3-5 EDITION · CLASSROOM

# 1952

## *Dwight D. Eisenhower vs Adlai Stevenson II*

A 35-minute lesson on the 1952 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

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| ERA<br>New Deal Coalition | ELECTORAL VOTES<br>531 total |
| WINNER<br>Dwight D. Eisenhower (Republican) · 442 EV | RUNNER-UP<br>Adlai Stevenson II (Democratic) · 89 EV |
| KEY ISSUE<br>Korean War; communist threat (McCarthyism); corruption in Truman administration | TURNOUT<br>62.3% |

CONTENTS


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

# 1952: Dwight D. Eisenhower vs Adlai Stevenson II

## Timing

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| 5 min | **Warm-up** | When a famous war hero enters politics, what political conditions favor his election? |
| 15 min | **Reading** | 1952 election was 42nd U.S. presidential election. Produced Dwight D. Eisenhower's 442-89 EV victory over Democrat Adlai Stevenson II. First Republican presidential victory since Hoover 1928. Eisenhower's 55.2% popular vote ended 20 years of Democratic presidents (FDR 1933-45; Truman 1945-53). 1952 election was structurally shaped by Korean War stalemate, McCarthyism, and post-WWII economic adjustment.<br><br>Political conditions had been transformed by Truman's second-term troubles. Korean War (June 1950 - July 1953) had become structurally stalemated by mid-1951. ~33,651 American military deaths through 1953. Public frustration with the "limited war" approach (no nuclear weapons; limited geographic scope; UN auspices). Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin's February 9, 1950 Wheeling WV speech ("I have here in my hand a list of 205... members of the Communist Party who are still working and shaping policy in the State Department") had launched anti-Communist demagoguery era. McCarthyism produced loyalty investigations, blacklists, and structural political fear. Truman's approval rating fell from 87% (May 1945) to 22% (January 1952).<br><br>March 29, 1952 Truman announced he would not seek another term. Truman was exempted from the 22nd Amendment (ratified February 27, 1951) but his political vulnerability made another term politically untenable. Truman quietly recruited Eisenhower to seek the Democratic nomination; Eisenhower had been politically nonpartisan but Truman believed he was structurally Democratic. Eisenhower declined the Democratic option and sought the Republican nomination instead.<br><br>Republican National Convention met in Chicago July 7-11, 1952. The convention faced a structural choice between two candidates: (1) Senator Robert Taft of Ohio (62, "Mr. Republican," conservative isolationist) was the establishment candidate. He had been the conservative Republican leader since 1940. His isolationism opposed continued Cold War commitments. (2) General Dwight D. Eisenhower (62, internationalist Republican) was the establishment's challenger. He had been Supreme Allied Commander Europe in WWII and was the first NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe 1950-52. He had been begged to run by both Democratic and Republican leaders since 1947. Eisenhower defeated Taft on the first ballot after a credentials fight over disputed Texas, Georgia, and Louisiana delegations. Senator |

Richard Nixon of California (39, anti-Communist crusader - had been instrumental in 1948 Alger Hiss case revealing Hiss as a Soviet spy) was VP. Nixon's anti-Communist credentials and youth balanced Eisenhower's war-hero status and age. The Republican platform criticized Truman's Korean War conduct, McCarthyism opposition, and federal spending; supported continued NATO commitments.

Democratic National Convention met in Chicago July 21-26, 1952 and drafted Illinois Governor Adlai Stevenson II on the third ballot. Stevenson was 52, a brilliant orator educated at Princeton (B.A. 1922), Harvard Law (one year), and Northwestern Law (J.D. 1926). He had been a State Department official during WWII and had served as U.S. delegate to the United Nations founding 1945. He had been elected Illinois Governor in 1948 by the largest margin in Illinois history. He was a reluctant candidate - had publicly refused the nomination - and was drafted by the convention. Senator John Sparkman of Alabama (a moderate Southern Democrat) was VP to balance the ticket regionally and to address potential Dixiecrat-type defections. The Democratic platform was moderate liberal: continued New Deal programs; civil rights expansion; continued Cold War commitments.

The campaign's most famous moment was the September 23, 1952 Checkers speech. Wealthy California businessmen had created an $18,000 political fund for Nixon's personal use. The September 18, 1952 New York Post story ("Secret Rich Men's Trust Fund Keeps Nixon in Style Far Beyond his Salary") threatened Nixon's place on the Republican ticket. Eisenhower told Nixon: "I don't know whether to keep you or not." Nixon arranged a 30-minute televised address from a studio in Los Angeles - broadcast September 23, 1952. ~60 million viewers and additional millions on radio. Nixon defended his honor by listing his modest personal finances: his wife Pat's "respectable Republican cloth coat" (not a fur coat); his $80 monthly mortgage on a house in Whittier, California; his debts. He mentioned that a Texas businessman had sent his daughters Tricia (6) and Julie (4) a Cocker Spaniel puppy: "regardless of what they say about it, we're gonna keep it" - because Tricia had named the dog "Checkers" and loved it. The speech was politically masterful. Eisenhower kept Nixon on the ticket. The Checkers speech demonstrated the power of television in politics and is widely cited as the first major political use of television to overcome a scandal.

