

URB 3030/ POLS 4190 – Power in the City: Urban Politics in the 21st Century
Georgia State University
Spring 2023

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Drop-In Hours: Thursdays, 12:30 PM – 2:30 PM (in office/Webex) or by appointment
Class Meetings: Thursdays, 9:30 AM – noon | Sparks Hall, Room 301

COURSE OVERVIEW

Cities are governed through formal political processes but also through informal power relations that are less visible, but equally significant, in shaping urban development. Power resides with elected representatives and government institutions but also with corporations, non-governmental organizations, universities, homeowner associations, social movements, and more. Moreover, the realm of politics is intimately entwined with the city's socio-cultural and economic fabric. Politics in the city is often about economics, and the urban economy influences how cities are governed. Perhaps even more pertinently, urban politics has profound spatial dimensions. In US cities, politics is closely related to the splintering of governance and the segregation of neighborhoods particularly along the axes of class and race.

This course introduces foundational concepts in urban politics and urban political economy. Through a focus on US cities and with due attention to Atlanta, we will learn about the configuration of formal politics and informal political processes that shape the development and governance of cities. Course topics include urban regimes; urban growth machines; the financialization of urban development; socio-spatial inequalities; data-driven urban governance; the right to the city; and more.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this course is to guide students toward:

- Understanding the configuration of formal politics and informal political processes in the workings and development of cities
- Understanding foundational theoretical concepts from urban political theory and urban political economy, and critically assessing their utility for explaining various aspects of contemporary urban politics
- Acquiring analytical tools to discuss key political and economic trends since the mid-20th century that have shaped urban development priorities and governance structures in contemporary US cities
- Identifying interconnections among economy, culture, and politics as they structure social relations in contemporary US cities

- Applying key concepts from urban political theory and urban political economy to contemporary urban issues

COURSE MATERIALS

Readings

The assigned readings in this course include textbook chapters and media and academic journal articles. All the readings will be available on iCollege.

Technology

To complete course assignments, you will need access to a reliable computer a word processing software like Microsoft Word. The CATLab has laptops available for students to borrow for periods of 8 hours of in-library use. For any technology-related questions on campus, please email help@gsu.edu.

Prerequisites

There are no formal prerequisites for this course.

EVALUATION

	Percent of Final Grade
Participation	15%
10 self-assessment scores x 1.5% per assessment	
Reflection Posts	20%
4 posts X 5% per post	
Midterm	30%
Final Project	
Project Proposal Worksheet	5%
Final Paper	30%
Total	100%

Grading Scale	
Percent	Letter Grade
98-100	A+
92-97	A
90-91	A-
88-89	B+
82-87	B
80-81	B-
78-79	C+
72-77	C
70-71	C-
60-69	D
≤ 59	F

Attendance

Regular attendance is important for your ability to learn the course material and to contribute to our classroom community. If you must miss class, please provide me with notice of your absence and the reason for it in advance or within one day of missing class. Excused absences include illness (your own or that of someone who depends on

your care), attendance at university-sponsored events (as defined by the university's Policy on Class Attendance outlined in Section IV of the Student Code of Conduct), legal obligations, religious observances, and emergencies related to personal or family obligations. If you miss class for an extended period of time (more than one class) please notify the [Office of the Dean of Students](#) within one week of your return. They will provide me with verification regarding your excused absence.

After two unexcused absences, points will be deducted from your participation grade as described in the following section.

If you miss class, I recommend that you attend drop-in hours to review the missed material with me shortly after an absence.

Participation

Participation constitutes 15% of your final grade and reflects your (1) attendance and (2) active participation in lecture, discussions, and in-class activities.

Starting on Week 2 (and excluding Weeks 9 and 10), you will submit a Participation Self-Assessment Sheet in iCollege by midnight each Sunday.

The Participation Self-Assessment Sheet provides a detailed list of participation activities to guide you in (1) understanding what constitutes active participation and (2) evaluating your own engagement in class. Through the Participation Self-Assessment Sheet, you will assess your own in-class participation each week on a scale of 0-4, where 0 points reflect an unexcused absence, and 4 points reflect active participation. I will review your sheets each week and give you 0-4 participation points based on your assessment. At the end of the semester, I will drop your two lowest participation grades.

