

Rhetoric and Revolution, Making the Constitution – A French Revolution (National Constituent Assembly Game Prototype for 3-6 Players, v. A2.0 (1/6/26)

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[This is a developing game. Please share any constructive comments and feedback with me about gameplay if you do play!](#)

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Development Log

1/23/25 First major classroom Playtest

The voting system is not feeling intuitive enough and it is easy to check out at right when it is so hard to pass right laws. What if 1.4 changed the Revolutionary Law Proposals such that the proposal will always pass in either left, moderate, or right variant based on the die roll. So when a group puts a card in play then when a second agent calls for a vote, someone version of the law will be passed???

1/9/26 Major revision in streamlining mechanics before second major classroom playtest

Revised law system, A law is now a constitutional or legal issue and when a vote is called a law on that issue **will** pass (left, moderate, right) – streamlining each group having to vote on its own version of the law.

Agent decks now compiled into a single deck with all agents. Now players may draw agent cards that are not useful to them.

CHanged all instances of left to left and right to right to better fit the relativity of those terms and how they would shift as the Revolution progressed

Introduction

As the leader of a group of loosely ideologically connected politicians and associates, guide the Revolution to a satisfactory (to you) outcome by drafting France's first written constitution

The current version only covers most of the period of the National Constituent Assembly, roughly January 1790 - June 1791 (and before the Royal Flight to Varennes)

Designer Statement

Rhetoric and Revolution is a prototype designed to engage students (and anyone else who plays this) and have them experience a highly-simplified game model of political maneuvering in the National Constituent Assembly (January 1790 - September 1791). During this period the NCA drafted and approved a written constitution, France's first, that was designed to make a revolutionary step from the *ancien regime*, the absolutist monarchy and noble and clergy dominated society of France. Specifically, the game is designed to emphasize these points.

There were delegates in the assembly with a variety of political leanings that clustered around three groups. Note, these groups did not use these terms; it is a convenient clustering for the purposes of the game. Also note that like all humans, these people were complex and a person could readily hold a mix of ideals, some that might be considered left and some that might be considered right.

- The red player(s) represents those (often associated with the Girond and Jacobins) who generally favored more democratic government and more participation even by those of lower economic class. Many also favored the elimination of social distinctions for nobility, the equalization of laws and punishments for all citizens, and substantial limits to the absolute monarchy. Some also favored more economic controls and securities to aid the urban workers (like price controls on bread, the primary food), voting rights for women, full citizenship for the free people of color (*gens de couleur libres*) the abolition of enslavement in Saint-Domingue, and so on.
- The white player(s) represent those who generally favored preserving more traditions and systems of the *ancien regime*: an absolutist monarch with absolute veto; privileges for nobility and clergy; restricted citizenship and voting rights, protection of the Catholic church as an independent institution in France, and so on.
- The blue player(s) represent those who were somewhere in between on these issues

Assembly delegates with political leanings in this area met and debated and voted for two years on the laws that would eventually become the Constitution of 1791, a constitution that would last less than a year in action. As they spoke at length on themes of tradition, equality, revolution, preservation, democracy, monarchy and so on, they attempted to persuade other delegates to vote the way they hoped on the various laws that made up the constitution.

Meanwhile in Paris, and elsewhere, there were other forms of politics influencing the opinions and votes of the National Constituent Assembly. The newspapers with editorials that harangued French people and assembly delegates to adopt political positions across the spectrum. The salons, often run by influential women, where the select were invited to read and discuss and debate the course of the Revolution, and the clubs, more public and often more raucous places of political debate. All these modes could influence assembly delegates as they voted on the constitution.

So the goals of the game are to encourage, through a highly simplified abstraction, thinking about:

- The political spectrum in the early Revolution (while acknowledging the great variety of opinions individuals have) and some of the core positions of delegates in that spectrum.
- The political maneuvering to gather enough voters to pass a law – at work in most if not all legislative voting assemblies historically and today
- **Some** of the core issues that the Constitution of 1791 took positions on. More on this in a moment.
- The ability of salons, newspapers, and clubs to influence delegates' political positions and therefore the ability of a wider group other than the delegates to have political input.

