

Anti-Asian Discrimination: Younger Canadians most likely to be hardest hit by experiences with racism, hate

Most say it will take generational change for anti-Asian prejudice to subside

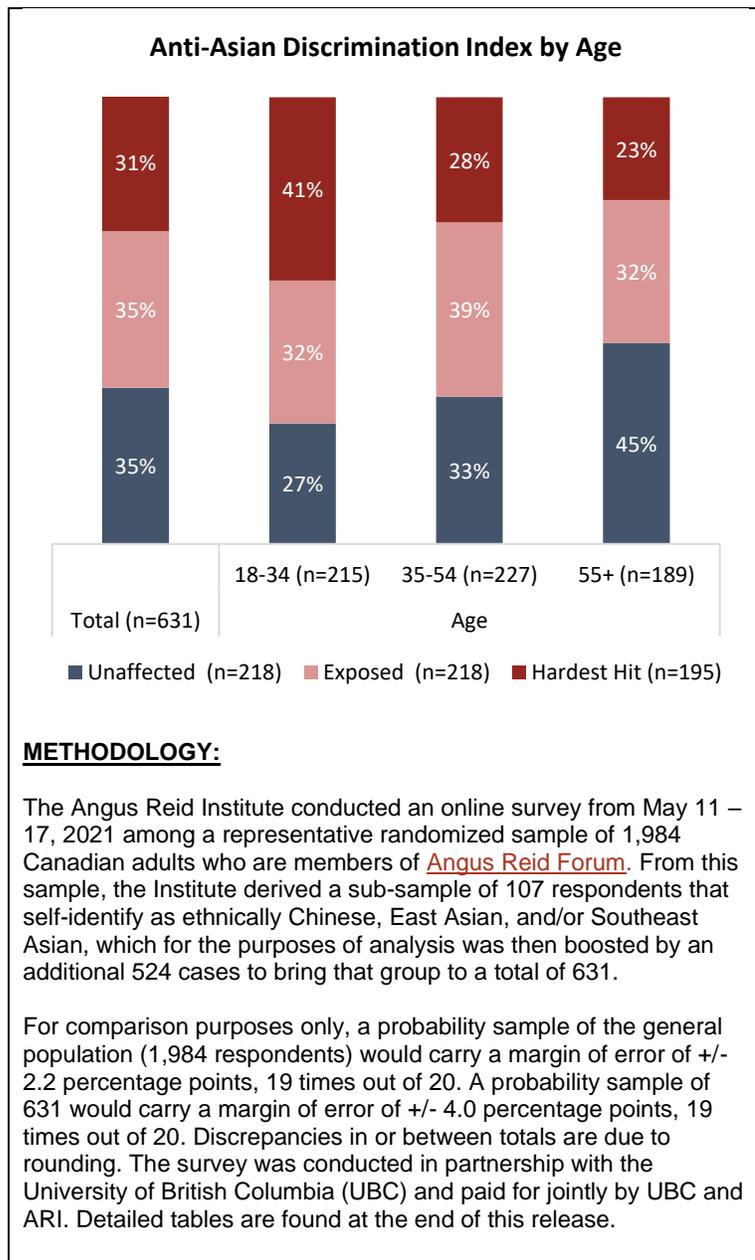
June 8, 2021 – As a nation eagerly looks to the weeks and months ahead to regain a closer semblance to their pre-pandemic lives, they are far more pessimistic about the timelines associated with eliminating one of the ugly by-products of COVID-19: [an intensification](#) of anti-Asian discrimination in Canadian communities.

A comprehensive new public opinion survey from the Angus Reid Institute, in partnership with the University of British Columbia, finds Canadians of Asian descent aged 18 to 34 most likely to have experienced and been affected by anti-Asian racism and bigotry over the last year.

This, as nearly half (47%) of Asian Canadians identify discrimination aimed at them to be a problem in their own communities.

The study – which canvassed the opinions of Canadians of non-Asian and Asian ethnicity, found that a majority (58%) of the latter group has experienced at least one of a range of situations related to anti-Asian discrimination in the last year, while more than one-in-four (28%) report exposure to these situations “all the time” or “often”.

Notably, however, not all Asian Canadians have experienced the same level and intensity of bigotry over the past year. According to ARI's Anti-Asian Discrimination Index (AADI), respondents of Asian (including Chinese) descent fall into one of three categories, the Hardest Hit (31%), the Exposed (35%) and the Unaffected (35%). Asian Canadians who are older (55+) and higher income are more likely to be among the Unaffected while the Hardest Hit are more likely to be younger (aged 18-34) and lower income.



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More Key Findings:

- Asked for their reaction to discrimination over the past year or so, 53 per cent of Asian Canadians said it has been hurtful and stays with them. Two-in-five (38%) are troubled but able to put it aside, while 9 per cent have not been impacted.
- Few Asian Canadians say the discrimination they experience is institutional. The vast majority (86%) say they have not received poor or unfair treatment by institutional organizations such as local police, the health care system, banks, or the justice system
- 79 per cent of non-Asian Canadians say that they view Asian Canadians as warm and friendly, while half (50%) say that they feel this group is often mistreated in Canada
- That said, one-in-five non-Asian Canadians say that they feel most or all Asian Canadians do not contribute to the broader community. More (one-quarter) say many or most Asian Canadians do not make an effort to fit into broader Canadian society.
- One-in-three non-Asian respondents say Chinese Canadians are more loyal to China than to Canada regarding issues of bilateral conflict between the two nations. Just seven per cent of Chinese Canadians say this is actually the case
- Nearly the identical number of Asian (20%) and non-Asian Canadians (17%) say that they would prefer if the community they live in was people from their own race or ethnicity
- Asian and non-Asian Canadians tend to agree that this issue will take another generation to solve. Three-in-five among each group say this is the case, while one-in-four Asian Canadians (26%) do not think Canada will ever overcome some of its discriminatory practices and prejudices – 10 points higher than non-Asians (16%)

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.*

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Part One: Asian-Canadian experience with discrimination during COVID-19

The stories from the past year are well-chronicled. Around the world, people of Asian, and primarily Chinese descent, have been the target of [harassment, abuse, and hate crimes](#), amidst the spread of COVID-19.

Indeed, previous work from the Angus Reid Institute and the University of Alberta [one full year ago](#) identified many of these issues by speaking to members of Canada's Asian population. This study goes further, illuminating the experiences of Asian Canadians, seeking to excavate some of the causes and prejudices among non-Asians, and assessing whether enough is being done to combat these actions.

Who was surveyed?

The Angus Reid Institute surveyed 580 Canadians who self-identify as ethnically Chinese, as well as 77 individuals who self-identify as ethnically East Asian or Southeast Asian, for a total of 631 respondents. Notably, the age and gender distribution of this sample is relatively balanced ([see detailed tables](#)).

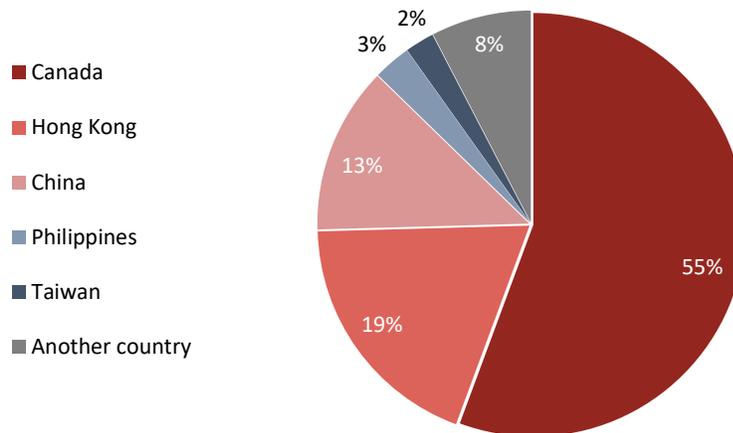
Additionally, 1,877 respondents who identified as non-Asian were interviewed. Some questions were asked only of those self-identifying as Asian, while others were asked of all respondents. This is the first release in a multi-part series, which will look further at perceptions of diversity and racism in Canada next week.

