Racial Discrimination Intensified while the Pandemic Subsided: Experiences of Chinese New Yorkers during 2020-2022

The vast majority of Chinese New Yorkers experienced racial discrimination in their daily lives and maintained a high level of racism-related vigilance.

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Key Findings

- Chinese New Yorkers reported increased levels of everyday discrimination experiences. In 2022, 70% of Chinese New Yorkers experienced racial discrimination in their daily lives, marking an increase from 58% in 2020 and 64% in 2021.

- Chinese New Yorkers maintained a high level of racism-related vigilance, with over 80% remaining constantly vigilant during the three-year period.

- Throughout 2020 to 2022, Chinese New Yorkers facing material hardships were more likely to report discrimination and racism-related vigilance compared to those without such hardships.

- Bias and hate incidents sustained during the three years. In 2022, over one-third of Chinese New Yorkers experienced bias and hate incidents, slightly higher than 2021 and 2020, with verbal harassment and threat being the most common types in all three years.

INTRODUCTION

The declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic as a U.S. national emergency on March 13, 2020, marked the beginning of a tumultuous period, characterized by widespread infections and a surge in fatalities. Unfortunately, this crisis also triggered an unprecedented rise in xenophobia, discrimination, and racism targeting Asian Americans, particularly those of Chinese descent. The initial association of the coronavirus outbreak with China, coupled with the historical backdrop of race-based scapegoating, provided fertile ground for this disturbing trend, exacerbated by the use of racist rhetoric by some politicians.

The year 2021 brought vaccinations and a decline in COVID-related deaths and also witnessed economic recovery, reflecting a reduction in the pandemic's negative health and economic impacts. This positive trend persisted through 2022 and continued until May 2023, when COVID-19 was declared no longer a public health emergency. However, even as the pandemic receded, Asian Americans continued to experience heightened and intensified racial discrimination.[1] FBI data revealed that anti-Asian hate crimes[2] increased by 167% from 279 in 2020 to 746 in 2021 and then decreased by 33% to 499 in 2022.[3] The *Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism* reported a 224% rise from 2020 to 2021 in anti-Asian crimes in 52 large U.S. cities with high reporting rates.[4] The *STOP AAPI HATE* national reporting center launched on March 19, 2020

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[1] We use the term "Asian Americans" to refer to people of Asian descent living in the United States in this report. Similarly, we use the term "Chinese Americans" to refer to people of Chinese descent living in the United States and the term "Chinese New Yorkers" to refer to people of Chinese descent living in New York City in this report.

[2] A hate crime is a crime motivated by bias against race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability. Bias or hate incidents refer to acts of prejudice that are not crimes and do not involve violence, threats, or property damage. For more information about hate crime and bias or hate incident, please visit the website of the United States Department of Justice. Access here.

[3] Federal Bureau of Investigation (2023).

[4] Levin, Venolia, Perst, and Levin (2022).

received reports of 11,467 bias or hate incidents[3] over the first two years, with 43% of the victims of Chinese descent.[5,6]

Racism is a pervasive social determinant of disparities in health and life opportunities. [7] Racial discrimination and hate crimes have enduring adverse effects on the physical and mental health of victims and targeted communities.[8,9,10] Vigilance about racial discrimination and fear of victimization often deter individuals from seeking healthcare and other essential services, with heightened detrimental impacts on the lives of Chinese and other Asian Americans since the COVID-19 outbreak.

This report draws upon data collected through the Poverty Tracker to understand the trend of discrimination experiences, racism-related vigilance, and coping strategies among Chinese New Yorkers from 2020 to 2022. Our findings reveal that Chinese New Yorkers remained at increased risk of racial violence and discrimination, persistently living in a state of vigilance even as COVID-19 subsided. This report aims to inform policymakers and the public, give insight, and guide the development of effective policies and strategies to combat racism.

DATA AND MEASURES

The Poverty Tracker and the Chinese Oversample

Since its launch in 2012, the Poverty Tracker has been conducting surveys of a representative sample of adult New Yorkers every 3 to 4 months. This ongoing study plays a pivotal role in shedding light on the dynamics of poverty and various forms of disadvantage in the city. In addition to assessing poverty and disadvantage, the Poverty Tracker gathers a wealth of data on subjects, including employment, assets and debts, and health, providing a comprehensive snapshot of New Yorkers' well-being.

The Asian population continues to be the fastest-growing racial or ethnic group in NYC,[11] comprising 15.6% of the city's population in 2020.[12] Among this diverse community, individuals of Chinese descent represent the largest ethnic group. Commencing in 2020, the Poverty Tracker expanded its scope to include an oversample of New Yorkers of Chinese descent.[13] This expansion allows for a more nuanced and detailed understanding of this vital demographic. The data presented in this report were collected from participants of Chinese descent in the fourth cohort during 2020 and 2021, as well as participants in the fourth and fifth cohorts in 2022. Surveys were conducted online in English, Simplified Chinese, or Traditional Chinese online, or in English or Mandarin via phone interviews. Appendix A presents the demographic characteristics of Chinese New Yorkers in this study.

