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# Guest editorial: Policing and Asian communities: an area that has been neglected by police scholars

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## Background

Recent mass violence against Asians (e.g. Atlanta Spa Shooting in 2021 and mass shootings at Monterey Park, Half Moon Bay and Oakland in California in 2023) seemed to signal an outbreak of violence occurring against Asians of all ethnic origins in the United States of America. During the COVID-19 pandemic, increased anti-Asian sentiments around the world arose from evidence that the virus that causes COVID-19 originated in a Chinese Government laboratory in Wuhan (Stolberg *et al.*, 2023). Those sentiments resulted in incidents of ambush violence that targeted Asians, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs). As the COVID-19 pandemic waned in 2023, back-to-back mass shootings in Asian communities in the United States of America raised concerns about a perceived rise of anti-Asian sentiment and an accompanying vicious cycle of bias-motivated crimes against Asians.

The mass media spotlighted the rise of anti-Asian sentiment, racism and violence that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, only a small number of scholarly studies empirically examined these topics before, during and as the pandemic waned. The numbers were small mainly because there are little relevant data available, which includes unreliable official hate crime data due to underreporting (Lim *et al.*, 2023). To illustrate, in a recent study, Kim *et al.* (2023) systematically examined the literature on hate/bias crimes against Asians published in the United States of America between 2000 and 2020. They found that only 23 out of 1,334 studies (1.7%) examined discrimination and/or microaggression against Asians, and none of the studies examined actual hate crimes against Asians. Kim *et al.* (2023) also found that not a single study among those selected had been published in criminology or criminal justice journals.

As policing scholars, we were curious about police practices toward Asian communities and relations between the police and Asian immigrants and their descendants, particularly Asians classified as racial/ethnic minorities in a specific country. Studying these issues is critical to uncovering what the practices involve, measuring their impact and cataloging similarities and differences in police practices involving Asian communities and police interactions with Asians. Such information can then be used to develop targeted police policies and practices that address the needs of members of Asian communities.

## In this issue

This special issue's focus is six on studies whose focus is on interactions occurring between local police and Asian residents both inside and outside the United States of America. We begin the issue with a study by Lim *et al.* (2024), which reviewed extant literature on the policing of Asian communities in the United States of America to investigate "what is known" on the topic. Utilizing a PRISMA systematic literature review framework, Lim *et al.* (2023) outlined the steps they undertook to compile and review relevant articles, beginning with the terms employed to search two criminal justice databases (Scopus and Criminal Justice Abstracts). The initial search identified a sample of over two thousand potentially relevant articles ( $N = 2,440$ ). Further review of the articles and subsequent filtering resulted in 16 articles highlighting research on direct and indirect interactions between the police and Asian



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respondents. Their results indicated that most of the studies focused on larger metropolitan areas and used the term “Asian” as a catch-all racial category, omitting discussion on variation within this grouping. In addition, the majority of the articles were published in criminal justice journals, focused only on citizens’ perspectives, were based on limited survey or secondary data and, not unsurprisingly, highlighted large gaps in police scholars’ knowledge and understanding of the relationship between Asian residents and police or about their encounters with the police. Based on their findings, [Lim et al. \(2023\)](#) recommended that future research and outreach efforts by the police would benefit from a more nuanced framework for discussing nationality over race, as well as again emphasizing the importance of a diverse police force.

In the second article, [Van Ha and Sun \(2024\)](#) examined the perceptions of police through interviews with twenty Asians living in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States of America. They applied system justification theory (SJT) to explore why most respondents presented a supportive narrative of their police encounters. Results suggested that the respondents who had little or no contact with the police held a more positive opinion of the police as compared to respondents who had been crime victims and had multiple interactions with the police. Through the framework of SJT, [Van Ha and Sun \(2024\)](#) highlighted the unique experience of Asians, emphasizing their lived experiences and the impact of context, indicating that a key difference in the finding of support could be mediated by the type of environment in which the respondent resided. [Van Ha and Sun \(2024\)](#) stated the limitation of their research in having a preponderance of respondents who reported on the police in a favorable light and suggest that future research make greater efforts to include a sample of respondents who do not support the police.

Using survey data collected from a generally representative sample ( $N = 128$ ) of first- and second-generation Korean Americans and recent Korean immigrants living in Atlanta, [Sohn et al. \(2024\)](#) examined residents’ attitudes toward the police and willingness to cooperate with the police. Results of multivariate modeling revealed that, consistent with previous research, [Sohn et al. \(2024\)](#) found perceptions of police as just, respectful and providing high-quality services played a critical role in determining the degree of cooperation among Korean immigrants and residents in Atlanta. However, unlike prior research, [Sohn et al. \(2024\)](#) found that male members displayed greater cooperative attitudes toward the police than did female members. [Sohn et al. \(2024\)](#) suggested these results could be a function of their sample, which included both recent immigrants as well as 1st and 2nd generation Korean Americans. Finally, [Sohn et al. \(2024\)](#) found, again in contrast to prior research, that sample members who had experienced criminal victimization were more willing to cooperate with the police than members who had not. [Sohn et al. \(2024\)](#) explain that these results suggest Korean residents’ cooperative attitudes toward the police may have been influenced by positive interactions with law enforcement after reporting their victimization. [Sohn et al. \(2024\)](#) thus shed light on the dynamics between Korean Americans and the police, thereby contributing to a growing literature on Asian community members’ perspectives on law enforcement.

