David Youngberg

ECON 201HC—Montgomery College

**Honors Essay 2**

Choose one of three continents: Africa, Asia, or South America. Construct an argument that a particular country is that region’s most prosperous country. This is a complex thing to argue. People typically associate “prosperity” with GDP per capita (average income) but it is not the only measure that matters.

Wikipedia, for all its flaws, is a great source for updated country statistics (provided the statistic has been accurately cited on the page). I suggest you ***start*** there, but cite the original source to (a) double check it’s still an active link and (b) add legitimacy to your paper.

Another source to consider is <http://www.gapminder.org/world>. You can find the raw data on the “Data” tab and use the scatter diagram view of all the countries’ statistics. (Use the dropdown menu to find other variables to display.) Gapminder is more legitimate than Wikipedia but it’s still a good idea to double check their sources.

Some other measurements to consider:

* The *Gini coefficient* is a measure of income inequality. High values imply the country has a lot of inequality. It ranges from 0 to 1 (or 100). We will discuss the Gini coefficient at the end of the semester but it’s a useful statistic some might want to use now.
* The *Human Development Index* (HDI) is determined by a combination of average income, education levels, and life expectancy at birth.
* The *Index of Economic Freedom* uses a variety of measurements to assess how close to free-market capitalism a country is.
* The *Environmental Performance Index* measures the quality of the environment;
* The *Press Freedom Index* measures how free the media is.
* The *Where-To-Be-Born Index* focuses on how prosperous life will be in the long-run.

In additional to three measurements, you can factor in less exact considerations, like the level of cultural diversity. But keep your approach neutral: “lots of barbeque” is a good attribute for some and bad for others.

Your paper must include:

* A thesis statement (i.e. X country is the most prosperous);
* At least three different measurements you used to determine your answer (be careful of being too redundant since some measures use others as inputs);
* Explanations of how your measures are determined/what they are;
* Detailed reasons and evidence for why you are correct, including why the measures you chose matter more than the ones you didn’t prioritize;
* An effective introduction and conclusion; and
* A works cited page including where you got your measurements.

You have a ***maximum*** length of *three* double-spaced pages (excluding a works cited page).

Your final draft has the same requirements as your first draft (readable font, double-spaced, etc.) including page length. *However*, you must add a table to your paper. This table might lead to additional justification.

Here’s what the table must include:

* Name of each of the three measurements you used;
* The top countries in your region for each measurement;
  + The number of countries you should include should be a few more than the lowest rank of your selected country. For example, if the proposed country is ranked second in two measurements and seventh in the third, then all three measurements should include the top ten countries.
* The value for each country;
* Some kind of highlight (e.g. bold, italics) of your country so it is easy to find;
* Logical and visually appealing formatting.

The purpose of this table is to demonstrate to the reader that your country really is the most prosperous and it might require some additional prose to defend your thesis. For example, consider this hypothetical table below. In this table, Dogistan is claimed as the best country based on the Human Develop Index (HDI), the Gini Coefficient (Gini), and the Environmental Performance Index (EPI).

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **HDI** | | **Gini** | | **EPI** | |
| *Country* | *Score* | *Country* | *Score* | *Country* | *Score* |
| Catistan | 0.98 | Birdistan | 20 | Birdistan | 82.9 |
| Dogistan | 0.75 | Catistan | 50 | Catistan | 80.6 |
| Birdistan | 0.71 | Dogistan | 60 | Dogistan | 60.1 |

It immediately becomes clear the thesis is poorly argued; Catistan ranks higher on all measures that the author deemed important (note that for Gini, lower numbers are better). I assume none of you made this sort of error (but if you did, you’ll have to change your thesis). But including the table demonstrates that you didn’t make such a mistake.

So suppose you argue Catistan is the most prosperous country. Now you have a new question: why isn’t Birdistan better? It ranks higher on Gini and EPI. If you want to defend Catistan, you’ll have to add a section why HDI is a more important indicator than Gini or EPI. If you argue Birdistan is better, you’ll have to add a section why HDI isn’t as important as Gini and EPI.

Emphasizing the differences between the numbers might prove to be a useful strategy. For example, Catistan has a much higher HDI than Birdistan (useful if you claim HDI is really important); Birdistan is a much more equal society compared to Catistan (useful if you claim Gini is really important). *All of you will probably have to add a section explicitly stating why some indices matter more than others.*

Place your table in a logical space: either right after the introduction or right after you’ve explained all the variables. You may, if you wish, divide the table into three parts based on measurement, and place each part in the paragraph concerned with that measurement.