



Foucault's Power/Knowledge and the Politics of Truth in Contemporary Governance

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Abstract: This essay looks at Michel Foucault's idea of power and knowledge to figure out how modern government systems create, control, and spread "truth." Foucault says that power isn't just oppressive or hierarchical; it also works through spread-out networks that shape what people think is true knowledge. Foucault's ideas are becoming more and more important in today's world of digital surveillance, data-driven decision-making, and algorithmic power. Today's government depends on a lot of expert opinions, data visualizations, and technological systems that say they are neutral but actually shape norms, behaviours, and public realities in subtle ways. These are the ways that states and organizations create "regimes of truth" that shape policies, affect how people think and feel, and support certain types of authority. This essay takes a critical look at how power and knowledge work in areas like digital government, public health management, and security systems, pointing out how finding the truth becomes a political act. It also looks at times when marginalized groups fight, when they question dominant narratives and offer new ways of knowing. By putting Foucault's theory in the context of modern government, the study shows that truth is not a fixed thing but a contested area shaped by power dynamics, institutional practices, and ongoing arguments over what something means.

Keywords: Power/knowledge, politics of truth, contemporary governance, regimes of truth, knowledge production, resistance.

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Introduction

These days, the way that governments and institutions run things is closely linked to what is considered "true." This makes information itself a political space for debate. At the heart of this dynamic is Michel Foucault's idea of "power/knowledge," a theoretical lens that rejects the idea that knowledge is neutral or different from power. Foucault says, "We should rather admit that power produces knowledge—that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, and that there is no knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power

relations.” (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 27). From this point of view, “truth” is not something that is just found; it is made, controlled, and kept alive through governance methods. This Foucauldian idea becomes even more important in this age of digital surveillance, data-driven policymaking, and algorithmic control. Modern government is based on more than just traditional legal powers. It also uses subtle tactics to decide what information is valid, what actions are acceptable, and what topics can be regulated. Scholars have said that modern forms of government, which are based on what Foucault later called “governmentality,” control people less through direct force and more through ongoing, spread-out practices and ideas. Still, the strengthening of certain “regimes of truth” is rarely contested. New research warns that the main stories about biopower and how life is controlled, which are often credited to Foucault, have become canonized without enough critical examination (Meloni, 2022, p. 102). This means that even though governing systems keep some knowledge-power relationships stable, there are still places for other kinds of knowledge, pushback, and reconfiguration. So, the point of this paper is to look at how power and knowledge still work in modern government, specifically how truth is made and used, how knowledge is used as a tool for regulation, and how new discourses appear to question established systems. The study looks at both old and new criticisms of Foucault’s ideas to show that truth in modern government is not set in stone or applied to everyone. Instead, it is shaped by history, shaped by politics, and fiercely disputed.

Power/Knowledge: A Single, Dynamic Field

The way scholars think about the connection between authority, knowledge, and government has been completely changed by Michel Foucault’s idea of power/knowledge. In the past, power and knowledge were seen as two separate things. Power was linked to dominance and force, while knowledge was seen as an impartial or objective view of reality. Foucault disagrees with this binary and says that power and knowledge are the same thing and can’t be separated. They form a single, changing field where one constantly changes and strengthens the other. “There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge,” he says. “There is also no knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.” This realization shows that knowledge is never just descriptive; it is also productive, changing what people think is understandable, okay, and normal in a society. Foucault’s idea of power and knowledge focuses on the ways that facts are made and accepted through institutions and conversations. To quote Foucault, “truth is a thing of this world; it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint” (Foucault, 1980, p. 131). So, knowledge can’t exist outside of power networks; it’s created, controlled, and kept stable by places like schools, hospitals, jails, and government agencies. These sites don’t just show how things are in society; they also create topics, make behaviours acceptable, and decide what kind of speech is acceptable. As Nikolas Rose (1999) adds to this point, he says that power is not just shown through direct punishments, but also by shaping the very field of action: “Power is exercised through the shaping of a field of possible action” (p. 4). In this case, governance works in subtle ways that make people internalize rules and act in ways that keep dominant structures in place.

