Building a Coalition

How a conservative movement gained national power

SS24.US2.17a "Describe the growth and composition of movement conservatism beginning in the 1960s, and explain how this culminated in the formation of the Reagan Coalition and led to his election in 1980."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two ways conservatives built their movement, circle three groups of supporters, and number two conditions that helped Reagan win. Use your marks to trace how the movement became an electoral coalition.

From Movement to Election

1. In 1964, Republican Barry Goldwater lost the presidential election badly, yet his campaign helped organize conservatives who distrusted expanding federal power. Activists built local clubs, raised money, and promoted candidates instead of waiting for party leaders to act. Some opposed federal civil rights measures, while others focused on taxes, business regulation, or a strong military against communism. These groups did not agree on every issue, but their organizing gave movement conservatism a lasting base.

2. During the 1970s, new allies enlarged this base. Business leaders criticized regulations and high taxes. Religious conservatives organized around abortion, school prayer, and changing social values. Some white Southern Democrats shifted toward Republican candidates, influenced in part by disputes over federal civil rights policies and changing party loyalties. Conservative media and fundraising networks connected people across regions. Inflation and slow economic growth also made calls for lower taxes and less regulation more appealing to many voters.

3. In 1980, Ronald Reagan united many of these voters with promises to cut taxes, limit federal regulation, strengthen national defense, and defend traditional values. His supporters included economic conservatives, religious conservatives, anticommunists, many white Southern voters, and some working-class Democrats dissatisfied with President Jimmy Carter. High inflation, unemployment, and the Iran hostage crisis added to Carter's difficulties. This Reagan Coalition helped Reagan win the presidency, turning years of conservative organizing into national electoral power.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did conservatives turn Goldwater's 1964 defeat into a base for future elections?

2. How did business leaders and religious conservatives broaden the movement in the 1970s?

3. How did changes among some white Southern Democrats affect the movement's composition?

4. Why was Reagan able to turn the growing movement into a presidential victory in 1980?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you advise Reagan's campaign in early 1980. Write a five-sentence strategy memo recommending how to connect at least three groups from the passage, using one organizing method described there; predict how one problem facing Carter could help the coalition win.

ANSWER KEY

Building a Coalition

GRADE 11 · SS24.US2.17a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two ways conservatives built their movement, circle three groups of supporters, and number two conditions that helped Reagan win. Use your marks to trace how the movement became an electoral coalition. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did conservatives turn Goldwater's 1964 defeat into a base for future elections?	**Activists built local clubs, raised money, and promoted candidates, creating an organization that lasted beyond the defeat.**
2	How did business leaders and religious conservatives broaden the movement in the 1970s?	**Business leaders joined over taxes and regulation, while religious conservatives organized around abortion, school prayer, and social values.**
3	How did changes among some white Southern Democrats affect the movement's composition?	**Some shifted toward Republican candidates, adding voters influenced partly by disputes over federal civil rights policies.**
4	Why was Reagan able to turn the growing movement into a presidential victory in 1980?	**He united several conservative groups and some dissatisfied working-class Democrats. Inflation, unemployment, and the Iran hostage crisis added to Carter's difficulties.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Our campaign should bring economic conservatives, religious conservatives, and anticommunists into the same local clubs. Club meetings could show how Reagan's promises on taxes, traditional values, and national defense speak to each group. We should invite working-class Democrats who are dissatisfied with Carter to those meetings. Although these voters disagree on some issues, shared organizing could help them support one candidate. High inflation may make Reagan's economic message especially persuasive and help this coalition win.

Accept historically supported explanations that connect organizing and distinct voter groups to the 1980 result. For the memo, look for a specific organizing recommendation and a prediction grounded in a problem named in the passage.