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THE NEW ROBBER BARONS:

A quarter century of wealth concentration in Canada

Canadians *for* **Tax Fairness**
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About Canadians for Tax Fairness

Canadians for Tax Fairness is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that advocates for fair, progressive tax policies in order to build a strong, sustainable and equitable economy, and support quality, well-funded public services.

About BC Policy Solutions

BC Policy Solutions is an independent, non-partisan research institute committed to advancing transformative policy solutions to the most pressing challenges facing people in British Columbia. Through research, convening and public engagement we seek to build a more just, equitable and sustainable future for all.

Cover image: "The protectors of our industries" Image Credit: Puck Magazine [1883].

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To address wealth inequality, we need to overhaul our tax system to tax high-end wealth and capital income more effectively.

Prime Minister Mark Carney delivers a special address at the World Economic Forum, focusing on safe-guarding Canada's sovereignty, democracy, and economic resilience. Image Credit: Ciaran McCrickard/Flickr. [2026].

As concern grows about Canada's sovereignty and economic resilience, it is essential to examine not only our independence from foreign powers but also the concentration of economic and political power inside Canada. Because wealth and political influence tend to reinforce each other, tracking who owns wealth — and how that distribution is changing — is more important than ever for the health of our democracy and the future of this country.

Standard official statistics in Canada fail to capture the extreme concentration of wealth at the top. To help address this gap, this report provides new estimates of the distribution of wealth over the past quarter century. By combining Statistics Canada survey data with billionaire lists, we estimate the complete distribution of wealth in Canada from 1999-2023. We find that:

- The wealthiest 1% of Canadian families (169,000 families) who have at least $7.8 million in wealth per family owned 22.7% of household wealth in 2023, up from 19.3% in 1999 — an increase of $3 trillion in total over that period.
- The wealthiest 0.01% of Canadian families (1,685 families) hold an average of $448.5 million, 4,041x the average wealth of a family in the bottom 50% in 2023.
- In total, the top 0.01% of families (1,685 families) held $756 billion in wealth in 2023, or 4.6% of household wealth, up from $131 billion, or 3.4% of wealth in 1999.
- 86 billionaire families held as much wealth as the 6.2 million least wealthy families in 2023.
- The wealthiest resident family of Canada in 2025 was the Thomsons, with $93.9 billion in combined wealth. They were also the richest family in 1999.

Looking at trends over the last quarter century, wealth concentration in the top 1% increased significantly between 1999 and 2016 before falling slightly from 2016 to 2023. Recent indicators suggest that top-end wealth concentration may be rising again: between July 1, 2023 and July 1, 2025, Canadian-resident billionaire wealth on the Forbes list rose 37.2%, while total household wealth rose only 9.3%.

Things haven't always been this way. Looking back even further for context, top wealth shares in Canada decreased after the Second World War through the 1960s, alongside economic policies and political trends that helped counterbalance the power of the ultra-wealthy.

Increasing wealth concentration is concerning for several reasons. First, high economic inequality is associated with outsized political influence for those at the top and the weakening of democracy. Second, inequality is associated with worse social and economic performance, including lower happiness and economic growth. Finally, an extreme concentration of economic resources means that major investment decisions are disproportionately made by a few powerful actors, often reflecting narrow private interests rather than democratically determined public priorities aimed at meeting the needs of everyone.

To address wealth inequality, we need to overhaul our tax system to tax high-end wealth and capital income more effectively. The revenue raised can be used to fund broad-based, high-return public investments to shore up Canada's social and economic resilience and strengthen our sovereignty, including: creating a national clean electricity grid, building affordable non-market homes, and expanding universal public child care. Reducing extreme wealth inequality is essential to ensure that democratic priorities, not concentrated economic power, shape a stronger Canada built for everyone.

A QUARTER CENTURY OF WEALTH CONCENTRATION IN CANADA

Billionaires. Wealth taxes. Stock market booms and busts. In one form or another, wealth is in the headlines day after day. But what actually is wealth? Who has it and who doesn't? And why should we care about it?

This report answers each of these questions — we explain the different forms of wealth in Canada and present new time-series estimates of wealth concentration trends in Canada from 1999 to 2023. This helps to address a long-recognized gap in Statistics Canada data, which generally fails to capture extreme wealth inequality at the very top of the distribution.[1] We also explain why extreme wealth concentration matters and why we need to take action.

What is wealth?

In simple terms, wealth (also known as net worth) is the market value of everything someone owns minus their debts. This includes real estate, pensions, the value in a checking account, any businesses, stocks, bonds, and mutual fund shares they own, less any liabilities like mortgages or credit card debt. In total, according to Statistics Canada, Canadian households owned about $16.4 trillion in wealth in Q2 2023[2]. This accounts for the vast majority of the net worth (about 92%) held by all domestic sectors in Canada, with the remainder held by governments, corporations, and non-profits.[3]

We can break aggregate household wealth down into different components: about 60% of wealth is held in non-financial assets, and about 40% is net financial wealth (financial assets less financial liabilities). The vast majority of non-financial wealth is the value of residential real estate assets — 48% being being the value of land under dwellings, 38% being the value of dwellings, with only 14% of household non-financial assets held in other forms (e.g., vehicles, agricultural land). Financial assets primarily include equity and investment fund shares, life insurance and pensions, cash, and deposits. These financial assets are offset by financial liabilities, which are equivalent to about 31% of financial assets.

1 This complements the Parliamentary Budget Officer's latest estimates of wealth inequality from 2016-2023, as well as other studies modelling wealth inequality in Canada.

2 We report Statistics Canada data from this quarter because this timing corresponds to our modelling of the 2023 wealth distribution described below, due to data availability. See Methods Appendix.

