

Why hate crime perceptions vary among the general populace

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A team of researchers from the University of Groningen and the University of Maryland has looked into the question of why people learning of hate crimes react to them differently. In their paper

published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the group describes their study of four hate crimes and how people who heard of the crimes felt about them.

The term "[hate crime](#)" is still relatively new. It is believed to have originated in the United States in the 1980s as a way to describe crimes committed out of hate rather than anger, jealousy, need, etc. Since that time, the term has come to be defined as a type of [crime](#) committed against a person, or group of people by one or more people who "hate" another group, such as Jewish people, or [black people](#) or people from the Middle East. But as the term has moved into common use, some in the psychology field have noticed that hate crimes are not always seen as such by some groups, even when the perpetrators report carrying out their crimes due to hating another group. In this new effort, the researchers sought to better understand how and why this occurs by asking people about their views on four specific hate crimes: the train shooting in Utrecht in the Netherlands, the mosque shooting in Christchurch, New Zealand, and shootings at two sites in the U.S.: a synagogue in Pittsburgh and a Walmart parking lot in El Paso, Texas. In all four cases, the researchers conducted psychological surveys of random people who had heard of the crime.

In all, the researchers queried 2,332 people who were willing to respond to questions about the hate crimes they had heard about on the news. In addition to asking respondents their [feelings](#) regarding the nature of the crimes, the researchers also probed a little deeper by asking questions related to their views and feelings in general. Some of the questions were phrased in ways to learn more specifically about their feelings or attitude regarding the backgrounds of both the perpetrators and the victims.

In reviewing the answers, the researchers concluded that many people tend to view the hatefulness of a particular crime by their own feelings or attitude toward both the perpetrators and the victims. Some who

privately feel resentful toward Hispanic immigrants in the U.S., for example, may feel a certain kinship with a man who guns down a group of Latinos at a mall—and because of that, do not see it as a hate crime.

More information: N. Pontus Leander et al. Biased hate crime perceptions can reveal supremacist sympathies, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2020). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1916883117](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1916883117)

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