

# Blame, bullying and disrespect: Chinese Canadians reveal their experiences with racism during COVID-19

*Half say they have been called names or otherwise insulted during COVID-19 outbreak*

**June 22, 2020** – It has been referred to as the “[shadow pandemic](#)” in Canada. As COVID-19 indiscriminately touches people in large communities and small households, it has brought another kind of virus – one that does discriminate – to the doorsteps of only some Canadians.

That virus is racism. Across the country, [assaults](#), [verbal threats](#), [graffiti](#) and worse – all directed at people of Chinese (and other East Asian) descent – have been reported since the pandemic was declared.

Now, in the first study of its kind since the pandemic was declared, new data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute in partnership with the University of Alberta reveals the experiences and emotions of those directly affected.

Results from this survey of more than 500 Canadians of Chinese ethnicity underscore the extent and depth to which they have been exposed to discriminatory behaviours, and the effect on their own sense of self and belonging in this country.

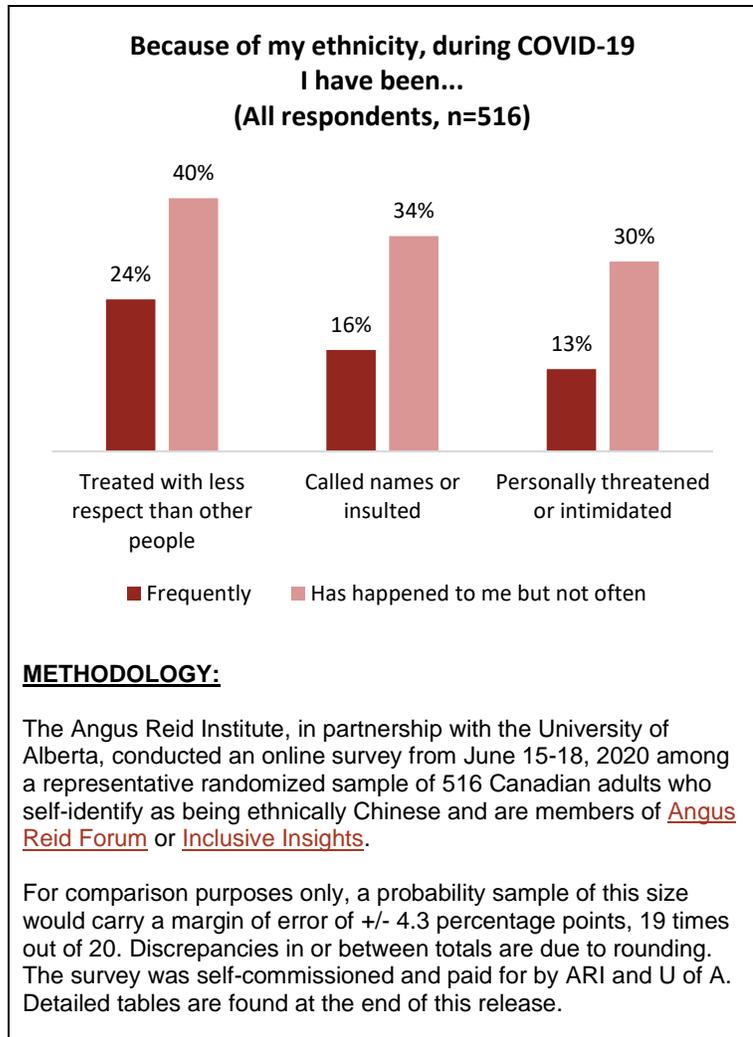
Half (50%) report being called names or insulted as a direct result of the COVID-19 outbreak, and a plurality (43%) further say they’ve been threatened or intimidated.

Additionally, three-in-ten (30%) report being frequently exposed to racist graffiti or messaging on social media since the pandemic began, while just as many (29%) say they have frequently been made to feel as though they posed a threat to the health and safety of others.

