



Course PSCI 6324, Local and State Government and Politics
Professor Robert Lowry
Term Fall 2025
Meetings Thurs. 4:00-6:45. SLC 1.202.

Professor’s Contact Information

Office Phone 972-883-6720
Office Location Green Hall 3.533
Email Address robert.lowry@utdallas.edu
Office Hours Thursday 1:30-3:30, or by appointment

General Course Information

<p>Course Description</p>	<p>The course takes a comparative approach to the study of local and state government and politics in the United States. We will focus primarily on areas where local and state government and politics is distinct from national government and politics, or where there are important differences between different states and metropolitan areas. We will also address intergovernmental relations and areas of public policy where state and local governments are particularly important.</p>
<p>Learning Objectives/ Outcomes</p>	<p>On completing this course, students should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be familiar with the political science literature on local and state government and politics in the United States. - Understand the major variations in political behavior, organizations and institutions across state and local jurisdictions and their possible effects. - Be able to evaluate competing explanations for differences in policy outputs and government performance across state and local jurisdictions.
<p>Required Texts & Materials</p>	<p>The following books should be purchased from the campus bookstore or your favorite alternative supplier:</p> <p>Virginia Gray, Russell L. Hanson, and Thad Kousser (eds) <i>Politics in the American States: A Comparative Analysis</i>, 11th ed. Washington, DC: CQ Press 2017. (Referred to in the reading assignments as “GH&K”)</p> <p>J. Eric Oliver, <i>Local Elections and the Politics of Small-Scale Democracy</i>. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012. Note: This book is also available online through the UTD Library website.</p> <p>Additional readings are listed at the end of the syllabus and indicated in the assignments by numbers in brackets. The list of readings may be revised as we proceed.</p>

ACADEMIC CALENDAR

Date	Topics & Assignments	Readings
Aug. 28	Course Introduction	
Sept. 4	States' Socioeconomic and Political Context	GH&K ch. 1; [1], [2]
Sept. 11	Federalism and Inequality	GH&K ch. 2, 18; [3], [4], [5]
Sept. 18	Parties, Elections and Interest Groups	GH&K ch. 3, 4; [6], [7], [8]
Sept. 25	Public Opinion and Direct Democracy	GH&K ch. 5, 6; [9] [10] [11]
Oct. 2	State Legislatures PAPER TOPICS DUE	GH&K ch. 7; [12]-[16]
Oct. 9	State Governors and the Bureaucracy	GH&K ch. 8, 17; [17]-[20]
Oct. 16	MIDTERM EXAM	
Oct. 23	State Courts and Judges; Corrections Policy	GH&K ch. 9, 10; [21]-[24]
Oct. 30	Local Government in a Federal Context	[25]-[30]
Nov. 6	Suburban Elections	Oliver; [31]
Nov. 13	More on Local Politics	[32]-[37]
Nov. 20	THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS	
Nov. 27	STUDENT PRESENTATIONS	
Dec. 4	State Fiscal and Economic Policy RESEARCH PAPERS DUE Take-home exam distributed	GH&K ch. 11, 16; [38], [39]
Dec. 11	TAKE-HOME EXAM DUE	

^ Numbers in brackets refer to additional readings listed at the end of the syllabus.

