

# Understanding and Engaging in Political Discussion

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# Political Discussion – Road Map

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Cognitive Biases – How we systematically misprocess information

Logical Fallacies – Logical mistakes used (often deliberately) to muddle communication

Discussion Format – How the type of conversation matters

News and other information sources – Bias and verification of external content

Short discussion on speech, political correctness, and cancellation

# Political Discussion – Caveats

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Triage – Each topic could be its own course

Limited representation – Identity, power, etc.

# Political Discussion – Basics

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Basics:

# Political Discussion – Basics

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Be respectful

# Political Discussion – Basics

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Be respectful

Target understanding

# Political Discussion – Basics

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Be respectful

Target understanding

Show interest

# Political Discussion – Basics

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Target understanding

Show interest

Practice empathy



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Ask questions

# Political Discussion – Basics

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Be respectful

Target understanding

Show interest

Practice empathy

Ask questions

Be humble

# Political Discussion — Basics

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Be respectful

Target understanding

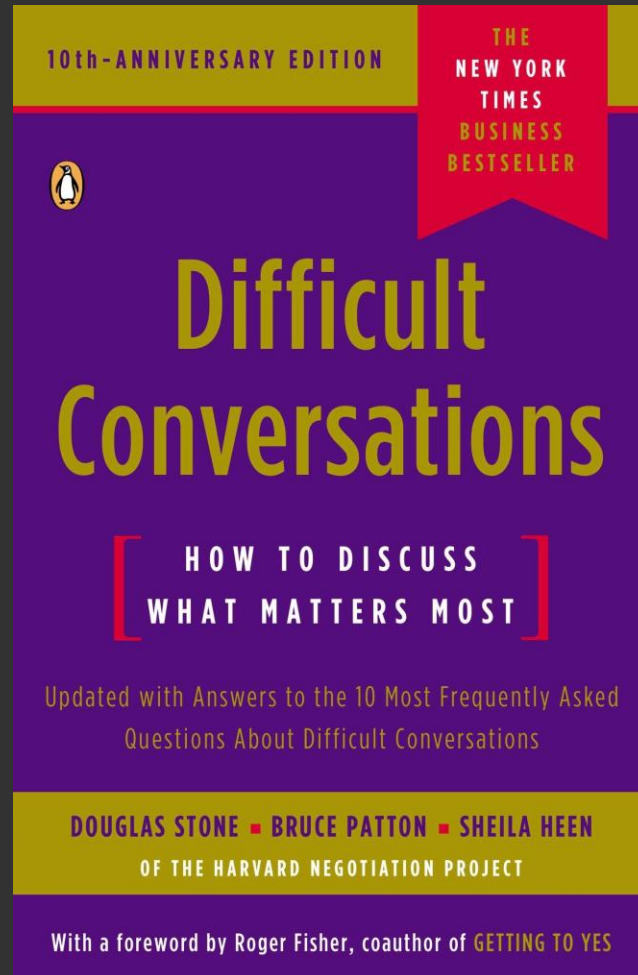
Show interest

Practice empathy

Ask questions

Be humble

Values vs. Facts



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**Intro**   Biases   Fallacies   Format   News   Free Speech

# Political Discussion – Basics

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Be respectful

Target understanding

Show interest

Practice empathy

Ask questions

Be humble

Values vs. Facts

Avoid Judgment/Defensiveness

# Political Discussion – Basics

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Be respectful

Target understanding

Show interest

Practice empathy

Ask questions

Be humble

Values vs. Facts

Avoid Judgment/Defensiveness

“you’re wrong because...” vs. “the way I understand it...”

