

ARTICLE

THE LEAKY LEVIATHAN:
WHY THE GOVERNMENT CONDEMNS AND CONDONES
UNLAWFUL DISCLOSURES OF INFORMATION

David E. Pozen

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THE LEAKY LEVIATHAN: WHY THE GOVERNMENT CONDEMNS AND CONDONES UNLAWFUL DISCLOSURES OF INFORMATION

David E. Pozen*

The United States government leaks like a sieve. Presidents denounce the constant flow of classified information to the media from unauthorized, anonymous sources. National security professionals decry the consequences. And yet the laws against leaking are almost never enforced. Throughout U.S. history, roughly a dozen criminal cases have been brought against suspected leakers. There is a dramatic disconnect between the way our laws and our leaders condemn leaking in the abstract and the way they condone it in practice.

This Article challenges the standard account of that disconnect, which emphasizes the difficulties of apprehending and prosecuting offenders, and advances an alternative theory of leaking. The executive branch's "leakiness" is often taken to be a sign of organizational failure. The Article argues it is better understood as an adaptive response to external liabilities (such as the mistrust generated by presidential secret keeping and media manipulation) and internal pathologies (such as overclassification and bureaucratic fragmentation) of the modern administrative state. The leak laws are so rarely enforced not only because it is hard to punish violators, but also because key institutional actors share overlapping interests in maintaining a permissive culture of classified information disclosures. Permissiveness does not entail anarchy, however, as a nuanced system of informal social controls has come to supplement, and all but supplant, the formal disciplinary scheme. In detailing these claims, the Article maps the rich sociology of governmental leak regulation and explores a range of implications for executive power, national security, democracy, and the rule of law.

INTRODUCTION

Ours is a polity saturated with, vexed by, and dependent upon leaks. The Bay of Pigs, the Pentagon Papers, warrantless wire-tapping by the National Security Agency at home, targeted killings by the Central Intelligence Agency abroad: the contours of these and

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countless other government activities have emerged over the years through anonymous disclosures of confidential information to the press.¹ Across the ideological spectrum, many Americans believe both that leaking “is a problem of major proportions”² and that “our particular form of government wouldn’t work without it.”³ Episodically, leaks generate political frenzy. The country is in such a period at this writing. Mass releases of classified defense documents and diplomatic cables through WikiLeaks, followed by a series of news stories about some of the government’s most closely held national security programs, have unleashed a torrent of legislative and media responses, of recriminations and justifications. This “latest outbreak of leak panic”⁴ will soon fade; a new iteration will arrive in due course.

Our comprehension of leaking has not kept pace with our fascination. Even accounting for the secrecy that obscures its workings, the ratio of heat to light in commentary on the subject is extreme. Some valuable progress has been made. Journalists and ex-officials have chronicled the role of leaks in their work. Students of government and the press have limned leaks’ different forms and motivations. Legal theorists have considered the First Amendment implications. Yet for a variety of reasons, the literature reflects only a rudimentary understanding of leaks’ consequences, inside and outside government.⁵ More surprising, because the questions are more tractable, scholars have devoted scant attention to the constitutive elements of the leak, as a legal and bureaucratic concept, or to the policies the executive branch has developed to enforce relevant prohibitions. We know something about the phenomenology and constitutionality of leaks but next to nothing about how the government deals with them.

This Article begins to reveal that world. Drawing on a range of theoretical perspectives and original sources — interviews with journalists and executive branch officials, plus records requested through the Freedom of Information Act⁶ (FOIA) — it offers the first sustained account of the regulatory regime applicable to leaking. Superficially straightforward, this regime turns out to be an intricate ecosystem. At the most general level, the Article demonstrates that the story behind

¹ I will refine this definition of leaks shortly. A wide range of practices are conventionally lumped together under the “leaks” heading, as explained below. *See infra* notes 28–32, 99–112, 270–81 and accompanying text.

² Statement on the Protection of Classified National Security Council and Intelligence Information, 18 PUB. PAPERS 22, 22 (Jan. 12, 1982).

³ BRUCE CATTON, *THE WAR LORDS OF WASHINGTON* 87 (1948).

⁴ Bill Keller, Op-Ed., *The Leak Police*, N.Y. TIMES (Aug. 5, 2012), <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/06/opinion/keller-the-leak-police.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁵ *See infra* section I.D, pp. 542–44 (discussing obstacles to systematic study of these questions).

⁶ 5 U.S.C. § 552 (2012).

the U.S. government's longstanding failure to enforce the laws against leaking is far more complicated, and far more interesting, than has been appreciated. More specifically, the Article argues that most components of the executive branch have never prioritized criminal, civil, or administrative enforcement against leakers; that a nuanced set of informal social controls has come to supplement, and nearly supplant, the formal disciplinary scheme; that much of what we call leaking occurs in a gray area between full authorization and no authorization, so that it is neither "leaks" nor "plants" but what I will term *pleaks* that dominate this discursive space; that the executive's toleration of these disclosures is a rational, power-enhancing strategy and not simply a product of prosecutorial limitations, a feature, not a bug, of the system; and that to untangle these dynamics is to illuminate important facets of presidential power, bureaucratic governance, and the national security state in America today.

These claims require extensive elaboration. As a way into them, consider two features that mark the United States' legal approach to unapproved disclosures of protected information. First, and most significantly, even though the Espionage Act of 1917⁷ and other statutes broadly criminalize the gathering, receipt, and dissemination of national defense-related information and even though every modern President has decried the practice, an enormous amount of leaking to the press appears to go unpunished. The federal government has brought roughly a dozen media leak prosecutions in the ninety-six years since the Espionage Act was enacted, eight of them under the current Administration.⁸ Available evidence suggests that civil and administrative sanctions are only marginally more common.⁹

Let us call this the punitive/permissive divide: the statutes on the books concerning leaks, and the political rhetoric associated with them, are so harsh, and yet the government's actual treatment of the activity seems to have been so mild. There is a dramatic disconnect between the way our laws and our leaders purport to condemn leaking and the way they have condoned it — a rampant, pervasive culture of it — in practice.

Second, the courts have indicated that while the government has expansive legal authority to prosecute employees who leak, it has minimal authority to stop members of the media who receive leaks from broadcasting what they learn, either through ex post penalties or prior

⁷ Ch. 30, 40 Stat. 217 (codified as amended in scattered sections of 18, 22, and 50 U.S.C. and codified in relevant part at 18 U.S.C. §§ 792–798 (2012)).

⁸ This is the standard narrative. Most observers now count eleven cases overall and attribute the last eight to the Obama Administration. Arguably, the former figure ought to be slightly higher and the latter slightly lower. See *infra* notes 113–14, 121 and accompanying text.

⁹ See *infra* notes 143–56 and accompanying text.

restraints.¹⁰ In nearly all cases, it seems, the government would have to prove that the actions of the reporter or publisher threatened grave, immediate harm to national security interests. It is hard to be sure because no such criminal case has ever proceeded that far.

Let us call this the source/distributor divide: the First Amendment has been construed to provide so little protection for the leaker and yet so much protection for the journalist who knowingly publishes the fruits of the leaker's illicit conduct and thereby enables the very harm — revelation of sensitive information to the public and to foreign adversaries — that the leak laws were designed to combat. In other areas of criminal law, downstream users of illegally obtained material are not similarly insulated from liability.¹¹

As a descriptive or diagnostic matter, the literature has pointed to several factors to explain the existence of these features. The leak laws are so rarely enforced, it is said, because the Department of Justice finds it so difficult at the investigatory stage to identify culprits and so difficult at the adjudicatory stage to bring successful cases without divulging additional sensitive information. Courts and prosecutors have privileged journalists over leakers, it is said, because of the former's special First Amendment status and the latter's consent to nondisclosure as a condition of employment. Throughout these discussions, the comparison is often drawn to the United Kingdom's notorious Official Secrets Act.¹² Whatever else might be true of our legal and political approach to leaks, virtually everyone agrees that the United States would never abide such a sweeping criminal prohibition.¹³

As a normative or justificatory matter, few have celebrated this “disorderly situation.”¹⁴ Many believe it to be regrettable if not outra-

¹⁰ The government does have legal authority to subpoena journalists in leak cases in an effort to uncover their sources, and thereby to frustrate their reporting indirectly, though it has placed strict limits on its own ability to do so. See *infra* notes 135–42 and accompanying text.

¹¹ See, e.g., 18 U.S.C. § 2315 (2012) (criminalizing the knowing sale or receipt of stolen goods).

¹² 1989, c. 6 (U.K.).

¹³ See *infra* notes 497–527 and accompanying text (describing the Official Secrets Act and its role in U.S. legal policy debates).

¹⁴ ALEXANDER M. BICKEL, *THE MORALITY OF CONSENT* 80 (1975); accord Geoffrey R. Stone, *Government Secrecy vs. Freedom of the Press*, 1 HARV. L. & POL'Y REV. 185, 199 (2007) (characterizing First Amendment doctrine on leaking as “an awkward, even incoherent, state of affairs”). Professor Bickel's and Professor Stone's observations were directed at the source/distributor divide, but they fairly capture sentiment on the regulation of leaking more broadly. See generally GARY ROSS, *WHO WATCHES THE WATCHMEN? THE CONFLICT BETWEEN NATIONAL SECURITY AND FREEDOM OF THE PRESS* 9–20 (2011) (reviewing the “remarkable” number of articles, hearings, and reports that have critiqued U.S. leak law and policy, *id.* at 14); Stephen I. Vladeck, *Commentary*, in ROSS, *supra*, at xii, xiii (stating that “prominent scholars from across the spectrum have felled forests in the past several decades” proposing how the laws against leaking might be improved); Note, *Media Incentives and National Security Secrets*, 122 HARV. L. REV. 2228, 2231–32 (2009) [hereinafter Note, *Media Incentives*] (discussing

geous. National security hawks and opposition members of Congress routinely call for legislative strengthening of the leak laws and more vigorous executive enforcement, including against members of the media. Civil libertarians have assailed the last two Administrations' "war" on leaking and sought federal shield legislation for journalists and enhanced doctrinal protections for their sources. The most thoughtful and influential defenses of the status quo — by Professors Alexander Bickel,¹⁵ Jack Goldsmith,¹⁶ and Geoffrey Stone¹⁷ — are self-consciously ambivalent. They do not attempt to idealize or even rationalize the punitive/permissive and source/distributor divides, so much as to highlight the factors confounding any effort to strike an optimal balance between national security needs and other democratic and constitutional goods. These analyses are also spare. They rely on discrete case studies and high-level constitutional theory to identify relevant values, precedents, and tradeoffs; they do not make any systematic inquiry into patterns and practices of leaking or enforcement, or into the functional and strategic dimensions of the leak-law regime.

This Article aims to show why our "disorderly situation" cannot be understood without such inquiry and to explicate a more satisfying logic, a richer model, that better accounts for the seemingly incoherent law of leaks. The core claim is that the status quo, although ritualistically condemned by those in power, has served a wide variety of governmental ends at the same time as it has efficiently kept most disclosures within tolerable bounds. The leak laws are so rarely enforced not only because it is difficult to punish violators, but also because key institutional players share overlapping interests in vilifying leakers while maintaining a permissive culture of classified information disclosures.

The executive branch is where most of the action takes place. With respect to the punitive/permissive divide, commentators have widely assumed the executive would prefer to bring more cases, and then looked to constraints on realizing that preference. By concentrating on barriers to prosecution, these treatments overlook the ways in which powerful actors *benefit* from leak-law violations, as well as the ways in which leaking may be punished in the absence of a criminal proceeding, or indeed any formal sanction. The executive's "leakiness" is often taken to be a sign of institutional failure. It may be better un-

"ample evidence of political dissatisfaction with the status quo," *id.* at 2232, concerning classified information leaks).

¹⁵ BICKEL, *supra* note 14, ch. 3.

¹⁶ JACK GOLDSMITH, *POWER AND CONSTRAINT: THE ACCOUNTABLE PRESIDENCY AFTER 9/11* ch. 7 (2012).

¹⁷ Stone has addressed these issues in numerous important works. *See, e.g.*, GEOFFREY R. STONE, *TOP SECRET: WHEN OUR GOVERNMENT KEEPS US IN THE DARK* chs. 1–3 (2007).

derstood as an adaptive response to key external liabilities — such as the mistrust generated by presidential secret keeping and media manipulation — and internal pathologies — such as overclassification and fragmentation across a sprawling bureaucracy — of the modern administrative state. Once these affirmative interests in leaking are identified, the source/distributor divide also begins to look less puzzling. To criminalize leaking at the publication stage, as well as the transmission stage, would not only raise difficult First Amendment issues but also risk compromising the government's instrumental use of the press.

The flood of leaks, in short, is neither legally nor technologically determined. It would be possible to stop a much higher percentage of disclosures. Leakiness is a product not only of external and organizational constraints but also of deliberate choices made by high-level officials within those constraints. These choices have helped an ever-growing executive to secure the necessary leeway and legitimacy for governance. Curious citizens are derivative beneficiaries. Even though particular leaks may cause real damage, an accommodating approach to enforcement has in the aggregate supported, rather than subverted, the government's general policymaking capacity as well as many different policymakers' discrete agendas.

That, at least, is the Article's central thesis. Part I reviews the legal landscape and the available evidence on how leaks are used and punished. Part II first details the shortcomings of constraint-based rationales for the government's permissiveness, and then advances an alternative explanatory theory grounded in the executive branch interests served by leakiness. These interests include preserving ambiguity as to the origins of unattributed disclosures and therefore the communicative flexibility of top officials; signaling trustworthiness; facilitating richer internal information flows; pacifying constituencies for transparency in Congress, the media, and civil society; and mitigating the classification system's political and deliberative costs. Part III extends this account by investigating the informal enforcement model that the executive appears, behind closed doors, to have applied to leaking. Part IV returns to the source/distributor divide and to the recent uptick in prosecutions and draws out additional evaluative and descriptive implications — including the surprising insight that the U.S. and U.K. legal regimes on leaks have, at least in their observable aspects, substantially converged.

Before proceeding further, several notes are in order. Throughout the pages that follow, the focus is on the U.S. federal executive branch

and its information control practices relating to national security,¹⁸ broadly defined to include many matters of foreign policy. Some of the Article's arguments may well carry over to other types of leaks, to other types of institutions, to subnational levels of government, maybe even to other mature democracies. At points, I will briefly discuss possible extrapolations. But national security leaks raise a number of distinct concerns and have always driven the legal conversation.¹⁹ Their treatment by the world's dominant military power will, I trust, be of sufficient interest to many.

The heart of the Article is the positive analysis in Parts II and III and the window it provides into the regulation of leaking. While I hope in Part IV to draw some fruitful linkages to broader questions in democratic, constitutional, and security theory, and while I hope more generally to facilitate normative projects of varied stripes, the Article is principally concerned with demonstrating how leaking works.²⁰ The overriding aim is to provide an explanation (not a justification) for this regulatory regime in terms of the intersecting desires, beliefs, and constraints of Presidents, political appointees, civil servants, legislators, journalists, and the institutions they populate. Although I cannot directly establish the intentions of many of these actors or rule out evolutionary factors — for instance, a natural tendency for the leakier components of government to gain in relative political power and thereby to propagate their disclosure norms — I try to the extent possible to provide microfoundations for my theory, to specify mechanisms that reduce leakiness to the individual level. I try to show further how personal incentives, bureaucratic politics, and functional system imperatives have largely reinforced one another in this area, how the diffusion of control over information has not crippled but empowered the national security state.

Some pieces of the analysis were aided by roughly two dozen interviews I conducted with current and former officials who have worked

¹⁸ In this, the Article follows much of the existing literature on leaks. *Cf. infra* notes 276 & 338 and accompanying text (noting the potential for more congressionally oriented approaches). As compared to prior legal studies, this study pays greater attention to the intragovernmental regulation, production, and function of leaking and less to doctrine or the demand side. While much more could be (and has been) said about the methods and incentives of those who seek to obtain government secrets, the world explored herein is that of officialdom, of the secret keepers and their minders.

¹⁹ *Cf. ELIE ABEL, LEAKING: WHO DOES IT? WHO BENEFITS? AT WHAT COST?* 4 (1987) (“The [U.S.] government’s problem with leaks and leakers tends to center on three related areas: foreign policy, defense, and . . . two intelligence organizations, the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency.”).

²⁰ Or rather, how it has worked, given the possibility that developments in technology, terrorism, the media, and government structure are unsettling the traditional paradigm. *See infra* notes 323–25, 427–28, 459–61, 528–50 and accompanying text.

on top secret issues across the executive branch,²¹ as well as by my own modest experiences in government.²² Almost all the interviews were “on background,” which is to say the interviewees asked not to be identified, and I agreed. The unsettling brand of methodological mimesis that results — this is an Article about anonymous government sources that itself makes use of anonymous government sources — is not lost on me. I would have preferred to conduct these conversations on the record. Yet like so many journalists and several scholars before me, I quickly learned that few were willing to discuss anything interesting under those ground rules.²³ Minimizing validity concerns, however, nothing expressed in an interview contradicts the publicly available evidence, including the returns from my own FOIA requests.²⁴ The interviews provided a measure of color and corroboration. They deepened but did not transform my understanding of this evidence.

A final caveat: while I try in this Article to shine light on an opaque corner of the law, I certainly do not mean to suggest that I have fully uncovered, much less “solved,” the inner workings of the leak regime. A number of significant developments occurred after the Article was drafted — most notably, one of the most sensational classified information leaks in history, by National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden.²⁵ I will touch on this event in a handful of places, including a closing discussion about whether we are at the cusp

²¹ I spoke with senior and mid-level officials who were working or had worked recently in the White House, the Intelligence Community, and departments including Defense, Justice, State, Treasury, and Homeland Security. Most of these officials served in a legal capacity. Several were directly involved in formal or informal leak-law enforcement. It is possible that this pool of interviewees — mainly lawyers, all willing to talk with me — suffers from selection bias, although it is not obvious in what direction such bias would skew perceptions of leaking. I make no claim to systematicity or comprehensiveness in the design of these interviews, which play only a supporting role in the analysis. My hope is that they add sufficient texture to merit mention, notwithstanding their evident limitations.

²² I served as a special advisor to the Legal Adviser of the Department of State from 2010 to 2012, and as a special assistant to Senator Edward M. Kennedy from 2007 to 2008.

²³ Among the few scholarly studies of leaking and associated issues that draw on interviews with U.S. government insiders, most appear to have similarly granted anonymity in full or in part. *See, e.g.*, GOLDSMITH, *supra* note 16, at 253; HUGH HECLLO, *A GOVERNMENT OF STRANGERS*, at xi–xii (1977).

²⁴ My primary FOIA requests, submitted to a dozen executive branch agencies in September 2012, asked broadly for records from 1970 through the present day relating to criminal referrals, internal investigations, or administrative or civil actions for suspected media leaks. *See, e.g.*, Letter from David Pozen, Assoc. Professor of Law, Columbia Law Sch., to Donna L. Sealing, FOIA/Privacy Officer, Nuclear Reg. Comm’n (Sept. 18, 2012), *available at* <http://pbadupws.nrc.gov/docs/ML1226/ML12263A214.pdf>. All records received through FOIA are on file with the author and available upon request.

²⁵ *See generally* *Edward Snowden*, *GUARDIAN*, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/edward-snowden> (last visited Oct. 27, 2013) (compiling articles on Snowden).

of a new era in enforcement.²⁶ But a focused treatment of the (still-unfolding) Snowden affair will have to await future work. The regulatory dynamics and arrangements explored here are no doubt historically contingent and subject to change. The phenomenon of leaking, more broadly, is so varied and complex that it defies neat characterization. I hope this Article can render it a little less mysterious and, in so doing, point the way to some new approaches to studying and conceptualizing government secrecy.

I. WHAT WE KNOW (AND THINK WE KNOW) ABOUT LEAKS

This Part sets the stage by synthesizing relevant law, commentary, and data on leaks. Legal scholars have largely concentrated on the First Amendment questions raised by publication and prosecution of leaks and on the small set of litigated cases, in particular the Pentagon Papers case.²⁷ The literatures on media, government, and the presidency are more helpful for understanding how leaking operates.

There is no settled definition of a leak in the academic literature or in journalistic usage.²⁸ Most commonly, a leak is taken to be (i) a targeted disclosure (ii) by a government insider (employee, former employee, contractor) (iii) to a member of the media (iv) of confidential information the divulgence of which is generally proscribed by law, policy, or convention (v) outside of any formal process (vi) with an expectation of anonymity.²⁹ This can serve as a working definition. Revelations made in a signed memoir, speech, or the like thus do not count because there is no mystery as to their source. Some commentators further stipulate that the disclosure must be “unauthorized.”³⁰ The concept of authorization is crucial in this context but also, as we will see, deeply difficult; I bracket the issue for the time being and

²⁶ See *infra* notes 528–46 and accompanying text. A number of other very recent developments are taken up in footnotes scattered throughout the Article.

²⁷ *N.Y. Times Co. v. United States*, 403 U.S. 713 (1971) (per curiam).

²⁸ See MARTIN LINSKY, *IMPACT: HOW THE PRESS AFFECTS FEDERAL POLICYMAKING* 169 (1986) (“[I]n the dialogue between reporters and officials, leaks are a complex, confusing, and controversial subject. There are arguments about what is a leak”); Leslie H. Gelb, *All About Leaks*, *N.Y. TIMES*, May 22, 1986, at B10 (“There is not even agreement on a definition.”). Several journalists I interviewed objected to the term “leak,” on the ground that it has unwarranted pejorative connotations. I use the term here neutrally, nonjudgmentally. Given the ubiquitous references to “leaks” in this area, it would be odd to use another label.

²⁹ See, e.g., LINSKY, *supra* note 28, at 169, 171, 197 (leaks involve confidential information, anonymous sources, and exclusive stories); LEON V. SIGAL, *REPORTERS AND OFFICIALS* 144 (1973) (similar).

³⁰ See William E. Lee, *Deep Background: Journalists, Sources, and the Perils of Leaking*, 57 *AM. U. L. REV.* 1453, 1461 n.35 (2008) (noting the prevalence of this approach); see also Clifton Daniel, *Leaks: A Fact of Life*, *N.Y. TIMES*, June 29, 1974, at 13 (“By Washington’s definition, a leak is an unauthorized disclosure of confidential official information, usually by an unidentified ‘source.’”).

then return to it at length in Part II.³¹ Except as otherwise specified, the Article uses the term “leaks” in the colloquial sense, encompassing both authorized and unauthorized disclosures.

As noted above, this Article primarily explores leaks to the press by executive branch sources of national security–related information, understood to include information pertaining to foreign affairs.³² Given the subject matter, these disclosures will frequently, though not always, implicate or involve classified content. Routine background briefings with multiple reporters fall beyond the Article’s focus. So do the tips and nudges that officials sometimes give to outside parties about which *nonconfidential*, publicly available materials deserve their attention (a significant and underappreciated practice). So do disclosures to foreign powers or their agents — espionage in the traditional sense. And so do disclosures to members of Congress or to private parties not in the media, except insofar as they are anticipated to generate a news story, rendering them media leaks at one remove.

A. *The Legal Framework*

As a number of recent works have catalogued the statutes and case law on leaking,³³ this overview strives for parsimony. The central statutory provision is 18 U.S.C. § 793, originally enacted as part of the Espionage Act of 1917.³⁴ Section 793 criminalizes a wide range of activities associated with the gathering, possession, or communication of information relating to the “national defense” — that is, a wide range of activities that may bear little resemblance to classic espionage — with intent or reason to believe the information could “be used to the injury of the United States or to the advantage of any foreign nation.”³⁵ Violators are subject to fines, forfeiture, and imprisonment for

³¹ See *infra* sections II.B.1–2, pp. 559–73.

³² The federal government’s uniform system for classifying national security information incorporates this understanding. See Exec. Order No. 13,526 § 6.1(cc), 3 C.F.R. 298, 324 (2010), reprinted in 50 U.S.C. § 435 app. at 233–45 (Supp. V 2011) (defining national security to include “foreign relations of the United States”); see also *id.* § 1.4(b), (d), 3 C.F.R. at 300 (expressly allowing for classification of information pertaining to “foreign government information” and “foreign relations or foreign activities of the United States”).

³³ See, e.g., JENNIFER K. ELSEA, CONG. RESEARCH SERV., R41404, CRIMINAL PROHIBITIONS ON THE PUBLICATION OF CLASSIFIED DEFENSE INFORMATION *passim* (2013); ROSS, *supra* note 14, at 147–68; Mary-Rose Papandrea, *Lapdogs, Watchdogs, and Scapegoats: The Press and National Security Information*, 83 IND. L.J. 233, 262–98 (2008); Stephen I. Vladeck, Essay, *Inchoate Liability and the Espionage Act: The Statutory Framework and the Freedom of the Press*, 1 HARV. L. & POL’Y REV. 219, 221–31 (2007). The laws themselves do not use the term “leaks.”

³⁴ 18 U.S.C. § 793 (2012). The Espionage Act of 1917 superseded the first federal statute directed to military information, the Defense Secrets Act of 1911, ch. 226, 36 Stat. 1084 (repealed 1917).

³⁵ 18 U.S.C. § 793(a); see also *id.* § 793(d)–(e). The broadest provisions of the Espionage Act have no special intent requirement for certain categories of tangible materials relating to the na-

up to ten years.³⁶ Courts have construed the term “national defense” broadly, so that the statute likely embraces a great deal of sensitive information implicating foreign relations,³⁷ and they have looked to the executive’s own classification system (which conditions eligibility for classification on anticipated “damage to the national security”³⁸) to help determine the statute’s reach.³⁹ No court has ever accepted a defense of improper classification.⁴⁰

In addition to section 793, a variety of other criminal statutes might be applied to leakers, including⁴¹:

18 U.S.C. § 371 — prohibiting conspiracy to commit any offense against or defraud the United States “in any manner or for any purpose.”

18 U.S.C. § 641 — prohibiting theft, conversion, or unauthorized disposition of “property” and “thing[s] of value of the United States or of any department or agency thereof.”

18 U.S.C. § 794 — prohibiting gathering or delivering of defense information in aid of a foreign government.

18 U.S.C. § 797 — prohibiting publication and sale of photographs of defense installations.

18 U.S.C. § 798 — prohibiting disclosure or publication of cryptographic and communication intelligence information.

tional defense, just the relaxed requirement that their unlawful communication or transmission have been “willful[.]” *Id.*

³⁶ *Id.* § 793(f), (h).

³⁷ The leading opinion comes from an espionage case, *Gorin v. United States*, 312 U.S. 19, 25–32 (1941). See also REPORT OF THE INTERDEPARTMENTAL GROUP ON UNAUTHORIZED DISCLOSURES OF CLASSIFIED INFORMATION 10 (1982) [hereinafter WILLARD REPORT], available at www.fas.org/sgp/library/willard.pdf (“Because the term ‘national defense’ was so broadly defined in *Gorin*, it is likely to cover most information relating to ‘foreign relations’ that is properly classified.”). But cf. Harold Edgar & Benno C. Schmidt, Jr., *The Espionage Statutes and Publication of Defense Information*, 73 COLUM. L. REV. 929, 976–86 (1973) (noting ambiguities in *Gorin*).

³⁸ Exec. Order No. 13,526 § 1.2(a), 3 C.F.R. 298, 299 (2010), reprinted in 50 U.S.C. § 435 app. at 233–45 (Supp. V 2011); see also *id.* § 1.2(a), 3 C.F.R. at 298–99.

³⁹ See, e.g., *United States v. Kiriakou*, No. 1:12cr127 (LMB), 2012 WL 3263854, at *6 (E.D. Va. Aug. 8, 2012) (explaining that “courts have relied on the classified status of information to determine whether it is closely held by the government and harmful to the United States” and adopting this approach); see also *United States v. Kim*, No. 1:10-cr-00225-CKK, slip op. at 6–10 (D.D.C. July 24, 2013) (holding that the government is not required to prove under 18 U.S.C. § 793(d) that the disclosure of specific classified information was potentially damaging to the United States and questioning whether a contrary Fourth Circuit ruling has been followed within that circuit). Tracking the language of the Espionage Act’s harm element, the nondisclosure agreements signed by millions of federal employees advise that “unauthorized disclosure . . . of classified information by [the employee] could cause irreparable injury to the United States or could be used to advantage by a foreign nation.” STEPHEN DYCUS ET AL., NATIONAL SECURITY LAW 1259 (5th ed. 2011); see also *id.* at 1258–59.

⁴⁰ See Patricia L. Bellia, Feature, *WikiLeaks and the Institutional Framework for National Security Disclosures*, 121 YALE L.J. 1448, 1523 (2012).

⁴¹ Except as otherwise indicated, all references in this list are to the 2012 version of the United States Code.

18 U.S.C. § 952 — prohibiting disclosure of diplomatic codes and correspondence.

18 U.S.C. § 1030(a)(1) — prohibiting disclosure of protected national defense and foreign relations information retrieved through unauthorized access of a computer.

18 U.S.C. § 1905 — prohibiting disclosure of confidential information acquired in the course of employment “in any manner or to any extent not authorized by law.”

18 U.S.C. § 1924 — prohibiting unauthorized removal and retention of classified documents or materials.

18 U.S.C. § 2071 — prohibiting “willful[] and unlawful[]” concealment, removal, or destruction of government records.

42 U.S.C. § 2274 (2006) — prohibiting communication of “Restricted Data” relating to atomic energy, with intent or reason to believe such data will be used to injure the United States.

42 U.S.C. § 2277 (2006) — prohibiting disclosure of “Restricted Data” to unauthorized parties.

50 U.S.C. §§ 421–426 (2006 & Supp. V 2011) — prohibiting disclosure of identities of covert intelligence officers, agents, informants, or sources.

The second item on this list, the general theft and conversion statute, warrants special mention on account of its potential breadth. While one circuit court has deemed § 641 inapplicable to disclosures of “intangible goods,”⁴² several others have found that it applies equally to intangible and tangible confidential information.⁴³ “Why bother with an Official Secrets Act,” a former CIA analyst asked a decade ago, “with this thing on the books?”⁴⁴

Judicial interpretations of these laws have narrowed their scope in a few respects, but not by much. Although there are many ambiguities in the statutes⁴⁵ and the case law, it has been reasonably clear for at least the past few decades that (i) virtually any deliberate leak of clas-

⁴² *United States v. Tobias*, 836 F.2d 449, 451 (9th Cir. 1988) (internal quotation marks omitted).

⁴³ *See, e.g., United States v. Matzkin*, 14 F.3d 1014, 1020 (4th Cir. 1994); *United States v. Girard*, 601 F.2d 69, 70–71 (2d Cir. 1979). *See generally* Irina Dmitrieva, Note, *Stealing Information: Application of a Criminal Anti-Theft Statute to Leaks of Confidential Government Information*, 55 FLA. L. REV. 1043, 1046–52 (2003). In at least one media leak case, the government secured a guilty plea and prison sentence under § 641 without bringing any charges under the Espionage Act. *See* Elaine Hargrove-Simon, *Balancing National Security and Civil Rights: Analyst Sentenced for Leaking Information to London Times*, SILHA CTR. FOR THE STUDY OF MEDIA ETHICS & L. (Winter 2003), <http://www.silha.umn.edu/news/winter2003.php?entry=202897> (describing the case of Jonathan Randel).

⁴⁴ Steven Aftergood, *Government Information as Property*, SECRECY NEWS (Jan. 16, 2003), <http://www.fas.org/sgp/news/secretcy/2003/01/011603.html> (quoting Allen Thomson) (internal quotation marks omitted).

