

# 1992

## *Bill Clinton vs George H. W. Bush*

A 75-minute lesson on the 1992 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, background reading with primary source, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

<p><b>ERA</b> Modern Polarization</p>	<p><b>CYCLE</b> 1992 of 538 total EV</p>
<p><b>WINNER</b> Bill Clinton (Democratic) · 370 EV</p>	<p><b>RUNNER-UP</b> George H. W. Bush (Republican) · 168 EV</p>
<p><b>KEY ISSUE</b> Economic recession; NAFTA; healthcare reform; 'It's the economy, stupid'</p>	<p><b>TURNOUT</b> 58.1%</p>

### CONTENTS

1. Cover + overview
2. Lesson plan (instructor, 75 min)
3. Background: key terms + primary source
4. Student worksheet (7 questions)
5. Answer key + discussion prompts

# 1992: Bill Clinton vs George H. W. Bush

## Standards alignment

NCSS · D2.His.4.9-12 (chronological reasoning) · D2.His.14.9-12 (causation in U.S. history). CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2 (key ideas/details in primary sources).

## Materials

One copy of the student worksheet per student. Optional: the 1992 map at [theamericanvote.com/elections/1992](http://theamericanvote.com/elections/1992) projected, or printed as a handout.

## Timing

<b>5 min</b>	<b>Warm-up</b>	Identify two structural conditions in 1990-92 America that would produce a three-way presidential race. For each identify the specific 1990-92 development most responsible.
<b>15 min</b>	<b>Reading + vocab</b>	<p>1992 election was 52nd U.S. presidential election. Clinton 370 EV / Bush 168 EV / Perot 0 EV (18.9% popular vote). Clinton 43.0% (plurality); Bush 37.5%; Perot 18.9%.</p> <p>Bush 1991 Gulf War approval (89% March 1991) faded. 1990-91 recession + 1990 tax-increase pledge violation + slow recovery damaged him. Approval 29% July 1992.</p> <p>Republican primary 1992: Pat Buchanan challenged Bush from right. Won 37% New Hampshire February 18, 1992. ~3M primary votes. August 17, 1992 Buchanan Convention keynote "culture war" speech damaged Bush moderate image.</p> <p>Democratic primary 1992 front-runner Clinton (45, AR Governor, DLC Chair 1990-91, "New Democrat"). Survived January 1992 Jennifer Flowers scandal + draft-dodging accusations. "Comeback Kid" after second-place NH February finish. Won March 1992 Super Tuesday.</p> <p>Sen Al Gore Jr (TN, 44) VP - all-Southern ticket first since Polk-Dallas 1844.</p> <p>Democratic Convention NY July 13-16, 1992 nominated Clinton-Gore. "I still believe in a place called Hope."</p> <p>Ross Perot (61, Texas billionaire EDS founder) entered February 20, 1992 on Larry King Live. United We Stand America organization. Self-funded ~\$65M. June 1992 polls Perot leading 3-way ~37%. July 16, 1992 withdrew. October 1, 1992 re-entered.</p> <p>Campaign theme "It's the economy, stupid" - James Carville Little Rock war room</p>

sign. October 15, 1992 town-hall debate "Bush check watch" moment cultural shorthand.

Clinton 370 EV / Bush 168 / Perot 0. Clinton 32 states + DC; Bush 18; Perot 0. Margin 5,805,344.

Clinton inaugurated January 20, 1993. DLC centrist: Family and Medical Leave Act February 1993; Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act August 1993 (top rate 31%'39.6%); Brady Bill November 1993; NAFTA November 1993; 1993-94 healthcare reform failed; 1994 Crime Bill; 1994 Republican Revolution midterm; 1996 Welfare reform; 1997 balanced-budget agreement; 1998 Monica Lewinsky scandal + impeachment + acquittal; 1999 budget surplus; 1999 Glass-Steagall repeal.

Clinton re-elected 1996 (379-159 EV over Dole; popular 49.2% Clinton vs 40.7% Dole vs 8.4% Perot).

1992 election structural significance: (1) Clinton first DLC centrist Democratic president. (2) Perot 18.9% highest third-party since TR 1912. (3) Bush 1992 loss first incumbent Republican defeat since Hoover 1932. (4) 1992 interrupted Reagan-era ascendance but didn't reverse - Bush 43 2000 + 2004 resumed.

