

# Local Democracy in NYC in Comparative Perspective

## Spring 2027

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Although the media tends to focus on national politics, local government, public policy, and electoral politics are critically important. Local governments in the United States manage policing, shape housing policy, provide essential public services such as garbage collection, water, and sanitation, and implement national policies in areas ranging from social welfare to climate change. New York City offers a particularly important and fascinating setting in which to study these issues: city government has attracted extraordinary local and national attention, while young New Yorkers have become increasingly engaged in local politics. In this course, we will examine local democracy and governance in New York City, situating the city within broader national trends and drawing comparisons with other cities. The course allows students to apply what they learn through group activities focused on NYC politics and governance and through a field component in which they observe local democracy in practice.

We will focus on answering four fundamental questions:

1. What do local governments and public officials do, and how does New York City differ from cities with other institutional arrangements?
2. How and why does participation vary across local elections and other forms of political activity—including attending public meetings, contacting representatives, and protesting—and why do these differences matter for policy?
3. When is local democracy most responsive to poor and marginalized groups? In what social and political contexts does local democracy work best for those groups?
4. How are major policy areas—including housing, public safety, and public services—governed in New York City, and what political and administrative challenges shape policy outcomes?

### **Goals/Objectives of the Course (intended outcomes):**

1. Students will learn to explain major debates in local politics and public policy.
2. Students will learn how the institutions of New York City government function, and analyze how they work in practice.
3. Students will learn how to communicate effectively through analytical writing, oral presentations, and civic education activities.
4. Students will learn to conduct interviews and participant observation to study local government and civic participation.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Your final grade will be based on the following components:

**Attendance and Participation in Group Activities and In-Class Discussions (15%)** You are expected to attend all classes and to read the required readings in advance of each class session. You will not be penalized for 2 absences after the first week of class, but will lose 5 percentage points for each additional unexcused absence off the final grade unless the professor agrees to alternative arrangements for extenuating circumstances. Please note that work conflicts are not excused absences and alerting me in advance of non-essential absences does not make an absence excused.

To do well in this course, you must attend but also actively participate in regular class meetings and come to class prepared. Students are required to complete the readings and watch assigned movies before class, and to come to class ready to discuss the material of the day. Students are also expected to come to class with one question a reading made you think about (and why it made you think about this question). Also, note that participating often is great, but you will get more points when it is clear you read and are engaging with class material.

Tips for Reading Preparation: After reading an article, you should be able to answer the following questions: What is the main argument? Does it make sense logically? What is the evidence for it? What does the article or chapter conclude based on the evidence? What are the strengths and the weaknesses? Use the reading worksheet at the end of this syllabus to help you with this. It is essential that you come to class prepared so that you can engage in discussion and ask questions. Completing the reading worksheet and weekly responses (described below) will help you be prepared for class discussions.

**Weekly reactions to reading and videos (5%).** You will be asked to write 250-word responses based on the readings and/or movies assigned for class sessions 10 times throughout the semester. To get credit these responses must be posted before class starts for which the readings are assigned.

- Responses should include engagement with the main ideas and findings of the readings to show you completed the reading and thoughts about it.
- Along with revealing main points of one or more readings, you should come up with a question that the reading makes you think about. This question could be a critical one or a question about how a core insight applies to NYC politics or government.

**Group Activity: Advise a New York City Council Member (5%).** You will work in a small group assigned to one New York City Council district. Throughout the semester, your group will advise the district's Council member on several local challenges. In-class activities will include analyzing local news and neighborhood demographics; designing a district-level GOTV campaign and deciding how to allocate resources across demographic groups and voters with different levels of turnout propensity; examining housing conditions, 311 complaints, and proposed zoning changes; analyzing crime trends and recommending public-safety strategies; and participating in a participatory-budgeting simulation.

At the end of the semester, each student will individually write a two-page policy memo advising the Council member on how to allocate a hypothetical \$1 million discretionary budget. The memo should recommend two or three spending priorities, explain how the proposed investments would address needs within the district, support the recommendations with evidence

gathered through the semester's activities, and discuss any important tradeoffs. Your grade will be based on your preparation, participation, contributions to the group activities, and individual policy memo.

