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# **Report Summary**

This short report has been compiled by AKE International's analytical team and has been released to support organisations and businesses with personnel, assets and exposure in the United States at this historic electoral juncture.

Looking at and beyond the election, it covers: threat groups, police brutality, population and civic relations, geographic areas of concern, targets, historical precedent, recent themes of unrest and the impact of possible electoral outcomes.

- The risk of civil unrest in the United States is elevated, although media coverage of violence and protests overstates the impact. Unrest is still largely localised, and in most cases contained to relatively minor incidents. Despite an apparent increase in mass violence associated with unrest – which is partially a result of improved media coverage
  - there have yet to be riots that are on the scale of the 1992 Los Angeles riots.
- Police brutality is the most likely spark for future unrest, although in the short-term election uncertainty and the potential for some (likely limited) right-wing militia opposition to COVID-19 restrictions remains concerns.
- Protests against police brutality may turn violent, although the vast majority will remain peaceful.
- Right-wing groups pose the greatest risk of future attacks.
- A potential theatre for violence between far-left and far-right groups are university campuses. The risk applies to most universities across the country – although is concentrated in more liberal states and areas, including New York, much of the north-east and California
- There have been a limited number of COVID-19-related protests thus far, although those which have occurred are largely orchestrated by right-wing groups - including militia movements, and Tea Party activists. However, should the pandemic continue and more restrictions are introduced it is likely that there will be a cascade of protests.
- Most governors enjoyed an initial positive effect in the polls at the start of the pandemic in March and April. Some, like Andrew Cuomo (NY) and Gavin Newsom (CA), enjoyed bumps as large as 30 or 40 points. However, support for governors' responses has decreased as the pandemic continued with a July survey showing that just five governors' approval ratings had risen for their handling of the COVID-19 virus. There is likely to be a continued systematic decline in the popularity of governors across the country.

# Overview

There has been a notable increase in civil unrest in the United States (US) over the last decade. However, unrest is still largely localised, and in most cases contained to relatively minor incidents. Despite an apparent increase in mass violence associated with unrest – which is partially a result of improved media coverage – there have yet to be riots that are on the scale of the 1992 Los Angeles (LA) riots.

The geographic distribution of major incidents of unrest from 2000-2020 occurred in major cities – with St Louis, New York, San Francisco-Oakland, and LA as epicentres.

There are cases of rural unrest, including the 'Bundy Standoff', an armed confrontation between supporters of cattle rancher Cliven Bundy and law enforcement over withheld grazing fees, although these are rare and unlikely to be destructive.

There have been several potential triggers for unrest. These main triggers are:

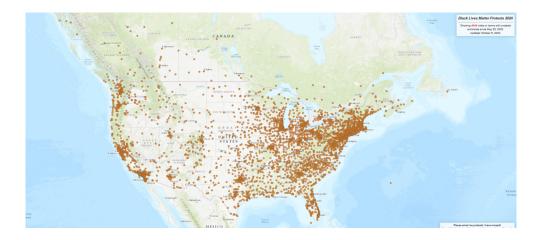
- Economic and social injustice including Occupy Wall Street and protests over the Dakota Access Pipeline
- Sports and event-related riots including a University of Maryland riot of 2004, where rowdy post-game celebrations crossed over into arson and property damage, or Philadelphia Eagles' first-ever Super Bowl victory in 2018, where celebrations eventually got out of hand.
- Politically-motivated civil unrest including protests over the election of Donald Trump that resulted in riots in Portland, Oregon and Oakland, California.
- Reaction to police actions including riots in Ferguson, and violence associated with the Black Lives Matters (BLM) protests.

The majority of protests in 2020 have focused on police brutality following the death of George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, for allegedly using a counterfeit US\$20 bill, at the hands of Minneapolis police officers on 25 May. Between 26 May, the day after Floyd's death, and 22 August there were 7,750 demonstrations linked to the BLM movement across more than 2,440 locations in all 50 states and Washington, DC.

# **Police Brutality**

The most likely cause of unrest over the coming years relates to policing. Protests against apparently racist policing can appear almost anywhere in the country, although they are likely to be worst in major cities and those with weak relations between the police and minority communities.