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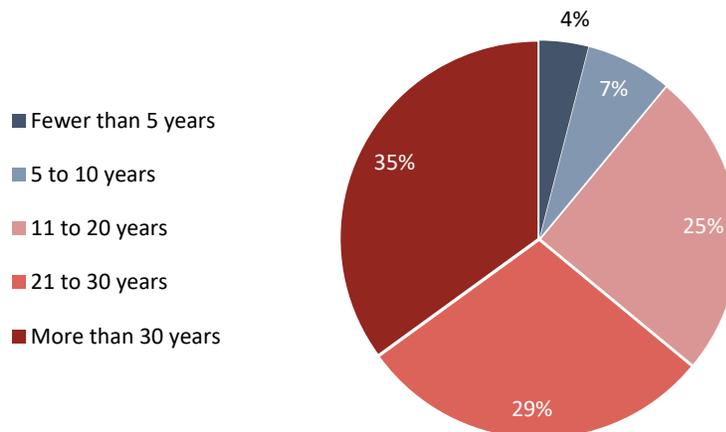
The graph below represents reported place of birth among the full sample of Asian Canadian respondents, just over half of whom were born in Canada. Note that Asian Canadian respondents come from all parts of the country but due to their concentration in particular regions, and sample limitations, regional analysis is not included:

**Place of birth
(Asian Canadians, n=631)**



One-in-ten Asian respondents (11%) say they have been in Canada for less than a decade, while most have lived in the country for more than two decades:

**How many years have you lived in Canada?
(Asian Canadians, n=631)**



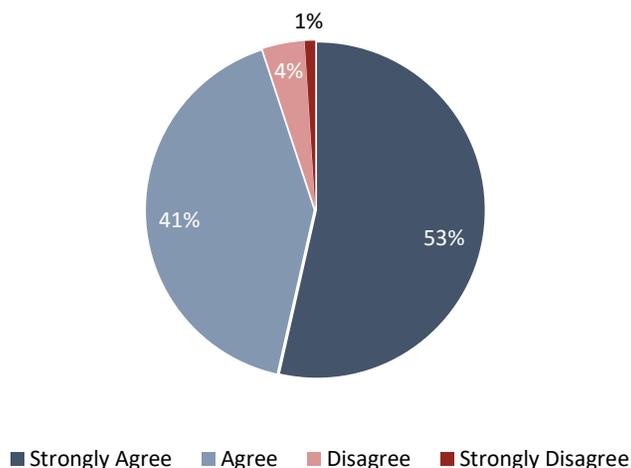
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Experiences over the past year

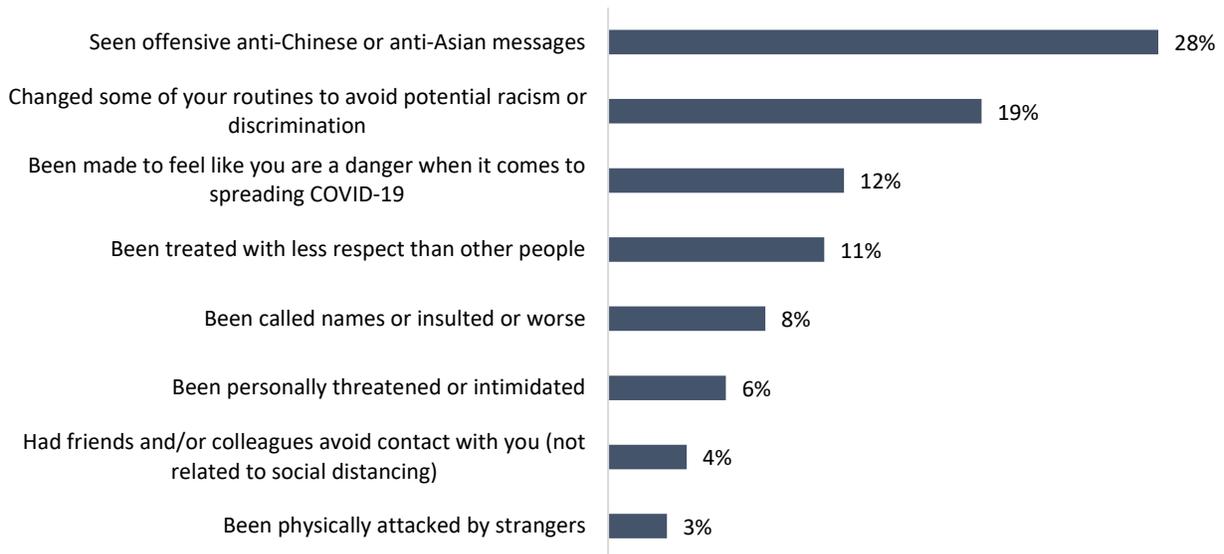
While the past year has been challenging for many, Canadians of Asian ethnicity almost entirely embrace the society in which they live. More than nine-in-ten say that Canada's diversity makes it a better country:

Agree vs. Disagree
"The fact that our population includes many people from
different racial backgrounds makes Canada a better country"
Asian Canadians (n=631)



This belief in diversity has, however, come face to face with a difficult reality for many. Asked about their personal experiences encountering anti-Asian or Anti-Chinese sentiments or actions, one-in-five say they have consistently changed their routines or behaviours to avoid situations that may be uncomfortable or dangerous. One-in-ten also say they have routinely felt disrespected:

Percentage of Asian Canadians who say they have experienced each often or always over the past year or so, because of their ethnicity (n=631)



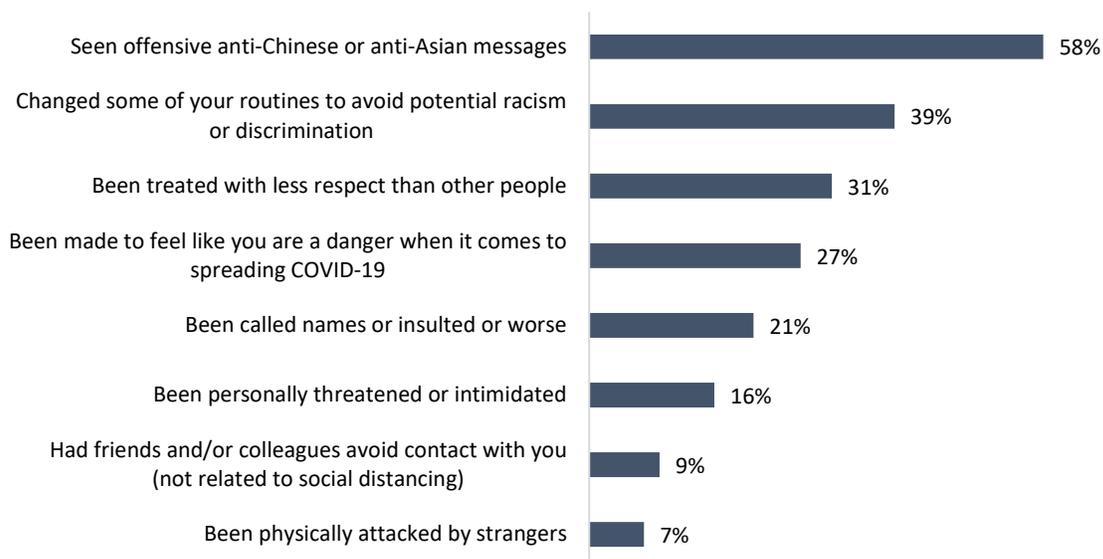
While each of these actions has not been a constant problem for everyone in Canada's Asian community, the proportion of Asian Canadians who have encountered each at least once is considerable.

*At work, I was called "Mr. Covid" several times but I chose not to say anything since I am going to leave the company in the near future and do not want to create any conflict with [my] coworkers.
- a man in his 20's*

Three-in-five (58%) have come across derogatory messages over the past year and two-in-five (39%) have made changes to avoid problematic encounters. Three-in-ten (31%) say they have been disrespected at some point since the pandemic broke.

