# WikiLeaks and the Age of Transparency

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The United States government is diligent—some might say to the point of obsession—in defending its borders against invaders. Now we are told a small, international band of renegades armed with nothing more than laptops presents the greatest threat to the U.S. regime since the close of the Cold War. WikiLeaks' release of a massive trove of secret official documents has riled politicians from across the spectrum. Even noted free-speech advocate Floyd Abrams blames WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange for the certain defeat of federal shield-law legislation protecting journalists. Hyperbole, hysteria? Certainly. Welcome to the Age of Transparency.

But political analyst and writer Micah Sifry argues that WikiLeaks is not the whole story: It is a symptom, an indicator of an ongoing generational and philosophical struggle between older, closed systems, and the new open culture of the Internet. Despite Assange's arrest, the publication of secret documents continues. As Sifry shows, this is part of a larger movement for greater governmental and corporate transparency: "When you combine connectivity with transparency—the ability for more people to see, share and shape what is going on around them—the result is a huge increase in social energy, which is being channeled in all kinds of directions."

## WikiLeaks and the Age of Transparency Details

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# From Reader Review WikiLeaks and the Age of Transparency for online ebook

## Jeannie says

I liked this book because it got behind the news flashes to understand what some of the issues are, namely transparency in our public institutions

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## David Sasaki says

The 2011 protests were merely a symptom of the disease; not a diagnosis and certainly not the cure. To improve democracy we need the smartest young activists to be working in government, not out on the streets protesting against it. We need more of the types of projects described by Micah Sifry in WikiLeaks and the Age of Transparency. We need more citizens educating Congress, not just criticizing it.

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## Sarah Jean says

This isn't a particularly accessible book unless you have a bit of background knowledge of American-based organisations pushing for government transparency. There's a lot less about Wikileaks in it than the title suggested to me. I'm not sure if I'm much wiser having read it.

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## David Sifry says

Awesome book, and yes I'm biased, as this is written by my fantastic, super-smart big brother.

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## Blake Maddux says

If you have read WikiLeaks: Inside Julian Assange's War on Secrecy and want to learn more about WikiLeaks, do not bother with this book. After the first few chapters, more than 100 pages pass with the work "WikiLeaks" being written. Sifry returns to WikiLeaks in the last two chapters, which salvage the book a bit. I am glad that other people liked it, but it was not what I was looking for.

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## Janis Kay says

Interesting read for my class. Makes me really wonder about things...

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## James Tae says

Technology has moved fast. It's moved faster than industry, and it's moved faster than government. It's such a new and relevent subject, and Sifry's open-minded précis of the issue is an excellent introduction into the discussion.

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## Dan Gillmor says

First rate look at how WikiLeaks exemplifies the trend toward transparency in public affairs -- and the threats/complications this brings.

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## Franci says

Very good book on how new internet tools can be used to improve transparency. It is a huge step forward in comparison to other books on transparency which I have read, because it is modern and you can see that the author has a practical not just academic approach. The part at the end of the
book is very useful - there is a Resource Guide with selected web pages with good practice examples.

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## Mark says

Michael Sifry's Wikileaks and the Age of Transparency is the most comprehensive survey to date of the the various movements (of which Wikileaks is only a part) to open up and free, in the name of democracy, the closely guarded information held by various government and corporate entities. The first half of the book is a review of the growth of groups like the Personal Democracy Forum, the Sunlight Foundation, and others in the community of "politically minded hackers and technologically savvy activists". The author examines the early successes, both in the US and Great Britain, of crowd-sourced transparency efforts, and then broadens his view to global transparency efforts. But he also looks at citizen journalists, and the growing usefulness and importance of social media in the breaking of news stories. Sifry drives home that point that effective citizen journalism can quickly undermine government-propagated evasions and falsehoods."Transparency," he writes,"is a necessary corrective to excessive government power." In the final chapter, Sifry looks at the problems with Wikileaks and its founder, Julian Assange, and carefully examines the multiple threats to the free distribution of information, ranging from government pressure on private providers like Google and Twitter to outright harassment and threats of legal action against transparency activists like Assange. The author concludes, "At a time when closed and powerful institutions like governments and corporations withhold so much information from us, and have so much information about us, it is vital that ordinary citizens should also have more information about them and what they do. More information...is our best defense against opacity and the bad behavior it can enable." Excellent, thoughtful, and timely book, highly recommended.

