

LONGITUDINAL TRENDS IN HATE CRIMES TARGETING ASIAN AMERICANS AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS

LOS ANGELES COUNTY, 2012 - 2020

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DISCLAIMER

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- EXECUTIVE SUMMARY4
- INTRODUCTION5
- METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH QUESTION6
- DATA & FINDINGS6
- CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS12
- NOTES13
- ABOUT THE AUTHORS13



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KEY FINDINGS

1. Federal, State, and Los Angeles County all show a **sharp rise in reported Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI)-targeted hate crimes** in 2020.
2. All racially motivated hate crimes and AAPI-targeted crimes saw **dramatic increases in 2020 following the COVID-19 pandemic**—however, **upward trends began years earlier**.
3. Crimes in which suspects are reported to have used anti-immigrant slurs or show other **explicit indications of anti-immigrant motivation rose 266%** between 2012 and 2020.
4. The upward trend in anti-Asian hate crimes is heavily fueled by a **concurrent rise in anti-immigrant hate crimes**.
5. Longitudinal data on the reported race of the suspect does not illustrate any clear trends for AAPI-targeted victims. However, there was a **sharper rise in both White and Latinx suspects starting in 2018**.
6. The **proportion of crimes taking place in public places has increased substantially** in both 2019 (pre-COVID-19 pandemic) and 2020 in comparison to other locations.
7. The **rate of violent hate crimes increased over the last decade** for reported crimes targeting AAPI victims as well as all racially biased hate crimes. This includes simple and aggravated assaults combined.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Form a **statewide network** of local government Human Relation Commissions and community organizations to **examine hate crime data and build an anti-hate infrastructure**.
2. Form a **commission in collaboration with state and local governments** to address the overall rise in hate crimes spurred during the pandemic that is affecting AAPIs along with all groups.
3. Support a set of **comprehensive studies on hate crimes** in different cities or regions to identify actions that could have been taken to prevent those incidents from taking place.
4. **Educate the broad public, especially K-12 and college students**, about Asian American and Pacific Islander history and contemporary issues to both humanize the diverse experiences of AAPIs and address negative and discriminatory attitudes.
5. Develop mental health programs, counseling services, and reconciliation programs that specifically address racist attitudes and ideologies, **strengthening community-based resources and education that increase safety**—especially in public places.
6. Explore **alternative consequences** for low level hate crime offenders who show promise in changing biased attitudes and behaviors.

7. Allocate resources to **reverse the underreporting** of hate incidents and hate crimes.
8. Utilize **longitudinal data and tools** such as the Los Angeles County Hate Crime data dashboard to deepen and broaden public understanding about the causes, consequences, and prevention of racially motivated crime and other types of hate crimes.



INTRODUCTION

The country witnessed a surge in hate targeted against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. This policy brief focuses on racially motivated hate crimes¹ and presents a longitudinal portrait of data collected by the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations (LACCHR) from 2012 to 2020.

The increase in reported anti-Asian hate crimes in 2020 represents the largest number of anti-Asian hate crimes committed in a single year since 2001. Anti-Asian hate rose 76% from 2019 to 2020 in LA County, with 44 reported crimes in 2020 compared with 25 the previous year.² Despite the sharp increase in the number of victims of anti-Asian hate crimes following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, our findings also indicate that the rise in anti-Asian hate is not only a pandemic-related phenomenon, but part of a longer trend of increasing racially-motivated hate against Asian Americans and an increase in race-motivated hate crimes experienced by all groups.

It is important to note that hate crime data nationally suffer from underreporting by law enforcement agencies, victims, and witnesses alike. An estimated 42 percent of violent hate crimes are not reported to police.³ In addition to reported hate crimes, 1,700 reports of hate *incidents* were reported to the Los Angeles (LA) County 211LA hotline or reporting site in 2020. Hate *incidents* differ from hate *crimes* because many incidents do not rise to the level of a criminal offense, though some do.

