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A Typology of Local and State Government Responses to Racism:

A Case of Anti-Asian Hate in the COVID-19 Pandemic

Abstract

We examine local and state government responses to anti-Asian hate during the initial months of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in the United States. Formal state and municipal government statements and websites were examined for 50 states and 104 of the largest municipalities using critical discourse analysis and racial formation theory to understand how government agencies racialized Asian Americans and reacted to their responsibility to address racism. We develop a typology of racist, race-neutral, and anti-racism to categorize the responses. Government statements are important for planners because they affect resident safety and willingness to report hate crimes.

Keywords: COVID-19, race/ethnicity, Asian Americans, discrimination, racism

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A Typology of Local and State Government Responses to Racism: A Case of Anti-Asian Hate in the COVID-19 Pandemic

Introduction

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) significantly affected public health concerns for individuals and local and state governments. Simultaneously, while hate crimes overall dropped by 7% in 2020, anti-Asian discrimination and hate crimes rose by nearly 150% in the 16 largest U.S. cities with scant action from the federal government (Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism [CSHE] 2021).[1] While local jurisdictions rapidly issued broad public health statements and guidance on public facilities, little is known about local and state government responses to anti-Asian hate in the U.S.[2]

Here, we analyze whether local and state governments responded to anti-Asian incidents in all 50 states and 104 largest cities through press releases, flyers, press conferences, governmental websites, and other related textual documents within the first five months of the COVID-19 pandemic (between January 21 and May 1, 2020). Government press releases are also important for planning because they generate increased media coverage of a topic (Cho and Yoon 2017) and positive perception of government officials (Hong 2016). As Ahmed (2012) describes, institutions respond to public racist acts by blaming it on abnormal beliefs rather than identifying embedded practices and attitudes that perpetuate systemic racism within the

[1] This study does not group Asian Americans with Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders for key reasons. First, Pacific Islanders comprise less than 1% of respondents who reported a hate crime or incident (Yellow Horse et al. 2021). Also, the Office of Management and Budget recognized Pacific Islanders as a distinct category in 1997, which later affected Department of Health and Human Services's data collection to disaggregate Pacific Islanders from Asian Americans. Pacific Islanders and Pacific Islander-serving organizations oftentimes distinguish themselves from Asian Americans given the significant difference in colonization, migration history, and socioeconomic outcomes that mask community differences. For example, see Sadhwani & Kulkarni (2021) about Asian American and Pacific Islander COVID-19 community responses and differences in health outcomes.

[2] While this study focuses on anti-Asian incidents in the U.S., anti-Asian racism is prevalent in other countries including Canada (Baylon and Cecco 2021), Australia (Lee et al. 2021), and the United Kingdom (Khan 2021).

institution. Existing literature similarly suggests that planners inadvertently perpetuate racialized policies whether they discuss race and racism (Goetz et al. 2020; Solis 2020; Williams 2020). Planners contend with and shape local and state policies that racialize groups, even if planning departments may not issue these press releases of statements.

For our analysis, we evaluate how state and local governments represent and/or respond to Asian Americans through Omi and Winant's (1986, 2015) foundational racial formation theory, which describes how social structures and institutions classify groups as racial categories to allocate resources.[3] We examine the significance of how governments invoke race and whether and how these jurisdictions understand their role in preventing or perpetuating systemic racism. Applying this lens to local and state government can illuminate how planners may choose to invest resources and in the safety of non-white communities and residents.

Anti-Asian Hate in the Pandemic

Asian Americans have experienced an increase in harassment, threats, hate crimes, and civil rights violations since the first identified COVID-19 case in January 2020. Given the scant information about this urgent and important issue in planning journals, the following details the magnitude and examples of these anti-Asian incidents using community reports and media sources. These groups tracked more than 100 daily reported hate crimes (Kelley 2020; Margolin 2020; Tavernise and Oppel, Jr 2020). In contrast, there are few coordinated governmental responses to address the issue.

[3] While racial formation theory is more than thirty years old, its more than 16,000 citations of the third edition prove its continued relevance in understanding race in the United States. This theory has been integrated in other disciplines including law, history, geography, sociology, literature, anthropology, gender studies, and ethnic studies (for example HoSang et al. 2012).

