

A Brief History of the Emmy Awards (and how to make the show better and improve ratings)

By Steve Sternberg



The *Emmy Awards* telecast, which has traditionally alternated among ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox, was once seen as a major promotional vehicle for the broadcast networks (pre-2015). The host network would win a bunch of awards and have commercials ready to immediately tout their wins.

Since there were no streaming platforms, and competing networks aired repeats, ratings were consistently strong. Virtually everyone was familiar with the nominated series, and liked to see if their favorite shows would win awards. I'm old enough to remember when marginally rated series would become hits after winning multiple Emmys. It was a big deal. But this hasn't been the case for several years.

In the early- to mid-2000s, premium and ad-supported cable started airing high-quality original scripted series, and soon began to overshadow the broadcast networks when it came to award nominations. The *Emmy Awards* has since become primarily a showcase for HBO and streaming

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Netflix and HBO/Max had the most series among the 20 best TV shows of 2024, with Apple TV+ and Paramount+ close behind (according to *The Sternberg Report*). Who will lead in 2025?

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platforms, most notably Netflix – although other streamers have caught up (particularly Apple TV+).

Nomination Trends: Shifting Platforms

Looking at the number of series nominated for the 15 major scripted series awards since 2000 – outstanding comedy, drama and limited series, and the lead and supporting actors in each – we can see how the broadcast networks gradually gave way to ad-supported and premium cable, and then both broadcast and ad-supported cable were supplanted by streaming series (although FX and occasionally AMC still manage to break through).



From 2000-2005, the **broadcast networks** maintained their dominance, accounting for roughly two-thirds of these major category nominations. Between 2005 and 2015, as premium and ad-supported cable started airing original scripted series in force (without broadcast network content restrictions), the broadcast percentage dropped from 64% to 24%. With the streaming wars at their peak, broadcast nominations fell to just 11% in 2020 and 6% in 2024 and 2025.



Ad-supported cable, which accounted for 26% of these nominations in 2015, dropped to 13% by 2020. As cable networks started shifting away from original scripted programming, this declined further, to just 4% in 2023. Led by FX's *Shogun*, it rebounded to 17% in 2024. In 2025, it dropped again, to 5%. This figure will continue to fluctuate depending on what FX airs in any given year.



Since 2015, **premium cable's** percentage gradually declined before rebounding in 2022 and 2023. In 2024, without HBO's *Succession*, *The White Lotus*, or *Barry* to hoard nominations, premium cable declined sharply, going from 32% to 13% in one season. And despite *The White Lotus* again being eligible in 2025, premium cable remained at 13% (aside from HBO, no other premium cable network was nominated this year).



In 2020, for the first time, half of all these major award nominations went to **streaming** series (compared to just 18% five years earlier). This rose to 63% by 2024. In 2025, more than three-quarters (76%) of these nominations went to streaming platforms.

Emmy Nominations (15 major scripted series awards)

Year	Broadcast	Ad-Supported Cable	Premium Cable	Streaming
2000	48 (65%)	4 (5%)	22 (30%)	----
Best Comedy	4	----	1	----
Best Drama	4	----	1	----
Best Miniseries	3	1	1	----
2005	47 (64%)	6 (8%)	21 (28%)	----
Best Comedy	5	----	----	----
Best Drama	3	----	2	----
Best Miniseries	2	1	1	----
2010	38 (49%)	19 (24%)	21 (27%)	----
Best Comedy	4	----	2	----
Best Drama	2	2	2	----
Best Miniseries	1	----	1	----

Emmy Nominations (15 major scripted series awards)

