

2020 US Presidential Election Protests

High-Impact Event Report – n. 14

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January 11, 2021

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THREAT LEVEL

Pinkerton's Intelligence Division uses Open Source Intelligence, additional local and national data, and information from our Pinkerton Vigilance Network to provide a holistic, quantitative, and qualitative analysis based on the most up-to-date and reliable information available. Pinkerton's threat levels are determined by analyzing the severity of potential incidents in conjunction with the likelihood of occurrence. The severity levels are in line with FEMA CAP standards.

Low

Moderate

High

Extreme



HIGH

Pinkerton assesses it is highly likely that anti-government violence will take place in the coming days. Armed civilians are mobilizing to oppose the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden. Bolstered security in the DC severely decreases the probability of further assaults at federal facilities in the city, but attackers are likely to target state capitols, officials, and companies who do not yield to their demands.

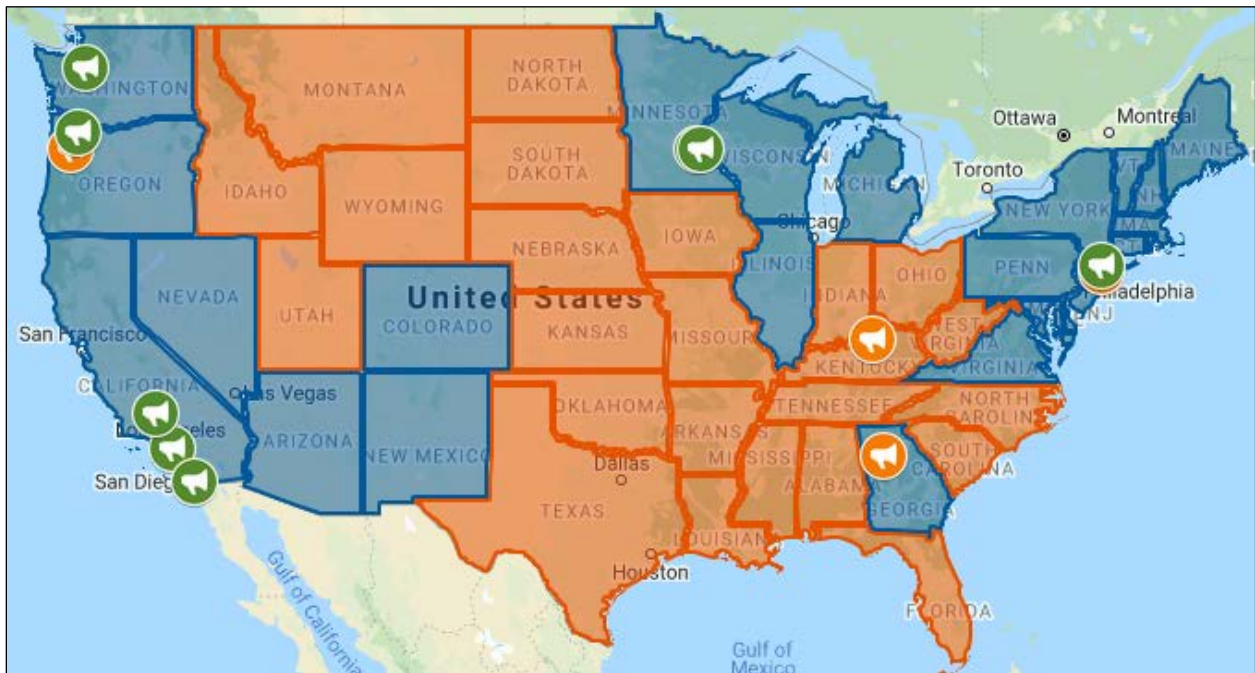
KEY FINDINGS

- Facing mounting pressure, the outgoing president vowed to ensure a peaceful transition and condemned the attack against the US Capitol, but this elicited angry responses by his supporters. Advocates of the Stop the Steal movement and armed civilians mobilized in various locations ramping up the pressure against stakeholders perceived as opponents of the movement.
- Mainstream social media platforms banned Donald Trump's accounts and are blocking his attempts at communicating through third party profiles. This elicited accusations of attacks against freedom of speech among its supporters. As mainstream App stores move to ban Parler, the platform most popular among Trump supporters, is leading these groups into underground encrypted software to plan their actions.
- Due to his initial response during the Capitol riots, pressure is mounting to remove the current president before the end of his term. It is highly unlikely that the cabinet will invoke the twenty-fifth amendment to remove the current president, a recourse even more difficult due to recent resignations.
- It is highly likely that the president will be impeached by the House. It is unlikely the US Senate will vote it before January 20. The outgoing president will likely be judged after his term. There is an even chance he will be found guilty. A conviction would imply eliminating benefits for former presidents and banning from running for office. Thus, if impeachment progresses quickly, voluntary resignation becomes more likely.

