

II. IN FOCUS: Anti-Asian Racism During the Covid-19 Pandemic: Preliminary Findings from the Virulent Hate Project *(Contributed by: Dr. Borja, University of Michigan)*

According to the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, hate crimes against Asian Americans [increased](#) 145% in the largest cities in the United States in 2020, even as hate crimes decreased 6% in the nation overall. The rise in anti-Asian attitudes owes in part to the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the beginning of the pandemic, conservative media and prominent political leaders in the United States have used terms for Covid-19 that associate the coronavirus with China, against the [guidance](#) of the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control. The use of terms such as “China virus” and “Wuhan flu” precipitated a sharp rise in anti-Asian sentiment and a [reversal](#) of a decade-long downward trend in anti-Asian bias. The rise in anti-Asian sentiment has not only been a domestic problem, but a [global](#) one, and attacks on people of people of Asian descent have been documented in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and Italy throughout the past year.

Attacks on Asian Americans are also occurring in the context of rising tensions between the United States and China. Historically, moments of conflict and competition between the United States and Asian countries have increased the vulnerability of Asian American people, who are often viewed as foreigners, even if they are citizens or are born in the United States. For this reason, some Asian American leaders have [expressed](#) their concern that current anti-Asian prejudice and violence might continue even as the pandemic ends.

The Virulent Hate Project at the University of Michigan has been using news media to track incidents of coronavirus-related anti-Asian hate, as well as incidents of Asian American resistance to racism. In its analysis of American news media in 2020, Virulent Hate identified 4,598 news articles that addressed the topic of coronavirus-related, anti-Asian racism in the United States. These articles included reports of 1,171 incidents of anti-Asian hate, including 736 incidents of physical, verbal, and non-verbal harassment. In addition, news media reported 1,190 incidents of Asian American resistance to racism.

Demographics of Anti-Asian Incidents of Racism, Harassment, and Discrimination

Although the stigmatizing rhetoric associated with the coronavirus has focused primarily on China, Asian Americans of nearly every ethnic background were targeted in acts of anti-Asian harassment in 2020. The ethnicity of the victim was known in 297 incidents of harassment, and Asian Americans of 14 different Asian ethnic backgrounds were attacked. Victims included Asian Americans of Burmese, Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Lao, Taiwanese, Thai, Vietnamese, Pakistani, and Pacific Islander descent. People who identified as Black, Latinx, and mixed race also experienced harassment.

Ethnic Groups Most Impacted by Anti-Asian Harassment in 2020		
<i>Ethnic Group</i>	<i># of Incidents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Chinese Americans	172	57.91%

Korean Americans	46	15.49%
Vietnamese Americans	26	8.75%
Filipino Americans	20	6.73%
Hmong Americans	15	5.05%

However, the impact of anti-Asian harassment was not shared evenly across Asian American ethnic groups. Chinese Americans suffered the greatest proportion of attacks (172 incidents, 57.91%), followed by Korean Americans (46 incidents, 15.49%), Vietnamese Americans (26 incidents, 8.75%), Filipino Americans (20 incidents, 6.73%), and Hmong Americans (15

incidents, 5.05%).

Women experienced a disproportionate share of incidents of anti-Asian harassment. For the 299 incidents in which the gender of the victim was reported in the news, women were the victim in 64% of the incidents. Virulent Hate’s finding confirms that of Stop AAPI Hate, which found that women were the victim in 68% of the incidents of hate reported through its online system. News reports of incidents of anti-Asian harassment against women reveal that these attacks sometimes involved references to both race and gender. For example, in one [incident](#) that took place in New York in February 2020, a woman on a subway platform in Chinatown was attacked by a man who pushed her against a wall, hit her on the head, and called her a “diseased b****.”

Asian Americans of all ages were attacked, including some of the most vulnerable populations. In 2020, there were 85 incidents in which children were the victim. In one [incident](#) in California in February, an Asian American teen was accused of having the coronavirus, attacked by his classmates, and required medical care in the emergency room.

There were also incidents in which entire families were targeted. In an [attack](#) that took place in New York in March, a man was walking his 10-year-old son to the bus stop when another man approached the family, yelled about a face mask, shouted, “You f***** Chinese,” and pushed the father.

Finally, elderly people were the victims in 14 incidents in 2020. In California in February, an elderly Chinese American man was [hit](#) in the head and robbed by two men who yelled racist slurs and declared their hatred of Asians.

