



Canadian  
Survey

AmericasBarometer

2025 SERIES

Brief

# Wealth and inequality in Canada and the USA

Do Canadians and Americans want  
their governments to take action?



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# Environics Institute

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The Environics Institute for Survey Research was established by Michael Adams in 2006 with a mandate to conduct in-depth public opinion and social research on the issues shaping Canada's future. It is through such research that Canadians can better understand themselves and their changing society.

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## AmericasBarometer

These results are from the Canadian portion of the 2025–26 AmericasBarometer, a regular comparative survey of democratic values and behaviours that covers countries in North, Central and South America, as well as a significant number of countries in the Caribbean (the 2025–26 study will cover 20 countries).

The project is led by the LAPOP Lab at Vanderbilt University's Center for Global Democracy (CGD) and was conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, in partnership with CGD's LAPOP Lab at Vanderbilt University and with the support of the Max Bell Foundation.

The survey was conducted online with a sample of 3,550 Canadians (aged 18 and over) between July 30 and August 7, 2025. The results are weighted by region, age, gender, education and language so as to be fully representative of the Canadian population.

This report also includes results from the companion survey conducted in the United States. This survey was conducted online with a 1,600 Americans, 18 years of age and older, between October 3 and 16, 2025. The results are weighted by region, age, gender, education and ethnicity so as to be fully representative of the American population.

[See our website for more reports from this survey.](#)

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# Introduction

The post-war period of 20th century in North America was marked by robust economic growth, and this prosperity was shared across economic classes that shrunk the gap between rich and poor. Most people benefitted from the expanding economy, and the middle class expanded dramatically. This was not to last, and now one-quarter into the 21st century income inequality has rebounded. In Canada, the gap in income between the country's top 40 percent and bottom 40 percent is the largest since 1999 (when Statistics Canada first began recording this indicator). The divide between rich and poor is even greater in the USA, where the top one percent of income earners are raking in an ever increasing chunk of that country's wealth.

Such inequality is patently visible in today's society. On the one hand the ostentatious wealth flaunted by tech barons and sports stars, on the other the growing numbers of people facing income, housing or food insecurity. Rising costs and the affordability of housing and other basics are now among the top public concerns in both Canada and the USA. Given this growing divide, does the public look to their governments to act, and have such expectations changed over the past decade or so? And what are the factors driving this perspective, based on people's economic circumstances, demographics, political affiliation and broader attitudes about wealth and society?

One way to answer this question is through public opinion research that measures beliefs and attitudes in the population over time. The AmericasBarometer is such a project that encompasses population surveys on democracy, governance and civic engagement in 20 plus countries spanning the western hemisphere, conducted biennially since 2006. Our focus here is on results from the most recent surveys in Canada and the USA (conducted in July – September 2025) and how opinions on this issue have changed or not over the past two decades.



# Government action to reduce income inequality

## Canada

In 2025, there is clear if not overwhelming public support for government to step up on this issue. A plurality (44%) of Canadians agree that “*government should implement strong policies to reduce income inequality*”, three times as many as who disagree (15%) with this statement. The remainder (41%) are less decided in their opinion, although this group tilts more toward agreement than disagreement.<sup>1</sup>

This current public sentiment is comparable to how Canadians have viewed this issue in the past, spanning the years 2008 to 2017; a period that began with the global financial meltdown but prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Public support for government intervention on income inequality in 2025 is a bit lower than in these previous years, except for 2010 when just over four in ten (42%) agreed with the statement, compared with almost one in five (18%) who disagreed. In comparison, 2012 was the high-water mark for public support for government action (50% agree, versus 12% disagree).



