POWER, PLATFORMS, & POLITICS:
ASIAN AMERICANS & DISINFORMATION

ASIAN AMERICAN DISINFORMATION TABLE

Disinformation is not just about lies, it is about power.

Researching and organizing against disinformation in Asian American communities requires nuanced understanding of relations of power across transnational contexts. Harmful information and problematic narratives become mobilized to maintain and expand existing power structures and inequities.

Additionally, effectively tracking and intervening on problematic narratives can be difficult due to the numerous platforms and ethnic media outlets that communities use, as well as multiple languages and cultural and political contexts.

Disinformation exposes frictions, fault lines, and tensions within and across our various diasporic communities.

Problematic narratives span three key themes:
1. Using Asians as 'wedges' against other communities of color;
2. Exploiting internal divides and hierarchies within Asian communities;
3. Weaponizing current and historical traumas.

We must connect the process of monitoring Asian American disinformation to power building and healing justice to redress harms and return trust, consensus, and accountability to our communities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To cite: Asian American Disinformation Table (2022) "Power, Platforms, Politics: Asian Americans and Disinformation Landscape Report." August 2022, www.AsianAmDisinfo.org

The Asian American Disinformation Table is anchored by the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA), and is part of the Disinfo Defense League network, a project of the Media Democracy Fund. Learn more at AsianAmDisinfo.org.

Table Chairs: Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA, AFL-CIO); Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC; Equality Labs; and the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA).

Partner Organizations include: APIAVote; Filipino Young Leaders Program (FYLPRO); Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund; and Viet Fact Check.

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WHO WE ARE

THE ASIAN AMERICAN DISINFORMATION TABLE

is a national table to coordinate research, strategies, policy recommendations, pop culture, messaging interventions, and corporate accountability around issues of domestic and transnational misinformation and disinformation impacting Asian Americans. The Table is an interfaith, inter-caste, multi-ethnic, multi-language coalition that builds shared intergenerational resilience by building across Asian American communities, supporting individual member organizations working on these issues against polarization and harmful narratives, sharing learnings, and coordinating with allies outside the U.S.

The Asian American Disinformation Table understands 'Asian American' as a collective political formation that includes immigrant and diasporic communities with homelands connected to Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Rim (e.g. China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Philippines, India, Japan, Pakistan, Korea, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, the Caribbean, Burma, Tibet, and many ethnic and religious minorities).

According to a population estimate by the 2020 Census Bureau, there are currently 19.9 million people identified as Asian and 4.1 million people identified as Asian in combination with another race. Our communities are extremely diverse with multiple ethnicities and languages.

Asian American disinformation can target us with white supremacy as commentary on our racialization and also exploit internal fractures based on our different histories and social hierarchies. This can exacerbate tensions within our communities and with other communities of color as well. Our goal as a table then is to help scope the problem of racialized disinformation in a holistic way for all of our communities so that we can not only name this problem but also work collectively to heal and build power.

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICANS (NCAPA), founded in 1996, is a coalition of 38 national Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander organizations around the country working together to shape the broader racial justice movement. NCAPA strives for equity and justice by organizing our diverse strengths to influence policy and shape public narratives.

THE DISINFO DEFENSE LEAGUE (DDL) works to foster spaces where a racialized lens on disinformation can be used to understand information ecosystems outside of Anglo- and Eurocentric approaches that continue to dominate this field of study. DDL is a distributed national network of organizers, researchers and disinformation experts disrupting online racialized disinformation infrastructure and campaigns that deliberately target Black, Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islander and other communities of color. DDL was created by and for these communities and is supported by services and insight provided by its members.

To learn more or get information on how to join the table, visit AsianAmDisinfo.org.

Disinformation is not race neutral.

To research and legislate on mis- and disinformation as a race-neutral phenomenon is not only misguided, but does a disservice to solution-oriented efforts because it ignores the complex and often emblematic issues that people of color experience online. These approaches go far beyond differences in platform moderation by language. Cultural competency and a deep contextual understanding of racialized disinformation is necessary if we are to adequately address the myriad of issues that contribute to the spread of harmful information.

Racialized disinformation perpetuates and gives rise to inequalities, seeks to consolidate power among ruling classes, and sustains white supremacy. Communities of color globally face the brunt of the persecution and violence underpinned by mis- and disinformation on platforms that continue to reward and benefit monetarily from incendiary content. From Taiwan[1], Myanmar[2], the Philippines[3], India[4], to the U.S.[5], disinformation has been at the center of attacks on disenfranchised communities. It works through the use of stereotypes and wedge issues meant to divide and target individuals, groups and movements with harassment, slander, and criminalization. Racialized disinformation can also be weaponized to disrupt solidarity among different communities.

This report offers a preliminary landscape analysis of mis- and disinformation within and about Asian and Asian American diasporic communities with the aim of strengthening Asian American movement building. Our report focuses specifically on Asians and Asian Americans to address the breadth of languages and contexts and respond to organizing priorities across different local and diasporic communities. Part of our current stage of work is addressing and detangling problematic narratives to do solidarity work.

Organizing and conducting research on the spread and impact of disinformation within our communities requires a careful and thoughtful application of our political lines and commitments—discerning in context what constitutes harm is not and can not be politically neutral. This means that mapping disinformation in our communities entails an active commitment to seeking the end of intersecting structural oppressions, including white supremacy, caste oppression, anti-Blackness, xenophobia, sexism, homophobtransphobia, ableism, and misogyny.

Please note that there is content included in this report that is graphic and mentions racial trauma and violence against people of color that may be upsetting to the reader.

1. Walter Kerr and Philip Macon (2020) "Taiwan Is Beating Political Disinformation. The West Can Too." Foreign Policy, 11 November.
2. Paul Mozur (2018) "A Genocide Incited on Facebook, With Posts From Myanmar's Military." New York Times, 15 October
3. Peter Guest (2020) "In the Philippines, fake news can get you killed." Rest of World, 29 October.
4. Equality Labs (2020) "Coronajihad."
5. See Ong, 2021

INFORMATION HARMS IN ASIAN & ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES:

"Understanding disinformation tactics in Asian American communities is studying fault lines that are also historical fault lines of trauma." - Thenmozhi Soundarajan

The problem of mis- and disinformation in Asian American communities is not just a problem of what constitutes 'true' or 'false' information, but rather how we understand misleading, manipulative, and deceptive information practices as facilitating political, social, cultural, economic, and material harms in our communities. For example, information that may be factually correct, like education statistics, may be placed in contexts to produce and promote nationalistic, racist, and casteist sentiments and ideologies.

In this report, we approach mis- and disinformation as encompassing different information harms. Definitions of disinformation often emphasize deliberate (and often covert) intent to spread harmful, deceitful, and problematic information to influence public opinion, erode consensus, and dispute evidence-based understanding of common facts. Misinformation is incorrect or misleading information without deliberate intent to deceive.

While such disinformation may originate from bad actors with malicious intent (and certainly, there are key actors and influencers with power and capital), they can also spread in seemingly more innocuous ways such as between family members or within community groups—sometimes even out of 'good' intentions and care. Such information harms occur at disparate and incommensurable scales, ranging from the incitement of deadly attacks against Asian Americans to voter suppression. Our approach to disinformation expands on the limitations of current mainstream definitions that focus on veracity and intent. Instead, we focus on how harmful information and problematic narratives become mobilized to maintain and expand existing power structures and inequities[6].

KEY DEFINITIONS:

News/reporting: Articles or programs that present observations and data

Opinion piece/show: An article or program that analyzes the news or uses facts to support an argument; clear bias and presented as an opinion

Misinformation: Misleading, incorrect, or false information; could be caused by human error, faulty fact-checking. Not intended to deceive.

Malinformation: Genuine information that is shared to cause harm; often de-contextualized information used to promote an argument or perspective.

Disinformation: Misleading, incorrect, or false information presented with the intent to mislead an audience.

Problematic Narrative: Narratives that fall under the misinformation, malinformation, and/or disinformation umbrella; narratives that have the potential to cause harm in general.

Mid-information: Incomplete information or information used out of context that can promote problematic or misleading narratives; often used as mal-information

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6.   See Kuo and Marwick, 2021

Disinformation is about power.

As Table Co-chair Thenmozhi Soundararajan of Equality Labs has emphasized, "A fact is a fact not just because of evidence but because of *power*."

Disinformation is explicitly designed to expose the frictions, fault lines, and tensions within and across our various diasporic communities while also working to deplatform us from democracy and create divisions with other communities of color. That is why we must connect the process of monitoring Asian American disinformation to power building to return trust, consensus, and accountability to our community narratives. This also cannot be done without acknowledging the tremendous harms and trauma our communities have endured in this time of unabated racialized disinformation and that healing justice must be at the core of all of our strategies.

For example, casteist disinformation, including arguments that caste 'does not exist' or claims that caste equity sows community divisions or promotes 'reverse discrimination,' aim to preserve dominant caste interests in the South Asian community and systems of social hierarchy[7]. Or, the incitement of Sinophobia through the racialization of COVID-19 as the "Chinese virus," "CCP virus," or "Kung Flu" has also circulated within Asian diasporic groups, drawing on pre-existing geopolitical tensions, such as between Taiwan and China, or in the Philippines and Indonesia[8]. Another example is the disinformation fueled by WeChat against affirmative action programs in local schools and higher education, pitting Chinese Americans against other communities of color[9].

This political landscape requires attention to the specific contexts in which this information circulates, including geopolitical histories; transnational news, information, and social networks; political and economic interests of particular actors; and more.

7. Nitasha Taku (2022) "Google's plan to talk about caste bias led to 'division and rancor'." The Washington Post, 2 June.
8. Jonathan C. Ong (2021) "Southeast Asia's Disinformation Crisis: Where the State is the Biggest Bad Actor and Regulation is a Bad Word." Items: Insights from the Social Sciences, 12 January.
9. Alia Wong (2018) "The App at the Heart of the Movement to End Affirmative Action." The Atlantic, 20 November.
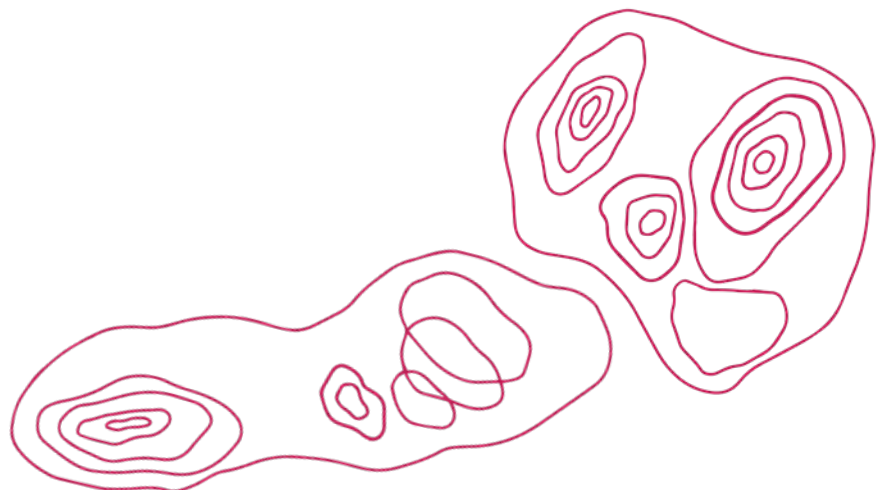
HOW DOES DISINFORMATION IMPACT ASIAN & ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES?

Asians and Asian Americans, like other communities, may find disinformation in their daily lives, including through social media platforms and other information networks. However, there are several key factors that differentiate how disinformation impacts our communities in comparison to others.

Problems with the Platforms:

Firstly, Asian Americans are spread out across more platforms, often in-language, in comparison to other demographics. Some of these include Line, Kakao, WhatsApp, WeChat, Weibo, and Viber – which many Asian Americans use as a main source of news and forum for political discussion[10].

Effectively tracking the variety of narratives that may be disseminating is difficult, as a result of the numerous platforms Asian Americans use.

Effectively tracking the variety of narratives that may be disseminating is difficult, as a result of the numerous platforms Asian Americans use. For example, information originating on a conservative news channel in Vietnam may find its way to a video clip on Youtube and news in India may circulate as a meme on WhatsApp. This issue is compounded by the fact these platforms heavily utilize private, closed spaces that make research and content moderation efforts difficult[11].

These in-language platforms also often have little to no infrastructure to combat disinformation, and typically face less public scrutiny to do anything about it, in comparison to social media platforms such as Facebook. Even mainstream platforms such as Facebook (owned by Meta along with WhatsApp and Instagram) or Twitter, which Asian Americans also use, already have relatively weak policies regarding disinformation and are inconsistent in enforcing said policies. Additionally, due to lack of competency and understanding

of specific language, cultural, and political contexts, most social media platforms are ineffective in countering disinformation.

To make matters more difficult, Asian and Asian American communities encompass over 50 languages. Fully understanding the diversity of disinformation in Asian American communities requires the capacity to monitor sources in this wide array of languages and understand linguistic nuances. This issue is intensified by the fact that platforms are less likely to flag disinformation in non-English languages[12], meaning Asian Americans are potentially being exposed to more false and misleading narratives than the average user.

Multiple Historical, Political, and Cultural Contexts:

Fully understanding disinformation in Asian American spaces also requires a knowledge of the cultural and political contexts. Different patterns and circumstances of migration also mean that new immigrants come with experiences and cultures that frame different understandings of 'democracy' and 'government'.

People's lived experiences of survival; memories of geopolitical conflicts; personal encounters with different state systems of governance; and economic circumstances interface with how they engage politically or how they consume news and information across national boundaries.

These histories and lived experiences undergird people's political analysis and can also be exploited. For example, members of Vietnamese communities have strongly connected to anti-Chinese sentiments and Trump's claims of the Democratic Party as socialist during the 2020 elections which exploited violent histories of Chinese imperialism in the South China Sea[13]. U.S. wars and military intervention in Asia coupled with propaganda of the U.S. "gift of freedom"[14] and fantasies of the 'American Dream' have also produced immigrant narratives of gratitude and debt that align citizenship and belonging with whiteness[15].

Language Injustice:

English language dominance is a huge problem. One of the main reasons disinformation is able to disseminate so widely in Asian American spaces is often because there is a lack or absence of any reliable information at all, specifically in-language. For example, the lack of available and sufficient language translation and interpretation for healthcare and other social services has made it difficult for Asian communities to access vaccine information, financial relief, and other resources during the pandemic.

Many under-resourced community groups have needed to fill in this gap by making their own in-language health guides and materials while also being overtaxed during ongoing crises. With a large portion of Asian American populations having limited English proficiency and little to no in-language resources, a vacuum is created – also allowing bad actors to seize an opportunity[16]. As mentioned above, there is a lack of will by platforms to allocate resources for non-English language contexts and lack of understanding about power beyond U.S. centric frameworks despite platforms operating multinationally and also exploiting and underpaying content moderators and workers in Asia.

Online Harassment, Fake Accounts, and Trolls

The spread of disinformation draws on tactics by abusers, including gaslighting, control of resources, retaliation, ostracization from social networks, and harassment. This is about the exertion and maintenance of power. For example, actors seeking to preserve power (e.g. dominant caste Hindu nationalists, wealthy Chinese right-wing actors, and Asian mens' rights activists[17]) will target organizers from minoritized backgrounds (e.g. Dalit and caste-oppressed organizers; Asian American feminists) and spread false and harmful information about individuals to delegitimize their expertise and political claims.

They may also use digital trolling tactics; harass people's loved ones and family members; or attack people at their homes or places of work. In addition to tactics of 'blaming' and 'shaming', problematic narratives may take the form of denial of grievances and historical traumas and reversing attacks onto those already vulnerable within communities (e.g. claims of Hinduphobia by caste dominant actors or 'reverse racism').

Additionally, external actors have created fake accounts using names and images of Asian people to perpetuate racist, anti-immigrant, and homophobic ideologies. These accounts also rely on racist stereotypes about Asians (see images of recent accounts using Chinese names and stereotypes). The weaponization of Asian-named handles to foment hostility against other racial groups is also a tactic to break racial solidarities.

Disinformation is not just caused by a few bad individual actors, but a collective endeavor to access and preserve power. For example, disinformation is also an

Images from researcher @murphtracks[18] showing examples of fake accounts using Chinese names and stereotypes.

industry. As scholars Jonathan Ong and Jason Vincent A. Cabañes describe in their 2018 study of disinformation campaigns in the Philippines, the widespread uses of fake accounts, professional trolls, and paid influencers (or "architects of networked disinformation") also indicate vulnerabilities in political cultures and digital industries that incentivize actors financially, politically, and socially[19].

Ethnic and Diasporic News Networks:

As a result of many Asian Americans often lacking access to any reliable information in-language from mainstream media outlets, there has always been a need for diasporic and ethnic news networks. These media networks are vast, spanning local, regional, national, and transnational circulation and readership and may include print, social media and digital platforms, cable news networks, and in-language radio.

Many Asians and Asian Americans consume media from outlets in their 'home countries,' including in English and in-language. This includes potentially thousands of outlets from across Asia. While many are credible, several carry problematic political biases and may be financially backed by political parties and factions.

