

URBAN POLITICS

Fall 2025

Political Science 227
Haverford College

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Office: Hall 105
Hours: W 12:30-2:30
(and by appointment)

Course Description

This course introduces students to the theory and practice of urban politics in the United States. Much of the first half of the semester will be devoted to investigating how urban power and politics changed as cities evolved from small mercantile entities into industrial juggernauts before transforming once again into postindustrial centers of an ever-expanding metropolis or struggling pockets of diminished opportunity and deepening conflict. How have cities responded to the challenges produced by large-scale economic, social, cultural, and technological change? How do the political processes and institutions of the past continue to influence those of the present?

During the second half of the semester we will focus on the contemporary period by analyzing how cities have sought to overcome the structural and political constraints that limit their capacity to address chronic problems such as inequality, poverty, crime, inadequate schools, and a lack of decent, affordable housing. Why have some cities made more progress in dealing with such issues than others? Influential scholars of city politics have emphasized the importance of stable governing coalitions composed of established groups from the public and private sectors with the resources and organizational capacity to get things done in an otherwise fragmented political environment. How do social divisions based upon race, ethnicity, national origin, and class reinforce or undermine collective efforts to promote political change? Whose agendas are advanced and why?

We will then consider how relatively recent expansions in popular mobilization from the bottom-up have affected urban politics. We will then turn to more recent analyses of urban politics to consider how mobilization from the bottom-up has affected how cities are governed. To what extent has grassroots activism driven by community-based organizations, issue-based advocacy groups, and neighborhood-oriented electoral campaigns altered decision making with respect to fundamental issues such as criminal justice reform, immigrant rights, precarious labor, affordable housing, urban development, and workforce diversity? Has broader engagement in the political sphere yielded more equitable governance? We will conclude the course by thinking about the future prospects of American cities.

Course Requirements

Class Participation	20%
First Paper (5 pages)	20%
Second Paper (5 pages)	20%
Third Paper (10 pages)	40%
Film outside of class on Thursday, September 11, VCAM	no grade

Note: Papers submitted after the due date will be penalized by one third of a grade each day they are late.

Newspaper Coverage of Urban Politics

Our academic examination of urban politics will be enriched if we simultaneously follow the reporting of relevant news in the media. To that end, students are expected to read at least one daily newspaper such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, or perhaps your home city's primary newspaper on a regular basis and be able to draw upon material in these newspapers in class discussions when appropriate.

Required Texts

Stephen J. McGovern, *Mobilization Politics: Governing Philadelphia in the Early Twenty-First Century* (University of Pennsylvania Press 2025)

Stephen J. McGovern, ed., *Urban Politics: A Reader* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2017)

Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (University Press of Kansas, 1989)

Timothy P. R. Weaver, *Inequality, Crime, and Resistance in New York City* (Temple University Press 2025)

All other assigned readings will be on Moodle.

Honor Code/Artificial Intelligence

I am committed to the standards regarding academic honesty contained in the Haverford College Honor Code. All submitted work must be your own, completed in accordance with the Honor Code. Use of ChatGPT and other AI-based composition software, either for generating ideas or for drafting writing, is prohibited in this course and will be considered a violation of the Honor Code.

Topics and Readings

Week 1

I. Introduction to Course

II. Politics in the Preindustrial City

Allen Tully, "The Ruling Elite" (Reader, 2-1)

Sam Bass Warner, "The Environment of Private Opportunity" (Reader, 2-2)

Gary B. Nash, "The Dream Deferred," in *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840*

Week 2

III. Urbanization, Industrialization and the Political Response to an Urban Crisis

A. Machine Politics

Humbert S. Nelli, "European Immigrants and Urban America" in *The Urban Experience*, eds. Raymond A. Mohl and James F. Richardson

William L. Riorden, "To Hold Your District: Study Human Nature and Act Accordin'" (Reader, 3-1)
Robert K. Merton, "The Latent Functions of the Machine" in (Reader, 3-2)
Alexander Callow, "That Impudent Autocrat" (Reader, 3-3) and "The House That Tweed Built" in *The Tweed Ring*
John M. Allswang, "Charles Francis Murphy: The Enduring Boss" in *Bosses, Machines, and Urban Voters*
Film at VCAM, Thursday, September 11: "Scandalous Mayor"

Week 3

B. The Reform Era

Andrew D. White, "The Government of American Cities" (Reader, 4-1)
Jacob A. Riis, "Genesis of the Tenement" (Reader, 4-2) and "The Italian in New York" in *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York*
Stanley Schultz, "The Engineered Metropolis" (Reader, 4-3)
Samuel P. Hays, "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era" (Reader, 4-4)
Margaret Kohn, "Public Space in the Progressive Era" in *Justice and the American Metropolis*, eds. Clarissa Rile Hayward and Todd Swanstrom
Jon C. Teaford, "Trumpeted Failures and Unheralded Triumphs" in *The Unheralded Triumph: City Government in America, 1870-1900*

Week 4

IV. Suburbanization and Urban Decline

A. The Suburban Century

Kenneth T. Jackson, "The Loss of Community in Metropolitan America" (Reader, 5-1)
Peter Dreier, Todd Swanstrom, and John Mollenkopf, "The Roads Not Taken: How Federal Policies Promote Economic Segregation and Suburban Sprawl" (Reader, 5-2)
Michael N. Danielson, "Suburban Autonomy" (Reader, 5-3)
Tim Keough, "Introduction" in *In Levittown's Shadow: Poverty in America's Wealthiest Postwar Suburb*

