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By Matt Rocheleau

GLOBE STAFF | JUNE 18, 2015

If proven to be a hate crime, the **killings of nine people in a black church in Charleston, S.C.**, Wednesday night would be unusual for its violence, both in the state and in the nation, and it would stand in stark contrast to recent decreases in hate-related crime.

In the United States, hate crimes — defined by the FBI as crimes against people or property motivated by bias against a race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, or disability — have decreased since 2001, the worst year on record, according to available data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation that goes back as far as 1996.

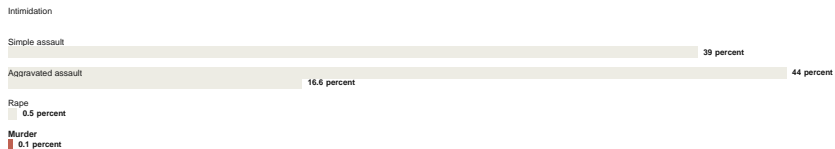
Hate crimes in America 2013 vs. 2001



While hate crimes have earned a special legal designation because of their cruel nature of targeting minority groups, they account for a small fraction of all crime in the United States, and national statistics tracked by the FBI show that many hate crimes involve intimidation or assault, but rarely result in murder.

On average, dating back to 1996, there have been nine hate crime-classified killings per year across the country. In 2013, five murders were classified as a hate crime, compared to 14,191 murders not classified as hate crimes.

Most common hate crime offenses in the US

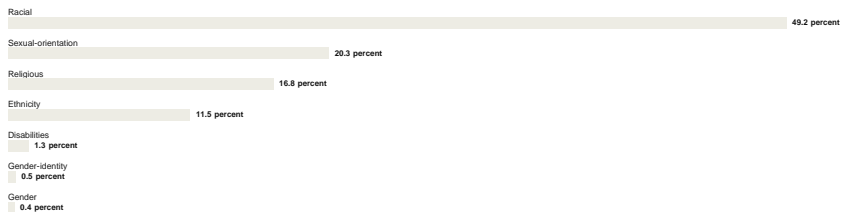


In South Carolina, there were four hate-motivated murders between 1996 and 2013, the most recent of which was in 2007, when Sean Kennedy, a 20-year-old gay man, was killed outside of a Greenville bar. Wednesday night's shooting, which authorities are investigating as a hate crime, would be the deadliest hate crime in the state in at least two decades, according to FBI data.

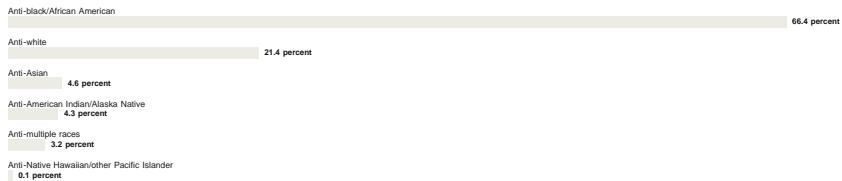
The total number of hate crimes fluctuated between 100 and 150 from 2004 through 2012, before the figure dropped to 51 in 2013, the fewest reported in the state since 2001, when there were 41 such incidents.

Racially motivated offenses have historically been the most common type of hate crime in the United States, followed by crimes driven by religious bias and sexual orientation bias.

Most common motivation in hate crimes in the US during 2013



Most common racially-motivated hate crimes



But reports of racially motivated hate crimes have dropped. The highest annual total was 5,396 in 1996, while last year there were about half as many across the country.

The number of racially motivated hate crimes has trended downward in South Carolina in recent years, too, from 89 race-related hate crimes in 2008 to 69 in 2012 and 33 during 2013.

Among all hate crimes nationally in 2013, nearly two-thirds were offenses committed against people, while the rest are considered property crimes.

The FBI notes that many variables can cause crime statistics to fluctuate from one year to the next or from one location to another, including an array of demographic, social, and economic factors within a given population, how and how often people in a community and local law enforcement agencies report crime, and the size of police forces.

Hate crime vs. all crime in 2013

All property crime 8,632,512

All violent crime 1,163,146

Hate crime 6,328

Hate crime in America

A look at the number of incidents of hate-motivated crime between 1996 and 2013.

— RACE — RELIGION — SEXUAL ORIENTATION — ETHNICITY — DISABILITY — MULTIPLE-BIAS — TOTAL

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DATA: Federal Bureau of Investigation

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