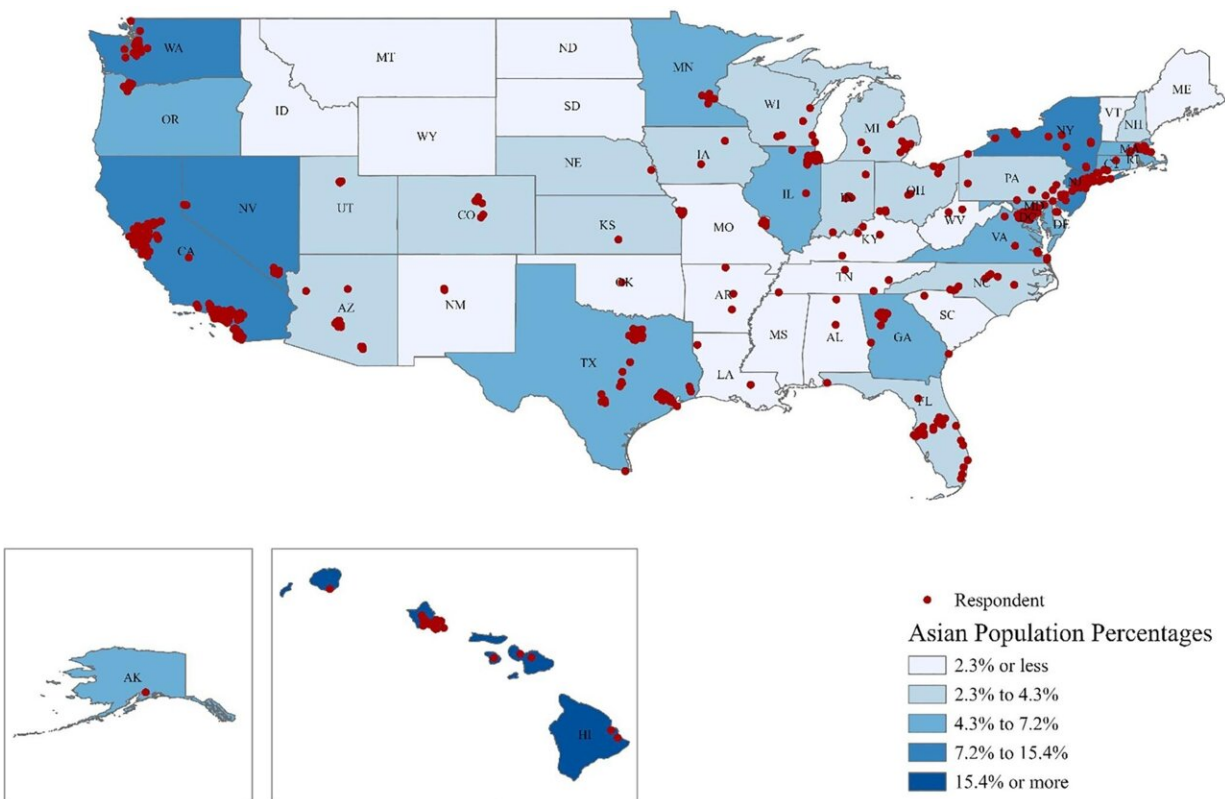


Asian Americans armed themselves during the pandemic in response to racial acts, study finds

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Geographic locations of study participants and Asian population by state. Credit: *Preventive Medicine Reports* (2022). DOI: 10.1016/j.pmedr.2022.101800

Asian Americans who experienced increased acts of racism at the start

of the COVID-19 pandemic were more likely to acquire firearms and ammunition for self-defense, according to a study by researchers at the University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University.

"Our data suggests that racism and its link to increased [firearm](#) ownership and carrying may put Asian Americans at elevated risk of firearm injury," said Hsing-Fang Hsieh, assistant research scientist in [health behavior](#) and [health education](#) at the U-M School of Public Health.

Lead author Tsu-Yin Wu, professor of nursing and director of EMU's Center for Health Disparities Innovation and Studies, said the findings "also suggest an urgent need to investigate further the compounded effects of racism, the COVID-19 pandemic and firearm-related behaviors in this population."

The researchers collected data in December 2020 and January 2021 from a representative national sample of 916 adults who identified as Asian American. They looked at demographics, firearm-related risks (i.e., firearm storage and carrying), and firearm and ammunition purchases, as well as measures of racism/discrimination experiences since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hsieh and Wu said they noticed the increased hate crimes and racism acts against Asian Americans, and an increase of firearm purchases in this community at the beginning of the pandemic.

"That was concerning to us and that's how we started this study looking into whether the racism and discrimination experience by Asian Americans were linked to their increased firearm purchase," said Hsieh, the evaluation director for the National Center for School Safety and Michigan Prevention Research Center, who also is part of Public Health IDEAS for Preventing Firearm Injuries.

"We also wanted to learn how the firearms were stored and whether they were carried more frequently, as these are two indicators of increased injury risk. It could be interpersonal violence that could happen. It could be accidental, like the unsafe storage that leads to firearm injury. So that's what we are concerned about and why we did this study," said Hsieh.

The researchers found that Asian Americans who experienced more [racial discrimination](#) were more likely to purchase a gun and more ammunition during the pandemic, after controlling for family firearm ownership and demographics.

Asian Americans who also perceived more cultural racism—depicted negatively on [social media](#) and by [news media](#) and [political leaders](#)—were more likely to purchase a gun, and individuals who reported higher anticipatory racism-related stress declared greater intent to buy firearms.

Other key findings include the following:

- More than half (55%) of individuals who purchased a gun since the start of the pandemic were first-time gun owners.
- More than one-third of gun owners reported having carried a gun more frequently when they were outside their home since the pandemic.
- About 43% reported that guns on their property were stored loaded.
- Roughly 47% said at least one firearm was stored unlocked.
- Racial discrimination and cultural racism are associated with gun purchase while anticipatory racism-related stress is associated with intent to purchase a gun.

The researchers said they hope their work will help develop [public health](#)

[policies](#) focusing on education and prevention of firearm injuries.

"For me, as a public health researcher and nurse by training, the focus is 'How do we protect people?' Not only those people who buy the firearms and their families, but also people around them in their neighborhoods and in the larger society," Wu said.

"I'd rather devote effort in prevention. I really want us to refocus on what we can do as a health discipline in the community to educate people. There's things happening right now and how do you watch for signs of mental distress related to racism? If you notice someone around you doing unsafe behavior related to firearms, how can you be an advocate and how do you take precautions for yourself, your family and your community?"

Hsieh said one of the next steps is to look further into the influences from structural racism on such a link.

"For example, how would hate crimes, racial/ethnicity segregation and disparity in health service access come in to influence the health and firearm injury risk of Asian Americans faced with discrimination?" she said. "Also, what kind of positive factors may mitigate the harm of [racism](#) and prevent firearm-related injury? These are the things we would love to learn from our communities to inform preventive efforts."

The study is published in *Preventive Medicine Reports*.

More information: Tsu-Yin Wu et al, Examining racism and firearm-related risks among Asian Americans in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Preventive Medicine Reports* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.pmedr.2022.101800](#)

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