

Wonks and War Rooms

S04E09 - Post-Truth Politics with Vinita Srivastava

Episode Transcript

Elizabeth: [00:00:04] Welcome to [Wonks and War Rooms](#), where political communication theory meets on-the-ground strategy. I'm your host [Elizabeth Dubois](#). I'm an associate professor at the [University of Ottawa](#), and my pronouns are she/her. Today I'm recording from the [traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin people](#).

[00:00:19] In today's episode, we're talking about post-truth politics with Vinita. Vinita, can you introduce yourself please?

Vinita: [00:00:24] So I'm [Vinita Srivastava](#). I'm the host of [Don't Call Me Resilient](#), which is a podcast produced at [The Conversation Canada](#), where I have been an editor for the last four years and recently switched over to mostly producing the podcast. [Before that](#), I was actually a professor of journalism for almost five or six or seven or eight years. And before that, where I got my training was [in] New York City as a journalist. I started off at one of the best places, I think, in the world, which doesn't exist anymore, but was [the Village Voice](#). And that's where I got my real political training as a journalist.

Elizabeth: [00:01:02] Wonderful. Thank you. I am so excited to have you here today. We're talking about post-truth politics and I think that these various roles you've had over the years really will enlighten us with a really good conversation. So as always, I'm going to start with some basic definition work from academic literature, and we're going to see whether or not that jives with your experience.

Vinita: [00:01:25] Sure.

Elizabeth: [00:01:26] So the idea of post-truth politics, which was [Oxford's dictionary word of the year back in 2016](#), it kind of boils down to the idea that feelings sometimes matter more than facts. It's this idea that [objective facts](#) are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief. And when we're thinking about, like, the politics of information and negotiating what should be trusted or seen as information that should guide your decision making when it comes to politics, when it comes to anything else in life, it's that, you know, the idea of objective fact really can't be primary anymore. Because facts can often be very contextual and perspective might influence whether or not you believe in one fact or another, actually we kind of do away with those and instead head to our feelings of what seems right.

[00:02:29] And, you know, Colbert talked about the idea of "[truthiness](#)", which, though not in academic definition, really does, I think, get at that idea of the difference between fact-based versus the-thing-that-we-feel-like-is-probably-right. [Editor's notes: Here is Colbert's [updated riff on post-truth](#)]

[00:02:47] So that's our initial definition. How do you feel about it?

Vinita: [00:02:52] Well [chuckles], that's very troubling. That's really troubling. As a journalist, we deal with facts, of course, and there are scientific and truthful facts that we know and we have to rely on. And so I would say, yes, we we still rely on facts - That's the truth. I mean, that's when we talk about the truth, we need the facts to back up what we're talking about. And the facts are.. They're objective facts. So there are some things that we know to be true, like the year has 365 days, the day has 24 hours. These are truth. So, we do rely on that.

[00:03:34] But then of course, what you're talking about is the [post-objectivity](#) really, I guess. Right? It's not just post-truth that people that we're talking about, it's that, I think, in the journalistic context there is sort of an ownership of truth. You know, who owned the truth, who had the right to tell the story. And so the challenge to that, I think, maybe came up as a post-truth. And we don't really mean post-truth so much, we mean "let's expand the definition of who is allowed to tell the truth."

Elizabeth: [00:04:08] Yeah, I really like thinking about it like: Who's allowed to tell the truth? Who's trusted to tell the truth? Who is seen as a voice that should be paid attention to? And when we start asking those questions, you know, it's not just the 2016, all of a sudden we're worried about misinformation and disinformation. [Instead,] it's a long history of how we understand who is in a position of power, enough to get to set the bar for what can and should be said.

