

# POLT 286: Power, Politics, and the American City

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Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30 pm - 2:45 pm, King 227

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## 1 Description

As citizens bemoan federal gridlock, mayors and city officials are stepping up to address some of our greatest social challenges. Or so claim city advocates. In reality, cities are highly limited, legally, politically, and financially. This course unpacks how cities work and what they can do to take on poverty, crime, and inequality. Coupling theory with empirical data, we will push beyond anecdote to unpack what cities can and cannot accomplish in today's America.

## 2 Objectives

1. Develop a fluency in the mechanics of local government.
2. Apply larger political science theory to city politics.
3. Dissect urban social challenges and theorize potential responses.

## 3 Class Structure

Classes will be a blend of lecture and discussion, seeking to combine canonical debates of urban politics with new policy challenges. This course will be built around modern politics, with an emphasis on using theory to help us better understand current events.

Each week's readings will be a blend of canonical theory, empirical tests, and policy specific articles. I have worked to make the readings as concise as possible. Consequently, you are expected to read them carefully and completely. Readings will be accessible on Blackboard. Specific readings for each week will change as the course evolves over the semester.

## 4 Grading

Grading will be built from the following measures:

- 10% participation
- 15% weekly memos
- 25% exam 1 (in-class, closed-book)
- 25% exam 2 (in-class, closed-book)
- 25% final paper

Participation consists of attendance and active, informed discussion during class. Attendance is expected at each class. Informed discussion consists of comments that reflect engagement with the materials in a way that advances the conversation. Students with weak participation marks will be notified early in the semester.

You are responsible for weekly, 300-word memos which synthesize the readings and respond to a prompt. These memos will be submitted each week by 6:00 am on Tuesday. Of the 10 weeks in which a memo may be submitted, two may be skipped, for a total of 8 memos.

The course contains two exams, one mid-semester and one at the end of the semester. These exams will cover the substance of the course readings and lectures. The exams are in-class, closed-book, and essay-based. The exams are non-cumulative, however, larger concepts of the first half of the semester will be useful in answering questions on the second exam.

The final paper is an 8 to 10 page double-spaced policy memo based on an urban policy challenge of your choosing. Your final paper will detail the policy challenge, reference how political science theory can help better address the challenge, and close with concrete policy recommendations informed by political science theory. The paper is due Tuesday, December 14th at 4:00 pm, which is the slot the College has assigned for the course's final exam.

## 5 Collaboration Policy and Honor Code

The Oberlin College Honor Code applies to all work produced for this class. You are encouraged to work together to understand the readings and materials. However, memos must contain independent work. Sources used for all assignments must be properly cited using APSR formatting.

## 6 Accommodations

Students with a documented need for accommodation should meet with me during the first week of class.

## 7 Laptop Policy

Laptops are not permitted to be open during class. All slides will be available online, and I ask that notes be taken by hand. If you have a specific need for an accommodation, please let me know.

## 8 Structure

| Week | Topic                                | Notes                        |
|------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1    | Introduction                         | Class canceled for 8/30      |
| 2    | Ground Rules and Power               |                              |
| 3    | Exit and the Push of Cities          |                              |
| 4    | Agglomeration and the Pull of Cities |                              |
| 5    | Inside the City/Neighborhoods        | Paper proposal due 9/28      |
| 6    | Machines and Corruption              |                              |
| 7    | Services and Enforcement             | Exam 1 on 10/12              |
| 8    | Fall Recess                          | No class                     |
| 9    | The Suburbs                          |                              |
| 10   | Race and Space                       |                              |
| 11   | State and Federal Policy             |                              |
| 12   | Neoliberalism and Privatization      |                              |
| 13   | TBD                                  | Thanksgiving Recess on 11/23 |
| 14   | People v. Places                     | Exam 2 on 11/30              |
| 15   | Presentations                        | Final paper due 12/14        |

## 9 Readings

Note: Readings will evolve with the course. Each week's readings will be confirmed at least one week in advance.

### 1. Introduction 8/29 & 8/31

- Why do cities believed to be promising for addressing social challenges?
- How are cities limited in filling this role?
- What factors make the study of city politics different than national politics?

Readings

- *None*

Notes: No class on 8/31 due to American Political Science Association Annual Meeting.

