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Latino Policy &
Politics Initiative

Unseen and Unheard:

*The Underrepresentation
of Latino Voices and Stories
in the Los Angeles Times
Opinion and Editorials Section*



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About LPPI

The UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Initiative addresses the most critical domestic policy challenges facing Latinos and other communities of color through research, advocacy, mobilization, and leadership development to expand genuine opportunity for all Americans.

Disclaimer

The views expressed herein are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the University of California, Los Angeles as a whole. The authors alone are responsible for the content of this report.

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Executive Summary

Academic research has shown that major newspapers' "Opposite Editorial page" (or Op-Ed) sections have long-lasting effects on public opinion and policy debates.¹ The modern Op-Ed was designed as a forum to appeal to policymakers or to people who influence policymakers, playing a powerful role in driving political priorities and policy agendas.² Therefore, Op-Ed writers and the viewpoints they share play a crucial role in defining the public narrative surrounding policy debates and legislation.

A September 2021 report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), however, documents persistent underrepresentation of Latinos working in the media industry.³ The GAO analyzed media industry subsectors and found that Latinos were most underrepresented in publishing sector jobs, including newspaper publishers.⁴ This lack of representation is not just a labor issue; more broadly, it means that Latinos, their lives, their concerns, and their triumphs are left out of the national narrative and the public's perception of the American identity.

This industrywide inadequacy in reflecting the experiences of Latino communities comes as the nation's population growth continues to be driven primarily by Latinos. According to figures from the 2020 Census, Latinos accounted for 51.1 percent of the country's population growth since 2010.⁵ As the Latino population continues to increase in size, so will its prominence as a growing consumer base for the nation's news and media markets.⁶

Given the policy relevance of newspapers and Op-Eds, we analyzed Latino representation in the authorship and content of the Op-Ed pages published between January 2020 and May 2021 in the Los Angeles Times (L.A. Times), an internationally renowned newspaper in a county that is almost 50 percent Latino. We quantify Latino representation on the Editorial Board, in authorship of published Op-Eds, and in the content of Op-Eds.

Our analysis of the L.A. Times Editorial Board membership, Op-Ed authorship, and Op-Ed content found that:

- 1. Latinos are severely underrepresented on the Los Angeles Times Editorial Board.**
Despite comprising over 48 percent of LA County's population, Latinos make up only 11.1 percent of the Los Angeles Times' Editorial Board (a representation gap of 37.5 percentage points).
- 2. Latinos are also underrepresented on the national editorial boards of comparable newspapers.**
Underrepresentation of Latinos on the Editorial Board is not unique to the L.A. Times. The representation gap between the percentage of Latinos on the newspaper's editorial board and the Latino share of the newspaper's county population is 26.5 percentage points at The Dallas Morning News, 17.9 percentage points at The New York Times, 9.4 percentage points at the Miami Herald, and five percentage points at The Washington Post.
- 3. Latino writers were almost completely missing from the Op-Ed pages of the L.A. Times in 2020 and the first five months of 2021.**
Only 4.3 percent of L.A. Times Op-Ed pieces were authored by at least one Latino. Almost 96 percent of all Op-Eds did not include any Latino voices.
- 4. Latino communities, their stories, and their policy needs are mostly invisible in the content of L.A. Times editorial pages.**
Latino communities were not mentioned in over 95 percent of all Op-Eds published between January 2020 and May 2021.

5. Latino authors are more likely than non-Latino authors to center Latinos in the content of the Op-Eds they write.

Almost 46 percent of Op-Eds written by Latino authors published between January 2020 and May 2021 were either moderately or centrally focused on Latinos and their communities compared to three percent of Op-Eds without a Latino author.

Rather than calling attention to a particular publication, the principal objective of this report was to highlight a case study of Latino underrepresentation in prominent news forums, particularly those conducting business in predominantly Latino communities. Our analysis of published Op-Eds provides a public and transparent picture of the dearth of Latino voices in a preeminent newspaper that reaches millions of readers and influences powerful policymakers across the state and country.

Given its location in the county with the largest Latino population in the United States, the Los Angeles Times has a unique opportunity to set a new industry standard for inclusion and serve as a model for other leading news organization across the country. This report includes several recommendations for how the L.A. Times Executive Leadership can leverage our analysis to take advantage of this opportunity.