COURSE POLICIES

Grading Criteria	<p>Grades will be based on the following factors: (1) class participation; (2) a midterm exam on <u>October 16</u>; (3) a research paper on a topic of the student's choosing, including an in-class presentation; (4) a take-home final exam due <u>December 11</u>. Assignments will receive the following weights in determining course grades:</p> <p>Class participation 20 % Midterm exam 25 In-class presentation 5 Final paper 25 Take-home final 25</p>
Late Work and Make-up Exams	<p>Late papers and take-home exams will be penalized 20 % for each day they are late without an excuse. If for any reason you will have trouble being in class for the midterm exam or student presentations, notify me <u>in advance</u>. Make-up midterm exams will be allowed only in the case of unforeseen circumstances beyond your control.</p>
Class Attendance	<p>Attendance is mandatory at student presentations April 19. Attendance on other days is expected, and unexcused absences will affect your class participation score.</p>
Comet Creed	<p><i>This creed was voted on by the UT Dallas student body in 2014. It is a standard that Comets choose to live by and encourage others to do the same:</i></p> <p>“As a Comet, I pledge honesty, integrity, and service in all that I do.”</p>
Other UTD Policies	<p>Additional UTD policies regarding student conduct and discipline, academic integrity, email use, withdrawing from class, grievance procedures, incomplete grades, disability services, religious holy days, and resources to help you succeed can be found at http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies.</p>

These descriptions and timelines are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.

NOTES ON THE RESEARCH PAPER

For the research paper, you have the choice of writing a critical analysis of the literature, a case study, or a design for an empirical research project. A one-page statement of your proposed topic is due in class October 2. Presentations of work-in-progress will occur in class November 27. Final papers are due Dec. 4. *Papers should not exceed 18 double-spaced pages* of text and footnotes (minimum 11-point font; standard margins), plus a list of references and any appendices, tables or figures.

Below are a few thoughts on each of the options:

Critical Analysis

A critical analysis of the literature is not just a summary. The goal is to draw on existing research to analyze and answer an important question about subnational government and politics.

The paper should start by identifying a research question and explaining why it is important. Examples of the kinds of questions that might be asked include:

- Are ballot initiatives as a form of direct democracy a good idea?
- What are the pros and cons of “professional” vs. “amateur” legislatures?
- Can states have their own economic policy?
- Does subsequent research support Paul Peterson’s main argument in *City Limits*?

It should then summarize existing research that is relevant to the question, identify the strengths and weaknesses of different arguments, and seek to come to a conclusion. If further research is required on a specific topic to answer the larger question, identify the topic and state how the answer could influence your final conclusion.

Case Study

A case study seeks to answer a research question through a detailed examination of one (or perhaps more) real political systems or events. Interesting case studies often are those that test a theory by applying it to a situation where it may seem counterintuitive or that explain why some cases may be exceptions to the general rule.

A well-written case study must do at least two things in addition to analyzing the case itself: (1) explain why the case to be studied is an interesting and important one for understanding state and local government; (2) address the issue of generalizability. Is this a “representative” case that gives us insights into many similar situations and if so, how do you define the population that this case represents? Is it an exceptional case and if so, how does it limit the extent to which the prevailing wisdom can be generalized?

It is often useful to contrast two or more cases that represent different variations, but the tradeoff is that the more cases you address, the less detail you can present on each one.

A few possible topics:

- Why did Texas voters reject a constitutional amendment that would have authorized statewide ballot initiatives?
- What has been the impact of California's "top two" primary system?
- How does the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) work, and why aren't there any comparable liberal organizations?

Empirical Research Design

The goal for this option is to develop a plan that could be used to conduct an original, empirical investigation. It should include the following elements:

1. A statement of the research question. Why is it an interesting/important question? What contribution will be made to the academic literature or contemporary policy debates?
2. A summary of previous research on this question.
3. One or more testable hypotheses to be explored. Explain the reasoning behind each hypothesis.
4. Identification of the relevant dependent, independent, and control variables to be studied.
5. A plan for operationalizing key variables and collecting data.
6. Identification of techniques for analyzing the data and testing the hypotheses, to the extent you can.
7. Discussion of problems that you might encounter.

The project should be one that a graduate student might actually complete. Possible research questions might include:

- What are some of the implications of legislative term limits for representation?
- How do differences in state campaign finance laws affect public policy?
- Does it matter whether public schools are governed by special districts or are part of general-purpose municipal government?

Style

The paper should begin with a short (no more than 150 words) abstract.

Papers should be well organized and use subheadings to denote major sections. Pages should be numbered.

