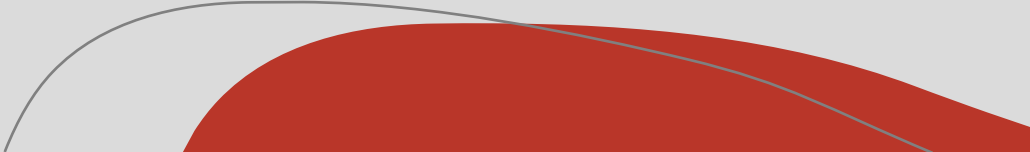


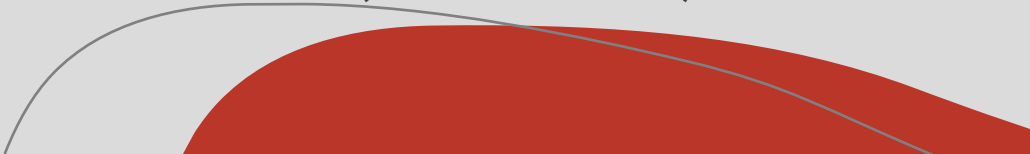
Disinformation and Differential Impact: COVID-19

Ashleigh Moore

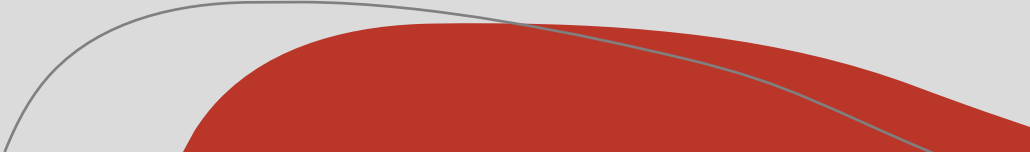
The Infodemic

- Term used by the World Health Organization to describe the extensive spread of false and/or misleading information about the coronavirus
 - Includes fake medical advice, rumors, conspiracy theories, disinformation campaigns, & attempts to leverage the crisis for political gain
 - Having information, even if it is not accurate, helps soothe the fear and anxiety surrounding the pandemic
 - Science tends to move more slowly than the public's demands for information
 - Collective sensemaking leads to rumors, conspiracy theories, and misinformation
 - Disinformation & misinformation can alter health behaviors and inhibit effective public health measures
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Medical Mistrust & Misinformation

- Historical, and often warranted, mistrust of the medical system and medical information within certain communities led to the spread of misinformation about the virus.
 - For decades, Black people have died of treatable diseases at higher rates because of disparities in access to healthcare and hospitals.
 - This distrust led to the spread of misinformation such as:
 - Black people cannot die of COVID-19.
 - The virus was made for population control.
 - The use of herbal remedies to prevent and/or control the virus.
 - 5G radiation caused the virus.
 - Some of this was misinformation that began organically, but much of it was disinformation being spread by outsiders into these communities.
 - Social media sites & tech companies did little to stop the spread of this misinformation, especially in cultural communities where different terms were used to discuss the virus (such as “rona”).
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Medical Mistrust & Misinformation

- Loss of trust in public institutions, such as government, media, and health officials in recent years
 - People go online to fill in gaps in information, especially during crises
 - Turn to informal sources
 - Allowed disinformation & misinformation about the virus to spread rapidly
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Islamophobic Disinformation & Hate-Speech

- The #Coronajihad hashtag went viral, insinuating that Muslims were terrorists, using the Coronavirus as a bioterrorism weapon.
 - Claims that they were intentionally spreading it to non-Muslims as a form of "jihad"
- Claims that Muslims tested positive at higher rates
- Focus on Muslim religious gatherings that occurred right before the lockdowns began, labeling them as super spreader events and implying they caused the pandemic.
- Initially spread by established Islamophobic pages in India, but due to the nature of social media and disinformation, was quickly spread and amplified globally.

