*Article*

# Urban Governance and the American Political Development Approach

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**Abstract**
This article outlines the value of the American Political Development (APD) approach for scholars of urban governance. Despite recent enthusiasm for APD, I argue that the tools of the APD approach have not yet been clearly articulated or demonstrated for urban scholars. By combining the concept of "intercurrence" with a methodological focus on shifts in urban political authority, APD allows us to capture the dynamics of urban governance in tractable ways. This approach focuses on the historical construction of urban governance and the patterns of political authority that are embodied by those governance structures—long a key theme in the study of urban politics. I illustrate the promise of the APD approach in urban governance using a study of policy institutions in six Canadian cities and five policy domains from the nineteenth century to the present. I then discuss four specific areas of research to which an APD approach to urban governance will be especially well equipped to contribute.

**Keywords**
urban governance, urban political authority, American Political Development

## Introduction

Several years ago, a group of urban business leaders in "Canada's technology triangle"—a cluster of midsize cities along the Grand River in Ontario,

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Canada—began to meet together to discuss shared challenges and concerns. At the top of the list was competition: Faced with the rapid growth of nearby Toronto, many worried that smaller cities like Kitchener, Waterloo, and Guelph would be able to advertise their advantages only by means of carefully coordinated action. Another more immediate concern was the Grand River itself, a river with a history of serious, and seriously costly, springtime flooding. With the help of civil servants inside the government of Ontario, the informal business group soon became a special-purpose public agency, which commissioned a detailed survey of the Grand River watershed and drew up a watershed-management infrastructure plan. Having secured a funding commitment from the federal government, which was enthusiastic about the project as part of a wider economic stimulus program, the agency's representatives then pitched the plan to the provincial government as a pilot program for similar regional projects elsewhere in the province. These advocacy efforts were successful, and the agency soon undertook Canada's first comprehensive watershed-management system, a system involving trilevel financing and a regional governance structure that incorporated public and private representatives from five cities as well as the provincial government.[1]

For anyone who is familiar with contemporary governance in North American cities, this story is entirely unremarkable. All of its themes are now common in the urban political experience: Competition from a large city necessitates collaboration among smaller cities that might once have been competitors; the landscape of the urban environment is reordered by the demands of local economic activity, even as that landscape itself shapes the urban political ecology; to solve complex regional policy challenges, new multilevel governance structures blend legal, political, and fiscal authority both vertically, across levels of government, and horizontally, across public and private actors in multiple cities. The details of the story might be new, but the plot is as familiar as a fairy tale.

The story of regional watershed governance along the Grand River watershed is therefore one of the hundreds of examples we might use to describe the causes and effects of complex urban policy challenges. But those who are more familiar with this policy domain will know that there is one element of the story that makes it different from many others: It is a century old. Despite the deliberately contemporary language in the description above, the Grand River Conservation Commission was first proposed more than 100 years ago, and it was created as a formal public entity in 1934. The story of watershed conservation policy, while sharing many similarities with discussions of multilevel urban governance today, originated in a much older, and undoubtedly very different, historical era.

My argument in this essay is that the Grand River Conservation Commission is far from unique and that the deeply historical character of complex urban governance requires that scholars of urban governance develop a theoretical and conceptual approach that is attuned to the study of long-term urban political change. Following the arguments of a growing community of urban scholars, I identify the American Political Development (APD) approach as a framework with which to carry out this historically oriented work. Not only does APD focus our attention on the temporal and spatial complexity of policy governance, I argue, but it also allows us to integrate the study of urban governance into a conversation that has long been at the heart of urban politics research: the nature and development of urban political authority. My argument, in short, is that APD offers us a set of concrete conceptual tools with which to explore, and ultimately explain, the long-term development of urban governance in modern cities. Despite recent enthusiasm for APD approaches within urban politics scholarship, these conceptual and methodological tools have not yet been clearly identified, nor has their analytical potential been demonstrated in a concrete empirical study. In this article, I aim to do both, and then to discuss the areas of urban governance research to which an APD approach will be especially well equipped to contribute.

## APD and Urban Governance

American Political Development—often called "APD"—is an approach to American politics that combines richly historical research with the conceptual debates, theoretical orientations, and methodological techniques of political science. Drawing inspiration from the work of scholars such as V.O. Key and E.E. Schattschneider, as well as the comparative historical work of Barrington Moore, Charles Tilly, and others, APD research has ranged widely across the study of the American party system, American political culture, and the development of the American state (Gerring 2003; Zelizer 2003). Outside the United States, the APD tradition is less well known, but recent scholarship in Canada (Smith 2009) and the United Kingdom (Spirling 2014) suggests that the concepts and approaches of the APD tradition have begun to attract considerable enthusiasm even outside the American context.

As is the case with any active research community, it is difficult to identify the key elements of APD—the "heart and soul" of APD—across its numerous subfields and research themes. In the context of urban politics and governance, however, what is most valuable about APD is its combination of two important ideas and techniques within a single coherent approach: The concept of "intercurrence" and an empirical program that is focused on concrete shifts in governing authority.

