

Anti-Semitic Incidents in US Hit Record High in 2019, Report Says

American Jews were targets of more anti-Semitic incidents in 2019 than any other year over the past four decades, a surge marked by deadly attacks on a California synagogue, a Jewish grocery store in New Jersey and a rabbi's New York home, the Anti-Defamation League reported Tuesday.

The Jewish civil rights group counted 2,107 anti-Semitic incidents in 2019, finding 61 physical assault cases, 1,127 instances of harassment and 919 acts of vandalism. That's the highest annual tally since the New York City-based group began tracking anti-Semitic incidents in 1979. It also marked a 12% increase over the 1,879 incidents it counted in 2018.

Jonathan Greenblatt, the group's CEO, attributes last year's record high to a "normalization of anti-Semitic tropes," the "charged politics of the day" and social media. This year, he said, the COVID-19 pandemic is fueling anti-Semitic conspiracy theories.

"Anti-Semitism is a virus. It is like a disease, and it persists," Greenblatt said. "It's sometimes known as the oldest hatred. It never seems to go away. There truly is no single antidote or cure."

The ADL's count of anti-Semitic assaults involved 95 victims. More than half of the assaults occurred in New York City, including 25 in Brooklyn. Eight of those Brooklyn assaults happened during a span of eight days in December, primarily in neighborhoods where many Orthodox Jews live.

"Objects were thrown at victims, anti-Semitic slurs were shouted, and at least three victims were hit or punched in

their heads or faces,” says the report first given exclusively to The Associated Press.

The ADL defines an anti-Semitic assault as “an attempt to inflict physical harm on one or more people who are Jewish or perceived to be Jewish, accompanied by evidence of antisemitic animus.” Three of those 2019 assaults were deadly.

A 20-year-old former nursing student, John T. Earnest, awaits trial on charges he killed a woman and wounded three other people during an attack on Chabad of Poway synagogue near San Diego in April 2019. The gunman told a 911 dispatcher that he shot up the synagogue on the last day of Passover because Jews were trying to “destroy all white people,” according to prosecutors.

Attacks in Jersey City, New Jersey, killed a police detective in a cemetery and three people at a kosher market in December. Authorities said the attackers, David Anderson and Francine Graham, were motivated by a hatred of Jewish people and law enforcement.

A 37-year-old man, Grafton Thomas, was charged with stabbing five people with a machete at a Hanukkah celebration at a rabbi’s home in Monsey, an Orthodox Jewish community north of New York City. One of the five victims died three months after the Dec. 28 attack. Federal prosecutors said Thomas had handwritten journals containing anti-Semitic comments and a swastika.

The ADL’s report attributed 270 anti-Semitic incidents to extremist groups or individuals. A separate ADL report, released in February, found that 2019 was the sixth deadliest year for violence by all domestic extremists since 1970.

The ADL counted 919 vandalism incidents in 2019, a 19% increase from 774 incidents in 2018.

Two men described by authorities as members of a white

supremacist group called The Base were charged with conspiring last year to vandalize synagogues, including Beth Israel Sinai Congregation in Racine, Wisconsin. Even before his synagogue was defaced with swastikas, Rabbi Martyn Adelberg sensed that anti-Semitic incidents in the U.S. have been increasing as extremist rhetoric migrates from the internet's fringes to mainstream platforms.

"It provokes something else, too: an undying outpouring of love," he said, noting that a crowd of 150 people—at least five times the normal size and consisting mostly of Gentiles—attended the first service at the temple after the vandalism. "The support was overwhelming."

The ADL says it helped authorities identify a suspect accused of plastering white supremacist and anti-Semitic stickers on a display case at Chabad Jewish Center in Ocean City, Maryland. Rabbi Noam Cohen, the center's director, said anti-Semitism has ebbed and flowed for centuries. He views the vandalism of his center as an isolated incident, not a sign of growing anti-Semitism.

"Maybe I'm naive, but I hope not," he said.

The ADL tallied 1,127 harassment incidents last year, a 6% increase over 2018. The group defined these incidents as cases in which at least one Jewish person reported feeling harassed by the perceived anti-Semitic words or actions of another person or group.

The ADL report doesn't try to fully assess online anti-Semitism, but it does include incidents in which individuals or groups received anti-Semitic content in direct messages, on listservs or in social media settings "where they would have the reasonable expectation to not be subjected to anti-Semitism."

The ADL counted 171 anti-Semitic incidents last year referencing Israel or Zionism, including five instances in

which members of a white supremacist group, Patriot Front, protested outside Israel-aligned organizations to oppose “Zionist influence” over the U.S. government.

“Although it is not anti-Semitic to protest Israeli policies, these protests must be considered within the context of this group’s well-documented antisemitic agenda,” the report says.

The ADL says it tries to avoid conflating general criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. “However, Israel-related harassment of groups or individuals may be included when the harassment incorporates established anti-Jewish references, accusations and/or conspiracy theories, or when they demonize American Jews for their support of Israel,” the report says. {eoa}

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