

# CRS Insights

South Carolina Church Shooting and Hate Crime in the United States

Lisa N. Sacco, Analyst in Illicit Drugs and Crime Policy ([lsacco@crs.loc.gov](mailto:lsacco@crs.loc.gov), 7-7359)

Kristin Finklea, Specialist in Domestic Security ([kfinklea@crs.loc.gov](mailto:kfinklea@crs.loc.gov), 7-6259)

June 18, 2015 (IN10297)

---

## Incident in South Carolina

On June 17, 2015, a lone gunman shot and killed nine individuals in a predominantly black church in Charleston, South Carolina. The suspect in police custody, Dylann Roof, is white, while the nine deceased victims are black. The [U.S. Department of Justice announced](#) it is initiating a hate crime investigation.

## Hate Crime in the United States

As part of its [Hate Crime Statistics Program](#), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) collects data on "criminal offenses that were motivated, in whole or in part, by the offender's bias against a race, gender, gender identity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, and were committed against persons, property, or society." In 2013, [law enforcement agencies reported to the FBI](#) that 3,407 "single-bias hate crime offenses were racially motivated." Of these incidents, 66.4% were motivated by anti-black or anti-African American bias (see [Table 1](#)).

Table 1. Hate Crimes in the United States

(by race motivation, 2013)

Hate Crimes: Bias Motivation	Number of Offenses	Percentage
<b>Total Hate Crimes</b>	<b>6,933</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Single-Bias Incidents <sup>a</sup>	6,921	99.8%
Single-Bias Incidents Motivated by Race	3,407	49.1%
<b><i>Single-Bias Incidents Motivated by Race</i></b>	<b>3,407</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<i>Motivated by Anti-Black or African American</i>	2,263	66.4%
<i>Motivated by Anti-White</i>	728	21.4%
<i>Motivated by Anti-Other Race<sup>b</sup></i>	307	9.0%
<i>Motivated by Anti-Multiple Races, Group</i>	109	3.2%

**Source:** Table created by Congressional Research Service using data from FBI, *2013 Hate Crime Statistics*, Table 5, [https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/hate-crime/2013/topic-pages/incidents-and-offenses/incidentsandoffenses\\_final](https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/hate-crime/2013/topic-pages/incidents-and-offenses/incidentsandoffenses_final).

**Notes:** For more information on FBI, UCR data see [https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/hate-crime/2013/resource-pages/about-ucr/aboutucr\\_final](https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/hate-crime/2013/resource-pages/about-ucr/aboutucr_final).

a. This category excludes "multiple-bias incidents" in which (1) more than one offense type must occur in the incident and (2) at least two offense types must be motivated by different biases.

b. "Other Race" includes Asian (158), American Indian or Alaska Native (146), and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (3).

## Federal Response to Hate Crime

[Current federal law defines hate crimes](#) to include any crime against either person or property, in which the

offender intentionally selects the victim because of the victim's actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, gender, gender identity, disability, or sexual orientation. Congress most recently amended the definition of hate crimes through the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, Division E of [P.L. 111-84](#), to cover gender identity. Although hate crimes may fall under the categories of both violent and property crimes, policymakers tend to focus more attention on those hate crimes that may be classified as violent crimes.

[The term hate crime was first coined in the 1980s](#). During this time, states began to establish hate crime statutes; these state laws vary in regard to the crimes included, penalties imposed, and groups protected. The conceptualization of hate crimes has evolved since the 1980s, and researchers have noted that one of the challenges in defining a hate crime is [distinguishing it](#) from other bias-motivated crimes, such as [domestic terrorism](#), or even from constitutionally protected expression. The Hate Crime Statistics Act of 1990 ([P.L. 101-275](#)) was the first major federal law to define and require data collection on hate crimes.

At the federal level, hate crimes are generally investigated and prosecuted along with other bias-motivated crimes, as civil rights violations, and the [FBI](#) is the primary federal agency responsible for investigating these incidents. Federal agents may also work with and support state and local law enforcement in their investigation of hate crimes. In addition to the federal role in investigating hate crimes, [federal grants](#) may be used by state and local entities to address these crimes.