

Race and Leadership in the News Media 2023: Evidence from Five Markets

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Key finding

In this Reuters Institute factsheet, continuing work started in 2020, we analyse the percentage of people of colour in top editorial positions in a strategic sample of 100 major online and offline news outlets in five different markets across four continents: Brazil, Germany, South Africa, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States (US).

Looking at a sample of ten top online news outlets and ten top offline news outlets in each of these markets, we find:

- Overall, 23% of the 81 top editors across the 100 brands covered are people of colour, despite the fact that, on average, 44% of the general population across all five countries are people of colour. If we set aside South Africa and look at the four other countries covered, 11% of the top editors are people of colour, compared with, on average, 31% of the general population.
- In Brazil and Germany, as in 2022, none of the outlets in our sample have a person of colour as top editor. In the UK, 6% of those in top editorial positions are people of colour. In the US, the percentage of top editors of colour remained the same as in 2022, at 33%. In South Africa, 80% of top editors are people of colour, up from 73% in 2022.

- Like in previous years, in every single country covered, the percentage of people of colour in the general population remains higher than among top editors.
- In the four countries where data are available on the number of journalists of colour, there continues to be no simple relationship between the percentage of journalists of colour and the percentage of people of colour in top editorial positions. In Brazil, there are fewer top editors of colour than there are journalists of colour. In the UK, these percentages are the same. In South Africa and the US, there are more top editors of colour than journalists of colour.
- The share of internet news users who say that they read news from at least one major outlet with a top editor of colour ranges from 0% in Brazil and Germany to 91% in South Africa.

General overview

Who occupies top editorial positions in major news organisations matters, both practically and symbolically. To the public, people in these roles often come to represent both their organisation and the broader media industry. As key figures in the leadership and direction of news outlets, top editors make decisions that influence what news

and newsrooms look like and their backgrounds and experiences are among the factors that influence these decisions (Duffy 2019). The racial and ethnic composition of newsroom management can affect diversity in hiring, retention, and promotion as well as in news content itself, influencing editorial decision-making and attention to stories and experiences that reflect the communities news organisations serve (Cruz and Holman 2022; Sun 2022). These premisses are central to our ongoing work studying diversity in leadership in the news media, both from the perspective of gender (Eddy et al. 2023) and race (Eddy et al. 2022).

We continue that work on race and ethnicity in news leadership here, documenting the diversity of top editors of major outlets to assess one component of how the news media industry has responded over the past four years to conversations about racial justice, equity, and representation in many countries. Several years into the Black Lives Matter movement and deepened inequalities related to the COVID-19 pandemic, in many countries the media industry continues to face calls both from outside and from inside to address broader issues around prioritising diversity in the newsroom.

This short factsheet adds to important research by others working on race in the news media, including work gauging journalists' perceptions of newsroom diversity (Boaventura Teixeira 2022; Gottfried et al. 2022) as well as studies documenting the challenges of under-representation, discrimination, and hostility facing journalists of colour in predominantly white newsrooms (Douglas 2021; Jackson 2022; Oh and Min 2023).

Methods and data

Continuing our work from previous years (Nielsen et al. 2020; Eddy et al. 2022; Robertson et al. 2021), we focus on top editorial leadership positions in a strategic sample of five markets: South Africa in Africa, Germany and the UK in Europe, the US in North America, and Brazil in South America. These countries have different demographics and histories of white imperialism, colonialism, and slavery. To get an overview of similarities and differences across markets, as well as any changes in leadership, we examine the same countries in 2023 as we did in prior years. This choice of markets also allows us to leverage available data on the journalistic profession and on news and media use. We include

five markets from those covered in the *Worlds of Journalism* project (2012–16) and in the Reuters Institute *Digital News Report 2022* (Newman et al. 2022). Where it is possible, we compare our findings to data on racial and ethnic diversity in the journalistic profession (using *Worlds of Journalism* data collected between 2012 and 2016) and in the wider population (using the most recent census and other official data). However, data are not always available and comparisons not always possible, not only because of limited research, but also because of legal restrictions on collecting and retaining certain statistics on race (for instance in Germany).