Vinita: [00:04:42] Yeah, for what's told - I mean, the story that's told. It just makes me think, you know, just going back to the history, thinking about [Walter Cronkite](#), right? He was the news journalist that basically, you know, he got on the air and then everybody stopped - and talking about North America, but - everybody stopped to listen to what this man, this anchor had to say on the news and the TVs kind of focused on him. But what if you turn the camera around, you swivel the camera to the left and you get a different story? And I think that's probably what we're talking about when we're talking about, you know, it's not post-truth, it's post-objectivity. Okay, well, we've got this one great journalist, you know, [an] older white man telling the story at the time, which is, for example, maybe was [MLK's death or assassination](#), you know. [But] what else was going on there? What was happening in Memphis, Tennessee? The stories that we didn't see, that were not told that day.

Elizabeth: [00:05:38] Yeah, it makes me think of some of the other kind of core ideas and theories of political communication, where we're looking at the work journalists do that help structure or constrain the flow of information. Like the idea of journalists having to make choices about what makes it on the agenda and what doesn't (like agenda setting theory). Right? Framing and priming and gatekeeping, right? There's all of these choices that have always been a part of what journalistic work is, because there's too much information to say all of it at all times, and so... I guess maybe what I'm wondering is: is post-truth or post-objectivity just a recognition that those kinds of decisions had to happen and have to happen? And is it just like kind of complaining that that they are happening?

Vinita: [00:06:34] Well, you mean, like, who's doing the complaining? I guess, right? I mean...

Elizabeth: [00:06:39] Maybe maybe complaining is not fair. Maybe it's more like critiquing the fact that this is happening. So if we think about the idea of post-truth as saying, like, "Look, you journalists are relying on facts, that doesn't resonate with me. That's not my experience of the world. It has no truthiness for me." And truthiness sometimes we also talk about as being [affective truth](#), [which is] this idea of the gut checking truth - which may or may not actually align with facts, right? So if somebody is saying like, "Well, my gut is telling me that what you're saying is wrong, like..."

Vinita: [00:07:18] Well, I think there's two things that we're talking about here, then in that case. There's two sides of this, right?

[00:07:24] There's people who are like, "Well, actually, we need to expand the definition of who gets to tell the story - expand the frame." Literally expand the frame. You know,

you have 6 seconds on a broadcast to tell the story. Well, maybe you should try expanding who gets to tell those 6 seconds? There's that factor. And then there's what I think you're talking about, which is people who are like, "I don't think that that scientific fact about climate change.. [it] doesn't really doesn't work with me. It's not true." Well, you can reject something because it doesn't work with your value system, but that doesn't mean it's not truth. I mean, I think that's what you're talking about when you're saying, "Are we just complaining?" Well, we're actually, on the one hand, challenging the framework - we're challenging the literal frame that you're telling the story. So expand your definition. Go 360 instead of 180 [degrees] when you tell a story. Talk to more people than you normally talk to. From a journalistic perspective, expand your definition of who the expert is.

[00:08:23] But then, you know, [on the other hand] I think you're talking about a whole section of people are like, I don't believe in climate change. And that's not truth. I mean, we have scientific fact and those things are proven to be true. So [chuckles] it's really challenging what you're talking about.

Elizabeth: [00:08:41] Yeah, I really like how you are separating out those two parts because I think often they sort of go in together. And one of the terms that's kind of used to describe this from time-to-time is [the relativization of facts](#), [which is] this idea that knowledge is merely a product of power, history, perspective.

[00:09:00] And so, if we're thinking about the relativization of facts, from one perspective, you could say, "My experience of climate change [is] like, yeah, you've got all of these scientists, but it's not jiving with my experience. They all, you know, are paid by somebody. They all have their own political desires, ([or] whatever)." There's all of these different kinds of arguments that people put forward to try and argue that the facts that the climate scientists are putting forward are relative to something else.

[00:09:36] But then you could also use that same idea of relativization of facts to be like, "Right, well, when the evening news was only covering the very specific things that were happening in middle- to upper-class white neighbourhoods and ignoring all of the other things that were happening in the city, it made it seem like the only things that mattered in a city - the only things that were worth fact-based coverage - were the things for those white, middle-upper class folks." Right? And so, I think trying to disentangle that is really important. But it's also tricky.

