

Statement Attributions

Statement by politician A – This is from Senator Kennedy’s opening statement, in the first Kennedy-Nixon presidential debate on September 26, 1960. What was interesting about this debate is in the rebuttal Nixon said “I subscribe completely to the spirit that Senator Kennedy has expressed tonight, the spirit that the United States should move ahead. Where, then, do we disagree? I think we disagree on the implication of his remarks tonight and on the statements that he has made on many occasions during his campaign to the effect that the United States has been standing still. We heard tonight, for example, the statement made that our growth in national product last year was the lowest of any industrial nation in the world. Now last year, of course, was 1958. That happened to be a recession year. But when we look at the growth of G.N.P. this year, a year of recovery, we find that it's six and nine-tenths per cent and one of the highest in the world today.” Thus Kennedy’s claim that “the United States last year had the lowest rate of economic growth of any major industrialized society” is true, but what it implies it not. It is not true that the United States is falling behind economically. By selectively choosing a piece of data that supports his position, Kennedy has used the biased sample fallacy. Nixon saw through the fallacy immediately.

Statement by politician B – From President Ford’s closing statement, in the first Carter-Ford presidential debate on September 23, 1976. Ford’s assertion that “We should never forget that a government big enough to give us everything we want is a government big enough to take from us everything we have.” implies that big government is bad, without saying how big “big” really is. Also, the conclusion that big government will “take from us everything we have” does not follow from the premise. The conclusion is also gross exaggeration, because there has never been a government that has taken everything from its citizens. Ford is creating a false enemy here by raising the false fear that government itself is bad.

By contrast, in his debate statements Jimmy Carter did not engage in nearly as many fallacious appeals. For example, in his closing statement he said “I don't claim to know all the answers. But I've got confidence in my country. Our economic strength is still there. Our system of government—in spite of Vietnam, Cambodia, CIA, and Watergate—is still the best system of government on earth.” Instead of pushing the fear hot button, Jimmy Carter did just the opposite. He appealed to the people’s intellect by saying that he didn’t have all the answers, and implying that he could figure them out as he went along. Thus he avoided making the false promises so common to political campaign speeches, where numerous false promises are made to woo supporters.

Statement by politician C – This was delivered by President William McKinley at a reception at the World’s Fair on September 5, 1901, the day before he was assassinated. It has become known as His Last Speech.

The statement commits a number of fallacies. Trade statistics alone cannot “indicate that this country is in a state of unexampled prosperity.” Nor can “furnishing profitable employment” to millions indicate that, because there could just as easily be other millions who are not employed. But the biggest fallacy in this statement occurs in the last sentence, which claims “That all the people are participating in this great prosperity is seen in every American community and shown by the enormous and unprecedented deposits in our savings banks.” This is the fallacy of the conclusion does not follow from

the premises. The presence of enormous and unprecedented bank deposits does not automatically translate into prosperity for all. It merely implies prosperity for some.

Statement by politician D – This was Governor Ronald Reagan of California, during the Carter-Reagan presidential debate on October 28, 1980. His key assertion, that “we cannot shirk our responsibility as a leader of the free world because we're the only ones that can do it,” does not follow from the premises. It is also an implied false dilemma. Reagan implies that either the US can do nothing or it can be the leader of the free world and assume the responsibility for keeping the peace. But there are many more options, such as the US participating in an international approach to keeping the peace.

Another conclusion that does not follow is “to maintain that peace requires strength.” Peace can also be maintained through diplomacy and cooperation. What Reagan is really doing here is promoting a philosophy that is beneficial to exploitation of the race to the bottom (via a false enemy and pushing the fear hot button) and to the military industrial complex (by increasing military expenditures). Both strategies will (and did) gain him more supporters than Carter's, which were just the opposite.

Reagan's statement harkens back to Barry Goldwater's electrifying speech at the Republican National Convention in 1964. Goldwater, author of *The Conscience of a Conservative*, became the anointed standard bearer of the right wing of the Republican Party at the convention with the speech. William Safire, in *Lend Me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History*, says that this was the speech that ignited the conservative movement. It contains the lines that Reagan came close to copying word for word: “It is further the cause of Republicanism to remind ourselves, and the world, that only the strong can remain free: that only the strong can keep the peace.”

Sample statement – Some of you received the page with the sample statement beginning with this sentence: “We say to you that you have made the definition of a business man too limited in its application.” This is from William Jennings Bryan's famous *Cross of Gold Speech*, given at the Democratic Convention on July 8, 1896. The speech ended with powerful imagery that emphasized the suffering inherent in maintaining the gold standard. Here is the final stirring paragraph from the speech:

“No, my friends, that will never be the verdict of our people. Therefore, we care not upon what lines the battle is fought. If they say bimetallism is good, but that we cannot have it until other nations help us, we reply, that instead of having a gold standard because England has, we will restore bimetallism, and then let England have bimetallism because the United States has it. If they dare to come out in the open field and defend the gold standard as a good thing, we will fight them to the uttermost. Having behind us the producing masses of this nation and the world, supported by the commercial interests, the laboring interests and the toilers everywhere, we will answer their demand for a gold standard by saying to them: You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.”

Experimental Design

This social experiment was designed to test the hypothesis that a brief exposure to the Truth Test would reduce susceptibility to political deception. To test this hypothesis, half the handouts contained a one page introduction to the Truth Test on page 2. The other half of the handouts contained a one page discussion of a neutral topic related to political statements. The purpose of the "dummy page" is so that both groups go through a similar experience and take about the same time to complete the questionnaire. To see the page you did not get, please see the end of this document, where both types of pages are included.

The experiment was run as a classic double blind randomized control group experiment. This is the gold standard for experimentation. *Double blind* means that neither the subjects nor the experimenter knew who received a treatment or not. This is to eliminate sources of bias, which would contaminate the results. A *treatment* is the independent variable. In this experiment the treatment was receiving the introduction to the Truth Test page.

A randomized control group experiment randomly assigns subjects to a control group or a treatment group. In this experiment there were 50% assigned to each group. A *control group* does not receive the treatment. They represent the real, unaltered world, whose behavior serves as a "control" to compare the behavior of the treatment group to. If subjects have been properly *randomly assigned* to the groups, and there is no source of bias in the experiment, then any significant variation in behavior between the two groups could only have been caused by the treatment.

If the treatment group scored significantly *lower* than the control group, then that indicates lower susceptibility to deception, which shows the hypothesis is true. If there is no significant difference then the hypothesis has been proven false. If the treatment group scored *higher*, then we've all got to get together and scratch our heads a little, because that is a counter intuitive result. For a new hypothesis to be widely accepted, experimental results must be replicated by running the experiment many times, with different experimenters and subjects, and even different variations of the experiment itself.

The experimenter will announce the results of the experiment, which you can write down in the table below:

Independent Variable	Response Averages							
	Agreement with Politician					Support of Politician		
	1	3	7	9	All 4	5	11	All 2
No Truth Test Training								
Brief Truth Test Training								
Percent Difference Between Groups								

Number of subjects: _____ Percent difference needed for 95% confidence: _____

This is the page for the *without* the Truth Test questionnaires:

In modern politics there are many things a politician can say. The following statements are examples of what actual politicians have said at crucial times in the history of their country. The statements are from a variety of parties and cover a one hundred year span in time. Please study them closely before attempting to answer the questions about each statement.

There are many types of political statements. They can be roughly classified into these categories:

1. Statements of facts and information.
2. Attempts to persuade by logic.
3. Attempts to persuade by emotion.
4. Irrelevant gibberish.

Over the years all of the above has been tried. A large body of standard approaches to communicating with the public has been developed. Politicians pick and choose from this body of knowledge depending on their needs, in a manner that varies from conscious strategies to woo voters to unconscious efforts based on practices so widespread they have become the norm.

Most political statements ramble all over the first three categories. For example, here is an actual statement:

“We say to you that you have made the definition of a business man too limited in its application. The man who is employed for wages is as much a business man as his employer; the attorney in a country town is as much a business man as the corporation counsel in a great metropolis; the merchant at the cross-roads store is as much a business man as the merchant of New York; the farmer who goes forth in the morning and toils all day, who begins in spring and toils all summer, and who by the application of brain and muscle to the natural resources of the country creates wealth, is as much a business man as the man who goes upon the Board of Trade and bets upon the price of grain; the miners who go down a thousand feet into the earth, or climb two thousand feet upon the cliffs, and bring forth from their hiding places the precious metals to be poured into the channels of trade are as much businessmen as the few financial magnates who, in a back room, corner the money of the world. We come to speak of this broader class of business men.”

Thus it is rare to find political statements that are “pure” and belong to only one category. This increases the difficulty of determining what is being said and what methods are being employed.

This is the page for the *with* the Truth Test questionnaires:

In modern politics, the purpose of political statements is not to objectively state the truth of a situation, but to cleverly persuade voters to support politicians. Deception and rhetoric is used to do this. Please study the following material, and see if you can use it to determine who is telling the truth and who is really the better candidate as you take the questionnaire.

Most political statements are arguments to convince people that certain conclusions are true. It is possible to apply what we call the Truth Test to these arguments and to very quickly tell if an argument is true or false about 90% of the time. The rest take longer or an expert. The Truth Test consists of these four simple questions:

1. What is the argument?
2. Are any common fallacies present?
3. Are the premises true, complete, and relevant?
4. Does each conclusion follow from its premises?

Let's take each question one at a time. An argument consists of one or more conclusions and the premises to support them. If a statement is not an argument, then there is no reason to support the politician. Examples of non-arguments are "It's time for a change" and "A vote for me is a vote for a better future." These are non-arguments because no reasons (premises) are given as to why the conclusion is true.

It is the second question that is the most effective, because most political statements employ very clever types of fallacies to "prove" their truth. A fallacy is a pattern of appealing but unsound reasoning. One popular fallacy is the *biased sample*. This is the use of a sample that is not representative of the full situation. For example, if the full situation consists of 12 months of data and the politician picks the one month that best supports their position, then that is a biased sample. Another popular fallacy is the *false dilemma*. This occurs when you are presented with a limited number of choices, usually two, but in reality there are more choices. A classic example of a false dilemma was George W. Bush's statement on September 20, 2001 that "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." This is fallacious, because you can also be undecided or neutral. You can also be both for and against, as were many countries that supported some of the Bush administration's policies and not others. There are many more common fallacies. Some of the most popular are creating a *false enemy*, *pushing the fear hot button*, promoting the *wrong priorities* instead of the right ones, and the most popular one of all, the *false promise*. A false promise is something that is promised but never delivered, or never delivered fully.

The third question is self-explanatory. The fourth question, the use of conclusions that do not follow from the premises, is very common and often subtle. An example is "I served your country valiantly in the war. This country needs strong, solid leadership." The premise of bravery does not support the implied conclusion that the politician can provide good leadership, because the ability to be brave does not translate into the ability to manage a country.