

Chief Reader Report on Student Responses: 2017 AP[®] Comparative Government and Politics Free-Response Questions

• Number of Students Scored	22,404			
• Number of Readers	101			
• Score Distribution		Exam Score	N	%At
		5	5,207	23.2
		4	5,481	24.5
		3	4,565	20.4
		2	3,993	17.8
		1	3,158	14.1
• Global Mean	3.25			

The following comments on the 2017 free-response questions for AP[®] Comparative Government and Politics were written by the Chief Reader, Jennifer Horan, University of North Carolina at Wilmington. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student preparation in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

Question #1**Task:** Descriptive & Explanatory**Max. Points:** 3**Mean Score:** 1.10***What were responses expected to demonstrate in their response to this question?***

The intent of this question was to assess students' understanding of the differences between regime change and a change in government. The skills tested were explanatory and descriptive. Students had three specific tasks: to explain the difference between regime change and change in government, to describe one example of a regime change since 1990 in a country studied in the AP Comparative Government and Politics course, and to describe one example of change in government since 2010 in a country studied in the AP Comparative Government and Politics course.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

- Many students correctly explained the difference between regime change and a change in government.
- Most students correctly described one regime change since 1990.
- Many students correctly described one change in government since 2010.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students often confuse the meaning of the concepts “regime” and “government” because they show lack of awareness of the three primary regime types: democratic, hybrid or transitional, and authoritarian. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “A regime change differs from a change in government in that the ruling body and all of its corresponding practices and governing characteristics in a regime is changed. An example is a change from an authoritarian regime to a democratic regime. Contrastly [<i>sic</i>] a change in government represents a change in leadership or party. This may be the succession of one president to the next or a new party.”

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

Teachers should emphasize that political change between regime types (democratic, transitional/hybrid, and authoritarian) is a fundamental categorical political change. A change of government represents leadership change within regimes of a particular type. Students should be familiar with contemporary political events including elections.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

- Comp GoPo Online Teacher Community, Resources
- AP Central, Comp GoPo, The Course
 - AP Comp GoPo Course Description—2014
 - Teacher’s Guide
- AP Central, Comp GoPo, Classroom Resources
- Question Bank (released in 2018)

Question #2

Task: Descriptive and Explanatory

Max. Points: 3

Mean Score: 1.69

What were responses expected to demonstrate in their response to this question?

The intent of this question was to assess students' knowledge of how the electoral system impacts party representation in the House of Commons in Great Britain. The skills tested were descriptive and explanatory. Students had three specific tasks: to identify the majority party in the House of Commons, to identify the electoral system in Great Britain, and to explain how the electoral system affects party representation in the House of Commons.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Many students correctly identified the Conservative Party as the party with a majority of seats in the House of Commons, though some identified the incorrect party as the majority party. Many students were able to identify the electoral system in Great Britain as single-member district, however some did not identify an electoral system or combined electoral systems. Some responses provided a correct explanation of how the electoral system affects party representation in the House of Commons, but many did not make an accurate connection between the electoral system and party representation. Some students based their explanations on the effects of a proportional representation system and incorrectly concluded that the electoral system increases representation for minor parties. Students sometimes exaggerated the two-party nature of representation in the House of Commons and incorrectly concluded that minor parties do not play a role.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Many students did not make an accurate connection between the electoral system and party representation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">“The electoral system affects party representation in the House of Commons by underrepresenting minority parties. These parties are spread throughout the UK and don't have enough regional concentration [sic] in a district to win a seat.”

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

Make sure to differentiate between different types of electoral systems and identify the system that each country uses. Encourage students to make connections between electoral systems and party systems. Teachers should address the typical outcomes of electoral systems in addition to country-specific outcomes.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

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Question #3**Task:** Descriptive**Topic:** Political Economy**Max. Points:** 3**Mean Score:** 1.65***What were responses expected to demonstrate in their response to this question?***

The intent of this question was to assess students' understanding of the causes of the greater concentration of foreign investment in the north of Mexico than in the south and of the economic and political consequences of regional differences in foreign investment. The skills tested were descriptive. Students had three specific tasks: to describe a cause of the greater concentration of foreign investment in northern Mexico compared to the south, to describe an economic consequence of the regional differences in foreign investment, and to describe a political consequence of the regional differences in foreign investment.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

- Most students correctly described a cause of the regional differences in foreign investment in Mexico by stating that northern Mexico is close to the United States or that the north of Mexico has a stronger industrial base or infrastructure.
- Many students correctly described an economic consequence of the regional differences in foreign investment.
- Fewer students correctly described a political consequence of the regional differences in foreign investment.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students would sometimes describe a social consequence of the regional differences in foreign investment instead of a political consequence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The north is more supportive of the PAN party”

