

# If You Want to See How Closely Divided America Is, Look at Hannity and Maddow's Ratings

[Josef Adalian](#) • July 12, 2017 5:53 pm



Photo: Getty Images

Tuesday's big revelations in the Trump-Russia scandal produced a predictable surge in cable-news ratings, with Sean Hannity and Rachel Maddow getting the biggest bumps. Maddow was No. 1 for the day in the key news demographic of adults under 55, followed by Hannity (boosted by a POTUS-promoted interview with Donald Trump Jr.) and MSNBC's *The Last Word With Lawrence O'Donnell*. But among all viewers, the flagship broadcasts of Fox News and MSNBC finished

in a near-tie last night:

Hannity: 2.885 million

Maddow: 2.855 million

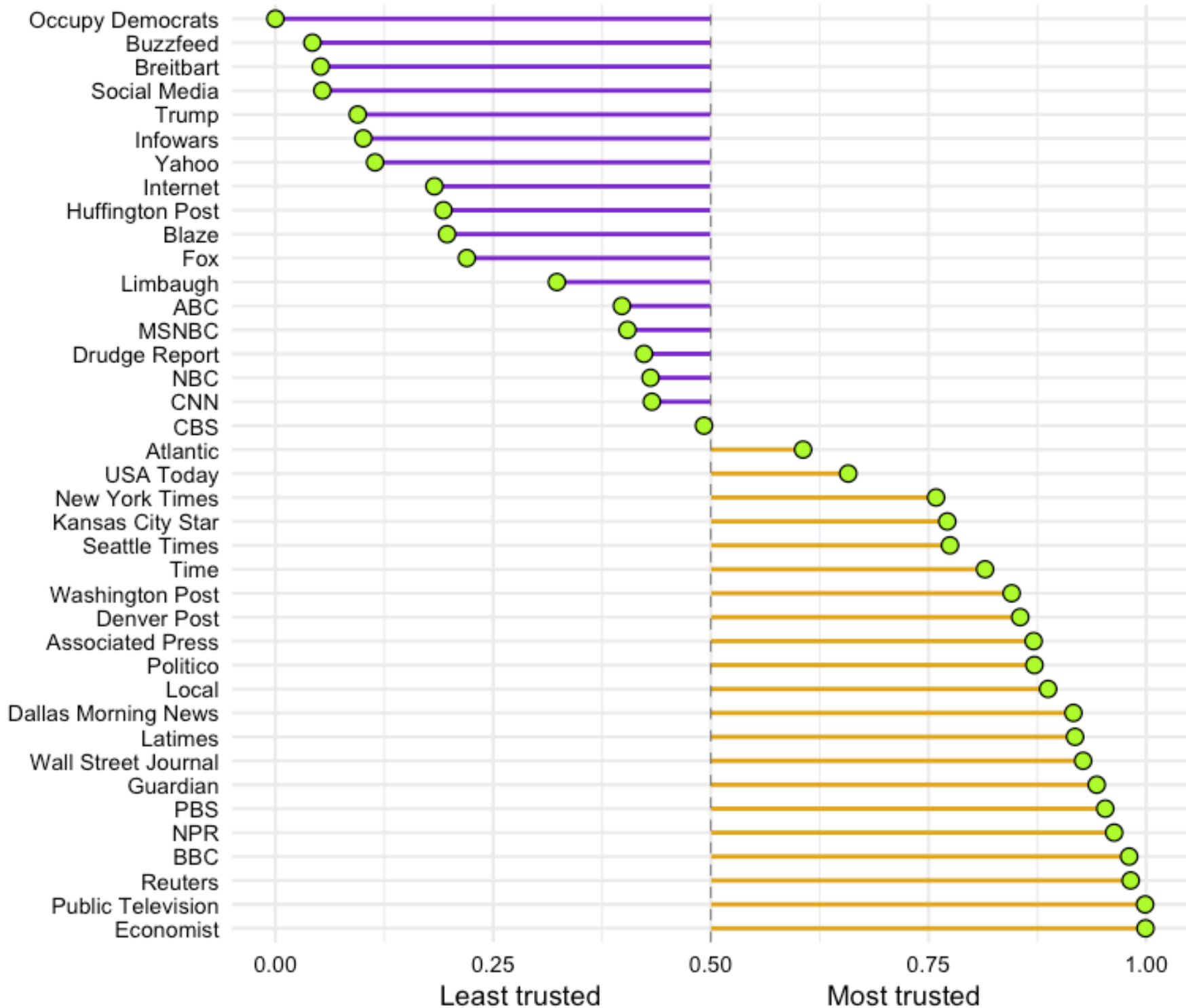
Hannity's 10 p.m. broadcast edged out Maddow's 9 p.m. hour by a statistically insignificant 30,000 pairs of eyeballs. Not doing all that well, relatively speaking? CNN.

