

Western University  
Department of Political Science

## **Globalization and Urban Politics**

Political Science 4210G / 9755B  
Winter 2026

*this is a DRAFT syllabus as of December 11, 2025, and is subject to change*

**Instructor:** Martin Horak  
**E-mail:** mhorak@uwo.ca  
**Office Hours:** Tuesdays 1:00 – 2:00 in office, or at other times by appointment on Zoom  
**Physical Office:** SSC 7237

**Class Time and Location:** Wednesdays, 1:30 – 3:30pm, location noted on class OWL site.

### **Course Description**

Cities have long been engines of social and economic change. Over the past thirty years, cities around the world have been focal points for globalization and have in turn been transformed by it. *How social and economic change affects city politics at the local level is the central theme of this course.* How can – and how do – local governments respond to changing urban economic conditions, the cultural diversification of urban populations, increasing social inequality, the need for new infrastructure, and a host of other changes and challenges? What do they do when they lack the powers and resources to respond on their own? When and how can urban politics help to overcome social and economic divisions, and when and how does it exacerbate them? How does contemporary urban politics intersect and interact with national politics? These are the kinds of questions that we will be discussing. The primary empirical focus is on Canadian and American cities, but in broader and global comparative perspective.

The course begins in Weeks 1 – 7 with foundational material. We will discuss the institutions and processes through which cities are governed; what globalization is and how it has re-shaped cities; how and why local governments have responded differently to the challenge of thriving in a global economy; how globalization has re-shaped local political cleavages and issues in cities; and how contemporary urban politics connects with national political debates. Some reading will be review for those who have taken POL3363, but we will synthesize it in new ways.

In Weeks 8, 9 and 11 we will focus on three city-level case studies: Toronto, Detroit, and London, Ontario. Each of these cities has faced different social and economic challenges in the era of globalization, which have in turn led to distinct patterns of political conflict and policy response. We will devote Week 10 to instructor support for student proposal development.

In Weeks 12 and 13 we will examine some thematic issues in urban politics. *The syllabus for these weeks is co-designed by the students and the instructor* (see below).

### Course Format and Readings

This is a mixed-format course. During the first seven weeks of the course, which discuss foundational conceptual and theoretical material, I will present lectures with visuals (45-60 minutes) at the start of our class; we will follow these with discussion. I may also present occasional short lecture segments later in the course, but in later weeks, most class time will be devoted to discussion. This means that **you** control the agenda of the course to a significant degree by contributing your questions and insights to our discussion in regular class time.

During the week of March 23 – 27 (Week 11 of the course), our regular class will be replaced by a four-hour (approximately) **field trip** featuring a walking tour of downtown London, Ontario. The exact timing of this trip will be determined through discussion in class. **Participation in the field trip is required** and will count towards your course participation grade.

You will also influence the agenda of the course by choosing topics for Weeks 12 and 13 of the course. We will do this during the seventh class.

4210G / 09755B is a **reading-based course**. The reading load, while not overwhelming, is substantial, and some of the readings (especially in the first half of the course) are quite challenging. *You must be committed to reading the assigned material before each class.* Advance reading is a prerequisite for doing well in the course. All readings will be posted on the course's OWL site unless otherwise noted. No purchase of materials is necessary.

### Course Evaluation for Undergraduate Students (POL 4210G)

The final grade for this course will be composed of the following elements:

#### 1. Participation in class discussion (15%).

In a reading-based seminar course such as this one, lively class discussion is what brings ideas to life and helps to produce a valuable learning experience for all. *Attendance in every class of the term is expected*, and you are expected to participate as actively as you are able in discussion and debate. I will take attendance at the start of each class and will subtract 1% from your participation grade for each unexcused absence.

Starting with Week 2, I will post **discussion questions** for each week's material on OWL one week before the class. Please come to class with some thoughtful, informed responses based on your engagement with the week's readings. For those who face challenges speaking in class and/or would like to add to their in-class comments, a weekly Forum on OWL provides an additional venue for engagement.

