

Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

Access to this work was provided by the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) ScholarWorks@UMBC digital repository on the Maryland Shared Open Access (MD-SOAR) platform.

**Please provide feedback**

Please support the ScholarWorks@UMBC repository by emailing [scholarworks-group@umbc.edu](mailto:scholarworks-group@umbc.edu) and telling us what having access to this work means to you and why it's important to you. Thank you.

## Teaching U.S. Constitutional Design: The Case of the “Genovian Revolution”

Ian G. Anson<sup>1</sup>

1/25/2023

*Paper prepared for the 2023 APSA Teaching & Learning Conference, Feb. 11, 2023, Baltimore, MD, USA*

**Abstract:** *Instructors often lament that their students possess a distorted understanding of the U.S. Constitution. Students often initially fail to appreciate how power, group interests, and conflictual processes have shaped American political institutions and their long-term effects. To foster a view of U.S. Constitutional design that better reflects the core insights of contemporary political science, I introduce a two-week constitutional convention simulation that centers on the fictional Principality of Genovia. Working in groups, students assume roles within various segments of Genovian society who seek democratic representation following the sudden abdication of their autocratic prince. The simulation is designed to foreshadow key concepts in American government and politics. It does so in a way that allows for vociferous debate and conflict while sidestepping students' pre-existing ideologies and party attachments. It also provides a collaborative, active learning environment. In a pre-post survey instrument, I test the effectiveness of the Genovian simulation in fostering key learning outcomes vis-a-vis several other classroom modules, finding that the Genovian exercise is beneficial to students on several dimensions.*

**Keywords:** *Simulation, constitutional design, classroom activity, role-play, active learning*

---

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, UMBC, 1000 Hilltop Cir., 305 PUP, Baltimore, MD 21250. [iganson@umbc.edu](mailto:iganson@umbc.edu).

Students in introductory American government and politics courses face a unique learning challenge. One prominent goal of K-12 instruction is to activate students' civic agency through a curriculum that focuses on how the U.S. political process is designed to function (e.g., Kedrowski 2003). While this is a laudable goal—and one that is shared by many college courses—students in these settings may develop an understanding of American politics that glosses the conflictual reality of contemporary politics (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1996; McDevitt and Caton-Rosser 2009; Smith and Graham 2014).

Despite the relatively benign descriptions found in many primary-school texts, our Constitution was designed through a tumultuous process that highlights the centrality of power and inequality as subjects of study in political science. Political scientists often examine how power shapes conflicts over foundational institutions (e.g., Beard 2012 [1913]; Pope and Trier 2012). We are interested in the ways in which groups excluded from constitutional moments are kept powerless until the emergence of pathbreaking social movements (e.g., Alberts et al. 2011; Dahl 1998). Scholars have also asserted that American constitutional design has yielded ongoing problems for the consolidation of U.S. democracy (e.g., Achen and Bartels 2016; Gilens and Page 2014; Levinson 2006). Teaching this “realist’s” view of power and the American constitution can be jarring to students whose earlier civics education was wholly uncritical in its treatment of these issues and concepts.

To address this potential learning roadblock, I propose a simulation activity that provides students with an opportunity to discover the politics of constitutional design. This simulation tasks students with the construction of a new constitution for Genovia, a fictional country with features

that resemble, but do not identically replicate, the issues at play in the American founding and beyond.<sup>2</sup>

The simulation activity is primarily designed to address the difficulty of teaching the realities (or “barbarics”) of American politics (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1996). But it also addresses several other key classroom objectives. Recent research in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) demonstrates the critical importance of a welcoming classroom environment that fosters active discussion and team building for student learning goals (e.g., Faulkner et al. 2021; Felton and Lambert 2020). In addition, scholars have pointed out that in an era of divisive politics, classrooms can quickly devolve into partisan- and ideologically oriented conflict zones, rather than arenas for discussion of course content and the respectful presentation of contrasting views (e.g., Garrett 2020). The Genovian simulation is designed to allow students to adopt roles that may not share their own ideological predispositions—indeed, some roles are actively working to undermine the success of the constitutional convention! In doing so, students can inhabit personas that allow for raucous debate, factional discord, and the realities of power politics, while keeping these political conflicts fun, lighthearted, and far outside of the scope of modern political disagreements.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> “Genovia” is the fictional country in *The Princess Diaries*, a popular film series starring Anne Hathaway that debuted in 2001 (a sequel premiered in 2004). Student awareness of this fact (despite recent discussion of a third installment to be produced by Disney) has decreased linearly since the initial deployment of the simulation in 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Invariably, students will reference American political controversies or U.S. politicians during the simulation, especially in ways that draw negative parallels to developments in Genovia. I often

Of course, no simulation is successful if it fails to increase students' understanding of the desired course content. In a pre-post survey-based pilot study conducted in the Fall of 2022, I examine the effectiveness of the Genovian simulation in helping students develop knowledge of U.S. Constitutional design. I also tap students' perceptions of the classroom environment and the simulation itself and compare these affective items to other simulation-based exercises within and outside of the course setting. This pilot study (survey N = 23, enrollee N = 93) was conducted in two sections of an Introduction to American Government and Politics course at a mid-sized, minority-serving university in the mid-Atlantic with a Carnegie classification of Research 1 (R1). Initial results provide suggestive evidence that the Genovian simulation is uniquely beneficial in advancing the stated learning goals for students in this course and university context.

Below, I describe what we know about simulations in political science, especially as they concern mock constitutional conventions. Next, I review the details of the Genovian simulation as it was implemented in the Fall semester of 2022, before providing the results of a pilot study testing the simulation's effectiveness. I conclude with a discussion of best practices for instructors hoping to incorporate a constitutional simulation in their own American government courses.

### **Constitutional Simulation and the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning (SoTL)**

Political scientists have long emphasized the benefits of in-class simulation in the introductory American politics curriculum and beyond (e.g., Baranowski and Weir 2015; Kensicki et al. 2022; Munir 2022). Simulation can help students gain a deep understanding of key concepts in institutional design, by allowing them to experience the functioning of those institutions

---

redirect these comments by striking a quizzical expression and asking, "America? What on earth is that?"

firsthand. Indeed, other SoTL work has previously engaged the notion that simulation activities can expose students to a better awareness of the political realities of institutional design in Congressional simulations (e.g., Lay and Smarick 2006).

Fewer simulation exercises have explicitly tasked students with the design of constitutions, though simulation has been used to introduce students to core constitutional concepts. Notably, Bridge (2014) uses the board game *Battleship* to teach institutional rules and the key differences between the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution of 1789. Other simulations have been designed to help students understand the policy-making process, a subject that engages U.S. constitutional design as a matter of course (e.g., Britt and Williams 2022). Altogether, the robust literature on simulation in the political science classroom (especially in the fields of International Relations and American politics) point to the potential for a constitutional simulation that tangibly benefits students' learning outcomes.

