

How far was
roosevelt himself
responsible for his
election victory in
1932 essay



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The Great Depression brought an end to the era of Republican dominance, as Herbert Clark Hoover was overwhelmed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt from the Democratic Party in the 1932 election. Franklin Delano Roosevelt won complete favour in this election, which gave him 57.4 percent of the total vote. About 22 million people voted for him while Hoover only received votes little less than 16 million.

He won 472 out of the total 531 electoral votes. There are many reasons as to why Franklin Delano Roosevelt won the election in a vast majority. The upbringing, background and character of the two candidates were very different. Herbert Hoover was orphaned at the age of eight. He studied mine engineering and worked as a gold miner after graduation.

Gradually, he was promoted and traveled around the world working as a mining engineer. By the age of 40 he was a multi-millionaire. Roosevelt on the other hand came from a rich family. He was brought up and educated at home and was pampered by his mother. He became a Senator in 1910 but in 1921, Roosevelt caught polio which shattered his political career.

He gradually recovered and came back on track in 1928, successfully becoming the Governor of New York State. Roosevelt was given comfort and luxury from the day he was born whereas Hoover was a self-made multi-millionaire. The only similarity between the two is that they both went through a time in their life when they were equal to the ordinary people; Hoover who was poor, and Roosevelt who suffered polio. ' Why did Franklin Delano Roosevelt win in such a vast majority? ' is a question which needs to

be asked. In many ways, Roosevelt himself was responsible for winning the election in 1932.

When he was the Governor of New York, he believed his main task was to 'make life better for ordinary Americans'. He wanted to help the farmers and the unemployed and to provide old age pensions. He always fulfilled his promises to the people. He said in a radio broadcast, "These unhappy times call for the building of plans..

.. that put their faith once more in the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid". 'The forgotten man' were the laborers.

If they did not work, the foundation of America's economy would be very weak causing it to collapse. So he became the first Governor to spend \$20 million of tax money to help the unemployed. He promised to start unemployment benefit and to set up large scale government industrial projects which would create new jobs. He offered hope to millions of hungry Americans.

This gained him more popularity. The number of unemployed during the Depression was very high and so these were the people who voted for him including the homeless and hungry. He believed strongly in 'active government' and wanted to be involved in the country's crisis. He promised the New Deal would be the answer for all Americans. The New Deal had three aims: relief, recovery and reform (RRR).

He was prepared to interfere as much as necessary and to spend government cash to pull the country out of the depression. The Republicans

(Hoover's party) were however reluctant to take these steps and believed in laissez faire where the people had have to work for themselves independently and not depend on the government. Roosevelt was ready to listen to ideas, to show flexibility. He responded to people's needs when they called for him. He himself had a great personality. He was a good communicator and loved politics.

Before winning the election in 1932, he was the Governor of New York for four years and had also stood for President earlier in 1920 but was unsuccessful then. This gained him recognition by the people in politics. He was paralysed by polio and suffered greatly. This leveled him with the sufferings of the ordinary Americans. He understood them and did everything he could to provide them with their needs.

He became popular among the locals and he was always ready to seek advice and did what the majority of the people wanted him to do. These personality traits and policies go some way to explaining Roosevelt's victory. Even though Franklin Delano Roosevelt was himself very capable and talented, Hoover's unpopularity might have been even more important. Herbert Hoover became President of America in 1928, the times when America was the richest country in the world. Unemployment was low and many were rich enough to add luxuries to their lives.

But when the Depression hit America in 1929 (the Wall Street Crash), it became a different story. The country was suffering economically. The blame was placed with Herbert Hoover even though it wasn't entirely his fault. He believed in 'laissez-faire' - the American system of rugged individualism.

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He was a non-interventionist and so the ordinary people felt he was not doing enough. His life had been like a ' rags to riches' story and so he expected every American could be like him. When the Depression hit USA, he thought it would be for a short term and so he was reluctant to act. He said to a group of businessmen, " Prosperity is just around the corner". He did not take action to end the Depression until 1932.

He set up a Reconstruction Finance Corporation which provided loans to companies with financial problems. He had many other policies in dealing with the Depression but none of them made a major effect and they came too late. The Depression caused the unemployment rate to increase many folds. In 1932, Cleveland, Ohio, unemployment reached 50%. Philadelphia City Council ran out of money and stopped giving aid to 50000 families. Many people starved and they were face with poverty.

Official reports stated that unemployment rose from 3. 2% in 1929 to 25. 2% in 1933. Another unofficial source showed that in 1933, 33% of the workforce was unemployed. The numbers from the official reports were underestimated and other agencies claimed that it was much higher.

Hoover increased spending on federal building projects which created new jobs, and he backed the Hawley-Smoot Tariffs in 1930. He encouraged employers not to reduce wages and lay off workers. He began schemes to relive unemployment. He also set up the Reconstruction Finance Corporation mentioned earlier which seemed to be the most successful but again they were too little, too late. The Wall Street Crash in 1929 that led to the World Depression in 1932 was probably the main reason why people till today

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regard Hoover as the worst of American Presidents. He was unlucky but some of his actions were to blame.

During the election campaigns, he was too wrapped up in fighting Depression. He had poor relations with the press unlike Roosevelt who was a charm to most people. Hoover lacked charisma and so it was Roosevelt who appealed more to the ordinary Americans. Hoover stuck to his policies and was not flexible. He wasn't prepared to listen to ideas unlike Roosevelt which gave the impression to the people that he was involved and not detached.

The people hated Hoover so much that they began to call shantytowns Hoovervilles. Their hatred for Hoover made their choice to vote much easier because they knew he was not the right man to help them. To conclude the achievement of his success, there were other people who helped and supported him throughout his career. His wife, Eleanor Roosevelt was always there for him and helped him to recover his illness when he was struck with polio in 1921. Frances Perkins (a member of his cabinet), S Rosenman (one of his early advisors) and Grace Tully (his secretary) always supported and respected him during his election. Roosevelt's career wouldn't have prospered if it weren't for John Garner, his rival who stood for the Presidential election within the Democratic Party in June 1932.

He agreed to stand aside and support Roosevelt for the good of the Democratic Party. He said, " I'll do anything to see the Democrats win one more national election. " He had many supporters who became on the same side as Roosevelt. In return, Roosevelt made him the Vice President. Two influences shaping his public career were his distant relative Theodore

Roosevelt, whose niece Eleanor he married in 1905, and Woodrow Wilson, whom he served as assistant secretary of the navy during the First World War.

The election in 1932 ended as Roosevelt won by the biggest majority for over ninety years. The figures were incomparable. The main reason to explain this in my opinion would be Herbert Hoover's unpopularity. His character lacked the qualities of a good leader. People didn't respect him because he disrespected them by not keeping his promises and not acting upon their ideas. This is a controversial matter because he did make an effort to revive the economy and so cannot be completely blamed.

Roosevelt having a good character and giving new hopes to Americans on his New Deal made it more convincing to people that he would be their saviour. People believed him when he spoke and they knew he would take actions. The timing for the election just wasn't right for Herbert Hoover who became President when America flourished but then had to suffer as he encountered the Depression. It was a clear and clean victory to Roosevelt.