



Student Performance Q&A:

2013 AP[®] Comparative Government and Politics Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2013 free-response questions for AP[®] Comparative Government and Politics were written by the Chief Reader, Glenn Hastedt of James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia. 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 performance 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

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was for students to identify which parties in Great Britain formed the coalition government after the 2010 parliamentary elections, why they formed a coalition, and what challenges the coalition faced. The skills tested were descriptive and analytical: to identify the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats as the coalition partners following the 2010 parliamentary elections, to explain why they had to form a coalition, and to describe a domestic policy issue that threatens the coalition.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 0.92 out of a possible 3 points.

Students did well in identifying the parties that formed the coalition. Most students identified the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats as the coalition partners in the government. Most students also identified a domestic policy that threatened the coalition, though some students were unable to describe a policy difference that has threatened the coalition.

What were common student errors or omissions?

A common error students made was confusing elections or voting with the selection of a government. Many students discussed parties not receiving a majority of votes, rather than not having a majority of seats in the House of Commons. Many students were unable to correctly describe a domestic policy issue that has threatened the coalition.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP® Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Emphasize the difference between winning elections or securing votes, and forming a government in a parliamentary system. Make sure students are informed about recent elections and contemporary issues so that they are aware of the policy issues facing the six countries studied in the AP® Comparative Government and Politics course.

Question 2

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was to assess student understanding and application of normative and empirical perspectives. The skills tested were conceptual and analytical: to apply theoretical concepts and to distinguish between normative, or value-related, statements and empirical, or factual, statements. The students had three specific tasks: to identify a given statement as either normative or empirical, to identify a second statement as either normative or empirical, and to explain the difference between empirical and normative assertions.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 1.62 out of a possible 3 points.

Most students correctly identified statement X as empirical and statement Y as normative. Some students were able to explain the difference between normative and empirical perspectives.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many students were unable to explain the difference between the normative and empirical perspectives. Common mistakes in explaining the differences between normative and empirical were defining the relationship between the two as being independent/dependent, cause/effect, general/specific, or as past/present. Some students defined either normative or empirical correctly, but did not complete the explanation by highlighting the difference between the two concepts. Some students correctly explained the difference between empirical and normative, but failed to answer the question correctly as a result of reversing the identification of normative and empirical.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP® Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Emphasize the definition and application of correct vocabulary from political science throughout the AP® Comparative Government and Politics course, pointing out normative (subjective) and empirical (objective) viewpoints.

Question 3

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was to assess students' understanding of revolution and coup d'état and to describe the real-world results of coups d'état in a specific country. The skills tested were conceptual and descriptive. The students had three specific tasks: to describe one major way that

a revolution differs from a coup d'état, to identify the country studied in the AP[®] Comparative Government and Politics course that has experienced several successful coups d'état in the past half century, and to describe one political result of the coups in this country.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 1.75 out of a possible 3 points.

The majority of students correctly identified Nigeria as the country in the AP[®] Comparative Government and Politics course that has had several successful coups d'état in the past 50 years. Most students were able to describe how a revolution differs from a coup d'état and to point out how coups in Nigeria affected the country politically.

What were common student errors or omissions?

A common problem was that students frequently claimed that a difference between coups d'état and revolutions is the level of violence, although both revolutions and coups d'état can be either violent or non-violent. Students often incorrectly claimed that the coups in Nigeria resulted in continued military dominance or political instability in the period following 1999 (the Fourth Republic).

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP[®] Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Emphasize the importance of clearly articulating the timeframe of events. Stress the significance of using words that clearly convey that you are referring to differences across phenomena rather than just providing a litany of traits for each, thus leaving in doubt whether the students know where the real difference lies.

Question 4

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of the question was for students to examine political legitimacy and to consider the different sources of legitimacy associated with the offices of the president of Russia and the supreme leader of Iran. The skills tested were conceptual and descriptive: to define and describe. Students had three specific tasks: to define political legitimacy, to describe one source of political legitimacy for the office of the president of Russia, and to describe a different source of political legitimacy for the office of the supreme leader of Iran.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 1.32 out of a possible 3 points.

