1928

Herbert Hoover vs Al Smith

A 105-minute lesson on the 1928 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, DBQ pairing, 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 (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

1928: Herbert Hoover vs Al Smith

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 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: Al Smith first Catholic ever nominated by major political party, and election was last under 1920s prosperity conditions before October 1929 stock market crash. Republican National Convention Kansas City June 12-15, 1928 nominated Hoover first ballot. Hoover 53, born 1874 West Branch Iowa. Organized WWI food relief - "Great Humanitarian." Charles Curtis of Kansas (first Native American on major-party ticket) VP. Democratic National Convention Houston June 26-28, 1928 nominated Smith first ballot. Smith 54, first Catholic ever nominated. Rose through Tammany Hall. Joseph T. Robinson of Arkansas VP. Smith candidacy faced three structural disadvantages: Catholic religion, support for ending Prohibition, urban Tammany Hall background. Campaign structurally bitter. Anti-Catholic prejudice overt. Methodist Episcopal Church Bishop James Cannon Jr. of Virginia led anti-Catholic religious mobilization. Hoover personally repudiated anti-Catholic attacks. 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 broke Solid South - carried TN, NC, VA, FL, TX. Smith lost home state NY. Hoover inaugurated March 4, 1929. October 24-29, 1929 stock market crash transformed political conditions. By 1933: unemployment 25%; industrial production -46%;

~9,000 banks failed.

Hoover response structurally inadequate. Smoot-Hawley Tariff June 1930 raised rates to 60%. RFC 1932 provided loans not direct aid. Revenue Act 1932 raised income tax rates (contractionary). July 1932 Bonus Army dispersed by Army troops under MacArthur (two veterans killed).

By 1932 Hoover politically destroyed. 1932 election (FDR 472-59 EV over Hoover, 57.4% to 39.7%) structural realignment.

Smith's 1928 coalition (urban Catholic immigrants, Northeastern industrial workers) became foundation of FDR's 1932 New Deal coalition. Smith 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 can be analyzed retrospectively as structural inflection point between two political eras. Before 1928: 1896-1932 Republican alignment, 1920s prosperity, Progressive Era policy consolidation, structural religious-ethnic-cultural conflicts of 1920s. After 1928 (more precisely after October 1929): New Deal Democratic alignment, federal welfare-state expansion, Catholic-immigrant integration into Democratic majority.

1928-1932 transformation one of most rapid and dramatic in U.S. presidential politics. Within four years, structural Republican advantage that had dominated 36 years was completely reversed. Structural elements: (1) Economic collapse - 1929-32 Depression destroyed Republican economic-policy credibility. (2) Hoover's personal failures - inadequate response, Smoot-Hawley, Bonus Army. (3) FDR's 1932 Democratic coalition - structural expansion of Smith's 1928 urban Catholic base to include Depression-converted farmers, workers, intellectuals, African Americans. (4) Structural shift in U.S. political philosophy - from limited-government conservatism to federal welfare-state liberalism.

1928 election's lessons: (1) Religious prejudice was decisive political force as late as 1928 and persisted until 1960 Kennedy victory. (2) Solid South's loyalty to Democratic candidates structurally tied to Protestant Southern culture - Catholic Democrat could break it. (3) 1920s Republican alignment structurally vulnerable to economic crisis. (4) Losing campaigns can structurally prepare future winning coalitions when underlying conditions change. (5) Major-party realignments can occur rapidly when economic crises destroy incumbent party's credibility.

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

Herbert Hoover
31st U.S. president (1929-33).

Anti-Catholic prejudice
Significant 1920s political force.

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

Bonus Army
Summer 1932 WWI veterans' protest in DC dispersed by Army troops under MacArthur.

American Liberty League
1934 anti-New Deal organization founded by conservative Democrats and Republicans (including Smith). Opposed FDR's federal welfare-state expansion. Dissolved 1940.

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

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

Smoot-Hawley Tariff
June 1930 federal law raising average tariff rates to 60% - highest in U.S. history.

Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC)
January 1932 Hoover-era federal corporation providing $2B in loans to banks/railroads/businesses to combat Depression. Continued and expanded under FDR's New Deal.

Acceptance Address for Republican Presidential Nomination

HERBERT HOOVER, AUGUST 11, 1928

Hoover delivered this speech at Stanford Stadium on August 11, 1928. Speech 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.

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

Acceptance Address for Republican Presidential Nomination

HERBERT HOOVER, AUGUST 11, 1928

"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.

SOURCE B

Address on the Religious Question

ALFRED E. SMITH, SEPTEMBER 20, 1928

"I summarize my creed as an American Catholic. I believe in the worship of God according to the faith and practice of the Roman Catholic Church. I recognize no power in the institutions of my Church to interfere with the operations of the Constitution of the United States or the enforcement of the law of the land. I believe in absolute freedom of conscience for all men and in equality of all churches, all sects, and all beliefs before the law as a matter of right and not as a matter of favor. I believe in the absolute separation of Church and State and in the strict enforcement of the provisions of the Constitution that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. I believe that no tribunal of any church has any power to make any decree of any force in the law of the land, other than to establish the status of its own communicants within its own church."

Smith, "Address on the Religious Question" (Oklahoma City, September 20, 1928). Public domain.

The 1928 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 key phrase in Source A (Hoover 1928) articulating 1920s Republican prosperity optimism. Quote verbatim.

QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify key phrase in Source B (Smith 1928) articulating constitutional separation of church and state. Quote verbatim.

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Both sources address structural 1928 political concerns from different positions. Identify specific political function each source performs.

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Smith's September 1928 Oklahoma City address anticipated by 32 years JFK's September 12, 1960 Houston Ministerial Association speech. What does this anticipation reveal about structural persistence of anti-Catholic political prejudice?

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

Hoover's "poverty will be banished" optimism tragically refuted by 1929-32 Depression. Identify three structural causes of Depression that Hoover's 1928 framework had failed to anticipate.

QUESTION 6 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many former Confederate states did Hoover carry in 1928?

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

QUESTION 7 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

In what year was JFK elected - first Catholic actually elected president?

( ) A. 1956
( ) B. 1960
( ) C. 1964
( ) D. 1968

QUESTION 8 · SHORT-ANSWER

Sketch thesis sentence for LEQ (next page). State position: was 1928 election about anti-Catholicism, Republican-alignment-triumph, or 1932-realignment-prerequisite? Identify one piece of evidence from each source.

Long-essay-question

LEQ PROMPT

Hoover's 1928 Stanford acceptance speech (Source A) articulated 1920s Republican optimism - "we shall soon... be in sight of the day when poverty will be banished from this nation." Smith's September 1928 Oklahoma City address (Source B) articulated his commitment to constitutional separation of church and state - directly responding to anti-Catholic attacks. Using BOTH sources and your knowledge of 1924-1940 period, evaluate extent to which 1928 election represented (a) demonstration that 1920s anti-Catholic prejudice could decisively defeat Catholic Democratic nominee, (b) final triumph of 1896-1932 Republican alignment under 1920s prosperity, or (c) structural prerequisite for 1932 New Deal realignment. Defend clear thesis.

GRADING RUBRIC

Thesis (1 pt): must take defensible position on anti-Catholicism-vs-Republican-alignment-vs-1932-prerequisite axis. Contextualization (1 pt): mention at least two of Coolidge prosperity, 1920s KKK revival, Smoot-Hawley Tariff, Bonus Army incident, 1932 FDR election, American Liberty League, 1960 JFK victory. Evidence (2 pts): must quote at least one phrase from each source. Analysis (1 pt): must explicitly evaluate extent rather than treating three framings as equivalent. Total 5 points.

Answer key

QUESTION 1

Accept any of: "We in America today are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land", "we shall soon, with the help of God, be in sight of the day when poverty will be banished from this nation", "Our American experiment in human welfare has yielded a degree of well-being unparalleled in all the world". The "we shall soon" phrase is most distinctive optimistic framing.