RISKS SNAPSHOT



Number of protests reported in Pinkerton Vigilance Network's Alerts (December 11, 2020-January 11, 2021).



Electoral college votes; Democrat victory (blue), Republican victory (red).

Protests after the US Capitol assault; no major incidents (green), violence/near miss (yellow), rioting (red).

RELEVANT EVENTS

- On January 11, 2021, the House of Representatives revealed the article of impeachment under which President Trump would be judged for “incitement of insurrection.”
- On January 11, the FBI warned that on January 16-20, it expects armed protests in all 50 state capitols and in the DC, some of which are calling to storm the buildings.
- On January 11, Twitter stocks lost 10% value over concerns of lost market share after erasing the @realDonaldTrump account. Protests were expected at the company’s HQ but failed to materialize.
- On January 10, Amazon Web Services banned Parler, a social media platform popular among Stop the Steal supporters, following similar decisions from Google and Apple.
- On January 10, armed protesters gathered outside Washington’s State Capitol. There were no major incidents despite initial calls to storm the building.
- On January 9, federal authorities continued identifying and arresting participants of the assault to the US Capitol. Several individuals identified by open sources have been terminated by their employers.
- On January 9, armed civilians staged a demonstration outside Kentucky’s State Capitol.
- On January 9, protests took place at various locations demanding the impeachment of the outgoing president.
- On January 8, Twitter permanently suspended Donald Trump’s account.
- On January 7, a police officer died after sustaining injuries during the US Capitol riots, increasing the total deaths to five. Another officer involved died three days later, allegedly by self-inflicted wounds.
- On January 6, anti-Trump protests in New York City turn violent; there were eight arrests.
- On January 6, armed protesters surrounded Georgia’s State Capitol. The secretary of state was evacuated over fears of attempts against his person.

AREAS OF CONCERN

DOMESTIC EXTREMISM

KEY POINTS

- Armed civilian groups remain active and highly motivated to pursue their interests by violent means. Late calls to stop the unruly attacks against federal institutions elicited angry responses accusing the president of treachery, alleging duress, or claiming hidden messages in the video address.
- Prominent extremist groups such as the Proud Boys, the Three Percenters, and the Oath Keepers have the ability to mobilize supporters nationwide from time to time, but smaller groups operating only at specific locations are more likely to carry out attacks.
- Social media platforms have effectively banned the outgoing president from using any major online application to communicate. This is causing further discontent among his supporters who claim discrimination and resistance in the name of the First Amendment.
- An examination of the protesters’ behavior suggests similar patterns to what was observed during racial justice protests. Most participants act on the general advice of prominent figureheads, while small cohesive clash units engage in more concerted acts of violence.
- Protesters do not appear to have properly defined chains of command. For this reason, limited online communication will severely hinder the groups’ mobility beyond January 20. However, local cells are likely to remain a serious threat of extremism.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE

KEY POINTS

- As of the time of writing, it appears highly likely that the outgoing president will be impeached. Reigning political conditions also provide an even chance he will be convicted and barred from running for office again in 2024. These actions, in addition to bans on social media, is galvanizing his supporters to more aggressive action.
- Counter-protesters are mobilizing to oppose as well. If Stop the Steal and "Patriot" rallies continue increasing their intensity, it is highly likely they will be met by confrontational opposition. Violence will be more likely as soon as impeachment proceedings start.
- The current situation is promoting a highly polarizing environment whereby anti-government protesters are likely to become more belligerent as media, public opinion, and authorities undertake measures to contain any further acts of violence.
- Proposals to remove the president for the remainder of his term seem unlikely due to the limited time to enact congressional measures, but impeachment is becoming more likely, thereby opening the way for a voluntary resignation. The latter would be the only scenario that could reasonably avoid further escalation.

ONLINE RADICALIZATION

KEY POINTS

- Mainstream social media are enacting stringent measures to avoid the risk of further violence. This has resulted in swift movements affecting the outlook of online activities among supporters of the Stop the Steal or similar movements.
- Although anti-government movements are likely to have limited outreach to the public, they are likely to move underground where radicalization is more likely and difficult to monitor.
- When Twitter and Facebook started flagging communications by the current president due to misinformation, supporters moved in mass to the lesser-known platform, Parler. Major vendors Google and Apple moved to ban the software, which elicited unprecedented number of downloads. Days later, the platform was down as Amazon refused to continue hosting it.
- Supporters of anti-government movements have pledged to create a platform of their own, but this is unlikely in the short term due to the long development periods. In the medium to long-term, advocates of such groups will likely obtain bulletproof hosting, especially with servers in China and Russia, to continue engaging with each other.

