

Synopsis of Problem Areas and Resolutions for 2021-2022

PROBLEM AREA I: ELECTION LAW

Resolved: The Supreme Court of the United States should issue an opinion that substantially changes interpretation of federal election law.

Both elections and the Supreme Court have been popular topics outside of the debate space, and while the occasional Elections Disadvantage and Courts Counterplan pop up, neither has been the primary focus of debates. The Supreme Court has a great deal of potential as an actor, with important and robust ground for affirmative and negative teams. The Supreme Court also allows for more niche arguments to enter the mainstream, from Hollow Hope to Critical Race Theory to Critical Legal Studies.

In the wake of Citizens United a spotlight has been trained on the aggregation of campaign finance, and what ramifications exist for individuals who accept large donation amounts, for better or for worse. This topic specifically hones in on many tangible issues for civic minded students who are or will shortly reach the age of majority: how does a candidate get on the ballot, voter ID laws, signature matching, stable addresses, closures of voting offices in districts that are heavily populated by certain ethnic or minority groups, gerrymandering, and what does access to the franchise look like in 2021 and beyond. The end result is a clear cut debate between whether election security means election integrity, or participatory scarcity.

The Supreme Court is the best actor to set the record straight with respect to issues of immense gravity, and election law is one of the best areas to access the Supreme Court from an educational standpoint.

PROBLEM AREA II: NATION STATE RECOGNITION

Resolved: The United States federal government should grant state recognition to the Republic of Artsakh, the Republic of Kurdistan, the Republic of Lakotah, the Republic of Somaliland, the Republic of South Ossetia-the State of Alania, the State of Palestine, and/or Taiwan.

The formation of new nations has been a part of international relations for centuries, yet the ramifications of that action have never been discussed in policy debate. Each of the seven potential states have been chosen to foster quality debate with unique sociopolitical ramifications and a quality literature base that would engage students in learning about international politics. Affirmatives about the Republic of Artsakh would discuss the ongoing conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and how great powers factor into those calculations. The Republic of Kurdistan would foster phenomenal debates about US support for allies, and would call into question the difference between engaging an ally in the Middle East and supporting their sovereignty. Debates about the Republic of Lakotah would center on US jurisdiction over native territories, and whether that occupation is lawful. Debates about Somaliland would center on the stability of the Horn of Africa and China's involvement in the area. South Ossetia debates would primarily center on US and Russian interests in Georgia in the wake of the 2008 conflict in the region, and how alliances could affect long term stability in the region. Palestine and Taiwan represent longstanding disputes of sovereignty that cut the core of the benefits and drawbacks of creating new states and the differences between engagement and full recognition.

Affirmative teams would require the United States to formally recognize one of the seven secessionist movements on the above list. Each affirmative would have distinct advantages and would affect broader relationships between United States and the target country. Potential advantages could include protecting subjugated populations from human rights violations, shoring up alliances, giving legitimacy to secessionist movements, and ending civil wars that have plagued areas of the world for decades.

While the topic might seem expansive, negative teams would have guaranteed access to a large range of arguments based on the mechanism of the topic and have the advantage of a limited number of affirmative areas to research. State recognition requires a large departure from the status quo, meaning that links to

disadvantages should be strong. Disadvantage ground will include arguments about emboldening new secessionist movements, disrupting existing alliances by injecting uncertainty of US commitment, instability arguments about the way that power will shift with changing borders and control, as well as more typical politics disadvantages based on lobbying by existing allies. The negative will also have access to counterplans that engage emerging states without rising to the level of full recognition.

Movements to establish new states have always been a part of international politics, but in an increasingly globalized world, the importance of these relationships needs to be researched and considered. Secessionist movements have been brewing in multiple geographic regions across the world for the entirety of these high school students' lives, yet they have never been directly debated. This topic would allow high school students across the country to engage in learning about those conflicts and becoming experts the ever-changing landscape of international politics vis a vis international sovereignty.

PROBLEM AREA III: PAKISTAN

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its economic and/or diplomatic engagement with the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Pakistan is one of the most important and interesting countries in the world. An Islamic nuclear power that is perennially on the verge of resuming war with India, Pakistan presents one of the most interesting challenges for the US to deal with. The South Asian region has never been a major focus of any policy debate topic despite its size and the influence the countries there wield. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is often caught up in the affairs of its neighbors. Its long-standing border dispute in the Kashmir region with India has been the subject of conflict for decades and continues to cause friction today. Additionally, the continued "war on terror" has placed Pakistan in the middle of the United State's attempts to curb the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Pakistan additionally continues to develop its own economy as it attempts to bridge the gap in its urban/rural divide and go from being a developing nation to a developed one.

Additionally, more direct support for Pakistan over India would be a major departure from current U.S. foreign policy and with a new president's term just beginning, how this might affect both internal and external politics will be intriguing for students to explore. Pakistan itself is the 5th largest country by population and one of the only Islamic nuclear powers in the world, yet it has not been given the attention of the debate community to the same extent as many other nations. Pakistan has played a major role in U.S. foreign affairs in the past, such as assistance in the raid against Osama Bin Laden. Since then, there has been little cooperation between the two governments as the U.S. continues to focus its efforts on fostering cooperation with India.