Excused absences, as defined above, will not impact your participation points.

Unexcused absences after your second one will impact your participation points. On those weeks, you will receive 0 participation points. This means that you may have up to two unexcused absences at no penalty.

Reflection Posts

Each Thursday starting on Week 2, the professor will post a prompt in iCollege that relates to the readings for the upcoming class. Students will draw directly from the assigned readings and the respective week's lecture to respond to the prompts. Reflection posts will be due within two weeks of the day on which the prompt is posted. For example, the prompt related to the assigned readings for Week 3 will be posted by midnight on Thursday of Week 2, and responses to it will be due by midnight on Thursday of Week 4.

Students will submit reflections for four weeks of their choosing. Reflection posts will be 500-600 words in length will connect closely to their respective week's concepts.

Each reflection post is worth 5% of your final grade. Instructions on the reflection posts will be posted in iCollege.

Midterm Exam

Students will take a midterm exam in class on Week 9 (March 9). The exam will be in multiple choice and true/false format and will cover material from Weeks 2-8. I will post a study guide in iCollege on Week 6. We will hold a review session during the second half of class on Week 7.

The midterm exam is worth 30% of your final grade.

Final Research Project

For the final project, students will submit one of the two following options depending on their interests and learning objectives:

Option A: An encyclopedia/reference guide entry that draws on course materials and related external readings to provide a detailed assessment of a key course topic or concept of the student's choosing (e.g., growth machines, municipal underbonding, tax-increment financing, entrepreneurial urbanism, etc.). The entry will provide an overview of (1) the historical and social context in which the concept was advanced; (2) key works and theoretical/policy debates that have shaped the concept's development; (3) applications of the concept in the assigned readings and in additional materials you review during your research; (4) future theory/policy directions. The entry will be 1,500 – 2,000 words in length excluding references. Detailed instructions on this assignment will be posted in iCollege.

Option B: An essay that applies at least one of the concepts or theoretical frameworks introduced in the course to an urban politics topic of the student's choosing (e.g., homelessness, nuisance ordinances, infrastructural development, crime, etc.). The essay will draw on assigned readings and additional materials you review during your research to relate key urban political theory and urban political economy concepts to an urban issue past or present. The assignment is intended as an opportunity for you to apply course concepts to urban issues you are interested in and to explore questions that support your personal interests or professional goals.

Students will submit their final projects in two parts: (1) a single-page project proposal worksheet to be filled out and submitted by midnight on Friday of Week 12; (2) a final essay due by midnight on Saturday, April 29. The essay will be 1,500 – 2,000 words in length excluding references. Detailed instructions on this assignment will be posted in iCollege.

The final project proposal worksheet is worth 5% of your final grade. The final project report is worth 30% of your final grade.

Late Submissions

Late assignments are accepted with 10% of the grade deducted for every day that has passed since the deadline.

COURSE POLICIES

Academic Integrity

Students must comply with the university's Policy on Academic Honesty outlined in Section III of the 2021-2022 Student Code of Conduct. Please consult this section of the Code of Conduct to learn what constitutes academic dishonesty: plagiarism, cheating on examinations, unauthorized collaboration on assignments, falsification of information in assignments and other course exercises, submissions of substantial portions of the same work to multiple classes, and unauthorized public posting and distribution of instructor-prepared materials. If you have questions regarding academic dishonesty, please ask me. To learn about what constitutes academic honesty and how suspected violations of it will be resolved, please review Section III of the GSU Student Code of Conduct here: <https://deanofstudents.gsu.edu/document/policy-on-academic-honesty/?wpdmdl=4950/>

Classroom Environment

In this class, we commit to fostering an environment that honors the diverse experiences we bring to this space, and which are shaped by things like our socio-economic background, racial and gender identity, sexual orientation, ability status, ethnicity, immigration status, religious beliefs, and cultural background. We will approach classroom discussions with care, empathy, and respect. We will not shy away from disagreements, but we will commit to upholding these three values – care, empathy, and respect – when expressing diverging opinions. The topics we will explore this semester may be difficult for us both intellectually and emotionally, and they may push us to question our most basic assumptions and values. We will approach this process of critical examination, learning, and unlearning as an activity vital to the social justice commitment that informs this course.