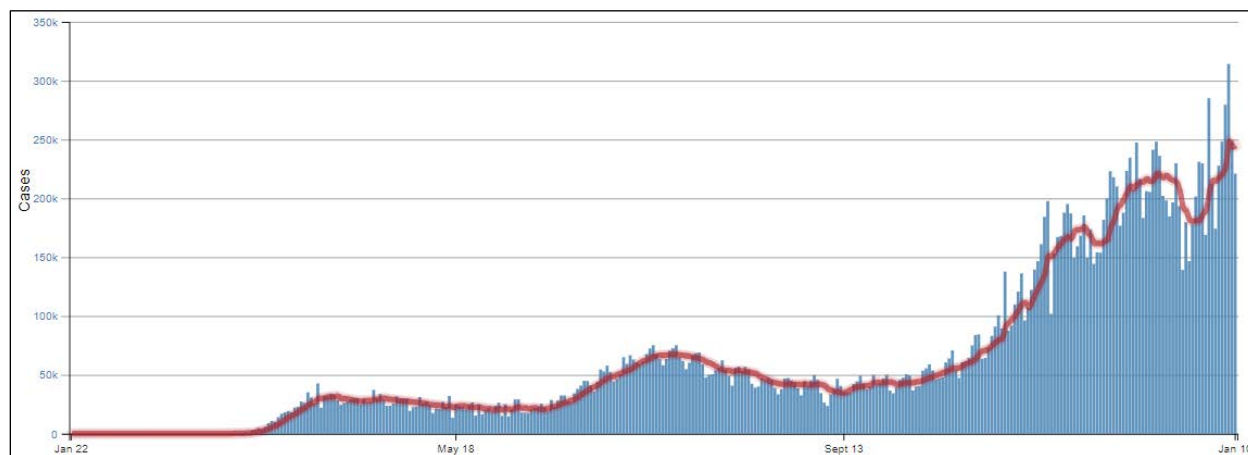
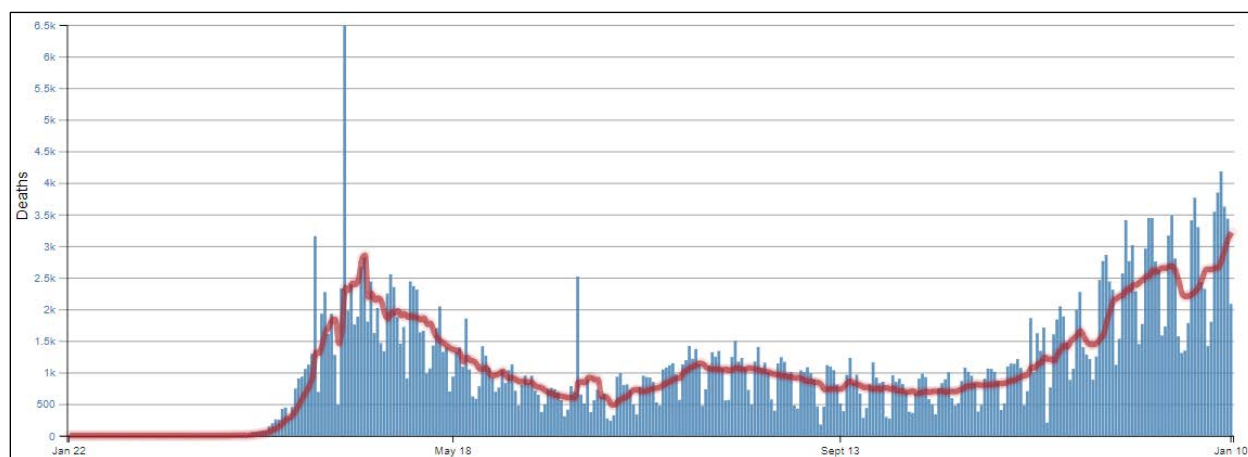
IMPACTS OF COVID-19

COVID-19

		7-day increase	7-day trend
Total Confirmed COVID-19 Cases	22,322,956	1,722,460	+12.84%
Total Recorded Deaths	373,167	22,582	+21.59%
Top 7-day Infection Rates per 100k Pop.	RI (95), AZ (122), AK (102), OK (102), CA (101)		

KEY POINTS

- The rate of new contagions continues increasing at a considerable pace, as estimated in previous iterations of this report. If the spread curve continues behaving as expected, contagions will peak this week or early next week.
- In the period covered under this report, deaths grew at a faster rate than contagions. Although mortality remains somewhat low, this is a relevant indicator that health infrastructure is displaying signs of exhaustion, presumably due to the high influx of patients.
- As infections and deaths continue increasing, some constituencies could enact restrictions to curb the spread of the virus. Any such measures have resulted in negative reactions in previous months, including attempts to cause harm to officials. Any such protests would be almost certain to coalesce with other anti-government movements, even prompting violence.
- Despite progress in the vaccination program, universal vaccination remains highly unlikely in the first quarter of 2021. It is unclear if current vaccines will be effective against new variants of the virus. Hence, herd immunity plans remain questionable, especially if anti-vaccination movements continue growing along with unfounded claims of government conspiracies.