Following work on the representation of race in editorial positions (Chakravartty et al. 2018) and citation patterns (Freelon et al. 2023) in communications research, we operationalised race by adopting a conceptualisation that contrasts institutionally dominant white populations and dominated racialised communities as a means of calling attention to the reification of racial categories as part of structural inequality and the exercise of power. This language and history differ across the countries we study, but what we are specifically referring to here are present-day hierarchies tied to colonial legacies of empire, militarism, and Apartheid. This year, unlike in past years, we have opted to use the terminology 'people of colour' instead of 'non-white' throughout our report in order to move away from references to a white default as well as to avoid terminology that in the South African context is associated with Apartheid. (We are grateful for feedback that brought this problem to our attention, and apologies for any offence we have caused in the past.) As in the past, we want to be clear: race and racial discrimination work in complex ways not always tied to skin colour, for example where it has a religious dimension. They are the product of what has been defined as 'racecraft', categories in part produced by racist practices that in turn shape society and how we see it (Fields and Fields 2012). There are also dimensions of ethnicity that are not always related to conceptions of race. However, the conceptualisation we use here captures some important aspects of this in the countries we cover.

We therefore deploy a simple and reductionist, but hopefully still illuminating and relevant, binary, and code each top editor based on whether they are a person of colour or not. This coding was based on editors' self-identification when publicly available as well as their biographies and images. Relying on physical appearance and biographies to analyse race is imperfect, as related research has noted (Freelon

et al. 2023), so we also drew upon local partners' expertise on differing contexts of race and ethnicity in each market we study here. Using the terminology 'people of colour' is in no way meant to suggest an identity, let alone a homogeneous group, given the great diversity and complexity of people's identities. Rather, it provides a way to categorise otherwise very different people who come from institutionally dominated ethnic and racial groups. It helps us point to a dimension of inequality in representation at a macro level.

Our overall approach is identical to that of previous years. In each market, we focused on the top ten offline (TV, print, and radio) and online news brands in terms of weekly usage, as measured in the 2022 Reuters Institute *Digital News Report* (Newman et al. 2022). Our focus on the most widely used offline and online brands means that some important outlets with editors of colour are not included in the sample (in the UK, for example, the *Financial Times* and VICE UK, edited by Roula Khalaf and Zing Tsjeng, are not in the sample). Because of changes in what the most widely used brands are, and our focus on the top ten offline and online brands, there has been some turnover in the specific brands included in the analysis: 89 of the 100 brands covered in 2022 are included in the analysis again this year, with 11 new brands included.

For each brand, we identified the top editor by checking their official webpages, press releases, and related news coverage. The data were collected in February 2023. We looked for editor-in-chief or the nearest equivalent, for example, executive editor, or head of news for TV. The exact terminology varies from country to country and organisation to organisation, but in most cases it is possible to identify a single person. We refer to the individuals identified collectively as the top editors. It is important to note, of course, that this does not mean the top editor is the only person who matters or, in fact, is the most important person in terms of day-to-day editorial decision-making. We coded one observation as missing in cases where both online and offline versions of the same brand share a top editor, as well

as where two brands with the same ownership share a top editor, to avoid double-counting. Together, the analysis covers a total of 81 individuals across the 100 brands included in 2023, compared with 82 individuals in 2022. Some top editors had publicly or privately announced they were stepping down at or around the time of data collection (e.g. John Ryley at Sky News in the UK). In these cases, where no replacement had been publicly announced by late February 2023, we chose to keep the outgoing top editor listed as is, and we include here the top editor as of late February.

The individuals identified were double-checked in consultation with local partners within every market, including current and former Reuters Institute Journalist Fellows as well as academic experts. In some cases, we also contacted the brands or their press offices to confirm who their top editor was. Where organisations responded, we always deferred to their judgement. In a few cases, where an organisation has not responded to our query and where there is no single clearly designated editor-in-chief, or where roles and responsibilities across online and offline parts of the same outlet are unclear, we have made a judgement call as to whom to code as the top editor of the outlet in question.

All individuals in the dataset were coded independently by the authors. Race and ethnicity are complicated phenomena, and so are statistics on race and ethnicity. What we present here is based on our coding of the individuals covered. Top editors may not in every instance see themselves in the same way, or always be seen by everyone else in the same way, though we prioritised editors' self-identification when this information was publicly available, including when it may have changed over time. This includes top editors who self-identify as mixed-race. All the numbers presented here, both from our own data collection and from secondary sources we rely on, should be seen with this in mind.

