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## Foreword

### *ANZRS AI 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference 2025*

For more than forty-seven years, the Australia and New Zealand Regional Science Association has brought together researchers across academic and policy fields to explore the cutting edge of regional development and regional analysis in Australia, New Zealand and around the world. If your work involves regions, join us at our 48th Annual Conference at the University of Waikato Hamilton Waikato, New Zealand. The 2025 Conference will be convened jointly with the Regional Studies Association (RSA), bring together researchers from Asia, Europe, Australasia and beyond. The event will be hosted by the University of Waikato on 1-2 December 2025. Two Best Paper Awards sponsored by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications and the Arts will be presented at the conference.

### **2025 Joint ANZRS AI/RSA Conference Theme: “Population change and regional resilience”**

It will be an in-person conference. To register, please go to [here](#). For more information on the conference, visit the ANZRS AI website at: [www.anzrsai.org](http://www.anzrsai.org).



### *The 2025 Nobel economics prize honours economic creation and destruction*

The Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel 2025 was awarded "for having explained innovation-driven economic growth" with one half to Joel Mokyr "for having identified the prerequisites for sustained growth through technological progress" and the other half jointly to Philippe Aghion and Peter Howitt "for the theory of sustained growth through creative destruction."



(Source: The Conversation)

Mokyr used historical sources as one means to uncover the causes of sustained growth becoming the new normal. Aghion and Howitt also studied the mechanisms behind sustained growth. In an article from 1992, they constructed a mathematical model for what is called creative destruction: when a new and better product enters the market, the companies selling the older products lose out.

Half of the 11 million Swedish kronor (about A\$1.8 million) prize was awarded to Joel Mokyr, a Dutch-born economic historian at Northwestern University.

The other half was jointly awarded to Philippe Aghion, a French economist at Collège de France and INSEAD, and Peter Howitt, a Canadian economist at Brown University.

Collectively, the trio's work has examined the importance of innovation in driving sustainable economic growth. It has also highlighted that in dynamic economies, old firms die as new firms are being born.

### **Innovation drives sustainable growth**

As noted by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, economic growth has lifted billions of people out of poverty over the past two centuries. While we take this as normal, it is actually very unusual in the broad sweep of history.

The period since around 1800 is the first in human history when there has been sustained economic growth. This warns us we should not be complacent. Poor policy could see economies stagnate again.

One of the Nobel judges gave the example that in Sweden and the United Kingdom there was little improvement in living standards in the four centuries between 1300 and 1700.

Mokyr's work showed that prior to the Industrial Revolution, innovations were more a matter of trial and error than being based on scientific understanding. He has argued that sustained economic growth would not emerge in:

*a world of engineering without mechanics, iron-making without metallurgy, farming without soil science, mining without geology, water-power without hydraulics, dyemaking without organic chemistry, and medical practice without microbiology and immunology.*

Mokyr gives the example of sterilising surgical instruments. This had been advocated in the 1840s or earlier. But surgeons were offended by the suggestion they might be transmitting diseases. It was only after the work of Louis Pasteur and Joseph Lister in the 1860s that the role of germs was understood and sterilisation became common.

Mokyr emphasised the importance of society being open to new ideas. As the Nobel committee put it:

*practitioners, ready to engage with science, along with a societal climate embracing change, were, according to Mokyr, key reasons why the Industrial Revolution started in Britain.*

### **Winners and losers**

This year's other two laureates, Aghion and Howitt, recognised that innovations create both winning and losing firms. In the US, about 10% of firms enter and 10% leave the market each year. Promoting economic growth requires an understanding of both processes.

Their 1992 article built on earlier work on the concept of "endogenous growth" – the idea that economic growth is generated by factors inside an economic system, not the result of forces that impinge from outside. This earned a Nobel prize for Paul Romer in 2018.

It also drew on earlier work on "creative destruction" by Joseph Schumpeter.

The model created by Aghion and Howitt implies governments need to be careful how they design subsidies to encourage innovation.

If companies think that any innovation they invest in is just going to be overtaken (meaning they would lose their advantage), they won't invest as much in innovation.

Their work also supports the idea governments have a role in supporting and retraining those workers who lose their jobs in firms that are displaced by more innovative competitors.

This will build political support for policies that encourage economic growth, as well.

### **'Dark clouds' on the horizon?**

The three laureates all favour economic growth, in contrast to growing concerns about the impact of endless growth on the planet.

In an interview after the announcement, however, Aghion called for carbon pricing to make economic growth consistent with reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

He also warned about the gathering "dark clouds" of tariffs; that creating barriers to trade could reduce economic growth.

And he said we need to ensure today's innovators do not stifle future innovators through anti-competitive practices.

For more information with some other significant news can be explored here at the following links:

<https://theconversation.com/the-2025-nobel-economics-prize-honours-economic-creation-and-destruction-267212>

<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/economic-sciences/>

### ***Overseas-born workers filling a void in local government while loving country life***

Councils in regional WA continue to face challenges in attracting and retaining staff to serve their local communities, with isolation a key factor.

However, in WA's Midwest, overseas-born workers who are attracted to the country lifestyle and the spirit of local community are filling the void.

Cocos-Malay Adim Hajat is a community development officer who has packed up his life and family to call the region home.

Mr Hajat grew up on an island with a population of 600 people.

He and his wife, Manisah Macrae, were attracted to the tight-knit community of Perenjori because it reminded them of life on the Cocos Islands.

"[The] Cocos Islands is a very small community, very cultural and traditional," he said.

"We look after family very well and we live with extended family, so for me community development is my kind of forte because I look after the community in the same way."

### **Small towns a place to flourish**



(Staff while working for the Cocos Islands shire. Source: <https://www.abc.net.au/>)

Mr Hajat has worked in 10 local governments across his career, including remote Aboriginal communities, before moving to Perenjori last year.

He said his background helped to bring a different perspective to his role as a community development officer.

"As a community development officer I like to diversify and share my culture ... like with meals, that's how we share our life," Mr Hajat said.

"So smaller communities is fantastic to do that because they're very accepting because they want new people to come to town."

Mr Hajat said he had noticed other community development officers had migrated to shires in the region.

"There's places like Coorow where she's [the community development officer] Indonesian and the officer at Three Springs is from India," Mr Hajat said.

### **Community is everything**

Muthuri Murithi, 27, works as a community development officer in the nearby town of Morawa after studying in Perth.

He attended boarding school while growing up in Nairobi, Kenya.

"Growing up with other kids just as part of your daily life because you're with them from Monday to Monday ... they become your community," Mr Murithi said.

"I feel like it shaped me in a unique way because growing up in Kenya the idea of community is people coming together as a whole."



(Morawa community members at a NAIDOC event. Source: <https://www.abc.net.au/>)

Mr Murithi said although his upbringing helped bring a different perspective to regional living, it was important to understand the locals.

"In Australia when you think of community, you think of the people who are next to you, so your neighbour, local doctor, your teacher," he said.

*"[Morawa] Is full of local farmers and other people who service the region and they all have different needs ... you need to be able to adapt to that."*

Mr Murithi said the Midwest had been an easy place to settle into and the region had unique experiences to offer.

"I had already travelled to Australia from Kenya so I was like 'this can't be too bad', I've already travelled way longer," he said.

"You get to say hi to people when you're driving, people wave at you, it's just a different feeling.

"I had given up on camping from previous experiences but now [in Morawa] I love just being out in the wild."

### **Attracting staff a challenge**

WA Local Government Association president Karen Chappel said attracting and maintaining staff in regional WA continued to be a challenge.

"There's a population shift that we know to larger centres and we are also competing with other industries," Ms Chappel said.

"We have to think outside the square for our workforce recruitment, which isn't easy.

*"WA is so large and most small country towns are four or five hours from the nearest centre and psychologically that's a big step for people."*

Ms Chappel said many local governments were using staff housing as an employment incentive.

"The challenge for us is to recruit people but generally, once they're with us, they're happy," she said.

Ms Chappel said community development officers moving from different backgrounds was important to help the region continue to grow.

"They bring youth and diversity and always seem to have good spirits, willing to assimilate within our communities," she said.

Further information can be found at:

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-11-07/overseas-workers-regional-shire-staff-wa/105944266>

### ***What happened when Trump met Xi?***

On October 30, 2025, in Busan, South Korea, U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping met for roughly 100 minutes. The meeting concluded Trump's five-day trip to Asia, his first visit to the region during his second term. In the commentary below, Brookings scholars analyze the key takeaways from the Trump-Xi meeting



(Source: <https://www.brookings.edu/>)

*China's lesson: It pays to push back*

The Trump-Xi meeting validated Beijing's strategy of pushing back forcefully against U.S. actions. The Trump administration has tried to search for new pressure points with China, moving far beyond tariffs to export controls, port fees, visa restrictions, and sanctions. China has responded with its own expanded toolkit, hitting back with a range of measures that mirror many U.S. actions. In the process, China has discovered which levers seem to be the most effective in dealing with the United States, including soybean purchases and a TikTok deal. And twice now, China has found export controls on rare earths to be its ace of spades.

China's primary goal is to halt the expansion of U.S. measures against it. No new tariffs or fees. No new export controls or sanctions. No new efforts to hobble its economy or slow down its technological development. Beijing had hoped that the Madrid meeting in September would mark a more lasting truce, but it grew frustrated with what it viewed as the bubbling up of new U.S. measures that violated the spirit of the talks. This came to a head with the expansion of the U.S. Entity List rules that would effectively subject thousands of additional companies connected to China to U.S. export controls. Beijing struck back through a massive expansion of its rare earths export controls that would have far-reaching consequences for global high-technology supply chains.

The recent meeting between Trump and Xi in South Korea marks another momentary de-escalation between the United States and China. But many of the actions both sides have taken are not permanently off the table. Moreover, China has now begun to develop a full-fledged export control regime, not just for rare earths but for a wide range of critical materials and technologies. So, while it may seem as if both sides have simply wound back the clock on their tit-for-tat retaliatory measures, the reality is that this process has helped spur the development of China's defensive and offensive tech-industrial capabilities.

*Friction without competition*

Any objective assessment of the success of Trump's meeting with Xi should answer two fundamental analytic questions: 1) Did the meeting advance U.S. policy objectives? 2) Did the meeting position the United States well to advance its interests in the coming year? Despite all the Sturm und Drang that preceded this meeting and the fanfare that accompanied it, substantively, the meeting itself accomplished remarkably little on either count. The United States and China returned to the status quo ante, and U.S. leverage over China has dissipated as Beijing has demonstrated a consistent willingness to retaliate against the United States.

