KEVIN B. SMITH | ALAN GREENBLATT

GOVERNING

STATES AND LOCALITIES | EIGHTH EDITION

Governing States and Localities

Eighth Edition

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Governing States and Localities

Eighth Edition

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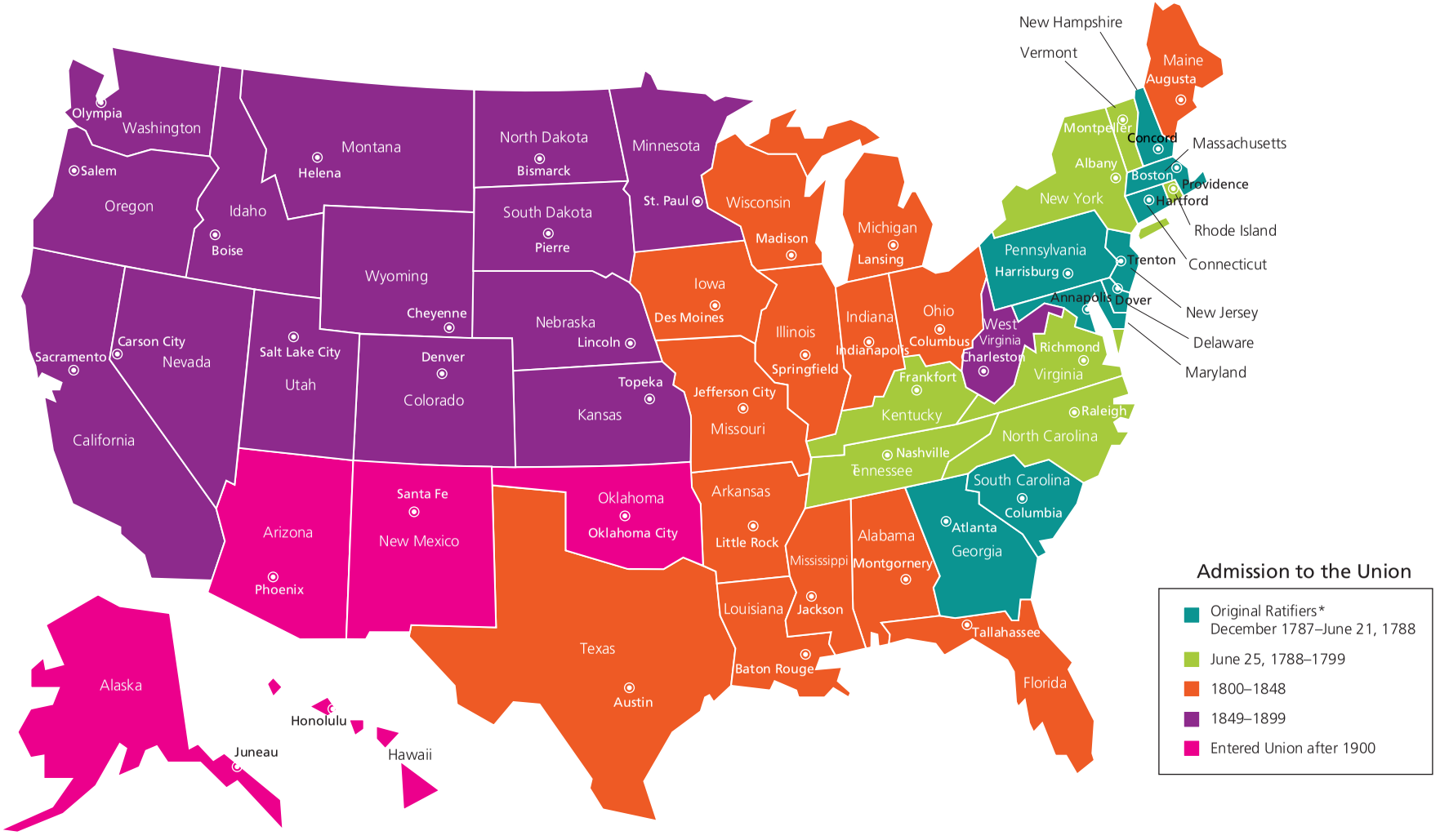
MAP OF THE UNITED STATES



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PREFACE

The primary mission of the eighth edition of *Governing States and Localities* is to provide a comprehensive introduction to state and local governments and do it with a difference. The book remains a unique collaboration between academic and professional writers that rests on a foundation of academic scholarship, more than two decades of experience teaching undergraduates about state and local governments, and the insight and experience of a journalist with decades of experience covering state and local politics.

Consistent with previous editions, this book aims to provide a fresh and contemporary perspective on state and local politics, not just in terms of coverage and content but also in its look and feel. The text deliberately follows a newsmagazine's crisp journalistic style, and the book employs magazine-quality, full-color layout and design. The text is deliberately designed to meet the highest academic and pedagogical standards while remaining engaging and easily accessible to undergraduates

While the goals and format remain the same as previous editions, the content has undergone significant revisions to reflect the latest issues, trends, and political changes. Key updates include the following:

- In response to reviewer feedback, the text has been significantly streamlined. All chapters have been revised to deliver the same comprehensive coverage while being significantly more concise.
- There is additional focus on the core pedagogical theme of the comparative method, including a number of completely new features highlighting "a difference that makes a difference."
- Recent events and issues that have affected (and in some cases transformed) states and localities, including updates on state and local responses to coronavirus and the pandemic's impact on state–federal relations, are examined in depth.
- This edition discusses the impact of the Donald Trump presidency on intergovernmental relations and issues of central interest to states and localities.
- The end of each chapter includes an updated "The Latest Research" section, where recent scholarship is put into the context of what students have just read.

Although the content is significantly revised for the eighth edition, the comparative method continues to provide the text's core thematic pedagogical structure. This approach compares similar units of analysis to explain *why* differences exist. As scholars know well, state and local governments make excellent units of analysis for comparison because they operate within a single political system. The similarities and differences that mark their institutional structures, laws and regulations, political cultures, histories, demographics, economies, and geographies make them exciting laboratories for asking and answering important questions about politics and government. Put simply, their differences make a difference.

The appeal of exploring state and local government through comparison is not just that it makes for good political science. It is also a great way to engage students because it gives

undergraduates an accessible, practical, and systematic way to understand politics and policy in the real world. Students learn that even such seemingly personal concerns as why their tuition is so darned high are not just relevant to their particular situation and educational institution but also fundamental to the interaction of that institution with its state's political culture, economy, history, and tax structure, and even to the school's geographic and demographic position within the state and region. Using the comparative method, this book gives students the resources they need to ask and answer such questions themselves.

KEY FEATURES

This book includes several elements designed to showcase and promote its main themes. Each chapter begins with a list of chapter objectives. Based on Bloom's taxonomy, these objectives present straightforward, big-picture statements of key information students should take away from each chapter. Instructors may easily turn these into class discussion topics or homework assignments.

Following the objectives, each chapter presents an opening vignette modeled after a lead in a newsmagazine article—a compelling story that segues naturally into the broader themes of the chapter. Many of these vignettes (as well as many of the feature boxes) represent original reporting.

Each chapter concludes with a set of questions intended to engage student interest and prompt students to look systematically for answers using the comparative method. The idea is not simply to spoon-feed the answers to students, but rather to demonstrate how the comparative method can be used to explore and explain questions about politics and policy.

The feature boxes in each chapter emphasize and reinforce the comparative theme:

- "A Difference That Makes a Difference" boxes provide clear examples of how variations among states and localities can be used to explain a wide range of political and policy phenomena. These pieces detail the ways the institutions, regulations, political culture, demographics, and other factors of a particular state shape its constitution, the way its political parties function, how its citizens tend to vote, how it allocates its financial resources, and why its courts are structured the way they are, to name a few.
- "Local Focus" boxes spotlight the ways localities function independently of the states and show how they are both constrained and empowered by intergovernmental ties. From battles to wrest control of their budgets from the state to constitutional restrictions on how they can tax and spend, the topics addressed in these boxes showcase the rich variety represented in these nearly 87,000 substate entities.
- "Policy in Practice" boxes demonstrate how different states and localities have interpreted and implemented the legislation handed down from higher levels of government, and the consequences of these decisions. The impact of declining agency fees on public unions, the difficulties and implications of city–county mergers, and the policy implications of the power imbalance between states and localities are just some of the issues addressed.

Another key feature that serves the comparative theme is the design and use of graphics and tables. Nearly 30 full-color, 50-state maps, including three unique cartograms, provide a visual representation of and intuitively easy way to grasp the differences among states and

localities—whether the sizes of the state economies, the party affiliation requirements for voting in direct primaries, the methods of judicial selection, or state incarceration rates. Similarly, more than 40 tables and figures emphasize how states and localities differ and what these differences mean to politics and policy. State rankings of voter turnout rates, recent regional murder rates, and many other features support comparisons made in the text.

To help students assimilate content and review for tests, at the end of each chapter is a list of "Top Ten Takeaways" that reinforces key themes and ideas. Each chapter also includes a set of highlighted key concepts. These terms are compiled into a list at the end of each chapter, with corresponding page numbers. A comprehensive glossary of key terms precedes the book's index.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The book is organized so that each chapter logically builds on previous chapters. The first chapter (subtitled "They Tax Dogs in West Virginia, Don't They?") is essentially a persuasive essay that lays the conceptual groundwork for the book. Its aim is to convince students that state and local politics are important to their day-to-day lives and to their futures as professionals and citizens. That is, it makes the case for why students should care about state and local politics. Along the way, it introduces the advantages of the comparative method as a systematic way to explore this subject. In introducing the book's approach, the chapter provides the basic context for studying state and local governments, especially the differences in economics, culture, demographics, and geography that drive policy and politics at the regional level.

The next two chapters cover federalism and state constitutions. These chapters provide a basic understanding of what state and local governments are and what powers, responsibilities, and roles they have within the political system of the United States, as well as a sense of how they legally can make different political and policy choices.

Chapter 4 examines the finances of state and local governments. This chapter provides a readily accessible introduction not just to the revenue and expenses of states and localities, but also highlights the importance of budgets to understanding policy priorities. Chapter 5 examines voting and political participation with an eye to helping students understand how citizens connect to the core policymaking institutions of government. Chapters 6 through 10 are separate treatments of those core institutions: parties and interest groups, legislatures, governors and executives, courts, and the bureaucracy. There is special emphasis in each chapter on how variations in the structure, powers, and responsibilities of these institutions have real-life implications for citizens of states and localities.

