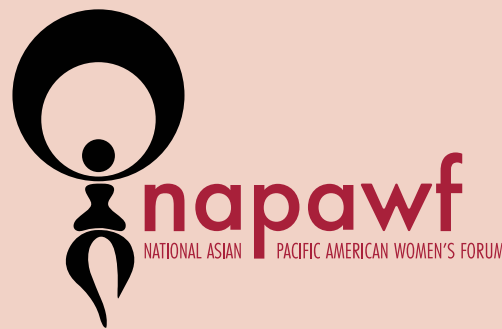


# **THE STATE OF SAFETY FOR ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER WOMEN IN THE U.S.**

March 2022



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There has been a 339% increase in reports of hate crimes against Asian Americans over the last year.<sup>1</sup> These incidents happen every day in our neighborhoods, in public spaces, places of work and worship, with Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women facing a disproportionate burden of these crimes. To better understand the intersectional and nuanced ways AAPI women experience gender and/or race-based discrimination, harassment, and violence, the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF) surveyed more than 2,400 AAPI women across the United States.

Through disaggregated and in-depth analyses, 74% of AAPI women report personally experiencing racism and/or discrimination, 38% report experiencing sexual harassment, and 12% report experiencing gender and/or race-based physical violence within the last 12 months. In addition, a resounding 91% believe that elected officials need to better understand the intersectional ways AAPIs experience hate while investing more resources in directly impacted communities.

We urge elected officials and the Biden administration to invest in culturally competent and language accessible services, resources to local communities and community-based organizations, in addition to focusing on data disaggregation to paint a more comprehensive and inclusive picture of the lived experiences of AAPI people.

## Introduction

Hate incidents against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) have risen sharply since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>2</sup> AAPI women face a disproportionate burden of anti-AAPI hate with 62% of all national hate incidents being reported by AAPI women.<sup>3</sup>

We applaud the Biden Administration for re-establishing and expanding the White House Initiative on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders (WHIAANHPI), and for the proposed actions to respond to anti-Asian violence, xenophobia, and bias.<sup>4</sup> Aligned with the goals of WHIAANHPI to advocate for “research to understand, address, and end bias, discrimination, and xenophobia,” this report aims to provide nuanced and disaggregated information about AAPI women’s experiences with discrimination, harassment, and violence amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and one year since the mass shootings in Atlanta that claimed the lives of six Asian American women.

## Background

Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women and girls are prime targets of hate and discrimination against the AAPI community. The shootings across Atlanta spas that occurred one year ago and claimed the lives of eight people, including six Asian American women, came on the heels of a staggering increase in hate incidents targeting the AAPI community.<sup>5</sup> Hate incidents, which include both hate crimes and incidents of violence or discrimination, against AAPIs rose sharply over the past year, with over 10,370 reports collected by Stop AAPI Hate between March 2020 and September 2021.<sup>2</sup> In particular, AAPI women and girls report 62% of hate incidents; AAPI non-binary people have also reported experiencing heightened incidents of hate.<sup>2</sup>

The racialized misogyny faced by AAPI women is not limited to hate incidents, but also includes experiences with different forms of harassment. AAPI women are continuously fetishized, exoticized, and objectified through hyper-sexualization, affecting the racialized, gendered, and sexualized violence AAPI women experience, historically and now.<sup>6</sup> Even prior to the pandemic, AAPI women experienced a great deal of violence and discrimination at the intersection of race/ethnicity, gender, immigration status, and

<sup>1</sup> Yam, Kimmy (2022). “Anti-Asian hate crimes increased 339 percent nationwide last year, report says”.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/anti-asian-hate-crimes-increased-339-percent-nationwide-last-year-repo-rcna14282>

<sup>2</sup> Siu, L., & Chun, C. (2020). Yellow Peril and Techno-orientalism in the Time of Covid-19: Racialized Contagion, Scientific Espionage, and Techno-Economic Warfare. *Journal of Asian American Studies* 23(3), 421-4 40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584211067796>

<sup>3</sup> Stop AAPI Hate. (2021). Stop AAPI Hate National Report 3/19/20-9/30/21 <https://stopaapihate.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/21-SAH-NationalReport2-v2.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The White House (March 30, 2021). FACT SHEET: President Biden Announces Additional Actions to Respond to Anti-Asian Violence, Xenophobia and Bias. Washington, DC.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/30/fact-sheet-president-biden-announces-additional-actions-to-respond-to-anti-asian-violence-xenophobia-and-bias/>

<sup>5</sup> Stop AAPI Hate & The National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum (NAPAWF). (2021). *The Rising Tide of Violence and Discrimination against Asian American and Pacific Islander Women and Girls*. [https://stopaapihate.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Stop-AAPI-Hate\\_NAPAWF\\_Whitepaper.pdf](https://stopaapihate.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Stop-AAPI-Hate_NAPAWF_Whitepaper.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Karen Leong and Karen Kuo (March 22, 2021). *The US has a long history of violence against Asian women*. *The Conversation*.

<https://theconversation.com/us-has-a-long-history-of-violence-against-asian-women-157533>.

socioeconomic class, among many other factors. According to the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence, one in five AAPI women experience some form of contact sexual violence (23%) and non-contact unwanted sexual experiences (21%) during their lifetime.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, AAPI women experience discrimination in multiple domains, including unequal pay, workplace discrimination, and fear of violence in the workplace, all of which result in AAPI women experiencing the highest rates of long-term unemployment.<sup>8,9</sup>

## Study Sample

NAPAWF's survey sample comprised 2,414 adult women residing in the United States who self-identify as Asian American, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander. Due to the relatively small incidence rate of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPI) in the population, most nationally representative surveys do not adequately sample the NHPI community, further making their lived experiences invisible. Therefore, NAPAWF's study oversampled NHPIs so that the community's experiences with discrimination, harassment, and violence could be properly documented (all findings are appropriately weighted to be nationally representative).

