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Content Audit

August 2022

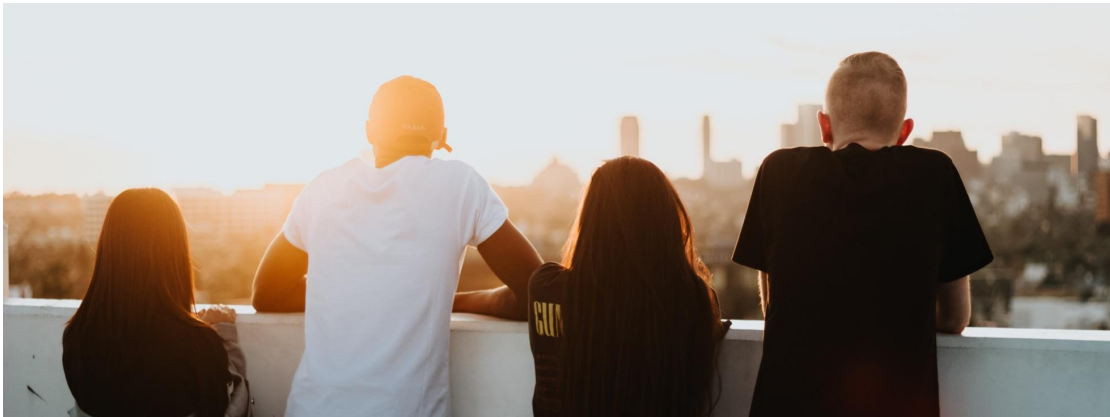
Eric Garcia McKinley, Ph.D.

IMPACT ARCHITECTS

Background

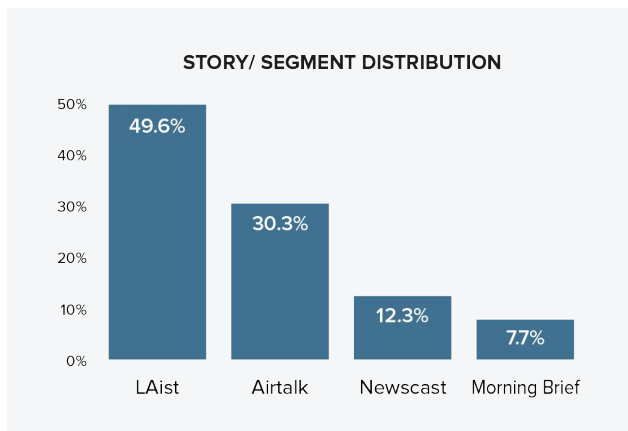
In summer 2022 Impact Architects (IA) partnered with KPCC/LAist to conduct a content audit of KPCC/LAist audio, digital, and newsletter content.

The purpose of the audit was to demonstrate the degree to which KPCC/LAist is adhering to the organization's [Dialogue style guide](#) – which emphasizes story framing and inclusive language – and to provide KPCC/LAist insight into its practices.