These can be hard to track for researchers without adequate understanding of local political, social, and cultural contexts. For example, an understanding of the Chinese language news media ecosystem in the U.S. (e.g. *World Journal, Sing Tao Daily, International Daily News, Epoch Times*) requires knowledge and analysis of politics within and across China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, such as the relationship to and positions on the Chinese Communist Party and Taiwanese independence.

Additionally, political bias across 'left' and 'right' politics is challenging to map transnationally: some outlets that might on the surface lean left on candidates and issues in the U.S. might promote conservative and nationalistic interests in their own country.

In the United States, there are also ethnic news networks that are distributed nationally and locally for various ethnicities – often in-language. This ecosystem is limited, however, as a result of a myriad of problems: the monopolization of news sources, the nationalization of news, lack of funding, and general overlooking of Asian American communities.

Much of the information Asians and Asian Americans may receive come from online sources as a result, due to decreasing barriers of entry to creating an online platform. There are various outlets, blogs, and social media accounts that distribute news in-language, as well as those targeting Asian American audiences and focusing on Asian American-specific issues at large. Within the online ecosystem, there is a wide breadth of problematic news sources that have arisen with little to no pushback. This includes social media accounts, problematic news websites, influencers and political commentators, and podcasts.

The documented lack of coverage about Asians and Asian Americans in mainstream media and news have left voids filled by sources and online hubs that promote coverage of Asian and Asian American news, lifestyle, and entertainment with a singular emphasis on 'pro-Asian' identity. These spaces foster problematic narratives that pivot on existing structures of misogyny, anti-Black racism, and xenophobia. For example, coverage on anti-Asian racism by sources like Asian Dawn and the Twitter account @ActiveAsian utilize narrative tropes of Black-on-Asian crime. ■

10. APIAVote (2022) Asian American Voter Survey.
11. Malhotra, 2020
12. See also AVAAZ (2020) "How Facebook can Flatten the Curve of the Coronavirus Infodemic."
13. See S. Nguyễn et al, 2022
14. M.T. Nguyen, 2012
15. See M.T. Nguyen, 2012; Baik, 2015; and Jun, 2011
16. Fang, 2021
17. Aaron Mak (2021) "Men's Rights Asians" Think This Is Their Moment." Slate, 15 September.
18. @murphtracks (2022) "Fake Asian accounts operated by Nazis and racists have made a comeback this season...." 1 August.
19. Ong and Cabañes, 2018

ELECTORAL IMPACT

Disinformation targeting Asian Americans in the leadup to the 2022 midterm elections and beyond underscores the urgent need to neutralize harmful political propaganda. As outlined in a 2022 map of battleground counties by Politco, there is a small number of contested regions that will have an impact on electoral outcomes and the balance of power in the country. Asian Americans are an important voter demographic in swing states and counties, making it critical to understand the political narratives resonating in these communities. This map features a small sample of demographic data.
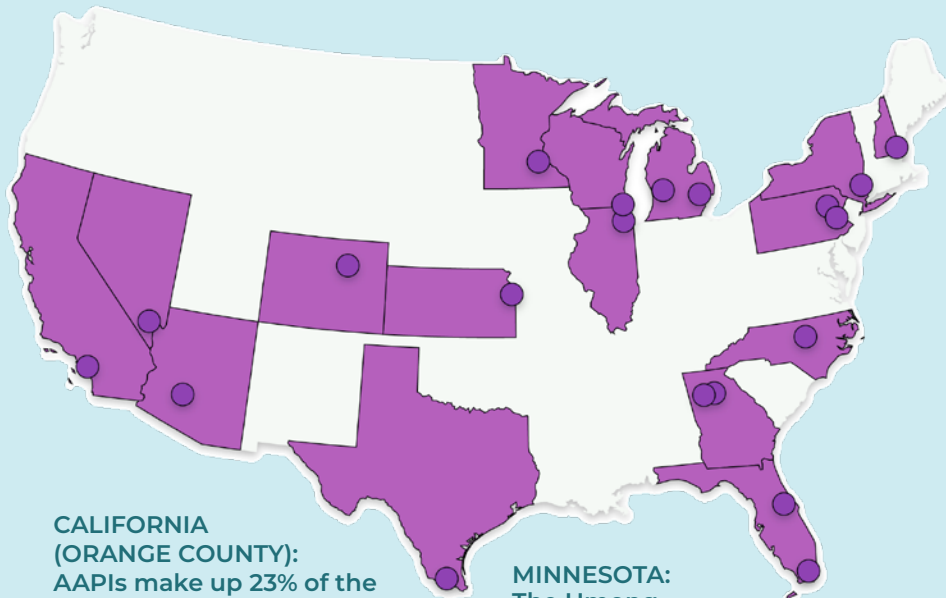
CALIFORNIA (ORANGE COUNTY): AAPIs make up 23% of the eligible voters. In California, 37% of Asian Americans did not declare an identification with either political party. In the state, the largest Asian American ethnic groups include: Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese.

ARIZONA: AAPIs make up 3.6% of the state's electorate. The largest Asian American ethnic groups include Filipino, Indian, Chinese, and Vietnamese.

This map is adapted from Politico's 2022 Battleground Counties with data about Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) demographics from APIAVote. For reference:
- Politico Staff (2022) "The 20 counties that will decide the midterms." 12 July.
- APIAVote (2022) AAPI Voter Demographics by State.
- Asian Americans Advancing Justice (2022) "Fake News and the Growing Power of Asian American Voters: What this Means for 2022 Midterm Elections." 5 May.

MINNESOTA: The Hmong community is the largest Asian American ethnic group in the state. From 2010 to 2020, the number of eligible AAPI voters in Minnesota grew by 28%.

ILLINOIS (DUPAGE COUNTY): AAPIs make up 10% of the eligible voters. 79% of Asian American adults in Illinois speak a language other than English at home. In the state, the largest Asian American ethnic groups include are Chinese, Filipino, and Indian.

TEXAS: Since 2010-2020, AAPI residents have grown 47% and currently make up close to 5% of the state electorate. The largest Asian American ethnic groups in Texas include Indian, Vietnamese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, and Pakistani. In the greater Houston area, Asian Americans make up 6.5% of the total population; 5.4% in the Dallas metro area.

MICHIGAN (OAKLAND COUNTY): This county is one of the wealthiest and most populous in the state with AAPIs making up 9% of the population. Indian Americans make up 31.4% of the AAPI population size in the state.

PENNSYLVANIA: The largest Asian American ethnic groups in Pennsylvania are Indian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Filipino, and Cambodian. From 2010 to 2020, the number of eligible AAPI voters in Pennsylvania grew by 24% (compared to a -8% change statewide over the same period).

NORTH CAROLINA (WAKE COUNTY): AAPIs make up 5% of the eligible voters. In the state, the largest Asian American ethnic groups are Indian, Chinese, Filipino, and Vietnamese. During the 2020 elections, 80,366 votes were cast by Asian American voters—the margin of victory for Republicans was by 74,481 votes.

GEORGIA (GWINNETT COUNTY): AAPIs make up 11% of the eligible voters. In the Atlanta metro area, they make up 4.8% of the total population. In Georgia, the largest Asian American ethnic groups are Indian, Indian, Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese. From 2010 to 2020, the number of eligible AAPI voters in Georgia grew by 36% (compared to a -1% change for the statewide eligible voting population over the same period). During the 2020 elections, 134,281 votes were cast by Asian American voters—the margin of victory for Democrats was by 11,779 votes.

FLORIDA: From 2010 to 2020, the number of eligible AAPI voters in Florida grew by 32% (compared to a 5% change for the statewide eligible voting population over the same period). The largest Asian American ethnic groups in Florida include: Indian, Filipino, Chinese, and Vietnamese. During the 2020 elections, 230,082 votes were cast by Asian American voters—the margin of victory for Republicans was by 371,686 votes (so Asian American voters would have made up 61.9% of the margin of victory).

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The Need for Transnational Political Analysis:

More capacity is needed for transnational political analysis to strengthen an Asian American progressive movement today. The revolutionary histories of our movements have demonstrated the necessity of *internationalist* politics[20].

While different diasporic groups may know a lot about U.S. politics or about their specific diasporic contexts, there are many growing edges around politics in and across Asia especially given different and cross-cutting ethno-nationalisms. For example, understanding the recent election of Bongbong Marcos Jr. in the Philippines requires historical grounding, in-depth knowledge of local and transnational media networks, and careful untangling of how and why problematic narratives of "authoritarian fantasy"[21] circulate. Additionally, one must consider intra-community dynamics and hierarchies and tensions across Asia and between the U.S. and Asia.

It is unrealistic to expect any one organization to hold all of the knowledge and expertise. However, more robust information sharing networks by cultivating relationships of trust and engaging in ongoing reflexivity in growing our political analysis can, and should be built.

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20. Bae and Tseng-Putterman, 2020
21. Jonathan Corpus Ong. (2022) "The World Should Be Worried About a Dictator's Son's Apparent Win in the Philippines." TIME Magazine, 10 May.

Understanding the Asian and Asian American disinformation landscape requires deepening our collective knowledge of historical and contemporary formations of power, including:

1. **Historical and contemporary forms of intra-Asian imperialism and colonialism** (e.g. Japan's colonial rule in East and Southeast Asia to the Tamil Genocide in Sri Lanka), including how displacement from state violence and conflict impact global movement and migration

2. **Nuanced applications of political analysis** (e.g. global forms of Islamophobia and caste supremacy while also recognizing Muslim violence against Hindus in Bangladesh)

3. **Politics in Asia**, including grassroots and electoral politics

4. **U.S. interventions in Asia,** including the ways U.S. war and military occupation create racialized narratives of Asians as perpetual threats (e.g. holding space for the reality of authoritarian politics and state violence of the Chinese Communist Party while also unpacking U.S. political and economic interests and tensions in China)

5. **Intersections between technology policies, corporations, and institutions of global governance**, as well as intersections between technology and other domestic and international policy terrains (e.g. immigration exclusion, national security, sanctions, social welfare, etc).

Rearching Mis- and Disinformation in Asian and Asian American Communities:

Community groups and organizations have been undertaking different forms of research and narrative interventions within their own diasporic communities, such as media monitoring, conducting community surveys, and creating in-language toolkits and platforms.

As outlined above, there are several challenges within this research landscape[22]:

1. **Histories of imperialism, colonialism, and geopolitical conflicts** (e.g. Western and inter-Asian imperialisms and U.S. military intervention and war in Asia) require contextualization of different layers of power interests and struggles

2. **Transnational news, media, and social networks** require attention to multiple streams of information across languages, cultures, generations, and geographies

3. **Information circulates on closed, intimate, and private networks** such as messaging applications (e.g. WhatsApp, WeChat, KaKao) which requires culturally informed and relational methods[23]

4. **Linguistic challenges given Anglo-centricity of tech platforms** (despite multinational operations) require contextual language translation and interpretation that account for historical, social, cultural, and political factors

5. **Individual and organizational risks of harassment and abuse** when documenting and countering harmful information narratives

Groups combine different methods, approaches and models to address multiple complexities within our different diasporas. For example, APIAVote utilizes social listening tools (e.g. Meltwater, CrowdTangle) and manual online investigation to monitor and study problematic narratives regarding voting rights, democracy, and elections, as well as narratives targeting Asian Americans and narratives originating from Asian American spaces.

Through social listening tools, APIAVote identifies highly-engaged posts and key players to understand the reach and roots of a narrative. They have also identified problematic outlets whose websites they analyze manually to identify specific problematic articles, such as *Asian Dawn, Epoch Times, Daily Caller, Breitbart, Post Millennial*, and *Gateway Pundit*. Filipino Young Leaders Organization (FYLPRO) combines media monitoring techniques with community surveys to find culturally informed storytelling strategies for narrative changes and intervention.

Equality Labs has one of the oldest South Asian disinformation research teams in the field. Their researchers are a multiracial, interfaith and inter-caste team. The team monitors multiple platforms through a combination of Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) gathering; social media listening tools like Meltwater, Crowdtangle, and Talkwalker; and custom built tools.

SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS:

MELTWATER (meltwater.com) is a social listening tool that is able to examine content from across social media platforms and news outlets, ranging from Facebook to Weibo to CNN. Based on boolean searches, it is able to estimate the number of mentions a narrative has, where it is being talked about, what are key words associated with the narrative, and the amount of engagement particular posts receive. It can also be used to track the salience of a conversation over time. It has the ability to search in various Asian languages.

CROWDTANGLE (crowdtangle.com) analyzes and examines limited public content and engagement across Meta platforms, Twitter, and Reddit by employing Boolean queries and list curation. The tool allows local relevance searches and searches in over 100 languages, among other features. CrowdTangle is a Meta-owned property.

Equality Lab's researchers come from multiple disciplines, including data scientists, social media listeners, cyber security specialists, and trauma-informed somatic therapists. As a digital safety provider for grassroots movements in the U.S. and South Asia, Equality Labs also partners with over 50 community groups who share information with our team to build community resilience and safety.

Unique to Equality Lab's process is a holistic approach to disinformation and cyberattacks which often go hand in hand against community leaders and organizations. Because of this, Equality Labs prioritizes building racial, gender, and caste equity amongst their researchers while also ensuring the team has training and certifications in trauma-informed approaches, transformative justice, safety and risk assessment, OSINT, and social media and data analytics training.

In addition to quantitative analysis of narratives, different researchers and organizations use qualitative, participatory, and multi-method approaches. For example, media studies scholar and AADT Research Facilitator Dr. Rachel Kuo is developing a project using archival research, community workshops, oral histories, and focus groups to map information across intergenerational, multilingual, and transnational media and information networks[24].

At the University of Washington-Seattle, Sarah Nguyen, alongside Dr. Rachel Moran, uses focus groups and interviews to examine misinformation in Vietnamese diaspora communities[25].

The University of Massachusetts-Amherst FACT CHAMP team, led by Dr. Jonathan Corpus Ong, brings together a team of communication researchers, historians, public policy experts, and computer scientists to closely monitor narratives related to #StopAAPIHate. Informed by participatory and community-engaged research principles and using qualitative and quantitative methods, their team maps out social media accounts peddling misleading yet persuasive messages that fan the flames of interracial division and pro-policing narratives.

TYPES OF DISINFORMATION:
Excerpted from UNHCR's Using Social Media in Community-Based Protection, Factsheet #4: Types of Misinformation and Disinformation

Fabricated Content: Completely false content

Manipulated Content: Genuine information or imagery that has been distorted, e.g. a sensational headline or populist 'click bait'

Imposter Content: Impersonation of genuine sources, e.g. using the branding of an established agency

Misleading Content: Misleading information, e.g. comment presented as fact

False Context: Factually accurate content combined with false contextual information, e.g. when the headline of an article does not reflect the content

Satire and Parody: Humorous but false stories passed off as true. There is no intention to harm but readers may be fooled

False Connections: When headlines, visuals or captions do not support the content

Sponsored Content: Advertising or PR disguised as editorial content

Propaganda: Content used to manage attitudes, values and knowledge

Error: A mistake made by established new agencies in their reporting

New technologies including artificial intelligence (AI) systems have also given rise to the production, manipulation, and modification of data and multimedia through algorithms and other automated means to mislead or change original meaning.

22. S. Nguyễn et al, 2022
23. Malhotra, 2020
24. Rachel Kuo (2022) Transnational Information Systems
25. Sarah Nguyễn and Rachel (2021) "Early findings from explorations into the Vietnamese misinformation crisis." Center for an Informed Public. 21 June.

NARRATIVE TRENDS

Common Themes in Asian American Communities:

Asian Americans come in contact with many of the same disinformation narratives that other communities do — strategic narratives used to maintain existing regimes of power and preserve particular political interests. However, there are sometimes narratives that either are directly targeted towards Asian Americans, resonate more strongly with Asian Americans, and/or pivot on racist narratives about Asian Americans.

Additionally, dialogue in the U.S. may draw upon politics from Asian nations and vice versa. Different ethnic groups may be exposed to specific narratives related to the communities they are a part of. For example, there is a higher level of anti-President Xi Jinping content in Chinese and Vietnamese diasporic spaces versus others. These narratives are forms of 'identity propaganda' that target and exploit identity-based differences (e.g. race, ethnicity, caste, religion, nation)[26].

These narratives span three key themes that should be accounted for by researchers and organizers:

1 **Using Asians as 'wedges' against other communities of color:** Narrative strategies and narrow interests that encourage assimilating into and gaining power from whiteness as a way to 'overcome' exclusion leverage Asian experiences of racialization to pit Asians against other communities. Key examples may include anti-affirmative action positions that decrease educational access for other communities or positions that promote increased policing as a response to anti-Asian violence.

2 **Exploiting internal divides in Asian communities:** Hierarchies of class, caste, religion, ethnicity, immigration status and other markers of internal difference can be exploited to promote interests that hurt those most vulnerable in our communities.

3 **Weaponization of current and historical traumas:** As Asians and Asian Americans experience different forms of racialized violence, these experiences can be co-opted and weaponized to further racist, nationalistic, and casteist interests.

