

## The Power of Deception Just Won

*What really just happened? Why, at the root cause level, did Trump win? The article casts an analytical eye at the most astounding political event of our time and concludes that the root cause is low truth literacy. The average vote cannot tell fact from fiction. This explains why conventional solutions, like fact-checking and pointing out the truth, have little effect. Three sample solutions for resolving the root cause are briefly presented, including Politician Truth Ratings, which takes fact-checking to the next level.*

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People are in shock. Suddenly the very survival of democracy is at stake. If candidates like Donald Trump can win in the country that gave the world its first version of modern democracy, then we can have little rational hope that *the general welfare of the people and the rights of man* will prevail, as enshrined in the United States and French constitutions of 1788 and 1789.

What just really happened? And what can we do about it? We cannot un-elect Trump. But we can prevent more Trumps. I'd like to explain how this is possible, based on analysis of the political system. As a starting point let's begin with what Paul Krugman had to say in *The New York Times* three days after the election: (Italics added)

### Thoughts for the Horrified – November 11, 2016

“So what do we do now? By ‘we’ I mean all those left, center and even right who saw Donald Trump as the worst man ever to run for president and assumed that a strong majority of our fellow citizens would agree. ...

“First of all, remember that elections determine who gets the power, not who offers *the truth*. The Trump campaign was *unprecedented in its dishonesty*; the fact that *the lies didn't exact a political price*, that they even resonated with a large bloc of voters, doesn't make them any less false. No, our inner cities aren't war zones with record crime. No, we aren't the highest-taxed nation in the world. No, climate change isn't a hoax promoted by the Chinese.

“So if you're tempted to concede that the alt-right's vision of the world might have some *truth* to it, don't. *Lies are lies*, no matter how much power backs them up.

“And once we're talking about *intellectual honesty*, everyone needs to face up to the unpleasant reality that *a Trump administration will do immense damage to America and the world.*”

Krugman displays his own intellectual honesty when he closes the article with these thoughts:

*“Maybe the historic channels of reform — speech and writing that changes minds, political activism that eventually changes who has power — are no longer effective. Maybe America isn’t special, it’s just another republic that had its day, but is in the process of devolving into a corrupt nation ruled by strongmen.*

*“But I’m not ready to accept that this is inevitable — because accepting it as inevitable would become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The road back to what America should be is going to be longer and harder than any of us expected, and we might not make it. But we have to try.”*

Krugman has got it right. We cannot lapse into wringing our hands and denouncing the result. There must be something we can constructively do to right this terrible wrong and prevent it from ever happening again. But what?

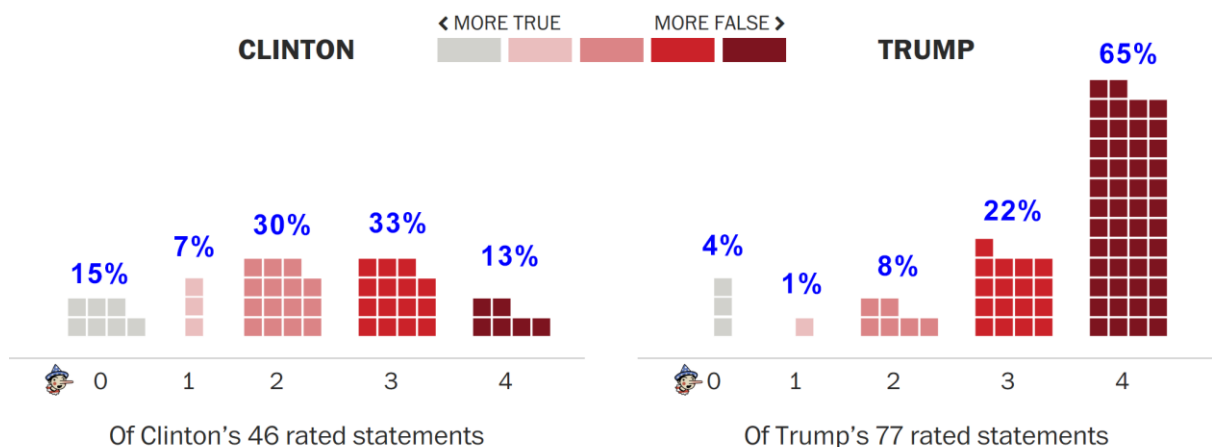
The road back begins with “unprecedented in its dishonesty” and “the lies didn’t exact a political price.” It was not Trump who won. It was deception that won. The winner could have been any similar candidate who based his appeal on dishonesty and lies. That is was not Trump but deception that won tells us where to begin the analysis that will lead to the road back.

