



Student Performance Q&A:
2004 AP[®] Comparative Government & Politics
Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2004 free-response questions for AP[®] Comparative Government and Politics were written by the Chief Reader, Kerry Haynie of Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. 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 performance 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

What was the intent of this question?

This question sought to ascertain if students knew the differences between federal and unitary political structures and whether or not they could identify relative advantages of both. Students were asked to demonstrate this knowledge by explaining how these structure types are manifested in the national legislatures of Great Britain and Russia. This task required students to know which country has a unitary and which has a federal political structure.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 3.2 out of a possible eight points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students generally knew the definitions of both systems and could distinguish between the two. Most students understood and accurately expressed the advantages of both systems. However, students were rarely able to discuss *how* the systems were reflected in the legislatures of Great Britain and Russia. A common error of students who could not accurately define the two structures was to define unitary systems as having one person in control and no local governments and to describe federal systems as having subunits with equal powers, not shared powers.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

It is important for students to be able to apply core concepts to specific situations or phenomena.

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

This question sought to examine students' understanding of social cleavages and the consequences they have for how political parties are organized and how they function in France and either India, Mexico, or Nigeria.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 2.5 out of a possible six points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students had the most difficulty in identifying and describing a social cleavage for France. They had little trouble identifying a specific French party and its response (most students used the National Front). However, their discussion of consequences of the party's response was often vague. Students had some trouble identifying a specific political party for India, Mexico, or Nigeria. As was the case with France, the discussion of consequences of the party's response tended to be vague.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Students tend to have a difficult time providing satisfactory consequences for the various phenomena (e.g., party response to a major cleavage) they have identified earlier in a question.

Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

This question sought to ascertain students' understanding of how economic liberalization can simultaneously challenge and coexist in the same political system with authoritarianism. Students were asked to examine both concepts as they apply to China.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 3.3 out of a possible eight points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students often incorrectly identified the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, the 100 Flowers Movement, and the one-child policy as economic liberalization policies. When students correctly identified an economic liberalization policy, they often could not provide a satisfactory explanation of why such policies challenge the authority of the state. Some students had difficulty describing two strategies used by the Chinese government to maintain political control.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

It is important for students of comparative politics to understand the link between economics and politics.

Question 4

What was the intent of this question?

This question asked students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of causal linkages by identifying factors that led to changes in economic performance and single-party dominance or military rule in India, Mexico, or Nigeria and then explaining how these factors led to those changes.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score for this question was 3.0 out of a possible six points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students had some difficulty with providing explanations that linked the factors they identified to the actual changes in economic performance and single-party dominance or military rule. That is, students generally failed to address the “how” question. A fair number of students identified incorrect causal linkages. Many students discussed changes in economic performance and single-party dominance or military rule that took place prior to 1985.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Students tend to have a difficult time providing satisfactory explanations of various phenomena. Good explanations answer the “how” and/or “why” questions.