According to Stop AAPI Hate, 9,081 reported cases were collected between March 19, 2020 and June 30, 2021—50% of these reports occurred in 2020 (Yellow Horse et al. 2021). Most reported incidents (64%) involve verbal harassment, with racial slurs and profanity. Cases include vandalism of Asian-owned businesses and/or Asian neighborhoods, claiming that Chinese restaurants or individuals are spreading the virus and contributing to prostitution or dirt (Buscher 2020; Cruz 2020). About 13% were physical assaults, such as when a perpetrator poured acid on a woman taking out her trash (AsAm News 2020); an offender stabbed a family with two young children (Johnson 2020); and two men set an 89-year-old woman on fire (ABCNews 2020b). Others reported discrimination at work, health care facilities, and on public transportation (Anti-Defamation League [ADL] 2020; Yellow Horse al. 2021). Most victims identified as female (63%) and were of varying age groups (Yellow Horse et al. 2021).[4] Nearly 40% of reports occurred in California but were also reported from other states such as Washington, Texas, Illinois, Massachusetts, or Pennsylvania (Yellow Horse et al. 2021).

Perpetrators assumed victims were from China and had blamed them for COVID-19 or presumed they had the virus. For instance, a light rail passenger yelled at another passenger about "Chinese people bringing diseases to the U.S." (Fowler 2020). In another instance, a suspect grabbed a woman by the hair and punched her while saying "You've got coronavirus, you Asian [expletive]" (ABCNews 2020c). Perpetrators attempted to clean an Asian person—a man sprayed an Asian passenger on the subway with Febreze (ABCNews 2020a) while another offender chased an elderly woman with Purell (Samson 2020). Additionally, Asian Americans were accused or presumed to eat an assortment of animal meats through online messages about

[4] After a wave of physical assaults on Asian seniors, Asian American organizations led community-based responses such as bystander intervention trainings to decrease reliance on carceral institutions that affect communities of color (Hollaback! 2021; O'Dowd and McMahon 2021).

dog meat, mice, or bat soup, while other businesses were vandalized with images of bats (ADL 2020; Yellow Horse et al. 2021). Other cases included "Go back to China" painted on a restaurant owner's car and two women who attacked a jogger, threw a log at him, spat on him, and told him to "go back to China" (ADL 2020). Of reported incidents to Stop AAPI Hate, 44% of victims were Chinese, 17% Korean, 9% Filipinx, 9% Japanese, 8% Vietnamese, and 6% Taiwanese (Yellow Horse et al. 2021).

The uptick in anti-Asian incidents do not align with officially investigated cases. In April 2020, police departments in Denver and Washington, D.C. were each investigating one case while New York City was investigating 11 incidents (Campbell and Ellerbeck 2020). This discrepancy between official responses compared to community and media reports was alarming given the severity of these cases.

COVID-related discrimination is also important to prevent because it extends to other racialized groups. In a national survey, about 31% of Asian Americans reported they were subjected to slurs or jokes due to their racial/ethnic background, followed by 21% of Blacks and 15% of Latinx (Ruiz et al. 2020). Also, 42% of Blacks and 36% of Asian Americans were concerned about people reacting negatively towards them if they wore a mask (Ruiz et al. 2020; see also Taylor 2020).

Government Responses to Anti-Asian Incidents

In the previous section, we summarize anti-Asian incidents. Here, we outline governmental responses to these incidents on the federal level that were instigated by xenophobic rhetoric. President Trump used the word "Chinese virus" more than 20 times between March 16 to 30, 2020, when more than 100 hate crimes were collected by the Stop AAPI Hate website (Yellow Horse et al. 2021; Viala-Gaudefroy and Lindaman 2020). There

were no reports of hate crimes on March 23—the day that Trump avoided racially charged terms (CSHE 2021; Sherman 2021). While the Trump Administration fomented xenophobia, the CDC and other agencies took few actions in 2020. In July 2020, more than 150 Congress members called on the Department of Justice to condemn COVID-related hate crimes and provide steps to address these impacts--this letter was supported by civil rights and/or Asian American-serving organizations (Congress of the United States 2020; Yam 2020). While two district attorney offices issued a press release about COVID-related discrimination, they do not mention anti-Asian hate nor steps beyond the minimum of submitting incident reports (U.S. Attorney's Office Central District of California 2020; U.S. Attorney's Office Southern District of Indiana 2020).