The survey was offered both online and via phone in English, Hindi, Korean, Mandarin, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. It was conducted in January and February 2022. Key demographics of the survey respondents are as follows:

- *Ethnicity:*
  - 32% East Asian (Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Taiwanese)
  - 28% Southeast Asian (Filipino, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, Thai, Laotian)
  - 20% South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan)
  - 19% NHPI (including Samoan, Marshallese, and Chamorro)
- *Age:*
  - Median age - 37 years old
  - Age Range - 18 to 89 years old
- *Educational Attainment:*
  - 9% Less than HS
  - 39% HS graduate
  - 52% College graduate or more

<sup>6</sup> Karen Leong and Karen Kuo (March 22, 2021). *The US has a long history of violence against Asian women*. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/us-has-a-long-history-of-violenceagainst-asian-women-157533>.

<sup>7</sup> Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence (2021). *Statistics on Violence against API Women*. Oakland, CA. <https://www.api-gbv.org/about-gbv/statistics-violence-against-api-women/>

<sup>8</sup> Jasmine Tucker (March 2021). *Asian American and Pacific Islander Women Lose \$10,000 Annually to the Wage Gap*. Washington, DC: The National Women's Law Center. <https://nwlrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/AAP-EPD2021-v1.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> NAPAWF (June 2021). *Long-Term Unemployment Among Asian American and Pacific Islander Women*. <https://napawf.org/s/Long-Term-Unemployment-Among-AAPI-Women.pdf>

- **Country of Birth:**
  - 55% U.S. Born
  - 45% Foreign Born
- **Region:**
  - 19% Northeast
  - 10% Midwest
  - 28% South
  - 43% West
- **Household Income:**
  - 15% <\$35,000
  - 22% \$35,000 to \$74,999
  - 13% \$75,000 to \$99,999
  - 47% \$100,000+
- **Employment Status:**
  - 54% Employed (full or part-time)
  - 46% Unemployed/Retired/Student
- **Marital Status:**
  - 25% Never married
  - 63% Married/Living with partner
  - 12% Divorced/Separated/Widowed

## KEY FINDINGS

### **AAPI Women’s Experiences with Discrimination, Harassment, and Violence**

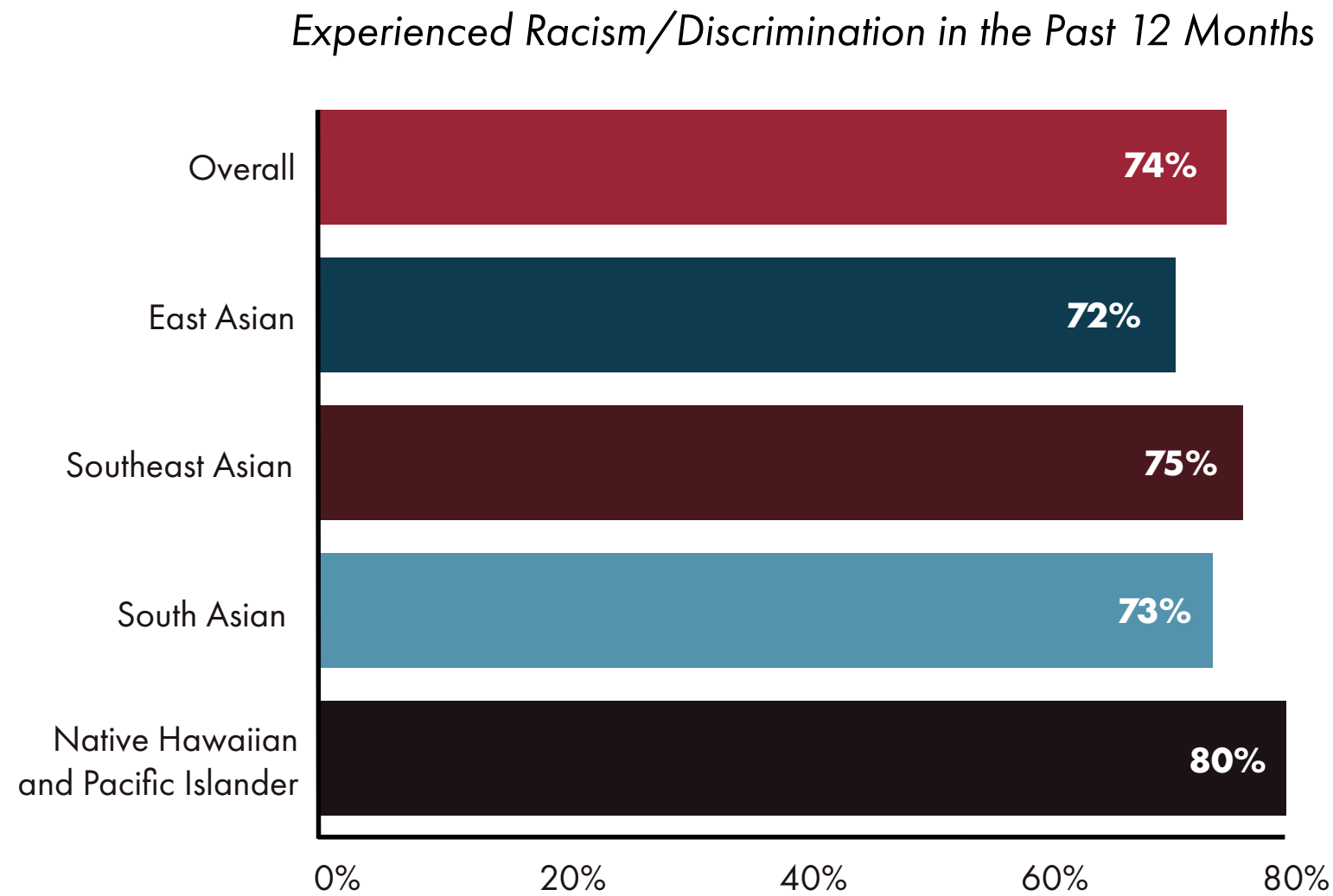
To take an in-depth look at AAPI women’s experiences of violence and discrimination, the National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum (NAPAWF) conducted a nationally representative survey of AAPI women in conjunction with The Harris Poll in January and February 2022 (n=2,414).<sup>10</sup>

