Presumption and Defending the Status Quo in Intercollegiate Debate: An Exploratory Survey of Judge Perceptions in Parliamentary & CEDA/NDT Debate Formats

Skip Rutledge
G. L. Forward

The concept of using presumption to help determine victors in close decisions has long been known to the legal and debate communities. Admittedly, presumption may not be the most glamorous concept ever drawn from the bowels of argumentation theory and research. However, a quick glance at two contemporary political conflicts will help to show the importance of this topic outside of debate circles. Burnett's (1992) article on presumption and non-policy debate noted the public's fascination with rules of presumption and burden of proof in the context of the sexual harassment allegations made by Anita Hill against Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas in his senate confirmation hearings. The same interest resurfaced in the 2000 presidential election between Al Gore and George W. Bush, where a potential deadlock ultimately could have been determined based upon the presumptive value of a few dimpled chads in Florida. The selection of the next President of the United States literally hung in the balance of how ballot counters were to presume the legitimacy or illegitimacy of certain ballots.

Presumption was probably first applied to rhetoric and debate by Archbishop Richard Whately in the early 1800s. More recently, that reliable tie-breaker of presumption has been treated somewhat as the bastard stepchild in intercollegiate policy debate (CEDA/NDT), sacrificed on the altar of the goddess CBA (the standard implicit or explicit debate criterion of Cost Benefit Analysis) where it is unofficially ordained that "no ties shall exist." For example, Rowland (1992) claimed, "... we do not need a theory of presumption to decide tie-debates. Personally, I have never witnessed a tie, although I have judged over a thousand tournament debates" (p. 23). However, with the growing popularity of a fairly new format of intercollegiate parliamentary debate (NPDA) (that does not permit access to specific evidentiary documentation to help adjudicators make close calls through evaluating calling for the evidence after the round), this theoretical construct should once again be examined, if only, as Rowland argued, to dismiss it.

Though presumption may no longer be considered a critical voting issue in CEDA/NDT debate, its residual impact is still very apparent. It is also being applied, perhaps through the fallacy of tradition, to parliamentary debate, a format which Rutledge (2000) argued should allow and encourage presumption to shift to the affirmative (or government) side of resolutions that

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do not specifically call for a change to the status quo. The problem Rutledge addressed in this earlier article is that many critics refused to even consider a government’s defense of the status quo on most resolutions, which materially restricts those teams’ grounds for potential defenses of the resolution.

One of the problems Rutledge (2000) encountered in his theoretical defense of the affirmative’s right to support the status quo was that little, if any, statistical research existed examining the role that presumption plays in the decision calculus for judges in CEDA/NDT and/or parliamentary debate. "While there is currently no formal research published to back this statement, requiring government teams to attack the status quo is clearly the predominant practice within the National Parliamentary Debate Association, with very few exceptions” (p. 29). He further found that "... since parliamentary debate has been the subject of relatively little research published to date, the effect of presumption on case construction in parliamentary debate has not been thoroughly documented." That dearth of statistical and theoretical research formed the impetus for this research project. Before describing the research project itself and discussing its findings, it is first important to briefly examine some of the past research on this issue.

Literature Review

There are probably as many ways of describing, dissecting, categorizing, and/or dismissing presumption as there are scholars that have studied the concept. As this article's admittedly incomplete bibliography attests, that number is considerable. However, brief mention will be made of several key components to help form a working understanding of the concept of presumption theory as it has been applied to academic debate.

Whately's Contributions

Richard Whately first borrowed the term from the legislative arena and included it in his primer The Elements of Rhetoric, essentially an early textbook on debating technique and theory. He was primarily discussing the concept of defending assigned ground, stipulating that unless an opponent can knock you off that argumentative ground, your argument should prevail. The famous phrase "innocent until proven guilty" provides an example of such a presumptive decision rule, as does the adage that "possession is nine tenths of the law". Virtually all of the articles on presumption credit Whately to different degrees. Burnett (1992) provided a good contemporary look at Whately's historical concept. Sproule (1976), in developing the psychological notion of presumption, traced the evolution of presumption through close textual analysis of Whately's many revised editions of The Elements of Rhetoric.

Argument Fields

Rowland (1992) added an important caveat to our understanding and application of presumption. "... I argue that the view of presumption as a general component of what might be called a field-invariant argumentation and debate theory is misguided. Rather, presumption is best understood as driven
by the purposes of different argument fields" (p. 20). The point here is to recognize that Whately did not bring down some unbreakable tenet etched on a clay tablet as transcribed from a burning bush. Rather, one should look to the most appropriate argument field to best determine how, or even if, to apply presumption theory. As noted earlier, Rowland argued that presumption is not necessary for intercollegiate debate, since there are virtually no ties. We would suggest that ,while that may or may not be universally accepted for the previous formats of debate, such as CEDA/NDT, parliamentary debate can still benefit from the appropriate understanding and application of presumption theory. Parliamentary debate might be considered to be a slightly different argumentation field than CEDA/NDT debate, due to the undocumented and unverifiable nature of claims and counter claims. Therefore, more rounds could be viewed as “dead heat” ties, absent some presumptive decision rules to help break those ties. These standoffs can become he said/she said rhetorical skirmishes without the original sources of testimony to compare the strength of evidence or qualifications of the actual authors.

