1936

Franklin D. Roosevelt vs Alf Landon

A 75-minute lesson on the 1936 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, background reading with primary source, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA New Deal Coalition	ELECTORAL VOTES 531 total
WINNER Franklin D. Roosevelt (Democratic) · 523 EV	RUNNER-UP Alf Landon (Republican) · 8 EV
KEY ISSUE New Deal defense; Supreme Court battles; economic recovery	TURNOUT 61.0%

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

1936: Franklin D. Roosevelt vs Alf Landon

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 1936 map at theamericanvote.com/elections/-1936 projected, or printed as a handout.

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	Identify two structural conditions in 1933-36 America that would produce a presidential re-election landslide. For each identify the specific New Deal policy most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	1936 election was 38th U.S. presidential election. Produced FDR's 523-8 EV victory over Republican Alf Landon - largest electoral landslide in U.S. history up to that point. FDR's 60.8% popular vote highest since 1820. 1936 result was structural confirmation of New Deal Democratic coalition that would dominate U.S. politics until 1968. FDR's First 100 Days (March 9 - June 16, 1933) produced 15 major federal laws: Emergency Banking Act, Glass-Steagall Banking Act (FDIC), Securities Act, AAA, NIRA (PWA + NRA), TVA, CCC, Homeowners' Loan Corporation, Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA), and others. The First 100 Days was the most productive federal legislative period in U.S. history. FDR's Second New Deal (1935-36) deepened reform: Wagner Act (July 1935); Social Security Act (August 1935); Public Utility Holding Company Act; Banking Act of 1935; Revenue Act of 1935 ("Wealth Tax Act"); Works Progress Administration (WPA, May 1935). Economic conditions had improved substantially by 1936 but had not fully recovered. Unemployment had fallen from 25% (1933) to 17% (1936). Industrial production had risen ~50% from 1933. GDP growth was strong. Bank failures had stopped after the FDIC. Structural opposition to New Deal had emerged: Conservative Democrats (American Liberty League 1934); Supreme Court (NRA struck down May 1935 Schechter; AAA struck down January 1936 Butler); Father Coughlin's populist right; Huey Long's populist left (before September 1935 assassination).

Democratic National Convention Philadelphia June 23-27, 1936 renominated FDR. Garner VP. 1936 Convention abolished Democratic Party's two-thirds rule. Republican National Convention Cleveland June 9-12, 1936 nominated Kansas Governor Alf Landon (49, moderate, balanced Kansas budget during Depression). Frank Knox VP.

Third parties significant: Union Party (Coughlin + Townsend + Smith's Huey Long supporters) nominated Lemke - 892,267 votes (1.9%). Socialist Thomas - 187,910 votes (0.4%). Communist Browder - 79,315 votes (0.2%).

FDR's campaign aggressive. October 31, 1936 Madison Square Garden speech: "They are unanimous in their hate for me - and I welcome their hatred." The speech identified "economic royalists" as structural opposition.

Literary Digest poll failure 1936: predicted Landon 57-43%; actual FDR 60.8-36.5%. Literary Digest had over-sampled telephone/automobile owners (Republican-leaning). Gallup correctly predicted FDR through probability sampling. Literary Digest folded 1938; Gallup methodology became industry standard.

FDR won 523 EV; Landon 8. FDR carried 46 states; Landon Maine + Vermont. Popular vote: FDR 27,752,648 (60.8%); Landon 16,681,862 (36.5%); Lemke 892,267 (1.9%); Thomas 187,910 (0.4%); Browder 79,315 (0.2%). FDR-Landon margin: 11,070,786.

FDR's 1936 New Deal coalition: urban Northern industrial workers; Solid South; African Americans (shifted from Republican for first time since Reconstruction); Western farmers and miners; intellectuals; organized labor.

1937 court-packing fight. February 5, 1937 FDR proposed Judicial Procedures Reform Bill - adding one Justice for each Justice over 70 (up to 6 additional). Democratic Senate leader Joseph Robinson died July 14, 1937 of heart attack. Senate rejected plan July 22, 1937 by 70-20. The 1937 controversy + 1937-38 recession + 1938 midterm losses ended New Deal political momentum.