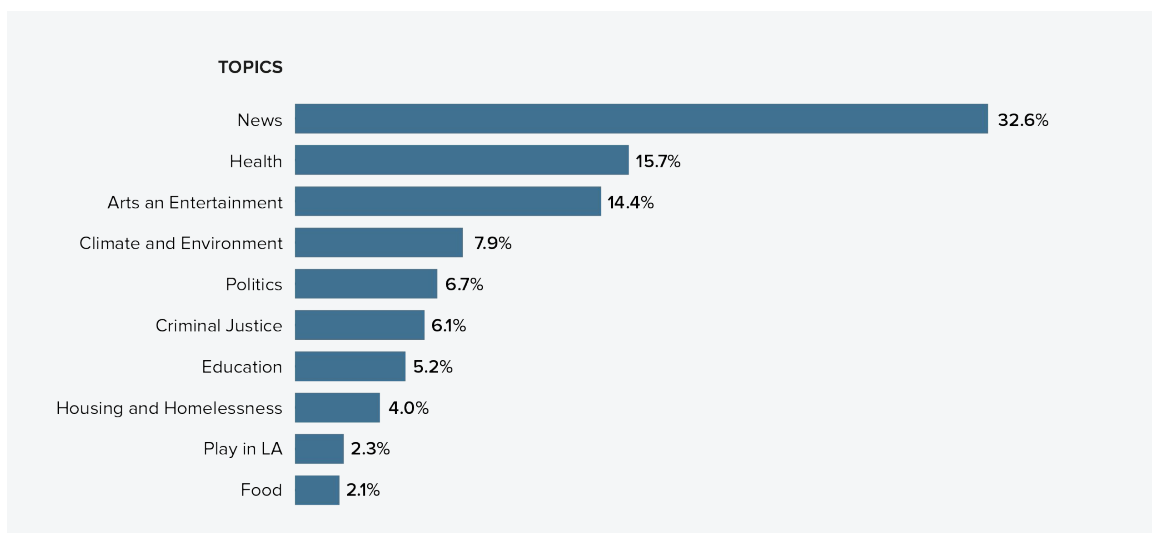
Methodology

IA selected a random, representative sample of content produced from July 1, 2021, to December 31, 2021, including four content areas: AirTalk, LAist, Morning Brief, and newscasts. We coded roughly 20% of the content produced from each content area over that time period. LAist and Morning Brief included a full textual review, while the audit of newscasts included a review of automated transcripts. The audit of AirTalk focused on segments and relied on top line text descriptions, [as appear on KPCC's website](#), but did not include a full audio review. Each segment of AirTalk has its own record.



The audit included a total of 478 records. LAist comprised 49.6% of the stories audited, followed by AirTalk (30.3%), newscasts (12.3%), and Morning Brief (7.7%).

We classified each story's topic based on KPCC/LAist's taxonomy and identification, with the exception of AirTalk, as its segments don't include tags. For the segments that don't have their own tag, we used our judgment in identifying a topic, again using KPCC/LAist's language and taxonomy. Because newscasts contain multiple topics, we followed the pattern for Morning Brief, which also contains multiple topics, and classified them as "News."



The audit focused on three aspects within each piece of content:

FRAMING

IMAGERY

INCLUSIVE
LANGUAGE

IA developed a coding framework that included a series of yes or no questions that the team of coders answered for each piece of content, when applicable (for instance, newscasts are exclusively audio, and thus don't have corresponding images). IA relied on KPCC/LAist's [Dialogue style guide](#) to develop the rubric, especially for answering the question about inclusive language. KPCC/LAist regularly updates its Dialogue style guide. We developed the rubric [based on the version up to date through February 7, 2022](#), while the coding took place during May and June, 2022, and may have referenced the style guide that included updates made in April and May, 2022. Each content area included a roughly 15% inter-coder reliability check, wherein two coders independently coded a story/segment, and we compared the results to ensure consistency.

