The website of The Washington Times, a conservative, daily national newspaper owned by the Unification Church that has published false and unsubstantiated claims, including about the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ownership and Financing

The Washington Times has been owned by the Unification Church through multiple, privately held companies since the paper was founded in 1982. Church founder Reverend Sun Myung Moon, a self-described messiah and cult-like figure who died in 2012, invested more than $1 billion in The Washington Times during its first 20 years.

Operations Holdings, Inc. owns The Washington Times through one of its subsidiaries, TWT Holdings, LLC, which was registered in 2010. Both are incorporated in Delaware. The Unification Church owns Operations Holdings, Inc. It also owns or controls hotels, schools, and other media outlets and businesses, which the church says have generated tens of millions of dollars each year.

The Washington Times earns revenue from advertising, sponsored content, and subscriptions.

Content

The Washington Times publishes conservative-leaning news and commentary about local, national, and international issues. Content appears in six main sections — News, Policy, Commentary, Sports, Special Reports, and Podcasts — and covers topics such as politics, national and international security, business, religion, and entertainment. Typical stories include “Elizabeth Warren claimed ‘American Indian’ race on State Bar of Texas registration card,” “New Mexico’s governor pulls National Guard troops from border,” and “Debate judge disqualifies students for citing ‘white supremacists’ Jordan Peterson, Ben Shapiro.”

The site also features a Trump Central section, with coverage of U.S. President Donald Trump’s administration. News stories run alongside the

Score: 42/100

- Does not repeatedly publish false content (22 points)
- 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.
president’s Twitter and Facebook feeds, under the prominent label “Connect with Donald Trump.”

Articles are largely produced by Washington Times staff. News services such as The Associated Press also contribute content.

The site also produces multiple podcasts about U.S. politics, including “Politically Unstable,” featuring commentary on top politics stories by Washington Times’ opinion editor Charlie Hurt and politics editor Stephen Dinan.

Credibility

Stories published by The Washington Times are generally produced by its staff and often cite primary documents, or published research. Headlines and images, which are attributed, generally reflect articles’ content. The Washington Times won 16 Dateline Awards from the Society of Professional Journalists’ Washington chapter in 2020, including first-place awards for Washington beat reporting, business coverage, and sports columns.

Despite those accolades, The Washington Times has published several false, misleading, or unsubstantiated claims in news and opinion articles, including about the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

For example, the website published several articles during the same week in July 2020 and August 2020 that promoted the anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine as an effective treatment for COVID-19. The articles generally omitted the abundance of scientific evidence and research published in 2020 that has concluded that the drug has been proven ineffective.

In an August 2020 news article titled, “Doctor goes on offensive after coordinated attacks on hydroxychloroquine,” the Washington Times interviewed Dr. James Todaro, an ophthalmologist who has promoted the use of hydroxychloroquine for COVID-19, saying he “stood on the steps of the Supreme Court last week to join fellow doctors in touting hydroxychloroquine as a viable early-stage treatment for those who contract the coronavirus.”
The article did not entirely ignore negative information about hydroxychloroquine, stating “Some states have banned its use as a COVID-19 treatment. The Food and Drug Administration has issued strict cautions about its use — though the agency says decisions about it should be left to doctors and patients.”

However, the article failed to mention any of the randomized clinical trials that have definitively found that hydroxychloroquine failed to provide benefits to COVID-19 patients. In June 2020, U. K. researchers ended the use of hydroxychloroquine in a large trial that had involved 4,600 patients. “We have concluded that there is no beneficial effect of hydroxychloroquine in patients hospitalised with COVID-19,” researchers Martin Landray and Peter Horby, who conducted the RECOVERY trial, said in a statement.

Another trial, involving 400 patients, conducted at the University of Minnesota, and published in the Annals of Internal Medicine, found that hydroxychloroquine did not decrease the severity of COVID-19 symptoms over 14 days any better than a placebo in patients who were not hospitalized.

In addition, Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said at a July 2020 congressional hearing, “Any and all of the randomized, placebo-controlled trials — which is the gold standard of determining if something is effective — none of them have found any efficacy for hydroxychloroquine.”

Instead of citing the research and expert opinions above, the article only cited one specific study on the drug, which was retracted in June 2020 by the journal The Lancet because its raw data could not be verified, not because it was found to contain false data. The study was retracted “thanks in large part to Dr. Todaro,” the Washington Times article said.

Another August 2020 article, an edition of The Times’ “Inside the Beltway” column that was labeled as “news” on its website, also failed to mention negative studies on hydroxychloroquine. The article, titled “Hydroxychloroquine: Dr. Stella Immanuel’s big
question for Dr. Anthony Fauci,” called Immanuel “a Houston-based physician who believes that the anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine can defeat the coronavirus. She has said in interviews that she has treated over 400 patients with the drug, approved by the FDA in 1955.”

