A blog run by activist Pamela Geller that portrays Islam and its adherents in a negative light. The site has published false claims about former U.S. President Barack Obama and the COVID-19 pandemic.

GellerReport.com’s domain name is registered to the American Freedom Defense Initiative (AFDI), a nonprofit group founded by Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer, director of the blog Jihad Watch. Spencer argues that Islam “mandates warfare against unbelievers.”

AFDI’s website states that the group “acts against the treason being committed by national, state, and local government officials, the mainstream media, and others in their capitulation to the global jihad and Islamic supremacism, the ever-encroaching and unconstitutional power of the federal government, and the rapidly moving attempts to impose socialism and Marxism upon the American people.”

According to its 2018 filing with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service, AFDI generated annual revenue of $204,000, including $198,000 in contributions and grants and $6,000 in investment income.

Geller is listed as the founder, editor, and publisher of GellerReport.com. She is a prominent figure in what adherents call the “counter-jihad” movement, which maintains that Islam and Muslims pose an existential threat to the U.S. and Western civilization. In a 2010 interview with The New York Times, Geller called claims that she is Islamophobic “a slanderous slur and it’s unfair…. I believe that Muslims are more victimized by Islamic supremacists than even non-Muslims.”

GellerReport.com carries advertisements and sponsored content. Every page includes a section soliciting readers to make monthly contributions ranging from $18 to $1,000.
The website’s content typically consists of stories aggregated from other news organizations and social media posts, punctuated by commentary from Geller. Sources cited by GellerReport.com range from news sites such as The New York Post and ABC News to sites that NewsGuard found to have repeatedly published false content, including The Gateway Pundit and TheConservativeTreehouse.com.

The site often highlights crimes said to have been committed by Muslims; criticism of Democratic politicians; and Geller’s own media appearances. Subject headings on the site include “How the Left Destroys the Nation,” “Democrats: New Nazi Party,” “Freedom of Speech in the Name of Jihad,” and “Canada Sharia Enforcement.”

The site’s Rebuttals page addresses what Geller says are false claims about her and the site.

GellerReport.com has a history of sharing false, unproven, or misleading claims, including, in 2020, about the COVID-19 pandemic.

In multiple articles, Geller claimed that the COVID-19 death toll was being deliberately exaggerated. For example, an April 2020 article headlined “Coronavirus Death Numbers Are A Complete Fraud,” began with the claim that “Coronavirus death toll is being juiced.” To back this assertion, the GellerReport.com article quoted a Montana physician named Annie Bukacek. “These statistics have been made to look really scary when it is so easy to add false numbers to the CDC database,” Bukacek said in a YouTube video addressing a Montana church. “Those false numbers are sanctioned by the CDC. The real number of COVID-19 is not what most people are told. Based on how death certificates are being filed out, you can be certain the number is substantially lower than what we are being told – based on inaccurate, incomplete data people are being terrorized by fearmongers into relinquishing cherished freedoms.”
There is no evidence to back the site’s claim in the headline that the reported number of COVID-19 deaths is “a complete fraud” or to support Bukacek’s claim that “false numbers” that are “sanctioned by the CDC” have been added to the death toll.

In a May 2020 virtual hearing of the Senate Health Committee, Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said that deaths from the pandemic were likely being undercounted, not overcounted, because “there may have been people who died at home who were not counted as COVID because they never really got to the hospital.”

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s April 2020 guidance on certifying COVID-19 deaths stated, “When determining whether COVID–19 played a role in the cause of death, follow the CDC clinical criteria for evaluating a person under investigation for COVID–19 and, where possible, conduct appropriate laboratory testing using guidance provided by CDC or local health authorities.” The guidance did say that it is acceptable to report COVID-19 as “presumed” or “probable” on a death certificate, based on the judgment of the person certifying the death. “In these instances, certifiers should use their best clinical judgment in determining if a COVID–19 infection was likely. However, please note that testing for COVID–19 should be conducted whenever possible,” the guidance stated.

The GellerReport.com article also cited a false claim from AmericanThinker.com, another website that NewsGuard found to be unreliable. “We even know that people who aren’t infected with the virus are getting counted as fatalities,” the American Thinker article cited by GellerReport.com stated. The article provided no evidence for this claim.

In fact, the CDC states on its website that “COVID-19 should not be reported on the death certificate if it did not cause or contribute to the death.” The cause-of-death section on a death certificate may include multiple conditions that contributed to a person’s death, but this has been standard practice long before the
COVID-19 pandemic. The CDC’s guidelines on death certificates, last revised in 2003, state that the cause-of-death section should include two parts: the sequence of conditions that led directly to death, as well as “other significant conditions that contributed to the death, but did not lead to the underlying cause.”

