



2023

The Damned Pipeline: U.S. News Industry's Broken Parity Promise

NAHJ task force survey shows investigative newsrooms don't reflect the communities they cover.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF HISPANIC JOURNALISTS

NAHJ

ASOCIACIÓN NACIONAL DE PERIODISTAS HISPANOS

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Investigative Reporters in US Newsrooms

A two-year study by an NAHJ Task Force reveals that investigative news teams lack journalists of color. [Most newsrooms won't discuss hiring numbers](#). Yet a number of news executives are creating change with better recruitment, training and support.

America's news media industry is one of the least diverse in the American workforce.

Nowhere is that lack of racial and ethnic diversity more stark than in the ranks of the nation's investigative editors and reporters at major news organizations.

A survey of 22 major metro newsrooms conducted by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists from 2021 to 2023 reveals that more than 60% of investigative news reporters are White.

Latinos made up 13% of investigative reporters, and 19% of the U.S. population. Black reporters made up 9% of investigative teams, compared to 13% of the population. The survey found that fewer than 1% of investigative staff are Indigenous reporters. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) reporters reflected a different trend comprising 11% of investigative staff, compared to 6% of the population.

There has been some progress in gender diversity, with 44% of reporters and 46% of editors identifying as female. Nonetheless, those ranks are also still dominated by White people.

Those numbers fall far short of representing the country's demographics, and contrast even more starkly with the demographics of the major metro areas that most of the newsrooms serve.

That has to change.



Yet the lack of progress in diversifying investigative teams is a hard conversation for national news leaders. Of 45 news organizations repeatedly invited to participate in the survey, only 22 responded. Many top news organizations – including the New York Times and the Washington Post – never answered the survey or responded to our requests for interviews with executives to discuss their diversity hiring record on investigative teams.

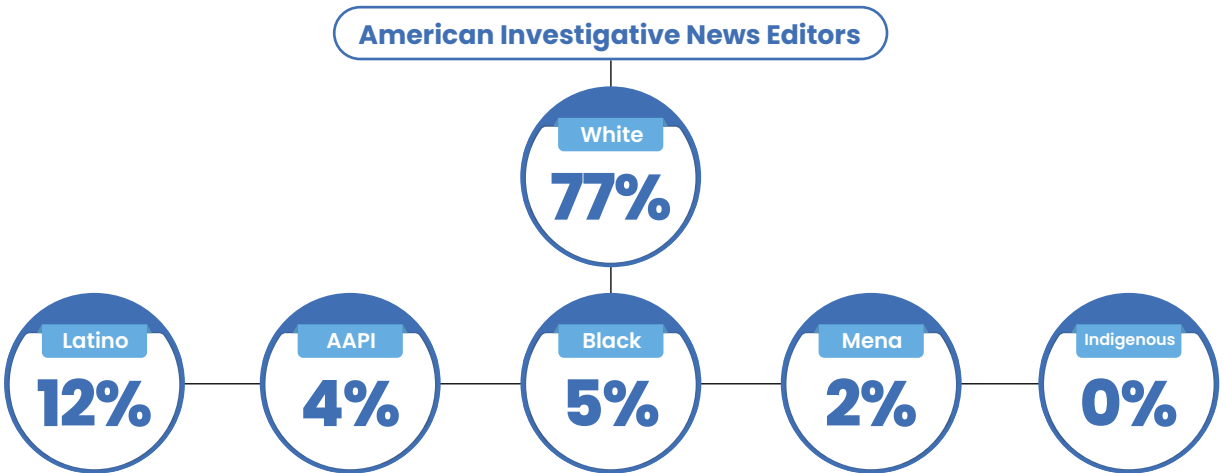
Other news organizations were more transparent, filling out the survey and agreeing to meet and discuss their hiring records. That includes the Los Angeles Times, whose leadership met with the NAHJ Task Force in January 2022 when reporters of color made up one of six investigative team reporters, covering a metropolitan region where people of color are more than half the population.

By September of that year, the LA Times [announced it had added three reporters](#) to further diversify its investigative team by gender and race/ethnicity.

Members of the NAHJ Investigative and Data Journalism Task force – working journalists who took the challenge of engaging and surveying newsroom leaders on the demographics of hiring – began efforts in December 2021 to reach out to newsrooms.

