



| Assessment |

Threats to the Republican National Convention

A-2024-07-11a

Classification: TLP:CLEAR

Criticality: Low

Intelligence Requirements: Geopolitical Events, All Industries

July 11, 2024

Scope Note

ZeroFox Intelligence is derived from a variety of sources, including—but not limited to—curated open-source accesses, vetted social media, proprietary data sources, and direct access to threat actors and groups through covert communication channels. Information relied upon to complete any report cannot always be independently verified. As such, ZeroFox applies rigorous analytic standards and tradecraft in accordance with best practices and includes caveat language and source citations to clearly identify the veracity of our Intelligence reporting and substantiate our assessments and recommendations. All sources used in this particular Intelligence product were **identified prior to 5:00 PM (EDT) on July 10, 2024**; per cyber hygiene best practices, caution is advised when clicking on any third-party links.

Assessment | Threats to the Republican National Convention

Executive Summary

The Republican National Convention (RNC) will be held at the Fiserv Forum in downtown Milwaukee, Wisconsin, from July 15–18, 2024. According to local officials, approximately 50,000 delegates, guests, and media members are expected to visit the city for the event, in addition to thousands of protesters.¹ Wisconsin is likely to be a hotly contested state in the upcoming November 2024 presidential election, with Milwaukee being a Democratic stronghold. In 2020, President Joe Biden carried the state by only slightly more than 20,000 votes, after Trump won the state in 2016. In this heated political atmosphere, left-leaning protest groups have vowed to carry out demonstrations that could lead to confrontations with police and security personnel.

Physical Security Preparations

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), U.S. Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security, and Wisconsin state and city law enforcement officials have identified no credible threats to the RNC. However, security forces are concerned that broad polarization and deepening societal fissures could drive radicalized domestic threat

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[hXXps://www.jsonline\[.\]com/story/opinion/columnists/2024/07/02/republican-national-convention-2024-milwaukee-local-business/74264965007/](https://www.jsonline.com/story/opinion/columnists/2024/07/02/republican-national-convention-2024-milwaukee-local-business/74264965007/)

actors to target the convention. A significantly heightened security presence and measures will be in effect leading up to and during the convention.²

- While the polarization will primarily inspire lawful protests against former President Trump, security officials have observed an increase in “disruptive tactics targeting election symbols” during this election cycle. These disruptive tactics have the potential to further disrupt business and traffic operations during the event.³
- Days of large gatherings and the presence of high-profile politicians could prove attractive targets for domestic terror groups or lone-wolf assailants.

To reduce the possibility of violent threat actors targeting the event, Milwaukee police have established pedestrian, vehicle, and river restriction zones around the Fiserv Forum area.

- The pedestrian restriction zone will be in place starting at 6:00 PM on July 14 and will limit the ability of pedestrians to walk north of the area starting at West McKinley Ave. and south of the Baird Arena.
- The vehicle screening area covers an even larger area around Fiserv Forum and will be in place starting at 2:00 AM on July 15. Only authorized personnel will be able to enter the area via five vehicle screening points.
- There will also be river restoration along portions of the Milwaukee River just east of the arena starting at 8:00 AM on July 14.⁴
- Firearms will be allowed in the “outer perimeter” (yellow) surrounding the RNC but not inside the event’s “inner perimeter” (red)⁵ shown below:

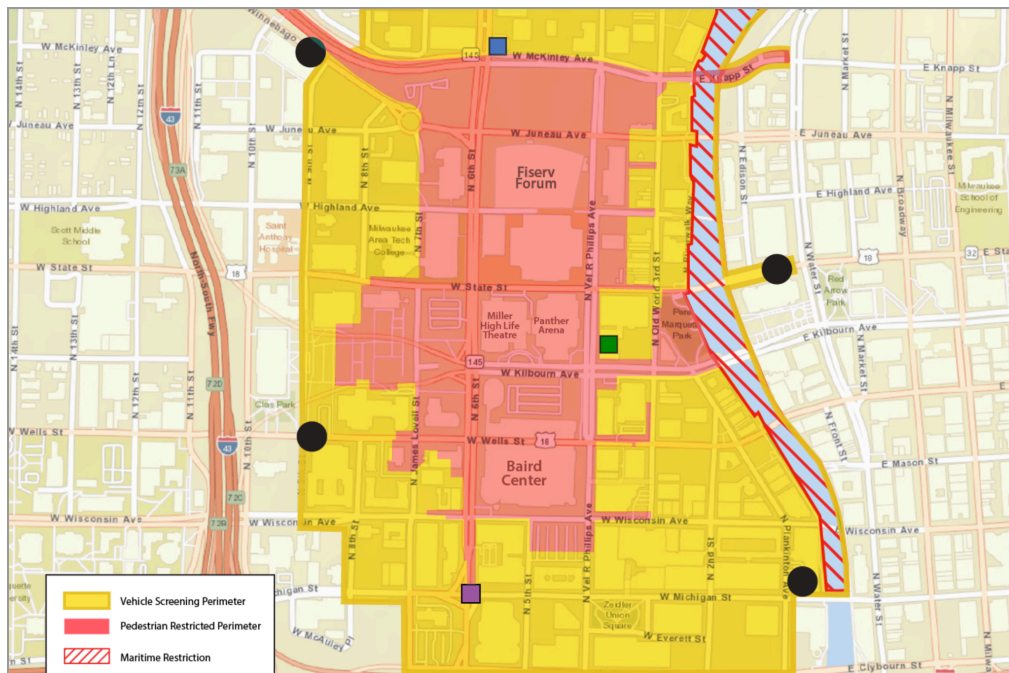
² [hXXps://abcnews.go\[.\]com/ThisWeek/video/secret-service-ready-rnc-dnc-111725727](https://abcnews.go.com/ThisWeek/video/secret-service-ready-rnc-dnc-111725727)

³ [hXXps://edition.cnn\[.\]com/2024/07/07/politics/republican-convention-target-extremists/index.html](https://edition.cnn.com/2024/07/07/politics/republican-convention-target-extremists/index.html)

⁴ [hXXps://city.milwaukee\[.\]gov/RNC](https://city.milwaukee.gov/RNC)

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[hXXps://chicago.suntimes\[.\]com/elections/2024/06/21/republican-national-convention-milwaukee-secret-service-police-security-plan-aclu-wisconsin](https://chicago.suntimes.com/elections/2024/06/21/republican-national-convention-milwaukee-secret-service-police-security-plan-aclu-wisconsin)



Map showing the security perimeters around the RNC

Source: [hXXps://city.milwaukee\[.\]gov/RNC](https://city.milwaukee.gov/RNC)

Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) announced plans to enact 14 detours for the downtown bus route system near the Fiserv Forum area. Localized traffic disruptions are likely to occur ahead of and during the convention and may begin as early as July 11. The detours are expected to last until July 19.⁶ Additionally, Milwaukee Mitchell International Airport (MKE) will also receive larger than normal traffic during the RNC. While airport officials do not anticipate major delays or cancellations, airport services may be crowded and experience disruptions ahead of the convention.⁷

- The transit system's main lines of 18, 30, 31, 33, 34, and 57 will be affected from East to West, while the northbound and southbound lines of 12, 15, 19, 80, and 81 will be disrupted at the time of reporting. However, the affected routes are subject to

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[hXXps://www.jsonline\[.\]com/story/news/local/milwaukee/2024/07/08/mcts-announces-adjusted-bus-routes-during-the-rnc/74327402007/](https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/local/milwaukee/2024/07/08/mcts-announces-adjusted-bus-routes-during-the-rnc/74327402007/)

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[hXXps://www.wisn\[.\]com/article/milwaukee-mitchell-international-airport-upgrades-for-rnc-11k-anticipated-passengers/61504532](https://www.wisn.com/article/milwaukee-mitchell-international-airport-upgrades-for-rnc-11k-anticipated-passengers/61504532)

change.⁸ In addition to the detours, MCTS officials added several temporary bus stops to curtail congestion during the convention.⁹

- Authorities advised residents and visitors to allow for more time than usual when using public transportation and at the airport when traveling amid the convention.

| Terrorism

Since the Israel-Hamas war began in October 2023, authorities have issued several security warnings over the heightened risk of a terror attack on large gatherings. Despite the warnings issued, it is very unlikely that the Islamic State (IS) or similar groups have the capability to carry out a large-scale coordinated attack on such a high-security event. Rather, security forces are more likely concerned about the risk of lone wolves hitting soft targets, such as protesters gathered away from the arena or other convention-related events outside of the security zones, like watch parties.

