

Guidelines for annotation of informal fallacies in political debates

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In the following guidelines we describe 7 categories of fallacies : appeal to authority in section 1, ad hominem in section 2, appeal to emotion in section 3, False cause in section 4 , fallacy of repetition in section 5 , use of slogans in section 6 , and slippery slope fallacy in section 7. Every section in the guidelines is divided to subcategories. In each subcategory one or several examples are brought from the dataset.

- Each example has a **justification** to explain why the example fits into that specific category of fallacy.
- At the end of each section explaining a category of fallacies, we provide some rules in which the statement may seem like to be fallacious but it does not contain any fallacy. For some sub-categories of fallacies we also provide examples of such **exceptions**.
- In this document Fallacies are underlined.

The dataset we are annotating is a collection of political debates prior to presidential elections in the united states from 1960 to 2016. Each debate is divided into several sections in which the candidates are debating on the same topic.

Types of fallacies

1 Appeal to authority (Ad Verecundiam)

In this category of arguments politicians use opinion of experts as their evidence. Two types of fallacies are defined based on this method of argument:

1.1 Appeal to authority without evidence:

Stating a claim is true just because a valid authority said it is true without providing the evidence why they said so.

Examples:

- And judgment is what we look for in the president of the United States of America. I'm proud that important military figures who are supporting me in this race: former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff John Shalikashvili; just yesterday, General Eisenhower's son, General John Eisenhower, endorsed me; General Admiral William Crown; General Tony McBeak, who ran the Air Force war so effectively for his father—all believe I would make a stronger commander in chief ¹

Justification: The candidate's premise as why he is a good commander in chief is solely based on the approval of the authorities he is mentioning and no other justification of why their judgement is correct is given thus this is considered as **appeal to authority**

- if we suffer defeat in Iraq, which General Petraeus predicts we will, if we adopted Senator Obama's set date for withdrawal, then that will have a calamitous effect in Afghanistan and American national security interests in the region²

Justification: The candidate is basing his argument on a premise that a defeat in Iraq is inevitable just because an authority said so without providing any other premise, thus he is committing a fallacy of **Appeal to authority**

1.2 Appeal to false authority:

When a false authority's opinion is used as an evidence to support a claim which is not that authority's field of expertise:

Examples:

- Look at her website, she is telling us how to fight ISIS on her website , I don't think general Douglas MacArthur³ would like that too much. ⁴

Justification: The candidate is trying to mock the opponent's war tactics by mentioning a relevant authority in the field who has been dead for a long time. Thus he is committing a fallacy of **Appeal to Authority**

- But in the case of missile defense, Senator Obama said it had to be, quote, "proven". That wasn't proven when Ronald Reagan said we would do SDI, which is missile defense. And it was major – a major factor in bringing about the end of the Cold War. We seem to come full circle again.⁵

Justification: The candidate is trying compare how Ronald Reagan handled the missile crisis in his time with the current time. Which is appealing to an authority on the relevant field but not related to the current situation. Thus the candidate is committing fallacy of **Appeal to Authority**

¹ Bush-Kerry debate , September 30th 2004

² McCain-Obama debate, September 26th 2008

³ A military general who played an important role in the US army during World War II, he died in 1964

⁴ Clinton-Trump debate, September 16th 2016

⁵ McCain-Obama debate, September 26th 2008

1.3 Appeal to popular opinion, ad populum

This fallacy covers instances of attempted reinforcement of political claims by referring to the fact that something is very popular, or the will of the people.

Examples:

- He can make any excuse he wants, but the facts are that we're reducing the number of uninsured percentage of our population. And as the percentage of the population is increasing nationally, somehow the allegation that we don't care and we're going to give money for this interest or that interest and not for children in the State of Texas is totally absurd. Let me just tell you who the jury is. The people of Texas. There's only been one governor ever elected to back-to-back four-year terms, and that was me⁶

Justification: The candidate is using his selection as governor to appeal to popular opinion. He is saying: since the majority of people chose me as governor for a four year term, the popular opinion is that I am a good governor thus I am a good governor (who conducts correct insurance laws). Thus the whole premise is annotated as

Appeal to authority

Exceptions:

- A statement is not appeal to authority if the candidate explains the justification of the authority of that statement. (Why the authority thinks that statement is true)
- A statement containing the name of an authority is not considered fallacious if the candidate doesn't mention their name to use as a reason why his statement is justified.

