

The Liar-in-Chief Leads the “Post-Truth” Era

Nick Gier

*If Bush and Rove constructed a fantasy world with a clear internal logic,
Trump has built something more like an endless bad dream.*

—Ned Resnikoff, ThinkProgress.org

We’re not going to let our campaign be dictated by fact-checkers.

—Mitt Romney

*We are rapidly becoming a people that totalitarian
monsters could only drool about in their dreams.*

—Robert Kreitner, *The Nation*

Lying is second nature to Trump.

—Tony Schwartz, ghostwriter of *The Art of the Deal*

In the summer of 2002 former President Bush’s adviser Karl Rove declared: “We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality.” Trump is so clueless and dishonest that he could not be possibly as candid as Rove, but with his brazen disregard for truth he is doing exactly the same thing.

Trump’s Big Lie is Unprecedented

Bush’s Big Lie on Iraq had a certain internal logic, but Trump’s Big Lie about Everything is filled with contradictions. For example, he does not seem to realize that his charge of wide-spread voter fraud undermines both his and Hillary’s votes. As Ned Resnikoff says: “Trump tells lies that are seemingly random, frequently inconsistent, and often plainly ridiculous.” What is even worse is his stubborn refusal to accept any corrections to what he gets wrong.

The volume of Trump’s untruths is incredible and unprecedented in American politics. A fact checker for the *Huffington Post* counted 71 falsehoods and misstatements in a one-hour speech. Paul Krugman explains that those who use the “big lie” technique make their falsehoods so huge, so egregious, that they would be widely accepted because nobody would believe they were lying on that grand a scale. And the technique has worked well for despots and would-be despots ever since.”

I take small comfort in the fact that only 46.1 percent of those voting went for, or excused, Trump’s lies, while 48.2 percent sided with the only qualified candidate with a high record of truth telling. That is a record 2.9 million vote lead. Gore beat Bush by 500,000 some votes.

Reagan Confessed on Iran-Contra, but Trump Never Backs Down

More dense than dishonest, President Ronald Reagan probably did not realize he was making his own reality with over 300 falsehoods, distortions, and misinformation—the worst and most dangerous being that the Soviet led in the arms race. Many of these would now count as “Pants on Fire” for the fact checkers at Politifact. See www.NickGier.com/GOPReignError.pdf.

When Reagan was caught deceiving the American public on the Iran-Contra affair, which led to a record number of indictments for any post-war administration, he had enough integrity to admit his mistake. His confession was quite remarkable: “My heart and my best intentions me still tell me that’s true”—that the U. S. did not trade arms for the Iranian hostages—“but the facts and evidence tell me it is not.”

I cannot imagine Trump ever being as honest as Reagan, the hero of his political party. Feeling that something is true, rather than verifying with evidence, is what characterizes the Post-Truth Era.

Comedian Stephen Colbert’s new word “truthiness” is already at dictionary.com: “the quality of seeming to be true according to one’s intuition, opinion, or perception without regard to logic or factual evidence.” Reagan’s “my heart tells me it’s true” is a perfect example of truthiness.

GOP Candidates 52% True; Hillary 75%; Trump 30%

The GOP’s record of untruths was clearly evident in the 2016 campaign. On average the GOP candidates scored, according to Politifact, 52 percent true, mostly true, and half true. Trump, Cruz, and Carson had an average of 25 percent in the truth categories. (Of all his statements checked by Politifact, Ben Carson did not speak a single truth.) Bernie’s average was 70 percent in the truth categories, and Hillary’s has now risen to 75 percent. In stark contrast Trump is lying to us 70 percent of the time.

I would invite anyone to read the in-depth analyses that are the basis for Politifact’s judgments. I will be reading along and say to myself: “This is obviously false” or “This is obviously true.” In all cases, however, caution is Politifact’s watchword and many of their conclusions are “mostly true,” “half true,” or “mostly false.” The investigators reserve “Pants on Fire” for the most egregious falsehoods.

Pants on Fire: Trump, 62; Romney, 19; Obama, 9; Hillary, 7

Trump has now accumulated 62 of these whoppers, over three times as many as Mitt Romney’s 19 in the 2012 campaign. Obama has a total of 9 Pants on Fire, 2 percent of all statements checked. Trump’s worst lies account for 18 percent of all his pronouncements. Out of 342 statements checked, there are only 14 of them that are true.

In stark contrast Hillary's pant suits were aflame only 2 percent of the time for a total of 7. Her most egregious falsehood was that there was no classified information in her emails. Her inability to extricate herself from that mess, plus FBI Director Comey's unfortunate pre-election announcement of yet more emails, took attention away from Trump's worst lies and liabilities.

Trump's Lies: A List of the Worst

Here is a select list of Trump's falsehoods. I challenge anyone to argue that Trump's many lies are less harmful than Hillary's few.

