

# The biggest leak: the Panama Papers

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By Hamza Iftikhar

**Luke Harding is an award-winning foreign correspondent with the Guardian. He has reported from Delhi, Berlin and Moscow and has covered wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. His new book *Mafia State: How one reporter became an enemy of the brutal new Russia*, is published by Guardian Books. He worked on the Guardian's collaboration with WikiLeaks and Ed Snowden and most recently the Panama Papers investigation.**

It seemed like no leak could top the WikiLeaks/Manning, or Ed Snowden revelations, but then came the extraordinary [Panama Papers](#): the biggest leak ever featuring 11.5 million documents worth 2.6 terabytes of digital data. Harding, who has been working extensively on the Panama Papers, said that despite the scale of the release, no one yet knows who exactly leaked them. All we know is that he or she goes by the name "John Doe". Although, ultimately, it might be in the interest of both the source and the journalists that s/he remains anonymous.



The leaks, published on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2016 after months of work by hundreds of journalists from dozens of different titles across the globe co-ordinated by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. They showed how certain people were evading taxes in their respective countries by opening an offshore company abroad. Although often not illegal in itself, it often raised questions about the source of the money. He said that because journalists from around the world collaborated in leaking these papers, they were able to focus on different regions, personalities, organizations, and contexts.

Interpreting the leaks was a very hard and long task. Harding said that he and his fellow colleagues at Guardian had to use special security encryptions on their devices in order to avoid hacking of their phones. In his view, there were two main concerns when they were working on the story. One was of the story leaking before the final reveal, as it would've overshadowed all of the journalists' hard work and effort. Second was the bad reception, that is, whether anyone would really care about the revelations?

Luckily that was not the case as the leaks led to protests around the world in places such as Iceland where the Prime Minister had to resign in light of the revelations about his offshore holdings. Harding believes that the revelations were a great journalism moment because despite a busy global news agenda it caught the world's

attention for a week. Moreover the Panama Papers also raised huge awareness about how offshore companies and bank accounts operate and who is associated with them.

The Panama Papers were a major achievement for journalism in my opinion because through careful investigation and contextualisation they were able to show wrongdoing even where the use of off-shore banking itself was not strictly illegal.

*This article by Polis Summer School student Hamza Iftikhar*

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