
AP[®] Comparative Government and Politics

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary Set 1

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Free-Response Question 4

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Question 4: Argument Essay**5 points**

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row A Claim/Thesis (0–1 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Responds to the prompt with a defensible claim or thesis that establishes a line of reasoning.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only restate the prompt. Do not make a claim that responds to the prompt. 	Responses that earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond to the prompt rather than restating or rephrasing the prompt and establish a line of reasoning. Provide a defensible claim or thesis that establishes a line of reasoning as to whether government protections of civil liberties increase or decrease stability in a state using one or more of the provided course concepts: democratization, transparency, and rule of law.
	Examples that do not earn this point: Restate the prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Government protections of civil liberties can both increase and decrease stability in a state.”</i> <i>“Some people argue that government protections affect stability.”</i> Do not respond to the prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“The U.S. Supreme Court is protecting civil liberties.”</i> <i>“Some governments don’t do enough to protect civil liberties.”</i> 	Examples that earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“As the state goes through the process of democratization, it offers protections of civil liberties to citizens. Citizens can use these civil liberties to organize and/or protest which makes their voices heard thus increasing the stability of the state.”</i> <i>“States going through democratization are often seeking to increase protections of civil liberties. However, this can create instability as these governments may be uncomfortable with how much new power its citizens have.”</i> <i>“States that have strong protections of civil liberties are more stable because the government allows for more transparency. This enhances support for the state and increases stability.”</i> <i>“Government protections of civil liberties increase stability in a state because they show the state’s commitment to rule of law.”</i> <i>“States that offer strong protection of civil liberties to citizens can end up becoming less stable over time. If they adhere to rule of law, they will allow more citizen dissent or protest in the government, which could lead to instability.”</i> <i>“States with governments that operate using rule of law protect civil liberties of individuals, even political opponents of the ruling government. This makes those opponents more likely to use legal methods of opposition, rather than violent means, which increases stability.”</i>
Additional Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The claim or thesis must consist of one or more sentences that may be located anywhere in the response. A claim or thesis that meets the criteria can be awarded the point whether or not the rest of the response successfully supports that line of reasoning. 		

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria		
Row B Evidence (0–2 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Provides <u>one</u> piece of specific and relevant evidence from a course country relevant to one of the course concepts in the prompt.	2 points Provides <u>two</u> pieces of specific and relevant evidence from one or more course countries relevant to one or more of the course concepts in the prompt.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes		
	Responses that do not earn points: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Do not provide any accurate evidence.Provide evidence that is not relevant to the course concepts in the prompt.	Responses that earn 1 or 2 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Provide specific and relevant evidence from required course countries, relevant to the course concepts in the prompt.	
	Examples that do not earn points: Provide evidence that is not specific <ul style="list-style-type: none">“Authoritarian states often do protect civil liberties.” Provide evidence that is not relevant to course concepts in the prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none">“Natural disasters can disrupt state stability.”	Examples of acceptable specific and relevant evidence (one example is one piece of evidence): <ul style="list-style-type: none">“China, Russia and Iran have more restrictions on civil liberties. They have less tolerance for opposing viewpoints, making democratization in these countries unlikely.”“In Mexico and Nigeria, the governments are democratizing, by giving more freedoms to their citizens.”“China, Russia and Iran are authoritarian states, with fewer protections of civil liberties, which makes government actions less transparent.”“In China, Russia and Iran, the media is state-owned, and the actions of government are not transparent.”“In the United Kingdom, a major function of the Supreme Court is to use the rule of law to ensure the protections of civil liberties.”“In China, Russia and Iran, protestors and journalists are arrested/tried without due process, violating rule of law.”	
	Additional Notes <ul style="list-style-type: none">A response does not need to earn the point in Row A to earn points in Row B.A response does not need to explain the relationship between the evidence and the claim or thesis to earn points in Row B. (That explanation is evaluated in Row C.)		

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row C Reasoning	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Explains how or why the evidence supports the claim or thesis.
(0–1 points)	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include evidence but offer no reasoning to connect the evidence to the claim or thesis. • Restate the prompt without explaining how the evidence supports the claim or thesis. Examples that do not earn points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Authoritarian governments ignore rule of law.”</i> • <i>“States experiencing democratization may choose to continue to limit civil liberties.”</i> 	Responses that earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the relationship between the evidence provided and the claim or thesis. Examples of reasoning that explain how evidence supports the claim or thesis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Governments limit civil liberties in order to control the ability of opposing groups to organize, because it increases the stability of the state.”</i> • <i>“Governments that protect civil liberties decrease stability because if enough people express anger toward the government, it can lead to a revolution/coup/revolt of the government.”</i> • <i>“Governments allow a free press and citizen access to information because this helps citizens understand how the government is responding to issues, thus improving stability.”</i>
	Additional Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To earn this point, the response must have a defensible claim or thesis (earned the point in Row A). • The explanation of the relationship between one piece of evidence and the claim or thesis is sufficient to earn this point. 	

