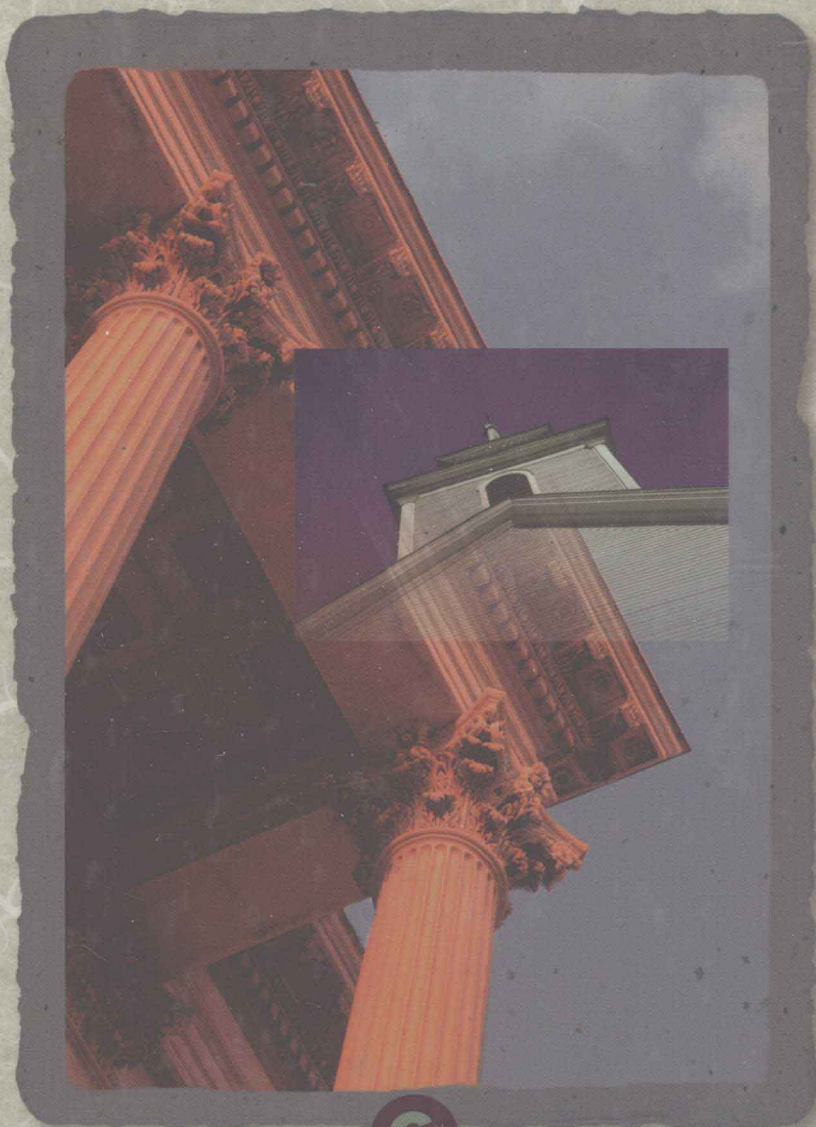


# POLITICS AND POLICY

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*in States & Communities*



6<sup>th</sup>

*Edition*

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JOHN J. HARRIGAN

# POLITICS AND POLICY IN STATES & COMMUNITIES

*Sixth Edition*

**JOHN J. HARRIGAN**

*Hamline University*



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In the closing years of the twentieth century, Americans are turning increasingly to state and community governments for leadership on the great domestic problems facing the nation. They are doing so in part because the federal government has abdicated leadership in so many areas of domestic policy over the past two decades, and there was no other governmental arena to which to turn. But they are doing so also because of four vital threads that have woven through the fabric of American domestic politics in recent years:

- The unprecedented rejuvenation of state and local governments over the past quarter century.
- The unprecedented role that state and community governments play today in the political economy and in promoting economic development.
- The never-ending ideological conflict over the public issues that dominate state and community politics.
- The emergence of explosive social conflicts over ethnicity, gender, and sexual preference.