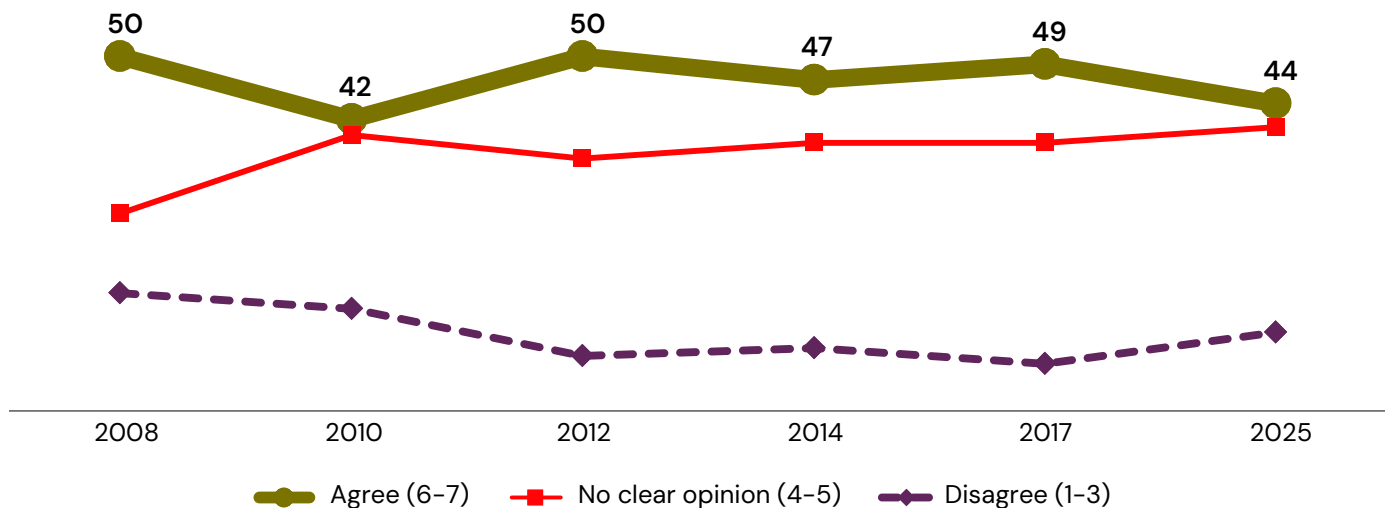
A plurality of Canadians agree that “government should implement strong policies to reduce income inequality”, three times as many as who disagree.

<sup>1</sup> This question used a 7-point response scale, with endpoints labelled as “strongly disagree” (1) and “strongly agree” (7). For analysis and reporting purposes, these scale points were combined to reflect disagreement (1 – 3), no clear opinion (4 – 5) and agreement (6 – 7).

**Figure 1**

## Should the Canadian government reduce income inequality?

2008 – 2025, Canada



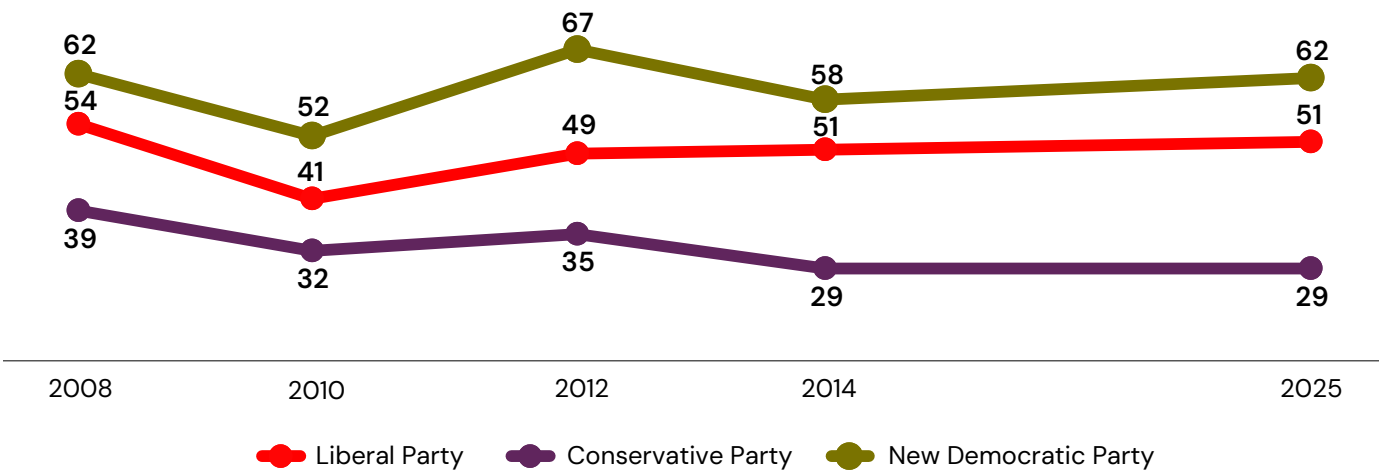
*Agree-Disagree: The Canadian government should implement strong policies to reduce income inequality between the rich and poor.*

