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

long version

If you believe looking for a win-win solution is better than a win-lose or lose-lose, this version is more for you. As a governing council negotiating on national policy and budget allocation, you need to find areas of overlapping interest. You can make it more competitive or less competitive by selecting alternative rules.

Game Setting and Goal

The U.S. is now a multi-party system of government similar to European parliaments in which elected officials of each party have a portion of decision-making power (i.e., proportional representation). You are in a commission, as one of the top-level officials representing your party, involved in allocating funds and making policy decisions. In a discussion with the other top council members, each of you will represent your constituents' interests and values, while also seeking to make decisions that will work for the nation as a whole. Your task is to negotiate with other council members to get the most possible dollar and thumbs up notes that represent gains for your party's goals. These notes are gained as others agree to your proposals.

Political Party Affiliation or Position

Color*	Party (or support base)	Political stance	Political positions
white	anti-establishment	pacifist or apolitical	anti-government = "libertarian individualists" who oppose government use of force, also left-wing anarchists
yellow	libertarian party	populist, fiscal and moral conservative	anti-government = "libertarian individualists" who oppose government use of force, tend to vote right-wing as fiscal conservatives, social liberals
red	republican party	social, fiscal, and moral conservative	right-wing pro-government, fiscal conservatives, often social conservatives
gray	centrist pro-establishment	institution-focused authoritarian	independent or centrist pro-government
blue	democrat or labor party	social, fiscal, and moral liberal	left-wing pro-government, fiscal liberals, social liberals
green	green party	populist, liberal, conservationist	pro-government ("democratic progressives," who favor the use of government force, e.g., seeking enforcement of environmental preservation) and are social liberals so tend to vote left-wing

* In clockwise order on the domiNation game board.

Setup

- **Game pieces:** agenda item cards, policy agreement notes 👍, budget funding notes **$**, incivility notes ☹, and time's up notes ⏳), a coin for coin-toss, a notepad and pencil to keep track of agreements (optional)
- **Number of players:** two to six (three or more players is optimal, and more than six can play if players team up or divide all agenda item cards evenly)
- **Party affiliation (color):** The person who brought the game decides how to designate the party affiliations of players or lets the group vote on how to assign or choose. 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.
- **Card selection:** Players take the cards and notes with the color that matches their party. If fewer than 6 are playing, the players can select the additional cards, taking turns choosing them.
- **Party-line adherence:** You do not need to stick exactly to the so-called party line as long as you can defend why your requests and positions adhere to a core value of your party.
- **Game length:** Decide on the number of rounds for the game. A short game could be one round, where each player has only one turn and chooses one agenda item. Each player could be allowed 4 or 5 minutes to make a proposal. Another 4 or 5 minutes could be allowed for discussion. A timer could be used. With each turn taking approximately 10 minutes, a fair way to allocate time would be as follows. Decide approximately how much time you want to play, then make sure each player will have the same number of turns with the same amount of time. For example, four players presenting two agenda items would take approximately 2 hours and 40 minutes with a 10-minute turn-time limit. For a 1-hour game, take 60 divided by the number of players. Each player gets that number of minutes for all their turns. Decide how

many agenda items each will present in the game, and divide the turn-minutes by that number. The result is how long each turn should take.

- **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.

