Understanding Politics — Chapter 11 Student Practice Pack

Constitutions and Democratic Design

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About this pack

This pack follows the practice-chapter template. The exercise asks you to design institutions for a hypothetical country; the case analysis uses Ghana's 1992 Constitution, which is freely available online (Constitute Project). Answers are in the Instructor Pack, available to teaching staff from www.oxterpress.com. Student Pack, Chapter 11, version 1.0 (October 2026). © Oxter Press. CC BY-NC 4.0.

Chapter at a glance

System	Executive selected by	Can the legislature remove it?	Typical risk	Key source
Presidential	Separate popular election	No (except impeachment)	Dual legitimacy and deadlock	Linz (1990); Cheibub (2007)
Parliamentary	The legislature	Yes, by confidence vote	Executive dominance through party discipline	Strøm (2000)
Semi-presidential	Elected president plus a prime minister responsible to parliament	The cabinet, yes; the president, no	Cohabitation conflict	Elgie (1999); Shugart and Carey (1992)

Lijphart (2012) contrasts majoritarian and consensus democracies across ten variables; Tsebelis (2002) asks how many veto players must agree to change policy.

Design exercise

You advise a constitutional assembly in a hypothetical country with three regionally concentrated groups, a history of one-party rule and a population that values decisive government. Choose and justify:

Choice	Your option	Main benefit	Main risk	How you would limit the risk
Executive type				

Choice	Your option	Main benefit	Main risk	How you would limit the risk
Electoral system				
Federal or unitary				
Second chamber				
Judicial review				
Amendment rule				

Then answer: (1) How many veto players does your design create? (2) Is it closer to Lijphart's majoritarian or consensus model? (3) What would Horowitz say about your treatment of the three groups?

Case analysis: Ghana's hybrid executive

Read articles 58 and 78 of the 1992 Constitution.

1. Article 58 vests executive authority in the President. Article 78(1) requires most ministers to be drawn from Parliament. Is Ghana presidential, parliamentary or something else? Use the chapter's definitions.
2. What incentives does article 78(1) create for members of Parliament in the governing party?
3. How might the overlap affect legislative scrutiny of ministers?
4. Reformers have proposed barring members of Parliament from ministerial office. Predict one benefit and one risk.
5. What did the 2020 election, which left the two main parties with equal seats, reveal about the system?

Self-test

1. In a parliamentary system, the executive:
    - A. Is directly elected for a fixed term
    - B. Cannot be removed
    - C. Depends on the confidence of the legislature
    - D. Is chosen by the courts
2. Linz's 'dual legitimacy' problem arises because:
    - A. President and legislature each claim a separate democratic mandate
    - B. There are two chambers
    - C. Courts rival the executive
    - D. Parties are weak
3. Cheibub found that presidential breakdowns reflect mainly:
    - A. Presidential powers
    - B. Federalism
    - C. Electoral systems

- D. Where presidentialism was adopted, such as countries with histories of military rule

4. Mainwaring argued presidentialism is most problematic when combined with:
    - A. Federalism
    - B. Fragmented multiparty systems
    - C. Two-party systems
    - D. Strong courts
5. Elgie defines semi-presidentialism as:
    - A. A popularly elected fixed-term president alongside a prime minister and cabinet responsible to parliament
    - B. A president chosen by parliament
    - C. A monarchy with a parliament
    - D. A federal presidency
6. In a premier-presidential system:
    - A. The president can dismiss the cabinet at will
    - B. There is no prime minister
    - C. The cabinet is responsible only to parliament
    - D. The legislature elects the president
7. Lijphart's consensus democracy:
    - A. Concentrates power in one party
    - B. Disperses authority through coalitions, proportional representation and federalism
    - C. Abolishes elections
    - D. Has no courts
8. Veto players are actors:
    - A. Who vote in elections
    - B. Who staff the civil service
    - C. Who lobby government
    - D. Whose agreement is necessary to change the status quo
9. Consociationalism (Lijphart, 1977) guarantees groups:
    - A. Separate states
    - B. Military protection
    - C. A share of power, autonomy and veto rights
    - D. Nothing
10. Horowitz preferred institutions that:
    - A. Reward politicians for winning votes across group lines
    - B. Guarantee each group its share
    - C. Ban ethnic parties only
    - D. Remove elections
11. Weingast argues constitutional limits become self-enforcing when:
    - A. Courts are strong
    - B. Citizens share an understanding of violations and can coordinate responses
    - C. Amendment is easy
    - D. Parties are banned
12. Elkins, Ginsburg and Melton found national constitutions typically:

- A. Last centuries
- B. Never change
- C. Are always written by elected assemblies
- D. Survive for less than two decades

13. Ghana's article 78(1) requires that:
    - A. Ministers be civil servants
    - B. The President be a member of Parliament
    - C. The majority of ministers be appointed from among members of Parliament
    - D. Ministers be elected separately
14. Institutional endogeneity means that:
    - A. Countries choose institutions for reasons that may also shape outcomes
    - B. Institutions are random
    - C. Institutions never matter
    - D. Outcomes cause nothing
15. Coalitional presidentialism describes presidents who:
    - A. Govern alone
    - B. Govern through multiparty cabinets
    - C. Abolish parliament
    - D. Share office with a monarch

Short answers and essays

Short answers: (1) Presidential versus parliamentary systems. (2) Dual legitimacy. (3) Cheibub's challenge to Linz. (4) Two subtypes of semi-presidentialism. (5) Majoritarian versus consensus democracy. (6) Veto players and policy stability. (7) Consociationalism versus centripetalism. (8) Why constitutions need enforcement. (9) Institutional endogeneity. (10) Ghana's hybrid executive.

Essays: (1) Is presidentialism dangerous for democracy? (2) Should divided societies share power or encourage cross-group appeals? (3) Do constitutions constrain power or reflect it? (4) Is consensus democracy better than majoritarian democracy? (5) Can institutions be transplanted? (6) Should Ghana bar members of Parliament from ministerial office?

Glossary

Term	Definition
Constitution	Rules allocating and limiting public power
Presidentialism	Separately elected executive with a fixed term
Parliamentarism	Executive dependent on legislative confidence
Semi-presidentialism	Elected president plus a prime minister responsible to parliament
Veto player	Actor whose agreement is needed for change
Consociationalism	Guaranteed power-sharing among groups

Term	Definition
Centripetalism	Institutions rewarding cross-group appeals
Endogeneity	Institutions shaped by the conditions they are said to affect