Hate crimes on the rise in the United States, according to FBI data

By Washington Post
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WASHINGTON, D.C. - The FBI on Monday released new data about hate crimes. It showed that more hate crimes were carried out in the United States last year, with an uptick in incidents motivated by bias against Jews, Muslims and LGBT people, among others.

There were more than 6,100 reported incidents of hate crimes in 2016, up from more than 5,800 the year before. The FBI made this report based on data submitted by law enforcement agencies across the country. As was the case in 2015, the largest share of victims last year, nearly six in 10, were targeted due to bias against the victim's race or ethnicity.

Hate crimes motivated by hatred of a religion increased last year, with a rise in the number of crimes targeting Jews and Muslims. Of the incidents spurred by hatred of a particular religion, anti-Semitism was again the leading cause, motivating about 55 percent of those episodes. Anti-Muslim sentiment followed next, spurring about 25 percent. The number of hate crimes targeting LGBT people also went up last year.

The FBI numbers come as reports of bias-fueled incidents have increased over the last year, raising a sense of unease nationwide.

Threats Forced Some Jewish Schools To Close

Studies have shown increasing discrimination against Muslims in the United States. Jewish schools and institutions have been repeatedly shuttered by threats. Cities have struggled with how to handle white-supremacist groups seeking to hold rallies, and gay-rights activists have decried what they describe as the Trump administration's "all-out assault on LGBTQ people, women, and other minority communities." The number of American hate groups has also increased, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center.

The number of hate crimes triggered by bias against a person's racial or ethnic background rose to 3,489 from 3,310 a year earlier, the FBI report said. Half of those episodes were motivated by racism against African-American people. One in five victims was targeted because of religious bias. One in six was victimized due to biases related to sexual orientation, the report said.

The FBI data captures a sweeping look at bias-fueled crimes in the nation. But this report is considered incomplete because not all jurisdictions or areas report their hate crimes. According to the FBI, 88 percent of agencies voluntarily participating in the hate crime statistics program "reported that no hate crimes occurred in their jurisdictions" last year.

Speaking earlier this year after a series of threats targeting Jewish schools and community centers, former FBI director James B. Comey acknowledged this. He said that the FBI needs "to do a better job of tracking and reporting hate crime, to fully understand what is happening in our communities, and how to stop it."

Why Hate Crimes Are Especially Heinous

"Hate crime is different from other crime," Comey said in prepared remarks delivered in May. "They strike at the heart of one's identity. They strike at our sense of self, our sense of belonging. The end result is loss: loss of trust, loss of dignity, and in the worst case, loss of life."

The FBI report, which collects information on the offenders in the hate crimes tallied last year, found that the largest share of offenders, 46 percent, were white. About a quarter of the people who carried out hate crimes were African-American.

Four in 10 of the people identified as "known hate crime offenders" committed simple assault. This could mean a threat of violence or causing a minor injury. Nearly a quarter committed aggravated assault, which is more serious and often involves the use of a deadly weapon. The report also identified more than 1,600 people who committed hate crimes by damaging, vandalizing or trying to destroy property.