Secrets and Leaks: The Dilemma of State Secrecy
Rahul Sagar

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Secrets and Leaks examines the complex relationships among executive power, national security, and secrecy. State secrecy is vital for national security, but it can also be used to conceal wrongdoing. How then can we ensure that this power is used responsibly? Typically, the onus is put on lawmakers and judges, who are expected to oversee the executive. Yet because these actors lack access to the relevant information and the ability to determine the harm likely to be caused by its disclosure, they often defer to the executive's claims about the need for secrecy. As a result, potential abuses are more often exposed by unauthorized disclosures published in the press.

But should such disclosures, which violate the law, be condoned? Drawing on several cases, Rahul Sagar argues that though whistle-blowing can be morally justified, the fear of retaliation usually prompts officials to act anonymously—that is, to "leak" information. As a result, it becomes difficult for the public to discern when an unauthorized disclosure is intended to further partisan interests. Because such disclosures are the only credible means of checking the executive, Sagar writes, they must be tolerated. However, the public should treat such disclosures skeptically and subject irresponsible journalism to concerted criticism.

Rahul Sagar is assistant professor of politics at Princeton University.

Endorsement:
"A truly excellent and provocative book. Secrets and Leaks makes an outstanding contribution to an issue of contemporary concern that will not go away—and will probably become far more serious—in the future."—Sanford Levinson, author of Our Undemocratic Constitution

"Sagar examines the very hot topic of the role of leaks and whistle-blowing in democracy. He argues that they are fundamental to democratic politics generally and American democracy specifically, but he is subtle and informed enough to recognize the dangers of whistle-blowing, particularly on matters of national security. Sagar could well launch a new literature on the subject."—Corey Brettschneider, author of When the State Speaks, What Should It Say?

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