**Discussion**

1. If states and localities are more prevalent in our daily lives than the federal government is, and people tend to trust their state representative more than a member of Congress, why do people tend to know so little about the workings of state and local government? What can be done to improve general understanding of government at the state and local level?

2. Devolution and the subsequent increase in the level of responsibility for the states mean that “states are developing policies that vary widely in their content and form.” Despite providing a systematic approach for explaining variance across states, does the comparative method accommodate broad policy generalizations, or is it limited to states with similar political cultures?

3. Why do the authors report that “states and localities spent the century’s last two decades, and much of the first decade of the twenty-first, aggressively asserting their independence”? If this is true, how might the Great Recession of 2008–2009 have affected that trend?

4. How does one systematically measure political culture? If no state represents a “pure” culture, does political culture provide a useful classification for systematic studies of state and local politics? How does one measure a way of life or social identity among citizens? Given that social diversity tends to represent a dynamic variable, is it possible to talk about political culture as a static variable?

5. Are there any disadvantages to devolution? That is, given the enormous discretion of states, do you foresee any problems with allowing policy experimentation across all states? How does the imposition of unfunded federal mandates force states to be creative in the political process?

6. Should states serve as “laboratories of democracy”? Is it useful and/or practical that national policy often is initiated at the state level? Are there any potential problems to such experimentation? Should there be more regulation over public policy at the state level? Should states be given less discretionary authority?