

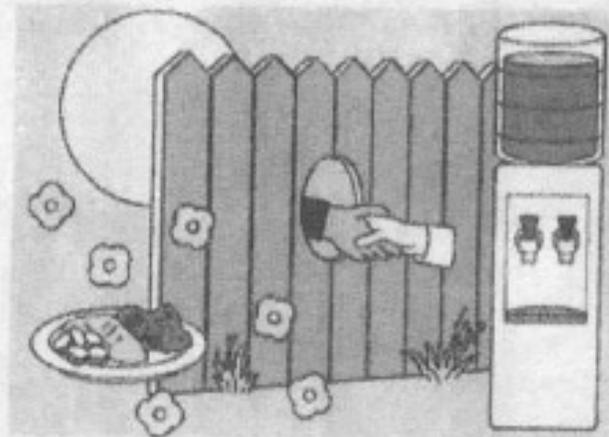
## Here to Help

### HAVING RESPECTFUL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT POLITICS

**Find common ground.** Few political positions are without weaknesses. Nearly all of them contain inconvenient facts. Before you try to persuade a friend or a relative to vote a certain way or sign a petition, it's worth thinking through the weaknesses of your own argument. And it's worth genuinely asking yourself what good points the other side is able to make. When you do so — when you treat other perspectives with genuine interest, rather than reflexive hostility — you give yourself a better chance to influence someone else. You turn what could have been a heated argument into a shared attempt to work through an issue and get to the right answer.

**Listen.** People are more apt to engage in political conversation if they feel their contributions are valued. If you challenge someone, do it politely and intelligently.

**Think issues, not parties.** Partisanship is a big barrier to talking about political issues. If possible, steer clear of political parties when talking politics, and make political issues relevant to daily life. Talk about the weather in your community rather than climate change. Talk about your health insurance, not Obamacare. Talk about



GEORGE WYLESOL

abortion in the context of a friend who chose to have one, or a neighbor who chose not to.

**Know when to quit.** Ending a conversation about politics can be as important as starting one. If it's going in circles or starting to get nasty, find a way to move on. You're not going to solve the world's problems in a single conversation, and your relationship with a friend or relative almost certainly matters more to you than how the person votes.

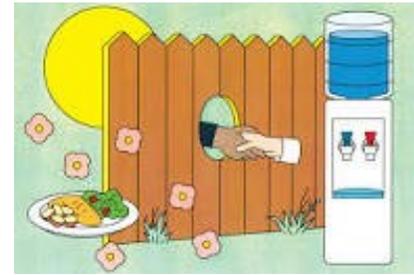
**IAN PRASAD PHILBRICK AND DAVID LEONHARDT**

For more tips, look for "How to Participate in Politics" at [nytimes.com/guides](http://nytimes.com/guides).



Political conversations easily get heated. Here are some ways to stay respectful, and maybe even change someone's mind.

By Ian Prasad Philbrick and David Leonhardt Illustrations by George Wylesol



### **Talk in Person**

Talking politics is normal, especially around elections. Millions of Americans try to influence the political behavior of their friends and relatives.

Most everyone has been part of political conversation on email or social media that quickly turned nasty. “We are the worst versions of ourselves over digital media,” says Celeste Headlee, author of “We Need to Talk: How to Have Conversations That Matter.” People are more likely to think an opposing viewpoint is stupid if they read it than if they hear someone argue it in person, a recent study found. Don’t try to sway people online. Try talking face to face.

### **Find Common Ground**

Jake Sullivan, the Democratic policy adviser, has said that participating in high-school debate — where you often don’t know what side of an issue you will be assigned and must prepare to argue both — helped him understand that few political positions are without weaknesses. Nearly all of them must grapple with inconvenient facts. Before you try to persuade a friend or a relative to vote a certain way or sign a petition, it’s worth thinking through the weaknesses of your own argument. And it’s worth genuinely asking yourself what good points the other side is able to make. When you do so — when you treat other perspectives with genuine interest, rather than reflexive hostility — you give yourself a better chance to influence someone else. You turn what could have been a heated argument into a shared attempt to work through an issue and get to the right answer.

Ms. Headlee, the author, sometimes plays a game that has a similar spirit. “I say, ‘We are not going to agree on that. But give me five questions, and I bet I can find something we agree on.’” From kids to pizza to the Netflix show “Stranger Things,” she says, “there are some universal unifiers.”

### **Listen**

People are more apt to engage in political conversation if they feel their contributions are valued.

“When you are actively learning about someone else you are passively teaching them about yourself,” Daryl Davis — a black musician who spent years trying to convince Ku Klux Klan members to quit and had some success — has said. Talking about our opinions and our lives activates the same reward centers in the brain as food, money and sex, brain researchers have found.

“You challenge them,” says Mr. Davis, “but you don’t challenge them rudely or violently. You do it politely and intelligently. And when you do things that way, chances are they will reciprocate.”

### **Think Issues, Not Parties**

Partisanship is a big barrier to talking about political issues. “The connection people feel with their city’s sports team is the same way they feel with political candidates,” Suzanne Degges-White of Northern Illinois University has said. Many Americans now feel more negatively about people of the other political party than people of different religions or races.

If possible, steer clear of political parties when talking politics, and make political issues relevant to daily life. Talk about the weather in your community rather than climate change. Talk about your health insurance, not Obamacare. Talk about abortion in the context of a friend who chose to have one, or a neighbor who chose not to.

### **Know When to Quit**

Ending a conversation about politics can be as important as starting one. If it’s going in circles or starting to get nasty, find a way to move on. You’re not going to solve the world’s problems in a single conversation, and your relationship with a friend or relative almost certainly matters more to you than how the person votes. “Sometimes you have to say ‘I’m not going to have a big win, but I am going to build a little bit. I might crack open their perspective,’” says Dr. Degges-White. “You don’t want to end up in fights, because nobody wins.”