

Canada-China tensions and the impact on Canada's Asian diaspora

Half of Chinese Canadians say Canada-China political tensions have led to negative treatment personally

July 12, 2023 – After COVID-19 led to a [reported surge](#) in hate crimes and discrimination against Asian Canadians, ongoing [tensions with the Chinese government](#) are evidently contributing to sustaining this abuse.

A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute, in partnership with the [Canadian Race Relations Foundation](#), finds many Asian Canadians burdened by judgements and mistreated based on their appearance and assumed associations. More than 800 Asian Canadians were surveyed to better understand these experiences and their interaction with real world event.

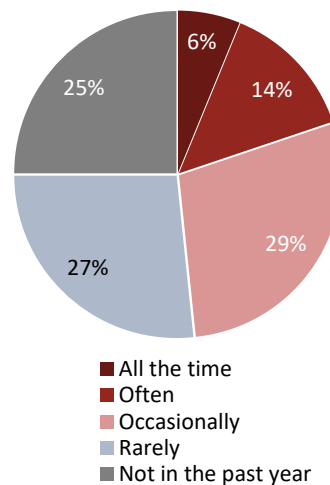
Among Chinese and other East Asian Canadians, half (48%) say they have experienced negative reactions from those around them due to political events over the past year involving Canada and China. One-in-five (20%) say this has happened repeatedly. These experiences add to discrimination that many Asian Canadians already endure.

At least one-quarter of all South Asians (28%), Chinese and East Asians (26%) and Filipino or Southeast Asians (25%) say that they have faced discrimination or harassment over the past year. This includes being insulted, disrespected, intimidated, and even physically assaulted.

The overall situation appears largely unchanged when comparing these new data to those collected in 2021. The percentage of Asian Canadians who consider discrimination against Asians in this country more than a minor problem is approximately three-quarters (77%), a slight drop from 83 per cent two years ago.

These direct experiences inform different views of Canada, depending on one's race and ethnicity. Consider that among the general population, one-in-three (34%) say Canada is a racist country. Among Asian Canadians, this rises to 46 per cent.

**How often this past year or so, if at all, have you personally felt negative reactions from other Canadians towards you because of political events concerning China?
(Chinese / Other East Asian, n=528)**



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute and Canadian Race Relations Foundation conducted an online survey from Feb. 27 – March 6, 2023 among a representative randomized sample of 1,625 Canadian adults (gen pop) as well as 884 additional Asian Canadians, who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size (gen pop) would carry a margin of error of +/- 2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The same number for the Asian Canadian sample is approximately +/- 3 percentage points. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for jointly by ARI and CRRF. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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More Key Findings:

- A significant number of Asian Canadians say people make assumptions about their education level (41%) – the so-called “model minority” myth – as well as about their working life, their ability to understand English, and other aspects of their lives.
- One-quarter feel that others around them assume they don’t possess “Canadian values” and four-in-five (78%) say that they feel as though they’re treated as an outsider.
- Despite facing significant levels of harassment and discrimination, 94 per cent of Asian Canadians say that diversity makes Canada a better country. This, compared to 86 per cent among the general population

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

About CRRF

*The **Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF)** was created to reaffirm the principles of justice and equality for all in Canada. The mandate of the Foundation is to facilitate throughout Canada the development, sharing and application of knowledge and expertise in order to contribute to the elimination of racism and all forms of racial discrimination in Canadian society.*

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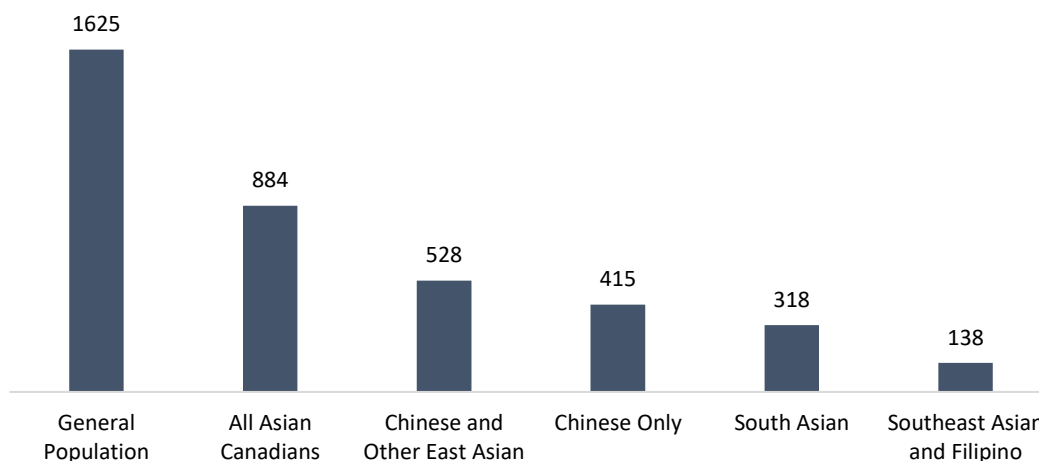
Part One: Views of Asian Canadians

How much of a problem is anti-Asian racism and discrimination?

In 2020 the Angus Reid Institute began a series of studies, speaking to Asian Canadians about their experiences in their communities, both positive and negative. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic appeared to have increased abuse and harassment for Chinese Canadians in particular.

