



Living Room Conversation on Understanding Political Differences

Since the founding of our country, there have been passionate debates about what is the “right” role for government. In the current campaign season, this question has been at the heart of many of the debates among the candidates, on both sides of the ticket. And much of the disagreement has been about the role of the federal government, with some arguing that the rights and authority of state and local governments need to be strengthened. Others argue that policies relative to such matters as health care, education, and immigration should be the purview of the US Congress and President. How involved should the government be on any given matter? How do our political beliefs influence our answers to this fundamental question? What should the government stay out of? Where should the government engage more? What is the right balance between federal, state, and local powers? In addition to government, how should we rely on individuals, families, private organizations, religious groups/churches, voluntary associations, and/or the free market to address social issues?

Round One: Getting Started / Why Are We Here? (5 minutes)

Why are we here? Let's get clear about that by reviewing together the Purpose, Intended Outcomes and Conversation Guidelines.

- Any questions or clarifications?

Round Two: Let's Get to Know Each Other (20 Minutes)

We encourage you to take your time with introductions. Don't rush through this first part but instead, take a few minutes to answer the questions below.

After introducing yourself and saying what town you live in, answer one or two of the following:

- What sense of purpose or duty guides you in your personal and working life?
- What word or words do you use to describe yourself politically?
- What are some of your hopes and concerns for the long term future of our country?





Round Three: What Do You Believe about the Role of Government?

(45 minutes)

Remember that the goal for this Living Room Conversation is for all of us to listen and learn about where we have different opinions and where we have shared interests, intentions and goals. This group may want to focus on only some of the questions below.

- In what ways does the current state of political discussion and debate impact your views about politics and government?
- Considering the values and perspectives you have shared, how have you been impacted by the candidates in this election?
- What is foremost in your mind when you think about the role of (state, federal, and local) government? Consider the issues listed below. Pick two or three and share your thoughts and priorities. *(In your answer, can you describe an experience you've had that influences your thinking?)* Do you think that the government's role should be larger, smaller or is just about right?
 - Economic opportunity for individuals and families, including job creation and "safety net" protections
 - K-12 Education
 - Health care, including health insurance
 - Social Security
 - Managing natural resources and protecting the environment
 - Defense (including care and benefits for veterans)
 - Immigration and refugee matters

Round Four: What Are We Learning Here? (15 Minutes)

Answer one or more of the following questions:

- What learning, new understanding, or appreciation do you have about politics and the role of government?
- Was any common ground identified?

Closing - Accomplishment, Appreciation, Acknowledgement. (5 minutes)

Invite each participant to make a brief statement about how this conversation went:

- What did you appreciate the most about what happened here?

