

GOP senator says China 'to blame' for coronavirus spread because of 'culture where people eat bats and snakes and dogs'

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WASHINGTON — Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, drew a backlash on social media and from Asian American advocates on Wednesday for claiming (<https://twitter.com/thehill/status/1240364608390606850?s=20>) China was "to blame" for the spread of the coronavirus (<https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/18/coronavirus-fact-check-covid-19-caused-eating-animals/5073094002/>) because of a "culture where people eat bats and snakes and dogs and things like that."

"These viruses are transmitted from the animal to the people and that's why China has been the source of a lot of these viruses like SARS, like MERS, the Swine flu, and now the coronavirus, so I think they have a fundamental problem, the Texas Republican said (<https://twitter.com/thehill/status/1240364608390606850?s=20>) to reporters, saying he did not object to a geographic name for the virus."

Asked about Asian Americans' concerns about racism, Cornyn said, "I disagree. We're not talking about Asians. We're talking about China, where these viruses emanate from and created this pandemic."

Sen. John Cornyn: "China is to blame because the culture where people eat bats & snakes & dogs & things like that, these viruses are transmitted from the animal to the people and that's why China has been the source of a lot of these viruses like SARS like MERS, the Swine Flu." [pic.twitter.com/N4TIIIGFqAL](https://twitter.com/N4TIIIGFqAL) (<https://t.co/N4TIIIGFqAL>)
— The Hill (@thehill) March 18, 2020
(https://twitter.com/thehill/status/1240364608390606850?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

The CDC says (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/summary.html>) the coronavirus has its origins in bats and might (<https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/16/coronavirus-fact-check-where-did-covid-19-start-experts-say-china/5053783002/>) have jumped to humans through a "wet market," or a live animal market, in Wuhan, China.

Swine flu was first detected (https://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/information_h1n1_virus_qa.htm#a) in the United States in 2009, and MERS was first identified in Jordan in 2012, according (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/mers/about/index.html>) to the CDC. The CDC says the first cases of SARS were reported (<https://www.cdc.gov/about/history/sars/timeline.htm>) in China's Guangdong province in 2002.

Drew Brandewie, Cornyn's communications director, said on Thursday that the senator "misspoke" about the origins of MERS and swine flu, but the rest of his comments referred to the animal markets.

Cornyn met a swift backlash on Twitter for his comments Wednesday.

"Can we go back to when being racist in public wasn't cool?" said (https://twitter.com/Bakari_Sellers/status/1240374244074192896?s=20) Democratic attorney and politician Bakari Sellers on Twitter.

Rep. Judy Chu, D-Calif., the chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, called Cornyn's comments "disgusting" and an attempt to "shift attention away from President Trump's truncated response" to the coronavirus pandemic.

"Disparaging an entire ethnic group and culture like this is bigotry, plain and simple," Chu said. "Blaming Chinese people en masse for the spread of this disease is the exact same bigoted line that was used to justify the Chinese Exclusion Act over a century ago."

More: [Fact check: Is COVID-19 caused by human consumption of animals? \(/story/news/factcheck/2020/03/18/coronavirus-fact-check-covid-19-caused-eating-animals/5073094002/\)](https://story/news/factcheck/2020/03/18/coronavirus-fact-check-covid-19-caused-eating-animals/5073094002/)

More: [Cash for Americans, lifelines for business: Congress turns to fresh coronavirus package as sick leave bill passes \(/story/news/politics/2020/03/18/coronavirus-congress-weighs-cash-americans-lifelines-business/2868345001/\)](https://story/news/politics/2020/03/18/coronavirus-congress-weighs-cash-americans-lifelines-business/2868345001/)

The National Council of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, a coalition of 35 national Asian American Pacific Islander advocacy groups, replied directly to Cornyn, writing, "there are over 1M Asian Americans in your state. These are wildly irresponsible comments when anti asian hate crimes are on the rise."

@JohnCornyn (https://twitter.com/JohnCornyn?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw), there are over 1M Asian Americans in your state. These are wildly irresponsible comments when anti asian hate crimes are on the rise.
" NCAPA #AAPI2020 (@NCAPAtweets) March 18, 2020
(https://twitter.com/NCAPAtweets/status/1240383382653149184?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)

"Yiiiiiiiikes," posted (<https://twitter.com/KevinMKruse/status/1240372702361288705?s=20>) Princeton University historian Kevin Kruse. " "

"Years of gaining international leadership from World War II to the fight against the Soviet Union, making America the shining city on the hill, and then we had to go and let this guy talk in front of a camera," said (<https://twitter.com/RadioFreeTom/status/1240375967094394880?s=20>) U.S. Naval War College professor Tom Nichols. " "

"Swine Flu didn't even originate in China. It started here in the United States, where we eat pigs," wrote (https://twitter.com/renato_mariotti/status/1240383088141746177?s=20) former federal prosecutor Renato Mariotti.

More: ['Abundance of caution': Several lawmakers self-quarantine out of fear of contact with coronavirus \(/story/news/politics/2020/03/09/coronavirus-lawmakers-self-quarantine-after-contact-patient/5003821002/\)](https://story/news/politics/2020/03/09/coronavirus-lawmakers-self-quarantine-after-contact-patient/5003821002/)

The backlash against Cornyn's comments come as President Donald Trump has continued to refer to the virus as the "Chinese virus," despite advocates and health experts' calls to avoid stigmatizing groups with named viruses. " "

The World Health Organization's [guidance \(https://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/notes/2015/naming-new-diseases/en/\)](https://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/notes/2015/naming-new-diseases/en/) for naming infectious diseases cautions against naming diseases for locations or people like the West Nile virus or Middle East Respiratory Syndrome. " "

Whether the virus originated in China is [not in serious dispute \(/story/news/factcheck/2020/03/16/coronavirus-fact-check-where-did-covid-19-start-experts-say-china/5053783002/\)](https://story/news/factcheck/2020/03/16/coronavirus-fact-check-where-did-covid-19-start-experts-say-china/5053783002/), despite some attempts by Chinese officials to [sow \(https://twitter.com/zlj517/status/1238269193427906560?s=20\)](https://twitter.com/zlj517/status/1238269193427906560?s=20) disinformation about the virus's origins. A USA TODAY fact check found claims the virus originated elsewhere "false."

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