

Constitution Exercise

Find answers to the following questions about the constitution of a country of your choice. Please note in your answer the article of the constitution where you found the information. Also, I use the phrase “head of state” to refer to the person who symbolically represents the country (e.g., a monarch or president), while the “head of government” is the person who leads the cabinet and makes day to day policy decisions (often called a prime minister). In some countries, like the U.S., one person plays both roles. The “government” refers to the head of government and his/her cabinet. For simple clauses (like “The assembly consists of two house”) you may cut and paste from the constitution; for more complicated provisions, put them in your own words. A good place to find constitutions is here: <http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/>.

1. To whom is the preamble of the constitution addressed?
2. What are the self-proclaimed objectives of the constitution?
3. Does the constitution mention God or any other deities?
4. Does the constitution mention democracy?
5. How many major sections does the constitution have? What are they?
6. How long in words is the constitution?
7. Who is the head of state and how is he/she chosen?
8. Who is the head of government and how is he/she chosen?
9. Can the head of state be removed before his/her term expires? How? What about the head of government?
10. What is the maximum length of time the head of government and head of state can remain in office?
11. What happens if the head of state or head of government suddenly dies?
12. How are cabinet members chosen and removed?
13. Does the head of government have the power to issue decrees (ie, make policy without the approval of the legislature)? How and under what circumstances?
14. How does a standard bill become a law? (Don't worry about extraordinary legislation.)
15. What does the constitution say about the country's electoral law for the assembly? Why does it say so little?
16. Are there quotas for the representation of any group? Which?
17. How many chambers does the assembly have? If more than one, what are the key differences in their mode of selection and powers?
18. Who has the power to declare war?
19. Does anyone have the power to veto/overturn legislation passed by the legislature? Must they veto the whole law or can they veto only part? Can the veto be overridden?
20. Can the government dissolve the assembly? How and under what circumstances?
21. What are the requirements for holding the main – president, prime minister, member of the assembly – public offices (e.g., age, place of birth, etc.)?

22. What sort (if any) immunity do these officers have from prosecution? Can the head of state or head of government be convicted of a crime while in office?
23. How many tiers of government does the constitution stipulate (i.e., central, regional, provincial, etc.)? What are they?
24. Are lower tiers of government assigned any exclusive powers – i.e., ones that they alone exercise? What kind of powers?
25. Are any regions or groups given special privileges or powers? What sort of privileges/powers?
26. Does the constitution allow nationwide referenda? If so, what conditions are placed on their calling?
27. What are the procedures for amending the constitution? Are any parts of the constitution unamendable?
28. How are members of the highest court selected? What are their terms?
29. Can the judiciary invalidate laws passed by the assembly? Who has standing to challenge legislation? Can the judiciary then be overruled?
30. Are any basic human rights missing from the constitution?
31. What rights are provided beyond these basic human rights?
32. Which groups, if any, are protected from discrimination?
33. Do citizens have any duties? What are they?
34. What are the requirements to vote in an election?
35. Is capital punishment permitted?
36. How does the constitution draw the line between church and state?
37. Is there a state language?
38. Does the constitution say how one becomes a citizen? If so, how?
39. Is the military completely subordinate to civilian rule? If not, how can it act unilaterally?
40. Are any societal groups (e.g., religious sects, social classes) mentioned by name in the constitution? Are they given any special privileges?
41. Are there any provisions for declaring a state of emergency? If so, how is it called and how does its calling change the normal course of government affairs?
42. Are there provisions for a central bank?
43. What is the status of international law/treaties?
44. Describe one provision in the constitution that surprised or confused you.
45. Briefly, does it appear to you that this is a democratic constitution? Why or why not? Which provisions appear non-democratic and why?