The hope then is that this game provides a bit of systems-thinking on these points that makes study of the course of the Revolution (or at least the legislative part of it) more interesting and comprehensible to students and interested players. For classroom purposes it should be used (and I use it) as an early game exercise to be broadened by class readings, lectures, and discussions.

This game is not a role-playing game by intention. It is a strategic boardgame designed to illustrate the competitive politics and ideologies of the National Assembly. Deeper understanding of the game and issues should come from preliminary classwork and debriefing classwork.

- **It does not, and is not meant to condone ANY of the political positions considered and decided by the Assembly in the game.**
- **Debating actual ideas of the time is not designed or supported in Rhetoric and Revolution.** Rather the players play broad theme cards to support a more left or right version of the law, measured in numbers (a very gamey thing to do)
- **It is not designed to have players articulate or understand the political positions in the game – that is the task of teacher and class before and after the game!** The various constitutional proposals are succinctly labeled and assigned numbers for gameplay (with 0 being arch-right and 100 as radical revolutionary – probably no one held either of these positions completely). Articulating or understanding these political positions—which students may or may not hold—is not part of the game; again **that is the role of class before and after.** The task the game provides is tactical: right players want the constitutional positions to average to a lower number than moderates and lefts in the game.

Historical games are abstractions, simplifications that attempt to capture essentials. This game is no exception. More has been left out than included, probably true of any historical game abstracting real life. The most glaring omissions

- **Gender and Race:** It is critical for educators to discuss with students of the French Revolution that citizen rights and voting rights for women and gens de couleur were absolutely issues at the time. I believe strongly that everyone should be treated equitably and have equitable abilities to shape their and their communities' paths. For the game, initially designed for my 10th grade Honors Modern World History students, I have erred on the side of leaving this debate mostly out of the design to avoid having student-players feeling placed in an uncomfortable position of trying to pass or reject such a law and feel uncomfortable. Again, though, there is no debate about the substance of law cards in the game, just strategic play to influence more or fewer delegates

through Rhetoric and the Salons, Clubs, and Newspapers of the time. However, this omission makes it imperative for me to teach about these aspects as part of the game debrief. The one constitutional issue in the game that bears on this, the decision to have universal male suffrage or active and passive citizens is kept general to allow for that debrief conversation while

- **The Parisian People:** It is easy to walk away from the game and feel the peoples of Paris are ignored. There are two current reasons for their omission. First, it seems to me the evidence suggests that assembly-moving journees of the Parisian people did not substantially happen after October 1789 and the Women's march on Versailles until July 1791 and the Champ de Mars massacre in reaction to Louis' failed attempt to flee France.

The Provinces

Components

30 Agent cards in the Agent deck

58 Rhetoric cards in the Rhetoric Deck(7 sets of 8 cards)

9 Revolutionary Law cards in the legislation deck

16 Blue Meeples or Cubes

2 Ten Sided Dice

Board:

1 Current Law Support track

1 National Assembly Positions track

1 French Constitution Track

Objective

To make the new (and First) French Constitution fit the ideology of your faction's political views: Left, Center, or Right)

Set Up

1. Randomly assign the ideologies. In a game of 4 or 6 players, seat players.
 - a. 3 players = 1 Red, 1 Blue, 1 White
 - b. 4 players = 2 Red, 1 Blue, 1 White
 - c. 5 Players = 2 Red, 1 Blue, 2 White
 - d. 6 Players = 2 Red, 2 Blue, 2 White.
 - e. 7 Players = 2 Red, 2 Blue, 2 White

Note: The game may support more than 6 players by distributing them around. The game **will also almost certainly be unbalanced** if each ideology does not have the same number of players. I'm not sure that's actually a problem. Possible game solutions: allow factions with fewer players to play an extra agent card each turn.

2. Players sit around a table in the following repeating order: Red, Blue, White, Red and so on.
3. Shuffle the theme deck. Deal 3 cards to each player, face down. Then place 3 themes face up beside the Rhetoric Deck: This is the Rhetoric Pool.
4. Shuffle the agent deck. Deal 3 cards to each player face down. Then place 3 agent cards face up next to the deck. This is the Agent pool.
5. Shuffle the Revolutionary Laws cards. Draw from the deck and lay three of them by the deck, face up. This is the Revolutionary Laws pool.
6. 16 Blue Meeples are positioned on the assembly board, in the moderate section
7. As a result of the card set up, each player should have a hand of six cards, three theme cards and three agent cards. The player keeps these hidden from other players
8. The player who is the first to say something in French goes first.

