

[PRESENT I] Civic Research

Case Study

Grade level: 9 to 12

Activity type: Project

Period: Multiple sessions

Related subjects: Government, U.S History

Overview

The efforts of others to make change can teach important lessons about effective participation today. In this case, educators guide young people in identifying and exploring a good case of civic participation. The Ten Questions provides a useful frame for analyzing complex social problems and movements as students conduct their own research.



Essential Questions

- Why does this case matter to me?
- Who participated and what were their main goals?
- How did they achieve the goals? What strategies and tactics were used?
- What counts as success? What can we learn from this case regarding our own civic action?

Learning Goals

- Identify and refine main research questions.
- Employ various methods of inquiry, including interviews, literature review, survey, and statistics.
- Use the Ten Questions framework to explore research questions for the chosen cases.
- Contemplate the lessons students can elicit from the case regarding their own civic action.

Activities

1. Begin with a warm-up conversation with students around social, cultural, and political issues they care about and are interested in exploring.
2. Have students form small groups and discuss the case they want to study. Ask them to engage with Question 1, or why the case matters to them.
 - The case can be any group, organization, or single person.
 - Have students explain what issues they want to explore and why the case matters to them.
3. Guide students in detailing a general plan about how to investigate their chosen cases using the Ten Questions and the methods they hope to use. Have students submit a research proposal (Assignment 1).
4. Provide feedback on Assignment 1 so that students may conduct research more effectively.
5. Allow students to work independently on their project. Have them submit a progress report on "what we have discovered so far" (Assignment 2).
 - Students briefly share their progress, interesting findings, unresolved issues, on-going agenda, or challenges.
 - Students calibrate the last step of the project, finalizing the main argument and searching effective presentation methods.
6. Students present their final work in class. Discuss together what they learned from the cases, what they saw as the cases' successes (or failures) and why, and what could have been improved.
7. Have student write an individual reflection note (Assignment 3) and submit it along with a final group project report (Assignment 4).

Materials

- The materials are mostly determined by students who conduct case study.
- Mobile phones can be a great tool, as they have various media apps and functions.

* This lesson is originated from an undergraduate course (yppactionframe.fas.harvard.edu/case-study), but its general structure can be applied to research projects on a high school level.

EXAMPLE. Gov94CZ (From Voice to Influence: Understanding Citizenship in a Digital Age) was an undergraduate seminar course offered at Harvard's Department of Government in fall 2016. Students discussed various topics on changing communication patterns, policymaking processes, and ethical issues around digital civic agency. For a class project students chose cases (any group, any organization, or any single person partaking in civic action) and investigated them using the Ten Questions. Students brought cases from all different corners of the participatory politics terrain: Veganism, Reclaim Harvard Laws, Get Out To Vote (GOTV), and Harvard Civics Program.

Veganism: Is Veganism Political?



In "Veganism: A Platform for Participatory Politics," Alice Jeon and Sarah Wu tried to study how veganism is gaining ground along with the rise of digital technology (according to their research, the term *vegan* was first coined in 1941 by Donald Watson). Among the discussed topics were how social media played a role in community building, information sharing, and identity formation among vegans and, mostly intriguingly, whether or not veganism is political. Alice and Sarah made two interesting distinctions to delve into the changing notion of *political* in participatory politics dynamics: one distinction between intention vs. perception and the other between means-based vs. ends-

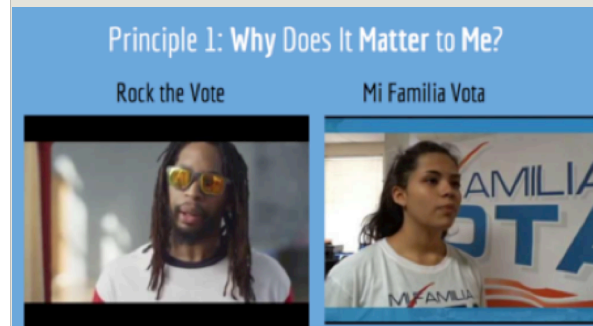
based civic groups. Understanding veganism and its (non)politicality requires an understanding of the margins of the fast growing territory of participatory politics that is largely left undefined and unclaimed. Read [more](https://ypactionframe.fas.harvard.edu/case-study) at ypactionframe.fas.harvard.edu/case-study.

Reclaim Harvard Law: HLS Responds to Inclusion in the Time of Black Lives Matter.



In "Reclaim Harvard Laws: Students Voices Reshape an Institution," Gabbi Giotti, Michaela Murrow, and Kailash Sundaram studied activism organized by Harvard Law School students for inclusion and diversity there, known as "Reclaim Harvard Law." HLS was a hard-reach group, due to the high sensitivity of its issues of concern and the risks involved, but the three students managed to get an inside look at their activism. The three students focused specifically on how activists channeled their voice into actual

change; what strategies and tactics, whether digital or traditional or [by any media necessary](https://ypactionframe.fas.harvard.edu/case-study), they used; and what struggles and pushbacks with which activists needed to cope. This case study rediscovered the significance of *sacrifice*, a concept essential to democratic citizenship and necessary to achieve equity. Reclaim HL has never meant to go on a national level, but due to the Harvard name and the national dialogue about *Black Lives Matter*, Reclaim HLS's influence exceeded easily the parameters of local campuses. Read [more](https://ypactionframe.fas.harvard.edu/case-study) at ypactionframe.fas.harvard.edu/case-study.

New Suffrage Movement in the Participatory Politics Era

Voting often seems to be pushed to the sidelines in the discussion about participatory politics. Yet it is one of the most important and oldest forms of political participation, and remains essential to modern democratic politics. In “A Transmedia Perspective of Voting: How ‘Get Out the Vote’ Organizations Use Online and Offline Strategies to Encourage Participation,” Avika Dua and Jonah Hahn challenged this neglect of voting and argued for placing it back at the core of participatory politics. In this case study, Avika and Jonah compared two Get Out the Vote (GOTV) organizations—[Rock the Vote](#) and [Mia Familia Vota](#). The two organizations originated from different goals for voting and nurtured different organizational visions. Avika and Jonah scrutinized how Rock the Vote and Mia Familia Vota developed different transmedia strategies according to their diverging goals. Avika and Jonah contextualized the groups in the [flow dynamics](#) model of discourse, with [Rock the Vote](#) representing structural change and [Mia Familia Vota](#) representing expressive change. Read [more](#) at ypactionframe.fas.harvard.edu/case-study.

Teaching Civics is Political Action

Teaching students civics can provide them with tools for responsible citizenship in a changing political landscape. But civic education goes well beyond formal teachers. Lukas Petry and Carolina Portela-Blanco examined the [Harvard Civics Program](#), which places motivated undergraduates in classrooms throughout the Boston area to teach civics and government classes and inspire students to grow into active members of our society. Carolina, a civics teacher in the program herself, and Lukas studied the passion and motivation of undergraduate participants and the challenges they faced teaching young students. Carolina and Lukas frame teaching civics as political action using the Ten Questions. They write, “[Undergraduate volunteers] are not merely talking about the problem of lack of civic instruction in K-12 schooling and how it affects participation in community, but they are doing something about it. The program takes teachers to the school—it acts upon perceived issues and intends to remedy it through education.” Read [more](#) at ypactionframe.fas.harvard.edu.