In this latest iteration, the most notable purported concessions the U.S. side extracted from the Chinese side were: 1) a suspension of China's expansion of its export control regime on rare earth elements, 2) a resumption of Chinese cooperation on fentanyl, and 3) a resumption of Chinese purchases of U.S. soybeans. Yet if one rewinds to the start of the Trump administration in January, it is clear that we are not better off now than at the start of the year: on January 20, China was purchasing U.S. soybeans, cooperating on fentanyl (albeit fitfully and unsatisfactorily), and had no rare earths export control regime in place. Now, in exchange for these stop-gap measures, the United States has lowered tariffs on China and pulled back a U.S. Commerce Department rule on export controls to China. These two moves, respectively, only reduce the incentives for companies to diversify their supply chains away from China and set a pernicious precedent of trading away U.S. export controls, which had previously been non-negotiable.

Looking forward, it seems that the serious negotiations are likely to follow rather than precede the deal made between the two presidents—a dynamic that will play to Beijing’s advantage. That is in large part because this most recent deal seems to be as truncated and delicate as the truces that preceded it—leaving enough ambiguity that both sides can claim victory now and make mischief later. For example, the Trump administration is considering further trade actions beyond the letter of the agreement—but which Beijing will seize on as vitiating the agreement’s spirit, resulting in yet another spike in tensions and a scramble to scurry to a third country capital to defuse the problem. We may even see this rerun play one more time before the end of 2025. The net result is more commotion than motion.

Even if this truce does hold, Beijing has played its cards adeptly by agreeing to a one-year cessation of the expansion of its rare earth export control regime. In a year, the United States will be days away from the midterm elections, and Trump will be loath to see one of his signature deals unravel just before voters go to the polls—a dynamic that will only enhance Beijing’s leverage over Washington. In the meantime, Beijing will have time and space to build out the bureaucratic capacity needed to effectuate this export control regime when the moment comes. Meanwhile, Washington is unlikely to have done enough to remediate its vulnerability to China’s chokehold over rare earth elements. This unsatisfactory state of affairs encapsulates the administration’s China policy, which can be described as friction without competition: the administration is doing enough to aggravate bilateral tensions, but it is not doing enough to actually organize the U.S. government for competition with China.

*Trump and Xi’s deal blurs economic and security boundaries*

The Trump-Xi deal pauses the escalating economic confrontation between the United States and China but sets the stage for a more managed—rather than market-based—trade relationship, and one that increasingly blurs the line between strategic and commercial objectives. The White House boasts that the deal will “effectively eliminate” China’s export controls on critical minerals and “open China’s markets to U.S. soybeans and other agricultural exports.” In reality, the agreement leaves Beijing and Washington firmly in control of key strategic levers in the bilateral economic relationship.

The commitments outlined in the deal primarily roll back the escalatory measures imposed since early March, when China retaliated against a White House executive order doubling tariffs under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA). The agreement also includes a pledge from China to curb the flow of fentanyl precursors reaching the United States, an issue tied to the justification for those tariffs. Yet the deal extends beyond IEEPA actions: both sides also pulled back on shipbuilding measures, with Washington suspending for one year the collection of vessel fees, and Beijing withdrawing its countermeasures.

More significantly, the deal ventures beyond commercial issues and into the realm of national and economic security. China agreed to facilitate U.S. access to critical minerals and rare earth elements—materials that are essential for many advanced technology manufacturing and defense—over which it controls global processing capacity and has increasingly restricted exports. In turn, the United States will suspend implementation of a new Bureau of Industry and Security rule that would have expanded the set of Chinese firms facing strict restrictions on access to advanced U.S. technologies. Beijing also agreed to unblock the flow of materials critical to legacy semiconductor production outside its borders—an action spurred by Dutch government actions rather than U.S. intervention. These steps

may ease near-term tensions but also signal that national security measures have become negotiable in a commercial context.

At the very least, this de-escalation offers some short-term relief. China's soybean purchase commitments may give U.S. farmers a reprieve, but it leaves them dependent on Beijing's willingness to honor the deal. And there are few indications that the broader agreement this is meant to preview will deliver a more stable or market-driven trade relationship. If the Phase One Agreement—touted as a major achievement of the first Trump administration—becomes the model for what follows, U.S. businesses will find themselves in a system where politically calibrated purchases and negotiated security concessions replace market discipline and predictable policy.

Further information can be found at:

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/what-happened-when-trump-met-xi/>

## **Commentary**

### **From the Regional Australia Institute**

#### ***Towards Net Zero: Building a Legacy***

*Towards Net Zero: Building a Legacy* analyses the factors that contribute to social licence for large-scale renewable energy projects including supportive regulatory frameworks, genuine community engagement and tangible local benefits.

#### *Overview*

Australia's renewable energy transition is accelerating, with regional communities at the forefront of hosting the infrastructure needed to meet net zero targets. As renewable sources now supply nearly 40% of the nation's electricity, some regions are already deeply engaged in this transformation, while others are just beginning. This shift presents a historic opportunity to invest in regional Australia, building sustainable communities and lasting legacies through thoughtful development.

However, the rapid pace and scale of change are creating challenges that threaten progress. Communities are voicing concerns about the social, cultural, environmental, and economic impacts of large-scale renewable projects. Strains on housing, services, and employment, coupled with fragmented engagement and complex regulations, are eroding trust and social licence. Without strong community support, projects risk delays, increased costs, and diminished investment, jeopardizing Australia's net zero ambitions.

This report, *Towards Net Zero: Building a Legacy*, offers a roadmap to overcome these challenges and unlock long-term regional benefits. It showcases leading practices from across the country and introduces the Regional Energy and Legacy Deal (REAL Deal); a national framework for coordinated planning and investment. By empowering communities through place-based decision-making and co-investment, the REAL Deal aims to turn the energy transition into a win-win for regions and the nation. This is a must-read for policymakers, industry leaders, and community advocates shaping Australia's energy future.

The 'Towards Net Zero – Building a Legacy' report was funded by the Australian, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australian, Victorian and Western Australian Governments.

*Key Findings*

**Building national, state & local narratives:** Building a strong narrative is important to create social licence for the energy transition and renewable energy development in regional Australia. Consultations heard that a lack of information and a compelling rationale for the transition remains a key issue for regional communities. Recent surveys show that communities have low levels of awareness about the energy transition and the role of different types of infrastructure within the transition. Governments and industry have a key role to play in building compelling narratives to support the energy transition and renewable energy development in regional communities.

**Policy & regulation:** Clear policy and regulatory frameworks contribute to social licence. State-wide energy roadmaps and designated renewable energy development zones provide a valuable framework for planning and regulating development and provide clear standards for developers to consider community impacts and interests. Leading practice regulatory frameworks are emerging nationwide, notably South Australia's Hydrogen and Renewable Energy Act 2024 and New South Wales's comprehensive suite of policies for the delivery of Renewable Energy Zones.

**Community engagement:** Transparent, accountable and participatory community engagement is essential to build social licence for renewable energy projects. Community engagement needs to recognise and acknowledge local experiences, from First Nations to farmers to coal transition communities. The RAI consultations heard that communities are dissatisfied with the quality of community engagement in their regions. Participants reported that governments and industry have insufficient presence in communities, communities are overwhelmed by the volume of consultation, and misinformation is rife. There is substantial evidence that genuine engagement that meets the needs of communities can mitigate community concern and reduce the time and cost of the transition in the long run.

**Just transition:** The concept of just transition provides a framework to ensure that the energy transition is structured, fair and equitable, addressing potential social, economic and environmental impacts in the regional communities that are hosting renewable energy infrastructure. Procedural and distributive justice are key factors in building social licence.

**Communities leading the way:** Many regional communities are taking a leadership role in planning for renewable energy development in their regions. The report highlights leading practice examples of regional communities developing strategic plans, creating partnership principles, identifying and prioritising local needs and proactively building the foundations for long-term benefits in their regions. The report finds that communities need resources and support to prepare effectively for renewable energy development in their regions. Community education and capacity building, along with funding for local strategic planning, are important to optimise benefits for communities.

**Delivering lasting benefits:** Communities want to be involved in decision-making about funding and benefits in their communities. Potential benefits include business development, jobs and skills training, upgrades to physical and social infrastructure, and community investment. These outcomes can only be realised through regional coordination and planning. Pooling developer contributions into regional benefits funds is a key opportunity of the energy transition.

*Policy Recommendations*

**Recommendation 1:** Implement regional investment programs to build a long-term legacy from renewable energy development: the RAI's REAL Deal.

The renewable energy transition is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to deliver long-term investment in regional communities. Governments, industry and communities should consider regional investment programs that deliver long-term benefits to the regions. The Australian Government should develop a national framework for regional legacy-building with reference to the RAI's proposed Regional Energy and Legacy Deal (REAL Deal).

Recommendation 2: Government transition management plans should incorporate international frameworks for just transition.

Australia's transition to a renewables-based energy will have a significant impact in many regional areas. Australia should continue to draw on international just transition models to inform transition management and planning. This will help to ensure that the energy transition is structured, fair and equitable, addressing potential social and economic impacts on communities hosting large-scale renewable infrastructure.

Recommendation 3: State and federal governments should resource regional communities to participate as partners in the energy transition.

State and federal governments must resource regional communities to participate as equal partners in the transition. Governments should fund delivery of education and capacity-building programs for landholders, councils, community members and government agencies in regions facing significant renewable energy development. Communities need to be resourced to undertake cyclical strategic planning to identify local needs, priorities and principles for partnership.

Recommendation 4: Timely, inclusive and appropriate community engagement should be mandated through policy, regulation and funding schemes.

Governments and coordinating agencies should ensure that requirements for timely, inclusive and appropriate community engagement are mandated in policy, guidelines and funding schemes.

Recommendation 5: State and federal governments should continue to strengthen policy and regulatory structures for renewable energy development.

Confidence in regulatory frameworks is a key contributor to social licence. State and federal governments should continue to strengthen policy that concentrates renewable energy development in suitable geographic locations and standardise processes for planning and implementation.

Recommendation 6: Build a cohesive narrative for the transition through public information at national, state and local levels.

Governments have a key leadership role to play in building a cohesive public narrative that promotes the rationale for the renewable energy transition. Consistent and coherent national, state and local public information campaigns are needed to communicate the practical, economic and environmental reasons for the energy transition and for renewable energy development in regional communities. Information materials should provide transparent and accessible information about benefits and impacts to specific regions.

