Both Sides of the Issue

Rent Control Revisited

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Contents

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- state the central claim each video makes about limiting what a landlord may charge.
- summarize the evidence each side presents in support of its position.
- contrast the roles each video assigns to private builders and to government in producing housing.
- argue a position on rent regulation that draws evidence from both videos and answers the strongest objection to it.

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.

Black Market: buying and selling that takes place outside the law, such as a renter quietly paying a landlord extra cash to move to the front of the line for a scarce apartment.

Collective Housing: an arrangement in which a group of residents jointly owns and manages the building where its members live, sometimes purchasing it over time from a government that built it.

Deferred Maintenance: repairs and upkeep an owner puts off, often because the money coming in no longer covers the cost of the work.

Incentive: something that motivates a person or a business to act, such as the prospect of profit that leads a developer to break ground on a new building.

Misallocation: a situation in which resources end up where they are least useful, such as one person occupying a three-bedroom unit while a growing family cannot find space.

Price Ceiling: a legal maximum on what a seller may charge for a good or a service.

Public Housing: residences that a government builds, owns, and operates, usually charging tenants less than a private owner would.

Rent Control: a policy that caps the amount a landlord may charge a tenant, traditionally as a strict, inflexible limit, and sometimes called a freeze.

Rent Stabilization: a more flexible form of regulation that limits how fast the amount a tenant pays may rise during a tenancy, often tying the increase to inflation.

Seen and Unseen: a method of judging a policy that weighs the visible results, such as a tenant with a predictable monthly payment, alongside the results that never appear, such as the building no one constructed.

Shortage: a condition in which buyers want more of a good at the going price than sellers are willing and able to supply.

Vacancy Rate: the share of rental units sitting empty and available at a given moment, used as a measure of how tight a housing market has become.

Zoning Laws: local rules that govern what may be built where, such as limits on building height or on the number of units allowed on a single lot.

Discussion Questions

Before watching, have students read through the questions below. After viewing both videos, use the questions to guide discussion — in small groups, as a whole class, or in writing. Encourage students to weigh the evidence on both sides before forming a view.

1. What is the central claim each video makes about limiting the amount a landlord may charge? State it in one sentence for each video.
2. The Foundation for Economic Education video argues that a price ceiling produces three side effects. Name all three, and give the example the narrator uses for each.
3. Richard Wolff agrees that capping rents could slow the building of new apartments. What two solutions does he offer for that problem, and where does he say each has been tried?
4. The Foundation for Economic Education video opens by saying the desire for rent control "comes from a good place." Why might a video that opposes a policy begin by describing the good intentions behind it?
5. Wolff argues that a landlord's freedom to charge whatever the market will bear is not a "one-way necessity." What does he mean by that phrase, and what does he propose in its place?
6. The Foundation for Economic Education video reports that after San Francisco expanded rent control in the 1990s, about 30 percent of the newly covered units left the rental market and citywide supply fell 15 percent. What did owners do with those units, and what would have made those choices attractive?
7. Wolff says an economic system is a failure if it overcharges for food, clothing, or shelter. What standard is he using to judge an economy? How does that standard differ from the one the other video uses?
8. Both videos describe renters paying very high prices for housing. According to each video, what is causing that?

9. Wolff predicts that if rents are capped while housing stays scarce, “illegal arrangements” will appear as desperate renters offer to pay more under the table. What does that prediction suggest about how much a legal price limit can actually control?

10. When sellers supply less of something than buyers want, what might be holding supply back? Consider both the choices sellers make and the rules they operate under.

11. The Foundation for Economic Education video describes tenants who remain in units that no longer fit their needs — empty nesters in three-bedroom apartments, young couples in studios. What incentive keeps them in place, and who bears the cost of that decision?

12. Wolff proposes that government build and operate housing because it “doesn’t have to make a profit.” What costs would a taxpayer-funded housing program still have to cover, and who would pay them?