The lack of response by news leaders and tendency to avoid conversations about why investigative teams don't represent their communities is nothing new. For years, the News Leaders Association experienced a similarly [poor response rate](#) from top U.S. editors during its [annual diversity survey](#), which was halted in 2020 for lack of participation from newsrooms.

The last survey conducted by the group, formerly known as the American Society of Newspaper Editors, showed that only 17% of national newsrooms bothered to respond to the [survey](#) in 2018, followed by a 22% response rate in 2019.



Despite those challenges, a host of top news executives from the surveyed news organizations did engage with NAHJ Task Force members to discuss how they approach hiring practices, nurture potential talent and create a support system. Those conversations also included newsroom leaders successes and failures – with the goal of finding an equitable way forward.

Task force members involved in this effort included Maria Carrillo, Monica Rhor, Norberto Santana Jr., Dianna Nájuez, Kimbriell Kelly, Mc Nelly Torres, Marina Walker Guevara, Yvette Cabrera, Mercedes Vigón, Michelle Faust Raghavan, Adriana Chavira and Walter Smith Randolph.

Some of the interviews were at times tense but always enlightening and also highlighted important trends, concerns and opportunities for the field.

► **By the Numbers**

In terms of raw numbers, none of these traditional corporate newsroom managers have been able to establish a culture that mentors and recruits reporters of color into the investigative ranks in large numbers. And as bad as the raw numbers are, a deeper look really lays out the inequity.

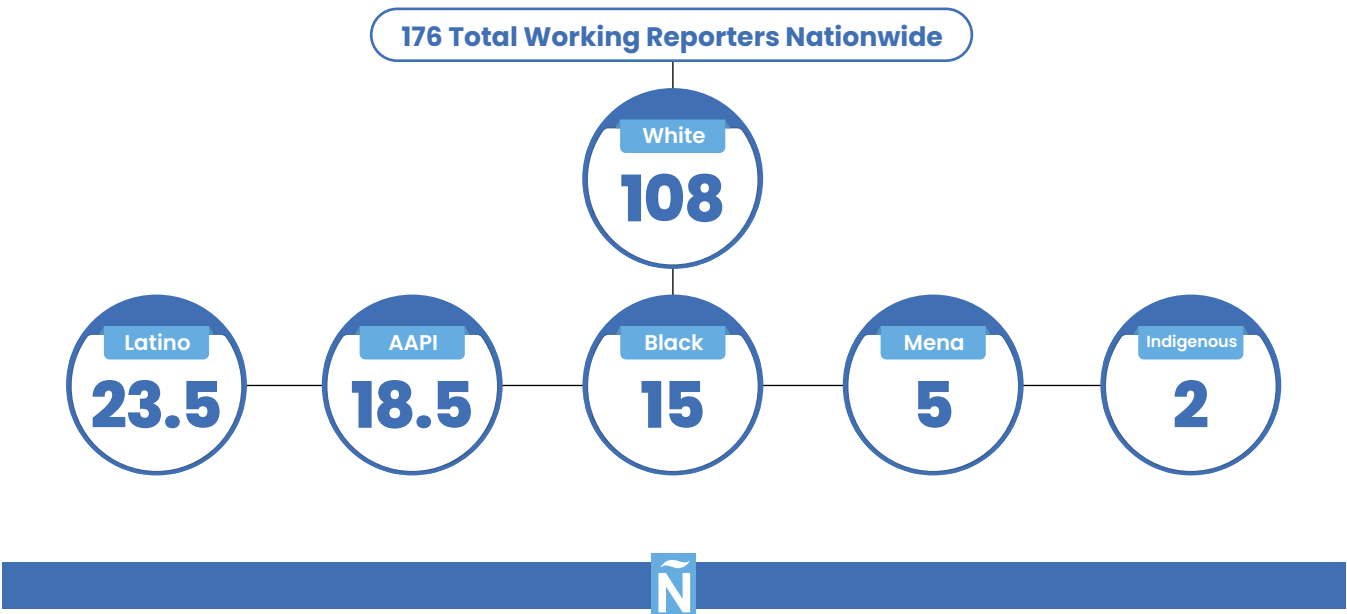
When it comes to the nearly 180 reporters identified as working on news investigations across the nation, only about two dozen investigative reporters are Latino.

