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# A Change in Competition: Assessing the NFA-LD Community and Its Views on Topical Counterplans

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A CHANGE IN COMPETITION: ASSESSING THE NFA-LD COMMUNITY AND  
ITS VIEWS ON TOPICAL COUNTERPLANS

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree Bachelor of Arts with

Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By

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\* \* \* \* \*

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2012

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## ABSTRACT

Intercollegiate academic debate allows students to participate in various contests and competitions to demonstrate expertise in argumentation and public speaking (Freeley & Steinberg 2009). The National Forensic Association's Lincoln-Douglas (NFA-LD) debate is a two-person style of policy-based debate, and it borrows much of its argumentative structure from other team-based debate organizations (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009). Yet it also prohibits other theoretical arguments from being used through its codified rules. This project seeks to examine current NFA-LD community attitudes towards the prohibition of topical counterplans, a theoretical negative argument, in the event.

Keywords: debate, counterplan, forensics, NFA-LD, topical, argumentation

Dedicated to my parents, Joseph Uhler, and Judy Woodring

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

From its beginnings in the late 19th century to the emergence of tournament-style debating at the first National Debate Tournament (NDT) in 1947, intercollegiate academic debate allows students the opportunity to participate in various contests and competitions to demonstrate expertise in argumentation, persuasion, and public speaking (Freeley & Steinberg 2009). Additionally, Freeley & Steinberg (2009) list seven current collegiate organizations that host competitions for participating students in a variety of formats, from mock trial proceedings to parliamentary debate. The most prominent formats of debate center the discussion around a resolution, or proposition, and require individuals or teams to either affirm or negate the resolution, often through the presentation of a plan-based policy. In this form of debate, known as policy debate, students on the affirmative side either seek to prove the resolution to be true or that their plan is preferable to the status quo, whereas students on the negative side seek to prove the resolution false or that the adoption of the affirmative's plan is worse than the status quo. Academic policy debate provides students with better research, logic, and critical thinking skills, which in turn, further develop academic skills in college

and beyond (Speice & Lyle 2003).

The National Forensic Association's Lincoln-Douglas (NFA-LD) debate is a two-person style of policy debate, and it borrows much of its argumentative structure from team-based policy debate organizations like the NDT and the Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA) (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009). The existence of other national debate organizations allows for numerous types of argumentation, technical jargon, and theoretical positions to be readily applied in NFA-LD (Minch, 2002). Yet as “over 100 LD competitors entered in the 2008 NFA National Tournament,” NFA-LD stands as an established organization of its very own (Swafford, 2010, p. 100).

The introduction of Lincoln-Douglas debate sought to combine traditional individual speaking events with the clash-based argumentation focus of debate. The intent behind the creation of NFA-LD constituted not only a combination of such events, but also a shift from other forms of debate to highlight a persuasive and more easily approachable event (Minch, 2002). For instance, the rules of LD denote the event should focus upon “traditional stock issues” and that “rapid-fire delivery, commonly called 'spreading,' is considered antithetical to the purpose and intent of this event” (National Forensic Association, 2011). In comparison to the more traditional cross-examination debate format utilized by NDT/CEDA, which involves two-person teams for the affirmative and negative, the speaking times for NFA-LD are much more limited. Cross-examination debate consists of two nine-minute constructive speeches, two six-minute rebuttal speeches, and ten minutes of preparation time per team as well as a three-minute cross-

examination period after each constructive speech. Conversely, NFA-LD consists of one six-minute affirmative constructive, one seven-minute negative constructive, a six-minute rebuttal for each side, and a final three minute second rebuttal for the affirmative, with only two three-minute periods of cross-examination after each constructive and four minutes of preparation time per side (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009). Establishing both the format and origins of NFA-LD allows for a fuller understanding of the inner mechanics of the event.

Additionally, the issues surrounding topical counterplans and the prohibition upon them in NFA-LD necessitates a brief discussion of the burdens established in traditional policy debate and NFA-LD itself. To justify an affirmative ballot, Freeley and Steinberg outline the three areas, or stock issues, the affirmative must prove: harms, inherency and solvency (2009). Establishing harms allows the affirmative to prove the need for a change from the status quo, or the world of the negative. Inherency demonstrates the lack of the status quo's ability to either remove the harm in the near future or its ability to allow the harms to persist. Demonstrating solvency simply proves the affirmative's policy will be able to either prevent the harms from occurring after the passage of the plan or will outweigh the status quo through a comparative advantage. These issues remain the core of NFA-LD debate as they are stipulated within the official rules, and all three must be upheld by the affirmative, as losing even one constitutes a negative victory; the rules of NFA-LD debate focus upon stock issues as voting issues for the debate round (National Forensic Association, 2011).