METHODOLOGY

STUDY DESIGN

Data was provided by the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations. LACCHR receives reports from law enforcement, school districts and universities, community-based organizations, 211LA, and directly from victims. The commission eliminates duplicates and reviews each case for inclusion in their dataset and reports to ensure each case meets the definition of a hate crime in the California penal code. If a violent crime is committed against multiple victims, in most cases each victim is counted separately.

The graphs throughout this report count the number of victims. LACCHR reports the perpetrator's intended target group instead of the actual identity of the victim, which accounts for cases in which the victim's identity is mistaken. The Commission also reviews each case to identify sub-motivations, such as the explicit use of anti-immigrant language or vandalism during act of a hate crime.

DATA & FINDINGS

LOCAL, STATE AND NATIONAL TRENDS

The rise in anti-Asian crimes in LA County in 2020 mirrors trends in data from the California Department of Justice and the FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program. There is a sharp increase across all three graphs from 2019 to 2020, however

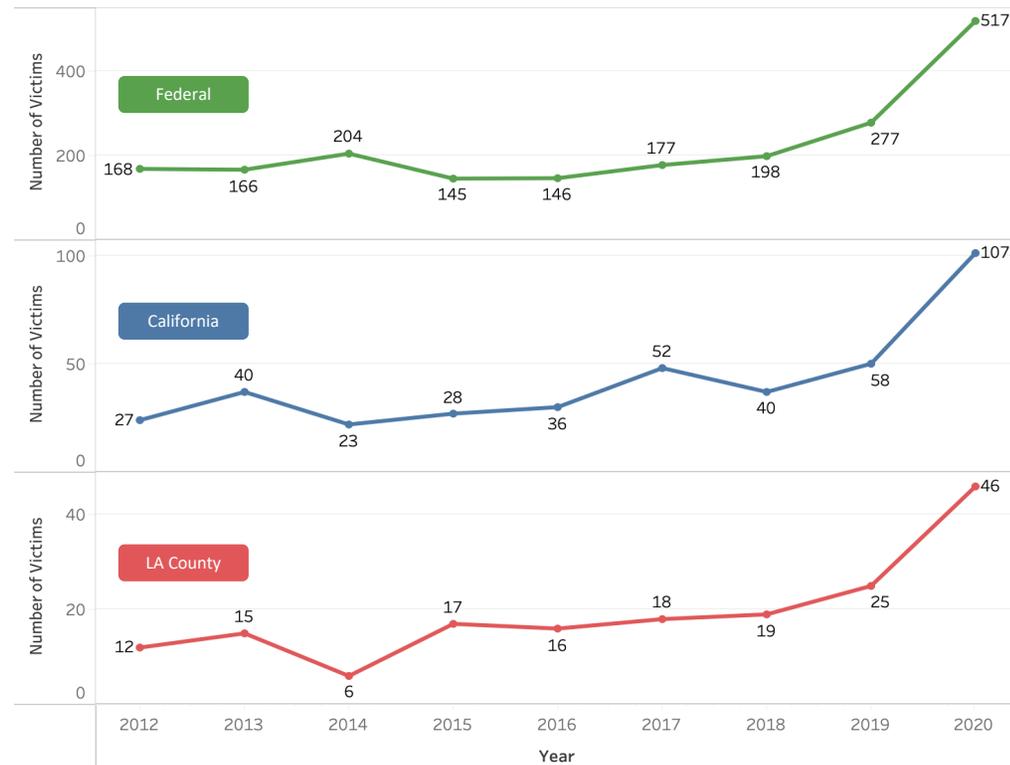


Figure 1: AAPI-Targeted Hate Crimes: Federal, State and LA County, 2012 – 2020 (Sources: Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations; Open Justice Platform, California Department of Justice; FBI Crime Data Explorer, Uniform Crime Reporting Program)

more gradual increases are apparent as early as 2014 in California and 2015 nationally. It is worth noting that LA County data makes up a large portion of reported racially motivated hate crimes across the state (39 percent between 2012-2022). In 2020, LA County accounted for 43 percent of all state-wide reported API-targeted hate crimes and 9 percent nationwide.