**Local Government News Tracker and Explainer Video (10%).** Each student will select a New York City office, official, agency, or policy issue rooted in a government department to follow throughout the semester. Students will submit five short news updates on Courseworks and follow relevant official social-media accounts, newsletters, and independent news coverage. At the end of the semester, students will create a 3–4-minute informational video explaining what the office or agency does, what authority it possesses, and how it has responded to one important issue or controversy during the semester. Students should draw on their news updates and distinguish between the institution's formal responsibilities and its actual performance. Videos will be shared with the class but do not need to be posted publicly. Grades will be based on substantive accuracy, effective use of examples, organization, and clarity—not advanced editing or production quality.

Positions and agencies may include any of following:

- Political positions: Mayor; city comptroller; council representative (any rep in NYC), speaker of the city council; NYC public advocate; Manhattan DA; Governor (specifically news on state government negotiations with NYC on funding, tax, and policy); governor-city relations (specifically role of state government in NYC funding and policy).
- Agencies: Police chief (NYPD); housing commissioner (department of housing); schools chancellor (department of education); civilian complaint review board; department of social services.

**Field Assignment (20%).** Students will choose a topic (e.g., education, zoning) or institution (community board, city council, board of education, issue-related government meeting or committee, or civic group involved in local issues to engage throughout the term). Each student should plan to attend a minimum of 4 events on the same topic.

Students will take field notes on each event so you can understand the context of what you are seeing (who shows up, is it emotionally charged, what seems to be the conflict or issue of focus, etc.). Fieldnotes will be posted after you complete each event and shared with the class on Courseworks so you can learn from each other's experiences and reference relevant events as needed. Students will also conduct 3-4 interviews with attendees and officials or civic leaders over the course of the semester. Interviews can take place during or after the event by phone or in-person but you should make the connection during the event. We will learn how to take field notes and practice conducting interviews in class to prepare you for this task.

You will present on your field experience in the field project workshop which will take place in the penultimate week of the course. Each presentation should be 6-8 minutes long and include what you set out to do, what you learned from the experience and about the theme, and what you saw/heard/discussed with people about their role in local governance (draw on your fieldnotes and interviews to support your narrative). You should also think of three core observations or

conclusions that come out of the full experience (e.g., how did the event vary, what did I learn about local democracy across all the events, etc.).

**Midterm (20%)** You will write a take-home midterm exam based on course content prior to the policy section of the course. It will include 4 short answers and an applied essay component on representation, responsiveness, and elections. You will have one week to complete it.

**Final Policy Brief (25%)** You will write a policy brief as if you were advising the mayor of NYC, a government agency, or a city council member (8-10 pages). The policy brief will diagnose a problem in the areas of housing, homelessness, public safety, welfare programs, public services, or environmental justice. It will spell out the problem with evidence, identify how the problem can be explained in terms of policy, administration, and the politics that support it, and then propose a strategy for changing the politics and the policy/implementation.

### **Classroom Etiquette**

To make sure that we have a hospitable learning environment, I ask students to follow 4 simple rules:

- 1) Turn your cell phones off and close your laptops when class begins (unless you are in paired discussion looking over readings).
- 2) Respect your classmates. Debate is encouraged but disagree respectfully by engaging in ideas and evidence rather than personal attacks.
- 3) Coffee/beverages are fine, but food is not permitted in class since it can distract your classmates.
- 4) It is acceptable to use AI tools such as ChatGPT or Pilot to identify relevant resources for papers or to find information relevant to the class. It is not acceptable to use AI tools to complete assignments or write papers beyond this. You are smarter and more creative than ChatGPT, and this class is the place to show me how you think about the material.

### **A Note on Academic Integrity**

As goes without saying, it will not be possible to pass this course if I find any evidence of plagiarism/cheating of any kind for any assignment. At minimum, this will result in a zero for that assignment and will be referred to the Dean without exceptions. If you do the work yourself, and think a lot about the material, you'll be fine.

