

Conventional and Unconventional Political Participation: Democracy in Action

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This module was developed and utilized for a ninth-grade advanced placement U.S. government class to teach the AP syllabus topic "Political Beliefs and Behaviors: Conventional and Unconventional Political Participation."

Estimated module length: Ninety minutes



Conventional political participation: The signing of the U.S. Constitution. Source: *Teaching American History* at <https://tinyurl.com/ycy8r933>.



Unconventional political participation: Boston Tea Party. Source: *Wikipedia* at <https://tinyurl.com/y9g9gua5>.

Overview

The United States is a democratic republic. This system of governance allows U.S. citizens to engage directly in political life through attempting to influence the public policies of their government. This allows different individuals and groups to choose various forms of action for different purposes. Conventional strategies like voting, running for office, making donations to candidates, or writing members of Congress are common and widely accepted. Unconventional participation is less widely accepted and often controversial. It involves using strategies like marching, boycotting, refusing to obey laws, or protesting in general. At different times in the nation's history, individuals and groups have succeeded or failed using both forms of participation.

Objectives

Students will:

Explain that in a democratic republic, citizens participate in the political system through their actions that can be conventional or, at times, unconventional.

Learn the concepts of conventional and unconventional political participation and study the civil rights movement as an example of a successful use of unconventional political participation.

Better understand the categories of conventional and unconventional political participation and types of actions associated with each category through applying knowledge to three political scenarios.

Prerequisite knowledge

In my course, this lesson is embedded in a unit on political beliefs and behaviors of U.S. citizens. It stands alone and requires no formal prerequisites, though students should have a general understanding of democracy as a form of government. It follows lessons about political beliefs and anticipates future lessons about voting and elections, civil liberties, and civil rights.

Module introduction:



Rosa Parks with Martin Luther King Jr. in the background. Source: *Wikimedia Commons* at <https://tinyurl.com/b4wuyon>.

Students are first asked to access and read the Constitutional Rights Foundation web page titled “Social Protests” at <http://www.crf-usa.org/black-history-month/social-protests>. This student reading with accompanying questions is a case study of the 1950s and 1960s civil rights protest movements. The reading is available for download at the following link (<https://www.utc.edu/center-reflective-citizenship/pdfs/crcmloganappendix1.pdf>) and is also included in Appendix I of this module. If laptops aren’t available, students can use their smartphones or the page can be printed and distributed. Students should read the accurate, concise, and objective overview of the protest movement and answer the two accompanying questions at the end of the reading. After completing the reading and questions, students are randomly asked to share their answers aloud. After hearing from two or three students, the teacher should then introduce the two core generalizations of the lesson by offering introductory comments similar to these:

First, although sometimes people in a democratic republic choose to participate in politics in an unconventional manner, including protesting, boycotting, and refusing to abide by certain laws, most people choose to participate conventionally, by voting, donating money to candidates for political office, or even running for office.

Second, people involved in the civil rights movement often chose the unconventional means of protest (as the students have possibly already discerned) because they were unable to have their voices heard through more conventional means, since as a racial/political minority, particularly in the South, established laws and generally accepted customs of the white majority denied African-Americans conventional access.

As students learn more about conventional and unconventional political participation, they should realize that different situations and individual and group interests mean that there is no standardized formula for choosing or not choosing actions from either or both categories that work in every situation (estimated time, forty minutes).

The basics of political participation: Understanding and applications

Students then receive the handout “Conventional and Unconventional Political Participation.” The handout clarifies and specifies types of political participation, as well as provides students with scenarios that give them opportunities to apply what they’ve learned. The handout is available for download at the following link (<https://www.utc.edu/center-reflective-citizenship/pdfs/crcmloganappendix2.pdf>) and is also included in Appendix II of this module. The document breaks down political participation into two categories: (1) conventional participation including voting, donating money, writing letters, joining an interest group, and more; and (2) unconventional participation including protesting, boycotting, rioting, and more. Randomly ask students to read the categories in the handout aloud.

Students then read the three short scenarios included in the handout and imagine themselves as the individual involved in each scenario: (a student concerned about low voter turnout among young people, a business owner who battles government bureaucracy, and a citizen concerned about poor local governance). They then are asked to choose one or more of the two categories of political participation, as well as specific actions from one or more of the categories they choose, that might assist the individual in changing the problematic situation he/she encounters in each scenario. Students then write brief scenarios of their choices and why they chose to act as they did for each type’s effectiveness.

