

Word of the Year 2016 is... “Post-Truth”

By [English Oxford Living Dictionaries](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

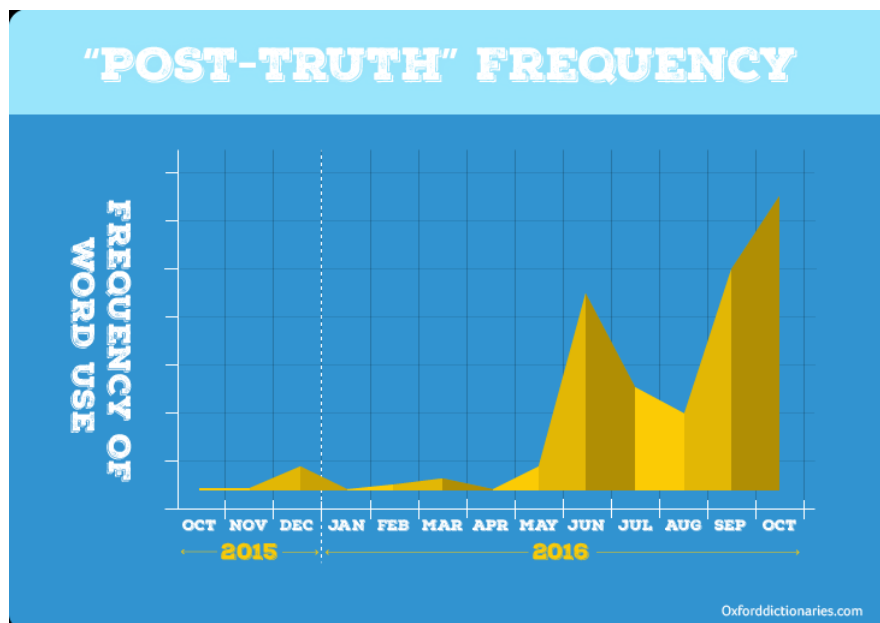
Global Research, December 14, 2016

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After much discussion, debate, and research, the Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2016 is *post-truth* – an adjective 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’.

Why was this chosen?

The concept of *post-truth* has been in existence for the past decade, but Oxford Dictionaries has seen a spike in frequency this year in the context of the EU referendum in the United Kingdom and the presidential election in the United States. It has also become associated with a particular noun, in the phrase *post-truth politics*.



Post-truth in 2016

Post-truth has gone from being a peripheral term to being a mainstay in political commentary, now often being used by major publications without the need for clarification or definition in their headlines.



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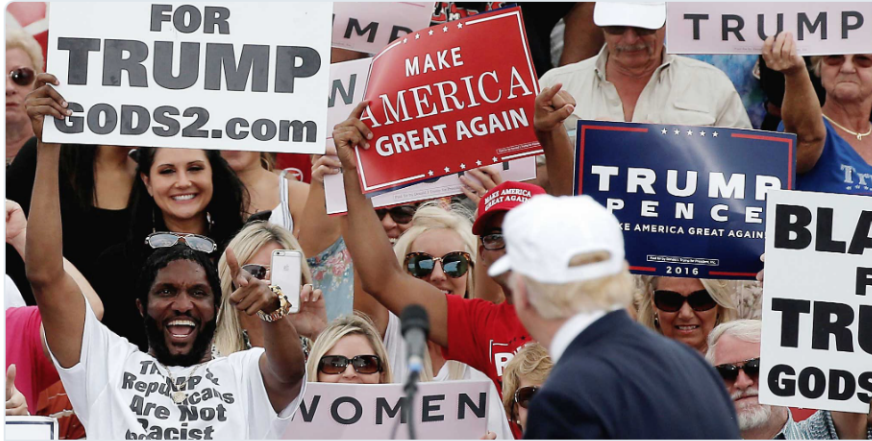


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A brief history of *post-truth*

The compound word *post-truth* exemplifies an expansion in the meaning of the prefix *post-* that has become increasingly prominent in recent years. Rather than simply referring to the time after a specified situation or event – as in *post-war* or *post-match* – the prefix in *post-truth* has a meaning more like ‘belonging to a time in which the specified concept has become unimportant or irrelevant’. This nuance seems to have originated in the mid-20th century, in formations such as *post-national* (1945) and *post-racial* (1971).

Post-truth seems to have been first used in this meaning in a 1992 essay by the late Serbian-American playwright Steve Tesich in *The Nation* magazine. Reflecting on the Iran-Contra scandal and the Persian Gulf War, Tesich lamented that ‘we, as a free people, have freely decided that we want to live in some post-truth world’. There is evidence of the phrase ‘post-truth’ being used before Tesich’s article, but apparently with the transparent meaning ‘after the truth was known’, and not with the new implication that truth itself has become irrelevant.

A book, *The Post-truth Era*, by Ralph Keyes appeared in 2004, and in 2005 American comedian Stephen Colbert popularized an informal word relating to the same concept: *truthiness*, defined by Oxford Dictionaries as ‘the quality of seeming or being felt to be true, even if not necessarily true’. *Post-truth* extends that notion from an isolated quality of particular assertions to a general characteristic of our age.

The shortlist



Here are the Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year shortlist choices, and definitions:

[adulting](#), n. [mass noun] *informal* the practice of behaving in a way characteristic of a responsible adult, especially the accomplishment of mundane but necessary tasks.

[alt-right](#), n. (in the US) an ideological grouping associated with extreme conservative or reactionary viewpoints, characterized by a rejection of mainstream politics and by the use of online media to disseminate deliberately controversial content. [Find out more about the word's rise.](#)

[Brexiteer](#), n. *British informal* a person who is in favour of the United Kingdom withdrawing from the European Union.

[chatbot](#), n. a computer program designed to simulate conversation with human users, especially over the Internet.

[coulrophobia](#), n. [mass noun] *rare* extreme or irrational fear of clowns.

[glass cliff](#), n. used with reference to a situation in which a woman or member of a minority group ascends to a leadership position in challenging circumstances where the risk of failure is high. Explore the word's history from [one of the inventors of the term, Alex Haslam.](#)

[hygge](#), n. [mass noun] a quality of cosiness and comfortable conviviality that engenders a feeling of contentment or well-being (regarded as a defining characteristic of Danish culture):

[Latinx](#), n. (plural Latinxs or same) and adj. a person of Latin American origin or descent (used as a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to Latino or Latina); relating to people of Latin American origin or descent (used as a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to Latino or Latina).

[woke](#), adj. (woker, wokekest) *US informal* alert to injustice in society, especially racism. [Read more about the evolution of woke throughout 2016.](#)

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