



How to cite this article:

Naderi, M. M. (2027). Political-Historical Analysis of the Relationship between Knowledge, Truth, and Power from the Enlightenment to the Post-Truth Era. *Journal of Historical Research, Law and Policy*, 5(5), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.61838/jhrp.426>



Article history:
Original Research

Dates:

Submission Date: 21 April 2026
Revision Date: 24 August 2026
Acceptance Date: 31 August 2026
First Publication Date: 05 September 2026
Final Publication Date: 01 September 2027

Political-Historical Analysis of the Relationship between Knowledge, Truth, and Power from the Enlightenment to the Post-Truth Era

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the political-historical relationship among knowledge, truth, and power from the Enlightenment to the contemporary post-truth era. It argues that knowledge has never been a purely neutral or isolated intellectual phenomenon; rather, it has been continuously shaped by institutions, social authority, political interests, and historical conditions. The study adopts a historical-analytical approach to trace the changing political role of truth across major intellectual and institutional transformations. The Enlightenment is examined as a period that associated reason, scientific inquiry, criticism, and public debate with human emancipation and political legitimacy. Enlightenment thought challenged inherited authority and promoted the idea that governments should be accountable to rational principles, law, and public welfare. However, the article shows that modernity also transformed knowledge into an instrument of administrative power through bureaucracy, education, law, medicine, statistics, national history, and social classification. The study further analyzes critical approaches that challenged the assumption that truth is always universal, neutral, and independent of relations of power. These approaches demonstrated that institutions influence which forms of knowledge are recognized as valid and that dominant intellectual frameworks may exclude alternative experiences, identities, and interpretations. The article then considers the post-truth era as a crisis of public credibility rather than the complete disappearance of truth. In this condition, emotional appeal, political identity, ideological polarization, algorithmic communication, and strategic misinformation can outweigh evidence in shaping public opinion. The findings indicate that post-truth politics is strengthened not only by technological change but also by declining trust in political institutions, media organizations, scientific authorities, and democratic processes. The article concludes that democratic societies must defend evidence-based public reasoning without allowing scientific, political, or institutional authorities to monopolize truth. A sustainable democratic response requires critical education, media literacy, institutional transparency, ethical communication, protection of independent research, and inclusive public deliberation. Truth remains essential to freedom, justice, accountability, and the preservation of democratic life.

Keywords: Knowledge; Truth; Power; Enlightenment; Political History; Modernity; Post-Truth; Democracy; Public Discourse; Epistemology

Introduction

The relationship between knowledge, truth, and power has been among the most decisive issues in the history of political thought. Political orders do not endure through force alone. They also depend on the ability of institutions, elites, intellectuals, religious authorities, scientific communities, media organizations, and state agencies to



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determine which statements are accepted as credible, which forms of knowledge are considered legitimate, and which interpretations of reality become publicly authoritative. In this sense, truth is not only a philosophical matter concerned with the correspondence between thought and reality; it is also a political matter because social actors struggle to define the standards through which reality is interpreted. Knowledge gives political power a language of legitimacy, while power shapes the institutions through which knowledge is produced, circulated, evaluated, and sometimes suppressed.

The historical development of this relationship cannot be understood as a simple transition from ignorance to enlightenment or from superstition to rationality. Every historical period has developed particular standards for distinguishing truth from error. The sources of authority have varied across time: religious revelation, philosophical reflection, scientific observation, legal procedure, historical memory, collective experience, and technological expertise have each played important roles in determining what societies recognize as true. Historical epistemology emphasizes that epistemic values are neither completely fixed nor detached from their historical environments. Carrier and Tafsiri argue that scientific and intellectual values have displayed diversity and transformation across different periods, indicating that the standards by which knowledge is judged are historically situated rather than permanently uniform (1). This insight provides an important foundation for examining the political history of truth.

The Enlightenment is commonly regarded as one of the most significant turning points in this history. Enlightenment thinkers defended reason, criticism, scientific inquiry, education, and public debate against inherited authority and unquestioned tradition. They believed that human beings could improve their social and political conditions by using reason independently. The ideal of enlightenment involved the replacement of arbitrary authority with rational discussion, lawful government, and publicly accessible forms of knowledge. Yet the Enlightenment also produced a new political confidence in expertise, classification, calculation, and institutional rationality. Knowledge became an increasingly important basis for governing populations, organizing economies, educating citizens, and defining social normality.