Next, students will work in groups of four. Predetermined mixed-ability groups work well for this assignment to encourage thoughtful discussion and multiple perspectives. Each group should try to find consensus about what type of action would work best in each scenario. The groups need not produce a document, but they should formally agree upon the best course of action for each scenario. During this process, it is suggested that the teacher circulate in the classroom, checking for understanding, answering any questions that may arise, and trying to help create consensus within each group (**estimated time, sixty-five minutes**).

Conclusion/summary

After all groups have shared and discussed their thoughts with each other, the teacher will take up each student’s written responses to the individual writing assignment and then address the class and summarize comments from different groups. Students will have disagreed on many finer points, but have mostly all agreed that some types of actions were required and, further, agreed that each situation called for a different response geared specifically to each scenario. The teacher may summarize the lesson with a brief statement like the following:

As we saw, participation in the civil rights movement took extraordinary courage. Everyday citizens used what little political power they had to fight for the changes that they wanted to see. The citizens who worked with the movement sometimes behaved conventionally by voting or helping political campaigns with time or money, and sometimes they behaved unconventionally through protests, boycotts, or civil disobedience. While most political situations don’t call for the level of effort the civil rights movement did, political participation is still an effective way to try to use the power that you, as a citizen, have in a democracy,

whether that's through the most popular form of participation—voting—or through protest and other less common methods. We may disagree about how to achieve our goals, but we can all agree that we should use our power to represent ourselves politically and that the methods we choose should not cause harm.

Day two: Reinforcement activity/summative assessment

As an introduction to the next day's lesson concerning voting (turnout, trends, demographics, and laws/amendments that impact voting), students will be prompted to list the two general types of political participation and give two specific examples of each. The assignment will be collected and graded to assess concept attainment in students.

References and Resources

O'Connor, Karen, and Larry Sabato. *American Government: Roots and Reform*. 10th ed. Hoboken, New Jersey: Pearson, 2009. This source is a textbook that is recommended for AP U.S. government and politics classes. It provides a general overview of government.

Thorson, Esther, et al. "A Hierarchy of Political Participation Activities in Pre-Voting-Age Youth." University of Missouri, 2010. <http://www.newshare.com/mdp/mdp-participation.pdf>. This paper from the University of Missouri discusses youth participation in politics. It provides teachers with useful, specific background on political participation as it relates to young people.

"Voter Turnout Demographics." *United States Election Project*. Last modified 2016. <http://www.electproject.org/home/voter-turnout/demographics>. This source from the University of Florida's United States Election Project provides current data on turnout rates, trends in voting, and useful graphs to illustrate political participation levels.

<http://www.crf-usa.org/black-history-month/social-protests>: This resource is used to introduce students to a historical example of unconventional political participation, the civil rights movement. Specific events from the time period are discussed, and students are exposed to many of the strategies that were used.

Matt Logan, "Conventional and Unconventional Political Participation," May 15, 2017.

Appendix I

Social protests

The modern civil rights movement grew out of a long history of social protest. In the South, any protest risked violent retaliation. Even so, between 1900 and 1950, community leaders in many Southern cities protested segregation. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the leading civil rights organization of this era, battled racism by lobbying for federal anti-lynching legislation and challenging segregation laws in court.

Following World War II, a great push to end segregation began. The NAACP grew from 50,000 to half a million members. The walls of segregation that existed outside the South started crumbling. In 1947, Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in Major League Baseball, and soon, black athletes participated in all professional sports. In 1948, President Harry S. Truman ordered the integration of the armed forces.

The greatest victory occurred in 1954. In *Brown v. Board of Education*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled separate schools for blacks and whites unconstitutional. This deeply shocked many Southern whites. White citizens councils, joined by prominent citizens, sprouted throughout the South. They vowed that integration would never take place. In this atmosphere, the social protests of the civil rights movement were born.

The Montgomery bus boycott



American civil rights leader Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968) stands in front of a bus at the end of the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott on December 26, 1956. Source: *History.com* at <https://tinyurl.com/qc9rqd9>.