Again, in policy debate, affirmative debaters typically seek to win rounds by proving the resolution to be true. This is accomplished by defending a particular plan that falls within the jurisdiction of the resolution. The affirmative debater does not need to prove all instances of the resolution to be true. Instead, the affirmative can provide an example (e.g. a plan) to narrow the scope of the resolution. Sherwood (1994) identifies this practice as parametrics (p. 10). For instance, an individual debating the 2003-2004 NFA-LD resolution, "Resolved: that the United States Federal Government should substantially increase environmental regulations on industrial pollution," could offer an affirmative plan calling for greater CO2 emissions standards on all corporations. By doing so, the affirmative debater would need only to prove this plan alone is more advantageous than the status quo in order to win the debate round. Conversely, negative debaters seek to prove the resolution false by proving the affirmative's plan is disadvantageous to the status quo. Under the same resolution, a negative debater could argue higher emission standards would limit the economic competitiveness of such companies and hinder the United States economy. However, negative debaters may also adopted the strategy of presenting an alternative policy to the affirmative's plan, termed the counterplan, instead of defending the status quo alone. In the instance above, the negative could present a counterplan to eliminate all CO2 emissions standards and seek to show that such a policy is preferable to the plan offered by the affirmative.

While the affirmative need not defend all examples of the resolution, affirmative debaters must present a plan within the scope of the resolution; the

plan must be considered topical to justify an affirmative ballot. Affirmative plans are presumed topical unless challenged by the negative. With the idea of parametrics and the aforementioned plan example in mind, the negative could argue the affirmative's plan does not fall within the scope of the resolution, claiming it is not a substantial increase, by offering a specific interpretation of the word 'substantial.' The role of challenging the question of topicality falls upon the negative, and topicality itself is considered a prima facie "voting issue" for NFA-LD; thus, if the affirmative does not win that the plan is 'substantial,' then the negative should win the round regardless of whether or not the plan considered more advantageous than the status quo (National Forensic Association, 2011). Lichtman & Rohrer (1975) assert a negative counterplan is competitive with an affirmative plan, and thus a reason to reject the affirmative, as long as the counterplan is mutually exclusive from the affirmative plan and the simultaneous adoption of the plan and the counterplan is less desirable than the counterplan alone. Lichtman & Rohrer also argue that in order to justify a rejection of the affirmative, a counterplan must be non-topical, as a topical counterplan would be no different than an affirmative plan (1975). Yet Panetta's (1981) introduction of the topical counterplan sought to change these assumptions by arguing for a more specific plan to plan comparison instead of whether or not the resolution itself could be proven true by the affirmative team or false by the negative team. This has led to a widespread usage and acceptance of topical counterplans within both the competitive high school policy debate circuit as well as the (non-NFA-LD) college circuit (Bruschke, 2002).

Despite changing assumptions in some debate communities, the NFA-LD rules require any counterplans, or “counterproposals,” to be “non-topical” if they are presented by the negative team, and thus, implicitly ban topical counterplans (National Forensic Association, 2011). Yet their usage in other debate organizations on the collegiate level, as indicated by Brusckke (2002), only seems to lend theoretical credence to the argumentation style, and raises a need to further examine the reasoning for the NFD-LD community’s rejection of topical counterplans as a permissible type of negative argumentation. By surveying participants in NFA-LD about topical counterplans and the idea of a rule change allowing the use of topical counterplans in the activity, this project intends to examine current community attitudes toward topical counterplans. Initially, this project will provide a literature review concerning counterplan theory in policy debate; next, provide a methodology for the assessment of community attitudes and research; and finally, present the results obtained in order to draw conclusions.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The underpinnings of counterplan theory comprise a complex debate itself. Lichtman & Rohrer (1975) situated their formative article on counterplan theory within then-contemporary practice of integrating academic debate and policy analysis and sought to provide a new theory of a competitive policy proposal. Under early counterplan practices, the negative debater would be forced to concede the problem-area, or harms, defined by the affirmative (Lichtman & Rohrer, 1975). This concession ruled out a potential area of strategic argumentation for the negative debater, as they could not simultaneously argue the harms did not exist or were mitigated; offering a counterplan resulted in a negative concession of the flawed nature of the status quo by offering a similar policy. Lichtman & Rohrer (1975) offer a theory of competitiveness as a means of comparing policy systems and selecting the best policy option rather than solely identifying problems and solutions; their theory of a competitive counterplan provides a “full range of alternative policy actions [and] provides criteria for choosing among them” (p. 72). In order to be competitive, a counterplan must be nontopical, mutually exclusive with the affirmative plan, and net-beneficial to the affirmative plan alone (Lichtman & Rohrer, 1975). If the resolution called for the United States Federal Government to increase foreign