A historical examination of philosophy shows that intellectual concepts cannot be separated from the conditions in which they emerge and become influential. Jamshidpour's discussion of the historicity of philosophy underlines that philosophical claims should be studied not merely as abstract ideas but also in relation to their historical implications, arguments, and transformations (2). This perspective is particularly relevant to the concepts of truth and power. Philosophical theories of knowledge may appear universal, but they often become politically meaningful through specific institutions and struggles. A theory of reason, for example, can support individual freedom in one context while being used to justify bureaucratic control, colonial classification, or technocratic decision-making in another.

The political importance of knowledge became especially evident with the rise of the modern state. Modern governments increasingly relied on statistics, censuses, legal codes, schools, universities, hospitals, military institutions, and administrative records. These institutions did not simply collect neutral information about society. They helped create categories through which individuals and groups were understood and governed. Citizens were classified according to nationality, class, occupation, gender, health, education, criminality, religion, and many other characteristics. Such classifications enabled governments to regulate social life more effectively, but they also created new forms of surveillance and exclusion. Knowledge, therefore, became both a means of social improvement and a mechanism of political control.

The historical study of epistemology is useful because it reveals that debates about knowledge have long involved conflicts over authority. Kakaie and Rahbar, in their historical approach to epistemology in Western and Islamic philosophy, demonstrate the importance of tracing epistemological questions through intellectual traditions rather than treating them as isolated theoretical problems (3). Questions such as “Who has the right to speak truth?” and “What counts as reliable knowledge?” have always possessed political consequences. In religious societies, these questions might concern the authority of sacred interpretation. In modern scientific societies, they may concern the authority of experts, researchers, institutions, and technical evidence. In digital societies, they increasingly concern platforms, algorithms, influencers, data infrastructures, and competing networks of communication.

The twentieth century brought major challenges to the optimistic belief that scientific and rational knowledge would necessarily produce freedom and justice. Wars, totalitarian regimes, colonial domination, propaganda, racial theories, and ideological manipulation showed that modern knowledge could be mobilized in the service of destructive power. Political systems used education, media, science, law, and historical narratives not only to inform citizens but also to shape loyalty and suppress dissent. The development of mass communication expanded the capacity of governments and political movements to construct public realities. The struggle over truth thus became central to the struggle over political legitimacy.

Critical approaches to history and philosophy have encouraged scholars to question the apparent neutrality of established intellectual traditions. Sanford argues that critical history of philosophy requires attention to the assumptions, exclusions, and power relations involved in philosophical narratives (4). This approach is essential for studying the relationship among knowledge, truth, and power. It asks whose experiences are represented as universal, whose voices are excluded from authoritative knowledge, and whose interests are advanced by dominant conceptions of rationality. Such questions do not imply that all truth is merely invented or that evidence is meaningless. Rather, they show that the social recognition of truth is always connected to institutions, languages, traditions, and political relations.

The contemporary post-truth era has made these issues especially urgent. Post-truth politics refers to conditions in which public opinion is shaped less by shared standards of evidence and more by emotional appeal, political identity, repetition, distrust, and digital visibility. Political falsehood itself is not new. Rulers, parties, and institutions have always attempted to manipulate information. What is distinctive in the post-truth condition is the weakening of common procedures for evaluating claims. Citizens may encounter vast quantities of information, yet they may lack confidence in the institutions traditionally responsible for verification. Scientific evidence, journalistic reporting, expert analysis, and legal findings can be dismissed as partisan constructions when they conflict with group identity or ideological commitment.

The present article aims to provide a political-historical analysis of the relationship between knowledge, truth, and power from the Enlightenment to the post-truth era. It argues that this relationship has not moved in a linear direction toward either liberation or domination. Instead, it has developed through recurring tensions. Knowledge has enabled criticism of arbitrary rule, expanded access to education, strengthened scientific inquiry, and supported democratic accountability. At the same time, knowledge has been incorporated into systems of governance, social classification, ideological influence, and institutional control. Truth has served as a language of emancipation, but it has also been claimed by authorities seeking to monopolize legitimacy.

