



**Testimony of Emily Chi  
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**Before the United States House of Representatives  
Committee on House Administration  
Subcommittee on Elections**

**Hearing on  
“A Growing Threat: The Impact of Disinformation Targeted at Communities of Color”**

**Thursday, April 28, 2022**

## **Introduction**

Mis- and disinformation presents an increasingly pervasive problem in Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities; spreading harmful myths, destabilizing democratic institutions and processes, and instilling tension and violence in and against the community. Some mis- and disinformation campaigns aim to manipulate and indoctrinate Asian American communities with false information, while other campaigns scapegoat Asians and Asian Americans with baseless theories that ultimately stoke hate and violence against AAPIs. In 2020, disinformation campaigns targeted Asian, Black, Latinx and other minority communities throughout to discourage voter turnout. However, most existing efforts to combat mis- and disinformation in the United States are exclusively focused on English-language content that centers mainstream content and users. These mainstream efforts fail to consider the specific cultural nuances and community-specific messaging that make AAPI communities uniquely vulnerable to certain mis- and disinformation narratives. Factors such as limited language abilities, lack of American history knowledge, and home country biases create additional complexities when attempting to understand how mis- and disinformation flows through diaspora communities. Asian American voters are not immune to these efforts to misinform or disinform our electorate. Indeed, Asian Americans are not only subject to the broader efforts to misinform and disinform voters of color but also face distinct issues stemming from Anti-Asian rhetoric and discriminatory attitudes.

While some platforms have taken some steps to flag and/or label potential disinformation, they continue to host, monetize, and enable the sharing of such content. Community organizers and advocates do not believe that labeling does enough to stop the harmful effects of such content.

Platforms must do more to prevent the active spread of harmful content, including enforcing their own terms and conditions by banning and taking down flagged disinformation. Even though entities like Meta publicly committed to bolstering security and content moderation efforts during the election cycle, some researchers believe that enforcement was not as effective or vigilant on non-English content such as Asian language videos (even after they had been flagged by users as featuring problematic content).<sup>1</sup>

Not only is it critical that platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube use translators to understand and moderate content in Asian languages better, but they must also engage with Asian American partner organizations to understand the history and cultural characteristics and barriers that are particular to the spread of disinformation in our communities.

Strategies to combat disinformation in Asian American communities must be targeted to address the unique characteristics of disinformation of each community. For example, many Asian Americans are especially prone to disinformation about China or related to accusations of Communist/Socialist leanings, because of their own complicated histories with Asian geo-politics. How messaging spreads is also distinct. Communication nodes often revolve around friends and family, rather than larger and more public platform groups. It is also important to note that each community has their own network of information sharing, and the channels and resources that Korean Americans use may be very different from the preferred platforms or trusted public figures in Vietnamese American and Indian American communities. Moreover, the collective history and memory of many Asian Americans, who have fled repressive governments or suffered violence and violations by institutions they once trusted, can make them more sensitive and distrustful of institutions like large tech companies and government entities.

Organizers and advocates have been studying, documenting, and creating resources to understand and dismantle these patterns. Partnering with these groups and listening to community members will be essential to better understanding, fostering trust, and more effectively targeting and deconstructing the unique challenges of Asian American communities. Platforms must go beyond superficial language translation to prioritize the deeper concerns, values, and user experience needs of all users. Content moderation, digital literacy, and anti-disinformation education efforts can only be successful when they include and honor the diversity of the users.

## **Organization Background**

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC (Advancing Justice | AAJC) is a national non-profit, non-partisan organization that works through policy advocacy, community education, and

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<sup>1</sup> Emily Chi, Diversity and Inclusion in Anti-Disinformation Work, Asian Americans Advancing Justice–AAJC (Jan. 25, 2021) <https://medium.com/advancing-justice-aajc/diversity-and-inclusion-in-anti-disinformation-work-302792ca45fe>.

litigation to advance the civil and human rights of Asian Americans and to build and promote a fair and equitable society for all. Founded in 1991, Advancing Justice | AAJC is one of the nation's leading experts on civil rights issues of importance to the Asian American community.

We work closely with our Community Partners Network, a national collaboration of nearly 250 AAPI-serving community-based organizations (CBOs) in 37 states and the District of Columbia to increase regional and local capacity to elevate community voices nationwide.

As a founding member of the Asian Americans Advancing Justice (Advancing Justice) national affiliation, we partner with our affiliates — Advancing Justice | Asian Law Caucus, Advancing Justice | Atlanta, Advancing Justice | Chicago, and Advancing Justice | Los Angeles — to extend the reach of our programming and enhance the impact of our collective work. Advancing Justice | AAJC also serves as a co-chair for the National Council for Asian Pacific Americans, a coalition of 37 Asian American Pacific Islander national advocacy organizations. We are also a member of the Board of Directors of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, comprised of over 200 national organizations working together to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all Americans.

Advancing Justice | AAJC leads on federal policy advocacy on telecommunications and technology issues impacting Asian American communities. We advocate for access to technology for our communities, including affordable and accessible broadband benefit programs, improving outreach to AAPI communities including multi-language efforts, and collecting disaggregated data to better understand communities' needs. We work to safeguard our communities' civil rights in the digital space, including advocacy for a digital privacy regime that keeps our communities in mind such as ensuring limited English-proficient individuals understand and can exercise their rights to the fullest extent. We also co-chair the Asian American Tech Table, which was created to facilitate a more unified Asian American voice and presence in national technology and telecommunications policy debates.