Daily new cases (blue), 7-day moving average (red); [U.S. CDC](https://www.cdc.gov)Daily new deaths (blue), 7-day moving average (red); [U.S. CDC](https://www.cdc.gov)

PLANNED EVENTS

January 11, 2021 — Anti-Twitter / Pro-Trump Rally

Location: Twitter HQ, San Francisco, CA

Time: TBD

January 12, 2021 — Deadline to Invoke 25th Amendment

Location: US House of Representatives, Washington, DC

Time: All day

January 13, 2021 — Impeachment Proceedings (expected)

Location: US House of Representatives, Washington, DC

Time: All day

January 15-18, 2021 — Reclaim King's Radical Legacy events

Location: Several locations

Time: TBD

January 16-20, 2021 — Pro-Trump mobilizations

Location: Nationwide

Time: TBD

January 16, 2021 — US Patriot Ride

Location: Colorado Springs, CO

Time: 1630 MST

January 16, 2021 — Tennessee Patriots Militia

Location: H.W. Cox Park, Collierville, TN

Time: 1400 CST

January 17, 2021 — March on Capitol Hill and State Capitols

Location: Nationwide

Time: All day

January 18, 2021 — BLM Car Caravan

Location: Baltimore, MD

Time: 1530 EST

January 18, 2021 — Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Location: South Station, Boston, MA

Time: 1700 EST

January 20, 2021 — Inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden

Location: US Capitol, Washington, DC

Time: 1200 EST

RECOMMENDATIONS

Social, political, and health circumstances vary between locations, thus threat vectors do not necessarily apply equally nationwide. Recommendations will be more effective if there is an ad hoc assessment for the relevant area of interest or for the specific assets to be protected. The following advice is based on an aggregate of observations made since the onset of nationwide protests in May 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.

- Most protests start peacefully, but the risk of violence increases the longer they drag into late hours. The majority of riots are declared after 2100 local time. Pinkerton advises considering modifications to night shift activities in areas where protests are expected.
- Protest groups typically have three components: a peaceful majority, criminals of opportunity, and shock elements. Pinkerton's clients can dissuade crime of opportunity with physical barriers and vigilance, but shock elements may become more confrontational with the presence of active guards and they will likely be armed.
- Security forces have proven their effectiveness to limit the impact of planned demonstrations. Most damages to businesses happen during incidents spurred by unforeseen events. To avoid impacts in such circumstances, Pinkerton advises devising a preventative vigilance and fast response plan.
- Tumultuous protests are more likely shortly after key announcements, relevant deadlines, or controversial episodes. Political animosity will remain high until inauguration day; until then, Pinkerton advises constant monitoring for early warnings of mobilization.
- As of the time of writing, vaccines for COVID-19 are not yet available to the general public, so the risk of contagion remains unchanged since the onset of the pandemic. Pinkerton recommends following the advice of authorities and devising plans to promote compliance among the personnel.
- COVID-19 infections are expected to intensify in the northern hemisphere during the Fall-Winter season. Pinkerton advises increased caution around holidays and avoiding closed spaces with high occupancy.
- Emerging evidence indicates some patients are left with long-term and asymptomatic sequels after the disease. Pinkerton advises monitoring the health condition of surviving patients.
- The sensitive nature of the electoral process poses considerable reputational risks. Pinkerton recommends increased caution on all public communications construed as a positioning pertaining to the results.
- Phishing attacks, scams, and data breaches by hostile actors posing as government or party representatives are expected after the elections. Pinkerton advises increased scrutiny of corporate communications systems.
- Hostile agents will likely try to exacerbate social and political tensions in digital media. Pinkerton recommends bolstering cybersecurity and awareness programs.
- Foreign agents will likely exploit windows of opportunity during the transition process. Pinkerton advises robust vigilance for assets in jurisdictions potentially exposed to hostile acts by rivals.

ABOUT PINKERTON

Pinkerton is a global comprehensive risk and security management leader focused on delivering brains-to-boots specialized solutions. With over 170 years of legacy, Pinkerton has built unparalleled institutional knowledge while having sight into future risk businesses are facing.

We bring our agile, knowledge-based design — powered by our years of experience and expertise — to harmonize strategy and tactical implementation services that address a total risk perspective. With our three-pronged approach, we assess the risk factors you are facing today, design an effective solution that fits your unique needs, and can deliver tactical services to assist you with execution — in a temporary to full-time capacity.

As a trusted partner, you can rely on our family of thousands of employees and connected partners across 100+ countries to support your risk management and security needs.

We never sleep.