

NewsGuard

aljazeera.com

The website for the English language affiliate of the Qatari state-funded news agency, Al Jazeera. The site often advances the interests of the government of Qatar and does not disclose its government ties.

 52 / 100

Proceed with Caution: This website generally fails to maintain basic standards of accuracy and accountability.

- ✓ Does not repeatedly publish false or egregiously misleading content 22 points
- ✗ Gathers and presents information responsibly 18
- ✓ Has effective practices for correcting 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

Ownership and Financing

Al Jazeera English (AJE) is part of the Al Jazeera Media Network, a media conglomerate encompassing Al Jazeera Arabic (AJA), the online youth-targeted news outlet AJ+, and several other Al Jazeera foreign language affiliates. Al Jazeera was founded in 1996 by Qatar's then-ruling Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. Originally named Al Jazeera Satellite Network and run as a public organization by the Qatari government, Al Jazeera changed its name and legal status in 2006 to become what the site describes as a "private corporation established for the public benefit." That year, the network launched Al Jazeera English (AJE).

Al Jazeera, which is Arabic for "The Arabian Peninsula," continues to be owned and funded by the Qatari government. Juan Carlos Van Meek, Al Jazeera's Director of Digital Innovation & Programmes, told NewsGuard in a February 2019 email that the amount of funding the network receives from the Qatari government "varies every year" and that "more of our revenue is coming in from advertising and sponsorships."

Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer Al Thani, a former official with Qatar's Ministry of Information and Culture and a member of the royal family of Qatar, the House of Al Thani, is chairman of the Board of Directors of Al Jazeera, which oversees all of the channels under the Al Jazeera umbrella.

The site generates revenue through advertising.

Content

AJE runs globally focused news coverage and investigations mixed with analysis and commentary. Content is browsable by region and topic; sections include

Economy, Ukraine war, Coronavirus, and Science & Technology. A video section and Live section feature segments and live coverage from Al Jazeera's English-language television channel.

Al Jazeera showcases a wide range of viewpoints. The organization first came to many westerners' attention in 2001 when it began broadcasting recordings made by al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. The Guardian wrote in 2017 that in Arab countries, the launch of Al Jazeera had allowed "all kinds of previously banned voices to be heard, from the Israelis and Muammar Gaddafi to Chechen rebels, the Taliban and Osama bin Laden." Broadcasting content that is taboo elsewhere has prompted criticism of the network, some of it based on misconceptions. For example, former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld inaccurately claimed in 2005 that Al Jazeera had broadcast footage of beheadings.

Al Jazeera English is distinct from Al Jazeera Arabic (AlJazeera.net). While the two often share bureaus, they function as two separate outlets. Foreign Policy magazine wrote in February 2014 that "The two channels are entirely separate: different management, different editorial lines, even physically separate buildings in Doha." AJE's coverage is sometimes considered biased in the West, but it is generally more restrained than the overtly opinionated AJA. Hussein Ibish of the Arab Gulf States Institute told The Economist in July 2017 that Al Jazeera Arabic was like "Fox News on steroids; it goes much further, flirting with the promotion of violence."

In October 2023, after the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war, Israel's government approved a regulation that "could pave the way for censoring Al Jazeera," according to The Washington Post. The regulation would allow Israeli officials to halt broadcasts of any outlet deemed to be pushing "enemy propaganda," the Times of Israel reported.

"The proposed regulations appear designed to allow [Israeli Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi] to shut down the local offices of the Al Jazeera news

network, which he has accused of harming national security and inciting violence, but critics have expressed concern that they could impinge on the freedom of the press,” the Times of Israel reported. As of early November, Israel had not moved to ban the network.

Also, Axios reported on Oct. 25, 2023, that U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken advised Qatar to “tone down Al Jazeera's rhetoric” about the conflict. However, Blinken appeared to be talking about Al Jazeera Arabic, not the English-language channel.

Credibility

The Al Jazeera Media Network maintains over 70 bureaus globally and produces a significant amount of original reporting. AlJazeera.com also republishes content with attribution from The Associated Press, Reuters, and Bloomberg. News articles are generally supported with a range of attributed sources and photographs. Headlines accurately represent content.

The site regularly runs corrections. When a news story is corrected, a note is added at the top of the article describing what was incorrect and how it has been remedied.