Only about 19 reporters are Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, 15 are Black and only two are Indigenous.

The numbers get considerably slimmer in the editors’ ranks.

Only seven Latino investigative editors were reported at the news organizations who responded to the survey. There were three Black investigative editors, two AAPI editors and no Indigenous editors.

This survey represents point-in-time data. These numbers are fluid, impacted in recent years by ongoing layoffs throughout the news media industry.



Industry Bright Spots

In interviews with the news executives who were willing to sit down and discuss their records and approaches, there were clear industry bright spots – with many coming from the nation’s oldest news cooperative and the growing field of nonprofit news publishers.

Associated Press

After Ron Nixon was hired as global investigative editor at the Associated Press in 2018, he brought the investigative team under one umbrella and cut a deal with editors in other departments to leverage talent with backgrounds in investigative reporting and bring them into the newsroom investigative program. These informal programs give reporters a chance to learn and get investigative experience.

Nixon’s approach broke the mold on what a traditional investigative reporter looks like in terms of gender, race and age, and top AP leadership also credited him for helping fuel a culture internally where ‘non-investigative’ journalists are able to recognize investigative skills and traits within themselves.

Newsroom leaders said they have a group of staff members empowered to hold management accountable for hiring decisions and for editorial story selection. From candidate pools to hiring managers, task force members noted that AP management is thinking about the jobs more broadly and outside the box.

While hiring pools for niche jobs are not always diverse, AP managers said they adapted their approach by investing in journalists that didn’t have relevant beat experience but did have a plan on how to cover those kinds of beats.

AP leaders noted they also created programs that go beyond conferences, such as an investigative correspondents program, a six-month internal fellowship and mentoring.

Yet despite these efforts, AP leadership never answered the survey.

Center for Public Integrity

Founded by Charles “Chuck” Lewis, Public Integrity had been led by White male CEOs and editors until Susan Smith Richardson became the first Black woman (and the first person of color) to lead the organization in 2019. Richardson set in motion changes in the organization, including shifting the focus to cover inequality.

Prior to her tenure, Public Integrity mirrored other legacy media where fellows, interns and women had few opportunities for internal growth.

Richardson set a new tone and the focus. She hired a number of experienced people of color into senior roles. The transformation at Public Integrity has been ongoing since Public Integrity’s editor-in-chief met with the task force in December 2021. Today, Public Integrity is a newsroom where the majority of staff are people of color.

Public Integrity leadership has worked to build a welcoming and inclusive culture, and prevent tensions over who can be an investigative reporter and who can't. Those past subjective arguments had been used to keep some people out.

Public Integrity pays specific attention to diversity during candidate job searches, something union organizers have also sought in the union contract.

Still, management is not as diverse as the staff.

ProPublica

As one of the nation's premier investigative newsrooms, ProPublica faces a unique challenge finding talent because it requires candidates to have at least five years of experience. That shuts out many journalists of color, considering the lack of racial and ethnic diversity on most investigative journalism teams.

Yet, out of eight managers hired this year, four are people of color.

Newsroom leaders told task force members they focus on clear measurements, holding themselves accountable by publishing a regular report about their own diversity efforts.

Their reporting shows staff numbers at 10% Latino and 7% Black.

These newsroom leaders also said they also take concrete actions to diversify their ranks, including extending hiring searches if they don't get a representative pool when jobs open up.

An Investigative Editor training program also was [launched](#) to find more talent and all the participants of this year's class identify as people of color.

ProPublica also has increased the salary for fellows to \$75,000 to try and attract a more diverse group of candidates.

Faces of Change

In addition to spurring tough discussions with newsroom leaders, as well as working to collect and analyze the hiring data, task force members also established a partnership with the Poynter Institute.

Task force members wrote a series of essays sharing personal stories about how they got into investigative reporting — with the hope of showing aspiring investigative reporters and hiring editors how pathways might be improved to make investigative teams more accessible.

You can read their profiles [here](#).

As the face of America changes, it's vitally important that newsrooms — particularly specialty beats like investigations — keep pace.