13. The Foundation for Economic Education video points to New York in the 1970s, when vacancy rates fell below 2 percent and entire blocks in the Bronx were boarded up or burned. What factors besides rent regulation might also explain what happened to those neighborhoods, and how would you go about finding out?

14. Wolff suggests the argument against price controls keeps getting repeated because “the wind is blowing in a certain ideological direction.” The other video says economists across the spectrum agree and cites a survey in which 93 percent concurred. How should a careful listener weigh a claim about what experts believe?

15. Each video reaches for a memorable phrase — Stockholm as a “housing museum,” and shelter as one of the “famous three” alongside food and clothing. What does each phrase do to a listener before any evidence arrives?

16. The two videos rest on different kinds of evidence. One leans on city case studies and surveys of economists; the other leans on historical examples of government building housing after the world wars. Which kind of evidence do you find more useful for this question, and what would the other side say in reply?

17. Suppose a city caps rents and also builds taxpayer-funded housing, as Wolff recommends. Which of the problems the Foundation for Economic Education video identifies would that combination solve, and which would remain?

18. Take a position: Should a city limit the amount landlords may charge? Defend your answer with evidence from the videos, then state the strongest argument against your own view and explain why you still hold it.

19. Both videos agree that expensive cities do not have enough housing, and they disagree about who should build it and on what terms. If the goal is more housing that people can afford, what should a city try first, and how would you know within five years whether it had worked?

Teachers who want to carry this discussion further may find these related pairings useful:

- *Both Sides:* "Rent Control" — the original pairing on this question, and a natural companion to this one.
- *Both Sides:* "The Housing Crisis Revisited" — widens the lens from rent regulation to the overall shortage of housing.
- *Both Sides:* "Wall Street vs. Housing" — examines who is buying homes and what that does to prices for everyone else.

Activities

Activity 1: Timeline of the Debate

Both videos argue from history, but neither lays its history out in order, and the two cover different stretches of it. Building one shared timeline allows students to see where each side's evidence clusters and where it goes quiet.

Student Directions

- Working in pairs, place each event from the bank below onto the timeline on the following page, in order.
- For each event, mark W if it came from the Richard Wolff video or F if it came from the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE) video.
- In the last column, write what the video offers that event as evidence for. The same event can support different conclusions.
- Finish by answering the question at the bottom of the sheet.

Event Bank

- The United States builds public housing after World Wars I and II, when private construction falls short.
- New York City adopts a rent freeze as a temporary wartime measure in the 1940s.
- By the 1970s, New York City vacancy rates fall below 2 percent, landlords abandon buildings, and blocks in the Bronx are boarded up or burned.
- San Francisco voters expand rent control to small apartment buildings in the 1990s.

- A Stanford study finds that about 30 percent of the newly covered San Francisco units leave the rental market, citywide supply falls 15 percent, and average rents rise 7 percent.
- Renters in Stockholm wait an average of nine years for a regulated unit, and twenty years in the city center.
- Americans today pay more than 20 to 30 percent of income for housing.
- Politicians renew calls for rent freezes in New York City.

Name ____________________________ Date _______________________

Class ________________ Period _______ Teacher ____________________

Timeline of the Debate: Rent Control Revisited

Date	Event	Video	Offered as evidence for

Look at the finished timeline. Which stretches of it does each video leave out, and how would filling those gaps change the picture?

Activity 1: Answer Key - Timeline of the Debate

Correct order: D, F, B, H, E, A, C, G.

#	Date	Event	Video	Offered as evidence for
D	1918–1950s	U.S. builds public housing after the world wars	W	that government can supply housing when private building falls short
F	1940s	NYC adopts a rent freeze as a wartime measure	F	that a measure sold as temporary becomes permanent
B	1970s	NYC vacancy below 2 percent; Bronx blocks abandoned or burned	F	that long-running caps destroy existing housing
H	1990s	San Francisco voters expand rent control to small buildings	F	sets up the study that follows
E	after the 1990s expansion	Stanford study: 30 percent of units leave the market, supply −15 percent, rents +7 percent	F	that caps shrink supply and raise rents overall
A	present day	Stockholm waits of nine years, twenty in the city center	F	that caps produce queues rather than housing
C	present day	Americans pay more than 20 to 30 percent of income for housing	W	that the private housing market is failing
G	present day	Politicians renew calls for rent freezes	F	that a failed policy is being revived

Teacher Notes

- Accept D and F in either order. D spans both postwar periods, so it begins before the 1940s freeze but continues past it.
- A, C, and G are all present day, so accept those three in any order. What matters is that students group them at the end.

