Who Will Fight to Keep It?

A welfare-policy simulation for American government and comparative politics

In Riverford, students propose a rent plan, check a campaign flyer and try to get a public hearing. In Millhaven, they compare two ways to get a hearing after a flood. Both courses use the same cases and choose a research note for their course.

Assign the activity

Play online at Under These Rules for American government or Possible States for comparative politics. For offline play, download and extract the classroom kit ZIP. Open the game's **.html** file from the extracted folder in a browser. If a file preview won't play, use the online links.

Choose **For Class** for four responses of at least 20, 50, 80 and 80 words. Allow about 50 to 60 minutes. **For Fun** takes about 15 to 20 minutes, with optional writing. The game includes the evidence and research notes. **Reading view** offers larger text and **Hide illustrations**.

Save and submit

Use **Save and pause** for a draft. Check the status by that button to see where the draft is available. To move to another site or device, use **Download progress** under **Backup and restore**, then **Restore progress** on the start screen. Edition 5.1 accepts backups from Editions 1.0 through 5.1.

1. Use **Add answer and continue** for the first three responses and **Add answer and finish** for Millhaven. For edits, including a new research note, choose **Add updated answer**.
2. Enter a name and course or section. Select **Open the Class report**, then **Print or save as PDF** and choose **Save as PDF** in the print menu.
3. Open the PDF and check the name, answers and final page. Upload it to Canvas and confirm the submission.

Students can type or dictate and copy and paste within the same answer box. For an alternate submission, post pages 6 to 9 and the course notes (page 10 or 11) as accessible Canvas text. Show the payment data and vote counts on page 2 after students choose evidence. Use the same rubric. Ask for four labeled answers with the plan, evidence choice, contact lists, forecast and research note.

Facilitate it in 50 minutes

Use Fun or paper for a shared walkthrough. Spend 5 minutes on the plan, 10 on the vote, 12 on the hearing and replay, 8 on Millhaven, 10 on discussion, and 5 on an exit response. For paper, pass out pages 6 to 9 in order, with reveals on pages 2 and 3. Give students the research notes for their course. Use pages 12 and 13 for optional rule exercises. Assign the four Class responses separately.

TEACHING THE CASE

Riverford’s two political decisions

1. Choose a plan, then see the vote

Give students 24 credits and tell them four households are each six credits short on rent. Targeted pays six credits each to those four. Broad pays two credits each to all twelve. Each plan needs three of five votes and begins with two committed supporters.

Show the flyer claiming only Juniper households would get Targeted relief. Alder and Juniper are fictional ancestry groups. Ask which evidence could test that claim. The payment data show two of six Alder households and two of six Juniper households qualify for Targeted. All six in each group qualify for Broad.

Plan	Without the flyer	With the flyer
Targeted relief	3 yes, passes	2 yes, falls short
Broad relief	3 yes, passes	3 yes, passes

Show the vote counts after students choose evidence on page 7. The flyer is the only change the game makes. It contains both a false claim and a group label. Ask what you would keep the same in a second comparison to isolate one of these elements.

2. Seek a renewal hearing

Broad passed and paid twelve households. Targeted lost the vote with the flyer and paid nobody. To test who could defend Targeted, imagine it passed without the flyer, four households got paid, and one year passed.

After the forecast on page 8, show the first counts. Then reveal the changed signing rule and recount. The plans change how many households get paid and the amount per household. For the signing replay keep those payments, the contact list and the hearing rule fixed.

Contact list	Targeted · first / replay	Broad · first / replay
Mail current addresses	2 / 2 · neither qualifies	6 / 4 · both qualify
Neighborhood aid centers	4 / 4 · both qualify	4 / 0 · first qualifies

Optional ancestry check. Targeted pays two households in each group. Mail reaches both paid Alder households and neither paid Juniper household, so the first signing rule gives two Alder signatures and no Juniper signatures. With help centers, both groups have two signatures. Ask at which step the counts first differ.

Debrief. The signatures in this table split equally across Riverford’s two neighborhoods. The optional address check on page 12 returns to the first signed petition. To see who was contacted and who signed, ask for the full contact list and signed petition.

ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING

Score the reasoning

Transfer to Millhaven

Flood relief reached all eight households. A hearing requires at least five signatures, including at least one from Harbor and one from Bluff. Each eligible household on the contact list signs. Have students predict which route meets both conditions, then give them the two splits.

Payment rule	Mail · Harbor / Bluff	Community groups · Harbor / Bluff
All eight households	5 / 0 · 5, no hearing	3 / 2 · 5, hearing
Four urgent households	2 / 0 · 2, no hearing	2 / 2 · 4, no hearing

Use page 9. Show the first row after students choose a contact list. Show the second after they explain what happens when four get paid. The optional exercise on page 13 uses the same signed petitions under both hearing rules.

Checkpoint	Give 3 points when the student can…
Plan forecast 20 words	Explain the payment, the rent gap and a trade-off, and identify the vote the plan needs.
Vote and evidence 50 words	Use the payment data for each group. Name whose vote changed for Targeted and explain how the flyer could have led to that change.
Hearing and replay 80 words	Compare both plans using one contact list. Explain the signing counts after the rule changes and name an assumption to check in a real town.
New town and research 80 words	Apply both hearing requirements when eight get paid and when four get paid. Connect a specific piece of evidence to what the study measured and say what the evidence could show.

Use 0 for missing reasoning, 1 for a partial rule or claim, 2 for sound reasoning missing a comparison or implication, and 3 for a complete, evidence-grounded response. Decisions and the signature forecast are practice. Even a 0 of 2 can accompany an excellent report. Score the written reasoning.

Example score. A response that gives the four correct splits and uses a petition count to test people’s views earns 2 of 3. Ask the same survey question in two places to measure views. Compare those answers with who signed to see if views line up with action.

EVIDENCE AND DISCUSSION

Connect the model to research

Both arrows between race and policy

In American government, start with a rule and a claim about who benefits. Ask how a campaign might use a racial category to influence a vote. Then ask what evidence could show why some voices reached the hearing. Compare who qualified, who got contacted, who signed and whose signature counted.

In comparative politics, have students name a pair of places or policy settings and use the same measure in both. Ask whether they propose to measure who qualifies, who is contacted, who participates, or public views about who should get help. If the discussion moves to U.S. and European welfare-state development, add historical evidence about particular programs and countries. The town cases illustrate mechanisms for that comparison.

Peer-reviewed sources used in the design

Gilens (1996). U.S. evidence on race coding and welfare opinion. Source

Michener (2019). A framework for analyzing how policies and racial politics shape one another. Source

Han (2016). Field experiments on organizational outreach and political participation. Source

Brady and Bostic (2015). Benefit coverage, generosity and targeting vary in their relationships with poverty and preferences. Source

Michener (2017). County-level Medicaid, civic association and turnout patterns. Source

Michener and SoRelle (2022). Interviews and observation of tenant organizing and political power. Source

Banting (2005). Cross-national variation in diversity, multicultural policy and social spending. Source

van Oorschot (2006). European survey evidence on who respondents viewed as deserving welfare support. Source

The town data and results are fictional teaching examples. The cover and scenes illustrate those places. Use the case tables for evidence and the research notes for links to published studies.

The activity asks students to build and revise an explanation from evidence, drawing on Chi and Wylie's work on active learning. The reading view and keyboard controls support more than one way to navigate the same case. Chi and Wylie · WCAG 2.2

Optional ChatGPT debrief. After students add their answers, give ChatGPT the fictional counts and a sample claim. Ask it to play a council member who asks what led to the outcome and what evidence could test another explanation.

EDITION 4 BLIND-REVIEW ARCHIVE

Five earlier playable builds

Five AI reviewers scored the earlier builds under neutral names in different orders. They reviewed matching Class journeys and stress-test results from those builds. The draft and release of Edition 3 were both part of that comparison.

