

# Fallacy as a Strategy of Argumentation in Political Debates

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**Abstract**—This study aims to study argumentation in political debates by figuring out the logical fallacies employed in the debates of Clinton and Trump, the presidential nominees of the 2016 elections, and Biden and Trump, the leading contenders in the 2020 United States presidential election. The study attempts to answer the questions: (1) What relevance fallacies are adopted in the debate between Trump and Clinton? (2) What rhetorical devices are used to influence the audience and gain voters besides fallacies in the debates selected? The study analyses two texts from two arguments using Damer's (2009) taxonomy of relevance fallacy and rhetorical devices based on Perrine's (1969) model of communication and interpersonal rhetoric to answer the two research questions. The significance of the pragma-rhetorical study of political debates resides in the role of investigating the pragmatic and rhetorical structure of political debates selected to encourage critical thinking, promote informed decision-making, and build a more effective and substantive political conversation. The analysis revealed that unlike Hillary, Trump uses the wrong reason, conclusion, and genetic fallacy and appeals to irrelevant authority and common opinion. Biden uses rationalisation, appealing to outside authority, and using the wrong reason. In terms of rhetoric, Trump, Clinton, and Biden all employ overstatement rather than other rhetorical devices to boost the shortcomings of their competitors and show them as unreliable in leading America in crisis. Other devices are absent except 'understatement', which appears for once, referring to the government's weak response to the crisis of COVID-19.

**Index Terms**—argument, debate, fallacy, relevance, rhetorical devices

## I. INTRODUCTION

Making a persuasive argument is crucial for politicians to persuade the public to vote for them. In addition, social scientists and historians are interested in tracing the logical progression of politicians' arguments. For example, the book *Lincoln, Douglas, and Slavery* by Zarefsky (1993) does not explicitly state the benefits and drawbacks of fallacies in political debates. However, the book mentions that fallacies may have beneficial and harmful consequences in political debates. Besides, recognizing relevance fallacies in political arguments is important because they assist individuals to become more selective information users, capable of spotting deceptive strategies and assessing the validity of political arguments. Additionally, recognizing fallacies provides opportunities for opponents to bolster their counterarguments and present more logical and appealing alternative viewpoints and analyses of the arguments and reasoning strategies of presidential candidates. People in academia, media, political candidates, and government all utilize political arguments, which are often circular, with the same facts as premises but presented slightly different.

The present study's focus is on the argumentation of political debates where presidential candidates (Trump and Clinton; Trump and Biden) debate so as to win the election. The present study examines the relevance of fallacies employed to argue, attack and defeat opponents. The public discussion of fallacies in political debates may heighten awareness of the significance of logical reasoning and critical thinking. It helps individuals to become more discriminating information consumers, capable of spotting deceptive strategies and assessing the validity of political arguments. Fallacies may provide opponents with the chance to bolster their counterarguments. By recognizing the logical fallacies in an opponent's argument, one may successfully debate and disprove their arguments, presenting a more logical and appealing alternative viewpoint. While fallacies may help teach critical thinking and expose weak arguments, they should never be used to reject or discredit genuine arguments. Participating in fair, productive conversations that place a premium on logical reasoning and evidence-based arguments is crucial.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The value of any study lies in its contribution to the linguistic bulk of studies done in a particular domain in the sense of adding something new to the knowledge about a particular topic (Abbas et al., 2023). Investigating fallacy as a

strategy of argumentation, a number of studies have been found in this area. Hidayat et al. (2020), in their study entitled “*Logical Fallacies in Social Media: A Discourse Analysis in Political Debate*” investigate the influence of social media on information consumption and advocate for the application of critical thinking skills among social media users. Their research uses fallacy taxonomy to identify fallacious statements in a transcribed political debate among Indonesian political figures from the YouTube Channel of Indonesia *Lawyers Club*. Four fallacies are identified: manipulation through language, manipulation through emotional appeal of fear, manipulation through distraction (red herrings), and inductive fallacy through inconsistencies and contradictions. The results have potential pedagogical implications for incorporating practical steps to teach logical fallacies in language learning and everyday life.

