3-5 EDITION · CLASSROOM

1964

Lyndon B. Johnson vs Barry Goldwater

A 35-minute lesson on the 1964 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA New Deal Coalition	ELECTORAL VOTES 538 total
WINNER Lyndon B. Johnson (Democratic) · 486 EV	RUNNER-UP Barry Goldwater (Republican) · 52 EV
KEY ISSUE Civil rights; Great Society programs; nuclear war fears; Kennedy legacy	TURNOUT 62.8%

CONTENTS

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

1964: Lyndon B. Johnson vs Barry Goldwater

Timing

5 min	Warm-up	When a vice president succeeds to the presidency after assassination, what political conditions make him likely to win his own term in a landslide?
15 min	Reading	1964 election was 45th U.S. presidential election. Produced Lyndon B. Johnson's 486-52 EV victory over Republican Barry Goldwater - biggest popular vote margin in U.S. history (LBJ 61.1% vs Goldwater 38.5% = 22.6 percentage points). 1964 election structurally shaped by JFK assassination (November 22, 1963), Civil Rights Act of 1964 (July 2, 1964), Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (August 7, 1964), Republican conservative-moderate split, and "Daisy Girl" attack-ad campaign. JFK assassinated November 22, 1963 in Dallas, Texas at 12:30 PM CST. Lee Harvey Oswald arrested at 1:50 PM; killed by Jack Ruby November 24. LBJ sworn in aboard Air Force One at 2:38 PM CST November 22 by U.S. District Judge Sarah T. Hughes - first president sworn in by a woman; first to take oath on an airplane. LBJ was 55, Texas senator (1949-61), Senate Majority Leader (1955-61), and JFK's VP (1961-63). His political skills were legendary: the "Johnson treatment" (intense personal lobbying) had passed the 1957 Civil Rights Act and made the Senate Democratic majority functional. LBJ's first speech to Congress November 27, 1963: "Let us continue" - explicit commitment to JFK's civil rights and Great Society agenda. LBJ's 1964 pre-election achievements: (1) July 2, 1964 Civil Rights Act of 1964 - banned racial discrimination in public accommodations, employment, federally funded programs. Title VII created EEOC. LBJ signed with 75 ceremonial pens. He told aide Bill Moyers: "We have lost the South for a generation." (2) August 7, 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution - Congress authorized U.S. military action in Vietnam after alleged August 2 + 4 North Vietnamese attacks on USS Maddox and USS Turner Joy. House 416-0; Senate 88-2 (Sens Wayne Morse and Ernest Gruening dissented). Operationalized Vietnam War escalation. (3) August 20, 1964 Economic Opportunity Act - "War on Poverty" launched. Created Office of Economic Opportunity, Job Corps, VISTA, Head Start, Community Action Program. (4) Major economic prosperity - GDP growing 5%/year; unemployment 5%; consumer confidence high. Democratic National Convention met in Atlantic City August 24-27, 1964 and renominated LBJ by acclamation. Sen Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota - 1948 Convention civil rights speech leader - was VP. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party

(MFDP) challenged the regular Mississippi delegation's seating - one of the structural civil rights tests of the convention. LBJ negotiated a compromise: 2 at-large MFDP seats + recognition of MFDP at all future conventions. Fannie Lou Hamer's August 22 televised testimony to the credentials committee was structurally consequential: she described racial violence and voter suppression in Mississippi.

Republican National Convention met in San Francisco July 13-16, 1964. The convention faced structural conservative-moderate split. Conservative wing: Sen Barry Goldwater of Arizona (55, "Mr. Conservative," 1960 ghost-written by Brent Bozell "The Conscience of a Conservative" was structurally important). Moderate wing: Gov Nelson Rockefeller of NY (1958-73 NY governor; wealthy heir) and Gov William Scranton of PA. Conservative wing won. Goldwater nominated on first ballot. Rep William Miller of NY (House Republican Conference chair) was VP.

Goldwater's acceptance speech July 16, 1964 was structurally controversial: "I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue." The "extremism" passage was written by speechwriter Karl Hess; the underlying philosophy was Goldwater's. The speech alienated moderate Republicans. Democrats immediately used the quote against him.

Goldwater's structural conservative positions: (1) Voted against July 2, 1964 Civil Rights Act on states' rights grounds. He was one of only 6 Republican senators to vote against it. (2) Proposed making Social Security voluntary. The proposal was politically devastating with elderly voters. (3) Considered using tactical nuclear weapons in Vietnam. His October 1963 comments about "lobbing one into the men's room at the Kremlin" had been politically toxic. (4) Wanted to sell Tennessee Valley Authority. (5) Opposed federal civil rights enforcement. (6) Proposed reducing federal welfare programs.

LBJ's campaign exploited Goldwater's extremism. September 7, 1964 "Daisy Girl" television ad: 60-second ad with young girl picking petals off daisy, counting up to ten; cut to countdown to nuclear explosion. LBJ voice-over: "These are the stakes! To make a world in which all of God's children can live, or to go into the dark. We must either love each other, or we must die." Aired ONCE on NBC Monday Movie September 7, 1964 - but generated massive media coverage and free additional airings on news programs. First major political attack ad. Implied Goldwater would start nuclear war. Subsequent LBJ campaign ads: "Confessions of a Republican" (October 1964 - actor John Holcombe playing a Republican voter explaining his switch to LBJ); "Ice Cream" (girl eating ice cream cone with female voice-over warning about strontium-90 fallout if Goldwater started nuclear testing).