THEME	RUBRIC
FRAMING	
Descriptive headline	Does the headline accurately describe the primary theme of the story, especially when assigning responsibility to action?
Hyperbolic language	Does the headline accurately describe the primary theme and content of the story, especially when assigning responsibility to action?
People-centered storytelling	Are the most prominent voices – sources with extensive or multiple quotes and/or paraphrases – representative of individual/community voices rather than institutions?
Responds to a problem	Does the story identify one or more ways an actor or group of actors is trying to address a social problem?
IMAGERY	
Relevance to topic	Is the image a depiction specifically tied to the theme of the story? For instance, an image of a masked person in a supermarket is relevant to a story about masking, but it's not relevant to a story about vaccines.
Stereotypes or biases	Does the image depict a stereotype, especially when depicting people from historically excluded groups or if the image is not relevant to the topic?
INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE	
Person first language	All references to people use person first language. "Person first language" emphasizes a person rather than a condition ("people without health insurance" rather than "the uninsured") and avoids stigmatizing or inaccurate descriptors ("addict," "convict," "homeless," "mentally ill," "unauthorized immigrant").
Specific language	All references to groups use specific language that does not "other" the group and does not imply that it is a monolith. An example of "othering" a group is using "us/them" language that implies essential difference. An example of monolithic language is reducing multiplicity ("members of South L.A.'s Black communities") to singularity ("the Black community").
Gender neutral language	All references to people use gender neutral language ("business people" rather than "businessman/businesswoman," "reproductive health" rather than "women's health").
Age neutral	An "age neutral" story only includes a reference to a source's age if it is relevant to the topic.
Non-ableist	A non-ableist story does not use ableist language. Ableist language uses words or phrases that refer to conditions but are used out of context colloquially ("crazy," "turn a blind eye," "fall on deaf ears").
LGBTQ+ affirming	To be considered LGBTQ+ affirming, the story only explains a person's pronouns if they are uncommon, describes sexual orientation in a way that does not imply choice ("sexual preference"), does not deadname trans people, and refers to "gender assignment" rather than "biological sex."
Race and ethnic identity inclusive	To be considered race and ethnic identity inclusive, the story does not refer to "majority" or "minority" populations; does not use "diverse," "POC," or "BIPOC" as descriptors; capitalizes racial identifiers; identifies a person's race or ethnicity only when relevant to the story; and follows proper naming conventions for specific cultures.

Findings

96.2%

of stories had a **headline directly tied to the theme** of the story

65.5%

of stories **prioritize the voices of people** over institutional voices

11.5%

of stories respond to a problem with an **actionable solution**

90.2%

of the images in stories that have an **image are directly tied to the theme** of the story

Morning Brief

had the **lowest percentage** of headlines tied to the theme of the story (**73%**), as well as the lowest percentage of images tied to the theme of the story (**81.1%**)

Less than 3%

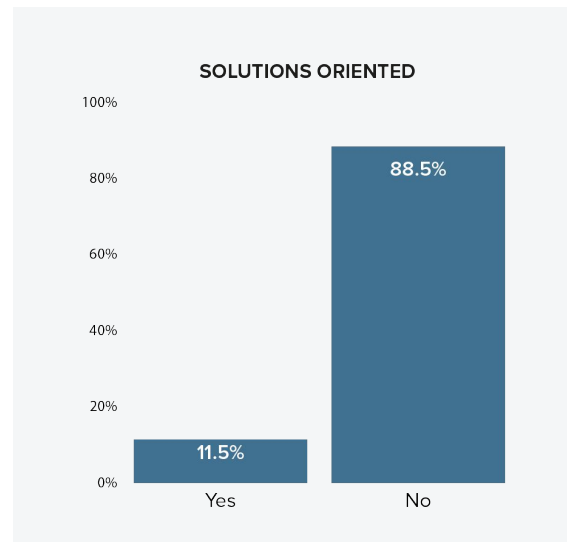
of stories include **content contrary to KPCC/LAist's standards** for inclusivity, including:

- Non person first language
- Non-inclusive language regarding specific populations
- Stereotypes in images
- Hyperbolic headlines

Summary & Analysis

KPCC/LAist has established high standards for inclusivity in its content, and it meets those standards most of the time. The most common flags during the audit came for headlines that don't adequately describe the theme of the story and for images that don't specifically relate to the theme of the story, but not all of those cases are style guide infractions regarding inclusivity. Often, the incongruity has more to do with lack of specificity. Non-inclusive language is rare in written KPCC/LAist content.

Most of the stories under review are classified as news. It is unsurprising, then, that these often no do have a solvable problem.



