

# U.S. Presidential Candidate Simulation

## *AP U.S. Government & Politics*

**Course:** AP U.S. Government & Politics

**Unit Fit:** Political Parties, Elections, Campaigns, Public Policy

**Grade Level:** 11–12

**Project Type:** Group Simulation / Performance Task

**Time Frame:** 2–3 weeks (mostly outside class)

**Group Size:** 3–5 students

**Assessment Type:** Summative (AP-aligned project requirement)

## SCHOLARFORGE LESSON OVERVIEW

In this simulation, students work in teams to design and run a **fictional presidential campaign**. Each team develops a candidate, crafts policy positions, responds to opposing viewpoints, manages a limited campaign budget, produces campaign media, and participates in a live debate.

Students are randomly assigned to one of three ideological campaign teams—**Conservative, Progressive, or Moderate**—regardless of their personal political beliefs. The project emphasizes **research, strategic thinking, collaboration, and political realism**, while maintaining a nonpartisan, academic framework.

## TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS & FACILITATION GUIDE

### Instructional Purpose

This project is designed to help students:

- Understand how presidential campaigns actually operate
- Analyze domestic and foreign policy positions
- Practice political strategy and persuasion
- Evaluate competing policy proposals
- Experience the complexity of coalition-building and elections

This is **not** a role-playing exercise based on real candidates.

It is a **simulation grounded in political structures and processes**.

## **Group Structure & Ideological Balance**

### **Teacher Setup**

- Create **three campaign teams**:
  - Conservative
  - Progressive
  - Moderate
- Students are **randomly assigned** to teams
- No consideration is given to students' personal political views

This ensures intellectual honesty, empathy, and analytical distance.

### **Required Team Roles (Each Student Must Have One)**

Each team member must hold a **clearly defined role**:

- **Campaign Manager** – Oversees strategy and coordination
- **Policy Director** – Leads issue research and policy papers
- **Communications Director** – Writes speeches, ads, messaging
- **Media & Social Media Director** – Manages visuals, video, social content
- **Debate Representative** – Prepares and participates in the debate

*(In smaller groups, students may combine roles.)*

## **PROJECT COMPONENTS (Teacher Overview)**

### **Candidate Development (Resume & Qualifications)**

Teams must create a **fictional presidential candidate**, including:

- Educational background
- Professional experience
- Prior public service (realistic but fictional)
- Personal qualities aligned with leadership

### **Guiding Question:**

*What qualities and experiences make someone a strong president?*

## **2 Policy Platform (Research-Based)**

Each campaign must develop **at least five major issues**, split between:

- **Domestic Policy** (minimum 3)
- **Foreign Policy** (minimum 2)

For **each issue**, students must prepare a **Policy Position Paper** that includes:

- Definition of the policy area
- Explanation of the problem
- Specific government actions or proposals
- Clear ideological rationale

## **3 Counter-Policy Papers**

Each team must write **counter-policy responses** to the other two campaigns, addressing:

- Weaknesses or consequences of opposing policies
- Alternative approaches
- Political feasibility

## **4 Campaign Strategy & Budget Simulation**

Each campaign is given a **\$10,000,000 budget**.

Teams must submit a **Campaign Strategy Plan** explaining:

- Which states the candidate will actively campaign in
- Which states will receive little or no attention
- How money will be allocated (ads, travel, digital, ground game)
- Which issues will be emphasized in which states

Students must justify decisions using:

- Electoral logic
- Demographics
- Political realities

## 5 Campaign Media

Each team must produce:

- **Two 60-second video commercials:**
  - One *positive* ad promoting their candidate
  - One *negative* ad criticizing an opponent's policies (issue-focused, not personal)

Videos must be:

- School-appropriate
- Issue-based
- Strategically targeted

## 6 Social Media Component (Added)

Each campaign must design a **social media strategy**, including:

- Platform choice (Instagram, TikTok, X, etc.)
- Sample posts or visuals
- Messaging style
- Target audience
- How social media reinforces campaign strategy

## 7 Live Debate

One representative from each team will participate in a **classroom debate**, representing:

- Their candidate's positions
- Their campaign's strategic messaging

Debate questions focus on:

- Major policy issues
- Leadership style
- Tradeoffs and consequences

## Assessment Suggestions (Teacher-Flexible)

Recommended evaluation categories:

- Quality of research and policy depth
- Strategic realism
- Collaboration and role fulfillment
- Effectiveness of communication
- Debate performance

*(Point values optional.)*

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# **STUDENT INSTRUCTIONS (HANDOUT TEXT)**

## **US Presidential Candidate Simulation**

### **AP U.S. Government**

You and your team will design and run a **fictional presidential campaign**. This project requires research, collaboration, creativity, and strategic thinking.

### **Team Assignment**

You will be placed in one of three campaign teams:

- Conservative
- Progressive
- Moderate

### **Your Responsibilities**

Each student must:

- Hold a specific role on the campaign team
- Contribute to research, writing, and planning
- Participate professionally and respectfully

### **What You Must Produce**

✓ **Candidate Resume**

✓ **Five Policy Position Papers**

✓ **Counter-Policy Papers**

✓ **Campaign Strategy & Budget Plan**

✓ **Two Campaign Videos**

✓ **Social Media Strategy**

✓ **Debate Participation (one member per team)**

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## Why This Project Matters

This simulation mirrors how real campaigns operate. It challenges you to:

- Understand political tradeoffs
- Communicate ideas clearly
- Think strategically about elections
- Engage with opposing viewpoints

This is not about winning—it's about understanding **how democracy functions**.