Changing Rental Affordability in California Regions: 
Application of the Constant Quartile Mismatch Indicator

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This conference presentation is adapted from and extends an article published in April 2019 by the authors in HUD’s journal, Cityscape, here applied to California MPO Regions with 2017 data.


https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/cityscpe/vol21num1/article7.html

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Background

*Rental affordability crisis* has drawn widespread attention for its severity since the onset of the Great Recession (HUD 2017; JCHS 2018; NLIHC 2019)

*Indicators of rental affordability* are useful tools for measuring the growing problems and for *comparing places* — and there are several alternatives — yet a crucial criterion of *good indicators* is that an indicator *must not be misleading*

*Traditional rent burden* indicator — more than 30% of income required for rent — is most commonly used, yet it has proven *inadequate* for many reasons, particularly for *comparing large metropolitan areas*

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**Surprisingly Similar Rent Burden Across Regions, Plus Curious Anomalies of ABAG Region and Washington D.C.**

Share of Renters Paying More than 30 (or 50) Percent of Income, US, 50 Largest Metros, and California MPO Regions, 2017

- **More than 50.0%**
- **30.1 to 50.0%**

![Graph showing rent burden across regions](image)
Faults with the Traditional Rent Burden Indicator

1. These metros can’t really be all so similar on affordability

2. The Bay Area and Washington, DC, CANNOT be more affordable than the national average – that is nonsensical

3. Rent burden DISGUISES the problem: is it rent’s too high or income’s too low? What has been changing the most?

4. Rent burden averages all income groups together, so we can’t tell if the incidence of high rent burden is driven by only the lowest income group or middle income groups as well

New Method of Tracking Growing Mismatch of Incomes and Rents

The idea of the Myers-Park (2019) method is to show the changing rent distribution, marking it into four equal quartiles in 2000, and then see in future years how many of the rental units have shifted over time into the top quartile

Separately, we show the changing income distribution of renters, marking that also into four equal quartiles in 2000, and then seeing how incomes of renters also shift into higher or lower quartiles

How great is the mismatch?

Here, we see how the new Constant Quartile Mismatch indicator helps disentangle rent and income effects, and how it can reveal the true variation of affordability problems across regions
Definition of Constant Quartiles

Quartile Rent Distribution of Renter Households, Under Current and Inflation-Adjusted Constant Definitions, U.S., 2000 and 2017

Sources: 2000 Decennial Census and 2017 American Community Survey IPUMS Microdata files (Ruggles et al., 2018).
Quartile Income Distribution of Renter Households, Under Current and Inflation-Adjusted Constant Definitions, U.S., 2000 and 2017

Current Quartile

2000

- 25% (8.4 M) $13,600
- 25% (8.4 M) $27,600
- 25% (8.4 M) $47,000
- 25% (8.4 M) ?

Inflation-Adjusted Constant Quartile

2017

- ? $19,359
- ? $39,288
- ? $66,903
- ? 

Sources: 2000 Decennial Census and 2017 American Community Survey IPUMS Microdata files (Ruggles et al., 2018).

Evidence from the Mismatch Indicator for the Nation, California, and CA MPO Regions
Soaring Rent Relative to Sluggish Income of Renters, United States and California, 2000 to 2017

Renter Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>CA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>31</td>
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Gross Rent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>CA</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Analysis with Myers-Park CQM method applied to the following data: 2000 Decennial Census and 2017 American Community Survey IPUMS Microdata files (Ruggles et al., 2018).

Incomes Are Growing across CA MPO Regions, While Rents Are Growing Even Faster, 2000 to 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MPO</th>
<th>Net</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SCAG</td>
<td>+25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABAG</td>
<td>+17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SANDAG</td>
<td>+30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCOG</td>
<td>+19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Analysis with Myers-Park CQM method applied to the following data: 2000 Decennial Census and 2017 American Community Survey IPUMS Microdata files (Ruggles et al., 2018).
**Summing Net Mismatch** at Both High and Low End

- **Rental** share change less **income** change in *highest quartile*
  - Net mismatch at **high end**
  - (e.g. (+ 22) – (+ 4) = + 18 worse affordability alignment
  - (e.g. (+ 22) – (– 4) = + 26 worse affordability alignment

- **Rental** share change less **income** share change in *bottom quartile*
  - Net mismatch at **low end** (X by –1, to convert negatives to positive)
  - (e.g. (– 12) – (+ 2) = – 14 X (–1) = + 14 worse affordability alignment
  - (e.g. (– 12) – (– 3) = – 9 X (–1) = + 9 worse affordability alignment

- **Total Mismatch** is net **High End** + net **Low End**

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**Where is**

**Least or Most Affordable?**
**Surprisingly Similar** Rent Burden Across Regions, Plus **Curious Anomalies of ABAG Region and Washington D.C.**

Share of Renters Paying More than 30 (or 50) Percent of Income, US, 50 Largest Metros, and California MPO Regions, 2017

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- 30.1 to 50.0%

**Least Affordable** SANDAG and D.C. Due to Serious Mismatches at Both Ends of the Market, While **Most Affordable** Buffalo and Raleigh

Constant Quartile Affordability Mismatch at High and Low End of Rental Markets, US, 50 Largest Metros, and CA MPOs, Changes from 2000 to 2017

- Low-end Mismatch
- High-end Mismatch
Discussion

- **Traditional indicator** shows very similar affordability problems across regions, fully 45 of 50 large metros are within +/- 8pp. of national average (47.4%) — even **ABAG (46.5%) and D.C. (45.0%)** were more affordable than the nation

- **CQM indicator** offers an alternative view on rental affordability, emphasizing growing stress on renters at both the high and low ends of the distribution and emphasizing growing mismatch of rent and income distributions

- Our mismatch indicator can *work very well with other indicators*, including in combination with the *traditional rent burden*

- The mismatch indicator offers a broader characterization of growing affordability problems that afflict both poor and middle incomes

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Key References


Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University. 2018. The State of the Nation's Housing. Cambridge, MA: JCHS.


Thank You

Visit USC PopDynamics
https://sites.usc.edu/popdynamics/housing/

for further information on the Haynes Foundation supported project on housing interconnections and problem trends, and 11 housing publications in 2018-19