These four themes play important roles in *Politics and Policy in States and Communities*. Examples of the four themes abound.

*Item:* A quarter century ago, as we shall see, state government was decried as “dullsville” and local government as a “lost world.” So complete has been the rejuvenation of state and local government in the past two decades that these complaints no longer ring true. Today the talk is of rejuvenating government and, as we shall see, of “reinventing” government. Some of the most exciting political leaders around the nation are emerging from state politics. (President Bill Clinton, for example, came to prominence as governor of Arkansas, and Republican senator Richard Lugar came to the Senate from the mayor’s office in Indianapolis).

*Item:* States and municipalities have gone into the economic development business in a big way in recent years. They seek to stimulate business activity to create more jobs, attract new industries, and keep existing ones. This has sparked an intense interstate and interregional competition for corporate investment dollars. When General Motors decided to build a factory to manufacture a new automobile called the Saturn, over half the states offered packages to GM in their competition to get the site of the new Saturn plant.

*Item:* Barely a quarter century ago, a prominent scholar published a book lamenting the end of ideology. Today ideology is alive and well in state and community politics. Too alive, in some people’s judgment. On virtually every major domestic issue area (education, social welfare, crime, infrastructure, regulation) political leaders divide themselves into a variety of ideological positions on the left-right spectrum, which we shall examine shortly.

## ◇ CONCEPTUAL THEMES

Rejuvenation of state and local government, the role of those governments in state political economies, and the influence of political ideology in state and community politics are the unifying themes of this book. Rejuvenation of state and local government is particularly the dominant theme for Chapters 2 through 12, which deal with the institutions and processes of state and local politics. Political ideology is most relevant in the material for Chapters 13 through 16, which deal with the major policy areas confronting state and local governments (crime, education, social welfare, infrastructure, and regulation). The object of examining the ideological aspect of these issue areas is twofold: (1) to help the reader better understand his or her own value orientations toward these issues and (2) to provide conceptual tools that the reader can use to evaluate these issues as they arise in the reader's own community. The theme of political economy is relevant in several chapters of the book but nowhere more directly than in Chapter 17, on the role that state and local governments play in promoting economic development. Finally, today's great social conflicts over ethnicity and gender will surface in a great many chapters ranging from legislative representation in Chapter 9 to affirmative action in Chapter 11.

## ◇ IMPORTANT FEATURES OF THIS EDITION

- A separate chapter (17) on economic development policy. So important has economic development politics become that a special chapter is devoted specifically to it. Especially useful in this chapter is a set of analytical questions the reader can use to assess proposed economic development projects in his or her own state.
- A unique appendix on career prospects in state and community government and politics. This appendix gives students a guide to numerous career possibilities in state and local politics as well as some references for exploring different careers. This is especially helpful given today's demand that the college curriculum be relevant to the workplace.
- End-of-chapter glossaries. Important terms are defined in glossaries at the end of each chapter, where they can easily be found by the reader.
- Up-to-date coverage of recent developments in state and community politics. These include the legislative term limitation movement, casino gambling, and recent changes in health care policy, among others.

## ◇ TEACHING FEATURES OF THIS BOOK

This book contains numerous pedagogical features that aid the instructor in teaching the course and help the student in learning the material:

- "You Decide" exercises. These are boxed case studies that ask the reader to respond to lively issues that range from deciding welfare eligibility in a complicated case to applying comparable worth to a particular situation.

