

The election of 1828 was one of the nastiest campaigns in U.S. history

By ThoughtCo., adapted by Newsela staff on 08.27.19

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Level 830L



View of the crowd in front of the White House during President Andrew Jackson's first inaugural reception in 1829. The furnishings of the White House were destroyed by the rowdy crowd during the festivities. Image by U.S. Library of Congress

The presidential election of 1828 was important as it signaled a major change. It led to the election of a man widely viewed as a champion of the common people. The election was also known for the harsh insults used by the supporters of both candidates.

President John Quincy Adams and his challenger, Andrew Jackson, could not have been more different. Adams was the highly educated son of the nation's second president. He had traveled widely as a U.S. messenger to other countries. Jackson was an orphan who fought his way to success. He became a national hero at the Battle of New Orleans.

Adams was known for being thoughtful. Jackson was known for violence and duels.

By the time the votes were cast, both men would have wild stories spread about their pasts. The stories were spread by newspapers that didn't hesitate to take sides.

Background For The Election Of 1828

The two opponents in the election of 1828 had faced each other before, in the election of 1824. It was a strange election that ended with what became known as "The Corrupt Bargain." The 1824 race ended with no candidate receiving a majority of votes in the electoral college. The race had to be decided by lawmakers in the House of Representatives. Speaker of the House Henry Clay was the leader of the House of Representatives. It was widely believed that he used his influence to tilt the victory to John Quincy Adams. Adams then rewarded him by naming him secretary of state.

Jackson's furious campaign against Adams basically resumed as soon as Adams took office in 1825. Jackson and his supporters worked hard to line up support around the country.

In 1827, supporters in both the Adams and Jackson camps led efforts to damage the character of the opponent. The two candidates had strong differences on important issues. Even so, the campaign turned out to be based on personalities. Many lies were told during the campaign.

Candidates' Personal Lives Became Material For Attacks

For those who disliked Andrew Jackson, there was a lot of material to work with. Jackson was famous for his short temper and had led a life filled with violence. He had taken part in several duels, killing a man in 1806.

When commanding troops in 1815, he had ordered the execution of six soldiers. They were said to have run away from their duties. Ordering the men to be killed became a well-known story about Jackson.

Those opposed to John Quincy Adams made fun of him for being out of touch. His intelligence was turned against him. His opponents said he believed in a society run by a small group of important people rather than by all people.

Coffin Handbills And Adultery Rumors

Some people viewed Andrew Jackson as a national hero based on his military service. He had been the hero of the Battle of New Orleans. It was the final action of the War of 1812. His military glory was turned against him, though. A Philadelphia printer named John Binns published the well-known "coffin handbill." It was a poster showing six coffins and claiming Jackson murdered the troops he had ordered to be executed.

Even Jackson's marriage was used for attacks. When Jackson first met his wife, Rachel, she mistakenly believed her first husband had divorced her. So when Jackson married her in 1791, she was actually still married.

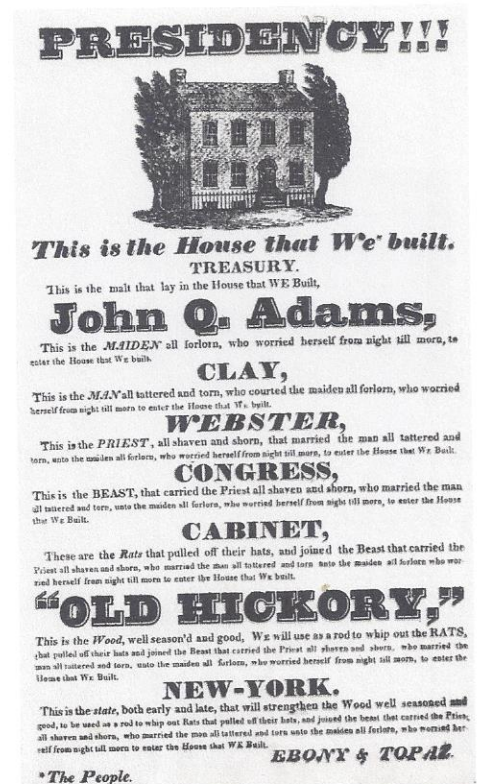


Image 1. Andrew Jackson election poster deriding John Quincy Adams and his following. Image: Bettman/Getty Images [click to expand]

The situation was resolved. The Jacksons were remarried in 1794, to make sure that their marriage was legal. However, Jackson's political opponents tried to confuse people and use it against him.

Attacks On John Quincy Adams

John Quincy Adams was the son of founding father and second president John Adams. He began his jobs in public service as a teenager. He worked as the secretary to the American messenger to Russia. He was respected for representing the U.S. in other countries. That's what led to his later work in politics.

