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Home / Politics / Federal Politics

FEDERAL POLITICS

‘No one’s experienced something like this:’ Canadian police data shows spike in hate against Jewish and Muslim communities

Police data across Canada shows an increase in antisemitic and Islamophobic hate crimes and incidents.

By Mark Ramzy Staff Reporter

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The Toronto Police Service says it has increased the size of its hate crime unit since Oct. 7.
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OTTAWA—Hate crimes and hate-motivated incidents against Jews and Muslims in Canada are rising, shows police data collected from several major Canadian cities and compiled by the Star.

As the Israel-Hamas war escalates and grips Canadians, community groups here say the rising tensions and hate are unlike anything they've seen before. Muslim and Jewish advocacy groups say there has been a steeper increase in hate crimes and incidents since the conflict started, most of which they say are not reported to police.

On Friday, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau appealed once again for tolerance, expressing dismay that “Canadians (are) lashing at each other in anger to each other.”

“Whether it’s a woman in a hijab getting spat on, or a Jewish kid going to college campus that’s not feeling safe, or gunshots fired at Jewish schools, or a terrifying rise in Islamophobia alongside

the significant rise and very troublesome rise in antisemitism ... Right now, the grief, the anger, the despair so many Canadians are feeling is bleeding over into each other,” he said.

Tensions have been high across the country since Hamas militants attacked Israel on Oct. 7 and Israel launched its counterattack on Gaza. According to Associated Press, more than 1,200 Israelis and 11,000 Palestinians have been killed in the conflict so far.

Ottawa’s federal envoys on antisemitism and Islamophobia, Deborah Lyons and Amira Elghawaby, did not respond to requests for comment from the Star.

“There’s a tremendous amount of anxiety,” Michael Mostyn, the CEO of B’nai Brith, told the Star. “Folks have been disturbed ... this is a generational issue. No one’s experienced something like this.”

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The increase in hate has been so intense that community groups are struggling to keep track and respond to it, Mostyn said.

Fatema Abdalla, a spokesperson for the National Council of Canadian Muslims, said the group is receiving reports of around eight incidents per day since Oct. 7.

“That’s a level of fear and hate that we haven’t seen in a long time, but we had seen right after 9/11,” she said.

Police data gathered by the Star offers a glimpse of the rise in hate crimes against Jews and Muslims since Oct. 7.

In Toronto, from Oct. 7 to Oct. 25, police received 15 reports of antisemitic hate crimes, compared to seven during the same period last year.

They also received five reports of anti-Muslim hate crimes during this time, compared to none received during the same period last year.

In Montreal, police received 73 hate crimes and hate incidents against Jewish communities, and 25 against Muslim and Arab communities, from Oct. 7 to Nov. 7, outpacing the rate at which Montrealers have reported hate crimes and incidents in the past, Statistics Canada figures show.

Ottawa, too, has seen an increase in hate-motivated crimes reported to police, with a total of 64 reports between the start of October and Nov. 6, compared to 41 during the same time period last year.

Though Ottawa police did not specify the exact numbers, a spokesperson said the Jewish, Black, LGBTQ+ and Muslim communities were most targeted.

Under Canadian law, a hate-motivated crime is a recognizable crime like assault, theft or vandalism, where the offender's action is motivated by hate, bias, or prejudice toward the victim's personal characteristics. A hate-motivated incident is when the act does not meet the threshold of a criminal offence.

A Calgary police spokesperson said while they haven't observed an overall increase in hate crimes, there's been a spike in reports affecting "specific communities in recent weeks" and motivated by the Mideast conflict.

Data shared by Halifax police also shows no overall increase in hate crimes, but an increased share of hate crime reports targeting the Jewish and Muslim communities.

Growing concerns about rising tensions have prompted Canadian chiefs of police to move their regular monthly meeting to a weekly gathering to better discuss what their front-line officers are seeing, to share intel, resources and "situational awareness," the RCMP says.

The RCMP will also soon launch an online repository of information that will contain information on the Criminal Code, statistics on targeted groups, and the impact of hate crimes and incidents. That repository will be available to police services within two weeks, and the public is expected to have access by year's end.

In a response to the war, the federal government has put \$5 million toward safety measures for community groups worried about an increase in hate-fuelled violence.

Barbara Perry, the director of the Centre on Hate, Bias and Extremism at Ontario Tech University, said that hate groups and extremists have capitalized on the conflict to further their agendas against both the Muslim and Jewish communities. This is playing out, she says, in increased hate speech online.

"It's almost unquantifiable," Perry told the Star. "It's just so high, both in terms of anti-Muslim, anti-Arab and antisemitic hate speech."

Perry pointed to Canada's envoys on antisemitism and Islamophobia as important figures in efforts to combat the rising hate, and said they should be vocally leading efforts to have open dialogue between communities.

Abdalla said there is a correlation between the rise of Islamophobic incidents and the "rhetoric" of political leaders, such as the labelling of all protesters against Israel's response to the Hamas attacks as supporters of violence.

On the other side, Mostyn said some of those who are frustrated with the conflict are falsely equating Israel's actions with Jewish communities in Canada. He also believes some people mask their antisemitism by inciting violence against "Zionists" and workers at Jewish-owned businesses and through disproportionate criticism against Israel at protests, he said.

With such a polarizing issue, Perry said, Canadian leaders need to be more vocal in denouncing hate speech here at home.

With files from Tonda MacCharles, The Canadian Press and The Associated Press.



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