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row D Responds to Alternate Perspectives	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Responds to an opposing or alternate perspective using refutation, concession, or rebuttal.
(0–1 points)	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restate the opposite of the claim or thesis. May identify or describe an alternate perspective but do not refute, concede, or rebut that perspective. 	Responses that earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must describe an alternate perspective AND refute, concede, or rebut that perspective.
	Examples of responses that do not earn the point: Restate the opposite of the claim or thesis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Government protections increase/decrease stability.”</i> Describe an alternate perspective but do not refute, concede, or rebut that perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Protecting civil liberties does not really impact stability.”</i> 	Examples of acceptable responses to an alternate perspective may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Some might argue that restricting civil liberties increases stability because opponents can be put in jail where they will not pose a threat to the regime. However, citizens may protest unjust arrests, increasing instability.”</i> <i>“Some political scientists claim that restricting civil liberties does not increase stability because citizens will revolt against government restrictions. However, if citizens are afraid of violence or arrest if they protest, they will stay home and not challenge the regime, increasing stability.”</i>
	Additional Notes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To earn this point, the response must have a defensible claim or thesis (earned the point in Row A). Responses that demonstrate an incorrect understanding of the alternate perspective do not earn this point. 	

Sample:

Although some might argue that protecting civil liberties can cause a government to have little control over their citizens, government protections of civil liberties ultimately increase the stability in a state because of the practice of transparency, establishing mutual trust between the government and people.

In the United Kingdom, the protection of civil liberties has resulted in transparency between the government, allowing the people to place trust in parliament and ultimately increase stability in the state. For example, when the issue of whether to join BREXIT was being debated, many interest groups in the UK were clearly able to express their opinions on the matter. Members of the UKIP party made it public that they supported this issue because they believed that it would make Britain more economically independent from other countries, while the Labour party opposed it due to the fact that they thought that Britain should remain in the European Union. When it was decided that Britain was going to exit the EU, there were protests and public demonstrations that occurred in Britain, but all the while, the government was honest with their citizens about their decision. Even though they knew that not everyone was going to agree with their decision, their transparency reflects trust that allows a state to be stable. If parliament had silenced the minority groups' opinions, then they wouldn't understand how to properly manage the dissenting opinion. This shows how protecting civil liberties is essential to establishing transparency and stability within a state.

In Iran, civil liberties are not protected. This has led to decreased trust in the government and riots from citizens, ultimately reflecting the instability of a state that can result from not granting citizens liberties that are endowed to them. In Iran, religious law dictates all aspects of life, including what you can wear, say, and do in public. Strict government control over the media and the enforcing of hijabs has led to mass protests in recent years. In 2022, over 500 people were killed and over 20,000 arrested for protesting strict government control, gender inequality, and other similar issues. This proves how not granting protection of civil liberties can lead to instability in the state of a country. Without transparency or openness from the government, the people have no one to trust and ultimately end up resorting to protests or even violence because their voices are silenced.

Those who oppose this assertion might argue that by protecting civil liberties, a government loses control over its citizens. Factions might affect the efficiency of the government, causing it to focus more on controlling interest groups and non-governmental organizations rather than economic productivity. However, this refutation is not strong enough to argue that protecting civil liberties can decrease a state's stability. Civil society and liberties are essential to creating a country that is able to control dissenting opinion in a way that still makes minorities' opinions heard. Without protection of civil liberties, citizens might utilize unhealthy ways to get their voices heard that could isolate them even further. Ultimately, the stability of a state rests in their own ability to protect the civil liberties of their citizens.

Sample 4B, 1 of 1

Sample:

Government protections of civil liberties will increase stability in a state due to an increase of transparency and rule of law system that would follow after.

A rule of law system is commonly seen in democracies and established through the protection and maintenance of the people's civil liberties and rights, and prevention of any authoritative figure or body being above the law. Therefore, protection of these civil liberties is substantial in the establishment of a democratic, rule of law system and gaining legitimacy in a country. A rule of law system results in a positive reception and increase of legitimacy from the people to the government for the protection of their liberties, thus also increasing the state's stability. An example can be provided through Russia, which is known to be an authoritarian regime going under a rule by law system. Punishments are subjective and able to be bypassed by those in positions of power. Their consistent abuse of civil liberties to maintain the rule by law system has shown to decrease the country's legitimacy, therefore lowering the public's support of the government. This leads to an overall decrease in stability for the country.

