Chief Reader Report on Student Responses:

2023 AP® Comparative Government and Politics Set 1

Free-Response Questions

• Number of Students Scored	23,611		
• Number of Readers	88		
• Score Distribution	Exam Score	N	%At
	5	3,867	16.38
	4	5,479	23.21
	3	7,372	31.22
	2	3,820	16.18
	1	3,073	13.02
• Global Mean	3.14		

The following comments on the 2023 free-response questions for AP® Comparative Government and Politics were written by the Chief Reader, Eduardo Magalhães, III, Professor, Simpson College. 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: Conceptual Analysis
Topic: Describing regimes, authoritarian and democratic
Max Score: 4
Mean Score: 2.25

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

The intent of this question was to assess students' understanding of a regime. Students were expected to describe a regime. In addition, students had to explain one difference between an authoritarian regime and a democratic regime. Students then needed to demonstrate that they understand how authoritarian regimes maintain legitimacy among their citizens. Finally, students needed to demonstrate why citizens would turn out to vote in an authoritarian regime.

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?

Students had a difficult time describing the concept of a regime and how it differs from the concepts of government and administration. Students were usually able to describe one difference between an authoritarian regime and a democratic regime, most commonly noting that democratic regimes held free and fair elections while authoritarian regimes held corrupt elections. Students were able to explain how authoritarian regimes maintained legitimacy through examples like economic growth, controlled elections, and charismatic leadership, but they had a difficult time explaining how these examples affected citizens' perceptions of legitimacy. Finally, students were able to describe reasons people would turn out to vote in an authoritarian regime, commonly citing support for the regime, they were mandated by the regime, and citizens believed their votes would make a difference.

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

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	Responses that Demonstrate Understanding
• "A regime is the current leader or group of people running a government."	• "A regime is the set of rules or institutions governments follow and last through transitions of leaders. Examples include democratic and authoritarian regimes."
• "One difference between authoritarian regimes and democratic regimes is authoritarian regimes concentrate power in a leader and democratic regimes have free and fair elections."	• "Democratic regimes have free and fair elections whereas authoritarian regimes do not have free and fair elections as candidates are vetted or elections are corrupted."
• "Authoritarian regimes maintain legitimacy through force and coercion."	• "Authoritarian regimes maintain legitimacy through charismatic leadership. A charismatic

	leader who is popular will be able to gain support of the citizens gaining the right to rule."
• "Citizens will turn out to vote in an authoritarian regime out of habit or to stay involved any way they can."	• "Citizens in authoritarian regimes will turn out to vote to support a charismatic leader, or they are mandated from the regime."

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

Teachers should provide multiple opportunities for students to practice describing concepts such as regime and government. It is important for students to describe the characteristics of concepts in this course.

Teachers can also assist students by providing opportunities to distinguish differences between concepts such as authoritarian and democratic. One suggestion is to create a comparison chart for characteristics of each regime to reinforce learning and continue throughout the year by adding specific country examples.

Teachers can also assist students by providing opportunities to practice writing, in this specific format, about explaining the relationship between two concepts. Students will typically write about each concept but not connect them. One example would be explaining how authoritarian regimes maintain legitimacy and then connecting this to popular support of the regime. Some students wrote about charismatic legitimacy or economic growth but did not connect the concepts to popular support of the regime. It is also helpful for students to provide them with an example from one of the course countries.

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

- The Course and Exam Description provides a section on "Developing the Disciplinary Practices" on pages 138–146. This section provides examples of questions and instructional strategies for incorporating the course skills into classroom instruction.
- Sign into AP Classroom to access AP Daily Videos and questions on the topics and skills addressed in this question. AP teachers can assign students short AP Daily Videos as homework, warm-ups, lectures, reviews, and more. AP teachers can also use the AP Question Bank in AP Classroom to enable students to practice and get feedback on formative topic questions and past AP Exam questions.
- AP Classroom also contains review videos for the 2021, 2022, and 2023 AP Comparative Government and Politics Exam that have helpful information for students and that review key concepts, theories, and skills.
- Resources related specifically to this prompt include:
  - AP Daily Video 2 for Topic 1.2 reviews key characteristics of political organizations including regimes and considers some of the distinctions between different types of regimes.
  - AP Daily Videos 1–3 for Topic 1.3 also focuses on differences between democratic and authoritarian regimes. County-specific examples are provided, and video #3 offers students the opportunity to practice developing a conceptual analysis addressing this topic.
- Additional resources may be found on the AP Comparative Government and Politics Course page on AP Central at: https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/courses/ap-comparative-government-and-politics