LONGITUDINAL TRENDS

All racially motivated hate crimes and AAPI-targeted crimes saw dramatic increases in 2020 following the COVID-19 pandemic; however, upward trends began years earlier. From 2012 to 2020, the number of victims of all racially motivated crimes rose 72%. In the same timeframe, there was a staggering 283% increase in the number of victims of AAPI-targeted hate crimes. A large portion of this increase happened recently: combined across the previous ten years, a total of 174 people experienced AAPI-targeted hate, yet a quarter of those victimizations occurred in 2020.

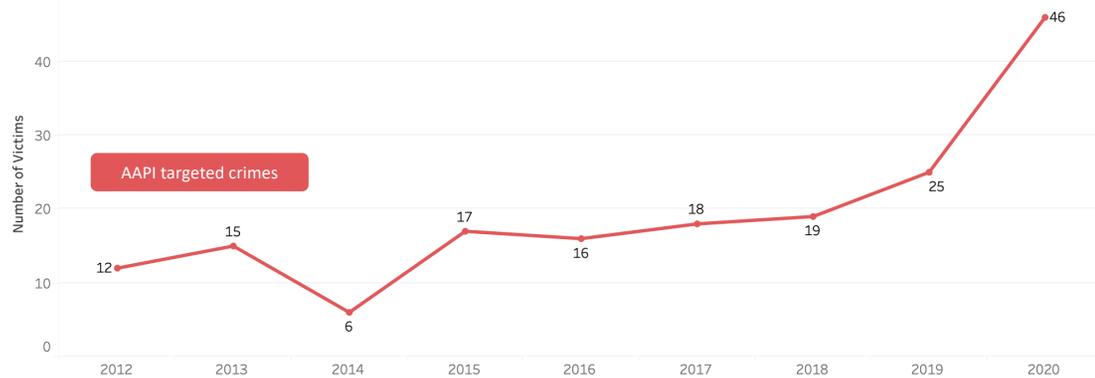
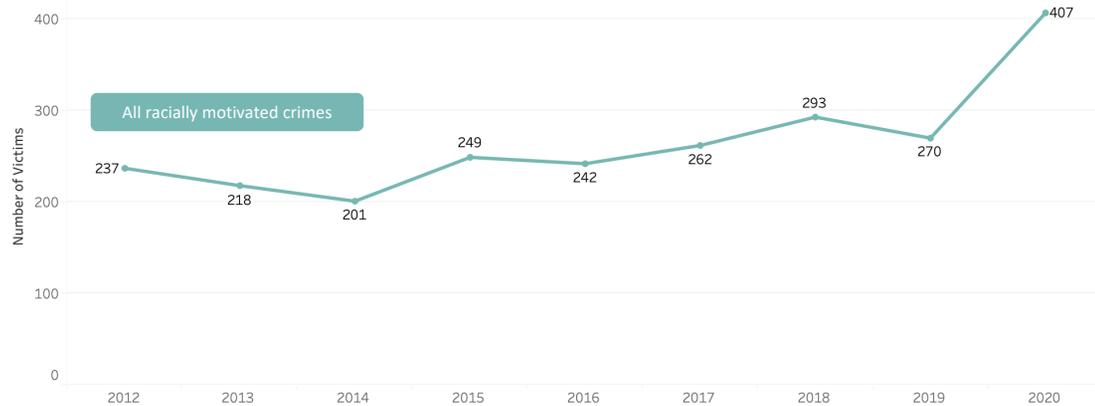


Table 2: Victims of Racially Motivated Hate Crimes vs. AAPI-Targeted Hate Crimes (Source: Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations)

ANTI-IMMIGRANT HATE CRIMES

LACCHR tracks cases in which suspects are reported to have used anti-immigrant slurs or shown other explicit indications of anti-immigrant motivation. **Crimes in which suspects are reported to have used anti-immigrant slurs or shown other explicit indications of anti-immigrant motivation rose 266% between 2012 and 2020.** These numbers only include crime reports in which explicit anti-immigrant motives were evidenced; anti-immigrant hate crimes tend to be underreported since xenophobic motivations may not always be evident and immigrants have a history of underreporting.

