

Advancing Justice - AAJC Messaging Guidance

Last Updated January 19, 2024

Background

- ***Racism and discrimination are a reality for members of the Asian American community.*** In the wake of COVID-19, the Asian American community has faced violent and harmful backlash, including numerous hate crimes and hate incidents. Research shows that Americans are most likely to name ‘China’ as the nation’s greatest enemy, which further contributes to anti-Asian sentiment.
- ***Profiling of and violence towards the Asian American community is rooted in history.*** Since the 19th and 20th centuries, Asian Americans have been unfairly targeted through anti-immigration laws, land ownership prohibitions, incarceration of Americans of Japanese descent during World War II, and other efforts that sought to exclude members of the community. Unfortunately, such racist and xenophobic behavior has since continued, from the murder of Vincent Chin in 1982 to the murders of Sikh Americans and the racial profiling of Muslim Americans in a post-9/11 environment. Asian Americans are too often considered to be “perpetual foreigners.”
- ***Broad condemnation of ‘China’ leads to people incorrectly conflating the actions of the Xi Jinping regime with the actions of Chinese Americans.*** While certain policies of Xi Jinping and the CCP do indeed pose a legitimate threat to U.S. national security, it is important to be mindful of how to frame criticism, and NOT conflate the actions of the Chinese government with the actions of Asian Americans.

Suggested Framing/Talking Points

- ***Call out the Chinese Communist Party’s harmful policies, not ‘China’ or ‘the Chinese.’***
 - It is important to draw the distinction between the Chinese government and the Chinese people. Similar to how the U.S. often refers to the “Putin Regime,” references to Xi Jinping himself or the Xi Government is also a good practice.
 - Falsely attributing anti-U.S. sentiment to all Chinese people is not only a misrepresentation of a diverse group, but it also leads to blowback against the Asian American community in the U.S.
- ***Call out specific actions on the part of Xi Jinping that undermine U.S. security interests.***
 - When critiquing malign foreign influence campaigns, it is important to be as specific as possible.
 - For example, instead of saying that ‘China is hurting U.S. national security,’ point to concerns around data privacy, free speech, IP and copyright issues, tensions with Taiwan, or human rights abuses.



- ***Call it ‘COVID-19; coronavirus, or SARS-CoV-2’, not the ‘Chinese virus.’***
 - When referring to the virus, it is important to use accurate medical terminology, not harmful colloquialisms that incorrectly imply a linkage with a specific race or ethnicity.

- ***Emphasize that racism and discrimination undermine U.S. national security.***
 - It is critical to underscore how racism and discrimination in all forms make our country less safe and less competitive across multiple sectors, including defense, information technology, energy, and others.

 - Connect how racism and discrimination inhibit our ability to effectively build out diplomatic corps, introduce diversity of thought into our military, and prevents the U.S. from engaging in competitive R&D, etc.

 - Moreover, highlight that unfair profiling of Asian American scientists and researchers is a real problem in academic institutions and highly technical fields, and can meaningfully contribute to the U.S. losing expertise.
 - These individuals should not be castigated as “spies,” but rather accepted in their communities. Specialized talent is now leaving the U.S.

 - The U.S. has traditionally celebrated immigrants from foreign countries – even countries hostile to the U.S. – because it showed that the American system was working and that such immigrants wanted to be in the U.S. For example, during the Cold War, defectors from the Soviet Union were lauded and not treated as spies or potential threats to national security.

 - Questioning the loyalty of Asian American officials, like Rep. Judy Chu, weaponizes anti-Asian sentiment and plays into Xi Jinping’s strategy to exploit fissures in our political system. Members of the Asian American community should not be accused of having “dual loyalty,” simply due to their race or ethnicity.

- ***Avoid blunt over-generalized statements or policies about the threat posed by “China.”***
 - Policies designed to address national security should be narrowly tailored to specific threats posed by specific groups or entities.

 - Terms such as “the Chinese Communist Party,” “Chinese Government,” or “the People’s Liberation Army” should be defined with precision, recognizing that overbroad applications using these terms can implicate many individuals and institutions that do not pose real economic or national security threats.



- Policies should always include civil rights/civil liberties safeguards to ensure that governments have the burden of demonstrating individuals and entities targeted are not deprived of rights or liberties without an adequate individualized showing of need.
- ***Use proper terminology to refer to the recent wave of discriminatory land laws.***
 - Recently, a series of bills have been introduced in state legislatures around the country that would bar foreign nationals from multiple countries—including China—from purchasing, leasing, or acquiring property in the U.S. Many of these bills include use language that is too vague, and therefore applicable to Americans with dual citizenship or lawful permanent residents.
 - Such language has also appeared in various vehicles of federal legislation, and while advocates successfully ensured that one such amendment to the FY24 NDAA was stripped from the final version of the bill, lawmakers continue to consider this type of overbroad and discriminatory legislation.
 - Historically, similar laws in the U.S. which were explicitly intended to prohibit Asian immigrants from purchasing land were termed “alien land laws.”
 - This was primarily because of legal language at that time which sought to target “aliens ineligible to citizenship,” such as the Chinese and Japanese immigrants (“Issei”) who settled on the West Coast.
 - To avoid adopting a harmful framework that implies criminality, refer to the recent wave of land laws as either “discriminatory land laws” or simply “land laws,” rather than “alien land laws.”
- ***Emphasize that the Asian American community is not a monolith.***
 - The Asian American community is often incorrectly viewed as homogenous.
 - In reality, the AAPI community includes more than 50 ethnicities, over 100 different languages, and occupies all points of the socio-economic spectrum.
 - A better understanding of Asian American needs requires policy makers to more rigorously disaggregate data about the Asian American community.
- ***Celebrate the achievements of the Asian Americans.***
 - While it is necessary to reckon with this nation’s history of alienating members of the Asian American community, it is also important to celebrate and uplift the accomplishments of Asian Americans as progress towards a more equitable future.





- ***Educate yourself and others.***
 - Take the time to learn about history of Asian American exclusion and alienation.
 - Take a look at the [glossary](#) of anti-Asian terms to hone a better understanding of way that harmful rhetoric can perpetuate Asian stereotypes.