The power of deception just won. Krugman knows it. So does nearly everyone that could listen to the words of Trump in an objective fact based manner. Some are doing more than listening. They are analyzing Trump’s truthfulness.

For example [The Washington Post](#), as shown below, found that Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump followed strikingly different campaign strategies. Clinton is the Champion of the Truth, while Trump is the Master of Deception. The truth data shows that Clinton’s

### How the candidates’ fact check rankings break down

Source: *The Washington Post*, October 4, 2016. Percents added by Thwink.org.



statements follow a normal distribution. Their truth clusters slightly to the right of the middle with smaller tails below and above. Most of her statements had truth ratings of 2 or 3. In sharp contrast, Trump's statements follow an abnormal distribution. 65% received 4 Pinocchios, the highest possible rating for falsehood. In plain English, 65% of Trump's statements were blatant lies. Trump's core strategy is deception, while Clinton's is the truth about what's best for the common good.

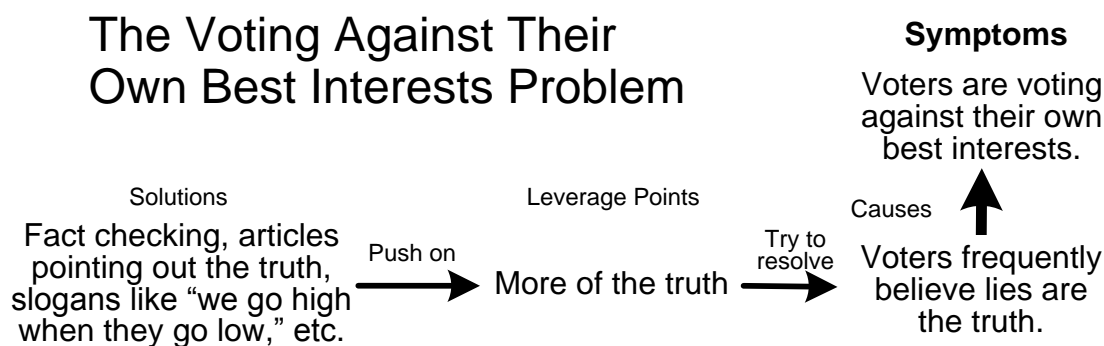
The reason "historic channels of reform... are no longer effective" is that past reform efforts did nothing to resolve the root cause of why political deception works. It works so well for Trump that "the lies didn't exact a political price." But if future reform aims at resolving the root cause then it will work, because all problems arise from their root causes.

That short but powerful phrase, *all problems arise from their root causes*, contains the seeds of how we can begin a successful journey on the road back. Our journey will not be easy, because it's a road that's never been traveled before. The current mechanisms of democracy contain nothing to prevent lies from electing Trumps. Following Krugman, I too feel that "The road back to what America should be is going to be longer and harder than any of us expected, and we might not make it. But we have to try." For doing that I would recommend the most powerful tool known for solving difficult problems of any kind: root cause analysis.

**Root cause analysis** is the process of finding and resolving the root causes of a problem. A **root cause** is the deepest cause in a causal chain that can be resolved. In this short article I can only briefly explain how root cause analysis can be used to prevent more Trumps. Root cause analysis works by starting with a problem's symptoms. You then keep asking WHY until you arrive at the root cause(s).

Krugman wrote that "a Trump administration will do immense damage to America and the world." In other words, *voters are voting against their own best interests*. That behavior describes the symptoms of the problem.

Now we ask our first WHY question. WHY are voters voting against their own best interests? As Krugman and many other have noted, it's because lies work. In other words, *voters frequently believe lies are the truth*. That is the cause of the symptoms.



If that's the cause, what is the cure? Conventional wisdom says the cure is *more of the truth*. Lies can be corrected by somehow spreading more of the truth, which will cause voters to realize they've been lied to, wise up, and not believe those lies anymore. Solutions for spreading more of the truth include *fact-checking*, *articles pointing out the truth*, *slogans like "we go high when they go low," etc.* The analysis is diagrammed below.

