

Play Rules for domiNation (a Political Role-Playing Game)

If your stance is that winner-takes-all is more realistic than trying to compromise in politics, if you enjoy competition, or you just like the opportunity to give someone a good ribbing, this game is for you. You might want to skip the details by reading only down to the *game end* bullet and skipping the shaded areas.

Game Setting

You aim to (a) convince others to support your party's values and interests and also (b) avoid an obligation to support causes that you may argue are against your values and interests. Landing in others' domains is simply part of life, as we sometimes, thru family or work obligations, end up in locations or situations that we wouldn't otherwise choose. For example, you might be invited to attend (and pay for tickets to) a football game or burning man festival. Taxes are demanded to support programs you don't personally benefit from. Donation requests are made by non-profits. Give-and-take is part of politics and life, so when you don't give, it's important to explain to the others why it just doesn't work for you to support some requests or demands.

Political Party Affiliation or Position

| Color | Player piece icon | Party (or support base) | Stance |
|--------|-------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| white | dove, fingers | anti-establishment | pacifist or apolitical |
| yellow | eagle, porcupine | libertarian party | populist, fiscal & moral conservative |
| Red* | elephant, dollar | republican party | social, fiscal, & moral conservative |
| gray | key, gavel | centrist establishment | institution-focused authoritarian |
| Blue* | donkey, fist | democrat or labor | social, fiscal, and moral liberal |
| green | tree, solar panel | green party | populist, liberal, conservationist |

Game Pieces

- Paper tokens (icons): dollar, red dollar (debt), frown, and hourglass
- Game board
- Player pieces: six round moveable pieces with icons representing party affiliation or position

Setup

- **Player numbers:** 2 to 6
- **Party affiliation (color):** Each player rolls one die. The person with the highest number has first pick of party affiliation. The second highest number has the next pick, and so on. Tied players roll again to see which of the two goes next. If learning alternate perspectives is the main goal, such as for classroom use, players should choose a color they have not been in previous games.
- **Party-line adherence:** For younger players, or playing for the first time, it's simpler to play from a "tow the party line" stance. Arguments or appeals should be consistent with your understanding of that party's main values and interests. Adherence can be decided by vote or by appeal to outside resources. For more politically informed players, you do not need to stick exactly to the party line as long as you can defend why your answer adheres to a core value of your party, allowing flexibility in interpreting each party's interests.
- **Player positioning:** Players then sit next to the squares that match their selected color. Each player puts their playing piece on the square to the left of their own domain (the set of game board squares of your color) to start.
- **Game length:** Decide on the amount of time you wish to play. Use a timer. When it sounds, the game stops and the player with the most dollar tokens wins.
- **Winner prize:** By vote, establish a prize or prize options for the winner, such as the winner gets bowed to by all and referred to for the remainder of the day as the Grand Poobah or other such honorary title, gets a

stash of pooled real cash, gets their chores done by the others, or other agreed-on prize. Different prizes for each player could be decided on, depending on what each potential winner would want, if all agree to this approach and agree to the prizes.

- **Starting money:** Each player counts out 10 dollar tokens and gives them to the person at their left.
- **Debt:** If you fall into debt because you need to make a payment and have no money, you can decide to (a) leave the game, (b) request a personal loan from another player or the bank (and record it), or (c) receive a red dollar token as debt.
- **Talk-time limit:** The number of time's-up tokens (with hourglass icon) each player starts with should equal twice the number of other players. A turn-taker should make their argument in about four minutes or less. An hourglass token can be given to a turn-taker when they are going on too long in their argument or repeating themselves. Any three time's-up tokens received will cancel out a black dollar token. That time's-up token should be placed with the player's dollar tokens and not given to another player.

