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Latino TV shows victimized by faulty counting, group says

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Latino television viewers are undercounted by the company that has a monopoly on measuring TV audiences, hurting the odds of success for Latino-oriented programs, a group claims.

Nielsen Media Research's methodology is at fault, a study released this week by the National Latino Media Council contends.

Among other problems, the council said, is that the company fails to include enough U.S.-born Latinos in its sample, skewing its ratings for Latino viewers of English-language shows.

"We stand by our sample and we make sure it represents everyone in the U.S., including Hispanics," Nielsen spokeswoman Karen Gyimesi said Thursday.

The study examined the ratings for "George Lopez," an ABC comedy about a Latino family. In late September it drew an audience of about 1.2 million viewers in 17 markets, according to Nielsen figures cited by the council.

But a survey conducted for the council by the Dallas-based market research firm Rincon & Associates between last August and October suggested those ratings were too low. Using a telephone survey of 1,536 people in four of those markets -- New York, Los Angeles, Miami and San Antonio -- the report estimated that nearly 900,000 Latinos regularly tuned in to the sitcom in those cities.

That likely means closer to 2 million Latinos in the 17 markets watched the show, a council spokeswoman said Thursday.

The lack of an accurate ratings assessment of Latino-oriented programs leads to their early cancellation by networks and a reluctance to produce and air more such shows, the council said in a statement.

"This in turn leads to diminished employment opportunities for Latino actors, writers, directors and other behind-the-camera professionals," according to the study. Undercounting also hurts advertisers trying to reach Latino consumers, the group said.