

Why did Roosevelt get elected as President in 1932

Background information

In 1932, in the depths of the Great Depression, there was a presidential election in which Franklin D. Roosevelt beat Herbert Hoover in a landslide. Roosevelt won the election in 42 of 48 States (there are now 50, but Hawaii and Alaska were not official states at this point). Because of the US Constitution, Roosevelt was elected in November 1932 but did not become president until March 1933 - in this time, Hoover remained president, and Roosevelt harshly criticised everything he did.

Roosevelt's campaign was a potent mix of grand promises, attacks on the Republicans' record (and Hoover's inaction), and presenting himself well. In particular, Hoover proposed a 'New Deal', which captured the imaginations of America, and signalled a radical shift in policy.

Your tasks

1. Read the background information. Highlight or annotate the key terms and dates in this information.
2. Read the information about Roosevelt on p.2. Define the following key terms:
 - Democrat
 - Republican
 - the three Rs
 - the New Deal
 - fireside chats
 - Great Depression
3. Rate Roosevelt's electability based on the following aspects of his profile:
 - personal background
 - political party
 - political career
 - plans for the Great Depression
 - strength of his election campaign.

Challenge: Use the profile on Hoover to compare with Roosevelt. Does this comparison make him more or less electable?

4. Create an election campaign for Roosevelt. Make it as realistic as possible.

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Personal background:

Roosevelt was an only child of a very rich family - he was spoiled, went to private school, and then went to Harvard Law School. In 1905 he married his cousin, Eleanor, and only became a politician in 1910, when he was 28. In 1921, Roosevelt contracted polio (which nearly killed him); he never fully regained the use of his legs, and had to use a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Many believe that this gained him some sympathy.

Political party:

Roosevelt was a Democrat, and there hadn't been a Democrat since Woodrow Wilson, who was affectionately and nostalgically remembered, and no Democratic President elected in the 1920s. People were ready for a change from Republicans, especially as they blamed Republican policy for the uncontrollability of the stock market, Hoover's poor response, and the Great Depression in general.

Political Career:

Roosevelt had an important and successful job, in the First World War, organising the US Navy. He then had to take out some time for health, but returned to politics in 1928 to win the election for Governor of New York. Whilst he had not held many posts, he had a good record, and defeated two significant opponents in the election.

Plans for the Great Depression:

Whilst he was the Governor of New York, Roosevelt was fairly successful in helping those worst affected by the Great Depression, largely through creating jobs for the homeless in upgrading the New York subway and transport systems (this also boosted the city economy). He planned the scale this up as President - with a policy called the 'New Deal', which was based around the 'Three Rs':

- Relief: urgent help for those in the most need, including the sick, old and homeless.
- Recovery: investing government money and savings into creating new jobs and business.
- Reform: improve the financial systems so another Depression could not happen again.

Strength of his election campaign:

Roosevelt ran a huge campaign - at times he was making up to 15 speeches a day. He also had an official campaign song, 'Happy days are here again', which is still popular today. Furthermore, Roosevelt made sure that his allies were criticising Hoover; however, in his own campaign he maintained a public image of positivity, trying to show Americans the hope for something different.

Hoover's election campaign:

Democrats made continued fun of the 'tired' Republican slogan that 'prosperity is just around the corner', and the Republicans proposed very few new ideas to tackle the Depression. Hoover's track record was fairly poor, but he did not acknowledge this - maintaining an insistence that the Stock Market would sort itself out, and it was everyone's individual responsibility to get themselves out of the Depression. His election campaign was greeted with protests and even egg-throwing. Hoover himself became fairly hated.