

# Reception of WikiLeaks

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The whistleblowing website WikiLeaks has received praise as well as criticism. The organisation has won a number of awards, including *The Economist's* New Media Award in 2008 at the Index on Censorship Awards<sup>[1]</sup> and Amnesty International's UK Media Award in 2009.<sup>[2][3]</sup> In 2010, the New York *Daily News* listed WikiLeaks first among websites "that could totally change the news",<sup>[4]</sup> and Julian Assange received the Sam Adams Award<sup>[5]</sup> and was named the Readers' Choice for *TIME's Person of the Year* in 2010.<sup>[6]</sup> The UK Information Commissioner has stated that "WikiLeaks is part of the phenomenon of the online, empowered citizen".<sup>[7]</sup> In its first days, an Internet petition calling for the cessation of extrajudicial intimidation of WikiLeaks attracted over six hundred thousand signatures.<sup>[8]</sup> Supporters of WikiLeaks in the media and academia have commended it for exposing state and corporate secrets, increasing transparency, supporting freedom of the press, and enhancing democratic discourse while challenging powerful institutions.<sup>[9][10][11][12][13][14][15]</sup>

At the same time, several U.S. government officials have criticized WikiLeaks for exposing classified information and claimed that the leaks harm national security and compromise international diplomacy.<sup>[16][17][18][19][20]</sup> Several human rights organisations requested with respect to earlier document releases that WikiLeaks adequately redact the names of civilians working with international forces, in order to prevent repercussions.<sup>[21]</sup> Some journalists have likewise criticised a perceived lack of editorial discretion when releasing thousands of documents at once and without sufficient analysis.<sup>[22]</sup> In response to some of the negative reaction, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has expressed her concern over the "cyber war" against WikiLeaks,<sup>[23]</sup> and in a joint statement with the Organization of American States the UN Special Rapporteur has called on states and other actors to keep international legal principles in mind.<sup>[24]</sup>

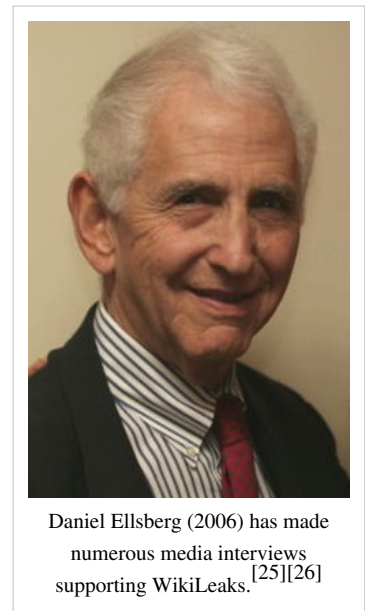
## Support

In July 2010 Veterans for Peace president Mike Ferner editorialised on the group's website "neither Wikileaks nor the soldier or soldiers who divulged the documents should be prosecuted for revealing this information. We should give them a medal."<sup>[27]</sup>

Documentary filmmaker John Pilger wrote an August 2010 editorial in the Australian publication *Green Left* titled "Wikileaks must be defended." In it, Pilger said WikiLeaks represented the interests of "public accountability" and a new form of journalism at odds with "the dominant section ... devoted merely to taking down what cynical and malign power tells it."<sup>[28]</sup>

Daniel Ellsberg, the man who released the Pentagon Papers in 1971, has been a frequent defender of WikiLeaks. Following the November 2010 release of U.S. diplomatic cables, Ellsberg rejected criticism that the site was endangering the lives of U.S. military personnel and intelligence assets stating "not one single soldier or informant has been in danger from any of the WikiLeaks releases. That risk has been largely overblown."<sup>[25]</sup> Ellsberg went on to note that government claims to the contrary were "a script that they roll out every time there's a leak of any sort."<sup>[26]</sup> Following the US diplomatic cable release, which a number of media reports sought to differentiate from Ellsberg's whistleblowing,<sup>[29]</sup> Ellsberg claimed, "EVERY attack now made on WikiLeaks and Julian Assange was made against me and the release of the Pentagon Papers at the time."<sup>[30]</sup>

