



# Chief Reader Report on Student Responses: 2025 AP<sup>®</sup> United States Government and Politics Free-Response Questions

## Set 1

• Number of Students Scored	388,804		
• Number of Readers	1574		
• Score Distribution	Exam Score	N	%At
	5	92,022	23.7
	4	96,493	24.8
	3	90,277	23.2
	2	71,529	18.4
	1	38,483	9.9
• Global Mean	3.34		

The following comments on the 2025 free-response questions for AP<sup>®</sup> United States Government and Politics were written by the Chief Reader, Stella Rouse, Professor, Arizona State University, with assistance from AP Reading leadership. 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:** Concept Application

**Topic:** Procedures of Legislative Consideration in the Senate and House of Representatives

	<b>Max Points:</b>	<b>Mean Score:</b>
<b>Part A</b>	1	0.47
<b>Part B</b>	1	0.35
<b>Part C</b>	1	0.13
<b>Overall Mean Score:</b>	0.96	

### ***What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?***

The concept application question expected responses to apply course concepts to a provided real-world scenario. The focus of the scenario was efforts to pass a bill on election reform in the summer of 2021. While the bill passed with majority support in the House of Representatives, it failed to make it to the floor for a vote in the Senate due to a filibuster by Republican senators and a failed attempt by Senate Democrats to invoke cloture. Ultimately, this question expected responses to demonstrate an understanding of several topics in the course and exam description from Unit 2 that relate to legislative procedures in the House and Senate.

In Part A, responses were expected to describe the debate rules of the Senate that included filibuster and cloture. This was the procedure at the center of the controversy in the scenario. The Senate can have debate prolonged or delayed by a senator invoking a filibuster, thus needing cloture to end debate before a final vote. Some responses just identified filibuster or cloture without describing the Senate procedures.

In Part B, responses were expected to explain how it is more difficult to pass legislation in the Senate compared to the House of Representatives by stating that the Senate debate can delay or prevent final passage of a bill. In order to end debate in the Senate, a supermajority must invoke cloture, compared to limited debate in the House of Representatives that requires a simple majority to end debate and pass a bill.

In Part C, responses were expected to explain how the Senators' actions in addressing the election reform bill illustrated partisanship. The response needed to show how the partisan actions of the two major parties, Democratic and Republican, affected the election reform bill. The response needed to explain how the actions of the parties impacted debate in the Senate.

### ***How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skill(s) required on this question?***

In Part A, many responses correctly/accurately identified and described the filibuster/cloture procedure as being at the center of controversy in the scenario. However, some responses merely identified the procedures without providing a description.

In Part B, most responses correctly/accurately noted that the House rules do not allow a filibuster and that a majority vote is all that is required to end debate and pass legislation, while the Senate's filibuster and the need for a supermajority to invoke cloture in order for a vote on passage to occur makes passage of legislation more difficult in the Senate. Some responses were able to compare what both chambers do when passing legislation but failed to explain how the Senate procedure made passing legislation more difficult. Finally, some responses only explained passing legislation in one chamber but did not compare it to the other chamber.

In Part C, some responses connected to an accurate understanding of how partisanship explained the actions of the two parties with respect to voting on efforts to invoke cloture on the election reform bill and allow for a

floor vote on the merits of the bill. These responses were able to note that Republicans voted along strict party lines against the cloture motion and/or that Democrats voted along strict party lines in support of the cloture motion. Many responses did not connect partisanship with the debate on the bill but offered instead a generic description of partisanship only. Some responses misunderstood partisanship as bipartisanship and stated that both sides were attempting to work together to change Senate debate rules to eliminate the filibuster. This part of the prompt proved to be the most difficult for responses to earn points.