### 2. The Ground Rules 9/5 & 9/7

- How do cities fit in a federal structure?
- What features are unique to city politics?

- (c) How have political scientists thought about who holds power in the city?

Readings

- Judd, Dennis R. and Todd Swanstrom. 2015. *City Politics*. pp. 1-43. [T]
- Altshuler, Alan and David Luberoff. “Mega-Projects: The Changing Politics of Urban Public Investment”. pp. 45-75. [Th]
- Chait, Jonathan. “Why the Worst Governments in America are Local Governments.” *New York Magazine*. [Th]

3. **Exit and the Limits of Cities** 9/12 & 9/14

- (a) How do cities appeal to businesses and residents?  
(b) How do groups leverage the threat of exit?  
(c) Can cities redistribute and address social challenges?

Readings

- Dahl, Robert. 1960. “Who Governs?” pp. 1-8, 89-103, 189-199. [T]
- Bachrach, Peter and Morton S. Baratz. 1963. “Decisions and Nondecisions: An Analytical Framework.” *The American Political Science Review* 57(3): pp. 632-642. [T]
- Peterson, Paul E. 1981. “The Interests of the Limited City” in Judd and Kantor. pp. 10-20. [T]
- Hirschman, Albert O. 1970. *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Response to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*. pp. 1-20, 120-126. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.04043.0001.001>. [Th]
- Judd and Swanstrom. pp. 137-173. [Th]

4. **Agglomeration and the Pull of Cities** 9/19 & 9/21

- (a) Why live in a city?  
(b) When do cities subsidize growth?  
(c) What leverage does the city have in negotiating with business?

Readings

- Logan, John R. and Harvey. L. Molotch. 1987. *Urban Fortunes*. pp. 1-98 (skim 66-98). [T]
- Glaeser, Edward. 2011. *Triumph of the City*. pp. 17-40. [T]
- Kantor, Paul and H. V. Savitch. 1993. “Can Politicians Bargain with Business?” in Judd and Kantor. pp 120-133. [Th]
- Orfield, Myron. 1998. “Building Consensus” in Judd and Kantor. pp. 334-339. [Th]
- Thompson, Derek. “The Miracle of Minneapolis”. March 2015. *The Atlantic*. [Th]

5. **Neighborhoods and the City's Insides** 9/26 & 9/28

- (a) How should we define a neighborhood?
- (b) What are the interests of residents towards their neighborhood versus the city as a whole?
- (c) How do institutions reflect this trade-off?

Readings

- Hwang, Jackelyn. 2016. "The Social Construction of a Gentrifying Neighborhood: Reifying and Redefining Identity and Boundaries in Inequality". *Urban Affairs Review* 52(1): 98-128. [T]
- Hankinson, Michael. 2017. "When Do Renters Behave Like Homeowners? High Rent, Price Anxiety, and NIMBYism". *Working Paper*. [T]
- Been, Vicki. 2010. "Community Benefits Agreements: A New Local Government Tool or Another Variation on the Exactions Theme?". *The University of Chicago Law Review* 77(1):5-35. [T]

6. **Machines and Corruption** 10/3 & 10/5

- (a) What are the incentives of politicians once in office?
- (b) Does institutional structure shape politician behavior?
- (c) How have reformers attempted to combat corruption and what are the consequences of their efforts?

Readings

- Judd, Dennis R. and Todd Swanstrom. 2015. *City Politics*. pp 48-110. [T]
- Trounstine, Jessica. 2006. "Dominant Regimes and the Demise of Urban Democracy." *Journal of Politics* 68(4): pp. 879-893. [T]
- Judd, Dennis R. and David Laslo. 2010. "The Regime Moment: The Brief but Storied Career of Urban Regimes in American Cities." pp. 35-45. [T]

7. **Services and Enforcement** 10/10 & 10/12

- (a) Is there a Democrat/Republican way to take out the trash?
- (b) How much do elections matter for policy outcomes?

Readings

- Kelling, George L. and James Q. Wilson. 1982. "Broken Windows". *The Atlantic*.
- Lacey, Nicola, and David Soskice. 2015. "Crime, Punishment, and Segregation in the United States: The Paradox of Local Democracy." *Punishment & Society*, 17:4, pp. 454-481.
- Sances, Michael and Hye Young You. 2017. "Who Pays for Government? Descriptive Representation and Exploitative Revenue Sources." *Journal of Politics* 79(3): 1090-1094.