aid to sub-Saharan Africa and the affirmative presented a plan to provide \$10 million in foreign aid to all countries within the region, the negative could present a suitable counterplan by eliminating all foreign aid to region. As long as the negative proved the counterplan to be net-beneficial in comparison to the plan, the counterplan would sufficiently fulfill the criteria established by Lichtman & Rohrer because an elimination of foreign aid could not coexist with the plan and the counterplan remains outside the scope of the resolution by removing, not increasing, foreign aid. Conversely, if the negative presented a counterplan to provide health workers and supplies amounting to the same cost to the region, it would not fulfill the criteria established by Lichtman & Rohrer as it would not be mutually exclusive with the plan.

Yet the introduction of counterplans also called into question whether the debate focuses purely upon policy proposals themselves or the guiding resolution of debate. Madsen (1989) contends that the debate should center upon the resolution via a comparison of systems rather than a comparison of plans. If the affirmative must prove the validity of the resolution, the introduction of a counterplan by the negative would need to disprove the validity of the resolution; Madsen's systems theory of counterplans calls for a holistic evaluation of examining the underlying assumptions of any affirmative or counterplan (1989). However, Herbeck, Katsulas, and Leeper assert a case for debates to focus on plan comparison as opposed to the resolution proper because it provides a clear framework for the debate, entails specific analysis of policy propositions, and assures the most pragmatic focus for both sides of the debate (1989). Such a

view allows for more clash to occur within the debate round as it localizes the controversy to the affirmative plan and increases the educational value gained from the activity by focusing upon the depth of plan-specific education rather than the breadth of the resolution. Panetta explains the broadness of debate resolutions renders an endorsement of their totality as garnering very little education and would entail “superficial analysis” (1981). Even then, as resolutions are more commonly than not policy propositions, rather than a proposition of fact, “they are never ‘true’ or ‘false’” and testing the desirability of a plan depends on its specificity, which can only be determined through an evaluation of policies and not instances of the resolution (Panetta 1981).

The subject of advocacy in regards to the resolution itself and where the locus of the debate falls remains a controversy for NFA-LD as well. Bile (1996) contends the focus of clash locates itself at the affirmative proposition, yet evaluating counterplans, or counterproposals, attempts to relocate the debate to the resolution:

The requirement that counterproposals be non-topical seems quite reasonable if the debate is seen as a test of the probable truth of the general proposition. However, as the NFA L-D rules clearly indicate, the proposition is not the focus of affirmative advocacy. It is merely a ‘parameter’ that the affirmative proposal must not violate. (1996)

The requirement of the NFA-LD rules to reject any topical counterplans is outside of the framework established by Panetta and Dolley (1989); while there is an assumption of a debate around the resolution, the actual in-round debate practice chooses to focus upon particular policy discussions. Panetta's original advocacy of topical counterplans and his subsequent article with Steven Dolley assert the necessity of allowing such argumentation to increase education. In addition to the aforementioned wide scope of resolutions, Panetta and Dolley (1989) contend the lack of direction in debate topics renders the argument of an affirmative example and the resolution itself being one in the same a moot point. For example, a resolution with a specific direction would call for an increase in foreign aid to sub-Saharan Africa whereas a bi-directional resolution would simply call for a change in foreign aid. Thus, topical counterplans have remained a point of contention within the rules of NFA-LD and critics of the distinctions between the affirmative advocacy and the debate resolution.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

In order to establish an effective sample of attitudes towards topical counterplans in NFA-LD, a survey was utilized and distributed in major areas of the community. The survey consisted of eight open-ended questions to assess participants' roles within the NFA-LD community as well as their considerations toward topical counterplans. Initially, voluntary distribution took place at the 2011 NFA National Tournament at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois. Presumably, attendance and involvement with NFA-LD is at its highest at the national tournament even with the relatively small size of the NFA-LD community. However, not all schools that participate in NFA-LD are able to attend the national tournament. Attending to this issue, the survey was also hosted online and distributed through the Individual Events Listserv, an unofficial discussion list for both the American Forensic Association and the National Forensic Association, and posted on the regionally-centered (Southern California) Lincoln-Douglas website, [social-ld.net](http://social-ld.net).