This federal response was inadequate given institutional precedence with the 2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Within the first week of confirmed SARS U.S. cases, the CDC created a Community Outreach Team to document, monitor, and address associated discrimination and stigma (Campbell and Ellerbeck 2020; Person et al. 2004). In the first month, the CDC team met with key Asian American leaders, conducted media interviews, and visited Asian neighborhoods (Person et al. 2004). The CDC operated a hotline to answer questions about SARS, as well as to collect data on fears and potential reports of discrimination. This team analyzed more than 4,000 calls about discrimination or hate crimes and met with more than 500 Asian American members in seven cities (Campbell and Ellerbeck 2020; Person et al. 2004). They developed recommendations around preventing stigma during public health crises: (1) disseminate simple prevention messages, (2) develop in-language materials, (3) share information through community- and culturally-based methods, and (4) partner with Asian organizations (Person et al. 2004).

In 2021, the Biden Administration enacted some changes. A memorandum was issued within the first few days on anti-Asian hate (The White House 2021b). However, Asian American leaders criticized it for lacking steps to prevent xenophobia (Summers 2021). The Biden Administration later announced on March 30, 2021 that it would reestablish the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, fund work to prevent domestic violence and sexual assault, create a COVID-19 Equity Task Force, and translate hate crime information into multiple languages (The White House 2021a).[5]

Theoretical Framework

Planners are part of public institutions that define and reinforce racial categories. Omi and Winant (2015) posited *racial formation*, or "the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed" (109). *Racial formation* is the "summation of signifying actions and social structures, past and present, that have combined and clashed in the creation of the enormous complex of relationships and identities that is labeled race" (Omi and Winant 2015, 13). The racial formation process supports the establishment of a *racial regime* that justify the social ordering of a dominant and subordinate group. For example, the U.S. racial regime structured laws, policies, and prioritized rights of white citizens and to limit non-whites from voting, land ownership, and equal protections (Omi and Winant 2015). *Racial projects* link structure and meaning to either corroborate or resist the racial regime or racial formation. These racial projects subsequently impact group *racialization*, in which racial

[5] The COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act was later passed in May 2021. More than 100 organizations—including Asian American -serving groups—opposed this bill because it relies on law enforcement to intervene. These groups argued that law enforcement does not address the root causes of anti-Asian violence and structural violence against all marginalized groups. (See the signed statement at http://reappropriate.co/2021/05/75-asian-and-lgbtq-organizations-statement-in-opposition-to-law-enforcement-based-hate-crime-legislation).

meaning is extended "to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group" (Omi and Winant 2015, 13).

This framework has been used to understand the racialization of Asian Americans in other fields, such as Communication Studies and Higher Education. For instance, Mudambi's (2019) study explored racial formation in South Asians and the model minority myth in South Asian blog posts responding to a *Time Magazine* column. Racial formation has also been implemented to examine Twitter hashtags and Asian American activism (Cho 2020). Dizon (2011) and Lee (2010) also examined how Asian American students pushed for racialization that counter the model minority myth in the University of California system and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, respectively.

Emerging studies in planning illustrate racial formation theory's relevance to the field. Klosterwill et al. (2020) frame urban renewal through the lens of a racial project. They describe how racialized meanings were connected to the built environment and equated whiteness with health versus Blackness with blight, justifying the resulting structural neglect and extraction from Black communities in Charlottesville, Virginia. Solis (2020) also describes how planning departments and jurisdictions are key institutions that create, attribute, or represent racial categories and are themselves racialized organizations. Accordingly, they prescribe racialized meanings to non-whites, which results in the perpetuation of planning practices and policies that serve white, affluent residents in how they organize social, political, and economic resources. This framework informs how individual acts are not discrete but reflect and/or respond to societal racial formations. Similarly, the way that jurisdictions handle COVID-related discrimination and hate crimes in this study affects how they understand their role in reinforcing or disrupting systemic racism.

Research Design and Analysis

This study seeks to understand and develop a typology of racialized responses to anti-Asian incidents. We analyzed all 50 state governments and the core cities within the 104 largest metropolitan areas with more than 500,000 residents as defined by the 2010 Census; the latter was chosen because these regions cover most of the population. Statements issued between January 21 and May 1, 2020 were collected and analyzed between April and June 2020. The unit of analysis was press releases, press conferences, government websites, and other related textual documents such as flyers. These documents are vetted official communication materials and thereby represent the government's stance on an issue, which shapes other agencies' actions. Four people coded all excerpts, and two coders reviewed each excerpt for intercoder reliability.

