

**COVID-19 and State Hate Crime Statutes: Exploring How News Media Coverage of  
Anti-Asian Bias Impacts State Legislative Activity**

Elizabeth Lee, June 2023

Department of Political Science, University of California, Irvine

Political Science 190: Senior Thesis

Faculty Advisor Professor Graeme Boushey

### **Acknowledgements**

I am deeply indebted to Professor Davin Phoenix for offering feedback and guidance throughout the research process and to Professor Graeme Boushey for being my faculty advisor and helping me refine my research questions and framework. Many thanks to Kai Ferragallo-Hawkins for support on data collection for anti-Asian hate-related and hate crime-focused legislation. I'd also like to recognize the moral support from my family and friends during the research process.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract and Introduction</b> .....	4
<b>Literature Review</b> .....	5
<b>Methodology</b> .....	11
<b>Results</b> .....	14
<b>Discussion</b> .....	23
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	28
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	30
<b>Appendix</b> .....	36

## Abstract

This thesis explores how national media coverage and framing of anti-Asian hate crimes impacted the rate of bill introduction and passage of hate crime laws in state legislatures over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to do so, I utilize content analysis of 4 flagship U.S. newspapers—New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, and Los Angeles Times—and of state legislation from 50 states focused on anti-Asian hate and hate crimes from January 2019 to December 2021. To test these hypotheses I employ event history analysis, evaluating how national and local salience of hate crime coverage impacts state lawmaking over time. I hypothesize that post-COVID-19 media coverage positively correlates with increased introduction of state anti-Asian hate-related legislation. While the correlation between anti-Asian hate-related coverage and anti-Asian hate-related bill introductions is not empirically significant, this thesis concludes that media coverage cues issue salience of anti-Asian hate to state legislators. The study also finds several interesting trends, one of which is the focusing role of the Atlanta Spa Shootings in increasing issue salience of anti-Asian hate and shifting coverage framing of anti-Asian hate incidents.

## Introduction

Thai American Vicha Ratanapakdee being violently shoved to the ground in San Francisco, California; a Cambodian family attacked with a knife in Midland, Texas; a Filipino mother and son verbally harassed then assaulted in Queens, New York; the Atlanta Spa Shootings with six victims of Asian descent in Cherokee County, Georgia. These are only a few of the many anti-Asian incidents covered in a variety of news media since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.

The trend of anti-Asian hate dramatically increased after the onset of the pandemic with the racialization of the COVID-19 virus (Gover et al. 2020). Federal officials' description, including then-President Donald Trump, of COVID-19 as a "Chinese virus" contributed to a dramatic rise in anti-Asian hateful content online (Kim and Kesari 2021), with anti-Asian violence surging after the public use of blaming language such as "kung flu" (Han et al. 2023). In 2020, Anti-Asian hate crimes surged by 149% in 16 of the United States' largest cities (Levin 2021). From March 19, 2020 to August 5, 2020 alone, Stop AAPI Hate, a national coalition group aimed at tracking hate incidents targeting Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, recorded 2,583 reports of anti-Asian attacks, shunning, and bullying (Stop AAPI Hate 2020).

Policy responses to these increases in anti-Asian hate crime have varied across different levels of government. In Congress, the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) urged fellow congressional members to avoid spreading misinformation by falsely racializing the virus with their constituents (CAPAC 2020). On May 20, 2021, President Joe Biden signed the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act, which aimed to make hate crime reporting resources more accessible and authorized grants for local and state hate crime reduction programs, into law

(Congress.gov 2023). Responses in contrast have differed state-by-state, with some states more rapidly responding with hate crime reporting hotlines, bulletins raising awareness of hate crimes to law enforcement officials across the state, and data collection systems for hate crime reports (Chiang 2020). In addition to variations in anti-Asian hate-specific state responses, broader hate crime statutes also differ drastically in forms and methods state-by-state (Grattet et al. 1998).

Considering the massive increase in news media coverage of anti-Asian discrimination and the differing policy responses from state legislators, this study focuses on two primary questions: (1) did news media coverage of anti-Asian hate over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic impact state legislative activity, and (2) if so, how did it impact state legislative activity? To answer these questions, this study records the frequency and codes the content of news media coverage of anti-Asian hate across four flagship news publications, as well as bill introductions related to anti-Asian hate across all 50 states. The paper will visually compare the frequencies of article publication and state bill introductions from January 2019 to December 2021.

The paper approaches the latter question in a more exploratory manner, expanding on emergent observations and providing more nuance on the relationship between media coverage and policy in the Results and Discussion sections. Topics related to the impacts of news coverage on legislative activity, such as the role of focusing events and issue framing, are further explored and discussed in these latter portions of the thesis.

## **Literature Review**

### **Media Effects and Public Policy**

#### *How agenda setting works*

Generally speaking, the agenda-setting effect of mass media informs the public which issues and events are significant and deserving of higher ranking in the public's agenda of policy problems (Dunaway & Graber 2023). Placement, breadth, and frequency of news media coverage all can indicate to individuals the significance of the policy issue or occurrence (Barabas and Jerit 2009), and members of the public tend to depend more on news coverage to determine issue importance if they lack personal experience with the subject matter (Druckman 2005). While it is an incredibly important media effect, the strength of agenda-setting is limited by personal preferences of readers, as individuals may instead draw upon personal experiences and beliefs to make their own conclusions about issue importance rankings (Graber 2004). Kosicki (1993) organizes the three theoretical sub-groups of agenda-setting scholarship: (1) public agenda-setting, which studies how mass media portrayal of issues influences public issue priorities; (2) policy-agenda setting, which focuses on media's effects on legislative issue agendas or entities dedicated to specific issues and their involvement with media content; and (3) media agenda-setting, which emphasizes how and why media selects, defines, and highlights certain issues.

Mass media influences public agenda-setting in that it impacts the salience of an issue in its coverage of political campaigns and thus sets the campaign's agenda (McCombs and Shaw 1972). Individuals are cognitively limited in the number of issues they can prioritize and consider when making political decisions, and various public platforms consisting of policy problem definition, framing, and discussion can only consider a handful of policy issues at a given time. This limited carrying capacity combined with the large volume of existing policy problems means that social problems compete to appear in and stay on the public agenda (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988).

The dramatization of the problem and use of new symbols or events for relevance, the connection of the issue to cultural concerns related to values and beliefs, the importance of the issue to influential political and economic interests, the carrying capacity of the public arena and various arenas that pick up the issue, and the timing of interactions between public institutions and social issues have all been shown to impact the success of social problems in entering and staying on the public agenda (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988).

#### *How media affects policy*

There have been multiple findings confirming the effects of media agenda setting, issue framing, and problem definition on public policy across a variety of social issues. Dolšák and Houston (2014) find that certain media framing and problem definitions of climate change impact the frequency of state-level introduced legislation. Arora et al. (2019) similarly note that news media framing of protestors, police, and other major figures in policing debates impacts the salience and resulting volume and content of policing-related policy. Increased frequency of issue coverage also increases public salience and issue ranking, sometimes along geographic regions, as is the case with higher coverage and public ranking of immigration reform with border states compared to non-border states (Dunaway et al. 2010).

However, while there is general consensus that media coverage can influence legislation, the pathways and variables through which mass media affects legislation are contested. The agenda setting model implies a causal process: mass media's agenda setting shifts the public's ranking of issue priorities and problem urgency, which in turn shifts legislators and influences the resulting introduced policy (McCombs and Shaw 1972). However, various groups and variables within the causal pathway have been shown to also simultaneously impact each other. Policymakers and journalists collaborate in defining and framing issues to increase public salience of a problem and move towards a desired policy outcome (Cook et al. 1983, Dearing and Rogers 1996, Lawrence and Birkland 2004).

The intent of journalists who control the timing and the extent of consultation of policy makers in media coverage also impact policy agenda setting (Dearing and Rogers 1996). Trigger events, which cue policy action and often occur at certain times, can also crystallize public attention by transforming complex policy issues into more easily understandable forms for the public, moving the problem up in the issue agenda (Cobb and Elder 1972). Media exposure has

also been shown to directly affect politicians' perceptions of the necessity of policy action and the severity of the issue (Cook et al. 1983). Lawmakers also often use media coverage to gauge and infer public attention and opinions on certain policy issues (Dolšak and Houston 2014), indicating another direct effect of media coverage on policy agenda.

## **Hate Crime Policy**

### *What are hate crimes?*

There exist a variety of definitions of hate crimes, also interchangeably called bias crimes (Jenness and Grattet 1996, Green et al. 2001, Shively 2005). Development and implementation of the first hate crime laws began in the early 1980s, with the state lawmakers reclassifying and enhancing penalties for bias-motivated crimes (Jenness and Grattet 2001), and since then, there have been seven federal hate crime laws passed, and all states except Wyoming have passed at least one hate crime law (Shively 2005, U.S. Department of Justice 2023).

As defined by the first federal bias crime law, the Hate Crimes Statistics Act of 1990, hate crimes are crimes motivated by the perpetrator's motivation of prejudice towards an individual or group's perceived race, religion, color, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation (Jacob and Eisler 1993). In addition to violent crimes such as assault, the term hate crime also applies to illegal conduct such as the destruction of property and vandalism.

### *Legal Strategies of State Hate Crime Laws*

Since their development in the 1980s, state hate crime legislation varies widely across states, with different state governments using an array of legal strategies and definitions. There have been a variety of ways these laws are categorized, but they generally involve criminalizing bias-motivated crimes, compensating hate crime victims, mandating law-enforcement agency collection of hate-crime data, and requiring training for law enforcement in hate crime response (Grattet et al. 1998, Soule and Earl 2001).

Grattet et al. identify five legal strategies states use to criminalize hate crimes: first, penalizing civil rights violations; second, creating specific laws criminalizing bias-motivated harassment and ethnic intimidation; third, "coattailing" a separate hate crime category onto previously criminalized conduct; fourth, adding provisions to existing laws to reclassify a bias-motivated crime; and fifth, enhancing penalties when the illegal conduct is found to be motivated by prejudice (1998). State laws may also make provisions on protected victim categories for gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, color, religion, age, and disability, with some states more recently including police officers (Mason 2022).

### *How Hate Crime Policy Spreads*

There is general academic agreement on the different variables that influence state hate crime policy passage and diffusion, including intrastate characteristics, which are the existing structural and polity-related features of a state, and interstate characteristics, which are the

relationships between states. However, there is disagreement on specific models to use when considering mechanisms through which factors impact state hate crime policy adoption.

#### *Intrastate and Interstate Factors*

Various studies have explored how specific intrastate features impact the process of state criminalization of hate crimes. Examples of intrastate characteristics include states' social disorganization and economic decline. It is noted that these structural and polity variables cannot fully explain the adoption of state hate crime laws, and more research could be done to explore the influence of media attention, triggering events, and collective actors and social movements (Jenness and Grattet 1996).

State hate crime policy passage is best predicted by the strength of interest groups, competition between parties, salience of hate crime issues, and the existing scope of hate crime policy (Haider-Markel 1998). In contrast, the impact of hate crime rates on state and federal hate crime law passage is inconclusive (Haider-Markel 1998). States with greater levels of per capita income, state policy innovation, and media attention are also more willing to adopt hate crimes compared to states that enacted data collection and civil hate crime laws earlier in the institutionalization process of hate crime criminalization (Soule and Earl 2001).

Additional scholarship examines interstate characteristics on policy spread as well. Grattet et al.'s 1998 study utilizes the conventional diffusion model to find that hate crime statutes have been found to spread similarly to other policy reforms but undergo simultaneous homogenization and differentiation, meaning that as policies spread, the variety in methods of adjusting the criminal code decreases and become more similar as the complexity of the laws' contents increase. This suggests that the content of a state's hate crime law is often temporally dependent on when the state begins to institutionalize hate crime criminalization relative to other regions (Grattet et al. 1998).