Sequence of Play

Play takes place in rounds where each player has one turn in the round. At the start of their turn, a player **must** draw 1 or more cards from either or both the agent deck and/or theme deck/pool (players may draw from the pool or the top card of the deck; if drawing from either pool, replace the card taken with a new card face up from the deck) according to the following rules

- If the player has fewer than three cards in their hand they may draw cards (from either Rhetoric or Theme deck or both as they choose) until their hand reaches size 4
- If the player has 4 or more cards but no more than 7, they may draw 1 card

If at the end of their turn the player has more than 7 cards in their hand, they must discard agent and/or theme cards of their choice until their hand is back to 7 cards. These cards are placed in the discard piles for those decks. If all the cards in either the agent deck or Rhetoric deck have been drawn (including the pools), shuffle the discard pile into a new deck and draw the top

If the player draws one of the face-up theme cards from the theme pool, replace it with the top card from the theme deck.

After drawing a card, the player may **pass** or :

1. **EITHER play a single agent card** and use its ability, adding Rhetoric cards if applicable.
2. **OR discard 1 agent card** into the Agent pool face up and up to **2 Rhetoric Cards into the Rhetoric Pool** face up

If the card played has the ASSEMBLY ability and there is no current Revolutionary Law under consideration, the player may select a Revolutionary Law from the pool and place it under consideration (see rules for considering and voting on Revolutionary Law below)

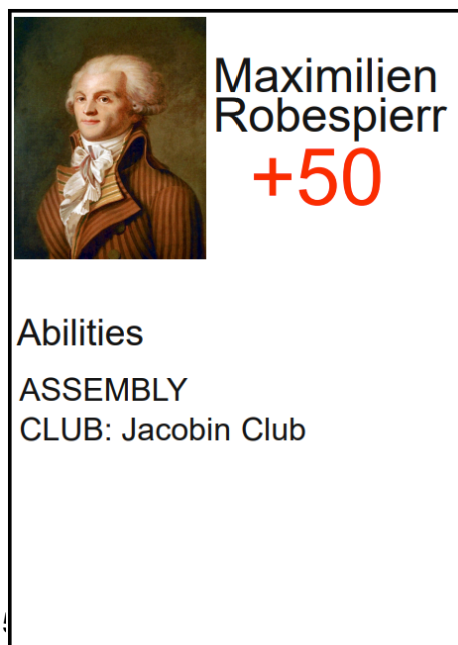
If an agent card and accompanying relevant themes are played for a Revolutionary Law under consideration, these remain in play until the vote for the Revolutionary Law is held. Move the marker on the "Current Law Support" track left or right according to the effect of the themes immediately after they are played

Otherwise, If an agent card is played when a Revolutionary Law is not under consideration, discard the card immediately after resolving its effects.

If the player has seven or more cards at the end of the turn, they must discard down to 7. These cards go into the Agent or Rhetoric discard piles.

Card Types

Agent Cards and Actions



Each agent card has the following features.

Name

Political Position: a number from +50 (Radical Revolutionary Left) to -50 (Ultra-Reactionary Right), in increments of 5 position points representing the general political stance of the agent. The numbers for political positions mean the following.

Base Political Position: The text color of the political position number. Red Left, Blue Center, Black Right

+50 to +15 left (Left); +10 to -10 Moderate (Center); -15 to -50 right (Right)

Political position determines the direction (left or right) an agent can move a proposed law or the leaning of the assembly **Core Abilities:** Each agent has 1 to 4 of the following abilities:

Assembly, Club, Salon, Newspaper

Core Agent Card Actions

Note: Players can only use an agent card's power to shift the position of Assembly tokens at any point in their turn. Shifts in the assembly disposition If a law is under consideration affect the starting positions on the Support Tracker of the **next** law to be considered. They do not affect the current law considered.

