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# Tales of Two Cities



*Sylvia Bashevkin*

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Tales of Two Cities  
Women and Municipal Restructuring  
in London and Toronto



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# Introduction

This study is built around an unusual meshing of conceptual and empirical streams of inquiry. At one level, it grapples with theories of citizenship, which ask how citizens of contemporary democracies engage with and feel a sense of belonging to their polities and larger societies. Boldly stated, is democratic citizenship possible in cities, and can it be robust and buoyant, in an age of state restructuring and economic globalization?

As is often the case, observers diverge in their responses to this question. Some believe that the fallout from integrative pressures directly threatens urban citizenship. In their view, as markets surge and states retrench, the interests of civil society become marginalized by a hollowing out of traditional channels of public engagement. Others maintain that as opportunities narrow for citizen engagement at the international and national levels, contemporary cities offer welcoming spaces for social mobilization. From their perspective, the same integrative processes that weaken nation-states can enhance local democracy.

Very little empirical research exists in this area. This project is among the first to ask how disparate experiments in municipal restructuring in London and Toronto have shaped civic engagement. The analysis employs the lens of citizenship theory to assess three dimensions of representation for a diverse category of citizens, urban women; each dimension flows from an identifiable way of thinking about political and social participation. First, we examine office holding on municipal councils as an indicator of liberal political representation. Second, we explore the development of municipal femocracies as a measure of difference representation. Third, we evaluate official spatial planning texts in order to reveal a discursive dimension of representation that emerges from post-structural approaches.

Our discussion opens in Chapter 1 with a review of the diverse institutional and leadership contexts that have unfolded in London and Toronto since the late 1990s. Chapter 2 explores patterns of women in public office, including on city councils and at the mayoral level. Chapter 3 examines municipal women's committees and other bureaucratic units in London and Toronto, asking how representation evolved at this level. Chapter 4 considers the texts of official spatial plans in both cities, with a focus on how they integrate feminist discourse about women in cities. Chapter 5 introduces qualitative data drawn from interviews with politicians, bureaucrats, planners, and activists in both cities, in order to understand their views concerning each dimension of municipal reconfiguration. Chapter 6 draws together the findings of the empirical sections, evaluates them in light of broader conceptual issues, and explores future prospects for women's citizenship in London and Toronto.

In training a spotlight on multiple dimensions of citizenship, this study relies on various empirical sources. Data about public office holding, urban bureaucracies, and official plans are drawn from municipal documents – including archival sources that lay out the historical record – as well as published accounts and confidential interviews with contemporary experts and participants: thirty-six in London and twenty-two in Toronto. As discussed in Chapter 5, I conducted in-person interviews with respondents in both cities between April 2001 and February 2005.

Overall, the study concludes that the context of urban restructuring is crucial to its impact. In London a moderate New Labour central government and progressive elected mayor helped open up opportunities for public engagement beginning in 1997. By way of contrast, a hard-right Conservative provincial government and conservative mayor in the newly amalgamated Toronto tended to close off or limit civic involvement during the same period.

These institutional and leadership circumstances registered forcefully and clearly on the citizenship radar screens of both urban environments. As will be demonstrated beginning in Chapter 2, decentralizing and democratizing initiatives in Britain, as well as Ken Livingstone's election in 2000 as the first mayor of the Greater London Authority, seemed to enhance an optimistic sense of possibility among progressive actors in civil society. In Toronto, however, centralizing efforts that culminated in the elimination of local boroughs, the 1997 election of Mel Lastman as the first megacity mayor, and Ontario's fiscal and service realignment process – which in effect punished cities – created far less

propitious circumstances. In Toronto, civil society actors sensed pessimism rather than possibility, defeat instead of promise, in the immediate aftermath of municipal governance changes.

My interest in the contours of urban citizenship was piqued in the course of fieldwork for two earlier books. When I began interviews in 1993 for the project that became *Women on the Defensive: Living through Conservative Times*, activists in London shared their still fresh memories of Margaret Thatcher's campaign to shut down the Greater London Council and vilify its last Labour leader, Ken Livingstone. Many harboured fervent hopes that pan-London government would be renewed and, more generally, that the Conservatives would soon be defeated in general elections. The 1997 New Labour victory brought their desire for metropolitan reform to the forefront just as I was returning to London to study social welfare policy.

The contrast between London's optimism over devolution – especially after Livingstone's mayoral victory in 2000 – and Toronto's anger, cynicism, and dismay following forced amalgamation and Lastman's election in 1997, was hard to miss. Like many other citizens, I witnessed the seeming futility of protests against the Ontario Conservative government – protests that included anti-megacity mobilizations in Toronto by Citizens for Local Democracy and other groups – and lived through the depressing aftermath of each defeat. The project that became this book thus grew out of lived experiences and research observations dating back to the early 1990s, which crystallized in 1997 and following when I was working in London and Toronto on the study that became *Welfare Hot Buttons*.

# Acronyms

ALA	Association of London Authorities
AWE	Association of Women Electors
CAO	Chief Administrator's Office
CAP	Canada Assistance Plan
C4LD	Citizens for Local Democracy
CHST	Canada Health and Social Transfer
EOC	Equal Opportunities Commission
EOO	Equal Opportunity Office
FCM	Federation of Canadian Municipalities
GLA	Greater London Authority
GLC	Greater London Council
GLDP	Greater London Development Plan
LAM	London assembly member
METRAC	Metropolitan Toronto Action Committee on Public Violence against Women and Children
NAC	National Action Committee on the Status of Women
NDP	New Democratic Party
NPM	new public management
OCAP	Ontario Coalition Against Poverty
PR	proportional representation
SCC	Safe City Committee
UDC	urban development corporation
WDS	Women's Design Service
WFTC	Working Families Tax Credit
WPT	Women Plan Toronto
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

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# Tales of Two Cities



# 1

## Restructuring Contexts

This study flows from puzzlement over contemporary politics in two large urban centres. One city, the long-standing capital of an established, centralized unitary state, was known for its ideologically brittle, protest-oriented, and relatively militant social activists. The other, a smaller and newer city in a decentralized federal system, was reputed to have pragmatic, cohesive, and institutionally focused social movements. Yet even the most casual observer of London, England, and Toronto, Ontario, must have wondered about the gap between conventional wisdom and observed reality.

In 2001, colourful advertisements on London's District Line trains included the following call for subway train drivers: "We believe in modern values ... like opening doors for women. London is a diverse city and we are taking action to ensure that our employee profile reflects the population we serve. Applications are encouraged from all sections of the community but we would especially welcome female applications."<sup>1</sup> Interested riders were urged to contact the London Underground offices to learn more about how they could earn £27,000 per year and higher with forty vacation days. Londoners were engaged during the same period in lively public conversations about proposals for a congestion charge to reduce inner-city traffic and improve air quality, and about ways to increase the numbers of women in public office.

In Toronto, calls for female train drivers did not appear on subway cars. Neither the environment nor women's political representation claimed much space on the urban public agenda. Instead, the most visible signs of urban activism during the early years of the twenty-first century were clashes between antipoverty activists and the police – including melees where protesters smashed gleaming windows on downtown bank towers.<sup>2</sup>

What was going on in these two cities? Had social movement politics

in London gone moderate and mainstream? Were anarchists displacing Toronto's famously middle-of-the-road activists?