The article follows this development across five historical and theoretical dimensions. It first examines the Enlightenment ideal of reason and the political promise of truth. It then considers the institutionalization of knowledge in modern states and the relationship between administration, expertise, and social control. It subsequently analyzes critical approaches that exposed the political conditions of truth production. Finally, it investigates the post-truth era as a crisis of public credibility, democratic communication, and shared reality. The conclusion argues that democratic societies must defend the value of evidence and public reasoning while remaining alert to the ways in which authority can disguise itself as unquestionable truth.

Enlightenment Rationality and the Political Promise of Truth

The Enlightenment transformed the political meaning of knowledge by presenting reason as a source of human emancipation. Before the Enlightenment, political legitimacy in many societies was strongly connected to tradition, hereditary rule, religious authority, and established hierarchy. Although philosophical and scientific inquiry had existed long before the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment intensified the claim that individuals should be able to examine beliefs critically rather than accept them merely because they were inherited. Truth increasingly became associated with rational inquiry, open debate, empirical observation, and intellectual autonomy. This shift had profound political implications because it challenged the ability of monarchs, churches, and traditional elites to define reality without public scrutiny.

Enlightenment thought did not emerge from a single philosophical school. It included diverse traditions of rationalism, empiricism, natural law, scientific inquiry, political reform, and moral philosophy. Nevertheless, these traditions shared a broad confidence that human reason could identify error, expose unjust authority, and improve social institutions. The political value of truth was connected to the belief that legitimate power should be accountable to reason. Government was no longer seen merely as an inherited structure of command; it increasingly became an institution that needed justification through law, consent, public welfare, and rational principles.

The development of modern scientific thought helped strengthen this intellectual transformation. Scientific inquiry challenged explanations based entirely on custom, authority, or theological certainty. It emphasized evidence, observation, experiment, and systematic reasoning. Wells's study of the principle of sufficient reason in early modern scientific philosophy shows the importance of debates concerning explanation, causality, and rational intelligibility in the formation of scientific thought (5). Such debates were politically meaningful because they encouraged the belief that natural and social realities could be investigated rather than merely accepted. If the world was intelligible, then political institutions could also be examined, criticized, and reformed.

The Enlightenment ideal of reason was closely connected to the idea of individual autonomy. Individuals were encouraged to think for themselves, to question dogma, and to participate in public discussion. This did not mean that every Enlightenment thinker held identical views about democracy or equality. Some favored constitutional monarchy, some emphasized property rights, and others defended stronger forms of popular sovereignty. Yet the broader intellectual movement weakened the claim that political truth belonged exclusively to rulers or religious authorities. Truth increasingly appeared as something that could emerge through critical inquiry and public reasoning.

The growth of print culture played a central role in this transformation. Books, pamphlets, newspapers, encyclopedias, journals, and learned societies created new spaces in which ideas could circulate beyond courts

and religious institutions. Public discussion became an important source of political influence. Intellectuals could criticize injustice, expose corruption, debate legal reform, and challenge censorship. The formation of a public sphere did not produce equal access for all people, but it created the ideal that political authority should answer to informed public judgment. Knowledge became a social force because it could move beyond closed institutions and become part of public life.

Historical epistemology offers a useful way of understanding the Enlightenment's intellectual significance. Schickore's examination of historical methodology in philosophy of science shows that the development of scientific ideas cannot be understood without attention to the changing methods, standards, and contexts through which knowledge is produced (6). The Enlightenment did not simply discover timeless rationality. It created new norms of intellectual authority. Observation, experiment, criticism, method, and public demonstration acquired greater importance. These norms became part of a new political culture in which rulers and institutions were expected, at least in principle, to justify themselves through rational arguments.

The relationship between truth and freedom was especially visible in Enlightenment critiques of despotism. Arbitrary rule was often associated with ignorance, secrecy, censorship, superstition, and the concentration of knowledge in the hands of privileged groups. Enlightenment reformers argued that citizens could not be free if they were denied education, prevented from discussing public affairs, or compelled to accept falsehoods as unquestionable truths. Political freedom therefore required epistemic freedom: the ability to inquire, criticize, learn, and communicate. Truth was imagined as a force that could liberate human beings from manipulation and domination.

