Votes That Mattered

How national elections changed American politics

SS24.US2.20b "Describe the significance of national elections from 1992 to the present, including the 2000 presidential recount in Florida and 2008 election of Barack Obama."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle each election year, then underline one detail for each year that shows why the election mattered.

When Election Results Made History

1. In 1992, Democrat Bill Clinton defeated President George H. W. Bush after a campaign focused on the economy. Independent Ross Perot won nearly one-fifth of the popular vote but no electoral votes, showing how a third-party candidate could draw broad support without winning states. In 2000, a tight vote in Florida triggered recounts. The Supreme Court stopped further recounting. Although Democrat Al Gore won more votes nationwide, Republican George W. Bush won Florida by 537 votes and secured the presidency through the Electoral College.

2. In 2008, amid a severe financial crisis, Democrat Barack Obama defeated Republican John McCain and became the first Black president of the United States. His victory marked a historic breakthrough in a country where Black citizens had long faced barriers to voting and holding office. Eight years later, Republican Donald Trump won the Electoral College while Democrat Hillary Clinton won more popular votes. The 2016 result renewed debate about whether the Electoral College should decide elections when the nationwide popular vote points elsewhere.

3. The 2020 election took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many voters used mail ballots, and turnout reached its highest share of eligible voters in over a century. Democrat Joe Biden defeated President Trump, who falsely claimed widespread fraud had changed the result. Courts rejected lawsuits seeking to overturn the outcome, making the transfer of power a test of public trust in elections. In 2024, Trump defeated Vice President Kamala Harris and became the first former president since Grover Cleveland to win a nonconsecutive second term.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What did Perot's 1992 result show about third-party candidates?

2. Why did the Florida recount dispute matter to the outcome of the 2000 election?

3. Why was Obama's 2008 victory historically significant?

4. What made the outcomes of the 2020 and 2024 elections significant? Give one reason for each.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A classmate claims the candidate with the most votes nationwide always becomes president. In four sentences, use the 2000 and 2016 elections to test this claim and explain what both elections reveal about how presidents are chosen.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 11 · SS24.US2.20b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle each election year, then underline one detail for each year that shows why the election mattered. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What did Perot's 1992 result show about third-party candidates?	**A third-party candidate could gain broad popular support without winning any electoral votes.**
2	Why did the Florida recount dispute matter to the outcome of the 2000 election?	**Florida's electoral votes decided the presidency. Bush won the state by 537 votes after the Supreme Court stopped further recounting.**
3	Why was Obama's 2008 victory historically significant?	**Obama became the first Black president, a breakthrough given the long history of barriers Black citizens faced in voting and holding office.**
4	What made the outcomes of the 2020 and 2024 elections significant? Give one reason for each.	**The 2020 outcome tested public trust when Trump falsely claimed fraud and lawsuits failed to overturn Biden's win. In 2024, Trump became the first former president since Grover Cleveland to win a nonconsecutive second term.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The claim is false because the Electoral College, not the nationwide popular vote, determines the winner. In 2000, Al Gore received more votes nationwide, but George W. Bush won after securing Florida's electoral votes by 537 votes. In 2016, Hillary Clinton also received more votes nationwide, yet Donald Trump won the Electoral College. Together, these elections show that where votes are cast can matter more than the national vote total.

Accept varied explanations that connect each election result to its broader significance. For the open task, look for accurate evidence from both elections and an explanation of the Electoral College's role.