

PS120: Politics Around the World

Section 4: Essay Writing Workshop: Madisonia

Background:

The country of Madisonia recently passed a series of far-reaching constitutional reforms. These reforms were enacted by a coalition government composed of all five major political parties, spanning the political spectrum from left to right. This broad coalition is a novelty in Madisonian politics, which has had governments consisting of two or three parties throughout its democratic history. However, the five-party coalition was necessary to achieve the legislative majority necessary to change the constitution—two-thirds of members in Madisonia’s unicameral legislature. Among the most important changes is the gradual devolution of limited government power to the authorities of Madisonia’s three major regions – Dream Bay, Chillwaukee, and Eclair. This issue was among the most controversial, and the center-right Madisonian Conservative Union (MCU) was adamant, and ultimately successful, in blocking written constitutional guarantees of regional authority. The other parties grudgingly agreed to this, despite their initial insistence on constitutional guarantees, after the MCU had almost let the reform negotiations collapse over the insistence of the center-left Social Democratic Party of Madisonia (SPM) to create a constitutional court with the power of judicial review. In the end, the constitutional court plan was abandoned in exchange for the Conservatives’ concession to maintain the existing electoral system of proportional representation, to make Madisonia’s central bank independent, and to create a second chamber of parliament.

Questions:

1. Does Madisonia, after the constitutional reforms, fit Lijphart’s majoritarian or consensus model of democracy?
2. How does it deviate from each type?
3. Do the reforms move Madisonia closer toward either a majoritarian or consensus model?
4. How does each aspect of Madisonia’s post-reform political system concentrate or disperse power?

Cookbook for Writing Exam Essays:

1. Read the essay question very, very carefully.
2. Ask yourself 1) what the essay question is about; and 2) what class materials you should rely on to answer it.
3. Go back to read the text again, highlight the information that relates to course materials.
4. Create a “roadmap” table that relates the relevant course materials to different parts of the question.
5. Start writing the essay, point by point, make sure you address clearly each part of the question.

Roadmap Table: Madisonia

Key Aspect	Ideal Type: Majoritarian System	Ideal Type: Consensus System	Madisonia: Pre-reform	Madisonia: Post-reform
<i>Type of Government</i>	One-party government	Coalition government		
<i>Party System</i>	Two-party system	Multi-party system		
<i>Vertical Structure</i>	Unitary system	Federalism		
<i>Legislature</i>	Unicameral legislature	Bicameral legislature		
<i>Constitution</i>	Constitutional flexibility	Constitutional rigidity		
<i>Judicial Review</i>	No judicial review	Judicial review		
<i>Balance of Power</i>	Executive dominance	Executive-legislative balance of power		
<i>Electoral System</i>	Majoritarian electoral system	Proportional representation		
<i>Central Bank</i>	Dependent central bank	Independent central bank		