## Intercurrence

At the core of a great deal of theoretical work in the APD tradition is a set of intersecting arguments about the nature of political order. The first of these is the claim that political institutions are never simply created anew but are instead forged within the context of already existing institutions (Sheingate 2014; Steinmo 2008; Thelen and Steinmo 1992). To understand the development of a particular state therefore requires that we examine not only its more recent institutional innovations but also the older institutions alongside which the new institutions are forced to operate (Orren and Skowronek 2004; Schickler 2001).

A second APD argument applies a similar theoretical logic to political culture. Against Hartzian theorists who find in American culture an unadulterated liberal "fragment" (Hartz 1955), as well as later scholars who insist upon the republican foundations of American culture (Pocock 1975), APD scholars have defended a conception of American political culture that is grounded in "multiple orders," one in which a small number of threads are woven together into different cultural patterns over time. Rogers M. Smith (1993), for example, did not deny the importance of liberal or republican cultural traditions in the United States, but he added an additional political-cultural order, which he called "ascriptive," and argued that American political culture must be understood as the complex development and interaction of these three orders over time.

Completing this set of arguments is a third claim about the American state itself. Against those who insist on the autonomy of the American "state" as a singular entity, APD scholars argue that there are in fact many *parts* of the state, each with its own internal purposes, culture, and rules (Carpenter 2001). Different parts of the state will therefore frequently conflict with one another, each pursuing different aims at the same time. Processes of wider change, such as economic crisis or demographic shifts, can therefore have very different effects across different parts of the state.

Taken together, these arguments add up to what has become a "foundational concept" in the APD repertoire: *intercurrence*. The concept of intercurrence, according to Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek (2004, p. 113), "directs researchers to locate the historical construction of politics in the simultaneous operation of older and newer instruments of governance, in controls asserted through multiple orderings of authority whose coordination with one another cannot be assumed." This simultaneous operation has both a spatial and a temporal dimension. Across political *space*, we expect to find multiple political orders coexisting at once, each with different purposes, internal organization, and ideological commitments. Across political

*time*, we also expect that changes to political orders will not be as clean as any simple periodization might suggest; not only will the internal dynamics of political orders evolve at different paces but also the diverse institutions and ideas that are present in those orders will mean that large-scale trends and events—economic shifts, political crises, ideological movements—will filter through those orders in very different ways.

The concept of intercurrence is in many respects a particular articulation of a more general theme within contemporary social science theory. Scholars of organization theory and sociological institutionalism (Clemens 1997; Clemens and Cook 1999), social movements (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001), and the sociology of the professions (Abbott 1988) have equally emphasized the importance of processes and institutions operating at varying temporal and spatial scales. Broader theories of the social process have also articulated similar arguments, including the field theory of Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam (2012) and the historically oriented social theories of Charles Tilly (1984) and William Sewell (2005). These conceptual resemblances are, in my view, a strength rather than a weakness; the concept of intercurrence seems to have captured, from an historical-institutionalist angle, an aspect of the social world that has increasingly been recognized from other angles as well.

## *Concrete Political Authority*

The theoretical concept of intercurrence suggests a picture of the political process that is teeming with spatial and temporal complexity. In the absence of some means by which to make this complexity tractable, intercurrence is therefore likely to remain little more than an empty theoretical rejoinder to monocausal treatments of political life. In APD, however, intercurrence is typically joined to an empirical program that enables researchers to grasp, in a concrete way, the ongoing dynamics of intercurrence. This empirical program is focused on what Orren and Skowronek (2004, p. 123) called "durable shift[s] in governing authority."

To understand political development over time, Orren and Skowronek (2004) argue, we need to track changes in patterns of governing authority: durable, long-term shifts in legitimate and institutionalized political mandates. Thus, what APD scholars hope to describe are the patterns of governing authority that exist within a political community over time and across political space—patterns that can be identified and tracked in empirically rigorous ways. History as written by APD scholars is therefore what William Sewell (2005) has called "eventful," focusing on the moments in which changes to governing authority structures serve to redirect the political process (Orren and Skowronek 2004, pp. 131–32).

At its core, then, APD is grounded in a *descriptive* claim about intercurrence, as well as a *methodological* argument about how to use concrete shifts in political authority to understand intercurrence across space and time. Beyond these shared descriptive and methodological assumptions, APD scholars have approached the explanation of patterns of intercurrence in widely varying ways. APD scholars therefore do not deny the existence or importance of a wide range of sources of social and political change, from long-term demographic trends to ideological shifts to the rise and fall of social movements. What they do argue, however, is that the political significance of these trends can best be understood by focusing on concrete changes to structures of political authority over time (Orren and Skowronek 2004).

To see how this approach works in practice, we can briefly review the arguments of two well-known books in the APD tradition. The first is Daniel Carpenter's (2001) *Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy*, a book that seeks to explore the causes and extent of bureaucratic autonomy within the developing American state. The book is grounded on the descriptive claim that different parts of the American state are simultaneously characterized by different levels of bureaucratic autonomy (i.e., intercurrence), and Carpenter identifies those differing levels of autonomy by examining the central moments of institutional and policy change in which that autonomy is most clearly visible (i.e., shifts in concrete political authority). Carpenter then explains these differences in political autonomy by means of an argument about the reputations of midlevel civil servants and their embeddedness within diverse networks of political support.

