3-5 EDITION · CLASSROOM

1928

Herbert Hoover vs Al Smith

A 35-minute lesson on the 1928 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Roaring Twenties	ELECTORAL VOTES 531 total
WINNER Herbert Hoover (Republican) · 444 EV	RUNNER-UP Al Smith (Democratic) · 87 EV
KEY ISSUE Prosperity; Prohibition; religious prejudice against the first Catholic major-party nominee	TURNOUT 56.9%

CONTENTS

1. Cover
2. Lesson plan (35 min)
3. Reading + key words
4. Worksheet (4 questions)
5. Answer key

1928: Herbert Hoover vs Al Smith

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	When religious prejudice major factor in election, what does that reveal about structural state of country's political culture?
15 min	**Reading**	1928 election was 36th U.S. presidential election. Produced Hoover's 444-87 EV victory over Democrat Al Smith - largest electoral landslide since Harding's 1920. Hoover's 58.2% popular vote second-highest since 1900. Election structurally significant: (1) Al Smith first Catholic ever nominated by major party - religion major factor in loss; (2) Last election under 1920s prosperity conditions - within 7 months October 1929 stock market crash began Great Depression. Coolidge August 1927 "I do not choose to run" opened Republican nomination. 1923-28 "Coolidge Prosperity" remarkable: GDP grew ~5%/year; unemployment <4%; federal budget surpluses every year; industrial production expanded rapidly; consumer credit and automobile ownership boomed; stock market unprecedented heights (Dow ~tripled 1924-29). Republican National Convention Kansas City June 12-15, 1928 nominated Hoover first ballot. Hoover 53, born 1874 West Branch Iowa - first U.S. president born west of Mississippi. Orphaned age 9, raised by Oregon relatives. Stanford geology grad 1895. Mining career made him millionaire by 40 - Australia, China (survived 1900 Boxer Rebellion siege of Tientsin), Russia, Burma. During WWI organized Commission for Relief in Belgium (CRB) - delivered ~5M tons food, saved estimated 9M people from starvation. Time magazine: "Great Humanitarian." Post-WWI directed American Relief Administration (ARA) - food aid to 22 European countries + Russia (1921-22 famine). Secretary of Commerce 1921-28 - transformed small Cabinet dept into powerful federal regulator. Senator Charles Curtis of Kansas - Kaw Native American heritage (first Native American on major-party ticket) - VP. Democratic National Convention Houston June 26-28, 1928 nominated NY Gov Al Smith first ballot. Smith 54, born September 30, 1873 Lower East Side Manhattan. Irish Catholic - first Catholic ever nominated by major party. No formal education beyond elementary school. Rose through NYC Tammany Hall machine. NY State Assemblyman 1904-15, Sheriff NY County 1916, four-term Governor of New York 1919-20, 1923-28. NY governorship Progressive reform record. Joseph T. Robinson of Arkansas (Protestant Southern Democrat) VP to balance ticket religiously/regionally. Smith candidacy faced three structural disadvantages: (1) Catholic religion. Anti-Catholic prejudice widespread 1920s. Many Protestants believed Catholic pres-

ident would take orders from Pope. KKK (3-5M members) actively campaigned against Smith. Anti-Catholic literature flooded country. Protestant ministers openly campaigned against Smith from pulpits. (2) Support for ending Prohibition. 18A ratified January 1919, Volstead Act began enforcement January 1920. Smith openly "wet" - supporting Prohibition repeal. Dry Protestant South deeply opposed. (3) Urban Tammany Hall background. Smith first U.S. presidential candidate from urban immigrant Catholic working-class - departure from rural Protestant tradition.

Campaign structurally bitter. Republican-affiliated literature suggested Smith would build "Pope tunnel" between Vatican and Washington. Smith attacked by Klan-affiliated groups and Methodist Episcopal Church leadership. Smith response inadequate: addressed religion question through formal statements but didn't actively counter prejudice.

1920s prosperity message dominated substantive campaign. Hoover emphasized continued prosperity, federal-government competence, personal record as "Great Humanitarian." Republican slogan "A chicken in every pot and a car in every garage." Republican fundraising ~$6.3M; Democratic ~$5.3M.

Hoover won 444 EV; Smith 87. Hoover carried 40 states; Smith 8. Popular vote: Hoover 21,427,123 (58.2%); Smith 15,015,464 (40.8%); Thomas (Socialist) 267,478 (0.7%); Foster (Workers/Communist) 48,170 (0.1%). Hoover-Smith popular margin: 6,411,659.

Geographic pattern structurally significant. Hoover broke Solid South first time since Reconstruction. Carried Tennessee, North Carolina, Virginia, Florida, Texas - all former Confederate states. Southern vote was structural rejection of Catholic Smith rather than support for Republican economic policies. Smith's 8 states: Massachusetts, Rhode Island (Catholic-heavy Northeastern), plus Deep South (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina). Smith lost home state NY. 1928 map structurally anomalous - only U.S. presidential election in which Catholic religion was decisively significant.

1928 election's structural significance paradoxical. Smith's loss demonstrated depth of 1920s anti-Catholic prejudice. But Smith's coalition - urban Catholic immigrants, Northeastern industrial workers, structural foundation of Democratic urban politics - became foundation of FDR's 1932 New Deal coalition. Smith's 1928 candidacy structurally prepared urban Democratic infrastructure that delivered FDR's 1932 victory.

