

Deliberative Dialogue Discussion Topics and Prompts

This is a compilation of suggestions for incorporating civil discussions about the influence of policy, elected officials, and the importance of voting into the curriculum. The list is alphabetical by topic. To search the document, please press CTRL+F and type the keyword.

Discipline search keys:

Anthropology, Architecture, Art, Art History, Biology, Business, Computer Science, Criminal Science, Ecology, Education, Economics, English/Literature, Engineering, Environmental Studies, Geography, History, Law, Math, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Public Health, Sociology, Statistics

Artificial Intelligence and Government Regulations

Disciplines: Computer Science, Engineering, Philosophy, Political Science

Discussion Prompts:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a growing field with potentially tremendous influence over our everyday lives. Regulating autonomous vehicles and investing in machine learning technology are important areas that the government has influence over, but are often researched by powerful private corporations. The applications of such technology could be nefarious or beneficial. To what extent should government have a responsibility in regulating AI? Is funding the responsibility of the government?

Issue Stances:

- AI research and technology should be completely privatized
- The government should regulate all AI research and technology
- Only certain aspects of AI research and technology should be regulated by the government: if so, what?

Supplemental resources:

- Washington Post: [Defense Department Pledges Billions Toward Artificial Intelligence Research](#)
- [NCSL State Legislations](#) on Autonomous Vehicles
- Two subcommittees of the House Science, Space and Technology Committee held a [joint hearing](#) to consider the applications and implications of artificial intelligence technology, or “AI” and its possible corrupt applications.

Censorship Legislation and Free Speech

Disciplines: Anthropology, Art, Art History, English/Literature, Political Science

Discussion Prompts:

Public influencers, art, and texts can often be divisive or offensive. Justice John Marshall Harlan said, "one man's vulgarity is another's lyric." In *Brandenburg v. Ohio*, the Supreme Court held that the government cannot punish inflammatory speech unless it intentionally provokes a crowd and immediately causes unlawful/violent action.

A public institution must regulate free speech/censorship as it pertains to the constitution.

However, private institutions have more control over their regulations. How should campuses (public and private) respond when a group of people want to ban a speaker/art/text from campus, but isn't technically immediately dangerous? How should the government respond to requests for censorship of private property?

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Issue Stances:

- Private institutions should ultimately decide what is censored.
- Private institutions should be held accountable to the same first amendment free speech standards as public institutions.
- There should be other ways to regulate free speech/censorship.

Supplemental Resources:

- Journal of Dispute Resolution: [Private Universities and the First Amendment](#)
- ACLU articles:
 - [Freedom of Expression in the Arts and Entertainment](#)
 - [Speech on Campus](#)

Climate Change: Emission Fees

Disciplines: Ecology, Economics, Environmental Science, Political Science

Discussion Prompts:

Washington State's Initiative 1631 (ballot measure in 2018) proposed to place a fee on carbon emissions to big polluters. The fee would generate \$2.3 billion in the first five years and fund environmental and climate-related projects as well as to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, fossil fuel companies would be free to pass this increase on to their customers, which would increase a gallon of gas 14 cents, among other price increases. This would hit especially hard in rural areas where agriculture (involving electricity) and long-distance driving are part of life. What accountability measures should the government impose on big polluters like the fossil fuel industry?

Issue Stances:

- Carbon fees should be charged
- There should be no carbon fees
- Carbon fees should only be applied in certain situations (if so, what?)

Supplemental Resources:

- American Meteorological Society: [U.S. Federal Climate Policy: Emission Fees](#)
- NPR: [Washington State Could Become the First to Charge A Carbon Fee](#)
- Seattle Times: [Washington State Voters Reject Carbon-Fee Initiative](#)

Endangered Species Protections

Disciplines: Biology, Ecology, Economics, Environmental Studies

Discussion Prompts:

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) enacted in 1973 to protect endangered species in the U.S. went and currently goes largely ignored by the federal government. The Senate Committee on Environment and Public Work recently released a new draft addressing the ESA, hoping to elevate its importance across the U.S. However, the ESA costs billions of dollars to enact. What responsibilities do elected officials have to protect endangered species? How should the government protect endangered species, if at all?

Issue Stances:

- Continue the Endangered Species Act
- Eradicate the Endangered Species Act
- Protect endangered species in a different way

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Supplemental Resources:

- [Draft Legislation to Strengthen the Endangered Species Act](#) (July 2, 2018)
- The Hill Opinion: [Wildlife has little to show for staggering cost of Endangered Species Act](#)

Gerrymandering/Redistricting

Disciplines: Computer Science, Geography, Math, Political Science, Sociology, Statistics

Discussion Prompts:

Gerrymandering serves the purpose of ensuring that one political party wins a district over another with an unfairly drawn district, practically denying the other party any true political power. However, with the biased boundaries created by gerrymandering, many politicians who are unheard are given the opportunity to make their voice heard. Talks about who should decide how boundaries are drawn have escalated all the way up to the Supreme Court. Some think that the drawing of districts should be done by politicians, while others believe an unbiased/non-partisan committee or automated machine should control these boundaries. How should districts be drawn?