Eisenhower's campaign focused on three themes: (1) Korean War - he promised "I shall go to Korea" (October 24, 1952 speech in Detroit). The promise pledged personal Eisenhower assessment of the war situation. Politically devastating - it implied his military expertise could resolve the war. (2) Communism - the "K1C2" framework: Korea, Communism (domestic), Corruption. (3) Modern Republicanism - acceptance of New Deal programs combined with fiscal conservatism. The campaign slogan "I Like Ike" was simple, friendly, irresistible. The Eisenhower campaign was the first major political campaign to use professional Madison Avenue advertising techniques - Rosser Reeves of Ted Bates & Co. created the "Eisenhower Answers America" TV commercials. The campaign was the first presidential campaign extensively to use television advertising.

Stevenson's campaign was structurally weaker. His brilliant oratory ("If we let ourselves become victims of our own indifference, then we shall destroy by complacency and self-satisfaction the freedom and democracy our generation has been called upon to defend") appealed to educated voters but did not connect with mass audiences. Republican ads mocked Stevenson as an "egghead" (a derogatory term for intellectuals - apparently coined by Republican campaign manager Stewart Alsop for Stevenson). Stevenson's divorced status (his wife Ellen had divorced him in 1949) was politically unusual for a presidential candidate. Stevenson was structurally outmatched.

Eisenhower won 442 electoral votes to Stevenson's 89. Eisenhower carried 39 states; Stevenson 9. The popular vote: Eisenhower 34,075,529 (55.2%); Stevenson 27,375,090 (44.3%); minor candidates ~280,000. Eisenhower-Stevenson popular-vote margin: 6,700,439.

The geographic pattern was structurally significant. Eisenhower carried New England, the Mid-Atlantic, the Midwest (except Kentucky, Missouri, West Virginia), the Mountain West, the West Coast, and parts of the Solid South (Florida, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia). Stevenson held the Deep South (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina) plus Kentucky and West Virginia. The 1952 map showed Eisenhower's 4-state Southern breakthrough (FL, TN, TX, VA) - the first significant Republican Southern penetration since the 1928 Hoover anti-Catholic vote against Smith. The 1952 Southern breakthrough was structurally consequential: it foreshadowed the 1960s Republican Southern realignment.

Eisenhower was inaugurated January 20, 1953. He governed as a "Modern Republican" - accepting most New Deal programs while emphasizing fiscal conservatism and Cold War internationalism. Major 1953-61 achievements: (1) July 27, 1953 Korean armistice (38th parallel division persists today). (2) 1953-54 Iran (Mossadegh coup) and Guatemala (Arbenz coup) covert operations. (3) May 17, 1954 Brown v. Board of Education (decided during Eisenhower's first term but driven by Chief Justice Earl Warren - whom Eisenhower had appointed in 1953). (4) 1954-55 Indochina decisions (declined to intervene at Dien Bien Phu; Geneva Accords partition of Vietnam). (5) June 29, 1956 Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 - the Interstate Highway System ($25B authorization, expanded over decades to $114B by completion). (6) September 1957 Little Rock crisis - Eisenhower sent federal troops (the 101st Airborne) to enforce school desegregation at Central High School. (7) October 1957 Sputnik response - led to NASA founding 1958 + National Defense Education Act 1958. (8) January 17, 1961 farewell address warning of "military-industrial complex."

1952 election's structural significance was threefold. First, it ended 20 years of Democratic presidents and restored Republican access to the presidency. Second, the 4-state Southern breakthrough (FL, TN, TX, VA) foreshadowed the 1960s Republican Southern realignment. Third, the Eisenhower campaign's professional

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| | | advertising methods (Madison Avenue, "I Like Ike," TV commercials) inaugurated the modern television-driven presidential campaign era.<br><br>Eisenhower would win 1956 in an even bigger landslide over Stevenson (457-73 EV). His 1953-61 presidency would establish the structural framework for post-WWII Republican governance: acceptance of New Deal welfare state combined with fiscal conservatism and Cold War internationalism. The framework would be largely maintained by JFK (1961-63), LBJ (1963-69), and Nixon (1969-74) - until Reagan's 1980 conservative revolution would attempt to reverse it. |
| **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 1952 Election

1952 election was 42nd U.S. presidential election. Produced Dwight D. Eisenhower's 442-89 EV victory over Democrat Adlai Stevenson II. First Republican presidential victory since Hoover 1928. Eisenhower's 55.2% popular vote ended 20 years of Democratic presidents (FDR 1933-45; Truman 1945-53). 1952 election was structurally shaped by Korean War stalemate, McCarthyism, and post-WWII economic adjustment.

