



2015 National Speech & Debate Association National Tournament Extemp Topic Area Analysis

by Logan Scisco

Introduction

This Extemp Central topic analysis breaks down the thirteen topic areas that will be used for International and United States Extemporaneous Speaking at the 2015 National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA) National Tournament in Dallas, Texas. This topic analysis is not sponsored by the NSDA and the author has not participated in writing questions for the NSDA National Tournament. His advice is based on their years of experience as competitors and/or judges at the tournament.

For each topic area, extempers will find an explanation of big issues, strategy tips, and a list of practice questions that they can use to prepare for the tournament. The end of the book also has a listing of how this year's premium topic briefs fit within each area, so extempers can look to that if they wish to get more detail about a specific issue.

It is my hope that extempers and their coaches will find this topic area analysis useful in their preparation for this year's NSDA National Tournament. I thank you for reading it and using Extemp Central for extemporaneous speaking resources.

If you have any comments about this topic area analysis, or any Extemp Central services, please forward them to me at logan.scisco@topper.wku.edu.

-Logan Scisco
Extemp Central Founder

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2015 NSDA Nationals
International Extemp Topic Area Analysis
by Logan Scisco

If you are reading this topic area analysis, you have probably qualified for the 2015 National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA) National Tournament in Dallas, Texas. You should be congratulated on qualifying and a stern test awaits you as more than two hundred other extempers will be competing against you for the right to call themselves national champion. While the size of the field might be intimidating, especially if you have never attended a national tournament before, a good idea to repeat in your head is that what you are going to be asked to do at the tournament is no different from what you encounter at your local competition. The speeches you are expected to give are still supposed to be seven minutes in length (although you get a grace period and as we have seen in past years time may not even matter in final rounds) and you are still expected to answer the questions you draw and support your conclusions with evidence. You have qualified to this tournament for a reason, so show the country what you can do in Dallas!

As I typically note in topic area analysis, International Extemp tends to be the sternest extemporaneous speaking test at the national tournament. The category typically includes most of the highly ranked extempers on the national circuit and more than its fair share of state champions. International Extemp also tends to include more senior competitors, many of whom competed in United States Extemp during previous editions of the national tournament. It is not uncommon to see a “stacked” preliminary round where several recognized extempers are clashing and early elimination rounds also tend to follow this pattern. If you are not a competitor that travels the national circuit, though, you have nothing to be worried about. Most of your judges at the tournament are not national circuit judges and when you get into elimination rounds you are going to be assessed by coaches with significant experience in the category that have been recommended by their respective NSDA district chairs. Unlike the Montgomery Bell Academy (MBA) Extemp Round Robin and the Extemporaneous Speaking Tournament of Champions (TOC) at Northwestern University, judges will tend to value more of your delivery of information than analysis, although analysis will be weighed more than what one typically sees among judges at the National Catholic Forensic League (NCFL) Grand National Tournament.

An advantage that International extempers have over their domestic counterparts is that the judging pool will be less educated and less prejudicial on the topics you are going to speak on. Think about it: how many judges (or Americans for that matter) typically read *The Economist* and *Foreign Affairs*? One of the challenges of International Extemp is that you will have to synthesize and explain the problems of the entire world to judges that are not very educated about it. This means that if you choose to talk about Burundi’s political crisis that you need to adequately explain why the situation exists, who the main characters in the ongoing situation are, and why the world should take notice of it. It is very easy to lose your audience in an International Extemp speech, especially if you use names and technical jargon that you do not bother to explain. For this reason, the background information that you provide in the introduction to your speeches, as well as your significance statements will be very important for all of your rounds. However, judges’ relative lack of knowledge about the world can also be an advantage. Whereas United States extempers are going to be forced to tip toe around controversial issues such as abortion, illegal immigration, and racial unrest in Ferguson and Baltimore, International extempers really do not have these problems. The one issue your judge may have a resolute opinion on is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (ISIS might be another), but you are not going to find a judge that would completely outraged that you chose to bash Venezuela’s Bolivarian socialism or Robert Mugabe’s political incompetence. Therefore, your goal in each speech at the NSDA National Tournament should be to clearly articulate your position and educate your audience about the topics that you drew.

It is my hope this topic area analysis, which will provide an overview of significant issues for each of the thirteen topic areas, strategy tips, and practice questions, will assist in your preparation for the NSDA National Tournament. I would highly recommend giving thirteen practice speeches, one on each topic area, before going to nationals. I would also highly recommend structuring your practices to replicate the endurance that you will need for the tournament. For the first three days you are going to be expected to give four speeches, usually two hours apart from each other. Having practice sessions where you do this, especially between the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m, the hours between which you will deliver your first twelve speeches of the tournament, would be wise.

I would also advise extempers to check out last year's topic area analysis in addition to this year's. The NSDA has a tendency to recycle some topic areas, so comparing advice given in last year's brief with this year's will allow you to see how the world has changed between 2014 and 2015 and possibly assist in your analysis of the issues.

Topic Area #1: Africa

Issues

In last year's topic area analysis, I made the statement that Africa is "a story of potential and chaos" and that theme still resonates for this year's NSDA National Tournament. The African continent has the world's youngest population, is witnessing continued population growth relative to other parts of the world, and is rich in raw materials. It is also in close proximity to other main arteries of the global economy, notably Western Europe, India, and the Middle East. However, the borders left by European colonialists, the inability of post-colonial leaders to construct viable states, and pressures of population growth have undermined the continent's ability to become an economic juggernaut. After all, there is not an African nation that sits as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and one finds that African nations are largely ignored by the international media until a humanitarian crisis strikes. This is very unfortunate, as the continent should be commanding much more attention for international investors. Yet until African leaders can quell domestic problems the continent will continue to be seen as one of untapped potential.

An immediate point to make about this year's topic area is that it simply reads as "Africa" just like last year. This means that every single African country is fair game for a question, although some areas will likely attract more questions than others (e.g. Nigeria, South Africa, and Somalia). The African continent is really a tale of two halves as North African countries that exist above the Sahara Desert have sizable Arab populations and Islam is the predominant faith. Experienced extempers will note that several of these North Africa countries such as Tunisia and Libya were sites of the Arab Spring in 2010 and 2011. Sub-Saharan Africa, located below the Sahara Desert, includes most of Africa's countries and these states tend to be smaller, yet arguably somewhat more economically prosperous than their Northern neighbors. Sub-Saharan states tend to have more peoples of African descent and they follow Christian or animist religious beliefs. Clashes between Northern and Sub-Saharan African countries over sectarian issues are common and the growth of Islamic extremism in North Africa could make this a more pressing issue in the future. Religious tensions fueled the Sudanese civil war of 1983-2005, are the basis for Nigeria's conflict with Boko Haram, and are also prevalent in Somali militant campaigns against Kenya. The ability of the Islamic State to create a beachhead in Libya has also caused sectarian conflict with Egypt and Ethiopia (as well as the Libyan government that has failed to exercise any degree of sizable authority since the death of long-time dictator Colonel Moammar Gaddafi in 2011). There are also still lingering sectarian problems in Tunisia, where Islamic militants killed foreign tourists at the country's Bardo Museum in March. Even though Tunisia is a secular state, disaffected young men are joining the Islamic

State in nearby Libya, creating a significant security problem for the country. Extremers should also recognize that Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria have been forced to cooperate to quell Boko Haram's violence. The good news is that they are making substantial progress as Boko Haram's hold on Northeastern Nigeria is weakening. And of course, not all religious violence in Africa is committed by Islamists. Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a radical Christian fundamentalist group, has terrorized Uganda for nearly three decades now and has utilized child soldiers, abused women, and committed substantial atrocities, prompting the United States and the African Union (AU) to try to root out the group. And one cannot forget that religious tensions are also creating a hostile environment for homosexuals in Africa. The continent refused to embrace anti-homophobia day and leaders in Gambia, South Africa, and Kenya and countless other states have said that there is "no room" for gay Africans in their countries. The struggle in Africa over gay rights is part of a global culture war that goes beyond Africa and involves other countries such as Russia and Iran.

In addition to religious conflict, the African continent is the site of conflicts over political rights and raw materials. A civil war has plagued South Sudan, the world's youngest country, since December 2013. In South Sudan, Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups are fighting for political control. More than 10,000 people have been killed in the conflict and more than 100,000 have been displaced, prompting the United Nations to warn of a growing humanitarian crisis. Raw materials have fueled conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since Belgium left the country in 1960, with most violence taking place in the country's eastern half. Violence in the DRC was the site of what was termed Africa's First World War in the 1990s when Angola, Chad, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Uganda, and Rwanda contested parts of the Congo's territory. Somalia's government is still trying to expand its authority, trying to quell the al-Shabab terrorist group that gives its neighbors such as Kenya significant problems. The international community has attempted to strengthen Somalia's government, which has shown increasingly authoritarian tendencies in recent months such as shutting down radio stations and arresting journalists. Somali-based piracy is not the threat that it was in 2010-2011, partly due to efforts by the Indian Navy to thwart attacks on international commerce, but a lack of government control and economic development are at the root of many of the nation's problems. The Sudanese government is also still at war with separatist militants in the Darfur region, who argue that the Arab-dominated Sudanese government is oppressing the non-Arab population of the Darfur region. It is notable that Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir currently stands under indictment for crimes against humanity and genocide by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for his government's activities in this region. On the bright side, Nigeria did have a successful presidential election on March 28 and voters ousted President Goodluck Jonathan, who surprised international observers by quickly conceding. Analysts hope that this will strengthen Nigerian democracy and serve as an eventual model for other African states.

Another theme across the African continent are political struggles against long-time leaders. Burundi garnered recent headlines when a coup was attempted against President Pierre Nkurunziza, who has been trying to seek a third term in office. Unrest has grown because under Burundi's constitution a president cannot be elected for more than two terms, but the nation's constitutional court is going to allow Nkurunziza to run again because he won his first term in office via appointment by parliament. Term limits are also a tricky issue in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as President Joseph Kabila might seek to amend the country's constitution to seek a third term in 2016. This is already provoking violent protests as people fear a dictatorship and a violation of the country's democratic principles. Rwanda also has a looming problem as President Paul Kagame, who has also served two terms, is seeking support for a constitutional amendment that would let him run for a third term as well. Like the Congo, Rwanda is also seeing protests against the idea, which has resulted in some suspicious deaths of pro-democracy advocates. A poster child for long-time political rule is Zimbabwe where President Robert Mugabe has ruled with an iron fist since December 1987. Mugabe is currently ninety-one years old and his rule has been marked by political repression, hyperinflation, a disastrous land seizure scheme against whites, and a

callous attitude toward the urban poor. Late last year, Mugabe's wife Grace (referred to as "Dis Grace" because of the many scandals that surround her) began to assume more political power within the governing Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party, taking control of the Women's League. She won her feud against Vice President Joice Mujuru, who was once designated as Mugabe's successor, and her growing role on the ZANU-PF Politburo means that she could be in line to succeed her husband. There is also a question of whether the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa is best-suited to run the country. The ANC has governed South Africa since the end of apartheid in 1994 and its hold on power has been solidified because of South African reluctance to vote for the white-dominated Democratic Alliance (DA) Party. The DA has recently chosen a black South African, Mmusi Maimane, to lead it and broaden its appeal.

Arguably the most notable African issue of the 2014-2015 season was Ebola. Ebola is a hemorrhagic fever and the latest outbreak is thought to have begun in December 2013 in Guinea. Health experts argue that deforestation has brought African peoples into closer proximity to animals that are carriers of Ebola such as bats and the consumption of bushmeat, or the meat of wild animals, also increases the risk of Ebola transmission. Ebola eventually spread from Guinea to neighboring countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone and the governments of each country were ill-prepared for a public health crisis. Senegal and Nigeria also battled their own cases and health workers, on the front-lines of preventing the transmission of Ebola (for which there is no cure), succumbed to the virus as did tens of thousands of other Africans. Religious practices of washing the dead before burial and a suspicion of international health workers complicated efforts to contain the disease. When some health workers with Ebola were flown to Western Europe and the United States there were fears that those countries would suddenly have their own outbreaks and these fears arguably affected the U.S. midterm elections in November. The World Health Organization (WHO) now thinks that it has Ebola under control with the number of cases decreasing. Liberia was found to have had its outbreak end on May 9, but Sierra Leone and Guinea are still affected. The reason Ebola matters is that it economically devastated the affected West Africa states, while also serving as a reminder that in a globalized world new diseases from one part of the world can easily affect another. It should also be noted that Ebola overshadowed Africa's ongoing battle with AIDS and HIV and while progress is being made on that front, aid workers say much more is needed to educate Africans about its dangers and more funding is needed for their work.

Finally, economic issues could factor into the Africa round, especially when it comes to the economic potential of the continent. Nigeria is the continent's economic powerhouse, having the largest GDP of any African nation. However, most of Nigeria's people live on less than \$2 a day and the country is notoriously corrupt, with billions of dollars of oil revenue siphoned off by government bureaucrats and leaders in recent decades. Part of the reason that Muhammadu Buhari, a former dictator, won the Nigerian presidential election was his promise to clamp down on corruption. Time will tell if Buhari is able to do so and if he can quell violence with Boko Haram and regional movements such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) then he might turn Nigeria into a place that can attract greater foreign investment. South Africa attracted headlines in recent weeks for xenophobic attacks on migrant workers, which is due to the inability of its government to decrease the nation's high unemployment rate that stands at over 20%. These problems date back to the end of apartheid where the South African economy liberalized, became more service-centric, and lost manufacturing and mining jobs. South Africans allege that migrants from Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, and Mozambique are taking much-needed jobs and violence against migrants drew condemnation from other African states. President Jacob Zuma and the ruling ANC also stand accused of fanning the flames of discontent to distract from the government's inability to solve the persistent unemployment problem. A radical leftist party called the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) of Julius Malema is appealing to South Africans angry about the economy and it advocates similar land seizure policies that were practiced in Zimbabwe. South Africa does have a problem of whites owning large tracts of property relative to the native black population, but

radical land reform may alienate foreign investment, thereby making the country's economic situation even worse. Furthermore, the dream of an economic integrated Africa still exists with Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta pressing for closer cooperation among African states to bolster economic development. Economic integrationists in Africa argue that old European colonial boundaries are inhibiting growth and fueling conflict and that an African version of the European Union (EU), one that potentially allowed greater movement of peoples, would overcome some of these problems. They also note that trade between African states is anemic when compared to other parts of the world and that it is easier for some African nations to trade with non-African states. African states also need to invest more in infrastructure, especially transportation and telecommunications, but it will take strong political leadership to win over foreign investors. Another glaring economic issue is female empowerment. Many African states have yet to truly empower women with adequate social and economic protections. Failing to integrate this part of the continent's workforce into society is seen as a potential drag on growth in the decades ahead, especially in terms of a lack of access to education for women. Few investors currently feel confident parking money in a continent with ethnic tensions, religious conflict, and political uncertainty, so those problems must be fixed for Africa to realize its potential.

Strategy

For the Africa round, I would highly encourage you to bolster your files about the continent by cutting African sources. The place to do this would be AllAfrica. AllAfrica provides links to other African newspapers (which can be identified when looking under the title of a given article) and also provides its own original writing about the issues plaguing the continent. *The Economist* is also good, especially its archives. I highly encourage extempers to use the search function on *The Economist's* main page for countries that have deficient coverage. Extempers also need to broaden their source base to include research institutes that are concerned with African problems. The International Crisis Group provides an overview of some of the continent's conflicts (as well as other parts of the world) and places such as the African Center for Strategic Studies and the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project can provide great information for the region. Finally, extempers should make use of the daily reports issued by the African Union, which has an interest in helping the continent prosper politically and economically.

I would also highly advise extempers to crack open a world history book and learn about some of the recent conflicts in Africa. A college-level World History text (possibly one that your school uses for AP World History) can be of great use. If you are limited for time, focus your attention on the European imperial control of Africa in the late 19th century and the decolonization that took place between the 1950s and 1970s. Europeans fundamentally altered the African continent by drawing boundaries that suited their aims and not those of the African peoples they governed, pitting ethnic groups against each other in imperial administration, and brutally abusing African peoples in their quest for raw materials (look at Belgium's administration of the Congo for horrifying accounts of this). History is a very underutilized tool for extempers, but getting a grasp of these historical problems can help you explain for your judges how the problems that Africa is facing are long-term phenomenon and did not emerge overnight. History can also explain why some European nations, especially France and Italy, remain so heavily engaged with their former colonial states of Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, and Mali.

Extempers should also head to the Voice of America pronunciation guide to look for foreign names that they do not know how to pronounce. This can be a challenge in African nations when the names of leaders do not easily translate into English equivalents. For example, Zimbabwean opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai's last name is pronounced CHANG-R-I, which is something that would not be apparent to one that was not skilled with Zimbabwean dialects.

Most importantly, when talking about Africa please do not call it a country! The continent is rich with diversity in terms of political viewpoints, ethnic groups, religions, and other beliefs. When breaking down a conflict, make sure to adequately describe the groups fighting and *why* they are doing so. Remember that you are educating your audience about a large continent, so make them feel like you are talking with them and not at them.

Practice Questions

1. How can the Democratic Alliance become a stronger force in South African politics?
2. Is South Sudan on the verge of collapse?
3. Would embracing gay rights help African nations better combat AIDS?
4. Is the African Union doing enough to promote democracy?
5. How should Muhammadu Buhari address corruption?

Topic Area #2: China, Japan, and the Koreans

Issues

Aside from the Middle East, this is the one global topic area that receives the bulk of attention from the American media. The United States has significant connections with this region of the world, being an ally of Japan since the end of the Second World War, preventing South Korea from falling to communist forces in the early 1950s, having a hostile relationship with North Korea, and engaging in contentious diplomacy with the Chinese government since its fell to communists in 1949. As a result, your judges will have some idea of what is going on in this region of the world. Also, I am still waiting for the NSDA to just have China constitute its own topic area. It seems as if the amount of articles written about China increases exponentially every year and *The Economist* now has a specific section of its magazine devoted exclusively to China coverage. Still, China is lumped back in with other East Asian nations this year, which is a replication of last year's topic area, and I fully expect that more questions will be written about China in this round than any of the other nations.

As I noted last year, expect "Taiwan" questions to fall into this category as well. I am not sure if the NSDA is avoiding the placement of Taiwan into this topic area as some type of political statement (keep in mind that China and other nations in the world do not recognize Taiwan's legitimacy), but I am just going to assume that they are subscribing to the "one China" policy where both territories are united under the Chinese flag and if that's the case you should not forget about Taiwan in this round. Do not also forget that China has contentious disputes with other territories it controls, notably Tibet (which China took control over in 1950) and Xinjiang Province that is home to ethnic groups such as Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Tajiks, and others that are Muslim. China is having growing fears that Ughur separatist groups and other ethnicities in Xinjiang will be won over by Islamic fundamentalism. After all, ISIS has actually made China a target of its ire because of Chinese support for the Iraqi and Syrian governments. China's growing appetite for natural resources has also put it into conflict with Southeast Asian nations such as Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines over the South China Sea. In fact, China has been expanding its presence through artificially constructed islands. The United States has been drawn into the dispute because it refuses to recognize China's presence on these islands as legitimate and it also sees China as a growing threat to its dominance of the Pacific. Chinese bullying of other Southeast Asian nations also has the potential to throw them into the arms of the United States or India, thereby escalating tensions in the region. Also, do not forget that China also claims part of Kashmir and has a disputed border with India. So a big theme to keep in mind for this round is that China does not get along with most of its neighbors, whether they be other nations or other ethnic minorities within its borders.

Politically, China is in the same situation as last year. President Xi Jinping has continued a purge of corruption leaders from Chinese politics, including older party figures. While some view this as a way to consolidate Jinping's rule, others see it as an attempt to keep the Chinese Communist Party relevant for a changing nation. The logic behind the latter view is that if the Communist Party shows that it can be trusted and reliable that democracy is not needed. Another motive behind the anti-corruption drive is to make structural changes to the Chinese economy and make it more responsive to market forces. This is meant to eliminate inefficiencies that could harm China's rise as a global economic power. Economists note that China still has many bureaucratic controls that weaken its economic performance, so Jinping has looked into ways to reduce these. In terms of democracy, China has clashed this season with pro-democracy forces in Hong Kong, who wish to select the city's chief executive. Last fall, pro-democracy protesters attracted international attention by staging sit-ins and rejecting China's decision to provide pre-approved candidates for Hong Kong's people to vote for. The Chinese government fears that granting Hong Kong universal suffrage might lead to similar demands in Tibet and elsewhere so it is resisting these pressures before chief executive elections are held there in 2017.

Economically, China's economy is showing signs of slowing down. Economists note that tax receipts are basically unchanged versus last year and that freight costs are falling by double digits, showing that there might be a glut of goods in the market and fewer goods are being produced. Investment growth in the Chinese economy has also slowed down, jeopardizing the Chinese government's aim to have 7% GDP growth this year. The Chinese government is also struggling with some of the byproducts of industrialization, which include urban congestion, pollution, and a lack of effective social programs. Jinping has tried to alleviate some of these problems by closing some coal-fired power plants, creating insurance for worker's bank accounts, and enact some land reform that would allow rural Chinese to sell their land and acquire assets to move to the city. China's leaders want the nation's economy to transition to a more consumer-driven rather than export-driven model, but there are doubts about whether this transition will proceed smoothly. To thwart economic problems, China is looking into more public spending on infrastructure, but it still must confront problems tied to an aging population and a lack of credit access for large numbers of its people. Since China is the world's second-largest economy, a slowdown there could jeopardize global economic growth. Furthermore, China is suspicious of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) as it is not a member. It fears that being left out of the TPP might help neighboring economies such as Japan at its expense.

In Taiwan, President Ma Ying-jeou is set to enter his final year of office. Mr. Ma has sought to strengthen Taiwan's relationship with China and currently, China receives 40% of Taiwan's exports. Trade was assisted by the passage of the Cross-Straits Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) in 2010, but China's hopes that this economic cooperation would solidify its hold over the disputed island, which was where Nationalist forces fled after losing the Chinese Civil War in 1949, have not been realized. There are signs that the 2016 Taiwan presidential election might lead to the return of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which routed the governing Kuomintang (KMT) in November's local elections. China is nervous about a DPP victory, since cross-strait relations under Mr. Ma have actually seen Taiwanese identify themselves as less Chinese. Although the DPP is saying that they favor "maintain the status quo," China knows that it did not have good relations with a DPP-led government in the late 1990s. Taiwan is also in a dispute over food-safety regulations with Japan after it was discovered that items from Japanese prefectures Gunma, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi, and Chiba, all of which were affected by the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011 found their way into Taiwan. Taiwan has passed a law mandating that a specific place of origin be affixed to Japanese products, something that the Japanese government opposes. Internally, the country is looking into constitutional reforms to better protect women, religious minorities, and homosexuals as well as enhance press freedom. These stand to be submitted to voters in a referendum over the next year.

With Japan, the economy is once again the focal point as it has been for over fifteen years at the NSDA National Tournament. Extempers should remember that deflation – the general falling of prices – is the primary hurdle that the Japanese economy has to overcome. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s program of Abenomics that has tried to use government spending, loose monetary policy, and deregulation to bolster the economy has had mixed results. Abe’s Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) won snap elections in December, which he said was a referendum on his economic platform, but it was somewhat notable that the LDP lost three seats in the Japanese Diet and that the opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) gained eleven seats. Agriculture Minister Koya Nishikawa went down in defeat as well. Still, Abe deemed the election result a victory and his economic program has continued. Still, in February indicators showed that inflation had gone down to 0% and wage gains were not being made in the economy. Japan also has a rising public debt that is 240% of its GDP, so there is a risk that the government will dig itself into a significant fiscal hole by continuing stimulus policies. The Bank of Japan (BOJ) is also incurring the wrath of the LDP for not pursuing more radical quantitative easing programs. BOJ Governor Haruhiko Kuroda reportedly does not get along with Abe and a lack of coordination between both men could inhibit the Japanese economy’s ability to finally escape the economic stagnation that Japan has experienced since 1990. On other issues, Abe has continually flirted with moving Japan’s defense forces beyond self-defense as proscribed in the nation’s constitution. This month Japan held its first international defense trade show and Japanese Defense Minister Gen Nakatani recently stated that Japan would attack South Korea to defend the United States. The problem of expanding the nation’s Self-Defense Forces, though, is economic. Scrapping Article IX of the Japanese Constitution and participating in a wider defense program may strain the Japanese debt. Currently, Japan benefits by having the United States constitute part of its defense in the Pacific so it can be a “free rider” on this assistance. However, the rising power of China has caused hawkish Japanese lawmakers to demand that Japan improve its defense capabilities and Abe has had to wrestle with this. Furthermore, Abe has been fighting with anti-nuclear forces over restarting the nation’s nuclear power plants, which were shut down following the Fukushima disaster. Japan needs nuclear power because it has to import other energy sources such as oil and coal, but concerns after safety for an industry that was once one-third of the nation’s electricity remain. There is also legal uncertainty over the reactors as different local courts are issuing different decisions about whether the reactors can be restarted.

North Korea is up to its old tricks, providing fodder for extempers AGDs with reports of political purges carried out with flamethrowers, anti-aircraft guns (allegedly used to execute Defense Minister Hyon Yong Chol), and mortar rounds. These purges are reportedly meant to solidify the rule of Kim Jong-un and are typical of communist dictatorships. The rogue state is reportedly turning to human trafficking to acquire much needed foreign exchange (although the country also has a fondness for counterfeiting the American dollar). The country is also engaged in weapons trading and drugs as a way to fund its activities. Human rights are a big issue for North Korea and extempers should be prepared to talk about it. North Korean workers are subjected to dangerous conditions and much of the fruit of their labor goes to the central government. The families of political prisoners are either brutally executed or imprisoned in concentration camps. The biggest international concern with North Korea is its drive for an intercontinental missile that can carry a nuclear warhead. Experts agree that North Korea has nuclear capability and the prospect of North Korea using such weapons against South Korea and Japan is on the minds of policymakers daily. The United States has expressed a willingness to re-engage North Korea in talks about its nuclear program, although Secretary of State John Kerry recently blasted North Korea for doing very little to rein in its nuclear program. The reason it is hard to put a great deal of pressure on North Korea is China, which functions as a supporter of the Kim regime. China fears that an implosion of the North Korea state could lead to refugee flows over its borders, further straining governmental services and possibly fueling ethnic unrest in areas near the Korean border. Extempers should be prepared, though, to discuss whether the progress made this year on Iran’s nuclear program could translate over to North Korea’s.

Finally, South Korea has been hard at work cultivating trade relationships with other parts of the world, notably India, Peru, and the United States. South Korean President Park Geun-hye, the nation's first female president that was elected in 2012, has a desire to increase South Korea exports and has stated that South Korea should become part of the Trans-Pacific Partnership. At home, Geun-hye has also pushed for an expansion of the welfare state, while also calling for fiscal responsibility via pay-go rules to reduce debt. Much like Japan, South Korea faces the problem of an aging society and needs to have funds available for healthcare and those who have retired from the workforce. Last month, South Korea was rocked by a bribery scandal that led to the resignation of Prime Minister Lee Wan-koo. In this scandal, Mr. Lee reportedly accepted \$28,000 from a construction company when he ran for office in 2013. This was a blow to Ms. Park who has also had some of her chiefs of staff affected by it. The country also has National Assembly elections scheduled for April and the bribery scandal, continued arguments over the Park government's complicity in failing to respond to the *Sewol* ferry disaster last year, and a perception that she is unable to enact significant policy programs could hurt her conservative Grand National Party (GNP). In terms of North Korea, Ms. Park has warned against that nation's proposed launch of a submarine missile and her critics say she is undermining a possible rapprochement by the two sides.

Strategy

What makes predicting the questions for this round tricky is that East Asia is a very interconnected region of the world. China, Japan, the Koreas, and Taiwan are all tied together through history, economic arrangements, and defense concerns. Therefore, you might see questions about East Asia exist in the "International Relations and Organizations" round later in the tournament. When approaching any of the questions for this topic area, I would suggest putting them in a regional context. Even if you are talking about the Chinese or Japanese economy, something that on its face appears to be a purely domestic issue for those nations, you can link those topics to a larger regional system. For example, a economically less prosperous Japan may feel more threatened by a growing China and this might strengthen the hand of Japanese hawks that want a more aggressive defense posture. Similarly, North Korea's nuclear program might drive South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan to look into their own nuclear deterrents.

As with the Africa round, history should be used to analyze topics in this round as well, especially if you have to discuss Japanese foreign relations. One of the big antagonisms in East Asia is Japan's behavior during the Second World War when it forcibly abducted Korean women as prostitutes for its army and then proceeded to massacre suspected Korean militants and civilians. It later repeated similar atrocities in China and other parts of Southeast Asia. Asian nations still remember this and still demand that Japan make amends for its wartime behavior. However, the Japanese government is still hesitant to do so. The nation's textbooks talk very little of Japan's wartime atrocities and prime ministers such as Junichiro Koizumi and Abe have visited Yasukuni Shrine and other wartime monuments. Yasukuni is a contentious place because the names of over 1,000 war criminals are listed there, so when Japanese statesmen visit they give the impression that they are paying tribute to those who have committed heinous crimes against Japan's neighbors. Historical animosity has clouded Japan's ties to China as well as its ties to South Korea, which is why the nations do not have a formal alliance between them even though they are staunch allies of the United States. Explaining this animosity can make your speeches memorable by illustrating for your judges how concerns in East Asia transcend the modern world and date back several generations.

It would be wise to memorize the names of all of the leaders of the nations in this topic area. You are going to have to talk about at least one of these nations, so get used to saying the name of their respective leaders and go to the Voice of America pronunciation guide if you have to. Great sources to get for this region include *The Taipei Times*, *The Japan Times*, *The South China Morning Post*, *The Asia Times*, *The*

Korean Herald, and *The Yomiuri Shinbun* (a Japanese newspaper that is really fun to pronounce and judges tend to remember it). Keep in mind that China does not have a free press, so its state news arm Xinhua will reflect government attitudes. However, even biased sources can be of use because if these sources are critical of a government policy that can show signs of internal dissent. Also, they can be great for assessing how an authoritarian government justifies its actions and how they portray nations they are allies with and nations that they disagree with. Other sources that are worth examining include the Center for Strategic and International Studies, *The Diplomat*, *Foreign Affairs*, the Council on Foreign Relations, the East Asian Institute, and the European Institute for Asian Studies.

Practice Questions

1. Will Xi Jinping's anti-corruption drive produce benefits for the Chinese economy?
2. How can Park Geun-hye revitalize her presidency?
3. Has Ma Ying-jeou failed to draw Taiwan closer to mainland China?
4. How can East Asian nations best deal with their ageing populations?
5. Can Japan afford a more robust military?

Topic Area #3: Crises and Natural Disasters of 2015

Issues

This is one of the broader topic areas in the tournament, one that is not defined by geographic proximity but instead by theme. What will fit into this topic area aside from actual natural disasters is anyone's guess since "crises" can be broad and encompass humanitarian efforts focused on refugees, healthcare, and famine relief. Crises could also touch on political, social, or economic crises in existing nations. International efforts to contain terrorism or the spread of weapons of mass destruction could also conceivably fit into this area. In some ways, this topic area might be a "catch all" for questions that did not make the cut for the other topic areas but fit within the "crises" theme. Extempers should be prepared for anything in this round and if you are well-read on the conflict zones of the world such as Syria, Libya, Sudan, Nigeria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Iraq you can likely get out of this round unscathed.

With natural disasters, the big issue is of course the recent Nepal earthquake that struck on April 25. The 7.8-magnitude quake killed more than 8,000 people and its aftershocks continue to trouble relief efforts in one of the world's poorest countries. Although seismologists knew that Nepal would be hit by a major earthquake, political deadlock in that nation prevented governmental authorities from creating a disaster plan. As a result, many Nepalis still do not have tarps and food. Furthermore, international aid efforts have become complicated because of politics as Nepal is closely aligned with China and has shown some reluctance to accept assistance from Taiwan and Great Britain. The other major disaster of 2015 has been Cyclone Pam, a category five severe tropical cyclone that slammed into islands in the South Pacific in March 2015. The storm displaced residents on the Solomon Islands and created water shortages on other smaller islands. The international community also pledged millions of assistance for areas that were most affected by the storm such as Vanuatu, but it took weeks for effective aid to arrive due to the logistical challenges of finding useable airstrips and ports. Southeast Asian nations such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand were also affected by monsoons that lasted from December 2014 to January 2015 and forced the relocation of more than a million people. The rains created flooding, landslides, and significant property damage. Keep in mind that some natural phenomenon can have positive effects. For example, Cyclone Niklas in March 2015 in Western and Central Europe brought record renewable energy production to Germany and Austria as it bolstered wind power (the storm did create an estimated one to billion euros worth of damage, though). Also, even though this is an International Extemp round, a U.S.-

centric question concerning the California drought might find work its way into this round. One might scoff at this suggestion, but the event is called International Extemp and not non-U.S. Extemp.

