Essay Prompt A:

Using Schiavo-Campo and McFerson’s description of ‘Good Governance’, choose one country of your choice and evaluate how this particular country would rank in terms of accountability, transparency, rule of law, and participation. Explain your answer with concrete examples that support your case.

According to Schiavo-Campo and McFerson, governance refers to how a government operates as distinct from the purpose for which it operates, taking into consideration the process as well as the result of governance. Good governance refers to what makes up the best system of government that consists of four pillars: accountability, transparency, predictability, and participation as well as the ‘Four Es” that include efficiency, economy, effectiveness, and equity. This essay seeks to evaluate the United States by these criteria and draw from another author that addressed good governance, Woodrow Wilson.

Of the four pillars, accountability is the most important and depends on both answerability and consequences. Answerability refers to leadership being able to account for decisions made through justifying them and consequences exist based on the negative or positive impact of those decisions. In the United States, the President and other leaders in government are held accountable for actions that affect the citizens. A recent example is the 9/11 Commission Report that evaluated the United States’ security system citing shortcomings and communication gaps that allowed the terrorist attack to occur. The government was held responsible for failing to provide security.

Transparency refers to the easy access to accurate and relevant information. In the United States this is provided by open access to Congressional discussion and 24/7 media reporting concerning politics. One might argue that there is too much transparency allowed for the government in the United States when the citizens’ right to privacy is breached as has been done since the Patriot Act. The prevalence of misinformation is also a notable issue though the level of transparency for citizens in the United States is generally positive.

Predictability through Rule of Lar is an area where I see the United States needing reform. Predictability refers to laws that are clear and known in advance. Many laws, outside of the Constitution, are confusing to citizens and purposefully ambiguous, as has been noted by Schiavo-Campo. An example of this is the legalization of marijuana for both medicinal and recreational purposes. State aand federal laws conflict and are unclear in reference to use and distribution. There is also debate over a Constitutional amendment recently with the gun control debate prevalent in the news and the predictability of legislative powers has been diminished by the surprising decisions made on popular court cases such as the Hobby Lobby employee health care issue. In comparison to other countries discussed in class including Cuba, the United States is more predictable based on rule of law. Considering the high level of transparency and accountability, however, the level of predictability in the United States is more moderate.

Participation, according to Schiavo-Campo and McFerson is contingent upon the strong foundation of civil society. An active citizenry participates by voting and providing a check for government action. In the United States, voter turnout is commonly a measure of participation and that number currently reports just over half of the population. Similar to predictability, the United States is moderate in rank for this pillar of good governance. In a country with access to information, the citizenry should be well informed, and active. Unfortunately, in-class polls related to voter turnout amongst students reveals that much of the population is apathetic toward voting. College students have access to the most up to date information in politics and many do not register or choose not to vote. This is unacceptable and voter registration should be improved.

In accordance with the four E’s of good governance, the Unites States ranks high in all areas. Economy refers to production and distribution of goods and services at the lowest possible cost, and efficiency means getting the greatest possible gains from inputs. The US’s mixed economy with capitalist competition and technological advancements make both of these possible. Effectiveness refers to how well actions reach a desired outcome. The U.S. court system is an example of a theoretically effective model because of due process and the appellate structure. However, if the just outcome is the desired outcome in these cases, improvement to the system is necessary. Disproportionate penalties are currently served based on race and ethnicity, contributing to overcrowded prisons. Even though the system is efficient does not mean it is effective or equitable. Inequity is a serious issue in the United States in terms of both current income and socioeconomic status as well as historical inequality based on gender and race. The United States deserves criticism for equity and effectiveness in certain areas of government but efficiency and economy are positive enforcements of diplomatic good governance at present.

In conclusion, the United States is a positive example of good governance. High rankings for the majority of the pillars and E’s as criteria are testament to that assertion. However, it is important to note that the legal-rational model that the United States is an example of, does not need to be applied to a democratic government in order to be effective in promoting good governance, though Zakaria argues that liberal democracy is the only long-lasting form of government through legitimacy. Simply put, good governance is a goal for many diverse governments and the United States is a good example in many areas. As Wilson noted, we cannot evaluate our weaknesses or virtues by comparing ourselves with ourselves. His ideal that better systems exist comes from his presidency, a time when the United States bureaucracy was undergoing reform. Compared across time and against different models of government with the Schiavo-Campo and McFerson model as guide, the United States government uses good governance with its four pillars being mutually reinforcing and having the foundation of a strong civil society.