The following are examples of problematic narratives targeted towards Asians and Asian Americans:

ANTI-AFFIRMATIVE ACTION & "REVERSE RACISM": Affirmative action is a set of procedures designed to eliminate discrimination among applicants, remedy prior discrimination, and prevent future discrimination. These types of procedures are often found in universities and other schools, benefitting many students of color.

While these types of policies have assisted Asian and Asian American students, there are some who oppose affirmative action by claiming the policies unfairly disadvantage them. Narratives on "reverse racism" against Asian and Asian American communities and racist remarks about Black and Latino/a/x communities have been used to oppose affirmative action.

These narratives have circulated widely to promote Chinese right-wing agendas, including partnerships with Edward Blum and his organization Students for Fair Admissions in a lawsuit against Harvard; and conservative formations such as the Silicon Valley Chinese Association to oppose California's SCA-5. An example of an intervention against this narrative includes VietFactCheck's article falsifying the claim that affirmative action hurts Asian Americans[27].

CLASS POLITICS & OPPOSITION TO DATA DISAGGREGATION: Narratives opposing data disaggregation campaigns pivot on class and ethnic hierarchies within Asian and Asian American communities. Currently, most statistics and figures regarding Asian and Asian American groups (e.g. income, education access, healthcare) aggregate all of the many ethnic groups together despite different social and economic conditions and needs. This data often paints a misleading picture.

For example, an aggregated Asian American median income may appear higher than the national average, making it difficult for communities to advocate for social welfare programs and resources. However, disaggregated data about median incomes

by specific ethnicity reveal stark differences, such as a $75,000 difference between the median incomes of Indian Americans and Burmese Americans[28].

Consequently, some communities, predominantly Chinese immigrant communities, have opposed data disaggregation bills, claiming them to be "racist" and promote segregation[27]. The narratives also promote the belief that data disaggregation would hurt their children's chances of getting into top schools.

CASTE ERASURE & "UNITY": Similar to 'aggregation not segregation,' the ongoing erasure of caste in South Asian diasporic communities relies on calls for 'unity' to maintain ongoing caste oppression. Attacks against caste-oppressed organizers use claims that bringing up caste causes political divides in the community reverses and erases experiences of oppression.

PLACING BLAME FOR ANTI-ASIAN VIOLENCE & OTHER SOCIETAL WOES ON BLACK & LATINO/A/X COMMUNITIES: Some within Asian and Asian American communities believe that the real threat of anti-Asian violence comes from Black and Latino/a/x communities, despite extensive research showing this to be untrue[30].

This racist sentiment goes beyond just the recent uptick in anti-Asian violence; it extends to blaming other communities of color for crime rates, the economy, and more. It also extends to blaming other communities of color for their own challenges and status – despite complicated histories of discrimination and oppression and current systems in place.

COVID-19, VACCINE DISINFORMATION: Disinformation about COVID-19 and their corresponding vaccines, like with other communities, run rampant within Asian and Asian American spaces. These narratives include, but are not limited to, claims such as the vaccines are worse than COVID-19 (in some cases killing people), COVID-19 was manufactured by the Chinese government, there are "concentration camps" for those who do not take the vaccine, and COVID-19 is used to control the citizenry.

VOTER SUPPRESSION & ELECTION FRAUD CONSPIRACY THEORIES: Election-related disinformation, including election fraud conspiracy theories regarding the 2020 election, QAnon, Antifa, voting-by-mail, and voter machines, can be found within Asian and Asian American spaces, particularly within the past few years. There is a belief among some that election fraud is widespread and perpetuated by the Democratic Party, as pushed by right-wing and far-right entities.

Bad actors will often amplify specific incidents of fraud or election tampering, especially if it's related to a left-leaning individual, to sow doubt into U.S. elections systems and the American left. People's lack of knowledge on the electoral process and lack of language access can also be exploited to misinform them on how the registration, voting, and tallying processes work to make it appear U.S. elections systems are ripe for fraud and manipulation. This includes, but is not limited to, topics such as voting early, voting-by-mail, the use of voting machines, and ballot collecting.

The "Big Lie," the belief that former President Donald Trump rightfully won the 2020 Presidential Election, is a direct result of the build-up from these narratives, and this conspiracy theory continues to drive an alarming number of Asians and Asian Americans to distrust and attack the electoral system and American democracy.

An intervention by APIAVote includes pushing out accurate election information (e.g. deadlines and other important dates; emphasizing voting rights by states); repeatedly circulating content emphasizing how voting-by-mail is safe and secure; and highlighting how sham election reviews have garnered no evidence of fraud. One key strategy is not responding directly to specific narratives, but to amplify counter-narratives repeatedly.

ANTI-COMMUNIST, ANTI-SOCIALIST NARRATIVES: Misleading anti-communist and anti-socialist narratives are widespread, but have a particular appeal to those in diaspora communities that were affected by authoritarian governments such as in China, Vietnam, or North Korea. These narratives typically paint certain policies, individuals, organizations, or ideas as being "communist" or "socialist" in order to incite fear and anger towards them.

ANTI-CRITICAL RACE THEORY: Critical race theory (CRT) is a school of thought that examines the intersection of race, society, and law in the United States and to challenge limitations to mainstream racial justice approaches, such as lack of intersectionality in anti-discrimination and gender-based violence policies[29]. Far-right provocateurs have been pushing the claim CRT is being taught in K-12 schools and being used to indoctrinate students into "Marxist" ideology, make them hate the United States, and sow division among them by race.

Despite CRT not being taught in K-12 schools, lessons and measures addressing racism, including curriculum on U.S. history, have become controversial as a result. Some Asians and Asian Americans have compared CRT to the Cultural Revolution and their concept of Communism in general, and have taken part in protesting against the mention of race in school curriculums.

ANTI-FEMINIST SENTIMENT: Misogynistic, queer- and transphobic speech also circulates. For example, among second generation Asian American men, there has been an alarming rise in anti-feminist sentiment and toxic masculinity in recent years. Or, as Equality Labs found in a 2019 study on Facebook and violent speech, over 25% of the posts were queerphobic and transphobic and 12% of the posts made direct reference to rape[32].

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Combating Anti-Asian Violence & Disinformation:

Asian Americans are not only exposed to disinformation, but are increasingly the subject of mis- and disinformation as well. These types of narratives include:

CREATING CONFLICT BETWEEN ASIANS AND OTHER COMMUNITIES OF COLOR: Some problematic actors try to sow division among Asians and Asian Americans and other communities of color, such as placing blame for anti-Asian violence and other societal woes on Black and Latino/a/x communities. For example, far-right provocateur Andy Ngo and Twitter accounts such as @ActiveAsian are currently utilizing the uptick in anti-Asian violence to do this, by blaming mainly Black communities for these attacks. These narratives can also be prevalent in mainstream news, where spectacles of violence pivot on racial conflict.

There are also instances where problematic actors highlight Asian Americans to push problematic narratives against other communities. Different groups may be exposed to specific anti-Asian American narratives related to the communities they are a part of. For example, there have been instances of problematic bad actors claiming "Asians are white-adjacent and do not care about Black people."

As another example, some problematic actors have utilized a whitewashed version of the "Rooftop Koreans'' narrative as an anti-Black and pro-gun response to the uprisings of summer 2020. Glorifying armed Korean Americans defending their shops during the 1992 Los Angeles uprisings not only papers over the history of Soon Ja Du shooting Black teenager Latasha Harlins to 'defend' her store from the perceived theft of orange juice, but also de-legitimizes Black liberation movements.

PLACING BLAME FOR COVID-19 ON ASIAN AMERICANS: The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a large uptick in anti-Asian violence, due to some people's belief the virus was "started or created in or by the Chinese government." This has led to numerous racist terms such as "Kung Flu" and "Wuhan Virus" – which have been used to discriminate against Asians and Asian Americans by blaming them for the pandemic, leading to verbal and physical harassment and violence as well as mental and emotional distress.

As Equality Labs has documented in a 2020 report, there was also Islamophobic disinformation about Indian Muslims as carriers of the virus ('Coronajihad'), such as memes combining disturbing imagery of suicide bombers with the virus. Originating in India, these memes circulated to the U.S. with Muslims reporting increased harassment at some mosques.

CLAIMING ASIAN AMERICANS AS 'FOREIGN ENEMIES': Claims that Asian Americans are actually loyal to foreign governments is a long-standing trope. Some contemporary disinformation claims pivoting on tensions between the U.S. and China include targeting Chinese people in the U.S. as loyal to the Chinese government and racializing them as potential spies[33].

Asians and Asian Americans have often been the target of unrightful investigations and racism due to perceived ties to the Chinese Communist Party, even if this is not true or misrepresented. By tying someone to the Chinese Communist Party, this undermines their credibility and paints them as "communist." These claims are tied to longer histories of Asians of different ethnicities as "perpetual foreigners" and enemies (e.g. Japanese incarceration during WWII; South Asians as "terrorists" after 9/11).

CLAIMING ASIAN AMERICANS ARE "COMMUNIST." Similar to tying Asians or Asian Americans to the Chinese Communist Party, anyone with a vague association to a communist or formerly communist country and is disliked by bad actors, may be a victim of being labeled "communist" in order to discredit and negatively portray them. ■

CASE STUDIES: PROBLEMATIC NARRATIVES

CASE: SUPPRESSION OF DISSENT IN SIKH COMMUNITIES

Censorship and Suppression of Farmers' Protests in 2020-2021:

Sikhs are a minority faith-based community originating in India with a truly global diaspora. Contemporary disinformation about Sikh communities is consistently tied to decades-ago agitation for 'Khalistan,' an independent Sikh state, in the wake of the partition of British India. The Indian government addressed this with a lowest-common-denominator approach to rooting out a small minority of violent agitators: using the institutions and calendar of Sikhism itself.

In 1984, the Indian government conducted Operation Blue Star: a full-blown military raid on the holiest site in Sikhism, Harmandir Sahib (AKA the Golden Temple) in Amritsar, deliberately conducted on one of the holiest days in the Sikh calendar and with a number of fatalities disputed by the Indian government to this day.

Decades later, the Indian government continues to use accusations of sympathy for the cause of Khalistan as a carte blanche to recruit other large-scale entities like governments or technology companies into their censorship of and misinformation about the Sikh community[34]. The most effective tool for the Indian government in this pursuit is to exploit an information asymmetry to paint innocuous things like Sikh religious imagery and the Punjabi language as the tools of the trade for terrorist organizations.

The playbook came to life once more in 2020 when farmers across India protested between November 2020 and November 2021 in what was the largest demonstration in the nation's modern history[35]. The protest movement spun up after the announcement of the Indian Agricultural Acts, a set of laws designed to completely overhaul an agricultural industry concentrated heavily in the Punjab. In solidarity with these farmers, Sikh and Punjabi Americans across the world—including in dozens of US cities—also protested and organized[36].

Photo Credit: Screenshot from VICE News (2021) "The Women Behind the Indian Farmers Protest." 8 February. Courtesy of SALDEF

While these protests were overwhelmingly peaceful, they were met by excessive force. Over 135 protestors were killed in the streets of Delhi[37]. The Indian government enforced internet blockages[38] and the suspension of mobile communications at/around protestor sites, and even froze the assets of Amnesty International[39] after it denounced the human rights violations of the response, forcing the organization to cease all services and aid in the nation.

Technology companies were fully complicit in the censorship. Supporters organized around several hashtags including #KisaanMajdoorEktaZindabad, #KisaanEktaZindabad, #FarmersProtest, #Sikh, and #Sikhism, since Sikhs overwhelmingly occupy the agricultural sector in India.

However, many of these hashtags were blocked, including #Sikh, multiple times in 2020 alone[40]. The Indian government
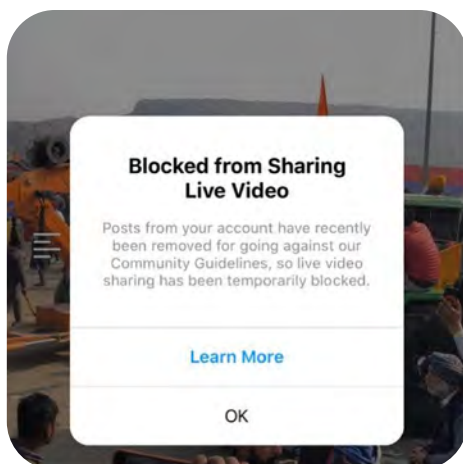
Many popular U.S.-based accounts that frequently posted using these hashtags were prevented from livestreaming.

successfully pressured Twitter to remove over 500 accounts related to Sikhism and the Farmers' Protests[41].

More than 150 tweets related to the protests were removed, also due to the pressure from the Indian government. One of the organizations was @WorldSikhOrg, an account based and run outside of India; they received an email from Twitter Legal outlining the request from Indian Law Enforcement[42]. The Indian government even threatened to jail Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter employees who don't comply with their demands to censor the Farmers' Protests[43].

Concurrent with their efforts to help the Indian government suppress the voices of the protesting farmers, technology companies amplified pro-government propaganda. Disinformation that we have noted in the form of misleading and manipulated content is still circulating on social media[44]. Specific examples include but are not limited to: Islamphobic content on Facebook and Twitter falsely identifying protestors as 'Muslim extremists,'[45] the use of old photos to falsely depict the Farmers' Protests as a separatist movement[46], and a video from 2019 going viral as it depicted the farmers' protests as being about agitating for Khalistan[45].

Government officials used Twitter to spread disinformation about the intent of the Farmers' Protests and to depict Sikhs as separatists and terrorists without any repercussions[48]. Some vigilante groups continued to perpetuate this information on Meta platforms, including WhatsApp, and incite violence against minority groups[49].

Even today, a year on from the protests ending and nearly four decades after Operation Blue Star, the Indian government continues to use its leverage to punish those who would truthfully discuss 1984 or the contemporary issues facing Sikhs[50].

The Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF) has been working to build leadership and capacity in the Sikh American community for 25 years. SALDEF continues to work to create English- and Punjabi-language counter-narratives to this harmful information rooted in racist and nationalistic ideologies.

SALDEF relies on networks of family and friends in the community to share new examples of problematic narratives, particularly of Punjabi-language disinformation spreading via WhatsApp. SALDEF also continues to press leadership at these technology companies for accountability around these decisions to punish Sikhs globally despite the requests resulting from politically motivated, anti-democratic impulses. ■

CASE: CHINESE RIGHT-WING DISINFORMATION IN THE U.S.

This section has been adapted from reports including ChangeLab's (2019) "The Chinese Tea Party and the Rise of the New Chinese Right Wing in the United States" and the Chinese for Affirmative Action's (CAA) 2021 digital engagement convening.

The election of Donald Trump in 2016 and the continued rise of white nationalism has happened concurrently with renewed ethnic nationalism, explicit racialized violence, and xenophobia.

The "Chinese Tea Party ("CTP")," the new Chinese right wing (CRW) that largely draws from the Chinese immigrant community has become more emboldened. This highly organized vocal minority with a political agenda has used aggressive and inflammatory "Tea Party"-like tactics and has used WeChat (a popular Chinese social media platform with over 1 billion active users) to organize the Chinese immigrant community.

This agenda promotes a politics of blame and grievance that target people of color, the homeless, and other immigrants, in order to benefit themselves. They choose divisive issues such as affirmative action, data disaggregation, sanctuary cities, and support for the homeless. They have also used WeChat to spread misinformation within the Chinese immigrant community.

Although there has always been conservatism within the Chinese immigrant community, this new force has emerged in a period of transnational global capital and has different characteristics. For example, in the post-1965 period, Chinese conservatism stemmed primarily from professional and highly educated immigrants from Taiwan and Hong Kong who were distinctly anti-China and anti-Communist. Many were also religious, primarily Christian.

We use the term "Chinese Tea Party" as a political identity to describe the "new" Chinese right wing that draws primarily from a more recent wave of immigrants. Unlike the prior wave, it includes immigrants from mainland China and is not necessarily driven by anti-China sentiment or Christian belief.

The new Chinese right wing is a well-organized and well-resourced group that uses ethnic (Chinese) nationalism to manipulate the community, especially wealthy and highly-educated Chinese immigrants who immigrated to the United States after 2000, to influence policy making and elections. Their work threatens our vision of a just and inclusive multiracial democracy.

A key tactic employed by the CTP is the airing of phantom grievances to sow division and the furtherance of an "us against them" mentality. For example, the CTP uses the term "racist" against any agenda that does not align with its own goal of privilege for Chinese elites. This aggressive use of the concept serves to mislead large segments of the Chinese immigrant community by calling policies "racist" when they are actually a means to promote greater equity.

To fully understand Chinese right wing disinformation requires analyzing the role of WeChat.

To fully understand the dynamics of the CRW requires analyzing the role of WeChat, the "one app that rules them all" with an estimated 19 million daily users in the United States as of August 2020. WeChat is a primary source of information amongst Chinese-language speakers, especially people from Mainland Chinese diasporas.

