Beyond the Ballot

How parties shape choices and governing

SS24.USG.10 "Outline major characteristics and functions of contemporary political parties in the United States, including the role of state and national conventions as well as party leadership..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two functions of party organizations, circle two effects of third-party candidates, and number one argument for and one argument against including them in elections. Use your marks to explain how parties affect voters and officials.

Who Shapes the Choices?

1. Before a presidential election, party organizations turn thousands of local choices into a national campaign. Depending on state rules, a state convention may choose delegates to the national convention and adopt a state platform. At the national convention, delegates formally nominate presidential and vice presidential candidates and adopt a national platform. Party chairs raise money and coordinate organizing, while party leaders in Congress guide their members' work on legislation.

2. Third-party candidates can change an election without winning it. In 1912, Theodore Roosevelt ran as the Progressive candidate after leaving the Republicans. He drew support from voters who had backed that party, and Democrat Woodrow Wilson won with less than half the popular vote. In 1992, independent candidate Ross Perot won about 19 percent of the popular vote but no electoral votes. His campaign drew attention to the federal deficit and debt.

3. Supporters of third-party inclusion argue that more candidates give voters choices and bring neglected issues into debate. Critics worry that candidates with similar views can split votes, allowing a less-preferred opponent to win. Meanwhile, many voters identify as independents, though some regularly favor one major party. Strong party divisions can help voters distinguish candidates, but they can also pressure elected officials to reject compromise. Voters who feel unheard may become disillusioned with the party system.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do state conventions, national conventions, and party leaders perform different jobs?

2. Compare one effect of Roosevelt's 1912 run with one effect of Perot's 1992 run.

3. Why might a voter support including third-party candidates even while worrying about a split vote?

4. How can strong party divisions affect both independent voters and elected officials?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 65 to 85 word memo to a state party chair proposing a specific way to include third-party voices in a party-hosted forum. Predict effects on independent voters and elected officials, and weigh one benefit against one risk.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.10

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two functions of party organizations, circle two effects of third-party candidates, and number one argument for and one argument against including them in elections. Use your marks to explain how parties affect voters and officials. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do state conventions, national conventions, and party leaders perform different jobs?	**State conventions may select national delegates and adopt state platforms. National conventions formally nominate presidential tickets and adopt national platforms. Party chairs coordinate campaigns, while congressional leaders guide legislative work.**
2	Compare one effect of Roosevelt's 1912 run with one effect of Perot's 1992 run.	**Roosevelt drew support from former Republican voters as Wilson won with a popular-vote plurality. Perot won about 19 percent of the popular vote and brought attention to the deficit and debt, but won no electoral votes.**
3	Why might a voter support including third-party candidates even while worrying about a split vote?	**Inclusion offers more choices and brings neglected issues into debate, but similar candidates could divide voters and help a less-preferred opponent win.**
4	How can strong party divisions affect both independent voters and elected officials?	**Clear differences may help independents compare candidates, but voters who feel unheard may become disillusioned. Party pressure can make officials less willing to compromise.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

To the state party chair: Invite qualified third-party candidates to a party-hosted forum and give every candidate the same time to answer questions about housing costs. Independent voters could compare plans instead of assuming the major parties speak for everyone. Elected officials might face pressure to address ideas they have overlooked. The forum would expand choices and discussion, although a third-party candidate could draw votes from a similar major-party candidate. Fair questions would let voters judge that risk for themselves.

Accept other passage-supported comparisons and effects. For the memo, look for a specific forum plan, effects on both groups, and a plausible benefit and risk.