In 2021, Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC launched a mis- and disinformation project to better document how mis- and disinformation campaigns operate in and impact the Asian American community. Advancing Justice | AAJC has been building out infrastructure for reporting and monitoring to track mis- and disinformation (Chinese- and English-language), meeting with subject matter experts, and conducting research on existing mis- and disinformation work being done in the Asian American community. The Mis- and Disinformation team regularly tracks and logs Asian- and English-language content from Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, Instagram, Facebook, WeChat, TikTok, and other platforms into a centralized, searchable data depository. Alongside the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA), the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA), and Equality Labs, Advancing Justice | AAJC co-chairs the Asian American Disinformation Table under the broader Disinformation Defense League (DDL), a network of organizations fighting disinformation that impacts communities of color. The Asian American Disinformation Table is a national table to coordinate research, strategies, policy recommendations, pop culture and messaging

interventions, and corporate accountability around issues of domestic and transnational misinformation and disinformation impacting Asian Americans.

### **Asian American Demographics Information**

According to Census 2020, Asian Americans continued to be among the nation’s fastest growing racial group, with a national growth rate of 45.5% between 2000 and 2010; growing to over 24.0 million Asian Americans and making up 7.2% of the total population.<sup>2</sup>

Often viewed as a monolithic group, Asian Americans are exceedingly diverse with different needs. The previous decade showed the country’s fastest growing Asian American ethnic groups as South Asian, with the Bangladeshi and Pakistani American populations doubling in size between 2000 and 2010.<sup>3</sup> Between 2010 and 2019, eleven Asian groups more than doubled in size, with some of the smaller groups growing the fastest.<sup>4</sup> Chinese Americans continue to be the largest Asian American ethnic group, numbering nearly 5.4 million nationwide, followed in size by Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Korean Americans in 2019.<sup>5</sup> In fact, these five groups plus Japanese accounted for 85% of all Asian Americans in 2019.<sup>6</sup>

Asian Americans are also geographically diverse and are growing fastest in non-traditional gateway communities. Asian American populations in Nevada, Arizona, North Carolina, and Georgia were the fastest growing nationwide between 2000 and 2010.<sup>7</sup> Since 2010, the top 10 fastest growing Asian American populations were in North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, District of Columbia, Nebraska, Utah, Indiana, North Carolina, and South Carolina, with growth rates ranging between 81.3% to 137.2%.<sup>8</sup> California had an Asian population of over 7.0

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<sup>2</sup> Author’s calculation based on U.S. Census Bureau Redistricting Data (PL 94-171) Table P1: Race from the 2010 (national at <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=table%20p1&tid=DECENNIALPLNAT2010.P1> and states at <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?g=0100000US%240400000&y=2010&d=DEC%20Redistricting%20Data%20%28PL%2094-171%29&tid=DECENNIALPL2010.P1&hidePreview=true> and ) and the 2020 (<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=redistricting&g=0100000US,%240400000&tid=DECENNIALPL2020.P1&hidePreview=true>).

<sup>3</sup> Asian Pacific American Legal Center & Asian American Justice Center, A Community of Contrasts: Asian Americans in the United States: 2011, 9, [http://www.advancingjustice.org/pdf/Community\\_of\\_Contrast.pdf](http://www.advancingjustice.org/pdf/Community_of_Contrast.pdf) (“Community of Contrasts”) (Note: Figures are for the inclusive population, single race and multi-race combined, and are not exclusive of Hispanic origin, except for white, which is single race, non-Hispanic).

<sup>4</sup> Abby Budiman & Neil G. Ruiz, Key facts about Asian Americans, a diverse and growing population, Pew Research Center (Apr. 29, 2021), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/> (“Pew Key Facts”).

<sup>5</sup> Id.

<sup>6</sup> Id.

<sup>7</sup> Community of Contrasts at 8.

<sup>8</sup> Author’s calculation based on U.S. Census Bureau Redistricting Data (PL 94-171) Table P1: Race from the 2010 (national at <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=table%20p1&tid=DECENNIALPLNAT2010.P1> and states at <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?g=0100000US%240400000&y=2010&d=DEC%20Redistricting%20Data%20%28PL%2094-171%29&tid=DECENNIALPL2010.P1&hidePreview=true> and ) and the 2020 (<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=redistricting&g=0100000US,%240400000&tid=DECENNIALPL2020.P1&hidePreview=true>).

million in 2020, by far the nation's largest. It was followed by New York (2.2 million), Texas (1.8 million), New Jersey (1.0 million) and Washington (almost 940,000).<sup>9</sup>

A similar increase among Asian American voters can be seen. The number of eligible Asian American voters grew by almost 150% from almost five million in 2000 to over 11.5 million in 2020 (as compared to a growth rate of 24% for the total population over that same time period).<sup>10</sup> The growth rate of eligible Asian Americans registering to vote (200%; from almost 2.5 million to over 7.3 million registered) and voting (236%; from just over 2 million to almost 7 million who voted) was even greater during that same time period.<sup>11</sup> The 2020 election showed over 1.2 million additional eligible voters from the previous presidential election, and an even higher increase in Asian Americans who actually registered and voted.<sup>12</sup> This represents a 27.1% increase in registered Asian Americans and 36.4% increase in Asian Americans who voted between the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections.<sup>13</sup> This growth will continue, with Asian American and Pacific Islander voters slated to make up five percent of the national electorate by 2025 and ten percent of the national electorate by 2044.<sup>14</sup><sup>22</sup>

## Language Access Issues

The Asian American community can trace their roots to more than 40 countries with more than 100 languages.<sup>15</sup> According to the American Community Survey, among Asian Americans, nearly 61% of Burmese Americans have Limited English Proficiency (LEP), while 17% of Indian Americans have LEP.<sup>16</sup> These numbers also vary among Pacific Islanders, while their average LEP rate is 10%, they range from 21% of Micronesian Americans to 3% of Hawaiians.<sup>17</sup>

Even in rare instances where translated informational materials are provided, they may not be corrected for cultural context or have quality issues making them difficult to decipher. English materials must be written in simple English that can be easily translatable. Only native-level speakers with deep knowledge of the community, cultural context, and familiarity with the

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<sup>9</sup> Pew Key Facts.