### **AI and Academic Ethics**

AI Use, Plagiarism and Other Violations of Code of Conduct: All assignments in this course fall under Columbia University's College's code of conduct. Generative AI tools are not permitted in this course for any written assignments. Students must rely on their own originality, creativity and critical thinking skills to complete assignments, complete take-home exams, write papers, and engage with course material. Any violation (including, but not limited to, cheating on exams, relying on AI, and plagiarism) will result in the student being held accountable to the full extent of university guidelines. This includes self-plagiarism – meaning, cases where students re-use material they wrote themselves for other courses.

## **Grade Complaints**

Your TA will grade your exams and assignments. It is possible that you may be unhappy with a grade, and I am always willing to discuss your progress during the course to help you improve. If you believe the grade you received is an incorrect assessment of the quality of the work you produced, you can challenge your grade. If you want to do so, please email your TA with a written description explaining in detail why you believe your grade does not accurately represent the quality of the work you submitted. Your TA will subsequently discuss your work and assess whether your grade should be changed. Note that your TA is the best person to talk to first as they will be grading your assignments and exams.

Before you contact your TA or myself about your grade(s), consider the following:

First, the goal of a grade reassessment is to produce a grade that is a fair representation of your performance: this means that any grading errors that lowered your grade will be corrected, but any potential grading errors that increased your grade will also be taken into account. The re-grading process can thus result in a higher grade, the exact same grade, or a lower grade than what you received through the original grading process.

Second, a grade challenge means you must make a specific argument about why you think the grading does not reflect the quality of your work. This is a non-negotiable part of a grade challenge: it is not enough to state that you are confused by your grade, or that you feel that it does not reflect the amount of time and effort you put into the course. Both of those feelings can be very frustrating! But they are not arguments for why a grade is not correct, and I will not entertain grading challenges based on these arguments.

Third, as you are assessing your work in comparison to the answer keys or comments by your TA, make sure you do not just look at the things you did right: you also have to incorporate those things you missed or got wrong. For example, if you received an A- for a midterm, it is easy to list a variety of things you got right. But those things are what likely earned you the A-. The point of a grade challenge is to show that your TA incorrectly withheld points for things you got wrong or failed to discuss (in enough detail).

Fourth, students sometimes try to ‘challenge’ their grade through a roundabout way – effectively having the instructor defend why they graded the work the way they did. Often, those students do not provide arguments for why they disagree with the grade. If you are unsure what you did wrong and you would like me to clarify, I am of course always happy to do so. But I will not engage the ‘roundabout grade challenge’: if you think the grade is incorrect, then you think I made one or more mistakes and you have to identify what I did wrong. If you cannot articulate why you think the grade is wrong, then that might just mean it is in fact a correct assessment of your performance.

Finally, grades are not a negotiation. The correct use of this process is not to look at your different grades at the end of the semester and to try to up one, or multiple, grade(s) with the sole goal of collecting enough points to increase your final letter grade. If you want to ensure you get

the highest grade possible, I would advise you to spend your time reaching out to me with questions before the exams and paper deadline, and not on trying to haggle about a grade afterwards.

All this said, you are welcome to discuss your exam outside of the grade challenge context to learn from it without the above requirements.

## **Title IX**

As a faculty member, I am – by law – a mandatory reporter and I am required to contact and provide information to Public Safety, the Dean of Students, or Columbia’s Title IX Coordinator if I am provided with any information indicating that a student has been sexually harassed (verbally or physically), sexually assaulted, stalked, had domestic violence or dating violence occur in a relationship, or been a victim / survivor of any behavior that is prohibited by Columbia University’s Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures. Once reported, Columbia University will seek to support any student and make efforts to stop the negative behavior, prevent it from recurring, and remedy its effects. It is important for you to be aware that there are three confidential places on campus where you can seek support or guidance from Columbia University staff members who are not mandatory reporters: clinical counselors in Counseling & Psychological Services, pastoral counselors in Campus Ministry, and medical service providers in University Health Services.

## **READINGS**

All required readings will be posted on Bright Space or via library e-reserves. Recommended articles are optional and likely to be references in lecture in case you want to read in more depth. This course requires you to carefully read all required readings before class and be prepared to discuss them. Generally, 3 articles or book chapters are assigned each week with occasional media pieces to illustrate course concepts. Make sure you not only understand the basic argument of each reading, but also give yourself time to think critically about them. You should complete the reading worksheet provided at the end of this syllabus on at least one reading per week to get practice reading actively and critically.