The upward trend in anti-Asian hate crimes is heavily fueled by a concurrent rise in anti-immigrant hate crimes. About half of anti-Asian hate crimes in 2017 and 2018 included explicit anti-immigrant language and roughly one third of victims experienced anti-immigrant language in 2019. In 2020, anti-immigrant hate within AAPI-targeted hate crimes continued to increase.

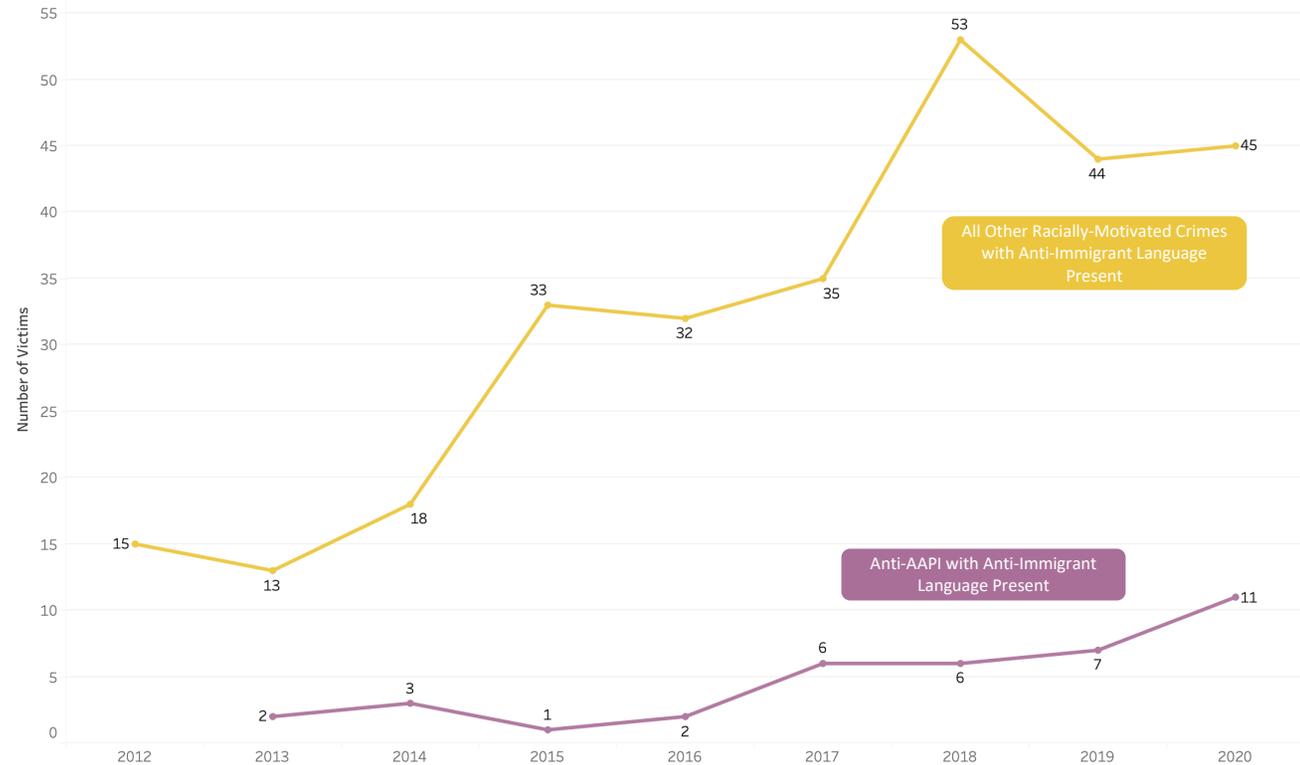


Table 3: Anti-AAPI Crimes vs. All Other Racially Motivated Hate Crimes with Anti-Immigrant Motivations Present (Source: Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations)

