



# 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

*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?

### Let's discuss

*Pick 2 or 3 questions that resonate with the group and discuss, or choose your own.*

- In your opinion, what is the priority in regards to current state's rights issues?
- Were there some points with which you strongly agreed or disagreed? Was there a perspective that was missing?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of more localized government authority, and those of more centralized government authority?
- Are state and local legislatures or the federal government better equipped to make and enforce laws in areas such as healthcare, education, or drug legalization?
- Do you feel that the Constitution as written by the founding fathers holds up to the challenges of modern day?

- Do you feel it is important to balance the power of the states and the federal government? Do you feel a state's laws and policies impact its revenue, its power in the union, and its ability to attract residents?
- How would our election process change if we went to a popular vote vs. the electoral college? How would it improve/impair the current situation where swing states are of significance? How would it improve/impair the integrity of the election?

## Let's act

### Spread the Word: Some Facts to Share

- The U.S. Constitution is the [oldest and shortest written constitution](#) of any government in the world.
- [In 2016](#), 47% of Americans wanted to keep the Electoral College system and 49% wanted a popular vote amendment. [For 2019](#), 43% want to keep the Electoral College and 55% support a popular vote amendment.
- [As of 2018](#), eight states and Washington, D.C. have enacted laws legalizing recreational marijuana use, and 29 states plus Washington, D.C., Guam, and Puerto Rico have legalized medical marijuana. This state action violates federal law, which lists marijuana as a Schedule I drug.
- In the first half of 2017, legislatures in 47 states enacted almost twice as many [bills addressing immigration](#) as they did in all of 2016.
- [Federal contributions](#) make up about 8-10% of total national spending on state elementary and secondary education budgets.
- As of July 2019, federal law only requires licensed dealers to perform background checks, handled by the FBI's [National Instant Criminal Background Check System](#) (NICS). This does not include private sales made at gun shows or online.

### Engage Locally

- *Learn more:*
  - **Research your elected representatives' positions** on Constitutional debates, and their vision for how to tackle challenges facing Americans and your community.
    - Your legislators, state comptroller, attorney general and other local elected officials want to know their constituents. Write to them about your interest in The Constitution and states' rights.
    - 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.
  - **Explore the impact of the Constitution in your community.**
    - On your municipality's website, try looking at the drop-down menu for a *Government* tab.
    - See judicial selection methods in your state [here, from Ballotpedia](#), and whether or not your local representatives have an impact on the judiciary. Find courts in your state or community with the [US Courts Federal Court Finder](#)

- The [National Conference of State Legislators](#) also provides a state legislatures website directory.
- The [National Conference of State Legislators](#) also tracks bills and researches state’s rights matters including [immigration](#), [healthcare](#), and [education](#).
  - You can search the various departments, agencies, and programs related to these areas on your municipality’s or state’s website. You can try using search words such as “*healthcare*” or “*education*” in the search bar. Alternatively, these options may be available in a dropdown menu.
- *Reach out:*
  - Explore what organizations, legislators, and journalists you could contact to ask questions, learn more and get engaged.
  - If you have trouble finding the information you are looking for on your municipality’s or state’s website, consider contacting agency or department heads. You can find the contact information for federal, state, and local government officials [here](#).
  - The Policy Circle offers a number of resources for engaging on the local level. Learn how to write a letter to the editor on [The Policy Circle website](#).
  - 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](#).

#### Post A Recap / Dive Deeper:

- Summarize your discussion to share thoughts with members not present. 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? This brief is part of the Five for Active Citizenship [Conversation Series](#). Other briefs in the series include:
  - [The U.S. House of Representatives](#) and [The U.S. Senate](#)
  - [Government Regulation](#)
  - [Civic Engagement](#)
  - Election Series: [Assessing Candidates](#), [Election Integrity](#), and [Campaign Finance](#)
- Dive Deeper into this area. 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.