On this topic, affirmative teams can choose to engage in diplomatic or economic cooperation. Teams can choose to help resolve major regional disputes like the conflict over Kashmir, religious tensions between Muslims and Buddhists, pressure cooperation in assisting the fights against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, or to offer support for development or investment in Pakistan's projects in areas like infrastructure and clean energy. Negative teams can utilize animosity from India as well as China's wish to maintain its sphere of influence in the region while developing their arguments. Pakistan as a key state in China's foreign and economic policy would likely push back against expanded U.S. influence in the country. Furthermore, support for Pakistan would have repercussions politically within the United States as well as in many parts of the Middle East.

PROBLEM AREA IV: RUSSIA

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its diplomatic engagement with the Russian Federation regarding one or more of the following: arms control, the Arctic, cybersecurity, human rights.

The state of relations between the United States and the Russian Federation will be at the forefront of the foreign policy agenda for the incoming Biden administration. The Trump administration seemed to step back

from arms control agreements and to look the other way as President Putin pursued an active agenda in the Arctic, in cyber interference, and in undermining his electoral opposition. The Biden administration will need to find a balance between a return to Cold War tensions versus active engagement with the Russian Federation on these key issues. The declarations from Russian Federation President, Vladimir Putin, that he may soon step back from politics also adds to the timeliness of this topic.

Each of the items listed in the resolution suggest numerous affirmative cases. Arms control cases could include a return to one or more of the agreements unilaterally abandoned by the Trump administration, or diplomatic engagement in new areas such as anti-ballistic missile defense or updating of nuclear stockpiles. Cases dealing with the Arctic could focus on climate change, oil exploration, or military engagement. Cases dealing with cybersecurity could include election interference, hacking of government systems, or use of propaganda bots. Cases dealing with human rights could include diplomatic engagement on issues related to silencing democratic opposition in Russia or in the states of the former Soviet Socialist Republics.

Possible disadvantage areas include impacts on internal Russian politics, undermining economic trade relations, and worsening relations with China, Iran, or other countries. Negative teams can also question the solvency of diplomatic engagement, given likely Russian opposition to Biden administration initiatives. Negative counterplans can argue that sanctions are preferable to diplomatic engagement or that relations with Russia can better be managed through the United Nations or other international forums. Critical ground can be found in hegemony, imperialism, neoliberalism, and militarism.

PROBLEM AREA V: WATER RESOURCES

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its protection of water resources in the United States.

In Erin Brokovich's new book, *Superman's Not Coming: Our National Water Crisis and What We The People Can Do About It* (2020), she clearly articulates the depth of this issue in America, "We are amid a major water crisis that is beyond anything you can imagine..... We are at a turning point...where we all need to fight before there's not a drop of water left to drink." Access to clean water is key to our lives, but we regularly ignore debates regarding it. The problems of Flint Michigan are neither isolated nor far from our own homes. We are at a cross-road to ensuring that water is clean, accessible, and secure for our use and consumption.

In order to advocate for substantial protection of water resources, affirmative teams can point to a wide range of problems in the status quo: pollutants and contaminants present in many community water systems, woefully outdated water infrastructure and a lack of federal spending, increasing water scarcity issues, deficits in rural water quality due to agricultural practices, inadequate security protection for critical water systems, inequities in protection for underserved or economically disadvantaged communities, and poor federal management of rules and regulations aimed at protecting water resources. Plans might include, but not be limited to adopt laws that increase the standards for water quality, fund water infrastructure creation or renewal, increase funding and/or regulation to address disparities in access to water resources, regulate agricultural use of water, fund development of innovative technologies for water filtration, fund and/or regulate to address security of water resources from cyber/terror threats, address environmental justice concerns, and increase enforcement of water resource standards.

Negative approaches to the topic would include both traditional and progressive debate arguments. Disadvantages, such as spending, federalism, politics, and tradeoffs will be the source of offense for traditional debaters. Critical arguments like anthropocentrism, feminism, securitization, or environmental racism will be employed by debaters who prefer a theory-based debate. Case arguments may focus on a lack of federal resources available to fully fund water infrastructure, federal mismanagement as a source of circumvention, whether a national policy would be feasible to address the diverse water needs of the United States, and how underserved communities could still be left behind due to structural racism. Counterplans could claim that states or localities will solve more directly or that a different actor would be more reasonable (i.e. EPA, Army Corp of Engineers, Bureau of Land Management, Courts, etc).

This topic allows debaters access to a broad literature base for both the affirmative and the negative. Research is easily accessible to all students. This topic engages debaters, judges, and the general public. Coaches will have an opportunity to make novices feel comfortable about the topic because it is relevant to every citizen. At the same time, coaches can focus on more critical arguments for advanced debaters. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to highlight the need for a reset on environmental issues, particularly water resources, this topic and the robust exchange of ideas it will ignite will be a critical part of beginning that reset.