In December 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, one of the first major protests began. Rosa Parks, a black woman, refused to give her bus seat to a white passenger, as required by the city's segregation laws. Although often depicted as a weary older woman too tired to get up and move, Parks was actually a longtime, active member of the NAACP. A committed civil rights activist, she decided that she was not going to move. She was arrested and jailed for her defiant and courageous act.

The NAACP saw Parks's arrest as an opportunity to challenge segregation laws in a major Southern city. The NAACP called on Montgomery's black political and religious leaders to

advocate a one-day boycott protesting her arrest. More than 75 percent of Montgomery's black residents regularly used the bus system. On the day of the boycott, only eight blacks rode Montgomery's buses.

The success of the one-day boycott inspired black leaders to organize a long-term boycott. They demanded an end to segregation on the city's buses. Until this demand was met, blacks would refuse to ride Montgomery's buses. A young Baptist minister named Martin Luther King Jr. led the boycott.

Carpools were organized to get black participants to work. Many walked where they needed to go. After a month, Montgomery's businesses were beginning to feel the boycott's effects. Some segregationists retaliated. Blacks were arrested for walking on public sidewalks. Bombs exploded in four black churches. King's home was firebombed.

King conceived of a strategy of nonviolence and civil disobedience to resist the violent opposition to the boycott. In school, Henry David Thoreau's writings on civil disobedience had deeply impressed King. But King did not believe the Christian idea of "turning the other cheek" applied to social action until he studied the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, who introduced the "weapon" of nonviolence during India's struggle for independence from Great Britain.

"We decided to raise up only with the weapon of protest," King said. "It is one of the greatest glories of America ... Don't let anyone pull you so low as to hate them. We must use the weapon of love."

The tactic of nonviolence proved effective in hundreds of civil rights protests in the racially segregated South.

The Montgomery bus boycott lasted 382 days. It ended when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregation on the city's buses was unconstitutional.

The success of the boycott propelled King to national prominence and to leadership in the civil rights movement. When some Southern black ministers established the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957, they chose King as its leader. The SCLC continued to lead nonviolent boycotts, demonstrations, and marches protesting segregation throughout the South.

The sit-ins

In February 1960, four black college freshmen sat down at a segregated Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, and politely asked to be served. They were ignored but remained seated until the counter closed. The next day, they returned with more students, who sat peacefully at the counter waiting to be served. They, like the protesters in Montgomery, were practicing nonviolent civil disobedience. The Greensboro lunch counter demonstrations were called "sit-ins." As word of them spread, other students in cities throughout the South started staging sit-ins. By April 1960, more than 50,000 students had joined sit-ins.

The tactic called for well-dressed and perfectly behaved students to enter a lunch counter and ask for service. They would not move until they were served. If they were arrested, other students would take their places.

Students in many cities endured taunts, arrests, and even beatings. But their persistence paid off. Many targeted businesses began to integrate.

In October 1960, black students across the nation formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC—pronounced “snick”) to carry on the work that students had begun in the Greensboro sit-ins. SNCC operated throughout the Deep South, organizing demonstrations, teaching in “Freedom Schools,” and registering voters.

The Freedom Ride

Some of the most dangerous and dramatic episodes of the civil rights movement took place on the Freedom Ride. This was organized in 1961 by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), a civil rights group committed to direct, nonviolent action. More than a decade earlier, the U.S. Supreme Court had declared segregation on interstate buses and in interstate terminals unconstitutional. Despite this decision, the buses and stations remained rigidly segregated.

In May 1961, black and white freedom riders boarded buses bound for Southern states. At each stop, they planned to enter the segregated areas.

CORE Director James Farmer said: “We felt we could count on the racists of the South to create a crisis so that the federal government would be compelled to enforce the law.”

At first, the riders met little resistance. But in Alabama, white supremacists surrounded one of the freedom riders’ buses, set it afire, and attacked the riders as they exited. Outside Birmingham, Alabama, a second bus was stopped. Eight white men boarded the bus and savagely beat the nonviolent freedom riders with sticks and chains.