On 3 December 2010 Republican Congressman of Texas, Ron Paul, spoke out publicly during a Fox Business interview in support of WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange; "In a free society we're supposed to know the truth," Paul said. "In a society where truth becomes treason, then we're in big trouble." Paul went on to state, "Why don't we



prosecute *The New York Times* or anybody that releases this?"<sup>[31]</sup> In another speech at US House of Representatives Paul again defended WikiLeaks against criticism for revealing the truth and warned the US administration that "lying is not patriotic".<sup>[32]</sup>

Fellow Republican congressman Connie Mack IV of Florida also praised WikiLeaks, stating that Americans have a right to know the contents of the leaks, "no matter how we acquire that knowledge."<sup>[33]</sup>

Australia's most senior and high-profile media professionals expressed their support for WikiLeaks in a letter to Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard.<sup>[34]</sup> The letter was initiated by the Walkley Foundation, who present the yearly Walkley Awards for Excellence in Journalism. The letter was signed by "the ten members of the Walkley Advisory Board as well as editors of major Australian newspapers and news websites and the news directors of the country's three commercial TV networks and two public broadcasters." Their position (an extract from the letter) is summarised as follows:

"In essence, WikiLeaks, an organisation that aims to expose official secrets, is doing what the media have always done: bringing to light material that governments would prefer to keep secret.

It is the media's duty to responsibly report such material if it comes into their possession. To aggressively attempt to shut WikiLeaks down, to threaten to prosecute those who publish official leaks, and to pressure companies to cease doing commercial business with WikiLeaks, is a serious threat to democracy, which relies on a free and fearless press."<sup>[35]</sup>

Following the November 2010 leak of United States diplomatic cables *The Atlantic*, in a staff editorial, opined "Wikileaks is a powerful new way for reporters and human rights advocates to leverage global information technology systems to break the heavy veil of government and corporate secrecy that is slowly suffocating the American press." Calling legal and physical threats against WikiLeaks volunteers "shameful" the magazine went on to state, "Not since President Richard Nixon directed his minions to go after Pentagon Papers leaker Daniel Ellsberg and *New York Times* reporter Neil Sheehan ... has a working journalist and his source been subjected to the kind of official intimidation and threats that have been directed at Assange and Manning by high-ranking members of the Obama Administration."<sup>[36]</sup>

On 4 December 2010, Reporters Without Borders condemned the "blocking, cyber-attacks and political pressure" being directed at WikiLeaks. The organisation is also concerned by some of the extreme comments made by American authorities concerning WikiLeaks and its founder Julian Assange.<sup>[37]</sup> On 21 December the organisation announced it will host a mirror website for the leaked US diplomatic cables being published by WikiLeaks.<sup>[38]</sup>

In an article titled "Only WikiLeaks can save US policy" published on the online foreign affairs magazine *The Diplomat*, former long-time CIA counter-terrorism expert Michael Scheuer said the source of interest in WikiLeaks revelations was in the inherent dishonesty of recent U.S. administrations. "In recent years, the US public has had to hear its leaders repeatedly tell Americans that black was white," Scheuer wrote, referencing the presidencies of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama.<sup>[39]</sup>

Evan Hughes, editor-in-chief of wired.com published his support for WikiLeaks in an online editorial titled "Why WikiLeaks is Good for America." Despite an often contentious relationship between *Wired* and WikiLeaks, with the former having been accused by the latter of complicity in the identification and arrest of Bradley Manning, Hughes argued that "WikiLeaks stands to improve our democracy, not weaken it." He went on to note that "The greatest threat we face right now from WikiLeaks is not the information it has spilled and may spill in the future, but the reactionary response to it that's building in the United States that promises to repudiate the rule of law and our free speech traditions, if left unchecked."<sup>[40]</sup>