Supporters of Andrew Jackson began spreading rumors about Adams.

Adams Recoiled, Jackson Participated

These wild charges began appearing in the pages of newspapers that took sides for one candidate or the other. John Quincy Adams refused to get involved with it.

Jackson, on the other hand, was so furious about the attacks on himself and his wife that he got more involved. He wrote to newspaper editors. He gave them guidelines on how their own attacks should proceed.

Jackson Won The Election Of 1828

Jackson's appeal to the "common folk" served him well and he easily won the election. It came at a price, however. His wife Rachel suffered a heart attack and died before the inauguration, and Jackson always blamed his political enemies for her death.

When Jackson arrived in Washington for his inauguration he refused the tradition of sitting down with the outgoing president. John Quincy Adams responded by refusing to attend Jackson's inauguration. Indeed, the bitterness of the election of 1828 lasted for years.

How the 2000 election came down to a Supreme Court decision

By History.com, adapted by Newsela staff on 10.27.20

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Broward County Election employees, reporters and Judicial Watch members look at undervotes on December 18, 2000, at the Broward County Elections warehouse in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. News organizations and the Washington-based Judicial Watch are looking at 6,000 undervotes countywide. Photo by Robert King/Newsmakers/Getty.

It all came down to Florida.

Three weeks after Election Day 2000, Republican George Bush had 537 more votes than Democrat Al Gore in Florida. Florida declared Bush had won the state's 25 electoral votes in the contest for president. That meant Bush was elected president of the United States.

On Election Day, TV networks first said Gore won the key state of Florida. Then they said Bush won. Gore called Bush to concede the election. Then, Gore changed his mind because the vote count narrowed. The results were too close to call.

Thirty-six days later, Americans learned Gore had won the popular vote by 543,895 votes. But he needed to win the Electoral College.

The problem was the "exit polls." These are interviews with voters. People are asked about how they voted, just as they leave polling stations.

Too Close To Call

The close call wasn't a huge surprise. Polls showed nine lead changes during the fall. Bush had a slight lead in the final week of the campaign. Gore gained strength on Election Day.

In such a competitive election, a recount "is to be expected," said Rick Hasen, professor of law and political science at the University of California, Irvine.

In 1876, neither major party candidate earned enough electoral votes to win without 20 disputed electors. Republican Rutherford B. Hayes eventually got the electors. He won the presidential election.

The Florida Recount And Hanging Chads

In the 2000 dispute, officials checked the electronic votes. Then Gore asked for a hand recount. People argued about the ballots themselves.

The paper punch-card featured two lists of names. A middle column had marks to be punched through. Some blamed the ballot's design for assigning some Gore votes to the wrong candidate.

Some of those marks did not get properly punched through. The little square is called the "chad." If one or more corners stuck to the ballot, it was called a "hanging chad."

After lawsuits, challenges and recounts, the Florida Supreme Court ordered a recount of undervotes in Florida's 67 counties. Bush quickly appealed, and the case went to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court Decision: Bush v. Gore

The Supreme Court did not want to get involved, Andrew E. Busch said. He is a professor at Claremont McKenna College. The court sent the first Bush plea back to the Florida Supreme Court by a 9-0 vote.

The Florida Supreme Court continued its argument, and the case went back to the Supreme Court. Officials examined election machines, voter lists, vote-counting rules and the state's election laws. They also reviewed election officials and the role of courts.

The Supreme Court issued two rulings. It ruled 7-2 that the Florida recount was unconstitutional because the same standards were not used for all ballots, Hasen said. By a 5-4 vote, the court said there was no more time to find a solution. The vote had five conservative Supreme Court justices "backing Bush, the more conservative candidate, and the liberals backing Gore, the more liberal candidate," Hasen said. The vote stopped, with Bush ahead.

The decision resulted in one of the most disputed Supreme Court decisions in American history. With the Florida win, Bush led Gore in electoral votes nationally 271-266. Gore accepted the results.

Bush became the first president since Harrison to lose the popular vote, but win the general election. About 80 percent of poll respondents told the Gallup polling company that they accepted the results as fair, said Busch.

One result of the outcome: Candidates learned not to concede too early, said Busch. Gore "conceded to Bush, then withdrew his concession, so he was widely seen as a bad loser," he says. Ever since, both parties have "attorneys prepared to swarm over the next Florida on a moment's notice."

The 2000 election added to the division in American politics. "Democrats saw Bush as a president who snuck in by the good graces of the Supreme Court," said professor Busch. "Republicans saw Gore and Democrats as people who would change rules in the middle of the game just to hold onto power."