Note: Exam 1 on 10/12

8. **Fall Recess** 10/17 & 10/19

9. **The Suburbs** 10/24 & 10/26

- (a) How do cities and towns interact?
- (b) How are the politics of the suburbs different than those of the center city?
- (c) When is localism preferable to regionalism in addressing social challenges?

Readings

- Judd, Dennis R. and Todd Swanstrom. 2015. *City Politics*. pp. 252-308 (“Rise of the Fragmented Metropolis” and “Governing the Fragmented Metropolis”).
- Fischel, William A. 2010. *The Homevoter Hypothesis*. Chapters 1 and 3.
- Glaeser, Edward. 2011. *Triumph of the City*. PP. 165-222.
- Oliver, J. Eric and Shang E. Ha. 2007. “Vote Choice in Suburban Elections.” 101(3): 393-408.

10. **Race and Space** 10/31 & 11/2

- (a) Why are cities more diverse than suburbs?
- (b) How has public policy contributed to racial segregation?
- (c) How does race affect political outcomes?

Readings

- Sands, Melissa. 2017. “Exposure to Inequality Affects Support for Redistribution.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 114(4). pp. 663-668.
- Enos, Ryan D.. 2014. “Causal Effect of Intergroup Contact on Exclusionary Attitudes”. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 111(10): pp. 3699-3704.
- Daniel Hopkins (2009). “The Diversity Discount: When Increasing Racial and Ethnic Diversity Prevents Tax Increases.” *Journal of Politics* 71:1, pp. 160-177.
- Massey, Douglas and Nancy Denton. *American Apartheid*. Chapters 2 and 4.
- Semuels, Alana. 12 July 2016. “Segregation in Paradise?”. *The Atlantic*.

11. **State and Federal Urban Policy** 11/7 & 11/9

- (a) How do state and federal power affect city politics?
- (b) Can cities defy state and federal regulation?

Readings

- Judd, Dennis R. and Todd Swanstrom. 2015. *City Politics*. pp. 182-226.
- Macey, Jonathan R. 1990. "Federal Deference to Local Regulators and The Economic Theory of Regulation: Toward a Public-Choice Explanation of Federalism." *Virginia Law Review*.

12. **Neoliberalism and Privatizing the City** 11/14 & 11/16

- (a) What are the side effects of privatization?
- (b) What are the limits to market-based approaches of social policy?

Readings

- Peck, Jamie and Tickell, Adam. 2002. "Neoliberalizing Space". *Antipode*.
- McKenzie, E. 1994. *Privatopia: Homeowner Associations and the Rise of Residential Private Government*. Chapter 1.
- Hackworth, Jacob. 2007. *The Neoliberal City*. Chapter 1.
- Kohn, M. 2004. *Brave New Neighborhoods: The Privatization of Public Space*.
- Katz, Michael. "Why Don't American Cities Burn?" Chapter 4.

13. **TBD** 11/21

*Open Lecture. Subject matter and readings will be set mid-semester based on student interest.*

- (a) *TBD*

Readings

- *TBD*

Notes: No class on 11/23 for the Thanksgiving Break.

14. **People v. Places** 11/28 & 11/30

- (a) Is there a trade-off between people or places?
- (b) Are some cities beyond saving?
- (c) Should we care more about poverty or inequality?

Readings

- Glaeser, Edward. 2011. *Triumph of the City*. pp. 247-269.
- Lee, Timothy B. November 28, 2016. "Economists Are Underestimating the Costs of Letting Small Rust Belt Cities Shrink". *Vox*.
- Stone, Lyman (2016). "What Happened to Atlantic City?" *Medium*.
- Glaeser, Edward, and Joseph Gyourko. 2005. "Urban Decline and Durable Housing." *Journal of Political Economy* 113(2): 345-375.

- “Tired of Promises, A Struggling Small Town Wants Problems Solved.”  
NPR. March 28, 2017.

Notes: Exam 2 11/30

15. **Presentations** 12/5 & 12/7

- (a) Present papers

Readings

- *None*