

FIRSTPOST.

Donald Trump Jr needs to put down the Skittles and take lessons in maths and grammar

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On Monday night, while world leaders in New York discussed immigration issues (among other problems) at the United Nations General Assembly meet, Donald Trump Jr, son of Republican nominee Donald Trump, **took to Twitter** to oversimplify the situation of Syrian refugees by comparing them to potentially dangerous Skittles candy.

Trump Jr used a graphic to explain as to why it's not a good idea to allow Syrian refugees in United States. The graphic poses a simple question: "If I had a bowl of Skittles and I told you just three would kill you. Would you take a handful?"

The question ended with a bold statement, "That's our Syrian refugee problem."

Three things come to mind when one looks at the graphic:

- 1) The statement's logical fallacy
- 2) The statement is a severe trivialisation of a serious world issue. Even school children wouldn't put it so crassly.
- 3) Trump Jr has a serious problem with Skittles.

Let's start with the first one.

The Fallacy

While various fallacies can apply to this statement, one or two immediately stand out. First is the false dilemma/dichotomy also called bifurcation, where the person presents the argument in such a way that there are only two conceivable alternatives left. 'Eat Skittles and die, don't eat Skittles and live', here it implies 'Give refuge to Syrians and die, don't give refuge and live.'

In this case a third possible solution could be to identify the poisonous skittle.
Donald Trump Jr. Reuters

Oversimplification is another fallacy which Trump Jr easily overlooked. Here, Trump Jr uses an easily relatable example of Skittle-eating and equates it to a research paper-worthy subject such as the Syrian refugee status. The graphic is tailor-made for the millions of people who are probably looking for an easy tutorial on complex subjects like immigration/counter-terrorism.

So, when Trump compares actual human beings, trying to escape war, with colourful candy, he is just trivialising their very existence.

So how do we provide a solution to this dilemma? Let's start with identifying the poisonous Skittles.

How to identify a poisonous Skittle?

Trump Jr has a Bachelors in Science from **Wharton School** of the University of Pennsylvania. So when we see him tweeting such graphics, we wonder whether Trump Jr slept through most of his (expensive) Ivy league education? How can he not think of a scientific solution to the poisonous Skittle problem? May we suggest a solution? Use a scientific screen test.

You know who does something similar? The United States government, while vetting people who want US citizenship. This screening test has been in place for more than a decade which was implemented after 11 September, 2001 attacks (9/11). So every time a Syrian immigrant applies for refuge in US, the system starts working.

This *Time* article very aptly presents the picture of the vetting process of the refugees who seek shelter in the US.

The process begins with a referral form from the United Nations refugee agency UNHCR which is responsible for providing aid and assistance to refugees. After extensive interviews and background checks, the military combatants are weeded out. Next comes government screening which includes consultation from nine different government agencies.

After this, the refugees go through the vetting process where multiple law enforcement, intelligence and security agencies like the State Department, the FBI's Terrorist Screening Centre, the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security, conduct interviews and tests to scrutinise the applicants. According to the *Time* report, the screening for the Trump Jr's 'Skittles' (Syrians) is more rigorous than regular immigrants.

The system is pretty effective if not foolproof but very few refugees have been arrested for terrorism charges after their citizenship is granted. That is the system working. Surely one should have more faith in the US government than Donald Trump Jr.

Dying from Skittle eating/Syrian refugees, low odds

Blaise Pascal and Pierre de Fermat laid the fundamental groundwork of probability theory whose guiding principle is that an event has higher probability if it is more likely to occur. So keeping this principle in mind, the probability of an American dying in a terrorist attack err, according to Trump Jr a Skittle eating accident is very low (they're the same thing, right? No).

Logically speaking, one should not be xenophobic and look at people from Syria with suspicion and one should definitely not stop eating Skittles.

According to **PBS**, the average American has a 0.000009 percent chance of dying in a plane crash (1-in-11 million) or a 0.02 percent chance of dying in a car crash (1-in-5,000). Last week a think tank, **Cato Institute**, published a report to note the risk posed by refugees. That report stated that, each year, the risk of an American of being killed by a refugee in a terror attack is 1 in 3.64 billion, just in case you're still wondering, we did the math, that is approximately 0.00000003 percent.

In March 2011, Harper's Index **noted** that the number of American civilians killed worldwide in terrorist attacks in 2010 was 8 and the minimum number of people killed after being struck by lightning were 29, suggesting there is a higher chance of being killed by lightning.

In the year 2013, even US President Barack Obama noted that "The odds of dying in a terrorist attack are a lot lower than they are of dying in a car accident"

The Washington Post studied the matter and on the basis of statistics from a 2004 National Safety Council report, the National Center for Health Statistics, the US Census Bureau, and 2003 mortality data from the Center for Disease Control, noted that in 2011:

- *Americans are 17,600 times more likely to die from heart disease than from a terrorist attack*
- *Americans are 12,571 times more likely to die from cancer than from a terrorist attack*
- *Americans are 11,000 times more likely to die in an airplane accident than from a terrorist plot involving an airplane*
- *Americans are 1048 times more likely to die from a car accident than from a terrorist attack*
- *Americans are 404 times more likely to die in a fall than from a terrorist attack*
- *Americans are 87 times more likely to drown than die in a terrorist attack*
- *Americans are 13 times more likely to die in a railway accident than from a terrorist attack*
- *Americans are 12 times more likely to die from accidental suffocation in bed than from a terrorist attack*
- *Americans are 9 times more likely to choke to death on your own vomit than die in a terrorist attack*
- *Americans are 8 times more likely to be killed by a police officer than by a terrorist*
- *Americans are 8 times more likely to die from accidental electrocution than from a terrorist attack*
- *Americans are 6 times more likely to die from hot weather than from a terrorist attack*

In fact an **FBI report** suggested that there is a lower probability of dying at the hands of an Islamist terrorist as compared to a Jewish terrorist. The report quoted numbers which noted that only a small percentage of terrorist attacks carried out in US between 1980 and 2005 were perpetrated by Islamic extremists. **According to the data**, 5 percent of the attacks between 1980

and 2005 were committed by Communists, 6 percent by Islamic terrorists, 7 percent by Jewish extremists, 24 percent by Extreme Left Wing Groups, 16 percent by other groups and 42 percent by Latinos.

Now studying the various inventive ways in which Americans can die, death at the hands of a terrorist is very low, more so if it is at the hands of a Syrian refugee posing as a terrorist.

Twitter erupts

Like always, Twitter enjoyed the Trump clans' grasp on world issues. They made it their own and mocked it. The first respondent was former Congressman Joe Walsh who passive aggressively pointed out that he had already used this analogy a month ago.

So no points for originality Trump Jr (reminds us of someone else from your family).

Skittles even responded to the distasteful candy analogy and asked Trump Jr not to trivialise a humanitarian issue.

Trump Jr should get rid of his pessimism, but the probability of that is quite low too.