Introduction: Diversity in the Media and Latino Representation

Research has identified two key disparities in U.S. news coverage of Latinos and their communities. First, systematic underrepresentation in media makes Latinos and their respective interests largely invisible to the public eye. Latinos and other nonwhite groups are significantly less likely to be represented in the content of news articles than their share of the population.⁷ Research on samples taken from Access World News in 2015 found that only 5.2 percent of local news articles covered Latinos, 5.6 percent covered African Americans and 2.8 percent covered Asian Americans when their shares of the population were 17.6, 12.3, and 5.3 percent respectively.⁸

Even when publications do spotlight Latinos, news outlets regularly perpetuate inaccurate or negative stereotypes. In privately owned media outlets, Latinos are significantly more likely than other ethnic groups to be presented in news stories that only contain negative stereotypes.⁹ For example, outlets may perpetuate the idea that Latina women are hypersexual¹⁰ or frame Latinos as “illegal aliens.”¹¹

Together, these two factors result in news content that limits Latino visibility and foments racial stereotypes. This effect correlates with negative public attitudes toward Latinos.¹²

To address some of these inequities in media representation, newsrooms across the United States have committed to hiring more staff of color.¹³ Despite these commitments, White staff remain overrepresented in U.S. newsrooms by 25 percentage points compared to their share of the U.S. population and none of the 22 largest newsrooms in the United States have reached racial parity.¹⁴

Additionally, increasing Latino representation among newsroom staff and leadership may not be sufficient to address inequities in media coverage. Previous studies show that newsroom diversity alone does not correlate with increased coverage of race-related issues.¹⁵ Interviews with journalists of color indicate that ethnocentric norms around what constitutes “news” push Latino and Black journalists to produce content that reproduces dominant white perspectives.¹⁶

Prior investigations into Latino coverage in news media have largely centered around newsrooms or local

reporting. Little academic or policy literature exists on the representation of Latinos on the Editorial and Op-Ed pages.

The content of editorial and opinion coverage matters for the treatment of communities of color beyond the opinion page. Academic research has shown that major newspapers' opinion and editorial sections have long-lasting effects on public opinion and policy debates.¹⁷ The modern Op-Ed was designed as a forum to appeal to policymakers or to people who influence policymakers, playing a powerful role in driving political priorities and policy agendas.¹⁸ Therefore, Op-Ed writers and the viewpoints they share play a crucial role in defining the public narrative surrounding policy debates and legislation.

This study seeks to understand Latino visibility in California's flagship media outlet, the Los Angeles Times. To this end, we examined the diversity of leadership on the Los Angeles Times Editorial Board, the body that determines the editorial positions of the organization and reaches millions of readers.¹⁹ We also evaluated the diversity of published Op-Ed authors and the extent to which they focus on Latinos.

Methodology

To assess the demographics of Los Angeles Times Editorial Board members, Latino Politics and Policy Initiative (LPPI) researchers investigated each individual board member's publicly available biographies to determine their name, position, race or ethnicity, and gender as of June 1, 2021. If their race or ethnicity was not readily available, their surname was analyzed to determine its most common geographic origin.

We compared the diversity of the L.A. Times Editorial Board with that of comparable newspapers: The New York Times, The Washington Post, the Miami Herald, and The Dallas Morning News. We selected The New York Times and The Washington Post because they are two print news outlets with national profiles, and the Miami Herald and The Dallas Morning News because both are print media outlets in cities and states with high concentrations of Latinos.

To evaluate the representation of Latino voices in Op-Eds published by the Los Angeles Times in 2020 and 2021, LPPI researchers randomly selected 120 dates in 2020 and 60 dates in the first five months of 2021. These randomly selected dates allowed us to account for the variation in key events throughout the year and follow academically accepted thresholds to obtain a representative sample.²⁰ LPPI researchers analyzed the demographics of the authors and the content of all the Op-Eds published in this randomized set of dates. This resulted in a sample of 564 Op-Eds written by 425 unique authors.

We obtained the authors' demographic information in three steps. First, we looked for publicly available biographical information on each author to determine their racial identity. We used pronouns in public biographies as a proxy for gender identity. Second, if an author's race or ethnicity was not readily available, we vetted their surname to determine its most common geographic origin. Third, we contacted all authors whose last name was not tied to Latin America or whose biography showed inconclusive indicators of race, ethnicity, or gender to confirm their racial, ethnic, and gender identity.

