1928

Herbert Hoover vs Al Smith

A 75-minute lesson on the 1928 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, background reading with primary source, 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 + overview
2. Lesson plan (instructor, 75 min)
3. Background: key terms + primary source
4. Student worksheet (7 questions)
5. Answer key + discussion prompts

1928: Herbert Hoover vs Al Smith

Standards alignment

NCSS · D2.His.4.9-12 (chronological reasoning) · D2.His.14.9-12 (causation in U.S. history). CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2 (key ideas/details in primary sources).

Materials

One copy of the student worksheet per student. Optional: the 1928 map at theamericanvote.com/elections/-1928 projected, or printed as a handout.

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	Identify two structural conditions in 1928 America that would produce Republican landslide. For each identify specific 1920s development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	1928 election was 36th U.S. presidential election. Produced Hoover's 444-87 EV victory over Democrat Al Smith. Hoover's 58.2% popular vote second-highest since 1900. Election structurally significant: (1) Al Smith first Catholic ever nominated by major political 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. 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. Stanford grad 1895. Mining made him millionaire by 40. WWI organized Commission for Relief in Belgium - delivered 5M tons food saving 9M people. Post-WWI American Relief Administration. Secretary of Commerce 1921-28. Charles Curtis of Kansas VP (first Native American on major-party ticket). Democratic National Convention Houston June 26-28, 1928 nominated 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. Rose through Tammany Hall. Four-term NY Governor. Joseph T. Robinson of Arkansas VP (Protestant Southern Democrat to balance religiously and regionally). Smith candidacy faced three structural disadvantages: Catholic religion, support for ending Prohibition, urban Tammany Hall background. Campaign structurally bitter. Anti-Catholic prejudice overt. Republican-affiliated lit-

erature suggested Smith would build "Pope tunnel." Methodist Episcopal Church Bishop James Cannon Jr. of Virginia led anti-Catholic religious mobilization. Hoover personally repudiated anti-Catholic attacks but broader Republican coalition exploited them.

1920s prosperity message dominated substantive campaign. "A chicken in every pot and a car in every garage" Republican slogan. 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%).

Geographic pattern structurally significant. Hoover broke Solid South first time since Reconstruction - carrying Tennessee, NC, Virginia, Florida, Texas. Smith's 8 states: Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina. Smith lost home state NY.

Hoover inaugurated March 4, 1929. Initially governed as conservative Republican: tax reduction; federal budget surpluses; pro-business policies; immigration restriction continuation; tariff increases (Smoot-Hawley June 1930 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.

Hoover response structurally inadequate. Believed in "rugged individualism." Specific responses: 1930 Smoot-Hawley Tariff worsened Depression by collapsing international trade; 1932 Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) provided loans not direct aid; 1932 Revenue Act raised income tax rates (structurally contractionary); July 1932 Bonus Army veterans' protest forcibly dispersed by U.S. Army troops led by MacArthur (killing two veterans).

By 1932 Hoover politically destroyed. 1932 election (FDR 472-59 EV over Hoover, 57.4% to 39.7% popular vote) structural realignment ending 1896-1932 Republican alignment and inaugurating 1932-68 New Deal coalition.

1928 election can be analyzed retrospectively as final triumph of 1920s Republican alignment before structural collapse. Smith's coalition (urban Catholic immigrants, Northeastern industrial workers) became foundation of FDR's 1932 New Deal coalition.

Al Smith political career effectively ended with 1928. Became increasingly conservative through 1930s - opposing New Deal. Helped found American Liberty League 1934. Endorsed Republican Landon 1936 and Republican Willkie 1940. Died