## **SCHEDULE AND READINGS**

### **PART 1: THE POWER AND INSTITUTIONS OF LOCAL DEMOCRACY**

#### **1/19: Introduction**

[Short video on Local Democracy](#)

Napsha, Daniel. 2025. “How Zohran Mamdani Can Build a More Civic New York.” *The Nation*, November 25.

Watch in Class: *Our Towns* (2021). Columbus, Mississippi segment.

## **1/21: What Does Local Government Do?**

Learning Goal: Understand how scale, institutions, and political relationships distinguish local democracy from national politics, and identify the officials who exercise power within New York City government.

Oliver, J. Eric, Shang E. Ha, and Zachary Callen. 2012. *Local Elections and the Politics of Small-Scale Democracy*. Chapter 1.

Berg, Bruce F. 2018. "The Charter, the Mayor, and the Other Guys." In *New York City Politics: Governing Gotham* (2nd ed.), 175–186, 201-209. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Optional: City & State. 2026. [“Who’s Who in Zohran Mamdani’s Administration? Meet the Folks Who Are Running New York City.”](#) *City & State New York*, Updated periodically.

Group Activity: Identify the main functions of an assigned NYC office or department and develop a 2-min explainer on that position and the most recent significant action taken by that office.

## **1/26: How Much Power Does the Mayor Have? NYC in Comparative Perspective**

Learning Goals: Understand the authority that mayors have in the US and how it varies across cities and states.

Note: We will choose a city council meeting to attend as a class today.

Svara, James H. 2017. “The Two Worlds of Elected Mayors in the US: What Type of Mayor Should Cities Choose?” In David Sweeting, ed., *Directly Elected Mayors in Urban Governance: Impact and Practice*, 103–120. Bristol: Policy Press.

Group Activity: Explore how the role of the mayor in an assigned city (LA, San Jose, CA, Buffalo, NY, Scranton, PA) and compare it to NYC. Who city gives the mayor more power and how do you know? Present your findings at the end of class.

## **1/28: Introduction to Participant Observation and Writing Fieldnotes**

Learning Goals: Learn the basics of participant observation, writing fieldnotes as a record of civic events you attend, and discuss the field assignment. I will assign city council districts to groups for the in-class project throughout the semester.

Assignment Before Class: Write fieldnotes for 30 minutes from a public location (park, subway, café, etc.).

Emerson, Robert, Rachel Fretz, Linda Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pages 169-182.

Partner Activity: Students will practice interviewing techniques with a partner and present what they learned. We will also discuss your field observations from the homework assignment.

## **2/2: Writing Questions and Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews**

Learning Goals: Learn the basics of developing questionnaires and conducting interviews. Practice interviewing technique in class.

Assignment Before Class: Interview a friend or family member for 10 minutes with 2-3 questions pre-written questions. Also watch an interview with a council member (find one with your assigned council member or try this [one](#)). Take notes on what questions were asked and which ones you think worked the best, and assess how the interviewer performed in the conversation.

Leech, Beth. 2002. "Asking Questions: Techniques for Semi-Structured Interviews." *Political Science and Politics* 35 (4) 665-68.

## **2/4: Who Shapes the City—and for Whom?**

Learning Goals: Compare neighborhood-centered and growth-machine perspectives on urban development; examine how residents, public officials, planners, developers, property owners, and business interests shape the city—and whose interests development serves.

Watch at Home (Before Class): *Citizen Jane: Battle for the City*. Directed by Matt Tyrnauer. Altimeter Films, 2016 (available on canopy).

Molotch, Harvey. 1976. "The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place." *American Journal of Sociology* 82(2): 309–332.

Group Activity: Evaluate one neighborhood in your assigned City Council district using Jacobs's four generators of diversity. Rate each condition as strong, mixed, or weak and cite specific evidence from maps, Street View, and your knowledge of the area. Then identify one change that would make the neighborhood function better according to Jacobs's framework. Thinking of elite actors, Who would support or oppose your proposed change, and what interests might explain their position?