It is perhaps unsurprising then, that a majority believe Canadians in general blame people of Chinese ethnicity for COVID-19, or that just 13 per cent believe others in this country view them as fully Canadian “all the time”.

## More Key Findings:

- Six-in-ten (61%) say they have adjusted their routines in order to avoid run-ins or otherwise unpleasant encounters since the COVID-19 outbreak began



## CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director Angus Reid Institute: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
Dave Korzinski, Research Director Angus Reid Institute: 250.899.0821 [dave.korzinski@angusreid.org](mailto:dave.korzinski@angusreid.org)  
Dr. Kimberly Noels, Professor, University of Alberta: 780-983-1291 [knoels@ualberta.ca](mailto:knoels@ualberta.ca)

- Two-thirds (64%) report feeling coverage from North American news outlets has led to negative views of people of Chinese ethnicity in Canada
- Just over half are worried that Asian children are going to be bullied when they return to school due to the COVID-19 outbreak

### **About ARI**

The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.

### **INDEX:**

#### **Part One: Life in Canada – Longing to Belong**

- **Who was surveyed?**
- **Canadian and Chinese: Pride in both identities**
- **Many feel they aren't seen as Canadian by others**

#### **Part Two: Experience with discrimination during COVID-19**

- **Widespread disrespect and abuse**
- **Changed routines, increased anxieties**

#### **Part Three: About this study**

#### **Part One: Life in Canada – Longing to Belong**

People of Chinese ethnicity have not borne the exclusive brunt of disrespectful, discriminatory, or threatening behaviour since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared. Indeed, there have been [instances of other Canadians](#) on the receiving end of ignorant comments and actions. The Angus Reid Institute has accordingly surveyed the experiences of the general population, which will be released in future reporting.

There is little doubt, however, that the weight of this problem has settled predominantly on the shoulders of those whose ethnic identification is Chinese, a segment of the Canadian population that comprises approximately 1.77 million individuals, or five per cent of Canada's total population, according to Statistics Canada.

#### **Who was surveyed?**

As part of a broad longitudinal research program, the Angus Reid Institute, in partnership with the [University of Alberta](#), has initially surveyed 516 Canadians who self-identify as ethnically Chinese. Just

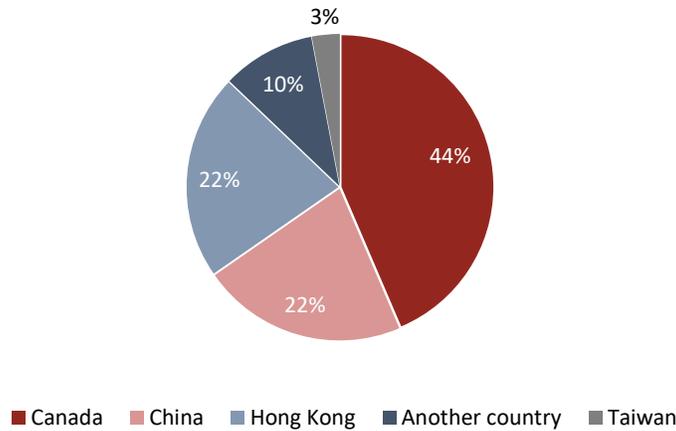
---

#### **CONTACT:**

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 [dave.korzinski@angusreid.org](mailto:dave.korzinski@angusreid.org)  
Dr. Kimberly Noels, Professor, University of Alberta: 780-983-1291 [knoels@ualberta.ca](mailto:knoels@ualberta.ca)

under half of this group were born in Canada (44%), while one-in-five were born in Mainland China (22%) or Hong Kong (22%) (for more information see the About this Study section at the end of the report).