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

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Part A, some responses identified Filibuster or Cloture but did not describe them, nor how to end debate in the Senate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“[S]enators are able to “filibuster,” or continue to talk about a bill for as long as they can manage, making it difficult for the debate to ever end, making it so voting on the bill cannot occur due to time running out.”</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Part B, some responses compared the Senate and the House in explaining the passage of legislation but failed to mention ending debate. And some responses only explained passing legislation in one chamber but did not compare it to the other chamber.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“The procedure described in part A makes passing legislation more difficult in the Senate compared with the House of Representatives because in the House, people debating bills have a time limit. This means that once a representative’s time is up, they can no longer continue to explain their perspective on the bill. However, in the Senate, since this can go on for as long as the senator can manage ... making it so senators are unable to vote on the bill. So, in the House, as long as there is a majority vote, a bill can move onto the next stage. However, in the Senate, even if enough people are willing to vote to pass a bill, they may run out of time and be unable to vote on it anyway.”</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Part C, many responses did not connect partisanship with the debate on the bill but instead only offered a generic description of partisanship. Some responses misunderstood partisanship as bipartisanship and stated that both sides were attempting to work together to change Senate debate rules to eliminate the filibuster.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“The senators’ actions in addressing the election reform bill illustrate the concept of partisanship because partisanship involves supporting your own party. The senators’ actions in addressing the election reform bill were essentially choosing whether or not they were going to try to filibuster the election reform bill. Given the opportunity, Democrats would’ve voted to pass the bill. However, most Republicans wouldn’t have supported it. Therefore, Republicans made the decision to filibuster. This demonstrates a division between the Republicans and the Democrats, where the Republican senators remained loyal to their cause, while the Democratic senators remained loyal to theirs. This illustrates the</i></li> </ul>

	<i>concept of partisanship because Democrats and Republicans in the Senate both made the decision to align themselves with actions that support the values of their party.”</i>
--	---

**Based on your experience at the AP<sup>®</sup> Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve student performance on the exam?**

Teachers could have students practice how to respond to certain task verbs, including thoroughly reading exactly what the prompt is asking them to do, and how to incorporate the scenario into their response. Some responses would just identify filibuster or cloture with no description. Responses indicated that the prompt was not read carefully, as some responses would reference House actions in the Senate. Responses did not address the prompt correctly because some students would not compare passing legislation in each chamber. Some would not explain actions senators took in addressing the election reform bill.

Teachers could provide regular opportunities for students to practice the task verbs that are found in the free response portion of the exam (*identify, describe, compare, explain*) through bellringers, class activities, class discussions, homework, or exit tickets, so that students will more clearly understand the expectations for the writing portion of the exam. This would allow students to more fully develop their reasoning and writing skills in response to this type of question. Activities could include discussions where students are expected to fully describe or explain a concept in relation to a prompt teachers provide or prompts that students write for themselves. Students could also be asked to compare and evaluate other students' responses in a discussion.

Teachers could also have students review examples of sample responses to understand what is expected of them on the concept application question. Through the practice of scoring these responses, students can help understand what a reader is looking for in this FRQ and read the notes that go along with the responses.

Teachers should be intentional in using task verbs in their activities with their students. Students could also be prompted to use current events topics to create their own questions and responses to a topic covered in the Curriculum and Exam Description guide.

Teachers should also reference the instructional planning report from last year's AP exam results to evaluate their scores on this and other FRQs.

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

Consider taking advantage of the following resources to help students prepare for the content and skills required in this free-response question.

- The CED provides a framework for teaching and learning about the topics that are covered on the exam. The CED describes Senate procedures like the filibuster and cloture in Topic 2.2 “Structures, Powers, and Functions of Congress” and introduces partisanship in Topic 2.3 “Congressional Behavior.”
- In AP Classroom, teachers will find a rich collection of resources to support learning about these topics. These resources include formative and summative assessment items for every unit of the course, including practice FRQs for teachers to use as formative assessment pieces. The formative items are scaffolded so that early items represent what students are ready for at the beginning of the school year and later items increase the level of challenge as teachers progress through the course.

- AP Classroom also includes topic-specific AP Daily Videos related to this FRQ. 2.3: Daily Video 2 focuses on congressional behavior and effectiveness, the role of partisanship, divided government, gridlock, and role conceptions of members of Congress.
- 2023 AP Exam On-Demand Review videos explain in detail strategies for responding to each FRQ type, including Practice sessions 2 and 3 that focus on FRQ 1 Concept Application.
- Additionally, the Professional Learning tab in AP Classroom has a skill-based module on teaching the concept application FRQ, Unit 2-Data Analysis and Concept Application.
- Finally, the online AP Teacher Community includes a library of instructional resources and a forum for teachers to share instructional ideas regarding these topics.

## Question 2

**Task:** Quantitative Analysis

**Topic:** Public Opinion Graph

	<b>Max Points:</b>	<b>Mean Score:</b>
<b>Part A</b>	1	0.96
<b>Part B</b>	1	0.95
<b>Part C</b>	1	0.38
<b>Part D</b>	1	0.36
<b>Overall Mean Score:</b>	2.65	

### ***What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?***

Responses to the quantitative analysis question are expected to demonstrate the ability to read and interpret data related to public opinion between 1997 and 2015. The graph gauged Americans' beliefs on climate change in their lifetime.