The New York Times reported that over 200 WikiLeaks mirror sites sprang up after some hosting companies cut their services to the company.<sup>[41]</sup> On 5 December, a group of activists and hackers known as "Anonymous" called upon supporters to attack sites of companies that oppose WikiLeaks as part of *Operation Avenge Assange*.<sup>[42]</sup> PayPal has been targeted following their decision to stop processing donations for WikiLeaks.<sup>[43][44]</sup> Gregg Housh, who previously worked on other projects with Anonymous, said that he had noticed an organised attempt taking place to attack companies that have not supported WikiLeaks. In reference to the support being shown for WikiLeaks, Mr. Housh said; "The reason is amazingly simple, we all believe that information should be free, and the Internet should be free."<sup>[45]</sup> On 8 December 2010, the PayPal website was victim of a Denial-of-service attack by Anonymous.<sup>[46][47][48]</sup> Later that day, PayPal announced in their blog that they will release all remaining funds in the account to the foundation that was raising funds for WikiLeaks.<sup>[49][50]</sup> On the same day, the websites of Visa and Mastercard were attacked by WikiLeaks supporters. By then over 1,200 mirror sites had been set up for hosting content no longer accessible at WikiLeaks.com. Anonymous also issued a fresh statement; "While we don't have much of an affiliation with WikiLeaks, we fight for the same reasons. We want transparency, and we counter censorship...This is why we intend to utilise our resources to raise awareness, attack those against, and support those who are helping lead our world to freedom and democracy."<sup>[51]</sup>



A December 2010 rally in Australia protesting the Australian government's treatment of Julian Assange


In December 2010, the Internet Society stated that despite the international concern about the content released by WikiLeaks, "we nevertheless believe it must be subject to the same laws and policies of availability as all Internet sites" and that "free expression should not be restricted by governmental or private controls over computer hardware or software, telecommunications infrastructure, or other essential components of the Internet". ISOC also called for appropriate action to "pursue and prosecute entities (if any) that acted maliciously to take it [WikiLeaks] off the air" because suppressing communication would merely serve to "undermine the integrity of the global Internet and its operation".<sup>[52]</sup>


On 8 December 2010 the international civic organisation Avaaz launched a petition in support of WikiLeaks, which was signed by over 250 thousand people within the first few hours, the total number went up to 600 thousand by 15 December 2010.<sup>[53][54][55]</sup>


In early December 2010, Noam Chomsky offered his support to protesters across Australia planning to take to the streets in defence of WikiLeaks.<sup>[56]</sup> In an interview for *Democracy Now!*, Chomsky criticized the government response, saying, "perhaps the most dramatic revelation ... is the bitter hatred of democracy that is revealed both by the U.S. Government – Hillary Clinton, others – and also by the diplomatic service."<sup>[57]</sup>


On 1 February 2011, Norwegian politician and musician Snorre Valen nominated WikiLeaks for the Nobel Peace Prize. Kristian Harpsviken, director of the Peace Research Institute Oslo and an expert on the Prize, believes that the site is not a strong candidate because of extensive criticism of it.<sup>[58]</sup>


## Praise by governments

 Brazil: President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva expressed his "solidarity" with Julian Assange following Assange's 2010 arrest in the United Kingdom. Lula went on to state—in reference to WikiLeaks disclosure of classified US diplomatic cables in November and December 2010—WikiLeaks had "exposed a diplomacy that had appeared unreachable."<sup>[59][60]</sup> He further criticised the arrest of Julian Assange as "an attack on freedom of expression".<sup>[61]</sup>

 Ecuador: In late November 2010 a representative of the government of Ecuador made what was, apparently, an unsolicited public offer to Julian Assange to establish residency in Ecuador. Deputy Foreign Minister Kinto Lucas stated "we are going to invite him to come to Ecuador so he can freely present the information he possesses and all the documentation, not just on the Internet, but in various public forums."<sup>[62]</sup> Lucas went on to state his praise for WikiLeaks and Assange calling them "[people] who are constantly investigating and trying to get light out of the dark corners of [state] information."<sup>[63]</sup> The following day, however, president Rafael Correa distanced his administration from the offer stating that Lucas had been speaking for himself and not on the government's behalf. Correa then criticised Assange for "breaking the laws of the United States and leaking this type of information."<sup>[64]</sup>

