

2023 SAMPLE RESPONSES (SET 2)

AP® US GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS FREE RESPONSE (FRQ)

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This is a full set of answers I have written for the 2023 AP® US Government and Politics Free Response Questions (FRQs). These answers are reflective of both my own experience teaching the course and additional feedback very generously provided to me by colleagues who read the initial draft. One sample response is provided for each item for Concept Application, Quantitative Analysis, and Supreme Court Comparison, while a full-credit response is given for each side of the Argument Essay prompt.

1. Concept Application: California Recall Election ([Direct Link to Question](#))

- (A) The model of voting behavior that reflects most voters' choice to recall Gov. Davis and elect Gov. Schwarzenegger is retrospective voting, in which voters look back at the recent performance of sitting elected officials to decide which party or candidate they will support in the current election.
- (B) Given that Arnold Schwarzenegger was a celebrity figure, it is likely that the media gave him much more coverage than the incumbent. The excitement of the recall was good for media ratings and having a movie star on camera gets people watching. It is unlikely that the media focused much on any of the issues or on how having a Republican governor would affect the policy agenda in a heavily-democratic state.
- (C) The United States Constitution does not have any provisions for recall, so the only way to remove a sitting president of the United States is through the impeachment process. The voters are not involved in impeachment, at all. In order to remove a sitting president from office, the House draws up Articles of Impeachment and votes on them, sending the successful Articles to the Senate. The Senate then conducts a trial, which requires a 2/3 vote of the Senate in order to remove the president from office.

2. Quantitative Analysis: Generational Electorate ([Direct Link to Question](#))

- (A) The Silent Generation is projected to have the lowest percentage of eligible voters in 2028.
- (B) The overall trend in the graph between 2016 and 2036 is that Generation Z will increasingly have more eligible voters, while other generations will make up a smaller percentage of the overall electorate over time.
- (C) Based on the trend in the data, a presidential candidate in 2032 will make less efforts to appeal to the Silent Generation and the Baby Boomers and appeal more to Generation X (because they will be at the age with the highest voter turnout), Millennials, and Generation Z (because these generations will make up the majority of the electorate).
- (D) In the later 2032 and 2036 elections, life cycle effects could influence a candidate's policy platform because Generation X will be retiring or preparing to retire, while Millennials will be paying on homes, raising children, and putting children through college. While Millennials today are typically more progressive and left-of-center, it is likely that this generation will be more conservative by 2032 and 2036 because of where they will be in life by that time.

3. SCOTUS Comparison: *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* ([Direct Link to Question](#))

- (A) The clause of the First Amendment that is common to both *Engel v. Vitale* and *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* is the Establishment Clause.
- (B) The facts in the *Engel* and *Zelman* cases led to different decisions because with *Engel*, the state of New York mandated that a non-denominational prayer be read over the loudspeaker at public schools that students were required to attend. The Court ruled it to be a violation of the Establishment Clause to read a prayer in a public school. In the *Zelman* case, religious schools were among the options that were offered to parents, with some parents choosing voluntarily to send their children to religious schools. These religious schools received no preferential treatment against other schools under the law, so it did not violate the Establishment clause.
- (C) Legislatures in states that support the *Zelman* ruling are likely to adopt policies that offer voucher programs to students who are zoned for failing schools since the constitutionality is no longer in doubt due to the ruling of the Supreme Court.

4. The Will of the People: Checks and Balances vs. Social Movements ([Direct Link to Question](#))**SAMPLE RESPONSE A: Checks and Balances**

<i>Checks and balances keep factions from taking over the policy agenda.</i>	<i>Checks and balances are designed to shield the government from short-term swings in public opinion.</i>	<i>Social movements are necessary to push the government when it's not listening (rebut)</i>
Federalist No. 10 Federalist No. 51	The Media (linkage institution) Article III of the Constitution	Letter from Birmingham Jail

Checks and balances are more effective than social movements in maintaining a democratic republic where the will of the people is put into action because these checks keep a single faction from dictating policy and limits the influence on short-term swings in public opinion on public policy.