Hill (1989) provided an interesting way of categorizing the research on types of presumption through different descriptive analogs, including legal, scientific, legislative and argumentative types. The legal view we have already covered. It is primarily an arbitrarily or previously assigned decision rule stipulating ground. The scientific presumptive analog draws from Zarefsky's (1979) notion of hypothesis testing, which treats the resolution as a hypothesis to be tested for validity. The legislative analog emulates a policy making paradigm, eschewing serious change absent sufficient proof that the benefits will outweigh the risks of change. Hill's portrayal of the argumentative analog was a little less clear to the authors of this article, but it appears to portray an artificial or stipulated presumption similar to the rule-based legal view above. As Hill (1989, p. 23) indicated, it is best represented by the adage "he who asserts must prove." Within each of these fields, Hill suggested that there are different presumptive elements. Rather than being satisfied with the above-mentioned four different views of presumption, Hill argued for a holistic policy of presumption for non-policy debate.

Winebrenner (1992) correctly pointed out that Hill (1982) may have over-simplified the situation. "By assuming that academic debate is a unidimensional experience, Hill necessarily vacillates between comments which seem to endorse presumption shift arguments and arguments which seem to reject the strategy. Only by recognizing the multiple dimensions of the debating experience can we begin to resolve the controversy surrounding presumption-shift arguments." Winebrenner's last claim is absolutely true, but ironically he seemed to contradict or ignore this sage advice with the final sentence of the article. "Presumptions about the individual arguments which make up a debate may, and often do, rest with the affirmative team. However, the presumption of the resolution rests always and forever with the negative team." In fairness to Winebrenner, when this statement was made, one could not have necessarily foreseen the rapid rise of a significantly different form of
scholastic debate, adding yet another different dimension to consider. This
new form of audience-focused NPDA parliamentary debate, unable to rely on
instant access to debater-toted tomes of research in every round to back
specific claims, effectively challenges the notion that the resolution must
always be presumptively false.

At the time Winebrenner, Tuman, Rowland, Whedbee, and Burnett
were published in the 1992 CEDA Yearbook, major differences existed
between how CEDA and NDT debate formats were practiced. It was, in part,
those differences that prompted the focus on the need for new theory for
handling presumption in value debate in the early 1990s. The distinctions
between CEDA and NDT are dramatically reduced today, and, in the view of
many, eliminated, since both groups have combined efforts and now debate the
same resolutions, in the same divisions, with the same judging pool and time
formats. However, the increasingly popular NPDA parliamentary debate
form is in need of stronger theoretical underpinnings for many of its
practices. Those practices are borrowed, sometimes appropriately and
sometimes inappropriately, from more traditional interscholastic debate
formats.

A Simpler Bifurcation

Tuman (1992) bifurcated these theoretical presumption approaches
into two main categories: stipulated/artificial and natural/psychological
presumption. Stipulated presumption is simply an artificial rule of the game
that is stipulated, negotiated, agreed to, or imposed, that governs which side
prevails in the absence of overwhelming proof to the contrary. Natural or
psychological presumption looks instead at how things are, or are perceived
to be, in the state of nature, or in society today. This natural approach embraces
the adage, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" and favors the least change from the
status quo, presuming that there must be something favoring it, since it
currently exists.

The more traditional CEDA/NDT topics clearly called for affirmatives
to make a significant change in the status quo. This meant that those proposing
the change had the onus of proving the need for a change, otherwise it was
assumed that the risks outweighed marginal advantages. Therefore, with
traditional CEDA/NDT policy debate, both natural/psychological and
stipulated/artificial presumption favored the negative side. As CEDA debate
was being developed, many recognized the need for new theory on the
application of presumption to this new format of scholastic debate, especially
with regard to value topics. The need is even more pressing today for
parliamentary debate to explore how presumption should be applied.

The Case Against Artificial Presumption in Parliamentary Debate

Rutledge (2000) suggested that artificial presumption (rules of the game
advantaging the negative) is unfairly favored over a resolution-focused reliance
on natural presumption (least change favored in close calls) in parliamentary
debate. He argued further that there are many compelling reasons to allow
presumption to be determined on a resolution-by-resolution basis. "Now that
the unsubstantiated concern for artificial presumption decision rules have been addressed, we will look to the reasons why parliamentary debaters should, when resolutional, construct cases defending the status quo. This course of action can be defended legally, theoretically, strategically, and paradigmatically” (p. 35). Though not mentioned in that article, there is also the need for presumptive tiebreakers in parliamentary debate. NPDA parliamentary debate may frequently be subject to over-generalized claims and counter claims, due to the absence of specific documentary evidence to support in-round claims that are difficult to particularize and weigh against competing counter claims. Other, more traditional debate formats allow and encourage examination of printed evidence to back up in-round claims.

Rutledge's four major arguments favoring government defense of the status quo can be briefly summarized here. First, legally, there are no stipulated rules in parliamentary debate (or other formats, for that matter) that require presumption to favor the negative. This practice is the result of tradition borrowed from a completely different format of scholastic debate. Second, theory has been inadvertently and mistakenly cross-applied to parliamentary debate to date. Artificial or stipulated presumption was favored in NDT debate, and now CEDA debate, because for many years each resolution specifically called for affirmatives to mandate a significant change from the status quo. However, many parliamentary debate resolutions make no such specific or implied demands for policy changes.

