



# EXPLAINER

PROGRESSIVE  
CAUCUS  
ACTION FUND

## COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act Would Track Attacks on Asian Americans

*Last updated 5/13/2021*

The brutal killing of Soon Chung Park, Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha Kim, Yong Ae Yue, Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng on March 16 in Atlanta suburbs was a chilling reminder of the spike in anti-Asian hate crimes and violence since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the US. Sen. Mazie Hirono and Rep. Grace Meng recently reintroduced legislation to address the increased attacks experienced by Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### The COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act

The COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act ([S. 937](#) and [H.R. 1843](#)) instructs the Department of Justice to designate an officer to speed up the review of COVID-19 hate crimes at the federal, state and local level. The legislation would also issue guidance for the establishment of and standards for online reporting of hate crimes at the state and local level, including ensuring that reporting is possible in multiple languages.

The Senate amended S. 937 last month to include the Jabara-Heyer NO HATE Act. This legislation was introduced by Sen. Blumenthal in the Senate and Rep. Beyer in the House. This legislation would improve reporting of hate crimes, encourage law enforcement prevention, training, and education hate crimes, establish hate crimes hotlines, and will allow for judges to require those convicted of violating federal hate crimes laws to undergo rehabilitation through education and community service.

### Rising Hate But Poor Reporting

The need for such legislation couldn't be clearer. Currently, hate crimes and racially motivated violence are reported separately to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Program (UCR) by state and local agencies but there is little uniformity and few nation-wide standards for the collection of the data. While the current system of reporting makes it difficult to know the full extent of anti-Asian hate crimes and violence in the nation since the onset of the pandemic (it is worth noting that the most recent federal data available only goes back to 2019), there is no doubt that such acts are on the rise. In fact, data from private groups that track acts of violence motivated by hate and racism demonstrate the frightening degree to which these acts are on the rise.

From March 2020 to February 2021, the group Stop AAPI Hate received [3,795 reports of attacks on Asian Americans](#). Of these attacks, 42% of the victims were Chinese. In March 2020, following a tweet from Rep. Paul Gosar about the “Wuhan Flu” and an interview in which then Secretary of State Mike Pompeo referred to COVID-19 as the “Chinese Virus,” researchers found an [800% increase in similar rhetoric](#) in the media.

There is a throughline from rhetoric like this to changing public opinions. This change in sentiment is apparent in a Pew poll that found that four in ten US adults say [it is more common for people to express racist views towards Asians](#) since the pandemic started. An Ipsos poll earlier that year found that [three in ten US adults blamed China or the Chinese for the COVID-19 virus](#).

The scapegoating of Asian Americans has been tragically borne out through an increase in violence and harassment. Asian American hate crimes were up by 145% in 16 major US cities compared to a decrease of 6% in total hate crimes. In 2021, the group AAPI Data found that [10 % of both Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders experienced hate crimes or incidents in 2021](#), the highest of any racial group surveyed.

## Recent Action

President Biden has not been silent on the issue of anti-Asian hate crimes and violence during his first 100 days, releasing a [memorandum](#) on the issue in January and a [factsheet](#) promising additional measures in March of 2021. S. 937 complements these directives and would allow the DOJ to better track instances of violence against members of the Asian American community. This included the establishment by the Department of Justice of an agency-wide initiative to respond to anti-Asian violence, including reconvening the Hate Crimes Enforcement and Prevention Initiative and improving reporting of anti-Asian hate crimes.

Last month, the Senate passed the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act in a 94-1 vote. The House is expected to take up and pass this legislation the week of May 17.