- IS welcomes and encourages lone-wolf attacks in its name. Unlike larger orchestrated attacks, knife/small arms attacks and vehicular assaults require little instruction. They could include unsophisticated improvised explosive devices (IEDs) that attackers learn to build online.

Unlike some Champions League soccer matches that were the target of rhetorical threats by Islamist terrorist organizations following the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war, no similar targeting calls have been observed for the RNC.

| Boycott and Protest Activity

The majority of the unrest is anticipated on July 15, 2024, when March on the RNC 2024, a coalition of left-leaning activist groups, plans to hold a large-scale march towards Fiserv Forum. According to leaders of the protest, demonstrators will meet in Red Arrow Park at 10:00 AM local time, before marching towards the arena at 12:00 PM.¹⁰ The event was

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⁸ [hXXps://www.jsonline\[.\]com/story/news/local/milwaukee/2024/07/08/mcts-announces-adjusted-bus-routes-during-the-rnc/74327402007/](https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/local/milwaukee/2024/07/08/mcts-announces-adjusted-bus-routes-during-the-rnc/74327402007/)

⁹ [hXXps://urbanmilwaukee\[.\]com/2024/07/09/mcts-updates-rnc-bus-detours-to-better-serve-downtown-riders/](https://urbanmilwaukee[.]com/2024/07/09/mcts-updates-rnc-bus-detours-to-better-serve-downtown-riders/)

¹⁰ [hXXps://www.instagram\[.\]com/p/C8xQQ0uuUfo/](https://www.instagram[.]com/p/C8xQQ0uuUfo/)

organized to oppose the Republican Party's stances on various issues, including abortion, immigration, LGBTQ+ rights, and in support of Palestine amid the Israel-Hamas war.¹¹

According to organizers, more than 100 groups will participate in the March, including:¹²¹³¹⁴

- Code Pink
- Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)
- National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression (NAARP)
- Black Youth Project 100, Milwaukee
- Democratic Socialists of America, Milwaukee
- Freedom Road Socialist Organization
- Palestine Solidarity Grand Rapids
- Minnesota Action Abortion Committee

The group's original route intended to defy city and federal authorities by entering the convention's restricted "inner perimeter." However, after a July 8 court ruling against the plan, activists modified their march and agreed with officials to only enter the "outer perimeter." This will take place on several roadways, including Martin Luther King Jr. Drive two blocks east of Fiserv Forum, as well as on West Wells Street and West Wisconsin Avenue.¹⁵¹⁶ Both city officials and activists agreed their "top priority" is keeping demonstrations "peaceful."¹⁷

- The dispute over the security zone may result in scuffles between march participants and security personnel, which has the potential to escalate into violent demonstrations and further disruptive activities during the convention.
- The outcome of the planned disruptive event also has the potential to have repercussions nationwide, as interest groups frequently plan solidarity protests in

¹¹ [hXXps://www.instagram.com/p/C9LRm9uOslu/](https://www.instagram.com/p/C9LRm9uOslu/)

¹² [hXXps://fightbacknews.org/](https://fightbacknews.org/)

¹³ [hXXps://x.com/medeabenzamin/status/1806358670134936010](https://x.com/medeabenzamin/status/1806358670134936010)

¹⁴ [hXXps://www.marchonrnc2024.org/endorse](https://www.marchonrnc2024.org/endorse)

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[hXXps://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/2024/07/09/milwaukee-protest-group-announces-rnc-march-route-drops-aclu-lawsuit/74339935007/](https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/2024/07/09/milwaukee-protest-group-announces-rnc-march-route-drops-aclu-lawsuit/74339935007/)

¹⁶

[hXXps://wisconsinexaminer.com/briefs/group-protesting-republican-convention-criticizes-ruling-announces-new-march-route/](https://wisconsinexaminer.com/briefs/group-protesting-republican-convention-criticizes-ruling-announces-new-march-route/)

