

Both Sides of the Issue

The Housing Crisis Revisited

stosselintheclassroom.org

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Objectives

Students will be able to:

- outline the key arguments each video presents about solving the housing crisis in the United States.
- relate the housing policies discussed in each video to real-world outcomes in cities such as Austin and San Francisco.
- weigh the trade-offs between rent control and market-driven housing supply as competing approaches to affordability.
- design a housing policy proposal for a specific city that incorporates evidence and reasoning from both videos.

Concepts & Key Terms

The following terms appear across both videos in this pairing. Understanding them will help students follow the arguments and engage in discussion.

Affordable Housing: Housing for which occupants pay no more than 30 percent of their gross income on rent or mortgage costs. The shortage of affordable housing is a central theme in both videos.

Building Permit: Official government approval required before construction or renovation can begin on a property. The *Reason* video notes that obtaining a single permit in San Francisco takes 627 days, compared with far shorter wait times in Austin.

Gentrification: The process by which rising property values and an influx of wealthier residents displace lower-income families from a neighborhood. The *Jacobin* video argues that rent control helps curb gentrification.

Housing Development Authority (HDA): A proposed federal agency, introduced in the Homes Act of 2024, that would build, buy, renovate, and operate social housing nationwide. The *Jacobin* video highlights this as a key policy solution.

Missing Middle Housing: A range of housing types — such as duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, and small apartment buildings — that fall between single-family homes and large apartment complexes. Nicole Nosek uses this term in the *Reason* video to describe the housing Austin is working to unlock.

NIMBYism: An acronym for “Not In My Backyard,” describing opposition by residents to new development in their neighborhoods. Both videos identify this attitude as a barrier to building more housing.

Public Housing: Residential buildings owned and operated by the government, typically offered at below-market rents to low-income households. The *Jacobin* video points to Vienna, Austria, as a successful model of public housing.

Rent Control (Rent Stabilization): Government regulations that limit how much landlords can increase rent on existing tenants. The *Jacobin* video advocates for rent control as an immediate solution, while the *Reason* video argues it reduces landlord incentives and restricts housing supply.

Social Housing: Housing with state or cooperative ownership that carries permanent price protections and community control. The *Jacobin* video promotes social housing as a long-term alternative to market-rate development.

Supply and Demand: A foundational economic principle holding that when the supply of a good increases relative to demand, prices tend to fall. The *Reason* video uses this concept to explain why Austin's rents have declined as construction has surged.

YIMBYism: An acronym for "Yes In My Backyard," describing a movement that supports building more housing, including in residential neighborhoods. The *Reason* video highlights Austin's bipartisan embrace of YIMBY policies as a key factor in lowering rents.

Zoning: Government regulations that dictate what types of buildings can be constructed in specific areas. Both videos identify restrictive zoning as a major contributor to the housing crisis, though they differ on what additional reforms are needed.

Discussion Questions

The questions below will help students achieve a better understanding of the arguments made on either side of a contentious topic. Because these questions often touch upon statements made briefly in the videos, we recommend reading the questions before watching each video.

Students are encouraged to take notes during the videos, and it may be helpful for students to break into groups, each taking responsibility for only a few questions, before coming together for discussion.

1. What are the opposing ideas in these two videos?
2. In the *Reason* video, when asked why Austin's housing prices were declining, Jake Wegmann said one reason is that "in Texas, counties are prohibited from zoning outside of city limits." How does this impact housing prices?
3. In the *Jacobin* video, Natalie Woolams-Torres said that "most young Americans just accept [the housing crisis] as a cruel reality." Is this true? Have you accepted high housing prices as a cruel reality in America? Have your peers? Why/Why not?
4. In the *Reason* video, Nicole Nosek used the term "missing middle housing." What is "missing middle housing"?

