

# Longitudinal Trends of Hate Crimes Targeting Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders

in Los Angeles County, 2012–2020

**ASIAN AMERICAN & PACIFIC ISLANDER POLICY INITIATIVE**

The country witnessed a surge in hate targeting Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) following the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. This policy brief focuses on racially motivated hate crimes<sup>1</sup> and presents a longitudinal portrait of data collected by the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations (LACCHR) from 2012 - 2020.

Anti-Asian hate rose 76% from 2019 to 2020 in LA County, with 44 reported crimes in 2020 compared with twenty-five the previous year.<sup>2</sup> This increase represents the largest number of anti-Asian hate crimes committed in a single year since 2001. Despite the sharp increase in the number of victims of anti-Asian hate crime 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, with an estimated 42% of violent hate crimes not reported to police.<sup>3</sup> In addition to reported hate crimes, 1,700 reports of hate incidents were reported to the Los Angeles 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.

## Key Findings

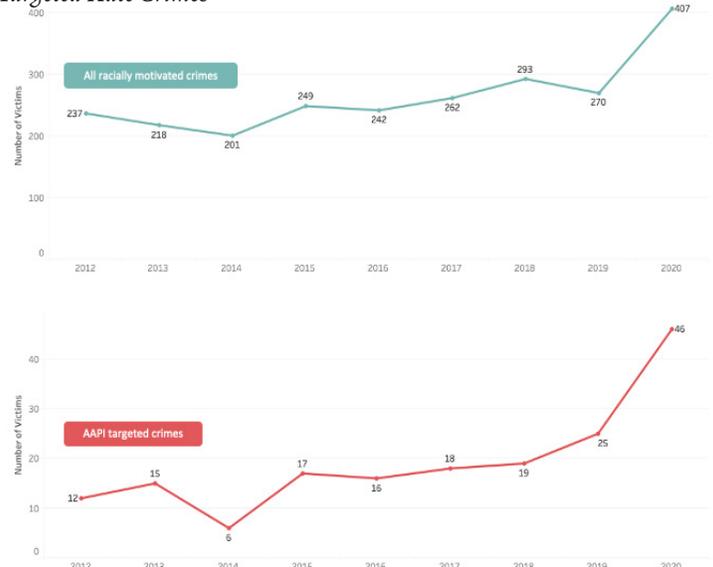
1. Federal, State and LA County all show a sharp rise in reported AAPI-targeted hate crime in 2020 (Figure 1). The rise in LA County anti-Asian crimes in 2020 mirrors trends in data from the California Department of Justice and the FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program.
2. All racially motivated hate crimes and AAPI-targeted crimes saw dramatic increases in 2020 following the COVID-19 pandemic, however upward trends began years earlier (Figure 2). From 2012 to 2020, the number of victims of all racially

Figure 1: AAPI-Targeted Hate Crimes: Federal, California 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

Figure 2: Victims of Racially Motivated Hate Crimes vs. AAPI-Targeted Hate Crimes



Source: Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations

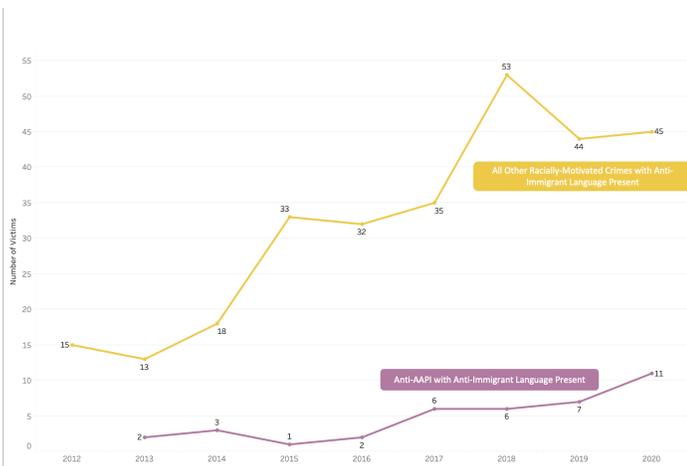
motivated crimes rose 72%. In the same timeframe, there was a staggering 283% increase in the number AAPI-targeted hate crime victims.

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.** 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 pattern of underreporting.