Overall, in the last 12 months, a staggering 74% of AAPI women report personally experiencing racism and/or discrimination, 38% report experiencing sexual harassment, and 12% report experiencing gender and/or race-based physical violence.

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<sup>10</sup> The results presented in this report and from a survey that was conducted by The Harris Poll on behalf of NAPAWF. The study interviewed 2,414 adult AAPIs who do not identify as men in the United States on a fully representative sample, allowing for a deep and disaggregated analysis of key demographics characteristics. Respondents either self-identified as Asian American and/or Pacific Islander (AAPI) or of any ethnicity/ national origin recognized in the Asian and “Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander” race categories by the U.S. Census Bureau. Interviews were conducted both online and via telephone in January and February 2022, and respondents were given the option to complete the survey in English, Hindi, Korean, Mandarin, Tagalog, or Vietnamese.

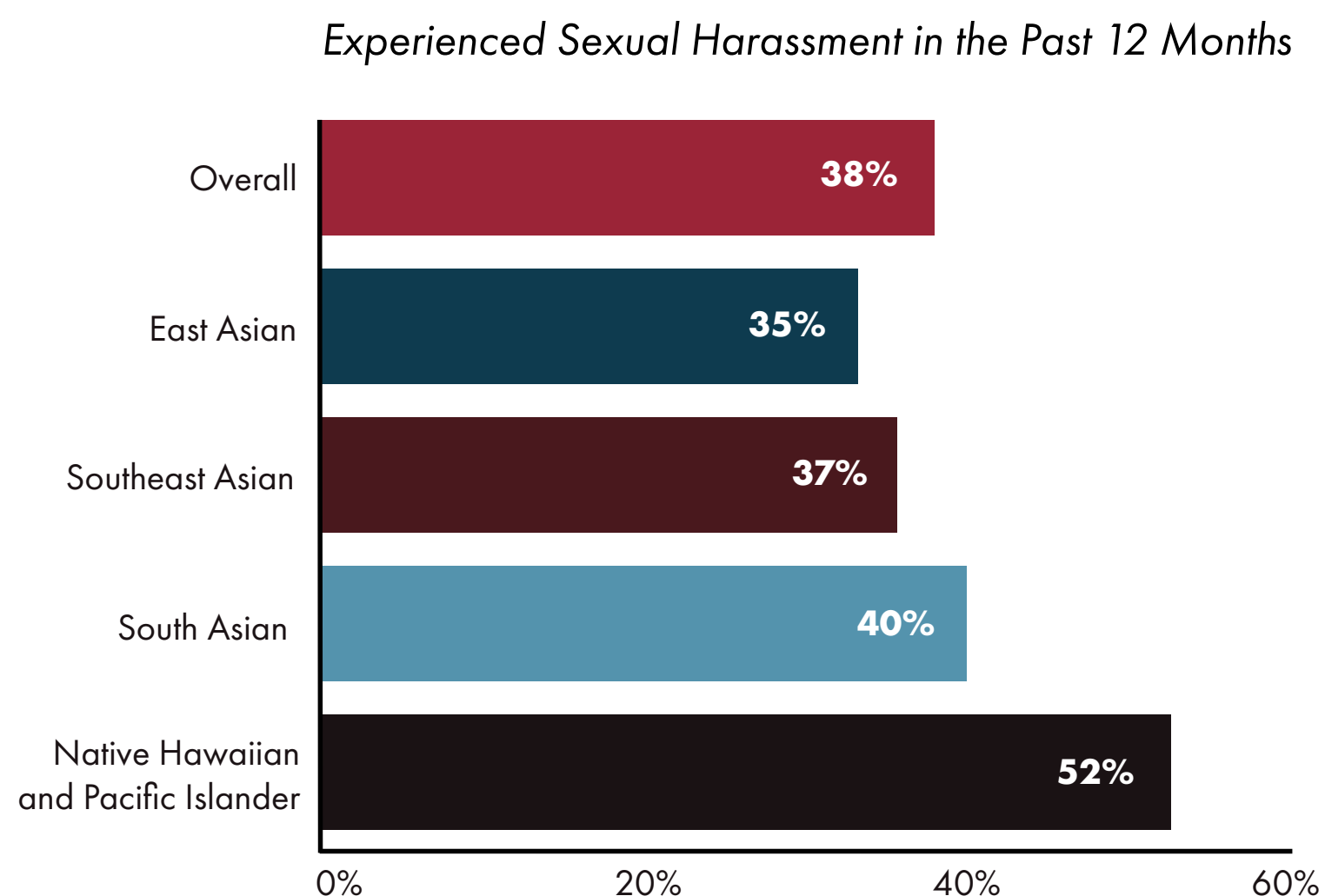
**Figure 1. Racism and/or Discrimination in the Past 12 Months**



*\*Differences between subgroups not statistically significant.*

Seventy-four percent of AAPI women report experiencing racism and/or discrimination in the last year with no significant difference across ethnic subgroups. The most common sites where AAPI women experience racism and/or discrimination include public spaces such as restaurants, grocery stores, and shopping centers (47%), an individual’s place of work (17%), their neighborhood (17%), and mass transit (17%). The most common perpetrators of racism and/or discrimination were strangers (53%), friends or neighbors (12%), and clients or customers (11%). The primary reasons AAPI women report experiencing racism and/or discrimination include race/ethnicity (46%), skin color (34%), and language and/or accent (19%).