Detailed report can be found at:

[https://regionalaustralia.org.au/common/Uploaded%20files/Research/Building%20a%20Legacy%20\(I%20SIP\).pdf](https://regionalaustralia.org.au/common/Uploaded%20files/Research/Building%20a%20Legacy%20(I%20SIP).pdf)

*From Brookings*

*Economic development in its place*

Xavier de Souza Briggs and Tracy Hadden Loh (October 2025)

This report extends that work, showing why and how land use tools should be upgraded (and integrated with other tools) to promote more inclusive and effective economic development—i.e., economic change that generates shared gains, including racial and social equity. Our goal is to encourage and inform a new generation of progress in local economies both large and small.

Across the country, there is broad-based interest in expanding good jobs, growing small and midsized businesses with local and diverse ownership, and making local economies and tax bases more resilient to shifts in trade policy, significant cuts in federal and state funding, and losses from extreme weather and other impacts of a changing climate. But the right steps for achieving the gains without displacing residents, making the cost of living even more unaffordable, or otherwise exacerbating inequality by race, class, or other traits are not always clear, especially for local decisionmakers in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

Likewise, with a call to make it easier and cheaper to build, Ezra Klein, Derek Thompson, and other champions of “abundance” have made long-standing proposals for regulatory streamlining—and more agile government and structured community debate—much more visible and politically salient. They offer vivid examples of how slow, litigious, and expensive the local development process can be in some places, especially when social equity, environmental sustainability, and other goals are emphasized via specific rules and standards. No question, the nature of the development process affects the quality of transportation, energy, and other infrastructure, the supply and cost of housing, and more. But development reflects core values too, as well as power and influence, and signals what a community thinks a worthwhile future should include.

Unfortunately, given that fact, land use policy and economic development are often considered separately, and the multiple ties between them superficially—or ideologically. As a growing body of ideas and practice underscores, many important economic development proposals are land-intensive and raise significant equity and effectiveness questions tied to land and its regulation, ownership, and value. As previous Brookings research has explored in depth, land also links the stakes of economic decisions at the neighborhood, district, or other “hyperlocal” scales to those at the city and regional level.

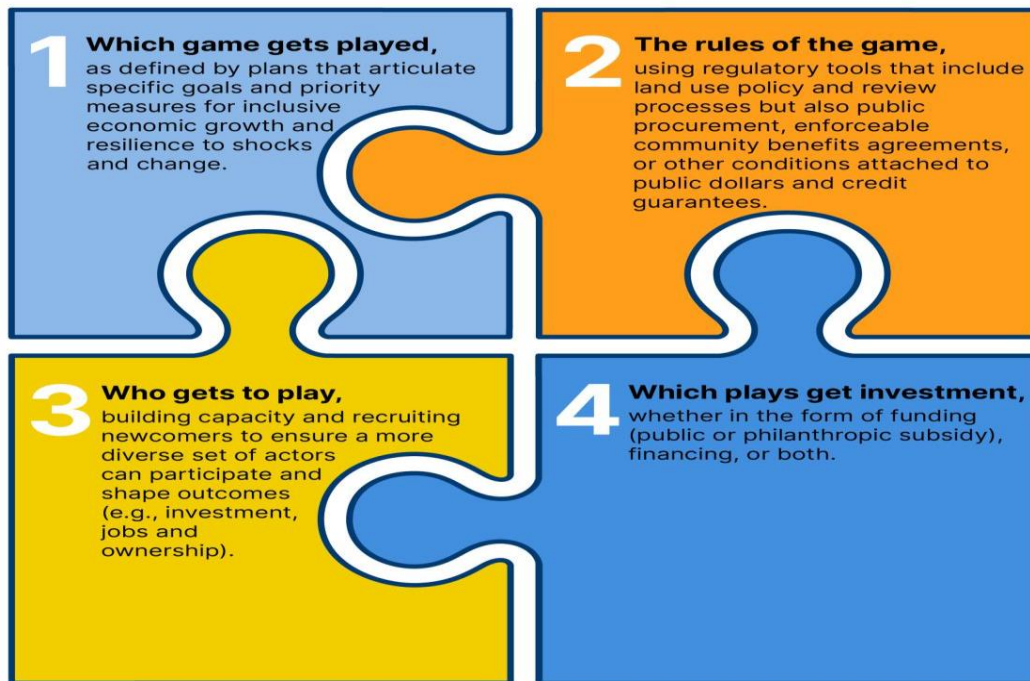
This report examines the stakes and offers a new framework for action (previewed in Figure 1). It is part of a larger project on the development and use of racial equity impact assessment tools for better decisionmaking. The project is a joint effort by the Brookings Institution’s Center for Community Uplift and the New School’s Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy.

A number of forces are converging to intensify the economic and fiscal pressure felt by local and state governments, with major implications for land development. Understanding these forces is critical if communities are to find viable ways to make inclusive economic development work as budgets are strained.

First, the housing affordability crisis—i.e., much wider recognition that it is in fact a crisis, along with rising prices themselves—has increased frustration about the mismatch between wages and the cost of living in the U.S., but also about gentrification, displacement pressure, and racial equity in land use planning and development. This, in turn, fuels skepticism about claims made to win support for real estate and other land development projects and job-creation proposals, which are often promoted as bolstering local government budgets.

FIGURE 1

**Inclusive economic development with land use:  
A strategy framework with four mutually reinforcing elements**



Source: Brookings authors

**B** | Brookings Metro

Second, due to the Trump administration and Congress, this year has brought dramatic shifts in federal policy and spending that affect the full spectrum of subnational governments: state or territorial, local, and Tribal. For example, a massive and controversial party-line domestic policy bill, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025, made a wide range of cuts, from future Medicaid spending to clean energy production, while expanding or modifying certain tax incentives. In real estate, for example, the law made the Opportunity Zone (OZ) investment incentive—which purports to focus on “economically distressed communities”—permanent. The impacts of the OZ program, which was originally enacted in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 and has catalyzed over \$100 billion of investment so far, have been mixed at best. Urban Institute analysis of accounting data and project case studies suggests that much of the invested capital has gone to build market-rate rental housing, with little focus on job creation in distressed neighborhoods and towns. More equitable outcomes are possible, for the OZ credits and other funding and financing tools, as we explore in this report.

In addition to the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, the annual congressional appropriations process (currently at impasse, producing a government shutdown) is likewise advancing a wide variety of cuts to federal spending that local communities have relied on, from criminal justice and rental assistance to emergency management and public education.

Third, for cities and counties especially, the risks and rewards in economic development proposals are taking on greater significance, along with a sense of urgency about jobs in light of inflation, recessionary fears, and uncertainties driven by steep and shifting tariffs.

For example, given intensified concerns about state and local finances, the stadium wars are back, along with conflicts over casinos and downtown redevelopment. In addition, communities, tech companies, utilities, and other players are drawing new battle lines over the proliferation of energy-hungry data centers. That’s thanks in part to hundreds of billions of dollars in private capital

investment to support the diffusion of artificial intelligence throughout the economy. By some credible estimates, that massive investment will account for a larger share of U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) this year than retail spending.

Economic and fiscal pressure is expanding on multiple fronts at once—some cyclical and some more structural, such as the aging of the population alongside a loss of immigrant workers (countering gains made during the post-pandemic recovery) and significant proposed cuts to federal research and development funding.

Strapped public budgets usually make commercial and industrial real estate developments especially attractive to local governments, in larger and smaller regions alike. Under the right conditions, such developments can be valuable sources of tax revenue.

To be sure, a robust conversation about fiscal innovation continues too, in public finance and budgeting. For example, the city of New York has traditionally used an accounting technique called the “surplus roll” to ensure a balanced budget, which for historical reasons is significantly larger than the city’s more recently created rainy-day fund. However, since FY 2022, the size of the surplus roll has fallen by more than half (from \$6.1 billion to \$2.3 billion), while the rainy-day fund has not grown—indicating that revenues are not keeping pace with expenses. New York state faces an even more immediate budget gap and future imbalance.

In principle, economic development strategies that can both grow revenue and reduce expenses or their growth—for example, from services that help alleviate poverty rather than prevent or shorten it—can be well worth investing in. And context is all important: In high-growth, high-cost, built-up cities such as New York, the pain of the housing crisis has drawn new attention to how land use is allocated and regulated, and the implications that has for inclusive growth. This makes high-cost cities a rich source of lessons for other communities, including revitalizing urban regions that aim to keep family incomes and the local cost of living in balance over time—an imperative highlighted in the 2025 Brookings Metro Monitor’s overview of trends nationwide over the past decade. Conversely, New York and other high-cost cities can learn from bold innovations elsewhere, as we show in this report, especially when it comes to deploying and integrating multiple economic development authorities and tools in new ways.

In the next section, we critically examine several strategic questions about local economic development—who and what it is for, how it takes shape—and then turn to what it would take to upgrade land use tools and integrate them with other essential levers for change in pursuit of economic development that is more inclusive as well as more effective and sustainable.

Read the whole story here at:

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/economic-development-in-its-place/>

### **From the Australia Rural and Regional News**

#### ***The wrong ratio headcount issue***

Murray Pioneer (November 2025)

Riverland medical staff are claiming new ratio laws that have been recently passed by the State Government to improve medical care and safety are failing to alleviate the “high pressure working conditions” of rural and regional healthcare.

Alongside an offer of a 13 per cent pay rise over four years, with bonus payments totalling \$4500 — that the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) SA branch responded to with a Parliament House rally last week — the State Government also announced the passing of new patient ratio laws, which are said to ensure “safer nursing”.

Though modelled on Victorian ratios, and constructed under “extensive consultation” with ANMF SA, striking nurses and midwives from the Berri-based Riverland General Hospital — speaking to *The Murray Pioneer* under the condition of anonymity — claimed the ratios were not efficient for rural and regional hospitals, and in fact, only enforcing and maintaining current workload pressure.

“(While) the union has been great... with their strong focus on pay rise, for us as regional and rural nurses, (the strike) is also about working conditions which haven’t been addressed yet — these patient ratios do nothing to help us,” a staff member said.

“Not only can we not retain staff (due to wage amount), but the high-pressure working conditions are making nurses leave the profession because they’re so stressed and burnt out.”

Passing the laws in October, Adelaide’s four largest hospitals — the Royal Adelaide Hospital, Flinders Medical Centre, Lyell McEwin Hospital, and Women’s and Children’s Hospital — will be required to have one nurse for every four patients during day shift, and one in eight patients for night shifts, with other metropolitan hospitals receiving the same ratios bar in the afternoon, which requires one nurse every five patients.