Keep in mind that this is the likely round where questions about climate change can arise. In disasters such as the monsoons that hit Southeast Asia and the intensity of Cyclone Pam, climate change has been cited as a culprit for making natural phenomenon less predictable and/or more intense. Furthermore, predictions about rising ocean levels threaten island nations in the South Pacific or smaller nations in coastal areas such as Bangladesh. Paris, France will play host to an international climate summit from November 30-December 11, 2015 and Germany and France have stated that their intent is to use the summit to secure a binding climate agreement to succeed the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. These nations have also said they would like for a global carbon trading system to be established that would parallel what the European Union enacted during the 2000s. However, climate accords have had difficulty because of disputes between industrialized and industrializing nations related to emissions targets. Remember that if you have to talk about climate change that you want to mention that two degrees Celsius brightline that climate change scientists argue is important not to broach. These people warn that going two degrees Celsius in average global temperature above pre-industrialization levels would be harmful for the world's people and its species.

One of the "crises" that could work its way into this round concerns public health. As explained in the Africa section of this topic area analysis, Ebola constituted a significant international health crisis during 2014-2015. Additionally, the world is making progress in slowing the growth of HIV/AIDS, especially in Africa, and there are hopes that an HIV vaccine could become possible within the next ten years. However, public health advocates warn that government policies that shun the homosexual community, sexual education, and funding for research and development may inhibit progress. The international community also faces threats of drug resistant diseases spreading such as tuberculosis, showing that more effective public health programs are needed in poorer nations to make sure that people use medications appropriately. Still, immunization programs are growing in the developing world, with the World Health Organization estimating that two to three million lives are saved every year from immunizations. Even the conservative Taliban of Afghanistan has supported immunization programs.

Another "crises" that warrants attention is the plight of refugees and migrants. Europe has been forced to improve funding for its Mediterranean border mission called Triton in an effort to locate migrants trying to make the perilous journey from Libya to Sicily and other parts of Southern Europe. In addition, Australia and other Southeast Asian governments such as Thailand and Indonesia have taken to casting migrant boats back out to sea rather than letting poorer peoples from Myanmar and Bangladesh land and seek asylum for political or religious reasons. The United Nations has been blasting nations over their treatment of migrants for the last several months, but nations justify their treatment of migrants by saying that they do not have the public resources to care for them. Migrants are quite desperate, fleeing nations that are poor or politically unstable. Although they know they could die in the Mediterranean or Indian Ocean they know that if they make it to a richer area that their lives will significantly improve. However, richer nations cannot take in everyone and the growth of the far-right makes it difficult for European governments near the Mediterranean to be accommodating (the same can be said of conservative governments in Southeast Asia), so this has produced international tension between national governments and international organizations. Migrants are also coming from areas of the Middle East that have been devastated by conflict. Refugees from Syria and Iraq are part of those trying to enter the European Union (EU) through Turkey and Bulgaria. Failing that, others are in camps in Lebanon and the Lebanese government is relying on international aid to care for them. However, funding shortfalls continue to exist and the Lebanese government has been criticized for not helping migrants find jobs. Migrants have also encountered hostility in Kenya, where the government flirted with the idea of closing the Dadaab refugee camp for Somalis after the Somali-based al-Shabab terrorist group massacred Christians. For migrant

workers that are able to secure work, they also face xenophobic attacks in places such as South Africa. Therefore, the migrant issue is a significant humanitarian crisis and is arguably the most important issue in this topic area.

Food crises are another part of this topic area and South Sudan is where this problem is becoming acute. The United Nations is warning that due to the conflict in that country farmers have been displaced. Furthermore, fighting between groups is forcing NGOs such as the International Committee of the Red Cross to halt some of its activities, which include food distribution. There are also concerns that Southern African countries are facing food deficits, with twelve of fourteen South African nations being forced to import food from other nations for their needs. Notably, Zimbabwean Agriculture Minister Joseph Made has come under fire over a poor harvest that will force the country to spend \$200 million on food imports. One of the problems for developing nations, notably in Africa and Southeast Asia, is that the construction of new urban centers is taking away fertile agricultural land. Also, foreign governments such as China are buying farmland for their own use, which deprive governments of these assets. South Africa has already moved to restrict foreign ownership of farmland although it has yet to seize farmland owned by its prosperous white majority. Doing so might prove harmful as Zimbabwe's agricultural output nosedived after it seized white-owned farmland in the early 2000s. Some economists speculate that the global food system needs a complete redesign as a natural disaster, production shortfall, or transportation disruption could trigger harmful consequences. The world's food system relies on readily available supplies transported in days to supermarkets and other city centers, but if this system breaks down as it is prone to do in significant disasters all across the world (e.g. Hurricane Katrina in 2005 in New Orleans), then significant problems can arise.

Since there is not a human rights topic area this year, you may see some of those issues placed into this round. This could include discussions of women's rights such as how to politically and economically empower women in the developing world, how to expand abortion rights, and how to avoid violence against women in conflict zones or in societies in general. India has had to wrestle with the latter problem over the last several years and its record on improving the issues remains mixed. Additionally, Boko Haram and the Islamic State's brutal treatment of women, notably those who share beliefs that differ from their agendas, has been well-documented. There is also the question of female education in the developing world. The UN is looking into new sustainable development goals (SDGs) that can be publicized next year and will focus on this issue.

Strategy

In preparing for this round, I would highly recommend going to the websites of relief organizations such as Doctors Without Borders, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the International Organization for Migration cutting their press releases. Furthermore, UNICEF, the United Nations humanitarian organization that fights for children's rights and coordinates emergency relief, and the World Food Program can be great assets for this round. All of these sites will provide you with adequate overviews of the activities of intergovernmental and non-government organizations (NGOs) in crises areas and also provide you with statistics that you can use in a round to persuade your audience. In fact, it may be worthwhile to commit to memory the number of people that are estimated to be lacking proper shelter, healthcare, and/or nutrition in conflict zones. If you see a graph or any statistical tables concerning humanitarian issues, I highly suggest cutting it and making sure that you place it in a prominent place in your file box for this round. The International Crisis Group would also be an important source for this topic area as its reports tend to provide excellent overviews of global conflict zones. They also provide details plans to solve those conflicts, which can greatly assist extempers when they seek to answer "How" and "What" questions.

Keep in mind that this round will be full of emotional appeals. You still need to argue your position with evidence, but this is not the round to crack jokes or use a cute canned introduction. Doing so would be inappropriate and insulting. Instead, you want to have a more dire tone in this round, explain how these crises have developed, and provide a great summary about the human toll that natural disasters and crises are exacting on the world. More than any other topic area of the tournament, this is where you should remember that you are talking about *real people*. Dylan Adelman, last year's International Extemp final round winner, wrote a strategy piece about empathy in extemp that I would consult as you prepare for this round. Do not let your analysis solely exist at the governmental, political level. Instead, make micro impacts where you use examples of people struggling to cope with these disasters and even quotations from your sources from people affected by the issue you are talking about. These are easy to find near the bottom of news articles. Just make sure that your emotional appeal does not go overboard, though. You should not cry as this is not dramatic interpretation, but you should make it clear to your audience that you are really bothered by some of the issues you have to address in this round.

Practice Questions

1. What steps should Nepal take to better facilitate the delivery of aid to its people after the April 25 earthquake?
2. How can a famine in South Sudan be avoided?
3. Should European governments follow the Australian model for dealing with migrants?
4. How can governments improve their disaster planning?
5. Has the international community failed Syria's refugees?

Topic Area #4: Economic Concerns

Issues

Last year, the NSDA National Tournament had a topic area called "Worldwide Economic Health." This year it is called "Economic concerns," which has a more dire tone but it is somewhat directional. For this area you can expect to discuss problems about the global economy, regional economies, and possibly the troubled economies of individual nation-states.

Globally, the world is facing anemic growth with a recent 1.1% growth rate for the first quarter of 2015 constituting the weakest number since 1998. This low number is attributable to disappointing growth in the United States, Japan's continued problems with deflation, slowing growth in China, and deflationary concerns in the eurozone. Numbers have been so dismal that projections have had to be lowered, with the UN recently saying that the world economy will grow 2.8% instead of 3.1% this year. The UN argues that questions about what the United States will do about interest rates, which could lead to a flow of money out of emerging nations from investors that seek higher interest rates of return; the Greek debt crisis; and the economic damage done by conflicts in Yemen, Syria, and Ukraine could create more global economic instability this year. Questions about the global economy will also focus on the economic balance of power in the international community. For example, will China's economic growth continue and eventually outstrip the United States? Are the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) continuing to constitute the "fragile five," especially now that commodities prices are going down? The fall of global oil prices has changed global economic calculations significantly this year with oil-rich states losing billions of dollars and lower oil prices have created lower-than-expected inflationary pressures in oil-importing nations. Of course, a larger outbreak of violence in the Middle East could propel oil prices back up to over \$100 a barrel. In fact, the unpredictability of the global oil market has some economists worried about how that could affect global consumption patterns over the next few months and potentially hurt global economic growth. Low oil prices have also caused some governments

and their populations to lose some of their passion for renewable energy resources (e.g. American consumers are actually showing a greater interest in again in SUVs).

A topic that consistently emerges during a global economic round is trade. Although the economic problems of the last several years have lowered the appetite of some nations to engage in free trade, there is still a drive for more free trade accords. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TTP) is not solely an American economic issue as it has the potential to bolster Japan's economy, significantly improve overregulated sectors of the Vietnamese economy, and create a regional trade block that could counter China's designs for larger free trade bodies in Asia including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) + 6. ASEAN + 6 would include all of the members of ASEAN, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and India. China is also interested in a free trade accord that would revitalize the old Silk Road trading routes, forming free trade zone that would link major Asian cities such as Beijing, Istanbul, and Tehran with Moscow. There are also discussions between the United States and the European Union about forming a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Extempers should become familiar with justifications for free trade, namely that they allow countries to specialize in producing what they are good at, break down barriers of inefficiency because old trade barriers are reduced that protected ill-equipped industries, create lower costs for consumers through the lowering of trade barriers, and provide more incentives for innovation. However, there are arguments against free trade as well, namely that it leads to job losses, hurts the manufacturing capabilities of developed nations, gives corporations more legal power, and is not "fair trade" since nations with stringent labor and environmental protections can attract companies that are bound by these laws in their host nations. The debate over free and fair trade has continued to complicate the globalization debate since the Cold War ended with some economists such as Joseph Stiglitz, a one-time antagonist of pro-globalization forces, switching sides. The World Trade Organization (WTO) is still hoping that it can conclude the Doha trade round, a process that began in 2001 with the hopes of further reducing global trade barriers for all WTO members. However, this process has run into problems because agricultural interests in developed countries such as the United States and Japan are worried about losing their subsidies and developing nations want to protect their manufacturing and service sectors from competition. Furthermore, the WTO is still waiting on two-thirds of WTO members to ratify the Bali Package agreed to in December 2013 that tries to streamline customs procedures among member states.

Regional economic challenges may exist in this round as well as in rounds on a respective geographic area, so be prepared to "double dip" your analysis at the tournament. As has been indicated about Africa, countries in the region still dream of creating a viable economic union that would resemble the EU, but rivalries between nation-states, as well as suspect monetary policies by some countries such as Zimbabwe have made dreams of a common African currency a pipedream. Still, African nations need to invest more in infrastructure, need to improve their records regarding property rights protection, need to clean up corruption, cut unnecessary bureaucracy, and need to shore up their political stability. Foreign investors are less likely to park their money in a country where it could be seized or where a sitting government can be overthrown by rebels or a military general. African governments also need to fight the "brain drain" of losing their most educated and talented workers to other parts of the world where they can earn more money and live a more stable life.

Asian nations are grappling with aging populations, notably Japan and South Korea. These nations will have to balance fiscal priorities as they try to deal with this and Japan is reluctant to allow immigration, something it may have to change its mind on as the nation needs a younger workforce. This is where policies that provide better childcare and opportunities for Japanese women may help the government because currently Japanese are not having enough children to replace themselves. China's ageing population also constitutes a challenge as it competes for geopolitical supremacy in Asia with India since India has a younger population. Part of this demographic challenge is due to China's "one child" policy,

a policy that has also distorted the male-to-female ratio in the country as families have aborted female fetuses to have a male child. China is also dealing with a slowing economy and interest rate cuts there show that financial authorities are worried that investment is slowing down. Regionally, a Chinese economic slowdown could have significant effects as it would lead to reduced demand for exports from Japan and Taiwan. Asia is one of the world's biggest emerging markets but it still has more than 700 million people living in poverty and this constitutes 65% of the world's poor. Nations are grappling with income inequality as the benefits of industrialization have benefitted a select few, usually the political well connected, and this could later lead to social protests. Those who have taken an AP history course can easily see how this situation parallels European industrialization in the nineteenth century and American industrialization during the Gilded Age. The region is also attempting to economically diversify as countries from Thailand to Malaysia are trying to find a way to protect themselves from global downturns.

A big theme in Europe during the 2014-2015 season was somewhat anemic growth and fears of deflation sweeping the continent. However, recent indicators show that the eurozone experienced more growth than the U.S. and Great Britain although this was still anemic at 0.4%. European governments have struggled since the 2008 financial crisis and Greece's ongoing problems with the eurozone. Throw in the possibility of a British exit from the EU in 2017 and things are still not looking better. This round if it chooses to focus on regional issues will likely toss you questions about how the European Central Bank (ECB) can continue to accelerate economic growth on the continent and how governments, namely France, Italy, and Spain, can continue to deregulate to bolster employment and entrepreneurship. Many European governments made it difficult to fire workers once they are hired, so this causes firms to hire temporary workers or avoid hiring altogether, thereby putting a strain on European social safety nets. Austerity policies have been demanded by Germany to put eurozone governments respective deficits under 3% of GDP, required under EU agreements. However, austerity has created backlashes in Spain, France, Italy, and other parts of the eurozone. The election of SYRIZA in Greece this year was due to anger over the EU's austerity dictates. The victory of the Conservative Party in Great Britain, though, might be a way for austerity advocates to double down on their position and have faith that they can be rewarded at the ballot box. One of the glaring problems of the eurozone is that national governments no longer have control of their currencies and creating a monetary policy that works for all of the nations that use the euro is difficult. For example, Greece, Italy, and other beleaguered nations would prefer to devalue the currency so that they can make some of their exports more competitive. Like Asia, Europe is also getting older and governments also need austerity to keep their social welfare programs afloat. The influx of workers from Eastern Europe and developing nations is increasing tensions in European communities as well, bolstering parts of the far-right that wish for more immigration controls and are skeptical of the EU.

Latin America is a region that saw some of its best years near the end of the last decade, benefitting from high commodity prices. For example, high oil prices benefitted Brazil and Venezuela, while high copper prices bolstered the economic fortunes of Chile. Now, though, the region is facing reduced economic output as commodity prices have tumbled and importing nations in more developed parts of the world have been able to keep their wealth. A problem for many Latin American governments is that they do not save when times are good, creating significant hardship when a "boom period" ends. Venezuela is a case in point as its economy could contract by 7% this year and it is quickly running out of foreign exchange. In an attempt to slow imports, the government has taken to enacting trade controls, but this, along with the expropriation of businesses that refuse to sell goods at prices that the government thinks are sufficient, is producing shortages of medicine, foodstuffs, and other basic consumer items. Brazil is currently rocked by a corruption scandal involving Petrobras, the state-owned oil company, and this creates more doubt among foreign investors about whether Latin American governments have overcome their corrupt ways. The Brazilian economy is also facing significant inflation that its monetary officials are trying to

bring under control but doing so through high interest rates may contract economic activity further. Questions about Latin America will likely require you to discuss the impact of commodity prices on the region and/or the accumulating levels of public debt that the region's governments are taking on. The debt question is significant because this may require Latin American governments to impose harsh austerity and create conflicts with urban workers, the poor, and indigenous groups that benefitted from social programs funded by the booming wealth of a few years ago. And this last point matters because income inequality is still a big problem for the region with indigenous peoples still lagging behind those of Spanish descent. This inequality has triggered coups and empowered populists such as Hugo Chavez in the past so Latin American governments need to tread lightly when handling this economic problem.

The Middle East has been affected significantly by the global downturn in oil where the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) appears to have control of global oil prices. Countries such as Iran have been hurt by the falling oil price and OPEC has been divided between countries such as Iran and Venezuela that want to sizably reduce OPEC's output and Saudi Arabia, which believes that OPEC will benefit long-term because low prices will bankrupt Western located oil interests that operate on thin profit margins. Unsurprisingly, threats of terrorism and civil unrest have kept investors away from the Middle East for decades and that continued in 2014-2015 as the Syrian civil war continued, sectarian violence flared in Yemen, and the Islamic State continued to terrorize Iraq. The region is also criticized for failing to reduce regulations that make it difficult to start a business and harming the ability of existing businesses to expand. Additionally, women face economic barriers to starting a business in the region despite the fact that the region has seen significant progress with female education since the 1970s. Unfortunately, many educated women are unemployed and this is not a female-centric problem. Educated men are also unemployed and this threatens the stability of governments in the region that have a young population that cannot find work. These pressures are arguably one of the reasons that Iran reached an interim deal with Western nations over its nuclear program because the pain of sanctions was making this situation worse.

If the question writers choose to get nation-specific in this topic area then be prepared to talk about some of the world's ailing economies. Greece, Russia, Spain, Japan (see the discussion of Abenomics in topic area #2 above), and South Africa are excellent candidates here.

Strategy

As Lily Nellans recommended in her NCFL topic area analysis, economic rounds can be intimidating, but you need to focus on boiling the concepts you are talking about into words that people can understand. Make sure that you explain for your audience what inflation and deflation are and why they matter, what monetary policy or fiscal policy is, what "austerity" is, and what you mean by "free trade" or "fair trade" if you get questions about these subjects. See yourself as a teacher and not merely as someone who is reciting facts about the economy. This will make your speech more accessible, while also showing your audience that you really do understand economic concepts. Also, make sure not to turn this round into a "data dump" round. Yes, it is important to have statistics for economic speeches, but over the last fifteen years in this activity I have seen speakers toss in a statistic every two to three sentences and the worst part is that they never bothered to impact those statistics and explain why they matter. Therefore, when you do cite statistics make sure that you communicate what they mean and why they are significant and do not assume that your audience will automatically know that a 25% unemployment rate is bad.

Like the natural disaster round, it would not hurt to bring in some discussion of how global, regional, and/or nation-specific policies affect real people. When a government policy causes a shortage of a good, when a regional conflict disrupts supply chains, or when a trade accord cause job loss, real people are hurt by these decisions. However, extempers usually focus their attention on the macro-level, choosing to

discuss policies in the abstract or how they may affect a nation's politics. I would challenge you to expand your horizons in this round. After all, you are talking about economic challenges, so put a human face on the issue you are talking about. This will help to differentiate you from other speakers in the round who will likely not pursue such a strategy and using a quotation or example that has a human dimension may make your speech more memorable than it otherwise would have been.

It is also good to remember that economic problems are interconnected with political and social issues. For example, rising poverty in a nation may be due to historical factors and social discrimination. In turn, this rising poverty could create political instability as people abandon conventional politics and seek out more radical alternatives. People can even turn to drug cultivation, crime, and other behaviors that might be more lucrative than staying within a formal economic structure. In addition, a poor economic situation in one country can have impacts elsewhere. For example, an increase in interest rates in the United States may divert investment from the developing world, thereby depriving those nations of funding for much needed infrastructure projects. Also, a Chinese economic slowdown might make the world's economy worse because China has accounted for the decline of American and European markets after the 2008 financial crisis. Therefore, it is okay to bring in other regions of the world with your analysis and even other countries that are not listed in your question. This will make your impact story more detailed and global, something that astute judges of International Extemp will reward you for doing.

Standard economic-oriented sources such as *The Economist*, *The Financial Times of London*, and *Business Week* will be useful for this round. I would highly suggest cutting data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and World Trade Organization's (WTO) websites as this will give you credible information about the health of the global economy. The press releases of regional blocks such as the EU, Mercosur, the African Union, ASEAN would probably be helpful as well. I would highly suggested downloading the 2015 Index of Economic Freedom, a publication created by *The Wall Street Journal* and the Heritage Foundation. This assesses the level of freedom found in each of the world's economies and provides fantastic information about property rights, transparency, and the level of bureaucracy of a specific nation. Having this source in your files would help for other topic areas as well if those happen to include economic issues.

Overall, this is the perfect round where the "keep it simple stupid" mantra applies. Look past the numbers, policy initiatives, and terminology and think about the big message you want to communicate. Focus on that message, use your evidence intelligently, avoid an excessive use of statistics to cover any deficient knowledge you have about economics and if you do all of these things well then you can get out of this round unscathed.

Practice Questions

1. Can more liberal trade policies revitalize the global economy?
2. What is wrong with the BRICS?
3. How can Latin American governments better combat income inequality?
4. Would female empowerment significantly improve the economies of developing nations?
5. How can African nations live up to their economic potential?

Topic Area #5: India, Pakistan, and Southeast Asia

Issues

This year there is not an "Oceania" component on this topic area, but I would still advise extempers to cut information about Australia as that country might still find its way into this round. This has always been

a difficult round for extempers at the national tournament. Most find that talking about India and Pakistan is relatively easy, as those countries receive more than their fair share of coverage in various periodicals. However, extempers are less familiar with the politics and cultural histories of other Southeast Asian nations such as Burma, Nepal, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. If this describes your plight relax because most of your judges have no idea what goes on in these places either. That said, Southeast Asia is a very interesting place that is primed for a breakout on the world stage if it can overcome lingering historical animosities and sectarian tensions.

In India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is wrapping up his first year in office. Modi has made it a goal to broaden India's influence in South Asia, which has put the nation on a collision course with China. The United Nations expects that by the end of next year India's economic growth will surpass China, but the country still has problems with infrastructure that it must solve to better facilitate trade and provide adequate water, sewage, and energy to its population. Also, Modi has not taken an adversarial relationship with China, with Modi making a recent visit and both nations seeking to clarify a border dispute and work towards establishing an economic corridor. Aside from Modi's administration, India is still grappling with problems in Kashmir, its only Muslim-majority state. Kashmiri separatists have traditionally given the Indian government problems and also caused India to become embroiled in conflicts with Pakistan. Questions in this round may also speak to religious tensions in India between its Hindu majority and Muslim minority. The governing BJP is known for its Hindu nationalism, although Modi has tempered this rhetoric during his first year in office. Still, Indian states aligned with the BJP have passed laws this year to ban beef consumption and this threatens Muslim communities that specialize in this trade. In addition, India is still wrestling with greater women's rights. Attacks on women drew significant international condemnation of the country last year. The Indian government is now seeking to recruit women for its armed forces, but women's advocates say that the government must do more to help women pursue options for family planning. India still has a very high maternal mortality rate and it is estimated that 120 Indian women die each day due to pregnancy-related problems. Fixing some of these pressing social problems might be difficult for the BJP, though, because it is a socially conservative party and Modi's attempts to move to the center may alienate his base. In addition, the BJP's emphasis on restoring Indian economic growth, preferring policies that help private business, will produce less social spending and this may widen income inequality in the country. Finally, India still has problems with the caste system, although it has used affirmative action policies over the last several decades to help lower-caste groups in education and employment.

When extempers usually have to talk about Pakistan the dominant issues are terrorism, conflicts with India, and political unrest. 2014-2015 saw all of these trends continue. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who assumed office in June 2013, survived political protests against his government in August that were led by Islamic cleric Tahirul Qadri and cricket player Imran Khan. Critics allege that Sharif is running a corrupt government and that he uses government patronage to enrich his relatives. In addition, they have questioned electoral returns from the 2013 election and an electoral tribunal has ordered the re-running of polls in Lahore and this could change some of the power within the Pakistani government. Extempers should also recognize that violent attacks by radical Islamists in recent years have constrained the political maneuvering of more moderate Islamic parties, creating a unfortunate situation where Muslims feel pressured to vote for radical candidates to protect their faith. Sharif has made improving the Pakistani economy a priority and he reached an agreement in 2013 with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to privatize state-owned companies and balance the government's budget. Extempers should note that Pakistan's credit rating has improved under Sharif and that the economy is growing at more than 4%, although the economy is still wrestling with poor services, inefficiencies that create frequent energy blackouts, and the government still has to deal with the cost of energy and food subsidy programs. Very early in the season, Sharif announced his "Pakistan Vision 2025" plan that calls for increasing the value of exports to \$150 billion by 2025, instituting bureaucratic reforms to make the nation more efficient,

improving education, and modernizing infrastructure. Of course, Pakistan has major problems with border regions near Afghanistan and India and the fact that Pakistan and India have nuclear weapons makes its dispute over Kashmir quite dangerous. This year has not seen a breakthrough with India, with Sharif saying in November that India was showing no signs of compromise on the issue, but he has brokered an agreement with Afghanistan to improve trade, construct a Trans-Afghan Pipeline, and enhance border security. Pakistan has also agreed to train Afghan intelligence forces and it could become a vital tool of brokering a peace agreement between the Taliban and Afghanistan. Remember, Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) created the Taliban. Currently, the Pakistani government is launching air strikes in its Federally Administered Tribal Areas along the Afghan border, but critics say that it still not doing enough to keep militants out of Afghanistan. Pakistan has also continued to face sectarian violence between the country's Muslims and its Christian minority. Thus, more than any country in the region Pakistan is teetering between the foundation for a successful future and continued struggles with radical Islamists and its other neighbors that could inhibit growth.

If Australia finds its way into this topic area then you can expect to see questions about its migrant detention policies to thwart poorer peoples from surrounding Southeast Asian nations from landing on its shores. In fact, Prime Minister Tony Abbott has suggested that European nations need to follow the Australian model. Abbott fended off a challenge to his leadership this year within the Liberal Party, so his political position is still not secure. Australia also dealt a blow to climate change activists by scrapping its carbon legislation. The country has also had uneasy relations with Indonesia after Indonesia executed two Australian nationals in late April for their involvement in a drug smuggling operation. Abbott is also tasked with creating a budget that will pass the Australian parliament. His 2014 budget was rejected and this nearly led to his ouster. Critics of Abbott's government argue that his push for taking away family tax benefits and changing the indexing of pensions are "unfair" and will hurt poorer Australians. Questions about Abbott's leadership and/or the nation's ties with other Southeast Asian nations could enter this round.

Other hot topics for the region include political unrest in Bangladesh and Thailand. In late April Bangladesh defied protests from the international community in executing Mohammad Kamaruzzaman, a high official for the country's largest Islamist political party Jamaat-e-Islami. Kamaruzzaman was convicted and sentenced by an International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) – which does not have international recognition by the way – that investigated war crimes committed during the country's war for independence from Pakistan in the 1970s. The execution is bound to raise political tensions in a country that has long been divided between the "battling ladies" or "battling begums" of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of the secular Awami League (AL) and Khaleda Zia of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, a Muslim nationalist entity. Some analysts worry that Bangladesh could become another Pakistan where sectarian conflict inhibits national economic growth. Thailand witnessed a coup last year and its current military government has squelched dissent. Former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, sister of controversial former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, is going to be put on trial for criminal negligence for sponsoring a rice subsidy scheme that paid rural Thais twice the market rate for their crops. Thailand is divided between "red shirts" that back the Shinawatras and want more social programs for the poor and "yellow shirts" that favor richer Thais and the country's monarchy. To squelch political unrest, the military seized power last year, but it says elections may not be held until August 2016 because a new constitution has to be ratified. This violates the military's pledge last year to hold elections within twelve months. There are worrying signs that the military might be staying around for an extended period of time, with Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha obtaining authority to govern by decree. Furthermore, a draft constitution seeks to reserve 123 of 200 Senate seats for the military and candidates for the other 77 seats would be vetted. A proposed National Ethics Assembly would look over the lower house of parliament and it could remove politicians for "moral" and "ethical" reasons. Critics say that the military is rolling back Thai democracy and this is a significant threat to the country's future.

Although the region's migrant crisis might end up with the "Crises and Natural Disasters of 2015" round, extempers should be well-read on how migrants from Burma and Bangladesh are fleeing to richer Southeast Asian nations such as Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia and being refused entry. Other topics of concern for Southeast Asia include Indonesian President Jokowi seeking a more "muscular" foreign policy, cracking down on piracy, showing a willingness to strike down Indonesia's barriers to foreign trade, listen to West Papuan independence advocates, and lifting subsidies on food and fuel (which have provoked social protest). Burma (also known as Myanmar) has made some efforts to reach ceasefires with its various ethnic groups, but there are concerns that some ethnic violence is spilling into China. Furthermore, the Rohingya ethnic group that is descended from Arab merchants of the eighth century is fleeing the country and alleging a genocide against them. Observers believe that part of Burma's hostility toward the Rohingya is due to Islamophobia, with Buddhist nationalists warning that "Muslim hordes" are encroaching on Burma. Burma also appeared to be making progress with democracy, but now those efforts appear stalled. There are even doubts that the nation will hold planned elections for October and November and a referendum on changes that the military wrote into the national constitution has not been scheduled. In some ways, Burma might offer a template for what not to do with Cuba as foreign governments thought Burma was opening to democracy, rushed in to invest, but now the government is having second thoughts and it has more wealth at its disposal. Cambodia continues to fight corruption, but it does not have a national election due until 2018 that may pit Prime Minister Hun Sen against Sam Rainsy. Vietnam's communist government stands to benefit if the TTP is approved in the United States and although it is attempting the change the nation's costly and corrupt social-insurance program it is encountering sizable protests by workers. Lastly, Malaysia is seeing a political spat between former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and current Prime Minister Najib Razak, with Mahathir accusing Najib of corruption. The Najib government has also targeted opposition groups with opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim jailed for five years on sodomy charges in February. Ibrahim's conviction was criticized by Human Rights Watch that said that the trial was politically motivated. These political problems could hurt economic development as Malaysian politics have been relatively stable compared with neighboring countries and this has given investors confidence. Najib has also used a colonial-era Sedition Act to silence those who speak out against the government and some observers see Malaysian democracy eroding along similar lines with other countries in the region such as Thailand.

Strategy

Keep in mind that many of the antagonisms of this region date back to the decolonization of this part of the world by European powers. India and Pakistan have waged three wars since they were liberated from British control (and partitioned) in 1947. Bangladesh waging a secessionist war from Pakistan in the 1970s also explains religious divisions in that country between those who wish to still associate their nationalism with the Islamic faith and those that wish to turn a new page and support the country's secular constitution. In addition, Vietnam's communist government is the one put in place following the Vietnam War against French and American forces (it should be noted that Vietnamese call the Vietnam War the "American War"). This year was the fortieth anniversary of the fall of Saigon as well, so that might be something worth talking about as an AGD device if you choose a Vietnam topic area in this round.

Geopolitics matters significantly in this round, especially because India views itself as a rising global power. The country does not have a permanent seat on the UN Security Council and it still lacks sizable influence in international organizations, but continued economic development will make that inevitable in the decades ahead. Chinese encroachments into the South China Sea affect nations in Southeast Asia and have turned previous Chinese allies such as Vietnam against Beijing. Also, the problems of one nation in Southeast Asia can spill over into others as the region's migrant crisis and Burma's fighting against ethnic groups illustrates. Continued unrest in some nations such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Thailand may

hold those nations back economically, allowing nations such as Vietnam and India to prosper and this could create a more prominent regional dynamic between the “haves” and the “have nots.” It would probably be a good idea to get numbers on how many people might be killed in a nuclear exchange between Pakistan and India as well. This might seem morbid, but if you end up talking about the disputes between both nations in this round that would provide you with a powerful impact.

Sources that are good for this area of the world include the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Straits Times of Malaysia*, *The South China Morning Post*, *The Hindu*, *The Asia Times*, *The Jakarta Post*, *The Dauly Jang Urdu* (Pakistan), and *The Bangkok Post*.