Game Play

- **Firsties:** The person whose birthday is coming up soonest (including today) goes first, then play proceeds clockwise.
- **Appeal:** Choose a card that contains an agenda item that you believe you can convince one or more other players to support. You may select one or more of the topics mentioned on that card. Make an appeal for funding and/or policy change. This can be related to the needs of your constituents, another player's constituents, or society in general. You may request funds from the national budget, deciding to increase or maintain funding for your agenda item. If you can allocate resources that are not from income tax or other national funds, more fiscally conservative members might be more likely to agree. Place the card where other players can refer to it. The other players may then question you. You can then briefly rebut or add to your original statement. You might make a concession on one of the topics of that card in order to get agreement on your proposed policy or budget.
- **Policy agreement:** The other players *each* may award you a 👍 from the common stash if they individually believe you made a convincing appeal for a policy change. They place their 👍 note near you, but during that play they can retract it if they choose, until a final decision is made.
- **Budget funding vote:** The other players then vote about maintaining or increasing funding if you have made a funding request. If the collective decision was a majority yes-vote to *maintain* funding, then you get a **$** note. If an *increase* in funding was approved by vote, you get two **$** notes.
- **Vote tie-breaker:** If there are only two players in the game, the no vote stands. Otherwise, a tied vote can be resolved by a coin toss by the turn-taking player, with tails as a no vote, and heads as a yes vote.
- **Conditional agreement:** Players can agree to give a 👍 note conditionally, but they should record these conditions in order to hold the others to the agreement.
- **Ending your turn:** Take back your agenda item card and collect your 👍 note and/or **$** notes for that turn.
- **Talk-time limit:** A ⏳ note can be given to a turn-taker or anyone else when they are going on too long, going over an agreed time limit, or repeating themselves. At the end of the game, three of these will either cancel out one 👍 note card or one **$** note. Each player should take the ⏳ note of their party's color. With colored notes, the recipient will remember it is a received note, not their own note. 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:** The ☹ note can be given to a player for swearing, rudeness, making faces, getting up too often, yelling, inattention, or other annoying behavior. At the end of the game, three ☹ notes cancel out one 👍 note or one **$** note. A player can challenge the receipt of an incivility note, and in that case, a vote by the other players will decide. The voting players can decide that (a) the presenting player keeps the incivility note for re-use or (b) the incivility note must be received by the offending player.
- **Winning:** After each player has taken their turn in the number of rounds agreed on, count up 👍 and **$** notes. deduct one for every three ☹ and every three ⏳ notes. The player with the highest count wins.

- **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, as a good example. Players who do not help should be shunned and chastised as shirking a civic duty.
- **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. You can also make up your own rules as a group, but they should be recorded. You can use other decision tools, such as consensus-building processes (if you want a very long game), chance (e.g., coin flip), or authority figure (such as a nearby person outside the game).

- **Party line adherence:** Your group may decide to play from a "tow the party line" stance instead of allowing flexibility in interpreting each party's interests. Adherence can be decided by vote or by appeal to outside resources. This may result in non-agreement, so you may want to have an outside authority to appeal to.
- **Information resources:** If players all have internet access, you could vote about use of online resources to assist in arguments and descriptions, with a time limit for searching.
- **The Ransberger pivot:** This is a powerful negotiating or consensus-building technique players could practice. First, the non-turn-taking players should listen carefully to what the turn-taking player is saying. Listen for what values and interests underlie their position, possibly asking clarifying questions. Second, make your first response a point you agree on. Third, bring up an idea you have that will help resolve the issue that you are both concerned about. At all times, stay focused on meeting your common goal. Stay respectful. If you discover that you misunderstood or were mistaken about some point of theirs, be honest and admit it; this can help them feel inclined to be more objective too.
- **Cooperative game with time limit:** Instead of having a winner, you could play a cooperative game in which the goal is to reach reasonable policy decisions on all agenda items within a time limit.
- **Cooperative game with more negotiation:** After a funding or policy decision, instead of removing that card to indicate it is no longer open for debate, place the earned 👍 and **$** note for that play under that card. It remains open for negotiation and can be de-funded by majority vote based on continued discussion.
- **Tax policy change:** A new policy mandates that the greater part of party members' taxes will be earmarked for causes that substantially serve them and align with their core values, thus encouraging greater contribution by party members. This will create an emphasis on meeting party goals for budget allocations, although policy proposals could still have wide appeal. This can increase competitiveness of the game.
- **Limited budget:** The economy is in recession and tax revenue is low. You must limit the number of **$** notes awarded. Choose the number of notes available, which could be equal to at least one less than the number of players multiplied by the number of rounds you've decided to play. **$** stash = (players x rounds) – 1 OR **$** stash = (players x rounds) – (number of players/2). Players will be pressed to use policy decisions to win, rather than "throw money at the problem."
- **Bias regulator:** 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 might be less good will among the players, such as a classroom, you could designate a non-playing, knowledgeable, and unbiased person to act as an authority (e.g., you could assign them the role of the supreme court) rather than using votes to settle a disagreement. You could also use ☹ notes to assert that an excess of bias is being shown.
- **Competing as a team:** You could play as a group against other teams, having a common goal to come up with realistic policy decisions that will be (a) superior to the policy decisions of another group or (b) reasonable and decided in a shorter amount of time, as judged by a panel who will read over the policy decisions without knowing the identity of the players involved.

Player Information Resources

- You can add your ideas online on the facebook page @politibanter and view others' ideas, such as alternative play rules or arguments you made.
- Overview of political positions: https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/theory-knowledge/201510/basic-map-political-positions
- See this game's website fractioNation.US. See also https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_spectrum and the second post of Politbanter substack.
- See the domiNation gameboard to view how these cards map onto the Nolan chart.