

As Audiences Look for Apolitical Laughs, Late-Night Shows Aren't Worried About a Lack of Material

Nearly half of Americans said they want late-night shows without politics

- Audiences are divided on political humor, with 37% saying jokes that don't involve politics would make them more likely to watch a late-night program, while 34% said jokes about Republicans and Democrats would make them tune in.

5 • Jimmy Fallon and Jimmy Kimmel were the country's most loved late-night hosts, at 53% and 50%, respectively.

- Just over half of those surveyed (52%) said hosts should be able to talk about political issues, but 49% said they want to watch late-night shows that don't involve politics. [...]

10 As the Biden administration inherits the global pandemic and a divided electorate, late-night comics are also facing a laborious challenge: What do you talk about when your most reliable source of material leaves office and is banned from social media platforms? But giving viewers some space from the political humor that's defined the last four years may not only keep them watching, but could lead to a renaissance of form and content in the late-night space.

15 "We had two terms of George W. Bush and people kind of said the same thing when Obama came into office, where it's like, 'Here's this great charismatic leader. There's nothing that's going to be funny anymore,'" said Alison Camillo, executive producer of "Full Frontal with Samantha Bee." "And boy, were we wrong. There's characters everywhere, even Biden himself."

Polling has shown that viewers — regardless of their political beliefs — prefer apolitical late-night shows.

20 A Dec. 16-19, 2020 Morning Consult survey found that, while the majority of adults (52 percent) support late-night hosts' right to discuss politics, a nearly equal share said they prefer to watch shows that don't wade into the latest news in Washington. Thirty-seven percent of adults, along with about a quarter of Democrats and half of Republicans, said jokes that don't involve politics would make them more likely to tune into late-night programs, such as "The Late Show" or "The Tonight Show." The survey has a margin of error of 2 percentage points.

25 Robert Thompson, director of the Bleier Center for Television & Popular Culture at Syracuse University, said the void left by Trump's exit might spark creativity and lead to new topics for these shows.

"This actually could be liberating for comedy," Thompson said. "They could actually escape the incredible, gravitational pull of this monolithic story that they've been covering so strongly."

30 While hosts like Meyers and Stephen Colbert devote significant portions of their shows to the day's political news, two of late night's more apolitical hosts — Jimmy Fallon and Jimmy Kimmel — are the most favored by the public. [...]

35 Late-night programs are looking for a reprieve, though. After telling nightly jokes about Trump and his cabinet, some hosts are looking forward to delving into¹ topics that have been largely sidelined since 2016. [...]

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