Third, strategically, most presumption scholars agree that an affirmative would gain a significant advantage if they were able to defend the status quo. In light of the approximately 60/40 win/loss ratio advantage enjoyed by the negative at many, if not most, parliamentary debate tournaments, this change may help to more fairly balance opportunities for affirmatives to win. Neither the Rutledge (2000) article nor this one suggests that the limitations on presumption in parliamentary practice is the sole or even primary cause of this significant differential between government and opposition wins and losses. Although that would be rich ground for a separate article or additional survey research, the authors suggest that a number of other factors may contribute to this uneven split. For example, for programs that once competed in policy debate, critics might carry with them the expectation that cases be at a higher level of quality and preparation, given that their past policy debate experience was primarily with cases constructed over a long period of time and battle-tested in many tournament rounds. Negatives, on the other hand, have always been given a certain bit of leeway to logically punch holes in affirmative plans and suggest disadvantages that may be more hypothetical than provable. Another cause may be that negatives only need to win one significant reason to get a critic’s vote, when the affirmative needs to win all the significant arguments to prevail. With quickly prepared cases, this is not as easy to do as it might have been in the more traditional formats of debate that used the same resolution and cases for the entire year. Nevertheless, the authors still believe that the appeal of the status quo is a very significant
tool in the negative team’s tool chest, because the affirmative’s burden of proof is very difficult to meet.

Fourth, paradigmatically, emulating the role of the government should allow, or even encourage, the government team to defend the status quo, and seems to argue that the opposition should be expected to actually oppose the current government policies, as the opposition parties usually do in actual parliamentary systems. After all, real parliamentary governments that consistently attack, rather than defend, government policies soon suffer a vote of "no confidence" and are ousted, ironically becoming the loyal opposition where they are expected to attack government policy, not defend it.

This interpretation seemed to be consistent with Rowland's (1992) argument which rejected blind adherence to the artificial notion of presumption applied at the time in CEDA and NDT. Likewise, presumption should not be a field-invariant rule applied artificially in parliamentary debate rounds with no rhyme or reason. Yet, based on the current study, this norm still seems to prevail in most current debate tournaments, regardless of format.

Burnett (1992) agreed that stipulated presumption is over-rated, claiming that we should follow a psychological approach that could change from round to round. He concluded, "Sproule correctly argues that argument textbooks which focus exclusively or even primarily on the legal or stipulative formulation of presumption are doing a disservice to students" (p. 39-40).

Vasilius (1980) made an even more compelling point in support of this notion. "But since as good a case for change may be made as for stability, traditional assignment of presumption to one team seems arbitrary at best. In an activity reliant upon reason, it seems ironic to assign duties by means of a reasonless game rule, however" (p. 34-35).

Foundational to discussing what should be occurring with regards to presumption as a potential tiebreaker of close debate rounds is an exploration of what actually is occurring in the minds of the critics who are charged with deciding these close rounds. There are two basic research questions (RQs) the authors explored.

RQ 1: How do CEDA/NDT and parliamentary debate critics differ in their assessment of presumption and affirmative team’s defense of the status quo?

RQ 2: How do scholastic debate judges in general differ in their assessment of presumption and affirmative’s defense of the status quo based on years of judging experience?
Table 1
Frequency Distributions (N=164)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SQ 1: Type of debate judged:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly CEDA/NDT</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Parliamentary</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both formats</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I rarely judge</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQ 2: Years judging debate:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than one year</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About one year</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two to Five years</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six to 10 years</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQ 3: Experience as competitor:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year or less</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 years</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 or more years</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>68.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQ 4: Teaching/Coaching experience:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never taught/coached debate</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coached, but not taught</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taught, but not coached</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both taught and coached</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer coached only</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non responses</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Methodology
Participants and Procedures

Surveys were distributed at eight debate tournaments from various regions of the country during the 2000-2001 academic debate season. The tournaments represented in this data set included those that utilized parliamentary-only formats, CEDA/NDT-only formats, and some that offered both forms of debate.

Directors of these eight tournaments were contacted and each agreed to facilitate the distribution and collection of a survey for the purposes of this research. A packet of surveys was then provided to each participating tournament director. Tournament judges were asked to complete a brief, two-page survey and return the completed instrument to the ballot table where they were either collected by the researchers, or by the tournament directors, who returned the surveys to the researchers. The final data set represents a convenience sample of N=164.
Table 2
Frequency Distributions (N=164)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. Presumption Use</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>2.89**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Inherency</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>4.66***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Affirmative/Status Quo</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>3.06 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Least Change</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Affirmative/Resolution</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>-6.62 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Tabula Rasa</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Least Change</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>-2.41 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Negative/Status Quo</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Presumption/Negative</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Statistically significant differences are noted as follows: *p.<.05, **p<.01, ***p.<.001.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument (see Appendix A) consists of four questions designed to assess judging background, including style, years, and type of experience. The next 27 questions focused on attitudes, beliefs, and practices relating directly or indirectly to presumption theory and defense of the status quo in various debate situations. These questions utilized a seven point, Likert-type response set scaled from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree. The survey concluded with two open-ended questions designed to elicit more comprehensive feedback. Not all of the survey questions were targeted toward this particular research project.

The data was analyzed using the SPSS (V.10) commands for producing descriptive statistics, t-tests, and ANOVA. In addition, a post hoc analysis of the data was conducted utilizing the FACTOR command in an effort to explore some tentative directions for future research.
Table 3
*t-test Comparison of Years of Judging Experience (N=73)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>1-5 Years (n=91)</th>
<th>6 or More Years (n=73)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 Inherencey Unimportant</td>
<td>4.0 1.7</td>
<td>4.70 1.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Affirmative Prove Resolution</td>
<td>5.09 1.90</td>
<td>4.15 2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. <em>Tabula Rasa</em> Critic</td>
<td>5.47 1.54</td>
<td>4.75 2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Delivery Skills Critic</td>
<td>4.54 1.47</td>
<td>4.10 1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Enjoy Philosophical</td>
<td>4.25 1.47</td>
<td>3.81 1.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Statistically significant differences are noted as follows: +p. < 1.0, *p. < .05, **p. < .01, ***p. < .001.