⁴⁵ *See* Edgar & Schmidt, *supra* note 37, *passim* (meticulously detailing ambiguities in the espionage statutes).

sified information to an unauthorized recipient is likely to fall within the reach of one or more criminal statutes;⁴⁶ and (ii) the government may prosecute most if not all employees, ex-employees, and contractors for such leaks so long as it can prove the information was not already in the public domain⁴⁷ and the defendant knew or should have known her actions were unlawful.⁴⁸ Complementing these criminal powers, courts have also allowed the government to enforce the terms of non-disclosure agreements through equitable and monetary remedies.⁴⁹ The courts have further granted the executive near-total discretion to revoke security clearances of, and take other disciplinary action against, individuals suspected of leaking.⁵⁰

As compared to the legal vulnerability of their government sources, journalists and other private actors who publish leaked information appear to occupy a privileged position. In the Pentagon Papers case, the Supreme Court held the government had not met its “heavy burden” of justifying a prior restraint on the *New York Times*’s and *Washington Post*’s publication of excerpts of a classified study on Vietnam War decisionmaking leaked by defense contractor Daniel Ellsberg.⁵¹ That burden, Justice Stewart famously maintained, requires the government to prove that publication “will surely result in direct, immedi-

⁴⁶ See WILLARD REPORT, *supra* note 37, at 2 (“[I]n virtually all cases the unauthorized disclosure of classified information potentially violates one or more federal criminal statutes.” (internal numbering omitted)); Letter from John Ashcroft, U.S. Att’y Gen., to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives 3 (Oct. 15, 2002) [hereinafter Ashcroft Report], available at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/othergov/dojleaks.pdf> (“I conclude that current statutes provide a legal basis to prosecute those who engage in unauthorized disclosures [of classified information], if they can be identified.”); see also *Unauthorized Disclosure of Classified Information: Hearing Before the S. Select Comm. on Intelligence*, 106th Cong. 10 (2000) (statement of Janet Reno, U.S. Att’y Gen.) [hereinafter *Reno Testimony*], available at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/othergov/renoleaks.pdf> (“[W]e believe that the criminal statutes currently on the books are adequate to allow us to prosecute almost all leak cases. We have never been forced to decline a prosecution solely because the criminal statutes were not broad enough.”).

⁴⁷ *But see* United States v. Squillacote, 221 F.3d 542, 575–80 (4th Cir. 2000) (holding that even publicly available classified information can qualify as national defense information under the Espionage Act).

⁴⁸ Scholars continue to debate the best view of the First Amendment in this context, but few dispute that the (very thin) case law permits the government at least this much. See, e.g., ELSEA, *supra* note 33, at 15; STONE, *supra* note 17, at 11–14 (characterizing the case law similarly, with the qualification that disclosures revealing unlawful government conduct must be seen as protected by the First Amendment). As explained above, see *supra* notes 34–44 and accompanying text, while the government may have to prove at trial the possibility of injury to the United States under some Espionage Act provisions, this harm element does not always apply and, where it does, the fact that a disclosure involved classified information ought to be highly probative given the criteria for classification.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., *Snepp v. United States*, 444 U.S. 507, 514–16 (1980) (per curiam); *United States v. Marchetti*, 466 F.2d 1309, 1316–18 (4th Cir. 1972).

⁵⁰ *Cf.* *Dep’t of the Navy v. Egan*, 484 U.S. 518, 527–33 (1988) (establishing the nonreviewability of security clearance determinations in the absence of specific statutory warrant).

⁵¹ *N.Y. Times Co. v. United States*, 403 U.S. 713, 714 (1971) (per curiam).

ate, and irreparable damage to our Nation or its people.”⁵² At least five Justices suggested that ex post prosecutions might be held to a less stringent First Amendment standard than prior restraints,⁵³ and by its plain terms the Espionage Act seems to extend to journalists and publishers.⁵⁴ More recent Supreme Court decisions, however, give reason to believe the government’s burden would be nearly as heavy in a criminal proceeding against a member of the press, at least in the absence of a concerted effort to exfiltrate the information.⁵⁵ Hence the source/distributor divide.

Of greater practical significance for national security journalists, the Supreme Court has declined to recognize a First Amendment– or common law–based reporter’s privilege against compelled disclosure of confidential source information.⁵⁶ While some lower courts have nevertheless recognized a qualified privilege,⁵⁷ Judge Posner’s 2003 opinion for the Seventh Circuit in *McKevitt v. Pallasch*⁵⁸ appears to have anticipated a swing in the doctrinal pendulum back toward the more restrictive view.⁵⁹ And while the vast majority of U.S. states have enacted statutes recognizing some form of reporter’s privilege, and Congress has considered many proposals,⁶⁰ no such “shield law” currently

⁵² *Id.* at 730 (Stewart, J., concurring). Justice Stewart staked out the median, and thus effectively controlling, position in his concurring opinion.

⁵³ *See id.*; *id.* at 733–40 (White, J., concurring); *id.* at 741–48 (Marshall, J., concurring); *id.* at 752 (Burger, C.J., dissenting); *id.* at 759 (Blackmun, J., dissenting); *cf. id.* at 757–58 (Harlan, J., dissenting) (disputing the Court’s prior restraint holding).

⁵⁴ *See* Papandrea, *supra* note 33, at 264; *see also* Criminal Liability for Newspaper Publication of Naval Secrets, 1 Op. O.L.C. 93 (Supp. 1942) (advising that the Espionage Act could be applied to a reporter, and possibly also to his managing editor and publisher, for their roles in acquiring and publishing wartime naval information); Government’s Consolidated Responses to Defendants’ Pretrial Motion at 15, *United States v. Rosen*, 445 F. Supp. 2d 602 (E.D. Va. 2006) (No. 1:05cr225) (“There plainly is no exemption in [18 U.S.C. § 793] for the press . . .”).

⁵⁵ Particularly important statements on press immunity include *Landmark Communications, Inc. v. Virginia*, 435 U.S. 829 (1978), and *Bartnicki v. Vopper*, 532 U.S. 514 (2001). *See also* Stone, *supra* note 14, at 200 nn.50–51 (citing additional cases). Stone concludes that “as a practical matter, the standard used in Pentagon Papers is essentially the same as the standard the Court would use in a criminal prosecution of the press for publishing information about the activities of government.” STONE, *supra* note 17, at 24.

⁵⁶ *See* *Branzburg v. Hayes*, 408 U.S. 665, 679–708 (1972).

⁵⁷ *See* RonNell Andersen Jones, *Avalanche or Undue Alarm? An Empirical Study of Subpoenas Received by the News Media*, 93 MINN. L. REV. 585, 587–93 (2008) (summarizing the case law). These courts creatively seized on Justice Powell’s *Branzburg* concurrence as if it were the controlling opinion, when in fact Justice Powell joined the Court’s opinion in full — making five votes for the “no privilege” position. *See Branzburg*, 408 U.S. at 709 (Powell, J., concurring).

⁵⁸ 339 F.3d 530 (7th Cir. 2003).

⁵⁹ *See, e.g.*, *United States v. Sterling*, 724 F.3d 482, 492–505 (4th Cir. 2013) (declining to recognize a First Amendment– or common law–based reporter’s privilege protecting confidential sources in a criminal proceeding); *In re Grand Jury Subpoena, Judith Miller*, 438 F.3d 1141, 1145–50 (D.C. Cir. 2006) (affirming a civil contempt order issued against reporters for failure to comply with subpoenas requesting source identities).

⁶⁰ *See* Jones, *supra* note 57, at 594–615, 652 n.280.

exists at the federal level. The Department of Justice (DOJ) has taken the position that the reporter's privilege does not apply in criminal cases, absent a showing that the subpoena was issued in bad faith or for the purpose of harassment.⁶¹ Over the past several decades, it appears that roughly two dozen journalists have served some, usually quite brief, time in jail for refusing to disclose their sources.⁶²

The federal whistleblower statutes might be expected to comprise the last major piece of the legal framework, except that in the national security context they play a marginal role. Several laws protect executive branch employees who disclose information regarding alleged abuses to designated agency officials or congressional committees under specified procedures.⁶³ But these laws offer significantly less succor when it comes to classified information, are widely seen as confusing and user-unfriendly, and under no circumstances permit disclosures directly to the press.⁶⁴ These laws also do not ensure against revocation of one's security clearance,⁶⁵ which in the national security and foreign policy fields generally means loss of one's job. And though the point is contestable, the laws are fairly read to provide "absolutely zero protection" for those who publicly reveal classified information, even as a last resort, and even when the information reveals illegal government conduct.⁶⁶ The vast majority of leakers have no interest in reporting wrongdoing in any event.⁶⁷ Consequently, the whistleblower statutes tend to be ignored in the debate over classified information leaking, apart from occasional calls to revise them. It is telling that in Jack Goldsmith's recent book-length study of mechanisms that publicize and constrain the executive's national security activities, these laws are never once mentioned.⁶⁸

⁶¹ See *id.* at 597; Brief for the United States (Public Version) at 13–14, 23–37, *Sterling*, 724 F.3d 482 (No. 11-5028).

⁶² See William H. Freivogel, *Publishing National Security Secrets: The Case for "Benign Indeterminacy"*, 3 J. NAT'L SECURITY L. & POL'Y 95, 96–97 (2009).

⁶³ E.g., Whistleblower Protection Act of 1989, Pub. L. No. 101-12, 103 Stat. 16 (codified as amended in scattered sections of 5 U.S.C.).

⁶⁴ See generally Papandrea, *supra* note 33, at 245–48; Stephen I. Vladeck, *The Espionage Act and National Security Whistleblowing After Garcetti*, 57 AM. U. L. REV. 1531, 1536–37, 1542–46 (2008). In an interview, secrecy expert Steven Aftergood stated that most classified information leakers are either uninterested in availing themselves of the prescribed whistleblower channels or do not trust that they will prove safe or effective. Interview with Steven Aftergood, Dir., Project on Gov't Secrecy, Fed'n of Am. Scientists, in Washington, D.C. (Apr. 10, 2012).

⁶⁵ See Papandrea, *supra* note 33, at 248.

⁶⁶ Vladeck, *supra* note 64, at 1534.

⁶⁷ See *infra* section I.B, pp. 528–34.

⁶⁸ See GOLDSMITH, *supra* note 16. The one allusion to these laws in Goldsmith's book highlights their practical irrelevance. See *id.* at 239 (observing that after 9/11, "CIA whistle-blowers leaked information to the press rather than follow internal whistle-blower procedures").

B. Leaking Practices

It is a commonplace that leaks course through the nation's capital. Classified information disclosures to the media are thought to occur "so regularly in Washington" as to constitute "a routine method of communication about government."⁶⁹ According to one executive branch study, they are a "daily occurrence."⁷⁰ What little empirical evidence there is in the public record tends to bear out these claims.

Most arresting, in a survey of current and former senior government officials conducted by the Harvard Kennedy School's Institute of Politics in the mid-1980s, forty-two percent of respondents indicated that they had, at least once, "fe[lt] it appropriate to leak information to the press."⁷¹ The survey designers concluded this figure was likely understated.⁷² "[E]verything we have found," the lead researcher reflected, "argues that leaks . . . are a routine and generally accepted part of the policymaking process."⁷³ Nonsurvey data point toward the same conclusion. Using an exceedingly restrictive definition of leaks, Leon Sigal found that between 1949 and 1969, 2.3% of the front-page stories in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* about national or foreign news relied primarily on leaks for the information reported.⁷⁴ Looking at classified information disclosures specifically, a study by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence counted 147 separate instances in the nation's eight leading newspapers in the first six

⁶⁹ Lee, *supra* note 30, at 1467.

⁷⁰ WILLARD REPORT, *supra* note 37, at 6.

⁷¹ LINSKY, *supra* note 28, at 238; *see also id.* at 172 (interpreting affirmative responses to this question as confessions of leaking). This survey, which attained a response rate of fifty percent, was given to hundreds of executive officials at the level of assistant secretary and above and to a few members of Congress. *Id.* at 228–30. The survey did not ask any questions about classified information disclosures specifically. This appears to be the only study to have polled current or former U.S. officials about their views on leaking.

⁷² *Id.* at 172, 197.

⁷³ *Id.* at 197.

⁷⁴ SIGAL, *supra* note 29, at 120–22; *cf.* Project for Excellence in Journalism & Rick Edmonds, *Content Analysis*, STATE OF THE NEWS MEDIA, <http://stateofthemediamedia.org/2005/newspapers-intro/content-analysis> (last visited Oct. 27, 2013) (finding that thirteen percent of all front-page newspaper stories, and twenty percent of the largest newspapers' front-page stories, contained anonymous sources in 2004). Sigal looked at two weeks' worth of stories in the *Times* and the *Post* from each of the years 1949, 1954, 1959, 1964, and 1969. A story was placed in the leak category only if its unattributed information appeared solely in that newspaper and "independent evidence from subsequent news articles, historical studies or memoirs, or officials' and reporters' recollections indicate[d] that it was a leak." SIGAL, *supra* note 29, at 121. While Sigal's method is admirably thorough, his data cover a small and not necessarily representative set of news items, and his strategy for identifying leaks — consulting subsequent articles, memoirs, recollections, and the like in some unspecified way — is too demanding and too arbitrary to replicate for a larger sample. In the view of the national security journalists with whom I spoke, any effort to systematically isolate "leak-based stories" through objective, observable criteria is destined to fail.

months of 1986.⁷⁵ The Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Commission claimed in its 2005 public report to have identified “[h]undreds of serious press leaks” of classified information over the past decade.⁷⁶ Goldsmith similarly appears to have tallied “hundreds of stories” in the *Times* and the *Post* following 9/11 that “self-reported disclosure of classified information,” and “many more” that contained “classified tidbits” without advertising as much.⁷⁷

A number of commentators have speculated that the volume of classified information leaks has been increasing in recent years,⁷⁸ whether because of the growing size of the classification system, rising levels of partisanship, diminishing trust in government, or new technologies that make it easier to produce, reproduce, store, and spread materials. I share the intuition that there has been significant growth in the raw amount of leaks, or at least in the amount of publicization and republicization of leaks across various media outlets. But it is worth recalling that over sixty years ago President Truman asserted, based on a Yale University study commissioned by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), that “95 percent of our secret information ha[d] been revealed by newspapers and slick magazines.”⁷⁹

Journalists and government insiders have consistently attested that leaking is far more common among those in leadership positions. The ship of state, one often hears, is the only known vessel that leaks from the top⁸⁰ — starting, that is, from the White House itself.⁸¹ This top-down dynamic is traceable to differences in professional norms, cultures, and incentives as between political appointees and career civil servants and — perhaps an even more pronounced gulf — as between high-level and mid- to low-level employees. The latter group has limited contact with reporters or access to “the kind of information that makes a front-page splash.”⁸² Senior officials routinely encounter

⁷⁵ See Mark Lawrence, *Executive Branch Leads the Leakers*, WASH. POST, July 28, 1987, at A13. This study, which found that Congress was responsible for nine percent of the leaks, *id.*, remains unpublished.

⁷⁶ COMM’N ON THE INTELLIGENCE CAPABILITIES OF THE U.S. REGARDING WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION, REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES 381 (2005) [hereinafter WMD REPORT].

⁷⁷ GOLDSMITH, *supra* note 16, at 68–69.

⁷⁸ See, e.g., *id.* at 68–74.

⁷⁹ The President’s News Conference, 247 PUB. PAPERS 254, 255 (Oct. 4, 1951).

⁸⁰ See Lili Levi, *Dangerous Liaisons: Seduction and Betrayal in Confidential Press-Source Relations*, 43 RUTGERS L. REV. 609, 624 n.47 (1991) (noting the popularity of this metaphor).

⁸¹ See MORTON H. HALPERIN ET AL., BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS AND FOREIGN POLICY 183 (2d ed. 2006) (“Leaks come from many different sources, but it is the judgment of most reporters that the greatest single source of leaks is the White House.”).

⁸² ABEL, *supra* note 19, at 17; see also STEPHEN HESS, THE GOVERNMENT/PRESS CONNECTION 75 (1984) (“The bureaucrats’ world faces inward. They know best how to maneuver within their own agencies; journalists . . . are outside their ken and represent risk beyond possible gain.”).

both. Civil servants generally operate in a work environment that prizes discipline and vilifies leaking as disloyalty.⁸³ For many senior officials, leaks are seen as “at worst an annoyance.”⁸⁴ Most bureaucrats have little to gain in their careers from leaking, and much to lose. Senior officials, especially those appointees who cycle in and out of government, are better positioned to reap benefits from media relationships and from changes in administration policy or public perception. “[T]he fine art of leaking,” accordingly, “is most often practiced at the level of the cabinet and subcabinet or among the president’s closest advisers in the White House.”⁸⁵ Many in the executive have plausibly claimed that members of Congress are a significant secondary source of leaks,⁸⁶ although reliable data on congressional leaking are even harder to come by,⁸⁷ and such claims may warrant skepticism inasmuch as they deflect attention from the executive’s own disclosure habits.

Less senior government officials have been known to leak as well, occasionally to spectacular effect. Several observers have opined that as the Reagan and Bush II Administrations wore on, their controversial policy initiatives inspired a growing number of mid-level employees to turn to the press.⁸⁸ Yet it is rare to hear of any such employee becoming a repeat player in the “game of leaks,”⁸⁹ as so many senior officials seem to be. And one will never find such an employee publicly proclaiming, as U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. once did, that leaking is his or her professional “prerogative,” “one of my weapons for doing this job.”⁹⁰

In part because of their association with opportunistic power-players rather than disempowered dissidents, leaks are sometimes thought to typify and foster the occasionally adversarial yet fundamen-

⁸³ See LINSKY, *supra* note 28, at 171, 201.

⁸⁴ *Id.* at 172; see also Lee, *supra* note 30, at 1463 (quoting a sworn statement by a former *Washington Post* national security correspondent that “the vast majority of high-level government officials become confidential sources” (internal quotation marks omitted)).

⁸⁵ ABEL, *supra* note 19, at 17.

⁸⁶ See, e.g., HESS, *supra* note 82, at 76 (“According to a wise departmental press officer, ‘we just assume that anything given to the Hill will be leaked . . .’”).

⁸⁷ The most careful (yet still anecdote-driven) study I have seen suggests that Congress has shared classified information with the media on a number of occasions, though far less often than the executive has. See Kathleen Clark, *Congress’s Right to Counsel in Intelligence Oversight*, 2011 U. ILL. L. REV. 915, 940–51. Just as politically appointed executive officials are significantly more likely to leak than lower-level civil servants, Clark finds that members of Congress are significantly more likely to reveal classified information than their staffers. *Id.* at 950–51; accord Robert Garcia, *Leak City*, AM. POL., Aug. 1987, at 23, 24.

⁸⁸ See, e.g., ABEL, *supra* note 19, at 42, 67 (Reagan); Seth F. Kreimer, *The Freedom of Information Act and the Ecology of Transparency*, 10 U. PA. J. CONST. L. 1011, 1037–45 (2008) (Bush II).

⁸⁹ Papandrea, *supra* note 33, at 248; see also *id.* at 248–62.

⁹⁰ SIGAL, *supra* note 29, at 137 (internal quotation mark omitted).

tally symbiotic relationship between the government and the mainstream press. Max Frankel's affidavit for the *New York Times* in the Pentagon Papers case remains the canonical statement of this view. Frankel described the "informal but customary traffic in secret information"⁹¹ that characterized the interactions of "a small and specialized corps of reporters and a few hundred American officials."⁹² Within this community, Frankel explained, high-level leaks of classified information are "the coin of [the] business."⁹³ The media outlets that participate in these "cooperative, competitive, antagonistic and arcane"⁹⁴ rituals have varied over time, with the *Times* and the *Post* long occupying a central position.⁹⁵ Their power to dictate outcomes is substantial. In many instances, media outlets have delayed publication or withheld certain especially sensitive details in light of the national security concerns raised by forewarned officials.⁹⁶ These acts of restraint underwrite the industry's claim to being a careful steward of the public interest — the notion that as a counterweight to the venality and extremism of its government secret keepers, the United States has been blessed with a responsible press. And yet it is clear that, as a group, journalists and editors do not believe that seeking, receiving, or broadcasting classified information is intrinsically harmful or unethical,⁹⁷ while as individuals they face potential professional harm from being "scooped" by competitors, versus gain from the "exclusives" and the frisson that leak stories tend to generate.⁹⁸ Both

⁹¹ Affidavit of Max Frankel at para. 17, *United States v. N.Y. Times Co.*, 328 F. Supp. 324 (S.D.N.Y. 1971) (No. 71 Civ. 2662), 1971 WL 224067 [hereinafter Frankel Affidavit].

⁹² *Id.* at para. 3.

⁹³ *Id.* at para. 16.

⁹⁴ *Id.* at para. 3.

⁹⁵ Cf. HALPERIN ET AL., *supra* note 81, at 185 ("The feeling is that 'everyone' in Washington reads the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*."). I have not seen any scholarly discussion of the changing composition of media leak recipients. Virtually all pre-WikiLeaks studies of leaks centered on print publications, though one assumes that broadcast media gained market share in the leak-revelation industry over the course of the twentieth century.

⁹⁶ See, e.g., SUNSHINE IN GOV'T INITIATIVE, LEAKS IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY 4–8 (2007), available at <http://www.sunshineingovernment.org/members/leaks/Overview.pdf> (reviewing examples).

⁹⁷ See LINSKY, *supra* note 28, at 171 (observing that for "nearly all journalists, most leaks do not carry . . . negative moral baggage"); Lee, *supra* note 30, at 1464 ("Journalists generally do not believe that seeking or receiving classified information is illegal or unethical."); cf. BICKEL, *supra* note 14, at 81 (arguing that the Pentagon Papers ruling vindicated a conception of the First Amendment in which "the presumptive duty of the press is to publish, not to guard security or to be concerned with the morals of its sources").

⁹⁸ See DAVID WISE, THE POLITICS OF LYING 282 (1973) ("Normally the leaker can count on competitive pressures within the news media to insure publication of the story."); Richard Halloran, *A Primer on the Fine Art of Leaking Information*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 14, 1983, at A16 ("For its part, the press rarely turns away leaks that have been checked for accuracy A published leak often leads to a counter-leak. It also makes reporters look good in the eyes of editors,

their incentives and their worldview cut strongly in favor of publicizing credible disclosures.

Media leaks come in many different shapes and sizes. In his 1984 book, *The Government/Press Connection*, Stephen Hess sketched a typology that has been widely followed. In motivational terms, Hess explained, the main variants include: the *ego leak*, meant to satisfy the leaker's "sense of self-importance"; the *goodwill leak*, meant to curry favor with a reporter; the *policy leak*, meant to help, hurt, or alter a plan or policy; the *animus leak*, meant to settle grudges or embarrass others; the *trial-balloon leak*, meant to test the response of key constituencies, members of Congress, or the general public; and the *whistle-blower leak*, meant to reveal a perceived abuse and, unique among the list, "usually employed by career personnel."⁹⁹ As Hess observed, these categories are not mutually exclusive.¹⁰⁰ A leaker may have multiple motivations or goals, some of them unconscious. Although Hess speculated that ego is the most common cause of leaking,¹⁰¹ policy leaks — an especially capacious category he did not parse — play a larger role in the accounts of ex-officials and in the academic literature.¹⁰²

Significant subtypes of the policy leak might include the *interne-cine leak*, through which competing agencies or factions within the executive branch strive to strengthen their relative positions, and the *counter-leak*, intended to neutralize or dispute prior disclosures. Hess also overlooked the important, if less titillating, category of the *inadvertent* or *lazy leak*, effectuated through accident or ignorance with no particular instrumental aim in mind. Such leaks plainly occur.¹⁰³ Equally important are the many stories that look like they may contain leaks but are in fact based on public materials or sources outside the U.S. government. Angry officials not infrequently suspect a delib-

competitors and customers." For a thorough treatment, see generally Note, *Media Incentives*, *supra* note 14.

⁹⁹ HESS, *supra* note 82, at 77; see also *id.* at 77–78. Additional typologies, largely complementary to Hess's, can be found in HALPERIN ET AL., *supra* note 81, at 184–201; Randy Borum et al., *Psychology of "Leaking" Sensitive Information: Implications for Homeland Security*, 1 HOMELAND SECURITY REV. 97, 101–07 (2006); and Richard B. Kielbowicz, *The Role of News Leaks in Governance and the Law of Journalists' Confidentiality, 1795–2005*, 43 SAN DIEGO L. REV. 425, 469–76 (2006).

¹⁰⁰ HESS, *supra* note 82, at 78.

¹⁰¹ *Id.* at 77.

¹⁰² Policy leaks also play a larger role in senior officials' self-reporting. In response to a question on why it would be appropriate to leak, the most common reasons given in the Kennedy School survey were to "counter false or misleading information," LINSKY, *supra* note 28, at 239, to "gain attention for an issue or policy option," and to "consolidate support from the public or a constituency outside government," *id.* at 238.

¹⁰³ See *id.* at 170–71, 192; ROSS, *supra* note 14, at 74–75; Mark Fenster, *The Implausibility of Secrecy*, 65 HASTINGS L.J. (forthcoming Feb. 2014) (manuscript at 19–21), available at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2220376>.

erate betrayal when there has been only clever journalistic sleuthing.¹⁰⁴ Sometimes referred to these days as “diffuse sourcing”¹⁰⁵ or “mosaic making,”¹⁰⁶ it is an old insight that in some cases “there is no one leaker, and no one leak, but a composite that looks like a leak but is really just good investigative reporting.”¹⁰⁷

Less has been written about the other dimensions on which leaks may differ. At least one Espionage Act case suggests that the government may have a substantially higher burden when prosecuting leakers of intangible information as opposed to documents, disks, files, and the like.¹⁰⁸ This distinction finds some support in the statutory language, though one suspects that it was bolstered, on functional or fairness grounds, by the comparatively greater “difficulty in determining orally transmitted information’s classification status.”¹⁰⁹ An additional distinction (really, a spectrum) worthy of note relates to the quantum and scope of material disclosed and the difference between what we might call *specific leaks*, which convey a limited amount of content about a discrete matter, and *general leaks*, which disclose vast swaths of information more or less indiscriminately. The three most famous leaks in modern U.S. history were tangible, general leaks: Daniel Ellsberg’s disclosure to the *Times* of the 7000-page Pentagon Papers study; Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning’s disclosure to WikiLeaks of, inter alia, 250,000 diplomatic cables; and Edward Snowden’s disclosure to the *Guardian* and the *Post* of untold numbers of National Security Agency (NSA) files.¹¹⁰

Tangibility and generality both ought to correlate positively with the average leaker’s heterodoxy and negatively with her seniority. High-level officials do not need to turn over official documents to get heard; in the absence of any tangible disclosure, journalists and editors are much more likely to find their statements to be credible and news-

¹⁰⁴ See ABEL, *supra* note 19, at 5–6; HALPERIN ET AL., *supra* note 81, at 203.

¹⁰⁵ See Jack Goldsmith, *Leak Investigations in the Digital Era*, LAWFARE (June 11, 2012, 9:29 AM), <http://www.lawfareblog.com/2012/06/leak-investigations-in-the-digital-era-2/>.

¹⁰⁶ See generally David E. Pozen, Note, *The Mosaic Theory, National Security, and the Freedom of Information Act*, 115 YALE L.J. 628 (2005).

¹⁰⁷ *Leaks of Classified National Defense Information — Stealth Aircraft: Hearing Before the Investigations Subcomm. of the H. Comm. on Armed Servs.*, 96th Cong. 13 (1980) [hereinafter *Hearing on Leaks of Classified Information*] (prepared statement of Admiral Daniel J. Murphy, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Review).

¹⁰⁸ *United States v. Rosen*, 445 F. Supp. 2d 602, 626 (E.D. Va. 2006) (discussing 18 U.S.C. § 793(d), (e) (2012)).

¹⁰⁹ *Id.* at 624.

¹¹⁰ Ellsberg’s leak appears to have been substantially more discriminate than Manning’s. Among other reasons, Ellsberg withheld four volumes of the Pentagon Papers containing diplomatic materials out of concern that their revelation would cause significant harm. See SANFORD J. UNGAR, *THE PAPERS & THE PAPERS* 83–84 (1972). It is not yet clear how Snowden’s disclosure stacks up against those of his predecessors, on these or other dimensions.

worthy. And as the discussion here suggests, high-level officials do not tend to see themselves as whistleblowers on a mission to expose abuse or as dissidents on a large scale.¹¹¹ I am unaware of any senior U.S. policymaker who has ever been accused of unlawfully revealing thousands of pages or their equivalent. General leaks are the province of the radically disaffected and the subversive. Top government brass, socialized into and successful in the Washington power culture, are unlikely to be either.

One final distinction: although legal scholars generally have not done so, some journalists have distinguished between *leaks* and *plants*.¹¹² Plants are taken to be “authorized” disclosures designed to advance administration interests and goals. Leaks are “unauthorized” disclosures. This distinction is fundamental, if elusive at the margins, and the lack of critical attention it has received represents a major hole in the legal literature. Part II will consider it in detail.

C. Enforcement Practices

Excluding cases of true espionage, all those thousands upon thousands of national security–related leaks to the media have yielded a total of roughly a dozen criminal prosecutions in U.S. history. The common wisdom is that there have been eleven such cases, including Edward Snowden’s and Donald Sachtleben’s.¹¹³ Depending on how one counts and on some unknown facts, the correct figure may be double that.¹¹⁴ (More on the composition of this group in Part III.)

¹¹¹ Many lower-level officials who make unauthorized disclosures outside the national security context are likewise not out to reveal malfeasance or subvert the system, but rather to influence agency policymaking. For a detailed account of this phenomenon, see Amanda C. Leiter, *Soft Whistleblowing*, 48 GA. L. REV. (forthcoming 2014).

¹¹² See ABEL, *supra* note 19, at 2; HESS, *supra* note 82, at 75. An exception in the legal literature is Levi, *supra* note 80, at 628–31.

¹¹³ For the standard pre-Snowden list, see Charlie Savage, *Nine Leak-Related Cases*, N.Y. TIMES, June 20, 2012, at A14. For the initial report of Snowden’s indictment, see Peter Finn & Sari Horwitz, *U.S. Files Charges Against Snowden*, WASH. POST, June 22, 2013, at A1. For an initial report on Sachtleben’s plea deal, see Sari Horwitz, *Former FBI Agent Will Plead Guilty in Leak Case*, WASH. POST, Sept. 24, 2013, at A1.

¹¹⁴ Arguably missing cases include the 2005–2006 aborted prosecutions of lobbyists Steven Rosen and Keith Weissman for conspiring to transmit classified foreign policy information to journalists, among others, see Lee, *supra* note 30, at 1512–20; the 2002 prosecution of Jonathan Randel for leaking sensitive but unclassified Drug Enforcement Agency information to the *London Times*, see Hargrove-Simon, *supra* note 43; the 1957 court martial of Col. John C. Nickerson Jr. for leaking classified information concerning an Army ballistic missile project to a syndicated columnist, among others, see *The Nation Can Relax*, TIME, July 8, 1957, at 11; and the 1945–1946 pursuit of six people associated with the left-wing magazine *Amerasia*, see HARVEY KLEHR & RONALD RADOSH, *THE AMERASIA SPY CASE* 56–135 (1996). Recent reports indicate that a grand jury is investigating WikiLeaks’s founder Julian Assange, see, e.g., Billy Kenber, *Civil Liberties Groups Predict Assange Will Also Be Prosecuted*, WASH. POST, July 31, 2013, at A1, and that retired general James E. Cartwright is the “target” of a separate criminal probe, see, e.g., Greg Miller & Sari Horwitz, *Four-Star General Is Targeted in Leak Probe*, WASH.

Only one Espionage Act case in recent memory has been brought against someone other than the initial source,¹¹⁵ and only a miniscule number of leak investigations appear to have yielded prosecutions for derivative offenses, such as perjury or destruction of evidence.¹¹⁶ Although it has contemplated doing so several times, the government has never once, over the past half century, proceeded against a member of the media for publishing or possessing leaked information.¹¹⁷

For a crime that Presidents describe as a major threat to national security and good government, the degree of “underenforcement”¹¹⁸ is

POST, June 28, 2013, at A1; *see also* Steven Aftergood, *Prosecutors Rebut Defendant’s Challenge to Espionage Act Statute*, SECRECY NEWS (Apr. 8, 2013), http://blogs.fas.org/secrecy/2013/04/793_rebuttal/ (describing another ongoing Espionage Act prosecution that does not involve disclosure to the media). At this writing, it is unclear whether Assange or Cartwright will be charged, or whether Assange has already been indicted under seal.

The standard list of eleven cases could be challenged from the other direction as well. If the inquiry is confined to leaks directed primarily at the media, the Defense Department official who passed information to Rosen and Weissman, Lawrence Franklin, should not be counted. I assume that the Rosen and Weissman cases have been omitted from the standard list because the defendants were not government actors. The Randel case may be excluded because no charges were brought under the Espionage Act. The Nickerson and *Amerasia* cases may go overlooked because of their age or because Nickerson’s leaked information seems never to have been published. (That the Espionage Act charges were eventually dropped or that Nickerson faced a court martial should not matter; Thomas Drake’s comparable plea deal and Chelsea Manning’s court martial are on everyone’s lists.) It is certainly possible that the U.S. government has brought additional cases fairly classed as “media leak prosecutions” beyond this group. However, given the fervent journalistic and scholarly attention devoted to these matters, it seems unlikely that the number of missing cases is substantial.

