Chief Reader Report on Student Responses:

2021 AP® Comparative Government and Politics Free-Response Questions

• Number of Students Scored	19,292		
• Number of Readers	117		
• Score Distribution	Exam Score	N	%At
	5	3,212	16.6
	4	4,726	24.5
	3	5,917	30.7
	2	2,869	14.9
	1	2,568	13.3
• Global Mean	3.16		

The following comments on the 2021 free-response questions for AP® Comparative Government and Politics were written by the Chief Reader, Dr. Eduardo Magalhães III, Professor of Political Science, Simpson College. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student preparation in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

Question #1   **Task:** Describe and Explain

Max. Points: 4   **Mean Score:** 1.46

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

The intent of this conceptual analysis question was to assess students' understanding of the rule of law in comparison to rule by law and the implications of its use by states. Students were expected to define rule of law and be able to distinguish what makes rule of law different from rule by law. In addition, students had to demonstrate that they understand what a state could do to strengthen rule of law. Finally, students needed to demonstrate that they understand the relationship between rule of law and citizen participation by explaining how the absence of rule of law affects citizen participation. The concept application disciplinary skills tested were descriptive and explanatory.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Most students were able to accurately explain how the absence of rule of law affects political participation by either noting that arbitrary treatment stifles participation by lowering political efficacy and raising the fear of government retribution or that it increases participation by driving citizens to protest or rebel against government corruption. Many students were able to define that rule of law exists when no one is above the law, including government officials. Many students were also able to explain that the state can strengthen rule of law by strengthening checks and balances to prevent arbitrary decisions by one branch of government.

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

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	*Responses that Demonstrate Understanding*
• Failure to provide the required comparison to rule of law when defining rule by law.	• "Rule of law holds all citizens and people in power to the same legal standard. The difference between this and rule by law is that rule by law does not hold government officials accountable for breaking the law."
• Failure to clarify that separation of powers is not sufficient to strenghthen rule of law.	• "A state might strengthen rule of law "'by making the supreme courts independent from outside influence with the ability to use judicial review to provide checks and balances on the executive branch.'"

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

AP® resources that are relevant to the content and skill(s) addressed in this question:

- Unit 1 on Systems, Regimes, and Government in the CED addresses the concept of rule of law.
- Unit 3 on Political Culture and Participation in the CED addresses connections between rule of law and political participation.
- The resources for Unit 1 in AP Classroom include topic questions and formative assessments related to this question.
- The AP Daily Videos for Topic 1.3 discuss the concept of rule of law in democratic and authoritarian regimes.
- The AP Daily Videos for Topic 3.4 address how rule of law may affect political values and beliefs.

Question #2   **Task:** Interpret, Describe, and Draw Conclusions

Max. Points: 5   **Mean Score:** 3.06

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

The intent of this question was to assess students' ability to interpret, describe, and draw conclusions from quantitative data presented in a graph. The intent, furthermore, was to assess students' ability to draw conclusions about democratic consolidation generally, and in Russia, one of the countries studied in the AP Comparative Government and Politics course, in particular. The chart presented data from the Freedom House Freedom Index for Mexico, Russia, and China for the time period 1991–2018. Students were expected to be able to correctly interpret data presented to them (in this case the Freedom House index in which a higher score corresponds to less freedom) and also to be able to recognize how that data is changing for a particular country (Russia) over time. Then students were expected to demonstrate their understanding of the process of democratic consolidation by describing one way that a country could consolidate its democracy. Students were also expected to be able to draw a connection between the data in the chart (which indicated a decline in freedom score for Russia) and the process of democratic consolidation, and the failure of that process, in Russia, by explaining why Russia did NOT consolidate its democracy between 1995 and 2000. Finally, students were expected to demonstrate their understanding of the political changes that have occurred in Russia under President Putin, which have resulted in Russia having the same level of freedom as China, as measured by Freedom House, by explaining how one change had that impact.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

The biggest challenge students had on this question was that they thought that Putin had been president during the period discussed in the question (1995–2000), when he only became president at the very end of that period. Consequently, student answers emphasized developments that Putin was responsible for, rather than Yeltsin. In addition, some students failed to understand the graph correctly and interpreted the data to say that China was the most free country. Students also often confused democratic consolidation with consolidation of governmental power. Students did a good job of explaining changes under Putin that produced change in Russia's Freedom House score.

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

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	Responses that Demonstrate Understanding
• "Putin was president of Russia during the period from 1995 to 2000."	• "During the Yeltsin regime in the 1990s, Russia failed to consolidate its democracy due to widespread corruption within the regime and the failure to establish a legitimate opposition party."

• "According to the graph, China is the most free."	• "According to the graph, Mexico is the most free."
• "There are many policies countries can adopt to prevent the emergence of democracy" (misunderstanding of democratic consolidation).	• "A country can consolidate democracy by establishing free and fair elections."

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

AP® resources that are relevant to the content and skill(s) addressed in this question:

- Unit 1 on Political Systems, Regimes, and Governments in the CED addresses the concept of democratic consolidation and methods of political analysis.
- The resources for Unit 1 in AP Classroom provide topic questions and formative assessment related to this question.
- The AP Daily Videos for Topic 1.1 focus on content and skills used in the analysis of quantitative data.
- The AP Daily Videos for Topic 1.4 discuss the process and characteristics of democratization, including the concept of democratic consolidation.
- AP Daily Review Session 4 offers practice and suggestions for developing strong skills used in responding to quantitative analysis FRQs.

