



**Chief Reader Report on Student Responses:
2023 AP[®] Comparative Government and Politics Set 2
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: Describe and Explain

Topic: States and nations

Max Score: 4

Mean Score: 1.96

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

The intent of this question was to assess the ability of students to describe and explain. Students were expected to describe the concept of the state, then to describe a difference between a state and a nation. Students then needed to explain one reason why a state might fail. Finally, students were expected to explain why multinational states might face challenges in maintaining legitimacy.

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?

Most responses accurately described two or more characteristics of the state, including sovereignty, control over a population, a defined territory, international recognition, and the presence of governing institutions, although some students mistook a sovereign state for a subnational unit and others only described one characteristic of a state. Many students failed to explain that a state requires a defined territory as opposed to an “area.” Many students accurately described the difference between a nation and a state as a distinction between people and institutions, although some failed to make the contrast explicit in terms of specific characteristics of a nation and a state, instead simply explaining the difference as the negation of some characteristic of one in the other. Most students successfully explained how a state might fail, usually through either an explanation of the relationship between lost legitimacy and inability to control the population or through the inability of a state to protect its borders and resist conquest. Finally, many students successfully explained the relationship between multinational states and legitimacy by focusing on conflict and representation, although some failed to give a sufficiently explicit account of how different national groups created specific dynamics of conflict and underrepresentation.

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

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difference between states as subnational units and states as sovereign, independent political entities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “A state is a sovereign set of governing institutions ruling over set borders with a permanent population.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difference between a nation and a state.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “A nation refers to a cultural or ethnic identity. A state refers to institutions of governance.”

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State failure versus government or regime change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “A state can fail when it lacks the capacity to provide security or economic assistance to its population, leaving those people vulnerable to violence and predation from foreign and domestic enemies.”
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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 state and nation. It is important for students to be able to describe characteristics of concepts in this course.

Teachers can also assist students by providing opportunities to distinguish differences between concepts such as states and nations. One suggestion is to create a comparison chart for these types of concepts to reinforce learning and continue throughout the year by adding examples from specific countries.

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 challenges of multinational states and then connecting this to legitimacy. Some students wrote about the challenges of multinational states but did not connect those challenges to legitimacy. It is also helpful for students to provide an example from one of the course countries, although this level of detail is not required to earn the task point.

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 1 for Topic 1.2 reviews key characteristics of political organizations and focuses on the difference between states and nations.
 - Topic 3.9 in Unit 3 addresses challenges governments face in multinational states. See also AP Daily Videos 1–2 for topic 3.9, which focuses specifically on the impact of cleavages.
- 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/web/apgopo-comp/home>

Question 2

Task: Identify, Describe, Draw Conclusions, and Explain

Topic: Trust, especially as it relates to political stability

Max Score: 5

Mean Score: 2.35

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

The intent of this question was to assess students' ability to interpret, describe, explain, and draw conclusions from quantitative data on public trust levels across four AP countries presented in a graph. The question also was designed to assess students' ability to make connections across the concepts of trust, political stability, and corruption. Students were presented with a graph displaying numbers for the Trust Index Barometer for China, Mexico, the United Kingdom, and Russia. The graph showed the scores for these four countries from 2015 to 2021. Students were expected to be able to correctly identify the country with the lowest level of trust from 2016 to 2021. Students were also expected to correctly describe a change in the level of public trust in Mexico from 2017 to 2021. Students were then expected to correctly describe the concept of political stability. The next prompt asked students, using data from the graph, to draw a conclusion about China's policies in maintaining political stability. Students were expected to reference a specific policy that China has pursued to bolster political stability. Finally, students were asked to explain what the data in the graph implied about corruption in Russia. Students were expected to demonstrate understanding that high levels of corruption negatively influence the degree of public trust in government.

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?

Responses were most consistently successful with interpreting the graph and answering parts (A) and (B), showing strong abilities to read the data presented in the graph and describe a change over time.

On this question, the biggest challenge students had was with understanding and describing the concept of political stability in part (C). Typically, responses would try to describe the strength and legitimacy of a government, instead of describing the survival of a political regime/institutions over time. Incorrect responses generally approached this in one of three ways. First, some would equate trust and legitimacy with political stability and focus on public support for the government. Second, others focused on the existence and strength of the government, regime, and/or institutions as evidence of stability, but they would leave out the element of time and long-term durability. Third, often responses simply restated the question by saying that political stability was when governments were stable and did not change much.

Students also struggled to successfully draw a conclusion about China's policies in maintaining stability, in part (D). Some responses equated trust with political stability and just described the trajectory of China's line in the graph. Others concluded that China's policies must be good at maintaining political stability because of the high levels of trust, when compared to the other countries, but they would fail to connect their conclusion to Chinese policy in any way. In addition, students frequently would simply restate that China's policies helped maintain political stability but did not indicate how.