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

Teachers should emphasize how politics and economics are interconnected. Students often perceive these two areas as distinct. Providing real-world examples of the causal relationships between these two areas would be very helpful to students. Often students confuse social consequence with political consequence. Teachers should spend some time demonstrating the difference between social and political indicators.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

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Question #4**Task:** Descriptive and explanatory**Max. Points:** 3**Mean Score:** 1.73***What were responses expected to demonstrate in their response to this question?***

The intent of this question was to assess students' knowledge of Iran's reservation of some Majles seats for some minority groups. The skills tested were descriptive and explanatory. Student had two specific tasks: to identify a minority group that has a reserved seat in Iran's Majles legislature and to explain why Iran reserves seats for some minority groups.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Many students correctly to identify Iranian religious minority groups that are given reserved seats in Iran's Majles. Some of their responses also explained why Iran's government reserves legislative seats for some minority groups but did not distinguish a second explanation, and therefore did not earn a second point for this skill. Many students correctly identified Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians as religious minority groups that are given reserved seats in Iran's Majles. Some students also identified Sunni Muslims as a religious as a minority group, but this identification did not earn a point as Sunni Muslims are allowed to be elected to the Majles, but are not given reserved seats by Iran's government. Many students were able to explain a reason that Iran reserves seats for some minority groups as way to co-opt these groups by offering representation, to gain political legitimacy and because reserving seats is mandated by Iran's constitution because Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians are considered to be "People of the Book." Most students were not able to distinguish a second correct explanation to earn a second point for this skill.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some students identified Sunni Muslims as a religious minority group that is given reserved seats in Iran's Majles. Since no Majles seats are reserved for Sunni Muslims, these students did not receive 1 point. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students who identified Christians, Jews, or Zoroastrians as religious minority groups that were given reserved seats in Iran's Majles received 1 point for this understanding.

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

When answering a question about two different explanations, encourage students to distinguish between the two. When students don't distinguish between two different explanations, their attempt at providing a second explanation is often more extensive writing about their first explanation.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

- Comp GoPo Online Teacher Community, Resources
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Question #5**Task:** Conceptual and analytical**Max. Points:** 3**Mean Score:** 1.01***What were responses expected to demonstrate in their response to this question?***

The intent of the question was to assess students' understanding of the concept "rule of law," how particular institutional arrangements promote the rule of law in democratic regimes, and why authoritarian regimes resist the rule of law. The skills tested were definitional, descriptive, and explanatory. Students had three specific tasks: to define the term "rule of law," to describe an institutional arrangement that promotes the rule of law in democratic regimes, and to explain why authoritarian regimes resist the rule of law.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

The response addresses a key concept in comparative politics – rule of law – and incorporates content related to the study of power and authority, as well as political institutions. Many students correctly defined the concept "rule of law" and successfully described an institutional arrangement that promotes the rule of law in democratic regimes. Some struggled to define the concept, particularly in terms of how everyone in society is accountable to the law or that it is universally applied. Some responses were less successful in describing an institutional arrangement that promotes the rule of law in democratic regimes. Although most students provided a description here, some did not describe a particular institutional arrangement, instead offering descriptions of leaders' actions. Explaining why authoritarian regimes resist the rule of law was challenging for a good number of students, as many wrote a description of authoritarian regimes or their general lack of rule of law instead of explaining authoritarian regimes' resistance to the rule of law.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

Some students equated the concept "rule of law" with having written laws, a constitution, or a particular legal system like code law or common law. Others connected rule of law to other concepts such as political legitimacy or civil liberties. In their descriptions of institutional arrangements that promote the rule of law, some students wrote about constitutions without describing particular institutional arrangements, such as independent judiciaries and checks and balances. Others described other forms of democratic accountability, such as free and fair elections, that do not necessarily promote the rule of law. As for explaining why authoritarian regimes resist the rule of law, a good number of students described the incompatibility between authoritarianism and rule of law and the desire of authoritarian regimes to assert control instead of specific reasons for their resistance to the rule of law.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rule of law as law written in a constitution. 	Rule of law is when laws "apply to everyone equally, including the government itself."

