



The Great Trust Reset

A New Map of Media Trust in America

Based on a survey of N=1,084 Registered Voters in the Likely Electorate Nationwide,
conducted July 10-14, 2025

We're living through a media trust reset. Traditional media is losing ground, and a new hierarchy is emerging — one where trust is built by people, not platforms. This moment isn't just about where people get information, it's about who they trust, why they trust them, and what that means for influence.

A national survey of 1,084 likely voters, conducted by Foretell and Echelon Insights reveals a new map of media trust in America. It's not divided by party so much as by age, income, and geography. And the old lines of authority—anchors, spokespeople, traditional outlets—are giving way to something else.

People aren't waiting for institutions to catch up. They're choosing the voices that feel most real to them, and those voices are often CEOs, creators, and unfiltered sources speaking plainly and directly. Substack-style journalism is rising, reels are replacing anchors, and voters are more likely to trust a CEO than a spokesperson.

This is the new trust media map, and it runs on clarity, consistency, and credibility.



1. Trust Starts at the Source

2. Where You Live Shapes Who You Trust

3. Who Still Believes in Legacy Media?

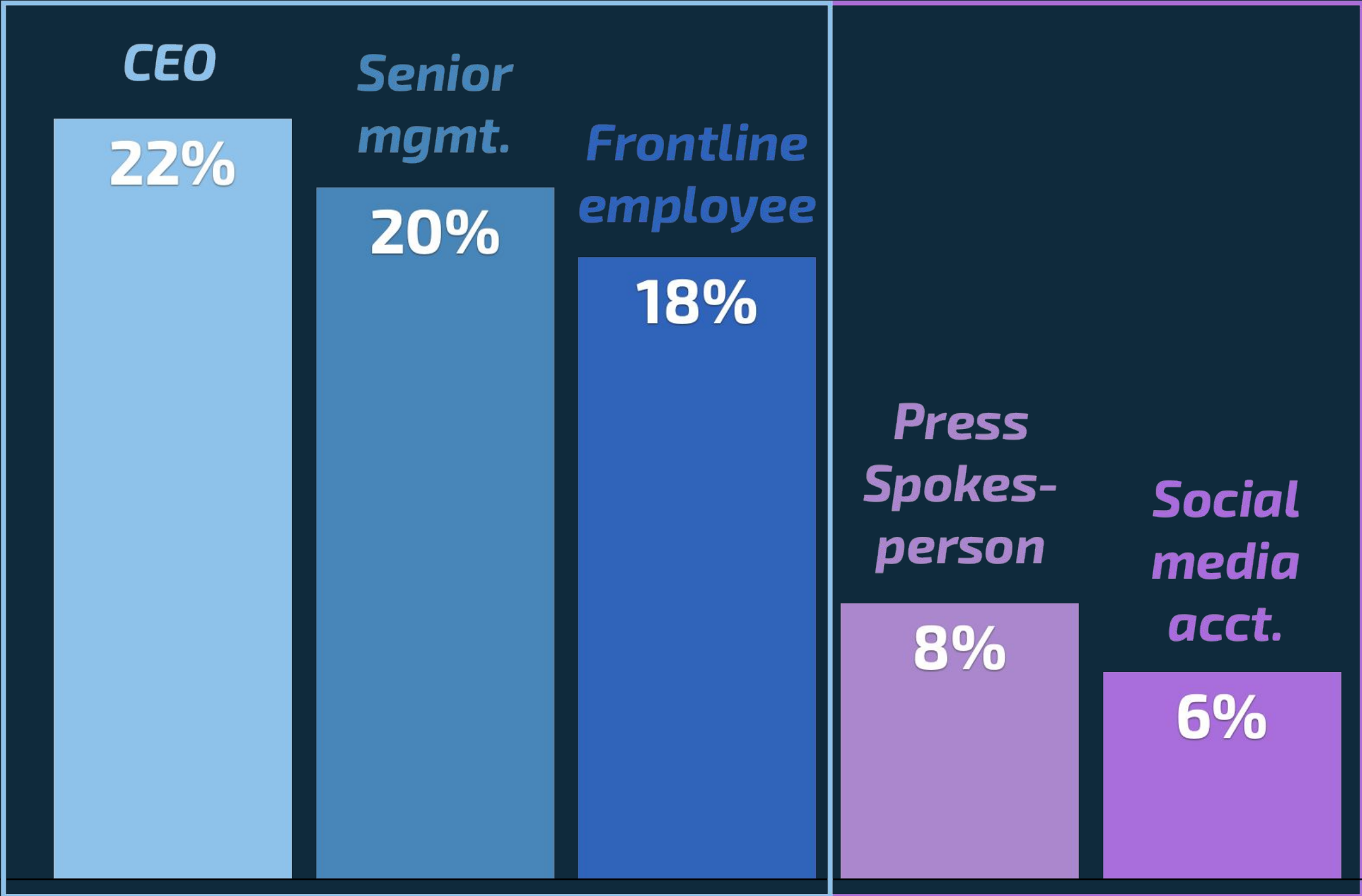
4. How Younger Voters Are Rewriting the Trust Script



1. Trust Starts at the Source: CEOs & Executive Leadership Teams

Voters trust companies most when they hear directly from leadership. **The CEO (22%), senior management (20%), and frontline employees (18%)** are the preferred communicators in a crisis.

Just 8% want to hear from a spokesperson and 6% want to hear from a brand's social media account.