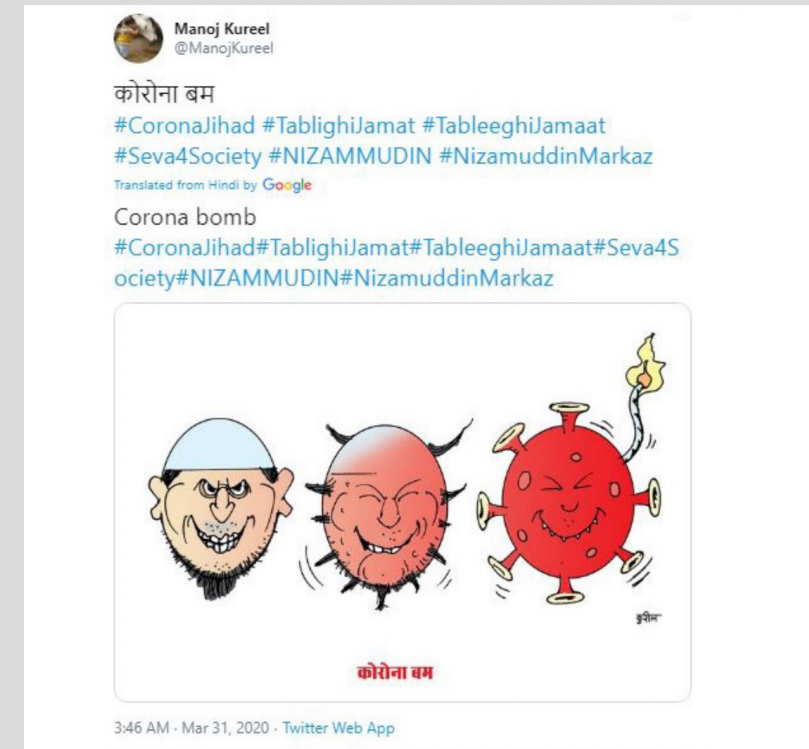
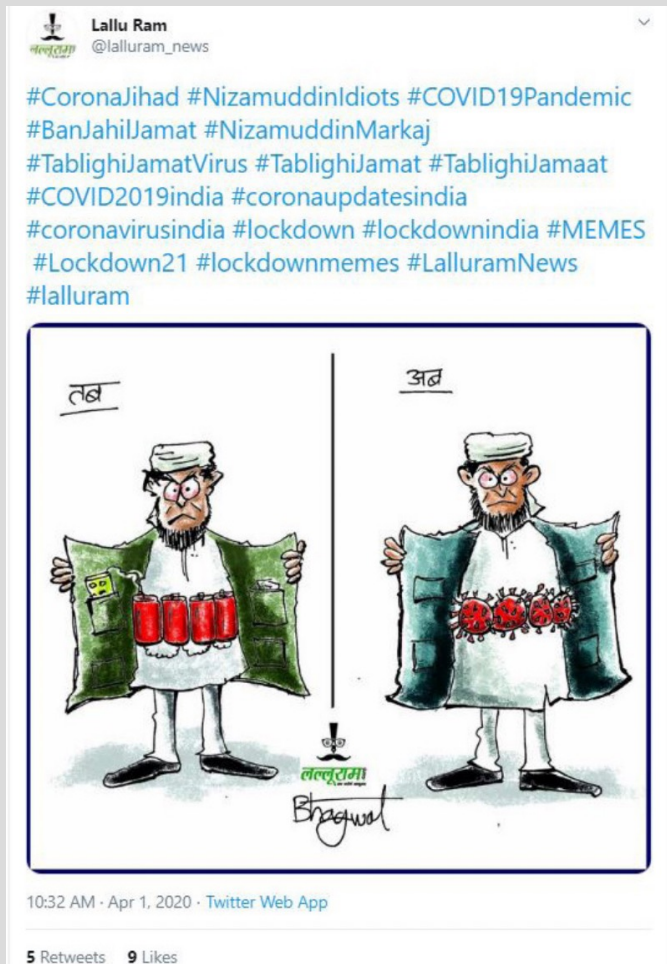


Image source: <https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/9n18p4/>


Islamophobic Disinformation & Hate-Speech



- Neither Facebook nor Twitter did anything significant to debunk these claims or stop the spread of them.
- Disinformation and hate speech such as this “not only harms impacted minorities, but also prevents accurate scientifically informed public health information from reaching the public and can exacerbate spread” (Soundararajan et al., 2020).
- Led to several instances of violence against Muslims & Muslim communities

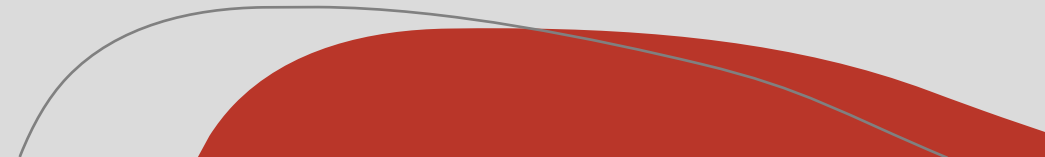
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The “Secondary Epidemic” of Racism & Xenophobia