**Figure 2. Sexual Harassment in the Past 12 Months**

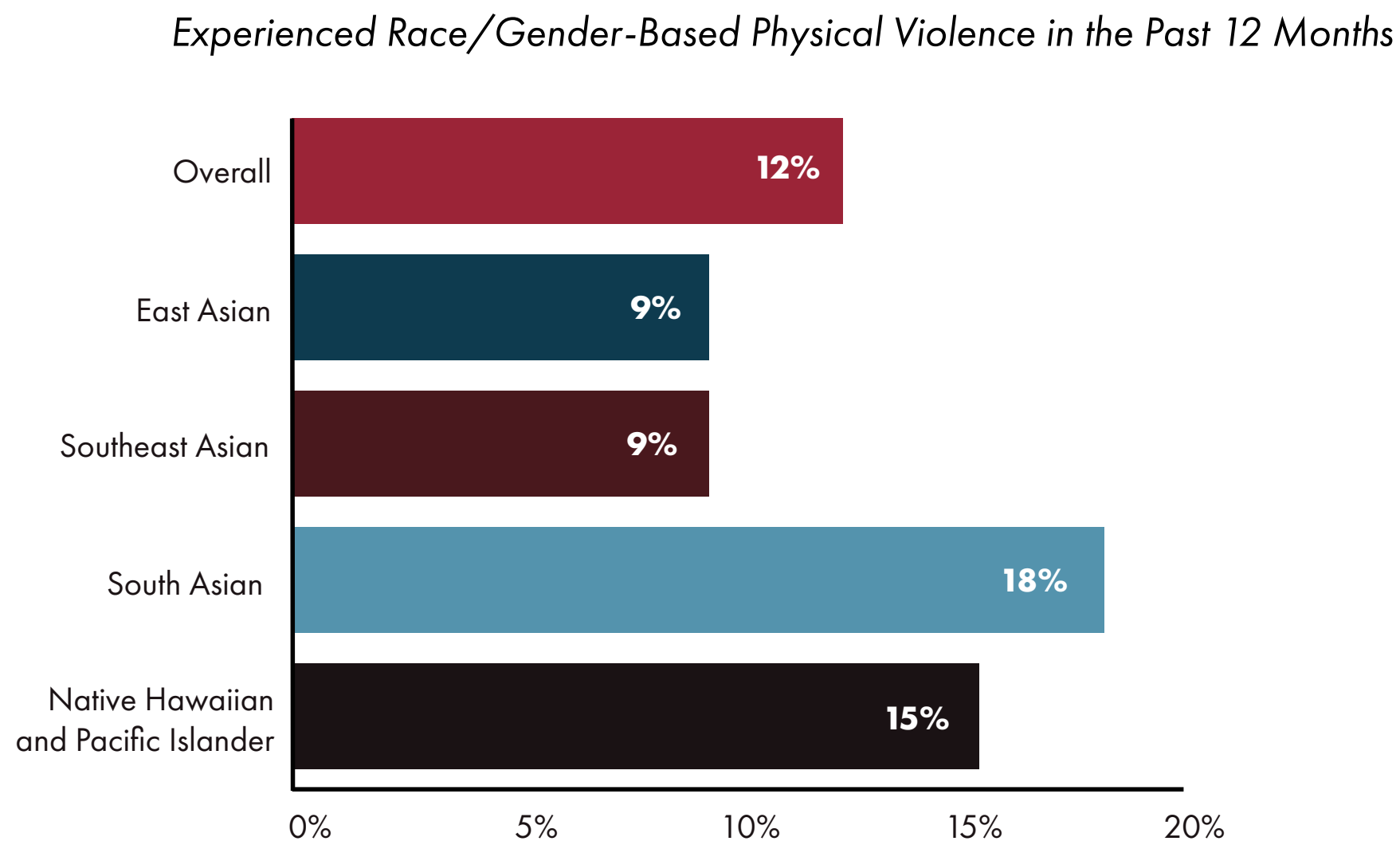


*\*Differences between subgroups statistically significant at  $\alpha=0.05$*

Almost 40% of AAPI women report experiencing sexual harassment in the last year with Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander women (52%) and South Asian women (40%) being significantly more likely to experience sexual harassment in comparison to other AAPI subgroups.

The most common sites where AAPI women experience sexual harassment include public spaces such as restaurants, grocery stores, and shopping centers (16%), online/via phone (12%), and mass transit (10%). The most common perpetrators of sexual harassment were strangers (25%), friends or neighbors (8%), and a significant other (5%). The primary reasons AAPI women report being targeted for sexual harassment included biological sex (18%), race/ethnicity (12%), and gender identity or perceived gender identity (11%).