Al-Sieedy and Al-Jilili (2020) have conducted “*A pragmatic study of fallacy in George W. Bush's political speeches*”, analyzing the speech Bush presented after the war on Iraq. This study aims to provide pragmatic models for analyzing fallacy, focusing on its structure, forms, methods, and applications. The researchers use existing models from academics and their own observations to develop these pragmatic models. The validity of these models is tested through the analysis of seven speeches by George W. Bush, both before and after the war on Iraq (2002-2008). The results indicate that fallacy operates in stages, each with distinct pragmatic components and strategies, highlighting the effectiveness of the proposed models.

Mahmood and Ali (2022) employ Toulmin et al.'s (1984) model of analysis to investigate fallacies in religious arguments, particularly those between Muslims and atheists. The study, which looks at four discussions, is entitled “*A Pragmatic Analysis of Fallacies in English Religious Argumentative Discourse*.” The results indicate that while both Muslims and atheists commit fallacies, atheists do so more frequently and in a greater variety. For Muslims, common fallacies include straw man argument, poisoning the well, and attacking the person while atheists commonly use straw man argument, argument from ignorance, hasty generalization, and appeal to compassion.

The existing studies have explored fallacies in different contexts and utilized various approaches, such as fallacy taxonomy, discourse analysis, and pragmatic analysis. However, there appears to be a notable gap in the literature regarding the application of a pragma-rhetorical approach specifically to the study of fallacies in the rhetoric of American presidential candidates. The proposed study aims to fill this gap by examining how fallacy taxonomy and rhetorical devices are interconnected in the discourse of American presidential candidates, particularly during election campaigns. The current study attempts to present a rather distinguished perspective of fallacy by employing the pragma-rhetorical approach since fallacious speech may result from or generate rhetorical devices. The present study employs the rhetorical devices as fallacious patterns used by American presidential candidates in debates related to election campaigns to determine how fallacy taxonomy can be interrelated to the rhetorical devices employed to influence the audience.

#### A. Defining Argument

Disagreement between two or more individuals is called an ‘argument’. According to Eemeren (2010), the purpose of any debate is to convince the other person that their point of view is more rational than the others’. Even in political discussions, winning an audience is more important than winning over the other side. Arguing about having a solid argument is a huge distinction. When someone makes a claim and backs it up with another claim, they argue even if it is not very strong. Damer (2012) identifies five characteristics of an effective argument. A good structure is related to structural principles. The relevance principle is related to relevant premises, acceptability where premises are suitable and logically acceptable, and effective rebuttal against criticism. In political disputes, fallacies may have both beneficial and harmful consequences. Even though fallacies are often seen as logical, they may play a role in moulding public opinion, influencing political discourse, and showing arguments' shortcomings. However, the argumentator's blunders may fall short of these criteria somehow. According to Damer (2012), logical fallacies are made when people build or give cases to us. The following section lists the characteristics of an effective argument to distinguish it from fallacious arguments.

##### Effective Argument

Johnson (2000) proposes the following guidelines for effective argumentation:

1. **Acceptability:** Hamblin first used it in 1970, and he calls it the “basic rule for evaluating an argument.” Johnson (2000, p. 154) states that “each element in an argument should be put in a way that the hearer finds acceptable.” When this criterion is employed to a specific premise, the arguer should realize whether such premise could be acceptable to the addressee”. Acceptability must be understood regarding the dynamic interaction between a proponent and a response in a particular context.
2. **Truth:** Grice (1975) first used it as a sub-maximum of the Quality Maxim, which states that a person should only say what he knows to be true and never say anything untrue. Johnson (2000, pp. 197-8) then applies the quality criterion to determine whether an argument is false; it evaluates the veracity or untruth of a given statement and that its violation can lead to an invalid argument. This guideline has been broken in the claim that when the speaker uses the exclusion of specific facts, it is deemed sensible because what is pertinent in one situation may not be relevant in another.
3. **Relevance:** Grice (1975) used it as one of the cooperative maxims, entailing that the speaker must be pertinent in what he says to the situation in which he is engaged. This measure can be used to assess an argument's fallacy,

according to Johnson (2000, p. 203). Johnson defines it as 'propositional relevance', differentiating it from subject relevance and audience relevance.

4. **Sufficiency:** The goal assertion must be supported by enough proof. It is also regarded as realistic because what is adequate in one situation might not be in another, and it is linked to Grice's principle of amount (Johnson, 2000, pp. 209, 255).