To assess the degree to which Op-Ed content focused on Latinos, LPPI researchers read each piece multiple times and categorized each piece into one of three different tiers: not at all focused on Latinos, moderately focused on Latinos, or centrally focused on Latinos. Researchers sorted each piece into one of these three tiers by assessing the frequency of specific cultural terms. The cultural terms that LPPI tracked in each opinion editorial include Latino, Latinx, Hispanic, Mexican American, Chicano, Central American,

South American, and Other (a category which included terms not otherwise listed such as Puerto Rican, Guatemalan, and Cuban).

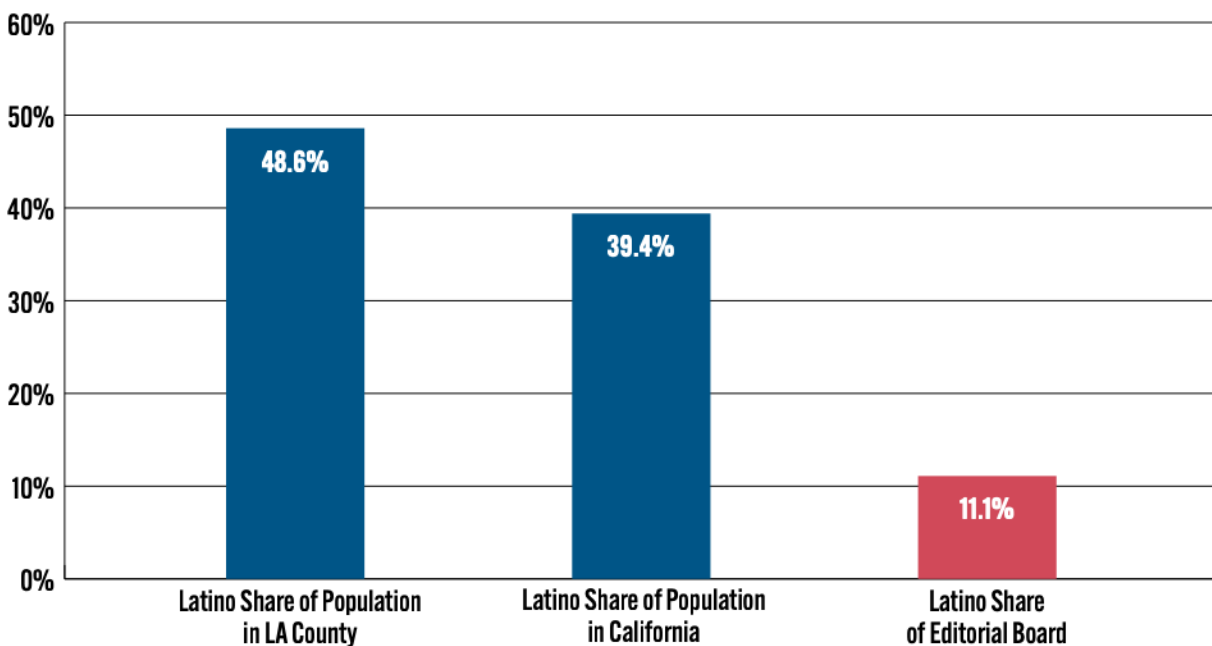
If these terms did not appear or only appeared once in a piece, the piece was designated as “not at all” focused on Latinos. If one or more of these terms appeared a total of two to four times, the piece was designated as “moderately” focused on Latinos. A piece could also be categorized as “moderately” focused on Latinos if it discussed Latinos or Latino populations in the U.S. without specifically mentioning them by name. If these terms appeared in the title of a piece or more than four times, then the piece was designated as “centrally Latino.”

Findings

Latino Representation on Editorial Boards of the Los Angeles Times and Similar Outlets

Latinos are severely underrepresented on the L.A. Times Editorial Board. As of June 2021, only one of the nine members of the L.A. Times Editorial Board was Latino.²¹ As Figure 1 below illustrates, Latinos make up only 11.1 percent of the editorial board, despite making up 48.6 percent of Los Angeles County’s population and 39.4 percent of California’s population. To achieve proportional representation of Latinos that adequately reflects the local county population, the L.A. Times Editorial Board would need to have three to four Latino members (representing 38 percent or 50 percent of the Board, respectively).