Issue Stances:

- Allow elected officials to control the drawing of boundaries
- Let an unbiased committee draw lines
- Let data from automated machines, mapping, census data, etc. control the drawing of boundaries

Supplemental Resources:

- [Auto-Redistrict](#): a free and open source computer program that automatically creates “fair and compact electoral districts” using census and election data and a genetic algorithm
- Working Paper, Princeton University: [A New Automated Redistricting Simulator Using Markov Chain Monte Carlo](#)
- Ballotpedia: [State by State Guide to Redistricting Procedures](#)

Incarcerated People’s Right to Vote

Disciplines: Criminal Science, History, Law, Political Science, Sociology

Discussion Prompts:

Under section two of the Fourteenth Amendment, states can legally deny the right to vote to anyone with a criminal conviction. Currently, 48 states deny voting rights to current inmates, and many states bar parolees and probationers from voting. Many believe that people in jail, or who have gone to jail, have effectively renounced their civil liberties, while many also believe that prisoner’s having the right to vote could bolster major change in the U.S. incarceration system. In what ways would letting incarcerated people vote affect the political system and/or mass incarceration issues?

Issue stances:

- Allow prisoners in every state the right to vote
- Ban prisoners in every state from the right to vote
- Let states decide

Supplemental Resources:

- Time Article: [Why Can't Felons Vote?](#)
- The Economist: [Why the restoration of felons’ voting rights in Florida is a big deal](#)

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Minimum Wage Determination

Disciplines: Business, Economics, Philosophy, Political Science, Sociology

Discussion Prompts:

The 2018 federal minimum wage rate is \$7.25 an hour, a rate that has not changed since 2009. While many states have set their own wage rates, none currently exceed \$12 an hour. Many feel that the minimum wage rate should not be increased, as there are many drawbacks, like possible lay-offs, slower hiring, a shift towards technology, or an outsource of jobs to other countries. Many, however, argue that with higher wages comes a better quality of life, lower unemployment rates, and a possible reduction in government spending for social programs for the poor, which would reduce taxes. In what ways should the minimum wage be changed, if at all? Would that be different in your campus town vs. your hometown?

Issue Stances:

- Raise the minimum wage
- Do not change the minimum wage
- Let states/cities decide what to do with minimum wage rates

Supplemental Resources

- Ballotpedia: [Minimum Wage on the Ballot \(by state\)](#)
- CNBC Article: [Amazon Raises Minimum Wage](#)

National Debt/A Nation in Debt

Disciplines: Business, Economics, Political Science, History

Our nation's debt has never been larger, and it has the potential to affect not only each of us but future generations. By the end of the fiscal year 2018, the United States government owed around \$21.7 trillion in gross federal debt. It was \$10 trillion just ten years ago and is projected to rise to \$34 trillion in another decade. Many economists warn that this level of debt is unsustainable and that significant actions need to be taken to address the growing problem. Should all of us have to tighten our belts or should we ask more from larger corporations or wealthier citizens? Are we willing to live with a much smaller federal government—and if so, what benefits and services are we willing to live without? Or should we address the debt through a combination of increased taxes and reduced federal spending?

Issue Stances:

- Raise federal taxes
- Cut spending in the federal budget
- Combination of raising federal taxes and cutting spending in the federal budget

Supplemental Resources

- National Issues Forum: [“A Nation in Debt” summary guide](#)
- CrashCourse: [Deficits & Debts: Crash Course](#)
- NPR: [U.S. National Debt Hits Record \\$22 Trillion](#)
- Peter G. Peterson Foundation: [Key Drivers of the National Debt](#)

Deliberative Dialogue Discussion Topics and Prompts

Percent for Art Government Funding Programs

Disciplines: Architecture, Art, Art History, Business, Economics

Discussion Prompts:

Nearly half of all U.S. states have implemented a government issued program called Percent for Art, where any public building in that state must allocate no less than 1% of the building's construction cost to works of art for permanent placement in that building. Arguments have been made that art in public buildings generally makes the community safer, more vibrant, and healthier. However, building developers say that the tax increases the cost of the entire project, and that the tax serves as more of a threat, since developers will be denied a certificate of occupancy if they do not meet the art tax requirement. To what extent should art be integrated into the community? Should it be mandatory?