#### *How factors impact policy: differences in models and frameworks*

There exist several models to explain how and why intra and interstate factors impact policy passage, as different models of policy spread and frameworks explaining how policy arises can highlight different patterns of hate crime policy diffusion and components and agents of the policymaking process. Many scholars have pulled from general policy research to model the spread of state hate crime law, for instance.

Models of general policy diffusion and adoption have shifted away from broader, population-focused measures to better account for individual agent's differing characteristics. The standard population diffusion model, introduced by Coleman, Katz, and Menzel, presumes that all members of a group are spatially and temporally homogeneous, meaning that all members are equally likely to affect and be affected by each other in adopting innovations and that the influence of earlier adoption events does not vary with the amount of time that passes (1966). However, as Strang and Tuma (1993) argue, the model fails to recognize individual



actors' differences in their tendencies to adopt certain innovations. Their paper proposes an individual model of diffusion: adopters ranging from social organizations to individual persons are heterogeneous in their tendencies to adopt new innovations across time (Strang and Tuma 1993). Their model accounts for individual differences of adopters, but also reduces to the standard population diffusion model if spatial and temporal homogeneity hold (Strang and Tuma 1993).

These different models have been applied to hate crime policy diffusion. Soule and Earl's 2001 article utilize Strang and Tuma's (1993) heterogeneous diffusion model to Grattet et al.'s (1998) intrastate factors of social disorganization, economic health, and the institutional political environment of states and interstate factors of differences in state executive and legislative majority parties. They find that while there is a net pressure towards conformity in criminal codes, states also face pressures against conformity with other state's hate crime policies using aforementioned interstate cues (Soule and Earl 2001).

In contrast, Haider-Markel's 1998 study applies the social regulatory framework to explain why the influence of hate crime rates on policy adoption and spread is inconclusive compared to the intrastate factors of interest group strength, competition between parties, salience of hate crime issues, and the existing scope of hate crime policy. Politicians do not respond to incidents, but to the demands of constituents and interest groups in certain political environments, leading to social regulatory policies such as state hate crime laws (Haider-Markel 1998).

### **Intersections of Media and Policy**

While there is an abundance of interdisciplinary work focusing on media studies and policy, there are only a handful of studies exploring the specific intersection of media effects in policy-agenda setting and public agenda-setting with hate crime policy, let alone at the state level. As aforementioned, politicians utilize the press to gauge public attention and attitudes towards certain policy problems (Cook et al. 1983, Dolšak and Houston 2014). In the context of state hate crime policy and the social regulatory framework in which politicians respond to the public and interest groups (Haider-Markel 1998), this adds another dimension to the connection between media coverage and issue salience on policy passage and adoption.

Public agenda-setting, policy-agenda setting, and media agenda-setting can directly and indirectly impact the different pathways through which hate crime policies are passed. By framing victims in a positive or negative light, proposing potential causes of hate crimes, and identifying certain hate incidents as bias-motivated or not, media coverage can influence the issue's importance ranking for members of the public and elected officials. As the public ranks the importance of hate crimes higher in their issue agenda, they may pressure public officials to enact hate crime policies. Increased media coverage can also directly influence public officials. After exposure to coverage, they may consider hate crimes to be of greater urgency. They may

also use increased news coverage as an indicator for greater public concern over the issue. As a result, they become more likely to propose and or support the adoption of a state hate crime law.

This study aims to explore the aforementioned intersection between media coverage and state policy passage, specifically in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. While recent research explores the impacts of the pandemic on news media and social media coverage surrounding Asian Americans and on public opinion towards Asian Americans and the #StopAsianHate Movement (Powers et al. 2023, Lyu et al. 2023, Croucher 2020), there is little connection of media coverage to policy. This paper investigates if and how print media coverage of Asian Americans and anti-Asian discrimination impacted state hate crime policy over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Methodology

In order to explore the impacts of media coverage of anti-Asian incidents and hate crimes on state hate crime policy passage, this study focuses primarily on two sets of data: national news and state legislation from the beginning of 2019 to the end of 2021, or pre- and post-arrival of the first reported appearances of COVID-19 in the United States.

### Newspapers

The first set of data consists of newspaper articles covering or related to anti-Asian incidents from the Los Angeles Times, New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and Washington Post from the beginning of 2019 to the end of 2021. These four newspapers have significant readership at the national and or regional level and are among the most widely-circulated newspapers in the United States. These four newspapers do not represent the wealth of media coverage styles that exist across different geographic regions, especially among more regional newspapers, but they are generally accepted as veritable news sources for readers within the mass public and among policy decision makers.

Using ProQuest, a newspaper article archive database, I collected and coded all articles appearing under the search keyword “anti-Asian” to capture any newspaper coverage including anti-Asian incidents from January 1, 2019 to January 1, 2022. Using content analysis, I coded for several variables, including the type of article, the presence of certain keywords, the race of the article’s subject or victim, the presence or absence of a policy recommendation, and the type of recommendation if one was made or suggested.

### *Article Type*

Each article was sorted into one of five categories based on their labels assigned by the newspapers as well as the articles’ contents: commentary or opinion piece; news reporting focused on an event or phenomenon; article related to or published under entertainment, arts, or culture; article related to or published under sports; or a reader-submitted Letters to Editor.

### *Keywords*

In each of the publications, the presence or absence of the terms and phrases “hate crime”, “hate incident”, “anti-Asian”, and “prejudice” were coded, with 0 representing absence and 1 representing presence of each term within the article. While this study is focused more on the impacts of media coverage frequency on legislative activity, coding the keyword usage in these articles provided an opportunity to analyze media framing effects with anti-Asian hate crime coverage.

Studies have shown that the use of certain key words can dramatically impact the framing of issues and policies and influence public receptivity to legislation. Hurwitz and Peffley find that when messages are framed to reinforce connections between legislation and a certain group

such as a racial minority, individuals are more likely to apply their evaluations of the group to their evaluations of the policy, even if the framing is subtle and present in only one keyword (2005). Considering this, as well as the fact that Asians have been historically associated with yellow peril stereotypes as “unassimilable foreigners” threatening a White American identity and model minority stereotypes of passivity and docility to deny institutional racism in the United States (Kawai 2005), I found it worthwhile to code for the frequency and presence of the term “anti-Asian” situated in the context of hate crimes in these publications.

In addition to impacting issue and policy evaluations, word use could inspire greater urgency in lawmakers and members of the public. The diction choice of “hate crime” and “hate incident”, similar to the usage of the word “emergency” rather than “crisis” in a climate change context explored by McHugh et al. (2021), may create different amounts of political pressure for governments to act. Threats with high issue salience could create pressure for lawmakers to create “treatment policy” that addresses root causes of issues or “placebo policy” that demonstrates action but does not necessarily address issue causes (McHugh et al. 2021). Distinguishing between the presence of the terms “hate crime” and “hate incident” could provide an interesting insight into whether media framing via word choice can impact legislative activity by influencing public and policymakers’ perceptions of the issue.

#### *Victim’s or Subject’s Race*

It is also important to note that non-Anti-Asian related trigger events such as the murder of Ahmaud Arbery and the Black Lives Matter Movement may have crystallized hate crime and racial discrimination issue salience. In an attempt to account for this, I coded for the victim or subject of the article’s perceived race as Asian(s), Non-Asian(s), Asian(s) and Non-Asian(s). The coding also captures whether or not connections were made in articles between anti-Asian incidents and hate crimes or discrimination towards other groups, as racial consciousness and identification of minority groups has been shown to influence participation in activities that can increase political pressure for legislators such as petitioning, protests, and boycotts (Chong and Rogers 2005).

If the article did not focus on a hate incident as its primary subject, such as articles on debates in Congress regarding legislation, I coded the article as Not Applicable (N/A). It is critical to note that there are some instances involving anti-Asian hate where individuals were attacked or discriminated against due to being perceived as Asian rather than their actual race. In these instances I recorded them under their perceived race in the coding.

#### *Triggering Events*

Triggering events, also known as focusing events, can act as crystallizing moments for the public that emblemize complex policy issues (Dearing and Rogers 1996). These focusing events can raise the salience of certain policy problems sharply and spur certain responses from

government officials and members of the public depending on the framing of the event and assignment of blame (Birkland 1997).

In regards to the broad policy problems of hate crime legislation and anti-Asian discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic, I wanted to consider whether the March 16th Atlanta Spa Shootings, in which six of eight victims were of Asian descent, and the Black Lives Matter Movement may have acted as triggering events for state hate crime legislation reform. To capture this, I noted any articles with mentions of either or both events, marking the presence of references to the Atlanta Spa Shootings and the Black Lives Matter Movement or Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd as “1” in their respective categories. I coded the presence of references to both potential focusing events as “1” in its own category. To avoid redundancy, I counted articles with references to both separately from articles that only covered or mentioned either the Atlanta Spa Shootings or the Black Lives Matter Movement.

### *Policy Recommendations*

I also coded for the presence or absence of a recommendation or potential solution to the anti-Asian hate crimes in the article using the binary system of 1 for presence and 0 for absence in the article. The presence of recommendations in articles included policy recommendations from quoted individuals within the article to policy recommendations explicitly from the author of the piece. If a recommendation was present, the article was coded either as an interpersonal and social recommendation or as a structural and procedural policy recommendation.

Calls for changes in social behavior such as increasing awareness of anti-Asian hate and white supremacy, encouraging victims to report hate crimes, promoting bystander involvement or intervention of hate incidents, and increasing positive depictions of Asian Americans were defined as interpersonal and social recommendations. In contrast, recommendations involving legislation enacting more structural and procedural changes such as the creation of a hate crime reporting hotline and training law enforcement agents were defined as structural and procedural policy recommendations.

### **Legislation Content**

The second set of data consists of state legislation introduced in state legislatures including the keyword “anti-Asian” from all 50 states from the beginning of 2019 to the end of 2021. The state, legislation introduction date, and the date of policy passage if the bill was passed and the general status of the bill were all noted. The content of the bill was coded as either Substantive, which does not involve structural or procedural changes and often takes the form of public condemnation of anti-Asian hate, or Symbolic, which involves structural changes such as increases in budget funding for certain anti-hate programs and mandated law enforcement training and hate crime reporting.

Due to limitations in time and resources, the state bills from 2019 to 2021 including the keyword “hate crime” were not coded as Substantive or Symbolic in their content. However, the state, date of introduction, and status of all bills were recorded in order to measure the monthly frequency of introduction of state bills related to hate crimes for event history analysis.

As discussed earlier, media coverage has been shown to impact both members of the public and legislators, but in different ways and along different pathways. While this study is mostly exploratory and does not focus on the specific mechanisms through which media affects policy, it aims to evaluate if increased media coverage correlates with state legislative activity in the context of anti-Asian hate over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Hypothesis:* Media coverage of anti-Asian discrimination will correlate with increased state legislative activity related to anti-Asian hate crime.

In the next section, I focus on visually analyzing trends of anti-Asian hate-related media coverage and state anti-Asian hate-related legislation. Looking at the frequencies of newspaper coverage and anti-Asian hate related bill introduction across the 2019 to 2021 period, we see that newspaper coverage of anti-Asian discrimination and state anti-Asian hate bill introduction tend to overlap. This indicates that media coverage signals the issue salience of anti-Asian hate and hate crimes more broadly and that legislators respond to these indicators with policy.