Questions about local politics during these years carried more than anecdotal significance. Citizen activism – whether by trade unionists, women's rights advocates, or other organized interests – had been a prominent feature of the public landscape in both cities for more than a century. By 2000, Londoners and Torontonians made up roughly 15 percent of their respective countries' total populations.<sup>3</sup> Each attracted about half the diverse newcomers who arrived annually in Britain and Canada.<sup>4</sup> Although London was a much older and larger port city than Toronto, both were making enormous contributions to their respective nations' economies – contributions that vastly overshadowed the flow of funds in the opposite direction.<sup>5</sup> In short, London and Toronto loomed large as crucial urban spaces in similar Westminster-style political systems.

Furthermore, each had an unusually fractious political history. Each was the capital city for a powerful central government – the national regime in Britain and the Ontario provincial government in Canada. Perhaps for this reason, the political autonomy of both cities had been vigorously contested from time to time. As early as 1215, King John confirmed the right of Londoners to elect their own mayor.<sup>6</sup> Yet when urban leaders offended the Crown and, centuries later, the political executive, London was virtually taken over by these units.

During the 1980s, Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher rejected what she viewed as challenges to her fiscal and jurisdictional plans emanating from the cheeky Labourites of the Greater London Council, and especially from GLC leader "Red Ken" Livingstone. She summarily eliminated that body along with six other metropolitan authorities.<sup>7</sup> After nearly two decades of Tory rule, Tony Blair's New Labour government promised to renew local democracy and held a public referendum on the future of metropolitan government in London.<sup>8</sup> The upshot of a 1998 referendum was the Greater London Authority, created to coordinate spatial development, transportation, and public safety in the city's inner and outer boroughs. To the chagrin of Downing Street elites, London voters chose Ken Livingstone as the first GLA mayor.<sup>9</sup>

In Ontario, Conservative frustration with inner-city progressives reached a crescendo in the late 1990s. By some accounts, Premier Mike Harris was relaxing at home with a scotch in hand when he was enraged by a television news report that said City of Toronto employees would be paid if they missed work to attend a protest rally against his government. He is said to have tossed his drink at the screen and thrown

down the gauntlet, along the lines of “That’s it. No more City of Toronto!”<sup>10</sup> Months later, the inner-city government was shut down and forcibly amalgamated with five inner suburban boroughs to create a Toronto megacity. During the same period, municipal governments in three other major Ontario cities were also restructured.<sup>11</sup> Mel Lastman, the long-time mayor of North York (one of the suburbs being amalgamated), supported by prominent provincial Tories, won the first amalgamated mayoral elections.<sup>12</sup>

In short, London and Toronto experienced sharply different political reconfigurations beginning in 1998, in each case at the hands of a more senior level of government. Their restructuring experiences were arguably as divergent as researchers outside a laboratory could ever expect to find.

These municipal governance changes raise crucial questions for students of urban politics. Do institutional arrangements matter to the lives of citizens? To what degree do political leaders make a difference? How long does it take for structural and personnel changes to exert meaningful effects?

Following the 1997 national elections, the new government of Britain’s highly centralized unitary state promised to renew local democracy in London. It then held a referendum to gauge public support for such a goal, and retained existing boroughs after creating the Greater London Authority as a strategic coordinating body. A new, twenty-five-member municipal assembly was proposed, with eleven of its members to be chosen under proportional rules. In 2000, voters elected a left-of-centre mayor who promised to push hard against the limits of urban autonomy. London thus gained a strategic metropolitan government headed by a progressive populist mayor, which existed alongside thirty-three borough councils and a New Labour central government. This situation contrasted with no pan-London government and a Conservative central government for most of the years between 1986 and 2000.

In 1995 the new Ontario government promised greater efficiency, lower taxes, and fewer politicians. Operating in an extremely decentralized federal system, the province’s elites ignored a public referendum in Toronto – arguably because the results went against Tory plans to eliminate local boroughs via amalgamation.<sup>13</sup> From more than one hundred locally elected borough and municipal positions before amalgamation, Toronto was reduced to fewer than fifty by 2000. Older, plurality-based election rules remained in place. In the first megacity elections, voters chose a right-of-centre mayor who promised to implement central government plans. Toronto as of 1998 thus had one municipal mayor and

council for the inner city and inner suburbs, and no borough government. Until the fall of 2003 the mayor was a suburban conservative and the provincial central government was Conservative as well. That autumn, however, voters elected a more progressive mayor and a Liberal provincial government.

Also, for more than a century the broad features of social movement organizing in London and Toronto had differed quite dramatically. Ever since the suffrage period, Britain's largest city had been known for its ideologically fractured, militant, and protest-oriented traditions of group mobilization. At the point of GLC shutdown in 1986, for example, one comparative study described the "fragmented contours of British feminism," detailing multiple cleavages that divided socialist and radical from middle-class activists and that divided women along the additional lines of race, age, sexuality, and issue focus.<sup>14</sup> In fact, Susan Bassnett's account noted that the "beleaguered idealism" of the times "has led some cynics to question whether the women's movement has not entered into its final agony."<sup>15</sup> By comparison, Toronto had a relatively stable history of moderate, system-focused, and pragmatic movement politics. Accounts of second-wave English-Canadian feminism tended to emphasize the cohesion and accommodation that brought activists together across partisan and ideological divides.<sup>16</sup>

These divergent patterns suggested to me that early post-GLA London and initial post-amalgamation Toronto were fascinating cases for comparative research. Were differences between the two in structures, leaders, and movements likely to hold meaningful consequences? How much time would need to elapse before the implications could be identified? This study is among the first to compare the effects of contemporary governance changes; it does so by probing political reconfiguration in London and Toronto from the perspective of women's citizenship. Rather than asking whether *all* city dwellers were affected by shifts in local arrangements, and how, we focus on one historically mobilized interest that was active in both cities and probe the fallout using three specific measures.

Why women? During the past one hundred years they have organized to push open the doors of urban public engagement and improve the quality of city life. These pivotal contributions are often overlooked in scholarly accounts, however, or else treated dismissively.<sup>17</sup> Yet in British and Canadian cities, women were active as suffragists who campaigned for the right to vote and hold public office; in the early twentieth century, women social reformers involved themselves in campaigns to regulate workplaces, build public libraries, and integrate newcomers;

and as grassroots activists during the 1970s and after, they worked hard for livable neighbourhoods with clean air and thriving transit services.

In fact, the 1980s saw the creation of mirror feminist planning projects in the two largest cities of Britain and Canada. Known as Women Plan London and Women Plan Toronto, these initiatives offered an integrative and proactive approach to designing cities “from women’s standpoint.”<sup>18</sup> As local planning activists, women in both places aimed to create or, at the very least, imagine a better city through their collective civic engagement. In other instances they worked to stop what they viewed as change for the worse.

Why is citizenship a useful analytic lens for this study? According to urban theorist Engin Isin, this concept embraces a broad cluster of both existing rights and rights-seeking claims: “Rather than merely focusing on citizenship as legal rights, there is now agreement that citizenship must also be defined as a social process through which individuals and social groups engage in claiming, expanding or losing rights. Being politically engaged means practicing substantive citizenship, which in turn implies that members of a polity always struggle to shape its fate.”<sup>19</sup> Isin’s definition raises the crucial question of human agency – in this case, how urban dwellers enhance and defend their own citizenship rights. Can people advance claims more effectively under one political arrangement than another? Were opportunities for what Canadian urban scholar Gerda Wekerle terms “insurgent citizenship” more available in some cities and at some times than others?<sup>20</sup> Can we imagine a governance continuum that extends from best- to worst-case conditions, permitting us to compare the various times and spaces of urban citizenship?