GellerReport.com has also promoted false claims about the origins of the COVID-19 virus. In an April 2020 article titled “Saturday Night Cinema: The Origin of the Wuhan Coronavirus,” the site embedded a documentary produced by conservative outlet The Epoch Times that falsely claimed that the COVID-19 virus was “engineered” with similarities to the human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV.

“2019-nCoV has four new sequences inserted, all of which can be found in HIV sequences... There were only three viruses containing all the sequences,” one of which is the COVID-19 virus, Epoch Times reporter Joshua Phillip stated in the video embedded in the GellerReport.com article.

This claim implying that the virus was manipulated in a lab was attributed to a study published by Indian researchers. However, the documentary did not mention that the study was posted to BioRxiv.org, a site that enables users to submit studies before they have been peer-reviewed or accepted by a journal. According to a February 2020 article on the fact-checking website HealthFeedback.org, the study’s finding that there is a similarity between the new strain of coronavirus and HIV “was detected using extremely short protein sequences, a practice that often gives rise to false positive results.” HealthFeedback.org also noted that study failed to note that the same sequences are found in many other organisms. The authors of the study withdrew it from BioRxiv.org two days after it first appeared on the website.

In April 2020, the site published an article headlined “Dem. Michigan Governor Bans Sales of American Flags During Coronavirus Lockdown.” The accompanying article, which was republished from The Gateway Pundit, claimed that an executive order from
Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer had “banned packaged seeds, tiling, carpet, flooring … And US flags.”

The sole evidence Gateway Pundit cited for this claim was a photograph, posted by a Twitter user named Pure Michigan Girl, that purportedly showed U.S. flags behind caution tape. “No buying flags in MI. This is Costco,” the tweet said.

An executive order from Whitmer did require stores larger than 50,000 square feet that remained open under the state’s stay-at-home order to close off sections dedicated to carpet and flooring, as well as garden centers and plant nurseries. The order did not prohibit the sale of any products, and U.S. flags were never mentioned. A Frequently Asked Questions page on the governor’s website states that “While the order places certain limits on how goods are sold, it does not ban Michiganders from buying any item, including flags.”

In older articles on the site, GellerReport.com has published false claims involving Islam, sometimes later removing the claims without correcting them. For example, a February 2018 article claimed that Nikolas Cruz, who admitted to killing 17 people at his former school in Parkland, Florida, was “immersed in Islamic and leftwing hate.” The only evidence cited in the article was a purported Instagram post from Cruz showing a Google search for the Arabic phrase “Allahu Akbar.” Based on local reporting and statements from police investigating the shooting, fact-checking site PolitiFact determined the site’s claim was baseless.

Geller later updated the article, removing the sentence claiming Cruz “was immersed in Islamic and leftwing hate.” The correction does not mention this change, only stating that the original post “originally featured a photograph of a young man who was not involved in the shooting in any manner. The Geller Report regrets the error.” The purported Instagram post from Cruz showing a Google search for “Allahu Akbar” remained in the story.
In another February 2018 article, headlined “Watch: Migrants in Italy,” Geller shared a video that she claimed showed Muslim migrants destroying a car in Italy. As noted by fact-checking site Snopes and other sites, the video had previously been identified as an amateur video showing a scene being filmed for the 2015 Italian drama “Mediterranea.”

Geller later removed the video. However, the site did not issue a correction, updating the story with criticism of the sites that had called out the fact that the video was from a film shoot. “Left-wing propaganda sites and Muslim supremacist terror-tied orgs have taken issue with one of the videos I previously ran saying it wasn’t real,” she wrote. “The fact is there are thousands of videos exposing Muslim migrant violence and destruction that elicit no response from the enemedia.”

GellerReport.com includes articles dating from Geller’s previous blog, Atlas Shrugs, that promoted false “birther” claims that former U.S. President Barack Obama was not born in the U.S. and therefore barred from being president. For example, a July 2008 article that remains on GellerReport.com, headlined “Mystery, Clarification and Obfuscation of Obama’s Birth Certificate Forgery,” claimed that Obama’s short-form birth certificate, released by his presidential campaign in 2008, was forged.

GellerReport.com’s Rebuttals section included the claim that Geller called Obama’s birth certificate a forgery among the “false charges” against her, despite the fact that articles in which she made that claim remain accessible on the site. “This is a dead issue now, but many people have expressed doubts about Obama’s birth certificate, and there are reasons to question it that the mainstream media steadfastly refused to explore,” she wrote. “That was the real issue.”