Total

Direct Communication: 60%
Filtered Communication: 14%



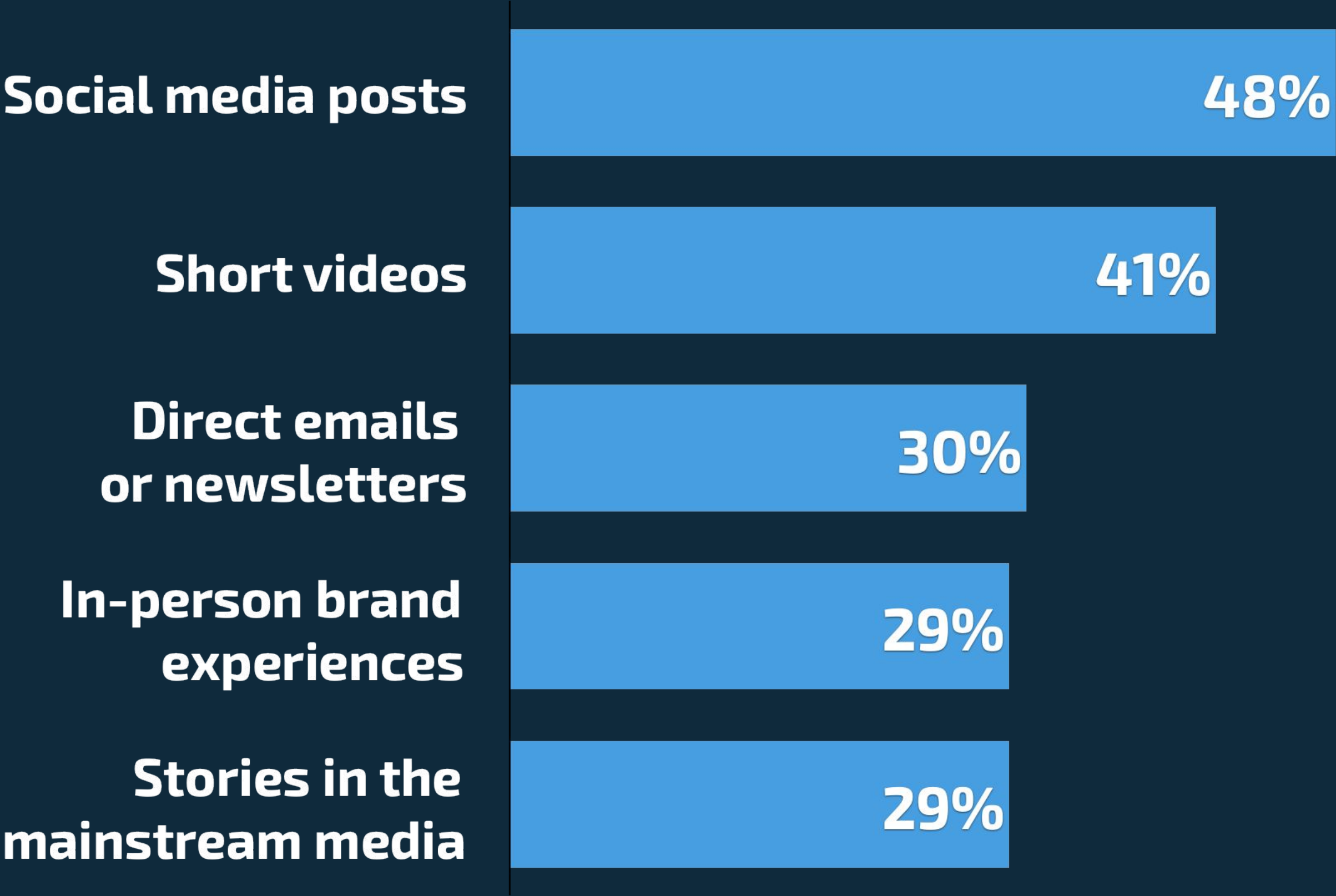
1. Trust Starts at the Source: Direct Connection With Brands

Americans no longer look to traditional media to validate credibility. They want direct connection.

48% of voters under 50 prefer to hear from brands through social media posts, and those over 50 are most likely to want to hear from companies through direct newsletters (38%).

Just 29% of those under 50, and 27% of those over 50, say they want to hear from them through mainstream media.

Top five ways voters under 50 want to hear from companies:



1. Trust Starts at the Source: Built Close to Home

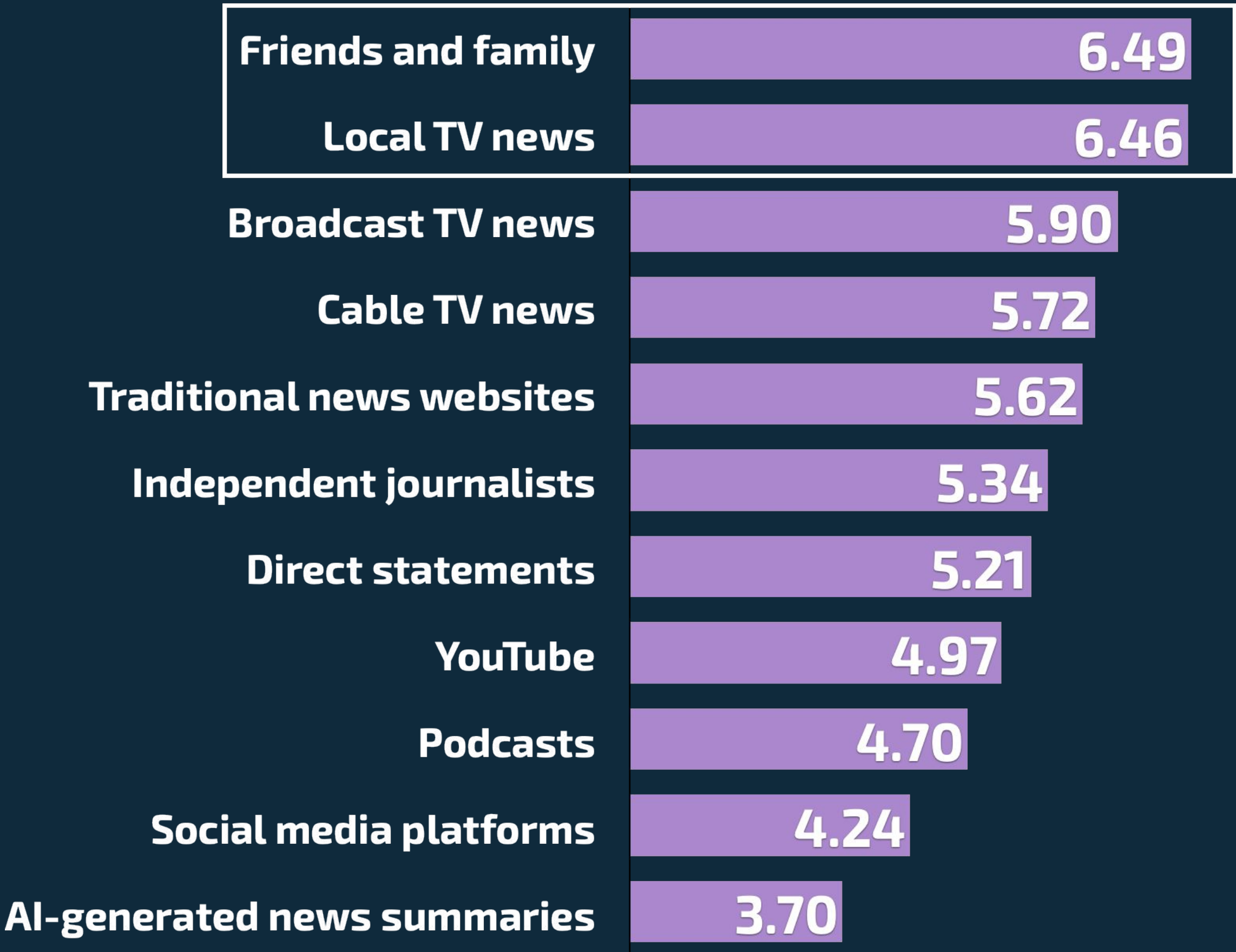
People trust people, especially in their own communities.

Friends and family and local TV news are the two most trusted sources of news, signaling that trust is earned relationally and locally, not institutionally.

This is being driven by younger voters and those in the cities: Voters under 50 (6.65 mean) and urbanites (6.81 mean) have particularly high trust of friends and family when it comes to news sources.



