1956

Dwight D. Eisenhower vs Adlai Stevenson II

A 75-minute lesson on the 1956 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 Dwight D. Eisenhower (Republican) · 457 EV	RUNNER-UP Adlai Stevenson II (Democratic) · 73 EV
KEY ISSUE Cold War; Suez Crisis; prosperity; Eisenhower's health	TURNOUT 60.2%

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

1956: Dwight D. Eisenhower vs Adlai Stevenson II

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 1956 map at theamericanvote.com/elections/-1956 projected, or printed as a handout.

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	Identify two structural conditions in 1953-56 America that would produce a 1956 Eisenhower re-election landslide. For each identify the specific 1953-56 development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	1956 election was 43rd U.S. presidential election. Eisenhower 457 EV / Stevenson 73 EV. Eisenhower 57.4% popular vote higher than 1952 (55.2%). Second consecutive landslide over Stevenson. 1953-56 Eisenhower achievements: Korean armistice July 1953; Iran + Guatemala covert operations 1953-54; Brown v. Board May 1954; Geneva Accords July 1954; McCarthy censured December 1954; Interstate Highway Act June 1956; economic prosperity. Eisenhower health campaign issue. September 24, 1955 heart attack. June 9, 1956 ileitis surgery. Doctors cleared him to run. 65 at 1956 election. Republican National Convention San Francisco August 20-23, 1956 renominated Eisenhower-Nixon. Democratic National Convention Chicago August 13-17, 1956 renominated Stevenson on first ballot. Stevenson declined to choose VP; convention chose Kefauver over JFK 755.5-589. Campaign focused on Eisenhower's record. Republican slogan: "Peace, Progress, Prosperity." Stevenson attacked H-bomb testing. October 23 - November 11, 1956 Hungarian Revolution. Soviet tanks crushed November 4-11. ~2,500 Hungarians killed; ~200,000 fled. U.S. did not intervene. October 29 - November 7, 1956 Suez Crisis. Britain, France, Israel invaded Egypt. Eisenhower opposed; pressured allies through UN + economic pressure. November 6 (U.S. Election Day) Britain announced ceasefire. British PM Eden government fell

January 1957.

Both crises strengthened Eisenhower. Voters wanted experienced foreign-policy leadership.

Eisenhower 457 EV / Stevenson 73. Eisenhower 41 states; Stevenson 7. Eisenhower-Stevenson margin: 9,551,152 popular votes.

Geographic pattern: Eisenhower expanded 1952 Southern breakthrough - carried FL, KY, LA (first Republican LA since 1876 Reconstruction), TN, TX, VA, WV. Stevenson held only Deep South remnant: AL, AR, GA, MS, NC, SC + MO.

1957-61 Eisenhower second term: Little Rock crisis September 1957 (101st Airborne enforced school desegregation); Civil Rights Act 1957 (first since 1875); Sputnik October 1957 ’ NASA + NDEA + ARPA 1958; 1958 recession; Cuban Revolution January 1959; U-2 incident May 1960; January 17, 1961 farewell "military-industrial complex" address.

1956 election structural significance: (1) Confirmed Eisenhower's "Modern Republican" framework. (2) Southern expansion foreshadowed 1960s Republican Southern realignment.

1960 election would be close (Kennedy 303 EV over Nixon 219). JFK's 1956 VP near-miss elevated him for 1960.

The 1956 election can be analyzed retrospectively as the high point of post-WWII U.S. political-economic consensus. Eisenhower's personal popularity transcended party - Democratic voters and Republican voters both supported him. The 1956-60 era produced the structural foundations of modern U.S. life: suburban expansion, automobile-dependent transportation (Interstate Highway System operationalized 1956+), consumer credit expansion, television-dominated mass media, federal-aid education (NDEA 1958), Cold War internationalism (NATO, Marshall Plan continuation).

The 1956 election's long-term political significance: Eisenhower's Southern breakthrough was the structural beginning of the 60-year Democratic-to-Republican Southern realignment. The trajectory: 1952 Eisenhower 4 Southern states ’ 1956 Eisenhower 7 Southern states ’ 1960 Nixon 7 Southern states ’ 1964 Goldwater 5 Deep South states ’ 1968 Wallace 5 Deep South states + Nixon 5 other Southern states ’ 1972 Nixon all 11 Southern states ’ 1976 Carter most Southern states (Southern Democrat exception) ’ 1980-present Republican dominance in Southern states. The 1956 Louisiana breakthrough was the first crack in the Solid South's structural Democratic loyalty. 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 1956 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

Hungarian Revolution 1956
October 23 - November 11, 1956 Hungarian uprising against Soviet rule.

Eisenhower 1955 heart attack
September 24, 1955 Eisenhower heart attack at Aspen Lodge Denver.

Civil Rights Act of 1957
September 9, 1957 federal civil rights law - first since 1875.

Sputnik (October 4, 1957)
Soviet satellite - first artificial Earth satellite. Triggered U.S. "Sputnik crisis." Responses: NASA 1958, NDEA 1958, ARPA 1958.

Suez Crisis 1956
October 29 - November 7, 1956 invasion of Egypt by Britain, France, Israel.

Estes Kefauver
Tennessee Senator and 1956 Democratic VP nominee. Defeated JFK at 1956 Convention 755.5-589.

Little Rock crisis 1957
September 1957 federal-state confrontation. Eisenhower federalized Arkansas National Guard and sent 101st Airborne to enforce school desegregation.

Address Regarding the Suez Crisis

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER, OCTOBER 31, 1956

Eisenhower delivered this address to the nation on October 31, 1956 - approximately one week before the November 6 U.S. presidential election.

