



AP Government & Politics: Comparative 1999 Sample Student Responses

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While both France and Great Britain have Prime Ministers, each the head of their respective nation's parliament, the different structure of each nation's government has dictated the Prime Minister's relative power and relation to the lower branches of government.

In both nations, the Prime Minister is the head of their party and the parliament itself (the head of their party within parliament). In France, the Prime Minister is appointed by the President, but comes from the majority; in Britain, the Prime Minister is chosen by his party (the majority). Likewise, each is essential in establishing policy; as the relative heads of their parties and controlling the majority in that branch of the legislature, the Prime Minister of Britain (also the effective head of government), such as Tony Blair in England, is expected to establish a policy and initiate it with the support of his followers. In France, Lionel Jospin is likewise expected to lead policy as the effective head of parliament and through his control of a majority of votes. In each nation, the Prime Minister is a parliamentary leader and as such is presumed to play a key role in making policy.

Differences are also present, however, largely due to the inately different styles and structures of the British and French governments. In Britain, the P.M. is the head of ~~the~~ government (more like the President in France) and so, while head of Parliament, also is a quasi-executive official who has a cabinet and appoints leaders of the bureaucracy - the Prime Minister of

Great Britain is accountable for not only creating policies but also the results (such as the blame placed on John Major over "mad cow disease" and bans on beef exports), whereas in France the Prime Minister is not accountable for enacting policy to the same degree (this blame/credit is also shared or placed upon the President). In the British House of Commons, the Prime Minister is elevated far beyond a mere member of Parliament to the role of head-of-government; he is more accountable yet somewhat more independent. The Prime Minister of France, however, is simply another member of the French National Assembly who can, in fact, be dismissed far easier - the President can call for new elections, whereas it is the role of the Prime Minister (in reality) to do this in Great Britain. In short, while each Prime Minister wields power over the lower house of each nation's legislature, the British PM is, owing to government structure, more powerful and also more independent.

Although the Prime Minister of Great Britain and the British House of Commons is similar to the Prime Minister of France and the French National Assembly, the two are also quite different. The similarities that pertain to this are that they are both leaders of the majority power in Parliament and both have many powers. Yet, each have different roles because of the French presidential system, and in France the party in majority in the National Assembly and of the president are not necessarily the same.

The difference in political roles is due to the "super presidential" powers obtained by the executive. In 1958, Charles de Gaulle rewrote the Constitution of the Fifth Republic for almost all power to be vested in the executive branch. This leaves the National Assembly and the Prime Minister with a much smaller role in policymaking. Yet, in Britain, the monarch is simply an honorable role. The majority of power is in the hands of the Prime Minister and the House of Commons. Also, as the British Prime Minister is the leading figure in politics, the majority party is always the main party in the government. Yet in France, because of cohabitation, as in the 1980s with President Mitterand, the president was of the opposing party than the National Assembly. In this situation, the President may either dissolve Parliament and call for re-election,

or he may pick a Prime Minister from the opposing party. This, unfortunately, reduces his power.

Contrary to these differences, the Prime Ministers of Britain and France and their relationships to their Parliaments are also similar. First of all, they do come from the leading party in the House of Commons or National Assembly. Therefore, their views are usually the dominating views in Parliament. In addition, although an executive branch does exist in both systems, the Prime Ministers are usually the most important figure in their respective Parliaments. The British Prime Minister usually makes many of the important decisions in government. He can influence the Queen to dissolve Parliament if he feels his party has gained enough support. In France, just as in Britain, the Prime Minister appoints many important personnel and usually has the upper hand in decision making in Parliament. In fine, the two countries' Prime Ministers and lower houses are quite similar yet different. Their success shows that different work for each country differently, and any country can find stability.

Great Britain and France both have a Parliamentary form of government which includes a Prime Minister and a ~~the~~ house. The British have a House of Commons and the French have the French National Assembly.

Both nations' prime minister ~~concern~~ meets with the house. Their relationship is characterized with the prime minister hold authority. The prime minister is the head of the meetings, much like the Supreme Court Justice is the head of the Supreme Court. The prime ministers, in both countries, are also elected by the party in the house which holds a majority. He is usually the person who has the most seniority. Although both the country's prime minister works for their respective houses, their influences are different. The prime minister in the British House of Commons has less power, because the House of Commons is the lower house. On the other hand, the French National Assembly is the upper house. Therefore, the French prime minister is more important. The French prime minister also has to listen to its party, whereas the British Prime Minister can do whatever he or she wants or thinks is best for the country. In other words, the French prime minister ~~also~~ shares its power and the British prime minister does not. For example, Margaret Thatcher greatly changed Britain's economy and role in the world.