However, we know these solutions are not working. Trump won anyhow. The fact checkers in particular were out in force. But that didn't matter. Dara Lind, writing for *Vox*, describes the system's behavior eleven days before the election:

**Donald Trump Lies. All the Time.** *And a stunning number of people don't seem to care.* – September 27, 2016

"It takes a certain kind of stubbornness to lie about things that are easy to verify.

"Donald Trump does it all the time. ...

"He doesn't just stretch the truth in the way most politicians do: selectively citing facts that make them look good, deliberately omitting ones that make them look bad, overstating or understating the probable impact of the campaign promises they make.

"No, he just says things that aren't true. And he knows it. Sometimes it's something big — routinely, on the campaign trail, he tells voters that he's going to lower everyone's taxes while Hillary Clinton will raise them. ...

"Even though **fact-checkers** deploy their forces on Trump regularly, he never apologizes or retracts. Calling out his lies doesn't make his supporters any less loyal to him.

"His nonchalant dishonesty is horrifying. The fact that much of the American public simply doesn't appear to care about his dishonesty — or that they don't consider it a deal breaker for a potential president of the United States to tell several lies even on his most honest days — is more so."

The pattern is clear. Lies work for Trump. Fact-checking does nothing to stop him. Later, after a long review of Trump's lies, Lind reaches an insightful conclusion:

"The lies keep coming. And we have no idea what to do about it. And nothing we've tried so far has worked."

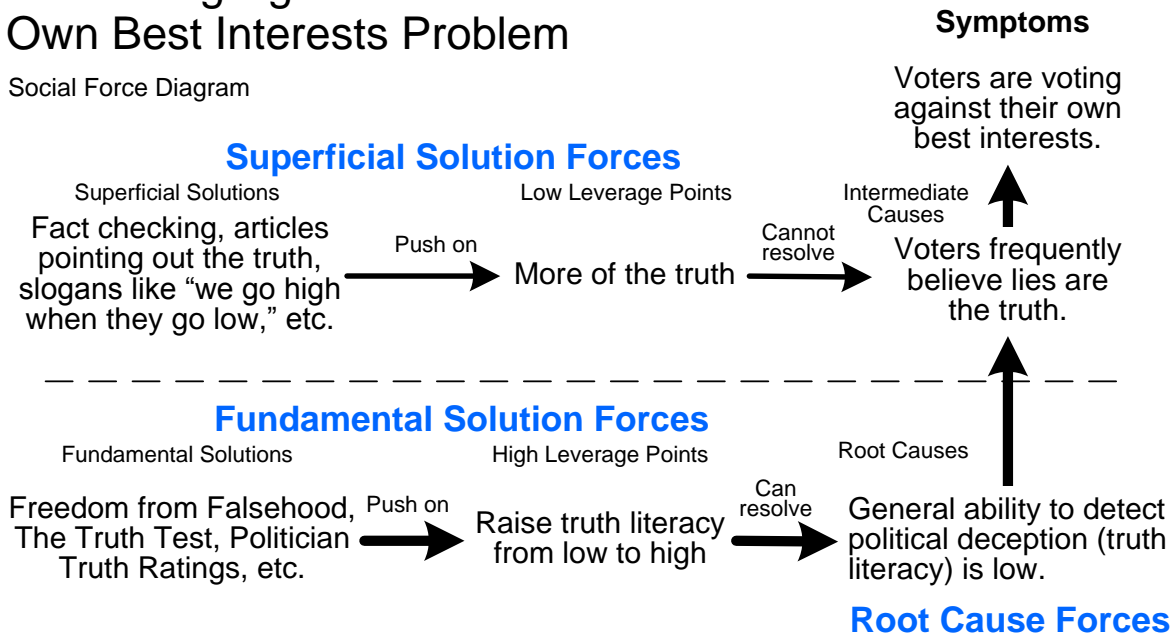
So what's the matter with popular solutions like fact-checking? Root cause analysis tells us that if a set of solutions has been tried and fails repeatedly, then the reason must be because the solutions do nothing to resolve the root cause of the problem. There can be no other possible reason. As Sherlock Holmes so eloquently noted, "Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth."