Public opinion about the role of government in addressing income inequality in 2025 varies somewhat across the country. Most noticeable is the difference in views between Quebecers (50% agree with the statement) and Albertans (35%). However, this gap has narrowed significantly over time since 2008 when Quebecers were much more likely to express agreement (69%), while opinions in Alberta have held more or less steady.

Not surprisingly, government action to reduce the gap between rich and poor is strongest among Canadians with the lowest household incomes (those earning less than \$35,000) (52%), and least evident among those earning in excess of \$100,000 (37%). But this difference in public sentiment across income cohorts has diminished steadily over time since 2012 (when the percentage in agreement was 60% among the lowest income group compared with 33% among the highest).

This issue is most likely to divide Canadians across federal political party support. Federal NDP supporters are by far the most likely to agree government should enact strong policies to reduce income inequality (62%), compared with half (51%) of those who support the federal Liberal Party; in both cases only six percent express disagreement. In contrast, barely three in ten (29%) federal Conservative Party supporters agree with this statement, while almost as many (28%) who disagree. Notably, these percentages have fluctuated some over time, but comparative differences across party lines have remained essentially the same.

**Figure 2**  
**Agree: the Canadian government should reduce income inequality**  
2008 – 2025, Canada, by federal political party support



*Agree-Disagree: The Canadian government should implement strong policies to reduce income inequality between the rich and poor.*



## United States

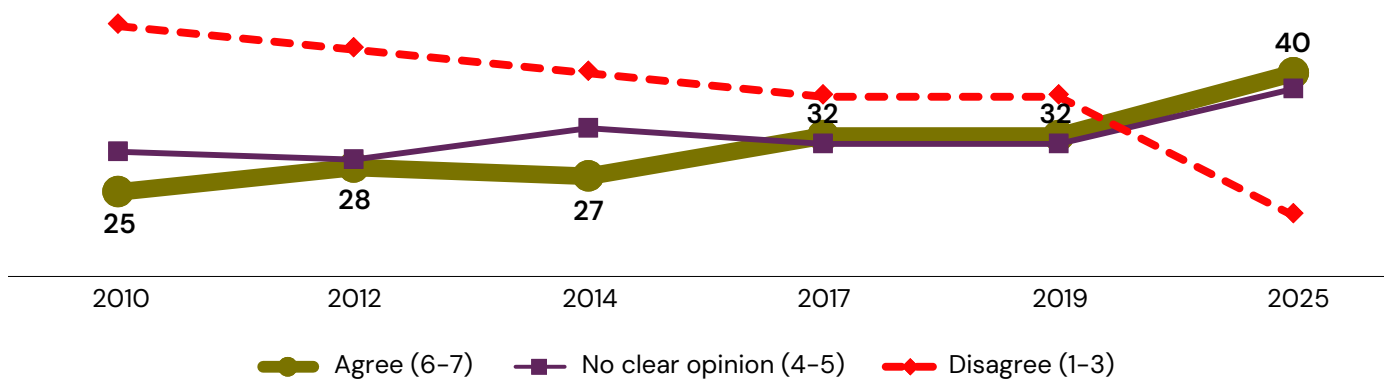
In comparison with Canada, the USA has greater economic inequality and Americans have been much more resistant to government changing the status quo. But this appears to be changing. In 2025, four in ten (40%) Americans agree with the statement that their national government should actively take steps to reduce income inequality between rich and poor, almost twice as many as the proportion who disagree (22%).