Several key issues by the CRW at a state and national level include:

DATA DISAGGREGATION/CENSUS:
The CTP has also called data disaggregation a form of "racial profiling against Chinese," "a version of the Chinese Exclusion Act," "segregation," an "Asian registry," and "Asian profiling," underscoring the vicious, incendiary fear-inducing tactics used by the CTP. There is a resounding sentiment that breaking down Asian Americans by countries of origins is a means of "singling out" Chinese Americans and a tactic to punish Chinese Americans for their relative success in the future.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION: Opposition to affirmative action has been a key factor in mobilizing the CRW, and the defeat of SCA-5 in California, which would have reinstated affirmative action policies in California schools, has been largely credited to the organizing of Chinese Americans. The CRW has supported lawsuits like that of Students for Fair Admissions brought against Harvard.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY: Most recently, alongside other right wing bad actors, the CRW has come out against "critical race theory," making false comparisons between their skewed version of the nuanced legal concept and the Chinese Cultural Revolution. The CRW relies on exploitation of fears, lived traumas, and cultural ignorance to manipulate vulnerable communities.

Each of these issues can be linked back to education, with opposition to each dominated by fears. For example, they may believe policies like affirmative action will hurt their childrens' chances of being admitted into top universities or that learning "critical race theory" will impact the quality of education that their children receive.

For comparison, WhatsApp is more popular in Singapore and Hong Kong and LINE in Taiwan. In addition to being a text messaging platform, WeChat functions as a platform for large group social connection, resource distribution, and news—think Facebook Messenger and Groups, Paypal, and multiple news and entertainment aggregation sites all on one platform.

WeChat's structure was initially designed to accommodate small group mobile messaging. Chat groups were based on real-life relationships and invite-only. But these days, even though the groups are still technically private, chat rooms may have as many as 500 members, and members may be unverified. In addition, the use of public accounts — which operate like news outlets, with the ability to post their own articles — has played a key role in spreading right-wing messaging and ideology. Articles and messages are posted, re-posted, and then disappear without a trace. Opinions masquerade as facts, and individuals as organizations.

Even in non-political groups like those for local Chinese supermarkets, individuals will share and disseminate right-wing content and use them as spaces to organize others. Beyond WeChat, Chinese language YouTube accounts are also a site for disinformation spread, including by actors such as the Falun Gong, a controversial religious group with right-wing affiliations that also runs the *Epoch Times*. ■

Photo: The Xinsheng Project (formerly the WeChat Project) provides bilingual narrative interventions to the most widely circulated issues on WeChat and beyond, including affirmative action, policing, systemic racism, homelessness, and more.

CASE: CASTE AND RELIGIOUS FAULTLINES IN SOUTH ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

Caste and Disinformation:

South Asian American communities are one of the largest growing Asian American communities with over 5.7 million people living in the U.S. While racialized as 'South Asians' in U.S., the category of South Asian masks internal community tensions that fall across faultlines of caste, religion, language, geography, and past historical trauma. These faulitnes become significant in understanding how disinformation works for South Asian communities.

Typically, South Asian communities have organized in solidarity with other communities of color by expressing support for immigration justice, healthcare access, environmental justice, and voter rights. However in recent years due to the rise of religious ethnonationalism in many South Asian countries, these faultlines have become active sites of friction and conflict in the community. Right wing networks inside the U.S. and in South Asia fracture political unity due to religious ethnonationlism and casteist interests. Understanding these dynamics are key to build unity in the face of these forces.

One large area of disinformation stems from within the Indian American community, specifically those propagating the interests of Hindu nationalism. Hindu nationalism is a religious ethnonationlist movement whose goal is to establish India as an ethno-Hindu nation state.

Images showing Hindu nationalist support for Donald Trump

From cultural wars over caste to fights over U.S diplomacy in South Asia, these networks aggressively advance Hindu nationalist identity and policies throughout the diaspora. They also promote the successes ofThe Bharatiya Janata Party (The BJP) which is led by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and is the ruling party of India. They do this through large events like Howdy Modi and through thousands of Whatsapp and Telegram groups across North America. With roots in caste-privileged networks in India and across the diaspora, it is one of the largest and best funded religious ethnonationalist disinformation networks in the world today.

Policies enacted by the BJP have included the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which creates a religious based criterion for citizenship and threatens to denaturalize and detain hundreds of millions of Indian minorities. In the 2016 and 2020 elections, Indian American Hindu nationalists found similarities between Donald Trump and Modi, finding resonance between 'India first' slogans and 'Make America Great Again.'

The geopolitical dimensions of these narratives in India take on a new significance in South Asian American communities. Right-wing Hindu nationalist dominant caste Indian Americans push for positions counter to the broader South Asian community as well as Black, Indigenous, and communities of color. For example, under the Trump administration, several Indian American organizations campaigned for policy positions designed to sever Indian Americans from larger coalitions focused on comprehensive immigration reform.

Groups like the Republican Hindu Coalition (RHC), Immigration Voice, and the Skilled Immigrants in America Coalition all supported policies for increasing H1-B visas for Indian Americans and expediting green card processing in exchange for higher processing fees that would pay for the

26

Image of the Republican Hindu Coalition's support for merit-based immigration, photo posted on Brietbart, a far-right news site

proposed wall at the U.S. Mexican border[51]. They played on model minority narratives of emphasizing 'skill,' coming to the U.S. via the 'right' means, and defining who is or is not 'deserving' (see image).

While Hindu nationalists represent the right-wing within Indian American communities, it is important to also note they have ties to both Republican and Democratic parties, and also mobilize nationalistic narratives under the guise of promoting progress and equality.

These narratives spread across multiple social media platforms. For example, viral ad campaigns from the Republican Hindu Coalition received millions of impressions on Youtube, Facebook, and Twitter, and over 1 billion worldwide views, including on major media channels in the U.S. and other countries. These media pipelines are supported by Steve Bannon, who is the Honorary Co-Chair of the Republican Hindu Coalition (see image). In many of these campaigns, Democratic candidates would be targeted by Republican dominant caste Hindu organizers for taking positions antithetical to the interest of nationalist movements in India.

This is crucial to understanding electoral disinformation in our community as transnational—what is considered domestically driven disinformation is aimed at influencing foreign policy and pushing for

candidates aligned with nationalist visions for U.S. diplomacy towards India. These Indian Americans are pivotal communities, as are their Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cuban counterparts, that can be a deciding factor in turning purple districts red or blue based on alignment with their nationlalist agendas.

Many South Asian diasporic communities use WhatsApp (owned by Meta) for both social and political connection, especially through group chats.

WhatsApp is popular among immigrant communities because of its popularity abroad. India's user base is currently Meta's largest market. Groups such as the Overseas Friends of the BJP, the U.S. arm of the Indian right-wing, has spread massive amounts of nationalistic, Islamophobic, and casteist disinformation on personal, professional, and religious WhatsApp groups. Casteist groups also use threatening tactics of harassment, intimidation, and abuse to silence dissent that challenge Hindu nationalism and dominant caste hegemony.

The common usage of WhatsApp for bigotry and dangerous speech has been well documented in South Asia during recent elections in India and Pakistan. Narratives spread on WhatsApp have led to offline violence, including mob lynching against Dalits and Muslims and calls for genocidal violence against Indian Muslims and other religious minorities[52]. This rhetoric has been
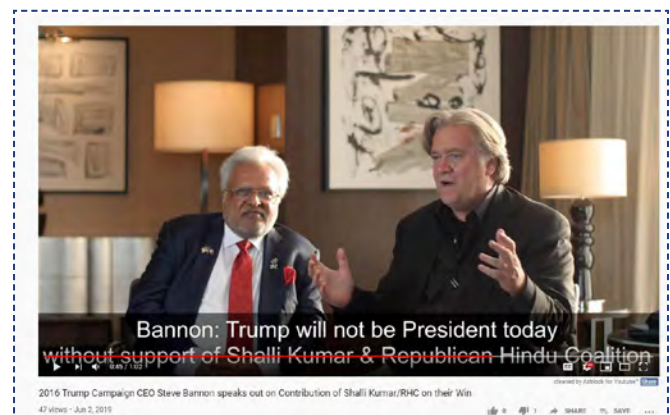

Image: Youtube clip of Steve Bannon acknowledging contribution of RHC in the 2016 election of Donald Trump

imported to the United States where these right-wing dominant caste Hindu actors direct attacks at electeds, activists, and community organizers who call attention to India's state violence.

Another important theme of disinformation in the South Asian community is dominant caste Indian American Hindu organizations who weaponize the term "hinduphobia" to silence and gaslight Dalit organizers and caste-oppressed communities in order to mantain dominant caste power and impunity in the South Asian American communities.

 The use of this term by dominant caste Hindus exploits current anti-discrimination policies on technology platforms and U.S. institutions, which lack caste competency and in-depth contextual understandings of power. By labeling caste-oppressed leaders as "hinduphobic", this not only decenters caste-oppressed people's religious freedom and the right to organize, but also sets up disconcerting false equivalencies.

These false equivalencies suggest Hindus are suppressed and under attack if caste oppressed people were to receive protections against caste discrimination. Akin to claims of 'reverse racism' to curtail affirmative action or incite moral panics around critical race theory, claims of Hinduphobia (and also 'anti-India' rhetoric) attack caste-oppressed organizers by reversing the roles of victimhood and also denying harm and/or the existence of caste.

As the movement for caste equity grows in the United States, we anticipate this potent form of South Asian disinformation to continue to target vulnerable caste oppressed leaders and organizations. This could also become an electoral theme in districts where South Asians are based. ■

WHAT IS CASTE?

Caste is a system of religiously codified oppression that affects over 1 billion people across the world. While originally established in Hindu scripture, there are casteist practices found within all South Asian religious communities, including in Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist, and other faith traditions.

Practices of exclusion based on one's caste status limit access to resources like education and land access, such as in the case of Adivasi communities who are Indigenous to South Asia, Dalit communities (formerly known as the "Untouchable" people), and Bahujan (collective term for caste-oppressed folks across parts of the subcontinent).

While legally prohibited in South Asia, caste apartheid continues to manifest across institutions both in the subcontinent and its diaspora. Caste impacts over 1.9 billion South Asians and 5.4 million South Asian Americans today. It is a defining axis of inequity in our community and is one of the most exploited faultlines for South Asian American disinformation. Caste-oppressed people have some of the highest rates of discrimination in the U.S. among Asian Americans: 1 in 4 facing physical and verbal assault; 1 in 3 facing educational discrimination; and 2 in 3 facing workplace discrimination[53].

Equality Labs views countering South Asian disinformation as key to building power and works with partners to identify and innoculate South Asian communities from harmful narratives. Equality Labs also experiments with new strategies rooted in trauma-centered approaches, healing, and transformative justice. Redefining South Asian American political identity and finding paths towards dignity and equity for all requires centering those who are caste-oppressed. This ensures our access to democratic processes are not derailed by disinformation designed to dilute political power and agency.

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52. Mukherjee, 2020
53. Equality Labs (2016) "Caste in the United States".

Images: Gendered disinformation about 'non-resident immigrant men' (NRI) from a mens' rights group in the form of physical flyers passed out during an Indian concert at a major venue.

CASE: "MEN'S RIGHTS ASIANS" AND THE RISE OF TOXIC MASCULINITY

MRAsians and Anti-Feminism:

Research about Asian American mis- and disinformation often focuses on first-generation immigrants, particularly how limited English-language proficiency; lack of access to in-language and credible information; and minimal understanding of American history and culture lead to belief in certain false narratives.

The recent rise of the so-called "Men's RIght's Asians" or "MRAsians,[54]" a subculture of anti-feminist Asian American men, draws attention to another aspect of Asian American disinformation. Many MRAsians were likely born and educated in the United States, speak English as their first language, and might even consider themselves progressive.

Misogyny, anti-Blackness, and an "Asian-first" mentality underlie the dominant narratives in these spaces. Many who identify as MRAsians subscribe to the idea that Asian Americans are the most oppressed of any racial group in the United States; by lauding the success of Asian Americans in spite of this oppression, these individuals further the model minority myth (despite many MRAsians purporting to reject this trope).

This type of rhetoric bleeds into toxic misconceptions about other communities of color who, MRAsians falsely argue, "have it easier." Those perceived as "self-hating Asians," "race traitors," or "threats to Asian men" are frequent targets of harassment by this community[55].

Asian women who speak out against anti-Blackness within the Asian American community[56], date non-Asian men[57], or commit other "traitorous" acts are especially vulnerable to abuse, vitriol, and even doxxing or threats of physical violence[58]. Prominent Asian American women like gymnast Suni Lee, actress Constance Wu, author Celeste Ng, writer Jenn Fang[59], and activist Eileen Huang have all spoken out about being the victims of such online attacks.

Within the MRAsian community, there is entrenched anger surrounding the idea that Asian American women receive preferential treatment in comparison to Asian American men. Certainly, centuries of emasculation of Asian American men, furthered by harmful media depictions, degrading stereotypes, and antimiscengenartion laws (which banned interracial marraiges) should not be minimized. But, in a society that hypersexualizes Asian American women, the MRAsian community has erroneously equated the perceived sexual desirability and "proximinity to whiteness" of Asian women to power.

The majority of the content within MRAsian spaces is malinformation rather than explicitly false information, which makes these harmful narratives difficult to report on. Examples of the types of manipulated and harmful narratives that emerge out of these spaces include:

- **Attacks on affirmative action** and other equity-driven education policies. Common refrains include the idea that affirmative action constitutes "systematic discrimination" or "anti-Asian hate."

- **Furtherance of the Black-on-Asian crime trope**, which is discussed further in the next case study on page 33.

- **Attacks on those within their own communities as "race traitors"** or "boba liberals."* Asian women who date white men, hatefully dubbed as "Lus" by MRAsians, often receive the most vitriol. "Boba liberals" are even blamed for furthering anti-Asian racism*.

Some prominent accounts, threads, and channels where this kind of problematic content is spread include Asian Dawn (website, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook); Asians with Attitudes (Instagram); /r/aznidentity and /r/AsianMasculinity (Reddit), and Asian Crime Report (Twitter).

These accounts and pages have tens or even hundreds of thousands of followers with growing support (see Figures 1-5). The administrators of these spaces are protected by anonymity and attempts to report them have not been successful.

We are continuing to monitor these spaces and build best practices for counter-messaging. Research into the MRAsian subculture is relatively understudied, particularly when it comes to understanding what motivates individuals to believe the kind of racist and sexist vitriol that permeates MRAsian spaces. ■

Figures 1-5: Prominent accounts where MRAsian content spreads.
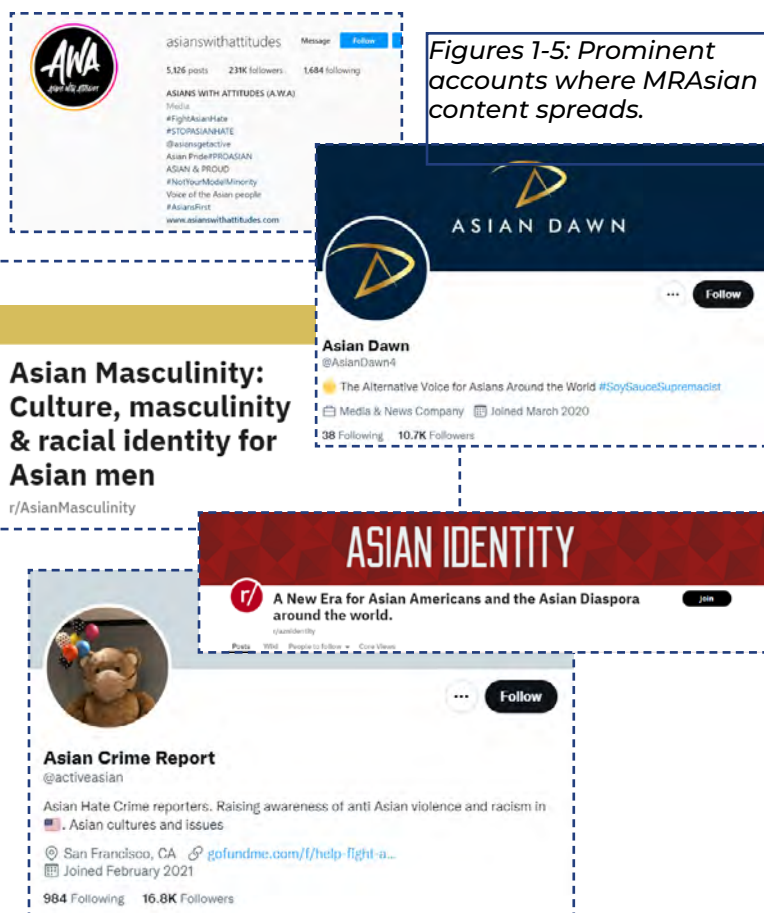
Examples of harmful narratives attacking affirmative action & furtherances of Black-on-Asian crime tropes:

AltAzn 🇺🇸
@Alt_Azn

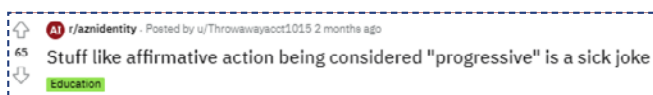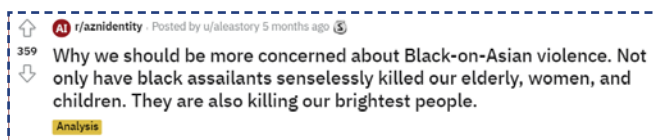If every student who got into college was qualified and no one gets in because of their race like the woke say then what is the point of affirmative action?