Information about the demographics of perpetrators is limited, but some trends have emerged. First, it appears that most perpetrators of anti-Asian hate incidents were male. In the incidents where the gender of the perpetrator was reported in the news, 68% of incidents had at least one perpetrator who was male.

The perpetrators also tended to be disproportionately white. In incidents where the race of the perpetrator was reported in the news, white perpetrators accounted for 78% of all incidents of verbal harassment, 70% of all incidents of physical harassment, and 94% of incidents of non-verbal harassment and discrimination. 95% of the statements and images that stigmatized Asian and Asian American people and blamed them for the coronavirus came from white sources. Overall, white perpetrators accounted for about 90% of the racist incidents against Asian Americans

reported in the news in 2020. In contrast, only 5% of perpetrators of anti-Asian incidents were Black. To be clear, only a fraction of the news articles that Virulent Hate analyzed reported the race of the perpetrators and identifying an individual's race is always complicated. Nevertheless, the evidence that is available, while imperfect, does not support the widespread claim that Black hostility is driving the current rise of anti-Asian racism and violence.

Location and Time of Anti-Asian Incidents of Racism, Harassment, and Discrimination

Incidents of anti-Asian hate occurred nearly everywhere in the United States in 2020. The news media reported on incidents of anti-Asian racism, harassment, and discrimination in 47 states, as well as in the District of Columbia. No incidents in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming were reported in the news in 2020.

The states where the news media reported the most incidents of anti-Asian racism, harassment, and discrimination were places where there is a significant Asian American population. The five states where there were the most reported harassment incidents were California (158 incidents), New York (115 incidents), Washington (40 incidents), Pennsylvania (38 incidents), and Massachusetts (38 incidents).

States with the Most Anti-Asian Harassment Incidents Reported in the News in 2020	
<i>State</i>	<i>Number of Incidents</i>
California	158
New York	115
Washington	40
Pennsylvania	38
Massachusetts	38

Harassment occurred primarily in three locations: businesses, streets, and public transit. That so many incidents took place in everyday public places has contributed to fear and anxiety among Asian Americans, who have worried about racist attacks as they go about their daily lives.

292 incidents of anti-Asian harassment reported in the news in 2020 occurred at businesses. These businesses included stores and restaurants. For example, a man and his son were denied service by a grocery store worker who would not give them samples and told them to “get away” because “he may be from China.”

164 incidents of anti-Asian harassment reported in the news in 2020 occurred on the street. In California in March, for example, a Chinese American woman was on her way to the gym when she was spit on and screamed at by a man on the street. The woman fled to a nearby business to escape further attack, while the attacker encouraged a passing bus to “run them over.”

105 incidents of anti-Asian harassment reported in the news in 2020 occurred on public transit. For example, a teenage girl [hit](#) an Asian American woman in the head with an umbrella on an MTA bus in the Bronx. The assailant yelled that the woman had “caused the coronavirus.”

Reports of anti-Asian attacks peaked in March and April 2020, even as most Americans were limiting their visits to public places due to pandemic-related lockdown and shelter-in-place policies. Researchers with the Virulent Hate Project have not yet begun to collect information about 2021 but expect to see a spike in attacks in the first three months of 2021, given the rise in public interaction during this period.

Location of Harassment Incidents Reported in the News in 2020	
<i>Location</i>	<i>Number of Incidents</i>
Businesses	292
Streets	164
Public Transit	105

Themes and Stereotypes Anti-Asian Incidents of Racism, Harassment, and Discrimination

Details about the incidents of racism, harassment, and discrimination that occurred in 2020 suggest that a few key stereotypes have animated recent anti-Asian hostility. First, the coronavirus was mentioned in many of these attacks. Victims were frequently accused by their assailants of having and spreading the coronavirus. For example, in March, an international student from Korea was grabbed by the hair and [punched](#) in the face. The attacker yelled, “You’ve got coronavirus, you Asian (expletive).”

Anti-Chinese rhetoric was often deployed in anti-Asian attacks. In Illinois in March, a Vietnamese-Filipino American man was leaving a movie theatre when a man [spat](#) on him and yelled, “F*** China!”

Finally, the perpetual foreigner stereotype—in other words, the idea that Asian American people are not truly American—was referenced in these attacks. Street comments and signs that [urged](#) Asian Americans to “go back to China” were common throughout the United States in 2020.