### ***Comparing Simulation Design Features***

Teaching the U.S. Constitution in comparative perspective can have unique benefits for students. However, in drawing a comparison between the United States and the fictional nation of Genovia, I faced several key choices. To maximize the potential benefits of this simulation, I varied students' power roles and sought to develop an "organic" simulation. These choices led students to make decisions based on their intuitions rather than specialized knowledge.

In Gelbman's (2011) work on the pedagogical benefits of teaching American politics in a comparative perspective, students gained an appreciation of the U.S. Constitution's unique design features and became more engaged with the political process by making direct comparisons to other countries' constitutional systems. The potential benefits of comparison are also evident in simulation exercises. Langfield (2016), for instance, argues that using real-world cases as

simulation materials can confer unique benefits for political science students. This strategy combines two successful pedagogical approaches (that of simulation and case study) into one.

While Langfield's (2016) proposal is useful in a variety of learning contexts, I choose to adopt a fictional case. I assert that the fictional properties of Genovia are ideal tools for amplifying the proposed benefits of *organic* simulation. According to the work of Kollars and Rosen (2013), organic simulations can be distinguished from illustrative simulations. The former category of simulations asks students to use their intuitions and natural reactions to situations and events to derive an initial understanding of broad learning outcomes. In contrast, in illustrative simulations, students use the knowledge they have developed in their close study of a topic to draw out nuances, examine the consequences of complex processes, and master the material.

Organic simulation may be especially useful in introductory courses like those in which I debuted the Genovian simulation. There exists some evidence that conducting simulations early in students' academic careers can be notably effective in shaping later success in the field (Lovell and Khatri 2021). This is another way in which organic simulation in an introductory American politics course might convey special benefits.

The Genovian simulation is also designed to expose students to a variety of "power roles" (Baranowski and Weir 2010). In simulations, some students can be assigned roles that wield outsized power relative to others, yielding interesting dynamics for analysis and discussion. Power roles can dramatically increase students' awareness of the realities of political conflict and compromise, a key feature of constitutional design.

Altogether, in designing the Genovian simulation, the literature on political science classroom simulations led me to adopt several design principles, including an emphasis on power roles, an organic approach, and a fictional case. It would certainly be possible to design a

simulation placing students in a real-world case setting (e.g., the adoption of the West German constitution in 1949), or to train students in the nuances of constitutional theory before a convention exercise (an illustrative simulation), or to give students more technocratic roles rather than ones with embedded interests and power dynamics. However, my suspicion is that none of these design choices would have achieved the stated goals of the simulation to the same degree. Below, I describe the specifics of the Genovian simulation, explaining students' roles, activities, deliverables, and debriefing in detail.

### **Welcome to Genovia: A Fake Country with Real Problems**

The Genovian simulation is designed to take place over three 75-minute course sessions, ideally early in the semester. In the first session, students are divided into five groups (in the courses described below, this resulted in groups of 8-10 students). They learn about their roles and the other groups' roles, and then spend time thinking about their approach to initial constitutional questions. In the second session, groups submit proposals for the design of the legislature and the executive, debate them, and ultimately seek to include them in the provisional draft of the constitution by majority vote. In the final session, students submit proposals related to the rights and liberties of Genovians, approve them by majority vote, and then vote on ratification on the full text of the constitution. As one might imagine, contentious moments may arise during these deliberations—and not all of them concern the questions under consideration. To understand why, I next describe the issues that the Genovian population face when the simulation is put into motion.

### ***The “Glorious” Genovian Revolution***

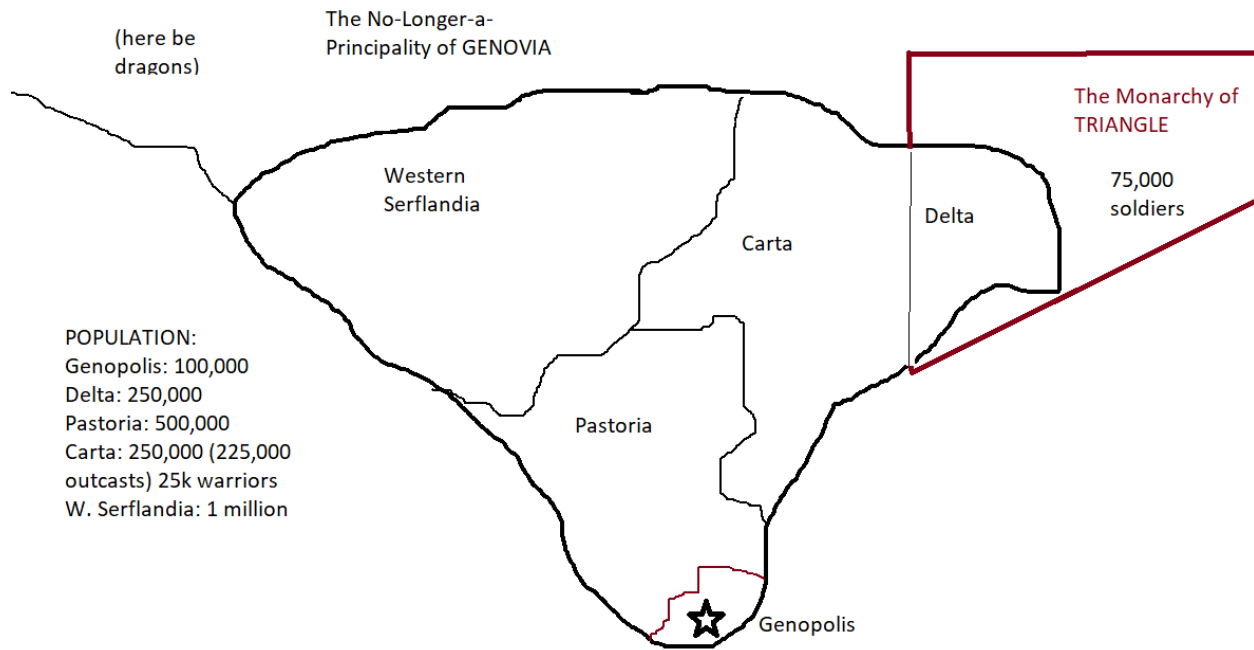
The simulation is introduced to students through a worksheet that describes the political situation as follows:



*The Principality of Genovia has cast out its authoritarian prince, and jubilant mobs have taken to the street to celebrate the advent of a new, more democratic, political order. Today, Genovians (that's you!) have been called forth to help assemble a new democratic arrangement. Below you will find information about your region and the people you represent, as well as some questions to discuss with your group of delegates before the convention begins.*

Students learn that Genovia has been ruled for centuries by authoritarians, and that these authoritarians have historically treated the five regions of the nation differently depending upon their proximity to the capital city of Genopolis. These regions vary by geographical size, population, socioeconomic status, political culture, and degree of loyalism to the former prince. As a result, even basic design questions like the process of allocating seats in Congress to each region can become intensely contested in the simulation. These design features were created to give each group a pivotal role in different proceedings within the convention. As I further describe below, each group's role is designed to spark controversy at a different moment, tapping a variety of issues at the heart of constitutions and democratic politics.

