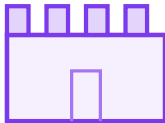


Absolutism and Constitutionalism

AP European History ■ Unit 3

AP European History



One period, several ways to govern

The organising question

Why did rulers facing competition develop different relationships with nobles, representative institutions and merchants?

Use a shared question to compare France, England and the Dutch Republic. A stronger state does not automatically mean wider political participation.

1

Contextualizing State Building

Locate the struggle for sovereignty

Political sovereignty 政治主权

Who claims authority to govern?
Monarchs sought revenue and military power; nobles and representative bodies defended their own powers.

1648–1815 and its background

Westphalia provides context. The earlier English Civil War helps explain later constitutional developments. State building remained uneven.

Westphalia did not instantly create a uniform system of modern nation-states.

Build a contextual explanation

Worked reasoning

Military and dynastic competition increased rulers' demand for resources. Efforts to raise revenue brought rulers into conflict with elites defending privileges and political authority. Different settlements therefore produced different distributions of power.

Context explains the pressures surrounding a development. It does not claim that every state followed the same path.

2

The English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution

Why could taxation become a political conflict?

Royal action

Charles I sought to govern and raise revenue without Parliament. Religion and authority also divided the crown and its opponents.

Parliamentary resistance

Parliament and other elites contested the crown's power to act without their consent. The dispute concerned the structure of government.

A cause explains why conflict developed; merely naming Charles I does not explain the dispute.

Elite institutions and wider participation

English Civil War 英国内战

The CED foregrounds competition among monarchy, Parliament and elites. It does not say that only elites took part.

Putney Debates, 1647

Army leaders, soldiers and Levellers debated political rights. Proposals for wider voting show that participation itself was contested.

UK Parliament's account provides evidence for involvement beyond elite institutions. Wider demands did not mean universal voting was achieved.

Avoid a straight line from war to settlement

- 1 Civil-war conflict challenged royal authority; monarchy was abolished during the upheaval.
- 2 Monarchy was later restored. The earlier conflict did not itself establish a permanent constitutional settlement.
- 3 The Glorious Revolution of 1688 and Bill of Rights of 1689 strengthened parliamentary constraints on the crown.

Read sequence carefully: the Civil War and the Glorious Revolution were distinct developments.

A concrete limit on royal action

Bill of Rights, 1689 — teaching paraphrase

The crown could not levy taxation without parliamentary grant. This gave Parliament an institutional means to constrain royal revenue raising.

Parliament 议会 gained protection against royal action. That does not establish equal voting rights for all adults. Source: House of Commons Library.

Your turn: change and limit

Original practice — attempt before the check

Compare Charles I's attempts to raise revenue without Parliament with the 1689 taxation constraint. Explain one institutional change, then one reason the settlement should not be described as universal democracy.

Check: identify the institution and its reach

Change

Parliamentary grant constrained the crown's taxation. The comparison identifies a specific limit on royal action.

Limit

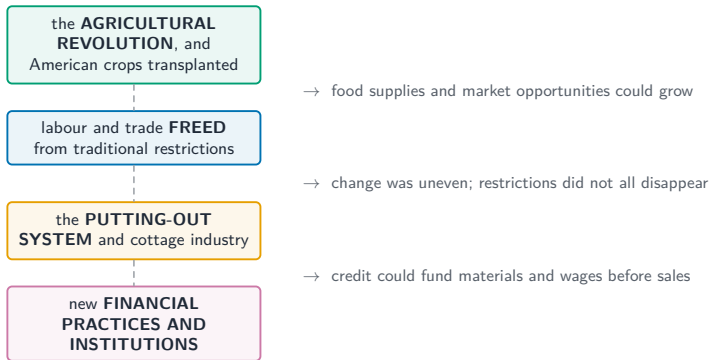
Political power remained concentrated among propertied elites. A constraint on monarchy is not the same as universal voting.

The Glorious Revolution protected gentry and aristocratic interests while changing the distribution of governmental authority.

3

Continuities and Changes to Economic Practice

Economic developments were related and uneven



Read the connections as possible mechanisms. Regions did not move through an identical four-stage sequence.

Food supply and production for markets

Agricultural Revolution 农业革命

Agricultural improvements raised productivity. American crops also contributed to food supply.

Continuing restrictions

Some restrictions on labour and trade weakened, but guild rules, privilege and dependent labour did not disappear everywhere.

Change in market production coexisted with older institutions and rural livelihoods.

How the putting-out system worked

Putting-out system 外包生产制 / cottage industry 家庭手工业

A merchant supplies wool to households. Workers spin and weave in homes or workshops. The merchant pays for the work, collects the cloth and sells it through commercial networks.

The merchant connects dispersed workers to markets. Production for sale does not require a factory.

Why finance mattered to the cloth merchant

Cash-flow problem

Materials and wages must be paid before the cloth is sold. Without funds, the merchant may be unable to commission production.

Credit and risk

Credit can bridge the delay.
Insurance can reduce exposure to specified losses during trade.
Finance supports market activity.