3 Statistics Canada, 2025. *National Balance Sheet Accounts*. Table: 36-10-0580-01. Retrieved December 2025. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=3610058001

It's important to understand these different components of wealth because who owns them is vastly different. 40% of Canadian households held only 4% of financial assets in Q2 2023, while over two thirds of financial assets are held by the wealthiest 20% of households.[4]

On the other hand, the least wealthy 40% of Canadian households held approximately 9% of non-financial assets and the wealthiest 20% held over half. This is because holding significant wealth through one's principal residence is far more common than owning significant financial assets. But this hides enormous disparities between renters and homeowners, with homeowners holding 10 to 30 times more wealth than renters, depending on the age group.[5] Of course, homeownership is increasingly out of reach for younger families and homeownership rates have fallen since 2011.[6]

Examining the distribution of wealth at the level of quintiles (groupings of 20%), as is possible through publicly available Statistics Canada datasets, hides the vast amounts of wealth concentrated among a few thousand households in Canada. It is important to understand the wealth of the ultra-wealthy because such levels of wealth offer not only the ability to live a life of luxury but the ability to exert power over the lives of others and over the political process.

Why we should care about wealth

Different types of wealth offer different types of power and control in society. For example, homeowners may exert power over local land-use policy to preserve property values, and in large expensive cities, even the seemingly mundane fact of homeowning means access to considerable levels of wealth relative to renters.[7, 8, 9] Whereas owning financial assets at a high enough level — think billionaires — can mean employing thousands of people, access to near-unlimited financing, and access to Canada's most influential political leaders.[10, 11] In short, expansive holdings of financial assets place the ultra-wealthy on an entirely different plane of power.

4 Statistics Canada, 2025. *Distributions of household economic accounts, wealth, by characteristic, Canada, quarterly.* Table: 36-10-0660-01. Retrieved November 13, 2025. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=3610066001

5 Rachelle Younglai, 2024. *Statistics Canada survey shows homeowners' net worth dwarfs that of renters.* The Globe and Mail. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-statistics-canada-survey-shows-homeowners-net-worth-dwarfs-that-of/

6 Statistics Canada, 2022. *To buy or to rent: The housing market continues to be reshaped by several factors as Canadians search for an affordable place to call home.* The Daily. www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220921/dq220921b-eng.htm

7 William A. Fischel, 2005. *The Homevoter Hypothesis: How Home Values Influence Local Government Taxation, School Finance, and Land-Use Policies.* Harvard University Press.

8 Katherine L. Einstein, David M. Glick, & Maxwell Palmer, 2019. *Neighborhood defenders: Participatory Politics and America's Housing Crisis.* Cambridge University Press.

9 Alex Hemingway, 2025. *Two facets of wealth inequality in Canada: billionaires and housing.* BC Policy Solutions. https://bcpolicy.ca/2025/03/27/wealth-housing/

10 Ashley Burke, Kate McKenna, & Andrew Ryan, 2024. *Pierre Poilievre called lobbyists 'utterly useless,' but they're still attending his fundraisers.* CBC News. https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/poilievre-fundraiser-lobbyists-1.7196143

11 BBC News, 2016. *Trudeau government faces 'cash-for-access' criticism.* https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38083733

Owning small amounts of wealth provides households with an important form of financial security. Households can borrow against their homes or sell assets when in need of additional income. On the other hand, billionaires will never spend the majority of their wealth. Even if one lived a very comfortable life, spending $1,000,000 a year, it would take 1,000 years to spend a billion dollars, even if it accrued no interest (and in reality, with investment returns, the fortune would only keep growing). The scale of billionaire wealth is in another universe from simply living a good or even a lavish life. The defining feature of billionaire wealth is the extreme level of power and influence that flows from commanding such extraordinary levels of economic resources.

With 13 billionaires in cabinet or other high-ranking positions in Trump's second term, the U.S. provides a clear warning of the danger extreme wealth inequality poses to democracy. Image Credit: Chris F/Pexels. [2025].

Extreme inequality isn't just unfair — it distorts democracy.[12] The rich have disproportionate influence on public policy because of their structural power.[13, 14] In the U.S., where billionaires are the wealthiest, their political power is most evident — there were 13 billionaires in cabinet or other high-ranking positions in Trump's second term.[15] In Canada, the power of the rich in our politics is perhaps more outwardly subtle but still ever-present. Technology CEOs have launched lobbying efforts inspired by Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, and the federal government is moving to embed more corporate leaders in the public service in response.[16, 17]

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12 E.G. Rau, & S. Stokes, 2025. Income inequality and the erosion of democracy in the twenty-first century, *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci,* 122(1) e2422543121. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2422543121

13 Martin Gilens & Benjamin Page, 2014. Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens. *Perspectives on Politics*, 12(3), 564–581. doi:10.1017/S1537592714001595

14 Hanna Elsässer & Armin Schäfer, 2023. Political Inequality in Rich Democracies. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 26, 469-487. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-052521-094617

15 Peter Charalambous, Laura Romero, & Soo Rin Kim, 2025. *Trump has tapped an unprecedented 13 billionaires for his administration. Here's who they are.* ABC News.

16 Jen St. Denis, 2025. The Tech CEOs Who Want a DOGE for Canada. The Tyee, 28 Feb 2025. https://thetyee.ca/News/2025/02/28/Tech-CEOs-DOGE-Canada/

17 Natasha Bulowski, 2025. *Ottawa hands corporate leaders 50 roles in government*. Canada's National Observer.

Companies controlled by the billionaire Irving family have collected tens of millions in government subsidies; just one example of extensive corporate subsidies in Canada.[18, 19] Policies like a wealth tax on the super-rich are never implemented, and efforts to close tax haven loopholes remain fragmented and slow, despite both having overwhelming public support across party lines.[20]

Investment in public infrastructure like transit boosts growth, productivity, and wages. Image credit: Glen Zi/Pexels [2025].