**Fig. 1. A Political Map of Genovia**



As seen in Fig. 1 (above), Genovia is a small coastal nation with impassable, unclaimed terrain to its north and northwest. The sparse northern hinterlands of Genovia are shared by the regions of Western Serflandia and Carta. The center of the country is occupied by the temperate and verdant Pastoria. A small peninsular region features the wealthy, glimmering capital city of Genopolis. Genovia also features a border with the Monarchy of Triangle to the northeast. Despite sharing ethnic and cultural similarities, Triangle is a bitter enemy of Genovia, having lost a war of territorial expansion 50 years prior to the simulation's events. This war resulted in Genovia's acquisition of a new region, Delta, which is largely inhabited by a *linguistic* minority. This group, which speaks the fictional language Trianglian, is otherwise totally undifferentiated from the descriptive profile of Genovians (who are, as it is often impressed upon students, quite diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and other descriptors).

## ***Rules of the Game***

The simulation is designed to take place over three 75-minute class periods. Below, in Table 1, I describe the basic process through which I conduct the simulation. For each set of tasks, I also list the pedagogical objectives I hope to accomplish on each day of the simulation.

***Table 1. The Genovian Convention, Day-By-Day***

Session	Tasks	Pedagogical Objectives
Day 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduce the simulation</li><li>• Assign students to roles</li><li>• Consider the question of legislative design</li><li>• Introduce groups to one another through the debate over the legislature</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Foster a collaborative, inclusive classroom environment</li><li>• Ensure knowledge of the simulation's design</li><li>• Set expectations</li></ul>
Day 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recap the past day's events</li><li>• Vote on legislative design</li><li>• Discuss and vote on the design of the executive</li><li>• Begin debates over civil rights and liberties</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop students' knowledge of the American legislature and executive</li><li>• Develop an awareness of Constitutional Convention's need for political compromise</li><li>• Hear as many voices as possible</li></ul>
Day 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conclude discussion Genovian rights and liberties and vote on clauses</li><li>• Assemble a final draft of the Genovian constitution</li><li>• Vote on ratification (50% approval)</li><li>• Observe simulation outcome</li><li>• Debrief</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop students' knowledge of American civil rights, liberties, and federalism</li><li>• Develop critical reasoning skills: What are groups' long-term outcomes if constitution is ratified?</li><li>• Raise direct comparisons between Genovian experience and U.S. experience</li><li>• Reflect on the nature of power, institutions, and group conflict</li></ul>

As seen in Table 1, the first day of the simulation asks little from the students in terms of formal objectives. Instead, the goal at this stage is to help the students in each group get to know

one another, and to better understand the details of the simulation and the five groups' roles. First, I assign students to groups, generally slicing the classroom into five side-by-side regions that mix students from the front and back of the classroom within each group. Once situated, students begin discussion of their roles in the simulation with their peers. The conversations can also become more casual as students introduce themselves. Eventually, after introductions are properly made (which can take a significant portion of class time), students are asked to consider the question, "how should we set up the legislature of Genovia?" I explain the need to determine the number of seats in the legislature, to determine how many seats should come from each region, and to explain any further legislative design details in a group's proposal.

Once each group has created a proposal for the design of the legislature, I project a Word document containing all five proposals on the classroom screen. I read each group's proposal and indicate that the proposal with the greatest enthusiasm from the room will be adopted as a plank in our draft constitution. I remind students that even if they "lose" this round of the convention, the tentative legislative design might reveal beneficial possibilities when it comes to later constitutional questions.

Then, students begin debate on the proposals. I let groups first introduce their roles to the other groups (though the materials for each group are visible to all participants, so enterprising students will have read about all the roles at the outset). Then, the proposals are debated—often leading to quite comical, yet vociferous, speeches in defense of certain arguments. Eventually, students who have fully "assumed their roles" might launch invectives at other groups (e.g., a group from the hinterlands is often labeled "bumpkins" by a group from the capital city—a barb that is often met with raucous jeers). Classroom management is an important aspect of the exercise in these moments. Success in this regard means that students feel that the convention is meaningful

and entertaining, while also feeling that any tensions between groups is a lighthearted consequence of fully inhabiting the simulation's roles, and nothing to be taken personally.

On Day 2, I ask more of the students. Having gotten a chance to see the process of proposing and selecting constitutional clauses on Day 1, students arrive eager to debate the next topic: the executive. This conversation often engages complex ideas about the balance of power between the groups and introduces the question of federalism. Some groups seek to create a strong executive that will have broad authority over the lives of Genovians, while others demand a figurehead with few formal responsibilities. Others seek a "council of five" that will serve as a kind of upper house. Veto points and the nature of checks and balances are discussed at great length, and a vote is eventually taken over the five proposals generated by the groups.

Day Two concludes with an initial discussion of a deceptively simple question: "Who should get the right to vote in Genovia?" While many students' instincts lead them to reflexively respond, "everyone," the students' factions have very different views of this question. Some see the attractiveness of literacy tests, educational requirements, or poll taxes, while others demand the exclusion of already-disenfranchised groups within their own regions. As discussed below, this is a key moment in the simulation for three reasons: It brings tensions between the groups to a head; it greatly jeopardizes the success of the convention; and it causes students to deeply reflect on the logic of disenfranchisement and the centuries-long struggle for full political inclusion in the United States.

On Day 3, the simulation concludes with a series of (normally highly contentious) votes on a series of proposed rights and liberties of Genovians. These questions also lead to a basic definition of Genovian federalism, with the meta-question becoming whether Genovia will remain a loose confederation of states, or whether it will concentrate authority at the federal level. Having

fleshed out the text of the draft constitution, groups are next given time to reflect on the draft and determine whether they will vote to ratify the constitution. At this juncture, two groups are informed that they have additional actions that they can take unilaterally: military conquest of the other regions, and secession. Before students then vote on the text of the constitution, these groups share their plans with the rest of the regions, and proposals to amend the text of the constitution to possibly prevent these outcomes are fielded. Once all amendments are finalized, the constitution is ratified or defeated by simple majority. See the Supplementary Information for an example of one class's constitutional text.

