

In Brief: Wisconsin

According to the [Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project \(ACLED\)](#), Wisconsin has recorded 567 demonstrations since January 1, 2020 — ranking 15th in the United States for overall demonstrations (and 16th in terms of events per capita). 93% of all demonstrations (or 528) were recorded as peaceful.

Of the 567 demonstrations, 58% (328) were related to the Black Lives Matter movement. 16% (93) of all demonstrations were COVID-19 related; 2% (11) were associated with the Stop the Steal movement, and 2% (10) were related to Back the Blue or Blue Lives Matter.

Demonstrations have been concentrated in a few counties, with Milwaukee, Dane (Madison city), Kenosha, Brown (Green Bay city), and La Crosse counties accounting for 65% of all demonstrations (or 368). While the majority of demonstrations have occurred in a handful of counties, over 63% of all counties in the state (46 of 72) have recorded at least 1 demonstration since January 1, 2020.

7% of all demonstrations (or 39 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.

Of the 39 contentious events, 34 (87%) were met by some form of state intervention. Of those 34 events, 17 (50%) saw the use of tear gas, pepper spray, or rubber munitions by the police as a crowd control measure. 15% of all contentious demonstrations saw the presence of counter-protesters (6) and 23% recorded militia or armed actors (9).

All contentious demonstrations recorded occurred in 1 of 7 counties, with Milwaukee, Kenosha, and Dane Counties accounting for 87 % of all contentious events (34).

64% (25 of 39) of all contentious demonstrations occurred in the week following the killing of George Floyd (12), the shooting of Jacob Blake (7), and the [Milwaukee DA's decision](#) to not charge former Wauwatosa Police Officer Joseph Mensah in the [fatal shooting of Alvin Cole](#) (6).

Political violence & risk factors

5% of all demonstrations (or 28 events) saw the presence of counter-protesters — 79% of which remained peaceful. These 28 events were spread across 14 counties, with

Milwaukee, Kenosha, and Dane topping the list with 7, 4, and 4 counter-protests respectively.

Wisconsin saw at least 37 police-involved deaths in 22 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 18 anti-semitic events, 84 occurrences of white supremacist propaganda, and 1 [terrorist plot](#) over the past year, with the majority of these events occurring in the greater Milwaukee area, Madison (Dane County), Appleton city (Outagamie County), Kenosha, and Juneau County.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 9, 2021]

County	Militia Recorded at Demo or Other Event	Total Demonstrations	% Contentious (Protesters, State, or External)	% With State Intervention	% Met with Counter-Protesters
Brown	No	24	8%	8%	4%
Dane	Yes	115	5%	4%	3%
Eau Claire	No	20	-	-	10%
Kenosha	Yes	46	17%	13%	9%
La Crosse	No	24	-	-	-
Milwaukee	Yes	159	13%	11%	4%
Ozaukee	No	6	-	-	33%
Racine	No	19	5%	5%	5%
Waukesha	No	20	-	-	-
Waupaca	No	3	33%	33%	-
Wisconsin	-	567	7%	6%	5%
National	-	26,199	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

At least 6 counties (Milwaukee, Kenosha, Oconto, Dane, Columbia, and Dodge) have recorded unlawful paramilitary activity from January 2020 to April 2021. Prominent unlawful paramilitia or militia-related organizations include: [Proud Boys](#), [Boogaloo Boys](#), III%, North Coast Peacekeepers, [Kenosha Guard Militia](#), and [Civilian Defense Force](#).

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](#).

The Southern Poverty Law Center has [mapped 13 hate organizations in Wisconsin](#) in 2020 across roughly four ideologies: white nationalist,³ general hate, anti-Muslim, and anti-LGBTQ. 5 of the 13 organizations are statewide, while 5 are based in Milwaukee.

Incidents and trends of note

Of Wisconsin's 567 recorded demonstrations, 62% (351) were racial justice demonstrations, driven in large part by the police-involved shootings of [Alvin Cole in February](#) and [Jacob Blake in August](#), in addition to large mobilization in response to the killing of George Floyd and other past and recent police-involved shootings.

On September 17, 2020 a [man died following a vehicle pursuit with police](#). Police alleged that the driver of the vehicle, Ello Johnson, committed suicide after crashing his vehicle. [Members of the community have questioned the officers' version of events](#), sparking several protests. According to several reports, community trust in the Monona police was already low following an [incident on June 2](#).