High levels of inequality also weaken economies and harm social well-being. Evidence across rich countries associates higher inequality with worse health and social outcomes, with benefits from greater equality extending beyond low-income groups.[21, 22] A wide range of research (including from institutions like the OECD and IMF) finds that high inequality can lower economic growth and productivity.[23, 24, 25] It can also make growth less stable and less durable,[26] and reduce aggregate demand — because lower-income households are more likely than richer households to spend most of what they earn.[27] At the same time, keeping taxes low on the rich means governments forgo revenue that could fund high-return public investments. For example, evidence suggests investment in infrastructure — including public transit — can boost growth, productivity, and incomes.[28] Research links universal public child care to higher women's labour force participation with broad economic payoffs[29].

18 CBC News, 2018. *Federal government gave $42M to J.D. Irving subsidiary, records show.* https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/jd-irving-ltd-federal-government-1.4522466
19 Laurent Carbonneau, 2025. *At the Trough: The Rise and Rise of Canada's Corporate Welfare Bums.* Sutherland House Books.
20 David Coletto, 2021. *To reduce the deficit, Canadians want increased taxes on the wealthy and large corporations.* Abacus Data, 11 Aug 2021. https://abacusdata.ca/canadians-want-a-wealth-tax/
21 Kate Pickett & Richard Wilkinson, 2009. *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone.* Allen Lane.
22 Nadine R. Nowatzki, 2012. "Wealth inequality and health: a political economy perspective." *International Journal of Health Services*, 42(3), 403–424. doi:10.2190/HS.42.3.c
23 OECD, 2015. *In It Together: Why Less Inequality Benefits All.* OECD Publishing, Paris. https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264235120-en
24 Era Dabla-Norris, Kalpana Kochhar, Nujin Suphaphiphat, Franto Ricka, & Evridiki Tsounta, 2015. *Causes and Consequences of Income Inequality: A Global Perspective*, IMF Staff Discussion Notes.
25 Federico Cingano, 2014. *Trends in Income Inequality and its Impact on Economic Growth.* OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 163, OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/5jxrjncwxv6j-en
26 Jonathan David Ostry & Andrew Berg, 2011. *Inequality and Unsustainable Growth: Two Sides of the Same Coin?* IMF Staff Discussion Notes, 008. https://doi.org/10.5089/9781463926564.006
27 Josh Bivens & Asha Banerjee, 2022. *Inequality's drag on aggregate demand.* Economic Policy Institute. https://www.epi.org/publication/inequalitys-drag-on-aggregate-demand/
28 Economic Development Research Group, 2020. *Economic Impact of Public Transportation Investment.* American Public Transit Association. https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-Economic-Impact-Public-Transit-2020.pdf
29 Iglika Ivanova, 2015. *Solving BC's Affordability Crisis in Child Care.* Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. https://www.policyalternatives.ca/wp-content/uploads/attachments/ccpa-bc-solving-childcare-summary_0.pdf

How wealth is distributed

In Canada, as in most countries around the world today, wealth is extremely concentrated among a few hands and much more unevenly distributed than income. Our new estimates suggest that, in 2023, nearly a quarter of all household wealth (22.7%) in Canada is concentrated among the wealthiest 1% of families. While the median family has only $407,000 in wealth (largely held in their principal residence), the 169,000 wealthiest families in the top 1% have at least $7.8 million.[30] Imagine a Canada where just the residents of London, Ontario owned nearly a quarter of all the country's wealth. That gives you a picture of the wealth distribution in our country right now.

For a picture of the wealth distribution in Canada right now, imagine just the residents of London, Ontario owning nearly a quarter of all the country's wealth. Image Credit: Mcalpinestudios [2017].

Notably, ours is likely a conservative estimate of the wealth share of the top 1% (and of the ultra-wealthy more broadly). This is because the Forbes billionaire list data, which we use to make consistent comparisons over the period 1999-2023, is incomplete. Another recent estimate by the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) finds that the 1% held 23.8% of wealth in 2023.[31]

30 Our estimates are based on a replication and extension of the method described in the Parliamentary Budget Officer's (PBO) 2020 and 2021 reports on the wealth distribution. We produced our own estimates in order to have consistent estimates of wealth inequality across the 1999-2023 period, which are not available in the PBO's latest 2025 report. For more information on our methods, see the Methods Appendix.

31 The PBO estimate for 2023 supplements the Forbes rich list with the Maclean's rich list for a more complete set of the ultra-wealthy. Our estimates use the Forbes list exclusively because it is the only one available for all of the years covered. See Matt Dong, 2025. *Estimating the top tail of the family wealth distribution in Canada – 2025 update*. Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. For more information on our methods, see the Methods Appendix.

Measurement of wealth inequality in Canada

Despite the importance of tracking extreme wealth concentration, Statistics Canada does not produce regular estimates of how much wealth the very wealthiest Canadians hold.[32] Quarterly estimates of wealth distribution are only produced at the level of quintiles. The only regular nationally representative survey that gathers data about wealth is the Survey of Financial Security, which is only carried out roughly every three years and fails to adequately capture the wealth of the ultra-wealthy. Because of this shortcoming, researchers have had to resort to a variety of second-best methods to estimate wealth concentration in Canada.

One strand of research, the capitalization approach, uses income tax data to estimate the value of the wealth that generated that income. This method was recently applied by Hempel to estimate the wealth distribution in Canada from 1990 to 2018,[33] and by Statistics Canada for financial wealth in 2019.[34] This method's strengths include that it relies on actual tax data as opposed to self-reported information and can be calculated more frequently. However, it requires strong assumptions to be made about rates of return on different assets and may not capture offshore wealth held by the ultra-wealthy.

Another strand of research, which this report contributes to, uses an interpolation approach that combines survey data and rich lists from sources like Forbes. Statistics Canada's Survey of Financial Security gathers self-reported wealth data directly from a nationally representative sample of Canadians, but it fails to properly capture ultra-wealthy individuals. Data on the wealth of ultra-wealthy individuals is gathered from publicly available lists of billionaires and integrated with the survey data using Pareto interpolation. This method can effectively capture the wealth of the ultra-wealthy, assuming that wealth reported on billionaire lists is reasonably accurate. This method has been used by the Parliamentary Budget Office,[35, 36, 37] and academic researchers.[38]

In this report, we adapt the method used by the Parliamentary Budget Office in their 2020 and 2021 reports, and apply it consistently to the 1999-2023 period to examine how wealth inequality has changed over the past 25 years.