Al Jazeera has prominently reported on several historically significant events. The organization was the only news agency in Iraq during the first weeks of Operation Desert Fox in 1998 and again in Afghanistan during the 2001 U.S.-led invasion. During the Arab Spring, Al Jazeera became the leading source for information about the turmoil: Business Insider reported in January 2011 that the outlet's web traffic increased by 2,500 percent during the Egyptian revolution. The Atlantic lauded Al Jazeera in January 2012, proclaiming “Al Jazeera correspondents are the first on the scene, and Al Jazeera anchors and interviewers provide the most detailed follow-up, discussion and analysis of breaking events in the Arab world.”

Al Jazeera has been accused of biased reporting and of popularizing extremist content in line with the strategic goals of the Qatari government. In particular, critics often allege that Al Jazeera promotes violent Islamism, anti-semitism, and anti-Americanism, and that it harshly covers governments at odds with Qatar. However, such criticism is typically made of Al Jazeera Arabic, not Al Jazeera English.

A number of countries have restricted, censored, or outright banned Al Jazeera for alleged misreporting. During the 2017–2021 blockade of Qatar by neighboring states including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt, one of 13 demands made of Qatar was that it shut down Al Jazeera. Israel later joined in this demand and revoked press passes for Al Jazeera journalists in the country.

Although individual news stories on AJE rarely editorialize, the site's coverage of Qatar's rivals tends to skew toward unflattering stories while its comparatively rare reporting on Qatar is almost always neutral or positive.

For example, coverage of the Israel-Hamas war that erupted in October 2023 has generally focused on Israel's assault on Gaza, depicting Israel in a harsh light. Typical headlines about the war have included "Israel retaliation kills 230 Palestinians after Hamas operation," "Israel bombs Greek Orthodox Gaza church sheltering displaced people," "I struggle to envision life after Israel's war on Gaza – if we survive," "Israel's 'war against Gaza's children' explained," and "Israel bombed a family home in Gaza, generations of Saqallahs were inside."

NewsGuard also found that Al Jazeera's coverage of the Oct. 17, 2023, explosion at a Gaza hospital left the impression that Israel was clearly responsible, despite the fact that no definitive cause had been established. For example, an Oct. 17, 2023, article was titled "Outrage spreads across Middle East after attack on Gaza hospital," with a subtitle stating, "Anger is palpable across the Middle East and North Africa as thousands take to the streets to protest Israel's attack."

“Thousands of protesters took to the streets across the Middle East and North Africa on Tuesday to show their outrage in the aftermath of a deadly Israeli air attack on the Al-Ahli al-Arabi Hospital in Gaza,” the article began. It was only at the end of the third paragraph that the article stated: “Israel has denied responsibility for the attack.”

An Oct. 18, 2023, article titled “Israel-Gaza: What international law says about the deadly hospital strike,” stated, “The bombing of al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza has pushed countries and organisations around the world to label Israel’s recent aggressions as a ‘war crime’, a ‘massacre’, and a ‘violation of international humanitarian law.’”

The article noted Israel’s denials of responsibility, but cast doubt on those denials. “Israel placed blame on the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, something viewed by many as part of a pattern where officials falsely attribute responsibility for attacks to other parties, often Palestinians themselves,” the article stated.

In days following the blast, Israel, the United States, and some independent experts stated that the blast appeared to be the misfiring of a rocket controlled by Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), an anti-Israel militant group in the region. On Oct. 18, a day after the blast, a spokeswoman for the U.S. National Security Council stated that the U.S “assesses that Israel was not responsible for an explosion that killed hundreds of civilians yesterday at the Al Ahli Hospital in the Gaza Strip.”

Al Jazeera’s coverage of the war is consistent with its general practice of portraying Israel in a negative light. For example, articles in March 2023 about Israel included “Israeli attack wounds Palestinians as settlers and soldiers dance,” “Israel kills 15-year-old Palestinian ‘shot in the back’,” and “‘Repugnant’: US rebukes Israeli remark on Palestinian village.”

In contrast, March 2023 articles about Qatar included “Qatar ships World Cup portable homes to quake-affected Turkey,” “Qatar’s emir criticises aid delay to Syria earthquake victims,” and “Qatar’s emir names new PM, carries out cabinet reshuffle.”

