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# AP<sup>®</sup> United States Government and Politics

## Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary Set 1

### **Inside:**

#### **Free-Response Question 4**

- ☒ **Scoring Guidelines**
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**Question 4: Argument Essay****6 points**

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
<b>Row A</b> <b>Claim/Thesis</b>  <b>(0–1 points)</b>	<b>0 points</b> Does not meet the criteria for one point.	<b>1 point</b> Responds to the prompt with a defensible claim or thesis that establishes a line of reasoning.
	<b>Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</b>	
	<b>Responses that do not earn this point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only restate the prompt.</li> <li>Do not make a claim that responds to the prompt.</li> </ul>	<b>Responses that earn this point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respond to the prompt rather than restating or rephrasing the prompt and establish a line of reasoning.</li> <li>Provide a defensible claim or thesis that establishes a line of reasoning as to whether the use of social media has helped or hindered participatory democracy.</li> </ul>
	<b>Examples that do not earn this point:</b>  <b>Restate the prompt</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“Social media has improved or impeded democracy.”</i></li> </ul> <b>Do not respond to the prompt</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“Americans love to talk about politics.”</i></li> </ul>	<b>Examples that earn this point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“Using social media helps participatory democracy because users can improve their political knowledge.”</i></li> <li><i>“By connecting people to multiple institutions and political processes, social media has helped participatory democracy in the United States.”</i></li> <li><i>“Social media has hindered participatory democracy by making Americans less certain about political information.”</i></li> <li><i>“When social media is used to spread negative information about politics, it makes citizens less willing to participate in the democratic process.”</i></li> </ul>
<b>Additional Notes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The claim or thesis must consist of one or more sentences that may be located anywhere in the response.</li> <li>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.</li> </ul>		

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria			
Row B Evidence  (0–3 points)	<b>0 points</b> Does not meet the criteria for one point.	<b>1 point</b> Provides one piece of evidence that is <u>relevant to the topic</u> of the prompt.	<b>2 points</b> Uses <u>one</u> piece of specific and relevant evidence to <u>support the claim or thesis</u> . <b>OR</b> Provides two pieces of evidence that are relevant to the topic of the prompt.	<b>3 points</b> Uses <u>two</u> pieces of specific and relevant evidence to <u>support the claim or thesis</u> .
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes				
<b>Responses that do not earn points:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Do not provide any accurate evidence.</li><li>Provide evidence that is not relevant to the topic.</li></ul>	<b>Responses that earn 1 point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Must provide one piece of evidence relevant to the topic of the prompt. This evidence can come from one of the foundational documents listed in the prompt, any other foundational document, or from knowledge of course concepts.</li></ul>	<b>Responses that earn 2 points:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Provide one piece of specific and relevant evidence that supports the claim or thesis.</li></ul> <b>OR</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Must provide two pieces of evidence relevant to the topic of the prompt. This evidence can come from one of the foundational documents listed in the prompt, any other foundational document, or from knowledge of course concepts.</li></ul>	<b>Responses that earn 3 points:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Provide two pieces of specific and relevant evidence that support the claim or thesis. One of these pieces of evidence <b>must</b> come from a foundational document listed in the prompt. The other piece of evidence can come from a different foundational document or from knowledge of course concepts.</li></ul>	
<b>Examples that do not earn points:</b>  <b>Provide evidence that is not specific</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>“Politics is about communication.”</li></ul> <b>Provide evidence that is not relevant to the topic of the prompt</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>“The Third Amendment stops the military from seizing a civilian’s house.”</li></ul>	<b>Examples of evidence that are relevant to the <u>topic</u> of the prompt:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>“Linkage institutions connect people to their representatives.”</li><li>“Political information includes new events and investigative journalism.”</li></ul> <b>Examples of acceptable specific and relevant evidence that support the claim or thesis (one example is one piece of evidence):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>“Social media can be used to learn more about candidates and the election process.”</li><li>“Presidents have used social media to encourage voters to support their policies.”</li><li>“Having freedom of speech means that people can complain to their representatives.”</li><li>“Misinformation on social media has led to violent reactions from citizens.”</li><li>“The First Amendment guarantees that people have the right to communicate their needs to their elected representatives.”</li><li>“The First Amendment makes it easier for social media to distribute false information.”</li><li>“Federalist No. 10 argues that factions are a threat to democracy.”</li><li>“Letter from a Birmingham Jail urged citizens to take direct action to seek equality and justice.”</li></ul>			
<b>Additional Notes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>To earn one or two points in Row B, the response does not need to have earned the point for claim/thesis in Row A.</li><li>To earn three points in Row B, the response must have a defensible claim/thesis (earned the point in Row A).</li><li>To earn three points in Row B, the response must use one of the foundational documents listed in the prompt.</li></ul>				

