cbf VOTING RIGHTS

SACRED CONVERSATIONS

This entry level conversation is recommended to assist your participants to (1) develop comfort with the resource format, (2) build trust with other participants, and (3) prepare them for more courageous conversations using this format.

SUMMARY

Voting rights were certainly news makers in 2020 but this conversation and the complexities around it have been, as students of American history can tell you, of note since voting rights were first granted. In our polarized political system, the right of who is allowed to vote, or denied it, can be a significant factor in who holds power. At the very least, conversations around voting rights can be used to rally the base of a political party. This discussion guide examines voting rights related to previously incarcerated citizens. It can be adapted for a harder conversation about other groups, and that will increase the Level of Vulnerability.

AT A GLANCE

LEVEL OF VULNERABILITY

(1-Low, 10-High): 6

RESOURCE PROVIDER

Living Room Conversations
www.livingroomconversations.org

TIME

Adjusted for 60-minute suggested

- Limit table groups to 4-6 (this is the key to allow all to be heard without feeling rushed)
- Use of a timer is recommended. All participants agree to this practice

RESOURCE APPENDIX

Books

- Heather Cox Richardson, Democracy Awakening: Notes on the State of America, 2023
- Adam Kinzinger, Renegade: Defending Democracy and Liberty in Our Divided Country, 2023
- Alexander Keyssar, The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States, 2009
- Kate Farrell, V Is for Voting (ages 3 to 6), 2020

Podcasts

- Now and Then, "Attacking and Defending Voting Rights," Aug 31, 2021
- Dirty Moderate Nation, "Voting Rights and Civi Re-engagement, Dec 1, 2023
- Civics 101, "The 1965 Voting Rights Act: Where Does It Stand?" July 12, 2022

Articles

- Carnegie Reporter, Voting Rights: A Short History
- Library of Congress, Voting Rights
- National Geographic, Voting Rights Throughout United States History

Music

- Bob Dylan, The Times They Are a Changing
- The Beatles, Revolution
- Andra Day, Stand Up For Something
- Genesis,Land of Confusion

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LivingRoom Conversations

Respect. Relate. Connect.

Conversation Guide: Voting Rights

Living Room Conversations offers a simple, sociable and structured way to practice communicating across differences while building understanding and relationships. Typically, 4-6 people meet in person or by video call for about 90 minutes to listen to and be heard by others on one of our nearly 100 topics. Rather than debating or convincing others, we take turns talking to share, learn, and be curious. No preparation is required, though background links with balanced views are available on some topic pages online. Anyone can host using these italicized instructions. Hosts also participate.

I. Introductions: Why We're Here (~10 minutes)

Each participant has 1 minute to introduce themselves.

- Share your name, where you live, what drew you here, and if this is your first conversation.

II. Conversation Agreements: How We'll Engage (~5 minutes)

These will set the tone of our conversation; participants may volunteer to take turns reading them aloud.

- **Be curious and listen to understand.** Conversation is as much about listening as it is about talking. You might enjoy exploring how others' experiences have shaped their values and perspectives.
- **Show respect and suspend judgment.** People tend to judge one another. Setting judgement aside opens you up to learning from others and makes them feel respected and appreciated. Try to truly listen, without interruption or crosstalk.
- **Note any common ground as well as any differences.** Look for areas of agreement or shared values that may arise and take an interest in the differing beliefs and opinions of others.
- **Be authentic and welcome that from others.** Share what's important to you. Speak from your experience. Be considerate of others who are doing the same.
- **Be purposeful and to the point.** Do your best to keep your comments concise and relevant to the question you are answering. Be conscious of sharing airtime with other participants.
- **Own and guide the conversation.** Take responsibility for the quality of your participation and the conversation as a whole. Be proactive in getting yourself and others back on track if needed. Use an agreed upon signal like the "time out" sign if you feel the agreements are not being honored.

III. Question Rounds: What We'll Talk About

Optional: a participant can keep track of time and gently let people know when their time has elapsed.

Round One: Getting to Know Each Other (~10 min)

Each participant can take 1-2 minutes to answer one of these questions:

- What are your hopes and concerns for your family, community and/or the country?
- What would your best friend say about who you are?
- What sense of purpose / mission / duty guides you in your life?

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Round Two: Exploring the Topic -- Voting Rights (~40 min)

One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.

In the United States, the concept of redemption, as it applies to voting rights, can be a distant dream for those who have been incarcerated for offenses small or large. One punishment we have enforced is the revocation of voting rights, which often may be restored only by a lengthy and costly legal process.

Take ~2 minutes each to answer a question below without interruption or crosstalk. After everyone has answered, the group may take a few minutes for clarifying or follow up questions/responses. Continue exploring additional questions as time allows.

- Have you or someone you know had your voting rights revoked? What happened?
- Should people who have "served their time" have their voting rights restored?
- What, if any, are the risks of having felons vote?
- Does the nature of the felony matter? [Felons in Florida (mentioned in the intro) include people that have driven with a suspended license as well as people that have committed murder].
- What redemption, specifically related to voting rights, should we, as a society, allow for people who have been incarcerated and completed their sentence?

Round Three: Reflecting on the Conversation (~15 min)

Take 2 minutes to answer one of the following questions:

- What was most meaningful / valuable to you in this Living Room Conversation?
- What learning, new understanding or common ground was found on the topic?
- How has this conversation changed your perception of anyone in this group, including yourself?
- Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the conversation you just had?

Closing (~5 min)

- *Give us feedback!* Use livingroomconversations.org/feedback-form/ or QR code
- *Donate!* Make more of these possible; give at livingroomconversations.org/donate/
- *Join or host more conversations!* With a) this group by exchanging your emails; b) others in person and/or by video call online. Get more involved or learn how to host at livingroomconversations.org/get-involved/

Thank you!

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