To make use of the data collected through the survey, the project utilizes Strauss and Corbin's idea of grounded theory (1998). Strauss and Corbin explain grounded theory as being drawn from the qualitative data itself rather than a preconceived notion of what research should seek to find. Instead of beginning with a predetermined research question in mind, grounded theory reverses the typical research approach, opting for an initial exploration and analysis of data to provide a direction to a project. Typically, data is collected through personal interviews, surveys, or questionnaires prior to formulating a type of research-based hypothesis. Afterwards, the data is analyzed and sorted via a process known as coding.

Within the scope of grounded theory, the surveys were analyzed through an open coding process in order to identify the concepts and establish the properties and dimensions within the data. Strauss and Corbin explain that in order to establish a theory, data must be conceptualized and labeled, and phenomena must be identified (1998). Conceptualizing data through an open coding process allows for an identification of concepts from the perspective of the subject, which can then be classified by the researcher. This allows for the best type of analysis to emerge from the data collected, as it enables a contextualized understanding to occur. Creating memos from the data helps facilitate the contextualizing of the data. Strauss and Corbin (1998) define memos as “the researcher’s record of analysis, thoughts, interpretations, questions, and directions for further data collection” (p. 110). The creation of memos also lends

itself to an easy categorization of data. As Strauss and Corbin explain, the categorization process simplifies the analysis of data (1998). Establishing categories helps to both distill the information gathered and to generate theories from it.

Grounded theory provides the best means of analyzing the data gathered. As opposed to beginning the research portion of this project with a specific direction in mind, grounded theory enables specific ideas, positions, and attitudes to reveal the direction the project will take and does not impose a theoretical framework upon the project. Additionally, grounded theory is used for the generation of theory. While this project does not seek to establish any new theories, grounded theory is apt for a methodology by letting the data tell the story of the attitudes within NFA-LD. To this end, Strauss and Corbin (1998) would also contend no methodology could escape a bias implicit in a researcher. However, the use of open-ended questions in the survey further justifies the use of grounded theory as other, more direct or quantitative research methodologies would fail to take into account the nuances of participants' responses.

After coding the data and identifying what concepts were represented, memos were created to organize and contextualize the responses. Additionally, responses were sorted into multiple categories if they contained enough information to do so. For instance, if a response spoke to both the strategic benefits of counterplans and to the ability of the negative debater to use a counterplan as an advocacy comparable to the affirmative's plan, the same response was placed in both categories.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

A total of 61 participants responded to the survey, with 45 surveys taken online and 16 filled out on paper. However, not all online surveys taken were completed in their entirety. The sample size for the survey is significant as the 2011 National Tournament had between 90-100 competitors participating.

Thirty-seven participants responded as a debater, four participants responded as a critic of debate rounds only, 22 participants responded as debate coach, and only one participant responded as a debate coach and NFA-LD Board Member.

Fourteen participants represented District 1 (California, Nevada, Hawaii); zero represented District 2 (Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Alaska, California State University Humboldt); two represented District 3 (Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas, Missouri, Louisiana, Arkansas); seven represented District 4 (North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Nebraska); nine represented District 5 (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Truman State, MO); thirteen represented District 6 (Georgia, Tennessee, Florida, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, Mississippi, Kentucky); five represented District 7 (Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, District of Columbia, Ohio University); five represented District 8 (Massachusetts, Rhode

Island, New York, Staten Island, N.Y., Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont); and, two represented District 9 (Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, El Paso, Texas, Eastern Montana College).

Forty-two participants had between 1-4 years of experience with NFA-LD, five participants had between 5-10 years, and nine participants had ten years or greater.

After initial metrics were gathered, the survey posited more open-ended questions. Question four, "What role do you believe counterplans play in negative strategies?", generated six categories with 12 participants providing no response.

The six categories created for the answers are:

- A strategic option for the negative;
- An opportunity cost to the plan or as a way to evaluate the cases via net-benefits;



- A role that is contingent upon the plan and/or resolution;
- A negative advocacy;
- Uncertainty to the role of a counterplan; and,
- Non-responsive to the question.

Twenty-eight responses were filed under the first category – a strategic option for the negative. The responses portrayed counterplans as a key way to win a negative ballot or as a way to gain a significant in-round advantage for the negative. Participants indicated multiple ways in which a counterplan could be a strategic option against the affirmative in order to win a debate round, which warranted separating these responses out. Some expressed the use of a counterplan as a “strong option when generic disads don't link or [the] plan is really crazy” or as “a way for the Neg to garner necessary advantages articulated by the Aff while still contradicting case.” Additionally, counterplans are “[believed to be] ...highly effective as protection against affirmative cases that are ‘too good’...where the harms are so pressing that most judges feel any action is warranted,” and “compared to engaging in a debate on both moral and policy levels or worse, simply trying to outweigh the harms with DAs and win on impact calculus, a counterplan debate results in better use of time and a cleaner flow. It allows debaters to remain engaged on policy in a field where the negative can also bring in specific evidence to their advantage.” Participants also identified the strategic option of counterplans as way to distract the affirmative or to be “used as Time Skews,” and how counterplans “allow negatives to act in a more real

world way, by allowing them to admit that a harm exists, but proposing an alternative solution.”