<sup>10</sup> Author's calculations based on U.S. Census Bureau data  
[https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/tables/p20/585/table02\\_5.xlsx](https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/tables/p20/585/table02_5.xlsx) (2020 data points) and  
<https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/tables/p20/542/tab04b.xls> (2000 data points).

<sup>11</sup> Id.

<sup>12</sup> Author's calculations of U.S. Census Bureau data available on voter participation in federal elections through its Current Population Survey.

<sup>13</sup> Id.

<sup>14</sup> Karthick Ramakrishnan & Farah Z. Ahmad, State of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Center for American Progress and AAPI Data (2014), <http://ampr.gs/AAPIREports2014>.

<sup>15</sup> Urban Institute and The Asian American Foundation, Advancing Equity for AAPI Communities, Report (July 2021) [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/104527/advancing-equity-for-aapi-communities\\_1.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/104527/advancing-equity-for-aapi-communities_1.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2021)  
<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?t=-04%20-%20All%20available%20detailed%20Asian%20races%3A-05%20-%20All%20available%20detailed%20Native%20Hawaiian%20and%20Other%20Pacific%20Islander%20races%3ARace%20and%20Ethnicity&tid=ACSSPP1Y2019.S0201&hidePreview=true>

<sup>17</sup> Id.

vernacular should be utilized for translations. Community groups and leaders should be consulted before translations are published to ensure they are actually accessible and understandable to the target audience. Furthermore, some languages do not have written alphabets, posing unique challenges for groups like Rohingya refugees who do not have a universally accepted script and require additional in-language audiovisual support. AAPIs are an extremely diverse group of people that possess a distinct culture, history, and language that defies easy categorization and generalization, and therefore requires a critical eye towards language access and accessibility. This can make outreach challenging.

### **Ethnic Media Consumption**

Language access barriers can present a challenge to Asian American communities attempting to obtain accurate and helpful information and news. In the absence of in-language resources or outlets, many turn to ethnic media outlets such as in-language newspapers, local TV channels, radio stations, and online forums and other information sharing hub websites. Compared to English-only mainstream sources of news, ethnic media outlets provide the most relevant and understandable content to AAPI communities. Ethnic media outlets not only provide the information in the right language; they are also trusted messengers to the community, curate stories that are important to AAPI viewers that are overlooked by mainstream media entities, and operate as embedded resources in the community that are connected directly with leaders and organizations. For example, during the rise of anti-Asian hate incidents, while many stations and outlets failed to cover these stories, “hundreds of Asian community media outlets servicing diverse communities played a significant role in informing the Asian community during the pandemic and the wave of anti-Asian hate incidents.”<sup>18</sup> Many individuals rely on in-language content exclusively to obtain news and other updates. “Asian American newspapers reach a substantial percentage of the nine million Asian American adults in the United States. More than half of all Chinese and Vietnamese adults read an ethnic newspaper on a regular basis. Nearly half of all Korean adults also read a Korean newspaper frequently... a quarter of those interviewed reported watching Korean and Chinese-language television more often than English-language television.”<sup>19</sup>

However, ethnic media entities are not available to all AAPI community members, and funding and support for local stations (especially those owned by women and minorities) is dwindling, creating “news deserts” where locals do not have access to reliable and/or trustworthy sources of information<sup>20</sup>. In the absence of legitimate news sources, fact-checkers, basic information about

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<sup>18</sup> Id.

<sup>19</sup> Center for American Progress, Bendixen & Associates, & Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund; The Ethnic Media in America: The Giant Hidden in Plain Sight, Report <https://legacy.npr.org/documents/2005/jul/ncmfreport.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Eileen Drage O'Reilly & Sarah Fischer, Ethnic Media Outlets Sprout up in U.S 'News Deserts', Axios (Nov. 13, 2021) <https://www.axios.com/black-latino-asian-indigenous-news-deserts-cb09cd22-e78f-42fc-909f-5983b8cf3b45.html?dcepdive=1>

government services and elections, or even outreach from political parties, elected officials, or candidates, many immigrants rely directly on their community or unverified online sources such as Facebook or Twitter newsfeeds for any information. Families, communities, and friends have created forums and closed messaging groups to share critical information. However, this can lead to individuals becoming more susceptible to mis- and disinformation as the content can become decentralized, difficult to trace, unverified, exaggerated, or even doctored as it is shared. In lieu of verified news sources that practice journalistic integrity, many individuals have turned to YouTube mis- and disinformation channels instead of news radio or broadcasts, rely on manipulated materials instead of official government or service announcements, and circulate incorrect information.

### **Mis- and Disinformation That Affects the Asian American Community**

When Americans think about mis- and disinformation in the United States, right-wing WeChat echo chambers or Vietnamese-language YouTube videos likely do not come immediately to mind. While mis- and disinformation broadly have garnered significant media attention, its insidious effects on Asian American communities have largely remained invisible to the American public and absent from chatter around the topic. With bad actors exploiting the fears and lived experiences of Asian Americans, mis- and disinformation that flows through Asian American communities is often distinct from mainstream, English-language mis- and disinformation. When it comes to issues such as anti-Asian hate<sup>21</sup> or affirmative action,<sup>22</sup> Asian Americans are even used as wedges to sow divisions between Asian Americans and other communities of color.

