

# THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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## Reports of O.C. hate crimes declined in '07, group says

But those who compile the data say Latinos face increasing hostility.

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THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

**SANTA ANA** • The number of hate crimes reported in Orange County dropped sharply last year, according to a report to be released today that is still far from across-the-board positive.

The report found that African Americans, who make up less than 2 percent of the county's population, continue to be targeted more often than any other group. They accounted for nearly a quarter of the hate crimes reported in 2007.

But, if reports are accurate, the county's Latino population faced the biggest jump in hate crimes last year. And community leaders fear that trend will continue as the economy grinds toward recession and the national debate over illegal immigration continues.

In all, Orange County recorded 81 hate crimes last year, down from 101 in 2006. The report also includes a lesser category of hate "incidents" – such as shouted slurs or racist pamphlets – which increased to 45 from 34.

But even taking those into account, it was the lowest level of hate-driven confrontations reported in the county since 2002.

"That's the most significant decline in hate crimes that we've seen in quite some time," said Rusty Kennedy, the executive director of the Orange County Human Relations Commission, which will present the annual hate-crimes report this morning. "It is good news, there's no question."

Among the report's other findings:

- Reports of hate crimes targeting people perceived to be Arab, Middle Eastern or Muslim fell to four in 2007 from nine in 2006.
- Vandalism and other property destruction was by far the most common type of hate crime reported in 2007.
- Hateful e-mails and other writings accounted for 19 of the incidents reported in 2007, a big increase from the five reported in 2006.
- More hate crimes and incidents were reported at homes (36) than in public areas (33) or businesses (27).

The report draws its statistics from community organizations as well as police departments, and not all of the crimes

it counts were reported to law enforcement. It does not break down the numbers by city; Kennedy said the numbers are so small that any change at the city level would be misleading.

The study doesn't explain why reports of hate crimes fell last year. But it does portray an ebb and flow in the statistics through the years, with hate crimes spiking during moments of intense and negative scrutiny of a particular group.

For example, the weeks after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks saw dozens of hate crimes and incidents against people perceived to be Middle Eastern or Muslim, according to the report. In 2004, hate crimes increased against gays and lesbians – amid a national debate over same-sex marriage.

This year, the concern among those who track hate crimes is more general: economics. In the past, tough economic times have generated resentments and frustration that showed up in hate-crime statistics.

In the early 1990s, for example, economic struggles and the loss of jobs accompanied an increase in hate-motivated confrontations with Asian Americans, according to the commission. This year's jump in reports of hate crimes directed at Latinos is likely an outgrowth of the fierce national debate over illegal immigra-

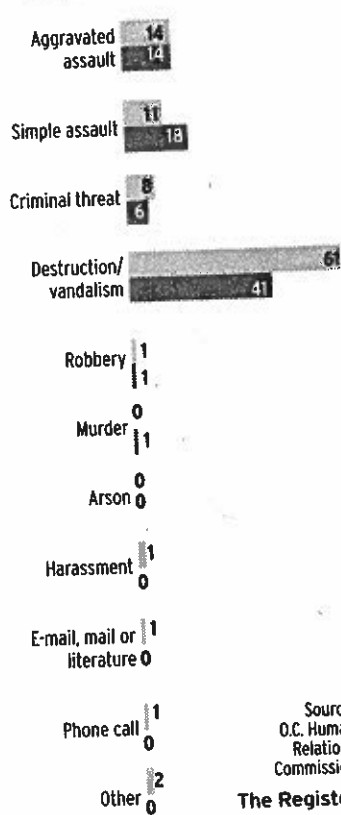
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## Types of offenses

Hate crimes by type of offense in O.C. in 2006 and 2007:

2006 2007

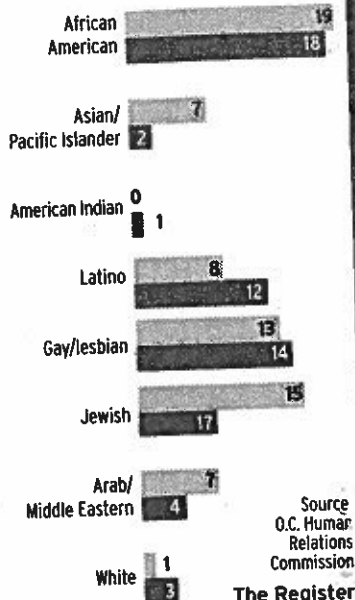


Source: O.C. Human Relations Commission  
The Register

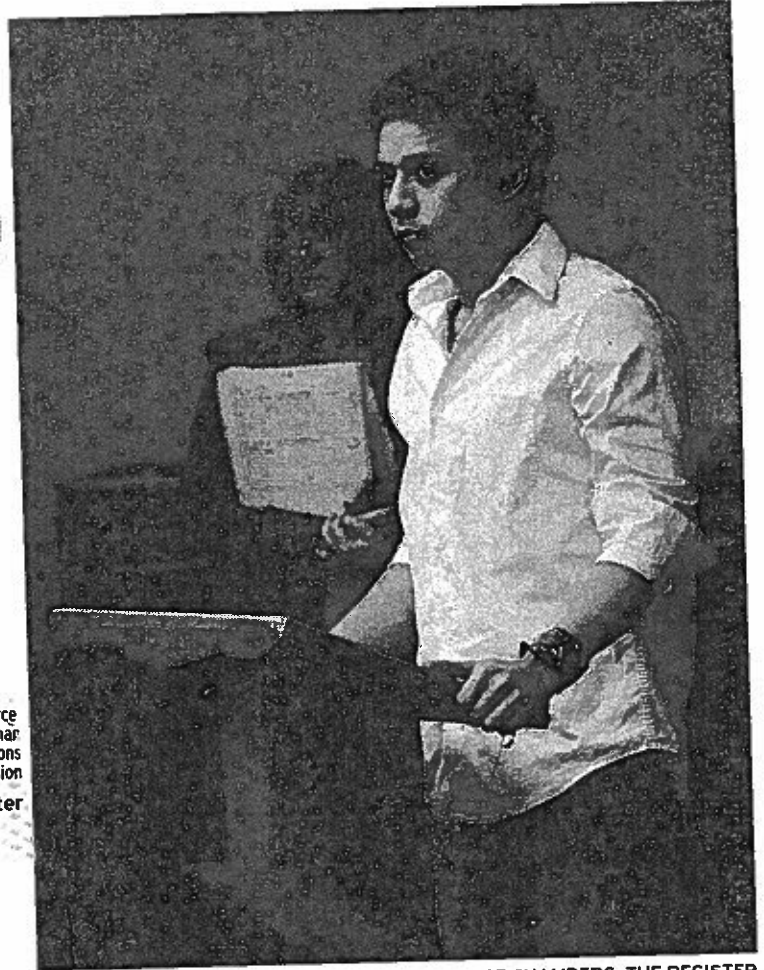
## Who the victims are

Hate crimes by ethnicity of victim in O.C. in 2006 and 2007:

2006 2007



Source: O.C. Human Relations Commission  
The Register



FILE PHOTO: BRUCE CHAMBERS, THE REGISTER

**ABUSE:** Patrick John Dizon Solis, whose attack on a disabled man in his care was recorded on a cell phone camera, appears in court in February 2007. He was sentenced to 90 days in jail.

tion and day laborers, the report says.

"The real challenges of foreclosures, the real challenges of poverty, bring out the worst of us," said the Rev. Mark Whitlock, the senior pastor of Christ Our Redeemer AME Church in Irvine, a predominantly African American church with a growing minority of whites, Latinos and Asians.

"I'm not optimistic, but I pray it does not go up," he said of the hate-crime numbers.

Aurora Fuentes, 56, was walking through a bank parking lot in San Juan Capistrano about a year ago when she brushed against a parked truck and became one of the numbers in the hate-crime report.

The driver, a middle-age man in messy clothes, was inside the truck, smoking. She said he began yelling at her, but she understood only a few phrases: "Ugly Mexican" ... "get out of here" ... and then cursing.

When he pulled himself out of the truck and started toward her, she ran. She said a bank employee ran toward her and pulled her inside. She reported the encounter to the police.

"I don't owe anyone anything," she said. "I'm not illegally here. Maybe my appearance is too Mexican, or maybe I have bad luck."

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