At a conceptual level, studying urban women permits us to see how a diverse group of citizens has organized and claimed recognition in ongoing struggles to build civic democracy. As Iris Marion Young argues in *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, cities are crucial meeting places for women and men from diverse backgrounds and have the potential to play an emancipatory role vis-à-vis democratic justice and representation.<sup>21</sup> By devoting attention to urban citizenship experiences, we can offer more nuanced theory, thus moving from grand, generic ideas about globalization and social change toward contingent views that are more sensitive to specific contexts and more persuasive in their policy relevance. In particular, Young’s account of the emancipatory role that cities could play raises a number of empirical questions: Are some cities better situated to represent diverse citizens than others? Do some institutional settings foster public engagement more than others?

One way to approach these questions is to review the contexts of municipal reconfiguration in London and Toronto. When mapped against the history of social movement mobilization and existing research in the field, this background yields a number of intriguing and sometimes conflicting expectations about contemporary citizenship. As well, it sheds light on the different kinds of measures that can be used to assess the fallout from governance reforms.

### **Municipal Restructuring in Review**

During the postwar years, both London and Toronto developed reasonably successful two-tier urban arrangements. The Greater London Council, created in 1965, served as the senior coordinating or strategic layer in that city. It operated alongside thirty-three inner and outer London boroughs; these included the historic Corporation of the City of London, which governed the “Square Mile” financial district. GLC responsibilities ranged from London-wide spatial planning and public safety services (police, fire, civil defence, ambulances) to garbage collection. In fields such as housing the GLC shared control with the boroughs.<sup>22</sup>

In 1981, Ken Livingstone became GLC leader. A charismatic populist from Labour’s new urban left, he served as a high-profile lightning rod for tensions between progressive supporters of local decentralization, on one side, and the Thatcher regime, on the other. Livingstone explained his opposition to central government direction by pointing to “a huge gulf between the cultural values of the GLC Labour Group [in areas such as antiracism, promotion of gender politics and gay rights, and the creation of nuclear-free zones] and everything Mrs. Thatcher considered right and proper.”<sup>23</sup>

Until it was shut down in 1986, the GLC generously supported feminist initiatives in areas such as child care, violence against women, employment rights, urban planning, health, and the environment. Before it was eliminated, the GLC Women’s Committee distributed millions of pounds annually to support child care services, women’s resource and information centres, and various issue campaigns – all with an eye toward ensuring these funds were widely distributed among London’s diverse ethnocultural communities.<sup>24</sup> By providing multi-year core funding, the GLC offered many benefits to feminist groups – notably financial security, opportunities to engage in a variety of activities (including policy advocacy), and a minimum of short-term reporting requirements to funders.

Margaret Thatcher believed her urban critics would fade from view once Britain was fully integrated into a competitive global economy,

freed of spendthrift “loony left” politicians, and imbued with “the smack of firm government.”<sup>25</sup> A 1983 central government White Paper titled *Streamlining the Cities* echoed Tory arguments that London metropolitan government was “the nation’s principal ‘over-spender’” and identified the GLC as “a wasteful and unnecessary tier of government.”<sup>26</sup> In Thatcher’s words, the 1983 Conservative campaign manifesto promising to shut down the GLC was only opposed by “the left-wing municipal socialists and their subsidized front organizations [who] were astute campaigners, trained and adept at exploiting every weakness of presentation of the Government’s case ... There was still too much socialism in Britain.”<sup>27</sup>

Shutting down the GLC was only one part of a broader campaign to overhaul Britain. In the field of public finance, the Conservatives imposed rate caps or ceilings on local government tax rates in 1984 and proposed the extremely contentious poll tax six years later.<sup>28</sup> They worked to privatize elements of what had been public infrastructure, including schools and roads, through the Private Finance Initiative. Tories championed the 1988 Local Government Act, one section of which prohibited the use of public funds to promote homosexuality.<sup>29</sup> Other parts of the same legislation required competitive tendering for all local services and said that tenders must be awarded to the lowest bidder. The 1988 act also discontinued the practice of contract compliance with respect to women, meaning that municipalities were no longer required to award contracts to firms that hired and promoted female employees.<sup>30</sup>

Thatcher-era legislation significantly reduced the influence of local authorities in education and housing. The 1988 Education Reform Act eliminated the Inner London Education Authority, an umbrella organization for London’s twelve inner-city boroughs that dated from the mid-1960s.<sup>31</sup> The same act devolved financial and management decisions to individual schools but centralized government control over school curricula. A parallel emphasis on less autonomy for local authorities and greater private market provision underpinned the 1988 Housing Act.<sup>32</sup>

Sustained conflict between Livingstone and Thatcher and their respective supporters turned the GLC into one of “the Labour Party’s most effective bases for the guerrilla war against the [central] government.”<sup>33</sup> These same tensions meant that complex fiscal and jurisdictional issues – of the sort that would have attracted minimal attention in less polarized circumstances – gained wide visibility and resonance. Overall, Thatcher-era policies aimed to elevate private-sector values, reduce public spending, and increase central government control by means that included shutting down metropolitan governments, narrowing the role

of local governments as service providers, and restructuring public finances. Thatcher's goal was "to set the people ... free of the institutions that have hitherto oppressed them."<sup>34</sup>

Critics from a variety of backgrounds believed that destroying London's metropolitan government was a far from perfect solution to the difficulties facing that city. In 1997, Tony Blair's New Labour manifesto proposed a scheme that was more democratic than no pan-London government but offered significantly less autonomy than had been enjoyed by the old GLC.<sup>35</sup> Blair claimed that by creating new metropolitan bodies in London, New Labour would be modernizing local government and reversing "a dangerous loss of civic pride" and a declining quality of life in Britain's capital city.<sup>36</sup> According to the Labour election platform, "London is the only Western capital without an elected city government. Following a referendum to confirm popular demand, there will be a new deal for London, with a strategic authority and a mayor, each directly elected. Both will speak up for the needs of the city and plan its future. They will not duplicate the work of the boroughs, but take responsibility for London-wide issues of economic regeneration, planning, policing, transport and environmental protection."<sup>37</sup> New Labour's proposal for greater local democracy was approved by 72 percent of the voters who participated in a May 1998 public referendum in London. The overall turnout rate in the referendum was 34 percent.<sup>38</sup>

The 1997 Labour manifesto also stressed the need to improve the "economy, effectiveness and accountability" of local government.<sup>39</sup> At one level, this suggested a decentralist agenda to enhance local democracy and restore some degree of social cohesion after many long years of Conservative rule. In fact, Tony Blair promised to create elected bodies in Scotland, Wales, and London, thus removing some authority from the central government agencies that controlled those areas during the Tory era. On another plane, many New Labour elites wanted to avoid a repetition of what they saw as the bloated, expensive, inefficient, and far-left ways of the Thatcher-era GLC.

Mindful of such considerations, they proposed a plan that retained borough government but that also introduced a new executive mayor, to be elected at large by voters, and a relatively weak Greater London Assembly, whose twenty-five members would hold oversight and supervisory responsibilities. The mayor and assembly would constitute the Greater London Authority, described as a streamlined "overall coordinating body" to look after economic development, transportation, and public safety for inner and outer London's approximately five million residents.<sup>40</sup>

Relative to the myriad central government agencies that dominated policy making in London after 1986, the more transparent structures set in place under the GLA scheme were clear improvements. For example, once Transport for London was created as an executive body controlled by the mayor, strategic responsibility for subways, buses, taxis, and major roads rested in the hands of a locally elected politician.<sup>41</sup>

Yet even under New Labour, Westminster retained the power to limit or cap spending by city councils. It also found new ways to reward compliant local units. For instance, Blair's government introduced selective, highly detailed, and heavily "prescriptive" fiscal criteria, including "Best Value" performance indicators, for municipalities.<sup>42</sup> The Best Value scheme was merely a slightly modified version of the Tories' competitive tendering and private finance initiatives.<sup>43</sup> Put simply, New Labour's suspicion of local authorities ran deep. One account of the first Blair government observed that "Downing Street and the Treasury believed that unless [local governments] were named-and-shamed, incentivised and scrutinized, they would slump into a relentless slough of mediocrity and failure."<sup>44</sup>

Overall, the GLA design offered the possibility of wider opportunities for civic engagement in urban democracy. Londoners won a chance beginning in 2000 to elect their own mayor, using a supplementary vote scheme that asked them to select both first- and second-choice candidates.<sup>45</sup> Under the GLA arrangements, women's chances to win municipal public office increased, since eleven of the twenty-five assembly members would be chosen under proportional representation rules. This scheme contrasted with the traditional single-member plurality arrangements that prevailed in London's boroughs and in Toronto.