Protection of civil liberties by the government will establish a rule of law system, however it will also result in higher levels of transparency. To protect the civil liberties of the people means that they will maintain their freedoms and rights, but it will also mean that no figure or body of power will be above the law and punishments established. Therefore, a rule of law system will also maintain high levels of transparency to combat the potential of corruption or bias in the law, which will directly result in higher levels of stability due to the ability for people to see the government's actions. An example of this can be shown through China's government, which is known to use rule by law and to infringe upon their people's civil liberties in order to maintain authority. One of which ways China has abused the civil liberties of their people is through the censorship of media, which directly infringes upon the freedoms of their people. The censorship of media not only attacks the civil liberties, but is also decreasing levels of transparency within China due to their control of what the people see online. This eventually undermines the country's stability as a low level of transparency means low levels of trust towards the government.

Alternatively, infringement of civil liberties could also increase stability within a country. For example, despite China's use of the judicial system to abuse civil liberties and punish those who oppose the regime with rule by law, they're also able to maintain stability through this by creating a stable dictatorship with little to no opposers.

Sample:

A government is defined as the set of institutions that are legally authorized to make legally-binding decisions for their state. As a result, various decisions heavily impact governments and regimes, despite a regime's endurance from government to government. Such decisions may impact a government's political stability, legitimacy, and authority. Specifically though, government protections of civil liberties will increase political stability within a state through the fundamental principles of a democracy.

A government's ability to protect civil liberties, such as the freedom of speech, press, assembly, protest, and religion, increases the stability in a state. When a country/state protects rights of individual's from the abuse of government, it increases political legitimacy, or the citizen's acceptance of government's rule. For example, the United Kingdom, being a democratically consolidated regime, has high levels of political legitimacy which positively influences its political stability. The United Kingdom governs their state on the principle of rule of law rather than arbitrary decision-making, which protects civil liberties and strengthens the political stability of their state. That said, citizens reserve the right of civil liberties in fear on tyrannical rule of government; this encourages high levels of political participation and even in government, and the United Kingdom's practice of rule of law directly reflects the needs of their citizens, with high political legitimacy. This flexibility and transparency within their government is even seen within high participation in civil societies; recently the government has been receiving criticism on environmental issues and LGBTQ+ rights (civil rights). Such criticism harms the United Kingdom's legitimacy, but with its encouragement and protection of civil liberties, citizens reserve the freedom and right to protest these social issues and attempt to influence policy which prevents the ripple effect with presence of environmental advocacy groups and LGBTQ+ spaces. Reiterating and connecting to the set principle, such outcome, presence, and outlets to connect with the government are through methods and freedoms of civil liberties, which enhances political legitimacy, and overall the political stability of a state.

Along with the United Kingdom, the protection of civil liberties in Nigeria, a democratically transitioning (democratization) country, strengthens the political legitimacy of the state. Currently, Nigeria is challenged and limited by sources of corruption within its government as a result of environmental factors. Specifically, there are civil society groups and social movements that have been spreading awareness of the environmental degradation of the state as a result of economic growth. However, the government fails to acknowledge such issues and has low levels of transparency. Citizens reserve the right to protest, especially peacefully; For example, the Movement of the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) have peacefully exercised their civil liberties to demand change regarding the environmental issues as well as to bring oil revenues back autonomously to the regions in order to address the wealth inequality. The government's response from Nigeria was brutal, militant suppression, killing the leader of the group. That said, this significantly harmed the political legitimacy of the country as Nigeria infringed on their civil liberties, governing through arbitrary decisions of rule by law, with little transparency regarding the issue, worsening their political stability and state as a country as a whole. The fix would be to address and acknowledge societal issues, hold corrupt politicians accountable, govern through rule of law in order to properly democratically transition and improve political stability. To especially govern as such and through rule of law, Nigeria must employ policy and legislation to protect civil liberties with urgency to strengthen their political legitimacy, and overall stability -- rather than disregard civil liberties and create societal turmoil as seen with MOSOP, decreasing the state's political legitimacy.

Sample 4C, 2 of 2

And although some congressional leaders, legislative members, and political executives may argue that the protection of civil liberties decreases the stability of a state, it is important to understand under which circumstances. With Russia, an illiberal/hybrid regime in which consolidates power through authoritarian rule, prioritization and protections on civil liberties will decrease their political stability. However, it will decrease their political stability because their state is governed in principles which focus on arbitrary rule by law, where politically corrupt leaders aren't held accountable. Additionally, Russia is so specifically unique that protections for civil liberties will increase protests and opposition against the government, so much so their constituents and citizens have accepted limiting their personal civil liberties to obtain a more politically stable country because of how geographically large Russia truly is. However, focusing on principles of democracy, and developing countries in the process of democratizing, protections of civil liberties will enhance and strengthen political stability as it increases political legitimacy through proper political governance of rule of law, open transparency and free circulation of political information rather than arbitrary rule. That said, government protections of civil liberties will increase political legitimacy within a state through fundamentals of democracy.