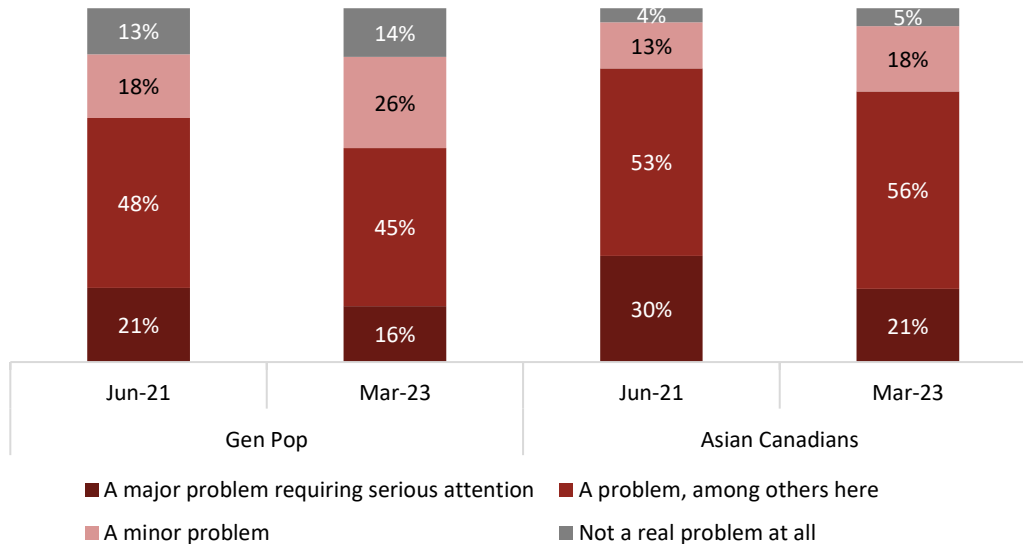
To build on this research, which has largely focused on Chinese and East Asian Canadians, this latest study expands the sample size to allow for a comparison between additional groups of Asian Canadians. This sample groups Asian Canadians together at times and at others looks at these communities distinctly. The responses from Asian Canadians are also weighted to their census averages for the general population sample. Below are the sample sizes used. Any discrepancies in totals is due to the weighting of these populations:

Sample groupings in this study, number of individuals interviewed among each group: see methodology notes for weighting information



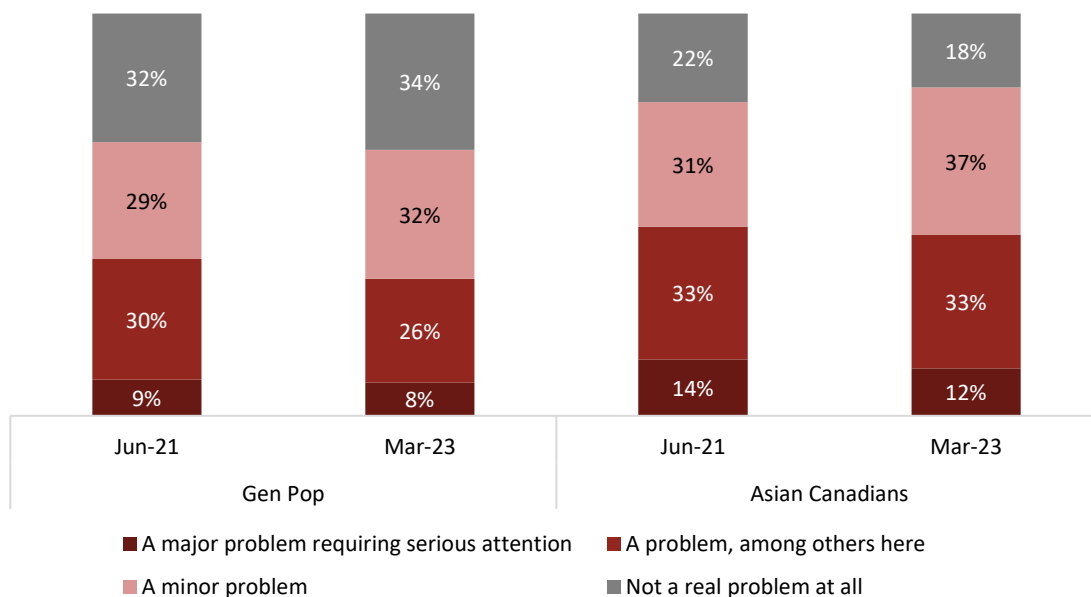
Consider that among the general population, 40 per cent of Canadians say racism and discrimination is a minor problem or no problem at all. Among Asian Canadians, that number drops by nearly half to 23 per cent. And while the situation appears to have improved marginally since the summer of 2021, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, still three-quarters of Asian Canadians see this as a problem for the country to address. This issue evidently remains widespread and of concern to the vast majority of those with Asian heritage living in Canada:

Overall, how much of a problem do you consider racism, and discrimination against Asians to be today in Canada overall?



Approaching half of Asian Canadians (45%) perceive racism as a problem in their own community. This level is consistent with that noted in 2021. Comparatively, fewer – but still one-in-three (34%) – among the general population see this problem in their own communities:

Overall, how much of a problem do you consider racism, and discrimination against Asians to be today in your own community?