Results

*Survey Summary*

The first four survey questions were designed to provide a demographic profile of the judges supplying survey data. Table 1 summarizes the respondents’ primary type of judging format, years of experience as a judge, as a competitor, and years of experience teaching or coaching debate.

The first two profile questions are the most significant for the purposes of this research. Survey Question One (SQ 1) reveals that the sample is almost evenly divided between those who primarily judge CEDA/NDT and those who primarily judge parliamentary debate format. Likewise, there is a fairly even distribution based on years of judging experience. This distribution allows a comparison between those with five or fewer years of judging experience and those with six or more years of experience (see Table 1).

Research Questions

**RO1.** This question, focusing on presumption and defense of the *status quo*, was explored with a t-test for independent means, utilizing debate format (CEDA/NDT or parliamentary) as the grouping variable. The questions relevant to this research project were identified as SQs 7, 10, 11, 14, 19, 22, 23, 26, 28, 30, and 33, and were included in this t-test accordingly. The data reported in Table 2 reveals several statistically significant differences between the two groups. These differences included the perceived relevance or importance of presumption, inherency, the affirmative’s defense of the *status quo*, proving the resolution, and the principle of the least change.

**RO2.** The second research question sought to make comparisons on the basis


Table 4  
Factor Analysis of Survey Instrument

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Quality of Argument</th>
<th>Cost/Benefit Argument</th>
<th>Philosophical Argument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q8 Advantages/Disadvantages</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q15 Quantifiable Significance</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q16 Real World Scenarios</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q17 Topical Counterplans</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q18 Philosophy v. Policy Debates</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q19 Affirmative Prove Resolution</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q24 Cost Benefit Analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q25 Argument Critic</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q30 Enjoy Philosophical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q31 Prima Facia</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Eigen Value | 3.057 | 2.061 | 2.008 |
| % Explained Variance | 21.83% | 14.72% | 14.25% |
| Cumulative % of Explained Variance | 21.83% | 36.55% | 50.90% |

of years of judging experience. A second t-test was run, utilizing years of experience as the grouping variable. Again, statistically significant differences were revealed for perceptions relating to the issues of inherency, tabula rasa, delivery skills, philosophical arguments, and affirmative’s proof of the resolution. The results of this test are shown in Table 3.

Post Hoc Analysis

Further analysis was conducted on the survey instrument in an effort to suggest direction for future research. This post hoc investigation began with an attempt at data reduction using a principle components factor analysis (varimax rotation). The initial solution, using all 27 Likert-type questions, identified nine possible factors. Inspection of the scree plot suggested a meaningful, three factor solution explaining
Table 5
Summary Data and Pearson Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Judging Exper.</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compet. Exper.</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Exper.</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>.37*</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-.27**</td>
<td>-.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost/Ben</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philos.</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.23**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: **Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2 tailed)

51% of the variance. All retained questions had primary loadings above .60 and any secondary loadings below .40. The questions loading on each factor were submitted to further assessment utilizing Cronbach’s alpha. Factor 1, dealing with the quality of proffered arguments, had an alpha of .70. Factor 2, dealing with cost/benefit analysis, had an alpha of .61. Finally, Factor 3, dealing with the use of philosophical argument, realized an alpha of .70. This data is summarized in Tables 4 and 5.

Discussion
Primary Debate Format Judged

One striking conclusion based on the survey responses is that the CEDA/NDT and parliamentary format critics have much more in common with one another than they have differences (See Table 2). Pertaining specifically to the area of presumption theory, for example, both marginally favor the notion (SQ 28) that negative ground should always include the option of defending the status quo, and (SQ 33) that presumption in debate is like a rule of the game, which should favor the negative. This is the artificial or stipulated view of presumption mentioned earlier in the literature review. Not surprisingly, then, if one believes that there can be a dichotomy between the artificial/stipulated view versus the natural/psychological view of presumption, both sets of critics marginally reject the notion that presumption should automatically be awarded to the side that advocates the least change. This least-change approach to presumption is best articulated by the natural/psychological camp, which says, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

Finally, and perhaps somewhat paradoxically, both sets of critics also agree that they attempt to be tabula rasa (SQ 22) in their adjudicating and try not to inject personal views not debated within the round itself. These areas of agreement on presumption validate Rutledge’s (2000) belief that currently artificial presumption is favored over natural presumption. It further suggests the possibility that though critics
may attempt to be tabula rasa, they do bring their own viewpoints on presumption into very close debate rounds, which may sway the outcome in favor of the negative teams. If it is true that parliamentary debate rounds are frequently closer calls than are CEDA/NDT rounds, due to competing claims and warrants absent tangible documentation, this could be a significant factor in the current imbalance in parliamentary debates favoring the negative by a 60/40 ratio.

As a cautionary side note, it should be mentioned that simply looking for a bipolar distribution between agreeing or disagreeing with the survey questions would be a mistake. It is far too simplistic a screen for appraising the results. Much more interesting findings are revealed by looking to between-group differences as revealed in the t-test comparison of responses.

