

VIRULENT HATE + REPORTS

ANTI-ASIAN RACISM IN 2020

Melissa Borja, Ph.D. and Jacob Gibson

Virulent Hate Project
University of Michigan

ABSTRACT

To understand trends in coronavirus-related, anti-Asian racism, the Virulent Hate Project at the University of Michigan reviewed 4,337 news articles published between January 1 and December 31, 2020. We identified 1,023 incidents of anti-Asian racism, which included 679 incidents of anti-Asian harassment and vandalism and 344 incidents of stigmatizing and discriminatory statements, images, policies, and proposals. Asian and Asian American people of all ages, ethnicities, and genders experienced racist harassment, but women and people of Chinese descent experienced most of the attacks.

Anti-Asian incidents peaked in March and April 2020, and harassment occurred across the United States, with incidents happening most frequently in businesses, on public transit, and on streets. In the incidents for which there were reported details about the individuals who were the source of anti-Asian harassment, discrimination, and stigmatization, the majority of the offenders were identified as male, white, and, in the case of politicians, affiliated with the Republican Party.

SUMMARY

Asian and Asian American people experienced many forms of racism, discrimination, and stigmatization in 2020.

In the 4,337 news articles that we reviewed, we identified **1,023 unique incidents of anti-Asian racism** that occurred in the United States between January 1 and December 31, 2020. These incidents of anti-Asian racism included acts of physical harassment and violence; verbal harassment; avoidance and non-verbal harassment; vandalism; and stigmatizing statements, images, policies, and proposals.

We identified **679 incidents of anti-Asian harassment and vandalism**, which comprised approximately two-thirds of the anti-Asian incidents reported in the news in 2020. The most common form of anti-Asian harassment was verbal harassment, which was involved in 541 of the 679 incidents (79.68%). In addition, 112 harassment incidents (16.49%) involved physical harassment and violence, 168 incidents (24.74%) involved avoidance and non-verbal harassment, and 43 incidents (6.33%) involved anti-Asian vandalism, graffiti, or defacement of property. (Note: because incidents often involved multiple types of harassment and were tagged with all of the categories that applied, the percentages add up to more than 100%.)

We also identified **344 incidents in which individuals made and shared stigmatizing and discriminatory statements, images, policies, and proposals** that reinforced harmful stereotypes about Asian and Asian American people. These incidents accounted for one-third of the anti-Asian incidents reported in the news in 2020.

Coronavirus-related, anti-Asian racism drew on old stereotypes of Asian and Asian American people as a “yellow peril” and as “perpetual foreigners”.

Longstanding negative stereotypes about Asian and Asian American people found expression in many incidents of anti-Asian hostility in 2020. 163 anti-Asian incidents articulated the “**perpetual foreigner**” **stereotype**, or the nativist xenophobic view that Asian Americans are not true Americans.

In addition, many anti-Asian incidents expressed “**yellow peril**” **beliefs** that hold that Asian and Asian American people pose an epidemiological, cultural, economic, racial, and national security threat to the United States.

Asian and Asian American people of all genders, ethnicities, and ages experienced anti-Asian harassment. However, anti-Asian harassment was not experienced evenly across demographic groups.

Women were the victims in nearly two-thirds (65%) of anti-Asian harassment incidents for which victim gender was reported in the news.

Asian and Asian American people of **at least 14 different ethnicities experienced anti-Asian harassment** in 2020. However, people of Chinese descent were the victims in 58% of the harassment incidents in which victim ethnicity was reported in the news, even though Chinese Americans comprise only 23% of the Asian American/Pacific Islander population in the United States.

Asian and Asian American people of all ages experienced racist harassment. Adults experienced the majority of incidents, but some of the most vulnerable populations, such as children and elderly people, were targeted in harassment incidents as well.

Information about the individuals involved in acts of anti-Asian racism and stigmatization were limited, due to reporting practices and other factors. However, in the incidents for which demographic details were available, the offenders were most often male and white.

Only a small fraction of news articles explicitly identified the race of the individuals who harassed or discriminated against Asian and Asian American people. However, in the few harassment incidents for which the news media explicitly stated the race of the offender, **the majority of perpetrators of anti-Asian harassment were reported to be male and white.**

American politicians working at all levels of government made stigmatizing statements and supported discriminatory policies and proposals. **The politicians who used and supported stigmatizing rhetoric, policies, and proposals were predominantly white, male, and affiliated with the Republican Party.**

Anti-Asian harassment was a national problem in 2020, and attacks occurred in common public places.

New media reported incidents of anti-Asian harassment in 40 states and the District of Columbia.

Over two-thirds (67.45%) of the incidents of anti-Asian harassment occurred in three locations: businesses, streets, and public transit. That so many incidents took place in public places has contributed to fear and anxiety among Asian and Asian American people, who have worried about racist attacks as they go about their daily lives.

Anti-Asian incidents were reported throughout all of 2020 but especially in the first of the pandemic in early spring.

Anti-Asian incidents occurred throughout the full span of 2020, with incidents taking place as early as January and February, before the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic.

The peak of anti-Asian harassment occurred during the first domestic wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, at a time when most Americans were staying at home due to pandemic-related lockdown and shelter-in-place policies. Anti-Asian incidents that were reported in the news **peaked in March and April 2020.**

THE VIRULENT HATE PROJECT: AN OVERVIEW

Context

The COVID-19 pandemic has coincided with a surge in violence and racism against Asian and Asian American people. Researchers documented a sharp rise in anti-Asian bias in March 2020, the month that the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic.¹ Hate crimes against Asian Americans increased 145% in the largest cities in the United States between 2019 and 2020, even as hate crimes decreased 6% in the nation overall.² The rise in anti-Asian sentiment has not only been a domestic problem, but a global one, and attacks on people of Asian descent have occurred in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and Italy throughout the pandemic.

The recent rise in anti-Asian hostility must also be interpreted in the context of escalating 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 naturalized citizens or are born in the United States.

Methods and Sources

The Virulent Hate Project at the University of Michigan used news media to track incidents of coronavirus-related, anti-Asian racism. Using an established set of search terms, we searched two news media databases--ProQuest and NewsBank--to collect news articles that mentioned the topic of anti-Asian racism that were published between January 1 and December 31, 2020.