Criterion / 100	Edition 1	Edition 2	3 draft	3 release	Edition 4
Political science rigor (25)	19	21	22	23	24
Student clarity (20)	11	15	17	19	20
Background and self-containment (20)	13	15	16	18	20
Navigation and saving (20)	10.5	14	17.25	17.5	19.5
Graphics and presentation (15)	9.5	11	12.5	13	14
Total score	63	76	84.75	90.5	97.5
Rank	5th	4th	3rd	2nd	1st

These were AI panel judgments. Edition 4 also passed 29 logic checks including 96 Class routes, conflicting saves, multilingual restore and report history. Ten Chrome checks covered both modes, enlarged text at 320 pixels, a corrected note, a disappeared save and the print-ready report.

What Edition 4 changed

Save status tells students if a browser copy is missing and lets them download the draft from the open tab or save it again. Students can change a research choice and add the updated answer. The report keeps the first answer and note.

The grading criteria and alternate submission steps appear before the first response and at Finish. The ancestry table asks whether counts differ and directs students to compare paid, reached and signed counts. The case outcomes and 230-word Class minimum were verified across the revised build.

Classroom pilot

In a classroom pilot, ask students to explain both Millhaven rules, recover a draft, and submit through their assigned route. Observe timing, phone use, assistive technology and PDF export on student devices.

Propose a plan for rent help

The plant closed. Twelve households lost a paycheck. You are asking Riverford’s town council to vote on a plan for rent help, also called relief.

What you know before you choose

Four households are each six credits short on rent. Credits are Riverford’s unit of money. You can spend 24 credits on one of two plans.

Plan	Who gets paid	Amount
Targeted relief	The four households short on rent	Six credits each
Broad relief	All twelve households that lost a paycheck	Two credits each

The council needs three yes votes out of five. Two members support either plan, two oppose both, and one is still deciding.

Your first move

Choose one plan and write down its name. Wait for the next sheet before checking how the council votes.

Plan forecast · at least 20 words for Class

1. How would your plan help the four households that are short on rent? What do you give up by choosing this plan?

2. How many more yes votes do you need?

STUDENT CASE SHEET 2 / RIVERFORD

Check the campaign flyer

Alder and Juniper are labels for family backgrounds in this fictional town. Six households have each label. People in both groups live in both neighborhoods. Past campaigns have tried to paint Juniper residents as outsiders.

Campaign flyer
“Only Juniper households get Targeted relief.”

Before the vote

The clerk puts three pieces of evidence on the table. The council votes next. Choose the one that could show who would get paid if the plan passed.

Payment data. The relief office compares what each plan would pay.

Council vote count. The clerk shows how each of the five members votes.

Relief budget. The finance office lists the total credits set aside for rent help.

Check the claim after you choose

Your instructor will show the payment data and the two vote counts. Compare votes for the same plan with and without the flyer. The flyer contains the false claim and the group label. Another comparison could test those two things separately.

Vote and evidence · at least 50 words for Class

1. Use the payment data. How many Alder and Juniper households would get help under Targeted relief?

2. For Targeted relief, compare the votes with and without the flyer. Whose vote changes? Does the plan pass?

3. How might the flyer change that member’s mind while the plan stays the same?

Gather signatures for a hearing

If you chose Broad, the plan passed and all twelve households got paid. If you chose Targeted, the plan lost and nobody got paid. To test who could defend Targeted, imagine it passed without the flyer and four households got paid. Now skip ahead one year.

Before the first count

A hearing is a public meeting to discuss keeping the program. The council votes on funding later. To get a hearing, send a petition, a request backed by signatures. You need at least four signatures total and at least one from Eastbank and one from Westbank. Each household you contact signs once if it got paid.

Contact list	Eastbank	Westbank
Addresses on file	3 households, 1 short on rent	3 households, 1 short on rent
Neighborhood help centers	2 households, both short on rent	2 households, both short on rent

Choose one list and write down how many households you think will sign under your payment plan.

After the first count

Use the same list and payments. A household you reach that was short on rent signs only if it got the full six credits this time. Other households follow the first rule.

Hearing and replay · at least 80 words for Class

1. Use the same contact list for both plans. Under the first signing rule, how many people sign for each plan? What explains the counts?

2. Keep the contact list. For both plans, what happens to the counts if households short on rent sign only when their payment covers the whole gap? Explain.