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[5] Yellow Horse et al. (2022).
[6] Jeung, Yellow Horse, and Cayanan (2021).
[7] Mendez et al. (2021).
[8] Williams et al. (2019).
[9] Chen, Zhang, and Liu (2020).
[10] Gee, Spencer, Chen, and Takeuchi (2007).
[11] Budiman, Cilluffo, and Ruiz (2019).
[12] Census Results for New York City (2020).
[13] For more information about this oversample, please refer to the methodological note, *"A note on the representativeness of the Poverty Tracker sample of Asian New Yorkers",* in our annual report (April, 2022; on page 46). Access here.
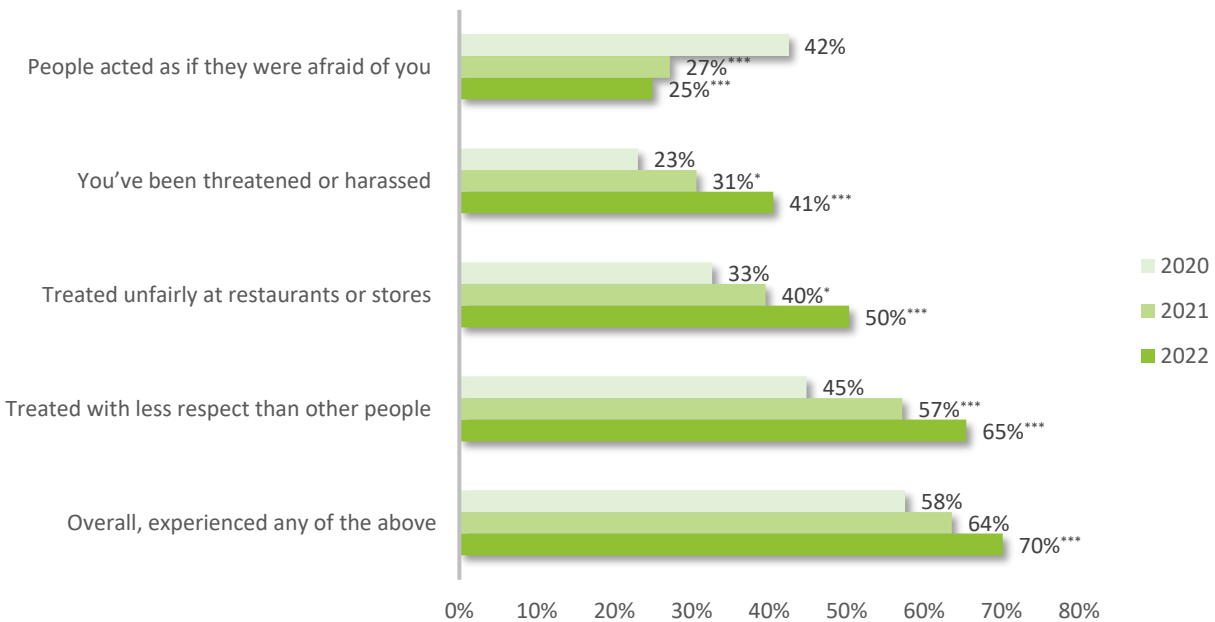
Racial Discrimination Measures

In this report, we use four sets of measures to capture the racial discrimination experiences of Chinese Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic. These include everyday discrimination experiences as measured by the Williams Everyday Discrimination Scale and three new scales that we developed or adapted from existing scales, including a 3-item scale to measure racism-related vigilance; a 7-item scale to identify the specific type of bias and hate incidents that victims experienced in person or online; and an 8-item scale to measure coping strategies that are used in response to these experiences.[14]

RESULTS

More than two-thirds (70%) of Chinese New Yorkers experienced racial discrimination in their everyday life in 2022, an increase from 58% in 2020 and 64% in 2021.

Figure 1. Everyday Discrimination Experiences of Chinese New Yorkers 2020-2022

Note: N_{2020} = 436, N_{2021} = 417, & N_{2022} = 662. Two-sample t-tests of proportions were used to detect significant differences between 2020 and 2021, and between 2020 and 2022, respectively. $+p<0.1$; $* p<.05$; $**p<.01$; $***p<.001$

In 2022, racial discrimination against Chinese Americans in New York City continued to surge, with over two-thirds (70%) of Chinese New Yorkers reporting at least one form of everyday racial discrimination. This marked a noticeable increase from 58% in 2020 and 64% in 2021. Figure 1 illustrates the prevalence of different forms of discrimination experienced by Chinese New Yorkers each year.

The most widespread form of discrimination across all three years remained "being treated with less respect than other people," reported by 65% of Chinese New Yorkers in 2022. This indicated a substantial increase from 45% in 2020 to 57% in 2021. As depicted in Figure 1, the

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[14] Please refer to Appendix B "Terms and Measures Used in This Report".

percentages of Chinese New Yorkers who reported unfair treatment at restaurants or stores (33%, 40%, and 50%) and threats or harassment (23%, 31%, and 41%) continued to rise for three consecutive years. These data demonstrate a 17-percentage point increase from 2020 to 2022 for unfair treatment in restaurants or stores and an 18-percentage point increase for threats or harassment during the same period.

Notably, a significant decrease was observed in reports of "people acted as if they were afraid of you." The percentage dropped from 42% in 2020 to 27% in 2021 and further to 25% in 2022, which can be attributed to the increased vaccination rates and reduced infectiousness of COVID-19.

From 2020 to 2022, Chinese New Yorkers maintained a high level of racism-related vigilance, with over 80% remaining constantly vigilant.

Racism-related vigilance, also known as anticipatory stress, signifies a chronic stress response where individuals are constantly on guard, having to simultaneously ruminate over past experiences and work actively to fend off stereotypes and discrimination. As shown in Figure 2, 85% of Chinese New Yorkers in our sample experienced racism-related vigilance in both 2022 and 2021, showcasing an increase from the 81% reported in 2020.

