

***Turmoil in Thudor* Debate Mechanic Version 2**

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Introduction

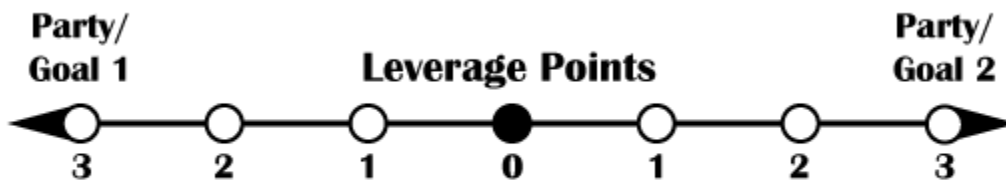
This “Debate Mechanic” is the core gameplay component of the *Turmoil in Thudor* project. The goal of the mechanic is to replace the major combat encounters that normally make the core of traditional *Dungeons & Dragons* one-shots with the conversations the project is trying to encourage. The challenge is that this is still a game, which comes with expectations of entertainment. We want to make these conversations fun without gamifying them to the point of hollowing them of meaningfulness.

This document describes the version of the Debate Mechanic edited after the first playtest on February 14 and before the larger playtest on March 23. As such, it is highly susceptible to change and is by no means the final version.

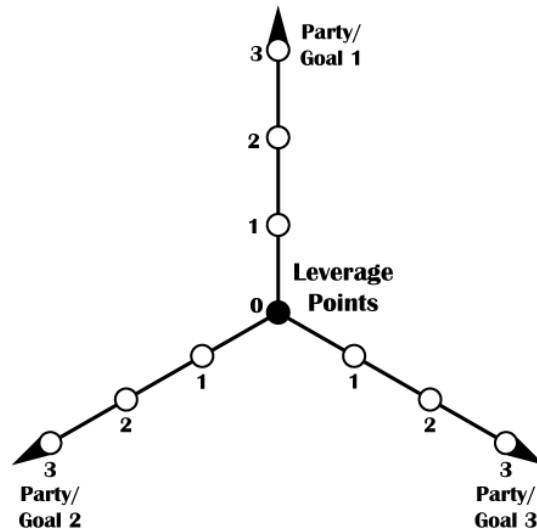
The Debate Mechanic is meant to be used in in-game social encounters where multiple groups, or “parties,” are trying to gain the edge in a debate to achieve their desired outcome. These parties can consist of player characters (PCs), non-player characters (NPCs), or a combination of the two, as long as members of that party share the same goal. There is technically no limit to the amount of parties that can participate in such a debate, although the Mechanic is optimal with only a small number of parties, typically two to four.

Leverage Points

The edge each party is trying to pursue is represented by “leverage points” on a sliding scale model. Each end of the scale represents each party and the goal they’re trying to achieve, with the very end also representing the maximum amount of leverage they can attain in the debate. The example scale below is for a debate between two parties.



If there are more than two parties involved, simply add another arm for each party like below.



The Process

A debate using this mechanic consists of five rounds of discussion, each ending with all parties rolling a “leverage roll” that awards a leverage point on a success. Each round follows this step-by-step process:

1. Declare the parties at play in the debate and their goals. To allow people to change their minds or form new goals, every round begins with these declarations (see “Changing Minds” below).
2. Allow conversation between the parties where they can discuss the issue at hand and offer solutions. Players can apply their individual faction leverage abilities to gain a +2 bonus to their upcoming leverage roll. The DM should do their best to keep track of the conversation to know when to move on with the rest of the round. Typically, the round can move on after about five minutes of conversation or when the conversation reaches a lull point.
3. In the middle of the conversation, each party can make a single “group action.” This consists of a simple roll such as using Insight to see if the opposition has been lying or using Persuasion to attract a wavering minor NPC to their side, or a more complex action such as casting a spell. All members of a party must agree to such an action, though, and spells that openly target the opposition are bound to have consequences. The results of the group action can give bonuses or penalties to the leverage roll according to the DM.

4. Allow a second, briefer conversation so any knowledge gained during the group action.
5. Tally up all the bonuses and penalties acquired by each party.
6. Each party makes a leverage roll to see if they earn a leverage point. A roll is made by one character in each party (a PC if there are any in a party), who applies the bonuses and penalties their party acquired and aims to beat a DC set by the DM. A success earns their party a leverage point. A critical success (natural 20) earns them two leverage points.
7. Repeat each step for the next round.

As shown in the diagrams above, the maximum amount of leverage points a party can acquire is three. The debate ends if the five rounds end or if a party achieves three leverage points. Whichever party has the most leverage points has the advantage in the debate.

However, the Debate Mechanic is designed to make total one-sided “victories” rare as they are in reality. If a party earns a leverage point in the debate, the opposite party does not automatically lose their leverage points. Each party keeps all the leverage they earn to the very end of the debate. This can lead to ties the parties must work out, or if a party didn’t “win” the debate but still has leverage points, they can apply those leverage points to gain concessions from the “winning” party.

Changing Minds

During the debate, it’s possible that characters may change their minds and want to switch to a different party, or make an entirely new party to pursue a new, different goal. The first step of each round takes this into consideration. At the beginning of each round, when parties redeclare their goals, a character can take the opportunity to join a different party or declare a new one.

If this happens, have the changing character make a straight Charisma check. On a success, they can take one leverage point from their old party into their new party to represent how the diplomatic weight of their shifting allegiance affects the debate as a whole.

Additionally, if a goal is no longer supported by any characters but still retains some leverage points by the end of the debate, the leverage points of that goal do not have to be accounted for when determining the debate’s outcome.

With all that said, try not to create too many new parties in the middle of the debate. As stated before, the Mechanic works best for smaller numbers of parties. There’s no use in making the system and the DM over-encumbered with too many parties.

The Role of the DM

This Debate Mechanic attempts to reflect the nuance and intricacies that come with real-life political conversations, especially in debates and negotiations. Rarely do they end with one side taking all, often resulting in compromises between participants. As the designers of this system, we recognize how non-structured some of the elements may seem and how this places more responsibility on the DM's shoulders than most traditional D&D adventures. The DM is meant to mediate the conversation, decide when to move on, and assist in determining the outcomes of debates, as well as concessions.

While this may seem like a lot, DMs will not be alone. The future *Turmoil in Thudor* website will feature plenty of resources such as articles describing how to run *Turmoil in Thudor* games and an in-depth document about the Debate Mechanic, like this one. Additionally, of course, the DM can always turn to their players for assistance as long as the overall dynamics between the player and DM are respected.