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
<b>Row C</b> <b>Reasoning</b>  <b>(0–1 points)</b>	<b>0 points</b> Does not meet the criteria for one point.	<b>1 point</b> Uses reasoning (classification, process, causation, or comparison) to explain how or why the evidence supports an argument relevant to the prompt.
	<b>Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</b>	
	<b>Responses that do not earn this point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include evidence but offer no reasoning to connect the evidence to the claim or thesis.</li> <li>• Restate the prompt without explaining how the evidence supports the claim or thesis.</li> </ul>	<b>Responses that earn this point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain the relationship between the evidence provided and an argument.</li> </ul> <b>Examples of reasoning that explain how the evidence supports the claim or thesis:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“Social media gives us better access to what’s happening in politics, and when we know what’s going on, we can act to make things better. That’s good for participatory democracy.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“Social media makes it easier for our representatives to respond to citizens’ needs, which improves efficacy and increase participation further.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“If the First Amendment allows citizens to spread misinformation, the quality of political knowledge will continue to decrease, and people will participate less in politics.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“When social media intensifies political polarization, people can be discouraged from participating in the political process and may even tune out politics all together.”</i></li> </ul>
	<b>Additional Notes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To earn this point, the response must have provided at least one piece of specific and relevant evidence.</li> <li>• The explanation of the relationship between one piece of evidence and a well reasoned argument relevant to the prompt is sufficient to earn this point.</li> </ul>	

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
<b>Row D</b> <b>Responds to Alternate Perspectives</b>	<b>0 points</b> Does not meet the criteria for one point.	<b>1 point</b> Responds to an opposing or alternate perspective using rebuttal or refutation.
<b>(0–1 points)</b>	<b>Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</b>	
	<b>Responses that do not earn this point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restate the opposite of the claim or thesis.</li> <li>May identify or describe an alternate perspective but do not rebut or refute that perspective.</li> <li>Rebut or refute a foundational document rather than an alternate perspective.</li> </ul>	<b>Responses that earn this point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Must describe an alternate perspective AND rebut or refute that perspective.</li> </ul>
	<b>Examples of responses that do not earn the point:</b> <b>Restate the opposite of the claim or thesis</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“Some people say that linkage institutions are good for democracy.”</i></li> </ul> <b>Describe an alternate perspective but do not rebut or refute that perspective</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“Changes in communication have given rise to ideologically-driven programming, which has contributed to issues with political knowledge and political participation.”</i></li> </ul>	<b>Examples of acceptable responses to an alternate perspective may include:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“Even if social media has introduced people to questionable information, it has encouraged them to become involved in politics anyway, which is good.”</i></li> <li><i>“Even though the rise of ideologically driven news sources has created some confusion, they are also giving our elected representatives a better perspective on what the people want, and that is good for participatory democracy.”</i></li> <li><i>“While some may argue that social media improves democracy because it improves linkage institutions, it has also harmed the credibility of news sources, which is ultimately worse for participatory democracy.”</i></li> <li><i>“Many would argue that social media gives more people an opportunity to express their opinions to a larger audience, but that could lead to an overwhelming amount of information that can discourage people from wanting to engage in the political process in the first place.”</i></li> </ul>
	<b>Additional Notes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To earn this point, the response must have a defensible claim or thesis (earned the point in Row A).</li> <li>Responses that demonstrate an incorrect understanding of the alternate perspective do not earn this point.</li> </ul>	

As the modern day democracy becomes more technologically advanced and connected through social media, the use of social media also has an unavoidable influence on politics and participatory democracy. The use of social media has helped participatory democracy by allowing for a direct link between candidates/political parties to constituents and by allowing the use of a vast vacuole of information for voters to make the most informed decisions regarding politics.

To begin, social media has positively benefited participatory democracy by giving voters access to a large capsule of information in which they can learn about the current issues, world events, agendas, and more regarding everyday government. The First Amendment to the Consitution of the United States protects the right to free speech, free press, assembly, and government interference regarding religion. Specifically, the First Amendment's protections regarding speech have an important link with social media. People are allowed to use social media to spread information regarding anything to people that are interested in it. Voters can use social media to uncover information regarding policy, candidate agendas, and more. News stations can post live information to constantly keep citizens updated on what's happening every day. This helps benefit participatory democracy because a more informed citizen is more likely to vote and vote based on issues instead of just voting for someone who represents an ideology. To conclude, social media benefits participatory democracy by exposing citizens to a vacuole information, which increases voter participation and voter awareness of issues.