¹¹⁵ *See* United States v. Rosen, 445 F. Supp. 2d 602 (E.D. Va. 2006) (prosecution of two lobbyists).

¹¹⁶ The best-known example is I. Lewis (“Scooter”) Libby’s 2007 conviction for committing perjury, obstructing justice, and making false statements in connection with Special Prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald’s investigation into the disclosure of a CIA operative’s identity. *See* Lee, *supra* note 30, at 1457–59. Fitzgerald’s actions are instructive and will be discussed further below: his brief tenure as Special Prosecutor gave a glimpse of what energetic enforcement would look like. *See infra* notes 138–39, 286 and accompanying text. Suspected grand jury leaks have generated some additional criminal penalties in recent years. *See, e.g.*, John Herzfeld, *Grand Juror Sentenced to Prison for Leaks to Insider-Trading Ring*, 38 SEC. REG. & L. REP. 2008 (2006).

¹¹⁷ In an exhaustive study published in 2011, Gary Ross stated that the U.S. government had “considered” prosecuting a member of the media for publishing leaked information “on at least four occasions.” ROSS, *supra* note 14, at 17. If Julian Assange is deemed a member of the media, that number may now be at least one higher. *See supra* note 114 (noting reports that Assange is the subject of an ongoing grand jury investigation); *see also* D.D. GUTTENPLAN, AMERICAN RADICAL 202–06 (2009) (explaining that several journalists were arrested and charged for leak-related activity, though not specifically for publishing leaked information, in the 1940s *Amerasia* case); KLEHR & RADOSH, *supra* note 114, at 56–135 (same).

¹¹⁸ *See generally* Alexandra Natapoff, *Underenforcement*, 75 FORDHAM L. REV. 1715 (2006). In saying that the leak laws are underenforced, I mean only to suggest that observable enforcement levels are very low in numeric terms and in comparison to what the political rhetoric on leaking would suggest. I do not mean to suggest that enforcement levels are low relative to any congressionally intended or otherwise normatively superior standard. Many of the crimes typically identified as “underenforced” are personal or recreational in nature (drug use, gambling); linked to sex (prostitution, sodomy); or associated with traditionally disadvantaged communi-

stunning. Even if we were to limit the denominator to classified information leaks that the Intelligence Community (IC) is known to have referred to DOJ or that government officials have otherwise documented publicly — which may be a small fraction of the universe of potentially prosecutable offenses — the historic indictment rate for leak-law violators would be below 0.3%.¹¹⁹ The actual rate is probably far closer to zero. We have, in other words, de minimis criminal enforcement of the laws against leaking. In formal terms this legal regime looks forbidding, draconian. In practical terms, as a frustrated intelligence professional once put it, the system amounts to “permissive neglect.”¹²⁰ Hence the punitive/permissive divide.

The Obama Administration has thus far brought eight criminal cases against media leakers,¹²¹ a significant increase over the enforcement levels of its predecessors. Emphasizing the departure from past practice, critics have decried the Administration’s “war” on leakers¹²² (or, more sharply, its “war on whistleblowers,”¹²³ though none of the inditees availed himself of the statutorily prescribed whistleblowing process). Some of the cases reportedly developed out of investigations begun in the prior Administration.¹²⁴ Yet even if all eight are fairly attributed to President Obama’s DOJ, it is important to keep *statistical* as well as historical perspective. Against a backdrop of “routine daily” classified information leaks,¹²⁵ a suite of eight prosecutions looks more like a special operation than a war.

I do not mean to minimize the significance of this enforcement uptick, to which Part IV will return. The uptick is of profound concern to many and threatens longstanding governmental conventions. I

ties, classes, or racial groups. *See id.* at 1722, 1727, 1733. Leaking is an outlier for having none of these attributes.

¹¹⁹ *See* ROSS, *supra* note 14, at 9–10, 17 (estimating the indictment rate from roughly 1981 to 2011).

¹²⁰ James B. Bruce, *The Consequences of Permissive Neglect*, 47 *STUD. INTELLIGENCE* 39 (2003); *see also* SUBCOMM. ON SECRECY & DISCLOSURE, S. SELECT COMM. ON INTELLIGENCE, 95TH CONG., NATIONAL SECURITY SECRETS AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE 3 (Comm. Print 1978) [hereinafter SSCI REPORT] (“*There has been a major failure on the part of the Government to take action in leak cases.*”).

¹²¹ This figure includes the Snowden and Sachtleben cases. It does not include the reported grand jury investigation of WikiLeaks or the reported target letter sent to James Cartwright. *See supra* note 114.

¹²² *See, e.g.*, Adam Liptak, *A High-Tech War on Leaks*, *N.Y. TIMES*, Feb. 12, 2012, at SR5.

¹²³ *See, e.g.*, Glenn Greenwald, *Secrecy Creep*, *SALON* (Aug. 14, 2012, 9:17 AM), http://www.salon.com/2012/08/14/secracy_creep (“That the Obama administration has waged an unprecedented war on whistleblowers is by now well-known and well-documented . . .”).

¹²⁴ Scott Shane & Charlie Savage, *Administration Took Accidental Path to Setting Record for Leak Cases*, *N.Y. TIMES*, June 20, 2012, at A14.

¹²⁵ WILLARD REPORT, *supra* note 37, at 6; *see also supra* note 78 and accompanying text (noting the belief that classified information leaks have become even more common since 1982, when the Willard Report was issued).

mean to call attention to the conventions themselves. Lost in the uproar over the recent prosecutions is just how remarkable it is for the executive branch to have a historic norm of “neglecting” major, politically resilient, judicially legitimated national security authorities.

Through occasional public statements, DOJ officials have outlined the procedures the Department uses for identifying and responding to potentially unlawful leaks. Within DOJ, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has traditionally played a lead role and continues to conduct leak investigations. The National Security Division (NSD), created by statute in 2006,¹²⁶ now oversees these efforts and generally shares authority over cases with the FBI and the Criminal Division.¹²⁷ The primary mechanism for triggering legal scrutiny is the referral process. Agencies that believe they have been the “victim” of an unlawful leak may submit a crime report to DOJ, which then determines whether to open an investigation.¹²⁸ The “overwhelming majority” of such reports, Attorney General Janet Reno stated in 2000, are submitted by the CIA and the NSA.¹²⁹ The FBI also has the authority, seemingly very rarely used,¹³⁰ to pursue leakers on its own initiative.¹³¹ Although the government has declined to release comprehensive data on leak referrals, officials have said that DOJ received “roughly 50” per year in the late 1990s¹³² and an average of 37 per year from 2005 to 2009.¹³³ Of these referred cases, DOJ appears to open an investiga-

¹²⁶ USA PATRIOT Improvement and Reauthorization Act of 2005, Pub. L. No. 109-177, § 506(b), 120 Stat. 192, 248–50 (2006) (codified at 28 U.S.C. § 509A (2006)).

¹²⁷ See *Oversight of the Federal Bureau of Investigation: Hearing Before the S. Comm. on the Judiciary*, 111th Cong. 45 (2009) [hereinafter *Mueller Response*] (written response of Robert S. Mueller III, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation); see also Shane & Savage, *supra* note 124 (stating that among the recent leak prosecutions, “[t]wo were handled by the Justice Department’s criminal division, while two others were developed by the national security division”). For a sketch of the DOJ process prior to the NSD’s creation, see *Reno Testimony*, *supra* note 46, at 3–10.

¹²⁸ For a valuable summary of reporting practices and procedures, including a link to the DOJ media leak questionnaire used to screen referrals, see Steven Aftergood, “*Crimes Reports*” and the *Leak Referral Process*, *SECREC NEWS* (Dec. 17, 2012), http://www.fas.org/blog/secrecy/2012/12/crimes_reports.html.

¹²⁹ *Reno Testimony*, *supra* note 46, at 4; see also Josh Gerstein, *Leak Probes Stymied, FBI Memos Show*, N.Y. SUN (Jan. 10, 2007), available at <http://www.nysun.com/national/leak-probes-stymied-fbi-memos-show/46407> (reporting that, according to an unnamed former DOJ official, “the vast majority of leak probes originate at the CIA”).

¹³⁰ See, e.g., *Reno Testimony*, *supra* note 46, at 3–10 (describing at length “the process by which [leak] investigations are opened and pursued,” *id.* at 3, before the Senate oversight body most likely to favor vigorous enforcement, without once mentioning this mechanism).

¹³¹ See *Mueller Response*, *supra* note 127, at 45.

¹³² *Reno Testimony*, *supra* note 46, at 4.

¹³³ See *Mueller Response*, *supra* note 127, at 47.

tion into approximately fifteen percent on average, with substantial variation year to year.¹³⁴

Constraining its ability to investigate and prosecute leak cases, DOJ's internal guidelines impose special procedures on the issuance of subpoenas to journalists. First announced in August 1970¹³⁵ and codified in 1973,¹³⁶ the guidelines prohibit use of such subpoenas except as a last resort and with the express authorization of the Attorney General.¹³⁷ All evidence suggests that this policy substantially depresses the number of subpoenas issued, and that the lack of access to journalists' records and testimony makes it substantially more difficult to identify and build cases against leakers. The significance of the policy was made vivid in the mid-2000s when Special Prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald — whose writ to investigate the leak of Valerie Plame's CIA affiliation effectively loosened the guidelines by delegating him “all the authority of the Attorney General” in the matter¹³⁸ — subpoenaed *New York Times* reporter Judith Miller and *Time* reporter Matthew Cooper, among other journalists, leading to Miller's spending eighty-five days in jail.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ The exact figure was fourteen percent from 2005 to 2009, *see id.*, and Gary Ross appears to estimate a global average of thirteen percent based on a handful of additional public statements, *see ROSS, supra* note 14, at 10, 17 (citing approximately 200 criminal leak investigations and 1500 referrals over the past three decades). In 2000, Attorney General Reno suggested that DOJ had investigated a significantly higher proportion of referrals in the immediately preceding years, although she did not provide any hard data. *See Reno Testimony, supra* note 46, at 4.

¹³⁵ OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GEN., DEP'T OF JUSTICE, DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE GUIDELINES FOR SUBPOENAS TO THE NEWS MEDIA (1970), *reprinted in* Robert G. Dixon, Jr., *Newsmen's Privilege by Federal Legislation: Within Congressional Power?*, 1 HASTINGS CONST. L.Q. 39, app. at 51–52 (1974); *see also* *Branzburg v. Hayes*, 408 U.S. 665, 707 n.41 (1972) (discussing the introduction of the 1970 guidelines).

¹³⁶ Policy Regarding Issuance of Subpoenas to, and Interrogation, Indictment, or Arrest of, Members of News Media, 38 Fed. Reg. 29,588 (Oct. 26, 1973) (codified at 28 C.F.R. § 50.10 (2012)).

¹³⁷ 28 C.F.R. § 50.10(b), (e)–(f). In response to mounting criticism of its pursuit of leak investigations, *see, e.g.*, Mark Sherman, *Gov't Obtains Wide AP Phone Records in Probe*, ASSOCIATED PRESS (May 13, 2013, 10:53 PM), <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/govt-obtains-wide-ap-phone-records-probe> (describing the backlash caused by a subpoena of two months of phone records from Associated Press reporters), DOJ announced in July 2013 that it would revise the guidelines by, among other things, giving greater notice to members of the media when prosecutors seek access to their records and creating additional layers of internal oversight, *see* DEP'T OF JUSTICE, REPORT ON REVIEW OF NEWS MEDIA POLICIES 2–4 (2013), *available at* <http://www.justice.gov/ag/news-media.pdf>.

¹³⁸ Katy J. Harriger, Feature, *Executive Power and Prosecution: Lessons from the Libby Trial and the U.S. Attorney Firings*, 38 PRESIDENTIAL STUD. Q. 491, 496 (2008) (quoting Letter from James B. Comey, Acting Attorney Gen., to Patrick J. Fitzgerald, U.S. Attorney (Dec. 30, 2003), *available at* http://www.justice.gov/archive/osc/documents/ag_letter_december_30_2003.pdf) (internal quotation mark omitted).

¹³⁹ *See supra* note 116. *See generally* Don Van Natta Jr. et al., *The Miller Case: A Notebook, a Cause, a Jail Cell and a Deal*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 16, 2005, at A1.

The policy is justified as serving First Amendment values.¹⁴⁰ In light of DOJ's unflinching position that in criminal cases journalists have no constitutional or common law privilege to withhold confidential source information, the existence and durability of these guidelines might seem remarkable. For in functional terms, they amount to codification of a qualified reporter's privilege.¹⁴¹ DOJ thus adamantly opposes recognition by Congress or the courts of a doctrine it scrupulously respects by internal rule — an unusually stringent form of (and a fascinating case study in) departmentalist constitutional construction.¹⁴²

Apart from criminal prosecutions, DOJ also has the option to pursue civil actions for injunctive relief or money damages against those who violate their nondisclosure agreements or profit from their disclosures of confidential information.¹⁴³ In theory, these suits might be brought against media leakers. In practice, however, injunctive relief is unavailable because leakers do not give advance notice of their intentions, and money damages may be unavailable because leakers do not tend to benefit, in a material sense, from the media's publication of their divulgements. The government's civil authorities matter greatly in the area of post-employment, overt expression. They have directly constrained the speech of a number of former officials who wished to publish memoirs or exposés, and they have indirectly chilled the speech of many more. Their impact on the netherworld of anonymous leaks has been relatively negligible.

¹⁴⁰ See 28 C.F.R. § 50.10 (pmb.) (emphasizing “freedom of the press,” “the news gathering function,” and “a reporter's responsibility to cover as broadly as possible controversial public issues”); *Mueller Response*, *supra* note 127, at 46 (defending the guidelines as “appropriately balanc[ing] the importance of First Amendment freedoms”).

¹⁴¹ Former *New York Times* senior counsel (and current Supreme Court correspondent) Adam Liptak highlighted this point in a celebratory 1999 essay. See Adam Liptak, *The Hidden Federal Shield Law: On the Justice Department's Regulations Governing Subpoenas to the Press*, 1999 ANN. SURV. AM. L. 227, 236 (characterizing the guidelines as “a shadow federal shield law” that is “sensible, rigorous, and predictable”).

¹⁴² On the various models of departmentalism, see generally David E. Pozen, *Judicial Elections as Popular Constitutionalism*, 110 COLUM. L. REV. 2047, 2063–64 (2010). The structure of the journalist subpoena guidelines is not unique. Whether to avert undesirable judicial rulings and congressional remedies, to preserve popular support, or to serve constitutional conviction, a number of other DOJ policies have constrained prosecutors beyond what the Constitution has been read to require: for instance, the Petite Policy, which discourages federal prosecutions when a state action has already been brought, DEP'T OF JUSTICE, UNITED STATES ATTORNEYS' MANUAL § 9-2.031 (2009), available at http://www.justice.gov/usao/eousa/foia_reading_room/usam/title9/title9.htm; the policy requiring presentation of exculpatory evidence to the grand jury, *id.* § 9-11.233; and the limitations imposed by the Levi Guidelines on the FBI's ability to monitor and infiltrate political and religious groups, *FBI Statutory Charter: Hearing Before the S. Comm. on the Judiciary*, 95th Cong. 20–26 (1978). This suite of self-binding rules awaits a synthetic scholarly treatment.

¹⁴³ See *Reno Testimony*, *supra* note 46, at 14.

Administrative remedies offer a more robust alternative to criminal punishment. All agencies have undoubted authority to conduct their own investigations into suspected leaks and to impose a wide range of sanctions, including removal, suspension without pay, and denial of access to classified information.¹⁴⁴ In fact, the controlling executive order *requires* sanctions for every knowing, willful, or negligent disclosure of properly classified information to unauthorized persons.¹⁴⁵ These sanctions will not always be available: former officials and those about to leave government may evade the reach of this regime. But in view of the difficulty of bringing criminal cases, many have championed administrative remedies as an efficient means to discipline and discourage leakers.¹⁴⁶

It is very hard to know how these remedies have been utilized. So far as I am aware, the government has never released any data on them, and no one has attempted a tabulation. Anecdotal accounts indicate that a number of individuals have been reprimanded over the years for leaking confidential information to the media. It is undoubtedly the case that additional sanctions, as well as investigations that damaged careers without leading to formal punishment, have occurred outside the public record. Administrative actions, unlike prosecutions, do not readily generate publicity. Still, given the potential deterrence value of that publicity for government enforcers, the media's interest in protecting their sources against reprisal, and the disciplined individual's interest in claiming whistleblower status, it is noteworthy how rarely accounts of such cases have surfaced: two General Services Administration employees fired in the mid-1970s but later reinstated,¹⁴⁷ a State Department speechwriter and an Assistant Under Secretary of Defense removed in 1986,¹⁴⁸ a CIA intelligence officer dismissed in 2006 ostensibly for leaking but perhaps for other reasons.¹⁴⁹ Years go by without a reported incident.

A long line of government studies has noted lax enforcement in this area.¹⁵⁰ Attorney General John Ashcroft acknowledged in 2002 that

¹⁴⁴ See Exec. Order No. 13,526, § 5.5, 3 C.F.R. 298, 321 (2010), *reprinted in* 50 U.S.C. § 435 app. at 233-45 (Supp. V 2011) (authorizing agency-level sanctions for violations of the classification rules).

¹⁴⁵ *Id.* § 5.5(b)(1), 3 C.F.R. at 321.

¹⁴⁶ See, e.g., WILLARD REPORT, *supra* note 37, at 4-5, 11; *Reno Testimony*, *supra* note 46, at 13-14.

¹⁴⁷ CLARK R. MOLLENHOFF, *THE PRESIDENT WHO FAILED 141* (1980).

¹⁴⁸ ABEL, *supra* note 19, at 26, 42; James Kelly, *Shifting the Attack on Leaks*, TIME, May 19, 1986, at 91.

¹⁴⁹ R. Jeffrey Smith & Dafna Linzer, *Dismissed CIA Officer Denies Leak Role*, WASH. POST, Apr. 25, 2006, at A1.

¹⁵⁰ There is some evidence that administrative enforcement may be trending upward, at least within the IC. See OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GEN. OF THE INTELLIGENCE CMTY., SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT TO THE DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE FOR THE PERIOD OF

“[w]ith respect to administrative actions to address unauthorized disclosures of classified information, information security programs across Government are fragmentary,”¹⁵¹ and that “[i]n most of the few cases in which a person who engaged in an unauthorized disclosure of classified information has been identified, the sanctions applied have been relatively inconsequential.”¹⁵² A Government Accountability Office audit found that, among the sixty-eight leak investigations conducted by the Defense Department from 1975 to 1982 that had been brought to its attention, “[i]n no case was there any indication that an individual was removed from a position of trust.”¹⁵³ A quarter-century earlier, a Defense Department committee remarked that “disciplinary action has not been adequate in the field of security information, even after making due allowance for the difficulties generally encountered in identifying those responsible for violations.”¹⁵⁴ Although not focused on the national security field, Hugh Heclo’s 1977 study of domestic policy agencies found that senior officials seldom confronted suspected leakers.¹⁵⁵ They were much more likely to respond by exercising self-help — cultivating their own media and congressional contacts rather than trying to stanch the flow of disclosures. Less systematically, but tellingly, a recent FOIA request revealed that in the late 1990s, DOJ’s Office of Professional Responsibility determined that an Assistant Director at the FBI and an Assistant U.S. Attorney who had been detailed to a management role had committed “intentional professional misconduct” by leaking classified information to the press, assertedly to correct what they saw as misconceptions in the public record. Se-

8 NOVEMBER 2011 TO 30 JUNE 2012, at 10 (2012), available at <http://www.fas.org/irp/dni/icig/sar-0612.pdf> (reporting that the Investigations Division recently “reviewed hundreds of closed [leak] cases from across the IC” and that, “[g]oing forward, the division will engage in gap mitigation for those cases where an agency does not have the authority to investigate . . . or where DOJ declined criminal prosecution”).

¹⁵¹ Ashcroft Report, *supra* note 46, at 3; accord SSCI REPORT, *supra* note 120, at 24 (“[T]here is no effective administrative system currently operating in the executive branch for investigating and penalizing unauthorized disclosures . . .”).

¹⁵² Ashcroft Report, *supra* note 46, at 4.

¹⁵³ U.S. GEN. ACCOUNTING OFFICE, GAO/GGD-83-15, REVIEW OF DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE INVESTIGATION OF LEAK OF CLASSIFIED INFORMATION TO *THE WASHINGTON POST* 5 (1982), available at <http://www.gao.gov/assets/210/205900.pdf>.

¹⁵⁴ DEP’T OF DEF. COMM. ON CLASSIFIED INFO., REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE BY THE COMMITTEE ON CLASSIFIED INFORMATION 9 (1956) [hereinafter COOLIDGE REPORT], available at http://bkofsecrets.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/coolidge_committee.pdf.

¹⁵⁵ HECLO, *supra* note 23, at 227–28. Senior officials declined to confront leaking civil servants, Heclo found, out of fear of limiting access to outside channels, provoking backlash, and distracting from their policy agenda, as well as a belief that “there are few effective sanctions to prevent recurrences.” *Id.* at 227.

nior department leadership overruled that determination and declined to impose sanctions.¹⁵⁶

The results of my own FOIA requests and interviews, discussed in Parts II and III, corroborate but also complicate the notion that administrative punishments for media leakers are rare. It appears that numerous agencies that work on national security– and foreign policy–related issues hardly ever impose such punishments, or even conduct leak investigations. Administrative discipline in these agencies is nearly as uncommon as its criminal counterpart. Informal sanctions, however, pick up some of the slack.

D. Consequences

Presidents since at least Woodrow Wilson have complained “bitterly” about the leakers within their midst.¹⁵⁷ Degrees of vehemence have varied (Reagan was on the high end, Carter on the low end), but there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of their dismay. Some leaks highlight unflattering or disturbing conduct, some prompt congressional scrutiny or media investigations, some reveal vulnerabilities or degrade a strategic advantage. And every leak not to the President’s liking has the potential to undermine his or her control of the political agenda. As one diligent student of the subject has noted, “[Theodore] Roosevelt and all subsequent Presidents discovered that leaks not authorized by the White House subverted their efforts to engineer public consent.”¹⁵⁸ This destabilizing power of leaks has significant implications for the executive branch’s internal governance, a theme to which this Article will return continuously.

Almost all commentary on classified information leaks has not pursued the insiders’ point of view, but rather some form of external critique centered on national security interests or values associated with the First Amendment. Government officials routinely claim substantial adverse policy consequences while minimizing democratic benefits. Journalists and civil libertarians question these claims and celebrate leaks as a source of accountability and transparency, a check on executive power, and a corrective to overclassification. For every governmental assertion of leaks “that have collectively cost the American people hundreds of millions of dollars, and . . . done grave harm to na-

¹⁵⁶ Josh Gerstein, *Judge: Justice Department Can Keep Secret Names of Lawyers Warned over Leaks*, POLITICO (Jan. 20, 2011, 11:07 AM), http://www.politico.com/blogs/joshgerstein/0111/Judge_Justice_Department_can_keep_secret_names_of_lawyers_targeted_in_leak_probe.html.

¹⁵⁷ HESS, *supra* note 82, at 91; accord GOLDSMITH, *supra* note 16, at 83–84; Lee, *supra* note 30, at 1468–69; Papandrea, *supra* note 33, at 255–56; Halloran, *supra* note 98. For a somewhat dated compilation of colorful presidential complaints, see Joel Garreau, *Up to Their Keisters in Leaks*, WASH. POST, Jan. 16, 1983, at B5.

¹⁵⁸ Kielbowicz, *supra* note 99, at 444.

tional security,”¹⁵⁹ one finds the rebuttal that “there has not been a single instance in the history of the United States in which the press’s publication of a ‘legitimate but newsworthy’ government secret has gravely harmed the national interest”¹⁶⁰ — indeed, that there have been few destructive leaks anywhere in the world.¹⁶¹

Government insiders occupy an epistemically privileged position in this debate. Their superior access to classified information enhances their capacity to assess harms from leaks while excusing them from offering detailed defenses of their claims.¹⁶² And yet, there is the stickiness of “permissive neglect”¹⁶³ to contend with: is it really plausible that the executive would adhere, across decades, to such a tragic enforcement model? There is also no shortage of former insiders who take the opposition line. In a largely ignored passage from *The Imperial Presidency*, Arthur Schlesinger asked, “[a]fter all the years of the American obsession with secrecy, could anyone name a case where a leak did serious damage to the national security? . . . Conceivably the nation might have been better off had there been more rather than fewer leaks.”¹⁶⁴

Conceivably, but in the final analysis, it is hard to draw any strong conclusions about the balance of consequences. The problem is not just that no one has attempted to measure the costs and benefits of leaking in a systematic way. It is that any such effort would likely prove futile, given the great variability of the phenomenon, the many unobservables involved, the incommensurateness of the values implicated, the complicated relationships with other forms of secrecy and transparency, and the contingent nature of disclosure’s effects (first-,

¹⁵⁹ WMD REPORT, *supra* note 76, at 381. For examples of similar governmental assertions and detailed discussions of potential national security harms from leaks, see ROSS, *supra* note 14, at 79–121; and Bruce, *supra* note 120, at 40–43. See generally GABRIEL SCHOENFELD, NECESSARY SECRETS (2010).

¹⁶⁰ Geoffrey R. Stone, *The Lessons of History*, A.B.A. NAT’L SECURITY L. REP., Sept. 2006, at 1, 3. For comparable claims, see Freivogel, *supra* note 62, at 98 (“[T]here is scant evidence that national security has been harmed in any significant way by the disclosure of government secrets.”); and Jeffrey T. Richelson, *Intelligence Secrets and Unauthorized Disclosures: Confronting Some Fundamental Issues*, 25 INT’L J. INTELLIGENCE & COUNTERINTELLIGENCE 639, 652–58 (2012).

¹⁶¹ See, e.g., Sandra Coliver, *Commentary on the Johannesburg Principles on National Security, Freedom of Expression and Access to Information*, in *SECURITY AND LIBERTY* 11, 66 (Sandra Coliver et al. eds., 1999) (“[T]here have been few instances anywhere in the world in recent memory where information disclosed by a government servant damaged a vital state interest.”).

¹⁶² Thus, immediately after asserting that leaks have “done grave harm to national security,” the WMD Commission Report pretermits further analysis or debate: “We cannot, however, discuss [these leaks] in an unclassified format.” WMD REPORT, *supra* note 76, at 381.

¹⁶³ See generally sources cited *supra* note 120.

¹⁶⁴ ARTHUR M. SCHLESINGER, JR., *THE IMPERIAL PRESIDENCY* 362 (1973). “Espionage,” Schlesinger granted, “was a different matter.” *Id.*

second-, and third-order).¹⁶⁵ The Defense Department came close to admitting as much in 1956, when a high-level panel charged with studying the issue conceded that “[t]he seriousness of unauthorized disclosures, both in number and nature, cannot be determined.”¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, even if we could reliably measure the consequences of the leaks that have occurred, it is impossible to know what outcomes would have followed from a system of slightly more, vastly more, or even paltrier enforcement. The debate over leaks’ impact on national security and democracy is destined to remain empirically impoverished to some significant degree. In many respects, the debate has barely advanced since 1956.

Yet, even if questions about leaking’s ultimate societal consequences have therefore proven intractable, and the associated debates become hoary, there is significant scope to advance our understanding of how permissive neglect actually works — what this regulatory regime looks like to participants, what mechanisms and customs it employs, why it takes the form that it does, how it has persisted for so long. A whole suite of analytic challenges has gone all but ignored. Macro-level positive and normative evaluation may be unusually vexed in the area of leaks, but mid-level theory remains viable.

“No answer is what the wrong question begets”¹⁶⁷

II. ORDER IN “DISORDER”¹⁶⁸: THE LOGIC OF LEAKINESS

Why does the executive branch tolerate so much leaking? The dearth of punishment is striking in itself, and it seems especially curious in light of the perpetual presidential hand-wringing. The standard explanation for the negligible enforcement rate — never developed at any length and never seriously challenged — emphasizes how difficult it is to identify and prosecute leakers. While there is surely some truth to this constraint-based account, its explanatory power fades upon inspection. An objective observer reviewing the full record could only conclude that elimination of leaks has not been a priority for many of the key actors in the U.S. government. The constraint-based view has distorted the debate on leaking, impoverished critical analysis. It fails to explain the persistent lack of formal discipline outside of the crimi-

¹⁶⁵ This contingency is the central theme of Mark Fenster, *Disclosure's Effects: WikiLeaks and Transparency*, 97 IOWA L. REV. 753 (2012).

¹⁶⁶ COOLIDGE REPORT, *supra* note 154, at 6; *see also* LINSKY, *supra* note 28, at 187 (“Despite the prevalence of leaks, the impact on policy is hard to discern and thereby even harder to predict.”).

¹⁶⁷ ALEXANDER M. BICKEL, *THE LEAST DANGEROUS BRANCH* 103 (Yale Univ. Press 2d ed. 1986) (1962).

¹⁶⁸ The allusion is to Bickel’s famous, and now conventional, observation that our legal regime for dealing with leaks is a “disorderly situation.” BICKEL, *supra* note 14, at 80.

nal realm. And it overlooks the numerous reasons why executive branch principals may prefer to avoid ramping up enforcement levels, even if they had ready means to do so.

Occasionally one finds the further claim that the “political will” to bring more cases has been lacking.¹⁶⁹ But that formulation just begs the question. What theory and evidence support an inference of insufficient political will? And how exactly does this lack of will manifest? Neither issue has received scrutiny. Leak prosecutions may generate political costs for an administration if they inspire media criticism. However, leaks themselves can be quite politically costly, as can the perceived failure to act against dangerous disclosures. And it is not clear that most media outlets would reflexively oppose greater enforcement against government insiders who supply some journalists with juicy information, yet who also jeopardize the industry’s legal and moral standing. The media would be on especially weak ground opposing greater *administrative* enforcement.¹⁷⁰ The puzzle of permissive neglect remains.

This Part deconstructs and then reconstructs the logic of leakiness. Section A details weaknesses in the constraint-based account. A great deal of enforcement capacity exists that is not being used; the inference arises that the U.S. government’s leakiness has a significant intentional component. Following this inference, section B identifies a range of executive interests served by leaks. These interests are substantially promoted by strategic behavior. Taken together, they are critical to maintaining and making sense of the negligible enforcement rate. Their imprint does not explain everything: the goal of this Part is not so much to supplant as to supplement the familiar rationales for why leakers go unpunished. Moreover, it is impossible to estimate with any precision the frequency with which leaking has served (or disserved) relevant parties’ interests. We would need to know far more than we do about the nature of their utility functions and about which sorts of secrets have been disclosed and which have not. At a minimum, however, this Part establishes the counterintuitive proposition that the optimal level of unauthorized classified information disclosures to the press, from virtually everyone in government’s perspective, is substantially higher than zero.

¹⁶⁹ See, e.g., WMD REPORT, *supra* note 76, at 382. I assume that many people who have reflected on the negligible enforcement rate have similarly concluded that lack of “political will” must play a role. I have not, however, seen any scholarly attempts to unpack this idea.

¹⁷⁰ For decades, there has been “widespread agreement among both government officials and civil liberties advocates that government officials who publicly disclose information learned through their official duties . . . may be administratively disciplined, including being fired from their jobs, for leaking such information.” Paul Hoffman & Kate Martin, *Safeguarding Liberty: National Security, Freedom of Expression and Access to Information: United States of America*, in *SECRECY AND LIBERTY*, *supra* note 161, at 477, 495.

Looking backward, this reconceptualization provides a more compelling account of the failure to enforce prohibitions against leaking. Looking forward, it generates a prediction, falsifiable in principle, that we will continue to see low levels of criminal leak-law enforcement in this country and perhaps all other advanced democracies with institutionally “thick”¹⁷¹ executives, notwithstanding the advent of new technologies that make it easier to smoke out perpetrators. In place of the unexamined intuitions that predominate in this area (“The leakers cannot be caught!” “The political will is not there!”), I offer what sociologists might call a middle-range theory,¹⁷² which draws on insights from a variety of literatures as well as various forms of empirical evidence. The theory provides a framework for understanding, in narrative and functional terms, both the persistence and the dynamics of permissive neglect.

