

POL SCI 149 STATE, LOCAL, AND SPATIAL POLITICS

2026 Summer Sessions C

Instructor:	E. Grant Baldwin	Email:	baldwinegrant@g.ucla.edu
Class Time:	Tu/Th 10:45am – 12:50pm	Class Zoom Link:	Click Here
Office Hours:	Th 1:30pm – 3:30pm	Office Hours Link:	Click Here

Why Study Sub-national U.S. Politics?

The Pledge of Allegiance boasts that the United States is “one nation. . . indivisible.” And yet, it is a country made up of smaller divisions of government. There is the one federal government that we know and love (to hate), 50 state governments, 3,144 county and county-equivalent governments, 35,705 municipal (city or town) governments, 12,546 school districts, and 39,555 other special purpose governments.

Although often overshadowed by politics at the national level, the decisions made by state, county, municipal, and special district governments more directly impact the day-to-day lives of Americans. Most of the interactions that you have had with “the government” have been with your local governments. These governments have substantial policymaking authority over education, public safety, public health, transportation infrastructure, and election administration, to only name a few examples. Indeed, in every episode of American history where we contemplated how government should exercise its power—from slavery to economic depressions, climate change, a global pandemic, and questions of election legitimacy—the state and local governments and the politics surrounding them have been at the center.

All in all, students interested in careers in law, government, public policy, political advocacy, social work, education, business, or social science research will inevitably confront state and local governments and the politics that define them. In each of these professions, understanding how power is distributed across and within levels of government, why certain governments produce different policies and experience different outcomes, and how geographic space shapes political attitudes and representation should prove useful.

Course Description:

This course’s aim is to provide students with an understanding of the politics and policymaking of state and local governments in the United States through exposure to contemporary social science research. The course gives significant attention to topics related to the division of political power across state and local governments, how political behavior differs from national politics in state and local elections, and the way geography shapes political conflict, representation, and policy outcomes. Along the way, we will cover topics related to the constitutional foundations of federalism, local institutional

design, political parties, redistricting and gerrymandering, the urban-rural divide, and racial segregation.

UCLA lists POL SCI 40: Introduction to American Politics as an official prerequisite to this course. As such, the course is built around the assumption that students already have an introductory-level understanding of U.S. politics and prior exposure to some social science research.

A Note on Online & Summer Learning:

Our class will be held synchronously online during Summer Sessions C (Aug. 3 – Sep. 11). This means that while we are meeting virtually, you are required to attend class during our designated meeting time (10:45am – 12:50pm Pacific Standard Time on Tuesdays and Thursdays). Be sure to join class from a place with a reliable internet connection and free from distractions. Our class meetings will NOT be recorded or posted for those not able to attend at the scheduled time, so prioritize proper attendance.

Additionally, because of the Summer Sessions schedule, material that would usually be taught in a ten week quarter is squished into six weeks! As such, it may feel you have to read or write more in a shorter period of time compared to other classes you would normally take throughout the school year. Be sure to prioritize your time and attention on course requirements accordingly.

Learning Outcomes:

This course focuses on four major themes:

1. *Dividing and Sharing Power* — students will be able to identify which responsibilities the U.S. Constitution grants to the national government, which responsibilities it leaves to the states, how the states interact with their cities, and where the lines remain unclear.
2. *Who Governs?* — students will be able to engage with scholarly arguments surrounding the political forces and groups that are most influential in state and local politics as well as what dimensions best define sub-national political conflict.
3. *Political Behavior in Cities and States* — students will be able to draw conclusions from quantitative data on how and why individuals, especially voters, engage with and participate in politics at the state and local level in the United States.
4. *Representing People and Places* — students will be able to recognize the advantages and disadvantages the American political systems gives on the basis of geography, how place is determinative of political attitudes and behavior, and the strategies parties employ when drawing district maps to maximize their representation.

Beyond attaining a mastery of the curriculum, at the end of this class students should be able to (1) more comfortably discuss (and disagree about) politics with others in a civil manner, (2) more confidently read and analyze primary historical documents and

contemporary social science literature, and (3) more effectively craft written arguments from theory and evidence. Most of all, attentive and successful students in this course will hopefully attain tools that will allow them to act as better citizens and residents of their local communities.