Practice Questions

1. Will Yingluck Shinawatra’s trial make it more difficult to re-establish democratic governance in Thailand?
2. Is Burma responsible for the Southeast Asian migrant crisis?
3. How can Nawaz Sharif reduce the appeal of Islamic extremism in Pakistan?
4. Is Bangladesh becoming the new Pakistan?
5. Has Narendra Modi succeeded in improving India’s economic fortunes?

Topic Area #6: International Political Theory and Philosophy

Issues

This is probably the trickiest of the thirteen topic areas because most extempers do not study international relations theory. It reminds me of the 2003 NCFL National Tournament where there was a “religion and philosophy” round. No one wanted to talk about it and we avoided it until finals hit, then the six of us in that round were stuck. Luckily, the round was not that difficult as it used readily accessible philosophies such as realism, neoconservatism, and liberalism to assess global and religious situations. The same situation should play out here.

The two primary international political theories are realism and liberalism. Realists tend to see the world as a place of anarchy and that state actors must impose authority on this system in order for it to work. Realists tend to be suspicious of international institutions and other nations, viewing everyone in the world aside from the nation they inhabit as a threat to their safety and security. This does not mean that realists oppose international agreements, but they are skeptical about giving away too much power or information about themselves under such arrangements as that could threaten state security. Realists also believe in the balance of power and that all other states act rationally in wanting to survive. This need to survive can usurp political and economic convictions, meaning that democratic states can find themselves in alliances with authoritarian regimes to check or constrain the rise of another power. The United States practiced some of this in the Cold War when it was willing to work with military dictatorships in Latin America to suppress the rise of communism. In summary, realists view the world as a dangerous place and nations that have strong political, economic, and military infrastructures are best poised to assert their dominance over others. One could argue that realism is taking place in the Middle East right now as Saudi Arabia and Iran are jostling over influence and the Saudis, Jordanians, and Egyptians, all of which are Sunni powers, are finding common cause with Israel, a nation that they have had historical animosity with. The unifying factor between the three is their survival in a Middle East that could become dominated by a nuclear-armed Iran.

On the other hand, liberals tend to favor international institutions, arguing that they are essential to creating a more peaceful world. Liberals are much more trusting of international bodies than realists and

believe the transparency is the best way to lessen tensions between states. Moreover, liberals are strong supporters of democracy and human rights and tend to follow the democratic peace theory whereby democratic nations are less likely to go to war with each other (it is notable though that Princeton University has found that democratic nations are likely to fight other nations than nations that are governed by dictatorships). Furthermore, liberals also tend to see economic and ideological factors as significant factors in the behavior of nation-states unlike realists that assume state survival is everything. Current debates over the feasibility of the International Criminal Court, the ability to promote democracy and human rights abroad through diplomatic efforts, and the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping forces would be debates that affect the liberal worldview.

Some of the liberal worldview can be found in the theory of institutionalism that argues that international institutions such as the United Nations can help overcome the suspicions that nations have for each other. This is because these organizations force nations to live by a set of rules and continual interactions can create bonds between countries that can be sustained over the long-term. Institutionalists also find that organizations can make the global system run more efficiently. For example, the World Trade Organization (WTO) hopes that reducing global tariff barriers can strengthen the global economy and enrich populations.

American participation in the Iraq war was guided by another theory of international relations, although it is very U.S.-centric, and that is neoconservatism. This described those American such as former Vice President Dick Cheney and former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld who sought to use military force to shape the world in America's image. The idea was that if the United States could take nations such as Iraq that had a history of rogue behavior and turn them into democratic states that the world would become more stable. Unfortunately for its proponents, the Iraq War significantly undermined the neoconservative cause as a lack of post-war planning undermined the ability of the Iraqi state to function and produced the rise of radical groups.

Over the last several decades there has been the rise of a "post-modernist" critique of political systems and global affairs. These post-modernists question the assumptions behind why democracy might be the best form of government or why international institutions such as the United Nations think that they should promote human rights in other nations. Some would argue that existing international bodies such as the UN, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Bank impose Western values on non-Western nations, thereby becoming a "neo-imperial" instrument. Still others that are on the Marxist end of the political spectrum (i.e. communist) find that international bodies further oppress the rights of workers and are in the clutches of an international business class that profits from cheap labor. Feminists have also challenged the scholarship of political and international relations theory, arguing that too much attention has been paid to men and that not enough international efforts have been directed to help the women of the world.

Of course, there are standard political philosophies that might have some bearing on this round. For example, democracy, socialism, nationalism, totalitarianism, Marxism, and Zionism (the call for Jews to have their own homeland in the Middle East) might find a place. Of those ideologies, nationalism is arguably the most relevant as there is rising nationalism in Europe with calls for Scottish and Catalan independence (do not forget about the Scottish referendum earlier in the season and the SNP's performance in the latest British parliamentary elections!) and the rise of the National Front in France and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in Britain. Additionally, you could see questions go back to older theories of pan-Arabism or pan-Africanism to argue that there needs to be more integration of Arab or African peoples in the Middle East/North Africa and the African continent to accomplish geopolitical aims. Nation-centric policies such as China's conception of itself as "the Middle Kingdom" and the center of the world might also be relevant because China's government sees its rise in the modern era as

reclaiming its long lost position in global affairs. Venezuela's "Bolivarian Socialism" that has spread to other countries such as Bolivia could be a target for question writers. The call by Islamic rebels for the return of a caliphate and the growing reach of the Islamic State can be seen within the context of rejecting Western values and even Russia might find something in common with these groups as it also opposes Western liberalism on issues such as gay rights.

Strategy

One of the ways that these rounds can be fun is that you get to take an abstract theory and explain how it fits an existing international issue. Unlike other rounds you get to talk more about the motivations of political actors and how intellectual forces can shape the world. The trick for this round will be able to clearly explain to your audience the theory or idea that you are given (if it is stated in the question). For example, if you have to discuss the issues of feminism in Sweden's attempted feminist foreign policy then you need to clarify what you mean. After all, there are a lot of different conceptions of what feminism is so you want to make it crystal clear how you are interpreting the ideology for your judge.

The other tip for this round is that even though it is theoretical, do not let the philosophy overwhelm the need to provide specific, concrete facts about your topic. For example, if you have to talk about how Zionism is shaping Israeli politics, make sure that you give examples of groups that are using this ideology and then connect it to what is happening Israel. If you devote too much time to just talking about Zionism and never connect it to anything significant then your speech falls short and loses relevance.

To get a handle on various political theories and philosophies, I would highly recommend looking at a college-level textbook for World and European history. Europe was the home of a great number of modern political ideologies, some of which became exported to their colonial lands during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, not all ideologies come from the Western world and understand the role of the "Middle Kingdom" in Chinese affairs and its traditional interactions with other states in the Asian region would be invaluable. Foreign policy journals such as *Foreign Affairs* can also help on this front as can other scholarly journals such as *The Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *The European Journal of International Relations*, *The International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *International Policy Digest*, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, and *World Affairs*.

Practice Questions

1. Has "Bolivarian socialism" failed?
2. What effect is nationalism having on the eurozone?
3. Is Islamic fundamentalism a significant threat to the Western liberal order?
4. Has Sweden's feminist foreign policy been successful?
5. Is democratic promotion in the world's best interest?

Topic Area #7: International Relations and Organizations

Issues

This is a topic area that can swing two ways. First, you may receive questions that are specifically linked to international organizations and institutions such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Criminal Court (ICC), the World Health Organization (WHO), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the

BRICS, and the G-7. And second, you may receive questions that discuss relations between nation-states. In other words, foreign policy questions about a particular nation (e.g. Saudi competition with Iran in the Middle East or Japanese competition with China in East Asia) may be redirected from the other geographic-specific topic areas and relocated here for this round.

Questions about the UN typically ask about what reforms should be made to the Security Council or whether the organization still has significant influence in the world. The Security Council still has five permanent members with veto powers that reflect the outcome of the Second World War. However, this does not account for the growing power of India, nor does it account for a representative from Latin America or Africa. Other prominent industrialized states such as Japan and Germany, which were antagonists during the Second World War, are also ignored. The UN flirted with reform in 2005, but it went nowhere because geopolitical factors complicate Security Council reform. China does not want Japan to have a permanent seat, Pakistan opposes India getting a permanent seat, giving a seat to Germany would only enlarge the body's Eurocentric profile, Argentina and Brazil feud over who should get the Latin American seat, and there are questions about whether the African seat should go to South Africa or Nigeria. UN Secretary Ban Ki-moon has spent a great deal of time this year lecturing other countries about their deficiencies in human rights, blasting European and Southeast Asian governments for not welcoming more migrants, but this could backfire as nationalist forces in those nations do not like being told what to do by an international body. The UN's Human Rights Council (HRC) is also viewed as a joke since Saudi Arabia, a country that has the death penalty and refuses to let women drive, is reportedly interested in leading it. Extempers should realize that although bashing the UN for its shortcomings is easy, it still does a great deal of good. The UN has solicited relief for the Nepali earthquake, is trying to coordinate food relief for South Sudan, is working on a development strategy to improve education and economic outcomes in the developing world, and it publicizes the problems of conflict zones when other media outlets do not have the willingness to do so. Furthermore, the UN was responsible for the creation of Israel in 1948 and it has become entangled in Palestinian claims for statehood since France is seeking a UN Security Council resolution that would set an eighteen-month deadline for a lasting peace agreement between Israeli and Palestinian officials. Also, the UN is seeking to create a sustainability agenda that can replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These so-called Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) seek to improve education, health, and energy outcomes in developing nations, as well as ending global poverty.

International economic institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO have also attempted to create stability for the global economy, but have had to wrestle with the 2008 financial crisis, rising demands for trade protectionism in the developed world, and the eurozone crisis. The IMF is part of the Troika that is dealing with the Greek debt crisis and the Greek government warns that it may not be able to make its payment to the IMF that is due on June 5. The IMF is also in a struggle with Russia over an economic bailout to Ukraine, with Russian President Vladimir Putin contemplating the recall of loans given to the country last year since Ukrainian debt continues to rise. There have calls to reform the IMF's institutions to give more representation to the world's emerging economies, but these proposals have been stalled since 2010. Global economists see reform as important to diversify the IMF's funding operations as well since the 2008 financial crisis harmed Western economies. However, the EU's decision to establish mechanisms to deal with debtor nations via the European Stability Mechanism in 2012 have caused some to question whether the IMF is as important in global financial markets as it used to be. The World Bank recently gave more than \$1 billion in debt relief to Chad to allow that government to concentrate resources on health and education and it has provided billions to Indonesia to help Jokowi's infrastructure programs. However, the World Bank's development strategies have also come under fire with environmental activists suing it for providing funding for coal power plants in northwest India. The WTO is still trying to broker a successful Doha trade round and is awaiting the ratification of the 2013 Bali Package among two-thirds of signatory nations. The WTO is also wrestling with several trade

disputes. It ruled against the U.S. for putting “origin” labels on meat packaging, will hear Japanese complaints about South Korean food import bans, and recently forced China to drop its quota that limited the export of rare earth minerals.

Extempers should be prepared to talk about the future of the World Health Organization (WHO) in this round. The WHO is a UN agency that is tasked with aiding public health. The WHO has done some good work in the past with fighting AIDS/HIV, tuberculosis, smallpox, and other diseases, but its response to the West African Ebola outbreak was criticized as slow. An independent panel found that the WHO did not seek support from other UN officials and that its emergency-response capabilities were poor. For example, the WHO did not try to mobilize other nation’s health resources or create a coherent communications strategy. All of this is concerning because if Ebola had become more of a global problem, the WHO showed that it was somewhat ill-equipped to deal with such a situation. The WHO is also warning countries that they need to do more to fight so-called “superbugs” that are resistant to existing antibiotics.

In terms of other organizations, the ICC could be the site of a Palestinian war crimes lawsuit against Israel for last year’s Operation Protective Edge. The Palestinian acceded to the Rome Statue that allows them to become a member of the ICC in April, but some say this could hinder their cause because it could subject Hamas leaders to prosecution for attacks against civilians in Israel. The ICC may also receive complaints about North Korea’s behavior, with Secretary of State John Kerry saying that Kim Jong-un’s regime could be investigated for crimes against humanity. A similar situation could occur with the Islamic State. The ICC has also thought about taking action against South African leaders if it does not clamp down on xenophobic attacks. Experienced extempers also know that African nations have criticized the ICC as a racist institution since a substantial number of its cases concern African leaders and officials versus other parts of the world. In December, the ICC dropped charges against Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta for lack of evidence, but the trial of former Ivory Coast President Laurent Gbagbo for crimes against humanity will begin in November.

Other questions in this round might concern the future of NATO now that Russia has re-emerged as a threat for Eastern European and Scandinavian countries. The future of the alliance is also in question as European states flirt with the idea of creating their own military through the EU or lower their spending on defense, something that could harm relations with the United States since the U.S. would have to pick up the tab for any European cuts. If you do not run into a BRICS question in the “economic concerns” round then one could emerge here. The G-7 in June will discuss climate change in anticipation of a UN Climate Change Conference in December in Paris. Furthermore, if there be significant changes in the policies of international institutions and policymaking, the G-20 might be the instrument to do so as it is also discussing climate change, food security, women’s rights, and global infrastructure.

If the question writers decide to place the foreign policies of other nations or regions into this topic area then be prepared to talk about the world’s major hot spots. Israeli-Iranian conflict, the Saudi-Iranian rivalry, the struggle for influence between India and Pakistan over Afghanistan, Chinese battles with its neighbors over the South China Sea, and Russia’s antagonisms toward Western Europe could emerge in this topic area and warrant attention.

Strategy

If you discuss supporters and critics of international organizations in your speech for this round, you can look to the international relations theories discussed in topic area number six and use those as well. International institutions still have their critics among conservative and nationalist forces throughout the world that are suspicious of ceding national authority and sovereignty to a global power. They are

opposed by more liberal forces that thing greater global interconnectedness is an inevitability in light of technological advances and that greater international cooperation is what is necessary to fight terrorism, famine, disease, and climate change.

It would also be helpful to look at the history of the prominent international organizations such as the UN, the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO. All of these organizations have experienced internal problems and significant debate about their efficacy and fairness. Remember, the UN was created after the Second World War when nations realized that the League of Nations, an organization created by the Treaty of Versailles that ended the First World War, was a failure at restraining aggressive nations such as Germany, Italy, and Japan. Since the UN has a mixed track record of peacekeeping in Africa and the Middle East, its critics allege that it also has some significant failures, but its supporters say that a “global talking shop” for major issues is still important to lessen tensions.

Additionally, keep in mind that many of the international institutions that you are going to discuss in this round rely greatly on the powers of persuasion. The UN can issue a condemnation of the behavior of certain governments, but its words can often be ignored (e.g. Syria). The UN also lacks an army to enforce its will on non-compliant states and this forces it to rely on the military power of more developed nations in a crisis area, something that can be hard to come by if those nations disagree on a problem (this is true of Sudan where Chinese interests support Omar al-Bashir and the West does not). The ICC can issue arrest warrants for certain war criminals, but if host nations refuse to hand them over then those warrants do not mean much (e.g. Omar al-Bashir in Sudan). Also, keep in mind that developing nations often want international organizations to have more power to account for their lack own lack of political and military influence in the world. In contrast, rising or more established powers are skeptical of the authority of international bodies because that could infringe on their priorities. This is why the U.S. has yet to join the ICC because it does not want its troops subject to the dictates of a foreign tribunal. This power dynamic should find its way into your speeches as it gets to the heart of why debates within international bodies remain so contentious.

As I have recommended elsewhere in this analysis, go to the websites of prominent international organizations and cut their press releases and any specific studies they have done for global problems. For example, where does the IMF think the global economy is headed? What is the WTO’s assessment of the 2013 Bali Package and what are its hopes for the rest of the Doha trade round? Instead of relying on the reports of standard sources such as the BBC, *The Economist*, or *The New York Times*, going directly to the organizations can give your speeches greater analytical power.

Practice Questions

1. What reforms should be made to the UN Security Council?
2. Can the ICC be a constructive player in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute?
3. Should emerging economies have a greater voice in the IMF?
4. Is the UN Human Rights Council a credible international institution?
5. Should the WHO receive a failing grade for its handling of the Ebola crisis?

Topic #8: The Middle East

The 2014-2015 season remained a volatile one for the Middle East. The usual problems of terrorism, war, lack of economic diversification, sectarian divisions, and lack of democratic participation continued and in fact, the region’s situation seemed to grow worse as the season continued. Whereas the Islamic State emerged at the end of last season it continued to expand its influence in Iraq and Syria and won new followers in Nigeria and Libya. It now has more than 10,000 recruits from all parts of the world and the

West and its Middle East allies have struggled to contain it. Also, Yemen became the latest country to fall to become engulfed with sectarian unrest and it is now divided between Shi'ite forces backed by Iran and those fighting with Sunni powers such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

Politically, the region is still reeling from the “Arab Spring” of 2010-2011 (it should be noted that some scholars now call this the “Arab Uprisings”). That conflict toppled the Mubarak regime in Egypt and created the conditions for the Syrian civil war. Egypt is a country likely to be included in this topic area because most of its diplomatic interactions tend to take place in the Middle East instead of Africa. Remember that Egypt has a peace treaty with Israel and the Israeli government has been kind to the government of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who toppled the Muslim Brotherhood government in 2013. Egypt's military has been fighting Islamic militants in the Sinai Peninsula and the courts have sentenced former President Mohamed Morsi to death. If Morsi is executed it could lead to more violent confrontations between the country's military leadership and the Muslim Brotherhood, which the Sisi government has significantly clamped down on since coming to power. In Syria, Bashar al-Assad still clings to power with the backing of Iran, Turkey, and Russia, but the West is trying to get him to step down in the face of Islamic resistance. Assad's position might be weakening after recent reports that Sunni rebels are coming together under the banner of the Army of Conquest after spending the last few years fighting amongst themselves. Saudi Arabia saw political change this year as King Abdullah died in January and was succeeded by his half brother Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud. King Salman has made some significant changes to the Saudi government in recent months by committing the nation to a war in Yemen to restore the government of Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, consolidating power between himself and heirs Crown Prince Mohammad bin Nayef and Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and putting the state oil company Aramco under al Saud leadership for the first time. King Salman has also changed royal succession by removing Muqrin bin Abdulaziz from the chain of power and instead decreeing that a grandson, rather than a son, of Abdulaziz ibn Saud, the founder of the country, would take power (this is the Interior Minister Mohammed bin Nayef). King Salman has also shown that he doubts that America will commit itself to Saudi objectives in the region. This has caused some to speculate that Saudi Arabia might pursue its own nuclear deterrent if Iran gets nuclear capabilities. In Turkey, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has stood accused of trying to weaken the country's secular institutions and clamping down on the democratic process. Turkey will have parliamentary elections on June 7 and Erdogan wants his Justice and Development Party (AKP) to win a supermajority of the 550-seat national assembly to rewrite the constitution and make Turkey a more presidential-centric rather than parliamentary-centric system. Watchdogs allege that Erdogan is clamping down on press freedom and eroding checks and balances in the Turkish government to accomplish his goals. Voters there are also sensing that the government is becoming more corrupt and that transparency reforms that Turkey once enacted for possible EU membership are eroding. Erdogan has also cracked down on supporters of the Gulen movement, which is a group that has criticized Turkish authorities, and Erdogan says the Gulen movement is trying to overthrow him. And in Iraq, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, who took power in September after the West tired of Nouri al-Maliki's Shia-prejudiced leadership, is still struggling to contain sectarian tensions. Sunni leaders argue that their populations are not being armed to fight the Islamic State and the Kurdish minority in the country continues to want to go its own way. The U.S. hopes that Iraq will establish national guard units that can be controlled locally and that it will move to dismantle Iran-backed Shi'ite militias, but Iraq may not have the power to do this.

In Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu overcame the odds to win re-election in March, although his likelihood of surviving a full term intact is in serious jeopardy since his coalition controls only sixty-one of the Knesset's 120 seats. Netanyahu's coalition was weakened by the defection of Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman who is not a fan of a two-state solution and recently said that two-state supporters were “autistic.” Netanyahu is continuing to have problems with the Palestinians, facing growing international pressure to reach a two-state solution. Traditionally, Netanyahu has favored passing

legislation mandating that Israel is a Jewish State and he supports settlement construction in Palestinian lands in addition to areas of East Jerusalem. With the Vatican recognizing a Palestinian state and the French government pushing a UN Security Council resolution demanding an end to the dispute, Israel risks becoming internationally isolated, especially since President Obama was not happy with Netanyahu's use of inflammatory rhetoric against the Palestinians to win re-election. Israel also appears to have lost its battle to keep Iran from becoming a nuclear power with global sanctions against the Islamic Republic poised to be lowered if a long-term nuclear deal with the West can be reached. However, while Israel's traditional allies might be turning against it, it has the potential to make new ones as it is finding common cause with Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and others to oppose Iranian influence in the region. Aside from the Palestinian dispute, Israel faces domestic unrest over housing shortages and income inequality. In addition, there have been conflicts between Israeli police forces and minority groups such as Ethiopian Jews that Netanyahu has had to wrestle with in recent weeks.

Regionally, the Middle East is grappling with terrorism as Hezbollah remains a strong political influence in Lebanon (and is fighting to preserve the Assad regime in Syria), Hamas continues to trouble Israel, and the Islamic State is currently giving Iraq, Syria, and Jordan problems. Finding ways to keep young people away from extremism is becoming a growing concern in nations that are dominated by monarchies such as Jordan, but the only way to possibly do that is through greater economic opportunities and illustrating how globalization is not a threat to traditional culture and values. Allowing more democratic participation may also help provide an outlet for dissent, but this could empower radical Islamist parties and produce problems as the 2005 Palestinian elections and Egyptian elections post-Arab Spring illustrated. Keep in mind that the Islamic State is a threat to the Middle East's heritage as they have destroyed heritage sites in Iraq and Syria. The conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen have produced a refugee crisis in the region with Lebanese resources becoming strained and some migrants seeking to cross the Mediterranean into Greece. The international community must wrestle with ways to secure refugee camps, while providing people there with adequate sources of assistance. Environmentalists are also warning that the region may soon be forced to grapple with water shortages and that deforestation and desertification are growing problems in Jordan, Iraq, and Palestine. The dispute over women's rights is pressing throughout the region as well, with some arguing that Western conceptions of rights should not infringe on Middle Eastern culture. In some countries such as Yemen women's testimony only counts for "half a witness" and in Saudi Arabia they are not allowed to drive (although Saudi women will be able to vote in elections this year) and victims of rape there can be charged with a crime. These countries also prohibit women to leave the home unless they are given permission by their husbands. Extempers should also look at the Middle East section of the "economic concerns" topic area as the economic problems of Middle Eastern nations could become topics of concern in this round as well.

Iran's growing influence will be a big theme in this topic area as a nuclear deal would remove Western sanctions that have crippled foreign investment. The Iranian government has preferred to use proxy forces to challenge other states in the Middle East or to keep its allies such as Syria afloat. In many ways, the Middle East is becoming a cauldron of sectarian violence between Shia and Sunni governments with religious minorities such as Christians caught in the crosshairs.

Strategy

The good news about this topic area is that you should already have substantial resources on it. Conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq have been highly publicized, as have lingering regional disputes over Iran's nuclear program, the Israel-Palestinian conflict, and the region's growing chasm between Shi'ites and Sunnis. The bad news, though, is that since this region is publicized your judges are likely to know what is going on there so you have less margin for error than other topic areas that are more obscure such as Southeast Asia. Your judges may also have preconceived notions about the region that you might need to

share as well such as that all terrorism in the world originates here, that the Middle East has always been a backward place globally, that all Muslims are the same, or that the region is solely dependent on oil resources. None of these are true as there are terror movements fighting for nationalist principles in Spain and that fight for Marxist principles in Latin America; the Abbasid caliphate of the twelfth century was one of the most advanced and cosmopolitan societies in the world; Muslims are divided along sectarian lines (and even within sectarian lines if Sufis are accounted for); and exports go beyond oil to include textiles, fertilizers, and software. Your task in this round is to communicate the diverse, yet complicated nature of the Middle East and show how generalized assumptions about the region are not only incorrect but are dangerous for policymakers to entertain.

If you draw an Israel-Palestinian question in this round, you really, really need to go into the history of the conflict between the two sides. This is due to the fact that historical animosities lie at the center of the conflict and complicate its solution. The UN partition British Palestine in 1948, but when Palestinians did not like that arrangement Israel was invaded by Arab armies that it beat back and secured its independence. Israel then proceeded to win wars against Arab countries backed by the Soviet Union in 1967 and 1973, but the status of Palestinians within its borders, notably in the Gaza Strip and West Bank that were initially designated as part of a future Palestinian state, remained unclear despite those conflicts. Arguably the biggest obstacle for a peace deal is the principle of the “right of return” and this is something that extempers never talk about. Palestinians argue that when a two state solution is reached that those Palestinians uprooted by Israel’s creation in 1948 should be allowed to return home, but Israelis object to this because the number of Palestinians that would be included under a complete “right of return” would make Jews a minority in Israel. To Israelis this is a non-starter because they want their country to be a Jewish-controlled state. The refusal of Israelis to grant a complete “right of return” and the refusal of Palestinians to abandon the principle has deadlocked negotiations more than arguably any other issue. Furthermore, if you draw a question on Israel-Palestine I would make sure to give credence to both views of the conflict. The American public is very polarized on this issue and your judges are likely going to be that way as well so it is probably best to adopt a middle ground.

Good sources for the Middle East include *The Middle East Times*, *The Jerusalem Post*, *Haaretz*, *Al-Jazeera*, *Al-Monitor*, *The Middle East Review of International Affairs*, the Middle East Media Research Institute, and the Gulf Research Center. Since the Middle East has a great deal of conflicts, using think tanks and policy centers concerned with conflict resolution such as the International Crisis Group and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace can also be useful.

Practice Questions

1. Is Bashar al-Assad’s downfall inevitable?
2. How can Israel overcome its growing international isolation?
3. Is Haider al-Abadi doing enough to assuage the concerns of Iraqi Sunnis?
4. Are Middle Eastern governments doing enough to protect Christian communities?
5. Is the Saudi government taking the right approach to the Yemeni conflict?

Topic Area #9: North and Central America

This topic area is interesting because it does not include South America. In fact, this year’s topic areas completely ignore South America (although you can bet that you will still see questions on that region in other topic areas such as “Economic Concerns” or “International Political Theory and Philosophy”) and the Caribbean (I predict that questions about Cuba will find their way into the “U.S. Foreign Policy” round). The countries that this topic area will include are Canada, Mexico, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, and Belize.

According to a recent article from Bloomberg, Canada “is often overlooked in discussions of the global economy and financial markets.” Extempers would be wise to heed that advice for this topic area because Canada should play a prominent role in it. The country’s equities are deemed as attractive investments because they can carry the returns of emerging markets, but unlike those they carry the stability of the Canadian government. The country’s technology industry is also booming and its central bank, which has typically been a leader of global monetary policy innovation, is investigating whether a 2% inflation target is still ideal for developed nations. The Canadian economy has taken a hit like other emerging oil powers due to slumping prices, but the country has 20% of the world’s freshwater, so that may become a very important natural resource in the decades ahead. There is also a debate in the country over whether taxes are too high on the rich, mirroring some of the American debate over income inequality. The country has a federal election scheduled for its House of Commons in October and Prime Minister Stephen Harper will seek to expand his conservative government. Polls currently show the conservatives ahead, but the New Democratic Party (NDP) is not far behind. The NDP recently won provincial elections in conservative Alberta and some think that this is a bad omen for Harper’s chances in October. Although separatists in Quebec once had significant political momentum, coming within less than a percentage point of winning an independence referendum in 1995, their fortunes have waned. In fact, last year the separatist Parti Quebecois was ousted from power in Quebec by the Liberal Party. The Harper government has taken a very prominent role in launching air strikes against the Islamic State and the Ottawa shootings last year prompted an overhaul of Canadian security policy. In May the Canadian government pushed through an anti-terror bill that allows the Canadian Security Intelligence Service’s (CSIS) to intercept financial transactions, prevent terror suspects from boarding aircraft, or conducting online recruiting for jihadists. Opponents warn that the bill gives too much power to national security agencies and constitutes a threat to freedom and security. Polls show that only 33% of Canadians approved of the measures, the first anti-terror legislation passed in Canada since 2001, and this will factor prominently into the October elections. Harper has also unveiling plans for more infrastructure spending, with opponents accusing him of trying to buy votes with public money.

Mexico is the other country likely to be featured prominently in this topic area. Unfortunately, President Pena Nieto has not been able to bring violence between government forces and drug cartels to an end with some Mexican states resembling war zones. The government’s effort to clamp down on drug gangs since 2006 has arguably been a disaster because as the government has targeted major drug kingpins, lower elements of their organizations that they once controlled have set up their own operations and become engulfed in turf wars with each other. The Mexican population is caught in the middle of this violence, some of which has spilled over the country’s long border with the United States. The Mexican government estimates that since 2006 more than 23,000 have disappeared. Furthermore, authorities are not winning the trust of the Mexican people due to the ongoing violence and their credibility took another hit when forty-three students from a teachers’ college went missing in Guerrero state in September. An investigation has found that the students, who were protesting discriminatory government practices, were arrested and then handed over to the drug gang Guerreros Unidos (“United Warriors”) who it is thought has them killed. The incident has been a public embarrassment for the country. Nieto had hoped that more liberal reforms would provide a jolt to Mexico’s ailing economy, but he recently had to say that growth for 2015 would be 1% lower than expected (projections are that the economy will grow 3.2%-4.2% after a disappointing first quarter). The Mexican economy is very dependent on American demand, so sluggish American economy growth plays a substantial role in the disappointing announcement. Still, economists note that Mexico is doing better than other Latin American economies, with the IMF noting that the Mexican economy is growing while other emerging economies such as Brazil are contracting. Nieto hopes that his liberalization of the Mexican oil industry will bring more jobs and halt economic decline, but the result of these initiatives may not be felt until 2018. Nieto is clashing with teachers’ unions in the country as well over education reforms that are meant to reduce the Mexican dropout rate

(over 50% of Mexican students leave school before the age of fifteen). The Mexican government is facing the challenge of providing enough funding for schools and Nieto has pledged \$554m to rural schools and is also pushing for “Digital Literacy.” However, the Mexican education system in general faces a \$4 billion funding shortfall, with corruption and inefficiency harming the system. Extempers will want to pay careful attention to the returns of the Mexican midterm elections that will take place on June 7. Violence has risen in the weeks before the elections, with several political candidates killed and kidnapped. The killings are likely organized by gangs that are trying to eliminate politicians that oppose them.

Other significant topics for this round include Nicaragua’s controversial Grand Canal project that has aroused fierce opposition within the country against the Chinese HKND Group that won the contract for it. The canal is meant to be a rival of the Panama Canal, but economists argue that it may not be necessary and environmentalists warn that it could negatively affect wildlife and the nation’s primary source of freshwater since the canal will go through Lake Nicaragua. For its part, Panama is looking into finalizing renovations of its canal and might look into another expansion due to the Nicaragua project. Another issue in Panama is an ongoing investigation of corruption that may have taken place in former President Ricardo Martinelli’s government. Current President Juan Carlos Varela says that the nation may have lost nearly \$100 million due to inflated government contracts, but Martinelli and his allies say that such charges are ridiculous and they are the victims of a campaign of political persecution. Honduras continues to be a focal point of political instability with the nation’s Supreme Court allowing President Juan Orlando Hernandez to run for another term. The decision has the prospect of creating a coup as former President Manuel Zelaya was ousted when he tried to conduct legal maneuvering to get around the constitution. Guatemala has a growing political scandal, with President Otto Perez dismissing his interior, energy, and environment ministers in May. The nation’s intelligence chief was also sacked. To make matters worse, Julio Suarez, the Guatemalan central bank chief, has been arrested as part of a financial scandal. It is uncertain where Perez will be forced to resign due to the scandals as he has yet to be directly implicated, but extempers should follow this evolving story closely. Costa Rican President Luis Guillermo Solis, who was elected last year, has seen his popularity fall due to his failure to fix the country’s nagging unemployment problem. The nation’s political parties are gearing up for municipal elections in February. El Salvador continues to combat its political gangs, seeking to look into new ways to reintegrate former gang members into society through an amnesty program and implement better assistance and protection to victims of gang violence. Polls show that Salvadorians think that social violence in the nation’s greatest problem and some fear the government’s recent pronouncements that it will win its war against the gangs “through force.” The beautification of Archbishop Oscar Romero, who advocated for the poor and was critical of El Salvador’s government in the late 1970s and was shot and killed thirty-five years ago, is arguably the most contentious issue in the country at the moment. Right-wing forces see Romero as a symbol for leftist guerillas that waged war against the government in the 1980s, so the decision of Pope Francis to beautify him, which is the last step before sainthood, has reopened old historical wounds.