This is a mechanism linking production and finance, not proof that credit alone caused industrialisation.

Your turn: explain a connection and a continuity

Original practice — attempt before the check

Use the cloth example to explain how finance could support cottage production.
Then identify one feature that distinguishes this production from a factory system.

Check: finance and place of work

Connection

Credit helps the merchant pay for materials and labour before sales income arrives, enabling production for a market.

Continuity

Work takes place in homes or workshops. The example does not describe all workers being brought into a factory.

Name the actual link in the example rather than listing four economic developments without explanation.

4

Economic Development and Mercantilism

State policy and commercial power

Mercantilism 重商主义

States regulated trade and drew resources from colonies to strengthen wealth and power. Tariffs, navigation laws and chartered companies were possible tools.

What a policy can change

A tariff can protect domestic producers; a navigation rule can favour a state's shipping; a charter can privilege selected merchants.

These are illustrative mechanisms. Governments did not all apply an identical policy package.

Trace the sugar connection

Demand → production → consumption

European demand for plantation sugar encouraged colonial production. Expansion relied on exploitation of enslaved labour. Imported sugar contributed to European consumer culture.

Overseas networks supplied goods, raw materials, labour and markets. Explain coercion and unequal benefits alongside consumer growth.

Your turn: connect two regions

Original practice — attempt before the check

Explain how European demand for plantation sugar could affect both colonial production and European consumption. Include the labour system in your explanation. Do not assume everyone benefited equally.

Check: demand, coercion and consumption

- 1 Demand encouraged expansion of plantation production in colonies.
- 2 Production depended on exploitation within the expanding transatlantic slave-labour system.
- 3 Sugar imports entered European consumer markets; the benefits and costs were unequally distributed.

Coffee, tea and tobacco also illustrate overseas influences on European consumption. Use the example relevant to the question.

5

The Dutch Golden Age

A commercial republic with concentrated power

Dutch Republic 荷兰共和国

Revolt against Habsburg rule produced a republic. Urban gentry and rural landholders dominated its institutions.

Oligarchy 寡头政治

An elite controls political power. Promoting trade and protecting traditional rights did not give equal influence to every resident.

Political form, commercial strength and social inclusion are separate questions.

Explain the connection, then qualify it

Worked reasoning

Merchant networks, shipping and finance supported Dutch commerce. A political system dominated by elites could protect commercial interests and traditional rights. Its commercial success therefore did not depend on royal absolutism.

Religious toleration could be comparatively broad while remaining limited. Avoid replacing “republic” with “universal democracy”.

Your turn: challenge a generalisation

Original practice — attempt before the check

A student writes: “Only absolute monarchies could become commercially powerful.” Use the Dutch Republic to challenge this claim, then state one limit on political participation in the Dutch case.

Check: a counterexample with a limit

Counterexample

The Dutch Republic developed a major commercial role through trade, shipping and finance without an absolute monarch.

Limit

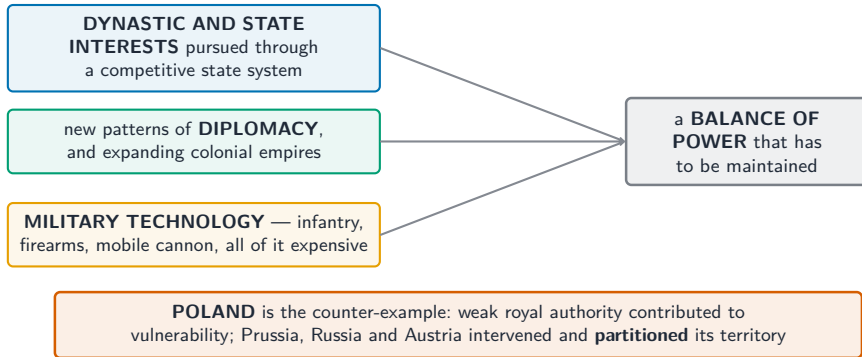
Urban and landholding elites dominated government. Commercial success did not mean equal political participation.

A counterexample challenges an “only” claim; it does not prove that every republic became wealthy.

6

Balance of Power

Military costs and diplomacy shaped rivalry



Coalitions could oppose a powerful ruler. Poland's partitions require both internal vulnerability and external intervention.

Why form a coalition?

Louis XIV's ambitions

Expansion and dynastic interests threatened the position of other European powers. His wars provoked coalitions.

Balance of power

States cooperated to prevent one power from becoming dominant. An ally in one conflict need not be a permanent friend.

Religion declined in importance as a cause of interstate war after Westphalia, but did not cease to matter.

Explain the military resource problem

- 1 Infantry, firearms, mobile cannon and elaborate fortifications increased demands on resources.
- 2 Governments raised taxation and expanded bureaucracies to finance and organise warfare.
- 3 States able to mobilise sufficient resources gained advantages; political labels alone do not explain military capacity.

The Ottoman defeat at Vienna in 1683 halted westward expansion. It did not mark the disappearance of the empire.

