

2022

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# AP<sup>®</sup> United States Government and Politics

## Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary Set 1

### **Inside:**

#### **Free-Response Question 1**

- Scoring Guidelines**
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**Question 1: Concept Application****3 points**

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- A.** Describe a structural barrier in the scenario that makes it less likely that a third-party candidate will be able to secure enough popular support to justify including the candidate in a debate. **1 point**

**Acceptable descriptions include:**

- The winner-take-all electoral system discourages voters from supporting third-party candidates because they are less likely to win, so third-party candidates rarely have enough support to be included in debates.

- 
- B.** In the context of the scenario, explain how a third-party candidate could still have an influence on public policy despite the barrier described in part A. **1 point**

**Acceptable explanations include:**

- Even though third-party candidates like Ralph Nader generally are unable to secure any electors in the electoral college, they sometimes are able to influence public policy by raising awareness of issues which leads to the major parties adopting that platform.

- 
- C.** Explain how including the third-party candidate in the scenario could have had a positive impact on participatory democracy. **1 point**

**Acceptable explanations include:**

- Participatory democracy encourages broad engagement, and the inclusion of a third-party candidate in a debate will expand the appeal of the election among more citizens by bringing in more people and ideas.
- A third-party candidate like Nader will usually expand the range of issues of interest to the public. This could motivate people to participate in politics.

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**Total for question 1 3 points**

Important: Completely fill in the circle that corresponds to the question you are answering on this page.

Question 1

Question 2

Question 3

Question 4

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

a) The winner take all system is a structural barrier that makes it less likely for a third-party candidate to be able to secure enough popular support to justify including the candidate in debate. The winner-take-all system, is a system in which whichever (party) elector wins the most votes of the state, ~~at~~ that elector's party gets ~~the~~ all of that state's electoral support/vote. Therefore, a third-party candidate, such as Nader from the Green party, would have difficulty winning popular support, because of the winner take all system, ~~eventhough~~ his policies have majoritarian support.

b) Despite the structural barrier of the winner take all system, third party candidates could still influence elections because the two main parties, Democrats and Republicans, will usually adopt popular third-party platforms or issues that they advocate for that receives a lot of public support.\* Therefore, third-parties can influence public policy through a major party adopting a third-party's popular policies that the public supports.

\* For example, the Green Party in this scenario, Nader argues, has a lot of their positions "taken off the table" by Republicans and Democrats.

c) Including the third-party candidate, ~~Nader~~<sup>Nader</sup>, would have a positive impact on participatory democracy. This is because, ~~including~~ this would show individual citizens that their interests ~~is~~<sup>are</sup> being accounted for, and therefore their actively participating in the democracy, which could lead to greater

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**Important:** Completely fill in the circle that corresponds to the question you are answering on this page.

Question 1

Question 2

Question 3

Question 4



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

political efficacy, a positive impact on participatory democracy and democracy overall.

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● Important: Completely fill in the circle that corresponds to the question you are answering on this page.

Question 1

Question 2

Question 3

Question 4

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Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

A) A structural barrier in this scenario that makes it less likely that a third party candidate will be able to secure enough popular ~~votes~~ support to justify including the candidate in a debate is the winner take all system demonstrated by all but two states (Maine and Nebraska) in the electoral college. This, unfortunately makes it very difficult for a third party candidate to gain support as a majority party will often win all the votes for that state in the electoral college. B) Despite the difficulty the winner take all system imposes on third party candidates, they can still have an influence on public policy as they can raise awareness on issues that have not been covered by either of the major political parties and exploit the weaknesses of both of the major parties as these are usually easy to find since these parties are so popular and well known. While it may be difficult for a third party candidate to obtain electoral votes, they can still acquire ~~votes~~ popular votes, as did Ralph Nader, who won the most popular votes of any third party candidate. C) The third party candidate in this scenario, Ralph Nader, could have had a positive impact on participatory society had he been able to present himself in a debate. If he had been able to participate in a debate, Nader could have ~~publicly~~ publicly expressed his goals for the country and for the future, while exploiting the weaknesses of

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Important: Completely fill in the circle that corresponds to the question you are answering on this page.

Question 1

Question 2

Question 3

Question 4

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Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

Democrat and Republican Candidates. This would have ~~been~~ had a positive impact on participatory democracy as this would allow more diversity in the voting process since more awareness on the third party candidate would have been known. Having three parties participate in a debate would expand the amount of voters as many people don't vote when they don't have enough knowledge on a candidate, but when the third party candidate is involved in the debate, voter turnout could be more diverse and less centered around the two major political parties.