When he heard about the violence, President John F. Kennedy sent federal agents to protect the freedom riders. Although the president urged the freedom riders to stop, they refused. Regularly met by mob violence and police brutality, hundreds of freedom riders were beaten and jailed. Although the Freedom Ride never reached its planned destination, New Orleans, Louisiana, it achieved its purpose. At the prodding of the Kennedy administration, the Interstate Commerce Commission ordered the integration of all interstate bus, train, and air terminals. Signs indicating “colored” and “white” sections came down in more than 300 Southern stations.

Birmingham

In 1963, King announced that the SCLC would travel to Birmingham, Alabama, to integrate public and commercial facilities. In defiance of Supreme Court orders, Birmingham had closed its public parks, swimming pools, and golf courses rather than integrate them. Its restaurants and lunch counters remained segregated.

Peaceful demonstrators singing “We Shall Overcome” met an enraged white populace and an irate police chief named Eugene “Bull” Connor. Day after day, more demonstrators, including King, were thrown in jail. After a month, African-American youth, aged six to eighteen, started demonstrating. They too were jailed, and when the jails filled, they were held in school buses and vans. As demonstrations continued, Connor had no place left to house prisoners. Americans watched the evening news in horror as Connor used police dogs, billy clubs, and high-pressure fire hoses to get the children demonstrators off the streets. As tension mounted, city and business leaders gave in. They agreed to desegregate public facilities, hire black employees, and release all the people in jail.

March on Washington



1963 March on Washington. Source: *Zinn Education Project* at <https://tinyurl.com/y8mot8co>.

The violence in Birmingham and elsewhere in the South prompted the Kennedy administration to act. It proposed a civil rights bill outlawing segregation in public facilities and discrimination in employment. The bill faced solid opposition from Southern members of Congress. In response, civil rights leaders organized a massive march on Washington, D.C. On August 28, 1963, hundreds of thousands of Americans traveled to the nation’s capital to demonstrate for civil rights. The peaceful march culminated in a rally where civil rights leaders demanded equal opportunity for jobs and the full implementation of constitutional rights for racial minorities. King delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. It inspired thousands of people to increase their efforts and thousands of others to join the civil rights movement for the first time. Full press and television coverage brought the March on Washington to international attention.

Mississippi Freedom Summer

Much of the civil rights movement focused on voting rights. Since Reconstruction, Southern states had systematically denied African-Americans the right to vote. Perhaps the worst example was Mississippi, the poorest state in the nation. Many Mississippi counties had no registered black voters. Blacks lived under the constant threat of violence. Medgar Evers, a major civil rights leader in Mississippi, was murdered outside his home in 1963.

In 1964, SNCC and other civil rights organizations turned their attention to Mississippi. They planned to register Mississippi blacks to vote, organize a “Freedom Democratic Party” to challenge the whites-only Mississippi Democratic Party, establish freedom schools, and open community centers where blacks could obtain legal and medical assistance.

In June, only days after arriving in Mississippi, three Freedom Summer workers disappeared. They had been arrested for speeding and then released. On August 4, their bodies were found buried on a farm. The discovery directed the media’s attention to Mississippi, just two weeks before the Democratic National Convention was scheduled to begin.

A major dispute over the Mississippi delegation was brewing. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party had elected delegates to attend the convention. They demanded to be seated in place of the segregationist Mississippi Democrats. Ultimately, a compromise was struck, but the power struggle at the convention raised the issue of voting rights before the entire nation.

Selma

In December 1964, the SCLC started a voter registration campaign in Selma, Alabama. Although blacks outnumbered whites in Selma, few were registered to vote. For almost two months, King led marches to the courthouse to register voters. The sheriff responded by jailing the demonstrators, including King. The SCLC got a federal court order to stop the sheriff from interfering, but election officials still refused to register any blacks.

King decided to organize a march from Selma to Montgomery, the state capital. As marchers crossed the Edmund Pettis Bridge out of Selma, state police attacked. A national television audience watched police beat men, women, and children mercilessly. This brutal attack shocked the nation and galvanized support for the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which would put elections in Southern states under federal control.

Two weeks later, the march resumed under federal protection. More than 20,000 people celebrated when the marchers reached Montgomery, the site of the bus boycott ten years earlier.

The North

Civil rights demonstrations also took place in the North. Although legal segregation existed primarily in the South, Northern blacks endured discrimination in employment and housing. Most lived in poverty in urban ghettos. King led demonstrations in Chicago, Illinois, which the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights called the “most residentially segregated large city in the nation.” Complaints of police brutality mobilized many African-Americans and their supporters. They organized street rallies, picket lines, and other forms of nonviolent protests that had dominated the civil rights movement in the South. Like their counterparts in the South, many of these protesters encountered hostility among the white population.

