



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 review the [Executive Summary](#) for this 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.