# Political Discussion – Biases

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What is cognitive bias? – Affectively motivated error

# Political Discussion – Biases

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Blessing/Curse:

# Political Discussion – Biases

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Blessing/Curse:

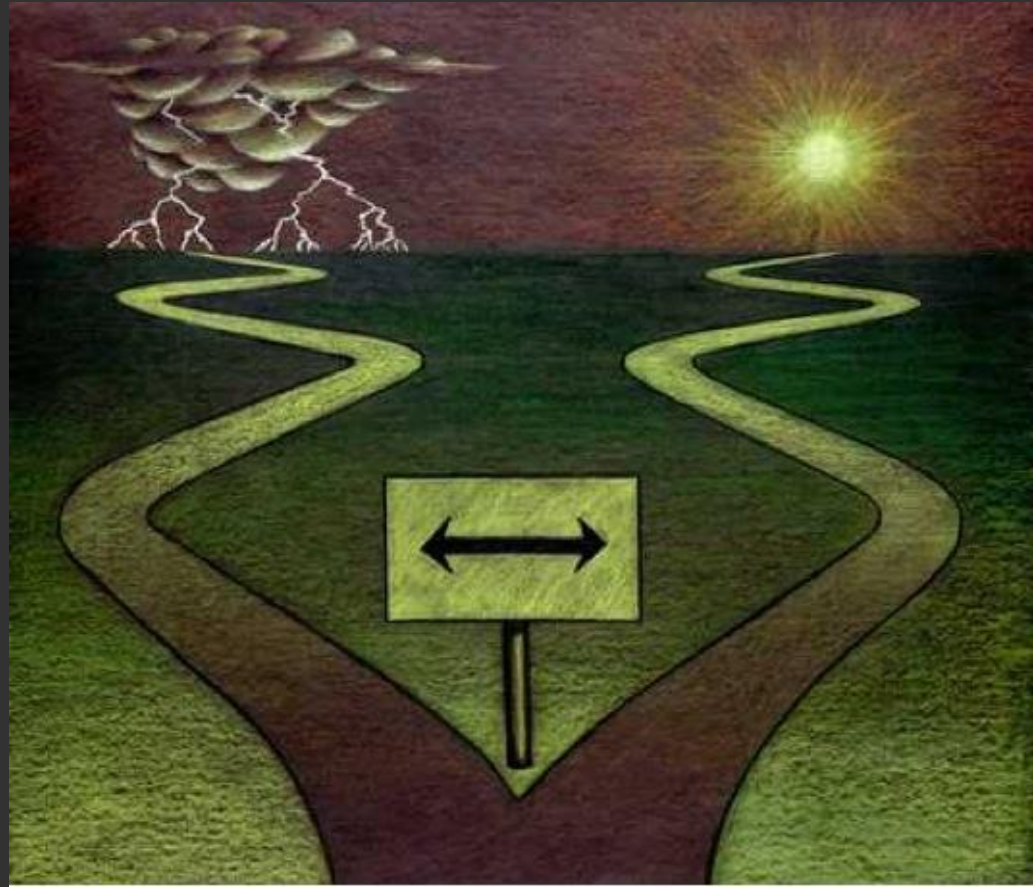
Heuristics – limited cognitive resources



# Political Discussion – Biases

Blessing/Curse:

Heuristics – limited cognitive resources



# Political Discussion – Biases

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Blessing/Curse:

Heuristics – limited cognitive resources

Especially pernicious

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Blessing/Curse:

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Especially pernicious

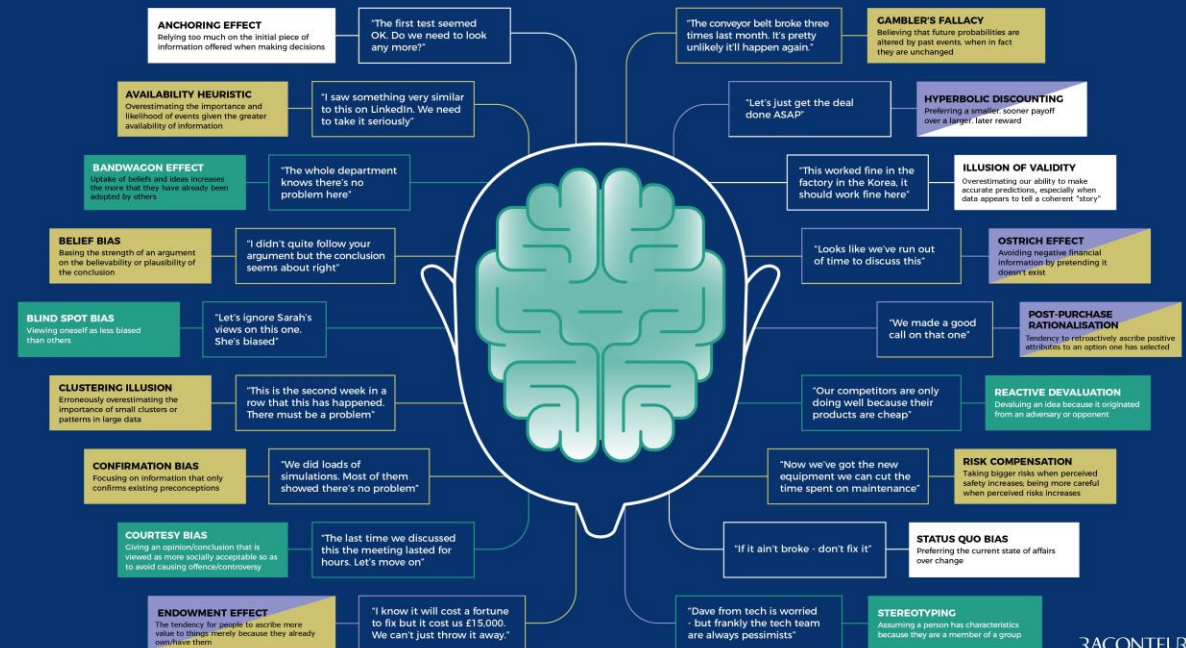
## Cognitive bias

● Social ● Financial ● Failure to estimate ● Short-termism

When it comes to assessing risk, humans often fail to make rational decisions because our brains take mental shortcuts that prevent us making the correct choice. Since the 1960s behavioural scientists and psychologists have been researching these failings, and have identified and labelled dozens of them. Here are some that can cause havoc when it comes to assessing risks in business

### ORIGIN

The notion of cognitive biases was first introduced by psychologists Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman in the early 1970s. Their research paper, 'Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases', in the Science journal has provided the basis of almost all current theories of decision-making and heuristics. Professor Kahneman was awarded a Nobel Prize in 2002 after further developing the ideas and applying them to economics.