- Chapter previews and summaries. Chapter previews give the reader a brief outline of the major issues in each chapter. The end-of-chapter summaries seek to wrap up the most important points.
- Highlight boxes in each chapter. These are short, boxed case studies that seek to illustrate important points made in the body of the text.
- A comprehensive *Instructor's Manual*. This manual provides: (1) chapter outlines, (2) twenty-five to thirty multiple-choice questions for each chapter, (3) suggested classroom exercises to promote discussion of key issues and topics, (4) proposed research projects designed to have the student investigate how well the chapter's assertions apply to his or her state or community, (5) a career exploration exercise tied to the book's Appendix, (6) a film guide, and (7) study guides that can be given to the student. The two-page study guide for each chapter can be duplicated and distributed to the class as an aid for mastering the material of the course. Each contains (a) learning objectives for the chapter, (b) identification terms that the student should understand, and (c) mastery questions for which the student should be able to outline answers.
- Detailed footnotes that the reader can use as a guide to basic literature on research topics.

## ◇ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For me it is exciting to write and teach about state and local politics, because it is a topic that is directly involved in people's daily lives and one that has changed dynamically over the past decade. If some of that excitement rubs off on some of the student users of this text, I have many people to thank. First, there are the many users of the earlier editions of the book. They will see retained the approaches they responded to positively in the earlier editions and will note substantial additions in this edition to accommodate changing events and perspectives. Additionally and more directly, I am greatly indebted to the following reviewers who read part or all of the manuscript and gave me their invaluable comments: Beverly A. Cyler, Penn State Harrisburg; Donald C. Williams, Western New England College; Richard K. Scher, University of Florida; Albert J. Nelson, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse; Ann Lin, University of Michigan; Richard Saeger, Valdosta State University. But most of all my appreciation is to Sandy for her support.

*John J. Harrigan*

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# INTRODUCTION TO STATE AND COMMUNITY POLITICS

## Chapter Preview

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Chapter 1 introduces the central concerns of state and community government today and outlines the plan of this book. In this chapter, we will discuss in turn:

1. How state and local government responsibilities have increased in recent decades.
  2. How state and local governments have reformed and rejuvenated themselves to handle their new responsibilities.
  3. What conflicts arise in states and communities as those governments seek to carry out their responsibilities.
  4. How state and local governments have become increasingly concerned with political economy and the politics of economic development.
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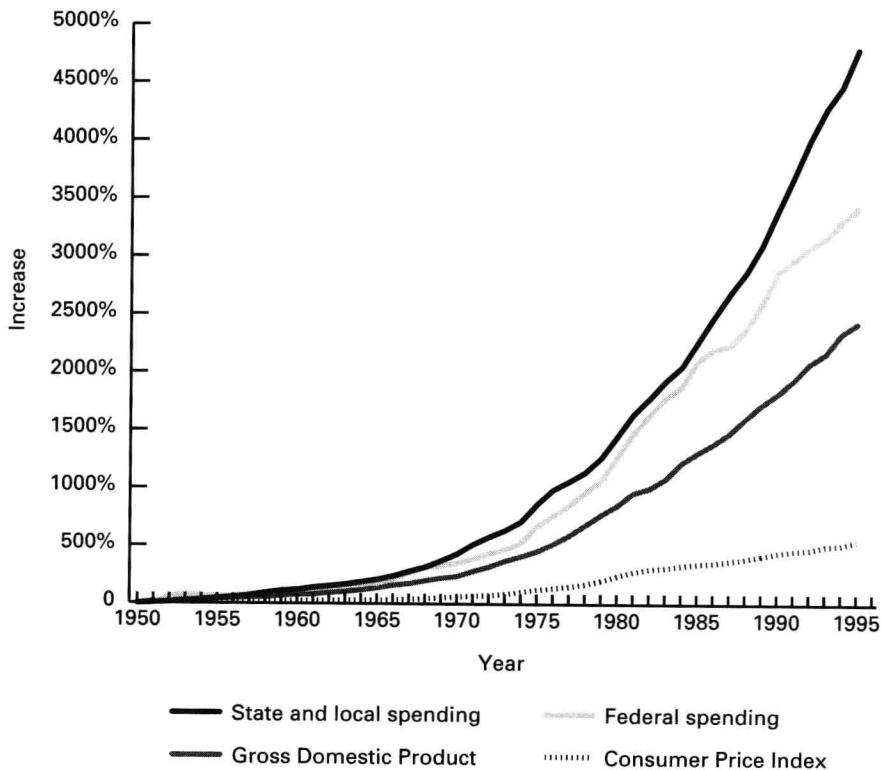
## ◇ INTRODUCTION

