

## Conversation Guide: Does My Vote Really Matter?

*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?

## **Round Two: Exploring the Topic -- Does My Vote Really Matter? (~40 min)**

*One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.*

A record-breaking 158.4 million ballots were cast in the November 2020 general election. While this is cause for celebration, there is equal cause for concern. Around 35 percent of eligible voters did not participate even in this major election and, if past trends hold, we can expect a dramatic drop in voting in 2021 when municipal elections are held. A stark gap still remains in the voting of different demographic groups, with younger, black and brown people voting at lower rates than white and senior voters. What is it about voting that inspires us to participate or turn away? What makes people question whether their vote matters or decide voting is not worth the effort? In this conversation, we talk about what leads us to choose to vote or to choose not to vote.

*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.*

- Are you registered to vote? What led you to that decision?
- Did you vote in recent elections? Why or why not? How do you feel about the significance of your vote?
- How important was voting in your family?
- How have you seen election results impact different groups in your community? Do results feel representative of the community in which you live?
- How would elections and communities be affected by substantially higher voter turnout?

## **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)**

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***Thank you!***