Chapters 11 and 12 focus on local government. Chapter 11 concentrates on laying out the basic structure, authority, and responsibilities of local government. Chapter 12 examines the relations among local governments from a regional perspective. The final four chapters are devoted to specific policy areas—education, crime and punishment, health and welfare, and the environment—that represent a selection of the most critical policy functions of state and local governments.

DIGITAL RESOURCES

This text includes an array of instructor teaching materials designed to save you time and to help you keep students engaged. To learn more, visit sagepub.com or contact your SAGE representative at sagepub.com/findmyrep.

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A lot of effort and dedication go into the making of a textbook such as this, only a fraction of which is contributed by those whose names end up on the cover. Alison O'Toole deserves special recognition for her hard work and dedication as a research assistant. We extend our thanks to Billy Corriher for updating the chapter on courts for this edition. We'd also like to acknowledge the contributions made by John Buntin, Melissa Feinberg, and Michele Mariani Vaughn to prior editions of this work.

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Government really is going to the dogs. For revenue, that is. In some places, dogs are not just pets but also a source of money for government.

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1 INTRODUCTION TO STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

They Tax Dogs in West Virginia, Don't They?

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you will be able to

- Identify the ways state and local governments can affect daily life,
- Discuss how the comparative method can help explain differences between states,
- List some of the basic differences that occur among states and localities, and
- Describe the importance of state and local government within the wider context of American government.

Dartmouth College junior Garrett Muscatel spent the 2019 spring semester studying state politics, but he was not taking a class. He was doing his job as a state representative in the New Hampshire legislature. At age 21, he was the youngest LGBTQ elected legislator serving in the United States, winning the competition to represent Grafton County's 12th District in the November 2018 elections.[1]

Muscatel, needless to say, is not a typical state legislator. Most state legislators are middle-aged (see Chapter 7) and have not worried about term papers or final exams in a long time. Muscatel is also an unusual college student. Clearly, he is very interested in politics and in state politics in particular—so much so that he has committed himself to undertaking an often grueling and low-paying ($100 per year) job in public office. That truly sets him apart. Most college students are not interested enough in politics to give up a big portion of their undergraduate experience to help run a government. Heck, most college students are not that into politics, period. Nationwide, only about one-in-three college-aged people bothered to vote in the election that saw Muscatel win office. And that low turnout level among the college-aged crowd attracted

Garrett Muscatel, a junior at Dartmouth College, was so interested in state politics he successfully ran for the New Hampshire state legislature in 2018. At 21, he was the youngest LGBTQ legislator elected in the United States.

The Washington Post / Getty

a lot of media attention because it was considered unusually *high*.[2] Less than half of the nation's college freshmen think that keeping up with political affairs is important, and only about a quarter think it is important to exert influence on the political system.[3] Regardless, if politics is something that less than half of college students can be bothered with, then any way you cut it, a textbook like this has a big problem. The data suggest that we can expect, at most, that roughly half the people reading this book have some sort of minimal threshold interest in politics generally, and the proportion with a genuine interest in and curiosity about state and local politics is undoubtedly lower. To those who do have that interest, to the Garrett Muscatels in our audience, we say welcome and enjoy the ride—given your interest in state politics, there is a lot to enjoy and soak up in what follows.

What about the rest of you, though—why should you care? Why should you have an interest in politics? More specifically, why should you give a hoot about politics and government at the state and local level? Fair question. The first goal of this textbook is to answer it. Everyone, and we mean *everyone*, should be interested in state and local politics. Let us start by explaining why.

THE IMPACT OF STATE AND LOCAL POLITICS ON DAILY LIFE

Regardless of who you are, what you do, or what you want to do, if you reside in the United States, state and local governments play a large role in your life. Regardless of what you are interested in—graduating, starting a career, beginning a family, or just good old-fashioned sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll—state and local governments shape how, whether, and to what extent you are able to pursue those interests. To make things immediately relevant, let us consider your college education. The vast majority of college students in the United States—more than 70 percent—attend public institutions of higher education.[4] Public colleges and universities are created and supported by state governments. For many readers of this book, the opportunity to get a college education is possible only because each state government created a system of higher education. For example, California has three major higher education systems: the University of California, the California State University, and the California Community Colleges system. State governments require that taxpayers subsidize the operation of these education systems; in other words, the systems were designed not just to provide educational opportunities but also to make those opportunities broadly accessible, with tuition covering only a portion of the actual costs of a student's education.

Much of the rest comes from the taxpayers' pockets via the state government. When that state subsidy falls, college students inevitably end up paying more in tuition. If you wonder why your tuition bill keeps going up, wonder no more. Adjusted for inflation, state governments spent less on higher education in 2017 than they did in 2008.[5] In 2000, state government appropriations in 47 states covered a bigger portion of higher education costs than student tuition and fees. In other words, if you went to a public university or college 20 years ago, there was a very good chance that your state government paid more for your college education than you did. That is no longer true. Today, students at public universities routinely cover more of the cost than state government does.[6] The budgetary math here is pretty simple: the lower the subsidy from state government, the higher your tuition bill.

State governments do not just play an outsize role in what you pay to go to college; they may also determine what classes you pay for, whether you want to take those classes or not. Some states have curriculum mandates. You may be taking a course on state and local politics—and buying and reading this book—because your state government decided it was a worthy investment of your time and money. In Texas, for example, a state politics course is not just a good idea;

it's the law. According to Section 51.301 of the Texas Education Code, to receive a bachelor's degree from any publicly funded college in the state, a student must successfully complete a course on state politics.

And, dear college student, if you think all of this adds up to government having a big impact on your life, dream on. The government's role in shaping your college education is actually pretty small. Compared with the heavy involvement of state and local governments in shaping K–12 education, colleges have pretty much free rein. For 2018, it was estimated that more than 90 percent of students in Grades 9–12 were attending public high schools.[7] Local units of government operate most of these schools. Private grade schools also are subject to a wide variety of state and local government regulations, from teacher certification and minimum curriculum requirements to basic health and safety standards. Whether you attended public or private school—or were homeschooled—at the end of the day, you had no choice in the decision to get a basic grade school education. Although the minimum requirements vary, every state in the union requires that children receive at least a grade school education.

Believe it or not, state and local governments do not exist simply to regulate large areas of your life, even if it sometimes seems that way. Their primary purpose is to provide services to their respective populations. In providing these services, state and local governments shape the social and economic lives of their citizens. The roads you use to get to school are there because state and local authorities built them and maintain them. The electricity that runs your computer comes from a utility grid regulated by state government, local government, or both. State and local governments are responsible for the sewer and water systems that make the bathroom down the hall functional. They make sure that the water you drink is safe and that the burger, sushi, or salad you bought in your student union does not make you sick.[8] State governments determine the violations and punishments that constitute criminal law. Local governments are responsible primarily for law enforcement and fire protection. The services that state and local governments supply are such a part of our lives that in many cases we notice only their absence—when the water does not run, when the road is closed, or when the educational subsidy either declines or disappears.

THE COMPARATIVE METHOD IN PRACTICE: YES, THEY REALLY DO TAX DOGS IN WEST VIRGINIA

Recognizing the impacts of state and local government may be a reasonable way to spark an interest in the topic, but interest alone does not convey knowledge. To gain a coherent understanding of the many activities, responsibilities, and levels of state and local governments, you need a systematic approach to learning. In this book, that systematic approach is the **comparative method**, which uses similarities and differences as the basis for explaining why the world is the way it is. Think of it this way: Any two states or localities that you can think of will differ in a number of ways. For example, they really do tax dogs in West Virginia—a dollar per head for male and spayed female dogs and two dollars a head for unspayed females. This is not the case in, say, Nebraska, where dogs have to be licensed but are not taxed.[9]

Or consider the electoral differences among states. Kansans and Nebraskans reliably send Republicans to the U.S. House of Representatives, while the people of Massachusetts send Democrats. Differences among states and localities are not limited to oddities like the tax status of the family pet or such big political questions as the balance of power in the House of Representatives. Those of you who do something as ordinary as buying a soda after class may pay more than your peers in other states or cities. Some readers of this book are certainly paying more

in tuition and fees than those attending other colleges. Why is that? Why do those differences exist?

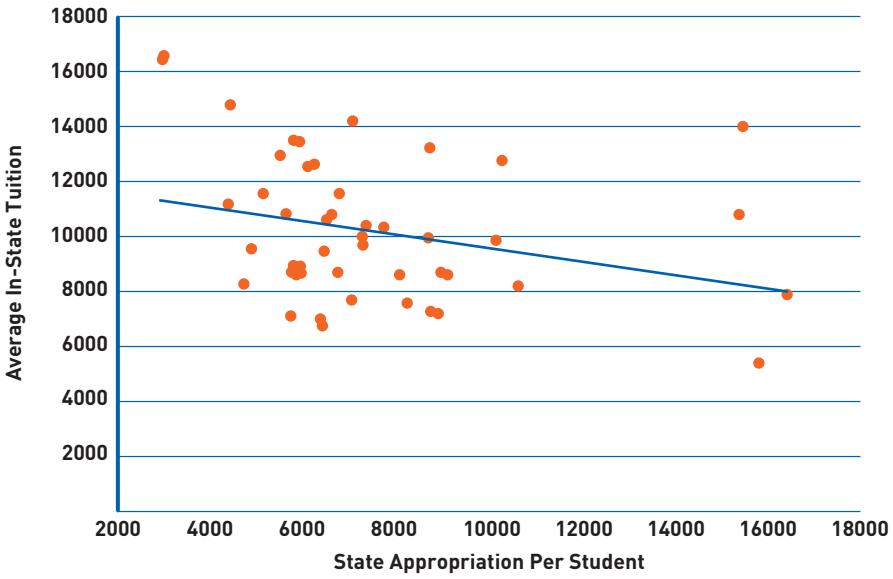
The comparative method seeks answers to these kinds of questions by looking for systematic **variance**, or differences, between comparable units of analysis. For our purposes, states are comparable units of analysis. Local governments—governments below the state level, such as county boards of commissioners and city councils—are another. Governments at each of these levels, state or local, have basic similarities that make comparisons of their differences meaningful. One way to think of this is that the comparative method is based on the idea that you can learn more about apples by comparing them with other apples than you can by comparing them with oranges or bananas.