The LBJ slogan "All the way with LBJ" was friendly and confident. Republican slogan "In your heart, you know he's right" attempted to address Goldwater's controversial reputation. Democratic counter: "In your guts, you know he's nuts."

LBJ won 486 EV; Goldwater 52. LBJ carried 44 states; Goldwater 6 states. The popular vote: LBJ 43,127,041 (61.1%); Goldwater 27,175,754 (38.5%); minor candidates ~330,000. LBJ-Goldwater popular-vote margin: 15,951,287 - largest in U.S. history (in absolute terms; the percentage margin of 22.6 points was also largest).

The geographic pattern was structurally consequential. Goldwater's 6 states: Arizona (his home state) + Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina (Deep South states - LBJ's "lost the South for a generation" prediction operationalized within months). The 1964 was the first Republican carrying of Mississippi since 1872; first carrying of Georgia since 1872; first carrying of South Carolina since 1876; first carrying of Alabama since 1872. The 5 Deep South states would become structurally Republican in subsequent decades - the realignment LBJ had predicted.

LBJ used the 1964 mandate for Great Society legislation 1965: (1) August 6, 1965 Voting Rights Act of 1965 - banned literacy tests and other voter-suppression devices; established federal supervision of voter registration in states with histories of discrimination. (2) July 30, 1965 Medicare + Medicaid - federal health insurance for elderly (Medicare) and poor (Medicaid). Signed at Truman Library with Truman attending. (3) October 3, 1965 Immigration Act (Hart-Celler) - ended 1924 national-origin quotas; opened immigration to non-European countries. (4) Elementary and Secondary Education Act April 1965 - first major federal aid to public schools. (5) Higher Education Act November 1965 - federal student loans and grants. (6) Voting Rights Act extensions and additional civil rights legislation. (7) Department of Housing and Urban Development September 1965. (8) Department of Transportation October 1966. (9) Public Broadcasting Act November 1967 (PBS, NPR). The Great Society legislative program was the most extensive federal social-policy expansion since the New Deal.

But Vietnam War destroyed LBJ's presidency. March 8, 1965 Marines landed at Da Nang. By 1968 the U.S. had 543,000 troops in Vietnam. ~58,220 American military deaths in Vietnam war 1955-75. The January 1968 Tet Offensive demonstrated that the war was not being won despite optimistic government claims. LBJ's approval rating fell from 79% (January 1965) to 36% (March 1968). March 31, 1968 LBJ announced he would not seek another term: "I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President."

The 1964 election's structural significance was fourfold. First, LBJ's 61.1% popular vote was the largest in U.S. history - structural confirmation of Democratic dominance. Second, Goldwater's 5 Deep South states inaugurated the Republican Southern realignment that LBJ had predicted with "we have lost the South for a generation." Third, Goldwater's 1964 candidacy is widely cited as the structural beginning of modern American conservatism - the Goldwater coalition would eventually produce Reagan 1980. Fourth, the Daisy Girl ad inaugurated the era of televised attack advertising.

		The Goldwater 1964 defeat was politically catastrophic but structurally transformative. Goldwater's conservative philosophy - limited government, anti-Communist foreign policy, opposition to federal civil rights enforcement, support for states' rights - became the structural foundation of post-1964 American conservatism. Goldwater's 1964 supporters included the young Ronald Reagan (his October 27, 1964 "A Time for Choosing" televised speech for Goldwater is widely cited as the launch of his political career). Reagan's 1980 presidential victory operationalized many of Goldwater's 1964 positions.
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 1964 Election

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realignment that LBJ had predicted with "we have lost the South for a generation." Third, Goldwater's 1964 candidacy is widely cited as the structural beginning of modern American conservatism - the Goldwater coalition would eventually produce Reagan 1980. Fourth, the Daisy Girl ad inaugurated the era of televised attack advertising.

The Goldwater 1964 defeat was politically catastrophic but structurally transformative. Goldwater's conservative philosophy - limited government, anti-Communist foreign policy, opposition to federal civil rights enforcement, support for states' rights - became the structural foundation of post-1964 American conservatism. Goldwater's 1964 supporters included the young Ronald Reagan (his October 27, 1964 "A Time for Choosing" televised speech for Goldwater is widely cited as the launch of his political career). Reagan's 1980 presidential victory operationalized many of Goldwater's 1964 positions.