## Results

In Table 4A, the hypothesis of a correlation between anti-Asian hate coverage and bills is rejected due to an absence of empirical corroboration of correlation<sup>1</sup>. However, I believe there is some type of relationship between article publication frequency and anti-Asian hate-related bill introduction, especially when considering the trends in Graph 4. Additionally, there are several interesting trends observable when considering the data collected and coded across 2019, 2020, and 2021.

Graph 1 displays the number of articles published related to anti-Asian hate from January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2021 from each of the four newspaper publications. As expected, media coverage of anti-Asian hate across all four newspaper publications began to increase around February and March of 2020, during which the United States officially declared COVID-19 to be a public health emergency then a national emergency (American Journal of Managed Care 2021). While there were modest increases in coverage, the number of anti-Asian articles skyrocketed in March 2021 after the March 16th Atlanta Spa Shootings across opinion and commentary, reporting, entertainment, sports, and letter to the editor pieces<sup>2</sup>. The marked increase in coverage of anti-Asian discrimination after the Atlanta Spa Shootings across all four

---

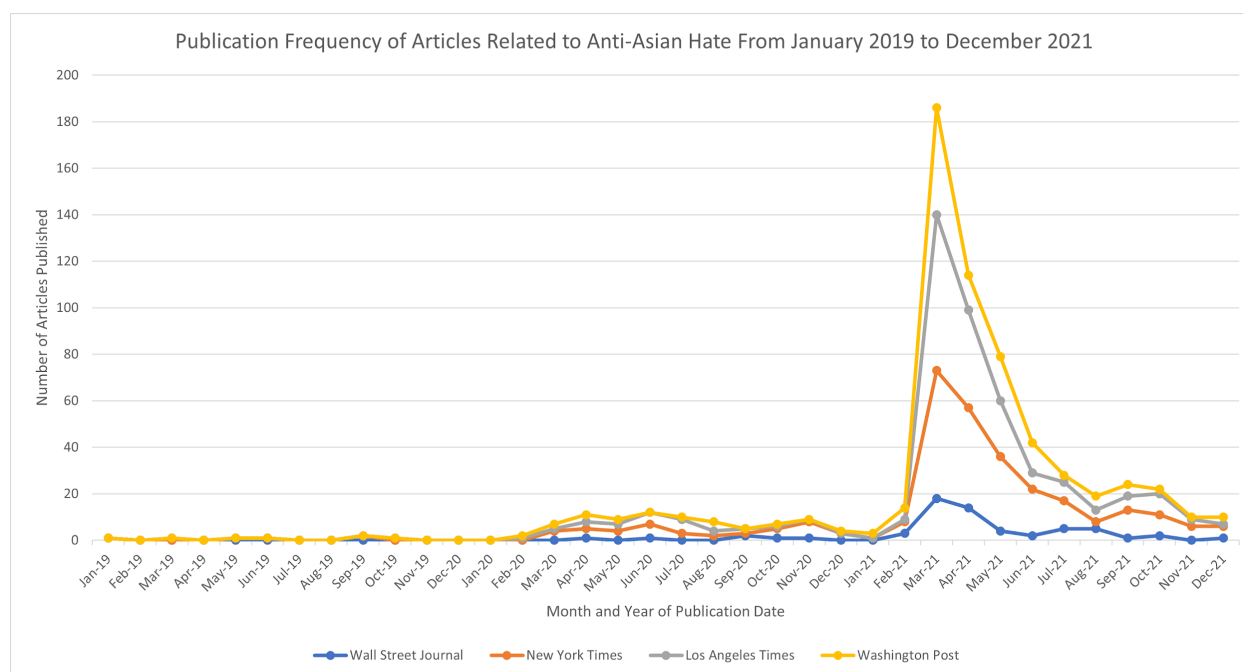
<sup>1</sup> To see the correlation coefficients of the variables, please refer to Table 4A in the Appendix.

<sup>2</sup> For a more in-depth table of the frequencies and proportions of the types of articles with references anti-Asian hate, refer to Table 1A in the Appendix.

publications implies that the shooting acted as a focusing event, drawing media attention to the broader policy problem of anti-Asian bias during the COVID-19 pandemic through a single, dramatic incident. This is further supported by the fact that 32% (206) of all 642 anti-Asian hate-related articles from 2019 to 2021 referred to or directly covered the Atlanta Spa Shootings<sup>3</sup>.

Table 2 shows the frequency of the keywords “hate crime”, “hate incident”, “anti-Asian”, and “prejudice” in articles covering anti-Asian hate across publications, with proportions of anti-Asian hate related articles denoted in parentheses. Unsurprisingly, more than 99% (641) of articles included the key word “anti-Asian” in their contents. Across all publications, 49% (315) of all anti-Asian hate articles included the keyword “hate crime”, and 10% (65) included the keyword “hate incident”. The variations in keyword usage across publications seen in Table 2 and the large gaps in numbers of published anti-Asian hate-focused articles across publications<sup>4</sup> could be due to a variety of structural factors ranging from racial composition of publications’ editorial and journalism teams to the demographics of each publication’s primary consumers.

**Graph 1.** Frequency of Publication of Articles Related to Anti-Asian Hate from January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2021.



<sup>3</sup> To see the frequency and proportions of articles referencing the Atlanta, Georgia Spa Shootings and Black Lives Matter/murder of Ahmaud Arbery and or George Floyd for each publication, please refer to Table 1B in the Appendix.

<sup>4</sup> Table 1A’s “Total Number of Articles Published Related to Anti-Asian Hate” row in the Appendix demonstrates the large gap in coverage of anti-Asian discrimination across the Los Angeles Times, New York Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal.

**Table 2.** Frequency of keywords “hate crimes”, “hate incidents”, “anti-Asian”, and “prejudice” in the Los Angeles Times, New York Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal.

*Note: Proportions of anti-Asian articles using keywords for each newspaper are denoted in parentheses. The values are the proportion of articles that use the keyword out of all anti-Asian hate-related articles for each publication. The proportions overlap since articles may use multiple keywords.*

<b>Key Words</b>	<b>Frequency for The Los Angeles Times</b>	<b>Frequency for The New York Times</b>	<b>Frequency for The Washington Post</b>	<b>Frequency for The Wall Street Journal</b>	<b>Totals from All Publications</b>
“hate crimes”	96 (0.48)	120 (0.49)	64 (0.47)	35 (0.56)	315 (0.49)
“hate incidents”	32 (0.16)	11 (0.04)	18 (0.13)	4 (0.06)	65 (0.10)
“anti-Asian”	200 (0.995)	244 (0.996)	135 (1.00)	62 (1.00)	641 (0.998)
“prejudice”	15 (0.07)	18 (0.07)	13 (0.10)	8 (0.13)	54 (0.08)

Graph 2 displays the monthly usage for the keywords “hate crime”, “hate incident”, “anti-Asian”, and “prejudice” across all four publications of the Los Angeles Times, New York Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal from 2019 to 2021<sup>5</sup>. One observation of note is that the use of the keyword “hate crime” increases above the use of the keyword “hate incident” starting in January 2021 and peaks in March 2021. There are multiple potential reasons for the shifts in word use. The yearly release of official federal, state, academia, and advocacy group-published reports on rates of anti-Asian hate crimes and victimization in January 2021 may have provided officially reported anti-Asian hate crime rates that journalists could cite, resulting in a shift away from the more general “hate incident”. Also, articles covering the Atlanta Spa Shootings may have framed the event as a potential hate crime since there were still speculations on the motives of the shooter, potentially explaining the increase in the use of the term “hate crime” in March 2021.

<sup>5</sup> For the monthly usage for keywords for each publication from 2019 to 2021, refer to Graphs 2A, 2B, 2C, and 2D in the Appendix.



**Graph 2.** Frequency of Keyword Usage Totals from 2019 to 2021 in the Los Angeles Times, New York Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal

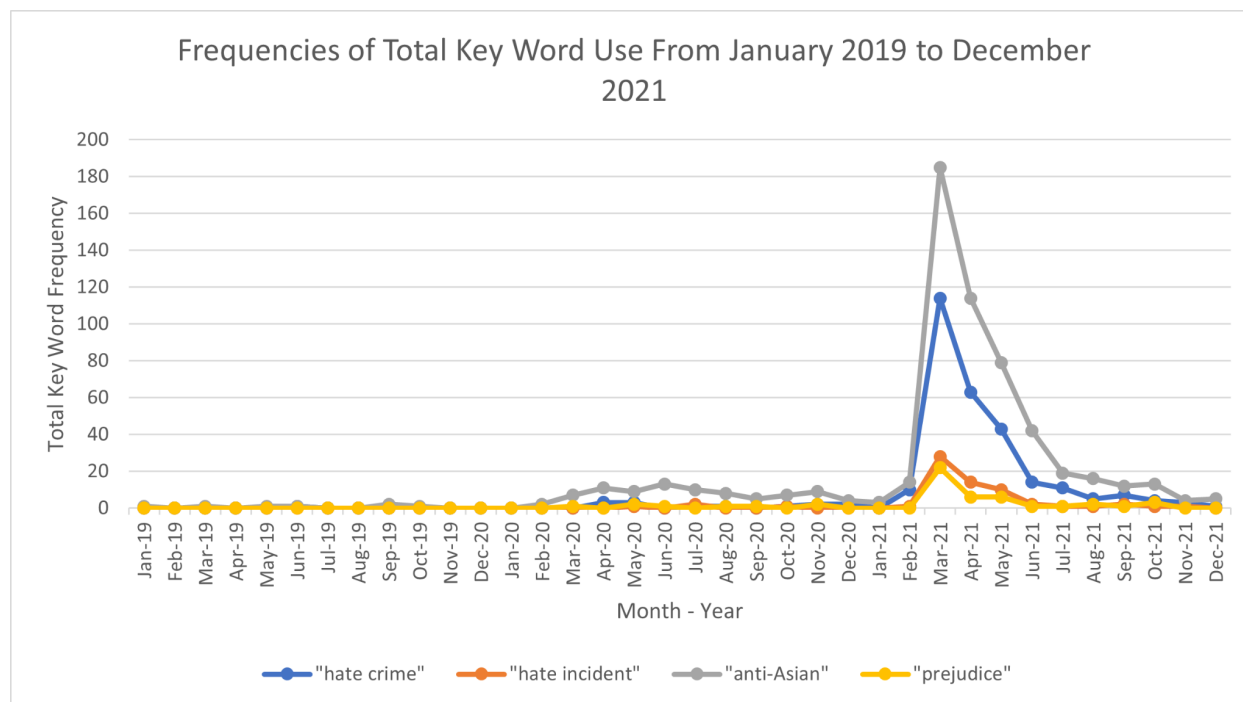


Table 3 displays the frequency of policy recommendations in articles covering anti-Asian hate, with proportions denoted in parentheses. 42% (269) of all total articles explicitly argued for recommendations from the author of the piece or included recommendations via quotes from advocacy groups and leaders or general coverage of policy. Of the total 269 articles with recommendations, 47% (127) were Interpersonal and Social Recommendations, 36% (97) were Structural and Procedural Policy Recommendations, and 7% (45) were recommendations with elements of both, indicating a media preference for recommendations that involves changes individuals would make in their day-to-day routine rather than broader policy reform that focuses on the structural root causes of issues of anti-Asian discrimination and hate crimes. The table also demonstrates that the proportion of articles with recommendations for each publication are generally similar (Los Angeles Times: 48%, New York Times: 40%, Washington Post: 41%, Wall Street Journal: 32%), though there are some variations.

**Table 3.** Frequency of Policy Recommendation in Articles in the Los Angeles Times, New York Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal.