Survey Questions 7, 10, 11, 19, and 23 reveal some interesting statistically significant differences between types of debate critics. For example, in support of the above scenario about presumption being utilized more in parliamentary debate rounds, CEDA/NDT critics were more likely to agree with SQ 7 that they would only rarely decide a round on the issue of presumption. Parliamentary judges indicated a significantly higher likelihood of voting on presumption. In SQ 10, CEDA/NDT critics were much more likely than parliamentary critics to agree that inherency (requiring that an affirmative show their plan is somehow prevented from being implemented by the status quo) is not an important issue in deciding rounds. Such a belief could help to explain parliamentary critic’s adherence to the stipulated/artificial interpretation of presumption.

Both sets of critics disagreed with SQ 11, which stated that they would “never” vote for an affirmative team defending the status quo. However, parliamentary critics registered stronger disagreement with such an absolute standard. CEDA/NDT debate tradition and theory has very few examples of affirmatives meeting the resolution and still defending the status quo. Rutledge (2000) argued that in recent years most CEDA/NDT type resolutions have been specifically worded to mandate a change in the status quo. Parliamentary critics could probably remember some NPDA resolutions which may even have required the affirmative team to defend the status quo, such as debating “This House Believes that President Clinton should not be impeached,” prior to his actual impeachment. Clearly such a resolution is debatable, policy oriented, and concretely defines affirmative ground as residing within the status quo. Additionally, during the approximate time of the survey, the topic of the legitimacy of affirmatives defending status quo in NPDA parliamentary debate had been a topic of some discussion at tournaments, including the National Communication Association convention in Chicago and Seattle, a summer workshop for parliamentary debaters and coaches hosted by Willamette, and on various electronic listserv threads on the Parli L. These discussions could have impacted critics’ responses to the survey.

SQ 23 is very similar to SQ 11 discussed above. It presents a scenario where the impacts are equal on both sides, but the affirmative is offering the
least change from the status quo. It then states that the critic would still vote negative on presumption, favoring artificial (stipulated rule) over natural (least risk) presumption. CEDA/NDT critics marginally disagreed and parliamentary critics marginally agreed. So, despite the heightened level of awareness of notable exceptions by parliamentary critics as discussed above, they seem less likely to favor natural presumption over artificial presumption in more common day-to-day applications.

The strongest between-group finding is on SQ 19, which states that the most important responsibility of the affirmative team is to prove that the resolution is true. CEDA/NDT critics disagree, and parliamentary critics strongly agree with the statement. Unfortunately, the survey instrument does not reveal what CEDA/NDT critics believe the most important responsibility of the affirmative team might be. Further research in this area may prove beneficial. If parliamentary critics truly believe that simply proving that the resolution is true is the most important affirmative responsibility, there may yet be some hope for those that would argue for a more lenient critic stance on allowing affirmatives to defend the status quo when it is consistent with the resolution and shifting presumption to the affirmative.

Experience of Critic

It is interesting to note other findings about the judge sample based on critic experience. For example, 68% of our critics have four or more years of experience as a debate competitor (SQ 3), and about 85% of our critics have coached or taught debate. Both of these indicators are encouraging and suggest a quality judge base (see Table 1), at least based upon survey respondents. SQ 2 was a demographic question designed to provide an approximate profile of number of years of experience judging for the respondents. Table 1 reveals a plurality of responses in the two to five years experience category (36.6%), with the second largest group in the six to 10 year category (24.4%). Together, this experience range from two to 10 years accounts for 61% of our critics in intercollegiate debate, with about 19% below that range and 20% above that range. For simple comparison purposes, this sample of critics was divided into two groups, those with up to five years experience and those with six or more years experience. Five questions (SQ 10, 19, 22, 26, 30) revealed statistically significant differences per t-test comparisons within this experience grouping (see Table 3).

While none of these questions directly focus on the area of presumption, a brief glance at these distinctions may be helpful. SQ 10 indicates that the more experienced critics are more likely to believe that inherency is not a very important issue in deciding most debate rounds. The less experienced critics are firmly undecided on this issue, showing a mean of 4.0, indicating they neither agree nor disagree with the statement. This may mean that less experienced critics are torn between texts that tell them it is an important stock issue, and practice, which seems less inclined to reflect that importance. The more experienced critics may be a bit more steeped in
practice than the texts as their basis of deciding rounds. Therefore, they favor granting inherency less preeminence in their decision calculus.

As with the t-test comparison between CEDA/NDT and parliamentary critics discussed above, SQ 19 again shows a very strong distinction on the basis of experience. The question states that an affirmative team’s most important responsibility in a debate round is proving that the resolution is true. The less experienced judges strongly agree with this statement and the more experienced judges marginally agree. One explanation might be, as mentioned above, that there is a distinction between textbook based theory/instruction versus actual tournament practice. Textbooks are typically several years or more removed from practice. However, other explanations are possible. The discussion above on debate format revealed a disparity between the CEDA/NDT and parliamentary factions with regard to this issue. Further reflection on reasons for this suggests that in CEDA/NDT it is not uncommon for an affirmative case to be opposed by a topical counterplan. In these cases the debate is no longer strictly over the validity of the resolution since both sides are in essence affirming the resolution. Instead, in CEDA/NDT debate one might more frequently encounter a Plan/Plan debate, in which the critic must decide strictly upon the basis of costs versus benefits to the competing plans, rather than whether or not the affirmative proved the resolution true. This practice is also appearing in many NPDA parliamentary debates, but probably not to the extent that it exists in CEDA/NDT debate.