Using racial formation theory, we conducted a critical discourse analysis (CDA) because this approach allows researchers to systematically categorize and summarize textual information by themes (Krippendorff 2018). Government discourse is key to understanding how institutions, race, and inequity affect broader social relations of resistance or dominance. For example, previous studies have used CDA to examine municipal or government language and their role in policymaking and race (Fairclough 2000; Poon and Segoshi 2018).

We collected documents through internet searches of government websites, press releases, and associated texts such as flyers, frequently asked question forums, city council or mayoral emergency proclamations, press conferences, and public health department reports. These documents were issued by various public agencies, such as the primary municipal department, county or state public health departments, mayoral offices, city councilmembers, human rights commission, and other related agencies.

Jurisdictions varied in their COVID-19 responses. Some jurisdictions issued statements daily while others posted one time or reposted state agency documents. Often, information relevant to this study was found in the frequently asked questions websites or at the end of statements. Jurisdictions with relevant statements to the key terms or COVID-related discrimination on average issued one or two documents. Statements that did not mention discrimination focused on public building closures and/or COVID-19 case counts.

The analysis included stages 1 through 3 of Chouliaraki and Fairclough's (1999) CDA process to systematically understand how discourse connects a social process. First, we examined the relationship between the textual materials and the problem of anti-Asian discrimination. Using racial formation theory, we examined how governments describe anti-Asian incidents and their role in addressing racism or racialize Asian Americans. Second, we systematically analyzed the text through a descriptive coding process of strings of text and phrases related to COVID. Then, we conducted a second round for deeper analysis of text related to our research question by searching for key words including "Asian," "China," "Chinese," "discrimination," "stigma," and "racism."

The initial two rounds of CDA allowed us to organize documents into thematic codes related to governmental response ("racist," "race-neutral," and "anti-racist") and racialization of Asian Americans as subthemes ("origin story," "animal markets"). *Racist* statements would use similar name calling as the federal level that may attribute or blame Asians or China for the pandemic. These statements align with Omi and Winant's (2015) description of racial despotism, in which race is embedded through institutions to exclude, deny rights, and/or dispossess non-whites. *Race-neutral* aligns with the concept of color-evasiveness or color-blindness, in which

racial disparities are explained as the outcome of a nonracial explanation (Bonilla-Silva 2017).[6] *Anti-racist* statements seek to end or reduce institutionalized racism (Omi and Winant 2015). Given that CDA seeks to address power relations, excerpts in the three categories were coded to build subthemes and assess government reactions and/or the degree they sought to address anti-Asian hate and discrimination.

We sought to establish trustworthiness in our analytical approach by acknowledging our positionality while analyzing the data. The four coders had different identities (1 Asian American, 2 Latinx, and 1 Middle Eastern) but with similar disciplinary orientations. We self-reflected during the analytical process by acknowledging our biases in wanting governments to address systemic racism. Given the diversity of coders' racial backgrounds, our biases and understanding of Asian Americans or connections to anti-Asian hate crimes differed. To identify disconfirming or contradictory evidence, we gathered a diversity of sources (as previously described) to assess government responses to these hate crimes.

Findings

Overview of Government Statement Typology

All jurisdictions had at least one website or statement about COVID-19 that typically shared information about public facilities or public health information (e.g., social distancing, washing hands, or travel restrictions). Here, 85 of the 154 jurisdictions translated materials in one or more Asian languages on their website. However, nearly half of the 154 jurisdictions did not issue a statement or website that related to anti-Asian incidents or Asian Americans.

[6] Studies use "color-blind" in similar ways as "race-neutral." However, color evasiveness challenges the ableist assumption that conflates sight with knowledge or that blindness equates to ignorance (Annamma et al. 2017). Color-evasiveness also encapsulates evidence that racism is perpetuated beyond sight, such as through text, speech, or audio (Annamma et al. 2017; Obasogie 2010).

Table 1 summarizes the number of jurisdictions that issued related text about anti-Asian incidents or Asian Americans by local and state government. A slight majority of jurisdictions issued a response to COVID-19 discrimination or racialized the pandemic (53%) versus those that did not respond to COVID-related discrimination (47%). A slight majority of states (56%) issued racialized responses compared to half of local jurisdictions.