Mean trust ratings of news sources



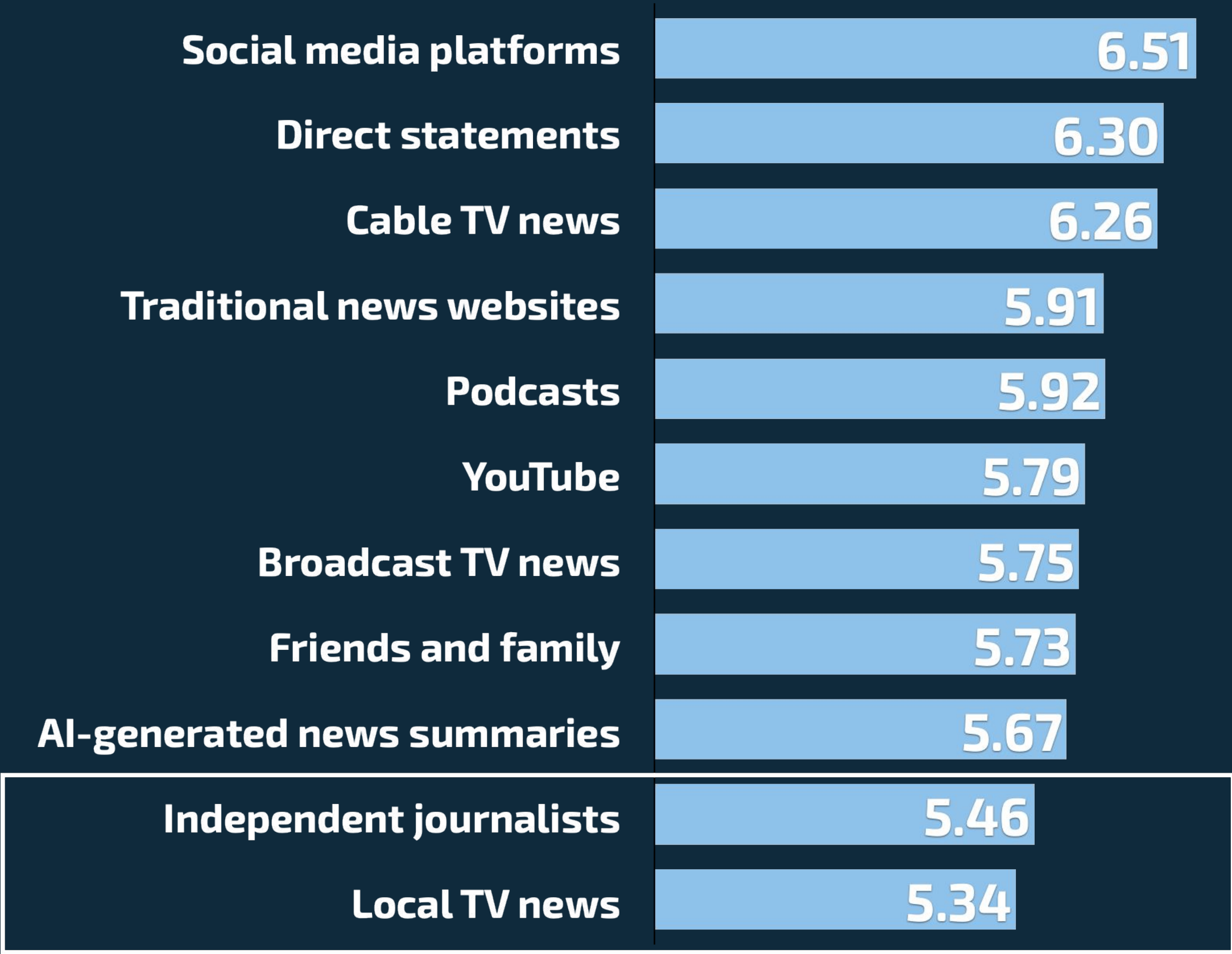
1. Trust Starts at the Source: Independent journalists and local TV are seen as least biased

The news sources that are seen as least biased are **Substack-style independent journalism** and **local TV news**.

Meanwhile, social media platforms, direct statements from institutions, and cable TV are seen as the most biased.



Mean bias ratings of news sources



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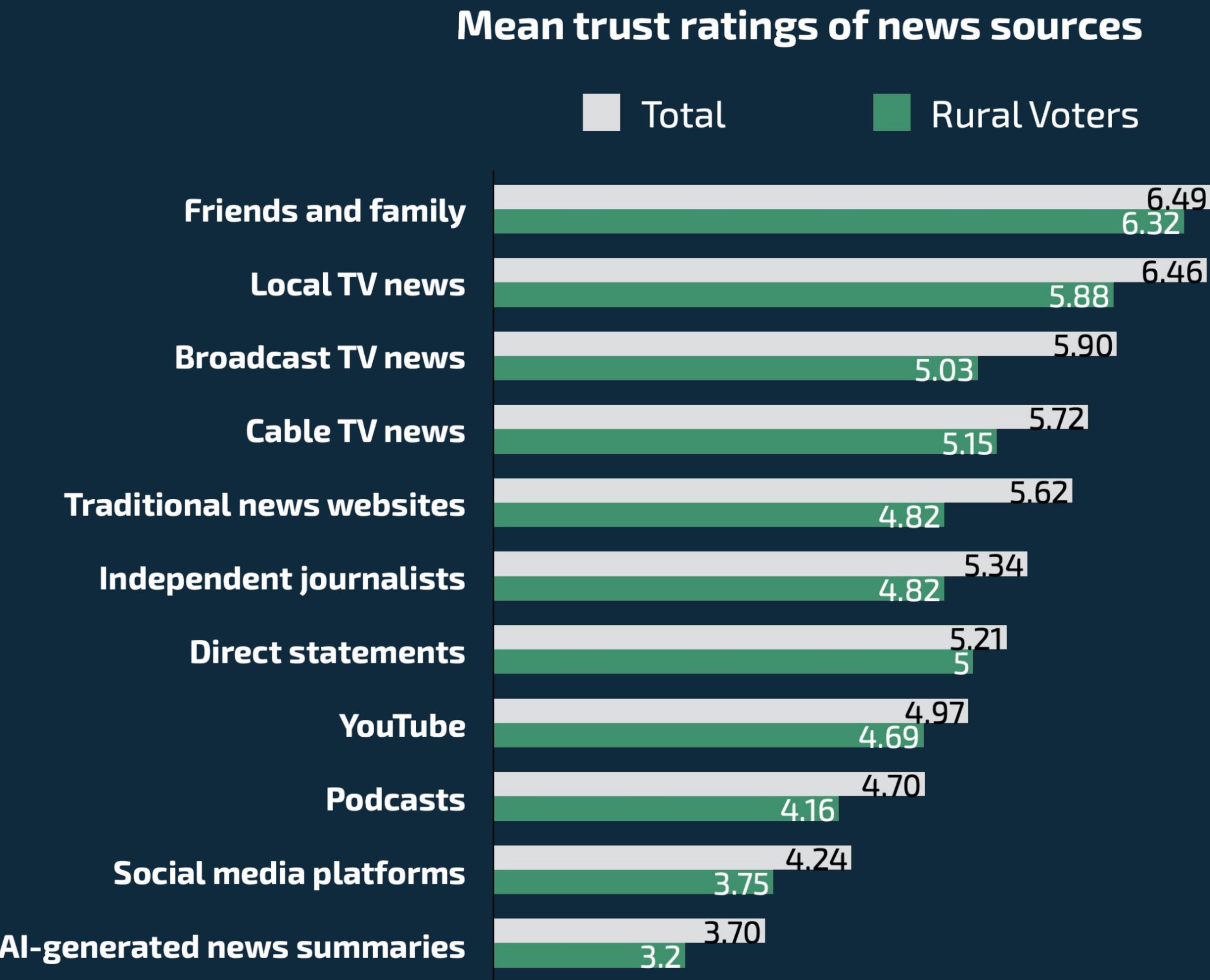


2. Where You Live Shapes Trust: Rural Americans Trust All News Sources Less

Rural voters trust every single news source less than voters overall.