¹⁷ [hXXps://www.wpr.org/news/organizers-coalition-march-rnc-protest-milwaukee](https://www.wpr.org/news/organizers-coalition-march-rnc-protest-milwaukee)

the event that the situation turns violent or if several participants are arrested. For instance, violent protests and encampments erupted nationwide in April 2024 in solidarity with dozens of students who were arrested at Columbia University during demonstrations over the Israel-Hamas war. The protests and encampments lasted for several weeks, resulting in widespread disruptions and violence across the United States.¹⁸

As of writing, no other major demonstrations are scheduled for the remainder of the convention. Nonetheless, sporadic protests and rallies will likely occur in downtown Milwaukee—particularly on July 18, the convention's last day, when former President Donald Trump will officially be nominated by the Republican Party. The ad-hoc nature of these events over three days could present security difficulties for authorities seeking to counter potential violent unrest.

Another possible source of protest activity is related to the Israel-Hamas war. Since the war started in October 2023, there have been several notable pro-Palestinian protests targeting major events in the United States. However, at the time of writing, ZeroFox has observed no evidence of demonstrations dedicated to the RNC, despite the expected presence of pro-Palestinian groups in the city.

- During the Macy's Day Thanksgiving Parade on November 23, 2023, several dozen pro-Palestinian protesters glued themselves to the parade route, temporarily halting the event, while others marched along the parade route before being arrested.¹⁹ Pro-Palestinian groups held large marches on New Year's Eve, notably in New York City, calling for a ceasefire.²⁰ A small gathering of pro-Palestinian protesters also demonstrated during the Grammy Awards in Los Angeles.²¹
- Pro-Palestinian protesters may also attempt to enter the arena as RNC guests and demonstrate solidarity with Palestinians during delegate counting or speeches. However, ZeroFox anticipates that the Democratic National Convention

¹⁸ [hXXps://apnews\[.\]com/article/gaza-war-campus-protests-966eb531279f8e4381883fc5d79d5466](https://apnews.com/article/gaza-war-campus-protests-966eb531279f8e4381883fc5d79d5466)

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[hXXps://abcnews.go\[.\]com/US/pro-palestinian-protesters-force-macys-thanksgiving-day-temporarily/story?id=105124720](https://abcnews.go[.]com/US/pro-palestinian-protesters-force-macys-thanksgiving-day-temporarily/story?id=105124720)

²⁰

[hXXps://www.aljazeera\[.\]com/news/2023/12/31/pro-palestine-campaigners-call-for-gaza-ceasefire-on-new-years-eve](https://www.aljazeera[.]com/news/2023/12/31/pro-palestine-campaigners-call-for-gaza-ceasefire-on-new-years-eve)

²¹ [hXXps://deadline\[.\]com/2024/02/pro-palestinian-protest-grammys-rain-storm-1235814186/](https://deadline[.]com/2024/02/pro-palestinian-protest-grammys-rain-storm-1235814186/)

(DNC), to be held from August 19–22, 2024, at the United Center in Chicago, is a more likely target for pro-Palestinian protests, both because the Biden administration is responsible for U.S. policy in support of Israel in its war with Hamas and because there is a higher possibility that pro-Palestinian delegates and guests will be at the DNC.

Other politically-motivated protest groups may use the convention to promote their cause; this could include protests in support of or against aid to Ukraine, abortion, immigration, or the cost of living.

Cybersecurity Threats

Although recent national election cycles have not seen major cyberattacks targeting the DNC or RNC, attackers have targeted smaller political conventions in recent years.

- In May 2020, suspected hackers triggered software issues that caused the delay of an online state convention for Minnesota Republicans.²² More recently, in June 2022, malicious actors added fake names and manipulated registration passes ahead of the South Dakota Republican Party Convention.²³

Major conventions (like other gatherings of elected officials) do present concerns regarding cyber espionage, especially as this event will feature high-profile elected officials with possible access to future policy decisions or other forms of proprietary information.

