

Diversity in Edmonton's Economy

March 20, 2015

All city names in this document refer to Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs). In Edmonton, the CMA contains the same municipalities as the Edmonton Capital Region, with the exception of Lamont and Lamont County.

Summary

By one commonly used measure of economic diversity, as of 2014 Edmonton has the most diversified economy by GDP among major Canadian cities. Edmonton's largest industry sector, primary and utilities, comprises only 17% of GDP (compared to 32% of GDP in Calgary).

The composition of Edmonton's GDP has not drastically changed since 1994. The primary and utilities sector makes up a slightly smaller share of GDP (19% in 1994 compared to 17% in 2014) while construction makes up a larger share (7% compared to 12%).

Like most major Canadian cities, Edmonton's overall economic diversity has been relatively constant since 1987. The exception is Calgary, which has become significantly more diverse over the same time period.

The index of economic diversity used in this analysis measures only the distribution of GDP across industries. It does not consider any inter-industry dependencies.

Defining Economic Diversity

An economy is typically considered to be diverse if its economic output is spread evenly over a variety of industry sectors. Conventional wisdom suggests that a diversified economy will see more stable and sustainable growth, because risk is spread more evenly over a greater number of industries. While this relationship makes intuitive sense, empirical results from studies on the link between diversity and growth have been inconsistent despite over 50 years of research.

This definition of diversification has been criticised for two major reasons. First, the selection of an equal distribution of activity across industries as the 'ideal' reference point is essentially arbitrary. Second, it only considers how output is distributed across industries; it does not take into account the degree to which different industries are interrelated. For example, a hypothetical economy with 10 industries, each with 10% share of output, would be considered highly diverse even if 9 industries existed solely to sell inputs to the remaining one. Despite being technically 'diverse', this economy is still dependent on one industry and exposed to high levels of risk. Alternate definitions of economic diversity which take into account inter-industry supply and demand relationships have been proposed but a lack of necessary data, especially at sub-national levels, prevents their widespread use.

It is important to recognize that diversity is only one aspect of a region's economic structure. Natural resources and comparative advantage are important contributors to economic growth, and diversification for diversification's sake could be counter-productive. Rather, the pursuit of economic growth and stability can be considered a balance between the stability of diversification and the growth potential of exploiting comparative advantages.

Finally, diversity of output is not the only type of diversity that can affect regional economic performance. Diversity of export markets can also theoretically improve economic stability even in regions with highly concentrated output, because risk is spread over multiple export 'customers'. And within the broad industry categories typically used to categorize output, diversity of products could theoretically have a similar effect.

Measuring Local Economic Diversity

Over the years a wide variety of diversity measures and indices have been developed, from extremely simple (the percentage of manufacturing activity accounted for by nondurable goods) to more complex measures using portfolio variance theory. Due to ease of computation and data availability, the most widely used are a related set of indices that define diversity as the level of equal distribution of economic activity across industry sectors.

For this analysis the specific mathematical formula used is the Herfindal index, which computes the sum of squares of industry shares of economic activity¹. Lower values of this index indicate higher levels of economic diversity as defined above. The Herfindal and similar indices have been the subject of decades of research that has not found a conclusive relationship between index ratings and economic growth or stability.

The two most common values used to measure industry shares of output are employment and GDP. In this case real GDP estimates from the Conference Board of Canada were used to compute the Herfindal index. These estimates are unofficial (Statistics Canada does not publish GDP estimates for metropolitan areas) and are a source of error in the analysis. The basic process used by the Conference Board is to estimate a city's GDP in a given industry by multiplying that city's share of province-wide industry employment by province-wide industry GDP. This process will very likely over-estimate city GDP in industries where capital is used in a separate geographic area from labour, for example the oil and gas industry.