 Russia: In December 2010 the office of Russian president Dmitry Medvedev issued a statement calling on non-governmental organisations to consider "nominating [Julian] Assange as a Nobel Prize laureate." The announcement followed commentary by Russian ambassador to NATO Dmitry Rogozin who stated that Julian Assange's earlier arrest on Swedish charges demonstrated that there was "no media freedom" in the west.<sup>[65]</sup>

 Venezuela: Hugo Chávez, president of Venezuela, stated his support for WikiLeaks following the release of US diplomatic cables in November 2010 that showed the United States had tried to rally support from regional governments to isolate Venezuela. "I have to congratulate the people of WikiLeaks for their bravery and courage," Chávez commented in televised remarks.<sup>[66]</sup>

 United Nations: In December 2010 United Nations Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression Frank LaRue stated he agreed with the idea that Julian Assange was a "martyr for free speech." LaRue went on to say Assange or other WikiLeaks staff should not face legal accountability for any information they disseminated, noting that, "if there is a responsibility by leaking information it is of, exclusively of the person that made the leak and not of the media that publish it. And this is the way that transparency works and that corruption has been confronted in many cases."<sup>[67]</sup> High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, subsequently voiced concern at the revelation that private companies were being pressured by states to sever their relationships with WikiLeaks.<sup>[68]</sup>

## Awards

In 2008, Index on Censorship presented WikiLeaks with their inaugural Economist New Media Award.<sup>[69]</sup>

In 2009, Amnesty International awarded WikiLeaks their Media Award for exposing "extra judicial killings and disappearances" in Kenya.<sup>[70]</sup>

## Criticisms

WikiLeaks has attracted criticism from a variety of sources.<sup>[71]</sup>

In 2007 John Young, operator of Cryptome, left his position on the WikiLeaks Board of Directors accusing the group of being a "CIA conduit". Young subsequently retreated from his assertion but has continued to be critical of the site.<sup>[72]</sup> In a 2010 interview with CNET.com Young accused the group of a lack of transparency regarding their fundraising and financial management. He went on to state his belief that WikiLeaks could not guarantee whistleblowers the anonymity or confidentiality they claimed and that he "would not trust them with information if it had any value, or if it put me at risk or anyone that I cared about at risk."<sup>[73]</sup>

Citing the leaking of the sorority rituals of Alpha Sigma Tau, Steven Aftergood has opined that WikiLeaks "does not respect the rule of law nor does it honor the rights of individuals." Aftergood went on to state that WikiLeaks engages in unrestrained disclosure of non-governmental secrets without compelling public policy reasons and that

many anti-corruption activists were opposed to the site's activities.<sup>[74]</sup>

In 2010, Amnesty International joined several other human rights groups in strongly requesting that WikiLeaks redact the names of Afghan civilians working as U.S. military informants from files they had released, in order to protect them from repercussions. Julian Assange responded by offering Amnesty International the opportunity to assist in the tedious document vetting process. When Amnesty International appeared to express reservations in accepting the offer, Assange stated that he had "no time to deal with people who prefer to do nothing but cover their asses." Other groups that joined Amnesty International in criticising WikiLeaks subsequently noted that, despite their displeasure over the issue of civilian name redaction, they generally appreciated WikiLeaks' work.<sup>[75]</sup>

In an August 2010 open letter, the non-governmental organisation Reporters Without Borders praised WikiLeaks' past usefulness in exposing "serious violations of human rights and civil liberties" but criticised the group over a perceived absence of editorial control, stating "indiscriminately publishing 92,000 classified reports reflects a real problem of methodology and, therefore, of credibility. Journalistic work involves the selection of information. The argument with which you defend yourself, namely that WikiLeaks is not made up of journalists, is not convincing."<sup>[76]</sup> The group subsequently clarified their statement as a criticism of WikiLeaks release procedure and not the organisation itself, stating "we reaffirm our support for Wikileaks, its work and its founding principles."<sup>[77]</sup>

