Hate crime reports fall

5th straight year of drops on LI as U.S. numbers rise

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Reports of hate crimes across Long Island decreased in 2017 — the fifth straight year of declines — even as such crimes spiked 17 percent nationwide, according to federal data.

But local experts and advocates cautioned that the annual FBI data, released Tuesday, do not reflect every police department in the country — and do not account for underreporting of hate crimes by victims themselves.

Nationally, 16,149 law enforcement agencies reported 7,175 hate crimes last year. In 2016, there were 15,254 agencies that reported 6,121 bias-motivated crimes, according to the data. The FBI defines hate crimes as being "motivated by bias toward race, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender and gender identity."

Before 2013, the FBI data did not include categories for gender or gender identity hate crimes.

"Is this really a spike?" said Frank Pezzella, a John Jay College of Criminal Justice professor whose research focuses on hate crimes. "Have hate crimes really increased, or has reporting gotten better?"

It's likely a combination of both, he said, noting that the current political climate has "emboldened" some offenders while also discouraging some victims from coming forward.

The total reported hate crimes from the Nassau and Suffolk police departments, as well as other law enforcement agencies on Long Island, decreased from 136 in 2013 to 77 in 2017, with declines in the years between, the data show. Other Long Island agencies reported separately to the FBI they had no hate crimes in that period.

In the FBI data, Nassau police reported 43 hate crimes in 2013 and 37 in 2017. In the years between, there was an increase to 52 hate crimes in 2016 despite decreases in 2014 and 2015. Suffolk police went from 87 reported hate crimes in 2013 to 36 in 2017. Of the 2017 total

crimes reported by Nassau and Suffolk police, 16 were related to race, ethnicity or ancestry, 54 were concerning religion and three had to do with sexual orientation.

"It was interesting to note the diminishing numbers on Long Island," Pezzella said. "Maybe what's happening on Long Island is an anomaly as compared to the rest of the nation."

Data collected by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, however, show that U.S. residents experienced 250,000 hate crime victimizations annually between 2004 and 2015, according to a 2017 news release about the most recent available information. The "majority" of the crimes were not reported to police, the release stated.

Patrick Young, program director for the Central American Refugee Center in Hempstead and Brentwood, blamed President Donald Trump's anti-immigrant sentiments, in part, for fewer reports. He also faulted Suffolk police for what he called a historic ignorance of hate crimes within the department, which was highlighted beginning 10 years ago with the hate-crime killing of Marcelo

Lucero, an Ecuadorian immigrant, by teenagers who were out looking to harm Hispanics.

"Latinos have become used to being insulted, and it becomes more and more difficult to distinguish when an incident rises to the level of a hate crime," Young said.

The Nassau and Suffolk police commissioners said the majority of their reports dealt with anti-Semitic crimes and incidents such as graffiti and vandalism. Both differentiated between hate crimes reported to the state and FBI, which must fit certain legal criteria and be directed at an individual with a specific bias motivation, and hate incidents, such as a swastika drawn at a playground that does not target an individual specifically.

"If you draw it in the snow, we take it," Nassau Police Commissioner Patrick Ryder said. "We investigate all of
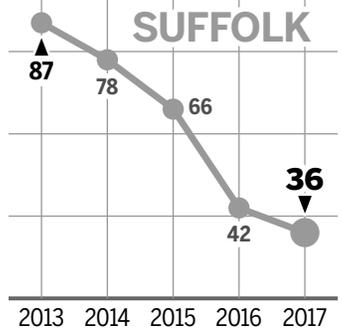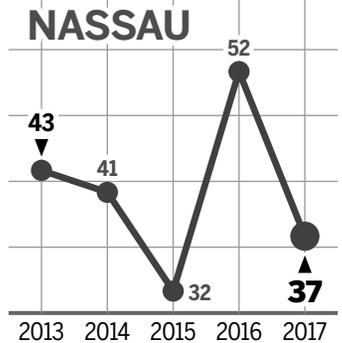
them. . . . We automatically treat them like a crime scene."

Hate incidents, as well as non-designated hate offenses, reported to Suffolk police went from 75 in 2016 to 104 in 2017, according to police data. There have been 62 incidents and offenses between Jan. 1 and Oct. 31 this year, while there have only been 19 reports of hate crimes.

In 2016, Nassau police received 59 reports of both bias crimes and incidents — 10 of which were swastikas at Nassau Community College that allegedly were the work of a Plainview man who was later arrested — and 56 reports in 2017, according to police data. Between Jan. 1 and Nov. 15, there were 30 reports of bias crimes and incidents within the county police's jurisdiction, 17 of which involved swastikas. Two of those 17 are believed to be 2 or 3 years old.

Alexander Rosemberg, associate regional director of the Anti-Defamation League's New York/New Jersey office, said his organization takes hate incidents seriously, even though they are legally considered less significant than hate crimes.

"They do foster the climate around which the crimes are

produced," he said.

Both departments said they send their police recruits to the Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County in Glen Cove and hold regular hate crime training. In addition, they put an emphasis on community policing — such as the Commissioner's Community Council in Nassau and a new civilian Hispanic liaison in Suffolk, both implemented this year — to build relationships with residents so that they feel comfortable working with police.

"Nothing's too small," Suffolk Police Commissioner Geraldine Hart said. "We want to make sure we are seeing and hearing about everything."

Joselo Lucero's brother Marcelo was killed 10 years ago by teenagers looking to harm Hispanics.

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NASSAU

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
43	41	32	52	37

SUFFOLK

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
87	78	66	42	36

TOTAL

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
136	132	101	96	77

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