

Constructing Arguments for Policy Claims*

In this chapter we discuss simple policy claims and comparative policy claims. Recall that Chapter 3 included policy claims within the broader category of claims of evaluation. Policy claims can be divided yet again into simple and comparative propositions of policy. First, we will discuss policy claims in general, then go on to affirmative approaches to constructing cases for simple and comparative policy propositions, and finally look at negative approaches to both kinds of policy propositions.

POLICY CLAIMS¹

A policy claim is a subset of the larger category of claims of evaluation that we first introduced in Chapter 3. What we called value claims differ from policy claims in that a policy claim explicitly calls for some kind of action whereas a value claim does not. For instance, the claim “capital punishment is immoral” is a value claim, whereas “the nations of the world should eliminate capital punishment” is a policy claim.

Our capital punishment example is a simple policy claim because it offers an evaluation of a single action—the elimination of capital punishment. A comparative policy proposition asks the affirmative and the negative teams to compare two policies. For instance, “Rehabilitation is better than punishment in dealing with drug abuse” asks debaters to compare two actions or policies: punishment and rehabilitation. Obviously societies have more alternatives than these two, but this proposition limits the debates to those two alternatives.

A comparative proposition of policy differs from a simple proposition of policy in two major ways. First, in a simple proposition of policy, the affirmative is assigned a certain stance and the negative has more choices regarding its stance. A comparative proposition of policy assigns a certain stance to both teams. In the proposition at hand, the affirmative is assigned to defend a “harm reduction strategy” and the negative is assigned to describe a “law enforcement strategy.” In this way, the affirmative has less liberty in a comparative policy proposition than it would in debating a simple policy proposition.

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