- Obama was not born in the United States. Trump deflected responsibility for this dastard falsehood by saying Hillary's advisers were the first to investigate this issue. Politifact found this charge to be false.
- "Crime statistics show blacks kill 81 percent of white homicide victims." This widely distributed falsehood drove Dylan Roof to murder nine black church members.
- "I watched in Jersey City where thousands and thousands of people were cheering" as the World Trade Center collapsed. In some versions of this American Muslims are implicated. Trump made fun of the differently abled reporter who found no evidence for this claim.
- "The Mexican government sends the bad ones over." This is not only a libelous statement, but also ignores the fact is that more Mexicans are now going back than coming.
- "The last quarter, it was just announced, our gross domestic product was below zero." Under Obama it has never been zero, and in the third quarter of 2016 it was 3.5 percent.
- "Right now, we're the highest taxed country in the world." In the industrialized world we are actually fourth from the bottom.
- Trump claims that he opposed the Iraq War, even though in a 2002 Howard Stern interview he said that he supported it. When confronted with that fact in the third debate, he refused to accept it.
- Trump's charge that Obama and Hillary were co-founders of ISIS is not only false but utterly ridiculous. In an interview with Trump supporter Hugh Hewitt, he refused to use less complicit language, because he said that his supporters are "really liking" this concoction. This proves that Trump clearly intends to deceive, something that the editors of the *Wall Street Journal* want to justify printing that Trump actually lies.
- Just for the record, the founder of Al Qaida in Iraq, from which ISIS sprang, was Abu Musab al Zarqawi, whom the CIA located in a small base near the Iranian border in 2003. The "Great Decider" Bush refused to send in commandos to take him out.
- Trump's claim that Ted Cruz's father was with Lee Harvey Oswald before he shot President Kennedy is of course viciously false.

- “Our African-American communities are absolutely in the worst shape they've ever been in before.” This is not only false but a gross insult to millions of African-Americans who have made dramatic gains in college enrollment and steady increases in home ownership and income.
- “Inner city crime is reaching record levels.” Except for some outliers such as Chicago, the rates have been in decline for 25 years.
- Trump’s charge that \$6 billion went missing at the State Department while Hillary was Secretary of State is a total fabrication.

As Trump Leads the Post-Truth Era, Some Conservatives Worry

The editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary* chose “post-truth” as the Word of the Year 2016. Trust in experts and commitment to widely accepted facts have been waning for years. What we have now is Donald Trump, who, “like any autocrat,” according to the *New York Times*, “wins his followers’ blind trust by lying so often and so brazenly that millions of people give up on trying to distinguish truth from falsehood.”

In the 2004 election war hero John Kerry was “swift boated” by Bush supporters so successfully that Bush’s failure to show up for national guard duty in Alabama was ignored. In the same way, the worst liar in American politics has succeeded in labeling Hillary a liar, even though Trump’s falsehoods outpace hers by 45 percent.

Some conservatives are very worried. Talk show host Charlie Sykes admits that “we’ve basically eliminated any of the referees, the gatekeepers. There is nobody you can go to and say: ‘Look, here are the facts.’ There’s got be a reckoning on all this.”

Trump Refuses to Follow the Experts on Russian Hacking

Candidate Trump’s disregard for the truth was bad enough for the moral fabric of our country, but as president his rejection of economic and intelligence data will be disastrous. Trump received a two-hour briefing on Russian hacking (it was not delayed as he falsely claimed and Obama did indeed mention it before election), and afterwards he refused accept the conclusions, which have been accepted by the most skeptical cyber security experts.

Currently, however, Trump is relying on Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, who rejects the Russian hacking and whom GOP House Speaker calls “a sycophant for Russia.” (Previously, Trump’s called for Assange’s execution, but now he is to be trusted.) GOP Senate leaders, led by John McCain, are going ahead with their investigation. GOP Senator Lindsay Graham pleaded with Trump: “When you listen to these people you can be skeptical. But understand they are the best among us. And they are trying to protect us.”

Will Trump Install his own “Team B” for Intelligence?

I also hope that Trump does not hear about “Team B,” a group of hardline defense professionals who were put in place by then CIA Director George H. W. Bush in the 1977. After Ronald Reagan, charging that Ford was soft on the Soviets, almost defeated him the New Hampshire primary, Ford allowed Team B to counter the CIA’s more accurate reports with their own questionable assessments. President Reagan used Team B’s exaggerations and falsehoods to add \$1 trillion dollars to the defense budget, which, along with excessive tax cuts, led to tripling of the national debt.

GOP Leaders Will Honor Economic Data, but will Trump?

During the campaign Trump said that the unemployment rate was actually 42 percent. Will he use that bogus figure as a benchmark when he boasts about his own administration’s success? Or will he be forced to use the government figure of 4.6 percent and reveal the 42 percent as an outrageous lie?

At their peril—international agencies blacklist countries that cheat on their data—GOP leaders will buck the experts at the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office.

Trump’s lies will not stand within these tried and true parameters, unless he tries to take all power unto himself. If he does, I predict that he will be impeached.

Nick Gier of Moscow taught philosophy at the University of Idaho for 31 years. He is also President of the Idaho Federation of Teachers, AFT/AFL-CIO. Read all of his columns on the 2016 election at www.NickGier.com/Election2016.pdf.