Until the 1960s, the civil rights movement had been integrated and nonviolent. As the decade continued, however, the mood of confrontation intensified, reflecting the growing frustration of millions of African-Americans. Major riots broke out in American cities, including

Newark, New Jersey; Detroit, Michigan; and Los Angeles, California. Thousands of injuries and arrests intensified the social conflicts. The 1968 assassination of King sparked more violence, forcing the United States to confront its most troubling domestic crisis since the Civil War.

A “black power” movement emerged, challenging the philosophies of nonviolence and integration. Like the nonviolent movement, this development had powerful historical roots. It originated in the violent resistance against slavery and continued in the outlook of major black spokespersons throughout the twentieth century. In the late 1960s, SNCC and CORE adopted black power. Activists argued that legal gains alone without corresponding economic and political power would deny millions of African-Americans equal opportunity.

By the end of the decade, with the Vietnam War escalating, the entire nation was in turmoil. Antiwar protests crossed paths with unrest in the cities. Black power took many forms. The Nation of Islam preached black separatism. Members of the Black Panther Party set up breakfast programs for children and published a daily newspaper while they armed themselves for a revolution. The media shifted focus from nonviolent black leaders to the most radical black spokespersons. These new, more militant philosophies created considerable anxiety in mainstream America. By the mid-1970s, however, the Vietnam War had ended and the protests had subsided.

But the civil rights movement left a lasting legacy, forever changing the face of America. It pushed America toward its stated ideal of equality under the law. Blacks now vote freely throughout the country. The injustices and indignities of racially segregated restaurants, bathrooms, and theaters have become a regrettable relic of the past. The civil rights movement did not end America’s racial problems, but it showed that great changes are possible.

For discussion and writing

What do you think were the most effective strategies used during the civil rights movement? Why?

During the civil rights movement, King stressed the involvement of many groups and reached out to people of all colors in the struggle for equality. The black power movement focused on organizing blacks, sometimes to the exclusion of other groups. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each approach? Which do you think is more effective? Why?

For further reading

Bullard, Sara. *Free at Last: A History of the Civil Rights Movement and Those Who Died in the Struggle*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Dierenfield, Bruce J. *The Civil Rights Movement*. United Kingdom: Pearson Education Limited, 2008.

Appendix II: Conventional and unconventional political participation

In the United States, citizens are allowed to participate in the political system in many ways. Some ways are common, or conventional, and some are rare, or unconventional. Common examples of types of participation are detailed below. Read the summaries and complete the assignment at the end of the worksheet.

Conventional political participation: Voting

Voting is the most prominent form of political participation, a method by which people interact with their government. It is considered “conventional participation,” or a common and widely accepted way to interact with government. To participate in voting in the United States, citizens must be registered to vote. Requirements to register include being eighteen years old or above, a non-felon (in some states), and a legal resident of the state in which you wish to vote. At our nation’s founding, only white, property-owning men could vote in most states, but after reforms such as the Fifteenth Amendment (allowing black men to vote), the Nineteenth Amendment (allowing women to vote), and the Twenty-Sixth Amendment (allowing eighteen-year-olds to vote), the electorate, or the people who are able to vote, has immensely increased in size.

The United States is one of the few democracies that requires citizens to register themselves rather than having the government take responsibility for automatically registering them. This, along with other factors like voter apathy and lack of education about the issues, has led to generally low voter turnout in the United States compared to turnout in other nations. Steps have been taken to improve turnout, including same-day registration (in some states, you may register and vote on the same day), "motor voter" laws (allowing people to register to vote at the Department of Motor Vehicles where they get a driver’s license), and early/absentee voting (allowing people to vote before Election Day or to vote on a mail-in ballot).

Conventional political participation: Contacting public officials

Expressing opinions to leaders is one avenue of political participation. It’s becoming easier and easier to contact officials today because of the availability of information and the ease of contact through the internet. Many people still write and post letters to public officials through the Postal Service, and often, people call the offices of their congressmen as well.