ANTI-ASIAN HATE AND RACE OF SUSPECT

The longitudinal data on the reported race of the suspect does not illustrate any clear trends for AAPI-targeted victims; however, there was a sharper rise in both White and Latinx suspects starting in 2018. The composition of suspects is not too dissimilar to the proportional racial composition of the population in the county. It should be noted that suspect data can be a problematic category due to false identification and heavier policing in some neighborhoods over others.

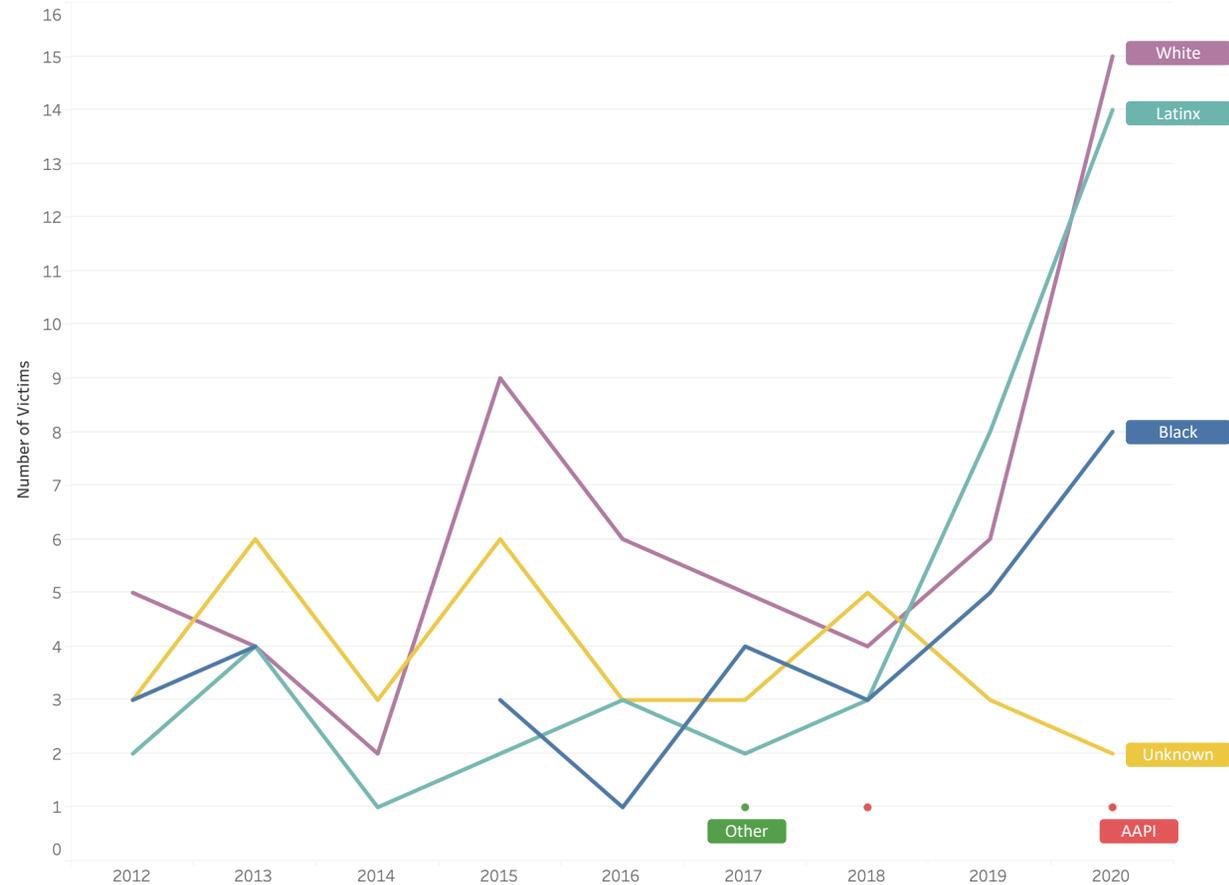


Table4: Number of Victims by Race of Suspect in AAPI-Targeted Crimes (Source: Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations)

LOCATION

The proportion of crimes taking place in public places has increased substantially in both 2019 (pre-COVID-19 pandemic) and 2020 