

Celebrities' Influence on Politics

Do endorsements by celebrities impact how people think about politics and public policy issues? A study of hypothetical endorsements of public policy statements by Taylor Swift concluded that celebrity endorsements do matter. Activities ask you to analyze media endorsements by celebrities and then develop a request (or pitch) to convince a celebrity to endorse your candidate for President in the next election.

Celebrities have considerable influence in today's media-dominated environment. Celebrities set trends in fashion, food, language, and lifestyles, and people follow their leads. So do celebrities impact how people, young and old, think about politics, political figures, or public policy issues and debates?

Many youngsters, both pre-teens and teens, are drawn to the fame of celebrities. They too want to become famous when they grow up, defining fame as status and media recognition. One research study showed that kids ages 6 to 17 are more likely to want to become a YouTube star, blogger, or vlogger than a doctor, nurse, athlete, teacher, or lawyer ([Daily Mail, 2017](#)).

During elections, celebrities might endorse a political candidate or public policy issue in hopes that their fans will follow in their footsteps. Oprah Winfrey's endorsement of Barack Obama for President in 2008 has been cited as the most impactful celebrity endorsement in history ([U.S. Election: What Impact Do Celebrity Endorsements Really Have? The Conversation](#), October 4, 2016).



[Watch on YouTube](#)

Do celebrity endorsements make a difference on people's thinking about politics and public policy issues?

One study sought to examine the **potential impacts of a hypothetical Taylor Swift public policy endorsement** on people's thinking about that issue ([Jackson, Nownes, & Norton, 2023](#)). Taylor Swift is one of the world's most successful musicians and public personalities – her 2023 Eras Tour generated some 2.2 billion in North American ticket sales along with another 4.6 billion in related consumer spending on clothing, hotels, and more.

Swift has endorsed progressive political positions in the past. In 2018, some 65,000 people registered to vote in Tennessee after she endorsed two Democratic Congressional candidates - one won and the other lost. She has donated thousands of books to libraries in her home state of Pennsylvania, asserted her support for feminism in public statements and song lyrics, and endorsed Joe Biden for President in 2020.

In the study, respondents asked whether they agreed with statements about hotly debated public policy issues including who should decide what books should be in school libraries. Responses to the statement, Taylor Swift believes "parents and teachers should have an equal say in deciding what books to include in school libraries" showed decreased disagreement and increased agreement, leading the researchers to conclude that "celebrities can influence how people think about political issues" ([Jackson, Nownes, & Norton, 2023, pp. 9-10](#)).

Can you think of examples of celebrities who have shared their political views or endorsements on social media? In what ways did they seek to influence people's political thinking?

How would you craft a celebrity endorsement for an issue or candidate you support?

Activity 1: Analyze Celebrity Endorsements in the Media

- Find an example of a celebrity endorsement of a political figure or a political issue.
 - The example can be any piece of media content (e.g., website, clip from a TV program or movie, a trailer from a video game, social media post, YouTube video, news article).
- Then, consider the following questions:
 - How did the celebrity use persuasive language and/or visuals to communicate their message?
 - How credible, accurate, reliable, and trustworthy was the celebrity's endorsement? How did you determine this?
 - What influence, if any, will the endorsement have on voters? Why do you think this?
 - Do you think the endorsement will encourage young people to think and/or act differently? Why or why not?
- Share the celebrity endorsement with peers, family members, and community members and survey them about their initial thoughts and reactions. Did this endorsement influence their thinking about the political candidate/issue in any way?
- **Present your findings** from your own analysis and your survey of others in the form of a video, [podcast](#), or blog post.

Activity 2: Request a Celebrity Endorsement for a Presidential Candidate

- Imagine that you are the campaign manager for a Presidential candidate for the next election and you have been tasked with requesting celebrity endorsements for the candidate.
 - Which celebrities would you ask?
 - What message would you want the celebrities to promote?
 - What would you want the celebrities to say in their endorsement?
 - How would you want the endorsement to happen (e.g., in a video game dance? A TikTok video? A news article? A magazine cover?)?
- **Write a letter or social media post** in which you ask a celebrity to endorse a presidential candidate for the next election.

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[Request a Celebrity Endorsement for a Presidential Candidate](#) by Anetia Rom

Learning Resources

- [iHeartRadio's podcast "Why I'm Voting"](#)
- [The Taylor Swift effect: Nashville sounds off on singer's political endorsements](#)
- [From Sinatra to Taylor Swift: 100 Years of Celebrity Political Endorsements](#), *CBC Radio* (October 12, 2018)
- ["Taylor Swift and Influence: Sorting Out the Effects of Celebrity and Other Political Endorsements."](#) David Jackson, Anthony Nownes, & Thomas Norton, *Advance*, 2023.

Connecting to the Building Democracy for All eBook

[Building Democracy for All: How Can Young People Become Civic Leaders in Schools and Society?](#)

Connecting to the Standards

- [Massachusetts Civics & Government Standards](#)
 - Apply the knowledge of the meaning of leadership and the qualities of good leaders to evaluate political leaders in the community, state, and national levels. (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Studies) [8.T4.7]
- [ISTE Standards](#)
 - Knowledge Constructor
 - 3a: Students plan and employ effective research strategies to locate information and other resources for their intellectual or creative pursuits.
 - 3b: Students evaluate the accuracy, perspective, credibility and relevance of information, media, data or other resources.
 - 3d: Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.
 - Creative Communicator
 - 6a: Students choose the appropriate platforms and tools for meeting the desired objectives of their creation or communication.
 - 6b: Students create original works or responsibly repurpose or remix digital resources into new creations.
 - 6d: Students publish or present content that customizes the message and medium for the intended audiences.
- [DLCS Standards](#)
 - Digital Tools (DTC.a)
 - Collaboration and Communication (DTC.b)
 - Research (DTC.c)
- [English Language Arts > History/Social Studies Common Core Standards](#)
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.8
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8



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