Vinita: [00:10:10] Is it, though? Is it tricky? I don't know. I mean, I'm not saying it out loud because there's such a challenging argument, but th[ese] idea[s] of, you know: Is COVID real? Do vaccines help? Do masks help? Yes, yes, and yes - scientific fact. Is climate change, real? Yes. And then, even to go one step further, is the Holocaust real? Yes- historical fact. Millions of people were persecuted and died. So it's not that tricky, to me. There [are] some very clear definitions of what happens, you know. The idea of truth getting twisted[, for example] when we're talking about perspective and you're talking about the evening news, for example, of the city of Toronto. Well, for a long time, city of Toronto was just this core, right? It didn't include Scarborough. And if it did, they were full of stereotypes and full of untruths. Those are the kinds of truths that come out of stereotypes or tropes. So it's not that complicated to me in some ways. You know, truth is truth and opinion is opinion.

Elizabeth: [00:11:10] Yeah. I think that the truth versus opinion - we hear that contrast a lot, and I want to come back to that in a second. But yeah, like I guess the trickiness for me is not, "Are these scientific facts scientifically proven or not?" Like that, you know, I'm an academic and I'm a researcher, I fundamentally believe in the [scientific method](#). Right? That I am here for, I agree with you - all of your answers to those questions [I am] totally on board [with].

[00:11:41] The part that I think becomes a little difficult is when you have conversations with people who kind of are in this post-truth politics where they're not saying that it's not fact, they're saying that that fact as presented is irrelevant. It's not the thing that matters for the way I want to live my life or how I want my politicians to make choices as they represent me. The question becomes less about whether or not a fact is a fact and whether or not there is truth to it, and more about how somebody feels or what perspective is being drawn on. And the idea being [that] regardless of who you are, you could believe that news coverage is not doing service to you because it's not covering the things you would like it to cover or it's not covering it the way you would like it to cover it.

Vinita: [00:12:37] Well, I mean, I have heard this phrase fake news so often in the last little while. Right? And I've heard it from friends or former friends and family, too, you know. And, being in the news business, it's an insult to me. You know, this is not fake news. I'm not trying to discount the fact that there are lots of people that think this way. I just, for me, there actually is a truth and there's there's an non-truth. The sun rises and and we can't talk about it any other way.

Elizabeth: [00:13:12] Yeah.

Vinita: [00:13:12] But at the same time, as someone who's deeply challenged the media for decades, I understand what you're saying at the same time. That truth is not ~my~ truth. It's not the ~whole~ truth. So I think when we're talking about truth, it's it also needs to be the ~whole~ truth.

Elizabeth: [00:13:28] Yeah. And getting at the whole truth... That's resource intensive.

Vinita: [00:13:34] Yeah, it is. It's really resource intensive. Yeah. I mean, I don't know, do you have any examples of what you're you're talking about? Because I think it is really interesting what you're saying, but just to try and get down into it, maybe we need an example.

Elizabeth: [00:13:47] Yeah, an example. Well, we can go to the [convoy](#). So as we're recording, the convoy is still happening in Ottawa and it's framed by some as a protest against very specific decisions that the provincial government made (despite the fact that they're protesting in Ottawa at the federal capital) about vaccine mandates and mask mandates. And then there's another perspective/framing of it, [which is] like, "This is about our freedoms. This is about liberty." And then there are other perspectives that are saying, like, "This is about white supremacy."

Vinita: [00:14:24] Yeah,

Elizabeth: [00:14:24] Right? And so first of all, we've got like all of these different frames of one event which, depending on who you talk to, the important aspects of what they are are going to be different. The fact that there are Confederate flags and Nazi flags and symbols of white supremacy undoubtedly...

Vinita: [00:14:45] That's a picture! I mean, that's another type of truth, right? I see a picture and I see you're carrying a flag that is... It's a racist flag. I mean, it's associated with deep genocidal tendencies. Right. We don't want to be associated with that in any kind of way.

Elizabeth: [00:15:01] Yeah.

Vinita: [00:15:01] Why would you be flying [it]?

Elizabeth: [00:15:02] Yeah. Its...

Vinita: [00:15:03] That's a truth, that you're actually flying that flag. You can't deny that.

