



ICIJ



Committee Summary

The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists is a collaborative network of reporters who investigate important stories around the world. Founded in 1997 by American journalist Chuck Lewis, the ICIJ today includes over 190 journalists from more than 65 countries. The ICIJ conducts in-depth investigations on international issues such as cross-border crime, corruption and the accountability of power.

The existence of the ICIJ today is extremely important. In the globalized economy, states, corporations and other international stakeholders hold greater power than ever. At the same time, many national media outlets struggle for resources and audiences. The ICIJ stands to unite journalists around the world to hold those in power accountable and uncover the world's most shocking stories.

Crisis Expansion

In this committee delegates will represent one of the twenty largest news agencies from around the world. Delegates will have the same powers as their real news outlet, from publishing stories to conducting investigations. The committee must work together, as each outlet alone will not be able to uncover the full picture of any story. However, delegates must do what they can to advance their own reputation, viewership, and profit margins.

Topic I: Panama Papers



A Brief History

The Panama Papers were a massive leak of over 11.5 million financial and legal records belonging to Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca. After over a year of analysis, the ICIJ and German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung released the documents in April 2016. The documents implicated many wealthy individuals, politicians and celebrities in crimes such as tax evasion, fraud, and the illegal use of shell corporations. Edward Snowden described the leaks as “the biggest release in the history of data journalism.”

The leaks exposed an extensive global network of offshore holdings and shell companies used by some of the world’s wealthiest and most powerful individuals. While the use of shell companies (corporate structures that can hide ownership of assets) is not illegal, they are often used for criminal activity like tax evasion. Those implicated include the Prime Minister of Iceland, the King of Saudi Arabia, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, the President of Ukraine and soccer star Lionel Messi. Associates of Russian President Vladimir Putin were shown to have placed up to \$2 billion in shadow companies.

The investigation began when an anonymous source leaked 2.6 terabytes of data to German journalist Bastian Obermayer from Süddeutsche Zeitung. Upon realizing the incredible amount of data, the ICIJ was asked to help with the investigation. 370 Journalists from 76 countries helped review the data, representing a milestone in investigative collaboration.



Current Situation

Mossack Fonseca has responded by denying any wrongdoing and claiming they are victims of an attack. The firm issued the following statement after the publication of the leaked documents:

"Our industry is not particularly well understood by the public, and unfortunately this series of articles will only serve to deepen that confusion. The facts are these: while we may have been the victim of a data breach, nothing we've seen in this illegally obtained cache of documents suggests we've done anything illegal, and that's very much in keeping with the global reputation we've built over the past 40 years of doing business the right way."

The firm has been raided by Panamanian, Peruvian and El Salvadorian police. A number of their 40 worldwide offices have already been shut down.

After public outrage ensued in Iceland after the Panama Papers, President Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson resigned. Many countries around the world have begun their own investigations into the use of shell companies and offshore holdings.

The ICIJ has received criticism for their handling of the leaks. Only 150 of the over 11.5 million documents have been publicly released. On this issue Wikileaks founder Julian Assange tweeted, "If you censor more than 99 percent of the documents, you are engaged in 1 percent journalism by definition." The ICIJ has claimed these documents contain sensitive information.



The long-term impact of the Panama Papers has yet to be seen. While some individuals have been hurt by the leak, few laws have changed. The use of offshore holding and shell companies likely remains very popular amongst the world's wealthiest. The public has become much more aware of this secret financial world, but just months after the leak media coverage has almost disappeared.

Role of the ICIJ

The Panama Papers have made clear the importance of the ICIJ's existence. National news agencies alone are not always able to process the mass amount of data that exists in the current information age. As well, the globalized financial system reaches all corners of the planet, requiring cooperation between journalists to uncover the world's biggest stories.

This story has also raised into question what the role of the ICIJ should be. Traditionally, it has focused on investigations, coordinating between journalists in different countries. However, the Panama Papers were also initially published by the ICIJ. Many people believe that publishing should remain within the power of newspapers as the ICIJ must be unbiased in how it presents stories.

Questions to Consider

1. Is acceptable to censor sensitive information?
2. Should the ICIJ publish stories or simply investigate?



3. Should the ICIJ hold independent power or simply be a liaison between different news agencies?
4. Why are the Panama Papers important?
5. What should be done about the widespread global use of shell companies and offshore holdings?

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Topic II: WikiLeaks

A Brief History

Wikileaks is a self described “multi-national media organization” founded by Australian reporter, publisher and activist Julian Assange in 2006. The non-profit organization focuses on the analysis and publication of classified information leaked by anonymous sources. It has published over 10 million secret documents on topics including war, spying and corruption. Wikileaks has contractual relationships with over 100 media organizations and maintains a perfect record of publishing authentic documents. Julian Assange described Wikileaks as “a giant library of the world’s most persecuted documents. We give asylum to these documents, we analyze them, we promote them and we obtain more.”

Wikileaks attained notoriety in 2007 after it published a confidential US Army manual on dealing with prisoners in Guantanamo Bay. Since then, releases include US military documents detailing the Afghanistan War and Iraq War, video of US airstrikes that killed civilians in Baghdad, communications from US diplomatic cables and recently emails from the Democratic National Committee and Hillary Clinton’s Presidential Campaign. Wikileaks has released more classified documents than the rest of the world’s media combined.

The motivations of Wikileaks are unclear, but are often understood to be the views of founder Julian Assange. Assange is a staunch supporter of government transparency and freedom of the press. He argues that secrets are fundamentally dangerous and radical transparency is necessary to prevent



governments from working to the detriment of the population. By exposing secrets, Assange argues, he is benefiting honest organizations while promoting the decline of those that are dishonest. When asked whether he supported Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton, Assange responded, “You’re asking me, do I prefer cholera or gonorrhea?” Since 2012, Assange has been claiming asylum at London's Ecuadorian embassy to avoid extradition to Sweden over sexual assault allegations.

Current Situation

Some of Wikileaks recent releases are perhaps its most controversial. In July 2016, WikiLeaks released nearly 20,000 emails from Democratic National Committee staffers, appearing to show the committee favoring Hillary Clinton over Bernie Sanders during the presidential primary. In October 2016, Wikileaks released more than 2,000 hacked emails (though they claim to have over 50,000) from Clinton’s campaign chairman, John Podesta. The Department of Homeland Security and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence have both said these releases originated with Russian state-sponsored hackers seeking to influence US electoral politics.

Critics have claimed that Wikileaks cooperated with the Russian government, targeting Hillary Clinton’s campaign in order to benefit Donald Trump’s bid for the presidency. Wikileaks has denied these claims.



Role of the ICIJ

The rise of Wikileaks raises many important questions for the ICIJ to consider. Wikileaks will censor its publications in very limited amounts, even if a security threat or personal information is exposed. The ICIJ, however, takes a different stance, censoring sensitive information and only publishing what is deemed necessary. Historically, Wikileaks has published illegally obtained information, often through computer hacking, which differs from the conventional whistleblower. Whether this practice is ethical is an important concern for the ICIJ.

While some members of the ICIJ cooperate with Wikileaks, some do not. The ICIJ does not have a public stance on the journalistic principles of Wikileaks.

Questions to Consider

1. When is it acceptable to publish classified information without consent?
2. Is Wikileaks good for democracy?
3. Should the ICIJ handle documents that have been obtained illegally?
4. Can WikiLeaks be a partner for the ICIJ?
5. How much or how little transparency must there be in democratic governments?



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