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## **#STOPASIANHATE: Donald Trump's Political Propaganda Against Asian Racism in the United States**

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### **Abstract**

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the issue of racism became a hot topic discussed by the world community, especially in the United States. The bustle of the #STOPASIANHATE hashtag illustrates that the issue of racism is attracting the attention of the world community massively. The emergence of this hashtag was triggered by one of the political propagandas of the Former President of the United States, Donald Trump, through his tweet stating that the Covid-19 virus was the "Chinese Virus." Therefore, this paper aims to find out how the influence of Donald Trump's political propaganda on the level of racism among Asian-Americans. This paper uses qualitative research methods through case studies and institutional racism approach as theory. The results show that Donald Trump's political propaganda affected racism in the United States with increased hatred of Asian Americans during the pandemic compared to 2019. This problem is also an extreme case of mental health for Asian Americans.

*Keywords: Pandemic, Racism, USA, Propaganda.*

### **Abstrak**

Selama pandemi Covid-19, isu rasisme menjadi topik yang hangat dibicarakan oleh masyarakat dunia, khususnya di Amerika Serikat. Raminya tagar #STOPASIANHATE menggambarkan bahwa isu rasisme menarik perhatian masyarakat dunia secara masif. Munculnya tagar ini dipicu oleh salah satu propaganda politik Mantan Presiden Amerika Serikat, Donald Trump, melalui cuitannya yang menyebutkan bahwa virus Covid-19 sebagai “Virus Cina”. Oleh karena itu, tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana pengaruh propaganda politik Donald Trump terhadap tingkat rasisme kepada orang Asia-Amerika. Dalam tulisan ini, penulis menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif melalui studi kasus dan pendekatan rasisme institusional sebagai teori. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa propaganda politik Donald Trump mempengaruhi tingkat rasisme di Amerika Serikat dengan peningkatan kebencian terhadap orang Asia-Amerika selama pandemi dibandingkan tahun 2019. Masalah ini juga merupakan kasus kesehatan mental yang tidak proporsional bagi orang Asia-Amerika.

Kata Kunci: Pandemi, Rasisme, Amerika Serikat, Propaganda

### **INTRODUCTION**

Racism can occur in society in various circles, identities, and entities in a region and country. One of the countries closely related to multiple issues/cases of racial discrimination in the United States. The racism that occurs in the country results from the social construction of its people (U.N. Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 2008). Throughout United States history, white Americans have generally enjoyed legal or socially sanctioned privileges and rights over certain ethnic or minority groups. European-Americans, predominantly white Anglo-Saxons, enjoy the privilege of education, immigration, voting rights, citizenship, land acquisition, criminal procedures, and so on (Wijaya, 2019). Racism against various ethnic or minority groups has existed in the United States since colonialism. Since time immemorial, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and other minority groups have also faced multiple obstacles in enjoying their political, social, and economic freedoms in the United States. Even Native Americans themselves have suffered from genocide, forced displacement, massacres, and they continue to face discrimination (Banda, 2020).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, cases of racism frequently happened in the United States. This racism occurs to non-whites such as native Indians, black people, Alaskan descent, also Asian descent (Gilbert et al., 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic was first identified in Wuhan, China, causing racism against Asians in the United States to increase. There are many cases of violence against Asians or descent of all ages and places. Such as in public places, schools, and workplaces that happened to both teenagers and the elderly. At least 1,900 cases of racism against Asians have been recorded since March 2020 (Chinese for Affirmative Action, 2020).

Apart from violent cases, economic activities carried out by Asians or their descendants are also experiencing difficulties. The number of customers from Asian restaurants has declined during the Covid-19 pandemic, primarily since this virus originated from China (Olson & Tang, 2020). Not only racism regarding social activities, but racism also happened to public health services. In handling health during the pandemic, the government of the United States still prioritizes certain groups, the whites, over other groups (Gomez, 2020). This causes racial groups of non-whites in the United States to be more marginalized. When handling the effects of Covid-19 and during the recovery phase, including the distribution of this vaccine. The racism that

