

americanindependent.com

A partisan news and commentary site, formerly known as Shareblue.com, that does not disclose its ownership by Democratic operative David Brock and its funding by a politically active nonprofit.



Proceed with caution: This website fails to meet several basic standards of credibility and transparency.

Score: 57/100

Ownership and Financing

The American Independent, formerly known as Shareblue Media and Blue Nation Review, is owned by True Blue Media LLC, a private company registered in Delaware. David Brock, a former conservative journalist turned Democratic operative, owns 80 percent of True Blue Media. MOKO Social Media Limited, an Australian media company from which Brock bought The American Independent (then called Blue Nation Review) in 2015, owns the remaining 20 percent.

Brock, who has created media companies, political action committees, and nonprofits to advance Democratic Party interests, is the founder of the anti-Republican American Bridge 21st Century super PAC, from which he still receives a salary, and its nonprofit arm, the American Bridge 21st Century Foundation.

According to the Center for Responsive Politics, which tracks U.S. political spending, the PAC spent approximately \$4.5 million in the 2020 election cycle on anti-Republican initiatives, including \$1.9 million on ads targeting U.S. President Donald Trump.

The American Bridge 21st Century Foundation paid True Blue Media more than \$1.6 million in 2017, according to its tax filings from that year. AmericanIndependent.com also lists an address for the foundation on its Terms page. The same address appears on the foundation's IRS filings, and documents that the American Bridge 21st Century super PAC filed with the Federal Election Commission.

Brock is also the founder and chairman of Media Matters for America, a nonprofit media watchdog website that monitors and investigates conservative news outlets it says spread misinformation.

The American Independent earns revenue through advertisements and donations. The website prominently features a "Donate" button on the top of its homepage, with the note, "Progressive journalism is under attack. Please help us fight back!"

Content

The American Independent describes itself as a "digital platform for progressive news" that works to "report with honesty and integrity, shining a light on those in power and the progressive political movement." The site publishes news and commentary, primarily on U.S. politics, in five sections — National, Local, Elections, Grassroots, and Opinion.

Content on The American Independent typically supports progressive and liberal views and portrays conservative politicians and causes in a negative light. The site's coverage often focuses on the Trump administration and local U.S. politics. It has also regularly reported on issues such as gun control, immigration, and LGBTQ rights.

Typical articles on the site include: "Trump tries to upstage impeachment hearing with irrelevant summary of first Ukraine call," "GOP senator blocks gun safety bill as another school shooting unfolds," and "Virginia GOP embraces bigotry in desperate bid to save majorities."

Shortly after the 2016 presidential election, Brock said he hoped Shareblue Media (The American Independent's former name) could become the "Breitbart of the left," referring to the conservative news site. A memo leaked in 2017 that was distributed to the funders of Brock's various liberal groups said Shareblue would "delegitimize Donald Trump's presidency by emboldening the opposition and empowering the majority of Americans who oppose him."



Does not repeatedly publish false content (22 points)



Gathers and presents information responsibly (18)



Regularly corrects or clarifies errors (12.5)



Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly (12.5)



Avoids deceptive headlines (10)



Website discloses ownership and financing (7.5)



Clearly labels advertising (7.5)



Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest (5)



The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information (5)

Criteria are listed in order of importance. [More information.](#)

During the 2016 presidential election, Shareblue Media often promoted the candidacy of former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton while attacking her Democratic primary opponent, U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders. The American Independent's coverage in 2019, however, has primarily focused on discrediting President Trump and other Republicans, and has not favored a specific Democratic presidential candidate during the 2020 primary race.

"I don't think that has any relevance for the site today — the mission changed after the election, as did the staff and leadership," Allison Girvin, CEO of The American Independent, said of the site's previous coverage of Clinton and Sanders in a September 2019 interview with the Daily Beast.

Credibility

Articles published by The American Independent are fact-based, citing reputable media outlets, official documents, public statements, and other credible sources. The site publishes articles written by its staff, and often republishes articles by The Associated Press.

Headlines accurately reflect content. The American Independent regularly publishes corrections, typically adding notes at the bottom of stories explaining the mistake.

The American Independent clearly discloses its progressive perspective at the bottom of each page and on a Company page. Its articles overwhelmingly reflect that position, including stories that criticize Trump, such as "Trump claims support for impeachment is dropping. It isn't," "Trump all but admits to obstructing justice by firing Comey — again," and "Trump's EPA is breaking records for letting polluters off the hook."

However, the website does not disclose on its About Us page or within individual stories that it is owned by Brock and funded by the American Bridge 21st Century Foundation. The foundation's associated super PAC describes itself on its website as "the opposition research engine of the Democratic Party" and has funded anti-Trump initiatives in the 2020 election cycle.