*Note: Proportions of articles with policy recommendations in newspapers are denoted in parentheses. The values are the proportion of articles that include policy recommendations or specific types of recommendations out of all anti-Asian hate-related articles for each publication. The last column "Across All Publications" considers the proportions out of all anti-Asian hate-related articles across all four publications.*

	<b>Los Angeles Times</b>	<b>New York Times</b>	<b>Washington Post</b>	<b>Wall Street Journal</b>	<b>Across All Publications</b>
Total Number of Articles with Policy Recommendations	96 (0.48)	98 (0.40)	55 (0.41)	20 (0.32)	269 (0.42)
Total Number of Articles with Interpersonal and Social Recommendations	52 (0.26)	43 (0.18)	29 (0.21)	3 (0.05)	127 (0.20)
Total Number of Articles with Structural and Procedural Recommendations	29 (0.14)	38 (0.16)	16 (0.12)	14 (0.23)	97 (0.15)
Total Number of Articles with Both Interpersonal and Social & Structural and Procedural Recommendations	15 (0.07)	17 (0.07)	10 (0.07)	3 (0.05)	45 (0.07)

Graph 4 overlays the total frequency of articles related to anti-Asian hate with the frequency of anti-Asian hate-related bills introduced and the frequency of hate crime-related bills introduced. Both anti-Asian hate-related bill introductions and article publications increase in March 2021, further affirming the role of the Atlanta Spa Shootings as a focusing event with lawmakers responding with bill introductions for anti-Asian hate. The impact of the Atlanta Spa Shootings in March 2021 is especially clear given that the number of introductions for bills related to anti-Asian hate was decreasing in February 2021 prior to March.

Graph 4 also demonstrates a trend of hate crime bills being introduced at the start of each year, possibly due to the annual releases of hate crime reports produced by state and federal law enforcement agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation's annual Hate Crime Statistics Reports. This would further confirm the importance of media coverage in affecting perceptions of issue salience for lawmakers. The much-higher spike in hate crime-related bill introductions in 2021 compared to previous years that also extends to September 2021 implies the Atlanta Spa Shooting's role as a focusing event. As a focusing event, it likely extended state lawmakers'

attention spans on the issue of anti-Asian hate and of the broader issue of hate crime reform. While coverage of hate crimes and incidents tended to focus on victims of Asian descent<sup>6</sup>, it is also possible that sustained coverage of anti-Asian hate crimes, combined with aforementioned annually-published reports on hate crime rates, contributed to the higher peak of hate crime bill introductions in January 2021 compared to January 2019 and January 2020.

**Graph 4.** Publication frequency of articles, introduction of anti-Asian hate state bills, and introduction of hate crime state bills.

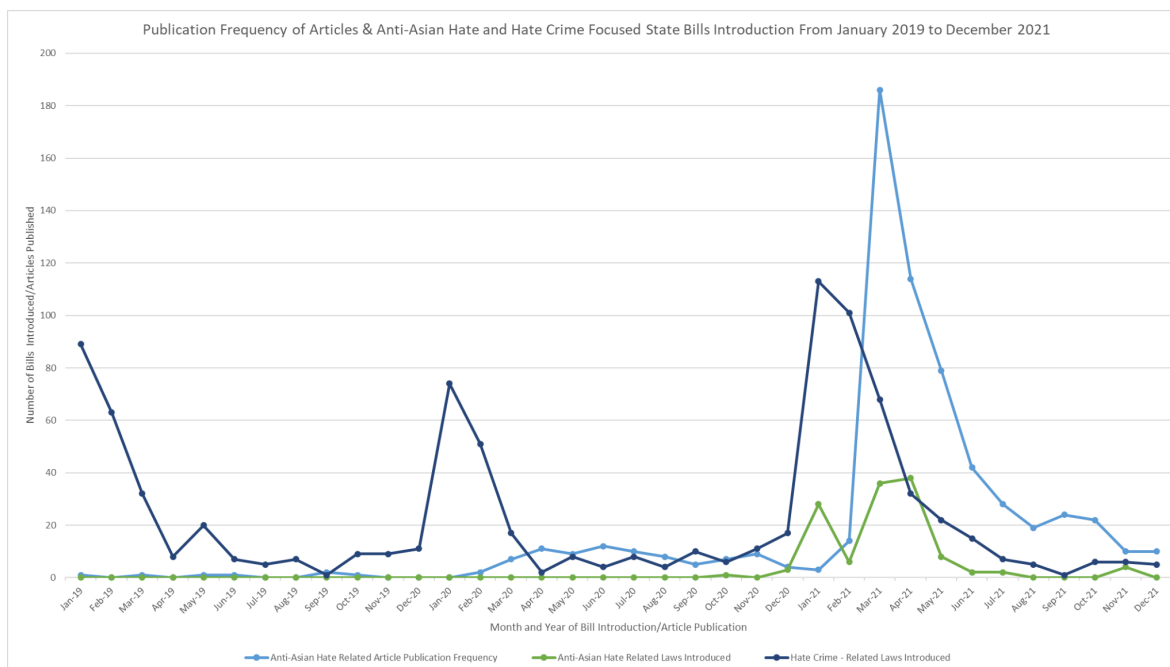


Table 5 provides a closer look at the article publication frequency, the introductions of anti-Asian hate-related state bills, and the introductions of hate crime-related state bills from January 2021 to December 2021. The peak frequencies of each variable are highlighted in yellow. Media coverage of anti-Asian hate peaked at 186 articles in March 2021 with the occurrence of the Atlanta Spa Shootings. Anti-Asian hate-related state bill introductions peaked at 38 bills in April 2021, with March 2021 having the second highest number of introductions at 36 bills.

In contrast, general hate crime bill introductions peaked in January 2021 at 113 bills in Table 6. These two peaks in Table 6 are revealing: first, the slightly delayed April 2021 peak of anti-Asian hate-related bill introductions after spikes in media coverage in March 2021 shows that media coverage peaks did precede legislative action and suggests that legislators responded to media cues of salience with bill introductions. Second, the fact that the second-highest peak of

<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed breakdown of subject and victim race in articles across the four publications, refer to Table 4B in the Appendix.

anti-Asian hate-related bill introductions occurred in March 2021 means that lawmakers not only responded to media cues but did so rapidly.

**Table 5.** Peaks in Anti-Asian Hate Related Articles Publication Frequency, Anti-Asian Hate Related State Bill Introductions, and Hate Crime Related State Bill Introductions from January 2021 to December 2021.

Date (Month-Year)	Anti-Asian Hate Related Article Publication Frequency	Anti-Asian Hate-Related Laws Introduced	Hate Crime - Related Laws Introduced
Jan-21	3	28	113
Feb-21	14	6	101
Mar-21	186	36	68
Apr-21	114	38	32
May-21	79	8	22
Jun-21	42	2	15
Jul-21	28	2	7
Aug-21	19	0	5
Sep-21	24	0	1
Oct-21	22	0	6
Nov-21	10	4	6
Dec-21	10	0	5

Graphs 6A and 6B displays all states that introduced and passed anti-Asian hate-related bills in 2020 (California, Georgia, Minnesota, and New Jersey) and how many bills each state introduced and passed in the 2020 period. Of the four states that introduced bills, only California and Georgia passed bills, with California passing all three of its Substantive-coded bills and Georgia passing its one Symbolic-coded bill in 2020<sup>7</sup>. Graphs 6C and 6D are pie charts displaying the state-by-state breakdown of anti-Asian hate-related bill introductions and passages in 2020 and 2021. Considering these four graphs, only eighteen states introduced and or passed any bills specifically referencing anti-Asian hate from 2019 to 2021. Different factors such as state demographics, partisan control of legislatures, and professionalism of state legislatures may explain variations in bill introductions. Another potential reason for this deficiency in anti-Asian hate-related bill introductions is that other states may have focused instead on broader hate crime-related bills, as possibly indicated by the dramatic spike in hate crime-related bill introductions in January 2021, compared to previous peaks in January 2019 and 2020.

**From left to right, Graphs 6A and 6B.** Histograms with a state-by-state breakdown of anti-Asian hate-related bill introductions in 2020 and anti-Asian hate-related bill passages in 2020, respectively.

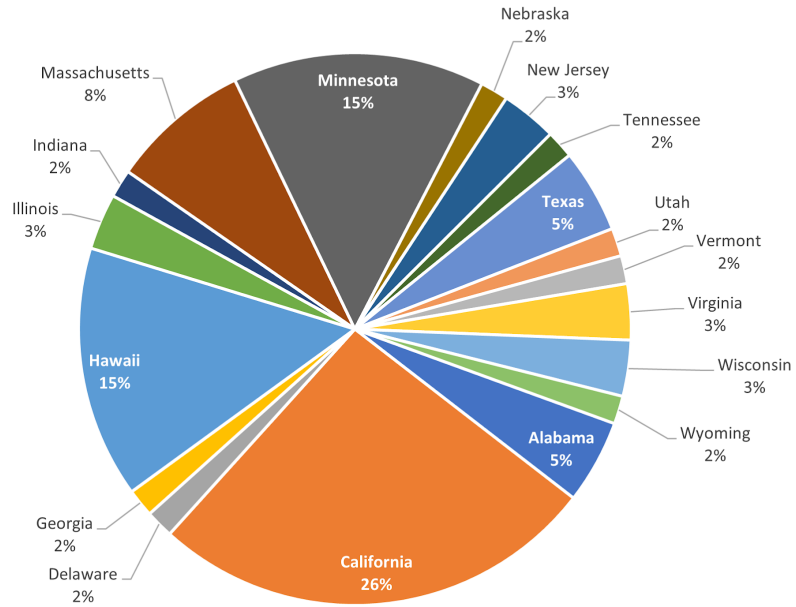
*Note: All states excluded from these graphs did not introduce or pass any anti-Asian hate-related bills during 2020.*



<sup>7</sup> For an in-depth table of the numbers of Substantive and Symbolic anti-Asian hate-related bills passed and introduced in 2020 and 2021, refer to Table 6E in the Appendix.

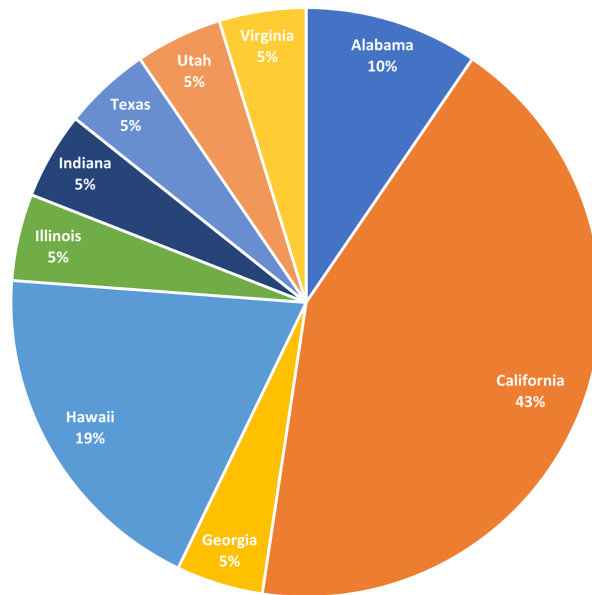
**Graph 6C:** State-by-state breakdown of all 122 anti-Asian hate-related bill introductions in 2021.

State-By-State Breakdown of Anti-Asian Hate Related Bill Introductions in 2021  
(n=122 bills)



**Graph 6D:** State-by-state breakdown of all 42 anti-Asian hate-related bill passages in 2021.

State-By-State Breakdown of Anti-Asian Hate Related Bill Passages in 2021 (n=42 bills)



## Discussion

### Confirmation of Media Coverage's Effects

The overall trends of this study confirm the critical role of media coverage in influencing issue salience and the policy agenda, especially in the context of anti-Asian hate during the COVID-19 pandemic and hate crime law at the state level. Over the initial three year period before and after the beginning of the pandemic, increases in news coverage played a critical role in signaling to state policymakers the perceived importance of anti-Asian hate, both through framing and frequency of coverage. We can see this in the peak in introductions of anti-Asian hate-related state bills in April 2021 after a massive increase in media coverage of anti-Asian hate in March 2021.

