

pjmedia.com

A conservative site that has promoted misleading and unfounded claims, including about the COVID-19 pandemic, and does not distinguish between news and opinion.



Proceed with caution: This website fails to adhere to several basic journalistic standards.

Score: 57/100

Ownership and Financing

PJMedia.com is part of Townhall Media, a publisher owned by Salem Media Group, a publicly traded company whose properties, according to its website, target “audiences interested in Christian and family-themed content and conservative values.” Salem also owns more than 100 radio stations, most of which are Christian-themed talk and music stations; more than a dozen websites; a publishing arm; Christian-themed mobile apps; and investment advice sites. Salem Media acquired Townhall Media in March 2019.

Townhall Media also includes conservative sites Townhall, Red State, Twitchy, Hot Air, and Bearing Arms.

The site derives revenue from advertising and selling PJ Media VIP memberships, which provide subscriber-only content.

Content

PJ Media discloses its political perspective on its About Us page, stating: “Since its inception in 2005, PJ Media has been focused on the news from a center-right perspective -- from the insightful commentary provided by our all-star lineup of columnists to our writers' quick takes on breaking news and trending stories.”

Content largely consists of political news punctuated with conservative commentary from PJ Media’s contributors, delivered mostly in the News & Politics section. Columnists on the site have included J. Christian Adams, a member of President Trump’s disbanded voter fraud commission, and Claudia Rosett, a former Moscow bureau chief and member of the editorial board of The Wall Street Journal.



Does not repeatedly publish false content (22points)



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.](#)

Typical articles have run under headlines such as “What’s Behind the Left’s Insane Push to Blame Trump for the Riots?,” “Voters Saw Joe Biden Moving Left Even Before the Horrific Unity Platform,” and “Georgia Democrat Defends Trump, Eviscerates Black Lives Matter Narrative.”

The site features a daily live blog updated with other news outlets’ reporting, along with PJ Media’s conservative commentary. PJMedia.com also links to Instapundit, a news-aggregation blog run by Glenn Reynolds, a PJ Media co-founder.

Credibility

Most articles on PJ Media consist of writers’ commentary on breaking news and on reporting from other sites, ranging from Politico and the Chicago Tribune to the South China Morning Post. Headlines, while often opinionated, generally do not contain false information and accurately reflect the content of articles.

However, articles on PJMedia.com have frequently included distorted or misleading claims, including about the COVID-19 pandemic.

For example, a July 2020 article headlined “COVID-19 May Soon Lose Status as an ‘Epidemic’ Under CDC Guidelines,” promoted a misleading claim originally published by JustTheNews.com.

“Despite the recent spike in COVID-19 cases, deaths have continued to decline and may soon reach a level where the coronavirus will no longer qualify as an epidemic under CDC guidelines,” the article stated. “A disease outbreak qualifies as an ‘epidemic’ by the CDC when the number of weekly deaths caused by the disease exceeds a certain percentage of overall deaths, explains Daniel Payne of Just The News.”

The basis for this claim in the PJ Media article was a June 27, 2020, report on COVID-19 deaths from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. As quoted by PJ Media, the report said, “Based on death certificate data, the percentage of deaths attributed to pneumonia, influenza or COVID-19 (PIC) decreased from 9.0% during week 25 to 5.9% during week 26,

representing the tenth week of a declining percentage of deaths due to PIC.” However, the PJ Media article omitted the next sentence from the report: “The percentage is currently at the epidemic threshold but will likely change as more death certificates are processed, particularly for recent weeks.”

CDC spokesperson Kristin Nordlund explained in a July 2020 email to NewsGuard that the “epidemic threshold” mentioned in this weekly report refers to “the point at which the observed proportion of deaths is significantly higher than would be expected at that time of the year in the absence of substantial influenza, and now COVID-related mortality.” That threshold, however, would not determine whether the COVID-19 qualifies as an epidemic, as the PJ Media article claimed.

“This one piece of data doesn’t have bearing on whether COVID-19 is still an epidemic,” Nordlund said. In a separate statement to fact-checking website PolitiFact in July 2020, Nordlund said that death rates alone do not “have bearing on whether COVID-19 is still an epidemic,” because the primary factor is the extent of the outbreak.