- The AP Comparative Government and Politics Online Teaching Community (OTC) is another great resource, which includes materials and resources posted not only by the College Board, but also by other teachers. The OTC Discussion Board is the place to ask questions, share resources, and exchange teaching ideas at: https://apcommunity.collegeboard.org/group/apgopo-comp

Question 2

Task: Identify, Describe, Draw Conclusions, and Explain
Topic: Natural resource rents, in relation to political legitimacy and authoritarian regimes
Max Score: 5
Mean Score: 2.42

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

The intent of this question was to assess students' ability to interpret, describe, and draw conclusions from quantitative data presented in a graph. In addition, the question was designed to assess students' ability to draw connections between natural resources rents and political legitimacy in authoritarian regimes. Students were presented with a graph of natural resources rents as a percentage of GDP for the countries of Iran, Russia, Nigeria, and Mexico for the period covering 2000–2018. Students were expected to correctly identify a data point on a line graph and to describe a pattern in the data. Students were then tasked with describing political legitimacy. The next two prompts asked the students to draw conclusions using the data in the graph. First, they were asked to draw a conclusion about natural resources rents in Iran. Then, students were asked to explain what the data in the graph implies about political legitimacy in authoritarian states.

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?

On this question, the biggest challenge students confronted was drawing a conclusion from the data in the graph. The task "drawing a conclusion" requires that students bring in outside information beyond the information provided in the graph. The vast majority of students summarized the data in the graph and did not go beyond discussing the significant role that oil rents play in Iran's economy. Correct answers required that students draw a conclusion about the data, such as what causes the fluctuations in Iran's oil rents or the implications that the oil dependence depicted in the graph has for Iranian politics.

A majority of students also had difficulty with the task of explaining what the data in the graph imply about political legitimacy in authoritarian states. Many students did not seem to understand that the prompt required students to describe relay a "cause and effect" relationship between the percentage of natural resources rents and political legitimacy in authoritarian states. Correct answers required that students start with natural resource rents and provide a mechanism to explain the consequences for political legitimacy in authoritarian regimes. Incorrect answers often failed to close the loop because they did not provide a reason that resource rents could affect political legitimacy. In other instances, students focused solely on the relationship between economic growth and political legitimacy, rather than on natural resource rents (as a percentage of GDP), which are the data presented in the graph. Finally, a number of incorrect responses demonstrated that students lacked an understanding of political legitimacy, which meant that they could not articulate cause-and-effect relationships between resource rents and political legitimacy in authoritarian regimes.

Students' ability to describe the concept of political legitimacy was mixed. Some students did not understand the concept of political legitimacy. A number of students confused political legitimacy with political capacity and governmental effectiveness. Other students who did not earn this point failed to convey that political legitimacy is not simply a government's right to rule, but citizens' belief in the government's right to rule. Finally, some students focused solely on related concepts of political trust and faith in government that can support political legitimacy but did not describe the essential components of political legitimacy, first that it is a "citizen's belief" and, second, that this belief is about "the government's right to rule."

Students were most successful at interpreting the graph and answering parts (A) and (B), showing strong abilities at reading the data presented in the graph and in describing a pattern in the data. The vast majority of students were able to identify Russia as the country with the second highest amount of natural resource rents as a percentage of GDP in 2014. Similarly, a large majority of students were able to describe a pattern in the amount of natural resource rents as a percentage of GDP in Nigeria from 2010 to 2018.

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

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	*Responses that Demonstrate Understanding*
• Responses described political trust or political popularity rather than political legitimacy. For example, "Political legitimacy is the extent to which citizens have faith in the government."	• "Political legitimacy refers to citizens' belief that the government has the right to rule."
• Responses summarized the data presented in the graph and did not draw a conclusion about natural resources rents in Iran. For example, "Natural resources rents are a large percentage of Iran's GDP. Therefore, oil is important to Iran's economy."	• "Iran's amount of natural resource rents as a percentage of GDP declined when there were international sanctions on oil against the regime."