In our estimates, the wealthiest 0.01% of families (1,685 families) have at least $155.8 million in wealth and an average wealth of $448.5 million, 4,041 times larger than the average wealth of the bottom half of families. There are nearly 17,000 families with at least $34.5 million in wealth, while the median family has only $407,000.

Focusing on billionaires alone, the estimated 86 Canadian-resident billionaire families in 2023 held $286 billion in wealth, as much as 6.2 million families at the bottom of the wealth distribution, and close to the value of all residential land in the City of Vancouver.[39]

32 Daniel Skilleter, 2024. *Billionaire Blindspot: How official data understates the severity of Canadian wealth inequality*. Social Capital Partners.

33 Alexander Hempel, 2025. New Estimates of Wealth Inequality in Canada. SSRN. https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5151980

34 James Gauthier, 2025. "Enhancing wealth distributions within the distributions of household economic accounts using a capitalization of income method," *Latest Developments in the Canadian Economic Accounts*, Statistics Canada. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/13-605-x/2025001/article/00002-eng.htm

35 Nigel Wodrich & Aidan Worswick, 2020. *Estimating the top tail of the family wealth distribution in Canada*. Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

36 Louis Perrault & Krista Duncan, 2021. *Estimating the top tail of the family wealth distribution in Canada: Updates and trends*. Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

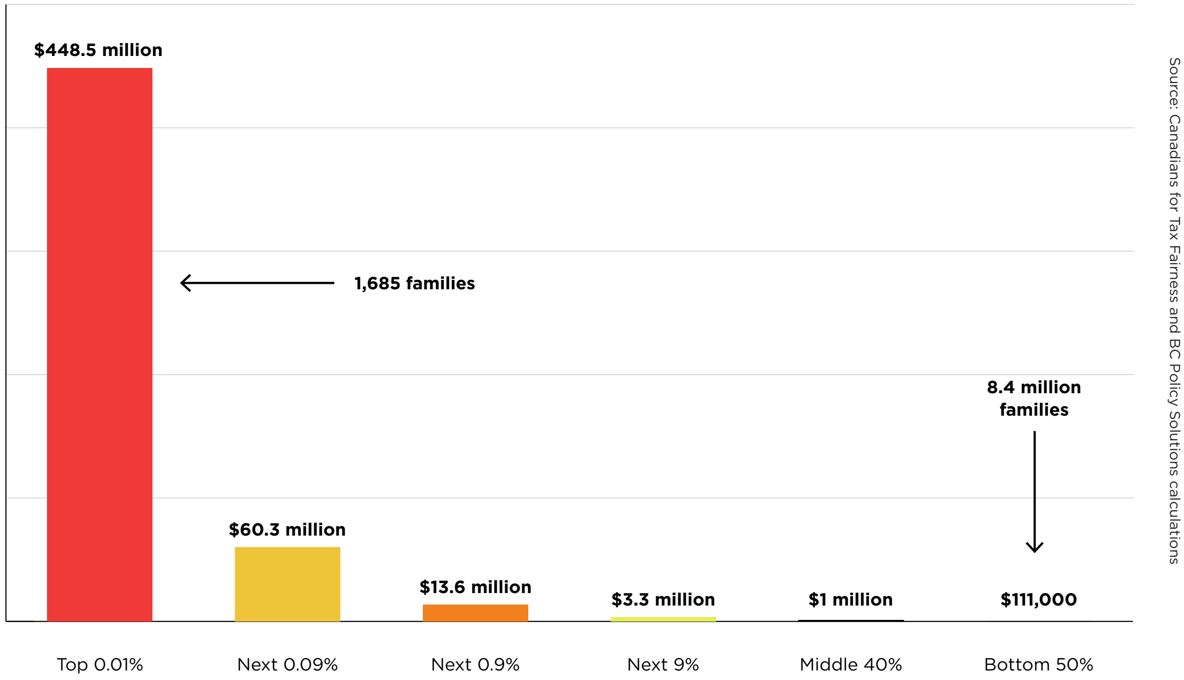
37 Matt Dong, 2025. *Estimating the top tail of the family wealth distribution in Canada – 2025 update*. Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

38 James B. Davies & Livio di Matteo, 2020. Long Run Canadian Wealth Inequality in International Context, *The Review of Income and Wealth*, 67(1). https://doi.org/10.1111/roiw.12453

39 Jack Jol, 2024. *A Look into BC's Land Value & Housing Statistics.* Common Wealth Canada, April 2024. https://www.commonwealth.ca/research/a-look-into-bcs-land-value-and-housing-statistics

Figure 1. Average wealth per family by wealth group, 2023

A typical family in the top 0.01% had 4,041x the wealth of a typical family in the bottom 50%