Table 1. Typology of Government Responses by Number of Jurisdictions and Themes

Category	Themes	All	%	States	%	Local Jurisdictions	%
Jurisdictions							
Racialized Response		80	53%	28	56%	52	50%
No Mention		74	47%	22	44%	52	50%
Total		*154*		*50*		*104*	
Racialized Response Statements							
Racist	Blaming China, Xenophobia	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Race-Neutral	Origin Story without Context	33	26%	6	14%	27	33%
	Animal Markets	14	11%	4	9%	10	12%
	Racism as Amoral	17	14%	7	16%	10	12%
	CDC Language/Protected Classes	22	18%	12	28%	10	12%
Anti-Racist	Contextualized Origin Story	10	8%	2	5%	8	10%
	Individual Racism	36	29%	17	40%	19	23%
	Government Role in Racism	1	1%	1	2%	0	0%
Total		*125*		*43*		*82*	

Table 1 also summarizes the number of statements by level of government and themes. Zero jurisdictions issued an explicitly racist statement.[7] It was expected that most governments

[7] There was one jurisdiction that referred to COVID-19 as the Wuhan Virus on January 27, 2020 for the virus name: "While Wuhan coronavirus is a new respiratory virus, ways to prevent respiratory illness are the same." However, the jurisdiction has since adopted "COVID-19" as the term and has taken down the statement; accordingly, this statement was not categorized as racist.

did not issue overt racist language, as Omi and Winant (2015) describe the rise of the color-evasiveness racial project after the 1980s. Race-neutral language dismisses the importance of race and suggests that it is possible to not account for race after the Civil Rights Movement, even though communities of color are experiencing the disparate effects of race during the pandemic.

Race-neutral statements mentioned geography and/or discrimination but did not directly connect these incidents to Asian Americans. We identified four subcategories: (1) the origin story tied to geography, (2) the origin story associated with animal markets, (3) racism as a moral issue, and (4) language around protected classes. The origin stories did not acknowledge discrimination incidents while the latter two subcategories attempt to respond to discrimination or hate crimes, though passively. Jurisdictions issued statements that focus on interpersonal racist actions as immoral (Bonilla-Silva 2017; Ahmed 2012). Language around protected classes sought to remind residents about anti-discrimination laws. More than a third of state and local jurisdictions referenced the origin story and/or animal markets (37%), while a third reference race as a moral issue or protected classes (see Table 1).

Anti-racist statements explicitly identified Asian American racial disparities in hate crimes and discrimination with three subcategories: (1) the origin story with context, (2) individual racism towards Asian Americans, and (3) accepting the government's role to help address racism. The last category was the most proactive and acknowledges the connection between individual racism to broader historical patterns and government actions. Ten jurisdictions used the contextualized origins story, and eight were from local jurisdictions (see Table 1). About 29% of jurisdictions mentioned individual racism, or 40% of states and 23% of local jurisdictions. One jurisdiction extended individual actions to government actions and is described in detail under the "Anti-Racism on the Individual and Government Scale" section.

Some agencies issued statements that included more than one theme, and the percentages among racialized responses sum to more than 100%. Twenty-two jurisdictions issued statements with multiple themes. The most common combination was the contextualized origin story with individual racism (n = 5) followed by CDC language and individual racism (n = 4). Also, jurisdictions may have issued two statements, where one specifically addressed individual racism and the second one mentioned the origin of COVID. A rare example of a statement covering race-neutral and anti-racist messages included one state health department that identified increased "violence, bullying, and harassment directed toward people of Asian descent" and several suggestions to stop this individual-level of racism, including "model inclusion and compassion" by "avoiding making negative statements about any racial, ethnic, or religious group. Reach out to your neighbors and colleagues who might feel at risk because of their ethnicity, religion, or other traits." The following details the subcategories with direct quotations as illustrative examples. We do not include the local or state jurisdiction names for race-neutral statements because we do not aim to call out specific governments. Instead, we use the examples to illustrate trends in government agency responses.

Race-Neutral Language

Decontextualized Origin Story

A common narrative was to describe the geographic origins of COVID. For instance, a state issued a statement describing the virus: "This new respiratory virus was first identified in the city of Wuhan in China's Hubei Province and continues to infect people in China and around the world, including the United States." Another state's department of health described COVID-19 as "a virus identified as the cause of an outbreak of respiratory illness first detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China in 2019 and has since spread globally into a pandemic." Other

statements described the first cases of travelers to their jurisdiction from China, such as one city: "The first human-to-human transmission of the 2019-nCov in the US is the sixth case, who is the spouse of a case associated with travel to Wuhan, China."