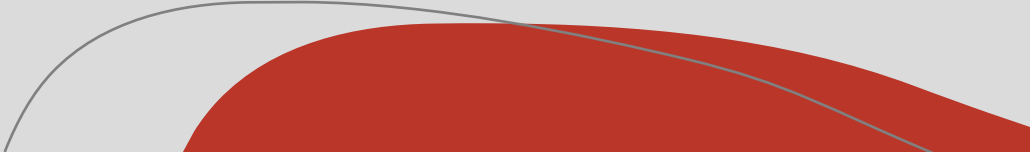
- The World Health Organization warned against relating locations or ethnicities to the virus to prevent stigmatization but was largely ignored.
 - “Wuhan Virus,” “Chinese Virus,” “Asian Virus”
 - Ignored by many right-wing elected officials and media outlets, & endorsed by the then-President
 - Donald Trump used the term “China Virus” or “Chinese Virus” in 54 tweets from March 2020 to January 2021
 - Conservative news sites continuously racialized the virus, even though cases in the U.S. were traced to travelers from Europe & within the U.S.
 - Naming of viruses with locations or ethnicities leads to increased xenophobia and racism
 - Spanish-Flu, Mexican Swine Flu, Ebola Virus
 - This naming convention can be psychologically damaging and can dictate public response to an epidemic or pandemic
 - Can be used as a tactic to promote fear or othering of certain groups
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The “Secondary Epidemic” of Racism & Xenophobia

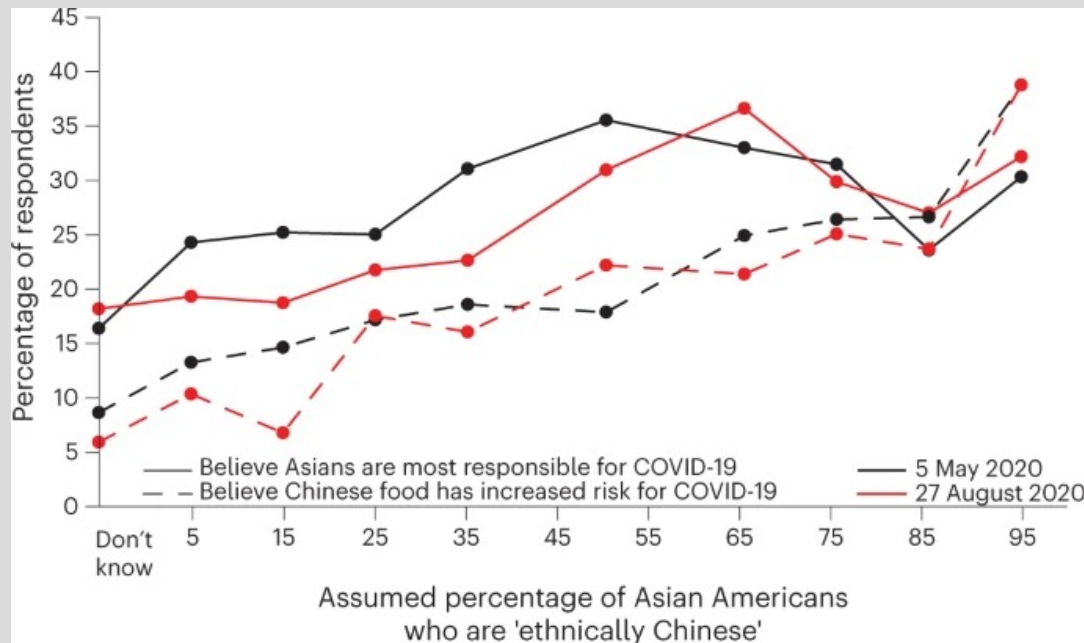
- “Politics of exclusion” where specific communities are blamed for death and illness
 - Such as the AIDS epidemic where LGBTQ+ people were blamed for the spread of the virus
- Racial tropes in early reports about the virus
 - News articles often included images of Asian people wearing masks
- ‘Mememes’ containing disinformation about Chinese people eating bats causing the virus went viral



The “Secondary Epidemic” of Racism & Xenophobia

- Racial-profiling of Asian people because of this wrongful association with the virus.
 - Increases in instances of racist attacks against people of East Asian descent.
 - In April 2020, the FBI issued a warning that there may be increased hate crimes against Asian Americans due to COVID-19
 - The Stop Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Hate project revealed on April 3, 2020 that there were 1,135 incidents of harassment or assault towards AAPI reported in two weeks.
 - AAPI women harassed at twice the rate of men
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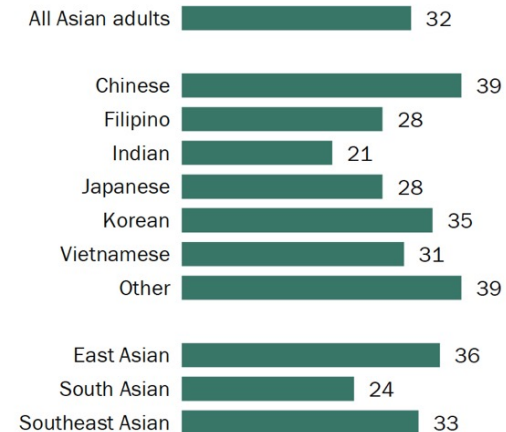
The “Secondary Epidemic” of Racism & Xenophobia