Question #3   **Task:** Describe and Explain

Max. Points: 5   **Mean Score:** 2.34

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

The intent of this question was to assess students' understanding of the concept of social movements and their ability to describe and explain the impact of social movements in countries studied in the AP Comparative Government and Politics course. The skills tested were descriptive and explanatory. Students first were expected to define social movements. Then they had to demonstrate their understanding of social movements by describing two examples of social movements in two course countries. Finally, students needed to demonstrate their understanding of the relationship between social movements and policymaking by explaining how social movements in those two countries have impacted government policies.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Students seemed to have limited understanding of the meaning of social movements. They had trouble distinguishing them from interest groups. In addition, while students were able to provide examples of social movemen2ts in democracies, and how those movements impacted policies, they had difficulty recognizing the role of social movements in authoritarian regimes.

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

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	Responses that Demonstrate Understanding
• Defining social movements in the same terms as interest groups.	• "Social movements are loosely organized groups outside the government that push for social or political policy changes."
• "Authoritarian regimes have experienced significant social change due to social movements" (not specific enough). • "The Industrial Revolution is an example of a social movement in the UK, and the Great Cultural Revolution is an example of a social movement in China."	• "Authoritarian regimes such as Russia, China, and Iran restrict social movement influence by ignoring their demands or silencing their supporters." • "An example of a social movement in the UK was the effort to get a referendum passed on leaving the EU. An example in China would be groups advocating for the reduction of pollution."

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

AP® resources that are relevant to the content and skill(s) addressed in this question:

• Unit 4 on Party and Electoral Systems and Citizen Organizations in the CED focuses on social movements in Topic 4.5.

- The resources for Topic 4.5 in AP Classroom provide topic questions and formative assessments related to this question.
- The AP Daily Videos for Topic 4.5 discuss constraints on civil liberties in democratic and authoritarian regimes.
- AP Daily Review Session 5 offers practice and suggestions for developing skills used in comparison FRQs.

Question #4   **Task:** Argumentation

Max. Points: 5   **Mean Score:** 2.72

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

The intent of this question was to assess students' understanding of term limits and their impact on legitimacy in regimes using one or more of the following course concepts: stability, accountability, or policy implementation. Students were expected to articulate a defensible claim/thesis and establish a line of reasoning using one or more of the concepts provided; support the thesis with relevant evidence from a course country; use reasoning to explain why the evidence provided supports the thesis; and respond to an alternative perspective using refutation, concession, or rebuttal. Students were expected to write an argumentative essay, demonstrating each of the skills mentioned above. In particular, students needed to be able to demonstrate their understanding of the relationship between executive term limits and legitimacy by indicating what the causal mechanism of that relationship is—using the course concepts to provide that connection. Students further needed to demonstrate their knowledge of the course countries by providing appropriate evidence from these countries involving the course concept or concepts the students used in their thesis. Students also needed to able to demonstrate their understanding of how the evidence they described was linked to the relationship between term limits and legitimacy. Finally, students needed to demonstrate their understanding of alternative explanations by describing an alternative thesis but then explaining why that thesis is inadequate (or, if they chose to concede, by explaining why the alternative is actually better than their thesis).

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

The different tasks within this question required students to demonstrate several higher-order thinking skills, applying their substantive knowledge about term limits and political legitimacy while using argumentation. This type of question required the content knowledge from the course to be integrated with the practice of providing a defensible thesis, providing specific and relevant evidence and reasoning, and responding to an alternative perspective. Most students were successful in providing a correct piece of specific and relevant evidence related to the prompt. Students generally demonstrated an understanding of term limits, with most students being able to articulate how they connect to political legitimacy. Students also were generally successful in articulating a defensible claim with a line of reasoning to support the thesis. Students who provided a correct thesis were generally able to provide at least one piece of evidence that supported the thesis, with most being able to provide a correct piece of evidence from one of the provided course concepts. Students were least successful in responding to an alternate perspective.

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

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	Responses that Demonstrate Understanding
• Russia no longer has term limits, or the UK has a five-year term limit on the prime minister.	• "The Russian constitution was amended to allow Putin to restart his term limits therefore decreasing accountability and political legitimacy."
• Not describing an alternate perspective or not responding to it.	• "While term limits could lead to instability due to inconsistent policy from one leader to the next, the length of the terms are long enough to provide political legitimacy to the regime."

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

AP® resources that are relevant to the content and skill(s) addressed in this question:

- The core concept of political legitimacy is discussed in Unit 1 on Political Systems, Regimes, and Governments in the CED.
- Executive Term Limits are the focus of Topic 2.4 in the CED.
- The resources in AP Classroom for Unit 2 include topic questions and formative assessments related to this question.
- The AP Daily Videos for Topic 2.4 focus on writing a thesis statement about term limits as a check on executive authority.
- The AP Daily Videos for Topic 5.7 offer practice on the argumentation skills of refutation, concession, and rebuttal.