While rural voters are less trusting of every news source compared to the total population, that gap is widest for broadcast TV news (0.87) and traditional news websites (0.8).

The gap is narrowest for friends and family (0.17) and direct statements (0.21).

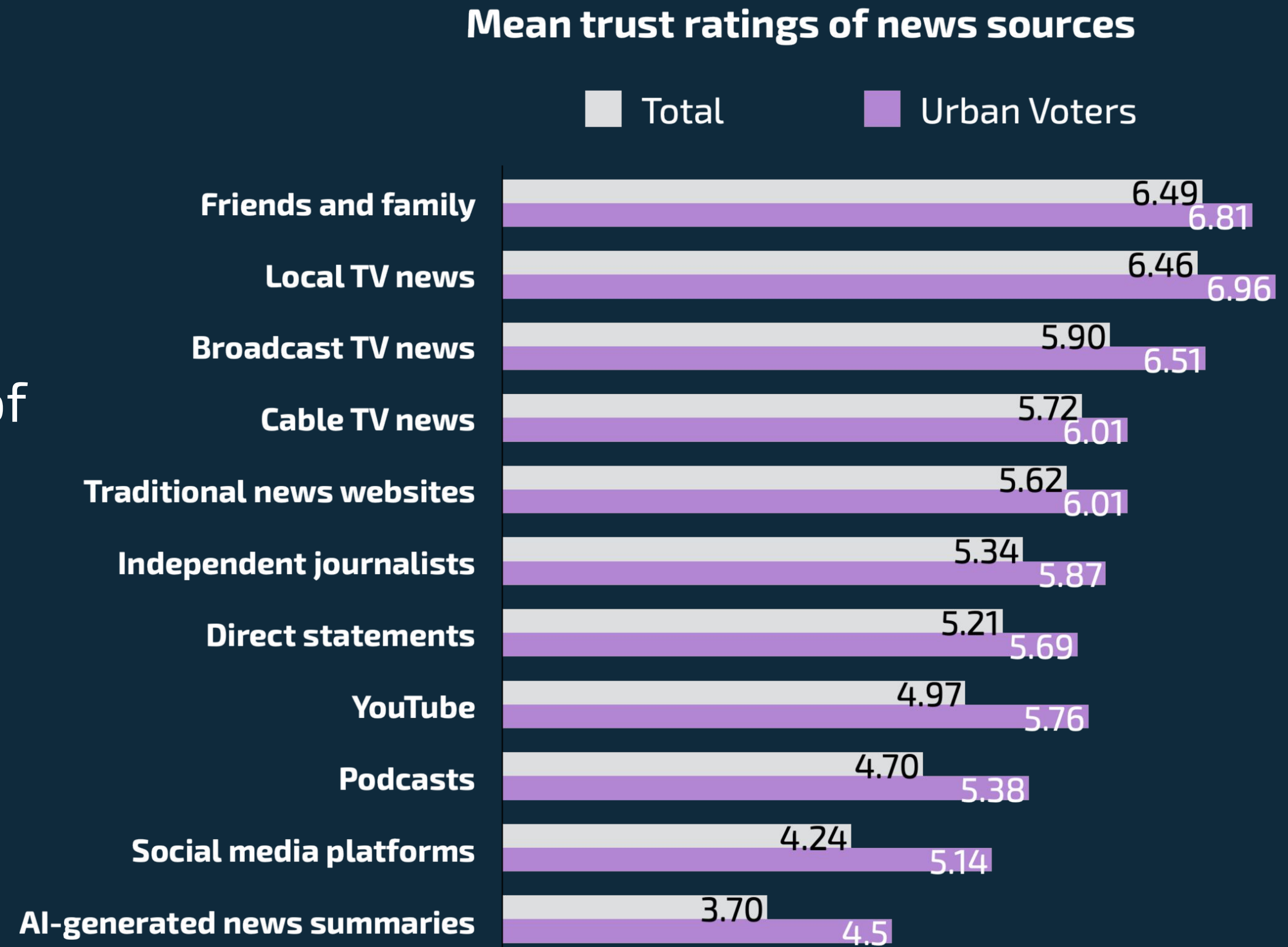


2. Where You Live Shapes Trust: Urbanites Are High

Trust

Urban voters trust every single news source more than voters overall.

So while rural Americans are characterized by their general lack of trust, urban voters can be characterized by the opposite: high trust, including significantly higher trust of AI-generated news summaries compared to the total audience.