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

Students performed well in interpreting the data presented in the chart, so instructors should continue to expose their students to a variety of charts throughout the course. Teachers could work to strengthen students' interpretation of "patterns" in the data, as some students struggled to characterize a trend in the data.

Teachers could most significantly improve student performance on the exam by focusing on developing two key skills. First, it is important to teach students how to "draw a conclusion" from the graph. "Drawing a conclusion" requires that students bring in outside knowledge that is specifically not mentioned or addressed by the graph. Most students wrote in detail about the findings from the graph for part (D) and did bring in outside information about the data presented, such as why the data exhibit the pattern they do or what the consequences of those data could mean politically. Second, teachers should stress to students that "explain" prompts require that students articulate a cause-and-effect relationship. Correct answers thus need to start with the variable presented in the graph and link it to the concept used in the prompt by providing a causal mechanism.

Finally, it is important to explain the concept of political legitimacy, particularly as it relates to the AP Comparative Government and Politics course countries.

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

- The Course and Exam Description provides a section on "Developing the Disciplinary Practices" on pages 138–146. This section provides examples of questions and instructional strategies for incorporating the course skills into classroom instruction.
- Sign into AP Classroom to access AP Daily Videos and questions on the topics and skills addressed in this question. AP teachers can assign students short AP Daily Videos as homework, warm-ups, lectures, reviews, and more. AP teachers can also use the AP Question Bank in AP Classroom to enable students to practice and get feedback on formative topic questions and past AP Exam questions.
  Resources related specifically to this prompt include:
  - AP Daily Videos 1–3 for Topic 5.9 address the relationship of natural resources to political and economic changes and development.
  - Use the filtering function in the Question Bank to search for quantitative analysis questions that provide students opportunities to familiarize themselves with different types of graphs, tables, and other data visualizations and to practice interpreting the data to find answers to questions.
  - For a deep dive into the concept of political legitimacy, see the University Faculty Lecture presented by Chief Reader Eduardo Magalhães of Simpson College on AP Classroom or on YouTube at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3I4RQCYoG60
- Additional resources may be found on the AP Comparative Government and Politics Course page on AP Central at: https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/courses/ap-comparative-government-and-politics
- AP Classroom also contains review videos for the 2021, 2022, and 2023 AP Comparative Government and Politics Exam that have helpful information for students and that review key concepts, theories, and skills.
- The AP Comparative Government and Politics Online Teaching Community (OTC) is another great resource, which includes materials and resources posted not only by the College Board, but also by other teachers. The OTC Discussion Board is the place to ask questions, share resources, and exchange teaching ideas at: https://apcommunity.collegeboard.org/group/apgopo-comp

Question 3

Task: Comparative Analysis
Topic: Role of the government
Max Score: 5
Mean Score: 2.65

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

The intent of this question was to assess students' understanding of the concept of the executive branch in the countries being studied. This included assessing their ability to describe executive power, how the head of government is selected, and to explain to what extent executive power is formally constrained in the countries studied. The skills tested were descriptive and explanatory. Students first were expected to describe the main role (function) of the executive branch of government in most countries. Then they had to demonstrate their understanding of how the head of government is chosen by describing the selection process in two course countries. Finally, students needed to demonstrate their understanding of checks on executive power by explaining the extent to which executive power is formally constrained in each of the countries selected.

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 were able to describe that the main function of the executive branch of government is to enforce the law and to formulate, implement, and execute policies. Many students correctly described the selection process of the Head of Government. However, numerous students confused Head of Government with Head of State and were, thereby, unable to provide a correct description of the process. In a significant number of cases, students failed to describe the process fully (see examples below). The final part of the response required an explanation of the formal restraints on executive power and the extent to which power was restrained in practice in the countries chosen. Many students successfully explained the extent to which formal constraints on the executive are effective or ineffective, and many others identified formal constraints on the executive without further explanation. Some discussed the extent of restraint on executive power without identifying the formal rules/institutions meant to restrain executive power. This was especially true of many responses on China and Russia, which discussed the extent to which power was restrained in practice/reality without referencing specific restraints.

