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For cable television stalwarts like TBS, ESPN, Discovery and Univision, 2016 was not a great year. Cord cutting remained a threat as viewership totals declined by double digits on a percentage basis, and the ratings for programs, including scripted dramas and sports, on cable and broadcast TV proved, yet again, that fewer people are watching live.



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But for cable news, it was a banner year. The presidential primaries, the general election and Donald J. Trump's victory proved to be a huge boon for the networks.

Fox News, which was rocked by a sexual harassment scandal that forced the ouster of Roger Ailes, its longtime chairman, had its highest-rated year. CNN had one of its best years, narrowing the gap with Fox. And even once lowly MSNBC had an enormous leap from where it was a year ago, seeing the highest percentage gains of the three news networks.

Just two years ago, cable news channels looked as if they were beginning to fade. Ratings were down significantly from the high-water mark of the 2008 presidential election.

Enter Mr. Trump, who helped the news networks to record-setting primary debate numbers and election night results.

Fox News will finish the year with an average of 2.4 million viewers in prime time, behind only NBC, CBS, ABC and Fox. It is the first time that Fox News will end the year No. 1 in prime time and total day ratings for basic cable channels.

CNN had great gains in total viewers and in the 25- to 54-year-old demographic important to advertisers. CNN was up 76 percent year over year in prime time, with an average of 1.3 million viewers. Fox News averaged 2.4 million and MSNBC averaged 1.1 million viewers. But in the 25-to-54 demographic, CNN averaged 423,000 viewers versus 481,000 viewers for Fox News. MSNBC averaged 270,000 viewers.

MSNBC had the biggest gains of any of the networks. In prime time, it was up 87 percent in total viewers, and 97 percent in the 25-to-54 demographic. In total day, it also had the biggest gains, 71 percent in total viewers and 72 percent in the 25-to-54 demographic.

Fox News's prime time lineup was strong with the 25-to-54 demographic. "The O'Reilly Factor," with Bill O'Reilly, is No. 1, "The Kelly File," with Megyn Kelly, is No. 2 and "Hannity," Sean Hannity's show at 10 p.m., was in third place. Mr. O'Reilly and Ms. Kelly finished in the top two slots for the most-viewed cable news shows.

Still, the audiences for the three news networks skew older. The median viewer age is 66 for Fox News, 61 for CNN and 63 for MSNBC. – ***New York Times***



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