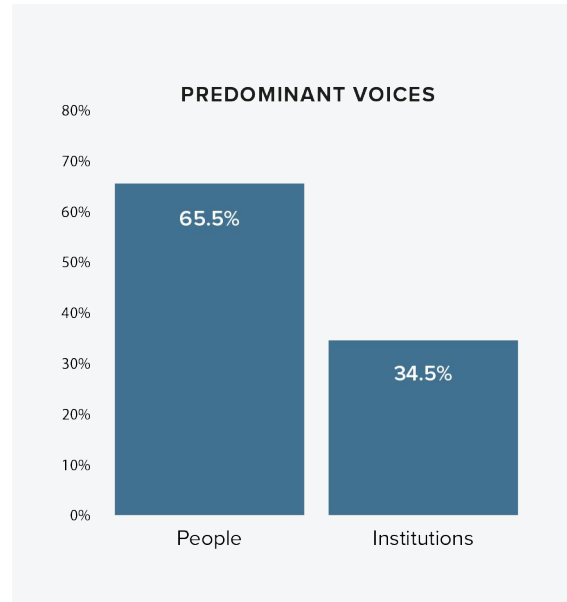
Framing

Most KPCC/LAist stories from the content areas under review are classified as "News." It is unsurprising, then, that relatively few stories are classified as including an actor or group of actors addressing a problem. Stories classified as "News" tend to deliver information, often without a solvable problem, let alone a method or example of addressing a problem.

For instance, an LAist article tagged as "News" that is not solution oriented is titled ["LA Area Feels 4.3 Magnitude Quake Centered In Carson."](#) Another story tagged as "News" does contain a theme with a solvable problem, redistricting: ["The Redrawing Of LA County's Five District Boundaries Is Torn Over Equity Issues."](#) This story does include a reference to a group working to solve a problem, Inner City Struggle, which the author writes "is part of a coalition pushing for community engagement in the redistricting process." As a result, this story was coded as solution oriented. It could have still done more to provide usable information, however. The story does not tell the reader how a person can get involved in the community engagement efforts, and it also makes reference to the independent committee drafting the new boundaries "with public input," but without saying how, or even whether, one can take an action to provide input.

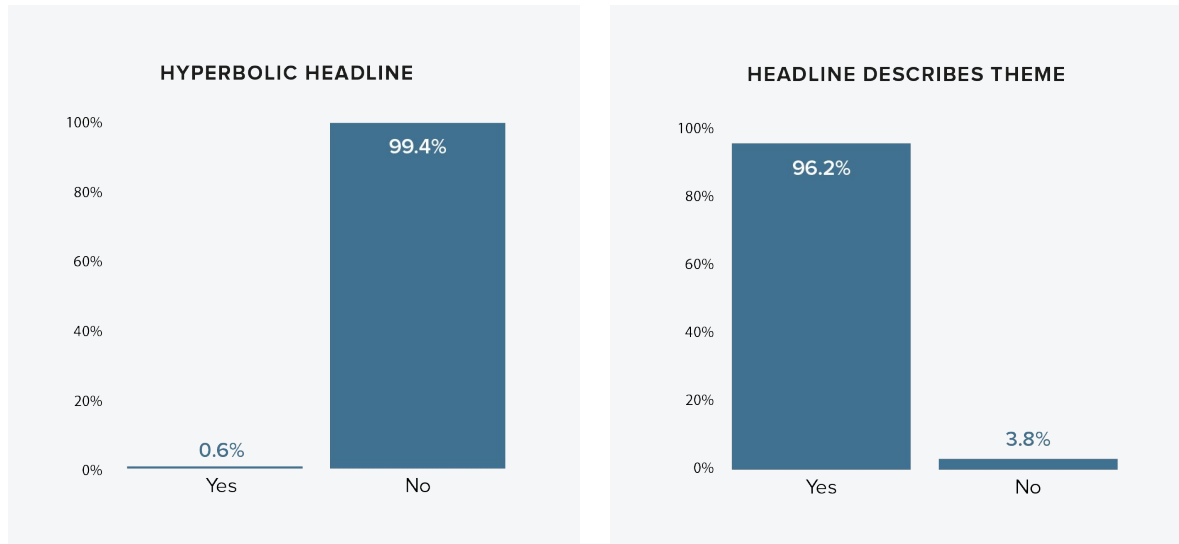
Another element of framing is whose voices are prioritized, people or institutions. Overall, about two thirds of the stories in the audit (65.5%) prioritize the voices of people rather than institutions. We classified institutional voices as those who speak on behalf of a government or private institution. This could include named or unnamed press releases, statements from public relations officers, or official statements advancing an institutional point of view. Voices identified as "people" might be associated with an institution, but their role in the story is either centered on expert commentary or speaking on behalf of a community, such as a representative of a nonprofit group.

