

Western University
Department of Political Science

Power in the City

Political Science 3363F
Fall 2025

Instructor: Katharine McCoy
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Office Hours: Wed. 11am – 12pm (in person, starting Sept. 24)
or by appointment (in person or on Zoom)
Physical Office: SSC 7328

Class Time: Mondays, 3:30-5:30pm

Location: SSC 3010

Course Description

Most people now live in cities. As a result, much of politics is profoundly urban in character. It takes place in cities, it is shaped by urban processes, and it responds to distinctly urban problems, ranging from local economic development and housing inequality to public transit and immigrant integration. This course aims to introduce you to leading theories of urban politics, which we will apply to urban political processes in Canada, the United States, and Western Europe. Our main focus will be on *local* government in cities, but we will also examine the ways in which urban politics is inherently multi-level in character, and how other levels of government help to shape responses to urban policy issues. We will discuss how contrasting national traditions and institutional structures shape the terrain of urban politics; we will investigate the role played in urban politics at the local level by politicians, business, and community actors, and compare how they operate in various settings; and we will focus on two specific urban political issues that the class will select in discussion with the instructor.

The course will also give you the opportunity to learn about politics in an ‘**adopted city**’ of your choice, and to conduct an independent research project in which you analyze some aspect of urban politics in your ‘adopted city’ and/or another city or cities of your choice, using theories and concepts drawn from the course.

Prerequisites

You must have taken at least 1.0 full course equivalent in Political Science at the 2200 level to enroll for this course. This course is useful preparation for **POL4210 Globalization and Urban Politics**.

Course Format

This is a mixed format course. Each class will feature a lecture, but I will also periodically open up the class for discussion; there will be opportunities for online discussion as well. The reading load for the course is not heavy, but some of the readings are challenging, and **you must be committed to reading all the assigned material before each class**. Advance reading is a prerequisite for doing well (see “Course Evaluation” below). *All readings will be posted under “Resources” on our course OWL site unless otherwise noted. There is no textbook.*

Note also that this course has an **extensive writing component**. We build from small, simple assignments about your “adopted city” (see below) to a full research essay; we will give you feedback along the way. Students in previous years have found that this format has been very helpful to developing their writing skills, but **you must be prepared for the volume of writing**.

The course also has an element of **curriculum co-design**: during the week of October 27th, students will collectively choose two topics in urban politics that we will engage with during Weeks 11 and 12 of the course (Dec 3).

Course Requirements

The final grade for this course will be composed of three main elements:

1. *Participation (attendance and active engagement with course material) (15%).*

You are expected to be at every class; *attendance* will be taken and is worth 5% of your course grade. In addition, *active engagement* with course material is an important part of this course. Each week except the first week, I will post **discussion questions** on the OWL site. Please come to class prepared with some thoughtful reflections on them (as well as with any other thoughts or questions that you may have on the readings or other materials). I set aside time in class to focus on the discussion questions. However, the class is large, and you may not always get a chance to participate in class; in addition, some of you may be less comfortable participating than others. I have also set up a **discussion forum on OWL** where you can post responses to the discussion questions and react to responses that others have posted if you so desire. This is an alternative way of engaging with the course material. Active engagement in class and/or on the forum is worth 10% of your course grade.

2. *Writing assignments on your adopted city (35%).*

On September 16th in class, you will choose an “adopted city” whose politics you will learn about in detail. You will be expected to bring your knowledge of politics in your city to our class discussions. Between Week 3 and Week 6 of the course, you will write **three** assignments on some aspect of politics in your adopted city. These assignments will respond to factual questions about politics in your city. They will be due on OWL on Tuesday night after the relevant class (one day after class). I will post the questions on OWL **one week** before each assignment is due. The first two assignments will each be about 500 words long, and each will be worth 10% of your grade. The third assignment will be about 1000 words long and will be worth 15% of your grade.

Below you will find a list of suggestions for adopted cities. You can also choose one that is not on the list, *with my prior approval* (the main concern is that you choose a city on which there is enough information available):

Atlanta	Detroit	London (UK)	Montreal
Paris	Toronto	Vancouver	Vienna

3. Research project (50%)

A significant proportion of your grade in this course will be based on your research project. This project is a chance for you to investigate in depth some aspect of urban politics that you are particularly interested in. You may select an aspect of urban politics in your ‘adopted city’ and investigate it in depth using concepts from the course; or you may compare aspects of urban politics across two or more different cities. The research project has two components:

a. Proposal for your research paper (10%)

By **November 14th**, you will put together a 500 to 750-word research proposal. The aim of the proposal is to focus your research question and develop a strategy for the rest of your research. Full guidelines will be handed out mid-way through the term.

b. Research paper (40%)

The final product of your research project will be a 3000 to 4000-word paper on your research topic. The paper must be double spaced with a consistent academic referencing style and a complete bibliography at the end. Full guidelines will be handed out mid-way through the term. The final paper will be due on **December 9th**.

