

## Gameplay Revision

In our revision process, we identified three areas for improvement. Specifically, they were as follows:

- **Player investment and uncertainty** – Because issue cards were the same in every game, an experienced player could tell quite easily if the game had become unwinnable for them. If this occurred in the middle of the game, players ceased to care about the remainder of the game.
- **Player agency** – To better engage players throughout the course of the game, we wanted to give each player more opportunities to affect the outcome of the game. Specifically, we looked to give players ways to influence the game *actively* rather than *passively*.
- **Ease of play** – Our prior playtesters commonly noted that the game seemed quite complicated at first, and were dissatisfied with the time it took them to understand all of the pieces and rules. We looked to streamline and simplify our game where possible, without losing valuable gameplay elements.

In our design process, we decided to start by tackling the easiest issue to solve. We found that the third issue, ease of play, was somewhat simple to improve upon. We incorporated the following changes:

- We abandoned the unnecessary 3:1 ratio of influence to money, instead making them equal in value.
- For both money and influence, we color coded game pieces to correspond to different increments of value (e.g. silver is 1, red is 5, green is 25).
- We also removed some extraneous game pieces, such as player-specific yes/no voting cups.

These changes allowed players to more quickly count votes, speeding up the game and taking up less cognitive overhead during gameplay.

Ameliorating the first and second issues proved to be a larger challenge, as they were not easily isolated from one another and required larger gameplay changes. After an ideation session, we came up with a dark horse idea: we removed issue cards from the game entirely, instead allowing players to decide what would be voted upon in each round. We conducted an in-class playtest with this change in effect. We hoped to see higher player engagement and investment, as any player could change the outcome of the game by proposing the right issue at the right time. We did observe that players were generally more active in discussions as they felt they had large amounts of agency at all times, and could never be certain of the game's outcome. However, these desired changes came coupled with some negative gameplay patterns. Specifically, players spent an unreasonable amount of time bickering over what the issue proposals should be, rather than discussing the issues themselves. Additionally, players who managed to complete their objectives early no longer had meaningful incentives to participate in discussions regarding issue proposals.

We met for another ideation session to determine whether or not it would be possible to keep the improvements from our dark horse test while shedding the undesirable elements mentioned above. We settled on three primary changes:

- All players now receive two objective cards rather than just one. This opens more strategies for players to follow, and forces them to care about a greater diversity of issues, as almost every issue will now affect them in some capacity.
- We implemented a new scoring system. Rather than having binary pass/fail metrics, we reward players who surpass their objectives by a large margin, and punish players who fail their objectives by a large margin. Players who prevent or fail to prevent their enemies from achieving their objectives by a large margin are similarly rewarded or punished respectively. Again, this opens more strategies for players to employ, and obfuscates the winner of the game until the game has ended and everyone has summed their victory points.
- We added two referendum cards. These cards function as “free proposal” issues, exactly like those in our dark horse idea. They appear randomly, and the proposing player is random as well. Their existence ensures that no two games will play exactly the same, and helps players to feel that they have a chance to turn a losing game around for themselves if they’re able to propose and pass a pivotal issue.

We were able to test gameplay slices with our new system, and found it to be quite effective in remedying both our initial gameplay issues, as well as those raised by our dark horse idea.