However, the Enlightenment's confidence in rational knowledge contained important tensions. The same rational methods that challenged arbitrary authority could also support new forms of authority. The classification of peoples, cultures, bodies, and social behaviors became increasingly important in modern thought. European intellectuals often treated their own historical experience as the universal standard of civilization. Other societies were frequently portrayed as irrational, undeveloped, or incapable of self-government. In this way, universal reason could become connected to colonial hierarchy. The language of progress could be used to justify intervention, domination, and cultural exclusion.

This ambiguity reveals that knowledge does not operate independently of political context. A claim to rationality can serve emancipatory purposes when it challenges oppression, but it can also become an instrument of domination when it defines certain groups as inferior or incapable of reason. Critical history is valuable because it reveals these contradictions rather than presenting intellectual development as a purely progressive narrative. Sanford's discussion of critical history encourages an examination of how philosophical traditions construct their objects of inquiry and how they exclude alternative perspectives (4). Applied to the Enlightenment, this approach shows that its ideals of reason and universality should be evaluated both for their emancipatory power and for their historical limitations.

The relationship between philosophy and political authority was not limited to Western Europe. Islamic intellectual traditions also developed complex discussions concerning reason, revelation, law, ethics, and political order. Fathi Hosseinabadi's account of Avicenna's political thought illustrates the continued importance of philosophical reflection in understanding political leadership, social order, and the relationship between intellectual authority and governance (7). Such traditions demonstrate that questions about truth and power have emerged in multiple

intellectual contexts. They also challenge any narrative that treats the history of rational inquiry as belonging exclusively to one civilization.

The political promise of Enlightenment thought rested on the belief that knowledge could make power more accountable. Laws could be examined in light of reason. Governments could be judged according to public welfare. Religious authority could be questioned through criticism. Social inequality could be challenged by appeals to natural rights and human dignity. Education could turn subjects into citizens capable of participating in public life. These ideals helped shape later movements for constitutionalism, democracy, human rights, secular government, and scientific education.

Yet the Enlightenment did not resolve the central problem of political truth. If rational knowledge becomes the basis of authority, who decides what counts as rational? If science becomes an important source of legitimacy, how should scientific expertise relate to democratic participation? If universal principles guide political life, how can they remain sensitive to historical diversity and social inequality? These questions became increasingly significant as modern states developed more extensive institutions of knowledge and control.

The Enlightenment should therefore be understood as both a beginning and a tension. It established the ideal that truth should challenge arbitrary power, but it also laid foundations for new forms of expert authority. It defended the public use of reason, but it did not always include all members of society equally within that public. It criticized dogma, but it sometimes treated its own historical assumptions as universal. The subsequent history of modern politics would reveal how knowledge could be transformed from a language of liberation into a technology of administration, discipline, and ideological influence.

Modernity, State Knowledge, and the Institutionalization of Power

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed the institutionalization of knowledge on an unprecedented scale. Modern states expanded their administrative capacities and increasingly governed through information. They collected data about populations, measured economic activity, recorded births and deaths, classified occupations, mapped territories, established schools, regulated health, organized military service, and developed legal and bureaucratic systems. Knowledge became essential to the everyday functioning of political power. The state was no longer simply a sovereign authority issuing commands; it became an administrative apparatus that sought to know society in order to manage it.

This transformation was closely connected to the growth of bureaucracy. Modern governments required records, files, rules, procedures, professional expertise, and systems of classification. Bureaucratic knowledge made it possible to govern large and diverse populations across extensive territories. Administrative institutions could identify citizens, allocate resources, regulate public health, enforce laws, and plan economic development. Such capacities supported important social achievements, including expanded education, sanitation, welfare provision, public infrastructure, and legal protection. At the same time, they enabled new forms of surveillance and intervention in individual life.

The production of official knowledge gave political institutions substantial power to define social categories. A census does not merely count people; it determines the categories through which they are recognized. Legal systems distinguish lawful from unlawful conduct. Medical institutions distinguish health from illness. educational systems distinguish success from failure. Police and prisons distinguish normality from deviance. These classifications may be necessary for social organization, but they can also reproduce inequalities when they are

treated as natural or unquestionable. Individuals may be governed not only through direct commands but also through the identities assigned to them by institutional knowledge.

