
AP[®] United States 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**6 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 an elected legislature or an independent judiciary is more effective in preserving limited government.
	Examples that do not earn this point: Restate the prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“There are debates about whether an elected legislature or an independent judiciary is more effective in preserving limited government.”</i> Do not respond to the prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“The executive branch best protects limited government.”</i> 	Examples that earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“An elected legislature is more effective at preserving limited government because they are elected by the majority and are held accountable to the will of the people.”</i> <i>“An elected legislature is better able to preserve limited government because checks and balances allow the legislature to limit the other branches of government.”</i> <i>“An independent judiciary is better able to preserve limited government because checks and balances allow the judiciary to limit the other branches of government.”</i> <i>“The independent judiciary is more effective at preserving limited government because they are not accountable to the wishes of the majority.”</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 (0–3 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Provides one piece of evidence that is <u>relevant to the topic</u> of the prompt.	2 points Uses <u>one</u> piece of specific and relevant evidence to <u>support the claim or thesis</u> . OR Provides two pieces of evidence that are relevant to the topic of the prompt.	3 points Uses <u>two</u> pieces of specific and relevant evidence to <u>support the claim or thesis</u> .
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 topic.	Responses that earn 1 point: <ul style="list-style-type: none">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.	Responses that earn 2 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Provide one piece of specific and relevant evidence that supports the claim or thesis. OR <ul style="list-style-type: none">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.	Responses that earn 3 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Provide two pieces of specific and relevant evidence that support the claim or thesis. One of these pieces of evidence must 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.	
Examples that do not earn points: Provide evidence that is not specific <ul style="list-style-type: none">“Legislatures have representatives.” Provide evidence that is not relevant to the topic of the prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none">“The Constitutional Convention of 1787 was held in Philadelphia.”	Examples of evidence that are relevant to the <u>topic</u> of the prompt: <ul style="list-style-type: none">“The principle of republicanism is found in the design of our government.”“Article III of the Constitution establishes the judicial branch of government.” Examples of acceptable specific and relevant evidence that support the claim or thesis (one example is one piece of evidence): <ul style="list-style-type: none">“Legislative processes are conducted by officials who are directly elected by a majority of citizens.”“Article III establishes that federal judicial officials serve for a term of good behavior.”“Federalist No. 51 discusses how each branch can check the power of the other branches.”“Federalist No. 78 explains that the judicial branch is not elected and holds lifetime appointments.”“Article I establishes the legislative branch as well as qualifications for holding office, elections to the office, and the powers of the office.”			
Additional Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">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.To earn three points in Row B, the response must have a defensible claim/thesis (earned the point in Row A).To earn three points in Row B, the response must use one of the foundational documents listed in the prompt.				

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row C Reasoning (0–1 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Uses reasoning (classification, process, causation, or comparison) to explain how or why the evidence supports an argument relevant to the prompt.
	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. 	Responses that earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the relationship between the evidence provided and an argument. Examples of reasoning that explains how the evidence supports the claim or thesis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Article I establishes the legislative branch as well as qualifications for holding office, elections to the office, and the powers of the office. Article I preserves limited government because it allows voters to respond to decisions made by the legislature through elections.”</i> • <i>“Federalist No. 51 discusses how each branch can check the power of the other branches. A legislative override of a presidential veto is one way to check the power of the president and preserve limited government.”</i> • <i>“Federalist No. 51 discusses how each branch can check the power of the other branches. The Supreme Court preserves limited government through the use of judicial review, which allows them to decide if laws passed by Congress or executive orders issued by the president are constitutional.”</i> • <i>“Federalist No. 78 explains that the judicial branch is not elected and holds lifetime appointments. The judicial branch protects limited government because it is insulated from political pressures and can protect against the abuse of power by other branches.”</i>
	Additional Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To earn this point, the response must have provided at least one piece of specific and relevant evidence. • 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. 	

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 rebuttal or refutation.
(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 rebut or refute that perspective. Rebut or refute a foundational document rather than an alternate perspective. 	Responses that earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must describe an alternate perspective AND rebut or refute 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>“An elected legislature is also a strong way to protect limited government.”</i> Describe an alternate perspective but do not rebut or refute that perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Some may argue the executive branch is the best protector of limited government, which I would agree.”</i> 	Examples of acceptable responses to an alternate perspective may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Some people might say that an independent judiciary would best preserve limited government because they are not influenced by public opinion. However, an elected legislature better protects limited government because elections make them responsive to the will of the people.”</i> <i>“It can be argued that an elected legislature is more likely to preserve limited government because they are elected by their constituents. However, since an independent judiciary is not elected, they are not subject to the will of the people and therefore more likely to preserve limited government.”</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. 	

An elected legislature is more important than an independent judiciary in preserving limited government because the legislature can be held responsible by the people, while also serving as a check on the other branches of government to prevent government overreach.

Article 1 of the Constitution defines Congress, its power to make laws, a system of two houses, and how the House of Representatives is meant to be elected by the people. Expanding the government's power and degrading the rights of the people would be disliked by most Americans and the current legislature would be voted out of power, so since the legislature is elected by the public, Congress has an incentive to maintain a limited government.

Federalist No. 51 is an essay which argues that a strong system of checks and balances between a legislature, executive, and judiciary can encourage each branch to check each other and prevent government overreach. An elected legislature, representing the will of the people, can prevent the Executive from expanding their power and transcending the constitutional limits of a limited government by using impeachment or veto-overrides.