How can I derive any explanatory significance from “executive” interests, when the executive branch contains many different components with interests, incentives, and cultures that are not always aligned? And how can I even talk about executive “interests” in leakiness, when every President condemns leaks and numerous officials are apt to resent any given disclosure?

These questions are common to many studies of executive behavior. Part of the answer is that leaking is a heterogeneous activity that occurs in a repeat-play environment. Participants in such iterated practices may deeply dislike specific instantiations and yet respect the basic structure of the practice. There is no need to posit disingenuousness or self-delusion on the part of leaks’ internal critics. Even if certain senators rail against any given failure to achieve cloture, incumbents may by and large advance their electoral fortunes by adhering to the filibuster.¹⁷³ Even if certain components of the government rail against various Supreme Court decisions,¹⁷⁴ powerful political actors may benefit in the aggregate from the maintenance of judicial review.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ See generally STEPHEN SKOWRONEK, *THE POLITICS PRESIDENTS MAKE* 31, 55–56 (1993) (describing “thickening” as the proliferation of organized interests and institutional actors that surround, support, and hem in the presidency).

¹⁷² See ROBERT K. MERTON, *SOCIAL THEORY AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE* 39–40 (enlarged ed. 1968) (defining middle-range theories as attentive to, yet abstracted from, specific observed patterns of social behavior and noting that “[t]he seminal ideas in such theories are characteristically simple,” *id.* at 40).

¹⁷³ See GREGORY J. WAWRO & ERIC SCHICKLER, *FILIBUSTER* 263 (2006) (arguing that contemporary filibuster reform efforts “run up against individual senators’ personal power goals”).

¹⁷⁴ *Boumediene v. Bush*, 553 U.S. 723 (2008), springs unbidden to mind. See *id.* (holding that the constitutional privilege of habeas corpus extends to alien detainees at Guantanamo Bay).

¹⁷⁵ See, e.g., Daryl J. Levinson, *Parchment and Politics: The Positive Puzzle of Constitutional Commitment*, 124 HARV. L. REV. 657, 733–45 (2011); Matthew C. Stephenson, “When the Devil Turns . . .”: *The Political Foundations of Independent Judicial Review*, 32 J. LEGAL STUD. 59 (2003).

Judicial review appears to be an episodically painful, but globally beneficial, institutional design mechanism for Presidents and other high-level officials. The claim here is that leakiness works the same way.

Another part of the answer is that social practices, particularly diffuse ones generated by custom, may reflect or further certain values and commitments even if individuals involved never consciously decide to prioritize those values and commitments. In an institutional context as intricate as the one applicable to leaking, structural features and competing agendas greatly constrain agency. A President who set out to plug every leak would quickly find she has few decent options. To ascribe strategic logic to the “leak-law regime,” it is unnecessary either to restrict the analysis to individual ambitions or to conceptualize the executive branch as some kind of organic entity. To the contrary, to make sense of this regime it is critical to appreciate the internal conflict and complexity that mark the modern administrative state.

And part of the answer is that the President and his team have been the primary architects and beneficiaries of the executive’s enforcement model, which allows us to home in on their incentives and behaviors. For analytic crispness and expositional clarity, section B concentrates initially on the White House’s interests in leaks. Building on that baseline identification of the executive branch with the White House, it then moves outward to consider other actors within and beyond the executive. Institutional players are disaggregated, and the executive’s pluralism is incorporated into the model, albeit incompletely. Any effort to account for every complication and contingency in an ecosystem this large would quickly become unwieldy. Particularly in light of the overlapping interests in leaking that unite the key actors in this story, as well as the President’s control over the classification system and the rise in presidential administration generally,¹⁷⁶ I believe that framing the analysis around the White House is not only the most fruitful but also the most methodologically sound approach.¹⁷⁷

The focus in this Part will thus be on the factors that help account for, and render rational, the lack of visible enforcement.¹⁷⁸ The next

¹⁷⁶ See Elena Kagan, *Presidential Administration*, 114 HARV. L. REV. 2245 (2001).

¹⁷⁷ Cf. ERIC A. POSNER & ADRIAN VERMEULE, *THE EXECUTIVE UNBOUND* 114 (2010) (taking a President-focused approach to a rational choice analysis of constraints on executive power). Like Professors Posner and Vermeule’s, this analysis has a rational choice cast, although I also try to go further in providing “thick” description of internal executive practices and in attending to noninstrumental sources of constraint.

¹⁷⁸ I do not pay special attention in this Part to prosecutors, and it may be that no prosecutor has internalized the interests described herein. Regardless of what motivates their behavior in this area, it is not prosecutors but rather top officials at DOJ, other agencies, and the White House who have, across decades, maintained the conditions that make it very difficult for leak cases to be brought. The point is not critical, but it also seems implausible to think that prosecutors are wholly insensitive to an administration’s basic political and policy objectives or to the habits of its highest-ranking members.

Part will look more closely at social and ethical dimensions of this regulatory regime and at modes of enforcement outside observers do not see.

A. The Inadequacy of the Constraint-Based Narrative

1. Catching Culprits. —

“It turns out you never can find the leaker.”
— President George W. Bush, 2006¹⁷⁹

“We have already alluded to the difficulty frequently encountered in identifying the source of ‘leaks.’ We are not convinced that this difficulty is insurmountable”

— Defense Department Committee on Classified Information, 1956¹⁸⁰

The most common explanation given for the lack of enforcement points to the difficulty of identifying the leaker.¹⁸¹ There is undoubtedly some force to these claims. In many cases, investigators will find it a challenge to trace the origins of a disclosure, given the secrecy that leakers may employ and the large number of individuals who may be “read in” to any given classified program. Journalists’ tendency to gather and aggregate information from multiple sources further complicates the investigative task.¹⁸²

For a variety of reasons, however, this explanation is unsatisfying. First, in the mine-run of leak cases, at least one person other than the source knows the source’s identity: the journalist who broke the story.¹⁸³ And, at least as a legal matter, the government has the power to

¹⁷⁹ The President’s News Conference, 2 PUB. PAPERS 2203, 2211 (Dec. 20, 2006).

¹⁸⁰ COOLIDGE REPORT, *supra* note 154, at 15.

¹⁸¹ See, e.g., *Reno Testimony*, *supra* note 46, at 9–10 (“[T]he sad fact is that in the vast majority of leak cases . . . we simply have not been able to identify the people responsible.”); *Espionage Act and the Legal and Constitutional Issues Raised by WikiLeaks: Hearing Before the H. Comm. on the Judiciary*, 111th Cong. 61 (2010) (prepared statement of Gabriel Schoenfeld, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute) [hereinafter Schoenfeld Testimony] (“The prosecution of leakers is rare because they are exceptionally difficult to catch.”). See generally ROSS, *supra* note 14, at 21–24 (explaining the basis for and prominence of this view); RAHUL SAGAR, SECRETS AND LEAKS 156–57 (2013) (observing that it is “de rigueur to conclude that ‘it is generally fruitless to try to discover the source of a leak’” (quoting GEORGE C. EDWARDS & STEPHEN J. WAYNE, PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP 158 (1997))).

¹⁸² See sources cited *supra* notes 104–07 and accompanying text (discussing “diffuse sourcing” and related practices). When the disclosures that inform a revelatory story are sufficiently diffuse, and the clues amassed by the reporter sufficiently diverse or redundant, it may be difficult to pinpoint any particular “leaker” as the key source who compromised the secret.

¹⁸³ Cf. WMD REPORT, *supra* note 76, at 383 (“During our work, we were repeatedly told that the greatest barrier to prosecuting leaks was in identifying the ‘leaker.’ And many people with

subpoena journalists who will not voluntarily reveal their sources.¹⁸⁴ Uncooperative journalists and news outlets can be pressured in subtler ways, too, as through denial of access to senior officials. Members of the media may fight such measures in court and in the editorial pages, but it is notable how much ground the executive cedes upfront. Notwithstanding occasional complaints about “irresponsible” stories, the reporters who repeatedly publish leaks are not so much shunned as courted. Bob Woodward’s many revelations have hardly led to his marginalization.¹⁸⁵ And while DOJ appears to have become slightly more aggressive in recent years, it remains very unusual for prosecutors to subpoena journalists¹⁸⁶ or to request information about their sources.¹⁸⁷ The immediate cause of this restraint is DOJ’s policy on issuing subpoenas to members of the news media — the entire point of which is to make these subpoenas as rare as possible (and thereby, presumably, to safeguard not just First Amendment values but DOJ’s standing with the courts and the press).¹⁸⁸ Leak investigations are so difficult, in part, because the government has *made* them so difficult by abjuring its most potent investigative tool.

Second, the government has refrained from using other significant investigative tools. Periodically, task forces have recommended that the White House take concerted steps to facilitate leak investigations, such as regularizing the use of polygraphs and requiring government employees who speak with the press to provide advance notice, fol-

whom we spoke also said that the best (if not only) way to identify leakers was through the reporters to whom classified information was leaked.”).

¹⁸⁴ See *supra* notes 56–62 and accompanying text.

¹⁸⁵ See FREDERICK A.O. SCHWARZ, JR., *SECRECY AND DEMOCRACY* (forthcoming 2014) (manuscript at 252) (on file with the Harvard Law School Library) (“Bob Woodward’s series of best-selling books about presidential administrations from [Nixon] through Obama could not have been written, and would not have sold in box-car numbers, without massive leaks from high-ranking officials.” (alteration in original)).

¹⁸⁶ See GOLDSMITH, *supra* note 16, at 222 (“[W]hat is remarkable about the last decade is not the slight increase in attempts to use subpoenas against journalists but rather the relatively sparse use of subpoenas given the number and type of leaks.”); Gerstein, *supra* note 129 (describing FBI records released through FOIA that suggest “many investigations into leaks of top-secret data are abandoned without pursuing some obvious, if intrusive, investigative techniques, such as seeking testimony or phone records from members of the press”). For data on federal subpoenas through 2008, including but not limited to leak cases, see Jones, *supra* note 57, at 637–42. In 2007, DOJ’s Criminal Division reported nineteen incidents between 1991 and 2006 in which DOJ had sought source-related information, although Professor RonNell Jones finds this figure may have been understated. *Id.* at 612–13, 642.

¹⁸⁷ According to experienced journalists in the field, prosecutors virtually never ask about the identity of sources in the absence of a subpoena. *E.g.*, Telephone Interview with Barton Gellman, Reporter, Wash. Post (May 8, 2013).

¹⁸⁸ See *supra* notes 135–42 and accompanying text (describing DOJ’s journalist subpoena guidelines).

lowed by summaries of what was discussed.¹⁸⁹ President Reagan went further than any other President in trying to implement these policies. No recognized constitutional obstacle stood in his way. Yet after journalists protested, senior officials rebelled from within; Secretary of State George Shultz held a press conference to announce that no one at the State Department would submit to a polygraph.¹⁹⁰ The attempted crackdown on leakers lasted all of three weeks before being summarily scrapped.¹⁹¹ Administrations and agencies have experimented to varying degrees with a number of other initiatives over the years, but Reagan's plan remains the closest the executive has come, at least in the pre-WikiLeaks era,¹⁹² to establishing a comprehensive program for monitoring prospective leakers, ferreting out culprits, or constraining media contacts.

To be sure, this restraint does not necessarily reflect any conscious appreciation for the upside of leaks, so much as a fear of undermining morale or generating mistrust. But notice how the grounds of argument have shifted — these considerations speak less to the legal and practical barriers to identifying leakers than to the political costs of seriously trying. Forces within government sharply limit any President's ability to invigorate apprehension efforts or otherwise deviate from the norm of broad-based leakiness. The likelihood of catching culprits is endogenous to the system. To say simply “you never can find the leaker”¹⁹³ obscures these internal drivers of nonenforcement.

Third, even with these self-imposed limitations, DOJ has had some success finding leakers. We do not have much data, but we know that from 2005 to 2009, the FBI opened investigations into twenty-six leak cases referred by the IC and identified suspects in fourteen of them.¹⁹⁴ There is presumably some selection bias here, if the FBI generally declines to open investigations it expects to be fruitless. Nonetheless, an identification rate of more than fifty percent over a five-year period

¹⁸⁹ See, e.g., WILLARD REPORT, *supra* note 37, at 4–5, 21–23; Steven Aftergood, *In 1962, JFK Was Urged to Take “Drastic Action” Against Leakers*, *SECURITY NEWS* (Sept. 24, 2012), http://www.fas.org/blog/security/2012/09/pfiab_drastic.html (summarizing the recommendations of a 1962 study by the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board).

¹⁹⁰ See Richard J. Pierce, Jr., *Saving the Unitary Executive Theory from Those Who Would Distort and Abuse It: A Review of The Unitary Executive*, by Steven G. Calabresi and Christopher S. Yoo, 12 U. PA. J. CONST. L. 593, 609 (2010).

¹⁹¹ See ABEL, *supra* note 19, at 41–42; HESS, *supra* note 82, at 90–91; David Hoffman, *Reagan Shelves Requirement for Polygraph Tests*, *WASH. POST*, Feb. 16, 1984, at A1.

¹⁹² Although it is too early to draw any firm conclusions, certain developments suggest the Obama Administration may be trending in the Reagan direction. See, e.g., Memorandum from the White House to the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies (Nov. 21, 2012), *available at* <http://www.fas.org/sgp/obama/nitp.pdf> (describing the establishment of a National Insider Threat Policy, which will require agencies to “monitor employee use of classified networks”).

¹⁹³ The President's News Conference, *supra* note 179, at 2211.

¹⁹⁴ *Mueller Response*, *supra* note 127, at 47.

suggests that many leakers can be discovered without extraordinary measures. Furthermore, in a significant portion of the investigations that failed to yield a suspect, other components of the executive branch appear to have borne some fault. Through a 2006 FOIA request, journalist Josh Gerstein obtained FBI records showing that the Bureau had abandoned numerous criminal investigations into classified information leaks because the “victim agency” had failed to cooperate with its work.¹⁹⁵

Finally, if it is true, as virtually every informed observer has indicated, that leaks are predominantly the province of top government officials with good media contacts,¹⁹⁶ then it should be all the easier to identify suspects. These top officials might be difficult to prosecute for political or other reasons. But as a purely evidentiary or investigatory matter, their special status ought to be a boon, not a burden, to enforcers. One former Defense Department official reflected in an interview: “It’s actually not so hard to catch the leaker in many cases. . . . Read a book like *Confront and Conceal*” — journalist David Sanger’s classified-information-strewn account of President Obama’s counterterrorism policies — “and it’s often pretty damn clear what the universe of people is who might have done it.”¹⁹⁷ *Confront and Conceal* describes not only specific classified programs to which a limited number of persons had access, but also specific meetings involving a sliver of officialdom.¹⁹⁸ “Compared to other crimes, you often have way more to go on in leak cases.”¹⁹⁹

2. *Bringing Cases.* — After the difficulty of identifying suspects, the next most common explanation given for the negligible enforcement rate centers on the national security concerns raised by public trials. To persuade a jury under the awkwardly worded Espionage Act, criminal cases may require the government to disclose classified information. They may also provide forums for defendants to seek to do the same, as well as focal points that draw attention to the initial leak and confirm its significance.²⁰⁰ An enforcement tool meant to vindicate national security interests, accordingly, may independently compromise them. This explanation surely has some force to it as

¹⁹⁵ Gerstein, *supra* note 129. This failure of interagency cooperation may be compatible with the claim that nonenforcement is driven by the national security risks of bringing criminal trials, *see infra* section II.A.2, pp. 551–54, but it undercuts the notion that leak suspects are intrinsically difficult to find.

¹⁹⁶ *See supra* notes 80–85 and accompanying text.

¹⁹⁷ Telephone Interview with former Department of Defense official (Aug. 29, 2012).

¹⁹⁸ *See, e.g.,* DAVID E. SANGER, *CONFRONT AND CONCEAL*, at x–xiii, 190–93, 200–03 (2012) (describing meetings about the “Olympic Games” cyber operation against Iran).

¹⁹⁹ Telephone Interview with former Department of Defense official, *supra* note 197.

²⁰⁰ For a representative statement of these concerns, *see* WILLARD REPORT, *supra* note 37, at 11.

well — indeed, more force than the identification rationale — but it is also far from satisfying.

For starters, it minimizes the Classified Information Procedures Act²⁰¹ (CIPA). CIPA was enacted in 1980 to facilitate the use of classified information in criminal cases. Congress was keen to address the problem of “graymail,” whereby (in simplest form) defendants pressured prosecutors to limit or abandon cases by threatening to reveal damaging material at trial.²⁰² CIPA contains numerous mechanisms to guard against such dilemmas: notification requirements prohibiting unilateral defense disclosures of classified information; protective orders prohibiting cleared counsel from sharing classified information with their clients; redactions, summaries, admissions, and substitutions; in camera and ex parte hearings.²⁰³ CIPA may be cumbersome to use and suboptimal from a national security standpoint; no statute concerned with protecting defendants’ due process rights could be otherwise. In the recent high-profile case of Thomas Drake, CIPA did not prevent a discovery ruling that, according to the judge, the government deemed insufficient to avoid public references at trial to sensitive NSA activities.²⁰⁴ Yet a number of studies have extolled the statute’s track record in national security cases.²⁰⁵ If anything, the literature on CIPA tends to underscore how harsh it has proven for defendants, who complain they are rarely given access to the government’s classified evidence or permitted to submit their own classified evidence.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ 18 U.S.C. app. 3 (2012).

²⁰² See RICHARD B. ZABEL & JAMES J. BENJAMIN, JR., HUMAN RIGHTS FIRST, *in PURSUIT OF JUSTICE* 82 (2008).

²⁰³ In addition to these measures, CIPA leaves in place other tools judges might use to safeguard sensitive information. See EDWARD C. LIU & TODD GARVEY, CONG. RESEARCH SERV., R41742, PROTECTING CLASSIFIED INFORMATION AND THE RIGHTS OF CRIMINAL DEFENDANTS: THE CLASSIFIED INFORMATION PROCEDURES ACT 10–11 (2012). A detailed analysis of CIPA’s procedures is well beyond the scope of this Article. For an overview, see 2 DAVID S. KRIS & J. DOUGLAS WILSON, NATIONAL SECURITY INVESTIGATIONS AND PROSECUTIONS 121–204 (2d ed. 2012).

²⁰⁴ See Transcript of Sentencing Hearing at 25–26, *United States v. Drake*, 818 F. Supp. 2d 909 (D. Md. 2011) (No. 10-cr-00181-RDB) (“When we had the hearings under [CIPA], . . . and certain rulings were made, some in favor of the government, some not, . . . the government made its determination that the disclosure of remaining classified information would harm national security and ergo the dismissal of the indictment.”).

²⁰⁵ See, e.g., SERRIN TURNER & STEPHEN J. SCHULHOFER, BRENNAN CTR. FOR JUSTICE, THE SECRECY PROBLEM IN TERRORISM TRIALS 22–25 (2005); ZABEL & BENJAMIN, *supra* note 202, at 87–90.

²⁰⁶ See Melanie Reid, *Secrets Behind Secrets: Disclosure of Classified Information Before and During Trial and Why CIPA Should Be Revamped*, 35 SETON HALL LEGIS. J. 272, 292–97 & 292 n.91 (2011); Ellen Yaroshesky, *Secret Evidence Is Slowly Eroding the Adversary System: CIPA and FISA in the Courts*, 34 HOFSTRA L. REV. 1063, 1070–76 (2006).

Whatever CIPA's drawbacks, its history and design put the burden on those who would argue it is inadequate in leak cases, an argument that has not been elaborated. CIPA was crafted with national security leaks specifically in mind.²⁰⁷ That its enactment did not correspond with any discernible rise in enforcement levels strongly suggests that the primary causes of permissive neglect lie outside of the trial process. For over two decades, the government barely gave judges a chance to apply CIPA safely and effectively in leak cases. The first time the government did so, in 1985, it secured a jury verdict of guilty on all counts.²⁰⁸

Jury verdicts in CIPA cases are not the only path to punishment. Vigorous investigations of suspected leakers can generate second-order criminal offenses, like materially false statements and obstructions of justice, which may be tried without use of classified information. In some instances, these investigations may turn up evidence that the leaker profited from her unauthorized disclosure, rendering her susceptible to a civil damages action. Furthermore, plea agreements offer the government a means to convict leakers without assuming the risks attendant to trial. Pleas have been used in a number of cases involving the unlawful transmission of classified information.²⁰⁹ Even when these agreements result in punishments milder than what prosecutors might have preferred, as in the Drake case,²¹⁰ the very act of seeking criminal penalties can still have significant retributive and deterrent effects. Accused leakers are liable to incur a wide range of psychic and professional costs, along with steep legal fees, from their time spent under investigation and indictment. In functional terms, then, even the "failed" Drake prosecution can be seen as a successful intervention against leaking.²¹¹ This is not to say that it would ever be appropriate for prosecutors to bring cases they do not believe they can win, for harassment value. It is to say that in light of CIPA, there is

²⁰⁷ See generally *Espionage Laws and Leaks: Hearings Before the Subcomm. on Legis. of the H. Permanent Select Comm. on Intelligence*, 96th Cong. (1979); S. REP. NO. 96-823, at 1-2 (1980).

²⁰⁸ See *United States v. Morison*, 844 F.2d 1057, 1062 (4th Cir. 1988); Brian Z. Tamanaha, *A Critical Review of the Classified Information Procedures Act*, 13 AM. J. CRIM. L. 277, 287 (1986) (discussing the use of CIPA in Morison's trial).

²⁰⁹ See ELSEA, *supra* note 33, at 5-7, 14, 17, 24 n.157.

²¹⁰ See Scott Shane, *No Jail Time in Trial over N.S.A. Leak*, N.Y. TIMES, July 16, 2011, at A13.

²¹¹ See Dan Froomkin, *The Big Chill: How Obama Is Operating in Unprecedented Secrecy — While Attacking the Secret-Tellers*, HUFFINGTON POST (Oct. 17, 2012, 12:05 PM), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dan-froomkin/obama-white-house-leaks_b_1973649.html ("In every significant sense, the government won [the Drake case], because it demonstrated the price of nonconformity." (quoting Steven Aftergood) (internal quotation marks omitted)); cf. Scott Shane, *U.S. Pressing Its Crackdown Against Leaks*, N.Y. TIMES, June 18, 2011, at A1 (reporting that, according to leak defendant Stephen Kim's sister, the charges brought against Kim "sent [their] parents into deep sadness and anxiety, put more strains on Stephen's marriage than a couple can bear, and ruined all he has worked for over his life").

no a priori reason to assume prosecutors cannot win most leak cases, and that in situations where the judge's pretrial rulings raise national security concerns or otherwise augur poorly, plea agreements provide a backstop.

Many of these concerns, moreover, relate to prosecutions brought under the Espionage Act. There are a number of other criminal laws potentially applicable to leak cases, as outlined in Part I.²¹² Some of these statutes — notably including the general theft and conversion statute, 18 U.S.C. § 641 — do not have a comparable scienter requirement. Nor do they have the same moral valence. The title of the Espionage Act, one former DOJ official who worked on leak cases suggested, can be a disadvantage for the prosecution inasmuch as it primes the jury to expect a traitorous offense.²¹³ While the government has enlisted several of these other statutes on occasion, it has declined to use them as aggressively as it might and continues to lead with the Espionage Act. Drake, for example, was never charged under § 641.²¹⁴

3. *Additional Evidence.* — In case the preceding discussion still leaves room to wonder whether investigative and prosecutorial constraints are sufficient to explain decades of minimal enforcement, additional evidence of the comparative and negative variety — relating to practices the executive has used in analogous areas, but not the leak area, and to potential remedial steps it has forgone — should erase any doubt.

First, as a Senate study once observed, the executive branch takes classic spy situations “much more seriously than leaks.”²¹⁵ The majority of Espionage Act prosecutions have, appropriately enough, involved espionage, incidents in which an official passed confidential information to a foreign power.²¹⁶ Spy situations are apt to present even greater investigative challenges than media leak cases, given that in the latter, news stories tend to reveal on their face the existence of a government source. While the practice of prioritizing espionage cases may be explicable on any number of grounds,²¹⁷ it undercuts the notion that the leak laws cannot accommodate aggressive enforcement within standard resource constraints.

²¹² See *supra* notes 40–44 and accompanying text.

²¹³ Telephone Interview with former DOJ official (Aug. 28, 2012).

²¹⁴ See Indictment, *United States v. Drake*, No. 10-cr-00181-RDB, 2010 WL 1513342 (D. Md. Apr. 14, 2011); see also *supra* note 43 and accompanying text (explaining that the Fourth Circuit, in which Drake's case was brought, construes § 641 as covering disclosures of intangible as well as tangible classified information).

²¹⁵ SSCI REPORT, *supra* note 120, at 8.

²¹⁶ See Papandrea, *supra* note 33, at 296.

²¹⁷ To take just two, espionage cases may generally be easier to bring because they are more conducive to being charged as conspiracies or less likely to elicit a skeptical reaction from juries.

Second, the executive appears to take violations of other criminal laws focused on government actors much more seriously than it takes leaks. “Public corruption,” DOJ announced recently, “is among the FBI’s top priorities and is the number one priority of the Criminal Investigative Division.”²¹⁸ In fiscal year 2009 alone, DOJ’s Public Corruption Unit managed approximately 2500 corruption investigations involving public officials, coordinated more than 1000 additional investigations, and helped obtain over 850 convictions of federal officials.²¹⁹ Intrusive techniques, such as undercover operations and electronic surveillance, are a staple of the unit’s investigative work.²²⁰ These raw data tell us nothing about the prevalence of the underlying criminal conduct, of course, or about the relative difficulty of identifying and prosecuting corrupt individuals versus leakers. But they are illustrative nonetheless of what a vigorous enforcement regime against federal employees is capable of.

Third, the majority of classified information leaks are not referred for possible criminal action. DOJ officials have indicated that the department receives roughly forty referrals per year, mainly from the CIA and NSA.²²¹ Taken together with the facts that (i) virtually all classified information leaks (as well as many leaks of unclassified information) potentially fall within the terms of one or more criminal statutes,²²² and that (ii) several studies have suggested such leaks occur almost daily,²²³ this figure implies that agencies have been reporting only a small fraction of leak-law violations. The only study ever to consider this ratio found similarly.²²⁴ The referral process, in other words, exercises major drag on the system. It filters out most leak cases before they ever reach a prosecutor.²²⁵

My FOIA requests and interviews flesh out this observation, which Part III will explore further.²²⁶ They suggest that over the past several decades, agencies that generate veritable mountains of information re-

²¹⁸ FED. BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION, TODAY’S FBI: FACTS AND FIGURES, 2010–2011, at 28 (2012).

²¹⁹ *Id.*

²²⁰ *Id.*

²²¹ See *supra* notes 128–33 and accompanying text.

²²² See *supra* notes 34–48 and accompanying text.

²²³ See *supra* notes 69–77 and accompanying text.

²²⁴ See SSCI REPORT, *supra* note 120, at 7 (stating that of the thirty recent classified information leaks brought to the committee’s attention, only three were referred to DOJ).

²²⁵ DOJ does have the authority to investigate possible leak-law violations in the absence of a referral, but, as noted above, such *sua sponte* investigations appear to be extremely rare. See *supra* note 130 and accompanying text. The failure of the victim agency to refer the matter presumably sends a strong signal to prosecutors that the agency would not welcome their intervention.

²²⁶ See *infra* notes 358–68 and accompanying text (situating the referral process within a “vetogates” model).

lating to the national defense — including cabinet-level departments like Energy, State, Treasury, and Homeland Security, as well as independent agencies like the Nuclear Regulatory Commission — have collectively referred a handful of leak cases to DOJ.²²⁷ The only meaningful users of the referral process are certain elements of the IC, the heads of which are required by executive order to report possible violations of federal law to the Attorney General.²²⁸ Even though its text speaks of the “national defense,” the Espionage Act has been reduced by executive branch practice to an intelligence statute.

This point bears emphasis. *The vast majority of entities within the U.S. government that work on national security–related issues have effectively opted out of the criminal enforcement regime for leaks.* Such widespread disregard of the referral process is all the more striking when one considers that individuals and agencies can refer cases to DOJ with no desire that they be pursued, simply to demonstrate concern or to gain bureaucratic cover. Perhaps some busy officials worry that referrals will only create more work for them, without in all likelihood yielding a conviction. Yet while this pattern is not strictly irreconcilable with the notion that the difficulties of investigating and prosecuting leaks have driven the lack of enforcement, it strongly suggests a more fundamental dynamic at work.

Fourth, to the extent that any perceived flaws in the Espionage Act or CIPA are seen to constrain prosecutions, no administration has made a concerted effort to address them. Specific executive branch components have episodically endorsed proposals to strengthen the Espionage Act, as by removing the scienter requirement.²²⁹ But the White House has never made such reforms a legislative priority. To

²²⁷ I say “suggest” because the information generated thus far by my FOIA requests, *see supra* note 24 (describing the requests and supplying the URL for one that has been posted online), is highly imperfect. Specifically, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the Offices of Inspector General of the Departments of Energy and State found no records relating to criminal referrals of media leaks; the Office of Inspector General of the Treasury Department likewise found no referral records, although one internal case is not yet closed; and the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Homeland Security provided records that, while not entirely clear, appear to suggest a maximum of five such referrals. The National Reconnaissance Office located approximately 100 pages of responsive material of any kind, but withheld it all under FOIA exemptions (b)(1) and (b)(3), 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(1), (3) (2012). My other FOIA submissions are regrettably still pending, even in the case of the FBI, which granted my request for “expedited processing” under 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(E). Interviewees from State, Treasury, Homeland Security, and DOJ confirmed that criminal leak referrals from the former three are rare to nonexistent, although they did not know specifics.

²²⁸ Exec. Order No. 12,333, 3 C.F.R. 200, 204–05 (1982), *amended* by Exec. Order No. 13,470, 3 C.F.R. 218, 227 (2009), *reprinted as amended* in 50 U.S.C. § 401 app. at 57–66 (2006 & Supp. V 2011). *But cf. supra* note 195 and accompanying text (noting evidence of IC elements submitting crime reports and then declining to facilitate DOJ’s investigations).

²²⁹ *See* SSCI REPORT, *supra* note 120, at 17–22; ROSS, *supra* note 14, at 154–58; WISE, *supra* note 98, at 153–56.

the contrary, President Clinton, immediately before leaving office, vetoed a bill supported by the CIA that would have criminalized the knowing and willful disclosure of “any classified information,” without regard to the leaker’s intent or the subject matter of the information.²³⁰ Clinton’s veto message explained that the legislation “might discourage Government officials from engaging even in appropriate public discussion, press briefings, or other legitimate official activities” and “create an undue chilling effect.”²³¹ The following year, Congress directed the Attorney General to conduct a study of the leak laws and to issue a report containing recommendations for legislative and administrative reforms.²³² Attorney General Ashcroft’s 2002 report recommended a slew of administrative measures but notably declined to discuss possible legislative revisions, stating that the benefit from any such reform “is unclear.”²³³ FBI Director Robert Mueller took a similar position in a 2010 written response to a Senator’s question.²³⁴ Most recently, the Obama Administration opposed certain Senators’ efforts to insert broad anti-leak provisions into the 2013 Intelligence Authorization Act.²³⁵

Fifth, consecutive administrations have likewise declined to relax DOJ’s stringent policy on the issuance of subpoenas to journalists. As explained above, this policy is not statutorily grounded (though it may correspond with congressional preferences) or constitutionally mandated under existing doctrine (though it may promote constitutional values), and it poses a significant obstacle to bringing leak cases.²³⁶ Although the White House generally refrains from interfering with DOJ’s specific prosecution decisions, it regularly seeks changes to high-level, self-imposed agency rules such as these. There is no evidence, however, that any President or Attorney General has considered loosening the journalist subpoena policy. I expected that the prosecutors and White House officials I interviewed would express some frustration or at least ambivalence on this score. None did. The policy is “respected more than resented,” one former DOJ official said.²³⁷

²³⁰ Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2001, H.R. 4392 EAS, 106th Cong. § 303 (2000).

²³¹ President’s Message on Returning Without Approval to the House of Representatives Intelligence Authorization Legislation for Fiscal Year 2001, 3 PUB. PAPERS 2466, 2467 (Nov. 4, 2000). For more on this episode, see Dmitrieva, *supra* note 43, at 1060–63.

²³² Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2002, Pub. L. No. 107-108, § 310, 115 Stat. 1394, 1400–01 (2001).

²³³ Ashcroft Report, *supra* note 46, at 3.

