Hate crimes in Mass. grew by a third in 2022, ADL report finds

Mass. had the nation's second-highest rate of white supremacist propaganda in 2022, report says

By **Nick Stoico and Tiana Woodard** Globe Correspondent and Globe Staff, Updated May 24, 2023, 12:11 p.m.



NSC-131 members showed up at Boston's St. Patrick's Day parade in 2022 and held a banner that read, "Keep Boston Irish." HANDOUT

Hate and extremism continued to rise in Massachusetts last year, driven by increases in antisemitic incidents, white supremacist propaganda activity, and threats and harassment directed at members of the LGBTQ+ community, according to a new report from the Anti-Defamation League.

The ADL's "Hate in the Bay State" report found Massachusetts faced the nation's second-highest rate of white supremacist propaganda in 2022, often in the form of fliers and banners, while antisemitic incidents rose by 41 percent, and LGBTQ+ events, particularly drag shows, were targeted by extremists throughout the state.

Overall, hate crimes rose in Massachusetts by 33 percent, the report said.

“Extremists have targeted Massachusetts with the intention to instill fear and intimidation through their stunts, propaganda and increasingly aggressive demonstrations,” Peggy Shukur, interim regional director of ADL New England, said in a statement.

“We call on our civic leadership, government officials and all citizens of the Commonwealth to firmly denounce hateful rhetoric and condemn anti-LGBTQ+ and antisemitic extremism whenever and wherever it occurs.”

Driving the rise in white supremacist activity are the Nationalist Social Club, a neo-Nazi group founded in Massachusetts that is also known as NSC-131, and Patriot Front, a Texas-based group with members across the country, the report said.

ADVERTISING

The new report, which follows prior studies released by the ADL this year highlighting white supremacist activity across New England and an alarming rise in antisemitic incidents, includes the ADL’s recommendations for lawmakers, particularly around holding social media sites accountable to rein in hate speech and harassment on their platforms. The organization also calls on legislators to expand hate crime laws and require law enforcement agencies to record and report hate crime data on a quarterly basis.

Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey and Attorney General Andrea Campbell praised the ADL’s work in documenting the activity of extremist groups in the state and pledged to support marginalized communities that are targeted with hate.

“We stand with the LGBTQ+ community, Jewish community, communities of color, and all who are the targets of hate and discrimination,” Healey said in the statement.

The ADL reported a 36 percent increase in antisemitic incidents across the country last year, including instances of assault, vandalism, and harassment. Massachusetts had the sixth-highest number of antisemitic incidents with 152, including 82 incidents involving vandalism, 66 involving harassment, and four assaults, the report said.

State Representative Simon Cataldo, of Concord, said the report findings are “at the same time alarming and not at all surprising.” Cataldo, who sits on several boards targeting antisemitism for his synagogue and for local Jewish community groups, said he is particularly concerned for his young children and their future in schools, and “what challenges they might face if they identify as Jewish as strongly and openly” as he does.

The report found that 71 of Massachusetts’s 351 cities and towns had at least one antisemitic incident last year, up from 54 in 2021, including several cases reported in K-12 schools and colleges. The report highlighted vandalism cases at a Westwood

synagogue in December, Middlesex Community College in October, and Harvard University in April last year, as well as a case in Waltham last May in which a Jewish student's classmate held a knife to his throat.

"It's painful to think of young people who are at a time where they're still forming their own identities," Cataldo said. "Their own relationship with religion would need to have the added complication of facing the hate that's aimed at their own heritage."

The report cited the "Mapping Project," an antisemitic website that claims to identify the locations of Jewish institutions in the state and their purported ties to one another.

It also flags the Nation of Islam and the Black Hebrew Israelite Movement as antisemitic groups that have active followings in Boston and throughout Massachusetts. Alexandria Onuoha, director of political advocacy for the grassroots nonprofit Black Boston Inc., led by Black women, said local leaders must also condemn the hate within communities of color.

"Anybody can be a vehicle of white supremacy," Onuoha said. "All of us deserve organizations where we can express our ideologies, but it's not right when we express it at the cost of someone else's oppression."

Meanwhile, activity by white supremacist groups expanded in Massachusetts in 2022.

NSC-131, a neo-Nazi group founded four years ago in Massachusetts, has "grown rapidly to become one of New England's most active white supremacist groups," the report said. The group held at least 22 events last year, drawing an average of 20 members and as many as 38, according to the report.

NSC-131 members showed up at Boston's St. Patrick's Day parade in 2022 and held a banner that read, "Keep Boston Irish."

A few months later, about 100 members of Patriot Front, with their faces hidden under white neck gaiters and black sunglasses, marched through Boston to the sound of a snare drum while carrying flags, riot shields, and banners reading, "Reclaim America" and "Strong Families Make Strong Nations."

The report said Patriot Front is responsible for the "overwhelming majority of propaganda content" found in the state last year. The ADL recorded 447 instances of white supremacist propaganda, an 83 percent increase from 2021.

Last year also saw a "national wave of bigoted action against the LGBTQ+ community" that was mirrored in Massachusetts with groups such as NSC-131 protesting LGBTQ+ events, particularly drag shows and story hours. Boston Children's Hospital was also targeted last fall by protesters opposed to services the hospital provides transgender patients.

The report endorses two bills proposed at the State House that would allow people who are victims of doxing, or the publication of personal information on the Internet, to seek civil remedies.

In many cases of hate, victims might be afraid to report what's happened, said Senator Barry Finegold, who proposed one of the laws. (Representative Tram Nguyen, of Andover, filed a similar measure in the House.) "If we have more laws that protect people, more people will speak up."

Senator Becca Rausch, who also filed an antidoxing proposal, said the legislation could build off of work the state is already doing, such as providing grant funding for nonprofits at risk of hate crimes or terrorist attacks. The state also earmarked funding for legislation mandating the teaching of the Holocaust and genocides in public schools.

Still, Rausch said laws aren't the only solution.

"Neighbors talking with neighbors, communities coming together, engaging in broader cultural exchange, understanding each other — these are things you can't legislate," Rausch said.

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