

and policies that reflect those values. In such situations, debates about values are “pre-policy” in nature. Thus, to constitute a policy protecting freedom of choice, society should have at least some consensus regarding what constitutes the value of freedom of choice.

Theoretically, debates should occur in this order. First, debate and settle issues of value. Then, and only then, proceed to debate about which policies should be used to implement those values. More often than not, however, debates about values occur simultaneously with debates about policies. For instance, debates about the relative value of human life and free choice occur simultaneously with debates about what policies government should enact to protect reproductive rights or the unborn. The debate about which policy the government should enact with respect to abortion does not wait until society settles the value questions concerning anti-abortion vs. pro-choice.

Societies cannot wait until debates on value issues are settled and its members unanimously agree on what constitutes such concepts as justice, freedom, or rights. Thus, while some value debates can be pre-policy, other value debates occur simultaneously with policy debates.

Policy debates sometimes occur in the absence of value disputes. For instance, sometimes a society might hold a shared value of equal rights for all citizens but might disagree on what policies are best to achieve equal rights. More often than not, a debate about policy includes both the debates about the importance of different values and about the means to achieve results consistent with those values even if the values are not held universally. Thus, when we speak of debating about policies, we envision a situation where disagreements will be found at both levels: what values are important and how to implement those values.

CONSTRUCTING ARGUMENTS ABOUT SIMPLE POLICY PROPOSITIONS: A NEED-PLAN-BENEFIT STRATEGY ²

The need-plan-benefit strategy is one of the most basic methods used for developing a case about policies.³ As its name suggests, the strategy involves three steps.

1. It identifies some *need* (a problem) caused by the status quo (present situation).
2. It proposes some *plan* to solve that problem.
3. It shows how the plan has the *advantage(s)* of remedying the problem.

We can illustrate this strategy by using an example from everyday life: friends discussing where to go to dinner. Nina suggests that she and her friend Noel go to a Greek restaurant. This is the claim. She then develops her case by first presenting the need caused by the status quo: “We have been working really hard today and we are hungry. There’s no food in the house, so we will have to eat out.” Next she proposes a plan: “Let’s go to the Greek restaurant.” To convince Noel, she then presents her plan’s advantages: “Greek food is delicious and the service in the restaurant is fast, so we can eat quickly.”

Collectively, arguments about need, plan, and benefits are called the affirmative case. We stress that such a case can be constructed in three parts: the need, the plan, and the benefits.