

BETWEEN Stereotypes & Specificity



Latino Representation in Popular Television

**1 in 5
Americans
are Latino**



68 million Americans have roots in more than 20 Latin American countries, yet television often portrays Latinos as a monolithic group.

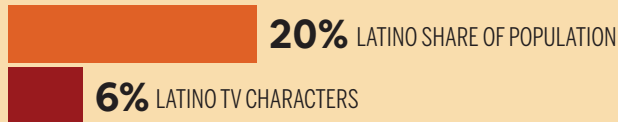
Scripted entertainment plays an important role in shaping attitudes towards historically-marginalized communities, and the rise in anti-Latino sentiment underscores the importance of nuanced Latino representation. Yet representation research traditionally treats Latinos — who have roots in 20 different countries — as a single category. As part of our *iPa'lante!* Latino Representation Initiative, the USC Norman Lear Center set out to examine what it means to be Latino on screen today, analyzing patterns *within* Latino communities and disentangling data by skin tone, race/ethnicity, and nationality.



Broad Sample of Popular Shows

First, we measured Latino representation in the 20 most popular scripted broadcast series from the 2024-2025 TV season.

UNITED STATES



LOS ANGELES



We identified a total of 69 Latino characters, which accounted for only 6% of all credited characters, compared to 20% of the U.S. population. Of the 20 series, 14 featured four or fewer Latino characters, with 7 featuring only a single Latino character.

DIVERSITY AMONG LATINO CHARACTERS WAS LACKING CULTURAL SPECIFICITY WAS RARE.



1

QUEER LATINO CHARACTERS



3

DARKER-SKINNED LATINO CHARACTERS



18

CHARACTERS WITH IDENTIFIED NATIONAL HERITAGE*

*Most heritage-specific portrayals were Mexican.



CRIMINALITY EMERGED AS THE MOST PROMINENT THEME.

Among Latino characters with evident professions:

1 in 4

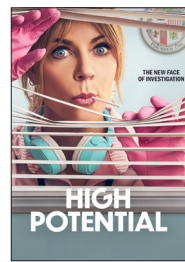
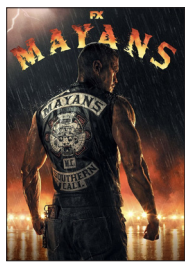
were depicted as career criminals

11%

participated in drug trafficking

11%

were part of a criminal organization



Deep-Dive into Latino-Led Shows

We conducted a **deep-dive** into eight Latino-led shows (featuring Latino main characters), four of which were also Latino-created (more than half of key behind-the-camera talent identify as Latino).

- **Latino-led shows featured nuanced portrayals of pressing social issues, cultural specificity, and complex explorations of Latino identities.** This was particularly true for shows that were also Latino-created.
- **In Latino-led shows, markers of cultural specificity like food, music, and cultural events were plentiful.** Five episodes specifically focused on depictions of quinceañeras. Through this cultural event, characters wrestled with gender and generational dynamics in Latino families and the push-and-pull between tradition and identity.
- **Latino-led content tackled stereotypes with humor, and among these, Latino-created shows more often centered the perspectives of Latino characters.** Social issues in Latino-led shows were wide-ranging, including gentrification, displacement, colonization, immigration, gender roles, and family dynamics.

Recommendations

Together, **this research points to the untapped potential of Latino-led and Latino-created content.** To support more nuanced depictions that highlight the diversity and complexity of Latino communities, we propose the following recommendations for storytellers and decision makers in the entertainment industry:

Aim for the inclusion of 1 Latino character for every 5 roles to reflect reality. If your show takes place in Los Angeles, aim higher!

Diversify your Latino characters with regard to socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, race, and skin-tones. It's ok to tell working class or undocumented stories — these aren't stereotypical if they're told with nuance and humanity. Show more characters who achieved wealth and success through means other than crime.

Exercise caution around depictions of Latinos as criminals, drug traffickers, or members of organized crime, particularly within smaller roles. These stories have long overshadowed other kinds of Latino stories. If your story does focus on these, make sure your characters have the screen time necessary to show complexity and depth, rather than being stereotypical, or reductive.

When appropriate, capitalize on the diversity of Latino actors by encouraging them to bring their lived experience into roles. Latino characters *don't have to* be played by actors of the same background. But cultural specificity can lend authenticity and counter monolithic assumptions among audiences. And since most roles are "unspecified Latinos," allowing actors to lean into the specificity of their own backgrounds requires little effort.

Prioritize Latino talent behind-the-camera. Inclusion of Latinos in key decision-making roles — as producers, directors, showrunners, or writers — brings nuance to the screen, even beyond Latino main characters.

Don't buy into the myth that Latino-led media is just for Latinos. Themes in Latino-led stories, like friendships, family life, and social issues appeal to all audiences, particularly younger ones.

**THE FULL REPORT CAN BE FOUND AT:
learcenter.org/latinorepresentation**

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