Seventeen responses were allotted to the second category. These responses portrayed the function of the counterplan as an opportunity cost in regards to evaluating the affirmative plan. In this sense, counterplans allow the judge to view the round between a plan and a counterplan as a trade-off scenario and to determine the winner of the round on the basis of which side is the most net-beneficial option (or least net-detrimental). While similar to the first category, participants focused more upon the opportunity cost role and the commonality of this language generated the category. Participants expressed counterplans themselves “represent an opportunity cost to plan action: if passage of [the] plan [prevents the counterplan], and [the counterplan] is better, [the judge should] reject [the] plan.” Participants also noted a counterplan can “Competitively [solve] the [affirmative] and [use] [net-benefits] as the criterion for [evaluating,]” and, indicatively, “Counterplans serve two purposes: 1) an opportunity cost of the [affirmative] plan. 2) A better way to solve for [affirmative] harms.” Essentially, counterplans offer the negative “an offensive, competitive position...meant to solve the harms of the case while competing with net-benefits.”

Nine responses indicated the role of the counterplan is contingent upon the plan presented or the resolution being debated. This category demonstrates the attitude that the role of the counterplan shifts from resolution to resolution or is entirely dependent on what the affirmative presents as a plan. While some of these responses were grouped into previous categories, the frequency of

counterplans being contingent necessitated its own category as it falls outside the realm of being purely strategic or being an opportunity cost. Participants explained the role of a counterplan “depends on the topic area and resolution; [for example,] often international topics give a lot more ground for counterplans than domestic topics, with the exception of the Cuba topic.” As the previous example illustrates, participants utilized previous resolutions or topic areas in NFA-LD to support their claim. One participant expressed that, “last year [2010-2011] negatives were forced to defend solitary confinement of the mentally ill, and there were a few other cases that I believed we really couldn’t beat without a counterplan.” Another participant claimed:

On the Greater Horn of Africa topic [2007-2008], a lot of cases dealt with the malnutrition of children...it was hard as a negative to really debate that any plan [addressing malnutrition] was not worth a try. However, a counterplan to have someone other than the US do the action was a good strategy...without necessarily [arguing] ‘starving children good.’

Four participants indicated the role of the counterplan is to function as the advocacy of the negative. Participants argued counterplans serve to mirror the plan-based advocacy of the affirmative and counterplans another option rather than defending the status quo alone. Participants expressed the negative advocacy position was “due to the NFA rules” and that “[counterplans] give the [negative] a chance to come up with a better policy [than either the affirmative or the status quo.]”

Only one participant indicated uncertainty with the role of counterplans in negative strategy. As such, there may have been some confusion about whether the question was asking an “impression of current practice [of counterplans]” or what role they should play. Additionally, three responses were effectively non-responsive to the question as they either explained the function of topical counterplans in a round or described their personal use of counterplans absent any discussion of the role of the position in the round.

Question five asked participants whether or not they support the NFA-LD rule against topical counterplans. Twenty-one participants responded with a yes to indicate support whereas nineteen participants responded no. One participant indicated no support for the rule, but that it should be followed “so long as the rule exists.” Twelve participants did not provide a response.

A few participants also provided a rationale as to why they did or did not support the rule. In terms of categories, two participants who answered yes stated their support was contingent on in-round theoretical argumentation, and another two indicated support for the rule in terms of fairness for the debate round. In the first case, argumentation would have to be made in the round, as in “a strong theoretical argument for abandoning parametrics and resolution-oriented debate.” For the latter category, participants indicated the rule helps to preserve fairness between both competitors in the debate round and to prevent “a debater [from running a] prepared affirmative case against other prepared affirmative cases.”

Seven participants did not support the rule due to some theoretical objection(s), which constituted the creation of a category as well. Participants indicated that the judge could “vote for the best policy-option,” “that there is no clear brightline [as to what determines a] topical counterplan,” or that the rule “seems theoretically irrelevant” if affirmative ground is limited to the plan alone.

