# 2004

## *George W. Bush vs John Kerry*

A 105-minute lesson on the 2004 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, DBQ pairing, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

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| ERA<br>Modern Polarization | ELECTORAL VOTES<br>538 total |
| WINNER<br>George W. Bush (Republican) · 286 EV | RUNNER-UP<br>John Kerry (Democratic) · 251 EV |
| KEY ISSUE<br>Iraq War; War on Terror; 9/11 security; same-sex marriage ballot measures | TURNOUT<br>60.1% |

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# 2004: George W. Bush vs John Kerry

## AP framework alignment

AP US History · Period varies by cycle · Reasoning skills: contextualization, comparison, causation, sourcing. CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2 (central ideas), RH.11-12.6 (point of view), RH.11-12.7 (multiple sources). NCSS · D2.His.5.9-12, D2.His.14.9-12, D2.His.16.9-12.

## Timing

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| **5 min** | **Warm-up** | Identify two structural conditions in 2001-04 America that would produce a Bush 43 re-election. For each identify the specific 2001-04 development most responsible. |
| **15 min** | **Reading + vocab** | 2004 election was 55th U.S. presidential election. Bush 286 EV / Kerry 251 EV. Bush 50.7% popular vote. First Republican popular vote victory since Bush 41 1988.<br><br>Bush first term defined by 9/11. September 11, 2001 attacks killed 2,977. Bush approval 92% post-9/11.<br><br>Bush first-term events: October 2001 Afghanistan invasion; October 2001 USA PATRIOT Act; 2001+2003 tax cuts; January 2002 No Child Left Behind; October 2002 Iraq War Authorization; March 2003 Iraq invasion; May 2003 "Mission Accomplished"; December 2003 Medicare Part D + Saddam Hussein capture; April 2004 Abu Ghraib scandal.<br><br>Democratic primary 2004. Dean anti-war front-runner mid-2003. January 19, 2004 Iowa upset: Kerry 37.6%; Edwards 31.8%; Dean 18.5%. "Dean Scream." Kerry won Iowa + NH + Super Tuesday. Edwards (NC) VP July 6, 2004.<br><br>Democratic Convention Boston July 26-29, 2004 nominated Kerry-Edwards. Kerry "I'm John Kerry, and I'm reporting for duty." Obama July 27, 2004 keynote.<br><br>Republican Convention NYC August 30-September 2, 2004 renominated Bush-Cheney.<br><br>Swift Boat Veterans for Truth August 4, 2004 launched. ~$22M ads. Karl Rove operationalized indirectly. Kerry initially failed to respond.<br><br>Bush framed Kerry "flip-flopper" + "Massachusetts liberal."<br><br>October 29, 2004 bin Laden video.<br><br>Bush 286 EV / Kerry 251. Ohio decisive (Bush +118,601; 20 EV). |

Bush second term 2005-09: February 2005 Social Security privatization failed; August 29, 2005 Hurricane Katrina; 2006 midterm Democrats gained Congress; February 2007 Iraq Surge; 2008 financial crisis; January 2009 Bush approval 22%.

2004 election structural significance: (1) First Republican popular vote victory since Bush 41 1988. (2) Demonstrated wartime incumbent advantage. (3) Swift Boat inaugurated cultural-attack independent expenditure era. (4) Obama 2004 keynote launched structural rise. (5) Last clean Republican popular vote victory until Trump 2024.

The 2004 Bush re-election was the structural high point of post-9/11 Republican-conservative dominance. Bush 43 2000+2004 extended Reagan-era ascendance into 2001-09. Iraq War + 2008 financial crisis structurally damaged Republican position. Obama 2008 ended Republican-conservative ascendance.

Karl Rove "Mayberry Machiavelli" strategy: wartime patriotism + cultural-conservative mobilization + Swift Boat-style attacks + Bush rural-Southern identity. Operationalized post-Reagan Republican coalition.

The 2004 election's long-term structural significance for Democratic Party: Kerry 2004 defeat (286-251 EV; 48.3%) close but politically devastating. Subsequent Democratic lessons: respond aggressively to character attacks; mobilize base + swing voters simultaneously; address cultural-conservative concerns. Obama 2008+12 operationalized lessons. Hillary 2016 criticized for inadequate PA+MI+WI mobilization. Biden 2020 + Harris 2024 attempted varied applications.

The 2004 Republican coalition assembly: Karl Rove micro-targeted voter mobilization through 72-Hour Project + Voter Vault database. Republican grassroots organization mobilized 4 million additional Republican voters from 2000 to 2004 (Bush 50.5M 2000 ’ 62.0M 2004). Targeted: evangelical Christians (anti-same-sex-marriage ballot initiatives in 11 states drove turnout); rural + small-town white voters; Catholic voters (Bush gained Catholic vote 47-52 + 47-50 in 2000 + 2004 vs Kerry); Latino voters (Bush won record 40% Latino vote vs Kerry's 58%); married women + suburban families.

The 2004 anti-same-sex-marriage ballot initiatives were structurally consequential: 11 states (AR, GA, KY, MI, MS, MT, ND, OH, OK, OR, UT) had anti-same-sex-marriage initiatives on November 2004 ballot. All 11 passed (margins 57-86%). The Ohio initiative passed 62-38% + helped mobilize Republican turnout in decisive state. Republican strategist Karl Rove subsequently denied operationalizing the ballot initiatives but evidence suggested coordinated structural mobilization. The 2004 anti-same-sex-marriage mobilization peaked + began to recede - subsequent state initiatives 2006-12 + Supreme Court 2013 + 2015 + 2024 same-sex-marriage rulings reversed the political dynamic. By 2024 same-sex marriage was structurally accepted across both parties.

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| | | The 2004-2008 political trajectory: Bush 2004 re-election ' second-term troubles (Social Security privatization failed, Hurricane Katrina August 2005, Iraq insurgency, 2006 midterm Democratic gains, 2008 financial crisis) ' Obama 2008 victory ended Republican-conservative ascendance. The 4-year trajectory from Bush 286-251 EV to Obama 365-173 EV was one of fastest structural political reversals in U.S. history. The structural lesson: political dominance can collapse rapidly when underlying conditions (wars, economic crises, scandals) overwhelm electoral advantages. |
| **20 min** | **Source A** | Read aloud once; students annotate individually for tone, evidence, and audience. |
| **20 min** | **Source B** | Compare/contrast against Source A. Pair-share on the DBQ comparison question. |
| **20 min** | **Worksheet** | Eight questions: 5 short-answer, 2 stimulus-based MCQ, 1 long-essay framing. |
| **20 min** | **LEQ planning** | Students sketch a thesis + outline for the LEQ comparison prompt. Submit for next-day full essay. |
| **5 min** | **Closure** | Exit ticket: one sentence summarizing the comparison. |

# 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

**George W. Bush**
43rd U.S. president (2001-09).

**Swift Boat Veterans for Truth**
2004 independent expenditure organization.

**9/11 attacks**
September 11, 2001 al-Qaeda attacks.

**Obama 2004 keynote**
July 27, 2004 Democratic Convention keynote.

**2004 anti-same-sex-marriage ballot initiatives**
11 states (AR, GA, KY, MI, MS, MT, ND, OH, OK, OR, UT) had anti-same-sex-marriage initiatives on November 2004 ballot. All 11 passed (margins 57-86%). Helped mobilize Republican turnout in decisive Ohio.

**John Kerry**
2004 Democratic presidential nominee.

**Mission Accomplished banner**
May 1, 2003 Bush USS Abraham Lincoln speech.

**Iraq War Authorization**
October 16, 2002 congressional resolution.

**Karl Rove**
Bush 43 chief political strategist + senior adviser 2001-07. "Mayberry Machiavelli" strategy. Architect of 2000 + 2004 Bush victories + 2002 Republican midterm gains. Operationalized post-Reagan Republican coalition. Subsequent Fox News commentator + Wall Street Journal columnist.

## Acceptance Address at Democratic National Convention

**JOHN KERRY, JULY 29, 2004**

*Kerry delivered this acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention at FleetCenter in Boston on July 29, 2004.*

> *"I'm John Kerry, and I'm reporting for duty. We are here tonight because we love our country. We are here tonight because we believe that this can be a better America. As President, I will bring back this nation's time-honored tradition: the United States never goes to war because we want to, we only go to war because we have to. That is the standard of our nation. I know what kids go through when they are carrying an M-16 in a dangerous place and they can't tell friend from foe. I know what they go through when they're out on patrol at night and they don't know what's coming around the next bend."*

**Kerry, "Acceptance Address at Democratic National Convention" (Boston, July 29, 2004). Fair use under 17 USC §107 — educational excerpt of public political speech, ≈150 words.**

# Document-based question

Source A is on the Background page; Source B is below. Use both as evidence for the worksheet's source-analysis questions and the LEQ.

SOURCE A

## Acceptance Address at Democratic National Convention

**JOHN KERRY, JULY 29, 2004**

*“I'm John Kerry, and I'm reporting for duty. We are here tonight because we love our country. We are here tonight because we believe that this can be a better America. As President, I will bring back this nation's time-honored tradition: the United States never goes to war because we want to, we only go to war because we have to. That is the standard of our nation. I know what kids go through when they are carrying an M-16 in a dangerous place and they can't tell friend from foe. I know what they go through when they're out on patrol at night and they don't know what's coming around the next bend.”*

Kerry, "Acceptance Address at Democratic National Convention" (Boston, July 29, 2004). Fair use under 17 USC §107 — educational excerpt of public political speech, ≈150 words.

SOURCE B

## Democratic National Convention Keynote Address

**BARACK OBAMA, JULY 27, 2004**

*“Now even as we speak, there are those who are preparing to divide us, the spin masters and negative ad peddlers who embrace the politics of anything goes. Well, I say to them tonight, there's not a liberal America and a conservative America - there's the United States of America. There's not a Black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America; there's the United States of America. The pundits like to slice-and-dice our country into Red States and Blue States; Red States for Republicans, Blue States for Democrats. But I've got news for them, too. We worship an awesome God in the Blue States, and we don't like federal agents poking around our libraries in the Red States.”*

Obama, "Democratic National Convention Keynote Address" (Boston, July 27, 2004). Fair use under 17 USC §107 — educational excerpt of public political speech, ≈150 words.

# The 2004 Election

Answer the eight questions below. Source A is on the Background page; Source B is on the DBQ Pair page.

**QUESTION 1 · SHORT-ANSWER**

Identify the key phrase in Source A (Kerry 2004 acceptance) articulating military-service framing. Quote it verbatim.

**QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER**

Identify the key phrase in Source B (Obama 2004 keynote) articulating unity-transcending-partisanship framework. Quote it verbatim.

**QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER**

Both sources are 2004 Democratic Convention speeches but from different positions in Democratic Party. Identify the specific political function each source performs.

**QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER**

Obama's "We worship an awesome God in the Blue States, and we don't like federal agents poking around our libraries in the Red States" articulates structural counter-stereotyping. What rhetorical purpose does this serve?

**QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER**
Identify three specific 2005-2009 developments that would damage Bush 43 second-term position.

**QUESTION 6 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE**
How old was Obama when he delivered the 2004 Democratic Convention keynote?

( ) A. 39
( ) B. 43
( ) C. 47
( ) D. 51

**QUESTION 7 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE**
How much did Swift Boat Veterans for Truth spend on 2004 ads?

( ) A. ~$8 million
( ) B. ~$15 million
( ) C. ~$22 million
( ) D. ~$35 million

**QUESTION 8 · SHORT-ANSWER**
Sketch your thesis sentence for the LEQ (next page). State your position: was the 2004 election about Republican-dominance, Swift-Boat-attacks, or Obama-launch? Identify one piece of evidence from each source you will use.

# Long-essay-question

**LEQ PROMPT**

Kerry's July 2004 acceptance speech (Source A) framed his Vietnam Navy service through "reporting for duty" military salute - a framing that would be neutralized by Swift Boat Veterans for Truth attacks 6 days later. Obama's July 2004 keynote address (Source B) articulated unity-transcending-partisanship framework - "there's not a liberal America and a conservative America" - that would structurally launch his political rise to 2008 victory. Using BOTH sources and your knowledge of the 2001-2024 period, evaluate the extent to which the 2004 election represented (a) the structural high point of post-9/11 Republican-conservative dominance, (b) the demonstration that Swift Boat-style attacks could neutralize candidate's structural strengths, or (c) the Obama 2004 keynote that launched his structural rise to 2008 nomination + victory. Defend a clear thesis.

**GRADING RUBRIC**

Thesis (1 pt): must take a defensible position on the Republican-dominance-vs-Swift-Boat-attacks-vs-Obama-launch axis. Contextualization (1 pt): mention at least two of the 9/11 attacks, the Iraq War, the Mission Accomplished banner, the Abu Ghraib scandal, Hurricane Katrina, the 2008 financial crisis, the Obama 2008 election, the Trump 2016 + 2024 elections. Evidence (2 pts): must quote at least one phrase from each source. Analysis (1 pt): must explicitly evaluate the extent rather than treating the three framings as equivalent. Total 5 points.

# Answer key

**QUESTION 1**

Accept any of: "I'm John Kerry, and I'm reporting for duty", "I know what kids go through when they are carrying an M-16 in a dangerous place", "We are here tonight because we love our country". The "reporting for duty" phrase is the most distinctive military-service framing.

Kerry's framing emphasized Vietnam Navy service.

**QUESTION 2**

Accept any of: "there's not a liberal America and a conservative America - there's the United States of America", "There's not a Black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America; there's the United States of America", "We worship an awesome God in the Blue States, and we don't like federal agents poking around our libraries in the Red States". The "not a liberal America and a conservative America" phrase is the most distinctive unity framing.

Obama's framing established unity-transcending-partisanship framework.

**QUESTION 3**

Source A is Kerry's 2004 presidential acceptance speech - articulated as Democratic nominee to assemble Democratic coalition through military-service framing + structural Vietnam-Bush Air National Guard contrast. The function is to position Kerry as more authentic military leader than Bush. The framing was politically risky: invited Swift Boat counter-attacks. Source B is Obama's 2004 keynote address - articulated as Illinois state senator + U.S. Senate candidate to introduce himself to national audience + mobilize Democratic Convention. The function is to establish Obama as transformative figure transcending partisan + racial + cultural divisions. The framing was politically transformative: launched Obama's structural rise to 2008 presidency. Together, the sources reveal the structural 2004 Democratic strategic options: military-biographical framing (Kerry) vs unity-transcending framing (Obama). Kerry's approach lost 286-251 EV; Obama's approach would win 365-173 EV in 2008. The structural lesson: candidate framings have long-term political consequences regardless of immediate electoral outcomes.

AP students should be able to articulate the structural framework.

## QUESTION 4

Obama's "awesome God in Blue States" + "federal agents poking around libraries in Red States" articulates structural counter-stereotyping through five rhetorical strategies: (1) Religious-cultural reversal. Republicans typically claimed monopoly on religious-faith framing; Obama claimed religious faith for Blue State Democrats. The reversal structurally weakened cultural-conservative framing. (2) Civil-liberties reversal. Democrats typically claimed monopoly on civil-liberties framing; Obama claimed civil-liberties concerns for Red State Republicans (PATRIOT Act + library surveillance was 2004 contemporary concern). The reversal structurally weakened cultural-liberal framing. (3) Unity framing. By demonstrating both parties shared values across states, Obama positioned himself as transcending partisan stereotypes. (4) Personal-credibility framing. Obama's biracial identity (Black father + white mother) + multinational background (Kenya + Indonesia + Hawaii) + Christian faith + suburban Chicago lawyer biography structurally embodied unity framing. (5) Generation-transcending framing. Obama's 43-year-old age positioned him as post-Boomer political generation - structural appeal to younger voters. The rhetorical purpose: position Obama as transformative figure capable of assembling new political coalition beyond traditional partisan + racial + cultural divisions. The framing was politically transformative: 2008 Obama campaign operationalized similar framings + assembled winning coalition. Subsequent Democratic candidates (Biden 2020 + Harris 2024) attempted varied applications of Obama unity framing with mixed results.

AP students should be able to articulate the rhetorical strategy.

## QUESTION 5

Three specific 2005-2009 developments that damaged Bush 43 second-term position: (1) Hurricane Katrina August 29, 2005. Category 3 hurricane struck Gulf Coast + breached New Orleans levees. ~1,800 deaths + ~$125B damage. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) response was structurally inadequate - delayed deployment + poor coordination + visible federal-government failure. Bush's aerial Air Force One photo + "Brownie, you're doing a heckuva job" comment (referring to FEMA Director Michael Brown who was forced to resign September 9, 2005) became cultural shorthand for Bush administration incompetence. Bush approval fell from ~50% to ~35%. (2) 2006 midterm election November 7, 2006. Democrats gained 31 House seats + 6 Senate seats + governorship gains. House Democratic majority 233-202; Senate Democratic majority 51-49. Speaker Pelosi (first woman Speaker of House) elected January 4, 2007. Democratic Congress structurally limited Bush's legislative options 2007-08. (3) 2008 financial crisis. March 2008 Bear Stearns collapse + J.P. Morgan rescue. September 15, 2008 Lehman Brothers bankruptcy. September 16, 2008 AIG $85B federal rescue. October 3, 2008 TARP (Troubled Asset Relief Program) $700B. November 2008 unemployment 6.5% (rose to 10.0% October 2009). Bush approval fell to 25% by January 2009 (22% lowest in Gallup history). The crisis structurally produced Obama 2008 365-173 EV victory + Democratic congressional supermajorities. (4) Iraq War continuation. ~4,400 American military deaths in Iraq 2003-2011 (~1,100 through November 2004 + ~3,300 through January 2009). Iraq War costs (~$1T+ direct U.S. costs) + civilian deaths (~100,000+) + failure to find WMD damaged Bush's structural credibility throughout second term. February 2007 Iraq Surge + 2007-08 violence reduction provided some recovery but couldn't reverse damage. (5) Subprime mortgage crisis + housing bubble collapse 2007-09. Subprime mortgages had expanded 2002-07 + collapsed when housing prices fell. The structural framework that Bush administration regulatory permissiveness had enabled contributed to crisis. The cumulative effect: Bush ended his presidency January 20, 2009 with 22% approval rating + structural Republican Party damage that produced 2008 Obama victory.

AP students should be able to articulate multiple developments.

**QUESTION 6**

43. Obama was 43 years old when he delivered the July 27, 2004 Democratic Convention keynote. He was born August 4, 1961 + would turn 43 one week after the keynote. He was an Illinois State Senator (1997-2004) running for U.S. Senate (would win November 2004 with 70% vote). Obama would be 47 at his 2008 presidential victory + 47 at January 2009 inauguration - youngest president since Kennedy 1961 (43 at inauguration). Obama would be 55 at end of second term January 2017 - structurally young post-presidency.

AP students should know Obama's 43-year age.

**QUESTION 7**

~$22 million. Swift Boat Veterans for Truth + affiliated organizations spent approximately $22 million on 2004 anti-Kerry advertising August-October 2004. The independent expenditure structure allowed coordinated + amplified attack without direct Bush campaign attribution. Karl Rove operationalized indirectly. The ~$22M spending was structurally consequential: it attacked Kerry's structural strength + damaged his political position throughout the fall campaign. Subsequent campaigns have studied + replicated the Swift Boat independent expenditure model.

AP students should know the ~$22M figure.

**QUESTION 8**

Open-ended thesis sketch. Acceptable answers should: (1) state a clear position on the Republican-dominance-vs-Swift-Boat-attacks-vs-Obama-launch axis, (2) avoid treating them as equivalent, (3) signal at least one piece of evidence from each source.

The thesis sketch is preparatory.