We read through the news articles, identified unique incidents of racism and activism, and entered these incidents into a database. We assigned tags for each incident based on the information made available in the news article, with particular focus on gathering details about the type, date, and location of the incidents; the demographics of the victims and perpetrators; and the deployment of specific stereotypes in anti-Asian rhetoric.

Using these methods, we collected and analyzed 4,337 news articles that addressed the topic of coronavirus-related, anti-Asian racism in the United States during 2020.

Types of Anti-Asian Incidents

Anti-Asian racism took many forms in 2020. In analyzing the types of anti-Asian incidents, we sorted events into one of two categories:

Harassment and vandalism. Harassment incidents were acts of aggression, intimidation, and discrimination that targeted an individual or group of individuals. In this category, we included physical, verbal, avoidance, and non-verbal harassment, as well as acts of vandalism.

Stigmatizing and discriminatory statements, images, policies, and proposals. These incidents included statements and actions by an individual or group of individuals that reproduced anti-Asian stereotypes and harmed Asian and Asian American people as a community. These incidents often involved the use of inflammatory rhetoric and the pursuit of policies and other actions that discriminated against Asian and Asian American people and contributed to anti-Asian sentiment.

In the 4,337 news articles that we analyzed, we identified 1,023 unique incidents of anti-Asian racism. These incidents included the following:

679 incidents of anti-Asian harassment and vandalism (66.37%)

344 incidents of stigmatizing and discriminatory statements, images, policies, and proposals (33.63%)

Harassment and Vandalism

Of the 679 incidents of anti-Asian harassment reported in the news, 112 incidents (16.49% of harassment incidents) involved physical harassment and violence, 541 incidents (79.68%) involved verbal harassment, 168 incidents (24.74%) involved avoidance and non-verbal harassment, and 43 incidents (6.33%) involved anti-Asian vandalism, graffiti, or defacement of property.

180 incidents (26.51%) of harassment incidents involved more than one type of harassment. For example, a single attack might involve both an act of violence and a verbal attack. In those cases, an incident was tagged as involving both physical and verbal harassment, and for this reason, the percentages add up to more than 100%.

TYPES OF HARASSMENT AND VANDALISM INCIDENTS

HARASSMENT CATEGORY	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Physical Harassment	112	16.49%
<i>Spitting, Coughing, and Sneezing</i>	38	5.60%
Verbal Harassment	541	79.68%
<i>Spoken Harassment</i>	456	67.16%
<i>Online/Social Media Harassment</i>	54	7.95%
<i>Racist Sign/Note</i>	43	6.33%
<i>Rumor</i>	9	1.33%
Avoidance and Non-Verbal Harassment	168	24.74%
<i>Barring from Business</i>	20	2.95%
Vandalism	43	6.33%
Total Harassment Incidents Identified	679	

Physical Harassment and Violence

Of the 679 incidents of anti-Asian harassment reported in the news, 112 incidents (16.49%) involved physical harassment and violence. **Asian and Asian American people were punched, pushed, burned, knifed, and doused with acid.** 81 physical harassment incidents (72.32%) also involved verbal harassment.

Violent incidents, while less common than other forms of anti-Asian racism, received substantial news coverage and galvanized public officials and community organizers into action. For example, after the stabbing of a Burmese American family in Texas, the FBI warned that hate crimes against Asian and Asian American people may rise due to “the assumption that a portion of the US public will associate COVID-19 with China and Asian American populations.”³

Anti-Asian racism plainly motivated some attacks, but in other incidents, the motive of the assailant was unclear. However, in the context of rising anti-Asian racism and violence, the impact of these events—not just their intent—was significant because they contributed to a growing sense of fear, worry, and anger among Asian and Asian American people.

PHYSICAL HARASSMENT

A man attacked a Burmese family at a grocery store. The perpetrator sliced the son’s face and stabbed other members of the family. The perpetrator claimed that he attacked the family because he thought they were Chinese and infecting people with the coronavirus.	3/14/2020	Midland, TX	The Daily Beast
A bicyclist spouted coronavirus-related, anti-Chinese slurs at a couple before spitting at them and throwing his bike at them. He yelled, “You are Chinese! God hates China! You die first! You don’t be with God!”	9/3/2020	New York, NY	New York Daily News
An Asian American man was attacked on the subway by another man who shouted at him, “You’re infected China boy, you need to get off the train.” The assailant then grabbed the victim and attempted to pull him out of his seat.	5/3/2020	New York, NY	New York Daily News

SPITTING, COUGHING, AND SNEEZING

38 physical harassment incidents involved Asian and Asian American people being spit at, coughed upon, or sneezed upon. These actions were not only hostile, but dangerous in the context of a pandemic in which respiratory droplets, saliva, and mucus can spread a potentially lethal virus.

An Asian woman was on her way to the gym when she was spit on and screamed at by a man on the street, forcing her to flee to a nearby business to escape further attack. The man encouraged a passing bus to “run them over.”	3/9/2020	San Francisco, CA	The New York Times
A 60-year-old Chinese American man was jogging when he was attacked and spat on by two women who accused him of having the virus. They told him to “go back to China” threw a log at him.	3/21/2020	Naperville, IL	Chicago Sun Times

Verbal Harassment

Verbal harassment was the most common form of anti-Asian harassment reported in the news in 2020. Of the 679 incidents of anti-Asian harassment, 541 incidents (79.68%) involved verbal harassment. The category of verbal harassment included four types of incidents: spoken harassment, online harassment, racist signs and notes, and anti-Asian rumors.

SPOKEN HARASSMENT

The vast majority of verbal harassment incidents involved spoken harassment. In these instances, Asian and Asian American people had slurs and racist insults yelled at them as they ate in restaurants, walked down the street, or rode public transit. Of the 541 incidents of verbal harassment reported in the news in 2020, 456 incidents involved spoken verbal harassment.