Eric Schickler's (2001) *Disjointed Pluralism* provides another highly regarded example of the APD approach in practice. The institutional rules of the American Congress, Schickler argues, are "disjointed"; Congressional institutions have been layered atop one another over time, each of them built on a different coalition of interests and a different set of organizing principles (i.e., intercurrence). Schickler demonstrates the nature of this layering process by examining four periods of major institutional change in the U.S. Congress (i.e., concrete shifts in political authority). The resulting legislative institutions, Schickler argues, are "historical composites, full of tensions and contradictions," and must be explained in terms of the multiple and competing interests that are involved in creating and sustaining them (see also Mahoney and Thelen 2009).

In each of these examples, despite their considerable differences in empirical themes and causal arguments, we see a clear common thread: careful description demonstrating the nature and existence of intercurrence in a particular sphere or time period, based on detailed analyses of concrete patterns of political authority. This description then forms the foundation for

two very different explanations of the particular phenomena under study. Although this basic approach is often implicit rather than explicit in APD work, it has allowed APD scholars to build up a foundation of knowledge on APD while also enabling rich and ongoing theoretical debates about the causes of American institutional change. It is this combination of features, I believe—intercurrence, concrete political authority, and an openness to a range of causal accounts—that makes the APD attractive for students of urban governance.

## APD and Urban Politics

In recent years, the APD approach has attracted a small but growing community of supporters within the field of urban politics (Dilworth 2009; Rast 2015; Stone 2015). Thus far, urban politics specialists have articulated the potential benefits of an APD approach from two angles. First, some have emphasized the important role of cities in the development of the wider American political system. From this perspective, we cannot understand the development of the broader American state while ignoring what was going on within American cities (Dilworth 2009). Just as other political scientists have sought to bring culture, ideas, or the state "back in" to explanations of American politics, so these urban scholars have argued that American politics, and the development of the American state, cannot be understood without attending to the cities in which that development often originated and occurred.

A second approach is to reverse the order of the argument: Rather than bringing cities back into APD, we must bring APD into the study of cities. Here, the argument is that APD can be useful for understanding the long-term development of cities themselves. Joel Rast (2011), for example, has drawn from the closely related literature on historical institutionalism to argue that processes like path dependence and feedback are as vital for understanding urban institutional change as they are for institutional processes at the state or national levels. Similarly, Clarence Stone and Robert Whelan have argued that an APD approach can be useful for illuminating patterns of urban political authority over time (Stone and Whelan 2009).

All of this recent work has expressed considerable enthusiasm for the idea that APD can be useful for students of urban politics. Thus far, however, few have attempted to specifically articulate just what it is about the APD approach, beyond its attention to history, that makes the approach so promising. Too often, urban politics scholars have made brief reference to a central concept in APD research—such as "intercurrence" or "complex political authority"—and then move on to a discussion of American urban history that

is linked only very tenuously to any of the central concepts of APD. Richardson Dilworth's (2009) agenda-setting chapter on the subject, for instance, defines "intercurrence" very broadly, spends just a single paragraph on the possible application of the concept to the urban context, and says nothing about the methods by which APD scholars have drawn on the concept of intercurrence in practice. Many of the authors in Dilworth's volume follow his lead, making brief reference to APD before turning to historical and often comparative discussions of urban political history (Hodos 2009). These studies are interesting and valuable in their own right, and they serve as a reminder of the deep importance of urban political history, but they tell us little about why the APD approach, beyond its openness to history, should serve as our theoretical framework in carrying out such work.[2]

At the other end of the spectrum, several recent essays have focused on the theoretical potential of APD for urban politics but have said little about what such an investigation might look like in practice. In one recent essay, Clarence Stone and Robert Whelan (2009) identify APD as a vital theoretical resource for understanding the multiple sources and sites of political authority within the "urban political order" and discussed this concept in the context of other theoretical approaches such as pluralism, political economy, and urban regimes. In a recent reflective essay on the urban regime approach, Stone (2015) has extended this argument, suggesting that an APD-inspired perspective on urban political order may serve as a useful next step for those who wish to continue to explore the capacity-oriented conception of urban power that is at the heart of the urban regime approach. Joel Rast (2015) has responded to Stone's (2015) recent essay by suggesting that Stone turn more seriously to formal political institutions and the historical-institutionalist literature that is useful for understanding their development, a turn to which Stone has thus far been resistant. These essays make a vital contribution to our thinking about the development of political authority in the urban context. What they are missing, however—and what I hope to provide here—is a clear account of how the central concepts of the APD approach have been used by APD scholars themselves, along with a brief empirical demonstration of the same conceptual and methodological approach "in action" in the specific context of the development of urban governance.