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

Teachers should continue to emphasize the importance of the rule of law for political governance, taking care to show how it goes beyond legal systems and constitutions and instead involves the universal application of law to everyone living in a country, including political leaders. Moreover, be sure to differentiate this concept from other important concepts such as political legitimacy and democracy. Showing how the rule of law is implemented in different types of political regimes may help students understand that while rule of law is certainly stronger in democratic regimes, it is not equivalent to democracy and is not always completely absent in authoritarian regimes. In a related manner, discussing how particular institutional arrangements support the rule of law in democracies can

reinforce other concepts such as separation of powers and independent judiciaries. As for connecting rule of law to authoritarian regimes, continue to show how the rule of law is weak but also emphasize the reasons why authoritarian regimes resist the rule of law. On this point, differentiating between description and explanation may be helpful. Authoritarian regimes resist the rule of law for reasons that go beyond the descriptive weakness of rule of law and their desire to control the system and population: to avoid accountability and possible regime change and to be able to engage in corruption, patronage, and to punish the opposition.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

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Question #6**Task:** Conceptual, descriptive, and explanatory**Max. Points:** 6**Mean Score:** 2.76***What were responses expected to demonstrate in their response to this question?***

The intent of this question was to assess students' understanding of the role of cabinets within the executive branch of government, the way cabinets are formed within parliamentary systems, and the important institutional differences between parliamentary and presidential systems. The skills tested were conceptual, descriptive, and explanatory. Students had six specific tasks: to describe two functions of a cabinet, to identify the institution from which members of the cabinet are drawn in a parliamentary system, to describe how a cabinet is formed in a parliamentary system, to explain how the process of removing cabinet members differs in parliamentary and presidential systems, and to explain why policy making is more efficient in a parliamentary system than in a presidential system.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Many students correctly stated that the function of a cabinet is to advise the chief executive. Some of these students also described providing expertise to the chief executive as a second function and did not receive the point as this was too similar to the first point. Some students correctly described managing a bureaucratic ministry as a function of cabinets. Many students correctly identified the parliament or the legislature as the institution from which cabinet members are drawn. Some students identified the major party as the institution from which cabinet members are drawn and did not receive the point as a party is not an institution. Many students correctly described that the prime minister or leader of the largest party picks members of the cabinet. Some students correctly described that the legislature must vote the cabinet into power. Most students did not correctly explain that cabinet members are removed with a vote of no confidence in a parliamentary system and impeachment in presidential systems. Many students incorrectly explained the difference as a president being able to remove cabinet members at will. That answer does not receive the point since the privilege of a chief executive to remove cabinet members exists in both parliamentary and presidential systems and is not a difference between the two. Many students correctly explained that fusion of powers makes policy making more efficient in a parliamentary system. Some students correctly explained that divided government makes policy making less efficient in a presidential system.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For part (a), some students described the first function as advising the chief executive and the second function as providing expertise to the chief executive. Since advising and providing expertise are the same, these students received 1 point instead of 2 points for part (a). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A cabinet functions...to advise the president or prime minister on policy matters and...to be the heads of certain major agency departments in the government that each have specific areas of control and expertise.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For part (d), some students explained that a presidential system is different from a parliamentary system because presidents can remove cabinet ministers at will. That is not a difference since executives have such privilege in parliamentary systems, as well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removing members of cabinet in a parliamentary system happens by a vote of no confidence while in a presidential system they are removed by impeachment.

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

When answering a question about a difference, encourage students to be certain that the process they attribute to one system type is not present in the other. When teaching about cabinets, focus on the process for appointing and removing both individual cabinet ministers and the cabinet as a whole. Prepare students to recognize a conceptual question and to avoid answering only with proper nouns that refer to a specific country, such as House of Commons, in their response.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

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Question #7**Task:** Descriptive and explanatory**Max. Points:** 5**Mean Score:** 2.42***What were responses expected to demonstrate in their response to this question?***

The intent of this question was for students to compare the economic and political consequences of oil and gas production in Nigeria and Russia. The skills tested were descriptive and analytical. Students had five specific tasks: to explain how large-scale oil production has stimulated economic development in Nigeria, to explain how large-scale oil production has limited economic development in Nigeria, to describe how the degree of central government control of oil and gas production differs between Nigeria and Russia, to describe a political consequence of oil production in Nigeria, and to describe a different political consequence of oil production in Russia.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

The production and export of oil and natural gas has both economic and political consequences in Nigeria and Russia. Many students were able to correctly explain how large-scale oil production in Nigeria has not only stimulated economic development, but also limited economic development. Frequently, students explained that foreign direct investment in oil production in Nigeria has stimulated economic development, but Nigeria's dependence on one resource makes its economy vulnerable to commodity price changes. Responses that did not earn these points often made a correct observation about oil production in Nigeria but failed to explain how it stimulated or limited economic development. Many students were also able to describe that Russia has a greater degree of central government control of oil and gas production than Nigeria because Nigeria produces oil in joint ventures with MNCs. Some responses, however, did not earn a point because they were descriptions of similarities instead of differences between the control of oil production by the central governments of Nigeria and Russia. Most students were able to describe that a political consequence of oil production in Nigeria is an increase in government corruption or social action by environmental groups. Finally, many students were able to describe that a political consequence of oil production in Russia is that it supports state centralization of power under President Putin. Responses that did not earn this last point often cited governmental corruption for both Nigeria and Russia instead of providing a different political consequence for Russia.