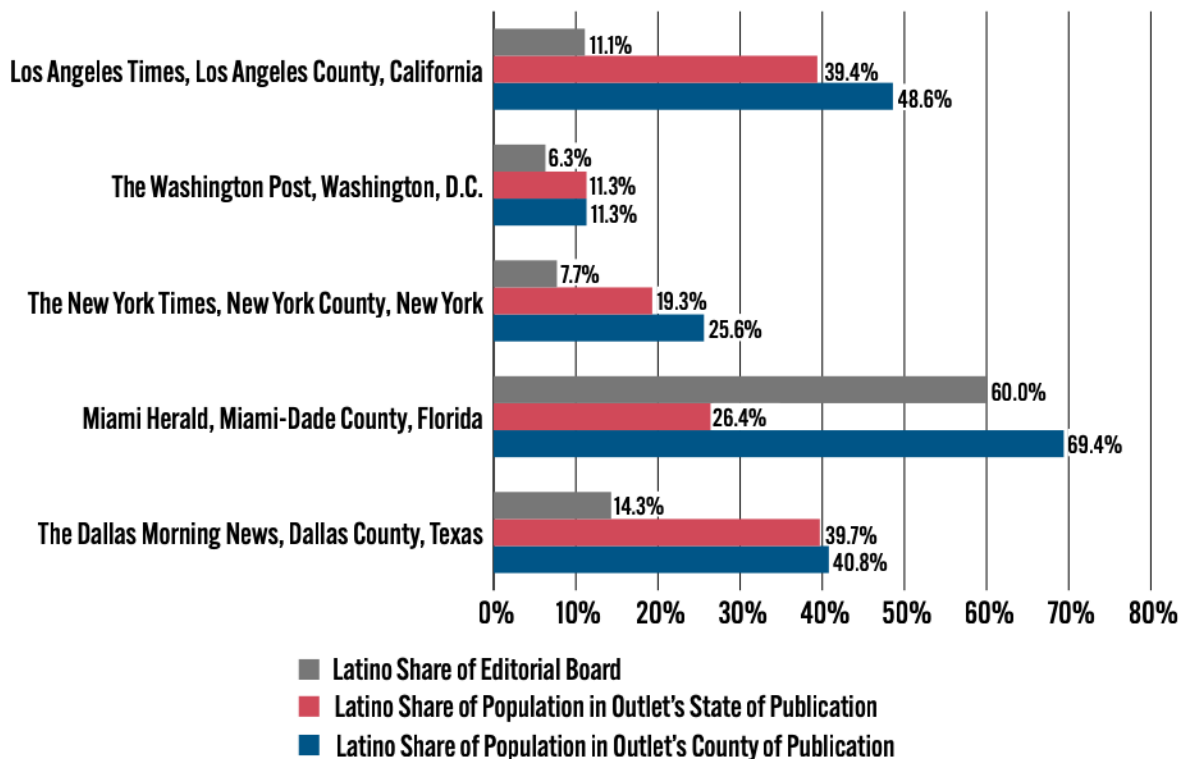
Figure 1: Latino Representation as a Share of the Los Angeles Times Editorial Board, Los Angeles County Population, and California Population



Sources: UCLA-LPPI analysis of L.A. Times Editorial Board composition in June 2021. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (2019), Table B01001. Sex by Age, [available online](#); U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (2019), Table B01001I. Sex by Age (Hispanic or Latino), [available online](#).

Underrepresentation of Latinos on the Editorial Board is not unique to the L.A. Times. Latinos are also underrepresented on the editorial boards of nationally prominent newspapers like The Washington Post and The New York Times, as well as newspapers in counties with large Latino populations like such as the Miami Herald and The Dallas Morning News. As Figure 2 below shows, Latinos make up a smaller proportion of three of these editorial boards than their share of the respective county. The Miami Herald stands out as the newspaper with the largest share of Latinos on its Editorial Board at 60 percent, which is higher than the percentage of Latinos in Florida’s population (26.4 percent), but still lower than Miami-Dade County’s share (69.4 percent).

Figure 2: Latino Share of the Editorial Boards of the Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, The New York Times, the Miami Herald, and The Dallas Morning News Compared to the Latino Share of the Population in the Outlets’ State and County of Publication.

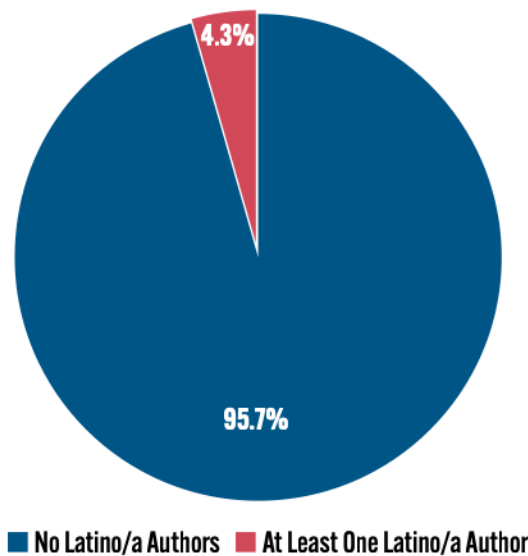


Sources: UCLA-LPPI analysis of editorial board composition in June 2021. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (2019), Table B01001. Sex by Age, and U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (2019), Table B01001I. Sex by Age (Hispanic or Latino).
 Note: For a clean comparison across newspapers, we use New York County as the county of reference for The New York Times even though it only encompasses the borough of Manhattan. Latinos make up 29.1 percent of the population in all five boroughs of New York City.