These latest results reflect a major shift in public sentiment over time dating back to 2010 when opposition to government action outweighed support, with this change most dramatic between 2019 and 2025. The most telling indicator of change is in the proportion of Americans who answer the survey question with the strongest possible negative response ("1" out of 7 on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree). This response was given by 31 percent of Americans in 2010, but declined to 21 percent in 2019, and then again down to only eight percent in 2025 (the comparable current percentage in Canada is 4%).

**Figure 3**

**Should the U.S. government reduce income inequality?**

2010 – 2025, United States



*Agree-Disagree: The United States government should implement strong policies to reduce income inequality between the rich and poor.*

In the USA, current opinions about government actions to reduce income inequality are generally similar across the country, with few differences by region or household income (unlike in Canada). Support is somewhat stronger among Americans who are under 45 years of age, those with a university degree, and who are Black or Latino.

As in Canada, political affiliation is the strongest predictor of attitudes about this issue, but less so than in the past. Democratic voters (49%) are more likely than Republican voters (33%) to agree that their national government should take strong action to reduce income inequality. But this gap has shrunk dramatically since 2019, primarily on one side of the political divide.



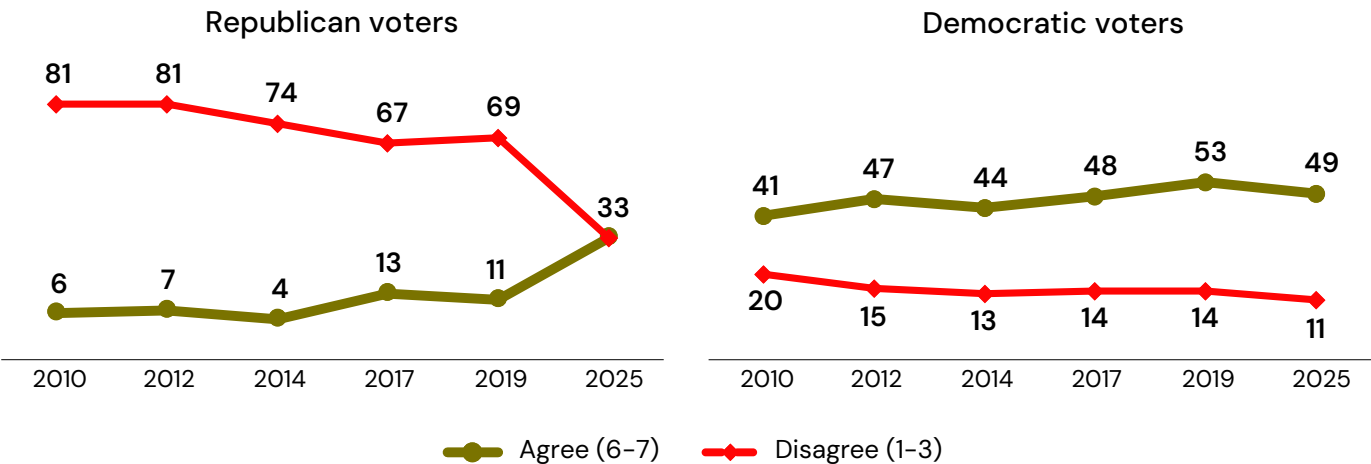
In 2025, four in ten Americans agree with the statement that their national government should actively take steps to reduce income inequality between rich and poor. These latest results reflect a major shift in public sentiment over time.

Among Republicans, a strong majority have opposed such government actions over much of the past 15 years, but this sentiment diminished between 2010 and 2019. Six years later, opposition dropped by more than half to only one in three (33%) who disagree with the statement, now even with the percentage who express the opposite view (33%). Perhaps the most telling indicator of this shift is the decline in the proportion of Republicans who voice the strongest possible disagreement to government intervention in reducing income inequality (responding with a “1” out of 7 on the question response scale): This percentage stood at 67 percent in 2010, 45 percent in 2019, and only 13 percent in 2025.

