



**Student Performance Q&A:**  
**2007 AP® Comparative Government and Politics**  
**Free-Response Questions**

The following comments on the 2007 free-response questions for AP® Comparative Government and Politics were written by the Chief Reader, Jean C. Robinson of Indiana University in Bloomington. 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?***

The intent of this question was to examine students' ability to identify functions of political parties shared by both authoritarian and democratic systems. It sought not just a list of common roles of political parties but a contextualized answer that showed the student was aware of similarities between the distinct authoritarian and democratic systems.

***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score was 0.65 out of a possible 3 points. This was a difficult question, and few responses earned the top score. Overall, students showed they understood the function of parties in democratic systems, but they applied this same function to authoritarian systems without any nuance.

***What were common student errors or omissions?***

A widespread student mistake was a response that identified a function(s) of political parties that is either exclusive to democratic systems or exclusive to authoritarian systems but not common to both. For example, many students who made this error identified getting candidates elected to office (democratic systems) or dictating policy (authoritarian systems) as a feature shared by both. Another frequent error was a response that failed to provide context for the identification(s). Some

responses identified a common function of political parties in general but did not demonstrate that it was a function that was common to both authoritarian and democratic systems.

***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?***

The short-answer section of this exam is meant to assess students' knowledge of theoretical and methodological concepts in the study of comparative politics. Teachers should emphasize concepts and provide ample opportunities for students to learn and apply them in specific contexts. They should also emphasize that responses consisting of bullet points and lists with no elaboration will often not earn credit, because they do not provide the nuance, context, or analysis that the prompt requires. Beyond the formatting of the answer, though, students should be encouraged to think through contrasts and comparisons between different types of political systems and to write about them clearly. They should learn that there are some common institutions and processes in different types of political systems, but these may work slightly differently or serve different purposes in various political systems.

## **Question 2**

***What was the intent of this question?***

The purpose of this question was for students to show that they understood and could define the concept of devolution and could then apply the definition by providing an example of an institution of government created by devolution.

***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score was 0.84 out of a possible 2 points. Students performed reasonably well on this question, most being able to identify an appropriate institution, and many able to provide a minimal definition. Capable students performed quite well on this question.

***What were common student errors or omissions?***

A common error students made was a response that provided an incomplete definition of devolution. Many indicated that it involves decentralizing power without explaining that power moves from a central government to subnational or local government. Another common error was a response that failed to identify a correct institution created by devolution.

***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 should be encouraged to think conceptually by learning how to generalize concepts and then to identify country-specific examples. They must be taught to go beyond the definitions they have learned in courses on U.S. politics in order to take into account the complexity of comparative politics.

### Question 3

#### ***What was the intent of this question?***

The intent of the question was to have students demonstrate that they could distinguish between generic revolutionary goals and specific types of revolutions—in this case, to identify two similar goals of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China and the Cultural Revolution in Iran.

#### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score was 0.42 out of a possible 2 points. Students performed relatively poorly on this question. Although they seemed to know something about the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China, many were confused about the Cultural Revolution in Iran. Furthermore, they did not show the ability to distinguish among types of revolutions.

#### ***What were common student errors or omissions?***

The most common student errors or omissions were (1) failure to identify two similar goals of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China or the Cultural Revolution in Iran; (2) confusing the goals of the Chinese Revolution and the Iranian Revolution with the goals of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China and the Cultural Revolution in Iran; (3) describing events in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China and the Cultural Revolution in Iran but failing to identify two similar goals.

#### ***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?***

Teachers should focus on developing students' ability to make clear comparisons that require them to apply comparative political concepts to political institutions, political behavior, political processes, and major political events from the six cases: China, Great Britain, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, and Russia.

### Question 4

#### ***What was the intent of this question?***

The intent of this question was to have students explain a defining characteristic for a command economy and one for a market economy. Additionally, they were asked to contrast the defining characteristics. Because students often confuse democracy with capitalism, the question's intent was to allow them to demonstrate that they understood simple aspects of political economy, as separate from ideology.

#### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score was 1.43 out of a possible 3 points. Many students performed well on this question and seemed to understand the political economy of different economic systems. Some confused ideology with economic systems, however.

***What were common student errors or omissions?***

A common omission students made when describing a defining characteristic of a command economy was not to state who controls the economy, sets the quotas, and designs the economic plans. A frequent error was to explain a defining characteristic of a market economy by using the term “market” (“market forces” or “market interactions”) without further amplification. This is an insufficient description. Another recurrent omission was to provide an insufficient contrast of the two characteristics. Restating the characteristics does not indicate an understanding of the contrast. A number of students also asserted that command economies function in Communist countries, whereas market economies exist in democracies; this is an inaccurate statement.

***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?***

In order to ensure that students think about all of the important elements, teachers should remind them to think about “who, what, where, when, and how” when providing characteristics. In addition, teachers should tell their students to be careful with absolute statements such as “in command economies there is no private property.” Finally, teachers might offer more assistance in helping students learn how to make contrasts. Contrasting is more than restating characteristics, and more than saying that one characteristic has something and another does not—students must explain what each has and how these differ. They should learn how to move beyond using the words in the prompt in order to provide an accurate and reliable definition or description.

**Question 5**

***What was the intent of this question?***

The intent of the question was to have students identify three forms of political participation in authoritarian systems. In explicitly limiting the question to authoritarian systems, students were sent a signal that they needed to focus on participation in authoritarian systems, not just political participation generically.

***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score was 1.39 out of a possible 3 points. Students performed reasonably well on this question, although as in the other short-answer questions, they needed to demonstrate more analytical acuity than was evident in many answers. There was a wide range of scores on this question, with better students performing more ably.

***What were common student errors or omissions?***

The most common errors and omissions were (1) simply listing forms of political participation and providing insufficient context to indicate that forms of participation common to democratic and some authoritarian systems (e.g., voting) serve a different function in authoritarian systems; (2) failing to identify three *different* forms of political participation in authoritarian systems; (3) identifying one form as a patron–client relationship with no discussion about how these relationships can serve as a form of participation in authoritarian systems. Without such a

discussion, patron–client relationships are not clearly forms of *political* participation, although they are processes for obtaining what citizens may need.

***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?***

Teachers should focus on developing students' ability to make clear comparisons that require them to apply comparative political concepts to political institutions, political behavior, political processes, and political events from the six cases: China, Great Britain, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, and Russia.

## **Question 6**

***What was the intent of this question?***

This question was intended to measure student understanding of the concept of bicameralism as it exists in many countries today, especially as it relates to federal democracies. Students were asked to define bicameralism and to identify one of the six case countries covered by the course that has a bicameral legislature. The question also required that they explain why a federal democracy is likely to have a bicameral national legislature. Further, it asked students to provide a second reason for a bicameral national legislature that did not have to specifically apply to a federal democracy. Finally, students were required to describe two implications of federalism for the policymaking process. Although students could supply examples from specific countries, the point of the question was to gauge understanding of the broad concepts of bicameralism and federalism and how they interact in many countries today.

***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score was 2.73 out of a possible 6 points. In general, the question produced a wide spectrum of student performances, with most students falling in the middle of the 6-point range. This question was effective in allowing the better students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the concepts.

***What were common student errors or omissions?***

Most students answered part (a) correctly, but those who answered incorrectly either left out the reference to a legislature, or they failed to specify two bodies. For part (b) students most commonly did not earn points because they identified more than one country, one of which was incorrect. The most frequently named incorrect country was the United States (an unacceptable answer because the United States is not one of the six countries studied in the course). Students were more likely to miss points in part (c) and part (e) than in parts (a), (b), and (d). For part (c) students often provided an explanation that might have been acceptable for part (d) but was incorrect for a federal democracy. An example is “checks and balances.” For part (d) students sometimes repeated the reason provided in (c) or cited an incorrect reason, such as “promoting democracy,” or “provided for proportional representation and first-past-the-post voting.” Also, students often did not earn points for citing “checks and balances” without specifying checks and balances between houses within the legislature. For part (e) students often provided underdeveloped descriptions that did not directly address implications of federalism. Another common error for part (e) was

describing the implications of bicameralism, not federalism. Students evidenced the greatest difficulty with describing implications of federalism. Instead, they tended to repeat definitions of the term or otherwise minimally attempt to answer part (e).