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## Caroline Gordon says

This is a really interesting overview of both WikiLeaks and the wider issues of open government, open society and how the internet is enabling both. It's important we all understand we are in the journey to openness and the impediments still in the way. Our freedoms from serfdom to the middle class of modern societies were hard won over many centuries, be awake to how open and free our society really is.

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### Ed Summers says

This book is a decent, quick read. There were quite a few pointers to news articles and blog posts I want to follow up on. I was kind of surprised how little content was about Wikileaks itself. There was much more information about transparency in government in general, with a focus on the US and UK. I thought the positioning of Wikileaks in a broader landscape of transparency in government was worthwhile. The criticism of Wikileaks itself for its lack of transparency was also interesting. Ironically, I was kind of hoping for more insight into how Wikileaks worked.

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### Dale says

This is actually less about wikileaks and more about the impact and utility of the web on the political process. Sifry shows how the web has allowed a degree of democratization of journalism, showing how bloggers have uncovered stories that weren't (and would not have been) covered by mainstream journalists.

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### Joan says

Micah Sifry gives us an amazing overview of what government transparency advocates around the globe have accomplished over a very short time through crowd sourcing,crowd scouring and their relentless commitment to open government. This book was a real eye-opener for me-- a low tech reader.

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### David says

The idea that Internet transparency tools will lead to a happy period of greater governmental, business, and organizational openness reminds me of previously-held ideas that electric street lighting would lead to less crime, or more powerful weapons would make war too horrible to engage in. They didn't, and it won't. That said, closing your mind to the use and implications of new inventions is never a wise idea. The inventions are here to stay. If you've been too busy earning a living or watching re-runs of "Say Yes to the Dress" to keep track of where these inventions are taking the world, this would be an excellent place to start informing yourself.

There's a certain amount of reinterpreting inconvenient facts in this book. In March 2009, an unholy coalition of online trolls and single-issue partisans torpedoed a attempt by the Obama administration to hold a more transparent town hall meeting by using Google Moderator, an online tool, to accept and collate questions. Advocates of marijuana-law reform manipulated the tool to push their issue to the top of the list of questions, over many issues which affected a larger number of people, e.g., the economy and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Obama administration looked slightly inept and not-ready-for-prime-time. Yet this book says

"[t]he forum was generally deemed a success" (Kindle location 1151), a claim that nearly screams out for a Wikipedia-style "[citation needed]".

On the day the forum took place, however, the author had a more complex analysis, cited here, in which he admitted that online question-sorting processes like Google Moderator were only "arguably" more transparent than other methods. Sifry continued on his blog: "The entire American political process is also gamed, constantly and unfairly, by all kinds of privileged and powerful actors." It is impossible to argue with that, but Sifry's blunt statement says to me that it's not the gaming he objects to, it's who gets to game. Maybe that's because he believes that, with these new tools, the game of influencing power might be loosened a little from the iron grip of money. That would suit me just fine, too, but, as a drug dealer in the TV program "The Wire" says: "Game the same, just got more fierce."

**Partial list of Internet transparency resources cited at the end of this book:**

PersonalDemocracy.com
SunlightFoundation.com
OpenCongress.org
EFF.org
Public.Resource.org
CivicCommons.org
transparency.globalvoicesonline.org
GlobalNetworkInitiative.org
mySociety.org
VisibleGovernment.ca
opendata-network.org
EUTransparency.org