In comparison, Democratic voters have been more consistent in their level of support for such policies over time. In 2025, Democrats are five times as likely to agree (49%) as disagree (11%) with government policies to reduce the gap between rich and poor (with one-third (33%) responding in the strongest possible way (with a “7” out of 7). This strong sentiment among Democratic voters has increased gradually over the past 15 years (although peaked at 39% in 2019).

Figure 4

Agree: the U.S. government should reduce income inequality  
2008 – 2025, United States, by national political party support



*Agree-Disagree: The Canadian government should implement strong policies to reduce income inequality between the rich and poor.*

# The role of billionaires

The past few decades have witnessed a dramatic growth in the number of billionaires (both in North America and worldwide), and even more so their public profile in business, politics, sports and popular culture. How does the public view the role of such super-wealthy individuals at a time when more people are struggling with rising costs and economic insecurity? Do billionaires have a *positive influence* on the economy because they drive innovation and create jobs? Or do they have a *negative influence* because they keep too much of the wealth for themselves instead of sharing it with the rest of us?<sup>2</sup>

## Canada

Canadians as a whole tend to see billionaires as having a negative influence. Six in ten strongly agree (31%) or agree (30%) that such super-wealthy individuals (and families) keep too much for themselves, compared with three in ten who generally (29%) or strongly (10%) express the view they are a net positive because of their contribution to economic growth.

Opinions about billionaires are largely similar across the country, with some minor variations. A positive view is somewhat more likely in Ontario, among older Canadians, and first generation in the country. Notably, there is little difference between Canadians with smaller and larger household incomes.

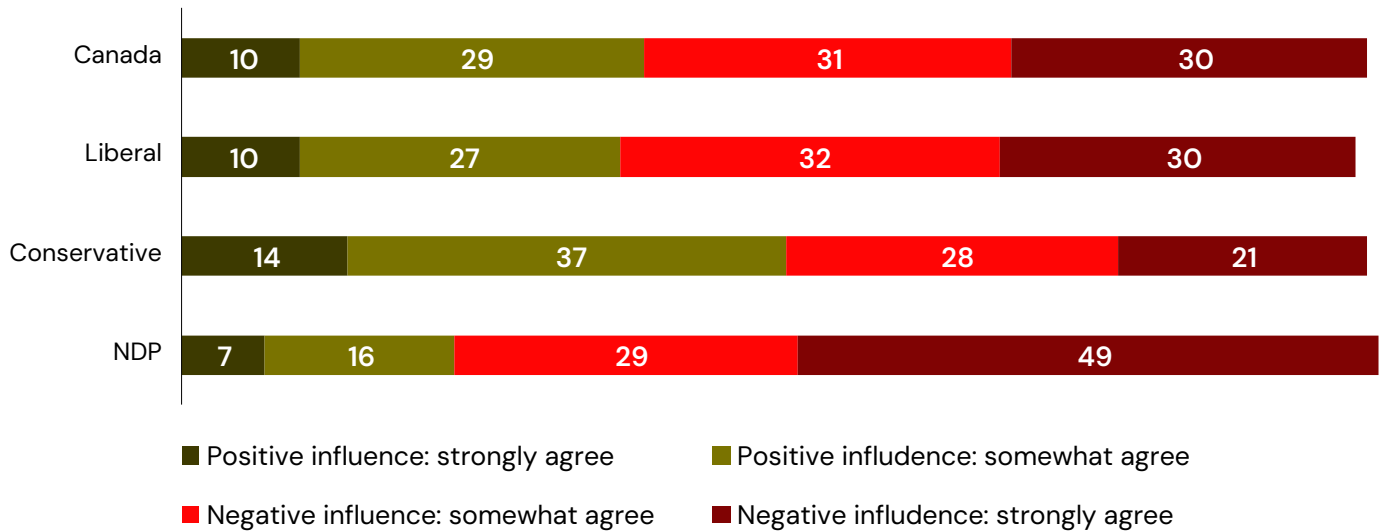
As with views about the government's role in addressing income inequality, political partisanship plays a role in how Canadians think about billionaires. Federal Conservative Party supporters are the most likely to see billionaires in a positive light (51%, versus 49% who say they have a negative influence). In contrast, this view is shared by 37 percent of federal Liberal Party supporters and even fewer who would vote for the federal NDP (23%). The most telling indicator of this difference is the percentage point gap between those who feel strongly positive and those who feel strongly negative: – 7 points among Conservatives, – 20 among Liberals, and – 42 among NDP supporters.