It is impossible for *voters frequently believe lies are the truth* to be the root cause, because if it was, popular solutions would be working. We must therefore investigate deeper and ask our second WHY question. WHY do voters frequently believe lies are the truth?

That's a difficult question to answer. I worked on it for seven years as part of research into root cause analysis of the global environmental sustainability problem. A portion of this analysis led to what I feel is a reasonable answer, as diagrammed below.

## The Voting Against Their Own Best Interests Problem

Social Force Diagram



Social systems are no different from physical systems. Both are ruled by their fundamental forces. Physical system behavior is determined by forces like gravity and momentum. Social system behavior is determined by the fundamental forces that make up the foundation of that system.

Here we are concerned with a tiny piece of the political system, *The Voting Against Their Own Best Interests Problem*. Those promoting popular solutions like fact-checking believe the root cause force is *voters frequently believe lies are the truth*. But this belief is flawed because that's not the root cause of problem symptoms. It is the intermediate cause.

Asking "WHY do voters frequently believe lies are the truth?" reveals the fundamental layer of the problem, below the dashed line. This layer is hard to see without root cause analysis. The root cause is that *general ability to detect political deception (truth literacy) is low*. We know this must be so because if truth literacy was high, lies would not work and Trump would not be the next President of the United States.

**Truth literacy** is the ability to tell truth from deception. Fact-checking does nothing to raise truth literacy. Instead, it attempts to correct lies *after they have infected a person's mind*. That's like trying to cure a person's cancer or diabetes after it has reached a chronic

stage. The cure will work on a small percentage of cases if the disease is not advanced. But it fails completely on advanced cases. As Lind reported, “Even though fact-checkers deploy their forces on Trump regularly, he never apologizes or retracts. Calling out his lies doesn’t make his supporters any less loyal to him.” Trump’s supporters are so infected with his ideological web of lies that they are immune to more of the truth solutions, like fact-checking and pointing out the truth articles. Furthermore, fact checks do not reach nearly the number of people that lies do. Fact checks are a drop in an ocean of lies.

If the root cause is low truth literacy, then the high leverage point is obvious. We must *raise truth literacy from low to high*. In a democracy, truth literacy is just as important as reading literacy because if people cannot “read” the truth of what politicians say then they are blind to the power of deception, and deception will win most of the time.

Truth literacy can be raised with solution elements like *Freedom from Falsehood*, the *Truth Test*, *Politician Truth Ratings*, etc. Once truth literacy becomes widespread, a population is inoculated against the manipulative power of deception and false ideologies like Trumpism, McCarthyism, racism, and fascism cannot take hold and spread.

Briefly, **Freedom from Falsehood** gives every citizen the right to freedom from falsehood from sources they must be able to trust, like politicians. Freedom from falsehood must become a fundamental right of man if democracy is to work as intended. **The Truth Test** is a simple procedure that allows citizens to tell truth from deception in a matter of seconds, in most of the cases they are likely to encounter. The test can be taught in grade school and be learned and practiced by all.

**Politician Truth Ratings** would provide an accurate measure of the average truth of what a particular politician says. Like credit ratings or product ratings, Politician Truth Ratings would allow people to more correctly make crucial everyday decisions. The ratings would be created by independent trusted organizations. Politician Truth Ratings are already partially implemented because they depend on fact-checking. But people need a truth rating for politicians, not a truth rating for individual statements. Politician Truth Ratings takes fact-checking to the next level by checking a statistically valid random sample of statements for a politician. The average is the politician’s truth rating.

Imagine how the election would have turned out if average truth literacy was high instead of low. Paul Krugman would have written a very different article. Instead of *Thoughts for the Horrified* he might have written *Thoughts on Hillary’s First One Hundred Days*. And Dara Lind, instead of penning a piece on *Donald Trump Lies. All the Time*, might have turned her eye to one on *We Are Stronger Together. All the Time*.

As I see it, the next step in the long evolution of modern democracy begins with a single question: What is the root cause of why The Power of Deception Just Won?

Thanks for your patience in this somewhat technical article. If you would like to read more about this vital topic, please see the earlier article on [Digging Down to the Root Cause of the Trump Phenomenon](#), published five days before the election.