The task force sees this survey and these dialogues as a first step to ensuring that the industry holds itself accountable. Our hope is that more partners will join our effort as we continue the good fight to reflect our country's changing demographics.

Origins of This Survey



In late 2021, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists' (NAHJ) Investigative and Data Journalism Task Force launched an effort to conduct a survey to measure the diversity of newsroom investigative teams across the country.

NAHJ's Investigative and Data Journalism Task Force is co-chaired by Vice President/Digital Mc Nelly Torres, and President Yvette Cabrera, and has three subcommittees: the Investigative & Data Journalism subcommittee, co-chaired by Mc Nelly Torres, Daniela Ibarra and Jose Luis Castillo; the Management subcommittee, co-chaired by Yvette Cabrera and Dianna Náñez; and the Academic subcommittee, chaired by Adriana Chavira, general academic officer.

The newsroom accountability initiative was spearheaded by the Management subcommittee, and included meetings with top editors at some of the country's major news organizations to discuss their hiring record, the demographics of their investigative units, and work underway to diversify their investigative ranks.

The Academic subcommittee oversaw the survey, which was conducted over two years from late 2021 to 2023. The survey and report were overseen by Florida International University Associate Professor Mercedes Vigón, who is also Associate Director of the International Media Center at the Lee Caplin School of Journalism & Media.

All three subcommittees contributed to the report, assisting with the survey and working in partnership with the Poynter Institute to publish a series of essays to raise awareness about the survey. In these essays, task force members shared personal stories about how they got into investigative reporting — with the hope of showing aspiring investigative reporters and hiring editors how pathways might be improved to make investigative teams more accessible.

Members of the NAHJ task force also included journalists representing allied journalism organizations, including the Asian American Journalists Association, the National Association of Black Journalists, and the Indigenous Journalists Association, who attended task force meetings and participated in the discussions leading to the survey.

Findings of the NAHJ Survey on Diversity in the Investigative Teams of the US Media

Introduction

Investigative journalism plays a crucial role in uncovering hidden truths, holding institutions accountable, and driving social change. However, concerns have been raised regarding the lack of diversity within investigative journalism units across the nation. To address this issue, a comprehensive national survey was conducted to examine the state of diversity within investigative teams. This article presents the findings of the survey, highlighting key areas of concern and potential strategies for improvement.

Methodology

The survey targeted investigative journalism units across various media organizations, including print, broadcast, and online platforms, nonprofit and for-profit organizations. A representative sample of units was selected to ensure geographic and organizational diversity. Editors were asked to provide information about their unit's composition, including demographic data such as gender, race, ethnicity, and other relevant indicators.

Additionally, the NAHJ task force met with executives and editors to discuss factors affecting diversity, including recruitment practices, workplace culture, and support mechanisms.

