



2021-2022

DISCUSSION OUTLINE

***What Is the State of
American Democracy in
the 21st Century?***

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Overview of Discussion

“Problem-solving Discussion is an effort on the part of a small group to reach a solution to a problem through informal interchange of facts, inferences, and judgments. This method of discussion seeks consensus rather than majority rule. The focus of this event should be the encouragement of cooperation and critical thinking to arrive at the collective goal of better understanding and problem solving.”

This statement from the *Minnesota State High School League Speech Rules and Policies Manual* reflects the true spirit of this event. As discussion participants prepare and research, the goal should be to collect information and develop collaborative skills that will maximize their ability to make valuable contributions as members of a variety of contest groups. In rounds, all discussants should cooperate to achieve group consensus through both substantive (adding valuable information, perspectives, and analysis) and procedural (enhancing the group process, full participation, and positive exchange of ideas) contributions to the process. The category is not intended to be adversarial.

Overview of This Year’s Topic

“The establishment of our new Government seemed to be the last great experiment for promoting human happiness.”

--George Washington, January 9. 1790

American democracy has often been described as a “grand experiment”. Despite the limitations placed upon participation in that experiment in its early days, democracy in America both grew and endured much trial and tribulation. Yet is it unfair to ask the simple question: What is the condition of democracy as we move forward in the 21st century? Has our grand experiment met its match? This year’s topic will explore the many challenges facing democracy in our nation and how they can be overcome. Will it require only fine tuning? A radical overhaul? Or something in between?

TASK INFORMATION

Tasks at Invitational Tournaments

While the Minnesota State High School League does not limit the use of topic areas used for Discussion at invitational speech tournaments, the Discussion Committee recommends the following schedule to give students experience with all parts of the outline:

- **Start of Regular Invitational Season – February 19: Area I, Subsection Topics**
- **February 20 – Last Regular Season Invitational: Area II, Section Topics**
- **State Tournament Tasks – Students should be prepared for tasks from both areas of the outline.**

Tournament Managers Please Note: Whether or not you choose to follow the above schedule, it is vital that you communicate to your participating schools which part(s) of the outline you will use and how you will be organizing your Discussion rounds.

Tasks at Subsection and Section Tournaments

Tasks for subsection and section tournaments will follow the procedure instituted in the 2016 season – Tournaments will no longer receive a full slate of tasks from which to choose. Instead, they will receive a set of four or five tasks for those tournaments. Those tasks will be date specific (unique to one or two sets of tournaments) and will not be repeated at other tournaments.

The tasks themselves shall not be shared beforehand with teams competing at subsection or section tournaments.

Rather, the specific outline sub-points used will be sent with the sets and – following procedure established in 2018 – must be communicated to all coaches in your sub and/or section within a time frame that affords adequate preparation for participating teams. For example: “Our [subsection/section] tournament will use Area 1, Sub-points A, C, D, J.”

Tasks at State Tournament

State tournament tasks will follow the same procedure as previous seasons. Separate sets will be written for each day and chosen at random for each round of competition. Participants should be prepared for tasks from both areas of the outline.

WHAT IS THE STATE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

2021 - 2022 MSHSL Discussion Topic Outline

Discussion tasks this year will critically examine what influences the workings of our governmental systems in order to ask the question: Is American Democracy working? Tasks for this topic should not shy away from covering what may be considered sensitive or difficult subject matter. All efforts should be made to ensure that the questions posed to the students encourage critical thinking and positive group interaction. Part of critical thinking is to recognize political bias and to avoid thinking in absolutes.

I. Influences on Our Democracy– Subsection Topic

- A. The Influence of Protest/Reform Movements.
- B. Influence and Role of Religious Belief Systems.
- C. Intersection of Technology and Government/Democracy. (voting methods, data collection, openness/transparency)
- D. The Role of Media of All Types (traditional and non-traditional)
- E. Lobbyists, Influence Peddlers, Bribery, Corruption (astroturf lobbying, unfair access).
- F. Racial Issues and Democracy.
- G. Gender Issues & Democracy.
- H. Unrealistic Expectations of Officials and Agencies.
- I. Financing of Campaigns (public financing, super PACs, foreign influence).
- J. Access to Government and Officials

II. Our Democracy From Within – Section Topic

- A. The Many Layers of Government ~ Inevitable Conflict?
- B. Direct vs. Representative Democracy (ballot reforms, ballot initiatives, referendums, recalls).
- C. Use and Control of the Media and Access.
- D. Status of the U.S. Constitution in the 21st Century.
- E. Disenfranchisement (codified and de facto)
- F. State and Role of Political Parties
- G. The State of Checks and Balances.
- H. Electoral College.
- I. Inconsistency Amongst the States (registration, redistricting, ballot access)
- J. Conflicts of Interest, Transparency.
- K. What Can We Learn from Other Democracies?