Neither Immanuel or The Washington Times has provided data or a published study showing that she has successfully treated COVID-19 patients with hydroxychloroquine. While it is true the drug has been approved by the FDA for decades, the article failed to mention that the FDA had revoked its emergency use authorization (EUA) related to treating COVID-19. “Based on its ongoing analysis of the EUA and emerging scientific data, the FDA determined that chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine are unlikely to be effective in treating COVID-19 for the authorized uses in the EUA,” the FDA said in a June 2020 press release.

The article also omitted any information about clinical trial evidence showing the drug is ineffective for treating COVID-19, only saying that Fauci “does not favor use of the drug.”

An April 2020 opinion story, headlined “COVID-19 turning out to be huge hoax perpetrated by media,” claimed that the COVID-19 pandemic is “not even the flu on a bad year.”

“When the postmortem is done on the media’s coverage of COVID-19 (and it will be), it will be clear that the virus was no Black Plague — it’s not even the flu on a bad year. SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19, has killed 56,749 Americans as of Tuesday. That’s not good. But it’s not as bad as the 2017-2018 flu season, when 80,000-plus perished.”

The article does not cite a source for this claim. The CDC estimated that 61,000 people died from the flu in the October 2017 to May 2018 flu season, which represented the highest death toll from the flu in a decade. The 80,000 figure cited in The Times opinion story appeared to be based on an earlier CDC estimate
of 79,000 deaths during the 2017-18 flu deaths which had been revised downward to 61,000 in November 2019.

In addition, in May 2020, a study published by researchers from Harvard University and Emory University in the journal JAMA Internal Medicine found that weekly death tolls from COVID-19 in April 2020 were 20 times higher than the deadliest week of an average flu season, refuting the Washington Times’ claim that the COVID-19 pandemic is “not even the flu on a bad year.”

In a November 2019 opinion article titled “Burisma shows double standard of Democrats,” WashingtonTimes.com advanced the theory that then-U.S. Vice President Joe Biden fired a top Ukrainian prosecutor, Viktor Shokin, in 2016 in order to protect his son, Hunter Biden, who sat on the board of the Ukrainian natural gas company Burisma Holdings.

The article said, “On Biden, where the quid pro quo intent was obvious — where Joe Biden actually bragged about threatening to hold up $1 billion in U.S. aid to Ukraine unless then-President Petro Poroshenko fired a prosecutor who was investigating, in part, Burisma Holdings, where Hunter served as a board member — it’s all conspiracy theory and tin hat crazy to suggest anything nefarious, to call for deeper scrutiny.”

The article also claimed that Biden “pressured Ukraine to oust Shokin as an investigator into Burisma corruption.”

There is no evidence that Biden supported firing Shokin to protect his son or Burisma, or that Burisma was under investigation at the time Shokin was fired. Biden was among several U.S and European officials who had called for Shokin’s removal because of corruption charges, not because of any pending investigation of his son, according to a FactCheck.org 2019 article.

The Washington Times has also published false claims in past years about former U.S. President Barack Obama’s U.S. citizenship and religion. A 2019 NewsGuard review found approximately 10 articles
published between 2009 and 2012 that promote false claims about Obama, including a five-part series that questioned whether Obama is a Christian, and claimed that he is, and was raised as, a Muslim. As of July 2020, the articles about Obama all remained online. None have been corrected.

A June 2009 column titled, “GAFFNEY: America’s first Muslim president?” claimed: “What little we know about Mr. Obama’s youth certainly suggests that he not only had a Kenyan father who was Muslim, but spent his early, formative years as one in Indonesia.” A September 2012 column by Daniel Pipes, “PIPES: Obama: ‘My Muslim faith’” quoted a Los Angeles Times article about Obama, reporting that “as a child, Obama had spent time in the neighborhood’s Islamic center.” Pipes wrote, “Clearly, ‘the neighborhood’s Islamic center’ is a euphemism for a mosque. Spending time there again points to Mr. Obama’s being a Muslim.”

There is no evidence to suggest that Obama is a Muslim. Although his father, Barack Obama Sr., was raised as a Muslim, he later said that he was an atheist. Although the younger Obama attended a predominantly Muslim school when he lived in Indonesia from ages 6 to 10, Obama said at the National Prayer Breakfast in February 2009 that he “was not raised in a particularly religious household” and that he became a Christian after college, when he moved to the South Side of Chicago. The former president has spoken openly about his Christian faith on many other occasions and has written about it in his memoirs.