While it did see its numbers go up from the night before, the network Donald Trump loves to hate finished a distant third Tuesday, behind MSNBC and Fox News. And in prime time (8–11 p.m.), CNN's audience was either flat or down in all three hours versus the same night in 2016. Not that Fox News execs should be all that happy about their Tuesday performance, either, at least compared to the same night in 2016. While Hannity was way up versus last year (thanks, Don Jr.), Tucker Carlson and *The Five* were down sharply compared to their now-departed predecessors at 8 and 9 p.m., *The O'Reilly*

*Factor* and *The Kelly File*. Indeed, Carlson's liberal-baiting hour (2.35 million) pulled in one-third fewer viewers than O'Reilly (3.47 million) averaged a year ago, while also doing worse in the key demo. These numbers are just for one night, of course. Fox News remains a ratings powerhouse, even with MSNBC increasingly challenging its lead in the key news demo. And while CNN has been having a rough few weeks in the ratings, relative to recent highs, the news network is still up in 2017 versus 2016.

# The least and most trusted news sources

Based on proportion of 'trusted' versus 'not trusted' responses



# Who trusts — and pays for — the news? Here's what 8,728 people told us



Is there a connection between people's politics and their trust in news? (Yes.) Do people's race or age play a factor in what they trust? (Yes on race, less on age.) And do those factors influence how likely people are to spend money on news? (They sure do.)

As part of the Trusting News project, 28 partner newsrooms asked their audiences to tell them about their views on the credibility of news. They published a [questionnaire](#) asking their readers, listeners and viewers about their demographics and political leanings, and how many news organizations they support financially.

What we found can offer insight into the general attitudes and beliefs of people toward the value and credibility of news.

## **About the Trusting News project**

The questionnaires were published as part of an interview project. We invited newsrooms to sit down for one-on-one interviews with their own news consumers to discuss how they decide what to trust, and the questionnaires helped those newsrooms find people across a spectrum of diversity — age, race, gender and political leanings — within their communities.

What we've learned, from the questionnaires and the interviews, is being used to create strategies newsrooms can adopt to demonstrate their trustworthiness. We'll share those strategies soon, and we'll be looking for newsrooms to help us test them.

**If you're interested in how your newsroom can enhance credibility and would like to hear more, [please contact us](#).**

In a previous phase of the Trusting News project, newsrooms helped us test ways to build trust on social media. You can read what we learned and search a database of Facebook posts [at TrustingNews.org](http://TrustingNews.org).

## **The questionnaire analysis**

[Michael Kearney](#), an incoming professor at the University of Missouri, did statistical analysis of our 8,728 questionnaire responses. [Read the full report](#), including methodology and lots of charts.

As we expected, people who rated themselves likely or very likely to trust the news were more willing to fill out journalists' questionnaires than people who don't trust the news. They account for 67.3 percent of responses. The other 32.7 percent — people unlikely or very unlikely to trust the news — perhaps have even more to teach us.

## **Who trusts and pays for the news?**

Patterns emerged with age, politics and race.

- Overall, more than two-thirds of respondents indicate they provide financial support to at least one news organization.
- Liberal respondents are more likely to both trust and pay for the news than conservative respondents.
- White respondents are more likely to both trust and pay for the news than nonwhite respondents.
- Older respondents are more likely to pay for the news, across politics and race.

We'll go into each of those factors in greater depth when we share what we learned in our one-on-one interviews.

## **What news brands do people trust?**

The questionnaire asked respondents to name three news brands they typically trust and three they don't. Kearney took a look at brands that came up at least 10 times and compared how often they were mentioned as trusted versus mentioned as not trusted. These lists show the relationship between positive and negative mentions. The responses were open ended, and some answers aren't actual news brands.

Mentioned as trusted:

1. The Economist
2. Public television
3. Reuters
4. BBC
5. NPR
6. PBS
7. The Guardian
8. The Wall Street Journal
9. Los Angeles Times
10. The Dallas Morning News

Mentioned as not trusted:

1. Occupy Democrats
2. BuzzFeed
3. Breitbart
4. Social media
5. Trump
6. Infowars
7. Yahoo
8. Internet
9. Huffington Post
10. The Blaze

The analysis also compared the political learnings of respondents with the brands they mentioned. We found, for example, that users who mentioned Rachel Maddow as trusted were more liberal than average, while users who trust Rush Limbaugh were more conservative than average. Not shocking, we realize, but the full chart is worth checking out. Liberals most often cited The New York Times, NPR and The Washington Post as trusted, while the brand most listed by conservatives was Fox News.

There's only so much we can learn from these limited questions, which is why we followed up with in-depth interviews. Our partner newsrooms collectively sat down with 81 news consumers for about an hour each to dive into what people are looking for as they decide what news to trust.

How does your newsroom work to earn trust? If you're interested in helping test some research-backed strategies, [let us know](#), and we'll get in touch in August with more details.