In Part A, responses were expected to identify the percentage of Americans in 2010 who believed that climate change would pose a serious threat in their lifetime based upon the data presented in the line graph.

In Part B, responses were expected to describe a trend in the data presented in the line graph.

In Part C, responses were expected to draw a conclusion about how a trend in the graph could be used by an interest group trying to influence policymaking.

In Part D, responses were expected to explain how the overall trend presented in the line graph could have been the result of political socialization.

### ***How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skill(s) required on this question?***

In Part A, the overwhelming majority of responses accurately identified the percentage of Americans in 2010 who believed that climate change would pose a serious threat in their lifetime as 32% (or between 31% and 34%).

In Part B, the overwhelming majority of responses accurately described a trend in the data shown in the line graph that as time progressed there was an increasing percentage of Americans who feel climate change would pose a serious threat in their lifetime. However, some responses were unable to provide a directional trend of the line graph and instead stated a singular data point.

Part C required a nuanced approach. In order to draw a conclusion about how a trend in the line graph could be used by an interest group to influence policymaking, a response needed to provide a directional trend from the line graph, an interest group action and policymaking target of that action, and how the action influenced policymaking. While many responses provided the required content to answer this question, some responses only stated that a trend was present or did not connect the action of the interest group to a policymaking target. For example, some responses were able to state that interest groups may lobby to influence policy, but those actions were not connected to a trend from the line graph or targeted at the policymaking process. The skills required in Part C were the ability to describe a trend from a line graph and connect them to course content from Units 2 and 5.

Part D required responses to apply the course content knowledge of political socialization to the overall trend in the graph. While many responses accurately explained how the overall trend in the line graph could be a result of political socialization, some responses struggled to identify an accurate agent of political socialization which prevented the response from earning the point. Interpreting the overall trend from the line graph was an essential skill to answering this question accurately along with being able to distinguish the difference between what qualifies as an overall trend or a short-term trend. Some responses stated that an overall trend was present but did not identify what the overall trend was. Many responses accurately identified the overall trend that more Americans believed climate change would pose a serious threat in their lifetime but did not explain how an agent of political socialization led to that increase. Finally, some responses were able to accurately describe the overall trend in the graph but did not make an accurate connection to agents of political socialization. Instead, the responses connected the overall trend to linkage institutions, which was not in line with the topic of the question.

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

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Part A, some responses did not accurately identify the percentage of Americans who believed that climate change would pose a serious threat in their lifetime in 2010.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“According to the data presented in the graph, in 2010 approximately 32% of Americans believed that Climate Change would pose a serious threat in their lifetime.”</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Part B, some responses did not accurately describe a directional trend in the data presented in the line graph or only identified a single data point in the line graph.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“The data shown in the line graph suggests an overall upward trend. Meaning that the percentage of Americans who believed climate change would pose a serious threat in their lifetime overall increased from 1997 to 2015.”</li> <li>“The trend in the line graph shows a steady incline from 1997-2007, but it spikes in 2008 and then declines in 2010, then goes back up in 2012.”</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Part C, some responses did not accurately discuss a directional trend in the data presented in the line graph or did not accurately connect the action of an interest group, the target of the action, or the goal of the action to a directional trend in the data.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“Because of the overall upward trend in the percentage of Americans who believed climate change would pose a serious threat in their lifetime between 1997 and 2015, an interest group could use this data to inform Congress on the issue of climate change and its importance to the American people. An interest group could pressure Congress with the data to push for environmentally friendly policies. This action would align with the purpose of interest groups which is to influence policy, highlighting how this could be done through lobbying, or directly informing and thus influencing Congressional representatives.”</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Part D, some responses did not accurately discuss the overall directional trend in the data presented in the line graph or did not accurately connect an agent of socialization or the action of the agent of socialization to the overall directional trend in the data.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“Political socialization is the formation of political ideologies based on the people with whom you associate. In the line graph, the upward trend in the percentage of Americans who believed climate change would pose a serious threat in their lifetime between 1997 and 2015 suggests that people are becoming more solidified in their beliefs about climate change. During this period of time, people who were aware of climate change could have spoken to their family, friends, and other acquaintances and enlightened them on the issue of climate change. In this way, by sharing information on the importance of climate change, more people likely recognized the issue as well, resulting in the overall upward trend as more people became aware and recognized the importance of climate change due to their associating with others.”</i></li> </ul>

**Based on your experience at the AP<sup>®</sup> Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve student performance on the exam?**

Teachers could expose students to data presented in a variety of different methods and styles and regularly practice how to read and interpret that data. *Do Now* or *Entrance/Exit Ticket* questions that ask students to describe a trend in the graph and connect that trend to a current topic of study will allow students to practice using data while also working with the task verbs that they will see on their AP exam. Embedding the practice into daily or weekly lessons will allow for students to have low stakes practice connecting data to a variety of different parts of the Course and Exam Description while still meeting the time constraints many classrooms face.