Many students did not seem to understand that the prompt required that students relay a "cause and effect" relationship between the low levels of trust indicated on the graph and corruption in Russia. Incorrect responses often explained that the presence of low levels of trust in Russia proved the existence of high

levels of corruption but failed to close the loop because they did not provide a reason that corruption could affect levels of trust.

Correct responses focused instead on how the data indicating low trust in Russia implies high levels of corruption in Russia because citizens of a country are less likely to trust a corrupt government.

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

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Political stability is when people are confident in their government’s action and/or believe in their government. For example, according to the graph China’s actions have political stability because they have a high trust level in their government.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Political stability exists when a country is able to maintain its political institutions ... for long periods of time without those people threatening institutions.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “China did not maintain political stability from 2015–2017. In 2015 government trust was 62, it went to 81 in 2016, back down to 62 in 2017. This shows that political stability grew and then decreased because people could not consistently trust the government those years.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “China’s policy in maintaining political stability is efficient and successful ... their methods of instilling trust in the people for the institutions of the government ... through political socialization in the media ... convincing them that they are good in governing, leading to high levels of trust in government.”

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 should be exposed to a variety of charts throughout the course. Consider discussing what constitutes significant or large differences as opposed to small or minimal differences in percentages, as students occasionally struggled to choose appropriate adjectives to describe the rate or pace of change. Remind students to carefully check (and double check) the graph’s key, as occasionally students lost the B point when they answered with numbers that were closer to Russia or the UK’s level.

It is also important to have students practice the skill of contextualizing data, especially in terms of comparisons with other countries. Many students focused heavily on the direction of change for China, and they overstated their answers in claiming that China’s policies had clearly failed because levels of trust were falling in China, without making a mention of the fact that China’s rates of trust were still much higher than any of the other countries. Most significantly, it is important to teach students how to “draw a conclusion” from the graph. This skill requires students to 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 parts (D) and (E), which is not necessary for this part of the question. Students need to practice drawing connections between key course concepts and the data provided in the graphs. Students should also be reminded to use specific language in explaining what the graph shows. Even though the graph’s note clearly states that it measures

“the mass population’s trust in the institutions” it was common for students to explain that the graph showed levels of political stability, which it does not.

Finally, it is important to explain the concept of political stability, 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.
- 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 Videos 1–3 for Topic 1.10 focus on the issue of Political Stability. Issues discussed include the use of quantitative analysis in measuring stability, policies used by states to maintain stability, and the challenges corruption poses to stability in course countries.
- 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/web/apgopo-comp/home>

Question 3

Task: Describe and Explain

Topic: Legislative systems

Max Score: 5

Mean Score: 2.22

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

The intent of this question was to assess students' understanding of the concept of legislative systems and their ability to describe and explain to what extent legislative power is formally constrained in countries studied in the AP Comparative Government and Politics course. The skills tested were descriptive and explanatory. Students first were expected to describe the main function of the legislative branch of government in most countries. Then they had to demonstrate their understanding of how legislators are chosen by describing the selection process of members of the lower or single house of the legislative branch in two course countries. Finally, students needed to demonstrate their understanding of checks on legislative independence by explaining the extent to which legislative power is formally constrained in each of the same two course countries.

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?

Most students were able to describe that the main function of the legislative branch of government is to create and pass laws. While some students incorrectly identified the selection process as appointment by the executive, many students were able to describe the procedure for choosing the lower or single house of the legislative branch for two course countries by differentiating between the various election systems that are required. Although some students merely identified formal constraints on the legislature, many students were able to explain the extent to which formal constraints on the legislative branch are effective or ineffective.

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

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “In Iran, the Majles is appointed by the Supreme Leader.”• “In China, the National People’s Congress is appointed by the Chinese Communist Party.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “In Iran, the Majles is directly elected in single member or multimember districts after being vetted by the Guardian Council.”• “In China, the National People’s Congress is indirectly elected by the local people’s congresses.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “In Mexico, the Supreme Court has the power of judicial review.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “In Mexico, the Supreme Court has the power of judicial review which overrules decisions by the legislature by declaring a law unconstitutional.”

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 government officials are selected for each of the six course countries. One suggestion is to introduce the process of selection in an overview of the political institutions for each country and then to reinforce it in later units covering election 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 this question, students often confused the upper and lower houses of the legislature, or they mischaracterized the features of a single-member district plurality system 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 legislatures by constructing a graphic organizer or engaging in a sorting activity. Then students need to be prompted to explain how the formal check constrains legislative power. Some students merely stated that “there are checks and balances in a presidential system” and offered no specific information about how, for example, a presidential veto can stop the passage of a law unless the legislature can override the veto.

