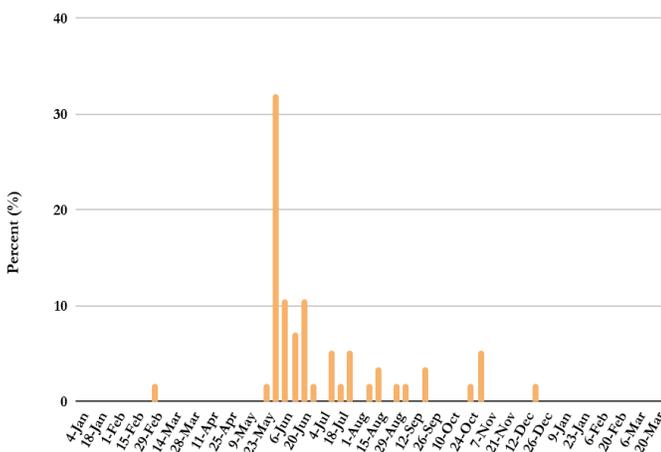
includes any peaceful demonstration met by state (police, other law enforcement) or non-state (active counter-protesters, citizens) intervention, as well as any demonstrations with violence by, against or associated with demonstrators. Though significantly less in number, these events may be potential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

In Virginia, at least 56 events met the criteria of contention. 6% of all demonstrations were met with state intervention and 5% were met by counter protesters. 29% of contentious events involved the use of tear gas, pepper spray, or rubber bullets by police to disperse or control crowds.

Total & Contentious Demonstrations in Virginia (counts per week)



Distribution of Contentious Demonstrations Over Time (Percent of Total Contentious Demonstrations)



**Of the 676 demonstrations, 92% (or 620) were recorded as peaceful.** In the broad category of contentious demonstrations, 8% of all demonstrations in Virginia were contentious in this period. Contention

### Other political violence & risk factors

Fredericksburg and Richmond have the highest incidence of demonstrations met with force, excessive force, or the presence of militias or non-state actors. Fredericksburg, Richmond, and Virginia Beach have significantly higher percentages, compared to the state and national average, of demonstrations that were met with contention and counter protesters.

Virginia saw at least 29 police-involved shootings in 23 counties since March 2019.<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

85 counties in Virginia (63%) have at least one confederate monument or symbol. With the history of a fatal car ramming in Charlottesville after the city planned to remove a confederate monument, and intense focus in Richmond, the former capital of the confederacy, around removal of prominent confederate monuments, other smaller localities have or may continue to see some contentious events around ongoing discussions and around the place of these symbols in public squares.

Virginia recorded 2 white supremacist events, 45 anti-semitic events, and 255 occurrences of white supremacist propaganda over the past year.<sup>2</sup> These incidents were concentrated within the Virginia Beach, Richmond, and Washington, D.C. metro areas. Preliminary analysis suggests that these incidents may be associated with future violence.

## Actors of concern

The Southern Poverty Law Center mapped [33 hate groups in Virginia](#) in 2020, across roughly five ideologies: white nationalist,<sup>3</sup> radical traditional Catholicism, anti-LGBTQ, Neo-Confederate, and general hate.

23 counties have seen unlawful paramilitary activity from January 2020 to April 2021. Richmond in particular saw numerous demonstrations with far-right actors including white nationalists, Virginia Knights, Virginia Militia, and Proud Boys, along with Boogaloo Bois and BLM757. Virginia members of the Oath Keepers were [among the leaders](#) of the insurrection at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.

## Incidents and trends of note

On May 31, 2020 Richmond police announced a curfew 30 minutes before it came into effect and [used tear gas and pepper spray before the curfew took effect](#). More than 200 people were arrested. [A journalist was tackled by police and pepper sprayed](#) after identifying as press. An [officer pepper sprayed a person recording](#) a demonstration from inside their apartment; the person has filed a lawsuit against the City. On June 7, in Richmond, an [alleged KKK](#)

<sup>2</sup> Includes all events from 1 January, 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

[member drove into a BLM demonstration](#), injuring one person. The driver was sentenced to 6 years in prison.

Virginia has seen at least 29 demonstrations related to monuments or statues. In June, protesters in Richmond tore down or vandalized the statues of Confederate [Gen. William Carter Wickham, Christopher Columbus, and Jefferson Davis](#). In early August, the Portsmouth Tea Party held a protest against the removal of the Confederate statue. III%ers were present; [3 counter-protesters were arrested](#). In August and September, at least 2 demonstrations in Portsmouth [supported those charged in vandalism of the Confederate monument in June](#).

In Richmond, on August 18, 2020 [a demonstration was held by armed members of the Virginia Militia](#) in front of the Virginia State Capitol Building - protesters chanted "Virginia will not fall," in opposition to the new gun regulation. Members of Virginia Knights and BLM757 were present. A [similar demonstration](#) occurred at the Virginia State Capitol on January 20, 2020.

On November 1, 2020, a ["Trump Train" car caravan](#) in Richmond was met by counter-protesters. The pro-Trump demonstrators reportedly sprayed chemical irritants and shot firearms at the counter-protesters, possibly in response to a counter-protester pulling a Trump flag off one of the caravan vehicles. Another counter-protester alleged that he was nearly run over by a pro-Trump demonstrator. No one was injured in the incident.

## Select Counties with State & National Comparison

[January 1, 2020 - March 26, 2021]

County	Militia Recorded at Demo or Other Event	Total Demonstrations	% Contentious (Protesters, State, or External)	% With State Intervention	% Met with Counter-Protesters
Richmond	Yes	130	28%	15%	6%
Charlottesville	Yes	35	3%	3%	3%
Norfolk	Yes	31	3%	3%	-
Williamsburg	No	29	-	-	3%
Roanoke	No	28	7%	4%	-
Loudoun	No	25	-	-	12%
Virginia Beach	No	24	25%	17%	8%
Fredericksburg	Yes	22	23%	23%	5%
Virginia	-	676	8%	6%	5%
National	-	25,537	7%	6%	5%

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

*BDI: Sharing data analysis to help communities build resilience.*