On 30 November 2010, former Canadian government adviser Tom Flanagan, while appearing on the CBC television program "Power & Politics", called for Julian Assange to be killed. "I think Assange should be assassinated," Flanagan stated, before noting to host Evan Solomon, "I'm feeling pretty manly today." Flanagan subsequently retracted his call for the death of Assange while reiterating his opposition to WikiLeaks.<sup>[78]</sup> Dimitri Soudas, spokesman to Prime Minister Stephen Harper, decried Flanagan's comments and said the former Tory strategist's remarks are "simply not acceptable." Ralph Goodale, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party in the House of Commons, called Flanagan's remarks "clearly contrary to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms."<sup>[79]</sup>





Russian investigative reporter Andrei Soldatov has criticised WikiLeaks for disclosing documents "without checking of the facts, without putting them in context, and without analysing them." Soldatov believes WikiLeaks is "filling the gap" left by the decline of investigative journalism with a sensationalist alternative while journalistic support of WikiLeaks is motivated by anger over declining funding and resources for investigative reporting.<sup>[80]</sup>

## Criticisms by governments

Most of the governments and organisations whose files have been leaked by WikiLeaks have been critical of the organisation.

- 🇦🇺 Australia: On 2 December 2010 Prime Minister Julia Gillard made a statement that she 'absolutely condemns' WikiLeaks' actions and that the release of information on the site was 'grossly irresponsible' and 'illegal'.<sup>[81]</sup> WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange is Australian and he responded two days later by accusing his prime minister of betraying him as an Australian citizen.<sup>[82]</sup> However, on 8 December 2010—after WikiLeaks published U.S. diplomatic cables in which United States diplomats labelled him a "control freak", former Australian Prime Minister and current foreign minister Kevin Rudd said the leak of the US secret cables raised questions about US security. Rudd said, "The core responsibility, and therefore legal liability, goes to those individuals responsible for that initial unauthorised release."<sup>[83][84]</sup> In an article in *The Australian*, Assange claimed, "The Australian attorney-general is doing everything he can to help a US investigation clearly directed at framing Australian citizens and shipping them to the US."<sup>[85]</sup> However, Australian officials later said that Assange has done nothing illegal.<sup>[86]</sup> Since then, representatives of the Australian Federal Government and the major opposition including Craig Emerson the Minister for Trade have come out in support of Wikileaks and against some violent rhetoric directed against them, stating; "We condemn absolutely the threats that have been made by some people in the United States against Julian Assange."<sup>[87]</sup>
- 🇫🇷 France: The French Industry Minister Éric Besson said in a letter to the CGIET technology agency, WikiLeaks "violates the secret of diplomatic relations and puts people protected by diplomatic secret in danger."

Therefore it would be 'unacceptable' that the site was hosted on servers based in France. The minister asked for measures to bar WikiLeaks from France.<sup>[88]</sup>

-  Iran: The President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, also criticised WikiLeaks following the release of United States diplomatic cables. Ahmadinejad claimed that the release of cables purporting to show concern with Iran by Arab states was a planned leak by the United States to discredit his government, though he did not indicate whether he believed WikiLeaks was in collusion with the United States or was simply an unwitting facilitator.<sup>[89]</sup>
-  Libya: Libyan leader, Muammar al-Gaddafi blamed WikiLeaks for the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia "[Do not be fooled by] WikiLeaks which publishes information written by lying ambassadors in order to create chaos."<sup>[90]</sup>
-  Philippines: President Benigno Aquino III condemned WikiLeaks and leaked documents related to the country, saying that it can lead to massive cases of miscommunication.<sup>[91]</sup>
-  United States: Following the November 2010 release of United States diplomatic cables, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton denounced the group saying, "this disclosure is not just an attack on America's foreign policy interests, it is an attack on the international community."<sup>[92]</sup> Peter King, chairman of the Homeland Security Committee of the United States House of Representatives has stated his support of Clinton's position for listing WikiLeaks as a "foreign terrorist organisation" explaining that "WikiLeaks presents a clear and present danger to the national security of the United States."<sup>[93]</sup> In a contrary statement, secretary of Defense Robert Gates has said that concerns about the disclosures were "over-wrought" in terms of their likely adverse impact on ordinary diplomatic activities.<sup>[94]</sup> Philip J. Crowley, United States Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, stated on 2 December 2010 that the US State Department does not regard WikiLeaks as a media organisation. "WikiLeaks is not a media organisation. That is our view." Crowley said and with regard to Assange;"Well, his – I mean he could be considered a political actor. I think he's an anarchist, but he's not a journalist."<sup>[95]</sup> US Senator Joe Lieberman called on Amazon.com to shut down a WikiLeaks web-site, praised the company for doing so, and called for other companies to follow suit.<sup>[96]</sup> He also proposed new legislation targeting similar cases—Securing Human Intelligence and Enforcing Lawful Dissemination Act,<sup>[97]</sup> also known as the SHIELD Act.<sup>[98]</sup> Lieberman later said that also *The New York Times* and other news organisations publishing the US embassy cables being released by WikiLeaks could be investigated for breaking US espionage laws.<sup>[99]</sup> After these statements the US Ambassador to Australia assured the Australian government and people that "The concerns we have do not centre on Julian Assange and they never should have"<sup>[100]</sup>