Hoover inaugurated March 4, 1929. Governed initially as conservative Republican: tax reduction, federal budget surpluses, pro-business policies, immigration restriction continuation, tariff increases (June 1930 Smoot-Hawley Tariff raising rates to 60%).

		October 24-29, 1929 stock market crash transformed political conditions. Crash wiped out ~$30B in stock value. By 1933: unemployment 25% (vs 4% in 1929); industrial production -46%; ~9,000 banks failed; agricultural prices collapsed. Hoover response structurally inadequate. Believed in "rugged individualism" and voluntary cooperation rather than federal intervention. Resisted federal direct relief, preferring loans and indirect aid. 1930 Smoot-Hawley Tariff worsened Depression by collapsing international trade. 1932 Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) provided loans to banks/businesses but not direct aid to unemployed. 1932 Bonus Army veterans' protest forcibly dispersed by U.S. Army troops led by Douglas MacArthur (July 1932) - producing public revulsion. By 1932, Hoover politically destroyed. 1932 election (FDR 472-59 EV over Hoover) structural realignment ending 1896-1932 Republican alignment and inaugurating 1932-68 New Deal coalition. 1928 election analyzed retrospectively as final triumph of 1920s Republican alignment before structural collapse. Al Smith political career effectively ended with 1928. Did not seek 1932 Democratic nomination (FDR was his protégé in NY politics; complicated relationship). Became increasingly conservative through 1930s - opposing New Deal as too radical. Helped found American Liberty League 1934 - anti-New Deal organization. Endorsed Republican Alf Landon 1936 and Republican Wendell Willkie 1940. Died October 4, 1944. 1928 election historical lesson: religious prejudice was decisive U.S. political force as late as 1928. 1960 election of Catholic John F. Kennedy (first Catholic actually elected, 32 years after Smith's nomination) marked structural defeat of organized anti-Catholic political prejudice.
10 min	**Worksheet**	Four questions: one matches key words, three are short answers.
5 min	**Closure**	One sentence: what surprised you about this election?

The 1928 Election

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Key words

Herbert Hoover	31st U.S. president (1929-33). Coolidge's Secretary of Commerce. Stanford-educated mining engineer who organized WWI food relief - "Great Humanitarian." Won 1928 with 444-87 EV. Faced October 1929 crash.
Al Smith	NY Governor and 1928 Democratic nominee. First Catholic ever nominated for president by major party. Lost 444-87 EV to Hoover. Lost home state NY. Coalition became foundation of FDR's 1932 New Deal coalition.

Anti-Catholic prejudice	Significant 1920s American political force. Many Protestants believed Catholic president would take orders from Pope. KKK (3-5M members) actively campaigned against Smith. Several Southern states voted Republican for first time since Reconstruction.
"A chicken in every pot"	Hoover's 1928 slogan: "A chicken in every pot and a car in every garage." 1920s prosperity message. Tragically ironic - 7 months after inauguration October 1929 crash began Great Depression.
Breaking the Solid South	1928 election was first since Reconstruction in which Republicans carried significant former Confederate states. Hoover won Tennessee, North Carolina, Virginia, Florida, Texas. Southern vote structural rejection of Catholic Smith.

Four questions

QUESTION 1 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many electoral votes did Herbert Hoover win in 1928?

( ) A. 292
( ) B. 356
( ) C. 404
( ) D. 444

QUESTION 2 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many former Confederate states did Hoover carry in 1928?

( ) A. 0
( ) B. 3
( ) C. 5
( ) D. 8

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Why was Al Smith's 1928 candidacy historically significant?

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

How did 1928 election's structural significance change with October 1929 stock market crash?

Answer key

QUESTION 1

444. Hoover 444; Smith 87. Hoover's 357-EV margin largest since Harding's 1920.

AP students should know 444-87 split.

QUESTION 2

5. Hoover carried Tennessee, North Carolina, Virginia, Florida, Texas - all former Confederate states. Southern vote structural rejection of Catholic Smith rather than support for Republican economic policies.

AP students should know 5 Confederate states broken from Solid South.

QUESTION 3

Al Smith first Catholic ever nominated for president by major political party in U.S. history. Irish Catholic from Lower East Side Manhattan. Catholic faith major factor in 1928 loss. Three structural reasons for anti-Catholic prejudice: (1) Protestant Americans believed Catholic president would take orders from Pope - structural Protestant anti-Catholic argument since Reformation. (2) KKK (3-5M 1920s members) actively campaigned against Smith. (3) Anti-Catholic literature flooded country during campaign. Protestant ministers openly campaigned against Smith from pulpits. 1928 anti-Catholic prejudice not overcome until JFK's 1960 victory - 32 years after Smith's nomination.

AP students should articulate Smith candidacy.

QUESTION 4

1928 election's structural significance transformed by October 24-29, 1929 stock market crash that began Great Depression. Before crash, 1928 election appeared to be structural confirmation of 1920s Republican prosperity decade. After crash, 1928 election analyzed retrospectively as final triumph of 1896-1932 Republican alignment before structural collapse. Specific consequences: (1) Hoover blamed for Depression even though structurally caused by 1920s economic weaknesses. (2) 1932 election (FDR 472-59 EV over Hoover) was structural realignment ending 1896-1932 Republican alignment. (3) Many of Smith's 1928 supporters (urban Catholic immigrants, Northeastern industrial workers) became foundation of FDR's 1932 New Deal coalition. (4) "A chicken in every pot" prosperity message proved tragically ironic - worst U.S. economic catastrophe in history began 7 months after Hoover's inauguration.

AP students should articulate retrospective significance.