## 2. Short reading response essay (20%).

You will write one reading response essay of about 1500 words. In Week 2, you will choose **one** of **Weeks 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 or 9** during which to write this essay.

In the short essay, you will analyze that week's reading material based on a question developed by the instructor. The instructor will post the essay question one week ahead of the due date, along with the discussion questions for that week (see above). The essay will be due on OWL **at the end of the day before the class in which the relevant material is discussed**. Your short essay will present a clearly developed argument that responds to the assigned question. It will be written in standard academic format, with citations and a reference list. Research beyond the class readings is not necessary, but it may help you to develop a stronger answer.

## 3. Downtown redevelopment blog (15%).

Following our field trip (Week 11) you will write a blog piece of about 1000 words, in which you will integrate observations from the field trip with concepts discussed in class. The blog post will be due on **Tuesday, March 31<sup>st</sup>** (the Tuesday after the week of the field trip). Detailed guidelines will be handed out in class the week before the field trip.

## 4. Research project (10% proposal, 40% final paper; 50% total).

Your research project is a chance for you to investigate in depth some aspect of urban politics or policy that you are particularly interested in. You will devise your own explanatory *research question* about *how or why* something happens the way that it does in your area of interest. Your paper will then answer your question by bringing together academic work on your subject with evidence from one or more cases.

There are two elements to your research project:

- a) By **Monday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>**, you will submit a research proposal of about 1000 words. The proposal will lay out your research question and your plan for completing your research. It is worth 10% of your course grade.
- b) At the end of the course, you will hand in a 3500 to 4000-word research paper in which you develop a well-crafted answer to your research question. The paper is worth 40% and is due on **Thursday, April 16<sup>th</sup>** (8 days after our last class).

Guidelines for the research project will be made available part-way through the course.

## Course Requirements and Evaluation for Graduate Students (POL 9755)

Graduate students will have **additional reading and assignment requirements**, as follows:

1. Instead of the reading response essay, graduate students will write one longer (about 3000 word) **literature review paper** worth **20%** of the final grade. This paper will engage with an *additional* set of 10 – 15 academic readings, identifying and critically evaluating questions, themes, findings and/or methodologies in a body of work that addresses a specific topic related to contemporary urban politics. By **Monday, February 9<sup>th</sup>** each graduate student will submit to the instructor a proposed topic for additional reading, along with a preliminary reading list. The list will then be finalized with input from the instructor. The paper will be due on OWL on **Monday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>** – the first Monday after Reading Week.
2. The final research project will follow the component structure, weighting format and schedule outlined above, but the final paper will be longer – approx.. 5000 – 6000 words.
3. All writing by graduate students will be evaluated in accordance with standards of quality appropriate to the stage of education of each student (ie, MA or PhD candidate).

## 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. *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](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 one-on-one meeting with you. If you are unable to explain and defend the content as your own original 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.

**Instructor contact:** I encourage you to bring any questions or concerns about course material, requirements or assignments to me promptly in person or by email. See above for contact details.

**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/>

## **COURSE OUTLINE AND READING SCHEDULE**

- *The assigned readings are best read in the order listed on the schedule below.*
- *All readings that are not hyperlinked will be posted on the course's OWL website.*

### **Part I: Globalization and Urban Governance: Theoretical Foundations**

#### ***Week 1 (Jan 7): Introduction: An Urbanizing World***

Soja, Edward and J. Miguel Kanai. 2007. "The Urbanization of the World." In Ricky Burdett and Dejan Sudjic, eds., *Endless City*. London: Phaidon: 54–69.

Ritchie, Hannah, Veronika Samborska and Max Roser. 2025. "Urbanization." *Our World in Data*, <https://ourworldindata.org/urbanization>

We will also discuss the structure and requirements of the course.