State and local governments affect our lives much more directly than does the national government in Washington. Most of the governmental services we receive are delivered by state or local units, not by Washington. That includes most of the federal government's domestic services, such as public housing, Medicaid and most forms of public welfare. Many people feel they can influence what goes on in their city hall or state capitol much more than they can influence what goes on in Washington. For most of us, Washington seems very far away, with most of its money being spent elsewhere, in somebody else's neighborhood, somebody else's state, or somebody else's country. State and local governments spend their money locally, and their projects are literally carried out before our eyes, sometimes in our own neighborhoods.

Not only do state and community governments have a more direct impact on our lives than does the government in Washington, but their role in domestic policy is steadily growing. This growth is illustrated in Figure 1-1, which shows that growth of state and local government expenditures since midcentury has outstripped the growth of federal governmental spending, the gross domestic product (or GDP, the most common measure of the nation's economic output), and inflation, as measured by change in the consumer price index (CPI).

This growing role was pushed on the states in part because the federal government during the 1980s abdicated leadership in tackling some of our most pressing domestic problems, such as air and water pollution, massive poverty, deteriorating public school systems, and dreaded toxic wastes seeping into the drinking water and contaminating the ocean beaches. During these years of neglect, groups concerned about these problems, finding little support for their

**Figure 1-1 GROWTH IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR**



Sources: Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1996* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996), pp. 303, 330, 443, 483; *Statistical Abstract: 1987*, pp. 250, 416, 463; *Statistical Abstract: 1984*, pp. 272; *Statistical Abstract: 1971*, pp. 305, 396.

concerns in Washington, D.C., began turning their attention to the states instead. The most imaginative leadership on some of these national problems today is coming not from the national capital in Washington, but from the state capitals.

The years of domestic neglect were possible in no small measure because domestic problems for most of the past forty years were overshadowed by America's great Cold War conflict with the Soviet Union. When choices had to be made in the federal budget, Cold War fears over national security usually ensured that it was not the military but federal programs for the environment, education, social welfare, and other domestic problems that got the axe. There are still dangerous challenges to America's security, but the Cold War is over, and nothing on the international horizon poses a threat of that magnitude. With the Cold War gone, it is more difficult to ignore any longer the scores of domestic problems that were given low priority during the years of neglect. As national attention turns to these issues, state and community governments have been playing ever-growing roles and have been reasserting their historic role as the laboratories of democracy.<sup>1</sup>

As states move to the forefront on domestic issues, they find themselves with difficult choices to make. Which public services should be emphasized? At what levels? Who should receive these services? Who should pay for their cost? And how should the great burden of regulating the environment, the economy, health, and safety be divided among the three levels of government (national, state, and local)?

## ◇ REJUVENATION OF STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

If these great tasks had been handed to the states a generation ago, in the 1960s, the states probably would not have been up to the task. In those years, scholars and journalists usually viewed state and community governments as incompetent at best. State governments were described as "sick,"<sup>2</sup> and state legislatures were caricatured as "horse-and-buggy" institutions.<sup>3</sup> States for the most part shirked their responsibilities for dealing with urban problems.<sup>4</sup> And as states ignored their growing urban problems in the 1950s and 1960s, the federal government picked up much of the slack with a vast expansion of social services and domestic programs. Journalists and social scientists increasingly turned their attention to Washington or to the central city, largely ignoring state government as "Dullsville."<sup>5</sup>

