Popular Sovereignty  
Negative Case by Thomas Sargent



The heart of this case points the negative spotlight on a brilliant concept known as “popular sovereignty,” the true source of government’s purpose, potency, and political power. If you’ve ever read the Declaration of Independence, you know what I’m talking about (for the people, by the people). In this case, the value of Popular Sovereignty is run with three Reasons to Prefer (RTP). This means that your debate will be focusing primarily on the values clash. For those who would rather spend time fighting over evidence, you should consider removing one or two of the RTPs and adapting your argumentation accordingly. What this case says is that preemptive warfare directly conflicts with popular sovereignty. Affirm the resolution, and you reject the voice of the people. The resolutional analysis gives you ground to argue that thesis, and some convincing evidence helps solidify it.

If you want to be successful in the debate world, you must do two important things. First, you need to *identify all your weak points.* This goes for not only this case, but for every case that you will run. I know it’s quite tempting to grab a cool case the night before a tournament and then try to win all your rounds, but that’s a terrible idea.

Don’t go into any debate round without clearly knowing what your weakest spots are. Put yourself in your opponent’s shoes and ask, “If I was facing this new Popular Sovereignty stuff, how would I attack it?” Take detailed notes on everything that is wrong with this case. Fix what you can and be aware of what you cannot. This rule is just like the game of chess: you should never try to trap the other player – you should put yourself in his position, consider the best possible move he could make, and then figure out a way to beat it. Spend time exploring options to defeating your case, then formulate your strategy to counter that.

Second, you need to make the case your own. Judges can always tell when a debater is personally attached to his case. With a scrutinizing eye, you must go over every detail and mold it to your liking. Take this case and splash your personal style all over it. Change the rhetoric according to your personality. Edit the RTPs to whatever strategy you prefer, whether it be little politer stabs at your opponent, or full on nuclear blasts. Take time to find more killer evidence to step up the quality of your contentions. As it is, the case is not ready to be run yet. But if you follow these two guidelines, you will be way ahead of many other competitors especially by running with this argumentation.

One last note: this case begs for persuasion. You must forge a personal connection with your judge. Your opponent can bring up all the logic he has up his sleeve, but you should master both logic and persuasion. Logic and persuasion beat the pants off plain ole’ logic every time, and if you can use them together, your win/lose rate will improve dramatically. Now follow my guidelines, have fun, and God bless you.

Popular Sovereignty

Jamaican nationalist Marcus Garvey once declared that…

“Government is not infallible. Government is only an executive control, a centralized authority for the purpose of expressing the will of the people… Without the people there can be no government. The government must be, therefore, an expression of the will of the people.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

This powerful declaration reveals to us an obvious, yet overlooked common American truth: a government’s first duty is to listen to the voice of its people. No moral objective, even preemptive warfare, can unfold properly without careful consideration of the people’s representation.

# Resolutional Analysis: Eliminating Ambiguity

The resolution gives both sides a tricky challenge: the context. The trouble comes when we try to decide the resolution based off a general world scope. To avoid ambiguity, we ought to look primarily at a single country or nation. I propose the United States of America. This is because, first off, the US is more relevant to us since most of us live in her, know about her, and care for her.

Second, focusing on our country creates a clearer scope. Instead of trying to arbitrarily determine the truth of the resolution based off vague context, we can establish a more transparent battleground. This means that the debate today should fall in the light of US preemption so that it is clear and relevant.

Let us begin the negative case by looking at a value, or a way we can determine why the resolution is false.

# Value: Popular Sovereignty

As Merriam Webster’s dictionary defines it, Popular Sovereignty is “a doctrine in political theory that government is created by and subject to the will of the people”[[2]](#footnote-3). This definition originated from the Declaration of Independence, where it states that “Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed…”[[3]](#footnote-4) The government’s existence depends the voice of people like you, judge. Its power and purpose comes from my value, ensuring that your words fuel government decisions with careful thought.

To show you why it ought to be preferred in today’s round, I will compare my value to my opponent’s value.

