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Data-Driven Journalism

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Data Critique 1

A Critique of “[The Pandora Papers](https://www.icij.org/investigations/pandora-papers/)” by the International Consortium of International Journalists

The ICIJ data visualization for their groundbreaking story “The Pandora Papers” is a great example of well-done data journalism. This story, considered one of the largest in journalism history, shows how the financial system benefits from the wealthiest and most powerful people in the world. At first glance, this story is extremely visual. Just the cover page of the story catches your eye right away with its use of a deep red and bright white colors mixed in with black in the drawings. The drawing itself shows recognizable buildings and monuments like the Statue of Liberty and the Gherkin exemplify this story’s global impact. These elements along with the lighting and currency from all over the world falling from the sky create an eerie dark feeling for the reader, immediately capturing their attention. Overall, the initial visual is a strong way to present what data was gathered throughout the reporting of this story.

Since this is such a large-scale story, there are a number of data elements used in every piece. It is reported that over 600 journalists from over 150 news outlets analyzed over 12 million documents for this story, resulting in multiple stories exposing financial scandals across the globe. In one story, “[How a billion dollar housing bet upended a Tennessee neighborhood](https://www.icij.org/investigations/pandora-papers/how-a-billion-dollar-housing-bet-upended-a-tennessee-neighborhood/)” they use a neighborhood map to show the numbers of homes owned by a large real estate firm in Nashville. For the most part, I think this visual is clear in what it is showing: the top half is a portion of a single neighborhood where the firm owns multiple properties and the bottom half is a zoomed out map to show highly-concentrated areas where the firm owns properties. The one critique I have of this visual is that the neighborhood snapshot would be more impactful if it showed the whole neighborhood. I might not be a real estate expert, but I think it is common for firms to own multiple properties within a neighborhood, so maybe the scale would be more impactful if it was a whole neighborhood rather than a few streets.

One thing that really stands out to me as something done well in this story is the access given to the reader to a lot of the data the journalists had. The ICIJ posted an “[Offshore Leaks Database](https://offshoreleaks.icij.org)” that allows readers to look up all of the companies who were involved in the Pandora Papers. I think this is incredibly unique and interesting because most stories present the data to you, but have you sort through it yourself, so it leaves some room for audiences to do their own research. They have done this for other stories as well and I think this is very well-done on their part.

Another critique I have, not about the data, but the story itself, is that it is a little difficult to navigate. When you get to the homepage you see the cover and it catches your attention immediately, but then it is a little hard to find where the stories begin and what order you should be reading them in so that you simultaneously understand the investigation and all of the data being presented to you. Since the concept is broken up into so many smaller stories, I think an easier way to navigate through it would be nice.

One story in this investigation that I liked was “[5 ways celebrities in the Pandora Papers use the offshore system](https://www.icij.org/investigations/pandora-papers/shakira-sachin-julio-celebrities-use-offshore/).” I liked this story because I think that a lot of the other stories could get bogged down with all of the financial jargon and this one has that sense of pop culture that could break that up a little bit. I think this is also a great angle to take on the issue because it isn’t always just billionaires working in hedge funds and large corporations who participate in leaks like this, but sometimes the celebrities we idolize. A nice touch at the end of the story was a visual that detailed three different celebrities and you could interact with it by expanding the bar to read more information. I think this was a good and simple interactive touch.

I chose this article because I think it serves as a really good example of taking data and turning it into a story that people can follow. Although the interaction and navigation isn’t as user-friendly, the message and importance of the story are clear. I really enjoyed this investigative project overall and I think although there are some things I would have done a little differently, the content speaks for itself and shows how data can be turned into great pieces of journalism.