Your turn: repair a causal claim

Original practice — attempt before the check

“Poland was partitioned because any state without absolute monarchy inevitably disappeared.” Use these facts to repair the claim: weak royal authority relative to nobles; intervention by Prussia, Russia and Austria; partition of Polish territory.

Check: vulnerability and intervention

Internal factor

The monarchy's difficulty consolidating authority weakened its capacity to resist stronger neighbours.

External action

Prussia, Russia and Austria intervened and partitioned the territory. Their actions are part of the explanation.

A contributing cause is not an inevitable outcome. Other non-absolutist states survived.

7

Absolutist Approaches to Power

Louis XIV and Colbert: institutions of control

Worked mechanism

Royal agents extended administration; financial policy supported revenue; armed forces supported state objectives; religious policy sought greater direction from the crown. Together these illustrate extension of central state control.

Absolutism was a claim and pattern of concentrated authority. Implementation still depended on institutions and cooperation.

Versailles: observe before interpreting



What can the photograph support?

The Hall of Mirrors displays scale, decoration and courtly grandeur. It can support discussion of royal display and court life; it cannot alone prove unlimited control throughout France.

Photo: Myrabella, CC BY-SA 3.0. Historical context: Palace of Versailles.

Royal authority could coexist with noble privilege

ROYAL CONTROL — greater central authority

administrative, financial,
military and religious control
increasingly directed by the crown

Louis XIV, Peter the
Great, Catherine the Great

ELITE POSITION — rank and many privileges

social position
many legal privileges and exemptions
land, and the income from it

Limiting independent noble power did not remove every noble from government. Rank, privilege and royal service could coexist.

Russian westernisation and continuity

Peter and Catherine

Peter the Great transformed military, political, religious and cultural institutions. Catherine continued aspects of westernisation.

What could remain?

Elite privilege and dependent labour remained important. Institutional reform did not necessarily widen political participation.

Compare the purpose and effects of reforms, rather than assuming that “western” means democratic.

Your turn: distinguish authority from participation

Original practice — attempt before the check

Explain how an absolute monarch could reduce independent noble power while still depending on nobles. Use administrative control, royal service and social privilege in your answer.

Check: control and cooperation

Model reasoning

The monarchy could direct administration and limit independent noble decision-making while using nobles as officers and officeholders. Retaining status and legal privileges gave elites reasons to serve the crown. Noble service therefore does not disprove stronger royal control.

Replace “nobles were completely excluded” with a precise account of limited independence and continuing service.

8

Comparison in the Age of Absolutism

Use the same questions for both governments

	Absolutism	Constitutionalism
Where does sovereignty sit?	claimed by the crown	in the crown together with Parliament
What of the nobility in government?	independent power limited; nobles still served the crown	represented, and its rights protected against the crown
The named cases	Louis XIV and Colbert; Peter and Catherine the Great	England after the Civil War and the Glorious Revolution
Elite status and many privileges remained important in both. Neither is popular government.		

Comparison needs a relationship: identify the same institutional dimension and explain similarity or difference.

Evidence pack for a comparison

Case	Evidence supplied
France	Louis XIV and Colbert extended central administrative, financial and military control.
England after 1689	The crown required parliamentary grant for taxation.
Both societies	Aristocratic status and many privileges remained important.

Original teaching pack based on CED topics 3.2 and 3.7. It is not a historical source quotation.

Your turn: write a supported comparison

Original practice — attempt before the check

Using the evidence pack, explain one difference and one similarity between France under Louis XIV and England after 1689. Link each piece of evidence to the relationship you claim.

Check: relationship, evidence, explanation

Difference in constraints

Louis XIV extended central royal control, whereas Parliament constrained the English crown's taxation. The cases differ in the institutional limits on royal action.

Similarity in elite position

Aristocratic status and many privileges remained important in both. Institutional change did not necessarily create equal participation.

Illustrative reasoning, not a guaranteed mark award. Use the actual exam prompt and scoring criteria when assessing an answer.

9

Exam tips

Diagnose weak historical explanations

Weak claim

“1688 created democracy.”

“Nobles lost everything.”

“Poland had to disappear.”

What to explain instead

Which institution constrained which royal action?

Which independent powers narrowed, and which privileges remained?

How did vulnerability combine with neighbouring intervention?

The correction should supply a mechanism or qualification, not merely replace one slogan with another.

Sources and practice provenance

Scope: local College Board AP European History CED, Unit 3, topics 3.1–3.8.

Historical checks: UK Parliament, Putney Debates; House of Commons Library, Bill of Rights 1689; Palace of Versailles, Places of Power and Courtiers.

Full links and photograph licensing are recorded in the handout and metadata. All practice prompts and models in this deck are original teaching material, not authentic past-paper items.

Check yourself

- 1 Explain how parliamentary grant limited royal taxation after 1689.
- 2 Connect credit to the putting-out system using a specific mechanism.
- 3 Explain why the Dutch Republic challenges a claim that commerce required absolutism.
- 4 Compare France and England on one shared institutional question.
- 5 Explain Poland's partition using internal and external factors.