

With a few exceptions, (such as the sunrise appears in the east, the earth is a globe, and the moon has predictable cycle), we cannot know that something is undeniable. Almost all other reliable facts are conditional. Truth depends upon honest witnesses, experienced observers, or professionally trained and peer reviewed expertise. The following list has served me well as a historian and commentator.

Science.

Western science is a process that changes as new information comes in. Scientific facts are the result of consensus: the majority consensus of specialists who are peer reviewed by those who are recognized as reliable. Those who have passed rigorous exams and are licensed, either by their disciplines (Medical association, University degrees, or the government) are generally reliable. Outliers may be found less reliable, and some are actual cranks. Science deniers are unreliable. Nobody can verify their claims.

People with limited education want scientific information to be unchanging. They suspect chicanery when doctors change their advice. They are particularly vulnerable to "big lies," cranks such as Robert Kennedy Jr., faith healers, snake oil salesmen, and outliers with medical degrees and questionable ethics.

Law.

Law is a difficult discipline because it is rare that absolute truth can be known. This is why we have defense and prosecution lawyers, grand juries, and juries who must determine the truth by consensus. In the most serious cases, their findings must be unanimous.

It is very difficult to remove the licenses or practices of criminal lawyers and unjust judges. The investigative power of journalists from mainstream press provide a needed protection from abusers of the public trust.

Mainstream Press and Journalists.

As with other professional institutions, the mainstream has standards that can be checked by fact checkers. Journalists do not always get it right, but when they err, the best sources are quick to print corrections. Good journalists depend upon other professional expertise: long time police chiefs, well-regarded historians, licensed professionals in a multiplicity of disciplines. Interviews with obvious liars and cranks are revealing of their lack of reliability. People in political power are particularly watched by journalists with long experience in asking important questions and speaking truth to power.

In dictatorships, mainstream press is suppressed and journalists intimidated and murdered. Dictators and wannabe dictators practice the "big lie," disinformation that is repeated loudly with threats against contradiction. We are currently witnessing this with Donald Trump's continuing lie that he was really elected and the election was a fraud. He has intimidated formerly mainstream Republicans and the irresponsible press (Fox News and other similar outlets) to support his big lie.

Statistics.

Statistics is a scientific discipline; its methodology is clear and explainable. However, it is only as good as the data it receives. Of all the sciences, this is the most dependent on its sources, the honesty and thoroughness of the data collection. If the information comes from the other professions with certification and licensing (medical and legal associations, democratic government agencies, numbers collected by qualified sources, the statistics will be accurate. When numbers are provided by organizations that cannot verify accuracy (such as the UN, which depends upon some unreliable governments for data), caution is required. Remember the proverb: garbage in, garbage out.

Banks and Financial Institutions.

We all depend on the honesty of those institutions that protect our money. Such institutions are kept honest by oversight: government institutions, licensing, and investigative journalism. One large accounting firm that provided the government with decades of reports on Donald Trump's businesses recently dropped him and acknowledged that the numbers they provided, and professed were accurate, were not accurate at all. They were provided by Donald Trump, who has a reputation for making up lies, including making up numbers.

Foreign Correspondents

Newspapers and mainstream TV media have long-serving foreign correspondents who brave every danger to personally cover war zones or regular postings. They risk their lives attempting to show the viewer what is happening. They interview local witnesses, often speaking the local language or using reliable translators. We are able to see for ourselves war zones, something much more difficult in the past.

Factcheck with NewsGuardTech.com.

683 words

Dr. Laina Farhat-Holzman is a historian, lecturer, and author of "How Do You Know That? Contact her at Lfarhat102@aol.com or www.globalthink.net.