



# AMERICAN STATES & CITIES

VIRGINIA GRAY  
PETER EISINGER

# American States and Cities

Virginia Gray  
*University of Minnesota*

Peter Eisinger  
*University of Wisconsin*

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# **American States and Cities**

*For Brian  
and  
For Jesse and Sarah*

# Preface

It is rare that any significant period of time passes these days without an important and exciting development in state or local politics. One month it is David Dinkins, the black mayor of New York City, speaking forcefully against racial and ethnic hatreds on all sides, at the risk of angering many black New Yorkers disappointed at the workings of the system of justice in the Bensonhurst trials. A few months later it is the story of Ann Richards winning the governor's race in Texas. Not long before that it is the federal court declaring that Los Angeles County supervisor districts have been gerrymandered in such a way that Hispanic-American voters are denied fair representation. And a week or so before that judicial pronouncement, it is the decision in the Wisconsin state legislature to suspend the use of bovine growth hormone (BGH), a major pharmaceutical commodity produced by the biotechnology industry to stimulate milk production.

With such stories as these appearing in the news week after week, even the most casual observer must come away with the impression that a lot is going on in politics outside of Washington and the international capitals of the world. Furthermore, it is apparent that these events hold real importance, some symbolic, some substantive, for how we manage daily life in our communities.

The remarkable combination of the sheer excitement of change, variety, and experimentation in state and local politics with the obvious importance to our collective lives of decisions made at the subnational level have sustained our respective commitments over more than two decades of teaching and research to the study of subnational politics. It is the same commitment, informed by an evolving sense of what is important to teach college students about politics in state and local settings, that has led to this book.

The purpose of this textbook is to provide a sophisticated introduction to the structure of government, the patterns of politics, and the major policy issues of state and local government within a coherent framework that serves to organize the material and helps us to understand the dynamic forces that animate subnational politics.

The framework we employ is drawn from Albert Hirschman's work, in which he observes that deterioration of performance in firms or other organizations (such as states or cities) may induce some members to leave the organization—what he calls the exit option. Others, however, may “express their dissatisfaction directly to management”—the voice option.<sup>1</sup> In considering the dynamics of subnational politics, we were struck with how much could be understood in these terms. At least some migration of people and firms from one place to another is a response to deterioration or to less-than-optimal local conditions: People move to the suburbs to escape crime, firms move out of one state to another to seek a cheaper business climate, businesses move to less congested communities to gain office space and parking, displaced factory workers migrate from depressed areas to places where the economy is booming, and so on. Much public policy in states and cities, as we shall see, is designed to prevent such out-migration and induce in-migration, for places see themselves in competition with other areas for people and firms. These represent, after all, resources for jurisdictions in the sense that every state and local jurisdiction needs taxpayers, employers, and “good citizens.”

Not everyone moves, of course, or even contemplates movement. But not everyone who stays put is happy. Some who do not like their current situation complain “directly to management,” as Hirschman would say, which in politics is to engage in reform, protest, or electoral opposition. The state and local arenas are our great forums for democratic politics, even if many decline to take part. But the democratic possibilities are manifest. Here is politics on a scale that ordinary citizens can master; here are issues that ordinary citizens can influence. In town and city politics, people quite literally confront one another; debates over political issues have a vivid immediacy. Where should the landfill go? Can we stop the noise from the airport? Who should help to house the homeless who sleep in the park? Will our children be safe on their way to school? Is the school doing its job? Should the state build the new highway over wetlands or farmland?

To speak of the democratic possibilities of local and state politics is not simply to consider the kinds of issues that people debate and the possibility for intimate confrontation. It is also to speak of the broad possibilities for leadership. The lower the level of government, the more open it is to groups that have never traditionally wielded authority. Thus, the political careers of David Dinkins and Ann Richards, or of Douglas Wilder, the black governor of Virginia, are very much products of the state and local political opportunity structure. National politics, by contrast, is less open to new groups. If the many races, ethnic groups, and social classes of America are somehow to accommodate one another with respect and mutual tolerance, it will

<sup>1</sup>Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 5.

be first in the cities and state capitols, where they can speak with one another face to face.