Question 5a asked participants if, as a judge, they enforced the rule against topical counterplans. Fifteen judges stated they did enforce the rule, four said they did not enforce the rule, and thirty-two participants did not provide a response to the question. Additionally, ten responses warranted the creation of a category that the rule would be enforced only if it was sufficiently invoked by a debater’s argumentation. Participants speculated that the enforcement of the rule would “[depend] on how it was argued in the round” or that “it is up to the debaters why [the judge] would vote on that particular issue over another.”

Question six asked participants why they thought the NFA-LD rules ban topical counterplans. Two participants were unsure as to why and 11 participants did not provide a response. Four categories were created for the rest of the responses provided:

- To uphold fairness and improve policy-driven education in the round;
- To debate the resolution alone and/or prevent plan-plan debate;
- To limit the negative; and,

- The rule was the framer's (of NFA-LD) intention.

Nineteen responses were placed into the category that topical counterplans are banned to uphold fairness and improve policy-driven education in the round. The creation of this category centered around responses claiming: first, that the rule is in place so that neither side in the debate round obtains an unfair advantage over the other side, and second, that the rule increases the amount of research-based, policy-driven education that takes place in preparation for debate rounds. Participants claimed the rule “prevents unfair debate [and] without such a rule, there could theoretically be no negative debate. A plan would be proposed on each side, in essence making two affirmatives.” Additionally, participants argued the rule supported education because “even if a counterplan would be better than a plan it would still prove the resolution true and thus not engage the literature in opposition to the resolution,” and, more specifically, the rule is in place “to increase education [because] if topical [counterplans] were allowed...students could (theoretically) run the same case every round.” One participant indicated that without such a rule “there would be no point in time/side constraints.” The issue of fairness also appeared in terms of equal footing between the affirmative and the negative, as the rule is “to preserve the division of ground between the negative and the affirmative.” While some responses provided a more detailed response as to the reasoning, others simply indicated the rule is for “fairness and competitive equity” or that “[allowing] the [negative] to run their affirmative [case on the negative would] destroy clash [and education.]”

Similarly, 14 responses were placed into the second category that the rule was created to debate the resolution alone and/or prevent plan-plan debate. The difference between this category and the first is that these responses focused heavily upon the idea that debate should center upon the resolution alone and that plan vs. plan debate is something to be avoided. Some participants indicated the rule was created to focus NFA-LD in this manner, as evidenced by “both the [affirmative and the negative would be] substantiating the [resolution,]” “so people can’t affirm the resolution on the negative,” and “can’t have two affirmative teams.” Other participants elaborated more fully upon the ban of topical counterplans in regards to plans, as “the ban prevents plan v. plan debates” or “because there was an original idea that the [negative] should be a test of the resolution in comparison to the [status quo.]” Participants indicated the significance of the resolution in regards to the rules as “a topical counterplan must support the resolution...[creating] two affirmatives, which is not organic to debate,” “the purpose of debate is to see if the resolution can be proven true,” and, “resolutional sufficiency—you prove the resolution true with a topical [counterplan.]”

Five responses were sorted into the category that the rule was implemented to limit the negative. These responses indicated that the rule was created to either unfairly limit the negative debater or to limit the negative side in regards to other debate organizations. In the first case, participants expressed the ban on topical counterplans was “because people are scared that Id will become more progressive,” or because “other, more popular interpretations of

topicality make [plan-inclusive counterplans, an instance or kind of topical counterplan,] topical and more static portions of the community dislike [plan-inclusive counterplans] for their tactical advantage.” In the latter case, the rule was implemented “to limit the flexibility that is emblematic of NDT/CEDA debate [and] to limit counterplans that are either not textually competitive or align themselves almost entirely with the plan,” or, “to prevent the [negative] from forcing the [affirmative] to argue against their own case without a suitable disadvantage or competitive counter proposal.”

The last category for question six, framer’s intent, contained 16 responses. The responses within this category all focused upon the idea that the rule was established by the founders/creators of NFA-LD and there was a specific intention in mind when codifying the rules. Participants varied in their explanation of the framer’s intention of creating the rule, but the intention alone was pervasive throughout the category. Some participants explained the “NFA founders wanted to try and stop an evolution towards CEDA/NDT practices,” or “the rulemakers wanted NFA-LD to be more focused on stock issues than debate theory arguments, so...they settled certain theory disputes in the rules.” Some spoke to different paradigms of debate as indicated by “NFA is known for pretty old-school behavior,” “because that’s what the old theory debates held as conventional wisdom,” and, as one participant stated, “NFA is full of dinosaurs who want to hold on to the archaic past.” Two responses provided detailed explanations. One explained:



As one of the first generation of LD competitors, it's because the founders of the activity wanted a model of policy debate that was simple (especially given the time limitations), clearly defined the purpose and roles within the debate, and where it was a form of debate focused on advocacy and delivery in addition to research and evidence. Topical counterplans...enter into a version of policy debate that is more about the game. In as much as they wanted LD to have a clear identity, they also wanted LD to stand apart from NDT and CEDA (separate styles and organizations at that time).

