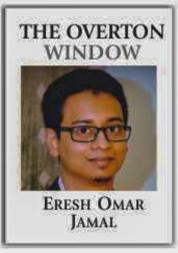


# The biggest underreported stories of 2016



ERESH OMAR JAMAL

**THE OVERTON WINDOW**

**T**HE conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organised habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society...is the true ruling power...we are governed, our minds are moulded, our tastes formed...it is they who pull the wires which control the public mind."

Thus wrote Edward Bernays in his book *Propaganda*, the nephew of Sigmund Freud and the father of modern propaganda, at whose suggestion, the United States' War Department, at the time called the National Military Establishment, was renamed the Department of Defence in 1949.

In the 'age of the corporate media', where 90 percent of the American media is owned by six corporations — General Electric, News Corp., Disney, Viacom, Time Warner and CBS — down from 50 back in 1983, it is not difficult to understand how what the majority of the 'public sees and doesn't see' depends and is controlled by the agenda of a small number of corporations and ultimately, by those who control them. This is especially the case as it is also the 'age of the repeater journalists'. Where you have the majority of mainstream journalists worldwide simply 'repeating the narrative' portrayed in the powerful quarters of the world media, namely the Western (American) media, and the information they receive from the biggest news agencies (Western mostly), instead of doing their job — 'questioning what happened' and 'investigating how' it did.

When such impervious power rests in the hands of a handful of individuals, you will of course have a select number of stories being regularly reported by the media. And some stories, never. So what were some of those stories worthy of being covered in the news that were not?

Well one of them is related to the story perhaps most covered in the world media — the US elections. Or rather one who contested the elections — Hillary Rodham Clinton. Throughout 2016, as she was campaigning to become the next US President, Wikileaks constantly proved to be a thorn in her side. But the revelations made public by Wikileaks have largely gone

unreported in the mainstream press. And one of the main reasons is because they involved the media itself. For example, according to Wikileaks, 65 mainstream reporters were working "hand-in-glove with the Hillary Clinton campaign to rig the US elections" (Wikileaks exposes secret list of 65 mainstream media reporters who are part of the Clinton mafia, *The Duran*, October 28, 2016). And for those who find it hard to believe that she, or the Democratic Party itself, would dare to do something so un-democratic, 20,000 e-mails released by Wikileaks also showed how the Democratic Party worked against Bernie Sanders and "derailed his campaign" (Wikileaks Proves Primary Was Rigged: DNC Undermined Democracy, *The Observer*, July 22, 2016). Despite the near media blackout, the incident was so scandalous that the Democratic National Committee Chairwoman, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, was quietly forced to step down from her position.

The leaks also revealed that CNN's political commentator Donna Brazile had sent Presidential Debate questions to Ms. Clinton prior to the debate which, again, forced CNN to drop her. But, perhaps the most important revelations came during an interview of Julian Assange, the founder of Wikileaks, by John Pilger, when he said that Hillary Clinton had urged John Podesta, the then advisor to Barack Obama, to "bring pressure" on Qatar and Saudi Arabia, "which are providing clandestine financial and logistic support to ISIL [Islamic State, IS, ISIS] and other radical Sunni groups".

He further said, "All serious analysts know, and even the US government has agreed, that some Saudi figures have been supporting ISIS and funding ISIS... But that email says that it is the government of Saudi Arabia, and the government of Qatar that have been funding ISIS." In the same vein, he added that what is most ironic is that some of the biggest donors to the Clinton campaign also happen to be the governments of Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

The next story which has criminally gone unreported also involves the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is the war being waged 'on' Yemen. Journalists Rose Delaney wrote on September 2, 2016, for the *Inter Press Service* that "The sheer gravity of Yemen's conflict should subsequently ignite a deafening global cry for justice, however, as long as the public are 'strategically' kept in the dark, little change can realistically be implemented."

I have already written a piece highlighting

the scale of the violence taking place in Yemen in a previous article titled 'The Tragedy in Yemen' published by *The Daily Star* on August 29, 2016. The article also includes facts and figures which show the massive amounts of weaponry being supplied by the US and the UK to Saudi Arabia that have been used on the Yemeni people. But what I would like to highlight now is the fact that no Saudi airstrikes would be possible without the help of the US and UK as Saudi Arabia has no means to refuel its own warplanes (also US and British manufactured) mid-air. Once you

understand how damaging it would be for the US to have people learn about what is really going on in Yemen, it is not difficult to unravel why the media has so blatantly failed to cover it.