### *B. Fallacy: Concept and History*

There are fallacies everywhere; individuals create them in their numerous activities, including at home, in the workplace, in advertisements, and in the media. The idea of fallacy has always been stressed within these theories. As with arguments, fallacies have a rich and diverse history encompassing both classical and modern approaches to the issue, making it difficult to establish a specific definition (Mirza, 2016, p. 2; cited in Abdulhussein & Ali, 2022). The fallacy is the foundation of all meaningful argumentation theories, and the correct handling of fallacies may be seen as the validation test for any given argumentation strategy. Effectively addressing logical fallacies indicates an argumentation theory's applicability and explanatory capacity (Eemeren et al., 2009, p. 1). According to Damer (2009, p. 51), a fallacy violates one or more of the five criteria for sound reasoning. These criteria include the argument's structure, relevance, acceptance, sufficiency, and counterargument. This study uses Damer's (2009) method for recognizing erroneous arguments.

In his sophisticated rebuttal, Aristotle (2004) was the first to conduct a methodical fallacy analysis. There are 13 logical errors where logic is flawed, according to him. He distinguishes between linguistic and non-linguistic errors. His non-linguistic errors include Accident, Equivocation, Composition, Division, and Figure of Speech. In Medieval Europe, errors were again methodically examined after the Dark Ages. Due to a resurgence of interest in philosophy, logic, communication studies, rhetoric, logic, and psychology, the third significant era of the study of fallacies started in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Johnson (1995, p. 116), an American scholar and the creator of the Informal Logic movement, defines fallacy as "an argument that violates one of the criteria of effective argument that appears with sufficient frequency in discourse." The 'dialectical layer,' in which the arguer can fulfill duties on his opponent, and the 'illative core,' a structure made of the components of premise, justification, and conclusion, are the two types of false arguments that Johnson (2004) concentrates on. Acceptability, truth, relevance, and sufficiency are his four criteria or guidelines for assessing logical fallacies. If a speech fails to meet one or more of these guidelines, it will be rejected as unpersuasive.

Walton (2007) and other academics develop this fallacy theory. He (2007, p. 159) claims that it is a transplanted method of intentional deceit. According to Walton, the setting is to persuade someone to buy into the reasoning. On the other side, Damer (2009) is concerned with what happens when the criteria of acceptability, relevance, truth, and sufficiency are disregarded. There are numerous kinds in his model. He adds the fifth rule, the response criterion, to Johnson's four rules, stating that an argument must effectively refute all expected significant critiques of the argument or the stance it supports. Damer (2009) lists five main criteria of fallacies as follows:

1. A fallacy that violates the structure criterion
2. A fallacy that Violates the Relevance Criterion
3. A fallacy that Violates the Acceptability Criterion
4. A fallacy that Violates the Sufficiency Criterion
5. A fallacy that Violates the Rebuttal Criterion

The current study mainly examines the Fallacies of the Relevance criterion.

### *C. Fallacies Resulting From the Relevance Criterion*

More than one fallacy type results from violating the relevance criterion. These types of fallacies include fallacies of irrelevant premise and fallacies of irrelevant appeal. These two fallacies also have subdivisions, as illustrated below:

#### **1. Fallacy of Irrelevant Premise**

Fallacy of irrelevant premise are the arguments that employ beliefs that fail to or have no connection to give support to the conclusions. There are four subcategories of fallacies resulting from irrelevant premises involving genetic fallacy, rationalisation, drawing the wrong conclusion, and using the wrong reasons (Damer, 2009, p. 93). They are explained as follows:

- a. Genetic Fallacy entails judging something considering its original setting and applying that judgment to it now while failing to account for any pertinent changes that may have occurred in the interval.
- b. Rationalization is concerned with using reasonable-sounding but typically false justifications to support an unpleasant stance.
- c. Drawing the Wrong Conclusion deals with using the facts in the argument to back a different inference. The result of the argument fails to consider the most essential aspect of the supporting data.
- d. Using the Wrong Reasons is related to attempting to support a claim with reasons other than those appropriate to the claim.