Expectations, Grading, and Assignments:

This syllabus acts as the course's "constitution" in that it outlines the expectations surrounding the assignments, course schedule, and how grades will be calculated. Any questions about those items should be answered below. But, just like the U.S. Constitution, this syllabus is a "living" document. This means that any information provided here is subject to change throughout the term. If anything does change, the change will be widely publicized.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

Attendance & Participation	10%
Reading Quizzes	25%
Final Project (<i>Visual Element</i>)	10%
Final Project (<i>Written Element</i>)	20%
Final Exam	35%

Attendance & In-Class Participation

Attendance in class sessions is essential for your success. Attendance will be measured by Attendance Quizzes on the course website, which open after each class session and close the day of the class session at 11:59pm. These quizzes will each consist of one open-ended question. The answer to each quiz's question will be a "code-word" that will be clearly stated in each corresponding class section at a random time. Students that attend each class session for the entire scheduled time will be able to earn all of the available points on the Attendance Quizzes. Two Attendance Quiz scores will be dropped from your final grade, meaning you are able to miss up to two class sessions without it negatively impacting your grade.

In addition to the Attendance Quizzes, each student will be given a Participation Score at the end of the term. Students that consistently attend class sessions and participate will receive favorable Participation Scores. Participation can appear in many forms, such as contributing to class discussions, getting involved during learning activities, asking insightful questions, and refraining from using computers, tablets, and smartphones irresponsibly.

Reading Quizzes

Assigned readings are to be completed *before* the corresponding class session. Not only will you feel lost without having done them, but you also will not be able to fully contribute to our class discussions or participate in learning activities. To encourage proactive reading, an online Reading Quiz will be posted on the course website every week.

This quizzes will cover the material from the readings assigned in the associated week and will close ten minutes *before* each Thursday's class session (10:35am). Each quiz will feature 5 multiple choice style questions.

Reading Quizzes are open-book and open-note, but closed-internet and closed-Artificial Intelligence. This means that you are free to refer to the text of the readings themselves and any notes you have taken while taking the quizzes, but you are not free to scan internet resources beyond the class or ask Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to assist you as you answer questions. Once you open each quiz on the course website, you have only ten minutes to complete it. So, ensure to have read the material thoroughly before beginning the quiz.

The lowest Reading Quiz score you receive will be dropped from your final grade. This essentially means that you may miss one week's quiz for any reason without it impacting the grade you receive.

Final Project

Each student is to complete a final project that takes both a visual and written form. Because this course covers three broad topics (state, local, and spatial politics), there are three possible types or "options" of final project that you may select from. Each project option is designed to be equally time consuming and rigorous, and each will be graded based on similar criteria. The three options for the final project are defined below:

Option 1: *Laboratories of Democracy Project*

Imagine that you work as a legislative analyst for a committee in one of the chambers in your home state's legislature (e.g., the Housing and Community Development Committee in the California State Assembly). The leading member of the committee comes to you and asks you write a policy brief on a policy of your choosing that has been enacted in another state but not yet in your own. The brief should summarize the other state's policy, provide information on which groups supported/opposed the policy's adoption, make an appeal to data that demonstrates whether the policy has been successful or not in the other state thus far, and predict whether the policy will be politically and financially feasible in your state.

Option 2: *Defining Local Politics Project*

Imagine that you are a local reporter that works for the newspaper in your hometown. The editor of the newspaper wants you to write an article that reports on a recent election for a local office (e.g., mayor, city council, school board, sheriff, county commissioner) for the paper. Your report should gather facts, figures, and information relevant to that local election to make an argument that explains its outcome. In other words, the editor wants you to explore what factors "defined" the politics surrounding the election.

Option 3: Redistricting Proposal Project

Imagine you have been hired by a political party, interest group, or nonpartisan commission to reevaluate a state's current congressional district map. The organization that hires you asks you to use available geographic data on the state to propose a new district map based on one of these five pre-specified goals: (1) maximize potential Republican/Democratic representation, (2) create as compact of districts as possible, (3) avoid splitting communities of interest as much as possible, (4) create a new majority-minority district, (5) draw a map without referencing any data on voter partisanship or previous election results. You may use any of a number of free, publicly available redistricting software/programs to draw your map (my recommendation is to use www.districtbuilder.org or <https://davesredistricting.org/maps#home>). You must select to draw a map for a state with at least four congressional districts. The districts in the map you draw must be (1) contiguous and (2) as equal in population as possible. Once you have created your map, you are to write a report to the organization that hired you that compares your map with the state's existing district map, and the strategies you employed to meet your pre-specified goal.