### ***Playing the Game: Inhabiting Genovian Political Factions***

As one might imagine, the simulation rarely produces a ratified constitution. To better understand why that is the case, I next describe the five roles inhabited by students in the simulation. While the five regions of Genovia have different populations and levels of pre-revolutionary power, each has the potential to be a “winner” or “loser” at the constitutional convention. The simulation intentionally divides the students in the classroom into five groups of equal size when assigning the roles. Thus, despite population imbalances, the constitutional convention itself places the groups on equal footing from the perspective of voting on constitutional clauses and ratification.

***Table 2. Five Genovian Regions and their Key Features***

Region	Population (%)	Historical Power	Key Simulation Details
<b>W. Serflandia</b>	1,000,000 (48%)	Low	Highly populous, historically marginalized community of subsistence farmers. Denied educational opportunities and public services by the prince. Critical of Genopolis due to longstanding resource deprivation and the prince's hardline treatment of a recent protest wave.
<b>Pastoria</b>	500,000 (24%)	Moderate	A well-educated, tolerant group of pro-democracy reformers. Many residents hold religious tenets that lead them to uphold social equality above all other considerations. Pastoria's bourgeois economy is driven by productive agriculture and skilled trades. This region called for the constitutional convention.
<b>Carta</b>	250,000 (12%)	High	A militaristic region dominated by a small ruling elite of 25,000 citizen-soldiers. All attendees at the Convention from the region are of this ruling caste. The remainder of the population forms an oppressed caste of "outcasts" with no rights. Cartan elites are suspicious of Deltans, having fought in the recent war against Triangle. Carta has the only standing army in Genovia.
<b>Delta</b>	250,000 (12%)	Low	A linguistic minority region with loyalties divided between the Kingdom of Triangle and a potentially democratic Genovia. The region boasts a strong economy thanks to robust trade with Triangle. Residents distrust Carta and Genopolis due to historical tensions and Genopolitan loyalism.
<b>Genopolis</b>	100,000 (4%)	Very High	Wealthy urban center of finance, culture, and international affairs, with strong ties to the former prince and a distaste for the democratic ideas flourishing in other regions. View other regions as uneducated and crude. The region could wield its high incomes, productivity, and wealth as justifications to offset the disadvantages of a tiny population.

As seen in Table 2 above, Genovia's five fictional regions each remind students of issues at the core of American politics and political development (and indeed, the politics of many democratic countries). Western Serflandia is a region with a large population, yet low human development, and its early conflict with Genopolis and other smaller regions in the simulation raises important early questions about the principle of "one person, one vote" and the nature of

regional or state-based representation. Serflandian politics evokes the Jacksonian Revolution and perennial democratic questions of class, representation, and power. Wealth imbalances across the regions also readily create opponents and proponents of federalism and a stronger, more redistributive centralized government. Western Serflandia and Genopolis often play an especially important role early in the simulation—when the convention considers the design of the legislature and the nature of the executive. These roles echo debates at the American constitutional convention between Virginia and New Jersey and foreshadow later class discussions about the New Deal and the Reagan Revolution.

As natural opponents, Carta and Delta play roles in the simulation that clearly endanger the success of the fledgling democracy. Delta’s dominant strategy in the simulation is to threaten secession in the face of Cartan saber-rattling. Students are often reminded of Benjamin Franklin’s 1754 “Join or Die” cartoon. They come to fear the threat of foreign conquest when they learn of the powerful army of Triangle and the King of Triangle’s hostility to democracy.<sup>4</sup> This discovery echoes the position of the U.S. under the Articles of Confederation.

Carta’s role is dissimilar from the U.S. experience in that all colonies had at least some means of self-defense (though the shock of Shays’ Rebellion is a helpful reminder that some colonies were less capable of self-defense than others). Carta’s military dominance is instead reminiscent of more modern democratic breakdowns, where military juntas depose democratically elected governments in the name of “public safety” (the Thai experience springs to mind). Regardless, the Cartan-Deltan rivalry reveals the fragility of democratic politics in the face of force

---

<sup>4</sup> As the literature on democratization helpfully reminds us, non-democracies do not like democratic neighbors (e.g., Brinks and Coppedge 2006).



and secession—themes that are deeply ingrained in American history due to the lessons of the Civil War.

The American Civil War is invoked in another aspect of the simulation. During the convention, the Genovian constitution often becomes even more imperiled once students move from the topic of basic legislative and executive design to questions of civil rights and liberties. In this part of the simulation, Carta normally stands in opposition to Pastoria (and often Delta) when it comes time to define Genovian citizenship. Students struggle to achieve a consolidated democracy throughout the simulation, but the question of universal citizenship is especially fraught. Cartans reject this notion because it would enfranchise the Outcast class in their region (a representation of the situation in the antebellum South, and a foreshadowing of the retrenchment of political representation for emancipated southerners during Reconstruction). Also foreshadowing discussions of the three-fifths compromise, representation, and systemic disenfranchisement from the founding to the present, these perilous moments for the Genovian constitution often cause students to reflect on the deeper meaning of the simulation while it is in progress.

The discussion of rights and liberties often centers the question of enfranchisement, but it can also include other parts of a “Genovian Bill of Rights” that students usually organically lobby to include. Groups—usually the pro-democracy Pastoria, or the minoritarian Delta—will suggest that one way to resolve irreconcilable differences across the regions is to specify a series of universal rights (echoing what the students might know about the U.S. Constitution). At this juncture, all groups will engage in frenzied lobbying for various constitutional guarantees. Examples include a guarantee of bilingual signage and official business (from Delta), a guarantee of economic equality among regions (from Pastoria or Western Serflandia), and a guarantee of property rights for the wealthy (from Genopolis).

After the inclusion of these constitutional details, students debate whether to ratify the text. It is at this moment that some groups are made aware of alternative strategies. Carta is reminded that they have “all the swords,” and that a power-play to re-write aspects of the constitution by force is possible. Delta is reminded that secession and reunification with Triangle would bring them back under the rule of authoritarians but would almost certainly give them the upper hand in an eventual war against the remaining four regions. Genopolis, echoing the capital flight that occurred after loyalists abandoned the colonies, is reminded that they could follow the Prince in exile and leave the country destitute.

In the discussion that follows, groups force their hands. The text of the constitution is rewritten to contain concessions, either according to the will of the majority, or in the case of Carta, against the majority. This moment, if it occurs, inevitably leads to shock and anger from the other groups, who have dutifully “played by the rules.” The conclusion of the amendment process brings a majority vote for ratification. The constitution almost always fails, leading to an unfulfilling denouement and a very active discussion about how it all went wrong.