Accessibility

Students who wish to request accommodations to meet their learning needs may do so by registering with the Access and Accommodation Center. Students will be accommodated upon issuance by the Access and Accommodation Center of a signed Accommodation Plan and are responsible for providing a copy of that plan to instructors of all classes in which accommodations are sought. To register for accommodations online, please visit access.gsu.edu

Access and Accommodations Center Contact Information:

Email: access@gsu.edu		Website: www.access.gsu.edu
Phone: (404) 413 1560		Address: Student Center East, Suite 205

Language in Addressing Students

Students can designate a preferred first name in several campus systems, including class rosters and iCollege. Please review the [Office of the Registrar website](#) for more information.

Even if you have not changed your name in this system, I will address you by the name and pronoun with which you identify.

Basic Needs

Students who face challenges securing their food or housing and believe this may affect their performance in the course are urged to contact the Dean of Students for support. The Embark Network at GSU provides resources for students facing houselessness. Panther's Pantry offers weekly food and hygiene bags along with additional support. For more information on these programs, please visit <https://pantry.gsu.edu/> and <https://deanofstudents.gsu.edu/student-assistance/#embark>.

Sexual Misconduct

Sexual misconduct will not be tolerated. In instances of sexual misconduct, the instructor is designated as a Responsible Employee and is required to share with administrative officials all reports of sexual misconduct for university review. If you wish to disclose an incident of sexual misconduct confidentially, there are options on campus for you do so. For more information on this policy, please refer to the Sexual Misconduct Policy, which is included in the Student Code of Conduct: <https://codeofconduct.gsu.edu/>.

Veterans and Serving Military Students

Georgia State honors its military and veteran students returning to pursue their education. Students who are veterans, serving in the military, their dependents, and the survivors of serving military are encouraged to avail themselves of a full range of college services and activities through the Military Outreach Center (MOC). For assistance or guidance, contact the Atlanta Campus Military Student Advocate, Randy Barrone, at 404-413-2331.

GSU Military Outreach Center Contact Information:

Email: rbarrone@gsu.edu		Website: www.veterans.gsu.edu
Phone: (404) 413-233		Address: Sparks Hall, 234

Sharing of Instructor-Generated Materials

The selling, sharing, publishing, presenting, or distributing of instructor-prepared course lecture notes, videos, audio recordings, or any other instructor-produced materials from this course for any commercial purpose is strictly prohibited unless explicit written permission is granted in advance by the course instructor. This includes posting any materials on websites such as Chegg, Course Hero, OneClass, Stuvia, StuDocu and other similar sites. Unauthorized sale or commercial distribution of such material is a violation of the instructor's intellectual property and the privacy rights of students attending the class and is prohibited.

Instructor Evaluations

Your constructive assessment of this course plays an indispensable role in shaping education at Georgia State. Upon completing the course, please take time to fill the online course evaluation.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1 (Jan. 12): Introductions and Course Overview

Week 2 (Jan. 19): Community Power & Urban Regimes: Who Governs?

Required Readings (~41 pages):

- Robert Dahl. (2007) [1961]. Who governs? In: E. Strom and J. Mollenkopf (eds), *The Urban Politics Reader*. New York: Routledge, pp. 110-119.
- Clarence Stone. (2003). Power and governance in American cities. In: J.P. Pelissero (ed), *Cities, Politics, and Policy: A Comparative Analysis*. Washington, DC: CQ Press. 27 pages.
- Maurice Hobson. (2018, 22 October). Black Mecca or most unequal US city?: Will the Real Atlanta Please Stand Up? *The Guardian*. ~2 pages.

Week 3 (Jan. 26): The City as a Growth Machine

Required Readings (~45 pages):

- John Logan and Harvey Molotch. (2013) [1987]. The city as a growth machine. In: Jan Lin and Christopher Mele (eds), *The Urban Sociology Reader*, 2nd Edition. New York: Routledge, pp. 109-118.
- Brady Collins. (2020). Putting culture on the map: media discourse and the urban growth machine in Koreatown, Los Angeles. *Urban Affairs Review*, 56(1): 254-288.