Figure 2. Racism-related Vigilance of Chinese New Yorkers 2020-2022
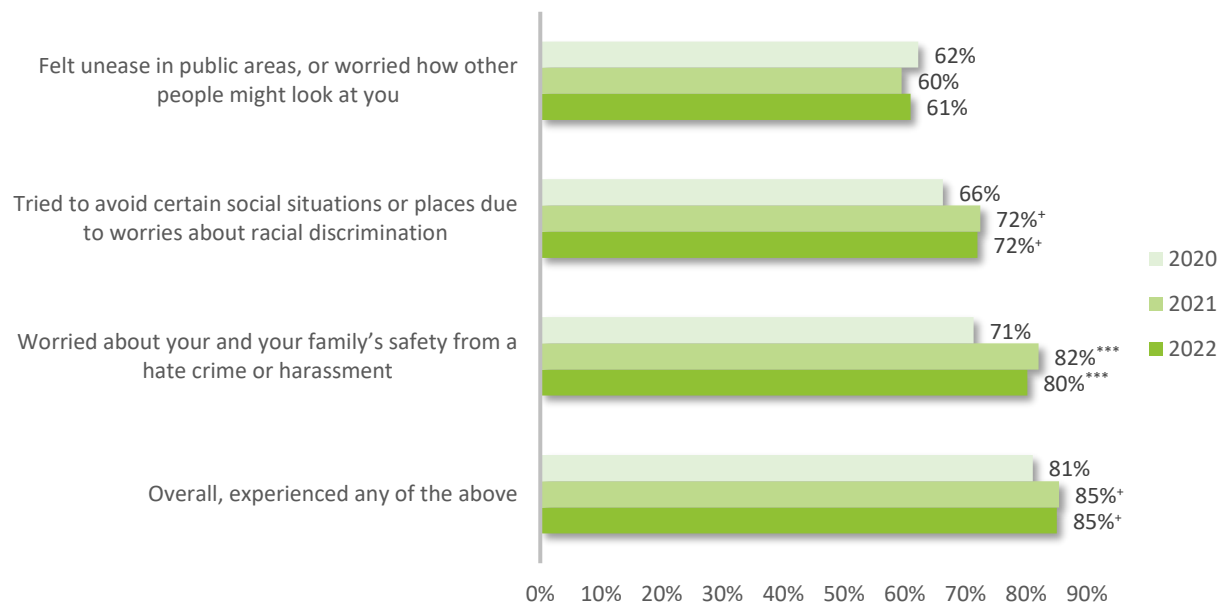
*Note: N_{2020} = 436, N_{2021} = 417, & N_{2022} = 662. Two-sample t-tests of proportions were used to detect significant differences between 2020 and 2021, and between 2020 and 2022. $^+p<0.1$; * $p<.05$; **$p<.01$; ***$p<.001$*

Between 2021 and 2022, roughly 80% of Chinese New Yorkers worried about their or their family's safety from a hate crime or harassment, a significant increase from 2020, when the figure stood at 71%. In both 2021 and 2022, 72% of Chinese New Yorkers tried to avoid certain social situations or places due to worries about racial discrimination, marking a noticeable increase from the 66% reported in 2020. Approximately 60% of Chinese New Yorkers reported feeling unease in public areas or worrying about how other people might look at them consistently over the three years.

More Chinese New Yorkers reported experiencing high levels of racism-related vigilance than experiencing some form of discrimination. This emphasizes how perceived racism and discrimination, along with associated concerns and fears, having significantly impacted the mental health and overall well-being of Chinese New Yorkers.

In each year, Chinese New Yorkers who experienced material hardship were consistently more likely to report experiences of discrimination and racism-related vigilance compared to those without material hardships.

Between 2020 and 2022, Chinese New Yorkers who faced material hardship were more inclined to report encountering any discrimination and maintaining racism-related vigilance, in contrast to their counterparts who did not face material hardship. The disparities in experiencing racial discrimination and vigilance between Chinese New Yorkers with and without material hardship either widened or remained consistent from 2020 to 2021, although they had subsequently narrowed from 2021 to 2022.
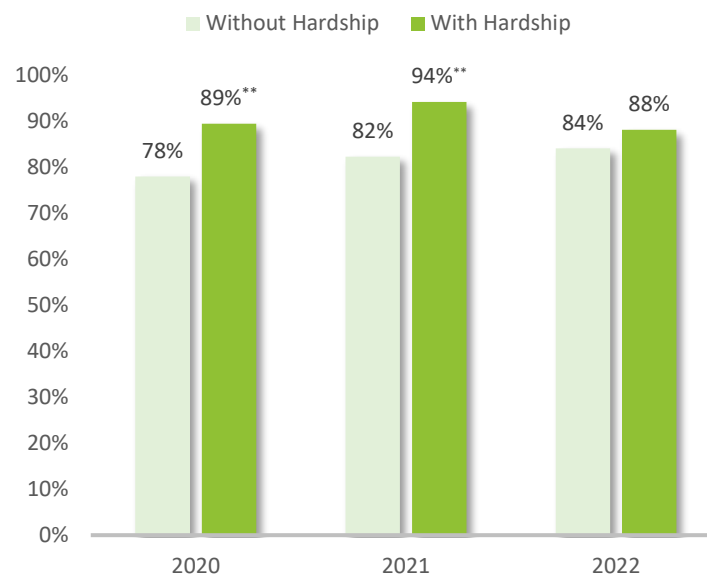
Figure 3. Everyday Discrimination Experiences among Chinese New Yorkers with or without Material Hardship 2020-2022
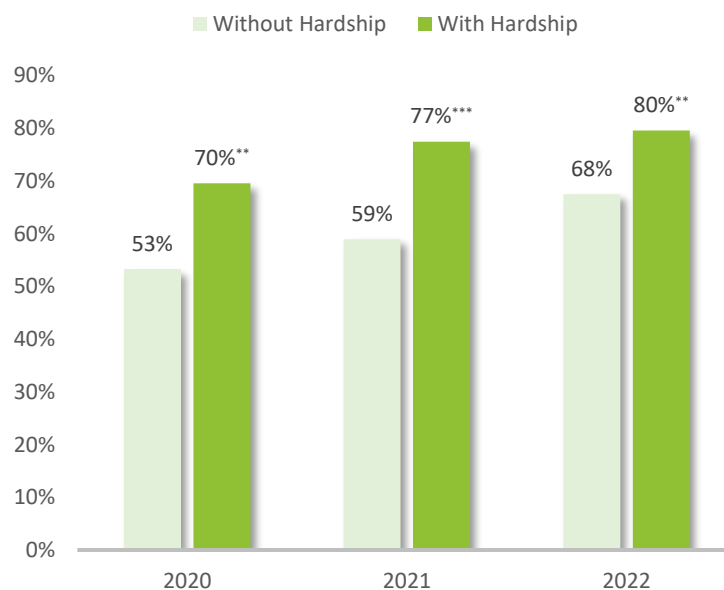
*Note: N_{2020} = 436, N_{2021} = 417, & N_{2022} = 662. Chi-square tests of proportions were used to detect significant differences between those with and without hardship in each year. * p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001*