These statements were categorized as race neutral because they do not identify disproportionate racial impacts of COVID-19 discrimination or hate. This practice of mentioning geography without a disclaimer is also socially irresponsible given the significant number and severity of anti-Asian incidents and because this practice can perpetuate stigma (World Health Organization 2020). The CDC (2020) provides clear guidance on explaining how no group or person is more likely to spread COVID-19 than another, and names specific racial/ethnic groups that may experience more racism including Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, or Blacks.

Another version of the origin story describes animal markets. For example, one county issued the following statement on a website about the source of the virus:

> The exact source is not yet known; public health officials across the world are working to identify the source of the COVID-19 virus… Early on, many of the patients in the outbreak in Wuhan reportedly had some link to a large seafood and animal market, suggesting the virus likely emerged from an animal source.

While the jurisdiction states that the source is unknown, they still posted information about a seafood and animal market. Another city's health department posted similar information: "This virus was first detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. The first infections were linked to a live animal market, but the virus is now spreading from person-to-person."

As with the geographic origin story, the information about animal markets could be perceived to be disseminating innocuous information. Yet, this framework is problematic for a couple of reasons. First, scientists ruled out the possibility that the virus came from an animal

market in Wuhan (Areddy 2020). Second, there are pervasive stereotypes about Chinese and other Asian groups consuming "exotic" animals for food and are then diseased and/or their neighborhoods are epicenters for disease. Early Chinatowns in the United States were conflated with "abnormalities" and associated with cholera, smallpox, and syphilis (Shah 2001). These misconceptions justified historic exclusionary policies, limited public services, enforced Chinese segregation, and/or the eventual removal of Chinatowns. As previously described, anti-Asian incidents in 2020 and 2021 also associate Asian Americans and/or Asian American-owned businesses to a variety of animals. These statements are insufficient because they are not stating these socially prevalent stereotypes and/or are not outright dismissing them.

Focus on Individual Racist Actions

The following two subcategories – race as morality and protected classes – emphasize interpersonal racism and impacts of discrimination or stigma. Both themes often used language suggested by the CDC and acknowledge that stigma exists. One governor urged residents to "fight stigma and help, not hurt, others by providing social support…Communicating the facts that viruses do not target specific racial or ethnic groups and how COVID-19 actually spreads can help stop stigma." A city health department included this message on their website: "Speak up if you hear, see or read misinformation or harassment. Gently correct false information and remind the speaker that prejudiced language and actions make us all less safe." This statement suggests that residents be proactive and prosocial to create a safer environment for everyone. A state health and human services department similarly called for greater compassion:

> While some people may be worried or have concerns about COVID-19, it is important to not let fear lead to social stigma... Treat all people with compassion and speak up if you hear others making statements that cause stigma against people in your community.

This statement goes beyond the previous examples by explaining why some residents may act negatively towards another. Another city agency stated, "Let's come together with compassion and unity during this stressful time. It's good for your health."

Other jurisdictions were more insistent in the moral reasons related to stigma or discrimination. A state governor issued a press release entitled "History will remember our reaction to coronavirus, so let's be there for each other." This governor tied current behavior to residents' legacies in the future. He continued with the following:

> Let's be mindful of our neighbors and thoughtful of our actions... Keep doing your part – listen to our public health experts about what to do and, most of all, "love thy neighbor." History will remember how we dealt with coronavirus. Let's make sure future generations use it as a model for calm and compassion in a time of uncertainty.

He references "love thy neighbor" and how their actions will influence how their children and other generations will remember their actions. These examples focus on individual actions that can perpetuate or halt COVID-related stigma without reference broader trends that disproportionately affect Asian Americans. Also, information about jurisdiction actions to protect Asian Americans is missing.

Other jurisdictions invoked language around protected classes, tying stigma and discrimination to governmental protections. A state's civil rights division described how "COVID-19 does not discriminate. The virus infects people regardless of their race, national origin, religion, or other protected characteristics." A city department similarly stated:

> A person's risk for COVID-19 is not related to race, ethnicity or culture. City employees must abide by the Discrimination and Harassment policy, and treat colleagues and

> members of the public with courtesy and respect. Discrimination and/or Harassment of any kind is a violation of the policies and will not be tolerated.

A city's civil rights commission acknowledged the connection between COVID-19 and discrimination before disseminating information on how to report these incidents:

> During this challenging period of COVID-19 and economic and social disruption the virus has caused in our communities, concerns regarding potentially discriminatory practices or actions remain. If you feel as though you have been discriminated against based on any of the above criteria, you can file a complaint of discrimination with the Commission.