### ***Learning Outcomes and Debrief***

A debrief takes place to conclude the simulation. However, as the Genovian simulation has so many themes and points of connection to the remainder of the introductory American Politics curriculum, I suggest several further opportunities to debrief the simulation. First, I ask students to engage in a brief expository writing assignment. The prompt for this informal journaling exercise asks students to reflect on their experience in the simulation, and to draw parallels and contrasts between the Genovian simulation and the situation in the U.S. in 1787. Next, I incorporate the Genovian simulation in a longer, more summative writing prompt (see the Supplementary Information for details). This prompt asks students to critique the constitution the class has created,

and to consider whether the U.S.' solution to the dilemmas posed in our simulation would serve Genovia better. In some cases, the U.S.' constitutional clauses and amendments would cause major problems for Genovia, making this a more critical exercise than it seems at first glance.

Overall, these opportunities to debrief the simulation are joined by many offhand references and callbacks later in the course. But the formal and informal writing assignments task students with specifically engaging the learning goals of the simulation. They help to better connect the fictional world of Genovia to the real world of U.S. politics, both at its founding and as it has evolved into its current form.

## **Assessment**

Next, I provide a brief description of an IRB-approved research project designed to evaluate the efficacy of the Genovian simulation.<sup>5</sup> While the research is still in a pilot stage due to a low number of observations collected in the past semester, I anticipate repeating the protocol with subsequent course sections in later semesters.

## ***Methods & Data***

Following the existing literature on the study of simulations and their effects, I use a pre-post survey instrument to assess affect and learning outcomes (e.g., Lohmann 2020; c.f. Frederking 2005). Students in two sections of Intro. to American politics were assigned the Genovian simulation in the Fall of 2022 (class N = 93). The first wave of the survey was implemented prior to the first day of the Genovian simulation. Students were recruited via email and invited to participate in the survey. While the survey was optional, all students participated in the simulation.

---

<sup>5</sup> UMBC IRB Approval #1015, Sept. 20, 2022.

After its conclusion, students were again recruited to participate in a second wave of the survey.

The survey measured observations from 23 students.

In both waves, the survey asked students a series of six factual questions about the U.S. constitution (see the SI for details). I combine these items into a constitutional knowledge scale ranging from 0 to 6, with each additional point indicating a correct answer. The survey also asked students in both waves to describe the degree to which they “can understand why [other people] might believe [differing political opinions],” whether students “enjoy trying to solve political problems by talking about them with [their] peers,” and whether students “enjoy in-class simulations” (measured on a 1-5 agreement Likert scale). These latter items are designed to tap the efficacy of the simulation in fostering collaborative learning.

The post-test instrument asked students follow-up questions related to the simulation, including whether the simulation was excellent “relative to other in-class exercises in this class,” whether it was excellent relative to “the in-class exercises in the other classes I have taken,” whether the simulation “taught valuable things about the U.S. Constitution,” and whether the simulation “helped [students] appreciate different viewpoints,” all measured on 1-5 Likert agreement scales. Responses were coded with larger values indicating greater agreement.

## **Results**

The results provide suggestive evidence that the simulation was effective in increasing knowledge of the U.S. Constitution. It provides less conclusive evidence that the simulation fosters a collaborative learning environment. However, students in the post-test instrument were highly

supportive of the simulation, consistently rating it as excellent. Despite the small sample size, the present results show partial evidence that the Genovian simulation improves learning outcomes.

In Table 3, below, I show the results of pre-post t-test comparisons on the items that were included in both survey waves. The first row of Table 3 includes evidence from the 6-point constitutional knowledge battery, while the later rows show evidence from the measures tapping the effects of the simulation on a collaborative learning environment.

***Table 3. Results of Pre-Post t-Test Comparisons***

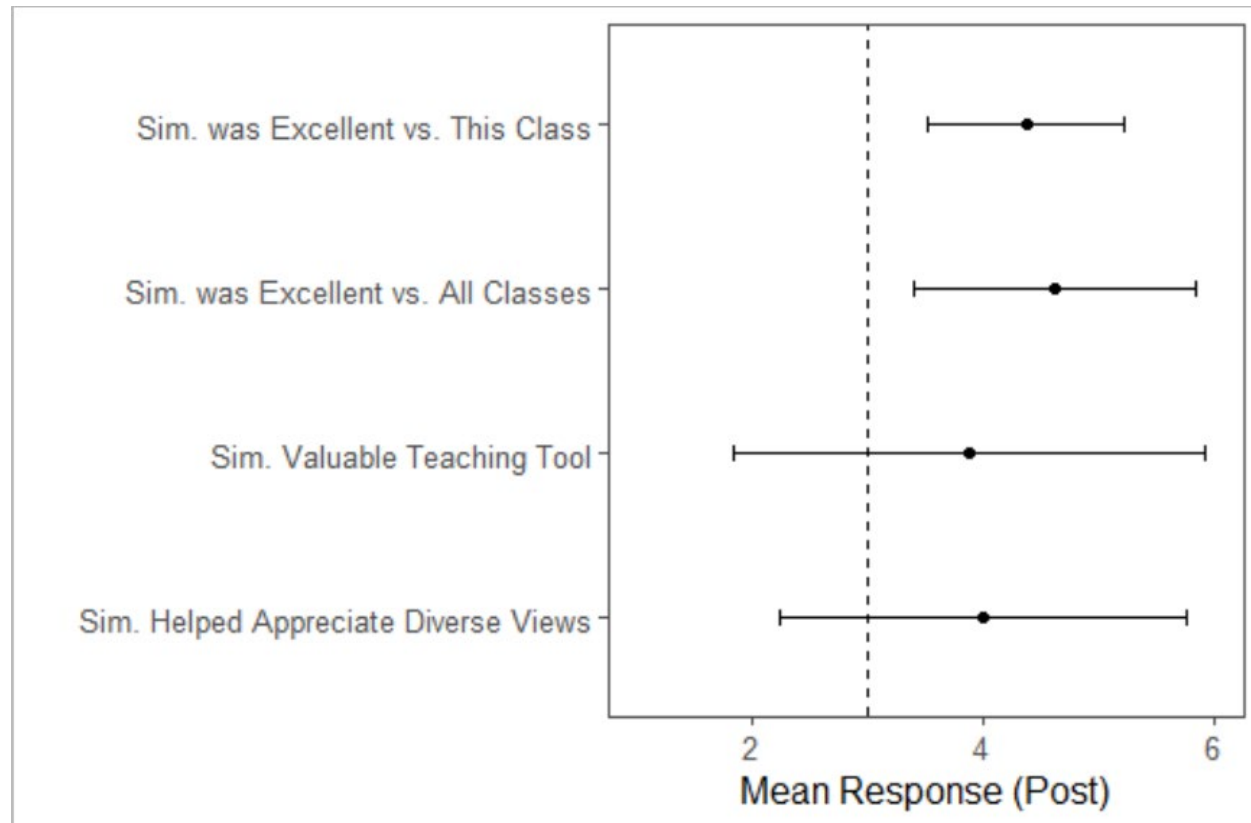
<b>Item</b>	<b>t-Value</b>	<b>p-Value</b>
Constitutional Knowledge	2.36	<b>0.035</b>
Appreciate Diverse Viewpoints	1.47	0.166
Enjoy Class Discussions	0.46	0.657
Enjoy Simulation Exercises	0.77	0.461

