



# Lot's TALK

Pluralist Lab



TOPICAL QUESTIONS  
AND RESPONSES

# About This Resource

This collection of topical questions and responses is part of the [The Pluralist Lab](#) toolkit, originally developed by the Mercatus Center and now offered through FIRE's Let's Talk program. This format is designed to foster deep, meaningful dialogue on divisive issues through a signature method called "Triadic Illumination" — a conversation structure that invites students to explore not only their own views but also the motivations and reasoning behind opposing perspectives.

Triadic Illumination questions are purposely broad and prompt participants to pick a response that most fits their own view. These views are often (but not always) more extreme than their own, but that's the point! The idea is that, through discussion, participants are able to discuss the nuances that exist within these polarizing topics.

These questions are intentionally impossible to answer in one discussion because answering the question is not the ultimate objective. The goal is for participants to learn from one another and understand why people might disagree with them. Even if they find that they still vehemently disagree, participants should increase their knowledge and empathy for those who hold differing views.

From the [Let's Talk Leader Moderation Guide](#):

*"It's important to appreciate what Isaiah Berlin termed 'value pluralism,' which is the idea that human values are diverse, conflicting, and cannot be reduced to a single principle. Sometimes, values may conflict with one another, but if we recognize the reality and legitimacy of our differing priorities, respect between value systems is possible. Different viewpoints often stem from different value systems, and by recognizing this, we may be able to simultaneously maintain our*

*position on an issue while accepting an opposing view as equally valid, but simply demonstrative of a different ordering of moral priorities."*

This resource supports Let's Talk's broader goal of developing free speech advocates through regular dialogue practice, exposure to diverse viewpoints, and civil disagreement grounded in mutual respect.

The questions laid out in this document are designed for Triadic Illumination exercises in a Pluralist Lab format, but in an open discussion, they would be categorized as Let's Talk **Heat Level 3** questions — complex, polarizing, and often deeply personal topics that can spark strong reactions. To prepare participants for high-stakes conversations using these prompts, facilitators may find it helpful to start with **Heat Level 0–2** exercises from the [Let's Talk Leader Moderation Guide](#), which gradually build trust and warm up conversation skills. Heat Level 0 questions are light and rapport-building (e.g., "What's a hobby you picked up recently?"), Level 1 prompts invite mild disagreement (e.g., "Is a hot dog a sandwich?"), and Level 2 questions explore values and experiences without diving into controversy (e.g., "What does community mean to you?"). This progression helps participants practice listening, build comfort, and engage more openly when it's time to tackle the harder stuff.

You can use these questions to host informal conversations or you can receive facilitator training to employ them in Triadic Illumination exercises through a "Let's Talk: Pluralist Lab Introductory Workshop." Learn more about the requirements to become a facilitator and host a formal Pluralist Lab workshop in the [Let's Talk: Pluralist Lab Conversation Guide](#).

# General Format

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## TOPIC: QUESTION #1

**ORANGE:** Response heavily leaning toward a progressive/left mindset.

**PURPLE:** Response heavily leaning toward a conservative/right mindset.

**ROSE:** I'm not sure / other...in some cases, it's good to add "both" and/or "neither"

## TOPIC: QUESTION #2

**ORANGE:** Response heavily leaning toward a conservative/right mindset.

**PURPLE:** Response heavily leaning toward a progressive/left mindset.

**ROSE:** I'm not sure / other...in some cases, it's good to add "both" and/or "neither"

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## SOCIOECONOMIC MOBILITY: WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO IMPROVE SOCIOECONOMIC MOBILITY?

**ORANGE:** The government should redistribute resources from the well-off to others in need, and establish a more comprehensive welfare system.

**PURPLE:** The government is involved in too many aspects of our lives and the economy. It should reduce taxes and regulatory requirements to make it easy for individuals to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities and realize their fullest potential.

**ROSE:** I'm not sure / other

## IMMIGRATION (OPTION #1): WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING WE CAN DO ON OUR IMMIGRATION POLICY

**ORANGE:** We are a nation of rules and laws. People who come here illegally should be deported and we should have stricter border controls to keep our country safe.

**PURPLE:** Immigrants (documented or not) are a benefit to the country they come to and kicking them out would hurt everyone.

**ROSE:** I'm not sure / other

## IMMIGRATION (OPTION #2): WHAT IS THE BEST POLICY FOR IMMIGRATION REFORM?

**ORANGE:** A nation that cannot control its borders is no nation. While there might be areas where immigration law might be made more efficient, we must prioritize enforcing border security and deporting illegal immigrants who are caught committing crimes.