compared to other locations. In 2019 and 2020, nearly half of all victims were targeted in public places. This rise in public places as the location of victimization was similar for White and Latinx-targeted hate crimes.

OFFENSE TYPE IN AAPI-TARGETED HATE CRIMES

The rate of violent hate crimes increased over the last decade for reported crimes targeting AAPI victims as well as all racially biased hate crimes. This includes simple and aggravated assaults combined.

There do not appear to be any major trends in specific offense type over the last decade; however, starting in 2018, there was a sharp increase in the number of simple assaults reported in AAPI-targeted crimes.

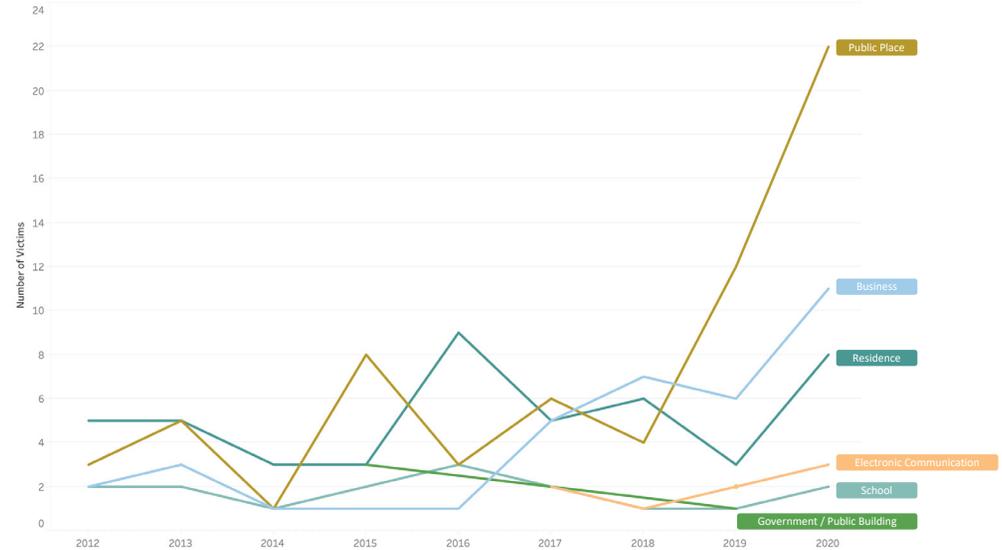


Table 5: Location of AAPI Targeted Hate Crimes (Source: Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations)