The results in Table 3 show that constitutional knowledge increased immediately after the simulation to a statistically significant degree ( $p < 0.05$ ), while other items did not show reliable evidence of an increase. Students were marginally more likely to say that they appreciated diverse viewpoints, but the comparison did not yield a reliable result ( $p = 0.166$ ). Other items, such as whether students enjoy discussing politics with their peers, and whether they enjoy simulations in general, showed even less of an impact. It is reassuring, however, that the simulation did not *reduce* students' willingness to engage in these ways. The simulation is designed to afford students the opportunity to contest politics intensely. In this case, the high stakes of Genovian politics did not seem to lead to any hard feelings or a desire to withdraw from discussion in the aftermath.

In an examination of the post-test-only items, we see that students also rated the simulation highly in terms of affect. On average, students thought the simulation was excellent relative to other in-class exercises in the same class and compared to other classes. These values were

statistically significant from the middle category of 3 at the 90% confidence interval level, indicating that we can reject the null hypothesis that students did not agree with the statements.

**Fig. 2. Mean Post-Simulation Wave Evaluations**



**Note: Horizontal bars denote 90% Confidence Intervals.**

Other items did have confidence intervals that crossed over this threshold of the middle response category, meaning we have less certainty that a larger sample of students would rate the items in the same way. But we do see mean values for the items in the bottom two rows of Fig. 2 of around 4 on the 1-5 scale. These values indicate widespread agreement that the simulation was a valuable teaching tool, and that the simulation helped students appreciate diverse viewpoints.

## Conclusions

The Genovian simulation is a rewarding experience for students in an introductory American Government and Politics course. Nevertheless, it takes a degree of skill and thoughtfulness to successfully implement. Classroom management, successful discussion-based debrief, and the implementation of informal and formal written reflection on the simulation are all challenges to ensuring learning goals are reached. However, even more important is the need to effectively steer the convention towards learning goals. The Genovian convention is a very “open-world” simulation, as it tasks students with the creation of answers to “big” political questions. Some over-eager students might devote themselves to minutiae in trying to specify their proposals, leading to protracted discussions of irrelevant (or at least, marginal) issues in the precious time allotted for the simulation. Indeed, qualitative feedback in one section focused on the perception that the simulation was too fast paced—a possible consequence of several lengthy derailments in that section. Instructors who choose to implement the simulation will need to strike a balance between course content delivery and simulation, perhaps choosing to offer the Genovian exercise over more than three days if they feel that their course schedule allows it.

There is much room here for improvement and tailoring by practitioners. While some may find that the materials and instructions described above work well for their institutions and classrooms, others may find the need to change key elements to match their own teaching styles and educational situations. The Genovian simulation has been previously implemented online, for instance. While generating vociferous group discussion was more difficult, some features of the course LMS were surprisingly useful in implementing the simulation. Breakout rooms and polls allowed quick and effortless transition between the phases of the simulation, and students enjoyed being able to see the vote totals for and against various proposals in real-time. While the classroom is perhaps the most natural setting for this simulation, it can be adapted to other modalities.

Overall, the simulation continues to be a memorable experience for both students and the instructor. I have had many former students reach out to me in recent years to share their fond memories of their time in our department. In many cases, unprompted, the Genovian simulation has come up as an example of an especially memorable moment from the undergraduate experience. While it is certainly possible that not all students appreciate the simulation to the same extent, the initial evidence presented above accords with the idea that the fictional politics of Genovia provide a fun, unexpected, efficacious, and collaborative first foray into core topics in American politics.



## Works Cited

- Achen, C. H., & Bartels, L. M. (2016). *Democracy for realists: Why elections do not produce responsive government*. Princeton University Press.
- Alberts, S., Warshaw, C., & Weingast, B. R. (2012). Democratization and countermajoritarian institutions: The role of power and constitutional design in self-enforcing democracy. In Ginsburg, T., ed., *Comparative Constitutional Design*, Cambridge University Press.
- Baranowski, M., & Weir, K. (2010). Power and politics in the classroom: The effect of student roles in simulations. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 6(3), 217-226.
- Beard, C. (2012) [1913]. *An economic interpretation of the Constitution of the United States*. New York: Free Press.
- Bridge, D. (2014). You sunk my constitution: Using a popular off-the-shelf board game to simulate political concepts. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 10(2), 186-203.
- Brinks, D., & Coppedge, M. (2006). Diffusion is no illusion: Neighbor emulation in the third wave of democracy. *Comparative Political Studies*, 39(4), 463-489.
- Britt, L., & Williams, R. (2022). Institutions and Arguments: Simulating the US Policy-Making Process. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 55(1), 176-181. doi:10.1017/S1049096521001013
- Dahl, R. A. (1998). *On democracy*. Yale University Press.
- Faulkner, S. L., Watson, W. K., Pollino, M. A., & Shetterly, J. R. (2021). "Treat me like a person, rather than another number": university student perceptions of inclusive classroom practices. *Communication Education*, 70(1), 92-111.
- Felton, P., & Lambert, L. M. (2020). *Relationship-rich education: How human connections drive success in college*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Frederking, B. (2005). Simulations and student learning. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 1(3), 385-393.
- Garrett, H. J. (2020). Containing classroom discussions of current social and political issues. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 52(3), 337-355.
- Gelbman, S. M. (2011). A Qualitative Assessment of the Learning Outcomes of Teaching Introductory American Politics in Comparative Perspective. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 7(4), 359-374.
- Gilens, M., & Page, B. I. (2014). Testing theories of American politics: Elites, interest groups, and average citizens. *Perspectives on Politics*, 12(3), 564-581.
- Hibbing, J. R., & Theiss-Morse, E. (1996). Civics is not enough: Teaching barbarics in K-12. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 29(1), 57-62.
- Kollars, N. A., & Rosen, A. M. (2013). Simulations as Active Assessment?: Typologizing by Purpose and Source. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 9(2), 144-156.