As shown in Figure 3, the year 2020 witnessed a disparity in experiences of everyday discrimination among Chinese New Yorkers based on whether they had material hardship. Approximately 70% of those facing material hardship reported experiencing any form of discrimination in their daily lives, in contrast to 53% of those without such hardships, a 17-percentage point difference. This gap widened to 18 percentage points in 2021 (77% vs. 59%) and slightly decreased to 12 percentage points in 2022 (80% vs. 68%). These persistent disparities suggest that individuals with financial and material disadvantages were more likely to experience racial discrimination.

Figure 4. Racism-related Vigilance Experiences among Chinese New Yorkers with or without Material Hardship 2020-2022

*Note: N_{2020} = 436, N_{2021} = 417, & N_{2022} = 662. Chi-square tests of proportions were used to detect significant differences between those with and without hardship in each year. * p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001*

Similar patterns emerged when examining racism-related vigilance experiences among Chinese New Yorkers over the course of three years. As shown in Figure 4, in 2020, 89% of Chinese New Yorkers facing material hardship reported experiencing some form of racism-related vigilance, while 78% of those without material hardship reported such vigilance, an 11-percentage point difference between the two groups. This gap widened to 12 percentage points in 2021 (94% vs. 82%) but then narrowed to 4 percentage points in 2022 (88% vs. 84 %) (see Figure 3). The persistence of racism-related apprehension and vigilance among individuals facing material hardship exacerbated their economic challenges from 2020 to 2022. For instance, it may have hindered their ability to seek work opportunities or access social services due to fears of encountering racial discrimination when stepping outside. These findings underscore how the ongoing influences of COVID-19 and racial discrimination disproportionately affect those already suffering from material hardships.

More than one-third of Chinese New Yorkers experienced at least one kind of bias or hate incident in 2022. The most common type of bias and hate incidents was verbal harassment and verbal threats over a three-year period.

We delve deeper to explore the other experiences of harassment, assault, and other biases and hate incidents endured by Chinese New Yorkers. Figure 5 shows the specific types of bias and hate incidents experienced in person or online by Chinese New Yorkers in three years.

In 2022, over one-third of Chinese New Yorkers (38%) reported experiencing some form of harassment, assault, or hate incident, a slight increase compared to 2021 (32%) and 2020 (33%). A closer examination of specific bias and hate incidents reveals that verbal harassment exhibited the largest increase, rising from 18% in 2020 and 2021 to 25% in 2022. Verbal threat

also saw a slight increase from 12% to 15% and then to 16%. Property vandalization showed a rise from 6% in both 2020 and 2021 to 10% in 2022, while incidents of physical intimidation or assaults decreased slightly from 6% in 2020 to 5% in 2021 and then rose to 9% in 2022.

In contrast, fewer Chinese New Yorkers felt excluded from activities or events in 2022 (8%) compared to 2021 (11%) and 2020 (14%). Approximately 2% to 4% of respondents reported being refused service in public transportation or stores over three years.

Overall, the risk of experiencing bias and hate incidents remained persistent for Chinese New Yorkers from 2020 to 2022 despite the easing of the pandemic.