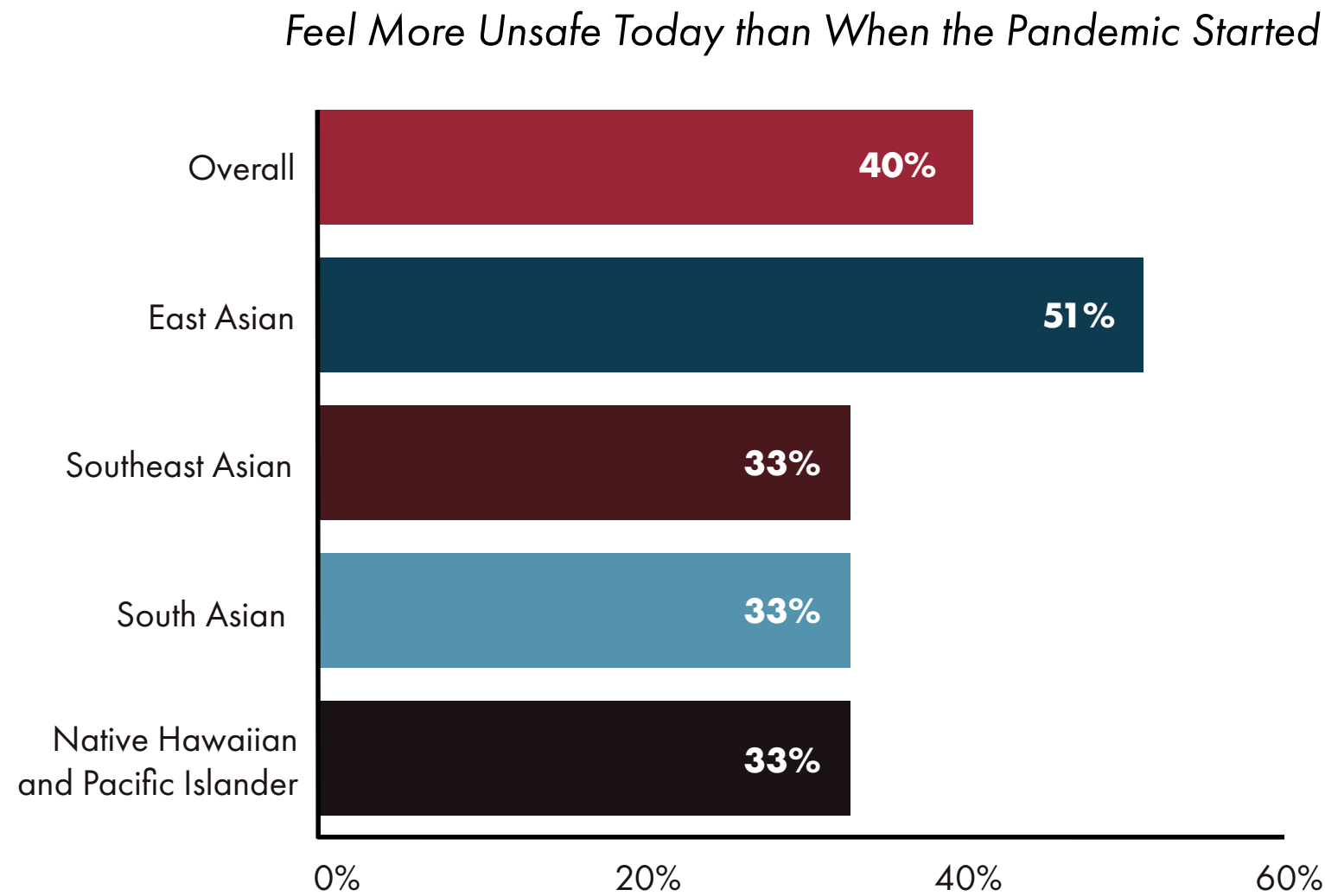
**Figure 3. Gender and/or Race-Based Physical Violence in the Past 12 Months**



*\*Differences between subgroups statistically significant at  $\alpha=0.05$*

One in ten AAPI women report experiencing gender and/or race-based physical violence over the last year. This number is significantly higher for South Asian women (18%) and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander women (15%).

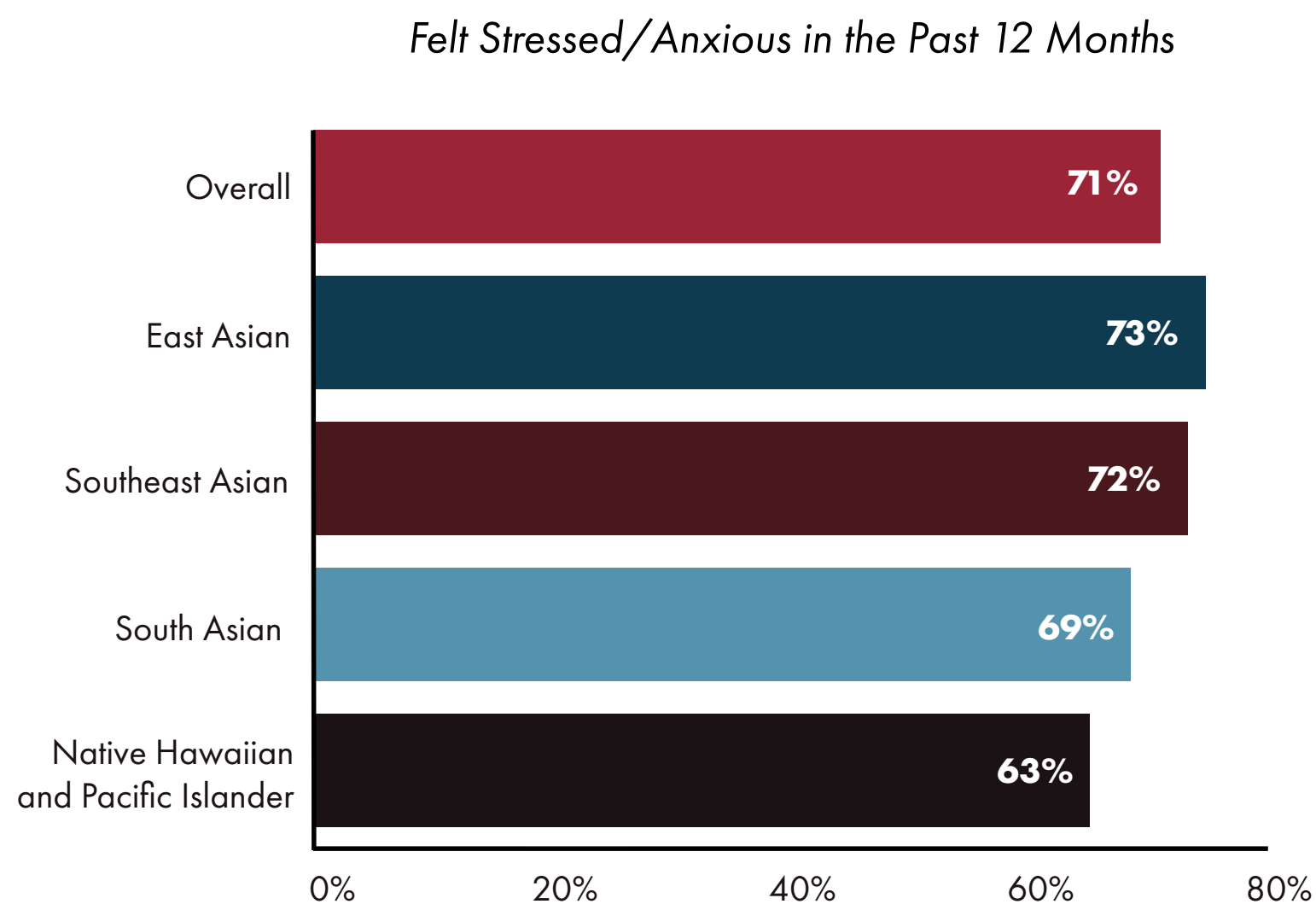
**Figure 4. Perceived Level of Safety Since the Start of the COVID-19 Pandemic**