1:03 PM · Feb 2, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

34 Likes

Wesley Yang
@wesyang

To be a woke Asian is to be deeply invested in 1.) justifying systemic discrimination against oneself in the things that matter (like public safety and college admissions) and 2.) flying into a frenzy over things that don't (like mispronouncing one's name)

3:09 PM · Dec 14, 2021

639   Reply   Copy link to Tweet

Asian Crime Report
@activeasian

Fixated on Black ppl? We report on crimes against Asians and 97% of the perps are Black. We want these Blacks attacking Asians to be sent to jail for a long long time. Bring the death penalty back! Don't you want them punished?

r/aznidentity · Posted by u/aleastory 5 months ago

359 Why we should be more concerned about Black-on-Asian violence. Not only have black assailants senselessly killed our elderly, women, and children. They are also killing our brightest people.

Analysis

r/aznidentity · Posted by u/Throwawayacct1015 2 months ago

65 Stuff like affirmative action being considered "progressive" is a sick joke

Education

UNPACKING THE TERM 'BOBA LIBERAL': 'Boba liberalism' first emerged as a leftist critique of shallow and consumption-oriented political identity among Asian Americans that seems progressive on the surface but is actually centrist and mainstream. However, the critiques of 'boba liberalism' as white adjacent have been used to advance a conservative pro-Asian agenda—that 'boba liberals' are Asians that are 'race traitors' and don't care about Asian issues.

Examples of MRAsians blaming 'boba liberals' for anti-Asian racism

r/aznidentity · Posted by u/[deleted] 8 months ago
277
Hapa girl calls out her white father's incredibly racist behavior towards her and her brother. This is what AFs are risking if they choose to get into WMAF relationships
tiktok.com/@shoyu... ⧉
Social Media

婷婷 | tingting
@cinnabunbimbo

next time i see a boba lib irl post some propaganda on their instagram story i'm just gonna slide up and say that the "anti asian violence" you talk about so much is literally your own fault i'm fucking tired of these bitches

11:23 PM · Mar 16, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

4 Retweets   26 Likes

gelatina coreana de bellota
@dotorii_muk

Breaking: Someone who openly hates her own people claims that her own people are somehow responsible for a white person killing Black people.

More boba lib news at 7.

???? Do these people not know about the heinous amounts of misogynistic violence embedded in patriarchal Asian cultures??????

Who better to call Asian men on their bullshit that the Asian women who witness and experience their bullshit?

Someday I will gather the courage to write about why many Asian women are afraid/weary of dating Asian men & how it has to do with the shit we have seen in our families & communities & how it is often about survival and self-love. It's not about who we choose but

As a Chinese woman [...] the misogyny of Chine [...] *great authority*.

Sorry not sorry for tal[...] about your favorite Ch[...] dissident uncles, but t[...] sub-human and I don'[...]

can do about this foul romanticization of a[...] myth.

No time like the present to establish & stre[...] folks, to fight white supremacy, to do bett[...]

♡ 1   ♡ 2

Frankie Huang 黄西[...]
@ourobororoboruo

We can't pretend the anti-Blackn[...] communities doesn't contribute t[...] fuck wrote in his manifesto about[...]

12:51 PM · May 15, 2022 · Twitter Web App

31 Retweets   7 Quote Tweets   277 Likes

r/aznidentity · Posted by u/000kevinlee000 5 months ago
174
Boba liberals are basically Stephen from the movie Django Unchained. Basically sold out the black community so he can upgrade in society. This is exactly how Boba liberals behave.
Meme

BOBA LIBERALS-SELLOUTS

SUPPORTS RACISM, VIOLENCE, DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THEIR OWN COMMUNITY. FOR VALIDATION AND ACCEPTANCE INTO SOCIETYet

16 Comments   Share   Save   Hide   Report   96% Upvoted

Media Manipulation Strategies of Black-on-Asian Crime News Aggregators

Social media has become an important and contentious battleground in shaping narratives around #StopAAPIHate. On one hand, Asian organizations and social media influencers have helped fundraise for victims of physical assault, created educational and mental health resources, and linked up with #BLM accounts to promote interracial solidarity.

On the other hand, a parallel network of alternative news pages, vloggers, and anonymously operated accounts have stoked racial conflict by spotlighting incidents of Black-on-Asian assault and spreading misleading narratives about the so-called "roots of Asian hate." These Black-on-Asian crime news aggregators are strategic, persuasive, and ambitious.

By archiving shocking visuals of assault and offering up easy scapegoats and solutions, these accounts address an information void for Asian and Asian American communities that have often felt anxious, confused, and desperate for explanations and life-saving information since the earliest incidents of Covid-19 racism. If left unchecked, these accounts may not only mobilize Asian Americans into far-right ideology and further anti-Black racism, they can also be weaponized during elections, deepen social divides, and sow distrust toward democratic institutions.

The University of Massachusetts at Amherst's Fact CHAMP team considers the media manipulation strategies of Black-on-Asian crime news aggregators as a perplexing challenge for scholars, activists, journalists,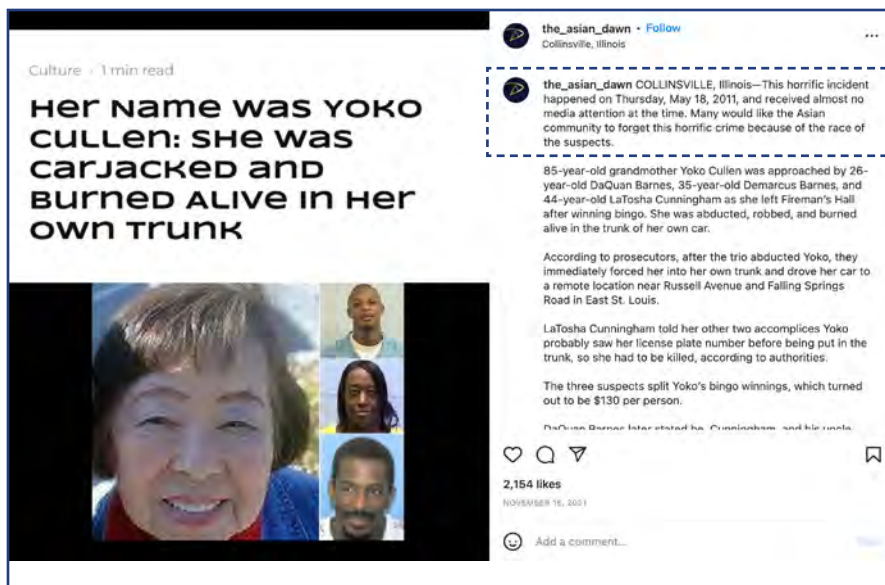 and social media platforms to address. Their preliminary analysis, through digital ethnography and a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches, suggests there is top-down sophisticated coordination among far-right Asian American-oriented websites and high-level influencers to promote the "crime wave narrative" that provoke fear and anxiety especially during peak moments of assault and crisis, such as the murder of six Asian women in Atlanta massage parlors in March 2021.

This analysis emerges from tracking the fearmongering storylines advanced by these accounts and computational analysis to collect big data about their coordinative behaviors. This work-in-progress research on Black-on-Asian crime news aggregators has uncovered their distinct features and media manipulations strategies.

First, crime news aggregators have proliferated across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok, amplifying each other's posts that document anti-Asian assault by Black perpetrators.

These accounts use powerful shock effect imagery by posting CCTV footage of a mugging and/or close-up photographs

Culture · 1 min read

HER NAME WAS YOKO CULLEN: SHE WAS CARJACKED AND BURNED ALIVE IN HER OWN TRUNK

the_asian_dawn · Follow
Collinsville, Illinois

the_asian_dawn COLLINSVILLE, Illinois—This horrific incident happened on Thursday, May 18, 2011, and received almost no media attention at the time. Many would like the Asian community to forget this horrific crime because of the race of the suspects.

85-year-old grandmother Yoko Cullen was approached by 26-year-old DaQuan Barnes, 35-year-old Demarcus Barnes, and 44-year-old LaTosha Cunningham as she left Fireman's Hall after winning bingo. She was abducted, robbed, and burned alive in the trunk of her own car.

According to prosecutors, after the trio abducted Yoko, they immediately forced her into her own trunk and drove her car to a remote location near Russell Avenue and Falling Springs Road in East St. Louis.

LaTosha Cunningham told her other two accomplices Yoko probably saw her license plate number before being put in the trunk, so she had to be killed, according to authorities.

The three suspects split Yoko's bingo winnings, which turned out to be $130 per person.

DaQuan Barnes later stated he, Cunningham, and his uncle...

2,154 likes
NOVEMBER 16, 2021

Add a comment...

CAPTION EXCERPT:
"This horrific incident...received almost no media attention at the time. Many would like the Asian community to forget this horrific crime because of the race of the suspects."

Photo: The Asian Dawn posts on their Instagram page a *recontextualized* historical crime. This event of Black-on-Asian violence from back in 2011 is posted as new content in November 2021. It implies that mainstream media has historically covered up horrific crimes against Asian communities based on the racial identity of perpetrators.

of bloodied Asian bodies. They credit ordinary people for sending tips about these incidents and also repackage already-available news reports.

As news aggregators, they embellish a news article, say from a CBS News site, by rewriting with a fear mongering tone, and adding in their original investigation that would "unmask," or racially profile, the perpetrator whose racial identity is not often included in the original report.

Second, these accounts deploy the media manipulation strategy of *recontextualization*[60], particularly when they re-present old historical crimes as new content for their page or website.

For example, the far-right Asian website The Asian Dawn, with highly popular accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, reports the theft and murder of an Asian woman that left the victim burned alive in the trunk of her own car from way back in 2011 (see photo). An event from a decade ago is posted as new content in effect to fan the flames of interracial conflict today.

It misleadingly includes these old incidents as part of their body of evidence that mainstream media have been systematically underreporting anti-Asian violence based on "the race of the suspects," as the caption from the image argues. Based on our content analysis of 50 posts of The Asian Dawn, 17% of their crime reports are recontextualized historical events.

Third, these accounts advance conspiratorial narratives that insinuate there is a "woke" liberal conspiracy where Democrat politicians, leftist journalists, and platforms themselves have suppressed the real truth about the roots of Asian hate.

Disputing statistics and academic research that find white men as the majority of perpetrators of anti-Asian violence[61], they challenge structuralist analysis that critique "white supremacy" as the root of these racist attacks and pose provocative questions why their archive of Black perpetrators seem to suggest otherwise.

34

Fourth and finally, these accounts are especially vicious when attacking or rebutting fellow Asian American scholars, journalists, and politicians.

Politicians, such as former San Francisco District Attorney Chesa Boudin, have been a consistent target of electioneering posts by these accounts that shame his 'soft-on-crime' policies as racist to Asian American people and biased on behalf of Black communities. Boudin lost his June 2022 recall vote, and this was celebrated by far-right Asian American social media accounts.

Meanwhile, progressive scholars and journalists who have called out anti-Black perspectives and criminalization narratives within their communities have been labeled as "race traitors" and trolled online. Many progressive community leaders interviewed in FACT CHAMP's qualitative research have themselves expressed fears of doxxing and digital harassment from various incidents of digital trolling organized by these far-right accounts.

Moving forward, it is important that we acknowledge the very real and perplexing challenge our communities face in the #StopAAPIHate moment which is to advocate for community protections without advancing anti-Black perspectives and carceral solutions.

Our team does not consider this an unresolvable paradox but a challenge for progressive political organizing. This requires a commitment to listening to diverse communities with a wide range of positions on how to end anti-Asian violence beyond relying on policing, prisons, and prosecution.

The team supports broad coalition-building and works with community leaders to catalog organizations' shifting mandates and digital capacities especially as they have been overwhelmed with diverse digital threats in the #StopAAPIHate moment. Supported by a National Science

Foundation grant entitled "Fact CHAMP" and a Luminate/Reset Foundation grant for capacity-building projects with Asian American community media, our team has interviewed over 20 Asian American community organizations in an effort to map out diverse responses to combat misinformation and developing counter-narratives that emphasize interracial solidarity, history education, and Asian joy.

Central to the team objectives is to expand communities' misinformation interventions beyond fact-checking of misinformation targeted to specific ethnic groups to include broader pan-Asian-American narrative-building and strategic tech policy advocacies.

For the team at UMass, this means developing innovative tools that can empower communities to conduct their own digital investigations and also creative and collaborative counter-narrative strategies that are committed to respond head-on to real grievances about racism, misrepresentation, and silencing. ■

54. Lauren Sirikul (2022) "Reddit and Instagram backlash highlights Asian masculinity movement's toxic rise", 28 January.
55. Kimmy Yam (2020) "Kellie Chauvin and a history of Asian women being judged for whom they marry." NBC News, 22 June.
56. Eileen Huang (2020) "A Letter from a Yale student to the Chinese American Community".
57. Kylie Cheung (2022) "The Backlash Against Sunisa Lee's Interracial Relationship Is All Too Familiar to Asian Women", Jezebel, 18 January.
58. Aaron Mak (2021) "Men's Rights Asians" Think This Is Their Moment." Slate, 15 September.
59. Celeste Ng (2018) "When Asian Women Are Harassed for Marrying Non-Asian Men." The Cut, 12 October.
60. The Media Manipulation Casebook, "Recontextualized Media."
61. Janelle Wong (2021) "Beyond the Headlines: Review of National Anti-Asian Hate Incident Reporting/Data Collection Published over 2019-2021." June 7, 2021.

CASE STUDIES: NARRATIVE CHANGE
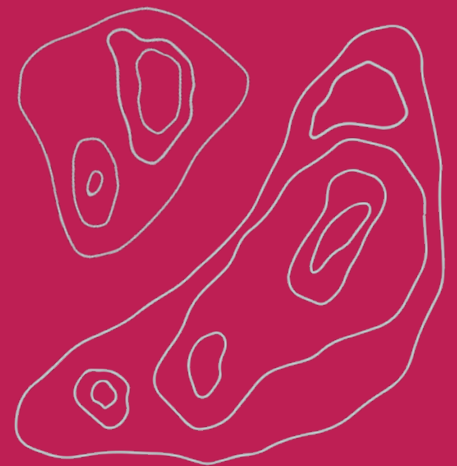
CASE: ORGANIZING AGAINST INFORMATION HARMS IN VIETNAMESE COMMMUNITIES

Understanding how Vietnamese Americans experience and understand political, economic, and social information requires context about historical patterns of colonialism, displacement, and migration. Similar to their Black and Brown siblings, Vietnamese American refugees share a sense of trauma and being othered in the U.S. despite full citizenship status for some and selective minoritized growth in social and economic reproductive contributions.

Historical Landscape of the Vietnamese American Diaspora

Vietnamese Americans are a diasporic community who arrived in the United States in broadly four migration waves, consisting of mostly 'first generation' refugees arriving after the fall of Sài Gòn in April 1975 with a growing community of second and third generations of migration. Displaced by war, the second wave arrived in the U.S. in the late 1970's during what is known as the "boat people" refugee crisis, and the third wave migrated as sponsored immigrants during the 1980-1990s[62].

These first three waves have been heavily researched across many disciplines, including studies of humanitarian aid, social work, immigration, urban development, militarism, post-war veteran, authoritarian and communist regimes, and Asian American studies. The fourth wave consists of Vietnamese Americans who migrated from 2000's to present-day as modern business and education-visa migrants. This group has been comparatively less researched, but are increasingly a part of the growing political faction of the Asian American voting bloc.

The first wave reflects U.S. policy towards non-European immigration in the form of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 and the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, where only highly skilled individuals and those with existing family associations within the U.S. (i.e. doctors, lawyers, and military officers) were allowed to emigrate within the strict quota[63].

After the reunification of North and South Vietnam, the second and third migration waves reflect Vietnamese peoples who desperately sought to escape re-education camps, resentment from the war, and lack of opportunity. The second and third waves of Vietnamese immigrants faced extreme hardship and had a generally more arduous journey to the U.S. since many did not receive government support due to the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act and relied on their families, who were struggling from lack of social services and adjustment to the new host country[64].

While less has been written or researched about the most recent, fourth wave migration group—consisting of Millenials and Gen Z—they have spent the majority of their youth in Vietnam and are now in the U.S. under work or education visas. They experienced primary and some secondary education in the communist Vietnamese education system, while also trained to participate in the globalized market.

Each of these migration waves hold different knowledge and experiences with the Vietnamese government, international affairs (i.e. China, U.S., and Vietnamese relations), and completely different experience of support, or lack thereof, in voluntary migration or forced displacement, yet all grounded in the aftermath of the wars against communism. Each of these lived experiences inform their ideological frameworks in how they see and approach the world[65].

Identity and Ideologies:

Intergenerational trauma among the community is tied to the direct experience of societal collapse and lived harms due to state violence under communist regimes and the U.S. War in Vietnam. In the U.S., the collapse of the Soviet Union and the announced end of the Cold War was celebrated as American democracy 'winning the war' against communism. The end of the Cold War was also welcomed by Vietnamese American refugees who suffered from experiences of war[66].