A man on the subway verbally harassed a Thai American Woman, saying "Every disease has ever come from China, homie. Everything comes from China because they're f***** disgusting...you can't even wipe your a**."	2/1/2020	Los Angeles, CA	NBC News
Two high school students recorded themselves mocking Asian American students, shouting "coronavirus" during a school cultural assembly, and harassing Vietnamese American classmates. A video showed the girls briefly touching the face of an Asian student wearing a face mask after telling her "Hey, b****." Both girls erupted in laughter as the Asian student turned her face away.	3/6/2020	Garden City, CA	Mercury News
A San Francisco tech CEO verbally harassed a family at a restaurant. He yelled. "Trump's going to f*** you," and called them "Asian piece of s***." He told the family that they "needed to leave" and "go back to whatever f***** Asian country you're from."	7/4/2020	Carmel Valley, CA	SFGATE

ONLINE HARASSMENT

Verbal harassment also took place online, where anti-Asian sentiment found expression through Zoom-bombing episodes and hostile interactions on social media, web forums, comment sections of websites, and more. There were 54 incidents of online verbal harassment reported in the news in 2020.

A Vietnamese YouTube personality and makeup artist was told "to go back to eating bats" and that Asians were responsible for "starting diseases."	3/15/2020		Tampa Bay Times
A dance studio had their morning Zoom session interrupted by two individuals who spewed racist taunts at the Korean artistic director of the dance studio. Both male crashers used fake foreign accents. One asked the director why she "gave him the coronavirus."	4/6/2020	Detroit, MI	Detroit Free Press
A high school AP Chinese class held on Zoom was disrupted by individuals who shouted racist slurs, mocked Chinese language, and posted "vile, hate-filled images."	4/15/2020	Newton, MA	Boston Globe

RACIST SIGNS AND NOTES

Anti-Asian racism was sometimes expressed through the display of racist signs and racist notes intended to intimidate individuals. There were 43 incidents of racist signs or notes reported in the news in 2020.

Fake fliers from the World Health Organization (WHO) were circulated, encouraging the public to avoid Asian supermarkets. The official logos of Los Angeles County, the WHO, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) were used in the document.	1/30/2020	Los Angeles, CA	Reuters
An international student from China returned to his dorm room and discovered plastic covering his door and a sign that read, "Caution, Keep Out, Quarantine."	3/12/2020	Albuquerque, NM	KOB 4
A flier was posted on a family's door that read, "We're watching you f***** c*****s take the chinese virus back to china. We don't want you hear [sic] infecting us with your diseases!!!!!!!"	3/25/2020	Woodbury, MN	Anti-Defamation League

RUMOR INCIDENTS

The final type of anti-Asian verbal harassment came in the form of false rumors that were spread about an Asian individual regarding COVID-19. There were 9 incidents of false rumors reported in the news in 2020.

False rumors were spread that a Korean flight attendant infected with COVID-19 dined at restaurants in Los Angeles's Koreatown. The flight attendant did not, in fact, visit any restaurants in Koreatown, and one of the restaurants where she was rumored to have visited was closed at the time. The restaurants mentioned in the rumors lost business.	Mid/Late February 2020	Los Angeles, CA	AP News
In February 2020, an Asian student at Cornell University got sick with the flu, and rumors began to spread that she had COVID-19.	7/4/2020	Ithaca, NY	The Cornell Daily Sun

Avoidance and Non-Verbal Harassment

Anti-Asian racism was sometimes non-verbal and non-physical in nature, as **Asian and Asian American people experienced shunning and other forms of hostile and discriminatory treatment because of the belief that they were likely to have or spread COVID-19.** Of the 679 anti-Asian harassment incidents reported in the news in 2020, 168 incidents (24.74%) involved discriminatory avoidance and other forms of non-verbal harassment.

AVOIDANCE AND NON-VERBAL HARASSMENT

In these incidents, individuals were avoided, stared at, and ostracized due to the perception that COVID-19 was associated with Asian and Asian American people.

A food sample worker would not give samples to a man and his 8-year-old son, who was wearing a face mask. The worker told the pair to “get away” because the son “may be from China.”	1/26/2020	Bellevue, WA	Insider
An Asian man went to Island Hospital due to liver issues and was quarantined over concerns of COVID-19. The individual had not visited any areas with travel alerts that would have recommended quarantine.	2/10/2020	Anacortes, WA	King 5 NBC
As a woman waited in line at a bakery, a couple standing behind her fled when they saw she was Asian, saying, “Oh gosh, not here,” and went to another line.	3/23/2020	Des Moines, IA	Des Moines Register

BARRING FROM BUSINESS

Among these incidents of non-verbal harassment, there were 20 incidents which businesses discriminated against Asian and Asian American people by barring them from entry or refusing them service.

A ride-share driver refused to let an Asian woman enter their car until the other passenger, who was white, approached the car. The driver asked whether the two had traveled to China. The driver admitted that he had rejected a ride request from another prospective passenger with a common Chinese name.	2/20/2020	San Francisco, CA	The Daily Beast
Two Hmong men were denied a room at a hotel. The hotel employee asked one of the men if he was Chinese. When the man asked why he needed to know, the employee responded, “Because of the coronavirus going around. And anyone from China, I am told, has to be picked up and quarantined for two weeks.”	2/13/2020	Plymouth, IN	CNN

Vandalism

There were 43 incidents involving anti-Asian vandalism, graffiti, or defacement of property reported in the news in 2020. These incidents often targeted property that was owned or frequented by Asian and Asian American people.

VANDALISM/GRAFFITI INCIDENTS

A movie poster for <i>Mulan</i> (2020) was defaced with graffiti that depicted a mask over the titular character's face and the message "Toxic made in Wuhan."	3/13/2020	Pasadena, CA	NBC News
A Chinese and Japanese buffet restaurant was vandalized with graffiti that included an ethnic slur and a message that read, "Take the corona back you c***k."	3/30/2020	Yakima, WA	Yakima Herald
An Asian American church was vandalized. A witness says "People ripped out wiring, cut pipes, and broke down doors. Even though no one was congregating, vandals destroyed the property during a time of financial hardship for all."	4/15/2020	Scottsdale, AZ	The Cap Times

STIGMATIZING AND DISCRIMINATORY STATEMENTS, IMAGES, POLICIES, AND PROPOSALS

In addition to harassment and vandalism, anti-Asian sentiment found expression in stigmatizing statements, images, policies, and proposals. These stigmatizing acts **discriminated against Asian and Asian American people, fostered anti-Asian bias, and reproduced harmful anti-Asian stereotypes**, especially in relation to COVID-19. We identified 344 such incidents reported in the news in 2020. These incidents included the following:

- 320 incidents of stigmatizing statements, images, and videos
- 24 incidents of stigmatizing and discriminatory policies and proposals

Stigmatizing Statements and Rhetoric About COVID-19

There were 320 incidents of stigmatizing statements, images, and videos about Asian and Asian American people reported in the news in 2020. These incidents often involved politicians, media celebrities, and other public figures making statements that promoted anti-Asian ideas and attitudes. These statements appeared in tweets, press meetings, rallies, interviews, and other public events.