Taken together, then, the theoretical discussion above and the empirical example below are intended to build upon the valuable work of Dilworth, Rast, Stone, and others by making the concepts, methods, and research agenda of an urban political development approach clearer to those who are interested in urban political history but who may not yet see the particular value of the APD approach. In my view, as I have argued above, it is the APD concept of intercurrence, combined with an empirical focus on concrete

governing authority, that is most likely to yield immediate gains for scholars of urban politics and governance. In the next section, I use a case study from six Canadian cities to demonstrate that these concepts do indeed illuminate aspects of urban governance that are central to the development of urban politics and urban political authority over time.

## APD and "Political Development Studies"

My choice of six *Canadian* cities necessitates one additional argument before we move on to the empirical discussion: an argument that in making use of the concepts and theory of the APD approach, we need not focus exclusively on the *American* political experience. This argument might not be needed were it not for the fact that two of the founding voices of the APD approach, Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, have explicitly argued that APD can and should remain focused on the American case. Although Orren and Skowronek (2004, p. 26) admit the possibility that the "analytic template" of APD "may well recommend itself for use in other national settings," they ultimately argue that the approach ought to remain focused on "a political science that will take its cues from the problems of American government and politics itself."

As is obvious from the Canadian case study below, I disagree. As Orren and Skowronek (2004) themselves recognize, there is nothing about the conceptual or theoretical machinery of the APD approach that is *necessarily* linked to the American case. The approach that I have outlined above, built on the theoretical concept of intercurrence and a research strategy that focuses on locating concrete shifts in political authority, is one that can travel not only to other states such as Canada but also to other scales of government such as cities. Moreover, by expanding the scope of the APD approach—toward what we might call "political development studies"[3]—we stand to learn something about the very issues that Orren and Skowronek identified as necessarily linked to the American normative tradition. For instance, the debate within APD about the sources of American political culture, a debate that is linked to important normative arguments about American liberalism (Katznelson 2011), may well benefit from considering similar Canadian debates about the Hartzian interpretation of Canadian political-cultural development (Forbes 1987; Horowitz 1966).

My emphasis on the comparative potential of the APD approach is shared by many others in the APD community. APD scholars inside the United States have advocated for more interaction between APD and comparative politics (Morgan 2014), whereas others have encouraged comparative work on APD and American cities (Dilworth 2009; Hodos 2009; Kaufman 2009;

Taylor 2014).[4] Similarly, scholars whose focus is not on the United States have begun to notice the promise of the APD approach for exploring their own empirical cases (Smith 2009; Spirling 2014). Thus, the brief empirical study below is intended not only to demonstrate that APD is valuable in studies of urban governance but also to contribute to the growing community of scholars who believe that the explanatory value of a "political development studies" approach extends well beyond the American political context.

## Urban Policy and Governance in Canada

As part of a larger project on the long-term dynamics of urban policy making in Canadian cities, I have built a dataset containing year-by-year data on urban policy institutions—the formal institutional structures in which public policies are developed and administered—in five policy domains and six cities from the nineteenth century to the present. I have selected the five policy domains—policing, public health, schools, public transit, and water—on the criteria of substantive importance (i.e., importance in the urban policy literature in Canada), policy scope (minimizing overlap between the domains that I have selected to maximize coverage), duration (selecting public policy tasks whose history reaches back to the early twentieth century at the latest), and access to reliable and comparable sources.[5] I used similar criteria to select the six case cities—Calgary and Edmonton (in Alberta), Hamilton and Toronto (in Ontario), and Vancouver and Victoria (in British Columbia)—while also selecting two cities from each province to allow for comparison both within and across provinces.

For each policy domain and city, my aim is to capture concrete patterns of governing authority as they exist in each city and policy domain. I have done so by recording information about the structure of urban policy institutions along four key variables. The first is the distinction between public and private policy provision. In the recent past, broad cultural shifts toward market-oriented institutional restructuring have combined with local fiscal pressures to produce new enthusiasm for private-sector involvement in local policy tasks (Isin 1998; Kipfer 1998), especially in "hard services" domains like water supply (Bakker and Cameron 2005), public transit infrastructure (Trebilcock and Hrab 2006), and waste management (McDavid 2001). In the urban context, however, this interest in private policy provision has a long history, and many cities were involved in franchising and "contracting out" arrangements in areas like water and public transit from the nineteenth century until, in some cases, after the Second World War (Bloomfield and Bloomfield 1983). The dataset captures these distinctions between periods in

which a policy task is contracted out to a private corporation and periods in which it is developed and administered by the local public sector.[6]

The second important distinction in the dataset is between *special-purpose* institutions, which are responsible for a single policy task, and *general-purpose* municipal councils with responsibilities across a range of policy domains. Although special-purpose institutions have received only intermittent attention in Canada (Siegel 1994), their importance is widely recognized in the international literature, with theoretical treatments (Frey and Eichenberger 1999; Hooghe and Marks 2003) as well as empirical studies (Foster 1997; Mullin 2009) devoting considerable attention to the strengths, weaknesses, and policy effects of special-purpose versus general-purpose governance arrangements. In Canada, as in the United States, the history of many special-purpose bodies stretches back into the nineteenth century.