- Six of the eight events come from the FEE video. Ask students what it means that one side supplies most of the historical record.

Activity 2: Strongest Argument Challenge

In this activity students build the best possible case for a position they reject, and the other side grades how well they did. Tell students plainly that the goal is not to win. A student who cannot state an opponent's argument in a form that opponent would accept does not yet understand the disagreement.

Student Directions

1. Choose one claim from the bank below that you do NOT agree with.
2. Write the strongest one-paragraph case for that claim. Use at least two specific pieces of evidence from the videos — a city, a study, a number, or a named economist.
3. Trade paragraphs with a classmate who actually holds the view you just argued.
4. Score the paragraph you received from 1 to 5 using the scale below, and write one sentence naming the strongest point the writer missed.
5. Revise your own paragraph using the note you got back.

Claim Bank

- Capping rents is the fastest way to keep current tenants in the homes they already occupy.
- Capping rents reduces the number of apartments that get built.
- When private builders will not supply housing at prices people can afford, government should build and operate it.
- Rent regulation helps some tenants at the expense of newcomers, young people, and anyone arriving later.
- Reforming zoning laws would do more for renters than capping rents.

Scoring Scale

- 5 — a supporter of this claim would sign his or her name to this paragraph without changing a word.
- 3 — the argument is recognizable, but the best evidence for it is missing.
- 1 — a caricature. No supporter of the claim would recognize it.

Debrief

Ask how many students scored a 4 or a 5 on their first attempt. Then ask the harder question: did writing the other side's best case change how strongly you hold your own?

Activity 3: Venn Diagram Plus

Students often assume that two opposing videos share no common ground at all. This activity makes the overlap visible, and the “Plus” box at the bottom pushes students past both videos to the questions neither one answers.