## Reason to Prefer 1: Creates Functional Government

Our government is the brain behind preemptive enforcement. If the USA preemptively strikes another country, the operation must unfold with the government’s approval. But a governmental decision is morally and pragmatically ineffective without careful consideration of Popular Sovereignty. As Thomas Jefferson once noted, “Government exists for the interests of the governed, not for the governors.”[[4]](#footnote-5) If a government willingly accepts its people’s voice, it fulfills its purpose – both morally and practically. With such a government, a nation thrives.

## Reason to Prefer 2: Moral Qualifier

Anytime our government tries to use preemption by disregarding the source of its power, it cannot truly achieve a moral objective. For example, if the government uses preemptive warfare in an attempt to establish justice in a foreign country, but in doing so ignores the people’s voice, *it is not really being just*. If a government desires to enact national security with preemptive warfare but in doing so silences the voice of the people, *it is not truly looking out for their best, nor their safety*. Any moral outcome that my opponent might propose (including his value) hinges on the power of the people, and before enforcing any preemptive action, no matter what the moral outcome desired, a government’s priority is listening to the voice of its people through Popular Sovereignty.

## Reason to Prefer 3: Realistic to Society

The way our society works in the real world is not as militaristic as my opponent would like you to believe. Sure, we should value national defense—and of course, our military—but would you rather have a society that builds itself on absolute warfare or one that prides itself on accepting the voice of its people? Most of us would say that the latter is more desirable *because that is the way we are intended to function as a nation*. Popular Sovereignty ensures a value that means more to our society today. That is realistic in nature and relevant in scope.

Now that we have seen why my value is paramount, let us look at how preemptive warfare can violate it and why we should not affirm the resolution.

# Contention: Preemptive Warfare Disregards Popular Sovereignty

I am going to spell out the resolution carefully: if you vote affirmative, you have to neglect the expression of the American people. In doing so, you reject the purpose of government, unity of the nation, qualifier for morals, realistic society, and national functionality. This is because of a “striking” clash between preemptive warfare and Popular Sovereignty. Let us look at the real world to prove this.

YouGov.org conducted a study on the use of general nuclear weapons. According to this national poll, only 18% of surveyed Americans believe that it is acceptable to use nuclear weapons even before an attack on the US has materialized. Although some have not decided yet, most surveyed Americans (66%) reject the idea of striking an opposing nation with nuclear weapons by means of preemption.[[5]](#footnote-6)

Gallup Poll discovered that 51% of Americans believe that the preemptive war in Iraq done by President Bush was a mistake, while only 43% think it was worthwhile.[[6]](#footnote-7) CNN also points out that in a survey about the war in Afghanistan loaded with preemptive attacks, 82% of surveyed Americans oppose the military involvement.[[7]](#footnote-8) And according to Brookings educational studies, 57% reject the idea of sending ground troops into Iraq and Syria to take down military leaders, even with the possibility of preemption.[[8]](#footnote-9)

The facts are clear: preemptive warfare clashes with Popular Sovereignty. In our resolution, the government can choose to either respect the people’s voice, or go for a risky, ambitious, and questionably “moral” involvement.

# Conclusion

At the end of the day, you have a choice. If you vote affirmative, you must ignore the reason for our government, and you also must disregard the people’s voices. By conflicting with Popular Sovereignty, preemptive warfare does not champion moral goals. However, if you vote negative, you protect the purpose of government as well as its functionality. That is why I urge you to stand for a strong nation that prides itself of its Popular Sovereignty rather than preemptive warfare. To thrive as a country, we must have a government for the people, by the people.

Thank you.

Opposing This Case

Cut out all the fluff, and what have you got? A thesis that carries ridiculous burden. If you sand the case down to its most basic core, it looks something like this:

*Preemptive warfare is not morally justified because a lot of Americans do not like it.*

Hmmm.