However, for large regional general hospitals, the requirements are one nurse for every five patients during morning shift, one nurse for every six patients during afternoon shift, and one nurse for every 10 patients during night shift, with smaller regional hospitals required to be staffed with at least one registered nurse, and one other nurse or midwife on all shifts.

For midwives, the mother and the baby are considered one patient.

While Minister for Health and Wellbeing Chris Picton said the laws and proposed raise were part of “a major win for South Australian patients, nurses and midwives”, an additional Riverland General Hospital staff member said the new offerings showed the government “does not know what (rural) nurses do” day-to-day and were “cruel.”

“(Politicians) get on the news and say we support nurses, but then they do this,” they said.

“Metro nurses only have worry about completing their nurse shift duty while caring for their patients. We have to do everything on top of our normal load.

“In metro, they have services built in, such as cleaners, (ward assistants), and phlebotomists — however, here, we have to (additionally) strip and clean the rooms, wash and feed patients, transport patients, take blood, assisting doctors, changing pads, wound care, and more.

“Five patients may not seem like a lot, but it is, especially when you have to do every single thing for them — you also need to remember, these are all sick people... three out of my five are often bed bound.

“Also, in Adelaide, they have separate wings — and orthopaedic wing, a maternity wing, a rehab wing, here, it’s all together.

“(My patient ratio could include) taking care someone from orthopaedics, someone from rehab, as well as someone who is acutely sick.

“You can understand why they can’t retain staff — students do their placement here, and they don’t return, and agency nurses come here once, and they never come back.”

“They’re cutting corners to save a buck, and we’re the ones that wear the consequences.

“To me it seems like (the Government thinks) this amount of work is not worthy of a pay rise, it’s just horrible, and it’s cruel.”

A staff member who also worked across smaller Riverland SA Health sites, such as the Barmera Health Service, said the small ratio laws were exacerbating issues of understaffing and overwhelming workloads.

“We only ever have two nurses on during a single shift,” they said.

“However, if a one nurse has to attend the emergency department — which is also going 24/7 — a nurse can be left with up to 11 patients.

“However, (at the Regional General Hospital) emergency department patients are admitted on top of patient ratios.

“They try to share (the workload) around, but it’s hard — especially as they struggle to get staff numbers up on the days where there are high patient numbers.

“You just have to put up with it and just work it. What else can you do?”

“(The State Government) have thrown us under the bus.

The full report is available at:

<https://arr.news/2025/11/05/the-wrong-ratio-headcount-issue/>

### **From the Gulbali Institute of Agriculture, Water and Environment (CSU)**

#### ***From African rivers to Asian plates***

Sheree Bega (October 2025)

When Lee Baumgartner talks about eels, his enthusiasm is palpable. But his tale of these slippery creatures quickly turns dark — a story of global trafficking, ecological collapse, and a little-known wildlife crime that has eclipsed even the trade in guns and drugs.

“The connection, it’s really crazy,” said the executive director and professor of fisheries and river management at the Gulbali Institute at Charles Sturt University in Australia.

“It’s driven by the demand in Asia for baby eels. It’s huge. And it’s a demand that comes from all over the world,” he told the *Mail & Guardian* on the sidelines of last week’s Oppenheimer Research Conference, where he delivered a presentation titled, ‘Drugs, guns and eels: The decline of Anguillid eels in East Africa and beyond’.



(Source: <https://mg.co.za/>)

The conference — convened by Oppenheimer Generations Research and Conservation — brought together researchers, policymakers, and conservation leaders to advance African-led solutions to the biodiversity and climate crisis

“You’ve got these baby eels, called glass eels, which are about a year old, that are captured, and then transported to Asia, and then they’re put into the eel hatcheries and they’re used for this gourmet food called Unagi [the Japanese word for freshwater eels],” Baumgartner said.

“And, it’s just an amazing delicacy that people eat ... The Anguillid eel is now the most trafficked animal in the world, and it’s all driven by this demand for Unagi in Asia.”

The numbers are staggering, he said. The annual illicit trade in glass eels is worth about \$4.8 billion. The fish are trafficked from Europe, North America, Canada, Indonesia, and Africa, all bound for Asia's lucrative markets.

In Mozambique, in the Limpopo River's estuary, glass eels are illegally harvested and exported.

"There are actually people in Mozambique who have been shipped from Asia to harvest eels because they owe money to people in Asia, and they have to pay off their debts by catching eels. That's how big this is," Baumgartner said.

In 2019, the illegal eel trade was worth more than three billion euros, outstripping the trade in guns and drugs that year. Glass eels can fetch an astounding \$6 000 per kilo on the black market, he said.

In Asia, they are kept in high-density tanks and fed a paste, getting fat not to reproduce, but to feed people. Largely, the global demand is driven by depleted Asian eel fisheries. Global demand is largely driven by depleted Asian eel fisheries.

"The bad thing is that if you like to eat eels and you fish them out, you can't actually breed them in captivity, and the reason is because they breed 3km deep in the ocean. You can't build a hatchery that is 3km deep," he said.

"If you can't breed them and you don't have enough left, what do you do? You catch them from elsewhere and you ship them to Asia. And that's what's been happening all over the world."

As law enforcement agencies such as Interpol and Europol cracked down on European smuggling rings in the Covid-era, traffickers looked for new frontiers.

"If it gets too hard to traffic eels in Europe, what do you do? You go to an area where there is lower compliance. That's why Indonesia and East Africa have seen a boom recently because the compliance isn't that high. We would really like to work with the governments to try and minimise it ... because it's really important for the fish."

Baumgartner marvels at their complex migratory life cycle, from their enigmatic oceanic spawning to migration in and out of freshwater systems across the Western Indian Ocean, which remains poorly understood.

Recent population declines are driven by habitat degradation, overfishing, and the obstruction of migration pathways, compounded by the illegal trafficking of glass and silver eels.

The Limpopo River Basin is home to four species of Anguillid eels. They are born in the ocean, northeast of Madagascar.

"They drift on the ocean currents for up to a year, they wait for a new moon — no one knows why — they then transform into little transparent glass eels and move upstream. They go to the upper part of the river and stay there for the next 60 years," Baumgartner said.

"On their 60th birthday, give or take, they go back to the ocean, swim back northeast of Madagascar, lay their eggs, and die. Over their lifetime, it's a journey of about 15 000km."

Theirs is a perilous journey.

“The first thing you’ll find when you’re a baby eel is you have to climb these big concrete walls in dams, and if you’re lucky enough, you get up to good habitat,” he said.

“Then when you have to go downstream, if someone has built a hydropower plant, you have to swim through a spinning turbine that’s twisting at 120 times per second ... then bang, they lasted 60 years to get back to Madagascar and a hydropower dam chops them up.”

It’s not safe in the ocean either, where they are caught by poachers or eaten by whales and sharks.

An adult eel has one job: to get fat. “It has to eat as much as it can over 60 years to get as much oil in its body so that it can swim 4 500km because when they turn into a breeding eel, their backside closes over, their digestive system vanishes, and it turns into gonads.

“They’ve got one job and that’s to lay eggs or to fertilise the eggs. They need enough oil in them to sustain them for a 4 500km journey where you don’t eat.”

Even for scientists, who have studied them for decades, the eels remain an enigma. No one has ever seen an eel spawn in the ocean.

“There’s a huge knowledge gap as to where they end up at the end of this 4 000km journey.

“We know where their eggs turn up in the ocean so we suspect that we know where they go but no one has ever seen one actually breed in the wild. It’s one of nature’s big mysteries.”

Baumgartner points out that while Asian countries have a big demand for eels, people have been eating them for tens of thousands of years.

“Original tribes and people who lived on the rivers knew that if you caught an eel and ate an eel with its huge fat content, you would have enough to sustain you for days. It was big in Australia, big in traditional ways of life in Africa. It still is really big in Indonesia.”

The overfishing of baby eels is only part of the problem. “The other thing that we have to do is make sure our rivers are healthy so that if they do avoid the poachers, they still have to live for 60 years in the river.”

Every single population of Anguillid eels in the world is in decline, Baumgartner warns.

“Our biggest concern is that in 20 or 30 years, we might start to lose some species. That would be tragic.”

His institute’s international collaboration, through the Sustainable African Rivers Initiative (Sari), aims to avert that. It is a partnership with the North West University, University of Mpumalanga, Oppenheimer Generations Research Programme, SANParks, and Rivers of Life.

It was established 10 months ago to meaningfully contribute to the conservation and sustainable development of the rivers, lakes, wetlands, and estuaries of Sub-Saharan Africa for the biodiversity, ecosystems, and people who depend on these functioning ecosystems for their livelihoods.

Further details are available at:

<https://mg.co.za/the-green-guardian/2025-10-23-from-african-rivers-to-asian-plates-the-global-eel-crisis/>

**From CEDA**

*Australia's AI crossroads: Build or be left behind*

Victor Bajanov and Jon Shen (October 2025)

Australia stands at a defining moment in the age of artificial intelligence — a choice between becoming a nation that builds the future, or one that merely consumes it.

While global competitors invest hundreds of billions in AI infrastructure, Australia risks drifting into an era where we consume technology rather than create it, becoming digital tenants in someone else's future and ceding the AI advantage to others.

The numbers tell a sobering story. Australia's direct tech sector contributes just 3.8 per cent to GDP, compared to 10.2 per cent in the United States and 8.1 per cent in the United Kingdom. Of our AI investment, 52 per cent goes to commercial software and 30 per cent to integration services. Only 18 per cent goes towards building foundational capabilities. We are buying someone else's solutions, not building sovereignty.

AI is fundamentally reshaping work. We are rapidly heading towards an AI-augmented economy where small, technically sophisticated teams achieve what once required hundreds. And those teams are hybrid, people and agents. Yet Australia faces a projected AI talent gap of 40,000 specialists by 2027, double today's shortage. More concerning, at the beginning of 2024, 59 per cent of Australians had never used generative AI, and 48 per cent of workers felt unsafe admitting to their manager that they used it. While executives race to deploy AI, cultural acceptance lags dangerously behind.

*The technical leadership void:* While Australia has exceptional data science talent, we need more of our experts gaining global prominence and recognition. After 7-10 years, our best technical talent faces a critical decision point - deepen expertise in technical contributor roles with limited advancement, or transition into management and abandon their technical edge.