²³⁴ Mueller Response, *supra* note 127, at 47.

²³⁵ See *Administration Opposes Leaks Provisions of Intelligence Bill*, CQ NEWS, Nov. 29, 2012, available at 2012 WLNR 27128218.

²³⁶ See *supra* notes 135–42 and accompanying text.

²³⁷ Telephone Interview with former DOJ official, *supra* note 213.

Finally, and critically, while the points made in this section have focused on criminal enforcement, my research confirms and extends prior findings that administrative enforcement is also extremely rare.²³⁸ (Civil remedies, which tend to be poorly suited to media leaks, are even rarer.²³⁹) Just as most agencies outside the IC decline to use the criminal referral process, the returns from my FOIA requests suggest that many decline to invest any significant energy into internal investigations or penalties. FOIA officers at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the Departments of Energy, State, and the Treasury collectively identified zero records relating to administrative sanctions for suspected media leakers.²⁴⁰ This passivity is particularly notable because administrative remedies not only are easier to obtain than criminal convictions, but also typically generate far less publicity and criticism.²⁴¹ To the extent that concerns about negative media coverage or the security risks associated with jury trials have been driving down prosecution rates, one might expect policymakers to shift enforcement into the lower-cost, lower-salience administrative realm. No evidence indicates that they have taken anything other than occasional, ad hoc steps to do so.

* * *

In sum, on a range of levels, the executive's actions are hard to square with the commonly voiced notion that investigative and adjudicative difficulties are the critical barriers to cracking down on leaks. At a minimum, the idea that the leak laws are inherently or peculiarly incapable of implementation is untenable. Energetic enforcement just comes at a cost — political, practical, personal — that relevant decisionmakers have been unwilling to accept. But how can that be so, if leakers are catchable and leaks are “a problem of major propor-

²³⁸ See *supra* notes 144–56 and accompanying text (reviewing evidence of lax administrative enforcement).

²³⁹ See *supra* notes 143–44 and accompanying text.

²⁴⁰ The Department of Homeland Security, by contrast, identified a number of leak cases that had been brought to the attention of its Office of Inspector General, although its records do not make clear how many, if any, of these led to administrative sanctions. The fact that FOIA offices in other agencies identified no responsive records does not necessarily demonstrate an absence of sanctions, but I take it to suggest that administrative discipline for media leaks is — at most — highly unusual within those agencies. Cf. *supra* notes 24 & 227 (describing my FOIA requests and the partial nature of the responses).

²⁴¹ See *supra* note 170 and accompanying text (noting widespread acceptance of administrative penalties for leakers). Relative to criminal prosecutions, administrative penalties are therefore also much less likely to generate perverse consequences from the government's perspective, such as the so-called Streisand Effect, whereby an attempt to suppress a disclosed item of information only draws more attention to it. See generally *What Is the Streisand Effect?*, THE ECONOMIST (Apr. 15, 2013, 11:50 PM), <http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2013/04/economist-explains-what-streisand-effect>.

tions”?²⁴² To understand how, it is necessary to turn to the other side of the ledger and consider the potential benefits that a strategy of minimal legal enforcement can yield for executive branch principals and the executive as an institution.

B. *Leaking’s Systemic Rewards*

1. *Plants Need to Be Watered — with Leaks.* — Perhaps the most basic benefit of a permissive approach to leaks is that it helps preserve a robust ability to use the media to convey anonymous statements that serve administration ends — that is, to plant.²⁴³ The efficacy of these “authorized” unofficial disclosures is linked to the frequency of “unauthorized” disclosures. (Although both types of disclosure involve leaking as colloquially understood, this section and the next one follow those who have written about plants in associating leaks with lack of approval.) In a few pages, I will return to the authorized/unauthorized divide and show why a binary formulation is too simple. But for the moment, it will suffice to think of plants as unattributed disclosures made or directed by the President and his immediate advisers.²⁴⁴

Planting is a critical policymaking and communications tool for this group. In pioneering the bully-pulpit presidency, Theodore Roosevelt is believed to have been the first occupant of the White House to develop a systematic practice of revealing confidential material, “on background,” to select journalists.²⁴⁵ This practice is now one of the White House’s most important means of disseminating information, framing its activities, gauging popular and congressional reactions, and controlling the political agenda — perhaps *the* most important means when it comes to sensitive national security and foreign policy subjects. Plants are valuable for many reasons. Depending on the context, they may allow the White House to circumvent or cajole the career bureaucracy, to communicate more efficiently with foreign governments, to send signals and warnings to adversaries without formally engaging them, to float trial balloons, to respond rapidly to breaking developments, to preserve plausible deniability if an initiative

²⁴² Statement on the Protection of Classified National Security Council and Intelligence Information, *supra* note 2.

²⁴³ See *supra* note 112 and accompanying text (summarizing the leak/plant distinction).

²⁴⁴ This group might be broken out further. The President’s national security operational team, for example, may tend to treat classified information more circumspectly than her political aides. The White House, too, is a “they” and not an “it,” though the degree of polycentrism is limited.

²⁴⁵ See Kielbowicz, *supra* note 99, at 444–46; Papandrea, *supra* note 33, at 249–55. The unsystematic practice of planting information has much older roots. See, e.g., DANIEL N. HOFFMAN, *GOVERNMENTAL SECRECY AND THE FOUNDING FATHERS 184–210* (1981) (describing the John Adams Administration’s decision in 1798 to release the “XYZ papers” to Congress, with the expectation that they would subsequently reach the public and enhance popular support for war against France).

is poorly received or an assertion turns out to be false, and generally to impart information about executive branch policies without officially acknowledging those policies and thereby inviting unwanted forms of accountability or constraint.²⁴⁶

Consider the recent news stories about the CIA's drone program targeting suspected al Qaeda militants in Yemen.²⁴⁷ The very existence of this program is classified. Relying on information provided by unnamed U.S. officials, the stories explain the basic purpose and nature of the program, and several report that all operations have been conducted with the consent of the Yemeni government. Let us assume that the President or his delegees authorized these communications with the press, whether proactively or in response to prior disclosures or discoveries by others. By revealing this information, the Administration keeps the American people minimally informed of its pursuits, characterizes them in a manner designed to build support, and signals its respect for international law and national sovereignty (the detail about the host state's consent). At the same time, by revealing this information through a plant, the Administration manages to avoid engaging in any unstructured public conversation about issues that might implicate intelligence sources and methods, or violating any pledges it might have made to Yemeni leaders not to officially reveal their role in the drone strikes, lest this cause them political trouble at home.²⁴⁸ The lack of official acknowledgement also limits the ability of domestic watchdog groups to leverage the decision for additional details about internal procedures, legal standards, collateral damage estimates, and the like: the program is, after all, still classified. Recognizing that "[a]s a practical matter, foreign governments can often ignore unofficial disclosures" whereas they cannot "so easily cast a blind eye on official disclosures," FOIA doctrine enables this strategy by providing that only the latter forfeit the government's option to refuse to confirm or deny the existence of records pertaining to a policy.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ For a somewhat more cynical catalogue of the purposes of planting, see Levi, *supra* note 80, at 629, which includes "lying to the press or the public" as among plants' ends.

²⁴⁷ See, e.g., Adam Entous et al., *U.S. Relaxes Drone Rules*, WALL ST. J., Apr. 26, 2012, at A1; Greg Miller, *U.S. Drone Campaign in Yemen Expanded*, WASH. POST, Apr. 26, 2012, at A8; cf. Philip Alston, *The CIA and Targeted Killings Beyond Borders*, 2 HARV. NAT'L SECURITY J. 283, 367 (2011) ("[O]ur knowledge of the CIA's targeted killings programs . . . derives very largely from self-serving leaks to journalists.").

²⁴⁸ Cf. Declaration of John Bennett, Dir., Nat'l Clandestine Serv., CIA, *passim*, N.Y. Times Co. v. Dep't of Justice, 915 F. Supp. 2d 508 (S.D.N.Y. 2013) (No. 11-cv-9336-CM) (explaining the CIA's concern not to reveal sources and methods and asserting that "in many foreign countries, cooperation with the CIA is not a popular concept," *id.* at para. 45).

²⁴⁹ *Wilson v. CIA*, 586 F.3d 171, 186 (2d Cir. 2009). A deeply pragmatic concern for the nuances of foreign affairs thus drives FOIA doctrine to be highly formalistic. The reported CIA drone program in Yemen also implicates the covert action statute, which provides that for such actions "it is intended that the role of the United States Government will not be apparent or acknowl-

There are countless variations on the Yemen story, but the basic insights generalize. Plants enhance the administration's capacity to play "two-level games"²⁵⁰: sending interconnected messages about its activities to various domestic and international audiences without incurring the full diplomatic, legal, or political risks that official acknowledgement may entail.²⁵¹ Every policy area generates some materials that are confidential and others that are public. In national security and foreign affairs, however, the classification system leaves the public side of this balance grossly underdeveloped — not just from the perspective of popular accountability but also from the perspective of a White House that wants to explain, justify, spin, and claim credit for its activities. As Max Frankel observed four decades ago, "practically everything that our Government does, plans, thinks, hears and contemplates in the realms of foreign policy is stamped and treated as secret."²⁵² The regular declassification process is relatively cumbersome, contentious, and irreversible. Planting offers a low-cost work-around.²⁵³ It is easy to be cynical about the practice. From a transparency standpoint, planting is highly problematic.²⁵⁴ But as a device for communicating about strategically and politically fraught matters, planting has clear instrumental value. Democratic value too; without it, public knowledge about these subjects might be even more impoverished.

The merits of planting aside, the key descriptive observation for present purposes is that it is a cherished presidential prerogative. When President Obama's former Chief of Staff William Daley raised

edged publicly." 50 U.S.C. § 413b(e) (2006 & Supp. V 2011). Plants may preserve legal wiggle room to claim the government's role has not reached this threshold.

²⁵⁰ For the classic account of two-level games from the international relations literature, see Robert D. Putnam, *Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games*, 42 INT'L ORG. 427 (1988). For a helpful summary of reasons why the government may prefer to communicate with foreign actors by relaying messages anonymously through the media, see Kielbowicz, *supra* note 99, at 482–83.

²⁵¹ Cf. HALPERIN ET AL., *supra* note 81, at 184 (stating that concerns about "multiple audiences" can generate "leaking," as the speaker may, inter alia, "desire to make clear to a domestic American audience or to the bureaucracy what the position is without making a formal statement to a foreign government").

²⁵² Frankel Affidavit, *supra* note 91, at para. 5.

²⁵³ See MARC AMBINDER & D.B. GRADY, DEEP STATE 60 (2013) ("Because so many matters of the state have been stamped Secret, the practice of illegally leaking to the press is not only considered acceptable, but oftentimes necessary for governance."); Steven Aftergood, *Some Unauthorized Disclosures of Classified Info Are Routine*, SECRECY NEWS (June 11, 2012), http://www.fas.org/blog/secrecy/2012/06/routine_leaks.html (stating that certain officials routinely disclose classified information "not to subvert policy but to explain it, to defend it and to execute it"); cf. *infra* notes 273–74 and accompanying text (discussing the use of ad hoc, or "instant," declassification in connection with planting and pleaking).

²⁵⁴ And it will only become more problematic if executive branch components like the CIA that refuse to officially acknowledge their activities, as a categorical matter, continue to assume greater paramilitary obligations.

hackles for acknowledging, “I’m all for leaking when it’s organized,”²⁵⁵ he was simply giving candid expression to a deeply rooted belief. Daley evoked a long line of predecessors, such as the top aide to President Carter who remarked on his affection for the “conscious planned leak,”²⁵⁶ or the aide to President Johnson who observed that, “[o]f course, the people at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue are not really worried about all leaks — only those that originate outside the White House.”²⁵⁷ Planting is not an incidental practice of a few craven officials. It is programmatic, a mode of governance. “With every rollout of everything significant we do” in the national security field, one White House official remarked in an interview, “there is a structured layout of how we will do the leaking” (that is, the planting).²⁵⁸ All recent administrations appear to have done the same.²⁵⁹ In the jaundiced but not unfounded view of some veteran reporters, “[t]he guiding principle, then and now, is that when it suits an administration’s purpose to leak secret information to the press, it simply ignores or temporarily overrides a document’s classification.”²⁶⁰

There is a catch, however: vigorous enforcement of the leak laws would cripple the administration’s ability to plant on national security and foreign policy subjects. For a strategy of planting to work, it is critical that relevant audiences not immediately assume that every unattributed disclosure they encounter reflects a concerted White House effort to manipulate the information environment. The practice of planting requires some amount of *constructive ambiguity* as to its prevalence and operation.

Imagine a world in which the laws against leaking were vigorously enforced — yielding, say, a dozen criminal cases each year rather than a dozen throughout U.S. history. Presidentially approved sources would remain untouched. Prosecutors would never charge them, if such a prosecution would even be constitutional.²⁶¹ Yet others who secretly divulge classified information would become much more vulnerable. Fewer officials would run the risk. Those who keep tabs on

²⁵⁵ Roger Simon, *Exclusive: Bill Daley, Unplugged*, POLITICO (Oct. 28, 2011, 4:37 AM), <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1011/67043.html>.

²⁵⁶ ABEL, *supra* note 19, at 62 (quoting Stuart Eizenstat) (internal quotation marks omitted).

²⁵⁷ SIGAL, *supra* note 29, at 145 (internal quotation marks omitted).

²⁵⁸ Telephone Interview with White House official (Aug. 20, 2012). The official added: “The people in this building want to leak when they want to leak — when it helps the President.” *Id.*

²⁵⁹ See, e.g., *Hearing on Leaks of Classified Information*, *supra* note 107, at 146–47 (testimony of Admiral Elmo Zumwalt) (explaining that during the 1970s, while the witness was a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, highly classified intelligence information was “very frequently” disclosed to the press through “authorized leak[s] from the White House, designed to have some policy impact or political impact,” *id.* at 147).

²⁶⁰ ABEL, *supra* note 19, at 34.

²⁶¹ See generally Ashcroft Report, *supra* note 46, at 2 (discussing the President’s constitutional authority to control the protection and dissemination of national security secrets).

the U.S. government would become conditioned to expect that less-than-fully authorized disclosures are the exception, not the rule, and that when such disclosures do occur they are reasonably likely to generate an observable sanction, such as a prosecution, or at least the opening of an investigation. They would come to assume that most if not all of the unattributed items they read about in the newspaper are really plants.

No special insight is needed to draw the connection between evidence of a crackdown on leaks and the likely pedigree of the classified information that filters out. A government that aspires to be leakproof, commentators have long claimed, is a government that aspires “to control its preferred [disclosures] and thus the press and other outside critics.”²⁶² “[A]llowing the Executive Branch to leak at will information that glorifies the President and his policies, while aggressively suppressing all information that does the opposite, is the classic recipe for propagandizing without limit.”²⁶³ For any President, to be seen as implementing an effective program against leaking is to invite charges of hypocrisy and abuse, and to lose some of the protections that anonymous sourcing provides.

Members of the media, for their part, would become more vulnerable to the critique that they are pawns of the President, if she were thought to exercise greater control over the composition of unattributed disclosures. To protect themselves against that critique, national security journalists would have to take steps to distance themselves from the White House, as by challenging more of its claims, highlighting more dissenting views, or insisting on identifying anonymous Oval Office sources as “White House officials” (much less common these days than hazier formulations such as “administration officials”). A preview of this dynamic was evident when President Reagan attempted to limit agency contacts with the press — a clear sign, reporters complained, that Reagan was trying “to make sure that whatever information gets out makes the administration look good.”²⁶⁴

In our current system, authorized disclosures often serve reporters’ ends as much as unauthorized disclosures do. But that mutuality of interests is fragile. Journalists who are seen to traffic too frequently or credulously in White House plants face reputational harm, the charge

²⁶² HECLO, *supra* note 23, at 231; *see also* Daniel, *supra* note 30, at 13 (noting the popular view that, without leaks, “the country would get only Government-controlled news”).

²⁶³ Greenwald, *supra* note 123.

²⁶⁴ Michael Getler, *Restrictions Protested by Reporters*, WASH. POST, Feb. 9, 1982, at A7 (quoting the executive director of the Reporters’ Committee for Freedom of the Press); *see also supra* notes 189–91 and accompanying text (discussing this episode).

that they are administration skills.²⁶⁵ Leakiness insulates most journalists from such accusations by disaggregating the government and disassociating the use of anonymous sources from the President's agenda.

This analysis solves a puzzle presented by the CIA example above. Recall that the lack of official acknowledgement is considered a key foreign policy advantage of planting information about the drone program.²⁶⁶ Yet if everyone knows these news stories are the product of White House plants, aren't they the equivalent of an official acknowledgement? Why does it matter that the disclosures were made "on background" as opposed to in a press release, speech, or the like? Are Yemenis really that dense? Part of the answer is that everyone does *not* know these disclosures came from the White House. This Article just stipulated that. The hypothesis is believable, but given the leakiness of the U.S. system, we have no solid basis for prediction. Leakiness preserves the President's plausible deniability as to his role in the disclosure, if not in the underlying policy as well. It is loosely analogous to what a game theorist would call a mixed-strategy equilibrium: an approach that generates sufficient randomness (or apparent randomness) across government sources as to degrade the ability of outsiders to predict the nature and origin of any given disclosure.²⁶⁷

Through several mechanisms, then, invigorating enforcement of the leak laws threatens to reduce the acoustic separation between perceived "official" and "unofficial" disclosures, and thereby reduce the President's ability to enlist the media in any number of complex policy games. There are differing degrees of invigoration, of course, and the causal pathways are complicated and messy at the margins. Some jaded audiences may already assume (incorrectly) that the White House dictates all national security- and foreign policy-related disclosures. Some may pay no attention. A major crackdown on leakers would be more avulsive than a minor crackdown. But the existence of

²⁶⁵ Last decade's contretemps over Judith Miller is a case in point. See Lili Levi, *Social Media and the Press*, 90 N.C. L. REV. 1531, 1561 n.169 (2012) (explaining that "Miller, a Pulitzer-winning former *New York Times* reporter, was subject to extensive criticism for articles uncritically reporting her White House sources' false claims about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq"). Although none of the journalists I interviewed suggested as much, I imagine that some reporters develop elaborate informal barter systems with their government sources, procuring a few real leaks now and again in exchange for passing off other pieces of spin as if they were leaks.

²⁶⁶ See *supra* p. 560.

²⁶⁷ See generally Mark Walker & John Wooders, *Mixed Strategy Equilibrium*, in THE NEW PALGRAVE DICTIONARY OF ECONOMICS ONLINE (Steven N. Durlauf & Lawrence E. Blume eds., 2d ed. 2008). Mixed-strategy equilibrium theory may explain, for example, why professional tennis players vary the direction of their serves. See Mark Walker & John Wooders, *Minimax Play at Wimbledon*, 91 AM. ECON. REV. 1521 (2001).

a basic positive relationship between the government's perceived leakiness and the President's communicative flexibility seems clear enough.

President Obama is currently learning this lesson — and validating the theory. By increasing criminal enforcement against suspected leakers, his DOJ has “exposed the White House to accusations . . . that it clamps down on whistleblowing when the disclosures undermine its agenda but eagerly volunteers anonymous ‘senior administration officials’ for interviews when politically expedient.”²⁶⁸ Critics in the media, civil society, and Congress now scrutinize every such unattributed disclosure for signs of hypocrisy, national security harm, or other grounds for delegitimation. It took only a handful of prosecutions to erode the Administration's credibility in the eyes of important constituencies and, with it, the capacity to shape the policy narrative.

In sum, the relationship between permissive neglect and presidential information management is much more complicated, and more interesting, than standard critiques of the former suggest. Leaking seems on the surface like the enemy of planting: almost by definition, disclosures unapproved by the President threaten to jeopardize his control over what information emerges and how. And without doubt, certain specific leaks can work at cross-purposes with certain other plants. Yet for the reasons just provided, it is a fallacy of composition to conclude that leakiness, as an aggregate phenomenon, therefore undermines planting. If there is tension at the retail level, at the wholesale level planting depends upon leaking to give it political and epistemological breathing room; leaking, in turn, depends upon planting to give it legal breathing room. The two are fundamentally symbiotic. Plants need to be watered with leaks.

2. *Plants, Leaks, and Pleaks.* —

“[S]omeone at my level never leaks.”

— President Carter's national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski²⁶⁹

An appreciation for presidential planting thus helps us start to sort through the puzzle of permissive neglect. However, notwithstanding the binary way in which some thoughtful journalists have parsed unattributed disclosures into leaks and plants (most journalists and almost all legal scholars have not done this much),²⁷⁰ the distinction is far

²⁶⁸ Uri Friedman, *Good Leak, Bad Leak*, FOREIGN POL'Y (June 8, 2012), http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/06/07/good_leak_bad_leak.

²⁶⁹ LINSKY, *supra* note 28, at 201 (internal quotation marks omitted).

²⁷⁰ It is notable that journalists today seem even less likely to promote the leak/plant distinction than their predecessors were a generation ago. Several journalists I interviewed seemed to take

from clean. Intragovernmental divisions, deficits in hierarchical supervision, and other complicating factors need to be brought into the analysis. This complexity further illuminates the rationality of minimal enforcement.

In distinguishing leaks from plants, the key concept is authorization. But what does it mean for a disclosure of classified information, or merely confidential information for that matter, to be authorized?²⁷¹ The Espionage Act is silent on the question. In legal terms, there is only one administrative process in place to regulate the disclosure of classified information, and that is the declassification regime set forth in executive order.²⁷² Although the order does not explicitly prohibit declassifying information immediately in advance or by means of unattributed disclosures to the press, it does not clearly countenance such an ad hoc approach either.²⁷³ Nor does it clarify the White House's role. The practice of publicizing information while maintaining its classification is disfavored but is not ruled out.²⁷⁴ The executive order resolves very little, in fact, about how specific declassifica-

offense at the mere mention of the term "plant." One hypothesis is that, in media circles, accusations of doing the government's bidding have grown increasingly damaging relative to accusations of jeopardizing important policy interests, and reporters have consequently sought to disassociate their work from labels like "planting" that highlight its benefits for officialdom.

²⁷¹ Two prior commentators have perceptively identified some of the complexity in this question, though neither engages it in depth. See Fenster, *supra* note 103, at 15–16 (noting that "[u]nauthorized" in this context can mean quite different things, depending on the leaker's identity and purpose"); Levi, *supra* note 80, at 630 (stating that "in view of the complexity of government today, leaks may be authorized at many different levels, leading to major definitional problems" regarding what constitutes a leak or a plant).

²⁷² The governing executive order includes a definition of "[u]nauthorized disclosure," but it is almost entirely circular. See Exec. Order No. 13,526, § 6.1(rr), 3 C.F.R. 298, 325 (2010), *reprinted in* 50 U.S.C. § 435 app. at 233–45 (Supp. V 2011) (defining "[u]nauthorized disclosure" as "a communication or physical transfer of classified information to an unauthorized recipient," without further defining "unauthorized" or "unauthorized recipient").

²⁷³ The executive order provides that "[i]nformation shall be declassified as soon as it no longer meets the standards for classification," *id.* § 3.1(a), 3 C.F.R. at 305, and that in "some exceptional cases, . . . the need to protect such information may be outweighed by the public interest in disclosure," *id.* § 3.1(d), 3 C.F.R. at 306. However, in restricting declassification authority to the small set of officials responsible for the original classification and in referring exceptional cases to "the agency head or the senior agency official," *id.* § 3.1(b)(4), 3 C.F.R. at 305, the order appears to assume that declassification will be handled primarily if not entirely by individual agencies, rather than by the White House or an interagency collective. The order sets forth hardly any procedures for discrete disclosure determinations, in contrast to its lengthy protocols on "automatic declassification," *id.* § 3.3, 3 C.F.R. at 307, "systematic declassification review," *id.* § 3.4, 3 C.F.R. at 310, and "mandatory declassification review," *id.* § 3.5, 3 C.F.R. at 311. As far as I can tell, no scholarship has considered the law governing ad hoc declassifications — a strange lacuna in the secrecy literature. Cf. JENNIFER K. ELSEA, CONG. RESEARCH SERV., RS21900, THE PROTECTION OF CLASSIFIED INFORMATION: THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK 11–14 (2013) (noting the executive order's ambiguity on "instant declassification," *id.* at 11, and stating that as "a practical matter, . . . there is little to stop agency heads and other high-ranking officials from releasing classified information . . . when it is seen as suiting government needs," *id.* at 13).

²⁷⁴ See Exec. Order No. 13,526, § 1.7(c)–(d), 3 C.F.R. at 302–03.

tion decisions are to be made or disputes concerning them resolved. At the highest levels of government, disclosure authority is barely specified. The practices of top officials do not track these or any other codified rules.

In terms of presidential management of the secrecy system, the critical variable is presumably whether the President or his delegees approved the release of information to the media. And yet there are no general procedures in place to govern or convey such approval, or to define relevant delegees and their authority relations vis-à-vis each other. In many cases, the President's wishes may be ambiguous even to those in the White House, whether because of silence, mixed signals, mixed precedent, or disagreement among top aides. In some cases, senior agency officials may disclose classified information in a manner permitted by the terms of the executive order but against the wishes of other agencies or White House overseers. For fear of dirty hands, some officials may enable disclosures by their subordinates without giving any instructions whatever.²⁷⁵

It is, in short, no simple task to apply the concept of authorization to this domain. As a matter of presidential control, if not formal law, we can begin to make headway by envisioning a spectrum reflecting the degree to which the President has expressly or impliedly blessed a disclosure. This spectrum runs from the quintessential plant (the President herself strategically sharing a secret or instructing an aide to do so) to the quintessential leak (a low-level employee stealing highly classified documents she was never meant to see and passing them to a journalist). Most unattributed disclosures to the press reside somewhere well between these poles. A senior official is authorized by the leadership of her agency to speak with a reporter about a certain subject, or her habit of doing so is tolerated, though her specific comments are not vetted with interagency counterparts or otherwise preapproved. A White House aide reveals something he has been working on in the course of a conversation with a journalist, without having cleared his remarks with colleagues or superiors. Let us call these disclosures *pleaks* to capture their quasi-authorized character.

We can go a little further in elaborating this conception of authority. Still on a presidentialist model,²⁷⁶ the authority to reveal confiden-

²⁷⁵ For a comic treatment of such stratagems, in the British context, see *Yes, Prime Minister: Official Secrets* (BBC television broadcast Dec. 10, 1987) (transcript available at <http://www.yes-minister.com/ypm2x01-2x05.srt>), which discusses “unofficially official, but officially unofficial” disclosures that the Prime Minister publicly disapproves but privately approves. Thanks to Gerald Magliocca for pointing me to this episode.

²⁷⁶ It would be conceptually coherent to speak of congressional planting and pleaking, too. My focus on presidential authorization in defining these terms follows from my descriptive interest in leaks' treatment by the executive branch. I do not mean to imply that national security secrets are solely a presidential prerogative, that congressional disclosures come with a comparative legit-

tial information might be assessed on several dimensions: (1) the speaker's positional distance from the President, as determined by hierarchical rank and practical proximity; (2) the speaker's substantive distance from the President, as determined by the expected correspondence between her disclosure decision and the President's desires (from "the President is dying to have this fact aired" to "the President sees the disclosure as grievously undermining his agenda"); and (3) the speaker's situational claim to communicative license, or the expected probability that the President, if he were to want the information made public, would approve of it being divulged in such a manner by such an official. Although it is impossible to draw clean cutoffs between plants and pleaks or between pleaks and leaks, these criteria provide some additional conceptual guidance and a basis for comparison. Chelsea Manning's traffic with WikiLeaks and Edward Snowden's traffic with the *Guardian* are near zero on all dimensions — clear leaks.²⁷⁷ Everything the President intentionally discloses is necessarily a plant. In between is a vast, liminal space in which authorization may be contested and pleaking may occur. Agencies' communications with the media frequently inhabit this space. Many of the internecine disclosures through which senior agency officials pursue rival policy goals, for instance, are deficient on one or more axes but nonetheless tolerated and even relied upon by the White House.²⁷⁸

Take the Secretary of State. She may not have express or implied approval from anyone in the White House to reveal certain things, and may well have interests and incentives that are misaligned with those of the President and other cabinet secretaries. Nevertheless, she is a leading administration policymaker in her own right, with strong ties to the President, original classification authority, a highly developed understanding of which information is more or less sensitive in which contexts, and a plausible warrant to control many disclosure decisions in the area of foreign policy. She also has formal declassification authority for information originally classified by the State Department.²⁷⁹ A significant percentage of the Secretary's statements to the media will hew closely to or at least support the White House line. Even the most

imacy deficit, or that presidential authorization provides an appropriate normative standard for assessing all disclosures.

²⁷⁷ General leaks almost always will be. See *supra* note 110 and accompanying text (defining general leaks).

²⁷⁸ The ubiquity of such disclosures is taken for granted by Washington observers. See, e.g., STANSFIELD TURNER, *SECRECY AND DEMOCRACY* 149 (1985) ("The Pentagon leaks, primarily to sell its programs to the Congress and the public. The State Department leaks when it is being forced into a policy move that its people dislike. The CIA leaks when some of its people want to influence policy but know that's a role they're not allowed to play openly.")

²⁷⁹ Exec. Order No. 13,526, § 3.1(b), 3 C.F.R. at 305.

provocative, legally problematic disclosures she might make are typically a long way from the pure-leak end of the spectrum. The same goes for the disclosures of her top aides and former aides. The heads of executive branch agencies and their immediate advisers and assistant secretaries are widely thought to be inveterate leakers. They may be better understood as a community of pleakers.

Top White House aides, in contrast, are more likely to be planters. No independent bureaucracy claims their duty or allegiance. Their job descriptions demand a higher degree of loyalty to the President, their political fates are tied more closely to his, and their perches near the Oval Office generate richer information about his views as well as more robust feedback mechanisms to clarify which sorts of disclosures he favors and disfavors.

Consider in this light Zbigniew Brzezinski's remark, "someone at my level never leaks"²⁸⁰ (or the analogous saying among top British officials, "I brief, you leak"²⁸¹). Brzezinski's meaning was ambiguous. He might have been making an implausible statement about the conceptual impossibility of top White House officials' acting without legal authority or about the superior ethics of these individuals. Or he might have been making a cynical statement about the prospects for legal enforcement, implying that someone of his rank faces no realistic risk of being disciplined for speaking out of turn. The analysis here offers a more defensible, and I suspect more faithful, interpretation: Brzezinski was suggesting that the secretive press dealings of someone who works as closely with the President as he did are vastly more likely than those of a lower-level employee to rate high on axes (1), (2), and (3) and therefore to merit recognition as plants. Brzezinski's disclosures were the functional equivalent of presidential disclosures.

The likelihood that many classified information disclosures are part-plant, part-leak provides additional grounds to favor a strategy of lenient criminal and administrative enforcement. The reason is not just that pleakers tend to be powerful people, and powerful people are difficult to punish. If that (conclusory) claim were dispositive, then in investigating the sanction rate we might simply note that high-level individuals appear to spill secrets more often than those below them;²⁸² any inquiry into how they do this would be explanatorily otiose. Yet the ambiguous bureaucratic character of their behavior matters greatly too. Pleakers like the Secretary of State's top aides are not rogue actors out to cause mischief or expose wrongdoing. To the con-

²⁸⁰ LINSKY, *supra* note 28, at 201 (internal quotation marks omitted).

²⁸¹ PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SELECT COMMITTEE, LEAKS AND WHISTLEBLOWING IN WHITEHALL, 2008-09, H.C. 83-I, at 13 (U.K.) [hereinafter LEAKS IN WHITEHALL] (internal quotation marks omitted), available at <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/uk/leaks.pdf>.

²⁸² See *supra* notes 80-85 and accompanying text.

trary, they are institutional insiders with thick connections to executive branch leadership and well-developed senses of what lines can and cannot be crossed. In many cases, their anonymous disclosures reflect a complex mix of motives, including the best interests of their agency and the nation, if not also a plausible grant of apparent authority. They are not the President's proxies but they are not entirely unfaithful agents either.