Question 4

Note: Student samples are quoted verbatim and may contain spelling and grammatical errors.

Overview

NEW for 2025: The question overviews can be found in the *Chief Reader Report on Student Responses* on [AP Central](#).

Sample: 4A

Score: 5

Thesis Claim Score: 1

The response earned 1 point for a thesis that establishes a clear line of reasoning using a course concept by stating, “government protections of civil liberties ultimately increase the stability in a state because of the practice of transparency.”

Evidence Score: 2

The response earned 2 points for supporting the thesis with two pieces of evidence from one or more course countries that are specific and relevant to a course concept in the prompt. The response earned 1 point by noting that, “In the United Kingdom, the protection of civil liberties has resulted in transparency” and notes that “When it was decided that Britain was going to exit the EU ... the government was honest with their citizens about their decision.” The response earned 1 point for Iran by stating, “Strict government control over the media ... proves how not granting protection of civil liberties ... without transparency or openness from the government, the people have no one to trust...because their voices are silenced.”

Reasoning Score: 1

The response earned 1 point for using reasoning to explain the relationship between the evidence provided and the thesis by stating that for the government of the United Kingdom, “Even though they knew that not everyone was going to agree with their decision, their transparency reflects trust that allows a state to be stable. ... This shows how protecting civil liberties is essential to establishing transparency and stability within a state.”

Alternative Perspectives Score: 1

The response earned 1 point for describing an alternate perspective and responding with refutation, concession, or rebuttal by stating that “Those who oppose this assertion might argue that by protecting civil liberties, a government loses control over its citizens. ... However, this refutation is not strong enough to argue that protecting civil liberties can decrease ... stability. ... Ultimately, the stability of a state rests in ... their own ability to protect the civil liberties of their citizens.”

Question 4 (continued)**Sample: 4B****Score: 4****Thesis Claim Score: 1**

The response earned 1 point for a thesis that establishes a clear line of reasoning using a course concept by stating, “Government protections of civil liberties will increase stability in a state due to an increase of transparency and rule of law system that would follow after.”

Evidence Score: 2

The response earned 2 points for supporting the thesis with two pieces of evidence from one or more course countries that are specific and relevant to a course concept in the prompt. The response earned 1 point by stating that “Russia, which is known to be an authoritarian regime going under a rule by law system. Punishments are subjective and able to be bypassed by those in positions of power.” The response also earned 1 point by stating that, “One of the ways China has abused the civil liberties of their people is through the censorship of media. ... The censorship ... not only attacks the civil liberties, but is also decreasing levels of transparency.”

Reasoning Score: 1

The response earned 1 point for using reasoning to explain the relationship between the evidence provided and the thesis by stating that decreased transparency resulting from censorship in China “eventually undermines the country’s stability as a low level of transparency means low levels of trust towards the government.”

Alternative Perspectives Score: 0

The response did not earn a point for describing an alternate perspective and responding with refutation, concession, or rebuttal because, although an alternate argument is presented, the response does not include a rebuttal, a refutation, or a concession.

Question 4 (continued)**Sample: 4C****Score: 2****Thesis Claim Score: 0**

The response did not earn a point for a thesis establishing a clear line of reasoning using one or more of the provided course concepts. Although the response makes the claim that “government protections of civil liberties will increase political stability within a state,” the reference to “through the fundamental principles of a democracy” does not describe the process of democratization or the concepts of transparency or rule of law.

Evidence Score: 2

The response earned 2 points for supporting the thesis with two pieces of evidence from one or more course countries that are specific and relevant to a course concept in the prompt. The response earned 1 point by noting that, “The United Kingdom governs their state on the principle of rule of law rather than arbitrary decision-making, which protects civil liberties.” The response earned 1 point by stating, “in Nigeria, [in] a democratically transitioning (democratization) country ... social movements ... have been spreading awareness of the environmental degradation of the state as a result of economic growth. However, the government fails to acknowledge such issues and has low levels of transparency.”

Reasoning Score: 0

The response did not earn a point for using reasoning to explain the relationship between the evidence provided and the argument because the response did not accurately provide a thesis.

Alternative Perspectives Score: 0

The response did not earn a point for describing an alternate perspective and responding with refutation, concession, or rebuttal because the response did not accurately provide a thesis.