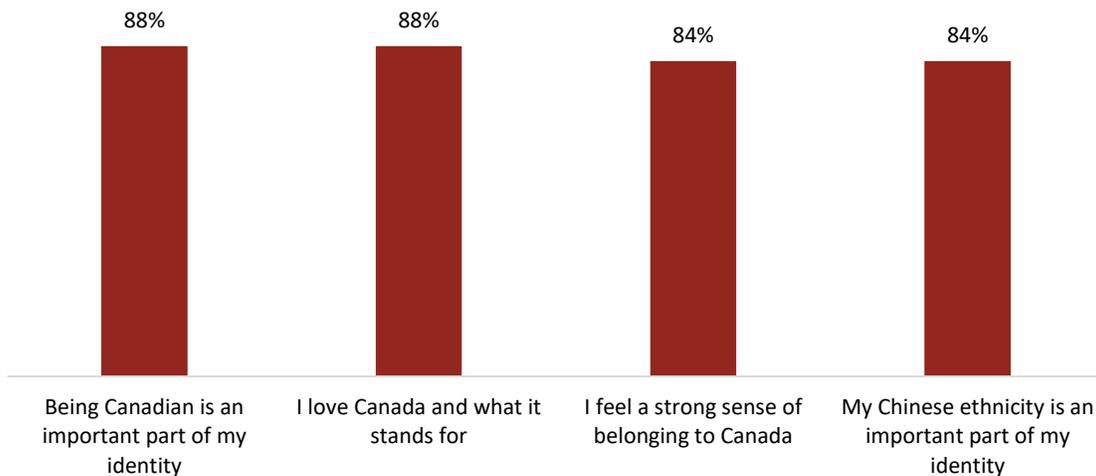
**Where were you born?  
(All Respondents, n=516)**



**Canadian and Chinese: Pride in both identities**

Those surveyed are all residents of Canada and express overwhelmingly strong ties to the country in which they live. For example, respondents were near unanimous in saying that being Canadian is an important part of their identity, that they love Canada and what it stands for, and that they feel a strong sense of belonging in this nation. At the same time, their own ethnicity is a source of pride:

**Percentage of Chinese Canadians who agree with each statement (n=516)**

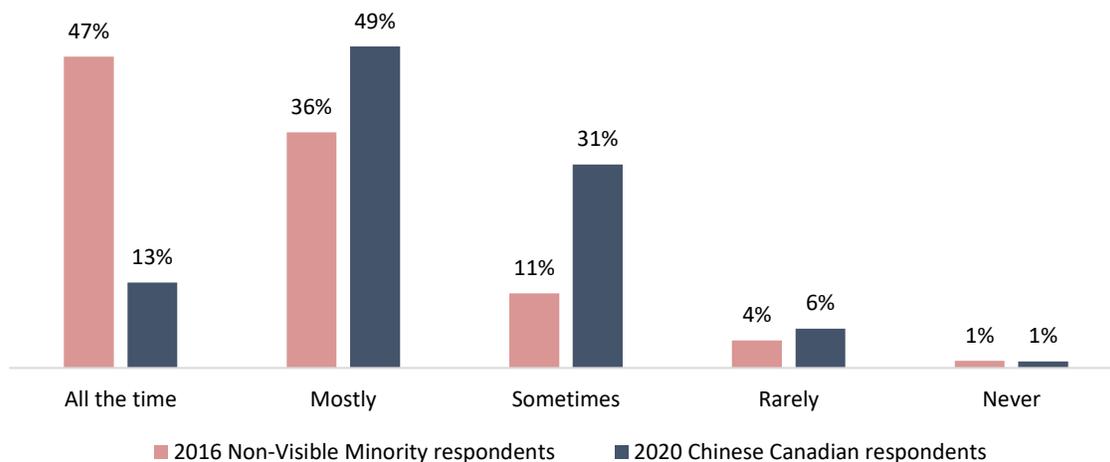


**Many feel they aren't seen as Canadian by others**

It is one thing to see oneself as Canadian, it is another thing to know others recognize you in the same way. The blunt reality is that for the vast majority of Canadians of Chinese ethnicity, that acceptance – which many in this country easily take for granted – remains elusive.