Yet the darker side of central government machinations – notably, efforts to deny the Labour mayoral nomination to Ken Livingstone and, later on, to ensure he did not run or win as an independent candidate – revealed Westminster's continued interest in controlling London. In the end, an unwavering hostility toward Livingstone among top Blairites seemed to backfire. "Red Ken" narrowly lost the party nomination to cabinet insider Frank Dobson but then triumphed as an independent candidate in the May 2000 mayoral race.<sup>46</sup>

Like London, Toronto developed a two-tier metropolitan government system during the postwar years.<sup>47</sup> Under the terms of a 1966 arrangement, one inner city and five inner suburban boroughs existed alongside a Metro Toronto layer that oversaw police and social services. All six borough mayors held seats on a larger Metro Toronto council, which allocated pooled funds from richer and poorer areas.<sup>48</sup>

As was the case in Britain during the 1980s, urban restructuring in Ontario followed from heightened concern over debts and deficits at all levels. Reduced transfers from the federal level had already exacted a heavy toll in Canada's most populous province. The Mulroney-era cap or ceiling on Canada Assistance Plan payments of 1990-91, and CAP's replacement five years later by the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST), dramatically cut federal funds for provincial social programs. Moreover, the Chrétien-era CHST eliminated cost-sharing arrangements between federal and provincial governments that dated from the mid-1960s, replacing them with fixed block transfers.<sup>49</sup>

Leading Ontario Conservatives endorsed efficiency and cost cutting in calls for "less government ... fewer politicians ... less bureaucracy ... less overlap and duplication."<sup>50</sup> In their 1995 provincial campaign platform, they promised to reduce public spending by, for example, increasing competition among child care providers, assisting commercial operators in that sector, and offering "free choice" to parents.<sup>51</sup> Above all, the Tory manifesto pledged to balance the provincial budget, reduce personal income tax rates by 30 percent, and freeze municipal property tax rates. Ontario voters were told the Conservatives would "spend more efficiently" because party leader Mike Harris would, in his own words, trim "a lot of fat, a lot of waste."<sup>52</sup>

Once elected, the Harris government closed the Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues, established in 1983 by a previous Conservative administration. It cut social assistance benefits by over 20 percent, dramatically weakened rent controls, reduced provincial grants to schools, chopped the number of local school boards, and repealed a provision in the Education Act that sought to increase the number of women principals and senior administrators.<sup>53</sup> In 1997, urban areas with high immigrant populations faced a rigid new funding formula for elementary and secondary schools. As R.D. Gidney notes in his account of the Harris years, metropolitan school boards lost control in a number of key areas once the province centralized fiscal and curriculum decisions.<sup>54</sup>

Unlike the Thatcher government's long-promised shutdown of the GLC, however, the Ontario Conservatives' decision to amalgamate Toronto was quick, rushed, and largely unexpected. In 1996 the Harris government rejected a provincial task force recommendation to create an enlarged metropolitan unit extending into Toronto's rapidly expanding outer suburbs. The Golden Task Force, appointed by the province's previous NDP government, endorsed a Greater Toronto structure to in-

tegrate older downtown with established suburban and newer suburban areas. The Tories seemed unwilling to risk alienating their supporters in the outer-ring suburbs and claimed that the proposal would create a mini-province of Toronto that would threaten small-town and rural interests – both of these crucial components of their political base.<sup>55</sup>

The provincial Conservatives also rebuffed the conclusions of their own “Who Does What” panel, chaired by former Toronto mayor David Crombie. The panel recommended that municipal governments retain a strong role in “hard services” related to infrastructure and property. By way of contrast, it urged the province to fund redistributive programs and “have a strong role in the provision of ‘soft services,’ such as health, welfare, and education.”<sup>56</sup>

Turning a blind eye to both reports, provincial elites announced plans in December 1996 to eliminate Toronto’s two-tiered borough and metropolitan government. Instead there would be a single amalgamated megacity for the 2.4 million residents of the older downtown and inner suburbs.<sup>57</sup> Harris government elites defended amalgamation as an efficient, streamlined scheme that would improve the coordination of local decision making and eliminate wasteful overlap and duplication.

In August 1997 the Ontario Conservatives introduced legislation that shifted greater responsibility for social housing, public health, ambulance services, child care, and public transportation onto local municipalities. Under the terms of a broader policy disentanglement exercise, the Tories reduced provincial support for social and infrastructure spending in major cities.<sup>58</sup> What critics referred to as a downloading process threatened the core priorities of urban women’s groups, notably because it cut funding for programs and services.<sup>59</sup> Concerns voiced by these interests about affordable child care, housing, and public transit were not peculiar to Toronto; rather, they were identified as core issues by women’s organizations and especially feminist planners in major cities around the world.<sup>60</sup>

Like Margaret Thatcher in her struggles with Ken Livingstone, the Harris Conservatives had clear political motives for eliminating the downtown unit known as the City of Toronto.<sup>61</sup> Under Mayor Barbara Hall (a former family lawyer, social housing advocate, and downtown NDP councillor) and several of her predecessors, the City of Toronto had built a reputation as a progressive municipality where equity initiatives, low-income housing, child care programs, and responsible commercial development were key priorities.<sup>62</sup> As part of a broader effort to defend the democratic role of local boroughs, Hall campaigned vigorously

against amalgamation. Not surprisingly, leading provincial Conservatives endorsed Hall's opponent, Mel Lastman, who won the first megacity mayoral race in November 1997.<sup>63</sup>

While these changes were unfolding, the Harris government announced it would be reducing the number of councillors in Toronto from a combined Metro and borough total of more than one hundred to fifty-seven plus the megacity mayor. The province cut this number further, to forty-four plus the mayor, before local elections in 2000. Over the same period the number of school trustee positions across Ontario also shrank, which dramatically narrowed recruitment channels for women seeking election to public office.<sup>64</sup>

One part of the provincial plan to eliminate borough government in Toronto promised to create new community councils. These were conceived as larger than individual megacity wards but small enough to facilitate local engagement. Leading observers concluded that during the initial period following amalgamation, community councils remained unknown to most Toronto residents. As vehicles for public participation, they were thoroughly unsuccessful.<sup>65</sup>

Clearly, Margaret Thatcher's elimination of the GLC and Mike Harris' amalgamation of Toronto had much in common. Both leaders had clear political motives for eliminating oppositional urban voices.<sup>66</sup> Thatcher's targets included "frivolous" women's groups subsidized by local government, immortalized in tabloid stories from the 1980s about public space in one London borough being used for "lesbian gym" sessions.<sup>67</sup> Harris voiced deep-seated frustration with his downtown critics, including Mayor Barbara Hall and others who opposed Tory policies.<sup>68</sup>

Both Thatcher and Harris extended their campaigns against local autonomy well beyond the confines of London and Toronto. Six metropolitan counties in England, all dominated by the Labour Party during the mid-1980s, were eliminated along with the GLC.<sup>69</sup> In Ontario the provincial Tories restructured at least three other major cities, largely controlled by opposition interests, around the same time as they amalgamated Toronto.<sup>70</sup> Parallel with Conservative approaches to local government, Thatcher and Harris also threatened to close inner-city hospitals that served large numbers of women and homosexuals in London and Toronto.<sup>71</sup>

Urban women were among the loudest critics of Thatcher's decision to eliminate the GLC and Harris' move to erase the City of Toronto. Echoing suffrage-era campaigns for the right to vote and for expanded public services (including kindergarten programs and neighbourhood libraries), feminists vigorously protested the closing of progressive urban

units by Conservative central governments. In both London and Toronto, organizations of women as well as civic groups with women in leadership positions pushed back against what they saw as a dangerous narrowing of citizen access at the local level.