Conventional political participation: Donating money, time, or running yourself

During campaigns, people work for political parties and their candidates, organize campaign events, and discuss issues with friends and family. New medias offer additional opportunities for people to engage in campaigns, as people can blog or participate in message boards related to an election. They can use social media sites like Facebook or Twitter to gain supporters, advertise campaign events, or encourage friends to donate money to a campaign. Another avenue for political participation is running for office yourself.

Conventional political participation: Joining a group or association

People sometimes choose to join civic groups like the Rotary Club or interest groups like the American Civil Liberties Union, National Rifle Association, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, or the Sierra Club, as well as business and professional associations and private and government labor unions. Joining these groups allows citizens to become active in their communities and educate themselves and others about issues that matter to the membership.

Unconventional political participation: Protesting

Political protest is another type of political participation. Protests are unconventional, and often unpopular and controversial, actions that are utilized to gain attention from the public, government, and media. Protests can take different forms, but a commonality is that these group actions have political objectives. Common examples of protests include opposing or supporting an elected official or advocating for or demonstrating against a proposed law. This tactic was used during the 1960s civil rights movement and has been employed in the past by women's movements, labor movements, environmental movements, and more recently by various groups such as the Women's March, Black Lives Matter, and the Dakota pipeline protesters. Social media may be making protest behavior easier today. Typical types of protests include marches, demonstrations, and carrying signs in public. Extreme forms of protest behavior include illegal acts that cause harm, like rioting. These types of behavior are typically counterproductive because they are so widely unpopular with the public and so often cause harm to people, property, and the integrity of the movement. States and the federal government allow but regulate protests to ensure they do not break laws or disrupt civil order.

Unconventional political participation: Civil disobedience

People sometimes choose to engage in nonviolent acts of civil disobedience where they deliberately break a law they consider to be unjust or prejudiced. This tactic was used to great success during the civil rights movement with sit-ins, marches, and other tactics.

Unconventional political participation: Boycotting

Boycotting may also be used by some groups to try to achieve a desired goal. Boycotting is an activity where people refuse to support or purchase goods or services from certain companies, groups, or people. In the last few years, boycotts of many businesses have been undertaken with varying degrees of success.

Assignment: What would you do?

Imagine yourself in each of the three scenarios below. Consider each of the two general categories and specific types of political participation under each category explained in the handout. On a separate sheet of paper, (1) choose one or more types of conventional and/or unconventional participation you would use to remedy the situation and list your specific types of participation choice(s); and (2) justify your choice(s) by explaining why you selected a given method of participation for the particular circumstance and why you think it would be effective at creating the desired change.

Scenario No. 1: Young voters

You are a college student considering a major in political science. One issue, above all others, has grabbed your interest: low voter turnout among young people. Your research indicates that eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds have lower turnout rates than any other age group. You know that politics turn off many young people, but you also know that political engagement through voting is one of the surest ways to have your preferences as an individual or as a group member represented in government. You decide to do something, but you don't know what, exactly. What would you do?

Scenario No. 2: Business owner vs. bureaucracy

You are a business owner who has enjoyed great success recently. However, the product that you manufacture has a competitor in another state that is rapidly growing and starting to expand into your region. To keep up your businesses growth and to beat your competitor, you decide you will open a new manufacturing plant. You immediately begin the building permit approval process with the state and local government, only to find that it's expected to take over three months to complete all the required paperwork. Your competitor's local and state government has a much more streamlined process and the competitor is able to open multiple plants in the time it takes you to receive your permit. Your business takes a hit. You're angry and you want to do something about the bureaucratic "red tape" so that this doesn't happen again. What would you do?

Scenario No. 3: Missing local government

You are the resident of a small town. You enjoy many aspects of living in a small town, but recently, you've noticed that the local government isn't very active. The mayor shows up to meetings, but, from what you can see, nothing else. City Council members don't attend parades, grant interviews, or go to local civic club meetings, and they don't make appearances in public for ribbon-cutting ceremonies, building dedications, or graduations at the local schools. People keep voting the same council and mayor into office, though. You're in a tough spot. You know many people seem to like the town government because they keep returning officials to office, but you also know that very few people vote in local elections. You believe that local government is important and that your local government isn't representing you well, but you know that being too "loud" about your concerns might offend some people from your town. What would you do?