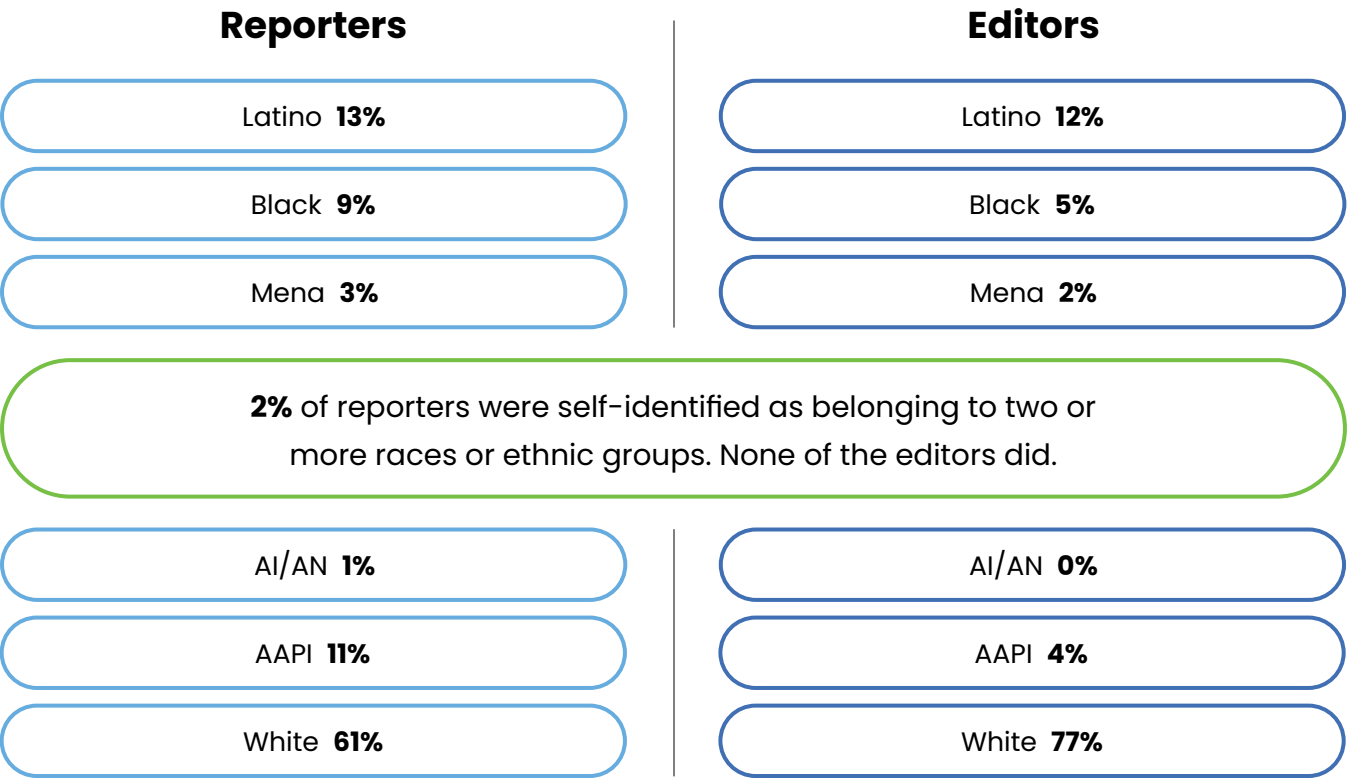
Categories Abbreviated:

- AAPI Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders
- MENA Middle East and North Africa
- AI/AN American Indian and Alaska Native
- LGBTQIA+ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Two-Spirit, or any term used by survey responders to describe evolving gender identities and sexual orientations.

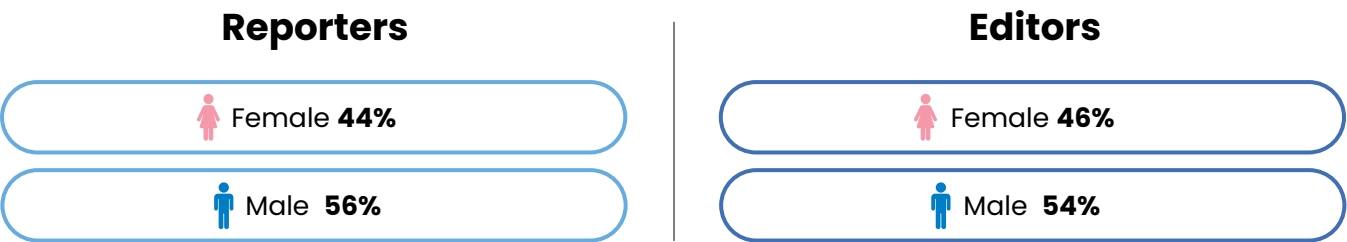
This survey represents point-in-time data. These numbers are fluid, impacted in recent years by ongoing layoffs throughout the news media industry.

Findings Reveal and Units Surveyed

1. Lack of Racial and Ethnic Diversity: Findings reveal a significant lack of racial and ethnic diversity within investigative journalism units. Many of the investigative units surveyed had limited representation from marginalized groups, Latino reporters were 13% and editors were 12%. In the investigative units surveyed 9% were Black reporters, and 5% were Black editors. This contrasts, with over 60% of reporters, and over 75% of the editors, being non-Latino Whites. And these imbalances raise concerns about the ability of investigative journalism to accurately reflect and address the concerns of diverse communities.



2. Gender Imbalance: Representation within investigative reporters and editors was unbalanced between female and male reporters and women were significantly underrepresented in higher-ranking roles.