Course Policies

Submitting assignments: All written work should be submitted via the course's OWL site. Work handed in late will be subject to a penalty of 2% for each day past the deadline, weekends included. If you foresee problems meeting submission deadlines, please consult the instructor early; accommodations can be made with adequate advance notice – this means *at least two days before the deadline*. While I am generally willing to grant brief 24 hour extensions for reasonable cause if you ask me in advance, *requests for longer extensions must go through Academic Counselling*. I do not grant extensions requested on or after the due date!

Academic Accommodation: If a situation should arise where a student requires accommodation because of a medical or personal issue or because they have flexible deadline accommodation from Accessible Education, the student should visit his or her faculty's Academic Counselling office so that an academic counsellor can make a recommendation for academic accommodation to the student's lecturer.

This procedure means that you **do not provide your Instructor with any details of your situation. Students may not approach the Instructor directly for accommodation and should never forward medical documentation to the instructor.**

Academic Counselling for the Faculty of Social Science is located at SSC 2105

Telephone: 519 661-2011

Recorded information: 519 661-2052

Fax: 519 661-3384

Email: ssaco@uwo.ca

Academic integrity: To protect and uphold academic integrity in the class, it is the responsibility of each student to be able to demonstrate the originality of his or her work. At a minimum, for every assignment, the sources of all information and ideas must be properly referenced using an accepted academic referencing style of your choice (I prefer Chicago author-date, though it isn't required). 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.

All upper-year students are expected to have a good 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/>

Use of AI tools: Using AI tools such as ChatGPT to generate content for your assignments is unacceptable in this class, since it undermines the learning process. If we suspect that an assignment contains AI-generated writing, we will discuss its content in a meeting with you. If you are unable to explain and defend the content as your own work, we 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.

Instructor contact: I encourage you to bring any questions or concerns about course material, requirements or assignments to me. My office hours and contact for appointments are listed above. Questions or concerns can also be sent to my e-mail: kmccoy7@uwo.ca. I will respond within 24-48 hours, except on weekends and holidays.

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/>

Grade Reviews and Appeals: Students must wait **72 hours** after their grade is released before contacting the lecturer about their assignment grade.

If you are concerned that your assignment was not graded fairly, you may formally appeal your assignment grade **within 10 days of the assignment grade being released**. To appeal your assignment, you must provide a one-page statement explaining why the comments provided to justify your grade are *inaccurate or unfounded*.

Please note that in the absence of a clear error that renders the original grade unsupportable, an appeal that is essentially an invitation to second-guess the original evaluation will be dismissed. A student's mere dissatisfaction with a grade does not constitute a ground of appeal. Similarly, a claim that the grade does not reflect the student's knowledge of the material or the effort expended is not a valid appeal ground. **Please note that grades may be either raised or lowered on appeal to the lecturer.**

Course Schedule and Required Readings

Week 1 (Sept 8): Introduction: Cities and Urban Politics

Our first session will include an overview of the structure, aims and requirements of the course. We will also discuss what a ‘city’ is, what urban politics is, and why it is important – both to our daily lives, and as an object of study in political science.

Wirth, Louis. 1938. “Urbanism as a Way of Life.” *American Journal of Sociology* 44(1). Read excerpt, pp. 1-18.

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.

Part I: Urban Political Institutions in Comparative Perspective

Week 2 (Sept 15) Local and Urban Politics: Differing National Traditions

*** Choose your adopted city ***

Keating, Michael. 1991. “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.

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. 2008. *The Craft of Research*. 3rd ed. Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing and Publishing. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, pp. 251-267.

Week 3 (Sept 22) Local Elections and Political Parties

Mevellec, Anne, Brandon Bolduc, Guy Chiasson and Veika Donatien. 2024. “Municipal Elections and Political Incorporation.” Chapter 8 in Kristin R. Good and Jen Nelles, eds. *Canadian Urban Governance in Comparative Perspective*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 246-266.

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. 2008. *The Craft of Research*. 3rd ed. Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing and Publishing. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, skim pp. 68-82 read 96-101

*** Short Writing Assignment #1 due on OWL Sept. 25th (Thursday) ***

Week 4 (Sept 29) * National Day for Truth and Reconciliation – No Class *

Week 5 (Oct 6): Local Political Leadership

Greasley, Stephen and Gerry Stoker. 2009. "Urban Political Leadership." In Jonathan Davies and David Imbroscio, eds., *Theories of Urban Politics*, 2nd ed. pp. 125–136. Los Angeles: Sage.

Sancton, Andrew. 2015. "Mayors and Local Political Leadership" in *Canadian Urban Politics*, 2nd ed. Toronto: Oxford. Excerpts: "Models of Mayoral Leadership" (pp. 239–247) and "How Mayors Become Powerful" (pp. 232–236) — in that order.

The Canadian Press. 2024. "A look at one year of strong mayor powers in Ontario." *CTV News*, July 22.

Access at: <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/a-look-at-one-year-of-strong-mayor-powers-in-ontario-1.6972452>

Luczka, Connor. 2025. "Do Municipalities have Legal Authority to Fight Strong Mayor Powers? Not According to Experts." *The Canadian Press*, May 16.

Access at: <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/wire-feeds/do-municipalities-have-legal-authority-fight/docview/3205168623/se-2>

*** Short Writing Assignment #2 due on OWL Oct 9th (Thursday) ***

Part II: Power in the City

Week 6 (Oct 13): Local Democracies or Growth Machines: Who Governs the City?

Harding, Alan. 2009. "The History of Community Power." In Jonathan Davies and David Imbroscio, eds., *Theories of Urban Politics*, 2nd ed. Los Angeles: Sage. Excerpt: pp. 27–39.

Bachrach, Peter and Morton S. Baratz. 1962. "Two Faces of Power." *American Political Science Review* 56 (4): 947–952.

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. 2008. *The Craft of Research*. 3rd ed. Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing and Publishing. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, skim pp. 40–48.

Week 7 (Oct 20): Community Activism and Urban Social Movements

Rabrenovic, Gordana. 2009. "Urban Social Movements." In Jonathan Davies and David Imbroscio, eds., *Theories of Urban Politics*, 2nd ed., pp. 239–254. Los Angeles: Sage.

Einstein, Katherine Levine, Maxwell Palmer, and David M. Glick. 2019. "Who Participates in Local Government? Evidence from Meeting Minutes." *Perspectives on Politics* 17(1): 28–46.

Tattersall, Amanda, and Kurt Iveson. 2022. "People power strategies in contemporary housing movements." *International Journal of Housing Policy* 22(2): 251–277.

*** Students Choose Course Topics for Weeks 11 – 12 ***

*** Short Writing Assignment #3 due on OWL Oct. 29 (Tuesday) ***

Week 8 (Oct 27th): Urban Regimes and Governing Capacity

Stone, Clarence. 1993. "Urban Regimes and the Capacity to Govern: A Political Economy Approach." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 15 (1): 1-28.

*** Fall Reading Week (Nov 3-9) ***

Part III: Urban Politics Beyond the Local

Week 9 (Nov 10): Governing Metropolitan Areas

Savitch, Hank and Ron Vogel. 2009. "Regionalism and Urban Politics." In Jonathan Davies and David Imbroscio, eds., *Theories of Urban Politics*, 2nd ed., pp. 106-124. Los Angeles: Sage.

Neill, William J.V. 2015. "Carry on Shrinking?: The Bankruptcy of Urban Policy in Detroit". *Planning Practice & Research*, 30(1): 1-14.

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. 2008. *The Craft of Research*. 3rd ed. Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing and Publishing. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, skim pp. 173-186.

Week 10 (Nov 17): Multilevel Urban Governance and Canada's Housing Crisis

Horak, Martin. 2024. "Multilevel Urban Governance in Canada." Chapter 4 in Kristin R. Good and Jen Nelles, eds. *Canadian Urban Governance in Comparative Perspective*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 108-140.

Eidelman, Gabriel, Tomas Hachard and Enid Slack, eds. 2022. *The Municipal Role in Housing*. Toronto: Institute for Municipal Finance and Governance.

<https://imfg.munkschool.utoronto.ca/report/the-municipal-role-in-housing/>

*** Research Paper Proposal due November 21 ***

Part IV: Selected Issues in Urban Politics

Week 11 (Nov 24): TBD

Week 12 (Dec 1): TBD

*** Final Papers due on OWL December 9th ***

Writing Resources

- Link to librarian consultations: <https://calendar.lib.uwo.ca/appointments/consultations>
- If you write a paper well, you can win money: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/wlura/>
- Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation
<https://libgen.li/edition.php?id=136169993>
- The Craft of Research: <https://libgen.li/edition.php?id=136309325>