Elizabeth: [00:15:05] Exactly. And so, so for some people, they've chosen to fly that flag and they've got whatever reasons they've got. And then there's the view of that from the outside - of seeing like, okay, these flags are here. That... That is a fact, that the flag was there, it shows up. But what that flag means to an observer versus to the person who was carrying it, and then [also what it means] to the other people who are there at the same event but not carrying those flags. Right? So, like, this is a situation where we can factually say there were flags there, but then what that actually means for these various actors that are all either part of or observing the convoy as it's happening - that's where you get into questions of like, "Well, what labels can you rightly, or appropriately, put on this kind of thing?" And, and there's disagreement depending on where you stand on a variety of different kinds of issues.

Vinita: [00:16:10] I mean, it's true. I... Boy, this convoy is an intense - it's intense in some ways, but in other ways it's very clear to me, also. There's there's a truth there as well that's pretty clear. I mean, the thing that's really - again, speaking from my perspective as the editor and the journalist - the thing that's driving me a little bit crazy about this convoy is the naming. So we're calling it "the Freedom Convoy". Why? Because that's what the organizers are calling it. Right. And now we journalists, in Canada anyway, have been instructed to capitalize F and capitalize C. So it's the Freedom Convoy. Well, how did that truth happen?

Elizabeth: [00:16:52] Yeah.

Vinita: [00:16:52] How did the truth... why did this become a capitalized thing? And who decided that? Well, no, I don't agree with that. So I won't be doing that. So in that way, yes, there is a truth there that somebody's decided. Who's decided that? That this is now a thing that we have to respect in the media and call them out for what they are, which is supposedly a legitimate capitalized protest. And that to me is the problem.

Elizabeth: [00:17:21] Yeah. And I think that that's just such a elegant - weird word to use in the context of this convoy - but it's an elegant way of describing the power that something as simple as a grammatical choice, how that can impact, deeply, the way an audience receives information. And we can go back to some of the things that we said at the beginning of this conversation about, like, the idea of who gets to be the purveyor of information? Who gets trusted and seen? As...

Vinita: [00:17:53] It drives me crazy. When I think about how long it took - and I don't even know if this is across the board - how long did it take the Canadian press (said very largely in a very large way [so as to indicate all the press in Canada, not news agency called [The Canadian Press](#)]), how long did it take them - us - to [capitalize B in Black](#)? How long did it take us to [capitalize I \[in\] Indigenous](#). But Freedom Convoy got capitalized in three days? Come on. Really?

Elizabeth: [00:18:20] Yeah, yeah. That would be fascinating to know

Elizabeth: [00:18:21] I want to switch gears briefly here. So we've talked now a little bit about who gets to make these choices [about truth and news and framing]. One of the features of post-truth politics or a post-truth political landscape, it's been suggested, is that there's no longer these kind of [universally recognized arbiters or referees of fact](#). And this idea of not having these universally recognized referees of fact, I think, is really interesting, because when we think about maintaining a strong healthy democracy, [one of the core components of that is a free press](#). And one of the reasons we need a free press is so that we can have coverage of our political systems and there can be information that everybody can have access to about how our political representatives are making choices and what's happening, so that we can then make informed decisions when we go vote. And so, yeah, this idea of: okay, well, if we don't have a referee of fact, can journalism still play that role in a democratic system?

Vinita: [00:19:23] Well, it depends who we mean by referee. But, the short answer is, yes, I think we can. We hope - we need to be [hopeful]. And that's part of the danger - whenever we're in danger of losing that [freedom of the press] that to me is a red alarm for any country. You know, I think about what's happening to what was one of the largest democratic institutions in India, for example, (which was the free press) [being muzzled right now by a very far right government](#). That's a problem. And any time we lose that [freedom of the press], that's a problem. Any time in Canada when we think about the impact of big business on media, well, that's a problem. You know, the ownership of media - who owns it. Is it really a free press? I mean, those those questions are all there.