Smaller groups say they have dealt with threats and intimidation, or have encountered violence:

Percentage of Asian Canadians who say they have experienced each at least once over the past year (n=631)



There is a generational element to many of these common experiences. Those between the ages of 18 and 34 are more likely than their elders to have been exposed to each, with the exceptions of physical attacks and avoidance of friends:

Percentage of Asian Canadians who say they have experienced each at least once over the past year or so				
	Total (n=631)	Age		
		18-34 (n=215)	35-54 (n=227)	55+ (n=189)
Seen offensive anti-Chinese or anti-Asian social media/graffiti/propaganda/jokes, etc.	58%	69%	58%	47%
Changed some of your routines because of concerns about racism or discrimination	39%	44%	39%	33%
Been treated with less respect than other people	31%	38%	33%	21%
Been made to feel like you are a danger when it comes to spreading COVID-19	27%	36%	27%	19%
Been called names or insulted or worse	21%	26%	18%	19%
Been personally threatened or intimidated	16%	17%	15%	15%
Had friends and/or colleagues avoid contact with you (not related to social distancing)	9%	8%	8%	11%
Been physically attacked by strangers	7%	7%	9%	4%

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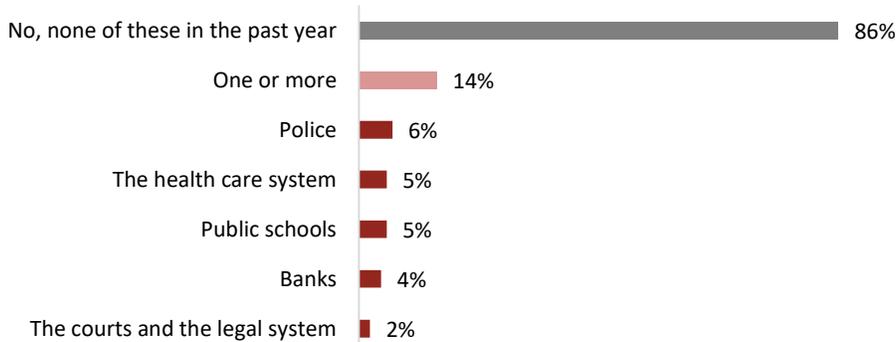
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Sources of racism and prejudice

More than a year of dialogue regarding anti-Asian discrimination has naturally included discussions about these aforementioned behaviours. That said, the vast majority (86%) of Asian-Canadians themselves do not view major institutional organizations, such as police, justice, or health care systems as wellsprings of unfair treatment. One-in-seven have, faced what they perceive as discrimination, as seen in the graph below, while 86 per cent say they have not encountered issues with these institutions:

*A white person came up to my wife and I and called us terrorists. When we reported it to the police, the officer on the phone told us it was too small an issue and [that] people have a right to say whatever they want on the street because no physical harm was done.
- a man in his 60's*

**Over the past year or so, would you say you personally have received poor or unfair treatment from any of these because of your own racial or ethnic background?
(Asian Canadians, n=631)**



Respondents were also asked about three examples of “microaggressions” - that is - situations where someone might say or do something that may be hurtful, while not thinking it so. The three specific microaggressions raised were:

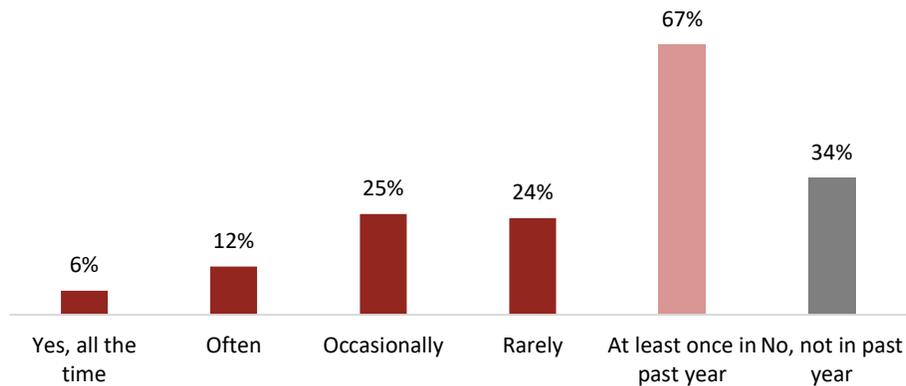
- Asking someone who is not white “Where were you born?”
- Saying “You speak good English” to someone with an accent
- Imitating/impersonating someone of a different ethnicity

Of these three examples, fully two-thirds of Asian Canadians (67%) have experienced at least one over the past year:

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Have you personally had these types of comments from strangers directed at you this past year or so? (Asian Canadians, n=631)



Part Two: Anti-Asian Discrimination Index

No community or demographic is monolithic in its views, experiences, and opinions. For this reason, the Angus Reid Institute created the Anti-Asian Discrimination Index (AADI) to better understand the true breadth, depth, and impact of such experiences among Canadians of Asian ethnicity.

There are 11 total variables included in the AADI, found in the methodology section at the end of this report. Negative experiences were scored higher and positive experiences lower, in order to situate respondents on a spectrum of experience. Some items, such as threats or violence, were more heavily weighted than others, such as verbal encounters or microaggressions.

Three levels of experience

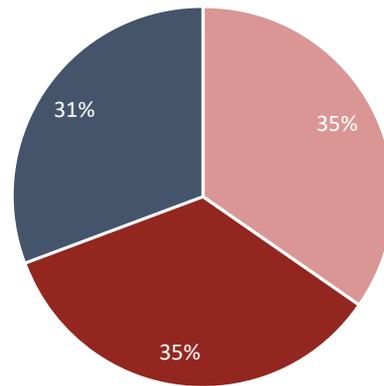
Overall, Asian Canadians fall into three categories based on their experiences. One-third (35%) comprise the Unaffected. These individuals have had few, if any, negative experiences with anti-Asian racism or discrimination over the past year.

The Exposed, the same size, (35%), have had more experiences causing discomfort or upset. As will be discussed however, these have not been regular occurrences. The Hardest Hit represent one-third of the overall sample (31%). These individuals report having consistently dealt with abuse or threats and have felt marginalized a number of times over the past year.

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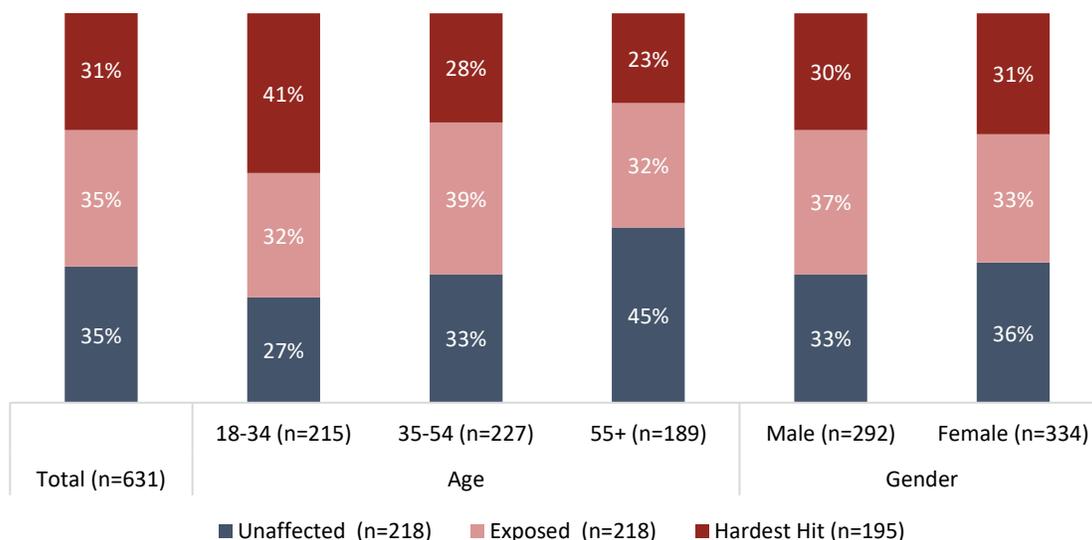
**Anti-Asian Discrimination Index
(Asian Canadians, n=631)**



