

In his New York Times guest essay, Minneapolis mayor Jacob Frey goes beyond a local tragedy to deliver a broader illustration of the Trump administration's relationship with Democratic cities. While the article uses a strongly critical tone, it raises a fundamental political question: **how does federal power, when combined with political misinformation, undermine trust in government and deepens partisan division in the United States?**

To answer this question, we will first examine how political lying and narrative manipulation, as described in the article, erode trust in federal institutions and intensify partisan conflict. We may then consider the article's second implication: the transformation of cities into political counterpowers, while also questioning the limits and biases of the mayor's perspective.

## **I. On political lies, narratives, and misinformation**

A central argument of the article is that the federal government deliberately constructs false narratives to justify its actions and discredit its opponents. Jacob Frey explicitly accuses the Trump administration of spreading misinformation about the ICE shooting, notably by labeling the victim as a domestic terrorist and falsely claiming self-defense. According to him, this political lying is not accidental but strategic.

Indeed, this phenomenon echoes a broader trend in contemporary U.S. politics, particularly since the Trump era, where truth has increasingly become partisan. The use of alternative facts, public attacks on institutions, and the delegitimization of local authorities contribute to what political scientists describe as a crisis of institutional trust. (Sometimes even called post-truth era)

This perceived rise of lying is accompanied by the sensation that politicians are in it for themselves, not the people, encouraging the growth of tension and hostility.

Thus, lying, while admittedly seeming to be a profitable action in a politician's calculation, harms the trust of the people in their representatives. Indeed, voluntarily misrepresenting the reality does revoke the Freedom to act or vote in consideration of one's knowledge of factual truth. This is shown during George W. Bush's presidency, with the myriad of lies told to justify America's war on Iraq. The choice to dupe the American public opinion led to heavy criticism and feelings of injustice in the public sphere, harming the trust in the political system in place.

Consequently, the indignation people may feel towards lies is crucial to the development of healthy democracies. Mendacity, for all the virtues we may concede it as an expedient tool, still erodes trust, and to the politicians, the value of honesty. Imagining lying was generally accepted in politics by the public sphere and its opinion, democracy would be led down a slippery slope towards the totalitarian "Big Lie".

The "Big Lie", appearing first under Hitler's politics, is a tool used by populist politicians in order to abrogate the essence of truth, falsifying both the past and the present. It is exemplified in George Orwell's work with the ironically named "Ministry of Truth" (Orwell 1950). The result of the success of such a lie is totalitarianism.

Therefore, Catherine Fieschi declares that "In the populist playbook, lying itself is glorified" (Fieschi 2019) by being a tool of subversion, that is supposed to show the

politician will stop at nothing "for the people". As a result, whereas typical political mendacity has at least, in its hypocrisy, a respect for the truth in distinguishing it from what is false, the never-ending lies told by populist and totalitarian politicians are a danger to politics in themselves. Consequently, the Big Lie is a form of tyranny that is evidently grounds for retributions.

The "court of public opinion" (Ruggie 2008), if it does not aim to denounce lying, and misinformation, will further build the fall of bypartisanship in America. While opinions are the basis of the power we give to our representatives, through our agreement or disagreement with theirs. (As James Madison states, "all governments rest on opinion" (Madison 1788 federalist paper 49), it should not interfere with facts in times of crisis. Whilst Mayor Frey is in fact sharing a biased vision of the events, the administration is actively transforming and outright denying facts.

## **II. Cities as democratic counterpowers: strength, examples, limits, and bias of the author's viewpoint**

In response to what Frey describes as federal hostility towards cities and democratic norms being threatened, he presents cities as defenders of democratic values. Consequently, Minneapolis is portrayed not only as a victim of federal overreach, but as a proof that inclusive, pragmatic governance can function despite national polarization. This argument sheds light on the evolution of American federalism in recent decades.

Indeed, multiple examples support this vision. On immigration, so-called sanctuary cities such as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco have resisted federal pressure to cooperate fully with ICE, arguing that trust between local authorities and immigrant communities is necessary for public safety. This highlights how, during the first Trump administration, several cities challenged executive orders threatening to withdraw federal funding, and with courts often ruling in their favor. This reinforces the idea that cities can act as legal and political counterpowers.

Beyond immigration, cities have also positioned themselves as democratic speakers in other policy areas. After the Supreme Court weakened federal abortion protections with *Roe vs Wade* overturn, many cities and states attempted to safeguard access to abortion locally.

In a similar manner, cities like Portland, Seattle, and Minneapolis itself have experimented with police reforms, civilian oversight, and alternative public safety models following nationwide protests after George Floyd's murder. These initiatives illustrate Frey's claim that cities are capable of producing concrete, policy-based alternatives rather than only symbolic opposition.

However, Frey's argument is not without limitations. His perspective is that of a Democratic mayor addressing a largely sympathetic audience. The article minimizes internal divisions within cities themselves. Indeed, residents may strongly disagree on immigration, policing, or federal authority. Moreover, cities remain structurally dependent on federal funding and legal frameworks, which limits their capacity to act independently in the long term.

The hopeful tone of the conclusion (that cities will "light the way forward") therefore functions as both a political strategy and a moral appeal to his potential electorate.