Overall, about two thirds of the stories in the audit prioritize the voices of people rather than institutions.



The article ["LAPD Releases Video of Officer's Shooting That Killed 14-Year-Old Inside Burlington Store And Expresses Regret"](#) is an example of a story that prioritizes an institutional voice. Other than descriptions and quoted references to the video in question, all quotes are from sources speaking on behalf of the LAPD, including an anonymous statement from the department. Conversely, a story titled ["CHP Killing of Unarmed Man in East LA Under State Investigation"](#) primarily quotes the attorney speaking on behalf of the man killed, which made it a story that prioritized the voice of people. These two examples demonstrate how similar incidences – police killings – resulted in stories that prioritize different voices.

Finally, we identified a very small percentage of headlines containing hyperbole (3 records total among the sample, or 0.6%), while a higher percentage (3.8%) of headlines did not adequately describe the theme of the story. Still, such instances were rare, and as we will see below, most cases came for Morning Brief, which used a non-descriptive headline structure.



The three hyperbolic headlines are:

- ["Morning Brief: Worst Fire Season Ever, A Recall Election Guide, and Vegan Mexican Eateries"](#)
- ["DOC AMA: Rare 'Breakthrough' Cases, Alarming One-Day Spike In COVID-19 Cases" \(AirTalk\)](#)
- ["Is America Headed For Another Civil War?" \(AirTalk\)](#)

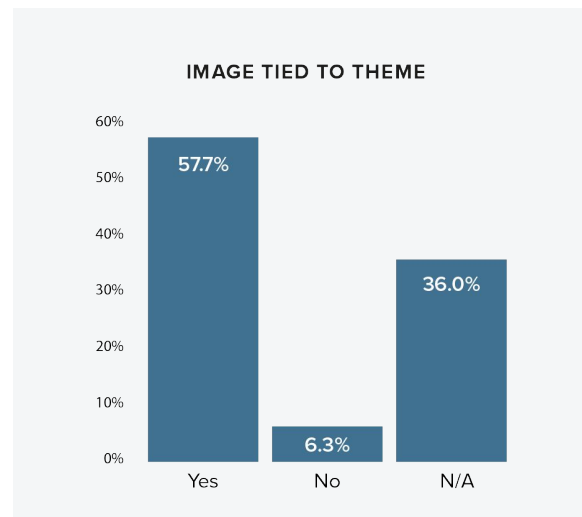
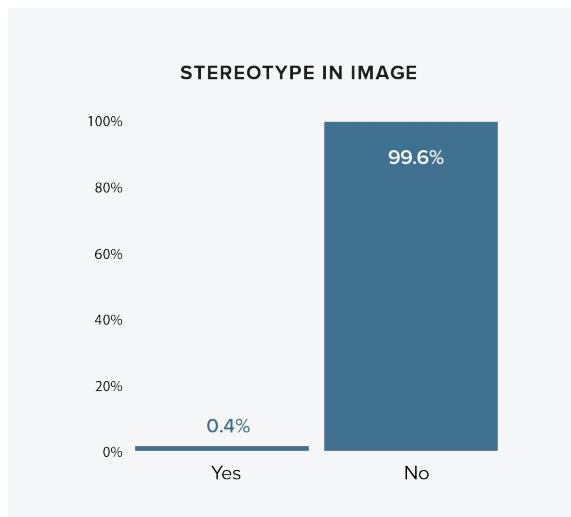
These three headlines were flagged as "hyperbolic" for different reasons. The first headline contains an accurate statement, that the current fire season is the worst on record; however, the article references the impact of individual fires dating back to 2018 and does not specifically substantiate the statement in the headline. The second headline was flagged because of the sequencing of "rare" cases with an "alarming" rise of COVID-19 cases, and due to the lack of context for what qualifies as "alarming." Finally, the third headline was flagged because it's a rhetorical question, whereas a description of the situation that is making the question viable would better serve the reader's understanding and be less hyperbolic in presentation.