Findings

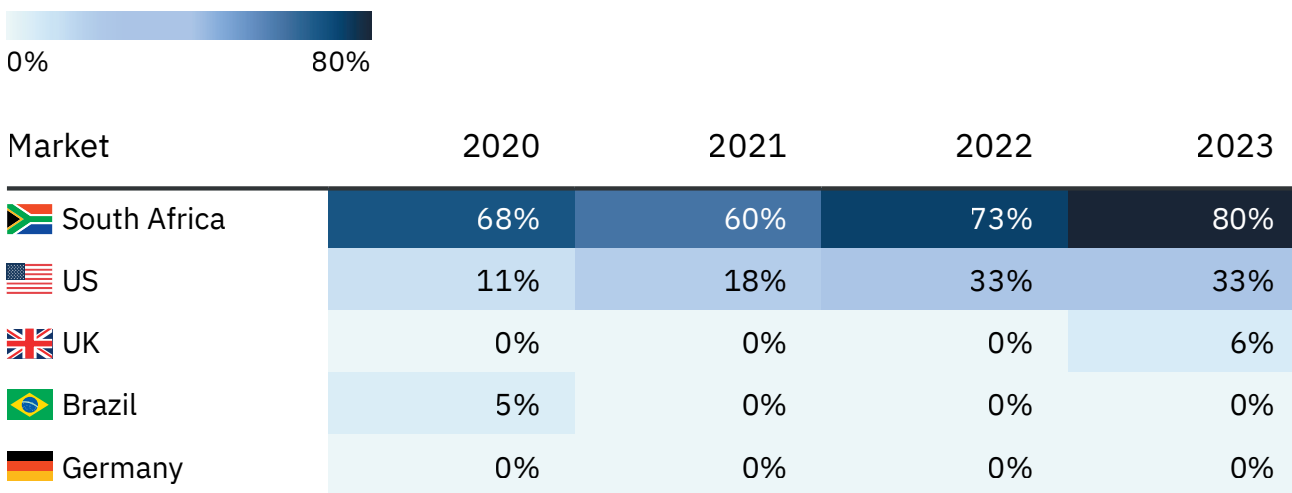
Based on this dataset, we find that 23% of the 81 top editors across the 100 brands covered are people of colour. This compares to 21% in 2022, 15% in 2021, and 18% in 2020. As in previous years, it is substantially below the, on average, 44% of people in the general population across all five markets who identify as people of colour (based on census data and other official estimates).¹ It is also below the average percentage of journalists of colour (21%) in the four countries where we have available data (Hanitzsch et al. 2019). Setting aside South Africa, 11% of top editors across Brazil, Germany, the UK, and the US are people of colour, compared with, on average, 31% of the general population across these markets.

Looking exclusively at the 89 brands we covered in both 2022 and 2023, 21% of the top editors in 2023 are people of colour, compared with 22% in 2022. This reflects the fact that there has been some turnover among the top editors. Among the 16 new top editors identified and coded among these brands,

four are people of colour: three from South Africa, and one from the US. While 75% of top editors of colour coded in the sample in South Africa are men, in the US, consistent with 2022, we find gender equity of top editors of colour. These market-level differences underscore the importance of tracking intersectional disparities to better understand structural inequalities in news leadership and the media industry more broadly (Banjac 2022; Lachover 2022).

As is clear from Figure 1, the percentage of top editors of colour varies considerably across the five markets we cover. In Brazil and Germany, as was the case in 2022 and 2021, none of the outlets we cover has a person of colour as top editor. South Africa still has a majority of people of colour in top editorial positions, up to 80% this year (from 73% in 2022). In the US, the percentage of top editors of colour remains at 33% from 2022, and in the UK, 6% of top editors in 2023 are people of colour. (The change from last year in the UK reflects a case of changing self-identification.)