Students were particularly good at defining political legitimacy. Many could describe two distinct sources of political legitimacy, one for the office of the president of Russia and the other for the office of the Supreme Leader of Iran.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students had difficulty defining political legitimacy. Students were able to identify, but not describe, sources of political legitimacy. Quite a few students described different types of political

legitimacy linked to the persons occupying these executive offices instead of describing the sources of political legitimacy for these executive offices. Others described the powers of these executives without linking those powers to different sources of political legitimacy.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP® Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Continue to emphasize the differences between the concept of political legitimacy and the sources of political legitimacy. Also, train students on how to write responses that require a description. Finally, reiterate to students that if a question asks about a particular political office, responses should include information related to that office and not just the particular person occupying that office.

Question 5

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of the question was for students to define supranational organizations; to identify two supranational organizations; and, for each supranational organization, name a country studied in the AP® Comparative Government and Politics course that is a member of the supranational organization identified. The skills tested are conceptual with application of the concept: to define and identify a supranational organization and name a member country in a short conceptual response. Students had three specific tasks: define supranational organization, which required an understanding of the concept; identify one specific supranational organization and name a member country; and identify another supranational organization and name a member country, which required knowledge of the concept of a supranational organization in practice.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was .90 out of a possible 3 points.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Many students were able to define a supranational organization. Some students, in their definition of supranational organization, did not discuss the ability of the supranational organization to exert sovereignty over member nations. Many students incorrectly identified supranational organizations. In other cases, some students incorrectly named member nations of correct supranational organizations. Some students provided more than the required number of responses for the prompt. When this occurred, if one of the examples provided was incorrect, the student earned partial credit.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP® Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Continue to emphasize, practice, and develop various strategies to help student develop the skill of correctly defining concepts on a regular basis throughout the course. With the use of textbooks and outside sources, students should be exposed to current supranational organizations, and the membership and the role of the supranational organizations. Teachers should emphasize to students to read the question and to provide only the number of responses required.

Question 6

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was to examine the concept of economic liberalization. The skills tested were conceptual, descriptive, and analytical. Students had five specific tasks: to define economic liberalization, to describe two actions governments would take in pursuing a policy of economic liberalization, to identify an international organization, to explain one reason why a state would pursue economic liberalization, and to explain one reason why a state would resist economic liberalization.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 2.95 out of a possible 6 points.

Students were often able to define economic liberalization. Many students were able to explain that governments pursuing a policy of economic liberalization will privatize formerly nationalized industries and encourage foreign direct investment. Some students were able to explain that a state engaging in economic liberalization will reduce tariffs and subsidies. Many students identified an international organization that promotes economic liberalization. Many students had difficulty sufficiently explaining a reason for pursuing economic liberalization. Some students could explain why a state might resist economic liberalization.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Students had difficulty defining economic liberalization. Many of these students did not define economic liberalization as a process. Some students incorrectly described the actions taken by states in pursuing economic liberalization and some described state-led development policies. Some students incorrectly identified NAFTA or OPEC as international organizations. Many students had difficulty explaining why states would pursue or resist economic liberalization. Many students gave overly general responses or discussed political, rather than economic, reforms.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP[®] Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Students appear better at defining economic liberalization than at fully understanding the actions governments take to liberalize their economies. Teachers should emphasize the specific steps taken by states to liberalize their economies to give students a fuller understanding of how economic liberalization is implemented. Teachers should explain that economic liberalization is a process. Students were given a list of four possible actions that governments take in pursuing economic liberalization, and students were asked to describe two of these actions. Some students chose to write about more than two actions. If a student provides more than the required number of responses for the prompt, and any one of the examples provided is incorrect, then the student will at most earn partial credit. Teachers should emphasize that students are expected to follow the prompt and provide only the number of examples requested. Some students described actions that are consistent with state-led development, rather than economic liberalization. Teachers should differentiate between government policies related to state-led development and economic liberalization. Some students misidentified NAFTA and OPEC as international organizations. Teachers should emphasize the differences between international organizations, regional organizations, and agreements. Some students had difficulty explaining why states would pursue or resist economic liberalization. Teachers should address specific policies states take to pursue or

resist economic liberalization, using examples from the six countries studied in the AP® Comparative Government and Politics course.

