


# Chapter 8

## Public Security in a Fragmented Reality Through a Social Psychological Framework

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### ABSTRACT

*The notion of post-truth implies that the truth involves sentimental judgements. This chapter explores how social identity, cognitive biases, and emotions play significant roles in shaping public security perceptions in the context of post-truth. These dynamics alter perceptions of risk and enhance intergroup conflict. Digital ecosystems and polarized social identities intensify negative emotions and cognitive biases while creating inconsistencies about the rules in which truth may be constructed. The chapter furthermore outlines several strategies for adaptive inter-group conflict resolution and public security governance. Among suggested strategies, identity-sensitive communication, trust-building, community resilience, and inclusive institutional practices emerge as vital components of effective public security policies in the post-truth era. The chapter concludes by underlaying a social psychological framework that incorporates social identity, cognitive biases, emotions, communication strategies to strengthen public security in increasingly polarized societies.*

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-6786-6.ch008

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The notion of post truth has become very popular in recent years as evidenced by Oxford English Dictionary selection of the concept as the word of the year in 2016, defined as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (Dell’utri, 2023, p.165). This perspective is clearly not aligned well with conventional public security assumptions. Public security politics and operations are conventionally based on shared and cleared understanding of threats, risks, and collective responsibilities. States and institutions have long operated under the assumption that public draw on a common pool of facts when evaluating dangers and responding to crises. Yet this underlying assumption does not seem to hold any longer in the post-truth context. In other words, the contemporary social settings are currently characterized by fragmentation, polarization, and the erosion of epistemic authority (McIntyre, 2018). This context is very concerning in public security domain given that decision makers, practitioners, and public may not agree on the operationalization of shared values. In this framework, the notion of *post-truth* has become a significant characteristic of contemporary public life, fundamentally altering the ways in which individuals interpret events, how collective beliefs are constructed, and how societies formulate responses to security challenges. For instance, the perceptions of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency’s actions during the Trump administration varied significantly across the political spectrum. While some viewed these operations as long-overdue efforts to enforce immigration laws, others interpreted them as violations of civil rights.

The notion of post-truth is not a new phenomenon. In fact, concerns relating to post-truth such as actual as opposed to possibilities, and truth versus fictions have been ongoing issue since the ancient Greece. The main concern of post-truth problem is not the concept of truth itself but how the truth is being constructed and accordingly the aim is to reduce discrepancy between the actual versus possibilities (i.e., fact/fiction) (Fuller, 2017). This is a significant topic in the area of public security given that individuals interpret even empirical facts such as sensations and observations through the filter of their expectations such as confirmation bias. In other words, there is a pressing need to explore how security related *truths* are constructed. Examining these processes sheds light on the mechanisms through which security narratives gain authority, legitimacy, and political traction. For example, consider a decline in criminal incidents reported to the police. This finding can be inserted in significantly different narratives depending on interpretive frameworks. Police may narrate this decrease as evidence of enhanced public safety (i.e., true reduction in crime rates). In contrast, other observers may construe the same trend as a sign of diminishing trust in police legitimacy, arguing that members of the

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