The map below highlights the national reach of Black Lives Matter Protests (BLM) in 2020. Although there have been some cases mass rioting and attacks on federal property, there is little evidence to suggest that demonstrators have engaged in widespread violence. Despite the media attention given to looting, vandalism, and incidents targeting statues, in more than 93 per cent of all demonstrations connected to the BLM movement, demonstrators have not engaged in violence or destructive activity.



https://www.creosotemaps.com/blm2020/

Peaceful protests are reported in over 2,400 distinct locations around the country. Violent demonstrations, meanwhile, have been limited to fewer than 220 locations — under 10 per cent of the areas that experienced peaceful protests. In many urban areas like Portland, Oregon, and New York City, for example, which has seen sustained unrest since Floyd's killing, violent demonstrations are largely confined to specific blocks, rather than dispersed throughout the city.

Violence is also likely to correspond to state to the use of force by authorities. Authorities have used force — such as firing less-lethal weapons like tear gas, rubber bullets, and pepper spray or beating demonstrators with batons — in over 54 per cent of the demonstrations in which they have engaged. The use of security forces appears to contribute to the incidents of violent protests. For example, in Oregon prior to the deployment, over 83 per cent of demonstrations in Oregon were non-violent. Post-deployment, the percentage of violent demonstrations has risen from under 17 per cent to over 42 per cent suggesting that the federal response has only aggravated unrest.

Dozens of car-ramming attacks by individual perpetrators — in some cases acting independently with no reported affiliation, and in others linked to hate groups like the Ku Klux Klan — have been reported at demonstrations around the country. California has seen the greatest number of car-ramming attacks, with at least nine incidents between May and August.

While protests against police brutality can turn violent in many parts of the country, they are most likely to result in mass unrest in areas that have incidents of police brutality or where police forces are seen to be racially biased. There is no reliable way to measure those places most at risk of antipolice brutality protests, although the table highlights several at-risk-cities. These cities are elected by the number of killing by police scaled for the population.

PER	100.0	00 PEOPLE			
Highest		Lowest			
Laredo, Texas	3.13	Corpus Christi, Texas	0.3		
Orlando, Florida	1.86	Nashville, Tennessee	0.3		
Las Vegas, Nevada	1.77	Seattle, Washington	0.25		
Tucson, Arizona	1.7	Wichita, Kansas	0.2		
Scottsdale, Arizona	1.67	Minneapolis, Minnesota	0.2		
Mesa, Arizona	1.67	San Francisco, California	0.2		
Albuquerque, New Mexico	1.62	Virginia Beach, Virginia	0.2		
Phoenix, Arizona	1.59	Omaha, Nebraska	0.2		
Columbus, Ohio	1.53	San Diego, California	0.2		
Denver, Colorado	1.47	San Jose, California	0.2		
Louisville, Kentucky	1.46	Chicago, Illinois	0.10		
Aurora, Colorado	1.4	District of Columbia	0.15		
Atlanta, Georgia	1.29	El Paso, Texas	0.15		
St. Louis, Missouri	1.27	Indianapolis, Indiana	0.12		
Kansas City, Missouri	1.26	New York, New York	0.0		

https://www.security.org/resources/police-brutality-statistics/

The risk can also be broken down on a state-by-state basis (see appendix 1), based on the risk to different ethnicities.

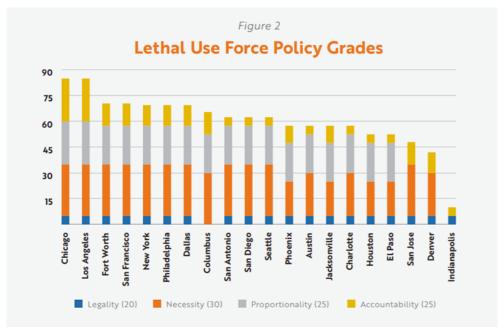
The rate of killing is not the only relevant metric. In any city a single incident can have totemic importance if there is a general belief that the police services are institutionally racist. There is no accurate data for the perceptions of the public, although a rough metric is the level of institutional checks on police action.