While only 4% of the headlines do not adequately describe the theme of the story, 57.9% of those headlines are from Morning Brief. And 72% of headlines flagged for not

describing the theme of the story were because the headline was vague, and most of those were Morning Brief stories as well. The structure of Morning Brief headlines was the central factor for the disproportionate number of flags. Morning Brief contains a short lead story, followed by a set of links from KPCC/LAist, often ending with another brief paragraph or two about a leisure activity taking place in L.A. The headline followed in a triplet structure: "Lead story, select bullet point, leisure activity." With limited space, the first part of the headline often vaguely described the lead story, as in ["Shared Wisdom, Thunderstorms, And Graffiti Tours."](#) wherein the "shared wisdom" was about the grief of those who lost loved ones on 9/11.

This structure can also lead to potentially insensitive headlines, especially when the lead story deals with a serious topic presented without context. The clearest example of this is a headline that contains just three words: ["Guns, Abortion, and Tacos."](#) Additionally, unlike most other Morning Brief headlines, the "guns" and "abortion" components both pertain to the lead story, which is about Gavin Newsom using the logic of Texas's abortion ban and applying it to gun ownership. The reader wouldn't grasp that from the headline, however, which ends its series with a reference to food. Other examples include ["I Was Attacked, Booster Shots, and LA's Best Donuts,"](#) and ["LA Hate Crimes, An Apple 1, And Pizza."](#)

The last headline is also an example of a Morning Brief headline that does adequately describe the theme of the story, as the story is about hate crimes in L.A. Still, descriptive headlines that focus specifically on the lead story, and not anything else, would serve the audience's understanding of what's in the newsletter. ¹



¹ While we have not systematically reviewed Morning Brief headlines outside of our six month sample, recent Morning Brief editions suggest that there has been an editorial change regarding the triplet structure.

Imagery

We reviewed the use of header images with regard to stereotypes in images and relevance to the topic. While only one image depicts a stereotype, the audit contains more flags for lack of specific relevance to the topic than any other aspect under review. Resource constraints are the likely reason for this. While writers and editors have an endless supply of imagination for crafting specific and descriptive headlines, there's a limited pool of photographer capacity and stock image selection when including an image to a story.

Nonprofit That Serves Unhoused Population Temporarily Saved From Eviction In City Of Orange

Published Nov 3, 2021 3:54 PM



A homeless encampment made of tents and tarps lines the Santa Ana riverbed near Angel Stadium in Anaheim, California, January 25, 2018. (Robyn Beck / AFP via Getty Images)

We flagged this [image](#) because tent encampments are visual shorthands to represent the unhoused that don't necessarily capture the broad experience of the people affected. The stereotypical image was also flagged for having an image unrelated to the topic at hand. The story is about a nonprofit that serves the unhoused population, not the population itself. Moreover, juxtaposing an image of a tent encampment with a headline about an organization being "saved from eviction" could also be read as an insensitive coupling.

The image on the right was flagged because of the use of a symbol, a pride flag, for a topic about services for transgender people specifically, not all LGBTQ+ communities. Moreover, by visually connecting services for transgender people with a pride flag, the viewer might assume a monolithic viewpoint that ignores that transphobia can and does exist within LGBTQ+ communities.

