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# Hate Acts Against O.C. Gays Up Again

Figures from 2004 continue a trend since 2000, says a county commission, which sees a link to the debate over same-sex marriage.

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Complaints of harassment and bigotry against gays and lesbians in Orange County rose in 2004, continuing a trend that began in 2000, according to a report released Thursday by the county's Human Relations Commission.

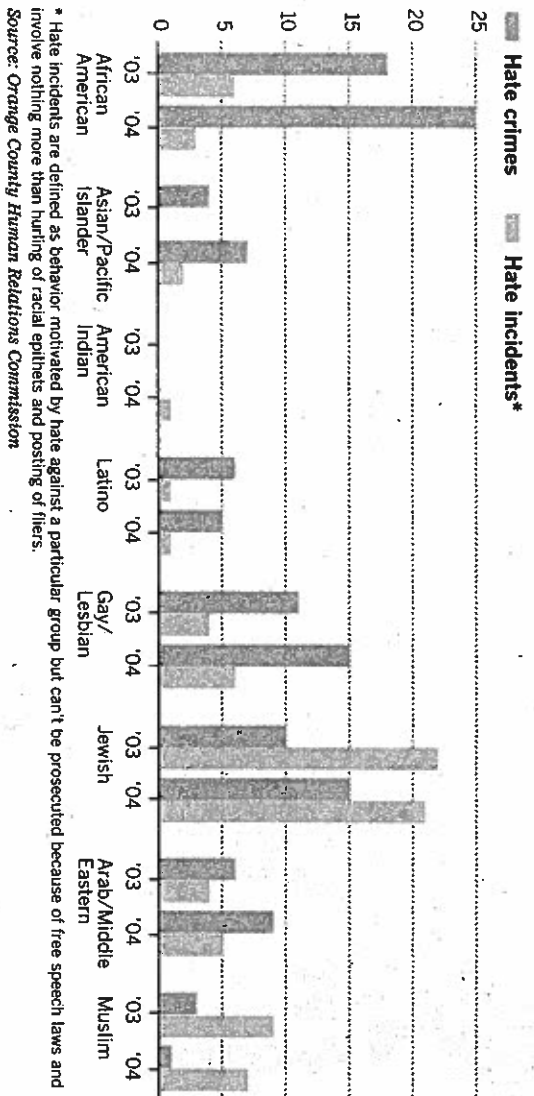
The agency said there were 152 alleged hate crimes and non-prosecutable "incidents" last year targeting all groups, compared with 128 in 2003. African Americans and Jews are most often the targets.

Rusty Kennedy, the commission's executive director, said 15 hate crimes were reported against gays and lesbians last year, along with six incidents not considered criminal activity. In 2003, there were 11 crimes and four incidents.

"We think the increase [in

## Tracking hate

Although blacks and Jews experience the most hate crimes and incidents\* in Orange County, gays and lesbians have been seeing a marked and steady increase in recent years. Overall, hate crimes and incidents have increased from 2003 except for Latinos and Muslims.



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2004] is connected to the same-sex-marriage controversy," Kennedy said. Perpetrators "are emboldened by the public debate and hostile language often used in the discussions."

Illustrating how hatred toward gays and lesbians has escalated, Kennedy said, crimes and incidents against them totaled an average of seven a year during the 1990s.

Hate crimes, ranging from vandalism to assault, were reported to the commission by law enforcement agencies. Hate "incidents" are those that cannot be prosecuted, largely because of

free speech laws.

As in previous years, the most hate crimes and incidents reported were against blacks and Jews. There were 25 crimes committed against African Americans and 15 against Jews, up from 18 and 10, respectively, in 2003.

Crimes against ethnic Asians and Pacific Islanders almost doubled in 2004 to seven, compared with four the previous year.

One hate crime was reported last year against victims identified as Muslim, compared with three in 2003. The number of "incidents" against Muslims also fell to seven, from nine the previous year.

Kennedy said he believed crimes and incidents against Muslims were underreported, that some victims were afraid to report attacks because they were immigrants and fearful of drawing police attention.

A total of 99 hate crimes were reported in the county last year, and as of Dec. 31 there had been convictions in six cases.

"Unfortunately, in many cases, the identity of the perpetrators is never known in the hate crimes reported to our office," Kennedy said.