Figure 5. Bias and Hate Incidents Experienced by Chinese New Yorkers 2020-2022
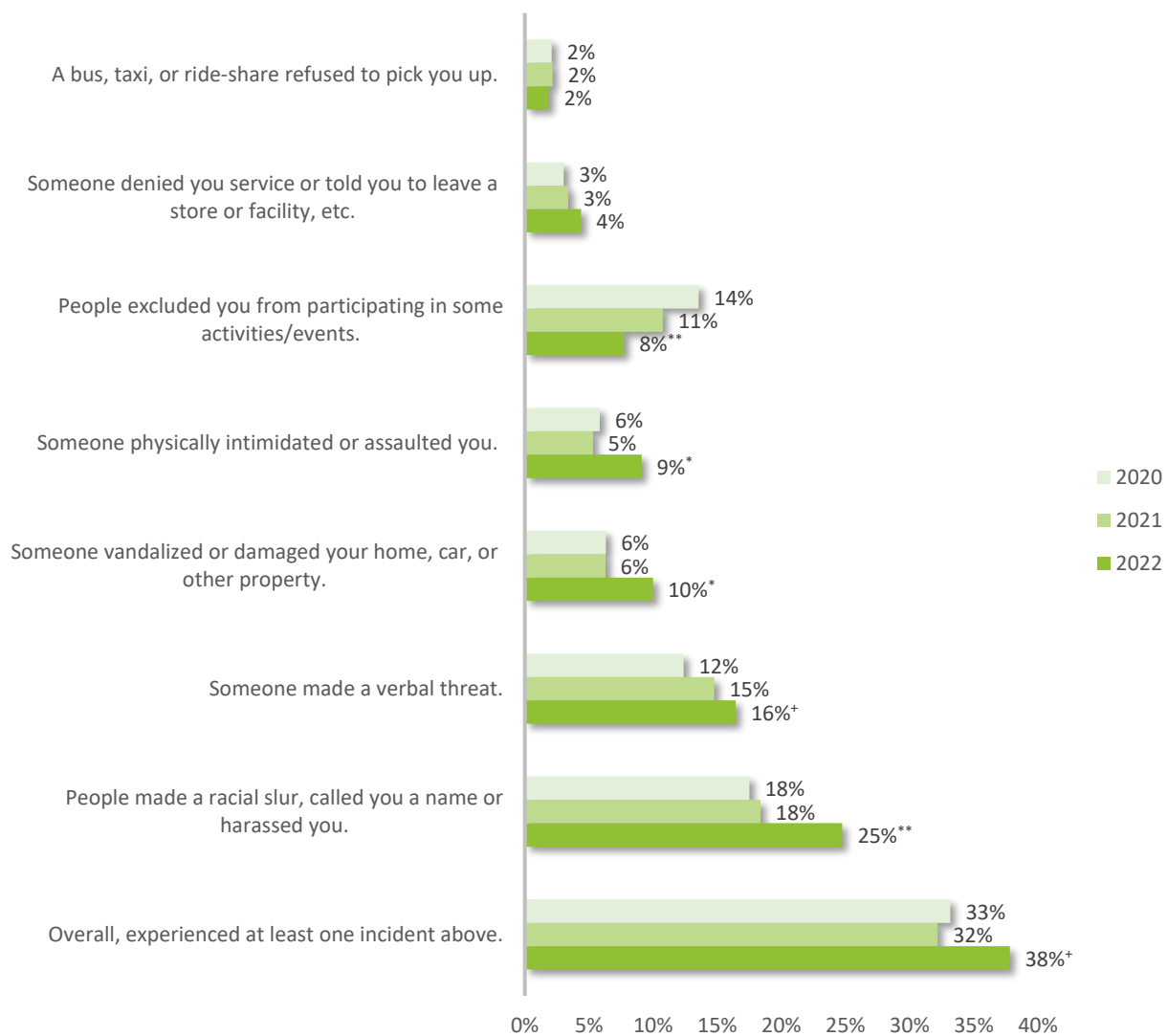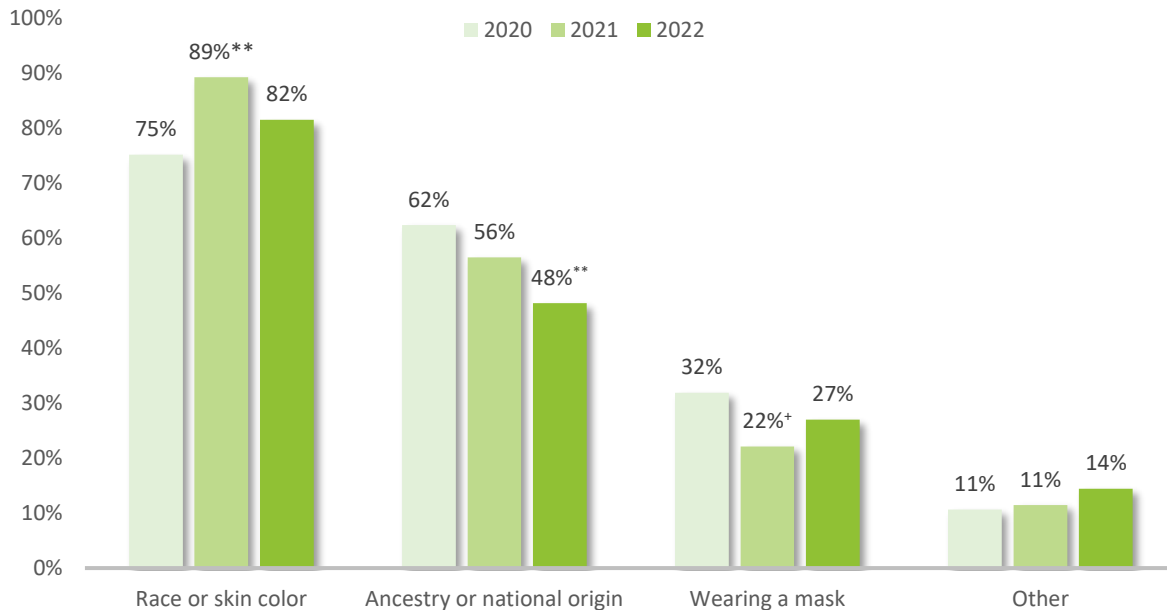

Note: N$_{2020}$ = 436, N$_{2021}$ = 417, & N$_{2022}$ = 662. Two-sample t-tests of proportions were used to detect significant differences between 2020 and 2021, and between 2020 and 2022. +p<0.1; * p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Over the course of three years, the majority of bias and hate incident victims consistently attributed their experiences to their race or skin color.

When asked about the main reasons for these incidents, the vast majority (75% to 89%) of Chinese New Yorkers who had experienced bias or hate incidents over the three-year period attributed them to their race or skin color, while 48% to 62% attributed them to their ancestry or national origin, and 22% to 32% attributed them to wearing a mask (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Attribution for Bias and Hate Incident Experiences by Chinese New Yorkers 2020-2022

*Note: N_{2020} = 141, N_{2021} = 131, & N_{2022} = 222. Two-sample t-tests of proportions were used to detect significant differences between 2020 and 2021, and between 2020 and 2022. +p<0.1; * p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001*

From 2020 to 2021, the use of active coping strategies increased significantly, rising from 82% to 92%, while passive coping strategies decreased significantly from 92% to 82%. In 2022, the use of active coping regressed slightly to 88%, but it remained higher than in 2020. The use of passive coping returned to the 2020 level at 90%.