A column in October 2008, a month before Obama was elected president, titled “GAFFNEY: The jihadist vote,” promoted the false “birther” theory about Obama’s U.S. citizenship, stating that “another question yet to be resolved is whether Mr. Obama is a natural born citizen of the United States, a prerequisite pursuant to the U.S. Constitution” and asserting, “There is evidence Mr. Obama was born in Kenya rather than, as he claims, Hawaii.”

Obama’s long-form birth certificate, which he released in April 2011, states that he was born in Honolulu, Hawaii. There is no evidence to suggest that he was
born in Kenya.

Because The Washington Times has published multiple false or misleading claims, including about the COVID-19 pandemic, NewsGuard has determined that the website does not meet NewsGuard’s standard for gathering and presenting information responsibly.

The Washington Times regularly publishes corrections, which usually appear as italicized notes at the end of stories. In 2018, it issued a retraction and apology for a column that promoted a false theory that Democratic National Committee staffer Seth Rich was killed in 2016 because he shared DNC emails with WikiLeaks. Law enforcement authorities said Rich was killed after a botched robbery. The retraction was published as part of a settlement with Rich’s brother, Aaron, who sued the publication.

The website published a clarification in March 2020 to a January 2020 story that advanced claims of an Israeli intelligence analyst that the COVID-19 virus “may have originated in a laboratory” in Wuhan, China. The note said, “Since this story ran, scientists outside of China have had a chance to study the SARS-CoV-2 virus. They concluded it does not show signs of having been manufactured or purposefully manipulated in a lab, though the exact origin remains murky and experts debate whether it may have leaked from a Chinese lab that was studying it.”

However, The Washington Times has not corrected several other articles referenced above, including the false claims about former President Obama’s citizenship and religion. Because the Washington Times has not corrected significant factual misstatements, including some that have been online for at least a decade, NewsGuard has determined that the website does not meet NewsGuard’s standards for having consistent, effective corrections practices.

The Washington Times has published conservative-leaning news coverage, including in stories that can include opinionated language.
For example, a July 2019 story about U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren’s decision to participate in a conference hosted by the liberal activist group Netroots Nation, was headlined “Netroots Nation abandoned by Dem. field: Warren only one to court rabid left.” The story began, “Sen. Elizabeth Warren is the only top-tier Democratic presidential candidate attending the gathering of liberal activists at this year’s Netroots Nation convention, as most of the radical leftists in this race scramble to avoid an event notorious for brazen hecklers and demonstrators.”

An October 2019 story titled “Seattle-area officials shun ICE despite second sanctuary city-related killing,” about the arrest of an undocumented immigrant on suspicion of murder, began, “Prosecutors last week announced a second sanctuary city-related murder case involving an illegal immigrant in the Seattle area, but that has yet to shake local officials who despite the brutality of the slayings say they are not yet ready to begin working with ICE.” The article discussed a second killing in which an undocumented immigrant was a suspect, and continued, “The two murders have not sparked much soul-searching among Seattle officials.”

The Washington Times’ About page describes the paper as “a trusted counterweight to the mainstream media” and says that it “was founded to represent readers outside the Capital Beltway by promoting “American values — freedom, faith and family — and to challenge a media establishment catering to coastal elites.” While some conservative websites have used the words “freedom, faith and family” to describe its perspective, NewsGuard does not believe that this description corresponds to an overall political orientation. However, the added description of its mission as being to “challenge a media establishment catering to coastal elites” does, in NewsGuard’s judgment, convey a conservative orientation, though barely so.

Nonetheless, because of the injection of such strongly opinionated statements in articles labeled as news, NewsGuard has concluded that the Washington Times
Christopher Dolan, executive editor of The Washington Times, and Ian Bishop, the paper’s digital editor, did not respond to eight NewsGuard emails and eight voicemails seeking comment about its editorial practices, including its publication of false or unsubstantiated claims about the COVID-19 pandemic, its failure to correct false stories about Obama, and its conservative opinion in news stories.

**Transparency**

WashingtonTimes.com identifies The Washington Times, LLC as its owner in copyright language at the bottom of the website. However, the website does not clearly disclose its relationship to TWT Holdings, LLC, Operations Holdings, Inc. or the Unification Church, although its connection to the church is widely known. Some articles that cover the Unification Church disclose the connection between the two entities, but others either do not mention it or do not explicitly explain the relationship.

Dolan and Bishop did not respond to eight NewsGuard emails and eight voicemails seeking comment about The Washington Times’ disclosure of its ownership by the Unification Church.

