
AP[®] Comparative Government and Politics

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary Set 2

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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. Examples that do not earn this point: Restate the prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Judicial independence can increase or decrease political legitimacy.”</i> <i>“Judicial independence can increase political legitimacy.”</i> Do not respond to the prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Political legitimacy can increase judicial independence.”</i> <i>“Russia is ruled by a dictator.”</i> 	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 judicial independence increases or decreases a government’s political legitimacy using one or more of the provided course concepts: checks and balances, stability, and rule of law. Examples that earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Judicial independence increases a government’s legitimacy because it protects the rule of law.”</i> <i>“Judicial independence can increase a government’s political legitimacy because an independent judiciary can maintain checks and balances by overturning laws passed by the legislature or executive actions.”</i> <i>“Judicial independence increases a government’s legitimacy because it promotes stability.”</i> <i>“Judicial independence decreases a government’s legitimacy because it may inhibit the power of the executive from acting on the will of the people.”</i> <i>“Judicial independence decreases a government’s legitimacy because it uses judicial review to overturn popular legislation resulting in protest and instability.”</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">“Some countries use judicial review to increase judicial independence.” Provide evidence that is not relevant to course concepts in the prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none">“The United States uses separation of powers.”	Examples of acceptable specific and relevant evidence (one example is one piece of evidence): <ul style="list-style-type: none">“Nigeria has been working to enhance judicial independence by addressing corruption and implementing reforms that check the other branches.”“China, Iran, and Russia do not have independent judiciaries, and therefore the judicial branch in these countries has not protected the rights of people or countered the power of other branches.”“In Mexico, an independent judiciary has been used to strike down unconstitutional laws, increasing stability.”“The Supreme Court in the United Kingdom uses common law to enforce the rule of law and ensure the government does not infringe on fundamental rights and liberties.”“China, Iran, and Russia do not have independent judiciaries, and judicial rulings are used to strengthen the power of the government’s control. This is an example of rule by law, as opposed to 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	
	<p>Responses that do not earn this point:</p> <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. <p>Examples that do not earn points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Judicial independence can increase legitimacy.”</i> • <i>“Overturning unpopular policies can increase legitimacy.”</i> 	<p>Responses that earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the relationship between the evidence provided and the claim or thesis. <p>Examples of reasoning that explain how evidence supports the claim or thesis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Judicial independence can increase a government’s legitimacy because an independent judiciary can maintain checks and balances, which prevents the executive from becoming a dictator. As a result, the executive is held accountable for their actions, which increases legitimacy in the regime.”</i> • <i>“Judicial independence can increase a government’s legitimacy because an independent judiciary can establish the rule of law by holding government officials accountable and protecting the civil rights and liberties of minority groups, which increases the people’s support for the regime.”</i> • <i>“Judicial independence can increase a government’s legitimacy because an independent judiciary can prevent the executive or legislature from taking authoritarian actions such as tolerating corruption by the ruling party, reducing civil liberties, or ignoring election results that oust the ruling party, which decreases the potential for protests and increases the stability of the regime.”</i> • <i>“Judicial independence can decrease a government’s political legitimacy because an independent judiciary may overturn or delay popular policies made by an elected executive or legislators, which may lead to protests or loss of citizen support that undermine stability.”</i> • <i>“Judicial independence can decrease a government’s political legitimacy because an independent judiciary can create internal confusion about what is lawful, when its decisions conflict with executive rulings, which may decrease stability.”</i> • <i>“Judicial independence can decrease a government’s political legitimacy because an independent judiciary may be influenced by unelected civil society groups and non-governmental organizations which may gain benefits that are not available to other groups, hindering rule of law and decreasing support for the regime.”</i>
	<p>Additional Notes:</p> <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 (0–1 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Responds to an opposing or alternate perspective using refutation, concession, or rebuttal.
	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>“Judicial independence can also increase or decrease legitimacy.”</i> Describe an alternate perspective but do not refute, concede, or rebut that perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Others might argue that judicial independence can decrease a government’s political legitimacy because they have an independent judiciary.”</i> 	Examples of acceptable responses to an alternate perspective may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Others might argue that judicial independence can decrease a government’s political legitimacy because an independent judiciary can overturn popular policies made by elected legislators. However, an independent judiciary can limit authoritarian policies made by a legislature, increasing support for the regime.”</i> <i>“Some political scientists may believe that judicial independence can increase a government’s political legitimacy because an independent judiciary can maintain checks and balances which prevents a dictatorship. However, an independent judiciary can undermine public confidence when decisions overturn popular legislation, creating confusion for citizens.”</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:

Judicial independence increases the government's political legitimacy because judicial independence acts as a check on the other branches of government, and allows a state to be under a rule of law system.

The importance of judicial independence on a government's political legitimacy can be seen in the UK. The UK has a democratic regime with an independent judiciary which actively checks the executive and legislative branches of government. Since the executive and legislative branches in government are conjoined in the UK there is no real separation of powers, but with the independent judiciary the UK is able to establish a check on the branches as well as gain legitimacy through transparency. The independent judiciary is not controlled by another branch therefore allowing citizens to trust the judiciary to protect their civil liberties and rights.

The significance of an independent judiciary can also be seen in Mexico. Similarly to the UK, Mexico has a democratic regime. Mexico and the UK have a rule of law system which states that no one is above the law, showcasing that the government is unable to abuse laws as a way to administer power. An independent judiciary in Mexico allows Mexico to be transparent with the people, and allows Mexico to have a rule of law system, protecting the liberties of the people under government authority. The rule of law in Mexico allows political legitimacy through the citizen's trust of the government in protection of their liberties and proper government protection under the set rules.

Some may argue that judicial independence decreases political legitimacy because judiciary actions taken as a check on power decrease effectiveness and facilitate gridlock which decreases political legitimacy. This being said, Judiciary independence increases political legitimacy because it actively acts as a check in the government to gain trust of citizens as well as facilitate the system's rule of law system, allowing citizen's civil liberties to be protected, causing an increase in political legitimacy.

Sample:

Judicial independence increases a government's political legitimacy by creating a system of checks and balances and keeping the rule of law.

The United Kingdom's supreme court provides checks and balances on the government of the UK by ensuring that common law is followed by the government. Even without judicial review an independent judiciary is able to keep the government in check. The court's ability to provide checks and balances increases a government's political legitimacy as the courts can prevent them from becoming too powerful or corrupt. A non-independent judiciary would not be able to go against the government's interest as easily and it may allow the government to become corrupt.

Mexico's supreme court helps maintain the government's political legitimacy by upholding the rule of law. Maintaining the rule of law is crucial to ensuring political legitimacy as it prevents the government from circumventing the law or breaking it without consequence. A non-independent judiciary such as Russia's allows immense government corruption and authoritarianism as the most powerful party is able to control the courts and allow themselves to become more powerful by breaking the law without punishment. This has allowed Putin to remain in power in Russia without any resistance from the courts. Some may argue that a non-independent judiciary would allow for more accountability from judges as they would have to represent their party in order to be reelected. However, the corruption that comes with a non-independent judiciary outweighs any positives there may be.

Sample:

Judicial independence increases a government's political legitimacy by forcing the government to be held accountable for its actions by having rule of law as well as being a form of checks and balances which furthers stability in the country.

Mexico's supreme court is an independent judiciary that holds its executive branch accountable for its actions. By being independent of the executive branch, the supreme court is able to employ rule of law to make it clear what laws need to be followed by not just the citizens but the government itself as well. This level of accountability that the government is held to and the transparency it creates between the government and its people reinforces the stability of the country itself; therefore the judicial independence increases political legitimacy by also increasing its stability.