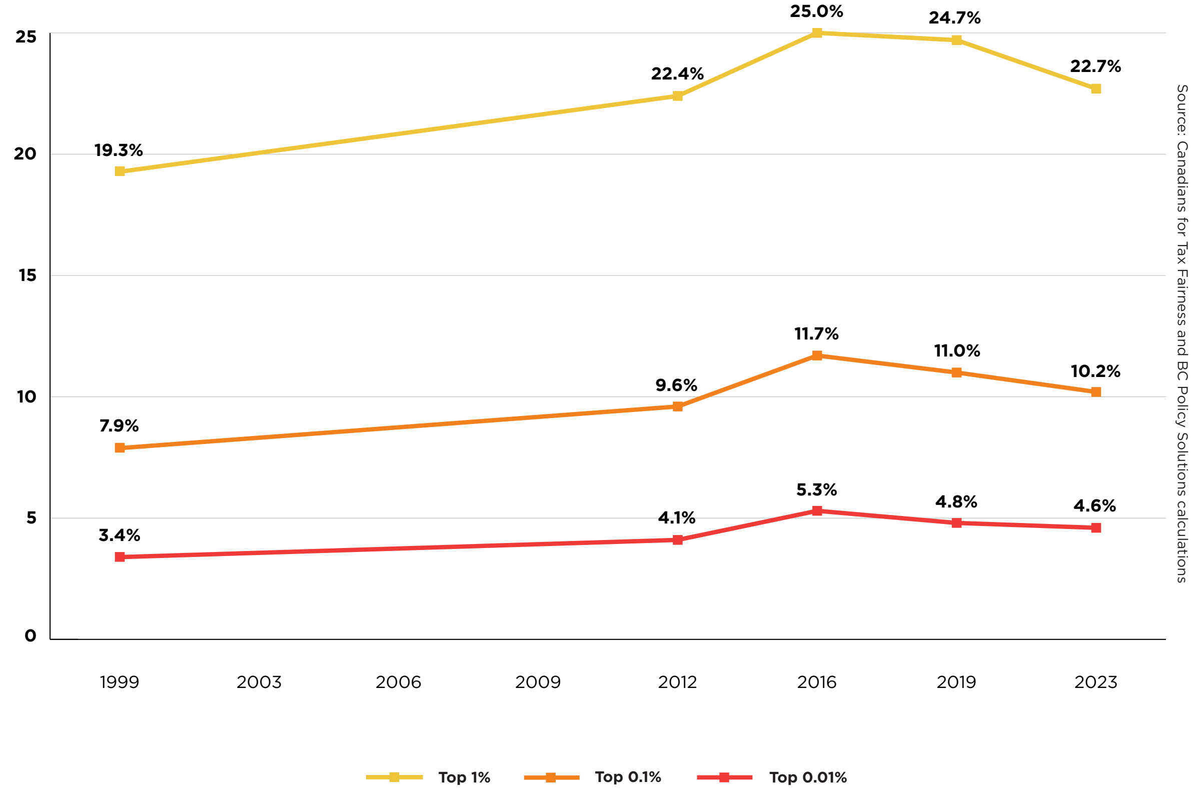


Wealth inequality has increased over the past 25 years

It has not always been this way. The concentration of wealth at the very top has increased since 1999. In 1999, the share of wealth owned by the top 1% was 19.3%. In 2023, the wealth share of such families (who in that year had at least $7.8 million in wealth) was 22.7%. The share of wealth of the ultra-wealthiest 0.01% increased from 3.4% to 4.6% from 1999 to 2023. In dollar terms, this change is even more stark. The average family in the top 0.01% had about $340 million more wealth in 2023 (totalling $756 billion) than they did in 1999.

Figure 2. Top wealth shares have increased significantly since 1999

Share of total household wealth among the top 1%, 0.1%, and 0.01%



These trends are broadly consistent with an earlier study that estimated longer-run wealth inequality trends in Canada, which found that the top 1% wealth share increased from 1970 into the 2010s.[40] That study also found that top wealth shares in Canada decreased after the Second World War through the 1960s, coinciding with a period of high marginal income tax rates, limits on capital flows, and growing rates of unionization that helped counterbalance the power of the wealthy.

Increasing wealth concentration over the past quarter century, however, has not been linear. Wealth concentration increased from 1999 to 2016 but actually fell slightly from 2016 to 2023. While this trend is encouraging, we should not expect the fall in wealth concentration to continue. Although there is not yet survey data available for 2025 that would allow us to estimate the full distribution of wealth in 2025, there are some numbers we can examine to get a sense of the latest trends.

40 James B. Davies & Livio di Matteo, 2020. Long Run Canadian Wealth Inequality in International Context, *The Review of Income and Wealth*, 67(1). https://doi.org/10.1111/roiw.12453

From July 1, 2023 to July 1, 2025, the billionaire wealth of Canadian residents on the Forbes list increased by 37.2%. Over the same period, total household wealth increased by only 9.3%.[41] Another indicator is the trajectory of housing prices. During the pandemic, housing prices increased drastically, inflating wealth for many homeowners. Housing prices began to flatten in 2022 and were actually lower in July 2025 than they were in July 2023,[42] suggesting that the wealth of most households has increased little over this period compared to the rising wealth of billionaires, which is mostly financial wealth. Although we'll have to wait for more detailed statistics to be released, wealth concentration may well be increasing again.

The Canadian labour movement (including groups like the IWA Women's Auxiliary in British Columbia) played a key role in fighting economic inequality and growing the middle class from the mid-1940s to the 1960s. Image Credit: United Steelworkers [1946].

Why is this happening?

While there is no single agreed-upon explanation for the increase in wealth concentration at the very top over the past couple of decades, a few important factors are worth considering. First, it is well known that larger fortunes tend to earn higher returns on their wealth than smaller fortunes.[43] People with large fortunes have access to a wider range of investment opportunities, can take on greater risks, and, when they have direct control of large companies, may be able to use their power to earn higher returns than competitors. This means that the wealth of those with the very highest levels of financial assets tends to grow faster than the wealth of those who have fewer financial assets. Canada's richest family, the Thomsons, are one dramatic example of such disproportionate growth, as their wealth increased fivefold from October 2012 to July 2025.[44]

41 Statistics Canada, 2025. *National Balance Sheet Accounts.* Table: 36-10-0580-01. Retrieved December 2025. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=3610058001

