

Spring 2021 U.S. Immigration Alert!

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2021 Can This Could Be An New Era For The Immigrant Rights at this COVID And New President? Yet Many Americans Are Strikingly Tolerant Of Massive COVID-19 Casualties, Why?

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2/4: Many Americans are strikingly tolerant of massive COVID-19 casualties

Maitreya Bhakal - CGTN

** Maitreya Bhakal is an Indian commentator who writes about China, India, U.S. and global issues. The article reflects the author's opinions, and not necessarily the views of CGTN.*

Apparently, Americans love challenging authority. They don't like being told what to do. Ever since the nation was founded on the genocide of native Americans and the theft of their lands, toxic notions of "freedom" and the need to project strength remain core elements of U.S. culture. As many Americans would put it, if we do anything we don't like – even if it's good for us – "the terrorists win."

If we wear masks, the virus wins

Unfortunately, this concept of rejecting authority extends to authoritative expert advice too. Many Americans – with their bodies infested with drugs and minds with propaganda – are proud of the freedom to believe whatever they want. Just

witness the ubiquitous popularity of conspiracy theories in the country – from Iraq's weapons of mass destruction to QAnon to Russian hacking.

This contradiction lies at the heart of U.S. culture. Call it the Schrodinger's American: someone who is both challenging of authority and believes whatever they are told as long as it fits into their pre-conceived notions.

The U.S. government is both the instigator and the beneficiary of this mass delusion. Most of these crank conspiracy theories are pumped into the public by the government itself – much like the drugs it pumps into them. This helps keep them in check and distracts them from domestic problems.

A pandemic of "freedom"

Into this explosive minefield stepped the deadliest pandemic in 100 years. As soon as America heard of this new virus, its Pavlovian response was to dismiss it. "Don't worry about the coronavirus. Worry about the flu," proclaimed BuzzFeed News. Hip millennial outlets such as Vox advised Americans to "pass on" wearing masks.

Astonishingly, so did U.S. officials and experts. The idea of a mass epidemic was dismissed as dystopian fiction – even though it was literally occurring in China at the time. U.S. experts scoffed at the idea of massive infections and deaths. Those only happened in movies apparently – or in exotic, faraway China.

Not only did health officials not advise wearing masks – they actually advised against it. The government literally warned the public against doing what was known to save lives. Even former President Donald Trump dismissed the outbreak as a hoax (before promptly being infected by the hoax himself).

In February 2020, he downplayed the coronavirus and compared it to the flu. Later in October, his chief of staff made exactly the same comparison. In between these two statements over 200,000 Americans had died. These American lives had caused no evolution in the U.S. administration's concern for its people.

The importance of shame in America

U.S. individualist culture is best described as militant individualism. Only in the U.S. do people refuse to wear a mask in public – but fight for the right to carry a gun in public. Instead, Americans fought for the right to not wear a mask – even protesting for it.

Many Americans are concerned that worrying about a mere virus would make them look weak. A study found that American men consider wearing masks to be "uncool," "shameful," and a "sign of weakness." Others liken it to a form of social control and an assault on their freedoms.

Defying healthy guidelines is considered to be a sign of American exceptionalism and resolve. Dr. Anthony Fauci initially asked Americans not to wear masks. By the time he changed his mind, after many Americans had already died, he received death threats just for asking Americans to be more hygienic.

After distilling such egoism in its subjects, the administration itself was also eager to look stronger. Initially, there was bipartisan consensus on abhorring masks. People were openly encouraged by officials to stop "living in fear" and flaunt social distancing guidelines.

Representative Paul Gosar tweeted that he'd "rather die gloriously in battle than from a virus." President Trump himself refused to wear a mask. By the time he finally appeared wearing one in public for the first time, about 135,000 Americans had already been sacrificed.

Look who's dying

An additional explanation for America's nonchalant attitude towards deaths could lie in the race of the victims. Despite White Americans constituting about 73 percent of the population, Blacks and indigenous Americans have much higher COVID death rates. Many of America's white majority considers minorities as dirty, backward and criminal.

No wonder the (white majority) government seems to have moved on, with Trump's chief of staff openly declaring "We're not going to control the pandemic." Americans would hope that the Biden administration will be different.

More than 457,000 Americans have died from COVID-19 so far. That is about 100 times China's death toll, despite a quarter of the population. Americans are proud of their freedoms, which apparently Chinese don't enjoy. If only more of them had the freedom to survive a pandemic.

2/2: New claims of migrant abuse as Ice defies Biden to continue deportations

Ice condemned as 'rogue agency' after rights groups allege torture by agents and man deported to Haiti who had never been there

Julian Borger– The Guardian

US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (Ice) has been denounced as a “rogue agency” after new allegations of assaults on asylum seekers emerged, and deportations of African and Caribbean migrants continued in defiance of the Biden administration’s orders.