In terms of regional issues, crime is at the forefront (Honduras has the world’s highest homicide rate of 90.4 per 100,000 inhabitants). Many nations in Central America struggle to control criminal gangs, some of whom end up running prison systems after they are apprehended by authorities. Prison conditions are so poor that Western nations refuse to extradite their nationals to Central American countries because doing so would put them at severe risk. Criminal violence is also one of the reasons that the United States is seeing a surge of migrants from this region. The war on drugs has done little to stop these groups and some analysts posit that governments might be better off supporting legalization. Democracy is also under siege in parts of the region with countries scrapping presidential term limits in recent years. Nicaragua’s national assembly scrapped term limits to let Daniel Ortega run for a fourth term last year and Honduras followed this trend, albeit through a legal ruling, this year. For a region that was plagued

by dictatorships decades ago, analysts see worrying trends of political consolidation and the re-emergence of leftist and right-wing authoritarianism. Also, corruption scandals dot many of the region's governments, so that is a theme for any region-based questions in this round.

Strategy

The United States looms large over Latin America and this round may require you to incorporate the United States into your analysis despite the fact that this is not the U.S. foreign policy round. The U.S. has been a major supplier of military equipment to Central American nations and it also works closely with governments there on anti-drug trafficking, anti-human trafficking, and other anti-crime efforts. Politicians in the region such as Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega have significant political credibility because of their opposition to the United States and the U.S. has to tread lightly due to past involvement in the region. During the Cold War, the United States sponsored military dictatorships and anti-communist militias in the region and two prominent Central American conflicts in Nicaragua and Guatemala had significant human rights abuses. American interventionism in the region is thus encouraged by some Central American governments because they need help, but they also do not want to look like puppets of the United States.

There is also a convergence of religious and socioeconomic forces in Latin America that extempers should be aware of. Liberation theology in the 1970s and 1980s stressed the importance of social programs to care for the region's poor and served as a way to critique more capitalist-driven economic policies that produced some hardship for the region. Today, these forces are still at work as socialists and neo-Marxists campaign for more "just" economic and social policies. There is also tension in some countries such as Guatemala between peoples of Spanish descent and those of indigenous heritage. Incorporating these indigenous communities into a broader national framework has been a challenge for many governments in this region.

Good sources for this topic area include *The Toronto Star*, *The Globe & Mail*, *The Montreal Gazette*, *The News* (Mexican newspaper), and *The Latin American Herald Tribune*. Upside Down World is an intriguing think tank because it is a leftist-oriented source. If you want articles that criticize American foreign policy in the region, neoliberal economic policies, and austerity then this is the place to go.

Practice Questions

1. What alterations should the Mexican government make in its war against drug cartels?
2. Will the Grand Canal prove to be Daniel Ortega's political undoing?
3. How can Stephen Harper increase his Conservative majority in this year's elections?
4. Should Otto Perez resign?
5. Is El Salvador taking the right approach toward gang violence?

Topic Area #10: Russia and Eastern Europe

Issues

The title of this topic area could "Russia and the former Soviet bloc nations" because that is usually the geographic area that question writers will be thinking of when designing questions for this round. Although Russia will be the focal point of many questions in this round, you should also be prepared to talk about the Baltic states, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, and the nations of the ex-Yugoslavia because each of those countries has its own issues that more than warrant discussion.

Russian President Vladimir Putin continued his political crackdown in Russia this year, with the Russian Duma recently moving to further restrict the operations of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The assassination of dissident Boris Nemtsov in late February also raised the specter of Putin's involvement, although that was never proven. Nemtsov was investigating Russian participation in aiding Ukraine's rebel factions, something that the Russian government has denied. Global health analysts are very concerned that Putin's anti-gay attitudes have led to a setback of HIV/AIDS prevention in the country, noting that three million Russians are now affected. Putin's government is also looking to mirror a crackdown on the Internet taking place elsewhere in the world, threatening to limit the activities of Google, Facebook, and Twitter. As has been the case of other major oil producers, the Russian economy has been negatively affected by low prices on the world market. Low prices, combined with investor criticisms of the Putin government's handling of Russia's 1990s "oligarchs" that profited from the privatization of state assets and European sanctions over Russian behavior in Ukraine have taken a toll. Russia also has a "brain drain" problem as some of its more educated and highly talented students are leaving for more prosperous Western nations. Capital investment in the Russian economy is at a year-and-a-half low, but unemployment seems to be edging downward. The IMF expects the Russian economy to contract by 3.4% this year, although that is better than the decline of 3.8% that it expected. The big question for Russia is whether a slumping economy will make Putin's political standing weaker, but there is little evidence that this is taking place. Polls show that more than 80% of Russians approve of Putin's leadership and the opposition is very fractured. For example, Nemtsov got lots of publicity in death but at the time of his shooting he was just a minor opposition figure, having fallen from an heir apparent of the presidency to a marginalized critic of Putin's administration. Also, Putin has done a great job selling his message to Russians, who do think that their culture and values are challenged by the Western world. As I have commented on some pieces before, Putin seems to want to lead a conservative wing of a global culture war that rejected Western liberal values, something that places Russia alongside more conservative nations such as Iran in the Middle East that reject Western ways.

With Ukraine, its civil war continues to rage on with no real end in sight. Ukraine is divided between its Northern and Western areas that wish to be aligned with the West and a South and East that are populated by Russian speakers that wish to align the nation with Russian interests. Political divisions exploded into civil war last year, but some think that the longer Russia remains in the conflict on the side of rebel forces that it may strengthen Ukrainian nationalism and eventually produce a stronger and more unified government. Of course, Ukraine's current violence should not be happening as a ceasefire was agreed to in February, but sporadic fighting continues to unfold. Amnesty International recently reported that both sides are torturing prisoners and that rebels were performing summary executions in violation of international law. Ukraine's government is also in a spat with Russia over its debt. Ukraine secured \$17.5 billion from the IMF to avoid a debt default, but Russia has taken issue with Ukrainian legislation that allows its government to avoid paying foreign creditors. Russia has said that it intends to use its influence to possibly restrain the IMF from restructuring Ukrainian debt repayments. However, the European Union in late May agreed to give \$2 billion in assistance to Ukraine to continue economic reforms. The IMF estimates that the Ukrainian economy may contract by up to 10% this year, partly due to the fact that Russia remains the nation's biggest trading partner and has sanctioned it, giving President Petro Poroshenko another significant challenge that he must solve.

In other areas of Eastern Europe, Poland recently finalized its presidential election with conservative Andrzej Duda defeating President Bronislaw Komorowski in a runoff. The election may signal that Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz, who was an ally of Komorowski, is in trouble for this fall's parliamentary elections. The election was thought to turn on economic issues as youth unemployment remains high despite eight years of relatively decent economic growth. The country's currency, the zloty, is the third-worst among emerging market currencies since May and investors are concerned about fiscal irresponsibility, although extempers should note that Poland has a president with substantial foreign

policy and military powers and a parliament that handles fiscal issues. Lingering tensions with Russia as also led to spending on Patriot missiles and other military equipment, as well as calls by Poland for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to take a greater interest in its defense. The Polish election may also weaken Poland's ties to the EU as Duda wants more distance from Brussels and seeks to investigate alliances with other Central European countries to defend it from Russian interests. Hungary's conflicts with EU officials have continued after Prime Minister Viktor Orban floated the idea of restoring the death penalty and investigating the possibility of establishing immigration controls. In the past, Hungary has come under fire from the EU for trying to limit freedom of the press and Orban's attempt at strengthening the hand of his party Fidesz over the state bureaucracy. Like other areas of Eastern Europe, Hungary wrestles with its past and Fidesz's nationalistic political vision has caused it to downplay the role of the country in the Holocaust. However, despite being an EU member, Hungary as an economy that is substantially less efficient than other EU states and Fidesz rose to power after Hungary's Socialist government was forced to accept IMF aid, which imposed hurtful austerity policies following the 2008 global financial crisis. Romanian officials are looking into ways to prevent deforestation by cracking down on illegal loggers and the country is battling corruption problems. Bulgaria is wrestling with similar corruption problems.

In the ex-Yugoslavia, Macedonia's political unrest between its Macedonian majority and ethnic Albanian minority is causing fears that the country will collapse back into ethnic violence. The United States has said that it is concerned with the Macedonian government "backsliding" on human rights and freedom of the press and that it is not doing enough to quell simmering tensions from the Balkan wars of the late 1990s. The Macedonian government has also had to face protests in the wake of revelations that it tapped the phones of as many as 20,000 people, including journalists. Bosnia is also the site of renewed ethnic tensions as there are concerns of Islamic extremism after a Muslim gunman killed policeman in Sarajevo. The attack has led to Serb politicians, who have an autonomous region in the country, to demand independence from the Bosnian and Croat section, and this could fuel more violence if the fragile peace that dates back to 1995 is not maintained. Serbia is seeking to join the EU, but its tense relationship with Kosovo is an obstacle. Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia in 2008 and there are questions about whether its Brussels Agreement of April 2013 with Serbia will hold.

In the Baltics, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia have demanded that NATO dispatch thousands of troops and military equipment to thwart Russian advances near their territory. These states are worried that Putin may use the justification of Russian minorities living in their lands to invade and take territory. All three have also been engaged in cyber wars with the Russian government in the past and they warn that Russia is participating in illegal flights over their territories. All of the Baltics are also keen on reducing their dependence on Russian natural gas and are looking into ways to get more investment from Western Europe to contrast more natural gas terminals.

Strategy

Keep in mind that the region of the world that you are talking about in this round has had to endure a great deal of trauma over the last two decades. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to "shock therapy" and open economic markets in this part of the world, fueling some good changes for consumers, but also enriching a very small elite. Ethnic tensions that the Soviet Union had once contained spill over in Russia in the Caucasus and Yugoslavia broke apart into several different nations, many of which saw brutal civil wars and ethnic cleansing, and this violence has produced animosities that still linger beneath the surface in many nations. Today, the leadership of many former Soviet states and communist nations grapple with what their proper role in the world happens to be. Should they embrace the West and the European Union (EU) or should they cast their lot with Russia and the forces of reaction? Although Africa and the Middle East get a lot of attention regarding development, Eastern Europe struggles with many of the same

problems. Governments are corrupt, crime is rampant, and economies are in dire need of investment and innovation. Therefore, when discussing this round you need to talk about the psyche of the people in this region of the world. Just because “Europe” is attached to this topic area does not necessarily mean that these people are living with all of the comforts as their Western European counterparts and the anxieties that permeate this region help explain why nationalism and right-wing rhetoric has become popular in recent years.

Sources in this region that are nation-specific are somewhat difficult because of linguistic issues. I would recommend the *Moscow Times* and the RIA, but not that these publications often reflect the views of the Russian state. *The Baltic Times* can give you coverage of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania.

Practice Questions

1. How can Serbia convince satisfy EU concerns about Kosovo?
2. What impact have Western sanctions had on the Russian economy?
3. Should NATO provide more resources to the Baltics?
4. How can the Ukrainian government avoid a debt default?
5. Is Fidesz endangering Hungary’s economic interests?

Topic Area #11: The World Next Week

Issues

This is the topic area that will be finals, so if you make it to this round then you are doing something right! This has typically been a “global hot spots” round so any of the big, mainstream items about the world that have been in the news in the week leading up to the tournament or that have taken place during the tournament will the subject of questions. Here were the questions asked for this round during last year’s NSDA National Tournament:

- Is the election of Narendra Modi a blessing or burden for China’s interests in Asia?
- Will Boko Haram cause the fall of the Nigerian government?
- What impact will violence in Iraq have on global oil markets in the short-term?
- What role is Petro Poroshenko playing in shaping the future of Ukraine?
- How should OPEC members respect to the escalation of violence in Iraq?
- Has hosting the World Cup exacerbated the problems facing Brazil’s poorest citizens?

So as you can see, there is nothing tricky about this round. If you have prepped the other twelve topic areas well, this one will be quite easy.

Looking ahead to the national tournament dates, there is not a significant election that will take place during the national tournament. However, Burundi is scheduled to have its presidential election the week after the tournament (June 26), so that fits within the “World Next Week” theme. Normally, extempers would say that they really did not need to learn much about Burundi, but since it has garnered significant headlines in recent weeks then I would advise you to take the time to learn about it. Aside from this, the only other major noticeable situation unfolding is the approaching deadline over Iran’s nuclear program, so many of your questions are likely going to ask you to prognosticate how current events are unlikely to unfold in the future. Notice that five of the six questions asked last year emphasized how a global situation might affect the future of a region or an economic area.

Strategy

If you make it to the final round – and I hope that you do – you are going to have a day off. The NSDA’s typical schedule is to get through the first twelve rounds of the tournament by Wednesday and then hold a microphone check on Thursday. The final rounds for both extemp categories will not take place until Friday morning. This will give you some time to collect yourself, soothe a few of your nerves, and think of some ideas for your final round speech. I would suggest thinking of questions that you might draw and doing some sample outlines. You cannot take these with you to prep on Friday, but if you have already trained your mind on how to answer some likely questions then you can improve your chances of doing well. You can also think of introduction ideas, but try to avoid something that is so canned that it can be applied to every topic because judges will be able to see through that. Also, try to avoid letting the bigger stage take hold of you by turning extemp into standup comedy. This happened to a few good competitors in the past that felt so pressured to appeal to a large audience that they completely abandoned what got them to the final round and they ended up finishing lower than they should have.

If your school has a large stage, I would highly suggest that you try to give one or two practice speeches in that setting. In fact, it is probably a good idea if you have your coach rotate rooms that you perform in to mimic the national tournament as you will likely be speaking in seven or eight different rooms. Speaking on a big stage with lights and more than a hundred people watching (not to mention the few hundred that make their way into the live feed) is a very different experience, one that is not really replicated anywhere else. If you are not a national circuit competitor you may be intimidated by all of this, but keep one idea in mind when you get nervous: it is still a seven minute speech and the speech you are giving is no different than the other twelve you had to deliver to get to this point. I remember being very, very nervous before my 2003 U.S. Extemp final, but those nerves completely went away when I stepped onto the stage and began speaking. Once you are up there, enjoy the moment because even if you are an underclassmen there is a possibility that you will not make it back to the final round again. If you show that you are enjoying yourself you can win over your judges because some competitors the last few years looked like they were miserable. You will be tired by Friday, but you have to find the energy to get through this speech. Lastly, it is natural to feel some anxiety before this round, but just know that your fellow competitors are having the same feelings. Some people show it more than others, but the idea that people do not get nervous before speaking is a fallacy.

And do not forget to have your coach pick up a newspaper for you at the tournament. Even if it is just a hotel copy of *USA Today* this will keep you abreast of any big events that might void your planned analysis of the thirteen topic areas. Besides, if you are stuck with *USA Today* instead of *The New York Times* that is not so bad because at least *USA Today* has colorful graphs and statistical information that is readily accessible!

Practice Questions

1. How can the Iraqi government defeat ISIS?
2. Can France and Germany create international momentum for a lasting global climate accord in Paris this December?
3. How will the inevitable Greek default impact the rest of the eurozone?
4. Can Israel afford to live with a nuclear Iran?
5. Should African democrats hope that Pierre Nkurunziza loses the Burundian presidential election?

Topic Area #12: U.S. Foreign Policy

Issues

Although this topic area may strike you as more U.S. Extemp worthy, it is still relevant for International Extemp because of America's prominent role in the international community. As noted in last year's NSDA topic area analysis, questions for this round will be more about how the world sees U.S. foreign policy rather than other domestic implications of American foreign policy. For example, a question on the U.S. foreign policy in this round about ISIS is more likely to talk about Syria's reaction to America's anti-ISIS policy than whether President Obama needs to reconsider the federal government's policy toward the group.

Many questions in this round will probably center on American foreign policy efforts in the Middle East and/or against terrorism. On the terror front, the U.S. has relied on a policy of arming local forces to go after ISIS whether they be moderate political factions in Syria and the Iraqi government. The U.S. has also taken to bombing ISIS targets. However, President Obama has ruled out sending ground troops back to Iraq, arguing that the Iraqis must fight for their own nation. Unfortunately, this strategy has produced mixed results. The Iraqi government was recently forced out of Ramadi and critics of the administration argue that it needs to do more to fight ISIS within Syria since that is its most prominent base. The U.S. has also offered assistance to France to fight Boko Haram in Niger and Chad, although it is still skeptical of providing major military aid to Nigeria because it is fearful that its government will use it to harm human rights. President Obama kept more troops than anticipated in Afghanistan to help shore up the Afghan government relative to the Taliban, but the Taliban has said that it will not sign a peace accord with the Afghan government if U.S. forces remain. By the end of 2015 the U.S. will have 5,500 troops in Afghanistan that will keep training the Afghan army and assist on counter-terror missions, but one wonders if Afghan might falter in the face of Islamic extremism like Iraq.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, the U.S. is flirting with the idea of not using its veto in the UN Security Council to stop resolutions against Israel. The Obama administration worked to try to keep Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from winning re-election and now it seems to be joining other Western nations in isolating the conservative Israeli leader. Still, the U.S. did block Egypt's plan for a nuclear-free Middle East by opposing the idea and this was seen as a way of protecting Israel's supposed nuclear deterrent. The Obama administration also appears to embrace Iran as an ally, working to solve the dispute over the country's nuclear program by June and seeing it as a valuable partner in Iraq. However, problems with this strategy are that it has alienated Saudi Arabia, a long-time U.S. ally in the region, and it could be disrupted by tensions in Yemen where Iran has warned the U.S. to stay out of regional affairs. With chaos continuing to rise in the region, former Defense Secretary Robert Gates said that the U.S. had no strategy for the Middle East "at all" and there have been calls for the President to adjust his policy for this region of the world.

One of the focal points of President Obama's foreign policy has been the so-called "pivot to Asia" and the Trans-Pacific Partnership is seen as a piece of this by freezing China out of a trade deal that would include Asian nations such as Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Australia. The U.S. is also working with military commanders in Japan, Australia, the Philippines, and other nations in the Asia-Pacific, which some experts think is a way to drill for the containment of China's regional ambitions in the South and East China Sea. One of the aspects hindering more cooperation between the U.S. and Asian nations are splits among its coalition regarding historical issues, as Japan and South Korea have typically been divided over interpretations of Japan's behavior during the Second World War. U.S. plans for larger Asian defense may also be troubled by local residents of Okinawa that do not want a U.S. base near their territory. President Obama visited India in January and closer Indian-U.S. relations may enhance America's position relative to China in Asia, while also facilitating greater economic integration of Indian interests with Japan and South Korea in East Asia. However, tensions continue to exist over American military aid to Pakistan, which some Indians see as a threat to their country, and American criticisms of

the Indian government's recent limitations on Greenpeace, the Ford Foundation, as well as its move to investigate the finances of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

In the Americas, the big U.S. foreign policy initiative of the season was the Obama administration taking executive action to lessen the long standing U.S. embargo on Cuba. President Obama is also seeking to remove Cuba from the State Department's "State Sponsors of Terrorism" list. This included lightening travel restrictions for religious and education work, but complications remain on lifting the full embargo in Congress. Furthermore, critics of lifting the embargo argue that lifting it before Cuba enacts market reforms means that the nation's political class will be enriched and no democratic benefits will be brought to the island. Exhibit A for their argument is China. Nevertheless, moving to lift the embargo has substantial benefits for American influence in Latin America as Latin American states grew to see the embargo as an extension of American imperialism. Venezuela hopes that it can shift Latin American focus to recent U.S. sanctions against it, which are directed against Venezuelan officials accused of human rights violations. The United States has also pegged Venezuela as a security threat showing its anger at Nicolas Maduro's anti-American regime. Extempers should also not forget that the U.S. is somewhat of a critic of Nicaragua's Grand Canal project, showing concern for its environmental impact. This matters because if U.S. companies choose not to use the canal then it may not be profitable.

Strategy

I would anticipate getting questions from this round that are similar to those that you may draw in the international relations and organizations round. You will have to talk about multiple actors when answering these questions and those actors may or may not be specified in the question under study. For example, a question about America's future role in Afghanistan will have you talk about American and Afghani interests, while also drawing in discussions about Pakistan, India, and the Taliban, all of whom have significant goals that they want to achieve there. Covering all of the necessary actors in seven minutes can be difficult, but the trick is through balance. Identify who are the most prominent countries that you need to talk about in a foreign policy question and ensure that you are giving each side its due diligence. If a question asks you about how Israel should react to the possibility of the United States not using its veto on the UN Security Council, then you need to split your analysis between the U.S. and Israel, while also leaving time for a small discussion of the Palestinians. Giving a speech for this topic solely from an American or Israeli perspective would be the wrong idea for this round because you have to cover both sides for your audience to understand why certain nations act the way that they do.

Do not be afraid to go back to the international relations and political theories discussed for that topic area of the tournament either. There is still an ongoing policy debate over whether the United States should embrace more realist, liberal, or neoconservative policy aims. For example, can other countries be relied upon through international institutions to win the war against terrorism or should the U.S. go its own way? President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama have had very different conceptions of what American leadership in the world should look like and their presidencies have provided several examples of achievements and failures.

Additionally, history is a very, very powerful tool in this round. The legacy of the Cold War and American support for neoliberal economic policies complicates American relations with Latin American countries (e.g. Cuba and Venezuela), while American aid to European governments in the years following the Second World War and Cold War has cemented alliances with some nations (e.g. Great Britain and Poland) while complicating relations with other countries that see too much U.S. hegemony in their region of the world (e.g. France and Russia). Also, the United States prevented China's partition in the late nineteenth century by European powers and was an ally of China during the Second World War, but China's turn to communism after 1949 estranged relations between the two nations until Richard Nixon

began the process of restoring them in 1972. Now that China is re-emerging as a power to challenge U.S. influence in the Pacific, the U.S. has to choose between backing traditional allies such as Japan and rebuilding ties with former enemies such as Vietnam or maintaining a healthy relationship with the People's Republic.

I would highly suggest that extempers look to think tanks and policy journals for this round as they will go beyond news sources in talking about the historical development and ideological motivations of American foreign policy in different world regions. Check out the Council on Foreign Relations, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Foreign Policy in Focus, and *Foreign Affairs*. Also, look at the State Department's briefings about American foreign policy decisions and when you read them note that the language used in diplomacy is very important. There is a reason the Obama administration prefers not to call ISIS "the Islamic State" as that lends it a degree of credibility that the administration does not wish to recognize.

Practice Questions

1. Will the lifting of the Cuban embargo strengthen the Castro regime?
2. Should Israel re-evaluate its relationship with the United States?
3. What benefits does a closer relationship with the United States have for Vietnam?
4. Has Iran become the Obama administration's most important ally in the Middle East?
5. Are U.S. sanctions on Venezuela counterproductive to its foreign policy efforts in Latin America?

Topic Area #13: Western European Politics

Issues

The very wording of this round instead of the traditional "Western Europe" is a giveaway that this round will not focus on Europe's economic woes, its migrant crisis, or fears about Greece's debt crisis. Expect to see those topics in the "Crises" round or the "Economic Concerns" round. Still, you may be able to incorporate these topics into speeches if they apply to the country or countries that you are discussing.

A major theme running through European politics is the rise of right-wing parties. The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), which is in favor of Great Britain leaving the EU and that wants more controls on immigration, won 12% of the vote in the British elections last month. In France, the National Front has become a refuge for voters that are disappointed with the Socialist Party of President Francois Hollande and think that the centre-right Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) is too moderate on economic issues and immigration. The National Front favors immigration restrictions, protectionist economic policies, favors abandoning the euro currency, and French military involvement overseas. Germany is seeing a rise of far-right sentiment in the PEGIDA movement that considers Islam a danger to Western civilization and it also favors more stringent immigration controls. In Greece, economic problems have helped the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn Party, which still has seventeen seats in the Greek parliament despite the jailing of its leaders for the stabbing of an anti-racist rapper in 2013. The Finns Party (previously known as the True Finns) have also succeeded in becoming the second-largest party in the Finnish parliament, winning 17.7% of the vote. The Finns support conservative social values, ethnic Finnish nationalism, and cast themselves as economic populists that are skeptical of globalization and the EU.

However, right-wing groups are not the only ones benefitting from Europe's economic problems and some of the anxieties generated by EU rulings and increased immigration. In Greece, SYRIZA, a coalition of left-wing moderate and radical groups, won the January 2015 snap elections and is governing

the country. SYRIZA is walking a fine line between challenging the dictates of the Troika that have kept Greece's economy afloat and promising more social spending, while also attempting to get Greece's debts renegotiated with public and private creditors. In Spain, Podemos ("We Can") is a left-wing populist movement that is waging a self-declared war against income inequality and corruption. It is a relatively recent political movement, having been formed in January 2014, and it wants to renegotiate austerity measures that have been part of European aid to the Spanish economy, raise the minimum wage, and raise taxes on the rich. As a political parallel, some see Podemos as the European equivalent to the U.S. "Occupy Wall Street" movement. Podemos recently won control of Barcelona's city hall in local elections that took place at the end of May and some analysts think that it could possibly win the most votes in Spain's general election in December (it is notable that the right-wing People's Party of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy suffered its worst setback in municipal elections in twenty-four years).

While these right-wing and left-wing groups may not win power in the near future in their respective nations (although it is possible that the National Front and Podemos could do so), these movements matter for several reasons. First, they show that many Europeans are becoming dissatisfied with their mainstream political options and they are becoming more skeptical about the powers granted to the EU. For too long, EU bureaucrats have written off anti-EU movements as fringe and not worthy of debate, but that behavior, coupled with continent-wide economic problems, is helping radical parties challenge the EU's very existence. Indeed, nationalism, the very force that the EU was trying to overcome, may prove to be the organization's undoing. And second, these alternative parties matter because more mainstream parties tend to steal their issues to woo their voters. This took place during the British parliamentary election when Prime Minister David Cameron pledged to hold a referendum on British EU membership by the end of 2017. This may have helped the Conservative Party win an outright majority in the House of Commons, but potentially sets Britain up for a so-called "Brexit" that could have negative consequences for London's financial industry and some British foreign policy aims.

Other issues worth considering in this round include how French President Francois Hollande can raise his anemic popularity levels (and whether the Socialists should ditch him as a candidate in 2017). The British Labour Party and the Liberal Democratic Party face questions of how to rebuild their brands after suffering losses in the British parliamentary election. Labour will be divided between those who liked the embrace of left-wing ideas of former leader Ed Miliband, while others will want to adopt more moderate policies that won Labour three elections under former Prime Minister Tony Blair. The Liberal Democrats will debate whether they have a future as they abandoned some of their centrist views to coalition with the Conservatives after the 2010 election. In Scotland, independence may be back on the table in the near future as the Scottish National Party (SNP) won all but three of the House of Commons seats from the area, so Cameron will have to sort out their demands for more devolution. Spain, as noted above, will have a parliamentary election in December, so Mariano Rajoy will need to find a way to show that the People's Party as delivered economic growth to Spain and that austerity policies are in the nation's best interest. Greece could head to the polls again if the country goes bankrupt as that could trigger the conditions for a snap poll, so pay careful attention to what happens there. In Germany, Angela Merkel's coalition partner the Social Democrats did well in state elections this year, as did the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), but her Christian Democratic Union did poorly. Political battles may soon emerge over the nation's clean energy strategy as the Green Party is pushing for eliminating all coal use, but this powers 44% of the nation's energy needs and trade unions oppose how the drive for clean energy is killing jobs. Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi survived a second confidence vote in April and secured passage of a radical political reform package that would make sure to give the largest party in a national election enough seats to govern the nation's parliament. Another reform no longer allows the Italian Senate to block and delays laws. Opponents say that this is a power grab, but Renzi says that it is needed to make Italy more governable by ensuring that elected governments survive their five year terms, something that has been a problem since the nation became unified in the late nineteenth century.

Strategy

For this round you need to make sure that you get your political systems of government correct. All Western European nations operate as democracies, but some of their structures are quite different. For example, France has a president and a prime minister and Germany has a president and a chancellor, while Great Britain just has a prime minister. Some governments such as Britain and Spain have constitutional monarchies, whereas others such as France and Germany do not. Also, some countries have coalition governments such as Germany's "grand coalition" of the Christian Democrats and the Social Democratic Party, but governments such as Great Britain's no longer have one. This round necessitates that you explain how a certain nation's government works to your judges (e.g. what is a coalition government, how many seats does a party have to win to have control, what powers are allocated to certain positions within the government), especially if you have to prognosticate or explain election results.

Also, check your U.S.-centric political alignment theories at the door. European interpretations of "liberal" and "conservative" are quite different than their American counterparts. For example, Great Britain's "Conservative Party" would be horrified by some of the policies of the Republicans in the United States and vice versa. Even though Australia is not part of this topic area, this logic applies to that country since the Liberal Party is conservative, but that is because it is "liberal" in the classical sense of the world as written about by eighteenth century economists such as Adam Smith. "Socialism" is not a dirty word in European politics either and some parties on the continent such as Germany's Social Democrats and Great Britain's Labour Party (especially in recent years) have embraced the term.

Great sources for this round will be your traditional British publications such as *The Economist*, *UK Telegraph* (right-leaning), *The Guardian* (left-leaning), and *The Financial Times of London*. Also, *Deutsche Well* and *Der Spiegel* are fantastic for German politics. *Le Monde Diplomatique* is your best bet for a French source and *The Scotsman* may not be bad for Scottish politics since nationalism is still a growing issue in that country. You may also want to look at any information on the European Union's website concerning decisions from its Court of Justice, European Parliament, and other bodies that could create tensions with national governments.

Practice Questions

1. Should the British Labour Party re-embrace the centrist politics of Tony Blair?
2. Is Podemos set to win the Spanish parliamentary elections?
3. Scottish independence: A dream deferred to a dream denied?
4. Will Renzi's political reforms significantly improve Italian governance?
5. How can the National Front win the 2017 French presidential election?

2015 NSDA Nationals
United States Extemp Topic Area Analysis
by Logan Scisco

If you are reading this topic area analysis, you have probably qualified for the 2015 National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA) National Tournament in Dallas, Texas. You should be congratulated on qualifying and a stern test awaits you as more than two hundred other extempers will be competing against you for the right to call themselves national champion. While the size of the field might be intimidating, especially if you have never attended a national tournament before, a good idea to repeat in your head is that what you are going to be asked to do at the tournament is no different from what you encounter at your local competition. The speech you are expected to give is still supposed to be seven minutes in length (although you get a grace period and as we have seen in past years time may not even matter in final rounds) and you are still expected to answer the questions you draw and support your conclusions with evidence. You have qualified to this tournament for a reason, so show the country what you can do in Dallas!

One can argue that International Extemp may feature more “names” from the national circuit or more seasoned competitors, but some of this is changing. This is due in part to new automatic qualification procedures and some extempers opting to stay with the event because they automatically qualified by making semifinals or finals the previous year. Also, in recent years underclassmen have had significant success on the national circuit and have opted to enter the U.S. Extemp field. For example, Arel Rende won United Extemp as a junior in 2013 and then repeated his victory last season. Additionally, Josh Wartel has been in the U.S. Extemp final round for the last two years, mirroring how Chase Harrison made both finals as a sophomore and junior in 2012 and 2013. For all of the hype International Extemp gets, its final round is not always the best either. The 2007 U.S. Extemp final in Wichita, Kansas was one of the best in recent memory and blew its International counterpart away.

As I noted in the International Extemp topic area analysis, if you are not a competitor that travels the national circuit you have just as good of a chance of winning the NSDA National Tournament as anyone else. Most of your judges at the tournament are not national circuit judges and when you get into elimination rounds you are going to be assessed by coaches with significant experience in the category that have been recommended by their respective NSDA district chairs. Unlike the Montgomery Bell Academy (MBA) Extemp Round Robin and the Extemporaneous Speaking Tournament of Champions (TOC) at Northwestern University, judges will tend to value more of your delivery of information than analysis, although analysis will be weighed more than what one typically sees among judges at the National Catholic Forensic League (NCFL) Grand National Tournament.