For example, governmentally speaking, all 50 states have a lot in common. Their governmental structures are roughly the same. All have a basic division of powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. All have to operate within the broad confines of the single set of rules that is the U.S. Constitution. There's a bit more variety below the state level, with many different kinds and levels of local government (counties, municipalities, townships, and so forth), but broadly speaking, all these governments share a basic set of responsibilities, and all have to operate within the rules set down within their respective state constitutions. These similarities among states and among local governments make meaningful comparisons possible. Paradoxically, what makes such comparisons meaningful are not the similarities but the differences. This is because even though states share similar political structures and follow the same overall set of rules, they make very different choices. These differences have consequences—as in the example of college tuition and fees. Figure 1.1 shows how differences in the size of a state government's contribution to higher education relate to differences in the tuition and fees paid. See the trend? As the per-student state appropriation—the amount the state kicks in per student—goes up, the average tuition bill goes down. In short, the state-level differences plotted on the horizontal axis systematically map onto the state-level differences on the vertical axis. That's an example of the comparative method in action. Similar sorts of systematic differences among the states explain why some of you will pay more for a soda after class than others will. The sales tax on a can of soda ranges from 0 to 8 percent, depending on the city and state, hence the different prices in different locales.[10] These examples demonstrate the essence of the comparative method—from your tuition bills to the price of soda, differences among political jurisdictions make a difference in the daily lives of citizens.

Such differences can lend themselves to sophisticated and useful statistical analyses. For example, just exactly how much is a tuition bill influenced by state support of public higher education? Using the data in Figure 1.1, we can calculate a precise relationship between contributions from state government and college costs. On average, for every appropriation of $1,000 per student by state government, tuition and fees at public four-year universities fall by about $241.[11]

This basic approach of looking for differences that make a difference can be used to answer a broad range of "why" questions. For example, we know that how much a state gives to higher education helps determine how much you pay in tuition. So why do some states provide more support to higher education than others do? This is a question about one difference (variation in how much state governments spend on higher education) that can be answered by looking at other differences. What might these differences be? Well, they could stem from partisan politics in a state's legislature, a state's traditions and history, or a state's relative wealth, among many other possibilities. As a starting point for using the comparative approach to analyze such questions, consider the following basic differences among states and among localities.

FIGURE 1.1 ■ State Appropriations and Tuition, 2018



Sources: Data from College Board, "2018–19 Tuition and Fees at Public Four-Year Institutions by State and Five-Year Percentage Change in In-State Tuition and Fees," https://trends.collegeboard.org/college-pricing/figures-tables/2018-19-state-tuition-and-fees-public-four-year-institutions-state-and-five-year-percentage, and "2016–17 State and Local Funding for Higher Education per Student and per $1,000 in Personal Income and 10-Year Percentage Change in Inflation-Adjusted Funding per Student by State," https://trends.collegeboard.org/college-pricing/figures-tables/state-local-funding-student-1000-personal-income-state-2016-17.

BASIC DIFFERENCES AMONG STATES AND LOCALITIES

As a starting point for using the comparative approach to analyze such questions, consider the following basic differences among states and among localities.

Sociodemographics

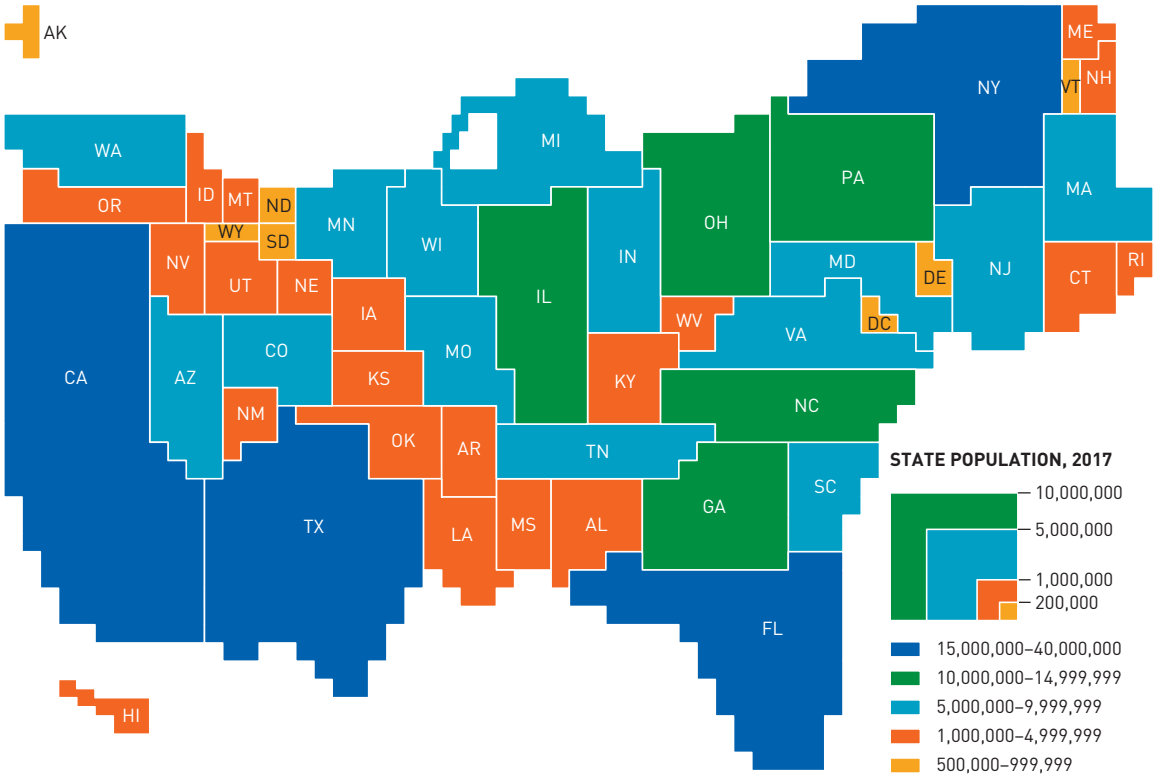
The populations of states and localities vary enormously in size, age, and ethnicity. The particular mix of these characteristics, or **sociodemographics**, in a specific state or community has a profound impact on the state or community's politics. California is the most populous state in the nation, with nearly 39 million residents. This is a racially and ethnically diverse population, with Hispanics and Latinos constituting about 39 percent, whites about 38 percent, Asians nearly 15 percent, and Blacks around 7 percent. Roughly 14 percent of Californians live in poverty. Compare this with New Hampshire, which has about 1.3 million residents, more than 90 percent of whom are non-Hispanic whites and only about 7 percent of whom live below the poverty line.[12] These population characteristics present different challenges to the governments in these two states. Differences in populations are likely to promote different attitudes about and policies on welfare, affirmative action, bilingual education programs, and even the roles and responsibilities of government in general.

All these sorts of population characteristics are dynamic—that is, they change. Between the two most recent census periods (2000 and 2010), the population of McKinney, Texas, grew by more than 200 percent.[13] During roughly the same period, the population of Parkersburg, West Virginia, shrank by more than 21 percent. Such population expansions and contractions

create very different problems and policy priorities for local governments—the struggle to accommodate new growth in a fast-developing area versus the challenge of maintaining even basic services in a rural county in which there are ever fewer taxpayers to tax. The same is true at the state level. Population-wise, some states are actually shrinking. Illinois, for example, had roughly 90,000 fewer residents in 2018 than in 2010. In the same period, Texas grew by more than 3 million. Such population shifts have potentially huge impacts, influencing everything from housing starts to job creation to demand for public services to state and local tax collections.[14]

Study Map 1.1 for a moment. Believe it or not, you are actually looking at the United States. The reason the states look so strange is that this is a special kind of map called a cartogram. Instead of using actual geographical space to determine the size of a particular area represented in the map—the number of square miles in each state, for instance—cartograms use other variables to determine how size is represented. This cartogram depicts the size of each state's population, another useful way to compare states. Notice that some states that are geographically pretty big, such as New Mexico at 122,000 square miles, are very small on this map because they have small populations. Other states that are geographically quite small, such as Connecticut (with only 5,000 square miles), look much bigger on this map because they have large populations. Some states, such as Virginia, don't look that different in size at all from their appearance on a traditional map.

MAP 1.1 ■ Population by State, 2018



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Estimates of Resident Population Change for the United States, Regions, States, and Puerto Rico: July 1, 2010 to July 1, 2018," https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-kits/2018/pop-estimates-national-state.html.

Culture and History

States and localities have distinct "personalities" that are apparent in everything from the "bloody bucket" shoulder patch worn by the Pennsylvania National Guard to the drawl that distinguishes the speech of West Texas natives. Some states have been part of the union for more than 200 years and still project an Old World connection to Europe. Hawaii and Alaska became states within living memory and are more associated with the exoticism of the Pacific and the Old West. New York City prides itself on being a cosmopolitan center of Western civilization. The visitors' bureau of Lincoln, Nebraska, touts the city's small-town ambience and Middle American values. These differences are more than interesting variations in accent and local points of pride; they are visible symbols that represent distinct values and attitudes. Political scientists generally accept that these differences extend to government and that each state has a distinct **political culture**, identifiable general attitudes and beliefs about the role and responsibility of government.

Daniel Elazar's *American Federalism: A View from the States* is the classic study of political culture. In this book, first published more than 50 years ago, Elazar not only describes different state cultures and creates a classification of those still in use today but also explains why states have distinctly different political cultures. Elazar argues that political culture is a product of how the United States was settled. He says that people's religious and ethnic backgrounds played the dominant role in establishing political cultures. On this basis, there were three distinct types of settlers who fanned out across the United States in more or less straight lines from the East Coast to the West Coast. These distinct migration patterns created three different types of state political cultures: moralistic, individualistic, and traditionalistic.[15]

States with **moralistic cultures** are those in which politics is the means used to achieve a good and just society. Such states tend to be clustered in the northern parts of the country (New England, the upper Midwest, and the Pacific Northwest). Elazar argues that the Puritans who originally settled the Northeast came to the New World seeking religious freedom. Their political culture reflected a desire to use politics to construct the best possible society. This notion, that government and politics represent the means to the greater good, creates a society that values involvement in politics and views government as a positive force for addressing social problems. This general orientation toward government and politics spread across the northern and middle parts of the country in successive waves of migration. Wisconsin, for example, is a classic moralistic state. First settled by Yankees and later by Scandinavians, Germans, and Eastern Europeans, the state has long had a reputation for high levels of participation in politics (e.g., high levels of voter turnout), policy innovation, and scandal-free government.

States with **individualistic cultures** have a different view of government and politics. In individualistic cultures, people view government as an extension of the marketplace, something in which people participate for individual reasons and to achieve individual goals. Government should provide the services people want, but it is not viewed as a vehicle to create a "good society" or intervene in private activities. In individualistic states, politics is viewed the same as any other business. Officeholders expect to be paid like professionals, and political parties are, in essence, corporations that compete to provide goods and services to people. Unlike those in moralistic states, as long as the roads are paved and the trains run on time, folks in individualistic states tend to tolerate a certain level of corruption in government. Illinois is an individualistic culture state—and four of its last nine governors have served jail terms for corruption, bribery, and fraud.

In a **traditionalistic culture**, politics is the province of elites, something that average citizens should not concern themselves with. Traditionalistic states are, as their name suggests, fundamentally conservative, in the sense that they are concerned with preserving a well-established society. Like moralistic states, traditionalistic states believe that government serves a positive

role. But there is one big difference—traditionalistic states believe the larger purpose of government is to maintain the existing social order. Those at the top of the social structure are expected to play a dominant role in politics, and power is concentrated in the hands of these elites. Traditionalistic states tend to be rural (at least historically); in many of these states, agriculture, rather than a broader mix of competing commercial activities, is the main economic driver.

Traditionalistic cultures tend to be concentrated in the Deep South, in states such as Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina. In these states, politics is significantly shaped by tradition and history. Like the settlers of individualistic states, those who settled the South sought personal opportunity. The preindustrial, agrarian economy of the South, however, led to a culture that was little more than a variation of the feudal order of the European Middle Ages. As far back as the 1830s, French aristocrat and writer Alexis de Tocqueville, writing about the United States, noted that "as one goes farther south . . . the population does not exercise such a direct influence on affairs. . . . The power of the elected officials is comparatively greater and that of the voter less."[16]

A DIFFERENCE THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

IS IT BETTER TO BE A WOMAN IN MARYLAND OR A GAL IN MISSISSIPPI?

According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR), it is better to be a woman in Maryland than a gal in Mississippi, at least economically speaking.

Why? Well, in a 2018 analysis of the economic status of women in the states, the IWPR had several reasons for ranking Maryland as the best state for women and Mississippi as the worst. For each state, the IWPR looked at how women were doing economically in two broad areas. They used a variety of indicators to create a composite index of employment and earnings (using earnings, the gender wage gap, female labor force participation, and female representation in professional and managerial occupations), and a companion index for poverty and opportunity (using percent living above poverty, percent with health insurance, percent college educated, and percent of businesses owned by women).

Maryland was the top ranked state in both composite indexes. Mississippi came in dead last in both indexes. This suggests, then, that women are considerably better off in Maryland than they are in Mississippi—they have higher earnings, are more likely to own a business, and are more likely to have a college education and health insurance. For half the population, those are some pretty important differences. The question, though, is why? Why are states like Maryland so different from states like Mississippi on these sorts of differences? The comparative approach to answering this question involves looking for other differences between Maryland and Mississippi—differences that might explain the variance in the status of women. One candidate for an explanatory difference is presented in Table 1.1, which shows the top five and the bottom five states in the 2018 IWPR economic rankings along with the dominant political culture in each state. Notice any patterns?

You may have caught that all the top five states have individualistic cultures, and all but one of the bottom five states have traditionalistic cultures. Political culture thus might explain some of the differences in women's status. States in which the dominant political values include individualism and letting the market do its thing seem to have lower barriers to women doing pretty well economically. Women seem to have a harder time economically in states that tend to value the preservation of traditional ways of doing things.

Political culture is not the be-all and end-all of the comparative method. Other differences might help explain why women's economic well-being and opportunity vary so much across states. For example, the five best states in Table 1.1 also tend to be pretty urbanized, while the bottom five states are less urbanized. Why might that make a difference? Well,

more urbanized regions may have more diverse economies with better opportunities for women than more rural states with less diversified economies. The point here is not to provide the definitive answer of why some states seem to be more economically advantageous to women, but to get you to start thinking using the comparative method. Once you get the hang of using the comparative method to frame a state-level question or analysis, it's easy to see its application to a wide variety of important political, social, and economic questions.

TABLE 1.1 ■ Political Culture and the Status of Women in the States, 2018

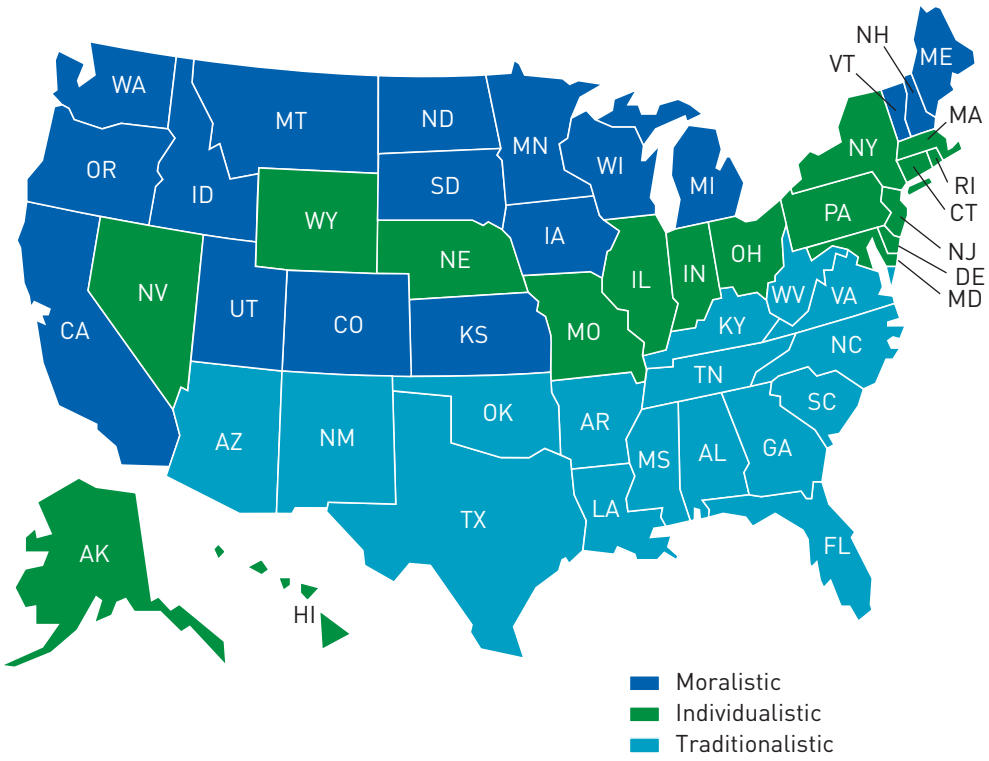
Five Best States for Women	Dominant Political Culture
1. Maryland	Individualistic
2. Massachusetts	Individualistic
3. Connecticut	Individualistic
4. New York	Individualistic
5. New Jersey	Individualistic
Five Worst States for Women	**Dominant Political Culture**
46. Alabama	Traditionalistic
47. Louisiana	Traditionalistic
48. Idaho	Moralistic
49. West Virginia	Traditionalistic
50. Mississippi	Traditionalistic

Sources: Julie Anderson and Jennifer Clark, *The Economic Status of Women in the States* (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2018), https://statusofwomendata.org/fact-sheet/economic-status-women-states-2018/; Daniel J. Elazar, *American Federalism: A View from the States* (New York: Crowell, 1966); National Conference of State Legislatures, "Women in State Legislatures for 2014," April 1, 2014, http://www.ncsl.org/legislators-staff/legislators/womens-legislative-network/women-in-state-legislatures-for-2014.aspx.

States have changed considerably since Elazar's pioneering research. Some traditionalistic states (e.g., Florida) have seen huge influxes of people from northern states, people who often are not from traditionalistic cultures. The Deep South is also considerably more urban than it used to be, thus the agricultural foundation of many traditionalistic states has changed. The upshot of these sorts of shifts is that many states these days tend to encompass a mix of two or even all three cultures.

Even with such changes, however, political culture is remarkably resilient. In most states, one of Elazar's three political cultures is likely to be dominant, as shown in Map 1.2. In a recent examination of state differences, one journalist deduced that those cultural classifications still hold explanatory power and concluded, "It is unlikely that we'll see the erosion of these different state cultures in the near future."[17] A 2014 academic study undertaken by non–political scientists (who were apparently unaware of Elazar's work) engaged in a highly sophisticated statistical analysis of state differences based on a wide range of variables, from disease rates to the threat of natural disasters. The resulting state rankings are highly correlated with the moralistic/traditionalistic/individualistic typology—indeed, so highly correlated that it is reasonable

MAP 1.2 ■ Dominant Political Culture



Source: Virginia Gray, "The Socioeconomic and Political Contexts of States," in *Politics in the American States: A Comparative Analysis*, 10th ed., ed. Virginia Gray and Russell Hanson (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2013), 22.

to argue that these researchers effectively rediscovered Elazar's cultural classification more than 50 years later.[18] This new cultural ranking scheme joins a long list of studies that have found that political culture (however measured) shapes politics and policy in important ways. Policy change and innovation, for example, are more likely in moralistic states. Individualistic states are more likely to offer businesses tax breaks. Traditionalistic states tend to commit less public money to areas such as education.[19] Faced with similar problems, therefore, the Texas and California state legislatures may propose radically different policy responses. These differences are at least partially products of the political cultures that still distinguish each state. In other words, culture and history matter.

These cultural differences certainly are apparent when it comes to states' support for higher education. Moralistic states commit considerably more resources to higher education than do individualistic and traditionalistic states. They spend about 13 percent more per capita on colleges and universities than do states with the other two cultures. Because moralistic states are those in which attitudes support higher levels of commitment to the public sector, these spending differences make sense in cultural terms. Why do some states provide more support to higher education than others do? Apparently, another part of the answer is that some political cultures see higher education in more communal than individual terms. See Table 1.2 for a summary of the three political cultures as classified by Elazar.