■ Unaffected ■ Exposed ■ Hardest Hit

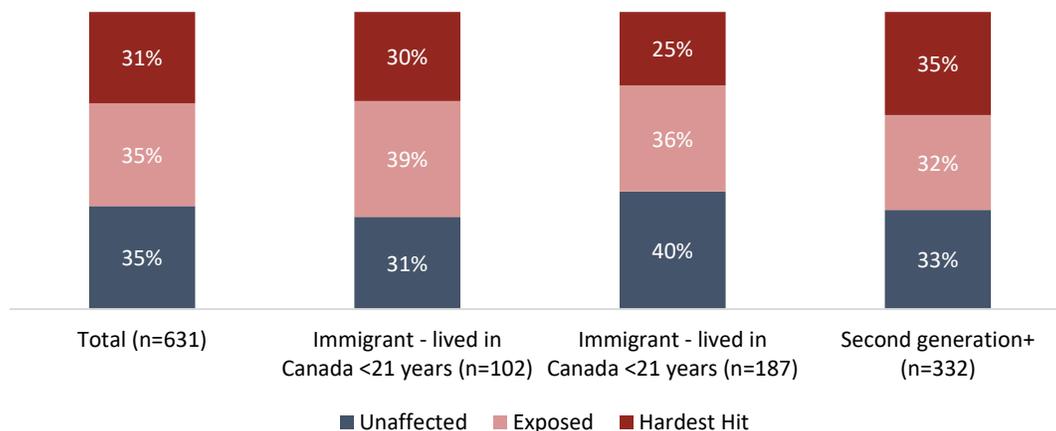
While men and women are equally likely to fit into each group along this Index, young people are noticeably more likely to have had consistent, negative experiences. Two-in-five 18-to-34-year-olds (41%) are among the Hardest hit, while older respondents are more likely to be among The Unaffected (45%).

Anti-Asian Discrimination Index by age and gender



The amount of time a person has spent in Canada does not appear to be a driver of negative experience. Those born here are closely match the makeup of each category of the AADI as those born abroad:

Anti-Asian Discrimination Index by place of birth



Differences in experience are stark

Among the Hardest Hit, negative experiences are myriad. The table below shows the percentage of Asian Canadians who have dealt with discriminatory situations “often” or “always”. Half of the Hardest Hit say they have consistently changed routines, one-in-three have worried a lot about how they are viewed as a COVID-19 spreader, while one-third among this group say they often feel disrespected.

The differences between the depth to which the Hardest Hit experience some of these behaviours, relative to The Exposed or the Unaffected, is striking:

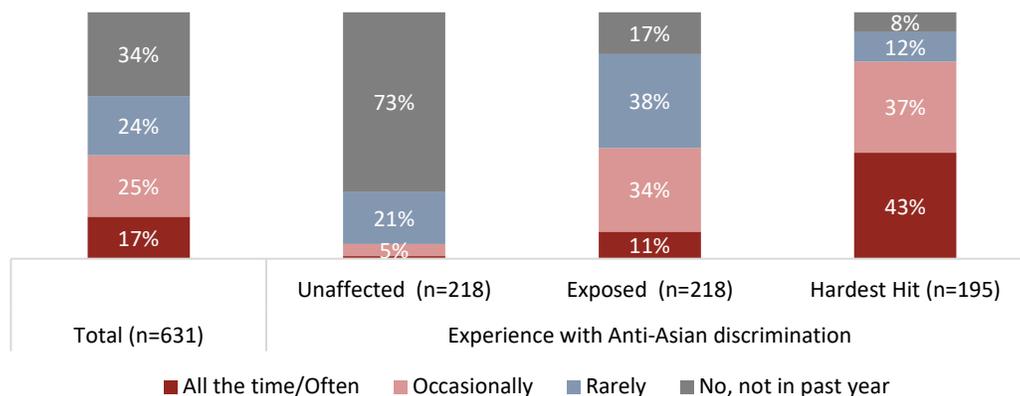
Percentage of Asian Canadians who say they have experienced each <u>often or always</u> over the past year				
	Total (n=631)	Anti-Asian Discrimination Index		
		Unaffected	Exposed	Hardest Hit
Seen offensive anti-Chinese or anti-Asian social media/graffiti/propaganda/jokes, etc.	28%	3%	26%	59%
Changed some of your routines because of concerns about racism or discrimination	19%	1%	9%	50%
Been made to feel like you are a danger when it comes to spreading COVID-19	12%	0%	4%	35%
Been treated with less respect than other people	11%	1%	1%	34%
Been called names or insulted or worse	8%	0%	0%	26%
Been personally threatened or intimidated	6%	0%	0%	19%
Had friends and/or colleagues avoid contact with you (not related to social distancing)	4%	0%	0%	13%
Been physically attacked by strangers	3%	0%	0%	10%

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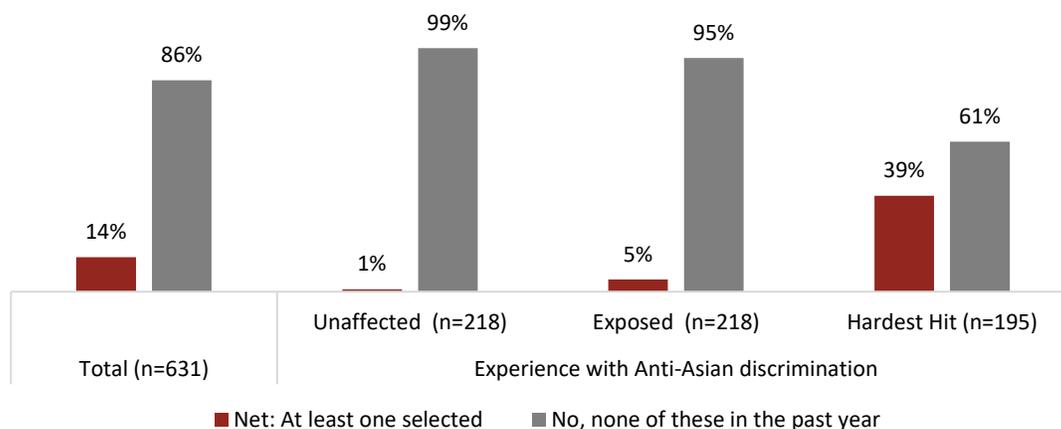
The disparate experiences within these three groups on the AADI are also pronounced when looking at the examples of casually offensive scenarios they encounter. For a refresher on the three examples [click here](#). When it comes to these types of comments, The Unaffected have rarely encountered any. About half of The Exposed have experienced some, while the Hardest Hit again report the most experience with such microaggressions:

Have you personally had these types of comments from strangers directed at you this past year or so? (Asian Canadians)



Regarding perceptions of being treated in a discriminatory way by police, banks, health care and other institutions, for the younger and lower-income individuals ([see detailed tables](#)) that comprise the Hardest Hit, these experiences are self-reported to be much more prevalent:

Over the past year or so, would you say you personally have received poor or unfair treatment from any of these because of your own racial or ethnic background? (Asian Canadians)

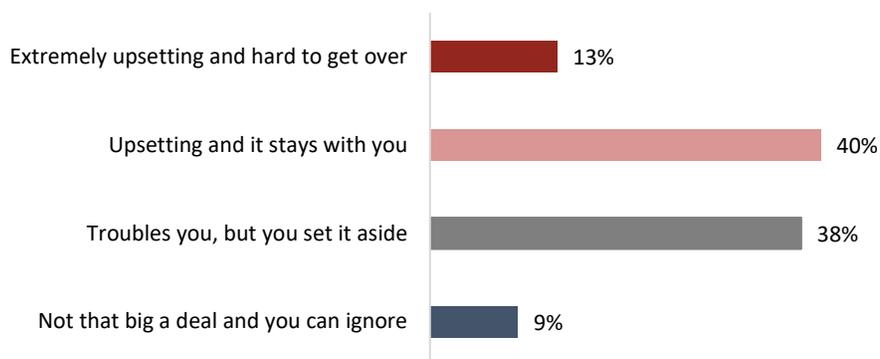


Half say treatment of the past year upsetting, stays with them

When Asian Canadians are asked about the lingering effects of racism and discrimination, just over half (53%) classify these experiences as either upsetting or extremely upsetting, with an impact that stays with them:

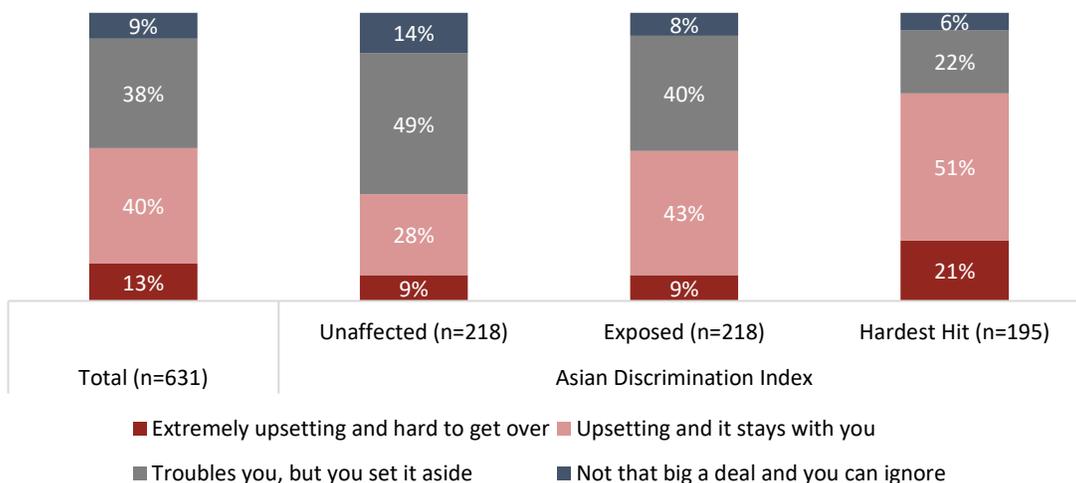
I witnessed a young Chinese woman being pushed onto the road while she was waiting for a traffic light to change. She was looking at her phone and a middle-aged Caucasian man came up from behind and pushed her.
- a woman in her 60's

Very broadly, how would you describe your own emotional reaction to the kinds of things we've been talking about? (Asian Canadians, n=631)



The Unaffected report being able to brush off negative feelings – 63 per cent feel this way, perhaps driven by vastly lower frequencies of conflict or perceived mistreatment:

Very broadly, how would you describe your own emotional reaction to the kinds of things we've been talking about? (Threats, messages, etc.) (Asian Canadians)



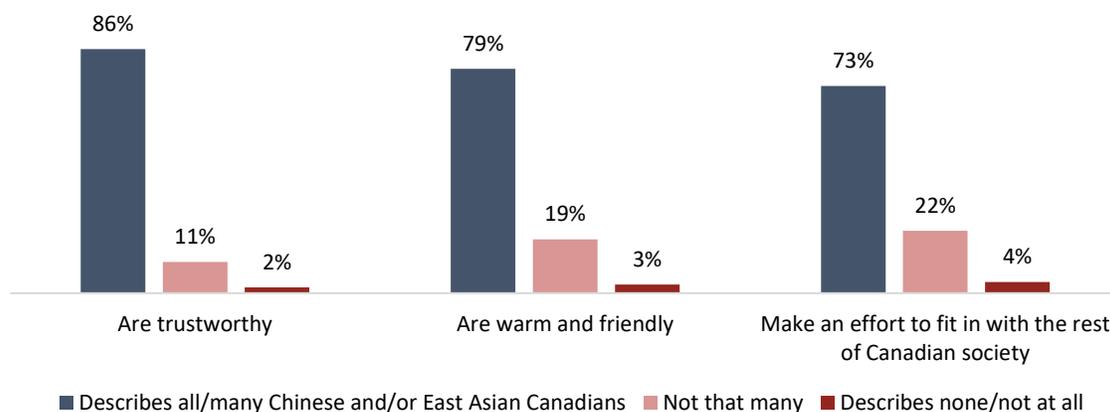
Part Three: General Attitudes about Anti-Asian Discrimination

As discussed earlier in this report, this survey also canvassed the opinions and perceptions of non-Asians on regarding the same subject. As will be exposed later, the differences – and similarities - between how these distinct sample groups perceive and understand the existence, depth and intensity of anti-Asian discrimination are striking.

Majority hold warm feelings toward Asian Canadians

For the vast majority of non-Asians, the Asian community is a warm and valued part of Canadian society. Indeed, 86 per cent say they trust Asian Canadians just as they would anyone else, and 79 per cent say their interactions are warm and friendly. That said, for one-in-five (22%), this is not the case, while one-quarter (26%) state that they do not believe that most Asian Canadians try to fit in with the rest of Canadian society. Note, the question does not ask if they ‘should’, simply whether or not they ‘do’:

**Indicate the extent to which you think it describes Chinese and/or East Asian Canadians:
(Non-Asian Candians, n=1,877)**



Mistreatment and denial of opportunity?

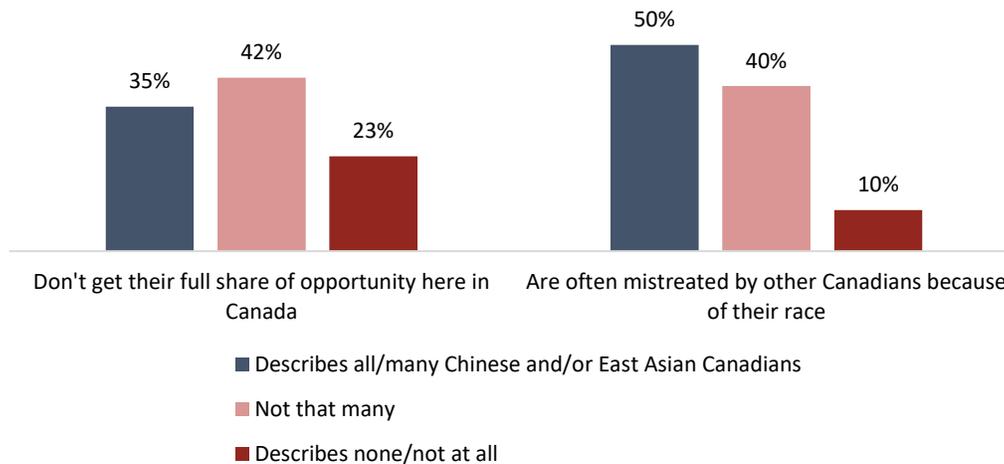
In terms of recognition of prejudice, one-third of non-Asians say the same opportunities are not available for Asian Canadians as they are for others. One-quarter (23%) disagree with that idea entirely. Further, half (50%) say that they believe the most Asian Canadians face mistreatment at the hands of other Canadians because of their race:

*I was heading back to my car and a gentleman that was muttering to himself passed me and said, "and you COVID" and coughed in my direction.
- a woman in her 40's*

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**Indicate the extent to which you think it describes Chinese and/or East Asian Canadians:
(Non-Asian Canadians, n=1,877)**



Views differ significantly along regional, age and gender lines

That all or many Canadians of Asian descent face discrimination is not a uniformly held view. Regionally, British Columbians, Ontarians and Atlantic Canadians are most likely to agree:

**Percentage of non-Asian Canadians who say that this describes all/many Asian-Canadians:
"Are often mistreated by other Canadians because of their race"
(Non-Asians)**

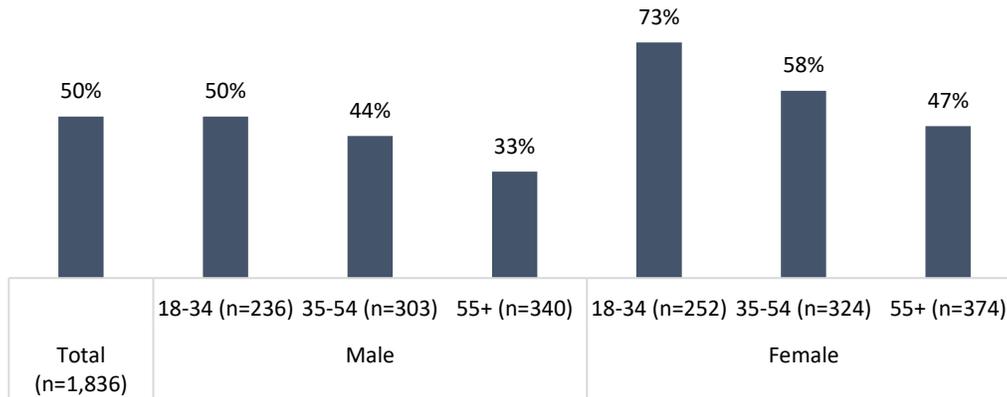


Differences among gender and generation are even more pronounced. Women, and significantly – women between the ages of 18-34 are far more likely than men to validate the mistreatment or discrimination against Asian Canadians:

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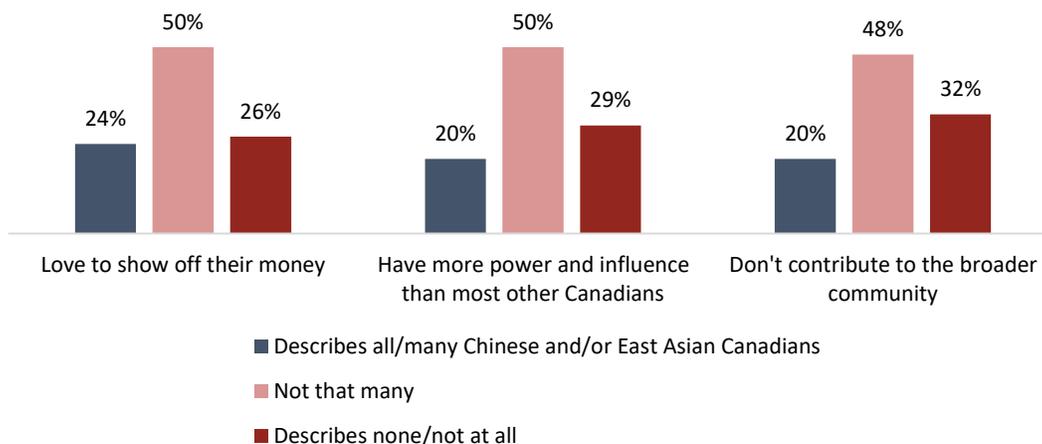
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**Percentage of non-Asian Canadians who say that this describes all/many Asian-Canadians:
"Are often mistreated by other Canadians because of their race"
(Non-Asians)**



More troubling viewpoints are revealed among a significant segment of non-Asians. One-in-five (20%) say Asian Canadians do not contribute to the broader community, a sentiment fairly consistent across age and gender demographics ([see detailed tables](#)):

**Indicate the extent to which you think it describes Chinese and/or East Asian Canadians:
(Non-Asians, n=1,877)**

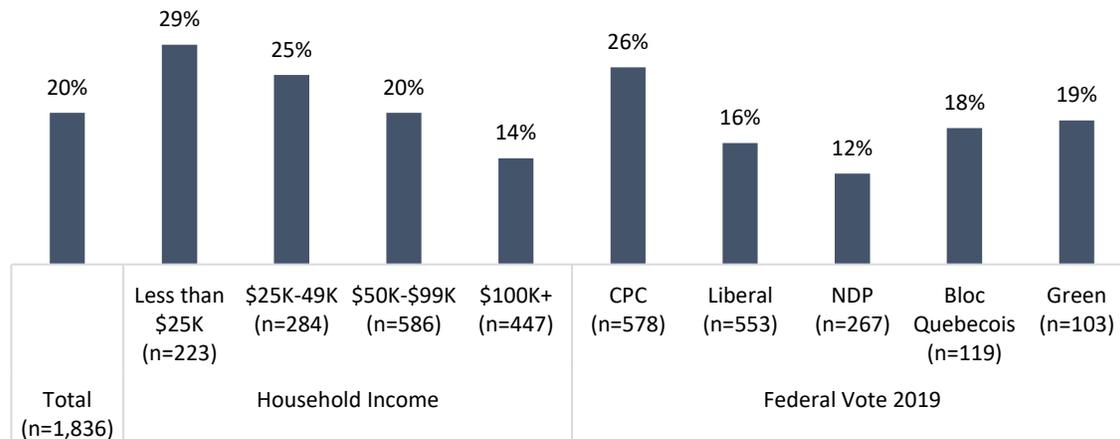


There are two more demographic elements that yield a stronger correlation with negative opinions of Asian Canadians – income level and political affiliation. The lower the level of household income, the harsher the criticism of Asian Canadians. Further, past Conservative voters, who [tend to favour](#) lower levels of immigration, are also more likely to negate the societal contributions of Asian Canadians.

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**Percentage of non-Asian Canadians who say that this describes all/many Asian-Canadians:
"Don't contribute to the broader community"
(Non-Asians)**



On China: No divided loyalty

It is a question that has “otherized” immigrant groups for centuries: are people born in a foreign land more aligned with the domestic policy of the country in which they live – or the one to which they may also claim cultural and family ties? Perhaps the most infamous examples of this arose during the Second World War when Japanese Canadians were interned under suspicions about their allegiance to Canada.

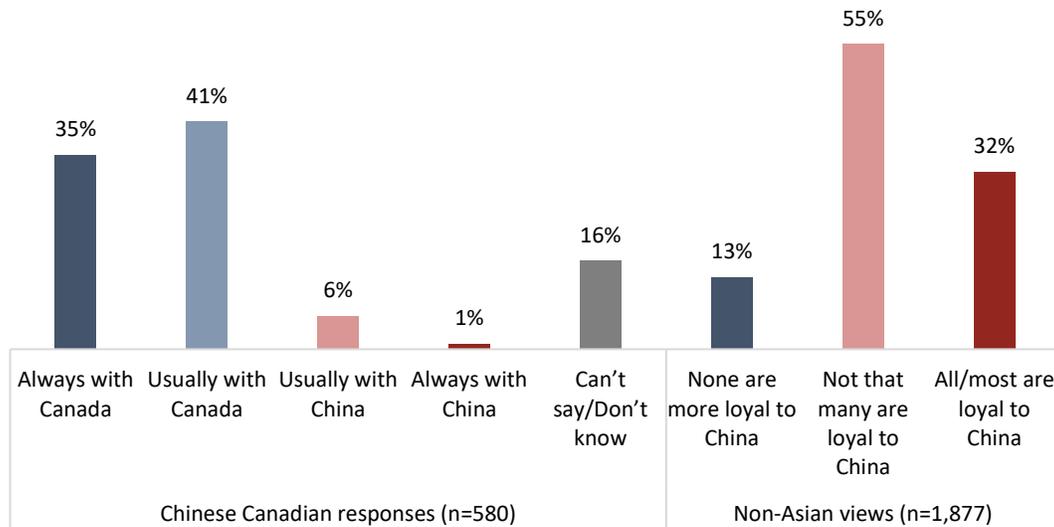
But while non-Asians in Canada are overwhelmingly more likely to perceive people in Canada of Chinese descent to be more loyal to an authoritarian, repressive regime in Beijing, Canadians of Chinese descent are in fact vastly more likely to say they side with Canada on Sino-Canadian flashpoints. The Angus Reid Institute will be reporting much more on the cleavage between perception, reality, and the impact on anti-Asian discrimination in near future.

One-in-three (32%) non-Asian respondents canvassed in this survey felt Chinese Canadians are more likely to be “loyal to” China than Canada on bilateral tension points between nations, more than four times the number of Chinese Canadians (just seven per cent) say they are more inclined to side with China than Canada:

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In disagreements between Canada/China, who do Chinese Canadians generally side with?



This misconception among non-Asians that Chinese Canadians may be more loyal to China than to Canada has no real demographic pattern. At least 26 per cent of all age and gender combinations feel this way, though there is a slight increase among the 35 to 54 age group compared to others. Past Conservatives are most likely from an ideological perspective to hold these views ([see comprehensive tables](#)).