Survey Question 22 also showed a statistically significant difference based on number of years of experience judging. While both CEDA/NDT and parliamentary critics agreed above that they both try to be tabula rasa with no statistically significant variance, there is no such agreement based on years of experience. The less experienced group still enthusiastically professes to be tabula rasa, the more experienced group somewhat less so. The more experienced critics perhaps realize that such a goal is more aspirational than practical. Even when critics attempt to not intervene, they are not capable of completely removing their own systems of belief from their decision calculus. Many critics have default decision modes influenced by various social, political, and even pedagogical issues. Though critics may allow these positions to be swayed in some rounds by compelling argument, they still rely on them in most situations when not specifically challenged. This element probably does effect presumption, even when critics might not think it does. Perhaps this represents a different type of presumption, one that favors our own a priori beliefs to some extent.

Survey Questions 26 (preference for strong delivery skills) and 30 (enjoyment of philosophical debates versus impact comparisons), registered slightly less significance (p<1.0). Judges in their first five years rated both of these areas as slightly more desirable than did judges with six or more years of experience. The reasons for these slight distinctions are not clear from the survey instrument, but might be an interesting topic for future research.

Current Limitations and Future Research
Some of the limitations in this project include sample size, geographical diversity of the sample and the sophistication of the instrument itself (see endnote 2). A more robust sample of at least 200 respondents was the goal. However, given the finite number of academic debate critics available, the researchers still feel that some reliance can be placed on these findings, especially given the fairly even balance between CEDA/NDT critics versus parliamentary debate critics, and the balance between those with five or fewer years experience versus those with six or more years.

Geographical diversity of the sample could also have been improved upon. Most of the tournaments surveyed were from the West (California, Colorado, Alaska). While Wake Forest University’s event is a large, well attended CEDA/NDT tournament, it is the only tournament east of the Rockies surveyed, and it had no parliamentary critics. The authors would have preferred a more regionally-balanced sample of critics for parliamentary debate, but at the time of the survey, and, to some extent, even today, parliamentary debate does not evenly blanket the country. It is well represented in the West, the Northwest, the Rockies, and has a growing presence in the South and the Midwest. It is still not well represented in the East. Finally, the instrument itself could have been more sophisticated and would have benefited from a pilot test, allowing the researchers to focus more on the desired area of analysis.

However, the open-ended nature of some of the questions did reveal other interesting fields of inquiry, and might invite looking to other ideological differences besides presumption theory between the two popular academic debate formats. One might look, for instance, at differences in preference for the various judging paradigms listed in the instrument (argument critic, policy maker, stock issues, games playing paradigms, etc.). Another interesting avenue of research would be to survey the student participants and see if their views are being fairly reflected in the views suggested by the critics. The Factor Analysis (Table 4) suggests that responses to survey questions clustered into three primary categories, Quality of Argument, Cost/Benefit Argument, and Philosophical Argument. Further survey development on the distinctions between NPDA and CEDA/NDT judging communities should focus on these criteria. It may be discovered that these factors contribute to more basic paradigmatic differences between the different formats of debate, perhaps even suggesting why some programs are drawn to one format over the other. This Factor Analysis may serve as an important step to better develop valid and reliable survey instruments relating to competitive interscholastic argumentation and debate.

Conclusion

To recontextualize this issue of presumption in academic debate, it should be noted that as long as critics resist granting presumption to the affirmative, they are more likely to also resist allowing affirmative cases that defend the status quo. This may not be a large issue in CEDA/NDT debate,
which traditionally debates a single resolution the entire year and is usually
careful to word that resolution in such a way as to require the affirmative to
make a substantial change to the status quo. However, that is not the case with
NPDA style parliamentary debate, which has a separate resolution for every
round debated. Many of those resolutions do not require any changes in the
status quo. Nonetheless, this research study shows that critics apply that
expectation as an unwritten rule of parliamentary debate.

This survey confirms that both CEDA/NDT and parliamentary critics
still consider presumption to rest with the negative team in academic debate.
Based on an examination of their answers to the survey questions, the authors
posit that this belief favors presumption as more or less as a rule of the game
in many, though not all, circumstances. This finding supports the conclusion
that the stipulated or artificial (rule based) interpretation of presumption seems
to be favored over the natural (or least risk) interpretation of presumption.
While both CEDA/NDT and parliamentary critics believe presumption
normally goes to the negative team, both also recognize that this is not an
absolute rule and can be context based. Or, one might say that exceptions to
the rule can exist for both groups of critics. Parliamentary debate critics seem
more open to such exceptions to the rule, but are also more likely to actually
vote upon presumption and then usually for the negative. CEDA/NDT critics
seem less likely to vote on inherency than do parliamentary critics.

The single largest area of disagreement between parliamentary and
CEDA/NDT critics is that parliamentary critics believe that the most important
responsibility of the affirmative team is to prove that the resolution is true. Not
only did the CEDA/NDT critics disagree with this statement, the variance of
responses was statistically significant beyond the .001 level. Remember too
that both sets of critics claim to be tabula rasa. Given both claims it seems
surprising that parliamentary critics would not be more open to affirmative
teams choosing to construct cases in defense of the status quo, as long as the
resolution does not specifically prohibit such an interpretation.

The survey also reveals some differences between critics when
grouped by experience. Critics (both CEDA/NDT and parliamentary) with six
or more years of experience were far less concerned than were critics with five
years or less experience, with deciding a round based on inherency, with the
most important responsibility of the affirmative team being to prove the
resolution true, and with trying hard to be tabula rasa.