2 2025 is the first year this question was included in the AmericasBarometer.

**Figure 5**

**What impact do billionaires have on the economy?**

2025 – Canada, by federal political party support



Given the current wealth disparity between the top one percent and everyone else, billionaires do not enjoy a good public reputation in either country. A majority in both countries view them as having a negative influence on the economy.

## United States

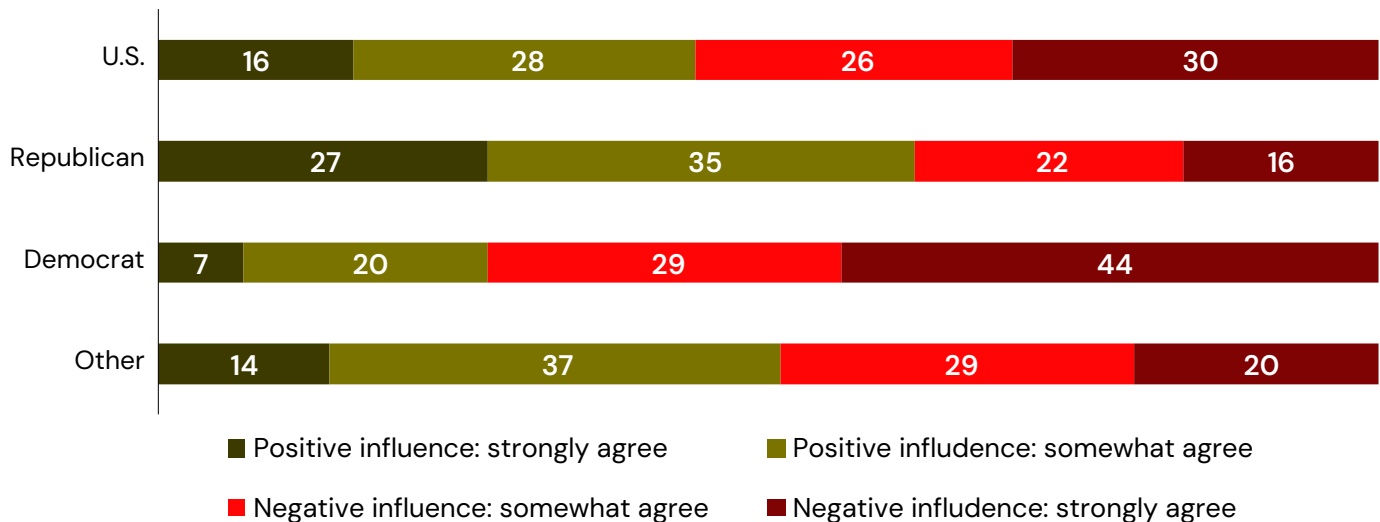
Compared with Canada, the USA has many more billionaires and they feature much more prominently in the country's business, political and cultural world. Perhaps for this reason, their public reputation is somewhat more positive. More than four in ten Americans agree strongly (16%) or somewhat (28%) agree that billionaires have a positive influence on the economy, compared with just over half who somewhat (26%) or strongly (30%) believe their impact is negative.

Across the USA, opinions about billionaires are somewhat more positive among men, Americans ages 60 plus, and those with higher incomes and a university education.

### Figure 6

#### What impact do billionaires have on the economy?

2025 – United States, by national political party support



Even more than in Canada, ideology and politics influence how Americans view billionaires. Republicans see them as being a positive force in society (by a 62% to 38% margin), in sharp contrast with Democrats (27%, versus 73%). And not surprisingly, a similar split is evident based on opinions about the role of government in reducing the gap between rich and poor: Billionaires are seen in a positive light among two-thirds (66%) of those who oppose government policies, compared with only half as many who support such intervention (33%).