The Quantitative Analysis free response question requires teachers to help students to make connections between data from a variety of different visuals and the course concept. Providing students with ample opportunity to practice interpreting a variety of images will work to their benefit. AP Classroom has both multiple choice and free response questions available for teachers to assign for formative and summative assessments that can help teachers identify skills and topics that their students may need more practice on throughout the school year.

Teachers could help students better recall relevant course concepts and apply them to the data provided. Building vocabulary knowledge throughout the school year will help make these connections. Teachers could use a variety of different strategies to help students recognize and define course concepts throughout the year. In addition, building vocabulary practice through multiple choice questions as an *Entrance/Exit Ticket* or short readings with data embedded in them for a *Do Now Question* would be a time efficient way to help students retain the relevant course concepts so that they can work towards applying them to a variety of different questions.

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

Consider taking advantage of the following resources to help students prepare for the content and skills required in this free-response question.

- The CED provides a framework for teaching and learning about the topics that are covered on the exam. For content support in responding to this FRQ, the CED addresses the actions interest groups may take in influencing policies surrounding climate change in Topic 5.6: Interest Groups Influencing Policymaking. Additionally, Topic 4.2: Political Socialization provides information as to why political socialization could have impacted the overall trend in the graph.
- In AP Classroom, teachers will find a rich collection of resources to support learning about these topics. These resources include formative and summative assessment items for every unit of the course, including practice FRQs for teachers to use as formative assessment pieces. The formative items are scaffolded so that early items represent what students are ready for at the beginning of the school year and later items increase challenge as teachers progress through the course.
- AP Classroom also includes topic specific AP Daily Videos related to this FRQ. 5.6: Daily Video 1 discusses how interest groups affect the policymaking process. 4.2: Daily Video 1 analyzes how political socialization works in the United States and also provides guidance for practicing Data Analysis.
- 2023 AP Exam On-Demand Review videos explain in detail strategies for responding to each FRQ type, including Practice session 4 focuses on FRQ 2 Quantitative Analysis.
- Additionally, the Professional Learning tab in AP Classroom has skill-based modules on teaching the Quantitative Analysis FRQ; Unit 2-Data Analysis and Concept Application and Unit 4-Data Analysis.
- Finally, the online AP Teacher Community includes a library of instructional resources and a forum for teachers to share instructional ideas regarding these topics.

### Question 3

**Task:** SCOTUS Comparison

**Topic:** *United States v. Lopez* and the Commerce Clause

	<b>Max Points:</b>	<b>Mean Score:</b>
<b>Part A</b>	1	0.74
<b>Part B</b>	2	0.99
<b>Part C</b>	1	0.30
<b>Overall Mean Score:</b>	2.03	

#### **What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?**

The SCOTUS comparison question provided a summary of a non-required Supreme Court case *Wickard v. Filburn* and expected responses to compare this non-required case to a case required in the course, *United States v. Lopez*.

In Part A, students were expected to correctly identify the constitutional clause common to both *United States v. Lopez* and *Wickard v. Filburn*.

To earn two points in Part B, the response must demonstrate an understanding of the required case and accurately compare it to the given non-required case. The response should have explained how the facts or holding in *Wickard v. Filburn* were different in *United States v. Lopez*. One point is earned for stating the correct facts or holding in *United States v. Lopez*. Two points are earned for explaining how the holding in *United States v. Lopez* differs from the holding in *Wickard v. Filburn*.

In Part C, responses were expected to explain how the decision in *Wickard v. Filburn* reflects the ideal of federalism.

#### **How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skill(s) required on this question?**

In Part A, while most responses identified the Commerce Clause, some responses identified other clauses in the Constitution which were incorrect.