		October 4, 1944. 1960 election of Catholic JFK marked structural defeat of organized anti-Catholic political prejudice. 1928 election's structural lessons: (1) Religious prejudice was decisive political force as late as 1928. (2) Solid South's loyalty to Democratic candidates structurally tied to Protestant Southern culture; Catholic candidate could break it. (3) 1920s Republican alignment structurally vulnerable to economic crisis - 1929-32 collapse demonstrated this within four years of 1928 landslide. (4) Smith's 1928 urban Catholic immigrant coalition became foundation of FDR's 1932 New Deal coalition - demonstrating that even losing campaigns can structurally prepare future winning coalitions. Then review the Key Terms on the background page so students share vocabulary before the primary-source work.
15 min	**Primary source**	Read the excerpt aloud once. Students annotate individually (3 min), then pair-share on worksheet questions 6 and 7 (5 min).
15 min	**Discussion**	Small groups (3–4). Pick one of the three prompts at the back of this packet (or assign one). Each group reports back two sentences.
20 min	**Assessment**	Student worksheet. Seven questions, mixed format (5 about the reading, 2 about the primary source). Answer key in the instructor section at the back.
5 min	**Closure**	One-sentence exit ticket — see Closure section below.

Closure

One-sentence exit ticket: "What is one thing the 1928 election tells you about the Roaring Twenties era that the textbook didn't?"

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

Herbert Hoover
31st U.S. president (1929-33). Coolidge's Secretary of Commerce. Stanford engineer who organized WWI food relief - "Great Humanitarian." Won 1928 444-87 EV.

Anti-Catholic prejudice
Significant 1920s political force. KKK (3-5M members) actively campaigned against Smith.

Breaking the Solid South
1928 election was first since Reconstruction in which Republicans carried significant former Confederate states.

Bonus Army
Summer 1932 protest by ~17,000 WWI veterans in DC. July 28, 1932 dispersed by U.S. Army troops led by MacArthur on Hoover's orders. Two veterans killed.

Al Smith
NY Governor and 1928 Democratic nominee. First Catholic ever nominated by major party.

"A chicken in every pot"
Hoover's 1928 slogan. Tragically ironic.

Smoot-Hawley Tariff
June 1930 federal law raising average tariff rates to 60% - highest in U.S. history. Worsened Depression by collapsing international trade.

Acceptance Address for Republican Presidential Nomination

HERBERT HOOVER, AUGUST 11, 1928

Hoover delivered this speech at Stanford Stadium on August 11, 1928. "We shall soon" passage articulated Hoover's optimism about elimination of poverty - tragically refuted by October 1929 crash.

> *"We in America today are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land. The poorhouse is vanishing from among us. We have not yet reached the goal, but given a chance to go forward with the policies of the last eight years, we shall soon, with the help of God, be in sight of the day when poverty will be banished from this nation. There is no guarantee against poverty equal to a job for every man. That is the primary purpose of the economic policies we advocate. Our American experiment in human welfare has yielded a degree of well-being unparalleled in all the world. It has come nearer to the abolition of poverty, to the abolition of fear of want, than humanity has ever reached before. Progress of the past seven years is the proof of it."*

Hoover, "Acceptance Address for Republican Presidential Nomination" (Stanford, CA, August 11, 1928). Fair use under 17 USC §107 — educational excerpt of public political speech, ≈150 words.

The 1928 Election

Read the background page (key terms and primary source), then answer the seven questions below. Questions 6 and 7 ask you to quote from the primary source.

QUESTION 1 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many electoral votes did 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

Hoover says in 1928 acceptance speech "we shall soon, with the help of God, be in sight of the day when poverty will be banished from this nation." Why is this passage tragically ironic in retrospect?

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

How did Smoot-Hawley Tariff and Bonus Army incident damage Hoover's political position?

SOURCE ANALYSIS — QUESTIONS 6 AND 7 REFERENCE THE PRIMARY SOURCE ON THE BACKGROUND PAGE.

QUESTION 6 · SHORT-ANSWER

Explain how Smith's losing 1928 coalition became foundation of FDR's winning 1932 New Deal coalition.

QUESTION 7 · MAP-READ

On 1928 election map identify Hoover's 40 states and Smith's 8 states. What does geographic pattern reveal?

Answer key

QUESTION 1

444. Hoover 444; Smith 87.

AP students should know 444-87 split.

QUESTION 2

5. Hoover carried Tennessee, NC, Virginia, Florida, Texas.

AP students should know 5 Confederate states.