In fact, barely more than one-in-ten (13%) Chinese Canadians say they think others in this country view them as Canadian “all the time”. Compare this to the result from the same question asked by the Angus Reid Institute of non-visible minorities in Canada four years ago. Half of the latter response group said at the time they “always” feel that others view them as Canadian (47%):

**To what extent do you think others in this country see you as Canadian?**



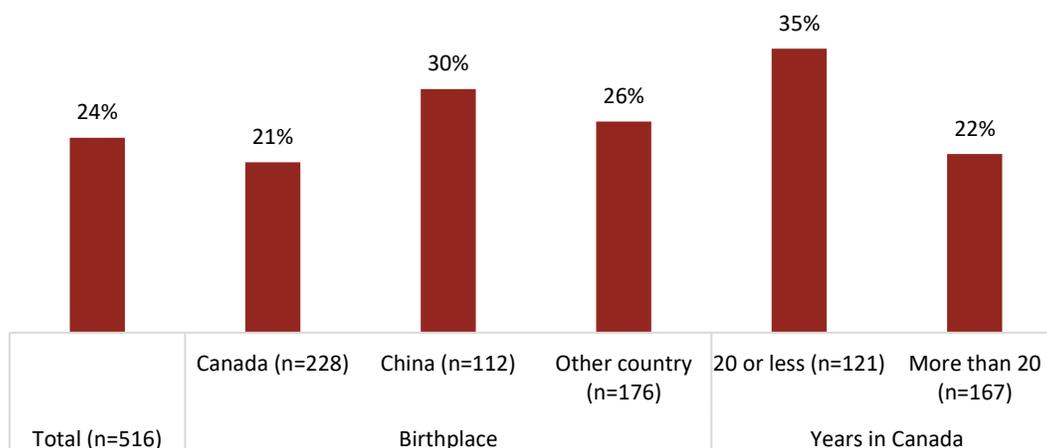

---

*Since March 2020, I have been repeatedly yelled at on the sidewalk in my own neighborhood. I have had my citizenship questioned despite my response stating that I was born in Canada when chatting with others.*  
 - A woman in her 30's

---

In even more stark terms, one-in-four Canadians of Chinese ethnicity say they feel like an outsider in Canada. This view is more common for those who were not born in Canada, or who have lived here for two decades or less, though it is relatively common amongst all segments:

**Percentage of Chinese Canadians who say they "feel like an outsider in Canada" compared by birthplace and time in Canada**



Some of this sentiment may have to do with a lack of connection with other Canadians. While the majority of Chinese Canadians say they feel a strong sense of this type of connection with other Canadians (71%), a significant number (29%) do not. These issues of connection and identity are complex, and notably, it is not only other “Canadians” with whom some are lacking a connection. Half (54%) of respondents also said that they feel like an outsider among other ethnically Chinese people, with this number rising closer to two-thirds (64%) among those who were born in Canada.

**Part Two: Experience with discrimination during COVID-19**

**Widespread disrespect and abuse**

This sense of belonging and identity can appear abstract based on people’s self-reported perceptions. There is no such abstraction, however, in the realities of lived experience. Respondents were asked about their own lives and experiences particularly since mid-March when provinces and territories began declaring public health emergencies in Canada.

---

*I was at a local Loblaws in the queue to pay and a person behind me got too close. I requested that he back up to allow for social distancing and he stated, “shut up and go back to where you came from.”*  
 - A man in his 50’s

---

One-quarter (24%) say that they have been frequently treated with less respect as a result of their ethnicity. Similar numbers say they were frequently made to feel as though they posed a threat to the health and safety of others around them (29%) or were exposed to anti-Chinese messages on social media (30%).