Historical studies of knowledge demonstrate that epistemic values change alongside broader social transformations. Perkins-McVey's discussion of historical epistemology emphasizes the diversity of styles and approaches that have emerged in the history and philosophy of science (8). This diversity is important because it shows that modern expertise has never been entirely neutral or uniform. Scientific, legal, medical, and administrative knowledge are shaped by methods, values, institutions, and historical conditions. Their authority should therefore be understood as socially organized rather than simply self-evident.

The expansion of public education offers a clear example of the dual role of knowledge in modern politics. Education can promote literacy, critical thinking, social mobility, and civic participation. It can allow individuals to enter public life with greater intellectual independence. Yet education also transmits official languages, national histories, cultural norms, and institutional values. Schools help create citizens, but they may also standardize identities and marginalize local languages, minority histories, and alternative ways of knowing. The curriculum becomes a political space because it determines which memories, authors, values, and forms of knowledge are treated as central to collective life.

Nationalism intensified this process. Modern states often used historical narratives to create a sense of shared identity. Museums, monuments, textbooks, archives, national holidays, and public ceremonies organized collective memory around particular stories of origin, sacrifice, progress, and unity. Historical knowledge could strengthen solidarity, but it could also conceal conflict and exclusion. Keshavarz Beizaei and Keshavarz Beizaei's examination of historical knowledge in the work of Hafez Shirazi reminds us that historical understanding is not confined to formal political institutions; cultural and literary texts also preserve, reshape, and contest collective memory (9). Political power often seeks to control historical narratives because memory influences identity, legitimacy, and public imagination.

Modernity also produced a closer relationship between knowledge and economic power. Industrialization required new forms of technical expertise, labor management, accounting, engineering, planning, and social research. Employers and governments used information to organize workforces, regulate production, and manage urban populations. Social science emerged partly from the desire to understand problems such as poverty, crime, unemployment, migration, and social disorder. These fields could support reform by revealing injustice and identifying social needs. However, they could also produce paternalistic forms of governance in which experts spoke for populations rather than with them.

The relationship between knowledge and class power became a major concern in modern political theory. Critical thinkers argued that dominant ideas often reflect dominant social interests. Economic inequality influences access to education, cultural authority, media ownership, and political representation. Groups with greater resources can shape the institutions through which knowledge becomes legitimate. This does not mean that every intellectual claim is merely an expression of class interest, but it does mean that the distribution of knowledge cannot be separated from the distribution of power. Access to education, research, publication, and public communication affects whose voices are heard and whose experiences are treated as authoritative.

The modern state's reliance on scientific and technical expertise also encouraged the growth of technocracy. Policymaking increasingly involved economists, engineers, physicians, legal specialists, statisticians, planners, and professional administrators. Expertise can improve political decision-making by providing reliable information and

specialized understanding. Yet technocratic authority may weaken democratic participation if citizens are treated merely as recipients of expert decisions. Political questions often involve values, justice, priorities, and competing interests; they cannot be solved exclusively by technical calculation. The challenge is not to reject expertise but to ensure that expertise remains accountable, transparent, and open to public criticism.

The history of philosophy in Islamic societies also demonstrates how knowledge has been connected to political and social authority through changing relationships among philosophy, law, mysticism, and religious interpretation. Kamalizadeh's study of the evolution of philosophy, jurisprudence, and mysticism in Islamic intellectual history shows that knowledge traditions develop through institutional, theological, and historical interactions rather than through isolated intellectual change (10). This observation is valuable for political analysis because it reminds us that no society has a single, stable source of truth. Multiple knowledge traditions often coexist, compete, and influence political authority in different ways.

Colonialism provided one of the clearest examples of knowledge functioning as a means of domination. Colonial states mapped territories, documented resources, categorized populations, and produced ethnographic, linguistic, legal, and geographical descriptions of colonized societies. This knowledge made rule more efficient, but it also constructed colonized peoples as objects of administration. Colonial categories frequently imposed external definitions of race, tribe, religion, gender, and tradition. The resulting knowledge was not simply descriptive; it actively shaped political realities. Groups were governed according to categories that had often been created or transformed by colonial institutions.