Checks and balances keep a single faction from dominating politics. Social movements are typically led by a faction of Americans, advocating for policy changes that the majority of Americans are either indifferent about or oppose. When a strong majority of the American people supports (or opposes) something, it shows up in opinion polling, prompting government action without a social movement being necessary. In Federalist No. 10, Madison argued that one of the greatest advantages of a large republic is that it keeps a single faction from taking over the government and steering the policy agenda. In Federalist No. 51, Madison outlines the system of checks and balances, with the legislative, executive, and judicial branches each having a check on the others. This makes the policy-making process intentionally difficult. With checks and balances, laws can only pass easily when they are clearly in accordance with the will of the people, as a whole (not just one group).

The system of checks and balances has the advantage of shielding the policymaking process from short-term swings in public opinion. As a linkage institution, the media can steer public opinion in the short term by covering certain events 24/7 in a sensational way. This sometimes manipulates public opinion in the short term, while in the long term, people are not as stirred up about a single issue. If it weren't for checks and balances – such as a bicameral legislature and the president's veto power – it would be easy for Congress to pass laws that the people might think they want at the time, but have second thoughts about later.

Advocates for social movements may argue that these movements are sometimes necessary to push public policy in the direction of justice when the government is not listening. Part of the idea of a democratic republic is to make sure that minority factions are respected and that everyone has the same basic rights. In his Letter from Birmingham Jail, Dr. King argued that a citizen has a moral obligation to break an unjust law. However, that unjust law might be in accordance with the will of the majority of the people. Dr. King's rationale, if pursued to the fullest extent by every individual citizen on their own terms, could undermine the rule of law and the very idea of majority rule.

Checks and balances work better than social movements in making sure that the people's will is represented through their elected representatives and that the government is not steered by short-term swings in public opinion.

4. The Will of the People: Checks and Balances vs. Social Movements ([Direct Link to Question](#))**SAMPLE RESPONSE B: Social Movements**

The Constitution was not created to be democratic.	The judiciary is not democratic, at all.	Social movements represent minority groups – not majority views (refute)
Federalist 10 Federalist 51	Article III of the Constitution Brutus No. 1	Public policy typically favors social movements only after they gain majority support

Social movements are better than checks and balances for making sure that the will of the people becomes policy in a democratic republic because the Constitution was not created in order to be democratic and the federal judiciary is not accountable to public opinion.

Implementing the will of the people is consistent with democracy, but the Framers created the Constitution so that it would not be accountable to the majority. The Framers actually feared democracy. James Madison, the “father of the Constitution,” wrote in Federalist No. 10 that the Constitution created a large republic, which would stop one faction from controlling the government. What he really meant here is that the majority would not be able to rule because it is harder to form a majority coalition in a large republic with checks and balances. In Federalist 51, Madison describes the president’s veto power, which allows one person to strike down a bill passed by both houses of Congress. It is difficult for the will of the people to be enacted when one person has so much power.

Article III of the Constitution creates the federal judiciary, which is unelected and has judges who serve for life. This makes it very difficult for the majority to be able to influence policy when federal judges have no incentive to listen. In Brutus No. 1, the author says that the federal judiciary would swallow up the powers of the states – the smaller political communities where the people have more direct control. In the summer of 2022, the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* even though the majority of Americans supported *Roe v. Wade* continuing to be law. In our constitutional system, the branch of government that is the least democratic has the most control, and with judicial review, only a constitutional amendment – requiring three-fourths of the states for approval – can overturn a Supreme Court decision. Without strong social movements, the government will ignore the people.

One argument that may be made against social movements promoting the will of the people is that social movements – such as the civil rights movements and LGBT rights movement – typically represent minority groups rather than the majority of the people. However, social movements typically only result in policy changes when majorities sympathize with these movements. In the early 2000s, when the LGBT movement did not have a lot of popular support, many states responded by passing constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage. After the movement gained more popular support, some states began to legalize same-sex marriage. Eventually, the Supreme Court even listened, declaring bans on same-sex marriage unconstitutional. The Supreme Court might not have ever acted if the LGBT community’s campaign for marriage equality did not have the support of the majority of Americans. This shows that social movements do not threaten majority rule.

Social movements are more effective than checks and balances in making sure that the will of the people becomes policy because the system of checks and balances was designed to stop the majority from influencing public policy – especially where the unelected federal judiciary is concerned. When social movements gain clear majority support, it forces an otherwise unresponsive government to act.