**CONTACT:**

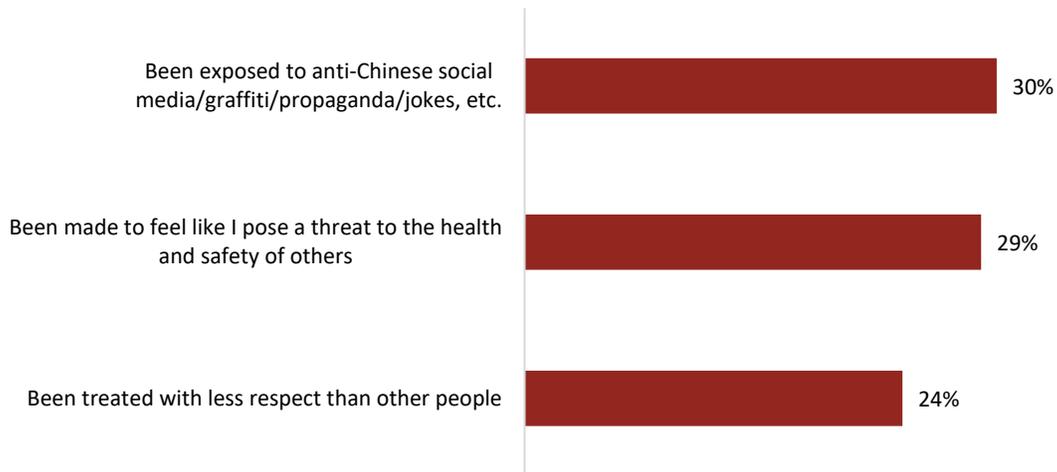
Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
 Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 [dave.korzinski@angusreid.org](mailto:dave.korzinski@angusreid.org)  
 Dr. Kimberly Noels, Professor, University of Alberta: 780-983-1291 [knoels@ualberta.ca](mailto:knoels@ualberta.ca)

---

*I don't read internet comments or contribute to discussions online because I receive nasty personal messages and harassment if I mention being Chinese Canadian, even though I don't speak the language.*  
*- A woman in her 20's*

---

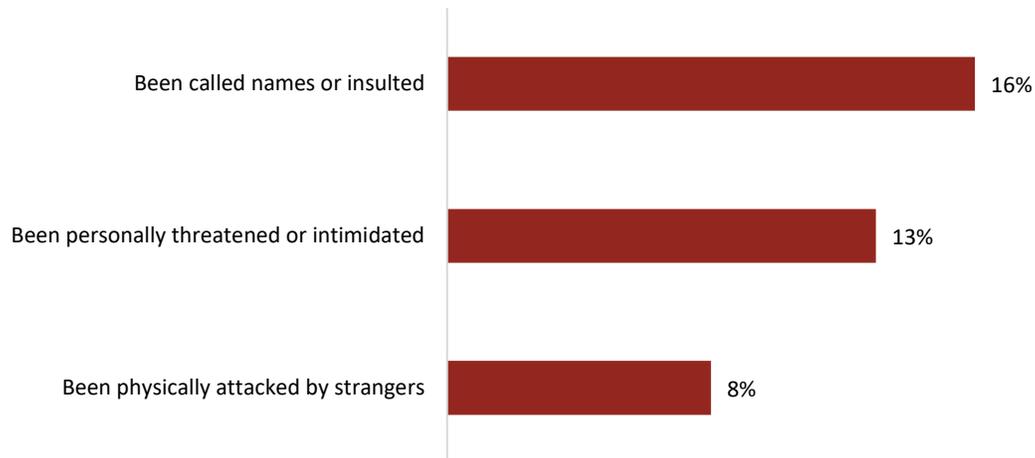
**Because of my ethnicity, during COVID-19 I have\*...  
 (Those who say "Frequently", among all respondents)**



*\*For more information on response scale see the About this Study section at the end of the report*

For close to one-in-five respondents, the abuse has been more direct. They have reported frequently facing insults or being called names (16%), while just over one-in-ten (13%) say they have been frequently threatened or intimidated. For just less than one-in-ten (8%), the abuse has been physical. This group reports being frequently attacked or harmed physically:

**Because of my ethnicity, during COVID-19 I have\* ...  
(Those who say "Frequently", among all respondents)**



*\*For more information on response scale see the About this Study section at the end of the report*

---

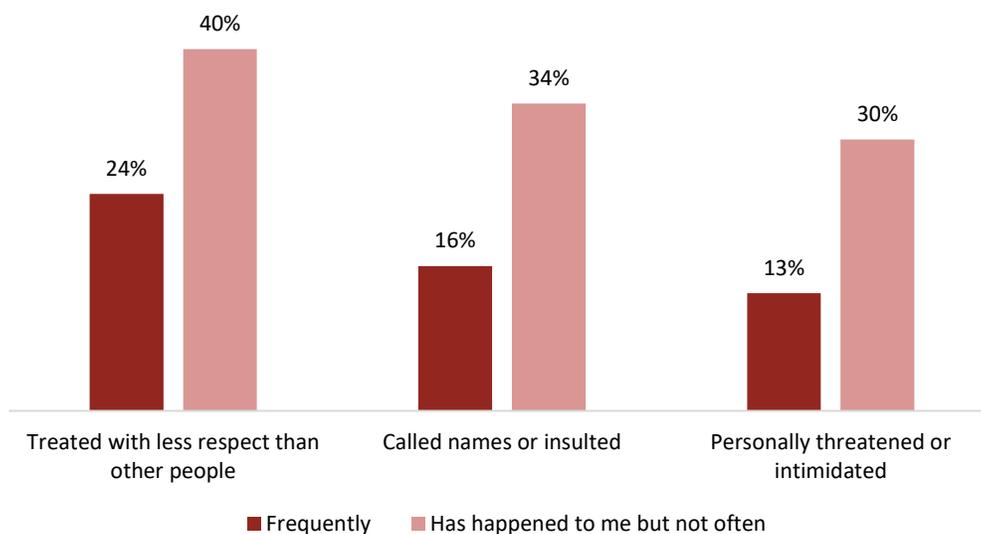
*[I was] spit at by a cyclist.*

*- A man in his 60's*

---

The above results focus on those who report these experiences “frequently” – but they are not the only ones. When those who have *ever* experienced these encounters over the last three months are totalled, fully two-thirds of Chinese Canadians (64%) have faced at least some level of disrespect during COVID-19, while half (50%) reported being called names or otherwise insulted and two-in-five have been intimidated or threatened (43%):

**Because of my ethnicity, during COVID-19 I have been...  
(All respondents, n=516)**



**Changed routines, increased anxieties**

Canadians of Chinese ethnicity also report changing their behaviours to avoid or mitigate some of the worst of this abuse. Overall, six-in-ten (61%) have adjusted their routines in order to avoid run-ins or otherwise unpleasant encounters since the COVID-19 outbreak began.

Half of this segment say they have done so frequently, while the other half say they've done it at least once.

---

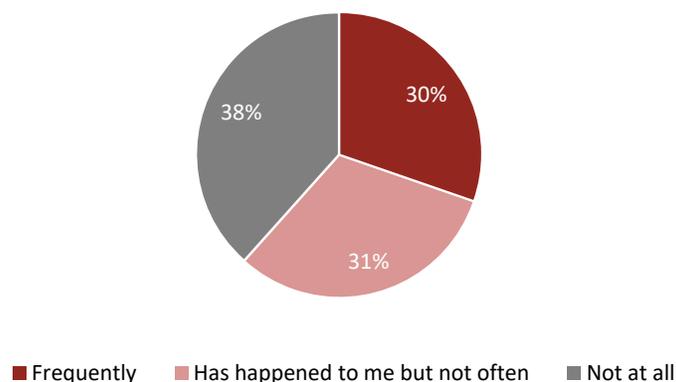
*Walking down the street with a mask on, there has [sic] been instances where people will scream at me to go back to China or swear and say other racist remarks. I look Chinese but I am not from China even though I have Chinese heritage. Makes it all very confusing.  
- A woman in her 20's*