You don't have to use either footnotes or endnotes, but if you do I prefer footnotes.

For citation style, consult "The Chicago Manual of Style Online" and use the author-date system. https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html

ADDITIONAL READINGS

In addition to the books by Gray, Hanson and Kousser and Oliver, the following readings are also required. Those designated **eLearning** are posted on the class eLearning page. The others are available through the UTD library website.

Socioeconomic and Political Context

[1] Deborah Schildkraut. 2024. "How Politics Shapes State Identities in the US." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly*. 24(3): 250-269.

[2] Nicholas Jacobs and B. Kal Munis. 2023. "Place-Based Resentment in Contemporary U.S. Elections: The Individual Sources of America's Urban-Rural Divide." *Political Research Quarterly* 76(3): 1102-1118.

Inequality; Federalism

[3] Daniel M. Butler and Joseph L. Sutherland. 2023. "Have State Policy Agendas Become More Nationalized?" *The Journal of Politics* 85(January): 351-355.

[4] William Franko and Christopher Witko. 2017. *The New Economic Populism: How States Respond to Economic Inequality*. Oxford University Press, chapter 2. **eLearning**

[5] Charles Barrilleaux and Carlisle Rainey. 2014. "The Politics of Need: Examining Governors' Decisions to Oppose the 'Obamacare' Medicaid Expansion." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 14(December):437-460.

Parties and Interest Groups

[6] Gerald Gamm and Thad Kousser. 2021. "Life, Literacy and the Pursuit of Prosperity: Party Competition and Policy Outcomes in 50 States." *APSR* 115(November): 1442-1463.

[7] Jacob M. Grumbach. 2018. "From Backwaters to Major Policymakers: Policy Polarization in the States, 1970-2014." *Perspectives on Politics* 16(June): 416-435.

[8] Alexander Hertel-Fernandez. 2014. "Who Passes Business's 'Model Bills'? Policy Capacity and Corporate Influence in U.S. State Politics." *Perspectives on Politics* 12(September): 582-602.

Public Opinion and Direct Democracy

[9] Justin de Benedictis-Kessner and Christopher Warshaw. 2020. "Accountability for the Local Economy at All Levels of Government in United States Elections." *APSR* 114(August):660-676.

[10] Amy Bridges and Thad Kousser. 2011. "Where Politicians Gave Power to the People: Adoption of the Citizen Initiative in the U.S. States." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 11(June):167-197.

[11] Daniel DiSalvo, Patrick Flavin, and Michael Hartney. 2023. "State Labor Laws and Government Responsiveness to Public Opinion." *Political Research Quarterly*. 76(3): 1475-1485.

State Legislatures

[12] Nicholas Carnes and Eric R. Hansen. 2016. "Does Paying Politicians More Promote Economic Diversity in Legislatures?" *American Political Science Review* 110(November): 699- 716.

[13] Todd Makse. 2017. "The Retention of Expertise and Productivity in State Legislative Committees." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 17(December): 418-440.

[14] Srinivas C. Parinandi. 2020. "Policy Inventing and Borrowing Among State Legislatures." *AJPS* 64(Oct.)852-868.

[15] Michael P. Olson and John C. Rogowski. 2020. "Legislative Term Limits and Polarization." *JOP* 82(April) 572-586.

[16] David Fortunato, Joshua McCrain, and Kaylyn Jackson Schiff. 2023. "Public Support for Professional Legislatures." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly*. 23(3): 327-339.

State Governors and the Bureaucracy

[17] Charles Barrilleaux and Michael Berkman. 2003. "Do Governors Matter? Budgeting Rules and the Politics of State Policymaking." *Political Research Quarterly* 56(December):409- 17.

[18] Jennifer Wolak and Srinivas Parinandi. 2022. "Does the Public Hold Governors Accountable for Policy Outcomes?" *Political Research Quarterly* 74(4): 1051-1064.

[19] Neal D. Woods. 2015. "Separation of Powers and the Politics of Administrative Rule Review." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*. 15(September): 345-365.