STIGMATIZING STATEMENTS

Fox News host Jesse Watters demanded on-air that China issue a formal apology for the virus and added that the virus started in China "because they have these markets where they are eating raw bats and snakes."	3/2/2020	New York, NY	Fox News
A postdoctoral student posted on Facebook telling Chinese students they are "1000000% to blame" for the pandemic, and that they should "go home" if they feel oppressed.	3/25/2020	South Bend, IN	NDSMC Observer
A Naperville resident described Asian people as "roving carpetbaggers" at a City Council meeting.	4/7/2020	Naperville, IL	Chicago Tribune

Of these 320 incidents, we identified 196 incidents in which politicians and other individuals publicly used stigmatizing terms (e.g., “China virus” and “kung flu”) that associated the coronavirus with Asian and Asian American people.

Both the WHO and the CDC have explicitly advised against using these terms, and researchers have shown that the use of these stigmatizing terms coincided with a sharp rise in anti-Asian bias in early March 2020.⁴ Despite repeated requests by Asian Americans to end the use of these terms, many public figures, especially politicians, have continued to use stigmatizing rhetoric related to COVID-19.

STIGMATIZING RHETORIC RELATED TO COVID-19

President Trump referred to the coronavirus as the “kung flu,” “Chinese virus,” and “China virus” at his campaign rally in Tulsa, OK.	6/20/2020	Tulsa, OK	The Hill
Rep. Paul Gosar (R-AZ) called COVID-19 the “Wuhan Virus” when he announced that he was self-quarantining after sustained contact with a CPAC attendee who was hospitalized with COVID-19.	3/8/2020	Gold Canyon, AZ	Twitter

Stigmatizing Images and Videos

There were 35 incidents in which individuals and groups circulated stigmatizing images and videos that conveyed harmful stereotypes about Asian and Asian American people.

STIGMATIZING IMAGES/VIDEOS

The president of the Delaware AFL-CIO posted a meme that showed Adam and Eve as two Chinese people eating a snake.	3/30/2020	Newark, DE	The Philadelphia Enquirer
Donald Trump Jr. shared a video on Instagram with the caption, “The Kung-Flu Kid.” The video was an edited scene from “The Karate Kid” where two individuals were fighting. President Trump’s head and a US flag were pasted over one fighter, and a rendering of a coronavirus and the Chinese flag were pasted over the other.	3/26/2020		HuffPost

Stigmatizing and Discriminatory Policies and Proposals

Finally, there were 24 incidents in which an individual or institution pursued a policy or resolution that discriminated or expressed bias against Asian and Asian American people.

STIGMATIZING POLICIES

Cruise companies Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd. and Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings Ltd. announced they would no longer allow people with passports from China, Hong Kong, or Macau to board their ships, regardless of the last time they were in China.	2/7/2020	Bayonne, NJ	Miami Herald
Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR) and Rep. Dan Crenshaw (R- TX) introduced legislation that would allow Americans to sue China in federal court to “recover damages for death, injury, and economic harm caused” by the coronavirus.	4/16/2020	Washington, DC	The Office of Tom Cotton

USE OF ANTI-ASIAN STEREOTYPES

To understand the ideas that contributed to incidents of anti-Asian racism, we tracked the number of times specific anti-Asian stereotypes were deployed in harassment incidents and stigmatizing statements and policies. Two stereotypes in particular appear to have animated anti-Asian hostility in 2020: first, the **view of Asian Americans as “perpetual foreigners”**; and second, the **belief that Asian and Asian American people are a “yellow peril”** that pose an epidemiological, cultural, economic, racial, and national security threat to the United States.

Asian Americans as Perpetual Foreigners

163 incidents involved references to the perpetual foreigner stereotype, which is the idea that Asian American people are not truly American, but outsiders who do not belong in the United States.

PERPETUAL FOREIGNER INCIDENTS

President Trump told CBS reporter Weijia Jiang to “ask China” in response to her question about COVID-19 testing on a global scale at a White House press conference.	5/11/2020	Washington, DC	Washington Post
An Asian man went to Island Hospital due to liver issues and was quarantined over concerns of COVID-19. The individual had not visited any areas with travel alerts that would have recommended quarantine.	2/10/2020	Anacortes, WA	King 5 NBC
Minnesota State Rep. Jay Xiong rolled down his car window in a store parking lot and a man called him a “c*****” and told him that a disease-ridden person like him should go back to his country.	Early 2020	Minnesota	Star Tribune

Asian Americans as Yellow Peril

The yellow peril belief that Asian and Asian American people are a danger to America found multiple expressions. First, fear about COVID-19 and anger at the role of China in the pandemic were articulated in many incidents of harassment. Asian and American people targeted in attacks were frequently accused by their assailants of having and spreading the coronavirus, and anti-Asian attacks often involved anti-Chinese rhetoric. For example, in March, a Vietnamese-Filipino American man was leaving a movie theatre when a man [spat](#) on him and yelled, “F*** China!”

In addition 42 incidents involved public figures making stigmatizing statements that circulated the conspiracy theory that China created COVID-19 in a lab.

CHINESE LAB/VIRUS CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stated on ABC’s “This Week” that “enormous evidence” indicates that the outbreak originated at a laboratory in Wuhan, China, suggesting that China has previously infected the world with a lab-produced virus.	5/3/2020	New York, NY	ABC News
Gov. Tate Reeves (R-MS) tweeted, “whether it was a Chinese wet market or lab as intel first said, the Chinese Communist Party needs to own the fact they unleashed this virus and lied about it.”	Early September 2020	Jackson, MS	The Associated Press

Finally, dozens of incidents drew on the long-standing yellow peril stereotype of Asian and Asian American people being dirty, backwards, and a threat to civilized society. For example, 51 incidents involved criticism of Chinese culture as barbaric.