The twentieth century showed that mass communication could dramatically intensify the political struggle over truth. Newspapers, radio, cinema, and television expanded the reach of political messages. Democratic societies used mass media to inform citizens and support public debate, but authoritarian systems used it to construct ideological unity and mobilize populations. Propaganda revealed that political power could shape public consciousness not only by suppressing information but also by producing emotionally compelling narratives. Repetition, symbolism, fear, national pride, and the identification of enemies could become more politically powerful than factual accuracy.

The political use of knowledge did not disappear with the development of democracy. Democratic governments also rely on official statistics, educational systems, public communication, legal classifications, and expert knowledge. The difference lies in whether these processes are open to criticism, public participation, independent research, and institutional accountability. A democratic political order cannot function without shared knowledge, but it must prevent any single institution from becoming the unquestionable owner of truth. The freedom to investigate, criticize, publish, and contest official claims remains essential.

Modernity therefore transformed knowledge into a central resource of governance. It created institutions capable of producing large amounts of information and applying it to social life. This transformation expanded human capacities for planning, education, health, and public welfare. Yet it also increased the power of states and elites to classify, monitor, normalize, and influence citizens. The history of modern knowledge reveals that truth is not politically innocent. It can serve justice and emancipation, but it can also become embedded in systems of domination. This tension prepared the ground for later critiques of objectivity, expertise, discourse, and the politics of truth.

Critiques of Truth, Discourse, and Power in the Transition to the Post-Truth Era

The confidence of the Enlightenment and early modern period in reason, science, and progress gradually encountered major philosophical and political criticisms. These critiques did not necessarily reject truth or knowledge. Rather, they questioned the assumption that truth was always neutral, universal, and independent of historical power relations. They examined the ways in which knowledge is produced through language, institutions, social interests, cultural values, and practices of exclusion. The central question became not only whether a statement is true, but also how particular claims become recognized as true, who has the authority to validate them, and whose experiences are excluded from dominant frameworks of knowledge.

Historical epistemology contributed to this shift by emphasizing that the values guiding inquiry change across periods. Carrier and Tafsiri show that epistemic values in science have not remained identical through history and that intellectual standards may be transformed in response to changing contexts and practices (1). This perspective weakens the simplistic assumption that science or philosophy develops through a direct and uninterrupted accumulation of objective truth. It does not deny the achievements of science, but it invites reflection on the historical conditions that determine which questions are asked, which methods are regarded as legitimate, and which forms of explanation are valued.

Critical approaches to philosophy further challenged the belief that intellectual history could be written as a neutral account of great ideas. Sanford's discussion of critical history of philosophy highlights the importance of examining the assumptions and exclusions involved in philosophical traditions (4). Philosophical concepts can appear universal while being shaped by particular social experiences. The language of "humanity," "reason," "civilization," or "progress" may conceal exclusions based on class, gender, race, religion, geography, or political status. Critical history therefore seeks to identify not only what a tradition says but also what it leaves unspoken.

These critiques became politically important because modern societies increasingly relied on expert knowledge. Universities, laboratories, professional associations, policy institutions, media organizations, and government agencies acquired significant influence over public life. Their authority was often justified by claims of objectivity. Yet critics argued that no institution is entirely outside power. Research priorities may be influenced by funding structures. Public policy may privilege measurable outcomes over moral or cultural concerns. Media organizations may select which events become visible. Educational systems may treat some forms of knowledge as superior while marginalizing others. Knowledge can be disciplined by power even when it is produced in the name of neutrality.

The relationship between truth and authority is particularly significant in political philosophy. Brill's discussion of method in relation to Arendt, Foucault, and Hobbes draws attention to the connection between political thought, historical analysis, and the forms through which power becomes intelligible (11). Political authority depends partly on the ability to create order in the realm of meaning. Governments seek to define threats, identify enemies, explain crises, and present their decisions as necessary or rational. The struggle over political language is therefore a struggle over reality itself. Those who control the dominant interpretation of an event can shape the range of possible responses to it.

The growth of media culture intensified this process. Mass media created new opportunities for information, criticism, and democratic communication, but they also transformed politics into a field of image, spectacle, and emotional persuasion. Political leaders learned to communicate through symbols, narratives, and visual

representation. Public opinion could be shaped by the framing of events as much as by the events themselves. The authority of truth became increasingly dependent on communication systems. A fact that remained invisible, inaccessible, or poorly explained might have little influence on public life, while a misleading claim that was emotionally powerful and widely repeated could become politically effective.