The 1992 election can be analyzed retrospectively as the first major break in the 1968-2008 Republican-conservative ascendance. The Republican coalition that Nixon 1968 + Reagan 1980 + Bush 1988 had assembled (Southern realignment + Mountain West + suburban-Northeast + working-class whites + religious conservatives) was structurally weakened by 1992 by: (1) 1990-91 recession + slow recovery damaging working-class economic confidence. (2) Bush's 1990 tax-pledge violation alienating fiscal conservatives. (3) Religious right discontent with Bush's perceived moderation. (4) Ross Perot drawing approximately 19% of voters disaffected from establishment politics. (5) Clinton's DLC centrist Southern Democratic identity neutralizing Northern liberal Democratic vulnerabilities. The Clinton 1992 victory operated within Reagan-era policy framework rather than reversing it: Clinton signed NAFTA (free trade); welfare reform 1996; balanced budgets 1997-2001; financial deregulation 1999 (Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act + Glass-Steagall repeal). The structural Reagan-era ideological dominance persisted through Clinton presidency.

The DLC centrism framework that Clinton 1992 operationalized would shape Democratic presidential politics for the next 32 years. The DLC framework: fiscal responsibility + welfare reform + free trade + cultural moderation. Subsequent Democratic candidates: Gore 2000 (DLC centrist; lost narrowly); Kerry 2004 (DLC adapted; lost); Obama 2008 + 2012 (DLC extended with multicultural-progressive elements; won twice); Hillary Clinton 2016 (DLC centrist; lost despite popular vote win); Biden 2020 (DLC centrist + Obama-Biden continuity; won); Harris 2024 (DLC centrist + Biden incumbent; lost). The DLC framework operationalized Democratic presidential strategy for 32 years (1992-2024). Critics argued the framework was too

accommodating to Reagan-era conservatism + structurally inadequate for post-2008 economic crisis + post-2016 populist moment.

The Ross Perot 1992 campaign's long-term structural significance: (1) Demonstrated structural appetite for independent + anti-establishment candidates. (2) Reform Party founding 1995 (Perot, Pat Choate). (3) Perot 1996 second run (8.4% popular vote, 0 EV). (4) Subsequent third-party challenges: Nader 2000 (2.7% popular vote - widely blamed for Gore's narrow Florida loss); Stein 2016 (1.1%); West 2024 (0.3%); Kennedy 2024 (began as independent then withdrew October 2024 + endorsed Trump). (5) Trump 2016 + 2024 victories can be analyzed as the operationalization of Perot 1992 + 1996 anti-establishment populism within the Republican Party. The Perot 1992 voter coalition (working-class whites + Midwestern industrial workers + small-business owners + government-distrust voters) was structurally similar to Trump's 2016 + 2024 coalition. The lesson: third-party movements can structurally migrate into major-party victories within 24 years. Then review the Key Terms on the background page so students share vocabulary before the primary-source work.

<b>15 min</b>	<b>Primary source</b>	Read the excerpt aloud once. Students annotate individually (3 min), then pair-share on worksheet questions 6 and 7 (5 min).
<b>15 min</b>	<b>Discussion</b>	Small groups (3–4). Pick one of the three prompts at the back of this packet (or assign one). Each group reports back two sentences.
<b>20 min</b>	<b>Assessment</b>	Student worksheet. Seven questions, mixed format (5 about the reading, 2 about the primary source). Answer key in the instructor section at the back.
<b>5 min</b>	<b>Closure</b>	One-sentence exit ticket — see Closure section below.

## Closure

One-sentence exit ticket: "What is one thing the 1992 election tells you about the Modern Polarization era that the textbook didn't?"

# Background

Before the worksheet, review the key terms below and then read the primary source carefully. The two source-analysis questions on the worksheet (questions 6 and 7) ask you to quote from the excerpt.

## Key terms

### Bill Clinton

42nd U.S. president (1993-2001).

### "It's the economy, stupid"

Clinton campaign strategist James Carville's 1992 mantra.

### Pat Buchanan culture war speech

August 17, 1992 Republican Convention keynote.

### "Bush check watch" moment

October 15, 1992 town-hall debate.

### Ross Perot

Texas billionaire entrepreneur and 1992 + 1996 independent presidential candidate.

### New Democrat

Clinton's 1992 political identity.

### "Comeback Kid"

Clinton's February 1992 New Hampshire primary self-designation.

## Acceptance Address at Democratic National Convention

**BILL CLINTON, JULY 16, 1992**

*Clinton delivered this acceptance speech at Madison Square Garden in New York City on July 16, 1992. "Place called Hope" referenced his birthplace Hope, Arkansas.*

*"I end tonight where it all began for me - I still believe in a place called Hope. My fellow Americans, I end tonight where it all began for me: I still believe in a place called Hope, a place called America. The choice we offer is not conservative or liberal; in many ways it is not even Republican or Democratic. It is different. It is new. And it will work. It is a new covenant. We need a new covenant. We need a new beginning. We need a new tomorrow."*

Clinton, "Acceptance Address at Democratic National Convention" (New York, July 16, 1992). Fair use under 17 USC §107 — educational excerpt of public political speech, 150 words.

