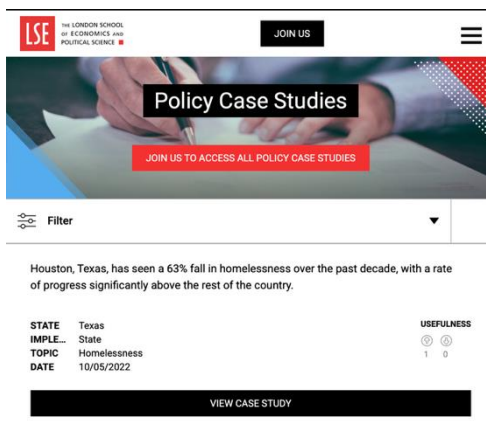# Undergraduate Research Assistantship Report 2025

During my work as an Undergraduate Research Assistant at the LSE Phelan US Center, I had the opportunity to work on the State of the States project with Chris Gilson, the founder of the platform. Through my collaboration with Chris on this project, I have deepened my understanding of American politics, gained invaludable research skills and insights into how to connect academic research with local American policymakers. Notably, the State of the State is still a developing, growing, and commercializing platform which made the work non-traditional and incredibly hands on compared to other options provided by the Phelan US Center.

The State of the States is an online platform and research initiative that provides an apolitical, comprehensive overview of the political and policy landscape of U.S. states. Its primary focus is to track key aspects of state governmental structures, electoral behaviors, and policy structures. These profiles delve into various aspects of state policy, including statistics and case studies about a variety of issues such as homelessness, unemployment, and COVID-19 recovery. These state profiles and case studies enable readers and local policymakers to

contrast states with evidence-based insights, guiding their decision-making processes. Accordingly, the State of the States has the potential to be an incredibly useful tool that bridges academic research and local policy.

As a Research Assistant on this project, I had a variety of responsibilities, including data collection, analysis, writing, and updated the website. Qualitatively I worked to provide research and write case studies. I am particularly proud of my work researching The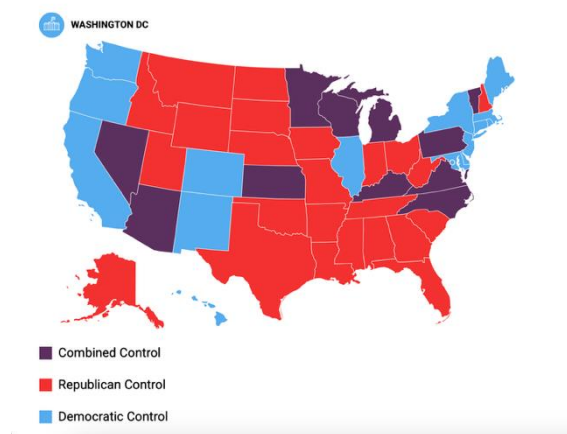 Courtyard homelessness initiative in Clark County and Las Vegas, Nevada and the youth unemployment initiatives in Austin, Texas run in collaboration with American YouthWorks. The former has been sent to Clark County for feedback prior to being posted on the website. Similarly, I worked to research, outline, and partially write a series of articles about the Department of Governmental Efficiency, or DOGE. Quantitatively, I worked to collect data on the governance structure, political leaders, and elections within states on Excel and updated the website on WordPress.

The data I collected and analyzed plays a critical role in the broader objectives of the State of the States. Organizationally, my work to update the website and write new content through blogs and case studies enables current readers and policymakers to have updated information to inform their work making state policy. Further, it can be used to draw in more readers. Additionally, the data helps to contextualize state-level policy initiatives by examining how states are addressing social issues. This can then be used by policymakers and researchers comparatively to improve their programs, as the experiences of different states can be used as laboratories for policy innovation.

Ultimately, this project fits within a broader discourse on the growing significance of state policy in shaping the lives of Americans. Initiatives, including DOGE, have sought to shrink the size of the American federal government, with impacts on both the funding and needs that state and local government will need to address. In recent years, states have become arenas for experimentation with policy solutions, particularly in areas like healthcare, education, and immigration. For example, states like California and Texas have become battlegrounds for debates over climate policy, where state policies often precede or conflict with national policies. Yet, traditionally, much of American political science has focused on federal government actions, with less emphasis on the importance of state politics. This project contributes to a growing body of literature that seeks to rebalance this focus and give state-level politics its due attention.

In sum, my work as an Undergraduate Research Assistant with Chris Gilson at the LSE Phelan US Center has been tremendously impactful. Personally, as an American living in the United Kingdom in this political moment, I have been incredibly greatful for the opportunity to academically engage on such a topical and politically impactful project. I do believe that the data collected in this project can demonstate how state governments can innovate in policy areas to improve the lives of their citizens.