Latino Representation in Op-Ed Authorship

Latino authors are almost entirely absent from L.A. Times Op-Eds. On the randomly selected dates we examined between January 2020 and May 2021, only 4.3 percent of Op-Ed pieces were authored by at least one Latino. As seen in Figure 3, roughly 96 percent of all Op-Eds lacked a Latino voice. This underrepresentation of Latino authors directly contributes to the lack of centrally Latino content in Op-Eds, as we present in the next section. Latino representation in L.A. Times Op-Ed authorship would need to increase almost elevenfold to achieve proportionality with the Latino population of the newspaper’s home county.

Figure 3: Percent of Op-Ed Pieces in the L.A. Times Authored by at Least One Latino Author Between January 2020 and May 2021.

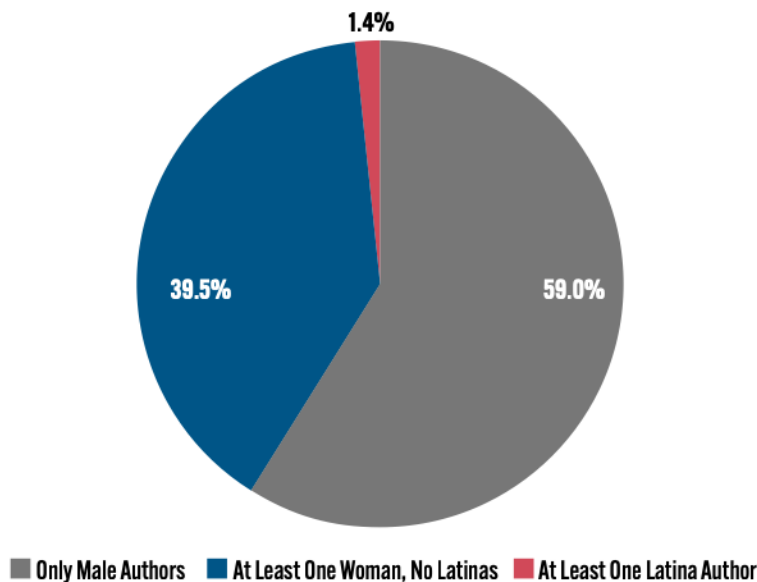


Source: Analysis by the UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Initiative based on the random selection of 120 dates in 2020 and 60 random dates in the first five months of 2021. See methodological appendix for details on the randomization.

Notes: UCLA LPPI was unable to confirm the ethnicity of three of the 425 authors analyzed. Additionally, 12 pieces were authored by the L.A. Times Editorial Board and one was written by an anonymous author.

Women authors are also underrepresented in L.A. Times Op-Eds, particularly Latinas. Over 59 percent of Op-Eds were written solely by men, 39.5 percent by at least one non-Latina woman, and only 1.4 percent by at least one Latina (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Percent of Op-Ed Pieces in the L.A. Times Authored by Only Men, at Least One Non-Latina Woman, and at Least One Latina Between January 2020 and May 2021.