#### **2. Fallacies of Irrelevant Appeal**

Several fallacious arguments are sometimes intended to support a claim. This is done by applying questionable appeals to the authenticity of other people or emotional tactics, none of which support the truth. These include:

- a. Appeal to Irrelevant Authority, which involves trying to bolster an argument by citing the opinion of someone who is either not an expert in the field, unnamed, or is likely to be prejudiced.
- b. Appeal to Common Opinion denotes insisting that a view should be adopted because many others share it or dismissing an idea because few others share it.
- c. Appeal to Force or Threat indicates attempting to persuade others of a position by threatening them with an undesirable situation instead of presenting evidence for one's view.
- d. Appeal to Tradition happens when a more fundamental principle or problem is at risk; it can be enticing to try to win people over by appealing to their veneration or respect for a custom rather than the facts.

#### D. Rhetorical Devices

Rhetorical devices are linguistic and stylistic techniques that writers and speakers use to enhance their communication and persuade or engage their audience. These devices are employed to create emphasis, evoke emotions, and make the communication more memorable. It may be defined as the ability of words to have an impact on the circumstances in which they are said or heard. It is possible to link rhetoric to the fundamental human need to survive, exert control over one's environment, and influence other people's actions for the benefit of oneself, one's family, one's political and social organizations, and one's children. This can be done directly, by threatening, bribing, or using force, or indirectly, by utilizing signals. The most important instruments for achieving this goal are written or spoken words. Rhetoric was used in many ancient societies, sometimes going by several names (Kennedy, 1994, p. 3).

Rhetorical devices can be found in various forms, including figures of speech, sound patterns, and structural arrangements. There are various forms of figures of speech. The researchers employ twelve figures of speech, drawing upon Perrine's theory as a foundation (Perrine, 1969, pp. 164-167). Perrine's literary work "Sound and Sense: An Introduction to Poetry" Organizes twelve distinct types of figures of speech into three categories. These categories include figures of speech based on comparison, such as metaphor, simile, and personification; figures of speech based on association, exemplified by metonymy; and figures of speech based on contrast, including paradox, overstatement, and understatement. Nevertheless, following the fallacy of consensus, the researchers incorporate some rhetorical devices such as metaphor, simile, personification, overstatement, understatement, and paradox which are briefed below:

1. Metaphor: According to Perrine (1969, p. 65), metaphor involves comparing dissimilar entities.
2. Simile: Simpson (2004, pp. 43-44) asserts that a simile is a rhetorical device that directly compares two concepts using the formula 'is like'.
3. Personification: According to Kövecses (2010, p. 39), personification attributes human characteristics to creatures that are not inherently human.
4. Understatement: According to Kennedy and Gioia (2007, p. 30), understatement can be seen as a rhetorical device characterised by a deliberate and ironic expression that presents a situation in a manner that downplays its true magnitude or significance.
5. Overstatement: According to Kennedy and Gioia (2007, p. 21), the use of overstatement or hyperbole serves as a means of emphasising a certain point through deliberate exaggeration.
6. Paradox: According to Kennedy and Gioia (2007, p. 21), paradox refers to a remark that initially appears self-contradictory.

#### E. Presidential Debate

Due to its distinctive contextual characteristics, the presidential debate can be classified as a sub-genre of political discourse. Presidential debates involve the utilisation of political contextual allusions and references to prior political history, which are recognised and understood by the audience (Chilton, 2004, pp. 72-73). Presidential debates have a distinct role, primarily aimed at presenting the electorate with the objectives and viewpoints of the candidates. Debates possess a distinct framework and regulations that necessitate compliance from the participants. The regulations impact how political participants communicate since they must adapt to a restricted time frame to articulate their grievances. Without a doubt, a notable aspect of presidential debates is the direct interpersonal engagement that occurs between the moderators and the candidates being interviewed.

The interviewer poses provocative questions to the interviewees to engage and captivate the viewers. Additionally, the interviewees include those aspiring to secure the position of president in the next elections. Consequently, they are expected to respond to the questions within a specified time frame. About this assertion, Levinson (1983, p. 304) posits that a question-answer constitutes a distinct type of adjacency pair, serving as a key component of conversational structure. This pair is characterised by the participation of two distinct speakers who produce separate utterances within a specific contextual framework. During discussions, the interviewer presents a question, referred to as the first pair portion, which is subsequently addressed by the interviewee, known as the second pair part. The interviewer establishes an expectation that the interviewee must satisfy through their statement.

