

 PROPUBLICA

Not Everything Has Changed

REPORT TO STAKEHOLDERS, MAY-AUGUST, 2017



Not Everything Has Changed

Much has changed since Election Day, November 8, including at ProPublica. We added new beats on immigration, the President’s personal business interests, white supremacy and hate crimes, extra reporting firepower on environmental issues, and much more—not to mention extensive coverage of the new administration, much of it focused on transparency.

But the need for the deep-dive investigative reporting for which ProPublica is best known remains as critical as it has ever been. In a short attention-span world, in an atmosphere of politics that sometimes seems divorced from policy, in a news ecosystem often addicted to quick clicks, shallow answers and an absence of context, ProPublica proudly marches to a different drummer.

Over the middle period of 2017, ProPublica took on stories that other news organizations would pass on as being too complex, time-consuming or legally risky. This kind of journalism is an essential and effective weapon against abuses of power and betrayals of the public trust. Here are just a few ways that we have shined a light on such issues wherever we find them.

Improving Maternal Health

One of our most resonant series this year has been *Lost Mothers*, a collaboration between ProPublica reporter Nina Martin and NPR special correspondent

Renee Montagne. It takes an unsparing look at why the U.S. has the highest maternal death rate in the developed world. Every year, 700 to 900 American women die from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes (with 60 percent of these deaths being preventable), and some 65,000 women come very close to dying. And while maternal mortality has declined significantly in other wealthy countries in recent years, it is rising in the U.S.

After launching the series with the harrowing story of Lauren Bloomstein, a neonatal nurse who died in childbirth in the hospital where she worked — of preeclampsia, a preventable type of high blood pressure — Martin and Montagne are continuing to illuminate factors that contribute to the problem. This includes confusion over how to recognize and treat obstetric emergencies, a lack of awareness that treats maternal mortality as a private tragedy instead of a public health crisis, disparities in care that put African-American women at significantly greater risk than white women, and a health care system that focuses on babies but often ignores their mothers.



Our Lost Mothers series launched with the harrowing story of Lauren Bloomstein, a neonatal nurse who died in childbirth in the hospital where she worked. (Bryan Anselm for ProPublica)

Holding the DEA Accountable

Senior reporter Ginger Thompson, who covers the U.S.-Mexico border, partnered with National Geographic to give an inside look at what went wrong in Allende, a Mexican town just south of the border, which suffered unspeakable violence at the hands of the Zetas drug cartel. In 2011, after learning of a DEA informant, cartel leaders demolished homes and businesses, kidnapping and killing dozens — possibly hundreds — of men, women and children. In a remarkable feat of reporting, Thompson repeatedly traveled to the small Mexican town and persuaded eyewitnesses to participate in an oral history of the attack.

Thompson's research led to a startling discovery: The massacre was inadvertently set in motion by the DEA. She learned that DEA agents in Dallas had shared intelligence, obtained from a source inside the Zetas, with a Mexican police unit known to leak to traffickers. Within days, the Zetas suspected that someone in Allende had become a U.S. informant, and they unleashed an attack that left scores of people dead. The DEA insists it bears no responsibility for what happened. It has not investigated the source of the leak, or changed its rules for sharing sensitive

information with Mexico. The U.S. government has done nothing to help the Mexicans who bore the brunt of the Zetas' attack.

Exposing Toxic Fires

Thirty years ago, citing adverse health effects and environmental hazards, Congress banned industries and local governments from burning hazardous waste in open pits. Yet this practice of "open burning" still takes place in our country, with the military disposing of unused munitions and raw explosives nearly every day — releasing millions of pounds of toxic chemicals and pollutants into the air.

In an unprecedented examination of the disposal of military waste and how it affects poor communities across the U.S., senior reporter Abrahm Lustgarten collected tens of thousands of pages of documents, and interviewed more than 100 state and local officials, lawmakers, military historians, scientists, toxicologists and Pentagon staff. Along with data reporters Lena Groeger and Hilary Fung, he identified 61 sites where open burns are actively being conducted, exposing people to dangers that experts say will persist for generations.



Pharmacist and toxicologist Lee Cantrell tested drugs that had been expired for decades. Most of them were still potent enough to be on the shelves today. (Sandy Huffaker for ProPublica)

Debunking Health Care Myths

This year reporter Marshall Allen has been covering a type of medical waste that is seldom tracked, from the valuable supplies that hospitals throw away to wildly overpriced drugs whose true costs are hidden from doctors and patients. His latest story laid bare the myth of expired drugs. Hospitals and pharmacies are required to dispose of drugs that have passed their expiration date, no matter how expensive or vital. Allen reported, however, that the Food and Drug Administration has long known that many drugs remain safe and potent for years after their expiration date. The U.S. health care system wastes an estimated \$765 billion a year — as much as a quarter of all the country's health care spending.