# The 1992 Election

Read the background page (key terms and primary source), then answer the seven questions below. Questions 6 and 7 ask you to quote from the primary source.

**QUESTION 1 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE**

How many electoral votes did Clinton win in 1992?

- A. 339
- B. 370
- C. 391
- D. 413

**QUESTION 2 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE**

What percentage of the popular vote did Perot receive?

- A. 12.4%
- B. 15.7%
- C. 18.9%
- D. 22.3%

**QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER**

What was the "Read my lips" promise Bush violated, and how did it affect 1992?

---

---

---

---

**QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER**

Clinton says "I still believe in a place called Hope, a place called America." What is the rhetorical purpose?

---

---

---

---

**QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER**

Who was Ross Perot and what was his structural significance?

---

---

---

---

---

**SOURCE ANALYSIS — QUESTIONS 6 AND 7 REFERENCE THE PRIMARY SOURCE ON THE BACKGROUND PAGE.**

**QUESTION 6 · SHORT-ANSWER**

Explain how the Clinton 1992 victory operated within Reagan-era policy framework rather than reversing it.

---

---

---

---

**QUESTION 7 · MAP-READ**

On the 1992 election map, identify Clinton's 32 states + DC and Bush's 18 states. What does the geographic pattern reveal?

---

---

---

---

# Answer key

**QUESTION 1**

370.

AP students should know the 370-168-0 split.

---

**QUESTION 2**

18.9%.

AP students should know Perot's 18.9%.

---

**QUESTION 3**

Bush's "Read my lips: no new taxes" August 1988 acceptance pledge. Violated November 5, 1990 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act. Affected 1992 through conservative Republican betrayal (Buchanan 37% NH), Perot challenge, Clinton 43% via Republican coalition fractures.

AP students should be able to articulate.

---

**QUESTION 4**

Clinton's "place called Hope" passage uses rhetorical strategies: geographical-biographical framing (Hope, AR birthplace); generational/historical framing; place-as-promise dual reference; closing-circle structure. Political function: authentic outsider + American renewal framing.

AP students should be able to articulate.

---

**QUESTION 5**

Ross Perot Texas billionaire EDS founder. Entered February 20, 1992 on Larry King Live. Self-funded ~\$65M. Won 18.9% popular vote + 0 EV - highest third-party % since TR 1912. Significance: structural appetite for anti-establishment candidates; Reform Party 1995; subsequent third-party challenges; Trump 2016+2024 can be analyzed as Perot-style populism within Republican Party.

AP students should be able to articulate.

---

**QUESTION 6**

The Clinton 1992 victory operated within Reagan-era policy framework rather than reversing it through five structural moves: (1) NAFTA November 30, 1993 - Clinton signed free-trade agreement that Bush 41 had negotiated. Operationalized Reagan-era free-trade framework. (2) Welfare reform August 22, 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act - structurally restricted federal welfare entitlements (replaced AFDC with TANF; imposed work requirements; lifetime benefit limits). Operationalized Reagan-era welfare-skepticism. (3) Balanced budget 1997-2001 - Clinton-Gingrich 1997 balanced-budget agreement produced first budget surpluses since 1969. Operationalized Reagan-era fiscal-conservatism rhetoric. (4) Financial deregulation 1999 - Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act repealed parts of 1933 Glass-Steagall Act separating commercial + investment banking. Operationalized Reagan-era deregulation framework. (5) Crime policy 1994 - Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act expanded federal death penalty + mandatory minimum sentences + "three strikes" provisions. Operationalized Reagan-era tough-on-crime framework. The structural lesson: Clinton 1992 victory did not reverse Reagan-era ascendance; it operationalized DLC centrist Democratic Party that accepted much of Reagan-era policy framework while opposing Republican electoral interests. The Clinton-era Democratic Party was structurally closer to Eisenhower-era Republican Party than to McGovern-era Democratic Party.

AP students should be able to articulate the structural continuity.

**QUESTION 7**

Clinton states (32 + DC): Northeast + West Coast + most Midwest + selected South (4 states + Border) + selected Mountain + HI. Bush states (18): 7 former Confederate + Mountain West + Plains + IN. Pattern reveals: Northeast structurally Democratic; West Coast structurally Democratic (CA 1992 first time since 1964); Solid South splintered; Mountain West + Plains structurally Republican.

AP students should be able to articulate.

## Discussion prompts

- 1 Ross Perot won 19% popular vote but 0 electoral votes in 1992. Identify three structural reasons the Electoral College systematically disadvantages third-party candidates.
- 2 Clinton 1992 was first DLC centrist Democratic president - operationalized "New Democrat" framework. Identify three specific 1993-2024 Democratic presidents/candidates who operated within the framework.