Example for exceptions:

- The following example is not an exception to appeal to authority because firstly the authority is relevant to the subject and secondly the candidate is providing premises why the authority is correct in their judgement. Thus no fallacy is committed by mentioning the authority.

Example from Bush-Gore debate, October 11 2000: ... I didn't think he necessarily made the right decision to take land troops off the table right before we committed ourselves offensively, but nevertheless, it worked. The administration deserves credit for having made it work. It is important for NATO to have it work. It's important for NATO to be strong and confident and to help keep the peace in Europe. And one of the reasons I felt so strongly that the United States needed to participate was because of our relations with NATO, and NATO is going to be an important part of keeping the peace in the future...

- In the following example the candidate is mentioning Tom Coburn as a conservative republican who he has work with to justify that he can work with the people of the other party. Thus no fallacy is committed by mentioning the name of this person.

Example from McCain-Obama debate, September 26th 2008: Mostly that's just me opposing George

⁶Bush-Gore debate, October 11th 2000:

Bush's wrong headed policies since I've been in Congress but I think it is that it is also important to recognize I worked with Tom Coburn, the most conservative, one of the most conservative Republicans who John already mentioned to set up what we call a Google for government saying we'll list every dollar of federal spending to make sure that the taxpayer can take a look and see who, in fact, is promoting some of these spending projects that John's been railing about⁷

2 Ad hominem

Walton [1987] says ad hominem occurs where an argument becomes an excessive personal attack on an arguer's position.

Example:

- So you've got to ask yourself, why won't he release his tax returns? And I think there may be a couple of reasons. First, maybe he's not as rich as he says he is. Second, maybe he's not as charitable as he claims to be. Third, we don't know all of his business dealings, but we have been told through investigative reporting that he owes about \$650 million to Wall Street and foreign banks. Or maybe he doesn't want the American people, all of you watching tonight, to know that he's paid nothing in federal taxes, because the only years that anybody's ever seen were a couple of years when he had to turn them over to state authorities when he was trying to get a casino license, and they showed he didn't pay any federal income tax.⁸

Justification: With the first claim: "maybe he's not as rich as he say he is" the candidate is implying that the opposing candidate is lying. With the second one they are mentioning that the other candidate is not charitable. These are examples of attacking the person directly thus examples of **Ad hominem** fallacy.

- I'm afraid Senator Obama doesn't understand the difference between a tactic and a strategy⁹
- Well, I was interested in Senator Obama's reaction to the Russian aggression against Georgia. His first statement was, Both sides ought to show restraint. "Again, a little bit of naivete there. He doesn't understand that Russia committed serious aggression against Georgia"¹⁰

Justification: Saying that the other candidate has naivete is a **Ad hominem** fallacy.

- Typical politician. All talk, no action. Sounds good, doesn't work. Never going to happen. Our country is suffering because people like Secretary Clinton have made such bad decisions in terms of our jobs and in terms of what's going on¹¹.

⁷Mccain-Obama debate, September 26th 2008

⁸Clinton-Trump debate, September 26th, 2016

⁹Mccain-Obama debate September 26th 2008

¹⁰Mccain-Obama debate September 26th 2008

¹¹Clinton-Trump debate, September 26th, 2016:

Justification: The candidate is trying to attack the person by mentioning stereotypical behaviour of politicians(all action, no talk).Thus his premise is annotated as **Ad Hominem**.

2.1 Name calling, labeling

Labeling the object of the propaganda campaign as either something the target audience fears, hates, finds undesirable for loves, praises.

Example:

- Manchin says Democrats acted like babies at the SOTU (video) Personal Liberty Poll
Exercise your right to vote

Justification: The use of the expression like babies makes this example an **Ad Hominem** because it is trying to diminish their opposite by labeling them as babies.¹²

2.2 Appeal to hypocrisy (tu quoque)

As Walton [1987] describes *tu quoque* is a function in dialectic when an arguer tries to evade an argument by putting the ball in the opponent's court". This fallacy occurs when a candidate evades the argument and attacks the opposite candidate by saying: But you did the same thing! instead of justifying their own actions or behaviour. Tu quoque literally means "you also".

Example:

- The book you mentioned that Vice President Gore wrote, he also called for taxing – big energy taxes in order to clean up the environment. And now that the energy prices are high, I guess he's not advocating those big energy taxes right now.¹³

Justification: In this example the candidate is pointing out that their opponent is hypocritical about their position on energy taxes and not addressing with a premise why he himself is opposing the energy tax. This is thus an example of *Tu quoque* which is a **Ad hominem** fallacy.