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had been the conservative Republican leader since 1940. His isolationism opposed continued Cold War commitments. (2) General Dwight D. Eisenhower (62, internationalist Republican) was the establishment's challenger. He had been Supreme Allied Commander Europe in WWII and was the first NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe 1950-52. He had been begged to run by both Democratic and Republican leaders since 1947. Eisenhower defeated Taft on the first ballot after a credentials fight over disputed Texas, Georgia, and Louisiana delegations. Senator Richard Nixon of California (39, anti-Communist crusader - had been instrumental in 1948 Alger Hiss case revealing Hiss as a Soviet spy) was VP. Nixon's anti-Communist credentials and youth balanced Eisenhower's war-hero status and age. The Republican platform criticized Truman's Korean War conduct, McCarthyism opposition, and federal spending; supported continued NATO commitments.

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## Key words

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| **Dwight D. Eisenhower** | 34th U.S. president (1953-61). Supreme Allied Commander in Europe during WWII. Organized June 6, 1944 D-Day invasion. Army Chief of Staff 1945-48. Columbia University president 1948-50. First NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe 1950-52. Won 1952 with 442-89 EV; re-elected 1956 with 457-73 EV. |
| **"I Like Ike"** | Eisenhower's famous 1952 campaign slogan. The Eisenhower campaign was first major political campaign to use professional Madison Avenue advertising techniques. |
| **Adlai Stevenson II** | Illinois Governor (1949-53) and 1952 Democratic presidential nominee (also 1956). Brilliant orator. Reluctant candidate - drafted by Democrats. Lost 1952 (442-89 EV) and 1956 (457-73 EV) to Eisenhower. Later JFK's UN Ambassador 1961-65. |

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| **Checkers speech** | Nixon's September 23, 1952 televised address defending himself from accusations of improper $18,000 political fund. Mentioned daughters' Cocker Spaniel "Checkers" - "we're gonna keep it." First major political use of television to overcome scandal. ~60 million viewers. |
| **"I shall go to Korea"** | Eisenhower's October 24, 1952 Detroit campaign promise. Pledged personal Eisenhower assessment of Korean War situation. Politically devastating - implied his military expertise could resolve the war. Eisenhower visited Korea December 2-5, 1952 after his November 4 election. |

# Four questions

**QUESTION 1 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE**

How many electoral votes did Dwight D. Eisenhower win in 1952?

( ) A. 372
( ) B. 404
( ) C. 442
( ) D. 472

**QUESTION 2 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE**

What was the name of Nixon's daughters' Cocker Spaniel mentioned in the 1952 Checkers speech?

( ) A. Buddy
( ) B. Checkers
( ) C. Spot
( ) D. Tippy

**QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER**

What was Eisenhower famous for before he ran for president?

**QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER**

How did the Checkers speech demonstrate the political power of television?

# Answer key

**QUESTION 1**

442. Eisenhower 442; Stevenson 89. Eisenhower carried 39 states. Stevenson 9 (mostly Deep South).

AP students should know the 442-89 split.

**QUESTION 2**

Checkers. The Cocker Spaniel was named "Checkers" by Nixon's daughter Tricia. Nixon: "regardless of what they say about it, we're gonna keep it."

AP students should know the dog's name.

**QUESTION 3**

Eisenhower was famous as a WWII general. Supreme Allied Commander in Europe during WWII (1943-45). Organized June 6, 1944 D-Day invasion of Normandy. Army Chief of Staff (1945-48). Columbia University president (1948-50). First NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe (1950-52). Both Democrats and Republicans had begged him to run for president throughout the late 1940s. He refused until January 1952 when Sen Lodge entered him in the New Hampshire Republican primary. Republican convention in Chicago July 7-11, 1952 nominated him over isolationist Sen Robert Taft.

AP students should know Eisenhower's military background.

## QUESTION 4

The Checkers speech demonstrated the political power of television in five structural ways: (1) Mass audience reach. ~60 million viewers + additional millions on radio - approximately 2/3 of the U.S. adult population. The mass audience was unprecedented for a U.S. political speech. (2) Direct candidate-to-voter communication. Nixon could appeal directly to voters without media filter or party intermediary. (3) Emotional intimacy. Television allowed close-up facial expressions and voice tones that radio could not convey. Nixon's emotional defense of his family's modest finances was structurally powerful through television. (4) Effective scandal management. Nixon converted an embarrassing financial story into a sympathetic personal narrative. The dog reference ("we're gonna keep it") was a master stroke of relatable storytelling. (5) Bypass of hostile media. Most major newspapers were Republican-leaning but had been covering the scandal critically. Television allowed Nixon to make his case directly. The cumulative effect: Eisenhower kept Nixon on the ticket; Republican voters supported Nixon overwhelmingly; the scandal effectively ended. The Checkers speech is widely cited as the first major political use of television to overcome a scandal and is the structural precursor to later televised political defenses (Reagan's 1976 speeches; Clinton's 1992 "60 Minutes" interview; Romney's 2012 video damage control).

AP students should be able to articulate the structural significance.