Our text interweaves themes of geographic mobility, competition for resources among states and cities, democratic participation, and opportunity as we trace the various aspects of state and local government, politics, and public policy. No text can be comprehensive, of course. But ours attempts a broad review, offering students an argument, substantial up-to-date information, challenging questions, and an introduction to how social science research has helped to shape our understanding of state and local politics.

A number of people have encouraged us, supported us, and read our drafts as we wrote this book. We wish first to thank our original editors, Dick Welna, John Covell, and Bruce Nichols for helping this project to take form. Robert Lineberry also merits our gratitude for his early contributions to the volume. A series of University of Minnesota graduate students ably served as research assistants: Dan Hofrenning, Diane Duffy, Cindy Kite, Sung-Don Hwang, and Bob Paolino. Manuscript production was facilitated by the efforts of Mary Ellen Otis, Nancy Christen, Althea Lamb, and especially Bob Goodman, who produced the final manuscript. Two younger colleagues—Glen Halva-Neubauer of Furman University and Bob Paolino of the University of Minnesota—prepared the instructor's manual.

Several colleagues around the country served as reviewers: Thad Beyle, University of North Carolina; Michael Fitzgerald, University of Tennessee; Herbert Jacob, Northwestern University; Malcolm Jewell, University of Kentucky; David Lowery, University of North Carolina; Paula McClain, Arizona State University; Charles Monsma, Eastern Michigan University; Wilbur Rich, Wayne State University; Pat Stephens, West Texas State University; Richard Winters, Dartmouth College. Their comments and suggestions have improved the final product.

Finally, we thank our editor, Lauren Silverman, for bringing this project to a close.

*Virginia Gray*  
*Peter Eisinger*



# **American States and Cities**

# Contents

*List of Boxes* xi

*Preface* xiii

## **PART ONE THE SETTING 1**

### **Chapter 1 American Subnational Government in the 1990s 3**

Why It Is Important to Study State and Local Government 5

The Demographic Context of State and Local Politics 10

Population Movements and Politics 13

Competition Among Places 16

Political Cultures 18

Conclusion 20

### **Chapter 2 Subnational Governments in the Federal System 23**

Defining Federalism 24

The Constitutional Basis of American Federalism 25

State Constitutions 26

Dual Federalism and Cooperative Federalism Before the New Deal 27

The Rise of National Power: 1930–1970 28

New Federalism: The Nixon Reforms 29

New Federalism: The Reagan Version 35

The Distribution of Federal Aid 38

States and Their Local Governments 41

Conclusion 43

## **PART TWO POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS 47**

### **Chapter 3 People and Groups in State Politics 49**

Political Participation: What It Is and Why It's Important 49

Political Participation Through Collective Action 59

Conclusion 71

### **Chapter 4 Political Parties, Campaigns, and Elections 75**

Party Organization 76

The Party and the Electorate 80

The Party in the Electoral Process 85

The Party in Government 96

Conclusion 100

## **PART THREE STATE GOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTIONS 105**

### **Chapter 5 State Legislatures 107**

The People 108

The Institution 114

The Legislative Process 122

Conclusion 128

### **Chapter 6 The Executive Branch 132**

The People 133

The Evolution of the Governorship 140

The Evolution of the Executive Branch 143

Roles of the Governor 145

After the Governorship 150

Good Governors and Good Politics 151

Conclusion 153

### **Chapter 7 State Courts 156**

Institutional Structure and Relations 157

The Judges 162

Judicial Process and Outcomes 170

Conclusion 175

## **PART FOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTIONS 179**

### **Chapter 8 The Structure of Local Government 181**

The Basic Types of Local Government 181

The Importance of Structural Variation in Municipal Government 184

Structural Variety in Municipal Government: Machines and Reform 188

City Executives 192

What Difference Does It Make Who Is Chief Executive?	195
City Councils	197
Conclusion	198