Game Play

- The person who at setup rolled the highest number goes first, and play proceeds clockwise from there.
- Players roll one die and proceed clockwise the number of squares indicated by the die roll.
- **Own-color square:** When you land on a square that's your own color and win that turn, receive a \$ from any other players (which they draw from the community stash) by convincing them how your party's contribution related to that agenda item helps the others, separately or as a society. Green and blue each have a double-pay square that makes up for one less square.
- **Example of play-rule for own-color square:** If I am the white-icon player, I might roll a three. Landing on mediation and community payback, I explain to the other player that the political right should value those measures as they reduce tax dollars needed for incarceration while still keeping violent criminals off the street. The left should value those as leaning toward rehabilitation as opposed to a tough-on-crime stance. The centrist authoritarian would value those measures as they reduce the backlog of cases in the court system. The political right may agree that if those programs can be run as private businesses, they reduce the amount of government bureaucracy involved. The courts will be slower to resolve issues, including those involving business. Those in agreement that my argument is valid would each give me a dollar from the community fund, so potentially I would receive five dollar tokens. I might ask for start-up funding to get the program going, and the group might vote to give me a dollar token.
- **Other-color square:** When you land on a square that's not your color, read aloud the text under the icon. You can pay from your stash to help their goal, or you can decline, stating why their agenda doesn't help you. The player of that party (if there is one) can argue back why their agenda does help society or specifically helps your party's cause. You, the turn-taking player, can then briefly rebut the other player or add to the original statement. The other non-disputing players then vote on who made the more convincing argument, which decides whether the token must be paid or not. If no other player owns the domain landed on, they vote whether your statement was convincing. The \$ token has to be paid from your own money to the person owning that domain, or if no one owns it, then pay to the common stash.
- **Example of play-rule for other-color square:** If I am the white-icon player described in the example above, on my second turn I might roll a six, landing on the red helmet. I might argue that although I have been invited to attend this event by a good friend, the competitive and sometimes violent aspect does not appeal to me as a pacifist-leaning person. I decline to pay the ticket price, nor do I want to support through taxes the government regulation of the NCAA. The red player might offer an oppositional view, that sports provide a needed outlet that actually decreases violence in society. Then the group votes on whether or not I made a substantial and valid argument. I am allowed to not pay a dollar to the general fund, or if red has made a valid counter-argument and I have no rebuttal, the group might vote that I must pay, from my own stash.

- **Vote tie-breaker:** If there are only two players in the game, the no vote stands. Otherwise, a tied vote will be resolved by die toss by the turn-taking player, with 1-3 as a no vote, and 4-6 as a yes vote.
- **Already-played square:** If you land on a square that you have already been on, you can jump to the next square or you can re-visit that topic with a different argument.
- **Debt:** If you fall into debt, because you need to make a payment and have no money, you can decide to (a) leave the game or (b) request a personal loan from another player or the bank (record it).
- **Game end:** When the timer rings, the game immediately ends, even if in the middle of a play. If a vote is already completed but the token has not yet been collected, that token can be collected. The person with the most \$ tokens wins.
- **Game-time extension:** If the endpoint agreed on was a set time, and if the apparently-winning player is in agreement with others who want to continue the game when the timer sounds, a time extension can be set.
- **Game clean up:** Before getting the prize, the winner is responsible for supervising the process of putting all game pieces in order and back in their designated container. Players who do not help should be shunned and chastised as shirking a civic duty to be a good example.
- **Prize forfeit:** By vote the group may decide that a winner will forfeit their prize if they have been inattentive, often absent, not sober, uncivil, suspected of unethical behavior, or failed to complete their duty of supervising the game clean up.

Alternative Play Rules

Alternate rules could be adopted by vote and check-marked to ensure that consent has been established. You can also make up your own rules as a group, but they must be recorded. You can use decision tools that are not democratic, such as various consensus-building processes (if you want a very long game), chance (die roll), or authority figure (such as a nearby person outside the game).