¹ $Herfindal_{region} = \sum \left(\frac{Output_{region,industry}}{Output_{region}} \right)^2$

Figure 1. In Terms of GDP by Industry, Edmonton is the Most Diversified Economy in Canada

Index of Real GDP by Industry Concentration, 2014 (Lower Index = More Diversified)

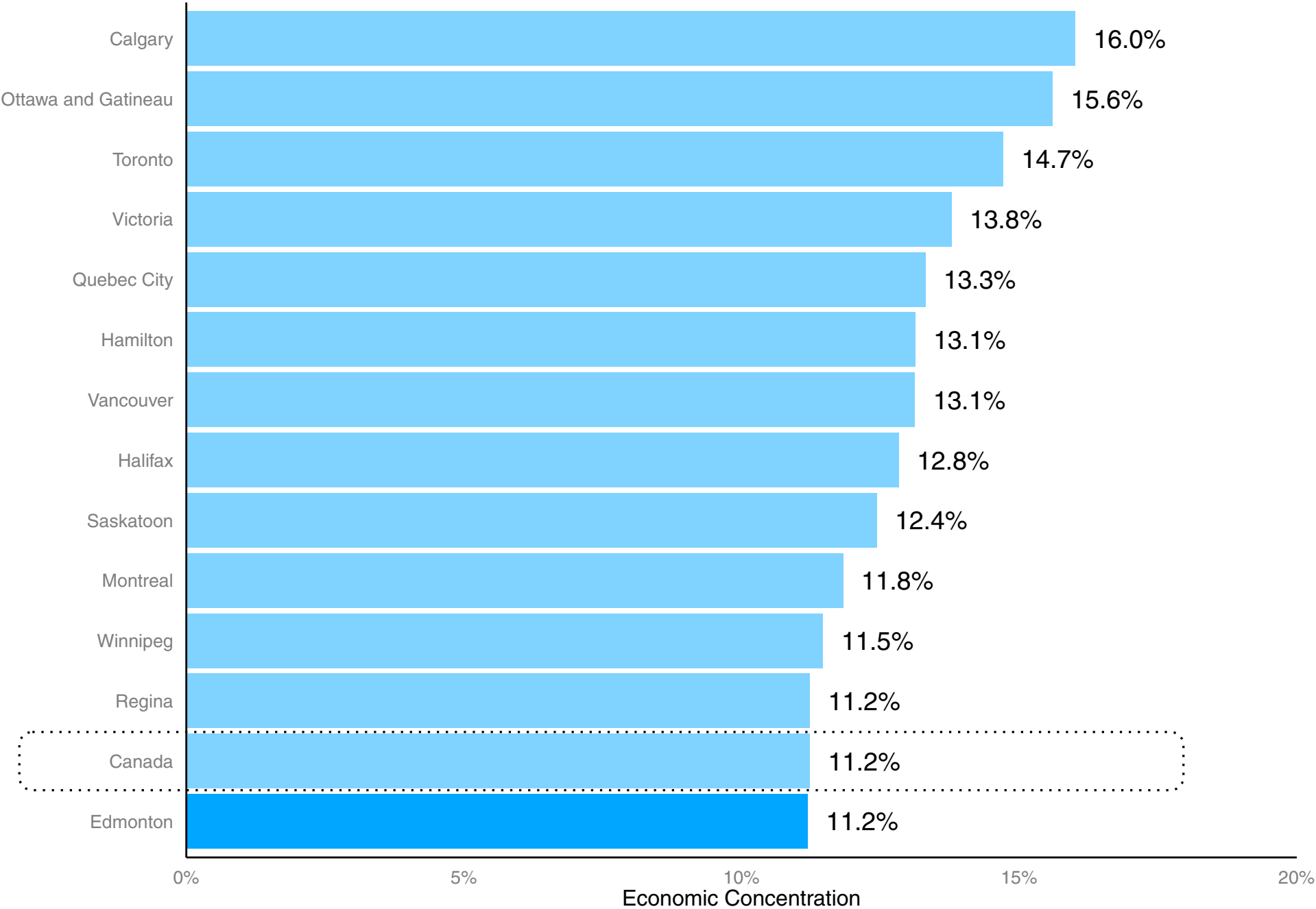


Figure 2. Calgary's GDP Has Significantly Diversified Since the 1980s, While Edmonton's Has Remained Relatively Diverse
Index of Real GDP by Industry Concentration, Major Canadian Cities, 1987 - 2014 (Lower Index = More Diversified)

