



# CIVIL DISCOURSE

*An American Legacy Toolkit*

## ■ **Module:** The Evolution of Political Parties in America

# Structured Academic Controversy (SAC) Plan

### Pre-Deliberation Content

#### Launch Activity

Ask participants to jot down and discuss the following question: *“Consider what you know about the history of political parties. Why were they created? What was their original role? How has that role changed over time?”*

#### Background Information

While taking notes about the pros and cons of political parties throughout American history, participants listen to the podcast series for Civil Discourse: An American Legacy titled [The Evolution of Political Parties](#) in America as well as the [Beyond the Legacy](#) video of the same name. Provide copies of [Federalist 10](#) and [George Washington’s Farewell Address](#) for participants to read and look for additional pieces of evidence about the impact of political parties. Have participants research the national platforms of the [Democratic Party](#), the [Republican Party](#), and one other national party such as the [Constitution](#), [Green](#), or [Libertarian](#) Parties. While listening and reading, participants should take notes and be able to summarize the key ideas of each podcast and document.

#### Vocabulary

Have participants share the words and phrases they found unfamiliar while a volunteer lists them on the (interactive) whiteboard. Be sure to include:

- [electioneering](#)
- [Federalist & Anti-Federalist](#)
- [ideology](#)
- [monitoring](#)
- [platform](#)
- [political party](#)

Assign the words and phrases to groups of participants to research and define. Then have the groups share with the entire class and discuss until all participants are comfortable with the surface meaning of the text.

## Pre-Deliberation Content

### Analytical Read

Have participants read through the text selection again, slowly highlighting the three most impactful lines or sentences. Then in the margins of the selections, write notes on what makes those lines or sentences so compelling.

## Pre-Deliberation Process

### Describe the Responsibilities of the Facilitator and Participants

“As the facilitator, my biggest responsibility is to keep time and ensure that each group stays on task within their allotted time. Equal distribution of time is crucial as part of a structured academic controversy (SAC) because it ensures that both sides of the discussion are given an equal opportunity to speak and to react. I will also provide sentence stem prompts to guide each segment of the SAC. Lastly, I will be listening to small group discussions to redirect to a focus on evidence-based discussion when possible.

“As the participant, your responsibility is to work with your partner or group to stay within the allotted time by providing concise, evidence-based responses. If it is your group’s turn to speak, your focus should be on using specific examples of evidence from the readings that support your claim and providing context that connects the evidence to your reasoning about your claim. While the other group is summarizing what you said, your role is to listen for accuracy and provide clarification when necessary.

“If it is your group’s turn to listen, your responsibility is to listen closely and take notes while the other side is speaking. When it is your turn to summarize, you should provide a concise overview of the key points made by the other side focusing on specific statements that they made, and be open to them providing clarification as needed.”

### Define and State the Purpose of the Seminar

“In the structured academic controversy (SAC) framework, students are to answer the questions and come to a consensus on the controversial issue. The consensus reinforces the idea that before students can choose a side, they need to consider all sides equally. Remember that the goal with a SAC is not to win; rather, SACs should give students adequate class time to present content knowledge and diverse perspectives as well as time for clarification questions, small group discussion, large group discussion, and consensus building-building.” (Schmidt & Pinkney, 2022)



## Structured Academic Controversy Process

### Overarching Statement Provided For the Group

- Political parties have had a net positive effect on our American democracy.

### Learn and Prepare

#### Initial Preparation

- Participants are provided with central text(s) to read in preparation. This is often done as part of the previous class period, or as homework leading up to class.

#### Groups are Created

- Participants are broken into groups. Half of the group is assigned “A” in favor of the statement/question, and half of the group is assigned “B” against the statement or question.

#### Final Preparation (Can be done during previous class if time allows.)

- Each side of the discussion “A” and “B” find a space separate from the other group to meet and prepare. If the group is large enough the “A” and “B” groups can be broken into smaller groups.
- During this phase of preparation, participants work together to share evidence and ideas that can be used during the small group discussion. The goal is that each participant leaves the large group planning phase with an understanding of the key points that can be made in support of their claim. (Usually 3-5 minutes)
- During this time, break all the “A”s into pairs (there can be a group of three if there is an odd number) and then do the same with the “B”s.
- Give each pair time to discuss their plan for the small group discussion. (Usually 5-10 minutes)

### Show and Tell

#### Small Group Creation

- Each “A” pair/group is paired with a “B” pair/group.
  - Groups meet up and introduce themselves to the others.
  - Sentence stem prompt: “Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I look forward to talking with you today.”



## Show and Tell

### Timed Share-Out

- Group “A” is given between 1-3 minutes to deliver an opening statement. The opening statement is to focus solely on the resources that they were provided with emphasis on providing direct quotes.
  - Sentence stem prompt: “Political parties have had a net positive effect on our American democracy because...”
  - During this time group “B” cannot speak at all. They are to listen and take notes.
  - Time allotted depends on the ability of participants, how much preparation time they were given, and how many resources they were provided as supporting research.
- Group “B” is given between 15 seconds and one minute to provide a summary of what group “A” said during their opening statement.
  - Sentence stem prompt: “What I heard you say is...”
  - Time allotted depends on how much time was provided for the opening statement. Give approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  the time of the opening statement to summarize. Emphasis is on being concise in highlighting key points.
  - During the summarize portion, group “A” should not speak unless something provided by group “B” is incorrect. Then clarification can be provided.
  - At the end of the summary time, the facilitator will ask, “Group A, did Group B understand you correctly?”
    - If yes, we move on, if no, then additional clarification can be provided.
- The process is then repeated with the two groups switching roles:
- Group “B” is given between 1-3 minutes to deliver an opening statement. The opening statement is to focus solely on the resources that they were provided with emphasis on providing direct quotes.
  - Sentence stem prompt: “Political parties have **NOT** had a net positive effect on our American democracy because...”
  - It is important to note that even though group “B” is second, their opening statement cannot directly address or refute anything said by group “A” as part of their opening statement. The opening statement by group “B” should be the same that they would have given even if they had gone first. This point will be emphasized by the facilitator.
  - During this time group “A” cannot speak at all. They are to listen and take notes.
  - Time allotted depends on the ability of participants, how much preparation time they were given, and how many resources they were provided as supporting research.