The changing nature of the power-knowledge nexus is especially important in modern government, where technology and bureaucratic processes shape truth more and more. Couldry

and Mejias (2019) say that algorithmic processes, data analytics, and expert-driven decision-making create new knowledge hierarchies that give power to some players and push others to the edges (p. 56). In these situations, making knowledge isn't just an intellectual act; it's also a way to keep society in order and under control. Expertise is a way for power to flow; it turns information into authority that can be used, which makes differences in who has social impact and is seen even bigger (Porter, 1995, p. 21). The power/knowledge approach also shows how power can be used to make things better. Unlike views that only see power as oppressive, Foucault stresses that it can also be used to create new things. Power creates subjects, information, discourses, and institutions, and it also makes resistance possible. According to Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983), this relational view doesn't reduce power to dominance. Instead, it shows how government works through useful, often invisible networks that shape the options for social life (p. 187). So, to understand governance, you need to pay attention to how power, knowledge, and subjectivity interact with each other. Basically, power and knowledge are like a field that is always changing. Truth, authority, and social order are always being bargained in it. It has to do with history, relationships, and chance, showing that knowledge is never just neutral but always shaped by power dynamics. By seeing power and knowledge as connected, Foucault gives us a new way to think about modern government, digital monitoring, public health systems, and other institutional practices that affect what people think is true, allowed, and possible.

The Politics of Truth: Who Has the Right to Speak?

Who has the power to decide what is true is inextricably linked to questions of power in modern government. "Truth isn't outside power," says Michel Foucault. "Truth is a thing of this world; it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint" (Foucault, 1980, p. 131). This realization means that information is never neutral and isn't available to everyone. It's made in power structures that decide who can speak, who is heard, and who can't. So, the politics of truth is a politics of who is included and who is left out. It sets the limits of what is acceptable speech and shapes social hierarchies. Foucault's idea of the "regime of truth" stresses that the right to speak is protected by the media, education, the law, and science. People in places of power in these institutions learn how to make claims that are believed to be "true," which supports some ideas and ways of doing things while putting others down (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 27). Nikolas Rose (1999) adds to this point by saying that modern government doesn't just stop people from doing things; it also shapes what people can say, know, and think: "Power is exercised through the shaping of a field of possible action" (p. 4). This means that the freedom to speak is closely connected to where you stand in society and institutions. Telling the truth becomes an act that depends on who you are and what you are known for.

This framework is very important for understanding how digital and bureaucratic government work today. Scholars say that algorithmic systems, big data analytics, and decisions made by experts create new knowledge hierarchies where experts, analysts, and state authorities have the power to define reality while the views of regular people are filtered or ignored (Couldry & Mejias, 2019, p. 56). In this case, the politics of truth are not just about objective facts. It's also about who has the power to shape how people understand social events, decide what is true, and make people follow the rules. Then, making knowledge is a very political act because

it embeds social norms, values, and structures into systems that seem neutral at first glance. The right to speak out is also contested and can be used as a place of protest. Chomsky (2002) says that groups that are left out or disagree with the majority often have a hard time getting their views heard in dominant knowledge regimes. This shows that discursive power is not evenly distributed (p. 78). Foucault says that where there is power, there is resistance: counter-discourses appear when actors who aren't included question the dominant production of truth, which breaks down established hierarchies and makes room for other kinds of knowledge (Foucault, 1980, p. 142). This is shown by modern movements like digital whistleblowing and grassroots activism, which show that power isn't always reliable and truth isn't always clear.

Lastly, to understand the politics of truth, you need to know about the moral aspects of how knowledge is made. Governing bodies, organizations, and experts are in charge of setting, spreading, and enforcing truths. These choices have an impact on social reality, individuality, and public life. Porter (1995) says that expertise is never neutral; it stands between knowledge and power, supporting some ideas about society and discrediting others (p. 21). Within this concept, the freedom to speak is linked to moral responsibility, showing how knowledge, power, and government are all connected. The politics of truth in modern government show a complicated relationship between power, knowledge, and pushback. It is Foucault's framework that shows how power both limits and creates truth by deciding who can speak and whose claims are believed. These systems are expanded by modern government using institutional, technological, and discursive tools. These tools create both knowledge hierarchies and spaces for opposition. To understand how the creation, regulation, and contestation of truth work in modern societies, it is essential to know who has the right to speak.