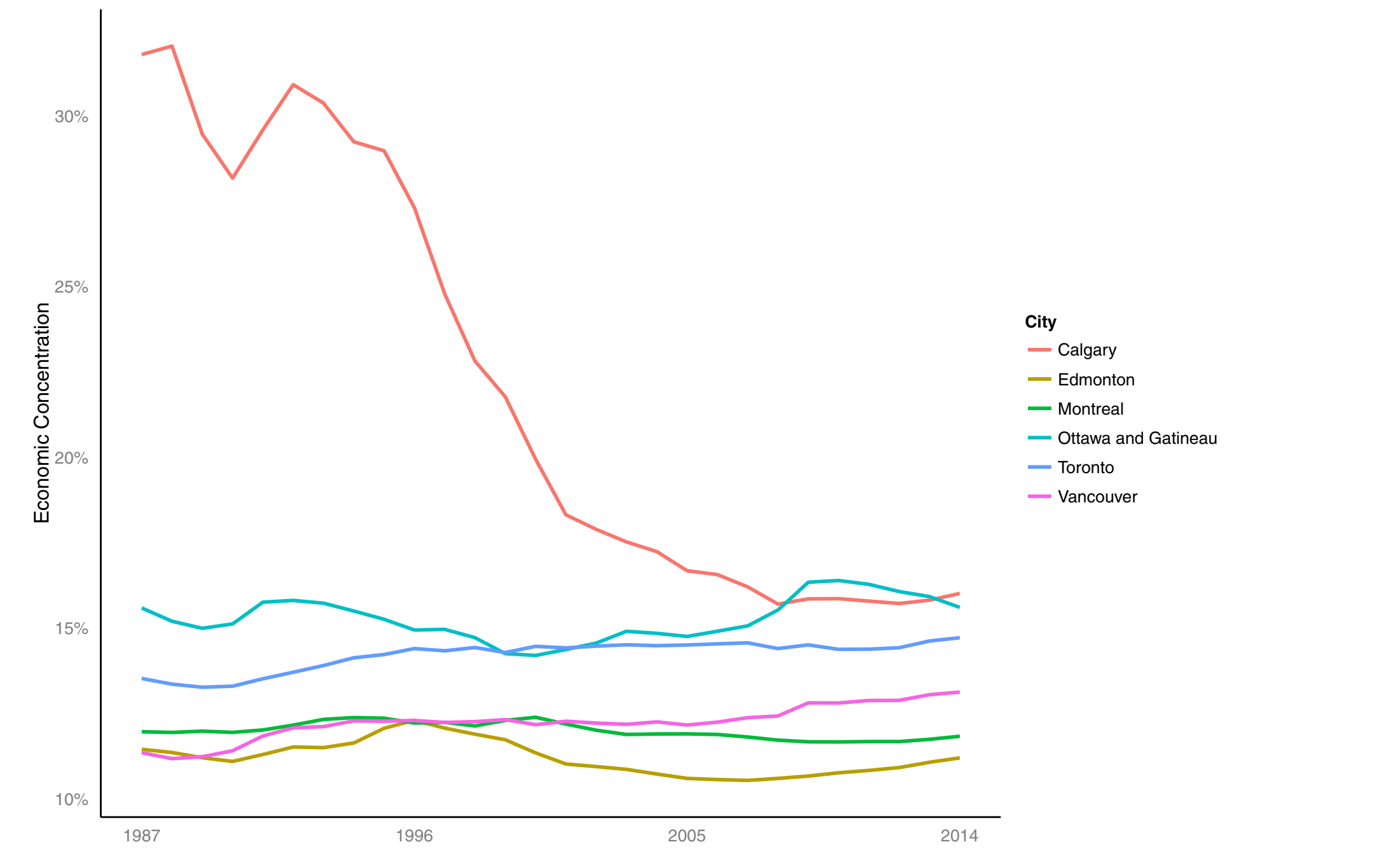


Figure 3. The Industry Composition of Edmonton's GDP Has Not Drastically Changed in 20 Years