Today, these charges no longer ring true. State and community governments have profoundly rejuvenated themselves in recent years. With few exceptions, there has been a broad upgrading of the professionalism and competence of the governors, legislatures, courts, and public bureaucracies. The ability of states to cope with domestic problems has been further enhanced by more effective revenue collection systems.<sup>6</sup> According to the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, this transformation of state government capability in such a short time "has no parallel in American history."<sup>7</sup>

By the early 1990s, the predominant buzzword for this reformist impulse was “reinventing government.” This term, taken from a book by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler<sup>8</sup> represents the idea that governments at all levels should become more flexible, decentralized, entrepreneurial, and consumer oriented in their quest to provide public services. The 1990s are turning out to be a time when the demands for services by state and local governments are great, but the financial resources for meeting those demands are scarce. The advocates of reinventing government hope that their entrepreneurial, decentralized approach will rebuild public confidence in government by making governments more effective and possibly less costly. The prospects for this happening is a theme we will examine throughout this book.

## ◇ WHAT MATTERS IN STATE AND COMMUNITY POLITICS

The big question about this rejuvenation of the past decade, of course, is, for what purpose? What is the proper role of government in a democratic society? What problems should government tackle? And in tackling those problems, what should be the proper distribution of responsibility between the states and the federal government?

These are not easy questions to answer, however, because every major interest grouping in society has a different answer. And the clash between these various interests about the purpose of government is at the heart of what state and community politics is about. As states and communities move to the forefront of American domestic politics, they become the battleground for dealing with society’s most contentious issues.

Should, for example, teenage girls be permitted to obtain legal abortions without consulting their parents? Should each state be permitted to decide this issue for itself? Or should the will of the federal government prevail on all fifty states?

What we are going to see, as we explore the proper role of state and community governments, is that certain facets of our political system matter a great deal to the ability of state and community governments to discharge their responsibilities. Five of these matters are going to gain our attention throughout this book.

### Political Economy Matters

One of the things that matters most to a state’s ability to perform its responsibilities effectively is the **political economy** (the interaction between economic conditions and public economic policy). Public revenues to provide good schools, for example, will be more plentiful if the state has a dynamic growing economy. And a state’s ability to produce a dynamic growing economy is in part influenced by policies adopted by the state. The community of East St. Louis, Ill., offers a case in point. Jonathan Kozol has described what he calls “savage inequalities” in that city’s schools. Delapidated buildings. Outdated books. Insufficient modern instructional technology such as computers. And abysmally unsafe environments



where school children run a high risk of drugs, abuse, teen pregnancy, and violence.<sup>9</sup> East St. Louis endures these deplorable conditions for its children in no small measure because the city's coal mining economy has been on the skids for decades. For East St. Louis, the inability to use the powers of government to rekindle the economy results in a school system of savage inequalities.

## Ideology Matters

More than political economy is involved in the plight of East St. Louis, however. Ideology also matters. That community is part of the state of Illinois, which, in addition to impoverished East St. Louis, has some of the most richly endowed public schools in the nation. Should some of Illinois's wealth be used to reduce the savage inequalities afflicting the people of East St. Louis? To argue yes is to argue an ideological position favoring **redistributive policies**. These types of policies serve people at the lower end of the income scale but are financed by revenue collected disproportionately from people at the middle and upper ends of the income scale.\*