We can now refine one of the claims advanced above. The previous section argued that notwithstanding the harms from specific leaks, a general practice of leakiness benefits the White House by facilitating plants. This tradeoff starts to look less stark when we realize that what we were calling "leaks" are not randomly distributed across the bureaucracy or unmoored from presidential will — that pleaks predominate over true leaks. Whatever the precise allocation of plants, pleaks, and leaks (and however one defines these categories), the outsized role played by the government's upper echelons helps explain why most reporters believe there are substantially more unattributed disclosures "for" the President than "against" him.²⁸³ Journalists, too, may benefit from a pleak-heavy system, if the resulting diversity of sources insulates them from charges of excessive attachment to the White House, while the seniority of sources insulates them from charges of recklessness in their research methods and publication decisions.

An energetic program of enforcement threatens to withdraw these benefits and cause significant independent harms. Many unlawful disclosures of information plainly do occur.²⁸⁴ But among the unattributed disclosures that look illegal on their face, some significant fraction may turn out to be lawful, or at least effectively insulated from legal penalty, because they are traceable to the President or consistent with the executive order on classification.²⁸⁵ Empower investigators to look too hard into too many of these cases, and any number of uncomfortable results may follow: the Special Prosecutor probe that brought down Vice President Cheney's Chief of Staff is the natural experiment that shows why aggressive enforcement is so unpalatable, the excep-

²⁸³ HESS, *supra* note 82, at 94.

²⁸⁴ See, e.g., *Mueller Response*, *supra* note 127, at 47 (explaining that the "majority of the [leak cases referred to DOJ] are meritorious in the sense that they are based on an unauthorized dissemination of classified information").

²⁸⁵ Cf. WILLARD REPORT, *supra* note 37, at 4 ("Sometimes a time-consuming investigation is undertaken, only to reveal that the source of the leak was a White House or Cabinet official who was authorized to disclose the information."). If the President or the executive order on classification permitted a certain disclosure, one assumes that the disclosure would never be prosecuted under the Espionage Act and that, if it were, the judge would find § 793's scienter requirement or distributional element (that the information was passed to a "person not entitled to receive it," 18 U.S.C. § 793(d), (e) (2012)) not to have been met.

tion that proves the rule.²⁸⁶ Formal leak investigations risk exposing top officials' efforts to manipulate the secrecy rules and marginalize opponents, among other machinations. Criminal cases against quasi-authorized sources risk provoking unfavorable judicial and legislative responses, constraining future flexibility. And all public sanctions risk exacerbating internal conflict as well as underscoring it. Prosecuting or firing an assistant secretary who discloses information with the acquiescence of her agency head may be seen as tantamount to challenging that agency head, and indeed the agency itself.

Investigators, furthermore, will rarely be able to tell upfront the extent to which any given disclosure was authorized. Plants and pleaks may be camouflaged as leaks. Journalists at the top of their profession say they often do not know, and could not realistically ascertain, the precise level or type of authorization their sources have received.²⁸⁷ The distinctions among leaks, pleaks, and plants become messier still in cases that involve multiple disclosures. News stories not infrequently combine elements of leak and plant. Journalists may acquire some initial piece of classified information through a leak or pleak or an off-the-record hint, supplement it with information from public and foreign sources (or vice versa), and then tell the White House that a story will be forthcoming, at which point the administration decides to cooperate in a bid to contextualize the initial disclosure and minimize its damage.²⁸⁸ It appears that something along these lines may have happened with David Sanger's stunning story in the *New York Times* in June 2012 about the U.S. government's partial responsibility for the Stuxnet virus that targeted Iranian nuclear enrichment facilities.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁶ See *supra* notes 116, 138–39 and accompanying text (discussing this investigation).

²⁸⁷ Telephone Interview with Barton Gellman, *supra* note 187; Telephone Interview with Charlie Savage, Reporter, N.Y. Times (Aug. 3, 2012); Telephone Interview with Scott Shane, Reporter, N.Y. Times (Aug. 8, 2012); see also Levi, *supra* note 80, at 630 (“[I]n many instances . . . neither the press recipient of the information, nor the reading public, will know whether or not the disclosure is authorized.”).

²⁸⁸ See David Ignatius, *What's Behind a Leak*, WASH. POST, June 24, 2012, at A23 (“[G]ood reporters start by assembling stories in bits and pieces. When they have enough, they go to high-level sources in the White House or elsewhere and say: I’ve got the story and I’m planning to run it, whether you cooperate or not.”).

²⁸⁹ David E. Sanger, *Obama Order Sped Up Wave of Cyberattacks Against Iran*, N.Y. TIMES, June 1, 2012, at A1; cf. Scott Shane, *Inquiry of Leaks Is Casting Chill over Coverage*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 2, 2012, at A1 (“The Stuxnet computer worm that destroyed some Iranian nuclear centrifuges . . . first came to light not from press leaks but from computer security companies that saw its consequences in several countries.”). Sanger’s account of how he elicited information from top National Security Council sources for a prior story on the Iranian nuclear program is telling: “The issue was too classified to discuss, I was told. Well, I said, it wouldn’t be in a few hours, after we wrote a story describing the Iranian letter and the secret facility.” SANGER, *supra* note 198, at 181.

The inverse can happen, too. Top White House aides may plant information in the hope of generating a particular sort of story, only to have the recipient leverage their disclosures to ferret out other information that the White House does not want revealed. Journalists are hardly passive conduits. To say they receive plants is not to suggest they themselves are potted plants.

These hybrid cases complicate prosecution as well as investigation. Any decent defense lawyer would emphasize the appearance of additional classified information disclosures in the news story at issue. To untangle the illicit from the licit disclosures is to invite critical scrutiny of the administration's tactics, and may bring high-ranking officials into the case.

All this conceptual, legal, and observational uncertainty regarding authorization thus further explains why strict enforcement would be so problematic for Presidents and agency leadership alike.²⁹⁰ The rare undeniable leak like Chelsea Manning's can be investigated and punished with only modest externalities for the executive's broader functioning. Any thoroughgoing effort to separate out the unauthorized from the authorized disclosures, however, would run up against an elaborate web of bureaucratic customs and conventions on which the executive has come to rely — the government by plant, pleak, and leak bequeathed by the New Deal.²⁹¹ Because "leaking" is such an ambiguous practice and leak investigations are so difficult to cabin once set in motion, all components of the executive branch that strategically reveal protected information through the press have a shared interest in keeping enforcement levels low.²⁹²

The individual incentives of top officials reinforce these structural dynamics. Because pleaking is so common across this group, a large number of policymakers will, at any given time, have reason to worry

²⁹⁰ The complexity of the concept of authorization, as it pertains to disclosures of protected government information, also helps explain the stickiness of the awkward, overinclusive wording of the Espionage Act — wording that invites noncompliance. Most everyone agrees that "authorized" leaks do not merit criminal punishment. And yet for all the reasons just given, it would be exceedingly difficult to spell out, in statute or regulation, exactly who has the power to authorize which disclosures in which ways. The resulting system would be cumbersome and inflexible, and it would force executive branch principals to manage and take responsibility for the processes of planting and pleaking to a degree many of them would not want. While the Espionage Act's breadth might seem on its face like the enemy of government-media intercourse, in practice it generates an open-ended delegation to the executive to develop its own standards for acceptable conduct.

²⁹¹ Cf. Levi, *supra* note 80, at 622 (describing Washington insiders as "hav[ing] the sense of participating in a 'government by leak'").

²⁹² If certain specific factions or components within government were systematically more likely to lose out from leakiness, a natural coalition for invigorating enforcement might develop. It is unclear a priori what that coalition would look like, however. The evidence marshaled in this Article suggests that, with the possible exception of the IC, the national security agencies and cabinet departments prefer to maintain the status quo.

that vigorous enforcement would ultimately redound to their detriment by exposing their prior actions or limiting their future capacity to use the media. Those who participate in the game of leaks do not want judgmental, non-game-playing prosecutors figuratively patrolling their hallways. As long as these pleakers continue to engage the press in a zone of ambiguous bureaucratic and legal authorization, they will remain the natural allies of leakers in their unwillingness to tolerate highly constrictive institutional responses.

3. *External Signaling and Executive Self-Binding.* — How does the executive gain and retain power over time? As it increasingly comes to be seen as the most dangerous branch, how does it convince Congress and the electorate to keep delegating authority, notwithstanding the deep antimonarchical strain in American thought?

Executive power scholars Jack Goldsmith, Trevor Morrison, Richard Pildes, Eric Posner, and Adrian Vermeule have recently drawn attention to one key instrument. With different accents, their work has stressed the paradoxical utility of mechanisms that are seen to reduce presidential discretion: for instance, arrangements that cede authority to relatively independent actors such as inspectors general or DOJ's Office of Legal Counsel (OLC).²⁹³ Professors Posner and Vermeule refer to this strategy, whereby Presidents adopt ongoing limits on their power and “commit themselves to a course of action that would impose higher costs on ill-motivated actors,” as “executive self-binding.”²⁹⁴

Although these self-binding mechanisms may sap presidential power in the short term, they ultimately serve to enhance it by sustaining the institution's credibility and legitimacy and thereby securing popular approval of further grants of discretionary authority. Or so the theory goes. Credibility and legitimacy on this account are social facts, not abstract ideals. They involve generalized judgments about trustworthiness, akin to the “diffuse support” the Supreme Court enjoys from the American public above and beyond the popularity of any particular ruling.²⁹⁵ Presidents must demonstrate that they are acting

²⁹³ See, e.g., GOLDSMITH, *supra* note 16, at 108 (arguing that “the institution of inspector general has empowered the presidency by constraining it”); POSNER & VERMEULE, *supra* note 177, at 137–50 (theorizing “executive self-binding” and listing mechanisms such as independent commissions, bipartisan appointments, and commitments to multilateralism); Trevor W. Morrison, *Libya, “Hostilities,” the Office of Legal Counsel, and the Process of Executive Branch Legal Interpretation*, 124 HARV. L. REV. F. 62, 63–64 (2011) (discussing OLC's role and reputation); Richard H. Pildes, *Law and the President*, 125 HARV. L. REV. 1381, 1387–88, 1407–08 (2012) (book review) (crediting Posner and Vermeule's general theory of executive self-binding though critiquing their application of it). As Professor Pildes notes, this line of argument reinforces a broader body of work on the significance of presidential credibility. Pildes, *supra*, at 1387 & n.21 (discussing RICHARD E. NEUSTADT, *PRESIDENTIAL POWER AND THE MODERN PRESIDENTS* (1990)).

²⁹⁴ POSNER & VERMEULE, *supra* note 177, at 137 (emphasis omitted).

²⁹⁵ See Pildes, *supra* note 293, at 1387–88.

in rational, restrained, law-respecting ways if they wish to win such support. This is nowhere truer than in the secretive realms of national security and foreign policy, where congressional and judicial checks are least robust and the executive's activities least visible to the average citizen.²⁹⁶ In these areas especially, credibility and legitimacy need to be signaled as much as earned.

Leakiness offers a signaling mechanism of just this sort.²⁹⁷ Political scientists have argued that by lowering monitoring costs, the provision of transparency by government agents can promote broader delegations of responsibility and resources.²⁹⁸ If members of the public believe leaking is pervasive, then they should expect to learn about most of the nefarious or unlawful things the executive branch might be doing, along with any associated internal disagreements, whether or not the President wants them to. Perhaps there will be a time lag, but even the executive's deepest secrets will tend to come to light. Members of the public should further expect that officials will internalize this prospect and therefore be reticent to do such troubling things in the first place.²⁹⁹ Indeed, compared to the other self-binding mechanisms that scholars have highlighted, leakiness may be especially efficacious precisely because it is not seen as strategic, or even consciously intended. Leaks are often taken to be unique sources of insight into the inner workings of power.

This special authenticity that many assign to leaks, and the special credulity that attaches, can be seen in historian Bruce Catton's early treatment of the subject:

[I]t is through the leak that the people are kept in touch with their government. . . . It is the leak which enables them to know whether the fine

²⁹⁶ See POSNER & VERMEULE, *supra* note 177, at 146 ("Because the information gap between voters and legislators, on the one hand, and the executive, on the other, is especially wide in foreign affairs, there is . . . wide scope for suspicion and conspiracy theories.")

²⁹⁷ Some social scientists reserve the term signaling for "*purposive* communication" or define it with reference to unintuitive formal criteria. Diego Gambetta, *Signaling*, in THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF ANALYTICAL SOCIOLOGY 168, 170 (Peter Hedström & Peter Bearman eds., 2009). This Article uses the term more loosely, to refer to situations where the display of otherwise unobservable attributes of an institution "rais[es] the probability the receiver assigns to a certain state of affairs" (for example, that the executive is acting responsibly), *id.*, whether or not various actors within the institution intended that result.

²⁹⁸ See, e.g., John Ferejohn, *Accountability and Authority: Toward a Theory of Political Accountability*, in DEMOCRACY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND REPRESENTATION 131 (Adam Przeworski et al. eds., 1999) (advancing this claim in the context of a formal model); James E. Alt & Robert C. Lowry, *Transparency and Accountability: Empirical Results for US States*, 22 J. THEORETICAL POL. 379 (2010) (finding empirical evidence that "increased transparency dampens the negative effect of tax increases" on retention of governors and "leads to greater fiscal scale," *id.* at 379).

²⁹⁹ Cf. SAGAR, *supra* note 181, at 5 (stating that the "possibility of unauthorized disclosures provides the most effective and credible guarantee that those who have the formal authority over state secrecy cannot systemically use it to their own advantage").

boasts and pretensions of an appointed person are really justified. It is the leak — telling them what may happen, what is being planned, what the carefully hidden facts actually are — which makes it possible for them to react while there is still time³⁰⁰

The bloated official secrecy system sends an opposite signal: that the government has something to hide. When the American people learn the executive branch classified more than ninety-five million items last fiscal year,³⁰¹ without learning anything about the content of those items, the effect is not likely to inspire trust. Concealment on such a scale inspires, instead, the belief that national security policy is a realm of nonaccountability. Leaks are holes in the wall that encircles this realm, rays of sunlight from a shadow world, “the authentic voice of the government.”³⁰² Permissive neglect is the means to generalize that perception of authentic access and counter the enormous credibility gap that ninety-five million secret documents threaten to open up. A leaky government is, over time, a trustworthy government.

For Presidents and all those around them who are charged with tending to executive prerogatives, or who depend upon a well-funded, politically secure national security state, theories of self-binding thus reinforce the importance of minimizing public sanctions for leaking and maintaining a substantial ratio of perceived unauthorized to authorized disclosures. They align the executive’s crude institutional interest in maintaining power with the more elevated normative ideal no doubt held by some officials that “press coverage of secret executive branch action serves a vital function in American democracy.”³⁰³ If their sociological premises are correct, these theories suggest that any enforcement regime that is seen as harsh on leakers — whistleblowers, they will be called — or that has the effect of exposing the administration’s media machinations, represents a profound threat to executive power.

The main difficulty here is that leakiness might also be taken as a sign of administrative fecklessness, and some leaks do in fact reveal abuse, illegality, or internal dissent — think of the Taguba Report on detainee torture in George W. Bush’s second term — and thereby hurt

³⁰⁰ CATTON, *supra* note 3, at 87.

³⁰¹ INFO. SEC. OVERSIGHT OFFICE, 2012 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT 1 (2013), available at <http://www.archives.gov/isoo/reports/2012-annual-cost-report.pdf>. The vast majority of these classification decisions are “derivative” rather than “original” in nature, *id.*, but this is small comfort to anyone concerned about overclassification. Cf. Peter Galison, *Removing Knowledge*, 31 CRITICAL INQUIRY 229, 230 (2004) (stating that “[s]ome suspect as many as a trillion pages are classified” in the United States, the equivalent of “200 Libraries of Congress”).

³⁰² ALEXANDER M. HAIG, JR., CAVEAT 17 (1984).

³⁰³ GOLDSMITH, *supra* note 16, at 222.

the executive's credibility in quite a direct sense.³⁰⁴ However, even these revelations may reassure various constituencies that their views are being represented by some in government. And no effective self-binding strategy is without such costs. A mechanism that never made the President look bad would quickly lose its capacity to signal credibility; the whole point is that the power-enhancing second- and third-order effects of these arrangements ultimately come to swamp the power-reducing first-order effects. No pain, no gain. From a presidential power perspective, the question is how the immediate adverse consequences of certain specific leaks compare to the subtler, longer-term benefits of leakiness. It is hard to see how this comparison could be made with any precision.³⁰⁵ But in light of the immense credibility costs that official secrecy imposes and the immense political costs that leakiness would impose on a mendacious chief executive (costs that explain why policies seen as targeting leakers spawn such distrust), there is a solid theoretical basis to believe the benefits win out.

There is an additional, more speculative sense in which leakiness may preserve the credibility of government, as well as the professional integrity of its employees: if it reduces the incidence of official lying. A leaky government keeps fewer programmatic secrets. Although Americans still do not know the specifics of the CIA's drone operations in places like Yemen, thanks to anonymous U.S. sources they know quite a lot about the Yemen program's basic structure and orientation. Government officials may refuse to confirm or deny this information in formal settings. But because of all the disclosures that have occurred, it would be pointless to dissemble about the program's existence, and no one feels pressure to do so. Leakiness, in this context, not only pushes out specific revelations to the media but also creates an envi-

³⁰⁴ See Vladeck, *supra* note 14, at xiv (suggesting that "the upsurge in unauthorized disclosures in the latter years of the Bush administration" damaged the President's credibility). Another difficulty concerns intentionality. As compared to some of the other self-binding mechanisms identified in the literature, it is less clear whether policymakers intentionally adopted leakiness for this strategic end. One possibility is that leakiness-as-self-binding is an emergent phenomenon, in the sense that it arises from interactions among the executive's components even though none of these components may have sought it as such. See generally Timothy O'Connor & Hong Yu Wong, *Emergent Properties*, STANFORD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHILOSOPHY (Feb. 28, 2012), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/properties-emergent/> (discussing theories of emergence). Leakiness's credibility-enhancing effects, on this account, would be a feature of the administrative state supervenient on, and irreducible to, the individuals and entities that comprise the system. It seems just as plausible, however, that numerous Presidents and top officials have come to appreciate the link between leaks and credibility and have consciously incorporated this insight into their permissive institutional designs, even if they have not expressly acknowledged as much.

³⁰⁵ Perhaps tests could be run for correlations between the incidence of leaks and public perceptions of government. The threshold constraint on this sort of empirical work is the tremendous difficulty of specifying and identifying the "leaks" that have occurred, not to mention the tremendous complexity of the factors that influence perceptions of government over time.

ronment in which official lying becomes an untenable and unnecessary strategy.³⁰⁶ The prospect of exposure through leaks and counter-leaks deters false disclosures more generally. A pervasive culture of leaking may substitute, to some extent, for a pervasive culture of lying. The executive benefits from this tradeoff both because it likely better supports public trust in government and because it prevents most officials from feeling pressure to violate an injunction (“thou shall not lie”) that, unlike the leak laws, continues to exert a strong moral pull on public servants.³⁰⁷

4. *Manufactured Scarcity and Intragovernmental Communication.* — Even if it manages to secure the public trust, how does the executive manage to secure effective communication across hundreds of offices and hundreds of thousands of employees? Leakiness plays a relatively straightforward role in advancing this interest. Leaks, pleaks, and plants (henceforth, as in Part I, “leaks” for simplicity’s sake) facilitate richer information flows throughout the bureaucracy and constitute an important means by which the executive branch speaks to itself. In a phrase, they are discursive as much as subversive disclosures.

The general point is not new. Colloquially, it is reflected in statements such as Secretary of State Alexander Haig’s quip that the Reagan Administration had converted the *Times* and the *Post* into “White House bulletin boards.”³⁰⁸ In the academic literature, the idea of leaks as tools for internal communication is touched upon in numerous works³⁰⁹ and was developed thoroughly in an article by Richard Kielbowicz.³¹⁰ The best-known variant involves the use of the press to gain the attention of an otherwise inaccessible White House. A *New York Times* essay from the 1980s conveys a sense of the timeless drama associated with these rituals:

A White House assistant, frustrated because he can’t get his views before the President, judiciously plants a story likely to catch the President’s eye. A Presidential aide, afraid to confront the President directly with bad news, gets his message across through the press. A Cabinet officer, unable to get past the White House palace guard, leaks a memo that will land on

³⁰⁶ The dissonance between the unofficial publicity and the official posture of nonacknowledgement may raise distinct credibility concerns, though it is also unstable over time. See generally Kreimer, *supra* note 88, at 1027–61 (explaining social, political, and legal dynamics that have worked to unravel government secrets once they have been publicly identified).

³⁰⁷ See, e.g., HESS, *supra* note 82, at 24 (stating that “[f]or all press secretaries” in the executive branch, “the crux of ethical conduct is lying”).

³⁰⁸ HAIG, *supra* note 302, at 18.

³⁰⁹ See, e.g., Harold Edgar & Benno C. Schmidt, Jr., Commentary, *Curtiss-Wright Comes Home: Executive Power and National Security Secrecy*, 21 HARV. C.R.-C.L. L. REV. 349, 400 (1986) (“[L]eak and counterleak by government employees have become an integral part of the way people with power talk to one another.”).

³¹⁰ Kielbowicz, *supra* note 99.

the President's desk in the morning newspaper. In recent weeks, top officials have engaged in that form of communication in a vivid, classic campaign to persuade President Reagan to adopt drastic revisions in the 1984 budget.³¹¹

As Professor Kielbowicz explains at length, leaks are used to push information not only upward to agency heads and the White House but also downward to those who are meant to implement a policy and horizontally across agencies and branches.³¹² Through trial balloons, internecine leaks, counter-leaks, and other such strategies,³¹³ policies are developed, debated, and disseminated. Presidents use leaks (again, defined to include plants and pleaks) to signal disapproval, promote a new policy direction, and strengthen the position of a particular inter-agency faction. Agencies use leaks to highlight helpful facts, undercut rivals, and build support for their initiatives. Just as they give confidential material to their media contacts, government sources often receive valuable information in turn; "[i]t is shocking," a former DOJ official reflected, "how much reporters will say about what others have told them."³¹⁴ Underneath the surface of the stories we read in the newspapers citing anonymous U.S. officials, lies an elaborate intragovernmental communicative economy.³¹⁵

What is less appreciated is the role played by lax enforcement of the leak laws. Most obviously, lax enforcement allows leaks to be used more freely. A larger volume of administrative samizdat circulates. Less obviously, the backdrop of formal illegality remains relevant, because in depressing the overall amount of leaking it enhances the significance of the disclosures that occur. The Espionage Act casts a shadow even though it is rarely enforced. The government official who discusses classified information with a reporter still assumes some modest amount of legal and professional risk for her actions. That she is willing to do so communicates to her listeners that she or her agency feels she has something notable to say.³¹⁶ Even if these practices generate ambiguity as to the precise identity of any given source, the paradox here is that leaking must remain illicit or else the speakers' statements would not necessarily reach their intended audiences or

³¹¹ Halloran, *supra* note 98; see also HALPERIN ET AL., *supra* note 81, at 184 ("Leaking is a time-honored means of getting information to the president outside formal channels.").

³¹² Kielbowicz, *supra* note 99, at 476–83.

³¹³ See *supra* notes 99–103 and accompanying text (cataloguing types of leaks).

³¹⁴ Email from former DOJ official to author (Feb. 2, 2013).

³¹⁵ To "newspapers" in this sentence we might now add online outfits such as *Politico*. Television and radio, however, still lag behind as vehicles for intragovernmental communication. The relative permanence of the written word, as much as the authoritativeness of the *Times* and the *Post*, makes print media a better "bulletin board."

³¹⁶ At least, it communicates as much in cases where there is no suspected speaker who is widely known to have an exceptionally high risk tolerance or discount rate.

convey the intensity of their preferences, and so would fail to deliver the communicative benefits the executive branch has come to expect from them. On this account, the laws against leaking can be seen as a form of *manufactured scarcity* which, by raising the cost of leaks, also raises their potential salience and signaling power when they occur. The illegality of leaking enhances its functionality.³¹⁷

In this way, a policy of permissive neglect toward leaking may be efficiency-enhancing relative to the baseline of colossal official secrecy.³¹⁸ Overclassification threatens to stifle important decisional inputs and cause policy sclerosis. Permissive neglect enables and refines a deliberative workaround for the increasingly plural executive and its many principals. These discursive disclosures have the added effect of informing the American people about the activities of government, yielding external democratic rewards as well as internal instrumental ones.

It might nevertheless be argued that, on balance, any deliberative benefits the executive branch realizes from leaks are wiped out by their deliberative costs, as when they transmit distorted information³¹⁹ or bias public opinion in ways that constrain options. I believe this is a very difficult case to make, given the importance of good information to central administrators and the educative value that even hostile leaks may have.³²⁰ It is unclear how much turns on the argument in any event. Regardless of whether leaks deserve to be seen as a desirable tool of intragovernmental communication from a god's-eye view, they have clearly become a significant tool in practice. For the many actors within the executive branch who are accustomed to utilizing them as such, this tradition furnishes additional grounds to resist any crackdown.

5. *Pacifying and Coopting Powerful Groups.* — We are not quite done with the political economy of leakiness. For leaking does more than enhance secret keepers' ability to send messages and signals throughout the bureaucracy and to outside audiences. It also mediates

³¹⁷ Leaks are like street drugs to this extent. Harsh statutory prohibitions increase their cost, even in zones of underenforcement. Risk-taking personalities are least deterred. Whatever deleterious side effects they might have, the prohibitions depress supply and so inflate the market value of the trafficking that occurs.

³¹⁸ To be clear, this is a second-best claim. Whether leakiness would be similarly efficiency-enhancing in a world without overclassification is much harder to say. See ADRIAN VERMEULE, *THE SYSTEM OF THE CONSTITUTION* 34, 68, 83–84 (2011).

³¹⁹ See HESS, *supra* note 82, at 93 (questioning leaks' deliberative utility because of the potential for messages to "get garbled in transmission").

³²⁰ Cf. HECLO, *supra* note 23, at 231 (discussing benefits that oppositional leaks by civil servants can generate for agency management). As we have already seen, moreover, many so-called "leaks" are not at all hostile to the agendas of high-level officials. See *supra* sections II.B.1–2, pp. 559–73.

the executive's relationships with a host of powerful groups in ways that further entrench the low enforcement rate.

The media elite. — First, and most directly, leakiness has served the individual and institutional interests of select members of the mainstream media. *New York Times* editor Max Frankel spoke truer than he may have intended when he characterized classified information leaks as “the coin of our business.”³²¹ A regime with fewer leaks and greater frontal openness might support the *Times*'s watchdog function as well, if not better. But it would not give *Times* reporters the same privileged role as information brokers or sell as many papers.

The laws against leaking prop up this dynamic. Notwithstanding their complaints about overclassification, FOIA stonewalling, and the like, those media outlets that tend to receive significant leaks have a strong incentive to maintain broad official secrecy. Publicizing leaks is how they scoop their competitors. If the cost of leaking were lowered through decriminalization, the incidence of disclosure would rise and the value of the information would fall. Manufactured scarcity increases the returns to leaking for publishers just as it does for government actors.

These returns are not distributed evenly across the media industry. The special access that major outlets have to senior officials, together with speakers' desire to be heard, has historically led to a concentration of leaks in papers like the *Times* and the *Post*³²² and thus to a reproduction of media hierarchy. It is not a stretch to think that leaks have helped consolidate the very notion of a mainstream press. To traffic in confidential government information is to be a Washington player; the flow of that information influences not only the substantive content but also the institutional structure of the public sphere.

At the same time, by channeling so many leaks (defined, again, to include pleaks and plants) to the media elite, government sources have generally enhanced the administration's ability to influence the coverage that ensues. While reporters and editors at the *Times*, the *Post*, and their ilk amass soft power, their commitment to responsible journalism, their interest in avoiding onerous regulation, their desire to remain in the loop for future disclosures, and their repeat interactions with top officials all combine to give those officials leverage and to moderate the reporting. The natural tendency of leaks to cluster in a few major outlets has in turn helped to keep most news coverage within bounds the executive's leadership finds acceptable.

³²¹ Frankel Affidavit, *supra* note 91, at para. 16.

³²² See *supra* notes 92–95, 308 and accompanying text.

This mutually beneficial arrangement is now under threat from changes to the media marketplace and the development of technologies that lower the cost of copying, disseminating, and mining information.³²³ It is an open question whether leaking will continue to provide similar benefits for executive policymakers and the establishment press in the years ahead, whether the portrait sketched by Max Frankel will retain its descriptive power.³²⁴ Recent efforts by “old media” luminaries to impugn the motives of WikiLeaks and distance themselves from its model³²⁵ reflect, among other things, how much they stand to lose from any significant reconfiguration of traditional disclosure and enforcement practices.

Classification’s critics. — Second, leakiness staves off fundamental reform by pacifying key constituencies for transparency. On account of leaks, neither Congress nor the executive has been compelled to tackle the problems posed by official secrecy in a meaningful, forward-looking way, as by invigorating moribund judicial review of national security secrets or streamlining a classification system that everyone agrees is obscenely bloated. Legislators, judges, journalists, and watchdog groups feel sufficiently served by the amount of information that percolates out.

Generally speaking, there are two stable equilibria in the U.S. market for transparency: broad formal classification with broad informal disclosure, or narrow formal classification with narrow informal disclosure. Whether or not leakiness is desirable for all concerned in an ideal world (a deeply contestable proposition), it is an appealing second-best solution for many given the fact of overclassification. Leakiness protects the classification system at a political level even as it undermines the system at a practical level.

Although this particular dynamic may go overlooked, commentators have long appreciated that “[l]eaking has a symbiotic relationship with secrecy.”³²⁶ Surely we would have less leaking of classified information if we had less classified information. Not only would there be fewer documents to pilfer, but people might treat the secrecy rules

³²³ For a lucid account of these developments, see GOLDSMITH, *supra* note 16, at 73–82.

³²⁴ It is similarly an open question whether, in light of upheavals in journalism and technology, the government’s enforcement model will remain so permissive for long. See *infra* notes 528–46 and accompanying text (considering this question and noting reasons to expect more continuity than discontinuity in the foreseeable future).

³²⁵ See Yochai Benkler, *A Free Irresponsible Press: WikiLeaks and the Battle over the Soul of the Networked Fourth Estate*, 46 HARV. C.R.-C.L. L. REV. 311, 333–36, 356–57, 370–93 (2011) (describing the old media’s vilification of WikiLeaks and linking this response to anxiety about economic and technological change); see also *id.* at 379–80 & nn.344–48 (citing leading contemporary sources examining threats to the newspaper industry more generally).

³²⁶ SISSELA BOK, *SECRETS: ON THE ETHICS OF CONCEALMENT AND REVELATION* 217 (1983).

with more respect. As Morton Halperin has observed, “[w]hen there is vast overclassification it is . . . difficult to persuade government officials that they are doing harm by providing information which is classified to the press and the public.”³²⁷

Unwinding overclassification is exceedingly difficult to do, however. Years of reform efforts have barely made a dent,³²⁸ and it is not clear they ever will. Large numbers of concerned citizens face a collective action problem in organizing effectively against the concentrated interests of those individuals and institutions within government for whom classified information is a valuable source of professional benefits. Furthermore, the marginal transaction costs of running a more selective classification system may be extremely high, while the policy costs of erroneous declassifications may be greater than those incurred under existing levels of leaking. For reasons both public-oriented and self-interested, the prospect of seriously addressing overclassification is a most unwelcome one for powerful actors within the executive branch. Leakiness may hurt them on occasion, but it spares them this potentially greater pain.³²⁹

Congressional overseers. — Third, leakiness allows congressional committees to economize on oversight as well as on transparency-seeking legislation. The political rewards of national security policies that are seen as successful accrue disproportionately to the executive.³³⁰ As compared to a more proactive, “police patrol” model of oversight — much of the content of which would be nonpublic and virtually all the good results from which would be imputed to the President — a more reactive, “fire alarm” model that relies on leaks

³²⁷ MORTON H. HALPERIN, CRIMINAL PENALTIES FOR DISCLOSING CLASSIFIED INFORMATION TO THE PRESS IN THE UNITED STATES 1 (2012), available at http://www.right2info.org/resources/publications/Halperin_CriminalPenaltiesforDisclosingClassifiedInformationtothePressintheUnitedStates.pdf.

³²⁸ See Steven Aftergood, Policy Essay, *Reducing Government Secrecy: Finding What Works*, 27 YALE L. & POL’Y REV. 399, 400–01 (2009) (describing “[t]he persistent failure to achieve significant reforms over half a century,” *id.* at 401, in which “[e]ntire shelves of commission reports, congressional hearings, and independent critiques” have targeted overclassification, *id.* at 400).

