AP EDITION · DBQ + LEQ · CLASSROOM

1924

Calvin Coolidge vs John W. Davis

A 105-minute lesson on the 1924 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, DBQ pairing, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Roaring Twenties	ELECTORAL VOTES 531 total
WINNER Calvin Coolidge (Republican) · 382 EV	RUNNER-UP John W. Davis (Democratic) · 136 EV
KEY ISSUE Teapot Dome scandal fallout; Ku Klux Klan influence; prosperity and Coolidge conservatism	TURNOUT 48.9%

CONTENTS

1. Cover
2. Lesson plan (105 min) + framework alignment
3. Background: vocabulary + primary source A
4. Primary source B (DBQ pair)
5. Worksheet (8 questions)
6. Long-essay-question + rubric
7. Answer key + discussion

1924: Calvin Coolidge vs John W. Davis

AP framework alignment

AP US History · Period varies by cycle · Reasoning skills: contextualization, comparison, causation, sourcing. CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2 (central ideas), RH.11-12.6 (point of view), RH.11-12.7 (multiple sources). NCSS · D2.His.5.9-12, D2.His.14.9-12, D2.His.16.9-12.

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	Identify two structural conditions in 1923-24 America that would produce a successful Republican re-election after a major Cabinet scandal. For each, identify the specific 1923-24 development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	The 1924 election was the 35th U.S. presidential election. It produced Calvin Coolidge's 382-136-13 electoral-vote victory over Democrat John W. Davis and Progressive Robert M. La Follette - Coolidge's first election as president in his own right. Harding died August 2, 1923. Coolidge became 30th president the next day. The Teapot Dome Scandal emerged through Senate investigations in late 1923. Coolidge handled the scandals with cool competence. The Republican National Convention met in Cleveland on June 10-12, 1924 and renominated Coolidge. Charles G. Dawes was VP. The Democratic National Convention met at Madison Square Garden on June 24 - July 9, 1924 - sixteen days and 103 ballots. The convention compromised on John W. Davis on the 103rd ballot. The Progressive Party nominated Senator Robert M. La Follette. Coolidge won 382 electoral votes; Davis 136; La Follette 13. The popular vote: Coolidge 15,723,789 (54.0%); Davis 8,386,242 (28.8%); La Follette 4,831,706 (16.6%). La Follette's 16.6% was the second-highest third-party percentage of the 20th century after Roosevelt 1912. Coolidge was inaugurated to a second term on March 4, 1925. He governed as a conservative Republican. On August 2, 1927, Coolidge issued his statement: "I do not choose to run for President in 1928." Republican nominee in 1928: Herbert Hoover. La Follette died June 18, 1925. The Progressive Party dissolved. The 1920s KKK revival was structurally significant. By 1924, the KKK had approximately 3-5 million members - one of the largest membership organizations in American history. The KKK declined rapidly after 1925.

The 1924 election's structural significance was threefold. First, it confirmed the 1920s Republican prosperity decade. Second, the La Follette Progressive Party run was the final major Progressive Era third-party effort. Third, the Democratic Party's 103-ballot convention demonstrated the structural divisions that would prevent Democratic victories until 1932.

The Coolidge presidency would be remembered for the "Coolidge Prosperity" - GDP growth 5%+ per year, unemployment below 4%, federal budget surpluses every year. But the prosperity was built on structural weaknesses: speculative stock market expansion, unsustainable consumer debt, agricultural depression in farm states, weak banking regulation. The 1929 Hoover succession and October 1929 stock market crash would expose these weaknesses.

The 1932 FDR realignment can be analyzed retrospectively as the structural correction to the 1920s Republican governance. Many specific 1920s policies would be reversed: high tariffs (1934 Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act); restrictive immigration (1965 Immigration Act); banking deregulation (1933 Glass-Steagall); weak labor regulation (1935 Wagner Act); fiscal austerity (1935-37 deficit spending). The 1924 election can be analyzed as the peak of 1920s Republican governance before the 1929-32 collapse.