Issue Stances:

- Percent for Art should be implemented in cities
- Public art should not be imposed by the government
- Public art should be funded by the government in a different way (be specific)

Supplemental Resources:

- New York Times: [Developers Fight Efforts to Make Them Pay for Public Art](#)
- National Assembly for State Arts Agencies: [State Percent for Art Programs](#)

Reducing Hyperpartisanship

Disciplines: Communication, History, Philosophy, Political Science, Sociology, Law

Discussion Prompts:

Today in the United States, there is a sense of a deep political divide. You are either a Democrat or Republican. You are from a red state or a blue state. Yet, these dichotomies are harmful to working through our country's most pressing issues. Major problems, such as the national debt, immigration, health care, and Social Security get kicked down the road again and again. Yet we appear unable to confront these urgent problems because of hyperpartisanship. One strategy to combat hyperpartisanship is making sure citizens have access to unbiased, nonpartisan information and news. Knowing that, should we require multiple viewpoints be addressed in the media and online? Or would that stifle free speech? Does that give media and internet companies too much power? Or should media companies be persuaded to provide multiple viewpoints without requiring them to do so?

Issue Stances:

- Require all media and internet companies to provide opposing views on controversial issues.
- No requirements of television networks to provide opposing views
- Suggest, but do not enforce, media and internet companies provide opposing views

Supplemental Resources

- National Issues Forum: [A House Divided: How Do We Get the Political System We Want? Summary Guide](#)
- The Washington Post: [Everything You Need to Know About the Fairness Doctrine in One Post](#)
- The Los Angeles Times: [Reagan's Veto Kills Fairness Doctrine Bill](#)

Deliberative Dialogue Discussion Topics and Prompts

Rising Healthcare Costs

Disciplines: Economics, Health Sciences, Philosophy, Political Science, Public Health

Discussion Prompts:

The United States spends more money on healthcare than any other developed nation. Yet, our healthcare outcomes are no better than other countries who are spending less. The U.S. performs worse in some common health metrics like life expectancy, infant mortality, and unmanaged diabetes. A healthcare system with high costs and poor outcomes undermines our economy and fundamentally isn't serving the needs of the people. Yet, healthcare remains one of the most politicized issues in the U.S. What should we do to lower costs and improve healthcare outcomes? Should we institute a government healthcare scheme similar to the United Kingdom or Canada? Or does that undermine individual choice? Should Obamacare be expanded? Or should Obamacare be repealed?

Issues Stances:

- Institute a government-run single-payer or Medicare-for-all style healthcare scheme
- Expand Obamacare and provide additional tax incentives to help individuals afford healthcare in a private marketplace
- Repeal Obamacare and no federal government support for healthcare

Supplemental Resources:

- Peter G. Peterson Foundation: [How Does The U.S. Healthcare System Compare To Other Countries?](#)
- CNBC: [France's health-care system was ranked as the world's best—Here's how it compares with the US'](#)
- The Brookings Institution: [Introduction to the U.S. health care system](#)

Student Debt Crisis

Discipline: Economics, Education, History, Political Science, Sociology

Discussion Prompts:

College can be the best, most memorable four years of most people's lives, but it can also prove to be financially draining and stressful - particularly in terms of student debt. Superficially, student debt might appear to be a personal problem - one that impacts only the individual who borrowed money to fund his or her dream for a successful future. But the truth is, student debt is more than a personal problem: It's one that can adversely affect the economy in many ways. In 2019, there are 45 million Americans with student debt who owe more than \$1.5 trillion dollars. What should we do about the student debt crisis? Should the government cancel and/or forgive all student debt? Or is it an unfair burden on taxpayers who don't go to college? Should we expand debt federal forgiveness plans for those students who choose careers in public service?

Issue Stances:

- Cancel all student debt
- No changes to current student debt repayment policies
- Expand federal debt forgiveness plans

Supplemental Resources

- Forbes: [Student Loan Debt Statistics In 2019: A \\$1.5 Trillion Crisis](#)
- Up to Us: [What is the cost and value of a college degree in 2019?](#)
- NPR: [Senators Press Consumer Financial Protection Bureau To Dig Into Problems With Public Service Student Loan Program](#)

Deliberative Dialogue Discussion Topics and Prompts

Sugary Drink Taxes

Disciplines: Economics, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Public Health, Sociology

Discussion Prompts:

In the case of Philadelphia, a sugar tax is leaving the city divided, with the question of its legality making it all the way to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. The extra taxes may help the consumer make a “healthier” choice and generate more tax revenue, but the tax also hurts businesses and disproportionately affects people of lower socioeconomic status. Should elected officials be able to tax what citizens privately consume? Would a sugary drink tax be a net positive or negative?

Issue Stances:

- Implement sugar taxes.
- Ban the implementation of sugar taxes.
- A sugar tax should be implemented in certain situations/communities. If so, who would get to decide?

Supplemental Resources

- [Cost Effectiveness of a Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Excise Tax in the U.S.](#)
- [Philadelphia Soda Tax](#)
- [List Places with Soda/Sugary Beverage Taxes](#)