Beyond Two Parties

Historical effects and present-day choices

SS24.USG.10a "Describe how third-party candidates have historically affected elections in the United States, and evaluate the arguments for and against their inclusion in contemporary elections."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two ways third-party campaigns affected past elections, circle two reasons for including these candidates today, and number two concerns about inclusion. Use your marks to compare the evidence and trade-offs.

Who Gets a Place in the Race?

1. In 1912, former president Theodore Roosevelt ran on the Progressive Party ticket against Republican incumbent William Howard Taft and Democrat Woodrow Wilson. Roosevelt won about 27 percent of the popular vote and 88 electoral votes, while Wilson won the presidency. Roosevelt's candidacy divided voters who might otherwise have supported a single Republican candidate, but no one can know how those voters would have voted without him. The Progressive campaign also put proposals such as women's suffrage and social insurance before a national audience. A third-party run can change both the contest for office and the ideas voters hear.

2. In 2000, Green Party nominee Ralph Nader received 97,488 votes in Florida. Republican George W. Bush's certified lead over Democrat Al Gore in that state was 537 votes, and Florida's electoral votes decided the presidency. Some observers argue that Nader's presence helped Bush by drawing potential Gore voters. Yet Nader's vote total alone does not prove this claim: some supporters might have stayed home or chosen someone else if Nader had not run. His campaign also raised environmental and consumer-protection concerns. The case shows why evaluating election effects requires more than comparing two vote totals.

3. Today, supporters of including third-party candidates on ballots and in debates argue that voters deserve more choices and that unfamiliar proposals need a public hearing. Critics worry that similar candidates may divide a constituency, allowing a less-preferred candidate to win; they also argue that crowded debates can reduce time to question leading contenders. Ballot-access rules differ by state, and debate organizers may set polling thresholds, so inclusion is not one single decision. A fair evaluation weighs broader representation against possible vote splitting and limited debate time, while avoiding claims that every third-party vote would otherwise go to one major party.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Roosevelt's candidacy affect the 1912 contest and public debate? What can you not conclude about voters who supported him?

2. Why might Nader's Florida vote matter to the 2000 outcome, and why do the vote totals alone not prove he changed the winner?

3. Give two arguments for including third-party candidates on ballots and in debates. How might a critic respond to one of them?

4. A debate organizer sets a polling threshold for participation. What argument from the passage supports that choice, and what argument challenges it?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A civic group is planning a debate with two major-party candidates, and a third-party candidate who is on the ballot asks to join. Write one paragraph of 90 to 110 words recommending a participation rule, using one historical case from the passage and an argument on each side of inclusion.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 12 · SS24.USG.10a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two ways third-party campaigns affected past elections, circle two reasons for including these candidates today, and number two concerns about inclusion. Use your marks to compare the evidence and trade-offs. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Roosevelt's candidacy affect the 1912 contest and public debate? What can you not conclude about voters who supported him?	**His candidacy divided voters who might have backed one Republican and brought proposals such as women's suffrage and social insurance to a national audience. We cannot know how his supporters would have voted without him.**
2	Why might Nader's Florida vote matter to the 2000 outcome, and why do the vote totals alone not prove he changed the winner?	**Nader received 97,488 Florida votes, while Bush's certified lead was 537 votes. The totals do not show whether Nader's supporters would otherwise have voted for Gore, someone else, or no one.**
3	Give two arguments for including third-party candidates on ballots and in debates. How might a critic respond to one of them?	**Inclusion gives voters more choices and brings unfamiliar proposals into public discussion. A critic might argue that similar candidates can divide voters or that more debaters leave less time for questions.**
4	A debate organizer sets a polling threshold for participation. What argument from the passage supports that choice, and what argument challenges it?	**A threshold may keep the debate from becoming so crowded that leading candidates receive too little questioning. It may also exclude candidates with unfamiliar proposals that voters deserve to hear.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I recommend inviting every candidate on the ballot who agrees to the same speaking limits. Roosevelt's 1912 campaign shows that a third-party candidate can bring proposals such as social insurance before voters. Including this speaker could give voters another choice and expose them to unfamiliar ideas. However, with more speakers, each candidate may get less time for questions, and similar candidates could divide voters. Give each participant equal opening time, then use timed questions and follow-ups. This rule makes room for another viewpoint while protecting discussion time. Organizers should explain the rule before the debate so candidates and voters know what to expect.

Accept recommendations for or against inclusion if the student proposes a specific rule, accurately uses one passage case, and weighs an argument on each side. Do not accept a claim that Roosevelt's or Nader's supporters would all have voted for one major-party candidate.