We see that despite variations in state demographics, intensity of party competition, state demographics, partisan control, professionalism of the legislature, and political identification, policymakers across different states respond to media cues with bill introductions. Democrats, for instance, have been shown to be more favorable towards government programs such as hate crime legislation (Pellegrini et al. 1997). These differences may explain why policymakers may have acted in different ways, with some states potentially focusing on broader hate crime laws while others introduced anti-Asian specific bills with variations in symbolic and or substantive content with some not introducing any bills.

#### *Media Policy Recommendations and Contents of Anti-Asian Hate-Related Bills*

When looking more closely at the content of these anti-Asian hate related bills, it is also observed that most of the legislation introduced in 2020 and 2021 was symbolic, meaning that the bills explicitly referencing anti-Asian hate often did not add any specific structural or procedural reforms. These symbolic bills ranged from condemnations of anti-Asian racism to legislative commitments to create more rigorous gun laws to recommendations for state law enforcement agencies and officials to prosecute anti-Asian hate crimes to the fullest extent.

While there are other potential factors to explain this phenomenon that should be considered in future research, one possible reason for this emphasis on symbolic legislation may have been the tendency to frame changes in individual behavior, rather than larger structural issues, as potential solutions for anti-Asian hate in news coverage. Nearly 20% of all articles included interpersonal recommendations focused on individual behavior while 15% focused on more structural and or procedural policy recommendations.

Examples of individual behavioral changes referenced in articles included the creation of informal community watches and the urging of bystanders to safely intervene if they witness anti-Asian harassment. In contrast, structural policy recommendations in articles varied. Some articles included concrete policy recommendations such as the creation of a hate crime reporting hotline and greater community education of hate crime reporting resources. Others contextualized anti-Asian hate-related policy recommendations within other issue frames like

gun violence (especially prevalent after the Atlanta Spa Shooting) or lack of mental health resources. These different framings and types of policies covered in articles on anti-Asian hate may have framed certain solutions as more efficacious over others. An emphasis on more interpersonal behavior changes could have contributed to the legislative focus on symbolic bills when it came to anti-Asian hate.

As previously stated, however, it is critical to note that, in addition to media framing of potential policy solutions to anti-Asian hate, there are a plethora of aforementioned, non-news media variables legislators may have considered that in turn affected bill content. Future research could work on considering these variables in conjunction with media coverage for a more holistic understanding of the policy process at the state level.

#### *Media Effects and State Hate Crime Bill Introductions*

While the relationship between anti-Asian hate news coverage and state hate crime bill introductions was less focused on due to limitations in time, the heightened spike of hate crime bill introduction in January 2021 and its extended duration compared to the previous spikes of January 2019 and January 2020 could indicate the effect of the heightened and sustained media coverage of anti-Asian hate incidents over the course of 2020 compared to previous years. This would further affirm the impact of media coverage on legislators' perceived issue salience and policy decision making.

#### *Spikes in Hate Crime Bill Introductions and Annual Reports*

The release of annual hate crime reports from various academic, government, and advocacy groups, in conjunction with increased media coverage of these reports and anti-Asian incidents, may have also signaled issue salience and urgency to legislators. These hate crime reports came from a variety of sources, with different newspaper publishers emphasizing multiple, if not all, reports. Notable examples include the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism's Report to the Nation (Levin 2021), the Federal Bureau of Investigation's annual Hate Crime Statistics 2020 (FBI 2021), and Stop AAPI Hate's various state and national-level data reports (Stop AAPI Hate 2023). Combined with continued media coverage over the course of 2020 from the beginning of the pandemic, these reports may have contributed to the increased bill introduction activity for hate crimes in January of 2021 compared to previous years.

### **Emergent Trends and Observations**

Though this study was not formally looking at certain variables, there were also several other interesting trends and themes that may provide a more nuanced understanding of factors impacting news coverage, media effects, and policymaking.

#### *The Focusing Effect of the Atlanta Spa Shootings*

Across all pieces of data, it is apparent that the March 2021 Atlanta, Georgia Spa Shootings acted as a spotlight on the issues of anti-Asian discrimination and hate crimes. The



number of introduced bills related to anti-Asian hate increased rapidly after the incident, as did the use of the term “hate crime” in media framing of anti-Asian hate. The latter finding is interesting as it indicates that the Atlanta Spa Shootings may have allowed journalists to shift their framing of anti-Asian hate towards more explicit criminal activity with motivations of racial bias (hence the increase in “hate crime” word usage).

This framing shift to “hate crime” is critical, as individuals have been shown to perceive hate crime victims and perpetrators as more innocent and more culpable, respectively, compared to non-hate crime victims and perpetrators (Rayburn et al. 2003). The resulting increase in the use of “hate crime” compared to “hate incident” in the media may have garnered more sympathy for victims and aroused a greater sense of urgency for lawmakers and the public. Higher usage of the term “hate crime” over the term “hate incident” to describe discriminatory acts against Asian victims likely also had a direct influence on legislators' perceived issue salience and urgency in legislation on hate crimes and or anti-Asian hate. This may explain why politicians were so quick to respond, with upticks in anti-Asian hate-related bill introductions beginning in March 2021 and peaking in April 2021.

The races of the perpetrator and victims in the Atlanta Spa Shootings may have also played a role in affecting public and legislator perceptions of anti-Asian hate crime, especially since it has been shown that individuals have greater negative perceptions of a hate crime when the perpetrators are White and victims are minority members (Marcus-Newhall et al. 2002). To better explore this, more extensive content analysis could be done of anti-Asian hate incident coverage to record the perpetrators' reported race and consider whether or not the race of the perpetrator has a relationship with the duration and quantity of coverage surrounding the incident.

### *Potential Causes Behind Differences in Framing and Coverage*

Another interesting observation is the variation in coverage frequency of anti-Asian hate between publications. There are several possible reasons why coverage frequencies and framing differed. The sections below briefly explore a few of these potential reasons.

#### Demographics of Journalism Teams

The racial compositions of editorial and journalism teams may differ between the different publications, potentially explaining variations in frequency of coverage and framing of certain anti-Asian hate-related issues and events. Generally speaking, Asian Americans are underrepresented in the newsroom (Owens 2007, AAJA 2022), which is problematic given that minority-member reporters and journalists can improve White colleagues' cultural sensitivity to ethnic issues, ensure accurate representations of their communities, and present stories and perspectives overlooked by White reporters (Nishikawa et al. 2009).

Asian reporters and journalists' abilities to provide nuanced views of issues and events is critical for Asian communities, which are often subjected to model minority stereotypes (Kawai

2005) and perceptions of Asians as a monolithic ethnic group. There exist vast disparities across Asian ethnic groups, including differences in access to health care (Wang et al. 2021, Yom and Lor 2021), immigration status and income (Robert et al. 1985), education and achievement (Paik et al. 2017), mental health (Birman and Tran 2010), and voting behavior and political behavior (Tam 1995, Lien et al. 2004). These disparities within the broader Asian ethnic umbrella also intersect with other identities such as gender identity, which can result in stereotypes such as the hypersexualization of Asian women and stereotypes of Asian females as passive and of Asian males as weak (Azhar et al. 2021).

Given the complexity of these issues, a publication lacking the staff with the experience, investment and understanding of these community-specific problems and barriers are more likely to miss certain stories and media frames, resulting in differences in the numbers of stories focused on anti-Asian hate across the pandemic and the timing of publication. While this study did not focus on structural reasons for issue coverage selection by publication companies, future work can compare demographics of each publication company and their coverage of certain issues to better explore the influence of racial diversity of journalism and editorial teams on coverage quantity and content framing.

Related to the diversity of reporting teams, broader internal organizational pressures may also dramatically impact what stories journalists learn are acceptable to cover. This is especially applicable in larger news enterprises, where journalists often look to their peers and colleagues for social and professional support (Dunaway and Graber 2023). Even if there are a handful of Asian journalists, less diverse journalism teams may run the risk of Asian reporters and journalists avoiding coverage of certain issues and news framing of policy issues out of concern for accusations of bias and or risks of lower performance evaluations.

#### Financial Pressures and Consumer Demographics

Financial pressures to appeal to consumers may also influence publications' content and framing. When making editorial and journalistic decisions, every publication considers their different targeted audiences, and these different consumer groups and regions of coverage may explain differences in coverage quantity and framing of anti-Asian hate incidents. Publications that serve more regional audiences such as the New York Times and Los Angeles Times also often included articles referencing local anti-Asian hate incidents such as instances of anti-Asian harassment in Torrance, CA and the Northern California Bay Area as well as specific attacks in the boroughs of New York City when referencing anti-Asian hate broadly.

The impact of consumer demographics is especially prominent considering that 15.4% of California's population identify as Asian (U.S. Census Bureau 2022). The diverse demographics of the region, especially in Southern California, may explain the Los Angeles Times' greater publication of anti-Asian hate related content compared to other publications. Being situated in a more diverse area of the United States, the Los Angeles Times may also have a more diverse team which also impacts its content.

### Journalistic Standards of Neutrality

Journalistic standards may explain why publications were hesitant to frame certain anti-Asian hate incidents as hate crimes during the 2019 to 2021 period. Hate crimes consist of two components: a criminal act and a discriminatory motive against the victim's "perceived or actual race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability" (Department of Justice 2023). This unique emphasis on motivation, the categorization of hate crimes under criminal conduct, and journalistic standards of impartiality may explain publications' hesitance to label incidents as "hate crimes" due to concerns of appearing biased and or influencing legal proceedings.

Diction choice in the coverage of these anti-Asian hate incidents with unconfirmed bias motivations and legal rulings may be similar to the phenomenon of "hedging" in the publication of unconfirmed information (Dunaway and Graber 2023). The use of "hedging" diction such as "purported" and "possible" may be used to allow the publication of non-verified information and or content, and the broader term "hate incident" may have allowed broader coverage of anti-Asian hate events compared to the more narrow "hate crime". These broader journalistic standards, combined with the earlier discussed factors, may have played a role in the variations in coverage framing and quantity between publications.

### *Racial Solidarity and Connecting Stop AAPI Hate to Black Lives Matter*

Another important observation in this study is that some articles connect the Stop AAPI Hate and Black Lives Matter movements with framings of racial solidarity against hate. This is critical framing, as it may broaden issue salience for larger portions of the public and policymakers, which in turn can increase salience and the likelihood of policy action. The phenomenon of connecting the two movements is not unique to news coverage and has been observed on social media, with Lyu et al. finding that individuals engaging with #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate movements online also tend to be active in related racial issues such as #BlackLivesMatter (2023). This finding, combined with the trends observed in this study, could indicate that the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement created a political environment more open to discussions about anti-Asian hate and hate crimes for the public and in the news media.

### *Potential Limitations and Future Avenues of Research*

Due to limitations in time, this study only coded anti-Asian hate-related bills and anti-Asian hate-related media coverage for the Los Angeles Times, New York Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal. There are a variety of other factors that may have contributed to anti-Asian hate and hate crime-related bill introductions and passages at the state level, all of which can be better accounted for and analyzed in future research.