And while underreporting is what is most often used to shape public perception, one which is even more effective, is misdirecting the public through false reporting. And 2016 revealed further, the extent of the misconception created in the public mind by the media, in regards to the Syrian crisis. And this relates to another topic that has

gone underreported — the mountain of evidence that has come out in 2016 showing that the Syrian crisis, rather than being a civil war, is a proxy war being waged against Syria by outside forces. Some of these 'evidences' were presented at the United Nations on December 9 by activist Sara Flounders, lawyer and human rights and peace activist Donna Nassor, Member of the Coordinating Committee for the Hands Off Syria and Organisation Secretary of US Peace Council Dr. Bahman Azad, and independent Canadian journalist Eva Bartlett, 'who have all visited Syria' themselves, including Aleppo, recently.

At the conference, Bartlett, who has visited Syria six times in the past two years and has spoken with Syrians in Arabic, in agreement with the other panellists said, "whatever you hear in the corporate media is exactly the opposite of reality [of what is happening in Syria]... our media and the Gulf media has made Syria out to be sectarian which is something the Syrians themselves have denied... it's a tool to make people confused... believe it's Sunnis against Bashar al-Assad."

When the truth, according to the panellists, was that people in Syria overwhelmingly support the government and the army. And they "are tired of the lies and are very well aware of the lies that our [Western mainstream] media and human rights groups are reporting".

The last, but not least, important topic that has not been reported in the mainstream press has been the collapse of public confidence in the mainstream media. People across the world, as more and more stories are underreported or falsely reported by the media, have shown, more than ever in 2016, that they have lost all faith in the sincerity of the mainstream press to be truthful and unbiased.

Hence, we have had organisations such as Wikileaks filling the vacuuming created by the absence of an unbiased press, attracting more and more people to look towards it for information. And although it is a real shame that these stories and so many others have gone unreported in 2016, what 2016 has taught us is that they can no longer be blacked out completely, largely because of organisations such as Wikileaks and others. And that, dear reader, is the biggest story of 2016, regardless of whether it was reported, or not.

The writer is a member of the Editorial team at *The Daily Star*.



## PROJECT SYNDICATE

# The five lessons of populist rule



SLAWOMIR SIERAKOWSKI

*The political ideal that a populist government strives for is essentially an elected dictatorship. And recent US experience suggests that this can be a sustainable model.*

**J**AROSLAW Kaczyński, Poland's *de facto* leader, has become, next to Donald Trump, an avatar of the populist threat to the Western democratic model. As we await Trump's inauguration as US president on January 20, it is worth pondering the first year of populist rule in Poland. The results have run contrary to expectations.

The conventional view of what awaits the US (and possibly France and the Netherlands) in 2017 is an erratic ruler who enacts contradictory policies that primarily benefit the rich. The poor will lose, because populists have no hope of restoring manufacturing jobs, despite their promises. And massive inflows of migrants and refugees will continue, because populists have no plan to address the problem's root causes. In the end, populist governments, incapable of effective rule, will crumble and their leaders will either face impeachment or fail to win re-election.

Kaczyński faced similar expectations. Liberal Poles thought that he would work for the benefit of the rich, create chaos, and quickly trip himself up — which is exactly what happened in 2005-2007, when Kaczyński's Law and Justice Party (PiS) last governed Poland.

But the liberals were wrong. PiS has transformed itself from an ideological nullity into a party that has managed to introduce shocking changes with record speed and efficiency. Other countries currently anticipating populist rule should take note of its key hallmarks.

*No to neoliberalism.* In 2005-2007, PiS implemented neoliberal economic policies (for example, eliminating the highest income-tax

bracket and the estate tax); this time, it has enacted the largest social transfers in Poland's contemporary history. Parents receive a 500 zloty (\$120) monthly benefit for every child after their first, or for all children in poorer families (the average net monthly income is about 2,900 zloty, though more than two-thirds of Poles earn less). As a result, the poverty rate has declined by 20-40 percent and by 70-90 percent among children.

The list goes on. In 2016, the government introduced free medication for people over the age of 75. The minimum-wage now exceeds what trade unions had sought. The retirement age has been reduced from 67 for both men and women to 60 for women and 65 for men. The government also plans tax relief for low-income taxpayers.

*The restoration of "order".* Independent institutions are the most important enemy of populism. Populist leaders are control freaks. For populists, it is liberal democracy that leads to chaos, which must be "put in order" by a "responsible government." Media pluralism leads to informational chaos. An independent judiciary means legal chaos. Independent public administration creates institutional chaos. And a robust civil society is a recipe for chronic bickering and conflict.

But populists believe that such chaos does not emerge by itself. It is the work of perfidious foreign powers and their domestic puppets. To "make Poland great again," the nation's heroes must defeat its traitors, who are not equal contenders for power. Populist leaders are thus obliged to limit their opponents' rights. Indeed, their political ideal is not order, but rather the subordination of all independent bases of power that could challenge them: courts, media, business, cultural institutions, NGOs, and so forth.

