

Our Founding Fathers knew that leaders would not always be honorable, honest, or uncorrupt. Our system is designed with divided power centers: administration (President), congress, and judiciary. It has worked over our two and a half centuries, sometimes better than other times. We have had corrupt governments every so often, usually outed by the press or good civil servants, but for the most part, by presidents following the norms of transparency.

We have learned that the best disinfectant of corruption is the diligent collection and publication of data. Good governance depends upon publishing information and making it available to presidents, cabinets, and Congress. When Congress allocates money for specific use, it needs to know how the money was spent. If there is suspicion of misuse of funds, Congress can subpoena data from the department in question---until now.

All of our governments departments (Justice, Agriculture, Labor, Military services, Environmental Protection, and the presidency itself) have independent Inspector-Generals or ethics departments charged with keeping the agency honest, preventing scandal---until now. We, the public, depend on government statistics being accurate, current, and available for audit---until now.

We find ourselves with an administration that is allergic to sunshine. All sorts of data are in the dark, withheld from the press and from Congressional oversight. When the President does not like the numbers he sees (such as the death and infection totals in the pandemic), he orders the health officials to stop publishing them and discontinues the press briefings. He hopes nobody will notice. When Congress authorizes funds to help small businesses survive the pandemic, but then hears (thanks to the press) that Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin has provided largess to his well-heeled corporate friends rather than the small businesses that need them, they subpoena the data of how that money has been allocated. Mnuchin at first delays providing the documents, promises it will be provided shortly, and finally just refuses. "We believe that that's proprietary information."

This follows months of Trump firing Inspector Generals from every agency or department charged with reporting bad behavior to Congress. This president does not want oversight, which should be no surprise to us considering his refusal to release his own financial holdings, tangled webs of secret deals and debts to dubious foreign actors (Putin and the Saudis). He always plays loose and fast with numbers that spin up from his imagination during a press conference or rally. Transparency is not for him.

Do we want to know how many police killings there have been annually? How many "bad apples," police with long records of violence who are not fired but are sent from precinct to precinct? There is no national registry. The police unions hide these numbers, much as the Catholic Church did in moving child molester priests from one place to another instead of sending them to prison.

Do we want to know how many elderly people have actually died from the Coronavirus? The press has to dig it up county by county because there is no national oversight of senior care facilities.

Does the NRA want comparative shooting deaths collected nationally and published? No, they fight it and hide the numbers.

The press has had to dig out how vote suppression is working in states where polling places are shut down, moved out of town centers, with faulty machines malfunctioning during an election, all in an effort to prevent certain people from voting. Data is not collected for a national registry lest we actually have a fair election.

We know that dictators, like Putin, lie. We will never know the real pandemic numbers from his corrupt government, nor will we know how much money he has stolen. Trump lies too, hides numbers, and hopes nobody notices. He fires overseers, bluffs and blusters, refuses subpoenas, and thinks he can get away with it.

He is already paving the way to claim that the election numbers are rigged (if he loses), but it won't work this time. The US is not Russia. We can do oversight, and we can, and will, vote. Numbers matter.

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