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

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	Responses that Demonstrate Understanding
• Confusing Head of State with Head of Government in Russia and China. Referring to the president in each case as Head of Government.	• "The head of government in Russia is the Prime Minister. The head of Government in China is the Premier."
• Identifying the Supreme Leader or the Guardian Council as head of government in Iran.	• "The head of government in Iran is the President."

• Not knowing the difference between plurality of the vote and majority of the vote.	• "The president of Mexico is elected by a plurality of the popular vote."
• Not fully explaining how the power of the executive is constrained instead of simple mentioning rules which constrain it.	• "In Mexico the president's power is constrained by a single 6-year term limit, which prevents the president from consolidating power and becoming a dictator."
• Not fully describing the process of selecting the Head of Government.	• "The Head of Government in Russia is the Prime Minister who is selected by the President and approved by the Duma."
• Overstating the power of the Supreme Leader in Iran. The President can be removed by the Supreme Leader.	• "The Supreme Leader can dismiss the President if he is impeached by the Majlis." • "The Supreme Leader can dismiss the President if he is found guilty of violating the constitution by the Supreme Court."

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

Teachers should provide multiple opportunities for students to practice writing about how the Executive is selected for each of the six course countries. One suggestion is to introduce the process of selection during an overview of the political institutions for each country and then to reinforce it in later units covering selection systems. Diagramming or drawing flowcharts of the process can help students to see the connections. But it is important for students to practice writing with precision about country-specific information. For example, in their responses, students often confused the Head of Government with the Head of State or mischaracterized a plurality vote as one in which the candidate needed to earn a majority of the vote.

Teachers can help students learn to distinguish between formal and informal checks on the Executive by constructing a graphic organizer or engaging in a sorting activity. Then students need to be prompted to explain how the formal check constrains executive power. Using the country-specific material, the students should then be prompted to explain the extent to which power is restrained in practice.

Teachers should also have students practice writing this specific question format which often requires the students to use the two countries in part (C) that they used in part (B). Some students used different countries in both sections. It could also be helpful to remind students that the United States is not a course country and that they should not use it as an example.

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

- The Course and Exam Description (CED) provides a section on "Developing the Disciplinary Practices" on pages 138–146. This section provides examples of questions and instructional strategies for incorporating the course skills into classroom instruction.
- Sign into AP Classroom to access AP Daily Videos and questions on the topics and skills addressed in this question. AP teachers can assign students short AP Daily Videos as homework, warm-ups, lectures, reviews, and more. AP teachers can also use the AP Question Bank in AP Classroom to enable students to practice and get feedback on formative topic questions and past AP Exam questions.
- Resources related specifically to this prompt include:
  - AP Daily Videos for Topics 2.1–2.7 provide detailed information about political institutions and functions using specific examples from countries studied in AP Comparative Government and Politics.
  - AP Daily Videos 1–2 for Topic 2.2 focus on the similarities and differences between checks on executive authority in presidential and parliamentary systems.
  - Topic 4.5 "Objectives of Election Rules" in the CED also provides information about restraints on executive power, which are addressed in AP Daily Video 2 for Topic 4.5
- Additional resources may be found on the AP Comparative Government and Politics Course page on AP Central at: https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/courses/ap-comparative-government-and-politics
- AP Classroom also contains review videos for the 2021, 2022, and 2023 AP Comparative Government and Politics Exam that have helpful information for students and that review key concepts, theories, and skills.
- The AP Comparative Government and Politics Online Teaching Community (OTC) is another great resource, which includes materials and resources posted not only by the College Board, but also by other teachers. The OTC Discussion Board is the place to ask questions, share resources, and exchange teaching ideas at: https://apcommunity.collegeboard.org/group/apgopo-comp

Question 4

Task: Argument
Topic: Populism and political stability
Max Score: 5
Mean Score: 1.37