---

**CONTACT:**

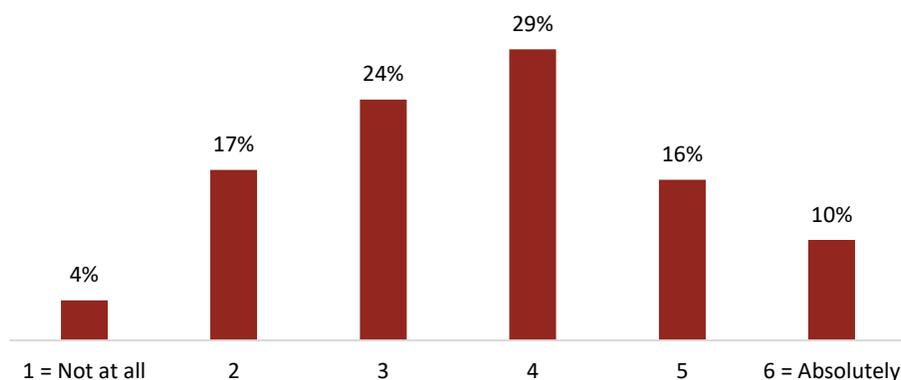
Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
 Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 [dave.korzinski@angusreid.org](mailto:dave.korzinski@angusreid.org)  
 Dr. Kimberly Noels, Professor, University of Alberta: 780-983-1291 [knoels@ualberta.ca](mailto:knoels@ualberta.ca)

**Because of my ethnicity, during COVID-19 I have...  
"Changed some of my routines because of concerns about racism  
or discrimination"  
(All respondents, n=516)**



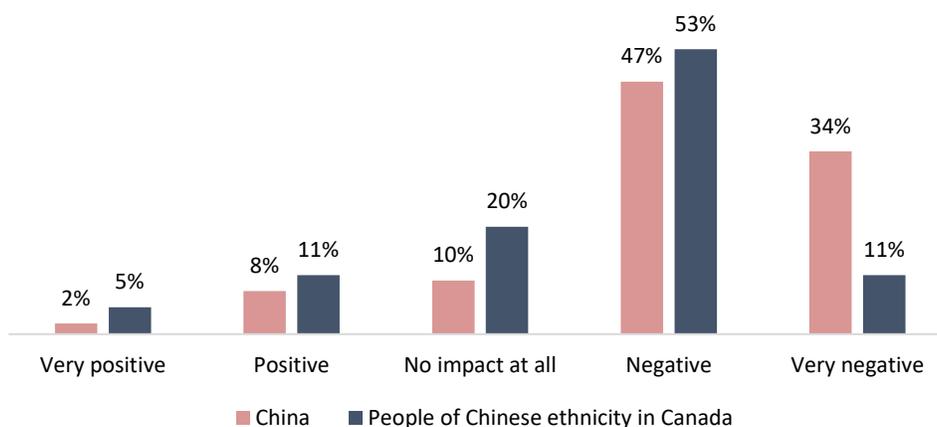
Asked to rate on a six-point scale how much they feel other Canadians blame people of Chinese ethnicity for COVID-19, only a handful say not at all (4%) while four-in-five choose a three or higher (79%).

**To what extent, if at all, do you think Canadians blame  
people of Chinese ethnicity for COVID-19?  
(All respondents, n=516)**



In the opinion of many Chinese Canadians, much of this blame has to do with coverage from mainstream North American news media. While it probably did not help when U.S. President Donald Trump and others referred to the novel coronavirus as the “Chinese Virus”, two-thirds of respondents (64%) report feeling North American news outlets have had a largely negative effect on Canadian views of people of Chinese ethnicity:

**In your view, how has mainstream North American media coverage of COVID-19 affected Canadians' view towards:  
(All respondents, n=516)**



*While walking on the streets in Kitsilano [Vancouver], a Caucasian man in his 30's said to me and my daughter, "everyday, I pray that you people die."  
- A woman in her 60's*