Suggested Readings:

- Jennifer Darrah-Okike. (2019). Disrupting the growth machine: evidence from Hawaii. *Urban Affairs Review*, 55(2): 428-461.
- Robin Bartram. (2019). Going easy and going after: building inspections and the selective allocation of code violations. *City & Community*, 18(2): 594-617.
- Paul Peterson. (2007) [1981]. The interests of the limited city. In: E. Strom and J. Mollenkopf (eds), *The Urban Politics Reader*. New York: Routledge, pp. 110-119.

Week 4 (Feb. 2): The Entrepreneurial City

Required Readings (~37 pages):

- David Harvey. (1989). From managerialism to entrepreneurialism: the transformation of urban governance in late capitalism. *Geografiska Annaler B*, 71(1): 3-17.
- Emily Eakin. (2002, 1 June). The cities and their new elite. *New York Times*. ~2 pages
- One of the following:
 - Johana Londoño. (2012). Aesthetic belonging: The Latinization and renewal of Union City, New Jersey. In: David R. Diaz and Rodolfo D. Torres (eds.), *Latino Urbanism: The Politics of Planning, Policy, and*

Redevelopment, New York: New York University Press, pp. 47-63.

- Kevin Ward. (2007). "Creating a personality for downtown": business improvement districts in Milwaukee. *Urban Geography*, 28(8): 781-808.
- Brandi T. Summers. (2016). H Street, Main Street, and the neoliberal aesthetics of cool. In: Derek Hyra and Sabiyha Prince (eds.), *Capital Dilemma: Growth and Inequality in Washington, D.C.* New York: Routledge, pp. 299-314.

Suggested Readings:

- Lester K. Spence. (2020). The neoliberal city and the racial idea. In: Richardson Dilworth and Timothy P.R. Weaver (eds.), *How Ideas Shape Urban Political Development*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 79-90.
- Jamie Peck. (2014). Entrepreneurial urbanism: between uncommon sense and dull compulsion. *Geografiska Annaler B: Series B*, 96(4): 396-401.

Week 5 (Feb. 9): Formal Powers of Local Government

Required Readings (~69 pages):

- Myron A. Levine. (2020). Formal powers, the structure of local government, and leadership. Chapter in Myron A. Levine's textbook, *Urban Politics (10th Edition)*. New York: Routledge. **Skip sections "Improving the Performance of City Councils," "Women in Local Government," "The Difficult Task of Mayoral Leadership," "Minority Mayors and the Debate over Deracialization"). ~26 pages.
- Domingo Morel. (2018). Race and state in the Urban Regime. *Urban Affairs Review*, 54(3): 490-523.
- TBA: Additional short newspaper articles on efforts to amend the Constitution of Georgia to implement the Opportunity Schools District in 2016. ~8 pages.

Week 6 (Feb. 16): The Financialization of Urban Development I (Tax-Increment Financing)

Required Readings (~49 pages)

- Rachel Weber. (2010). Selling city futures: the financialization of urban development policy. *Economic Geography*, 86(3): 251-274. (*Read only sections "The Financialization of Urban Development Policy" and "Tax Increment Financing"), pp. 254-260.
- Richard Dye and David F. Merriman. (2006). Tax increment financing: a tool for local economic development. *Land Lines*. Cambridge, MA: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, pp. 2-7.
- Daniel Immergluck. (2022). The Beltline as a public-private gentrification project. Chapter in Immergluck's book, *Red Hot City: Housing, Race, and Exclusion in Twenty-First Century Atlanta*, Oakland: University of California Press, pp. 59-94.

Suggested Readings:

- Benjamin Schneider. (2019). CityLab University: Tax-Increment Financing. *Bloomberg CityLab*: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-10-24/the-lowdown-on-tif-the-developer-s-friend> (if you want more information on TIFs)
- Jamie Peck and Heather Whiteside. (2016). Financializing Detroit. *Economic Geography*, 92(3), 235-268.