The Rebuttals section also includes a claim that Obama was once a Muslim. Geller wrote, “He was a Muslim in his youth: in The Audacity of Hope he discusses how he got in trouble for making faces in Quran class. Did he ever renounce Islam? There is no record of his doing so.”
The debunked claim that President Obama was a Muslim began circulating widely during Obama’s 2004 Senate campaign, according to reports in The Los Angeles Times and The Washington Post. According to a 2007 article by The Associated Press, while Obama lived in a Muslim-majority country, Indonesia, for four years during his youth, he attended a Catholic school and a secular public school. "Senator Obama has never been a Muslim," Obama spokesperson Barry Gibbs told The Associated Press in 2007.

Because GellerReport.com has frequently published false, misleading, and unsubstantiated claims, NewsGuard has determined that the site has repeatedly published false content, fails to gather and present information responsibly, and does not avoid deceptive headlines.

The site does not post a policy explaining how it corrects errors. The only correction NewsGuard found on the site was in the previously noted February 2018 article about Nikolas Cruz, and that correction did not address the false claim originally made in the article.

Because GellerReport.com has not corrected numerous articles known to contain false content, the site does not meet NewsGuard’s standard for regularly correcting errors.

The site is transparent about its political perspective and agenda on the About page, describing Geller as “a foremost defender of the freedom of speech against attempts to force the West to accept Sharia blasphemy laws.” However, stories labeled as “Latest News” on the site regularly include opinion.

For example, a June 2020 article, headlined “Judge denies emergency request to stop Trump’s Tulsa campaign rally due to coronavirus fears,” stated, “Despicable! Thousands of Leftist thugs destroyed and looted in every major city in America, while their lapdogs in the mainstream media and Hollywood cheered them on. Now the tyrannical Left is trying to stop the Trump rallies.”
A May 2020 article about the violence that marked multiple protests against police brutality stated: “This is the result of Democrat rule in every major American city. The left’s war on civilized society. They want chaos. The deep state of liberals want to damage the country to blame Trump and ruin his re-election.”

Another May 2020 article criticized the stay-at-home orders that were issued during the COVID-19 pandemic. “The objective isn’t ‘safety,’ the objective is global subjugation to the left,” the article stated. “But first they must destroy capitalism, destroy the individual — take control of everything you have.”

All these articles were labeled “Latest News.”

Because GellerReport.com includes opinion in articles labeled as news, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

The site did not respond to three emails from NewsGuard, including one sent in 2020, inquiring about its history of publishing false content, its approach to corrections, and its separation of news and opinion.

Transparency

Pamela Geller is listed as the site’s founder, editor, and publisher, as well as president of the American Freedom Defense Initiative. However, AFDI is not explicitly named as the site’s owner, and AFDI does not disclose any major donors. Therefore, the site does not meet NewsGuard’s standard for nonprofits’ transparency regarding financing.

Articles on the site are generally credited to Geller, and her biography is provided on the About page. An email address is provided on the site’s Contact page.

Advertisements are not always distinguished from editorial content. The site publishes sponsored links from other websites, under the heading “Recommended” and labeled only as “Powered by FeedNetwork.” This does not meet NewsGuard’s standard for clearly labeling advertising.
The site did not respond to three emails from NewsGuard, including one sent in 2020, seeking comment on the site’s lack of disclosure regarding its financing and its labeling of advertisements.

History

The site’s domain name was registered in 2016, but includes earlier material from PamelaGeller.com and her first blog, Atlas Shrugs. The New York Times reported that Geller worked on the business side of The New York Daily News through the 1980s, before serving as associate publisher of The New York Observer from 1989 to 1994.

Geller helped organize protests in 2010 against plans to build an Islamic community center two blocks away from the site of the World Trade Center. In May 2015, Geller hosted an exhibition and contest for drawings of Muhammad — which is prohibited according to many interpretations of Islamic law. Two gunmen shot and wounded a security officer at the event before being killed by police. Geller was later named as a target of a foiled assassination plot organized by three men in the name of the Islamic State terrorist group.

Editor’s Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on June 25, 2020, with new examples of the site’s content. This update also reflects that the site now meets NewsGuard’s standard for providing information about content creators, but does not meet the standard for clearly labeling advertising. The criteria checklist has been adjusted accordingly. This label was previously updated, in January 2019, to indicate that the site does not meet the standard for disclosing ownership and financing.

Written by: John Gregory
Edited by: Jim Warren, Eric Effron

Send feedback to NewsGuard: Click Here

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