Many students were successful in comparing the degree of government control and the political consequences of oil and gas production in Nigeria and Russia by correctly describing the situation in both countries and supporting their descriptions with relevant factual information. Many students were successful in analyzing the dual effects of oil production in Nigeria on economic development by comparing how it both stimulates and limits economic development.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In part (a), students often stated that oil production in Nigeria increased government revenue but then failed to explain how the revenue stimulated economic development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Large-scale oil production has stimulated economic development in Nigeria ... it has led to large cash reserves ... that allows the national government to spend on internal improvements."

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In part (b), students often stated that oil production in Nigeria has made Nigeria dependent on one resource but then failed to explain how the lack of diversification limited economic development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Large-scale oil production has limited economic development in Nigeria by creating an over-dependence on a single export. This has slowed down potential investment in other sectors.”
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Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

It is essential that students understand the interaction between political and economic trends, particularly as they impact economic development. Teachers can help students visualize these trends by crafting lessons which have students analyzing economic development data from sites, such as the World Bank or the CIA World Factbook, to update the information presented in a textbook. Students also need practice in discerning the differences between political and economic consequences. Frequent use of graphic organizers comparing these two concepts for each core country is helpful for students to master differentiating between political and economic effects. It is also important to task students to compare these concepts across countries. Finally, students need extensive opportunities to answer different kinds of writing prompts, particularly those which require students to explain how. Oftentimes, students fail to close the loop and completely answer the question as in shown in the samples above. Teachers can help students learn to provide complete answers by challenging them with a single prompt as a bell ringer, providing quick feedback with peer review, and then having students track their progress with a writing log.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

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- Question Bank (released in 2018)

Question #8**Task:** Identification, Explanatory, and description**Max. Points:** 6**Mean Score:** 2.81***What were responses expected to demonstrate in their response to this question?***

The intent of this question was to assess students' understanding of the impact of media and control of media in authoritarian and democratic regimes, in particular China and Mexico. The skills tested were descriptive and explanatory. The students had six specific tasks: to identify a governmental constraint on media freedom in China in the past decade and to explain how that constraint helps sustain the authoritarian regime, to explain why China has allowed some media freedom in the last decade, to explain how the media helps sustain democracy in Mexico, to describe one nongovernmental constraint on media freedom in Mexico in the past decade, and to explain why democratic regimes place constraints on media.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

- The question provides an intersection of the study of authority and power. Students are expected to recognize different types of political regimes (authoritarian and democratic) and the different relations between the state and media, depending on the type of political regime.
- Almost every student was able to identify some mechanism used in China to constrain the media, and most students were able to connect that constraint with a purpose in sustaining the authoritarian regime in China.
- Many students recognized that there were some reasons that even an authoritarian regime like China's would allow some media freedom.
- Most students were able to explain some way that the media helped to sustain democracy in Mexico in the past decade.
- Many students were able to describe a non-governmental constraint on media freedom in Mexico.
- Many students were able to explain why, even in a democracy, it might be necessary to constrain the media.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

- Many students were not able to recognize the difference between the identification of a media constraint and the purpose or reason for that constraint.
- Many students argued that popular groups had much more influence on China's media policy than is actually the case.
- Many students were not able to recognize the difference between a description of the role of the media in a democracy and the purpose of media freedom in sustaining a democracy.
- Many students were unable to explain the unique motivations for a democracy to justify constraining the media.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description vs. explanation of Chinese media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "China censors the media" so that "there will not be much challenge to the party's power in China, by the people"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description vs. explanation of Mexican media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free media "helps keep elections free, open, and fair"

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description vs. explanation of constrained media in a democracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “protecting national security interests”
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Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- The role of the media is complicated; in some instances there are different roles depending on the type of regime. This question was designed to challenge students to recognize the common functions of the media in an authoritarian regime and in a democracy, but also to understand why each type of regime would act counter to the norm in its treatment of the media (allowing more media freedom in an authoritarian regime and constraining the media in a democracy). Therefore, teachers need to clearly explain to students the differences between the different types of media environments and media regulations, but also exactly which governmental purposes and goals are served by different media environments and regulations.
- Teachers should make clear to students that while there might be some instances where China allows media freedom, they are generally done to serve the interests of the state, rather than based on popular demand.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

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