- Kensicki, A. E., Harlow, J., Akhilandeswari, J., Peacock, S., Cohen, J., Weissman, R., & Gordon, E. (2022). Exploring the impacts of educational simulations on the development of 21st century skills and sense of self-efficacy. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 18(4), 635-651. DOI: [10.1080/15512169.2022.2080071](https://doi.org/10.1080/15512169.2022.2080071)
- Langfield, D. (2016). Reality imagined: The choice to use a real-world case in a simulation. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 12(4), 403-419.
- Lay, J. C., & Smarick, K. J. (2006). Simulating a senate office: The impact on student knowledge and attitudes. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 2(2), 131-146.
- Levinson, S. (2006). *Our undemocratic constitution: Where the constitution goes wrong (and how the people can correct it)*. Oxford University Press.
- Lohmann, R. (2020). Effects of simulation-based learning and one way to analyze them. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 16(4), 479-495.
- Lovell, D., & Khatri, C. (2021). Do Early Simulations Work? Simulations in Gateway Political Science Courses at Community Colleges. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 17(1), 139-148.
- Munir, L. (2022). A National Development Simulation Online to Teach Experiential Problem-Solving. *Journal of Political Science Education*, doi: 10.1080/15512169.2022.2116332.
- Pope, J. C., & Treier, S. (2012). Mapping dimensions of conflict at the Federal Convention of 1787. *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 37(2): 145-174.
- Smith, M., & Graham, B. (2014). Teaching active citizenship: A companion to the traditional political science curriculum. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 47(3), 703-710.

**Supplementary Information for:**

Teaching U.S. Constitutional Design: The Case of the “Genovian Revolution”

Jan. 31, 2022

Table of Contents

CIA World Factbook for Genovia	27-29
Sample Constitution	30
Writing Assignment Rubric	31-32
Survey Question Text	33-34

## CIA World Factbook for Genovia (2020)

### Genovia: Introduction

*Genovia is a small island nation bordered to the East by its longtime rival, the bloodthirsty Kingdom of Triangle. Genovia has recently suffered a political crisis, as pro-democracy activists from an agrarian region near the capital have convinced Radicals from the other regions to peacefully depose their Crown Prince and Princess.*

*Over its long history, the Princes of Genovia have exerted control over five distinct regions, each featuring a distinct culture, economy, and political tradition.*

### Population

*Genovia's population totals 2,100,000. The regional breakdown can be seen below.*

Region	Population (%)
W. Serflandia	1,000,000 (48%)
Pastoria	500,000 (24%)
Carta	250,000 (12%) (1% Citizen-Warriors)
Delta	250,000 (12%)
Genopolis	100,000 (4%)

### Western Serflandia

Western Serflandia is a vast, poor, and remote area where the primary industry is rutabaga farming. While residents are part of the ethnic majority Genovian population, and speak Genovian, the region's economy has been historically depressed by the lack of public services available in the region. Especially lacking in the region is even a basic education system. Most people in Serflandia are illiterate. Serflandians are very suspicious of people from Genopolis, the glimmering capital city of Genovia, especially because they have been so often ignored by the Prince and his predecessors. It is often very difficult for Serflandians to travel to Genopolis.

### Delta

Delta is a northern territory that used to be a part of Genovia's neighbor to the north, the Kingdom of Triangle. The Prince claimed this territory in the bloody War of Acute Suffering in 1997. 96% of Delta are members of the Trianglian minority in Genovia. These residents speak Triangle, not Genovian. Delta's economy is fairly strong thanks to trade with their home country, but the Genovian Princes often taxed this region at high levels because they were suspicious of Triangular influence.

Deltans are very suspicious of people from Genopolis, the glimmering capital city of Genovia,

especially because they were so often scrutinized (and occasionally bullied) by the Prince and his predecessors. Many Deltans hate the Prince, and worry that his supporters will somehow regain power. In fact, sometimes Deltans wonder if anyone in Genovia really likes them.

## **Genopolis**

Genopolis is the beautiful and historic capital city of Genovia. Genopolitans are almost entirely made up of the dominant Genovian majority, with Genovian the official language of the region. The city's economy is incredibly strong, largely because the Genovian Princes used their enormous wealth to purchase fine goods and imports. It is the intellectual and cultural hub of the country, unlike the bumpkins who farm rutabagas in other areas. Genopolitans universally love the Prince, especially because he threw lavish parties for his city-dwelling friends.

Genopolitans are very suspicious of people from the West, especially because people there once raided a train carrying goods bound for the city. They see pretty much everyone outside of the city as uneducated and unsophisticated, and probably unfit to participate in a democracy. In fact, many Genopolitans openly wonder whether a democracy would be a good thing at all!

## **Carta**

Carta is an eastern territory that borders the minority community of Delta. Carta's citizens unanimously speak Genovian, the majority language. Their economy is partly agricultural, but the most prosperous career in the area is historically that of Soldier. For years, young Cartan recruits have served in the Prince's mighty armies. Many who are unable to pass the rigorous basic training, though, are often shunned from society and live on the margins as impoverished Outcasts. The Outcasts are very excited about democracy, but Cartan social traditions forbid them from becoming citizens with any rights or liberties. There are around 250,000 Cartans in Genovia, representing a modest population. But only 10% are considered true citizens (known in Carta as Warrior-Citizens). 25,000 Warrior-Citizens live in Carta, while the other 225,000 are part of the (very angry) Outcast class. Wealth disparities in Carta are enormous.

Cartan Warrior-Citizens are outright hostile towards their neighbors to the north, the Deltans. After all, many of them fought in 1997's bloody War of Acute Suffering. However, most Cartans are undecided regarding the Prince and this new democratic uprising. Cartan armies stood down instead of crushing the revolution as it happened, but they are still encamped and ready for mobilization. Many citizens of other regions fear a military coup, which might result in the installation of draconian Cartan social rules in their own regions.

## **Pastoria**

Pastoria is a southern territory that borders the capital city of Genovia. Its citizens generally speak Genovian, though many are bilingual and can speak the minority language, Triangle. Pastoria is prosperous. Its economy is partly agricultural, but many Pastorians have moved away

from farming to establish bookstores, blacksmithing shops, breweries, trade houses, music halls, and artists' collectives.

Almost all Pastorians are devout members of a religious minority, the Order of the Golden Gopher. Their religious text demands Gopherites value social equality above all other goals. *"Hold in your heart these words above all others: Your community must have an equal distribution of social, political and economic resources" [Book of Squeaks 33 (12:13)]*. This is one of the reasons why Pastorians fought so hard to get rid of the Princess.

