



## Student Performance Q&A:

### 2002 AP<sup>®</sup> Government & Politics: Comparative Free-Response Questions

The following comments are provided by the Chief Reader regarding the 2002 free-response questions for AP<sup>®</sup> Government & Politics: Comparative. *They are intended to assist AP readers as they develop training sessions to help teachers better prepare their students for the AP Exams.* They give an overview of each question and its performance, 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 performance in these areas are also included. Readers are encouraged to use their expertise to create strategies for teachers to improve student performance in specific areas.

#### Question 1

*What was intended by the question?*

This question sought to have students 1) draw a conceptual linkage between two structurally- or socially-created conditions and corruption and 2) explain a consequence of corruption, either negative or positive, in Russia and in their chosen developing country — India, Mexico, or Nigeria. Students were not required to use the general conditions they described in the first part of their response in their explanation of consequences.

*How well did students perform?*

Many students were able to provide adequate descriptions of general conditions leading to corruption. Some students answered this part using a specific example to describe how a condition might lead to corruption, but this was not necessary to earn credit.

In the parts of the question that required country-specific responses, many students wrote at some length about current evidence of corruption in Russia, more so than in India, Mexico, or Nigeria. Although the question did not ask students to describe corrupt practices in these countries, students earned partial credit for this type of response, because it showed a country-specific knowledge and often *implied* a consequence for the political system. Answers to this part of the question tended to explain political consequences of corruption broadly, or in conceptual terms (e.g., “the growth of corruption has reduced political legitimacy in Russia”), often without reference to specific institutions, leaders, or events.

*What were common errors or omissions?*

A large number of students found the first part of the question challenging, due to the request for a conceptual discussion not tied to a specific case. Students seemed to lack an understanding of how certain conditions (e.g., poverty) or social power structures might encourage corruption. Many did not understand

what was meant by “condition” and sometimes used a circular definition, naming some form of corruption as a condition of corruption (e.g., “one condition that leads to corruption is bribery”). Some students demonstrated limited analytic understanding of corruption, confusing it with activities of which they disapproved (e.g., military coups or authoritarian rule) or with other unrelated political phenomena (e.g., revolutions). Furthermore, students often confused conditions leading to corruption with the consequences of corruption. The most consistent omission was the lack of references to specific political consequences in India, Mexico, or Nigeria.

*Based on your experience at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that could improve the performance of their students on the exam?*

As in the past, students were often unable to demonstrate a command of concepts or an ability to generalize and apply these conceptual connections to specific political systems. Students often had some command of facts about corruption and were able to describe it in Russia and in the chosen developing country. However, the inability to generalize across cases requires a more topical approach to teaching as a complement to country studies. Study of recent events in India, Mexico, and Nigeria would also help students to write with more knowledge when asked about the consequences of corruption for politics.

## **Question 2**

*What was intended by the question?*

The question asked students to demonstrate their understanding of the concept of *regime*, as opposed to *government*, which would lead to an understanding of the difference between long-term and short-term political changes. Students were required to support this conceptual framework with country-specific evidence from both China and France after 1950. They were also expected to explain clearly how the threat they described would actually challenge the long-term stability of the regime.

*How well did students perform?*

Students scored more highly on this question than on any of the other free-response questions on the exam. Most students discussed the countries separately. For China, students were able to identify correctly the incident in Tiananmen Square as “a threat to the Chinese regime” and go on to describe the use of troops as the regime’s response. Attempts to identify threats to regime stability in France produced a variety of examples; the events of May 1968 and the Algerian crisis in the late 1950s were identified most frequently. An unanticipated answer for France was the 2002 presidential election. This response received credit if both the description and explanation were effectively linked to long-term regime stability. In general, the responses for China were much better than the responses for France.

*What were common errors or omissions?*

The most common problems students had in responding to this question were their tenuous understanding of 1) the difference between a regime and a government and 2) the concept of regime stability. While the stem of the question highlighted the idea that regime change involved more than just a change of government, students did not understand that most changes of leadership or laws do not usually constitute a change of regime. For instance, some students identified “cohabitation” as a threat to the French regime, when it is actually an institutional arrangement that enables the regime to survive through periods of considerable internal division. Also, students incorrectly identified threats that were only policy debates (e.g., immigration). For China, some students tried to argue that economic reforms in PRC in and of themselves were threats to the regime.

Another common problem was that many students did not do a good job of explaining the link between a threat event and the effects it had on the regime itself. Students were asked to explain *how* the events they identified threatened the regimes, but often this attempted explanation did not discuss what it was about the event that could have been perceived as a regime challenge.

Finally, there was a tendency to misreport historic facts, especially when addressing the French system. Many students did not have sufficient knowledge to make either their identifications or their explanations of regime threats convincing.

*Based on your experience at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that could improve the performance of their students on the exam?*

The difference between regime and government — between the political system and a government produced by that system — is one of the bedrock concepts of this course. Teachers must refer to this difference constantly, using it to analyze governments in the required country studies. These concepts are most helpful when students study historical background; they provide an effective approach to understanding and comparing political change in nations, even in nations as different as China and France. Furthermore, a careful review of important political crises in each country’s recent history helps students with this kind of question. In their answers about France, few students had even a minimal understanding of the Algerian crisis or of the events of May 1968. In regard to China, students knew something about the Tiananmen Square protests and economic reform, but their responses indicated that many knew little about China’s communist regime beyond these major topics. One could easily list more than eight “threats” to regime stability in China since 1950 (e.g., the “Hundred Flowers” campaign or the Cultural Revolution), many of them more serious than the protests in Tiananmen Square. References to these events were rare, even in responses indicating a student had an otherwise strong understanding of current events in the PRC.

