

U.S. State and Local Politics
YSS PLSC S240
Time: Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays 1:00 p.m. – 3:15
Location: TBD

Instructor

Eleanor Schiff, Ph.D.

Office Hours: Thursdays 1:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. or by appointment

Or via zoom:

Meeting ID number: 810 688 2315

<https://yale.zoom.us/j/8106882315>

Course Overview

In the U.S.'s federal system, the fifty distinct state governments are often referred to as "laboratories of democracy." This phrase implies two interconnected meanings. First, different state governments innovate and experiment with various policy solutions that are tailored to their geography, specific workforce needs, and particular state culture. This can provide policymakers at both the state and national levels to learn from states about what approaches to policy solutions may work better than others. Secondly, fifty different states (some such as California, Texas, and New York have gross state products bigger than most countries – in fact the CA economy ranks 5th in the world behind Germany and India, and Texas ranks 8th in the world) comprise a natural laboratory in which to observe and test questions about political institutions, representation, political behavior, policymaking, and public opinion, among other topics. In this class, we will take a comparative approach to studying state politics, using an analytical approach to understand the variety and variability of issues facing states and different approaches to solving societal problems.

While Americans' attention is often focused on events in Washington, D.C. and the activities of the president and the Congress. Arguably, however, the policies enacted in state houses and city councils have a more direct effect on citizens' everyday lives than the activities in our Nation's capital. State and local politics includes a myriad of issues that have an important effect on citizens including welfare, elections, healthcare, social policies, education, criminal law, infrastructure, and many others. Understanding how state institutions and behavior shape policy outcomes is not only substantively interesting, but the states also provide political scientists with opportunities to examine larger questions about topics such as power, representation, and responsiveness. This course will address both how the states themselves are substantively interesting, as well as how they are used to understand broader issues in political science and governance.

At the end of this class students will be able to:

- 1) Identify how and why state institutions differ
- 2) Evaluate how variation in political institutions influences political outcomes in states
- 3) Improve oral and written communications skills

Assignments and Grading

The grading for this class will be based on the following criteria:

Class Participation:	10%	100 points
Quizzes	10%	100 points
Midterm Exam	25%	250 points
Final Exam	35%	350 points
Policy memo	20%	200 points

You can earn up to a total of 1000 points for the semester. I will ask you to do a self-evaluation of your participation both at the mid-point of the semester and also at the end.

We will use the following grading scale:

Letter	Percent
A	94 to 100
A-	90 to 93
B+	87 to 89
B	83 to 86
B-	80 to 82
C+	76 to 79
C	70 to 75
D	60 to 69
F	59 and below

In addition to class participation (where you'll be evaluated for your mastery of the assigned material) there are four written deliverables for this class: two 'response' papers which must provide a thoughtful reaction to or an extension of the **research articles (not the text book chapters)**. Second, you will complete Comparative Research proposal. Third, you will draft a policy memo that policymakers could use to evaluate a solution to a public policy problem in their state. Each deliverable is detailed in the below text.

Course Requirements

Participation and Attendance. You are expected to attend **EVERY** class. You are expected to participate in a variety of formats in the class. This includes active engagement with the reading material, asking your classmates questions, demonstrating to me that you have

thoroughly thought through the readings and formed some of your own questions related to it. To that end, **I am requiring you to post 1 questions about each reading to the Canvas discussion forum for that day.** Posting questions is a component of your participation grade. If you feel uncomfortable speaking in front of your peers, please contact me early in the semester so that we can strategize ways together for you to contribute to class discussions.

Quizzes. There will be 8 quizzes given during this class with the two lowest grades dropped. They will cover main ideas in the assigned readings and important topics from lectures.

Midterm Exam. The midterm exam will consist of important terms (for instance “devolution”) for you to define and explain the importance of as it relates to state politics. There will also be several short answer questions. The exam will cover material from lecture, readings, and class discussion.

Policy Memo: Choose a state in the United States that is of particular interest to you and a problem that the state electorate is facing. Describe the nature of the problem, the political environment in the state, and two potential solutions that the governor and state legislature could consider in solving the problem. Make sure to discuss the political feasibility of your proposals as they relate to the political environment and culture of the state. This paper should be approximately 6-8 pages in length double spaced. More detailed information about this assignment will be shared on Canvas.

Final Exam. The final exam will be in the same format as the midterm and will be cumulative, and will take place on the final day of class.

Class Policies

Academic Integrity: Students are expected to follow Yale's policies on [academic integrity](#). Specifically, Yale’s policy on academic dishonesty includes “cheating on a test or an examination, plagiarism, improper collaborating on assignments, or the submission of the same essay to two instructors without the explicit consent of both.” Please consult the Poorvu Center’s [guidelines on using sources](#). If you’re confused, please consult with me.

Late Paper Policy: A late paper will automatically have a grade deduction unless you have a Dean's excuse. Without a Dean's excuse, all papers will be marked down a grade for each day late (i.e. within 24 hours late = A to A-, 25-48 hours late = A to B+, etc.).

