What’s the Point?

This is not a comprehensive course in the field of state politics. It will not survey the literature to prepare you for an exam, it will not investigate all of the operations of the three branches of state government, and it will not make you an expert in the politics of each of the 50 states. Its more narrow focus will be how our general knowledge of politics has been advanced by several streams of scholarship that take advantage of the unique research opportunities presented by the American states.

These streams tend to have three common characteristics. First, they are motivated by the same types of questions that have interested political scientists working in other fields. Second, they look at phenomena that vary significantly across the states, hoping to isolate the effects of one factor by comparing states which are (ostensibly) otherwise similar. Third, they are self-consciously cumulative enterprises that use theoretical or empirical innovations to advance previous works. By focusing on these sorts of literatures, we will ignore important areas of state politics research and reality. Please see me if you’d like citations that can help you gain a general familiarity with the operations of state governments or an introduction to literatures that we are giving short shrift (like state courts, interest groups, female and minority legislators, bureaucracy, committees, party organizations, or policies).

Our seminar discussions will sacrifice scope for rigorous examinations of the formulas and flaws of each work. Each class member will present a reading approximately every other week, giving a conference-style PowerPoint and proposing questions for the rest of the class to consider. My ultimate goal is to turn you into state politics researchers by figuring out what we already know about each topic, what the remaining questions are, and how you can go about answering them.

Where are the Readings?

› Two books are available for purchase at the bookstore: Politics in the American States, A Comparative Analysis, Tenth Edition (very different from prior editions) and Erikson, Wright, and McIver’s Statehouse Democracy: Public Opinion in the American States.
› Articles are on JSTOR

What are the Assignments?

› 30% of your grade will be based on class presentations and participation.
› 20% will come from a four-page research design due on or before October 15.
› 20% will come from a four-page research design due on or before November 12.
› 30% will come from an 8-page research design and exploratory data analysis due December 10th.
Course Outline

Part I. What Does State Politics Research Look Like?

September 24. Studying State Politics

October 1. The Good and Bad of Direct Democracy
v. Mike Binder, Matthew Childers and Natalie Johnson “Campaigns and the Mitigation of Framing Effects on Voting Behavior: A Natural and Field Experiment,” Forthcoming Political Behavior.

October 15. The Politics of Income Inequality


October 22. Attend Piketty Symposium on Inequality

October 29. Do People Get What they Want from State Governments?

i. Statehouse Democracy, Chapters 4,7,8.


November 5. Parties in State Legislatures.


iv. Cox, Gary W., Thad Kousser, and Mathew McCubbins. 2010. “Party


**November 12. Governors and Legislative-Executive Bargaining.**


Note: do not get too bogged down in the econometrics.


**November 19. Policy Innovation and Diffusion.**


**December 3. Legislative Structure: Term Limits and Professionalism**


