

TALKING POLITICS

HOW TO HAVE AN INFORMED, INSIGHTFUL—EVEN POLITE!—CONVERSATION ABOUT THE ELECTION

NAVIGATE

★ ★ THE NEWS ★ ★

Before you can banter smartly about politics, you've got to feast on the right info. Consider these your entrées, sides, and snacks.



REACH FOR THE BIGGIES AS YOUR MAIN CONSUMPTION SOURCE

The Washington Post, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*: All have a track record of objective coverage, as well as real-time election updates. The *Times*—and nonpartisan sites like FactCheck.org and PolitiFact.com—feature hubs that verify (or refute) claims made by candidates. Whatever you're reading, recognize red flags, such as exaggerated language ("immigration is higher than ever before") and blanket statements ("Republicans believe...").



GET A SIDE BEAT AND MASTER IT

So many issues, so many bills, so much friggin' jargon. Rather than being a master of none, go deep on one issue that you feel connected to. You'll stay invested as the race plods along, and you'll be able to contribute more effectively when the dinner-party talk gets heated. Download iCitizen (free, iOS and Android), which lets you customize your main feed based on topics you care about most, and check OpenCongress.org to track the status of specific bills and votes in the House.



SNACK ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Look, nearly half of Americans use Facebook to access news about politics, according to a Pew Research Center survey. Problem is, FB is a private feed of mostly like-minded friends. Treating it as a news source limits the breadth of your knowledge. When you read a post, ask yourself: Is this validating my beliefs? Or is it presenting bipartisan facts that force me to confront difficult truths about an issue? The latter will help you have more constructive and balanced chats with people.

OKAY, CAN WE

Just Be Civil?

Raised voices? Passive-aggressive digs? Not happening!

Treat it like a discovery, not a face-off.

Inviting questions ("What did you think of last night's debate?") rather than stating opinions helps steer the conversation into an open dialogue. Plus, when you inquire about others' experiences, you might end up understanding their perspectives better.

Accept that nothing is black and white.

Most issues are 50 shades of gray. Don't label people as pro-life versus pro-choice or pigeonhole them by asking them binary Qs ("Are you for or against gun control?"). That puts the other person on the defensive. Recognize that most issues are complicated.

Throw the other side the occasional bone.

Even if you disagree, she likely isn't wrong about everything, so acknowledge that. Repeat back something to let her know you hear her POV. (E.g., "I understand why the sanctity of marriage matters to you. I just don't think it's up to the government to regulate it.")

AND NOW...

TALKING POINTS ON HOT-BUTTON ISSUES

These are three of the most controversial (and misunderstood) topics, according to PolitiFact.com. Study up!



THE ECONOMY

WHAT YOU HEAR: "Einstein idea: Instead of blowing the budget on wars, how about spending it on creating jobs?"

THE REALITY: One viral (and false) news item claimed 57 percent of the federal budget goes to the military. But the U.S. spends more money on both Social Security and Medicare/Medicaid.

WHAT TO SAY: "Spending needs to be capped, yes, but it's just as crucial to consider the global economy's impact (e.g., China) on future job growth."

GUN VIOLENCE

WHAT YOU HEAR: "We need background checks and gun control!"

THE REALITY: The majority of Americans agree that universal background checks are necessary, but in a national survey, 40 percent of prison inmates admitted they got their weapons from the black market. Others got them from friends and family.

WHAT TO SAY: "Background checks could help, but we also need additional regulation methods and initiatives that explore the mental health issues that often lead to such violence."

TERRORISM

WHAT YOU HEAR: "Did you read about that pro-ISIS rally in Dearborn, Michigan?? We gotta get a president who's tough on terrorism."

THE REALITY: One PolitiFact analysis shows most of the GOP candidates' plans aren't so different from Obama's. (Oh, and that particular rally? The picture was doctored. It was an *anti*-ISIS rally.)

WHAT TO SAY: "Our new prez needs a plan, but the candidates haven't given specifics on how they'd handle it. We need concrete details from our leader."

Sources: Angie Drobnic Holan, editor of PolitiFact.com; Lynn Vavreck, Ph.D., associate professor of political science and communication studies at UCLA