Figure 1: Percentage of top editors of colour by country



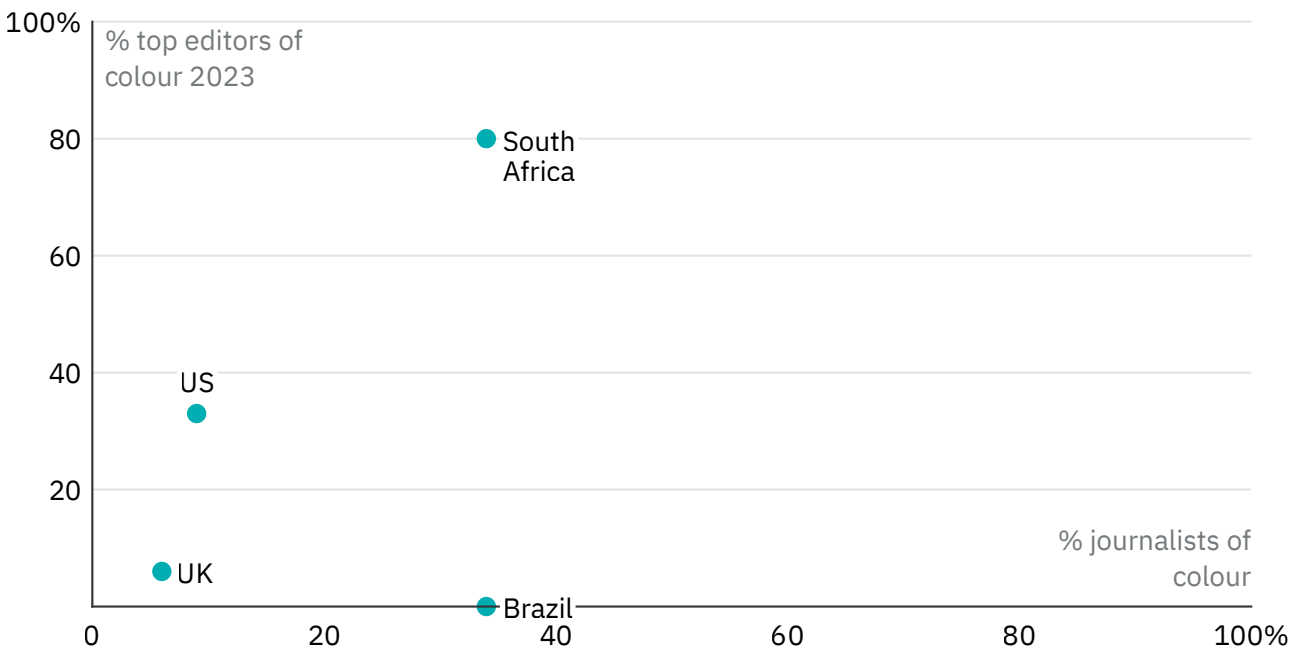
Source: Data collected and coded by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism on the top editors at 100 news outlets per year.

¹ For information about the general population, we have relied on official data where possible, namely 2018 population data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, the 2019 mini-census in Germany, 2020 population estimates from Statistics South Africa, 2021 UK Census data, and 2020 US Census data. Race and ethnicity do not have the same history or work the same way in all these countries, a complexity we set aside here to enable cross-national comparison. German law prohibits the collection of official statistics about ethnic categories. To arrive at an approximate figure for comparison, we have aggregated census data on households with a Middle Eastern/Northern African/Central Asian, Sub-Saharan African, East Asian and South/Southeast Asian, and other/unspecified/mixed migrant background.

Relying on data from *Worlds of Journalism* collected between 2012 and 2016 (Hanitzsch et al. 2019), shown in Figure 2, we compare the relationship between the percentage of people of colour working in journalism and the percentage of people of colour in top editorial positions across four of the five markets. (Data on the racial identity of journalists in Germany is not available.) Here, we find a mixed picture, as we have in previous years. In 2023, the UK has a small number of journalists of colour (6%)

as well as top editors of colour (6%). The US also has a small number of journalists of colour (9%), but a larger percentage of top editors of colour (33%). In Brazil, despite a third of journalists being people of colour (34%), like in 2021 and 2022, there remain no top editors of colour in our sample this year. South Africa stands out as an exception, with a third of journalists being people of colour (34%) but 80% of top editors of colour.