But Supreme Court had effectively switched position before fight ended. March 29, 1937 West Coast Hotel Co. v. Parrish upheld minimum-wage law for women - "the switch in time that saved nine" (Justice Owen Roberts shifted to liberal bloc). April 12, 1937 NLRB v. Jones & Laughlin Steel Corp. upheld Wagner Act. May 24, 1937 Helvering v. Davis upheld Social Security. Court's constitutional position shifted permanently.

1936 election's structural significance: (1) Confirmed New Deal Democratic coalition that dominated U.S. politics until 1968. (2) FDR's 1936 mandate used immediately for 1937 court-packing fight - demonstrating that even landslide mandates can be

		politically over-extended. New Deal Democratic coalition's structural longevity 1932-68: FDR (4 terms 1933-45) + Truman (1945-53) + Eisenhower (Republican 1953-61, but governed within New Deal framework) + Kennedy (1961-63) + Johnson (1963-69). The coalition broke in 1968 when Wallace's segregationist Independent candidacy (46 EV) plus Nixon's Republican "Southern Strategy" + urban unrest + Vietnam fragmented the coalition. Republican dominance 1968-92 + Democratic resurgence 1992-2008 + Republican gains 2016-24 would follow. 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 1936 election tells you about the New Deal Coalition 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

Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR)
32nd U.S. president (1933-45). Only president elected four times.

First New Deal
FDR's 1933-35 emergency response. First 100 Days produced 15 major laws.

"As Maine goes, so goes Vermont"
Famous 1936 joke. Landon carried only Maine and Vermont.

Literary Digest poll failure
1936 polling failure. Mail-survey methodology predicted Landon 57-43%; actual FDR 60.8-36.5%.

New Deal
FDR's 1933-39 federal response to Great Depression.

Second New Deal
FDR's 1935-36 redistributive expansion. Wagner Act; Social Security; WPA.

Alf Landon
Kansas Governor and 1936 Republican presidential nominee. Lost 523-8 EV.

Madison Square Garden Address

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT, OCTOBER 31, 1936

FDR delivered this address at Madison Square Garden on October 31, 1936 - the Saturday before Election Day. The speech was FDR's closing argument and most aggressive class-conflict rhetoric of the 1936 campaign. The "economic royalists" passage articulated the structural class-based critique of 1920s and pre-New-Deal American politics. The "I welcome their hatred" passage was FDR's explicit embrace of the New Deal Democratic coalition.

> *"For nearly four years you have had an Administration which instead of twirling its thumbs has rolled up its sleeves. We will keep our sleeves rolled up. We had to struggle with the old enemies of peace - business and financial monopoly, speculation, reckless banking, class antagonism, sectionalism, war profiteering. They had begun to consider the Government of the United States as a mere appendage to their own affairs. We know now that Government by organized money is just as dangerous as Government by organized mob. Never before in all our history have these forces been so united against one candidate as they stand today. They are unanimous in their hate for me - and I welcome their hatred. I should like to have it said of my first Administration that in it the forces of selfishness and of lust for power met their match. I should like to have it said of my second Administration that in it these forces met their master."*

Roosevelt, "Address at Madison Square Garden" (New York, October 31, 1936). Public domain.

The 1936 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 FDR win in 1936?

( ) A. 435
( ) B. 472
( ) C. 486
( ) D. 523

QUESTION 2 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

Which two states did Republican Alf Landon carry in 1936?

( ) A. New Hampshire and Vermont
( ) B. Maine and Vermont
( ) C. Massachusetts and Maine
( ) D. Vermont and Connecticut

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

What was the New Deal Democratic coalition and why did it dominate U.S. politics 1932-68?

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

FDR says "they are unanimous in their hate for me - and I welcome their hatred." What political strategy does this articulate?

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

How did the Literary Digest poll failure of 1936 change U.S. polling methodology?

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

QUESTION 6 · SHORT-ANSWER

Explain the 1937 court-packing fight and the "switch in time that saved nine."

QUESTION 7 · MAP-READ

On the 1936 election map, identify FDR's 46 states and Landon's 2 states (Maine and Vermont). What does the geographic pattern reveal?

Answer key

QUESTION 1

523. FDR 523; Landon 8.

AP students should know the 523-8 split.

QUESTION 2

Maine and Vermont.

AP students should know Maine + Vermont.

