

American Dialect Society

Julie Roberts, Executive Secretary
julie.roberts@uvm.edu

Dept. of Romance
Languages & Linguistics
University of Vermont
Burlington, VT 05405

Contact for Word of the Year: **Ben Zimmer**,
Chair of the New Words Committee of the American Dialect Society
and language columnist for *The Wall Street Journal*.
bgzimmer@gmail.com, (740) 485-2105

(For immediate release)

Jan. 7, 2022

American Dialect Society Selects “*Insurrection*” as 2021 Word of the Year

The American Dialect Society, in its 32nd annual words-of-the-year vote, selected “*insurrection*” as the Word of the Year for 2021. While the selection is typically held in person at the society’s annual meeting, for the second year in a row the event was conducted as a webinar open to all who were interested in attending via Zoom. More than three hundred attendees took part in the deliberations and voting.

Presiding at the Jan. 7 voting session was Ben Zimmer, chair of the ADS New Words Committee and language columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*.

“More than a year after the attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, the nation is still coming to grips with what happened that day,” Zimmer said. “At the time, words like *coup*, *sedition*, and *riot* were used to describe the disturbing events at the Capitol, but *insurrection* – a term for a violent attempt to take control of the government – is the one that many felt best encapsulates the threat to democracy experienced that day. The lasting effects of that *insurrection* will be felt for years to come.”

Word of the Year is interpreted in its broader sense as “vocabulary item”—not just words but phrases. The words or phrases do not have to be brand-new, but they have to be newly prominent or notable in the past year.

The vote is the longest-running such vote anywhere, the only one not tied to commercial interests, and *the* word-of-the-year event up to which all others lead. It is fully informed by the members’ expertise in the study of words, but it is far from a solemn occasion.

Members in the 132-year-old organization include linguists, lexicographers, etymologists, grammarians, historians, researchers, writers, editors, students, and independent scholars. In conducting the vote, they act in fun and do not pretend to be officially inducting words into the English language. Instead, they are highlighting that language change is normal, ongoing, and entertaining.

AMERICAN DIALECT SOCIETY VOTING RESULTS

Raw vote totals and percentages of the vote are given after each nomination. In cases requiring a runoff, two figures are given. Winners are indicated by an asterisk.

WORD OF THE YEAR (2021)

antiwork: position supporting the refusal to work, pushing back against labor exploitation 18 (6%)

Big Lie: propagandistic distortion of truth, as in Donald Trump's false claim that the 2020 election was "stolen" 19 (6%)

Great Resignation: pandemic-era phenomenon in which workers are leaving their jobs in large numbers. 59 (18%)

* **insurrection**: violent attempt to take control of a government, applied to the Capitol attack of Jan. 6, 2021 - 188 (36%) / 169 (53%)

long Covid: lingering symptoms and health problems experienced by people after they have recovered from Covid - 5 (2%)

Omicron: name assigned by the World Health Organization for a highly contagious "variant of concern" of the coronavirus 4 (1%)

variant: new form of a virus, such as coronavirus, resulting from mutations 33 (10%)

vax/vaxx: shortened form of vaccine, vaccination, or vaccinate, often used as combining form (as in anti-vaxxer, Hot Vax Summer, double/triple-vaxxed, vaxxed and relaxed) - 71 (22%) / 152 (47%)

MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED

* **antiwork**: position supporting the refusal to work, pushing back against labor exploitation 109 (34%) / 165 (52%)

endemic: describing a disease that is always present in a community or population, as some predict will be the case for Covid-19 62 (19%)

Great Resignation: pandemic-era phenomenon in which workers are leaving their jobs in large numbers 89 (28%) / 153 (48%)

mid: of average or poor quality, or simply decent, in the amorphous slang of Generation Z - 15 (5%)

NFT: abbreviation for non-fungible token, a digital asset using blockchain technology to make a unique token, with its own identification that cannot be replicated 11 (3%)

sigma male: term used in the masculinist "manosphere" for a male who is more introverted than an "alpha male" but is still considered successful 5 (2%)

shrinkflation: reduction of the size or quantity of a product while the price remains the same or even rises 28 (9%)

MOST USEFUL

bussin': extremely good, such as food that is indescribably tasty 31 (10%)

* **hard pants**: pants that lack an elastic waistband or stretchy fabric, unlike the "soft pants" favored by those working from home during the pandemic 124 (39%) / 178 (55%)

tone indicator: code such as "/srs" or "/lol" that indicates the tone (serious, ironic, humorous) of online discourse 78 (24%)

vibe: mood or emotion, such as the positive feelings evoked by a piece of music; to exult in one's good feelings. 89 (28%) / 144 (45%)

POLITICAL WORD OF THE YEAR

Big Lie: propagandistic distortion of truth, as in Donald Trump's false claim that the 2020 election was "stolen" 70 (34%) / 87 (41%)

CRT/critical race theory: framework for analyzing how racism is embedded in law and policies, exploited as a scare tactic by politicians favoring "anti-CRT" legislation 27 (13%)

*** insurrection:** violent attempt to take control of a government, applied to the Capitol attack of Jan. 6, 2021 67 (33%) / 124 (59%)

mandate: official or authoritative command, as in politically contentious "mask mandates" and "vaccine mandates" 41 (20%)