Asian Americans are also negatively impacted by violent, dehumanizing, and scapegoating false narratives that proliferate in alt-right, White Supremacist, and insurrectionist echo chambers. These messages are not targeted for Asian American consumption, but Asian Americans are the subject of these messages. Disparaging rhetoric promotes the false narrative that immigrants are responsible for social problems such as disease, the “perpetual foreigner” and other alienating content, and baseless characterizations of Asian Americans as untrustworthy or even dangerous threats. This type of mis- and disinformation has created increasing tension, violence, and mistrust between Asian Americans and other groups; causing serious mental health distress, intimidating Asian Americans from practicing everyday activities, and forcing entire communities to live in fear.

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<sup>21</sup> Kimmy Yam, Viral images show people of color as anti-Asian perpetrators. That misses the big picture, NBC (Jun. 15, 2021)  
<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/viral-images-show-people-color-anti-asian-perpetrators-misses-big-n-1270821>

<sup>22</sup> Kimmy Yam, Experts say framing affirmative action as anti-Asian bias is ‘dangerous’, NBC (Jan. 25, 2022)  
<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/experts-say-framing-affirmative-action-anti-asian-bias-dangerous-rcna13544>

## **In-Language Mis- and Disinformation Targeting Asian American Communities**

### COVID-19

While the Asian American community has relatively high vaccination rates,<sup>23</sup> harmful mis- and disinformation around COVID-19 and the COVID-19 vaccine is pervasive in Asian-language social media content. Outrageous Chinese-language tweets claim that 96% of vaccinated individuals will die or get cancer.<sup>24</sup> Korean-subtitled YouTube videos claim hospitals have been paid to falsify additional COVID-19 deaths.<sup>25</sup> Vietnamese-language TikTok videos claim that vaccines cause individuals to become magnetic.<sup>26</sup> Thousands of these kinds of harmful posts promoting vaccine skepticism or minimizing the severity of COVID-19 have circulated within Asian American communities and put the health and wellbeing of these groups at risk.

The mis- and disinformation trends around COVID-19 in the Asian American community demonstrate how diverse and widely spread AAPI mis- and disinformation can become. Unfortunately, every community and language group can become susceptible to mis- and disinformation. Responses must be tailored to each specific community, considering the language, context, class, and other defining characteristics.

### Election/Voting

While many Asian American voters are bombarded with misleading and false information from questionable sources, very few actually hear directly from candidates, political parties, or officials. During the 2020 election cycle, 12% of Asian Americans said they were contacted by the Democratic Party a great deal, whereas 50% said they were not contacted at all.<sup>27</sup> In comparison, only 8% of Asian Americans were contacted a great deal by the Republican party, where 55% of Asian Americans said they were not contacted at all.<sup>28</sup> Thus, communities must rely even more heavily on informal sources of information which may not be accurate.

Following the 2020 presidential election, thousands of YouTube videos, tweets, Facebook posts, and WeChat articles in Asian languages made false claims of a stolen election and asserted that Donald Trump was the true winner of the presidency. Later on in 2021, other posts made similar arguments about the California recall election and the Virginia governor's race, claiming, for

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<sup>23</sup> Claire Wng, Asian Americanas have high vaccine rates, but it hasn't come easy, NBC ( Aug. 11, 2021) <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/asian-americans-high-vaccine-rates-hasnt-come-easy-nonprofit-grou-ps-sa-rcna1639>

<sup>24</sup> <https://twitter.com/Se1y7CbLJSeLVA/status/1470315175375155203>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1558mzd3t0&feature=youtu.be>

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[https://www.tiktok.com/@lan15.8/video/7014035584515706114?is\\_copy\\_url=1&is\\_from\\_webapp=v1&q=mot%20nam%20tam&t=165092252775](https://www.tiktok.com/@lan15.8/video/7014035584515706114?is_copy_url=1&is_from_webapp=v1&q=mot%20nam%20tam&t=165092252775)

<sup>27</sup> <https://aapidata.com/2020-survey/>

<sup>28</sup> Id.



example, that the September recall election of Gavin Newsom was “rigged” just like the “2020 Presidential Election Scam.”<sup>29</sup>

In addition to directly translated falsehoods from prominent figures such as Trump and news organizations like Breitbart or Newsmax, some election-related narratives exploit home country biases to explicitly target specific communities. For example, allegations of ballot tampering to benefit President Joe Biden and the Democrats during the 2020 election mirrored similar conspiracy theories during the April 2020 South Korean legislative elections; Korean-language social media posts urged against the use of “fraudulent” mail-in ballots<sup>30</sup> and claimed that both the American and Korean elections were “100% fraudulent.”<sup>31</sup>

Ahead of the 2020 presidential election, dozens of groups circulated a flyer warning of efforts by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to deploy the National Guard in preparation for “impending riots” in efforts to frighten Chinese Americans away from the polls on election day.<sup>32</sup>

This type of false information about elections, candidates, and voting rights have discouraged Asian American communities from engaging with civic processes, including going out to vote. Suggesting the election process is flawed or inaccurate discourages engagement in our democracy while casting doubt on the legitimacy of these processes. These narratives are also meant to instill fear in potential voters, by suggesting visiting the polls could pose a significant danger to their safety and well-being.

### **Mis- and Disinformation About/Scapegoating Asian Americans**

Disinformation and its negative offline effects profoundly impact minority and Black, Indigenous and people of color communities. Mis- and disinformation seeks to manipulate and indoctrinate Asian American communities with false information, while other campaigns scapegoat Asians and Asian Americans with baseless theories that ultimately stoke hate and violence against AAPIs.