The University of Chicago compiled a scorecard for major police departments based on whether they met international best practices of:

Legality: 'use of force' policies must sit within a human rights compliant federal and state legislative framework that properly balances security needs with individual human rights;

**Necessity**: All law and policies on police use of force must comply with the necessity requirement and only allow for force when 'absolutely necessary' to save the life or prevent serious bodily harm of an officer or civilian as a 'last resort' to other alternatives; **Proportionality**: the use of force must always be proportionate to the threat the officer confronts and weighed against the fundamental human rights of the individual;

Accountability: requires an independent, external review of each use of lethal force by the police as well as departmental transparency of use of force policies and practices. 05

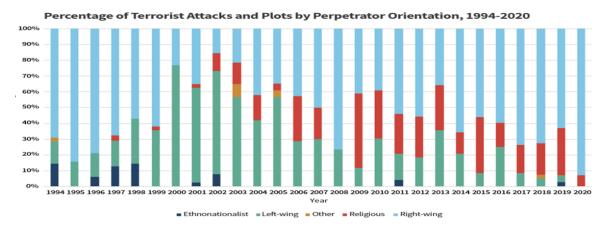


University of Chicago: Deadly Discretion: The Failure of Police Use of Force

No major police department met all the criteria, although there are wide differences between cities – with Chicago and LA as the best, and Indianapolis the worst.

# **Threat Groups**

Data from CSIS of 893 terrorist incidents in the United States between January 1994 and May 2020, showed that attacks from left-wing perpetrators like Antifa made up a small percentage of overall terrorist attacks and casualties. Right-wing terrorists perpetrated 57 per cent of all attacks and plots during this period, particularly those who were white supremacists, anti-government extremists, and involuntary celibates (or incels).



https://www.csis.org/analysis/escalating-terrorism-problem-united-states

In comparison, left-wing extremists orchestrated 25 percent of the incidents during this period.

#### Antifa

Antifa (anti-fascist) is a decentralised network of far-left militants. Their activities tend to be coordinated through social media, encrypted peer-to-peer networks and encrypted messaging services such as Signal. Antifa groups frequently conduct counter- protests. They often organise in 'black blocs' (ad hoc gatherings of individuals that wear black clothing). Their methods include the use of improvised explosive devices (IED) and other homemade weapons, and resort to vandalism. There are no indications that the group is geographically bound.

Examples of major incidents involving Antifa include a July 2016 confrontation with a neo-Nazi rally in Sacramento, CA, where at least five people were stabbed. In February, March, and April 2017, Antifa members attacked alt-right demonstrators at the University of California, Berkeley, using bricks, pipes, hammers and homemade incendiary devices. In July 2019, William Van Spronsen, a self-proclaimed Antifa militant, attempted to bomb the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention facility in Tacoma, Washington, using a propane tank, but was killed by police.

#### **Far Right Groups**

Far-right groups tend to operate under decentralised models - with the threat coming from individuals within a network rather than groups. They also operate online through sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Gab, Reddit, 4Chan, 8kun.

There are broadly two types of right-wing extremist organisations - although there are wide differences both within and between the groups. Firstly, there are White supremacists. White supremacist networks are highly decentralised. Most White supremacists believe that Whites have their own culture superior to other cultures, are genetically superior to other peoples and should exert dominance over others. Of particular concern is the emergence of the Atomwaffen Division (AWD), a US-based neo-Nazi hate group with branches in the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Baltics.

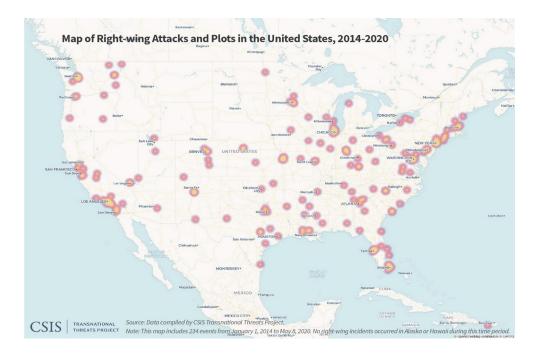
In January 2018, Brandon Russell, founder of the AWD was arrested and sentenced for possessing a destructive device and explosive material. Despite similar arrests, the AWD continues to plot, conduct attacks, and recruit. In February, four AWD members—including Cameron Shea, a high-level member and recruiter of the AWD—were arrested for conspiring to targets journalists and activists. They used encrypted chat platforms, distributed threatening posters and wore disguises.

Secondly, there are anti-government extremists, including militias and the sovereign citizen movement. Most militia extremists view the US government as corrupt and a threat to freedom and rights. These extremists tend to be slightly more organised, and in some cases form militia - and almost always have access to arms. However, the majority of incidents appear to be lone-wolf attacks, rather than coordinated attacks by a group. For example, the 'Three Percenters' are a far-right paramilitary group which advocates gun rights and seeks to limit US government authority.