Given the above findings, the authors call on the parliamentary debate
community of critics to give serious thought to relaxing the imposition of an
unwritten rule requiring affirmatives to reject the status quo even when the
resolution may not make such a requirement. Natural presumption should be
given more credence, allowing critics to favor the side which represents the
least risk, rather than automatically awarding it to the negative team. The
negative team in parliamentary debate is hardly deserving of a helping hand
based on the current uneven split in win/loss records which favors negatives
over affirmatives by a 60/40 ratio.
At the very least, the NPDA parliamentary debate community should engage in more research, of both a philosophical and statistical variety, to help determine which direction it wishes to take this activity, and why it should go in that direction. Merely mirroring, or even worse, rejecting, a practice, simply because another form of debate has practiced it, is hardly a strong rationale for deciding a format’s practice.

Coaches, instructors and debaters wondering how specifically they can incorporate the suggestions in this article into practice should target several practice rounds to work on such issues. It is easier to begin such practice rounds with resolutions that specifically require the government case to defend the status quo, shifting presumption to the affirmative side. Metaphoric examples might be, “This house would stay the course,” “Resolved: Don’t change horses midstream,” or “This house would not stick its head in the sand.” The last resolution could, for example, be used to prevent further government imposition of regulations on particular forms of scientific research, from cloning to germ warfare. More specific examples might include, “The United States should not expand its military presence in the Middle East (or insert region of choice here in place of the Middle East),” or “This house believes that imposing congressional term limits is not the answer,” or even “The U. S. Supreme court was right in (insert well known and debatable Supreme Court decision such as “Roe V. Wade” here).”

Eventually, debaters can start looking for how to construct status quo defense cases in less-defined resolutions. For example, with the resolution “This house would embrace bilingual education,” a government team could argue for continuing bilingual education in states or counties that already have enacted successful bilingual education policies. They need not find areas that currently have laws (inherent barriers) banning the practice, and institute this as a new policy, although they certainly could. With a value comparison resolution like “Resolved: Security is more important than freedom,” government teams could defend the onerous security checks and invasions of freedom at airport security check stations, and argue that, though inconvenient and unpleasant, these invasions of our rights to freedom are justifiable in the name of more secure air travel.

Debaters and coaches should also be prepared to defend such departures from traditional debate practice or theory and show that defending the status quo is entirely legitimate in parliamentary debate, unless the resolution specifically calls for a significant change in the status quo. Preparing these responses ahead of time and practicing them in rounds would be a good idea before trying it in a tournament environment.

Likewise, debaters would benefit from practicing on the opposite side of this issue as well, to be better able to defend the expectation that affirmatives should be required to advocate significant changes from the status quo. They may wish to read up on inherency theory to be prepared to defend the importance of inherency as a stock issue in debate. Inherency clearly trumps status quo defense by the affirmative if the judge can be persuaded to
vote on it as a *prima facie* requirement. Another consideration by negatives might be to place the debate in a policy-making judging paradigm. Then, they need only show a slight improvement in the *status quo* on the negative counter plan in order to outweigh affirmative or government significance. The affirmative’s counter to this might be to shift the judging paradigm to proving if the resolution is demonstrated as true, then the government prevails. There are many other possibilities that will be revealed if practice or actual tournament debates start exploring these theoretical issues. Not only are such theoretical debates arguably just as valuable a learning tool as debates on specific policies, they also advance the community’s understanding of this important activity’s theoretical foundation.

Coaches and tournament directors that agree with the arguments advanced in this article can further the practice of encouraging affirmative defense of the *status quo* by including resolutions at tournaments that require or allow the government to defend the *status quo*. Examples were listed in the preceding paragraphs. Coaches and tournament directors that oppose such a practice should work harder to derive resolutions that specifically call for changes to *status quo* practices. Regardless of one’s reaction to this issue, greater attention to providing quality resolutions can only help the activity.

The bottom line on this practice of encouraging government teams to consider defending the *status quo*, as with all practices in the activity, is that if the students want to pursue the practice, and can make cogent arguments in support of it, that practice will survive and probably flourish. Likewise, if it somehow does not resonate with the student participants’ ethic, it will likely flounder. Those who think outside the box and attempt this technique, assuming they are able to give a spirited defense of the tactic, could meet with success. If so, the tactic will likely be emulated by others in the community. If, on the other hand, people think that defending the status quo on the government it is too easy of a way to win, certain critics may refuse to honor it in an effort to police the activity for their perception of what is good for the activity, regardless of the theoretical merits of the advocacy. Ironically, the call of this article is not to accept the *status quo* as it exists in current parliamentary practice but instead to challenge the opinions recorded in the surveys reported upon in the article.
End Notes

1. When the authors use the term parliamentary debate we are primarily referring to the style of debate currently practiced within the NPDA (National Parliamentary Debate Association). This audience-centered form of intercollegiate debate attempts to focus on style of delivery, content and development of arguments, and breadth of knowledge. When we refer to CEDA/NDT style of debate we mean the form of debate practiced currently by both CEDA (Cross Examination Debate Association) and NDT (National Debate Tournament, or National Debate Topic). Although NDT and CEDA were at one point philosophically different debate formats they are at this point perceived to be all but identical, except for hosting separate national championship tournaments and electing different officers. Merger discussions are ongoing and were a focus of other panel discussions at the 2001 Tahoe Argumentation Conference. CEDA/NDT debate places great emphasis on policy analysis, argument development, depth of research on a more focused area of study, and supporting claims with specific evidence from authoritative sources. There is also a greater focus on development of detailed alternative policy options and less emphasis on public speaking skills delivered at conversational rates of speed.