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

The intent of this question was to assess student's understanding of the political ideology of populism and its impact on political stability, while using one or more of the course concepts: corruption, sovereignty, or cleavages. Students were expected to articulate a defensible claim/thesis with two pieces of relevant evidence from a course country; use reasoning to explain why the evidence provided supports the thesis; and respond to an alternative perspective using refutation, concession, or rebuttal. Students were expected to write an argumentative essay, demonstrating each of the skills mentioned above. Specifically, students needed to demonstrate their understanding of populism and its impact on political stability using the course concepts to establish the link between the two. Students needed to further demonstrate their knowledge of the course countries by providing appropriate evidence from the countries that reflect course concepts the students used in their thesis. Students also needed to be able to demonstrate their understanding of how the evidence they described was linked to the relationship between populism and political stability. Finally, students needed to demonstrate their understanding of alternative explanations by describing an alternative thesis and then either refuting that thesis, rebutting it, or conceding it.

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 different tasks within this question required students to demonstrate several higher-order thinking skills, applying their substantive knowledge about populism while using argumentation. This type of question required the content knowledge from the course to be integrated with the practice of providing a defensible thesis, providing specific and relevant evidence and reasoning, and responding to an alternative perspective. Most students struggled with an accurate definition of populism and how it may manifest in policymaking; most definitions or descriptions of populism were nonspecific, incomplete, or incorrect. Of the four question components, most students were able to provide a defensible thesis. While most students provided evidence, that evidence was often not relevant or not connected correctly to the required course concepts. Most students who correctly understood populism were also able to use reasoning to connect accurate, specific evidence to the thesis. Most students attempted the alternative perspective; however, the responses were often underdeveloped: describing an opposing point of view but not providing a substantive rebuttal, refutation, or concession.

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

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	*Responses that Demonstrate Understanding*
• Not understanding what populism is and how addressing the majority or minority is not specific enough.	• "Populism is valuing the opinions and needs of normal people over the opinions of the elites."
• Not understanding that stating the opposite of a thesis or stance without explanation is not a refutation or rebuttal.	• "While some may argue that populism would increase stability through equal treatment of citizens, … the government may still not represent all people, having unrest in minority groups therefore undermining political stability."

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

Teachers should help students regularly articulate complete and accurate key vocabulary terms, concepts, and principles and then provide various contemporary examples of said vocabulary, concepts, and principles in the six focus countries.

Teachers should help students articulate relevant evidence and how the evidence is to connect back to or justify the thesis statement.

Teachers should outline how to develop an alternative or opposing line of thought and how to write a rebuttal, refutation, or concession of that line of reasoning.

Teachers should expose AP students to the released scoring guides and allow students to see valid examples of high, medium, and low answers and allow them to practice assessing released prompts to see what appropriate responses may look like and to become familiar with AP vernacular.

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

- The Course and Exam Description (CED) provides a section on "Developing the Disciplinary Practices" on pages 138–146. This section provides examples of questions and instructional strategies for incorporating the course skills into classroom instruction.
- Sign into AP Classroom to access AP Daily Videos and questions on the topics and skills addressed in this question. AP teachers can assign students short AP Daily Videos as homework, warm-ups, lectures, reviews, and more. AP teachers can also use the AP Question Bank in AP Classroom to enable students to practice and get feedback on formative topic questions and past AP Exam questions.
- Resources related specifically to this prompt include:
    - AP Daily Video 1 in Topic 3.3 addresses the concept of populism.

- o Topic 4.5 "Objectives of Election Rules" in the CED also provides information about restraints on executive power, which are addressed in AP Daily Video 2 for Topic 4.5.
  - o AP Exam Practice Session 8 for 2023 provides a close analysis of an argument FRQ to help students prepare for this challenging question type.
- AP Classroom contains review videos for the 2021, 2022, and 2023 AP Comparative Government and Politics Exam that have helpful information for students and that review key concepts, theories, and skills.
- Additional resources may be found on the AP Comparative Government and Politics Course page on AP Central at: https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/courses/ap-comparative-government-and-politics
- The AP Comparative Government and Politics Online Teaching Community (OTC) is another great resource, which includes materials and resources posted not only by the College Board, but also by other teachers. The OTC Discussion Board is the place to ask questions, share resources, and exchange teaching ideas at: https://apcommunity.collegeboard.org/group/apgopo-comp