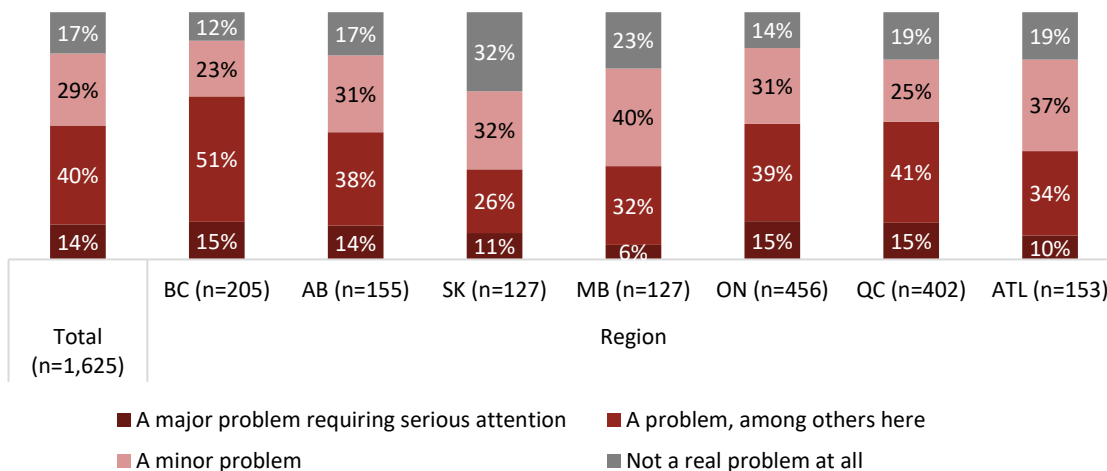


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Regions with higher levels of Asian Canadian representation (Ontario and British Columbia) are more likely to voice concern when it comes to discrimination in their own province. In British Columbia, two-thirds say this is a problem. In 2021, Metro Vancouver [police reported](#) a 717 per cent increase in anti-Asian hate crimes over the previous year. In 2022, [repeated reports of racist graffiti](#) were documented. Residents in Chinatowns in [Montreal](#) and [Toronto](#), too, have reported an uptick in abuse and racism:

Overall, how much of a problem do you consider racism, and discrimination against Asians to be today in your own province?



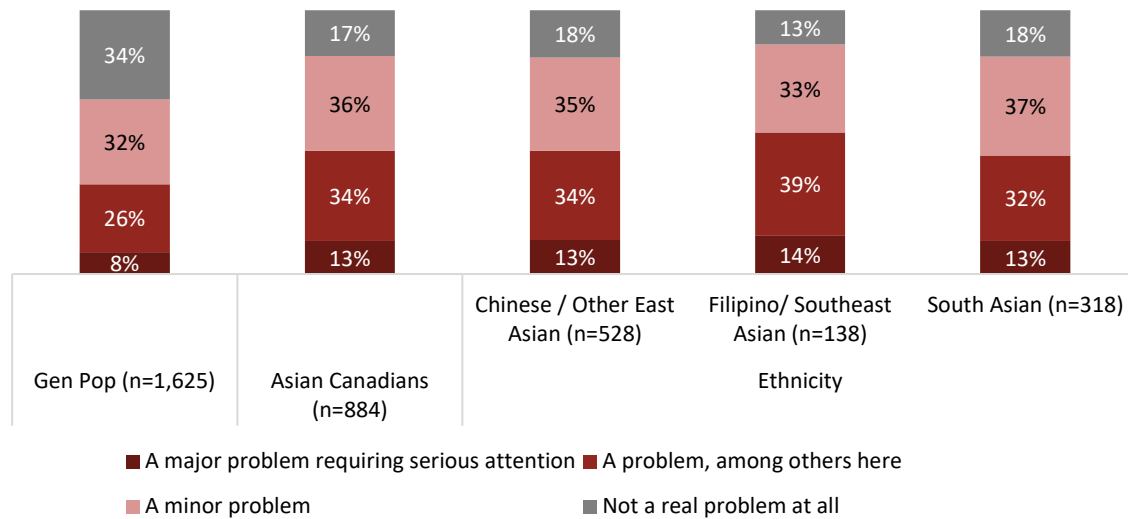
Comparing views from different ethnic and racial groups

At the community level, Asian Canadians are half as likely to say that this is “not a real problem” than the general population. One-in-three among this latter group feel that way, while the same number (32%) say this is a minor problem where they live. One-in-three among the general population sample (34%) perceive this as a serious issue in their community. Conversely, at least 45 per cent of all Asian Canadians say this is more than a minor problem in their own community:

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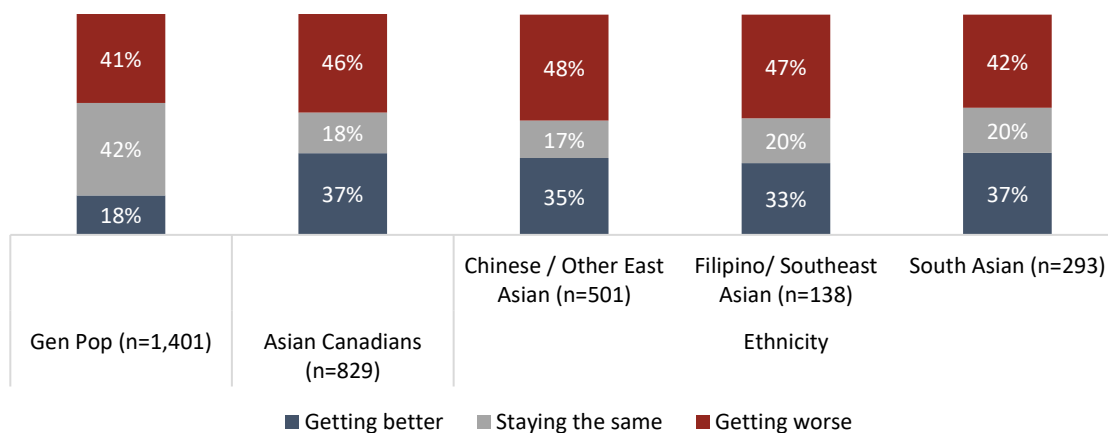
Overall, how much of a problem do you consider racism, and discrimination against Asians to be today in your own community?



Is it getting better or worse?

