**How Did Georgia Attempt to Modernize Its Government After World War II?**

By the 1940s, Georgia’s outdated **1877 Constitution** had become increasingly unworkable for a modernizing society. It was overloaded with amendments, vague about administrative roles, and entrenched a political system rooted in **rural dominance** and **voter suppression**. In response, a new generation of reformers—led by **Governor Ellis Arnall**—pushed for constitutional revision to bring the state in line with postwar realities.

The resulting **Georgia Constitution of 1945** aimed to **streamline government operations**, **abolish the poll tax**, and **professionalize state administration**. It established the office of **Lieutenant Governor**, restructured the **judicial system**, expanded executive powers, and introduced modern reforms like a **merit system for public employees** and a **State Board of Corrections**.

Although praised for its administrative efficiency, many critics argued that the document failed to deliver **substantive civil rights protections** or challenge entrenched systems of **segregation and rural control**. Nevertheless, it marked a key step in Georgia’s slow constitutional evolution toward more effective and responsive governance.

**Key Terms and Definitions**

| **Term** | **Definition** |
| --- | --- |
| Georgia Constitution of 1945 | The mid-20th-century state constitution aimed at modernizing Georgia’s government and streamlining administration. |
| Ellis Arnall | Reformist governor of Georgia (1943–1947) who led the push for constitutional revision and state modernization. |
| Poll Tax | A fee required to vote, used historically to suppress African American and poor white voters; abolished by the 1945 Constitution. |
| Lieutenant Governor | An executive officer created in 1945 to preside over the Senate and assist the governor. |
| Merit System | A system of hiring and promoting government employees based on qualifications rather than political connections. |
| Home Rule | The ability of local governments to govern themselves with limited interference from the state legislature. |
| State Board of Corrections | A newly created body to professionalize and oversee Georgia’s prison system. |
| Judicial Reorganization | The restructuring of Georgia’s courts to improve efficiency, professionalism, and consistency. |

**Orienting Question**

**In what ways did the Georgia Constitution of 1945 modernize state government, and why did some argue that it still fell short of true reform?**

**Active Learning Exercises**

**Exercise 1: Historical Analysis Essay**

**Prompt:**  
Write a 3–4 page essay analyzing the historical context and reform goals of the Georgia Constitution of 1945. Consider:

* What political and administrative challenges prompted the call for revision?
* How did Governor Ellis Arnall’s leadership shape the reform process?
* To what extent did the 1945 Constitution modernize Georgia’s governance?
* Why did critics argue the document lacked substantive reform?

Use primary sources (e.g., constitutional excerpts) and scholarly commentary to support your analysis.

**Objective:**  
To evaluate the political and institutional motivations behind the 1945 constitutional revision and assess its effectiveness in addressing the limitations of the 1877 Constitution.

**Exercise 2: Comparative Constitutional Mapping**

**Prompt:**  
Create a comparative chart or infographic that highlights key similarities and differences between the 1877 and 1945 Georgia Constitutions. Focus on:

* Executive structure (e.g., creation of lieutenant governor)
* Judicial organization (e.g., number of supreme court justices)
* Civil rights provisions (e.g., jury service for women)
* Administrative reforms (e.g., merit system, prison board)

**Reflection (1–2 pages):**  
How do these changes reflect broader shifts in Georgia’s political and social landscape?

**Objective:**  
To identify and compare structural and substantive changes between the Georgia Constitutions of 1877 and 1945.

**Exercise 3: Civic Engagement Simulation**

**Prompt:**  
Participate in a classroom simulation of the 1945 constitutional commission.  
Students will take roles such as:

* Governor Ellis Arnall
* Legislator from a rural county
* Urban civic group representative
* State judge
* Journalist or civic reform advocate

**Debate Issues:**

* Home rule for municipalities
* Merit-based hiring for state employees
* Expansion of judicial authority

**Tasks:**  
Each group writes a one-page position paper outlining their priorities. Participate in a moderated debate, then write a brief (1–2 paragraph) reflection on the difficulty of balancing reform, tradition, and public interest.

**Objective:**  
To explore the role of public input and institutional negotiation in constitutional reform.

**Review Questions**

1. What motivated the creation of the 1945 Constitution, and how did it differ from the 1877 Constitution?
2. How did Ellis Arnall’s leadership influence the scope and direction of reform?
3. What were the key structural and administrative reforms introduced in 1945?
4. Why did critics say the new constitution did not go far enough in addressing civil rights and rural dominance?
5. How did the 1945 Constitution reflect both modernization and continuity with older systems of power?