In August 2017, Jerry Varnell, a 23-year-old who identified as holding the 'III% ideology' and wanted to "start the next revolution" attempted to detonate a bomb outside of an Oklahoma bank, similar to the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing.

Such groups are likely to oppose COVID-19 restrictions, although their activities on that front have thus far been limited. Nonetheless, AKE believes that anti-government militias will be a source of concern if there is a medium- term proliferation of harsh COVID-19 restrictions. AKE notes that they could also include anti-vaxxer groups, which could target vaccine facilities – although such incidents are likely to be rare.

Right-wing activity has increased, and it a nationwide concern. CSIS report that over the last six years there have been right wing attacks and plots in 42 states, Washington DC, and Puerto Rico.



#### University campuses

A potential area of violence between far-left and far-right groups are university campuses. The risk is to most universities across the country – although concentrated in more liberal states and areas, including New York, and much of the northeast, and California

Left-wing student movements tend to focus on deplatforming – which can led to disruptive demonstrations and counter-demonstrations. Examples include fights breaking out at New York University when far-right men's club founder Gavin McInnes appeared at the school, leading to 11 arrests. No students were arrested. Berkeley, in California, has also been a site for violence.

In general, universities across the country are potential zones of unrest. The could also be sites of opposition to President Donald Trump if he wins re-election (discussed below) – although thus far incidents of serious violence and rioting are rare.

# **Election Related Violence**

There is an elevated risk of violence following the 2020 US Presidential election which will occur on 3 November 2020. Opinion polls indicate that Democratic candidate Joe Biden is substantially ahead of President Trump in national polls and slightly ahead in swing states.

The states that will likely decide the election are (in order of likelihood):

- Pennsylvania
- Wisconsin
- Florida
- Michigan
- Arizona
- North Carolina.

In most election simulations incumbent US President Donald Trump can lose at most two of those states and win the election. The race is also competitive in Georgia and Texas, and if the Republicans lose either, Republicans are highly unlikely to hold the White House.

There are broadly three scenarios:

A clear victory for Biden – at this stage is the most likely outcome of the election. There could be sporadic unrest, particularly if Trump and Trump surrogates push the narrative that the election was stolen. Trump has already questioned the integrity of mail-in voting and could push the narrative further. There are likely to be minor protests in strongly Trump-supporting states, and there could be clashes in closer swing states (including Pennsylvania). The credibility of that narrative will decrease if Trump loses by a landslide. Reports currently indicate that over half of Trump supporters think that Trump should not accept a Biden win.

A close victory for Trump – if Trump were to win the election there could be a rise in unrest in anti-Trump cities and states. Anti-Trump activists will likely claim that voter suppression and manipulation drove the result. There was unrest following Trump's 2016 election victory in several cities, including:

Atlanta, Georgia - Boston, Massachusetts - Cleveland, Ohio - Dallas, Texas - Detroit, Michigan - Houston, Texas - Los Angeles, California - Miami, Florida - New York City, New York - Oakland, California - Omaha, Nebraska - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania - Portland, Oregon - Richmond, Virginia - San Diego, California - San Francisco, - California - San Jose, California - Seattle, Washington - Washington, D.C. - Winston-Salem, North Carolina

There were also protests at universities, including:

- Arizona State University
- Fisk University
- University of Kentucky
- University of Michigan
- University of Pittsburgh
- Ohio State University
- University of New York at New Paltz
- Texas State University
- University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
- University of Massachusetts Amherst
- University of Miami
- University of North Carolina, Greensboro
- University of North Carolina, Wilmington
- University of Pacific
- University of Rochester
- Vanderbilt University
- Virginia Commonwealth University
- Wayne State University
- Wesleyan University

The majority of such protests were peaceful, although there were numerous violent incidents in Oakland, CA and in Portland, Oregon. In the event of another close Trump victory a similar set of cities are likely to be affected by civil unrest, although it is probable that there will be greater incidents of violence. It is also probable that such protests will be met by right-wing counter demonstrations, which could lead to escalating violence and the involvement of federal authorities.

