



# The U.S. Constitution

## Discussion Guide

### Let's review

*At the start of each discussion, review the conversation ground rules for returning and new members alike to set the stage for active participation by all. You may want to use a timer as you go around the room. And don't forget to decide who will take notes and post a discussion recap.*

- **Be open and curious:** Everyone has a unique perspective, so listen and be prepared to hear a different point of view. Remember, you do not need to share your political affiliation; this is a discussion and exchange of ideas, not politics.
- **Be respectful and engaged:** Be sure that everyone has a chance to speak before adding a second comment or perspective. Encourage each other's participation.
- **Be focused and concise:** Keep the conversation centered on the issue and the brief.

**The "Table-it" Rule:** If the group has gone off-topic but the area is of interest, the group can table the conversation and save it for another time to be addressed in a different manner.

### Let's begin

- **Take five minutes** to walk through the brief. Highlight the main point of each section and key statistics.
- Each member is invited to answer the following questions in a **two-three minute reaction** to the brief:
  - Introduce yourself, and share what "lens of care" did you wear when reviewing this brief (e.g. personal, professional, community, state, nation, global)?
  - What did you find most interesting or surprising from reading the brief? What matters?

### Spread the word: facts to share during your discussion

- The U.S. Constitution is the [oldest and shortest written constitution](#) of any government in the world.
- While still at war in 1777, the Continental Congress adopted the [Articles of Confederation](#), "to avoid a powerful federal government with the ability to invade rights and threaten private property." The Articles of Confederation [were too weak](#) to bring together "a fledgling nation that needed both to wage war and to manage the economy."
- During the ratification of the Constitution, "many states proposed amendments specifying the rights that Jefferson had recognized in the Declaration." In 1791 these amendments officially became the [Bill of Rights](#).

## Let's discuss

Below are 3 questions for the group to consider and discuss, or choose your own.

- **Community:** Do you feel that the Constitution as written by the founding fathers holds up to the challenges of modern day?
- **Government:**
  - What are the benefits and drawbacks of more localized government authority, and those of more centralized government authority?
  - Who is better equipped to make and enforce laws in areas such as healthcare, education, or drug legalization - state and local legislatures or the federal government?

## Let's act

1. **Take it local. Talk to your neighbors** to identify how states' rights affect your community. Identify opportunities to work with other community members in your area.
2. **Explore the impact of related laws in your community.** Explore [Ballotpedia](#) and the [National Conference of State Legislature](#) databases to see where your state stands on important issues such as healthcare and immigration.
3. **Investigate community programs.** Are there [local organizations](#) that engage young Americans?
4. **Research your elected representatives' positions** on states' rights and their visions for how to tackle challenges facing Americans at large and your community specifically. You can find contact information for federal, state, and local government officials [here](#). Your state or municipality's websites will also have information to contact leaders. Try looking at the drop-down menu for a *Government* tab.
5. **Establish a relationship with your legislators.** It's easy to establish a relationship with your legislators. Start by introducing yourself. You can also learn to write to your representatives or set up a meeting with a legislator on [The Policy Circle website](#).
6. **Consider writing a letter to the editor or an op-ed on your stance on states' rights in your local paper.** Learn how on [The Policy Circle website](#).

## Next Steps for Your Circle

- **Post a Recap:** Summarize your discussion to share thoughts with members not present, and share planned actions from group members. Designate who will post a meeting recap on your circle page.
- **Decide your next meeting topic.** Want to discuss a related brief at your next meeting? Suggestions include:
  - [The U.S. House of Representatives](#)
  - [The U.S. Senate](#)
  - [Civic Engagement](#)
- **Dive Deeper into the issues.** If this is an area you would like to pursue further, consider taking possible steps to influence policy. The Policy Circle offers resources for [developing a message about your issue](#) and [organizing a petition](#) to amplify your voice and raise awareness. Don't miss our [latest events](#) that help you dive deeper on this issue and more.