

ENGAGED
COMMUNITIES SERIES

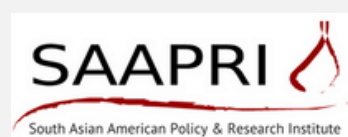


UNPACKING HATE

Here's what you need to know

**Amplifying Community Voices: The Stories
Behind the Headlines**

September 8, 2025



Our Panelists

UNPACKING HATE

Amplifying Community Voices: The Stories Behind the Headlines



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Pardeep Singh Kaleka
Anti-Hate Advocate

Big Ideas

1. **Who gets heard = who gets protected. Silence/invisibility is its own harm.**
2. **Labeling matters. Many bias-motivated attacks never get counted as hate crimes.**
3. **Trust = safety. Public safety is built at the speed of trust and relationships.**
4. **Stories shape policy. Data, press, and survivor voices drive resources.**

What counts as a hate crime

- “Hate incident” ≠ “hate crime.”
- Law requires proving bias motivation, beyond the underlying assault/theft.
- Result: prosecutors default to easier charges; the hate element disappears from the record.

The numbers behind the gap (Sunita)

- California 2022: ~2,100 hate crimes reported by police → 52 convictions; only 6 cases went to trial (2023: 5 trials).
- Big picture: reporting happens, prosecution rarely follows through with the hate-crime enhancer.

Why cases get downgraded (Pardeep)

- If officers don’t investigate bias early (slurs, symbols, online posts, prior threats), evidence can often vanish.
- For responders without lived experience, bias is treated as “academic”—and survivors feel disbelieved.

The gap between law and lived experience

Both speakers emphasized that hate crimes often aren't recognized because investigators and prosecutors approach bias as an intellectual exercise rather than a lived reality. To officials, an assault may look like "just a robbery" or "just vandalism." But to a targeted community, it sends a message of fear and exclusion. That mismatch between law enforcement's framing and community experience magnifies distrust in institutions.

Data visibility matters

Since 2017, FBI data lets communities like Sikhs and Hindus be counted separately (not just "Asian").

Being named in the data makes patterns visible—and funding and policy more likely.

Trust = public safety

- "Public safety is built at the speed of trust." – Pardeep Kaleka
- When pain is dismissed, communities disengage from 911, hotlines, and counseling.
- Meet people where they are – culturally, linguistically, spiritually.

Assimilation, Identity and the Spiritual Toll

Pardeep connected hate violence to a deeper cultural struggle. Assimilation, he argued, isn't just about changing language or food; it pressures young people to adopt a "power-over" mindset, where worth comes from domination and success at any cost. He described this as a "spiritual loss" that erodes compassion, empathy, and connection. For youth who don't see themselves represented or valued, invisibility can turn inward, fueling depression, anxiety, or even substance use.

- Many South Asian youth feel pressured to "fit in" by erasing culture, faith, or language, believing this will protect them from being targeted.
- This pressure can push them toward "power-over" models: success measured by domination or proving strength, instead of empathy or connection.
- That erodes mental health and belonging, youth feel invisible, disconnected, and undervalued.

Why this matters for hate crimes?

- Communities that are told to assimilate often hesitate to report bias incidents, fearing dismissal or more stigma.
- Underreporting fuels a cycle of invisibility: attacks don't get counted as hate crimes → data looks minimal → resources and recognition shrink.
- When society ignores identity, it also ignores bias, letting perpetrators escape hate-crime charges.

“We can't prevent what we refuse to name.”

-Pardeep Singh Kaleka

Hate incidents as early warning signs

Kaleka stressed the importance of treating hate incidents, not just crimes, as red flags. Slurs, graffiti, intimidation, and harassment may not meet the legal threshold for a hate crime, but they escalate into violence if ignored.

Communities and systems should see incidents as “indicators” of where vulnerability is growing, and act preventatively rather than waiting for tragedy.

Intersectionality of invisibility

Sunita highlighted how survivors often hesitate to report because of immigration status, language barriers, or fear of retaliation. For example, a Thai woman attacked in San Francisco didn't want to go to police because her perpetrators lived nearby and she feared for her child's safety.

Even when evidence was clear, her case wasn't charged as a hate crime. This shows how legal systems not only undercount hate but also unintentionally silence the very people who need protection most.