5. Natalie Woolams-Torres said rent control is “one of the most immediate and proportionate responses to exponentially rising housing costs.” What is rent control?
6. Nicole Nosek said it takes 627 days to get a single building permit in San Francisco. Is this reasonable? Why/Why not? How does it impact housing prices?
7. Natalie Woolams-Torres said: “Rent control not only cuts housing costs for existing renters but also lowers market rates across the board.” How does it do that?
8. In the *Reason* video, Alim Virani said the landlord of his rent stabilized apartment in San Francisco “didn’t really have an incentive” to renovate or offer amenities. Why was this?
9. Natalie Woolams-Torres said rent control can curb gentrification. What is gentrification? How does rent control curb it?
10. Rent control is illegal in Texas, but Alim Virani said rents stabilize “naturally through the influx of new units.” What did he mean by this?
11. Natalie Woolams-Torres said that public housing “gets a bad rap in the United States.” What is your impression of public housing? Does it get a bad rap? Why/Why not?
12. In the *Reason* video, Nick Gillespie said Austin and San Francisco represent the distinct paths of “markets versus government.” What did he mean by this?
13. Both videos pointed to zoning laws as a contributing factor in rising housing prices. What are zoning laws? How do they impact housing prices?
14. The *Reason* video explained that some progressives in Austin have embraced a more market-oriented approach to housing, and both videos agreed that zoning regulations stifle development. Is this a topic that can bring together people of different political leanings? Why/Why not?
15. Aside from zoning, did these two videos share any common ground? Were there any other points on which they agreed? If so, what were they?
16. Should one of the arguments we heard carry more weight than the other? If so, which one? Why?
17. Did you have an opinion on this topic before watching these videos? If so, what was it? Has your opinion changed? If so, how? What did you learn from these videos that affects your views on this topic?
18. What else would you like to learn about this topic?
19. For more on this topic, see these installments of Both Sides of the Issue:
 - *Both Sides*: "[How to Solve the Housing Crisis](#)"
 - *Both Sides*: "[Rent Control](#)"

Activities

Activity 1: Common Ground Finder

Despite their sharply different conclusions, both videos share surprising areas of agreement. In this activity, students identify the overlapping ground between the two perspectives and explore why people who agree on certain facts can still reach opposite policy conclusions.

Teacher Instructions: Pair students or form small groups. Each pair rewatches or reviews notes from both *How Zohran Mamdani Can Fix the Housing Crisis* and *How Texas Beat California on Housing* and completes the three-column exercise below. After 15 minutes, bring the class together and compile a master list on the board. Use the compiled list to drive a discussion: If both sides agree on these points, why do they still disagree on solutions?

Student Directions:

Create three columns on a sheet of paper or in your notebook:

- Column 1 — "Common Ground": List every point on which both videos agree. For example, both videos acknowledge that restrictive zoning contributes to the housing crisis. Find at least four areas of agreement.
- Column 2 — "Where They Split": For each area of common ground, explain how the two videos diverge in their proposed solutions. For example, both agree zoning is a problem, but the *Jacobin* video calls for rezoning combined with public housing, while the *Reason* video favors letting the market respond.
- Column 3 — "Why the Split?": For each divergence, write one sentence explaining what underlying value or assumption drives the disagreement. Consider differences in how each side views the role of government, the reliability of markets, or the rights of property owners versus renters.

Activity 2: Cost-Benefit Analysis

Students systematically evaluate the costs and benefits of two specific policies discussed in the videos: rent control and reducing zoning restrictions. This activity reinforces the economic concept that every policy involves trade-offs and that what helps one group may impose costs on another.

Teacher Instructions: Distribute the worksheet on the following page. Students should work individually to complete the chart, drawing on evidence from both videos. After completing the worksheet, pair students and have them compare

answers. Close with a class discussion: Did the costs outweigh the benefits for either policy? Could both policies work together, or do they conflict?

Student Directions: Use the worksheet on the following page. For each policy, list at least three benefits and three costs, using specific evidence from the videos. In the bottom row, write your overall assessment: Does this policy do more good than harm? Explain your reasoning.

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____ Period _____

Teacher _____

Cost-Benefit Analysis: Housing Policies

Policy 1: Rent Control

Benefits	Costs
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
Overall Assessment:	

Policy 2: Reducing Zoning Restrictions

Benefits	Costs
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
Overall Assessment:	

Could these two policies work together, or do they conflict? Explain:

Activity 3: Timeline of the Debate

The housing crisis did not appear overnight. In this activity, students trace the historical events, policies, and trends that both videos reference to understand how the debate has evolved over time.