Joe Biden unveiled his immigration agenda on Tuesday, and his homeland security secretary, Alejandro Mayorkas, was confirmed by the Senate, but the continued deportations suggested the Biden White House still does not have full control of Ice, which faces multiple allegations of human rights abuses and allegations that it has disproportionately targeted black migrants.

A coalition of immigrant rights groups published affidavits from Cameroonian asylum seekers who they said were tortured by being forced to approve their own deportations. The asylum seekers described being forced to the floor and having their fingers inked and pressed on to deportation documents they had refused to sign.

An Ice plane deporting Cameroonian, Angolan, Congolese and other African migrants is expected to leave Louisiana on Wednesday, despite an order from the incoming Biden administration for a 100-day suspension of deportation flights.

A Trump-appointed judge in Texas blocked the Biden moratorium last week, approving a challenge from the state’s attorney general, Ken Paxton, who played a leading role in the attempt to overturn the election result.

However, the judge did not block guidelines laid down by the then acting secretary of homeland security, David Pekoske, which came into effect on Monday and stipulated that deportations should be limited to suspected terrorists, convicted felons deemed a “threat to public safety”, and migrants who arrived after 1 November last year.

Ice carried out a deportation flight to Haiti on Tuesday morning carrying people who fit none of those criteria. One of the deportees on that flight was Paul Pierrilus, a 40-year-old financial consultant from New York state, who had never been to Haiti and is not a Haitian citizen, according to the country’s ambassador to Washington. The ambassador, Bocchit Edmond, has told activists he was taken by surprise by the deportation but did not respond to a request for comment on Tuesday.

Pierrilus was taken off a 19 January deportation flight at the last moment after the intervention of his local congressman, Mondaire Jones. But despite that temporary reprieve, he was driven to an Ice airfield in Alexandria, Louisiana, early on Tuesday and put on a plane to Port-au-Prince, the Haitian capital.

“There was nothing we could do to stop it,” said Jones, the Democratic representative for New York’s 17th district. “Unfortunately, Paul’s story is not uncommon. Black immigrants have been disproportionately targeted and deported by our racist, inhumane immigration system, particularly in recent weeks.”

Jones told the Guardian: “Ice is a rogue agency that must be brought to heel. There is no world in which an agency under the control of the leader of the executive branch should continue to deport people after the president of the United States signed an executive order halting deportations for 100 days.”

There was no response from the national security council to questions about any further attempts to stop the Ice flights. The state department referred queries to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The DHS did not respond.

On Monday, a coalition of migrant rights groups – Freedom for Immigrants, Al Otro Lado and Advocates for Immigrants Rights – presented fresh allegations to the DHS of what they described as torture of Cameroonian asylum seekers.

One of them, identified by the initials HT, described being brought into a room with darkened windows on 14 January at the Winn correctional center, where he was forced by Ice agents to put his fingerprint on a document in lieu of a signature, waiving his rights to further legal process before deportation.

"I tried to stand up because of the force that they were using on me, and they tripped me," HT said. "I fell on the floor; I kept my hands under my body. I held my hands tight at waist level so they could not have them. Five of the Ice officers and one of the officers in green ... joined them. They pressed me down and said that I needed to give them my finger for the fingerprint."

HT's statement went on: "As one was pressing on my neck with their hands, the other came in front of me, pulling my head from above, straightening my neck so they could easily suppress me. One climbed on to my back. I had a lot of trouble breathing. This happened for more than two minutes. I was gasping for air. I told them: 'Please, I can't breathe.' I asked them to release me. They said that they didn't care; what they need is my fingerprint."

An Ice spokesperson said it would not be possible to respond to the allegations by the end of Tuesday. The agency was previously accused of using torture to force inmates to sign deportation waivers in October.

Most, if not all, the Cameroonians on Wednesday's scheduled flight are English speakers from the west and south of the country, who fear imprisonment, torture or death on return in the midst of a brutal civil conflict between the government and anglophone separatists.

Martha, the sister of one of the Cameroonian deportees, identified only as NF for reasons of his security, said they were the only surviving members of their family, after their brothers were killed by government security forces for being members of a non-violent organisation, the Southern Cameroons National Council.

"He is definitely going to be jailed for a very long time. I am not back home so I can bribe his way out, which is the only way you get out," said Martha, who arrived in the US before her brother and was granted asylum.

"That's why I'm really shaking right now, because I don't know what is going to happen when he's jailed. There were people that went on the first [Ice deportation] flight in October and they are still in jail."

The Democratic senator Chris Van Hollen said on Tuesday: "Ice is accelerating pending flights for many of these asylum seekers who escaped torture and death in their home countries, only to be sent back into imminent danger without fair or complete consideration of their asylum requests."

He added: "This is unacceptable and goes against our values as a nation. Ice must halt these flights at once."

2/18: Updated State Data Continues To Show Wide Disparities in COVID-19 Vaccination Rates by Race/Ethnicity

Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF)

KFF has an updated analysis of state-reported data as of February 16, 2021 on COVID-19 vaccinations, cases, and deaths by race/ethnicity.

New to the analysis are comparisons of vaccination rates in each racial/ethnic group based on state-reported data of total people who have received at least one dose of the vaccine. Among just over half of states reporting data, the vaccination rate among White people is over three times higher than the rate for Hispanic people (10% vs 3%) and twice as high as the rate for Black people (10% vs. 5%). The vaccination rate for Asian people is closer to the rate for White people in most reporting states, although they are less likely to have been vaccinated in most reporting states.

Across the 34 states reporting data on vaccinations by race/ethnicity, there is a largely consistent pattern of Black and Hispanic people receiving smaller shares of vaccinations compared to their shares of cases and deaths and compared to their shares of the total population.

For example, in Texas, 20 percent of vaccinations have gone to Hispanic people, while Hispanic people account for 42 percent of COVID-19 cases, 47 percent of deaths from the virus, and 40 percent of the total population in the state. Similarly, in Mississippi, Black people have received 22 percent of vaccinations but make up 38 percent of COVID-19 cases, 40 percent of deaths, and 38 percent of the total population in the state.

The share of vaccinations among Asian people was similar to their share of the total population in most states and when there was a disparity in most cases the differences were small. White people received a higher share of vaccinations compared to their share of cases and deaths and their share of the total population in most states reporting data.

Vaccination patterns may change as more data is available and more parts of the country gain greater access to vaccines. Eighteen states and Washington DC are not yet reporting vaccinations by race/ethnicity and some states have high shares of vaccination data with unknown race/ethnicity and/or reporting “other or multiple races.”

2/22: Community Activists and Medical Experts from the U.S. at Action LA Network Condemn U.S./Europe COVID-19 “Vaccine Racism”

Panelists say wealthy nations stockpile life-saving vaccines while poor countries and poor people within these countries are ignored. Western countries criticize China, despite China’s success in containing the virus and providing vaccines to the world.

Lee Siu Hin – National Immigrant Solidarity Network

Activists from immigrant rights, community, peace and social justice movements are increasingly critical of the giant corporate pharmaceutical companies in Western countries for launching vaccine imperialism and racism against communities of color and poor countries across the globe.

On January 26, 2021, Popular Resistance hosted a challenging international webinar: “The Vaccine Wars and the Weaponization of Disease in the age of COVID Pandemic” to expose the glaring inequality.

The panelists were co-authors of the recent book jointly published by the China-U.S. Solidarity Network (CUSN) and the International Action Center (IAC): “Capitalism on a Ventilator - the Impact of COVID-19 in China and the U.S.” They focused on the catastrophe in the U.S., currently suffering the world’s highest rate of infections and deaths. The panelists included Lee Siu Hin, Margaret Flowers, Sara Flounders, Margaret Kimberley, Vijay Prashad and Max Blumenthal.

The book and the panel discussion focused on the need for a scientific approach and global cooperation. This was sharply contrasted to the U.S. lack of preparation as the virus hit and the continuing confused distribution of vaccines.

In opening the panel, Sara Flounders, a co-editor of the book, said: “The ill-planned roll out of high tech, for-profit, patented vaccines in the U.S., a country without any functioning public health infrastructure, is chaotic and disorganized. It leaves especially people of color, who have the highest rate of COVID infections, the least protected. The impact on long-term health is not yet fully known or tested.”

Flounders explained the escalating drum beat of attacks on China. “U.S. capitalism is deeply threatened by a developing country using socialist planning that is able to contain a global pandemic, share information and life-saving resources, and is now surging ahead in production.”

Lee Siu Hin, the other co-editor of the book and director of the CUSN, explained that very few Western-made vaccines have been delivered to the global South. The terms “vaccine imperialism” and “distribution racism” is based on rich countries buying up most Western-made vaccines—far more than they need, while leaving very few for developing countries. He summarized the data from Duke University Global Health Innovation Center. As of January 19, 2021, high-income countries have ordered nearly 4.2 billion doses, while lower-middle and low-income countries' orders count for less than 700 million doses.

- The European Union, with 450 million people, has ordered 1.85 billion doses.
- The United States, with 331 million people, has ordered 1.21 billion doses.
- The African Union, with 1.32 billion people, has only been able to order 270 million doses.
- Iraq, with 40 million people, has only 1.5 million doses.

“The Western countries are running a vaccine market monopoly scheme,” Lee Siu Hin argued. “They control the market and control the price; just like a future trading market, in the future they can sell their 'excess' vaccines to the poor countries for political ransom or higher price.”

Margaret Flowers of Popular Resistance and panel co-host is a medical doctor and pediatrician. She explained the five vaccines developed in China and the difference from U.S. vaccines. “If we want to get this virus under control, we all need vaccines. There are dangerous, long-term, serious consequences to health even after recovery.” One third of the population of Los Angeles is now infected.

Dr. Flowers explained the potential for global cooperation, COVAX and the World Health Organization. "However, U.S. sanctions have made it more difficult for countries to obtain desperately needed supplies."

2/7: "Biden immigration policy looks beyond reversing Trump

Rebecca Beitsch - The Hill

President Biden is signaling not only an eagerness to reverse Trump-era immigration policies with his early executive actions but a willingness to go beyond the Obama administration.

A trio of orders signed by Biden last week seeks to make amends for the Trump administration's family separation policy by establishing a task force dedicated to reuniting 545 children with their parents.

Biden also ordered a review of his predecessor's public charge rule, which limited immigration opportunities for those who might need to rely on government assistance like food stamps or other social programs.

But it was Biden's call for a sweeping review of the asylum and naturalization process -- along with a pledge to try to address the root causes of Latin American migration -- that excited immigration advocates.

"We're not just rolling back the Trump policies, which were at best superficial and ideological, but we're going beyond the Obama administration," said Thomas Saenz, president of Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

"Certainly it presents a much much more sophisticated view of the refugee and asylum issues for the Western hemisphere than we have seen."

The new Biden administration policy puts a particular focus on the Northern Triangle, the nickname given to neighbors Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, where in recent years migration patterns have rivaled those of Mexican nationals.

The "root causes" strategy Biden's order calls for would funnel aid to strengthen democracy, combat gang violence and boost the economy.

"This is a much more sophisticated view of seeing the issue from the root causes and a recognition that the root causes in the Northern Triangle are in part caused by the U.S.," Saenz said.

That seismic shift from enforcement to aid is being hailed by many immigration experts as a more realistic long-term approach.

"We're in a situation now where we can no longer lead with heavy handed enforcement and our approach needs to change, and I think what we've seen from the administration is absolutely an acknowledgement of that," said Jorge Loweree, policy director at the American Immigration Council.

Others argue the policy, which differs from the Obama years, will prove more cost effective than recent border security measures, in addition to doubling as foreign aid.

"Starting a Marshall plan for Central America is a lot cheaper than building a wall or hiring immigration officers. It can provide jobs and security in Central America that could turn off the faucet for refugees coming to the U.S. instead of building more tubs," said Domingo Garcia, president of the League of United Latin American Citizens.

Advocates say Biden isn't just proposing policies that go beyond the Obama years; he's also striking a new tone on immigration and setting higher goals.

One of his orders calls for strengthening inclusion of recently naturalized citizens, a nod to potentially reducing the fees and test requirements associated with becoming a citizen.

There are also signs the Biden administration might diverge from the Obama years by enacting policies making it easier to come to the U.S., like directing the government to consider giving those fleeing domestic or gang violence the ability to apply for asylum. Current law only protects those fleeing discrimination based on race, religion, political views and other protected classes.

Biden also called for reviving another program the Trump administration targeted for elimination, one that allows minors from the Northern Triangle to apply for refugee status.

But Biden's orders, along with a comprehensive immigration bill Biden sent to Congress that would provide an eight-year path to citizenship for some 11 million immigrants, are sparking backlash among some congressional Republicans.

"Through these actions, President Biden has sent the message loud and clear to the world that our immigration laws can be violated without consequence," said House Oversight and Reform Committee ranking member James Comer (R-Ky.).

"These radical, far-left immigration policies will continue to enable the humanitarian crisis at the border, place more children in peril as they are brought dangerously to the southern border, encourage more illegal immigration, and undermine the rule of law."

Sen. Josh Hawley (R-Mo.), who slowed the Senate's confirmation of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas by placing a hold on his nomination, said Biden's nominee had not "adequately explained how he will enforce federal law and secure the southern border."

Garcia said Democrats will now be tested on showing that their policies are sensible.

"One of the attacks Republicans have against Democrats is that Democrats are for open borders. We have to show we're not for open borders but for legal immigration in an orderly fashion."

Immigration advocates argue Biden's plans are a direct response to what they view as Trump's failures.

"The last four years of asylum policies have been based on the premise that if we find a way to make it as difficult as possible and increase the hardship that people have to endure to get to us, people will give up or never come in first place. We've gone as far as to take children away from their parents at the southern border, but we're seeing people continue to come," Loweree said.

"It speaks to the conditions people are facing in their home country. People would not face that kind of risk if remaining in their home country weren't such a dangerous proposition."

That's where advocates see a chance for Biden to treat the border differently than Trump did.

Biden's order calls for expansion of shelter networks "to address the immediate needs of individuals who have fled their homes to seek protection elsewhere in the region."

From Saenz's perspective, the U.S. bears some responsibility for having contributed to a militarized Northern Triangle that is now creating refugees.

"We contributed to those conditions a lot, and not just with our drug policy but with our immigration policy," he said.

"Pretty much everyone that's leaving wants to get out of that situation because it's so dangerous, and that's as true in a war atmosphere like Syria as it is in the violent circumstances of the Northern Triangle."

Loweree argued that Biden needs to go further than reuniting families that were separated during the Trump years.

"They also need to give considerable thought to some kind of compensation fund to provide redress for harms they faced from the previous administration," he said.