## **PART 2: LOCAL REPRESENTATION, RESPONSIVENESS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

### **2/9: Turnout in Local Elections: Explaining Variation**

Learning Goals: Describe how turnout varies across cities and demographic groups; explain how election timing and other institutional arrangements affect the size and composition of the electorate; evaluate reforms intended to increase turnout and make local electorates more representative.

Oliver, J. Eric, Shang E. Ha, and Zachary Callen. 2012. *Local Elections and the Politics of Small-Scale Democracy*. Princeton University Press. Chapter 2.

Hajnal, Zoltan L., Vladimir Kogan, G. Augustin Markarian. 2022. "Who Votes: City Election Timing and Voter Composition." *American Political Science Review* 116 (1): 374-383.

Optional: Increasing Voter Turnout in Local Elections. National Civic League:  
<https://www.nationalcivicleague.org/ncr-article/increasing-voter-turnout-in-local-elections/>

Discussion: Recommend one institutional or policy reform to increase turnout in NYC local elections. Explain how it would work, which voters it would be most likely to affect, and any potential disadvantages.

## **2/11: Getting Out the Vote in Local Elections**

Learning Goals: Evaluate evidence about the effectiveness of canvassing, telephone calls, and direct mail; explain why political interest does not always translate into voting, particularly among young people; apply research on voter mobilization to develop an evidence-based local campaign strategy.

Gerber, Alan S., and Donald P. Green. 2000. "The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment." *American Political Science Review* 94 (3): 653–663.

Holbein, John B., and D. Sunshine Hillygus. 2020. *Making Young Voters: Converting Civic Attitudes into Civic Action*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1: "The Puzzle of Low Youth Turnout."

Lange, Michael. 2025. "[How Zohran Mamdani Brought New Voters to the Polls](#)." *The New York Times*, June 29, 2025.

Group Activity: Develop a strategy for increasing turnout among low propensity local election voters in your city council district.

## **2/16: Participation Beyond the Voting Booth**

Learning Goals: Understand how residents and civil-society organizations influence local government outside elections; explain how local organizations mobilize participation; and assess how inequalities in participation affect whose interests government hears and addresses.

Assignment Before Class: Watch one hour of a recent Community Board meeting available on YouTube from a Community Board that overlaps with your assigned City Council district. Take notes on who participates, the issues discussed, how residents present their concerns, and how board members and public officials respond.

Einstein, Katherine Levine, Maxwell Palmer, and David M. Glick. 2019. "Who Participates in Local Government? Evidence from Meeting Minutes." *Perspectives on Politics* 17 (1): 28–46.

Nuamah, Sally A., and Thomas Ogorzalek. 2021. "Close to Home: Place-based mobilization in racialized contexts." *American Political Science Review* 115 (3) 757-774.

Class Discussion: Discuss your observations from the CB meeting and whether it aligns more with findings from Einstein et al. or Nuamah and Ogorzalek.

## **2/18: Local News: Decline and the Way Forward**

Learning Goals: Understand the challenge local news is facing in the U.S. and in NYC. Discuss the future of local news.

Medill Local News Initiative. 2025. [\*The State of Local News 2025: Two Decades of Data, Deserts, and Dynamic Change\*](#). Northwestern University. Read the Executive Summary and the sections on News Deserts and Startups and Sustainability.

Rafsky, Sara. 2020. *Media Mecca or News Desert? Covering Local News in New York City*. Tow Center for Digital Journalism, Columbia Journalism Review, January 7. [Read the executive summary for an overview of NYC news sources] [https://www.cjr.org/tow\\_center\\_reports/local-news-deserts.php](https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/local-news-deserts.php)

Ferdman, Roberto. 2025. "The Rise of AI Local News." *Columbia Journalism Review*, May 15, 2025. <https://www.cjr.org/analysis/ai-local-news-civic-sunlight-maine.php>

Group Activity: Explore social media, newspapers (small, and larger ones), and other sources reporting on news in your assigned city council districts. What are the sources that reported on your district in the last week? What issues did they cover? How much investigative or on-the-ground reporting do you see? How did they differ (divide up types of sources among group members for efficiency).

## **2/23: Civics Education**

Learning Goals: Understand the knowledge gap in civic knowledge and best practices for delivering civics education. Settle on a plan for the explainer video project.