*\*Differences between subgroups statistically significant at  $\alpha=0.05$*

Forty percent of AAPI women report feeling more unsafe today than when the COVID-19 pandemic first began and another 39% report that their level of safety has not changed since the start of the pandemic. Only 21% of AAPI women report feeling safer today compared to when the pandemic started. East Asian women (51%) were significantly more likely to report feeling more unsafe today compared to other AAPI subgroups.

**Figure 5. The Mental Health Impact of Anti-AAPI Hate**



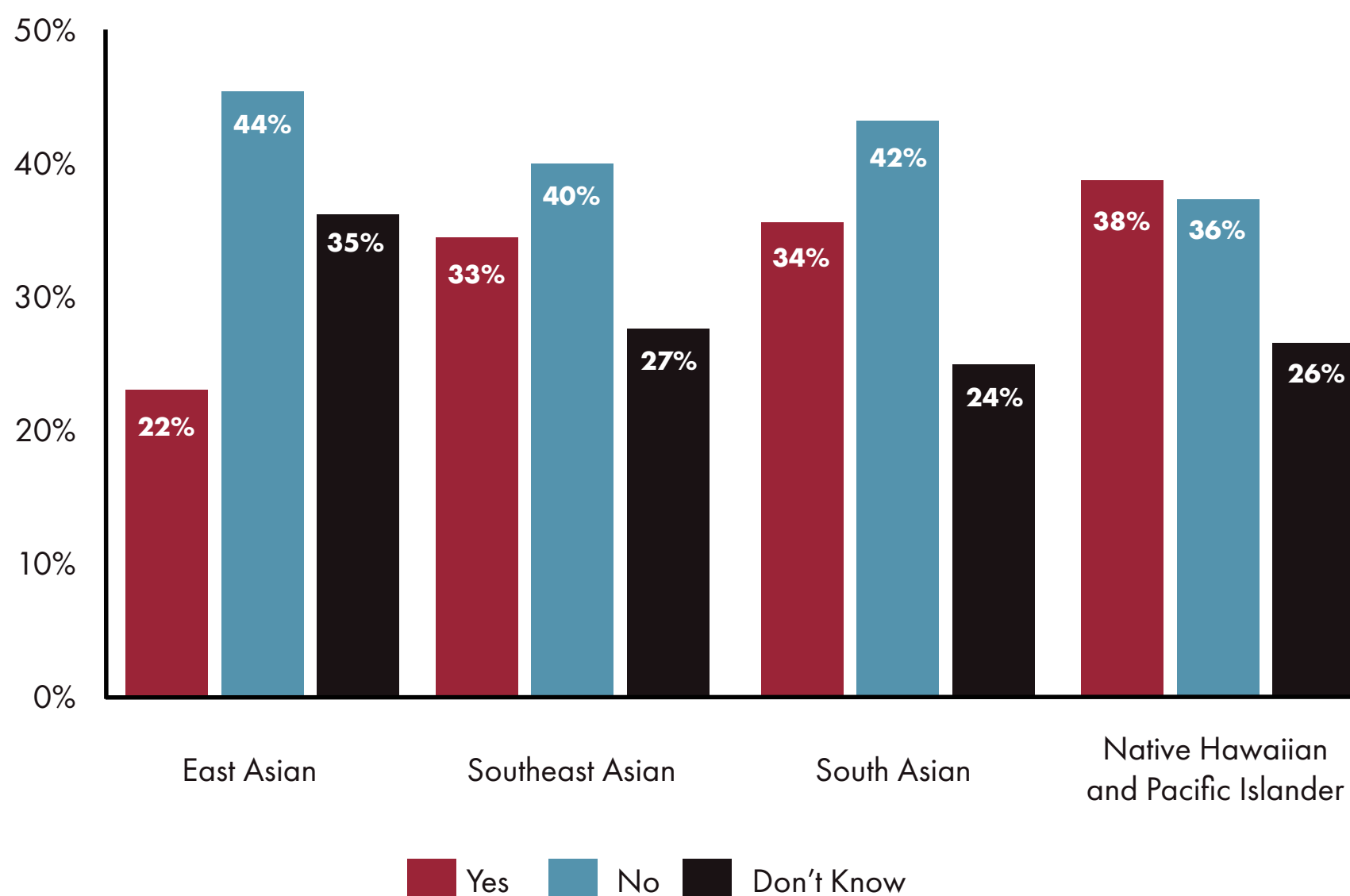
*\*Differences between subgroups not statistically significant.*



A staggering 71% of AAPI women report feeling stressed and/or anxious over the last year due to fear of gender and/or race-based discrimination, harassment, or violence. Because of this, many AAPI women report modifying their behavior with 20% advising family members to stay away from public areas, 13% feeling scared to leave their homes, 6% not wanting their children to resume in-person learning due to fear of bullying, and 6% feeling scared to return to work.