Source: Huang, J., Krupenkin, M., Rothschild, D., Cunningham, J. L. (2023). The cost of anti-Asian racism during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Nat Hum Behav* 7, 682-695. [Graph]. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-022-01493-6>

About one-third of U.S. Asians know another Asian person who's been threatened or attacked since COVID-19

% of Asian adults who say they personally know an Asian person in the U.S. who has been threatened or attacked because of their race or ethnicity since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020



Note: Ethnic origin groups include those who self-identify with one Asian ethnicity only. Regional origin groups include those who identify with ethnic origins that belong to one Asian region only. Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer or provided other answers not shown.

Source: Survey of Asian American adults conducted July 5, 2022-Jan. 27, 2023.

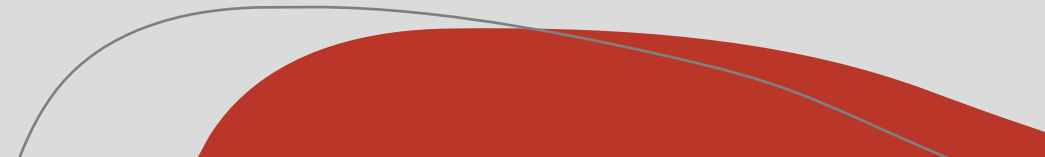
"Discrimination Experiences Shape Most Asian Americans' Lives"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: Pew Research Center. (2023). *Asian Americans and discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic*. [Chart]. <https://www.pewresearch.org/race-and-ethnicity/2023/11/30/asian-americans-and-discrimination-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

Economic Effects of Racism & Xenophobia

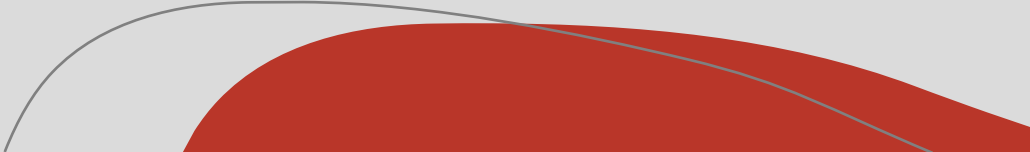
- Small business ownership, especially restaurants, has historically been used by immigrants as a way to achieve economic success
 - During COVID, Chinese and other Asian cuisine restaurants saw significant decreases in business and revenue compared to non-Asian restaurants
- Increase in vandalism incidents to Asian-American owned businesses



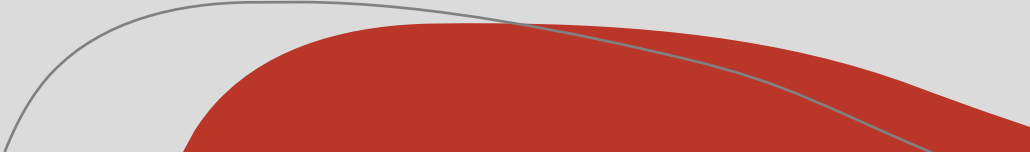
Politics & Disinformation in the Pandemic

- Manipulation by politicians and governments using the fears of the virus to gain control/power through use of disinformation and xenophobia
 - Use of emergency powers to repress civil liberties and invade privacy
 - Media outlets praise of Western, 'developed' countries for their preparedness and response to the pandemic, while demeaning poorer, non-Western countries for their response
 - Relied on old tropes and fueled stigmatization of these countries
 - Credited any success of these countries to some external factor, whether it was true or not
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Technology, Education, & Misinformation in the Pandemic

- The use of technology to continue learning and education during the pandemic provided a unique opportunity for educators to:
 - Reduce stigmatization
 - Mitigate the spread of misinformation
 - Reiterate zero-tolerance for xenophobia
 - Allowed them to communicate accurate and credible information to students and their communities .
 - Encouraged source credibility evaluations to be done by educators and students.
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Technology, Education, & Misinformation in the Pandemic

- These benefits of technology on education during the pandemic were not shared equally amongst all communities
 - Highlighted the digital divide between those with easy access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) and those without
 - Socioeconomic factors
 - Infrastructure
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