And, another indicated that:

Two decades or more ago, some directors of programs began to quit NDT debate because of various reasons. One of which was that many debates came down to process [counterplans], topical [counterplans], agent of action [counterplans] and sometimes revolved solely around topicality. To try to regain a more substantive exchange even over policy issues rather than esoteric strategies, such strategies as topical [counterplans] and alternative justification cases were banned by the framers.

Question seven asked participants how LD would change if topical counterplans were allowed and if this change would have a positive effect or a negative effect on the community. Twelve participants did not provide a response. For this question, responses were separated into three categories:

- Positive, via increasing education, fairness, and/or participation;

- Negative, detrimental for education, fairness, and/or participation; and,
- Indeterminate or no change.

Responses under the first category provided numerous reasons as to why a change in the rules would provide a positive effect via increasing education, fairness, and/or participation in debate as an activity. While not every response claimed a positive influence through each area (education, fairness, and participation), the category provides a suitable means of grouping all fifteen positive responses. Some participants focused on education effects, such as “[increasing] topic depth and understanding,” or “the topic literature would be more fully explored,” or “a more concise dissection of policies and solvency advocates.” Other participants explained a rule change would improve fairness by having “negatives...win more debates,” or “[allowing] the [negative] to access more ground.” Finally, some participants claimed the rule change would increase participation by “[interesting] more people” or “[NFA-LD] would be perceived as more theoretically legitimate...and more debaters [from other formats] would join.”

Twenty-one responses from participants determined the change would have a negative effect by being detrimental for education, fairness, and/or participation in debate as an activity. Participants claimed the educational benefits provided by debate would decrease as “students would only research the affirmative side...[and] there would be very little focus on negation” or “only

one upmanship of one plan over another.” On fairness, participants asserted the rule “would ‘cheapen’ the [negative strategy,]” or the rule would be “infinitely unfair for the affirmative.” Lastly, participants argued it would be detrimental to participation in NFA-LD as “welcoming styles of argument...that accompany the gamesmanship [of debate] would...make it impossible for LD to maintain its identity as part of an Individual Events tournament” or that “it would cause a rift in the community.”

Eleven responses stated a rule change would have an indeterminate change or at the very least, produce a limited change, if any. Participants indicated “some debaters [already utilize] topical [counterplans,]” and conversely, “counterplans of any type [are not ran] frequently enough to make their change have a meaningful impact.” One participant indicated there would be no change because “most judges don’t like [topical counterplans.]”

Question eight asked participants whether or not they would support a rule change to allow topical counterplans in NFA-LD. The majority of the responses were separated into yes and no categories, with 20 supporting a change and 24 not supporting a change. One participant was unsure as to whether or not s/he would support a change. Ten participants did not respond to the question. Additionally, four participants indicated they would support a rule change only under certain conditions. These participants stipulated a rule change would require a “discussion of the CP rules in their entirety,” or more specifically, as one participant stated, a “provision that counterplans still have restrictions that force a link between the counterplan and the plan.”



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Three main questions regarding both counterplans and topical counterplans can be answered from the results within this project. First, what is the general perception of counterplans in the NFA-LD community? Second, would the NFA-LD community support a change in the rules to allow topical counterplans? And finally, what would be needed to precipitate such a change, if any, to the rules?

Initially, responses from question four indicate a strong perception of counterplans in NFA-LD as a pertinent, if not vital, option for any negative strategy. As noted in the previous chapter, the strategic option of counterplans for the negative debater can be garnered in multiple ways and can help to more easily secure a win for the negative. Both the first and second category for question four illustrate the importance of counterplans in winning a round or at least, helping to obtain an advantage for the negative during the course of a debate round. As an opportunity cost, a counterplan could effectively persuade a judge to vote for a negative. However, responses collected suggest that the role of counterplans also shifts depending on each round or resolution, which could either increase or decrease its propensity to be strategic. As responses also

described counterplans as a negative advocacy, counterplans offer greater flexibility in terms of what the negative can argue in a round. Overall, counterplans are perceived as a strong, if not the most important, strategic argument available to a negative debater.