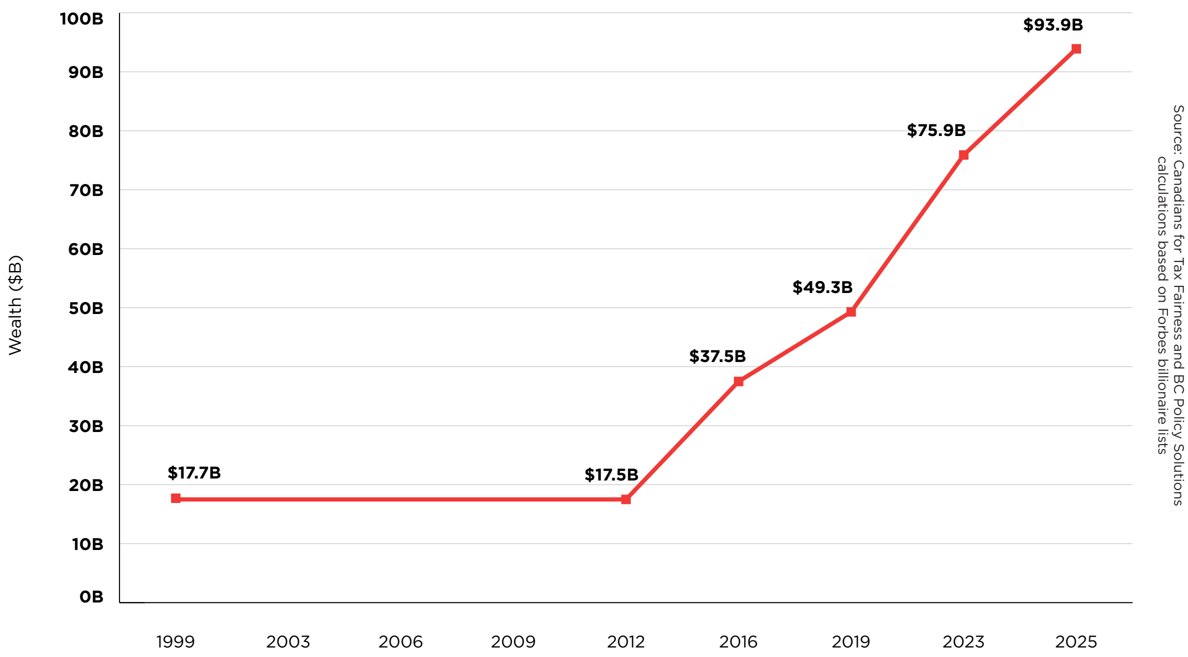
42 The Canadian Real Estate Association, 2025. *MLS Home Price Index Tool.* Accessed November 10, 2025. https://www.crea.ca/housing-market-stats/mls-home-price-index/hpi-tool/

43 Matthew Smith, Owen Zidar, & Eric Zwick, 2023. Top Wealth in America: New Estimates Under Heterogeneous Returns. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 138(1), 515–573. https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjac033

44 This comparison assumes that Forbes consistently included all wealth of the Thomson family in their calculations. In 1999, this wealth was listed as "Kenneth Thomson"; in 2012, 2016, 2019 and 2023 it was listed as "David Thomson & family"; and in 2025 it is listed under six different Thomson family members. Canadian Business listed Thomson family wealth as $20B in 2012 and $98.1B in 2025.

Figure 3. Thomson family wealth has quintupled since 2012

Increase was driven by skyrocketing Thomson Reuters share price



Second, the increase in wealth concentration is very likely, in part, a result of a suite of neoliberal policy changes that were made in the late 20th century. Free-trade agreements that empower capital over workers, attacks on workers' rights, the approval of corporate mergers, large reductions in top marginal income tax rates from post-war highs, and the privatization of public services have all contributed to empowering people who already own wealth over others. These changes tend to increase financial asset values because markets predict that owners will be able to keep more revenue for themselves instead of sharing it with workers. Indeed, rising wealth concentration has been accompanied by an increasing income inequality at a global scale over the past 40 years.[45]

These trends are not unique to Canada. The United States, which enacted similar neoliberal reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, has had an even larger rise in the share of wealth owned by the top 1%.[46] Because Canada's economy is heavily integrated with that

45 Chancel, L., Gómez-Carrera, R., Moshrif, R., Piketty, T., et al, 2025. World Inequality Report 2026. World Inequality Lab. https://wir2026.wid.world/

46 Emmanuel Saez, & Gabriel Zucman, 2016. Wealth Inequality in the United States since 1913: Evidence from Capitalized Income Tax Data , The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 131(2), 519–578. https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjw004

At the vanguard of neoliberal economic policy changes across the west were US President Ronald Reagan, UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. Image Credit: Reagan White House Photographs, US National Archives [1988].

of the United States, and the global economy as a whole, American and global trends affect Canada. Increasing integration with the United States has given Canada's wealthy elites more power to increase their wealth because it has made it easier for them to threaten to move their wealth south of the border if Canada challenges them in any way.

Finally, contrary to the popular myth that Canada is a land of equal opportunity, Canada has no mechanism to prevent extremely concentrated wealth from being passed down across generations.[47] In fact, Canada is the only G7 country without an inheritance tax.[48] This means that heirs of families with huge fortunes never have to work a day in their lives, while millions of Canadians struggle to afford a place to live.

47 Canada does have deemed realization of capital gains upon death, which some refer to as a form of inheritance taxation. However, given that capital gains are taxed at half the rate of other forms of income, that the tax applies only to an asset's growth rather than its total value, and that much of capital gains are not taxable at all (e.g., those on principal residences, in TFSAs), this is a very limited measure.

48 Luc Theriault, 2018. *Should Canada have an inheritance tax?* The Conversation. https://theconversation.com/should-canada-have-an-inheritance-tax-102324

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To prevent further wealth concentration, we should implement a wealth tax targeted at the ultra-wealthy.

To protect our democracy, bolster our economic resilience, and preserve our sovereignty, Canada must act now to limit and reverse extreme wealth concentration. Image Credit: Ruiqing Bi/Pexels. [2025].

Canada has a wealth concentration problem. Extreme wealth concentration comes with extreme concentration of control over the economy and control over the jobs and livelihoods of thousands of Canadians. Controlling billions in wealth is associated with huge inequalities in power and influence over our political process.