Hoover's framing reflected 1920s Republican prosperity confidence.

QUESTION 2

Accept any of: "I believe in absolute freedom of conscience for all men and in equality of all churches, all sects, and all beliefs before the law", "I believe in the absolute separation of Church and State and in the strict enforcement of the provisions of the Constitution that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof", "I recognize no power in the institutions of my Church to interfere with the operations of the Constitution of the United States". The "absolute separation of Church and State" phrase is most distinctive commitment.

Smith's framing addressed structural anti-Catholic argument.

QUESTION 3

Source A is Hoover's 1928 acceptance speech - articulated as Republican nominee to commit his administration to continued 1920s prosperity. Function: commit Republican Party to pro-business, anti-poverty governance under continued 1920s economic conditions. Source B is Smith's September 1928 response to anti-Catholic attacks - articulated as Democratic nominee to address structural Protestant fears about Catholic president. Function: commit to constitutional separation of church and state while affirming Smith's Catholic identity. Together sources reveal structural tensions of 1928: economic optimism (which would be refuted by 1929 crash) and religious prejudice (which would be defeated only by 1960 Kennedy victory).

AP students should articulate structural framework.

QUESTION 4

32-year gap between Smith's September 1928 Oklahoma City address and Kennedy's September 12, 1960 Houston Ministerial Association speech reveals three structural facts about anti-Catholic political prejudice: (1) Prejudice was structurally deep - 32 years insufficient to overcome it through accumulated education and integration. (2) Prejudice was structurally similar across generations - Kennedy faced essentially same fears (papal control, religious establishment) that Smith had faced. (3) Prejudice required specific political combination to overcome - Kennedy's combination of personal charisma, structural Cold War foreign-policy credentials, and explicit church-state separation commitment defeated prejudice that Smith's combination could not. Both speeches articulated essentially same constitutional commitment: absolute separation of church and state, no papal authority in U.S. policy, equal protection for all religions. But political conditions had changed: by 1960 urban Catholic immigrant integration complete; KKK collapsed; ecumenical Protestant-Catholic cooperation emerged; Cold War produced shared anti-Communist priorities across religious lines. Structural lesson: organized political prejudice can persist for decades even after formal arguments against it have been refuted.

AP students should articulate 1928-to-1960 evolution.

QUESTION 5

Three structural causes of Depression Hoover's 1928 framework failed to anticipate: (1) Speculative stock market expansion. Dow Jones tripled 1924-September 1929. Margin lending allowed investors to leverage with 10% down. Stock prices rose to unsustainable levels. October 1929 crash wiped out ~$30B. (2) Unsustainable consumer debt. Consumer installment credit expanded from ~$2B in 1920 to ~$7B in 1929. (3) Weak banking regulation. Banks invested heavily in stock speculation. Glass-Steagall Act of 1932 separated commercial banking from investment banking - acknowledging structural problem Hoover's framework failed to address. ~9,000 banks failed by 1933. (4) Agricultural distress. Farm prices declining throughout 1920s due to overproduction. (5) International trade collapse. 1930 Smoot-Hawley Tariff raised rates to 60% and prompted retaliatory tariffs - reducing world trade ~60%. Cumulative effect: by 1933 U.S. economy collapsed ~30% in real GDP. Hoover's 1928 prosperity framework built on assumptions of continued growth without acknowledging structural vulnerabilities.

AP students should articulate structural causes.

QUESTION 6

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

AP students should know 5 Confederate states.

QUESTION 7

1960. JFK elected November 8, 1960 (303-219 EV over Nixon, 49.7% to 49.6% popular vote - one of closest in U.S. history). Inaugurated January 20, 1961 - 32 years after Smith's September 1928 Oklahoma City address.

AP students should know 1960 Kennedy victory date.

QUESTION 8

Open-ended thesis sketch. Acceptable answers should: (1) state clear position on anti-Catholicism-vs-Republican-alignment-vs-1932-prerequisite axis, (2) avoid treating them as equivalent, (3) signal at least one piece of evidence from each source.

Thesis sketch is preparatory.