# *Flash!*

Voter's Edge empowers 2.1 million users in 2016 elections

This year, thanks to Voter's Edge, 2.1 million people in California, Illinois, and New York were able to find the information they needed to cast more informed votes in the primary and general elections.

During elections, the media is saturated with news and ads about presidential races and other high-profile contests. Meanwhile, voters (who often have limited time and access to information) struggle to find even basic facts about down-ballot races, leading them to vote on the basis of limited or misleading messages—or opt out altogether.

That's where Voter's Edge comes in.

For the 2016 elections, MapLight expanded the groundbreaking Voter's Edge California model— piloted in 2014 in partnership with the League

http://votersedge.org
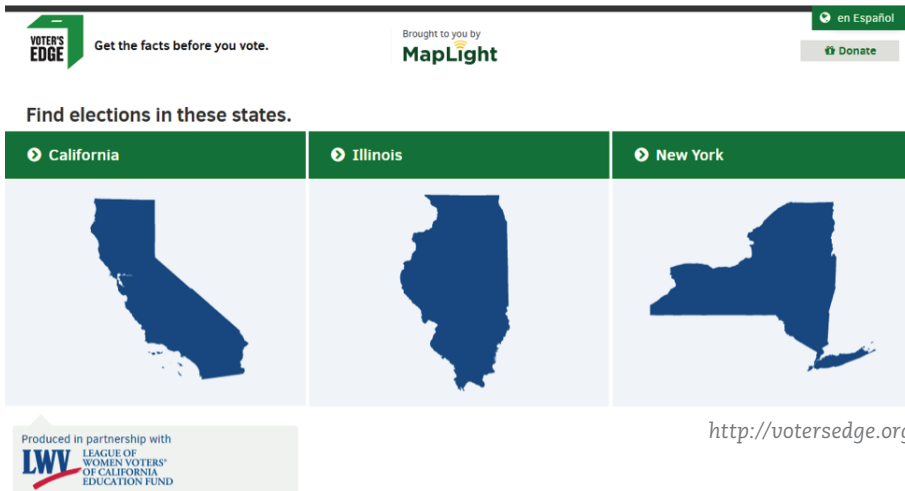
of Women Voters of California Education Fund (LWVCEF)—to new territory. We covered federal, state, and local elections in Illinois and New York as well as California, giving more than one in five Americans access to information about every contest on their ballot.

The fully redesigned guide featured a professionally translated Spanish-language site, a tool called "My List" that let users save their

## New website from MapLight makes it easier to investigate dark money

In May, MapLight launched Dark Money Watch, an online hub for information about election spending by groups that don't disclose their donors. The site explains how dark money works, profiles the key players involved with it, and includes a comprehensive guide to sources of data for investigating dark money. An up-to-date news section aggregates recent articles and features original reporting by MapLight.

One featured MapLight investigation found that the number of "social welfare organizations" that can raise and spend dark money has surged since the Citizens United Supreme Court case; 60% of the more than 3,800 such nonprofits were created after the 2010 decision. In another story, we examined data from the Political TV Ad Archive and determined that dark money groups were more likely to spend money on attack ads than any other type of ad sponsor.

"There's no question our current political system keeps voters in the dark about who is spending to influence their vote—making it all the more critical that the tools and information to understand secret spending are centralized and accessible," said MapLight President Daniel Newman about the launch of the site. MapLight hopes that Dark Money Watch—whose launch was promoted by Politico, Forbes, and former U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich, among others—will inspire journalists and citizens to take a closer look at the special interests influencing American elections from the shadows.

