

MDU ADVANCED TRAINING SESSIONS



Prep Time Efficiency



how to think about prep time

- not just 15 minutes to talk through your own arguments
- instead, you should spend your prep time making accurate predictions about the debate, choosing the correct strategic way to win it and only then generating comprehensive argumentation that helps you fulfil that strategy



prep time checklist

● initial clarifications

● discuss the opposite side's case

● identify contentions

● generate analysis

initial clarifications i

- some debates are very straightforward and this phase will be very quick - others are not and failing to do the initial clarifications might easily lose you the debate
- **type of motion** → some motions require specific considerations
 - THR - counterfactual (all teams!)
 - THW - mechanism
 - TH, as X, would X THBT X should
 - hypothetical motions (assuming the technology exists, TH prefers a world)
- **wording of the motion**
 - pay attention to every word of the motion - e.g. THW *aggressively* redistribute / THW *strongly* condemn
- **new and weird policies** - think of an analogy to speed up the rest of the prep - e.g. THW redistribute happiness



initial clarifications ii

- 'why was this motion set'
 - without going into any side's arguments, clarify with your partner what the motion is broadly about
 - this can be very straightforward, but it is very helpful to vocalise it
 - questions to ask
 - 'what problem is the motion addressing'
 - if actor-focused motion 'what are the broad interests of this actor', 'is there anything important happening that is relevant to this actor'
 - e.g. THBT the Mexican government should adopt measures that enable one cartel to monopolise the drug market. → 'reducing cartel violence'



discuss the other side's case

- why should you do this?
 - allows you to make your case more robust and less vulnerable to obvious attacks
 - you do not spend time on analysing claims that will not be contested
 - allows you to anticipate closing/backload
- how to go about it
 - outline the strongest obvious opp claims
 - identify where the **contentions** are likely to be - e.g.
 - both gov and opp are likely to agree about how the motion plays out in two different contexts (e.g. positive in the developed world, negative in the developing world) → **contention: *framing*** on which of these contexts is this motion more likely to be enacted / where the scale of the impacts would be bigger
 - both gov and opp agree on a desirable impact (e.g. improving the situation of women/minorities), but disagree on whether the mechanism is effective or harmful → **contention: rigorous mechanistic *analysis***
 - gov and opp disagree on which impact is more desirable (e.g. mass mobilisation vs. commitment trade-off in social movement motions) → **contention: *weigh-off*** between the importance of different impacts



THBT it is in the interest of dominant organised religions for their leaders to declare more progressive interpretations of traditional dogma (e.g. on dietary and pilgrimage requirements, the acceptability of contraception, same-sex relationships)

Initial clarifications

- is there anything in particular to consider regarding the motion type?
- is there anything in particular to consider about the wording of the motion?
 - e.g. what can we expect 'more progressive interpretations of traditional dogma' to be?
- why was this motion set?
 - what problem is the motion trying to address?
 - what are the broad interests of the actor?

THBT it is in the interest of dominant organised religions for their leaders to declare more progressive interpretations of traditional dogma (e.g. on dietary and pilgrimage requirements, the acceptability of contraception, same-sex relationships)

in the West, the societal values are becoming more and more progressive → this means many people are alienated by conservative religions

by becoming more progressive, you are able to attract more young people in/prevent young people who grew up in religious households from leaving in favour of secularism

getting a larger following is desirable for religions

even if this were true in the West, the majority of the world is still rather conservative - in that context, you would probably alienate more existing followers than attract new ones

contention: does it matter more what the outcome of this motion is in the West or in the developing world?

(*mitigation*) even in the context of the West, it is unlikely that even more progressive religion can provide enough value for young people, which is why they are likely to leave anyway

contention: which of these scenarios is more likely?

more devout followers are likely to be alienated from religion as a result of this shift → losing a devout following is very detrimental for religions

contention: assuming both teams prove their impact, would it be more desirable to have larger following or smaller, but more committed one?

contention i: framing and characterisation

in the Western context, this could attract more people to religions



in the developing world context, this would push people away from religion

should religious leaders care more about the Western context or the developing world?

the West

the developing world

strategic purpose: if you manage to prove the developing world matters more, even if gov achieves all their impacts in the West, they still lose, unless they engage with you in the developing world context as well



contention ii: compelling analysis

young people would be attracted to religion should it become more progressive



young people would not be interested in religion anyway

which of these scenarios is more likely?

would be interested

would not be interested

strategic purpose: by mitigating the gov claim about young people, we can win much more decisively, because we will be comparing only a marginal benefit on gov side, vs. a substantial harm on ours



contention iii: weigh-up

more young people would join



devoted followers are likely to be alienated → less committed following

is it more important to secure a larger following of young people, or ensure the existing committed followers remain active?

new young people

committed followers

strategic purpose: engaging in gov's more favourable context (the West) and in their best case scenario (young people actually join), we are showing why our harms still matter more



be flexible

- each **motion** will require different amounts of work on different parts of prep
- you might need to adapt to **different partners**
 - in a lot of successful partnerships, speakers complement in each in terms of their skills (e.g. analysis/content knowledge vs. strategic thinking) → identify your respective strengths/weaknesses and make sure to capitalise on them in prep time
 - often one partner does more of the content generation, the other questions and provides strategic direction - this might be based on your partnership dynamics in general or on the specific motion/topic area
- **check/question** each other - it is better to point out weaknesses in your case during prep than letting opp do it in the debate itself
 - be aware of common biases and shared assumptions (e.g. your and your partner's shared political beliefs that might be 'obvious' and 'intuitive' to you might not be as obvious to the judge)