## Show and Tell

- Group “A” is given between 15 seconds and one minute to provide a summary of what group “B” said during their opening statement.
  - Sentence stem prompt: “What I heard you say is...”
  - Time allotted depends on how much time was provided for the opening statement. Give approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  the time of the opening statement to summarize. Emphasis is on being concise in highlighting key points.
  - During the summarize portion, group “B” should not speak unless something provided by group “A” is incorrect. Then clarification can be provided.
  - At the end of the summary time, the facilitator will ask, “Group B, did Group A understand you correctly?”
    - If yes, we move on, if no, then additional clarification can be provided.
- The process is then repeated with the two groups switching back to their original roles. The number of rounds is determined by how much time the facilitator wants dedicated to the discussion and how much background material was provided at the start. The more time and material, the more rounds can and should be provided to allow for deeper discussion.
- Things to note for rounds two and beyond:
  - Unlike the opening statements, in rounds two and beyond, the groups can directly address or refute statements made by the other group as part of their opening statement, or at any point in SAC.
  - Emphasis is given to using direct quotes from the material provided. The more rounds provided, the more likely participants are to start bringing “outside information” to the conversation. Background knowledge can be useful, but be careful about the academic rigor of the source. For example, having knowledge of specific presidential campaigns or political machines of the past can be helpful. Sharing a meme that you read on Facebook is not helpful. The facilitator will be listening in to as many small group conversations at a time as possible to help ensure that the conversations stay at an academically rigorous level.



## Talk and Think

### Open Conversation

- For 1-3 minutes, the group drops their assigned “role” and each member participates in an open discussion about what they have heard.
- Sentence stem prompts:
  - “I think the most persuasive argument in favor of is....”
  - “I think the most persuasive argument against is...”

## Taking a New Approach

### Perspective Switch

- Each group takes the opposite stance in the discussion.
- Group “A” will claim the political parties have **NOT** had a net positive effect and group “B” will claim that they **HAVE** had a net positive effect.
- Each pair will have 3-5 minutes to decide the main points of their new argument.

### Timed Share-Out

- At least one round of a timed share-out occurs in the same format as previous rounds.
  - Both groups are allowed to respond to or rebut previous statements including their own.
  - The number of rounds is determined by how much time the facilitator wants dedicated to the discussion and how much background material was provided at the start.
  - Both sides must have the same number of opportunities to speak.

## Come Together

### Open Conversation

- For 3-5 minutes, the group drops their assigned “role” and each member participates in an open discussion about what they have heard.
- Sentence stem prompts:
  - “I think the most persuasive argument in favor of is....”
  - “I think the most persuasive argument against is...”

### Final Vote

- Each participant casts a vote based on what they have learned and what they believe.
- Sentence stem prompt: “I am voting **yes/no** that political parties have had a net positive effect on our American democracy.”
- Each small group tallies their votes.



## Come Together

### Voting Share Out

- The facilitator asks each group to share their vote tally and if they were for/against the statement/question.

### Full Group Discussion

- The facilitator asks the group if they noticed anything about the voting (this is especially powerful when you have a 4-0 yes AND a 4-0 no in the same room), and why they think the voting went that way.
- The facilitator then leads a full group discussion that focuses on the two sentence stems:
  - “I think the most persuasive argument in favor of is....”
  - “I think the most persuasive argument against is...”
- Time of the final discussion depends on how much time is available and how much time the facilitator wants to spend on the discussion. The full group discussion can take place during the following class period.

## Post-Seminar Content

### Transition to Writing

Participants are encouraged to revisit notes they captured on their selections, personal recording space, etc. and during the Launch Activity.

### Writing Task

What should the future of political parties in America be? Write an argumentative essay (or other form of expressive work like a PowerPoint presentation or a Public Service Announcement Video) that provides the key reasons why you believe that your stance on political parties would strengthen American democracy. Focus on the included texts and podcasts, issues raised in related readings and during the SAC, and your background knowledge on your stance.

### Extension Task

Outline a political campaign for a candidate's election that focuses on what role you believe political parties should play in the future of American politics.



## Main Text Selections

- **60-Second Civics Podcast**
  - [Functions of Political Parties](#)
  - [Origins of Political Parties](#)
  - [Political Parties in Jacksonian Democracy](#)
  - [Political Parties in the Civil War Era](#)
  - [Political Parties in the 1960s](#)
- **Beyond the Legacy Video**
  - [The Evolution of Political Parties in America](#)
- [Federalist 10](#)
- [George Washington's Farewell Address](#)

## Additional Sources

- [Democratic Party: National Platform](#)
- [Republican Party: National Platform](#)
- [Ballotpedia: List of Political Parties in the United States](#)
- [Library of Congress: Political Parties](#)
- [Ideologies of Political Parties, Khan Academy](#)