Governmentality and the Management of Populations

Foucault's idea of "governmentality" is an important way to look at how modern government works, not just through direct force but also through subtle, spread-out methods meant to control people. Governmentality is the set of organizations, procedures, analyses, and reflections that make it possible to control populations by using knowledge, expertise, and social norms to guide behaviour. Foucault says that government is "the conduct of conduct," which means that it tries to determine how people should act in order to improve their lives, health, and work (Foucault, 1991, p. 102). From this point of view, the focus is moved from traditional legal power to the complicated systems that modern states use to control people and their abilities. The idea that populations are not passive objects but active things whose behaviours, risks, and abilities can be studied, grouped, and controlled is at the heart of governmentality. Statistics, epidemiology, education measures, and economic indicators are all tools that states use to make populations easier to understand. This lets them make policies that guide people instead of forcing them to do something. Rose (1999) says that this "advanced liberal" way of running the government depends on knowledge, self-control, and internalizing standards. This creates people who run their own governments based on knowledge and rationalities that are accepted by society (p. 12). The way power is used is linked to what we know about groups of people, like health trends, crime rates, and how productive workers are. This is similar to Foucault's idea that power and knowledge are both made up of things.

Managing groups of people also includes using rules and categories in a planned way. According to Dean (2010), governing bodies set categories of normalcy and deviance that shape behaviour, reward obedience, and push undesirable behaviour to the edges (p. 33). For example, public health programs, welfare programs, and school changes all use data-driven knowledge to control everyday life. This creates both ways to empower people and ways to keep them in line. So, knowing about people is political because it affects who is counted, whose needs are met, and whose lives are hidden. Applications of governmentality in the modern world show how useful Foucault's ideas are. Couldry and Mejias (2019) say that digital technologies, algorithmic governance, and surveillance systems bring old ways of managing populations into cyberspace. They create new ways of regulating people where their actions, choices, and risks are constantly watched and judged (p. 102). Power in this case works by creating information that can be used, which affects behaviour at both the individual and group levels. These actions show how governmentality changes the politics of truth: knowing about a community isn't just describing them; it's also used to make decisions about policy, intervention, and social order.

It is important to remember that governmentality is not only a way to control people; it is also a place to negotiate and fight back. Foucault (1991) says that whenever power is used, there is a chance for counter-behaviour and the rise of new knowledges (p. 105). Movements in civil society, activist data projects, and participatory government show that people are not just passive recipients of regulatory methods. Scholars can think critically about both the positive and negative aspects of modern political authority by seeing government as a constantly changing interaction between power, knowledge, and behaviour. The idea of governmentality shows how modern states control their citizens not just by force, but also through knowledge, standards, and regulatory practices. It emphasizes how power works in relationships and shows how groups of people are both things that are governed and people who can control themselves and fight back. So, the Foucauldian framework gives us important ways to look at the complicated politics of truth, power, and social control in modern government.

Disciplinary Power and Self-Governance

Foucault's theory of disciplinary power gives us a more complex picture of how modern government affects people and society by using methods that work on both the inside and the outside. Unlike sovereign power, which is shown through physical force and legal punishment, disciplinary power works in more subtle ways through observation, normalization, and regulation. It creates people who internalize standards and govern themselves. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault writes, "The main effect of disciplinary power is that people come to 'exercise the power they are subjected to' on themselves" (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 201). One important thing this understanding shows is that power doesn't just limit behaviour; it also actively shapes people's abilities, behaviour, and identities. Surveillance is a key part of disciplinary power because it works as both a tool for control and a way for people to internalize rules. The Panopticon, Foucault's most famous example, is a way for people to control their behaviour when they think they are always being watched. Discipline methods "produce conformity and self-discipline by embedding normative standards within everyday routines and practices," as Garland (1990) puts it (p. 168). In this way, power is more than just institutional control; it also exists in social, educational, and professional settings to create people who are self-governing and take part in their own regulation.

There is a very important link between punitive power and knowledge. Foucault's idea of power/knowledge makes the point that disciplinary practices are based on what we know about people through assessment, labelling, and evaluation. Porter (1995) says that expertise and bureaucratic knowledge help to standardize behaviour, which makes groups easier to understand and control while also supporting institutional authority (p. 21). In this way, the production of truth through disciplinary knowledge is linked to self-governance mechanisms, showing how power, expertise, and personal behaviour are all connected. Disciplined power in modern government goes beyond physical structures and into digital, corporate, and social areas. Couldry and Mejias (2019) say that algorithmic surveillance, performance metrics, and data-driven management systems are all like disciplinary methods; they push people to watch, change, and improve their own behaviour to fit publicly defined standards (p. 102). Modern examples of places where disciplinary power is used to control behaviour while making it look like it is voluntary, neutral, or self-directed are educational platforms, job monitoring, and social media scoring systems.