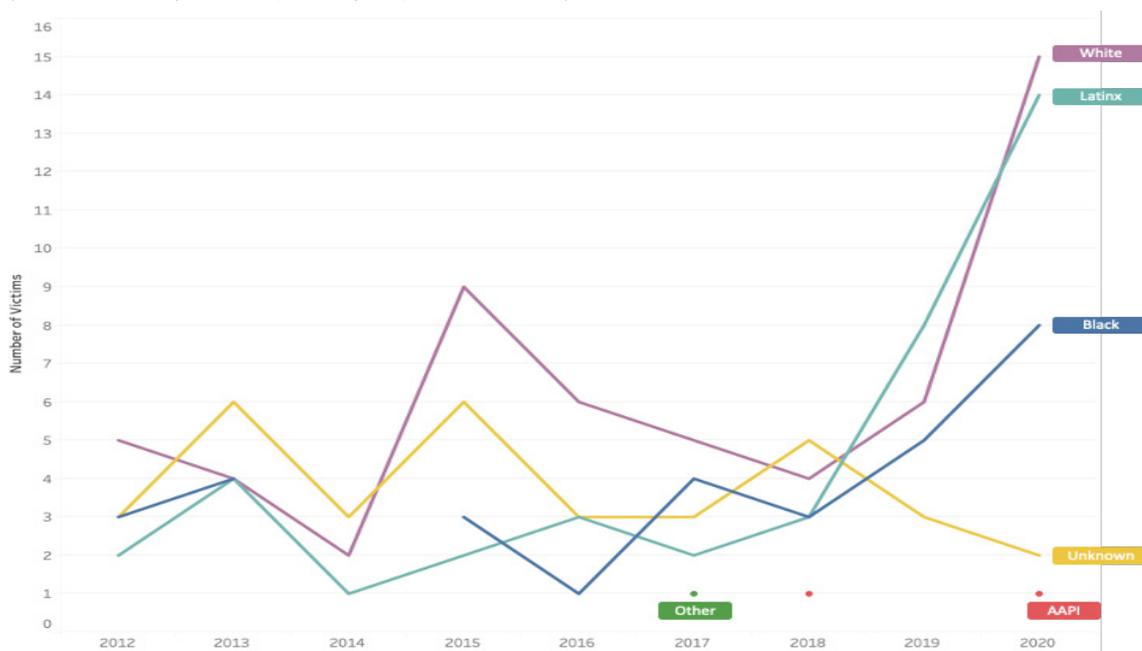
4. **The upward trend in anti-Asian hate crimes is heavily fueled by a concurrent rise in anti-immigrant hate crimes (Figure 3).** About half of anti-Asian hate crimes in 2017 and 2018 included explicit anti-immigrant language and roughly one-third of victims experienced anti-immigrant language in 2019. In 2020, anti-immigrant hate within API-targeted hate crimes continued to increase.
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 (Figure 4). 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.
6. **The proportion of crimes taking place in public places has increased substantially in both 2019 (pre-covid) and 2020 in comparison to other locations.** In 2019 and 2020, nearly half of all victims were targeted in public places. This rise in

Figure 3: Anti-AAPI Crimes vs. All Other Racially Motivated Hate Crimes with Anti-Immigrant Motivations Present



Source: Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations

Figure 4: Number of Victims by Race of Suspect in AAPI-Targeted Crimes



Source: Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations

public places as the location of victimization was similar for White and Latinx targeted hate crimes.

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

## Discussion

The rise in AAPJ hate and in racial violence more broadly emerge as two concerning trends from our analysis and may signal a looming crisis of racial animus and division. A rise in anti-immigrant or xenophobic hate crimes began as early as 2012 in LA County and ticked upward again in 2015. This preexisting trend set the stage for the surge of violence, xenophobic scapegoating, and divisive political narratives propagated by deliberate language used by political leaders leading up to and exacerbated during the Trump presidency. In 2019, crimes targeting Asians and Pacific Islanders increased 32% and in 2020, crimes targeting Asians and Pacific Islanders increased 76%, resulting in back-to-back years each with the largest number of anti-Asian hate crimes ever reported across the previous decade.

Factors contributing to the increase in race-motivated hate crimes may 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; an inadequate social safety net and mental health infrastructure to address social hardships and 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 53 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, “the biggest surprise that emerged... was that the rise in anti-Asian hate crime in 2020 was exceeded by skyrocketing racial hate crimes targeting African Americans, Latino/as, and whites.”

## Recommendations

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 is affecting AAPJ's 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 and hateful acts.



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. This includes studying patterns in the personal histories, social and economic environments, organizational affiliations, motives, weapons access, news and information sources, and other characteristics as well as catalyzing events surrounding the incidents.
4. **Educate the broad public, especially K-12 and college students, about Asian American 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 of the sources of social division.
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. This includes programs such as bystander and mediation training.
6. **Explore alternative consequences for low-level hate crime offenders who 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 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.

## Endnotes

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.*



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