Chinese New Yorkers responded to bias and hate incidents using various coping strategies. We categorized these strategies into two sets: active and passive. As shown in Figure 7, overall, 92% of Chinese New Yorkers who were victims of bias and hate incidents used some of the active coping strategies in 2021, a significant increase from 82% in 2020; this percentage dropped to 88% in 2020, but still higher compared to 2020.

Over the course of three years of facing elevated levels of perceived discrimination and racism-related vigilance, the most frequently used active coping strategy among Chinese New Yorkers was "talking to someone about your feelings" (65%~76%), while the least commonly used strategy was "going to authorities/police" (11%~24%). There were notable increases in the

utilization of both strategies in 2021/2022 compared to 2020. This reflects a growing awareness of help-seeking and defense of one's rights among Chinses New Yorkers experiencing racial discrimination.

Other active coping strategies, such as "seeking advice on dealing with the issue," "expressing anger to let off steam," "praying or seeking spiritual support," and "making a verbal protest or trying to reason with the offender," saw a slight increase in 2021 compared to 2020 but a slight decline in 2022 (See Figure 7). The use of these strategies remained relatively consistent over the three-year period.
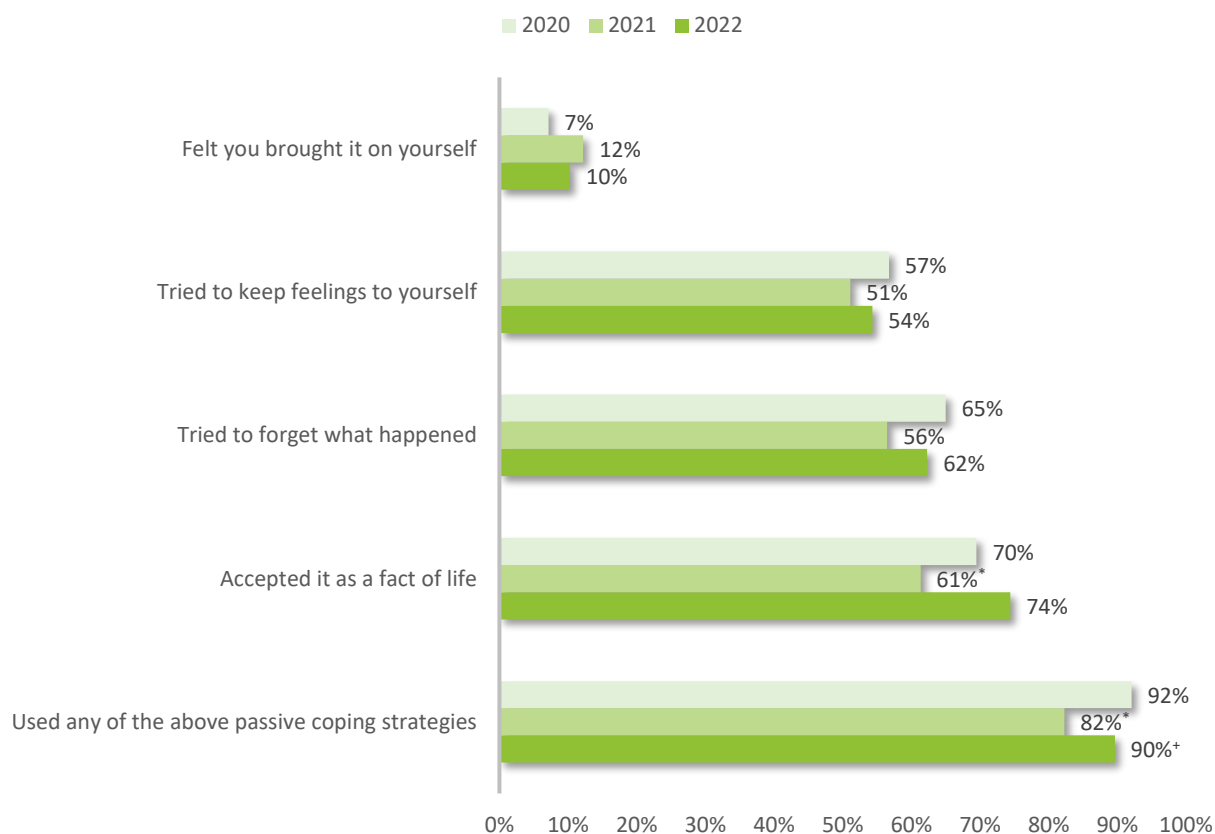
Figure 7. Active Coping Strategies Used by Chinese New Yorkers Who Were Victims of Bias and Hate Incidents 2020-2022
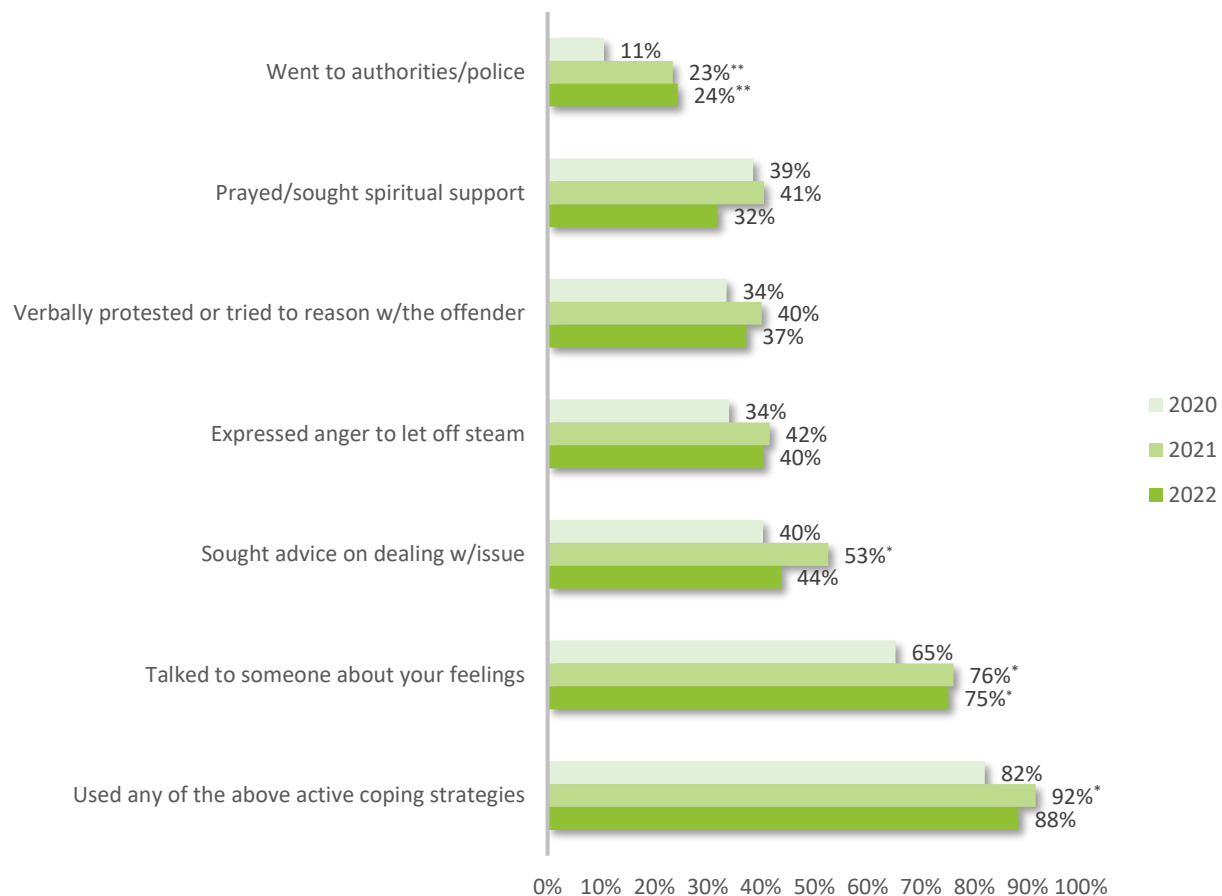
Note: N2020 = 141, N2021 = 132, & N2022 = 211. Two-sample t-tests of proportions were used to detect significant differences between 2020 and 2021, and between 2020 and 2022. * p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Figure 8 shows that, in comparison, in 2021, 82% of Chinese New Yorker victims used passive coping strategies, which marked a significant decrease from 92% in 2020. However, this percentage rebounded to the 2020 level, reaching 90% in 2022. A similar pattern was observed in the use of the three most prevalent passive coping strategies: "accepting it as a fact of life," "trying to forget what happened," and "trying to keep feelings to themselves." These strategies were less frequently utilized in 2021 but returned to the 2020 level in 2022.

