

Issue 50: July 2011

## Book Review: Wikileaks and the Age of Transparency

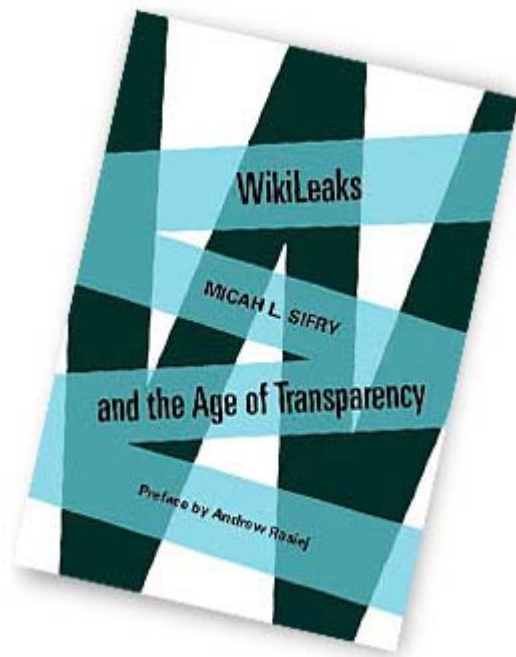


By [Micah Sifry](#)<sup>1</sup>

Published by [Scribe Publications](#)

Reviewed by [Dr. Louise Floyd](#)

*WikiLeaks and the Age of Transparency*, as the title suggests, is about the emergence of the internet as a means of achieving more open government. The book discusses the utilisation of websites and social media by political movements - from the American '[TEA Party](#)' through to the [Obama Campaign](#) and, of course, the ongoing WikiLeaks 'incident' (where highly sensitive US security and embassy documents have been published to the world). The author, Micah Sifry, comes from a public accountability background and openly declares his bias that he regards the internet as something which can both open governments (hence making them more accountable) and lead to collaborative government (in which politicians use social media to become more responsive to their citizens' needs and demands).



Only occasionally does Sifry talk about the fact that instantaneous communication can lead to the rash publication of inaccurate (or needless/irrelevant) data and that the organisational capacity of social media can lead to the insidious bullying of others (and sometimes mistaken sullyng of reputations). This, in my view, is the weakness of the book – it is a bit one-sided. As this present reviewer has published in her academic work, freedom of information and mass organisational capabilities can lead to tremendous social good, but they can also lead to painful errors and allow small groups to occasionally hijack the political agenda. In the reviewer's opinion, the power the internet gives to people should be coupled with consideration of responsibilities.

That aside, the book does deal with something clearly here to stay – the internet as a political tool. And, as Sifry acknowledges, the final form of the internet in its political dimension is as yet unknown. To that end, the book makes a contribution to the literature on an important subject.

### Footnotes

- Sifry's blog may be found [here](#).