

“AUSTERITY” MERRIAM- WEBSTER’S WORD OF 2010

Merriam-Webster has made “austerity” it’s word of the year for 2010.

Topping the list is *austerity*, defined as “enforced or extreme economy.” Lookups for *austerity* peaked dramatically several times throughout the year, as people’s attention was drawn to global economic conditions and the debt crises in Europe, but lookups also remained strong throughout the year, reflecting widespread use of the word in many contexts. “*Austerity* clearly resonates with many people,” said Peter Sokolowski, Editor at Large at Merriam-Webster, who monitors online dictionary searches. “We often hear it used in the context of government measures, but we also apply it to our own personal finances and what is sometimes called the new normal.”

I’m so cynical my first response was to wonder whether Pete Peterson had bought off the dictionary company like he did the Washington Post. But M-W says the list is based off of top online dictionary searches. Which is why some of the other words are perhaps more interesting:

- 4) socialism
- 5) bigot
- 7) shellacking
- 9) dissident

Remember, these reflect actual searches of the online dictionary. That suggests a significant proportion of the people still inclined to actually look things up in the dictionary chose

(or needed) to refer to the dictionary to figure out what socialism actually is. And did Obama's use of the term "shellacking" send journalists and Obama fans to the dictionary to find out just how badly Democrats got whopped at the mid-terms?

Use this thread to predict what words will make up next year's list.