The Connie Norman Transgender Empowerment Center Opens In West Hollywood

Published Sep 10, 2021 3:46 PM



A new transgender empowerment center just opened in West Hollywood. (David McNew / Getty Images North America)

Other images flagged have some relevance to the topic, but it's either general or abstract. For example:

The example to the right depicts the Beverly Hills police station. While the Beverly Hills police serve as the primary source in the brief article that follows, the headline only indicates the anti-Semitic flyers were "found," and not that there has been a police response.

Morning Brief: Unhoused Vets, Another Recall, And Griffith Park's Birthday

Published Nov 12, 2021 5:00 AM



The L.A. County Board of Supervisors has created a Blue Ribbon Commission to "assess existing structures and systems" regarding homelessness.
(FREDERIC J. BROWN/AFP via Getty Images / AFP)

Finally, this right image merely depicts water for a story about individual water usage. It also depicts what, at a glance, looks like an abundance of water for a story implicitly about the need to conserve as a result of a shortage.

Anti-Semitic Flyers Found In Beverly Hills

Published Nov 29, 2021 3:45 PM



The Beverly Hills Police Department.
(Chris Lott / via the LAist Featured Photos pool on Flickr)

We flagged this image on the left because it depicts an unidentified person for a story about unhoused vets without any indication that the person is unhoused or a vet.

Californians Haven't Cut Their Water Usage Enough This Year

Published Sep 23, 2021 12:04 PM



California, especially SoCal, if not doing enough to cut water usage.
(Deryl Barker / LAist)

A less common instance involves an image that has nothing at all to do with the story. The example to the right is one of those cases. However, given that the description of the image is supposed to represent redistricting, it's possible that the image appeared as a mistake.

About three fourths of images flagged for not related to the story were stock images



About three fourths (75.8%) of the images flagged for not being related to the story were stock images that too loosely relate to the theme, including photos taken by KPCC/LAist photographers but that seem to have been taken from the organization's library. Some of the images relate to the story more than the headline. One specific instance that came up multiple times and is likely to in the future are articles that involve high level government officials, in particular the governor.



[The image on the left](#), for instance, is about Governor Gavin Newsom being responsible for signing or vetoing a slate of bills the California legislature passed. One of the bills concerned protecting journalists' right to cover protests, though it was not the only, or even the first, bill mentioned. With a clearer headline, the image would be a more adequate depiction of the article's theme. Still, a picture from a campaign stop doesn't capture the essence of the newsletter.

[The image on the right](#) similarly depicts Newsom giving a speech. This image, however, was flagged because the primary actors are voters and what they said about Newsom's recall, not necessarily Newsom himself.


It is worth asking if there are other ways to depict themes that involve high level government officials.

A New Poll Finds California Voters Almost Evenly Split On Newsom Recall Election

▶ LISTEN · 1:42:39

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California Governor Gavin Newsom attends California Governor Gavin Newsom's press conference for the official reopening of the state of California at Universal Studios Hollywood on June 15, 2021 in Universal City, California.

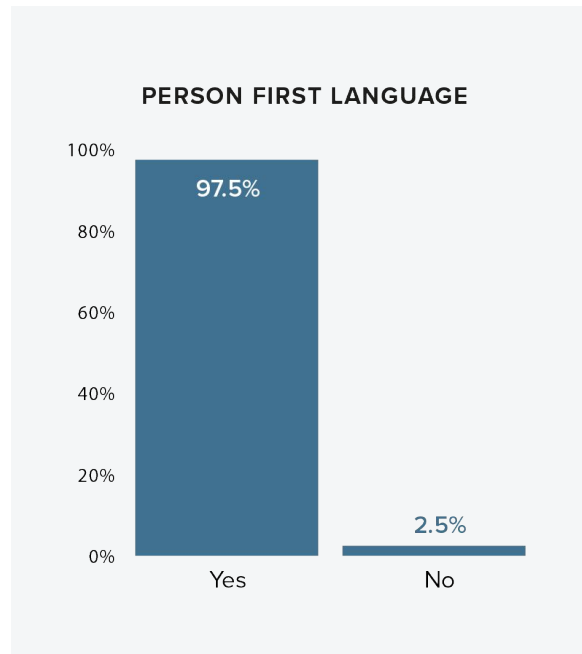
Taken together, it's worth asking if there are other ways to depict themes that involve high level government officials besides the images of the actors during public appearances. These are the most readily available, but they tend to only loosely be related to the activities discussed in the actual content.

