

2019 Was the Year the Truth No Longer Mattered

By [Johanna Ross](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

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New Year happens to be one of these rare moments in the news business when we pause to reflect on the greater context of the endless stories spouted out on a daily basis by an ever-growing variety of media platforms. And 2019 was one year which deserves more than a moment's reflection. For it was an iconic year that saw more than ever the label 'post-truth era' used to describe the time in which we are living.

Nothing signified this more than the arrest of former Wikileaks editor Julian Assange, a man incarcerated for years inside the Ecuadorian embassy – his only crime to have published footage and documents exposing unlawful killings and torture committed by the US military. The collusion between the governments of Ecuador, the UK, and the US in orchestrating his illegal arrest – given his right to Asylum – really shines light on the gaping holes in western democracy. When journalism is attacked in this way, we should all be concerned. As we speak, Assange is slowly dying in Britain's most secure prison, Belmarsh, along with some of the country's most notorious criminals. His treatment has been condemned by the UN as his basic human rights are continually being violated. This, I repeat, a man, whose only crime was to expose the crimes of others. But where are the mainstream journalists leaping to his defence?

2019 had started with another story which received little or no coverage in the mainstream press however; that of the UK's [Integrity Initiative](#) scheme. This story clearly demonstrated the restrictions posed on journalists working in the UK at present, with the revelation that the British government was funding a covert propaganda campaign against Russia, involving journalists and academics across the globe. It highlighted that many of the anti-Russian articles and media appearances in the mainstream media were in fact ordered and paid for, in part, by the UK Foreign Office. The exposure of the leaked documents detailing this initiative ruffled more than a few establishment feathers, to the extent that my photograph, along with my colleagues' was printed in [The Times](#) as part of a targeted smear story aimed at counteracting what was none other than basic fact. Once again, journalists had crossed the line in terms of revealing the truth about what the powers that be, are up to.

The mainstream media plays a fundamental role in this era of post-truth, as was never more apparent in the way it aided and abetted the government this year in its strategy to undermine the opposition led by Jeremy Corbyn prior to the election. In much the same way as the [Zinoviev](#) letter was used to prevent a socialist government from coming to power in 1924, the media has led a concerted campaign to accuse the Labour leader and his party of anti-semitism, incredibly without providing a shred of evidence. But the hammering home of the message that Corbyn was anti-semitic paid off for his opponents; it coloured the December election campaign and was one of the main questions put to Labour MPs in countless negative interviews. Many prominent Jews spoke out against Labour's unfair

treatment, as did the Jewish Voice for Labour movement. Sadly, their pleas fell on deaf ears. Not surprising, according to Professor David Miller at the University of Bristol, whom I [interviewed](#) back in July 2019 and for whom this catalogue of smears against Corbyn was clear evidence of establishment bias.

As a result the effective nature of the campaign, Corbyn's radical policies to improve people's lives, didn't get a look in. And despite the fact that Boris Johnson's government was also facing allegations of Islamophobia, this received no real traction in the press. But Johnson, and his team, led by close advisor Dominic Cummings, know exactly how to play the media. Cummings, one of the key individuals behind Brexit, led a successful campaign for Britain to leave the EU back in 2016. Recently he helped Johnson to win the December general election also, with his catchy 'Get Brexit Done' slogan. But such victories have not been without their fair share of lies. Award-winning journalist Peter Osborne has researched the nature of the relationship between No.10 and the media since Johnson came to power, accusing British journalists of becoming part of the Prime Minister's '[fake news machine](#)'. He has charged the mainstream media, from The Times to the BBC, of 'peddling Downing Street's lies and smears' and even runs a [website](#) entitled 'The lies, falsehoods and misrepresentations of the Boris Johnson government'. And Osborne himself is not even a socialist. He just believes in the truth.

2019 showed that never before has the survival of independent media been so important. If we have no objective media, then the truth itself is at stake.

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