A third important variable in the dataset is *local* versus *regional* governance. In the Canadian context, at least, this is perhaps the most vital dimension of urban policy and governance since the Second World War. The "metropolitan question"—the question of how to govern and redistribute the benefits and burdens of postwar metropolitan growth—has been at the heart of nearly all of the best known urban politics research in Canada, in part because a generation of Canadian scholars became directly involved in metropolitan restructuring processes across the country (e.g., Brownstone and Plunkett 1983; Fyfe 1974). In the United States, the metropolitan debate has competed for attention with other subjects—questions of social class, racial politics, and governance regimes—and regionalist arguments have also been forced to grapple more directly with competing arguments for decentralization and polycentric governance (Ostrom 1977). Even in the United States, however, no one would deny the importance of scale in a study of urban policy institutions. The dataset therefore captures the scale at which each of the five policy tasks is administered: the municipal scale, the regional scale, or a two-tier structure involving both municipal and regional institutions.

The final important variable captured in the dataset is the formal authority of municipal council. This variable captures the involvement of elected councillors in a policy task regardless of its institutional location. In some cases, such as Canadian public schools, governing actors (school trustees) are separately elected and municipal councils have little role in the policy domain. In other cases, municipal councillors may appoint all of the members of a special-purpose body and may even appoint themselves to sit on the board. This variable therefore takes us beyond the institutions in which policy tasks are governed and attempts to capture the personnel who are responsible for directing those institutions.

Taken together, then, the dataset captures formal, concrete patterns of governing authority in four respects: the relative role of *public* versus *private* actors; the *scale* at which a policy task is governed, whether local or regional or some combination of the two; the *institution* that is entrusted with the policy task, be it a general-purpose council or a special-purpose body; and the *personnel* who are empowered to govern the policy task, whether elected or appointed, and if appointed, by whom. I have used a range of sources, from statutes and regulations to published histories and government reports, to identify the structure of policy institutions in each domain and city, and I have written a "backgrounder" for each domain in each city, along with a list of the sources that I have used for each case, which is available for interested readers at my website. This approach to urban policy governance focuses on the formal institutional structures in which urban policies are developed and administered, even if those institutions are not contained within ordinary municipal governments; while municipal institutions are therefore an important component of urban policy governance, this approach also enables us to understand how municipal institutions fit within the broader governance of urban public policies within the "local state" (Magnusson 1985). By recording these basic features of urban policy governance for each year in each policy domain and city, we can track the long-term structure of policy governance institutions over time, comparing these structures not only across policy domains but also across cities and the higher-order governments with legislative authority over urban governance institutions (provinces, in the Canadian case).

In a separate article, I have provided a description of the dataset along with a sequence-analytic comparison of the histories of each policy domain in each city (Lucas, forthcoming). As mentioned above, I have also built an online data archive containing institutional histories and sources for each of the 30 policy domain and city combinations.[7] Thus, my aim here is not to examine the dataset in detail, but instead to discuss it in relation to the potential value of an APD approach within the study of urban political authority and urban governance.

The dataset illustrates, first of all, that a focus on concrete structures of authority does reveal interesting patterns in the development of urban governance over time. Figure 1 provides a simple sketch of these patterns. The colors in the figure are organized according to three very basic distinctions, each of which is linked to the four variables above: first, public and private governance, where periods of private governance are marked in pink; second, local and regional governance, where local institutions are marked in blue and regional institutions are marked in green; and finally, institutions with low levels of municipal council authority and those with high levels of

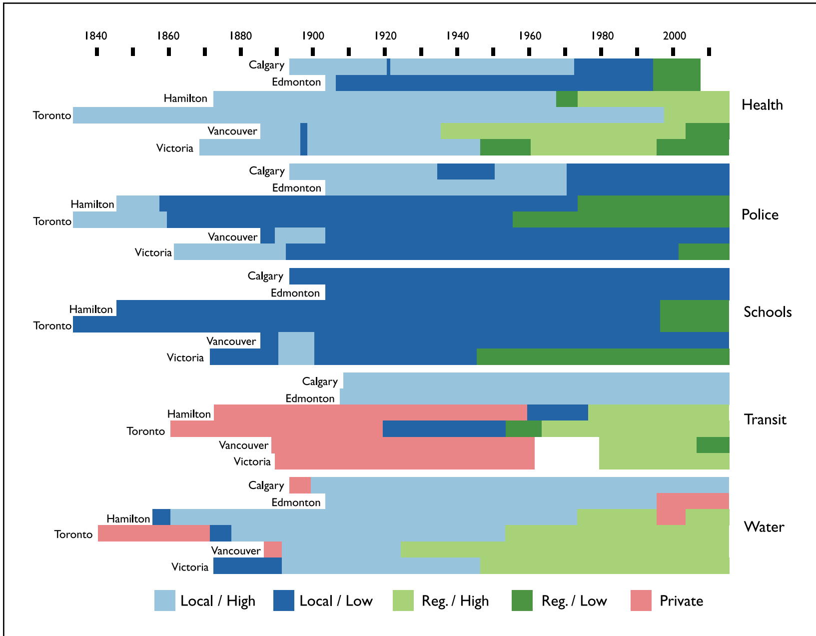


**Figure 1.** Policy institutions in Canadian cities, sorted first by domain and then by city. Each year is sorted into one of five categories: private governance, low-authority local institutions, low-authority regional institutions, high-authority local institutions, and high-authority regional institutions. Authority here is understood as the relative role of local elected councillors in the policy domain; this is authority of local general-purpose government over the policy task.