DENIGRATION OF CHINESE CULTURE

Fox News host Tucker Carlson blamed the emergence of the coronavirus on Chinese culture, claiming it was a result of people consuming animals “alive.” “I won’t ask you why people would eat koalas or bats or snakes. That’s a cultural question. It’s repulsive, frankly.” Carlson also used the term “Chinese coronavirus” during the episode.	1/23/2020	Washington, DC	USA Today
Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX) blamed China for the coronavirus outbreak due to Chinese cultural practices. He told reporters that “China is to blame” for the coronavirus outbreak because of its “culture where people eat bats and snakes and dogs and things like that.” He also said he did not find the term “Chinese Virus” controversial.	3/18/2020	Washington, DC	Dallas Observer

VICTIMS OF ANTI-ASIAN HARASSMENT

Victim Ethnicity

Although the stigmatizing rhetoric associated with the coronavirus has focused primarily on China, Asian and Asian American people of nearly every ethnic background experienced anti-Asian harassment in 2020.

Information about the ethnicity of people targeted in harassment incidents is somewhat limited, as news reports identified the ethnicity of victims in 295 incidents, or 43.45% of harassment incidents. However, based on the reported details about these incidents, it appears that a wide array of Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander people experienced harassment in 2020. According to news reports, Asian and Asian American people of at least 14 different Asian ethnic backgrounds were attacked. Individuals who identified as Black, Latinx, white, and mixed race also experienced harassment in these incidents.

Although all Asian and Asian American people have been affected by coronavirus-related racism, the impact of anti-Asian harassment was not shared evenly across Asian American ethnic groups in 2020. People of Chinese descent suffered a disproportionate number of attacks. According to the [Pew Research Center](#), Chinese Americans comprise 23% of the Asian American population, but they experienced 171 incidents, or 57.97%, of the harassment incidents for which the ethnicities of victims were reported in the news in 2020.⁵ People of Korean descent experienced 45 incidents (15.25%), People of Vietnamese descent experienced 26 incidents (8.81%), People of Filipino descent experienced 20 incidents (6.78%), and People of Hmong descent experienced 15 incidents (5.08%).

ETHNICITY	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Chinese	171	57.97%
Korean	45	15.25%
Vietnamese	26	8.81%
Filipino	20	6.78%
Hmong	15	5.08%
Japanese	10	3.39%
Taiwanese	4	1.36%
Mixed Race	4	1.36%
Lao	4	1.36%
Burmese	4	1.36%

ETHNICITY	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PERCENTAGE
White	3	1.02%
Indonesian	3	1.02%
Cambodian	3	1.02%
Thai	1	0.34%
Pacific Islander	1	0.34%
Latinx	1	0.34%
Black	1	0.34%
Total Harassment Incidents with Victim Ethnicity Identified	295	

Victim Gender

Women experienced a disproportionate share of incidents of anti-Asian harassment. Among the 463 incidents in which the gender of victims was reported in the news, women were victims in 300 incidents (64.79%).

In contrast, men were victims in 191 incidents (41.25%). (Note: in some incidents, victims involved both men and women, which is why the percentage adds up to over 100. News media did not report any incidents involving non-binary or gender non-conforming individuals, although Stop AAPI Hate has received reports from non-binary individuals through its self-reported system.) Our finding converges with that of Stop AAPI Hate, which found that women were victims in 68% of the incidents of hate reported through its online system.⁶ Details from news reports show that attacks on Asian and Asian American women sometimes expressed racialized misogyny and referenced 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****.”

GENDER	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Female	300	64.79%
Male	191	41.25%
Total Harassment Incidents with Victim Gender Identified	463	

Victim Age

Anti-Asian harassment affected Asian and Asian American people of all ages, including some of the most vulnerable populations. The age of victims was reported in the news in 508 incidents, or 74.82% of the incidents. Of those 508 incidents, 438 incidents (86.22%) involved adult victims, 84 incidents (16.54%) involved child victims, and 14 incidents (2.76%) involved senior victims.

AGE	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Adult	438	86.22%
Child	84	16.54%
Senior	14	2.76%
Total Incidents with Age Identified	508	

Youth Victims

84 incidents involved children and adolescents under the age of 18 being harassed. Incidents sometimes happened when children were at school. This finding converges with research by Stop AAPI Hate’s youth campaign, which found that one in four Asian and Asian American youths experienced racist bullying during the pandemic.⁷ Other incidents of harassment that involved children and youth occurred when children were out in public with their families.

HARASSMENT INCIDENTS INVOLVING CHILDREN

A middle schooler was beaten and hospitalized. Another kid at the school accused him of having the coronavirus and said, “Go back to China!” When the child said, “I’m not Chinese,” the bully proceeded to punch him 20 times in the head on the schoolyard.	2/4/2020	Los Angeles, CA	The San Fernando Valley Sun
A student was verbally harassed by a group of boys telling him, “he shouldn’t be here because of the coronavirus,” and physically pushed and grabbed him when he didn’t respond.	2/25/2020	Weston, FL	South Florida Sun Sentinel
A woman was at a park with her kids when a couple approached her saying, “Can you read, you Oriental?” and “Go back to where you came from.”	6/10/2020	San Francisco, CA	The New York Times

Senior Victims

Asian American elders also experienced harassment, and some incidents were violent. Among harassment incidents reported in the news in 2020, 14 incidents involved people over sixty years old.

HARASSMENT INCIDENTS INVOLVING SENIOR VICTIMS

A 68-year-old Chinese man was hit on the head and robbed by two men collecting cans to recycle. One yelled a racial slur, and someone else said, "I hate Asians." Several people were standing around, but none intervened. Some jeered and mocked him.	2/22/2020	Bayview, CA	CBS SF Bay Area
An 89-year-old woman was set on fire and slapped in the face on a public street by two 13-year-old boys.	7/14/2020	New York, NY	Brooklyn Paper

SOURCES OF ANTI-ASIAN INCIDENTS

Details about the individuals involved in acts of anti-Asian racism and stigmatization were limited. That we have scarce information about these individuals owes in part to the fact that the offenders in harassment incidents were sometimes never known. Even in cases where the offender was identified, news reports included few details about the perpetrators.

However, demographic information about the individuals involved in these incidents was occasionally available for two types of incidents: 1) harassment and 2) stigmatizing statements and actions by politicians. In reporting on harassment, news articles sometimes explicitly identified the gender, age, race, and ethnicity of the perpetrators. In reporting on stigmatizing statements and actions by politicians, news articles typically named the involved politicians, whose gender, age, race, and ethnicity could be identified with publicly available information.