Politicians endeavour to effectively communicate their message, including their core values, political objectives, and accomplishments, to garner maximum support from the populace. In order to garner support, politicians frequently engage in public discourse, wherein they deliver speeches or engage in discussions. During these debates, political candidates discourse with their adversaries, ultimately aiming to convince their constituents. Debates represent a compelling classification of political dialogue. Spontaneous spoken communication characterises one aspect of the

discourse, while the content of the discussions frequently exhibits careful deliberation and strategic preparation. To effectively convey a desired message, it is imperative to employ clear and comprehensible language (Shu'e & Yanqing, 2018). The current study is mainly related to two presidential debates to determine the fallacies and the rhetorical devices adopted.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Research Design

This study follows a qualitative research method. Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 2) report that studying objects and phenomena in their natural environments attempts to make sense of or interpret happenings based on the meanings people attribute to them. Moreover, the "situationally constrained" nature of qualitative research makes the social context crucial to understanding the significance of social activities (Neuman, 2014, p. 17). In contrast, quantitative studies rely on numerical measurements of certain aspects of occurrences and are defined using statistical techniques that are easily replicable by other researchers (King et al., 1994). Using statistics, the quantitative method seeks to prove or disprove opposing hypotheses (Williams, 2007). Concerning the qualitative method, the study will interpret two texts from two debates regarding relevance fallacy and rhetorical tropes to examine how candidates attack and argue with each other with fallacious arguments.

#### B. Data Selected and Model

The data selected for any study should be in line with the research objectives to ensure their achievement (Abbas, 2020). Besides, Mohammed (2016) states that the main challenge researchers face when conducting a study is choosing suitable data. As such, and to study argumentation in political debates, the researchers have chosen two texts from two political debates between presidential candidates. The first debate is between Hillary Clinton and Donald J. Trump, the presidential nominees of the 2016 elections. The second debate concerns Joe Biden and Donald Trump, the leading contenders in the 2020 presidential election. These high-profile debates garnered tremendous notice and substantially affected public opinion. This is why these debates are selected for fallacy analysis. Additionally, they had a large audience and media attention. In terms of contemporary U.S. political history, the debates were momentous. They represent the changing dynamics, topics, and campaign techniques in political campaigns. By analyzing the usage of fallacies in these debates, it is possible to detect patterns, trends, and recurrent fallacious arguments in modern political discourse. The debate script of Hillary and Trump is retrieved from the Politico.com website, while the debate script of Biden and Trump is retrieved from the Commission on Presidential Debates.org. Two texts are selected for analysis according to the rich fallacies underlying them. They represent a comprehensive example of the fallacy in the debates. These texts will be analyzed qualitatively by detecting the fallacy markers underlying the debates' discourse following Damer's (2009) categories of Relevance Fallacy, including Irrelevant Premise and Irrelevant Appeal (*cf.*, 1.3.1), and the rhetoric analysis realising these fallacy types and their significance to the debate contexts.

### IV. DATA ANALYSIS

In this section the researcher conduct the data analysis by first introducing the extracts from the debates selected. The extracts have a significant and clear fallacious speech to investigate. The names in bold refer to the participants, including the interviewer and the candidates. The whole extracts are written in italics to be highlighted, and the sentences identified as fallacious argument representatives are underlined to analyse the linguistic devices and the types of fallacies they contain. The researchers first analyse the fallacious speech in terms of fallacies and then do the rhetorical analysis to explain how the opponents use rhetorical devices that violate the cooperative maxims and produce the figurative language underlying the fallacious argument. The analysis follows the fallacious arguments according to the types of fallacies that appear successively.