Canadians aren't quite sure if this issue of anti-Asian discrimination is getting better or worse. For a significant group, including close to half of Chinese and East Asians, as well as Filipino and Southeast Asians, the problem continues to worsen. That said, there are considerable differences of opinion regarding this trend. Asian Canadians are also much more likely to voice optimism about the direction Canada is going:

**And, over the past year or so, do you think discrimination and racism against these groups has been getting better or worse in Canada overall?
(Among those who say discrimination is a problem in Canada)**

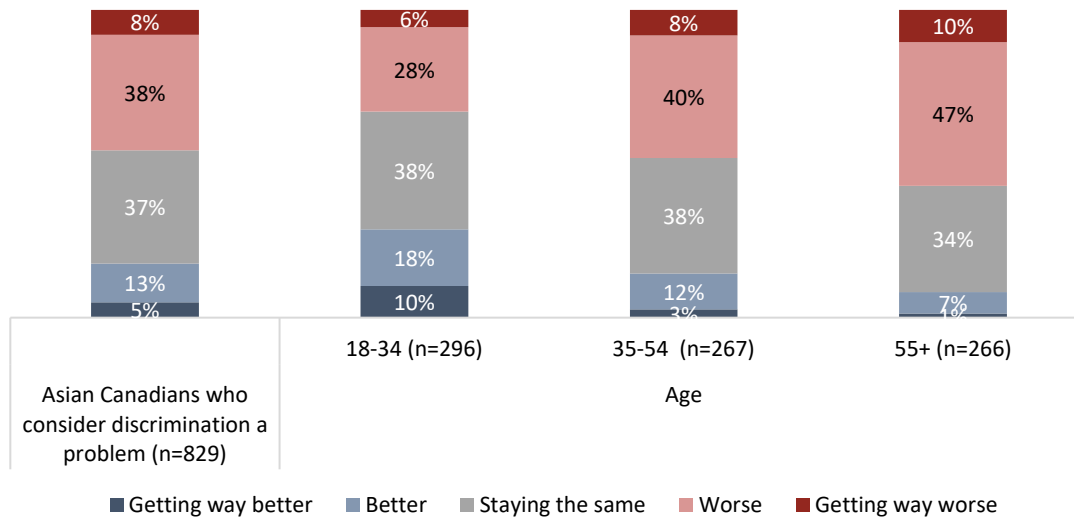


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For younger Asian Canadians who were most likely to experience discrimination and abuse when asked in 2021, the situation remains challenging. Three-in-ten say they feel Canada’s treatment of Asian Canadians is improving, but one-in-three say it is worsening and two-in-five perceive no change. Those over the age of 54 are most likely to say that the situation is worsening – 57 per cent say so:

And, over the past year or so, do you think discrimination and racism against these groups has been getting better or worse in Canada overall:



Part Two: Asian Canadian experiences

Chinese Canadian experience

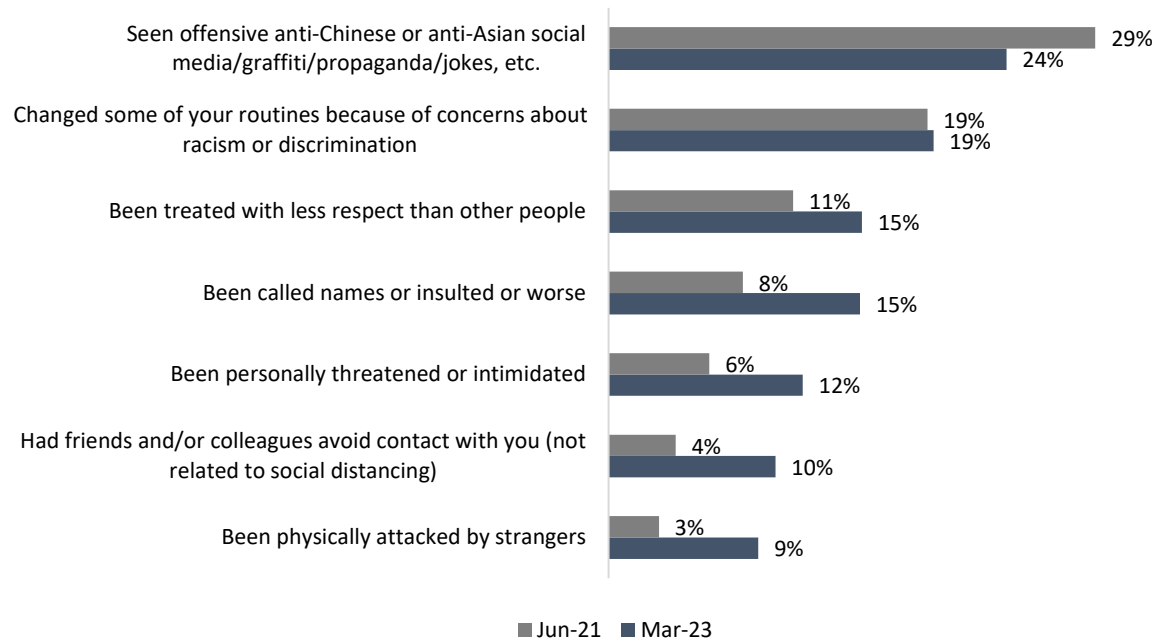
Experiences within the Asian Canadian community are unique to each individual but follow a number of similar threads. While the proportion of Chinese Canadians seeing offensive material on social media, on graffiti around their community, or other spaces, has dropped marginally compared to 2021, the percentage reporting disrespect or abuse in other forms has largely increased. This includes one-in-11 individuals who say they have had a physical altercation with someone because of their ethnicity over the past year:

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**Over the past year or so, would you say you have received poor or unfair treatment from any of these because of your own racial or ethnic background?
(Chinese respondents only, n=415)**

Percentage who say 'all the time' or 'often' shown



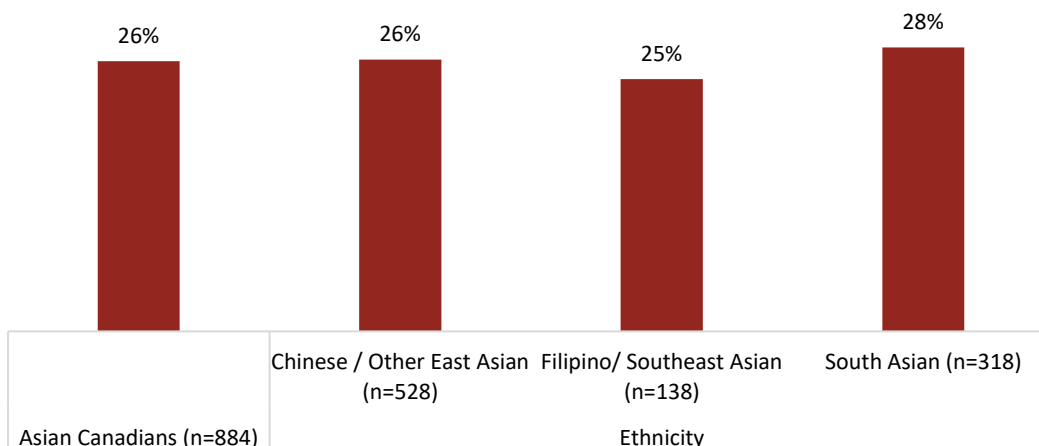
Many continue to face harassment, abuse

Broadening the scope of these experiences, it is clear that many visible minority communities of Asian descent are impacted to some level. The percentage of those saying yes to any level of abuse or discrimination in this list is between 25 and 28 per cent for all Asian Canadian groups:

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Yes to any level of abuse/discrimination



Looking at the individual components of this discrimination or harassment helps to understand the breadth of experience across each group. South Asians, for example, are most likely to say they have been treated with disrespect (22%), while close to one-in-ten among all groups have faced intimidation or threats:

Thinking about the past year or so, have you personally experienced any of the following because of your perceived race/ethnicity?				
	Asian Canadians (n=884)	Ethnicity		
		Chinese / Other East Asian (n=528)	Filipino/ Southeast Asian (n=138)	South Asian (n=318)
Seen offensive media/graffiti/propaganda/jokes, etc.	22%	26%	19%	24%
Feared for your personal safety	17%	16%	16%	17%
Changed some of your routines because of concerns about racism or discrimination	17%	18%	15%	19%
Been treated with less respect than other people	16%	15%	16%	22%
Feared for the safety of your friends and family	14%	18%	16%	21%
Been called names or insulted or worse	13%	13%	10%	14%
Had friends and/or colleagues avoid contact with you (not related to social distancing)	10%	10%	9%	13%
Been personally threatened or intimidated	10%	11%	7%	10%
Been physically attacked by strangers	7%	8%	5%	8%

Abuse because of governmental tensions?

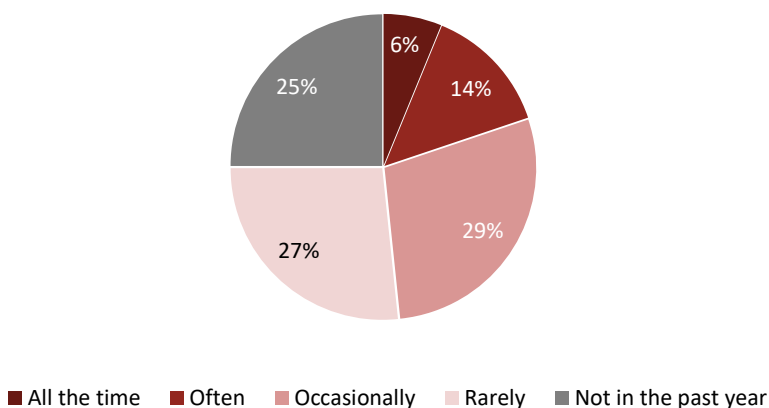
Tensions with China have been pronounced in recent years. The saga of [Meng Wanzhou and the Two Michaels, trade disputes](#), and more recently allegations of [election interference](#), have all contributed to Canadians' [overwhelmingly negative view of the Chinese government](#). A consequence of this appears to be poor treatment of Asian Canadians in Canada.

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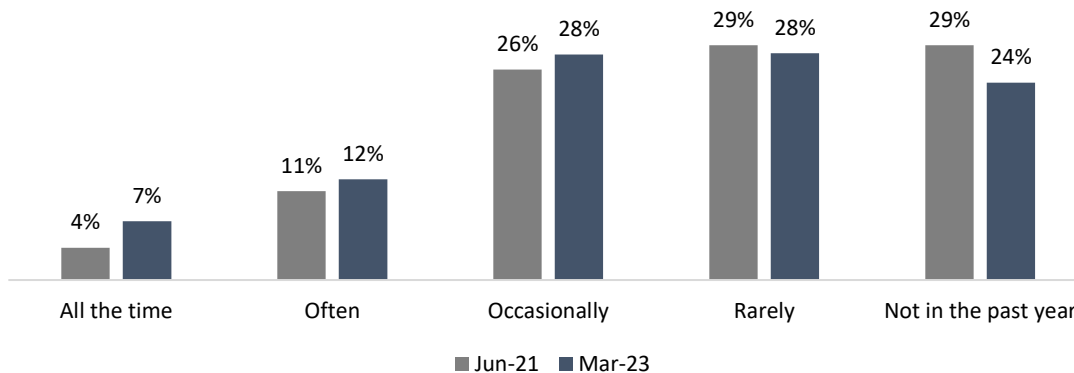
Indeed, one-in-five Chinese and East Asian Canadians say they have regularly faced negative reactions from other Canadians as a result of the political tensions between the Canadian and Chinese governments. Another one-in-three (29%) say this has happened occasionally over the past year, while just one-quarter say this is something they have not experienced.