As demonstrated by the recent surge in anti-Asian hate, Asian Americans are suffering from race-related discrimination, harassment, and violence. Platforms have failed to enforce their own internal guidelines and policies prohibiting hate speech and the incitement of violence, allowing racism and xenophobia to proliferate online. Derogatory online content has fueled, justified, and inspired acts of violence targeting AAPI individuals and perpetuated fear in AAPI communities across the country. While expressing legitimate criticism of or disagreement with the Chinese

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<sup>29</sup> <https://twitter.com/ChooLucia/status/1437624240396775424>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/stimesus/permalink/3322609674521862/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QhW701KO9sM>

<sup>32</sup> Joe Fitzgerald Rodriguez & Shannon Lin, Misinformation Image on WeChat Attempts to Frighten Chinese Americans Out of Voting, ElectionLand from ProPublica, (Nov. 2, 2020) <https://www.propublica.org/article/misinformation-image-on-wechat-attempts-to-frighten-chinese-americans-out-of-voting>

government for the handling of COVID-19 based on verified facts is certainly permissible and important, what cannot be tolerated is the use of “dog whistles” to spread verifiably false information or to falsely equate the actions and responsibilities of a government entity to an entire community of people based on race. Language that conflates Asians and Asian Americans with the Chinese government is weaponized to mischaracterize and harm an entire race. Failure to recognize and remove such “dog whistles” perpetuates and escalates harm to AAPI communities. In a 2017 report, Advancing Justice | AAJC noted an increase in hate crimes, harassment, and violence against Asian Americans within the first year of the Trump presidency when such conflation and disinformation started to become more normalized.<sup>33</sup> The number of anti-Asian incidents dramatically increased in 2020— an outcome of continued anti-Asian rhetoric amplified and normalized by Trump and others on social media platforms.

Hate crimes against Muslims in the United States have also increased by 15% in recent years. According to the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), this rise can be attributed to xenophobic rhetoric used by Trump, including his statements on social media platforms.<sup>34</sup> Under the Trump administration, a greater percentage of hate incidents against Muslims became physically violent against victims. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other platforms have been consistently used as an organizing tool by white nationalists and militias to advance violent, anti-Muslim agendas; but Trump’s own anti-Muslim rhetoric gave such views legitimacy and authority. Allowing such content to persist on platforms without oversight or contest proliferated and uplifted the rhetoric of far-right extremist groups and encouraged violence and harassment against members of the Muslim community.

While some platforms have taken some steps to flag and/or label potential disinformation,<sup>35</sup> they continue to host, monetize, and enable the sharing of such content. Community organizers and advocates do not believe that labeling does enough to stop the harmful effects of such content. Platforms must do more to prevent the active spread of harmful content, including enforcing their own terms and conditions by banning and taking down flagged disinformation. Even though some entities like Meta publicly committed to bolstering security and content moderation efforts during the election cycle,<sup>36</sup> some researchers believe that enforcement was not as effective or vigilant on non-English content such as Asian language videos (even after they had been flagged by users as featuring problematic content).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Asian Americans Advancing Justice–AAJC, Advocates See ‘Disturbing’ Rise in Hate Crimes Targeting Asian Americans’, Aug 14, 2017,

<https://www.advancingjustice-aaajc.org/news/advocates-see-disturbing-rise-hate-crimes-targeting-asian-americans>

<sup>34</sup> DW, Anti-Muslim hate crimes on the rise in Donald Trump’s US,

<https://www.dw.com/en/anti-muslim-hate-crime-on-the-rise-in-donald-trumps-us-report/a-43500942>

<sup>35</sup> Terry Nguyen, The challenge of combating fake news in Asian American Communities, Vox (Nov. 27, 2020),

<https://www.vox.com/identities/21579752/asian-american-misinformation-after-2020>

<sup>36</sup> Mike Isaac, Facebook, Alarmed by Discord Over Vote Count, IS Said to be Taking Action, New York Times (Nov. 5, 2020) <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/05/technology/facebook-election-misinformation.html>

<sup>37</sup> Rebecca Heilweil, YouTube is awash with election misinformation - and it isn’t taking it down, Vox (Nov. 6, 2020) <https://www.vox.com/recode/21551696/stolen-election-misinformation-youtube-trump-voter-fraud>

## Examples of hate speech and violence inciting language on digital platforms

### Google:

Content perpetuating the myth that COVID-19 is the result of a lab or other conspiracy theories surrounding China's responsibility for the spread of the virus continues to proliferate on platforms like YouTube.<sup>38</sup> Other content repeatedly insists that "China must pay" for "victimizing the world,"<sup>39</sup> blaming China for the "Wuhan flu's" "devastation" on America.<sup>40</sup> In some videos, Trump supporters also blamed his 2020 presidential election loss on the "kung flu."<sup>41</sup> This type of YouTube content scapegoats China and Chinese people, while normalizing and legitimizing hateful and dehumanizing speech. Google does label COVID-19 related content with a link to the CDC website, but many of these videos remain unflagged and unmarked with any warning about their false claims. Moreover, some content creators deny the prevalence of anti-Asian hate stemming from disinformation they spread about the pandemic, dismissing victims' reports and undermining statements of law enforcement. This rhetoric continues to be readily accessible on YouTube and shared through networks, accumulating views and receiving supportive comments from viewers.

### Meta:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of Facebook posts baselessly accused Chinese individuals and Chinese Americans for the spread of COVID-19 in the United States. Trump and other prominent figures repeatedly posted content on Facebook that scapegoated China and Chinese individuals for the outbreak of the virus, using phrases like "China ban,"<sup>42</sup> "China virus,"<sup>43</sup> and other racialized rhetoric like "Remember, it was China's fault!"<sup>44</sup> Posts also encouraged xenophobia against Asians and Asian Americans, suggesting only U.S. citizens were welcome into the country<sup>45</sup> and even conflating U.S. Chinatowns with the virus.<sup>46</sup> The scapegoating of Chinese people is a continuation of anti-Asian rhetoric Trump and other right-wing personalities have amplified on Meta's platforms throughout recent years, including content that repeatedly singles out Chinese and North Koreans as threats.