In Toronto, for example, a group calling itself the Women's Coalition for Local Democracy argued in early 1997 that amalgamation would likely cause setbacks in policy areas such as low-income housing, child care programs, and public transportation. The coalition also predicted a gradual decline in women's numerical representation in public office.<sup>72</sup> Local democracy advocates claimed victory in a March 1997 referendum on amalgamation, in that 76 percent of voters opposed provincial plans. The overall turnout rate in the referendum was 30 percent.<sup>73</sup>

In both London and Toronto, urban progressives rejected claims that political restructuring was necessary in order to promote efficiency, reduce waste, and cut costs. The same actions that British and Canadian Tories said made cities more competitive would, according to critics, centralize power in the hands of more distant decision makers and remove crucial channels for urban democracy. Over time, they claimed, political norms that emphasized citizen participation, social equity, and local autonomy would be pushed aside by the increasingly privileged free-market values of growth, competitiveness, and efficiency.<sup>74</sup>

In more general terms, Thatcher's Tory government in Britain and Harris' in Ontario sought to reduce local fiscal capacity and weaken competing sources of political authority.<sup>75</sup> Their goal in targeting what were viewed as loci of protest in the GLC and downtown Toronto was clear – shut down oppositional units, centralize power, and save money at the same time.

How were these actions, and the more decentralist decisions taken by New Labour in Britain, likely to affect women's citizenship? The next section examines this question in light of research in the field.

### **Perspectives from Urban Research**

Despite a recent resurgence of academic interest in cities, many studies entirely ignore citizen engagement. Contemporary research on the so-called creative class, for example, follows this pattern. Writing in 2002, American geographer Richard Florida argued that musicians, artists, writers, designers, and other creators play a crucial role in renewing urban areas.<sup>76</sup> According to Florida, cities that bring together a wide mix of talented creators are often thriving, vibrant, and economically competitive in international terms. When gays and straights, singers and painters, poets and pianists live and work in close proximity to one

another, their creative resources help transform humdrum cities into thriving metropoli.

Florida's thesis is particularly unsettling from the perspective of political history. In fact, his claims about the inherent promise of diverse, creativity-based urban communities evoke Berlin of the 1930s. Here was the city as cabaret, a flowering of edgy, variegated human performance on the world stage. Yet to ignore the broad political context of pre-Nazi Berlin – or any other city, for that matter – is to obscure fundamental concerns about citizens' voices and democratic institutions, by focusing only on other phenomena, including cultural vitality and economic potential. Florida's study, all four-hundred-plus pages of text and appendices, said virtually nothing about either political structures or citizen participation.

Cities are, despite the impression conveyed by Florida and others, more than simply centres of commercial exchange and artistic expression. Since Ancient Greek times, they have served as critical spaces for members of the polis to learn about and practise democracy, including by discussing issues of general social import. In fact, struggles to build a better polis have characterized urban settlements through the many centuries since Aristotle and Plato debated their visions of the ideal society.<sup>77</sup>

Other streams of contemporary urban research treat politics, particularly at the local level, as highly relevant. In *Governing from Below*, American political scientist Jefferey Sellers explored how cities in the United States and Western Europe grew increasingly independent of external political and economic influences.<sup>78</sup> Sellers argued that an array of integrative pressures, including transnational capital flows and fierce competition to attract firms to specific locations, failed to overturn Tip O'Neill's famous nostrum that "all politics is local."<sup>79</sup> Sellers concluded that although senior layers of government and international economic forces were important, "local choices continue to influence local outcomes."<sup>80</sup>

Sellers' thesis, however, makes little sense in locations like London and Toronto, where determined central governments foisted their own choices and outcomes on urban citizens. Conservative decision makers in Britain during the Thatcher years and in Ontario during the Harris years effectively reorganized their urban opponents out of existence. Under these circumstances, "local choices" in the basic democratic sense of the term had little to do with local outcomes. Although urban citizens vigorously protested the actions of Conservative central governments in both cities, local preferences did not necessarily make much difference.<sup>81</sup>

A third stream of urban research focuses on supranational economic influences. This literature identifies globalization and neo-liberal restructuring as powerful brakes against citizen engagement in North America and Western Europe and portrays integrative pressures as stifling or even suffocating democratic politics. According to this view, globalization threatens to extinguish the tradition of civic activism that underpins liberal democracies, along with the likelihood of progressive policy changes in them.<sup>82</sup>

How does globalization work to constrain democratic citizenship? Institutional analysts maintain that the uploading of authority over domestic policy agendas to international and transnational actors, through globalization and other integrative pressures, reduces opportunities for citizens to exert political influence.<sup>83</sup> For example, people who want their governments to invest in urban services have a hard time making this case once international actors, who are unelected and who rarely rely on the services in question, gain control of public-sector bond ratings and debt and deficit levels.

As well, institutional studies point toward greater offloading or lateral loading of some policy responsibilities away from central and toward local governments, as well as toward unelected governance bodies. These studies focus in particular on the widespread adoption since the 1980s of new public management (NPM) approaches, predicated on arguments that governments at all levels should increase their reliance on appointed agencies or private-sector “partners” to deliver what were once public services. From this perspective, offloading pressures associated with NPM separated progressive interests from target decision makers, because the shift from public government to mixed-sector and agency-dominated governance made the policy process more convoluted, opaque, and distant.<sup>84</sup>

Moreover, in an era dominated by NPM approaches to administration, organized interests that seek public monies are likely to be challenged by frequent and detailed reporting requirements and by the instability of short-term public funding.<sup>85</sup> Most ominously, the criteria used to evaluate the contributions of voluntary groups are grounded primarily in cost and efficiency considerations. Local organizations that began as advocacy-based social movements tend, as part of broader NPM directions, to take on the role of service providers, perhaps in partnership with governments or their agencies. The same campaigners who formerly operated as protesters, advocates, and lobbyists are then expected to carry out activities once performed by the state, and forfeit their role as activists for social change.<sup>86</sup>

A related stream of research examines the language or discourse employed to defend international economic integration. According to post-structural analysts, the rhetoric of elites can deepen and reinforce the negative effects of globalization. Language that celebrates and elevates economic considerations such as efficiency, growth, and streamlined political structures tends, in turn, to marginalize fundamental democratic norms, including the quality of local citizen participation and the importance of diverse representation in public decision making.<sup>87</sup> For example, when elites evaluate, rank, and fund cities using a framework that privileges competitiveness norms, they are inclined by definition to reward minimal expenses and maximal efficiencies and to ignore equity, representational, and social justice dimensions.

