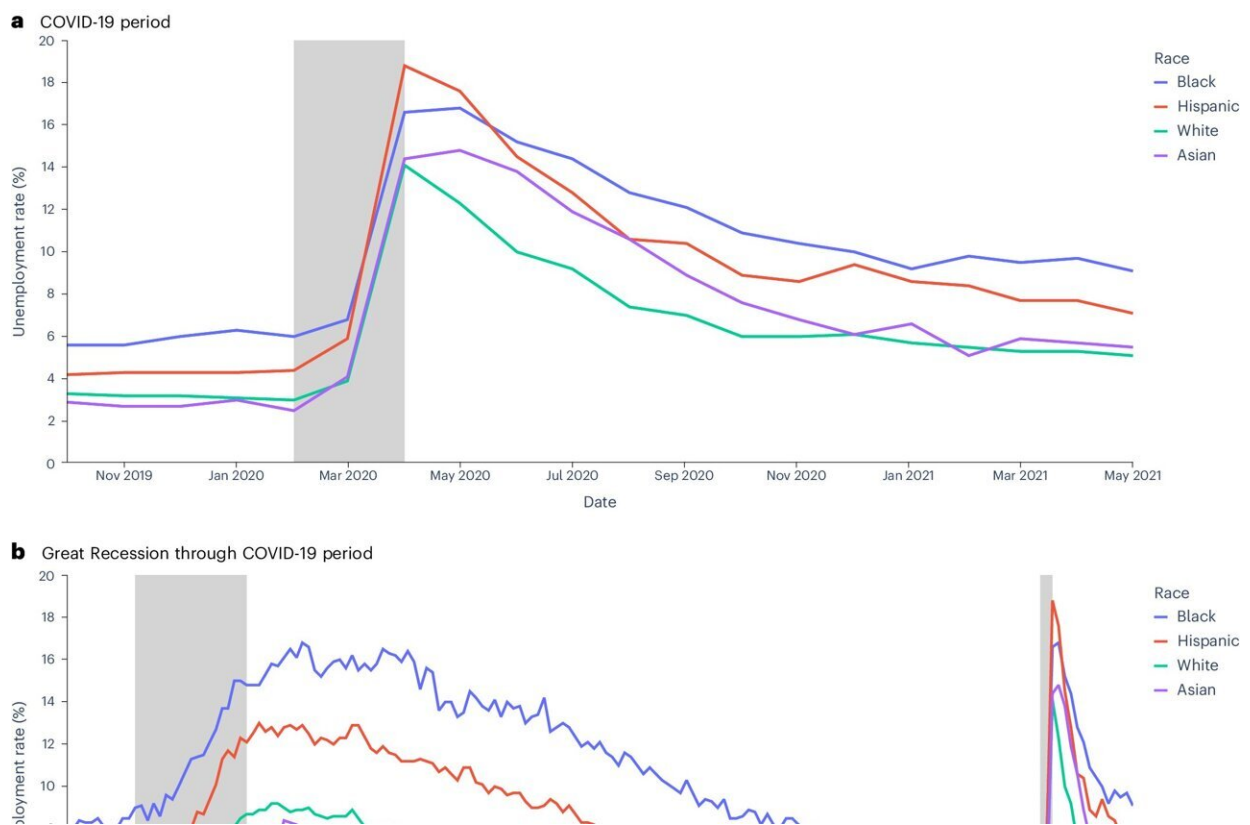


# Anti-Asian rhetoric during the pandemic negatively impacted employment and earnings, new research finds

June 18 2024, by Alena Kuzub



US unemployment rate over time by race/ethnicity. Credit: *Nature Human Behaviour* (2024). DOI: 10.1038/s41562-024-01904-w

A first-of-its-kind study, led by a Northeastern University researcher,

examined how racial bias and political rhetoric against Asians and other underrepresented groups in the United States impacted their employment status in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study, "[Public opinion, racial bias and labour market outcomes in the U.S.](#)," published June 17 in *Nature Human Behaviour*, found that from April 2020 to May 2021 the unemployment rate of Asians surpassed that of whites in the U.S. for the first time in modern history.

The study, co-authored by Silvia Prina, associate professor of economics at Northeastern, found that all underrepresented groups—but most notably Asians—performed poorly in the post-pandemic job market compared to white employees.

The study found that Asians were more likely to be unemployed—by a statistically significant 7%—in jobs that required face-to-face interaction.

The study also found that, if still employed, Asians saw a drop in their weekly earnings by an average of 8%.

Consistent with a role for [public opinion](#) affecting labor market outcomes, the research finds that the effects are larger in magnitude in strongly Republican states, where anti-Asian rhetoric might have had more influence.

In addition, while widespread along the [political spectrum](#), negative shifts in views of Asians were much stronger among those who voted for President Donald Trump in 2016 and those who report watching Fox News.

Overall, the study suggests that anti-Chinese [political rhetoric](#) by politicians and the media is likely to have played a role.

"We knew that there was discrimination against this group of people because we saw news reports of people being attacked," Prina says. "We didn't know that there were implications that went beyond the acts of verbal or physical violence."

Using nationally representative data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), the primary source of official U.S. labor market statistics, the researchers found that Asians who worked in occupations with a higher likelihood of face-to-face interactions were more likely to become unemployed with the onset of the pandemic.

At the same time, Anti-Asian hate crimes in large U.S. cities increased by more than 180% in the [first quarter](#) of 2021 compared to the same period in 2020, according to the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism.

In fact, one in five Asians in the U.S., or about 4.8 million people, experienced a hate incident in the first year of the pandemic, according to a report from Stop AAPI Hate, a coalition dedicated to ending discrimination against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

"The anti-Chinese rhetoric by Donald Trump and the right-wing media is likely to have played an important role in people's perception of Asian people and their willingness to interact with them as workers," according to the research.

Trump used the wording "Chinese virus" for the first time on Twitter on March 16, 2020, and repeated the term more than 20 times before March 30, as the database website Factbase reports.

The data used in the study shows that Asian workers were the highest educated racial group by a wide margin, with nearly 70% of them holding at least a bachelor's degree.

They also had the highest average weekly earnings of \$1,361, the study shows, which was 19% higher than whites, and by far exceeded the earnings of Black and Hispanic workers.

After the start of the pandemic, the CPS data showed each underrepresented race was approximately 3% more likely to be unemployed than white Americans.

After the start of the pandemic, Asians doing in-person work were 7% more likely to be unemployed, the study found.

Those who kept their jobs experienced an 8% drop in earnings, or a \$75.50 decrease in weekly pay compared to the decrease experienced by white workers.

"You were more likely to become unemployed and you were more likely to suffer a pay cut if you were an Asian worker working in a face-to-face occupation," Prina says.

The definition of Asians in the study included ethnicities such as Indians, Pakistanis, Iranians, Nepalis and others, Prina says, so the results should be interpreted as an underestimate.

While many of the job losses were temporary, unemployment has long-lasting effects on the people who are unemployed and their families, Prina says.

The study raises caution, Prina says, about the consequences of divisive racial rhetoric.

"It's a cautionary tale in terms of saying, 'Look, when we point the finger at a specific underrepresented group, there could be huge dangers [for them],'" she says.

**More information:** Kaveh Majlesi et al, Public opinion, racial bias and labour market outcomes in the USA, *Nature Human Behaviour* (2024). [DOI: 10.1038/s41562-024-01904-w](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-024-01904-w)

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