#### ***Week 2 (Jan 14): Institutions, Democracy, and Urban Politics***

Sellers, Jefferey, Anders Lidstrom and Yooil Bae. 2020. Ch. 1, "Introduction: Taking Local Institutions Seriously." *Multilevel Democracy: How Local Institutions and Civil Society Shape the Modern State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1-18.

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*. Aldershot: Edward Elgar: 13-35.

*NB: This reading is review for those who have taken POL3363.*

England, Kim and John Mercer. 2006. "Canadian Cities in Continental Context: Global and Continental Perspectives in Canadian Urban Development". In Trudi Bunting and Pierre Filion, eds. *Canadian Cities in Transition* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Oxford: Oxford University Press: 24-39.

**\*\* undergraduate students choose weeks for reading response (Week 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 or 9) \*\***

### ***Week 3 (Jan 21): Globalization and Cities: Origins, Processes and Consequences***

Sassen, Saskia. 2005. "The Global City: Introducing a Concept". *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 11: 27-43.

Borja, Jordi and Manuel Castells. 1997. "Chapter 2: The Impact of Globalization on the Spatial and Social Structure of Cities". In *Local & Global: Management of Cities in the Information Age*. London: Earthscan, pp. 16-44.

*NB: You do not need to read the inset case study boxes (they are hard to read!)*

Horak, Martin, Jack Lucas and Zack Taylor. 2025. "Introduction: Bringing Local Politics Back In". In Martin Horak, Jack Lucas and Zack Taylor, eds. *City Politics in Canada: Forty Years of Continuity and Change*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 3-35.

*NB: Only read pp. 5-12 for this week.*

### ***Week 4 (Jan 28): Globalization, Urban Governance and Multilevel Governance***

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

Harvey, David. 1989. "From managerialism to entrepreneurialism: the transformation of urban governance in late capitalism". *Geografiska Annaler* 71B, pp. 3–17.

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

*NB: This reading is review for those who have taken POL3363.*

### ***Week 5 (Feb 4): Urban Growth and Development: Local Strategies in a Global Era***

Savitch, H.V. and Paul Kantor. 2002. "Chapter 2: Toward a Theory of Urban Development". In *Cities in the International Marketplace*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 29-54.

Florida, R., 2003. "Cities and the creative class." *City & Community*, 2(1), pp.3-19.

Siemiatycki, Matti. 2013. "Riding the wave: explaining cycles in urban mega-project development." *Journal of Economic Policy Reform* 16(2), pp. 160-178.

Spicer, Zac. 2024. "The Politics and Governance of Growth and Economic Development." In Kristin Good and Jen Nelles, eds., *Canadian Urban Governance In Comparative Perspective*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 311-341.

**\*\* preliminary graduate student reading lists due Monday, February 9<sup>th</sup> \*\***

***Week 6 (Feb 11): Local Politics in Globalized Cities: Cleavages and Policy Debates***

Horak, Martin, Jack Lucas and Zack Taylor. 2025. "Conclusion: Change and Continuity in Canadian City Politics". In Martin Horak, Jack Lucas and Zack Taylor, eds. *City Politics in Canada: Forty Years of Continuity and Change*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 247-271.

Doering, Jan, Daniel Silver, and Zack Taylor. 2021. "The spatial articulation of urban political cleavages." *Urban Affairs Review* 57(4), pp. 911-951.

Cleveland, Tristan and Elizabeth Schwartz. 2024. "Municipalities, Urban Governance, and Climate Change." In Kristin Good and Jen Nelles, eds., *Canadian Urban Governance In Comparative Perspective*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 311-341.

Sidney, Mara and Adam Straub. 2024. "Addressing Poverty and Social Polarization." In Kristin Good and Jen Nelles, eds., *Canadian Urban Governance In Comparative Perspective*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 466 - 502.