TABLE 1.2 ■ Political Cultures at a Glance

	Elazar Classification		
	Moralistic	**Individualistic**	**Traditionalistic**
Role of Government	Government should act to promote the public interest and policy innovation.	Government should be utilitarian, a service provider.	Government should help preserve the status quo.
Attitude of Public Representatives	Politicians can effect change; public service is worthwhile and an honor.	Businesslike—politics is a career like any other, and individual politicians are oriented toward personal power. High levels of corruption are more common.	Politicians can effect change, but politics is the province of the elites.
Role of Citizens	Citizens actively participate in voting and other political activities; individuals seek public office.	The state exists to advance the economic and personal self-interest of citizens; citizens leave politics to the professionals.	Ordinary citizens are not expected to be politically involved.
Degree of Party Competition	Highly competitive	Moderate	Weak
Government Spending on Services	High	Moderate—money goes to basic services but not to perceived "extras."	Low
Political Culture	Strong	Fragmented	Strong
Most Common in . . .	Northeast, northern Midwest, Northwest	Middle parts of the country, such as the Mid-Atlantic; parts of the Midwest, such as Missouri and Illinois; parts of the West, such as Nevada	Southern states, rural areas

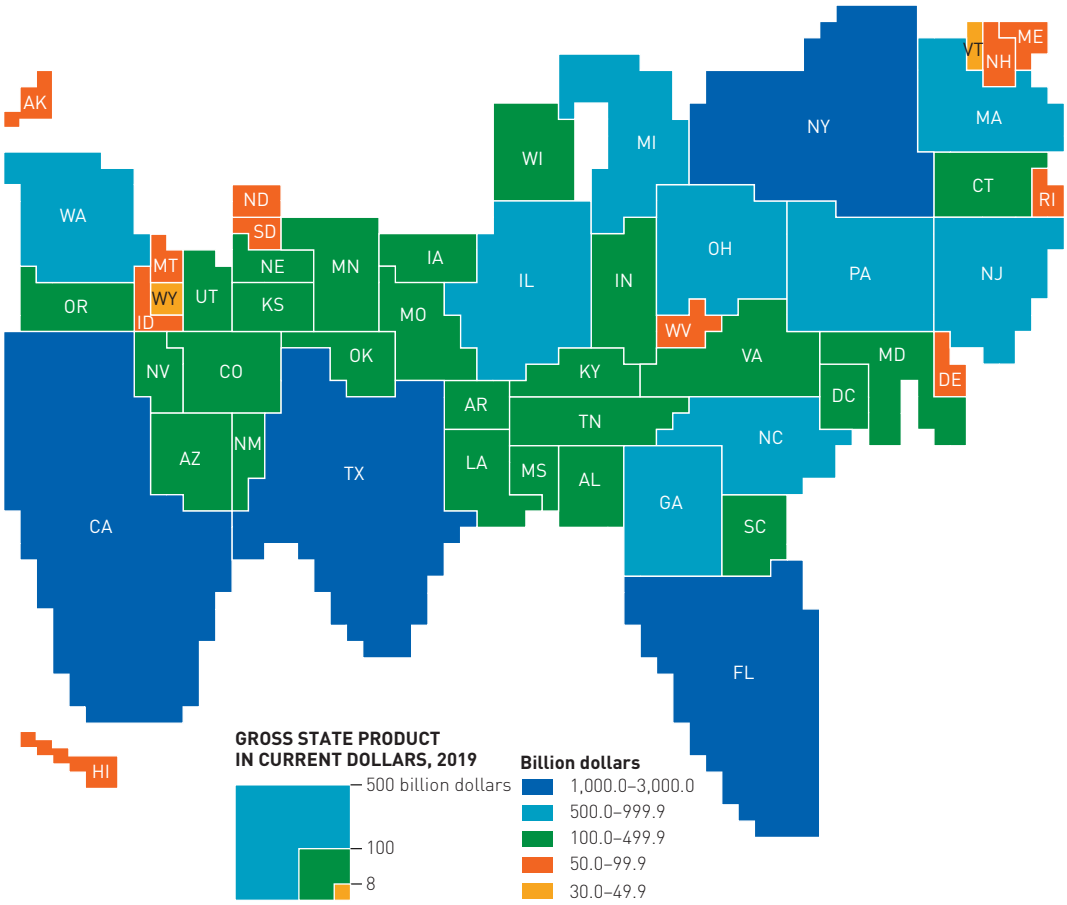
Source: Adapted from Daniel J. Elazar, *American Federalism: A View from the States*, 2nd ed. (New York: Crowell, 1972).

Economy

The relative size and health of a state's economy has a huge impact on its capacity to govern and provide public services. State-level gross domestic product—the state equivalent of the gross national product—varies wildy, from Vermont's $31 billion to California's roughly $2.6 trillion (see Map 1.3). If we standardize that on a per capita basis, state economies range from about $38,000 in Mississippi to about $86,000 in New York.[20] This means government in New York has the ability to tap a greater amount of resources than can government in Mississippi. The difference in wealth, in effect, means that if New York and Mississippi were to implement identical and equivalent public services, Mississippi would have a considerably higher tax rate. This is because Mississippi would have to use a greater proportion of its smaller amount of resources, compared with New York. These sorts of differences also are visible at the local level. Wealthy suburbs can enjoy lower tax rates and still spend more on public services than can economically struggling urban or rural communities.

MAP 1.3 ■ Economy by State, 2019

The relative size of state economies is measured in terms of gross state product. Notice how geographically big states with small economies (Montana and Alaska) compare with geographically small states with big economies (New Jersey and Massachusetts).



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, "Current-Dollar Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by State and Region, 2018:Q1–2019Q1," press release, July 25, 2019, https://www.bea.gov/data/gdp/gdp-state.

Regional economic differences do not determine only tax burdens and the level of public services; they also determine the relative priorities of particular policy and regulatory issues. Fishing, for example, is a sizable industry in coastal states in the Northeast and Northwest. States such as Maine and Washington have numerous laws, regulations, and enforcement responsibilities tied to the catching, processing, and transporting of fish. Regulating the economic exploitation of marine life occupies very little government attention and resources in places such as Kansas and Nevada, although agriculture in the former and gambling in the latter create just as many policy challenges and demands for government action.

Regardless of the basis of a state's economy, greater wealth does not always translate into more support for public programs. States with above-average incomes actually tend to spend *less* per capita on higher education. Why would less wealthy states concentrate more of their resources on higher education? There are a number of possible explanations. Education is a critical component of a postindustrial economy, so states that are less well-off may direct more of their resources into education in hopes of building a better economic future. Citizens in wealthy states simply may be better able to afford higher tuition costs. Whatever the explanation, this

example suggests another advantage of employing the comparative method—it shows that the obvious assumptions are not always the correct ones.

Geography and Topography

There is wild variation in the physical environments in which state and local governments operate. Hawaii is a lush tropical island chain in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, Nevada encompasses a large desert, Michigan is mostly heavily forested, and Colorado is split by the Rocky Mountains. Such geographical and topographical variation presents different challenges to governments. State and local authorities in California devote considerable time and resources to preparing for earthquakes. Their counterparts in Texas spend comparatively little time thinking about earthquakes, but they do concern themselves with tornadoes, grass fires, and hurricanes.

Combine geography with population characteristics, and the challenges become even more complex. Montana is a large rural state in which the transportation logistics—simply getting students to school—can present something of a conundrum. Is it better to bus students long distances to large, centrally located schools, or should there be many smaller schools within easy commuting distance for relatively few students? The first is cheaper. Larger schools can offer academic and extracurricular activities that smaller schools cannot afford. But the busing exacts a considerable cost on students and families. The second alternative eases transportation burdens, but it requires building more schools and hiring more teachers, which means more taxes. Geographical and population differences often not only shape the answers to such difficult policy issues but also pose the questions.

Consider the variety of seasonal weather patterns that occur within the enormous geographical confines of the United States. In Wisconsin, snow removal is a key service provided by local governments. Road-clearing crews are often at work around the clock during bad weather. The plows, the crews, and the road salt cost money. They all require a considerable investment in administration and coordination to do the job effectively. In Florida, snow removal is low on local governments' lists of priorities, for good reason—it rarely snows in the Sunshine State. On

Weather and climate are differences that make a difference. Some states need to prepare for tornadoes or hurricanes. Others need to have the ability to respond to devastating wildfires.

David McNew / Stringer/Getty Images

the other hand, state and local authorities in Florida do need to prepare for the occasional hurricane. Hurricanes are less predictable and less common than snow in Wisconsin, and it takes only one to create serious demands on the resources of local authorities.

And, yes, even basic geography affects your tuition bill, especially when combined with some of the other characteristics discussed here. Many large public colleges and universities are located in urban centers because central geographical locations serve more people more efficiently. Delivering higher education in rural areas is a more expensive proposition simply because there are fewer people in the service area. States with below-average population densities tend to be larger and more sparsely populated. They also tend to spend more on higher education. Larger government subsidies are necessary to make tuition affordable.

RECOGNIZING THE STAKES

The variation across states and localities offers more than a way to help make sense of your tuition bill or to explain why some public school systems are better funded or to understand why taxes are lower in some states. These differences also serve to underline the central role of states and localities in the American political system. Compared with the federal government, state and local governments employ more people and buy more goods and services from the private sector. They have the primary responsibility for addressing many of the issues that people care about the most, including education, crime prevention, transportation, health care, and the environment. Public opinion polls often show that citizens place more trust in their state and local governments than in the federal government. These polls frequently express citizens' preference for having the former relieve the latter of a greater range of policy responsibilities.[21] With these responsibilities and expectations, it should be obvious that state and local politics are played for high stakes.