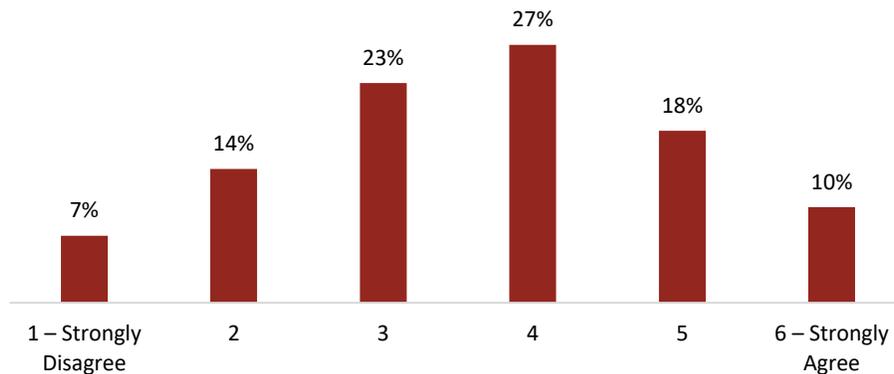
Given their aforementioned experiences with discrimination and prejudice, it is likely unsurprising that a significant number of Chinese Canadians worry that racist attitudes and behaviour will persist even after the pandemic is over.

Schools across the country have been closed for regular instruction since mid-March, but with the prospect of students returning for in-person classes in the fall comes the potential for bullying. Indeed, there are [numerous examples](#) of coronavirus-related bullying from the early days of the pandemic. Looking ahead, three-in-five Chinese Canadians expect these instances to recur once kids are back in school:

**CONTACT:**

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
 Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 [dave.korzinski@angusreid.org](mailto:dave.korzinski@angusreid.org)  
 Dr. Kimberly Noels, Professor, University of Alberta: 780-983-1291 [knoels@ualberta.ca](mailto:knoels@ualberta.ca)

**Agree vs Disagree on a 6-point scale**  
**"Asian kids in Canada will be bullied when they return to school post-COVID-19"**  
**(All respondents, n=516)**



### Part Three: About this Study

This report summarizes data collected as part of a broader and more in-depth COVID-19 related inquiry. Other aspects of this in-depth study include a general population canvassing of preventative behaviours aimed at slowing the spread of the virus, as well as more general perspectives about the virus, its origin, and its manifestation in Canada. Data gleaned from these other surveys will be released at a future point.

As previously noted, the data summarized in this report was collected from Canadian residents who self-identify as being of Chinese ethnicity and completed the survey in English and French. Further interviews will be conducted in Mandarin, and the results accordingly reported.

In terms of nomenclature, the phrase “Chinese Canadian” has been used at times interchangeably with “Canadians of Chinese ethnicity”. The authors note there is no attempt in the use of the former phrase to “otherize” or hyphenate the individuals referenced.

#### **Six-point response scale**

On some questions about instances of discrimination, respondents were provided a six-point response scale and asked to select the number that most closely associated with the frequency or intensity of their experience and/or agreement with a given issue. For example, on a six-point scale regarding being called names or insulted, six means this happens all the time and one means it has never happened to them. Four to six on this scale were categorized as having dealt with an issue “frequently”, given that they are in the top half of the response metric. Two and three points were categorized as having dealt with the issue but not often. Individual datapoints are viewable in the detailed tables.

*For detailed results by age, gender, education, and other demographics, [click here.](#)*

#### **CONTACT:**

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 [shachi.kurl@angusreid.org](mailto:shachi.kurl@angusreid.org) @shachikurl  
 Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 [dave.korzinski@angusreid.org](mailto:dave.korzinski@angusreid.org)  
 Dr. Kimberly Noels, Professor, University of Alberta: 780-983-1291 [knoels@ualberta.ca](mailto:knoels@ualberta.ca)