Race and Ethnicity

When we combined these two types of incidents (harassment and stigmatizing statements and actions by politicians), we had information about the race and/or ethnicity of offenders in a total of 184 anti-Asian incidents: 57 incidents of anti-Asian harassment and 127 incidents of stigmatizing statements and actions by politicians.

In the 184 incidents in which the race of the source was identified, the perpetrators were predominantly white. White individuals were reported as offenders in 165 of the 184 anti-Asian incidents (89.6%). In contrast, Black individuals were identified as offenders in 10 of the 184 anti-Asian incidents (5.43%). This observation is worth noting, given the

current public conversation about Asian-Black relations. **The information that we have, while limited and imperfect, does not support the common claim that Black hostility is driving the current epidemic of anti-Asian racism and violence.**⁷

We must emphasize that identifying and reporting on an individual's race and ethnicity is always complicated, even in situations in which the perpetrator is known. Reporting practices might differ by the race of the perpetrator, and it is not clear how news outlets and individual reporters chose to navigate the complex issue of racial identification in its coverage of specific incidents discussed in the articles we reviewed.

The fact that news reports contained few details about the perpetrators raises many questions, both about trends in anti-Asian harassment and practices of news media in reporting on this topic. Patterns in news coverage concerning this aspect of anti-Asian racism and violence is a topic that we may analyze in greater depth in future reports.

Harassment

The race and/or ethnicity of offenders was explicitly identified in the news in 57 incidents, or 8.39% of the 679 incidents of harassment that we analyzed. Of these 57 incidents, white individuals were reported as the perpetrators in 44 incidents. In contrast, Black individuals were reported as the perpetrators in 6 incidents overall.

SOURCES OF ALL HARASSMENT

RACE/ETHNICITY	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PERCENTAGE
White	44	77.19%
Black	6	10.53%
Latinx	4	7.02%
Chinese	3	5.26%
Vietnamese	1	1.75%
Total Identified	57	

PHYSICAL HARASSMENT

The race and/or ethnicity of offenders was explicitly identified in the news in 16 of the 112 physical harassment incidents (14.29%).

SOURCES OF PHYSICAL HARASSMENT

RACE/ETHNICITY	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PERCENTAGE
White	12	75.00%
Black	3	18.75%
Latinx	2	12.50%
Total Identified	16	

VERBAL HARASSMENT

The race and/or ethnicity of offenders was explicitly identified in the news in 55 of the 541 verbal harassment incidents (10.17%).

SOURCES OF VERBAL HARASSMENT

RACE/ETHNICITY	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PERCENTAGE
White	43	78.18%
Black	6	10.91%
Latinx	4	7.27%
Chinese	2	3.64%
Vietnamese	1	1.82%
Total Identified	55	

AVOIDANCE AND NON-VERBAL HARASSMENT

The race and/or ethnicity of offenders was explicitly identified in the news in 15 of the 168 avoidance and non-verbal harassment incidents (8.93%).

SOURCES OF NON-VERBAL HARASSMENT

RACE/ETHNICITY	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PERCENTAGE
White	14	93.33%
Latinx	1	6.67%
Chinese	1	6.67%
Total Identified	15	

STIGMATIZING STATEMENTS BY POLITICIANS

The race and/or ethnicity of the politicians involved in stigmatizing statements and actions was identified in 127, or 70.95% of the 179 incidents that we analyzed. **White politicians were the source of 121 (95.28%) of the statements, images, policies, and proposals that stigmatized Asian and Asian American people and blamed them for the coronavirus.**

Note: the percentages add up to over 100% because there were some incidents in which politicians of multiple races and ethnicities were involved.

SOURCES OF STIGMATIZING STATEMENTS BY POLITICIANS

RACE/ETHNICITY	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PERCENTAGE
White	121	95.28%
Black	4	3.15%
Latinx	3	2.36%
Korean	1	0.79%
Indigenous	1	0.79%
Arab	1	0.79%
Total Identified	127	

Gender

Individuals who were the source of anti-Asian incidents also appear to have been predominantly male. Of the 470 incidents in which the gender of perpetrators was identified, 358 incidents involved men (76.17%), while 115 incidents involved women (24.47%).

SOURCES OF HARASSMENT

Compared to reporting on race, news media gave more information about the gender of the perpetrators of anti-Asian harassment incidents. Information about the gender of these individuals was available for 298 harassment incidents, or 43.89% of the 679 harassment incidents that we analyzed. Male individuals were reported as offenders in 202 cases, which is slightly over two-thirds of the incidents for which information about the gender of the perpetrator was available (67.79%).

ALL HARASSMENT

GENDER	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Male	202	67.79%
Female	98	32.89%
Total Identified	298	

The gender of the perpetrators was explicitly identified in the news for 72 of the 112 physical harassment incidents (64.29%). 57 of these physical harassment incidents involved male perpetrators (79.17%), and 15 of these incidents involved female perpetrators (20.83%).

SOURCES OF PHYSICAL HARASSMENT

GENDER	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Male	57	79.17%
Female	15	20.83%
Total Identified	72	

The gender of the perpetrators was explicitly identified in the news for 259 of the 541 verbal harassment incidents (47.87%). 180 of these verbal harassment incidents involved male perpetrators (69.50%), and 81 of these incidents involved female perpetrators (31.27%).

SOURCES OF VERBAL HARASSMENT

GENDER	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Male	180	69.50%
Female	81	31.27%
Total Identified	259	

The gender of the perpetrators was explicitly identified in the news for 69 of the 168 avoidance and non-verbal harassment incidents (41.07%). 37 of these avoidance and non-verbal harassment incidents involved male perpetrators (53.62%), and 32 of these incidents involved female perpetrators (46.38%).

SOURCES OF NON-VERBAL HARASSMENT AND AVOIDANCE INCIDENTS

GENDER	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Male	37	53.62%
Female	32	46.38%
Total Identified	69	

SOURCES OF STIGMATIZING STATEMENTS BY POLITICIANS

The gender of the politicians involved in stigmatizing statements and actions was identified in 172 of the 179 incidents (96.09%). **The politicians involved in incidents that stigmatized Asian and Asian American people were overwhelmingly male.**

Note: the percentages add up to over 100% because there were some instances that involved both male and female politicians.