municipal council authority. This final category is a combination of the "institution" and "personnel" variables above: Special-purpose institutions with a minority of municipal councillors on the board, which are more distant from council authority, are marked as low-authority, whereas general-purpose institutions, along with special-purpose bodies that are dominated by municipal councillors, are marked as high-authority institutions.

It is important to note that the categories in Figure 1 are not intended to serve as a definitive typology of local policy institutions. These categories provide a simplified version of the highly variable policy institutions in the dataset, and some important compromises are involved in distilling the variation in the dataset down to just five basic categories.[8] Moreover, the high-authority and low-authority categories, grounded in the perspective of general-purpose municipal governments, are just one of many possible

approaches to policy authority at the urban scale. The visualization in the figure is therefore intended to serve as a first sketch, rather than a definitive final statement, of the development of urban policy governance in Canada.

Notwithstanding these limitations, Figure 1 does provide a useful and visually tractable overview of the policy institutions contained in the dataset. The sequences in the figure are sorted first by policy domain and then by city. Comparing the sequences vertically, domain by domain, we can see differences in institutional approaches across domain, from the low-authority governance in schooling and policing (darker shades of green and blue) to the higher-authority governance approaches in public health and transit (lighter shades). We can also see that experimentation with private provision (pink) has been concentrated in domains like water and public transit. Reading the figure horizontally, across time, some interesting patterns are also visible, such as the transition from high- to low-authority in policing, as cities across Canada adopted police commissions to govern their police forces at arm's length from municipal councils. The transition to regional governance, which has been widely discussed in the Canadian urban literature (Sancton 2001), is also clear in the figure's green-shaded regions. Thus, even in a highly simplified overview, a focus on the concrete structures of urban political authority turns up interesting patterns in the development of Canadian governance over time.

The value of the APD approach to urban governance becomes even clearer, however, when we sort the same data so that it is organized first by city and then by policy domain, as I do in Figure 2. What is most evident about this second figure, at first glance, is that it is *messier* than the domain-by-domain presentation. There *are* patterns of governance that appear to be sorted by city such as the arrival of regional institutions (green-shaded areas) in Hamilton, Toronto, Vancouver, and Victoria. But each city also contains multiple colors and shades, often at the same time. Viewed from the perspective of a single city, what is clear in the figure is *intercurrence*: the coexistence of multiple forms of governance, each of them premised on different assumptions about political authority, within and across Canadian cities and urban policy domains.

To better understand the dynamics of these long-term patterns of urban governance, I undertook an analysis in which I compared each of the 30 city–domain combinations with one another using optimal matching sequence analysis techniques (Lucas, forthcoming). My findings in that analysis suggest that similarities among long-term sequences of urban governance are sorted primarily by policy domain, secondarily by the higher-order government with legislative authority for cities, and not at all by the cities themselves. What this means is that a long-term institutional sequence—the full

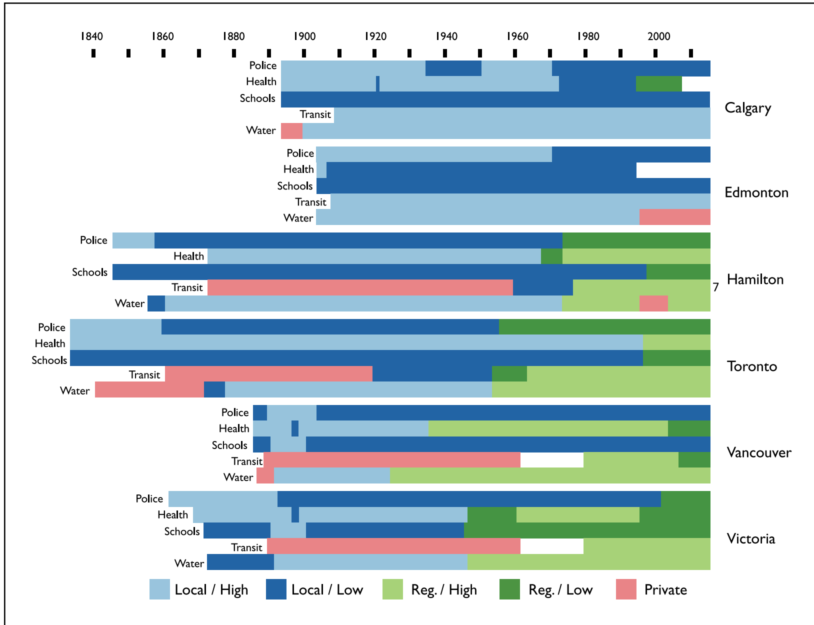


**Figure 2.** Policy institutions in Canadian cities, sorted first by city and then by domain. Each year is sorted into one of five categories: private governance, low-authority local institutions, low-authority regional institutions, high-authority local institutions, and high-authority regional institutions. Authority here is understood as the relative role of local elected councillors in the policy domain; this is authority of local general-purpose government over the policy task.

