

The Election of 1932

READING FOCUS

- How did President Hoover respond to the Great Depression?
- What did Roosevelt mean when he offered Americans a “new deal”?
- Why was the election of 1932 a significant turning point for American politics?

MAIN IDEA

As the Depression worsened, people blamed Hoover and the Republicans for their misery. The 1932 presidential election brought a sweeping victory for Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt and profound changes in the role of government.

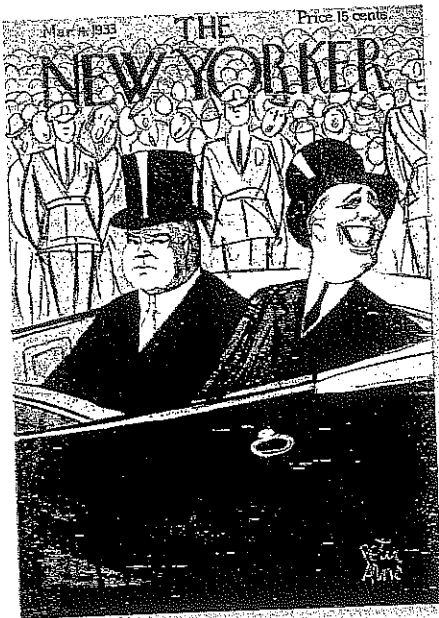
KEY TERMS

Hawley-Smoot tariff
Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC)
Bonus Army

TAKING NOTES

As you read, complete this chart listing some ideas of the presidential candidates in 1932.

Candidate	Ideas on Government
Herbert Hoover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believed in minimal government action • Strict view of government (less government is better) •
Franklin Delano Roosevelt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willing to experiment with government roles • Supported broadening the role of government •



VIEWING HISTORY This *New Yorker* cover drawing of FDR’s inauguration in 1933 shows Roosevelt, the new President, in contrast with Hoover. **Recognizing Bias** Do you think this drawing is being critical of a particular candidate or of the American public’s perception of the two candidates?

Setting the Scene In 1932, President Hoover asked the popular singer Rudy Vallee to come up with a theme song for his campaign. Hoover wanted a song that would help people forget about their troubles during the Depression. The song that Vallee produced, “Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?” was taken from the Broadway musical *New Americana*, and soon became a fitting symbol for the Depression years. Although embraced by Americans, it was not quite the rousing song of optimism Hoover would have preferred as a campaign song.

“Once I built a railroad
I made it run
Made it race against time.
Once I built a railroad
Now it’s done
Brother, can you spare a dime?”

In contrast, the Democratic candidate for President in 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, built his campaign around a much different tune:

“Happy days are here again,
The skies above are clear again
Let us sing a song of cheer again—
Happy days are here again.”

As the election approached, Hoover, known as the “great engineer” for his exceptional engineering career, tried desperately to “engineer” the United States out of the Depression. His strict adherence to his political beliefs, however, would put severe limits on what he was able to accomplish.

Hoover’s Limited Strategy

For a few months after the stock market crash, President Hoover, along with business leaders, insisted that the key to recovery was confidence. Hoover

blamed the Great Depression on “world-wide economic conditions beyond our control”—not on problems in the United States economy. Taking Hoover’s advice, business and government leaders tried to maintain public confidence in the economy. Even as factories closed, Hoover administration officials insisted that conditions would improve soon.

Voluntary Action Fails Hoover believed that voluntary controls by businesses in the United States were the best way to end the economic crisis. He quickly organized a White House conference of business leaders and got their promise to maintain wage rates. At first, many firms did keep wages up. By the end of 1931, however, companies were quietly cutting workers’ pay.