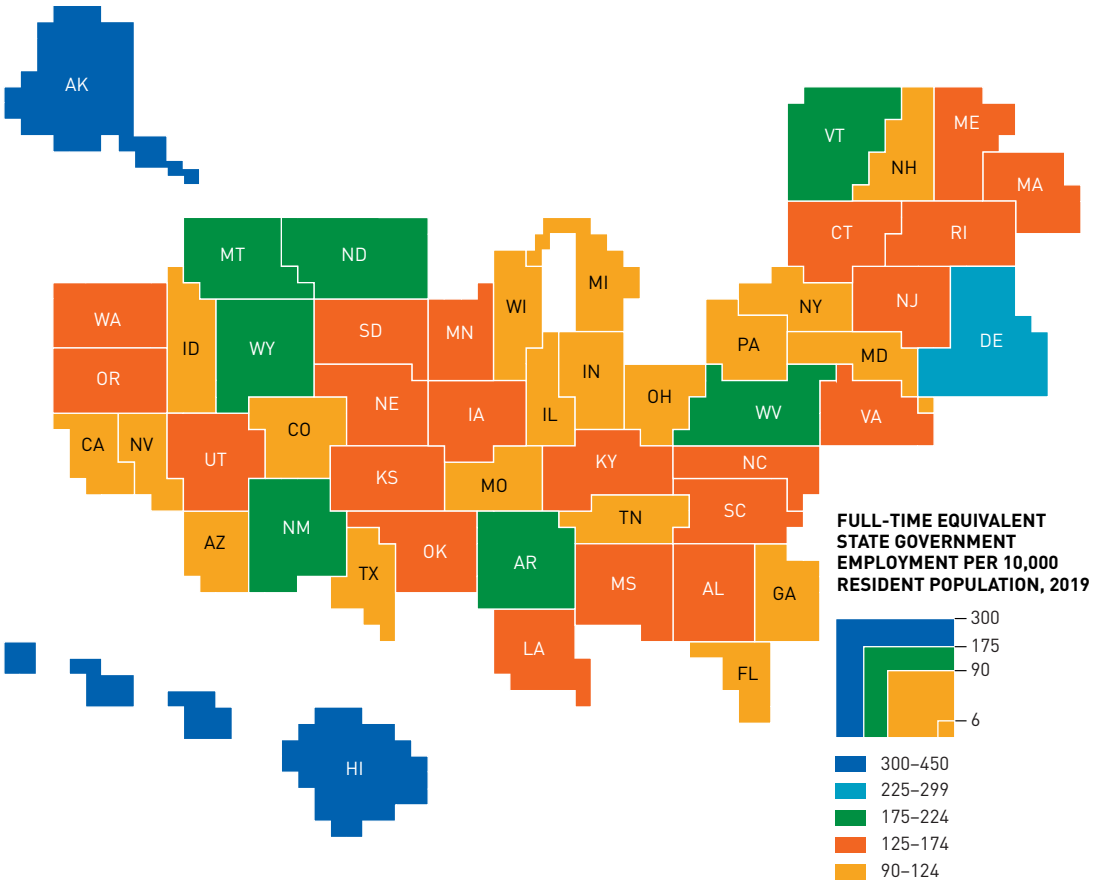
High stakes, yes, but it is somewhat ironic that state and local governments tend to get less attention in the media, in private conversation, and in curricula and classrooms than does their federal counterpart.[22] Ask most people to think about American government, and chances are they will think first about the president, Congress, Social Security, or some other feature of the national government. Yet most American governments are state or local. Only 535 elected legislators serve in the U.S. Congress. Thousands of legislators are elected at the state level, and tens of thousands more serve in the legislative branches of local government.

In terms of people, state and local governments dwarf the federal government. There are more teachers working for public schools—about 3 million—than the entire combined civilian workforce of the federal government (about 2.7 million).[23] There are roughly 3.8 million full-time state employees and 11 million full-time local government employees. (See Map 1.4.) In terms of dollars, state and local governments combined represent about the same spending force as the federal government. In 2016, state and local government expenditures totaled about $3.5 trillion.[24]

The size of state and local government operations is commensurate with these governments' 21st-century role in the political system. After spending much of the 20th century being drawn closer into the orbit and influence of the federal government, states and localities have spent the last few decades aggressively asserting their independence. This maturing of nonfederal, or subnational, government made its leaders and policies—not to mention its differences—among the most important characteristics of our political system.

The context of the federal system of government, and the role of state and local governments within that system, is given more in-depth coverage in Chapter 2. For now, it is important to recognize that governance in the United States is more of a network than a hierarchy. The policies and politics of any single level of government are connected and intertwined with the policies

MAP 1.4 ■ Number of State Government Employees by State, 2018



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "State Government: Employment and Payroll Data by State and by Function: March 2018," 2018, https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2018/econ/apes/annual-apes.html.

and politics of the other levels of government in a complex web of interdependent relationships. The role of states and localities in these governance partnerships has changed considerably in the past few decades.

What states and localities do, and how they go about doing it, turns out to shape national life overall, as well as the lives of individual citizens. Given what is at stake at the state and local levels, no citizen can fully comprehend the role and importance of government without understanding subnational politics.

Laboratories of Democracy: Devolution and the Limits of Government

U.S. Supreme Court justice Louis Brandeis famously described the states as **laboratories of democracy**. This metaphor refers to the ability of states—and, to a lesser extent, localities—to experiment with policy. Successful experiments can be replicated by other states or adopted by the national government. For much of the past 30 years, state–federal relations have been characterized by **devolution**, or the process of taking power and responsibility away from the federal government and giving it to state and local governments. As a result, the states for a time aggressively promoted new ways to solve old problems in such high-profile policy areas as welfare, gun control, and education. That trend of increasing state policy autonomy was temporarily

halted by the severe economic contraction of 2008–2009, the so-called Great Recession. For several years after the Great Recession, states became critically dependent on federal money to stay solvent, and that meant they had to pay attention to federal policy priorities. As the economy recovered and states became less reliant on federal grant dollars, however, states in the past decade have once again begun to assert their independence from the federal government. This independence is increasingly characterized by ideological and partisan differences. States with conservative Republican governors sought to resist the health care, immigration, and environmental policy priorities of Democratic president Barack Obama's administration, and blue state Democratic governors aggressively opposed Republican president Donald Trump's priorities on those same issues. We'll take a closer look at the details of intergovernmental relations in the next chapter, but it is important here to recognize that how state and local governments exercise their independent decision-making authority is dependent on a number of factors. Some of these factors are external. The U.S. Constitution, federal laws and regulations, nationwide recessions, and the like constrain what states and localities can and cannot do. Internal factors, such as the characteristics of a particular state, also play a critical role in setting limits on what the state decides to do.

The big three of these internal factors are wealth, the characteristics of the state's political system, and the relative presence of organized interest groups, those individuals who organize to support policy issues that concern them. For states and localities, money is the biggest factor limiting independent policy action. Launching new policy initiatives tends to be expensive, and simply continuing to support existing programs and services (higher education, for example) at historical levels can require ever-increasing infusions of cash. While critically important, money is not the only factor that influences policy directions at the subnational level. Political system characteristics are the elements of the political environment that are specific to a state. States in which public opinion is relatively conservative are likely to pursue different policy avenues than are states in which public opinion is more liberal. States in which Republicans dominate the government are likely to opt for different policy choices than are states in which Democrats dominate. States with professional full-time legislatures are more likely to formulate and pursue sustained policy agendas than are states in which legislators are part-timers who meet only periodically. States in which the government perceives an electoral mandate to reform government are more likely to be innovative than are states in which the government perceives an electoral mandate to retain the status quo.[25] Organized interest group activity helps determine what sorts of policy demands government responds to. Governments in states with powerful teachers' unions, for example, experience different education policy pressures than do governments in states where teachers' unions are politically weak. These three factors constitute the basic ingredients for policymaking in the states. Specifics vary enormously from state to state, and the potential combinations in this democratic laboratory are virtually infinite.

Localities face more policymaking constraints than states do because they typically are not sovereign governments. This means that, unlike states, local governments get their power from the level of government above them rather than directly from citizens. The states have much greater control over local governments than the federal government has over the states. Yet, even though local governments are much more subordinate to state government than state government is to the federal government, they do not simply take orders from the state capital. Many have independent taxing authority and broad discretion to act within their designated policy jurisdictions.

These policy jurisdictions, nevertheless, are frequently subject to formal limits. The authority of school districts, for example, extends only to funding and operating public schools. State government may place limits on districts' tax rates and set everything from minimal employment

qualifications to maximum teacher-to-pupil ratios. Even within this range of tighter restrictions, however, local governments retain considerable leeway to act independently. School districts often decide to contract out cafeteria and janitorial services, cities and counties actively seek to foster economic development with tax abatements and loan guarantees, and police commissions experiment with community-based law enforcement. During the past two decades, many of the reforms enthusiastically pursued at all levels of government—reforms from innovative management practices to the outright privatization of public services—have had their origins in local government.[26]

What all this activity shows is that states and localities are not only the laboratories of democracy but also the engines of the American republic. States and localities are not just safe places to engage in limited experimentation; they are the primary mechanisms connecting citizens to the actions of government.

CONCLUSION

There are good reasons for developing a curiosity about state and local governments. State politics determines everything from how much you pay for college to whether your course in state and local governments is required or elective. Above and beyond understanding the impact of state and local governments on your own life and interests, studying such governments is important because of their critical role in the governance and life of the nation. Subnational, or nonfederal, governments employ more people than the federal government and spend as much money. Their responsibilities include everything from repairing potholes to regulating pot. It is difficult, if not impossible, to understand government in the United States and the rights, obligations, and benefits of citizenship without first understanding state and local governments.

Washington, D.C., is neither a state nor a local government in the traditional sense. It has a municipal government like a city and electoral votes like a state. It is ultimately ruled by Congress, even though it has no voting representatives in the federal legislature.

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LOCAL FOCUS

THE FEDERAL CITY

Riddle me this: It is a city. It is sort of a state. It is ruled by Congress. What is it? It is the District of Columbia, otherwise known as Washington, D.C. It is also the nation's capital—and surely the most unusual local government in the country.

Technically, Washington, D.C., is a federal city. Article I, Section 8, Paragraph 17 of the U.S. Constitution gives Congress the power to rule over an area not to exceed 10 square miles that constitutes the seat of national government; yet it has never been quite clear what that means in terms of governance. Should Congress rule the city directly? Should the citizens of the city be given the right to elect a representative government? If they do this, should the government be subordinate to Congress, or should it be counted as equivalent to a state and thus free to make any laws that do not violate the U.S. Constitution?

Throughout the city's history, these questions have been answered very differently. In the early 1800s, the district was a strange collection of cities and counties, each governed by different means. Washington City and Georgetown were municipalities run by a chief executive (a mayor) and a legislature (a council). Depending on the time period, however, the mayors were sometimes appointed by the federal government and sometimes elected. In addition to the two cities, there were two counties. Maryland laws governed Washington County; Virginia laws governed Alexandria County.

In the 1870s, Washington City, Georgetown, and Washington County were combined into a single governmental unit, a federal territory with a governor appointed by the president and a legislature elected by the territorial residents. This eventually became the District of Columbia, or Washington, D.C. For most of its history, commissioners appointed by the federal government governed the district. It was not until 1974 that the residents of Washington, D.C., gained home rule and the right to elect their own mayor and council.

This mayor–council arrangement, however, is unlike any other municipal government in the United States. The laws passed by the council have to be reviewed and approved by Congress. The laws that govern federal–state relationships treat the district as a state, even though it is not a state and cannot operate like one. The mayor is not considered the head of a federal agency, but he or she is expected to act like one when seeking appropriations from Congress.