**How often this past year or so, if at all, have you personally felt negative reactions from other Canadians towards you because of political events concerning China?
(Chinese / Other East Asian, n=528)**



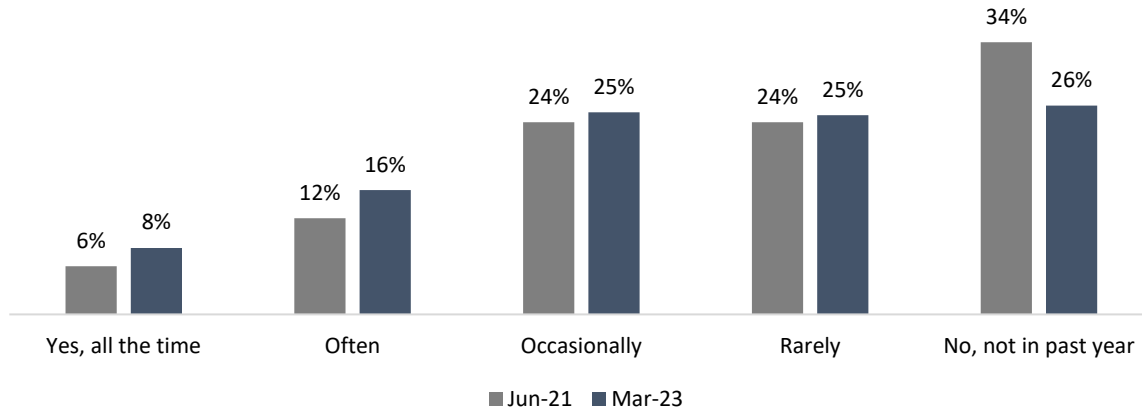
Comparing these data with responses from 2021 for specifically Chinese Canadians, the percentage of those who have experienced negative reactions due to political tensions has risen five points:

**How often this past year or so, if at all, have you personally felt negative reactions from other Canadians towards you because of these recent political events concerning China?
(Chinese respondents only, n=415)**



Further, among Chinese Canadians, the percentage saying they have faced racist or discriminatory comments from strangers over the past year has also risen, in this case up eight points to 74 per cent.

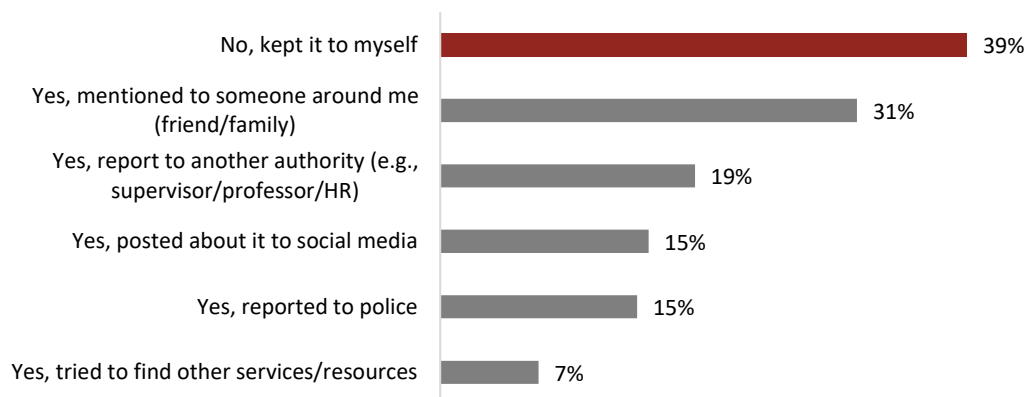
**Have you personally had these types of comments* from strangers directed at you this past year or so?
(Chinese respondents only, n=415)**



Many do not report abuse

As has been the case repeatedly when this issue is studied, both by the Angus Reid Institute and others, many people who face abuse do not report it. In fact, two-in-five (39%) Asian Canadians who have faced abuse say they have not told anyone about it. Three-in-ten spoke to friends or family, while just 15 per cent reported it to the police:

**You indicated some personal experience of being threatened or intimidated or even attacked over the past year due to your ethnicity. Did you report that or mention it to anyone?
(Asian Canadians, n=233)**



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Assumptions that other people make about Asian Canadians