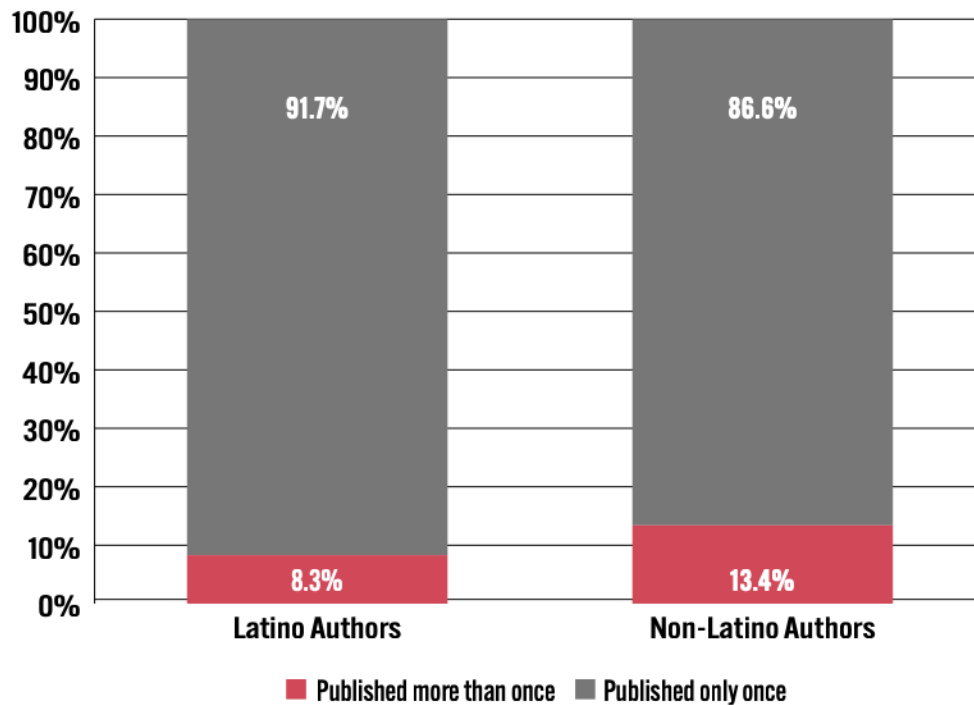


Source: Analysis by the UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Initiative based on the random selection of 120 dates in 2020 and 60 random dates in the first five months of 2021. See methodological appendix for details on the randomization.

Notes: UCLA LPPI was unable to confirm the ethnicity of three of the 425 authors analyzed. Additionally, 12 pieces were authored by the L.A. Times Editorial Board and one was written by an anonymous author.

Latino authors were less likely than non-Latino authors to be published more than once in the L.A. Times Op-Ed pages. As seen in Figure 5, only 8.3 percent of Latino authors were published more than once compared to 13.4 percent of non-Latino authors. After further inspection, our analysis also revealed that five regular columnists hired by the L.A. Times, all of whom are non-Latino, wrote over 24 percent of all the Op-Eds analyzed. This means that by hiring more Latino columnists who regularly write opinion pieces, the L.A. Times could quickly increase Latino representation in its Opinion section.

Figure 5: Percent of Latino and Non-Latino Authors Who Wrote More Than One Op-Ed in the L.A. Times Between January 2020 and May 2021.



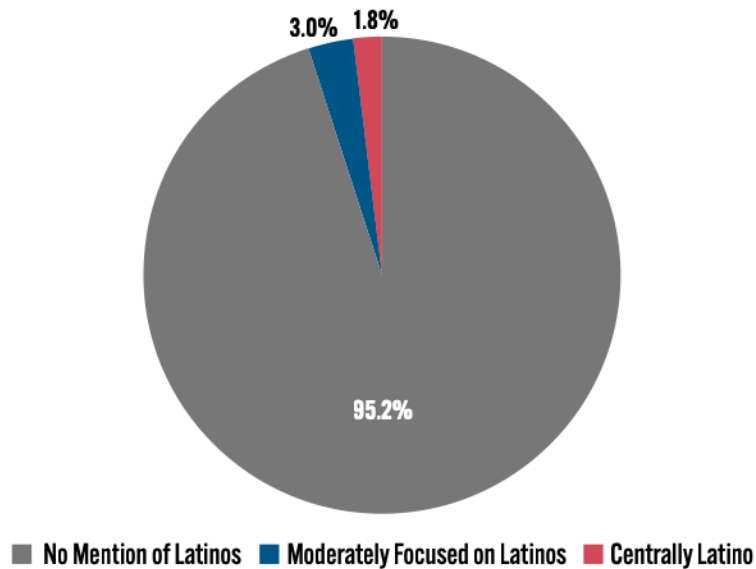
Source: Analysis by the UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Initiative based on the random selection of 120 dates in 2020 and 60 random dates in the first five months of 2021. See methodological appendix for details on the randomization.
Notes: UCLA LPPI was unable to confirm the ethnicity of three of the 425 authors analyzed. Additionally, 12 pieces were authored by the L.A. Times Editorial Board and one was written by an anonymous author.