Figure 8. Passive Coping Strategies Used by Chinese New Yorkers Who Were Victims of Bias and Hate Incidents 2020-2022

Legend: ■ 2020 ■ 2021 ■ 2022

Felt you brought it on yourself: 7% (2020), 12% (2021), 10% (2022)

Tried to keep feelings to yourself: 57% (2020), 51% (2021), 54% (2022)

Tried to forget what happened: 65% (2020), 56% (2021), 62% (2022)

Accepted it as a fact of life: 70% (2020), 61%* (2021), 74% (2022)

Used any of the above passive coping strategies: 92% (2020), 82%* (2021), 90%+ (2022)

*Note: N_{2020} = 141, N_{2021} = 132, & N_{2022} = 211. Two-sample t-tests of proportions were used to detect significant differences between 2020 and 2021, and between 2020 and 2022. * $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$*

CONCLUSION

While the COVID-19 pandemic subsided, anti-Asian discrimination that spiked at the onset of the pandemic remained on the rise. Our longitudinal data from 2020 to 2022, collected from Chinese New Yorkers through the Poverty Tracker, reveals increased experiences of racial discrimination and racism-related vigilance in 2022 and 2021 compared to 2020. Importantly, those with material hardship consistently had more such negative experiences than those without material hardship. Over one-third of Chinese New Yorkers experienced bias and hate incidents in 2022, an increase from 2020-2021.

Greater efforts are essential and urgently needed to combat these challenges. The *COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act* signed into law in May 2021 provides essential legal requirements for addressing hate crimes and strengthening law enforcement. Initiatives like New York State's $10 million in awards to AAPI community organizations in February 2022 support the expansion of the provision of a range of services and demonstrate a step in the right direction.[15] The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights' Statutory Enforcement Report, *The Federal Response to Anti-Asian*

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[15] See: Press release from New York State Governor's Office (2022).

Racism in the United States, released in September 2023, which examined the rise in anti-Asian hate crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic and recommended building upon the tools and guidance laid out in the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act, is another positive step forward.[16]

At the community level, a broader array of programs and services need to be offered, with a focus on mental health support, health care, and culturally sensitive resources. Those facing material hardships and other disadvantages should receive targeted services. Community-based prevention programs can foster solidarity between Asian and other communities of color, contributing to the reduction of racial discrimination and greater alliance building.