Bibliography

The bibliography is a starting point for those desiring direction in researching this topic. This list is not meant to be exhaustive and presents only a small number of the resources that could be used to prepare for Discussion tasks.

Area I -- Influences On Our Democracy – Subsection Topic

A. The Influence of Protest/Reform Movements.

1. “Protesting is as important as voting”. Brookings Institution, 28 August 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/08/28/protesting-is-as-important-as-voting/>
2. “Going Too Far: The American Public’s Attitudes toward Protest Movements”. *Roper Center For Public Opinion Research*, August 2014. <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/going-too-far-american-publics-attitudes-toward-protest-movements>
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4. “We’re on the Brink of a New Era of Political Reform”. *New American Weekly*, 27 June 2019. <https://www.newamerica.org/weekly/brink-new-era-political-reform/>

B. Influence and Role of Religious Belief Systems.

1. “8 facts about religion and government in the United States”. *PEW Research Center*, 16 July 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/07/16/8-facts-about-religion-and-government-in-the-united-states/>
2. “Why Political Sectarianism Is a Growing Threat to American Democracy”. *New York Times*, 19 April 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/19/us/democracy-gop-democrats-sectarianism.html>
3. International standards on freedom of religion of belief. United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. Copyright 1996-2021. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/freedomreligion/pages/standards.aspx>

C. Intersection of Technology and Government/Democracy. (voting methods, data collection, openness/transparency)

1. “Many Tech Experts Say Digital Disruption Will Hurt Democracy”. *Pew Research Center*. 21 February 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/02/21/many-tech-experts-say-digital-disruption-will-hurt-democracy/>
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3. “Technology a double-edged sword for U.S. election security”. Botelho, Bridget. *TechTarget*, 14 December 2020.

<https://searchsecurity.techtarget.com/Technology-a-double-edged-sword-for-US-election-security>

D. The Role of Media of All Types (traditional, non-traditional, social)

1. "THE DARK PSYCHOLOGY OF SOCIAL NETWORKS: Why it feels like everything is going haywire". *The Atlantic*, December 2019.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/12/social-media-democracy/600763/>
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<https://www.pnas.org/content/118/15/e1912443118>
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<https://journalism.uoregon.edu/news/six-ways-media-influences-elections>

E. Lobbyists, Influence Peddlers, Bribery, Corruption (astro-turf lobbying, unfair access)

1. "Lobbying in the 21st Century: Transparency, Integrity and Access". The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 20 May 2021.
<https://www.oecd.org/corruption-integrity/reports/lobbying-in-the-21st-century-c6d8eff8-en.html>
2. "'Grassroots' bot campaigns are coming. Governments don't have a plan to stop them". Farrell, Henry and Schneier, Bruce. *The Washington Post*, 20 May 2021.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/05/20/ai-bots-grassroots-astroturf/>
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<https://www.pewresearch.org/2020/09/23/the-changing-racial-and-ethnic-composition-of-the-u-s-electorate/>

G. Gender Issues and Democracy.

1. "A Century After Women Gained the Right To Vote, Majority of Americans See Work To Do on Gender Equality". Horowitz, Juliana Menasce and Igielnik, Ruth. Pew Research Center, 7 July 2020.

- <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/07/07/a-century-after-women-gained-the-right-to-vote-majority-of-americans-see-work-to-do-on-gender-equality/>
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- H. Financing of Campaigns (public financing, super PAC, foreign influence).
1. “Campaign Finance in the United States: Assessing an Era of Fundamental Change”. *Bipartisan Policy Center*, January 2018. <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/BPC-Democracy-Campaign-Finance-in-the-United-States.pdf>
 2. “Ten years on, Citizens United ruling has changed U.S. politics — but not in the way many feared”. *Los Angeles Times*, 12 January 2020. <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-01-12/citizens-united-ruling-anniversary-how-it-changed-american-politics>
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- I. Access to Government and Officials
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 2. “Voters to Congress: Are you listening?”. Cioffi, Chris. *Roll Call*, 17 March 2021. <https://www.rollcall.com/2021/03/17/voters-to-congress-are-you-listening/>
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Area II – Our Democracy From Within – Section Topic

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1. "Is America a democracy? If so, why does it deny millions the vote?" *The Guardian*, 7 November 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/nov/07/is-america-a-democracy-if-so-why-does-it-deny-millions-the-vote>
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K. What Can We Learn from Other Democracies?

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Websites

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Citizens for Responsibility & Ethics in Washington: www.citizensforethics.org

League of Women Voters: www.lwv.org

C-SPAN: www.c-span.org

American Political Science Association: www.apsanet.org

Open Secrets: www.opensecrets.org

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State of American Democracy Project <https://stateofamericandemocracy.org/>

National Conference of State Legislatures <https://www.ncsl.org/>