

Anti-Semitism in U.S. spikes after nearly a decade of decline

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WASHINGTON (RNS) Anti-Semitic incidents in the U.S. spiked 21 percent last year, according to the Anti-Defamation League, unsettling many American Jews who had thought that hatred of Jews and Judaism was on the decline, at least here at home.

The ADL has released a spring report that, for nearly the past 10 years, showed fewer incidents targeting American Jews. That downward trend contrasted sharply to the rising tide of anti-Semitism in Europe—recently witnessed in the January killings of four Jews at a kosher supermarket in Paris.

“The United States still continues to be unique in history” as a safe place for Jews, said Abraham Foxman, the ADL’s national director.

But this new ADL report casts a shadow on the idea that the U.S., which is home to about 40 percent of the world’s Jews, stands in stark contrast to European anti-Semitism and far higher levels of antipathy against Jews in the Middle East, as reflected in studies of anti-Semitic attitudes worldwide.

“It’s still different here than anywhere else, but don’t take anything for granted,” Foxman said.

The ADL counted 912 incidents in 2014, up from 751 the previous year.

The report includes assaults, vandalism, and harassment targeting Jewish people, property, and institutions that were reported to ADL’s 27 regional offices and to law enforcement. It shows 36 assaults, up from 31 in 2013; 363 incidents of vandalism in 2014, compared with 315 in 2013; and 513 incidents of threats and harassment in 2014, contrasted with 405 in 2013.

Though the report does not consider anti-Zionist or anti-Israel expressions (unless they cross the line into anti-Semitism), ADL researchers nonetheless correlate the rise in anti-Semitism to last summer's 50-day war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. During the war, for example, a vandal in Malibu, California, painted "Jews=Killers" and "Jews are Killing Innocent Children" near the entrance to a Jewish summer camp last July. Another vandal spray-painted "Free Palestine" and "God Bless Gaza" in red on a synagogue in Lowell, Mass.

Those were among the 139 anti-Semitic incidents reported in July 2014, more than double the 51 reported incidents for the same month a year earlier.

The ADL also called 2014 a particularly violent year that included the fatal shootings at a Jewish community center in Overland Park, Kansas.

Separately from ADL, *Moment* magazine editor Nadine Epstein launched a campaign this week to combat anti-Semitism by encouraging more Jews to invite non-Jews to their Passover seders, where the story of the ancient Israelites' escape from slavery in Egypt is retold.

The idea sparked some controversy among some traditional Jews because a strict interpretation of Jewish law actually forbids non-Jews at seders, which will be held on Friday and Saturday this year (April 3 and 4). The prohibition, which is rarely observed or even known by many Jews, stems from a rabbinic opinion that Jews should not cook for those who do not observe the laws of the holiday.

"If every family does this, some six million non-Jews will experience a Seder this year, and at the very least taste traditional Passover foods and learn of their significance—not to mention gain an invaluable window into Jewish life and values, and a better understanding of the connection Jews feel to the land of Israel," she wrote in the *New York Post*.