The trajectory of the United States as a society should be a dire warning for Canada. Runaway wealth concentration has resulted in billionaires exerting extraordinary influence over the political process, with President Trump having selected 13 billionaires for top roles in his administration.[49] If Canada does not want to follow in America's footsteps in allowing a few ultra-wealthy families to dominate our economy and our political process, we need to implement policies that put us on a different path. We should start by properly measuring wealth concentration. Statistics Canada should publish regular estimates of extreme top-end wealth concentration so that we can have an informed public conversation about the distribution of wealth.[50]

49 Peter Charalambous, Laura Romero, & Soo Rin Kim, 2025. *Trump has tapped an unprecedented 13 billionaires for his administration. Here's who they are.* ABC News.

50 Statistics Canada published a first estimate of top-end wealth concentration using the capitalization method in 2025. However, it only included financial wealth and was a one-time estimate.

To prevent further wealth concentration, we should implement a **wealth tax** targeted at the ultra-wealthy. It is estimated that an annual tax of 1% on net wealth above $10 million (affecting just 0.6% of families), 2% above $50 million, and 3% above $100 million would raise an estimated $39 billion in its first year alone (rising in subsequent years) and could raise $495 billion over ten years.[51] This is even after accounting for behavioural responses like tax avoidance and evasion. Under the same modelling assumptions, a 3% tax on billionaires alone (specifically, the portion of their wealth above $1 billion) would raise $5.8 billion in its first year.[52]

An **inheritance tax** would prevent concentrated wealth from being passed down indefinitely. As mentioned earlier, Canada is the only G7 country without an inheritance or estate tax. It is no wonder, then, that the Thomsons, Canada's richest family in 1999, remain Canada's richest family today (the patriarch Kenneth Thomson, who himself inherited his fortune from his father, passed away in 2006, absent an inheritance tax in Canada). The UK levies an inheritance tax of 40% on inheritances above £325,000, which is projected to raise 0.7% of government revenue in 2025-26,[53] equivalent to $3.6 billion in revenue for Canada. Similarly, the US has an estate tax of 40%. Despite the fact that very few families pay it today, it still contributes 0.6% of government revenues (down from 1.5% in 2000).[54]

Capital gains tax reform would end the unfair special treatment of capital gains income (accrued mostly by the richest Canadians), which is currently taxed at half the rate of income from wages and salaries that working people earn.[55] This tax break for the rich means forgoing a projected $30 billion in federal government revenue in 2025 and more in provincial and territorial revenue.[56]

While tax policy is only one lever for change, reforms of this kind are crucial steps towards curbing extreme wealth concentration, rebalancing power in our economy and democracy, and preventing the kind of slide into oligarchy we are witnessing in the United States. These types of tax reforms also have the potential to raise considerable amounts of revenue that can be invested in the public good, addressing many of the major societal challenges of our time. Indeed, a wealth tax alone could fund a whole suite

51 Alex Hemingway, 2025. A wealth tax could raise half a trillion dollars for a stronger, fairer Canada. BC Policy Solutions. https://bcpolicy.ca/2025/06/04/wealth-tax/
52 This estimate assumes the wealth tax base is first reduced by a 16% behavioural response rate and 2% of revenues are deducted for administration costs (following Hemingway, 2025, cited above, and using the same PBO-derived model of the wealth distribution used in that paper for comparability).
53 Office for Budget Responsibility. Inheritance tax. UK government.
54 Fiscal Data, 2025. *How much revenue has the U.S. government collected this year?* Treasury.gov.
55 Michael Smart & Sobia Hasan Jafry, 2022. *Why won't Canada increase taxes on capital gains of the wealthiest families?* Finances of the Nation.
56 Department of Finance, 2025. *Report on Federal Tax Expenditures - Concepts, Estimates and Evaluations 2025*.

of transformative national projects, including enabling 100,000 new non-market homes per year, building a national clean electricity grid, delivering more reliable and affordable public transit, vastly expanding affordable public child care spaces, and broadening public dental and pharmacare plans.[57]

To be sure, enacting a policy agenda of this kind would require growing the power and mobilization of working people, including strengthening workers' ability to organize in unions and counter the growing economic and political power of extreme wealth. To protect our democracy, bolster our economic resilience, and preserve our sovereignty, Canada must act now to limit and reverse extreme wealth concentration.

57 Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2025. Alternative Federal Budget 2026.

APPENDIX

Methods

To construct our estimates of wealth inequality in Canada, we replicated the methods used by the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) to construct the High-net-worth Family Database (HFD), described in their 2020 and 2021 reports.[58, 59] In general, we relied closely on the methods outlined in the Appendix of the 2020 report. As the PBO reports, we relied on three principal data sets: public use microdata files from the Survey of Financial Security (SFS), national balance sheet accounts, and rich lists. In order to construct an estimate that was consistent across the five years with reliable SFS data (1999, 2012, 2016, 2019, and 2023),[60] we relied on Forbes billionaire lists as our rich lists. The unit of analysis is the "family unit", which includes economic families and individuals not in economic families. Wealth is defined as the money a family would have if it sold all its assets at market value and paid off all its debts.[61]

In short, our method entailed the following (for more details, see the PBO's 2020 report): We scaled SFS observed wealth and debt values so that aggregate values matched NBSA aggregates for the same quarter. Then, we added the corresponding Forbes rich list with non-residents removed and wealth converted to CAD using Bank of Canada exchange rates. Next, we created a synthetic dataset between the bottom of the Forbes rich list and the top of the observed wealth values in the SFS using Pareto interpolation. Finally, we iterated the above steps until the total wealth and liabilities in our dataset matched those in the NBSA. Our method differed from the PBO's 2020 report in a few ways, which are outlined below:

For Forbes list entries that combine a billionaire and their family, we split their wealth into three constituent family units, following Davies and di Matteo (2020). We tested the sensitivity of top shares to this assumption and found that splitting families into one, two, or four (as opposed to three) family units had very little effect on top shares.

National Balance Sheet Accounts are revised regularly. We use the values published on December 11, 2025, which differ from those used in the PBO's (2020) report.