Prominent Facebook accounts and groups have also frequently shared negatively charged language like "terrorist" and "jihadist" and attached negative connotations to the word "Muslim." In one Facebook post, Trump characterized Middle Eastern immigrants as "terrorists,

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<sup>38</sup> One example with 146 views: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rR2C7gkd\\_4E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rR2C7gkd_4E); another with 185k views: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U023FSiOdf0>

<sup>39</sup> <https://youtu.be/em77L2CsqYg>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JY1RhCSj0v0&t=478s>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LiUN6e7tXVc&t=2225s>

<sup>42</sup> Over 12 instances of "China ban," "China travel ban," or other language on Trump's account alone, suggesting individuals of Chinese descent should not be allowed to enter the United States.

<sup>43</sup> Over 40 instances of "China virus" or "ChinaVirus" appear in Donald Trump's posts alone

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/153080620724/posts/10166036380945725>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/153080620724/posts/10164590148900725>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/153080620724/posts/10165154893590725>

jihadists, and violent extremists.” The post garnered over 273,000 reactions, 45,000 comments, and 58,000 shares with a sizable number of reactions and comments in support of this hateful rhetoric.<sup>47</sup> Groups such as Muslim Advocates have repeatedly called for Meta to take anti-Muslim rhetoric on Facebook seriously. They cite that white nationalists and militias have used Facebook to organize protests at mosques.<sup>48</sup> They also emphasize that the platform has been used internationally to incite violence and even genocide against Muslims.

Meta internal documents have revealed that in some instances, Meta took down less than 5% of hate speech content<sup>49</sup>, despite publicly declaring that closer to 95% of hate speech content is removed automatically.<sup>50</sup>

### Twitter:

Anti-Asian hate and scapegoating intensified on Twitter as prominent accounts with high numbers of followers like those of Trump, Senator Ted Cruz, and others amplified hateful rhetoric, hashtags, and disinformation on the platform. The former President’s tweets referring to COVID-19 as the “#chinesevirus” was associated with a rise in anti-Asian content on the platform. Posts that contained “#chinesevirus” had higher associations with anti-Asian language and the use of other hateful hashtags such as “#batmaneatingflu” and “#yellowmanflu,”<sup>51</sup> shifting blame to Asians and Asian Americans. One popular hashtag that proliferated anti-Asian sentiment was “#ChinaLiedPeopleDied,” which more explicitly blamed China for the virus, baselessly accused Chinese people of intentionally spreading the virus, and even called for revenge. Another trending topic was “#MakeChinaPay,” which echoed the Trump administration’s desire to punish China for the pandemic.<sup>52</sup>

Studies indicate that increases in hateful social media activity and content consumption is associated with increases in anti-minority sentiment and even hate crimes. For example, Trump’s tweets “about Islam-related topics are highly correlated with anti-Muslim hate crimes...[and]

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<sup>47</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/153080620724/posts/10165726004780725>

<sup>48</sup> Muslim Advocates, Muslim Advocates Calls on Facebook’s New Civil Rights VP to Ban Trump, Prioritize Anti-Muslim Hate (Jan. 11, 2021)

<https://www.commondreams.org/newswire/2021/01/11/muslim-advocates-calls-facebooks-new-civil-rights-vp-ban-trump-prioritize-anti>

<sup>49</sup> Scott Pelley, Whistleblower: Facebook is misleading the public on progress against hate speech, violence, misinformation; CBS (Oct. 4, 2021)

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/facebook-whistleblower-frances-haugen-misinformation-public-60-minutes-2021-10-03/>

<sup>50</sup> Elizabeth Culliford & Katie Paul, Facebook offers up first-ever estimate of hate speech prevalence on its platform, REuters (Nov. 19, 2020) <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-facebook-content-idINKBN27Z2QY>

<sup>51</sup> Hswen, Yulin, et al. “Association of ‘#covid19’ Versus ‘#chinesevirus’ With Anti-Asian Sentiments on Twitter: March 9–23, 2020.” American Journal of Public Health, Mar. 2021, pp. e1–9. DOI.org (Crossref), doi:10.2105/AJPH.2021.306154.

<sup>52</sup> Amanda Macias, The world will make China ‘pay a price’ over coronavirus outbreak, Mike Pompeo says, CNBC (Jul. 15, 2020)

<https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/15/the-world-will-make-china-pay-a-price-over-coronavirus-outbreak-mike-pompeo-says.html>

Trump's tweets [even] predict[ed] more anti-Muslim Twitter activity of his followers."<sup>53</sup> Social media platforms like Twitter normalizes anti-minority sentiments, which can make such bigotry seem more socially acceptable, potentially leading to an increase in violence.

## **Election and Voting Impact of Mis- and Disinformation**

Racist sentiment towards Asian Americans is not a new phenomenon but a continuing reality, fueled in recent years by a growing xenophobic and racist backlash against immigrants. Numerous hate incidents have been directed against Asian Americans either because of their minority group status or because they are perceived as unwanted immigrants. These attacks have grown exponentially with the COVID-19 pandemic, with racist harassment and violence directed toward Asian Americans who are wrongly blamed for the COVID-19 pandemic. While hate incidents targeting Asian Americans sharply rose with the onset of the pandemic and have been ongoing over the past year, the recent spate of violent attacks against elderly Asian Americans captured on video has drawn previously unseen media attention.

Discriminatory attitudes toward Asian Americans and the aforementioned "perpetual foreigner" stereotype have also become squarely embedded in the political process. Insidious manifestations of the stereotype can be found in the verbal attacks levied against Asian American candidates and voters, negative political ads that use the misconception of "Asia" as an enemy to the U.S., and manipulation of images of candidates to trigger negative stereotypes of minority candidates.