Continuing, social media has helped participatory democracy by linking the candidates and political parties directly to the people. In order for voters to make decisions, they need to be familiar with current candidates, political parties, interest groups, and more. Social media allows for a constant comparison between vying people, parties, and groups by engaging citizens on the platform. Federalist 10, a document written by James Madison, mainly explains what factions are and how they affect government and the people. James Madison points out that factions are necessary to the concept of a free government and the only way to make them go away is to erase the fabrics of liberty, in which the country would be free no more. This applies to social media because the "factions" being refered to can be political parties and interest groups. Social media specifically allows a link between citizens and these factions through videos, live rallies, live debate, e.t.c. This information benefits participatory democracy by allowing citizens to understand the will of candidates and parties and help them decide to vote/participate in participatory democracy. To summarize, social media benefits participatory democracy because social media helps people get dirctly linked to candidates, parties, and competing factions.

Additionally, the information that social media provides to citizens benefits participatory democracy in other ways. Interest groups, candidates, and parties use social media as a way

to pressure people to vote through ads that remind them of voting day, polling places, e.t.c. These competing groups want as many people to vote as possible so they can win their election. This has a positive impact on participatory democracy because the relentless attempts to increase participation in elections generally works, which means more people are voting and it is more likely that the public is getting who they want in office. Since more people participate in elections because of the efforts of parties and other competing groups, the concept of participator democracy benefits from this as well.

On the opposing side, some say that the incresed use of social media in modern day democracy has hindered participatory democracy because of the constant barrage of fake news, attack ads, and exaggerated information about candidates in their actions. Some say that attack ads cause people to not participate in elections and fake news leads people to choose the wrong candidate for office. Others say that the constant defamation of candidate character is not helpful to the election process. While this may be true to some extent, social media can't be disregarded as a source of information simply because some people don't use it correctly. Social media helps people come to informed decisions about political parties, candidates, and interest groups, thus benefiting participatory democracy by incresing voter activeness.

In conclusion, social media benefits participatory democracy for a variety of reasons. Social media allows for citizens to learn about candidates, interest groups, and more to make better decisions. It also allows voters to be directly connected to candidates so they can hear the extent of the desired policy. Because of social media, many people vote and take part in participatory democracy. While some find social media as a barrier to the best of information, it still serves the purpose of informing and connecting voters to parties and candidates. Overall, social media has benefited participatory democracy and helped politics.

Social media was created for the purpose to express yourself, communicate, and create a healthy environment for people to learn. Social media has helped participatory democracy because it has helped gain rights and establish freedoms. They have gained rights because of supreme court cases over social media and freedom of speech such as in the United States v. FEC giving people and media the ability to write and post about government secrets. They got established freedoms because in the first amendment it establishes free speech and free press for the people that social media strives from.

Social media has helped participatory democracy such as in the court case United States v. FEC. In this case the FEC found government files talking about that the United States is losing the Vietnam war, this outraged citizens and making people want to pull out of Vietnam and end the war. The media's ability to find information to help the people allowed for the people to participate in democracy calling for the end of the Vietnam war and to bring their children back home. This finding of secret government files outraged the United States government and created a case in which they argued that secret cases couldn't be shown in social media but the supreme court found the FEC in the right and awarding the people with more rights to free speech. This allows for people to find more information even on secret topics and help the people participate in democracy because of these new findings and information.

Social media has also helped participatory democracy through the first amendment of the Constitution of the United States. The first amendment helped establish free speech, free press, and many more allowing the people to speak freely except for anything that causes chaos. Social media allowed for more people to use free speech across the world helping people learn and speak about their political beliefs and helping participatory democracy. Social media allowed people to speak about their beliefs and communicate their reasons why to more and more people giving the people more ways to free speech. This helped participatory democracy because it allowed people to speak their mind to other people and help them participate in democracy in many ways also in the ways of interest groups online or donations to campaigns through social media.

Social media helped participatory democracy because it helps establish rights and gain freedoms through the United States v. FEC and First amendment of the Constitution of the United States. It helped establish rights with the first amendment because it helped people use their freedom of speech across the globe and it helped gain freedoms through the United States v. FEC because it helped people gain more freedoms within freedom of speech because the supreme court ruled that secret files from the government could be talked about and that the media had the right to tell the people. It helped participatory democracy because it allowed people to speak their mind and use their freedoms of speech and also allowed for more participation making politics much closer and world known.