Overall, many students made use of their knowledge of U.S. government to answer the question, and often the attempts to apply the concepts to the four federal democracies (Great Britain, Russia, Mexico, and Nigeria) fell short. Either the information was omitted, or students incorrectly identified unitary systems as federal democracies.

***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?***

Teachers should ensure that they are teaching concepts across countries and that they are not just teaching government and politics in the specific countries. Bicameralism and federalism are concepts that may be applied to many countries, and students should use the terms to analyze how each country functions, not the other way around. Instructors who also teach AP United States Government and Politics should extend concepts learned in that course (such as bicameralism and federalism) to the analysis of government and politics in the six core countries. Finally, teachers should alert students that they must not discuss countries that are not studied in the course if they are asked to provide an example from among only the six countries that are. Adding more country examples in hopes of getting one right will not earn points.

## **Question 7**

***What was the intent of this question?***

The aim of this question was threefold. The intent of part (a) was conceptual. Students were asked to define the term *referendum* and to describe one advantage for a government of holding one. As the referendum is a feature of democratic politics, it was important to clearly state that a referendum is an opportunity for a government to refer an issue to the people for a vote. Students should have explained that in this way the government can enhance its legitimacy and the power of the executive by shifting accountability for the issue to the people instead of the legislature.

The objective of part (b) was country-specific to Great Britain. Students were asked to identify the official who has the power to call a referendum in Great Britain and to describe the use or proposed use of one actual referendum in Great Britain. They were expected to name the Prime Minister as the official with the power to call a referendum and to accurately describe a specific referendum that had either been proposed or called for by the Prime Minister, or called for by the Prime Minister and voted on by the entire United Kingdom or a specific nation within the multinational state of Great Britain. Consequently, students should have distinguished between a proposed referendum—such as having Great Britain adopt the euro, which has not been put to an actual referendum vote—and an actual national referendum, such as Scotland's voting for a parliament.

The objective of part (c) was specific to Russia. Students were asked to identify the official who has the power to call a referendum in Russia and to describe the use or proposed use of one referendum in Russia. They were expected to name the President as the official with the power to call a referendum and to accurately describe a specific referendum that had been called for by the

President and voted on either by the entire country, such as ratification of the 1993 Russian constitution, or by a specific nation within the multinational state of Russia, such as the Chechnyan ratification of its own constitution in 2003.

### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score was 2.06 out of a possible 6 points. This question was apparently among the harder ones, because even the best students had difficulty with earning the sixth point. Although there were very few zero scores, there were also very few 6s.

### ***What were common student errors or omissions?***

Many students were able to identify a referendum in Great Britain and Russia but not in a fashion that answered the specific requirements of the response prompt. Students were least likely to give a comprehensive definition of “referendum” that clearly distinguished a referendum from a public opinion poll, vote of confidence, or recall initiative. Subsequently, few were able to accurately describe an advantage of a referendum as one that would enhance the power of the executive by bypassing the legislature and shifting accountability to the people.

In part (a) the most common error that students made in the definition of a referendum was to not differentiate it from an initiative. Students commonly said that “a referendum was a direct vote by the people on an issue.” They failed to clearly indicate that this policy vote was *referred to the people by the government* and not placed on the ballot as a result of a petition. Other common errors concerning the definition were to equate a referendum with a meeting, public opinion poll, vote of confidence, or recall initiative. The most widespread mistake that students made on the description of one benefit derived from a government’s holding a referendum was to state that “the advantage to holding a referendum for a government is to find out how the people feel.” This statement did not clearly indicate the advantage of holding a referendum over a public opinion poll. Students needed to be more specific about referendum advantages, such as bypassing the legislature or legitimacy for the government, by explaining that the process increases efficacy of citizens.