*Electoral dictatorship.* Populists know how to win elections, but their conception of democracy extends no further. On the contrary, populists view minority rights, separation of government powers, and independent media — all staples of liberalism — as an attack on majority rule, and therefore on democracy itself.

The political ideal that a populist government strives for is essentially an elected dictatorship. And recent US experience suggests that this can be a sustainable model. After all, everything depends on how those in power decide to organise elections, which can include redrawing voting districts or altering the rules governing campaign finance or political advertisements. Elections can be falsified imperceptibly.

*Might makes right.* Populists have benefited from disseminating fake news, slandering their opponents, and promising miracles that mainstream media treat as normal campaign claims. But it is a mistake to think that truth is an effective weapon against post-truth. In a post-truth world, it is power, not fact-checking, that is decisive. Whoever is most ruthless and has the fewest scruples wins.

Populists are both unseemly and ascendant. Trump's supporters, for example, have come to view tawdriness as evidence of credibility, whereas comity, truth, and reason are evidence of elitism. If people are worse off under liberal democracy, so much the worse for liberal democracy.

Those who would resist populism must come to terms with the fact that truth is not enough. They must also display determination and ruthlessness, though without becoming the mirror image of their opponents.

The current situation in Poland can serve as a useful example. After a year of retreating, the two largest opposition parties have begun to occupy

the Sejm (Poland's parliament) to protest an illegal vote on the state budget. They are laying a trap for Kaczyński's government: back down or resort to violence. Either way, he loses.

*Nationalism is not dead.* Unfortunately, what won't lose, in Poland and elsewhere, is nationalism — the only ideology that has survived in the post-ideological era. By appealing to nationalist sentiment, populists have gained support everywhere, regardless of the economic system or situation, because it is being fueled externally, namely by the influx of migrants and refugees.

Mainstream politicians, especially on the left, currently have no effective message on the issue. Opposing migration contradicts their ideals, while supporting it means electoral defeat.

But the choice should be clear. Either populism's opponents drastically change their rhetoric regarding migrants and refugees, or the populists will continue to rule. Migrants and refugees lose in either scenario, but in the second, so does liberal democracy. Such calculations are ugly — and, yes, corrosive of liberal values — but the populists, as we have seen, are capable of far nastier tradeoffs.

After a year of populism in Poland, Kaczyński has succeeded in establishing control over two issues near and dear to voters: social transfers and immigration. As long as he controls these two bastions of voter sentiment, he is safe. Those who seek to oppose Trump — or France's Marine Le Pen in April's presidential election — can draw their own conclusions from that fact.

The writer is founder of the Krytyka Polityczna movement. He is also Director of the Institute for Advanced Study in Warsaw.

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(Exclusive to *The Daily Star*)

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**SUSAN SONTAG**  
American writer, filmmaker, teacher and political activist

*To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- 1 Make less threatening
- 7 Join the game
- 11 Like some skiing
- 12 Went up
- 13 Christmas song
- 15 Rx amounts
- 16 Mayor's domain
- 18 Betting group
- 21 Jupiter's wife
- 22 Crèche part
- 24 "The Simpsons" clerk
- 25 Coolidge nickname
- 26 Grazing spot
- 27 Accident
- 29 Time in office
- 30 Donner and Blitzen
- 31 Fishing poles
- 32 Generous one
- 34 Christmas song
- 40 War of 1812 port
- 41 Shredded
- 42 Lights-out tune
- 43 Old-fogyish

**DOWN**

- 1 "—Kapital"
- 2 Quarter-back Manning
- 3 PFC's superior
- 4 Deceived
- 5 Irritate
- 6 Moistens
- 7 Con's place
- 8 Fireplace item
- 9 Fireplace waste
- 10 So far
- 14 Sherpa's home
- 16 One of Santa's team
- 17 Busy
- 19 Looked at lustily
- 20 Lusty looks
- 21 Toast spread
- 22 Atlas page
- 23 Ewe's mate
- 25 Christmas song
- 28 Yard surroundings
- 29 Man with a cape
- 31 Man of steel
- 33 Brooklyn team
- 34 Airport sight
- 35 Nest-egg account
- 36 Quick taste
- 37 Set the pace
- 38 Tote
- 39 Mole, for one

**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

P	E	A	C	E	A	N	G	E	L
O	R	G	A	N	L	A	N	G	E
W	R	E	N	S	B	Y	R	O	N
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C	E	D	A	R	A	G	O	R	A
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G	I	G	A	P	O	P			
A	D	O	R	N	A	L	I	C	E
R	E	L	I	C	P	U	R	S	E
B	A	D	G	E	E	M	A	I	L