- And I never promoted Fannie Mae. In fact, Senator McCain's campaign chairman's firm was a lobbyist on behalf of Fannie Mae, not me. So – but, look, you're not interested in hearing politicians pointing fingers.¹⁴

Justification: This is a very explicit example for *Tu quoque* which is a **Ad hominem** fallacy.

¹²SemEval2020 task-11

¹³Bush-Gore debate, October 11th 2000

¹⁴Mccain-Obama debate, 07 Oct 2008

2.3 Circumstantial ad hominem

This type of fallacy occurs when someone attacks a claim by saying that the person making the claim is only making it because it's in their interest or because of their circumstances. This actually has no bearing on whether or not the claim is true or false.

Example:

- I happen to support that in a way that will actually work to our benefit. But when I look at what you have proposed, you have what is called now the Trump loophole, because it would so advantage you and the business you do.¹⁵

Justification: Mentioning that the opposing candidate will take a personal advantage of the tax law they are supporting is an example of circumstantial **ad hominem**.

3 Appeal to emotion

Using emotion to support an argument. If the emotion is irrelevant to the argument being made, it's fallacious. There are different categories of emotions that politicians use in their arguments:

3.1 Appeal to pity, ad Misericordiam

Walton [1987] 's¹⁶ definition of appeal to pity: “an appeal to pity may be an evasion of relevant considerations needed to make a decision on the issue. For example, in a criminal trial if the defence attorney bases his whole argument on an appeal to pity it could be reasonable to criticize his argument for its failure to look at the evidence for the defendant's guilt or innocence”

Examples:

- So gun laws are important, no question about it, but so is loving children, and character education classes, and faith-based programs being a part of after-school programs. Some desperate child needs to have somebody put their arm around them and say, we love you¹⁷

Justification: Instead of providing relevant premises against conducting gun laws, the candidate tries to appeal to the emotion of the audience to feel pity for the children who commit shooting in schools. Thus the premise is annotated as **“Appeal to emotion”** fallacy.

¹⁵Clinton-Trump debate, September 26th 2016

¹⁶page 5

¹⁷Bush-Gore debate September 26th,2000

3.2 Flag waving

Flag waving is a propaganda technique which falls under the category of appeal to popular opinion by trying to appeal to a group of people by using arguments which contain emotions concerning nation, race, gender, political preference or in general a group, idea or country.

Example:

- In 1933, Franklin Roosevelt said in his inaugural that this generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny. I think our generation of Americans has the same rendezvous. The question now is: Can freedom be maintained under the most severe tack - attack it has ever known? I think it can be. And I think in the final analysis it depends upon what we do here. I think it's time America started moving again¹⁸

Justification: By constantly talking of American will, the candidate is trying to appeal to the patriotic emotion to imply that a move (away from the previous administration) is needed in the US. So his claims are identified as **Appeal to emotion** fallacy because it is not explicitly mentioning why this change is needed.

- You know, my father came from Kenya. That's where I get my name. And in the '60s, he wrote letter after letter to come to college here in the United States because the notion was that there was no other country on Earth where you could make it if you tried. The ideals and the values of the United States inspired the entire world. I don't think any of us can say that our standing in the world now, the way children around the world look at the United States, is the same. And part of what we need to do ,what the next president has to do – and this is part of our judgment, this is part of how we're going to keep America safe – is to – to send a message to the world that we are going to invest in issues like education, we are going to invest in issues that – that relate to how ordinary people are able to live out their dreams¹⁹

Justification: In this example the candidate is trying to show his competence. The premise he provides using **appeal to emotion** (Flag waving technique) has no relevance to his claim of being competent as the next president.

3.3 Appeal to fear

Seeking to build support for an idea by instilling anxiety and/or panic in the population towards an alternative.

Example:

- Jim, we've got the capability of doing both. As a matter of fact, this is a global effort. We're facing a group of folks who have such hatred in their heart, they'll strike anywhere, with any means.²⁰ And that's why it's essential that we have strong alliances,

¹⁸Kennedy-Nixon September 26th 1960

¹⁹Mccain-Obama debate, September 26th 2008

²⁰Bush-Kerry debate, September 30th, 2004

and we do. That's why it's essential that we make sure that we keep weapons of mass destruction out of the hands of people like Al Qaida, which we are.