http://darkmoneywatch.org
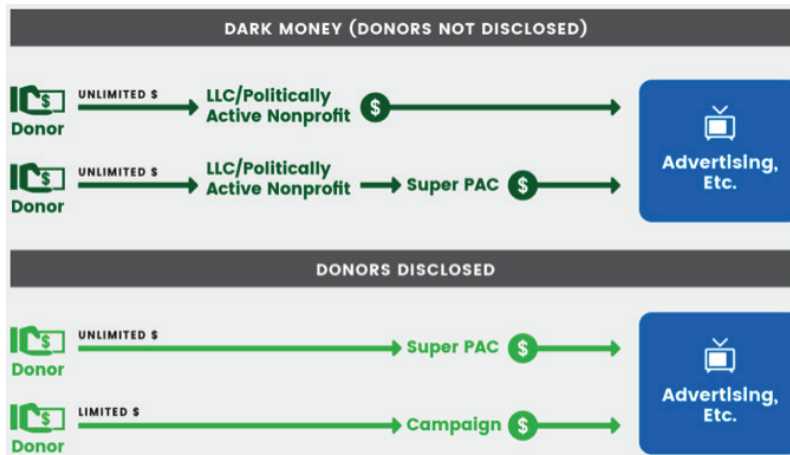
Dark Money Watch was made possible through partnerships with the Sunlight Foundation, the Political TV Ad Archive, and the Center for Responsive Politics, as well as by grants from the Lisa and Douglas Goldman Fund and the Blue Haven Fund. MapLight greatly appreciates these partners and donors for their work educating the public about the influence of dark money in our country.

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U.S. Congress contributions data provided by the Center for Responsive Politics (OpenSecrets.org) and the Federal Election Commission (FEC.gov) and legislative data provided by GovTrack.us. California contributions data provided by the California Secretary of State (Sos.ca.gov).

SPOTLIGHT: **MapLight in the community**

According to the Corporation for National Community Service, one in four Americans volunteers their time in the community. MapLight's employees are no exception. Over half of our staff participate in causes close to their hearts or actively engage with their communities through hobbies outside of work:

Ayça: "I volunteer at the Bonsai Garden at Lake Merritt in Oakland. We welcome visitors and assist with events at the lake, and also help with the beautification and upkeep of the garden."

Chelsea M. works as an advocate at a sexual assault and rape crisis center.

Chelsea W. babysits for families in her neighborhood.

DeAnna: "I volunteer at the Berkeley Animal Shelter as a dog walker and new volunteer mentor, and also do occasional fostering for them and other rescues."

Hamsini practices Muay Thai at a local gym and and volunteers with the Berkeley Public Library.

Irene: "I volunteer on the Board of the local Autism Society, two advisory councils at the local level, and also coordinate a support group for parents of adults with developmental disabilities. The latter was just awarded a mini-grant to host a listening session with families on crisis services in Alameda County!"

Laura sings in the International Orange Chorale of San Francisco, a volunteer choir that focuses on contemporary music, including newly commissioned pieces.

Phil enjoys darkroom photography at a City of Oakland community facility called Studio One Arts Center.

In addition, a number of MapLight employees volunteered on the campaign for Measure X1, a ballot initiative to reduce the impact of special interests in Berkeley elections by rewarding candidates who only accept small donations from local citizens. Alec, Ashleigh, Ayça, Bret, Chelsea W., Dan, DeAnna, Elliott, Laura, Leon, and Shane all contributed to the successful effort to pass X1 in November 2016.

SPOTLIGHT: **New staff**

Ayça K. Güralp
Executive Assistant, assists the President in maintaining organization and efficiency. She received a double B.A. in International Studies and Anthropology from the University of North Carolina and an M.A. in Conflict Resolution from Georgetown University. Prior to MapLight, she coordinated Turkey's first peace studies academic program and founded an arts and peace club in Istanbul. Her hometown is Raleigh, NC.

Shane Dosch
Software Engineer, helps with all things engineering. From architecture and design to development and devops, he pitches in wherever he can. Graduating with honors from the University of Pittsburgh and an alumnus of Semester at Sea and Y Combinator, he has a diverse background working for design agencies, giant corporations, tiny to medium-sized startups, and nonprofits. After fighting the good fight at MapLight, he does lots of yoga, makes his own wine, and tries to keep his two young boys from breaking an arm.

Andrew Perez
Political Reporter, is a political reporter at MapLight. He previously covered money in politics for International Business Times. A South Florida native, Andrew received a B.A. in journalism and an M.P.S. in political management from George Washington University. He currently lives in Washington, DC.