2. The tournaments surveyed included the Claremont Colleges Invitational, University of Alaska at Anchorage, California State University of Fresno, Pepperdine University, Biola University, Metro State University (Fall), and Wake Forest University. Special thanks to all tournament directors and to other coaches that helped collect the surveys. These tournaments were primarily from the Rockies and westward, which was consistent with the predominant areas of parliamentary debate at that time. In the few intervening years, the NPDA style of parliamentary debate has spread more into the Mid West, the South, and may soon be spreading more into the East. It would be interesting to see if these different regions of participation reflect similar judge pool beliefs and biases. Time may also have changed findings somewhat, though the authors have not witnessed anything that might have lead to large changes in this area.

3. The authors would like to thank Dr. Rodney Reynolds for his help and input on this research project.

References


Tuman, J. S. (1992). Natural value hierarchies and presumption: Merging


Appendix A

JUDGING SURVEY – PARLIAMENTARY AND CEDA/NDT DEBATE
(Please return surveys to the ballot table)
Please answer the following questions regarding interscholastic debate to the
best of your ability. Circle the best answer and provide only one answer per
question please. Do not complete the survey more than once. This survey is
being collected for both Parliamentary and CEDA/NDT debate. Since the
terms Affirmative and Negative teams can be used interchangeably for both
styles of debate, this survey will employ that word choice rather than add the
terms Government and Opposition teams for each such question. Thank you
for helping with this research effort.
The types of debate that I normally judge are
Mostly CEDA/NDT debate.
Mostly Parliamentary debate.
A Fairly equal ratio of CEDA/NDT and Parliamentary debate.
I only rarely judge debate
The number of years I have been judging interscholastic debate (college or
high school):
  This is my first experience judging debate
  I have judged debate for about a year
  I have judged debate for between 2-5 years
  I have judged debate for between 6 and 10 years
  I have judged debate for over 10 years
My experience as a competitor in debate (high school and college combined),
if any, is:
  I have never competed in tournament debate.
  I competed in tournament debate for about a year or less.
  I competed in tournament debate two or three years.
  I competed in tournament debate for four years or more.
My experience teaching or coaching debate, if any, is:
  I have never taught or coached debate.
  I have coached debate, but not formally taught a debate class.
  I have taught debate in the classroom, but have not coached debate
teams for tournaments.
  I have taught debate in the classroom and coached tournament teams.
  Though I never formally taught or coached debate as a part of my
   professional duties, as a competitor I actively helped peer coach other debaters
   on my team.
The following questions ask for you to assess how important certain issues are
in your decision calculus, or how you decide which team wins the debate.
Please answer each question by circling the number, which most closely
answers the question. The following scale will apply to each of the following
questions:
Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Slightly Disagree (3), Neither Agree nor
Disagree (4), Slightly Agree (5), Agree (6), Strongly Agree(7)
I believe that topicality is one of the least important issues in a typical debate.
I find it very difficult to decide a value debate without clearly articulated policy
implications.
I only rarely decide a debate round on the basis of presumption.
Typically the most important issue in a debate round is how the advantages
compare to the disadvantages.
Criterial arguments in the debate round are very helpful for my decision
making process.
Inherency is not a very important issue in deciding most debate rounds.
I would never vote for an affirmative team that defended the Status Quo.
In value debates, establishing clear criteria should be required as a stock issue
for the affirmative team.
I frequently base my decision in debate rounds on how the solvency disputes
are resolved.
I usually grant presumption to the side representing the least change of the
Status Quo.
I rely a great deal on quantifiable significance in deciding debate rounds.
In my decision calculus, I ignore silly arguments, not grounded in real world
scenarios.
I would vote against a counterplan if the affirmative team proved it was topical.
I rank highly good philosophical debates, even if they are not directly linked
to policy scenarios.
An affirmative team’s most important responsibility in a debate round is
proving that the resolution is true.
As a judge, I will not vote for the negative on the basis of a critique.
I prefer to base my decision on substantive issues rather than jurisdictional
issues like topicality, justification, or hasty generalization.
I consider myself to be fairly Tabula Rasa, and try hard to minimize my
intervention as a judge.
If the impacts for both sides are completely equal, and the affirmative team
represents the least change, I would probably still vote for the negative.
I feel that I am primarily a policy maker as a critic, weighing the round by
comparing costs and benefits.
My judging paradigm could best be described as that of an argumentation
critic, requiring that claims be logical and well supported before I can vote for
them.
I give preference to teams with strong delivery skills and speaker ethos in my
judging criteria.
I will vote against affirmative teams for constructing cases that do not provide
fair and reasonable ground for both sides to debate.
Negative ground should always include the option of defending the Status Quo.
When judging parliamentary debates, I like debates over metaphoric
resolutions.
I enjoy judging philosophical debates, rather than just weighing tangible
impacts.
I usually vote against cases that are not Prima Facia.
Developing transferable real world skills is one of the most important purposes
for academic debate.
Presumption in debate is like a rule of the game, and should favor the negative.
Open Ended Questions:
If you could fiat one change into how debate is currently conducted, what would it be and why?
What would you say is the most important benefit to participating in intercollegiate debate, and why?