August 23, 2020 [Kenosha police shot and seriously injured Jacob Blake](#). The shooting sparked a large series of new demonstrations in Kenosha and across the country, including an August 25 demonstration in Kenosha where [a teenager shot and killed two demonstrators and injured another](#). The shooter was acting in response to an unlawful paramilitary call-to-action. Police reportedly welcomed the suspect and other armed individuals at the demonstration prior to the shooting. Protests spiked in the immediate aftermath of the shooting, but have since tapered off.

who [shot and killed three people in the past five years](#) including Alvin Cole in February 2020. While demonstrations occurred throughout the summer, protests spike following the [DA's decision](#) to not file charges against Mensah.

On July 31, 2020 [demonstrators in Oshkosh](#) protested against police brutality and the death of Isaiah Tucker, a Black man killed by two officers in 2017. On July 13, [protesters called for the dismissal of a Milwaukee Police Officer](#) over the death of Joel Acevedo, a Black man allegedly killed by an off-duty police officer, and on July 2, a [police officer in Sheboygan fatally shot Kevan Ruffin](#), a Black man, who was allegedly armed with knives. According to his family, [Ruffin had a mental health condition that the police were aware of](#). [This event sparked several protests](#) across the state.

Wisconsin has also recorded activity by unlawful paramilitary and armed actors, largely in response to BLM and "Stop the Steal" mobilization.

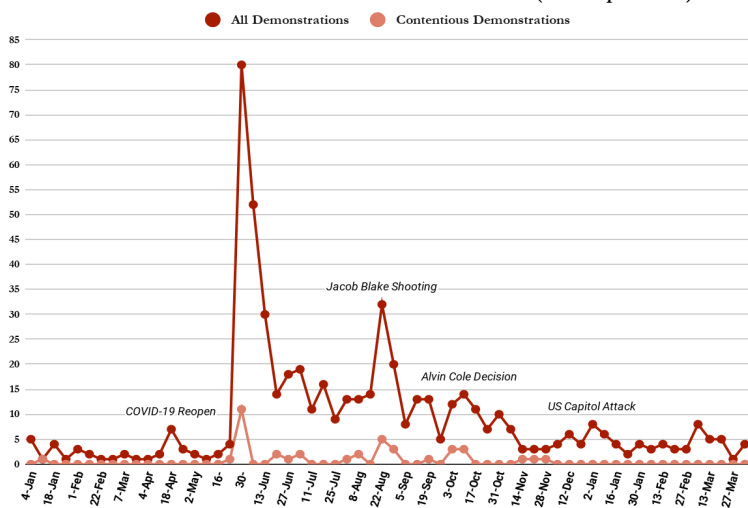
On November 14, 2020 upwards of 1,000 demonstrators gathered in Milwaukee's Serb Hall for a Stop the Steal rally. Speaking at the rally, former Milwaukee Sheriff David Clarke [called for the formation of a Proud Boys chapter in the state](#), stating the Proud Boys are "the only ones with the courage to get in the face of Black Lives Matter". According to [Political Research Associates](#), Clarke is affiliated with [far-right networks and policies](#). The rally was shut down by Health Department officials for violating COVID-19 restrictions. Health inspectors were met by verbal abuse and death threats, which prompted [a new safety policy](#) requiring city health inspectors to be accompanied by police escorts when visiting businesses. Additionally, the [venue manager was assaulted](#) after he asked protesters to comply with the pandemic restrictions.

On November 21, 2020 Clarke held a second [Stop the Steal rally in Wauwatosa](#), with armed Proud Boys and III%ers present to "provide security."

On October 7, 2020 an [organized armed group gathered in Milwaukee to "protect homes"](#) in anticipation of unrest following the [decision by the District Attorney](#) to not file charges against the officer involved in the fatal shooting of Alvin Cole.

A large pro-BLM protest in Kenosha on September 1 was met by [counter-protesters, including members of the Proud Boys](#). On August 24, a small unidentified armed group showed up at a pro-BLM demonstration in Madison following the shooting of Jacob Blake to "prevent" violence. And on August 21, a march organized by the Coalition to March on the DNC was [met by armed counter-protesters](#).

Total & Contentious Demonstrations in Wisconsin (counts per week)



Wauwatosa (Milwaukee County) has recorded at least 26 demonstrations calling for the firing officer Joseph Mensah

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