On the societal level, Asian American community organizations should collaborate with other marginalized communities. For example, Asian, Black, and other racial or ethnic communities can build solidarity to challenge discriminatory policies and advocate for broader solutions. To achieve this, it's critical to incorporate Asian Americans' voices and cultures and actively tackle stereotypes and anti-Asian racism. Notably, the *Teaching Asian Pacific American History Act*, introduced by Representative Grace Meng and Senator Mazie Hirono, can help address the root causes of anti-Asian racism by promoting the teaching of Asian Pacific American history in schools and communities.

In conclusion, we urge society to raise awareness about the challenges faced by Asian Americans, speak out against racial discrimination, and advocate for resources, support, and education to address anti-Asian racism. It's vital that community organizations, businesses, and governments work together to support those affected by anti-Asian discrimination and hate crimes, pursue lasting solutions, and take action toward a racially equitable and just society.

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[16] U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. (2023).

Appendix A

Table 1. Characteristics of Chinese New Yorker Participants

	2020 (N = 436)	2021 (N = 417)	2022 (N = 662)
Gender			
Female	61%	60%	61%
Male	39%	40%	39%
Age			
18-35	35%	35%	44%
36-65	52%	52%	43%
65 and older	13%	13%	13%
Nativity			
Foreign Born	91%	91%	79%
Born in the U.S.	9%	9%	21%
Borough			
Manhattan	17%	16%	16%
Brooklyn	38%	38%	36%
Bronx	1%	1%	1%
Queens	41%	41%	44%
Staten Island	3%	3%	3%
Education level			
High School or Less	37%	38%	32%
Some College/Vocational School	16%	18%	15%
College Graduate	47%	44%	53%
English proficiency			
Limited English Proficiency (LEP)[17]	75%	74%	64%
English Proficient	25%	26%	36%

*The values of some categories didn't add to 100% because of rounding.

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[17] *LEP refers to "any person age 5 and older who reported speaking English less than 'very well' as classified by the U.S. Census Bureau. The term English proficient refers to people who reported speaking English only or 'very well.'" (Migration Policy Institute, 2015).*

Appendix B

Terms and Measures Used in This Report

In this report, we use four sets of measures to capture the racial discrimination experiences of New Yorkers of Chinese descent during the COVID-19 pandemic. These include *everyday discrimination experiences* as measured by the Williams Everyday Discrimination Scale and three new scales that we developed, including a 3-item scale to measure *racism-related vigilance*; a 7-item scale to identify the specific type of *bias and hate incidents* that victims experienced in person or online; and an 8-item scale to measure *coping strategies* they used in response to their experiences.

- *Everyday Discrimination Scale —* the day-to-day experiences of unfair treatment were measured by one of the most widely used measures for individual discrimination experiences—the Everyday Discrimination Scale.[18] Four items were included in this survey: being treated with less respect, being treated unfairly at restaurants or stores, people acted as if they were afraid of you, or being threatened or harassed. Response categories to this question include never, rarely, sometimes, and often. We recoded the responses into two categories—no (never) and yes (rarely, sometimes, or often)—and present the percentage of the sample reporting yes.

- *Racism-related Vigilance Scale —* the self-developed scale in our survey includes three items asking respondents since January 2020 how often they have felt unease in public areas, have tried to avoid certain social situations or places due to worries about racial discrimination, and have worried about their and their family's safety from a hate crime or harassment. Response categories to this question include 0 (never), 1 (rarely), 2 (sometimes), and 3 (often). We recoded the responses into two categories—yes (including 1 to 3) and no (0)—and present the percentage of the sample reporting yes.

- *Bias and Hate Incidents Checklist —* a checklist of specific types of bias and hate incidents experienced by victims (yes/no) developed by us based on the existing literature and case reports. It is a non-exhaustive list of major types of harassment, assault, and other bias incidents against people of Chinese or Asian descent, including physical assaults, verbal harassment, vandalism and property damage, and denial of access to services and public spaces.[19] (Box 1)

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[18] *Williams,* et al. (1997).
[19] *See: The special rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Right. Access* here; *Tessler, Choi, and Kao (2020).*

Box 1: Bias and Hate Incidents Checklist

A.	People excluded you from participating in some activities/events.
B.	People made a racial slur, called you a name or harassed you.
C.	Someone made a verbal threat.
D.	Someone physically intimidated or assaulted you.
E.	Someone vandalized or damaged your home, car, or other property.
F.	Someone denied you service or told you to leave a store or facility.
G.	A bus, taxi, or ride-share refused to pick you up.

- *Coping Strategies in Response to Bias and Hate Incidents —* adapted from existing scales,[20] our research team developed a checklist (yes/no) to understand the coping strategies adopted by New Yorkers of Chinese descent who were victims of bias and hate incidents (Box 2). These coping strategies are classified into two sets: active coping strategies that enable people to restore emotional balance and address the problem, and passive coping strategies such as avoidance and self-blame.

Box 2: Coping strategies adopted by New Yorkers of Chinese descent who were victims of bias and hate incidents

Active coping strategies	Passive coping strategies
- Went to authorities (e.g. police) - Talked to someone about how you were feeling - Sought advice and guidance to deal with the problem - Expressed anger to let off steam - Made a verbal protest or tried to reason with the offender - Prayed or sought spiritual comfort and support	- Accepted it as a fact of life - Felt that you brought it on yourself - Tried to keep your feelings to yourself - Tried to forget that it had happened

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[20] McNeilly et al. (1996); Krieger (1990); Noh et al. (1999).

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