Articles on WashingtonTimes.com generally name authors, link to an archive of the writer’s work and, in many cases, short biographies. Most writers provide email addresses, and sometimes a link to their Twitter profile. Author names are also included on the site’s homepage and on main section pages.

A Contact Us page lists the names, titles, email addresses, and telephone numbers of top editors and columnists at The Washington Times. The page also includes a telephone number for the newspaper, and general email addresses for letters to the editor and the opinion section.

Display advertising is typically distinguished from editorial content. However, WashingtonTimes.com publishes other paid content that is not clearly labeled. The website publishes sponsored links from other
websites under the heading “Recommended,” and marked only as “Powered by FeedNetwork,” which does not meet NewsGuard’s standard for clearly labeling advertising.

Washington Times Director of Digital and Marketing Adam VerCammen told NewsGuard in a 2019 telephone interview that the “Powered by FeedNetwork” label distinguishes the content from editorial content. “It has a different text, different color, different font,” he said. “It clearly does not look like our content.”

The website also regularly publishes stories paid content that appears under the headings, “Special Reports” or “Special Sections,” on the homepage alongside straight news stories.

The “Special Reports” sections list packages of stories, such as those titled “Qatar: What Makes America’s Greatest Ally Special,” and "Energy 2019: Bipartisan thought leadership on how to power America — and the world,” which are sponsored and produced within the website’s Advertising and Marketing Division, next to packages of stories that are produced by the website’s news staff, such as “COVID-19 Updates.”

The sponsored stories also appear on the homepage under the title “Special Reports,” and are not differentiated from news content listed in the same section.

VerCammen told NewsGuard that the content in the “Special Reports” sections is “one big advertorial” and said it was properly labeled. “We know the rules on native and all that good stuff and we think, not we think, we know, we’re in line,” VerCammen said.

History

Unification Church founder Reverend Sun Myung Moon founded The Washington Times in 1982. It was intended to be “another source of news and information in the nation’s capital,” according to a March 1982 article in The Washington Post. The WashingtonTimes.com domain was registered in 1998.
The newspaper was twice a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, in 2007 for feature photography and in 2003 for breaking news photography.

The Washington Times has had close ties to Republican presidential administrations — former U.S. President Ronald Reagan called it his favorite paper — and it has also served as a platform for many well-known conservative journalists, including Tony Snow, who was the newspaper's editorial page editor from 1987 through 1991, and Tony Blankley, who was a columnist and editorial page editor while at the newspaper between 1997 and 2007.

Prominent opinion columnists have included former Republican House Speaker Newt Gingrich and conservative pundit Michelle Malkin.

The Washington Times has written publicly that the Unification Church does not exert any editorial control, but staff have refuted this claim, and one-third of the newspaper's founding editorial staff were church members.

Amidst family infighting for control over the Unification Church's operations and a decline in advertising income at The Washington Times, the paper's three top executives were fired in 2009. One of Rev. Moon's sons, Kook-jin (Justin) Moon, cut off most of the paper's annual subsidy around that time, which The Washington Post reported to be about $35 million. The elder Moon moved ownership of the newspaper to another company in 2010, which also assumed the paper's debts.

Moon founded the Unification Church in South Korea in 1954 and brought it to prominence in the United States in the early 1970s. Moon was convicted of filing false income tax returns and of conspiracy to defraud the federal government in 1982. He served 13 months of an 18-month sentence.

Under the leadership of the late Wesley Pruden, from 1992 to 2008, the newspaper covered white nationalist conferences and regularly ran excerpts from right-wing publications such as VDARE and commentary by neo-
Nazi Bill White. Pruden also ran a full page in The Washington Times’ Saturday print edition dedicated to the Civil War, which often glorified the Confederacy.

Pruden retired from The Washington Times in 2008, although he continued to write a twice-weekly opinion column until he died in July 2019. A 2006 article by The Nation magazine recounted many allegations of racism and sexism at the paper, including from former staffers, under Pruden’s regime.

Correction: An earlier version of this Nutrition Label also incorrectly reported that the newspaper’s Civil War page ran on Sundays; it appeared in the Saturday edition. NewsGuard apologizes for the error.

Editor’s Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on Aug. 18, 2020. Following a review of new content on the site, this Nutrition Label was previously updated on August 7, 2020, and its rating was changed, to reflect NewsGuard’s determination that WashingtonTimes.com no longer meets NewsGuard’s standard for gathering and presenting information responsibly. The criteria checklist has been adjusted accordingly. This Nutrition Label was updated in 2019, and its rating was changed to show that WashingtonTimes.com does not meet NewsGuard’s standard for regularly issuing corrections or for clearly labeling advertising.

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Send feedback to NewsGuard: Click Here

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