

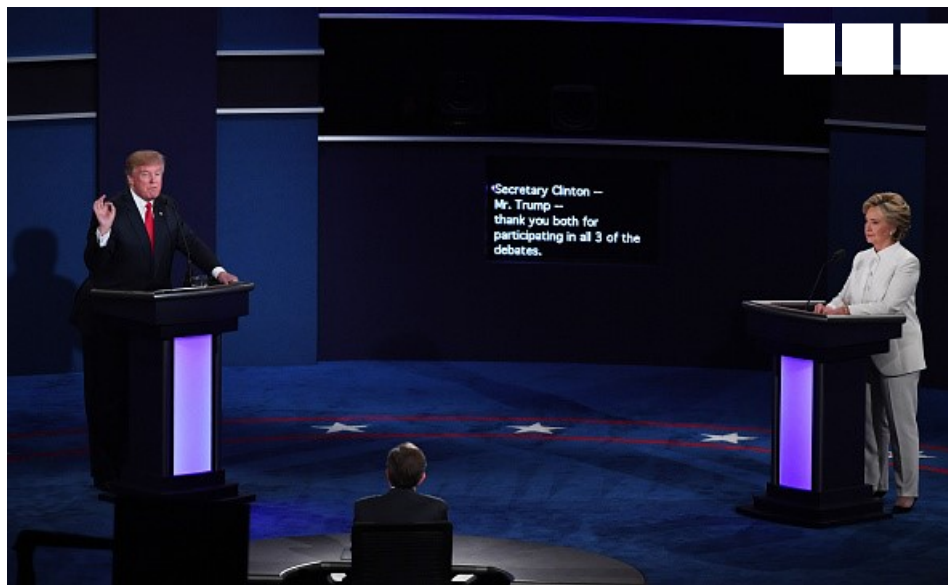
# 4 Logical Fallacies from the Third Clinton Trump Debate



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A logical fallacy is a flaw in reasoning that leads to false assertions. Let's look at 4 logical fallacies from the third presidential debate between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump held on Tuesday, October 19, 2016.

A special mention goes to Chris Wallace that did an extremely good job moderating this debate.

## False Cause

“In Chicago, which has the toughest gun laws in the United States, probably you could say by far, they have more gun violence than any other city. So we have the toughest laws, and you have tremendous gun violence.” Donald Trump

False cause, is a fallacy committed when the speaker implies that since two events are occurring, one must be causing the other. The error is this fallacy is that it assumes that correlation implies causation, which is not true. In the example given, Donald Trump implies a causal link between tough gun laws and tremendous gun violence as if one is causing the other. However, he presents no proof nor develops a reasoning to explain this causation. He also ignores any other potential explanation that can be inherent to this specific situation such as socio-economic circumstances, gang rivalries or guns obtained elsewhere which is a form of the fallacy of a single cause that we we previously discussed following the second debate.

## **Straw Man Fallacy**

“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. Now, you can say that that’s OK and Hillary can say that that’s OK. But it’s not OK with me, because based on what she’s saying, and based on where she’s going, and where she’s been, you can take the baby and rip the baby out of the womb in the ninth month on the final day. And that’s not acceptable.” Donald Trump

A straw man fallacy is when a person takes the argument of his opponent, distorts it and then attacks the distorted form to win the argument. The distortion can happen by quoting the opponents words out of context, by oversimplifying the position of the opponent to better attack it or by distorting a position to give it a moral or emotional connotation, to cite a few techniques. In the above excerpt, Donald Trump attributes to Hillary Clinton and the moderator a position that they do not hold (i.e., being OK with ripping a baby out of the womb of the mother just prior to the birth of the baby). He also distorts a medical procedure by giving it a graphic moral dimension and hence forcing the situation that any person with empathy or morality cannot but agree with him. This is also a form of appeal to emotion.

## **Non Sequitur (Does Not Follow)**

“Wallace: Secretary Clinton, I want to clear up your position on this issue, because in a speech you gave to a Brazilian bank, for which you were paid \$225,000, we’ve learned from the WikiLeaks, that you said this, and I want to quote. “My dream is a hemispheric common market with open trade and open borders.”[...] Is that your dream, open borders?

Clinton: Well, if you went on to read the rest of the sentence, I was talking about energy. You know, we trade more energy with our neighbors than we trade with the rest of the world combined. And I do want us to have an electric grid, an energy system that crosses borders. I think that would be a great benefit to us.

But you are very clearly quoting from WikiLeaks. And what's really important about WikiLeaks is that the Russian government has engaged in espionage against Americans. They have hacked American websites, American accounts of private people, of institutions. Then they have given that information to WikiLeaks for the purpose of putting it on the Internet."

## Example 2

"Wallace: Secretary Clinton, during your 2009 Senate confirmation hearing, you promised to avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest with your dealing with the Clinton Foundation while you were secretary of state, but e-mails show that donors got special access to you. Those seeking grants for Haiti relief were considered separately from non-donors, and some of those donors got contracts, government contracts, taxpayer money. Can you really say that you kept your pledge to that Senate committee? And why isn't what happened and what went on between you and the Clinton Foundation, why isn't it what Mr. Trump calls pay to play?

Clinton: Well, everything I did as secretary of state was in furtherance of our country's interests and our values. The State Department has said that. I think that's been proven. But I am happy, in fact I'm thrilled to talk about the Clinton Foundation,

because it is a world-renowned charity and I am so proud of the work that it does. You know, I could talk for the rest of the debate — I know I don't have the time to do that. But just briefly, the Clinton Foundation made it possible for 11 million people around the world with HIV-AIDS to afford treatment, and that's about half all the people in the world who are getting treatment. In partnership with the American Health Association...

Wallace: Secretary Clinton..."

This example is a little bit more complex than the other examples we've seen, because it contains a particular form of non sequitur but also a red herring. We've already seen the red herring fallacy in the second debate so we're going to focus on the non sequitur in this example.

A non sequitur is an invalid argument where the conclusion does not follow the premises. Non sequitur is usually used to refer to invalid arguments that do not constitute formal, named fallacies. In this example, the non sequitur is between the premises and not between the premises and a particular conclusion. Hillary Clinton, after commenting on the email issue, pivots into doubting the motive of the source. This is a red herring, however, it is also a form of non sequitur because the red herring is presented as if *it follows* from the premise of the email even though the motives of Wikileaks are independent of the content or the authenticity of the emails. Hillary Clinton mixes the non sequitur with a red herring to get to her goal: the conversation was steered away from the initial topic (border control) and became about the Russian political interference in American politics. In the second example, a similar technique is used. Hillary Clinton briefly replies to the question she is being asked only to pivot on a red herring that *seems to follow* from the initial topic but in fact does not and is actually used as a diversion.

## Base Rate Neglect

“So I just left some high representatives of India. They’re growing at 8 percent. China is growing at 7 percent. And that for them is a catastrophically low number.

We are growing — our last report came out — and it’s right around the 1 percent level. And I think it’s going down.” Donald Trump

Base rate neglect is a form of fallacy and also cognitive bias where only part of a statistic is focused on and a conclusion is drawn from this partial premise. Base rate neglect refers usually to a bias in probabilistic situations. We will probably cover biases such as base rate in their classical form in future posts. The example given here refers to the more common use of base rate neglect as a fallacy which is very close to the false analogy fallacy also known as the popular saying “you can’t compare apples to oranges”. In the example, Donald Trump commits a mix between a base rate neglect and false analogy fallacy because we do not know the *base rate* from which India, China and the United States are growing. A country that is currently in development will necessarily have a later growth rate than a country that is already developed. In order to adequately compare between those percentages, we have to make sure that they have the same starting point.

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