[00:20:06] But who are the arbitrators? Who are the arbitrators of truth? Like, we have Wikipedia now - a very, very different type of truth, right? Where we're supposedly all making the the encyclopedia entry now.

Elizabeth: [00:20:29] Yeah. Wikipedia is a super interesting example of this because yeah, we can all contribute to it, but [if you've ever edited a Wikipedia article](#) [then you know that] if you don't cite things properly, particularly if you are not an established editor that other editors know of, your edits might get removed. They definitely are going to get flagged. There's going to be debate and conversation and discussion. And yes, that is a more ground up, user generated content version of creating these references and these sources. But it's also still a very particular group that are on the inside circle and are respected as editors. Right? And they've had to build up their [cred](#) by editing lots of pages over time and being part of a community, actively.

Vinita: [00:21:20] But I love the fact that, I mean, I've heard of like these [Wiki sit ins](#) and things like that where people get together and [like] "We're going to create, we're going to create history, we're going to create entries, we're going to tell stories that have not been told before. We're going to start to record." And we call it journalism that - [the first draft of history](#). You know, is that really I mean... You know, we talk about the truth, right? The first draft of history. Well, there's a lot left out in that first draft. There is a lot of misinformation in those early days, in that first draft of history. Does it really tell the true story of the birth of Canada and how Canada was created? You know, I grew up in school with a story of [John A. MacDonald](#) and a particular way that that draft of history was very limited. It didn't tell the whole story and the whole truth. So it is complicated in many ways because I do want to throw out a lot of that first draft. And at the same time, I do think it's very important.

[00:22:24] So, you know, as a journalist who is also an outsider from the industry of which I am a part of, I'm both insider and outsider. I do walk a fine line [in that] I'm always going to critique [the industry] because I know the history of its dangers. I know the history of its stereotypes. I know the history of its racism. And in that there's a lot of stories that did not get told. There's a lot of myths, truths and misinformation. So when somebody says, you know, "Well, we've got to hold media accountable and we've got to

hold them accountable to the truth." Yeah, of course we do. But I believe that, at least in Canada, we are doing that. There's a lot of places that we are doing that.

Elizabeth: [00:23:19] Yeah. So you bring up a few different things in that comment that I would really love to dig into. One is the idea of that the first draft, or wanting to improve upon those drafts, and thinking about it as building towards a more comprehensive view of what happened or what is happening. Building towards something that is more complete. I don't know that we could ever get to a fully complete draft, but the push towards filling in gaps and holes and identifying - and just even recognizing - [that] there are things that are not going to be in this one 800 word story, or this 30- second clip, or whatever it is. Right?

Vinita: [00:26:17] Yes. What I'm talking about partly is that we have to go back, and I do challenge what we do see.

[00:26:35] Last week we were talking about how there's there's a lot of anti-vaxxers in Quebec, for example. This was the news article I read. You know, the headline says one thing, the photo says something else, the caption says something else. Each one of those pieces of information is going to give me a story. So I read the text and it doesn't identify who the anti-vaxxers are specifically by race or by any location or anything. But then I see the photograph. And in the photograph on the article, there's not one white person. So, so in essence [what] I'm reading is, oh, the anti-vaxxers in Quebec are like ~this~, and there's no identification in the text, but the photo says they're all people of colour or they're all racialized people.

[00:27:18] So I think that the information that we decide to put out is very nuanced and complicated, and we're not always aware ourselves as journalists. We want to be, but we're not. We have full of our own bias and untruths and all of those things that we throw in there without even realizing it. "Well, I just put that photo because that's what

was available that day. And I didn't really think to look at what that implied the to go along with the text."

[00:27:46] Like, we do have fact checkers. We've lost a lot of the fact checking ability because of speed. It is resource heavy to go and sort of check all of your facts and to get all the multiple perspectives. How much time do you have to produce the nightly news? Not that much time.