Figure 2: Percentage of journalists of colour vs. percentage of top editors of colour



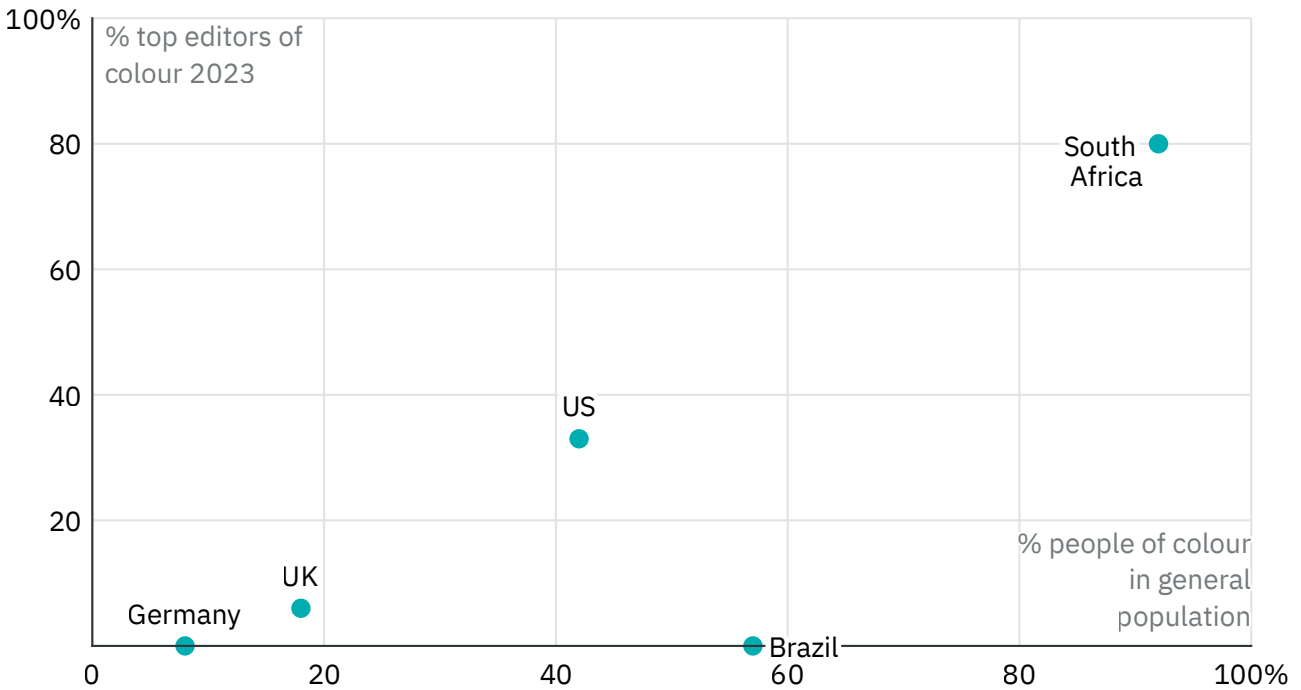
Data on journalists not available in Germany.

Source: Data collected and coded by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism on the top editors at 100 news outlets. Data on journalists from the *Worlds of Journalism* project (2012–16).

In Figure 3, we plot data on the demographics of the population as a whole and the percentage of people of colour in top editorial positions in each market. As in previous years, we find marked disparities. Well over half of the population in Brazil are people of colour (57%), but there are no people of colour in top editorial positions in our sample. Germany has a much smaller percentage of people of colour in the general population, and no top editors of colour. In the US and the UK, the percentage of people of colour in top editorial positions (33% and 6%, respectively) is still below the percentage of people of colour

(including Hispanic/Latinx in the US) in the general population (42% and 18%, respectively). Even South Africa, where the percentage of people of colour in the general population is 92%, has a disparity in representation among top editors (80% being people of colour). Even as the gap continues to shrink in markets like South Africa, there continues to be under-representation of top editors of colour – and in two markets with millions of citizens of colour, there continue to be no people of colour in top editorial positions at all.