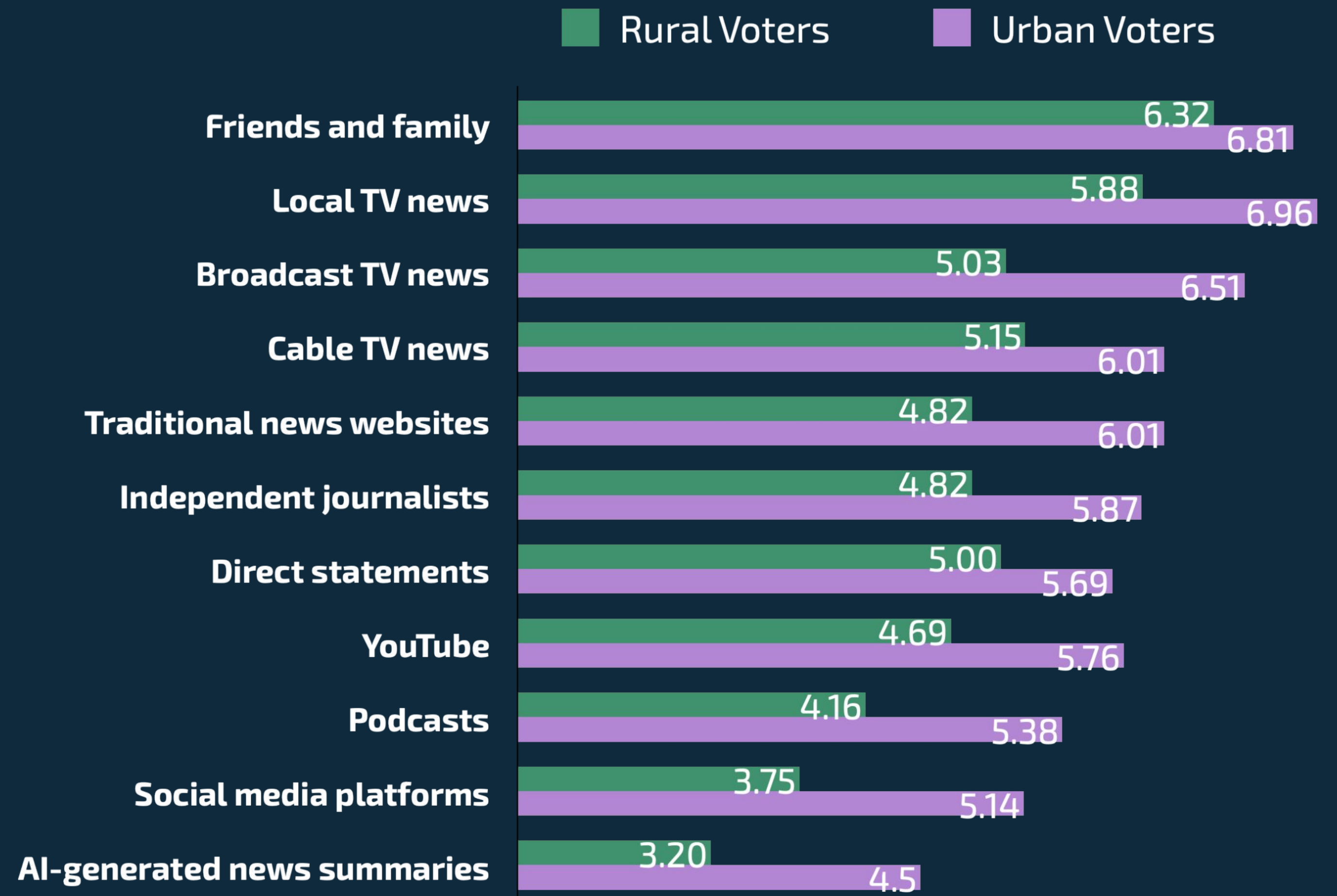


2. Where You Live Shapes Trust: Urbanites And Rural Voters Have Completely Different Trust Landscapes

Where one lives drives massive gaps in the trust landscape.

That gap is widest for broadcast TV news (1.48) and social media platforms (1.39).

Notably, the gap is narrowest for friends and family (0.49) and direct statements (0.69).



1. Trust Starts at the Source

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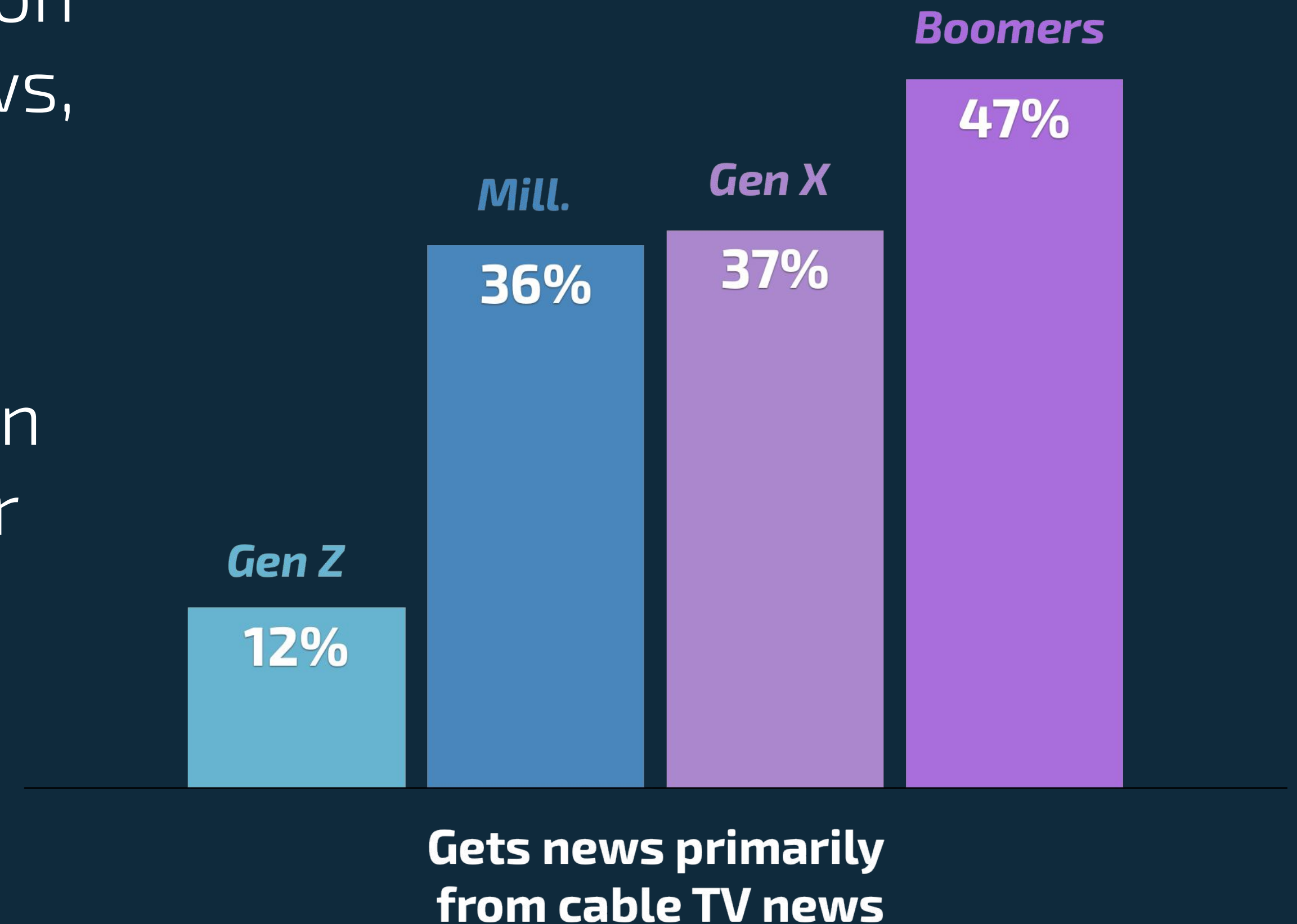
4. How Younger Voters Are Rewriting the Trust Script



3. Who Still Believes: Older Americans

Boomers are the last stronghold of traditional TV news: 49% get information from local TV news, 47% from cable news, and 41% from broadcast TV news.