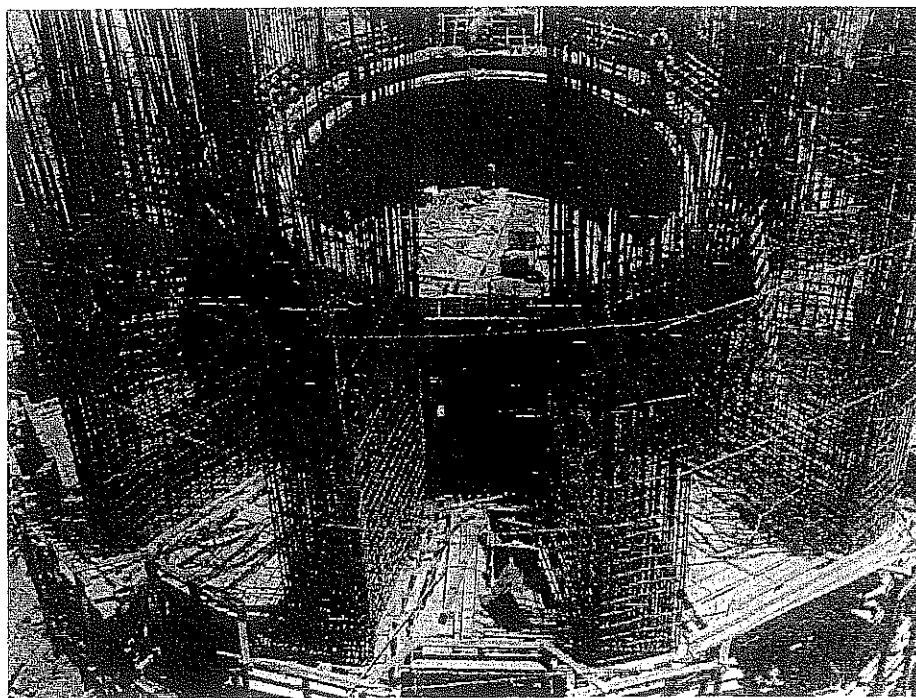
Hoover held rigidly to his principle of voluntary action. A shy man, he was successful in business but inexperienced in politics. As a result, he showed less flexibility when it came to political compromise. Often unwilling to budge from his views, Hoover was ultimately unable to make his plan attractive to the American people. After a year of misery, the public began to blame him and the Republicans for the crisis.

The Government Acts Despite his staunch beliefs and continual reassurances to the public, Hoover knew that he had to do something to alleviate the suffering of so many Americans. Even before the Depression began, Congress, with the support of Hoover, passed the Agricultural Marketing Act in June 1929. The act provided a form of relief for farmers by creating a Federal Farm Board, which was designed to stabilize the prices of farm crops. The program proved to be a failure, however, losing over \$150 million and sending farm prices on another downward spiral.

As a result of the worsening Depression, the Republicans took a beating in the 1930 midterm elections. After the election, Republicans no longer controlled the House, and their majority in the Senate was reduced to just one seat. As the hardships continued and criticisms increased, Hoover took an even more active approach. To create jobs, the government spent more on new public buildings, roads, parks, and dams. Construction on Boulder Dam (later renamed Hoover Dam) began in 1930. A President’s Emergency Committee on Employment advised the President to create local relief programs.

In an attempt to protect domestic industries from foreign imports, in 1930 Congress passed the **Hawley-Smoot tariff**, the highest import tax in history. The tariff backfired. European countries raised their own tariffs, bringing a sudden slowdown in international trade. Hoover suspended the Allies’ payments of their war debts, but Europe’s economies grew weaker.

In early 1932, Hoover set up the **Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC)**, which gave government credit to a number of institutions, such as large industries, railroads, and insurance companies. The act also lent money to banks so that they could extend loans. Also that year, Congress passed the



VIEWING HISTORY Boulder Dam, seen here under construction, was built with massive steel bar columns, and used as much steel as the Empire State Building. **Synthesizing Information** What did Hoover hope to accomplish by spending money to build Boulder Dam?

READING CHECK

What did Hoover think of direct federal relief?

Home Loan Bank Act, which, by discounting mortgage rates, helped homeowners save their homes and farmers keep their farms. The RFC reflected the theory that prosperity at the top would help the economy as a whole. To many people, however, it seemed that the government was helping bankers and big business leaders while ordinary people went hungry. Despite the RFC, banks continued to fail.

Hoover's Unpopularity Grows Despite his support of these programs, Hoover insisted that state and local governments should handle relief. Hoover argued that direct federal relief would destroy people's self-respect and create a large bureaucracy. His refusal to provide direct aid brought bitter public reaction and negative publicity. Although his World War I relief work had earned him the title "Great Humanitarian," Hoover's attitude toward Depression relief made him seem cold and hard-hearted.

