



Political State Placards: Predicting the Electoral Vote

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About this Lesson

In an election year, the American electorate is often oversimplified into a patchwork collection of red and blue states without significant study of what makes a state “red” or “blue” or somewhere in between. In this lesson, students will research and analyze the key factors that influence a state’s political make-up, create a state placard with all the relevant information contributing to a state’s “color” and use this information to make predictions about the 2008 electoral vote. Ideally, this lesson would take place after teaching about the US presidential election system, and specifically about the electoral college. Students will need a basic understanding of the Republican and Democratic parties, including their key constituencies and platforms.

Grade(s) Level

High School, although applicable with some adjustments for Middle School

Classroom Time

Two or three class periods (less if any of the assignment is given as out of class work).

Handouts

50 state slips cut outs

Electoral votes per state sheet

Materials/Requirements

Crayons/markers

Card Stock Paper

Internet Access

Constitution Connections

Article II, Section I

12th Amendment

23rd Amendment

Background

In previous elections political pundits assigned the two major political parties one patriotic color to represent them in the given election cycle, alternating red and blue. Yet during and after the election of 2000 and fallout, the terms 'red states' and 'blue states' became a part of the national lexicon. Rather than switching in the next race(2004), Republican states continued to be called red states and Democratic states continued to be referred to as blue states.

Predicting the way a state will vote in a presidential election is a complicated process. In the months leading up to a presidential election pundits endlessly speculate of which states will "go for" each candidate, and who ultimately will have the most electoral votes to win the contest. So-called battlegrounds, or swing states, are under constant watch, and pundits look both at past polls, demographics, and recent economic and social conditions in the state to predict which way the state will lean. In considering who a state will vote for, pundits consider the residents religious affiliation, race, economic status, past voting behavior, [party affiliation levels, popular elected officials, employment status, etc.] Yet it is not simply one issue or one characteristic that will decide an election. Rather it is a combination all of these factors and more to predict how a state will vote.

Objectives

Students will:

- Evaluate how demographics influence political outcomes
- Examine how political behaviors and issues guide the process of making political predictions
- Identify how the results of the US presidential elections are determined by electoral votes and not popular votes

Standards

From the National Council for the Social Studies

<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>

- **X: Civic Ideals and Practices:** *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic*
- **VI: Power, Authority and Governance:** *Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance.*

Activity

Warm-Up:

1. Display a map featuring recent presidential election results that feature the ubiquitous “red” and “blue” states (you can print out a copy from the National Constitution Center’s website at: http://www.constitutioncenter.org/HeadedToTheWhiteHouse/downloads/ConstPoster_2.pdf).
 - a. Explain that since the 2000 election, red states have become identified as voting republican and blue states are identified as voting democrat.
2. Ask students to brainstorm what factors might influence a state to vote “red” or “blue”.
3. They should do this individually and then you can solicit their responses to create a class list on the board. Important factors may include:
 - Past voting history
 - Statewide economic trends
 - Employment
 - Income levels
 - Racial make-up
 - Popular (or unpopular) local elected officials
 - Religious composition
 - Geography
 - Education levels
 - Voter registration levels
 - Party affiliation levels
4. Explain to the class that not just one factor makes a state “red” or “blue”.
5. Tell students they will analyze what factors paint a state red or blue and then make their own predictions for the 2008 race.

In-Class Activity:

6. **Assign States:** Depending on your class size, you will need to assign each student two or three states to research.
 - a. You can have students choose the states through a draft or simply draw states from a hat (state slips attached).
 - b. It is also possible to divide the states between two classes, and in doing so, each student will only have one state to research.
7. **Research:** Once students have been assigned a state, they will conduct research into the pertinent information that influences the way a state votes.
 - Use the list that was created during the warm-up for reference.
 - Remind students that they are not researching the various polls that show how a state is leaning in the 2008 race, but they are looking into the key factors that influence a state’s political make-up.
 - Students should use the following resources in conducting their research:
 - www.uselectionatlas.org Gives past voting history to 1789.
 - www.270towin.com/states Nice summary of a state’s voting history and key factors.

- www.bea.gov/regional/index.htm#g Great resource for current economic trends and reports--including maps showing general economic trends in all 50 states.
- <http://quickfacts.census.gov/> Demographic facts of all 50 states from US Census Bureau.

