



Full Disclosure: The Perils and Promise of Transparency

By Archon Fung, Mary Graham, David Weil

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Full Disclosure: The Perils and Promise of Transparency By Archon Fung, Mary Graham, David Weil

Which SUVs are most likely to rollover? What cities have the unhealthiest drinking water? Which factories are the most dangerous polluters? What cereals are the most nutritious? In recent decades, governments have sought to provide answers to such critical questions through public disclosure to force manufacturers, water authorities, and others to improve their products and practices. Corporate financial disclosure, nutritional labels, and school report cards are examples of such targeted transparency policies. At best, they create a light-handed approach to governance that improves markets, enriches public discourse, and empowers citizens. But such policies are frequently ineffective or counterproductive. Based on an analysis of eighteen U.S. and international policies, Full Disclosure shows that information is often incomplete, incomprehensible, or irrelevant to consumers, investors, workers, and community residents. To be successful, transparency policies must be accurate, keep ahead of disclosers' efforts to find loopholes, and, above all, focus on the needs of ordinary citizens.

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- Sales Rank: #1314406 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Cambridge University Press
- Published on: 2008-07-21
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.98" h x .67" w x 5.98" l, .92 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 304 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"Packed with ideas and information, Full Disclosure is, by far, the best book to date on the problem of public transparency. The authors offer a host of indispensable lessons for citizens and policymakers in diverse domains, including education, pollution, national security, and health care. At the same time, Full Disclosure is an important contribution to democratic theory -- and a great read to boot."

Cass Sunstein, University of Chicago Law School

"Sunshine may indeed be the best disinfectant, in Louis Brandeis' words, but only if we know when, where, and how to shine the light. That is exactly the task that Full Disclosure sets itself. This is an important book at an important time, for everyone from mayors to senators to secretary generals."

Anne-Marie Slaughter, Dean, Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University

"The authors have done us all a good service by offering sound analysis and ideas on how to make public policy transparent and accessible for all citizens. As the country heads into the 21st century, more transparent governance is just what we need."

Tom Daschle, Former Senate Majority Leader

"Governmental transparency efforts inform the public about additives in the food we eat, dangerous criminals in our neighborhoods, and the financial support of our political leaders. Full Disclosure offers several important lessons that will help give citizens easier access to vital information through the creation of better, more meaningful transparency policies."

Bill Richardson, Governor of New Mexico

"Superb...This rich, carefully researched, well balanced, and readily accessible study shows us that good governance, with legislators at the local, state, or national levels in the lead, is surely difficult but far from unattainable. This is hard-nosed scholarship demonstrating, as the authors themselves discovered, that pragmatism about both policy expectations and policy results should prevail among political leaders and citizens alike."

Brian J. Cook, Clark University, Perspectives on Politics

"Full Disclosure provides a wide-ranging and systematic analysis of targeted transparency in the United States...The book makes two key contributions: it clarifies the factors that determines whether policies are effective and it suggests that transparency measures are now entering a new phase when they can be even more useful to the public than in the past."

Paul Starr, The American Prospect

"It is a fantastically researched and excellently written....I suspect it is destined to become the definitive book in the area, and i recommend it to academics..."

Jay P. Shimshack, Political Science Quarterly

"A major contribution to our understanding of targeted transparency as a policy...Fung, Graham and Weil have provided a compendium and reference resource for thinking about how to structure transparency in the new governance..."

Lisa Blomgren Bingham, Journal of Policy Analysis and Management

"Full Disclosure is a guide for policymakers, complete with the requisite "10 principles for an effective transparency policy" guide. It ought to make citizens wise to the tricks that commonly turn transparency policies into little more than symbolism."

Lee Drutman, San Francisco Chronicle

"In their thoughtful and constructive book, Full Disclosure: The Perils and Promise of Transparency, Archon Fung, Mary Graham, and David Weil provide an in-depth assessment of government mandated disclosure policies intended to reduce the costs to consumers created by imperfect information."

Clifford Winston, Brookings Institution, Journal of Economic Literature

About the Author

Archon Fung is Associate Professor of Public Policy at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. His research examines the impacts on public and private governance of civic participation, public deliberation, and transparency. He has authored three books, including Empowered Participation: Reinventing Urban Democracy (2004); three edited collections; and more than fifty articles appearing in journals such as the American Political Science Review, Political Theory, Journal of Political Philosophy, Politics and Society, Governance, and Journal of Policy and Management.

Mary Graham is a Research Fellow at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. Her research focuses on the use of information strategies to foster social change, the politics of public information, innovative approaches to health and safety regulation, and new trends in environmental policy. She is the author of Democracy by Disclosure (2002) and The Morning After Earth Day (1999). Graham has written for the Atlantic Monthly, Financial Times, Environment magazine, Issues in Science and Technology, Brookings Review, and other publications.

David Weil is Professor of Economics and Everett W. Lord Distinguished Faculty Scholar at Boston University School of Management. His research spans the areas of labor market policy, industrial and labor relations, occupational safety and health, and regulatory policy. He has published widely in these areas and has also served as advisor to the U.S. Department of Labor, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and other government agencies. He has written two other books (including the award-winning A Stitch in Time: Lean Retailing and the Transformation of Manufacturing, 1999) and his articles have appeared in numerous journals including the RAND Journal of Economics, Industrial and Labor Relations Review, Harvard Business Review, and the Journal of Policy Analysis and Management.

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