**Figure 6. Satisfaction with Local Elected Officials**

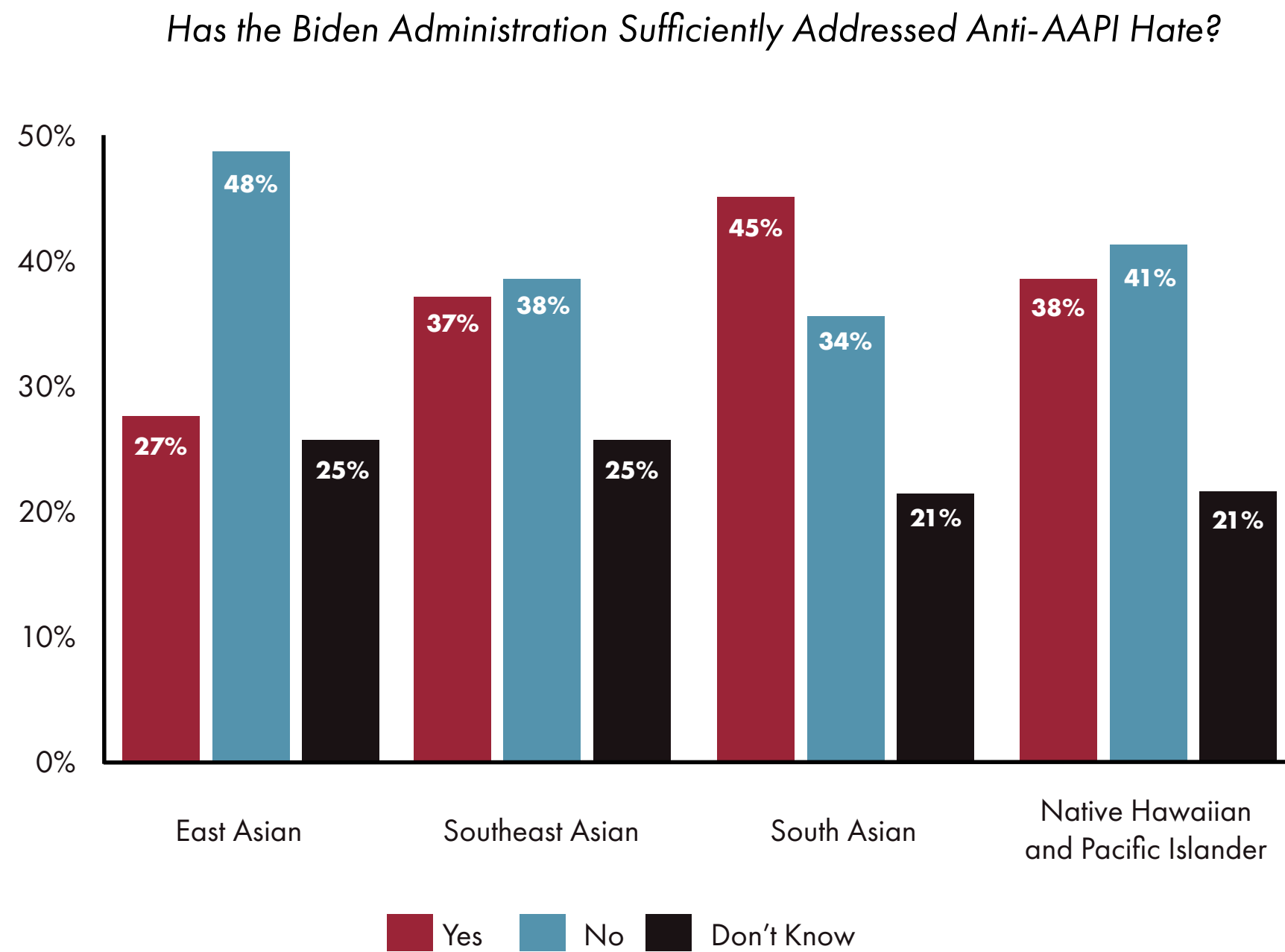
*Have Local Elected Officials Sufficiently Addressed Anti-AAPI Hate?*



*\*Differences between subgroups statistically significant at  $\alpha=0.05$*

Twenty-nine percent of AAPI women believe their local elected officials have sufficiently addressed anti-AAPI hate. There were significant differences across subgroups with East Asian women being the least likely (22%) and NHPI women being the most likely (38%) to report that their local elected officials have sufficiently addressed anti-AAPI hate.

**Figure 7. Satisfaction with the Biden Administration**



*\*Differences between subgroups statistically significant at  $\alpha=0.05$*

Thirty-six percent of AAPI women believe the Biden administration has sufficiently addressed anti-AAPI hate. There is significant differences across subgroups with East Asian women being the least likely (27%) and South Asian women being the most likely (45%) to report that the Biden administration has sufficiently addressed anti-AAPI hate.