In terms of supporting the rule prohibiting topical counterplans in NFA-LD, attitudes appear closely divided among participants. Considering the difference between participants who support the rule and participants who do not is only two as per question five of the survey, the rule itself appears to be a point of contention.

However, in terms of enforcement, attitudes toward the rule appear somewhat diluted. Although 15 participants who responded to question 5a indicated they would enforce the rule, the fact that ten indicated they would only enforce it depending on whether it became an in-round issue or not suggests a willingness to let the function of the rule be decided by debaters themselves. Even in spite of the rule's existence, there appears to be a commonality of "letting the debaters debate" instead of having a judge blatantly enforcing the NFA-LD rules.

The categories generated for question six help further illuminate attitudes towards the rule banning topical counterplans. Most participants indicated the rule to be beneficial for preserving fairness and education in NFA-LD rather than the rule being detrimental. Additionally, question six displayed the idea that the rule was not inconsequential to NFA-LD. As 14 responses fell under the category to debate the resolution alone and/or prevent plan-plan debate and 16 responses fell under the category of framer's intent, attitudes expressed in the surveys are evident of a perception of intentionality for the ban.

Question seven also demonstrated the contentiousness of changing the NFA-LD rules regarding topical counterplans. While 15 responses argued a shift would be positive, 21 claimed the change would be detrimental to the event. Considering the small difference between these two categories, as well as the 11 responses indicating there would be no change, no clear or decisive effect in how a rule change would be perceived can be inferred. Additionally, a change in the rules to allow for topical counterplans in NFA-LD would spark further debate within the organization as support for and against a change was shown to be divisive as well, with 20 supporting and 24 not supporting. According to the data collected in this project, support towards a rule change for allowing topical counterplans is controversial at best.

The limitations of this project could preclude a full examination of attitudes towards topical counterplans in NFA-LD. Although this project intended to explore a general sense of attitudes within the NFA-LD community, the sample size taken could have been larger to display a wider range of responses.

Additionally, future research could improve upon this project by providing more specific, directed, and theoretically grounded questions to obtain a better sense of what sort of change to counterplans would be acceptable or approved in the NFA-LD community. Finally, researchers should propose specific examples of rule changes in order to assess any potential impacts within the community.

The nature of NFA-LD and competitive debate itself gives way to numerous points of contention. Given the responses collected and analyzed for this survey, any change made to the NFA-LD rules concerning topical counterplans should involve further discussion and involvement within the community from those who compete in the activity as well as those who judge. The attitudes reflected within this survey suggest that topical counterplans are a theoretical issue unlikely to be resolved in a simple fashion. Any proposed change to the rules concerning topical counterplans would likely draw much criticism, if not support as well. Certainly, the codification of the NFA-LD rules was meant to resolve certain theoretical debates, such as topical counterplans, outside the realm of actual debate rounds. Yet the shifting paradigms and attitudes within the community, as evidenced by this project, suggest such resolutions may be impossible, or at very least, impractical. To address such concerns, the NFA-LD community should reexamine the rules guiding debate theory and perhaps the event itself. An in-depth discussion of the theory surrounding the rules of NFA-LD, as well as the rules themselves, would be necessary to precipitate any changes in NFA-LD. While some may argue no change to the rules concerning counterplans is necessary, responses taken from



this project suggest ample room for consideration of renegotiating the theory surrounding topical counterplans. Ultimately, the attitudes demonstrated towards topical counterplans in NFA-LD suggest a diverse, if not controversial, range of opinions.

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APPENDIX  
Survey Instrument

1. Which of the following best describes your role in the debate community?

- a. Debater
- b. Critic Only (No Coaching)
- c. Debate Coach
- d. Debate Coach and NFA-LD Board Member
- e. Board Member Only
- f. Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. If applicable, please select your AFA District. \_\_\_\_\_

District	Geographic Area
1	California, Nevada, Hawaii
2	Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Alaska California State University Humboldt
3	Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas, Missouri, Louisiana, Arkansas
4	North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Nebraska

5	Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Truman State, MO
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6	Georgia, Tennessee, Florida, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, Mississippi, Kentucky
7	Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, District of Columbia, Ohio University
8	Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, Staten Island, N.Y., Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont
9	Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, El Paso, Texas, and Eastern Montana College

3. How many years of experience do you have with NFA-LD?

4. What role do you believe counterplans play in negative strategies?

5. Do you support the NFA-LD rule against topical counterplans?

a. As a judge, do you enforce this rule?

6. Why do you think the rules ban topical counterplans?
7. How do you think LD would change if topical counterplans were allowed? Would this have a positive effect or a negative effect on the community?
8. Would you support a rule change to allow topical counterplans?