occurred during this pandemic continues to happen both structurally and institutionally. This racism aimed at the Asian occurs on various platforms such as verbal hate in social media both directly and indirectly, racism in-person, xenophobia in the health sector, and xenophobia in the media (Cheah et al., 2020).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the issue of racism against Asian-Americans or Asian descent was increasingly being discussed. Data from Stop AAPI (Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders) Hate shows that there have been nearly 3800 incidents targeting Asians in the United States over the past year since mid-March 2020. This issue has become public attention after a gunman killed six Asians at a spa in Atlanta, Georgia, on March 16, 2021 (Malekoff, 2021). After the incident, reports of attacks on Asians increased. The day after the Atlanta shootings, a 75-year-old woman was assaulted in San Francisco. These incidents sparked a national protest movement against racism with #stopasianhate. Various movements occurred in New York, Atlanta, Pittsburgh, Washington, to Montreal, Canada. They voiced #stopasianhate and demanded police reform, and denounced Trump's hate propaganda against China during the pandemic. The #stopasianhate hashtag then spread widely after various people around the world used the hashtag as a form of support and solidarity for the Asian community through social media, especially Twitter (Bob Marcotte-U. Rochester, 2021).

The increase of racism in the United States is allegedly triggered by political propaganda by the former President of the United States, Donald Trump. Trump's politics through a propaganda pedigree proves that passionate professionals are tools for managing an unruly underclass. Trump's propaganda presents a pause, thus removing professionals from their roles who behave from the lower classes to the elite. This provides psychological benefits; as a result, people can vent their hatred in the professional class and see them as targets of propaganda control (Wimberly, 2018). Therefore, the research aims to examine the effect of Trump's political propaganda on racism in the United States, specifically on Asian-Americans. The discussion will include case studies of racism against Asian-Americans before and after Donald Trump's political propaganda.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research was conducted using qualitative research methods based on case studies. Through this method, the writer tries to explain and describe the object descriptively. Namely by describing the influence of Donald Trump's political propaganda on the increasing cases of discrimination against Asians, Asian Americans, and their descendants in the United States.

The data collection process is obtained through documents from various sources, such as relevant ministries, journals, books, research reports, laws and regulations, and other relevant sources. The keywords used in searching the data include #stopasianhate, Donald Trump's political propaganda, COVID-19, and racism in the United States. This study uses qualitative data triangulation to describe the results of data analysis. Based on the data that has been obtained, the researcher will filter the data by grouping the data into several categories, arranging them into patterns, selecting important information, narrowing the data, and making conclusions.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Asian Hate (Anti-Asian discrimination in America)**

Asian-Americans have received various forms of hate both verbally and physically motivated by racism since their arrival in the late 1700s. At the individual level, this form of hatred also happened at institutional levels, such as implementing the Chinese exclusion law of 1881, which

prohibited Chinese from immigrating and becoming citizens of the United States (Gover et al., 2020). From the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, American popular culture and media described Asian-Americans as "Yellow Peril" due to their fear of non-white invasion and domination (Tessler et al., 2020)

The dominant stereotype regarding Asian-Americans is that they will always be seen as foreigners, whether they are immigrants or of Asian descent, because of their physiology. When the bubonic plague broke out in the 19th century, the government quarantined and controlled the entry and exit of food and the residents of Chinatown for associating it as a racial disease. The same thing happened during SARS 2003 where epidemic studies focused on Chinatown as the disease's epicenter. It was reported that 14% of Americans avoided Asian businesses and Asian-Americans received more racial threats (Tessler et al., 2020)

The forms of hatred against Asian-Americans are increasing after the discovery of the COVID-19 virus. This is because COVID-19 was first discovered in Wuhan, China, which makes Asia the virus's origin and associates it with COVID-19. American society considers Asians, especially Chinese, as the carriers of the virus. 80% of Asian hate incidents occur in public places such as shopping malls, subway stations, and on the street (Tessler et al., 2020). In addition, we also found that Asian Americans experience hatred, violence, and discrimination, which disproportionately worsen mental health (Wu et al., 2021).