A May 2020 article included false claims about the safety of wearing face masks. The story cited claims by Dr. Russell Blaylock, a retired neurosurgeon, in an article for NewsGuard Red-rated website Technocracy.news. The PJ Media article repeated Blaylock’s claims that wearing a mask could cause the COVID-19 virus to enter the brain. “By wearing a mask, the exhaled viruses will not be able to escape and will concentrate in the nasal passages, enter the olfactory nerves and travel into the brain,” the article stated.

There is no evidence backing this claim. In a May 2020 fact-checking article from The Associated Press, Sarah Stanley, an infectious diseases professor at the University of California, Berkely, said that the claim lacked any scientific basis. “Breathing out the virus is not going to appreciably change the amount that is there,” Stanley told The Associated Press. “Therefore, there should be no reason why wearing a mask would increase your chance of infection in the brain.”

The article also cited Blaylock to claim “there is no scientific evidence that masks are effective against COVID-19 transmission.” Blaylock backed this claim by citing a review of 17 studies, published in the journal *Influenza and Other Respiratory Viruses*, that concluded “none of the studies established a conclusive relationship between mask/respirator use and protection against influenza infection.”

This study did not study the COVID-19 virus. A review of existing scientific evidence published in *The Lancet* in June 2020 found that “face mask use could result in a large reduction in risk of infection, with stronger associations with N95 or similar respirators compared with disposable surgical masks or similar.” Additionally, the CDC states on its website that its recommendation for people to wear cloth face coverings “is based on what we know about the role respiratory droplets play in the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19, paired with emerging evidence from clinical and laboratory studies that shows cloth face coverings reduce the spray of droplets when worn over the nose and mouth.”

The article also included false claims that were later addressed by a correction. The article claimed that face masks would cause hypercapnia, a condition of having too much carbon dioxide in the bloodstream, and thus impair the immune system response to the COVID-19 virus. In fact, health care workers who regularly wear face masks for long periods of time have not experienced an accumulation of carbon dioxide. According to a May 2020 article from health fact-checking website [HealthFeedback.org](https://www.healthfeedback.org), even surgical and N95 masks used by health care workers are porous enough to allow gas molecules such as carbon dioxide to pass through, while limiting exposure to the respiratory droplets that could spread the COVID-19 virus.

PJ Media’s correction notice added to the top of the article partially addressed these claims. The correction stated: “Many in the medical field are disputing Dr. Blaylock’s claims and do not see wearing a mask as a serious risk to healthy people, although people who

have breathing difficulties, such as those with COPD, smokers, etc., may be adversely affected. Nor do the masks weaken the immune system, according to these medical professionals. While most concede that hypercapnia is possible, they say it is highly unlikely, especially with cloth masks.”

This correction, however, did not address other false claims made in the PJ Media article noted above.

In July 2020, PJ Media Deputy Managing Editor Bryan Preston did not respond to two emails from NewsGuard seeking comment on the site’s COVID-19 coverage.

Articles posted in August 2018 and January 2019 both stated that “Some studies have shown that induced abortion increases the risk of breast cancer.” While the articles pointed to a study, in fact, the National Cancer Institute and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists have repeatedly reviewed scientific evidence since 2003 and concluded that there is no link between abortion and breast cancer. An ACOG analysis of multiple studies on the purported breast cancer and abortion link found that some earlier research asserting that a link existed was “methodologically flawed.” Additionally, the American Cancer Society has stated that “scientific research studies have not found a cause-and-effect relationship between abortion and breast cancer.”

After being contacted by NewsGuard in July 2019, PJ Media updated the January 2019 article to say “some studies have shown that induced abortion may increase the risk of breast cancer *in some women*” [emphasis added] — a claim that ignores the abundance of scientific evidence stating that no link exists. The August 2018 article was not changed.

In a February 2019 article, titled “The Six Most Bizarre Proposals from Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s Green New Deal,” five of the six proposals mentioned are not actually included in the resolution under consideration in the House, which is aimed at addressing climate change. Contrary to the site’s claims, the resolution introduced in February 2019 does not call for “getting rid of airplanes” or “getting rid of cows,” aim to “get rid

of gas-powered cars in a decade,” call for eliminating carbon emissions in ten years “without the use of nuclear power,” or “promise ‘economic security’ for those ‘unwilling to work.’”