<https://www.raconteur.net/infographics/cognitive-bias/>

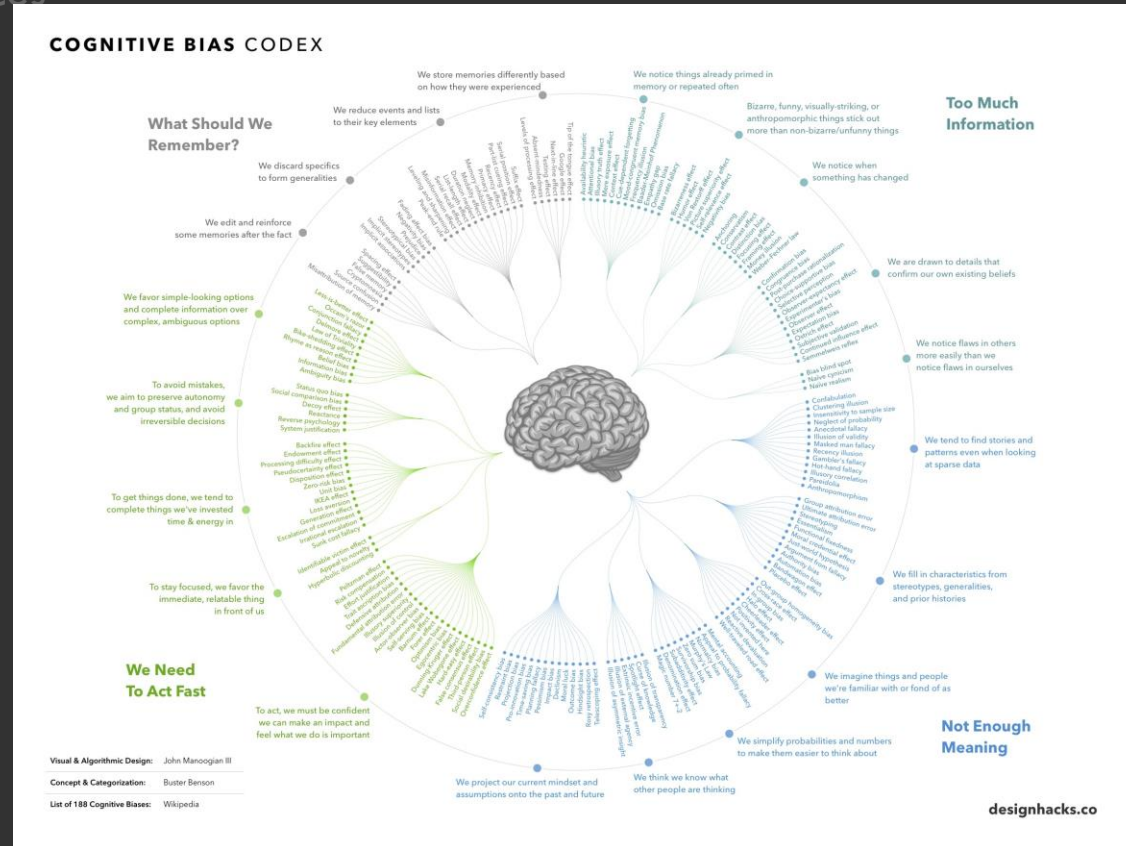
RACONTEUR

# Political Discussion – Biases

## Blessing/Curse:

Heuristics – limited cognitive resources

Especially pernicious



<https://www.visualcapitalist.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/cognitive-bias-infographic.html>

# Political Discussion – Biases

Blessing/Curse:

Heuristics – limited cognitive resources

Especially pernicious

Kahneman – System 1 vs. System 2

THINKING,  
FAST AND SLOW



DANIEL  
KAHNEMAN

WINNER OF THE NOBEL PRIZE IN ECONOMICS

# Political Discussion – Biases

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Kahneman – System 1 vs. System 2

Selected biases relevant to political communication:

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Selected biases relevant to political communication:

Confirmation Bias: Evidence that supports your beliefs is more compelling

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Kahneman – System 1 vs. System 2

Selected biases relevant to political communication:

Confirmation Bias: Evidence that supports your beliefs is more compelling

Be intentional about investigating the other side

Seek out different perspectives



# Political Discussion – Biases

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Kahneman – System 1 vs. System 2

Selected biases relevant to political communication:

Attribution Error: Your actions are circumstantial, others' are intentional

# Political Discussion – Biases

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Kahneman – System 1 vs. System 2

Selected biases relevant to political communication:

Attribution Error: Your actions are circumstantial, others' are intentional

Develop explanations for people's behavior

Put yourself in their shoes

# Political Discussion – Biases

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Blessing/Curse:

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Especially pernicious

Kahneman – System 1 vs. System 2

Selected biases relevant to political communication:

Anchoring Bias: Judgments are based on the first thing you learn about

# Political Discussion – Biases

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Kahneman – System 1 vs. System 2

Selected biases relevant to political communication:

Anchoring Bias: Judgments are based on the first thing you learn about

Look for/develop new anchors

Get more information

# Political Discussion – Biases

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Blessing/Curse:

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Kahneman – System 1 vs. System 2

Selected biases relevant to political communication:

Availability Bias: Likelihood to assess issues by what comes to mind first (similar to anchoring)

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Availability Cascades: Echo chambers reinforce the availability of talking points (groupthink)

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Kahneman – System 1 vs. System 2

Selected biases relevant to political communication:

Availability Bias: Likelihood to assess issues by what comes to mind first (similar to anchoring)

Availability Cascades: Echo chambers reinforce the availability of talking points (groupthink)