Note: on moving assembly tokens: an agent with the ability to move assembly tokens can only move them toward the agent's own political position, never past it. So for example, an agent with a -10 can move the pawn on the Current Law Support tracker down to -10 or up to -10, not both.

Club: Speak at _____ Club

- **EITHER:** Move 2 assembly tokens from **MODERATE** to **Leaning Left or Leaning Right** or the reverse in the direction of the agent's base political position.
- **OR:** Draw 2 theme cards from the theme pool
- **OR:** Play up to 2 relevant Rhetoric cards (with the same theme) to support or oppose a Revolutionary Law under consideration

SALON: Maneuver at the Salon -

- **EITHER:** move 1 assembly token from **MODERATE** to **LEFT** or **RIGHT** or the reverse in the direction of the base political position of the Agent.
- **OR:** Draw the top four themes from the theme deck, pick 2, and reshuffle the rest into Theme deck
- **OR:** Play up to 2 relevant Rhetoric cards (with the same theme) to support or oppose a Revolutionary Law under consideration

EDITORIAL: Publish a Newspaper Editorial

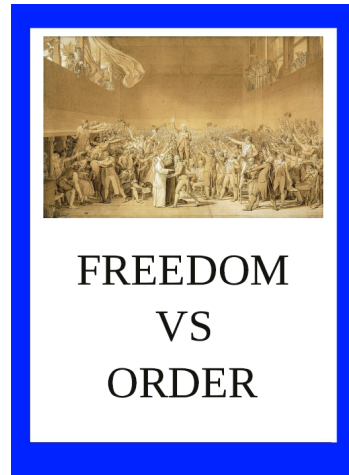
- **EITHER:** Move 1 assembly token currently **Leaning Left or Leaning Right** to **LEFT** or **RIGHT** or the reverse in the direction of the Base Political Position of the agent.
- **OR:** Play up to 2 relevant Rhetoric cards (with the same theme) to support or oppose a Revolutionary Law under consideration

ASSEMBLY: Speak at the Assembly

- **EITHER:** Propose a Revolutionary Law and speak in favor of or against it, playing up to 4 cards sharing the same relevant theme to support or oppose the Revolutionary Law under consideration. That Revolutionary Law remains under consideration until a player plays an agent card and calls for a vote)
- **OR:** Speak in favor of or against a Revolutionary Law under consideration, playing up to 3 cards sharing the same relevant theme

- **OR:** Call for a vote on a law and speak in favor of or against it, playing up to 3 cards sharing the same relevant theme to support or oppose (assembly vote is rolled for the Revolutionary Law under consideration)

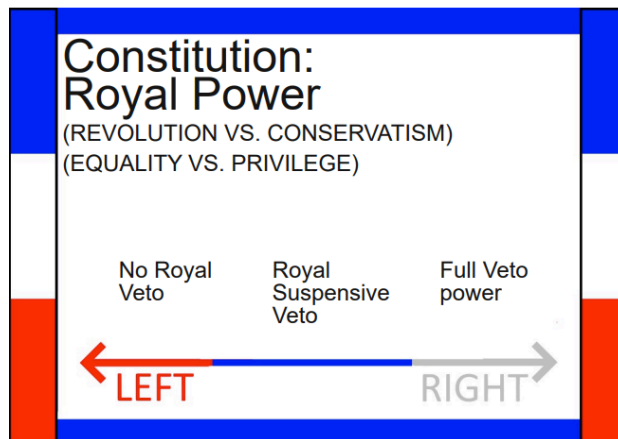
Rhetoric Theme Cards



Rhetoric Theme Cards power debates about Revolutionary Laws under consideration in the National Constituent Assembly. A player playing an agent card with a power that enables playing Rhetoric cards for a law under consideration may play any relevant with the relevant rhetorical theme listed on the Revolutionary Law under consideration. A relevant theme must **match one of the themes** listed at the top of the Revolutionary Law under consideration. The Rhetoric themes an agent plays are scored in sets of multiple copies of the same theme. Their impact on the law under consideration is immediately tracked on the Current Law Support tracker. NOTE: An agent may not move support for the law past their agent's Political Position.