Much of this success was credited to the Republican Party, which swayed a majority of Vietnamese American refugees and immigrants to align with right-leaning, conservative politicians and their political rhetoric. While recent census research shows that Vietnamese Americans poll like Democrats on gun control[61] and healthcare[66], according to historical contexts, the fear of a collapse within society or threats of attacks from foreign state powers has guided a majority of Vietnamese Americans to vote against their self-stated interests[68].

These contradictions and disconnects between lived experiences, ideological beliefs, and then social practice has become a site of information disorder within the Vietnamese diaspora.

For example, in the contexts of media and internet content moderation and freedom of speech, there are competing perspectives due to the politics and problematic information that have spread between the generations of former Presidents Lyndon Johnson, to Richard Nixon, to Donald Trump. Those who support content moderation believe that there are larger unstable social issues that need to be addressed[71].

Each of these are issues which many Vietnamese immigrants experienced under the authoritarian regime. On the other hand, many Vietnamese people in the diaspora have found economic success through

YouTube. The platform's moderation allows Vietnamese corporations and entrepreneurs to avoid fines from the Vietnamese government for having their content paired with problematic advertising content[72].

Those who oppose content moderation because of anti-government sentiment face issues relevant within and outside of communist states, such as rights to freedom of speech and the ability to incentivize innovation and business (on YouTube or Facebook) within the guise of government power[73].

Similar to U.S. economic sanctions, the Vietnamese government is moderating "international corporations like Google (YouTube) or Facebook [to] both comply with Vietnamese laws, customs, and traditions and protect users' rights"[74]. In other words, "internet content that [the

government] believes threatens stability in the communist country"[75]. This extends to other platforms, such as TikTok, as well[76]. This transnational complexity within how diasporic information is used for social and economic terms, highlights the difficulties of disentangling sentiments about content moderation and broader opinions around communications platforms. However, these complexities retain significance in understanding the spread and impact of misinformation and necessitate deep qualitative methods to contextualize the varied and nuanced views on platforms, politics and social issues.
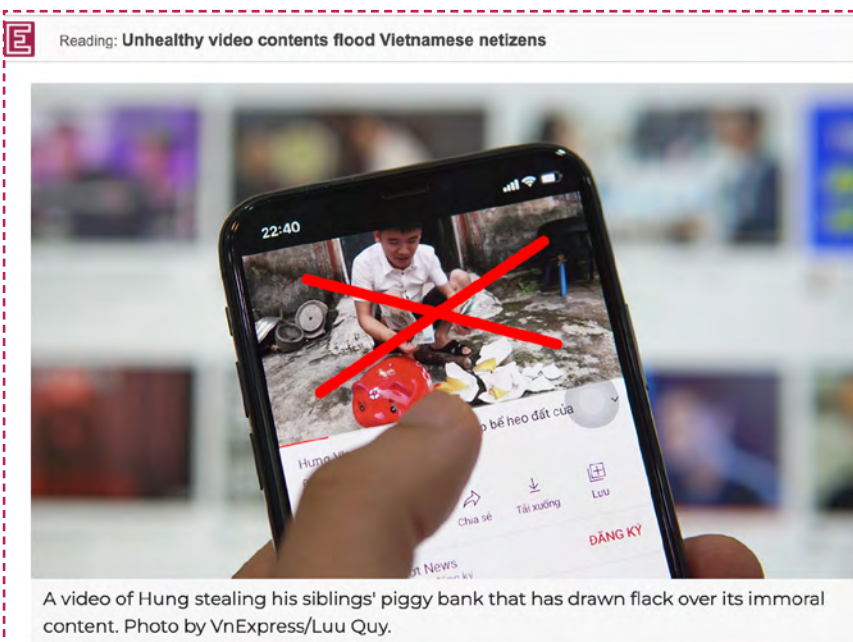

Image: Screenshot of an image from VnExpress, captured by Luu Quy demonstrating one of many YouTube videos that have been flagged by Vietnamese authorities as problematic information within YouTube content moderation policies[77].

Community Organizing in Response to Problematic Narratives

In order to address these transnational problematic information issues, Viet Fact Check was created as a project within the non-profit Progressive Vietnamese American Organization (PIVOT). The project was created in the wake of George Floyd's murder, when stereotypes about Black Americans combined with a lack of understanding of the U.S. criminal justice

system; lack of in-language informaton; and incongruences between political education on U.S. history with daily survival needs[78].

This lack of critical understanding of historical and political contexts contributes greatly to intergenerational conflict within Vietnamese American dinner tables.

While organizations like The Interpreter sought to bridge this gap by translating existing U.S. media into Vietnamese, Viet Fact Check staff (mostly volunteers) also found that the attention economy of online media has evolved to feed content and target extremist ideals. This became particularly problematic as this user-generated content is often decontextualized, rarely referencing knowledge building practices, and lacks self-contained content to explain the history of civil rights or basic topics like the role of policing in the U.S.

With combined backgrounds in tech policy, law, and journalism, Viet Fact Check members worked to exhaustively research topics like social movements, history, COVID-19, voting, and policy to produce accessible information out of complex and dense topics.

First and foremost, the information is available in a language Vietnamese Americans are comfortable reading and communicating in, and the information is further contextualized to historical lived experiences they know. Generational divides are common with regards to English and Vietnamese proficiency, particularly since pre-1975 Vietnamese terms differ and conflict with post-1975 terms. Viet Fact Check collaborated with translators to ensure the content, written and edited in English, was accessible in Vietnamese. The goal

Are Vietnamese people protected from Trump's immigration policies?

📅 October 16, 2020

Claim: Many Vietnamese-Americans believe that Trump's immigration policies will not affect Vietnamese students and their opportunities to study in the United States. They believe that Trump's immigration policies are focused solely on keeping out students from countries that sponsor terrorism. They also assume that because Trump is a Republican, he is therefore pro-Vietnamese.

Rating: This claim is **FALSE.** The Trump administration has recently introduced a new rule to limit visas for international students. This rule will severely affect international students currently studying in the United States,

Is Black Lives Matter a pro-communist China group?

📅 September 28, 2020

Claim: An article on September 15 from the conservative Heritage Foundation claimed that a co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement and a pro-communist China group are partnering up. The claims in this article have gone viral, with more than 15,000 shares on Facebook.

Rating: This claim is **FALSE**. The article incorrectly equated two nonprofits with the same name and wrongly associated Alicia Garza, co-founder of BLM, with the nonprofit that has ties to the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Are Democrats trying to resettle Afghan refugees in order to help them win the next election?

📅 November 6, 2021

Claim: The Democrats want to resettle Afghan refugees to the U.S. in order to help their party win the next election.

Rating: This claim is **FALSE**. The main requirement for casting a ballot is that voters are U.S. citizens. There are many severe punishments for non-citizens who vote, including deportation, jail time, and fines, which

Is Biden enriching China by ordering at-home COVID-19 tests from China?

📅 February 14, 2022

Claim: The Biden Administration has awarded a $1.3 billion contract to iHealth Lab to create millions of free at-home COVID-19 tests. IHealth Lab is owned by a Chinese company. Critics have said that the contract enriches China, and that the tests are unsafe and inaccurate because they are made in China.

---

is to facilitate communication and understanding by removing confrontation as a prerequisite for understanding.

Media Techniques for Change:
Hosted on Wordpress, Viet Fact Check has used standard social media techniques like Canva image editing assets to promote Viet Fact Check content on major social media platforms (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram), relying on the accessibility of Vietnamese translated articles to be shared

via direct message or private messages channels with family members who are not necessarily heavy social media users.

The goal is to de-escalate and repair intra-family interactions around misinformation and provide tools to communicate difficult information, and empower both Vietnamese and English speakers with fact checked, source-verified content that was written by and for them.

Similar to existing social sciences scholarship, Viet Fact Check's experience supports the understanding that many U.S. born children, second generation, of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander immigrants have family and social dynamics that reify the feeling of being outsiders of U.S. capitalistic society[79].

This includes being informed on policies that affect their economic, social, and political needs so that they can vote in their own interests. An additional goal of Viet Fact Check is to provide a source of information that is perceived as serious and level headed to support readers as they attempt to make informed decisions about policies that affect their lives and their present and future community's lives.

In addition to covering racial justice issues, Viet Fact Check has invested in collaborating with individual dedicated community members (i.e. @viet.fake. news.buster), academic researchers, and mainstream media to explain the source of mis- and disinformation[80].

Motivations such as power and finances are more easily understandable to the wider public, and are of particular interest to refugees who are invested in preserving their personal built generational wealth by also supporting the power and prestige of the U.S. economy. It is understood that these motivations stem from Vietnamese Americans' shared trauma of growing up in an imperialized, now non-existent country.

During the very active 2020 U.S. Presidential election and the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, Viet Fact Check relied on tips from volunteers and readers to decide on the topics to address. The lack of existing content made the task easier as volunteers knew that topics like civil rights and public health policies are significant to understanding the root of living in the U.S.

Volunteers also spent time debunking rampant misinformation in the 2020 U.S. Presidential election, up to and including the Georgia runoffs and the January 6th insurrection. While published content initially largely mirrored standard U.S. and English sources of misinformation, strategies for narrative change routed to concentrate on more influential content producers (i.e. repeat offenders), such as Nguy Vu (also known as The KING Radio) who faithfully copied the red-baiting tactics of deplatformed talking heads like Alex Jones[81].

While Alex Jones was recently deplatformed from American social media platforms[82]. Viet Fact Check volunteers observed that the same mitigation was not happening for content in Vietnamese.

Contacting Facebook (Meta) and YouTube resulted in little to no acknowledgement.

Contacting Facebook (Meta) and YouTube resulted in little to no acknowledgement. Technology companies do not prioritize bugs or problematic features in their product as long as it is financially beneficial to their company.

Therefore, Viet Fact Check shifted their media strategy and focused on mainstream media coverage of their

efforts. In October 2021, HBO's "Last Week Tonight with John Oliver" covered the misinformation crisis in Vietnamese and Spanish social media content (see image). Since then, YouTube has shifted content moderation operations to detect and remove problematic content from bad actors like The KING Radio.

These banned content producers now tend to publish their message and attract smaller audiences on platforms like Facebook Live—an ephemeral platform that has significantly less content moderation protocols in place[83].

Cross-Cultural Alliances

At its peak of community volunteer engagement, Viet Fact Check had dozens of volunteers writing, promoting, and translating Viet Fact Check content. In solidarity, connecting with members of the Latinx community who had very similar stories to share about diasporic trauma, red-baiting, and misinformation[84], this provided context to the larger issues of the marginalizations of non-English contexts.

Today, Viet Fact Check is working in partnership with similar organizations to get a better handle on the misinformation memes that trend in our communities, as well as raise funding for projects like video to help reach the Vietnamese speaking audience.

The 2020 election, the murder of George Floyd, and the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic were a unique time; the community around Viet Fact Check has made the most of that time as many Americans have been motivated and empowered to use their abilities and talents to help make their country a better place, and their family dinners a bit less stressful.

Moving forward, Viet Fact Check continues to make community-specific narrative interventions including issues such as gun violence and attacks on reproductive rights.

62. Rkasnuam, H., & Batalova, J. (2014). Vietnamese Immigrants in the United States. Migrationpolicy.org.
63. Fujiwara, 2008
64. Lipman, 2011
65. Le and Su, 2018
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CASE: *KWENTUHAN* IN FILIPINO/A/X COMMUNITIES

FYLPRO & the Tayo Project:
Beginning as a virtual help desk in the fall of 2020, the Tayo project is an initiative of the Filipino Young Leaders Program (FYLPRO). Tayo has continuously diversified its culturally tailored offerings to connect Filipinx/a/o communities with vital information and services, refute misinformation, and improve the collection of data through efforts such as educational webinars, surveys, public service announcement campaigns, and health clinics.

In addition to debunking COVID-19 mis- and disinformation via traditional fact-checking content on social media, Tayo leverages the power of *kwentuhan* (traditional Filipino oral storytelling/talk story)[85] through a multiplatform and multidisciplinary lens.

By proactively engaging with its core audience, Tayo is able to get ahead of false narratives circulating within community information networks before those stories are poised to go viral[86]. At its heart, Tayo was initially launched to bridge gaps in services, reliable information, and demographic data for the millions of Filipinos residing in the United States.

Tayo's Emergence as a Diasporic Response to Mis- and Disinformation
When the novel coronavirus pandemic hit, FYLPRO created a COVID-19 task force to provide a rapid response, which originally consisted of fundraising efforts to boost the capacity of those working on the ground. In those early days, FYLPRO facilitated the delivery of PPE, food, and other supplies to local communities in the Philippines and the United States[87].

Meanwhile however, virtually every member of the task force also felt some degree of personal or familial impact from the pandemic[88] thanks to the outsized presence of Filipino workers within

America's critical healthcare infrastructure (a legacy of American imperialism in the Philippines)[89] and the elevated risk factors for severe COVID-19 outcomes among Filipinos nurses[90]—such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity[91]—not to mention the widely reported incidents of violence and harassment towards Asian Americans correlated with public discourse scapegoating China for the global spread of COVID-19[92].
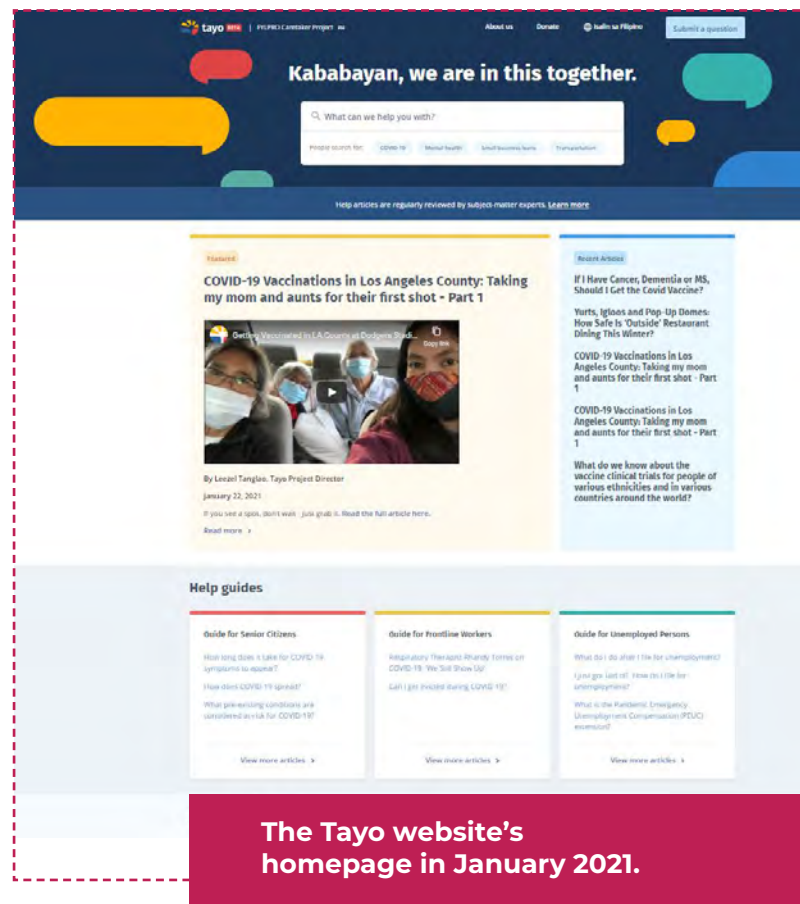
The Tayo website's homepage in January 2021.

As noted in a September 2020 report by National Nurses United, Filipino Americans made up 4% of registered nurses in the U.S. but accounted for almost a third of COVID-19 related nursing deaths at the time[93]. Just as vexing was the fact that because Filipinos tend to have extended, close-knit families[94], the kinds of large social gatherings and multigenerational household structures[95]

that had been traditional sources of support in times of crisis proved to be a considerable threat to community health and safety given the highly contagious nature of COVID-19.

Indeed, after expressing their frustrations at convincing close relatives to shelter in place and witnessing the proliferation of coronavirus misinformation online, members of FYLPRO's COVID-19 task force vocalized a need for some sort of playbook to help Filipino Americans talk with their elders about taking seriously the public health guidance surrounding the pandemic, igniting the primary spark for Tayo's creation[96].

In summer 2020, FYLPRO successfully pitched the Booz Allen Foundation's COVID Innovation Fund[97], thus securing the organization's first ever major grant and obtaining seed money for the Tayo Help Desk, which launched in October 2020 with a pilot geared towards Filipinos in the Los Angeles region[98].

Tayo, which inclusively translates to "us" in Tagalog/Filipino, consists of a Zendesk-powered virtual platform located at tayohelp.com that has since published more than 500 articles in a Q&A format. The platform covers a wide range of topics, from public health mandates, infection control, and vaccine accessibility to small business assistance, travel guidance, and consumer fraud advisories, all in furtherance of the site's main goals: to overcome misinformation in the Filipino diaspora and connect seniors, unemployed individuals, and essential workers with government resources and social services[99].

Available both in English and Filipino and written in an accessible and culturally relevant style, articles are vetted prior to publication by a panel of Filipino American subject matter experts[100] versed in areas such as medicine, public health, mental health, journalism, education, social work, community organizing, technology, and the law, among others. For any questions not covered by an existing article, users may submit their queries through the website's

ticketing system[101], which are then escalated to the expert panel in order to craft an individualized response or develop a new article. Tayo also supplements the content it develops in-house with articles syndicated from trusted public health and local news organizations, including Meedan's Health Desk, Southern California Public Radio's KPCC/LAist, and Kaiser Health News[102].