If you think about it, that’s pretty silly. The negative paints a much nicer picture that sounds logical, but that is really what this case is saying. How difficult is it to defeat? Depends. To get you started, here are some arguments that you can run against the case/value:

*Doesn’t disprove the resolution.* Sure, a lot of people don’t like it. So, what? How does that prove that preemptive warfare isn’t morally justified? What if it saves lives? What if it restores justice? What if it protects human rights? Just the fact that preemptive war can sometimes disagree with people’s opinions doesn’t mean that it isn’t a *morally right thing to do.*

*Isn’t very accurate.*Even if “Popular Sovereignty” could determine morality, it would make for a dangerous world. Remember the mob scene in the classic animated film *Beauty and the Beast?*If you recall, the character Gaston deceived the entire village into believing that Belle’s kind and gentle friend, the Beast, was really a terrible monster. And sadly, only a few characters knew the truth. Simply asking people for their opinion should not fuel the military’s decisions. They ought to look for better methods of determining action, such as thinking of moral outcomes.

You can cross-apply these responses to the rest of the case, and take up about 50% less time. For example, say something like this:

“Now regarding my opponent’s evidence, you can cross apply both of my value responses because these instances of popular opinion do not disprove the resolution and they don’t determine morals either. Just because some Americans prefer not to use preemptive warfare doesn’t mean it isn’t morally justified. Now that I have finished arguing against my opponent’s case, let us focus back on the more critical issue – my case.”

Boom. LD mic drop.

Focus back on your stance. Show how absurd the negative is and how realistic you are. Don’t let the fancy-schmancy rhetoric destroy your case. Fight on your grounds, and prove the resolution true.

Bonus: Refuting the Affirmative

As a special treat for you, I’ve included some extra ammunition against the affirmative.

Don’t be scared by the opposition brief. Your opponent can only run those responses if he takes down your RA. The point you make about the US being the primary focus is logical and convincing. If your bombastic opponent tries to weasel his way into looking at a broad picture, use your wit (I know you have one). Point out that it is ridiculous to go big in scope – there’s just no good reason for it. There *are* good reasons to look at America’s actions. The RA lists them.

Once you win the context battle, you can win the round.

If your opponent says that your value does not prove the resolution false, simply bring back your second RTP. Sure, a government might want to preempt for a moral value like justice. But if it lunges for that ambitious goal by ignoring the voice of the citizens, is it really being just? No. Same thing with rights. A government can go to war to protect other people’s natural rights, but if it throws Popular Sovereignty down the drain, is it really concerned about protection of rights? Nay, says I. If anything is to be moral, it relies on the people’s voice.

Now, is it accurate? In the real world, it usually is. Preemptive warfare isn’t a subject that can get tossed around, left and right, like raging battles between liberals and conservatives, or emotional terror in believing that a Beast is after you. It requires some thought and that’s why when people give their views on preemptive war, you can tell that they aren’t all just deceived. While there are crazy, reckless, or emotionally charged people out there, most folks have pretty good common sense.

In closing, this case is certainly not perfect. But no case is. Even with a few weak spots, this approach to the resolution has a lot of fortes. It shines light on a clear thesis, defines a striking conflict, defends the stance with convincing RTPS and statistics, and it holds the persuasive edge over your opponent. I encourage you to take it and run hard with it.

May God richly bless your competition!

1. <http://www.alexdapiata.com/14912/quotes-about-government-control/marcus-garvey-quote-government-is-not-infallible-government-is-quotes-about-government-control/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/popular%20sovereignty> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. USHistory.Org *the Declaration of Independence,* originally published on the internet on July 4th, 1995. <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. <http://www.azquotes.com/quote/371390?ref=purpose-of-government> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. YouGov US, “Poll Results: Nuclear Weapons”, By Peter Moore, August 11,2016, 7:07 a.m. <https://today.yougov.com/news/2016/08/11/poll-results-nuclear-weapons/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Gallup Poll, “Fewer in U.S. View Iraq, Afghanistan Wars as Mistakes” By Andrew Dugan, June 12, 2015 <http://www.gallup.com/poll/183575/fewer-view-iraq-afghanistan-wars-mistakes.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. CNN Politics, CNN Poll: “Afghanistan war arguably most unpopular in U.S. history” <http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2013/12/30/cnn-poll-afghanistan-war-most-unpopular-in-u-s-history/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Brookings, *“American Public Attitudes Toward ISIS and Syria”,* [Shibley Telhami](https://www.brookings.edu/experts/shibley-telhami/), Thursday, January 8, 2015 <https://www.brookings.edu/research/american-public-attitudes-toward-isis-and-syria/> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)