

Western University · Dept. of Political Science

Urban and Local Politics

Political Science 9524

Winter 2025

Instructor: Dr. Zack Taylor
E-mail: zack.taylor@uwo.ca
Office Hours: By appointment
Class time: Wednesdays 9am–12:00pm
Location: See OWL Brightspace

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 interrelated 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 graduate 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 – Urban Politics and Political Power in Cities

Class 1	Jan. 8	Introduction: What is Urban Politics?
Class 2	Jan. 15	Local Government and Cities: Institutional and Historical Perspectives
Class 3	Jan. 22	The Community Power Debate: Elite Theory vs. Pluralism
Class 4	Jan. 29	Urban Regimes and Governance

Part II – Politics and Policy in Cities

Class 5	Feb. 5	Interests in Urban Politics
Class 6	Feb. 12	Local Elections and Representation

*** *Family Day and Reading Week, Feb. 17–21* ***

Class 7	Feb. 26	Ideology in Local Politics <i>Virtual visit by Jack Lucas</i>
Class 8	Mar. 5	Cleavages and Group Conflict in Urban Politics
Class 9	Mar. 12	Racial Inequality and American Urban Politics

Part III – Urban Politics Beyond the Local

Class 10	Mar. 19	Multilevel Urban Governance <i>Mar. 21: Jessica Trounstone Lecture</i>
Class 11	Mar. 26	City Limits? Economic Competition and Local Agency
Class 12	Apr. 2	Governing Metropolitan Areas

*** *Wednesday, April 9 – final paper due* ***

COURSE WEBSITE

This course makes use of OWL Brightspace. Please refer to the course website regularly for announcements and course information.

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 on OWL. The books below have been ordered through the Western bookstore.

Students are encouraged to purchase the following books:

- Jessica Trounstein, *Segregation by Design* (Cambridge University Press, 2019)
*** This book is available on-line, but as we are reading the whole book it is recommended that you buy it.
- Jack Lucas, *Ideology in Canadian Municipal Politics* (University of Toronto Press, 2024)
*** This book is not available on-line.

A list of **supplemental readings for doctoral students** who intend to write the Comprehensive Examination on Urban Politics and Local Governance will be posted on OWL Brightspace.

EVALUATION

Participation (20%): 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.

Half your participation grade will be for **discussion questions**. Please submit *two* discussion questions using the Discussions feature in OWL before midnight the day before each class, for 10 classes out of the 11 spanning Classes 2 through 12. Your questions should be critical in nature, and may concern the implications of the readings, how they relate to other readings in the same or prior weeks, or the methodology. They cannot simply restate the research questions investigated by the readings' authors.

Depending on their availability, the instructor is arranging for some of the authors of our readings to join us virtually for a Q&A. Please come especially prepared when this occurs!

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. Sign up will occur in Class 2 for classes 3–12. Depending on how many students are enrolled, we may have more than one presenter per class.

Reading commentaries (5% each): Over the course of the term, students will submit *three* short papers of 3–4 pages in length that offer critical consideration of the assigned readings in a single class. The aim is to identify what is at stake in the week's material, evaluate the theoretical and empirical 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. You may use the questions at the top of each week's reading list as a starting point.

The commentaries must pertain to one class within the following groupings of classes:

1	Parts I and II: Classes 3, 4, 5, or 6
2	Class 9: Jessica Trounstone's book <i>Note:</i> Prof. Trounstone will be giving a lecture at Western on Friday, March 12, which you are required to attend in lieu of scheduling a thirteenth seminar session.
3	Parts II and III: Classes 7, 8, 9 10, 11, 12

Submit on OWL before midnight the day before the class in which that material is discussed. Papers should be double-spaced, and the 3–4 page limit does not include references. No cover page is necessary. Please put your name at the top of the first page, give your commentary a title, and number your pages.

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 (maximum 1 page) proposal for instructor feedback on or before March 5.**

MA students will write a paper of approximately 20 pages in length. PhD students will write a paper of approximately 25 pages in length. Papers should be double-spaced, and page lengths do not include cover pages or references. Please number your pages.

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.

Assignment submission: All assignments must be submitted via OWL Brightspace. The instructor will not accept assignments by e-mail.

Late assignments: The penalty for late assignments is two percentage points per day (including weekend days). *The three-day rule:* If you require an extension of three days or less on any assignment, you must send me an e-mail request *at least three days before the original due date*. The email must include reasons why you are seeking the extension. I will approve most reasonable requests. I will not approve requests submitted less than three days before the due date. If you require a longer extension, and/or are seeking broader accommodations for illness or other emergency situations, you must go through the Academic Counseling office.

Academic integrity: It is the responsibility of each student to be able to demonstrate the originality of their work. For every assignment, the sources of information and ideas must be properly referenced using a standard academic referencing style such as Chicago, APA, or MLA. Failure to properly reference ideas, concepts, and quotations in an assignment that are not your own will result in academic penalties as required by university policy:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

All upper-year students are expected to have a thorough understanding of the rules and conventions of academic writing. If you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism or how to reference sources, please visit the Writing Support Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing/> or review information at: <http://www.lib.uwo.ca/tutorials/plagiarism/>

Using **AI tools** such as ChatGPT to generate content for your assignments is unacceptable in this class, since it undermines the learning process. If I suspect that an assignment contains AI-generated writing, I will discuss its content in a meeting with you. If you are unable to explain and defend the content as your own work, I will require you to re-write the assignment. Any late penalties incurred since the original due date will be applied to the re-written assignment.

Help with writing: Learning to express ideas clearly is a central goal of the university experience. If academic writing does not come easily to you, you are strongly encouraged to make use of the Writing Support Centre: <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing/>

READING LIST AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Readings available online are either linked below or are available through the Western Libraries portal. Readings **not** available on-line are marked with an asterisk (*) and are posted on OWL.

Part I: Urban Politics and Political Power in Cities

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.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12144>

*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 City Development: Historical and Institutional 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](#)

*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.

Class 3

The Community Power Debate: Elite Theory 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 a ‘machine politics’ a type of regime? 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. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9906.1993.tb00300.x>
- 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. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087413518175>
- Stoker, Gerry. 1998. “Governance as Theory: Five Propositions”. *International Social Science Journal* 155, pp. 17–28. <https://doi.org/10.1111/issj.12189>

Part II: Politics and Policy in Cities

Class 5 Interests in Urban Politics

Questions: Urban political conflict very often revolves around the use of land – who gets to build what, where, and for whom – and who receives services. What is a ‘growth machine’ according to Molotch, and which societal and economic interests comprise it? How is a ‘growth machine’ similar to or different from Stone’s conceptualization of an ‘urban regime’ or earlier thinking about political machines? Can we reconcile the growth machine thesis with more recent research about homeowner and interest group politics in American cities? How does Anzia intervene in the earlier community power debate?

- Molotch, Harvey. 1976. “The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place.” *American Journal of Sociology* 82 (2):309–332. <https://doi.org/10.1086/226311>
- Fischel, William A. 2001. “Homevoters, Municipal Corporate Governance, and the Benefit View of the Property Tax.” *National Tax Journal* 54(1): 157–173.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41789539>
- Einstein, Katherine Levine, David M. Glick, and Maxwell Palmer. “Neighborhood defenders: Participatory politics and America’s housing crisis.” *Political Science Quarterly* 135, no. 2 (2020): 281–312. <https://doi.org/10.1002/polq.13035>
- Anzia, Sarah F. *Local Interests: Politics, Policy, and Interest Groups in US City Governments*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022. [Read Chapters 1, 4, 7, 10.] [LINK](#)

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. 213–30.
[LINK](#)
- Tennant, Paul. 1980. “Vancouver Civic Politics, 1929–1980.” *BC Studies* 46: 3–27.
<https://doi.org/10.14288/bcs.v0i46.1054>
- Lucas, Jack. 2021. “The size and sources of municipal incumbency advantage in Canada.” *Urban Affairs Review* 57(2): 373–401.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/10780874198792>

Class 7 Ideology in Local Politics

Questions: What is ideology? Thinking back to Class 2, what is the historical relationship between non-partisanship and ideological competition? How does Lucas's work challenge the perspective that Canadian local government is non-ideological?

Lucas, Jack. 2024. *Ideology in Canadian Municipal Politics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. **[Read Chapters 1–4, 7–8.]**

Jack Lucas will join us in our third hour!

Class 8 Cleavages and Group Conflict in Urban Politics

Questions: This week's readings make a variety of 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? How do these perspectives fit with earlier theories of urban policy, such as pluralism, elite theory, urban regime analysis, or growth machine theory?

- Macedo, Stephen. 2011. "Property-owning plutocracy: Inequality and American localism". In *Justice and the American Metropolis*, edited by Swannstrom, Todd and Clarissa Hayward, 33–58. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. [LINK](#)
- Hajnal, Zoltan, and Jessica Trounstein. 2014. "What Underlies Urban Politics? Race, Class, Ideology, Partisanship, and the Urban Vote." *Urban Affairs Review* 50 (1):63-99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087413485216>
- Ley, David. 1994. "Gentrification and the Politics of the New Middle Class." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 12 (1):53–74. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d120053>
- Doering, Jan, Daniel Silver, and Zack Taylor. 2020. "The Spatial Articulation of Urban Political Cleavages." *Urban Affairs Review* 57 (4): 911–951. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087420940789>
- Taylor, Zack and David Armstrong. 2025. "Political Divisions in Large Cities: The Socio-Spatial Basis of Legislative Behavior in Chicago and Toronto." *Journal of Politics*. <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/732976>

Class 9 Racial Inequality and American 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]
<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108555722>

Please attend Jessica Trounstine's lecture the week after this class!

Part III: Urban Politics Beyond the Local

Class 10 Multilevel Urban 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. [Chs. 2, 3, Postscript] [LINK](#)

*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. [LINK](#)

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. [LINK](#)

Eckersley, Peter. 2017. "A New Framework for Understanding Subnational Policy-making and Local Choice." *Policy Studies* 38(1): 76–90.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2016.1188910>

Class 11

City Limits? Economic Competition and Local Agency

Questions: What are the ‘interests’ of the limited city, as Paul Peterson calls them? Thinking back to the first part of the course, how does Peterson intervene in the earlier ‘community power’ debate? 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?

- *Goldsmith, M. 1995. “Autonomy and City Limits”, in D. Judge, G. Stoker and H. Wolman (eds), *Theories of Urban Politics*. London: Sage, pp. 228–52.
- Peterson, Paul. 1981. *City Limits*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Chs. 1–3] [LINK](#)
- 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.] [LINK](#)
- 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. <https://doi.org/10.1080/04353684.1989.11879583> or <https://www-jstor-org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/stable/490503>

Class 12

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? Are different types of metropolitan governance more or less likely in depending on which form of Sellers, Lidström, and Bae’s multilevel democracy we are in?

- *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. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2007.00303.x>
- Oakerson, Ronald J., and Roger B. Parks. 2011. “The Study of Local Public Economies: Multi-Organizational, Multi-Level Institutional Analysis and Development.” *Policy Studies Journal* 39 (1):147–67. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0072.2010.00400.x>
- 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):325–359. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087418773905>
- Taylor, Zack. 2022. “Regionalism from Above: Intergovernmental Relations in Canadian Metropolitan Governance.” *Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance* 26:139–159. <https://doi.org/10.5130/cjlg.vi26.8141>