



Free Speech

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

- Take five minutes to review the [Executive Summary](#) for this brief. Highlight the main point of each section and key statistics.
- 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?

Spread the word: facts to share during your discussion

- Even two centuries after the Bill of Rights was ratified, "[debate continues](#) about the meaning of freedom of speech and its First Amendment companion, freedom of the press."
- Without first satisfying "a [variety of standards and tests](#) that have been established by the Supreme Court over the past century," the government is very limited in its ability to restrict free speech.
- When major online platforms were getting their start, most "preferred to [moderate as little content as possible](#)," but today "companies such as Facebook employ thousands of moderators and use artificial intelligence and other technology to keep tabs on what their users post."

Let's discuss

Below are 3 questions for the group to consider and discuss, or choose your own.

- **Community:** How is free speech central to a healthy, vibrant democracy? Should speech ever be limited?
- **Local, State or Federal Government:** Do speech regulations have any role on social media platforms?
- **Business:** What can businesses do to balance freedom of expression with their status as private entities?

Let's act

1. **Take it local. Talk to your neighbors** to identify the status of First Amendment rights and freedom of expression in your community. Identify the opportunities to work with other community members in your area.
2. **Explore the impact of free speech in your community.** Search for “free speech” + [your state] to see recent news, including relevant legislation or court cases.
3. **Investigate community programs** in your state or municipality. See if your state’s ACLU chapter has any recent news on free speech. Investigate policies put in place by your alma mater or local colleges and universities.
4. **Research your elected representatives’ positions** on First Amendment rights, and their vision for how to tackle free expression challenges facing Americans and your community. 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.
5. **Establish a relationship with your legislators.** 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](#).
6. **Consider writing a letter to the editor or an op-ed on your stance on First Amendment rights in your local paper.** Learn how on [The Policy Circle website](#).

Next Steps for Your Circle

- **Post a Recap:** Summarize your discussion to share thoughts with members not present, and share planned actions from group members. 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? Suggestions include:
 - [Rebuilding Trust in America](#)
 - [Higher Education Reform](#)
 - [Digital Landscape](#)
- **Dive Deeper into the issues.** 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. Don’t miss our [latest events](#) that help you dive deeper on this issue and more.