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Important: Completely fill in the circle that corresponds to the question you are answering on this page.

Question 1

Question 2

Question 3

Question 4

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

- a) A structural barrier that makes it less likely that a third-party candidate will be able to secure enough popular support to justify including the candidate in a debate is the political campaigns portrayed in the media. Moreover, the media uses apps, such as Facebook, to portray many political advertisements, yet it tends to leave out information about the third party candidate. So, the media is a barrier to third-party candidates as it rarely even mentions them or their policies.
- b) A third-party candidate can still have influence on public policy by giving major party candidates more ideas. Furthermore, just because the general public may be ignorant about third-party candidates due to lack of representation in the media, that doesn't mean the Republican and Democratic candidates are uninformed. These major candidates can adopt ideas from the third party candidate and use ~~it~~<sup>them</sup> in their own campaigns to influence public policy.
- c) Including the third-party candidate could have a positive impact on participatory democracy because the candidate could have provided more ideas and policies that the general public agreed with. For instance, if more people were aware of the third-party candidate's ideas, then they could have given more input and opinions and increased participatory government. In addition, even if citizens disagreed with the third-party candidate, it would still help advocate participatory democracy as <sup>more</sup> people would feel inclined to vote and express their own beliefs.

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## Question 1

**Note:** Student samples are quoted verbatim and may contain spelling and grammatical errors.

### Overview

The Concept Application question expected students to apply course concepts in response to a provided real-world scenario. The focus of the scenario was the candidacy of the 2000 Green Party presidential nominee, Ralph Nader. First, students were expected to understand the concept of the two-party system and how the dominance of the two major political parties is a structural barrier to the success of third parties. A third-party candidate is less likely to secure sufficient popular support to justify including the candidate in a presidential debate due to this two-party dominance. Following this, the students were expected to understand how the campaign process would still allow a third-party candidate to influence public policy despite the barrier described earlier in the response. Finally, the students were expected to understand the concept of participatory democracy and how including the third-party candidate in the scenario would have a positive impact on this form of government.

The question expected students to describe a structural barrier that reduces the likelihood of a third-party candidate gaining enough support to be included in debates. Students were expected to reference the scenario in order to describe the structural barrier. Students were also expected to explain how a third-party candidate could still influence public policy in the context of the scenario, despite being excluded from debates due to the previously described structural barrier. Finally, students had to explain how including the third-party candidate could have a positive impact on participatory democracy.

### Sample: 1A

#### Score: 3

The response earned 1 point in part A because “a third-party candidate, such as Nader from the Green Party, would have difficulty winning popular support, because of the winner take all system” is an acceptable description of a structural barrier.

The response earned 1 point in part B for explaining that “third party candidates could still influence elections because the two main parties, Democrats and Republicans, will usually adopt popular third-party platforms or issues that they advocate for that recieves a lot of support.” The response relates to the scenario by mentioning the Green Party and Nader.

The response earned 1 point in part C because “the third-party candidate, Nader ... would show individual citizens that their interests are being accounted for, and therefore their actively participating in the democracy” sufficiently explains how the third-party candidate in the scenario could have a positive impact on participatory democracy.

### Sample: 1B

#### Score: 2

The response earned 1 point in Part A because “the winner take all system ... makes it very difficult for a third party candidate to gain support as a majority party will often win all the votes for

### Question 1 (continued)

that state in the electoral college” is an acceptable description of a structural barrier.

The response did not earn a point in Part B , while it notes that third-party candidates like Nader can raise awareness of issues, there is no reference to adoption of the third-party position by the major parties.

The response earned 1 point in Part C because “Having three parties participate in a debate would expand the amount of voters” and “when the third party candidate is involved in the debates, voter turnout could be more diverse.”

**Sample: 1C**

**Score: 1**

The response did not earn a point in part A because “the political campaigns portrayed in the media” is not a structural barrier in the scenario.

The response did not earn a point in part B even though it states that “major candidates can adopt ideas from the third party candidate and use them in their own campaigns” because it does not refer to the scenario.

The response earned 1 point in part C for explaining that “the candidate could have provided more ideas and policies that the general public agreed with,” so that “more people would feel inclined to vote.”