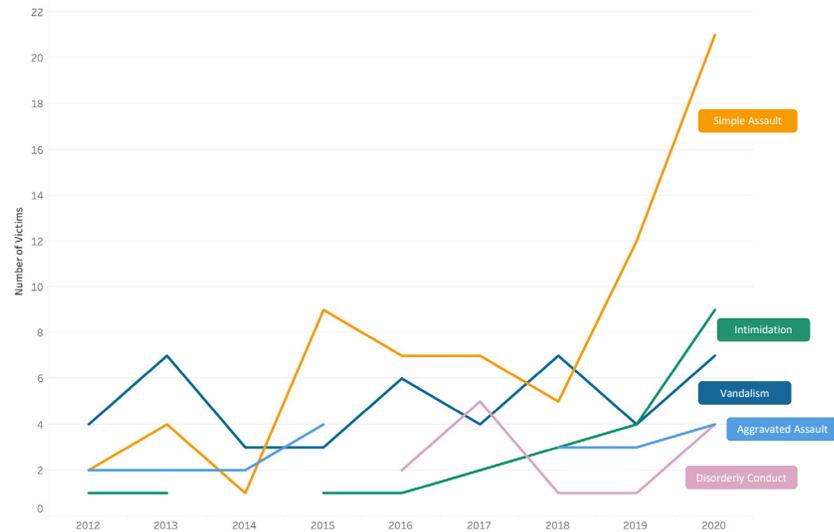


Table 6: Offense Type of AAPI Targeted Hate Crimes (Source: Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations)

DISCUSSION

The rise in anti-Asian hate as a result of the scapegoating of Asians for the pandemic can be hard to tease apart from other causes and motivations. This xenophobic scapegoating, however, was stoked by divisive political narratives and growing political polarization propagated by deliberate language used by political leaders (e.g., Trump's reference to the "Chinese virus"). Fear of the pandemic was attached to anti-immigrant and xenophobic sentiments, which likely tapped into an already rising undercurrent of anti-immigrant sentiment that helped propel the staggering increase of AAPI-targeted crimes documented in LA County and across the United States. In 2019, the number of crimes targeting AAPIs increased 32% from the previous year; in 2020, crimes targeting AAPIs increased another 76%, resulting in back-to-back years each with the largest number of anti-Asian hate crimes ever reported across the previous decade.

Anti-immigrant or xenophobic sentiments did not start in March 2020: the longitudinal data for AAPI-targeted crimes displayed here help to visualize this growing undercurrent of both racial tension and victimization of AAPIs prior to the pandemic. This preexisting trend set the stage for the surge of violence experienced after March 2020. Factors contributing to the increase in racially motivated hate crimes

likely include the rise of anti-immigrant rhetoric as part of the Trump campaign that also energized nationalistic and white supremacist politics and organization; the deep religious, racial and political polarization that had been growing in the years prior to and since his election; widening economic divides and political competition accentuated along boundaries of race; inadequate social safety nets and mental health infrastructure to address social hardships and growing discord; lack of broad public education about minoritized groups to counter destructive stereotypes; unchecked social media misinformation; and backlash to political protests centered on the Black Lives Matter movement and related anti-racism lexicon.

In addition to the increase in anti-Asian hate in 2020, the number of victims of all targeted groups for racial hate crimes increased by fifty-three percent in 2020. This represents a disturbing specter of racial violence and tension writ large that is not specifically explained by anti-Chinese or anti-Asian sentiments associated with COVID-19. As noted in the 2020 LACCHR annual report, one of the most troubling realizations was that the rise in anti-Asian hate crimes in 2020 was even exceeded by skyrocketing racial hate crimes targeting African Americans, Latino/as, and Whites.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The rise in AAPI hate and in racial violence more broadly emerge as two concerning trends from our analysis of data on race-motivated hate crimes and may signal a looming crisis of racial animus and division. The longitudinal analysis of hate crime data, provided by organizations like the LA County Commission on Human Relations, allow us not only to track impacts of major events, but to see more nuanced trends that indicate shifts in political culture or human relations. These trends, because they are not explained by a single cause, underscore the ways in which our fates are all tied; that human relations is rarely limited to a single group, but, over time, links all groups of people together. The rise in AAPI hate is not only a result of COVID-19 scapegoating, but is linked to wider shifts in xenophobia, political polarization and shifting narratives embedded in national conversations. The hate crime data analyzed here are one metric that can help identify these broader shifts and help direct more serious and comprehensive interventions in the areas of racial justice and race relations.