POLITICIAN GENDER	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Male	156	90.70%
Female	17	9.88%
Total Identified	172	

Government Position

Using news reports, we identified 179 incidents in which American politicians and government officials made stigmatizing statements and supported stigmatizing and discriminatory policies. These politicians and government officials worked in all areas of government: in local, state, and federal government and in the executive and legislative branches.

POLITICIAN TYPE	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PERCENTAGE
White House/Executive	89	49.72%
US Congress	36	20.11%
Local Government	22	12.29%
State /Territory Government	19	10.61%
Non-Governmental/ Candidate	13	7.26%
Total	179	

Party Affiliation

The politicians and government officials who made stigmatizing statements and supported stigmatizing proposals and policies tended to be affiliated with the Republican Party. **Of the 157 incidents for which the political affiliation of the politicians and government officials could be identified, 152 incidents (96.82%) involved politicians affiliated with the Republican Party.**

This finding converges with previous research that the Virulent Hate Project conducted with Stop AAPI Hate in the fall of 2020. That analysis of political candidates' Twitter activity revealed similar partisan and demographic patterns in politicians' use of stigmatizing and racist rhetoric.⁹

AFFILIATION	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Republican	152	96.82%
Democrat	5	3.18%
Total	157	

Stigmatizing Statements Made By Politicians and Government Employees

POLITICIANS OR GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES INVOLVED IN AT LEAST TWO INCIDENTS OF STATEMENTS, IMAGES, POLICIES, AND PROPOSALS THAT STIGMATIZED ASIAN AND ASIAN AMERICAN PEOPLE

POLITICIAN	TITLE	TYPE	PARTY AFFILIATION	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS
Donald Trump	President of the United States	White House/Executive	Republican	55
Tom Cotton	U.S. Senator, Arkansas	US Senate	Republican	8
Peter Navarro	White House Trade Adviser	White House/Executive	Republican	8
Mike Pompeo	Secretary of State	White House/Executive	Republican	6
Ted Cruz	U.S. Senator, Texas	US Senate	Republican	3
Jim Banks	U.S. Representative, Indiana	US House	Republican	3
Kellyanne Conway	Former Senior Counselor to the President	White House/Executive	Republican	3
Lindsey Graham	U.S. Senator, South Carolina	US Senate	Republican	2
Michael Caputo	Former HHS Spokesman	White House/Executive	Republican	2
Daniel Castelline	Augustine Police Department Officer	Local Government		2
Michael McCaul	U.S. Representative, Texas	US House	Republican	2
Andrew Gasser	Algonquin Township Highway Commissioner	Local Government	Republican	2
Kayleigh McEnany	White House Press Secretary	White House/Executive	Republican	2
Tate Reeves	Mississippi Governor	State/Territory Government	Republican	2

LOCATIONS OF ANTI-ASIAN HARASSMENT

States

Incidents of anti-Asian harassment occurred nearly everywhere in the United States in 2020. The news media reported on incidents of anti-Asian harassment in 40 states and the District of Columbia. No harassment incidents were reported in the news in 2020 in Alaska, Idaho, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, Wyoming. However, the absence of news stories about anti-Asian harassment in those states may say more about patterns of news coverage and less about patterns of anti-Asian harassment.

The states where the news media reported the most incidents of anti-Asian harassment were places where there is a significant Asian and Asian American population. The five states where there were the most reported harassment incidents were California (156 incidents), New York (117 incidents), Washington (37 incidents), Pennsylvania (34 incidents), and Massachusetts (34 incidents).

However, assessing the number of harassment incidents in relation to the state’s Asian American population reveals that 2020 was sometimes more dangerous for Asian Americans in states with a smaller Asian American population.

NUMBER OF ANTI-ASIAN HARASSMENT INCIDENTS IN EACH STATE

STATE	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	STATE	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS
CA	156	DC	6
NY	116	GA	5
WA	37	LA	5
MA	34	NC	5
PA	34	AL	4
TX	32	IA	4
IL	27	MO	4
MN	21	OH	4
MI	16	KY	2
NJ	16	MS	2
CT	11	NH	2
FL	11	NV	2
IN	9	VT	2
MD	9	AR	1
UT	9	DE	1
WI	9	HI	1
AZ	8	KS	1
CO	8	ME	1
VA	8	MT	1
NM	7	WV	1
OR	7		

Cities

The cities where there were the most incidents of anti-Asian harassment reported in the news in 2020 included New York City; San Francisco; Los Angeles; Seattle; Philadelphia; Chicago; Austin; Boston; Pasadena; Washington, D.C.; San Jose; San Diego; and Ann Arbor.

CITIES WITH MORE THAN 5 INCIDENTS REPORTED

CITY	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS
New York, NY	87
San Francisco, CA	32
Los Angeles, CA	30
Seattle, WA	26
Philadelphia, PA	21
Chicago, IL	16
Austin, TX	13
Boston, MA	12
Pasadena, CA	8
Washington, DC	6
San Jose, CA	6
San Diego, CA	6
Ann Arbor, MI	6

Event Locations

Over two-thirds (67.45%) of the incidents of anti-Asian harassment occurred in three locations: businesses, streets, and public transit. Of the incidents reported in the news in 2020 for which location details were available, 293 incidents took place at businesses, which included grocery stores, big box stores, and restaurants; 164 incidents occurred on the street; and 106 incidents happened on public transit. Harassment incidents also occurred in public parks, educational institutions, and residences. (Note: some incidents occurred in places that warranted more than one location tag, so the percentages in the table below add up to more than 100%.)

The fact that racist harassment occurred in public places has contributed to a general sense of fear and anxiety among Asian and Asian American people who worry about suffering attacks, discrimination, and verbal abuse as they go about their daily lives.