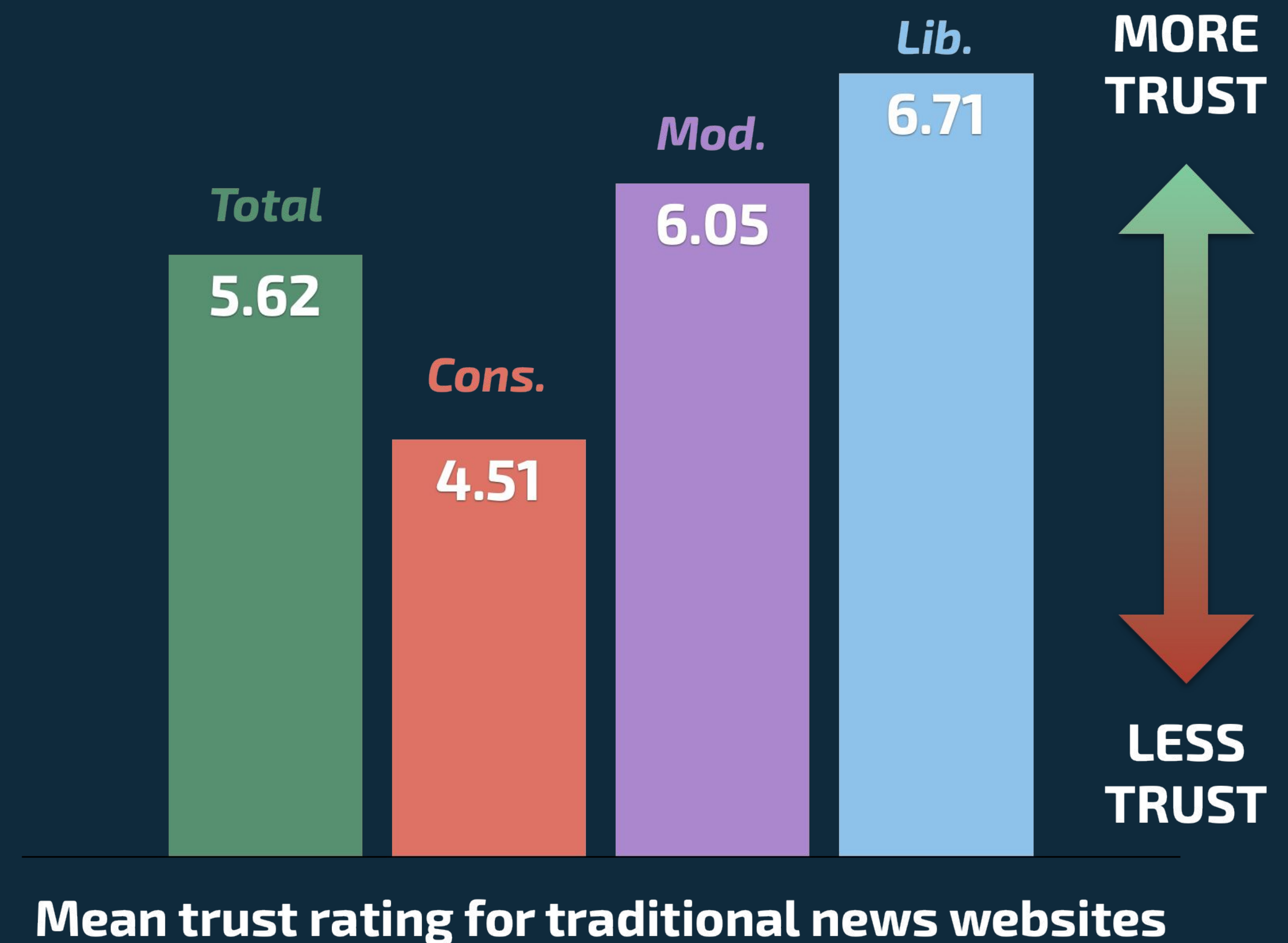
Meanwhile, there is a **massive gap between Gen Z and everyone else** when it comes to the proportion that gets their news from cable TV, signaling that **the new news landscape is here to stay.**



3. Who Still Believes: The Partisan Divide

Trust in traditional news websites is **sharply partisan**: mean trust is 4.51 among conservatives, 6.05 among moderates, and 6.71 among liberals.

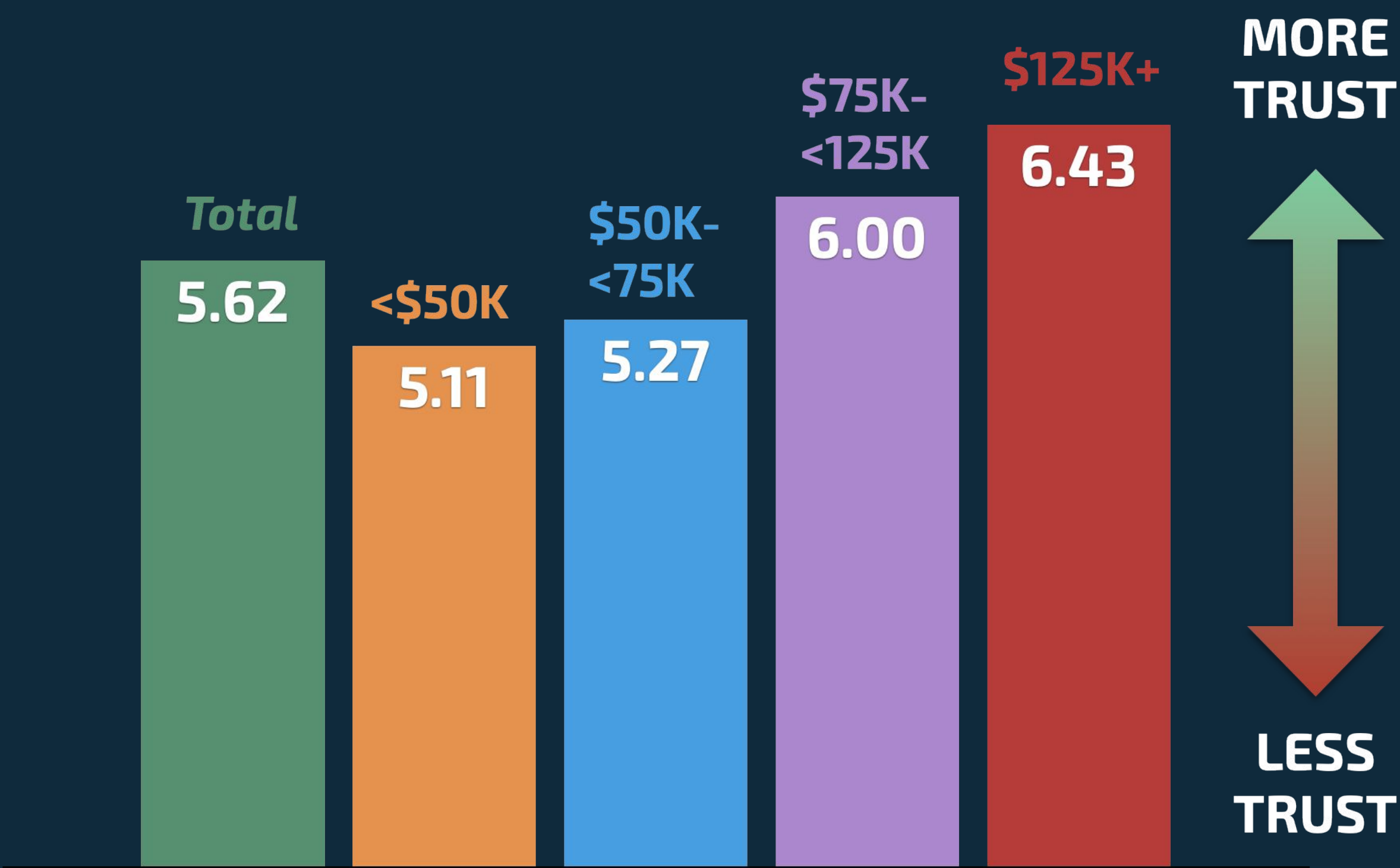
In short: if your message relies on traditional news websites, you're reaching a much more left-leaning audience.



3. Who Still Believes: Wealthier Americans

Trust in traditional news websites is also divided by income. Those who make more than \$125K are more likely to trust traditional news than any other income bracket.