8. Creation of Political State Placards: Once students have gathered the essential background information about their states, they will create an appealing and easy to read placard (small 8x11 sized posters) that lists the most essential information about their state.

- 9.** Give students a piece of heavier card stock paper, markers and the student checklist sheet to use in creating their placard.
- Encourage students to utilize visuals as well as text (50% text, 50% visuals is a good rule of thumb).
 - State maps, flags, or other symbols might help.
 - Stress that these placards will be hung up on a wall or bulletin board so they need to be not just informative but also visually appealing and easy to read/understand.

Note: This step can easily be altered. Besides producing placards, students could present the information in other formats including posters, PowerPoint slides, one page written summaries, etc.

10. Presentation of Placards. Before students post their placard on a blank wall or bulletin board, they are to share with the class their findings.

- Students should have no more than 1 minute to present the key information about their state or states—this should be a short, concise summary.

11. Predicting the Electoral Map. Now that students have a better understanding of what makes a state “red” or “blue”, they will use this knowledge to play the role of a political pundit in predicting the electoral map for the 2008 race.

12. Handout the electoral state map and allow students time to fill in the map with the correct state labels and electoral votes amounts. You can download a blank electoral map at: http://www.constitutioncenter.org/HeadedToTheWhiteHouse/downloads/ConstPoster_2.pdf

- Attached is a sheet with the current number of electoral votes per state for your use (you can also project a current electoral map for your students to use).
- Students should follow the directions on the handout, using crayons or markers to color states red or blue.
- When finished, display their predictions around the room.
- You can award extra credit or prizes to those students who get closest to the actual electoral results.

Assessment-Options

- Create a fictional state's demographic, economic and political information and ask students to analyze the data and decide whether it would be a red or blue state.
- Have students pick 5 states off of their electoral map and explain to you orally or in writing why the colored that state red or blue. Their explanations should be based on using the appropriate statewide data and reflect thoughtfulness.

State Placards: Student Checklist Sheet

When finished your placard should have the following:

- ✓ 10-15 political, economic or demographic facts that influence the state's voting record.
- ✓ The name of the state in large lettering.
- ✓ Supporting visuals (for example: a state map, state flags, etc)
- ✓ 2 charts (pie, line or bar).
- ✓ References for factual information listed above (this can be in fine print).
- ✓ Edit and Revise. This placard will be displayed around the room and it should be error free!
- ✓ Check to see that from a distance that the space on your placard is approximately 50% text and 50% visuals—this is a good rule of thumb for attractive looking displays.

Cut out and place in hat or bowl for students to select.

District of Columbia	South Dakota	Ohio	Nebraska
Alaska	Washington	Virginia	Delaware
Texas	North Dakota	Tennessee	Rhode Island
California	Oklahoma	Kentucky	
Montana	Missouri	Indiana	
New Mexico	Florida	Maine	
Arizona	Wisconsin	South Carolina	
Nevada	Georgia	West Virginia	
Colorado	Illinois	Maryland	
Oregon	Iowa	Hawaii	
Wyoming	New York	Massachusetts	
Michigan	North Carolina	Vermont	
Minnesota	Arkansas	New Hampshire	
Utah	Alabama	New Jersey	
Idaho	Louisiana	Connecticut	
Kansas	Mississippi	Pennsylvania	

Electoral Votes by State

Alabama	9	New Jersey	15
Alaska	3	New Mexico	5
Arizona	10	New York	31
Arkansas	6	North Carolina	15
California	55	North Dakota	3
Colorado	9	Ohio	20
Connecticut	7	Oklahoma	7
Delaware	3	Oregon	7
D.C.	3	Pennsylvania	21
Florida	27	Rhode Island	4
Georgia	15	South Carolina	8
Hawaii	4	South Dakota	3
Idaho	4	Tennessee	11
Illinois	21	Texas	34
Indiana	11	Utah	5
Iowa	7	Vermont	3
Kansas	6	Virginia	13
Kentucky	8	Washington	11
Louisiana	9	West Virginia	5
Maine	4	Wisconsin	10
Maryland	10	Wyoming	3
Massachusetts	12		
Michigan	17		
Minnesota	10		
Mississippi	6		
Missouri	11		
Montana	3		
Nebraska	5		
Nevada	5		
New Hampshire	4		

