Urban agglomeration and the rise of megacities is one of the most significant geopolitical phenomena of our time. The current figures, in particular in the Global South, are mind-boggling; rising urban poverty, extreme density, failing infrastructure, and political underrepresentation abound. Forecasts for 2030 or 2050, let alone for 2100, are near-dystopian. This trend poses considerable challenges to modern spatial governance and to the theory and practice of constitutional democracy more generally. Strikingly, while it is appreciated by geographers, economists, and political theorists, the urbanization trend is largely overlooked by jurists and constitutional thinkers. The gap is even more glaring when it comes to comparative constitutionalism. Despite the tremendous renaissance of comparative constitutional law, very few comparative studies trace the origins of constitutional innovation and stalemate with respect to city/state relations. In fact, the metropolis is virtually non-existent in comparative constitutional law, constitutional design, or constitutional thought. This lecture, based on Professor Hirschl’s forthcoming book City, State: Comparative Constitutionalism and the Megacity (Oxford University Press, 2020), will address these scholarly lacunae as it explores the challenges posed to the theory and practice of constitutional democracy in what has been hailed as the “century of the city.”

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Ran Hirschl is Professor of Political Science and Law at the University of Toronto, holder of the Alexander von Humboldt Professorship in Comparative Constitutionalism at the University of Göttingen and head of the Max Planck Fellow Group in Comparative Constitutionalism. He is the author of several major books including City, State: Comparative Constitutionalism and the Megacity (Oxford University Press, forthcoming in 2020); Comparative Matters: The Renaissance of Comparative Constitutional Law (Oxford University Press, 2014)—winner of the 2015 APSA Herman Pritchett Award for the best book on law and courts; Constitutional Theocracy (Harvard University Press, 2010)—winner of the 2011 Mahoney Prize in Legal Theory; and Towards Juristocracy (Harvard University Press, 2004), as well as over 100 articles and book chapters on constitutional law and its intersection with comparative politics. He has won academic excellence awards in five different countries; served as co-president of the International Society of Public Law (ICON-3); and held distinguished visiting professorships at Harvard, Stanford, and NYU. His work on the intersection of social science and public law has been translated into various languages, discussed in numerous scholarly fora, cited by jurists and in high court decisions, and addressed in media venues from the New York Times to the Jerusalem Post. He is an elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada (FRSC)—the highest academic accolade in that country. The official citation describes him as “one of the world’s leading scholars of comparative constitutional law, courts and jurisprudence.”