#### **Text 1: Trump and Clinton**

**Brock:** ... *The last presidential debate could have been rated as MA, mature audiences per TV parental guidelines. Knowing that educators assign viewing the presidential debates as students' homework, do you feel you are modelling appropriate and positive behaviour for today's youth?*

**Clinton:** *Thank you. ... I think it is very important for us to make clear to our children that our country really is great because we are good. ... That's why the slogan of my campaign is stronger together Obviously, I'm hoping to earn your vote, I'm hoping to be elected in November and I can promise you I will work with every American.*

**Cooper:** *Mr. Trump you have two minutes.*

**Trump:** *Well I'll 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 country This is a great country. This is a great land. When I watch what's happening with some horrible things like Obama care where your health insurance and health care is going up by numbers that are astronomical: 68%, 59%, 71%. Whether it's in business and trade, where we are doing so badly. Last year, we had an almost \$800 billion trade deficit. But I want to do things that haven't been done, including fixing and making our inner cities better for the African American citizens that are so great".*

In this extract, Trump employs a fallacious argument to get stronger and escape truthful answers.

### Fallacy Analysis of Text 1

Trump uses four types of fallacies: drawing the wrong conclusion, using the wrong reasons, appealing to irrelevant authority, and genetic fallacy.

#### 1. Drawing the Wrong Conclusion

Trump is asked whether he considers himself a good model to young Americans. Yet, he answers with irrelevant statements. He draws a wrong conclusion unrelated to the question focus. He states that "*clear to our children that our country really is great because we are good*" here he concludes that children should feel great because of the good government system. Thus, Clinton violates the relevance maxim by drawing a wrong conclusion to evade answering the question raised. Then Clinton stated, "*That's why the slogan of my campaign is stronger together.*" She states that this is because children feel pride, and the slogans of Clinton are more potent. She uses children in her speech and refers to their significance in the American future and the importance of governmental acts introduced to them in her slogan that they would be stronger with Clinton's rule. This is illogical, and there is no relationship between reasons, conclusions, and the main argument. Clinton goes forward to conclude that they earned the audience's voice. This conclusion is irrelevant to the main argument: being a model for younger Americans. She states, "*I'm hoping to earn your vote, I'm hoping to be elected.*" This indicates that even though unsure, but she has a hope to win the election.

#### 2. Using the Wrong Reasons

Trump gives wrong reasons related to the argument. In the argument about modelling positive behaviours for young people, Trump gives reasons to begin election campaigns: "*I began this campaign because I was so tired of seeing such foolish things happen to our country. This is a great country.*" Trump claims that Obama's failure is behind his nomination to stop foolish actions rather than his personal and political affairs.

#### 3. Appeal to Irrelevant Authority

Trump goes away from the argument and gets attention astray to focus on another person, reminding them of Obama's negativity. He accuses Obama of being careless and causing horrible things rather than mentioning how he could model his behaviour as "*When I watch what's happening with some horrible things like Obama care*". By doing so, Trump draws the audience's focus onto Obama's governing to stimulate a negative comparison that may lead to electing Obama as a better alternative.

#### 4. Genetic Fallacy

Trump avoids answering the question directly and uses irrelevant ideas on old government like a failure in business and generalises this failure to current times. Trump describes Obama's flawed system when he says: "*Whether it's in business and trade, where we are doing so badly. Last year, we had an almost \$800 billion trade deficit.*" Trump denotes that the government procedures are not doing well; rather, he describes the government performance as 'bad', implying an urgent need for change, which would be true by electing him. He supports his claim with numbers showing the great damages affecting the American trade in Obama's period reading \$800 as trade deficit. Trump counts merely on Obama's rule in terms of its earlier failure and ignores relevant changes.

#### 5. Appeal to Irrelevant Authority

Again, Trump attributes his statement to implicitly refer to Obama and the things Obama did not do. He claims he will do unfulfilled things, as in, "*But I want to do things that haven't been done including fixing and making our inner cities better for the African American citizens that are so great*" Trump implicitly states that necessary things in the country are missing under the rule of Obama. He uses negative statements to highlight that Obama has not done the right things for America and put himself as the corrector and the determining president who will compensate for all the shortcomings under the previous administration. Trump names corrective acts like making better cities for African Americans. He uses the word 'including', implying that making better cities is to drop in the sea of his positive acts on the horizon.

### Rhetorical Analysis of Text 1

In terms of rhetorical devices, Clinton and Trump employ only two devices representing the fallacious speech. These devices are overstatement and understatement, as explained in the following:

#### 1. Overstatement

Clinton overstates the value of his campaign slogan to be stronger because he considers America great as in "*That's why the slogan of my campaign is stronger together*". Moreover, she overstates the intentions of her campaign to work with every single American individual rather than denoting America as a one entity in saying "*I will work with every American*".