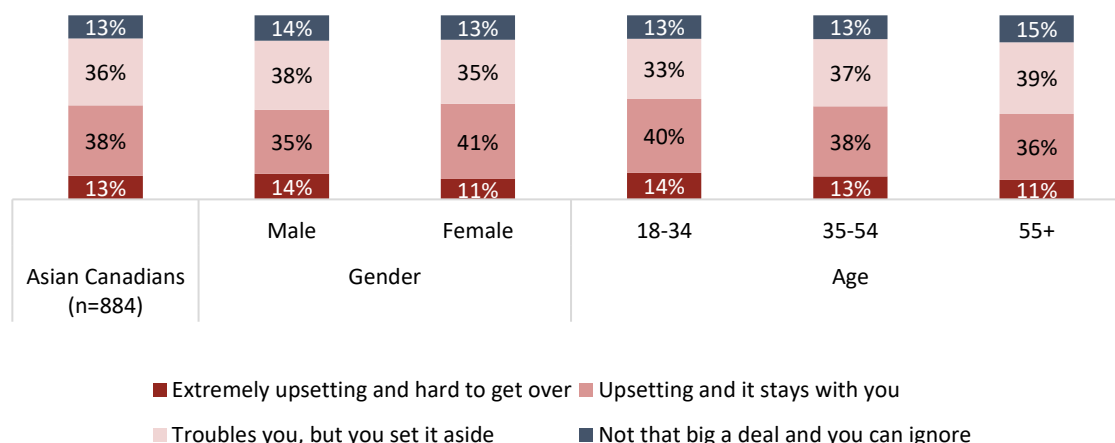
Alongside harassment and discrimination, more subtle forms of judgement are also widespread. These instances can create further alienation for Asian Canadians, being categorized by prejudgement rather than their own lives. For example, half of Chinese and east Asian Canadians say they are treated as a “model minority”, that is, people they meet assume that they are well-educated. This type of judgement assumes a homogeneity among a diverse group.

More than one-in-three Asian Canadians (37%), including 44 per cent of South Asians, say that people assume that they only eat certain types of foods. Three-in-ten overall, including a close-to-equal number among each group say people assume they don’t understand English very well:

Has someone assumed something about you just because of your ethnicity, without knowing anything about you?				
Unweighted sample sizes	Asian Canadians (n=885)	Ethnicity		
		Chinese / Other East Asian (n=487)	Filipino/ Southeast Asian (n=122)	South Asian (n=318)
I’m well-educated (the model minority)	41%	47%	37%	35%
I only eat certain types of food	37%	35%	31%	44%
I work a certain type of job	30%	32%	38%	26%
I don’t understand English well	29%	30%	26%	29%
I don’t have many friends outside my ethnicity	26%	23%	25%	33%
I don’t share “Canadian” values	24%	23%	24%	28%
I’m religious	21%	9%	32%	35%
None of these	24%	25%	24%	20%

What this all amounts to is a reality where the majority of Asian Canadians are left to feel harassed or discriminated against in some form and carry this with them in their day-to-day life. Just 13 per cent among this group say that there’s nothing that really affects them:

Feelings about the type of challenges Asian Canadians have been facing in recent years:

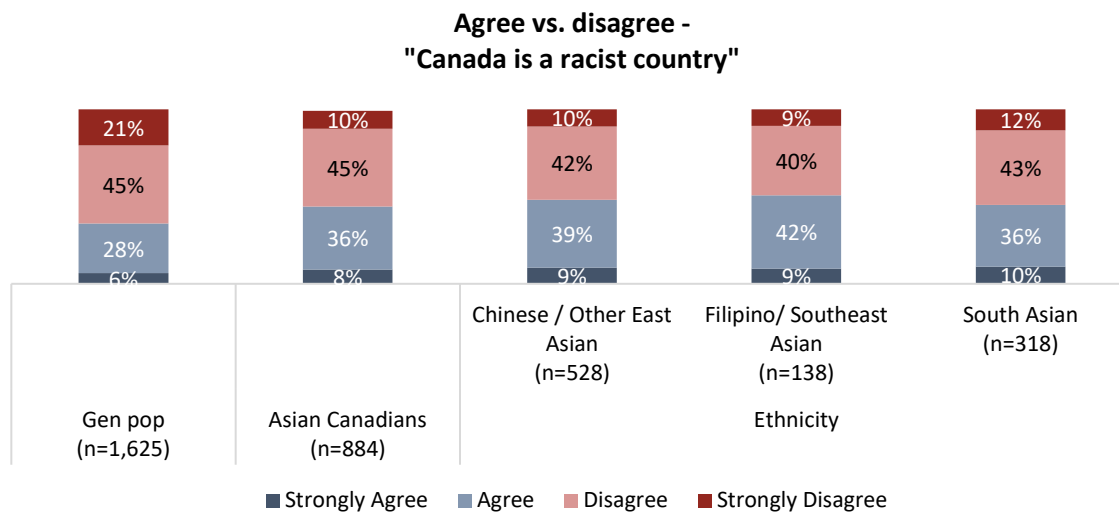


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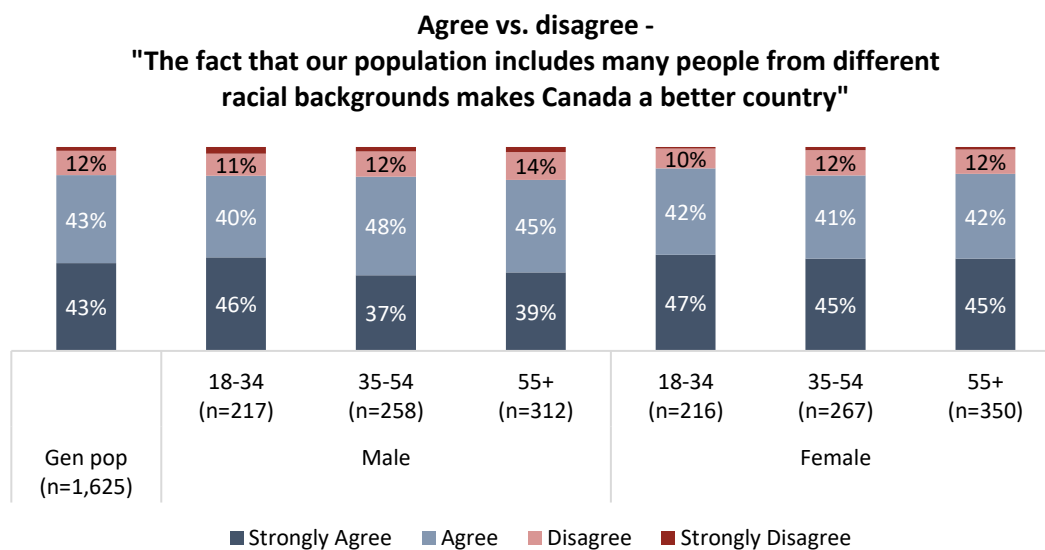
Is Canada a racist country?