Chelsea Whitman
Office Manager, coordinates office activities and helps to keep internal operations running smoothly. She grew up in the San Diego political scene and nurtured her interest in government by volunteering on a variety of campaigns. Chelsea earned a B.A. in English from the University of California, Berkeley, where she taught introductory writing classes to freshmen and directed an after-school literacy program. Her interests include cooking, true crime, Netflix, local history, and cats.

MapLight follows the money behind CA's record-breaking ballot measure campaigns
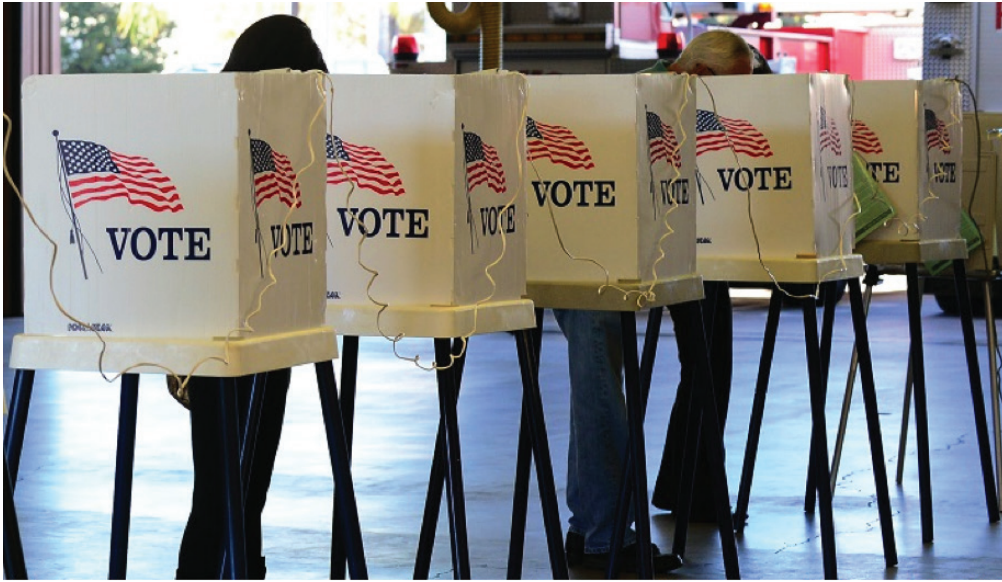

Photo Credit: Frederic J. Brown/AFP/Getty Images

This election season, MapLight was hot on the trail of the money fueling California's ballot measure campaigns. It was a record-breaking election in California: with 17 statewide initiatives up for consideration, on issues ranging from the death penalty to school funding and beyond, spending on ballot measures topped $446 million—the most money spent on ballot measures in a single election since 2001 (and a number that will likely grow as filings trickle in through January).

Prop. 61—the California Drug Price Relief Act, which would limit state spending on prescription drugs—was a prime example of the skyrocketing cost of ballot measure campaigns. By early November, contributions to the campaign against the measure (which ultimately failed to pass) exceeded $109 million, with Big Pharma contributing the lion's share.

MapLight's coverage of ballot measure spending was cited in over 100 stories, reaching more than 1.7 million people through the Wall Street Journal, the Los Angeles Times, Yahoo! Finance, the Mercury News, Capital Public Radio, Southern California Public Radio, the Sacramento Bee, and other outlets. We also supplied custom research for a series of articles in Bloomberg exploring various ballot measures in depth.

In the months leading up to the election, the millions of dollars that poured into ballot measure campaigns to fund ads, mailers, and robocalls could have allowed wealthy special interests to exert outsized influence. MapLight's research exposed this influence, bringing crucial information to the public in time for them to cast more informed votes.

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ballot choices for later, and a section explaining the basics of voting. In California, MapLight again partnered with the LWVCEF, whose well-established network collected data on state and local races. We also developed a new system for collecting candidate information in states like Illinois and New York that lack the LWVCEF's infrastructure.