These messages focus on individual reporting and are a low level of government response because the burden is on the victim to report incidents.

Race-neutral themes do not explicitly name Asian Americans and their racialization in the U.S. These themes also focus on individual-level racism, which is important for planners to understand. However, this approach is insufficient—anti-Asian racism is not limited to isolated incidents, and individual racism reflects systemic racism. Though "race-neutral" highlights the absence of describing race, these jurisdictions' silence or absence in naming Asian Americans is also unintentionally contributing to broader inaction and silence on anti-Asian hate.

Anti-Racist Rhetoric

A Contextualized Origin Story

Some jurisdictions contextualized the geographic origin information by debunking the myth that Chinese or Asian Americans are more susceptible to spread or contract COVID. We categorized these examples as anti-racist because they are acknowledging disparate impacts and are taking a stand for Asian American residents and businesses. One city made this distinction:

"Although coronavirus originated geographically in Wuhan, China, the disease is not specific to any ethnic group. Chinese ancestry – or any other ancestry – does not make a person more vulnerable to this illness." A county department of health posted a similar message:

> Unfortunately, stories of discriminatory treatment of members of the Asian community have been reported in local media and online. It's important to remember that the risk to the general public in contracting novel coronavirus remains low. Although novel coronavirus originates in Wuhan, China, the disease is not specific to any ethnic group. China is an ethnically diverse country with thousands of people from around the world passing through its borders each day.

This county explicitly stated that anti-Asian incidents are occurring and explained complexities of national origin, or that individuals from China are also not monolithic. A state health department released a similar message:

> It is really important to understand that someone's nationality alone is not a risk factor for coronavirus. Unfortunately, fears of the virus are fueling anti-Chinese racism around the world and here at home in [state]. Staff who are receiving calls from the public are hearing many stories of fear and discrimination. Of course, when people aren't informed about an emerging health issue, there is a tendency to feel afraid. [Our] leading priorities center around health equity. With that in mind, it is important to be well informed in order to share accurate information and dispel myths that can be hurtful to the Asian community.

These narratives differ from simply providing information about the geography because they identify that misinformation about the origin can and has led to resident harm. Jurisdictions can

accordingly pair facts with preemptive messages that deter actions targeting a racialized population.

Anti-Racism on the Individual and Government Scale

These statements were more proactive because they did not shy away from naming anti-Asian racism, which is a step towards acknowledging Asian American resident concerns. For instance, a governor described how: "Anxiety, fear, and stress can lead to stigma or poor treatment toward others...this can include Asian Americans or people of other nationalities or ethnicities...Be wary of misdirecting fear at neighbors instead of at the disease itself." A local jurisdiction stated that the rise in "discrimination against people of Asian descent…is based on unfounded, untrue, and irrational fear and misinformation surrounding the novel coronavirus." Another state health department encouraged residents to stop xenophobic actions:

> The public health concern surrounding the spread of COVID-19 (coronavirus) has resulted in alarming hate crimes, discriminatory acts, bullying and stigmatization against Asian-Americans in towns and cities across the country. News outlets and social media have further perpetuated the stereotype that Asian-Americans are the carriers of this virus...As a community we must respond to xenophobia and bullying when we see it. We must educate ourselves, our children and our community members about racism, stereotypes, hate crimes and bullying arising out of fear.

The statement proceeds with tips on how to safely stop these incidents, such as supporting the victim and reporting the incident to various public agencies.

A few jurisdictions, including a city's Commission on Human Relations, listed examples of racism: Anti-Asian rhetoric, anti-Chinese social media posts, denial of services, harassment, vandalism, and physical assaults. Another state department of health added more violations:

> ...not providing transportation, barring entrance into a grocery store, refusing medical treatment, firing or suspending Asians and Asian Americans from work...refusing to allow Asian or Asian American students to participate in education to the same degree as their non-Asian peers, refusing to rent to Asians or Asian Americans.

A county district attorney focused on persecution of individual perpetrators who target Asian Americans: "If you are bigoted and hateful, if you are targeting people based on xenophobia or racism, you will be held accountable." These examples highlight a step towards acknowledging anti-Asian hate and illuminate the pervasiveness of individual racist actions in everyday life. While supportive of residents, these statements also distance government agencies from historical and contemporary examples of systemic racism embedded in their policies or practices (Ahmed 2012).