Institutional-level hatred was also shown by the President of the United States, Donald Trump, when he referred to the COVID-19 virus as the "Chinese virus." Donald Trump and a similar accusation were also voiced by high-ranking state officials such as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Senator John Cornyn. Based on an analysis of news content published by Professor Russel Jeung of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University, it was found that "hate incidents" reported in the media are increasing as a result of the xenophobic language used by public officials. In addition, Dr. Jeung also explained that the increase precisely coincided with President Donald Trump's use of the term "China virus." From his findings, he argues that political language can fuel racial hatred and related violence (Gover et al., 2020)

### **Donald Trump's Political Propaganda**

The occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic has implications in various sectors of society. Along with the pandemic, verbal and physical violence has escalated in different places, including the United States of America. Moreover, the unresolved issue of racism in the United States continues to exist in their society, and it paves the way for other problems. In the COVID-19 pandemic situation, racism in The United States has escalated, especially against Asians, Asian Americans, and their descendants. Based on data from Stop AAPI Hate, in the first four weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were 127 Asian Americans who reported physical attacks. In addition to physical attacks, Asian Americans have also experienced vandalism attacks on their business properties. Data from Stop AAPI Hate shows that 70% of racial discrimination against Asian Americans is carried out verbally. In the first four weeks of COVID-19 in the United States, Stop AAPI Hate received reports of as many as 1000 incidents of verbal attacks against Asian Americans (Tessler et al., 2020). One of the examples of the hate crime incident was the attempted murder of a Burmese-American family at Sam's Club in Midland, Texas. In that accident, a father and children aged four and two were tried to be killed because they were thought to be Chinese families who spread the COVID-19 virus (Kim, 2020).

The rise in hate crimes against Asians, Asian Americans, and their descendants in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic was sparked by several factors. One of them was

the response of Donald Trump, the previous President of the United States, and his government to the virus COVID-19. When the virus COVID-19 spread around the world in February 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) urged people to avoid terms like "Wuhan Virus" or "Chinese Virus" for fear that it could trigger conflict and backlash against Asians. However, this was not heeded by the former President of the United States, Donald Trump, who had a significant influence in world politics. On March 16, 2020, he first tweeted on social media Twitter that mentioned the phrase *COVID-19* (Bloomberg, 2020). Donald Trump's tweet made some political propaganda for the American people. Harold Lasswell defined propaganda with the term "technique of changing attitudes and behaviors by manipulating symbols."

According to the database site Factbase, the President used COVID-19 more than 20 times between March 16 and March 30, 2020 (The Conversation, 2021). The intentionality of the words became clear when a photographer captured the script of his speech in which Trump had crossed out the word "Corona" and replaced it with "China." As the most critical person in the United States at that time, what Trump did trigger various reactions and criticisms in the world. Even after his actions, hate speech against Asians, Asian-Americans, and their descendants increased sharply. This was proven when the hashtags #chinesevirus became a hot topic and hate speech against Asians, Asian-Americans, and their descendants.

### **The Effect of Rising Racism in the United States**

After a controversial tweet from the President of the United States, Donald Trump, cases of racism against Asia in the United States rose sharply. This is none other than triggered by the prejudice directed by Trump and the designation of COVID-19 as the coronavirus. This expression creates a situation where the people in the United States are more wary and afraid of Asian people, especially East Asia, as this virus started in China. Data shows that cases of racism against Asians and other minority groups in the United States have increased compared to previous years. In March 2020, there were 1.900 reported acts of racism against Asian or Asian-American people who live in the USA (Chinese for Affirmative Action, 2020). While in December 2020, 2.808 cases occurred, with the majority cause being verbal racism (BBC News, 2020).

Some examples of cases related to Asian hate are physical attacks on elderly Asian people aged 70 years and over in California and New York. Besides the incidents that happened in public places, the attacks also occurred in an office area where this place should have more authority, and the safety of every worker should be guaranteed. According to the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, anti-Asian-related incidents increased about 1200%, and hate speech against Asian-Americans increased by 115% around Los Angeles (BBC News, 2020).

In addition to physical violence against Asians, Asian hate also occurs on social media, especially Twitter. There is an encounter between trends related to the number of hashtags about COVID-19 and Chinesevirus. It was noted that the hashtag about COVID-19 contributed 20%, while the hashtag about the "Chinese virus" contributed 50% of the total tweets (Reja, 2021). Although the tweets are neutral expressions, the use of words related to what is said, especially that related to races, is essential. The hashtag used about the "Chinese virus" more than COVID-19 makes people have certain perceptions regarding this pandemic; sometimes, it is an incorrect prejudice. What happens in social media, indirectly, will impact daily social activities due to the prejudice and perspective of a person or group of people towards this pandemic.