Year	Broadcast	Ad-Supported Cable	Premium Cable	Streaming
2015	21 (24%)	23 (26%)	28 (32%)	16 (18%)
Best Comedy	2	1	2	2
Best Drama	----	3	2	2
Best Limited Series	2	2	1	----
2020	11 (11%)	13 (13%)	25 (26%)	49 (50%)
Best Comedy	1	2	2	3
Best Drama	----	2	1	5
Best Limited Series	----	----	1	4
2021	13 (14%)	4 (4%)	20 (21%)	59 (61%)
Best Comedy	1	----	----	7
Best Drama	1	1	1	5
Best Limited Series	----	----	2	3
2022	7 (7%)	8 (8%)	30 (29%)	58 (56%)
Best Comedy	1	1	2	4
Best Drama	----	1	3	4
Best Limited Series	----	----	1	4
2023	5 (5%)	4 (4%)	32 (32%)	58 (59%)
Best Comedy	1	----	1	6
Best Drama	----	1	5	2
Best Limited Series	----	----	----	5
2024	6 (6%)	17 (18%)	12 (13%)	60 (63%)
Best Comedy	1	2	1	4
Best Drama	----	1	1	6
Best Limited Series	----	1	1	3
2025	5 (6%)	5 (6%)	11 (13%)	67 (76%)
Best Comedy	1	----	----	4
Best Drama	----	1	1	6
Best Limited Series	----	1	----	4

Broadcast Networks all but Disappear

As already mentioned, broadcast networks accounted for just 5 nominations in 2025 (6%). Three went to ABC's *Abbott Elementary*, one to CBS's *Matlock*, and one to NBC's *Saturday Night Live*.



Between 2018 and 2021, none of the major outstanding series or acting awards for comedy or drama went to a broadcast network (Sterling K. Brown won *Outstanding Lead Actor* in a drama for *This is Us* in 2017). Sheryl Lee Ralph was the lone broadcast series representative in 2022, as she nabbed *Outstanding Supporting Actress* in a comedy for ABC's *Abbott Elementary*. In 2023, Quinta Brunson won *Outstanding Lead Actress*, also for *Abbott Elementary*. The broadcast networks were shut out in 2024.



No broadcast series has won for *Outstanding Drama* since *24* got the honor in 2006. In 2017, *This is Us* was the first broadcast drama even nominated in six years (it was also nominated in 2018 and 2019). No broadcast series were nominated in 2020. *This is Us* was nominated once again in 2021, no doubt benefiting from *Better Call Saul*, *Killing Eve*, *Ozark*, *Stranger Things*, and *Succession* not being eligible that year. In 2022, 2023, and 2024, no broadcast dramas were nominated. *Matlock* and Kathy Bates broke the shut-out in 2025 with her *Outstanding Lead Actress* nomination.



The last broadcast show to win for **Outstanding Comedy** was *Modern Family* in 2014. In 2018, *Black-ish* was the only broadcast network comedy nominated, while in 2019 and 2020, NBC's *The Good Place* was the only broadcast comedy to make the cut (although *Black-ish* did get an *Outstanding Lead Actress* nomination and both *Black-ish* and *The Good Place* got *Outstanding Lead Actor* nominations). *Black-ish* made the cut again in 2021 – most likely because *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *The Good Place*, and *Schitt's Creek* ended their runs. In 2022, 2023, and 2024, *Abbott Elementary* was the sole broadcast series nominated for *Outstanding Comedy* (receiving three acting nominations each year). The show also got three nominations in 2025 (for *Outstanding Comedy*, *Lead Actress*, and *Supporting Actress*).

Streamers Continue to Dominate



In 2024, for the first time, **Apple TV+** surpassed Netflix with the most nominations (in these 15 major categories). Nearly half of its 22 nods went to *The Morning Show*, which got 10. In 2025, the streamer again leads the way with 26 nominations, and tied Netflix for the most series nominated, with eight: In the drama category, *Severance*, which returned for its second season after a three-year absence, snagged seven nominations, *Slow Horses* managed two, and *Bad Sisters* got one; among comedies, *Shrinking* and *The Studio*,

each nabbed five nominations; for *Limited Series*, *Presumed Innocent*, got four nominations, while *Disclaimer*, and *Dope Thief* each got one.