**9 in 10 AAPI women agree that elected officials need to:**

- Better understand the intersectional ways in which AAPIs experience discrimination and,
- Invest more resources in directly impacted communities in order to combat anti-AAPI hate.

## CONCLUSION

Discrimination, harassment, and violence against AAPI women — stemming from a long history of anti-AAPI sentiment and misogyny — are still rampant in society, occurring every day in public spaces, at schools and businesses, and even in our own neighborhoods. Racism intertwined with misogyny continues to be a part of the lives of AAPI women, and the pandemic merely laid bare what went unnoticed before. Incidents of violence against AAPI women in early 2022 have left our communities eager to seek change.<sup>11,12</sup> We cannot ignore hate incidents and discrimination targeting AAPI persons and communities, especially the disproportionate impact on AAPI women and girls. We call for systemic changes to understand, address, and end these hate incidents and discrimination based on racism and xenophobia.

### Policy Recommendations

- **Culturally-Competent and Language Accessible Services** - AAPIs face significant language and cultural barriers, due to the high percentage of immigrants. These barriers are higher in geographic areas with newer and rapidly growing AAPI populations, which may lack the social, political, or cultural infrastructure of states with longstanding AAPI populations.<sup>13</sup> This has profound implications for access to services and opportunities, such as in employment, housing, and health care. Regardless of their ability to speak English, victims and survivors of race and gender-based violence should have access to in-language, culturally competent, and holistic services. Investments are needed in trusted community partners to directly provide and help connect women to these services.

The Biden Administration's commitment to allocate \$49.5 million from the American Rescue Plan toward community-based, culturally specific services and programs for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault who face language and other barriers to services and safety is a step in the right direction.<sup>4</sup> This progress must be matched by a long term, consistent commitment at all levels of government to fund these services in addition to mental health, immigration, and legal services.

- **Resources to local communities and community-based organizations** - The pandemic has exacerbated existing structural inequalities harming the well-being of AAPI women and communities, from high rates of workplace harassment in low wage and socially isolated industries to compromised access to health care due to

<sup>11</sup> Kimmy Yam (January 19, 2022). NYC subway station death of Michelle Go leaves Asian Americans reeling. NBC News.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/nyc-subway-station-death-michelle-go-leaves-asian-americans-reeling-rcna12650>

<sup>12</sup> Ashley Southall, Ali Watkins, and Jeffrey E. Singer (February 14, 2022). Screams That 'Went Quiet': Prosecutors' Account of Chinatown Killing. The New York Times.

[nytimes.com/2022/02/14/nyregion/suspect-christina-yuna-lee-murder.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/14/nyregion/suspect-christina-yuna-lee-murder.html)

<sup>13</sup> NAPAWF (2017). Still Fierce, Still Fighting: A Reproductive Justice Agenda for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. <https://napawf.org/s/still-fierce-still-fighting.pdf>

immigration restrictions and language barriers. The urgent needs of individuals are often met — if they are met at all — by local community-based organizations. In addition to being trusted messengers, these organizations act as “first responders” delivering services, distributing information, and bridging the gap between individuals and critical government programs administered by complex, often inaccessible bureaucracies.

After decades of underinvestment, federal, state, and local budgets should prioritize and support AAPI women and communities by centering equity in their annual budget cycles. In addition to funding culturally-competent and language-accessible services for victims and survivors, investments are needed in the health, infrastructure, safety, and development of AAPI neighborhoods, the families and businesses that sustain them, and the community-based organizations that serve them.

- **Data Disaggregation** - AAPIs are an extremely diverse population, comprising more than 50 ethnic subgroups and 100 languages and dialects.<sup>14</sup> Yet, publicly reported data on AAPIs are rarely disaggregated or inclusive. Instead, the “model minority” myth has cast a shadow over the AAPI community for decades, minimizing the effects of structural racism and sexism on women of color and erasing the unique struggles of a large and diverse population.<sup>12</sup> Accurate and disaggregated data collection is needed to identify key disparities within the AAPI community and allocate resources to those most in need.<sup>15</sup>
- **Workplace Protections** - Even before the pandemic, AAPI women comprised a disproportionately high share of the low-wage workforce, and immigrant AAPI women in particular were especially vulnerable to workplace sexual harassment and violence.<sup>6,12</sup> Since the pandemic, over a fifth of the Pacific Islander women surveyed have reported facing discrimination or harassment at their workplace. Businesses, which include workplaces, are also the most common sites of violence or discrimination for Southeast Asian, South Asian, and multiracial Asian women. Government agencies with the appropriate jurisdiction must enforce the civil rights and labor protections that prohibit workplace discrimination and harassment on the basis of race or gender. Government agencies should also provide educational resources in multiple languages and partner with trusted community-based organizations to ensure that AAPI women are aware of their rights.

<sup>14</sup> NAPAWF, *Fighting for Equal Pay for AAPI Women*. <https://www.napawf.org/equalpay>

<sup>15</sup> AAPI Data (2021). “Tip of the Iceberg: Estimates of AAPI Hate Incidents Far More Extensive than Reported”. <http://aapidata.com/blog/tip-iceberg-march2021-survey/>

## Authors

**Dr. Drishti Pillai** is the Research Director at the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF). For questions about this study, please contact: [dpillai@napawf.org](mailto:dpillai@napawf.org).

**Alyssa Lindsey** is the Research Associate at the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF).

## Suggested Citation

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## About NAPAWF

*The National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)* is the only multi-issue, progressive, community organizing and policy advocacy organization for Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women and girls in the U.S. NAPAWF's mission is to build collective power so that all AAPI women and girls can have full agency over our lives, our families, and our communities.

For more information, visit [napawf.org](http://napawf.org) or email [info@napawf.org](mailto:info@napawf.org).

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