Some may argue that an independent judiciary is more effective in preserving limited government because they can use the power of judicial review to strike down laws that expand the government's power past the limits of the constitution. However, the courts have no ability to actually enforce their decision, so it is possible for the executive branch to simply ignore a court order for example, and continue to grow the government's power.

An elected legislature is more effective in preserving limited government than an independent judiciary because it better represents the wants and needs of the people that are being governed.

One of the ways that this can be seen is through Article I of the Constitution of the United States. In Article I, the powers, abilities, and responsibilities of Congress, which is an elected legislature, are explained. Article I describes how members of Congress are the only ones that can pass laws and are elected based on the population of each state in the House of Representatives. Furthermore, it highlights how members are up for reelection every 2 years in the House, and every 6 years in the Senate. This shows that an elected legislature is better for representing the wants and needs of the governed because the approval of the people is more important since the legislature is responsible for passing laws. Since the people being governed are the ones who elect members of the legislature, the legislature is more likely to listen to and pass laws that the people want. This will make the people being governed more satisfied and help preserve limited government.

Some who disagree may rebuttal and claim that the legislature has no responsibility to listen to those being governed after being elected. However, this does not work because since members of Congress are up for reelection every 2 or 6 years, any members who do not follow the will of the people will not be reelected. The reason that an elected legislature is more effective for preserving limited government is that the people being governed will keep electing different members until they find one that listens to them and follows their wishes. Due to the people being able to decide who makes their laws, the elected legislature is more effective because the people being governed are less likely to turn against their limited government if they instead have the ability to change who is in power.

An elected legislature is more effective in preserving limited government because of the ability to convey the will of the people and to further develop a government with checks and balances.

The will of the people is an important aspect in American's government because it is something that we always strive to accomplish. In Federalist No. 51 Hamilton argues that the executive branch must have the single leader so that the government can have a president who can make quick and decisive decisions. This allows the president to hear the needs of the people and have provide action to ease those needs quickly. A elective legislature would be able to accomplish this same need of the people. By allowing the people to elect who is in the legislature they are essentially speaking their mind through who they voted for.

Having a system of checks and balances will preserve a limited government. An elected legislature will increase the diversity of parties causing more disagreement in the legislative branch. The less agreement will lead to slower legislation passed. This will severely limit the government because having this balance decreases the chance of having one party in control.

A elected legislature will preserve a limited government because the will of the people can be more frequently heard and fulfilled and the checks and balances of the legislative branch will be that no one party can be in control.

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 describes a defensible claim when it states, “An elected legislature is more important than an independent judiciary in preserving limited government” and establishes a line of reasoning when it states “because the legislature can be held responsible by the people.”

The response earned 3 points for evidence. The response identifies one piece of evidence as “Article 1 of the Constitution defines Congress, its power to make laws, a system of two houses, and how the House of Representatives is meant to be elected by the people.” The response also uses “Federalist No. 51 is an essay which argues that a strong system of checks and balances between a legislature, executive, and judiciary” as a second piece of evidence. Both pieces of evidence support the thesis.

The response earned 1 point for reasoning. The response states, “Expanding the government’s power and degrading the rights of the people would be disliked by most Americans and the current legislature would be voted out of power, so since the legislature is elected by the public, Congress has an incentive to maintain a limited government.” This provides an explanation as to why Article I supports government responsiveness to the public.

The response earned 1 point for an alternative perspective. The response states, “Some may argue that an independent judiciary is more effective in preserving limited government because they can use the power of judicial review” which correctly identifies an alternative perspective. The response also states, “However, the courts have no ability to actually enforce their decision” which refutes that perspective.

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 when it states, “An elected legislature is more effective in preserving limited government than an independent judiciary” and establishes a line of reasoning when it states “because it better represents the wants and needs of the people that are being governed.”

Question 4 (continued)

The response earned 2 points for evidence. The response states, “One of the ways that this can be seen is through Article I of the Constitution of the United States. In Article I, the powers, abilities, and responsibilities of Congress” as one piece of evidence that is consistent with their claim. The response did not use a second piece of evidence to support their claim.

The response earned 1 point for reasoning. The response states “Furthermore, it highlights how members are up for reelection every 2 years in the House, and every 6 years in the Senate. This shows that an elected legislature is better for representing the wants and needs of the governed because the approval of the people is more important . . .» this ties the evidence to their thesis by explaining how an elected legislature fosters public influence.

The response earned 0 points for an alternative perspective. The response states “Some who disagree may rebuttal and claim that the legislature has no responsibility to listen to those being governed after being elected. However, this does not work because since members of Congress are up for reelection every 2 or 6 years, any members who do not follow the will of the people will not be reelected” which presents a negative view of their claim, but not an alternative perspective. A correct understanding of an alternate perspective would present information about why some think an independent judiciary would be better at preserving limited government.

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 when it states, “An elected legislature is more effective in preserving limited government” and establishes a line of reasoning when it states “becasue of the ability to convey the will of the people and to further develop a goverment with checks and balances.”

The response earned 0 points for evidence. The response incorrectly describes evidence for Federalist No. 51 and checks and balances.

The response earned 0 points for reasoning. The response did not provide one piece of specific and relevant evidence.

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