Anti-racist projects further seek to dismantle ways in which race is upheld and perpetuated on a systemic level (Omi and Winant 2015). The State of New York was unique in that it acknowledged broader structures of racism that affect government policies and actions. We name the jurisdiction to laud their efforts. The New York Attorney General (2020) released a statement detailing a new hotline to "combat coronavirus hate crimes and xenophobic rhetoric." This press release included quotations from State Senator John Liu, who tied contemporary hate crimes to historical stereotypes: "Long scapegoated and cast as 'yellow peril,' Asian-Americans are besieged on two fronts by the COVID-19 contagion, with outbreaks of ignorance and bigotry sometimes inflicting more harm than the virus itself." His remarks invoke Asian American racialization from the late 19th century and early 20th century, in which Asia and Asian laborers brought to the U.S. were perceived to be a threat to the sociopolitical domination of Europe and

the United States (Kawaii 2005). The statement includes another quotation from State Assembly Member Yuh-Line Niou:

> While we battle this crisis, it has become abundantly clear that the coronavirus does not discriminate based on race. Yet, people are using COVID-19 as an excuse to perpetuate racism and xenophobia throughout New York and the entire country. There have been so many reports of Asian Americans being attacked because they were just riding the subway or wearing a face mask. The attacks are hateful and go out of their way to blame our community.

The statement shows greater governmental responsibility to address or prevent anti-Asian incidents because it is paired with concrete government steps – a new hotline -- which remains one of the few exceptions to support Asian Americans among all local, state, and federal government bodies. This example also highlights the importance of diverse racial/ethnic representation among public figures, given that New York's Asian American elected officials are using their position to elevate issues affecting Asian Americans.

Conclusion and Implications

The findings show that jurisdictions primarily did not address anti-Asian violence (no response) or avoided the topic of race, leaving them to remain passive and/or do nothing to support, prevent, and/or protect residents who experience disparate violence and hate. For jurisdictions that focused on individual racist acts, they inadvertently hide or minimize systemic racism. Many statements were also issued once despite the longevity of these incidents. A singular press release is an inconsistent message that is easily missed by constituents. Planners should reflect on the importance of textual materials given that they are the primary vehicle of

communication with residents. Statements are the minimum that a public institution or planning department can do to address racism.

Planning practitioners and educators can draw from empirical studies on university statements to learn how to issue more effective statements. For example, Kides (2021) found that making a statement is better than no action when addressing sexual assault on campuses; yet these statements should be specific to the institution and avoid vague or indistinct language to help campus members feel understood and safe. Consequently, jurisdictions can improve statements by including specific language on what the agencies are doing to help Asian Americans; additionally, repeating CDC language and vague messages about discrimination without referencing Asian Americans may not help residents feel safe and acknowledged. Templeton et al.'s (2016) study found that diversity statements are ineffective when they are inconsistent with other university statements because this discrepancy reflects a missed opportunity to examine structural practices. Similarly, planners and public agencies can assess whether they are using consistent language across multiple formats and materials. Press releases would also be more impactful if planners and jurisdictions increased their collaboration with Asian American-serving organizations that can provide insight in how to best support local Asian American residents.

Future studies can build on these findings in several ways. It is beyond this study to assess if jurisdictions were more likely to issue statements where more incidents occurred. The Stop AAPI Hate data are proprietary to the organizations involved—thus, it is beyond this study to conduct a geographic analysis. Future studies can also assess if press releases were issued in relation to COVID-19 infection spread based on geography and timing. Our data included websites which did not have issue dates and are limited in assessing temporal changes. However,

our data were within the first few months of the COVID pandemic and highlight the initial reactions of state and municipal governments to these hate crimes. Additional comparisons with public responses to incidents affecting Black, Latinx, and Indigenous groups would help further understand government understanding of their role in systemic racism. Press releases are also independent of planners' and elected officials' actions to address anti-Asian racism. Finally, additional studies can further assess other ways that jurisdictions are working to address resident safety and perception of Asian Americans through proactive policy change.

Asian Americans and Asian American-serving organizations have advocated for governments to take a stand and recognize the increase of anti-Asian hate crimes and discrimination. For nearly two years, most government jurisdictions have done little to acknowledge, support, and/or protect Asian Americans and others from COVID-related discrimination. When government bodies are silent, other xenophobic messages become louder. Instead, planning must move beyond race-neutrality and value difference (Steil 2018; Steil and Delgado 2019) to then combat systemic racism in its practices.

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