Question 7

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was for students to examine the concept of hybrid regimes, to identify two different countries' regime types using map data, and to consider how the characteristics of two different elements of each of those countries' political systems contribute to their regime-type designations. The map prompt tested information literacy: the ability to interpret data displayed in maps correctly. The other skills tested were conceptual, descriptive, and analytical: to define hybrid regimes, to describe two elements of two particular political systems, and to explain how regime-type designations are a result of the characteristics of these elements. The students had eight tasks: to define hybrid regimes; to use data in cartographic form to identify Russia and China's regime designations; to describe characteristics of two different elements of Russia's political system; to explain how each of these elements lead to Russia's regime designations; to describe characteristics of two different elements of China's political system; and to explain how each of these elements lead to China's regime designations.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 4.7 out of a possible 8 points. Students were occasionally able to define a hybrid regime correctly. Students seemed adept at using the map to correctly identify the type of regime for both Russia and China, and at describing two characteristics of elements of the political systems of both Russia and China. On occasion, students could describe only one element accurately, but could still explain how that element contributed to the regime designation. Many students were able to explain how at least one of the elements of the political system contributed to the designation of China as an authoritarian regime, and often students could explain how both elements contributed to China's regime type designation. On occasion, students were able to explain how at least one of the elements of the political system contributed to the designation of Russia as a hybrid regime.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Most often, students had difficulty explaining how two elements of the political system contribute to the designation of Russia as a hybrid regime. While many students described one element of Russia's political system as inherently democratic and one element that was inherently authoritarian, they did not accurately explain how each of these elements had characteristics of both democratic and authoritarian institutions or practices. Other students had difficulty defining a hybrid regime correctly. Many students who did not earn this point described democratic elements of the regime, and then suggested that these were deficient or flawed in some way, rather than discussing the incorporation or coexistence of authoritarian institutions or practices. Some students accurately described characteristics of elements of the Chinese political system, but did not adequately explain how these led to its designation as an authoritarian regime. Many of these students did not link the elements they had described to a central authority.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP® Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Students are stronger at describing regime characteristics (institutions and practices) than at making effective comparisons between and across different types of regimes. Students also appear to understand the idea that some regimes are neither fully democratic nor fully authoritarian, but are not always able to articulate the nuances of what types of regimes might exist, and how they might be constituted. Teachers should emphasize the nuances of various regime types between democracy and autocracy. By helping students understand how understanding these nuances contributes to how we might expect them to function or act as compared to democratic or authoritarian regimes. Students were typically very good at using the map prompt, but those that were not able to do so appear to have been working from a knowledge base that emphasized a limited perspective on regime type designation (e.g., liberal democracy, illiberal democracy, autocracy). Teachers should try to expose students to a diversity of perspectives on how to think about the concepts or data available to them in the course.

Question 8

What was the intent of this question?

The intent of this question was for students to comparatively analyze the role of ethnic movements in contemporary Mexican and Nigerian politics. The skills tested were both descriptive and analytical. Students had five specific tasks: to describe a significant ethnic division in Mexico, to identify an ethnic movement that emerged in Mexico after 1990 and explain one reason why the movement arose, to describe a significant ethnic division in Nigeria, to identify an ethnic movement that emerged in Nigeria after 1990 and explain one reason why the movement arose, and to explain one reason why ethnicity has played a more significant role in Nigerian than in Mexican politics.

How well did students perform on this question?

The mean score was 2.47 out of a possible 7 points.

Students accurately described significant ethnic divisions in both Mexico and Nigeria. Students effectively explained one reason why ethnicity has played a more significant role in Nigerian than in Mexican politics. Students were less successful at identifying an ethnic movement that emerged in Mexico or Nigeria after 1990 and therefore often failed to explain one reason why the movement arose.

What were common student errors or omissions?

Most errors were country-specific, content issues.

Common errors on Mexican content include: students could not identify the Zapatista movement, an omission of an explanation of why the movement arose in Mexico after 1990, or a simple identification rather than an explanation of why NAFTA was a reason why the movement began.

Common errors on Nigerian content include: a description of a significant ethnic division in Nigeria as either “Muslim and Christian” or “North and South,” a failure to identify an ethnic movement in Nigeria, or calling the radical Islamist group Boko Haram an ethnic group and therefore focusing on religious rather than ethnic conflict.

Based on your experience of student responses at the AP® Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?

Students need to make connections between concepts and country-specific content, in this case the linkage between citizens, society, and the state. Students need to think critically about the ways people participate in political activity, including through ethnic movements. To truly understand this relationship, teachers need to help students make the explicit association between the concept of ethnic movements and major examples in the six core countries. Although it is impossible to cover all the major social movements in each country, it is imperative that students are familiar with those specifically listed in the course description and discussed in current introductory textbooks.