I have always argued that United States Extemp is more difficult than its International counterpart for two reasons (although admittedly I am biased because I competed in U.S. Extemp for four years at the NSDA National Tournament in high school). First, the depth of knowledge you have to have for this topic area eclipses what International Extempers have to know. Yes, International extempers have to know about the entire world, but their questions often skim the surface of major events whereas United States extempers have to think about California’s water policy, how the avian flu outbreak has affected the Iowa poultry industry, and police policies in New York City and Baltimore. And second, United States Extemp judges carry many more biases than they do for International questions. Your judges are going to have political attitudes about how much they like Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama and will have biases about women’s issues, abortion, police brutality, affirmative action, illegal immigration, and income inequality. Walking through thirteen rounds of United States Extemp is akin to going across a minefield. You would be wise to offer multiple perspectives in your speeches throughout the tournament so that you at least make your

audience feel included. For example, if you are forced to talk about *Roe v. Wade* at least give credence to both the pro-choice and pro-life sides even if you are fervently devoted to one position. Bashing one side of the aisle, especially if you lean to the right of the political spectrum, is an easy way to get a ticket back home before Friday's final round.

It is my hope this topic area analysis, which will provide an overview of significant issues for each of the thirteen topic areas, strategy tips, and practice questions, will assist in your preparation for the NSDA National Tournament. I would highly recommend giving thirteen practice speeches, one on each topic area, before going to nationals. I would also highly recommend structuring your practices to replicate the endurance that you will need for the tournament. For the first three days you are going to be expected to give four speeches, usually two hours apart from each other. Having practice sessions where you do this, especially between the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m, the hours between which you will deliver your first twelve speeches of the tournament, would be wise.

I would also advise extempers to check out last year's topic area analysis in addition to this year's. The NSDA has a tendency to recycle some topic areas, so comparing advice given in last year's brief with this year's will allow you to see how the world has changed between 2014 and 2015 and possibly assist in your analysis of the issues.

Topic Area #1: The 2016 Election Cycle

Issues

Out of all of the topic areas at this year's national tournament, this is the one that you should be most practiced in because 2016 presidential election questions have been a staple of competitions since the last presidential election ended. It is very likely that at some point this season you have had to talk about Hillary Clinton's presidential chances, whether Elizabeth Warren will run or not run, and/or various contenders for the Republican presidential nomination. This topic area will not be throwing any curveballs as you will be assessing candidates, paths to victory, and electoral strategies that concern the 2016 election cycle.

For the 2016 presidential election extempers will face questions assessing the prospects of certain candidates to win their respective party's nomination. On the Democratic side, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is the overwhelming favorite as the Democrats have a very weak bench behind her in this cycle. Clinton's big primary foes look to be Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, a self-declared socialist who serves as an independent in the Senate, and former Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley. Sanders and O'Malley will try to win over the far-left of the Democratic base that is suspicious of Clinton's past advocacy for free trade, her moderate positions on social issues, and her ties to big financial institutions. Clinton is trying to prevent being flanked on her left wing, which is what happened when she faced then-Senator Barack Obama in 2008, by supporting a large amnesty package for illegal immigrants, profusely apologizing for her vote to authorize the Iraq War, and sounding more populist on issues such as income inequality. The Democratic far-left would much rather have Elizabeth Warren as their candidate, but there are questions about Warren's electability as she won her Senate seat in a heavily Democratic state in a presidential year, has served in the Senate for less than one term, and there are questions about whether she lied about having Native American ancestry to obtain a job at Harvard. It would be easy to assume that Clinton will coast to victory in the primaries, but being the early frontrunner has disadvantages since she is receiving attacks over whether contributions to the Clinton Foundation bought favors from the State Department and Clinton's use of a separate e-mail account as Secretary of State. Extempers should be prepared to talk about these scandals as scandals tend to follow the Clintons wherever they go (e.g. Filegate, Travelgate, Lewinskygate, Chinagate to name a few from Bill Clinton's presidency in the

1990s). There is also a danger that Clinton could be dragged too far to the left during the primaries. She appears to be banking on getting the same voters to the polls that cast ballots for President Obama in 2008 and 2012, but there are questions about whether African American turnout will be high enough to put her over the top in a close race.

The Republicans have the opposite dilemma of the Democrats as more and more candidates continue to toss their hats into the race. The Republican field is much better than 2012, with more accomplished and electable legislators showing a willingness to run, but having such a crowded field will make it difficult for a candidate to stand out in televised debates. There is also the chance that a candidate may fail to win a majority of delegates before the Republican National Convention next summer and that a deadlocked convention could divide the party. As was the case last year, the Republican Party is still at war with itself, which tends to be a problem for political parties when they are out of power. The more traditional Republican establishment that favors an engaged foreign policy, deregulation, and moderate positions on social issues seems to prefer Florida Governor Jeb Bush over all the other candidates in the Republican field. The problem for Jeb, though, is that his brother, former President George W. Bush, left office with dismal approval ratings and the idea of a Bush-Clinton matchup in November disappoints many Americans. Bush's recent gaffe that he would have approved of the Iraq War despite knowing what he knows now and his support for a wide scale amnesty for illegal immigrants have also done some damage to his campaign. Florida Senator Marco Rubio is looking to cut into Bush's support in Florida and would be a great challenger to Hillary Clinton because of his youth, but there are questions about Rubio's experience as he has only served one term in the Senate and has not served in an executive capacity. In many ways he could be the Republican version of Barack Obama, but some Americans may prefer an executive with greater experience. Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee is running for a second time and will compete with former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum, who finished runner-up to Mitt Romney in the 2012 primaries, and Dr. Ben Carson, a former neurosurgeon that is the sole African-American candidate in the field, for the votes of social and religious conservatives. One of the most intriguing possibilities is Kentucky Senator Rand Paul, who is anti-Patriot Act, favors less American military engagement abroad, and presents a more libertarian vision of the party. Paul has visited traditional black colleges such as Howard University and in his home state of Kentucky has opened offices in Louisville to better engage the black community. While it is unlikely that Paul would be the nominee, his brand of politics might play well in New Hampshire, the first primary state, and this could give him staying power in the race. If he were nominated the Republicans would be in an interesting situation as they would actually be to the political left of Hillary Clinton on foreign policy issues. In light of the crowded field it can be difficult to remember that Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker is running despite the fact that he is leading some early election polls. Walker is a darling of the right-wing for pushing through public sector reforms in Wisconsin and beating back three Democratic attempts to unseat him. One could argue that no other candidate in the Republican field raises the ire of the Democratic left more than Walker. Other dark horse candidates that are worth considering are former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, who is still wrestling with the "Bridgegate" scandal back home. Although Christie's presidential hopes have dimmed somewhat, he continues to make speeches about major domestic policy initiatives (e.g. means testing Social Security and blasting opponents of renewing the Patriot Act) and this is keeping him relevant. People forget that Arizona Senator John McCain was written off very quickly before the 2008 presidential primaries and mounted an effective campaign to take the nomination from Mitt Romney. Ohio Governor John Kasich is also someone to monitor as he comes from a swing state, won two terms as governor, and has very moderate positions that would appeal to a broad electorate (e.g. he expanded the state's Medicaid program under the Affordable Care Act and has said that Ohio does not need a right-to-work law). Minor candidates that are unlikely to make much traction include Texas Senator Ted Cruz, a favorite of the Tea Party who is easily getting lost in the shuffle of other candidates, and Carly Fiorina, the former CEO of Hewlett-Packard. Fiorina is trying to make herself relevant by shadowing Hillary Clinton's recent campaign stops, but her dismal record at

Hewlett-Packard hurts her chances. She also lost to California Senator Barbara Boxer in 2010. Finally, even though former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney says that he is not going to seek the nomination, a “draft Mitt” movement remains alive and if the Republican convention were to deadlock next summer Romney might be a compromise choice.

Aside from questions about candidates or the strategy that they are going to employ to win their respective nominating contests, you may also draw questions the ask whether the presidential primary process should be changed. Iowa and New Hampshire are still the first two states in the calendar, with Iowa holding a caucus where voters have to show up to polling stations at assigned times, and New Hampshire holding a regular primary election. An important fact to remember about New Hampshire is that voters can cross-over and vote in the other party’s primary if they choose to do so. This means that if Democrats think Hillary Clinton is not facing a sizable challenge they can choose to vote in the Republican primary instead. Critics of the current primary model argue that Iowa and New Hampshire do not reflect the diversity of the country since they are largely white and only possess six and four electoral votes, respectively. Putting Iowa early means that candidates are often pressed on state-specific issues such as ethanol subsidies that other parts of the country do not care about. However, sometimes the small and ethnic composition of these states can be an advantage. Campaigns typically have to employ person-to-person politicking to win votes and this can show how well a candidate relates to “regular” people. Also, when Barack Obama won Iowa in 2008 he showed that he had cross-racial appeal and his win there arguably caused African-American voters that were once skeptical to his candidacy to crossover from the Clinton camp. Both parties have tried to create more diversity in their presidential lineups by positioning Nevada, a state with a growing Latino population, in the first four states and South Carolina, where most Democratic primary voters are African American, serves as another test of Democratic strength with this constituency (for Republicans winning South Carolina is akin to receiving the “conservative stamp of approval”). There is usually a tendency for some states to want to move up their primary so that they could conceivably have greater influence. Both parties try to prevent this by sanctioning states that try to move beyond their established slots. For example, the Republicans have announced that any state trying to move past the established four of Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada, and South Carolina will incur a loss of delegates that party’s nominating convention. States that hold their primaries between March 1 and March 14, 2016 will award their delegates via proportional representation and those voting on March 15 and later will be winner-take-all. Thus, the Republican system is designed to encourage states to wait later in the calendar. Still, some states in the South such as Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Tennessee have talked about a so-called “SEC Primary” that would pull these states out of “Super Tuesday” and position their election on March 1.

Extempers should also not forget the Iowa straw poll that will be held on August 8. This is a Republican event and is serves as a fundraiser for the Iowa Republican Party. The event is seen as a barometer of a candidate’s strength in Iowa and sometimes serves to eliminate candidates. For example, in 2012 former Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty withdrew after a poor showing in the straw poll. However, it has been criticized for wasting candidate’s funds as they seek to drive in voters and entertain them before the vote to bolster their totals. Also, candidates have tended to win the poll in recent years that had little chance of winning their party’s nomination. This took place in 1987 when evangelical pastor Pat Robertson defeated Bob Dole by nearly 10% and former Minnesota Representative Michele Bachmann and former Texas Representative Ron Paul topped the field with more than 25% of the vote in 2011. In such a crowded field, the straw poll may serve to knock a few candidates out, but with the poll’s credibility in question, it is still uncertain how many candidates will seriously contest it and risk the public relations hit if they fare poorly.

Finally, do not forget that there are congressional elections that will take place in 2016 as well. Democrats hope that a strong turnout from their traditional base that only seems to turnout in strength in

presidential years will help them retake the Senate (retaking the House would be difficult since the Democrats would have to win thirty seats). To retake the Senate, Democrats have to pick up five seats after they lost nine seats in the 2014 midterms. The good news for Democrats is that Republicans are defending the seats that they won in the 2010 “wave” election where Tea Party energy, a poor economy, and dissatisfaction with the way President Obama handled the Affordable Care Act’s passage and his attempt at creating a carbon emissions law led to a Republican takeover of the House and a pickup of six Senate seats. The map seems to favor Democrats as some Republicans such as Illinois Senator Mark Kirk, Wisconsin Senator Ron Johnson, Pennsylvania Senator Pat Toomey, Ohio Senator Rob Portman, and New Hampshire Senator Kelly Ayotte are defending seats in states that trend Democratic in presidential years. What could happen in these states is that Democrats show up to vote for the presidential contest and then just click “down the ballot” which then leads to votes for other Democratic candidates. Kirk is probably the most vulnerable Republican and his situation is reminiscent of former Massachusetts Senator Scott Brown who was a moderate Republican that lost his seat in 2012 to Elizabeth Warren. Kirk has backed gay marriage, gun control, and immigration reform, but he will face a tough road, especially after Democrats have backed Representative Tammy Duckworth, a double amputee and Iraq War veteran. Johnson is also in a tough matchup as he polls poorly among Wisconsin voters and will face a rematch against former Senator Russ Feingold who really personifies the historical Wisconsin progressive image (extempers of my generation had to talk about Feingold quite a bit as he worked with John McCain on campaign finance legislation in the late 1990s and early 2000s). Not all is bad news for the Republicans, though, as Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada is not running for re-election and Republicans will hope to defeat Colorado Senator Michael Bennet, who struggled to defeat a Tea Party-backed challenger in 2010. Extempers should remember that candidate recruitment is key for both parties when it comes to Senate races. The Republicans did a poor job of this in 2010, losing chances to win in Colorado, Delaware, and Nevada by picking flawed candidates, but they did a much better job in 2014. One difficulty the GOP will run into, though, is that some gifted candidates may opt to delay running for another time as they fear losing in a presidential year where the GOP has lost five of the last six elections when it comes to the popular vote.

Strategy

Unlike some of the topic areas in the tournament your biggest challenge for this round will be dealing with too much information. I would venture to say that extempers nationwide have hundreds, if not more than 1,000 articles that touch on the 2016 elections in some capacity. Before the national tournament I would highly suggest that you make files on *each* of the candidates that are running for president whether they be prominent figures or not. I remember having to give speeches on Al Sharpton and Carol Moseley Braun in 2004, so questions about minor presidential candidates do exist and you need to be ready for them! For the major candidates that receive a lot of coverage such as Hillary Clinton, Jeb Bush, Scott Walker, Marco Rubio, and Rand Paul, I would highly recommend sub-dividing those files. Do not have a file that is just about Hillary Clinton. Instead, I would recommend making files such as “Hillary Clinton-Foreign Policy,” “Hillary Clinton-Liberal Base,” “Hillary Clinton-E-mails,” and so on so that you have files that specific to questions you may draw on her. This makes it quicker to reference information, but before you subdivide make sure that you have ample articles to put in the new folders. Just creating a folder for one article is a waste of time. The good news is that since most teams have moved to digital files the process of creating a new file is a couple of clicks with your mouse and nothing more.

If you draw a question that assesses the prospects of a certain candidate it is important to use a few themes to guide your analysis. First, focus on how much fundraising that candidate can do. Political writers are already speculating that the cost of a presidential campaign in 2016 could be \$1-\$2 billion dollars (for a job that only pays \$400,000 or so a year!). A candidate is going to need money to get through the primaries, buy advertising, pay for consultants, run their website, and purchase other

campaign essentials. Candidates that fail to fundraise do not do well and it is a major reason they drop out of the primaries, so pay attention to this factor. Second, where is the candidate aligned ideologically with their party? In many elections the candidate that can occupy the middle ground tends to do better as they can appeal to a broader segment of the electorate. George W. Bush and Barack Obama's 2004 and 2012 campaigns arguably adopted a different strategy of appealing to their base at the expense of moderate independents, but most presidential elections are a race to see who can occupy the middle ground. One of the dangers of primaries is that a candidate that is at first moderate has to appeal to fringe elements of their party to secure the votes for the nomination. This can change their image and impair their ability to tack back to the center later (Mitt Romney faced this problem in 2012). Third, what is the candidate's experience level and how much influence do they have with their party's machinery? Can they call in favors for helping candidates during the midterms? Voters also prefer candidates that have executive-level experience, which is why many recent presidents prior to Barack Obama were governors (e.g. Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush). Fourth, does the candidate's platform satisfy the current needs of the American electorate? Some presidential candidates have been well ahead of their time such as the Populist Party campaigning for a graduated income tax in the 1890s, but the country was not yet ready for that type of discussion. The same could be said of Barry Goldwater's advocacy of small government in 1964. One could say that the 2016 election is going to revolve around rejuvenating the economy, income inequality, law and order, and America's future place in the international community due to threats from China, Russia, and ISIS. Is the candidate you are speaking on well-versed in these issues and do they have an effective plan for dealing with them? If so, they may have a great chance of winning the presidency. And fifth, do not forget the primaries! Many extempers gloss over this in speeches, but if Jeb Bush cannot get out of the Republican presidential primary field then he is not going to be elected president!

Historical examples are not utilized enough by extempers in this round and they can help you stand out. Examples of far-right and far-left candidates that went down in defeat because they were unelectable include Barry Goldwater in 1964 and George McGovern in 1972. Examples of presidential candidates that made a comeback after losing a previous election include Richard Nixon in 1968 (which would be a great example if you draw a crazy question on Mitt Romney). There is also a great example for Hillary Clinton of a candidate losing their party's nomination during a previous cycle and winning the White House. That would be Ronald Reagan, who lost the Republican nomination to President Gerald Ford in 1976 and then went on to win the 1980 presidential election in a landslide. History is full of great examples to draw from and you do not even have to go back very far. Examples of what worked and did not work in the 2008 and 2012 presidential contests for candidates can also work in your favor.

Finally, for this round you really want to have a good knowledge of how a potential primary could play out on both sides. This is a round where you can be a political Nostradamus that predicts the future, but to do so you have to understand how certain states tend to align ideologically. For example, Iowa is a state that favors Democrats with union credentials and Republicans that are socially conservative. New Hampshire tends to be a wild card state that rallies behind the underdog in a presidential nominating contest (e.g. Pat Buchanan in 1992 and Hillary Clinton in 2008) and favors more moderate politicians (e.g. John McCain in 2000). South Carolina Democratic voters have typically backed candidates that appeal to the African-American community or working class voters (e.g. Jesse Jackson in 1988, John Edwards in 2004, and Barack Obama in 2008) and Republican voters gravitate to those with strong socially conservative positions (e.g. George W. Bush in 2000 and Newt Gingrich in 2012). Florida has a tendency to favor moderate politicians and is seen as a major prize for candidates that wish to show that they can win a big swing state. Knowing these trends can best help you predict who will survive the next year's primaries.

For sources, conventional news sources such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal* are your best bets. *Politico* also has good coverage of the presidential election cycle, although many of its writers tend to lean to the left of the political spectrum. It may not be a bad idea for you to visit the websites of specific candidates and to clip what specific positions they have taken on major issues. This will help you give credible evidence for where candidates stand on a specific issue if that becomes appropriate in your speeches. Also, polls can be your friend in this round and RealClearPolitics, Gallup, and the Pew Research Center can be of great help to you.

Practice Questions

1. Can Jeb Bush overcome his problems with conservative voters?
2. Should Iowa and New Hampshire remain at the front of the presidential primary calendar?
3. How can Martin O'Malley mount a serious challenge to Hillary Clinton for the Democratic presidential nomination?
4. What impact will the Iowa straw poll have on the 2016 Republican presidential primary?
5. Will Democrats retake the Senate in 2016?

Topic Area #2: America's Role on the World Stage

Issues

On face, this appears to be the "U.S. foreign policy" round of the tournament, although the wording of this topic area is a little more nuanced. "America's Role on the World Stage" appears to imply a specific direction for most of the questions, with many of them possibly concerned with America's waning influence in the world (or concerns about it), America's role in international institutions, and what role the United States should take in the futures of Iraq and Afghanistan. Since there is also a topic area on national defense and the military, questions about the war on terrorism and other conflicts may not appear in this round, but it will probably be difficult to give a speech in this round without knowledge of those conflicts.

The region of the world that you must be prepared to talk about the most is the Middle East. The continued success of ISIS in recruiting Western Muslims to fight for it and its continued successes in Syria and Iraq have been a headache for the Obama administration. President Obama's previous statements that ISIS was a mere "JV squad" have come back to haunt him over the past year. The President's current position is that American airstrikes, funding, and arming of regional actors can restrain the group (one could view the restoration of U.S. military aid to the Egyptian government this year along these lines), but that strategy is faltering. There are growing calls for the United States to take a more proactive role, possibly with ground troops, but that is something that President Obama is less willing to do as he has banked part of his foreign policy legacy on getting the bulk of American troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan. Still, the current policy has produced some resentment by the Iraqi government that has not been happy with Obama administration criticisms of its efforts. In addition, the deadlocked policy on ISIS is also influencing the Syrian Civil War. Public pressure caused President Obama to drop the idea of airstrikes against the Assad regime in the fall of 2013 and finding moderate political groups to provide weapons to has been very difficult. In addition, President Obama's push for a nuclear agreement with Iran has alienated some of America's allies in the region such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan that see the United States working too closely with Shi'ite interests. The President also has frosty relations with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who came and warned the U.S. Congress about the threat of Iran's nuclear program earlier this year. President Obama has low approval ratings in Israel, something that helped Netanyahu win re-election in March. As problems rise in the Middle East, there is a lingering question of what role America should play in the region. President Obama's critics argue that he is

alienating allies while simultaneously failing to win over enemies. Religious conservatives also allege that the administration has turned a blind eye to the violence inflicted upon the region's Christians. However, the President has very legitimate concerns about dispatching American forces back to the Middle East. The move would probably be resented by millions of Americans, not to mention some of the peoples of the Middle East, and could be an economic drain on American finances at a time when balancing the budget and investing more American dollars at home is becoming a more sought after goal. After the Iraq War, more Americans are becoming disillusioned with international engagement and are more content to let Sunni and Shi'ite forces settle their disputes in the region.

Aside from the Middle East, Asia is another prominent place where the United States is finding some of its traditional interests threatened. Since the end of the Second World War, the United States has been a guarantor of security in the Pacific, aligning its defensive might behind Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, and South Korea. China's rise as a stronger power, though, is beginning to threaten these relationships. The Chinese government wants to establish a foothold in the South China Sea, building up artificial islands to enhance its presence and this has placed it into conflicts with surrounding nations and one-time allies such as Vietnam. While this presents an opportunity for the United States, it also presents risks as the United States could soon clash with Chinese officials over its aims in the region. North Korea's continued behavior as a rogue state and reports that it is working to develop missiles that can be launched from submarines presents another nightmare. Chinese provocation and North Korean belligerence could provide more momentum behind Japanese hawks that wish to revoke Article IX of their nation's constitution and move beyond having self-defense forces. In addition, growing nationalism in Taiwan might lead to growing calls for independence and that would place the U.S. in the awkward position of having to decide between its support for a "one China" policy that calls for the theoretical reunification of China and Taiwan and its ambiguous pledges in the past to defend Taiwan from Chinese attack.

American interests in Asia also move to South Asia where the Obama administration has tried to cultivate stronger ties with India. This might be part of a geopolitical play to further isolate China and to arouse the concerns of Chinese defense planners, but there will be tensions in this relationship because of concerns about the Indian government's clamping down on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Greenpeace and the Ford Foundation, its checkered record of women's rights, bleed between the civil and military aspects of its nuclear program, and India's clashes with Pakistan. The United States currently provides more than \$1 billion in military aid to Pakistan and India challenges that these funds arm its enemy and exacerbate tensions on the Indian subcontinent. The continuing American role in Afghanistan also makes its role in the India-Pakistan relationship difficult because all three nations wish to control the future of Afghani politics. At the end of the year, the U.S. will still have more than 5,000 troops in the country, although these will be used primarily for training and counter-terrorism roles. Pakistan does not want Afghanistan to become an Indian satellite because that could put it at a defensive disadvantage if the two sides went to war, but the United States does not want the Taliban, a group that Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) created, to retake power and provide a shelter for Islamic terrorists.

In Latin America, the Obama administration has taken a mixed approach toward engaging old foes, while also continuing to be skeptical of other governments in the region. The administration is working toward a resumption of full diplomatic relations with Cuba and dismantled some travel restrictions via executive order earlier this year. President Obama has also met with Cuban President Raul Castro. A lifting of the embargo will carry some substantial benefits for the Cuban economy, while American agricultural interests stand to benefit from an easing of tensions. However, while sanctions are being relaxed in Cuba, the Obama administration slapped them on Venezuelan officials that are accused of human rights violations. Leftists in the region argue that this is hurting America's image and will inhibit democratic change because it allows Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro to paint himself as a victim of American

aggression. The debate has rekindled what role sanctions should play in American diplomacy and if they really accomplish much of a purpose. The U.S. has also been skeptical of Nicaragua's Grand Canal project that is being positioned as a rival to the Panama Canal.

Questions in this round may also go well beyond relations that the United States has with specific nations or its interactions with certain regions. Instead, you could receive questions about the commitment of the U.S. to tackle international problems such as human trafficking and climate change. Congress recently passed legislation to expand law enforcement efforts to aid victims of human trafficking and the Obama administration supports international action on climate change that will take place in Paris this December. The problem is whether the administration can rally public opinion behind it, which is becoming very disinterested in the climate change issue and is skeptical of signing agreements that would allow nations such as China and India to continue to pollute with few penalties. Also, there are constitutional questions about whether the Obama administration could legally commit the U.S. to a binding emissions target without the consent of Congress. Conservatives also resist the contribution of American dollars to developing nations to combat climate change. U.S. foreign aid organizations such as the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) are beginning to focus on gender equality issues in order to enhance development and are working with governments such as the Ivory Coast to enhance legislation to help women. The U.S. currently spends \$31 billion on foreign aid, which is more than any other country in the world, but this is only 0.19% of GDP. This is an important statistic because most Americans think that 28% of the U.S. budget goes to foreign aid when that is not the case. Some development advocates argue that the U.S. needs to increase, not decrease, its foreign aid commitments, but political pressure at home may make this difficult. Finally, generic questions about whether the U.S. should join the International Criminal Court (ICC) or should reconsider its relationship with the United Nations.

Strategy

There are likely to be many bilateral and trilateral questions in this round that will demand that you talk about multiple actors. For example, a question about America's future role in Afghanistan will have you talk about American and Afghani interests, while also drawing in discussions about Pakistan, India, and the Taliban, all of whom have significant goals that they want to achieve there. Covering all of the necessary actors in seven minutes can be difficult, but the trick is through balance. Identify who are the most prominent countries that you need to talk about in a foreign policy question and ensure that you are giving each side its due diligence. If a question asks you about how Israel should react to the possibility of the United States not using its veto on the UN Security Council, then you need to split your analysis between the U.S. and Israel, while also leaving time for a small discussion of the Palestinians. Giving a speech for this topic solely from an American or Israeli perspective would be the wrong idea for this round because you have to cover both sides for your audience to understand why certain nations act the way that they do.

Additionally, history is a very, very powerful tool in this round. The legacy of the Cold War and American support for neoliberal economic policies complicates American relations with Latin American countries (e.g. Cuba and Venezuela), while American aid to European governments in the years following the Second World War and Cold War has cemented alliances with some nations (e.g. Great Britain and Poland) while complicating relations with other countries that see too much U.S. hegemony in their region of the world (e.g. France and Russia). Also, the United States prevented China's partition in the late nineteenth century by European powers and was an ally of China during the Second World War, but China's turn to communism after 1949 estranged relations between the two nations until Richard Nixon began the process of restoring them in 1972. Now that China is re-emerging as a power to challenge U.S. influence in the Pacific, the U.S. has to choose between backing traditional allies such as Japan and

rebuilding ties with former enemies such as Vietnam or maintaining a healthy relationship with the People's Republic.

I would highly suggest that extempers look to think tanks and policy journals for this round as they will go beyond news sources in talking about the historical development and ideological motivations of American foreign policy in different world regions. Check out the Council on Foreign Relations, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Foreign Policy in Focus, and *Foreign Affairs*. Also, look at the State Department's briefings about American foreign policy decisions and when you read them note that the language used in diplomacy is very important. There is a reason the Obama administration prefers not to call ISIS "the Islamic State" as that lends it a degree of credibility that the administration does not wish to recognize.

Practice Questions

1. Should the U.S. join the International Criminal Court?
2. What role should the U.S. play in international efforts to fight climate change?
3. Should human rights occupy a more significant role in American foreign policy?
4. Is the United States becoming "the sick man" of the international community?
5. Should the U.S. support a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East?

Topic Area #3: Business and Industry

Issues

As per usual, the United States Extemp tournament has two economics rounds, something that thrills hundreds of coaches, competitors, and judges. Okay, maybe not, but the reason that this type of division exists is because the question writers have to get thirteen topic areas and devoting a round solely to the operations of specific sectors of the economy and companies is sensible. However, this round can be difficult because extempers that confront "Economics" rounds at their local tournaments can just as easily take questions on fiscal and monetary policy without ever having to talk about General Motors, Microsoft, Comcast, or other corporate giants. Such an out will not exist here.

Sectors of the economy will be important in this round and the auto sector is usually an important area for questions. The U.S. auto industry is showing signs of growth, recovering from the 2008 financial crisis, and industry experts see 2015 as a banner year. Even SUV sales are climbing due to low gasoline prices. General Motors (GM) officials are facing possible criminal charges due to an ignition switch defect that has thus far been attributed to the deaths of more than one hundred people. The company also faces lawsuits related to the incident, which they are attempting to deflect due to the immunity they received as part of the 2009 auto bailout. GM will face negotiations with the United Auto Workers (UAW) union this year as well, creating an interesting showdown because both sides are headed by women (Mary Barra is the CEO of GM whereas Cindy Estrada is heading the UAW's GM department). Pay raises and working conditions are likely to play a role in those negotiations. Innovation is always a big part of the auto industry and futuristic idea of self-driving cars is starting to become more of a reality. Google is allegedly testing this technology and Ford Motor Company's CEO Mark Fields has said that his company wants to make self-driving cars affordable for all Americans. If self-driving cars become affordable, some industry experts see them as a major challenge for established auto companies. Netflix took out Blockbuster and other retail chains and self-driving cars could flatten GM, Ford, Toyota, and other companies if they do not innovate fast enough. Supporters of self-driving vehicles note that they could substantially eliminate traffic accidents and could be electrically powered, thereby reducing American fossil fuel consumption for gasoline. Of course, this could create substantial economic challenges

because the collapse of American auto giants would create a major unemployment nightmare, but again, we are talking about the future.

In telecommunications, net neutrality will factor into this round. Earlier this year the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) voted along party lines (three Democrats to two Republicans) to reclassify broadband Internet providers as a telecommunications service, thereby allowing them to impose regulations as if these companies were public utilities. The FCC mandated that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) cannot block or throttle content, nor can they compel companies to pay fees to achieve faster speeds on their networks. Telecommunications companies such as AT&T and Comcast argue that net neutrality rules are bad for their business as small companies that provide online content, especially streaming content, such as Netflix need to pay for part of the infrastructure necessary to carry that content to customers. Thus far, AT&T and CenturyLink have called for the FCC to rethink these rules and a court challenge over them is likely to play out in the years ahead. Additionally, mergers have been the dominant theme of telecommunications in recent years and 2014-2015 was no different. Public pressure and regulator skepticism caused Comcast to abandon its bid for Time Warner Cable, which would have sizably increased Comcast's presence in the U.S. broadband market. Now, Charter Communications has reached a \$55 billion agreement to acquire Time Warner, but this may not survive regulatory approval either. America Online was also recently taken over by Verizon for \$4.4 billion as part of a push by Verizon to establish a greater presence in Internet content. Extempers should look into the arguments made for and against these mergers in telecommunications. Advocates for them say that they will result in better economies of scale and greater benefits for consumers, while skeptics say they will produce worse customer service and monopolies in local communities. Telecommunications firms are also being challenged by Google laying fiber networks in major metropolitan centers of the country such as Austin, Texas. In January, Google announced that fiber networks are planned for Atlanta, Charlotte, Raleigh, Durham, and Nashville. If successful, Google could enhance its market presence even more and it was notable during the net neutrality debate that Google was silent, which some took as an indication that it now sees itself as a premier, established corporation and not as a small start-up. Also, some local communities are looking into building their own Internet networks that can be run as a public utility and telecommunications firms are crying foul over this development well. In fact, some have called upon state officials to prohibit such action.

In the airline industry, Southwest continues to dominate and customers remain unhappy. The airline industry, like other sectors of the economy, has experienced significant consolidation in recent decades and four carriers – Delta, American, United, and Southwest – control 80% of domestic passenger traffic. Airlines now stand accused of making it more difficult for travel agencies such as Expedia and travel sites such as TripAdvisor to access their airfare and route information, thereby costing consumers billions of dollars. This has led to calls for regulations that mandate more transparency within the industry. Despite the complaints, though, the U.S. airline industry is set to have a good 2015 with 2.5 million travelers expected to hit the skies this summer, which would be an industry record. The industry also saw its most profitable quarter of all-time in the first three months of this year (likely helped by low oil prices and a stronger U.S. dollar). However, some investors are worried about oversupply as airlines are all planning to bolster capacity and this may fuel more competition, which in turn will produce lower prices on some flights and less corporate profits. The industry must also handle security challenges, with some worried about whether the industry is doing enough to prevent hacking of aircraft and there is a renewed focus on pilot mental health after the tragic downing of Germanwings Flight 9525 into the French Alps in late March.