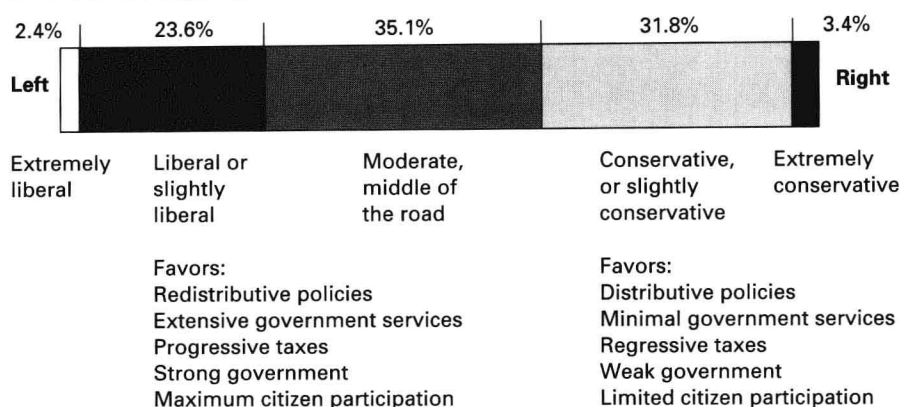
Not everybody agrees that public services should be redistributive, and there are ways to ensure that they are not. The first is to minimize government's role and let it provide the least amount of services. A second is to provide only the services that disproportionately benefit the middle and upper classes—higher education, public freeways, redevelopment of big-city central-business districts, and support for the arts. A third is to finance public services through regressive taxes rather than through progressive taxes. (A *regressive tax* takes a bigger percentage of poor people's income than it takes from high-income people. A *progressive tax* does the opposite.) Progressive and regressive taxes are discussed more fully in Chapter 4.

People on the left, or liberal, end of the **ideological spectrum** generally support the expanding of government services for low-income people and paying for these services out of a progressive tax system. This system redistributes income from the rich to the poor. In contrast, people on the right, or conservative, end of the ideological spectrum support minimal government services and regressive tax systems. This leads to distributive policies; that is, people receive about as much in government services as they pay in taxes. Ideological differences are illustrated in Figure 1-2, which shows that the overwhelming majority of people are middle of the road or lean just slightly away from center.

Redistributive policies usually draw their greatest support from groups representing people low on the socioeconomic scale. These include labor unions (which may want more jobs), welfare rights organizations (which may want higher welfare benefits), minority groups (which may want higher expenditures on health and educational services), the elderly (who may want better transportation services for senior citizens), and groups for other specific categories of people, such as the poor, the handicapped, or the mentally disturbed.

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\*Redistribution can also work in the opposite direction—taking from the poor and giving to the well-off. As the term is used in this book, however, redistribution means taking from the well-off and giving it to the not-so-well-off.

**Figure 1-2 THE IDEOLOGICAL SPECTRUM**

Don't know + no answer = 3.9%

Sources: James Allan Davis, *General Social Surveys, 1972–1994* [machine-readable data file.] Principal Investigator, James A. Davis; Senior Study Director, Tom W. Smith. NORC ed. (Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, producer, 1994, Storrs, Conn.: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, distributor).

Opposition to redistributive policies usually comes from interest groups representing people who expect to see their taxes rise as a result of higher expenditures—chambers of commerce (which may fear potential tax increases), business groups (which may fear that higher taxes will erode the business climate), and ad hoc taxpayers associations (which may resent potential tax increases, welfare expenditures, or higher salaries for public employees).

Redistributive policies also pose problems for the advocates of reinventing government, whom we discussed earlier. At the core of the idea of reinventing government is the desire to make government more efficient, more cost effective. But is cost-effectiveness the highest goal of government? When it conflicts with other values, which value should prevail? If you turn to the box labeled “You Decide,” you will find an exercise asking you to sort out some of the tradeoffs between efficiency and other values such as effectiveness, justice, equity, and public order.

### Citizens Matter: You Matter

If the states are truly becoming laboratories of democracy, then citizens will have to play an important role in shaping public policies. And certainly there are ample opportunities to do this. One way is for you to run for and win elective office. There are 7,000 state legislative positions and tens of thousands of other elective offices. Thus, virtually anyone seriously interested in government can get elected to *some* office if he or she does the right things and persists long enough. In addition, citizens can influence policy through interest groups, political parties, and political movements, a topic that we will discuss in Chapters 5 and 6. With a little