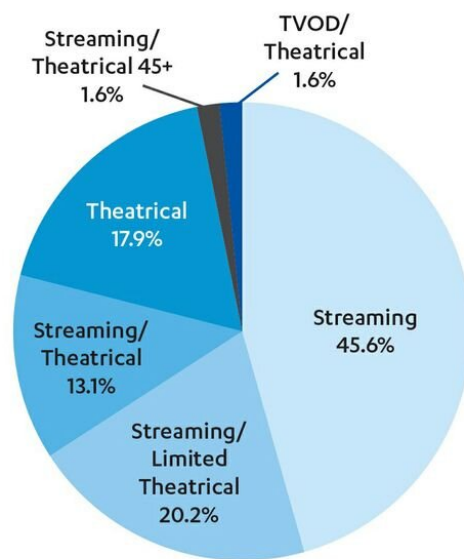


# People of color helped keep movie business afloat during pandemic

March 24 2022, by Jessica Wolf

Film Release Type, 2021 (n = 252)



▶ The largest single category of films considered in this report includes those that were released solely on streaming platforms<sup>12</sup> (45.6 percent), which is down from the share of streaming-only films considered in the previous report for 2020 (54.6 percent). By contrast, only 17.9 percent of films were released solely in theaters in 2021.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, 20.2 percent of films were released both on streaming platforms and in limited theaters,<sup>14</sup> while 13.1 percent were released both on streaming platforms and widely in theaters.<sup>15</sup> Finally, only 1.6 percent of films were released both theatrically and through transactional video on demand,<sup>16</sup> and 1.6 percent were released on streaming after a modified theatrical release window (45+ days).<sup>17</sup>

Credit: University of California, Los Angeles

A large percentage of the movie business's box office revenue and home viewership was driven by consumers of color in 2021, according to UCLA's [latest Hollywood Diversity Report](#). The report examines the 252 top-performing English-language films—based on box office receipts and streaming data—during the second year that the COVID-19 pandemic forced movie studios to adopt unconventional release strategies.

The report tracks progress for women and minorities in acting, directing and writing roles, and analyzes audience segments by race and ethnicity, focusing on Asian American, Black, Latino and white audiences, and age, focusing on viewers 18 to 49.

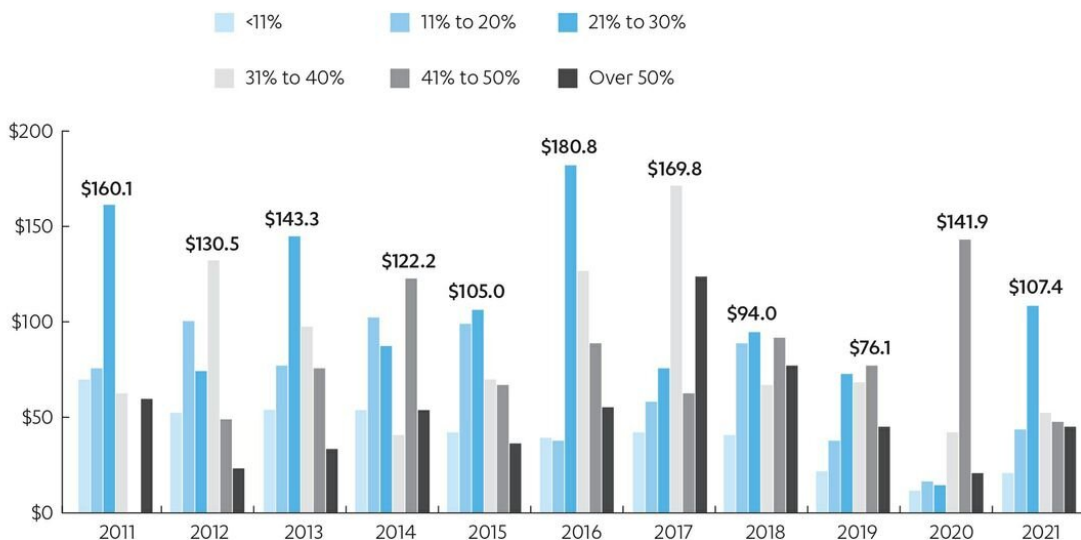
Published twice a year—with one analysis of movies and another for TV—the Hollywood Diversity Report has consistently shown increases in the percentages of women and people of color in key jobs in front of the camera. Researchers have also tracked sustained, albeit stubborn, growth for women and minorities in Hollywood writing and directing jobs.