In Part B, some responses earned one point for correctly explaining the facts of *United States v. Lopez*, by stating Lopez brought a gun to school, or the holding of the case by stating, the Supreme Court ruled that gun possession was not an economic activity that could be considered interstate commerce. However, they did not earn two points since they did not explain the difference in the holding between *United States v. Lopez* and *Wickard v. Filburn*. Most responses that earned two points correctly explained the facts or holding in *United States v. Lopez*, and then they compared the holding in *Lopez* with *Wickard v. Filburn*, by stating the difference between the two cases was that in *United States v. Lopez*, the Supreme Court ruled that gun possession in school was not an economic activity that could be considered interstate commerce. Whereas, in *Wickard v. Filburn*, the Court determined Filburn could be punished under federal law for growing excess wheat for personal consumption because it could have an indirect effect on the economy of other states and was therefore covered by the Commerce Clause. Students that did not receive any points in Part B often did not correctly explain the facts or holding of *United States v. Lopez* or how the two cases differed.

In Part C, many responses did not sufficiently explain how federalism was reflected in *Wickard v. Filburn*. Responses were able to show an understanding of what federalism is but were not able to explain the connection between the holding in *Wickard v. Filburn* and federalism. Responses that earned the point included a statement on the understanding of federalism and how the struggle for power between the states and the federal government sometimes favors the federal government as seen by the Court making activities performed entirely in one state subject to the Commerce Clause.

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

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Part A, some responses identify more than one clause.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“The constitutional clause that is common to both United States v. Lopez (1995) and Wickard v. Filburn (1942) is the Commerce Clause”</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Part B was worth 2 points. If a response failed to earn 2 points by completing the task, the response could still earn 1 point by providing relevant information about the required case, <i>United States v. Lopez</i>.</li> <li>Many responses did not earn 2 points because they did not demonstrate an understanding that actions of Congress related to their use of the Commerce Clause were treated differently in the two cases, which resulted in different holdings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“In United States v. Lopez, the case regarded a man bringing a gun into a school zone, which does not fall under the commerce clause as Congress cannot regulate an issue that does not involve an effect on multiple states and their economies. However, in Wickard v. Filburn, there was a possibility that the activities of Filburn could have an effect on the economy of other states, which made his case fall under the commerce clause in Article I of the Constitution, leading to a different holding.”</i></li> <li><i>“The facts in these cases led to different holdings because in United States v. Lopez the commerce clause did not apply, whereas in Wickard v. Filburn, the commerce clause did apply. In United States v. Lopez, Congress used the commerce clause to create a law that banned guns in school zones. In this case, the Supreme Court ruled against Congress’s ability to use the commerce clause, because guns in school zones did not affect interstate commerce. The ruling in Wickard v. Filburn was different because the supply and demand of wheat affected interstate commerce. ... The Supreme Court ruled that Congress was allowed to use the commerce clause in this case, because the increase in the supply of wheat that Filburn caused indirectly affected the money farmers across the United States could make.”</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Part C, some responses were unable to correctly explain the concept of federalism.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“The holding in Wickard v. Filburn reflects the concept of federalism because it displays the divide of power between the state and federal</i></li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some responses were unable to connect the holding of <i>Wickard v. Filburn</i> to the concept of federalism.</li> </ul>	<p><i>government, known as Dual or Layer Cake Federalism. The case claims the federal government has the sole and supreme power of regulating state activities when they affect other states, while the states are given separate reserved powers to regulate intrastate commerce that does not affect other states, thus dividing control between the feds and states.”</i></p>
--	--

**Based on your experience at the AP® Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve student performance on the exam?**

Teachers could emphasize that students read the task closely and identify one clause instead of listing multiple clauses. Also, teachers could emphasize that their students follow the directions to identify the correct clause rather than articles or amendments.

Teachers could instruct their students to explain the relationship between the required and non-required cases for the task. Also, teachers could have students make use of content review from AP Central to make sure students are well versed in the facts and holdings of the required SCOTUS cases.

Teachers could instruct their students to explain the relationship between course concepts with the non-required case for the task.

Teachers should access the resources in AP Central to help students become familiar with the task verbs of the FRQ exam. Some students struggled with including enough information to meet the “explain” threshold in Part B and Part C.

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

Consider taking advantage of the following resources to help students prepare for the content and skills required in this free-response question.