Estimated Real GDP by Industry, Edmonton CMA, 1994 - 2014

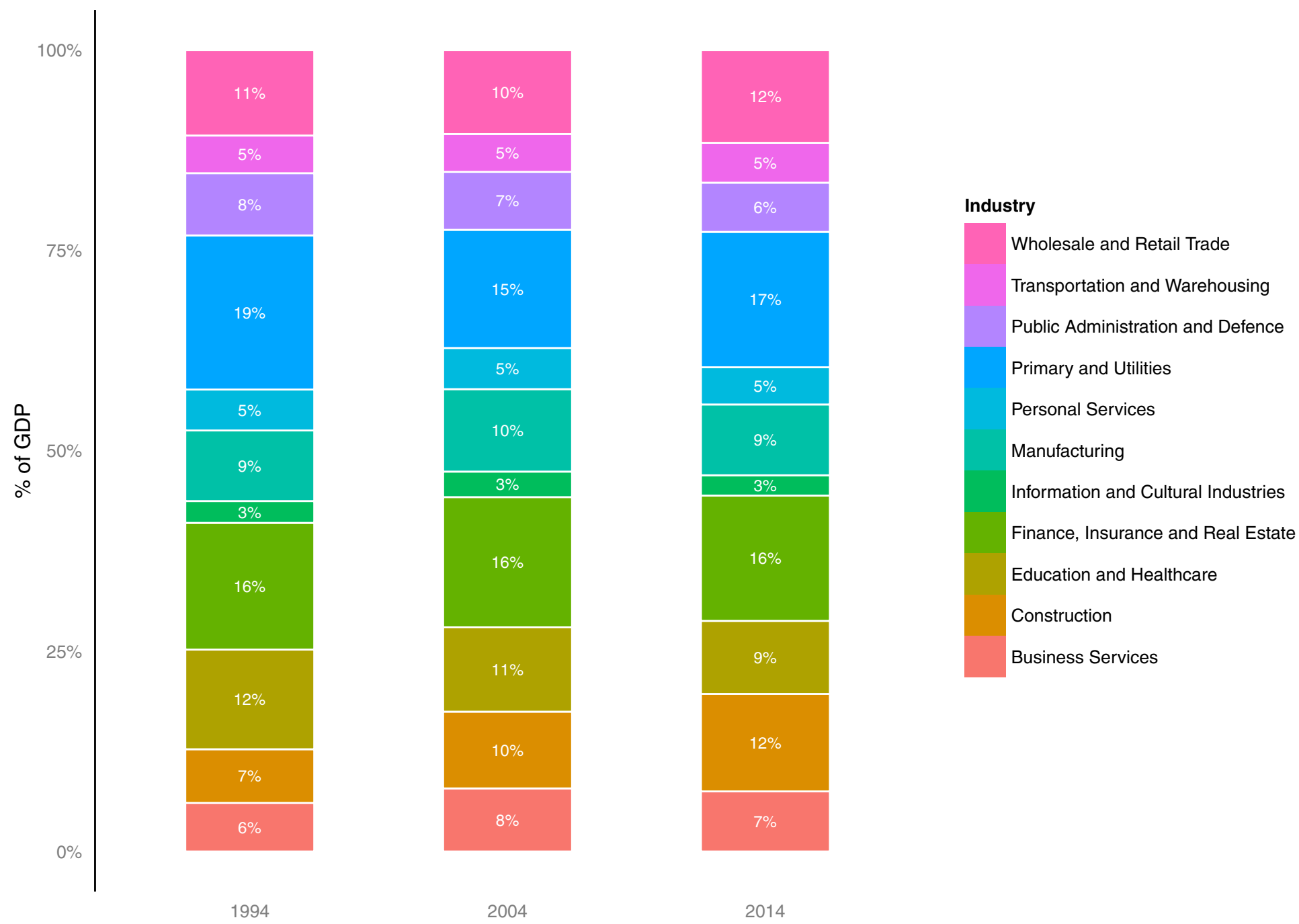
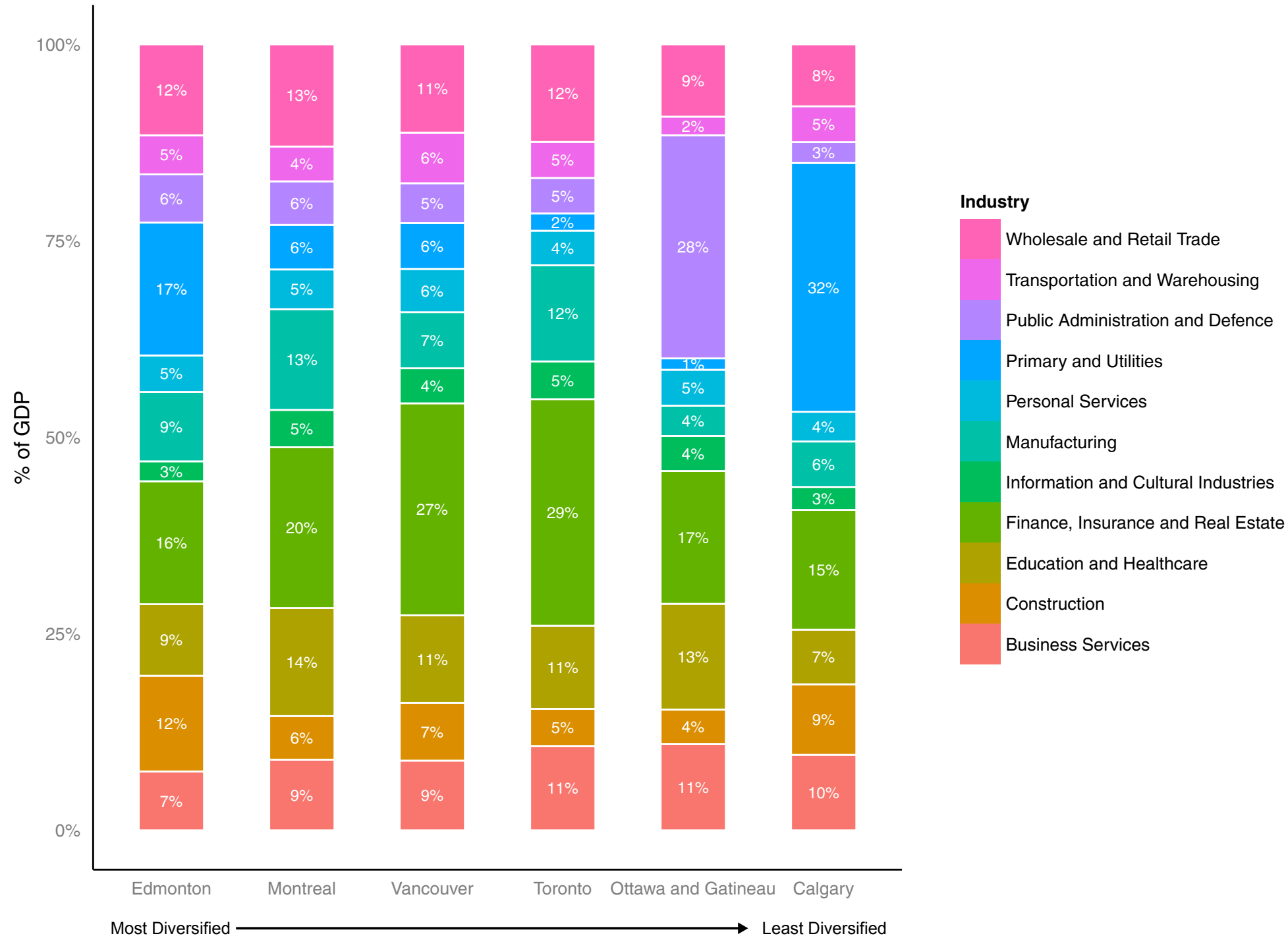


