

William Kousser

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Education

2023 - 2027 BA (expected) Political Science, Stanford University

GPA: 4.041, Major GPA: 4.115 (Stanford weighs A+ over 4.0)

Honors Thesis (in progress): *Narrow Majorities and Control Switches: How Competition Affects American City Governance*. Advised by Prof. Yiqing Xu

Research Interests

American democratic institutions are struggling to solve 21st century problems such as climate change, regulating AI, affordability, and polarization. I am interested in studying US political institutions and the challenges that face them to inform the institutional and legal changes that can create a more efficacious government and revitalize our democracy.

While I study all levels of government, I am primarily interested in local politics.

Research Experience

Summer 2026 Major Grant Awardee (Honors Thesis)

Received a competitive grant from Stanford to study the effects of political competition on city governments. Created a novel dataset containing transcripts (and other variables derived from them) of 200+ city councils and thousands of meetings using a LLM-powered research pipeline that scraped, transcribed, and classified videos of city council meetings. Applied a "Double Discontinuity" design (my novel variation of RDD) to identify the effects of close elections, changes in majority control, and shrinking majorities on the change in number of permits issued, dollars spent, and the sentiments expressed as well as the topics discussed at city council meetings.

Summer 2025 Research Grantee

Received a grant from Stanford's Bill Lane Center to study sea level rise (SLR) and its intersections with California's political system. Used econometric inference (Difference-in-Differences) to measure market reactions to SLR and statewide property data to develop and estimate impacts of policies for climate adaptation. Worked with my partner, the 2nd District Santa Barbara County Supervisor, to make SLR projections for and plan the future of unincorporated areas in the county.

2025 - Present Research Assistant

Worked as research assistant to Professor Brandice Canes-Wrone. Wrote R code to collect and clean CCES and ANES survey databases, managed other research assistants, helped craft survey experiment questions, etc.

Working Papers

Kousser, William *Pricing the Edge: How Sea Level Rise and Coastal Erosion Affect Housing Prices in California*

Kousser, William *Narrow Majorities and Control Switches: How Competition Affects American City Governance*

Relevant Coursework

Technical / Methodological:

POLISCI 158: AI Technologies for Social Applications

PS 150c: Causal Inference

PS 150b: Machine Learning

PS 150a: Data Science for Politics

CS 106a: Programming Methodology

Substantive:

CEE 175A: California Coast: Science, Policy, and Law (Stanford Law School Course)

POLISCI 327C - Law of Democracy (Stanford Law School Course)

POLISCI III: The Politics of Climate Change

POLISCI 220R: The Presidency

POLISCI 25N: The US Congress in Historical and Comparative Perspective

POLISCI 120B: Campaigns, Voting, Media, and Elections

POLISCI 123D: The Politics of American Courts

ECON 1: Principles of Economics

Skills

Programming: R (Advanced), Python (Proficient), SQL & Stata (through R libraries)

Statistics: Causal Inference (RCTs, IV, RDD, DiD & TWFE, etc.), Prediction Models (both machine learning and classical statistics)

AI: LLM Research Pipelines (Literature Review, Programming Assistance, Data and Effect Visualization), Agentic Orchestration & IDEs (Creation of websites, apps, workflows)

Spanish: Reading (Advanced), Speaking & Writing (Intermediate)