



FEATURES AND STORIES

FBI Reports an Increase in Hate Crimes in 2019: Hate-Based Murders More than Doubled

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Continuing a trend in the Trump era, reported hate crimes across America rose by 3% in 2019 – to 7,314, the highest number recorded since 2008, according to the FBI’s annual [Hate Crime Statistics report](#), released today.

The report, which includes both violent attacks and nonviolent hate crimes such as vandalism, documented 51 hate crime murders. That was the most recorded since the FBI began collecting this data in 1991 and more than double the 24 recorded last year – previously the highest documented figure.

Like every year, race-based hate crimes were the most numerous, the vast majority directed at Black people. Anti-Hispanic hate crimes increased for the fourth straight year – to 527, a 9 percent increase and the highest since 2010. Reported crimes directed against Jews and Jewish institutions increased 14%, to the highest figure since 2008. Hate crimes against LGBTQ people also went up, including an 18% increase in crimes against the transgender community, the highest since the FBI began collecting this specific data in 2013.

It’s important to note that, because of the nature of hate crime reporting, the FBI’s annual report vastly understates the real level of hate crimes in the country.

Local and state law enforcement agencies are not required by law to report hate crime data to the FBI. In addition, many hate crimes go unreported because of inadequate training and a lack of trust between law enforcement and the communities they police. Previous Department of

Justice studies estimate that an average of 250,000 people are victimized by hate crimes each year.

Enacted in 1990, the [Hate Crime Statistics Act \(HCSA\)](#) requires the Department of Justice to publish an annual report on the number of hate crimes collected by the nation's more than 18,000 federal, state, city, university and tribal law enforcement agencies.

For the 2019 report, 15,588 law enforcement agencies participated in the collection effort. However, only 2,172 of these agencies – less than 14% percent – reported one or more hate crimes. Every other agency, including more than 80 cities with populations over 100,000, affirmatively reported zero (0) hate crimes or did not report any data to the FBI at all.

Though the report undercounts the nation's hate crimes, it does document large trends, including how and against whom hate crimes are perpetrated.

Recent increases in hate crime reflect a growing threat of violence from the extreme right, one that the Department of Homeland Security acknowledged in its [Homeland Threat Assessment](#) released in October.

White supremacist terrorists, the report noted, pose the largest domestic terror threat in the United States. Because of their attacks, 2019 was the “most lethal year for domestic violent extremism in the United States since the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995.”

Many of today's white power activists venerate Timothy McVeigh, who committed the 1995 bombing and encourage others to carry out similar attacks. This is the strategy of [“accelerationists,”](#) who believe that violence is the only political tool at their disposal. For a growing segment of the white power movement, violence isn't only a way to inflict harm on groups they deem inferior but a strategy to alert other white people to the perceived dangers of immigration, racial integration and the decline of white people as a percentage of the American population. Attacks like the one at an El Paso Walmart – which accounted for 22 of the 51 hate crime murders in 2019 – are meant to spur further violent action.

Anti-Hispanic hatred is an inherent part of white power ideology, which was captured in the manifesto of the accused El Paso shooter. He claimed the attack was a response to the “Hispanic invasion of Texas” and alluded to the “Great Replacement” – one of the conspiracy theories central to white nationalist ideology. White people, white supremacists claim, are

being systematically replaced across the Western world through immigration and intermarriage. Proponents of the racist theory often insist that this “replacement” is being orchestrated by Jews, an idea expressed in the manifesto linked to the man accused in the [attack](#) on a synagogue in Poway, California, that left one person dead and three injured on April 27, 2019. The alleged attacker has been charged with 54 violations of the [Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act](#).

These racist ideas are not a political anomaly but rather the most extreme outgrowth of a white supremacist political culture. That racism, anti-Hispanic sentiment, antisemitism, and homophobia remain pressing problems in the U.S. is reflected in the 2019 hate crime increases.

Hate-based attacks have coincided with growth in the [white nationalist movement](#). According to the SPLC’s research, the number of white nationalist hate groups grew by 55% between 2017 and 2019.

At the same time, the nature of hate crimes has shifted toward violence. In 2018, personal attacks motivated by hate [hit a 16-year high](#). While there was a very slight decrease in the number of crimes against people in 2019 – less than 1% – the drop is attributable to the decline in crimes of intimidation. Every other category increased. Aggravated assault, for instance, rose nearly 13% over 2018, while simple assaults increased by almost 7%.

Hate crimes have a special impact on both the victim and the victim’s community, Recognizing that these crimes can inflame community tensions, civic leaders and law enforcement authorities have given them priority attention. The federal government and 46 states and the District of Columbia have enacted [hate crime training and prevention laws](#), and many police department have adopted [special policies to address these crimes](#).

The SPLC is now working with a broad coalition of civil rights, religious, education and civic organizations to urge Congress to pass the [Khalid Jabara and Heather Heyer National Opposition to Hate, Assault, and Threats to Equality \(NO HATE\) Act](#), which would promote hate crime training and prevention and provide funds to develop state hate crime reporting and victim services hotlines.

In addition, the SPLC’s [Vision for a Just America](#) presidential transition document calls for the Biden administration to:

- Mandate federal collection of hate crime data;

- Move funding for Department of Education programs aimed at preventing extremism and promoting deradicalization from punishment models to initiatives that build community resilience; and
- Provide funding for the Department of Education to develop a curriculum on structural racism and funding for states to implement their own related initiatives.

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