Number In Set of Identical cards	Both Themes Matches Law Card	Only 1 Theme Matches Law Card
1	+5/-5	+5/-5
2	2 of a kind: +15/-15	2 of a kind: +10/-10
3	3 of a kind: +25/-25	Cannot play more than 2
4	4 of a kind: +35/-35	Cannot play more than 2

Revolutionary Law Cards



Each Revolutionary Law card has the following features.

Name:

Relevant Themes: Theme cards that may be played to support or oppose the Revolutionary Law under consideration.

Political Positions: This lists the possible political positions on the law in order from Left to Right based on the historical debates.

Proposing, Debating, & Calling for a Vote on a Revolutionary Law

Note: remember for scoring:

Each left/left law passed has a score value of 1, and Left player(s) wins if the total score is ≥ 2 . Each moderate/center law has a score value of 0, and Center player(s) wins if the final score is ≥ -1 and $\leq +1$. Each right /right law has a score value of -1, and the Right player(s) wins if the final score is ≤ -2 .

If there is no current legislation proposal **under consideration**, the player whose turn it is can play an agent card and use its ASSEMBLY ability to propose a law. They select a Revolutionary Law card from the 3 face-up Revolutionary Law cards in the pool and place it in the center of play. They read the political issue and note the possible versions of the law (historical). Then they take the Current Law Support tracker token and place it on the total of the National Assembly Disposition. To do this, add up the bonuses for the LEFT, Leaning Left and subtract from them from the Leaning Right and RIGHT minuses in the National Assembly Disposition board. The final number, positive or negative, is added or subtracted from 0 (center) to get the starting position of the law on Current Law Support tracker. Place the support marker on the tracker

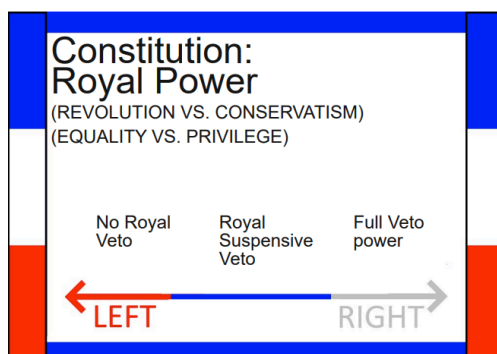
1. Now the law is “**under consideration**” i.e. subject to debate and a vote. The player who played the Agent with Assembly power and proposed the law may now attempt to sway the assembly by playing one or more of the same Rhetoric card with a single theme relevant to the proposed law. The proposed law position track for the current law is then

moved left or right based on the number of Rhetoric theme cards played and the following considerations.

- a. An agent card using their assembly power and rhetoric themes **must** move the Current Law Support tracker in the direction of their political position and cannot move the current position beyond it. So, for example, if the Current Law Support tracker is +30 (left) an agent with less than a +30 political position may not move the support any higher, only lower.
2. While a Revolutionary Law is **under consideration**, card play continues, going clockwise until a player plays an agent with the assembly ability and calls to put the Revolutionary Law proposed to a vote.
 - a. **Only one Revolutionary Law can be under consideration at a time.** To consider a different law, the law currently under consideration must be voted upon by the National Constituent Assembly. This requires some player to play an agent with the assembly ability and put the Revolutionary Law under consideration to a vote.
 - b. While the Revolutionary Law proposal is under consideration, a player may, during their turn, play an agent card with an assembly ability and one or more of the same relevant Rhetoric theme to support a more left, moderate, or right position on the law. The rules in 2a apply: An agent card using their assembly power and rhetoric themes **must** move the current position on the law in the direction of their political position.
 - c. Any shifts to the National Assembly Disposition, will factor into starting positions Current Law Support tracker positions of the next Law Considered. The current law considered is not affected by shifts in the assembly after it begins to be considered

Voting upon a Legal Proposal

Once a vote is called, the player who played the agent with the assembly power to call for a vote rolls two ten-sided dice, one representing 10s and the other 1s, to get a number from 01 to 100 (00). This is the **assembly vote roll**. Add to or subtract from the **assembly vote roll** the total bonus or penalty indicated on the Current Law Support tracker. The result is political leaning of the passed law, where 0 = reactionary right 50 = moderate and 100 = radical revolutionary. Take the legal proposal (now law) and place it in the correct column of the Constitution tracker according to the modified assembly vote roll



