

Why Vox's Matt Yglesias Should Go Back in Time and Unwrite Recent Column

A member of the press arguing against transparency?

[Matt Taibbi](#), RollingStone.com | Sep 7, 2016



Hillary Clinton in 2007. Credit: Brooks Kraft/Getty

You may never see a worse case of media Stockholm Syndrome than a recent column by Matt Yglesias at Vox, entitled, "[Against Transparency](#)."

Subheaded "Government officials' email should be private, just like their phone calls," the Yglesias piece basically argues that emails shouldn't be covered by laws like the Freedom of Information Act because it's the 2010s, and it's just too darn hard to use the phone if you want to keep something secret while you're on the public payroll.

I'm sure there's no shortage of reporters lining up to take a whack at Yglesias and his treasonous column this week, so I'll keep this short:

1) Government agencies already routinely blow off FOIA requests, sometimes to the point of being cheeky about it. (I have one friend in the business who was sent a single empty fax cover sheet by a particularly obnoxious federal FOIA officer.) Presidents expand the definition of "classified" seemingly every year, and at the state level whole ranges of documents are quietly excluded from FOIA all the time. Ask the families of police brutality victims in New York about section 50-A of the civil rights code, which excludes most police records from public scrutiny. It's an enormous pain in the ass just to get officials to follow the law. And now we have a fellow journalist arguing that we don't need access to emails? Thanks a lot.

2) It's kind of not our job in the media to worry about how officials might conduct politically embarrassing conversations without the press finding out. If that's what Matt stays up at night worrying about, he might need a more news-appropriate hobby, like alcoholism.

3) If George Bush had been the subject of an email scandal, Yglesias obviously wouldn't have written this article, making this a transparently partisan piece and therefore automatically pathetic.

4) I'm a private citizen and I operate on the assumption that anything I write down could end up in a newspaper tomorrow. This is too hard for public officials? Really? They need their emails to be a safe space?

5) Yglesias writes that phone calls are "journalistically indispensable" for extended interviews but that for a "routine query or point of clarification," email is "much, much better." He adds: "Besides which, like any self-respecting person born in the 1980s, I hate phone calls." The journalists I grew up around would cane me half to death and tell me to get a new job if I ever admitted to preferring email (also known as "prepared remarks") over the telephone. It's another subject for another time, I guess.

I get that Yglesias thinks that the Clinton email/Clinton Foundation business isn't a story. But whoever heard of a reporter begging for less access? We're all losing our minds.

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(Highlights, footnotes and minor edits may have been added, but only to add clarification)