

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY JAMES BOVARD

14.06.2024

Politicians Will Always Be Shameless Liars



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

Former president Donald Trump was recently convicted by a New York jury after prosecutors claimed he was guilty of “hoodwinking” voters in the 2016 election by paying to cover up his boinking a beefy porn star. Manhattan prosecutor Alvin Bragg proclaimed that Trump was guilty of taking steps with “the end of keeping information away from the electorate.”

Cue the casino scene from the movie Casablanca, with the French officer lamenting that he was “shocked, shocked” to find gambling on the premises.

Lying is practically the job description for politicians. Economist John Burnheim, in his 1985 book *Is Democracy Possible?*, observed of electoral campaigns: “Overwhelming pressures to lie, to pretend, to conceal, to denigrate or sanctify are always present when the object to be

sold is intangible and its properties unverifiable until long after the time when the decision to buy can be reversed.”

A successful politician is often merely someone who bamboozled more voters than the other liar running for office. Dishonesty is the distinguishing trait of the political class. Thomas Jefferson observed in 1799, “Whenever a man casts a longing eye on offices, a rottenness begins in his conduct.” One carpetbagger Reconstruction-era Louisiana governor declared, “I don’t pretend to be honest. I only pretend to be as honest as anybody in politics.”

A lie that is accepted by a sufficient number of ignorant voters becomes a political truth. Legitimacy in contemporary democracy often consists merely of lying to get a license to steal. Candidates have almost unlimited prerogative to deceive the voters as long as they do not directly use force or violence during election campaigns. And once they capture office, they can use government power against those they deceived.

Trump is being legally hounded eight years after a presidential campaign that was a bipartisan farce. Americans recognized they had a choice of scoundrels. A September 2016 Gallup poll found that only 33% of voters believed Hillary Clinton was honest and trustworthy, and only 35% trusted Trump. Gallup noted, “Americans rate the two candidates lowest on honesty.” The combined chicanery of Clinton and Trump made “post-truth” the Oxford English Dictionary’s 2016 word of the year. But according to prosecutor Bragg, Trump’s alleged payoff to Stormy Daniels was a greater sin against democracy than Hillary Clinton deleting 30,000 emails from her time as secretary of state that a congressional committee subpoenaed in 2015 and her lying to FBI agents in July 2016.

America is increasingly a “Garbage In, Garbage Out” democracy. Politicians dupe citizens and then invoke deluded votes to sanctify and stretch their power. Presidents and members of Congress take oaths to uphold and defend the Constitution. But, as former U.S. senator Bob Kerrey explained in 2013, “The problem is, the second your hand comes off the Bible, you become an asshole.”

The era of nearly boundless cynicism did not begin with Trump’s ascension to the Oval Office. A 1996 *Washington Post* poll found that 97 percent of people interviewed trusted their spouses, 87 percent trusted teachers, 71 percent trusted the “average person,” but only 14 percent trusted politicians. A 1994 poll found that only 3 percent of those surveyed had a “high” opinion of politicians. Burns Roper, the director of the Roper poll, observed, “Those in government-related occupations are at the very bottom of the list of occupational groups thought well of.” A 1995 survey by the *Washington Post*, Harvard, and the Kaiser Foundation found that 89 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that “politicians

tell voters what they want to hear, not what they will actually try to do if elected”; only 10 percent disagreed.

Public opinion polls on trusting politicians reveal perverse preferences. A 1997 CNN–USA TODAY–Gallup poll asked, “Is Clinton honest and trustworthy?”; 44 percent of respondents said yes and 51 percent said no. Yet, when asked, “Is Clinton honest/trustworthy enough to be president?” 55 percent said yes and 41 percent said no. Apparently, the more power a person acquires, the more irrelevant his character becomes. Someone who is not scrupulous enough to sell used cars somehow becomes sufficiently honest to commence wars. It is almost as if people presume a politician’s power magically compensates for his moral depravity.

The same subversive assumptions rescued George W. Bush. A Time magazine poll in late September 2004 found that only 37 percent of registered voters believed that Bush had been “truthful in describing the situation” in Iraq, while 55 percent said the “situation is worse than Bush has reported.” Ironically, exit polls on Election Day showed that “Voters who cited honesty as the most important quality in a candidate broke 2 to 1 in Mr. Bush’s favor.” (Both Bush and Democratic candidate John Kerry flogged the truth.) In 2004, many voters apparently concluded that Bush was trustworthy despite his false statements and misrepresentations on Iraq. The vast extent of Bush’s Iraq lies was covered up until after his re-election.

While New York prosecutors are legally impaling Trump for lies tied to the 2016 election, President Biden has faced to no legal consequences for an endless torrent of falsehoods. From fabrications on foreign conflicts, to his denials of Biden family kickbacks from foreign governments, to the January 6th Capitol clash, to those Pfizer vaccines that would magically keep everyone safe from Covid, Biden has uncorked one howler after another. But as long as he occupies the Oval Office, he enjoys sovereign immunity from the truth.

Lies are political weapons of mass destruction, obliterating all limits on government power. Lies subvert democracy by crippling citizens’ ability to rein in government. Citizens are left clueless about perils until it is too late for the nation to pull back. Political lies are far more dangerous than Leviathan lackey intellectuals admit. Big government requires Big Lies—and not just about wars but across the board. The more powerful government becomes, the more abuses it commits and the more lies it must tell. Unfortunately, Americans have no legal way to commandeer government files until long after most power grabs are consummated.

The pervasiveness of political lies goes to the heart of whether Leviathan can be reconciled with democracy. How much can the people be deceived and still purportedly be self-

governing? Philosopher Hannah Arendt wrote of the “most essential political freedom, the right to unmanipulated factual information without which all freedom of opinion becomes a cruel hoax.” But any such right has become practically extinct since her time. Even when much of the public becomes convinced that the government has lied, there is still little or no pressure on Congress or from Congress to force executive agencies to disclose facts.

When people blindly trust politicians, the biggest liars win. There is no reason to expect politicians to be more honest in the future than they were in the past. Biden’s lies on Ukraine are eerily similar to the Obama administration’s lies on Libya, which resembled the Bush team’s lies on Iraq and the Clinton administration’s lies on Kosovo. It is folly to trust whoever wins the next presidential election to morally redeem the U.S. government.

Any fantasy about a pending age of honest politicians is a bigger delusion than anything Trump or Biden are peddling. America is increasingly a “Garbage In, Garbage Out” democracy. Politicians dupe citizens and then invoke deluded votes to sanctify and stretch their power. The easiest way to stack the deck in favor of honesty is to reduce the number of cards politicians can hold. The smaller the government, the fewer dead bodies it will likely need to hide.

Deceiving voters is as much a violation of their rights as barring them from the polling booth. Only if we assume that people consent to being lied to can pervasive political lies be reconciled with democracy. And if people consent to being deceived, elections become little more than hospital patients choosing who will inject their next sedatives.

An earlier version of this piece appeared at the Libertarian Institute.

*James Bovard is the author of *Attention Deficit Democracy*, *The Bush Betrayal*, and *Terrorism and Tyranny*. His latest book is *Last Rights: the Death of American Liberty*. Bovard is on the USA Today Board of Contributors. He is on Twitter at @jimbovard. His website is at www.jimbovard.com*

JUNE 13, 2024