historical "story" of governance types in each domain and city—tends to resemble the same domain in other cities and provinces much more than it resembles sequences from different domains within the same city. Once again, the most useful concept with which to characterize this finding is *inter-currence*: multiple patterns of political authority, across domains and across time, within each urban context.

This brief overview of urban policy institutions in Canadian cities is meant to be suggestive rather than comprehensive. There is much more to say about the long-term development of urban governance in each of these cities—not only the formal institutional structures, which are my focus in this particular dataset, but also other aspects of governance that ought to be included in a full historical account: fiscal relationships within and among governments, internal administrative arrangements, challenges to existing governance

structures, patterns of discourse related to urban political authority, and so on. However, by finding ways to capture these features within the concrete structures of urban governing authority, as APD suggests, we can begin to describe the development of urban governance in an empirically tractable way.

Two broader lessons emerge from this survey of Canadian policy institutions as it relates to the potential value of APD in urban politics. First, if an APD approach is to be useful in the context of urban governance, we would expect to find a number of different "orders" or institutional-ideological contexts existing within specific cities at the same time. These contexts would resemble what Douglas Reed (2014) has called "states" in his recent study of the "educational state" in Alexandria, Virginia, or, following a more policy-oriented literature, they might be called "subdomains" (Baumgartner and Jones 2009) or "fields" (Lucas 2016). Whatever we choose to call these orders, our discussion of Figures 1 and 2 suggests that, in the context of urban governance, they are indeed quite real. These orders exist not only within higher-order institutional contexts, such that we can speak of an "Alberta urban governance state" and an "Ontario urban governance state," but they also exist very powerfully across policy domains like education, public health, and public transit. These varying forms of governance embody important differences in structures of political authority, pointing once again toward the importance of intercurrence as an organizing concept for urban governance research.

Second, the example of policy institutions in Canadian cities reveals the considerable value of a concrete approach to the study of shifts in political authority. It would be foolish to claim that the figures above capture the full development of Canadian urban politics over time; even in the context of a focus on "concrete shifts in governing authority," there is much more that could be added to the dataset, including fiscal authority, general levels of local autonomy, and the evolving networks of actual political actors who were involved in each city and domain over time. However, even the simple approach we have taken here, focused exclusively on the formal machinery of urban policy institutions, reveals empirical patterns that are complex yet empirically tractable. To explain these patterns will probably require that we draw from a wide array of causal arguments. But our approach has given us a groundwork of basic empirical patterns with which to begin the process of describing, and ultimately explaining, the development of urban political authority over time.

## Research Agenda

My argument thus far has been that APD provides a useful theoretical and conceptual framework from which to explore and explain the development of

urban governance over time. The first goal of such research will be to develop strong descriptive inferences about how cities in Canada, the United States, and elsewhere have developed, inferences that are grounded in a focus on concrete shifts in political authority and sensitive to the likelihood that a number of different "orders" or "fields" will exist within single cities at the same time. Only then will we be equipped to move toward arguments about the causal processes that have driven the patterns of authority that we find. Within this broad research agenda, I believe that "urban political development" has the potential to make particularly valuable contributions in four more specific areas of research.

## *Intercurrence and Spillover*

The concept of intercurrence points us toward the coexistence of differing institutional-ideological orders within the state. I have argued above that such orders are clearly evident within Canadian cities. But it is equally obvious, for anyone who is familiar with North American urban history, that these orders, although separate, are hardly independent from one another; what happens in one broad policy field can have implications for other fields as well. Thus, although intercurrence is an opening theoretical assumption for APD theorists, the nature and extent of each field's independence from the others must always be a matter of empirical investigation. An urban political development approach could help us understand when, where, and why some ideas about political authority remain locked inside certain domains while others "spill over" from one domain into another. It will also help us to identify moments when this spillover was an intentional attempt to import new forms of political authority into another policy domain and moments when spillover is more indirect, a result of the unintended spinning out of changes from one domain into another.

## *Urban Regimes and Policy Fields*

Among scholars who are interested in urban political authority, perhaps the most dominant source of inspiration has been Clarence Stone's (1989) urban regime approach, which focuses on the construction of political and policy capacity in the urban context. More recently, however, Stone and others have recognized that the urban regime is a form of city governance that is more likely in particular contexts, and particular historical time periods, than in others (Stone 2015; Stone and Stoker 2015). An approach to urban politics that is grounded in APD could help us to identify the particular historical periods that are more or less conducive to the existence of urban regimes.[9] Such an

approach would examine the construction of urban authority and local policy capacity in different cities, domains, and time periods, focusing on the contexts that are more or less susceptible to the forms of political leadership and public–private governance coalitions that are characteristic of urban regimes.