Figure 3: Percentage of people of colour in general population vs. percentage of top editors of colour

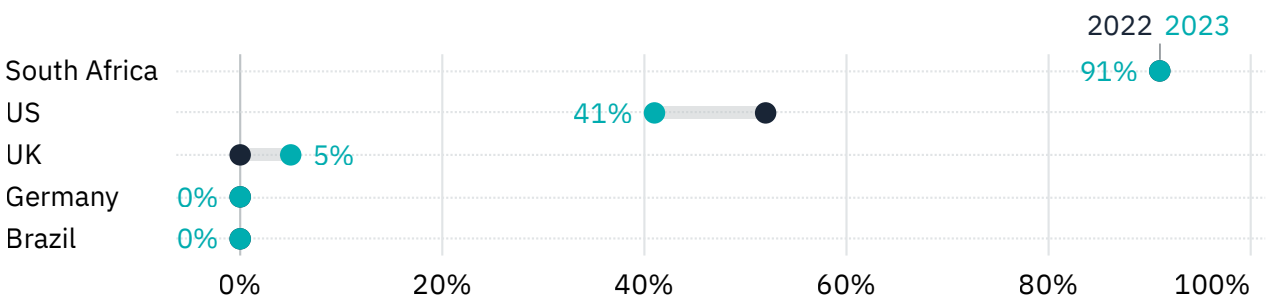


Source: Data collected and coded by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism on the top editors at 100 news outlets. Data on the general population from census and other official government sources.

Finally, by combining the data collected for this Reuters Institute factsheet with data from the 2022 Reuters Institute *Digital News Report* (Newman et al. 2022), we can identify the proportion of people in each market who access news from at least one major news outlet with a person of colour as top editor. In Figure 4, we show the share of online news consumers who say that they got news from at least one major outlet (online or offline) with a top editor of colour. The numbers vary considerably from country to country, with limited variation from 2022 to 2023. Audiences in Brazil and Germany still accessed no news in the past week from a major outlet included

in our sample and edited by a person of colour, for the simple reason that there are no people of colour in top editorial positions among the outlets we cover. In the US, in 2023, 41% of online audiences used at least one source with a top editor of colour, down from 52% in 2022 – largely driven by changes in which top brands are included in the analysis as well as in overall 2022 brand reach. In the UK, 5% of online audiences now access news from at least one major news outlet with a person of colour as top editor, and in South Africa, that figure remains the same as in 2022, at 91%.

Figure 4: Percentage of online audiences using at least one news source with a top editor of colour



Source: Data collected and coded by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism on the top editors at 100 news outlets. Data on news audiences from the Reuters Institute *Digital News Report* 2022.

Conclusion

In this Reuters Institute factsheet we have analysed the racial composition of top editors at a strategic sample of 100 major online and offline news outlets in five different markets across four continents. Following reckonings around racial and ethnic injustice amid protests that picked up in 2020, we find some evidence of increasing racial diversity among top news editors in countries like South Africa and the United States. But it continues to be the case that there are few or no top editors of colour in our sample of brands in three countries.

With four years of data tracking these trends across five markets, we continue to find that people of colour are significantly under-represented, and white people are significantly over-represented, relative to their share of the general population in all five countries – even where we see improvements over the past several years.

Similarly, it continues to be the case that news leaders themselves recognise that there is still much work to be done when it comes to racial and ethnic representation and equity. Less than half (47%) of industry leaders in a recent survey say their organisation is doing a good job when it comes

to ethnic diversity, and a third (35%) feel their organisation is doing a bad job (Cherubini 2022). This differs starkly from the same results for gender diversity – where a strong majority (79%) of leaders feel their organisations are doing well – despite the fact that respondents nearly equally felt that gender (33%) and ethnic (32%) diversity were the most important priority in terms of improving their newsroom’s diversity.

Will the news media deliver on this stated priority at the top levels of editorial leadership? We will continue to collect these data to document developments across the world. A sparse and spotty record on the collection – let alone publication – of data on these issues from most individual news media and from the industry at large suggest progress (or lack thereof) will not be documented unless someone takes on the work of collecting data. As Professor Meredith Clark said after stepping away from the American Society of News Editors annual diversity survey, citing a lack of willingness from newsrooms to participate: ‘You don’t get to transparency about diversity by relying on people’s goodwill.’² We will repeat this analysis and publish new data in 2024, as we continue to track developments across the world in diversity and representation among top editors.

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² <https://www.niemanlab.org/2022/04/crushing-resistance-yet-again-newsrooms-arent-showing-up-to-the-industrys-largest-diversity-survey/>

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