**Midterm will be handed out. You have one week to complete it.**

Assignment before class: Teach 2 friends or family members about the position or office you are following in the news, drawing on the lessons about civic education. Think about not only what information to provide but how to engage your listeners, make it feel real and relevant, and get them to want to know more. What does this tell you as you approach the video assignment?

Levine, Peter, and Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg. 2017. "The Republic is (Still) at Risk—and Civics is Part of the Solution." *Medford, MA: Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, Tufts University*.

Holbein, John B., and D. Sunshine Hillygus. 2020. "Rethinking Civic Education." In *Making Young Voters: Converting Civic Attitudes into Civic Action*, 118–154. New York: Cambridge University Press.

## **2/25: Field Assignment Check-In 1**

Learning Goals: Discuss your first field visit and your experience with civic education.

Upload your first field note entry from your first civic event to Courseworks discussions before class.

## **3/2: Local Elections and Holding Mayors Accountable**

Learning Goals: Understand how voters make decisions in low-information local elections and when they hold mayors accountable for local conditions and public-service performance.

Midterm is due electronically on Courseworks before class starts.

Assignment: Watch a debate for one elected city office (not the mayor) —for example, comptroller, public advocate, borough president, district attorney, or City Council. In your reaction post, identify the principal issues discussed in each debate. Compared to the mayoral debate (watched in class) what do the differences suggest about the responsibilities of each office and the conditions for which voters hold its officeholder accountable?  
Sances, Michael W. 2018. "Ideology and Vote Choice in U.S. Mayoral Elections: Evidence from Facebook Surveys." *Political Behavior* 40(3): 737–762.

Burnett, Craig M., and Vladimir Kogan. 2017. "The Politics of Potholes: Service quality and retrospective voting in local elections." *The Journal of Politics* 79 (1) 302-314.

Ball, Molly. 2025. "[The Tragedy of Eric Adams](#)." *Time*, October 29.

Group Activity: Evaluate the current administration on its performance in one area. How do you think voters will assess it?

## **3/4: Descriptive Representation: Race and Gender**

Learning Goals: Understand how descriptive representation—electing leaders who share the identity of marginalized communities—shapes public attitudes and policy.

Watch in Class: *The New York Times*. 2020. "[Remembering David Dinkins, NYC's Only Black Mayor](#)." November 24, 2020.

*The New York Times*. 2025. "[New York Elects Its First Muslim Mayor](#)." November 5, 2025.

Mansbridge, Jane. 1999. "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A

Contingent ‘Yes’.” *The Journal of Politics* 61(3): 628-657.

Hajnal, Zoltan L. 2006. *Changing White Attitudes Toward Black Political Leadership*. Cambridge University Press. Introduction (1-12).

### **3/9: Redlining and Persistent Racial Inequality**

Learning Goals: Explain how government housing policies and discriminatory real-estate practices created racial segregation and deprived Black families of housing wealth; analyze how these policies contributed to persistent inequalities in housing, school environments, environmental conditions, and access to neighborhood resources.

Assignment Before Class: Examine the historical HOLC map for the neighborhoods in your assigned City Council district. Identify which areas, if any, were redlined. Then use the EJNYC mapping tool to compare one historically redlined area with another area in or near your district. Identify one present-day difference in housing, health, or environmental conditions and come prepared to discuss what might explain it.

Watch in Class: *Shame of Chicago, Episode 1*.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. 2014. “[The Case for Reparations](#).” *The Atlantic*, June. Selected sections on Clyde Ross, contract buying, and redlining.

Resource for the Assignment: New York City Mayor’s Office of Climate and Environmental Justice. 2024. *Environmental Justice NYC Report*. Selected maps and findings on historical redlining and present-day environmental-justice areas. [Report and mapping tool](#).

### **3/11: Explainer Video Workshop**

We will use this session to prepare for the explainer video assignment. Students will identify the three central points of their videos and develop project outlines in pairs. A librarian will introduce relevant recording, editing, sourcing, and accessibility tools.

Assignment Before Class: Watch two short videos about the NYC government position or department you plan to cover in your assignment. Choose your favorite of the two and identify one feature that made an explanation effective and one element that could be improved.