3. What evidence could you use to test one of the game’s assumptions in a real town?

Your instructor may also have you compare two ways to count the first petition after it has been signed.

STUDENT CASE SHEET 4 / MILLHAVEN

Five signatures. Now what?

A flood interrupted work for eight households. All eight got payments. Five households live in Harbor and three in Bluff. A household signs if it got paid and you reach it.

Choose one contact list before checking its result

A hearing needs at least five signatures total with at least one from Harbor and at least one from Bluff.

Contact list	Harbor	Bluff
Mail confirmed addresses	5 households	0 households
Work with community groups	3 households	2 households

Choose which list to use. Explain to your partner why your choice can or cannot get a hearing.

Now try a different payment plan

Only four households have the most urgent needs. Two live in Harbor. Both are on both contact lists. Two live in Bluff. Both are on the community groups' list. The conditions for a hearing and the signing rule stay the same.

Read one note for your course on page 10 or 11 before you write the last part of your response.

New town and research · at least 80 words for Class

1. Both lists get five signatures. Using Millhaven's starting rule, explain why only one gets a hearing.

2. Now imagine only the four households that need help most get paid. How many signatures does each list get from Harbor and Bluff? Does either get a hearing under the starting rule?

3. What did your chosen study look at? Name one real piece of evidence you would use to test the idea. Explain what it could show.

Connect one study to a real place

Choose one of these notes. The summary is enough for the response. Use it to think of evidence you would look for in a real case. Opening the full article is optional.

Choose one U.S. place or program.

Michener (2017) · Medicaid and local political participation

Medicaid helps pay for health care for eligible people. In counties where a larger share of residents were enrolled, Michener found lower overall voter turnout and fewer local civic and political groups.

Scope. The study compares counties. It leaves open how a particular person reacted to getting Medicaid. **Optional idea.** Within one county, what evidence could show whether neighborhoods with similar Medicaid enrollment had different chances to get involved? Full article

Michener and SoRelle (2022) · How renters get organized

The researchers interviewed and observed renters organizing together. They show ways renter groups help people build connections and act on shared problems.

Scope. These cases show how organizing can work in particular settings. To estimate how often it works elsewhere, you would need other evidence. **Optional idea.** What evidence could show whom a renters' group contacted and who later attended a meeting or signed a petition? Full article

Lieberman and Lapinski (2001) · American federalism and racial exclusion in cash assistance

The authors studied Aid to Dependent Children, created in 1935. They argue that broad state control and weak national supervision let states administer the program in different ways, including excluding Black families in the South.

Scope. The study concerns a specific U.S. program. It gives you a question about how a rule was enforced in one place. **Optional idea.** What evidence could show who made a decision about an application in one U.S. place and who was approved or denied? Full article

Connect one study to a real place

Choose one of these notes. The summary is enough for the response. Use it to think of evidence you would look for in a real case. Opening the full article is optional.

Choose two places to compare and use the same measure in both.

Banting (2005) · Immigration and public benefits across countries

Reviewing work on higher-income democracies, Banting found that countries with larger immigrant populations could sustain public benefits. Faster immigration growth and the politics of redistribution looked different across cases.

Scope. National spending and public attitudes capture different things. A pattern across countries leaves open how a particular program gained or lost support. **Optional idea.** Compare the same type of program in two countries. Choose a measure of who qualifies, how much help they get, or how politicians decided on the rules. Full article

van Oorschot (2006) · Who people think should get help

In a 1999–2000 survey across European countries, people generally expressed more concern for older people than for immigrants when asked about the living conditions of different groups.

Scope. The survey measured stated concern. A signature list would show an action under particular rules. **Optional idea.** What survey question could you ask in both places to compare opinions about who should get help? If you want to study action, choose evidence of something people did. Full article

Hacker (1998) · How early choices shaped health coverage

Hacker compares Britain, Canada, and the United States. He argues that choices about health coverage made at different times shaped which groups gained a stake in the system and which later changes they could support or resist.