Still, Loweree said the Biden administration has already taken great strides in a short amount of time.

"The reality is they've done a lot. They've been in office for two weeks, and they've done an extraordinary amount of work on immigration. It's an indication of a new era."

2/12: US Will Allow Entry To 25000 Migrants Waiting for Hearings

Telesur English

This is the latest decision by Joe Biden's administration to reverse Trump's migration policies. In 2019 the former U.S. president activated the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), which forced at least 65,000 non-Mexican asylum seekers, to return to Mexico and wait for their legal procedures.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced on Thursday that it would allow 25 000 migrants stranded in Mexico to enter the United States as they wait for their court hearings.

This is the latest decision by Joe Biden's administration to reverse Trump's migration policies. In 2019 the former U.S. president activated the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), which forced at least 65,000 non-Mexican asylum seekers, to return to Mexico and wait for their legal procedures.

The DHS explained in a press release that "this new process applies to individuals who were returned to Mexico under the MPP program and had cases pending before the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR)."

"Beginning on February 19, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will begin phase one of a program to restore safe and orderly processing at the southwest border," the DHS announced.

DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said to the U.S. National Public Radio (NPR) that the authorities expect to process 300 people a day at border points. Meanwhile, the DHS warns that "individuals who are not eligible under this initial phase should wait for further instructions and not travel to the border. Due to the current pandemic, restrictions at the border remain in place and will be enforced."

2/24: APAPA Applauds CA Legislature's Funding Approval to Help Address Surge of AAPI Hate Crimes

Asian Pacific Islander American Public Affairs Association (APAPA)

Sacramento, CA – APAPA congratulates the efforts of Assemblymember Phil Ting (D-San Francisco), Chair of the Assembly Budget Committee, for securing the approval of \$1.4 million in state funding. This will bolster the research and reporting at UCLA that tracks the recent wave of hate incidents targeting Asian Americans in California. The appropriation will be a part of Assembly Bill 85 (AB 85), a fiscal measure to provide additional resources for California's ongoing pandemic response.

The recent trend of racial attacks on Asian Americans in the San Francisco Bay Area and the whole country is of great concern to APAPA and all Asian Americans. APAPA leaders, Carl Chan in Oakland, Dennis Wu in San Francisco, and Ruth Asmundson in Yolo County, are proactively working with local authorities to prevent future hate crimes.

We greatly appreciate the efforts of the Asian Pacific Islander Legislative Caucus (APILC) and other legislators for making this fund available to collect data, conduct research, and address racism and hate crimes against the API community. Special thank you to California Governor Gavin Newsom for signing AB 85 into law on February 24, 2021.

12/8: US fully restores protections for young immigrants

Nomaan Merchant and Elliot Spagat – Associated Press

The Trump administration said Monday that it fully restored the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program that shields hundreds of thousands of young people from deportation, complying with a federal judge's order.

The Department of Homeland Security posted on its website that it is accepting new applications, petitions for two-year renewals and requests for permission to temporarily leave the U.S.

The department said it "may seek relief from the order," signaling that its concession to the court order may be short-lived if its legal efforts succeed.

The announcement is still a major victory for young people who have been unable to apply since Trump ended DACA in September 2017. His administration has long argued that DACA is unconstitutional.

After the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in June that Trump violated federal law in how he ended the program, Chad Wolf, the acting Homeland Security secretary, said the administration would study its options and, until then, wouldn't accept new applications and would grant renewals for one year instead two. DACA shields about 650,000 people from deportation and makes them eligible for work permits.

Monday's announcement came hours before a deadline set by District Judge Nicholas Garaufis in the Eastern District of New York for the administration to post public notice that it would accept applications under terms before Trump ended DACA in 2017. The judge ruled Friday that Wolf was unlawfully serving in his position.

DACA was started in 2012 during the Obama administration. It allows certain immigrants who were brought to the country illegally as children to work and be exempt from deportation, though it does not confer legal status on recipients.

President-elect Joe Biden has pledged to reinstate DACA when he takes office in January but permanent legal status and a path to citizenship would require congressional approval.

DACA recipients and their supporters greeted the news with a mix of elation and awareness that their futures are precarious, even with Biden's support.

Maria Garcia, 18, an aerospace engineering student at Arizona State University, said she will apply for the program as soon as she can. She and her parents and two brothers arrived in Phoenix in 2006 Mexico. Her older brother, now 23, is already a DACA recipient and has a job. Her younger brother, now 16, is in high school and plans to eventually seek DACA protection as well.

Garcia said the court's decision last week "was wonderful news."

"There are a lot of other students who are undocumented who don't qualify for DACA. They have to find a permanent solution," she said.

Michelle Celleri, an attorney at advocacy group Alliance San Diego, was preparing an application for a client who was putting the final touches on her petition when Trump canceled DACA in 2017.

"Her feeling is, 'I'll do anything. I'm sick of being in the dark and I want to move forward,'" Celleri said.

