

# COVID-19 brings out xenophobia and discrimination against migrants and people of color

The word xenophobia is made up of the Greek words 'xenos', which means stranger or foreigner, and 'phobos', which means fear. Incoming immigrants are considered a danger to the culture, traditions, and customs of the 'locals'. History has shown us that pandemics and global disease outbreaks bring out xenophobia against specific ethnic groups.

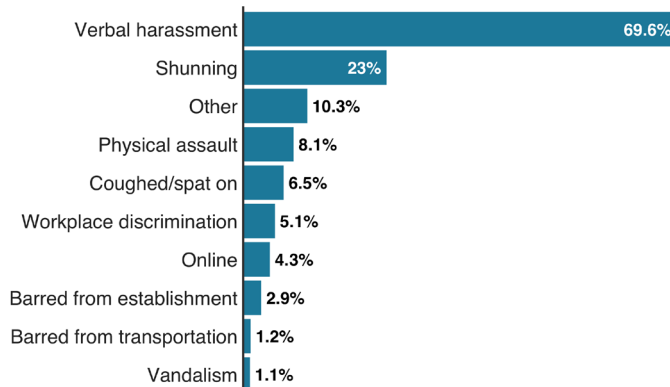
A typhus and cholera outbreak in the 1880s led to discrimination against Russian Jewish immigrants, and a bubonic plague outbreak in the early 1900s led to discrimination against the Chinatown community in San Francisco. Chinese communities were also stigmatized during the SARS outbreak in 2003.

Every group that has immigrated to America has battled hatred and discrimination from those who were already settled. German and Irish Catholics in the mid-1800s were shunned or killed. During the Great Depression, 20 percent of the Mexican and Mexican-American population was deported. Japanese Americans were interned during World War II, while

Chinese coronavirus, Kung-Flu and similar variations. These terms have led to discrimination and harassment towards Asian-Americans, as seen in the following chart which shows a distribution of the recent incidents of harassment and hate.

## Verbal harassment the most common form of discrimination

Percentage of 1,710 reported coronavirus-related incidents



Source: Stop AAPI Hate Reporting Center (19 Mar-29 Apr)

BBC

Discrimination towards Asian-Americans can also lead to significant health care problems and uncharacterized social-determinants. According to a 2019 study by the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health that interviewed 500 Asians, 13% had experienced discrimination in healthcare encounters with providers. At least one in four adults experienced discrimination in employment (27% job applications, 25% equal pay/promotions); discrimination in housing (25%); microaggressions (35%); and racial slurs (32%). People from East and South-Asia regions were the worst affected.

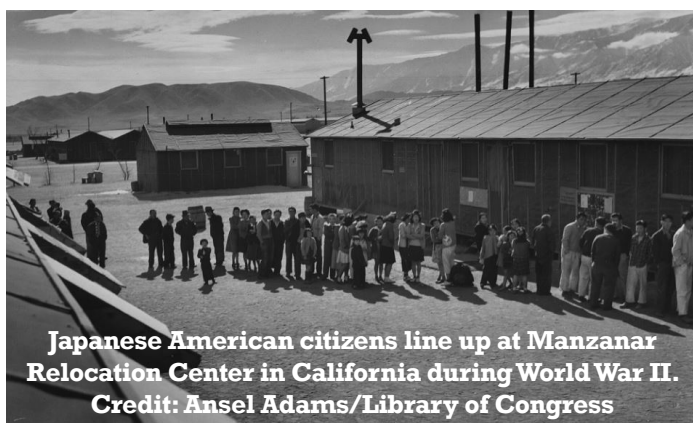
We are in the midst of a crisis of epic proportions with no end in sight. Our communities of color will suffer greatly due to loss of jobs and lack of access to basic necessities. We will experience business closures and also have significant health problems due to the coronavirus. However, we cannot lose hope. As Asian-Americans and immigrants we can overcome discrimination by being united and standing together.

Andrew Yang, Democratic presidential candidate and founder of Humanity Forward said, "We have to demonstrate that we are part of the solution. We are not the virus, but we can be part of the cure."

Let us make our voices heard, embrace and celebrate our identities, and highlight our exceptionalism.

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Muslim Americans continue to battle xenophobia today.

As the coronavirus spreads, the xenophobia it foments interconnects with the political conditions of countries. For example, right-wing parties in Europe, have latched onto the outbreak to reiterate their calls for tougher immigration restrictions. Italy's far-right leaders exploited the virus for their own pandemic populism, erroneously linking the outbreak to African asylum seekers and urging border closures.

Similar calls to suspend Europe's open-border system, known as the Schengen Area, have been made by far-right politicians in Germany, France, and Spain. Thus, immigrants and refugees are a convenient scapegoat at times of global crisis.

The American Medical Association has called on public officials and the media to utilize the World Health Organization's globally identified nomenclature for the pandemic—coronavirus or COVID-19—and to abstain from using racially-charged and xenophobic language such as: Wuhan virus, the