## A theory of manipulation

(This is largely translated from the **main** Wikileaks article in French)

Most of the information revealed by Wikileaks, at least until beginning 2011, often corroborate gossip and trends already evoked by the media of the public opinion.<sup>[101]</sup>

Based among others on this postulate, a theory of manipulation, according to which the leaks are intended and remote-guided by the U.S., has progressively emerged. The goal of this manipulation would be to force certain regimes which previously were reluctant to engage in actions advocated by the U.S. This conspiracy theory of manipulation is notably illustrated by the sparking of the Jasmin Revolution in Tunisia, which followed a couple of weeks after the uncovering of the telegrams on the Ben Ali regime.<sup>[102]</sup>

## Public opinion

-  Australia: A UMR Research December 2010 poll showed that the majority of Australians are against the official government position on WikiLeaks. The findings which were done on 1,000 individuals show 59% support WikiLeaks' action in making the cables public and 25% oppose it. This was asked a few weeks after the initial release of the cables. The poll also looked at issues in relation to Julian Assange, with the results showing a positive opinion on him.<sup>[103]</sup>
-  Germany: According to a telephone survey of 1,004 German residents age 18 and older, which was conducted end of November for the German public broadcaster ARD, a majority of 53% disapprove of WikiLeaks, while 43% are generally in favour of the platform. Asked about the specific release of US diplomatic cables, almost two Thirds (65%) believe that these documents should not be published, compared to 31% that agree that they are being released to the public.<sup>[104]</sup>
-  Pakistan: A December 2010 a Gallup poll found that 52% of Pakistanis believe that "America herself has published the documents on purpose to create unrest," while 24% believe that this is not the case and 24% did not respond.<sup>[105]</sup>
-  United Kingdom: A CNN poll of 2,010 British adults conducted in December 2010 revealed that more people agree than disagree that WikiLeaks was right to release the cables, by 42% to 33%. The remaining 25% did not have a position. According to the same poll 41% of Britons believe that Assange should not be prosecuted for releasing the secret diplomatic cables, while 30% do want him prosecuted. Almost half of the respondents (44%) also believe that the sex charges against Assange are "an excuse" to keep him in custody so that the U.S. government can prosecute him for releasing secret diplomatic cables, while only 13% disagree. Nevertheless almost half of Britons stated that their government should send Assange to Sweden for questioning. Older people were significantly more likely to oppose WikiLeaks. While 42% of persons 65 and older say Assange should be prosecuted for releasing the secret diplomatic cables, this view is only held by 21% of those between 25 and 34.<sup>[106]</sup>
-  United States: According to a telephone survey of 1,029 US residents age 18 and older, conducted by the Marist Institute for Public Opinion in December 2010, 70% of American respondents – particularly Republicans and older people – think the leaks are doing more harm than good by allowing enemies of the United States government to see confidential and secret information about U.S. foreign policy. Approximately 22% – especially young liberals – think the leaks are doing more good than harm by making the U.S. government more transparent and accountable. A majority of 59% also want to see the people behind WikiLeaks prosecuted, while 31% said the publication of secrets is protected under the First Amendment guarantee of a free press.<sup>[107]</sup>

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