

January 9, 2026

Anthony Shadid Award for Journalism Ethics | Center for Journalism Ethics
School of Journalism and Mass Communication | University of Wisconsin-Madison

To the Committee:

Please accept these materials to support the nomination of **Deported and Imprisoned** for the Anthony Shadid Award for Journalism Ethics.

1) Name and contact information of the nominators and their relationship to the story

Steve Mills was one of the ProPublica editors who oversaw this project. He can be reached at steve.mills@propublica.org or 312-208-0348.

2) Names and emails of the reporter or reporting team that produced the report

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3) Brief description of the story and a link to it online

Deported and Imprisoned: In painstaking detail, ProPublica investigated the Trump administration's deportation of more than 230 Venezuelan immigrants who the government claimed were all "terrorists" and "sick criminals" to a brutal maximum-security prison in El Salvador. We exclusively obtained government data that revealed the administration knew the vast majority of the men had not been convicted of U.S. crimes. Then we went further. Partnering with a team of Venezuelan journalists, we conducted mini-investigations of each man, tracking down their immigration paths and their criminal histories, or lack thereof, across multiple countries. We spoke with relatives and loved

ones of more than 100 of the men, analyzed internal federal records and obtained hundreds of pages of police reports, court documents and international arrest records. We used this information to build an interactive database that reveals who these men really are. Because of months of reporting and connections we had made with the men's families while they were held incommunicado, we were able to speak with more than a dozen of them in the immediate aftermath of their release and witness some of their reunions. They shared the trauma of their experiences and their hopes for the future. We published our work simultaneously in Spanish with a network of international publications to ensure the reporting reached affected communities across Latin America.

Two installments for closest consideration:

- [The Men Trump Deported to a Salvadoran Prison | July 23, 2025](#)
- [Trump Administration Knew Vast Majority of Venezuelans Sent to Salvadoran Prison Had Not Been Convicted of U.S. Crimes | May 30, 2025](#)

Additional coverage:

- [He Came to the U.S. to Support His Sick Child. He Was Detained. Then He Disappeared. | July 18, 2025](#)
- [Now That They're Free | July 30, 2025](#)
- [He Was Asked About His Tattoos and a TikTok Video in Court. Five Days Later, He Was in a Salvadoran Prison. | July 29, 2025](#)

4) Description of conflicting values encountered in reporting the story

We set out to learn whether the Trump administration's claims about the men were true. But publishing all of our reporting came with risks for the men that we had to weigh against our goal of accountability. We had obtained federal data that showed how the government itself classified the men's criminality, and we used that as a starting point to seek court and police records across the country. We ultimately found criminal charges or convictions against dozens of the men, which we reported on in broad terms in our first story. But as we began building an interactive database that featured each man's story, we had to decide whether to include everything we found. Information on arrests was based on public records, but it was not necessarily public knowledge. And though the plight of these men had become international news, they were not public figures. We thought it was important to be transparent about what we found in order to fairly assess the Trump administration's claims. But we also knew that the men and their families could face repercussions in Venezuela if we made it easy to find this information.

5) Options considered to resolve the conflicts

We considered publishing varying degrees of the information about criminal charges and convictions — from none at all, to convictions, to everything we found, including old news reports from Venezuela about arrests. We also considered whether to make it easy for readers to filter by criminal histories.

6) Final decisions and rationales behind them

We decided to publish everything we found, including information about charges that were pending at the time the men were deported and imprisoned, as well as media reports about arrests even when we could find no underlying records in Venezuela or elsewhere. We did not come to a decision lightly. Editors and reporters met several times over the course of our reporting until we decided together that the power of the project was in presenting a case-by-case investigation and letting readers see what we found — from the personal stories of the men's families and immigration trajectories, to their interactions with the criminal justice system here or abroad — and assess for themselves the government's claims. When we did not know the outcome of a case, or could find no underlying records to corroborate a media account, we explained that.

We also made significant efforts to contact the relatives and attorneys of each of the men — especially if we had records indicating that they had a criminal background. We brought in additional reporters from ProPublica and hired four freelancers to help us track people down. Ultimately, we spoke with the relatives of more than 100 of the men and included their comments on their loved ones' criminal records. One father told us he didn't know that his son had been arrested for reckless driving and shoplifting but confirmed that the mugshot we found was his son's. "Does that make him deserve being sent to CECOT?" he said, referring to the brutal Salvadoran prison. Including comments like these helped make sense of the reporting and bring humanity and nuance to each profile.

After the project was published, which included powerful video and photos pieces, we have continued to update the interactive database when we have learned new information, including when we interviewed some of the men after their release. A few of them even told us about criminal histories we had not previously found. Over and over, the men told us they were grateful that we had told their stories.