When observations with large weights lie on the threshold of wealth groups, we split them so that exactly X% of families are in the top X% wealth group.

58 Nigel Wodrich & Aidan Worswick, 2020. *Estimating the top tail of the family wealth distribution in Canada*. Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

59 Louis Perrault & Krista Duncan, 2021. *Estimating the top tail of the family wealth distribution in Canada: Updates and trends.* Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

60 Following the PBO (2021) and Davies and di Matteo (2020), we do not estimate the wealth distribution for 2005 despite a round of the SFS being conducted that year. This is because the 2005 SFS has a much smaller sample size than other years and is thus considered less reliable.

61 Some literature argues that non-marketable wealth, such as the value of future Canadian Pension Plan payments, should be included in measures of family wealth. However, these are not measured by the SFS nor included in the household sector in the NBSA so we do not include non-marketable wealth.

Our estimates of top 1% shares are within 0.3 percentage points of those estimated by the PBO for 1999, 2012 and 2019 in their 2021 report, indicating our success in replicating the PBO's method. For 2016, there is a discrepancy of 2.3 percentage points. This may be due to differences in the inclusion of non-residents or the use of a Forbes billionaire list from a different date. The PBO used a revised methodology in their 2025 report, but did not explain the differences in enough detail for us to explain the differences between their revised estimates and our estimates (nor the differences with their earlier estimates).

Limitations

There are a few limitations to our methodology that should be noted. First, our estimates of the distribution of wealth are very sensitive to the coverage and accuracy of the Forbes rich lists. If the Forbes list is not exhaustive of Canadian resident billionaire families, then we will underestimate the Pareto parameter that gives shape to the top of the distribution, and therefore underestimate the wealth concentrated at the top. There is some evidence that this is the case because the Forbes billionaire list is missing some families listed on other available billionaire lists. For example, the Forbes 2023 list is missing the Weston, McCain, Rogers, and Desmarais families, which are included on Maclean's magazine's 2024 list of the richest Canadian families.[62] The PBO estimated the wealth distribution using both Forbes and (in years they were available) Canadian Business and Maclean's magazine rich lists and got higher estimates of top wealth shares when using the latter, more exhaustive lists. Relying on Forbes may lead to our estimates slightly underestimating top wealth concentration. We rely on Forbes lists because, unlike the other rich lists, they are available for each year in which we have SFS data. On the other hand, our estimates may also be biased if Forbes valuations are systematically too high or too low.[63]

One other limitation is that we rely on public use microdata files (PUMFs) rather than the raw survey data from the Survey of Financial Security. PUMFs are subject to top-coding, which could bias our estimates of the top of the wealth distribution. The PBO compared estimates of top shares using PUMFs and the raw microdata for 2019 and 2023 and found that the "differences are usually not large".[64] Hempel (2025) found that top-coding had a greater influence on top wealth shares for the 1999 SFS PUMF than in the later years in our sample. For this reason, as a robustness check, we created a modified 1999 SFS PUMF where the top 1% share matched that reported for the microdata.[65] In the robustness check, using this modified PUMF increased the final estimated top 1% share by about 0.3pp in 1999.

62 Jessy Bains & Avery Mullen, 2024. Canada's Richest People. Macleans. https://macleans.ca/society/canadas-richest-people/
63 Matt Durot, 2025. Forbes 400 Methodology: How We Crunched The Numbers In 2025. Forbes.
64 Matt Dong, 2025. Estimating the top tail of the family wealth distribution in Canada – 2025 update. Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, p. 18.
65 Matthew Brzozowski, Martin Gervais, Paul Klein, & Michio Suzuki, 2009. Consumption, Income, and Wealth Inequality in Canada. University of Iowa Working Paper.

Table A1. Canada's wealth distribution, 1999-2023

Group	Families	Threshold ($)	Average wealth ($)	Wealth share
		1999		
Top 0.01%	1,218	37,500,000	107,267,000	3.4%
Next 0.09%	10,960	9,450,000	15,672,000	4.5%
Next 0.9%	109,603	2,425,000	3,990,000	11.4%
Next 9%	1,096,031	738,000	1,169,000	33.5%
Middle 40%	4,871,250	120,000	334,000	42.5%
Bottom 50%	6,089,062	–	29,000	4.7%
		2012		
Top 0.01%	1,457	83,489,000	223,201,000	4.1%
Next 0.09%	13,113	19,248,000	33,458,000	5.5%
Next 0.9%	131,129	4,424,000	7,697,000	12.7%
Next 9%	1,311,291	1,267,000	2,016,000	33.4%
Middle 40%	5,827,962	176,000	564,000	41.5%
Bottom 50%	7,284,952	–	30,000	2.7%
		2016		
Top 0.01%	1,535	126,000,000	367,067,000	5.3%
Next 0.09%	13,814	26,500,000	48,515,000	6.3%
Next 0.9%	138,145	5,625,000	10,194,000	13.3%
Next 9%	1,381,448	1,517,000	2,382,000	31.2%
Middle 40%	6,139,767	236,000	690,000	40.1%
Bottom 50%	7,674,709	–	51,000	3.7%
		2019		
Top 0.01%	1,591	136,000,000	375,329,000	4.8%
Next 0.09%	14,323	30,500,000	53,275,000	6.2%
Next 0.9%	143,229	6,625,000	11,760,000	13.7%
Next 9%	1,432,295	1,701,000	2,764,000	32.1%
Middle 40%	6,365,755	274,000	764,000	39.4%
Bottom 50%	7,957,194	–	59,000	3.8%
		2023		
Top 0.01%	1,685	156,000,000	448,506,000	4.6%
Next 0.09%	15,166	34,450,000	60,308,000	5.6%
Next 0.9%	151,659	7,750,000	13,553,000	12.5%
Next 9%	1,516,587	2,165,000	3,293,000	30.4%
Middle 40%	6,740,387	407,000	1,001,000	41.1%
Bottom 50%	8,425,484	–	111,000	5.7%