This odd hybrid of local, state, and federal governments is reflected in the unique electoral status of Washington, D.C., voters. Voters in the district have a local vote but only half of a federal vote. They can vote for the president but not for a member of Congress. They can vote for a mayor and council, but they have no voting representative in Congress; yet Congress has the power to overturn laws passed by the council. The district now has three electoral votes. Prior to 1963, it had none, and D.C. voters could not cast a ballot for president.

All this makes Washington, D.C., the nation's most unusual local government. It is the only municipality that is a creature of the United States rather than of a state constitution, and, as such, it is the only really national city in the country.

Source: Mark David Richard, "History of Local Government in Washington, D.C.," 2002, https://www.dcvote.org/inside-dc/history-local-government-washington-dc.

This book fosters such an understanding through the comparative method. This approach involves looking for patterns in the differences among states and localities. Rather than advocating a particular perspective on state and local politics, the comparative method is predicated, or based, on a systematic way of asking and answering questions. Why is my tuition bill so high? Why does Massachusetts send mostly Democrats to the U.S. House of Representatives? Why are those convicted of capital crimes in Texas more likely to be executed than those convicted of

comparable crimes in Connecticut? Why are sales taxes high in Alabama? Why is there no state income tax in South Dakota? We can answer each of these questions by comparing states and looking for systematic patterns in their differences. The essence of the comparative method is to use one difference to explain another.

THE LATEST RESEARCH

As discussed extensively in this chapter, the comparative method is an important tool used by scholars to understand how state-level differences translate into meaningful political and policy differences. A lot of these differences that make a difference are not static—indeed, some may be changing even as you read this textbook.

The "granddaddy" of all differences—though far from the only one—is political culture, a concept originated by Daniel Elazar that continues to be widely respected for its explanatory power. While scholars in the past few decades have conducted a number of more fine-grained analyses of political culture that take advantage of new data sources and more sophisticated statistical techniques, Elazar's original classification system remains a disciplinary standard. Below we summarize some of the newest research that uses the comparative method and investigates state political cultures and their impact on politics and policy.

- **Dincer, Oguzhan, and Michael Johnston,** "Political Culture and Corruption Issues in State Politics: A New Measure of Corruption Issues and a Test of Relationships to Political Culture," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 47, no. 1 (2017): 131–148.
- **Fisher, Patrick I.,** "Definitely Not Moralistic: State Political Culture and Support for Donald Trump in the Race for the 2016 Republican Presidential Nomination," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 49, no. 49 (2016): 743–747.

The two studies listed here use Elazar's classification to examine the impact of political culture in two very different areas. Fisher examines whether political culture can help explain state-level voting patterns in the 2016 Republican presidential primary. This is indeed the case: Donald Trump's share of the primary vote was significantly lower in states with a moralistic political culture. Dincer and Johnston examine whether political culture can help explain patterns of corruption in state government. It does. States with moralistic cultures have fewer corruption issues than states with traditionalistic or individualistic cultures. These two studies show that more than 50 years after Elazar first developed his theory of political culture, contemporary scholars continue to find his cultural classifications have a lot of explanatory power across various dimensions of politics and policy.

- **Harrington, Jesse R., and Michele J. Gelfand,** "Tightness-Looseness across the 50 United States," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111, no. 22 (2014): 7990–7995.

Harrington and Gelfand do not analyze an existing concept of state-level culture, but try to create a new one. They take a theory used to explain differences in political culture between nations and see if it works for the states. This theory distinguishes between "tight" and "loose" cultures. Tight cultures strongly enforce rules and norms, with less tolerance for deviance. Loose cultures have fewer strongly enforced rules and higher levels of tolerance. The basic idea is that nations that face a lot of stress—wars, environmental or economic threats, internal strife—gravitate toward a tighter culture to maintain social cohesion (or even survival). Nations that face fewer threats tend to gravitate toward a looser culture. Harrington and Gelfand find that the basic idea also works at the state level. They create a state-level index of cultural "tightness" that successfully predicts various state characteristics in exactly the way you would expect culture to affect laws and policy choices.

This book's examination of state and local politics is organized into three distinct sections. The first section consists of five chapters designed to set the basic framework, or context, for studying state and local politics. Included here are chapters on federalism, state constitutions, budgets, political participation, and political parties and interest groups. The second section covers the institutions of state and local government: legislatures, executives, courts, and bureaucracy. Although elements of local government are discussed in all these, there are also two chapters in this section devoted solely to local politics and government. The final section covers a series of distinct policy areas: education, crime, health care, and the environment. These chapters not only cover areas of substantive policy interests but also offer concrete examples of how a broad understanding of the context and institutions of state and local governments can be combined with the comparative method to promote a deeper understanding of the politics of states and localities.

TOP TEN TAKEAWAYS

1. Most citizens know comparatively little about state and local politics, even though these governments have a significant impact on their daily lives.
2. State and local governments have the primary policy responsibility in areas such as education and law enforcement, and decisions made by these governments affect everything from the size of a tuition bill to the size of an elementary school class, from the licensing requirements to become a barber to the licensing requirements to become a doctor.
3. States are different in many ways, from topography and weather to population size and sociodemographics.
4. Despite their differences, all states have a core set of political similarities—they all must operate within the guidelines of the U.S. Constitution, and they have similarly structured governments, with an elected legislature, an independently elected executive, and an independent judiciary.
5. States are sovereign governments. In other words, as long as they are not in violation of the U.S. Constitution, they are free to do as they please. They draw their power not from the federal government, but from the U.S. Constitution, their own state constitutions, and their own citizens.
6. These differences and similarities make the states unique laboratories for investigating a wide range of important political and policy questions. The states constitute 50 truly comparable and sovereign governments.
7. The comparative method uses the similarities and differences of the states as a basis for looking at systematic variance. In other words, this method seeks to see whether one set of differences among the states can help explain other differences.
8. There are three basic types of political culture in the states. Moralistic cultures tend to view government as a means to make society better. Individualistic cultures view government as an extension of the marketplace. Traditionalistic cultures tend to view government and politics as the concern of elites, not average citizens.

9. Political culture provides a good example of how "a difference makes a difference." Variation in political culture helps explain a wide variety of political and policy differences among the states—everything from differences in voter turnout to differences in the political status of women.

10. It is virtually impossible to understand politics, policy, and governance in the United States without understanding state and local government.

KEY CONCEPTS

comparative method (p. 4)
devolution (p. 16)
individualistic culture (p. 8)
laboratories of democracy (p. 16)
moralistic culture (p. 8)
political culture (p. 8)
sociodemographics (p. 6)
traditionalistic culture (p. 8)
variance (p. 5)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Write a list of all the things you typically do every day—everything from turning on a light to checking social media to walking on a sidewalk to buying lunch. How many of these are in some way touched by policies and programs managed by state and local governments? How many of the things on your list would be hard, or even impossible, to do without those policies and programs?

2. After reading this chapter, you should have a basic understanding of the comparative method. Try to apply this to a question that interests you (e.g., Where can you find the most and best-paying jobs?). What "difference that makes a difference" among states would be your main analytical target (e.g., unemployment rates, average wages, or tuition?), and what other state-level differences would you use to try and answer your question (e.g., income tax rates, graduation rates, or state expenditures?).

3. This chapter discusses a range of "differences that make a difference," everything from culture to geography. Which of these do you think plays the biggest role in making states different economically and socially? If you had to identify one difference among states that causes the most social and economic variation, what would that difference be?

4. Given the importance of state and local governments across a range of crucially important programs and policies, why do you think most people know much less about them compared to the federal government? Is it really important to know as much about state and local governments as the federal government? Why or why not?

States and the federal government might not always agree, but they need each other to get things done. That means presidents and governors have to work together. Here President Trump talks with Texas governor Greg Abbott about coordinating state and federal efforts to deliver hurricane relief.

AFP Contributor /Getty Images

2 FEDERALISM

The Power Plan

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you will be able to

- Identify the three systems of government and how they divide power,
- Explain what federalism is and why it was chosen as a system for the United States,
- Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of federalism,
- Describe the ways elements in the U.S. Constitution provide a basis for federalism,
- Summarize the different types of federalism that developed over time, and
- Discuss the Supreme Court's role in U.S. federalism.

In 2019 roughly $140 million worth of marijuana was legally sold every month in the state of Colorado.[1] Well, sort of. Technically, it was all illegal, even though the selling was done by aboveboard, legitimate businesses. Huh? How can selling marijuana be legal and illegal at the same time? Simple: federalism.

Federalism is a political system in which national and regional governments share powers and are considered independent equals. The upshot of federalism in the United States is that the national government and state governments can have pretty different ideas about what should or should not be done. And you don't have to get too far into the legal weeds to figure this out. You just have to get into weed. See, the reason selling pot is both legal and illegal in Colorado boils down to a difference between state and federal law. It's (sort of) legal in Colorado because voters in that state approved a 2012 ballot initiative permitting the commercial cultivation and retail sale of marijuana. That law took effect in 2014, and legal sales of marijuana promptly skyrocketed. At last count, the tax revenues generated by marijuana sales in Colorado amounted to something like $25 million a month. That's a nice little windfall for the state treasury. No wonder, then, that another nine states (and counting) have fully legalized marijuana. State legalization, however, changes nothing about federal law.

At least in theory, federal law is supposed to take precedence over state law, and federal law takes a dim view of selling spliffs or herb-enhanced candy. It classifies marijuana as a Schedule I drug, in other words more like heroin than booze. As far as federal law is concerned, possessing and/or selling marijuana is a serious no-no punishable with stiff fines and jail time. Except it isn't. Or at least, not until it is. If this sounds confusing, it's because, well, it *is* confusing. When states started to adopt full-on legalization of marijuana a half-decade or so ago, the federal government basically said, "No worries, we've got bigger fish to fry." So, basically, every day there are millions of dollars' worth of marijuana sales that are totally above board and legal under state law. And totally illegal under federal law. What happens if the federal government decides to start getting serious about enforcing its laws on buying, selling, and possessing weed? Good question. We're not sure.

This confusing state of affairs is actually a good metaphor for federalism as it is practiced in the United States. State governments want to do one thing and go their own way, while the federal government wants the nation as a whole to go in a different direction. Clearly, both of these things cannot happen. So, who ultimately has the power and the authority to get their way? The

states or the federal government? Finding the answer to this question drives a good deal of political conflict in the United States. The only way any of that makes sense is if you understand federalism. Indeed, the bottom line is that you cannot understand politics in the United States—and that means national as well as state and local politics—without understanding federalism. This chapter is aimed at providing that basic understanding of federalism, its history and evolution in the United States, and its implications for politics and governance in states and localities.