Because The American Independent does not disclose it is funded by a politically active, liberal nonprofit, while publishing content that advances the organization's interests, NewsGuard has determined that the website does not gather and present information responsibly.

The website publishes opinion articles in a dedicated section, and discloses an overall progressive perspective. However, the website also includes liberal opinion in stories that appear in news sections, which is why NewsGuard has determined that the website does not handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

For example, a November 2019 article labeled as National, "Pence 'proud' of Trump rule that would block LGBTQ people from adopting," reported on a new rule proposed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that would allow recipients of its federal grants, including faith-based adoption agencies, to discriminate against LGBTQ people. "What the administration is really doing is blocking children from loving homes, all in the name of enshrining religious bigotry into law," the article stated.

Another November 2019 national news article, "Anti-abortion group misused funds so badly Texas took its money back," reported that the Heidi Group, an anti-abortion organization, would need to repay \$1.5 million it received from Texas' government because it had failed to provide family planning services to its patients. "It isn't just that the group wasted taxpayer money, though that's bad enough. It's that a group like this would never have been, even operating at its projected peak performance, a substitute for Planned Parenthood in Texas," the article stated.

Following an exchange of phone calls and emails with The American Independent Digital Director Erin Reed, NewsGuard did not receive answers to its questions about the site's publication of political stories that advance the interests of the American Bridge 21st Century Foundation, and its mixing of news and opinion.

Shripal Shah, vice president of the American Bridge 21st Century Foundation, declined to comment when asked by NewsGuard about the nonprofit's relationship with the website.

Transparency

AmericanIndependent.com does not clearly disclose its ownership by True Blue Media, beyond a copyright notice listed in small print at the bottom of the website, and references to the company in its Terms of Service policy.

In addition, The American Independent does not disclose Brock's majority ownership of True Blue Media and the company's relationship with the American Bridge 21st Century Foundation. Brock, although he is not listed as a top editor on the website, appears to retain undisclosed editorial influence. In a July 2019 press release announcing Girvin as then-Shareblue Media's new CEO, he said that Girvin was "the ideal leader to bring our vision of Shareblue to fruition."

Because The American Independent does not disclose its relationship with Brock, a Democratic operative, and its financing by a liberal political nonprofit, while predominantly covering politics, NewsGuard has determined that the website does not meet its standard for revealing ownership and relevant financing, and revealing conflicts of interest of those in charge.

Following an exchange of phone calls and emails with The American Independent Digital Director Erin Reed, NewsGuard did not receive answers to its questions about the site's lack of ownership and editorial leadership disclosure.

A Company page lists the names titles, biographies, and Twitter profiles of The American Independent staff, including its editorial leadership. Users can contact The American Independent through a general feedback form on a Contact page.

American Independent articles generally name the author and link to an archive of the writer's work, as well as a short biography and often a link to their Twitter profile. Author biographies are provided at the bottom of opinion articles.

Advertising is distinguishable from editorial content.

History

The American Independent launched in 2014 as Blue Nation Review, a site known for reporting on the finances and spending habits of Illinois Republican Congressman Aaron Schock, who eventually resigned from Congress for misusing campaign and federal funds.

Brock bought Blue Nation Review from MOKO Social Media Limited, an Australian social media company, at the end of 2015. He relaunched the site as Shareblue Media in 2016, ahead of the U.S. presidential election.

In November 2019, Shareblue Media announced in a Facebook post that it had rebranded as The American Independent and that it would have "an increased focus on investigative journalism in preparation for 2020 coverage."

Brock is a former conservative journalist who spent the 1990s investigating the Clintons. In 1993, he published a piece in the American Spectator, a conservative magazine, that delved deeply into former U.S. President Bill Clinton's personal life, and ultimately helped trigger the investigation into Clinton's relationship with Monica Lewinsky. Five years later, Brock wrote a piece for Esquire, detailing his regrets about the story.

The New York Times reported in December 2017 that Brock's American Bridge 21st Century Foundation spent \$200,000 in an attempt to bring forward sexual misconduct claims against Trump before the 2016 presidential election.

Corrections: Following a new review of AmericanIndependent.com, formerly known as Shareblue.com, this Nutrition Label was updated on Dec. 2, 2019, and its rating has been changed, to reflect NewsGuard's determination that the website meets NewsGuard's standard for avoiding deceptive headlines and for regularly issuing corrections and clarifications. NewsGuard apologizes for the errors.

A previous version of this label incorrectly referred to Wayne LaPierre as president of the NRA; he is CEO. The label also misstated which of David Brock's organizations funded research into sexual misconduct claims against Donald Trump; it was the American Bridge 21st Century Foundation. The label has also been updated to reflect that the website does provide some staff contact information in the form of Twitter handles. Finally, the label incorrectly reported the date that Blue Nation Review launched; the correct year is 2014. NewsGuard apologizes for these errors.

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Ownership and Financing

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