The 1924 election's comparison to 1912 is instructive. Both elections featured a major third-party Progressive challenge (Roosevelt 1912; La Follette 1924). Both elections produced Republican-dominated results (combined Republican + Progressive vote in 1912: 50.6%; in 1924: 70.6%). But the 1912 result produced a Democratic victory (Wilson 41.8% won 435 EV); the 1924 result produced a Republican victory (Coolidge 54.0% won 382 EV). The structural difference: in 1912, the Republican Party itself had split, creating a Democratic opportunity; in 1924, the Progressive challenge was from outside the Republican Party, while the Democratic Party itself was internally divided. The lesson: third-party challenges affect the major-party competition primarily by which major party is internally divided. The 1924 Democratic divisions (Catholic-Protestant, urban-rural, KKK-influenced) ensured that La Follette's Progressive challenge would damage Davis rather than Coolidge.

20 min	**Source A**	Read aloud once; students annotate individually for tone, evidence, and audience.
20 min	**Source B**	Compare/contrast against Source A. Pair-share on the DBQ comparison question.
20 min	**Worksheet**	Eight questions: 5 short-answer, 2 stimulus-based MCQ, 1 long-essay framing.
20 min	**LEQ planning**	Students sketch a thesis + outline for the LEQ comparison prompt. Submit for next-day full essay.
5 min	**Closure**	Exit ticket: one sentence summarizing the comparison.

Background

Before the worksheet, review the key terms below and then read the primary source carefully. The two source-analysis questions on the worksheet (questions 6 and 7) ask you to quote from the excerpt.

Key terms

Calvin Coolidge
The 30th U.S. president (1923-29). Won 1924 with 382-136-13 EV and 54.0% popular vote.

Robert M. La Follette
Senator from Wisconsin and 1924 Progressive Party presidential candidate. Won 16.6% and 13 EV.

1920s KKK revival
By 1924, the KKK had approximately 3-5 million members.

Coolidge Prosperity
The 1923-29 economic boom. GDP growth 5%+ per year; built on structural weaknesses that produced the 1929 crash.

"I do not choose to run"
Coolidge's August 2, 1927 statement declining to seek a third term despite his enormous popularity. Structurally unusual. Republican nominee in 1928 became Herbert Hoover.

Silent Cal
Coolidge's nickname for his quietness.

1924 Democratic Convention
The 16-day, 103-ballot convention bitterly divided between factions. Compromised on John W. Davis.

Johnson-Reed Immigration Act (1924)
The May 1924 federal law establishing national-origin quotas restricting immigration.

Dawes Plan
The August 1924 international agreement to restructure Germany's WWI reparations payments. Created by Charles G. Dawes (1924 VP nominee, later Coolidge's VP 1925-29). Awarded 1925 Nobel Peace Prize.

The Business of America is Business (address to ASNE)

CALVIN COOLIDGE, JANUARY 17, 1925

Coolidge delivered this speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Washington, DC on January 17, 1925. The speech articulated the structural Republican economic philosophy of the 1920s.

> *"After all, the chief business of the American people is business. They are profoundly concerned with producing, buying, selling, investing and prospering in the world. I am strongly of the opinion that the great majority of people will always find these the moving impulses of our life. We make no concealment of the fact that we want wealth, but there are many other things that we want very much more. We want peace and honor, and that charity which is so strong an element of all civilization. The chief ideal of the American people is idealism. I cannot repeat too often that America is a nation of idealists. That is the only motive to which they ever give any strong and lasting reaction. No newspaper can be a success which fails to appeal to that element of our national life."*

Coolidge, "Address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors" (Washington, DC, January 17, 1925). Public domain.

Document-based question

Source A is on the Background page; Source B is below. Use both as evidence for the worksheet's source-analysis questions and the LEQ.

SOURCE A

The Business of America is Business (address to ASNE)

CALVIN COOLIDGE, JANUARY 17, 1925

"After all, the chief business of the American people is business. They are profoundly concerned with producing, buying, selling, investing and prospering in the world. I am strongly of the opinion that the great majority of people will always find these the moving impulses of our life. We make no concealment of the fact that we want wealth, but there are many other things that we want very much more. We want peace and honor, and that charity which is so strong an element of all civilization. The chief ideal of the American people is idealism. I cannot repeat too often that America is a nation of idealists. That is the only motive to which they ever give any strong and lasting reaction. No newspaper can be a success which fails to appeal to that element of our national life."