A contested election – neither candidate clearly wins on election day, and results are delayed in swing states (likely in either Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, or Michigan). Both parties mount legal challenges – similar to 2000. Irrespective of which side wins there is likely to be a cascade of violent protests in major cities across the country – although these will likely deescalate relatively quickly.

Other than the cities listed above, it is plausible that there will be greatest violence in states where there are concerns over voter suppression or electoral manipulation. A rough list of the states (and DC) most likely can be proxied by the table below which examines how restrictive election laws are based by state:

State	PEI index of electoral integrity	Electoral laws	Electoral procedures	District boundaries	Voter registration	Party registration	Media coverage	Campaign finance	Voting process	Vote count	Results	Electoral authorities	Rank
Vermont	75	65	86	50	69	88	66	68	79	85	69	89	1
Idaho	73	58	98	46	66	82	68	61	73	88	74	81	2
New Hamp.	73	55	96	48	64	83	64	54	74	90	76	92	3
lowa	73	58	94	73	60	81	64	59	71	90	66	89	4
New Mexico	73	56	90	64	53	89	50	74	71	88	64	90	5
Maine	72	66	89	62	62	82	63	60	75	85	58	87	6
Washington	72	68	93	39	62	81	65	52	78	86	67	90	7
Hawai'i	72	67	84	63	76	83	62	66	73	79	66	73	8
Louisiana	71	61	84	41	66	81	63	66	70	80	75	81	9
Colorado	71	69	87	40	62	73	55	62	79	83	63	86	10
Maryland	70	65	88	26	62	81	59	60	76	82	63	84	11
Oregon	69	54	96	35	71	78	42	50	83	88	55	89	12
Minnesota	69	62	89	40	61	80	51	58	75	82	64	82	13
Delaware	68	36	81	39	58	79	59	58	79	82	62	80	14
Connecticut	68	61	78	50	63	75	58	59	69	82	64	69	15
Montana	67	45	79	44	58	73	57	57	74	85	71	77	16
Massachusetts	67	56	87	38	64	78	55	51	72	80	64	80	17
Wyoming	67	42	85	26	61	74	64	53	74	81	73	79	18
DC	67	63	78	51	61	74	52	56	72	75	64	78	19
West Virginia	66	50	66	39	47	98	58	54	70	86	72	58	20
Alaska	66	56	81	53	59	80	49	52	74	71	69	63	21
Nebraska	66	45	83	36	53	84	58	58	66	84	71	63	22
California	65	55	85	51	57	73	50	51	69	80	56	83	23
Utah	65	56	81	17	53	82	55	53	70	74	78	73	24
Illinois	64	47	83	18	61	74	53	47	71	83	63	80	25
	64		73	30	50	78	53		70	79	67	73	
Missouri New Jersey	63	41 59	85	30	67	78	51	57 46	66	80	62	66	26 27
		42			41	77	41	48	64	84	80	82	
Arkansas Indiana	63 63	39	81 77	37 26	49	80	58	55	67	80	65	72	28 29
		38	63		59	71	54	50	72	84	75	58	
North Dakota	63	48	77	42	46	83		57		77		73	30
Kentucky	62			35			43		61		72		31
South Dakota	62	58	78	17	60 54	67 76	46	41	72	72 71	74	80	32
Kansas	62	35	77	48			57	57	64		67	56	33
Nevada	62	53	68	45	57	68	40	42	72	76 76	64 61	78	34
New York	61	47	76	33	60	68	52	49	65			71	35
Virginia	60	35	75	16	52	70	48	48	64	82	66	73	36
Texas	59	32	70	13	51	70	54	53	64	75	63	67	37
Florida	58	35	73	15	53	70	46	45	68	78	62	65	38
North Carolina	58	28	73	7	48	74	59	52	68	73	50	70	39
Alabama	58	24	82	17	47	62	50	51	62	76	71	69	40
Michigan	57	41	73	13	53	74	51	49	64	71	51	65	41
Ohio	57	26	73	10	53	72	48	44	69	77	61	63	42
Georgia	57	37	71	20	49	66	50	49	65	75	63	61	43
Rhode Island	57	33	73	42	56	59	48	43	62	74	53	66	44
Pennsylvania	56	37	73	11	51	72	46	48	63	73	55	66	45
South Carolina	56	45	76	14	54	64	40	42	61	73	66	63	46
Mississippi	56	33	72	17	46	72	43	43	61	74	70	61	47
Oklahoma	55	31	74	23	45	55	52	47	58	73	65	64	48
Tennessee	55	21	70	19	57	55	45	47	58	79	61	69	49
Wisconsin	54	17	70	8	44	72	43	40	65	81	57	66	50
Arizona	53	29	59	19	47	63	47	44	66	69	55	54	51
Total	64	47	79	33	56	75	53	53	69	79	65	73	

https://www.electoralintegrityproject.com/

Vermont has the least restrictive election laws, while Arizona has the most. Importantly, all the likely swing states are near the bottom of the list – which means that any state in which the election result is particularly close could be an epicentre for protests.