QUESTION 3

The New Deal Democratic coalition was the structural Democratic majority assembled by FDR through New Deal policy: urban Northern industrial workers (Catholic and Jewish immigrants); Solid South; African Americans (shifted from Republican); Western farmers and miners; intellectuals; organized labor. Coalition dominated 1932-68. Broke 1968 when: (a) Southern Democrats defected over Civil Rights Act 1964 and Voting Rights Act 1965. (b) Working-class whites defected over urban unrest and Vietnam. (c) Wallace 1968 Independent campaign demonstrated the cleavage. (d) Nixon's "Southern Strategy" exploited the cleavage.

AP students should be able to articulate the coalition.

QUESTION 4

FDR's "I welcome their hatred" articulates aggressive class-conflict political strategy. Core elements: (1) Identify a specific class enemy ("economic royalists" - corporate interests, Wall Street, conservative media). (2) Embrace explicit conflict with that class. (3) Use the conflict to mobilize the coalition (urban workers, farmers, intellectuals, African Americans). (4) Frame the conflict in moral terms - "the forces of selfishness and of lust for power met their match." The strategy was structurally novel for a U.S. president: prior presidents had typically sought unity rhetoric. It worked in 1936 (60.8% popular vote) but produced lasting conservative opposition. The lesson: aggressive class-conflict rhetoric can mobilize a winning coalition but produces structural opposition.

AP students should be able to articulate the strategy.

QUESTION 5

The Literary Digest poll failure of 1936 changed U.S. polling methodology fundamentally. The magazine had correctly predicted every U.S. presidential election since 1916 through mail-survey methodology. In 1936, predicted Landon 57-43%; actual FDR 60.8-36.5%. Two structural causes: (1) Sampling bias - telephone directories and automobile-registration lists over-represented wealthier Republican voters. (2) Response bias - 25% response rate; respondents structurally different from non-respondents. George Gallup correctly predicted FDR through probability sampling. Literary Digest folded 1938. Gallup methodology became industry standard. Lesson: a large biased sample is worse than a small representative sample.

AP students should be able to articulate the methodology revolution.

QUESTION 6

1937 court-packing fight: FDR proposed Judicial Procedures Reform Bill February 5, 1937 - adding one Justice for each Justice over 70 (up to 6 additional). Motivation: Supreme Court had struck down NRA (May 1935 Schechter) and AAA (January 1936 Butler) and was expected to strike down Social Security and Wagner Act. FDR sought to overcome the Court's conservative majority by expanding the Court. Plan was politically devastating: Democratic Senate leader Joseph Robinson died July 14, 1937; Senate rejected plan July 22, 1937 by 70-20 vote. But "switch in time that saved nine": before the court-packing fight ended, Justice Owen Roberts shifted from conservative to liberal bloc. March 29, 1937 West Coast Hotel Co. v. Parrish upheld minimum-wage law for women - reversing 1923 Adkins precedent. April 12, 1937 NLRB v. Jones & Laughlin Steel Corp. upheld Wagner Act. May 24, 1937 Helvering v. Davis upheld Social Security. The Court's constitutional position shifted permanently; New Deal programs were upheld. The structural lesson: even rejected institutional reforms can achieve their goals if the targeted institution responds defensively. The court-packing plan failed but the Court's position shifted in FDR's favor.

AP students should be able to articulate both the fight and the shift.

QUESTION 7

FDR states (46): everything except Maine and Vermont. Landon states (2): Maine, Vermont. Geographic pattern reveals: (1) FDR's coalition was geographically comprehensive. (2) Maine and Vermont were structurally Republican-loyal small New England states - the most-Republican states in the country. Vermont had voted Republican every election since 1856 (Frémont). (3) The 1936 map demonstrated FDR's 1936 mandate. The next decisive Democratic landslide (LBJ 1964) would carry 44 states. The 1936 map would not be matched until Nixon 1972 (49 states) and Reagan 1984 (49 states).

AP students should be able to articulate the structural mandate.

Discussion prompts

1. FDR's 1936 New Deal coalition would dominate U.S. politics until 1968. Identify three structural reasons the coalition would eventually break in 1968.

2. The Supreme Court struck down major New Deal programs before "switching" in 1937. Identify two structural reasons FDR's 1937 court-packing plan failed despite his 1936 landslide.