When organisations lack technical depth at senior levels, they default to implementation over invention. Just 35 per cent of Australian chief data officers hold technical qualifications as their highest credential. Without technical leaders who understand AI's capabilities and limitations, organisations risk catastrophic misallocation of resources.

The opportunity cost is staggering. A technically-led organisation could achieve with 10 people what traditionally requires 100, while improving both quality and speed. The global competition for markets, talent and innovation is increasingly won by those who can effectively blend human expertise with AI capabilities.

Australia has demonstrated world-leading innovation: the multi-channel cochlear implant, polymer banknotes, HPV vaccine, Google Maps, the black box flight recorder. Yet in the field of AI, our investment in generating breakthroughs and retaining the talent capable of creating them has been lacklustre, driving our up-and-coming technical leaders to seek their fortunes offshore because Australia lacks structures to retain technical excellence at senior levels.

*Government action accelerating - But is it fast enough:* Recent developments signal growing urgency. In June, Amazon announced a \$20 billion investment in Australian data centres. The National AI

Capability Plan, due in late 2025, projects AI could generate \$600 billion annually toward GDP by 2030.

*Infrastructure and sovereignty:* We need strategically placed data centres with renewable energy access. This is not about matching Silicon Valley - it is about enabling scale for Australia's AI demands, and unlocking sovereign capability for sensitive applications in finance, healthcare, defence and infrastructure. Privacy Act reforms recognise local processing is necessary. But data centres alone are not enough. We must rapidly deploy robust, sustainable energy networks to power AI systems while keeping energy affordable for all Australians.

*AI literacy as a national priority:* Immediate, coordinated intervention across Australia's schools, workplaces and communities. Every Australian should understand how AI affects their life and recognise AI-enabled scams. The ASIO Director-General warns AI enables disinformation that can "undermine factual information and erode trust in institutions." This is about developing critical thinking and adaptability skills that will serve Australians as technology continues its rapid evolution.

*Building technical leadership pathways:* Organisations must create genuine technical career tracks that allow experts to reach senior levels while maintaining technical focus. This means dual career pathways with authority over technical strategy, rethinking leadership development beyond traditional programs and fostering organisational cultures that celebrate technical excellence. Australian organisations need to embrace small, high impact teams where world-class technologists with AI tools can outperform traditional large departments.

*Responsible AI requires technical depth:* Deploying AI responsibly requires deep technical understanding. Poorly implemented AI can disproportionately harm marginalised communities because they are the least equipped to challenge erroneous decisions made against them. AI systems require ongoing maintenance, protection against adversarial attacks and continuous evaluation as business and societal contexts evolve. Without technical leaders who understand these complexities at decision-making levels, organisations risk deploying systems that cause real harm while believing they're following best practices.

*The window is closing:* The pace of advancement is exponential and the AI competitive advantage shifts rapidly. Australian companies may find themselves debating whether to adopt basic AI tools, while global competitors are developing systems that outperform entire departments.

Further information about this report is available at:

<https://www.ceda.com.au/news-and-resources/opinion/technology/australias-ai-crossroads-build-or-be-left-behind>

### **From the Productivity Commission**

#### *Productivity Commission inquiry into regional airfares*

The Albanese Government released the terms of reference for the Productivity Commission Inquiry into key factors that determine regional airfares.

Regional Australians deserve reliable air services at reasonable prices and that's what this review is about.

That's why in response to the Aviation White Paper, we tasked the Productivity Commission to look at regional airfares, including competition, pricing practices and whether profits along the supply chain are fair.

This will give state governments and the Commonwealth the nationally consistent data required to tackle the issue of regional airfares.

We know that safe, affordable and reliable air services are vital for regional and remote communities, not just for travel, but for access to healthcare, education and jobs.

More accessible regional airfares can help drive local economies, support tourism and boost productivity in regional Australia.

The Aviation White Paper found the average ticket price per kilometre was 52 per cent higher for flights involving regional airports than for flights between two capital cities.

Despite overall growth in passenger numbers, the number of regional routes fell from 458 to 291 between 1989 and 2021 and the number of remote routes fell from 264 to 163 in the same period. Many routes are now serviced by only one airline.

We have asked the Productivity Commission to hold public hearings and to invite submissions from the public.

#### *Scope of the inquiry*

The Commission will conduct a review of the determinants of regional airfares in Australia and make recommendations on policy settings to support a competitive, reliable and affordable regional aviation network.

For the purposes of this inquiry, the term 'regional' encompasses passenger flights to or from areas outside Australia's major cities (i.e. regional, rural and remote areas).

In undertaking the inquiry, the Commission should holistically consider a range of factors, including but not limited to:

- analysing the determinants of regional airfares and service offerings, and the composition of factors that contribute to differences between airfares available on regional routes and those available between major cities, including airport fees and charges;
- identifying the main drivers of demand for regional air services;
- examining any barriers to entry or expansion for airlines to provide regional services;
- identifying policies and regulatory settings that may contribute to higher regional airfares, reduced service levels or reduced competition;
- assessing the role for government and the most efficient forms of government intervention in the market and other policies to improve access, pricing and service outcomes;
- identifying the impacts of regional air fares and access to regular and reliable air services on regional economies (including tourism and migration), productivity, and improving Closing the Gap outcomes;

- identifying the extent of competition between different air transport services (regular public air transport and charter) and with other modes of transport (road and rail), and the role of regional air freight in supporting the commercial viability of regional air services; and
- considering international comparisons and best practices in comparable aviation markets.

In undertaking the inquiry, the Commission should consider all entities which affect regional aviation, including airlines, airports, aircraft maintenance, aircraft part suppliers, fuel suppliers, supply chains, regulators and any other entities which contribute to costs and other determinants of airfares.

#### *Process*

The Commission is to undertake a public consultation process including holding public hearings, inviting public submissions and releasing a draft report to the public.

The Commission should consult with a broad range of stakeholders, including the Commonwealth, state, territory and local governments, airlines, airports, relevant aviation industry and tourism operators, regional communities and businesses, including First Nations peoples.

The Commission should have regard to previous inquiries in relation to the economic regulation of airports and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's domestic airline monitoring.

The Productivity Commission will provide a final report in about 18 months' time.

The terms of reference are available on the Productivity Commission website.

Further information and the terms of reference are available at:

<https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries-and-research/regional-airfares/terms-of-reference/>

<https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries-and-research/regional-airfares/>

### **From the Business Insider Australia**

#### ***One Australian bank just gave employees a choice***

Shybangi Goel (August 2025)

- ANZ Group warned staff of pay cuts for not meeting in-office attendance requirements.
- The bank's hybrid policy requires employees to work in-office at least half the week.
- ANZ joins other banks and tech giants enforcing return-to-office mandates.

One of Australia's largest banks has made it clear to employees that not coming into the office will have consequences.

In an internal memo on Thursday, ANZ Group said employees' salaries will be cut if they are not in the office for at least half the working week.

Bloomberg first reported the memo. A spokesperson for ANZ confirmed the contents of the memo to Business Insider.

"Our hybrid working expectation has been made clear to our employees, including potential impact on future remuneration if employees don't have an appropriate exception," an ANZ spokesperson said. They added that the flexible working policy has existed for a number of years.

Thursday's email to managers referenced a tool for tracking staff members' attendance and how pay brackets would change for people not meeting the 50% in-office requirement.

Employees coming to the office less than 20% of the time won't be eligible for salary increases unless they have an exemption. Those who come between 21% and 40% of the time could see their variable pay cut by up to 50%.

ANZ joins a growing number of companies mandating return-to-office and cracking down on those that skirt requirements.

In January, Britain's biggest retail bank, Lloyds, said it would consider office attendance when deciding staff bonuses. The same month, JPMorgan Chase told its employees to return to the office five days a week starting in March, ending a pandemic-era work-from-home policy.

Outside finance, some of the world's largest employers, including Amazon, Meta, and Walmart, have instructed employees to come in several days a week or face termination.

But not everyone is on the mandated RTO bandwagon.

Late last month, Standard Chartered CEO Bill Winters said he would let his staff decide whether to return to the office.

"We work with adults, and the adults can have an adult conversation with other adults and decide how they're going to best manage their team," Winters said in an interview with Bloomberg.

Further details are available at:

<https://www.businessinsider.com/australia-bank-anz-tells-employees-must-rto-or-pay-cut-2025-8>

## THE CONVERSATION

### *As global climate action threatens to stall, can Australia step up at COP30 in Brazil?*

Naomi Rahim (November 2025)

Ten years on from the landmark Paris Agreement, countries have taken big strides in limiting emissions and the clean energy transition is accelerating rapidly. But geopolitical headwinds are growing and the damage bill for climate pollution is rising. Climate action hangs in the balance.

Next week, these issues will come to a head as negotiators gather in Brazil for COP30, the 30th annual global climate talks. This year's talks could be pivotal, as all countries were due to set more

ambitious targets to cut emissions. Will the world double down on the clean energy transition – or will momentum stall and fossil fuel interests win out?

Australia has a larger role than its size and clout might suggest. After two decades as one of the world's worst climate laggards, the new national emissions target compares favourably with much of the developed world. Australia is also bidding to host the next COP talks with Pacific nations.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has attracted some criticism over his decision not to attend the summit. But Climate and Energy Minister Chris Bowen will be there, alongside dozens of negotiators and experts from Australia and the Pacific.

The outcome is uncertain. But for the first time in years, Australia will be a leader in working towards a consensus on a managed transition away from fossil fuels.

#### *What's at stake at COP30?*

The world's climate talks are returning to their birthplace. The UN Climate Convention was signed in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 before talks began three years later. This year, the 30th Conference of Parties will be held in the Amazonian city of Belém.

For COP30 to succeed, it must firm up global commitment to the Paris Agreement. That may seem hard, given the United States is once again walking away from climate action.

But there is good news. The Paris Agreement is working, slowly but surely. Countries agreed to set emissions targets and increase their ambition every five years. These targets are bending the curve of emissions and limiting warming.

Before Paris, the world was on track for a catastrophic outcome: 4°C degrees of warming this century. The first wave of global emissions targets brought this closer to 3°C. In 2021, upgraded targets brought projections down to 2.1–2.8°C. Tallying up the new round of national targets suggests it may be possible to limit warming to 1.9°C. That assumes, of course, all targets are met in full. The new United Nations emissions gap report suggests 2.3–2.5°C is more likely.

