



[EAI Online Seminar] COVID-19 and New World Order Series

Fighting Anti-Asian Americanism

East Asia Institute (EAI)

I. Rise of Anti-Asian Americanism

U.S. Democracy in Crisis

- Political, social, cultural, and racial polarization in the U.S. has led to the threat to democracy. However, this phenomenon is not new and has begun prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although trends of polarization were observed before the Trump administration, racial discrimination and partisan polarization deepened during this time with the rise of “White Nationalism.” The pandemic rapidly increased negative sentiments as Trump pinpointed China as the root of the public health crisis.

Characteristic of Asian-American Discrimination

- The rise in Asian-American discrimination is alarming as the hate crimes against Asian-Americans increased despite the fact that there was a decrease in hate crimes overall. Professor Taeku Lee stated that between 2019 and 2020, anti-Asian American hate crimes increased 149% while overall hate crimes noticed a 7% decrease.
- Professor Shang E. Ha pointed out that discrimination against Asian-Americans differs from other racism against other communities for two reasons: the discrimination is based on the belief that Asians cannot be “insiders” in American society and it is more individual-based and less institutionalized. Due to the differences, it is difficult for other minorities of color to understand Asian-American discrimination and vice versa. Therefore, building a type of pan-ethnic coalition to fight discrimination will be difficult.
- Likewise, Professor Min Hee Go states that the possibility of pan-Asian solidarity is questionable as Asia itself is made up of diverse ethnicities and Asian-American communities internalize diplomatic tensions from their home countries.



II. Political Participation of Asian-Americans

Voting Rights of Asian Americans

- Asian-American discrimination does not only come in the form of verbal and physical violence, but it also restricts political participation. According to Professor Lee, between January and June of 2021, at least 21 states enacted 28 new laws that restrict the voting rights of minorities.
- The tightening of the identification requirement is just one legislation that is punitive to Asian Americans' ability to vote. Although 64% of Asian Americans voted by mail in 2020, Asian American votes might have been annulled due to different spellings of names and different addresses written on identification documents (a common issue experienced widely by minorities).
- However, the increase of injustice and discrimination has also led to the increase of political participation of Asian Americans. For example, voter turnout increased by 20% between 2016 to 2020.

Increase of Political Participation of Korean Americans.

- Professor Go stated that Korean Americans had the largest jump in turnout as 60% of Korean Americans voted in 2020 compared to 45% in 2016. This upward trend in political participation can be said to have been spurred by the Trump presidency and the rise of “White Nationalism.”
- The growth in political participation has also led to the growth in political voice which is visible in the number of seats Korean Americans possess in the political office. The current Congress has the highest number of Korean elected officials with two Democrats and two Republicans in the House of Representatives.
- Korean-Americans have also become more active in organizing civil society organizations (CSOs) to support their agenda. Korean Americans not only hold leadership roles in prominent Asian-American CSOs, but have also formed their own organizations to combat hate against Asian Americans.

III. Future Steps in Addressing Anti-Asian Americanism

Implications on anti-Asian Americanism on U.S.-ROK relations

- While anti-Asian hate crimes might not directly impact US-ROK relations, the continued occurrence of hate crimes against the Asian American community can be a destabilizing factor for U.S. engagement with Asia. To illustrate, the Chinese government issued official statements condemning anti-Asian violence in the U.S. This, however, has countered claims made against human rights infringements in China.
- In this regard, Professor Go used the example of the circulation of a video in which a Korean national beat his Vietnamese wife in Vietnam. Observing how the dissemination of this video stirred anti-Korean



sentiments in Vietnam, the persistence of racial discrimination, an issue that stimulates emotionally charged behavior, has the potential to undermine diplomatic relations.

- Both the U.S. and ROK have agreed to strengthen democratic cooperation both at home and abroad. This is evident through the ROK-U.S. joint statement as leaders agreed to expand cooperation to encompass issues like human rights.

What can South Korea do?

- While it remains unclear what the South Korean government can do to alleviate anti-Asian prejudice, Professor Ha stated that South Korea is in a better position to take action than is China. Given China's record of human rights issues such as the internment of Uyghurs in the province of Xinjiang, the U.S. is likely to readily undermine reactions from China.
- Under the Biden administration, the mission to curtail the progress of democratic backsliding has been reinforced anew. Following the Moon-Biden summit, both countries have echoed the importance of US-Korea cooperation beyond the domains of national security, onto issues such as human rights, climate change, and sustainable development. As such, the U.S. seeks Korea to further engage with the international community to protect democracy.
- However, Professor Go highlighted that Korea should promote democratic norms as one of the few strong democracies in Asia, rather than do so in U.S.' favor from a strategic point of view. ■



V. Speaker, Discussant, and Moderator Bios

- **Taeku Lee** is George Johnson Professor of Law and Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley. He received his Ph.D. in political science from the University of Chicago. He serves on the National Advisory Committee for the U.S. Census Bureau and on the Board of Directors of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. Lee previously served as Associate Dean at Berkeley School of Law, Department Chair at Berkeley Political Science, Associate Director at Berkeley's Haas Institute and has also been on the Board of Overseers of the American National Election Studies, the Board of Overseers of the General Social Survey, and the Executive Council of the American Political Science Association. His research focuses on racial and ethnic politics, public opinion and survey research, identity and inequality, and deliberative and participatory democracy. Lee is currently completing a book on racial diversity and political inequality in the United States and at work on a second book on public opinion on financial regulation in six advanced Western democracies
- **Min Hee Go** is an associate professor in the department of political science at Ewha Womans University. Her research interests broadly concern key issues in urban politics, including inequality, sustainable development, identity politics, and political representation. Prior to joining Ewha, she earned her M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Chicago and taught as assistant professor at Brooklyn College, the City University of New York (CUNY). Her recent publication includes a book titled *Rethinking Community Resilience: The Politics of Disaster Recovery in New Orleans* (2021, NYU Press).
- **Shang E. Ha** is a professor of political science at Sogang University. Before coming to Sogang University, he served as a dissertation fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California, a postdoctoral associate at the Institution for Social and Policy Studies at Yale University, and an assistant professor of political science at Brooklyn College - The City University of New York. He received his M.A. and Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Chicago. His interests include political psychology, public opinion, and voting behavior. Some of his major publications include “Donald Trump and the Reactionary Politics in the United States (in Korean)”, “The Effects of Pre-Contact and Prepaid Cash Incentives on the Quality of Telephone Surveys (in Korean)”, and “Personality Traits and Civic Engagement: The Case of South Korea.”
- **Byoung Kwon Sohn** is a professor at the Department of Politics and International Relations, Chung-Ang University in Seoul, Korea. He teaches American Politics, American Foreign Policy, and Party and Legislative Politics as a subdivision of Comparative Politics. He got both B.A. and M.A. degrees from the Department of International Relations, Seoul National University, and Ph.D. from Department of Political Science, the University of Michigan, majoring in American Politics. He published several books and articles, including *Climate Change and the Dilemma for the U.S. Hegemony* (2012, written in Korean), *Is U.S. Congressional Politics Still a Model to Follow? The U.S. Congress Captured by Partisan Politics* (2018, written in Korean), *The Superdelegate Reform in 2018 in the Context of Democratic Party's Delegate Reform History* (2019, written in Korean).



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