How are institutional and discursive arguments relevant to contemporary urban citizenship? Canadian political scientists Jane Jenson and Susan Phillips provide one of the most compelling responses to this question. In their view, pressures for international economic integration and competitiveness have fundamentally altered state/market relations in such a way that the older, postwar emphasis on building cohesive communities has been trumped by neo-liberal demands for ambitious, “market ready” individuals.<sup>88</sup> Our understanding of social belonging and our ability as citizens to act, in Engin Isin’s words, as agents who are “practicing substantive citizenship” have demonstrably suffered as a result.<sup>89</sup>

According to Jenson and Phillips, the postwar assumption that governments at all levels ought to play a constructive role in bringing citizens together was reflected in policies that pooled collective risk and that wove social safety nets – nets such as public health care, pension schemes, unemployment insurance, social assistance, and subsidized housing. The sustained erosion of these programs and their replacement by increasingly individualized, marketized arrangements not only reduced the centrality of shared norms and values, but also fragmented those collective identities that managed to remain in place.<sup>90</sup> In large cities with high rates of immigration from around the world, the fragmenting of a heterogeneous interest such as women was almost inevitable. As well, according to Jenson and Phillips, older and relatively robust emphases on community futures and collective well-being receded in the face of both greater socio-economic polarization and the eclipsing of public spaces and public services by private ones.<sup>91</sup> Over time, cities risked losing the necessary common ground for strangers from different backgrounds to meet and work together – ground that had long characterized healthy urban environments.

Scholarly work in the globalization stream thus suggested a far from promising future for urban citizenship. Cities would likely compete against one another for highly mobile sources of capital investment. In turn, competition among localities would increase the weight attached to market-based norms, including efficiency and productivity; it would also diminish the weight of political considerations, including justice, equality, and citizen participation. Cohesion among citizens would decline with rising socio-economic polarization and a generalized pattern of identity fragmentation. As NPM schemes made inroads at the administrative level, the clout of elected governments and social protesters would decline. In one of the boldest statements of the global cities thesis, Engin Isin concluded that these directions implied a loss of public government as we once knew it. In his words, "*modern city government is increasingly like an empty shell whose territory marks out the once-meaningful boundaries of the political.*"<sup>92</sup>

If Isin and others were correct about the suffocating effects of integration pressures, then observers could not expect to find much evidence of citizen participation in progressive urban politics. Following Jenson and Phillips' argument, shared identities would likely become fragmented and politically ineffective in the wake of globalization. The erosion of citizenship values in unitary states such as Britain could be especially pronounced, since they would be able to implement NPM approaches more quickly and widely than decentralized federal systems such as Canada's.<sup>93</sup> As a result, urban citizenship might be considerably weaker in London than in Toronto.

Compounding this pattern, a large gulf divided London's relatively ideological, militant social-movement activists, on one side, and key decision makers pressed by private-sector competitiveness and efficiency considerations, on the other. To the extent that globalization theories address collective action during the contemporary period, they suggest that moderate, system-oriented interests in Toronto would be better equipped to bridge such divides than more militant activists in London. The narrower reach of NPM approaches in Canada as opposed to Britain reinforces this expectation, since it also suggests more buoyant citizenship in Toronto than in London.<sup>94</sup>

These hypotheses that flow from the globalization literature ignore at least three crucial dimensions of local state reconfiguration. First, do plausible arguments weigh against the dismal picture they paint? Second, are all metropolitan restructurings the same? And third and most important, what has been the real-world fallout from specific changes in municipal governance?

We can begin by asking whether the same globalization pressures that weaken nation-states might actually strengthen organized interests at the local level. As Canadian urban scholar Caroline Andrew notes, “municipal governments have a potential for progressive action because, being less pretentious than nation-states, they have a less predetermined sense of what they should and should not do and therefore are more open to being vehicles for action by social movements. Not being burdened with the obligations of sovereignty, municipal governments are more open to innovation, to new relationships with civil society.”<sup>95</sup> Andrew’s observation opens an important window on the effects of urban restructuring. In particular, it implies that the terms of institutional change and political discourse vary over time and across cities. For example, her perspective reminds us that some urban leaders value local democracy and may be willing to innovate in response to progressive collective action – even in the broader context of international economic integration.<sup>96</sup> In particular, Andrew’s work suggests that identifiable patterns of movement activism and gender relations in cities may make some metropolitan contexts more welcoming than others.

How do we know which places would be more open or less so? One of the only efforts to examine variations in democratic engagement in a globalizing era – including under circumstances where senior levels of government imposed restructuring from above – was undertaken by Quebec political scientist Vincent Lemieux. His 1996 article, “L’analyse politique de la décentralisation,” presented a comparative framework for exploring the consequences of institutional change, including with reference to civic engagement and progressive public policies.<sup>97</sup> For Lemieux, the effects of structural rearrangements can best be understood in terms of the policy objectives of senior levels of government. Once these goals are known, his account suggests, specific propositions can be developed to predict the dynamics of citizenship in one location versus another.

Although it was published before the GLA and the megacity were created, Lemieux’s study presents two core propositions that relate directly to contemporary London and Toronto. First, some resources at stake in restructuring processes are more important assets of power than others. The setting of normative standards (e.g., efficiency, accountability, equity) that govern how shifts in governmental responsibility are evaluated is a crucial attribute of power; so is control over financial resources. Second, the criteria employed to evaluate restructuring processes are generally not grounded in objective or scientific standards, but rather in ideological and political preferences.

Lemieux's study hints at a useful corollary to these propositions, which concerns the role of local political leaders in pushing back against the normative, fiscal, and institutional designs of central governments. The broad lines of his study suggest that the ability of municipal politicians to articulate and defend normative standards that challenge those employed by senior levels of government constitutes a valuable political asset for local regimes. Stated differently, effective urban mayors who contest efficiency or competitiveness norms imposed from above, or who challenge central government rhetoric about local democracy, can successfully insert alternative discourses in public debate.

This line of argument suggests that by developing a compelling counter-rhetoric about social justice, representation, or local control, urban mayors can challenge to some degree the constraints placed on their autonomy by central governments. As well, innovative mayors who build sustainable revenue streams within their local jurisdictions can contest their subordinate status more effectively than mayors who lack such creativity and, of course, fiscal resources.

Extending Lemieux's study in this way shows how municipal political leadership can operate as a critical intervening variable between metropolitan restructuring in a global era, on one side, and urban citizenship, on the other. With respect to post-GLA London and post-amalgamation Toronto, the contrast between a rhetorically gifted, fiscally creative, and progressive leader in one city (Ken Livingstone) and a relatively inarticulate, fiscally unimaginative, and conservative mayor in the other (Mel Lastman) could hardly have been more stark.

Ken Livingstone had a long and distinguished record of promoting powerful counterdiscourses, dating back to his sustained opposition to Thatcherism during the 1980s. By the time he became the GLA's first mayor in 2000, he had developed a distinct but equally compelling challenge to Tony Blair's New Labour direction.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, as GLA mayor, Livingstone was prepared to experiment with a number of creative revenue-generating ideas, including congestion fees in central London.<sup>99</sup>

By way of contrast, Mel Lastman initially tended to parrot rather than contest the efficiency rhetoric of the Ontario Conservatives – for example, he promised to freeze property tax rates in Toronto. Eventually he grasped the very damaging consequences of reforms he had said could work – including municipal amalgamation, policy disentanglement, and the tax freeze – at which point he attacked his former allies. In 2001 he alleged that “everything [Premier] Mike Harris touches turns to crap.”<sup>100</sup> By that point, according to Lastman, there were “no two ways about it.