Many people blamed Hoover, not always fairly, for their problems. While people went hungry, newspapers showed a photograph of him feeding his dog on the White House lawn. People booed when he said such things as "Our people have been protected from hunger and cold."

Private charities and local officials could not meet the demands for relief as Hoover wanted. Finally, in 1932, Hoover broke with tradition and let the RFC lend the states money for unemployment relief. But it was too little and too late.

As the Depression deepened, some economists backed the ideas of British economist John Maynard Keynes. Keynes argued that massive government spending could help a collapsing economy and encourage more private spending and production of goods and services. This economic theory was not yet widely accepted, however.

Veterans March on Washington A low point for Hoover came in the summer of 1932, when 20,000 jobless World War I veterans and their families encamped in Washington, D.C. The **Bonus Army**, as they called themselves,

Fast Forward to Today

Philosophy of Government

FDR's New Deal represented the birth of a new philosophy of the government's role in American life. Since the days of FDR, Americans have had differing opinions on what the size and role of the government should be.



1981 Conservatives, who believe in a minimal role for the government, score a victory when President Reagan begins to cut social welfare spending.



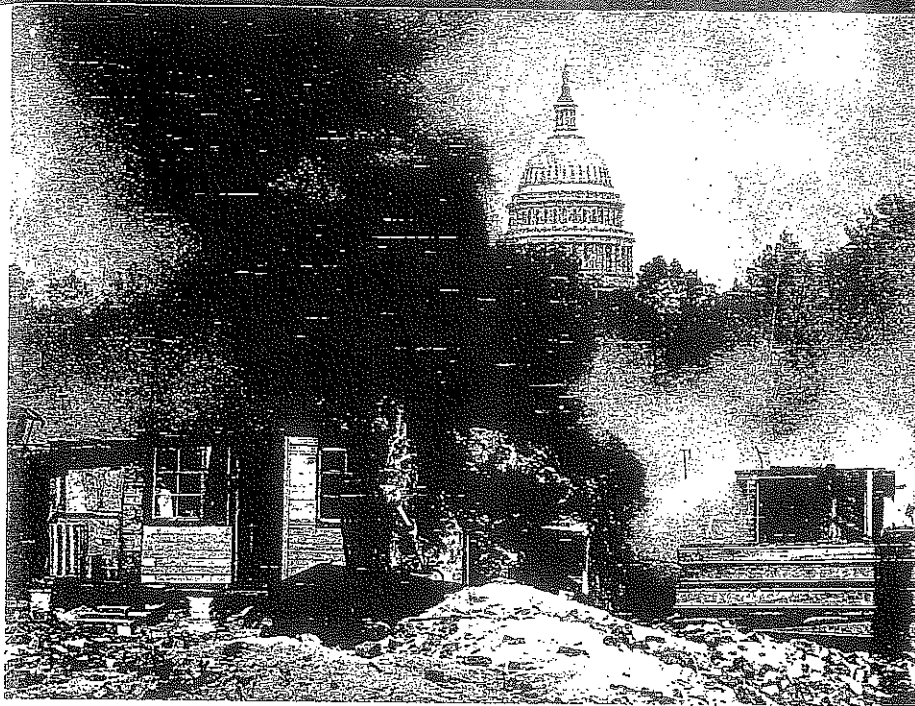
1933 Roosevelt's New Deal greatly expands the role of government for social and welfare programs.

1964 In the tradition of FDR, President Johnson promises a "Great Society," which would provide legislation to combat poverty and offer healthcare.

1993 President Clinton promotes a smaller, but active government, which reconciles FDR's activism with Reagan's conservatism.



? What are possible consequences of both a large government role in social welfare and a limited government role?



VIEWING HISTORY

MacArthur's troops set fire to the Bonus Army camps after driving out the protesters. **Determining Relevance** Why do you think the government's response to the Bonus Army hurt Hoover at election time?

wanted immediate payment of a pension bonus that had been promised for 1945. The House of Representatives agreed, but the Senate said no. Most of the Bonus Army then went home, but a few thousand stayed, living in shacks.