Inclusive Language

KPCC/LAist operates under a codified style guide, which includes guidance for inclusive language. Our audit concluded that KPCC/LAist follows the style guide most of the time, with under 2.5% of stories flagged for using non-person first language and 1.8% of stories using non-inclusive language. Non-inclusive language includes things like not being gender or age neutral, or containing ableist language. Two instances of non-inclusive language are from stories that are also flagged for using non-person first language.

When it comes to inclusive language, KPCC/LAist meets its own standards most of the time.

Because KPCC/LAist meets its own standards most of the time, there are no clear trends or problem areas to identify that need to be addressed more than others. The examples of using non-person first and non-inclusive language below are set next to examples of inclusive language, which is far more prevalent in KPCC/LAist's content.



Some of the examples are straightforward infractions of the style guide, such as the use of "the homeless." Others exist as a result of systems, such as the use of "crazy" in a KPCC fundraising pitch, decontextualized headlines/links found in Morning Brief, which was the case for the example that is not age neutral.

Flagged for style guide infraction

Follows style guide

Non-person first language (AirTalk): ["An Appeals Court Struck Down A Judge's Order to House the Homeless on Skid Row by October. What Happens Now?"](#)

Person first language (LAist): "Mary's Kitchen, a nonprofit that provides essential services to the **unhoused population** in Orange County, is safe from being evicted for now."

Non-person first language (LAist): ["As they left the event, Whitlow, Burnett and the other former prisoners felt a heavy weight."](#)

Person first language (LAist): "Burnett and 11 other formerly **incarcerated people** walked the stage at a graduation ceremony in Cal State L.A. last summer."

Not gender neutral (Morning Brief): [The City Council approved a motion Tuesday to explore how — and how many — **unmanned** delivery vehicles should be allowed to operate in L.A.](#)

Gender neutral (LAist): "William Boyer, a **spokesperson** for the district, said authorities are monitoring the situation and that there might be a change in the coming weeks."

Not racially and/or ethnically inclusive (AirTalk): ["Many consumer groups argue this is unfair to low-income and **minority** consumers"](#)

Racially and/or ethnically inclusive (LAist): "**Jarrin** says it bothers him when he hears other announcers mispronounce Latino players' names."

Story includes monolithic characterizations (Newscast): ["**Blacks** comprise 90% of Rodeo Drive arrests"](#)

Non-monolithic characterization (Morning Brief): "But well before that, I knew it was a place I could discover new things written for and by **Black people**."

Story is not age neutral (Morning Brief): ["**Lisa Chilton, a bisexual 63-year-old woman, spent five years couch surfing when she was unhoused, and she's worried she might have to do it again.**"](#)

Gender neutral (Newscast): "And **Dr. Sam Torbati says** research from Britain shows your immunity rebounds fast with that extra shot within a couple of weeks the immunity is back up to 94% after a booster."

Story contains ableist language (Morning Brief): ["**If you've been relying on our newsroom to keep you informed during these crazy times, please click here to make a donation in any amount and help us continue providing the news Angelenos need to know.**"](#)

Non-ableist language (AirTalk): "During that time, overdose deaths rose nearly 30% compared to the year prior. Experts say limited access to treatment played a role."