We have continued to see these racist attitudes and stereotypes permeate our political process over the last several election cycles:

- During the 2017 local and statewide elections in New Jersey, Asian American candidates were targets of racist propaganda. First, in Edison, New Jersey, two school board candidates, Jerry Shi and Falguni Patel were targeted with anti-immigrant mailers that said, "Make Edison Great Again" and called for their deportation. The mailers said that "[t]he Chinese and Indians are taking over our town," and "Chinese school! Indian school! Cricket fields! Enough is enough." Next, in Hoboken, New Jersey, Sikh mayoral candidate, Ravi Bhalla was targeted with racist flyers placed on car windshields in Hoboken with the message "Don't let TERRORISM take over our town!" above his picture.
- In 2018, the New Jersey Republican Party distributed campaign mailers about current Congressman Andy Kim (NJ-03), who was running as a challenger to then-Rep. Tom MacArthur, with the words "Something Is Real Fishy about Andy Kim," in a typeface called Chop Suey with a picture of a dead fish on ice.
- In July 2021, Congressman Kim was again targeted in a video made by Republican challenger Tricia Flanigan, in which she says about Congressman Kim, "He doesn't

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<sup>53</sup> Muller, Karsten, and Carlo Schwarz. From Hashtag to Hate Crime: Twitter and Anti-Minority Sentiment. p. 110.

represent our interests. He is not one of us.” Congressman Kim responded that such words were used deliberately against him as an Asian American, and that “‘Not one of us’ are words that make many Asian Americans constantly feel like we are seen as foreigners in our own country.”

- A recent Instagram post wrongly suggested that Democratic nominee for California’s 45th Congressional district, Jay Chen, has “ties to the Chinese Communist Party.”<sup>54</sup>
- Ahead of the 2020 presidential election, dozens of groups circulated a flyer warning of efforts by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to deploy the National Guard in preparation for “impending riots” in efforts to frighten Chinese Americans away from the polls on election day.<sup>55</sup>

This kind of mis- and disinformation that exploits anti-China (and anti-Asian) bias and ultimately suppresses Asian American electoral turnout is detrimental to our community. Some of these examples, such as claiming candidates are communist, are unwelcoming, untrue, and detrimental to the willingness of Asian Americans to vote. Falsehoods such as these aimed at Asian American candidates, combined with misinformation and disinformation about elections and the Anti-Asian rhetoric being expressed, will likely have a chilling effect on Asian Americans voting. Especially in light of the increasing restrictions on voting by mail and other voter suppression tactics being enacted across the country, Asian American voters may face the unenviable choice of personal (or family) safety versus exercising their right to vote as options to vote safely from one’s home are denied more and more voters.

## Challenges

### Language

As stated above, language access can present a formidable challenge for some Asian Americans. The Asian American diaspora is extremely diverse, with the roughly 22 million Asian Americans in the United States tracing their origins back to more than 40 countries across Asia.<sup>56</sup> Approximately 66% of Asian Americans speak a language other than English at home.<sup>57</sup> The diversity of languages spoken within Asian American communities presents a unique challenge when analyzing mis- and disinformation within these groups.

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<sup>54</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/CcXKMX3Oppp/>

<sup>55</sup> Joe Fitzgerald Rodriguez & Shannon Lin, Misinformation Image on WeChat Attempts to Frighten Chinese Americans Out of Voting, ElectionLand from ProPublica, (Nov. 2, 2020) <https://www.propublica.org/article/misinformation-image-on-wechat-attempts-to-frighten-chinese-americans-out-of-voting>

<sup>56</sup> Urban Institute and The Asian American Foundation, Advancing Equity for AAPI Communities, Report (July 2021) [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/104527/advancing-equity-for-aapi-communities\\_1.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/104527/advancing-equity-for-aapi-communities_1.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> Abby Budiman & Neil Ruiz, Key Facts about Asian Americans, a diverse and growing population, Pew Research Center (Apr. 29, 2021)

[https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/#:~:text=The%20most%20common%20of%20these,%25\)%%20and%20Vietnamese%20\(7%25\).](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/#:~:text=The%20most%20common%20of%20these,%25)%%20and%20Vietnamese%20(7%25).)

Additionally, technology platforms that struggle to moderate content in English acknowledge additional blind spots when it comes to addressing non-English mis and disinformation. Documents indicate that 87% of Facebook’s budget for classifying misinformation goes towards the United States, but North American users make up only 10% of Facebook’s user base.<sup>58</sup> English-language misinformation is grave enough, but it’s clear that Facebook and other platforms are ill-equipped to address misinformation in other languages. Fewer resources dedicated to moderating and taking down misinformation in Asian languages means that such dangerous content is more likely to spread to Asian American users.

Moreover, where some platform companies may have Asian-language translators and monitors readily available, they may lack the training and context to translate, monitor, and correctly classify and remove the right content adequately and accurately. Some Asian-language translators and monitors may be overseas and located in foreign offices. While their language skills are likely competent, these individuals can be poorly matched for reviewing and flagging AAPI-related mis- and disinformation, as they may lack any cultural, social, and/or political context for immigrant populations residing in the United States. Without a thorough understanding of Asian American history, US politics, American racial and social dynamics, and the lived realities of immigrant communities, monitors become ineffective.

### Cultural Context

Asian Americans, notably first-generation Asian Americans who were not educated in the United States, are often un or misinformed about sensitive issues, making them susceptible to certain mis- and disinformation topics. First generation immigrants who lack the knowledge of America’s complicated racial history, for example, might be especially vulnerable to falsehoods around policies like affirmative action because they do not possess the broader historical and cultural contexts crucial to understanding why these kinds of policies were implemented in the first place. Immigrant communities may also possess different cultural practices, norms, and values that are important to consider in the dissemination of information, building trust, and creating better resources and services for these populations. For example, first-generation Chinese Americans may be especially susceptible to falsehoods that invoke sensitive subjects, such as the Cultural Revolution or communism, because of the lived experiences they bring with them.