Documenting Hate

As always, not all important coverage comes in the form of a deep dive. When news of murder at a neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville, Va., spread across the country last month, many responded with disbelief, insisting that such abhorrent views and behavior were un-American. But ProPublica's Documenting

Hate project, which has been collecting data and reporting on hate crimes and bias incidents since January, had already established that instances of hate are actually all too common. Documenting Hate involves 125 newsrooms across the country. We asked people to tell their personal stories and have so far have collected more than 3,000 incidents.

In addition to collecting data that documented surges in anti-Semitic activity and anti-immigrant sentiments, we told the stories behind the statistics. Reporter A.C. Thompson chronicled how members of the Sikh community in America have faced suspicion and violence for more than 100 years, in part because of the erroneous assumption that they are Muslim. Thompson also delivered on-the-scene dispatches from Charlottesville, reporting on the new face of America's white supremacy movement. Many of the marchers chanting "Jews will not replace us" were clean-cut, college-educated young people who abandoned the political mainstream in recent years for extremist ideologies.

With a goal to build the most complete national database of hate crimes and bias incidents, the Documenting Hate team is working through the tips we receive and tackling the questions of why the nation's official record keeping is so inadequate.



Alec MacGillis, co-published with New York magazine, showed how HUD Secretary Ben Carson is gutting the agency with a staggering \$7 billion in budget cuts and spiraling mismanagement. (Cameron Cottrill, special to ProPublica)

Covering the Trump Administration

ProPublica has also actively covered the new Trump administration. A collaboration between ProPublica reporter Robert Faturechi and the New York Times' Danielle Ivory, for example, unmasked secretive teams that President Trump assembled to aggressively scale back government regulations — an effort often conducted by political appointees with deep industry ties and potential conflicts. An investigation by Alec MacGillis, co-published with New York magazine, showed how HUD Secretary Ben Carson is gutting the agency with a staggering \$7 billion in budget cuts and spiraling mismanagement. Jessica Huseman and Annie Waldman reported how the Trump administration is quietly rolling back civil rights efforts

across the federal government, curtailing the use of consent decrees and court oversight for addressing civil rights abuses.

Our inquiries about new government personnel revealed that Trump's lead bank regulator previously worked to help banks avoid laws that protect consumers, White House advisor Jared Kushner served as an abusive landlord to hundreds of tenants in low-income housing units in the Baltimore suburbs, and the president's pick for chief scientist of the USDA is not a scientist at all.

These are just some examples of our recent work to ferret out hidden facts and expose wrongdoing. And as our entire newsroom has always done, ProPublica will continue to tell the stories that aren't being told elsewhere.

Impact

The most important test of ProPublica is whether our work is having impact. By this, we mean not audience size or honors, but real-world change. Examples of what we mean can be found at <http://www.propublica.org/impact/>, as can a white paper on how ProPublica thinks about impact and related questions. In the middle period of 2017, ProPublica stories produced such change in a number of important areas:

■ **Online safety strengthened.**

After we reported that Cloudflare, a major content delivery network, provides services to neo-Nazi sites like the Daily Stormer — including giving them names and email addresses of people who complain about their content — the company altered its policies. In response to our report, Cloudflare now allows people in certain instances to complain anonymously, and is more selective about sharing with its clients the personal information of people who report objections. The service provider later ended its relationship with the Daily Stormer, taking the site off the mainstream US internet.

■ **Workers' rights protected.**

In May, ProPublica documented how Case Farms, a chicken plant in Ohio, has for decades relied on undocumented immigrant workers to staff its dangerous factories. When workers fought for better conditions or were seriously injured on the job, the company used their immigration status to quash dissent and evade worker's compensation. Citing our reporting, the Ohio House of Representatives amended a bill to remove a

provision that would have barred unauthorized immigrants from getting workers' comp benefits.

■ **Business partnership with extremist site severed.** In August, we reported how leading tech companies are helping ex-

tremist sites monetize and stay in business. PayPal facilitated donations to the anti-immigration site VDARE, for example, while the online news network Newsmax pays anti-Muslim site Jihad Watch in exchange for users clicking on its headlines, despite policies that



After Yuliana Rocha Zamarripa hurt her knee at work, an investigator working for her employer's insurance carrier reported her for using a false Social Security number. (Scott McIntyre for ProPublica)



After a 2016 ProPublica investigation, the Houston police department ended its longstanding practice of using faulty chemical field tests. (David Sleight for ProPublica)

say they don't do business with hate groups. After the story, payment processors PayPal and Plaso discontinued services to at least five sites identified by ProPublica.