**\*\* Reading Week – February 14-22<sup>nd</sup> \*\***

**\*\* graduate student literature reviews due on OWL Monday, February 23<sup>rd</sup> \*\***

***Week 7 (Feb 25): 'Urbanity' in Contemporary National Politics***

Magnusson, Warren. 2014. "The symbiosis of the urban and the political." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38(5), pp. 1561-1575.

Taylor, Zack, Jack Lucas et al. 2024. "The development of the urban-rural cleavage in Anglo-American democracies." *Comparative Political Studies* 57(4), pp. 1339-1374.

Buzogány, Aron, and Tobias Spori. 2025. "Cities against democratic backsliding: democratic resilience through urban resistance in the Visegrad 4 capitals." *Contemporary Politics* 31(4), pp. 544-567.

Beveridge, Ross, Matthias Naumann, and David Rudolph. 2024. "The rise of 'infrastructural populism': Urban infrastructure and right-wing politics." *Geography Compass* 18.2 (2024): e12738.

**\*\* class chooses topics for weeks 12 – 13 \*\***

## **Part II: Socio-Economic Change and Urban Politics: Three Case Studies**

### ***Week 8 (Mar 4): Toronto: Governing Diversity and Inequality in a Growing Global City***

Hulchanski, J. David. 2010. *The Three Cities Within Toronto*. Toronto: Cities Centre, University of Toronto. NB: Scan this report quickly for overall findings; no need to absorb the details.

Horak, Martin and Zack Taylor. 2025. "Toronto." In Martin Horak, Jack Lucas and Zack Taylor, eds. *City Politics in Canada: Forty Years of Continuity and Change*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 62-97.

Siemiatycki, Myer. 2011. "Governing Immigrant City." *American Behavioral Scientist* 55(9), pp. 1214–34.

Horak, Martin, and Aaron A. Moore. 2015. "Policy Shift without Institutional Change: The Precarious Place of Neighborhood Revitalization in Toronto." In Clarence N. Stone et al., *Urban Neighborhoods in a New Era*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 182-208.

Filion, Pierre, Markus Moos, and Gary Sands. 2023. "Urban neoliberalism, smart city, and big tech: the aborted Sidewalk Labs Toronto experiment." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 45(9), pp. 1625-1643.

### ***Week 9 (Mar 11): Detroit: Deindustrialization, Decline, Racial Politics and Rebirth***

Readings for this week will be finalized early in the term.

### ***Week 10 (Mar 18): No Class: Proposal Preparation Week***

This week we will NOT have a class on Thursday. Instead, I will book one-on-one meetings with every student in the class on March 16 or March 17 to discuss their research proposals.

**\*\* research proposals due on OWL Monday, March 23<sup>rd</sup> \*\***

### ***Week 11 (Mar 25): London, Ontario: The Politics of Redevelopment in a Changing Core***

During this week, our regular class will be replaced by a four-hour (approximately) class field trip and walking tour of downtown London (and possibly also the Village SoHo redevelopment project just south of downtown). Joined by local experts and policy leaders, we will explore the recent history of social and economic change and revitalization initiatives in London's core.

**Field trip timing:** The preferred time is the afternoon of Thursday March 25<sup>th</sup>. However, we will finalize the exact timing of the field trip based on mutual consultation early on in the semester.

**The field trip is a required class component.** You will be writing a reflection blog based on your field trip experiences, which is worth . If by chance COVID-19 conditions do not permit a group field trip, I will develop guidelines for a self-guided walking tour instead.

Readings for this week will be assigned closer to the date of our field trip.

*\*\* field trip blog posts due **Tuesday, March 31<sup>st</sup>** \*\**

### **Part III: Selected Topics in Urban Politics and Governance**

During the last two weeks (**Week 12, April 1 and Week 13, April 8**) we will discuss selected topics that we will choose as a class in Week 5 of the course. I will set the reading list for these weeks after we have chosen the topics.

*\*\* final research papers due on **OWL Thursday, April 16<sup>th</sup>** \*\**