Building on the topic of media effects of issue salience, future work could explore several aspects of media coverage of anti-Asian hate: first, the influence of local news coverage of anti-Asian hate on state hate crime bill introduction and passage. Second, the influence of

different news media coverage mediums. With the former, local news coverage may have different media frames for anti-Asian hate, especially since they may cover more local incidents of anti-Asian hate. For the latter, state politicians and their teams use a variety of mediums and news sources, including social media and television broadcasts not analyzed in this study, to collect information and gauge public attention on certain policy issues.

Other avenues of exploration include a more in-depth coding of hate crime bills from 2019 to 2021 as well as the recording of state characteristics. While bills from all 50 states were considered, other factors such as the racial demographics of states, diversity of the state legislatures, party control, election competition, and so on could be recorded and analyzed to determine how other intrastate and interstate factors may have interacted with media coverage in state hate crime bill introduction.

### **Conclusion**

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, the frequency of anti-Asian hate incidents and the ensuing media coverage dramatically spiked compared to pre-pandemic levels. Though this study did not find statistically significant correlations between media coverage of anti-Asian hate and of anti-Asian hate-related bill introductions, it visually demonstrated how spikes in media coverage preceded state bill introductions and signaled issue salience for policymakers who then made decisions in the form of policy action or inaction. While the increase in hate crime bill introductions occurred in January 2021 prior to the March 2021 peak in anti-Asian hate-related news coverage, the state hate crime bill introduction's heightened and longer-lasting peak compared to previous years may indicate potential issue salience effects of both the sustained and increased media coverage of anti-Asian hate crimes and the publication of several hate crime reports over the course of 2020.

The study also observed several notable emergent trends. For one, the March 2021 Atlanta Spa Shooting played a huge role in spotlighting the issue of anti-Asian discrimination and may have shifted what was considered acceptable framing of anti-Asian discrimination. Keyword usage, for example, dramatically shifted in March 2021, with higher use of the term "hate crime" over "hate incident". Additionally, there were noticeable differences in the quantity and framing of coverage of anti-Asian hate across publications, shedding a light on how different organizational and economic factors may influence what is determined to be newsworthy and how different subjects are covered.

These findings are critical in that they touch on several important aspects of the relationship between media and policy. First and foremost, it further confirms the need to consider media coverage as another variable in the larger policymaking process. Regardless of the pathways through which news media may affect legislation, it is clear that coverage indicates issue salience for policymakers and may be a part of their political decision making process. While the study did not code the content of all state hate crime bills, further work can be done

coding for the content of state hate crime bills to better capture the potential effects of media coverage on state policy.

Second, the findings demonstrate how a focusing event and the ensuing media coverage can dramatically increase issue salience and encourage discussion of potential policy solutions. While not the focus of the study, the critical role of triggering events in placing certain policy issues in the national and local spotlights is certainly emphasized here. Media coverage itself may have played a role, but the triggering effect of the Atlanta Spa Shootings in spurring increased coverage of anti-Asian hate and raising issue salience is clear considering the upshot in media coverage of anti-Asian hate in March 2021. The willingness to discuss racial discrimination at a broader, structural level may have also been cultivated in part due to the earlier attention on the Black Lives Matter Movement and on protests in response to the murder of George Floyd, as evidenced by connections and references made between anti-Asian discrimination and racial discrimination of other minority groups in various articles. Future research could more deeply explore how triggering events and media coverage interact and their influence on policy.

Third, the findings highlight how institutional characteristics and economic pressures may result in variations in news coverage and framing across different publications. Given that the four publications studied were all traditional print publishers but still noticeably varied in coverage, future work could consider how different organizational and economic factors would impact media coverage for other news media such as television broadcast and online journalism. While this study did not look at local news, the effects of local news coverage on state policy should also be explored, especially since regional news coverage may provide different issue frames and reference more local issues and views compared to national news coverage.

In sum, the findings here affirm the impacts of media coverage of anti-Asian hate on introduced, related legislation. The emergent trends also highlight the effects of a high media-coverage triggering event like the Atlanta Spa Shooting on state legislation. The shootings dramatically shifted framing as indicated by changes in key word use, and lawmakers worked rapidly to respond to the alarms given by the heightened news coverage. Though this study focuses on anti-Asian hate, its findings emphasize the broader significance of better understanding the ways through which media coverage of underrepresented groups has crucial policy implications for said groups.

## Bibliography

- (117th) <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/937/actions> (May 30, 2023).
- “2020 FBI Hate Crimes Statistics.” 2023a. *The United States Department of Justice*.  
<https://www.justice.gov/crs/highlights/2020-hate-crimes-statistics> (May 30, 2023).
- “A Timeline of Covid-19 Developments in 2020.” 2021. *AJMC*.  
<https://www.ajmc.com/view/a-timeline-of-covid19-developments-in-2020> (May 25, 2023).
- Arora, Maneesh, Davin L. Phoenix, and Archie Delshad. 2018. “Framing Police and Protesters: Assessing Volume and Framing of News Coverage Post-Ferguson, and Corresponding Impacts on Legislative Activity.” *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 7(1): 151–64. doi: 10.1080/21565503.2018.1518782 (April 12, 2023).
- Azhar, Sameena, Antonia R. Alvarez, Anne S. Farina, and Susan Klumpner. 2021. “‘You’re so Exotic Looking’: An Intersectional Analysis of Asian American and Pacific Islander Stereotypes.” *Affilia* 36(3): 282–301. doi: 10.1177/08861099211001460.
- Barabas, Jason, and Jennifer Jerit. 2009. “Estimating the Causal Effects of Media Coverage on Policy-Specific Knowledge.” *American Journal of Political Science* 53(1): 73–89. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-5907.2008.00358.x.
- Birkland, Thomas A. 1997. “Focusing Events, Agenda Setting, and the Policy Process.” In *After Disaster: Agenda Setting, Public Policy, and Focusing Events*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press. essay, 1–20.
- Birman, Dina, and Nellie Tran. 2008. “Psychological Distress and Adjustment of Vietnamese Refugees in the United States: Association with Pre- and Postmigration Factors.” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 78(1): 109–20. doi: 10.1037/0002-9432.78.1.109.
- “Broadcast Snapshot Project.” 2022. *Asian American Journalists Association*.  
<https://www.aja.org/programs-and-initiatives/broadcast-snapshot-project/> (May 30, 2023).
- “CAPAC Leaders Condemn White House Use of ‘China Virus.’” 2020. *Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus*.  
<https://capac-chu.house.gov/press-releases/capac-leaders-condemn-white-house-use-china-virus> (May 30, 2023).
- Chiang, Pamela P. “Anti-Asian Racism, Responses, and the Impact on Asian Americans’ Lives.” In *COVID-19*, ed. J. Michael Ryan. . essay. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003142065> (May 30, 2023).

- Chong, Dennis, and Reuel Rogers. 2005. "Racial Solidarity and Political Participation." *Political Behavior* 27(4): 347–74. doi: 10.1007/s11109-005-5880-5.
- Cobb, Roger W., and Charles D. Elder. 1972. "INDIVIDUAL ORIENTATIONS IN THE STUDY OF POLITICAL SYMBOLISM." *Social Science Quarterly* 53(1): 79–90. doi: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42858854> (February 27, 2023).
- Coleman, James S., Elihu Katz, and Herbert Menzel. 1966. "Medical Innovation: A Diffusion Study." *Behavioral Science* 12: 481–83.
- Cook, Fay Lomax et al. 1983. "Media and Agenda Setting: Effects on the Public, Interest Group Leaders, Policy Makers, and Policy." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 47(1): 16–35. doi: 10.1086/268764.
- Croucher, Stephen M., Thao Nguyen, and Diyako Rahmani. 2020. "Prejudice toward Asian Americans in the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Effects of Social Media Use in the United States." *Frontiers in Communication* 5. doi: 10.3389/fcomm.2020.00039 (April 20, 2023).
- "Data Reports Archives." 2023. *Stop AAPI Hate*. <https://stopaapihate.org/tag/data-reports/> (May 30, 2023).
- Dearing, James W., and Everett M. Rogers. 1996. "Policy Agenda Studies." In *Agenda-Setting*, ed. Michele Lingre. London: SAGE. essay, 75–87.
- Dolšák, Nives, and Kristen Houston. 2013. "Newspaper Coverage and Climate Change Legislative Activity across US States." *Global Policy* 5(3): 286–97. doi: 10.1111/1758-5899.12097 (October 26, 2022).
- Druckman, James N. 2005. "Does Political Information Matter?" *Political Communication* 22(4): 515–19. doi: 10.1080/10584600500311444.
- Dunaway, Johanna, and Doris A. Graber. 2023. "Current Trends and Future Directions." In *Mass Media and American Politics*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. essay, 605–658.
- Dunaway, Johanna, and Doris A. Graber. 2023. "Media Effects: Then and Now." In *Mass Media and American Politics*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. essay, 553–602.
- Dunaway, Johanna, and Doris A. Graber. 2023. "Newsmaking and Reporting Routines." In *Mass Media and American Politics*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. essay, 79–118.

- Dunaway, Johanna, Regina P. Branton, and Marisa A. Abrajano. 2010. "Agenda Setting, Public Opinion, and the Issue of Immigration Reform." *Social Science Quarterly* 91(2): 359–78. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-6237.2010.00697.x.
- Gardner, Robert W., Bryant Robey, and Peter C. Smith. 1985. *Asian Americans: Growth, Change, and Diversity* Honolulu, HI: East-West Institute. rep.
- Gover, Angela R., Shannon B. Harper, and Lynn Langton. 2020. "Anti-Asian Hate Crime during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Exploring the Reproduction of Inequality." *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 45(4): 647–67. doi: 10.1007/s12103-020-09545-1.
- Graber, Doris. 2003. "Mediated Politics and Citizenship in the Twenty-First Century." *Annual Review of Psychology* 55(1): 545–71. doi: 10.1146/annurev.psych.55.090902.141550.
- Grattet, Ryken, Valerie Jenness, and Theodore R. Curry. 1998. "The Homogenization and Differentiation of Hate Crime Law in the United States, 1978 to 1995: Innovation and Diffusion in the Criminalization of Bigotry." *American Sociological Review* 63(2): 286–307. doi: 10.2307/2657328 (September 28, 2022).
- Green, Donald P., Laurence H. McFalls, and Jennifer K. Smith. 2001. "Hate Crime: An Emergent Research Agenda." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27(1): 479–504. doi: 10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.479.
- Haider-Markel, Donald P. 1998. "The Politics of Social Regulatory Policy: State and Federal Hate Crime Policy and Implementation Effort." *Political Research Quarterly* 51(1): 69–88. doi: 10.2307/448830.
- Han, Sungil, Jordan R. Riddell, and Alex R. Piquero. 2022. "Anti-Asian American Hate Crimes Spike during the Early Stages of the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 38(3–4): 3513–33. doi: 10.1177/08862605221107056.
- Hilgartner, Stephen, and Charles L. Bosk. 1988. "The Rise and Fall of Social Problems: A Public Arenas Model." *American Journal of Sociology* 94(1): 53–78. doi: 10.1086/228951.
- Hurwitz, J., and M. Peffley. 2005. "Playing the Race Card in the Post-Willie Horton Era: The Impact of Racialized Code Words on Support for Punitive Crime Policy." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 69(1): 99–112. doi: 10.1093/poq/nfi004.
- Jacobs, James B., and Barry Eisler. 1993. "HATE CRIME STATISTICS ACT OF 1990." *Criminal Law Bulletin* 29(2): 99–123.
- Jenness, Valerie, and Ryken Grattet. 1996. "The Criminalization of Hate: A Comparison of Structural and Polity Influences on the Passage of 'Bias-Crime' Legislation in the United States." *Sociological Perspectives* 39(1): 129–54. doi: 10.2307/1389346.