Leaning on traditional news means your message skews toward wealthier Americans, while lower- and middle-income audiences are far less likely to hear it.



Mean trust rating for traditional news websites

1. Trust Starts at the Source

2. Place Matters: The Trust Divide by Geography

3. Who Still Believes in Legacy Media

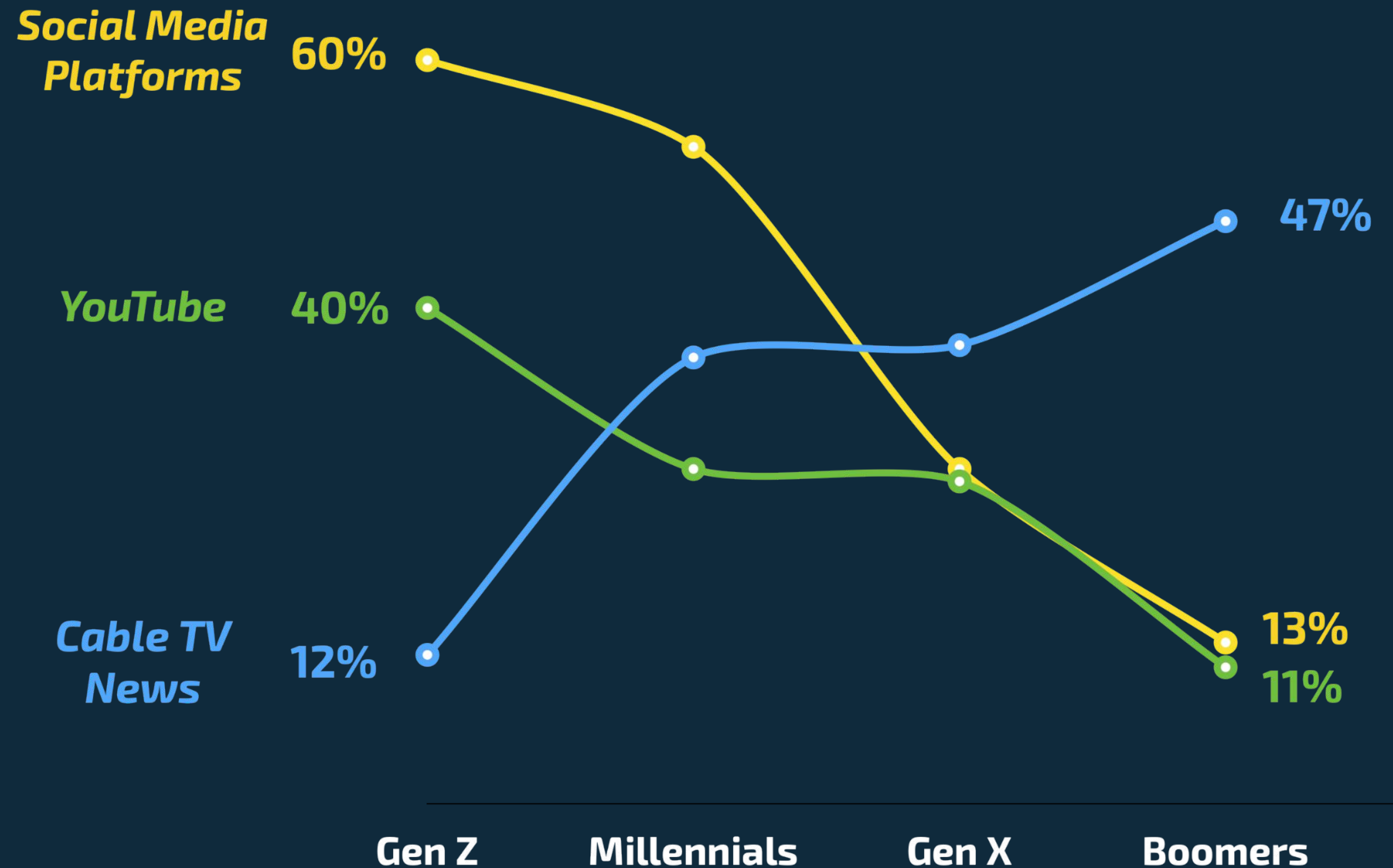
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Reliance on sources for news and current events differs markedly across generations.

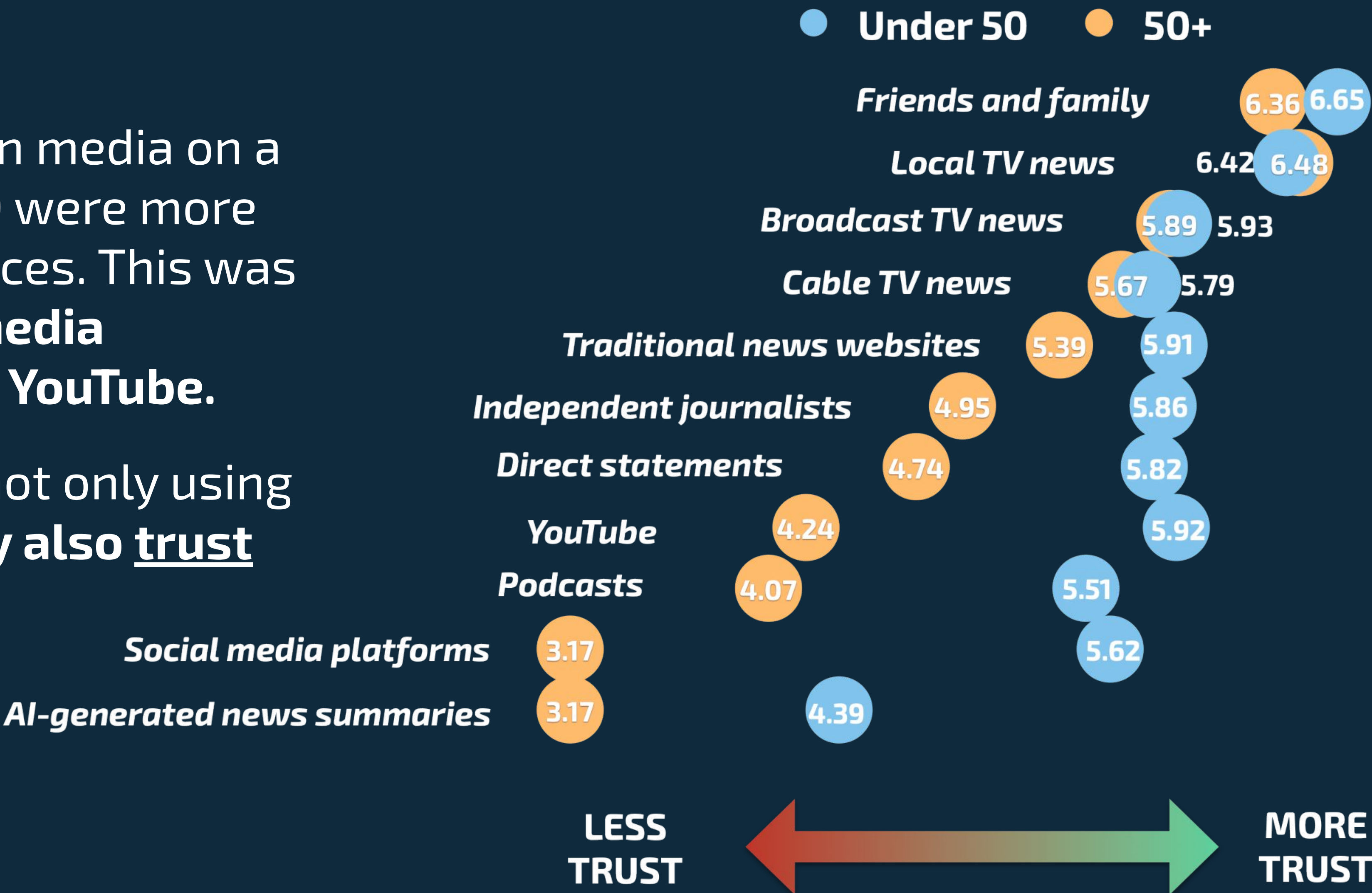
Social is 5x cable news for Gen Z while cable news is nearly 4x social for Boomers.