The Impact of Community Media:
From its October 2020 launch through late July 2022, tayohelp.com has seen more than 8,800 unique users land on the website with more than 9,500 unique engagements (searches, shares, page views). The top search inquiries include "mental health" and "COVID-19," indicating the type of information that community members are seeking the most.

Direct traffic to the homepage accounted for 32% of engagements, while 47% of users came through organic search, 6% via Facebook, and 1% from trackable news story referrals. Tayo has been covered by local, national, and international news outlets such as NBCNews.com, Rappler, and WNYC across print, digital, social, broadcast, and radio channels, which places a potential combined reach of more than 10 million monthly unique visitors via more than a dozen media features[103].

While 50% of users were from the United States, Tayo also saw 43% of traffic originate from the Philippines, revealing a level of engagement beyond the geography of Tayo's intended demographic of Filipino community members in the U.S.

A dedicated analysis of possible drivers of traffic from the Philippines has yet to be undertaken. However, in May 2020, the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) issued a cease and desist order mandating the closure of ABS-CBN's TV and radio operations after earlier attempts to renew the media network's broadcast franchise proved unsuccessful[104]. One major criticism of the shutdown (aside from its negative impact on press freedom[105]) was that it eliminated a trusted source of news

English and Filipino language flyers promoting Tayo's call center.

for millions of Filipinos just when the need for timely and reliable information about the pandemic was particularly urgent[106].

After receiving a second round of funding from the Booz Allen Foundation, in May 2022 Tayo launched a dedicated hotline which replicates the website's services via a live bilingual customer service agent (recalling the labor of the Philippine call center industry[107]. The hotline brings the project closer to fulfilling Tayo's original vision for the help desk concept by making content more accessible to seniors, especially those experiencing isolation, as well as other community members who may be less willing or able to navigate digital spaces[108].

Upon its launch, Tayo also established an active presence on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. In terms of social media use, Filipinos spend the most time on social media compared to other nationalities[109] and represent the 'social networking capital of the world'[110]. Half of Filipinos receive their political news from the internet, with over 40% of those individuals citing Facebook in particular[111].

For the millions of Filipino overseas foreign workers (OFWs) around the globe, technology has been a crucial way to keep in touch with information from 'home'[112] as evidenced by the Philippine government's eager adoption of social media as a forum for assisting OFWs in distress[113] and the emergence of Meta/Facebook's social networking and instant messaging apps as top communication platforms of choice for Filipinos living in the diaspora[114].

Crafting Culturally Relevant Narratives:
In November 2020 FYLPRO created a private Tayo Facebook group in collaboration with the UC Davis Bulosan Center for Filipino Studies, Pilipino Workers Center, Southern California Pilipinx-American Student Alliance, and USC Annenberg Center for Health Journalism as a space for community members to discuss pandemic-related questions. With the first COVID-19 vaccines becoming available in the U.S. the following month, Tayo began enlisting medical and public health experts as well as Filipino community groups to conduct webinars explaining the science behind the shots.

The webinars used culturally relevant references to Filipino food and traditional social activities, providing basic information about media literacy, and encouraging vaccine uptake[115]. Presenters appealed to traditional values such as *kapwa* (sense of shared identity as fellow human beings)[116]
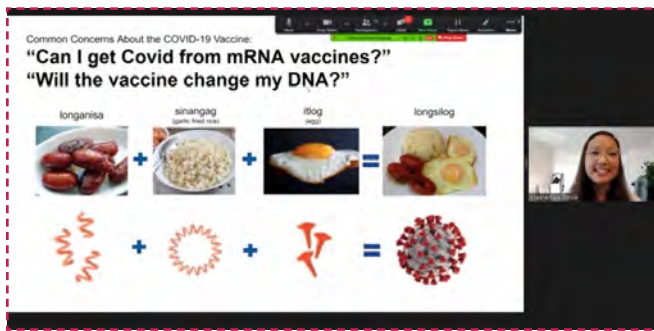
45

Image: Screenshot of a Tayo webinar debunking COVID vaccine misinformation using a Filipino breakfast food analogy.

and *bayanihan* (solidarity, civic unity, and cooperation)[117]. Presenters furthermore cited public statements by Pope Francis supporting vaccination[118] in an attempt to head off any religious objections that may have been lingering among the devout Catholics who make up a majority of the Filipino faith community[119].

Tayo's efforts to counteract vaccine hesitancy also included publishing first-person accounts of the immunization process[120], as well as a multimedia campaign consisting of bilingual public service announcements and a youth-oriented dance video[121].

The campaign was funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)[122] as part of its "We Can Do This" initiative[123]. Tayo also has partnerships with the National Domestic Workers Alliance and various local community based organizations in Chicago and Los Angeles[124] to provide online educational programming and in-person vaccination clinics focusing on key demographics like predominantly undocumented care workers and school-age children[125].

In guiding the development of this content, Tayo's team of experts applied current best practices in public health communication[126] filtered through a lens of health equity[127]. This takes into account more granular considerations such as acculturation factors specific to the Filipino immigrant experience[128] and lingering memories of the Dengvaxia controversy in the Philippines,

a dengue immunization campaign in 2016 that did much to erode trust in vaccines. The campaign had resulted in several child fatalities and a highly politicized effort to prosecute government officials who were involved in the initial vaccination rollout[129].

This multifaceted strategy is a reflection of the strong community-driven relationships and diverse knowledge base that FYLPRO had already cultivated through its extensive professional networks[130]. These enable Tayo to adopt a more comprehensive, human centered approach that went beyond basic fact-checking even early on.

For example, during the buildout of the Tayo web platform in late summer and early fall of 2020, the product development team workshopped user personas by conducting extensive interviews with community members—ranging from elders and parents of young children to COVID survivors and workers rights activists—who shared their concerns on a variety of topics (e.g. remote learning, emergency financial aid, and navigating the healthcare system).

Image: Promotional graphic and screenshot documenting a virtual community celebration hosted by Tayo in January 2021. Programming was designed to not only educate the public, but also stave off isolation by providing social interaction during the pandemic.

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Image: YouTube screenshot of Tagalog language PSA video created by Tayo in summer 2021 for the HHS "We Can Do This" vaccination outreach campaign. The caption translates to "Don't forget to protect the loved ones in your life."

Thus, Tayo seeks to unlock the power of narrative not just in the dissemination, but also the collection of data.

This reinforces a connection with the cultural values embedded in the traditional oral storytelling ritual of *kwentuhan*, which places an emphasis on interpersonal cooperation, reciprocity, and social acceptance[131]. While researchers have come to recognize the methodological benefits of this framework[132], performing *kwentuhan* carries extra weight in Tayo's work because it pays respect to a practice that has deep historical significance for Filipinos in the diaspora[133].

Community Data Practices:
Meanwhile, conventional practices of gathering data on historically excluded communities must take into account the potential harms when data gathering is abused for purposes of surveillance by state agents and other related actors[134]. This uneven distribution of risk puts the most vulnerable

members of those communities in a "double bind". The same data that can be marshaled to assert collective political claims and advocate for more equitable distribution of resources in the civic arena[135] can also harm communities.

For example, while improved data collection on undocumented immigrants can help fill conspicuous gaps in knowledge about the true size and demographics of the Filipino population in the U.S.[136] or concerns about the flows of labor trafficking[137], this information can be used by law enforcement to monitor communities of color and break up families whose members have been targeted for removal.[138]

The very real fears of police uses of data collection led advocacy groups to warn against the proposed inclusion of a citizenship question on the 2020 U.S. Census. They argued that such a queston could hamper outreach efforts by chilling

Image: Tayo representatives promoting the "MAGPABAKUNA na Tayo" vaccine survey and the Tayo Help Desk hotline in suburban Chicago during Piyesta Pinoy, a local Philippine Independence Day celebration in June 2022.

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participation and perhaps result in an undercount of already marginalized groups[139].

During an online discussion about Asian American and Pacific Islander data disaggregation hosted by FYLPRO and Tayo, panelists Dr. Melanie Sabado-Liwag and RJ Taggueg explained how data collection practices by institutions rooted in the ideals of white supremacy can inflict damage on Filipino communities. For example, data aggregation can erase the distinct experiences of Filipinos or further exclusion can occur when researchers conduct their work siloed off from counterparts in other disciplines[140].

Collaborations between academics and community organizations represent more ethical ways of doing research and data collection by involving the community. For example, the Bulosan Center's *kwentuhan*-based "Filipin[x]s Count" survey was administered such that participants felt comfortable enough to openly talk about their undocumented status.

As Tayo ramps up efforts to conduct more primary research in the public health space (discussed further below), it recognizes that trust is an essential factor in collecting community data, especially in multiply marginalized communities[142]. Tayo has accordingly looked to models of community-based participatory research (CBPR)[143], which emphasize the inclusion of community members in all aspects of the research process[144].

Transnational Connections and Coalition Building:

COVID-19 represents just one arena in the fight against online mis- and disinformation. The relationship between media manipulation, electoral politics, and the weaponization of cultural discontent has been a particularly pernicious phenomenon in the Philippines. In the estimation of whistleblower Christopher Wylie, "the country's high social media usage and lack of regulation makes it lucrative for a company like Cambridge Analytica to test out strateg[ies] before implementing them in Western countries with tighter regulations.[145]"

Indeed, Facebook users in the Philippines represented the second largest source of data harvested by Cambridge Analytica for their political targeting initiatives during the previous decade, behind only the United States. In 2018, Facebook's own director of global politics and government outreach labeled the Philippines as "patient zero[146]" in the so-called "infodemic" of deceptive social media practices threatening the integrity of democratic governance around the world[147].

The added layers of colonial history between the United States and the Philippines[148]; the decades-long and ever increasing rates of Filipino migration to the U.S.[149]; and the emergence of Filipinos as the second largest Asian American ethnic group[150] further underscore the importance of understanding the unique experience of Filipinos and the Filipino diaspora in mapping out the globalized landscape of mis- and disinformation.

The problem of disinformation in the Philippines began receiving significant attention after the 2016 presidential election, where supporters of then-candidate Rodrigo Duterte were notably linked to the proliferation of "fake news". During the election, bots, trolls, and fake accounts were deployed to drum up political support and delegitimize rivals on the path to victory[151]. The former Davao mayor's campaign admitted it relied on creative uses of social media to make up for a relative lack of financial resources.

These developments continued apace[152] during the 2019 Philippines midterm elections[153], paving the way for the heavily scrutinized 2022 presidential contest. The 2022 election saw former senator Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr.—the son of deposed autocrat Ferdinand Marcos—emerge as the eventual winner by a landslide in tandem with vice presidential running mate Sara Duterte, daughter of the term-limited President Duterte, himself an ally of the Marcos family[154].

In documenting the evolving landscape of disinformation, observers noted several key elements in the most recent election cycle, including:

1. continued use of paid political consultants (i.e. trolls) who open up and manage a barrage of fake online accounts to boost support for their clients;
2. creation of non-political social media pages that harvest followers, then eventually push out political propaganda to unsuspecting users; and
3. increased reliance on multimedia avenues, particularly YouTube livestreams, amateur videos, and TikTok influencer clips containing deceptive content that is much harder to debunk or remove in real time[155].

These developments are a refinement of practices that emerged with the rise of President Duterte, a self-styled strongman whose ideology operates on political grievance and fixates on returning the Philippines to a bygone era of perceived orderliness and social control. Conveniently enough, Duterte's populist romanticization of the martial law period converges with the decades-long effort to rehabilitate the Marcos legacy, a campaign that predates the rise of social media and Duterte's *very online* administration, but which also helped prime the electorate to accept the Marcoses back into the presidential palace in 2022[156].

While large tech platforms understandably face criticism for monetizing algorithms that facilitate disinformation by rewarding sensationalistic and emotionally manipulative content[152], that's not the only issue. Scholars like Dr. Jonathan Corpus Ong, who have conducted ethnographies of paid political trolls in the Philippines[158], argue for a more nuanced analysis that takes into account the complex political, economic, and historical dynamics at play in Asia's oldest democracy.

After the unofficial election returns indicated a win for Bongbong Marcos, Ong explains how the former's campaign was able to successfully weave notions of

reclaiming an idyllic past with fantasies of settling scores against the "liberal elite." This narrative connected with a citizenry yearning to cast aside a political establishment regarded as unresponsive to their needs[159].

"[R]ather than scapegoating social media as a technological brainwasher turning out voters who support populist strongmen, we must consider why communities resonate with, and willingly participate in, myth-making, misinformation, and historical revisionism online." - Dr. Jonathan Corpus Ong

Such inquiries should resist the temptation to write off these voters as unintelligent masses, but instead express a willingness to engage the issues faced by excluded communities and their own agency in political participation.

As with efforts to dispel falsehoods about COVID-19, fact-checking alone will not solve the crisis of mis- and disinformation in the electoral sphere.

Having already made inroads as a source of reliable health-related information, Tayo looks to further expand its research, analysis, and content creation capacities with various strategic allies. These include the Asian American Disinformation Table, Disinfo Defense League, and the #FactsFirstPH coalition[150], a Philippines-focused fact-checking project supported by technology partners Meedan, Google News Initiative, and Rappler.

As a network of community leaders and subject matter experts with ties spanning both sides of the Pacific, FYLPRO and Tayo seek to take a more proactive stance in tackling media manipulation in the Philippines, which itself has a tangible impact on the civic engagement of migrants in the diaspora.

In the 2016 presidential election, for example, overseas voters broke for the elder Duterte by a convincing margin[162], an outcome that was repeated in 2022 with the younger Marcos[162].

Image: Tayo core leaders and summer 2022 fellows meeting with a representative from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health during FYLPRO's 10th anniversary celebration held during late July in Washington, D.C.

Conversely, by strengthening collaborations with organizations combating racialized disinformation within communities of color in the United States, Tayo also hopes to provide Filipino Americans with the critical, culturally relevant tools to evaluate and respond to content advancing complicated narratives promoting xenophobia, anti-Blackness, and anti-LGBTQ sentiment.

Exercising Narrative Agency: Empowerment Through Data

As Tayo continues to refine its mis- and disinformation toolkit, the project's current strategic plan centers on transforming the initial help desk model into an innovative data hub that empowers Filipino/a/x communities. This work includes collecting data, fostering partnerships, and publishing culturally relevant insights, as well as developing leaders to create equitable and sustainable futures.

Tayo's mission statement now asserts that the project exists to illuminate the lived experiences of the Filipino/a/x diaspora by using data to amplify those communities' narratives and possibilities. To that end, Tayo has embarked on the CDC Foundation supported MAGPABAKUNA na Tayo ("Measuring and Gathering data on Pilipino/a/x American Behaviors, Attitudes, and Knowledge Understanding the Novel CoronAvirus vaccines") survey. Tayo has also partnered with Northwestern University's Institute for Public Health and Medicine (IPHAM) and Center for Community Health (NU-CCH) on the Bayanihan Project, a three-year community-based participatory research study that seeks to understand the role of Filipino sociocultural norms in health seeking behaviors.

By endeavoring to not only fill in the overall gaps in data on Filipino/a/x Americans[63], this work also highlights the actual disparities between the various ethnic groups that are all-too-often subsumed under the homogenous category of "Asian American[164]". These efforts can hopefully equip researchers, journalists, policymakers, and other community stakeholders with additional qualitative and quantitative resources to advance a more accurate portrayal of the Filipino diaspora in their work[165].

What started as an ad hoc response to the emerging epistemic crisis of the global pandemic has over time evolved into a long-term, multisectoral campaign to document the Filipino/a/x experience at the grassroots level. As Tayo's namesake indicates, it is ultimately up to "us" to care for each other and cultivate community resilience in the face of ongoing marginalization and structural neglect by institutions of power.

Tackling Challenges and Looking Ahead

With these ambitious plans to become a central data innovation hub for Filipinos in the diaspora, Tayo faces many challenges, such as the capacity to address the virality of misinformation in real time (especially with

respect to content that circulates through private channels like Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, and Viber groups)[166]; identify reliable sources of funding; and navigate the ever-changing situation of the global pandemic.

New COVID-19 variants proliferate in the U.S. and upend established guidance on testing, treatment, and prevention[167]. Meanwhile, the cultural onset of so-called "pandemic fatigue[168]" and a shifting emphasis on individualized risk assessment[169] has accompanied a relaxation of government-mandated safety measures. All of these developments highlight the continued importance of delivering clear and concise public health information that is communicated through accessible and culturally relevant means.

Tayo has long recognized that regular monitoring of online media channels would ensure that it stays nimble amidst a turbulent information landscape. It has recently taken initial steps to establish a formal infrastructure for identifying and tracking specific pieces of problematic content, primarily through the use of tech solutions such as the Algorithmic Transparency Institute's Junkipedia platform and The Public Good Projects/New York State Health Foundation's Project VCTR.