Teacher Instructions: Provide students with a long strip of paper (or have them use two taped-together sheets) to create a physical timeline. Students should draw a horizontal line and mark key events, dates, and policy decisions mentioned in both videos. Color-code the entries: one color for events cited in the *Jacobin* video and another for events cited in the *Reason* video. Events cited in both videos should use both colors. Allow 20 minutes, then have groups present their timelines. Discuss: Which video reaches further back in history? Does historical context strengthen one argument more than the other?

Student Directions: Create a timeline that includes at least eight entries drawn from both videos. For each entry, note:

- The date or time period (exact year if mentioned, or approximate era).
- What happened (a policy was enacted, a trend began, a city made a decision).
- Which video referenced it, and how it was used to support that video's argument.

Here are some starting points from the videos to help you get going:

- 1916 — New York City's original zoning code was created (85 pages). Referenced in the *Jacobin* video as the beginning of zoning complexity.
- 1920s–1930s — Vienna's "Red Vienna" period built 65,000 public housing units. Cited in the *Jacobin* video as a model for taxpayer-funded housing.
- 1961 — New York City's zoning code was revamped to 539 pages. Referenced in the *Jacobin* video to illustrate growing regulatory complexity.
- 1980 — Median rent was \$243 per month (\$983 in today's money) and families could afford homes on a single income. Cited in the *Jacobin* video as a benchmark for how much affordability has declined.
- 2020s — San Francisco's population dropped for four consecutive years. Referenced in the *Reason* video as evidence that overregulation drives people away.
- 2023 — San Francisco added just 1,800 housing units; Austin added 13 times as many. Cited in the *Reason* video to contrast the two cities' approaches.

Add at least two more entries from your own notes on the videos. Then answer: How does seeing these events on a timeline change your understanding of the housing crisis?

Activity 4: Devil’s Advocate Round

In this activity, every student must challenge whichever side he or she initially agrees with. The goal is to test the strength of one’s own position by finding its weaknesses.

Teacher Instructions: Begin with a quick poll: after watching both videos, which approach does each student find more convincing — the market-based approach from *How Texas Beat California on Housing* or the government-intervention approach from *How Zohran Mamdani Can Fix the Housing Crisis?* Record the split on the board. Then give students 10 minutes to write three specific challenges to their own preferred side, using evidence from the opposing video. After writing, students pair up with someone who chose the same side and share their challenges. Each pair selects their strongest challenge and presents it to the class. Close by asking: Did this exercise change anyone’s mind, or did it strengthen your original position? Why?

Student Directions: Write down which side you agree with more after watching both videos. Then play devil’s advocate against your own position. Write three specific challenges using evidence from the video you found less convincing. For each challenge:

- State the specific claim or piece of evidence from the opposing video that weakens your preferred side’s argument.
- Explain why this point is difficult for your side to answer.
- Suggest how someone on your side might respond — or acknowledge if he or she cannot.

Example: “I favor the market-based approach, but the *Jacobin* video’s point that median rent was \$243 in 1980 on a single income challenges my position because it suggests markets alone did not prevent the crisis from developing over the past 40 years. Someone on my side might respond that government regulations grew significantly during that same period, contributing to the price increases.”

Activity 5: Exit Ticket Reflection

A structured short-write that asks students to synthesize both perspectives into a personal takeaway. This reflection serves as a formative assessment of student understanding and engagement with both sides.

Teacher Instructions: Distribute the exit ticket below (or project it) during the last 5–10 minutes of class. Collect the tickets as students leave. Review responses to gauge which arguments resonated most, which were misunderstood, and whether students engaged substantively with both perspectives. Consider sharing anonymized excerpts at the start of the next class to continue the discussion.

Student Directions: Answer all four prompts on the exit ticket below. Write in complete sentences. There are no right or wrong answers, but your responses must reference specific content from the videos.

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____ Period _____

Teacher _____

Exit Ticket: The Housing Crisis Revisited

1. The strongest argument from the *Jacobin* video was:

2. The strongest argument from the *Reason* video was:

3. One thing both videos agreed on that surprised me:

4. After watching both videos, the one question I still have about housing policy is:
