Western University · Dept. of Political Science

# Urban Politics

Political Science 9524

Winter 2024

**Instructor:** Dr. Martin Horak

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**Office Hours:** Wednesdays 2:30pm – 3:30pm in SSC7237, or by appointment (in person or on Zoom)

**Class time:** Wednesdays 10:30am – 1:30pm

**Location:** See course OWL site.

This course is an advanced survey of foundational and current research in the field of urban politics, with an empirical focus on Canada, the United States, and other countries of the Global North. Five key themes are interwoven throughout the course:

1. **Power**. What is political power? Who has it? How is it acquired? How is its use enabled or constrained? We will explore how political scientists focusing on local politics in cities have answered these questions, and on how the exercise of power in the urban realm is both similar to, and different from, its exercise in national politics.
2. **Institutions**. How do governing institutions evolve over time, and how do they shape politics and policy-making? The tremendous variety of institutional arrangements across different cities allows us to explore these questions in a comparative manner.
3. **Cleavages**. How and why does the significance of group identity, geographical, and class-based cleavages differ across local contexts and over time? Through what mechanisms do cleavages structure the practice of urban politics?
4. **Political Economy.** How are political and economic power inter-related in urban politics? How do local economic conditions shape the terrain for political agency? How much (and how) do powerful economic actors influence politics? How do broader national and global economic forces and trends shape urban politics?
5. **Governance.** What is governance? How can the study of urban politics help us understand practices of governing? How is urban politics shaped by the interplay of local, regional and national governments? Why, and with what consequences, are non-governmental actors involved in governing our cities?

This intensive seminar course will be of interest to students specializing in Canadian Politics and Comparative Politics, in addition to Urban Politics and Local Government. It is a required core course for PhD students intending to write a Comprehensive Exam in Urban Politics and Local Governance. It complements POL 9755 Globalization and Urban Politics.

## Learning Objectives:

By the end of this course, you will:

* be familiar with foundational theories of urban political power, contemporary research and debates in the study of local politics in cities, and leading theories and research agendas in metropolitan and multi-level urban governance.
* have sharpened your analytic and argumentative skills through classroom discussions and assignments.

**SCHEDULE OF TOPICS**

**Part I – Situating Urban Politics**

Class 1 Jan. 10 Introduction: What is Urban Politics?

Class 2 Jan. 17 Local Government and Cities: Institutional and Historical

 Perspectives

**Part II – Urban Political Power: An Intellectual Genealogy**

Class 3 Jan. 24 The Community Power Debate: Elitism vs. Pluralism

Class 4 Jan. 31 Urban Regimes and Governance

**Part III – Politics and Policy in Cities**

Class 5 Feb. 7 Cleavages and Group Conflict

Class 6 Feb. 14 Local Elections and Representation

*\*\*\* Family Day and Reading Week, Feb. 19–23 \*\*\**

Class 7 Feb. 28 The Politics of Urban Growth and Development

Class 8 Mar. 6 Racial Inequality and Urban Politics

**Part IV – Urban Politics Beyond the Local**

Class 9 Mar. 13 City Limits? Local Agency and Economic Constraint

Class 10 Mar. 20 Governing Metropolitan Areas

Class 11 Mar. 27 Multilevel Governance

Class 12 Apr. 3 The Urban-Rural Cleavage in National Politics

*\*\*\* Wednesday, April 10 – final paper due \*\*\**

**COURSE WEBSITE**

This course makes use of OWL. Please refer to the course website regularly for announcements and course information: https://owl.uwo.ca/portal.

## COURSE FORMAT

This is a seminar course. There will be no lecture. The instructor may briefly discuss key concepts or other elements as necessary, but the majority of each class will be devoted to student-led discussion. **Reading the required texts in advance is a necessary prerequisite for doing well in this course and will make for more exciting and insightful discussion.**

## COURSE MATERIALS

Most of the course readings are available on-line through Western Libraries. Those that are not available through the library system will be posted under “Resources” on the OWL site. No purchase of material is necessary, but I recommend that you consider purchasing Trounstine’s *Segregation by Design*, which we will be reading most of (it is an inexpensive book on Amazon), as well as any other books n the syllabus on subjects that particularly interest you.

## EVALUATION

**Participation (25%):** Lively, informed, and thoughtful discussion is at the heart of this course. You will be expected to provide consistent, informed, and active participation throughout the term. Read the material, reflect on it before and during the seminar, and engage in the seminar discussion in an open-minded fashion. Grades will be assigned based not just on the frequency but also the quality of your oral contributions to the seminar.

**Seminar leadership (15%):** You will deliver one substantial presentation, of up to 25 minutes that will offer a brief introduction to some (but not necessarily all) of the week’s readings. In addition to effective summary and integration of the selected readings, you should raise questions and challenges in such a way as to stimulate seminar discussion in the time to follow.