Centrality of Latinos in the Content of L.A. Times Op-Eds

Explicitly centering underserved communities in policy debates, designs, and interventions is key to reducing structural inequities that have historically placed communities of color at a disadvantage. Policy debates that fail to highlight the needs and priorities of a certain demographic may lead to race-neutral policies that ignore existing inequities and perpetuate or deepen long-lasting inequities.²² Thus, it is imperative to center the needs of underserved and minoritized communities in policy debates. Because Op-Eds often frame these policy debates, UCLA LPPI evaluated the degree to which Latino populations and communities were explicitly mentioned in Op-Eds.²³

Our analysis suggests that Latinos, their narratives, their lived experiences, and their policy needs remain largely invisible in the editorial content of the L.A. Times. As Figure 6 shows, over 95 percent of all Op-Eds did not include any content that unambiguously discussed Latino communities. The systematic underrepresentation of California's largest demographic group could result in policy debates that are less likely to consider the specific needs of Latinos in the state or country.

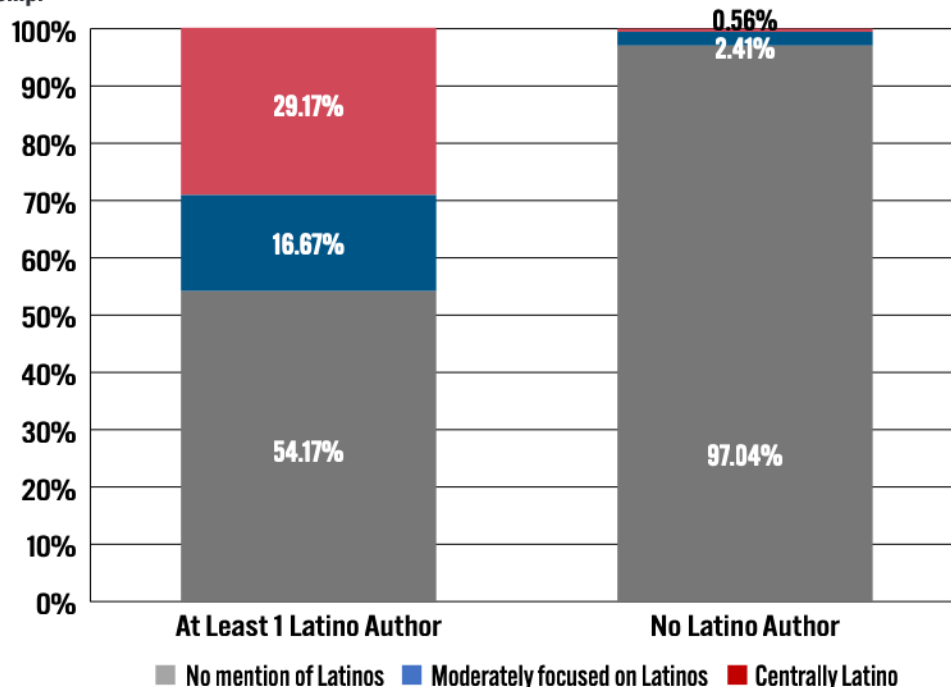
Figure 6: Centrality of Latinos in the Content of Op-Eds Published by the L.A. Times Between January 2020 and May 2021



Source: Analysis by the UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Initiative based on the random selection of 120 dates in 2020 and 60 random dates in the first five months of 2021. See methodological appendix for details on the randomization.

Notably, Op-Eds written by Latino authors were more likely to focus on Latino issues. As Figure 7 illustrates, our analysis found that author background is closely correlated with the centrality of Latino content in L.A. Times Op-Eds. Nearly 46 percent of Op-Eds written by Latino authors were either moderately or centrally focused on Latinos and their communities. In contrast, less than three percent of Op-Eds without a Latino author were either moderately or centrally focused on Latinos.

Figure 7: Centrality of Latinos in the Content of Op-Eds Published by the L.A. Times Between January 2020 and May 2021, by Latino Authorship.



Source: Analysis by the UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Initiative based on the random selection of 120 dates in 2020 and 60 random dates in the first five months of 2021. See methodological appendix for details on the randomization.

These data suggest that actively recruiting Latino authors would be an important first step in increasing the number of Op-Eds authored by Latinos and, consequently, the visibility and centrality of Latino issues in Op-Eds.

Conclusion

Our analysis demonstrates that Latinos are severely underrepresented on the Los Angeles Times editorial board and in the widely read opinion section. At just 11.1 percent, the share of Latinos on the L.A. Times Editorial Board is far from LA County's 48.6 percent Latino population share, a representation gap of 37.5 percentage points. Latinos are also underrepresented in the national editorial boards of other comparable newspapers. The representation gap between the percentage of Latinos on the newspaper's editorial board and the Latino share of the newspaper's county population is 26.5 percentage points at The Dallas Morning News, 17.9 percentage points at The New York Times, 9.4 percentage points at the Miami Herald, and 5 percentage points at The Washington Post.