**PURPLE:** National borders that prevent the free movement of people are unjust, immoral, and impractical. A policy of open borders that allow everyone to move across boundaries on a map with impunity and give legal status to undocumented immigrants would benefit both immigrants and current citizens.

**ROSE:** I'm not sure / other

## CLIMATE CHANGE (OPTION #1): HOW SHOULD WE DEAL WITH CLIMATE CHANGE?

**ORANGE:** We should focus on promoting innovation and market-driven solutions that empower businesses to develop clean energy technologies while reducing regulatory burdens that hinder economic growth.

**PURPLE:** We must prioritize aggressive government action to transition to renewable energy, enforce strict emissions regulations, and invest in green infrastructure to combat climate change and ensure a sustainable future for all.

**ROSE:** I'm not sure / other / both

## CLIMATE CHANGE (OPTION #2):

### WHAT IS THE BEST POLICY FOR ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE?

**ORANGE:** Business and civil society can innovate and grow our way out this problem. We should focus on promoting market-driven and voluntary solutions that empower innovators to develop clean energy technologies, carbon capture, and bottom-up answers to resource management.

**PURPLE:** Government must implement degrowth policies. Strong regulations, carbon controls, investment in green technology and other policies designed to rein in or even reverse the uncontrolled growth of industry are the only realistic solutions.

**ROSE:** I'm not sure / other / both

## CRIME REDUCTION:

### WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING WE CAN DO TO REDUCE CRIME?

**ORANGE:** To reduce crime, you must reduce poverty. When people's needs are met, they commit less crime.

**PURPLE:** Reducing crime means you aggressively prosecute criminals and put them in jail.

**ROSE:** I'm not sure / other / both

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM:

### WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO ADDRESS CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM?

**ORANGE:** The criminal justice system is systemically unjust, from policing to prosecuting to prison policies. We must make fundamental changes that refocus the system to account for the rights of the accused and rehabilitation of those who have committed crimes.

**PURPLE:** While there may be some areas where the criminal justice system can be improved, it is still fundamentally just. Any changes need to prioritize justice for the victims of crime who had their rights violated and not the rights of the criminals who make our communities less safe.

**ROSE:** I'm not sure / other



**FORMERLY INCARCERATED:  
WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTION WE CAN TAKE TO ADDRESS  
FORMERLY INCARCERATED PEOPLE RE-ENTERING SOCIETY?**

**ORANGE:** We need to enhance monitoring and supervision of individuals re-entering society to ensure public safety and deter repeat offenses, focusing on strict parole and probation measures.

**PURPLE:** We need to invest in comprehensive reintegration programs that offer education, job training, and mental health support to address the root causes of recidivism and facilitate a smooth transition into society.

**ROSE:** I'm not sure / other

**VOTING:  
WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTION WE CAN TAKE TO ENSURE THE  
INTEGRITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF VOTING RIGHTS?**

**ORANGE:** We need to enhance monitoring and supervision of individuals re-entering society to ensure public safety and deter repeat offenses, focusing on strict parole and probation measures.

**PURPLE:** We should implement stricter voting identification laws and registration verification processes to prevent fraud and ensure that only eligible voters participate in elections, and prevent other forms of election tampering.

**ROSE:** I'm not sure / other / both

**EDUCATION (GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT AND OUTCOMES):  
WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING WE CAN DO TO REDUCE CRIME?**

**ORANGE:** For profit businesses and civil society have the most important role to play in improving education outcomes.

**PURPLE:** The federal and state governments have the most important role to play in improving education outcomes.

**ROSE:** I'm not sure / other

## EDUCATION (SAFETY)

### WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO ENSURE SCHOOL SAFETY?

**ORANGE:** Schools should prioritize armed personnel including allowing teachers and staff to carry concealed firearms on campus. Schools should also invest in metal detectors, and surveillance cameras even if they disrupt the learning environment.

**PURPLE:** Schools should prioritize mental health resources to preemptively address issues of violence within the school population. Schools should also practice active shooter drills and lockdowns to be prepared for dangerous situations.

**ROSE:** I'm not sure / other / both

## EDUCATION (SCHOOL CHOICE):

### WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTION WE CAN TAKE TO ENSURE ACCESS TO EDUCATION?

**ORANGE:** Government must ensure a wide range of educational options, including public, charter, and private schools are available to all families regardless of their socioeconomic status to meet diverse student needs.

**PURPLE:** School choice increases segregation and disadvantages students with high needs. They are more likely to undermine traditional public schools than improve educational outcomes.

**ROSE:** I'm not sure / other

## EDUCATION ACCESS:

### WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING WE CAN DO TO REDUCE CRIME?

**ORANGE:** Government should increase funding and resources to public schools as disadvantaged students and communities may not have access to all options.