Elizabeth: [00:28:11] Right - you have to meet a deadline. And that kind of feeds into the idea of: is the purpose of journalism purely to share facts, or is it actually to share information about what's happening on a given day? And that is slightly different because you have time constraints that matter. Like if your goal is pure facts, then journalism is not the industry for you [chuckles]. Because the idea is to tell stories to people about what's happening in their communities, what's happening in their economic system, their political system, culturally. It's not just about facts - although facts are so essential to the way that we understand journalism, at least right now in Canada.

[00:28:55] We you mentioned briefly before the idea [that] everybody could take the label [of journalist but] that doesn't necessarily make them a journalist.

Vinita: [00:29:10] Yeah, I don't know, Elizabeth; it's very complicated because who is a journalist? I don't know always. I mean, anybody can go out there and tell their story. In fact, that's what the Internet gave us in many ways.

Elizabeth: [00:29:30] Yeah.

Vinita: [00:29:31] It's a democratic institution, the Internet, supposedly. Right? We still need time and money to do it, but if you've got an Internet connection, you can post your story.

Elizabeth: [00:29:39] Yeah, well, I mean, the democratizing effects of the Internet is a whole other podcast.

Vinita: [00:29:45] [Laughs]

Elizabeth: [00:29:46] But yeah, what I really like about that comment is [that] it brings us back to the wider media environment. And definitely when we think about what post-truth politics is, if it exists [then] it exists in this context of [what] I like to describe as a [high choice media environment](#) where there's a lot of different ways to get information. There's a lot of different places and people and organizations that you can get information from. People ~have~ to make choices about who they want to pull into their little information circle and who they're just going to ignore. You know, there's fears that come out of this of polarization and people only getting information that confirms their existing beliefs.

Vinita: [00:30:25] Yes. The echo chamber.

Elizabeth: [00:30:27] Yeah.

Vinita: [00:30:28] I mean, I guess [when] we're talking about journalism and facts and post-truth [and] what's truth, the two words that keep coming up in my head are [context

and analysis]. You know, context is so important. Analysis is so important. So, yes, as a journalist, I can give you the facts of the day. [But] that's not why I'm in journalism. I'm here because I'm really interested, first of all, in telling stories, and telling inspiring stories, but also in making sure that we actually provide the context for which that story sits in.

[00:30:57] So, are we going to provide the context? Are we going to start talking about, for example, when you talk about back to John A. McDonald, are we going to talk about the history and the context of colonialism, of residential schools, of... You know, besides that he was a "Sir" and he was the first prime minister and he was whatever - all of those things that we learned in school, in the history books. Well, there's all this extra additional context. And then there's the analysis that we need to put on top of that. And, truthfully, I almost several times gave up on being a journalist because I'm like, "I can't do this anymore. I don't [have the stomach](#) to tell that story in the speed that's required of me." Because the speed forces us to choose - to give up the context or to leave out context, to not provide an analysis, to not accept our subjectivity and our own biases.

[00:31:53] So we can't, you know - you're right, [in] 800 words we can't really tell it all. But if you bring all of that [context and analysis] to what you're trying to tell, then I think you just get a much richer, fuller picture. So when I say I almost - I mean, I did give up on journalism. I went to go teach journalism. I thought, "Well, if I can't do it, then I can at least teach the next generation to think about it in this way." You know? First of all: what's ~your~ mission? Why are ~you~ in it? What's your own bias? How did you get here? And also: don't forget to look left and right and up and down and get on the floor if you have to. Go talk to the person who's in the background that you would normally not talk to. All of those things. And then actually being able to come back to [journalism] in a different way. I think at The Conversation we do it in a completely different way. So the pleasure of it is being able to speak with scholars who've been thinking about the issue for a long time and help to bring that context and help to bring that analysis to a media

that, because of the structure of who you are [and] of who we are as journalists, we have not necessarily been able to do.

Elizabeth: [00:33:00] Yeah, that really makes a lot of sense to me and resonates really well. And what it makes me think about is [that] sometimes [in] an argument for, "Okay, well, what do we do about post-truth politics? What do we do when people think facts are irrelevant?" The response is like, "Well, we just need more facts. We need to be more convincing that these facts are in fact facts." But what you've just described feels to me more like, "Well, no, we need to give the contextual information that's going to make it so that the things that are facts are also truth-y." You know? Like [so that] the things that are facts also do resonate with people's experiences of the world. And we get there by offering context - by bringing in and acknowledging the perspective of whoever is creating the information and sending it out.

