

Alexander Hempel

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Canadian, German

Research Interests:

Urban Economics, Public Economics & Real Estate Economics

EMPLOYMENT

Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Alberta 2024 - present
Department of Resource Economics and Environmental Sociology

EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Economics, University of Toronto 2018 - 2024
Committee: Robert McMillan, Stephan Heblich, Jonathan Hall

M.A in Economics, University of Toronto 2017 - 2018

B.A in Economics & European Studies, University of Toronto 2013 - 2017

WORKING PAPERS

Tightening the Belt: The Impact of Greenbelts on Housing Affordability

New Estimates of Wealth Inequality in Canada
(R&R at Canadian Journal of Economics)

The Impact of Immigration on Local Public Finances: Evidence from Canadian Municipalities (with Feng Qiu & Sandeep Agarwal)

PRESENTATIONS

European Meeting of the Urban Economics Association (Berlin), Annual 2025
Conference of the Canadian Economics Association (Montreal), CREEA
PhD and Early Career Researcher Workshop (Montreal), Briding Divides
Research Retreat (Niagara-on-the-Lake)

LSE Department of Geography and Environment (London), Annual Con- 2024
ference of the Canadian Economics Association (Toronto)

Annual Conference of the Canadian Economics Association (Ottawa) 2022

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Contributor, University of Toronto - School of Cities 2025 - present

- Conducting fiscal impact analysis for project studying impact of new transit-oriented development in Canada

Course Instructor, University of Alberta 2025

- Taught a GIS module of a Land Use Economics course (AREC460)

Teaching Assistant 2017 - 2024

- Courses: Lead Writing TA, Principles of Microeconomics & Macroeconomics, Microeconomic Theory, Public Economics, Economics of Inequality, Economic History, Sports Economics

Research Assistant, University of Toronto - Department of Economics 2017 - 2020

- Performed data analysis on Canadian tax data, developed original web content and translated historic German data into English

AWARDS AND GRANTS

Royal Bank Graduate Fellowships in Public and Economic Policy 2018

Department of Economics Essay Prize in Economic Policy 2015

ACADEMIC SERVICE

Referee: Journal of Urban Economics, Agribusiness 2024 - present

Co-President, Graduate Economics Union 2019 - 2020

Doctoral Student Mentor 2019 - 2022

LANGUAGES

English (native), French (advanced) & German (intermediate)

Programming: Stata, Python, Julia, ArcGIS, QGIS

REFERENCES

Robert McMillan
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Abstracts

Tightening the Belt: The Impact of Greenbelts on Housing Affordability

Greenbelts are a widespread policy tool used to protect natural spaces from urban sprawl. With rising housing costs in many metropolitan areas, numerous questions have been raised about the impact of greenbelts on housing markets. In this paper, I evaluate the impact that the introduction of the world's largest contiguous greenbelt, which was formed around Toronto in the early-2000s, had on housing prices across the region. To capture the key dynamics of a greenbelt, I develop an estimable model of the housing market with heterogeneous supply elasticities and a nested logit demand system. Using rich transaction and project-level data on housing prices and developments from 2000-2010, I estimate housing supply and demand curves separately, where I address the endogeneity of housing prices with instrumental variables. Using the estimated model, I find that the Greenbelt led to an average increase in housing costs of 2.9% by 2010. Although non-trivial (C\$600 a year in rent), this increase accounts for only 4% of the increase in prices during this period, suggesting that the Greenbelt does not explain much of the deterioration in housing affordability. Skyrocketing housing costs can instead be explained by the fact that strong housing demand within the urban footprint is met with highly inelastic housing supply.

New Estimates of Wealth Inequality in Canada

Measures of wealth inequality are important indicators, but only exist in a handful of countries. This paper is the first to estimate the distribution of wealth in Canada on a regular basis from 1990-2018. Using the income capitalization method of Saez & Zucman (2016), I find that while the top 1% wealth share rose from 15.3% in 1990 to 19.7% in 2008, it fell back to 17.5% by 2018. I compare these results to those in the United States and France and find that Canada has much less wealth inequality compared to the US and is slightly more equal than France. Using linear decomposition methods, I show that this gap with the US is driven by greater concentration across every asset class and is not driven by a single asset or a different composition of assets held in each country. Then, using *synthetic savings* decompositions, I show that most of the variation in the top 1% wealth share can be explained by the collapse in the top 1%'s savings rate, which, while positive from an inequality perspective, could have important ramifications for future economic growth in Canada.

The Impact of Immigration on Local Public Finances: Evidence from Canadian Municipalities

As immigration becomes the primary driver of population growth in many countries, concerns persist regarding its implications for public finances. This paper examines the fiscal impact of immigration at the municipal level in Canada between 2004 and 2022, leveraging high-quality annual immigration data and a shift-share instrumental variables (IV) approach. We find that immigration increases municipal revenues and leads to improved municipal budget balances, which holds even for *low*-skilled immigrants. These results contrast with recent evidence from the United States, which highlights substantial heterogeneity across immigrant skill groups. We argue that low-skill immigrants to Canada are in fact net fiscal *contributors* in the municipal context, due to the more complex interactions between municipal budgets and the skill distribution.