Two of the articles included in this issue examined police interactions with Asian immigrants living in Taiwan and South Korea. [Lai et al. \(2024\)](#) presented the findings of their structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis examining respondents’ attitudes toward the police. The study specifically examined the relationship between immigrants residing in Taiwan measured through the use of face-to-face surveys, with 579 respondents participating. Respondents were asked about topics such as police legitimacy, assimilation, ethnic identity, discrimination, procedural justice, perceptions of home country police, perceptions of home country crime and respondents’ home country (Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Thailand). Key findings suggest that overall respondents held a positive attitude toward the police, further highlighted by whether the police were seen as acting in a procedurally just way and whether the respondents engaged in

the cultural activities of Taiwan. [Lai et al. \(2024\)](#) concluded by suggesting additional training for the police on procedural justice principles as well as on the immigrants' cultures. [Lai et al. \(2024\)](#) also suggested greater efforts be undertaken at the community level to foster greater cultural engagement with those immigrating to Taiwan.

The study by [Kuen et al. \(2024\)](#) examines crime patterns in South Korea and identifies higher homicide rates in areas that are "foreigner concentrated." Breaking the population into the categories of Korean, Korean Chinese and other foreigners, [Kuen et al. \(2024\)](#) applied Elijah Anderson's *Code of the Streets* to explain why these geographic areas have lower crime overall but higher homicide rates. Predicting a measure of street code beliefs from a five-item scale, their analyses found a significant relationship between the measure of nationality, street code beliefs and perceived effectiveness of the police. Specifically, Korean Chinese residents who indicated that the police are less effective also reported more support for street code beliefs. [Kuen et al. \(2024\)](#) built off of these analyses to suggest that the marginalization of Korean Chinese residents in South Korea may be leading them to rely on informal measures of control, much like Anderson's (1999) seminal work on the street culture that impoverished African Americans endorsed. [Kuen et al. \(2024\)](#) concluded that South Korean police face the challenge of (1) demonstrating greater effectiveness in the eyes of non-Korean residents, particularly the Korean Chinese and (2) improving their community relationships with these same residents.

### Concluding remarks

Xenophobic sentiments, particularly those expressed by the former leader of the United States of America (e.g. [Fersan and Golden, 2020](#)), raised unreasonable fears about Asians during the COVID-19 pandemic and likely resulted in increased violence against Asians (e.g. [Associated Press, 2021](#)). At the end of the pandemic, not only are anti-Asian racism and violence still a concern, but there are also apparent increases in violence by Asians against other Asians (e.g. [Thompson and Alexander, 2022](#)).

In an effort to address issues of discrimination against AAPIs, on June 25, 2021, the USA White House announced that President Biden had signed an Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce. The purpose of the Order was to strengthen "its ability to recruit, hire, develop, promote, and retain [the] Nation's talent and remove barriers to equal opportunity" ([The White House, 2021](#)). Federal agency administrators and officials at public universities then coordinated a diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEI) initiative to develop strategies to identify and execute the initiative. By the beginning of 2023, however, a "Stop DEI initiatives" movement was well underway, supported largely by Republican political leaders and some groups of academics, over expressed concerns that the new policy violates federal and state employment laws and discriminates against certain demographic groups in hiring (e.g. [McGee, 2023](#); [Turner, 2023](#)).

We are well aware of how strongly the actions of political leaders can affect everything from people's quality of life to their safety. At this moment, no one is sure about how "Stop DEI" efforts will affect relations between the police and the public, especially relations between local police and residents who are members of racial/ethnic minority groups. Also unknown is how "Stop DEI" will affect the ethnic/racial makeup of law enforcement agencies.

As shown in this special issue, scholars have largely ignored studying policing and Asian communities. Issues, challenges and/or concerns among Asian immigrants and their descendants in various countries have not been given enough attention either by the authorities or police scholars, and few of them have been empirically examined. Also, most previous studies lump Asians together into a monolithic category, ignoring member differences by region, country, language or culture, among others. We recommend that future studies investigate differences and similarities in the policing of Asian communities by

distinguishing “Asians” by their origin, heritage, geographical location and/or many other characteristics. Further efforts to study this topic are essential to recognize Asian community needs and offer empirical evidence to establish relevant policies and practices.

**Hyeyoung Lim**

*Department of Criminal Justice, University of Alabama at Birmingham,  
Birmingham, Alabama, USA*

**Brian Lawton**

*John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York,  
New York, New York, USA, and*

**John J. Sloan**

*Department of Criminal Justice and Institute for Human Rights,  
University of Alabama at Birmingham, Birmingham, Alabama, USA*

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