3. Limited Representation of Underreported Groups: The survey findings also highlight limited representation of other marginalized groups, such as LGBTQIA+. These findings suggest a lack of inclusivity within investigative journalism units, potentially impacting the range of perspectives and stories that are covered.



Recruitment Practices: The informal conversations indicated that recruitment practices in investigative journalism units tend to favor those coming from traditional backgrounds/professional networks, which can inadvertently perpetuate existing inequities. To address this issue, innovative and proactive recruitment strategies are needed to attract diverse talent, including partnerships with community organizations, targeted outreach, and mentorship programs.

Workplace Culture and Support: Findings suggest that creating an inclusive and supportive workplace culture is crucial for attracting and retaining diverse talent in investigative journalism units. Survey participants emphasized the need for comprehensive diversity training, mentorship opportunities, and transparent promotion and advancement processes.

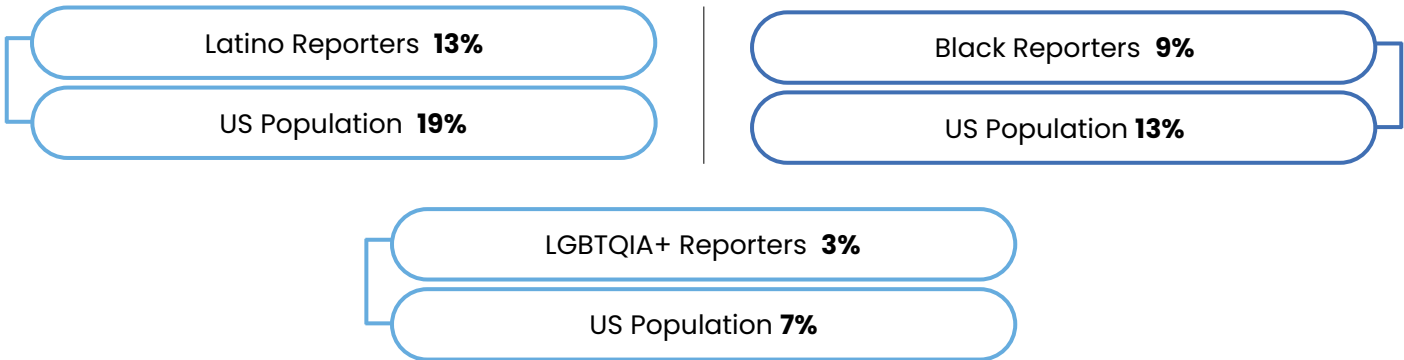
Conclusion: The findings of the survey of U.S. news media investigative teams highlight significant disparities in terms of racial and ethnic representation, gender balance in leadership roles, and overall inclusivity.

Findings in Graphics

The comparison with the U.S. population demographics helps highlight the disparities in representation within reporters and editors positions of investigative journalism units. The findings suggest that there is underrepresentation of racial, ethnic and gender groups compared to their proportions in the overall population.