Justification: The premise that the enemy has hatred in their heart and their attack would be merciless is not a logical premise why alliances are needed in this war. and is used to provoke the audience into being afraid of the enemy anywhere they are. Thus it is a type of **appeal to emotion**

- Well, I think it's terrible. If you go with what Hillary is saying, in the ninth month, you can take the baby and rip the baby out of the womb of the mother just prior to the birth of the baby.²¹

Justification: The candidate is trying to put fear of the law which the other candidate is proposing by painting an image of a baby ripped out of their womb as a premise to justify why this abortion law is not good. Thus they are committing an **appeal to emotion**

3.4 Loaded Language

In this category of fallacies politicians make use of specific words and phrases with strong emotional implications(either positive or negative) to influence an audience. **Example:**

- Well, I actually agree with that. I agree with everything she said. I began this campaign because I was so tired of seeing such foolish things happen to our country²²

Justification: The word "foolish" has a negative connotation and is a loaded word which will put the premise used in a **loaded language** and thus the argument is considered fallacious. It is not ad hominem since it is not directed to an opposite candidate.

- But we have to stop our jobs from being stolen from us We have to stop our companies from leaving the United States and, with it, firing all of their people. All you have to do is take a look at Carrier air conditioning in Indianapolis. They left fired 1,400 people. They're going to Mexico. So many hundreds and hundreds of companies are doing this. We cannot let it happen. Under my plan, I'll be reducing taxes tremendously, from 35 percent to 15 percent for companies, small and big businesses. That's going to be a job creator like we haven't seen since Ronald Reagan. It's going to be a beautiful thing to watch²³

Justification: By using the word "beautiful" the candidate is making a claim that his tax plan is going to be successful using a positive language. Thus committing a fallacy of **Loaded Language**

- to think that another round of resolutions would have caused Saddam Hussein to disarm, disclose, is ludicrous, in my judgment. It just shows a significant difference of

²¹Clinton-Trump debate, October 19th 2016

²²Clinton-Trump debate, 09 October 2016

²³Clinton-Trump debate, September 26th 2016

opinion²⁴

Justification: Having provided no premises why he thinks the resolutions won't work by using the word ludicrous the candidate is committing a fallacy of **Loaded Language**

- And we have former members of Congress now residing in federal prison because of the evils of this earmarking and pork-barrel spending²⁵

Justification: By using the expression "The evils of" the candidate is committing a fallacy of **Loaded Language**

Exceptions:

- If the statement contains an emotion which supports the argument that is relevant to the argument, it's not considered a fallacy. Thus, it should not be annotated as a fallacy.

4 False Cause, Post hoc Ergo Propter Hoc

Based on an initiated order of events, Post Hoc is the fallacy that provides the conclusion that some event happens as a result of an earlier event. In general, drive to the conclusion that some event is a result of a situation just because it happened at the same time or after. "This fallacy is usually characterized as the argument from correlation to causation" Walton [1987]²⁶. This fallacy can happen for example when politicians blame the previous administration or a the party of their opponent for something global or general, or demanding credit for a situation which happened during their/their party's time responsible for an office.

Example:

- During the years between World War I and World War II, a great lesson was learned by our military leaders and the people of the United States. The lesson was that in the aftermath of World War I, we kind of turned our backs and left them to their own devices and they brewed up a lot of trouble that quickly became World War II. And acting upon that lesson in the aftermath of our great victory in World War II, we laid down the Marshall Plan, President Truman did.²⁷

Justification: The candidate is implying that the cause of World War II happening after world War I was that American Army left the area of War. In this example the candidate is implying that the World war II began in the aftermath of world war I because the American's left the field. This is an example of **False Cause**.

- we have to stop the violence. We have to bring back law and order. In a place like Chicago, where thousands of people have been killed, thousands over the last number

²⁴Bush-Kerry debate, 30th September 2004

²⁵Mccain-Obama debate, September 26th 2008

²⁶Page 206

²⁷Bush-Gore debate, October 11th 2000

of years, in fact, almost 4000 have been killed since Barack Obama became president,
over almost 4000 people in Chicago have been killedWe have to bring back law and
order. Now, whether or not in a place like Chicago you do stop and frisk, which worked
very well, Mayor Giuliani is here, worked very well in New York. It brought the crime
rate way down.²⁸

Justification: By saying since Barack Obama(the previous president from the opposing
party) has been president there has been thousands of killings in Chicago, he is
implying that the laws of the administration is a cause of the events. Which is an
example of **False Cause**

Exceptions:

- A statement does not contain the fallacy of False cause if the candidate explicitly
explain the reason why the second event is caused by the first event.