The report's authors noted that 2021 was the first year since they began tracking such statistics that the majority of Academy Awards went to films that were directed by people of color and featured minority actors in lead roles. And the year's third highest-grossing film at the [box office](#) was "F9: The Fast Saga," which featured a cast that was more than 50% minority and was directed by Taiwanese American filmmaker Justin Lin. Sixty-five percent of opening weekend ticket sales for "F9" were to minority audiences, the highest figure among all films in the top 10.

The report tracks the numbers of writers, directors and actors who identify as Asian American, Black, Latino, Middle Eastern/North African, multiracial and Native American. People in those groups make up 42.7% of the U.S. population, and they form an important consumer bloc for entertainment, including movies.

For six of the 10 top-grossing films that opened in theaters in 2021, people of color accounted for the majority of opening-weekend U.S. ticket sales.

Global Box Office (000,000s), by Minority Cast Share, Theatrical Films, 2011-2021  
(n=172, 164, 163, 162, 168, 173, 167, 140, 145, 56, 84)



Median global box office peaked for films with casts that were from 21 to 30 percent minority in 2021 (\$107.4 million). Twenty-five films fell into this cast diversity interval, including *Venom: Let There Be Carnage* (\$501.0 million), *A Quiet Place Part II* (\$297.4 million), and *Cruella* (\$233.3 million). In a year in which theater attendance began to rebound after a COVID-decimated 2020, theatrically released films with relatively diverse casts again outshined their less-diverse counterparts at the box office. Indeed, the 14 films with the least-diverse casts (less than 11 percent minority) were again the poorest performers in 2021.

Credit: University of California, Los Angeles

The report also analyzed box office performance based on the diversity of the movies' casts—whether minority actors made up less than 11% of the cast, 11% to 20%, and so on, up to 51% or more. The study revealed that films with 21% to 30% minority actors had higher median global box office receipts than films in any other tier. That echoed a pattern since the report began tracking box office performance in 2011.

The report also found that, as in previous years, films with the least diverse casts (11% or less minority) were the poorest performers at the box office.

