

GOP Funds Messaging Sites That Look Remarkably Like Trusted Local News | Ars Technica

By Megan Geuss

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A variety of Republican Party messaging websites have been popping up, styled after local news sites. These sites claim to be “unbiased,” but they are actually funded by Republican donors, candidates, and organizations. Politico has been chronicling the appearance of these sites, and an investigation from [Snopes published last week](#) reveals GOP funding sources for three similar sites: The Tennessee Star, The Ohio Star, and The Minnesota Sun.

The trend started gaining steam in 2017. In Maine, [a website called the Maine Examiner was revealed to be owned by a top Maine Republican Party official](#) after the site had reportedly influenced a contentious mayoral election. Democrats lodged an ethics complaint, but the party official, Jason Savage, said his work on the website was not related to his work for the party.

The Maine Ethics Committee declined to investigate the Democratic Party’s complaint, but [recent news of leaked emails](#) that were passed to Savage and the Maine Examiner during the election could reopen the possibility of an investigation.

The tactic marks an aggressive shift in how politically motivated information is distributed. [Poynter notes](#) that Americans across the political spectrum trust local news media more than any other kind of media, whereas Americans trust online-only news sites the least. Making an online-only media site look like an extension of a truly well-established local newspaper or TV station is a way to capitalize (or prey) on some of that trust.

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