The U.S. oil and natural gas industry's boom has helped to lower oil prices globally, but fears exist about how several firms are carrying too much debt that they may not be able to pay off due to the low rates of return that they are acquiring from low oil prices. To give an indication of how the industry has grown, in

2008 the U.S. produced 5 million barrels of oil a day, but last year it produced 8.7 million barrels of oil per day. Natural gas also increased from 57.7 billion cubic feet a day to 74.7 billion cubic feet per day during the same time frame. The boom has led to more jobs in states such as North Dakota and Texas, but again, people question whether the boom is sustainable. Optimists see continued innovation as an asset for U.S. oil firms, but sustained low prices benefit other oil producers such as Saudi Arabia that have fewer overhead costs. There are also concerns that a wave of defaults by oil companies could spill into financial markets as investors have found good rates of return here in recent years. This could sow the seeds of another financial crisis if regulators are not careful. With reports coming out that banks are starting to become hesitant in lending money to oil businesses that have growing debt burdens, this is a story that extempers need to start thinking about.

In terms of other prominent businesses and sectors, do not forget that you may get a question about the wisdom of Apple's investment in its recent watch. Also, fast food chains are redesigning their image with Taco Bell and Pizza Hut pledging to eliminate artificial flavors and colors from most of its selections. McDonald's is struggling with dismal sales figures, so much so that it has recently decided to quit releasing monthly sales data. The company's CEO Don Thompson retired in January (although he was really fired by all accounts) and Steve Easterbrook, its chief brand officer, was put in his place. Easterbrook has decided that the company needs to warm its burger buns more and also heat its burger patties longer to try to improve taste. Beyond this, the company also faces the brunt of worker protests for \$15 wages, something that is a very polarizing issue among Americans because a wage hike of that magnitude would make unskilled work on par with skilled work in some parts of the country. Still, Wal-Mart has decided to raise its hourly minimum wage to \$10 by February 2016 in face of some progressive protests. The U.S. steel industry hoped that 2015 would be a turnaround year, but this did not happen as prices collapsed and Moody's sees the industry as declining and not stabilizing. The steel industry has fought for more than a decade for trade protections, but this is an uphill battle for a Congress that is in the process of giving President Obama trade promotion authority. The U.S. poultry industry is facing the brunt of a bird flu outbreak that should not be ignored for this round and agricultural interests are feuding with West Coast and Southwestern states such as California over water rights in light of the region's drought. U.S. agricultural subsidies are also under international attack as Brazil is in the process of challenging U.S. subsidies for soy and corn farmers.

Finally, extempers should not forget about consumer protections in this round and this revolves around data breaches. Congress has yet to pass a major legislation that clarifies whether companies should monitor identity fraud, should be legally bound to recover financial losses that customers endure, and protect the credit ratings of minors. In the past few years, Anthem, Target, CareFirst, Sony's Playstation Network, and even the Internal Revenue Service have been hacked and customer information has been compromised to some degree.

Strategy

This round demands that you know about the microeconomic aspect of the economy and tests whether you can fit that into a macroeconomic framework. This inverts traditional economic rounds where you center your analysis primarily on wages, unemployment, or another economic issue and then use sectors of the economy or businesses as examples. If you are not aware of what is taking place in specific sectors of the economy, then you need to read about it over the next few weeks. You do not have to know every minor detail, but it helps to know which industries are doing well, which are not, and a few quick facts about each industry (e.g. what challenges they face, do they have labor disputes, how prevalent are mergers, etc.).

Remember that since this is an economic round that you will need to have statistics to back up your conclusions. This will include employment figures, profits, and growth numbers (or numbers that indicate a lack thereof). However, be careful of turning the round into a “data dump.” Make sure that you impact all of your statistics to give them meaning. So what if the airline industry’s profits have risen by 5%? What does that mean? Similarly, what might it mean for GM if it has to pay hundreds of millions more for worker’s health insurance? Numbers without impacts are numbers without meaning and the “data dump” strategy will not only hinder the communication of your advocacy, but it will also frustrate and alienate your audience. As I recommend for the other economic round, try to put a human face on the issues you are talking about here. If you have to talk about data breaches, try to find a brief story or quotation of someone who was negatively affected by the event. The same can be said of industry layoffs or poor pay. This will provide a creative dimension to your analysis and make it more realistic instead of merely theoretical.

Keep in mind that you can use a lot of information in this round to support your conclusions in the “The State of the American Economy” round and vice versa. Although your focus in this round should be more microeconomic, you can still touch on the strength of the American dollar, current monetary policy, and federal and state-level economic policymaking and regulation. Just remember that these aspects of the economy should not overwhelm your analysis in this round, though, and that they should *supplement* your existing analysis about a given industry.

For sources, you want to cut the business section of various newspapers such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The New York Times*, and *The Los Angeles Times*. Bloomberg’s *Business Week* is also valuable, as are any *Economist* articles that focus specifically on a U.S. industry. The Chamber of Commerce and the Department of Commerce can also provide interesting data on business activity in the United States and can help you vary your sources.

Practice Questions

1. Will net neutrality help or hinder innovation in the telecommunications industry?
2. What should companies be obligated to do when a data breach occurs?
3. Should regulators block the proposed Charter Communications-Time Warner Cable merger?
4. How can McDonald’s improve their sagging financial fortunes?
5. Will American automakers fortunes continue to improve over the next five years?

Topic Area #4: Congressional Issues

Issues

This topic area is the second of four American politics rounds in the tournament and as its name implies, all of the questions will in some way concerns the operations of the current Congress (which is the 114th edition for those keeping score). Many of the questions you draw will likely discuss public perceptions of Congress, some of its personalities, and some public policy issues.

The theme that carries through most of this round is deadlock as Republicans won the 2014 midterm elections and recaptured the Senate for the first time since 2006. Republicans now have 247 seats in the House of Representatives and fifty-four seats in the Senate, but one of their problems is that President Obama can veto any legislation that they manage to get through the chamber. Republicans lack a two-thirds majority to override a presidential veto, so they are stuck working with the President, but the problem is that far-right Republicans, especially those voters who turn out the most in primary contests, do not want to see Republicans working with the President on anything. The wrath that Republicans have

incurred from their base for moving to grant President Obama trade promotion authority illustrates this. For example, conservative talk radio shows such as Michael Savage's "The Savage Nation" actually praised Elizabeth Warren! John Boehner was frustrated in the last Congress by a rebellion by Tea Party members in his own ranks, who complicated the passage of agreements on the debt ceiling and forced a temporary government shutdown. He pledged in January to avoid falling into this trap again and overcame a Tea Party challenge to his leadership after the midterm elections. Political observers speculate the Boehner needs to grow more of a backbone in handling Tea Party-aligned Republicans that keep scuttling legislation in the name of ideological purity, saying that he should revoke rewards and committee assignments from those who oppose him. Thus, assessing Boehner's ability to keep Tea Party politicians in line with larger Republican goals could factor into this round.

In terms of other leadership questions, extempers should not forget that Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid is stepping down after the 2016 elections and he should be succeeded by New York Senator Charles Schumer, who is the third-highest ranking Democrat in the chamber. Reid's leadership was sometimes criticized for arousing too much partisanship in the Senate, pushing through controversial initiatives such as the "nuclear option" for presidential appointments, and he has a testy relationship with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell. However, critics of Schumer say that he is not the leader that suits the Democrats growing progressive tendencies. They note that he is too cautious as a tactician, too absorbed in his own political personality (jokes circulated around Capitol Hill of Schumer carrying the media with him everywhere so he can constantly be noticed), and he is also a friend of Wall Street financial interests. When Reid announced his retirement, there were calls by progressives for Elizabeth Warren to be made the Democratic Senate leader, but Warren was instead inserted into a leadership job to liaison with liberal groups. Despite these criticisms, Schumer is very intelligent (he scored a perfect 1600 on his SATs) and he has a moderate record that may make it easier to work with Republicans. For example, he has tended to take hawkish positions on foreign policy and Israel's defense (he lists Reform Judaism as his religion) and he is concerned that excessive regulations of the financial industry may impair American global competitiveness. In fact, Schumer has some of the same financial donors as some Republican candidates. His reputation as a "skilled dealmaker" in the chamber may also assist in more bipartisanship. And when it comes to leadership, extempers should not forget House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, who has been unable to get the Democrats back in control of the House after they lost it in 2010. After the Democrats lost thirteen seats in the 2014 midterms some moderate Democrats and even members of the Congressional Black Caucus began to publicly argue that it might be time for new leadership. If the Democrats fail to make significant gains in 2016 – a presidential year – Pelosi may start to feel more pressure to step down, so this is a story that extempers should think about. For his part, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell departed from Harry Reid's old format of not allowing senators from all parties to make amendments to legislation. The problem with this, though, is that it has slowed Senate business and made the body look more ineffective. McConnell has sold his image to the American public as a dealmaker, playing a significant role in ending the government shutdown two years ago, and he has shown little patience for members that want to push the government toward another shutdown over fiscal issues. McConnell was credited for securing trade promotion authority (TPA) for President Obama and some see him producing a more bipartisan atmosphere in the Senate, but it is still far too early to see if this will bear fruit in the years ahead.

Another big issue surrounding Congress is deadlock and this has become a big theme of the Obama presidency since 2010. The Republicans tried to live up to a campaign promise by pushing for the approval of the Keystone XL pipeline, a project that would eventually transfer oil from Alberta, Canada all the way to Houston, Texas, but President Obama vetoed the bill in late February, arguing that an environmental impact study is still pending and that the President of the United States has sole authority to approve the project. Republican attempts to repeal the Affordable Care Act have run into the same obstacle (they have tried to do this more than fifty times now). Anger over President Obama's unilateral

action on immigration sparked a feud over funding for the Department of Homeland Security, where the Republicans were forced to surrender at the eleventh hour when Democrats held firm. However, there have been some areas of bipartisan agreement. Congress agreed on a human trafficking bill this year, agreed to extend the Terrorism Risk Insurance Program, mandates better mental health care for military veterans, reauthorizing the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) that provides funds to states for giving health insurance to families with children, and securing a voice in an eventual nuclear deal with Iran. Nevertheless, Congress is still deadlocked over important issues such as reauthorizing the Patriot Act, funding for the Highway Trust Fund, finding common ground on equal pay legislation, immigration reform, and beginning the process of making reforms to entitlement programs. The Republicans have vowed to take action on tax reform, pass a budget, reduce spending and regulations, and support the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and other deals. President Obama is willing to work with them on trade and tax reform, but progress on the tax reform issue is not readily apparent.

The problem with a deadlocked Congress over the last few years is that it has weakened American confidence in the institution. Gallup recently found that Congress's approval rating is 19% (by comparison 58% of Americans approved of Congress in early 2003) and the Pew Research Center also found that just 23% of Americans think Republicans are keeping the promises that they made in the midterm elections. Critics of Congress charge that it is becoming too detached from the public, alleging that it is corrupt and that legislators are too concerned with their own careers rather than the public interest. Some political scientists allege that the reason the appointment of Supreme Court justices and the Federal Reserve Chair in recent years have become more acrimonious is because those institutions are the ones actually showing real power. Congress did not authorize gay marriage, but the Supreme Court might. Similarly, Congress has not yet acted on immigration reform, but President Obama has used the deadlock as an excuse to issue his own executive guidelines (and this is now subject to judicial review). Thus, anger at Congress reflects more generalized anger at the American political system and gives a greater impetus for those who seek campaign finance and other election reforms.

Strategy

Before you speak on this round it is important that you learn some of the major personalities that are part of the 114th Congress such as Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY), Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV), Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-OH), and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA). These figures dominate the public perception of what Congress is about for better or worse and they are in charge of trying to rally members behind or against certain pieces of legislation and plotting strategy. In fact, some of the questions you get in this round may be specifically tailored to some of these figures so it is important that you understand their records and their views on significant issues.

Since you will be talking about politically charged issues in this round, this can be one where you need to tread carefully. Do not refer to any of the politicians you are talking about as an "idiot" or bash them without evidence. Doing so is inexcusable because there is already ample evidence out there that shows that Congress is dysfunctional and unpopular. Similarly, you may think that the Tea Party or progressives in Congress are "loons" or "psychos" but such poisonous rhetoric does little for you in this round. If you disagree with a position that these sides are taking in the chamber then use evidence to show how they are misguided. Quotations from politicians can also be of great use in this round, especially if they come from figures that have significant power in either chamber.

Great sources for this round would include *Roll Call* (a very underutilized source in the extemp community), *Politico*, and *The Washington Quarterly*. The standard "politics" sections of mainstream American newspapers would also be of great use, so make sure to direct your attention there as you clip articles in the weeks leading up to the national tournament.

Practice Questions

1. Has Mitch McConnell been an effective Senate Majority Leader?
2. What has been the biggest success of the 114th Congress?
3. Will Chuck Schumer been an effective leader for Senate Democrats?
4. Should Democrats give Elizabeth Warren a greater voice in the Senate?
5. Would campaign finance reform make Congress a more efficient institution?

Topic Area #5: Education and Healthcare

Issues

This is a somewhat awkward pairings as health issues have traditionally been their own round at the national tournament (see last year's topic area on "Medicare, Medicaid, and the Affordable Care Act") and education was once paired with "issues of youth" as a topic area. Still, this is not a terrible round to navigate because of all the domestic social issues speeches that you have given during the season you have probably talked about healthcare and education topics more than any other issue.

First, education should be conceptualized as two separate fields: P-12 and higher education. When it comes to P-12 there are several significant policies that could factor in this round, most dealing with ways to reform the system. Education rankings from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) place the United States at twenty-eighth in scores for math and science among seventy-six different nations. As the global economy becomes more interconnected, there are fears that such an education deficit threatens national security and American economic competitiveness and this explains how STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) programs are receiving significant attention in schools today. In addition, states are trying to bolster their high school graduation rates and the federal government has given funding to states implementing "college and career readiness" standards. States have also been incentivized to adopt the Common Core education standards that are designed to increase rigor. However, teachers have blasted the standards are too difficult for some younger students and conservatives argue that the federal government is trying to get states to adopt Common Core to create a unified national standard (extempers should keep in mind that the federal government cannot set a national curriculum under the Constitution). Measuring student performance and holding schools accountable is also quite controversial as teachers and parents complain about too much testing of students. Sanctions against failing schools and financial incentives for schools that test well were part of what drove Atlanta public school administrators to cheat on state assessments, creating a scandal that involved more than 170 teachers and principals. Congress is currently looking into a reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), something that is long overdue, but the bill is bogged down over whether low-income students should be able to move to a better school and take their federal Title I funding with them and whether states should be able to design their own assessment instruments (this is criticized by reformers that believe states will create easy assessments to mask deficiencies). The NCLB debate creates strange bedfellows as Tea Party forces and teachers' unions favor less intrusion into the classroom, while other elements of the Democratic coalition such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and other civil rights groups support NCLB because it focused attention on the performance of minority, ESL, and low-income students. Other reform ideas that create significant controversy include school vouchers (the granting of funding by the government to a student to attend a private school), charter schools (schools that receive federal funding but are not bound by the same curriculum requirements as their public counterparts), merit pay (the awarding of financial incentives to teachers with good test scores), and lengthening the school year or day. And of course, there is always the debate over whether the federal government needs the Department of Education since that

department does not have the authority to create a national curriculum framework. Presidential candidates such as Kentucky Senator Rand Paul have floated the idea of abolishing the department to save costs, but proponents of keeping the department say that it is important in keeping education issues in the public eye and make the President aware of education concerns.

Another significant theme in P-12 education concerns inequality, not just between racial groups, but also within income brackets. There is a statistical correlation between richer areas and educational performance and social critics have noted that the flight of wealthier Americans to suburbs after the end of the Second World War gradually eroded the funding for urban schools, which came to be populated largely by minorities. Over the last several decades states have moved to equalize funding between schools, but since property taxes remain a significant amount of school funding such inequalities persist. Urban school districts such as Philadelphia are teetering on the brink of bankruptcy and Chicago faces a looming battle with its teachers' unions that could jeopardize the budget of the city's school system (Chicago has actually moved to close more than fifty public schools since Rahm Emanuel became mayor as a way to reduce costs via consolidation). Education reformers argue that charter schools can help to reduce income inequality by providing alternative options for parents, but teachers' unions argue that charters do not perform significantly better than public schools, are not as accountable as public schools with public money, and that they are part of an attempt to destroy the universal public school model. Questions of safety swirl around low-income schools as well, which does little to help a child's educational performance. This year marks the fifty-year anniversary of the Head Start program that provides early childhood education, health, and nutrition services to low-income students. Reformers have pushed the idea of universal preschool in recent years out of the belief that educating students at earlier ages can improve education performance, but critics say that such a program would be too costly and may not be worth the investment.

College issues often gets ignored by question writers in domestic social rounds, but at the national tournament that will not be the case. Concerns about tuition increases outpacing the rate of inflation have reinvigorated the debate over whether college is becoming unaffordable for the American working and middle class. States such as Wisconsin are cutting back on public education and many have failed to restore cuts made during the 2008 financial crisis, leading some to speculate if the American higher education model is in crisis. The rising cost of student loan debt is also perceived a genuine threat to the American economy in the long-term and continuing calls are made to have some type of bailout of those with significant student debt burdens. The Obama administration has tried to provide more federal assistance for student aid programs and has taken executive action to help strengthen consumer protections for student borrowers. Furthermore, President Obama has proposed two years of free community college for Americans, but critics question its cost, efficacy, and warn of the intrusion of the federal government into collegiate curriculum decisions as has been the case on the secondary level. Colleges are also under fire to do more about sexual assault with the federal government pressing schools to do more under Title IX. While these efforts have heightened awareness about sexual assault, critics allege that colleges are taking on an extralegal role to handle problems best left to law enforcement and some universities such as Columbia are facing lawsuits from male students that allege they were railroaded by administrators. The efficacy of liberal arts education is also under attack on college campuses as critics allege that students need to pursue degrees with better avenues of employment.

The healthcare side will continue to focus primarily on the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Republican efforts to repeal the legislation are going nowhere, although opponents of the law might win a small victory if the Supreme Court finds in *King v. Burwell* that the federal government cannot provide subsidies to states that have refused to set up their own health insurance exchanges. If this occurs, health insurance could become unaffordable for millions of Americans and there will be calls for larger reform of the ACA. Moderate Republicans have talked of making tweaks to the law, something President

Obama said he might be open to, and this could be an entering wedge for Republicans to turn the law into something that is more to their liking. However, there does not appear to be substantial momentum behind this kind of a push from most of the Republican ranks. The law has reduced the number of uninsured Americans from 16% to 12% and this number could become lower as the penalties for not having health insurance grow. Critics would argue, though, that mandating that Americans have to buy a certain product (in this case health insurance) is bound to improve those rates. The law also provides more affordable health insurance for women since insurance companies cannot use “gender ratings” (the counter argument for this is that men have had to pay much higher premiums than prior to the ACA to account for this) and those with pre-existing conditions can now get coverage. Still, some progressives argue that the ACA does not go far enough and they are still campaigning for a “public option” where the government would offer insurance to compete with private insurance companies. There are continuing concerns that the ACA may hinder economic performance as well since companies may not employ many full-time workers so as not to be compelled to provide insurance (the counter argument here is that more health insurance creates a healthier workforce and more vibrant economy). Some participating insurers in the ACA are also seeking to raise premiums by significant amounts for 2016 and beyond. 2016 is a crucial year for insurers because after this point they cannot rely on federal funds to make up for deficits that they are experiencing in their business models. Overall, be prepared for questions about the effectiveness of the ACA so far and you may also want to investigate what “tweaks” need to be made to the law.

Healthcare reform issues that warrant attention include Medicare (the health insurance program for the elderly) and Medicaid (the health insurance program for the poor). Medicare, along with Social Security, is becoming a larger share of federal spending as the population ages and there are greater calls to reform the program to keep it viable. Congress agreed this year to change Medicare payments to a performance-based system and establishing means-testing for Medicare drug programs (meaning that those who are low-income seniors do not have to pay as much). Still, more reforms are needed to prevent fraud in the program that costs the government billions of dollars each year. In fact, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found last February that Medicare was “a high-risk program” as its \$586 billion in payments are susceptible “to mismanagement and improper payments.” The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) supplements the GAO’s anxieties by finding that three to ten percent of all health spending is fraudulent! The ACA tried to fight parts of this by allowing the Department of Health and Human Services Secretary to impose a moratoria on providers in at-risk areas of fraud, but critics say that this actually hinders access for seniors, reduces competition, and creates higher medical prices in the long-run. When it comes to Medicaid, the big battle at the state level is expanding access under the ACA. Twenty-one states have yet to expand coverage and states that have are seeing the federal government pick up 100% of the tab (this falls to 90% by 2020). Medicaid has historically produced mixed results, with some arguing that it does little to help the poor as doctors put a limit on how many Medicaid patients they will accept and this can create long wait times. There are also fears that some states that have expanded coverage will be pressed for billions of dollars when federal assistance for expansion begins to wane after 2020. Like Medicare, fraud is a sizable part of the Medicaid program as well, with some federal estimates noting that 10-30% of Medicaid payments are fraudulent. Despite the problems, making cuts to either program carries risks. Politicians do not want to cut Medicare because senior citizens vote more than other segments of the population. Cutting Medicaid is somewhat easier because poor people tend not to vote as often and lack lobbying clout, but it still does not look good and can make politicians appear heartless.

Other health issues to take notice of in this round concern the regulation of e-cigarettes, the quality of mental health treatment, Indiana’s HIV/AIDS outbreak that has been linked to drug use, the use of sugar taxes to combat obesity, stem cell research, what role the federal government should take to reduce drug costs, and the progress of the “war on cancer” that health authorities have been waging since the 1970s.

Where there is some overlap in the education and healthcare issues in this round is the controversy over the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) that is run through the Department of Agriculture. First Lady Michelle Obama has made improved school lunches and fitness a linchpin of her tenure and there is a growing pushback against it. Parents and children have complained that the lunches are not enough for some students, especially those that participate in athletics, and there are widespread reports that students are throwing away lots of fruits and vegetables that they are required to take. Health advocates argue that these reports are overblown and that a healthy lunch can curb growing childhood obesity rates. Some schools have opted to drop out of the NSLP completely to avoid federal regulations. Recent reports that the Department of Agriculture made \$2.7 billion in improper reimbursement payments to schools from 2012-2013 has led Republicans to demand greater federal oversight of the program. Although separate from NSLP, there have also been calls to reform the federal food stamp program called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Some conservatives have taken to calling SNAP reform the “next welfare reform,” noting that the program has grown 69% under the Obama presidency despite poverty rising 16.5% and the program is becoming a middle class entitlement, which it is not intended to be. Reforms could focus on weak work requirements in the program and even mandating the purchase of healthier foods with SNAP funds. Democrats are casting such efforts as heartless, but the GOP may find some bipartisan cooperation in improving the nutritional element of the program since the diets of poorer Americans are more deficient than their wealthier counterparts.

Strategy

As with most domestic social topics, this round can be somewhat politically and emotionally charged, but that can actually work to your advantage. As I have recommended for other topic areas, put a human face on the issues that you are talking about. Many news articles on healthcare and education will provide quotations and stories of people that are affected by bad schools, cuts to public healthcare services, or medical malpractice. Sadly, many extempers just do not utilize this information and skip it in their reading of daily events. *Use* this material to show how decisions that policymakers implement have far-reaching implications. Such material can also provide powerful impacts for your speeches.

A big theme of this round is going to be reform, so I would challenge you to brainstorm some solutions for American crises in education and healthcare. Americans love to complain about the problems in each, but it is easy to complain and far harder to create a solution. Do not turn this round into a seven minute “complaint festival,” especially if the question asks you to assess whether a particular solution will work for a given problem or asks you to come up with a solution of your own. Think tanks such as the Brookings Institution (centrist), the Heritage Foundation (right-wing), and the Center for American Progress (left-wing) have drafted policy papers on healthcare and education topics, so use those sources (just make sure that if you cite them that you indicate their ideological bias to your judge)!

Furthermore, when it comes to the “education” part of this round you are actually a stakeholder and expert on the system since you are part of it, but you must recognize that most of your judges at the national tournament will be stakeholders as well (e.g. teachers, parents). As a result, if you choose to take an education topic do not make generalized statements such as “teachers are lazy,” “teachers are overpaid,” “public schools are awful,” or something along those lines. Yes, there are some bad teachers, administrators, and schools, but there are also some great teachers, administrators, and schools. You can probably score points if you talk about teachers being underappreciated and how standardized testing is wrecking the American education model, but this is not a time to make appeals without facts. If you want to raise teacher pay, how are states going to afford that? If you scrap standardized testing, what replaces it? Also, if you spend your time bashing the education system and you have a teacher as your judge, how are they going to feel? Imagine someone insulting the job that you have dedicated your entire life to.

Therefore, make sure you are very specific when talking about any problems in the American education system, but stress how the problems are fixable and how problems in certain areas of the country should not paint the entire system in a bad light.

I would also highly encourage extempers to avoid the term “Obamacare” when talking about the Affordable Care Act. Yes, the President has sometimes embraced that term, but it is often used in a politically charged way by conservative politicians that hate the law. The Affordable Care Act sounds much better and more professional, so I would suggest going that route, especially if you wish to give a speech that bashes the law. But again, if you choose to bash the Affordable Care Act you need to show how you intend to fix healthcare. What would happen to Americans that might lose coverage if the law was abolished? What is a better alternative?

Aside from the think tanks cited above, good sources for this round include *Education Week*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (a great source for college issues), *The Psychiatric Times*, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education’s websites, the Network for Excellence in Health Innovation, and the Education Sector.

Practice Questions

1. Should the federal government have the power to negotiate drug prices?
2. What steps should be taken to curb Medicare fraud?
3. Is the Common Core superior to No Child Left Behind?
4. Should Congress support President Obama’s call for free community college?
5. Has the Affordable Care Act significantly improved American healthcare?

Topic Area #6: Energy and the Environment

Issues

I am glad that to see that these two topics are combined into one area because the drive to fix some environmental problems such as air pollution and climate change directly involve the energy industry. The quest for renewable energy sources presents political and economic challenges for the American government and dealing with environmental issues has become a very polarized debate over the last several decades.

American fossil fuel consumption will be one of the primary focal points of this round. As noted in the “Business and Industry” topic, American production of oil and natural gas has increased as in 2008 the U.S. produced 5 million barrels of oil a day, but last year it produced 8.7 million barrels of oil per day. Natural gas also increased from 57.7 billion cubic feet a day to 74.7 billion cubic feet per day during the same time frame. This has given the U.S. some more energy independence and security, although it is continuing to use fossil fuels that environmentalists charge are harming the environment. There is also the question of whether U.S. production levels can be sustained since low global oil prices are putting the finances of some domestic firms in question. In addition, the use of fracking to extract natural gas has the potential to poison groundwater and some scientists are linking the technique with earthquakes in the Midwest. Pipeline projects in the Arctic and from Canada have also been scuttled thus far due to environmental concerns, thereby positing the current debate between extracting energy resources that the U.S. currently has and protecting the environment for future generations. A recent oil spill in Santa Barbara, California makes this debate even starker.

Despite low oil prices, the consumption of renewable energy resources is growing in the United States, hitting an eighty-year high in 2014. Economists note that 9.8% of America's total energy consumption is coming from renewable energy and that renewable energy use grew 5% a year between 2001 and 2014. Hydroelectricity is currently America's largest renewable energy source. However, one of the big challenges of renewables is their cost, feasibility, and environmental impact. To offset the cost, the federal government has provided subsidies for biofuels such as ethanol and money for research and development, yet renewables must find a way to become economically competitive on their own to really take over the marketplace. Fanciful ideas of paving the entire U.S. interstate highway grid with solar panels remain just that – fanciful – at the moment, although such proposals have attracted significant public interest. There are also side effects of various renewables that must be considered. Nuclear power is ideal, but communities are skeptical about having a nuclear plant, the costs of establishing one are high, and there are questions of safely disposing with nuclear waste. Hydroelectric power has the potential to disrupt aquatic systems, wind power can be an eye sore and a threat to birds, and solar panels can also hurt wildlife. Using biofuels as an energy source has the side effect of reducing food for the nation's population, which is something that is becoming less and less attractive with each coming year. Therefore, while renewables are making growth, America appears to still be wedded to fossil fuels at the moment.

Extempers should be familiar with actions taken by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in this round, especially under the guise of protecting groundwater and fighting climate change. The EPA recently passed new clean water rules to protect streams and tributaries and this extends the Clean Water Act to bides of water that are next to rivers, lakes, and their tributaries. The regulation can include prairie potholes, ditches constructed out of streams, and prairie wetlands off the coast of Texas. Conservatives have blasted the decision as a federal power grab that will create burdensome mandates on farmers and landowners, but EPA administrators note that the rule does not change existing exemptions for agriculture. The EPA's rule on restricting carbon emissions from the nation's power sector by 30% by 2030 have also come under fire. The EPA is expected to make that rule final in August and states will have a year to submit compliance plans, but it is very possible that some states may take the same route they did with the Affordable Care Act and refuse to submit them. In that case it is unclear what authority the EPA will have. As the United States heads to Paris for the UN Climate Change Conference there will also be legal questions about whether President Obama can commit the United States to a legally enforceable emissions target without having to submit such an agreement to Congress. The United States initially signed onto the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, but the U.S. Senate refused to ratify the treaty. The Obama administration has taken a firm stand on climate change, arguing that the U.S. must be a leader for worldwide carbon containment efforts and that climate change is a threat to American national security. However, conservatives remain skeptical about how much humans have influenced climate change and they warn that EPA air regulations will lead to higher electric bills for Americans and impair economic growth.

This year was the forty-fifth anniversary of Earth Day, but at the moment the American environmental movement is languishing. Although it has won victories with the federal bureaucracy, it has largely failed to win sizable legislative achievements. Low oil prices, languishing economic growth, and the growing significance of issues such as terrorism have also hurt the movement's ability to make inroads over the last several years. Some have said that the movement needs an overhaul as it is directed too much by wealthy white people. For example, low-income, minority communities often bear the brunt of the problems associated with pollution, but African Americans only hold 12% of the leadership positions in environmental groups. Also, a report by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy noted that environmental groups spent \$10 billion between 2000 and 2009, but only 15% of that money went to poor communities. There are also calls to fix environmental education and to emphasize how environmentalism is a civil responsibility and not a political affiliation. America's first-past-the-post

electoral system, though, inhibits the growth of a legitimate Green Party to campaign on environmental issues and this is another blow to environmental activism. Additionally, the diversity issues within the environmental movement mean that it has failed to gain some political traction as it is written off as a white liberal movement.

Further issues worth investigating for this round include California's four-year drought that has forced state residents to begin slashing their consumption. The state's plight has created a debate over how much water agricultural interests should have, why the state has not invested more in reservoirs over the years, and whether environmental laws have gone too far in protecting wildlife at the expense of state residents. Local laws prohibiting the use of plastic bags by supermarket chains are also a volatile issue as advocates champion their ability to avoid excessive waste, while critics say that it constitutes a tax on the poor. Huntington Beach, California recently made news by repealing its plastic bag ban, arguing that it failed to reduce waste, created a hassle for consumers, and failed to generate funds for environmental efforts. There are also efforts by foreign governments and some conglomerates in the U.S. to divest from coal mining, arguing that it will work to fight climate change.

Strategy

Much of this round will turn on your knowledge of technology, especially if you have to talk about energy. Make sure that you are aware of the various pros and cons of specific alternative energy sources such as nuclear, biofuels, hydroelectricity, solar, and wind. This knowledge can easily be cross-applied to many questions within this round. In addition, commit to memory the percentage of foreign oil America imports (27% - the lowest since 1985) and the figures cited earlier in this section about the growth of the oil and natural gas sector.

For the environmental topics, it is also good to remember the names and dates of significant environmental legislation. The Environmental Protection Agency was established via executive order by President Richard Nixon in 1970. The Clean Air Act was passed in 1970, the Clean Water Act in 1972, and the Endangered Species Act in 1973. These three pieces of legislation have been significant in giving the EPA the authority to regulate pollutants or threats to the environment.

As with the other domestic social-type rounds, look for the human element when talking about this area, especially if you have to detail the health effects of pollution or how a terrible environmental event is taking a toll on a specific community. Since environmentalism has lost some of its edge in recent years, you are really going to have to convince your judges that some of these issues, especially those without a specific link to climate change, are very important and worthy of their attention. Citing statistics about the potential side effects on public health of not fixing the environment, population dislocation, etc. can help make your impacts stronger in this round.