Fifty media outlets and civic engagement groups shared Voter's Edge with their audiences via co-branded sites, including NBC, ABC 7, Telemundo, the Chicago Sun-Times, the New York City Campaign Finance Board, New York Public Interest Research Group, KPBS, KPCC, KQED, Capitol Public Radio, and the Illinois Public Media collaborative. In addition, 80 organizations embedded widgets and logos linking to Voter's Edge online.

While most Voter's Edge users were from California, we saw promising starts in Illinois and New York, with usage increasing between the primary and general elections. In California, general election site usage reflected a 51% increase from the November 2014 general election. Moreover, response to the site was overwhelmingly positive across all three states: in fact, in a survey, 97% percent of respondents stated that they found Voter's Edge useful.

MapLight thanks the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Kaphan Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, the Rita Allen Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, and countless donors like you for making Voter's Edge possible.

We're hiring!

MapLight is looking for an experienced and dedicated **Development Associate** to support our fundraising team with grants management, grant writing, and other duties that help us keep the lights on. Come work with us on the cutting edge of government transparency and accountability! Visit http://maplight.org/jobs to learn more.

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Flash! A NEWSLETTER FROM MAPLIGHT
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Tool built with CA Secretary of State cuts through ballot measure campaign noise

This fall, MapLight continued our collaboration with the California Secretary of State to launch the Quick Guide to Propositions, a user-friendly tool to help voters follow the money behind each of the 17 measures on the 2016 ballot. The Quick Guide makes it easy to find key information such as contribution totals and the top 10 contributions to "Yes" and "No" campaigns, alongside summaries and arguments for and against each measure. Funding data was pulled from Power Search—a campaign finance search engine that MapLight built in partnership with the Secretary of State—and updated daily through Election Day.

As with Power Search, we designed the Quick Guide as open-source software so that other organizations can adapt our code to their transparency needs. The Quick Guide is now live on the Secretary of State's website and available through the official Vote California app.

The launch of the Quick Guide was highlighted in media outlets across the state, including Capital Public Radio, the Topanga Messenger, the Daily Republic, the North Coast Journal, and others. The guide was also promoted by civic organizations such as the California Voter Foundation, the League of Women Voters Berkeley Albany Emeryville, the San Benito County Registrar of Voters, and the Modesto Junior College Library.

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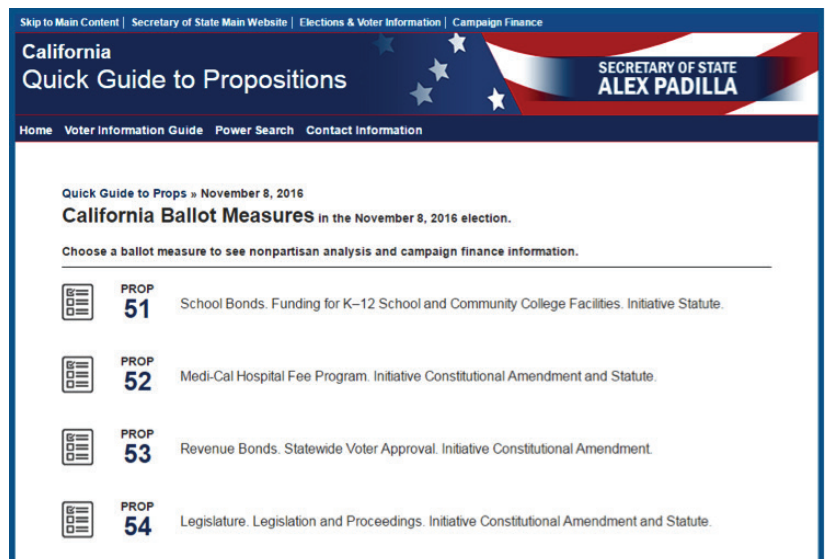
"Voters are barraged with an overwhelming amount of contrasting messages from campaigns during election season," said MapLight President Daniel Newman. "The Quick Guide to Props provides clear and concise information to help Californians cut through the noise."