Pastorians are friends and neighbors of all the other regions in the country. However, they despised the Prince and his Cartan military forces, who would often raid bookstores in search of "dangerous" democratic literature.

# THE CONSTITUTION OF GENOVIA

## FIRST DRAFT (10:00AM SECTION)

### ARTICLE 1: THE LEGISLATURE

#### The Composition of the Legislature.

1. There shall be 50 seats;
2. 25 to W. Serflandia, 12 to Pastoria, 5 to Carta, 5 to Delta, 3 to Genopolis.

### ARTICLE 2: THE EXECUTIVE

#### The Executive Council.

1. The “Executive Council” shall consist of 15 representatives;
2. 3 representatives shall come from each state;
3. The state shall vote on their state delegation.
4. The Executive Council has the final say on legislation, using a Veto, to be ruled on through majority vote (50%)

### ARTICLE 3: THE RIGHTS & LIBERTIES OF GENOVIAN

#### Citizenship Eligibility

1. Anyone 18+ can vote and claim citizenship
2. However, citizens must take a free, Federally-funded Civics class provided by the Federal government;
3. Elections are to be Federally administered

#### Subsequent Rights and Liberties of Genovian Citizens

- A. Right to federally funded education to high school level with federal core curriculum and state-determined auxiliary subjects
- B. Right to an attorney
- C. Right to a “reasonable” level of education for adults who have aged out of K-12; adolescents and adults’ education includes math, reading, writing
- D. The Cartan army is now Federally funded and supervised; tax dollars go to fund military for national defense purposes
- E. All states may set up a National Guard; state representatives and the Federal government have the right to call up the Guard in each state
- F. The government shall guarantee farm subsidies and protection

## Rubric: Reflective Writing Assignment 1

### Prompt

*Over the past few weeks, the great nation of Genovia has assembled a Constitutional Convention. After much deliberation, they have come up with a proposal for a new “democratic” constitution. **Read the Constitution on Page 2 of this sheet.***

*In your response, critically compare the Clauses of the Genovian Constitution (see below) to specific features of the U.S. Constitution. Refer to specific Clauses, amendments, and other features of the U.S. Constitution in your response. Please consider the following questions:*

- *Compare the design of the Genovian Legislature and Executive Council with the U.S.’ system of Checks and Balances. Discuss what would happen if Genovia were to adopt either the U.S.’ system or the proposed Genovian plan.*
- *Compare the design of Genovian institutions with the modern U.S. system of Federalism. Is the U.S. system a better idea than the proposed Constitution? Could one or both systems cause problems for Genovia? What are they?*
- *How democratic is the proposed Genovian constitution? Compare and contrast your assessment with Robert Dahl’s description of a polyarchy, as well as key features of U.S. democracy.*

### Instructions

Reflective writing assignments are expected to be 3-5 pages in length. They are not five-paragraph essays. While I ask that you use paragraph breaks, good grammar, and structured formatting, the organization of the paper is completely up to you. Grading will be performed on the basis of criteria in the Rubric (see the Blackboard site).

**Due: September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022 at the start of class.**

### Tips & Guidelines

- **Online submissions ONLY! Use the Blackboard submission tab.**
- 12 point font, double spacing, Times New Roman, standard margins, no large headers.
- The core reading for this assignment is Dahl and the textbook ch. 1-3. Please use the Course Materials tab to find the Dahl reading.
- There is no need to provide parenthetical citations in this writing exercise, unless referencing material from outside of the assigned course reading (not required).
- Try to have fun!



# **The Proposed Constitution of The Democratic Nation of Genovia**

## **Article 1: Legislature**

1. The legislature will consist of a single chamber consisting of 100 Genovian citizens. 20 citizens will come from each region.
2. The legislature has the power to create legislation, but it must be approved by the Executive Council.

## **Article 2: Executive Council**

1. The Executive Council will be a council of five State leaders, each selected by the voters of their respective states. There is no single President of Genovia.
2. Only a unanimous vote in the executive council can pass legislation into law. If the executive vote fails, the Legislature must start the lawmaking process over.

## **Article 3: Federalism**

1. Laws passed in the Genovian Legislature are the supreme law of the land. But the Genovian government can only legislate on matters of national security and common economic prosperity.
2. State laws apply within state borders. Crossing into another State means you become subject to that other State's laws.
3. States may form exclusive agreements, partnerships, and special trade deals with other Genovian States and foreign countries.
4. The Federal Genovian government taxes each citizen 20% of their yearly earnings. States cannot tax their citizens, but they will each receive one tenth of the Federal budget to use as they please. The remainder will be reserved for national defense and other national priorities.

## **Article 4: Declaration of Rights of Genovians**

1. There is no such thing as Genovian Citizenship. All adult residents of Genovia are Citizens of their State. Each State can decide what rights citizens have.
2. Each state will be responsible for managing and carrying out elections. This means that states reserve the ability to decide how elections for the Legislature and the Executive Council will be carried out, and who is eligible to participate.
3. Genovian Citizens may not move outside their home State without the consent of both the sending and the receiving States.

Question Text: Genovian Simulation Survey

We would like to ask you some questions about the U.S. Constitution. Please try to answer these questions to the best of your ability. Remember that there is no penalty for wrong answers. Please do not look up any of the answers--we want to know what your best guess might be.

How many times has the U.S. Constitution been amended?

- Never (1)
- Once (2)
- Ten Times (3)
- Twenty Times (4)
- More than Twenty Times (5)

The U.S. Constitution allows states to overrule Federal laws by passing their own, more specific laws

- True (1)
- False (2)

The U.S. Constitution establishes English as the official language of the United States of America

- True (1)
- False (2)

The U.S. Constitution explicitly states that the Supreme Court may rule laws passed by Congress as null and void through judicial review

- True (1)
- False (2)

The U.S. Constitution grants states the right to conduct and oversee elections for Federal offices

- True (1)
- False (2)

The text of the U.S. Constitution is longer than almost every other modern constitution in the world

- True (1)
- False (2)

Please tell us whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:

"When people have different political opinions than I do, I can understand why they might believe those things"

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

"I enjoy trying to solve political problems by talking about them with my peers"

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

"I enjoy in-class simulations"

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statement:

"Relative to other in-class activities in this class, I would rate this activity as excellent"

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statement:

"Relative to the in-class activities in the other classes I have taken, I would rate this activity as excellent"

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

"Overall, I feel that the Genovian simulation taught me valuable things about the U.S. Constitution"

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

"The Genovian simulation taught me to appreciate why people might hold political viewpoints that are different from my own"

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)