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# Hate crimes in U.S. are statistically rare

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Crimes motivated by hatred for a person's race, religion or other characteristics remain a tiny percentage of all offenses, the government reported yesterday, based on samples from several states.

The Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics said 2,976 hate crimes were reported by local police departments to the FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System between 1997 and 1999. That represents a tiny fraction of 1 percent of the total 5.4 million crimes reported over the three years.

Offenses known as "hate crimes" have attracted special scrutiny since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington.

The suspected hijackers — and those in the al Qaeda network believed to have masterminded the deadly attacks — are Middle Eastern and Muslim. The government has said the hijackers lived in U.S. communities, sometimes for years,

while preparing for the attacks.

Since the attacks, hundreds of Americans of South Asian and Middle Eastern descent — or just people with dark skin, beards, turbans or veils that make them appear to fit that profile — have been victims of threats, beatings and even killings. Muslim mosques and temples have been vandalized and fire-bombed.

FBI Director Robert S. Mueller III said Thursday the bureau was investigating about 90 hate crimes and would prosecute fully those who turn their anger about the attacks onto innocent people.

"We cannot scapegoat certain members of our society because of the actions of a few," Assistant Attorney General Ralph Boyd said as the new report was released.

The nearly 2,976 offenses chronicled by the Bureau of Justice Statistics were categorized as hate crimes when police could determine the victim was targeted based on race, religion, sexual orientation, disability or national origin.