Apple TV+ has two series nominated for *Outstanding Drama* (*Severance* and *Slow Horses*) and *Outstanding Comedy* (*Shrinking* and *The Studio* – with both receiving multiple acting nominations). *Severance* also received nominations in all the acting categories, while *Bad Sisters* and *Slow Horses* were nominated for actress and actor, respectively. *Presumed Innocent* received multiple *Limited Series* acting nominations, while *Disclaimer* and *Dope Thief* each got one.



As it was last year, **Netflix**, is next in total nominations in these categories. In 2024, 11 of its 16 nominations went to just two shows *The Crown* (6), in its final season, and the limited series, *Baby Reindeer* (5). In 2025, Netflix's 20 nominations are split among the eight series: *The Diplomat* was its lone drama nominated, with three; among comedies, *Nobody Wants This* also got three nominations, while *The Residence* and *The Four Seasons* got one apiece; for limited series, *Adolescence* snagged six nominations, *Monsters: The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story* received four, *Black Mirror*, two, and *Sirens*, one.

The majority of Netflix's nominations were in the *Limited Series or Anthology* category. *Adolescence* received one for series and multiple nods for acting. *Monsters: The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story* was nominated for series and three of the four acting awards. *Black Mirror* scored nominations for series and actress, and *Sirens* got one for actress. Netflix also got one nomination each for *Outstanding Drama* (*The Diplomat*, which also got a *Lead Actress* nod) and *Outstanding Comedy* (*Nobody Wants This*, which was also nominated for *Lead Actress* and *Lead Actor*).



While Warner Bros. Discovery and several press outlets like to combine its tally for **HBO** and **HBO Max**, there are still distinctions between the two. If a show airs first on HBO, I include it there; if it originates on HBO Max I include it there (even though they virtually all wind up on HBO Max eventually). HBO got 15 nominations and HBO Max got 6 in these 15 major categories, so if you want to combine them, it surpasses Netflix's total by one



HBO's 15 nominations were divided among three series. Among dramas *The White Lotus* scored eight nominations and *The Last of Us* got three. For limited series, *The Penguin* got four nominations.

In addition to *Outstanding Drama*, *White Lotus* received seven nominations in the *Supporting Actress* and *Actor* categories. *The Last of Us* got nods for *Lead Actress* and *Actor*, to go along with *Outstanding Drama*. *The Penguin* added *Lead Actor*, *Actress*, and *Supporting Actress* to its nomination for *Outstanding Limited Series*.



HBO Max's six nominations were evenly split between two series – *Hacks*, which was nominated for *Outstanding Comedy*, as well as *Lead* and *Supporting Actress*, and the new medical drama, *The Pitt*, which was nominated for *Outstanding Drama*, *Lead Actor*, and *Supporting Actress*.



Hulu received 10 nominations. *The Bear* took five, including *Outstanding Comedy*, and freshman series, *Paradise*, garnered four, including *Outstanding Drama*. *Only Murders in the Building*, which got six nominations last year, got just one this time. Why a drama like *The Bear* continues to be placed in the comedy category remains a mystery (but maybe not so mysterious, since it's a weaker category than drama and guarantees more nominations). Unfortunately, it steals the spotlight from actual deserving comedies.

The Bear also snagged nominations in all four acting categories, while *Paradise* did so in three of them. The sole nomination for *Only Murders in the Building* was *Lead Actor*.



Disney+ got one nomination, for its *Star Wars* drama, *Andor*, which was nominated for *Outstanding Drama*. **Prime Video**, which received five nods last year (for *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* and *Fallout*), didn't get any this year.



On the ad-supported cable front, **FX** often bucks the trend of general decline. Last year, the network was second only to Apple TV+ with 17 nominations, as its epic miniseries *Shogun* snagged five, the always popular *Fargo* got four, and *Feud: Capote vs. The Swans* also managed four. This year was something of a downturn for the network, with new limited series, *Dying for Sex* getting four nods, including *Outstanding Limited Series or Anthology* (and three of the four acting categories) and perennial nominee, *What We Do in the Shadows*, getting a single nomination (for *Outstanding Comedy*).