Scope. The study explains differences in health coverage. Comparisons of other benefits require evidence on those programs. **Optional idea.** For two countries, pick a date before a major health reform effort. What evidence could show who already had coverage and which groups supported or opposed the reform? Full article

Try an address check

At the hearing, open **Try an address check** after the signing replay. Go back to the petition from the first signing rule. The same households got paid, got contacted and signed under both checks. A hearing still needs four counted signatures, including one from each neighborhood.

Same signatures, different ways to count

The clerk can count every signature on the petition or check addresses against an older town list. Three households live in apartments missing from that list. E2 is Juniper and is on the help centers' list. E3 is Alder and W4 is Juniper. Both are on the mailing list. If Targeted passes, E2 gets paid. If Broad passes, all three get paid.

Ask whether their petition would still get a hearing under the old address check. Then ask what happens to a different plan or contact list before revealing the results.

Plan and contact list	Signed petition Eastbank / Westbank	Old-list count Eastbank / Westbank	Hearing All signed → old list
Targeted, mail	2 total, 1 / 1	2 total, 1 / 1	No → No
Targeted, help centers	4 total, 2 / 2	3 total, 1 / 2	Yes → No
Broad, mail	6 total, 3 / 3	4 total, 2 / 2	Yes → Yes
Broad, help centers	4 total, 2 / 2	3 total, 1 / 2	Yes → No

American government · Follow the official count

With help-center outreach, two Alder and two Juniper households sign under either plan. The old list counts both Alder signatures and one Juniper signature. To check a newspaper claim that fewer Juniper households signed, compare the organizers' sheet with the clerk's tally. Which step first produces the gap?

Use Michener's framework to examine who shapes the rule and how the rule shapes political voice. Ask who controlled the list, who had the power to review it, and which households the rule treated as verified residents for the hearing. The ancestry groups are fictional, and the modeled rule governs whose signatures count. In a real town the same rule could also change who tries to sign.

Lieberman and Lapinski study Aid to Dependent Children. They argue that state control and weak federal oversight helped exclude Black families in the South and enabled patronage in parts of the North. Ask what evidence could show who had authority and which applications were approved or denied.

Lieberman and Lapinski (2001). American Federalism, Race and the Administration of Welfare. British Journal of Political Science 31(2), 303-329. DOI 10.1017/S0007123401000126. Source

Choose a rule for the hearing

After the contact result, students see **Your vote sets the hearing rule**. Both options require at least five signatures. Their vote decides whether at least one must come from each neighborhood. The petitions stay the same. A hearing puts funding up for discussion. The council decides whether to fund the program later.

In Fun, choosing a rule shows both payment cases. In Class, the four-household results appear after the first **New town and research** answer is added to the report. Return to Millhaven to see them. Use the same order on paper.

Who got paid and contact list	Signed Harbor / Bluff	Five and both neighborhoods	Five from anywhere
All eight, mail	5 total, 5 / 0	No	Yes
All eight, community groups	5 total, 3 / 2	Yes	Yes
Four urgent households, mail	2 total, 2 / 0	No	No
Four urgent households, community groups	4 total, 2 / 2	No	No

Comparative politics · Compare the same kind of program

Choose two named places, a program and a period. Compare who gets covered, how much help people get, or who can get the program discussed. Hacker argues that earlier health coverage decisions in Britain, Canada and the United States shaped who could support or resist later reforms. Ask what evidence shows who had coverage and who could block reform.

Hacker (1998). The Historical Logic of National Health Insurance. Studies in American Political Development 12(1), 57-130. DOI 10.1017/S0898588X98001308. Source

Five-minute debate

First minute. Show the all-paid cases. Students choose a hearing rule and cite a count.
Next 90 seconds. Each side explains who gets access to the agenda under its preferred rule.
Next 90 seconds. Reveal both four-household cases. Each side gets 45 seconds to make the strongest case for the other rule using the counts.
Final minute. Each student names one piece of evidence that could change their position, such as a log showing who knew about the petition and had a chance to sign.

Both decisions are optional practice. Use the four existing writing checkpoints and the same rubric on page 3. In real life organizers and households might act differently if they knew the rule in advance.