For sources, I would highly suggest going to *The Christian Science Monitor*, which actually has an "Energy & Environment" heading. Good policy centers on energy and environmental issues include the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the World Resources Institute, the Global Warming Policy Foundation, the Heartland Institute (a place to go for the skeptical side of the climate change debate), and the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies. Visiting the Department of Energy, the Department of Interior, and the Environmental Protection Agency's websites can also give you first-hand policy briefs from government sources.

Practice Questions

1. What effect will the Santa Barbara oil spill have on the California oil industry?

2. How can the U.S. environmental movement enhance its public profile?
3. Is California doing enough to mitigate the effects of its four-year drought?
4. Do the EPA's recent clean water rules go too far?
5. Is climate change a significant threat to U.S. national security?

Topic Area #7: Judicial Affairs

Issues

My advice for this round is to treat it as a U.S. constitutional issues round. Questions that you can expect will center on the operations of the Supreme Court, major cases that are pending before the court (some of which may bleed into "The Nation Next Week" topic area), or legal issues that may come before the court sometime in the near future.

Obviously, judicial decisions will be an important part of this round. Cases that extempers should keep an eye on include *King v. Burwell* that concerns the use of federal subsidies in states that have not set up their own health insurance exchanges, *Obergefell v. Hodges* that will decide whether the Constitution guarantees a right to same-sex marriage, *Glossip v. Gross* concerning the use of the sedative midazolam in lethal injections, and *Equal Employment Opportunity Commission v. Abercrombie & Fitch Stores* that will decide whether an employee should have been required to request a religious accommodation to wear a hijab when applying for a position at Abercrombie & Fitch. Lower court rulings on illegal immigration could factor into this as well as the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit has refused to lift an injunction against President Obama's deportation amnesty.

The round could also ask you to assess future issues that could come before the Supreme Court, thereby requiring you to adopt a more theoretical approach. Questions about abortion rights always linger near this round, so *Roe v. Wade*'s ability to survive legal challenge will factor in here, especially when it comes to moves by Congress to restrict abortions beyond twenty weeks. With states such as Nebraska now abolishing the death penalty a question about whether the Supreme Court may eventually find it in violation of the Eighth Amendment may also find its way into this round. Pro-gun groups are also bound to challenge future city or statewide gun control laws that are being pondered in places such as Chicago. Another issue that the Court recently decided not to consider, but may be worth thinking about is whether the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) apply to those arrested by police. The Court will also hear *Evenwel v. Abbott* in the near future which will decide whether states should consider total population or only eligible voters when drawing equal legislative districts. This could empower rural communities over urban ones and produce sizable shifts at the state level towards more right-leaning areas. In addition, the Supreme Court has shown over the years that it is becoming more and more skeptical of affirmative action programs and some think that if the current composition of the Court remains intact that such programs could be found in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment within the next decade. The recent net neutrality regulations and are also bound to come to the Supreme Court in the future, although that may take several more years. And do not forget about future cases that may present themselves about campaign finance reform that may allow the Court to revisit its ruling in *Citizens United v. FEC*.

Judicial affairs rounds can also turn on future Supreme Court picks. Obviously, if a Supreme Court justice were to retire or die before the next president is inaugurated, President Obama would choose a replacement, but such an appointment would have to pass a Republican Senate. As the delayed confirmation of Attorney General Loretta Lynch showed, Republicans are not going to make important appointments go without a fight and this would likely force President Obama to nominate a moderate justice. The oldest justice on the Court is currently liberal Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who is eighty-two years

old. The next two oldest justices are conservative Antonin Scalia (79) and moderate Anthony Kennedy (78), both of whom were appointed by Ronald Reagan in the late 1980s. If President Obama had to replace Ginsburg, the fireworks would probably be minimal since it would be a liberal justice replacing a liberal. However, if the appointment was for Scalia or Kennedy's seats there would be significant partisan maneuvering around the nomination. The current Supreme Court balance of power tilts to the political right – five judges to four – so the replacement of right-leaning judges such as Scalia, Kennedy, Clarence Thomas, Chief Justice John Roberts, and Samuel Alito would move the court in a liberal direction for the first time since the 1970s. Concerns about Ginsburg's age – former Kentucky Senator Jim Bunning once made headlines by saying that she was going to die soon – have led some liberals to ask that she step down so President Obama could appoint a younger replacement. However, she has refused to do so. Future picks by President Obama if a vacancy were to arise include Ninth Circuit Judge Paul Watford, Eighth Circuit Judge Jane Kelly, federal district judge Alison Nathan (who could become the first openly gay justice if confirmed), California Attorney General Kamala Harris (although this is unlikely now that Harris is seating a Senate seat in 2016), California Supreme Court Justice Goodwin Liu, former Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick, Stanford Law Professor Pam Karlan (who is also openly gay), gay rights litigator Paul Smith, former acting Solicitor General Neal Katyal, and Labor Secretary Thomas Perez. When thinking about who the next selection could or should be, you should also weigh the fact that people think the Court is not really showing the diversity of the public because all of the judges were law school graduates. The Court, unlike earlier times, does not have business leaders or politicians on it, so some worry that it is becoming too elitist with too many graduates from top-tier law schools.

Finally, this round may ask you to assess personalities on the Court and their doctrines. For example, left-wing justices such as Ginsburg and Sonia Sotomayor tend to see the Constitution as a living, changeable document. However, Scalia believes in the doctrine of originalism that calls for interpreting the Constitution as the Framers' intended back in the eighteenth century. This lends itself to a much more conservative, narrower reading of the document. Similarly, Thomas tends to reason out decisions based on jurisprudence from the nineteenth century, striking a very conservative tone more fitting for the Marshall or Taney courts of that era. Meanwhile, Chief Justice Roberts has shown a willingness to try to build consensus on the Court, although this has typically broken down on polarizing cases such as the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act. Still, Roberts have never authored a sole dissent on the Court during his tenure. Justices that issue sole dissents in cases tend to disagree significantly with their colleagues and tend to be the more politically polarizing figures on the bench such as Scalia or Thomas. He does default to limited government, though, and hates the Court being used to settle political disputes, which is becoming more common due to the polarized and deadlocked nature of the American political system today. The latter concern is why some think Roberts voted with the Court's liberal wing in deciding that the ACA was constitutional several years ago.

Some questions may even go beyond the courts to look at the Justice Department. You may be asked to assess the recent federal charges brought against FIFA for corruption, the involvement of the Justice Department in police brutality allegations in Cleveland and other major cities, and how Loretta Lynch will shift the Justice Department's direction after taking over for longtime Attorney General Eric Holder.

Strategy

You must know your important constitutional amendments to excel at this round. Yes, you can probably survive if you know little about the Constitution, but your speeches will not pack the kind of punch that they could have if this analysis is included. The First Amendment, Second Amendment, Fourth Amendment, Eighth Amendment, Tenth Amendment, and Fourteenth Amendment are the most contested amendments in Supreme Court history, so it is good to understand how the Court has ruled in some major

cases concerning these amendments and what those precedents may mean for future cases. For example, the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause has been a cornerstone of major civil rights decisions by the Court, notably in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 that ended segregated schools. Today, gay rights litigators are using the same amendment to argue against restrictions on the LGBT community. The Eighth Amendment's prohibition of "cruel and unusual punishment" is the key to death penalty cases and could one day be used to declare lethal injection, or the mixture of drugs used for it, unconstitutional. I would highly recommend putting a copy of the Constitution into your files for this round for a reference.

It also helps to know the specifics of recent Supreme Court cases that date back to at least the 1950s. These can constitute fantastic parallels for your analysis. For example, *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967 saw the Supreme Court strike down state bans on interracial marriage so that would be a fantastic example to use in a speech about gay marriage before the Court. Similarly, understanding the Supreme Court's rulings on abortion in *Roe v. Wade* (1972), *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey* (1992), and *Gonzales v. Carhart* (2007) can help you if you decide to talk about the abortion question (something you may want to avoid because of its polarizing aspect but if you tread carefully and offer sufficient explanation of both sides then doing a speech on this topic is possible). The good thing is that news articles will sometimes include these precedents for you, but doing some independent research of your own through Google searches can help. Merely typing in "Supreme Court abortion cases" will direct you to several sites that provide a case-by-case breakdown of major decisions on the topic.

The best speeches of this round will combine an understanding of constitutional law and discussion of Court precedents. Even if you have to talk about a specific person on the Court, using his or her stances on significant issues can be of great use. For example, if you have to talk about Ginsburg leaving the Court how might this change the Court's views of women's rights, abortion, search and seizure cases, and the expansion of federal power? A great example of a constitutional issues round is the 1988 NSDA U.S. Extemp final (that year the event was called "Constitutional Extemp"). Pay careful attention to the speech made by eventual winner David Kensinger that is over the use of wiretapping to stop terrorism. I would argue that it is one of the best speeches in NSDA history and would win a national final round in any era.

For sources, *The Christian Science Monitor* has some of the best coverage of judicial issues, with its articles providing an audience-friendly discussion of the major issues in upcoming cases and significant precedents. These can be found in the U.S. section of the paper under the "Justice" heading. SCOTUS Blog is also a fantastic resource for understanding Supreme Court cases and getting a statistical breakdown of the Court.

Practice Questions

1. How should the Supreme Court rule in *Glossip v. Gross*?
2. Is the Supreme Court bound to shift toward a more liberal direction over the next decade?
3. Will the Supreme Court eventually find the FCC's net neutrality regulations constitutional?
4. Has Chief Justice John Roberts been an effective voice for moderation on the Supreme Court?
5. If President Obama gets another Supreme Court pick, who should he nominate?

Topic Area #8: The Nation Next Week

Issues

This is the topic area that will be finals, so if you make it to this round then you are doing something right! This has typically been a miscellaneous round with broad questions about American political, society, and economic issues that have been in the news in the week leading up to the tournament or that have taken place during the tournament will be the subject of questions. Here were the questions asked for this round during last year's NSDA National Tournament:

- What message does the defeat of Eric Cantor in the Virginia Republican primary send to the GOP nationally?
- Can President Obama prevent a Republican takeover of the Senate in November?
- What is the most important lesson to be learned from the Bowe Bergdahl controversy?
- What will the House's inquiry into the GM recall achieve?
- Should access to quality education be considered a civil right?
- Is the Fed's recently announced plan to trim monthly bond holdings wise?

As I noted in the International Extemp topic analysis, if you are well prepared for the other twelve topic areas then you should be fine for this round. The NSDA is not going to throw you a crazy curveball here as they want all six speakers to perform well in the round.

This round could turn on legal issues since the Supreme Court is set to announce some decisions in some very significant cases by late June. See the previous section for breakdowns of these cases, but the gay marriage and Affordable Care Act decisions are likely topics here. Also, I would prepare for a general question about 2015 gubernatorial races, especially in a tossup state like Kentucky, and/or general questions about the 2016 presidential race such as the influence of progressives on the Democratic Party, whether Elizabeth Warren should run, if Hillary Clinton's lack of a sufficient primary challenge is good for the Democratic Party, and if there are too many contenders for the GOP nomination. For economic issues, do not forget that the Federal Reserve will decide in June whether to raise interest rates. Arel Rende won a question last year concerning the ending of quantitative easing so economic questions are fair game. Also, make sure that you are prepared to talk about controversial social issues as income inequality and police brutality will likely make an appearance here based on the way the 2014-2015 season has gone. The bottom line is that you should be ready for anything in this round, but the real challenge here will not be what question you draw but how you control your nerves and speak on the biggest stage of the year.

Strategy

If you make it to the final round – and I hope that you do – you are going to have a day off. The NSDA's typical schedule is to get through the first twelve rounds of the tournament by Wednesday and then hold a microphone check on Thursday. The final rounds for both extemp categories will not take place until Friday morning. This will give you some time to collect yourself, soothe a few of your nerves, and think of some ideas for your final round speech. I would suggest thinking of questions that you might draw and doing some sample outlines. You cannot take these with you to prep on Friday, but if you have already trained your mind on how to answer some likely questions then you can improve your chances of doing well. You can also think of introduction ideas, but try to avoid something that is so canned that it can be applied to every topic because judges will be able to see through that. Also, try to avoid letting the bigger stage take hold of you by turning extemp into standup comedy. This happened to a few good competitors in the past that felt so pressured to appeal to a large audience that they completely abandoned what got them to the final round and they ended up finishing lower than they should have.

If your school has a large stage, I would highly suggest that you try to give one or two practice speeches in that setting. In fact, it is probably a good idea if you have your coach rotate rooms that you perform in to mimic the national tournament as you will likely be speaking in seven or eight different rooms. Speaking on a big stage with lights and more than a hundred people watching (not to mention the few hundred that make their way into the live feed) is a very different experience, one that is not really replicated anywhere else. If you are not a national circuit competitor you may be intimidated by all of this, but keep one idea in mind when you get nervous: it is still a seven minute speech and the speech you are giving is no different than the other twelve you had to deliver to get to this point. I remember being very, very nervous before my 2003 U.S. Extemp final, but those nerves completely went away when I stepped onto the stage and began speaking. Once you are up there, enjoy the moment because even if you are an underclassmen there is a possibility that you will not make it back to the final round again. If you show that you are enjoying yourself you can win over your judges because some competitors the last few years looked like they were miserable. You will be tired by Friday, but you have to find the energy to get through this speech. Lastly, it is natural to feel some anxiety before this round, but just know that your fellow competitors are having the same feelings. Some people show it more than others, but the idea that people do not get nervous before speaking is a fallacy.

And do not forget to have your coach pick up a newspaper for you at the tournament. Even if it is just a hotel copy of *USA Today* this will keep you abreast of any big events that might void your planned analysis of the thirteen topic areas. Besides, if you are stuck with *USA Today* instead of *The New York Times* that is not so bad because at least *USA Today* has colorful graphs and statistical information that is readily accessible!

Practice Questions

1. Should Congress renew the Export-Import Bank?
2. What significance do the 2015 gubernatorial elections have on the 2016 presidential election?
3. Is education reform the civil rights issue of the 21st century?
4. What are the legal ramifications of the Supreme Court's ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*?
5. Should federal entitlement programs be means tested?

Topic Area #9: National Defense and the Military

Issues

Extempers should view this topic area as an extension of the "America's Role on the World Stage" round except that this round will focus exclusively on the "hard power" aspects of American influence in the world. Whereas diplomacy will likely dominate the "World Stage" topic area, this round will require you to think of defense priorities as they involve military aid to other nations, the defense of American interests in various parts of the world, and the state of the American military today.

The war against terrorism will be significant in this round as questions continue to swirl about how the United States can best fight the Islamic State. The group has continued to terrorize Syria and Iraq, destroying cultural landmarks and threatening ethnic groups such as Kurds and religious minorities such as Christians. The group has also capitalized on the unrest in Libya to establish a more prominent beachhead there and this has created an intervention by the Egyptian government. There are fears that the Islamic State could use Libya as a beachhead for spreading unrest to Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt, and that it could even use Libya as a vehicle to attack Southern Europe. President Obama and Congress are jostling over whether he needs new military authority to go more aggressively after the Islamic State, although the President has thus far refused to pledge American ground troops against the group.

American intelligence officials are also failing to keep up with the Islamic State's social media presence and there are questions about whether Americans that have left to fight for the group will become a threat if they return home. As an extension of the war on terrorism, questions will continue to swirl about whether the United States should send ground troops back to Iraq to help bolster the fortunes of the Iraqi government and whether its troop commitment in Afghanistan should be increased beyond the 5,500 soldiers that will remain there by the end of the year. The problem of the war on terrorism is that the United States is fighting an enemy without recognized boundaries. Some military analysts even speculate that the United States may have to begin fighting proxy wars to protect its interests as Iran is using groups such as Hezbollah to enhance its position in Lebanon and Syria. Doing so would raise significant ethical questions, but since perceived enemies of the United States are willing to use militant groups and other forces to accomplish their aims indirectly, the U.S. may want to consider this option.

There are fears that the United States is coping with more belligerence by a resurgent Russia as well. The United States has been critical of Russian operations in Ukraine and has favored significant economic sanctions, but Russian President Vladimir Putin is undeterred. Reports of Russian surveillance activities near the Baltics and Scandinavian countries have raised fears that Russia may try to drive near these areas and a worst case scenario would see Russia try to increase ethnic tensions in the Baltics and intervene as it did in Ukraine. The Baltics are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), but the United States is having to wrestle with some of the contradictory aims of European leaders on security issues. While some European leaders such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel have called for an EU army, other European leaders such as British Prime Minister David Cameron are pursuing austerity policies that will produce cuts in defense spending. A tension in the NATO is how the United States is shouldering a significant amount of the funding for the organization despite the fact that Russian aggression is becoming a more pressing problem for European nations. For example, it was reported in February that only the United States and *Estonia* put more than 2% of their respective GDPs toward defense that all NATO members pledged to meet in September 2014. As the European continent continues to wrestle with its own economic problems, American policymakers are starting to question whether continued funding of NATO at existing levels should continue and there are also growing concerns about European nations "free riding" by cutting military expenditures and hoping that the U.S. will pick up the tab. If existing trends continue, tensions could rise in trans-Atlantic relations as fiscal pressures force the U.S. to make choices between cutting its defensive presence in Europe or demanding that European nations make structural reforms to bring their military budgets up to par.

China and the U.S. have been sparring recently over Chinese interests in the South China Sea and the Chinese construction of artificial islands where it has reportedly placed artillery and other military equipment. Chinese officials have warned the U.S. to stay out of the issue and to refrain from aggressive behavior that includes American military patrols of the area, but U.S. military planners fear that without a more aggressive presence in the region the Chinese could erode American influence and threaten U.S. interests in the Philippines, Japan, Malaysia, and elsewhere. Extempers should note that China is claiming that it owns 90% of the South China Sea, territory that was once deemed international waters, and they should also note that American interests in the region are not about the resources of oil and gas that might be found in the South China Sea, but freedom of navigation. Remember, the United States entered the War of 1812 and the First World War due to this principle, but a big question is whether Chinese military planners understand this. Chinese and American tensions are also rising over American courting of India, especially continued work on a nuclear agreement between the two sides, and one cannot forget Taiwan either, which the U.S. has vague commitments to protect.

This round may also include a discussion of American security issues. At the time that this analysis was written, Congress was grappling with reforming or reauthorizing the Patriot Act that gives more intelligence powers to the National Security Agency (NSA) and other government agencies. Concerns

about privacy and the government eavesdropping on phone calls has created a battle over reauthorizing the Patriot Act and libertarians such as Kentucky Senator Rand Paul have spoken out against the bill. A reform of the Patriot Act would include passage of the USA Freedom Act that calls for limiting the NSA's ability to collect some intelligence data. Supporters say that the Patriot Act is needed to preserve national security, arguing that some of the law's provisions such as the government's ability to monitor a suspect when they switch phones instead of getting a warrant to monitor a new phone line are important to fight international terrorism. Border security is another major issue, with people warning that American ports are still vulnerable, but there is some evidence that undocumented immigration into the United States is decreasing. In fact, the Department of Homeland Security recently reported that illegal immigration activity is at its lowest in three decades. Despite these claims, Texas and other border states are investing hundreds of millions in more border security with some legislators talking about drug violence from Mexico spilling over the U.S. border. A recent lapse whereby deadly anthrax samples were accidentally sent to Australia, South Korea, and labs in nine states has also put the U.S. military under the microscope in terms of its containment procedures.

Other defense issues for this round would include the debate over how prepared the United States is for a cyber attack. There are fears that the United States is losing its advantage in cyber capabilities relative to other nations and protecting the nation's defense grid from hackers from foreign nations, especially China and Russia, has become an issue of growing concern. Analysts note that even rogue states such as Iran, North Korea, and Syria are working to bolster their cyber warfare capabilities and that terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda are even dabbling in the field. The continued use of drones to strike terror targets in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and elsewhere also creates problems for the United States when such attacks create civilian casualties. There are also fears of the proliferation of the technology and fears about privacy, not to mention a recent controversy where the Air Force and Army were not sure of the length of time some drone pilots had been trained. Extempers may also be asked about the size of the U.S. defense budget, which is more than \$600 billion. The United States typically spends more than 3% of its GDP on defense and this is four times as much as the next nation – China – but there have been calls to cut back on defense spending and put that back into social programs or “nation building” at home with infrastructure. There are also criticisms of wasteful spending on initiatives such as the missile defense program, the promotion of the military at sporting events, and the F-35 advanced fighter jet that is billions of dollars over budget and far behind schedule. As the U.S. national debt continues to rise there are doubts about whether the U.S. can continue to be the “world's policeman” even if it wishes to do so. Finally, you may be asked to assess the job of Defense Secretary Ashton Carter, who assumed office when Chuck Hagel stepped down in February. Carter is trying to do more to reach out to U.S. troops and improve their morale, but he has also generated controversy by significantly criticizing the willingness of the Iraqi government to fight the Islamic State.

When it comes to the military side of this topic area, questions will focus on morale, training, and health. Some analysts argue that the military is facing its worst morale crisis since the 1970s and it is not really a secret that military personnel are not fans of President Obama's foreign policy decisions. The Obama administration repealed the Clinton-era rule of “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” in 2011 and women are now being shifted into direct combat roles. The military has also taken steps to begin welcoming transgendered individuals into the armed forces. One of the significant battles in the military is what standards women should be held to with regards to Ranger School and Marine Infantry Officers School, especially as reports circulate that large numbers of women are not passing. Critics say that physical standards cannot be lowered because in combat operations lives could depend on a soldier carrying heavy equipment or a fellow wounded soldier, so the debate is very emotionally charged, but most are in agreement that if women can meet established standards that they should be able to participate in serving in the nation's military. The military is only a year removed from its health scandal in the Veterans Affairs Department, so following up on that may be the source of a question or two. The scandal created

turnover at VA hospitals nationwide, but some veterans continue to complain about long wait times and slow treatment. There have also been criticisms of VA hospital projects that are running behind schedule and that have cost overruns beyond \$1 billion. Reformers want to make sure that the Veterans Affairs Secretary has the power to fire staff that are performing poorly and there have been calls to let veterans go to other providers in VA hospitals are not meeting their needs. The VA's problems can be linked to reports of mental health services in the military, which some say are not going far enough to help Afghan and Iraqi War veterans. Indiana Democratic Senator Joe Donnelly is pushing for more mental health options for active and retired military personnel (the legislation is called the Community Provider Readiness Recognition Act) and legislation was passed this year to require annual mental health evaluations of all military service members. Finally, the military is still wrestling with combating sexual assault within its ranks, but there are signs that it is making progress as the percentage of military personnel that said they were victims of sexual assault plunged by 27% over the last two years. Still, more has to be done to help victims come forward, provide them with necessary medical and mental health services, and complaints must be taken more seriously. New York Senator Kirsten Gillibrand has fought to take away the prosecution of sex crimes from the military and place such prosecutions in an independent body, but the military has objected and Gillibrand's efforts have been filibustered. A compromise measure did pass last year, though, and this legislation that was sponsored by Missouri Democratic Senator Claire McCaskill ended the statute of limitations for rape cases in the military, made retaliation for reporting such crimes a crime, and allowed civilian authorities to handle some sexual assault cases.

Strategy

Keep in mind that in this round there is overlap with the "America's Role on the World Stage" topic area so some of your analysis of American "soft power" can be combined with an analysis of "hard power," possibly allowing you to weigh which of the two is in America's best interest when confronting significant international problems such as terrorism, China, and Russia. Since you are probably going to have to talk about a foreign country in this round, especially if you choose a topic that is not specific to the internal operations of the American military, then you will need to provide sufficient context for that other country (or countries) in your speech. For example, you cannot give a speech on American military intervention in Syria unless you also discuss the actions taken by the Syrian government against rebel forces and who those rebels are. Similarly, when assessing American defense interests in East Asia you are going to have to talk about the interests of China, South Korea, and Japan.

If you do talk about an internal problem in the American military, especially if it concerns LGBT issues or women, make sure that you are careful with your rhetoric. This is especially true if you are discussing sexual assault or sexual harassment in the military. Make sure that any controversial claims such as the incidence of assault in the military or the challenges that women have faced in military physical testing are supported by evidence. Making broad claims that the nation's military is being ruined by political correctness or that the military is a destructive tool of American imperialism are bound to turn off at least one of your judges and in a cumulative tournament that is death. This is not MSNBC or Fox News. Instead, you need to show what the military's challenges are with inclusion, discuss how it is responding to these challenges, and the pros and cons of various approaches (note that the McCaskill compromise bill was passed by Congress but Gillibrand's was not). Even if a judge disagrees with your position, if you couch your speech in a framework of factual evidence that sounds neutral you are more likely to end up with a higher rank.

Sources worth looking into for this round include the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Center for Advanced Defense Studies, the Center for Defense Information, Defense One, and *The*

Military Times. Also, check out the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Veterans Affairs websites.

Practice Questions

1. How can President Obama restore morale in the nation's armed forces?
2. Is a more inclusive American military a more effective one?
3. Should the United States consider Boko Haram as a national security threat?
4. Would a drawdown of defensive commitments in Asia be in America's best interest?
5. Should the U.S. send ground troops to combat the Islamic State?

Topic Area #10: The Obama Legacy

Issues

This topic area is a staple of the national tournament when American presidents enter their final years in office, although it seems as if the question writers are jumping the gun on this topic area by a year. Still, President Obama is in the twilight of his presidency and it is time for extempers to begin assessing how history may view him later. This round will ask you assess the policy successes and failures of the Obama presidency, as well as its impact on the Democratic Party and American politics.

Obviously, race will always be on the defining characteristics of the Obama presidency. As the first African-American president, Barack Obama achieved something that many African Americans never thought that they would see in their lifetimes, especially coming just over forty years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In some ways, President Obama's race has been an asset as he was able to turn out black voters in record numbers in 2008 and 2012, but it has also been a problem because he has been forced to speak out more on racial division in the United States, especially with regard to policing, and this has put him in a very uncomfortable (and unwinnable) situation. Unfortunately, although his election in 2008 was deemed as a way to overcome racial divisions, the Obama administration has governed during a time of renewed racial animosity. Unemployment numbers for African Americans, especially men, have remained higher than whites and crime rates continue to trouble minority communities in major metropolitan areas such as Detroit and Chicago, fueling a troubling cycle of police intervention and conflict that erupted into riots in Ferguson, Missouri and Baltimore, Maryland this year. A recent *New York Times* poll has found that public perceptions of race have grown more negative in the last several years and President Obama has been unable to reverse this trend. Thus, historically President Obama will remain a substantial figure because of his breakthrough victory, but he has struggled to heal lingering racial animosities in the United States.

Another major theme of the Obama presidency has been the number of gains made by Latinos, women, and the LGBT community. President Obama has continued to push for immigration reform that would allow millions of illegal immigrants, who are mostly Latinos, to remain in the United States. Executive action in July 2012 saw the President create the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program that protected illegal immigrants from deportation as long as they were in school or were honorably discharged from the military. DACA provided de facto amnesty for more than 500,000 immigrant youths. President Obama has also tried to push for a broader amnesty through more executive action last year that would give work permits to millions, but the courts are currently blocking this. He also appointed the first Latina Supreme Court justice in Sonia Sotomayor. Women have benefitted under the Obama administration's Affordable Care Act (ACA) law that reduced their insurance rates by abolishing gender rating and the President has fought against abortion restrictions originating from Congress (although extempers should be careful to note that not all women support abortion).

Additionally, the administration has fought to mandate that employers provide contraception to their employees, although this was thwarted by the Supreme Court. The Obama administration has also fought for equal pay legislation, supports women being on the front lines of the nation's military, and both of President Obama's Supreme Court picks have thus far been women. The Obama administration has also provided gains for the LGBT community as it did not defend the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in court, eliminated the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy in the military, signed an executive order in April that prohibits federal contractors from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, and the Justice Department announced in February that same-sex couples could file jointly for bankruptcy and taxes and would not be compelled to testify against each other at trial.

When it comes to foreign policy, President Obama has tried to move away from the more aggressive actions of President George W. Bush, who was skeptical of international institutions and showed a willingness to act unilaterally if it suited American interests. The Obama administration lived up to a campaign pledge and withdrew American troops from Iraq, but the Islamic State soon emerged there and destabilized a government that the 2007 "surge" had protected. Similarly, the Obama administration has moved to reduce America's commitments in Afghanistan, although thousands of troops will remain there in a training role. The killing of Osama bin Laden was a significant achievement, but bin Laden's death has not stopped the growth of worldwide terrorism. In a move to support the "Arab Spring," President Obama supported the toppling of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in 2011 and then worked with NATO allies to oust Libyan dictator Moammar Gaddafi that same year. However, the Egyptian military overthrew the elected Muslim Brotherhood government in 2013 and Libya has descended into chaos, with some critics of the administration saying that it proves the need to put "boots on the ground" and not merely rely on air power to facilitate a political transition. The Obama administration has also achieved diplomatic breakthroughs with Cuba and Iran, but Congress could scuttle both if it does not end the Cuban embargo and refuses to approve an eventual Iranian nuclear deal. The President's decision to "pivot" American foreign policy to Asia may reap benefits into the future if closer cooperation with the Indian government can be achieved. The attempt to "reset" relations with Russia ended poorly and it remains unclear if sanctions will force Vladimir Putin to change course in Ukraine as Russians blame the West for their recent economic problems. In many ways, President Obama had good intentions for foreign policy, but he is facing growing threats to American interests in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East that may be passed onto his successor.

There is also the question of the economy. President Obama inherited an economic nightmare in 2009 and although growth is returning to the economy, it has been sluggish. Unemployment has fallen below 6%, but millions of Americans are still too discouraged to look for work or are "underemployed," which means that they are in part-time work but wish to work full-time. The poor economy has taken a significant toll on younger Americans who find it harder to get jobs than other Americans who have more experience in certain industries. The administration have overseen dramatic growth in the federal food stamp program and has pushed for a higher minimum wage, but his opponents argue that his support for more environmental regulations, higher wages, immigration, and provisions of the ACA discourage firms from hiring workers. President Obama has even become embroiled in an intraparty conflict with progressives over his support for trade initiatives such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The stock market has shown very vibrant signs of life during the Obama years. In fact, major stock market indexes such as the Dow Jones Industrial Average and the S&P 500 have reached all-time highs, yet there is the problem of these gains benefitting a small number of Americans (only 13.8% of Americans own stock). Indeed, this problem of income inequality has become a staple of the Obama presidency and the problem has become part of the rhetoric of both parties that argue they are best suited to solve the problem. Progressive critics of the President allege that he still has not gone far enough on Wall Street reform and did not take advantage of the supermajority he had in Congress between 2009 and 2010 to implement reforms that could prevent another financial crisis. Extempers should not forget that questions about the

2009 stimulus and the auto bailout. Economists such as Paul Krugman have claimed success for both programs, although Krugman consistently writes about how the 2009 stimulus – worth \$831 billion – needed to be bigger. U.S. taxpayers did lose \$9.26 billion on the auto bailout, but this was less than economists expected and the auto industry did recover more quickly than other parts of the economy and is now thriving.

In terms of a wider political legacy, President Obama has positioned the Democratic Party well with a variety of interest groups such as unions (he has supported \$10.10 as a federal minimum wage via executive order in 2014), African Americans, Latinos, women, the LGBT community, and young people, but the problem that the Democrats may face is that this constituency tends to only turnout in large numbers in presidential years. Yes, this coalition if it holds for the 2016 election, will give Democrats a lock on a large pool of electoral votes, but it also produces substantial losses for the party in midterm elections. Analysts warn that one of the negative legacies of the Obama years may be a dwindling of the Democratic “bench” for Senate and presidential contests and they point to the dearth of credible candidates running for the party’s presidential nomination as proof of this. In many ways, President Obama is the most liberal American president since Lyndon B. Johnson, but ensuing presidential elections will show whether his liberal alignment of the party will reap long-term benefits. However, it can be said that President Obama has done a good job painting the GOP into a corner with Latinos and that he has done a great deal of work to frame them as the party of privilege and multinational corporations.

Strategy

The biggest advice that I can give for this topic area is that you need to put aside your opinion of President Obama as much as possible and try to evaluate his presidency as a historian and from a distance. When one uses the term “legacy” it does not so much imply how Barack Obama’s presidency will be viewed in the short-term, but rather how Americans will look back at his years in office between 2009 and 2017. Will they view this as a time of significant problems that the President tried but failed to control? Will they see it as a transformational moment when aggrieved groups finally had a stronger voice in federal policymaking and liberal dreams that were cast aside for decades were finally enacted? The worst thing you can do in this round is to avoid this component and give a seven minute speech that either deifies or bashes the President. You need to think of how his policies will affect future presidents and whether he is going to transfer a more stable country to another leader in a few years.

