
AP[®] United States Government and Politics

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary Set 2

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Free-Response Question 2

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Question 2: Quantitative Analysis**4 points**

A. Identify the year in which a presidential candidate had the greatest percent of the popular vote in a presidential election. **1 point**

- The year in which a presidential candidate had the greatest percent was 1972.

B. Describe the overall trend in the percent of the popular vote of third-party/independent candidates. **1 point**

Acceptable descriptions include:

- Third-party candidates do not get as high a percentage of the popular vote as major party candidates.
- Third-party candidates never win 20% of the popular vote.
- Third-party candidates never win a majority of the popular vote.

C. Using the data, draw a conclusion about how the third-party/independent candidate may have affected the outcome of the 1992 presidential election. **1 point**

Acceptable conclusions include:

- In 1992, the third-party candidate received a significant number of votes, and if those votes were allocated differently, they could have affected the outcome of the election by changing the number of electors won in the electoral college.

D. Explain why the data in the bar graph does not necessarily relate to the outcome of presidential elections. **1 point**

Acceptable explanations include:

- The data in the graph do not relate to the outcome because the electoral college, not the popular vote, determines the winner.
- The electoral college allows states to choose how they allocate their votes for determining state electors. Most states use a winner-take-all system which sometimes leads to the candidate with the most popular votes not winning the election.

Total for question 2 4 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. 1972
- B. The popular vote percentage of the third-party candidate is always significantly lower than that of the democrats and republicans, and never exceeds 50%.
- C. During the 1992 election, it is very likely that the election race was much closer in terms of two-party results due to the fact that the third party candidate garnered an unusually higher number of votes. This means that the vote margin between the republican and the democrat candidates was much smaller than usual, and it may have affected the electoral college votes, making it a much closer race for the two-party candidates.
- D. The bar graph does not necessarily relate to the outcome of the elections due to the electoral college and the winner takes all system. Securing the popular vote in an election does not secure the presidency, electoral votes secure the presidency. This is due to ideally having equal state representation in political matters.

Page 2

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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. In 1972 a Republican candidate had the highest percent of popular vote in a presidential election.

B. The overall trend for third party candidates seems to jump and decrease over time then increase one year and decrease again. For example in 1992 the popular vote was high and then decreased very low until again increasing in 2000.

C. The independent candidate in 1992 may have affected the outcome of the election because they were taking votes from the two main parties therefore making it a tighter and closer race between the two main party candidates.

D. This data in the graph relates to the citizens popular vote but it does not relate to the outcome of the election. The electoral college determines the presidential outcome and not the popular vote.

Page 3

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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 - 1972 was the year in which a presidential candidate had the greatest percentage of the popular vote in a presidential election.

B - the overall trend seen in the percentage of 3rd party votes is that the more 3rd party votes there are, the more votes are taken from the 2 main parties. the overall trend seen in the percentage of 3rd party votes is that the more 3rd party votes there is the smaller the margin is for the winning candidate.

C - the high percentage of 3rd party voters in 1992 subtracted a substantial amount of votes from both ~~of the other parties~~ the other parties.

D - this bar graph ~~data~~ does not necessarily relate to the outcome of presidential elections because the graph does not disclose the voter turnout, only the percentage of total votes per year, so we don't know how many votes the candidates got, we only know the percent of the votes they got.

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Question 2

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

Overview

The quantitative analysis question expected students to read and interpret data related to the popular vote share in presidential elections by political party, from 1968 to 2016. Students were expected to identify the year in which a presidential candidate received the highest percent of the popular vote. Students were then expected to describe the overall trend in the data as it related to third-party/independent candidates, after which they were expected to use the data in the graph to draw a conclusion about how third-party/independent candidates impact the outcome of presidential elections. Finally, this question expected students to explain why the data in the bar graph was not necessarily related to the outcome of the presidential election.

Sample: 2A

Score: 4

The response earned 1 point in part A by correctly identifying 1972 as the year that a presidential candidate had the greatest percent of the popular vote.

The response earned 1 point in part B by describing the overall trend in the percent of popular vote of third-party/independent candidates as “always significantly lower than that of the democrats and republicans.”

The response earned 1 point in part C because “the third party candidate garnered an unusually higher number of votes ... and it may have affected the electoral college votes, making it a much closer race for the two-party candidates” is an acceptable conclusion drawn from the data.

The response earned 1 point in part D by explaining that the data in the bar graph does not necessarily relate to the outcome of presidential elections by stating, “Securing the popular vote in an election does not secure the presidency, electoral votes secure the presidency.”

Sample: 2B

Score: 2

The response earned 1 point in part A by correctly identifying 1972 as the year that a presidential candidate had the greatest percent of the popular vote.

The response did not earn a point in part B because it does not correctly describe the overall trend in the percent of the popular vote of third party/independent candidates. While the response states, “The overall trend for third party candidates seems to jump and decrease over time,” this refers to individual points within the bar graph and not an overall trend.

The response did not earn a point in part C because it does not draw an acceptable conclusion about how the third-party/independent candidate in the 1992 election may have affected the outcome of the election. While the response states, “The independent candidate in 1992 may have affected the outcome of the election,” the statement is not linked to data displayed in the graph. While the response

Question 2 (continued)

references “taking votes from the two main parties therefore making it a tighter and closer race,” it does not rise to the level of connecting the third-party/independent popular votes to the Electoral College or allocation of electors, which could impact the outcome of the presidential election.

The response earned 1 point in part D for stating that the Electoral College is responsible for selecting the President, not the popular vote.

Sample: 2C

Score: 1

The response earned 1 point in part A by correctly identifying 1972 as the year that a presidential candidate had the greatest percent of the popular vote.

The response did not earn a point in part B because it does not correctly describe the overall trend in the percent of the popular vote of third party/independent candidates. While the response states, “the overall trend seen in the percentage of 3rd party votes is that the more 3rd party voters there are, the more votes are taken from the 2 main parties,” this points to a relationship between third parties and “main parties” and does not describe an overall trend in the data.

The response did not earn a point in part C because it does not draw an acceptable conclusion about how the third-party/independent candidate in 1992 may have affected the outcome of the election. While the response states, “The high percentage of 3rd party voters in 1992 subtracted a substantial amount of votes from both of the other parties,” the response does not rise of the level of connecting the third-party/independent popular votes to the Electoral College system, which is what determines the outcome of presidential elections.

The response did not earn a point in part D because it does not explain why the bar graph does not necessarily relate to the outcome of presidential elections. The response mentions “voter turnout” but nothing about the difference between the popular vote and the electoral college vote.