Celleri said she is advising clients to submit applications before Dec. 22, when there is a key hearing in Texas in a lawsuit by several states challenging DACA's legality.

"There's just way too much happening right now," she said. "I don't want people caught in the crossfire."

2/20: Asian Americans Express Alarm Over Recent Acts of Violence And Demand Action

Arun Venugopal, WNYC - Gothamist

On Wednesday, a man violently shoved a 52-year-old Chinese woman on a sidewalk in Flushing, Queens. The victim required at least five stitches after knocking her head on the concrete floor.

A video of the incident, which took place in daylight outside a bakery and showed the attacker throwing an object at the woman before pushing her, was shared online and quickly went viral, the latest in a string of violent incidents that have troubled Asian American communities and prominent public officials.

What made the Flushing attack especially alarming to some Asian Americans is that it took place in a neighborhood that is overwhelmingly Asian.

"I think Asians are easy targets," said Chris Kwok, a board member of the Asian American Federation, an advocacy group for Asian communities. "I think people feel like they won't fight back. People feel 'Oh, the police won't report. And maybe Asians won't report.'"

Kwok co-authored a report for the Asian American Bar Association of New York, "A Rising Tide of Hate and Violence Against Asian Americans in New York During COVID-19: Impact, Causes, Solutions, finding 2,500 Asians to be the target of a hate attack related to COVID-19 between March and September 2020 nationwide.

“And this number understates the actual number of anti-Asian hate incidents because most incidents are not reported,” the report reads.

Deputy Inspector Stewart Loo, who heads the NYPD’s Asian Hate Crime Task Force, which formed last August after a spike in hate crimes against Asians, corroborated Kwok’s “soft target” theory.

“One hundred percent that is part of the problem,” said Loo in an interview with Gothamist/WNYC on Friday. “I spoke to people who rob Asian Americans and they’ll tell you why they target Asian Americans. It’s not because they’re Asian. They perceive them to be soft targets. They carry cash. They won’t report it. It’s less likely that they’ll identify them, and they put up the least amount of resistance.”

The NYPD arrested Patrick Mateo, 47, for the Flushing attack, and he was charged with assault and harassment. The incident took place a day after two other Asian American women were attacked in separate subway encounters. Earlier this month, a 61-year-old Filipino man was slashed across the face while riding the L train.

Across the country, Asian American organizations have documented thousands of bias incidents since the beginning of the pandemic last year and are urging law enforcement agencies and government officials to take the problem seriously. In San Francisco, an 84-year-old Thai man died after being knocked to the ground; a 91-year-old Asian American was pushed to the ground in Oakland’s Chinatown, and a Vietnamese grandmother was robbed in San Jose ahead of the Lunar New Year.

The NYPD has not yet established a racial motive for the Flushing attack but in a Facebook post the victim’s daughter categorized it as a hate crime.

“This douchebag was yelling out racial slurs, walks into my mom and shoved my mother on Main street and Roosevelt Avenue in Flushing, Queens today,” wrote Maggie Kayla Cheng on Wednesday. “He shoved her with such force that she hit her head on the concrete and passed out on the floor. She received 5-10 stitches on her forehead, spending 4-5 hours in the hospital. Hate crime has no place in our community. How you go up against a 5’3”, 110-115lbs lady?”

State Senator John Liu was more blunt about the discrimination in these attacks. He joined the Reverend Al Sharpton to denounce the anti-Asian violence at Sharpton’s National Action Network on Saturday.

“We have seen attacks against Asian Americans, sometimes with explicit racial terms, and sometimes not so overt, but you know, as an Asian American,” Liu said. “We understand, when we’re being singled out for one reason and one reason only. And that is the color of our skin or some would say, the angle of our eyes. That is bigotry, and it’s worse. And we cannot stand for, here in New York or anywhere else in this country.”

The Asian American Federation estimated “approximately 500 reports of bias incidents and hate crimes directed at our community in New York City,” and joined with Black, Arab American and Latino groups in calling for leaders “to go beyond verbal expressions of solidarity and take meaningful actions to provide us with the resources to navigate COVID-19 and address the racism that is plaguing Asian New Yorkers.”

The group is planning a Stop the Hate rally on February 27th at Federal Plaza in downtown Manhattan. It called for resources for victims of bias incidents to seek recovery in Asian languages and help in encouraging self defense among Asian Americans as well as bystander intervention training. Another rally is slated for Monday and organized by Queens Borough President Richard Donovan.

The overall number of hate crimes in the city dropped from 426 in 2019 to 276 last year. But the NYPD identified a total of 26 crimes specifically motivated by COVID-19, of which 24 were against Asians. The trend prompted the NYPD last summer to create the Asian Hate Crime Task Force, comprising 25 Asian American detectives.

Loo said the detectives on the task force collectively speak 11 languages, including several Chinese dialects as well as Korean, Thai, Tagalog, and Burmese.