Scholarly research has revealed many causes and conditions for the rise of hate crimes and racial animosity. The recommendations below are based on our current knowledge of the causes and precedents for hate crimes as well as hate crime data analyzed in this study.

1. **Form a statewide network of local government Human Relation Commissions (HRCs) and community organizations to examine hate crime data and build an anti-hate infrastructure.**
2. **Form a commission in collaboration with state and local governments to address the overall rise in hate crimes spurred during the pandemic that affects AAPIs along with all groups.** This includes addressing the public culture of hate speech, particularly among political leaders who should be held more accountable for words and actions that have helped to fuel racial and social hostilities as well as hateful acts.
3. **Support a set of comprehensive studies on hate crimes in different cities or regions for the purpose of identifying actions that could have been taken to prevent those incidents from taking place.** This includes identifying patterns in the personal histories, social and economic environments, organizational affiliations, motives, weapons access, news and information sources, and other characteristics of those perpetrating hate crimes as well as catalyzing events surrounding the incidents.
4. **Educate the broad public about Asian American and Pacific Islander history and contemporary issues to humanize the diverse experiences of AAPIs and address negative and discriminatory attitudes.** Require Asian American histories to be included in ethnic studies graduation requirements to increase cross-racial empathy and understanding.

- 5. Develop mental health programs, counseling services, and reconciliation programs that specifically address racist attitudes and ideologies as well as strengthen community-based resources and education that can increase safety, especially in public places.**

This includes programs such as bystander and mediation training.

- 6. Explore alternative consequences for low-level hate crime offenders that show promise in changing biased attitudes and behaviors.** Currently, consequences for misdemeanor offenses are rare. Changing attitudes is an important step to preventing offenders from passing along hateful sentiments or graduating to more serious hate crimes.
- 7. Allocate resources to reverse the underreporting of hate incidents and hate crimes.** This includes identifying underreporting jurisdictions, developing strategies to increase reporting, providing additional mechanisms of reporting that do not require people to go to law enforcement, increasing funding for government and community-based reporting sites, and improving data sharing among nonprofit and government agencies.
- 8. Utilize longitudinal data and tools such as the data dashboard** to deepen and broaden public understanding about the causes, consequences, and prevention of racially motivated and other types of hate crimes.

NOTES

1. We use “racially motivated hate crime” to describe all hate crimes motivated by race, ethnicity, or nationality.
2. Data from 2012 includes the most recent low points for all reported hate crimes and racially motivated hate crimes in the last two decades.
3. U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Human Services. *Raising Awareness of Hate Crimes and Hate Incidents During the Pandemic*. 2022.

ABOUT THE DATA DASHBOARD

The data dashboard, created as a partnership between the UCLA Institute of American Cultures, UCLA Asian American Studies Center and Los Angeles County Commission of Human Relations, is intended to help researchers, students and the general public visualize almost two decades of hate crime data reported for Los Angeles County. We present multi-year data, which opens doors to understanding trends over time. Data are provided by law enforcement agencies, schools and universities, and several community organizations and compiled by the Los Angeles County Commission of Human Relations, who publishes annual reports on their website. On the dashboard, we limit data to reported hate crimes based on motivation, targeted groups, offense type, location, victim gender identity and victim race. Additional information was collected and can be explored further in LACCHR annual reports.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Maggie Seay is a graduate student in the Urban Planning department at UCLA's Luskin School of Public Affairs. She is interested in understanding how history and policy get embedded in our built and natural environments and the consequences of those connections on communities, climate, and culture. Maggie is GSR in the Asian American Studies Center at UCLA analyzing hate crime data in LA County. She is also a Fellow at the Luskin Center for History and Policy researching the commemorative naming practices of LA streets and worked as a summer intern at the Governor's Office of Planning and Research researching potential land-use mechanisms to prevent sprawl in rural California. Before graduate school, Maggie worked at a tech firm, a science festival, and a non-profit researching Huntington's disease. She holds an undergraduate degree in neuroscience from Colorado College.

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