



## ***The Politics of (Post) Truth***

### **Politics and (Post) Truth**

For some time, the world of politics has been shocked by the introduction of a new concept that is shifting the traditional sense of responsibility, honesty and rightness that should characterise political discourse. Some intellectuals identify 2015-2016 as the year where politics changed and became ruled by a new dynamic that centred on emotionally charged discourse and appealed to the passions of the audience. The term post-truth was coined as a reflection of this new political dynamic and has quickly become ubiquitous. Even the *Oxford English Dictionary* declared post-truth the word of the year in 2016, and defined it as: 'relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief'. Politics, as it was understood, has mutated into a new creature that exceeds the control of its own players. Post-truth is the new wave.

Using the definition given by the *Oxford Dictionary* as a starting point, it can be said that if post-truth is an adjective that relates to emotions and subjectivity, then, the logical conclusion is that politics is no longer based on rigour and objectivity. But, was politics ever devoid of any reference to emotions? Brexit and Donald Trump's electoral campaigns are used as the two events that inaugurated a post-truth era in politics, but this does not mean that politics and political discourse lacked an emotional charge. The difference between these events and the previous era, in terms of the influence of post-truth, is that objectivity and truth, if present at all, are no longer at the centre of the debate. The aim of any electoral campaign, for instance, should be to create a series of expectations in the electorate. When voters buy in to a particular party's policies, this expectation can be seen as emotionally charged and related to the prospect of change for the better. Yet, it seems unlikely that this emotional response was at the centre of the political debate; rather, at the centre of the debate sat the means by which such change could be achieved. In the new era of post-truth politics, this is no longer the case. Speaking to the emotive response of the electorate sits front and centre in political debate, and the means for affecting change are merely secondary considerations. As this process becomes less important to political discourse, so the

rigour of party policies and pledges is undermined as the means to the promised end is not subject to question or challenge.

This shift in the dynamic of the political arena has a potentially significant impact on voters. The old adage that politicians are not to be trusted may be true, but voters at least trusted the system, thus ensuring its survival. With the emergence of the post-truth era of politics, it is no longer simply the case that politicians may be untrustworthy, but that the system as a whole is undermined by public servants who can twist, hide, or manufacture the facts they require to suit the emotional needs of the voters. It is not only the players who are different – the game itself has changed and appears to be in direct conflict with the values and moral codes used to build our political structures. Such values serve as the pillars on which our political arena is constructed; if these are undermined, then the building itself is in danger. This is the risk inherent in the rise of post-truth politics: the complete mistrust of the electorate leading to the collapse of those institutions that are built on trust and responsibility. This new era of politics demands investigation – how can we adapt to this new form of political discourse? What does this mean for the future of politics?

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## Want to know more?

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