Student Directions

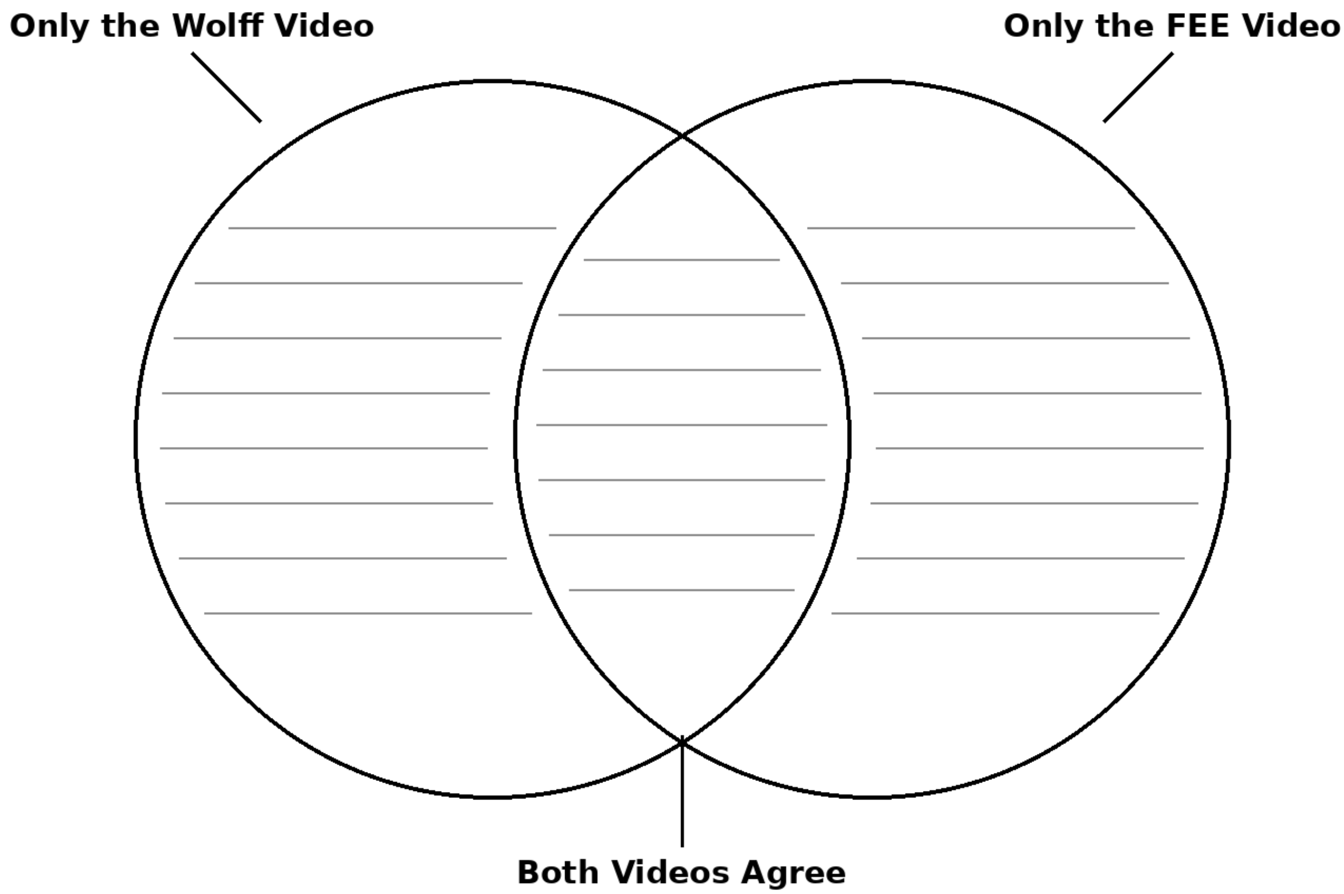
- In the left circle, list the claims only the Wolff video makes.
- In the right circle, list the claims only the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE) video makes.
- In the overlapping center, list what both videos accept as true. Look carefully — there is more overlap than a first viewing suggests.
- In the Plus box, name one question neither video answers, and describe the evidence that would answer it.

A hint for students who stall in the center: both videos agree that housing in expensive cities costs too much, and both agree that capping rents can slow new construction. The disagreement is about what follows from those two facts.

Name ______________________________ Date _________________________

Class _________________ Period _______ Teacher _____________________

Venn Diagram Plus: Rent Control Revisited



PLUS: Name one question neither video answers, and describe the evidence that would answer it.

Activity 4: Letter to a Legislator

Tell students that a state legislator has announced a bill capping rent increases statewide at 3 percent a year, and that each student will write to that legislator. Make clear before students begin that the letter is graded on how well it engages the strongest opposing argument, not on which position it takes.

Letter Requirements

- Open with one sentence naming the bill and stating your position on it.
- Cite at least one specific piece of evidence from each video, and name the source — for example, the San Francisco study, or the public housing built after the world wars.
- Devote one full paragraph to the strongest argument against your position, stated in the terms its own supporters would use rather than in terms they would reject.
- Explain why you still hold your position after weighing that argument.
- Close by naming one specific action you want the legislator to take.
- Keep the letter to a single page, and hold a respectful tone throughout. A legislator stops reading an insulting letter.

Extension

Have each student trade letters with a classmate who took the opposite position, then write a one-paragraph reply that begins by naming the single strongest point in the letter received.

Activity 5: Exit Ticket Reflection

Use this at the close of the lesson. Collect the tickets and sort them by position before the next class, so students can see how the room actually divides rather than how they assumed it would. The second prompt matters most — it asks students to hold on to a fact that cuts against them.