Get multiple, different perspectives

Develop multiple considerations before moving forward

# Political Discussion – Biases

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Kahneman – System 1 vs. System 2

Selected biases relevant to political communication:

Streetlight Effect: Likelihood to only search where it is easy to look



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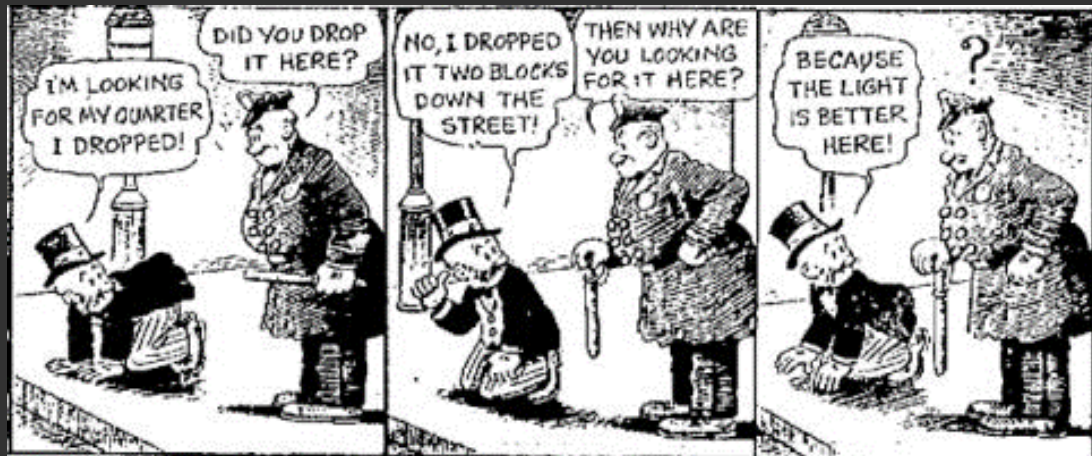
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Kahneman – System 1 vs. System 2

Selected biases relevant to political communication:

Streetlight Effect: Likelihood to only search where it is easy to look  
Expand your search (don't just read headlines, etc.)

# Political Discussion – Biases

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Blessing/Curse:

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Kahneman – System 1 vs. System 2

Selected biases relevant to political communication:

Halo Effect: Someone looks good in one area and is assumed good in another

# Political Discussion – Biases

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Kahneman – System 1 vs. System 2

Selected biases relevant to political communication:

Halo Effect: Someone looks good in one area and is assumed good in another

Compare the contexts

Affirm why you like them “I love The Rock, but that doesn’t mean he should be President.”

# Political Discussion – Biases

Blessing/Curse:

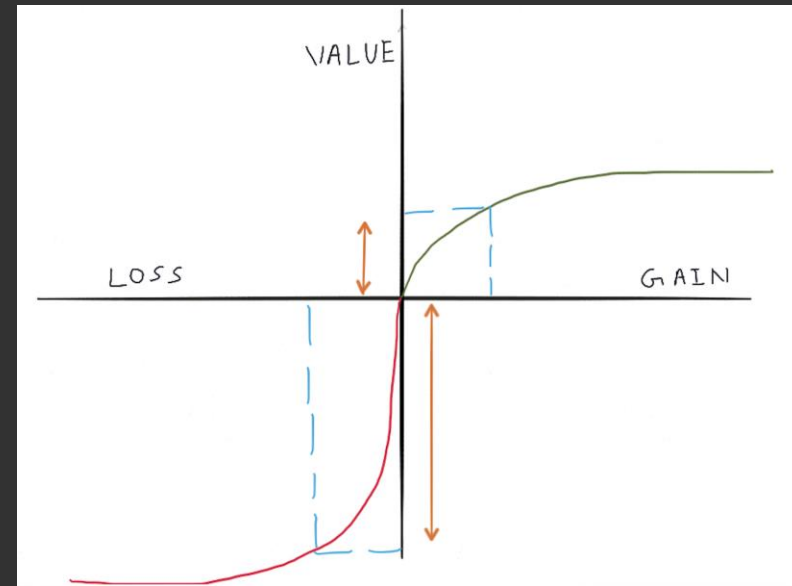
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Kahneman – System 1 vs. System 2

Selected biases relevant to political communication:

Prospect Theory: Losses are more impactful than gains



# Political Discussion – Biases

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Kahneman – System 1 vs. System 2

Selected biases relevant to political communication:

Prospect Theory: Losses are more impactful than gains

Put yourself in the shoes of those who stand to lose

# Political Discussion – Biases

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Blessing/Curse:

Heuristics – limited cognitive resources

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Kahneman – System 1 vs. System 2

Selected biases relevant to political communication:

General Strategies:

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Selected biases relevant to political communication:

General Strategies:

Slow Down (Use system 2)



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Slow Down (Use system 2)

Be humble

# Political Discussion – Biases

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Kahneman – System 1 vs. System 2

Selected biases relevant to political communication:

**General Strategies:**

Slow Down (Use system 2)

Be humble

**Acknowledge these biases**

# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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What are fallacies? – Logical errors in reasoning

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Problems with fallacies:

Communication breakdown

# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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Incorrect, often harmful, conclusions (e.g. policy)

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- Incorrect, often harmful, conclusions (e.g. policy)

Selected fallacies relevant to political communication:

# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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What are fallacies? – Logical errors in reasoning

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Selected fallacies relevant to political communication:

Straw Man: Arguing against a position that doesn't exist

# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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What are fallacies? – Logical errors in reasoning

Problems with fallacies:

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Selected fallacies relevant to political communication:

Straw Man: Arguing against a position that doesn't exist

Example: “Democrats want to eliminate free speech”



# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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What are fallacies? – Logical errors in reasoning

Problems with fallacies:

- Communication breakdown

- Incorrect, often harmful, conclusions (e.g. policy)

Selected fallacies relevant to political communication:

Straw Man: How to avoid **your** fallacy

- Example: “Democrats want to eliminate free speech”

- Restate the argument of the other person

# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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What are fallacies? – Logical errors in reasoning

Problems with fallacies:

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- Incorrect, often harmful, conclusions (e.g. policy)

Selected fallacies relevant to political communication:

Straw Man: How to counter **their** fallacy

- Example: “Democrats want to eliminate free speech”

- For you: Restate the argument of the other person

- Restate your own position

# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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What are fallacies? – Logical errors in reasoning

Problems with fallacies:

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Selected fallacies relevant to political communication:

Red Herring: Redirecting an argument to a new topic to avoid an issue

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Example: “Well, what about your stance on...”

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- Incorrect, often harmful, conclusions (e.g. policy)

Selected fallacies relevant to political communication:

Red Herring: How to avoid **your** fallacy

- Example: “Well, what about your stance on...”

- Stay on topic

# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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Problems with fallacies:

Communication breakdown

Incorrect, often harmful, conclusions (e.g. policy)

Selected fallacies relevant to political communication:

Red Herring: How to counter **their** fallacy

Example: “Well, what about your stance on...”

Stay on topic

“That’s a different issue, we can discuss that after we finish this one...”

# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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What are fallacies? – Logical errors in reasoning

Problems with fallacies:

- Communication breakdown

- Incorrect, often harmful, conclusions (e.g. policy)

Selected fallacies relevant to political communication:

False Dichotomy: Presenting a complex issue as having only two outcomes

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Example: “The contest between capitalism and socialism is over: capitalism has won.”



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False Dichotomy: How to avoid **your** fallacy

- Example: “The contest between capitalism and socialism is over: capitalism has won.”

- Explore a “middle-ground”

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Selected fallacies relevant to political communication:

False Dichotomy: How to counter **their** fallacy

- Example: “The contest between capitalism and socialism is over: capitalism has won.”

- Explore a “middle-ground”

- “What about a system that has a mix of both?”

# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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What are fallacies? – Logical errors in reasoning

Problems with fallacies:

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Selected fallacies relevant to political communication:

Equivocation: Using ambiguous words to mean multiple things

# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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What are fallacies? – Logical errors in reasoning

Problems with fallacies:

- Communication breakdown

- Incorrect, often harmful, conclusions (e.g. policy)

Selected fallacies relevant to political communication:

- Equivocation: Using ambiguous words to mean multiple things

- Bias as a preference versus bias as a mistake

# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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What are fallacies? – Logical errors in reasoning

Problems with fallacies:

Communication breakdown

Incorrect, often harmful, conclusions (e.g. policy)

Selected fallacies relevant to political communication:

Equivocation: How to avoid **your** bias

Bias as a preference versus bias as a mistake

Be consistent with definitions

# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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What are fallacies? – Logical errors in reasoning

Problems with fallacies:

Communication breakdown

Incorrect, often harmful, conclusions (e.g. policy)

Selected fallacies relevant to political communication:

Equivocation: How to resist **their** bias

Bias as a preference versus bias as a mistake

Be consistent with definitions

“I would agree if we were using *that* definition...”

# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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What are fallacies? – Logical errors in reasoning

Problems with fallacies:

- Communication breakdown

- Incorrect, often harmful, conclusions (e.g. policy)

Selected fallacies relevant to political communication:

Ad hominem: Attacking someone's character to attack their position

# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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What are fallacies? – Logical errors in reasoning

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Ad hominem: Attacking someone's character to attack their position

Example: “Sleepy Joe” Biden



# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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- Incorrect, often harmful, conclusions (e.g. policy)

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Ad hominem: How to avoid **your** fallacy

- Example: “Sleepy Joe” Biden

- Focus on the issue

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Problems with fallacies:

- Communication breakdown

- Incorrect, often harmful, conclusions (e.g. policy)

Selected fallacies relevant to political communication:

Ad hominem: How to counter **their** fallacy

- Example: “Sleepy Joe” Biden

- Focus on the issue

- Explain the irrelevance

# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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What are fallacies? – Logical errors in reasoning

Problems with fallacies:

- Communication breakdown

- Incorrect, often harmful, conclusions (e.g. policy)

Selected fallacies relevant to political communication: **Lightening Round**

# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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What are fallacies? – Logical errors in reasoning

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- Incorrect, often harmful, conclusions (e.g. policy)

Selected fallacies relevant to political communication: **Lightening Round**

Ecological Fallacy: Judging individuals based on groups

# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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What are fallacies? – Logical errors in reasoning

Problems with fallacies:

- Communication breakdown

- Incorrect, often harmful, conclusions (e.g. policy)

Selected fallacies relevant to political communication: **Lightening Round**

Ecological Fallacy: Judging individuals based on groups

Example: All Republicans are racist

# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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What are fallacies? – Logical errors in reasoning

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Example: All Republicans are racist

Slippery Slope: Baselessly claiming an action will lead to increasingly extreme outcomes

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Example: Same-sex marriage will lead to legal bestiality

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Example: Same-sex marriage will lead to legal bestiality

Appeal to Authority: Relying on someone's status to justify a position (similar to Halo Effect)



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Example: All Republicans are racist

Slippery Slope: Baselessly claiming an action will lead to increasingly extreme outcomes

Example: Same-sex marriage will lead to legal bestiality

Appeal to Authority: Relying on someone's status to justify a position (similar to Halo Effect)

Example: Gov. Ron DeSantis said masks don't work so I don't have to wear one...

# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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What are fallacies? – Logical errors in reasoning

Problems with fallacies:

- Communication breakdown

- Incorrect, often harmful, conclusions (e.g. policy)

Selected fallacies relevant to political communication:

General Strategies:

# Political Discussion – Fallacies

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What are fallacies? – Logical errors in reasoning

Problems with fallacies:

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General Strategies:

- Ask questions

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Selected fallacies relevant to political communication:

General Strategies:

- Ask questions

- Avoid making it personal

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General Strategies:

- Ask questions

- Avoid making it personal

- Patiently and tactfully clarify when necessary

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- Ask questions

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- Structure the conversation ahead of time (see next section)

# Political Discussion – Format

---

Different kinds of conversation:

# Political Discussion – Format

---

Different kinds of conversation:

Different purposes

Different roles



# Political Discussion – Format

---

Different kinds of conversation:

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Debate:

- Purpose: to win

- Roles: Competitors

# Political Discussion – Format

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Purpose: to win

Roles: Competitors

Lecture:

Purpose: to teach/learn

Roles: Mentor/Mentee

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Deliberation:

Purpose: to generate, innovate

Roles: Collaborators

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Gregory Bateson – A Theory of Play and Fantasy

# Political Discussion – Format

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The type of conversation can be negotiated beforehand!

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“Let’s agree that we will try to find a compromise”

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# Political Discussion – Format

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“Let’s agree that we will try to find a compromise”

“I promise to respect your values if you promise to respect mine”

“We should take turns making out points and not talk over each other...”



# Political Discussion – Format

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“Let’s agree that we will try to find a compromise”

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Define and agree to the roles:

# Political Discussion – Format

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Define and agree to the roles:

Many arguments result from both parties trying to be the mentor

# Political Discussion – Format

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Define and agree to the roles:

Many arguments result from both parties trying to be the mentor

Stop and take stock – conversations can construct roles, reset as necessary

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The type of conversation can be negotiated beforehand!

“Let’s agree that we will try to find a compromise”

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“We should take turns making out points and not talk over each other...”

**Define and agree to the roles:**

Many arguments result from both parties trying to be the mentor

Stop and take stock – conversations can construct roles, reset as necessary

**Be aware of other roles your fellow brings to the discussion**

Identity roles are especially important and can lead to defensiveness

Defensiveness can make collaborators into competitors

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Meaning is socially constructed (roles, format, substance)

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Be aware that these can be in flux and might require negotiation

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Identity roles are especially important and can lead to defensiveness

Defensiveness can make collaborators into competitors

Meaning is socially constructed (roles, format, substance)

Be aware that these can be in flux and might require negotiation

But this also allows for correction and better conversation

# Political Discussion – News

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Approach news media and other information brokers with caution



# Political Discussion – News

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Approach news media and other information brokers with caution

News Biases:

Newness Bias

# Political Discussion – News

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Profit-Motive

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News information management:

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- Lies

# Political Discussion – News

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News engagement strategies:

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Subscribe to a variety of news services

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## Fake-news detection strategies:

### BREAKING NEWS CONSUMER'S HANDBOOK

#### FAKE NEWS EDITION

1. Big red flags for fake news: ALL CAPS, or obviously photoshopped pics.
2. A glut of pop-ups and banner ads? Good sign the story is pure clickbait.
3. Check the domain! Fake sites often add ".co" to trusted brands to steal their luster. (Think: "abcnews.com.co")
4. If you land on an unknown site, check its "About" page. Then, Google it with the word "fake" and see what comes up.
5. If a story offers links, follow them. (Garbage leads to worse garbage.) No links, quotes, or references? Another telltale sign.
6. Verify an unlikely story by finding a reputable outlet reporting the same thing.
7. Check the date. Social media often resurrects outdated stories.
8. Read past headlines. Often they bear no resemblance to what lies beneath.
9. Photos may be misidentified and dated. Use a reverse image search engine like TinEye to see where an image *really* comes from.
10. Gut check. If a story makes you angry, it's probably designed that way.
11. Finally, if you're not sure it's true, don't share it! *Don't. Share. It.*

ON **THE MEDIA**

ONTHEMEDIA.ORG

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- Fake-news detection strategies:

Not all bad

# Political Discussion – Free Speech

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Has political correctness gotten out of control?



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Has political correctness gotten out of control?  
Left and Right issue

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Silencing versus de-platforming

# Political Discussion – Conclusion

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Thank you!

Questions?