Brame, Cynthia J. 2016. “[Effective Educational Videos: Principles and Guidelines for Maximizing Student Learning from Video Content](#).” *CBE—Life Sciences Education* 15(4).

**No Class 3/16 and 3/18. Spring Break.**

### **3/23: Gentrification and Development**

Learning Goals: Explain the causes and consequences of gentrification, analyze how residents, developers, and local government shape neighborhood change, and evaluate policies intended to limit displacement.

Watch an Excerpt in Class: Anderson, Kelly, dir. *My Brooklyn*, 2012. Documentary.

Freeman, Lance. 2006. Chapter 3: “There Goes the ’Hood: Views of Gentrification from the Ground Up.

Moskowitz, Peter. 2017. “Fight Back.” In *How to Kill a City: Gentrification, Inequality, and the Fight for the Neighborhood*. New York: Nation Books.

### **3/25: The Politics of Multifamily Housing and Zoning**

Learning Goals: Understand how homeowners, renters, developers, and housing advocates compete over multifamily housing—and how local land-use rules reproduce racial and economic inequality.

Dougherty, Conor. 13 Feb 2020 “Housing Crisis Is a Crisis of Local Democracy.” *The New York Times*.

Trounstein, Jessica. 2020. “The Geography of Inequality: How Land Use Regulation Produces Segregation.” *American Political Science Review* 114 (2): 443–455.

In-Class Activity: Examine a recent rezoning or proposed development in your assigned City Council district. Identify:

- What zoning or land-use change was proposed?
- Who supported and opposed it, and why?
- What powers did the Council member, mayoral agencies, developers, and community organizations possess?
- What concessions or community benefits were proposed?
- Did the final outcome increase housing while addressing—or reproducing—racial and economic inequality?

### **3/30: Homelessness**

Learning Goals: Explain the structural causes of homelessness, assess how housing markets and public policy shape homelessness in New York City, and evaluate competing policy responses.

Watch at Home: [Young and Homeless in New York](#)

Shinn, Marybeth, and Jill Khadduri. In the Midst of Plenty: Homelessness and What to Do About It. John Wiley & Sons, 2020. Chapter 2: “What Causes Homelessness?”

Coalition for the Homeless. 2026. [Build from the Bottom Up: Affordable Housing for Homeless New Yorkers](#). Policy brief, February 6.

Recommended: Herring, Chris. 2021. *Caging the Homeless: Public Policy and the Criminalization of Poverty*. Chapter 1.

#### **4/1: No Class. Attending the MPSA Conference.**

Watch at Home: *Policing the Police*

#### **4/6: Policing Strategies in NYC and Public Safety Since the 1990s**

Learning Goals: Understand which elected positions have authority over policing and understand what policing is like in urban areas day to day.

Moskos, Peter. 2025. “NYC Transit Policing and Safer Subway (1984–1995).” In *Back from the Brink: Inside the NYPD and New York City’s Extraordinary 1990s Crime Drop*, 75–105. New York: Oxford University Press.

Venkat, Surina. 2025. [“NYPD Stop-and-Frisks Soared in 2024.”](#) *New York Focus*, April 2.

Group Activity: Working with your previously assigned City Council district, examine crime patterns in an overlapping police precinct using [NYPD CompStat 2.0](#)

#### **4/8: Police Reform, Accountability, and Alternatives to Policing**

Learning Goals: Explain how mayors, police commissioners, civilian-oversight institutions, and social movements shape police accountability. Evaluate why police reforms encounter resistance or limited implementation and assess proposals that shift certain public-safety responsibilities from police to civilian institutions.

Olzak, Susan. 2021. “Does Protest Against Police Violence Matter? Evidence from U.S. Cities, 1990 through 2019.” *American Sociological Review* 86(6): 1066–1099. [Read the introduction, conclusion, and main findings].

Simon, Mollie, Lena V. Groeger, Eric Umansky, and Adriana Gallardo. 2020. [“What It Looks Like When the New York City Police Commissioner Has ‘Unchecked Power’ Over Officer Discipline.”](#) *ProPublica*, December 11.

Cooper, Wilbert L. 2026. [“In New York City, Mamdani’s New Appointee Talks About Reimagining Public Safety.”](#) *The Marshall Project*, April 4.