Coolidge, "Address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors" (Washington, DC, January 17, 1925). Public domain.

SOURCE B

Progressive Party Platform (1924)

PROGRESSIVE PARTY NATIONAL CONVENTION, JULY 4, 1924

"The great issue before the American people today is the control of government and industry by private monopoly. For a generation the people have struggled patiently, in the face of repeated betrayals by successive administrations, to free themselves from this intolerable power which has been undermining representative government. Through control of government, monopoly has steadily extended its absolute dominion to every basic industry. In violation of law, monopoly has crushed competition, stifled private initiative and independent enterprise, and has fastened upon the everyday life of the nation a yoke of privilege and extortion. We pledge ourselves to use the full powers of government to crush the private monopoly system and to protect agriculture, labor, and the consumer from extortion. We favor stringent enforcement of the Sherman Anti-trust Law and a thoroughgoing reorganization of the Federal Trade Commission so that it may protect the public against unfair competition."

Progressive Party, "1924 Platform" (Cleveland, Ohio, July 4, 1924). Public domain.

The 1924 Election

Answer the eight questions below. Source A is on the Background page; Source B is on the DBQ Pair page.

QUESTION 1 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source A (Coolidge ASNE) articulating the 1920s Republican economic philosophy. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source B (1924 Progressive Platform) articulating the structural Progressive critique. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Both sources articulate political philosophy but from opposite positions. Identify the specific political function each source performs.

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

The 1924 Progressive Party Platform demanded federal regulation of utilities, federal labor regulation, federal banking regulation, and federal old-age insurance. Identify the specific FDR-era federal laws that operationalized each demand.

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER
How did the 1924 Democratic Convention's 103-ballot disaster contribute to Coolidge's landslide victory?

QUESTION 6 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE
How many electoral votes did Coolidge win in 1924?

( ) A. 292
( ) B. 356
( ) C. 382
( ) D. 404

QUESTION 7 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE
What percentage of the popular vote did La Follette receive in 1924?

( ) A. 8.5%
( ) B. 12.2%
( ) C. 16.6%
( ) D. 21.4%

QUESTION 8 · SHORT-ANSWER
Sketch your thesis sentence for the LEQ (next page). State your position: was the 1924 election about Republican-alignment, Democratic-division, or Progressive-finality? Identify one piece of evidence from each source you will use.

Long-essay-question

LEQ PROMPT

Coolidge's 1925 ASNE address (Source A) articulated the structural Republican economic philosophy of the 1920s - "the chief business of the American people is business." The 1924 Progressive Party Platform (Source B) articulated the structural Progressive critique - "the great issue before the American people today is the control of government and industry by private monopoly." Using BOTH sources and your knowledge of the 1920-1933 period, evaluate the extent to which the 1924 election's structural significance was (a) the confirmation of the 1920s Republican prosperity decade and the structural Republican alignment under Coolidge, (b) the demonstration that the Democratic Party was internally divided beyond the point of effective competition, or (c) the final major Progressive Era third-party effort before the 1932 New Deal absorbed Progressive demands into the Democratic Party. Defend a clear thesis.

GRADING RUBRIC

Thesis (1 pt): must take a defensible position on the Republican-alignment-vs-Democratic-division-vs-Progressive-finality axis. Contextualization (1 pt): mention at least two of the Teapot Dome Scandal, the 1924 Democratic Convention KKK debate, the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act, the Dawes Plan, the 1927 "I do not choose to run" statement, the 1929 stock market crash, the 1932 FDR election. Evidence (2 pts): must quote at least one phrase from each source. Analysis (1 pt): must explicitly evaluate the extent rather than treating the three framings as equivalent. Total 5 points.

Answer key

QUESTION 1

Accept any of: "the chief business of the American people is business", "they are profoundly concerned with producing, buying, selling, investing and prospering in the world", "we make no concealment of the fact that we want wealth". The "chief business of the American people is business" phrase is the most distinctive.

Coolidge's framing established the 1920s Republican philosophy.