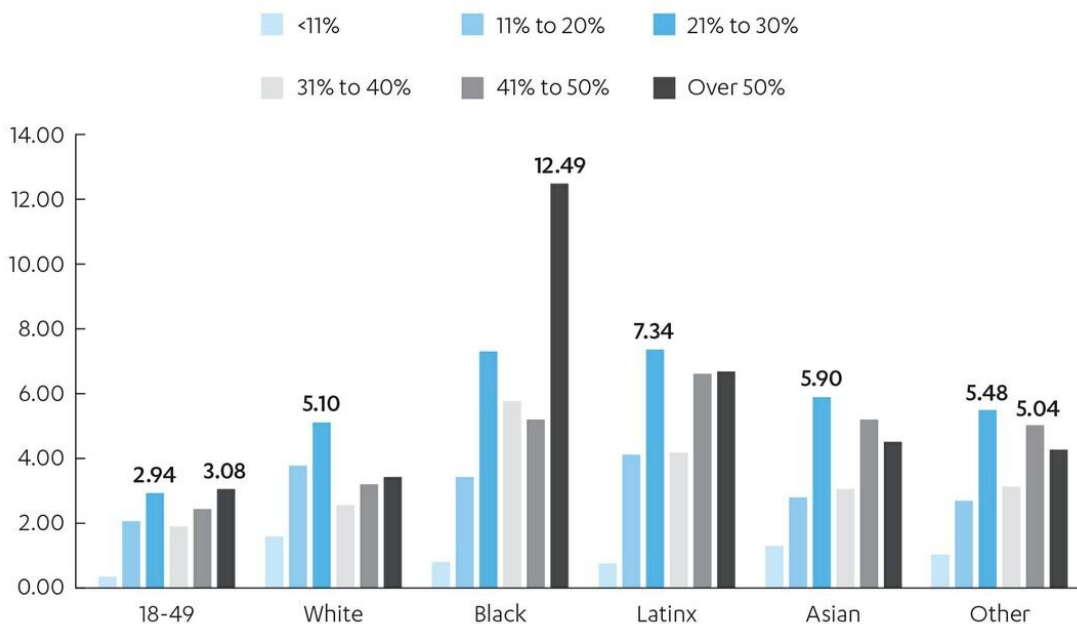
"Last year, every time a big movie exceeded expectations or broke a box office record, the majority of opening weekend audiences were people of color," said Ana-Christina Ramón, a co-author of the report and the director of research and civic engagement for the UCLA College division of social sciences. "For people of color, and especially Latino families, theaters provided an excursion when almost everything else was shut down. In a sense, people of color kept studios afloat the past couple of years.

"Studios should consider them to be investors, and as investors, they should get a return in the form of representation."

Overall, 43.1% of actors in the movies analyzed by the report were minorities. That's more than double the percentage from 2011, the first year of data collected by the authors, when 20.7% of actors were minorities. And 31.0% of the top-performing films in 2021 had casts in which the majority of the actors were minorities.

"Minorities reached proportionate representation in 2020 for the first time when it comes to overall cast diversity in films, and that held true again in 2021," said Darnell Hunt, dean of the social sciences at UCLA and co-author of the report.

**18-49 Ratings and HH Ratings, by Minority Cast Share, Streaming Films, 2021 (n=164)**



During the second full year of the pandemic, the volume of major films released via streaming platforms continued to increase, from 87 films in 2020 to 164 in 2021. Again, for all groups, median ratings were highest for relatively diverse streaming films in 2021. That is, for viewers 18-49 (3.08 ratings points) and Black households (12.49 ratings points), ratings peaked for streaming films with majority-minority casts. Seventy-two films fell into this cast diversity interval in 2021, including: *Raya and the Last Dragon*, *Coming 2 America*, *Vivo*, and *Mortal Kombat*. For viewers 18-49, though, it should be noted that streaming films with casts that were from 21 percent to 30 percent minority came in a close second (2.94 ratings points). For White (5.10 ratings points), Latinx (7.34 ratings points), Asian (5.90 ratings points), and other-race households (5.48 ratings points), streaming films that were from 21 percent to 30 percent minority also enjoyed the highest ratings in 2021. Examples of the 36 films that fell into this diversity interval include: *Don't Look Up*, *The Boss Baby: Family Business*, and *The Suicide Squad*.

Credit: University of California, Los Angeles

Hunt said the phenomenon is probably due in part to the greater number of movies that are initially released on streaming services: Of the films analyzed in the report, 45.6% were released on streaming services only.

"We do think this dual-release strategy is here to stay," Hunt said. "And

it could have a lasting impact on diversity metrics in front of and behind the camera as studios think about how to finance content for different platforms."