Amalgamation for Toronto has turned out to be a disaster.”<sup>101</sup> This about-face, combined with an unsteady performance as mayor, directly weakened Lastman’s public standing. To the extent that he pursued additional revenues for Toronto, these were largely through provincial grants and loans, as well as user-pay schemes that did little to address the city’s precarious fiscal status.<sup>102</sup>

In this way, a modified version of Lemieux’s thesis helps map out how urban leaders can resist (or advance) central government directions of the sort that constrain (or expand) opportunities for local citizen engagement. Overall, our review of these factors generates predictions that are at odds with those that follow from globalization studies.

Livingstone’s popularity as the GLA’s first mayor relative to Lastman’s weaker public standing as the Toronto megacity’s first mayor draws out a crucial dimension of this contrast. Although both mayors were colourful local populists, they clearly differed in ideological terms, with Livingstone considerably more left politically than Lastman. Moreover, if leadership skills can be expected to intensify discursive, fiscal, and institutional factors, then it seems that as of 1998, Toronto faced an especially ominous scenario: weak conservative local leadership, dominant right-wing discursive values, constrained fiscal resources, and limited structural possibilities to respond to these challenges.

Our recasting of Lemieux’s thesis suggests that when municipal restructuring occurs in a normative context that emphasizes efficiency or low taxes, and when it provides limited fiscal resources and a narrow base of authority for relatively compliant or discredited urban politicians – as arguably characterized Toronto in the aftermath of amalgamation and downloading – then robust civic engagement is unlikely to follow. By way of contrast, when the reconfiguration process elevates local democracy norms and elects credible urban leaders who contest the boundaries of municipal fiscal capacity and structural autonomy – arguably characteristic of the initial GLA period – then buoyant urban citizenship is more likely. Lemieux’s framework also suggests a citizenship continuum extending from relatively limited opportunities for public engagement and progressive policy (e.g., in early post-amalgamation Toronto) on one end of the spectrum, to more expansive possibilities (e.g., in post-GLA London) on the other end.<sup>103</sup>

This approach dovetails tightly with elements of the literature on women and urban politics. A number of contemporary studies use the concept of “gender regime” or “gender system” to interpret internal variations within cities. Simply stated, gender systems are groupings of political, economic, and family arrangements that shape the lives of

urban residents.<sup>104</sup> They vary widely, from relatively welcoming, heterogeneous, often inner-city contexts that offer varied occupational and civic engagement opportunities for women, to less congenial, more homogeneous, frequently suburban contexts that present fewer such openings. Moreover, because suburbanites face relatively long travel times, suburban women have even less time for civic engagement than do their inner-city counterparts.<sup>105</sup> Gender regimes in downtown areas are therefore more conducive to what Isin calls “practicing substantive citizenship” than are those in suburban areas.

Gender regimes vary over time as well as space. As British researchers Stefania Abrar, Joni Lovenduski, and Helen Margetts observed in 1998, urban reconfigurations often reorder power arrangements along a number of different axes. One of these is centralization versus decentralization – that is, the extent to which political authority is concentrated in the hands of central governments or shared by cities and central governments, and the degree to which each layer shares power with citizens. According to Abrar and her colleagues, decentralization of both types tends to advantage urban women by breaking down established government hierarchies and fostering community participation in policy making.<sup>106</sup>

If downtown spaces offer relatively equitable gender regimes, and if decentralization generally benefits women, then Toronto’s amalgamation was a worst-case scenario for urban citizenship. Although it does not address the Toronto case, Abrar’s thesis suggests that when local boroughs are eliminated, essential channels for community engagement are closed off. The old City of Toronto was a downtown, women-friendly unit that also served as the base for one of Canada’s top feminist politicians – Barbara Hall. In effect, the amalgamation that merged downtown with the inner suburbs made Toronto a provocative test case for theories about gender regimes, decentralization, and urban citizenship.

A second axis identified in the literature on women and cities concerns state/market relations – notably, the degree to which public-sector actors and values dominate relative to private-sector ones. According to Abrar and her colleagues, metropolitan restructurings since the 1980s have tended to reward market-based norms of efficiency and competitiveness while devaluing other considerations, including political equity and democratic participation. The consequences of this shift for women in specific locations, however, remain unclear. Would the entrenchment of NPM practices in Britain limit women’s citizenship more than the hurried embrace of efficiency and performance criteria by elites in Ontario?

This question points toward the need to look systematically at the real-world implications of metropolitan restructuring.

### **Citizenship in London and Toronto**

This study presents an explicit case for returning both politics and women to urban research. Without politics, we risk building a literature that elevates economic growth and cultural edginess to the status of uncontested icons and that treats business investment and artistic creativity as valued assets in and of themselves – including, most dangerously, in the absence of civic democracy.

Taking women out of the equation – as is the norm in many contemporary sources – harkens back to a darker age of the polis. In ancient Greece, only free men attained the status of public citizens; women and slaves were relegated to a lesser realm. Ongoing struggles simply to understand (never mind foster) vibrant communities lose their impetus when contemporary scholars neuter or homogenize more than half the citizens who actively build those communities – be it inside the ancient Roman walls of London, in the Victorian enclaves of downtown Toronto, or elsewhere.

By training a spotlight on developments in London and Toronto, we can assess the relationship between divergent metropolitan governance changes and contemporary citizenship. Simply put, how were women as citizens affected by the GLA's creation in London and by amalgamation in Toronto?

Building on the work of New Zealand political theorist Rian Voet, this study explores the initial consequences of disparate municipal restructuring experiences for democratic citizenship. According to Voet, citizenship embraces far more than simply “membership in a state” as signified by the holding of a passport.<sup>107</sup> In Voet's words, “citizenship can, in principle, be both the relationships between a state and an individual citizen and the political relationships between citizens themselves. Citizenship might just refer to rights, but it can also refer to the duties, actions, virtues and opinions that follow from the above-mentioned relationships.”<sup>108</sup> Like other scholars in this field, she acknowledges that numerous (often contentious) understandings of citizenship as status or rights, as agency or outcome, exist across a variety of philosophical traditions.<sup>109</sup> These concepts tend to converge at a practical level around a single focal point – namely, membership and engagement in a human community. For the purposes of this discussion, citizenship “represents an expression of human agency in the political arena” and is defined as the civic and political participation of women in decision-making

activities.<sup>110</sup> In many cases this involvement is linked to a broader social perspective on citizenship whereby increased engagement in elective or appointive office, for example, helps revalue women's domestic responsibilities or underline their differential experiences of urban safety.