Our Panelists' Insight

Breaking the Cycle

Visible role models, pluralistic values, and safe cultural spaces affirm identity.

When youth feel their full selves are valued, they are more likely to speak out, report, and resist invisibility, making hate harder to deny.

Healing through intentional community-building

Despite the weight of these issues, both speakers pointed to hope. Oak Creek, Wisconsin, site of the 2012 Sikh gurdwara massacre, transformed over time into one of the most diverse suburbs in the U.S. Local leaders chose intentional healing, hosting cultural festivals and interfaith initiatives. Their example shows that hate can fracture a community, but intentional effort can build something stronger and more inclusive.

"Labeling a hate crime sends a message: we are watching, and bias will carry consequences."

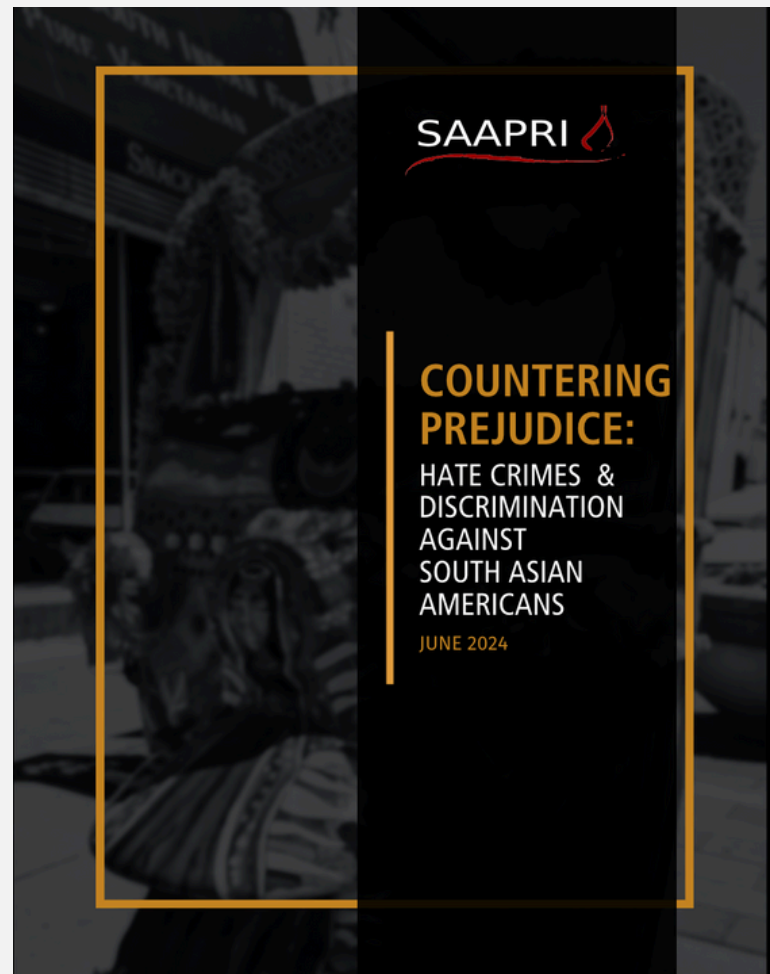
-Sunita Sohrabji

What communities can do (practical steps)

1. **Report + document:** capture slurs/symbols, screenshots, prior threats; ask for hate-crime enhancer review.
2. **Language access:** interpreters, translated forms, trauma-informed advocates at first contact.
3. **Partner with ethnic media:** survivor-led storytelling builds awareness and accountability.
4. **Policy ask:** make law-enforcement hate-crime reporting to FBI mandatory (not voluntary).
5. **Host civic events** in community spaces (mandirs, gurdwaras, masjids) to build bridges.
6. **Track hate incidents** as early warnings before crimes escalate.
7. **Create multilingual tip lines & warm handoffs** to legal/mental-health services.

COUNTERING PREJUDICE:

HATE CRIMES & DISCRIMINATION
AGAINST SOUTH ASIAN AMERICANS



Our Countering Prejudice: Hate Crimes & Discrimination Against South Asians report is now available online!

**To request access to the full report, visit:
<https://www.saapri.org/our-work/reports-publications/>**