

SEAN HANNITY

IMPACT: Sean Hannity is a popular talk radio and cable news host in the United States. A self-described “advocacy journalist,” he is known for pushing right-wing conspiracy theories and for his close relationship with President Donald Trump. He frequently hosts prominent anti-Muslim figures on his show, including Sebastian Gorka, Pamala Geller, and Robert Spencer.

- Sean Hannity is currently the **most watched and highest paid cable television host in America**. His *Fox News* show, Hannity, averages 3.28 million views a night. He is also the **second most listened to radio host in America**, with 15 million weekly listeners to tuning into *The Sean Hannity Show*. In a 2017 interview with the *New York Times* he described himself as an “advocacy journalist” or an “opinions journalist.”
- Hannity began his career in radio in 1989 as a volunteer host for *KCSB*, the University of California, Santa Barbara’s independent radio station. As a radio host, he attracted criticism for his derogatory statements about the LGBTQ+ community, which included the claim that “anyone listening to this show that believes homosexuality is just a normal lifestyle has been brainwashed.” He ultimately left the station following the statements.
- Hannity has significantly influenced modern right-wing politics. According to a 2017 article in the *New York Times*, “[H]e helped bolster the case for an invasion of Iraq and chipped away at Republican support for a bipartisan 2007 path-to-citizenship bill that later perished in the United States Senate.” He also provided an early platform for the Tea Party movement, with one of his reporters providing daily coverage of their 2009 national tour. In 2017, **Steve Bannon, the former chief strategist for President Trump, labeled Hannity “the single most important voice for the ‘deplorables.’”**
- Since Donald Trump announced his run for president in 2015, Hannity has been one of his most dependable supporters. When the Access Hollywood scandal broke, **Hannity defended Trump’s conduct, calling his comments “locker room” talk** and claiming that “King David had 500 concubines, for crying out loud.” **After his inauguration, President-elect Trump gave his first interview with a cable news station to Hannity.**
- According to *The Washington Post*, **many White House aides refer to Hannity as the “unofficial chief of staff” or the “shadow” chief of staff.** Several other reports claim that the **Trump and Hannity talk on the phone multiple times a week**, with the topic ranging from current events and policy to Twitter. These conversations occasionally translate into action— according to the *LA Times*, in 2017 Hannity urged Trump to take a hard line on immigration when negotiating the renewal of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). The demands Trump made ultimately lead to the failure of the bill in question.
- A 2017 analysis found that **Hannity “peddles conspiracy theories more than any other news show in the U.S.”** For example, **he spread the false claim that DNC staffer Seth Rich was murdered by the Clintons and has on multiple occasions spoken about so-called “no-go zones” in Europe.**
- Hannity has also **provided a platform for proponents of the Birtherism conspiracy theory**, including Donald Trump. In an April 2011 interview, Hannity asked Trump about his opinion on then-President Barack Obama’s birth certificate and allowed him to talk at length about the issue. Throughout 2011, Hannity repeatedly demanded that Obama release his long form birth certificate,

SEAN HANNITY

saying that “it’s beginning to get odd to me” that Obama would not do so. This is despite the fact that Obama had, in fact, released his official [birth certificate](#) in 2008.