Another February 2019 article, titled “The Ocasio-Cortez ‘Green New Deal’ Is Even Shoddier and More Absurd Than You Thought,” repeated some of those claims, stating that the resolution “calls for abolishing cows, nuclear energy, and airplanes.” The article refers to the FAQ as a “summary” of the Green New Deal resolution, despite the substantial differences in the documents’ content.

PJ Media managing editor Paula Bolyard told NewsGuard in a July 2019 email that the claims about the Green New Deal were included in opinionated articles “that included hyperbole as a rhetorical device. I don’t see a reason to make any changes to that.”

An August 2018 article, headlined “96 Percent of Google Search Results for ‘Trump’ News Were from Liberal Media Outlets,” was based on Bolyard’s unspecified number of Google News searches for “Trump” on several computers. She based her conclusion on which news sites showed up in the first 100 results, stating that the only “right-leaning” news site she found in those results were The Wall Street Journal and Fox News. To determine biases of individual news organizations, Bolyard used a chart from Sharyl Attkisson, a former CBS reporter who now hosts a Sunday morning show for Sinclair Broadcast Group. The chart labeled wire services such as The Associated Press and Reuters, as well as ABC News, NBC News, and CBS News, among many other mainstream sites, as “left.” Fox Business picked up the story and it was cited by President Trump as evidence of Google’s anti-conservative bias.

While Bolyard acknowledged in the article that her experiment was “not scientific,” she presented it as evidence that Google’s search algorithm creates “blatant prioritization of left-leaning and anti-Trump media outlets.”

The article prompted follow-ups by other news organizations. On tech site Gizmodo.com, a reporter said that a Fox News story on another Trump-related subject was the top result when he searched for “Trump News.” The Washington Post reported that three days after the PJ Media article was published, it was Bolyard’s story that was then among the top results when searching “Trump News.” Google has denied that its news search algorithms favor left-leaning sites.

Bolyard defended her report in an email to NewsGuard, saying “I was very clear to explain in the article that it was anecdotal. No doubt many sites and individuals mischaracterized the article, but that’s something beyond our control. Alleged Google bias is another example of a topic where there is widespread disagreement.”

Prior to being contacted by NewsGuard, PJ Media advanced conspiracy theories about the death of Seth Rich, a Democratic Party staffer who was shot in Washington in July 2016. Rich’s murder spawned a conspiracy theory that he was murdered for allegedly being the source of internal Democratic National Committee emails that were published by WikiLeaks.

For example, a May 2017 article, headlined “Fox News: Murdered DNC Staffer Sent 44,053 Internal Emails to WikiLeaks,” cited Fox News’ reporting to claim that Rich was the source of DNC emails leaked to WikiLeaks, further stating that “there is evidence on Rich’s laptop that confirms he was emailing WikiLeaks prior to his death.”

Fox retracted its story a week later, but PJ Media did not update the story for two years, before removing the article in July 2019.

Law enforcement and intelligence agencies have refuted the claim that Rich’s death was somehow connected to WikiLeaks’ publishing of damaging information about Hillary Clinton. Washington police stated the murder occurred during an attempted robbery. The claim was also discredited in the Mueller report on Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, which stated that WikiLeaks had “implied

falsely” that Rich was the source of the DNC emails, when the real source was a group of Russian hackers. A July 2019 report from Yahoo News traced the origin of the conspiracy claims about Rich’s death to Russian foreign intelligence service SVR.

After being contacted by NewsGuard in July 2019, PJ Media altered this story, appending an editor’s note stating the article was “updated to remove references to suggestions that Rich was murdered as the result of his involvement in the release of emails from the DNC — allegations have not held up to scrutiny.”

Because PJMedia.com articles have frequently relied on distorted, misleading, or unsubstantiated claims about a range of issues, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not gather and present information responsibly.

The site posts a corrections policy on its About Us page, stating: “Corrections and updates to articles (except for minor typographical errors) are noted at either the top or the bottom of the article, depending on the magnitude of the correction.” NewsGuard found a total of 11 corrections published between January 2019 and July 2020.

However, the site has neglected to correct numerous false claims in other stories, including the articles linking abortion to cancer and articles claiming COVID-19 may not qualify as a pandemic under CDC guidelines.

In the case of the May 2017 article promoting the conspiracy theory about the death of Seth Rich, PJ Media removed the story more than two years after Fox News retracted its story.