As a small and lean team led by volunteers, Tayo would greatly benefit from the ability to hire part-time and full-time staff to address operational challenges and sustain work long-term. In April 2022, Tayo's core leadership conducted strategic planning sessions to develop a multi-year roadmap by leveraging FYLPRO's extended network to bring more visibility to its activities; engaging with data producers to scale up the dissemination of primary research; and partnering with other mission-aligned organizations to build technical capacity, and continuing to diversify funding sources.

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Additional footnotes (106-169) located in appendix, on page 65.

MOVING FORWARD: WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

MOVING FORWARD

The narratives raised in this report, which demonstrate how tensions are sown within, across, and about Asian communities, also demonstrate the different ways people make political meaning out of Asian American identity. We need a multipronged strategy to build a political agenda for racial justice. Fact-checking or platform takedowns are not enough—what is needed are diverse skill-sets of investigative research and journalism, creative and strategic communication, and intersectoral community organizing to acknowledge and address head-on communities' needs, including fears and anxieties over safety and access to resources. Safeguarding all communities against the harmful consequences of mis- and disinformation requires centering the experiences and work of those most affected in order to thoroughly address issues at their core.

WHAT WE NEED:

Resources for Capacity and Grassroots Power Building:

We advocate for more resources and funding to be allocated towards community-based knowledge production and building connections across different communities in order to facilitate internal knowledge sharing.

This might include funding for more research capacity including:
- partnerships between academic researchers and community organizations
- capacity for qualitative and quantitative research, including software and paying community researchers
- translation and interpretation services
- public trainings and workshops

This might also include resourcing cross-movement building including:
- organizing strategic cross-sector gatherings of grassroots, policy, and advocacy groups
- power mapping and landscaping pan-Asian and multiracial politics

Narrative Change:

Beyond documentation and monitoring, we need strategies and tactics for narrative change. How we use stories for healing and building empathy are communicative tools that our communities have been doing for centuries.

This includes:
- tools for building political consensus and processes for coordinated messaging
- infrastructures and resources for long-term change, as well as rapid response
- alignment with other social justice and racial equity organizations and stakeholders
- support for cultural workers to help create visionary frames and counter divisive messaging

This work rebuilds trust and focus on unity. This can critically influence on elections and make a significant impact on Asian American voters, especially in swing states.

Healing Justice:

We need to coordinate and research trauma-informed practices as part of this work. Beyond solely discussing harm in our communities, we need to find opportunities for collective repair and healing, and social media platforms are often not the place for this.

For example, this may include:
- finding ways to prevent and address burnout and to shift the palpable fear, stress, and anxiety in our communities
- developing practices for intentional relationship building
- using transformative justice and mindfulness approaches to address harm and conflict
- building resilience across divides to reunite fractured communities and organizations

We center healing across many dimensions, including the reclamation of our political consensus. This means healing relations without further fracturing.

Image from the June 2022 Unity March in Washington D.C. of someone holding a sign that reads "Isang Bagsak" (or "One Down"), a rallying cry introduced by Larry Itliong during the Delano Grape Strike in 1965 by Filipino farmworkers. Photo by Jeremy Thompson, courtesy of APIAVote.[270]

HEALING JUSTICE AND DISINFORMATION:

We need reparative and healing approaches that address community grief and trauma as well as addressing root causes of harm and violence in our communities. We have lost loved ones to COVID-19; witnessed and experienced targeted attacks and violence against community members; and also confronted political fractures and fissures in our communities. This work is mentally and emotionally difficult. We need resources for collective safety, care, and support in this work, such as creating spaces to share and process harmful narratives and encounters or building capacity to address high-risk scenarios.

Healing justice also reorients how we understand harm. It brings our attention to family members who join conservative churches after migrating to the U.S. because that's the only place they can access community services; to aging relatives who are losing their memory and turn to in-language nationalistic media as they self-isolate from their community; to intergenerational traumas and erasures, including ways people can be cut off from their diasporic languages and histories.

BUILDING WITH PACIFIC ISLANDER COMMUNITIES

COVID-19 misinformation has been deadly in Pacific Islander (PI) communities. While media coverage has emphasized infection spread due to tourism economies or from military bases as well as disparities in medical care and lack of in-language health resources, less has been discussed in public discourse about the ongoing impact of colonial occupation—of stolen lands, languages, and knowledge.

Histories of mis- and disinformation about Pacific Islander communities have justified land theft and occupation as well as ongoing displacement, e.g blood quantum logics to dispossess Native Hawaiians of their homes[171]; myths about Indigenous communities as 'backwards' and 'anti-science'[172]; propaganda commissions of Hawai'i as a multicultural melting pot to be incorporated into a state in order to disprove communist charges of racism in the U.S.[173]; and erasures of violence such as nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands[174].

We can advocate for resourcing projects that promote narrative change for movement building and healing justice. Examples of existing projects include Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC)'s Maps of Colonial Impact project that demonstrates how colonization has shaped racial categories and controlled the ability for PI communities to access resources[175]; or grassroots organization Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana's use of narrative strategy, movement history, and educational activities to heal Kaho'olawe.

As future directions of our work, we seek to build closely with Pacific Islander communities. Much mis- and disinformation within Asian and Asian American communities has deep roots in harmful conceptions about nationhood.

We need political agendas that work in alignment with Pacific Islander communities, including advocating for resources and capacity for PI organizations.

Rather than erasing and excluding Pacific Islanders from Asian and Asian American political organizing or uncritically incorporating 'PI,' our communities have much shared work when addressing disinformation. Resourcing PI community organizing can also expand shared political approaches to challenging the status quo of how the relationship with "America" is understood.

Namely, understanding histories of violence against our communities by the U.S. and challenging solutions limited to seeking inclusion into the nation-state. For example, this shared work may include ongoing interventions against narratives shaped by U.S. imperialism and military occupation in Asia and the Pacific.

170. Abby Pasion (2020) "From "Isang Bagsak" to #FilipinxForBlackLives, the Filipino Identity Has Always Been Political." Medium, Nov. 3
171. J. Kehaulani Kauanui, 2008
172. Maile Arvin (2019) "Mauna Kea Protests Aren't New. They're Part of a Long Fight Against Colonialism." Truthout, 27 July.
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174. Teaiwa, 1994
175. EPIC, Our Community
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DIRECTIONS FOR POLICY ADVOCACY

Refusing Counter-Terrorism Approaches:

After the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the Capitol, U.S. government framing has approached disinformation as fueling a 'crisis' of democracy, including relying on law enforcement to understand and counter the spread of disinformation[176]. Approaches to 'stop' white supremacy (enabled by 'bad' information) as issues of domestic terrorism under the purview of the Department of Homeland Security does not actually address the roots of white supremacy as part of the historical foundation of the U.S.

'Bad' information itself is seen as the threat rather than the ongoing ways in which racism and nationalism continue to hinder communities' access to democracy and freedom.

Developed after 9/11, Homeland Security is the most heavily armed agency and has been an instrument of state violence through immigration exclusion, detention, and deportation. Further, these approaches emphasized counter violent extremism (CVE) approaches. CVE models of reporting individuals as suspected extremists or terrorists legitimize policing practices as 'community engagement', including targeting and surveilling community organizations as potential terrorist groups. These approaches are devastating to Asian and Asian American communities. They double down on strategies that have policed and incarcerated communities of color, including Muslim, Arab, and South Asian communities.

Beyond Platform Accountability:

Currently, policy interventions focus primarily on platform accountability, namely U.S. based companies, including adopting stronger policies around monitoring and preventing disinformation spread and harmful speech or demanding transparency and oversight of technological systems. This may include platforms increasing language and cultural competency when it comes to monitoring.

Current policies and tools are not equipped to understand contextual depth and breadth across various languages and geographies.

On the one hand, this ignores how problematic information spreads on spaces like WeChat, Weibo, and KakaoTalk. On the other hand, we cannot deputize for-profit companies to be police, judge, and jury of online harm. Additionally, multinational U.S. companies should not be imposing policies, frameworks, and tools based on narrow U.S. legal frameworks and cultural understandings in other places. Without a nuanced understanding of power in relation, current policies can easily become weaponized against vulnerable communities. Additionally, an overemphasis on technological solutions often ignores root causes of social problems. Current platform problems have not created a 'crisis', but rather exacerbated existing ones.

APPENDIX

Disinformation is not a new phenomenon for our communities to contend with— the harmful information that circulates within and about our communities pivots on pre-existing racial and geopolitical narratives. The process of racialization was incredibly violent for our communities who have endured xenophobia and racism, military occupation, and colonization. In many ways, histories of disinformation, as well as organizing through counternarratives about and within our communities can be vital areas for us to search for resilience on these issues.

While it is beyond the scope of this report to speak about the total history of disinformation from our communities, this section offers background on two key examples of problematic narratives about Asian racialization that can be found in contemporary mis- and disinformation: the 'perpetual foreigner' and 'model minority' myth.

Please note that this section primarily focuses on Asian racialization within and through the U.S.

Fears of Asians as Enemies and Perpetual Foreigners:

Xenophobic narratives about Asians as enemies and perpetual foreigners are often linked to domestic white nationalism and U.S. imperialism, war, and military invasion in Asia (see image on right).

For example, in the early 1900s, the U.S. colonial relationship with the Philippines combined with ideologies of white entitlement over resources and immigration restrictions facilitated racial violence against Filipino migrant workers due to white anxiety over perceived sexual deviance and job theft[177]. Or, during the 1980s, racial anxieties over U.S. economic competition with Japan led to an influx of anti-Asian

violences. Further examples of this include Yellow Peril (Figures 1-4) and Dusky Peril (Figures 5-8); anti-Japanese sentiment and mass incarceration during World War II (Figures 9-12); and anti-Vietnamese attacks after the U.S. War in Vietnam (Figure 13).

Model Minority Myth:

The model minority myth is a combination of narratives about Asian exceptionalism, immigrant uplift, and 'pull yourself up by the bootstraps' ideology that highlights the success of Asian immigrants (historically Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Indian immigrants) of a specific educational and professional background. On the surface, the racialized tropes of Asians as hardworking, successful, and high achieving seem to be 'positive' narratives, but they are actually quite harmful.

The model minority myth is a tool that protects white supremacy, validates anti-Black racism, and hurts Asian communities.

As a political strategy, the myth uses the economic wellbeing of some to justify the ongoing disenfranchisement of others— basically, 'if this group can do it, why can't you?' In other words, the model minority myth constructs other minoritized groups as 'problems,' such as by creating binaries of 'good' versus 'bad' immigrants, in order to foreclose possibilities for racial and economic justice.

Used in tandem with the 'perpetual foreigner' myth, the model minority narrative offers the illusion of belonging while also reinforcing Asians as 'others.' For example, contemporary and historical anxieties about Asia 'rising' based on economic and technological advancement can facilitate anti-Asian scapegoating in the U.S.

Additionally, the model minority myth constructs notions of 'success' as one's ability to assimilate into white societal norms[178]. Further, the myth serves to both protect white America from Black encroachment and deflect Black demands for racial justice while continuing to ostracize Asians as "outsiders."[179]

"At a time when it is being proposed that hundreds of billions be spent on uplifting Negroes and other minorities, the nation's 300,000 Chinese Americans are moving ahead on their own with no help from anyone else". - *U.S. News and World Report*, 1966

Popular media stories during the Cold War and Civil Rights Movement promoted Asian Americans as models of successful assimilation, such as the January 1966 *New York Times* article, "Success Story: Japanese-American Style," and the December 1966 *U.S. News and World Report* story on

Chinese Americans, "Success Story of One Minority in the U.S."[180] These are examples of "model minority imperialism"— a way for the U.S. empire to 'check enemies of peace and progress.'[181]

Histories of Narrative Change:

The history of Asian American movement building has been one in which different communities have come together to facilitate narrative change about Asian American racialization and politics. From community-based surveys and the creation of grassroots media, our communities have long utilized culturally informed storytelling strategies to build pan-Asian resilience and shared political visions.

For example, *Gidra* was a monthly Asian American movement newsletter that offered an internationalist and anti-imperialist perspective between 1969-1974. Stories also aimed to change the historical narrative around the legacy of Japanese mass incarceration away from model minority tropes and emphasize political connections such as links between incarceration and Native removal and displacement.[182]

THE YELLOW TERROR IN ALL HIS GLORY

He's a Yellow Peril Chink of surprising versatility,
And he stole into our country with astonishing facility;
He'll washee-washee shirtee for the Melican Gentility
And sit with girls in Sunday School in studious humility.
Ah Sin's the heathen's name.

Figures 1-4: Yellow Peril

Racialized panics ('Yellow Peril')[183] about Chinese migrants as deviant, dirty, and dangerous in the U.S. during the 19th century concretized as anti-immigration policies including the 1875 Page Act, 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, and later the 1917 Asiatic Barred Zone Act.

The Page Act in particular targeted Chinese women as sex workers believing they would 'transmit Chinese diseases' to white clients[184]. Contemporary disinformation about Asians spreading disease at the start of the pandemic (e.g. Wuhan virus, 'China lied, people died', and 'immigration kills') stems from these long-standing xenophobic narratives (e.g. blaming the San Francisco Chinatown community for the 1876 smallpox outbreak).[185]

Figures 5-8: Dusky Peril

Similar to Yellow Peril and the fear of Asian invasion, "Dusky Peril" was a term coined by a local newspaper in Washington state in the early 1900s to refer to the 'threat' of South Asian migration. The fear of South Asians migrating (and thus contaminating) into the "white settler societies"of Canada and U.S. produced narratives of migrants as diseased and immoral[186]. White mobs went door to door in local communities to violently expulse people from their homes. In the late 1980s, Dotbusters (a racist reference to the 'bindi' dot), a white supremacist group in New Jersey, attacked Indian American communities. According to a letter published in T*he Jersey Journal*, they described planning their attacks by using phone books to "look up the name Patel."

177. Ngai, 2004
178. Wu, 2013
179. Kim, 1999
180. Lee, 2010
181. Bascara, 2006
182. Densho, Gidra Archives
183. John Kuo Wei Tchen and Dylan Yeats (2014) "Yellow Peril: 19th-Century Scapegoating." Asian American Writers' Workshop. March 5.
184. Rachel Kuo and Salonee Bhaman (2021) "Attacks on Asian Women Are Fueled by Criminalization, War and Economic Injustice." Truth Out, 21 March.
185. Shah, 2001
186. Shah, 2011
187. Densho, Terminology.
188. Yuh, 2002
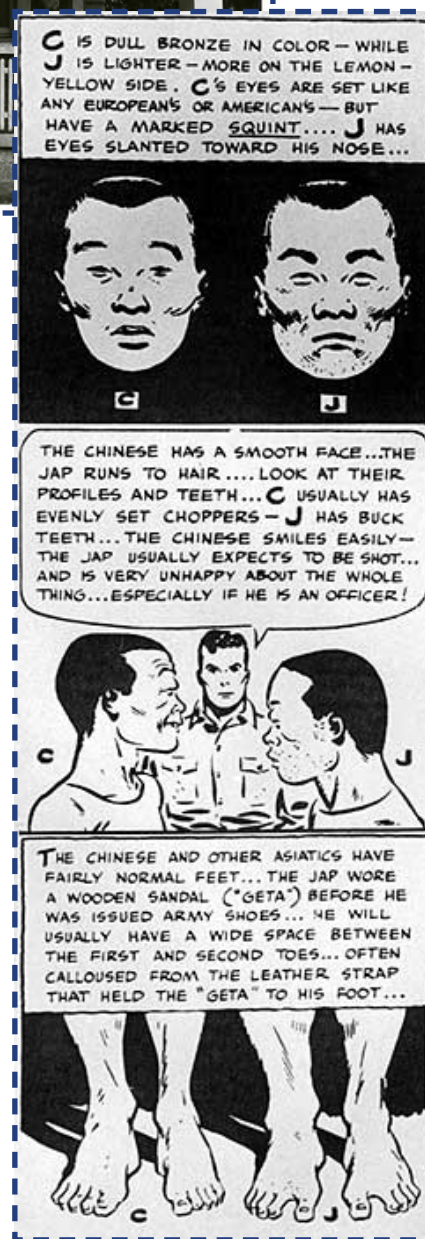
Figures 9-12: Japanese Mass Incarceration During World War II, Japanese Americans were seen as a national security threat. U.S. propaganda and popular press coverage of Japanese people as 'enemies' supported public legitimization of forced removal and incarceration. The U.S. military distributed pocket guides on the differences between Chinese 'allies' from Japanese 'enemies.' Mainstream media articles in *Time* and *LIFE* magazines featured headlines such as "How to Tell Your Friends from the Japs" and "How to Tell the Japs from the Chinese." Later, euphemisms in textbooks and news around 'relocation' and 'internment' distorted the violence of displacement and mass incarceration.[187]

Figures 13: Anti-Vietnamese Attacks During and after the U.S. War in Vietnam, mainstream news coverage over missing soldiers and popular action movies furthered public resentment over U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia. This spurred racist targeting and violence against Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian communities, including Cambodian, Laotian and Hmong communities.

Historical moments of U.S. permanent war and military occupation in Asia are also connected to long-standing violence against Asian women, particularly the fantasy of Asian women as submissive. For example, local sex industries created during military occupation were often the "first encounters" U.S. soldiers had with Asian women where soldiers presumed sexual access.[188]

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