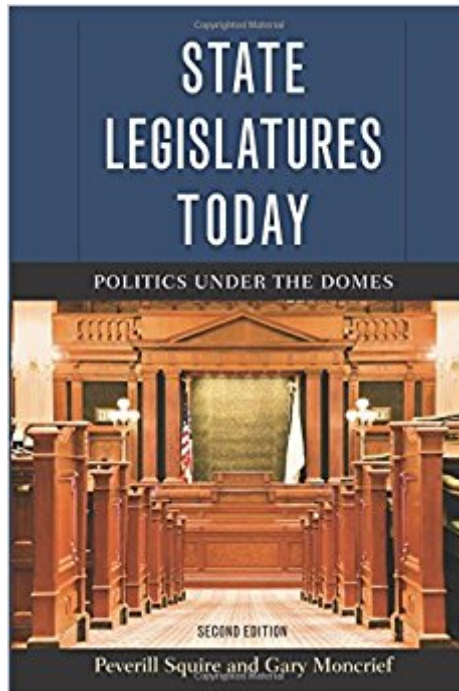




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# State Legislatures Today: Politics Under The Domes



## Synopsis

A concise and provocative introduction to state legislative politics, *State Legislatures Today* is designed as a supplement for state and local government courses and upper level courses on legislative politics. The book examines state legislatures and state lawmakers, putting them in historical context, showing how they have evolved over the years, and differentiating them from Congress. It covers state legislative elections (including the impact of redistricting, candidate recruitment, etc.), the changing job description of state legislators, legislatures as organizations, the process by which legislation gets produced, and the influences upon legislators. Many things have happened in the five years since the popular first edition. Significant developments addressed in the new edition include:

1. The rise of the Tea Party Movement, which has contributed to the stalemate in Congress and greatly influenced legislative politics in many states. Indeed, the Tea Party's greatest impact has been in state capitals, not in Washington, DC.
2. A marked increase in one-party government, resulting in greatest number of states with one-party government in at least fifty years. One-party government, of course, allows for dramatic policy shifts. Thus, governors and state legislatures have been able to make significant policy decisions while Congress and the President have been gridlocked.
3. A dramatic increase in the use of recall elections (Arizona, Michigan, and Wisconsin) and referenda to challenge legislative policy decisions (Idaho, South Dakota, Ohio, and Washington), signaling a growing frustration with legislative policies in some states. Recall elections and referenda only occur at the state level.
4. Changes in term limits and budgeting laws in California directly affecting the work of the legislature in the largest state in the Union.
5. Highly visible state legislative policies on hot-button issues such as gun control, taxation, public employee benefits, teachers' unions, abortion, immigration and education reform. The conflicts generated by these debates have produced incidents that captured national attention, perhaps most notably when Democrats in the Wisconsin Senate fled to Illinois to break quorum and prevent the Republicans from passing a measure limiting public unions in the state.
6. Efforts to profoundly alter the structure of some state legislatures, such as a measure to substantially reduce the number of legislative seats in Pennsylvania and a proposed initiative to radically increase the number of seats in California.
7. The culmination of a redistricting cycle in 2012 which alters the nature of many legislative districts and the course of politics and policy over the next decade.
8. A rare and historic "wave election" in 2010 that saw the Republican Party gain more than 700 seats in state legislatures.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This volume examines the legislatures of the 50 American states. While it is organized as a textbook, a general reader will find it fruitful reading. Squire and Moncrief begin with the organization of colonial legislatures and then trace the historical development of the legislatures seen in action today. Chapter 2 presents the details of state legislative elections, including questions of legislative districting and the power of incumbency in state legislatures. In chapter 3, the authors consider the job descriptions and careers of state legislators. Particularly interesting is the discussion of the effects of state legislative term limitations. Chapter 4 turns to the organizational aspects of legislatures, analyzing the role of committees, legislative leaders, and staff in legislative work. The legislative processes in each state are compared in chapter 5. The authors consider the influence of actors outside the legislature on the legislatures' work in chapter 6, with a focus on the effects of direct democracy. The work concludes with an assessment of the current state of state legislatures. The book is richly cited and will serve readers well as an entry point into the field of state legislative research. Summing Up: Recommended. All readership levels. (CHOICE)Written by two of the most seasoned scholars of the U.S. legislative process, *State Legislatures Today* provides a thorough and insightful examination of these very important "but often under-the-radar" institutions. The book is truly comparative, describing the subtle variations among the state legislatures and leveraging those variations to understand deeply how law gets made in the US context. With data, colorful anecdotes, and a careful review of the literature, this is the definitive book on state legislatures today. (Christopher Z. Mooney, University of Illinois)State

Legislatures Today provides a thorough examination of state legislatures in the United States. Not only does this text cover all state legislatures, but it also provides detailed information about all aspects of these institutions, from campaigns and elections to the legislative process. The book is grounded in current research and current evidence, with lively writing and engaging stories throughout. Peverill Squire and Gary Moncrief have written a book that is both informative and entertaining, a combination well suited to today's students. (Shannon L. Jenkins, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth) Peverill Squire and Gary Moncrief continue their excellent work with a detailed yet accessible exploration of important institutional and electoral issues found throughout the states. Squire and Moncrief take current political science research and blend it nicely with contemporary political and policy examples to provide an effective classroom text. (Jonathan Cole Winburn, University of Mississippi) A concise and provocative introduction to state legislative politics, State Legislatures Today is designed as a supplement for state and local government courses and upper level courses on legislative politics. The book examines state legislatures and state lawmakers, putting them in historical context, showing how they have evolved over the years, and differentiating them from Congress. It covers state legislative elections (including the impact of redistricting, candidate recruitment, etc.), the changing job description of state legislators, legislatures as organizations, the process by which legislation gets produced, and the influences upon legislators.

Peverill Squire holds the Hicks and Martha Griffiths Chair in American Political Institutions at the University of Missouri. Gary Moncrief is University Foundation Professor of Political Science at Boise State University.

To understand the legislative process in the United States, one cannot just study Congress. Each state has its own legislature, and one needs an understanding of these for a complete picture. There are many fascinating tidbits in this book--From 1993-2003, there is almost an incomprehensibly high percentage of incumbents re-elected to state legislatures. From a high of 98.1% in New York to a "low" of 84.4% in Louisiana. In short, incumbents don't normally get defeated! The book covers the standard elements for a perspective on state legislatures. Chapters focus on such matters as: The nature and history of state legislatures; campaigns and elections for legislative seats; the job of the legislator--and changes over time; legislative organization (leadership structures and committees); how decisions get made and laws passed; the variety of actors that state legislatures must reckon with (e.g., the governor, bureaucracy, courts, public

opinion, interest groups, and the like). The book concludes with a chapter on how representative state legislatures actually are. Some nice features: case studies in each chapter (e.g., in the chapter on the job of the state legislator today is a tale of Pennsylvania's pay raise disaster). The book is well written. There are summary tables that help make sense of the chapters. All in all, a good work. I may well adopt this as a textbook when I next teach Legislative Politics and Process.

This book provides a comprehensive overview of how legislatures actually function (spoiler alert: Schoolhouse Rock's "I'm Just A Bill" doesn't really capture the nuances of the legislative process). I'm currently writing a policy analysis of state-level lobbying reforms, and the information provided in this book gave me a clearer sense of how lobbyists fit into the lawmaking process. The book is easy to read, concise, and thorough.

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