- The CED provides a framework for teaching and learning about the topics that are covered on the exam. The CED addresses the Supreme Court cases that are required for this course on pages 27–32. This section also includes a cross-reference table with suggestions for opportunities to show relationships between these cases and course concepts. This section also includes a table with terms and definitions for how these terms are used when assessing FRQ 3. Topic 1.8 specifically addresses the Commerce Clause, which is central to *United States v. Lopez*. Additionally, Topic 1.7 Relationship Between the States and National Government contains more information about the concept of federalism.
- In AP Classroom, teachers will find a rich collection of resources to support learning about these topics. These resources include formative and summative assessment items for every unit of the course, including practice FRQs for teachers to use as formative assessment pieces. The formative items are scaffolded so that early items represent what students are ready for at the beginning of the school year and later items increase challenge as teachers progress through the course.
- AP Classroom also includes topic specific AP Daily Videos related to this FRQ. 1.8: Daily Video 1 focuses on the balance of power between the national and state governments and what factors can cause changes in that balance. 1.2: Daily Video 2 focuses on two Supreme Court case rulings,

including *United States v. Lopez* (1995). This video also examines how these cases defined and redefined the distribution of power between the state and national governments. 1.7: Daily Video 1 examines the powers exclusive to the national government, powers reserved to the states, and powers that are concurrent to both.

- Additionally, the Professional Learning tab in AP Classroom has a skill-based module on teaching the SCOTUS Comparison FRQ, Unit3-Supreme Court Case Analysis.
- Finally, the online AP Teacher Community includes a library of instructional resources and a forum for teachers to share instructional ideas regarding these topics.

## Question 4

**Task:** Argument Essay

**Topic:** Social Media and Participatory Democracy

	<b>Max Points:</b>	<b>Mean Score:</b>
<b>Thesis</b>	1	0.76
<b>Evidence</b>	3	2.17
<b>Reasoning</b>	1	0.70
<b>Alternative Perspective</b>	1	0.36
<b>Overall Mean Score:</b>	3.99	

### ***What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?***

This Argument Essay question expected responses to demonstrate an understanding of how social media use could affect participatory democracy in the United States. Responses were to take a position on whether the use of social media helped or hindered participatory democracy. Responses should have also shown an understanding of how to relate one of the required foundational documents to social media and participatory democracy (First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, *Federalist* No. 10, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”), while taking a position on the topic of the prompt.

Responses were expected to articulate a defensible claim/thesis and establish a line of reasoning; support the thesis with evidence from the course concepts and/or foundational document(s); use reasoning to explain more deeply why the evidence provided supports the thesis; and respond to an alternative perspective using rebuttal or refutation. Responses should have been written so that each of these skills are demonstrated.

### ***How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skill(s) required on this question?***

In general, responses defended the position that social media helped participatory democracy. Many responses made a successful claim and established a defensible line of reasoning that connected to a political or democratic concept. Most of the responses were able to provide one piece of evidence from one of the provided foundational documents, and many were able to provide a second piece of evidence from another foundational document or course concept that was relevant to the prompt. Many responses were successful in providing reasoning to explain why their evidence supported their claim/argument. However, most responses did not successfully respond to the alternative perspective. Although responses generally demonstrated some understanding of an alternative viewpoint, they often neglected to give a reason(s) to the alternative perspective connected with participatory democracy or provide a rebuttal or refutation.

The different tasks within this question required responses to demonstrate several higher-order thinking skills and apply substantive knowledge about participatory democracy, while using the argumentation skill from the course. Most responses successfully demonstrated substantive knowledge, and the needed skills associated with the argumentative essay. Most responses also provided a correct piece of specific and relevant evidence related to the prompt.

Responses could earn 1 point by providing a defensible claim or thesis that establishes a line of reasoning. Incorrect responses attempted to take a position on whether the use of social media helped or hindered participatory democracy, but did not establish a line of reasoning.

When addressing the thesis point, most responses made the claim at the start of the response. However, many responses had a claim and line of reasoning at the end and/or had a split thesis within the response. This

included having the claim at the beginning of the response, and the line of reasoning elsewhere in the response. Some of the responses did not successfully have a claim or a line of reasoning, and some gave both sides of the argument. The most common error was no line of reasoning.

Responses could earn up to 2 evidence points by describing evidence relevant to the topic of the prompt or up to 3 points by using evidence to support the claim or thesis. Responses could ONLY earn 3 evidence points if a response had a valid thesis or claim, and one of the evidence pieces was a required foundational document. When addressing the evidence points, most responses used the First Amendment with Freedom of Speech being the required foundational document. Many responses attempted to use the other foundational documents that were listed, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” and Federalist No. 10. Many responses successfully received evidence points for accurately connecting different course content or a relevant example to the prompt. The most common error was that many responses struggled to use “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” successfully because while they could generally describe this piece of evidence, the description was not done in relation to social media use or participatory democracy.

