



Whether you're bracing yourself for the electioneering of the U.S. mid-terms, bemused by EU politics in Brussels, or just confounded by the compromises of the governing coalition in your own country, we all have an opinion on politics and politicians.

Once considered a taboo conversational subject along with sex and money, now politics is often a casual part of daily discourse. How, when and even if you should express your views can be a tricky minefield in both social and business settings.

Whether you are at the office, actively campaigning, or quietly curious, when pursuing the subject of politics, it is important to consider the setting and the audience before wading into the fray.

Some tips for a successful conversation: Know your goal. Think about the purpose of the conversation, and whether you should even be having it. Are you seeking information? Advocating a point of view in the hope of changing someone else's mind? Venting frustration?

Consider how receptive your audience will be to your purpose. Do your homework. While there is always more to learn, at least know some basics about a candidate or issue before volunteering an opinion.

What is a candidate's stance? What did he or she say in the debate? What is the opposition's point of view? Whether or not to trust a candidate's word is one matter, but knowing what was said in the first place is the only way to form a valid opinion.

Don't make it personal. Comments such as, "I can't believe you think that," are perceived as attacking the other person's character rather than engaging in discussion.

Stay away from personal, opinionated, or judgmental comments, as political conversation can often deteriorate into pejorative dumping sessions. Keep in mind, too, that asking for someone else's point of view doesn't mean you have to agree or cede your own position.

## Reuters: Talking politics at work and home

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Assume nothing. No matter how perceptive you may think you are, it is impossible to know another's political convictions prior to conversing.

Never presume that someone agrees or disagrees with you, or even that they wish to discuss political issues; one-word responses are a sign of polite disinterest.

Have an exit strategy. It takes two to argue, and if you choose not to participate the other person will have nowhere to take the conversation.

It's not always easy to swallow the last word; it can feel as though you are conceding the point. But if cutting the conversation short will keep a friendship or business relationship from being damaged, it is well worth it.

Have a neutral, stock answer ready to get you out of a heated conversation, and be aware you may need to repeat it firmly and patiently: "We'll have to agree to disagree;" "I guess we just don't see eye to eye;" or, "I'll have to consider that."

Opt-out. There are some occasions that don't recommend themselves to political topics. Weddings and holidays are risky settings for such potentially divisive conversations, especially among family members who might not be so shy about tempering their opinions.

These are memorable events, and the memories should be good ones. Charged political conversations or comments should also be avoided when meeting new people or speaking briefly.

The results. Election day will inevitably arrive, bringing decisive outcomes (hopefully). Elation in victory and dismay in defeat are normal; how we choose to display those emotions is important.

Celebrate or commiserate when with like-minded friends and colleagues, but in less certain company -- this goes double at work -- be sensitive of others' emotions and be discreet with your own.

So what's left to talk about?

Lots. Political discourse is central to making good decisions in the voting booth. It can also be invigorating and healthy debate among friends and colleagues. The best political conversation is one where the participants can gain deeper or broader knowledge while enjoying the thrust and parry of a lively exchange.

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