The digital revolution deepened these transformations. The internet initially appeared to democratize knowledge by making information more accessible and enabling individuals to communicate outside traditional media institutions. Digital platforms allowed marginalized voices to enter public conversation, created new opportunities for activism, and expanded access to educational resources. However, they also weakened older systems of editorial verification and created environments in which misinformation could circulate rapidly. The abundance of information did not automatically produce better-informed citizens. Instead, it often made it more difficult to distinguish reliable evidence from manipulated content.

Post-truth politics emerged within this environment of informational abundance, institutional distrust, ideological polarization, and technological acceleration. It does not mean that truth has literally disappeared. Facts, evidence, expertise, and rational inquiry continue to matter in scientific, legal, medical, and everyday contexts. Rather, post-truth describes a condition in which factual accuracy may have less influence on public opinion than emotional resonance, group loyalty, political identity, and strategic repetition. A claim can become influential because it confirms what a community already fears or desires, even when strong evidence contradicts it.

The concept of post-truth should not be reduced to the simple idea that citizens have become irrational. Distrust in institutions may arise from genuine experiences of inequality, exclusion, corruption, failed policy, or elite indifference. When public institutions appear distant or unaccountable, citizens may become more receptive to alternative explanations. Conspiracy theories and misinformation often gain influence not only because people lack information but also because they provide emotionally satisfying narratives of control, blame, and belonging. The task of democratic politics is therefore not merely to correct false claims. It is also to rebuild trust through transparency, accountability, social inclusion, and respectful public communication.

The historical study of knowledge can help clarify why post-truth politics is so dangerous. Kakaie and Rahbar's historical approach to epistemology demonstrates that debates over reliable knowledge have long been shaped by philosophical, religious, and cultural traditions (3). The post-truth condition is not simply a technological problem. It is also an epistemological and political problem. It concerns the standards by which citizens evaluate claims, the institutions they trust, and the values that guide public reasoning. When these standards become fragmented, democratic deliberation becomes more difficult because citizens no longer share even a minimal basis for discussing common problems.

The crisis of public truth has also affected science. Scientific institutions depend on methods of peer review, evidence, replication, critical debate, and gradual revision. Scientific conclusions are not always final, and uncertainty is an ordinary part of research. Yet political actors may exploit this uncertainty by presenting normal scientific disagreement as proof that no knowledge is reliable. This strategy is especially visible in debates involving public health, environmental policy, technology, and economic regulation. The existence of uncertainty does not mean that all claims deserve equal credibility. Democratic societies need greater public understanding of how knowledge is produced, tested, corrected, and improved.

Abbaszadeh's discussion of a priori knowledge in contemporary epistemology and Farabi's philosophy illustrates the continued importance of examining the foundations and limits of human knowledge (12). In the post-truth era,

such examination is urgently needed because citizens must distinguish between critical skepticism and destructive cynicism. Critical skepticism asks for evidence, questions authority, and remains open to correction. Cynicism assumes that all institutions lie, all expertise is manipulation, and all truth claims are merely political weapons. The first attitude strengthens democracy; the second can make democratic societies vulnerable to authoritarian rhetoric.

The post-truth era also raises ethical questions concerning the use of information. Digital platforms are not neutral channels. Their designs may reward speed, outrage, engagement, and polarization. Algorithms can amplify content that provokes emotional reaction. Political actors may use targeted messages to exploit fear, resentment, or cultural division. In such conditions, truth competes with content that is more sensational, simpler, or more profitable. The political economy of information therefore becomes central to the defense of democratic communication.

The historical role of ethics is significant in this context. Bahadorifar's analysis of history and organizational ethics emphasizes that ethical principles are shaped by historical experience and institutional practice (13). The contemporary crisis of truth cannot be addressed solely through technical fact-checking. It also requires ethical commitments from political leaders, journalists, researchers, educators, technology companies, and citizens. Honesty, responsibility, transparency, intellectual humility, and respect for evidence are not merely private virtues. They are public values necessary for the survival of democratic life.