The use of social media has helped the participatory in democracy. It helps to share and voice opinions for people to hear how other people feel to help maybe learn about different points of views. Such as the First amendment to the constitutions of the united states is a big example. This amendment means a lot to the U.S. The constitution claims that people are born and created equal. This amendment has helped stop many things that were making other americans hurt fellow americans. Social media is a great way to spread messages and educate people on topics like this and spread information about the amendment and help spread the word on how to properly use it. In some ways social media can be bad for politics it can start bad things and even spread misinformation which can cause a big mess.

## 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: 6**

**Claim/Thesis: 1**

**Evidence: 3**

**Reasoning: 1**

**Alternative Perspectives: 1**

The response earned 1 point for the thesis. The response makes a defensible claim: “The use of social media has helped participatory democracy by allowing for a direct link between candidates/ political parties to constituents and by allowing the use of a vast vacuole of information for voters” and establishes a line of reasoning when it adds “to make the most informed decisions regarding politics.”

The response earned 3 points for evidence. The first piece of evidence the response provides is a foundational document: “The First Amendment to the Consitution of the United States protects the right to free speech, free press, [and] assembly.” and it supports their claim by writing “the First Amendment’s protections regarding speech have an important link with social media.” The response uses *Federalist* No. 10 as a second piece of evidence and shows it supports their claim when it states “This applies to social media because the “factions” being refered to can be political parties and interest groups. Social media specifically allows a link between citizens and these factions through videos, live rallies, live debate, e.t.c.”

The response earned 1 point for reasoning. The response states, “This information benefits participatory democracy by allowing citizens to understand the will of candidates and parties and help them decide to vote/participate in participatory democracy.” This provides a deeper explanation as to how this supports the claim.

The response earned 1 point for an alternative perspective. The response states “On the opposing side, some say that the incresed use of social media in modern day democracy has hindered participatory democracy because of the constant barrage of fake news, attack ads, and exaggerated information about candidates in their actions. Some say that attack ads cause people to not participate in elections and fake news leads people to choose the wrong candidate for office,” correctly identifying an alternative perspective which negatively effects participatory democracy. The response also states “While this may be true to some extent, social media can’t be disregarded as a source of information simply because some people don’t use it correctly. Social media helps people come to informed decisions about political parties, candidates, and interest groups, thus benefiting participatory democracy by incresing voter activeness,” which rebuts that perspective.

**Question 4 (continued)****Sample: 4B****Score: 4****Claim/Thesis: 1****Evidence: 2****Reasoning: 1****Alternative Perspectives: 0**

The response earned 1 point for the thesis. The response describes a defensible claim: “Social media has helped participatory democracy” and establishes a line of reasoning later when the response states “becasue it allowed poeple to speech their mind to other people and ehlp them participate in democracy in many ways also in the ways of interest groups online or donations to campagins through social media.”

The response earned 2 points for evidence. The response uses the First Amendment as one piece of evidence, which is also a foundational document, and shows how it supports the claim when they state “Social media allowed for more people to use free speech across the world helping people learn and speech about their political beliefs and helping participatory democracy.” The response incorrectly used “*United States v. FEC*” as a second piece of evidence to support their claim.

The response earned 1 point for reasoning. The response states, “Social media allowed for more people to use free speech across the world helping people learn and speech about their political beliefs and helping participatory democracy. Social media allowed people to speech about their beliefs and communicate their reasons why to more and more people giving the people mroe ways to free speech.” This provides a deeper explanation as to how the evidence supports their claim.

The response earned 0 points for an alternative perspective. The response does not provide or rebut an alternative perspective.

**Sample: 4C****Score: 1****Claim/Thesis: 1****Evidence: 0****Reasoning: 0****Alternative Perspectives: 0**

The response earned 1 point for the thesis. The response describes a defensible claim: “The use of social media has helped the partcipatory in democracy” and establishes a line of reasoning when it states, “It helps to share and voice opnions for people to hear how other people feel to help maybe leanr about diffrent points of veiws.”

The response earned 0 points for evidence. The response mentions, “Such as the First amendment to the constitutions of the united states is abig example. This amendment means a lot to the U.S. The constitutin claims that people are born and created equal” but these statements do not explain how these might provide evidence that supports their claim.

### **Question 4 (continued)**

The response earned 0 points for reasoning. While the response states, “This amendment means a lot to the U.S. The constitutin claims that people are born and created equal,” this is an inaccurate statement regarding the 1st Amendment.

The response earned 0 points for an alternative perspective. While the response states, “In some ways social media can be bad for polotic it can start bad things and even soread missinformation which can cause a big mess,” which provides an alternative perspective, but does not rebut nor refute that perspective.