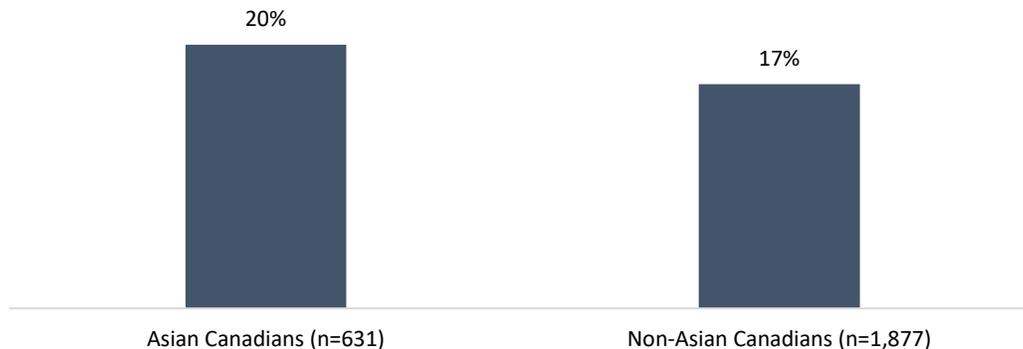
For Asians and non-Asians, uncomfortable home truths

Another finding unites one-in-five Canadians, Asian and non-Asian alike: is the sentiment that they would prefer to have neighbours who are from their own race or ethnicity. For a significant segment of the population, familiarity breeds comfort and preference. Note that this particular question will be looked at more in depth in part two of this study next week

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Percentage of Canadians who agree with the statement: "If I had my choice, I'd rather have next door neighbours who are my own colour"



Part Four: Comparing views on future of race relations, discrimination

All respondents in this study were asked about the scale of anti-Asian discrimination in Canadian society. There are widely differing views among both populations and further, based on the width of the lens used to assess the situation.

Perception at the national, provincial and community level

Among Asian and non-Asian respondents, anti-Asian discrimination is perceived as worse the further it is from home. All are much more likely to say that anti-Asian discrimination is a problem in their own province and in Canada.

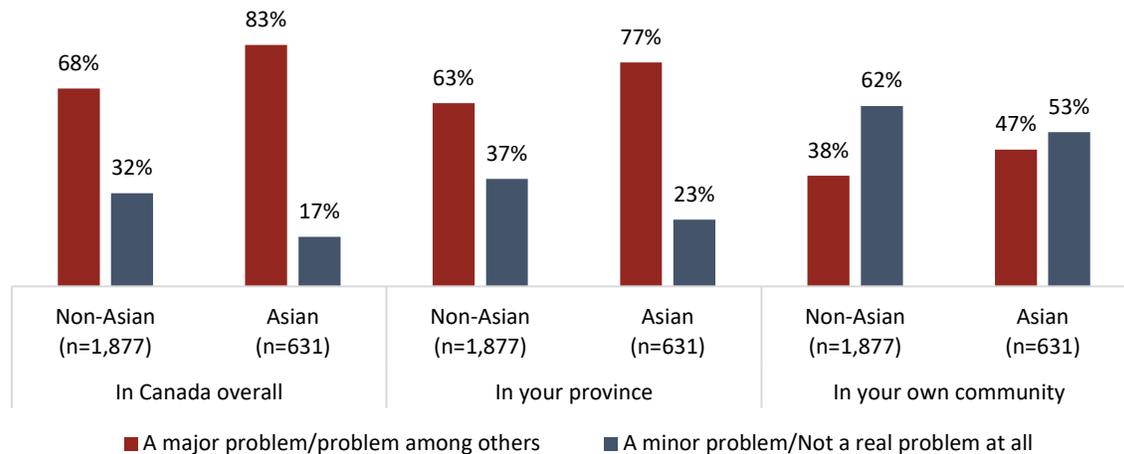
I was walking by someone holding groceries and as we passed each other they spat in my face and kept on going. There was never any eye contact.
- a woman in her 40's

Perhaps most importantly however, half (47%) of Asian-Canadians say it is a problem within their own community, while slightly fewer non-Asian respondents say the same (38%).

CONTACT:

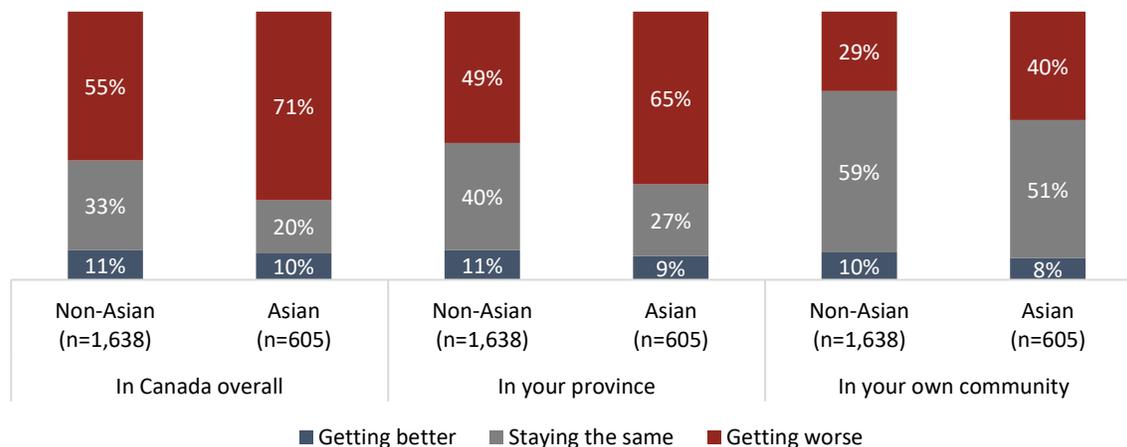
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**Overall, how much of a problem do you consider this issue of anti-Asian racism and discrimination to be today?
(All respondents)**



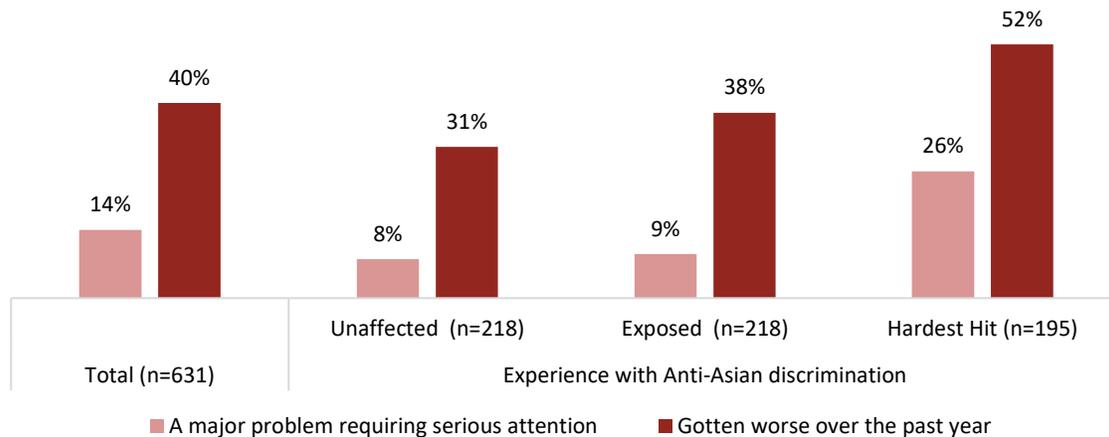
Among those who do see the issue as serious, there is a sense that it has been worsening over the past year. Stories of anti-Asian discrimination have been widely reported in national media and likely contribute to that perception – which again, far outweighs the idea that problem are worsening in local communities. That said, there are very few Canadians, from either group, at any level, that say that progress is being made to improve treatment of Asians.