B. Migration to Cities

James N. Gregory, "The Second Great Migration: A Historical Overview," in *African American History since World War II*, eds. Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter
Arnold R. Hirsch, "The Second Ghetto and the Dynamics of Neighborhood Change" (Reader, 5-4)

First Paper Due

Week 5

V. Urban Politics under Stress

A. Deindustrialization and the Rise of a Postindustrial City

Alan Mallach, “The Rise and Fall of the American Industrial City” in *The Divided City: Poverty and Prosperity in Urban America*

Thomas Sugrue, “‘The Damning Mark of False Prosperities’: The Deindustrialization of Detroit” (Reader, 6-1)

Jon C. Teaford, “The Problem Perceived” (Reader, 6-2)

Joel Rast, “Creating a Unified Business Elite: The Origins of the Chicago Central Area Committee” (Reader, 6-3)

Thomas Fitzgerald and Kevin Riordan, “The Highway that Could Have Destroyed South Street,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 21, 2025

Film: “The World that Moses Built”

Week 6

B. Race, Protest, and Backlash

Alan Mallach, “Race, Poverty, and Real Estate” in *The Divided City: Poverty and Prosperity in Urban America*

Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, “Black Power: Its Needs and Substance” (Reader, 7-1) and “The Myths of Coalition” in *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*

Bayard Rustin, “From Protest to Politics: The Future of the Civil Rights Movement,” (Reader, 7-2)

Jonathan Rieder, “The Fenced Land” and “The Lost People” (Reader, 7-3)

Timothy J. Lombardo, “African American Politics in Frank Rizzo’s Philadelphia” in *If There Is No Struggle, There Is No Progress: Black Politics in Twentieth-Century Philadelphia*

Week 7

Fall Break

Week 8

VI. Crisis

Paul S. O’Hara, “‘The Very Model of Modern Urban Decay’: Outsiders’ Narratives of Industry and Urban Decline in Gary, Indiana,” (Reader, 8-1)

Llana Barber, “The Armpit of the Northeast?” in *Latino City: Immigration and Urban Crisis in Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1945-2000*

Timothy Weaver, “Crisis, Finance, and Inequality” in *Inequality, Crime, and Resistance in New York City*

Paul Peterson, “The Interests of the Limited City” (Reader, 8-3)

VII. Cities in a Federal System

Peter Eisinger, "City Politics in the Era of Federal Devolution" (Reader, 9-2)
Karen Paget, "Can Cities Escape Political Isolation?" (Reader, 9-3)
Film in class: "Drop Dead City"

Week 9

VIII. Regime Politics

Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics*, Chs. 1-6
Raphael J. Sonenshein, "Conclusions and Implications: Toward a New Contract for Biracial Politics" (Reader, 10-2)
Film: "Eyes on the Prize" (Profile of Mayor Maynard Jackson of Atlanta)

Week 10

Regime Politics (continued)

Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics*, Chs. 7-10
Adolph Reed, Jr., "Demobilization in the New Black Political Regime: Ideological Capitulation and Radical Failure in the Post-Segregation Era" (Reader, 12-2)
Timothy Weaver, "Crime and Punishment" in *Inequality, Crime, and Resistance in New York City*
Peter Dreier, "Urban Politics and Progressive Housing Policy: Ray Flynn and Boston's Neighborhood Agenda" in *Revitalizing Urban Neighborhoods*, eds. W. Dennis Keating, Norman Krumholz, and Philip Star

Week 11

IX. Mobilization Politics

A. The Surge in Grassroots Activism

Stephen J. McGovern, Ch. 1: "Mobilization in the City" in *Mobilization Politics*

B. Theories of Urban Politics

Stephen J. McGovern, Ch. 2: "Analyzing Urban Politics" in *Mobilization Politics*

C. Applications of Mobilization Politics

Stephen J. McGovern, Ch. 3: "The Carceral State and the Movement to Overhaul the Criminal Justice System" in *Mobilization Politics*

Second Paper Due

Week 12

D. Applications of Mobilization Politics (continued)

Stephen J. McGovern, Ch. 4: “Immigration, Sanctuary, and Activism Around Precarious Work”; Ch. 5: “Millennials, Gen Zers, and the Reform Impulse”; and Ch. 6: “Organizing Around Gentrification and the Affordable Housing Crisis” in *Mobilization Politics*

Week 13

E. Applications of Mobilization Politics (continued)

Stephen J. McGovern, Ch. 7: “Anchor Institutions, Markets, and the Continuing Power of Business” and Ch. 8: “Jobs, Trade Unions, and White Privilege” in *Mobilization Politics*

Thanksgiving Break

Week 14

F. Political Change in Philadelphia

Stephen J. McGovern, “Mobilization Politics in Philadelphia” in *Mobilization Politics*
Meghna Chandra, “Studentification and the Political Displacement of the Black Worker Electorate,” *Urban Affairs Review*, July 2025

Week 15

X. The Future of Urban Politics in America

Stephen J. McGovern, “Mobilization Politics Beyond Contemporary Philadelphia” in *Mobilization Politics*
Timothy Weaver, “Resistance and Rebellion” in *Inequality, Crime, and Resistance in New York City*
Marc Doussard and Greg Schrock, “Economic and Racial Justice Coalitions and the Rise of Progressive Cities,” *Journal of Urban Affairs*, vol. 47 (3)

Third Paper Due at End of Exam Period