Both Sides of the Issue

Rent Control

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Contents

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- describe how rent control and rent stabilization differ as approaches to housing affordability.
- distinguish between the claims and the supporting evidence presented in each video about rent regulation.
- critique the assumptions each side makes about how landlords, tenants, and developers respond to incentives.
- propose a housing policy approach that incorporates the strongest arguments 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.

Anti-Gouging Law: A regulation designed to prevent extreme or sudden price increases—such as rent hikes well above inflation—rather than to cap ordinary pricing.

Gentrification: The process by which a neighborhood becomes more expensive as wealthier residents and businesses move in, often pushing out lower-income tenants.

Housing Voucher: A taxpayer-funded subsidy that helps low-income renters pay private landlords for housing.

Incentive: Something that motivates a person or business to act, such as the prospect of profit motivating a developer to build new housing.

Just-Cause Eviction: A legal requirement that landlords have a valid, specified reason—such as nonpayment of rent or lease violation—before evicting a tenant.

Mom-and-Pop Landlord: A small-scale, often individual or family owner of rental property, typically operating only a few units rather than a large real-estate company.

Price Ceiling: A legal maximum that sellers may charge for a good or service, such as a strict, inflexible cap on rent.

Rent Control: A policy that limits how much a landlord can charge for rent, traditionally through a strict, inflexible price cap.

Rent Stabilization: A more flexible form of rent regulation that limits how much rent can rise during a tenancy, often tied to inflation or another index.

Subsidy: A payment from the government to help cover the cost of something, such as taxpayer-funded assistance for renters or developers.

Supply and Demand: The economic relationship between how much of a good is available (supply) and how much consumers want it (demand), which together influence price.

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. What is rent control?
3. In the Wall Street Journal video, Alexandra Cardinale said, "Rent is growing faster than the money most people make to pay it." What did she mean by this?
4. John Stossel said, "Profits are what persuade people to build things." What did he mean by this?
5. According to the Wall Street Journal video, what limit does California's rent stabilization law impose on rent increases?
6. John Stossel said, "Soon there will be more housing, and that will lower rents." How would more housing lower rents?
7. In the Wall Street Journal video, Solomon Greene said, "You can understand why [rent control] would be an appealing solution to that problem. It is essentially a costless solution to policymakers…." What did he mean by "costless?"
8. In the Stossel video, Salim Furth said, "Every rent control ordinance…has had an exemption for new construction, because everybody understood that if you apply this to new construction, you would completely shut it down." Why would rent control shut down new construction?
9. What is the difference between rent control and rent stabilization?
10. John Stossel said that building permits were up 65% in Minneapolis but were down 60% in St. Paul. What was the difference between the rent control policies in these cities?
11. What does "anti-gouging" mean?
12. Salim Furth said, "[Landlords] don't set the price, the market as a whole sets the price." What did he mean by this?

13. Alexandra Cardinale said that California's bill addressed common critiques of rent stabilization by including several exceptions. What were these exceptions?
14. John Stossel said that in New York City, some landlords neglected their buildings, and even burned them down for insurance money. What role did rent control play in this?
15. If the costs to landlords continue to go up (taxes, insurance, water and other utility bills, cost of repairs, etc.), but they cannot charge more for an apartment, how can they afford to pay those increased costs? What might result from them not being able to afford the increased costs?
16. Rent control stops the landlord from charging more money for an apartment or house. Should taxes on the property also be frozen at the same time? Why or why not?
17. Did these two videos share any common ground? Were there any points on which they agreed? If so, what were they?
18. Should one of the arguments we heard carry more weight than the other? If so, which one? Why?
19. 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?
20. What else would you like to learn about this topic?
21. To further explore the housing crisis, see Both Sides: *How to Solve the Housing Crisis*. https://stosselintheclassroom.org/both-sides-how-to-solve-the-housing-crisis/

Activities

Activity 1: Evidence Mapping

Teacher notes: *This activity asks students to separate claims from evidence in both videos. Distribute the Evidence Mapping worksheet (next page). Have students complete it individually while watching the videos a second time, then compare their charts in pairs or small groups.*

As you watch each video, listen for the main claims the speakers make about rent control. For each claim, write down the specific evidence the speaker offers to support it—statistics, examples, quotes from experts, or historical references. At the bottom of the worksheet, note any claims that were made without supporting evidence. After watching, compare your chart with a partner. Did you record the same claims? Where did the two videos rely most heavily on evidence? Where did they rely on assertion?