[20] Sarah F. Anzia and Jessica Trounstine. 2025. "Civil Service Adoption in America: The Political Influence of City Employees." *American Political Science Review*. 119(2): 549-565.

State Courts and Judges; Corrections Policy

[21] Richard P. Calderone, Brandice Canes-Wrone and Tom S. Clark. 2009. "Partisan Labels and Democratic Accountability: An Analysis of State Supreme Court Abortion Decisions." *The Journal of Politics* 71(April):560-573.

[22] James L. Gibson. 2008. "Challenges to the Impartiality of State Supreme Courts: Legitimacy Theory and 'New-Style' Judicial Campaigns." *American Political Science Review* 102(February):59-75.

[23] Miles T. Armaly and John M Bruce. 2025. "Democratizing U.S. Courts: Perceived Representation and Support for Judicial Elections." *Political Research Quarterly* 78(1): 73-86.

[24] Thomas Gray. 2017. "The Influence of Legislative Reappointment on State Supreme Court Decision-Making." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 17(September): 275-298.

Local Governments and Politics in a Federal Context

[25] Paul E. Peterson. 1981. *City Limits*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, chapters 2 and 3. **eLearning**

[26] Christopher R. Berry. 2008. "Piling On: Multilevel Government and the Fiscal Common Pool." *American Journal of Political Science* 52(4):802-820.

[27] Joshua Fechter and Paul Cobler. 2025, July 9. “Disasters are a Human Choice: Texas Counties Have Little Power to Stop Building in Flood-Prone Areas.” *The Texas Tribune*.
<https://www.texastribune.org/2025/07/09/texas-floods-growth-kerr-county-camp-mystic/>

[28] Ann O’Malley Bowman. 2017. “The State-Local Government(s) Conundrum: Power and Design.” *The Journal of Politics* 79(October): 1119-1129.

[29] Daniel J. Moskowitz. 2021. “Local News, Information, and the Nationalization of U.S. Elections.” *APSR*. 115(Feb.): 114-129.

[30] Carolyn Abott and Asya Magazinnik. 2020. “At-Large Elections and Minority Representation in Local Government.” *AJPS*. 64(July): 717-733.

Suburban Elections

[31] Sanmay Das, et al. 2022. “All (Mayoral) Politics is Local?” *The Journal of Politics* 84(April): 1021-1034.

More on Local Politics

[32] Jacob S. Rugh and Jessica Trounstine. 2011. “The Provision of Local Public Goods in Diverse Communities: Analyzing Municipal Bond Elections.” *The Journal of Politics* 73(October):1038-1050.

[33] Daniel M. Thompson. 2020. “How Partisan is Local Law Enforcement? Evidence from Sheriff Cooperation with Immigration Authorities.” *APSR* 114(Feb.) 222-236.

[34] Jessica Trounstine. 2020. “The Geography of Inequality: How Land Use Regulation Produces Segregation.” *APSR* 114(May): 443-455.

[35] Jesse Yoder. 2020. “Does Property Ownership Lead to Participation in Local Politics? Evidence from Property Records and Meeting Minutes.” *APSR* 114(November): 1213-1229.

[36] William Marble and Clayton Nall. 2021. “Where Self-Interest Trumps Ideology: Liberal Homeowners and Local Opposition to Housing Development.” *JOP* 83(Oct.) 1747-1763.

[37] Michael T. Harney and Vladimir Kogan. 2025. “The Politics of Teachers’ Union Endorsements.” *American Journal of Political Science* 69(July):1163-1179.

State Fiscal and Economic Policy

[38] William Franco and Christopher Witko. 2017. *The New Economic Populism: How States Respond to Economic Inequality*. Oxford University Press, chapter 6. **eLearning**

[39] Robert C. Lowry. 2025. “Does a Pro-Business Regulatory Environment Lead to a Robust State Economy?” Manuscript. **eLearning**