History can be a great tool for this round, especially if you wish to assess how some presidents are ranked by historians. Presidents such as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin D. Roosevelt are typically ranked highly because they effectively dealt with some sort of significant challenge and succeeded (e.g. Washington maintained a stable American government for eight years and avoided what could have been a disastrous war with Great Britain in the 1790s, Lincoln guided the country through the Civil War, and Roosevelt restored American confidence in democratic governance with the New Deal). Other presidents such as James Buchanan and Warren G. Harding tend to rate poorly because they either failed to solve significant national problems or led scandalous administrations (Buchanan failed to prevent the Civil War and Harding was ill-equipped to lead the country in the 1920s). Rating presidential legacies is something that takes more than a generation as President John F. Kennedy is steadily dropped in the rankings since his assassination in 1963 while President Harry S. Truman, who left office with low approval ratings and was despised by many Americans, has steadily risen. Currently, President George W. Bush rates very poorly, but future historians might be more kind to him. As of right now, historians have placed President Obama in the top half of American presidents so he is off to a nice start, but the readers of this analysis will have to wait until they are senior citizens to find out if he will stay there. Still, presidential comparisons can prove useful in this round, especially if you wish to place President

Obama's legislative achievements in their proper context. For example, the Affordable Care Act could be seen as a further extension of the American welfare state on par with the New Deal of Roosevelt and the Great Society of Lyndon Johnson. The ACA is also an area where President Obama succeeded where other presidents such as Truman, Richard Nixon, and Bill Clinton failed.

Practice Questions

1. Has the Obama presidency enhanced the image of the Democratic Party?
2. What will be considered as the most significant legislative achievement of the Obama presidency?
3. Have women benefitted the most from the Obama presidency?
4. What will be President Obama's economic legacy?
5. Has President Obama's foreign policy made America's position in the world more secure?

Topic Area #11: Social Controversies

Issues

All of the extempers in the prep room will probably be dreading this round because – as the topic area's name implies – you are going to be talking about sensitive and controversial issues that demand a careful approach. American society has become very polarized along political lines and that makes this round very dangerous for every extemper that hopes to leave Dallas with the national championship.

The first issue that will come to mind for many extempers will be this year's controversies surrounding police interactions with minority communities. The shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, the shooting of Tamir Rice in Cleveland, the shooting of Walter Scott in Charleston, the death of Eric Garner after a chokehold was applied by a New York police officer, and the death of Freddie Gray while in police custody in Baltimore have raised questions in American society about the tactics of police, how they interact with the communities they serve, and racial justice. These concerns are not always strictly along political lines as Republicans such as Kentucky Senator Rand Paul have echoed the concerns of liberals that police forces in America are becoming "militarized," receiving surplus military equipment through the 1033 program that was created in 1997. Under the program, more than 8,000 local law enforcement agencies have received more than \$5 billion in American military equipment that includes grenade launchers, medical supplies, and armored vehicles. When law enforcement clashed with protesters in Ferguson late last year this equipment was on display and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has raised significant questions about the program. The riots that struck Ferguson after the decision of a grand jury not to indict the officer that shot Brown and that hit Baltimore after details of the Gray case began leaking out were the worst instances of racial unrest that the country has experienced since the 1992 Los Angeles riots. Some commentators point to the 1960s when American cities were engulfed in race riots in places such as Detroit, Newark, and Watts. Concerns about the economic damage of the riots, how they affected small business owners, and whether investment will return to these communities have proliferated. The Justice Department's Civil Rights Division is currently investigating and working to change police tactics in some cities, recently reaching a settlement with Cleveland's police forces. The Justice Department is also looking at police tactics in Baltimore, Ferguson, New York City, Seattle, Newark, and elsewhere. Under the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, the Department of Justice can step in when police engage in "a pattern or practice of conduct" that infringes on citizens constitutional rights. President George W. Bush discouraged federal intervention in police affairs, but the Justice Department under President Obama has increased the number of "open consent decrees" (basically memos of understanding) with cities. If cities refuse to work with the DOJ then they could be sued for civil rights violations. Police unions have criticized recent federal interventions as making their jobs more difficult and there is evidence that police patrols have become less engaged

following the Gray shooting in Baltimore and the death of Garner in New York, thereby creating a rising crime rate in these cities (although police officers in both areas say that they are not intentionally slowing down activity). To fix the problem, there have been calls for police forces to increase their number of minority officers so that they best reflect the demographics of the communities they serve and to provide all officers with body cameras. The problem with body cameras, though, is storing the necessary footage as some departments have struggled to do this after adopting the technology.

Issues of religious tension are likely to emerge in this round as well. Christian conservatives are fighting against the drive for gay marriage, alleging that if the Supreme Court legalizes the practice that they could lose their tax-exempt status if they refused to officiate gay weddings. Disputes have also arisen about whether conservative religious schools have the power to dismiss LGBT faculty that go against church doctrines. Conservative politicians have sought to carve out religious exemptions for institutions or individuals who may not want to serve the LGBT community for religious reasons with so-called “religious freedom bills. Indiana and Arkansas passed such bills this year and this has provoked significant public outcry and controversy. States are now moving to ban so-called “gay conversion therapy,” which is the practice of trying to change the sexual orientation of homosexuals, on the grounds that it unnecessarily shames individuals and has led to some suicides by LGBT youth. President Obama has also called for an end to such psychiatric treatment, but no federal legislation has been passed to do so. The handling of transgendered individuals has become an issue of growing prominence the last few years as well, with the Girl Scouts announcing that they are welcoming transgender girls and schools are being pressed to do more to protect transgender students and staff. The U.S. Department of Education has informed schools across the country that transgender students are protected under Title IX, which the LGBT community has seen as a significant victory. Religious issues go beyond Christianity, though, as the role of Islam in American society has been debated since the war on terrorism. It was only a few years ago that Oklahoma moved to ban the use of sharia law in court and South Carolina’s legislature has considered a similar move. Critics say that such moves are “a solution in search of a problem.” An attack on a Mohammad cartoon contest in Garland, Texas earlier last month has prompted a debate over free speech and whether such events should be allowed to take place when they seek to offend a certain group in society. Those blasting such cartoon events say that they are “Islamophobic” and violate the multicultural principles that American society should represent.

Culture clash has also been highly charged when it comes to the illegal immigration issue. Although reports exist that levels of illegal immigration are declining, conservative Americans argue that the borders are not secure and that the federal government should not reward those who came to America illegally with amnesty, as was done under President Ronald Reagan in 1986. Latinos are the fastest growing demographic group in America and anxieties about their rise have witnessed the call for English-only legislation in some communities. The illegal immigration debate can become heated because some economists charge that immigrants have taken a significant chunk of employment gains made in the economy since 2008, while supporters note that deporting millions of people would be inhumane. There is an education dimension to the battle as well as some communities that are housing large numbers of illegal immigrants are having to provide language services, something that is straining some local education budgets.

Other social controversies that can exist in this round include Congress’s latest push for an abortion ban after twenty weeks, the equal pay debate, the teaching of evolution in schools, the legalization of marijuana, how effective colleges are at responding to allegations of sexual assault, affirmative action, and whether states should abolish the death penalty (or move to more experimental measures of capital punishment such as the use of nitrogen gas). Some of these issues overlap with the “Judicial Affairs” round, but any questions on similar topics will avoid a legal dimension. For example, a question in this

round on the death penalty is likely to simply ask whether states should eliminate the practice as opposed to whether the death penalty violates the Eighth Amendment.

Strategy

Of all of the United States Extemp topic areas, this is the one that could decide the national championship. If I were competing at this year's nationals I would hope that this topic area was in prelims so that I could overcome a terrible draw, but if this topic area ends up in elimination rounds then it could change the dynamics of the competition because someone might not be able to overcome a devoutly left-wing or right-wing judge that may not want to hear another side of an argument. This is not meant to scare or discourage you, but before you go to the NSDA National Tournament you should give great thought to how you tackle subjects that would normally be avoided in rounds. Topics such as racial unrest, abortion, affirmative action, the death penalty, and multiculturalism create passionate debates in American society and these feelings will affect your judges.

As with other sensitive topics, you need to make sure that you couch any big claims within the confines of your evidence and it is *very* important for this round that when you cite evidence that might be ideologically biased that you recognize such biases. For example, if you are talking about illegal immigration and cite the Heritage Foundation as a source then you had better tell your audience the Heritage Foundation is a conservative think tank! Be careful to avoid heavily charged language in this round as well because you do not want to put your judges on the defensive. Derisive language toward a particular political viewpoint should be taken out of your lexicon, so do not make references to "radical feminists," "liberal elitists," or "Tea Party whackos"! Also refrain from calling political actors or social activists as "morons" or other derisive terms.

When tackling a sensitive subject, I always think it is important that you pay heed to both sides of the argument. The best place to find this is by looking at rival think tanks views of an issue (e.g. Center for American Progress vs. Heritage) or dueling op-eds from major newspapers. *The New York Times* op-ed page leans to the political left, while *The Wall Street Journal* leans to the political right and they will have very divergent views about the issues of the day. Columnists such as Eugene Robinson, Paul Krugman, Thomas L. Friedman, Charles Krauthammer, and Peggy Noonan showcase the views of a wide part of the political spectrum, so for this round I would encourage you to cut op-eds (you should be cutting them anyway as they provide great point ideas for speeches) and read them so that you can understand the main arguments each side is using to support for their view. For example, when it comes to the unrest in Baltimore liberal voices have talked about more federal funding for urban areas, whereas conservatives have blasted such policies as creating the endemic poverty that fueled the riots there. If you can incorporate both views into your speech and try to show how the correct position is probably somewhere in the middle, you can get out of this round unscathed.

Practice Questions

1. What steps should local police forces take to avoid another Baltimore?
2. Should affirmative action programs be reformed to account for socioeconomic status instead of race?
3. Is America growing increasingly "Islamophobic"?
4. Should the federal government ban the use of "gay conversion therapy"?
5. Is the legalization of marijuana a threat to public health?

Topic Area #12: The State of the American Economy

Issues

This is the second economic topic area of the tournament and will focus on macroeconomic issues such as fiscal policy, monetary policy, and large-scale economic trends. Extempers should be comfortable with this area as they have likely had to answer several economic questions at the local level during the course of the season.

A big issue with the U.S. economy is that although its performance is better than the 2008 financial crisis, the economic recovery has been weak in several areas. Data from the first quarter of 2015 suggests that the U.S. economy contracted by 0.7%, something that economists are attributing to a harsh winter that kept consumers indoors and stifled business activity in sectors such as construction. The 0.7% contraction was an update over Department of Commerce numbers that forecasted 0.2% growth. It is also notable that there have been three quarters of contraction since the Great Recession officially ended in 2009. Extempers should expect to see second quarter numbers reveal a positive growth rate, but growth has remained a modest 2% during the Obama presidency and economists note that this is below the average growth rate of 3% that the U.S. economy experienced between 1983 and 2007. Some of the anemic economic recovery is also attributed to the strong value of the American dollar. Having a strong dollar value has some benefits in that it can buy more imports from abroad (e.g. oil), but it also has a negative side effect on the economy because it makes American exports more expensive. The dollar has risen due to the central banks of Japan, South Korea, China, and Europe trying to reduce the value of their currencies and this is viewed as harming long-term economic growth in the United States as the nation buys more goods from abroad than selling them to other nations. Economists hoped that low oil prices would produce an economic boom as well, but there is growing evidence that consumers are opting to use money saved from gasoline to pay off debts, bills, or are merely placing it in the bank. Since more than two-thirds of the U.S. economy is based on consumer spending this can also have harmful economic effects.

Another big talking point in this round is when the Federal Reserve will move to raise interest rates. Short-term interest rates have remained near 0% since the Great Recession and these low interest rates try to encourage consumers to spend money rather than depositing it in a bank (since it would earn hardly any interest and not keep up with inflation) and also make it cheaper for businesses to get loans. However, low interest rates by unleashing a great deal of liquidity (currency) into the economy have the potential to create significant inflation and the Fed's job is to keep the economy stable by keeping enough liquidity in the market to facilitate economic activity, while making sure that inflation does not get out of control as it did during the 1970s. Inflation, or the general rising of prices, can be harmful for consumers because it makes goods more expensive and it can exacerbate income inequality as inflation benefits those who own fixed assets such as property and stocks, which poor people do not have. Federal Reserve "hawks," those who favor an aggressive fight against inflation regardless of the economic effects of a rate increase, pushed for an increase of rates in March, but Federal Reserve Chairwoman Janet Yellen and her allies decided to stay put at the existing rates, warning that increasing rates too soon may choke off economic growth. Federal Reserve "doves," of which Yellen is one, are willing to tolerate some excessive inflation that goes beyond the Fed's ideal 2% target if it gets the economy moving more robustly. The Federal Reserve will decide in June whether to raise rates and the decision will have a significant impact. Raised rates may cause a drop in lending in the economy, but it may also affect the developing world as investors pull their funds from those countries to place them into American lending instruments that carry a higher interest rate. Thus, the interest rate decision carries domestic and international implications.

What has flabbergasted Fed officials is that inflation and unemployment are not necessarily showing a clear need to raise interest rates. The inflation rate has remained in the 1.3%-1.7% range since 2012 and is not showing signs of getting out of control. The low inflation rate is partly due to the lower cost of fuel (when one looks at inflation instruments that account for fuel as some do not because it can be a volatile

commodity), but also shows how wage growth in the economy has been stubborn. Critics of the Obama administration note that in the “Obama recovery” jobs in part-time work or low-wage service sectors such as fast food have improved, but jobs that pay more have not yet returned in sizable numbers. Other economists explain that wages have not grown significantly because workers are not demanding higher wages in large numbers or that firms paid workers too much prior to the 2008 recession and are still stabilizing wages. There are still fights over the minimum wage, though, that may change these calculations. President Obama called last year for a minimum wage of \$10.10 an hour and signed an executive order to require federal contractors to follow this. Large urban areas such as Seattle have approved of a \$15 an hour minimum wage and fast food workers are protesting for a similar increase. Economic measurements show that the federal minimum wage is 10% below what it should be, but it is important to realize that minimum wages may be best set by local and state officials as the federal minimum wage would not adequately cover the cost of living in Los Angeles, Chicago, or New York City. Unemployment now stands at 5.5%, a significant improvement over the numbers that President Obama inherited, but there is a lack of public trust in some of these figures. For example, the U-3 unemployment rate that shows 5.5% only accounts for those workers who are actively looking for work and does not count workers that are too discouraged to look for work or that consider themselves “underemployed,” which means that they are in part-time work but wish to work full-time. The U-6 unemployment rate that accounts for discouraged and underemployed workers is nearly double the U-3 rate, so there is a dispute over which number is a better way to measure the number of Americans that are employed. Critics of the Obama presidency also point out that the number of Americans in the labor force is at a thirty-seven year low, but part of this is due to the “baby boom” generation retiring. With inflation numbers not running wild, wage growth remaining tepid, and disputes over whether a falling U-3 unemployment rate shows signs of a complete economic recovery, the Federal Reserve is hesitant to raise interest rates and may not do so in 2015.

President Obama’s recent battles with Congress over trade will factor into this round as well. Senate Republicans, who have been a thorn in the President’s side over the last few years, rallied around him to pass trade promotion authority (TPA) several weeks ago. If passed by the House, this will enable President Obama to conclude trade agreements with other countries and submit them to Congress – where they could not be amended – for an up or down vote. Although free trade agreements saw significant political support in the 1990s and early 2000s, they are coming under fire from progressives that think they do not adequately provide for labor or environmental protections and are not fair to American workers. Some more conservative members of Congress are also growing more skeptical of free trade, warning that the outsourcing of American jobs and industries has weakened national security. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) that would create a free trade bloc of nations around the Pacific Rim such as the U.S., Mexico, Canada, Malaysia, Japan, and others has become the focal point for recent free trade disputes and I would highly recommend that extempers check out the recent topic brief on the TPP so that they have a good grasp of this issue before NSDA. Aside from the TPP, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is another significant trade pact that would create free trade between the U.S. and the European Union (EU). Controversies over the TTP and TTIP have involved the power of foreign investors to sue governments through investor state dispute settlements (ISDS) if a governmental regulation harmed possible profits. Critics of ISDS procedures say that tobacco companies have used them to deter foreign governments from enacting anti-smoking rules and this sets a dangerous precedent where multinational corporations exert more powers than they should. Another criticism of free trade models, especially the TPP, is that they do not include penalties for currency manipulation, which has been a significant criticism leveled against some nations such as Japan. Extempers should also not forget the renewal of the Export-Import Bank whose charter expires on June 30. Conservative voices want to abolish it because they think it gives unfair advantages to some businesses and is not needed because 98% of U.S. exports take place without subsidies from the Bank, but defenders of the institution say that it is needed to guarantee loans and provide insurance credits for those that buy American products overseas.

Proponents say the Bank is successful, runs efficiently, usually turns a profit for the Treasury (it ran a profit for the Department of Treasury of \$675 million in 2014 and \$1.1 billion in 2013), and that not renewing it could create financial risk.

And of course, one cannot avoid issues of fiscal policy in this round. Sooner or later, the federal government will have to take fiscal responsibility seriously as the nation has \$16 trillion in debt. With an aging population, entitlement programs such as Social Security and Medicare will come to claim a bigger slice of discretionary spending and both programs are in dire need of reforms to make them sustainable. This could include an extension in the age needed to receive benefits, the means testing of benefits (whereby poorer Americans would receive more benefits than wealthier Americans), substantial tax increases, or a combination of all three. Republicans and President Obama have signaled that they are interested in tax reform, so the idea has bipartisan appeal, but Republicans and the President disagree on how much to tax wealthier Americans and whether U.S. corporate tax rates, now the highest in the world, need to be significantly slashed. Extempers would be wise to look up Republican Representative Paul Ryan's tax and entitlement reform plans as he is arguably the most gifted Republican fiscal mind on Capitol Hill and as Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee he would be given a significant role in negotiating tax reform with the White House.

Strategy

Whereas the "Business and Industry" topic area forces you to focus your attention on microeconomic policy with specific businesses while using the larger economy as a backdrop, this topic area inverts that arrangement back to its "traditional" pattern where the larger economy is the focus and specific businesses are used as examples of economic activity. Your speeches in this round should accommodate for this change in focus and you should remember to point to the economic health (or lack thereof) of several American businesses or sectors. For example, if you give a speech talking about how the American economy is becoming more stable, you might want to cite the record profits made in the first quarter of 2015 by the American airline industry. Thus, there is a great deal of overlap between the two areas that you can use to your advantage in this round.

As noted in the "Business and Industry" section, you need to make sure that you utilize statistics for this round that are as recent as possible. However, do not make the round a statistics class by throwing out numbers without showing what they mean. If you want to talk about how the Federal Reserve should raise interest rates by 0.25% at its June meeting, then you need to talk about why 0.25% is an ideal number and what that really means. You also need to clarify any economic jargon in your speeches. Judges may not understand what you mean by "fiscal policy" or "monetary policy."

The best approach that you can take for this round is to focus on *teaching* your audience. This is good advice generally, but it is essential for economic topics because economics is an abstract field that many Americans struggle to understand. Madhu Vijay of Bellarmine College Preparatory won the U.S. Extemp final round in 2012 with a brilliant speech about the Federal Reserve. I would highly recommend watching this speech because Vijay did a fantastic job teaching his audience how monetary policy worked and how it affected the larger economy. Make sure that you do not leave gaps in your analysis either. Do not merely say "Free trade is great and will bolster American economic growth." Instead, you need to *show* how free trade specifically will lead to more growth. Extempers make these logical leaps all of the time, but when they do they fail to prove their argument and can easily confuse their audience.

The same sources recommended for the "Business and Industry" round apply here as Bloomberg, Bloomberg's *Business Week*, and specific economic analysis from *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, and *The Los Angeles Times* can be useful as can reports by the Chamber

of Commerce and the Department of Commerce. Since this round is focused on macroeconomic policy, though, you can also broaden your source base to include policy announcements from the Federal Reserve and reports by the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO). I would especially check out the CBO's analysis of President Obama's 2016 budget that was published in March.

Just make sure that when you use sources for this round that they are as recent as possible and are not older than three months (which is a full economic quarter). Check to ensure that you cut several articles in early June about the recent unemployment number and that you have a recent source detailing GDP growth in the first quarter (as this number can be revised several times). It is completely unacceptable to have sources from anything prior to April for this round, so do yourself a favor and delete those articles from your files.

Practice Questions

1. What does bipartisan tax reform look like?
2. Should the Federal Reserve raise interest rates by the end of 2015?
3. Would passage of the TTP harm American workers?
4. What steps should Congress take to lower the U-6 unemployment rate?
5. Will the U.S. economy significantly improve over the last three quarters of 2015?

Topic Area #13: United States Political Theory and Philosophy

Issues

This is a very curious round and it has a counterpart in the International Extemp tournament entitled "International Political Theory and Philosophy." Although this round can seem intimidating since high schools typically do not offer in-depth political science courses, you can view this round as a domestic politics round shrouded in American political ideologies such as conservatism, liberalism, socialism, and progressivism. Also, the "philosophy" part of the question will probably raise some questions about whether a particular idea for government is justified. For example, is it better for the United States to embrace a "big government" philosophy or are there merits for the American government downsizing and going with a more Jeffersonian philosophy that "That government is best which governs least"? Furthermore, questions in this round may ask you to apply a particular political theory or philosophy to a specific problem. In other words, is American liberalism better suited than conservatism to solve the problems of the inner city?

When it comes to American conservatism one has to immediately realize that conservatives do not oppose all change. Instead, conservatives favor gradual change that are in keeping with the nation's traditions and historical development. Sudden change causes conservatives a great deal of anxiety and it is important to note that the doctrine of conservatism was fashioned during the French Revolution when British politician Edmund Burke warned that the Revolution was dangerous because it moved France away from the order of the *ancien regime*. When the Reign of Terror struck Paris in 1792-1793, Burke's prediction appeared astute. American conservatism for generations has tended to favor small government, championed American democratic and social traditions, and warned that modernist social or economic views are a threat to Western civilization. However, the conservative movement, like its liberal counterpart, has several different sub-disciplines. Fiscal conservatives are concerned with maintaining low taxes, favor the free enterprise system, and want to restrain what they deem as wasteful and excessive government spending. Libertarian conservatives share the free market and budgetary views of the fiscal conservatives, but tend take a more liberal aim toward immigration (true libertarian philosophy stresses open borders) and believe that small government ideas are incompatible with government restrictions on

gay marriage, homosexuality, or abortion. Social conservatives are often aligned with the so-called “Religious Right” that emerged in American politics in the late 1970s. Social conservatives stress largely Judeo-Christian principles, see the displacement of religious instruction in public schools as a cause for American social ills, and resent modern moves that seek to legalize same-sex marriage or grant expanded legal protections to homosexuals. Social conservatives are also the most fervently active pro-life part of the modern Republican Party and they make it very difficult for a pro-choice candidate to ever win the party’s nomination. In fact, since the Religious Right broke onto the political scene, the Republican Party has not nominated a pro-choice candidate for president. Neoconservatives are those conservatives that were once liberals in the 1950s and 1960s and became conservatives. During the Cold War they were fervently anti-communist and came to hate political radicalism. Neoconservatism is often described today within the confines of foreign relations as they see democratic promotion as serving America’s best interest and do not hesitate to advocate the use of military force to accomplish this aim. Finally, there is another neglected branch of conservatives that call themselves “Paleoconservatives” (or “ancient conservatives”) that place their views within the ideological spectrum of early conservative actors such as Edmund Burke and Thomas Jefferson. Paleoconservatives favor an isolationist position in international affairs, are skeptical of American alliances abroad (again this is “ancient” as it goes back to President George Washington’s Farewell Address), are suspicious of non-European immigrants as they fear such immigration will erode the Western character of the nation that they think was essential to making America a great nation, and tend to favor more domestic protection of the environment and consumers.

If you think that American conservative philosophy is complicated, American liberalism can be just as messy. Before going into various strains of American liberalism, it is important to clarify the “American liberalism” is different than the liberalism that affected European politics in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The European strand of liberalism, best discussed by Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill, stressed *laissez-faire* economics and enhanced rights of speech, press, and assembly. American liberalism has some of these strains, but classical liberals in the European model would significantly disagree with modern American liberals support of a growing welfare state. Liberals that differ from the classical liberal model, as is the case in America today, can be regarded as “modern liberals” or “social liberals.” Social liberals favor freedom of the press, speech, and assembly, but unlike conservatives they think that the government must take a more active role in public life to protect the less fortunate as market forces will tend to discriminate and marginalize this group. Social liberals are not as wedded to Western culture as well, tending to favor a more multicultural approach that seeks to deny the idea of American exceptionalism (the idea that the United States is unique or in some ways superior to other nations). Historically, social liberals have led the charge for universal healthcare, universal education, and welfare programs that are all funded by tax revenues and are run or facilitated in some way by the government (conservatives that have favored some of these problems would opt for them to be run by the private sector and not the government). Social liberals are also more skeptical of the market, favoring laws that promote minimum wages, workplace regulation, and find it necessary to seek less income inequality. A sub-field of social liberalism is “American progressivism” that is a more radical strain that wants to do more to reduce income inequality. Such measures include more forceful steps to halt racial, gender, and sexual discrimination, much higher taxes on the wealthy, cuts to national defense, and more significant regulations of financial institutions. It is possible for liberals to be conservative, leading to so-called “conservative liberalism,” which sounds like an oxymoron but is sometimes used to denote politicians that agree with liberal social aims, but tend to favor their operation through traditional power structures. Conservative liberals may also be devoutly religious and favor the influence of religion on public society and favor strong national defense policies. An example of a conservative liberal today might be Pennsylvania Senator Bob Casey, Jr. who is pro-life, favors overturning *Roe v. Wade*, and said that he would have supported the Iraq War in 2006, but yet supports other liberal aims such as the Affordable Care Act and immigration reform.

Socialism must also be taken into account for this round because self-declared socialist Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont is running for the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination. Sanders is calling for greater infrastructure investment to the tune of \$1 trillion, more investment in renewable energy resources by the federal government, the establishment of worker-owned cooperatives, favors card-check for unions rather than secret ballot elections, raising the minimum wage to a “living wage,” equal pay for women, an end to free trade policies, affordable college education (which may be code for free university education paid for by the federal government), the breakup of large Wall Street financial institutions, a single-payer system of healthcare that would be modeled based on Medicare, expand Social Security and Medicare, and higher progressive taxes on the rich. Socialism at its core is a big government philosophy and one notices that all of Sanders policy ideas place government at the center. The eventual goal of socialists is for the economy to be managed by society along the lines of cooperatives as Sanders suggests. Ideas for a “sharing economy” come out of this type of model.

There are other ideas that could find their way into this round. These include American exceptionalism (explained above), multiculturalism (the institutionalization of cultural diversity that prefers a “salad bowl” model of handling new immigrants instead of a traditional “melting pot”), and feminism (the quest for equal rights for women).

Strategy

If your question for this round contains a philosophical idea such as feminism or conservatism, it is going to be important for you to explain this in easily understandable words for your audience. This is especially crucial because there are many different definitions of what makes one a feminist, a conservative, a liberal, etc. A good time to do this would be in your introduction since you need to establish the guiding principles of the ideology or philosophy that you are talking about before you dive into the issue that you are applying that philosophical idea to.

However, while you need to clarify the philosophy that you are talking about, you need to ensure that you are also talking about the core issue that the question is addressing. For example, if you drew a question about how American conservatism should respond to the illegal immigration problem, then you need to focus the bulk of your attention on illegal immigration and not spend 70% of the speech talking about the history or tenets of conservative thought. Use the philosophy as a lens through which to examine a particular issue, but do not turn your speech into an informative exercise. Remember, extemporaneous speaking is all about persuasion.

This is one of those rounds where having a political dictionary can be invaluable. In my days of competing I always carried *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics* by Iain McLean. There have been several editions of this text since 1996 and it gives you sufficient background on political groups, ideologies, and other valuable political terms. You can buy used copies of it on Amazon for less than \$3 and if you are an underclassman, I would recommend making the purchase, especially if the field of political science interests you. Think tanks or ideologically-driven publications across the political spectrum can also prove useful for you in this round by giving you insight into how various political persuasions think about certain issues. For liberalism check out the Center for American Progress and the Economic Policy Institute; for progressivism check out Think Progress, the Levy Economics Institute, and *Mother Jones*; for conservatism *National Review*, *Town Hall*, and the Heritage Foundation are great resources; The Heartland Institute and Cato Institute provide advocacy for libertarian beliefs; and social conservative beliefs can be found from the Family Research Council.

Practice Questions

1. Is libertarianism the political ideology that will decide America's future?
2. Should the Democratic Party become more progressive?
3. Is social conservatism losing its political appeal?
4. What effect is third-wave feminism having on American society?
5. Are multicultural policies harming the United States?

2014-2015 Extemp Central Premium Topic Brief Guide

Below you will find a listing of how this year's premium topic briefs fit into this year's NSDA topic areas. The month of publication for each one has been placed into parenthesis next to the brief's title. Previous season's topic briefs also fit into the topic areas, but were not listed here. You can find all of these topic briefs by clicking on the "premium content" tab on the Extemp Central homepage.

International Extemp

Africa

- *Nigeria's Presidential Election (April 2015)
- *The West African Ebola Outbreak (2014 – August 2014)

China, Japan, and the Koreas

- *Hong Kong's Political Protests (October 2014)
- *The Fate of Abenomics (December 2014)

Crises and Natural Disasters of 2015

- *Europe's Migrant Crisis (April 2015)
- *Nepal's Earthquake (May 2015)

Economic Concerns

- *Collapsing Oil Prices (December 2014)
- *Greece's Future (February 2015)
- *Russia's Economic Difficulties (January 2015)
- *The Fate of Abenomics (December 2014)
- *The Trans-Pacific Partnership (May 2015)
- *Venezuela's Economic Problems (September 2014)

India, Pakistan, and Southeast Asia

- *Pakistani Political Protests (August 2014)

International Relations and Organizations

- *Normalizing U.S.-Cuban Relations (December 2014)
- *The China-U.S. Climate Deal (November 2014)
- *The Trans-Pacific Partnership (May 2015)
- *U.S.-Iranian Relations (March 2015)

The Middle East

- *Instability in Yemen (February 2015)
- *Israel's New Elections (December 2014)
- *President Obama's Iraq Policy (August 2014)
- *U.S.-Iranian Relations (March 2015)

North and Central America

- *Nicaragua's Grand Canal (March 2015)
- *Terrorism in Ottawa (October 2014)

Russia & Eastern Europe

- *Russia's Economic Difficulties (January 2015)
- *The Assassination of Brois Nemtsov (March 2015)

Western European Politics

- *France and Islamic Extremism (January 2015)
- *Greece's Future (February 2015)
- *The British Parliamentary Election (May 2015)
- *The Case for Catalan Independence (September 2014)
- *The Scottish Independence Referendum (September 2014)

The 2016 Election Cycle

*Hillary Clinton in 2016 (October 2014)

America's Role on the World Stage

*Normalizing U.S.-Cuban Relations (December 2014)

*The China-U.S. Climate Deal (November 2014)

*The Trans-Pacific Partnership (May 2015)

*U.S.-Iranian Relations (March 2015)

Business & Industry

*Burger King's Tax Inversion (September 2014)

*Collapsing Oil Prices (December 2014)

*The FCC's Net Neutrality Decision (March 2015)

*The U.S. Bird Flu Outbreak (May 2015)

Congressional Issues

*2014 Midterm Election Recap (November 2014)

*The State of the Union and the Politics of 2015 (January 2015)

Education & Healthcare

*American Education Reform (February 2015)

*Ebola in the United States (October 2014)

*The Vaccination Debate (February 2015)

Energy & Environment

*The California Drought (August 2014)

*The China-U.S. Climate Deal (November 2014)

Judicial Affairs

*Eric Holder's Resignation (September 2014)

National Defense and the Military

*Operation Freedom's Sentinel (January 2015)

*President Obama's Iraq Policy (August 2014)

The Obama Legacy

*The State of the Union and the Politics of 2015 (January 2015)

Social Controversies

*President Obama's Executive Action on Immigration (November 2014)

The State of the American Economy

*Collapsing Oil Prices (December 2014)

*Raising Interest Rates (April 2015)

*The State of the U.S. Economy (December 2014)

*The Trans-Pacific Partnership (May 2015)