Examples for exceptions:

- In the following example the candidate is directly criticizing the previous administration's economic
policies and giving a premise why he thinks they have not worked. Thus is not a fallacy of False cause
because the candidate is explaining the economic policy of the previous administration has not worked.
Example from McCain-Obama debate, September 26th 2008: Now, we also have to recognize that
this is a final verdict on eight years of failed economic policies promoted by George Bush, supported by
Senator McCain, a theory that basically says that we can shred regulations and consumer protections and
give more and more to the most, and somehow prosperity will trickle down. It hasn't worked

5 Argument by Repetition, ad nauseam

Repeating an argument without providing any statement to justify it. Repetition can be
ambiguous to detect at sentence-level as it can be repeated during the entire conversation.
The annotation step should consider the entire conversation to identify the span of such
fallacy.

Example:

- He approved NAFTA, which is the single worst trade deal ever approved in this
country.
...
The NAFTA agreement is defective.
...
Your husband signed NAFTA, which was one of the worst things that ever happened

²⁸Clinton-Trump debate, September 26th, 2016

to the manufacturing industry

...

NAFTA is the worst trade deal maybe ever signed anywhere, but certainly ever signed in this country.²⁹

Justification: By repeating the same claim of NAFTA being the worst trade without providing concrete premises for his claim the candidate is committing the fallacy of **Repetition**

Annotation instruction: Annotation of repetition fallacy needs to be considered per document. Each chain connects two or more statements that are repeated. Figure 1 identifies that each chain represents one sample of fallacy of repetition.

39	TRUMP: Excuse me.	
40	CLINTON: And I have done a lot...	
41	TRUMP: Your husband signed NAFTA, which was one of the worst things that ever happened to the manufacturing industry.	(Repetition, ad nauseam)
42	CLINTON: Well, that's your opinion. That is your opinion.	(Repetition, ad nauseam)
43	TRUMP: You go to New England, you go to Ohio, Pennsylvania, you go anywhere you want, Secretary Clinton, and you will see devastation where manufacture is down 30, 40, sometimes 50 percent. NAFTA is the worst trade deal maybe ever signed anywhere, but certainly ever signed in this country. And now you want to approve Trans-Pacific Partnership. You were totally in favor of it. Then you heard what I was saying, how bad it is, and you said, I can't win that debate. But you know that if you did win, you would approve that, and that will be almost as bad as NAFTA.	(Repetition, ad nauseam)
44	CLINTON: Well, that is just not accurate. I was against it once it was finally negotiated and the terms were laid out. I wrote about that in...	(Repetition, ad nauseam)
45	TRUMP: You called it the gold standard. I cross talk!	(Repetition, ad nauseam)

Figure 1: Mock-up of the annotation of fallacy of repetition as a chain on the annotation platform.

6 Slogans

A brief and striking phrase that may include labeling and stereotyping. Slogans tend to act as emotional appeals. It can appear to invoke the excitement and discourage the counter part.

Example:

- And we can enforce law. But there seems to be a lot of preoccupation on – not certainly only in this debate, but just in general on law. But there's a larger law. Love your neighbor like you would like to be loved yourself. And that's where our society must headig we're going to be a peaceful and prosperous society.³⁰
- I know we have to, but this is a classic example of walking the walk and talking the talk. We had an energy bill before the United States Senate. It was festooned with Christmas tree ornament³¹
- if it doesn't work, then we have strengthened our ability to form alliances to impose the tough sanctions that Senator McCain just mentioned. And when we haven't done

²⁹ Clinton Trump debate, September 26th 2016

³⁰ Example from Bush-Gore debate October 11th 2000

³¹ McCain-Obama debate, September 26th, 2008

it, as in North Korea – let me just take one more example – in North Korea, we cut off talks. They're a member of the axis of evil³²

Justification: Using the familiar term axis of evil to talk about North Korea in his claim is a fallacy of using **Slogans**

7 Slippery Slope

The slippery slope is to suggest that an unlikely outcome may follow an act. It refers to an extreme event as an assumption or a conclusion that can cause based on facts. In this type of fallacy an arguer is opposing some action based on the fact that some other implausible extreme event may follow by taking this action.

Example:

- Now what do the Chinese Communists want? They don't want just Quemoy and Matsu; they don't want just Formosa; they want the world.³³

Referenser

Douglas N. Walton. *Informal Fallacies*. John Benjamins Publishing, January 1987. ISBN 978-90-272-7890-6. Google-Books-ID: LQVCAAAAQBAJ.

³²Mccain-Obama debate September 26th 2008

³³Kennedy-Nixon debate, October 13th 1960: