

A Resource for Studying Presidential Elections in Years of a National Crisis

The 2020 Election Year is an opportunity for students to research past elections during times of war, domestic unrest, and close results. Invite your students to explore the website links, analyze the popular, electoral, and geographic voting patterns, and to formulate a thesis or argument (Claim) about elections during a time of crisis or division.

At the end of this document, we included information from an earlier exhibit at Duke University on 7 elections that changed history. Invite your students to explore how these elections brought change to the United States. The elections of 2008 and 2016 could also be added.

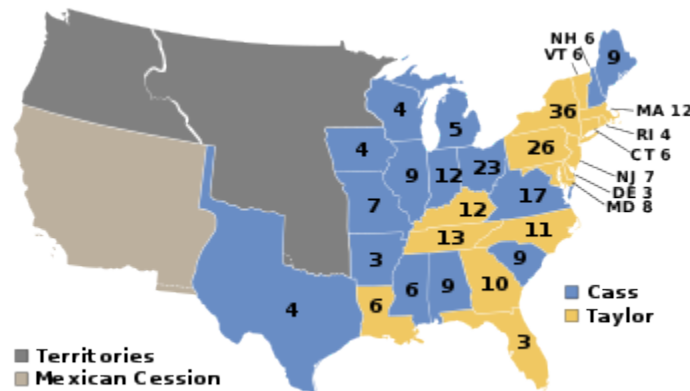
Election of 1848: <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/elections/election1848.html>
<https://millercenter.org/president/taylor>

Crisis: War with Mexico (1846-1850)

Central Issue(s): Expansion of slavery into new territories

Candidates: Zachary Taylor (W), Lewis Cass (D), Martin Van Buren (Free Soil)

Candidate	Taylor	Cass	Van Buren
Electoral Vote	163	127	0
States carried	15	15	0
Popular vote	1,361,393	1,223,460	291,501
Percentage	47.3%	42.5%	10.1%



A shift of less than 6000 votes to Cass in Georgia and Maryland would have left the Electoral College in a 145-145 tie, while a shift of less than 27,000 votes to Van Buren in Connecticut, Maine and Massachusetts would have left both Taylor and Cass short of the 146 electoral votes required to win, forcing a contingent election in the House of Representatives.

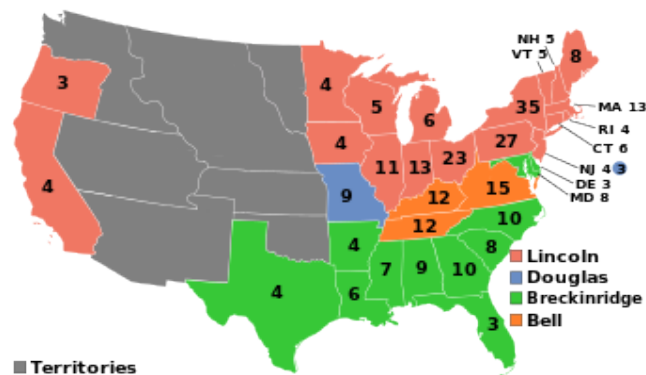
Election of 1860: <https://millercenter.org/president/lincoln>

Crisis: Threat of Secession by some states

Central Issue(s): Slavery and Preservation of the Union

Candidates: Abraham Lincoln (R) , Stephen Douglas (D), John Breckinridge (D), John Bell (Constitutional Union)

Candidate	Lincoln	Breckenridge	Bell	Douglas
Electoral vote	180	72	39	12
States carried	18	11	3	1
Popular vote	1,865,908	848,019	590,901	1,380,202
Percentage	39.8%	18.1%	12.6%	29.5%



The Election of 1860

- The United States was in crisis, and it was inevitable that the election of 1860 would be focused on the issue of slavery.
- Abraham Lincoln began the year in relative obscurity, but a speech in New York City in February helped make him a credible candidate.
- Lincoln's greatest rival for the Republican Party's nomination, William Seward, was out-manuevered at the party's nominating convention.
- Lincoln won the election by running against three opponents, and his victory in November prompted slave states to begin leaving the Union.

The presidential election was held on November 6, 1860. **Lincoln did very well in the northern states, and though he garnered less than 40 percent of the popular vote nationwide, he won a landslide victory in the electoral college.** Even if the Democratic Party had not fractured, it is likely Lincoln still would have won due to his strength in states heavy with electoral votes.

The 1860 election proved to be one of the most momentous in American history as it came at a time of national crisis, and brought Abraham Lincoln, with his known anti-slavery views, to the White House. **Indeed, Lincoln's trip to Washington was literally fraught with trouble, as rumors of assassination plots swirled and he had to be heavily guarded during his train trip from Illinois to Washington.**

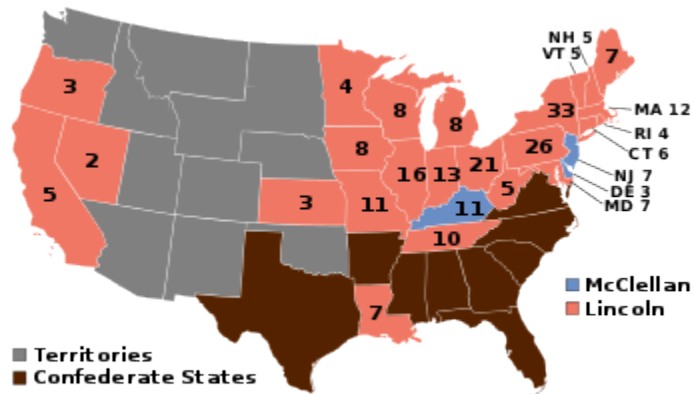
Election of 1864: <https://millercenter.org/president/johnson/campaigns-and-elections>

Crisis: Civil War

Central Issue(s): Preservation of the Union

Candidates: Abraham Lincoln (R) and George B. McClellan (D) (McClellan was from NJ)

Candidate	Lincoln	McClellan
Electoral vote	212 (+17)	21
States carried	22 (+2)	3
Popular vote	2,218,388	1,812,807
Percentage	55.0%	45.0%



This election tested our democratic election process during a war when our country was under direct assault.

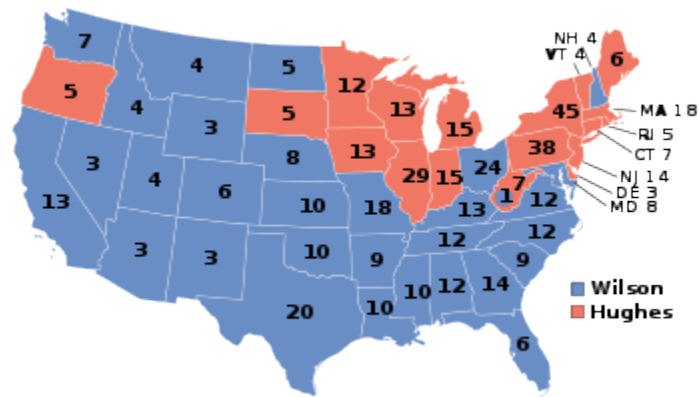
Election of 1916: <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/elections/election1916.html>

Crisis: World War I

Central Issue(s): Neutrality and Mexican Civil War

Candidates: Woodrow Wilson (D), Charles Hughes(R)

Candidate	Wilson	Hughes
Electoral vote	277	254
States carried	30	18
Popular vote	9,126,868	8,548,728
Percentage	49.2%	46.1%



Numerous newspapers carried accounts of Wilson's supposed defeat. Many political analysts also predicted a victory for Hughes, but the final count in California gave that state to Wilson by 4,000 votes. Charles Hughes did not have the support of Gov. Hiram Johnson in California. If Hughes carried California, he would have won in the Electoral College by 3 votes.

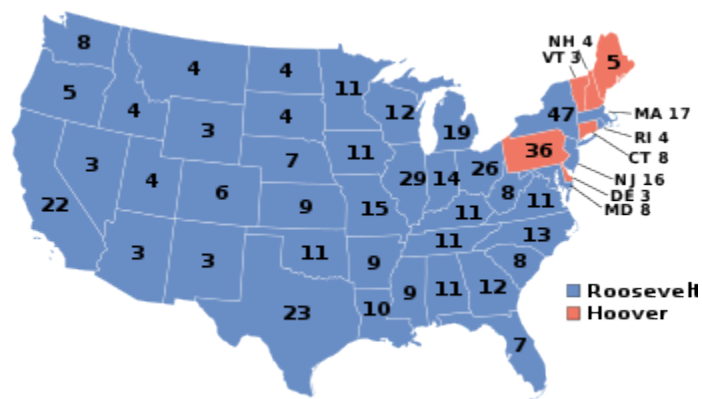
Election of 1932: <http://origins.osu.edu/article/punishing-past-presidential-elections-times-crisis-1932-1968-2008>
<https://millercenter.org/president/hoover/campaigns-and-elections>
<https://millercenter.org/president/fdroosevelt>

Crisis: Great Depression

Central Issue(s): Economy

Candidates: Herbert Hoover (R) and Franklin D. Roosevelt (D)

Candidate	Roosevelt	Hoover
Electoral vote	472	59
States carried	42	6
Popular vote	22,821,277	15,761,254
Percentage	57.4%	39.7%



In the election of 1932, the electorate voted the Republican Herbert Hoover decisively out of office and replaced him with Democrat Franklin Roosevelt. In 1928 Hoover and his party had taken credit for the prosperity of the 1920s, and at the end of Hoover’s term citizens blamed him for the Great Depression that had engulfed the United States from late 1929 on. The public also felt that Hoover’s efforts over three years to alleviate the economic suffering had been unavailing.

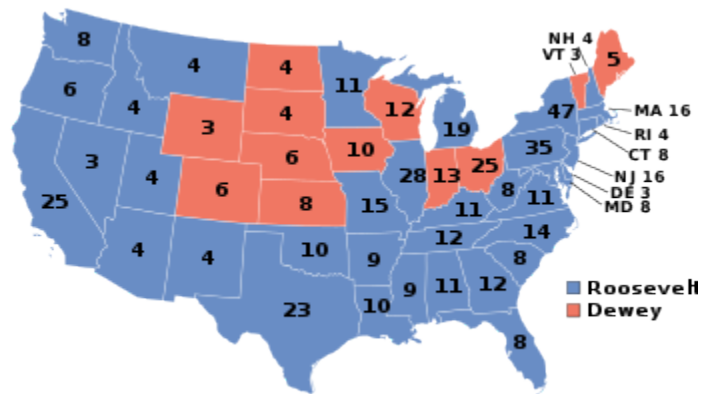
Election of 1944: <https://millercenter.org/president/fdroosevelt/campaigns-and-elections>

Crisis: World War 2, D-Day

Central Issue(s): United Nations, Post-War World, FDR's age

Candidates: Franklin Roosevelt (D)

Candidate	Roosevelt	Dewey
Electoral vote	432	99
States carried	36	12
Popular vote	25,612,916	22,017,929
Percentage	53.4%	45.9%



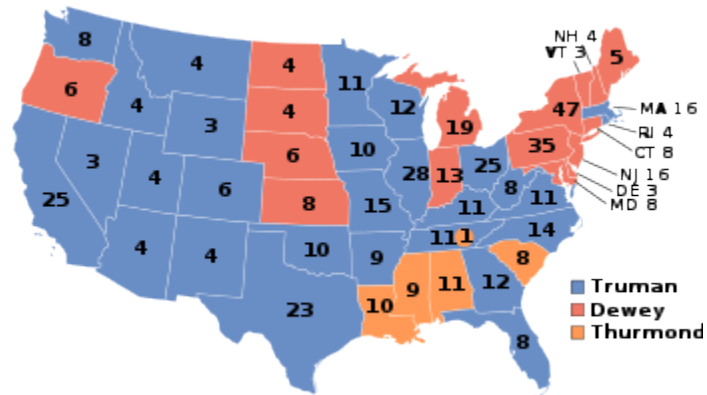
Election of 1948: <https://millercenter.org/president/truman>

Crisis: Europe – Berlin Blockade, Iron Curtain, Marshall Plan

Central Issue(s): Civil Rights and Cold War

Candidates: Harry Truman (D), Thomas Dewey (R), Strom Thurmond (Dixiecrat)

Candidate	Truman	Dewey	Thurmond
Electoral vote	303	189	39
States carried	28	16	4
Popular vote	24,179,347	21,991,292	1,175,930
Percentage	49.6%	45.1%	2.4%



Election of 1968: <https://www.pbs.org/johngardner/chapters/5a.html>

<http://origins.osu.edu/article/punishing-past-presidential-elections-times-crisis-1932-1968-2008>

<https://millercenter.org/president/nixon>

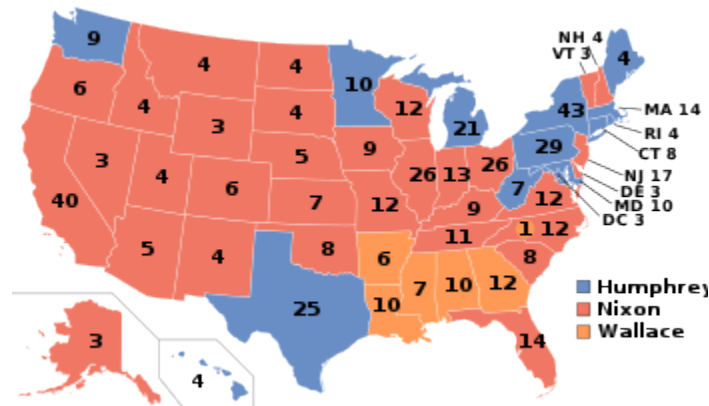
<https://library.duke.edu/exhibits/sevenelections/elections/1968/issues.html>

Crisis: Vietnam War, Civil Rights, Law and Order

Central Issue(s): Civil Rights and Cold War

Candidates: Hubert Humphrey (D), Richard Nixon (R), George Wallace (American Independent)

Candidate	Nixon	Humphrey	Wallace
Electoral vote	301	191	46
States carried	32	13 + DC	5
Popular vote	31,783,783	31,271,839	9,901,118
Percentage	43.4%	42.7%	13.5%



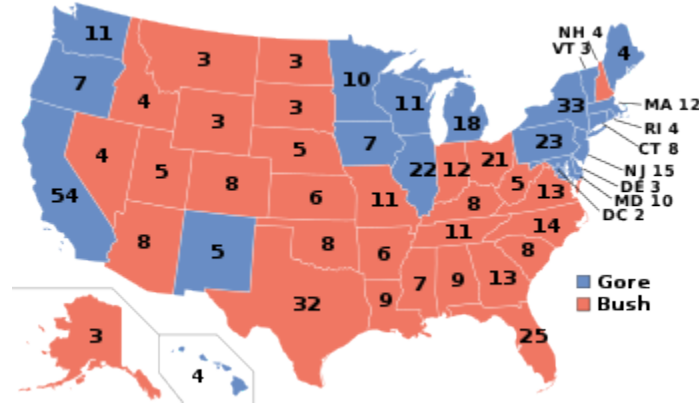
Election of 2000: <https://millercenter.org/president/gwbush>

Crisis: Election Results and Election Security

Central Issue(s): Domestic Issues

Candidates: Al Gore (D), George W. Bush (R)

Candidate	Bush	Gore
Electoral vote	271	266 ^[2]
States carried	30	20 + DC
Popular vote	50,456,002	50,999,897
Percentage	47.9%	48.4%

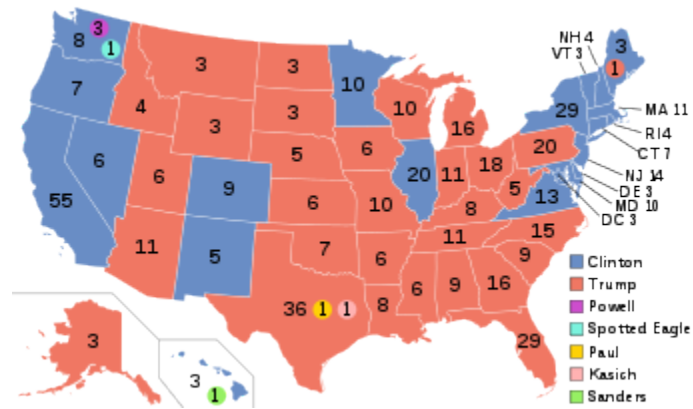


Election of 2016: <https://millercenter.org/president/trump/campaigns-and-elections>


Crisis: Election Results


Central Issue(s): Domestic Issues (Immigration and Health Care)



Candidates: Hillary Clinton (D), Donald Trump (R)








7 Elections that Changed U.S. History <https://library.duke.edu/exhibits/sevenelections/results.html>


	Candidates	Count	%
1800			
	Republican Party <i>President: Thomas Jefferson</i> <i>Vice-President: Aaron Burr</i>	98	68 %



	Federalist Party <i>President: John Adams</i> <i>Vice-President: Charles C. Pinckney</i>	47	32 %
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	Candidates	Count	%
1828			
	Republican Party: <i>President: John Quincy Adams</i> <i>Vice-President: Richard Rush</i>	73	32 %
	Jacksonian Party: <i>President: Andrew Jackson</i> <i>Vice-President: John C. Calhoun</i>	152	68 %


	Candidates	Count	%
1872			
	Liberal Republican Party <i>President: Horace Greeley</i> <i>Vice-President: Benjamin Gratz Brown</i>	47	56 %
	Republican Party <i>President: Ulysses S. Grant</i> <i>Vice-President: Henry Wilson</i>	37	44 %



	Candidates	Count	%
1912			
	Progressive Party <i>President: Theodore Roosevelt</i> <i>Vice-President: Hiram Johnson</i>	61	52 %
	Socialist Party <i>President: Eugene Debs</i> <i>Vice-President: Emil Seidel</i>	26	22 %
	Democratic Party <i>President: Woodrow Wilson</i> <i>Vice-President: Thomas Marshall</i>	17	14 %

	Republican Party <i>President: William H. Taft</i> <i>Vice-President: James Sherman</i>	14	12 %
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	Candidates	Count	%
1928			
	Democratic Party <i>President: Alfred Smith</i> <i>Vice-President: Joseph T. Robinson</i>	60	66 %
	Republican Party <i>President: Herbert Hoover</i> <i>Vice-President: Charles Curtis</i>	31	34 %

	Candidates	Count	%
1948			
	Democratic Party <i>President: Harry S Truman</i> <i>Vice-President: Alben Barkley</i>	47	59 %
	Republican Party <i>President: Thomas Dewey</i> <i>Vice-President: Earl Warren</i>	16	20 %
	Dixiecrat Party <i>President: Strom Thurmond</i> <i>Vice-President: Fielding Wright</i>	8	10 %
	Progressive Party <i>President: Henry Wallace</i> <i>Vice-President: Glen Taylor</i>	9	11 %

	Candidates	Count	%
1968			
	Democratic Party <i>President: Hubert H. Humphrey</i> <i>Vice-President: Edmund Muskie</i>	74	64 %

	Republican Party <i>President: Richard M. Nixon</i> <i>Vice-President: Spiro T. Agnew</i>	30	26 %
	American Independent Party <i>President: George Wallace</i> <i>Vice-President: Curtis LeMay</i>	11	10 %