QUESTION 3

Al Smith first Catholic ever nominated for president by major political party. Irish Catholic from Lower East Side Manhattan. Three structural reasons for anti-Catholic prejudice: (1) Protestants believed Catholic president would take orders from Pope. (2) KKK (3-5M members) actively campaigned. (3) Anti-Catholic literature flooded country. 1928 anti-Catholic prejudice not overcome until JFK's 1960 victory.

AP students should articulate Smith's significance.

QUESTION 4

Hoover's "poverty will be banished" tragically ironic because: (1) October 1929 stock market crash began Great Depression just 14 months after August 1928 speech. (2) By 1933 U.S. poverty massively expanded: unemployment 25%, industrial production -46%, ~9,000 banks failed, agricultural prices collapsed. (3) "Abolition of poverty" rhetoric became one of most cited examples of unjustified pre-Depression optimism. (4) Hoover's political career destroyed by contrast between 1928 promises and 1929-32 catastrophe. Structural analysis: Hoover's 1928 optimism reflected genuine 1920s prosperity but assumed continuation rather than acknowledging structural vulnerabilities.

AP students should articulate irony.

QUESTION 5

Smoot-Hawley Tariff (June 1930) raised average tariff rates to 60%. Prompted retaliatory tariffs from ~25 trading partners. World trade fell ~60% between 1929 and 1933. Bonus Army (summer 1932): ~17,000 WWI veterans camped in DC demanding immediate payment of wartime service bonus. July 28, 1932 Hoover ordered MacArthur to disperse encampment. Army burned camp killing two veterans. Image of U.S. Army troops attacking U.S. veterans produced massive public revulsion. Cumulative effect: by November 1932 Hoover politically destroyed. 1932 election structural rejection.

AP students should articulate both incidents.

QUESTION 6

Smith's losing 1928 coalition (urban Catholic immigrants, Northeastern industrial workers, Tammany Hall organization) became foundation of FDR's winning 1932 New Deal coalition through three structural processes: (1) Organizational continuity. Urban Democratic machines that mobilized for Smith in 1928 (NYC Tammany Hall, Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh) remained intact and mobilized for FDR in 1932. Infrastructure for delivering urban Catholic immigrant votes already built. (2) Voter conversion. 1929-32 Depression devastated urban industrial workers most severely - converting them from Republican voters (1920-28) to Democratic voters (1932+). Catholic-immigrant industrial-working-class coalition that had been Democratic in 1928 joined by Protestant industrial workers in 1932. (3) Demographic expansion. 1929-32 Depression also drove farmers, small businessmen, middle-class professionals into Democratic coalition - dramatically expanding what had been structural minority coalition in 1928. Result: FDR's 1932 coalition was Smith's 1928 coalition + Depression-converted voters. Structural lesson: presidential losing coalitions can prepare future winning coalitions when underlying conditions change.

AP students should articulate coalition transformation.

QUESTION 7

Hoover states (40): everything except 8. Including all Northeast except MA + RI, all Midwest, all Mountain West, all West Coast, plus 5 Southern Border/Confederate states (TN, NC, Virginia, Florida, Texas) - first time since Reconstruction. Smith states (8): MA, RI (Catholic-heavy Northeastern), plus 6 Deep South (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina). Smith lost home state NY. Geographic pattern reveals: (1) 1928 election was structurally about religion, not economics. (2) Catholic-heavy Northeast voted Smith; rest of country voted Hoover. (3) Even some Confederate states voted Republican over Catholic Democrat - anti-Catholicism overrode 60+ years of Southern Democratic loyalty. (4) Deep South remained loyal to Smith partly because of structural racial politics (Black disenfranchisement made Republican Southern victories difficult).

AP students should articulate religious-geographic dynamic.

Discussion prompts

1. Smith's 1928 loss demonstrated depth of anti-Catholic prejudice in 1920s America. Identify three structural reasons 1960 Kennedy victory could overcome 1928's anti-Catholic prejudice.

2. Hoover took office March 4, 1929. October 1929 stock market crash began Great Depression 7 months later. Identify three structural causes of 1929 crash and assess whether Hoover could have prevented or mitigated Depression.