**Reading commentaries (3 x 5% = 15%):** Over the course of the term, you will submit *three* short papers of 3–4 pages in length that offer critical consideration of the assigned readings in a single class. You may emphasize any theme or themes within the readings, and you need not cover all of the assigned items for the week (although you should cover at least two, unless you have chosen Week 8). The aim is to identify what is at stake in the selected material, evaluate the approach of the author or authors, and reflect briefly upon how the puzzle or debate that you are focusing on might in your view best be addressed. Submit them to the OWL Assignments folder the day before the class in which that material is discussed. Which weeks you choose is up to you, but you must submit at least two prior to Reading Week.

**Final paper (40%):** Building on the course material, you will write a journal article-style paper that critically engages with an important question raised in this course. This may involve taking a deeper dive into the literature to compare and contrast diverse theoretical perspectives and their extensions, or it may involve applying a theory to one or more empirical cases. You may choose to undertake a quantitative analysis in your paper. **You will submit a short (1–2 pages) proposal for instructor feedback on or before March 6.** Paper will be approximately 25 pages in length, double-spaced. Papers are due on Wednesday, April 10.

Both your proposal and your final paper will be submitted via the OWL assignment submission system. *Further details on the paper assignment will be discussed early in the term.*

## COURSE POLICIES

**Communication with the instructor:** Please do not hesitate to e-mail me if you would like to discuss course material. I will make every effort to respond to e-mails within 24 hours (weekends excepted). If you are having trouble with the course material or are falling behind in your work, please contact me as soon as possible.

**E-mail policy:** All Western University students are required to have an @uwo.ca e-mail account. The instructor will *only* respond to e-mails sent from your Western University account. The instructor will notaccept assignments by e-mail.

**Late assignments:** The penalty for late assignments is two percentage points per day (including weekend days). If you foresee problems meeting submission deadlines please consult the instructor early; accommodations can always be made with adequate advance notice.

**READING LIST AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

On-line readings are either linked below, or are available through the Western Libraries portal. Readings **not** available on-line are marked with an asterisk (\*), and will be posted on OWL.

**Part I: Situating Urban Politics**

**Class 1**

**Introduction: What is Urban Politics?**

*Questions:* What is distinctive about urban life? How might urban living give rise to distinct forms of political cooperation and conflict? How, for Magnusson, do the state and the city represent different political ontologies? How would you define ‘urban politics’?

Wirth, Louis. 1938. “Urbanism as a Way of Life”. *American Journal of Sociology* 44(1): 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1086/217913>

Magnusson, Warren. 2014. “The Symbiosis of the Urban and the Political.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38 (5):1561–1575.

John, Peter. 2009. “Why Study *Urban* Politics?” In Jonathan Davies and David Imbroscio, eds., *Theories of Urban Politics*, 2nd ed., pp. 17–23. Los Angeles: Sage.

**Class 2**

**Local Government and Cities: Institutional and Historical Perspectives**

*Questions:* What are some important purposes of local government in democracies? How and why do these purposes vary by country? What are some ways in which Taylor’s account of the development of Canadian urban government differs from Magnusson’s? What is a “machine” and what role did machine politics play in the rapid growth of American cities? What was “urban reform” and how did it impact local politics in Canada and the United States?

\*Keating, Michael. 1991. Ch. 2, “Systems of Local Government: Culture and Structure.” In *Comparative Urban Politics: Power and the City in the United States, Canada, Britain and France*, pp. 13–35. Aldershot: Edward Elgar.

Magnusson, Warren. 1983. “Introduction: The Development of Canadian Urban Government.” In *City Politics in Canada*, edited by Warren Magnusson and Andrew Sancton, 3–57. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Taylor, Zack. 2019. *Shaping the Metropolis: Institutions and Urbanization in the United States and Canada*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press. **[Chs. 2, 3]** [**LINK**](https://books-scholarsportal-info.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/uri/ebooks/ebooks4/upress4/2019-07-11/1/9780773558427)

\*Merton, Robert. 2002 [1957]. “The Latent Functions of the Machine.” Ch. 8 in *The Politics of Urban America: A Reader*, 3rd ed., edited by Dennis R. Judd and Paul Kantor, 101–109. New York: Pearson.

**Part II: Urban Political Power: An Intellectual Genealogy**

**Class 3**

**The Community Power Debate: Elitism vs. Pluralism**

*Questions:* What is power according to Hunter? How is it acquired and exercised? Who are the elites? How does the pluralist perspective on power differ from the elite domination perspective? How do Bachrach and Baratz critique the pluralist and elite domination perspectives?

\*Hunter, Floyd. 1953. *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers*. Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press. **[Chs. 1 and 4]**

\*Dahl, Robert. 2005 [1961]. *Who governs? Democracy and power in an American city*, 2nd ed. New Haven, CT: Yale UP. **[Chs. 7–8, 12, 24–27 (the chapters are short)]**

Bachrach, Peter, and Morton S. Baratz. 1962. “Two faces of power.” *American Political Science Review* 56(4): 947–52. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055406222561>

**Class 4**

**Urban Regimes and Governance**

*Questions:* What is an urban regime? How successfully does Stone resolve the structure-agency conflict in the earlier debate between structuralist and pluralist perspectives? Is the approach underlying the regime concept more generally applicable than the concept itself? How is the concept of governance different from the concept of regime? Does the concept of governance share some affinity with Magnusson’s concept of ‘seeing like a city’, and if so, in what sense?

\*Stone, Clarence N. 1989. *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta 1946–1988*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press. **[Chs. 1, 9, 11]**

Stone, Clarence N. 1993. “Urban regimes and the capacity to govern: a political economy approach.” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 15(1): 1–28.

Pierre, Jon. 2014. “Can urban regimes travel in time and space? Urban regime theory, urban governance theory, and comparative urban politics.” *Urban Affairs Review* 50 (6): 864– 889.

Stoker, Gerry. 1998. “Governance as Theory: Five Propositions”. *International Social Science Journal* 155, pp. 17-28.

**Part III: Politics and Policy in Cities**

**Class 5**

**Cleavages and Group Conflict in Urban Politics**

*Questions:* This week’s readings make a variety claims about cleavages – such as race, place and class – that structure local politics in cities. Are these claims competing, are they context-dependent, or do they reflect different facets of the same complex reality? Are patterns of group conflict in American and Canadian cities historically variable, or enduring? How are they shaped and constrained by the distinct institutional characteristics of local government?

Macedo, Stephen. 2011. “Property-owning plutocracy: Inequality and American localism”. In *Justice and the American Metropolis*, edited by Swanstrom, Todd and Clarissa Hayward, 33–58. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. [**LINK**](http://www.princeton.edu/~macedo/Papers/Macedo%20Metro%20Justice%20chapter%202011.pdf)

Hajnal, Zoltan, and Jessica Trounstine. 2014. “What Underlies Urban Politics? Race, Class, Ideology, Partisanship, and the Urban Vote.” *Urban Affairs Review* 50 (1):63-99.

Ley, David. 1994. “Gentrification and the Politics of the New Middle Class.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 12 (1):53–74.

Doering, Jan, Daniel Silver, and Zack Taylor. 2020. “The Spatial Articulation of Urban Political Cleavages.” *Urban Affairs Review* 57 (4): 911–951.

**Class 6**

**Local Elections and Representation**

*Questions:* In what ways does non-partisanship affect the conduct and outcomes of local elections in North American cities? To what extent do elections actually matter for local policy outputs? How concerned should we be about the incumbency advantage in local politics?

\*Trounstine, Jessica. 2009. “Challenging the Machine–Reform Dichotomy.” Ch. 4 in Richardson Dilworth, ed., *The City in American Political Development*. New York: Routledge. pp. 77–97.

Lucas, Jack and R. Michael McGregor. 2021. “Conclusion.” In Lucas, Jack, and R. Michael McGregor, eds. *Big City Elections in Canada*. University of Toronto Press, pp.213-230.

de Benedictis-Kessner, Justin, and Christopher Warshaw. 2016. “Mayoral partisanship and municipal fiscal policy.” *The Journal of Politics* 78(4): 1124-1138.

\*Horak, Martin. 2023. “Campaign capital and resource mobilization by candidates in Canadian municipal elections.” Paper presented at Canadian Political Science Association annual meeting, York University, May 31.

Lucas, Jack. 2021. “The size and sources of municipal incumbency advantage in Canada.” *Urban Affairs Review* 57(2): 373-401.

**Class 7**

**The Politics of Urban Growth and Development**

*Questions:* Urban political conflict very often revolves around the use of land – who gets to build what, where, and for whom. What is a “growth machine” according to Molotch, and which societal and economic interests comprise it? Can we reconcile the growth machine thesis with more recent research about homeowner politics in American cities?

Molotch, Harvey. 1976. “The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place.” *American Journal of Sociology* 82 (2):309–332.

Fischel, William A. 2001. “Homevoters, Municipal Corporate Governance, and the Benefit View of the Property Tax.” *National Tax Journal* 54(1): 157–173.