LOCATION TYPE	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Business	293	45.22%
Street	164	25.31%
Transit	106	16.36%
University	63	9.72%
Residence	43	6.64%
Primary/Secondary School	39	6.02%
Park	18	2.78%
Identified	648	

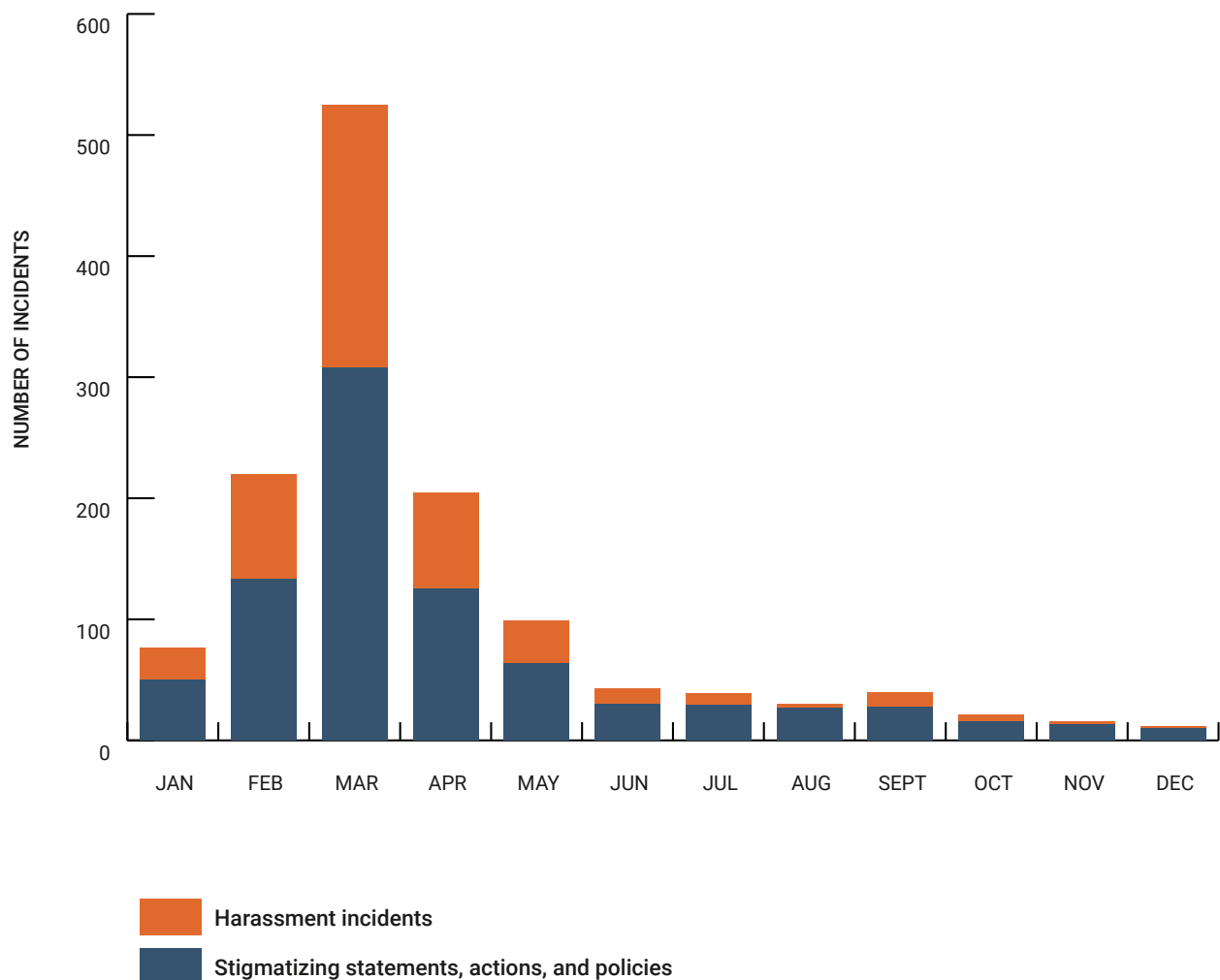
PEAK OF ANTI-ASIAN INCIDENTS

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.

News reports did not always identify the exact date of an incident. Whenever possible, we noted the information provided in news reports and approximated if an incident took place in a specific week or month. If an incident could not be approximated within a four-week period, it was excluded from our time analysis.

When combining all forms of anti-Asian incidents together (that is, all forms of harassment, vandalism, and stigmatizing statements and policies), anti-Asian incidents peaked during the week of March 16–22, 2020. We identified 65 unique incidents that occurred during that week, which was shortly after March 11, 2020, which was the day the WHO officially declared COVID-19 a global pandemic.

TYPES OF ANTI-ASIAN HATE INCIDENTS IN 2020



ENDNOTES

- ¹ Sean Darling-Hammond, et al. "After 'The China Virus' Went Viral: Racially Charged Coronavirus Coverage and Trends in Bias Against Asian Americans," *Health Education & Behavior* (September 2020).
- ² "Fact Sheet: Anti-Asian Prejudice March 2021," Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, California State University, San Bernardino.
- ³ "FBI Calling Stabbing at Midland Sam's a Hate Crime," CBS7 News, March 30, 2020, <https://www.cbs7.com/content/news/FBI-calling-stabbing-at-Midland-Sams-a-hate-crime-569233691.html>
- ⁴ Darling-Hammond, et al., "After 'The China Virus' Went Viral."
- ⁵ Abby Budiman and Neil Ruiz, "Key Facts About Asian Americans, a Diverse and Growing Population," *Pew Research Center Fact Tank*, April 29, 2021.
- ⁶ Russell Jeung et al., "Stop AAPI Hate 2021 National Report," March 19, 2021.
- ⁷ Russell Jeung et al., "Stop AAPI Hate Youth Report," September 2020.
- ⁸ For discussion of Black-Asian conflict, see, for example, Jennifer Lee and Tiffany Huang, "Why the Trope of Black Asian Conflict in the Face of Anti-Asian Violence Dismisses Solidarity," *How We Rise Blog*, Brookings Institution, March 11, 2021. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/how-we-rise/2021/03/11/why-the-trope-of-black-asian-conflict-in-the-face-of-anti-asian-violence-dismisses-solidarity/>.
- ⁹ Melissa Borja et al., "Study on 2020 Candidates and Rhetoric on China and AAPIs on Twitter," October 21, 2020.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Poverty Solutions and the Center for Social Solutions at the University of Michigan, whose generous financial support made the research for this report possible. We are also grateful for the U-M Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program, which offered invaluable research assistance, and the U-M Department of American Culture, which provided administrative support. Finally, thank you to Studio Five Two for expertise in the graphic design of this report.