- Jenness, Valerie, and Ryken Grattet. 2001. *Making Hate a Crime: From Social Movement to Law Enforcement*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Kawai, Yuko. 2005. "Stereotyping Asian Americans: The Dialectic of the Model Minority and the Yellow Peril." *Howard Journal of Communications* 16(2): 109–30. doi: 10.1080/10646170590948974.
- Kim, Jae Yeon, and Aniket Kesari. 2021. "Misinformation and Hate Speech: The Case of Anti-Asian Hate Speech during the Covid-19 Pandemic." *Journal of Online Trust and Safety* 1(1). doi: 10.54501/jots.v1i1.13.
- Kosicki, Gerald M. 1993. "Problems and Opportunities in Agenda-Setting Research." *Journal of Communication* 43(2): 100–127. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01265.x.
- Lawrence, Regina G., and Thomas A. Birkland. 2004. "Guns, Hollywood, and School Safety: Defining the School-Shooting Problem across Public Arenas\*." *Social Science Quarterly* 85(5): 1193–1207. doi: 10.1111/j.0038-4941.2004.00271.x.
- "Laws and Policies." 2023. *The United States Department of Justice*. <https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/laws-and-policies> (April 12, 2023).
- "Learn About Hate Crimes." 2022. *The United States Department of Justice*. <https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/learn-about-hate-crimes> (May 30, 2023).
- Levin, Brian. 2021. Report to the Nation: Anti-Asian Prejudice & Hate Crime San Bernardino, California: Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism. rep.
- Lien, Pei-te. 2004. "Asian Americans and Voting Participation: Comparing Racial and Ethnic Differences in Recent US Elections." *International Migration Review* 38(2): 493–517.
- Lyu, Hanjia et al. 2023. "Understanding Public Opinion toward the #StopAsianHate Movement and the Relation with Racially Motivated Hate Crimes in the US." *IEEE Transactions on Computational Social Systems* 10(1): 335–46. doi: 10.1109/tcss.2021.3136858.
- Marcus-Newhall, Amy, Laura Palucki Blake, and Julia Baumann. 2002. "Perceptions of Hate Crime Perpetrators and Victims as Influenced by Race, Political Orientation, and Peer Group." *American Behavioral Scientist* 46(1): 108–35. doi: 10.1177/0002764202046001008.
- Mason, Gail. 2020. "Blue Lives Matter and Hate Crime Law." *Race and Justice* 12(2): 411–30. doi: 10.1177/2153368720933665.
- McCombs, Maxwell E., and Donald L. Shaw. 1972. "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36(2): 176. doi: 10.1086/267990 (April 2023).

- McHugh, Lucy Holmes, Maria Carmen Lemos, and Tiffany Hope Morrison. 2021. "Risk? Crisis? Emergency? Implications of the New Climate Emergency Framing for Governance and Policy." *WIREs Climate Change* 12(6). doi: 10.1002/wcc.736.
- Monte, Lindsay M., and Hyon B. Shin. 2022. "20.6 Million People in the U.S. Identify as Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander." *Census.gov*.  
<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/05/aanhpi-population-diverse-geographically-dispersed.html#:~:text=20.6%20Million%20People%20in%20the,Native%20Hawaiian%20or%20Pacific%20Islander&text=There%20are%2020.6%20million%20people,according%20to%20the%202020%20Census>. (May 30, 2023).
- "National Report." 2020. Stop AAPI Hate. <https://stopaapihate.org/2020/08/05/national-report/> (May 30, 2023).
- Nishikawa, Katsuo A., Terri L. Towner, Rosalee A. Clawson, and Eric N. Waltenburg. 2009. "Interviewing the Interviewers: Journalistic Norms and Racial Diversity in the Newsroom." *Howard Journal of Communications* 20(3): 242–59. doi: 10.1080/10646170903070175.
- Owens, Lynn C. 2007. "Race in the Television Newsroom: Do on-Air Personalities Reflect the Communities They Serve?" *Electronic News* 01(01): 7–20. doi: 10.1207/s19312431en0101\_4.
- Paik, Susan J. et al. 2017. "Diverse Asian American Families and Communities: Culture, Structure, and Education (Part 1: Why They Differ)." *School Community Journal* 27(2): 35–66.
- Pellegrini, Robert J., Sergio S. Queirolo, Victor E. Monarrez, and Dona M. Valenzuela. 1997. "Political Identification and Perceptions of Homelessness: Attributed Causality and Attitudes on Public Policy." *Psychological Reports* 80(3\_suppl): 1139–48. doi: 10.2466/pr0.1997.80.3c.1139.
- Powers, Ráchael A., Kacy Bleeker, and Crystal Alcalde. 2022. "Anti-Asian Hate Crime in U.S. National News: A Content Analysis of Coverage and Narratives from 2010–2021." *Race and Justice* 13(1): 32–54. doi: 10.1177/21533687221120949.
- Rayburn, Nadine Recker, Margaret Mendoza, and Gerald C. Davidson. 2003. "Bystanders' Perceptions of Perpetrators and Victims of Hate Crime." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 18(9): 1055–74. doi: 10.1177/0886260503254513.
- Shively, Michael. 2005. Study of Literature and Legislation on Hate Crime in America Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Justice. rep.

- Soule, Sarah A., and Jennifer Earl. 2001. "The Enactment of State-Level Hate Crime Law in the United States: Intrastate and Interstate Factors." *Sociological Perspectives* 44(3): 281–305. doi: 10.2307/1389708.
- Strang, David, and Nancy Brandon Tuma. 1993. "Spatial and Temporal Heterogeneity in Diffusion." *American Journal of Sociology* 99(3): 614–39. doi: 10.1086/230318.
- Tam, Wendy K. 1995. "Asians—A Monolithic Voting Bloc?" *Political Behavior* 17(2): 223–49. doi: 10.1007/bf01498815.
- Wang, Victoria, Michelle J. Wang, and Yeon Woo Lee. 2021. "Reflections on the Asian American and Pacific Islander Experience." *Obstetrics & Gynecology* 138(2): 284–88. doi: 10.1097/aog.0000000000004472.
- Yom, Stephanie, and Maichou Lor. 2021. "Advancing Health Disparities Research: The Need to Include Asian American Subgroup Populations." *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities* 9(6): 2248–82. doi: 10.1007/s40615-021-01164-8.

## Appendix

**Table 1A.** Frequencies of Types of Articles Related to Anti-Asian Hate in the Los Angeles Times, New York Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal.

*Note: Proportions of each type of article related to anti-Asian hate for each newspaper are denoted in parentheses. The values are proportions of articles of each category out of all of a publication's anti-Asian hate-related articles. The proportions for the Los Angeles Times do not add to 1 due to rounding.*

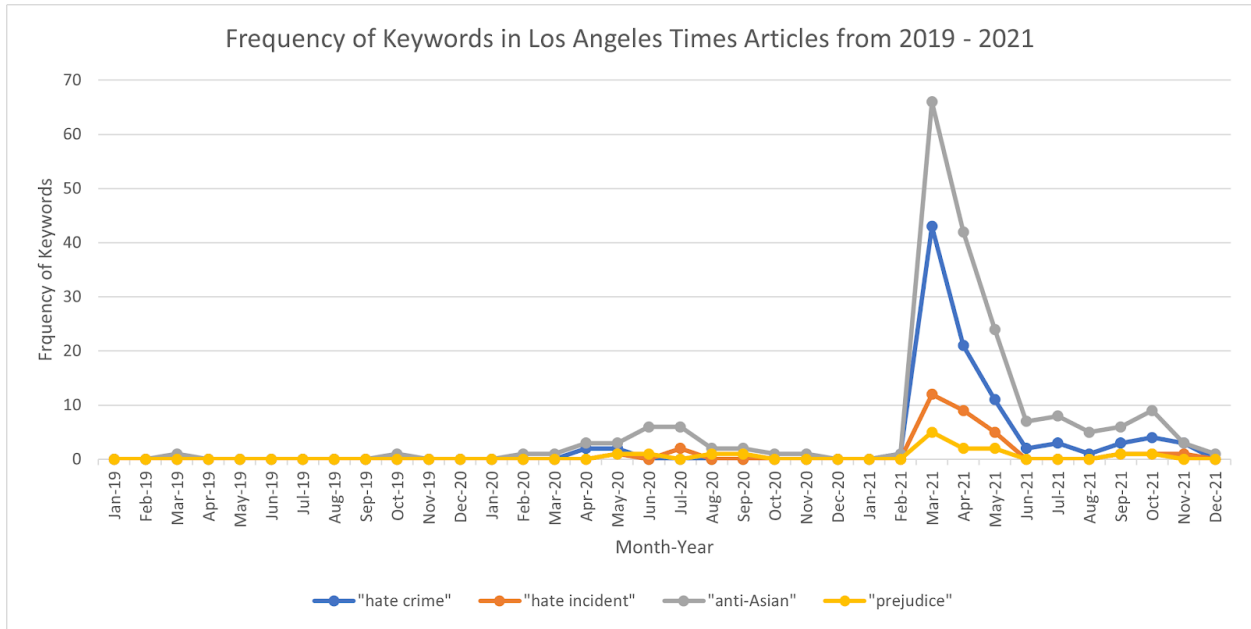
<b>Types of Articles</b>	<b>Frequency for The Los Angeles Times</b>	<b>Frequency for The New York Times</b>	<b>Frequency for The Washington Post</b>	<b>Frequency for The Wall Street Journal</b>
Opinion/Commentary	39 (0.19)	21 (0.09)	16 (0.12)	12 (0.19)
Reporting	121 (0.60)	179 (0.73)	117 (0.87)	44 (0.71)
Entertainment	25 (0.12)	36 (0.15)	0 (0)	3 (0.05)
Sports	7 (0.03)	3 (0.01)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Letters to the Editor	9 (0.04)	6 (0.02)	2 (0.01)	3 (0.05)
<b>Total Number of Articles Published Related to Anti-Asian Hate</b>	201	245	135	62

**Table 1B.** Frequency of Articles Referencing the Atlanta, Georgia Spa Shootings and Black Lives Matter/murder of Ahmaud Arbery and or George Floyd in the Los Angeles Times, New York Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal.