- **Party (color) assignment:** Your group may vote to assign each player to a party that opposes their known political views.
- **Party-independent players:** Instead of party-related player pieces, your group may decide to use generic player pieces. With this variation, you are not obligated to stick to or defend a party line.
- **Talk-time limit:** At any time, the group can choose to start using a timer to keep arguments to an agreed-on time limit decided by vote. Decide whether (a) all players will do their own time-checking, (b) one player will manage the timer, or (c) the player to the left of the turn-taker will manage the timer.
- **Civility:** If there is a concern about potential unpleasant comments, this may help. The number of incivility tokens (with frown icon) each player starts with should equal the number of other players. These can be given to a player for swearing, rudeness, making faces, getting up too often, yelling, or other annoying behavior. Three incivility tokens will cancel out a dollar token. A player can challenge the receipt of a incivility token, and in that case, a vote by the other players will decide. The non-contending players have two choices. The presenting player either (a) keeps their incivility token for re-use or (b) because of the challenge process, the one incivility token will then become more powerful and cancel out a dollar token of the player it is given to. That incivility token should be placed with the player's dollar tokens and not given to another player.
- **Voting or appeal to authority:** As a democracy, much of our policy is decided by vote, and personality plays into that, so it's realistic to let players vote for and against each other's ideas even though they are likely somewhat biased. In a setting in which there is less familiarity among the players or you want to mitigate the discomfort some might feel about personal biases, you could designate a non-playing, knowledgeable, and unbiased person to act as an authority rather than using votes for decisions.

- **Information resources:** If players equally have internet access, you could vote about use of online resources to assist in arguments and descriptions, with a time limit for searching.
- **Decrease competitiveness:** You might choose a rule that any \$ tokens that have to be paid will go to the common stash instead of to the person owning the domain landed on.
- **Purchased domain ownership:** If you did not adopt the “lowering the competitiveness” rule above, the group may decide to add a strategic element to the game. A player has to choose to buy their own party affiliation (domain) by campaign contribution before owning it (as in Monopoly). Unless the group decides by vote on an alternative rule, you can choose to purchase it when landing on it and it will cost 3 dollar tokens, which could be feasible to make up the ROI in a 1-hour game. Thereafter, anyone landing on that domain and having to pay would pay the owner, not the common stash. Make sure you get paid (instead of the bank getting paid) at that time. You may not demand payment after that player’s turn is over.
- **Money in politics:** For parties or positions that no player is representing during your game, you might buy that party’s voter base thru campaign contributions, bribes, or advertising. This could follow the rule of “purchased domain ownership” described prior to this bullet point. You are required to describe a rationale for why that party or position should support yours, such as a policy concession by your party.
- **Political climate:** A spinner, color die, or other method could be used to periodically (such as every 15 minutes) change the presidency color. Arguments could then take into consideration the political climate.
- **Same start-point:** You could choose to all start at school. Blue and green have one fewer square, but the payments for that square are double. In the domain ownership alternative rule, the blue and green have a disadvantage by being the later colors that are landed on as players move clockwise around the game board, so they would not as soon get payment for players landing on their squares. In a game with the same starting position, a more fair alternate end-time would be that after the end-time timer rings, the play will continue until the player with the domain furthest from the start has finished their next turn. The same start will result in a game that is more likely to initially center on similar topics as players progress thru the same domains.
- **Alternative tokens:** Colored paper squares or baubles could be used as tokens. Various types of tokens could be accumulated depending on the stripe color of the square landed on: red possessions tokens, yellow freedom tokens, green earth-saving tokens, blue humanitarian tokens, white peace tokens, and gray power tokens. In this variation, each player could seek their own party’s color tokens. You win by having the most of your own color when the timer rings. Any color of token could be used to pay the bank or another player. Any player, on finishing their turn, could request a trade of one token with another player who can agree to swap tokens or not. The winner could be decided as the one first accumulating a certain number of their own tokens, or stay with the timer for an end-time.
- **More alternative tokens:** Alternative tokens can be righteousness tokens, conspicuous consumption tokens, fun tokens, fame tokens, popularity tokens, or enlightenment tokens. After paying when you must, you may then make a case for why your party’s contribution related to that square should win you that type of token, and other players decide by vote if the argument is valid. These tokens (at some point) can be printed from the online game printouts. Players must agree on what constitutes a win, or you might have a different definition of win for each player. You could win by having the most of all types of tokens, by having the most of one single type of token, or by having a balanced distribution of tokens.

Player Information Resources

- You can add your ideas on the facebook page @politibanter and view others’ ideas, such as alternative play rules that others could use.
- This game board maps roughly onto the Nolan chart. See the Nolan chart page at fractioNation.us. Similarly a chart proposed by the Political Compass Organization fits. See also https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_spectrum
- Overview of political positions: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/theory-knowledge/201510/basic-map-political-positions>