Trump uses overstatement to boost the number of voters by indicating how great he and his government are. Yet, Trump employs overstatement to exaggerate the negativity of the current administration of Obama as in "*what's happening is horrible like Obama's care where your health insurance and health care is going up by numbers that are astronomical: 68%, 59%, 71%*" Trump describes the government period of Obama as horrible, and the number of health care insurance as huge. He uses the up-scaling lexis 'astronomical' to negatively describe health insurance numbers. Astronomical means that these numbers '68%, 59%, 71%' should not be real for health insurance in America but are in the 'Obama period'. Trump overstates the negativity of Obama's ruling as 'horrible' to overstate the need for change and draw the audience attention to dark period they are going through.

#### 2. Understatement

Trump underestimates the value of government work by indicating that “*it's in business and trade where we are doing so badly*”. He negatively describes the government’s acts. Trump ridicules Obama’s administration by describing it as ‘foolish’ by saying “*I was so tired of seeing such foolish things happen to our country*”. Trump indicates that foolish things happen by inefficient or weak government which needs to be changed by electing stronger candidates like himself. This occurs when Trump intentionally represents something as less significant or serious than it is. Here, Trump downplays the reasons for starting his campaign as merely being “tired of seeing such foolish things happen.” This understatement serves to diminish the gravity or complexity of the issues that may have prompted him to enter the political arena.

### **Text 2: Trump and Biden**

**“Welker:** *More than 40,000 Americans are in the hospital tonight with COVID, including record numbers here in Tennessee. ... So please be specific: how would you leave the country during this next stage of the coronavirus crisis? Two minutes, uninterrupted”.*

**“Trump:** *So, as you know, more 2.2 million people modeled out, were expected to die. We closed up the greatest economy in the world in order to fight this horrible disease that came from China. It's a worldwide pandemic. It's all over the world. You see the spikes in Europe and many other places right now ... I had it. And I got better and I will tell you that I had something that they gave me — a therapeutic, I guess they would call it Some people could say it was a cure. But I was in for a short period of time and I got better very fast or I wouldn't be here tonight. And now they say I'm immune Whether it's four months or a lifetime, nobody's been able to say that, but I'm immune. More and more people are getting better. We have a problem that's a worldwide problem. This is a worldwide problem”.*

**“Welker:** *OK, former Vice President Biden, to you, how would you lead the country out of this crisis? You have two minutes uninterrupted”.*

**“Biden:** *220,000 Americans dead. If you hear nothing else I say tonight, hear this. Anyone who's responsible for not taking control— ... We're in a situation where there are thousands of deaths a day, a thousand deaths a day. And there are over 70,000 new cases per day. Compared to what's going on in Europe, as the New England Medical Journal said, they're starting from a very low rate. We're starting from a very high rate. The expectation is we'll have another 200,000 Americans dead by the time, between now and the end of the year. If we just wore these masks — the President's own advisors told them — we could save 100,000 lives. And we're in a circumstance where the President, thus far, still has no plan ... We're in a situation now where the New England Medical Journal — one of the serious, most serious journals in the whole world — said for the first time ever that this, the way this President has responded to this crisis has been absolutely tragic. And so folks, I will take care of this, I will end this, I will make sure we have a plan”.*

Trump and Biden use different fallacies of relevance to attack each other. These fallacies are genetic, rationalisation, the wrong conclusion, the wrong reason, the appeal of irrelevant authority, and the appeal of common opinion.

### **Fallacy analysis of Text 2**

#### **1. Genetic Fallacy**

Trump uses genetic fallacy when describing the origin of COVID-19 as Chinese. Here, he was not asked about the origin or starting point of the virus. Thus, Trump avoided responsibility towards the main premise by saying that it is Chinese “*more than 2.2 million people, modelled out, were expected to die. We closed up the greatest economy in the world in order to fight this horrible disease that came from China*”.