It is important to remember that disciplinary power does not totalize; it works in relationships and can always be negotiated and resisted. Foucault (1980) says that power creates opportunities for opposition: when self-governance methods are used, people and groups can challenge, subvert, or reinterpret the rules that are being internalized (p. 142). Modern research shows how underrepresented groups, activist networks, and digital audiences interact with surveillance and regulation systems to create new knowledge and ways of doing things. This shows that self-governance can be both a place of dominance and potential freedom (Rose, 1999, p. 12). To sum up, disciplinary power shows how modern government affects behaviour by using subtle, all-pervasive methods that help people absorb rules and control themselves. Foucault shows that authority is not only practiced from the outside, but also through the ways that people govern themselves. He does this by connecting power, knowledge, and subjectivity. So, it's important to understand disciplinary power in order to understand modern systems of government, which rely more and more on data, surveillance, and normative standards to make people follow the rules and self-regulate, while also leaving room for resistance and new interpretations of truth.

Resistance and Counter-Truths

Foucault's framework of power and knowledge stresses that power does more than just control people. It also shapes topics, conversations, and social rules. But the idea that power always creates places of pushback is just as important. Resistance happens everywhere power is used, showing that truth and knowledge are inherently debatable. According to Foucault, "where there is power, there is resistance, but this resistance is never outside of power" (Foucault, 1980, p. 142). This idea makes it clear that counter-truths are not outside attacks on authority; they are made within the same networks of power and knowledge, challenging established discourses while still being connected to them. Resistance comes in many forms, from well-organized social groups to small actions that go against what most people think is right. Scott (1985) talks about the "everyday forms of resistance" that pushed-to-the-side groups use to fight against the rules that are put in place. These include small acts of defiance or different behaviours that challenge the power of those in charge (p. 29). These actions show that counter-knowledge and counter-truths don't need

to be officially recognized to have political power. They can weaken established truth regimes by showing how contingent and historically placed they are.

It is becoming more and more clear in the digital and public spheres of modern government that counter-truths are being made. Couldry and Mejias (2019) say that algorithmic governance and data-driven decision-making make knowledge authority uneven, giving institutions and experts the power to define reality while shutting down other views. But digital platforms also give activists, whistleblowers, and underrepresented groups a way to share alternative information, question official stories, and organize pushback on a scale that has never been seen before (p. 112). These counter-discourses show that regimes of truth are never complete; social agents are always negotiating, disrupting, and rebuilding them. There are also moral and intellectual issues that come up in the politics of counter-truths. As Harding (1991) points out, standpoint epistemology shows how information that comes from underrepresented points of view can show biases in mainstream discourses and provide different views of social reality (p. 119). This fits with Foucault's idea of counter-conduct, which stresses that resistance is more than just rejecting authority; it also means trying out new ways of being and acting in society (Foucault, 1991, p. 104). So, counter-truths are not just statements that are at odds with each other; they are also places where new ideas about government, identity, and social rules can be created.

Resistance and falsehoods are important because they show how power works in relationships. Rose (1999) says that governing is not an imposition that goes only one way. It includes negotiation, compliance, and contestation, where people and groups respond to and change the rules that govern them (p. 12). By creating new kinds of knowledge, communities take control of power and knowledge systems, questioning who has the right to say what is true, whose views matter, and what is legitimate. This dynamic of relationships makes sure that power is never fixed and that the politics of truth are always open to debate. Foucault's view of power and knowledge is built around opposition and falsehoods. They show that truth is fluid, negotiated, and contested, showing that knowledge and power are never set in stone. With its dependence on institutional, bureaucratic, and digital knowledge systems, modern government still creates hierarchies of truth, but these can always be questioned and changed. Because of this, it is important to understand resistance in order to understand how power works, how information is made, and the ongoing fight over what is true in modern society.

Contemporary Governance as a Hybrid Regime of Power

These days, government is a mix of different types of power, using disciplinary, regulatory, and biopolitical methods to create, manage, and legitimize information while also influencing how people act. Foucault's work gives us a way to think about how power is used, not just by forcing people to do things, but also by creating and using knowledge that shapes behaviour, identity, and social reality. As Foucault says, power creates reality, places where things can be found, and ceremonies that honour the truth (Foucault, 1980, p. 194). So, modern government is not a single structure, but a mix of different power tools that work together to create a field of regulation, surveillance, and normalization. The coming together of disciplinary and biopolitical methods is a key part of this hybrid system. Individuals are shaped by disciplinary power, which includes monitoring, training, and internalizing norms. Institutions like schools, prisons, and workplaces

are good examples of this (Foucault, 1977/1995, p. 183). Biopolitical power, on the other hand, works at the level of populations and focuses on things like health, population, and output. To make collective life better, biopolitical power often uses statistics and administrative processes (Foucault, 1991, p. 137). These days, modern government uses both methods. Institutions teach people how to self-regulate, and at the same time, they manage populations through norms, data, and predictive analytics. In 1999, Nikolas Rose wrote that modern government is made up of methods that “mediate between the individual and the population, seeking to shape choices and capacities within broader social frameworks” (p. 12).

This dual focus shows how modern government is a mix of different types of power. This hybridization is made even stronger by digital tools, big data, and algorithmic governance. According to Couldry and Mejias (2019), data-driven systems create knowledge hierarchies that favour some players while putting others at the bottom (p. 102). These systems work at the same time as tools for surveillance, standardization, and regulation. Power in this situation doesn't come from direct force, but from authoritative knowledge and moral judgment. It has a big effect on behaviour, choices, and getting resources. Combining different fields of study, biopolitical issues, and digital tools shows how modern government relies on complex, multilayered systems to make people follow the rules and be easy to control. Hybrid government is also relational and dependent by nature. Authority doesn't just go one way; it rests on negotiation, following the rules, and fighting back. Foucault says that when power is used, resistance usually comes up in the form of different ideas and truths that question the prevailing frameworks (Foucault, 1980, p. 142). Scott (1985) shows that pushed-to-the edges groups fight back in both quiet and loud ways, upsetting the rules that are put in place and showing that authority isn't always reliable (p. 29). These changes show that power is always useful but never absolute in hybrid government, and that knowledge, truth, and authority are always being questioned.

Lastly, understanding that modern government is a mix of different types of systems makes the political and moral importance of knowledge production even clearer. The way rights, respect, and resources are shared in society is shaped by expertise, normative standards, and institutional authority. Porter (1995) says that using technical knowledge is never neutral; it supports institutional power and changes the way people live their lives (p. 21). By looking at governance through Foucault's view, researchers can see how truth is made, contested, and used to control groups of people and individuals' behaviour. This shows how modern political power is complex and always changing. Contemporary governance is a mixed type of power that uses disciplinary, biopolitical, and digital methods to create subjects, control populations, and approve information. This mixing of styles shows how power is relational, productive, and contested. It also shows that government is more than just force; it works through knowledge, norms, and established practices. To understand the politics of truth, power, and resistance in modern societies, you need to know how these three things interact with each other.

Conclusion

Foucault's power/knowledge thesis helps explain modern governance's complicated dynamics. Foucault shows that knowledge and power are mutually constitutive, challenging objective reality and revealing the political nature of knowledge production. Modern governance uses dispersed,

relational, and productive systems to change individual and group behaviour. Institutions, technology, and normative frameworks enable authority, legitimize knowledge, and regulate populations under a hybrid regime of governance that blends disciplinary, biopolitical, and digital methods. Foucault shows that power processes are inseparable from truth politics. Authority regulates who can talk, whose expertise is recognized, and which discourses are validated, while creating opposition and counter-truths. The contested and dynamic nature of truth in contemporary governance is shown by subtle or overt resistance within these power/knowledge networks. Digital platforms, algorithmic decision-making, and data-driven bureaucracy worsen these dynamics by expanding power and creating new areas for counter-discourses, activism, and alternative knowledge generation. Scholars can understand the complex relationship between authority, expertise, social norms, and subjectivity by studying governance through power/knowledge. Power and truth are relational and contingent, and modern governance regulates and makes populations knowable and governable. Understanding these processes is crucial for political theory, ethics, and practice since decisions about truth, knowledge, and norms affect justice, equity, and democratic participation. Foucault's theory illuminates knowledge and power's inseparability, truth's contested nature, and modern governance's hybrid, multi-layered nature. It shows that governance is productive and regulating, allowing the production of subjects and populations and opposition, negotiation, and social reconfiguration. Foucault's theory helps us analyse current political, institutional, and technical institutions by emphasizing the politics of truth, reminding us that knowledge and truth are always contextual, contingent, and open to question.

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