In another case in which the site neglected to correct faulty information, a January 2019 article, headlined “Texas Says 58,000 Non-Citizens Cast Ballots in 2018 Elections,” was based on a claim made by Texas Secretary of State David Whitley. However, after Texas election officials found that tens of thousands of people included in that figure were indeed U.S. citizens, Whitley apologized, acknowledging that his initial

statement caused “some confusion.” In February 2019, a federal judge ruled that there was no evidence of widespread voter fraud in Texas, and in April 2019, Whitley’s office rescinded the advisory that claimed 58,000 non-citizens had voted in Texas in 2018. None of the developments that followed the publication of the original PJMedia.com article were reported by the site, and the original article was not corrected.

Therefore, although PJ Media does issue corrections, because there are multiple uncorrected stories on the site that are demonstrably false, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not meet its corrections standard.

Asked about uncorrected errors in stories, Bolyard said that “PJ Media has published somewhere in the neighborhood of 150,000 articles since its inception. With our small editorial team, it would be impossible to go through each and every article to check for updates. However, if factual errors are brought to our attention, we will most certainly correct them.”

PJ Media discloses the site’s “center-right perspective” on its About Us page. However, articles posted in the site’s News & Politics section regularly include opinionated statements and are not labeled opinion.

For example, a July 2020 article, headlined, “Pro-Trump Goya CEO Pushes Back Against Boycott Calls,” stated, “There is creeping desperation that’s overtaking any rational opposition to Trump. Democrats have always been unhinged about Trump, and the left has burst their blood vessels every time the president opens his mouth. But the closer we get to the election, the more desperate the opposition is getting.”

A third July 2020 article, titled “Why Isn’t Black Lives Matter Protesting the Slavery That Still Exists Today?,” stated: “It is, or ought to be, clear to everyone by now that Black Lives Matter is not a genuine movement for racial justice and a more equitable society, but a Marxist organization using real, exaggerated, and imagined racial injustice to try to destroy the United States.”

Because the site routinely includes opinions in articles labeled as News & Politics, NewsGuard has determined the site does not handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

Asked about the site's approach to opinion, Bolyard said: "Our News and Politics section has changed from straight news to op-eds."

Transparency

PJMedia.com's ownership is disclosed on the site's About Us page, which says it was acquired by Salem Media Group in March 2019.

Articles on PJMedia.com generally include the name of the writer, and the bylines link to the author's biography and contact information.

The About Us page lists the site's contributors, columnists, editors, and leadership. The same page includes an email address for booking PJ Media writers. The Contact Us page provides two additional email addresses for media requests and editorial/technical requests.

Advertising and sponsored content are distinguishable from editorial content.

History

The company was founded as Pajamas Media in 2005 by Roger L. Simon, a novelist, columnist, and screenwriter once nominated for an Academy Award for co-writing the 1989 film "Enemies, A Love Story," and conservative bloggers Glenn Reynolds and Charles Johnson. The company's name was changed to PJ Media in October 2011, with the Pajamasmedia.com site redirecting to PJMedia.com.

Simon wrote in October 2011 that the name "Pajamas Media" came from a comment by a CBS News executive aimed at critics of CBS News anchor Dan Rather, for his handling of a since-discredited 2004 "60 Minutes" segment questioning then-President George W. Bush's National Guard record. Coming to Rathers' defense, CBS News executive Jon Klein stated: "You

couldn't have a starker contrast between the multiple layers of checks and balances [at '60 Minutes'] and a guy sitting in his living room in his pajamas.”

In 2008, Pajamas Media, launched PJTV, an Internet-based conservative television channel. The television component shut down in 2016, and its content is archived on PJMedia.com.

Corrections: An earlier version of this Nutrition Label referred to Claudia Rosett as a former Wall Street Journal Moscow bureau reporter; she was the bureau chief. The label also incorrectly noted that Fox News had picked up a PJ Media story; it was Fox Business. NewsGuard apologizes for the error.

Editor's Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on July 16, 2020, with new examples of the site's content. This label was previously updated to reflect that the site discloses its ownership and labels advertising and that it added a corrections policy and a disclosure of a political perspective — although these additions did not result in changes to the site's rating.

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Send feedback to NewsGuard:[Click Here](#)

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Financing

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