### *Complex Temporality and Urban Authority Shifts*

Changes to urban public policies are the result of an enormous range of processes that occur at a host of temporal and spatial scales. The emergence of urban social policies, such as child welfare or public health, for example, resulted from a complex combination of processes ranging from large-scale demographic and economic trends to the public intervention of particular policy leaders in particular cities at particular times. Explaining how these differing temporal and spatial scales interact to produce particular changes has been, and will continue to be, a matter of important theoretical discussion across the social sciences (Abbott 2001; Sewell 2005). Although an urban political development approach is unlikely to fully resolve this problem theoretically, it may help us to make it more tractable, by focusing on how processes across these scales variably reconfigure concrete patterns of political authority. For instance, comparing how processes of urbanization differently affected governance structures in various urban policy fields—municipal governance, public health, child welfare policy, and so on—would give us important clues about the ways that large-scale social structures are encoded in the resources and ideas that constitute a particular field or order within a city. Here, too, the strength of an urban political development approach would lie in its combination of theorizing about complex processes and its empirical focus on concrete structures of political authority.

### *Cities, Fields, and State Development*

Finally, as scholars like Richardson Dilworth have argued, urban political development can help to illuminate the role of cities and urban political actors within broader developmental processes, including state formation, bureaucratization, democratization and citizenship, and the emergence of the welfare state. In the latter case, for example, an urban political development approach would focus first on the emergence of social policy in the urban context and the institutionalization of those policies within new forms of urban governance—often involving novel funding, reporting, and inspection relationships with higher-order governments, as well as special-purpose institutions to govern the new policy tasks at the local scale. It would then explain how those social policy responsibilities shifted across the new

institutions, and ultimately across scales, many of them moving upward from the local to the provincial and federal levels. Much about the role of urban actors in generating, advocating, and resisting these changes remains to be explored, in part because of the fluidity and complexity of the early "urban welfare state". Here, too, an urban political development approach can help us to understand such outcomes in a comparable, theoretically rich, and empirically tractable way.

## Conclusion

Urban governance institutions always have a history—one that usually stretches back further than we imagine. To describe a city's institutions is to describe a series of layers, with new forms of governance, often embodying new conceptions of political authority, layered atop and alongside already existing institutions. To understand the development of urban governance over time, and the operation of urban governance institutions today, requires that we develop the theoretical and methodological resources with which to examine these layered institutions, to sort them into coherent patterns, and to understand how they have developed across cities, across policy tasks, and across time.

I have argued in this article that the theories and techniques of APD—sufficiently expanded into a broader "political development studies" approach—can help us to carry out this work. The combination of a rich theoretical vocabulary, grounded in the concept of intercurrence, with a concrete empirical program, grounded in concrete shifts in governing authority, is, I have argued, particularly useful for understanding the complex development of urban governance. Although APD is not founded on a particular *causal* argument about political authority, this is a strength rather than a weakness. By giving us a clear picture of the urban political world—one that is sufficiently complex to capture the intersecting dynamics and orders of urban governance, while also concrete enough to allow us to describe those dynamics and orders in empirically tractable and verifiable ways—APD sets us in the direction of asking the right questions about the development of urban governance over time.

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## Notes

1. For a more extended treatment of Grand River watershed management, see Lucas (2016).
2. In fairness, this relative absence of theoretical concepts is largely due to the underlying purpose of Dilworth's book, which is, as I noted above, to bring the city "back in" to the wider literature on American politics and American Political Development (APD).
3. I am grateful to Zack Taylor for suggesting this phrase.
4. Discussion about the comparability of Canadian and American cities, sometimes called the "North American City debate," is also ongoing. For a recent instance, see Good (2014) and the other articles in the same volume. My focus here, however, is on comparing Canadian cities with *one another*, rather than a Canadian-American comparison, in an attempt to demonstrate the promise of the APD approach. Even so, an APD approach may prove useful within the North American City discussion (see, for example, Taylor 2014).
5. I discuss each of these criteria in more detail in Lucas (forthcoming).
6. Of course, students of "Alternative Service Delivery" will note the range of arrangements between the public–private poles. Because I am operating at the level of entire policy domains in this dataset, my goal is to capture the public–private distinction only at the very largest scale: administration of the domain as a whole.
7. http://jacklucas.pennyjar.ca/governance.html.
8. Perhaps the most important of these compromises concerns the local/regional distinction; for instance, when the amalgamated cities of Toronto and Hamilton were created, what were once "regional" policy institutions became "local" in the sense that their borders now matched that of the municipal government. As the institutions did not in fact change scale, I have not changed their visual categorization in the figure. For more information about the coding decisions in the figure, please see the backgrounder available at my website (see previous note).
9. This approach may also serve to clarify some questions about the applicability of the urban regime approach to non-American contexts such as Canada (see Cobban 2003; Leo 2003).

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