## **Chapter 9 The Politics of Metropolitan Areas 202**

Metropolitan Political Fragmentation	203
Metropolitan Fragmentation: Two Views	205
Metropolitan Residential Differentiation	211
Political Responses to Metropolitan Fragmentation	213
Conclusion	219

## **PART FIVE PUBLIC POLICY 223**

### **Chapter 10 The Politics of Taxing and Spending in States 225**

The Fiscal Position of State Governments	225
State Revenue Systems	228
State Budgetary Process	239
State Expenditure Policy	243
Conclusion	246

### **Chapter 11 Taxing and Spending in Local Government 250**

The Sources of Local Government Revenue	252
State Constraints on Municipal Fiscal Policy	258
The Rise of Special Districts	258
Municipal Spending Patterns: What Do Cities Do?	259
Budget Politics: Who Makes Taxing and Spending Decisions?	261
The Politics of Service Delivery	262
Conclusion	267

### **Chapter 12 Economic Policy 270**

State and Local Regulatory Policies	272
The Provision of Infrastructure	279
The Promotion of Economic Growth	282
Conclusion	291

### **Chapter 13 Social Policy 294**

The Politics of Social Policy	295
Welfare	296
Housing	302
Criminal Justice	305
Education	308
Morality Policy	316
Conclusion	320

**PART SIX THE FUTURE 325**

**Chapter 14 State and Local Governments in the Twenty-First Century 327**

Change in State and Local Government 329

An Agenda for the Twenty-First Century 336

*Index 341*

# List of Boxes

Box 1-1	Women and the Local Political Arena as a Training Ground	9
Box 3-1	Political Participation in Georgia and Minnesota	54
Box 3-2	Lobbyist Profiles	62
Box 3-3	The Greenhouse Compact	70
Box 4-1	The North Carolina Republican Party	79
Box 4-2	The Closed Primary in Alabama and Connecticut	88
Box 4-3	The Illinois Democratic Primary, 1986	92
Box 5-1	Legislative Profiles	109
Box 5-2	The Texas Legislature	115
Box 5-3	The California Legislature	116
Box 6-1	The Old Breed: Governor Edwin Edwards, Louisiana	134
Box 6-2	The New Breed: Governor Lamar Alexander, Tennessee	136
Box 7-1	The New Jersey Supreme Court	162
Box 7-2	The Ohio Supreme Court	164
Box 7-3	The Defeat of Rose Bird	168
Box 8-1	Money-Making Cities: Municipal Socialism?	183
Box 8-2	Fort Worth Adopts District Council Elections	185
Box 10-1	The Florida Sales Tax on Services	231
Box 10-2	The Lottery: Will Utah Be the Only Holdout?	234
Box 12-1	"Star Wars" in the States	283
Box 12-2	"Car Wars" in the States	288
Box 13-1	Innovations in Prison Policy	309
Box 14-1	The Texas Legislature Confronts AIDS	333

*PART*  
***ONE***

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*The Setting*





# Chapter 1

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## American Subnational Government in the 1990s

**T**here was a time not so long ago when many people believed that state governments in the American political system were obsolete. “It is a matter of brutal record,” wrote one political scientist; “the American state is finished.”<sup>1</sup> This conviction stemmed in part from the apparent inability or unwillingness of the states to deal with the emergence in the 1960s of a host of issues—racial disadvantage, deteriorating housing and central business districts, crime, crumbling public school systems, poverty, traffic congestion, pollution, and so on—that came to be known as “urban problems.” Even state politicians doubted the capacity of the states to govern effectively. In his book *Storm Over the States*, former governor of North Carolina Terry Sanford conceded that the states were antiquated, timid, ineffective, unresponsive, and unwilling to face their problems.<sup>2</sup>

Additional impetus for the belief that the states were no longer vital partners in the American federal arrangement was provided by the legislative whirlwind in Washington during Lyndon Johnson’s presidency in the 1960s, during which the national government seemed to take responsibility for every domestic problem under the sun. Under the banner of the **Great Society**, Congress passed programs to address, among other problems, poverty, mass transit, community development, housing, medical care for the poor and aged, youth employment, primary education, racial discrimination, and public safety. Many of these programs provided federal