Name ____________________________ Date _______________________

Class ________________ Period _______ Teacher ___________________

Evidence Mapping: Rent Control

Use this chart to track the claims each video makes and the evidence offered to support each claim. At the bottom, note any claims that were made without supporting evidence.

Wall Street Journal Video — "How California Is Redefining Rent Control"

Claim 1: ____

Evidence: ____

Claim 2: ____

Evidence: ____

Stossel Video — "How Rent Control Hurts Renters"

Claim 1: ____

Evidence: ____

Claim 2: ____

Evidence: ____

Claims made without supporting evidence (either video):

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Activity 2: Stakeholder Analysis

Teacher notes: *Assign students or small groups one stakeholder each. Have students predict how that stakeholder would be affected by strict rent control under both perspectives presented in the videos. Then have groups share findings so the class builds a full picture of who gains and who loses under each scenario.*

Choose one of the stakeholders below (or use the one your teacher assigns). Using specific points from both videos, answer these questions in writing:

1. How does this stakeholder benefit under strict rent control, according to the Wall Street Journal video?
2. How is this stakeholder harmed under strict rent control, according to John Stossel?
3. Which argument do you find more convincing for this specific stakeholder, and why?

Stakeholders:

- A current tenant in a rent-controlled apartment
- A renter searching for a new apartment in the city
- A mom-and-pop landlord who owns one duplex
- A developer deciding whether to build a new apartment building
- A city official trying to keep families from being priced out
- A taxpayer who does not rent and does not own rental property

Activity 3: Common Ground Finder

Teacher notes: *The two videos present opposing conclusions, but they share more starting points than students may notice. This activity surfaces those shared assumptions so students can see where the disagreement actually lives.*

Working with a partner, list at least three points on which the two videos appear to agree. Consider claims about the housing crisis, supply and demand, the experience of renters, or the role of incentives. For each point of agreement, write one or two sentences quoting or paraphrasing how each video expresses it.

Then answer: If both sides agree on these starting points, why do they reach such different conclusions about rent control? Where, exactly, does the disagreement begin?

Activity 4: Policy Proposal

Teacher notes: *Push students past "pick a side." Their task is to draft a housing policy that honestly incorporates the strongest objections from both videos. Encourage them to be specific—vague proposals are easy; workable ones are not.*

Imagine your city is debating a new housing affordability law. Draft a one-page policy proposal that addresses the rising cost of rent. Your proposal must:

1. Borrow at least one specific idea from the Wall Street Journal video (such as exceptions for new construction, mom-and-pop landlords, just cause eviction protections, or a flexible cap tied to inflation).
2. Take seriously at least one specific concern raised in the Stossel video (such as the impact on new construction, landlord maintenance, or housing supply).
3. Identify the trade-offs your proposal accepts—what does your policy give up to gain what it gains?

Close with one paragraph explaining why a thoughtful person from the opposing side should still consider supporting your proposal.

Activity 5: Real-World Connection

Teacher notes: *This activity grounds the debate in current events. Students locate one news story from the past year that connects to the rent control debate, then map both perspectives onto the actual situation.*

Find one news article published within the past twelve months about rent prices, rent control, rent stabilization, eviction, or new housing construction. It can be national, state, or local. In writing, complete the following:

1. Summarize the article in three to five sentences.
2. How would Solomon Greene or Alexandra Cardinale (Wall Street Journal video) likely respond to this situation? Cite specific points from the video.
3. How would John Stossel or Salim Furth likely respond? Cite specific points they made.
4. Which response do you find more persuasive given the facts of the article? Defend your answer with evidence from both the article and the videos.