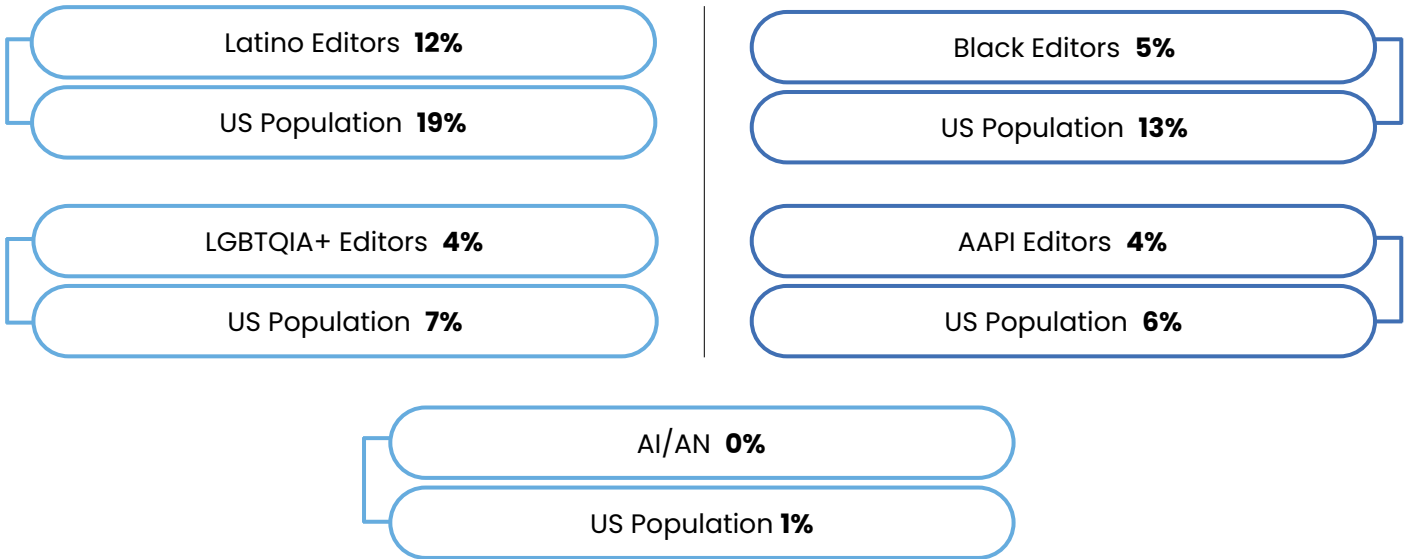
Infograph 1

Less represented groups: Investigative reporters when compared with the U.S. population demographics.



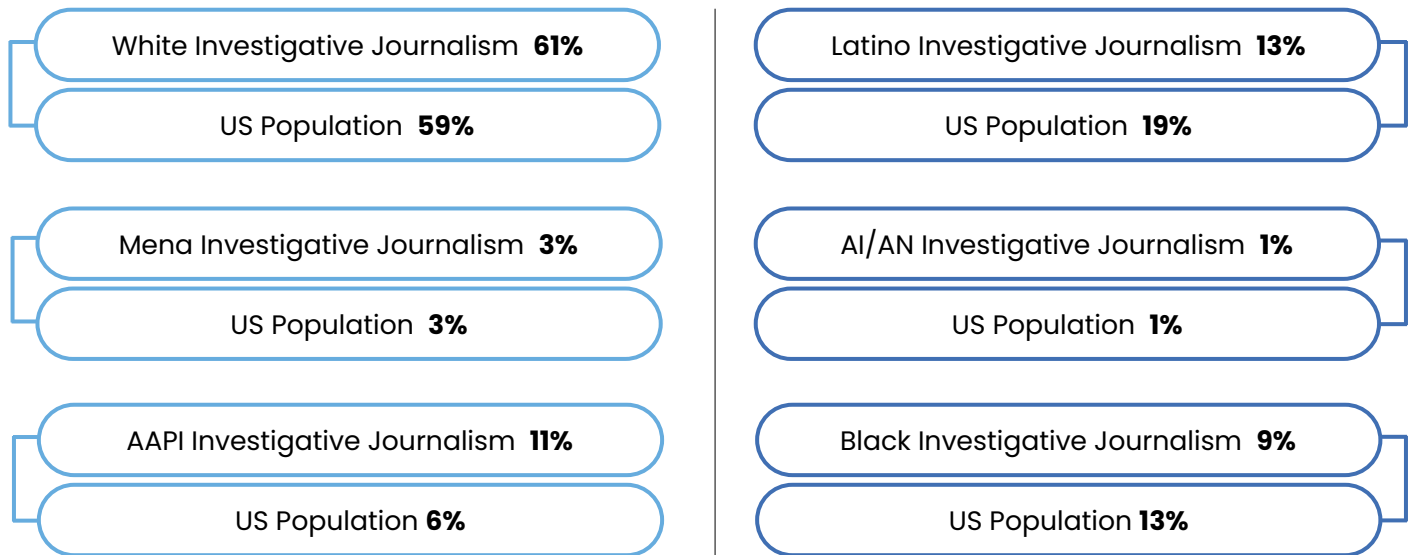
Infograph 2

Less represented groups: Investigative editors when compared with the U.S. population demographics.