■ **Harmful police practice abandoned.** A 2016 ProPublica investigation published with the New York Times Magazine spotlighted how the Houston Police Department uses roadside drug tests to secure guilty pleas, sending hundreds of people to jail in recent years — despite widespread evidence that the tests routinely produce false positives. This July, the police department ended its longstanding practice of using the faulty tests, following an order from the then-Harris County District Attorney to require that any positive field tests be confirmed in a crime lab before a guilty plea could be won.

■ **Predatory practices investigated.** We reported in January that Wells Fargo inappropriately charged customers fees to extend promised interest rates when their paperwork was delayed. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau followed up on our reports with an investigation into the bank's mortgage fee practices; the investigation remains underway.

■ **Ground-breaking data documented.** The May issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association focused on conflicts of interest in medicine, repeatedly citing ProPublica's work across seven articles. Our key health care investigations from 2013 and 2014 — showing that doctors who receive payments from the medical industry tend to prescribe more brand-name drugs, and that doc-

tors prescribe massive quantities of inappropriate and needlessly expensive drugs — were especially noted, suggesting that ProPublica's pioneering work is critical to discussion of these issues.

■ **Inconsistent hate speech rules amended.** In our reporting on Facebook and the secret guidelines the company's censors use to distinguish between hate speech and legitimate political expression, we published a trove of internal Facebook documents that explain the rationale behind seemingly inconsistent decisions on which types of user posts get deleted. Using their hate speech algorithm, we found, white men fall under protected categories of people — based on gender, race or religious affiliation — but black children, for instance, do not. Following the story, Facebook changed its rules to add age as a protected category, an adjustment that will now lead to the deletion of some slurs.

■ **Health crisis detected.** Our reporting with NPR about maternal mortality in the U.S. spotlighted preeclampsia, a dangerous type of hypertension that can emerge after a baby is delivered, when it is often overlooked. Having recently read the story and four days after delivering her first child, Marie McCausland, a 27-year-old scientist in Ohio, recognized that her painful symptoms might be preeclampsia and raced to the nearest emergency room. Although the ER doctor claimed nothing was wrong, she stayed until another doctor was consulted — and her severe preeclampsia was treated, likely saving her life.

What People Are Saying

We ask donors why they gave to ProPublica. Here's a sampling of recent answers.

*"Thank you for continuously providing the public with quality investigative journalism. A friend of mine had posted one of your articles on his Facebook page, and it caught my attention. I was impressed; it was obvious that the journalist spent a great deal of time and effort on the article. The first thought that popped into my mind was 'Now that's what I call true journalism!' Needless to say, I have been following your publication ever since." — **Erin***

*"I lament the current state of journalism in this country and the general negative attitude many of our citizens have regarding the vital role of a free press in our republic. Much of the journalistic tradition has been replaced by corporate-owned media, more concerned with sensationalism and ratings than holding our society's leaders to account. Use my donation well and keep up the good work." — **Bill***

*"Keep doing what you do, and keep seeking/speaking the truth. 'Real news' isn't just what we want to hear. It's the truth whether we agree with it or not, whether it devastates us or lifts us up, and I will always applaud and support it." — **Patricia***

*"It's extremely important for journalists to be non-partisan truth seekers, protecting and defending our country and democracy from those who would do it harm. Real journalists deserve to be supported — like our troops, they protect citizens. After reading your ethics, goals, and focus I stand behind what you are trying to achieve. The openness with which you provide information (your financials being easily accessible is a plus) earns my support and trust. Though I may not agree with some of the focus, I have high regard for the process and am trusting that seeking the facts for the betterment of the country, rather than an agenda, will always be your focus." — **Katherine***

*"Happy to make my small donation to the cause of open inquiry. If we haven't learned anything else over the past twelve months, we should have learned that independent, hard-driving journalism is worth paying for. I have no illusion that my small donation will stem the tide of partisan spin-doctoring, but I do know that with many other small donations, democracy will be served. Keep up the good work, ProPublica. The nation needs you now more than ever." — **David***

Honors

Most journalism awards are bestowed in the first months of the year, when ProPublica was honored with its fourth Pulitzer Prize, but honors received in the middle period of 2017 included the following:

Our prescient project with Texas Tribune, “**Hell and High Water**,” on how a major hurricane could devastate the Houston region, won the Edward R. Murrow National Award in the category of investigative reporting, and is a finalist for the Online Journalism Awards for excellence and innovation in visual digital storytelling, and University of Florida Award for Investigative Data Journalism. The series was also a finalist for the Knight-Risser Prize for Western Environmental Journalism, and the National Academies Communications Award in the online category.