**And, over the past year or so, do you think anti-Asian discrimination and racism has been getting better or worse?
(Among those that say it is a problem n=2243)**



Those most likely to say they have experienced anti-Asian discrimination are much more likely to say that this is a “major problem”. Indeed, the Hardest Hit are three times as likely as others to say so. Further, half of this group on the AADI say that the problem has been exacerbated over the past year or so during the COVID-19 pandemic:

Percentage that perceive anti-Asian discrimination and racism in their community as a "major problem" vs. getting worse (Asian Canadians)

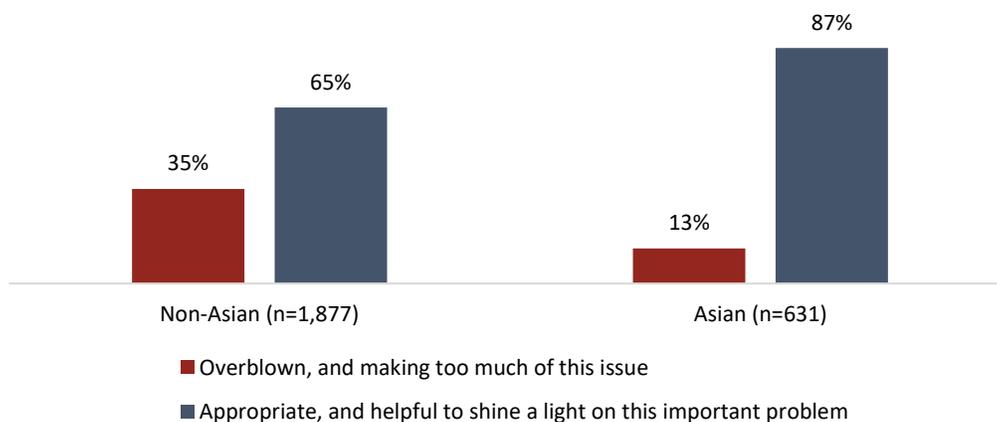


Media coverage has 'helped', shone a light on issue

High-profile stories of Asian discrimination in Canada began to emerge early in the pandemic. Indeed, the Angus Reid Institute published the first Canadian study of its kind on this topic in [June of last year](#), finding many of the worst behaviours and effects were already being reported by Asian Canadians.

For their part, Asian Canadians find overwhelming value in stories highlighting the phenomenon. Nearly nine-in-ten (87%) say such coverage has been appropriate and shed light on the issue. Non-Asians, however, are three times as likely to say that the stories are overblown, and that anti-Asian discrimination is a topic of too much media focus:

How would you describe the news media's coverage of this issue of anti-Asian discrimination and racism in Canada? (All respondents)

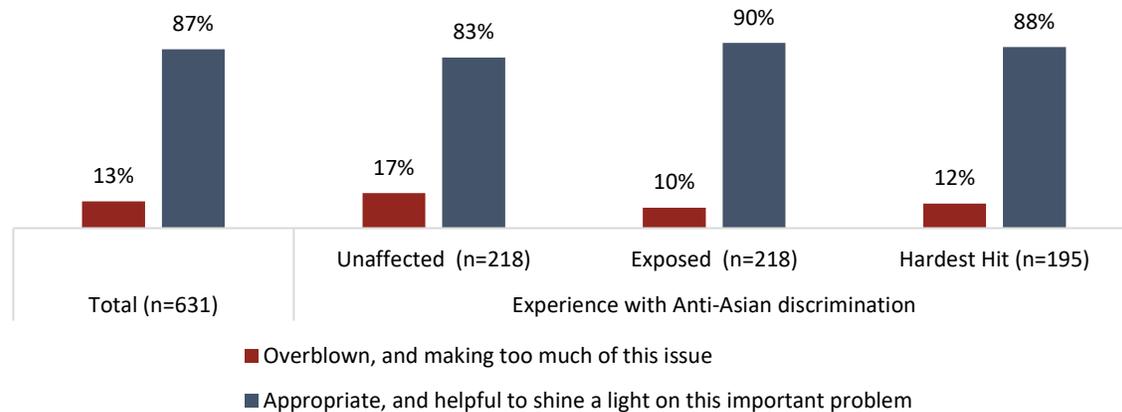


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Importantly, even those who are less likely to have dealt with abuse first-hand are supportive of sharing the stories of those who have. At least 83 per cent of all Asian Canadians across the AADI agree that this type of media coverage is helpful:

**How would you describe the news media’s coverage of this issue of anti-Asian discrimination and racism in Canada?
(Asian Canadians)**

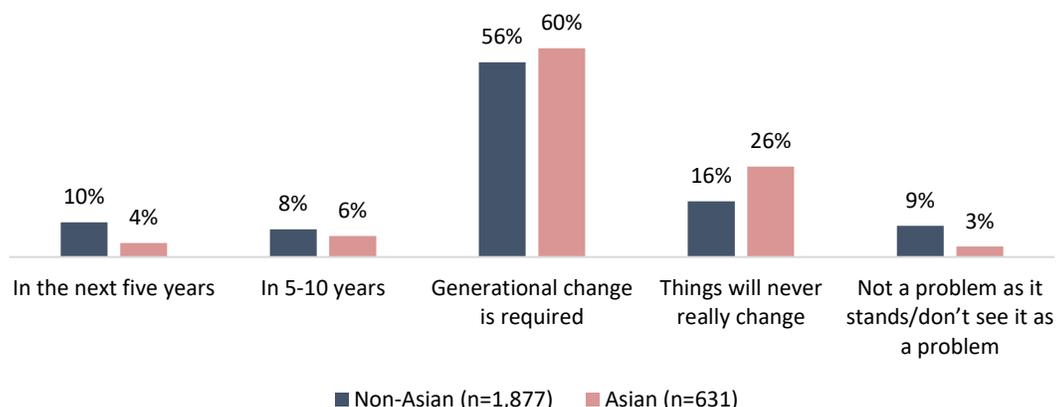


Most say this is a generational issue, won’t be solved soon

While attention has been paid to perhaps a larger extent than by previous generations to this issue, there is little expectation that this problem will be solved soon. All respondents were asked what they foresee for the future, and a near identical three-in-five from each say that generational change is required if Canada is to overcome some of the prejudices and practices of its population.

Notably, Asian Canadians are more likely to say that it will never change – one-quarter (26%) feel this way – while non-Asians are three times as likely to say that they don’t see a problem to begin with, as seen in the graph below:

**When, if ever, do you think anti-Asian discrimination will end?
(All respondents)**



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Notably, regardless of where they are situated in the anti-Asian Discrimination Index, each group is equally likely – approximately 60 per cent – to say that this is a generational problem. See detailed tables at the end of this report for more information.

This is the first in a series of reports that focus on diversity and discrimination in Canada. Next week we will look at Canadian's views of racism and multiculturalism.

Notes on Methodology

Sample augment

In order to enhance our view of anti-Asian discrimination in Canada, the Angus Reid Institute augmented the portion of those that self-identify as ethnically Chinese, East Asian, and/or Southeast Asian up to the total of 631. Due to the nuance of ethnic identity, some Canadians who identify as mixed race were asked to confirm whether or not others perceived them as Asian. If they said yes, they were included in the sample of Asian Canadians.

The general population sample size for the study is 1,984 and yielded a sub-sample of 107 respondents (5%) reporting they belong to this sub-sample. To provide a more robust sub-sample for analytical purposes, the overall group was “boosted” with an oversampling of 506 additional respondents.

Those in this “booster” sample had been previously profiled on the Angus Reid Forum and re-qualified on the initial screening questions used in this special survey. The sample augment was statistically weighted to reflect the demographic makeup of the original general population group it represents.

Asian experience index

11 variables on experience with anti-Asian discrimination in past year, including:

- Negative reactions towards you related to recent political events concerning China
- Microaggressions such as being asked “where were you born?” or told they “speak good English”
- Being treated with less respect than other people
- Being made to feel like you are a danger when it comes to spreading COVID-19
- Being called names or insulted or worse
- Being personally threatened or intimidated
- Witnessing offensive anti-Chinese or anti-Asian social media/graffiti/propaganda/jokes, etc.
- Being physically attacked by strangers
- Having friends and/or colleagues avoid contact (not related to social distancing)
- Changing daily activities because of concerns about racism or discrimination
- Experiencing poor or unfair treatment from public organizations such as police departments and health care because of their racial or ethnic background

Survey Methodology

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from May 11 – 17, 2021 among a representative randomized sample of 1,984 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). From this sample, the Institute derived a sub-sample of 107 respondents that self-identify as ethnically Chinese, East Asian, and/or Southeast Asian, which for the purposes of analysis was then boosted by an additional 524 cases to bring that group to a total of 631.

For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of the general population (1,984 respondents) would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. A probability sample of those with

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ongoing pain (631) would carry a margin of error of +/- 4.0 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was conducted in partnership with the University of British Columbia (UBC) and paid for jointly by UBC and ARI.

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

[For detailed results by anti-Asian Discrimination Index, click here.](#)

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