Distribute the ticket on the following page and allow five to seven minutes for completion.

Name ___________________________ Date ______________________

Class ________________ Period _______ Teacher ___________________

Exit Ticket: Rent Control Revisited

1. In one sentence, what does a cap on rents do to the supply of housing? Name the video that convinced you.

2. Name one fact from the video you disagreed with that you cannot dismiss.

3. Before this lesson I thought . . .

4. After watching both videos I think . . .

5. One question I still have:

Activity 6: Interrogate the Machine

Rent control is one of the most lopsided questions in economics — the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE) video cites a survey in which 93 percent of economists agreed. That makes it an unusually good test case for how an artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot handles a contested question, because the chatbot will almost certainly answer with confidence, and it will almost certainly sound like one of the two videos rather than both.

The lesson is not that the machine is wrong. On this question, its answer may well be defensible. The lesson is that a fluent, confident answer is not a neutral referee — it reflects the weight of the writing it learned from, and a student who stops there never meets the other side of the argument at all.

Two Ways to Run This

- Whole class, teacher device: project one response and audit it together. This works in any school, including those where students may not use AI tools, and it takes about 20 minutes.
- Small groups, student devices: each group submits the same prompt and audits its own response, then compares. Groups will get different answers, which is itself part of the lesson. Use only if your school permits student AI accounts.

Round One: Ask the Question Plainly

Submit this prompt exactly as written to whichever AI assistant your school permits, and record the response:

> **Is rent control a good policy?**

Then audit the response on the worksheet that follows. Students score three tests, identify which video the answer resembles, and name one thing from the videos the answer left out entirely.

Round Two: Write a Better Prompt

This is the part that builds the durable skill. Having seen what a plain question produces, students write a second prompt designed to surface the argument on both sides — then submit it and compare. A stronger prompt usually asks for the strongest case on each side, asks what supporters of each position would say to the other, or names the disagreement outright.

Have students record the revised prompt on the worksheet and note what changed in the answer. Ask which response would have made a student a better participant in the class debate, and why.

Extension: Check the Captions

The automatic captions on these two videos garbled several names. Henry Hazlitt came through as "Hlett" and "Hasllet," and Milton Friedman as "Freriedman." Turn on automatic captions, find one mangled name, then have students look up the correct spelling and identify who the person actually was. Ask the question that follows: the captions never signaled any doubt, so what would have happened to a student who quoted "Henry Hasllet" in an essay? Machine output does not flag its own errors. That is the reader's job.

Teacher Notes

- There is no answer key for this activity, because AI responses differ every time — even from the same prompt on the same day. The worksheet scores the response, not the student's agreement with it.
- Expect the plain prompt to produce something close to the FEE position: shortages, reduced maintenance, San Francisco or Stockholm, a nod to good intentions. If your class gets a genuinely two-sided answer, that is a useful result too — ask students what the response did that the videos did not.
- Watch for confident, uncheckable evidence. A response that says "studies show" without naming a study fails Test 2 no matter how reasonable it sounds. This is the single most transferable habit in the lesson.
- The point to land in the debrief: the machine learned from what people have written, so on a question where one side dominates the writing, that side dominates the answer. Ask students to name a question where they would expect this to mislead them badly.

Name ____________________________ Date _______________________

Class ________________ Period _______ Teacher ____________________

AI Response Audit: Rent Control Revisited

AI assistant used: ____

Prompt submitted: Is rent control a good policy?

Test 1 — Does the response say that people disagree about this, or does it present one answer as settled?

Circle one: YES PARTLY NO

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Test 2 — Does it give evidence you could actually check: a named study, city, year, or economist?

Circle one: YES PARTLY NO

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____

Test 3 — Does it state the case FOR capping rents in terms Richard Wolff would accept?

Circle one: YES PARTLY NO

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____

Which video does this response sound more like, and what specifically told you that?

____

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Name one thing from the videos the response left out entirely.

____

____

Round Two — write your revised prompt here, then note what changed in the answer. ____

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