

Second, in a simple proposition of policy, the affirmative generally defends a change from the present system and the negative generally defends the status quo (unless, of course, the team presents a counterplan). However, in a comparative proposition of policy, the contrast is not between the status quo and change but between a policy stance assigned to the affirmative and a contrasting policy stance assigned to the negative. In fact, in some comparative policy propositions, the concept of status quo may not even be meaningful. In the proposition dealing with drug abuse, for instance, the status quo varies from country to country. Some countries use a harms reduction approach while others use a law enforcement approach. Determining a status quo in this case is very problematic and not necessary for the debate. In the following sections we discuss constructing arguments to support a comparative policy proposition.

POLICY CLAIMS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Policy decisions are an important part of everyday life, both in the private and public spheres. When you decide how to spend your day or where to take your vacation, you are making policy decisions. When planning a holiday, you evaluate the details of plan (how will we travel? how much will it cost?) as well as its potential costs and benefits (the family has not had a holiday for a few years). National legislatures in democracies around the world also debate policy claims when they make decisions about taxes or treaties, while local government bodies deliberate school policy or how to help the seniors in the community.

THE ROLE OF VALUES IN POLICY CLAIMS

When a topic requires students to debate about policies as, for instance, “Resolved that the nations of the world should strengthen the International Criminal Court (ICC),” debaters must be prepared to engage both value and policy dimensions of advocacy. In both real life and in the world of academia, policy debate is a natural extension of value debate; just like in real life, in educational debate values and policies are connected. Debates about policy do not and should not require additional jargon or strict reliance on form, but should reflect the debates that take place around us, both in our local communities as well as internationally.

Many public debates address questions of values, especially in societies that believe that citizens can shape their own destinies by participating in public forums and other democratic processes. One purpose of democratic public debates is to influence legislatures to uphold values important to society at large. Although most contemporary societies uphold such values as the right to high quality education, social justice, and safety of citizens, justification of capital punishment or abortion continues to be heatedly debated. Public as well as academic debates provide a medium to express differing views on, for instance, does the fetus have a right to life and, if so, does that right outweigh the mother’s right of choice.

Value debates and policy debates can occur at different times or they can occur simultaneously. Sometimes debates about values precede debates about policies designed to implement those values. In such cases, a society reaches a consensus on what constitutes its system of values and then aims to develop laws