³²⁹ The leak laws could pose a limited threat to the classification system if alleged violators were allowed to raise a defense of improper classification, bringing judges into the business of evaluating classification determinations. However, no court has recognized such a defense. See Bellia, *supra* note 40, at 1523. This outcome is unsurprising. Even after Congress amended FOIA’s national security exemption in 1974 to require de novo review of disclosure denials, 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(B) (2012), and to cover only those records that “are in fact properly classified,” *id.* § 552(b)(1)(B), courts persisted in declining to consider the substantive propriety of classification decisions, see Pozen, *supra* note 106, at 636–38.

³³⁰ Cf. Amy Zegart & Julie Quinn, *Policemen, Firefighters, and Spooks: How Oversight Varies Across Policy Domains*, in EYES ON SPIES 55, 55–84 (Amy B. Zegart ed., 2011) (explaining how an asymmetry of payoffs and incentives promotes lax congressional oversight of intelligence agencies).

has many benefits for members of Congress.³³¹ Without lifting a finger, they receive a steady stream of reports about the executive's activities and the public's response to those activities, as mediated through the press. Through their own overt and covert uses of the media, they may additionally influence the coverage of those activities. So long as the ratio of agency leaks and pleaks to White House plants is not too small — which motivated partisans can help ensure by drawing attention to the latter, as they are energetically doing at this writing³³² — leakiness allows Congress to exploit the diversity of viewpoints within the executive to acquire better, broader, cheaper information.

Congress's longstanding failure to confront the executive secrecy system must be understood in light of these institutional and member-level interests in leakiness. With some notable exceptions such as the bill vetoed by President Clinton that would have strengthened the Espionage Act,³³³ Congress has done little to address national security leaks or the classification system that underlies them. A variety of committees have held hearings on high-profile incidents, and the intelligence committees have recently mooted measures to curb certain forms of planting and pleaking. But in general legislative action has been minimal for decades. Of particular note, members have declined to make use of the protection afforded by the Constitution's Speech or Debate Clause³³⁴ to reveal, or threaten to reveal, executive branch information without fear of criminal or civil liability.³³⁵ One might expect that a responsible legislature would try to steer classified information leaks its way, so as to preserve legitimate secrecy while

³³¹ See generally Mathew D. McCubbins & Thomas Schwartz, *Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols Versus Fire Alarms*, 28 AM. J. POL. SCI. 165 (1984) (distinguishing these two models of oversight).

³³² See Charlie Savage, *2 Inquiries Set to Track Down Paths of Leaks*, N.Y. TIMES, June 9, 2012, at A1 (describing accusations by congressional Republicans that “the White House [has] risk[ed] national security for political gain by deliberately disclosing secret information that makes Mr. Obama look tough”). The most recent intelligence authorization act included a new measure requiring responsible officials to notify the congressional intelligence committees of “authorized disclosure[s] of national intelligence” made to the media outside of the FOIA, litigation, and declassification-review contexts. Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013, Pub. L. No. 112-277, § 504, 126 Stat. 2468, 2477 (2013); see also Steven Aftergood, *Senate Passes Intelligence Bill Without Anti-Leak Measures*, SECURITY NEWS (Dec. 31, 2012), http://blogs.fas.org/secrecy/2012/12/2013_intelauth (discussing this “unprecedented” reform). The degree to which this measure — which never defines “authorized” or “intelligence” — will alter high-level officials' planting calculus is an important open question.

³³³ See *supra* notes 230–31 and accompanying text.

³³⁴ U.S. CONST. art. I, § 6, cl. 1 (“[F]or any Speech or Debate in either House, [Senators and Representatives] shall not be questioned in any other Place.”).

³³⁵ See Josh Chafetz, *Congress's Constitution*, 160 U. PA. L. REV. 715, 742–53 (2012). Senator Mike Gravel is an outlier for the way he placed much of the Pentagon Papers in the Congressional Record on the eve of the Supreme Court's ruling in *New York Times Co. v. United States*. See *id.* at 745–48. No comparably dramatic breach of executive secrecy rules has occurred on the House or Senate floor in all the years since.

providing an outside check on the executive.³³⁶ Congress has largely bypassed this approach, which would force it to take greater responsibility over the revelations that emerge, and has instead countenanced minimal enforcement against media leakers while directing all prospective whistleblowers to their agency inspectors general in the first instance.³³⁷ Many members of Congress seem quite content to be regular readers (and perhaps occasional purveyors) rather than recipients of leaks. Systematic recourse to leaking emerges, once again, as the more efficient and politically palatable alternative to systematic legal reform.

Congress's role in the ecosystem of national security leaks is a large and complex subject. Certain congressional entities receive a steady flow of classified information through official channels, supplemented by a side traffic in direct and indirect unofficial disclosures. Agencies typically incur political risk if they try to limit this traffic by clamping down on staffers' communications with their oversight committees. Partisan motivations and sincere good-governance sentiments sustain a perpetual interest on the Hill in leaks, along with a ready-made rhetoric of crisis about their prevalence. The recent rise of a "commuter Congress," in which many members spend as little time as possible in Washington, may have helped strengthen relationships between elite reporters and less peripatetic executive officials, shifting power to the latter in the intragovernmental game of leaks.

While a full account of Congress's disclosure practices is well beyond the scope of this Article,³³⁸ the key point here is simply that leaks offer Congress a low-cost mechanism for monitoring and disciplining the executive and for providing transparency. These benefits powerfully if imperfectly reinforce the executive's own interests in leakiness. Congress, too, stands to lose a great deal from the demise of permissive neglect.

Civil servants and game players. — Fourth, leakiness moderates certain structural tensions within the executive branch. It is widely believed that career bureaucrats are, on average, more change-

³³⁶ Cf. David E. Pozen, *Deep Secrecy*, 62 STAN. L. REV. 257, 329–33 (2010) (discussing this general strategy).

³³⁷ See *supra* notes 63–66 and accompanying text. In several famous cases, executive branch leakers reached out to the press only after failing to receive what they felt was an adequate response from Congress. See, e.g., DANIEL ELLSBERG, *SECRETS: A MEMOIR OF VIETNAM AND THE PENTAGON PAPERS* 365 (2002) (describing Ellsberg's turn to the *New York Times* after "striking out" with two senators); Jane Mayer, *The Secret Sharer*, NEW YORKER, May 23, 2011, at 46, 52–55 (describing Thomas Drake's turn to the *Baltimore Sun*).

³³⁸ The subject merits greater attention. So far as I am aware, the most significant treatment remains a 1977 study by Hugh Hecló that focused primarily on the executive branch. See HECLÓ, *supra* note 23.

resistant, expertise-driven, and risk-averse than the presidential appointees who cycle in and out around them.³³⁹ When new administrations consider bold plans that roil staff who were installed by their predecessors or who feel invested in the prior program, anonymous disclosures to the media provide a means to fight back. Presidential plants can be used to advance radical agendas: the Bush II Administration's campaign to build the case for the Iraq invasion is, for some, a notorious case in point. Inasmuch as leaks and pleaks (and the specter of leaks and pleaks) tend to be a conservative force in policymaking — debilitating to sudden shifts and extreme proposals on either end of the ideological spectrum — they may help to keep the bureaucracy reasonably satisfied with the policies that are pursued and with their level of knowledge thereof. Leaks and pleaks, more broadly, help to keep the National Security Council (NSC) reasonably well aligned with agencies even as the former continues to consolidate power in the postwar era.³⁴⁰ While specific disclosures by senior civil servants and military brass may serve to constrain the President, their general availability is critical to maintaining her own disclosure discretion and sociological legitimacy, not just with the general public but with the vast workforce she needs to carry out her policies.

Leakiness also offers cultural and psychological benefits for those involved. Leaks, we have seen, are a medium through which political appointees challenge civil servants and vice versa, ideological factions challenge other ideological factions, agencies challenge other agencies, individuals challenge other individuals, and the “multivocality” of the executive branch passes from metaphor to reality. Whether leaking ultimately does more to inflame or improve relations across bureaucratic components, its very existence as a forum for disputation enhances all components' ability to exercise voice and exit³⁴¹ on sensitive matters. To shut down this forum through vigorous enforcement would impoverish not only executive branch deliberations but also the *experience* — the degrees of freedom, the opportunities for strategic

³³⁹ See generally RONALD N. JOHNSON & GARY D. LIBECAP, *THE FEDERAL CIVIL SERVICE SYSTEM AND THE PROBLEM OF BUREAUCRACY* 154–76 (1994) (discussing the political autonomy and professional orientation of career bureaucrats). In numerical terms, the civil service dwarfs the “politically” selected portion of the executive workforce. See DAVID E. LEWIS, *THE POLITICS OF PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTMENTS* 56 (2008).

³⁴⁰ On the postwar rise of the NSC to predominance in national security and foreign affairs policymaking, see generally AMY B. ZEGART, *FLAWED BY DESIGN: THE EVOLUTION OF THE CIA, JCS, AND NSC* 76–108 (1999); and Laura K. Donohue, *The Limits of National Security*, 48 AM. CRIM. L. REV. 1573, 1677–87, 1693, 1699–1703, 1746 (2011).

³⁴¹ See generally ALBERT O. HIRSCHMAN, *EXIT, VOICE, AND LOYALTY* (1970) (describing “voice” and “exit” strategies). By “exit,” I mean that in publicizing their positions, leakers may depart, legally and metaphorically, from the executive branch's internal deliberative process and the rules governing disclosure.

behavior, the sense of self-importance, the intrigue, the thrill — of being an executive branch insider.

Common references to the “game of leaks”³⁴² capture something important about the competitive, pleasurable outlet leaking can provide for some. A policy of lax enforcement avoids darkening the clouds with widespread investigations, prosecutions, and the like, preserving these experiential rewards. Participants in the game of leaks are hedonically, not just instrumentally, invested in keeping enforcers at bay.

III. “ORDER” IN DISORDER: DISCIPLINING LEAKERS WITH AND WITHOUT LAW

To submit that the laws on the books have been underenforced is not to suggest that anything goes in the realm of leaking. To the contrary, in the absence of more supple formal proscriptions, a set of customary norms appears to have arisen that conditions disclosure and enforcement behavior alike, imposing some amount of order in the absence of regularly applied law. Leakers do get disciplined. It is just that the system of social control is partially nonhierarchical, largely informal, and almost completely invisible to the outside observer.

This Part sketches that system. The sketch is necessarily tentative and incomplete. Interviews, personal observations, and a small number of generally available sources provide a sufficient basis to construct a preliminary account of the values, conventions, and sanctions that “regulate” national security–related leaking, separate and apart from the laws on the books. I believe that this account has substantial descriptive power — indeed, that without a grasp of its basic contours, one cannot begin to understand or evaluate the law and policy of leaks. Many of the points made in this Part likely obtain outside the national security field as well. But it must be stressed that the regulation of leaking is a diffuse practice, my visibility into which is limited. To refine the inductive story I tell here, much more work would need to be done to establish relevant norms, trace their development, formalize a model, consider case studies, and so on. The overriding goal of this Part is to lay the foundation for that work, to set a new research agenda for scholarship in the area as much as to convince on any particulars.³⁴³

³⁴² E.g., Papandrea, *supra* note 33, *passim*; Howard Kurtz, *See Who? How Sources and Reporters Play the Leak Game*, WASH. POST, Mar. 7, 1993, at C5.

³⁴³ Existing scholarship has valuably explored issues such as the journalistic norms that influence newspapers' decisions whether to publish secret information, *see, e.g.*, Note, *Media Incentives*, *supra* note 14, at 2234–42, and the ethical considerations specific to whistleblowers, *see, e.g.*, C. FRED ALFORD, *WHISTLEBLOWERS: BROKEN LIVES AND ORGANIZATIONAL POWER* 63–81 (2001), but it has not considered the institutional norms that structure leak regulation.

For all the reasons detailed in Part II, it is not in the interest of executive branch principals to throw the book at a great number of leakers. And yet neither is it in their interest to allow prohibitions on leaking to fall into desuetude and to invite informational anarchy. A strategic administration, rather, will seek to maintain a steady stream of disclosures that are understood by the public to be leaks, while minimizing these disclosures' policy costs. In the sketch offered below, I suggest that a pragmatic code has developed within the executive to help mediate this tension. This code has come to gloss, and nearly displace, the inert and overbroad Espionage Act,³⁴⁴ functioning as a parallel law of leaking. Critics like James Bruce miss these dynamics entirely when they assert that on account of the "glaring absence of criminal penalties," the message sent to executive employees is, "[I] leak all you want, and no matter how much, or how serious, nothing will happen to you."³⁴⁵ Permissive neglect is not nearly that permissive.

A. Internal Signaling and Informal Sanctions

Stated most generally, instead of linear, legalistic supervision of the release of confidential information to the media, the executive exercises supervision to a large degree through suasion and the threat of informal sanctions if an employee goes too far. Top White House officials' complaints about specific instances provide a signal as to which disclosures cross the line. These complaints are sometimes aired publicly, as when President Reagan's spokesperson called a press briefing to vent the President's anger over the leak of a scuttled fighter-jet sale to Taiwan.³⁴⁶ More often, they are communicated privately, as when President Obama phoned the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency to express dissatisfaction with the leak of a finding on greenhouse gases.³⁴⁷

A variety of sanctions back up these threats. The key mechanisms, interviews and anecdotal accounts suggest, involve *shaming*, *shunning*, and *exiling*.³⁴⁸ Through shaming, suspected leakers may be targeted

³⁴⁴ On its face, as suggested above, the Espionage Act fails to distinguish among different types of leakers or even different parties to the leak transaction: it crudely lumps together classic saboteurs with ill-motivated leakers, well-intentioned whistleblowers, and members of the media. See Edgar & Schmidt, *supra* note 37, at 1083–84 (calling the Act "fatally defective," *id.* at 1084, for failing to distinguish among "spies, government employees and ex-employees, and newspapers and the rest of us," *id.* at 1083); see also sources cited *supra* note 54.

³⁴⁵ Bruce, *supra* note 120, at 43. In Bruce's telling, the "enforcement climate" is one of "utter indifference." *Id.*

³⁴⁶ See HESS, *supra* note 82, at 89–90.

³⁴⁷ See JONATHAN ALTER, THE PROMISE: PRESIDENT OBAMA, YEAR ONE 155 (2010).

³⁴⁸ There is nothing exceptional about this aspect of the leak regime. In general form, these sanctions — which are not mutually exclusive and may overlap in any given case — are ubiquitous in bureaucratic settings. See, e.g., HERBERT KAUFMAN, THE FOREST RANGER: A STUDY IN ADMINISTRATIVE BEHAVIOR 220–21 (1960) (noting the importance of shaming);

with damaging rumor campaigns, given the cold shoulder, or berated by agency bosses and White House overseers. President Obama's Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel is said to have been "a big screamer" who relished "hauling in" suspected offenders, including the occasional cabinet secretary.³⁴⁹ Through shunning, suspected leakers may be cut out of certain types of meetings, working groups, or email chains; denied face time with key policymakers; or brought in on plans only at the last minute. A former top aide at the State Department recalled that after an NSC official accused him of divulging sensitive information on Africa policy, he was told he was no longer welcome at White House strategy sessions.³⁵⁰ Through exiling, suspected leakers may be moved to obscure posts, denied promotions, or pressured to resign. Morton Halperin, cited throughout this Article as a leading chronicler of the role of leaks in the policy process, was forced out of the Nixon Administration's NSC when his colleagues suspected he had passed information on the secret U.S. bombing of Cambodia to the *New York Times*.³⁵¹

Exclusion from meetings and projects appears to be an especially common remedy. Among senior government officials, loss of such access means loss of status, influence, power. One White House interviewee asserted that those leakers who are seen as undermining "message discipline" are "going to quickly be rendered irrelevant. . . . I think that really shuts some people up."³⁵² If no suspect has been identified, key authority figures like the President's national security adviser or chief of staff may issue warnings to a larger audience of potentially guilty employees, threatening to initiate an investigation and expose offenders if similar leaks recur. Unlike with formal disciplinary methods, these enforcers need not build a case against any particular individual. Informal enforcement, moreover, allows for sanctions at

JAMES Q. WILSON, BUREAUCRACY: WHAT GOVERNMENT AGENCIES DO AND WHY THEY DO IT 156–58 (1989) (discussing shunning and exiling strategies); Aimee L. Franklin & Javier F. Pagan, *Organization Culture as an Explanation for Employee Discipline Practices*, 26 REV. PUB. PERSONNEL ADMIN. 52, 56 (2006) (reviewing research finding that informal disciplinary methods "are widely employed" in public organizations).

³⁴⁹ Telephone Interview with former White House official (Aug. 20, 2012).

³⁵⁰ Interview with former State Department official, in New York, N.Y. (July 28, 2012).

³⁵¹ *Halperin v. Kissinger*, 606 F.2d 1192, 1196–97 (D.C. Cir. 1979). In Halperin's case, as in many others, it is difficult to disentangle whether he was marginalized because he leaked about a certain subject or because the content of the leak indicated he did not share key administration goals.

³⁵² Telephone Interview with White House official, *supra* note 258; see also Daniel Ellsberg, *Secrecy and National Security Whistleblowing*, 77 SOC. RES. 773, 778–81 (2010) (asserting that, within the U.S. national security bureaucracy, "what is most feared by most prospective secret-tellers . . . is social isolation, ostracism, exile," *id.* at 781, and that "[b]reaking the pledge of secrecy in a way that is not tacitly tolerated or authorized by group leaders or practices is generally the surest and fastest way . . . to be expelled," *id.* at 778).

the *agency* level. If it is believed that someone known or unknown from the State Department was responsible for a damaging disclosure — for example, because the disclosure corresponded to the policy preferences of Department leadership — officials from other parts of the executive branch may seek to limit State’s influence in related matters.

As the executive’s main architect of communications strategy, coordinator of the interagency process, and ultimate policy authority, the White House is the primary issuer of these informal sanctions. It is not the only issuer. Agency leadership may supplement or assist, and occasionally resist, the White House’s efforts. IC elements like the CIA may try to punish leaky agencies, and even certain members of the White House itself, by limiting access to highly classified undertakings. But by and large, consistent with the insight that top White House aides have the strongest claim to communicative license as presidential planters,³⁵³ one finds that they are more likely to be dispensers than to be recipients of disclosure discipline.

The executive takes efforts to prevent leaking as well as to punish it. All components that handle classified material, for instance, employ a wide range of information security technologies and protocols.³⁵⁴ The President’s main practical tool of prevention is limiting the circle of secret keepers. As one White House official explained, “when there’s been a ton of leaking on an issue, senior folks in this building change the process in a way that reduces the number of people who have access to the information.”³⁵⁵ These programs become, in the jargon, a closer hold. Yet while the expected odds of leaking may thereafter decline, the risks of decisionmaking defects associated with insularity and compartmentalization³⁵⁶ rise — as does the risk of triggering a vicious cycle whereby excluded officials come to feel aggrieved and so speak increasingly freely to the press, which only reinforces the secret keepers’ perceived need to close ranks, further fueling bureaucratic alienation, and on and on. Vicious cycles involving exclusion, disobedience, and retrenchment appear to have developed in the Nixon and Bush II Administrations.³⁵⁷ These predictable pathologies, along with the simple need to disclose information broadly enough to effectuate any given policy, inherently constrain the ability to head off leaks through precautionary strategies.

³⁵³ See *supra* section II.B.2, pp. 565–73.

³⁵⁴ See, e.g., Exec. Order No. 13,587, §§ 1–2, 3 C.F.R. 276, 276–77 (2011), reprinted in 50 U.S.C. § 435 app. at 247–49 (Supp. V 2011) (directing “structural reforms to ensure responsible sharing and safeguarding of classified information on computer networks,” *id.* § 1, 3 C.F.R. at 276).

³⁵⁵ Telephone Interview with White House official, *supra* note 258.

³⁵⁶ On these risks, see generally Pozen, *supra* note 336, at 278–80.

³⁵⁷ See HALPERIN ET AL., *supra* note 81, at 256–57.

For senior officials (the sorts of people, roughly at the level of deputy assistant secretary and above, who regularly or semi-regularly attend meetings at the White House³⁵⁸), the informal enforcement regime is easily the most important source of discipline for leaking. A crude set of vetogates³⁵⁹ insulates these officials from prosecution. As explained above, a referral by the victim agency to DOJ is typically a precondition to criminal action, and referrals have seldom been submitted by agencies other than the CIA and NSA.³⁶⁰ Outside of the IC, there seems to be no systematic process in place to govern the production or transmission of these crime reports.³⁶¹ Former DOJ officials with whom I spoke knew almost nothing about how agencies determine whether to submit them. As a matter of practice, it appears that in many agencies politically connected appointees exercise substantial control. Rather than encourage individual employees to contact DOJ or coordinate referrals through a relatively independent inspector general, agencies reportedly tend to route concerns through their general counsels' offices.³⁶² Referrals, consequently, are unlikely to be made over the opposition (tacit or overt) of the general counsels' superiors.³⁶³

³⁵⁸ Recall that in the Kennedy School's survey of officials at the level of assistant secretary and above (as well as a few members of Congress), nearly half of the respondents acknowledged having found it appropriate to leak. See *supra* note 71 and accompanying text.

³⁵⁹ Vetogates are "the choke points" in a legal process, key preliminary phases in which discrete groups can block final action. See WILLIAM N. ESKRIDGE, JR. ET AL., *CASES AND MATERIALS ON LEGISLATION* 66–68 (4th ed. 2007) (describing vetogates in the legislative context).

³⁶⁰ See *supra* notes 128–33 and accompanying text.

³⁶¹ Within the IC, a formal policy directive currently requires all senior officials to report suspected unauthorized disclosures of classified information to the Special Security Center within the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI). OFFICE OF THE DIR. OF NAT'L INTELLIGENCE, INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY DIRECTIVE No. 701 (Mar. 14, 2007), available at <http://www.fas.org/irp/dni/icd/icd-701.pdf>; see also OFFICE OF THE DIR. OF NAT'L INTELLIGENCE, ODNI FAQ 2–4, 9, <http://www.dni.gov/index.php/about/faq?tmpl=component&format=pdf> (last visited Oct. 27, 2013) (explaining that the ODNI has coordinated the work of the CIA, the NSA, and the rest of the IC since the mid-2000s). This directive reinforces the broader executive branch policy of placing special reporting responsibilities on the IC, with the consequent "intelligentization" of leak enforcement. See *supra* notes 221–28 and accompanying text.

³⁶² A former DOJ official who worked on leak cases stated that referrals "always" seemed to come from general counsels' offices, Telephone Interview with former DOJ official, *supra* note 213, and high-level lawyers from the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, and State assumed that this is how leak referrals would be handled in their agencies, in the unlikely event such a referral was made. Throughout the executive, most agencies have presidentially appointed, Senate-confirmed general counsels. See CHRISTOPHER M. DAVIS & JERRY W. MANSFIELD, CONG. RESEARCH SERV., RL30959, PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTEE POSITIONS REQUIRING SENATE CONFIRMATION AND COMMITTEES HANDLING NOMINATIONS *passim* (2012).

³⁶³ My impressionistic sense is that the primary users of the referral system, in the CIA and NSA, often suspect that someone employed by another part of the government leaked "their" information. Referrals of such leaks are less likely to implicate the CIA's or NSA's own high-level officials. Unlike their counterparts in non-IC agencies, the heads of the CIA and NSA are also

On top of the ordinary gatekeeping done by career prosecutors who decide whether to move forward with a case, the referral process can give an effective veto to the leadership of critical agencies.

There may be yet another veto, held by the President and his appointees at DOJ. Notwithstanding the norm of declining to interfere with specific prosecution decisions, Oval Office executives have been known to encourage their DOJ counterparts to prioritize or deprioritize certain categories of cases,³⁶⁴ and some interviewees suggested that media leaking has historically been an area on which the White House has counseled caution.³⁶⁵ Even if line-level prosecutors typically have no special compunctions about pursuing leakers — and I am not aware of evidence that they do — it is conceivable that their FBI and NSD bosses would curtail their discretion upon receiving a negative signal from the President, the Attorney General, or the President’s or the Attorney General’s top aides. DOJ’s tradition of running leak cases out of Main Justice, instead of individual U.S. Attorneys’ Offices, strengthens these sources of “political” influence.³⁶⁶

Beyond the criminal process, agency heads may hold additional vetoes over administrative penalties for senior staff who disclose information with their bosses’ assent or acquiescence. Agencies have broad discretion to withhold most punishments in most cases. Their disciplinarians cannot easily ruin someone’s career against the wishes of agency leadership;³⁶⁷ in the vast majority of cases, one assumes, they would not even contemplate trying to do so.

required by executive order to report possible violations of federal law. *See supra* note 228 and accompanying text.

³⁶⁴ *See* Kate Andrias, *The President’s Enforcement Power*, 88 N.Y.U. L. REV. 1031, 1034 (2013) (explaining that “the White House has long influenced administrative enforcement efforts within and across executive branch agencies”); *id.* at 1051–54, 1056, 1060, 1066 (reviewing examples of “presidential influence over criminal enforcement,” *id.* at 1053).

³⁶⁵ One interviewee, for instance, stressed that before the Obama Administration, no recent White House had given DOJ “carte blanche” to pursue leak cases. Telephone Interview with Department of Homeland Security official (Sept. 10, 2012).

³⁶⁶ *See supra* notes 126–37 and accompanying text (describing relevant DOJ policies and procedures); *see also infra* note 394 (explaining that under pressure from critics in Congress, DOJ granted an unusual degree of independence to the mid-2000s investigation that led to Scooter Libby and to the ongoing investigation that reportedly has led to James Cartwright).

³⁶⁷ *Cf.* 5 U.S.C. § 7532 (2012) (granting agency heads final authority to suspend or remove employees in the interest of national security); LEAKS IN WHITEHALL, *supra* note 281, at 13–14 (observing that in the United Kingdom, while “[s]pecial advisers are, in theory, subject to the same rules regarding the disclosure of information as other civil servants,” *id.* at 13, in practice the minister responsible for their discipline is unlikely to take any action “where the adviser has been acting in what they [sic] believe to be the minister’s interests,” *id.* at 14). Even in cases where their bosses would be supportive, administrative disciplinarians have limited ability to punish presidentially appointed leakers who work in other parts of the executive or who have the option to leave government service at low cost.

The existence of multiple, institutionally diverse vetogates predictably biases the formal enforcement system against action. For all the reasons given in Part II why a strategic executive should be wary of public sanctions, this bias is perfectly rational. Informal remedies for leaking are not only easier to calibrate and administer but also comparatively obscure. They can preserve a veneer of bureaucratic harmony at the same time that they minimize backlash. The spillage of sensitive information is seen by some as a “management problem,” one White House official noted, and Oval Office brass (“chief of staff–level people”) generally do not wish to highlight their managerial failures.³⁶⁸

B. Senior Officials, Junior Officials, and Mixed Deterrence

Lower-level officials are subject to some of the same informal sanctions as their superiors, which may be replicated in miniature within an agency. They may also be exposed, secondhand, to some of the same internal White House signals regarding the boundaries of acceptable leaking. But, for them, the precise contours of the “game of leaks” are likely to remain opaque, and the possibility of career-jeopardizing investigation and formal sanction — while still statistically remote — is more realistic.³⁶⁹

From an enforcement perspective, the value of informal sanctions generally declines as one moves down the bureaucratic hierarchy. For employees as low on the totem pole as Chelsea Manning, a private first class soldier stationed abroad when she transferred materials to WikiLeaks, many informal sanctions would not even be possible. Manning was never part of any inner circle from which she could have been marginalized. The same appears to hold true for NSA contractor Edward Snowden. Shaming, shunning, and exiling work best when the professional community is close-knit and the personal costs associated with loss of access are high.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁸ Telephone Interview with White House official, *supra* note 258.

³⁶⁹ Although civil service rules raise the cost of pursuing administrative remedies, they allow all agencies to punish employees for misconduct. See Kent H. Barnett, *Avoiding Independent Agency Armageddon*, 87 NOTRE DAME L. REV. 1349, 1375 (2012) (“[F]ederal law uniformly provides that insubordination is a suitable ground for good-cause removal.”). For a recent example of administrative punishment, see Gidget Fuentes, *7 SEALs Punished for Secrecy Breach*, NAVY TIMES (Nov. 8, 2012, 8:21 PM), <http://www.navytimes.com/article/20121108/NEWS/211080305/7-SEALs-punished-secrecy-breach> (reporting that seven members of Navy SEAL Team 6 received letters of reprimand and a partial forfeiture of pay for two months for divulging classified information to a video game maker).

³⁷⁰ I offer no direct evidence for this claim as regards leakers, but it is consistent with the literature on relational contracting and private ordering in homogeneous communities. See, e.g., Lisa Bernstein, *Opting Out of the Legal System: Extralegal Contractual Relations in the Diamond Industry*, 21 J. LEGAL STUD. 115, 140–41 (1992) (exploring the use of informal governance mechanisms within the diamond industry).

Below the senior policymaking level, then, the machinery of formal enforcement assumes greater significance. How much significance varies by agency. The returns from my FOIA requests indicate that in responding to leaks, certain executive branch components are substantially more active than others in their use of administrative remedies. As noted above, it appears that over the past several decades, the Departments of Energy, State, and the Treasury have never once levied an administrative sanction for an unauthorized disclosure to the media (or at least, none that was identifiable as such by FOIA staff in their Offices of Inspector General),³⁷¹ whereas the CIA has reportedly used “single issue” polygraphs in leak investigations and fired at least one veteran officer for leaking within the past decade.³⁷² Particularly in the IC, if not elsewhere, leakers cannot take administrative apathy for granted.

Once we attend to its extralegal dimensions, we thus find that the executive’s regime for regulating leaks is in significant respects more pluralistic than unitary. Even though the classification rules and the laws against leaking are written in generally applicable terms, in practice the regime privileges White House officials over agency officials, political appointees over civil servants, senior staff over junior staff, and non-IC employees over IC employees, both in terms of the type of sanctions utilized and the amount of disclosure discretion given. The first three discrepancies are ingrained in the way the executive organizes its work. High-level officials — above all, top White House officials — are expected to speak with the press as part of their jobs, to explain and defend administration policies. There is widespread recognition that this may entail, as one former White House official put it, some “informal trimming” of the boundaries of confidentiality and classification.³⁷³ Lower-level employees have no comparable discretion, no reliable safe harbor. For many in the White House, leaks by low-level career employees are seen as “totally unacceptable from the standpoint of running the government.”³⁷⁴

³⁷¹ See *supra* note 227 and accompanying text.

³⁷² See Mark Mazzetti & Scott Shane, *C.I.A. Director Has Made Plugging Leaks a Top Priority*, N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 23, 2006, § 1, at 31.

³⁷³ Telephone Interview with former White House official, *supra* note 349.

³⁷⁴ Telephone Interview with White House official, *supra* note 258. Across a range of fields, it has been noted that American legal practice appears more pluralistic than unitary in “its implicit acceptance of customs founded on multiple sources of legal authority.” Hendrik Hartog, *Pigs and Positivism*, 1985 WIS. L. REV. 899, 935. It is nonetheless striking to find such pronounced pluralism *within* the executive branch, in a core national security area. These fissures reflect leaking’s role as a means by which different normative communities within the executive coordinate and compete with one another, as well as leaking’s relevance to a diverse set of governmental ends, from retaining power to shaping public opinion to securing the nation.

In effect, senior officials are given a standard: “Don’t disclose confidential information in a manner that causes serious harm to U.S. interests or the President’s agenda.” The difficulty of delineating a comprehensive policy *ex ante* is too great for this group, so the details are largely left to be worked out through *ex post*, informal enforcement. Junior officials are given a rule: “Don’t disclose confidential information, period.” Violations of this rule are largely endured by those who run the executive branch, as Parts I and II explained, and in the abstract their utility may even be appreciated. But these disclosures are not similarly approved, much less cultivated.