“**Fire Fight**,” our investigation into the state-by-state lobbying efforts of U.S. homebuilders to block life-saving fire sprinklers from new homes won the National Press Club’s Sandy Hume Memorial Award for Excellence in Political Journalism.

Electionland, a national reporting initiative that covered voters’ experiences during the

2016 election in real time, won the Data Journalism Award for News Data App of the Year and the Society of Professional Journalists’

Sigma Delta Chi Award for online non-deadline reporting, and is a finalist for the Online Journalism Award for planned news/events.



Electionland, a national reporting initiative that covered voters’ experiences during the 2016 election in real time, won several awards. (John Brecher for ProPublica)



Illustrations for our “A Gunfight in Guatemala” investigation were selected for American Illustration’s annual showcase. (Christopher Park for ProPublica)

“**Busted**,” which exposed how police use error-prone drug kits to convict thousands of people every year, won the Sigma Delta Chi Award for public service in online journalism, and was a finalist for the Gerald Loeb Award for Distinguished Business and Financial Journalism in the investigative category.

A ProPublica series on **anti-trust enforcement** — explaining why the Justice Department backed down from fighting corporate concentration in the airline industry, and exposing the hidden world of economic consultants working for merging corporations — won the Excellence in Economic Reporting Award.

“**Rent Racket**,” our series on how New York City landlords sidestep tenant protections, won the Excellence in Financial Jour-

nalism Award in the local category and the Deadline Club Award for digital local news reporting, and is a finalist for the Online News Association’s Al Neuharth Innovation in Investigative Journalism Award.

An investigation about **Jared Kushner’s role as a real estate developer** and shoddy landlord to hundreds of tenants in low-income housing units in the Baltimore suburbs won the Sidney Award for June.

ProPublica is a finalist for the Online Journalism Award for **general excellence in online journalism**.

Our series with Consumer Reports on **racial disparities in car insurance premiums** is a finalist for the Online News Association’s Al Neuharth Innovation in Investigative Journalism Award.

“**Lost Mothers**,” our series with NPR exploring the maternal mortality crisis in the U.S., is also a finalist for the Online News Association’s Al Neuharth Innovation in Investigative Journalism Award.

Our series exploring the hidden power of computer-generated algorithms, “**Breaking the Black Box**,” is a finalist for the Online Journalism Award for topical reporting.

Represent, a news application that tracks how elected officials vote, is a finalist for the Online News Association’s Gannett Foundation Award for Technical Innovation in the Service of Digital Journalism.

The **ProPublica Data Store** was a finalist for the Data Journalism Award for open data, and two ProPublica reporters — Lena Groeger and Derek Willis — were named finalists for the Data Journalism Award for Best Individual Portfolio.

Six ProPublica reporters were named finalists for the Livingston Awards, which honor outstanding achievement by journalists under the age of 35: Al Shaw and Jeff Larson for “**Hell and High Water**,” and Sisi Wei, Lena Groeger, Cezary Podkul and Ken Schwencke for their news application that tracks **evictions and rent stabilization in New York City**.

Several of our illustrations were honored by American Illustration, selected for the organization’s annual showcase. Their hardcover book will feature two original illustrations from ProPublica investigations: “**A Gunfight in Guatemala**” and “**Dr. Orange: The Secret Nemesis of Sick Vets**.”

By the Numbers

4,300,000	Average ProPublica.org pageviews per month	UP 83% YEAR-OVER-YEAR
2,500,000	Average unique ProPublica.org visitors per month	UP 148% YEAR-OVER-YEAR
690,000+	Twitter followers	UP 6% SINCE MAY 1
346,000+	Facebook fans	UP 8% SINCE MAY 1
125,000+	Email subscribers	
4,000+	Additional donors	

Publishing Partners, May–August, 2017

New partners marked in **bold**:

- Atlantic
- BBC
- **Bloomberg View**
- Chicago Tribune
- Consumer Reports
- Des Moines Register
- **Forbes**
- Houston Chronicle
- Huffington Post
- IRE Journal
- Kaiser Health News
- **National Geographic**
- **New York Magazine**
- New Yorker
- New York Times
- NPR News
- Politico
- Real Deal
- Stars and Stripes
- Stat
- **Texas Monthly**
- Texas Tribune
- Washington Post
- **Vanity Fair**
- Virginian-Pilot