> *"We do not accept the use of force as a wise or proper instrument for the settlement of international disputes. To say this in this particular instance is in no way to minimize our friendship with these nations - nor our determination to maintain those friendships. We are fully aware of the grave anxieties of Israel, of Britain and of France. We know that they have been subjected to grave and repeated provocations. The present fact, nonetheless, seems clear: the action taken can scarcely be reconciled with the principles and purposes of the United Nations to which we have all subscribed. We believe these actions to have been taken in error. For we do not accept the use of force as a wise or proper instrument for the settlement of international disputes. To say this - in this particular instance - is in no way to minimize our friendship with these nations - nor our determination to maintain those friendships."*

Eisenhower, "Address Regarding the Suez Crisis" (Washington, DC, October 31, 1956). Public domain.

The 1956 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 Eisenhower win in 1956?

( ) A. 419
( ) B. 432
( ) C. 457
( ) D. 486

QUESTION 2 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

Who defeated JFK at the 1956 Democratic Convention's open VP fight?

( ) A. Sen Stuart Symington
( ) B. Sen Estes Kefauver
( ) C. Sen Hubert Humphrey
( ) D. Sen John Sparkman

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

What were the two October-November 1956 Cold War crises, and how did they affect the U.S. election?

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Eisenhower says "we do not accept the use of force as a wise or proper instrument for the settlement of international disputes." What is the political risk and why did Eisenhower take it?

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

Why was Eisenhower's 1956 Louisiana victory structurally significant?

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

QUESTION 6 · SHORT-ANSWER

Explain how Eisenhower's 1956 Southern expansion (FL, KY, LA, TN, TX, VA, WV) foreshadowed the 1960s-1980s Republican Southern realignment.

QUESTION 7 · MAP-READ

On the 1956 election map, identify Eisenhower's 41 states and Stevenson's 7 states. What does the geographic pattern reveal?

Answer key

QUESTION 1

457. Eisenhower 457; Stevenson 73.

AP students should know the 457-73 split.

QUESTION 2

Sen Estes Kefauver (Tennessee).

AP students should know Kefauver.

QUESTION 3

Two crises: (1) Hungarian Revolution October 23 - November 11, 1956. Soviet tanks crushed. U.S. did not intervene. (2) Suez Crisis October 29 - November 7, 1956. Britain, France, Israel invaded Egypt. Eisenhower opposed. Both crises strengthened Eisenhower: voters wanted experienced foreign-policy leadership.

AP students should know both crises.

QUESTION 4

Eisenhower's position carried three political risks: alienated Britain + France (NATO allies); alienated American Anglophiles + pro-Israel constituencies; created Cold War risk during Hungarian crisis. Eisenhower took the position for three reasons: principled commitment to UN Charter; strategic recognition that European colonialism was untenable; personal belief about aggressive force. Position was politically effective: established Eisenhower as fair/principled/decisive; strengthened U.S. credibility in non-aligned nations; boosted 1956 landslide.

AP students should be able to articulate.

QUESTION 5

First Republican Louisiana victory since 1876 Reconstruction collapse - 80-year gap. Louisiana structural Democratic state since 1880s due to Solid South loyalty + Black disenfranchisement + Catholic Cajun culture. Eisenhower broke this through personal popularity + Stevenson weakness + moderate civil rights position + Suez prestige. Foreshadowed 1960s Deep South Republican realignment.

AP students should be able to articulate.

QUESTION 6

Eisenhower's 1956 Southern expansion (FL, KY, LA, TN, TX, VA, WV) was the structural beginning of the 60-year Democratic-to-Republican Southern realignment. Trajectory: 1952 Eisenhower 4 Southern states (FL, TN, TX, VA) ’ 1956 Eisenhower 7 Southern states (added KY, LA, WV) ’ 1960 Nixon 7 Southern states ’ 1964 Goldwater 5 Deep South states (AL, GA, LA, MS, SC) ’ 1968 Wallace 5 Deep South states + Nixon 5 other Southern states (TN, VA, KY, NC, SC, FL, TX - various combinations) ’ 1972 Nixon all 11 Southern states ’ 1976 Carter most Southern states (Southern Democrat exception) ’ 1980-present Republican dominance in Southern states. The 1956 LA breakthrough was first crack in Solid South's structural Democratic loyalty. The trajectory reflects: (1) Eisenhower's personal popularity (1952, 1956). (2) Civil rights backlash (post-1964). (3) Nixon's "Southern Strategy" (1968+). (4) Reagan's conservative coalition (1980+). (5) Cultural-religious-economic conservative consolidation (1980-present). The 1956 election was the structural inflection point.

AP students should be able to articulate the realignment.

QUESTION 7

Eisenhower states (41): everything except 7 Stevenson states. Eisenhower's 7 Southern states: FL, KY, LA, TN, TX, VA, WV. Stevenson states (7): AL, AR, GA, MS, NC, SC, MO. Pattern reveals: (1) Eisenhower expanded 1952 Southern breakthrough - gained LA + KY + WV. (2) Stevenson held only Deep South Democratic remnant - foreshadowed structural Republican Southern realignment. (3) The 1956 LA breakthrough was first crack in Solid South.

AP students should be able to articulate.

Discussion prompts

1. Eisenhower's 1956 Southern expansion foreshadowed the 1960s Republican Southern realignment. Identify three structural reasons Eisenhower could break Southern Democratic loyalty.

2. JFK's near-miss 1956 VP candidacy structurally elevated him for the 1960 presidential campaign. Identify three structural reasons a losing VP nomination effort can elevate a future presidential candidate.