Einstein, Katherine Levine, David M. Glick, and Maxwell Palmer. 2019. *Neighborhood Defenders: Participatory Politics and America’s Housing Crisis*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. **[Chs. 1, 2, 5]**

**Class 8**

**Racial Inequality and Urban Politics**

*Questions:* In what ways does Trounstine’s analysis either support or challenge other American-based theories of urban politics that we have discussed? How convincing do you find her claim that race, rather than class, is the main driver of segregationist policies? How does the multi-method approach of the book contribute to the findings?

Trounstine, Jessica. 2018. *Segregation by design: Local politics and inequality in American cities*. Cambridge University Press. **[Read whole book, skim Chapters 5 and 9]**

**Part IV: Urban Politics Beyond the Local**

**Class 9**

**City Limits? Local Agency and Economic Constraint**

*Questions:* What are the ‘interests’ of the limited city, as Paul Peterson calls them? How does Savitch and Kantor’s account of local agency differ from Peterson’s? How about Harvey’s account? How do each of these accounts conceptualize the ways in which local jurisdictions are constrained by broader structural forces when making policy decisions?

Peterson, Paul. 1981. *City Limits.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. **[Chs. 1–3]**

Savitch, Hank V., and Paul Kantor. 2002. *Cities in the International Marketplace: The Political Economy of Urban Development in North America and Western Europe.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. **[Chs. 1, 2, 5, and 9.]**

Harvey, David. 1989. “From managerialism to entrepreneurialism: the transformation in urban governance in late capitalism.” *Geografiska Annaler: series B, human geography* 71(1): 3-17.

**Class 10**

**Governing Metropolitan Areas**

*Questions:* How does fragmented (or “polycentric”, or specialized) metropolitan governance affect the exercise of political power in the urban arena? Is the development of a fully unified or coordinated metropolitan governance a realistic goal? Why or why not?

\*Stephens, G. Ross, and Nelson Wikstrom. 2000. *Metropolitan Government and Governance: Theoretical Perspectives, Empirical Analysis, and the Future*. New York: Oxford University Press. **[ch. 2]**

Mullin, Megan. 2008. “The Conditional Effect of Specialized Governance on Public Policy.” *American Journal of Political Science* 52(1): 125-141.

Miller, David, and Jen Nelles. 2018. “Order out of Chaos: The Case for a New Conceptualization of the Cross-Boundary Instruments of American Regionalism.” *Urban Affairs Review* 56 (1):325-59.

Taylor, Zack. 2022. “Regionalism from Above: Intergovernmental Relations in Canadian Metropolitan Governance.” *Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance* 26:139–59.

**Class 11**

**Multilevel Governance**

*Questions:* Why do different countries distribute power across multiple levels of government differently? Where does Canada fit in Sellers et al.’s typology? How do contemporary Canadian and American national urban policies and intergovernmental relations differ, and how has historical evolution shaped these differences? Is local government autonomy supported by the absence or the presence of involvement in local and urban affairs by other levels of government?

Sellers, Jefferey M., Anders Lidström, and Yooil Bae. 2020. *Multilevel Democracy: How Local Institutions and Civil Society Shape the Modern State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [**Ch. 2, Postscript]**

\*Taylor, Zack, and Neil Bradford. 2020. “Governing Canadian Cities.” In *Canadian Cities in Transition: Perspectives for an Urban Age*, edited by Pierre Filion, Markus Moos, Tara Vinodrai and Ryan Walker, 33–50. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.

Silver, Hilary. 2016. “National Urban Policy in the Age of Obama.” Ch. 1 in *Urban Policy in the Time of Obama*, edited by James DeFilippis, 11–34*.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Horak. Martin. 2012. “Conclusion: Understanding Multi-Level Governance in Canada’s Cities.” Ch. 12 in *Sites of Governance: Multilevel Governance and Policy Making in Canada’s Big Cities*, edited by Martin Horak and Robert Young, 339–370*.* Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press.

Eckersley, Peter. 2017. “A New Framework for Understanding Subnational Policy-making and Local Choice.” *Policy Studies* 38(1): 76–90.

**Class 12**

**The Urban-Rural Cleavage in National Politics**

*Questions:* What are the dominant explanations for the growth of the urban-rural political cleavage in national politics? What are its effects?

Taylor, Zack, Jack Lucas, David A. Armstrong, and Ryan Bakker. 2023. “The Development of the Urban-Rural Cleavage in Anglo-American Democracies.” *Comparative Political Studies*: 00104140231194060.

Kenny, Michael, and Davide Luca. 2021. “The urban-rural polarisation of political disenchantment: an investigation of social and political attitudes in 30 European countries.” *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 14 (3):565–582.

Mettler, Suzanne, and Trevor Brown. 2022. “The growing rural-urban political divide and democratic vulnerability.” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 699(1): 130-142.