Among the broadcast networks, **ABC** got three nominations for *Abbott Elementary* – Outstanding Comedy, Lead Actress, and Supporting Actress. **CBS** got one for *Matlock* (Lead Actress). The *Emmys* continued the bizarre policy of allowing **NBC's** *Saturday Night Live* to take a spot in the series comedy category, but fortunately it only got one nomination (Supporting Actor). This tied 2023 for the lowest number of combined nominations ever for the broadcast networks.

Here are some suggestions on how to improve the *Emmy* award show and attract more viewers.

Create New Categories

Once the exclusive domain of the broadcast networks, and a vehicle for broadcasters to promote themselves, the *Emmy* telecast has clearly shifted to being something that not only showcases their major competitors, but also rewards series that many viewers haven't seen – which has undoubtedly contributed to the show's declining ratings.



TV series that air on different video outlets have different creative limitations based on levels of language, sex, and violence, and whether they must answer to advertisers. Even though all major streaming platforms now have advertising tiers, it hasn't limited their greater content freedom. Having them all compete with one another is

inherently unfair, and works against the broadcast networks – particularly since streaming series generally have between 6 and 13 episodes per season while the broadcast networks have typically had between 16 and 24 (and require more “filler”).



The obvious solution is to **divide the awards into two groups – Linear and Premium** (which would include premium cable and streaming). This season, the *Linear Drama* category could have included, [Dark Winds](#), [Doc](#), [High Potential](#), [Matlock](#), [NCIS: Origins](#), [The Old Man](#), and [Will Trent](#). The *Premium Drama* group could have included, [Andor](#), [The Diplomat](#), [Industry](#), [Paradise](#), [The Pitt](#), [Severance](#), and [Slow Horses](#).



We could get a similarly diverse group of shows in the comedy categories. *Linear* – [Abbott Elementary](#), [Animal Control](#), [Elsbeth](#), [Ghosts](#), [The Neighborhood](#), and [What We Do in the Shadows](#); *Premium* – [A Man on the Inside](#), [The Bear](#), [Hacks](#), [Nobody Wants This](#), [Only Murders in the Building](#), [Shrinking](#), and [The Studio](#) (although again, [The Bear](#) is not a comedy).

This would allow more series to be nominated, and would appeal to a significantly broader audience.



One possible solution to avoid ridiculous mislabeling of genres is to create a new category called **dramedy** or have two comedy categories, **situation comedy** and **narrative comedy**. This way, shows like [The Bear](#), [The Gilded Age](#), [Hacks](#), [The Morning Show](#), [Only Murders in the Building](#), and [Shrinking](#), can all be in the same category (which logically they should be).



How about creating a new category for **Outstanding Franchises**. This would enable some of the most popular shows on television, with the broadest fan bases – the [Law & Orders](#), [NCISs](#), [One Chicago](#) shows ([Med](#), [PD](#), and [Fire](#)), [FBI](#)s, [911](#)s, etc. – which would otherwise never get nominated, to win an Emmy. This would certainly appeal to many viewers.

Then you could have online/app/phone voting where viewers can select the overall winners for comedy and drama, and have something like an hour-long follow-up [Emmy Viewers' Choice](#) show (where they could have extended trailers of the major nominees, which would serve as great promotional vehicles for those unfamiliar with the shows).



This way, more television series that people have actually seen (particularly the broadcast networks' core 50+ audience) would be up for major awards without negatively impacting the high-quality shows that are only available to subscribers in 50-75% of the country. There's little doubt that ratings would improve as well. Otherwise, let Netflix or HBO air the [Emmys](#). In its current form it has become a vehicle to promote the broadcast networks' competitors, so why not let one of them air it. Given that the broadcast networks recently extended their rights to alternate the award show, however, now would be a good time to implement the above suggested changes.



Barring that, perhaps the broadcast networks should go back to the future and institute their own version of the long defunct [Cable ACE](#) Awards. Prior to 1988, the [Emmys](#) refused to recognize cable shows (ACE stood for Award for Cable Excellence). These were given between 1978 and 1997 by the National Cable Television Association to recognize excellence in American cable television.