DIGITAL WORD OF THE YEAR

bones day/no bones day: prediction of whether a day will be good or bad (based on Jonathan Graziano's TikTok videos of his dog Noodle getting up in the morning) 58 (18%)

*** #FreeBritney:** hashtag for those supporting the release of Britney Spears from the conservatorship set up by her father 13 years ago 125 (39%) / 215 (68%)

girlboss: a confident, capable woman pursuing business ambitions; also used in a derogatory fashion for a woman cynically combining feminism with careerism 26 (8%)

horny jail: imagined place a person is sent to as punishment for being excessively sexual on social media 22 (7%)

parasocial: describing a relationship that a person imagines with someone whom they do not actually know, such as a celebrity on an online platform 61 (19%) / 102 (32%)

the ___ urge to: ironic framing device to describe stereotypical tendencies and traits, as in "the feminine urge to..." 29 (9%)

PANDEMIC-RELATED WORD OF THE YEAR (special category)

*** boosted:** having received a booster shot, as for Covid-19 (also *boostered/boosterized*) 108 (32%) / 192 (58%)

breakthrough: describing an infection, as from coronavirus, after a person has been vaccinated 16 (5%)

Delta/Omicron: Greek-letter names assigned by the World Health Organization for coronavirus "variants of concern" 10 (3%)

flurona: sickness from a combination of the influenza virus and the coronavirus 4 (1%)

long Covid: lingering symptoms and health problems experienced by people after they have recovered from Covid - 23 (7%)

variant: new form of a virus, such as coronavirus, resulting from mutations 102 (30%) / 139 (42%)

vax/vaxx: shortened form of vaccine, vaccination, or vaccinate, often used as combining form (as in *anti-vaxxer, Hot Vax Summer, double/triple-vaxxed, vaxxed and relaxed*) 78 (23%)

FINANCIAL/ECONOMIC WORD OF THE YEAR (special category)

Great Resignation: pandemic-era phenomenon in which workers are leaving their jobs in large numbers 98 (29%) / 148 (43%)

NFT: abbreviation for non-fungible token, a digital asset using blockchain technology to make a unique token, with its own identification that cannot be replicated 50 (15%)

SPAC: abbreviation for special purpose acquisition company, an investment vehicle that allows a company to go public without going through the traditional IPO process 1 (0%)

stimmy: shortened form of stimulus, used in reference to government stimulus checks 26 (8%)

stonk: deliberate misspelling of stock, used by online day traders for their investments, esp. for "meme stocks" like Gamestop (aka *Gamestonk*) 32 (9%)

* **supply chain**: interconnected global system of supplying goods and services to consumers, put in jeopardy by the pandemic 133 (39%) / 194 (57%)

INFORMAL WORD OF THE YEAR

cheugy: term used by members of Generation Z to poke fun at the off-trend lifestyles and fashions of millennials 111 (35%)

down bad: used to describe intense (typically sexual) desperation 16 (5%)

flop era: time in which a person, such as a pop star, enters an unsuccessful period 24 (8%)

* **yassify**: to apply image filters to a person's photo to transform it into a cartoonishly beautiful image; more generally, to make beautiful or glamorous 164 (52%)

MOST CREATIVE WORD OF THE YEAR

chin diaper: face mask worn below the chin instead of properly covering the nose and mouth 98 (31%) / 148 (49%)

copium: the rationalizations, justifications, and denial one uses to deal with a severe letdown or personal failure (a blend of *cope* and *opium*) 85 (27%)

-core: productive suffix for aesthetic trends, such as *gorpcore* (functional outdoorsy gear), *emancicore* (non-restrictive clothing emphasizing freedom), and *goblincore* (chaotic aesthetic inspired by goblin folklore) 45 (14%)

* **Fauci ouchie**: rhyming phrase for a Covid-19 vaccine, in honor of Dr. Anthony Fauci 89 (28%) / 154 (51%)

EUPHEMISM OF THE YEAR

election integrity: euphemism used for voter suppression 81 (25%) / 122 (38%)

glizzy: slang term for a hot dog (also used to describe fellatio, as in *glizzy gobbling*) 18 (6%)

Let's Go Brandon: playful euphemism for "Fuck Joe Biden," based on a sports reporter mishearing a chant while interviewing stock-car racer Brandon Brown 50 (15%)

TFG: abbreviation for "the former guy," an expression used by President Biden to refer to his predecessor Trump without saying his name 23 (7%)

* **unalive**: term used as a substitute for "suicide" or "kill" to avoid social media filters 152 (47%) / 198 (62%)

Founded in 1889, the American Dialect Society is dedicated to the study of the English language in North America, and of other languages, or dialects of other languages, influencing it or influenced by it. ADS members are linguists, lexicographers, etymologists, historians, grammarians, academics, editors, writers, and independent scholars in the fields of English, foreign languages, and other disciplines. The society also publishes the quarterly journal *American Speech*.

The American Dialect Society began choosing Words of the Year in 1990. Winners are listed below. A full account of the previous choices may be found on the American Dialect Society's website, [www.americandialect.org](http://americandialect.org).

Not all words chosen for a particular year are destined to become permanent additions to the vocabulary. *Y2K* in 1999 and *chad* in 2000 are examples of prominent terms that faded quickly. An explanation of which words are likely to succeed may be found in *Predicting New Words: The Secrets of Their Success* by Allan Metcalf.

American Dialect Society Words of Previous Years are at
<http://americandialect.org/woty>