Although the bonus marchers were generally peaceful, a few violent incidents prompted Hoover to call in the army. General Douglas MacArthur decided to use force to drive the marchers out of Washington. Armed with bricks and stones, the Bonus Army veterans faced their own country's guns, tanks, and tear gas. Many people were injured. Hoover was horrified, but he took responsibility for MacArthur's actions. In the next election, the lingering image of this ugly scene would help defeat him.

A "New Deal" for America

"I pledge myself to a new deal for the American people," announced presidential candidate Franklin Delano Roosevelt as he accepted the Democratic Party's nomination at its Chicago convention in July 1932. Delegates cheered, and an organ thundered out the song "Happy Days Are Here Again." The Republicans, in June, had again named Hoover as their candidate. As the presidential campaign took shape, the differences between the two candidates became very clear.

In Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, the Democrats had a remarkable political couple ready to bring them to victory. Franklin, nicknamed "FDR" by the press, was born in 1882. He graduated from Harvard University and took a job in a law firm, although his main interest was politics. He was elected twice to the New York State Senate before becoming Assistant Secretary of the Navy under President Wilson.

In 1920, FDR ran for Vice President but lost. The following summer, he came down with polio and never walked without help again. He spent much of the 1920s recovering at Warm Springs, Georgia, but with his wife's help kept up his political interests.

Eleanor Roosevelt, a niece of Theodore Roosevelt, was born in 1884 into a wealthy family. She married her distant cousin Franklin in 1905. During the 1920s, in New York State, Eleanor worked for several causes, including public housing legislation, state government reform, birth control, and better conditions for working women. By 1928,

Focus on GOVERNMENT

The Twentieth Amendment On March 2, 1932, Congress proposed the Twentieth Amendment to the Constitution. Called the "Lame Duck Amendment," its purpose was to shorten the period between election day in November and the time when congressional representatives and the President take office. Prior to this amendment, elected officials took office on March 4. During this post-election period of over four months, those who had lost the election were "lame ducks," and would spend this time without having much influence or effectiveness. The amendment changed the inauguration date to January 20, cutting the lame duck period in half. By October 15, 1933, every state had ratified the amendment. The first presidential term to be affected would be FDR's second term, which began on January 20, 1937.

when FDR was persuaded to run for governor of New York, Eleanor was an experienced political worker and social reformer.

After FDR's success as governor of New York (1929–1932), his supporters believed him ready to try for the presidency. With his broad smile and genial manner, he represented a spirit of optimism that the country badly needed.

Unlike Hoover, FDR was ready to experiment with governmental roles. Though from a wealthy background, he had genuine compassion for ordinary people, in part because of his disability. He was also moved by the great gap between the nation's wealthy and the poor.

As governor of New York, Roosevelt had worked vigorously for Depression relief. In 1931, he set up an unemployment commission and a relief administration, the first state agencies to aid the poor in the Depression era. When, as a presidential candidate, FDR promised the country a "new deal," he had similar programs in mind.

The Election of 1932

Hoover, the incumbent candidate for President, summed up the choice that voters had in 1932:

"This campaign is more than a contest between two men. . . . It is a contest between two philosophies of government."

—President Herbert Hoover, October 1932

This statement also accurately describes the long-term impact of the 1932 presidential election. It was a historic battle between those who believed that the federal government could not and should not try to fix people's problems, and those who felt that large-scale problems such as the Depression required the government's help. The election would have an enormous effect on public policy for decades to come.

Still arguing for voluntary aid to relieve the Depression, Hoover attacked the Democratic platform. If its ideas were adopted, he said, "this will not be the America which we have known in the past." He sternly resisted the idea of giving the national government more power.

Roosevelt, by contrast, called for "a reappraisal of values" and controls on business:

"I feel that we are coming to a view through the drift of our legislation and our public thinking in the past quarter century that private economic power is . . . a public trust as well."

—Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 1932

While statements like this showed FDR's new approach, many Americans did not support Roosevelt because of his ideas as much as they opposed Hoover because he had been too passive. Even longtime Republicans deserted him. A reserved man by nature, Hoover became grim and isolated. He gave few campaign speeches. Crowds jeered his motorcade.

FDR won the presidency by a huge margin of 7 million popular votes. Much of his support came from groups that had begun to turn to the

COMPARING PRIMARY SOURCES

Fighting the Depression

Sharp philosophical differences characterized the presidential campaign of 1932.

