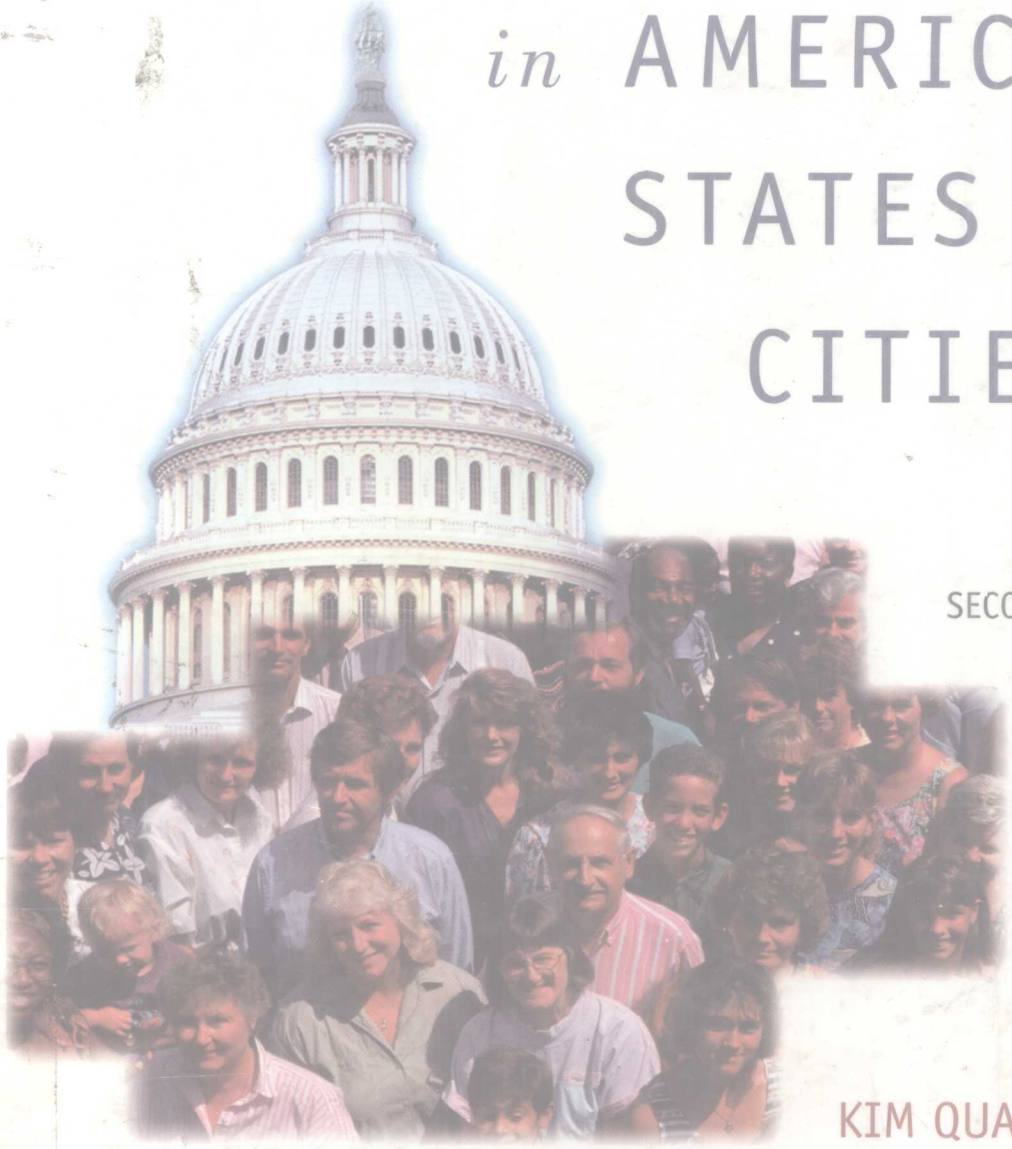
# DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE *in* AMERICAN STATES *and* CITIES



SECOND EDITION

KIM QUAILE HILL

KENNETH R. MLADENKA

# Democratic Governance in American States and Cities

Second Edition

**KIM QUAILE HILL**
Texas A&M University

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# Preface

As recently as the 1970s, thoughtful observers were predicting the demise of state and local governments as meaningful, independent entities. The federal government appeared to be usurping all the notable powers of those smaller jurisdictions. But the times and the commentary of political observers have both changed dramatically. As the end of the twentieth century draws near, state and local governments are experiencing a remarkable revival in importance and attention.

One reason for this reversal of fortune is the erosion of the power of the federal government. The election of Ronald Reagan and then George Bush to the presidency meant that political conservatives seeking to reduce the power of the federal government were in charge of policy-making efforts in the White House. Although the U.S. Congress was far less conservative during this period, both of these presidents were successful in slowing the overall growth of federal power and even in reducing that power in some areas. And the election of a Republican-controlled U.S. Congress in 1994 appears to have greatly accelerated the trend of declining federal power.

Uncle Sam is also less powerful today because he is broke. The 1980s and 1990s have witnessed the largest federal budget deficits in American history. Even political liberals have accepted numerous cuts in federal programs—and, therefore, in federal power—because of financial exigency. For these reasons the Clinton presidential administration has been able to reverse the flow of power from the federal government to the states in only a few selected policy areas. Thus, in good part because of these budgetary difficulties, many responsibilities

have been returned to state and local governments. Those governments have always had more power than many people assumed—even when the federal government was at its strongest. Now, however, they have become even more important.