The transition from Enlightenment rationality to post-truth politics should not be interpreted as the failure of reason itself. Rather, it reveals the fragility of the institutions and practices that make public reasoning possible. Reason requires education, freedom of expression, independent research, responsible media, equal access to information, and institutions that can be criticized without being destroyed. Truth requires more than facts; it requires social practices through which facts can be examined and trusted. Power will always influence these practices, but democratic societies can limit its distortions by protecting pluralism, accountability, and open debate.

Conclusion

The political history of the relationship between knowledge, truth, and power demonstrates that none of these concepts can be understood in isolation. Knowledge has always been connected to institutions, social authority, cultural values, and political struggle. Truth has served as a standard through which power is criticized, but it has also been claimed by those seeking to justify authority. Power has often depended on force, law, and material resources, yet it has also depended on the capacity to define reality, shape public memory, classify citizens, and influence collective belief.

The Enlightenment made reason and critical inquiry central to the political imagination of modernity. It promoted the ideal that political authority should not rest solely on inherited privilege, religious dogma, or arbitrary command. Instead, power was expected to justify itself through law, public welfare, education, rational argument, and increasingly through evidence. This intellectual transformation strengthened the possibility of political criticism and helped establish important ideals of freedom, citizenship, public debate, and accountable government.

However, the expansion of rational knowledge did not eliminate domination. Modern states transformed knowledge into an instrument of administration. Statistics, schools, legal systems, medical institutions, policing, national histories, and bureaucratic records enabled governments to understand and organize society in new ways. These institutions contributed to public welfare and social development, but they also created systems of classification, surveillance, exclusion, and normalization. The modern history of knowledge is therefore neither a story of pure liberation nor a story of pure control. It is a history of continual tension between these possibilities.

Critical theories of truth made this tension visible. They showed that knowledge is never produced in a social vacuum and that claims to universality may conceal historical interests and exclusions. Such critiques were valuable because they challenged the authority of institutions that presented their own categories as natural, neutral, or permanent. They encouraged attention to marginalized voices, overlooked experiences, and the political conditions through which some forms of knowledge gain legitimacy while others are dismissed.

Yet the recognition that knowledge is historically and politically situated should not lead to the belief that truth is irrelevant. The fact that institutions influence public knowledge does not mean that evidence, inquiry, and rational judgment have no value. A democratic society cannot survive if every factual claim is treated as merely an expression of political preference. Public life requires shared methods for examining evidence, correcting mistakes, questioning authority, and distinguishing credible claims from deliberate deception.

The post-truth era has intensified the crisis of public credibility. Digital communication has expanded access to information, but it has also made manipulation, polarization, and misinformation easier. Political actors can exploit distrust, emotional insecurity, and social division by presenting false or misleading claims as expressions of authenticity or popular resistance. The danger is not simply that citizens encounter incorrect information. The deeper danger is that they may lose confidence in the possibility of shared reality altogether.

A democratic response to post-truth politics must avoid two extremes. The first is authoritarian certainty, in which governments, experts, or institutions claim exclusive ownership of truth and silence criticism. The second is total relativism, in which all claims are treated as equally valid regardless of evidence. Democracy requires a more difficult path: protecting open criticism while defending standards of evidence; recognizing the role of power in knowledge production while resisting cynicism; respecting pluralism while preserving the possibility of common facts.

Education has a central role in this task. Citizens need more than access to information. They need the ability to evaluate sources, understand evidence, identify manipulation, recognize emotional persuasion, and revise their views when confronted with better arguments. Media literacy, scientific literacy, historical awareness, and ethical responsibility should therefore be treated as essential dimensions of democratic citizenship.

Political institutions also have responsibilities. Trust cannot be demanded; it must be earned through transparency, fairness, responsiveness, and accountability. When governments conceal information, dismiss public concerns, or use expertise to avoid democratic discussion, they contribute to the distrust that makes post-truth politics more powerful. Similarly, journalists, researchers, educators, and digital platforms must recognize that the communication of truth is not merely a technical task. It is a public responsibility.

The historical relationship between knowledge, truth, and power ultimately reveals that truth is always politically significant. It can restrain arbitrary authority, expose injustice, and support collective decision-making. It can also be manipulated, monopolized, and used to silence dissent. The challenge of the present era is not to imagine a politics without power, but to create institutions and public practices in which power remains accountable to truth, evidence, criticism, and human dignity.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who helped us carrying out this study.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

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