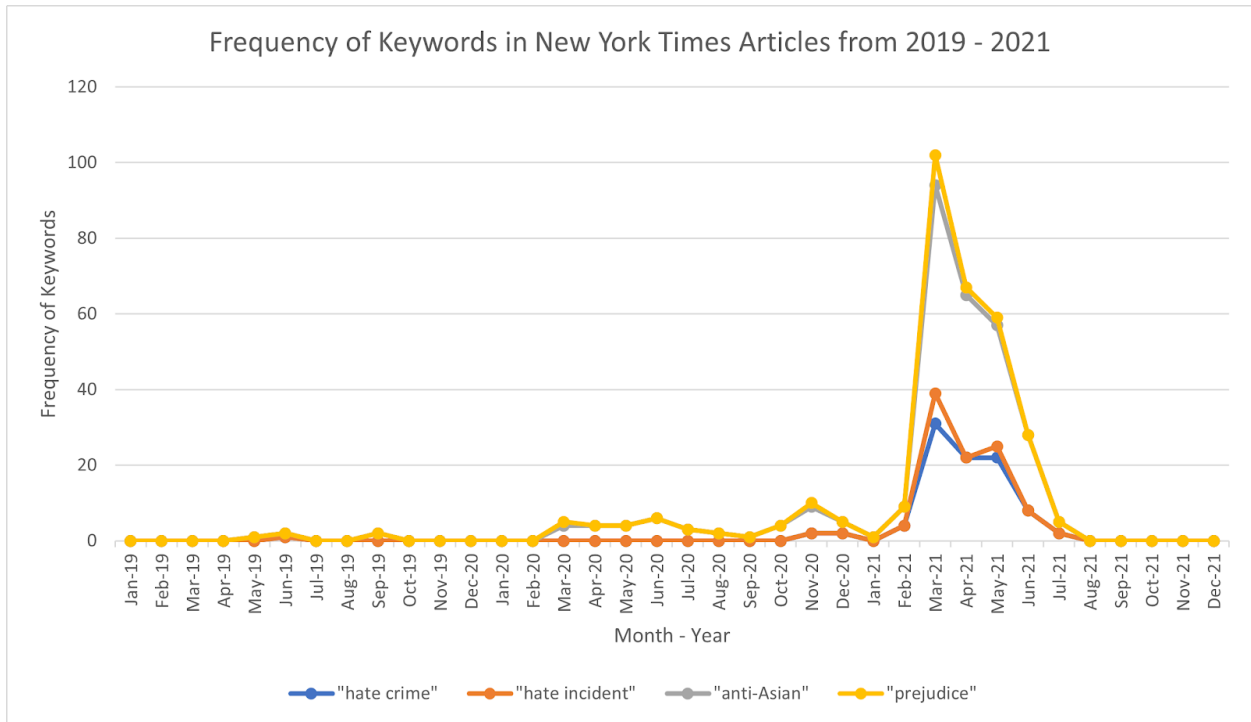
*Note: Proportions of articles referencing either or both focusing events are denoted in parentheses. The values are the proportion of articles referencing either or both focusing events out of all of a publication's anti-Asian hate-related articles. For instance, 31% of all Los Angeles Times anti-Asian hate-related articles reference the Atlanta Spa Shootings.*

	<b>Los Angeles Times</b>	<b>New York Times</b>	<b>Washington Post</b>	<b>Wall Street Journal</b>	<b>Totals from All Publications</b>
Number of Articles that reference the Atlanta Spa Shootings	63 (0.31)	69 (0.28)	48 (0.36)	26 (0.42)	206 (0.32)
Number of Articles that Reference the Black Lives Matter Movement or the Murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd	1 (0.01)	10 (0.04)	2 (0.01)	2 (0.03)	15 (0.02)
Number of Articles that Reference <i>both</i> the Atlanta Spa Shootings <i>and</i> Black Lives Matter Movement or the Murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd	0 (0)	10 (0.04)	7 (0.05)	1 (0.02)	18 (0.03)

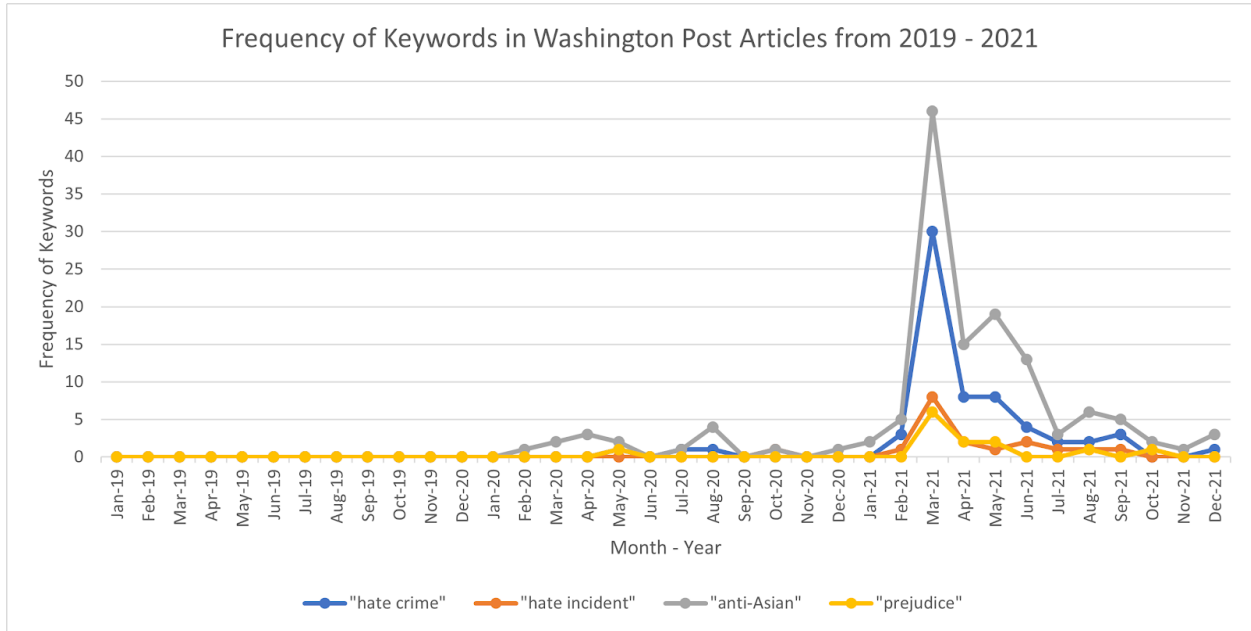
**Graph 2A.** Frequency of Keyword Usage in Articles for the Los Angeles Times from 2019 - 2021



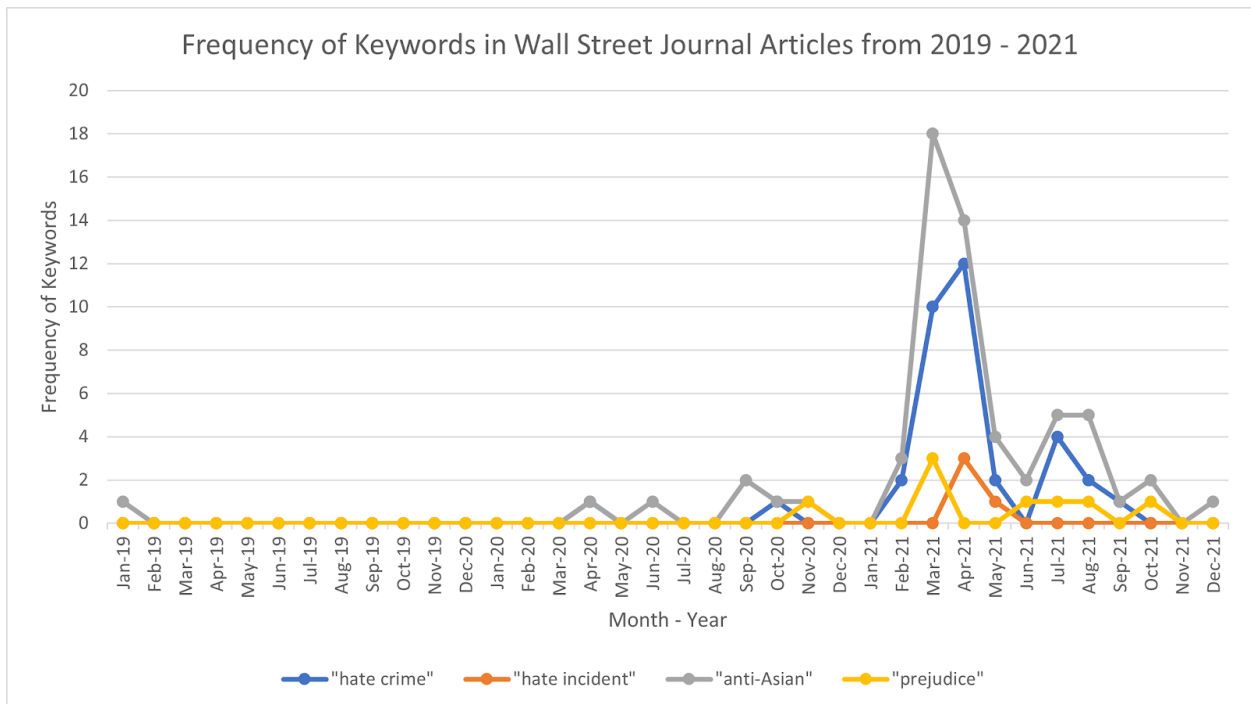
**Graph 2B.** Frequency of Keyword Usage in Articles for the New York Times from 2019 - 2021



**Graph 2C.** Frequency of Keyword Usage in Articles for the Washington Post from 2019 - 2021



**Graph 2D.** Frequency of Keyword Usage in Articles for the Wall Street Journal from 2019 - 2021



**Table 4A.** Correlation Coefficients of Variables

*Note: A significance level of 0.05 was used. p levels are denoted in parentheses.*

	Anti-Asian Hate Related Article Publication Frequency	Anti-Asian Hate Related Laws Introduced	Hate Crime - Related Laws Introduced
Anti-Asian Hate Related Article Publication Frequency	1	-	-
Anti-Asian Hate Related Laws Introduced	0.79 (1.01E-08)	1	-
Hate Crime - Related Laws Introduced	0.17 (0.32)	0.46 (0.004)	1



**Graph 4B.** Number of Articles with Victim’s or Subject’s Race(s) in Articles in the Los Angeles Times, New York Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal.

*Note: Proportions of Articles with Victim’s or Subject’s Race(s) in Articles are denoted in parentheses for each newspaper. The values are the proportion of articles that mention the victim/subject’s race out of all of a publication’s anti-Asian hate-related articles. Due to rounding, the proportions for the Los Angeles Times and Washington Post do not add to 1.*

<b>Victim/Subject Race</b>	<b>Los Angeles Times Articles</b>	<b>New York Times Articles</b>	<b>Washington Post Articles</b>	<b>Wall Street Journal Articles</b>
Asian(s)	73 (0.36)	91 (0.37)	50 (0.37)	24 (0.39)
non-Asian(s)	2 (0.001)	4 (0.02)	1 (0.007)	0 (0)
Asian(s) and Non-Asian(s)	21 (0.10)	33 (0.13)	9 (0.07)	2 (0.03)
Not Applicable	101 (0.50)	117 (0.48)	74 (0.55)	36 (0.58)

**Table 6E.** Introduction and Passage of all state anti-Asian related bills introduced from 2020 to 2021 by state.

*Note: Bill introductions and passages from 2019 were omitted in this table due to there being no bill introductions related to anti-Asian hate during the 2019 period.*

State	Symbolic Bills Introduced in 2020	Symbolic Bills Passed in 2020	Substantive Bills Introduced in 2020	Substantive Bills Passed in 2020	Symbolic Bills Introduced in 2021	Symbolic Bills Passed in 2021	Substantive Bills Introduced in 2021	Substantive Bills Passed in 2021
Alabama	0	0	0	0	6	4	0	0
California	0	0	3	3	2	2	30	16

State	Symbolic Bills Introduced in 2020	Symbolic Bills Passed in 2020	Substantive Bills Introduced in 2020	Substantive Bills Passed in 2020	Symbolic Bills Introduced in 2021	Symbolic Bills Passed in 2021	Substantive Bills Introduced in 2021	Substantive Bills Passed in 2021
Delaware	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Georgia	1	1	0	0	2	2	0	0
Hawaii	0	0	0	0	18	8	0	0
Illinois	0	0	0	0	4	2	0	0
Indiana	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0
Massachusetts	0	0	0	0	1	0	9	0
Minnesota	1	0	0	0	18	0	0	0
Nebraska	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
New Jersey	1	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
Tennessee	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Texas	0	0	0	0	6	2	0	0
Utah	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0
Vermont	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Virginia	0	0	0	0	4	2	0	0

State	Symbolic Bills Introduced in 2020	Symbolic Bills Passed in 2020	Substantive Bills Introduced in 2020	Substantive Bills Passed in 2020	Symbolic Bills Introduced in 2021	Symbolic Bills Passed in 2021	Substantive Bills Introduced in 2021	Substantive Bills Passed in 2021
Wisconsin	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
Wyoming	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0