The bad news is the Paris Agreement is not working fast enough. The longer we take to bring global emissions to net zero, the more heating we bake in. Every fraction of a degree intensifies damage to ecosystems and human communities. We are seeing these worsening impacts now at 1.2°C of warming. Almost every corner of the world is already reeling from intensifying heat, storms, floods, droughts and fires.

#### *What can Australia do?*

Australia's delegation will arrive in Belém with a much stronger target: cutting emissions 62–70% by 2035 (from 2005 levels).

This isn't aligned with the science – a cut of at least 75% is needed to align with the Paris goal of limiting warming to 1.5°C. But it's an improvement.

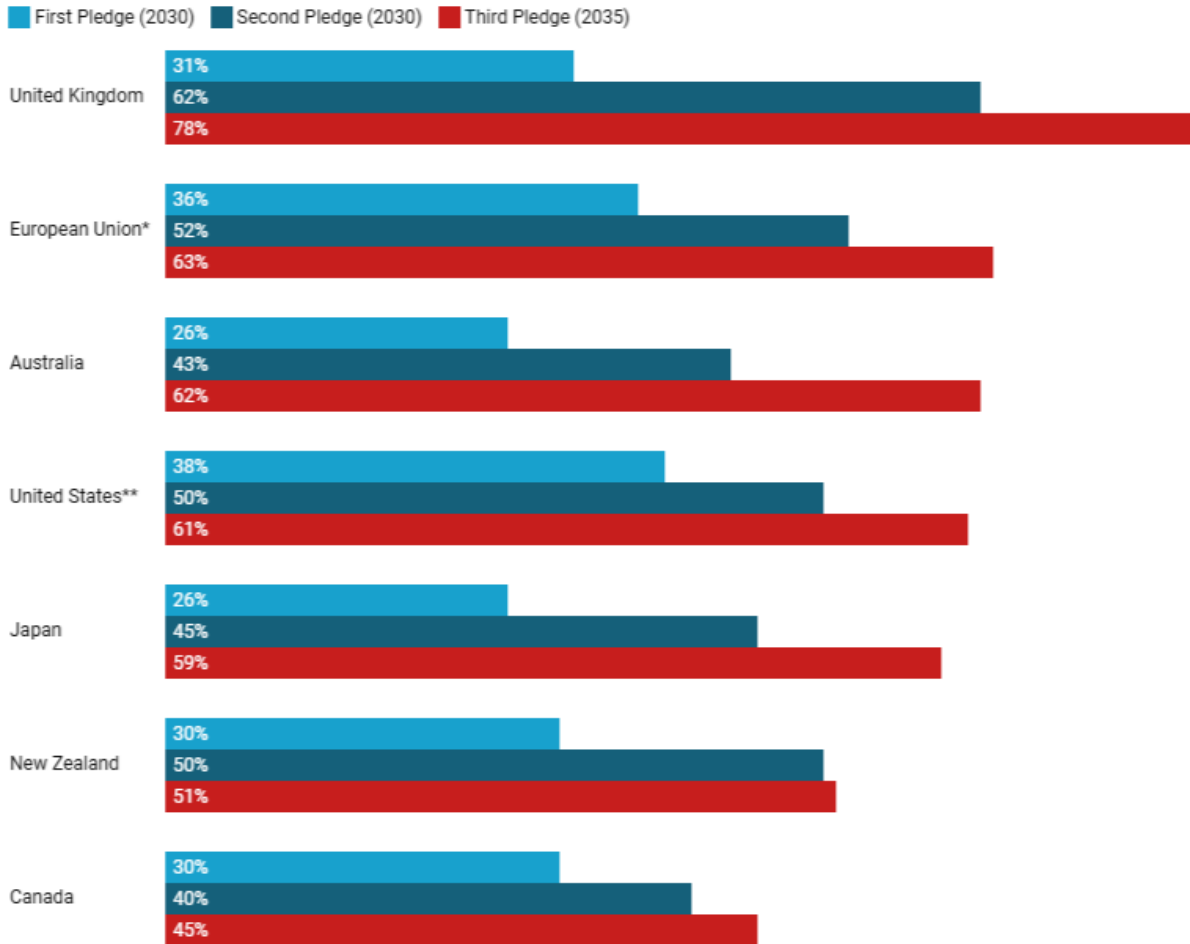
Australia's 2030 target was one of the weakest among wealthy nations. But only a handful of nations now have a more ambitious 2035 target.

That's not all. Australia's rapid shift to renewable energy is one of the fastest in the world. One in three Australian homes now has rooftop solar. Grid operators are at the forefront of soaking up more

and more clean power. The federal government plans to have the main grid running on over 80% renewable power within five years. These successes offer an encouraging story.

### **Emissions cut pledges under the Paris Agreement**

Pledges represent percentage emission cuts below 2005 levels.



*Where country pledges are a range, only the lower reduction target is shown. \* The EU's 2035 pledge is indicative, based on the statement of intent submitted to the UN \*\*The US 2035 pledge was announced by the previous administration. The US has since pulled out of the Paris Agreement.*

(Source: The Conversation)

#### *Our turn next?*

If the COP31 bid succeeds, it would mean Adelaide would host Australia's largest ever diplomatic meeting. Success would help cement Australia's place in the Pacific at a time of increasing geostrategic competition.

In 2022, the Australian government announced its bid to host the COP talks with the Pacific. Since then, Bowen has effectively been auditioning to head the talks, taking on key roles at the annual climate talks. At last year's talks in Azerbaijan, he co-chaired negotiations for a new global finance goal.

The bid has broad support. But Turkey has refused to withdraw a rival bid. The standoff is expected to be resolved in the second week of talks in Belém.

If Australia secures hosting rights, leaders will have a positive story to tell about the renewables shift. But hosting would also draw attention to Australia's huge gas and coal exports. Long one of the largest coal exporters, Australia's gas production has doubled since the 2015 Paris Agreement. The emissions of these exports are three times larger than the entire domestic economy.

Until recently, these exported emissions were considered a customer responsibility. But in July, the world's highest court found countries are legally responsible for climate damages caused by fossil fuel production and consumption, noting countries approving new fossil fuel projects may be committing "internationally wrongful acts".

This finding is likely to ripple through these talks. Two years ago, nations at COP28 in Dubai agreed to "transition away from fossil fuels" in their energy systems. Bowen hailed the announcement:

*if we are to keep 1.5°C alive, fossil fuels have no ongoing role to play in our energy systems – and I speak as the climate and energy minister of one of the world's largest fossil fuel exporters.*

Bowen and the Australian delegation will have to bring this level of clarity to Brazil amid backsliding by other major fossil fuel exporters such as the United States.

If COP31 comes to Adelaide, Bowen will need to go further. No one has yet given a sunset date for Australia's fossil fuel industry.

More on this story is available at:

<https://theconversation.com/as-global-climate-action-threatens-to-stall-can-australia-step-up-at-cop30-in-brazil-267430>

### **From Other Government or NGO**

#### ***Teen self-esteem and social media's distorted mirror***

Kate Newton (September 2025)

It was something so small that turned the lock.

"Let's say I was having a really bad day after school," Olivia, 17, says.

"I'd get on my phone, [go to my] regular for-you page and then I'd see someone talking about, 'Oh I hate myself,' and they have this sad little TikTok song."

Then 14, struggling to fit in, Olivia would tap 'like' – and then she'd tap on the audio to see who else had used it.

"Now I'm just scrolling through all these TikToks, and it's not necessarily people bawling their eyes out," she says. "It's kind of like, people with sad poetry. And then a few scrolls and ... you'd maybe get a 'what I eat in a day' video, and it's once again one of those 'emo audios' and it's like, cucumber and a Diet Coke."

It was easy enough to take herself back into a lighter part of the algorithm, but after a while, Olivia didn't want to.

“Feeling sad can feel great, you know what I mean?”

“It turned into this addictive cycle of, I'm watching all these people being sad and it's making me feel sad. And the cycle just kind of repeats.”

At the same time, Olivia had befriended a group of girls, who all made social media accounts separate to their main accounts. They used these accounts to exclusively view and share the same kind of “depression content”, she says.

“So self-harm, eating disorders, girls crying, girls body-checking.”

They never discuss it directly, but Olivia knew they all saw the same content – because they started re-enacting the behaviour in the real world.

“You'd watch a video on - uh, this is dark - how to [self-harm in a very specific way]. And then what would happen at school is we wouldn't talk about the fact that we saw that video. Someone would talk about the fact that they [self-harmed in the same way].”

There was no counter-narrative. “With the eating stuff, I got into a couple of recovery accounts, which was just really sick girls pretending to get better... There wasn't really anyone saying, guys, this isn't normal.”

Olivia – who is now in recovery herself, with plans to study psychology – says she was aware that what they were seeing and doing wasn't good but, in the moment, it felt like validation.

“To me, having the same content on my TikTok as all these other girls and making me feel the same way was perfect.

Further details are available at:

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/programmes/in-depth-special-projects/story/2019001505/four-phones-three-weeks-teen-self-esteem-and-social-media-s-distorted-mirror>

## **CONFERENCES and STUDY OPPORTUNITIES**

### **ANZRSAL 2025 Conference**

The ANZRSAL 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference will be held on 1-2 December 2025 at the University of Waikato Hamilton Waikato, New Zealand. Further details are available at the [ANZRSAL website](#).

### **2025 RSA Regional Futures Conference**

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected it remains marked by persistent regional disparities. Regions are hubs of adaptation and mitigation strategies, especially in vulnerable areas, and regional studies must evolve to address the dynamic challenges and opportunities of our time. Complex issues such as climate change, migration, urbanisation, and socio-economic inequalities require multi-faceted approaches that transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries. Regional studies will increasingly need to collaborate with environmental, data and health scientists, while co-producing knowledge with policymakers, businesses, and communities will be key to ensuring

relevance and impact. Allied with a stronger push to decolonise regional studies by incorporating indigenous perspectives and local knowledge systems into research and policy frameworks, these shifts are key to creating more equitable and context-sensitive approaches to regional development.

The Regional Studies Association Regional Futures Conference 2025 presents an important opportunity to champion a positive agenda for regional change and development. The event will provide an important platform to discuss and debate regional futures, establish new connections, and assess options for practitioners and policymakers working towards brighter regional futures.

The conference organisers are keen to attract papers and sessions which identify new connections, address broad research and policy agendas, and include contributions from any discipline offering insights at local and regional levels. Papers which are highly innovative, collaborative, international or multi-disciplinary are especially welcome.