“A lot of things get lost in language, and translation,” he said. “So it’s extremely important from an investigative standpoint that you speak the same language as your victim. And I feel crimes as serious as hate crimes, you need that connection. You need to be able to speak with the victim in their native language and this task force provides that.”

Loo moved to this country from Taiwan as a child, and witnessed firsthand how his father, a restaurant delivery worker, was dealt with as a victim of crime during the 1980s crime wave.

“There’s always an issue, depending on which officer shows up. Some officers, when they have difficulties speaking with victims who don’t speak the language, they get frustrated [and] the report doesn’t end up getting made,” Loo said.

The experiences left the younger Loo feeling like “a guest,” he said. “It didn’t feel like home.”

He joined the NYPD in 2000 when he said there were around 200 Asian Americans on the force.

“We were overwhelmingly under-represented and the public was ill-equipped to handle all these Asian victims who did not speak English,” Loo said.

The figure now stands closer to 2,000 Asian American officers, comprising around 5% of the NYPD.

“We are making progress,” Loo said.

Part of the work is convincing undocumented Asian New Yorkers to come forward and conveying that there is no risk in doing so.

“If it comes from somebody like me, maybe they’ll trust it more,” Loo said.

The results of a survey released by Stop AAPI Hate indicate that Asian Americans are more likely to experience verbal harassment or name calling in New York than nationally, and more likely to be victims of physical assault, or be coughed at or spat upon.

“The surge is staggering: there’s been a 1,900% increase in anti-Asian hate crimes in New York City in the past year,” wrote Eric Toda, the global head of social at Facebook, in an Ad Week article aimed at corporate America. “And no one is paying attention. No big news outlets. No brands. No influencers. No hashtags. Silence.”

The frequency of the attacks, which many Asian American leaders tie to the xenophobic language deployed by former President Donald Trump during the early days of the pandemic, has prompted some members of the community to change their behavior.

In New York, 70% of Asian American students have opted out of in-person learning, the highest of all racial groups and twice the level of white students. One principal told NBC News that one factor for this was the anti-Asian sentiment in the community.

“Asian American women, moms, feel fear when they go to the playground with their children, when they go to the supermarket, when they go to the doctors,” Kwok told Gothamist/WNYC. “My wife won’t take the subway anymore because she really fears what might happen.”

Loo said even his wife won’t take the subway either, because she thinks “it’s too dangerous.”

The problem of anti-Asian discrimination, he said, has been around for a long time, and he doesn’t expect it to go away soon. But he argued that Asians who are victimized increasingly have recourse.

“A lot of the concern is that nobody cares, and the police don’t care, the police don’t do anything,” Loo said of criticism from community groups, then added, “We care. We’re here and we’re going to do everything we can. We’re going to take care of the Asian American community.”

2/9: Outcry as more than 20 babies and children deported by US to Haiti

Ice accused of sending ‘defenseless babies into the burning house’ as deportations of 72 carried out in apparent breach of Biden order

Ed Pilkington – The Guardian

US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (Ice) deported at least 72 people to Haiti on Monday, including a two-month-old baby and 21 other children, as the Biden administration made clear it would press on with expulsions of newly-arrived migrants, pending a review of immigration policy.

The children were deported to Haiti on Monday on two flights chartered by Ice from Laredo, Texas, to the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince. The removals sent vulnerable infants back to Haiti as it is being roiled by major political unrest.

The expulsions were carried out under a 77-year-old public health statute, called Title 42, first invoked by the Trump administration after the start of the coronavirus outbreak. A spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security said that policy would continue for new arrivals at the border, until there had been a review and facilities for housing migrants had been restored.

“The return of a family is a solemn and heartbreaking event. That is especially true when the country of destination suffers instability, violence, lack of economic opportunity or other challenges,” the spokesperson said.

“As this administration has stated from the very outset, our capacity at the border will not transform overnight, due in large part to the damage done over the last four years to our asylum system and infrastructure. As we review and reform current immigration policies, we will continue prioritizing the health and safety of everyone we encounter during the Covid-19 pandemic. We are committed to restoring our asylum system and building an improved system.”

The Biden administration issued a 100-day moratorium on deportations on taking office, with exceptions for suspected terrorists, dangerous criminals and arrivals at the border after 1 November last year. The moratorium alone would not have stopped Monday’s Title 42 expulsions, officials said.

The moratorium itself was blocked by a Trump-appointed Texas judge on 26 January, though the judge did not strike down new guidelines, calling on Ice to focus its resources on deporting only potentially dangerous migrants. The agency however appeared to ignore those guidelines last week, attempting to deport a planeload of African migrants last week, leading to accusations it was a rogue agency. The flight was stopped at the last minute on the grounds that some of the deportees could be witnesses in an investigation into abuse by Ice agents.

Following intense lobbying from community groups and congressional staffers, who pointed to the political instability and lawlessness in Haiti, repatriation flights to Haiti were paused on Friday, but they resumed on Monday.