Week 7 (Feb. 23): The Financialization of Urban Development II (Municipal Bonds)

Required Readings (~20 pages):

- *Wall Street Journal*. (2022, 5 September). The water woes of Jackson, Mississippi explained: the Mississippi city is another example of a failed local government. ~1 page.
- Brief Explanation of municipal bonds by the US Securities and Exchange Commission: <https://www.investor.gov/introduction-investing/investing-basics/investment-products/bonds-or-fixed-income-products-0> ~1 page
- C.S. Ponder. (2021). Spatializing the municipal bonds market: urban resilience under racial capitalism. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 111(7): 2112-2129.

Suggested Readings:

- Emily Thornton. (2007, 7 May). Roads to riches: why investors are clamoring to take over America's highways, bridges, and airports – and why the public should be nervous. *Business Week*.
- Destin Jenkins. (2021). *The Bonds of Inequality: Debt and the Making of the American City*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Week 8 (March 2): Elections and Political Representation in the City

Required Readings (~29 pages):

- Myron A. Levine. (2020). The rules of local politics and elections: the reform and the post-reform city. *Read only until the "A New Generation of Reforms" section. Pp. 239-267.

Week 9 (March 9): Midterm

Week 10 (March 16): Spring Break – No Class

Week 11 (March 23): Predictive Analytics and Urban Governance

Required Readings (~40 pages):

- The Economist. (2018, 5 May). Serve and predict: data analytics are showing promise as a tool to prevent violent crime. ~2 pages.

- Brian Jordan Jefferson. (2018). Predictable policing: predictive crime mapping and geographies of policing and race. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 108 (1): 1-16.
- Virginia Eubanks. (2018). High-tech homelessness. *American Scientist*, 106(4). ~2 pages. <https://www.americanscientist.org/article/high-tech-homelessness>
- Sara Safransky. (2020). Geographies of algorithmic violence: redlining the smart city. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 44(2), 200-218. (If you want a quick recap of redlining, this 6-min video can be helpful: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5FBJyqfoLM&feature=emb_title)

Suggested Readings:

- *Blame!* manga by Tsutomu Nihei

Week 12 (March 30): Community-Based Movements

Required Readings (~41 pages):

- Akira Drake-Rodriguez. (2021). Black women at the fore: Perry Homes and the transformation of tenant activism in 1960s Atlanta. *Atlanta Studies Journal*. ~ 6 pages (~30-min read): <https://atlantastudies.org/2021/05/26/black-women-at-the-fore-perry-homes-and-the-transformation-of-tenant-activism-in-1960s-atlanta/>
- Teresa Irene Gonzalez. (2020). Semillas de justicia: Chicana environmentalism in Chicago. In: Sharon Navarro and Lilliana Saldaña (eds.), *Latinas and the Politics of Urban Spaces*. New York: Routledge. ~20 pages.
- Cindi Katz. (2008). Bad elements: Katrina and the scoured landscape of social reproduction. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 15(1): 15-29.

Week 13 (April 6): Care as Urban Politics

Required Readings (~41 pages):

- bell hooks. (1990). Homeplace (a site of resistance). Chapter in bell hooks' *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*. Boston, MA: South End Press. ~9 pages.
- Zenzele Isoke. (2011). The politics of homemaking: Black feminist transformations of a cityscape. *Transforming Anthropology*, 19(2): 117-130.
- Brandi T. Summers and Desiree Fields. (2022). Speculative urban worldmaking: meeting financial violence with a politics of collective care. *Antipode*. ~21 pages.

Week 14 (April 13): Municipal Fragmentation

Required Readings (~24 pages):

- Brentin Mock. (2022, 11 February). The future of cityhood. *Bloomberg CityLab*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-02-11/atlanta-s-wealthy-white-suburbs-want-their-own-cities> ~7 pages
- David Segal. (2012, June 23). A Georgia town takes the people's business private. *New York Times*. ~9 pages.
- Emily Tumpson Molina. (2014). Mobilized 4 movement: race, municipal underbounding, and coalitional politics in Modesto, California and Moore County, North Carolina. *Kalfou*, 1(1): 180-187.

Suggested Readings:

- Jan Nijman and Tom Clery. (2015). The United States: Suburban imaginaries and metropolitan realities. In: P. Hamel & R. Keil (eds.), *Suburban Governance: A Global View*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 57-79.

Week 15 (April 20): The City as Revolutionary Turf

Required Readings TBD

The course syllabus provides a general plan for the course. Deviations may be necessary.