Debates over the decline of the nation-state, the rise of supranational institutions, and the multiplication of diverse gender, ethnocultural, and other identities during the contemporary period have focused particular attention on the varied spaces of citizenship. Among scholars of cities, the concept of urban citizenship has been proposed as a way to make the normative case for closer ties "between the users of cities and the public realm of cities."<sup>111</sup> In terms of research directions, focusing on urban engagement helps illuminate how struggles for recognition and voice within cities continue, within "spaces where the very meaning, content and extent of citizenship are being made and transformed."<sup>112</sup>

At an empirical level, how can we measure urban citizenship? Citizenship claims are often framed with reference to the theme of political representation for individuals and groups in Westminster-style political systems. For instance, representational ideas infused nineteenth-century British arguments for female suffrage that said women needed to carry or defend their interests in the political realm so as to ensure that all social talents were put to good use.<sup>113</sup> More recently, second-wave feminist theories have laid out three main propositions about political representation. First, according to the liberal or humanist variant, improving the formal political representation of women is a precondition for equality; wider representation not only engages more human talents in a society but also reinforces the value of democratic participation among citizens of a polity. As Voet notes, this stream of thought emphasizes the importance of increasing the numbers of female candidates and office holders as a route toward strengthening women's presence in politics.<sup>114</sup>

Second, difference- or woman-centred feminists maintain that women hold talents that are distinct from those of men. Therefore, including more women in public life will make governments more responsive to women and will ensure the inclusion of "different and better values in politics."<sup>115</sup> Among the real-world strategies advocated by difference feminists are the establishment of specific women's units, known as femocracies, in government bureaucracies. Third, in the view of post-structural feminists, political representation occurs through the crucial vehicle of language or discourse, and not simply in the formal institutions of public office and public administration. By analyzing linguistic representations, post-structural analysts reveal the influence of multiple

interests in spoken as well as written text or, conversely, their lack of influence. In Voet's words, this third variant endorses the opening up of public discourse toward "an inclusive politics that listens to the voices of groups for whom policy-making is intended."<sup>116</sup>

This book is among the first to subject Voet's three-pronged vision of citizen representation to empirical testing. It assesses women's citizenship and, in particular, their political representation in pre- and post-restructuring London and Toronto – two cities characterized by divergent institutional and leadership experiences in recent years. The study focuses on three measures of urban citizenship, each of which is drawn from a specific strand of representational theory. First, we consider women's engagement with municipal public office, at the council and mayoral levels, as a reflection of liberal political representation. Next, we examine the evolution of municipal femocracies as an indicator of difference representation. The discussion then turns to official spatial planning texts to reveal discursive dimensions of representation that follow from post-structural approaches. Then, after a chapter on the qualitative experiences of Londoners and Torontonians, drawn from interviews with activists and experts in each city, we take a speculative look at future citizenship prospects in London and Toronto.

The main propositions that guide the empirical analysis can be summarized as follows. First, if the pessimistic view noted above is empirically correct, we can expect to find minimal evidence of women's electoral, bureaucratic, or discursive representation in either London or Toronto in the contemporary period, and we predict no increases over time in any of these measures. The deep penetration of NPM approaches and radical social movement traditions in London should make contemporary citizenship especially fraught in that location. We refer to this proposition as the "erosion thesis" because it suggests that globalization and governance pressures associated with international economic integration should weaken or extinguish democratic citizenship in contemporary cities. Second, if the optimists are correct, women's representation at all three levels should be similarly robust in London and Toronto and should tend to rise over time. We term this the "buoyancy thesis," since it predicts that integrative pressures will create universal opportunities for urban public engagement.

Finally, if specific institutional and leadership contexts make a difference, we can expect to find systematic variations across cities. In particular, we predict that women's contemporary representation in London, given a New Labour central government, a left-of-centre mayor, and renewed local democracy under the GLA design, should be consider-

ably more promising than it was in Toronto with its right-wing Conservative provincial government, right-of-centre mayor, and municipal amalgamation (which included borough elimination). In terms of longitudinal variation within a single location, this approach suggests that citizen representation should be enhanced by the GLA's creation in London but diminished by amalgamation in Toronto. We call this the "contextual thesis," because it maps democratic citizenship against the backdrop of particular urban institutional and leadership circumstances.

Overall, the results reported below provide sustained confirmation of the contextual thesis. Women's engagement on elective, bureaucratic, and discursive levels varied systematically across locations and was considerably more robust under the GLA arrangement in London than under the amalgamation scenario in Toronto, and tended to improve markedly over time in terms of liberal representation in London only. With at least 40 percent women, the first two London assemblies were exceptional for any elected body in the Anglo-American world, surpassing the roughly 30 percent level on the amalgamated Toronto council. The presence of an effective – albeit small – women's bureaucracy in the GLA compared with the absence of any such unit in the megacity. Feminists' calls for improved public transit, affordable housing, child care, and employment provisions were reflected to a far greater extent in spatial development plans in London than in Toronto, where the word "women" was absent from the text of the 2002 official plan.

This study concludes that urban women can indeed practise substantive citizenship in a globalizing era. The prospects for doing so vary considerably, however, with local institutional and leadership circumstances. The data on women in public office in Chapter 2, on feminist bureaucratic units in Chapter 3, on official plans in Chapter 4, and on the broad contours of metropolitan restructuring in Chapter 5 all point in the same direction. They demonstrate that London in the early twenty-first century has been, in measurable ways, a more welcoming context for women's urban citizenship than Toronto during the same period. Through early 2005, women in London were consistently more numerous as municipal councillors, more visible in bureaucratic terms, and more likely to be named in official plans as a meaningful citizenship category than their counterparts in Toronto. Moreover, interviewees were generally more hopeful about what the future held in terms of prospects for representation at all levels in London than they were in Toronto.

On many different levels, therefore, urban citizenship seemed more buoyant or robust in post-GLA London than in post-amalgamation Toronto. This pattern flies in the face of expectations of uniform erosion

or uniform buoyancy, as well as expectations that Britain should be a less welcoming space, given its long embrace of NPM approaches. The same trend also disconfirms claims that because British social movements had been more ideologically fragmented and less institutionally focused than their North American counterparts, they would be less influential in the contemporary period.

These conclusions shed valuable light on a number of themes in the urban literature. First, they challenge studies of the creative class that focus exclusively on culture and economic growth while ignoring politics and urban citizenship. Our account demonstrates that the ability of collective interests to come together and make policy claims varies across cities, including two that have been vibrant centres of cultural flowering and economic growth. The ways that civic engagement varied in London versus Toronto are worth exploring further, in order to gauge whether they hold longer-term implications for creativity and growth. For example, future research on urban citizenship might explore the relationship between creative-class variables, on one side, and political voice, representation, and citizen engagement, on the other.

Second, this project underlines the extent to which central governments continue to play a crucial role in Britain and Canada. London and Toronto – as revealed in the following chapters – were far from autonomous political spaces, even though some urban researchers shifted their attention toward supranational and local actors, to the neglect of central regimes. London and Toronto remain pawns of higher levels of government – the national one in Britain and the provincial and federal ones in Canada. In probing women's representation both pre- and post-metropolitan restructuring, we will be underscoring the ongoing importance of senior levels of power in either fostering or frustrating urban citizenship.

Finally, this study disconfirms at least one core assumption of globalization arguments. The notion that international economic integration limits or even suffocates possibilities for meaningful citizen engagement – by restructuring both the institutions and the discourses of contemporary cities – is not supported by the evidence from at least one case examined here. The evidence presented below suggests that women's citizenship was sustained to some degree under GLA arrangements in Britain's largest city – given a central government that vowed to enhance local democracy and a progressive municipal leader who was prepared to test the limits of that promise. Representation was measurably weaker along all three dimensions in Toronto after amalgamation, with

a central government preoccupied by efficiency and low tax norms and a conservative municipal leader who embraced the same ethos.

Under these circumstances, urban feminists and other social movement campaigners were able to identify opportunities to influence public policy from the inside in London, and they acted accordingly. In the absence of much grounds for hope in Canada's largest city, mainstream activists seemed to retreat toward silence and dormancy. Their frustration with blocked access channels arguably left the field wide open to anarchists and other radicals, who captured headlines by applying direct action strategies to register their discontent in Toronto.

Arguably the most powerful conclusion of this study is that urban institutions and leaders can have meaningful and immediate consequences for citizen representation. These implications may be positive or negative, as shown in the chapters that follow, and the danger of ignoring them is far from trivial. Students of politics need to reclaim the intellectual turf of cities and unearth the consequences of the reconfigured polis in all its multiple variations.