Responses could earn 1 reasoning point by explaining how or why a piece of evidence supports an argument relevant to the prompt. Reasoning requires the response to go beyond describing the evidence and articulately explain the relationship between the evidence provided and the argument. Many responses were able to accurately explain the reasoning as to how or why the evidence supported the argument. Responses that failed to earn the reasoning point did not adequately explain the relationship between the evidence and the argument or failed to even attempt to give an explanation.

Responses could earn 1 alternative perspective point by providing an opposing or alternative perspective and then using refutation or rebuttal. This required the response to explicitly state the opposing or alternative perspective, provide a line of reasoning for that perspective, and then refute or rebut that perspective. When addressing the alternative perspective point, most responses gave the counterclaim, however, did not describe that counterclaim. Another common error was not providing a refutation or rebuttal to the counterclaim. Some responses contradicted the initial claim and attempted to argue both sides.

The different tasks within this question required responses to demonstrate several higher-order thinking skills and apply substantive knowledge about participatory democracy, while using the argumentation skill from the course. Most responses successfully demonstrated substantive knowledge, and the needed skills associated with the argumentative essay. Most responses also provided a correct piece of specific and relevant evidence related to the prompt.

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

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<p><i>Thesis</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A claim was made without a clear line of reasoning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“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.”</li> <li>“social media has helped participatory democracy” ... “develop by outlets of expression to Americans</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was not a line of reasoning, instead a response included documents and/or concepts as the attempt at the line of reasoning.</li> <li>• A clear claim was not made and instead the response attempted to argue both sides of the prompt.</li> </ul>	<p><i>and by creating room for many many factions to coexist. Participatory democracy relies on input from the people which often organize them selves into factions to coordinate more effective efforts in influencing government and policy.”</i></p>
<p><i>Evidence</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responses included the incorrect use of the foundational documents.</li> <li>• Responses included evidence that was not relevant to the prompt.</li> <li>• Responses included evidence that was factually inaccurate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“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.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“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.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“Letter from a Birmingham Jail” explains the justified use of civil disobediance. Dr. King expresses that following laws is necessary, but that when a law is clearly unfair to a group, person, religion, ethnicity, race, or gender, it is just to break the law and protest against its wrongness. This idea to keep fighting for what is right is supported by the many social media platforms that presidential candidates and government officials use to further their beleifs. Following Kamala Harris’s loss in the 2024 presidential election,...This idea, which was mainly shared through social media, helped citizens to paticipate in politics, by suggesting that their strive to fight for what they beleive in matters, and will truly make a difference in the government.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“The equal protection clause of the 14th amendment” ... “In 2020, a video of an African American man being killed by a police officer spread rapidly throughout the internet, kickstarting</i></li> </ul>

	<p><i>the Black Lives Matter movement. The murder of this man was so incredibly devastating to millions of Americans, and many felt that black individuals were not being protected equally by police officers.” (Not a foundational document—an example of possible 2nd piece of evidence)</i></p>
<p><i>Reasoning</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The response provided evidence but did not provide a reasoned explanation as to why the evidence supported their claim or argument.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“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.”</i></li> <li>• <i>“Social media encourages people to express themselves more freely and truthfully by allowing them a greater degree of ease and safety than traditional means of participating (ex. protesting, rallying, etc.). This is because social media can protect the identity of the speaker from harm and threats from opposition.”</i></li> </ul>
<p><i>Alternative perspective</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responses did state an alternative perspective, but did not give a line of reasoning.</li> <li>• Responses did state an alternative perspective, gave a line of reasoning, but did not give a refutation or a rebuttal.</li> <li>• Responses did not attempt an alternative perspective.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“On the opposing side, some say that the increased 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.”... “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 increasing voter activeness”</i></li> </ul>

**Based on your experience at the AP<sup>®</sup> Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve student performance on the exam?**

Teachers could emphasize the importance of writing the response with the thesis at the beginning, taking a clear position (claim) and including a distinct line of reasoning that supports that claim to fully establish a clear thesis. For example, “Using social media, participatory democracy has been helped by people gaining a sense of community and increasing their democratic voices that spread across the world through digital means that increase social activism through gaining political knowledge about political candidates, attending various political rallies or attending voter registration drives.” It is more helpful for the reader to be able to see the clear thesis at the very start of the response. The clear thesis also “unlocks” the opportunity to earn additional points across the response, including the third evidence point and the alternative perspective point. Teachers should encourage students to begin their thesis statement by taking a clear position on the topic of the prompt (claim) and providing an adjacent line of reasoning. Teachers should not advise students to include the alternative perspective while presenting the thesis at the beginning of the response; it makes the thesis unclear and the response contradictory.