The underrepresentation of Latinos in editorial leadership has implications for how and how often Latino voices and stories are included in editorials. The data show that Latinos are also significantly underrepresented in the authorship and content of L.A. Times Op-Eds. Only 4.3 percent of the Op-Ed pieces we analyzed were authored by at least one Latino, which means that almost 96 percent of these Op-Eds did not include any Latino voices. Latino communities were not explicitly mentioned in over 95 percent of Op-Eds analyzed.

We hope this report, and others to come, will provide evidence to justify much-needed restructuring of editorial boards and Op-Ed content not only at the L.A. Times but also at other premier newspapers across the country.

Recommendations

Our analysis of published Op-Eds provides a public and transparent picture of the absence of Latino voices in a prominent newspaper that reaches millions of readers and influences powerful policymakers. The data do not uncover the specific mechanisms behind this absence; however, given its location in the county with the largest Latino population in the United States, the Los Angeles Times has a unique opportunity to implement changes to reduce the underrepresentation of Latinos in its editorial pages and become a north star for other major publications.

We recommend that the L.A. Times executive leadership:

- 1. Meaningfully address the underrepresentation of Latinos on the editorial board and lineup of columnists by increasing the proportion of Latinos to a minimum of 33 percent in each within the next year.**

We advise the L.A. Times to increase the number of Latino or Latino-focused journalists on the editorial board by either expanding the size of the board or prioritizing Latinos as vacancies arise. To increase the visibility of Latinos in opinion pieces, the addition of Jean Guerrero as an Op-Ed columnist in July of 2021 was a move in the right direction. However, as the Los Angeles Times says in its mission, "The Los Angeles Times is a citizen of the city of Los Angeles." To stay true to this mission in a city where almost half of the population is Latino, further progress in diversifying the lineup of columnists is needed.

2. Effectively address the gross underrepresentation of Latino voices by increasing the share of published opinion pieces authored by a Latina/o to 33 percent in 2022.

At minimum, the L.A. Times should endeavor to achieve a seven-fold increase from less than 5 percent share to a 33 percent share in the 2022 calendar year. As part of this goal, the L.A. Times should allocate sufficient resources to build formal and informal publication pipelines so that the opinion section can better reflect or surpass the share of Los Angeles' Latino population.

We encourage the L.A. Times to recruit more Latino authors by commissioning pieces through the creation of a formal network of Latino leaders, policymakers, scholars, activists, journalists, and artists. Additionally, The L.A. Times should build a pipeline fellowship program that trains current Latino students and community leaders to become Op-Ed writers and editors.

3. Institute effective editorial review processes that close the invisibility gap between opinion pieces and their explicit inclusion of Latino issues.

The L.A. Times should create formal protocols to increase the publication of opinion pieces that speak to and make mention of the nation's diverse Latino communities.

4. Immediately implement a demographic data collection protocol to ascertain the racial and ethnic diversity of editorial board members, authors of opinion pieces submitted and published, columnists, and readership.

Methodological Appendix

Date Randomization

To create a representative sample of Op-Ed content in the Los Angeles Times, we selected 120 dates in 2020 and 30 dates the year 2021 and analyzed all Op-Eds on each date. Dates were randomized using a simple randomization scheme, with all dates holding an equal chance of inclusion in the sample. Randomization was conducted using the sample and sequence functions in R.

Editorial Board Members

Our data analysts analyzed the demographics of the following members of the L.A. Times editorial board on June 1st, 2021.

Table A1: Members of the Editorial Board of the Los Angeles Times in June 2021

Position	First Name	Last Name	Gender	Race/Ethnicity
Editorial Page Editor	Sewell	Chan	Male	Asian American/Pacific Islander
Deputy Editorial Page Editor	Jon	Healey	Male	White
Editorial Writer	Kerry	Cavanaugh	Female	White
Editorial Writer	Mariel	Garza	Female	Latina
Editorial Writer	Robert	Greene	Male	White
Editorial Board Member	Carla	Hall	Female	Black/African American
Editorial Board Member	Karin	Klein	Female	White
Editorial Board Member	Scott	Martelle	Male	White
Senior Editorial Writer	Michael	McGough	Male	White

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