Key words

Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ)	36th U.S. president (1963-69). Texas senator and Senate Majority Leader before becoming JFK's VP. Sworn in aboard Air Force One November 22, 1963. Won 1964 with 486-52 EV and 61.1% popular vote - biggest popular vote margin in U.S. history. Signed Civil Rights Act 1964, Voting Rights Act 1965, Medicare/Medicaid 1965. Declined to run in 1968.
Barry Goldwater	Arizona Senator (1953-65, 1969-87) and 1964 Republican presidential nominee. Conservative wing leader. Voted against Civil Rights Act of 1964. Acceptance speech: "Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice." Lost 486-52 EV. Carried 6 states (AZ + 5 Deep South).
Daisy Girl ad	LBJ's September 7, 1964 60-second television attack ad. Aired ONCE on NBC Monday Movie. First major political attack ad. Implied Goldwater would start nuclear war.
Civil Rights Act of 1964	July 2, 1964 federal law banning racial discrimination in public accommodations, employment, federally funded programs. Title VII created EEOC. LBJ signed with 75 ceremonial pens.

Gulf of Tonkin Resolution August 7, 1964 congressional resolution authorizing U.S. military action in Vietnam. Passed House 416-0; Senate 88-2 (Sens Morse and Gruening dissented). Operationalized Vietnam War escalation.

Four questions

QUESTION 1 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many electoral votes did LBJ win in 1964?

( ) A. 447
( ) B. 472
( ) C. 486
( ) D. 509

QUESTION 2 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

Which 5 Deep South states did Goldwater carry in 1964?

( ) A. AL, FL, GA, MS, NC
( ) B. AL, GA, LA, MS, SC
( ) C. AR, GA, LA, MS, TX
( ) D. AL, AR, GA, SC, VA

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

What was the Daisy Girl ad and why is it historically significant?

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Why is Goldwater's 1964 defeat widely cited as the structural beginning of modern American conservatism?

Answer key

QUESTION 1

486. LBJ 486; Goldwater 52. LBJ carried 44 states; Goldwater 6 (AZ + 5 Deep South).

AP students should know the 486-52 split.

QUESTION 2

AL, GA, LA, MS, SC. Goldwater carried Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina + his home state Arizona = 6 total states. The 5 Deep South victories operationalized LBJ's "we have lost the South for a generation" prediction. First Republican carrying of Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi since Reconstruction (Mississippi 1872; Georgia 1872; Alabama 1872; Louisiana 1956 Eisenhower; South Carolina 1876).

AP students should know the 5 Deep South states.

QUESTION 3

The Daisy Girl ad was LBJ's September 7, 1964 60-second television attack ad against Goldwater. The ad opened with a young girl in a field picking petals off a daisy and counting "1, 2, 3, 4, 5..." Her counting cut to a male voice counting down a missile launch "10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5..." The screen filled with the image of a nuclear mushroom cloud. LBJ's voice-over: "These are the stakes! To make a world in which all of God's children can live, or to go into the dark." The ad aired ONLY ONCE on September 7, 1964 during The NBC Monday Movie - but generated massive media coverage and free additional airings on news programs. Historical significance: (1) First major political attack ad. The ad inaugurated the era of televised negative advertising that would dominate U.S. campaigns through the 1990s. (2) Pioneered emotional rather than logical political persuasion. (3) Demonstrated that single televised ad could reshape political narrative through media coverage. (4) Structurally weaponized fear of nuclear war as political tool. (5) Created template for subsequent attack ads (1988 Willie Horton; 2004 Swift Boat; modern attack advertising). The ad effectively destroyed Goldwater's candidacy by reinforcing the "Goldwater would start nuclear war" framing.

AP students should be able to articulate the historical significance.

QUESTION 4

Goldwater's 1964 defeat is widely cited as the structural beginning of modern American conservatism for five reasons: (1) Coalition building. Goldwater's 27.2M votes (38.5%) had assembled a distinct conservative coalition - Southern segregationists + Western libertarians + Northern Catholic anti-Communists + suburban middle-class voters. The coalition would persist and grow through subsequent elections. (2) Ideological clarity. Goldwater's "Conscience of a Conservative" (1960) articulated coherent conservative philosophy: limited government, anti-Communist foreign policy, opposition to federal civil rights enforcement, support for states' rights. The framework would shape Republican philosophy for the next 60 years. (3) Movement infrastructure. The 1964 campaign produced structural conservative organization: Young Americans for Freedom (1960+), American Conservative Union (1964+), Heritage Foundation (1973+), Federalist Society (1982+). The infrastructure would sustain the movement through electoral defeats. (4) Ronald Reagan emergence. Reagan's October 27, 1964 "A Time for Choosing" televised speech for Goldwater is widely cited as the launch of his political career. The speech raised ~$1M for Goldwater in its final week - more than any political speech to that point. Reagan would be elected California Governor 1966 (defeating incumbent Pat Brown by 1M votes), then U.S. president 1980 (defeating Carter 489-49 EV). (5) Structural ideological transformation. The 1964 defeat showed that conservative ideology was politically viable as a major-party identity. Subsequent Republican nominees would increasingly adopt Goldwater positions: Nixon 1968-72 partial conservative; Reagan 1980+ full conservative; Bush 1988-92 partial conservative; Bush 2000-04 partial conservative; Trump 2016-24 nationalist conservative. The Goldwater 1964 defeat was the foundation of modern American conservatism that would eventually win the presidency.

AP students should be able to articulate the structural significance.