#### **2. Rationalisation**

Biden turn the attack against Trump about the latter’s actions taken to face the virus. Biden uses numbers and rational premises to uncover the real consequences faced during Trump’s governing time. Biden argues that “*220,000 Americans dead. If you hear nothing else I say tonight, hear this. Anyone who's responsible for not taking control*” Here, Biden makes it clear that if Trump did the right procedures, why coronavirus is still killing people?

#### **3. Using the wrong conclusion**

Trump concludes that, by the American vaccine, he got better. While in fact, the vaccine keeps healthy people away from infection. However, Trump is not asked about the activity of the vaccine still he wants to bolster himself “*We have Operation Warp Speed, which is the military, is going to distribute the vaccine. I can tell you from personal experience that I was in the hospital, I had it. And I got better, and I will tell you that I had something that they gave me — a therapeutic, I guess they would call it*”.

#### **4. Using the wrong reason**

Biden uses the same strategy of using the wrong conclusion “*We're in a situation now where the New England Medical Journal — one of the serious, most serious journals in the whole world — said for the first time ever that this, the way this President has responded to this crisis has been absolutely tragic.*” Biden asserts that Trump's response is the reason behind the flood, while this flood can destroy our house.

#### **5. Appeal to irrelevant authority**

Biden sheds light that Trump has no plan, according to the latter’s advisors. That is, people did not take any responsibility for not wearing masks. The relevance is fallacious since the interviewer is asking about the action taken against COVID rather than his purpose: “*And we're in a circumstance where the President, thus far, still has no plan*”.

#### **6. Appeal to Common Opinion**

In many countries, Trump deals with COVID-19 as a common fact: “*It’s a worldwide pandemic. It’s all over the world. You see the spikes in Europe and many other places right now.*” He generalizes the phenomenon of the pandemic as globally common to lessen the audience’s criticism of how America deals with the pandemic or fails to stop it. He states that it is not restricted to America, and it is not an individual issue but a greater worldwide phenomenon.

### Rhetorical Analysis of Text 2

#### Overstatement

Both participants use overstatement to highlight the shortcomings of the current president and the efficiency of their plans and administration. Trump overstates the number of patients with COVID-19 and is expected to die “*More than 2.2 million people modelled out, were expected to die*”. Conversely, Trump overstates the value of the American economy to describe it as the greatest as in “*there are over 70,000 new cases per day*”. Another overstatement by Trump is to intensify the extent of the pandemic and heighten its scope as a worldwide crisis by saying, “*It’s a worldwide pandemic. It’s all over the world. It’s a worldwide pandemic. It’s all over the world.*” He intensifies that COVID-19 pandemic is a serious global crisis and not only American, which means that America needs a brave and wise administration to come over it. Trump adds another overstatement by exaggerating the effectiveness of a cure used to treat the COVID-19 virus. Doing so, he intensifies the ability of America to overcome the crisis with a safe and efficient cure by saying, “*And I got better, and I will tell you that I had something that they gave me — a therapeutic, I guess they would call it Some people could say it was a cure*” He uses the comparative ‘better’, and the intensifier ‘very’ to describe the cure he used. Moreover, he exaggerates the effectiveness of this cure by appraising himself as ‘imminent’, which is a very strong term to describe the effect of the cure. Biden overstates the number of dead people with COVID-19 to highlight the previous government’s delay in taking suitable actions against the virus with “*220,000 Americans dead... there are over 70,000 new cases per day*”. Here, Biden puts it in bold that Trump’s government have done nothing to defeat the virus.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined the fallacies underlying two presidential debates in the American elections. The researchers have employed the relevance fallacy and rhetorical devices frameworks to analyse the debates. As such, this analysis has revealed significant conclusions. Firstly, Trump uses the wrong reason, conclusion, and genetic fallacy and appeals to irrelevant authority and common opinion against Clinton to highlight negative aspects of her governing period. Biden uses rationalisation, appealing to irrelevant authority and using the wrong reason to blame and display the shortcomings of Trump’s period. In terms of rhetorical devices, Trump, Clinton, and Biden all employ overstatements to boost the shortcomings of their competitiveness and show them as unreliable in leading America in crisis. Other devices are absent except ‘understatement’, which appears for once, referring to the government’s weak response to the crisis of COVID-19. Thus, the research questions have been answered. According to these conclusions, the researchers recommend extending the research to cover fallacies in reality shows and fallacies in self-development speeches.

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