Vinita: [00:33:46] I mean, I wish it was that simple. I really do. I mean, I sometimes lose my patience. You know, it's really challenging to have conversations with people, especially these days. And when you're talking with someone who is just really... They're on the complete opposite scale, you know, they don't, for example, believe COVID exists or they believe that they can rinse their mouth with mouthwash and it'll be fine, you know, like those kinds of things. Right. It is super challenging then to engage in this conversation. [When] you don't believe in climate change I just don't know how to begin to have that conversation. And I could present you with stories, as I do - and I guess that's what it is for me. How do we battle exhaustion and defeat is you just keep telling the stories that you think will bring to life the issues that you want, that we're that we're trying to talk about. Whether or not that makes a difference for somebody who's like, "I just don't want to hear what you say because I don't believe you." I'm not sure.

Elizabeth: [00:34:46] Yeah. And what the research shows on those kinds of fronts right now is that for some people it is what is needed. It's the bit of a bridge. It's the the kind

of pulling in to a conversation that feels not aggressive or adversarial. And having those spaces for sharing of stories can be really helpful. But there are people who are very steadfast in their beliefs and and ideas and aren't going to be pulled in. And so, is there a great solution or a silver bullet solution? No, there isn't. But but step by step. Little bits. You know?

Vinita: [00:35:22] It is little bits. It is. It's... You know, you caught me on a day where it's like.. Okay, we're on the second day of Black History Month and yesterday they were [bomb threats to historically black colleges](#) in the United States. It's devastating to hear news like that.

Elizabeth: [00:35:40] Yeah.

Vinita: [00:35:41] You know, like, how can we be here in 2022 and still experiencing this kind of anger?

Elizabeth: [00:35:49] Yeah, I think [the connection to anger and emotion and that sort of intensity is really important](#) - not just for post-truth politics. You know, this whole season of Wonks and War Rooms is about mis- and disinformation and emotion is just such a big part of it. And emotion in the context of a global pandemic, when everybody is just a lot closer to their edge - it really changes the dynamics of our information environments, which changed the dynamics of how we interact with each other.

Vinita: [00:36:20] Yes, I mean, we are all on edge. And when I hear myself responding, sometimes I can hear myself. And so, you know, as a journalist, as a storyteller, to try

and step back and remind myself again [of] the context of which we're operating from, which is a pandemic [chuckles].

Elizabeth: [00:36:39] Yeah. Absolutely. All right. Well, this has been a wonderful conversation. As much as the topics have been difficult and are a little depressing, I've really enjoyed chatting. We're going to end with a little pop quiz.

Vinita: [00:36:53] Oh sure! It's my favourite.

Elizabeth: [00:36:54] Can you...? Excellent. Yes - as a professor yourself, you've I'm sure given lots of these. All right. Short answer. Can you define for me what post-truth politics is?

Vinita: [00:37:09] Post-truth politics: the idea that anybody can start a story, that they you know... You can just invent a story. I mean, that's post-truth politics. We're going to start the story and we're going to run with it. And this is the new truth.

Elizabeth: [00:37:25] Yeah, yeah. That idea of, like, facts don't actually matter. They're irrelevant now.

Vinita: [00:37:32] They're irrelevant now. And why is it so easy for people to believe those things? Because we have a system in place like the democratizing idea of the Internet, social media, which allows you to post something that looks to be true.

Elizabeth: [00:37:49] Yeah, yeah. Something that looks to be true, that feels to be true, regardless of whether it is. All right. Well, thank you again. This was a really, really great conversation.

Vinita: [00:38:00] It's nice to talk to you.

Elizabeth: [00:38:05] All right. That was our episode on Post-Truth Politics. I hope you enjoyed it. This special season on mis- and disinformation is brought to you in part by a grant from the [Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada](#) and the [Digital Citizen Initiative](#).