100	85	65	35	15	0
LIBERAL		MODERATE		CONSERVATIVE	

Ending the Game

When all ten Revolutionary Law cards have been voted on (in one of their forms) Each ratified law card adds to the final score depending on the column it is in on the Constitution Tracker: 1 (Red), 0 (Blue), -1 (White). If the total of all the ratified laws is:

≥ -1 and $\leq +1$: The Blue player(s) wins

≥ 2 : The Red player(s) wins

≤ -2 : The White player wins

Player Quick Reference Sheet (2 sides)

During a Turn

1. Draw cards
 - a. If the player has fewer than three cards in their hand they may draw cards (from either Rhetoric or Theme deck or both as they choose) until their hand reaches size 4
 - b. If the player already had 4 or more cards, they may draw 1 card (from either Rhetoric or Theme deck or both as they choose)
2. Play or Pass
 - a. **play a single agent card** and use its ability, adding Rhetoric cards if applicable.
 - i. If the card played has the ASSEMBLY ability and there is no current Revolutionary Law under consideration, the player may select a Revolutionary Law from the pool and place it under consideration (see rules for considering and voting on Revolutionary Law below)
 - b. **OR discard as many agent cards as desired** into the Agent pool face up and/or as many Rhetoric cards as desired into the Rhetoric Pool Face up
 - c. **OR pass**
3. Discard if needed. If the player has seven or more cards at the end of the turn, they must discard down to 7 cards. These cards go in the Agent and Rhetoric discard piles, not the pools.

Number In Set of Identical cards	Both Themes on the Rhetoric Card Matches Law Card	Only 1 Theme on the Rhetoric Card Matches Law Card
1	+5/-5	+5/-5
2	2 of a kind: +15/-15	2 of a kind: +10/-10
3	3 of a kind: +25/-25	Cannot play more than 2
4	4 of a kind: +35/-35	Cannot play more than 2

Core Agent Card Actions

Note: Players can only use an agent card's power to shift the position of Assembly tokens when **no law is under consideration**. If a law is under consideration, they may not use those powers but may use others that do not shift the position of Assembly tokens. **Note:** on moving assembly tokens: an agent with the ability to move assembly tokens can only move them toward the agent's own political position, never past it. So for example, an agent with a -10 can move the pawn on the Current Law Support tracker down to -10 or up to -10, not both.

Club: Speak at _____ Club

- **EITHER:** Move 2 assembly tokens from **MODERATE** to **Leaning Left or Leaning Right** or the reverse in the direction of the agent's base political position.
- **OR:** Draw 2 theme cards from the theme pool
- **OR:** Play up to 2 relevant Rhetoric cards (with the same theme) to support or oppose a Revolutionary Law under consideration

SALON: Maneuver at the Salon -

- **EITHER:** move 1 assembly token from **MODERATE** to **LEFT** or **RIGHT** or the reverse in the direction of the base political position of the Agent.
- **OR:** Draw the top four themes from the theme deck, pick 2, and reshuffle the rest into Theme deck
- **OR:** Play up to 2 relevant Rhetoric cards (with the same theme) to support or oppose a Revolutionary Law under consideration

EDITORIAL: Publish a Newspaper Editorial

- **EITHER:** Move 1 assembly token currently **Leaning Left or Leaning Right** to **LEFT** or **RIGHT** or the reverse in the direction of the Base Political Position of the agent.
- **OR:** Play up to 2 relevant Rhetoric cards (with the same theme) to support or oppose a Revolutionary Law under consideration

ASSEMBLY: Speak at the Assembly

- **EITHER:** Propose a Revolutionary Law and speak in favor of or against it, playing up to 4 cards sharing the same relevant theme to support or oppose the Revolutionary Law under consideration. That Revolutionary Law remains under consideration until a player plays an agent card and calls for a vote)
- **OR:** Speak in favor of or against a Revolutionary Law under consideration, playing up to 3 cards sharing the same relevant theme