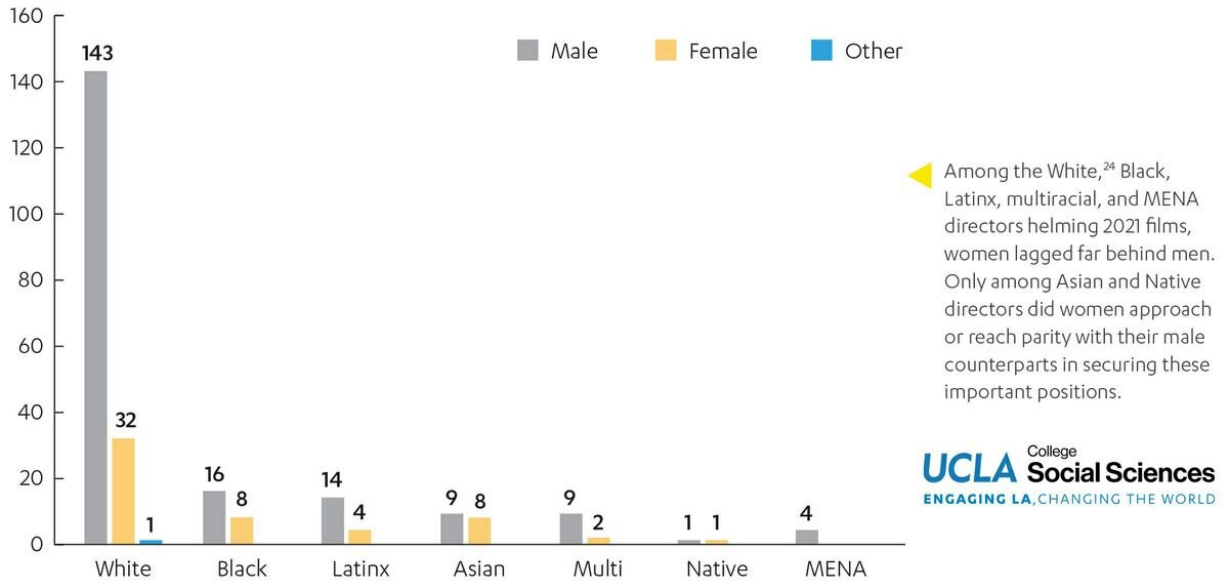
For example, the report found that women and people of color were far more likely than white men to direct films with budgets less than \$20 million.

"A small production budget usually means that there is also little to no marketing and studio support, unless it's from a production company known for making art house films," Ramón said. "And that makes it more difficult for filmmakers to get the next opportunity if their films have to fight for attention."

Hunt said studios are likely to bank on big-budget tentpole movies and sequels as traditional box office drivers, even as they continue to experiment with release platforms and adjust the amount of time between films' theatrical releases and their arrival on streaming services or on DVD or Blu-ray.

Among the 2021 films released to streaming services, those with casts in which a majority of actors were non-white enjoyed the highest ratings among viewers aged 18 to 49 and in Black households. Seventy-two films with majority-minority casts were released on streaming in 2021, including "Raya and the Last Dragon," "Coming 2 America," "Vivo" and "Mortal Kombat."

Film Director Counts, by Race and Gender, 2021 (n=252)



Credit: University of California, Los Angeles

"In 2021, diversity in front of the camera did not equate to more opportunities behind the camera for filmmakers who are women and people of color," Ramón said. "They continue to receive less financing, even when they make films with white lead actors. Most of these filmmakers are relegated to low-budget films. For women of color, directing and writing opportunities are really the final frontier."

Of the filmmakers who directed the movies analyzed in the report, 21.8% were women and 30.2% were people of color. Among the screenwriters for those films, 33.5% were women and 32.3% were people of color. Diversity in both jobs increased incrementally from 2020.

Out of the 76 [minority](#) directors of 2021's top films, just 23 were

women. And among Black, Latino and multiracial directors, at least twice as many were men as women in each racial or ethnic classification.

Although there was gender parity among Asian American and Native American directors, the overall numbers of directors from those groups were very small: just 17 Asian American directors and just two Native American directors were represented in 2021. Among white directors, 32 were women and 143 were men.

The authors counted one trans woman among the directors of the 2021 films they analyzed.

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

Citation: People of color helped keep movie business afloat during pandemic (2022, March 24) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-03-people-movie-business-afloat-pandemic.html>

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