

Despite dwindling response rates, hate crimes in Missouri surge

The number of police departments who report hate crimes to the FBI is on a steady decline. The number of hate crimes reported, though, are increasing at unprecedented rates.

From 2020 and 2021, there was a 68.85% increase in the number of statewide hate crimes reported, the largest reported increase in the state's history. Missouri reported 206 hate crimes in 2021, the highest number in state history.

Gregg Etter, a professor of criminology and former Wichita, Kansas police department lieutenant, said there isn't one reason to blame for that number, but a few possible explanations.

The first explanation was the base year. "In 2020 there may not have been as much of it," he said. "These people [hate groups] were thwarted in anything they might have done because they couldn't go anywhere." In 2021, following the nationwide shutdown, the number of hate crimes could be attributed to the ability of people to move freely again, Etter said.

The second possible cause was a nationwide switch from the Uniform Crime Report—a reporting system that had been in use since the late 1920s—to NIBRS, or the national incident based reporting system. That switch may have caused extra training needs and other delays in getting the data to the FBI, Etter said.

The third cause he proposed? "Have you ever heard of quiet quitting?" he said. "If people's morale is low, they're going to do what is asked of them but they're going to do the bare minimum."

Etter believes a nationwide call to defund the police following the police killing of George Floyd, subsequent outrage and the Great Resignation has culminated in police departments having less money, few employees and fewer still applicants. He says documenting hate crimes requires an additional effort made up by smaller staffs and longer hours.

"When you make a report, there's a box," he said. "You have to check 'is this a hate crime?' if you check the box, you have to fill out another form."

Despite Dr. Etter's conclusion, there have been no instances of police departments in Missouri getting defunded. In fact, some departments are getting more funding.

Still, though he claims police departments in the state are underfunded and understaffed, Etter doesn't believe any police department would let hate crimes go unreported. "There is no department on the face of the planet that will say 'don't report that'," he said.

Hate crime collection in Missouri

Missouri is one of the only states that has no laws about hate crime collection or police training. It protects all classes as defined by the ADL – race/religion/ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, gender and gender identity – but does not mandate data collection or police training.

In 2019, Politico reported that Columbia was one of the 71 cities with populations over 100,000 that didn't report a single hate crime. The MUPD, however, reported two hate crimes that year.

That discrepancy in 2019 highlights a concerning phenomenon in Columbia – with multiple police departments within the city proper, finding an accurate total can be difficult.

2021 also marked the first year since 2006 that fewer than 85% of agencies in Missouri reported hate crimes to the FBI.

Hate crime bias In Missouri, an overwhelming amount of hate crimes are anti-Black. Other high biases thus far 2023 include anti-LGBT, anti-Sikh and interestingly enough, anti-white hate crimes.

Anti-LGBT hate crimes are historically, the second highest driver of hate crimes in Missouri.

Traci Wilson-Kleekamp, vice president of Race Matters, Friends takes issue with the term 'hate crime.'

"They're ongoing outcomes of white supremacy," she said. "We don't have a hate crime problem, we have a white supremacy problem."

Hate crimes often go unreported

The picture we have of hate crimes in Missouri may not be complete.

"People generally don't report crimes to the police. And for hate crimes, a lot of victims might not know they're a victim of a hate crime," said Jacob Kaplan, a researcher at Princeton's School of Public and International Affairs in an interview with NPR.

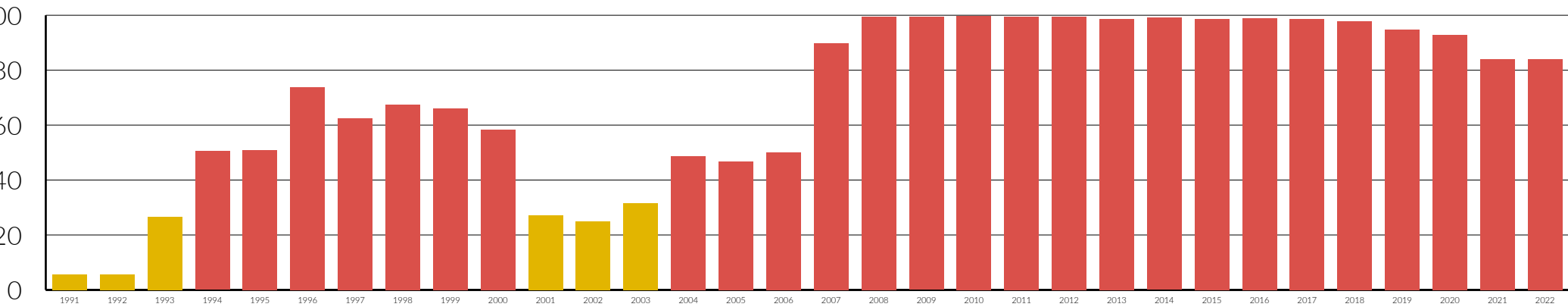
"So even if 100% of agencies reported every hate crime they had and tried to really investigate everything, perceived hate crime, you're still going to be missing out on a potentially extremely large number of victims."

Wilson-Kleekamp confirms this phenomenon locally. "The system doesn't acknowledge their humanity. That doesn't make them feel recognized by the police," she said. "People who are victims of white supremacy are not going to go to systems that propagate white supremacy for help."