QUESTION 2

Accept any of: "the great issue before the American people today is the control of government and industry by private monopoly", "monopoly has steadily extended its absolute dominion to every basic industry", "we pledge ourselves to use the full powers of government to crush the private monopoly system and to protect agriculture, labor, and the consumer from extortion". The "control of government and industry by private monopoly" phrase is the most distinctive Progressive critique.

The Progressive Platform articulated the structural critique.

QUESTION 3

Source A is Coolidge's 1925 presidential commitment to the conservative-Republican framework - articulated three months before his second-term inauguration. The function is to commit the Republican administration to pro-business, fiscal-conservative governance and to frame the 1920s prosperity as the structural foundation of American well-being. Source B is the Progressive Party's 1924 platform - articulated as the foundation of the La Follette campaign. The function is to articulate the structural Progressive critique of 1920s Republican governance: behind apparent prosperity was concentration of wealth and political power. Together, the sources reveal the structural ideological conflict of 1924: Coolidge's business-as-American-life framework vs the Progressive monopoly-control critique. The 1924 election decided the conflict in Coolidge's favor by 4.8M votes to La Follette's 4.8M - but the Progressive critique would be operationalized through the 1932 New Deal.

AP students should be able to articulate the ideological conflict.

QUESTION 4

Four FDR-era federal laws operationalized 1924 Progressive Platform demands: (1) Federal banking regulation - Banking Act of 1933 (Glass-Steagall Act): separated commercial banking from investment banking, created the FDIC (federal deposit insurance), regulated bank holding companies. (2) Federal labor regulation - National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (Wagner Act): guaranteed workers' right to organize unions, established the National Labor Relations Board, prohibited unfair labor practices. (3) Federal old-age insurance - Social Security Act of 1935: established federal old-age pensions, unemployment insurance, and aid to dependent children. (4) Federal regulation of utilities - Public Utility Holding Company Act of 1935 (PUHCA): regulated utility holding companies; Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) Act of 1933 (federal public power); Rural Electrification Act of 1936. Additional 1924 Progressive demands operationalized: federal agricultural credit (Federal Farm Loan Act 1916 already, plus Agricultural Adjustment Act 1933, Commodity Credit Corporation 1933); federal regulation of railroads (already in place); restriction of judicial review (partially through FDR's 1937 court-packing controversy and the structural shift in Supreme Court jurisprudence). The cumulative effect: the 1924 Progressive Platform's structural framework would be largely operationalized within 11-12 years of La Follette's defeat.

AP students should be able to articulate the New Deal operationalizations.

QUESTION 5

The 1924 Democratic Convention's 103-ballot disaster contributed to Coolidge's landslide victory in three specific ways: (1) The convention's 16-day duration and 103 ballots was a public spectacle of Democratic divisions - displayed to the country through the new medium of radio broadcasting. The convention occupied prime media attention for over two weeks. (2) The Democratic Party emerged from the convention divided rather than united. The Smith-McAdoo factionalism (Northern urban Catholics vs Southern rural Protestants) was the structural foundation of Democratic weakness; the KKK influence on the McAdoo faction (and the 542.7 to 543.85 vote against explicitly condemning the KKK) was particularly damaging. (3) The compromise nomination of conservative Wall Street lawyer John W. Davis alienated both factions. Progressive Democrats abandoned Davis for La Follette; conservative Southern Democrats viewed Davis as too closely tied to Northern business interests. Davis's 28.8% popular vote was the lowest for a major-party candidate since the Republican Frémont in 1856. The structural lesson: a major party's internal divisions can produce a third-party challenge that draws votes from one party while leaving the other party's coalition intact.

AP students should be able to articulate the convention's impact.

QUESTION 6

382. Coolidge 382; Davis 136; La Follette 13.

AP students should know the 382-EV figure.

QUESTION 7

16.6%. La Follette won 4,831,706 popular votes (16.6%) and 13 electoral votes (Wisconsin) - the second-highest third-party percentage of the 20th century after Roosevelt 1912 (27.4%).

AP students should know the 16.6% La Follette figure.

QUESTION 8

Open-ended thesis sketch. Acceptable answers should: (1) state a clear position on the Republican-alignment-vs-Democratic-division-vs-Progressive-finality axis, (2) avoid treating them as equivalent, (3) signal at least one piece of evidence from each source.

The thesis sketch is preparatory.