Property Tax Lien Sales, Private Capital, and Gentrification in the U.S.

Faculty Member: Cameron LaPoint

Proposal Description:

This project examines the role of tax delinquencies in facilitating corporate real estate purchases in U.S. prime property markets, and the effects of these purchases on new property construction and housing affordability. In many jurisdictions, the local government not only has the authority to auction off property in the event of overdue tax bills — in what is known as a tax lien sale — but actively recruits corporate buyers for these auctions to help recover lost tax revenues. It has been alleged in the popular media that tax lien sales accelerate gentrification within major cities, promote wealth inequality, and allow certain companies to greatly expand their real estate portfolios by converting cheap housing to commercial development projects.

I am seeking an RA to provide support on several tasks related to this project, including the creation of a database of municipal financial conditions, the collection of tax lien sale records from local tax and revenue office websites, and classifying areas of the U.S. as gentrifying by applying models of long-run population flows.

Requisite Skills and Qualifications:

For the data acquisition aspects of the project, the work primarily involves scraping PDFs from local tax authority websites. The formatting of these PDFs is often quite messy, and in many cases may require hand corrections. Therefore, attention to detail is a crucial skill.

Familiarity with geocoding methods and mapping packages in R such as choropleth and geosphere is a big plus.

Proficiency in statistical/econometric software packages such as Stata or R is necessary to work directly with the real estate data involved in this project.

Prior experience with LaTeX/Overleaf and coursework in econometrics and statistics are preferred.

Award: Mark Hodges
Evan Hu
Lu Zheng

Tobin Application Link: Tobin Application
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