The system for senior officials, moreover, is designed to facilitate learning. Statements and sanctions issued by the President and his top aides establish the disclosure standard applicable to this group; discrete leaks, pleaks, and plants progressively test that standard and stimulate refinements. Generalized grievances about unauthorized disclosures (“too much is being shared with the media about China policy”) yield, over time, to more particularized enforcement cues (“the next leak about our negotiations with the Taiwanese military will not be tolerated”). Agency participants and White House overseers continually learn from each other and iteratively codetermine the limits of acceptable disclosure behavior, in an active feedback loop. Even if certain components of the executive have more or less tolerant cultures with regard to leaking, this dynamic process, together with the vetogates that minimize formal sanctions, helps ensure that those overlapping normative orders substantially converge on an authoritative system for disciplining senior officials.³⁷⁵

From the executive’s perspective — that is, taking the institution’s objective interests and not social welfare as the maximand — this mix of threats, rhetoric, occasional informal sanctions, and very occasional formal sanctions may generate something approximating privately optimal deterrence. Given the benefits of leakiness and the high costs of enforcement, rare imposition of stiff penalties may be an efficient approach.³⁷⁶ Prosecutions invite backlash. They can also overdeter. The executive’s relatively invisible, asymmetric regulatory model conserves political capital and curtails litigation risk, even as it skews the

³⁷⁵ An analogy might be drawn to the way in which OLC opinions on questionable practices generate effective immunity for those who follow them. See *Developments in the Law — Presidential Authority*, 125 HARV. L. REV. 2057, 2092 (2012) (“[OLC] opinions are not only followed by the entire executive branch, but arguably also confer nearly complete civil and criminal immunity for officials that act in accordance with OLC’s view of the law.”). A reasonable expectation attaches that those high-level sources who stay within the bounds of acceptable disclosure, as signaled by the White House and agency heads, will escape formal punishment.

³⁷⁶ Cf. Gary S. Becker, *Crime and Punishment: An Economic Approach*, 76 J. POL. ECON. 169, 183–84 (1968) (arguing that harsh penalties, rarely imposed, may be a socially optimal strategy when enforcement is costly).

balance of leaks, pleaks, and plants toward the latter two.³⁷⁷ If one assumes some normal distribution of risk preferences among those junior officials with access to classified information, the government need create only a modest sense of danger to discourage all but the most risk-loving tail of the distribution. And so much of that tail may be sufficiently reckless that invigorating criminal enforcement would have little effect beyond a small number of individuals at the margins. By allowing junior officials to challenge the secrecy rules through leaking, but only at significant personal peril, the executive likely weeds out many idiosyncratic appeals while preserving some of the most important communications.³⁷⁸

Taking all of these observations together, the picture that emerges looks quite different from the conventional view of leak regulation as a field in which top-down efforts by the White House to control the executive branch have lost out to balkanized assertions of power by lower-level players across the various agencies. The reality puts pressure on that very distinction. Leakers operate with a high degree of impunity from criminal, civil, and administrative discipline. Decentralization seems to run riot. Yet through the design of the criminal referral process and DOJ's journalist subpoena policy, the failure to promote legislative revisions or invest significant resources in apprehension, and the informal signaling and sanctioning mechanisms just described, the diffuseness of the system is constructed to a significant extent by the President and his appointees. The White House plays a key role both in establishing the boundaries of acceptable leaking and in enforcing them through periodic interventions — sometimes through the very practice (anonymous disclosures to the press) the White House means to discipline.

Put another way, in lieu of the command-and-control regulation of national security information that the classification scheme and certain versions of the unitary executive theory might seem to envision, the White House gives agency leadership a kind of informational block grant.³⁷⁹ What Presidents lose in control over specific disclosures, they gain in deniability and other rewards from leakiness. Part II demonstrated that switching to a more formal, centralized model of disclosure would impose enormous costs on the executive, not only in terms of transactional efficiency but also in terms of legal flexibility, popular credibility, policy development, and bureaucratic harmony. There is no need to make this switch, however, unless the misallocations and missteps inevitable in an informal system are perceived to outweigh

³⁷⁷ On this skew, see *supra* section II.B.2.

³⁷⁸ Cf. *supra* section II.B.4 (discussing the intragovernmental communicative economy of leaks).

³⁷⁹ I thank Professor David Super for suggesting this metaphor.

these costs. That the existing model has persisted for so long suggests they do not. To the contrary, the analysis here lends more support to the notion — roughly in line with Professor Robert Ellickson’s famous hypothesis about close-knit groups³⁸⁰ — that members of the President’s national security team have developed informal norms of disclosure that tend to maximize their aggregate welfare.

C. Substantive Norms

Ideally, an account of the executive’s informal code of leaking would elaborate not just the procedural and remedial conventions sketched above, but also the content of the primary unwritten norms that tell government actors what they may say and do. Leaking is such a broad, varied, and clandestine phenomenon that it is impossible to specify this content with precision. No doubt certain norms have evolved over time. Nevertheless, from the opinions shared by insiders and the enforcement known to have occurred, it is possible to piece together some basic elements. U.S. officials routinely vilify “leakers,” as a class, and deny the existence of any First Amendment protections beyond whatever might be afforded to members of the media.³⁸¹ It is therefore striking to find that the substantive norms on leaking appear to incorporate a fairly nuanced set of ethical and constitutional distinctions. If Professor Goldsmith is right that the government’s failure to crack down reflects “a recognition . . . that press coverage of secret executive branch action serves a vital function in American democracy,”³⁸² these norms help to operationalize that sentiment and reconcile it with the equally widespread recognition that certain leaks can do great damage.

A limited amount of evidence on disclosure norms can be gleaned from the criminal cases that have been brought against suspected media leakers³⁸³ — the expressive value of which far transcends their specific facts. The leading Espionage Act case, *United States v. Morison*,³⁸⁴

³⁸⁰ See ROBERT C. ELICKSON, *ORDER WITHOUT LAW* 167 (1991) (predicting that “members of a close-knit group [will] develop and maintain norms whose content serves to maximize the aggregate welfare that members obtain in their workaday affairs with one another” (emphasis omitted)). As Ellickson acknowledges, welfare assessments in most such contexts will be “impossible to quantify with precision” and must rely on “largely intuitive assessments of the utilitarian potential” of the social norms that are employed versus alternative norms that are not. *Id.* at 183.

³⁸¹ The government’s longstanding official position is that, to the extent conveying classified information to unauthorized parties even “constitutes speech, that speech is wholly unprotected by the First Amendment.” Consolidated Response of the United States to the Defendant’s Pretrial Motions at 30, *United States v. Kim*, 808 F. Supp. 2d 44 (D.D.C. 2011) (No. 10-225).

³⁸² GOLDSMITH, *supra* note 16, at 222.

³⁸³ Cf. ELICKSON, *supra* note 380, at 183 (“Norms are also identifiable. They are evidenced by patterns of sanctions, patterns of primary behavior, and aspirational statements.”). Too little is known about the details of administrative sanctions to mine them similarly for insights.

³⁸⁴ 844 F.2d 1057 (4th Cir. 1988).

is particularly instructive. As recounted by the appellate court, Samuel Morison was a disaffected American naval intelligence analyst who sought to gain full-time employment with the British circular *Jane's Defence Weekly*.³⁸⁵ Seemingly to impress the *Jane's* editor-in-chief, Morison purloined reconnaissance satellite photographs of a Soviet military site, cut off the Top Secret markings on their border, and mailed them, with an expectation of payment, to the editor-in-chief.³⁸⁶ The *Morison* court squarely rejected the alternative narrative advanced by the defendant: that he had leaked the photographs, not for pecuniary or professional reasons, but in a patriotic bid to alert the American public that the Soviet Union was preparing to expand its naval reach.³⁸⁷ The Fourth Circuit upheld Morison's conviction on all counts.³⁸⁸

Morison not only violated several laws against leaking, like so many before and after him, but also transgressed several ethical lines. In the court's telling, he (i) sold protected information, (ii) in a manner not designed or intended to advance U.S. policy or broader First Amendment values, (iii) to a foreign publication. Morison's activities were, in these respects, closer to espionage than to whistleblowing.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁵ *Id.* at 1060–61.

³⁸⁶ *Id.*

³⁸⁷ *Id.* at 1076–80.

³⁸⁸ *Id.* at 1060. Morison was convicted on two counts of violating provisions of the Espionage Act, 18 U.S.C. § 793(d) and (e), and two counts of violating 18 U.S.C. § 641, *see Morison*, 844 F.2d at 1060, and sentenced to two years' imprisonment (in the form of four two-year terms to run concurrently), *see Ex-Intelligence Analyst Morison Sentenced to Two Years in Spy Case*, L.A. TIMES, Dec. 5, 1985, at 22.

³⁸⁹ It is something of a puzzle, then, why President Clinton pardoned Morison on his last day in office. The U.S. Attorney who handled the case on appeal spoke for many in government when he complained that the pardon was "inexplicable," as Morison had acted "with the basest of motives." Breckinridge L. Willcox, Editorial, *Speaking of Pardons . . .*, WASH. POST, Feb. 24, 2001, at A23; *see also* Vernon Loeb, *Clinton Ignored CIA in Pardoning Intelligence Analyst*, WASH. POST, Feb. 17, 2001, at A6. A FOIA request I submitted to the William J. Clinton Presidential Library sheds a bit of new light on this episode.

It appears that several letters sent to Clinton late in his presidency may have influenced his decision. In 1998, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan began to press the case for a pardon. Senator Moynihan asserted, without explanation, that Morison had been seeking "to bring pressure to bear on a policy question"; repeatedly equated Morison's conviction with "press censorship"; and suggested that Morison's rank — "not too high, not too low" — influenced the Reagan Administration's decision to prosecute. Letter from Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan to President William J. Clinton (Sept. 29, 1998), *available at* <http://www.fas.org/sgp/news/2001/04/moynihan.html>. Senator Moynihan also emphasized the potential for leak-law enforcement to jeopardize presidential interests: "An evenhanded prosecution of leakers," he noted, "could imperil an entire administration." *Id.* Two years later, the famed historian Arthur Schlesinger and journalist Anthony Lewis followed with their own missives. Schlesinger and Lewis characterized Morison as a patriotic policy leaker and criticized the application of the Espionage Act to media leaks as a Reagan Administration gambit to create a de facto Official Secrets Act. Letter from Anthony Lewis to Sidney Blumenthal, Senior Adviser to President William J. Clinton (Dec. 28, 2000) (on file with the Harvard Law School Library) (attaching several columns Lewis had writ-

These ethical lines remain significant. Another convicted media leaker, Jonathan Randel, sold tangible documents to a British publication.³⁹⁰ (For their part, the British authorities also seem more inclined to prosecute leaks involving the sale of information.³⁹¹) And virtually every U.S. official with whom I spoke affirmed that they would judge a leak more critically if it possessed the above-described attributes.

The *Morison* episode is best known for the Fourth Circuit's legal analysis. Given how rarely the laws against leaking are enforced, the most notable aspect of the case is simply that it was brought. *Morison* stands not just for the legal proposition that the Espionage Act and 18 U.S.C. § 641 may be applied to media leaks, but for the broader proposition that leaks made without any apparent patriotic or policy justification are the most deserving of punishment.

Post-*Morison* cases elaborate on this theme. It is a staple of leak litigation that the prosecution portrays the defendant as lacking in public-regarding motive and personal virtue. In several cases, the prosecution has alleged that the defendant turned to the press in retaliation for a perceived slight by his employers, such as the CIA's denial of Jeffrey Sterling's racial discrimination claims;³⁹² or that he

ten about *Morison* in the 1980s); Letter from Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., to President William J. Clinton (Dec. 7, 2000) (on file with the Harvard Law School Library). Schlesinger further noted that *Morison*'s grandfather was his "teacher and friend, the great historian Samuel Eliot Morison." Letter from Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *supra*. None of these letters mentioned the Constitution, though their arguments were pregnant with First Amendment implications. The journalist Bob Scheer evidently wrote President Clinton to similar effect. On the internal cover letter for the Lewis and Scheer letters, Clinton scrawled a handwritten note to his advisers: "looks like something we probably should do."

What ultimately drove President Clinton's decision to pardon *Morison* (among many others) remains largely unknowable, as do the thought processes of Senator Moynihan, Schlesinger, Lewis, and Scheer. On their face, these documents suggest that President Clinton may have been moved by a sincere concern for press freedom — or perhaps a concern to be seen by history as concerned for press freedom — as well as by a pragmatic interest in maintaining the viability of pleaks and plants. One wonders whether President Clinton would have made the same decision had he read the Fourth Circuit's discussion of the facts, if indeed he did not do so. Inasmuch as the *Morison* pardon holds any generalizable lessons on leaks, it might be taken as evidence that behind all the tough rhetoric, at least some Presidents consciously appreciate their democratic, political, or policy value.

³⁹⁰ See Hargrove-Simon, *supra* note 43.

³⁹¹ See LEAKS IN WHITEHALL, *supra* note 281, at 17 (stating that the police's decision not to investigate a recent leak on the expenses of Members of Parliament "might seem surprising" if the information had been sold for personal gain); *UK Anthrax Officer Jailed for a Year*, BBC NEWS (Oct. 23, 1998, 2:57 PM), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/199796.stm (describing the conviction of a British naval officer for disclosing information about an alleged anthrax plot to *The Sun* in exchange for £10,000).

³⁹² See Indictment at 7–8, *United States v. Sterling*, 818 F. Supp. 2d 945 (E.D. Va. 2011) (No. 1:10CR485 (LMB)) (asserting that Sterling leaked classified information "[i]n retaliation for the CIA's refusal to settle on terms favorable to [him]," *id.* at 7, as well as other decisions made by the CIA).

employed spy-like tactics to communicate with journalists, such as Stephen Kim's use of an online pseudonym or Thomas Drake's use of encrypted email accounts and his efforts to gather information from unwitting NSA colleagues.³⁹³ Most defendants have been accused of leaking tangible items. Tangibility not only eases the government's evidentiary and Espionage Act burdens, but also limits its ability to downplay or deny a security breach. All of the recently prosecuted individuals have been low- to mid-level civil servants or contractors, except for Chelsea Manning, who was a soldier, and Drake, who was more senior in rank though not a bureau chief or presidential appointee.³⁹⁴ Critically, all engaged reporters in some proactive fashion, without any implicit or explicit backing from agency leadership. These individuals were not legitimate participants in the game of leaks, as conceived by the upper echelons of the executive branch. Defense counsel in these cases, meanwhile, almost invariably seek to portray their clients as whistleblowers, notwithstanding the failure to follow whistleblowing protocols. Both sides recognize the value of pitching their arguments in an ethical register against the backdrop of an overbroad law.

Because there are so few leak prosecutions, those that are brought can send powerful signals throughout government about the parameters of permissible leaking. The sample size is too small, and the recent cases (several of which are ongoing) too fresh, to distill neat lessons. But the general pattern suggests that the most vulnerable officials are those lone wolves who speak with reporters outside the context of any active interagency process — true leakers, not pleakers or planters, in this Article's typology — and whose claim to a whistleblowing purpose is complicated by evidence of dubious tactics or dishonorable aims. The case of Chelsea Manning has highlighted and reinforced an additional normative line, in Manning's almost total failure to discriminate among the hundreds of thousands of documents

³⁹³ See Shane, *supra* note 210 (describing the case against Kim); Indictment at 5–7, United States v. Drake, 818 F. Supp. 2d 909 (D. Md. 2011) (No. 10-cr-00181-RDB), 2010 WL 1513342 (describing Drake's alleged conduct).

³⁹⁴ News reports suggest that a retired four-star general and former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, James Cartwright, may soon be indicted for leaking information about a cyber operation against Iran, following an investigation carried out by the U.S. Attorney for Maryland. See *supra* note 114. If Cartwright is indicted under the Espionage Act, he would be far and away the most senior official to meet this fate. The closest analogue is the case of Scooter Libby, in which pressure from Congress similarly led to the initiation of an investigation outside of Main Justice and, ultimately, to criminal charges against someone close to the President. See *supra* note 116 (explaining that Libby was convicted of perjury, obstruction of justice, and false statements in connection with this investigation); *infra* note 457 and accompanying text (describing congressional reactions to the alleged Iran leak).

she passed to WikiLeaks.³⁹⁵ A strategic administration can tolerate some significant amount of discrete revelations about perceived errors or abuses. It cannot tolerate the proliferation of internal dissenters who seek to impeach the entire secrecy and national security system.

In the leak context as in others, the jury serves as an important mechanism for bringing these sorts of moral and practical sentiments into the prosecutorial calculus. One former DOJ official who worked on leak cases opined that FBI and NSD lawyers “by and large use good judgment” in assessing whether a leak “was wrong” before deciding whether to move forward.³⁹⁶ Informing these assessments, the former official further suggested, are the lawyers’ expectations of how ordinary citizens would think about criminal desert: cases may be shelved if they lack “jury appeal.”³⁹⁷ The referral process ensures that prosecutors never encounter most potentially unlawful leaks. Within the set they do encounter, the prospect of skeptical jurors raises the cost of pursuing disclosures that appear to be consistent with ubiquitous practices or otherwise justified. It is notable in this regard that the government never indicted Thomas Tamm, the DOJ employee who revealed the NSA’s highly classified warrantless-wiretapping program to the *New York Times*, even though his identity emerged fairly quickly.³⁹⁸ Tamm’s civil disobedience was vindicated in the court of public opinion. The failure to bring charges against him sent a message that disclosures of government conduct widely believed to be illegal will prove immune from criminal punishment, even if they may not escape its administrative counterpart.

A focus on relatively unsympathetic, bureaucratically isolated defendants makes sense as a matter of prosecutorial strategy. It economizes on resources and political capital, enhances odds of securing convictions and averting unfavorable judicial rulings, and refines the law’s deterrent effect. It also complicates the charge of selective prosecution. That DOJ has chosen to indict only a small subset of leakers is not necessarily a mark of politicization or double standards, so much

³⁹⁵ See Benkler, *supra* note 325, at 321–30 (summarizing the contents of the materials allegedly leaked by Manning in 2010); see also *supra* note 110 and accompanying text (discussing general leaks).

³⁹⁶ Telephone Interview with former DOJ official, *supra* note 213.

³⁹⁷ *Id.*; see also *Reno Testimony*, *supra* note 46, at 10 (stating that in some cases, DOJ has identified the leaker but “decided not to prosecute because we concluded that . . . a jury would likely refuse to convict notwithstanding the evidence”); cf. J.C. Smith & D.J. Birch, Case and Comment, *R. v. Ponting*, 1985 CRIM. L. REV. 318 (describing a case of apparent jury nullification in England, involving a civil servant who had leaked documents calling into question the official story of the Falklands War).

³⁹⁸ See Charlie Savage, *No Prosecution Seen for Official in N.S.A. Leak*, N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 27, 2011, at A17.

as fidelity to the disclosure norms executive officials abide by — norms that themselves sharply (and problematically) distinguish among different types of speakers and speech acts.

Interviews and apparent leaking patterns suggest several more specific norms governing media disclosure. These norms correlate with but by no means mirror the formal classification hierarchy. The revelation of “intelligence sources and methods,”³⁹⁹ numerous interviewees indicated, is generally considered an egregious offense, a line that even habitual pleakers will not cross. Human sources are considered especially off-limits; revealing the identity of an undercover U.S. agent is the paradigmatic example of an improper disclosure. Such episodes have occurred in recent decades, but seemingly rarely. Only two individuals have ever been charged under the Intelligence Identities Protection Act of 1982⁴⁰⁰ (IIPA). While some of the same forces that depress the overall enforcement rate may help to explain this miniscule figure, I expect that the primary driver is the degree to which government officials have internalized the underlying norm. The IIPA is largely superfluous for them. The potency of this norm could be seen in the widespread outrage — and Special Prosecutor appointment — that followed the outing of Valerie Plame as a CIA operative.⁴⁰¹ Importantly, in this disapprobation of revealing intelligence sources and methods, national security interests and First Amendment principles may converge.⁴⁰² Public awareness of the name of a CIA agent typically creates an immediate risk to that individual, without contributing anything meaningful to the project of self-government.

³⁹⁹ Cf. *CIA v. Sims*, 471 U.S. 159, 167 (1985) (describing sources and methods as “the heart of all intelligence operations”); Vicki Divoll, *The “Full Access Doctrine”: Congress’s Constitutional Entitlement to National Security Information from the Executive*, 34 HARV. J.L. & PUB. POL’Y 493, 522 n.104 (2011) (noting that the term “sources and methods,” though lacking in clear definition, “has become somewhat of a talisman in intelligence circles” (internal quotation marks omitted)).

⁴⁰⁰ 50 U.S.C. §§ 421–426 (2006 & Supp. V 2011). Both individuals served in the CIA. See Indictment at 8–10, *United States v. Kiriakou*, 1:12cr127 (LMB) (E.D. Va. Apr. 5, 2012); Andrew M. Szilagyi, Note, *Blowing Its Cover: How the Intelligence Identities Protection Act Has Masqueraded as an Effective Law and Why It Must Be Amended*, 51 WM. & MARY L. REV. 2269, 2282 (2010); see also Scott Shane, *From Spy to Source to Convict*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 6, 2013, at A1 (quoting John Kiriakou, recently convicted under the IIPA for leading a reporter to a covert CIA interrogator, as stating, “I should never have provided the name,” and quoting a former senior CIA lawyer as stating that while Kiriakou is not “evil,” “it’s not a trivial thing to reveal a name” (internal quotation marks omitted)).

⁴⁰¹ See sources cited *supra* notes 138–39 and accompanying text.

⁴⁰² Professor Geoffrey Stone has insightfully observed that all of the traditional examples of information the publication of which may be criminally punished, including the sailing dates of military transports and the identities of CIA operatives, share the feature of threatening significant harm while adding little to public debate. See STONE, *supra* note 17, at 24–25. My research suggests that internal executive branch norms incorporate this perspective. These exceptionally high-risk, low-return disclosures are least respected and least tolerated.

Beyond intelligence sources and methods, some interviewees suggested that disclosures of “operational details” are likewise seen as beyond the pale.⁴⁰³ The key word in this phrase is not “operational,” as one might expect, but “details.” Leaks about the general contours of a military initiative or diplomatic negotiation do not necessarily arouse special outrage. In this case, too, it is the especially particularized nature of the leak that minimizes the possibility of justification and motivates the prohibitive norm.⁴⁰⁴ Also verboten, it seems, are explicit threats to leak information if one does not get one’s way.⁴⁰⁵ Such behavior not only flaunts the speaker’s disrespect for background norms of legality and collegiality, but makes identification of the source too easy: enforcers cannot so easily ignore a complaint that tells them exactly who did it. An additional norm, applicable beyond the national security realm, appears to forbid direct criticism of the President. For all the difficulties that anonymous U.S. government sources may cause for the White House, it is exceedingly rare to find a news story in which one has impugned the President in any overt manner. The Commander in Chief might be challenged in some of his policy goals, but he is not mocked.

Although it may seem counterintuitive, there is nothing inherently odd about the observation that those who flout the rules on disclosing classified information would nonetheless abide by certain other norms on leaking. Recent work in social psychology demonstrates that all but the most sociopathic rule violators want to believe they are acting ethically, and so maintain certain boundaries they will not cross even as they blow past the generally applicable proscriptions.⁴⁰⁶ It seems likely that psychological mechanisms such as the urge to avoid cognitive dissonance⁴⁰⁷ help explain how even hardened national security types can rationalize violating the laws against leaking, as

⁴⁰³ *E.g.*, Telephone Interview with former Defense Department official, *supra* note 197.

⁴⁰⁴ *Cf.* Pozen, *supra* note 336, at 275–323 (arguing that there are diminishing marginal returns, for values such as public debate and democratic accountability, to increasingly specific disclosures about government policies).

⁴⁰⁵ *See* HALPERIN ET AL., *supra* note 81, at 202 (noting that while bureaucrats may strategically raise the concern that information “will leak,” they do not threaten, “I will leak it” (internal quotation marks omitted)).

⁴⁰⁶ This is a central theme of DAN ARIELY, *THE (HONEST) TRUTH ABOUT DISHONESTY* (2012). Daniel Ellsberg has recently contended that bureaucratic “habits” in the U.S. government “allow a good deal of leeway and discretion in disregarding formal rules of the classification system,” Ellsberg, *supra* note 352, at 774, but demand fidelity to “the ‘real’ rules,” which forbid “revelations to potential adversaries or rivals of the policies or agency or bosses one serves,” *id.* at 775.

⁴⁰⁷ *See* LEON FESTINGER, *A THEORY OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE* (1957) (positing that the existence of cognitive dissonance — the psychological discomfort that results from holding conflicting knowledge, opinions, or beliefs — “will motivate the person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance”).

most naturally construed. There may be other “strategies of reconciliation” at work here, too.⁴⁰⁸ For instance, those officials who discuss classified items with select journalists may tend to hold some sort of inchoate Dworkinian or natural law–based understanding about the relationship between legality and justice, whereby their belief in law’s ultimate reasonableness leads them to resist the very notion of a “law” that could prohibit what they see as valuable, accountability- and security-promoting activities. Or perhaps certain officials come to believe that the classified materials their agency generates are their property, in some legally significant sense, and that this property relationship gives them a right of disposition that trumps otherwise applicable disclosure restrictions. This hypothesis is speculative but not far-fetched. We know from research in behavioral economics that people pervasively use various sorts of mental accounting to place information into coherent normative frames and to rationalize their conduct,⁴⁰⁹ and “property talk” about classified information is ubiquitous in U.S. government circles.⁴¹⁰

Let us close with one more speculative, but particularly important, hypothesis. If the analysis above is sound, then paradoxically it may be the case that more vigorous enforcement of the laws against leaking would lead to a *greater* amount of unlawful disclosures, or at least to a greater amount of destructive disclosures. It is well established in the social-psychological literature that enhanced external prohibitions may correspond with reduced internalization of the underlying norm⁴¹¹: a classic finding shows that harsh, punitive parenting is associated with decreased inhibitory control and increased antisocial behavior in adolescence and young adulthood.⁴¹² One

⁴⁰⁸ Frederick Schauer, *Official Obedience and the Politics of Defining “Law,”* 86 S. CAL. L. REV. (forthcoming 2013) (manuscript at 22–27), available at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2220923> (cataloguing “strategies of reconciliation” that officials may use to avoid acknowledgment of lawbreaking).

⁴⁰⁹ See generally DANIEL KAHNEMAN, THINKING, FAST AND SLOW 342–46 (2011) (reviewing some of the literature).

⁴¹⁰ See MARK J. ROZELL, EXECUTIVE PRIVILEGE 10 (3d rev. ed. 2010) (noting the “belief of many in the government that each branch *owns* the information it develops” (internal quotation marks omitted)). Based on experience, I would refine the observation just quoted to reflect that many in government believe each *agency* or *component* of the executive branch owns the information it develops.

⁴¹¹ See, e.g., Joan E. Grusec & Jacqueline J. Goodnow, *Impact of Parental Discipline Methods on the Child’s Internalization of Values: A Reconceptualization of Current Points of View*, 30 DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOL. 4, 10–11 (1994); Mark R. Lepper, *Social-Control Processes and the Internalization of Social Values: An Attributional Perspective*, in SOCIAL COGNITION AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT 294, 314–16 (E. Tory Higgins et al. eds., 1983).

⁴¹² See Diana Baumrind, *Effects of Authoritative Parental Control on Child Behavior*, 37 CHILD DEV. 887, 897–98 (1966); R. Loeber & T. Dishion, *Early Predictors of Male Delinquency: A Review*, 94 PSYCHOL. BULL. 68, 87 (1983); Kristin L. Moilanen et al., *Predictors of Longitudi-*

possible causal mechanism for the efficacy of a softer touch is what is known as “insufficient deterrence.” When parents punish rule violations only lightly, it arouses cognitive dissonance in children who comply without strong external justification for doing so; to dissolve this dissonance, the children come to internalize the rule.⁴¹³ There is no clear reason to expect this dynamic would be confined to juveniles or to rules that lack the force of law. It is an old concern of tax policy, for instance, that aggressive enforcement may backfire in revenue terms, by attenuating the sociocultural link between taxpaying and civic virtue and decreasing citizens’ intrinsic motivation to comply with the laws.⁴¹⁴

Low levels of official discipline help preserve the primacy of the unofficial code on acceptable leaking. Unpatriotic disclosures, disclosures made for money, disclosures with a high ratio of expected national security harm to democratic benefit — all are kept in check by a broadly held set of norms condemning such conduct. To be sure, these norms can be vague as guides to decision and are highly imperfect as social controls. In certain cases, they may be distorted or disregarded. Yet given the difficulty of detecting and punishing leakers, any system that relied solely on external enforcement to suppress unwanted disclosures would be either exceedingly ruthless or exceedingly ineffective. An escalation in formal enforcement risks alienating those many officials who take the informal prohibitions on leaking seriously, corroding their feeling of stewardship over the secrecy system and unraveling associated cultural and psychological constraints (even if it is impossible to estimate the causes and effects of such alienation with any precision). Permissive neglect maintains loyalty to the social norms against improper disclosures even as it destroys loyalty to the legal norms against unauthorized disclosures.

The policy implications of this tradeoff are potentially profound. And perverse. By making government employees feel like they are not trusted to look after the nation’s important secrets, a stern, suspicious

nal Growth in Inhibitory Control in Early Childhood, 19 SOC. DEV. 326, 343 (2010); Gerald R. Patterson, *Performance Models for Antisocial Boys*, 41 AM. PSYCHOLOGIST 432, 441–42 (1986).

⁴¹³ See, e.g., Elliot Aronson & J. Merrill Carlsmith, *Effect of the Severity of Threat on the Devaluation of Forbidden Behavior*, 66 J. ABNORMAL & SOC. PSYCHOL. 584 (1963) (finding that a mild threat influenced children’s perceptions of the desirability of a toy more than a severe threat or no threat); Jonathan L. Freedman, *Long-Term Behavioral Effects of Cognitive Dissonance*, 1 J. EXPERIMENTAL SOC. PSYCHOL. 145 (1965) (finding that children who encountered a mild threat when playing with a toy were less likely to play with the toy at a later date than children who faced a severe threat or no threat).

⁴¹⁴ See Lawrence Zelenak, *The Great American Tax Novel*, 110 MICH. L. REV. 969, 973 (2012) (book review). See generally Frank B. Cross, *Law and Trust*, 93 GEO. L.J. 1457, 1482–1527 (2005) (reviewing theory and evidence on the idea that law undermines various forms of trust).

administration may foster the very sort of leaking behavior it most fears.

IV. SOME NOTES ON LEAKINESS AND EXECUTIVE POWER

To offer a new theory of how the legal regime on leaking works is to invite questions about how it should work. For reasons already suggested, I am skeptical of global assessments and optimizing proposals in this area. The secrecy that surrounds disclosure and classification practices necessarily limits our understanding of leaks' incidence, impacts, causes, and relationships to other forms of transparency.⁴¹⁵ Leaking implicates so many governmental interests and social goods that prescription necessarily entails significant value choices. And regardless of one's empirical assumptions or normative priors, a thicket of practical and political obstacles stands in the reformer's path. President Reagan learned this lesson the hard way.⁴¹⁶ While it is undoubtedly true, as Professors Louis Henkin and Cass Sunstein insisted in well-known works,⁴¹⁷ that the United States' mixture of broad official secrecy with broad leaking fails to ensure that improperly concealed information will be revealed or that properly concealed information will remain under wraps, the observation is unhelpful. No system this large could ever ensure against failure. The pertinent question is how our system compares to viable alternatives in facilitating ends such as national security, government accountability, and informed public debate. That question cannot be answered satisfactorily in the abstract.⁴¹⁸

These caveats notwithstanding, the positive theory advanced in this Article clearly carries a range of potential implications, not just for how we conceptualize and study leaks but also for how we understand the executive branch and judge its policies. Parts II and III interspersed a number of evaluative and predictive observations — for instance, the point made just above about social-psychological factors that may lead a crackdown on leakers to generate perverse conse-

⁴¹⁵ See *supra* section I.D, pp. 542–44.

⁴¹⁶ See *supra* notes 189–91 and accompanying text (discussing President Reagan's failed attempt to minimize leaking).

⁴¹⁷ Louis Henkin, Commentary, *The Right to Know and the Duty to Withhold: The Case of the Pentagon Papers*, 120 U. PA. L. REV. 271, 278 (1971); Cass R. Sunstein, *Government Control of Information*, 74 CALIF. L. REV. 889, 901–04 (1986).

⁴¹⁸ In turning away from ideal theory and optimistic prescription on the balance to be struck between government openness and other public values, I join company with Professors Jack Goldsmith, Seth Kreimer, and Geoffrey Stone. See GOLDSMITH, *supra* note 16, at 210–11, 218, 228; STONE, *supra* note 17, at 2–3; Kreimer, *supra* note 88, at 1074–79. Professor Rahul Sagar similarly stresses the intractability of the “puzzles” posed by secrecy regulation in a valuable new book. SAGAR, *supra* note 181, at 14.