Final Project, Visual Element

Regardless of which option you select for the final project, you must create a visualization that translates your findings for the audience specified in your chosen prompt. You may choose one of the following two formats.

Both formats are designed to be equally time-consuming and will be evaluated using the following criteria: (1) the extent to which it accurately and clearly communicates the primary argument/finding, (2) the extent to which it is appropriate for its designated audience, (3) the overall quality of design/production, and (4) adherence to format specifications. The Visual Element must be posted on the course website before 10:44a.m. Thursday, September 3rd for all students in the class to see. Once all students' Visual Elements have been posted, you must view three of your peers' Visual Elements and leave relevant comments on each that either connect their visualization to course content or to your own Final Project by 11:59p.m. Thursday, September 3rd.

For students choosing the *Redistricting Proposal Project* option, note that your district map on its own does not satisfy this requirement. Your visual element should go further to communicate how your map performs relative to your stated goal, not simply a display of the map itself.

Format 1: Infographic

A single-page static visual (submitted as a PDF or high-resolution image) that presents your core argument or finding through a combination of text, data visualization, and interesting design. The infographic must be created in portrait orientation with a fixed canvas size of 11 x 17 inches (or your design tool's exact pixel equivalent at standard resolution, e.g., 3300 x 5100 px at 300 DPI). All body text must be a minimum of 20-point font, and all headers/titles must be a minimum of 36-point font, to ensure legibility and

to encourage prioritization of your central finding over dense text. It must include at least one chart, map, or data-driven graphic (which you must create yourself—no AI generated data visualizations). It should also be legible as a standalone piece, meaning that a reader should be able to understand your main point without having read your written report.

Click [HERE](#) for an example of a high-quality infographic, and [HERE](#) for a tutorial from Canva on how to use its platform to create infographics. All UCLA students can use Canva Pro for free, so I highly recommend using this tool. Other possible tools to create infographics include Adobe Acrobat, Google Slides, and Microsoft Powerpoint.

Format 2: *Short-Form Video*

A vertical-format video, no longer than 90 seconds, in the style of a TikTok or Instagram Reel, that explains your core argument or finding to your specified audience. The video must contain at least one chart, map, or data-driven graphic (which you must create yourself—no AI generated data visualizations). It may include narration, on-screen text, clips from other video sources (with proper attribution within to where the video comes from), and/or interviews with those who have given their permission to be filmed. It should be legible as a standalone piece, meaning that a viewer should be able to understand your main point without having read your written report.

Click [HERE](#) for an example of a high-quality short-form video. To create the video, I recommend using an application/tool like CapCut, iMovie, Canva Video, or the in-app video tools of Instagram, YouTube, or TikTok.

Final Project, *Written Element*

You will respond to the prompt of the option you select in a written format that is 850–1,000 words in length. Notice that each option does not ask for a research essay, but instead to address a particular type of audience. Regardless, you must incorporate ideas from at least two class readings in your writing and from as many outside sources as necessary to fully respond to the prompt.

The Written Element for the Final Project will be evaluated based on the following criteria: (1) the extent to which it accurately responds to the prompt, (2) the extent to which the writing is appropriate for its designated audience, (3) the extent to which the writing demonstrates an understanding of the course material, and (4) the quality of argument and the incorporation of relevant data/evidence. The Written Element must be submitted to the course website as a PDF or Word document before 11:59p.m. Tuesday, September 8th.

Final Exam

The Final Exam will test your knowledge of the curriculum and your ability to engage in scholarly arguments around it. As such, you will not be necessarily expected to memorize names, dates, and places, but instead to engage with important ideas.

The Final Exam will be administered on the class website from Friday, September 11 at 7:00a.m. – Saturday, September 12 at 11:59p.m. The exam will be cumulative, meaning that it will cover all the course material from the beginning to the end of the term. It

will consist of 35 multiple choice style questions. While taking the test, you may consult your notes, assigned readings, and any other course resources. However, the test must be completed on your own—no collaboration with other students, peers, the general internet, or AI chatbots. Once you open the test on the course website, you will have 3 hours to complete it—although I imagine many, if not most, students will finish it much more quickly than that.