Knafo, Saki. 2021. [“Bridging the Divide Between the Police and the Policed.”](#) *The New Yorker*, April 28.

#### **4/13: Parks, Libraries, and Unequal Social Infrastructure**

Learning Goals: Explain how libraries, parks, and other shared public spaces function as social infrastructure; analyze why their accessibility, quality, and programming vary across neighborhoods; and assess how residents, community organizations, elected officials, city agencies, and private organizations influence their provision.

Klinenberg, Eric. 2018. "A Place to Gather." Chapter 1 in *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life*. New York: Crown.

NYC Parks. "[Equity in Action: The Community Parks Initiative](#)."

Kully, Sadeef Ali. 2018. "[Report Finds Deep Need for Open Space in Brooklyn and Bronx Neighborhoods](#)." *City Limits*, June 20.

**Group Activity:** Evaluate access to social infrastructure in one neighborhood in your assigned City Council district. Consider libraries, parks, playgrounds, plazas, recreation centers, and other safe public gathering spaces. Compare their accessibility, condition, amenities, programming, and capacity with those available in Morningside Heights. What inequalities do you observe, and what public policies or political processes might explain them?

#### **4/15: Sanitation, Pollution, and Environmental Justice**

**Learning Goals:** Explain why sanitation burdens, pollution, extreme heat, and climate risks are distributed unequally across NYC neighborhoods; identify the policies and institutions that produce these disparities; and analyze how affected communities organize to demand government action.

Fernández, Johanna. 2020. "The Garbage Offensive." Chapter 3 in *The Young Lords: A Radical History*, 91–114. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

New York City Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice. 2024. [Environmental Justice NYC: A Study of Environmental Justice Issues in New York City](#). Executive Summary and selected portions of Chapter 2.

**Recommended:** Miletic, Alek. 2023. "[What Stinks in Here!? Addressing Inequity in Sanitation Services in NYC](#)." *Hunter Urban Review*, June 30.

#### **4/20: Explainer Short Video Conference**

We will present the explainer short videos on officials or departments.

Upload your video to the assignment entry before class.

#### **4/22: Field Project Workshop**

Upload your slides to Courseworks before class. Sign up to be a discussant for one presentation by another student.

#### **4/27: Participatory Budgeting**

Learning Goals: Explain how participatory budgeting works in New York City, assess whether it broadens participation and changes public spending, and evaluate its potential and limitations as a tool of local democracy. We will also do a participatory budgeting exercise in class.

Calabrese, Thad D., Daniel W. Williams, and Anubhav Gupta. 2020. “Does Participatory Budgeting Alter Public Spending? Evidence from New York City.” *Administration & Society* 52(9): 1382–1409.

Golliher, Daniel. 2025. [“The City Council’s Participatory Budgeting by the Numbers.”](#) *Maximum New York*, February 3.

#### **4/29: Course Conclusion**

Please complete course evaluations online before class.

## Reading Worksheet

*For each book, chapter, or article assigned in this course, you should fill out the following (nongraded) worksheet. Many of these points can be addressed in a sentence or two (e.g. Questions 1 and 2; in some cases, answers will not need even to be full sentences (e.g., Question); and in some cases, the answers may overlap. These worksheets should be retained: they will be useful for future reference.*

1. State the central question that the reading addresses.
2. State the central argument(s) defended in the paper in response to this question.
3. What type of reasoning or evidence is used to support these arguments? If it is an analytical paper, what is the logic that undergirds the argument? If an empirical paper, what type of data is employed? Are there other data sources that you think might be more appropriate?
4. Do you find the claims of the reading convincing? What do you see as the main gaps that need to be filled?
5. Why (if at all) is the reading interesting?
6. Do you agree with the main claims? What are your hesitations? (This may simply involve restatement of previous points.)
7. Identify one or two implicit premises or background assumptions in the paper that you think are especially controversial or objectionable.
8. Considering your answers to the previous questions, write an abstract for the article of no more than 100 words. (Feel free to repeat formulations given in response to earlier questions.)
9. When you have done this for individual readings, take some time to think about the various readings you have been assigned in relation to each other. See if you can write or imagine a summary table for all the readings taken together which compares and contrasts them.