## Governors

There have been a limited number of COVID-19-related protests thus far, although those which have occurred are largely orchestrated by right-wing groups - including militia movements and Tea Party activists. However, should the pandemic continue and more restrictions are introduced it is likely that there will be a cascade of protests.

In general, the US population appears to be supportive of state governors' responses to the pandemic. In the initial months of the pandemic, polls in most states showed a positive spread between how governors handled the pandemic and their general job approval:

			COVID-	19 POLLS	PRE-PANDEMIC	
GOVERNOR	PARTY	STATE	NUMBER	APPROVAL	APPROVAL	DIFF
Newsom	D	CA	1	83%	42%	+41
Cuomo	D	NY	2	79	47	+32
DeWine	R	ОН	1	80	49	+31
Evers	D	WI	2	72	48	+24
Whitmer	D	MI	2	66	42	+24
Inslee	D	WA	1	67	44	+23
Hutchinson	R	AR	1	80	58	+22
Cooper	D	NC	1	63	47	+16
Bel Edwards	D	LA	1	68	5 4	+14
Sununu	R	NH	1	73	59	+14
Stitt	R	OK	1	69	56	+13
Gordon	R	WY	1	82	69	+13
Wolf	D	PA	2	66	53	+13
Baker	R	MA	1	80	69	+11
DeSantis	R	FL	1	51	58	- 7

Baseline approval numbers are from Morning Consult's 2019 Q4 governor rankings.

SOURCE: POLLS, MORNING CONSULT

Most governors enjoyed an initial positive effect in the polls at the start of the pandemic in March and April. Some, like Andrew Cuomo (NY) and Gavin Newsom (CA), enjoyed bumps as large as 30 or 40 points. However, support for governors' responses has decreased as the pandemic continued – with a July survey showing approval ratings rose for only five governors' handling of the virus: New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, Vermont Gov. Phil Scott, Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and Hawaii Gov. David Ige. There is likely to be a continued systematic decline in the popularity of governors across the country.

Mornington Crescent, a polling company, finds the following are the country's 10 most popular governors:

- Mark Gordon (R WY)
- Larry Hogan (R MD)
- Phil Scott (R VT)

- Chris Sununu (R NH)
- Doug Burgum (R ND)
- Ron DeSantis (R FL)
- Greg Abbott (R TX)
- Asa Hutchinson (R AR)
- Kay Ivey (R AL)

#### While the most unpopular are:

- David Ige (D HI)
- Matt Bevin (R KY)
- Gina Raimondo (D RI)
- Ned Lamont (D CT)
- Kate Brown (D OR)
- Kristi Noem (R SD)
- Janet Mills (D ME)
- Jim Justice (R WV)
- Mike Dunleavy (R AK)
- Andrew Cuomo (D NY)

These rating are susceptible to change dramatically as COVID-19 spread. AKE also notes that some governors may be generally popular but could face backlash from a segment of the population over their handling of the pandemic. Gretchen Whitmer, of Michigan, has been regularly attacked by the Trump administration and a focus of his public attacks. Whitmer was also reportedly the subject of a kidnapping attempt by Trump supporters.

# **Appendix 1**





We've been enabling our clients to operate in the world's most challenging environments for three decades.

That's a lot of experience.

So, harnessing this strength, we've been working hard innovating, adapting and delivering solutions that enable our clients to work safely, securely and effectively in a world with COVID-19.

We'd love to tell you more about about our analytical, training and security solutions globally.

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# Safety During Riots & Demonstrations

A half-day online course designed to enable and support your teams to operate safely in these volatile and dynamic times.

# This course will cover:

Planning - Tactical medical response - Public disorder, demonstrations & riots - Tactical evacuation