4. How Younger Voters Are Rewriting the Trust Script

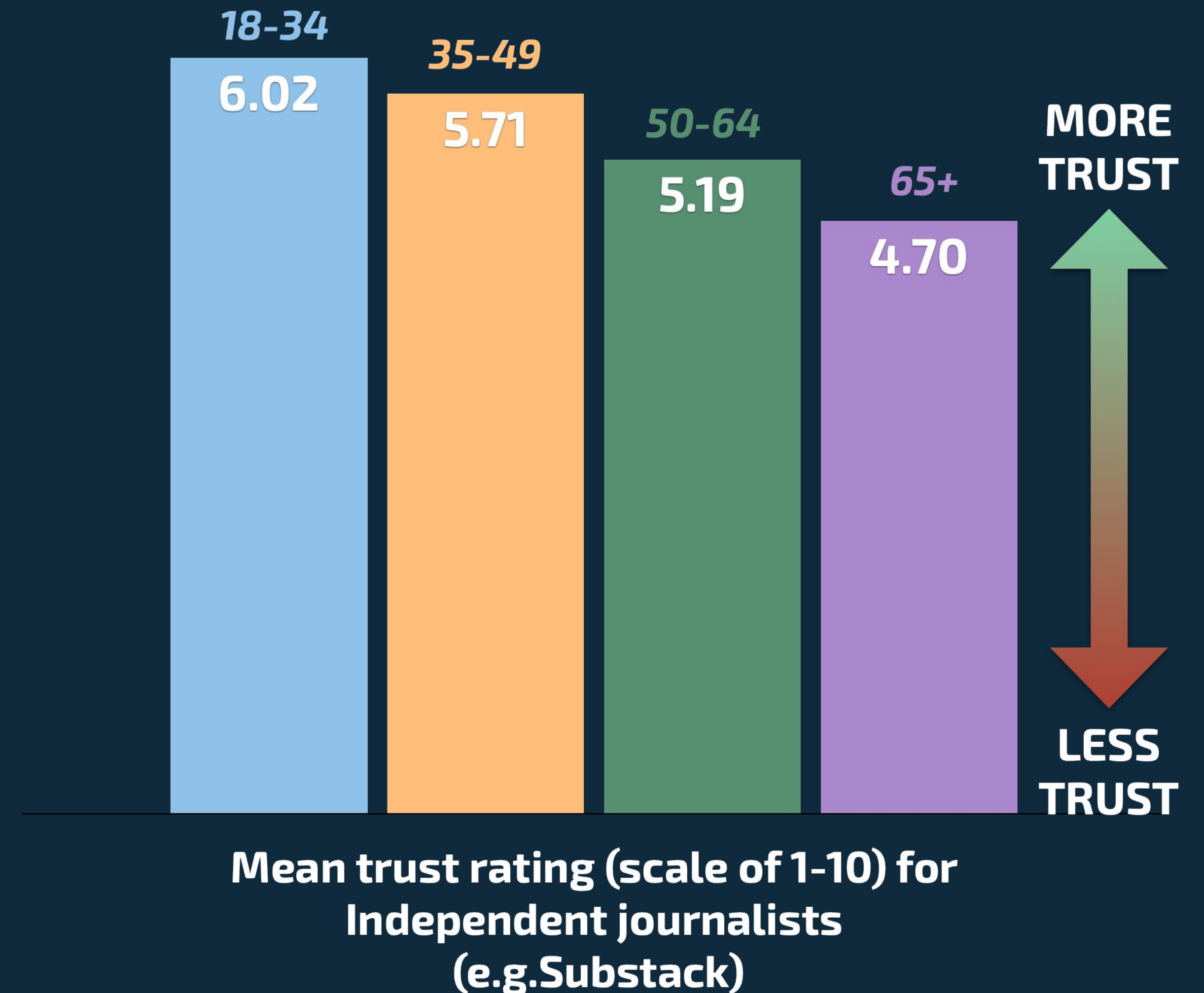
When asked to rate trust in media on a 0-10 scale, those under 50 were more trusting of almost all sources. This was especially true of **social media platforms, podcasts, and YouTube.**

Younger generations are not only using new platforms more. **They also trust these platforms more.**



4. How Younger Voters Are Rewriting the Trust Script

While still an emerging news source, **Substack-style independent journalists are gaining ground**, with voters 18-34 trusting them significantly more than those 65+.



What to Do Right Now

The new trust game is multichannel. Here's how to win it.

If you work in comms and want to build for this reality, here are the moves to make today:

- **Put your leaders out front.** People trust people. Skip the corporate filter and equip execs to speak directly—on video, in first-person posts, and in formats they're comfortable in.
- **Rethink Earned Media.** Credibility now comes from what's said and where it's amplified, not just the outlet it appears in. Use earned to anchor a story and then push it through your own and shared channels.
- **Expand your definition of media.** Creators, podcasts, Substacks, and short-form video aren't niche—they're central. Treat them as key players, not afterthoughts.
- **Design for the moment.** Real trust is built in real time. Respond fast, show up clearly, and leave the polish behind.
- **Be consistent, not perfect.** Audiences don't want scripts. They want steady, human signals of what you stand for. Keep showing up and they'll start to believe it.



About Foretell

Foretell is a new kind of strategic advisory firm helping brands build for what comes next. At a time where trust and authenticity are non-negotiable, we empower brands to seize opportunities and own their stories across the full spectrum of communications and public affairs.

With a team forged from the highest levels of business, government, tech and politics, we bring an unparalleled blend of communications experience and unconventional thinking to every challenge. We've guided some of the biggest brands on the planet through their most pivotal moments. Foretell was founded in 2024 by Shopify alumni Nicole Flotteron and Erin Pelton.

About Echelon

Polling. Analytics. Technology. Echelon Insights ties it all together to make you smarter than the competition. Founded by experts from the digital and polling worlds, we're erasing old industry lines that separate the process of conducting research from the tools to act on it. Echelon Insights helps leaders have the most comprehensive understanding of what their voters, customers, and key stakeholders want. We know that across industries and institutions, leaders need to have an ear to the ground to know what people really believe, really think, really *feel* . We help you listen and learn, so that you can lead.



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