

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

By [English Oxford Living Dictionaries](#)

Global Research, December 14, 2016

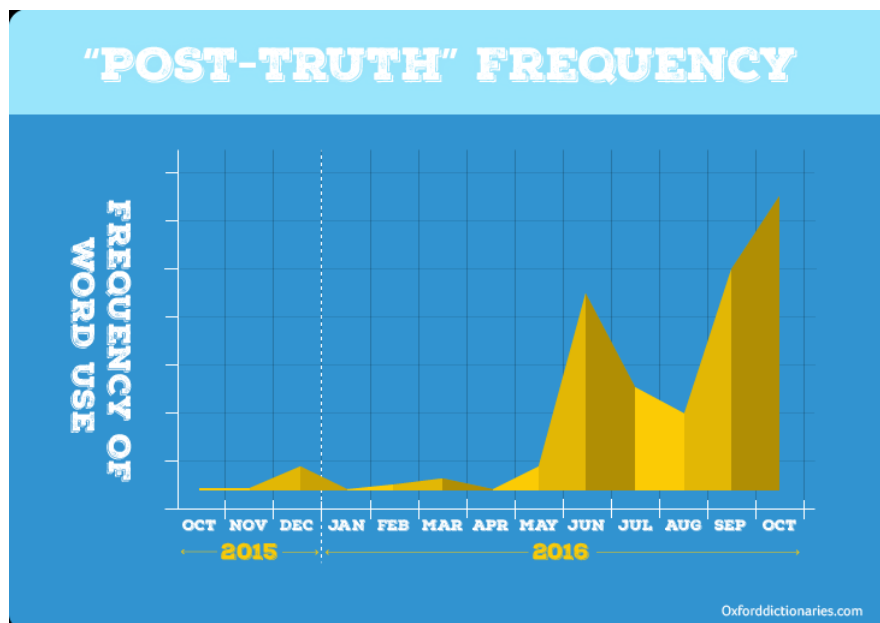
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Theme: [History](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

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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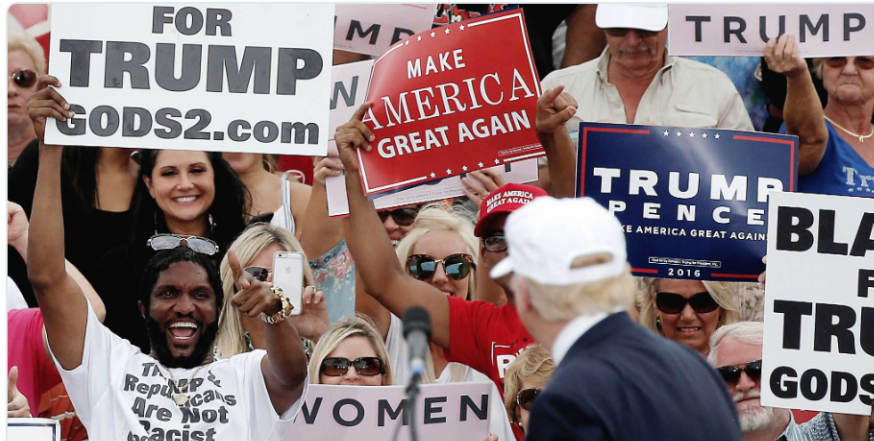
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Anyone who has closely watched a campaign that has captivated and besmirched its followers in equal measure could name several

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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:

[adulthood](#), 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.](#)

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

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