Analyzing Viewpoints Compare the statements made by the two candidates.

Against Drastic Measures

"We are told by the opposition that we must have a change, that we must have a new deal. It is not the change . . . to which I object but the proposal to alter the whole foundations of our national life which have been built through generations of testing and struggle."

—Herbert Hoover, speech at Madison Square Garden, October 31, 1932

For Drastic Measures

"I have recounted to you in other speeches, and it is a matter of general information, that for at least two years after the Crash, the only efforts made by the [Hoover administration] to cope with the distress of unemployment were to deny its existence."

—Franklin D. Roosevelt, campaign address, October 13, 1932

READING CHECK

From what groups did FDR receive support in the 1932 election?

Democrats in 1928: urban workers, coal miners, and immigrants of Catholic and Jewish descent.

On a rainy day in 1933, FDR stood before a Depression-weary crowd and took the oath of office of President of the United States. As reporter Thomas Stokes observed, a stirring of hope moved through the crowd when Roosevelt said, "This nation asks for action and action now."

Phrases like this foreshadowed a sweeping change in the style of presidential leadership and government response to its citizens' needs. Ultimately, such changes altered the way many Americans viewed their government and its responsibilities.

In the depths of the Great Depression, many Americans had to give up cherished traditional beliefs in "making it on their own." They turned to the government as their only hope. Thus, as you will read in the next chapter, the Roosevelt years saw the beginning of many programs that changed the role of government in American society.

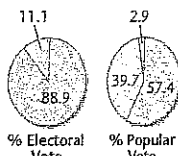
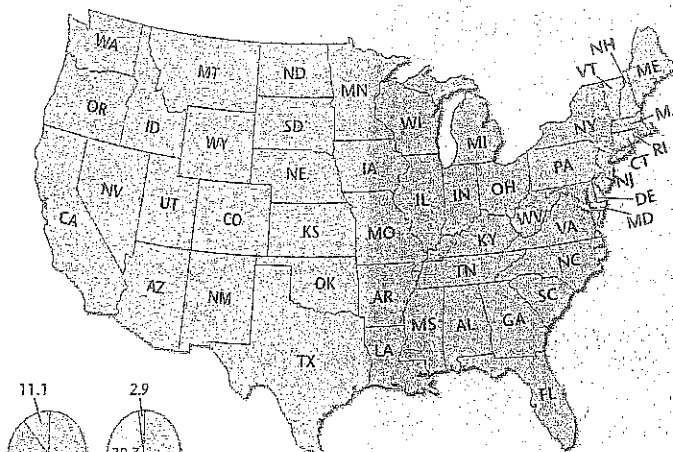
The words of FDR's Inaugural Address gave much of the country renewed hope for the future:

"So first of all let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

—President Franklin Delano Roosevelt,
First Inaugural Address, 1933

Having overcome fear in his own life many times, Roosevelt spoke with conviction and confidence, reassuring a frightened nation.

Presidential Election of 1932



Candidate/Party	Electoral Vote	Popular Vote
Franklin D. Roosevelt (Democrat)	472	22,821,857
Herbert Hoover (Republican)	59	15,761,841
Other		1,160,615

MAP SKILLS Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Democratic Party won the popular vote in 1932 as well as a huge margin of electoral votes. **Location** Which states' electoral votes did Hoover win?

Section

4

Assessment

READING COMPREHENSION

- How did President Hoover hope to end the Depression and its hardships?
- What was the intent of the **Hawley-Smoot tariff** and the **Reconstruction Finance Corporation**?
- How did the **Bonus Army** conflict contribute to Hoover's downfall? Describe Franklin Delano Roosevelt's appeal to the American voter in 1932.

CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

- Distinguishing Fact From Opinion** Do you think the criticisms of Hoover were justified, or might the Depression have brought failure for any President? Explain.
- Writing a News Story** Take the position of a reporter covering FDR's inaugural speech. Write a brief newspaper report describing what the President said and how Americans responded to the speech.



Take It to the NET

Activity: Analyzing Primary Sources Read several of FDR's campaign speeches. What issues did he focus on? Referring to the map of the election of 1932 above or online, did FDR win the states in which he made campaign stops? Use the links provided in the *America: Pathways to the Present* area of the following Web site for help in completing this activity. www.phschool.com