The United Kingdom and Northern Ireland also benefits from an judicial independence that comes in the form of the house of lords who hold the actions of the UK's parliament and prime minister accountable. Much like Mexico this increases the political legitimacy by improving the relationship between the people and its government by having the government be transparent about its actions due to the house of lords. The stability brought from this relationship between the government and the people is what increases the political legitimacy of the government.

Another perspective on this matter might look to Nigeria's supreme court as proof that an independent judiciary does not increase a country's political legitimacy. They however would be mistaken as Nigeria's judicial system is set up in such a way that on paper, it has the power to hold the executive branch accountable but in practice has little power to control the actions of the head of government. This has been reflected in the actions of the current president of Nigeria who has irresponsibly spent the country's budget and taken money from the country itself for personal gain. The judiciary unable to reprimand him from doing so.

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, “Judicial independence increases the government’s political legitimacy because judicial independence acts as a check on the other branches of government.”

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 UK has a democratic regime with an independent judiciary which actively checks the executive and legislative branches of government.” The response earned 1 point by stating, “Mexico ... [has] a rule of law system which states that no one is above the law. . . . An independent judiciary in Mexico allows Mexico to be transparent with the people, and allows Mexico to have a rule of law system, protecting the liberties of the people under government authority.”

Reasoning Score: 1

The response earned 1 point for using reasoning to explain the relationship between the evidence provided and the thesis by stating, “The rule of law in Mexico allows political legitimacy through the citizen’s trust of the government in protection of their liberties and proper government protection under the set rules.”

Alternative Perspectives Score: 1

The response earned 1 point for describing an alternate perspective and responding with refutation, concession, or rebuttal by stating, “Some may argue that judicial independence decreases political legitimacy because judiciary actions taken as a check on power decreases effectiveness and facilitates gridlock which decreases political legitimacy. This being said, Judiciary independence increases political legitimacy because it actively acts a check in the government to gain trust of citizens as well as facilitate the system’s rule of law system, allowing citizen’s civil liberties to be protected, causing an increase in political legitimacy.”

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, “Judicial independance increases a governments political legitimacy by creating a system of checks and balances and keeping the 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’s supreme court provides checks and balances on the government of the UK by ensuring that common law is followed by the government.” The response earned 1 point by stating, “A non independant judiciary such as russia’s allowes immense government corruption and authoritairiansim as the most powerful party is able to controll the courts and allow themselves to become more powerful by breaking the law without punishment.”

Reasoning Score: 1

The response earned 1 point for using reasoning to explain the relationship between the evidence provided and the thesis by stating, “Even without judicial review an independant judiciary is able to keep the government in check. The courts ability to provide checks and balances increases a governments political legitimacy as the courts can prevent them from becoming too powerfull or corrupt.”

Alternative Perspectives Score: 0

The response did not earn 1 point for describing an alternate perspective and responding with refutation, concession, or rebuttal because the response does not refer to the overall prompt of legitimacy.

Question 4 (continued)**Sample: 4C****Score: 3****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, “Judicial independence increases a government’s political legitimacy by forcing the government to be held accountable for its actions by having rule of law as well as being a form of checks and balances which furthers stability in the country.”

Evidence Score: 1

The response earned 1 point for supporting the thesis with one piece 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, “Mexico’s supreme court is an independent judiciary that holds its executive branch accountable for its actions. By being independent of the executive branch, the supreme court is able to employ rule of law to make it clear what laws need to be followed by not just the citizens but the government itself as well.” The response did not earn a point for the United Kingdom because the evidence presented is based on the legislature rather than the judiciary.

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 in Mexico the “level of accountability that the government is held to and the transparency it creates between the government and its people reinforces the stability of the country itself; therefore the judicial independence increases political legitimacy by also increasing its stability.”

Alternative Perspectives Score: 0

The response did not earn 1 point for describing an alternate perspective and responding with refutation, concession, or rebuttal because the response presents evidence from a third country case but does not offer an alternative thesis.