Broad themes and key agendas the organisers are keen to facilitate discussion around include, but are not limited to:

- Regional policies in/for the majority world
- Technological change, innovation and entrepreneurship
- Industrial development and policy development
- Regional investment and trading patterns
- Rethinking the concept of regions in the context of (de)globalisation, digital transformation, and transnationalism
- Financing regional change
- New tools, data, and methodologies for studying regions and their interconnections
- Improving the design, planning and governance of regions

**Date & Location:** London, UK, 13-14 November 2025

More details are at <https://www.regionalstudies.org/events/2025-regional-futures/>

### **Regional Studies Blog**

Professor Paul Dalziel, Executive Officer, ANZRSAL has recommended the Regional Studies Association Blog, which has been running since 2010. Each post is an easy-to-read piece between 500 and 750 words on a topical issue in regional studies.

The link is [https://www.regionalstudies.org/category\\_news/rsa-blog/](https://www.regionalstudies.org/category_news/rsa-blog/). A recent contribution that is relevant to ANZRSAL as we plan for the new post-CoVID normal is the following item: [Moving towards a new conference model? The rocky road to virtual conferencing](#), by Daniela Carl and Alex Holmes. Ashleigh Weeden talks about the 'right to be rural' during the CoVID epidemic in a contribution entitled [COVID-19 and Cottage Country: Exploring place, power, and policy in the 'right to be rural'](#).

## **CURRENT RESEARCH ABSTRACTS**

### **ANZRSAL Abstract Alerts**

To contribute to ANZRSAL Abstract Alerts email the editors a title, abstract, and citation.

Yogi.Vidyattama

[Yogi.Vidyattama@canberra.edu.au](mailto:Yogi.Vidyattama@canberra.edu.au)

We would like to draw your attention to the abstracts from Australasian Journal of Regional Studies and a YouTube Channel 'Professor Joseph Drew's World of Local Government'

For the latter it can be found in:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXn5CI2x5h1cgEsaT8nLK9g/videos>

The whole purpose of the channel is to help local government help other people. So, please consider subscribing and sending the link on to colleagues.

In a few weeks' time Prof. Joseph Drew will start uploading videos by some of his colleagues from around the world which will provide people with new global insights into what can be done to make LG even stronger.

### ***One Kazakhstan, multiple nations: on a growing regional divide amidst economic dynamism***

Andrés Rodríguez-Pose, Federico Bartalucci, Genadiy Rau

Abstract: This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the growing regional divide in Kazakhstan, examining the dimensions and implications of spatial inequality in a country that has experienced robust economic growth in recent decades. We employ convergence analysis, a Regional Development Trap Index, and a Regional Competitiveness Index to measure territorial inequalities across Kazakhstan. Our findings reveal that whilst the country has achieved

relatively rapid aggregate economic growth, this has been accompanied by a widening territorial divide. Wealth and economic activities are becoming increasingly concentrated in major urban centres, such as Almaty and Astana, whilst other regions—particularly those in the south—continue to lag significantly behind. These results highlight an increasingly polarised nation, where certain regions benefit from economic dynamism and Kazakhstan's international integration, whilst others remain trapped in low-growth equilibria. The article concludes by offering targeted policy recommendations aimed at promoting inclusive growth, enhancing regional competitiveness, and reducing spatial disparities throughout Kazakhstan.

### ***Assessing spatio-temporal patterns of urban growth using geospatial techniques: Kamrup Metropolitan District, Assam, India***

Pixi Gogoi, Jimmi Debbarma

Abstract: This study aimed to assess urban growth in the Kamrup Metropolitan District by utilizing geospatial techniques. Additionally, it examined the alignment of observed urban growth patterns in the region with the diffusion-coalescence hypothesis and three-growth-mode theory. To analyze these dynamics, it is essential to assess how land is utilized. Therefore, this study classified land use and land cover, then evaluated urban landscape dynamics through the zone-wise distribution of built-up areas, and computed Shannon's entropy alongside landscape metrics such as Number of Patches (NP), Largest Patch Index (LPI), Edge Density (ED), Mean Euclidean Nearest Neighbor Distance (ENN\_MN), Contagion (CONTAG), and Shannon's Diversity Index (SHDI). Furthermore, we delineated urban growth typologies using the Landscape Expansion Index (LEI) and compared the results of each technique with the established urban growth theories. Results indicated that the built-up area increased from 40.97 km<sup>2</sup> in 1990 to 183.86 km<sup>2</sup> by 2024, with burgeoning sprawl

predominantly occurring in peripheral buffer zones further away from the urban core. This revealed a dual growth trajectory: the urban core demonstrated coalescence through infilling, while peripheral regions experienced urban sprawl, marked by increased dispersion and outlying growth as indicated by a Shannon entropy value exceeding 0.5. Landscape metrics further elucidated these dynamics with increases in ENN\_MN and LPI reflecting clustering in core areas, whereas increases in NP, LPI, ED, SHDI, and decreased in CONTAG suggesting dispersion in peripheral areas. Thus, diffusion and coalescence occurred simultaneously. These results provide empirical insights into urban growth patterns to aid policymakers in urban planning.

***Urban air quality modeling and health impact analysis using geospatial methods and machine learning algorithms***

Chetan Rathod, Aneesh Mathew, Abhilash T. Nair

Abstract: This study utilized geospatial techniques and machine learning (ML) algorithms, viz. Random Forest and XGBoost, for predicting the air quality and the AirQ+ model for assessing health risks in urban environments. We analyzed the annual variations in sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) and nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) levels of five Indian metropolitan cities from 2019 to 2022. Preliminary analysis indicated the highest levels of NO<sub>2</sub> and SO<sub>2</sub> in Delhi and Kolkata as compared to other metropolises. Kolkata had an 11% increase in SO<sub>2</sub> concentrations in 2022 compared to 2019, while Delhi had a 20% increase in NO<sub>2</sub> concentrations in 2022 compared to 2019. The air pollutant levels predicted by ML algorithms were analyzed in the AirQ+ model for health risks. The health impact assessment conducted using the AirQ+ model revealed concerning trends. In 2023, particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) was attributed to 20.26% of respiratory disease cases per 100,000 population in Delhi, followed by NO<sub>2</sub>, accounting for 11.01%. In Kolkata, SO<sub>2</sub> was

responsible for 3.21% of respiratory disease cases. By implementing this approach, policymakers can estimate the air pollution levels and potential respiratory disease health risks. This knowledge can help them formulate targeted interventions, such as implementing pollution control measures, managing health risks, and issuing health advisories, to protect public health and improve air quality in cities.

***Evidence of the effects of ethnic diversity, years of residence, and location on migrant bridging, bonding, and linking, social capital: a New Zealand synthesis***

Matthew Roskrug, Jacques Poot

Abstract: New Zealand has one of the highest immigration rates in the developed world, resulting in a high share of foreign-born residents. Its population is highly urbanized, spatially uneven, ethnically diverse, and includes a significant indigenous Māori population. This paper synthesizes two decades of research on migrant social capital in New Zealand, drawing on data from multiple waves of the New Zealand General Social Survey and the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey. These datasets provide insights into community participation, volunteering, perceptions of safety and inclusion, and electoral engagement. We draw two main conclusions from our synthesis. First, although migrants arrive with limited local social capital, they gradually build bonding, bridging, and linking, social capital over time. In addition, reported experiences of discrimination decline with longer residence. However, pooled survey data reveal variation in these patterns across time. Second, social capital investment is shaped by the spatial distribution of ethnic groups. Migrants are more likely to engage in bridging social capital in regions where their group is underrepresented, and in bonding social capital in communities where ethnic clustering occurs.

*Assessment of non-destructive nuclear and non-nuclear asphalt density testing devices for Australian road construction*

Noriko Wood, Azizur Rahman, Ryan H.L. Ip, Jackie Graham

Abstract: Non-nuclear density gauges, also known as Pavement Quality Indicators (PQIs), offer several advantages over widely used destructive test methods and nuclear density gauges (NDGs) for asphalt density measurement. Replacing NDGs with PQIs would simplify regulatory requirements and reduce the cost and complexity of in-situ asphalt density measurement. This is due to the absence of nuclear materials and the ability of PQIs to provide measurements rapidly. However, PQIs have not gained widespread use in Australia due to concerns regarding accuracy. This work assesses the suitability of PQIs for both acceptance and quality control testing by analysing a dataset collected over an extended period and across a wide range of construction sites in Australia. Accuracy was evaluated based on the strength of the relationship between gauge measurements and core density results. Although some evidence supporting the use of PQIs for quality control purposes has been found, their use for acceptance testing remains unwarranted. Recommendations for establishing standard testing methods are provided to encourage wider adoption of PQIs.

**Regional Studies**

Vol. 59, Issue 1, 2025

*Shifts in graduate mobility between Chinese cities during COVID-19: evidence from mobile phone data*

Lu Hao, Frank van der Wouden, Yueqi Zhang, Xuyang Wang & Peng Gong

Abstract: This study analyses how graduate mobility between Chinese cities changed before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Using mobile phone signalling data

on more than one million graduates from nine cities, we estimate gravity models to explain graduate flows between 297 cities from 2019 to 2021. We find that geographical distance, prior population flows and service-sector employment consistently influenced mobility. During the pandemic, technological collaboration networks became more important, while traditional economic indicators weakened. Lockdown policies had no significant impact. These results emphasise the importance of networks in graduate mobility and suggest that service-oriented cities are more attractive in times of uncertainty.

*The contribution of European cities and regions to the circular economy: an analysis of territorial strategies*

Sebastien Bourdin & Nicolas Jacquet

Abstract: This article examines how European cities and regions engage with circular economy (CE) strategies through the lens of territorial intermediation. Based on the analysis of 54 strategic planning documents, it identifies a range of local rationales – predominantly environmental – supporting CE commitments. The findings reveal a selective and often downstream-oriented framing of CE priorities. Local authorities assume three main roles in structuring circular transitions: promoter, facilitator and enabler, each operationalised through distinct policy instruments. Rather than following a uniform model, CE strategies take different forms depending on local priorities, challenges and development goals. The article contributes to the literature by clarifying how territorial intermediation mediates ecological transitions at the local scale.

*Hierarchical migration of university graduates: the role of higher education as a springboard or retainer*

Jiarui Yang & Can Cui

Abstract: Access to higher education is considered an important avenue for upward social mobility. However, the question of which city to attend university and its influence on migration trajectories remains underexplored. Drawing on a 2022 survey of university graduates from eight Chinese cities, this study examines how the location of a university affects mobility within the urban hierarchy. The findings reveal that universities function as springboards in graduates' migration trajectories. The study highlights the spatial role of universities in talent distribution, a process that is both shaped by and reinforces the hierarchical structure of the urban system.