Course Schedule:

Required readings will be posted in electronic form to the class website. There is no official textbook requirement. Although, you may buy physical copies of any of the books we read portions from if you so choose. All reading materials are also available either digitally or in print from the UCLA library. You may NOT distribute the online versions of the reading materials to anyone not enrolled in the course.

Class Session	Required Readings	Assignments
Week 1		
Session 1 (8/4): <i>Constitutional Origins of Our Federal System</i>	– Kettl (2020). <i>The Divided States of America: Why Federalism Doesn't Work</i> . Chapters 2–3 (33pgs).	Attendance Quiz 1 closes, 11:59p.m.
Session 2 (8/6): <i>Theories of Federalism and State Policymaking</i>	– Grumbach (2022). <i>Laboratories Against Democracy: How National Parties Transformed State Politics</i> . Chapters 2–3 (51pgs).	Reading Quiz 1 closes, 10:35a.m. Attendance Quiz 2 closes, 11:59p.m.
Week 2		
Session 3 (8/11): <i>The “Nationalization” of State & Local Politics</i>	– Hopkins (2018). <i>The Increasingly United States: How and Why American Political Behavior Nationalized</i> . Chapters 3–4 (52pgs).	Attendance Quiz 3 closes, 11:59p.m.

Session 4 (8/13):	– Oliver (2012). <i>Local Elections and the Politics of Small-Scale Democracy</i> . Introduction & Chapter 1 (52pgs).	Reading Quiz 2 closes, 10:35a.m.
<i>Theories of Local Governance</i>		Attendance Quiz 4 closes, 11:59p.m.

Week 3

Session 5 (8/18):	– Schaffner, Streb & Wright (2001). "Teams Without Uniforms: the Nonpartisan Ballot in State and Local Elections." <i>Political Research Quarterly</i> 54(1) (23pgs). – Anzia (2011). "Election Timing and the Electoral Influence of Interest Groups." <i>The Journal of Politics</i> 73(2) (16pgs).	Attendance Quiz 5 closes, 11:59p.m.
<i>State & Local Political Institutions</i>		

Session 6 (8/20):	– Lax & Phillips (2012). "The Democratic Deficit in the States." <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> 56(1) (19pgs). – Butler & Dynes (2016). "How Politicians Discount the Opinions of Constituents With Whom They Disagree." <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> 60(4) (14pgs).	Reading Quiz 3 closes, 10:35a.m. Attendance Quiz 6 closes, 11:59p.m.
<i>Government Responsiveness & Representation</i>		

Week 4

Session 7 (8/25):	– Brown (2010). "Are Governors Responsible for the State Economy? Partisanship, Blame, and Divided Federalism." <i>The Journal of Politics</i> 72(3) (11pgs). – Burnett & Kogan (2017). "The Politics of Potholes: Service Quality and Retrospective Voting in Local Elections." <i>The Journal of Politics</i> 79(1) (19pgs).	Attendance Quiz 7 closes, 11:59p.m.
<i>Accountability</i>		

Session 8 (8/27):	– Springer (2014). <i>How the States Shaped the Nation: American Electoral Institutions and Voter Turnout, 1920–2000</i>. Chapter 4 (26pgs).	Reading Quiz 4 closes, 10:35a.m.
<i>Election Administration & Redistricting</i>	– Chen & Rodden (2013). “Unintentional Gerrymandering: Political Geography and Electoral Bias in Legislatures.” <i>Quarterly Journal of Political Science</i> 8 (30pgs). – Vox (2026). “How Trump’s Redistricting Could Backfire.” (Short read).	Attendance Quiz 8 closes, 11:59p.m.
Week 5		
Session 9 (9/1):	– Watch documentary film <i>Street Fight</i> (2005), available for free on YouTube (1 hr 21 mins).	Attendance Quiz 9 closes, 11:59p.m.
<i>NO CLASS</i>	Use extra time to work on Final Project	
Session 10 (9/3):	– Hopkins (2010). “Politicized Places: Explaining Where and When Immigrants Provoke Local Opposition.” <i>American Political Science Review</i> 104(1) (20pgs).	Reading Quiz 5 closes, 10:35a.m.
<i>Geography’s Influence on Behavior and Attitudes</i>	– Enos (2017). <i>The Space Between Us: Social Geography & Politics</i>. Chapter 5 (33pgs).	Final Project, Visual Element due, 10:44a.m. Attendance Quiz 10 closes, 11:59p.m.
Week 6		
Session 11 (9/8):	– Trounstein (2018). <i>Segregation by Design: Local Politics and Inequality in American Cities</i>. Chapter 4 (24pgs) & Chapter 7 (23pgs).	Final Project, Written Element due, 11:59p.m.
<i>Segregation & Geographic Sorting</i>		Attendance Quiz 11 closes, 11:59p.m.