This selective approach to covering the Middle East, coupled with persistent allegations that Qatar’s government leans on Al Jazeera’s leadership to push Qatar’s geopolitical aims, has led NewsGuard to conclude that AJE does not adequately distinguish its news agenda from the strategic interests of its ownership. Therefore, NewsGuard has determined that Al Jazeera does not handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

During a previous review, NewsGuard found that AJE disclosed on its About Us page that it was funded “in part by the Qatari government.” However, during a November 2023 review, NewsGuard found that as of the spring 2023, Al Jazeera no longer disclosed its ties to the Qatari government and only described itself on the About Us page as “the first independent news channel in the Arab world.”

In NewsGuard’s view, this omission is significant because it deprives readers of relevant information that could help them assess the credibility of the site’s content. Moreover, as noted above, in its November 2023 review, NewsGuard found that AJE routinely gave credence to unconfirmed Palestinian claims of an Israeli airstrike on a hospital, while diminishing or ignoring countervailing evidence.

Therefore NewsGuard has determined that AJE no longer meets the standard for gathering and presenting information responsibly.

Three 2023 emails to Stuart Pendleton, News Editor at AJE, about the site’s coverage of the Israel-Hamas War, did not draw a response.

In January 2021, Al Jazeera Product Manager James Ku told NewsGuard that he had referred NewsGuard’s questions to the editorial team; however, no further

comment was received. Two May 2022 inquiries through the site's contact form also did not elicit a response.

Transparency

As mentioned above, the site's About Us page previously stated that "Al Jazeera is an independent news organisation funded in part by the Qatari government." However, as of November 2023, the site's About Us page no longer discloses its relationship to the Qatari government.

Because Al Jazeera no longer discloses this relationship, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not meet the standard for disclosing ownership and financing.

Stuart Pendleton, AJE's editor, did not respond to a November 2023 email inquiring about Al Jazeera's lack of an ownership disclosure.

The About Us page used to feature a "Leadership at Al Jazeera" tab, which listed the network's Chairman of the Board, Director General, managing directors, and executive directors, with links to biographies for each. However, as of May 2022, this information does not appear anywhere on AlJazeera.com and is only accessible on Al Jazeera's corporate website, network.AlJazeera.net.

Because few readers would know to look on a separate website for information about the site's leaders, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not meet the standard for revealing who is in charge in a user-friendly manner.

News articles on AlJazeera.com typically do not name the writer, and those that do generally do not provide contact or biographical information about them.

Asked about the site's approach to identifying its content creators, Al Jazeera Product Manager James Ku told NewsGuard in a January 2021 email that the company planned to rebuild its staff directory. However, as of May 2022, it did not appear that the company had done so.

NewsGuard did not receive a response to two May 2022 inquiries on the matter sent through the site's contact form.

Advertisements are clearly labeled.

History

Al Jazeera was founded in 1996 in a bid to use Qatar's growing oil and gas wealth to boost the small, historically vulnerable country's diplomatic and cultural power abroad. Many of the organization's founding journalists had previously worked at an Arabic BBC channel which operated in Saudi Arabia until censorship by the Saudi government forced the station's closure. In 2013, Al Jazeera launched Al Jazeera America, a cable and satellite television channel targeted at the U.S. The channel closed in 2016 in the face of persistently low viewership.

In December 2020, Canadian research laboratory Citizen Lab published a report alleging that operatives in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia had used spyware created by the Israeli firm NSO Group to hack "36 personal phones belonging to journalists, producers, anchors, and executives at Al Jazeera." The hacks were initially detected because one of those targeted, Al Jazeera host Tamer Almisshal, had allowed Citizen Lab to install a virtual private network (VPN) application on his phone to monitor metadata about his internet traffic, following threatening messages that he said he had received.

Since its launch in 1996, 12 Al Jazeera journalists have been killed in the line of duty, according to the network. In May 2022, a prominent Al Jazeera correspondent, Shireen Abu Akleh, was killed while reporting on an Israeli military raid in the West Bank. Witnesses and Al Jazeera said she was killed by Israeli forces, but Israel denied that. Abu Akleh's death sparked widespread condemnation, which intensified after Israeli police officers were filmed beating and kicking mourners carrying her coffin during her funeral procession. Israeli

police said that the mourners were throwing stones at them and “disrupting public order.”

Editor’s Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on Nov. 10, 2023, to reflect that AlJazeera.com no longer meets the standard for gathering and presenting news and information responsibly and for disclosing its ownership and financing. The criteria checklist was adjusted accordingly. This Nutrition Label was previously updated on March 7, 2023, May 16, 2022, and Jan. 25, 2021.

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