- Hannity has **invited British preacher Anjem Choudary onto his shows on four occasions to speak about Islam**. In 2016, Choudary was [sentenced](#) to five and a half years in prison for inviting support for ISIS. **Both the [Islamic Society of Britain](#) and the [Muslim Council of Britain](#) have condemned his work, and denounced any media outlet that chooses to give him airtime.** During Hannity’s hour-long “Rise of Radical Islam” [TV special](#)—which featured some of America’s most prominent anti-Islam figures, including [Robert Spencer](#), [Brigitte Gabriel](#), and [Pamela Geller](#)—he frequently cited Choudary as an authority on Islam.
- Hannity **provided an early platform to [Pamela Geller](#) and her campaign to halt the construction of the [Park51 Mosque](#) and community center**. In May 2010, Geller published a [blog post](#) denouncing the project, which was [picked up](#) by the *New York Post* and others in the conservative media sphere. Hannity invited Geller onto his [show](#) to talk about the project just seven days after the original post. He has continued to [regularly host Geller](#) on his show to discuss Islam.
- **When speaking about Islam, Hannity often invokes a “[clash of civilizations](#)” narrative**. He has expressed doubt that people from Muslim-majority countries are capable of assimilating to American culture, because **Hannity believes that “[Sharia law is the antithesis of our Constitutional republic](#).”** This worldview has been [criticized](#) by numerous experts and academics like Edward Said, but [remains influential](#) in many right-wing circles.
- In 2018, **Hannity received the Freedom Flame award from the [Center for Security Policy](#), an anti-Muslim think tank founded by [Frank Gaffney](#)**. This award “recognizes individuals who have exemplified the ideals of freedom, democracy, economic opportunity and international strength to which the Center for Security Policy is committed.”
- Several of Hannity’s guests have called for reductions on the civil rights of American Muslims. *Fox* contributor Bo Dietl, for example, called for the New York Police Department to resume their illegal practice of [spying on Mosques](#), [saying](#), “We broke so many, so many plots by eavesdropping on these radical mosques. We’ve got to do it again. And let’s stop worrying about people’s rights.” In another [interview](#), Dietl spoke disparagingly of campaigns to halt the use of torture by the U.S. military: “You got Diane Fienstein worrying about people’s rights, about waterboarding, and about interrogation... Without eavesdropping, without intelligence, we’re not going to stop the next attack.”
- In April 2019, **Hannity agreed with a guest on his show who [claimed](#) that Minnesota Congresswoman Ilhan Omar is “infatuated with Al Qaeda, with Hamas, Hezbollah.”** Hannity has also [spread](#) the disproven [conspiracy theory](#) that Omar married her brother for citizenship purposes, also **claiming that she makes “anti-American comments” and has “empathy for Islamic Extremists.”** A 2019 [article](#) in the *Guardian* identified the numerous incidents in which President Trump portrayed Rep. Omar as an “enemy” of the U.S. *The Huffington Post* [noted](#) how such attacks led to multiple [threats](#) on Rep. Omar’s life.
- After Iran [shot down](#) a U.S. drone in June 2019 that they claimed had entered into Iranian airspace, Hannity called for an aggressive response from the U.S. military. He [told](#) Iran that they will “feel pain... like never before.” He went on to warn them: “You’re going to get the living crap bombed out of

SEAN HANNITY

you,” and insisted, “We got to be able to blow them out of the water, and they must pay if they take out a drone in international waters. And I’m not believing a word that these lying mullahs say!”

- In late 2017, Hannity came under fire for his [coverage](#) of Judge Roy Moore, the Republican candidate for Senate in Alabama. Moore had been [accused](#) of sexual misconduct with a series of teenage girls. On his radio show, Hannity [cast doubt](#) upon the accusers’ stories and implied that one of the accusers could have [consented](#) at the age of fourteen. This resulted in a public boycott of his show, during which several [advertisers](#) ended their relationship with his shows.
- In 2010, conservative blogger Debbie Schlusel [revealed](#) that only a fraction of the money raised by Hannity’s “Freedom Concerts” was actually going towards the charity work it supposedly supported. The money was supposed to be used to support injured veterans and provide scholarships for the children of soldiers killed in battle. However, Schlusel found that from 2006 to 2008 the organization had directed just [3.68%](#), [7%](#), and [12%](#) of their annual proceeds to charity. Shortly after Schlusel’s report, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington [launched](#) their own investigation and filed [complaints](#) with the IRS and the FTC, alleging that Hannity and Freedom Concerts had engaged in illegal and deceptive marketing practices.

Bridge Initiative Factsheet