**Asia-Pacific Journal of Regional Science**  
Volume 9, Issue 3 (September 2025)

***Tanneries in Kanpur, India, water pollution in the Ganges, and unitization***

Amitrajeet A. Batabyal

Abstract: We analyzed water pollution in the Ganges River caused by tanneries in Kanpur, India. Specifically, we examined the merits of a claim made recently in the literature that unitizing or merging polluting tanneries can improve water quality in the Ganges. We modeled the polluting tanneries in Kanpur as a Cournot oligopoly and derived the equilibrium output of leather, profits, and social welfare. Second, we permitted tanneries to merge and determined when the -tannery unitization is profitable to the unitized entity. Third, the non-unitized tanneries were better off with unitization. Finally, our findings demonstrated that -tannery unitization increases the industry price of leather and lowers social welfare. In conclusion, we discuss the implications of these findings for improved water quality in the Ganges.

***Assessing the impacts of economic growth, stringent environmental policies, renewable energy, and non-renewable energy on environmental sustainability in G-7***

***economies: Insights from the Method of Moments Quantile Regression***

Huri Gül Aybudak, Waqar Khalid, Qazi Shahzad Ali

Abstract: Amid growing concerns about global environmental sustainability, increasing attention has been directed toward the relationships between economic growth, stringent environmental policies, and energy consumption patterns. However, a critical gap remains in understanding how these factors collectively influence environmental sustainability in G-7 economies. This empirical study sought to bridge this gap by examining the heterogenous effects of economic growth, environmental policy stringency, energy intensity, foreign direct investment, renewable energy consumption, and non-renewable energy consumption on environmental sustainability. Load capacity factors were employed as an innovative metric to assess ecological demands relative to biocapacity. Utilizing a non-parametric Method of Moments Quantile Regression (MMQR) approach on panel data spanning 1993–2023, the findings revealed that environmental policy stringency, energy intensity, renewable energy consumption, and foreign direct investment have positive and significant impacts on environmental sustainability across heterogenous quantiles. Conversely, economic growth and non-renewable energy consumption exerted negative and significant influences on environmental sustainability across most quantiles. In conclusion, we recommend prioritizing policies that promote a transition from non-renewable to renewable energy sources through incentives such as tax reductions and subsidies. Additionally, increased investments in green technologies and enforcement of stringent environmental regulations, including carbon taxes on excessive greenhouse gas emissions, are needed to enhance environmental sustainability in the G-7 economies.

*Socioeconomic determinants of coffee intake:  
a multi-regional analysis*

Md. Mominul Islam, Sabrina Islam

Abstract: Coffee is one of the most widely consumed beverages globally, with its consumption influenced by socio-economic factors, such as income levels, pricing, and regional preferences. This study examined the relationships between income and coffee consumption across different regions to analyze whether coffee behaves as a normal good. Using an unbalanced panel dataset from 53 countries, we incorporated key economic variables including Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, coffee and tea consumption, and the prices of ground coffee and tea. A fixed-effects regression model was employed to assess the impact of income variations on coffee intake. The findings revealed significant regional disparities. For the European and African & Middle Eastern Regions, income showed a positive effect on coffee consumption when grouped with all variables. For the Asia–Pacific (APAC) and American regions, income within the regression showed no statistical significance whatsoever. Therefore, income appears, for half the regions, to be significant in determining coffee consumption, i.e., the more money one has, the more coffee they are able to consume, which reiterates that coffee is a normal good. These results contribute to the existing literature by providing a comparative regional analysis of income-driven coffee consumption. The findings also have practical implications for coffee producers, policymakers, and businesses seeking to understand market demands. Understanding regional coffee trends can support demand forecasting and pricing strategies. However, future studies should also examine consumer behavior and marketing dynamics.

**Papers in Regional Science**

Volume 104, Issue 6 (December 2025)

*The role of spatial structures in shaping  
regional economic resilience: Evidence from  
OECD regions based on urban core  
configurations*

Seulki Kim, Euijune Kim

Abstract: The evolution toward more interconnected urban networks underscores the significance of spatial configuration in regional resilience. This study leverages the 2008 global financial crisis as a quasi-experimental context to examine how spatial structures shape the economic resilience of OECD regions to recessionary shocks. The results reveal that regions with cores exhibit higher resilience than those without. Among core regions, single-core regions outperform non-core regions, while multi-core regions demonstrate even stronger resilience. Notably, clustered-core regions—where multiple urban centers are spatially proximate—further enhance resilience by leveraging synergy effects through spatial interactions with neighboring resilient regions. Additionally, patterns of industrial diversity underscore the complementary yet asymmetric roles of related and unrelated variety. Unrelated variety drives substantial resilience gains by promoting structural independence, whereas related variety offers steady but moderate support by fostering sectoral interconnectedness and knowledge diffusion. These findings highlight that spatial integration beyond administrative boundaries can effectively foster cross-regional synergies.

*Regional institutions and the urban digital  
divide*

Andrea Caragliu, Chiara F. Del Bo

Abstract: The digital divide represents one of the many facets of socio-economic inequalities, creating a wedge between citizens with the means and ability to reap the benefits related to modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) and those who lack these resources and skills. Among its

determinants at the individual and more aggregate level, space-specific factors, including the quality of regional institutions, may affect its geographical breakdown. In this paper we exploit data covering 181 European cities for the period 2008–2017, examining the spatial distribution of the within-city digital divide and how this relates to several local characteristics. In particular, we focus on the interplay between geographic variables and institutional quality at the local level, measured with the University of Gothenburg’s Quality of Governance dataset. Within-city digital divide is computed using individual-level data on European citizens, thus controlling for individual traits that the literature has identified as relevant determinants. These include gender, age, education level, and occupational information, among others. Our paper sheds light both on the individual level determinants of the within-city digital divide, and considers how the uneven spatial distribution of the urban digital divide is related to local institutional, economic and social characteristics. Implications of our work can help inform local policy makers, who increasingly rely on digital solutions in urban policy planning, to consider the existence of a local digital divide among citizens and adopt corrective measures to help achieve digital urban policies’ full potential. Our empirical results document a negative association between the quality of local institutions and the within-city digital divide. Results are robust to a number of alternative specifications, as well as to the use of historical instruments.

*Australasian Journal of Regional Studies*  
Vol. 29, No. 2

***URBAN RESILIENCE AND SOCIAL SECURITY UPTAKE: NEW ZEALAND EVIDENCE FROM THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC***

WILLIAM COCHRANE, JACQUES POOT,  
MATTHEW ROSKRUGE

**Abstract:** This paper focuses on the spatial variation in the uptake of social security benefits following a large and detrimental exogenous shock. Specifically, we focus on the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) and on the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. We construct a two-period panel of 66 Territorial Authorities (TAs) of New Zealand (NZ) observed in 2008-09 and 2019-20. We find that, despite the totally different nature of the two shocks, the initial increase in benefit uptake due to the COVID-19 pandemic was of a similar magnitude as that of the GFC, and the spatial pattern was also quite similar. We link the social security data with 146 indicator variables across 15 domains that were obtained from population censuses that were held about 2 years before the two periods. To identify urban characteristics that point to economic resilience, we formulate spatial panel regression models. Additionally, we use machine learning techniques. We find that the most resilient TAs had two years previously: (1) a low unemployment rate; and (2) a large public sector. Additionally, but with less predictive power, we find that TAs had a smaller increase in social security uptake after the shock when they had previously: (3) a high employment rate (or high female labour force participation rate); (4) a smaller proportion of the population stating ethnicities other than NZ European; (5) a smaller proportion of the population living in more deprived area units. We also find that interregional spillovers matter and that there are spatial clusters of resilient regions.

***COVID-19: THE ISSUE OF POLICIES AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR EASTERN INDONESIA***

YOGI VIDYATTAMA, MUHAMMAD  
HALLEY YUDHISTIRA, MEILA HUSNA

**Abstract:** As in other countries, the incidence of COVID-19 and its infection rate is not the same in every area in Indonesia. In addition, the different local conditions and situations mean the policy action items often need to be

adapted to these factors. This study aims to understand the impact of COVID-19 on Eastern Indonesia's economy compared to other places in Indonesia and the contribution of their governments at provincial and district levels in terms of COVID-19 prevention and economic recovery effort. This study shows that remoteness has not excluded Eastern Indonesia from COVID-19 infection. Despite less requirement for the community to stay home, the mobility data shows that other activities such as retail, recreation, grocery shopping and park use still went down as much as in other parts of Indonesia. However, activities in workplaces dropped considerably less and allowed the economies in Eastern Indonesia to grow better than other areas during the pandemic.

***POPULATION, REGIONAL STRATEGIC GOVERNANCE AND THE PANDEMIC: A LIMESTONE COAST PERSPECTIVE***

ANDREW PARKIN, LEONIE  
HARDCASTLE

Abstract: Uncertain post-pandemic population trends raise an interesting dilemma for regional governance authorities. Population stagnation afflicting non-metropolitan regions had been a familiar feature of Australian history. In recognition of its serious social and economic effects, population retention and growth have been familiar elements within the development strategies promulgated by regional governance authorities. Such was the case for South Australia's Limestone Coast region. Unexpectedly, the coronavirus pandemic became associated with more favourable population-movement trends for many regions, including the Limestone Coast. In that region, there is an emerging sense that future strategic challenges may centre on the housing and infrastructure implications of a growing population rather than on the problem of a stagnant population. The strategic response of the region's governance authorities is hampered by the uncertainty about whether the more favourable population

trends will turn out to be a temporary or a more enduring phenomenon.

**ABOUT ANZRSAL**

**ANZRSAL Council Notes**

Council has planned for the 2024 conference in Canberra at the Ann Harding Conference Centre in University Canberra and improving access to and ranking of AJRS and the website. Conference participants gain access to support, encouragement, and relevant experience. AJRS offers an opportunity for publication. Council acknowledges Rolf Gerritsen's contributions to ANZRSAL and proposes his name as a lifetime member of ANZRSAL.

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**Editors:**

**2025 Conference Proceedings:**

Michael Cameron, Yogi Vidyattama, Rolf Gerritsen, Azizur Rahman, Bruce Wilson, et al.

**Australasian Journal of Regional Studies:**

Michael Cameron  
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Bruce Wilson

**Sustaining Regions**

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