### **Question 3**

*What was intended by the question?*

The question attempted to assess students’ understanding of how the forces of fragmentation and globalization have affected domestic politics in India or Mexico or Nigeria. These forces were defined in the stem of the question itself. Students were asked to explain the political consequences of fragmentation and globalization for two of the following: political parties, political legitimacy, or sovereignty. The ideal responses would *link* fragmentation and globalization to these aspects of government. No credit was given for discussions of fragmentation and globalization that did not also contain references to the listed aspects of government. Similarly, no credit was earned for explanations of the political consequences for political parties, legitimacy, or sovereignty that were not linked to fragmentation and globalization.

*How well did students perform?*

Of all of the questions on the exam, this question posed the most problems for students. Among those students who did respond with relevant information, however, were some whose responses were very detailed and well supported, with good country-specific information.

Typical responses included only very basic explanations of how fragmentation and/or globalization affect political parties, political legitimacy, or sovereignty. In many instances, students applied fragmentation or globalization to one or two of the chosen subjects in a way that did not describe anything specific about the country’s political system, earning only partial credit.

Even students who responded to the question relatively well seemed to have more difficulty with the concepts of globalization and fragmentation than with their descriptions of country-specific politics in India or Mexico or Nigeria. In fact, in comparison to previous questions on these countries, students in 2002 appeared to be better prepared for answering questions about developing countries.

*What were common errors or omissions?*

The most common problem students had with this question was an inability to take the forces of fragmentation and globalization as described and connect them logically with examples of political parties, political legitimacy, or sovereignty. Many students wrote long, undirected essays about politics in India or Nigeria or Mexico with no linkage to the question. Frequently, students had sufficient knowledge to achieve an explanation but were unable to link their specific knowledge of the country (e.g., the Hindu nationalist BJP in India) with the relevant concept provided in the question stem (“strong primary loyalty to . . . religious groups”). Of the two forces presented in the question, globalization was often less discussed and less well explained than fragmentation.

*Based on your experience at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that could improve the performance of their students on the exam?*

Student performance on this question again reinforces the necessity for teachers to teach concepts and how to produce conceptual hypotheses supported with country-specific information. Fragmentation and globalization are two concepts that have become pervasive in the field of comparative politics and have implications for all areas of domestic politics for all countries. Yet, in general, a large number of students were unable to go beyond a recitation of facts about institutions and politics in these countries. Teachers can rely on the future expectation that any student taking this exam will encounter an abstract, conceptual vocabulary that is an essential tool for comparative political analysis.

#### **Question 4**

*What was intended by the question?*

The question measured students’ knowledge of how the Labour and Conservative parties have both changed positions on specific issues in Great Britain since 1979. Students were asked to explain how various factors have contributed to these changes in party policy. Thus, students were required to combine their country-specific knowledge of Great Britain with their understanding of party politics in a democratic political system.

*How well did students perform?*

Many responses were complex and included intricate, detailed knowledge of the British party system. These often showed that students had acquired more knowledge about politics in Great Britain than is available from reading a textbook. While many students chose to address the Thatcher era and to discuss changes in the parties’ policies only in the immediate post-Thatcher period, just as many cited more recent evidence to support their arguments about changes in policies. Descriptions of “New Labour” and Tony Blair’s leadership were used in an overwhelming majority of responses. In addition, students seemed able to connect change in party policy to change in other parts of the political system (e.g., public opinion, the economic situation) and even to changes outside of the political system (e.g., the European Union).

*What were common errors or omissions?*

The most basic problem was that students could not describe a real *change* in party position. Some students did not attempt to describe a change but merely chose to describe party policy at a single point in time (e.g., “the Labour Party is in favor of devolution”). To the extent that both parties have made cautious, gradual, and strictly pragmatic shifts on some issues, these sorts of changes are harder to describe accurately than the more obvious and dramatic ones. If students could not identify a relevant change in party policy, they could earn no credit for the latter parts of the question.

Overall, students described the Labour Party’s changes of policy more fully and accurately than they did the Conservative Party’s. In some cases, students were able to get a point for a description of party position but could not connect a specific factor to the change. This appeared to be due more to a lack of conceptual understanding of how political systems may function than a lack of country-specific knowledge about Great Britain.

*Based on your experience at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that could improve the performance of their students on the exam?*

Responses to this question demonstrated the need for teachers to show how party politics are affected by non-party phenomena in the political system. Students need to understand the political consequences of many factors playing out with and against one another in the political arena. Furthermore, students should also be able to generalize this type of interaction to particular countries, such as in Great Britain, where many factors could explain changes in party politics. For instance, students must understand the roles that political economy and leadership can play in determining outcomes. Consequently, while both parties are indeed office-seeking, generic student references to “political opinion” and “electoral appeal” were not accepted as contributing factors for all of the changes in party position.