Figure 4. Compared to Calgary, Edmonton's Economy is Much Less Concentrated in Primary Industries

Estimated Real GDP by Industry, Major Canadian Cities, 2014



Industry Definitions

Primary and Utilities

- Growing crops, raising animals, harvesting timber, harvesting fish and other animals from their natural habitats and providing related support activities
- Extracting naturally occurring minerals (incl. coal and ores, crude petroleum, natural gas)
- Operating electric, gas and water utilities

Construction

- Constructing, repairing and renovating buildings and engineering works, and in subdividing and developing land

Manufacturing

- The chemical, mechanical or physical transformation of materials or substances into new products. These products may be finished, in the sense that they are ready to be used or consumed, or semi-finished, in the sense of becoming a raw material for an establishment to use in further manufacturing.

Wholesale and Retail Trade

- Wholesaling or retailing merchandise, generally without transformation, and rendering services incidental to the sale of merchandise

Transportation and Warehousing

- Transporting passengers and goods, warehousing and storing goods, and providing services to these establishments. The modes of transportation are road (trucking, transit and ground passenger), rail, water, air and pipeline

Information and Cultural Industries

- Producing and distributing (except by wholesale and retail methods) information and cultural products. The main components of this sector are the publishing industries, the motion picture and sound recording industries, the broadcasting industries, the telecommunications industries, and the data processing and hosting services industries.

Finance, Insurance and Real Estate

- Conducting financial transactions (that is, transactions involving the creation, liquidation, or change in ownership of financial assets) or facilitating financial transactions, including financial intermediation and the pooling of risk by underwriting annuities and insurance.

- Renting, leasing or otherwise allowing the use of tangible or intangible assets. Managing real estate for others; selling, renting and/or buying of real estate for others; and appraising real estate.

Business Services

- Legal services; accounting, tax preparation, bookkeeping and payroll services; architectural, engineering and related services; specialized design services; computer systems design and related services; management, scientific and technical consulting services; scientific research and development services; and advertising, public relations, and related services.
- Managing companies and enterprises and/or holding the securities or financial assets of companies and enterprises, for the purpose of owning a controlling interest in them and/or influencing their management decisions
- Activities that support the day-to-day operations of other organizations; and waste management activities

Education and Healthcare

- Providing instruction and training in a wide variety of subjects. This instruction and training is provided by specialized establishments, such as schools, colleges, universities and training centres. These establishments may be privately owned and operated, either for profit or not, or they may be publicly owned and operated
- Providing health care by diagnosis and treatment, providing residential care for medical and social reasons, and providing social assistance, such as counselling, welfare, child protection, community housing and food services, vocational rehabilitation and child care

Personal Services

- Operating facilities or providing services to meet the cultural, entertainment and recreational interests of their patrons
- Providing short-term lodging and complementary services to travellers
- Preparing meals, snacks and beverages, to customer orders, for immediate consumption on and off the premises
- Repairing, or performing general or routine maintenance, on motor vehicles, machinery, equipment and other products; providing personal care services, funeral services, laundry services and other services to individuals, such as pet care services and photo finishing services; organizing and promoting religious activities; supporting various causes through grant-making, advocating (promoting) various social and political causes, and promoting and defending the interests of their members

Public Administration

- Activities of a governmental nature, that is, the enactment and judicial interpretation of laws and their pursuant regulations, and the administration of programs based on them. Legislative activities, taxation, national defence, public order and safety, immigration services, foreign affairs and international assistance, and the administration of government programs are activities that are purely governmental in nature