1956

Dwight D. Eisenhower vs Adlai Stevenson II

A 20-minute lesson on the 1956 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, 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%

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1956

Eisenhower had been president 4 years. Korean War ended July 1953. Federal government desegregated schools (Brown v. Board May 1954). U.S. economy prospered. Suburbs grew. New cars, new houses, new TVs. Eisenhower was hugely popular.

But Eisenhower had health problems. September 24, 1955 he suffered a heart attack at Aspen Lodge in Denver, Colorado. He was in the hospital 7 weeks. June 9, 1956 he had emergency surgery for ileitis (intestinal blockage). Doctors said he could run for re-election. Eisenhower was 65 (would be 66 in 1956 election; 70 by end of second term).

Republicans nominated Eisenhower + Nixon again. Eisenhower endorsed Nixon despite some pressure to drop him.

Democrats nominated Adlai Stevenson AGAIN. Stevenson had lost 1952. Many Democrats believed he could not beat Eisenhower. Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts (39, future president) almost won VP nomination but Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee won instead. The Democratic Convention's open VP fight was a structural rarity.

Look at picture. That Dwight Eisenhower - re-elected by even bigger margin than 1952.

Campaign was relatively calm. Eisenhower campaigned little due to health concerns. Stevenson campaigned hard but had nothing new to say.

Then October 1956 brought TWO foreign-policy crises. (1) Hungarian Revolution: October 23 - November 11, 1956 Hungarian uprising against Soviet rule. Soviet tanks crushed it killing ~2,500 Hungarians. U.S. did not intervene. (2) Suez Crisis: October 29 - November 7, 1956 Britain, France, Israel invaded Egypt after Egyptian President Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal July 1956. Eisenhower opposed the invasion - pressured allies to withdraw.

Both crises strengthened Eisenhower. Voters wanted experienced leadership during international crises. Eisenhower's steady management of Suez Crisis was politically masterful.

Election Day November 6, 1956: Eisenhower 457 EV vs Stevenson 73. Popular vote 57.4% vs 42.0%. Eisenhower won 41 states - biggest Republican landslide since Hoover 1928. Even bigger than 1952.

Eisenhower's second term included Little Rock crisis (1957 federal



Dwight D. Eisenhower, 34th U.S. president. He was re-elected in 1956 by an even bigger margin than his 1952 victory.

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Let's talk about the story

1.

How many electoral votes did Eisenhower win in 1956?

2.

What were the two foreign-policy crises during the 1956 campaign?

3.

Why did Eisenhower's health become a 1956 campaign issue?

Warm-up (5 min)

In 1956 Eisenhower ran for re-election against Adlai Stevenson again. Cold War crises happened during the campaign - Hungarian Revolution + Suez Crisis both in October-November 1956. Eisenhower won even bigger than 1952.

Answer key

1.

457. Eisenhower 457; Stevenson 73. Eisenhower carried 41 states. Even bigger landslide than 1952 (442-89). Largest Republican Electoral College margin since Hoover 1928.

AP students should know the 457-73 split.

2.

Two foreign-policy crises during the 1956 campaign: (1) Hungarian Revolution October 23 - November 11, 1956 - Hungarian uprising against Soviet rule. Soviet tanks crushed the revolution November 4-11. ~2,500 Hungarians killed; ~200,000 fled as refugees. U.S. did not intervene. (2) Suez Crisis October 29 - November 7, 1956 - Britain, France, Israel invaded Egypt after President Nasser nationalized Suez Canal July 26, 1956. Eisenhower opposed invasion and pressured allies to withdraw through United Nations and economic pressure. Both crises happened during the final weeks of the U.S. presidential campaign. Both strengthened Eisenhower's position: voters wanted experienced leadership during international crises. Eisenhower's steady management was politically masterful.

AP students should know both crises.

3.

Eisenhower's health became a 1956 campaign issue because of two major health events during his first term: (1) September 24, 1955 heart attack at Aspen Lodge in Denver, Colorado. Eisenhower was hospitalized for 7 weeks. (2) June 9, 1956 emergency surgery for ileitis (intestinal blockage). Doctors cleared Eisenhower to run for re-election but his health was structurally concerning. He was 65 years old at the 1956 election (would be 66 at his second inauguration; 70 by end of second term). The health concerns made his vice president (Nixon, 43) more politically important. Eisenhower would suffer additional heart attacks in 1957 and 1965 before dying March 28, 1969 at age 78. The 1956 election established the precedent that presidential health is a structural campaign issue.

AP students should know Eisenhower's health.