SYSTEMS OF POWER

We typically think of a nation as being ruled by a single sovereign government—that is, a government that depends on no other government for its political authority or power. This does not mean that every nation has one government. Power and policy responsibility are distributed throughout any given political system in one of three ways, and all typically involve multiple levels of government. (See Figure 2.1). The first option is to concentrate power in a single central government. Nations in which legal authority is held exclusively by a central government are known as **unitary systems**. Unitary systems typically have regional and/or local governments, but these can exercise only the powers and responsibilities granted them by the central government. In other words, these governments are not sovereign; how much or how little power they are allowed to wield is up to the central government, not the citizens of the particular localities. For example, the United Kingdom is a unitary system with a strong tradition of local and regional government. Yet power is concentrated in the nation's Parliament—Parliament can expand or contract the powers and responsibilities of these lower governments or even shut them down entirely.

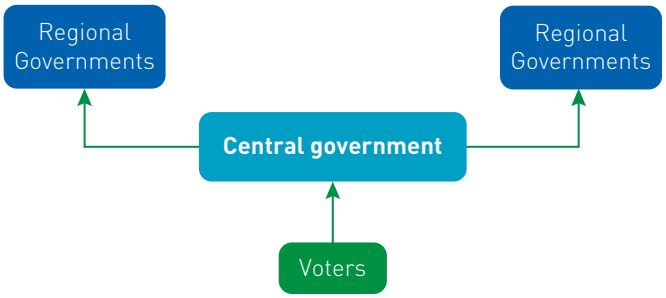
In contrast to unitary systems, confederal systems concentrate power in regional governments. A **confederacy** is defined as a voluntary association of independent, sovereign states or governments. This association stands the power hierarchy of a unitary system on its head. In a confederacy, the central government depends on the regional governments for its legal authority. The United States has experimented with confederal systems twice during its history. The Articles of Confederation was the first constitution of the United States. It organized the U.S. political system as an agreement of union among sovereign states, and that confederal system remained in effect for the first decade or so of the nation's existence. The Articles were replaced by a new constitution drafted at the Constitutional Convention of 1787. The product of that gathering in Philadelphia—the U.S. Constitution—was ratified in 1788 and replaced the Articles of Confederation as the basis of the U.S. political system.[2] The second experiment with confederacy began in 1861 at the onset of the Civil War. Southern states seeking to secede from the Union organized their political system as a confederacy. All this ended with the South's surrender in 1865 and the return of the seceded states to the Union.

Federal systems operate in a middle range between unitary systems and confederacies. Responsibilities in a federal system are divided between the two levels of government, and each is given the appropriate power and legal authority to fulfill those responsibilities. The system's defining feature is that neither level of government is dependent on the other for its power. Within its defined areas of responsibility, each is considered independent and autonomous. In the United States, the two levels of government considered sovereign are the federal government and state governments. States are legally equal partners with the national government and occupy a central role in the political system. Although required to operate within the rules laid down by the U.S. Constitution, states are considered sovereign because their power and legal

FIGURE 2.1 ■ How It Works

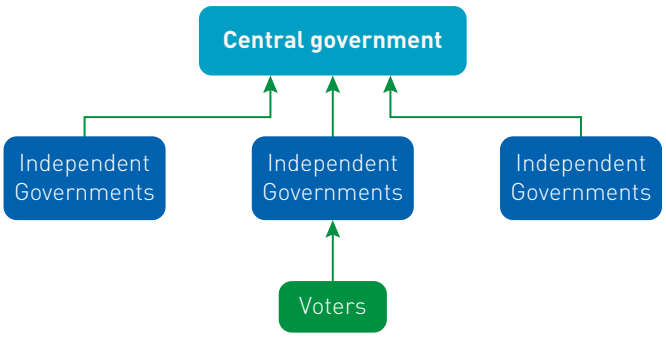
Systems of government

Unitary system



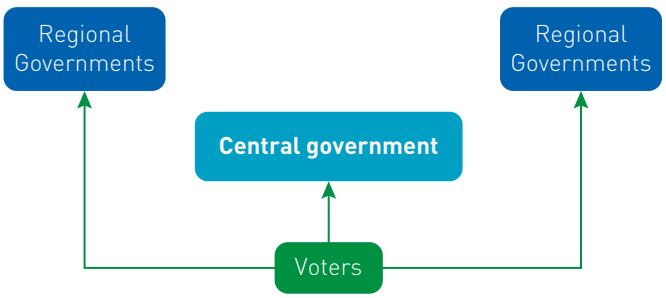
Central government grants powers to the regional governments.

Confederal system



Independent states or governments grant legal authority to Central government.

Federal system



Responsibilities and powers are divided between central government and regional governments or states; neither level is dependent upon the other for its power.

authority are drawn not just from the U.S. Constitution but also from their own citizens as codified in their own state constitutions. Local governments are treated very differently than are states. Within their own borders, states are very much like unitary systems; substate governments such as cities and counties get their power from the state, and they exercise only the policymaking authority the state is willing to grant. The specifics of local governments' powers and policy responsibilities are discussed in more depth in Chapter 11.

WHY FEDERALISM? THE ORIGINS OF THE FEDERAL SYSTEM IN THE UNITED STATES

The United States is a federal system for a number of reasons. Largely because of their experiences with the Articles of Confederation, the framers of the Constitution rejected the possibility of a confederacy. The national government was so weak under the Articles that prominent figures such as James Madison and George Washington feared it doomed the newly independent republic to failure.

These fears were not unfounded. Following the successful conclusion of the Revolutionary War in 1783, the new United States found itself in the grip of an economic recession, and the central government had little power to address the crisis. Indeed, it actually contributed to the problem by constantly threatening to default on its debts. Independence had brought political freedom, but it also meant that American-made products were now in head-to-head competition with cheap, high-quality goods from Great Britain. This made consumers happy but threatened to cripple American businesses. The economic difficulties pitted state against state, farmer against manufacturer, and debtor against banker. The weak central government really did not have the power to attempt a coordinated, nationwide response to the problem. It could do little but stand by and hope for the best.

As internal tensions mounted within the United States, European powers still active in the Americas threatened the nation's very sovereignty. Spain shut down shipping on the Mississippi River. The British refused to withdraw from some military posts until the U.S. government paid off its debts to British creditors. George Washington believed the United States, having won the war, was in real danger of losing the peace. He said that something had to change "to avert the humiliating and contemptible figure we are about to make on the annals of mankind."[3]

For a loose coalition of the professional classes who called themselves Federalists, the "something" that needed to change was obviously the central government. Americans, however, were not particularly enthusiastic about handing more power to the central government, an attitude not so different from that held by many today. Most recognized that the Articles had numerous flaws, but few were ready to copy the example of the British and adopt a unitary system.

Two events in fall 1786 allowed the Federalists to overcome this resistance and achieve their goal of creating a more powerful national government. The first was the Annapolis Convention. This meeting in Maryland's capital was convened for the purpose of hammering out an interstate trade agreement. Few states sent delegates, and those who did show up had strong Federalist sympathies. They took advantage of the meeting and petitioned Congress to call for a commission to rewrite the Articles of Confederation.

The second event was Shays's Rebellion, an uprising of Massachusetts farmers who took up arms in protest of state efforts to take their property as payment for taxes and other debts. It was quickly crushed, but with further civil unrest threatening to boil over into civil war and with mounting pressure from powerful elites within the Federalist ranks, the Continental Congress was pushed to call for states to send delegates to Philadelphia in summer 1787. The purpose of the meeting, which came to be known as the Constitutional Convention, was the rewriting of the Articles of Confederation.

Once convened, the group quickly abandoned its mandate to modify the Articles and decided to write an entirely new constitution. In doing so, the Federalists who dominated the convention rejected confederacy as an adequate basis for the American political system. What they wanted was a government capable of dealing effectively with national problems, and this meant a strong central government whose power was independent of the states. Some Federalists,

notably Alexander Hamilton, were attracted to the idea of a unitary government, but such a system was never seriously considered. As the Revolutionary War had been fought in no small part because of the perceived arrogance of and abuse by a central government toward its regional subordinates (the states were originally colonies of the British Crown), this was not surprising. Political realities also argued against a unitary system. To have any legal force, the new constitution would have to be ratified by the states, and it was unlikely the states would voluntarily agree to give up all their powers to a national government. Federalism was thus the only practical option.

Yet a federal system meant more than the political price that had to be paid to achieve a stronger national government. The founders were attempting to construct a new form of **representative government**, in which citizens would exercise power indirectly, on the basis of a paradox. Convention delegates wanted a more powerful national government, but at the same time, they did not want to concentrate power for fear that would lead to tyranny. Their solution to this problem was to create a system of separated powers and checks and balances. They divided their new and stronger national government into three branches—legislative, executive, and judicial—and made each branch partially reliant on the others to carry out its own responsibilities. This made it difficult for any single group to gain the upper hand in all three divisions of government and gave each branch the power to check the excesses of the other branches.

The delegates achieved a similar set of goals by making state and national governments coequal partners. By letting states remain independent decision makers in a wide range of policy arenas, they divided power between the national and subnational levels of government. The national government was made more powerful by the new constitution, but the independence of the states helped set clear limits on this power.

THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF FEDERALISM

Federalism solved a political conundrum for the founders and helped achieve their philosophical aims of dispersing and separating power. Yet federalism is not necessarily better than a confederal or a unitary system—it's just different. In the United States, the pros and cons of federalism have benefited and bedeviled the American political system for more than two centuries.

There are four key advantages to the federal system. (See Table 2.1). First, it keeps government closer to the people. Rather than the federal government's imposing one-size-fits-all policies, states have the freedom and authority to match government decisions to local preferences. This freedom also results in the local variance in laws, institutions, and traditions that

TABLE 2.1 ■ Advantages and Disadvantages of Federalism

Advantages	Disadvantages
Allows for flexibility among state laws and institutions.	Increases complexity and confusion.
Reduces conflict because states can accommodate citizens' interests.	Sometimes increases conflict when jurisdictional lines are unclear.
Allows for experimentation at the state level.	Duplicates efforts and reduces accountability.
Enables the achievement of national goals.	Makes coordination difficult.
	Creates inequality in services and policies.