Session 12 (9/10):	– Vox (2026). “What Just Happened in California?” (Short read).	Reading Quiz 6 closes, 10:35a.m.
<i>Los Angeles 2026 Mayoral Election, California 2026 Gubernatorial Election, and Final Exam Review</i>		Attendance Quiz 12 closes, 11:59p.m.
(9/11 – 9/12)	Final Exam open 7:00a.m. 9/11 – 11:59p.m. 9/12	

Statement on Plagiarism, AI Usage, & Academic Dishonesty:

Cheating, academic dishonesty, and plagiarism as defined in the UCLA Student Conduct Code ([102.01a-g](#), [102.02](#)) will not be tolerated. I will take instances of academic dishonesty very seriously and ignorance regarding how the university defines academic dishonesty is not an acceptable defense.

Plagiarism involves using another’s work without proper attribution. This can take the form of directly “copying and pasting” the written work of another or presenting another’s ideas, data, or research as if it was created wholly by the student. If in doubt, cite the sources from which you are drawing your information. Any assignment submitted for a grade in this course must be the original work of the student and acknowledge the sources of the information which it draws from.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly becoming a useful tool for learning. However, it must be used cautiously. For instance, AI always appears confident in the answers it gives you, whether or not it is correct. *You* are required to do the necessary thinking to evaluate whether or not what is confidently telling you is true. Additionally, [some evidence](#) suggests that people who regularly use AI tools become worse at the tasks they use them for once they are asked to stop using AI tools.

For this course, you may use AI tools to assist you in your studying or to give you feedback on your writing. However, you may not submit text wholly written by an AI model, nor may you consult AI tools while taking quizzes or tests. If it comes to my attention that you are using AI tools in one of these non-permitted cases, you will lose credit for the assignment in question.

Statement on Assignment Deadlines & Late Work:

As a general rule, no assignment submission will be accepted after its posted due date. All assignment expectations and due dates are given up front at the beginning of the term, so it is up to each student to manage their time effectively in order to submit assignments before they are due.

There is a limited set of circumstances where I would allow for an extension of an assignment's deadline. These include a letter from the University's Center for Accessible Education (CAE) forwarded to me at the beginning of the term to ensure any special accommodations or met or an unforeseen incident occurring such as a serious illness or accident. In either case, students wishing for extensions should reach out to me long before the assignment is due.

University Resources Available to Students:

Center for Accessible Education (CAE) —

Facilitates academic accommodations for students with disabilities.

A255 Murphy Hall

(310) 825-1501

<https://www.cae.ucla.edu>

Undergraduate Writing Center (UWC) —

On-demand writing assistance for undergraduates through in-person, online, and walk in appointments.

A61 Kaplan Hall

(310) 206-1320

<https://uwc.ucla.edu>

Title IX/Sexual Harassment Prevention Office —

Provides support for students that experience, witness, or wish to report instances of sexual harassment and sexual assault.

2255 Murphy Hall

(310) 206-3417

www.sexualharassment.ucla.edu

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) —

Supports students' mental health needs.

John Wooden Center West

221 Westwood Plaza

(310) 825-0768 – 24/7 crisis support line

<https://counseling.ucla.edu>

Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion —

Provides resources relating to equity, diversity, and inclusions on campus and offers a space to report incidents of discrimination and harassment.

(310) 825-3935

<https://equity.ucla.edu>

LGBTQ Campus Resource Center —

Provides education and advocacy services to foster a safe and inclusive environment for the LGBTQ community.

220 Westwood Plaza B36, Student Activities Center

<https://www.lgbtq.ucla.edu>