

# [***Movie Review: In ‘Girls State,’ Missouri teens start a mock government***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BPP-KP41-DYMD-64HR-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

What would an all-female government look like in the U.S.? Or even a majority female government? It’s something that remains a fantasy. But for the ambitious high school students in the Girls State program, given the spotlight [*in a new documentary*](https://apnews.com/article/girls-state-movie-b354330e759b7bef0a68edfa2afe488d) arriving on Apple TV+ Friday, it’s something they can play at for at least a week.

Six years ago, documentary filmmakers Amanda McBaine and Jesse Moss brought their [*cameras to the Boys State camp in Texas*](https://apnews.com/article/austin-entertainment-reviews-texas-film-reviews-81add4529c80354a95ef2faebeb8699a) in the aftermath of a historic and, according to that 2018 class, embarrassing stunt in which their predecessors voted to secede from the U.S. By the time the filmmakers were finishing that effort, they were already thinking about a follow up focused on the girls’ program.

In [*“Girls State”*](https://tv.apple.com/us/movie/girls-state/umc.cmc.7fsw9p5hdoagfd4lajhf6a5li?itscg=MC_20000&itsct=atvp_brand_omd&mttn3pid=Google%20AdWords&mttnagencyid=a5e&mttncc=US&mttnsiteid=143238&mttnsubad=OUS20191128_1-693908927981-c&mttnsubkw=163610374207__jp12PgHm_&mttnsubplmnt=_adext_) they move away from Texas and to Missouri, and give voice to several midwestern teens during a heightened week in which [*a draft of the Supreme Court’s decision to overturn Roe v. Wade*](https://apnews.com/article/supreme-court-abortion-draft-opinion-07439f9fc4542f1500ab78dfd34036b1), which legalized abortion nationwide, had leaked to the press. This is hardly a consensus issue among the young women at the camp: Even at a single lunch table, many sides of the debate are represented. One girl is firmly pro-choice, but even those opposed also have differing viewpoints of what the government’s purview should be.

During another moment, two girls talk about the right to bear arms. One preaches the importance of protecting a constitutional right, the possibility of arming teachers and the comfort she would get from having access to a bedside automatic rifle should an armed intruder enter her house at night. The other wonders if that’s more of a danger to the household than anything else. And they eventually agree to disagree. Minds are not necessarily being changed through these talks, but all seem excited for the opportunity to be heard (and, sometimes, to hear what others have to say).

McBaine and Moss take pains to find a group of main characters with different backgrounds and viewpoints. There’s the city girl from St. Louis who thinks she’s probably the most liberal of the bunch. There’s the reformed conservative who once followed her family but in recent years has started disagreeing. There’s a moderate conservative who truly believes in bipartisanship. And there is one Black girl who wonders if she’s the first Black person that some of the others have seen. The microaggressions, she says, have been few at least. She ends up being elected attorney general, while the others run for the highest office: governor.

Perhaps the most compelling turn of events is how a bit of camp gossip about Boys State, being held on the same campus for the first time ever, evolves into a movement. The girls are dispirited by rumors of more funding and less fluff for the boys. They also all cringe when time is taken to scold them for wearing shorts and tops that are too revealing and wonder if the boys are getting similar lectures. After the election, one girl takes it upon herself to do some investigative journalism about the rumored inequities.

Like [*“Boys State,”*](https://apnews.com/article/aa1cebb34692f0796e26c62ac6ac713b) this film presents a fascinating microcosm of American teenagers. Granted, it’s a rather narrow, self-selecting group of kids who choose to spend a week of their summer vacation creating a mock government. You wonder whether four or eight years from now, when they are voting and entering the workforce, they’ll have a similar interest in ***politics*** and policy and the ambition to do something about it. For the sake of democracy, let’s hope so — these kids are really something.

“Girls State,” an Apple TV+ release streaming Friday, has not been rated by the Motion Picture Association but should be appropriate for most audiences. Running time: 98 minutes. Three stars out of four.

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