- Foreign threat actors may attempt to learn about a future Trump administration's policies regarding ending the war in Ukraine via phishing emails or impersonation scams designed to convince individuals to pass on sensitive information.
- In 2023, Russian-backed cyber threat actors tried to infiltrate NATO (as well as U.S. and EU government agencies), hoping to obtain information that could help its war effort against Ukraine.²⁴ Ahead of the 2023 NATO summit in Lithuania, phishing

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[hXXps://www.startribune\[.\]com/hacking-suspected-as-technical-difficulties-stymie-minnesota-gop-convention/570535152/](https://www.startribune.com/hacking-suspected-as-technical-difficulties-stymie-minnesota-gop-convention/570535152/)

²³

[hXXps://www.dakotanewsnow\[.\]com/2022/06/10/hackers-add-fake-names-prevent-press-registration-sd-republican-party-convention/](https://www.dakotanewsnow.com/2022/06/10/hackers-add-fake-names-prevent-press-registration-sd-republican-party-convention/)

²⁴ [hXXps://edition.cnn\[.\]com/2023/12/07/politics/russian-hackers-nato-forces-diplomats/index.html](https://edition.cnn.com/2023/12/07/politics/russian-hackers-nato-forces-diplomats/index.html)

emails were sent to attendees. A later hack of a Lithuanian IT system was linked to the efforts made during the NATO summit and resulted in leaks regarding delegate movements and notes from NATO meetings.²⁵ A breach of this year's summit has also been observed targeting a branch of NATO that collects and analyzes data to support military decisions.²⁶ ZeroFox can neither confirm nor deny the veracity of the alleged breach, which includes data on events and users, but if it is authentic, it could be used to carry out a range of threats.

- With the 2024 NATO summit taking place in Washington, D.C., one week before the RNC, threat actors could seek to target those participating at both events.

| Conclusion

While the only documented threat to the RNC is from myriad protest groups made up largely of those opposed to former President Trump, security services are also concerned that widespread political polarization surrounding issues like the Israel-Hamas war, immigration, and abortion could inspire would-be attackers to target the RNC. Gatherings of elected officials and thousands of opposition protesters in close proximity could prove attractive targets for domestic terror groups or lone-wolf assailants to disrupt a high-profile event.

²⁵ [hXXps://blogs.blackberry\[.\]com/en/2023/07/decoding-romcom-behaviors-and-opportunities-for-detection](https://blogs.blackberry.com/en/2023/07/decoding-romcom-behaviors-and-opportunities-for-detection)

²⁶ [hXXps://www.redhotcyber\[.\]com/en/post/alleged-nato-data-breachalleged-nato-data-breach-643-csv-files-with-user-data-and-server-details-leaked/](https://www.redhotcyber.com/en/post/alleged-nato-data-breachalleged-nato-data-breach-643-csv-files-with-user-data-and-server-details-leaked/)

Appendix A: Traffic Light Protocol for Information Dissemination

	Red	Amber
WHEN SHOULD IT BE USED?	Sources may use TLP:RED when information cannot be effectively acted upon by additional parties and could lead to impacts on a party's privacy, reputation, or operations if misused.	Sources may use TLP:AMBER when information requires support to be effectively acted upon but carries risks to privacy, reputation, or operations if shared outside of the organizations involved.
HOW MAY IT BE SHARED?	Recipients may NOT share TLP:RED with any parties outside of the specific exchange, meeting, or conversation in which it is originally disclosed.	Recipients may ONLY share TLP:AMBER information with members of their own organization and its clients, but only on a need-to-know basis to protect their organization and its clients and prevent further harm. Note that TLP:AMBER+STRICT restricts sharing to the organization only.
	Green	Clear
WHEN SHOULD IT BE USED?	Sources may use TLP:GREEN when information is useful for the awareness of all participating organizations, as well as with peers within the broader community or sector.	Sources may use TLP:CLEAR when information carries minimal or no risk of misuse in accordance with applicable rules and procedures for public release.
HOW MAY IT BE SHARED?	Recipients may share TLP:GREEN information with peers and partner organizations within their sector or community but not via publicly accessible channels.	Recipients may share TLP:CLEAR information without restriction, subject to copyright controls.

Appendix B: ZeroFox Intelligence Probability Scale

All ZeroFox intelligence products leverage probabilistic assessment language in analytic judgments. Qualitative statements used in these judgments refer to associated probability ranges, which state the likelihood of occurrence of an event or development. Ranges are used to avoid a false impression of accuracy. This scale is a standard that aligns with how readers should interpret such terms.

Almost No Chance	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Roughly Even Chance	Likely	Very Likely	Almost Certain
1-5%	5-20%	20-45%	45-55%	55-80%	80-95%	95-99%