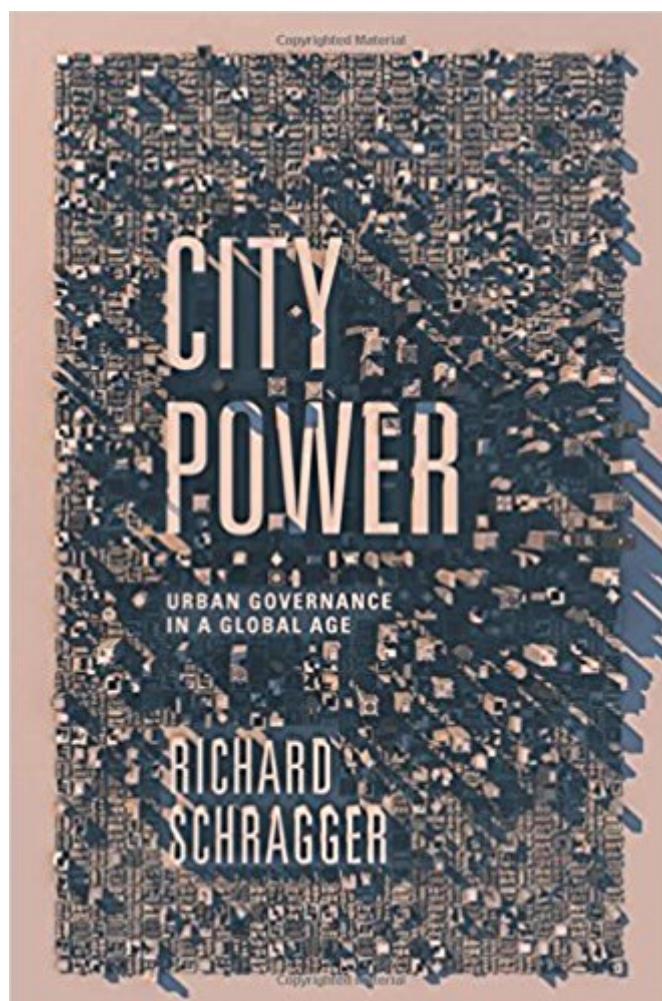


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# City Power: Urban Governance In A Global Age



## Synopsis

In 2013, Detroit filed the largest municipal bankruptcy in US history. That dubious honor marked the end of a long decline, during which city leaders slashed municipal costs and desperately sought to attract private investment. That same year, an economically resurgent New York City elected a progressive mayor intent on reducing income inequality and spurring more equitable economic development. Whether or not Mayor Bill de Blasio realizes his legislative vision, his agenda raises a fundamental question: can American cities govern, or are they powerless in the face of global capital? Conventional economic wisdom asserts that cities cannot do very much. Conventional political wisdom asserts that cities should not do very much. In *City Power*, Richard Schragger challenges both these claims, arguing that cities can govern, but only if we let them. In the past decade, city leaders across America have raised the minimum wage, expanded social services, put conditions on incoming development, and otherwise engaged in social welfare redistribution. These cities have not suffered from capital flight - in fact, many are experiencing an economic renaissance. Schragger argues that the range of city policies is not limited by the requirements of capital, but instead by a constitutional structure that serves the interests of state and federal officials. Maintaining weak cities is a political choice. *City Power* shows how cities can govern despite constitutional limitations - and why we should want them to. In an era of global capital, municipal power is more relevant than ever to citizen well-being. A dynamic vision of city politics for the new urban age, *City Power* demonstrates that the city should be at the very center of our economic, legal, and political thinking.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"What if cities could exercise the power Schragger suggests? City Power provides a brilliant and challenging legal analysis of the possibilities of local government reform." -- Myron Orfield, University of Minnesota  
"City Power challenges conventional thinking about what cities should be empowered to do. Instead of focusing on an inter-jurisdictional battle for economic growth, it argues, cities should concentrate on improving basic city services for their own citizens. Whether you agree or argue with it, this book will sharpen your thinking about city power and city powerlessness. A real contribution." -- Gerald Frug, Harvard Law School  
"Cities are coming back and experimenting with new policies to improve the quality of life and reduce economic inequality. A tour de force of urban scholarship, City Power is the best single source on the possibilities and pitfalls of emerging local progressive movements." -- Todd Swanstrom, University of Missouri

Richard Schragger is the Perre Bowen Professor at the University of Virginia School of Law, where he has taught for almost fifteen years. His scholarship focuses on the intersection of constitutional law and local government law, federalism, urban policy and the constitutional and economic status of cities.

This is one the best books I've ever read pertaining to local government. It provides an excellent history of American local government and a first rate accounting of the laws and powers of local government vis-à-vis state and federal government. I think every student of public management or public planning who sees a career working for cities and urban areas should read this book. My career working for and writing about local government would have been significantly enhanced had Schragger published this many years ago.

This is a very interesting, well-researched book. Rich does a great job assessing different views about how city policies can and do impact the economy from a legal, political, and historical perspective. He debunks several widely-held myths regarding cause and effect of city policies through thoughtful analysis and many case studies. Highly recommended for anyone who wants to learn more about the influence (and limitations) of cities.

An insightful and engaging book. As a local government attorney it makes me hopeful that at least

some localities can make meaningful strides in supporting the social welfare of their citizens and environment. Particularly timely given current intransigence in federal and state government...A resurgence of hope where that is rare currency. The author is engaging - both in print and in person. In particular, it should be noted that his office is well-appointed with a lovely view of the grounds.

This book takes a look at a difficult, quite specialist subject - the concept of local authority governance and manages to transform it into an open, interesting and thought-provoking read. Focussing on how U.S. cities may, or may not, govern in this ever-globalised world, it tweaks conventional economic wisdom that states that they cannot do a lot and, backed up by political wisdom, that they should not be doing a lot either. The answer is in our (city residents') hands, argues the author, who suggests that cities can do a lot towards governing and transforming their own locality, but only if we let them, if we want them to do so and if we are prepared to give them sufficient resources and support. Of course, cities cannot be an island and they will face pressures from other cities in their own country as well as from overseas, yet this does not mean that they have to throw in the towel and roll-over in desperation either. Who benefits from a weak city and why - this is one of the interesting conundrums examined. Maybe the more open-minded will see the benefits of placing individual cities at the heart of economic, legal and political thinking with a view of leveraging this massive powerbase in the process for the municipal, federal and even national good. Clearly a lot of this book may be directly relevant to readers living in the United States, yet elements may still be an interesting read to foreign residents. It can be possible that much of this book's central arguments could be adopted by other municipalities around the world. The author notes that in the U.S. people are often ambivalent about the exercise of local, participatory democracy with cities usually viewed as relatively inconsequential political units, the poor step-children of states and the nation. Maybe things are different in other countries, yet the author wants U.S. cities to govern and break out of any wrongly perceived stereotypes, impressions or cultures. It would have been nice if this book could have been a little more accessible to the generalist reader, without dumbing it down of course. It is an important, fascinating subject that deserves wider distribution and it did demand a little too much focus than might be reasonably be expected from someone who doesn't need to consider this as part of their day job. Yet, it is still worth the investment in time and trouble to read through it! It might even lead, gradually, to change.

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