### Resources and Data

Generalized approaches to combating mis-and disinformation fail to address unique challenges and characteristics of disinformation that proliferates in the AAPI community. To effectively dismantle disinformation that harms our communities, we must conduct targeted, specific, and diversified research to understand and document the specific contexts, messaging, topics, platforms, languages, and influences that resonate most profoundly with AAPIs. More must be

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<sup>58</sup> Nik Popli, The 5 most important revelations from the ‘Facebook Papers’, Time, (Oct. 26, 2021) <https://time.com/6110234/facebook-papers-testimony-explained/>

done to catalog the distinct experiences of each diverse group and address the systemic issues that make mis- and disinformation so prolific in each community. Academics, researchers, technologists, and technical teams must learn more about users before they can develop effective inoculation strategies.

## **Policy Recommendations**

### Language Access, Translations, and More Inclusive Enforcement

Platform companies need to improve understanding of diverse users and adjust policies, training, hiring, and practices accordingly. Cultural competency is an extremely crucial element of combating Asian American mis- and disinformation. It is important that individuals at all stages of the content moderation process—whether these be the engineers designing the algorithms or the content monitors removing harmful content—have the relevant cultural understanding to address non-English mis- and disinformation. For example, bad actors will often use slang or specific keywords to evade content moderators; superficial translations or translators without knowledge of a particular culture would fail to flag this kind of mis- and disinformation. Translators should, at minimum, possess local dialect and vernacular ability, native-level fluency, and cultural experience and competency to effectively reach non-English speaking groups and monitor their content more responsibly.

Policies, practices, and other documentation that is meant to assist and inform consumers and/or users should always be made available in all languages that the companies provide services in. The policies and agreements listed in these notices must also actually be provided and enforced in all languages. Users who do not use platforms in English still have the same rights and services that companies promise to honor. Community guidelines, user agreements, privacy policies, etc. should all be enforced as robustly as they are in English contexts. Otherwise, companies are violating the very promises they themselves have made to their users.

### Government Policies and Resources that Prioritize Communities of Color

As Congress and various agencies consider how to mitigate the continued spread and negative effects of mis- and disinformation, it is critical to keep communities of color at the forefront. Communities of color are often even more susceptible to mis- and disinformation, but also left with the fewest resources, information, and services to combat mis- and disinformation because of language barriers, cultural nuances, and historic systemic inequalities and harms. To adequately address and reduce the harmful effects of mis- and disinformation on our society and democratic systems, lawmakers must consider the unique needs and challenges that marginalized communities face on the fringes. Companies must be held accountable for how they treat all users, not just those who use platforms in English.



Any studies, resources, or new processes must include marginalized individuals, such as Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders. New efforts to share information (such as broadband coverage mappings or election information outreach), research and document emerging issues (such as this hearing), and address underlying issues (such as new legislation or dedicated offices) must include and prioritize our communities to be truly effective. It is imperative that our leaders listen to Asian American and other communities directly and build solutions that are specifically catered to addressing the growing concerns of AAPI and other minority communities.

### Digital Literacy Training and Resources for Communities

Digital and media literacy are extremely important in inoculating community members against harmful mis- and disinformation. As referenced above, limited English-language abilities restrict the sources of information many Asian Americans have available for their consumption, meaning that these individuals often consume content from sources lacking the necessary fact-checking and journalistic rigor that national outlets possess. Members of the Asian American community should be trained to discern what information is accurate and be equipped to seek out credible sources of information. Furthermore, community-based journalists and other trusted messengers should be given the necessary resources to keep their communities accurately informed.

### Greater Investment, Resources, and Study for Asian American Media

In addition to strengthening defenses against the spread of mis- and disinformation, there is a need for greater investments, resources, and studies to bolster the availability and journalistic integrity of Asian American media resources. Creating more funding and opportunities for robust and reliable sources of news for minority communities can fill a vacuum that is currently filled by unreliable and even manipulative sources of false information. Ethnic media remains one of the most trusted sources of information in our communities. Anh Do, an Editor at a Vietnamese station notes that "...the trend here shows a greater need for ethnic media because [there] should those day-to-day stories include issues vital to immigrant lives – but then are missed – we have the newspapers, TV and radio stations in those individual communities on hand to provide news. And the more in-depth, the better."<sup>59</sup> Without protecting the diversity of media ownership, creating more opportunities for local and ethnic media outlets, and building better pipelines to reach Asian American and other minority constituents, the community will increasingly rely on poor sources of information, exacerbating the mis- and disinformation problems.

Many community organizations are actively working on combating mis- and disinformation in their communities. For example, Viet Fact Check<sup>60</sup>, Chinese for Affirmative Action<sup>61</sup>, and other

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<sup>59</sup> Pew Research, What's Next for Ethnic Media, Pew Research Center (Aug. 21, 2006) <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2006/08/21/whats-next-for-the-ethnic-media/>

<sup>60</sup> <https://vietfactcheck.org/>

<sup>61</sup> <https://caasf.org/>

groups have been working to fact-check, debunk, and provide more accurate resources and materials to communities. These organizers, researchers, and community members need better data, resources, funding, and support to continue the work.

## **Conclusion**

Mis- and disinformation continues to plague our communities, inciting violence, posing health risks, casting doubt on our democratic institutions, and spreading confusion and fear. Minority and historically marginalized communities such as Asian Americans continue to be disproportionately negatively impacted by such media manipulation. It is critical for Congress, other government entities, companies, researchers, technologists, and other stakeholders to prioritize understanding and responding to the needs and challenges of AAPI and other minority communities as we address the threat of mis- and disinformation.