Teachers should also have students practice writing this specific question format which often requires the students to use the two countries in part (C) as 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 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 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, including the relationships of executive and legislative branches in different systems of government.
 - Topic 4.5 “Objectives of Election Rules” in the CED also provides information about checks on legislative power.

- 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/web/apgopo-comp/home>

Question 4

Task: Argument

Topic: Environmental issues and political legitimacy

Max Score: 5

Mean Score: 2.10

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

The intent of this question was to assess students' understanding of how environmental challenges impact government legitimacy using one or more of the following course concepts: demographic change, globalization, or sovereignty. 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 environmental issues and their impact on political legitimacy 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 involve 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 environmental issues and political legitimacy. Finally, students needed to demonstrate their understanding of alternative perspectives 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 demographic change, globalization, or sovereignty while using argumentation to connect one of these concepts to environmental issues' impact on legitimacy. 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. Of the four question components, most students were able to provide a defensible thesis, usually referencing globalization or demographic change and showing a clear understanding of these concepts. Many responses showed familiarity with the cases of urban pollution in China and environmental damage due to oil extraction in Nigeria. Some responses provided an explanation of how the identified evidence supported the thesis; however, many responses summarized the evidence and did not fully connect the evidence to the original thesis or incorporate the key concept in their reasoning. Many responses did not give or respond to an alternative perspective, instead simply stopping short after presenting evidence or providing a concluding statement summarizing their thesis and evidence.

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

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Misunderstanding of sovereignty (“increased participation in voting enhances sovereignty of citizens,” “lack of government response harms its devolved powers of sovereignty”). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Sovereignty refers to the extent to which a country’s government is recognized by others as being able to rule over its territory.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not returning to the original thesis in presentation of an alternative thesis and key concept of legitimacy (“some may say that environmental issues destabilize government and cause revolution”). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Some may say that environmental issues decrease legitimacy, because the mass migration of citizens from vulnerable areas exposes the government’s inability to protect people.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confusing economic issues with environmental issues (“To illustrate how environmental issues decrease legitimacy, the money government makes from oil is not fairly redistributed to people from Nigeria’s oil-rich regions.”). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Oil extraction leads to massive pollution of land and water, so that farming and fishing is severely limited.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not including specific examples from a course country or countries (“Environmental issues harm people all over the world.”). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Groups such as MEND protest the exploitation of oil in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the area of the essay where they should provide evidence, providing hypotheticals (“If Chinese officials could clean up cities, citizens would be more satisfied with government”). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “In major manufacturing regions of China, air pollution is so high that people need to wear masks if they need to go outdoors.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not returning to the argument made in their thesis when offering reasoning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “In this example from China, we can see how pollutants emitted from factories—factories which are a result of globalization—lead to citizen frustration as their outdoor activities and everyday lives are disrupted, which decreases the Chinese government’s legitimacy.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responses confuse sovereignty with popular sovereignty and legitimacy (“Citizens are unable to control their quality of life, decreasing their sovereignty” or “Citizens have no respect for government, decreasing sovereignty”). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “When the global conditions do not allow a government to make or enforce decisions in its own territory, that government suffers a loss of sovereignty.”

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 could emphasize the difference between state sovereignty and individual/regional autonomy, as there appears to be conceptual conflation of sovereignty and autonomy in this year's responses.

Teachers could have students practice writing argumentative essays where they reference and support their original thesis consistently. Students appear to retain a lot of key information that they provide in the responses, but, as they write, they lose track of the main points they made at the outset.

- Always remind students to answer the question being asked.
- Present students with essay prompts and have them write ONLY THE THESIS STATEMENT. Have them do that repeatedly. Emphasize that they must clearly pick one side to argue and leave the other side for the alternative perspective paragraph. Make sure to work with one or more course concepts.
- Return to the same questions and write ONLY EVIDENCE AND REASONING POINTS for each prompt.
- In the final stage, have the students write an alternative perspective and rebut, refute or concede.
- Make sure to review the difference between rebuttal, refutation, and concession.

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 Video 3 for Topic 1.2 describes and discusses the important concept of sovereignty.
 - AP Daily Videos 1–2 for Topics 1.9 discuss how legitimacy can be sustained or undermined, using case studies from course countries.
 - Globalization is discussed in Unit 5 of the CED. The relationship of globalization, economic development, and environmental issues is addressed throughout Unit 5.
 - AP Daily Videos 1–3 for Topic 5.8 focus on the topic of demographic change.
- 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.
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