Accessibility Statement (adapted with thanks to Michelle Morgan, Poorvu Center)
We will all need accommodations because we all learn differently. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or form barriers to your inclusion, please let me know. Together we will develop strategies that will enable you to succeed in this course. I encourage you to visit the Student Accessibility office. If you need official accommodations, you have a right to have those met. There are a range of resources on campus including the Writing Center, Residential College Tutors and Academic Strategies.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging

“This class strives to be an inclusive community, learning from the many perspectives that come from having differing backgrounds and beliefs. As a community, we aim to be respectful to all. We reject all forms of prejudice and discrimination, including but not limited to those based on age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, and veteran status. Faculty and students are expected to commit to creating an environment that facilitates inquiry and self-expression, while also demonstrating diligence in understanding how others’ viewpoints may be different from their own.” (quoted from Dr. Rona Ramos, Lecturer and Graduate Services Coordinator in Physics)

A note on using AI (Artificial Intelligence)

Inserting AI-generated text into an assignment without proper attribution is a violation of academic integrity, and using AI tools in a manner that was not authorized by your instructor may also be considered a breach of academic integrity. Your learning in this course is a product of the inquiry, reflection, and writing built into each assignment. For this reason, all work you submit must be your own. Language, data, and ideas drawn from other sources must be documented. You may not use ChatGPT or other AI composition software while completing assignments for this course. By following Yale College guidelines for academic integrity, you ensure that you achieve your full potential for learning in this class. (from Yale AI workshop August 24, 2023).

Required Books: (price quotes from Amazon)

Moncrief, Gary and Pererill Squire. *Why States Matter: An Introduction to State Politics*. 3rd Edition. New York: Rowman & Littlefield. 2021. (denoted WSM on syllabus)

Paperback: \$36.00

Ebook: \$41.50

Moncrief, Gary and Pererill Squire. *State Legislatures Today: Politics Under the Dome*. 2nd Edition. New York: Rowman & Littlefield. 2021. (denoted SLT on syllabus)

Paperback: \$43.78

Ebook: 31.54

Erikson, Robert S. Gerald C. Wright, and John P McIver. *Statehouse Democracy: Public Opinion and Policy in the American States*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 1993. (denoted SD on syllabus)

Paperback: \$11.98 – \$41.99

Course Schedule

You are responsible for reading the assigned pages *prior* to class. Each reading is due on the date that it is assigned. While we will adhere to this schedule as closely as possible, **I reserve the right to make changes and adjustments as needed during the course of the class.**

Part I: Processes in States, Groups operating in States, and Elections and Election environments in States

Week 1

Meeting 1: Introduction to State Politics: Why Study States?

- WSM Chapter 1: Making a Case for States
- Key, V.O. 1949. *Southern Politics in State and Nation*. New York: Alfred A. Knoph. Chapters 1, 14, 18-20, 24, plus one of the state chapters

Meeting 2: What is the relationship between state governments and the federal government? What types of policies do states take leadership for and which policies do states have to acquiesce to the federal government?

- WSM Chapter 2: States and the Federal System
- Kelly, Nathan J. and Christopher Witko. 2012. "Federalism and American Inequality." *Journal of Politics* 74(2): 414-426.
- *Arizona vs. U.S.* (2012) majority opinion written by Justice Kennedy

Meeting 3: How are state party systems organized and how do they influence federal politics? Are voters' voices and policy preferences equally represented by political parties and state houses?

- WSM: Chapter 8: Elections and Political Parties
- Holbrook, Thomas M., and Emily Van Dunk. 1993. "Electoral Competition in the American States." *American Political Science Review*. 87:955-962.
- Wright, Gerald C. and Elizabeth Rigby. 2020. "Income Inequality and State Parties: Who Gets Represented?" *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 20(4): 395-415. (older paper from 1993)

Week 2

Meeting 4: What is the role of interest groups in states to shape public opinion on issue salience? How do interest groups shape direct democracy (via the initiative process) and are they actually furthering democracy or working for a small but vocal group within states? How

democratic is the initiative process? Why is this not practiced in the eastern portion of the United States?

- SLD: Chapter 6: The Legislative Context
- Monogan, James, Virginia Gray and David Lowery. 2009. "Public Opinion, Organized Interests, and Policy Congruence in Initiative and Noninitiative U. S. States." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 9(3):304-324
- Anzia, Sarah F. 2011. "Election Timing and the Electoral Influence of Interest Groups." *Journal of Politics* 73 (2): 412-427.

Meeting 5: What is the role of public opinion in policy debates in state politics? How is public opinion measured? Has state ideology and partisanship changed over time?

- Erikson, Robert, Gerald Wright, and John McIver. 1993. *Statehouse Democracy: Public Opinion and Policy in the American States*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1, Chapter 2 (skim pages 21-39 (their statistical digression about the validity of their measures, read pages 39-42), Chapters 3, 4, 5. Chapter 9 (to pg. 232). Chapter 10 (conclusions)
- Berry, William D., Evan J. Ringquist, Richard C. Fording, and Russell L. Hanson. 1998. "Measuring Citizen and Government Ideology in the American States." *American Journal of Political Science*. 42:337-348.