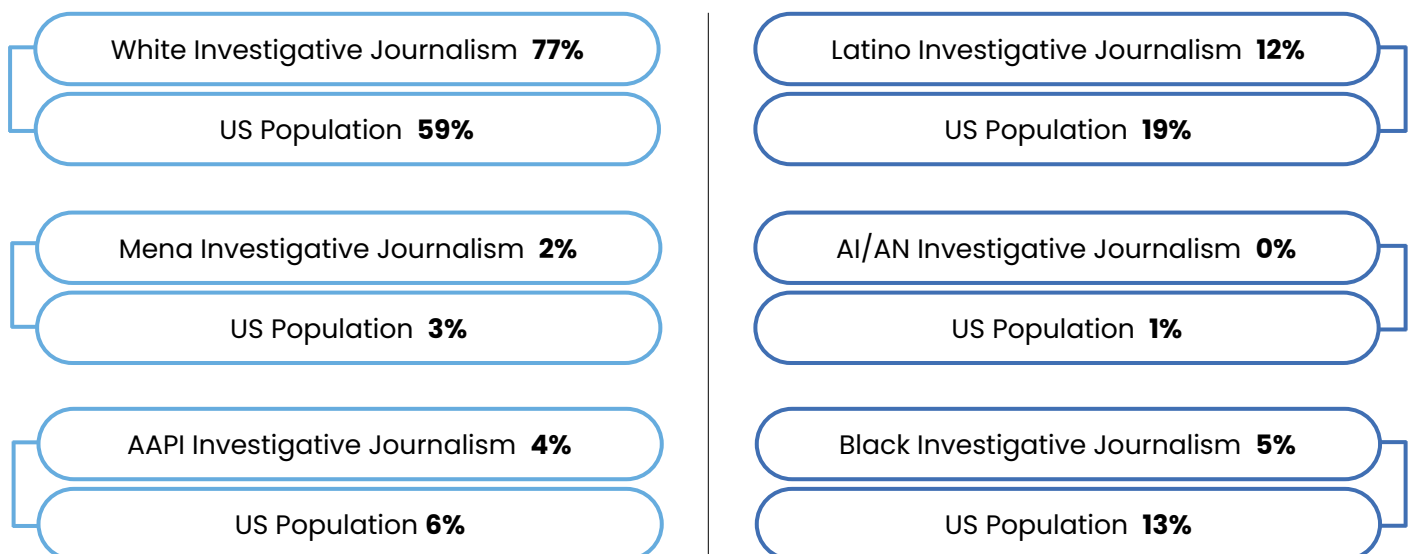
Infograph 3

Race & ethnicity comparison: % of investigative journalism reporters versus the % of U.S. population demographics



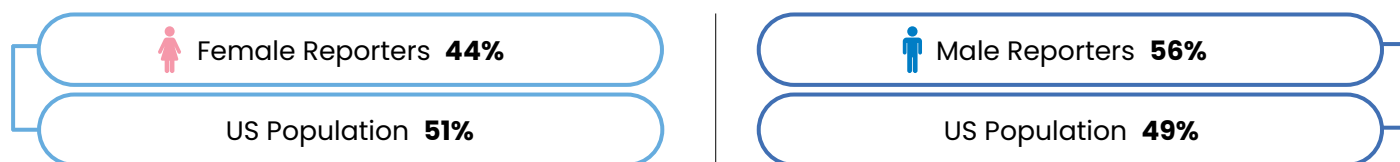
Infograph 4

Race & ethnicity comparison: % of investigative journalism editors versus the % of U.S. population demographics



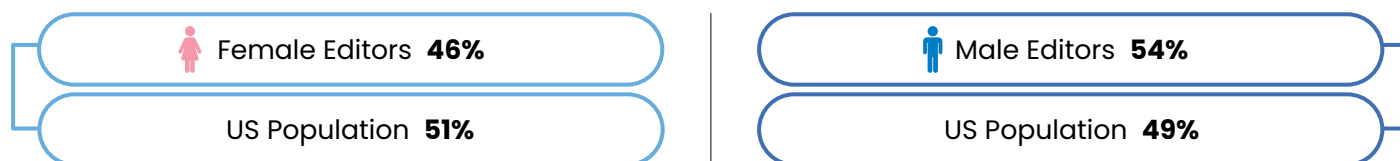
Infograph 5

Gender investigative journalism reporters compared with U.S. population



Infograph 6

Gender investigative journalism editors compared with U.S. population



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