Some of these personal experiences are perhaps correlated with an elevated sense that Canada is a racist country. This is a view held by one-in-three Canadians overall (34%) but 44 per cent of Asian Canadians. Asian Canadians are also half as likely to “strongly disagree” with this idea compared to the general population:



Diversity a source of pride

This reported treatment represents a contradiction within Canadian society. Canadians, broadly speaking, continue to value diversity in Canada. More than four-in-five (86%) say that Canada’s multicultural population represents a strength rather than a weakness. That said, a persistent one-in-nine across all age groups disagree that this makes Canada better:

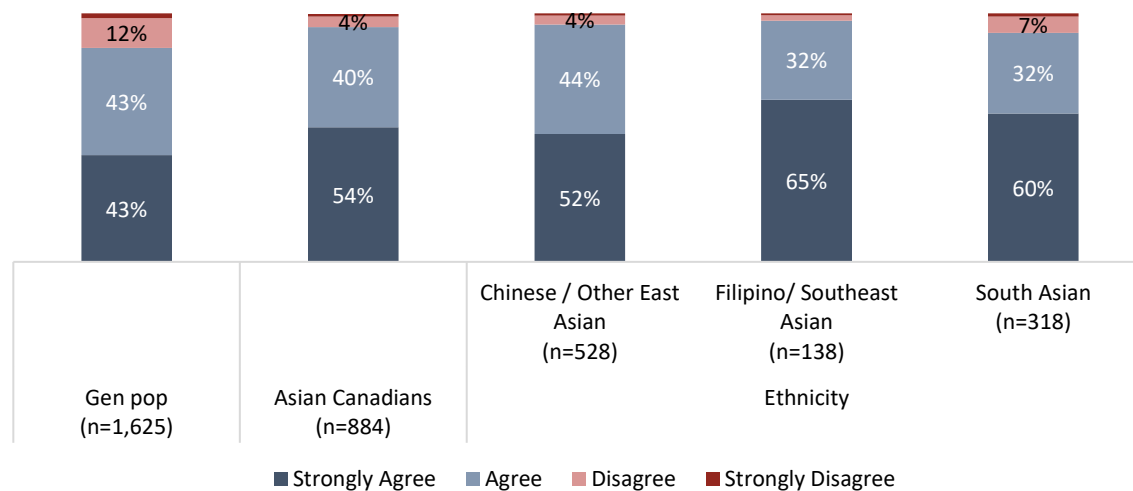


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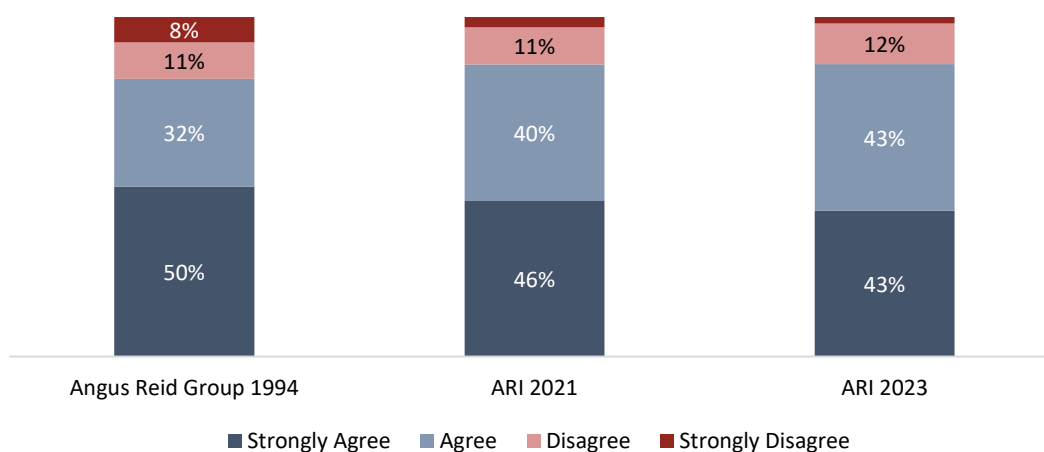
Despite those feelings that Canada may be a racist country with large issues to resolve, Asian Canadians are more likely to “strongly agree” with this statement about the value of diversity than the general population, and overall, less likely to take a negative view:

**Agree vs. disagree -
"The fact that our population includes many people from different racial
backgrounds makes Canada a better country"**



Recent polling on this question suggests that Canadian society has become more open to diversity rather than less open. In 1994, the proportion of those saying diversity hurts Canada was closer to one-in-five:

**Agree vs. disagree -
"The fact that our population includes many people from different
racial backgrounds makes Canada a better country"**



Methodology Notes:

The general population sample, Asian Canadian sample, and Chinese only sample are all weighted to census demographics. Chinese and Other East Asian (combined), South Asian, and Southeast Asian samples are distributed close to evenly across age, gender, and other demographics, but not weighted to census.

For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results by Asian Canadian respondents across age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results by Chinese Canadians only, [click here](#).

For detailed results among unweighted samples of Chinese and other East Asian, South Asian, and Southeast Asian, [click here](#).

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