Part II: State Institutions

Meeting 6: How are state legislatures organized and what is the variability across states? How are state legislative campaigns conducted? What does it mean, and what are the implications, that some state legislators are more 'professionalized' than others?

- PAS: Chapter 7: Legislative Politics in the States
- SLD: Chapters: 1-3: Nine-Nine Chambers and Why They Matter, State Legislative Campaigns and Elections, The Changing Job of State Legislator

Week 3

Meeting 7: How can we measure professionalism across state legislatures? What are the advantages and disadvantages of a more professionalized state legislature from a citizen and policy perspective?

- SLD: Chapters: 4-5: Legislative Organization across States, The Legislative Context

- Squire, Peverill. 2007. "Measuring State Legislative Professionalism: The Squire Index Revisited." *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 7(2): 211-27.
- Berry, Berkman, and Schneiderman. 2000. "Legislative Professionalism and Incumbent Reelection: The Development of Institutional Boundaries," *APSR*, 94 (Dec. 2000): 859-874

Meeting 8: MIDTERM EXAM

Meeting 9: How representative are state legislatures? What is the role of public opinion in shaping public policy outputs?

- SLD: Chapter 7: Are State Legislatures Representative Institutions?
- Pacheco, J. (2013). "The Thermostatic Model of Responsiveness in the American States." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 13(3): 306-332.
- Lax, Jeffrey R. and Justin H. Phillips. 2009. "Gay Rights in the States: Public Opinion and Policy Responsiveness." *American Political Science Review* 103(3):367-386

Week 4

Meeting 10: What are the roles of state governors and how do they vary across the 50 states? What are the major roles that governors perform? What is the relationship of a state's governor to the U.S. president and members of Congress?

- PAS: Chapter 8: Governors and the Executive Branch
- Brown, Adam. 2010. "Are Governors Responsible for the State Economy? Partisanship, Blame, and Divided Federalism." *Journal of Politics* 72(3): 605-15.
- Barrilleaux, Charles and Michael Berkman. 2003. "Do Governors Matter? Budgeting Rules and the Politics of State Policy Making," *Political Research Quarterly* 56: 409-17.

Meeting 11: What is the role of state courts in major policy debates – from abortion politics to gun rights to election interference? What are the societal and policy implications for electing state judges?

- Shugerman, Jed H. 2010. "Economic Crisis and the Rise of Judicial Elections and Judicial Review," *Harvard Law Review* 123:1061-1150. Read the Introduction and pg. 1097-1123.

- Canes-Wrone, Brandice, Tom S. Clark, and Jason P. Kelly. 2014. “Judicial Selection and Death Penalty Decisions.” *American Political Science Review* 108:23-39.
- Kastellec, Jonathan P. 2018. “How Courts Structure State-Level Representation.” *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 18(1): 27-60.

Part III: Policymaking in the States and States as ‘laboratories of democracy’

Meeting 12: How can states learn from one another (policy diffusion)? How do states innovate and why do TANF (Welfare) programs vary so widely across states?

- Berry, Frances Stokes, and William D. Berry. 1990. “State Lottery Adoptions as Policy Innovations: An Event History Analysis.” *American Political Science Review*. 84:395-416
- Shipan, Charles R. and Craig Volden. 2006. “Bottom-Up Federalism: The Diffusion of Antismoking Policies from U.S. Cities to States.” *American Journal of Political Science* 50(4): 825-843.
- Soss, Joe, Sanford F. Schram, Thomas P. Vartanian, and Erin O'Brien. 2001. “Setting the Terms of Relief: Explaining State Policy Choices in the Devolution Revolution.” *American Journal of Political Science* 45 (2):378-395.

Policy memo due Sunday at midnight

Week 5

Week 13: How do states organize their K-12 education systems and how do states fund public education? Why do we see such variation across states in spending per pupil?

- Jackson, C. K. (2020). The costs of cutting school spending. *Education Next*, 20(4)
- Elizabeth Bell, Wesley Wehde, Madeleine Stucky; Supplement or Supplant? Estimating the Impact of State Lottery Earmarks on Higher Education Funding. *Education Finance and Policy* 2020; 15 (1): 136–163.
- Wood and Theobald, “Political Responsiveness and Equity in Public Education Finance,” *Journal of Politics*, 65 (Aug., 2003): 718-738

Meeting 14: Why does the United States incarcerate so many people? What are the states’ role and responsibility in the politics of punishment? Why is there substantial variation in the use of capital punishment across states? How are state bureaucracies (such as prisons) organized and how effectively do they deliver public goods to citizens?

- Norrander, Barbara. 2000. "The Multi-Layered Impact of Public Opinion on Capital Punishment Implementation in the American States," *Political Research Quarterly*.
- Smith, K. B. (2004). The politics of punishment: Evaluating political explanations of incarceration rates. *The Journal of Politics*, 66(3), 925-938.
- Enns, Peter K. 2016. *Incarceration Nation: How the United States Became the Most Punitive Democracy in the World*. Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1 and 6. (online via the Yale library)

Week 13: FINAL EXAM