Human rights activists are dismayed by the deportations, which bear a close resemblance to the hardline course set by Donald Trump. “It is unconscionable for us as a country to continue with the same draconian, cruel policies that were pursued by the Trump administration,” said Guerline Jozef, the executive director of the immigration support group the Haitian Bridge Alliance.

She added: “I don’t know what’s going on between Ice and the Biden administration, but we know what needs to be done: the deportations must stop.”

Immigration advisers are especially concerned about the safety of the Haitian children deported on Monday, given that they are being returned to a country that is embroiled in rapidly mounting political turmoil. The Haitian president, Jovenel Moïse, is refusing to heed opposition calls for him to step down in a dispute over the end of his term – his detractors say he should have left office on 7 February.

Moïse has been ruling by decree for more than a year and has recently cracked down on public protests. On Sunday, the day that opponents urged him to stand down, he announced the arrests of 23 people including a supreme court justice and a senior police inspector whom he claimed were plotting a coup against him.

Two Haitian journalists were reportedly shot with live ammunition fired by the armed forces on Monday in volatile scenes in the Champ de Mars in downtown Port-au-Prince.

The Biden administration has stoked further controversy by backing Moïse in the dispute. The US government has announced it takes the view that the Haitian president has another year to run before he must leave office.

Jozef said it was not safe to return children to this environment. “I fear for the kids being sent into the middle of this uprising. It’s as if there is a house burning, and instead of taking people out for their own safety the United States is sending defenseless babies into the burning house.”

Trump continued to follow an aggressive approach to Haitian deportations right up to the final hours of his presidency. The day before he left the White House, a final deportation flight was sent to Haiti carrying a man who was not a Haitian citizen and had never been to that country.

1/26: Reported Massacre of 19 People Underscores Dangers Faced by Migrants in Mexico

U.S. and Mexico Must Work Jointly to Restore Asylum Access and Center Human Rights, Safety in Migration Policies

Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)

WOLA condemns and expresses its profound sorrow at the discovery of 19 murder victims in a burned truck in the northern Mexican border state of Tamaulipas on January 22. The victims are believed to be Guatemalan migrants, based on information provided by witnesses, family members, and Guatemalan officials' statements. Preliminary media reports drawn from witness accounts suggest that the Guatemalans were attacked by an organized criminal group. Several families in Guatemala's northwestern San Marcos department, who believe their children to be among the victims, stated that a pandemic-related food shortage had forced their children to set out for the United States earlier in the month.

This grim news recalls other massacres of migrants in transit through Mexico, including the emblematic case of 72 migrants murdered in San Fernando, Tamaulipas just over a decade ago. Such killings form part of a larger picture of daily assaults on migrants in Mexico, enabled by a continuing climate of impunity for these crimes. In recent months, the Trump administration's disastrous "Remain in Mexico" policy has illustrated the frequency and brutality of violence against migrants: as of December 2020, Human Rights First had compiled a list of over 1,300 publicly reported cases of murder, rape, torture, kidnapping, and other attacks against asylum-seekers forced to wait in Mexico under the program.

These endemic patterns of violence demonstrate the urgency of cooperation between Mexico and the United States to address regional mixed migration flows in a way that protects migrants' safety and human rights, as well as the need to restore access to asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border.

While both governments' plans to address root causes of migration in Central America are of great relevance, it is also clear that migration through Mexico will not end soon. On the contrary, the region will see a continuing flow of people seeking asylum and better opportunities due to record hurricanes, crushing poverty exacerbated by COVID-19, and persistent violence in Central America.

Just days ago, for example, Mexican officials found 128 men, women, and children, mostly from Central America, crowded into the back of a shipping truck in the state of Veracruz. The use of such dangerous forms of travel stems largely from Mexico's detention-and-removal-focused migration policies, which leave people forced to flee their homes with little choice but to seek clandestine routes to the United States, exposing them to increased risk of attack and other dangers.

Mexico and the United States should work together to get out in front of an avoidable crisis of violence against migrants. Now is the time to ensure that the reversal of harmful U.S. border policies and joint plans to address root causes of migration in Central America are accompanied by equally necessary actions on the long and very dangerous journey through Mexico.

There is much the Mexican government can do to protect migrants in its territory. Preventing, investigating, and punishing crimes against migrants, as well as ensuring access to Mexico's asylum system, are priority actions. In this current case, the Mexican government must guarantee a prompt investigation into the crime, the forensic identification of the victims, and allow the victims' families and their legal representatives full access to the case file. Through cooperation and joint investigations into transnational crimes against migrants, the United States can also be an important partner in these efforts. Both countries must ensure that migrants' safety—at all stages of transit—is at the forefront of current discussions and plans to address regional migration.

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NISN is a coalition of community, immigrant, labor, human rights and student activist groups, founded in 2002 in response to the urgent needs for the national coalition to fight immigrant bashing, support immigrant rights, no to the sweatshops exploitation and end to the racism on the community. Please visit our website: <http://www.ImmigrantSolidarity.org>

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