The states are also getting considerable attention because of the problems they face today. Every newscast and newspaper is full of stories about—to name just a few of the more prominent domestic problems—crime in the streets, the war on drugs, the effort to preserve environmental quality, the problems of educating today's youth, and the difficulties of raising sufficient revenues to pay for governmental efforts. State and local governments have always had the major responsibility for these and many other commonplace but quite vexing difficulties. Because of the federal government's shrinking domestic efforts, the states have taken on even more responsibility in these areas.

If we accept the conventional view of these problems, there is a remarkable irony in the facts cited above. Most people believe that the present-day social and economic difficulties of the United States are far worse than those of the recent past. Thus, the federal government has reduced its commitment to domestic policy at a time when domestic problems are especially acute. Clearly, the states must take up the initiative that Uncle Sam has relinquished.

Grappling with the particular problems mentioned above has proven very demanding. Beyond such specific policy concerns, however, the nation faces an even bigger, potentially more disruptive challenge, one that also complicates the response to many individual problems. As we explain in Chapter One, the United States is on the threshold of a transformation from an industrial to a postindustrial society. The nature of the economy is changing fundamentally. It is possible to envision the tantalizing prospect of a high-tech future, in which economic and social life might be remarkably better than it is under mature industrialism. But getting to that rosy future will entail a difficult passage. And even if the vision is realized, not all Americans may enjoy the benefits.

The reasons for concern about the impending economic transition are already quite evident. Once-vigorous industrial sectors of the economy are in decline. High-tech industries are growing, but they have suffered their own growth pains and economic vicissitudes. Whole regions of the nation have experienced dramatic periods of boom and bust, with bust being the more common condition in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Furthermore, the character of life in metropolitan America is evolving with these economic changes, creating a host of difficulties for the governance of cities. And even the nation's economic power is in doubt. The United States not only faces tough economic competition from abroad but is also the world's largest debtor nation.

The economic transition and the immediate problems it poses will dramatically affect Americans' lives in a host of ways. Individuals, families, and governments will be equally touched. And these changes will complicate efforts to deal with other priorities, such as education, the environment, urban decline, and regional economic recessions. How governments respond to those problems will also affect the success of their efforts to accommodate economic changes.

These observations justify considerable concern with the character and quality of state and local governments. Thus, we begin this book by discussing the difficulties these governments face and why one should read the rest of the book to learn more about them. We argue that the states face an unusual period of stress which will test their policy-making capabilities and their commitment to democratic governance. And because their policy decisions over the next several years will dramatically affect the quality of Americans' daily lives, every citizen can benefit from a better understanding of how they work.

After explaining these policy challenges, we examine the separate parts of state and local governments—the "nuts and bolts," as political scientists say. We subject each nut and bolt—each major institution—to relatively microscopic examination, considering its role in the overall governmental process; the unique technical, political, and decision-making problems it confronts; and how democratic its functioning might be.

This book is heavily shaped, then, by themes implicit in the preceding remarks. We believe that state and local governments, because of their special responsibilities, merit the close attention of average citizens as well as scholars. We see economic change as causing some of the most serious problems, and we frequently discuss the relevance of economics to politics and policy. We also believe that the greatest threat inherent in today's major problems is to democratic governance. As state and local governments try to resolve these problems, will the general public interest be served, or will narrow special interests reap undue rewards?

The preceding themes are this book's focus. Like many other authors in this field, however, we pay close attention to the nuts and bolts of state and local governments in order to demonstrate how these governments function and why they function as they do. These are complicated governments, affected by a host of competing external forces. Furthermore, each of these levels of government consists of a fragmented collection of institutions responding in various ways to the social and political pressures of their environments. Thus, understanding state and local governments necessitates a close, careful examination of how their constituent parts function. For this reason, we offer a detailed explanation of what scholars have concluded about these matters—about what is known with some certainty. At the same time, we recognize that even scholars who specialize in the study of state and local governments disagree on a number of basic issues. Thus, we have attempted to present the major points of controversy, for they are equally important to a sophisticated understanding of these governments. One must recognize what is unknown along with what is known.

We are indebted to a number of people who aided the completion of this book. Leo Weigman and David Follmer of The Dorsey Press commissioned this enterprise more years ago than we care to admit. Cindy Stormer at Brooks/Cole inherited it as a result of the acquisition of The Dorsey Press by Wadsworth, Inc., and shepherded the first edition of the book to its completion. Brian Gore inherited editorial guidance for this second edition when Wadsworth Publishing Company acquired the political science book list of Brooks/Cole. And Tammy Goldfeld

saw the work to completion as the political science editor who replaced Gore in the midst of the project.

Several scholars offered thorough reviews of earlier versions of the manuscript. They are Robert Albritton, Northern Illinois University; Thad L. Beyle, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; John Bibby, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee; Ed Brazil, Eastern Illinois University; Doug Brown, Arizona Western College; Raymond Cox, Office of the Lieutenant Governor of New Mexico; Charles Dunn, Henderson State University; Larry Elowitz, Georgia College; Richard Foster, Idaho State University; William K. Hall, Bradley University; Charles William Hill, Jr., Roanoke College; Tom Holbrook, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee; Mark Hyde, Providence College; James Jarvis, Wayne State University; Andrew D. McNitt, Eastern Illinois University; Edward J. Miller, University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point; Paul T. Neal, Center for Study of Federalism, Temple University; Jim Seroka, University of North Florida; and Elliott Vittes, University of Central Florida. Although we agreed with their suggested revisions on many points, we remained doggedly resistant to their advice on a number of others—whether to our good or ill fortune, we must let our readers decide.

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# Contents