Agency response rates are decreasing

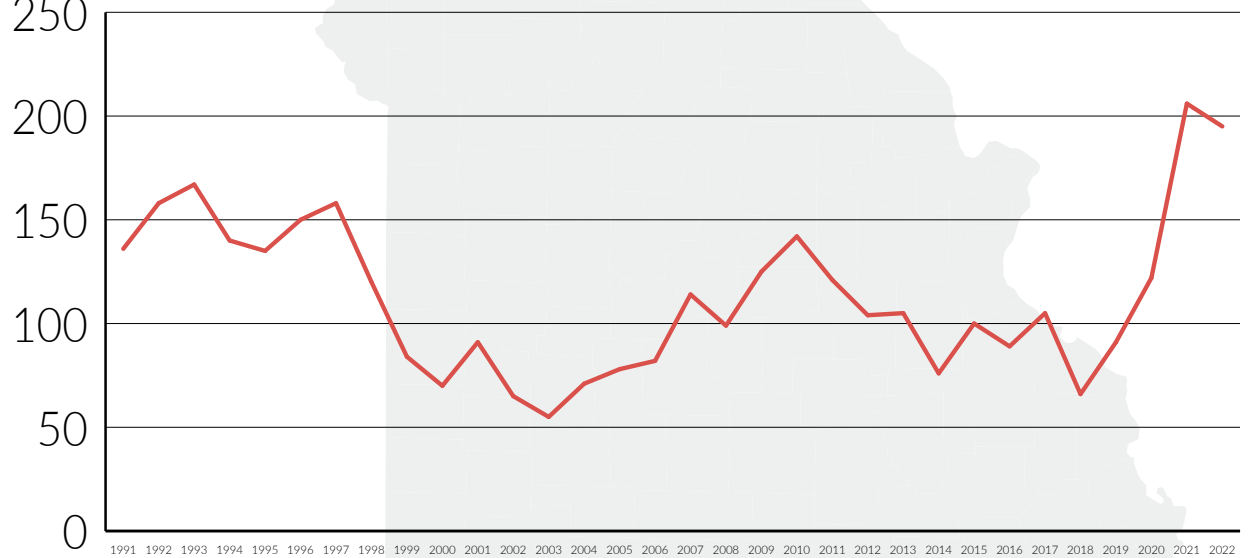
Since 1991, Missouri has had between 303 and 593 agencies who report to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting program. Response rates peaked in 2010, and dropped below 90% in 2021 for the first time since 2007.

Fewer than 40% of agencies reported hate crimes these years.



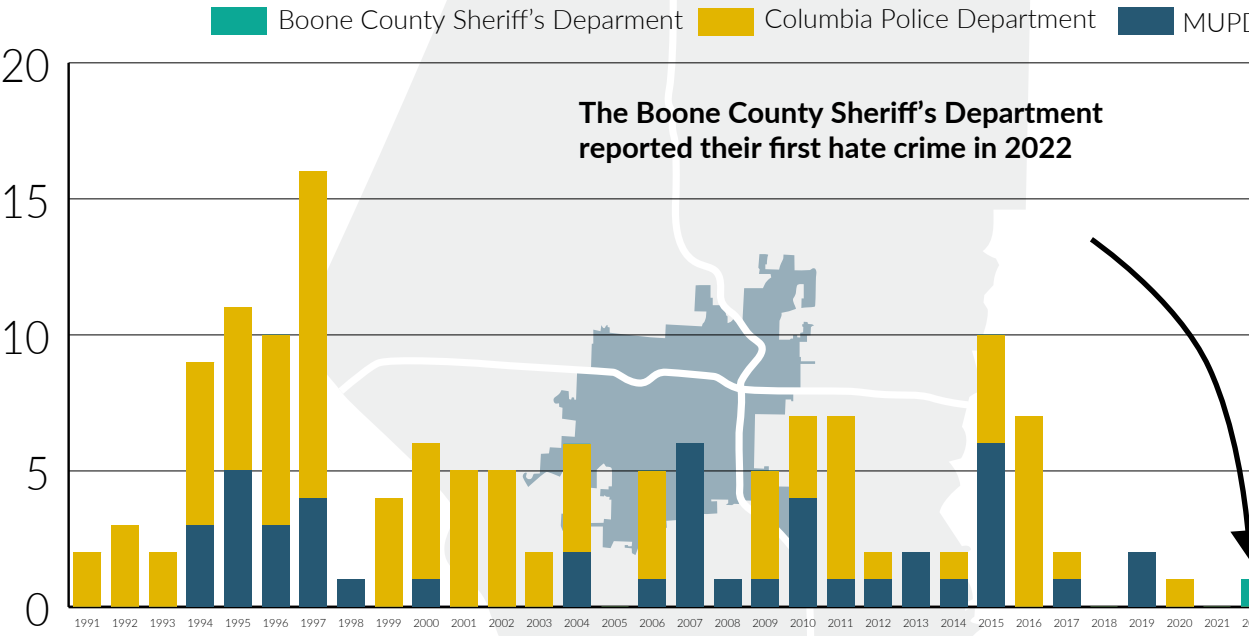
Hate crimes in Missouri are at their highest ever...

Hate crimes in Missouri are at their highest ever reported since the FBI began collecting national hate crime data in 1991, increasing 69% between 2020 and 2021.



...But hate crimes for all Boone County reporting agencies are down

Each agency receives and reports hate crimes individually. The CPD and MUPD report the most number of hate crimes, though they have tapered off in recent years.



Anti-Black hate crimes drive statewide hate crime total

Since 2007, the first year the the Missouri State Highway Patrol has specific bias data available, the number of anti-Black hate crimes in Missouri have far outpaced all other biases.

