

# **Electability, Bias, and the American Voter**

**How Personal Beliefs Shape Political Decisions**

## **Grade Level**

Grades 9–12

## **Time Required**

1–2 class periods (45–90 minutes)

## **Subject Area**

Civics / Government / U.S. History

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## **Lesson Overview**

Voters rarely choose candidates based solely on policy positions. Personal characteristics—such as experience, identity, background, and perceived “electability”—often influence political decisions. This lesson challenges students to think critically about how bias and assumptions shape voting behavior, while distinguishing between personal preference, fairness, and democratic principles.

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## **Learning Objectives**

Students will be able to:

- Identify factors that influence voter decision-making
- Analyze how bias affects political participation
- Distinguish between qualifications and personal characteristics
- Reflect on their own assumptions as voters
- Evaluate what makes a candidate “electable” in a democracy

## Activity Part 1: Create a Presidential Candidate

Students design a hypothetical presidential candidate by identifying:

### A. Key Issues

- Three major issues the candidate should address

### B. Voter Coalitions

- Three groups of people the candidate must gain support from

### C. Electoral Geography

- Three states or regions critical to winning a national election

### D. Perceived Electability

Students respond in writing:

What personal characteristics do voters often consider when deciding whether a candidate can win?

(Examples: experience, background, family life, public image, communication style)

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## Activity Part 2: Voter Decision-Making Survey (Reframed)

Students respond **privately or in small groups** to the following prompts, using **Yes / No / It Depends**:

- Would a candidate's gender influence your vote?
- Would a candidate's sexual orientation influence your vote?
- Would a candidate's religious beliefs—or lack of belief—matter to you?
- Would a candidate's past personal struggles (e.g., addiction, divorce) affect your decision?
- How much political experience should a candidate have?
- Is there an age at which a candidate is “too old”? Why?

Emphasize: There are **no right or wrong answers**—the goal is reflection and analysis.

## Guided Class Discussion

- Which factors are about **qualifications**, and which are about **perceptions**?
  - Should voters focus more on policy or personal characteristics?
  - Is it possible to vote without bias?
  - How do media and culture influence what we think is “electable”?
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## Writing Task (Reflection)

Students write a brief response addressing:

- One assumption they noticed in themselves or society
  - Whether that assumption is fair or problematic
  - How voters can make more informed and democratic choices
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## Assessment Options

- Completion of candidate worksheet
  - Participation in discussion
  - Reflective writing (formative)
  - Exit ticket: “*What should matter most when choosing a president?*”
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## Teacher Notes

- Set norms for respectful discussion before beginning
  - Stress academic analysis, not personal judgment
  - Allow students to pass on questions if needed
  - This lesson works especially well in units on elections or political behavior
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## Extensions & Enrichment

### Extension 1: Media Analysis

Analyze how real candidates are described differently based on identity or background.

## Extension 2: Historical Comparison

Compare voter attitudes today to past elections (e.g., first Catholic president, first woman candidate, etc.).

## Extension 3: Data Connection

Examine polling data on voter attitudes toward candidate characteristics.

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## Conclusion

This lesson helps students understand that voting is not purely rational or neutral. By examining electability and bias, students gain insight into how democracy functions—and how it can be strengthened through informed, reflective participation.

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## Final Note

This revised lesson **preserves the original intent and impact** of your activity

Would you vote for someone who ...

while making it **safer, clearer, and more powerful** for modern classrooms and national distribution on ScholarForge.

If you want, next I can:

- Create a **student-facing worksheet PDF**
- Add a **rubric**
- Align it to **AP Government or state standards**
- Package this as part of a **Voter Behavior mini-unit**

Just tell me where you want to take it next.

Sources

Create the worksheet

Electability, Bias, And The American Voter – Student Worksheet

# Electability, Bias, and the American Voter

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Part I: Create a Presidential Candidate

### A. Issues

List **three major issues** your candidate should address.

1.

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3.

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### B. Voter Coalitions

List **three groups of people** this candidate must gain support from in order to win.

4.

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6.

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### C. Electoral Geography

List **three states or regions** that would be important for this candidate to win a national election.

7.

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8.

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9.

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### D. Perceived Electability

In your opinion, what **general characteristics** do voters often believe a presidential candidate needs in order to be elected?

(Examples: experience, background, family life, public image, communication skills)

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## Part II: Voter Decision-Making Survey

Directions: For each question, circle **Yes**, **No**, or **It Depends**. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. Would a candidate's **gender** influence your vote?  
Yes  No  It Depends
  2. Would a candidate's **sexual orientation** influence your vote?  
Yes  No  It Depends
  3. Would a candidate's **religious beliefs or lack of belief** influence your vote?  
Yes  No  It Depends
  4. Would a candidate's **past personal struggles** (such as addiction or divorce) influence your vote?  
Yes  No  It Depends
  5. Would a candidate's **lack of political experience** influence your vote?  
Yes  No  It Depends
  6. How important is a candidate's **age** when deciding who to vote for?
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## Part III: Reflection

Answer **one** of the following questions in a well-written paragraph.

**Option A:** What factors *should* matter most when voters choose a president? Why?

**Option B:** Is it possible for voters to make decisions without bias? Explain.

**Option C:** Should personal characteristics matter as much as policy positions in elections? Defend your answer.

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## Exit Ticket (Optional)

What is **one assumption** voters often make about candidates, and why might that assumption be misleading?