**PURPLE:** Government should ensure diverse educational options (public, charter, and private schools) are accessible to meet varied student needs.

**ROSE:** I'm not sure / other / both

## EDUCATION (HIGHER ED DIVERSITY): WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTION WE CAN TAKE TO ADDRESS EQUITY AND DIVERSITY ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES?

**ORANGE:** Eliminate affirmative action, advocating for merit-based selection processes that do not consider race, gender, or ethnicity, to ensure fairness and equality for all individuals.

**PURPLE:** Enhance affirmative action policies to actively promote diversity and correct historical inequalities in education, employment, and other sectors, supporting underrepresented groups.

**ROSE:** I'm not sure / other

## FREE SPEECH: WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING WE CAN DO TO PROTECT FREE SPEECH?

**ORANGE:** We should have specific and clear restrictions on speech that can be defined as hate speech or misinformation, in order to create a respectful and fact-based society. It is essential to prevent behavior that can be detrimental to the well-being and civility of the general community.

**PURPLE:** We must prioritize the right to express all viewpoints, even those that are controversial or unpopular, because open dialogue and debate are the cornerstones of a democratic society.

**ROSE:** I'm not sure / other / both

## HOUSING: WHAT IS THE BEST APPROACH FOR HOUSING ACCESSIBILITY FOR AMERICANS?

**ORANGE:** Zoning and regulatory barriers should be removed so that builders and developers can produce affordable housing options for individuals.

**PURPLE:** The government should ensure that every individual adult is adequately housed with livable amenities.

**ROSE:** I'm not sure / other / both

## SECOND AMENDMENT: DOES THE SECOND AMENDMENT DO MORE HARM THAN GOOD?

**ORANGE:** The second amendment has done more good than harm. Having an armed citizenry is integral to the American way of life from hunting to sporting to self and national defense.

**PURPLE:** The second amendment has done more harm than good. We would be far better off if we banned all firearms for citizens, with the possible exception of antiques.

**ROSE:** Neither / other

## FINANCIAL REGULATION: WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTION WE CAN TAKE TO ENSURE THE STABILITY AND INTEGRITY OF THE FINANCIAL SYSTEM?

**ORANGE:** Relaxing regulations to encourage innovation and competitiveness in the financial sector will be most effective. Market forces naturally correct imbalances and foster growth.

**PURPLE:** Strengthening consumer protections and increasing transparency in the financial industry will prevent abuses and ensure fairness for all participants.

**ROSE:** I'm not sure / other/ both / neither

## EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS: HOW SHOULD GOVERNMENT AGENCIES HANDLE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS (ESAS)?

**ORANGE:** Designating an animal as an emotional support animal (ESA) lacks oversight and negatively impacts other service and working animal programs.

**PURPLE:** Emotional support animal (ESA) restrictions should be softened to allow more species

**ROSE:** Neither / other

## IDENTITY POLITICS: NECESSARY FOR JUSTICE OR DIVISIVE AND HARMFUL?: SHOULD SOCIAL AND POLITICAL MOVEMENTS FOCUS ON IDENTITY-BASED ACTIVISM, OR SHOULD WE MOVE TOWARD A UNIVERSAL APPROACH TO RIGHTS AND POLICY?

**ORANGE:** Identity-based advocacy is crucial to achieving justice for marginalized groups.

**PURPLE:** Identity politics divide people and weaken social cohesion; universal policies work best.

**ROSE:** I'm not sure / other/ both / neither

## ABORTION: WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTION WE CAN TAKE TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF ABORTION?

**ORANGE:** We should ensure full access to comprehensive reproductive health services, including abortion, as part of protecting women's health and rights, emphasizing the importance of choice and privacy.

**PURPLE:** We should implement restrictions on abortion to protect unborn life whenever possible, focusing on promoting alternatives such as adoption and providing support for expecting mothers.

**ROSE:** I'm not sure / other

## Final Notes for Facilitators

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You can adapt Let's Talk [heat level questions](#) or add your own questions following the same Triadic Illumination structure. These conversations work best when participants are surprised by what they learn — about themselves and others.

Let's keep learning together. Let's Talk.



## How FIRE can help

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We are counting on you to help cultivate a culture of free speech on your campus! FIRE is here to provide guidance and resources. We have a team of experts at your disposal who can help decode and demystify your school's policies, help you talk to administrators, and offer advice on tricky free speech questions. Additionally, we can send guides, literature, speakers, and FIRE materials. Please do not hesitate to contact us with questions. We are here to help!