In part (b) the most common error that students made in identifying the official who has the power to call a referendum was to name the Queen. Other incorrect answers included head of state, the Parliament, head of the legislature, and Shadow Prime Minister. The most predominant error made on the use or proposed use of one specific referendum in Great Britain was inaccuracy about the actual referendum. Often students simply wrote “devolution in Scotland” and did not indicate that this meant that Scotland voted on a national legislature. Some also claimed that there had been a referendum on “joining the European Union,” which did not occur. Proposed referendums were also not clarified. Students stated that “a referendum on the adoption of the euro failed” or “there is a proposed referendum on abolishing the House of Lords.” They also confused the power to call a referendum with the Prime Minister’s power to call for new elections.

In part (c) the most common error that students made in identifying the official who has the power to call a referendum was to name the Prime Minister. Other incorrect answers included the Duma, head of government, the Politburo, and the Federation Council. Another frequent mistake concerning the use or proposed use of one specific referendum in Russia was to cite a nonexistent referendum, such as “lower taxes,” “improve health care,” “remove the President,” “glasnost,” or “ban nuclear weapons.” In addition, they often did not clarify what the actual referendum was about and instead stated the goals of the referendum. For example, students insufficiently

explained that referendums were used to “resolve the Chechen conflict” or “to decide whether or not to privatize the economy” in place of reference to the 2003 referendum on the ratification of the Chechen constitution by Chechens or the 1993 referendum on the socioeconomic policies of the Yeltsin administration after “shock therapy” had already been implemented.

***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?***

Teachers should emphasize the use of vocabulary terms such as “referendum.” Often they expect that their students know this term from the study of U.S. politics and then simply list referendum as a power of the executive for the countries studied in the AP Comparative Government and Politics course without fully explaining its use and application.

Teachers should also emphasize the advantages and disadvantages of the different methods of both formal and informal policymaking—in this case, the advantage to a government of a direct democracy. In the process, they should highlight the formal/informal power structures of the six core countries. Additionally, supplying specific examples for each of the six countries on major political changes that have/will have a significant effect on the structure of the political system—especially constitutional changes—will help students to think more analytically. Teachers should remind their students to answer the question with a thoroughness of detail that completely addresses the prompt.

## **Question 8**

***What was the intent of this question?***

The intent of this question was to have students explain similarities and differences in the selection procedures for the Presidents of Iran and Nigeria. In addition, students were asked to explain why the President of Nigeria has more power than the President of Iran. Thus, the focus of this question was on both country-specific knowledge and on institutions and processes of governance.

***How well did students perform on this question?***

The mean score was 2.12 out of a possible 5 points. Students performed reasonably well on this question, perhaps because it is most similar to the types of questions used on previous exams and with which students and teachers are most familiar. Students demonstrated knowledge about both countries, although they seemed less capable in performing the more analytical tasks in part (c) of the question.

***What were common student errors or omissions?***

Students in general could answer part (a) well. More errors were found in parts (b) and (c). In part (b) common errors were that students did not make actual comparisons between two different procedures for the selection of the President in Iran and in Nigeria, provided only one difference in the procedures, and/or provided inaccurate information about the selection procedures. In part (c) a frequent mistake was that students provided an insufficient explanation for why the President in Nigeria was more powerful than the President in Iran.

***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?***

Teachers should consider providing more assistance in helping students learn how to explicitly make comparisons and how to make qualitative assessments of how structures and processes of government affect the exercise of power. Thus, students need to think both about specific country-situations and how institutions and processes more generally might affect political power. Showing students how to move back and forth between these goals will enhance their performance.