Teachers should spend time on the nine foundational documents to ensure that students can recall specific, descriptive information about each document that is relevant to major course concepts. For example, responses needed to describe the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, (Speech/Expression, Press, Assembly, Petition—Note: religion is not relevant to the prompt) and be able to make a connection to social media. For example, “The First Amendment of the US Constitution allows people to post their political ideas and thoughts about political candidates for the upcoming elections on social media. This is protected and allowed by their right to freedom of speech.”

Teachers should provide a structured essay template for writing the argumentative essay that begins with the thesis statement, continues with two pieces of evidence and reasoning and concludes with an alternative perspective, line of reasoning and a refutation or rebuttal. This helps students practice the structure and allows them to get used to writing in the allotted time.

Teachers should spend time in each unit on how democratic values, principles, and linkage institutions effect everyday life of people in the United States. Students need to be able to connect these concepts to the nine foundational documents while testing their argumentative skills.

Each section of the essay could be addressed as a separate skill that students can work toward mastering. After students become comfortable with each section, then teachers can design classroom practices and assessments to integrate the various elements of a successful argumentative essay. Teachers could spend time conducting structured, mini-lessons that break down each section of the argumentative essay; design exercises based around thesis creation, with a heavy emphasis on crafting thesis statements that take a clear position and establish a line of reasoning; create a lesson centered around how to accurately describe the information contained within the foundational documents; utilize practices designed to analyze and explain how the information found in these documents relates to both course concepts and more current events in order to better develop reasoning skills.

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

Consider taking advantage of the following resources to help students prepare for the content and skills required in this free-response question.

- The CED provides a framework for teaching and learning about the topics that are covered on the exam. The CED includes a section on the Foundational Documents that are required for this course on pages 25–26. The introduction to this section states, “Foundational documents are necessary for students to understand the philosophical underpinnings and political values of the U.S. political system and may serve as the focus of AP Exam questions. Source analysis of these documents helps students gain an understanding of how philosophical discussions and debates shaped the architecture of the government.” This section also includes a table that provides suggestions for places in the course where these documents are particularly related to specific learning objectives.
- Information about the required foundational documents for this FRQ can be found throughout the CED. Topic 1.2 Types of Democracy examines participatory democracy and Federalist No. 10. Topic 1.3 Government Power and Individual Rights also discusses Federalist No. 10. The First Amendment is examined in Topic 3.2 First Amendment: Freedom of Religion, 3.3 First Amendment: Freedom of Speech, and 3.4 First Amendment: Freedom of the Press. Topic 3.10 Social Movements and Equal Protection addresses Martin Luther King’s Letter from a Birmingham Jail.
- In AP Classroom, teachers will find a rich collection of resources to support learning about these topics. These resources include formative and summative assessment items for every unit of the course, including practice FRQs for teachers to use as formative assessment pieces. The formative items are scaffolded so that early items represent what students are ready for at the beginning of the school year and later items increase challenge as teachers progress through the course.
- AP Classroom also includes topic specific AP Daily Videos related to this FRQ. Topic 1.2 Types of Democracy has three that could be useful. 1.2: Daily Video 1 compares different theories of representative democracies and practices describing characteristics of each model via source analysis. 1.2: Daily Video 2 explains participatory theory by providing summaries of major claims and reasoning in Brutus No. 1. 1.2: Daily Video 3 practices a close reading of James Madison’s Federalist No. 10 and explains pluralist theory by providing summaries of major claims and reasoning in Federalist No. 10. 1.3: Daily Video 1 compares a central distribution of power versus power being shared between a central point and a locality as debated in Federalist No. 10 and Brutus No. 1. 3.3: Daily Video 1 analyzes the interpretations and limits of the First Amendment's freedom of speech, including symbolic speech. 3.3: Daily Video 2 analyzes some more limits of freedom of speech and then practices the argumentation skill. 3.10: Daily Video 2 analyzes the required source “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” to connect usage of the Fourteenth Amendment to supporting civil rights movements.
- Additionally, the Professional Learning tab in AP Classroom has a skill-based module on teaching the Argument Essay FRQ, Unit 5-Argumentation.
- Finally, the online AP Teacher Community includes a library of instructional resources and a forum for teachers to share instructional ideas regarding these topics.