According to Allport, quoted by Hari Poerwanto, prejudice and discrimination carried out by certain groups against the out-group or people who are not included in their group will negatively impact the behavior and beliefs of the group towards the out-group (Poerwanto, 2017).

It happens because a particular group's belief or identity is threatened by the presence of the out-group, so discriminatory and prejudiced behavior is an indirect defensive action or mechanism of protection against the out-group. This theory can explain why discriminatory actions that occurred during this pandemic have increased, especially to Asian people in America. This is because of the defensive mechanism that emerged from the Americans and blamed Asians through pressure and discrimination.

In addition, President Trump's tweet about COVID-19, according to Lee and Johnstone (E. Lee & Johnstone, 2021), is a political act of racism using terror or fear to create an imagined enemy related to nationalism United States. According to Hirvonen (Hirvonen 2017), racism is the most basic to create national identity politics. With this common enemy or fear, the feeling to protect their homeland and national identity will increase. As a result, the nationalists will usually discredit and discriminate against groups that threaten their identity. This theory is in line with what is happening with the case of Asian hate in the United States today

### **The Response of the People in the United States**

After Donald Trump's tweet, which was followed by an increase in racist treatment towards Asians, various responses emerged from people living in the United States. This response came not only from politicians and the white people but also from the Asian-American community itself. According to Jen Psaki, the White House Press Secretary, Trump's tweets have created a bias against Asian-Americans, which has led to a rise in crime rates against Asians (Porterfield, 2021). He made the statement after the Atlanta shooting that killed eight people, of which 6 were women of Asian descent (M. Y. Lee, 2021). In addition, at a congressional hearing after the Atlanta shooting incident, Doris Matsui, who is a member of the Democratic party, stated how the way former President Donald Trump depicted Asian people like the ones responsible for the presence of COVID-19 has placed Asian citizens in America as the target of anger from other citizens (Mint, 2021).

A civil rights group consisting of Chinese-American citizens sued Donald Trump after calling COVID-19 the "Chinese Virus." They claimed that Trump stated while ignoring that such a statement when the world was going through a pandemic would cause Chinese-Americans to suffer emotional distress. In addition, they add that people in positions of power and influence should know that their words have consequences. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure that what is said is the truth. Not only that, but the Chinese-American group also thought that Donald Trump had deliberately used slanderous words for his own personal and political interests (The Economic Time, 2021). Although the claim was dismissed by Jason Miller, a senior adviser to Donald Trump, as a preposterous and ridiculous claim, the voices of the Chinese-Americans who have suffered the most from Trump's words cannot be ignored.

It is undeniable that the use of language is something that must always be considered carefully. On March 18, 2020, Donald Trump denied accusations of racism over the term "Chinese Virus" with the defense that he only wanted to refer to it accurately because of how COVID-19 originated in China. However, since early March 2020, Trump's remarks have caused racist acts against Asian-Americans to spike (The Conversation, 2021). Since then, some Asian-American citizens have begun to feel afraid of living in the United States. One Chinese citizen living in the United States stated that people would cover their mouths and noses with their clothes when they were around them. Not only that, some of them are afraid for their child's life where there is a possibility that other children will start to annoy their child by calling him "*Chinese Virus*" as the former President of the United States, Donald Trump said (Travernise, Sabrina, n.d.)

## CONCLUSION

The cases of racial discrimination against Asians in the United States have existed since the 1700s. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the discrimination issue sparked massively because Asia was associated as a carrier of the COVID-19 virus. The occurrence of massive hate speech and racism towards Asians, Asian Americans, and their descendants in the United States during the pandemic was triggered by one of the political propagandas of the former President of the United States, Donald Trump, through his tweets which refers to the COVID-19 virus as the "*Chinese Virus*."

In sum, the act of discrimination against Americans against Asians is associated with the nature of nationalism. The Asian hate that occurs in the United States is considered a political action to protect their national identity. Donald Trump's tweet also caused various responses from the United States community. This response came in the form of increasing hate speech or other acts of racism against Asian Americans and from various Asian communities in the country. After the term "*Chinese Virus*" was popularized by Donald Trump, many Asian-Americans admit that they sometimes feel insecure and fearful when working in their area of residence.

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