# What it takes to get ahead in life

The 2025 survey posed a new question about what it takes for people to get ahead in life, in terms of financial security and success: does it matter more to work hard or have parents who are rich?

## Canada

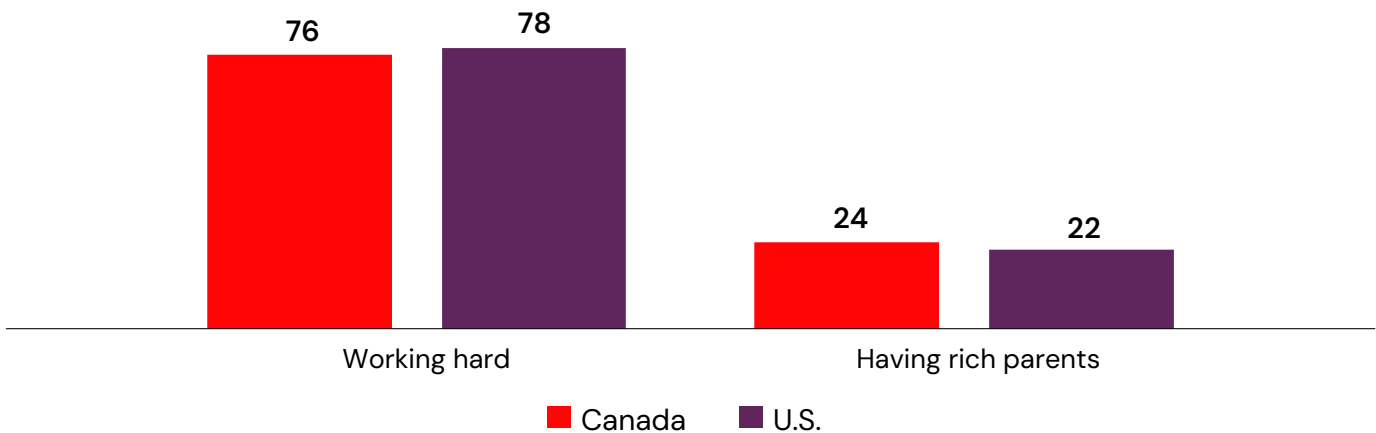
Increasing income inequality and billionaire fortunes aside, most Canadians believe getting ahead is more about working hard (76%) than having rich parents (24%). This is the majority view across the country, although most widely expressed in Quebec (83%), among Canadians ages 60 plus (82%), those without a high school diploma (82%) and also those in the top income brackets (81%).

Even across political party lines there is general agreement on this issue, although the importance of hard work is most widely cited by Liberal party supporters (80%), followed by those who would vote for the Conservative Party (77%) or NDP (67%).

Figure 7

What matters more in getting ahead in life?

2025 – Canada and the United States



## United States

On this issue, Americans and Canadians generally agree. Just under eight in ten (78%) Americans believe that it is hard work that matters more in getting ahead, compared with just over one in five (22%) who maintain rich parents make the difference. As well, there are few differences in viewpoint across the population, even across household income levels.

And as in Canada, American attitudes about what it takes to get ahead are more similar than different across the political divide. Hard work is seen as mattering more by 87 percent of Republicans, compared with 74 percent of Democrats.



Increasing income inequality and billionaire fortunes aside, most Canadians believe getting ahead is more about working hard than having rich parents.



# Conclusion

Canada and the USA are both experiencing a growing divide between the haves and have-nots. As the wealthy are buoyed by rising stock prices and generous tax havens, most other people are struggling with a rising cost of living and dim prospects for future financial security. So it is not surprising that the public in both countries support the idea of their government taking more active steps to reduce the gap between rich and poor.

Canadians and Americans alike are twice as likely to agree as disagree that their national government should intervene in some way.

In Canada, this sentiment has been generally stable over time, dating back to 2008 when the world was reeling from the global financial crisis. Opinions on this issue have been, and continue to be, most closely linked to one's political party affiliation, with NDP voters most strongly in favour of government action on income inequality and Conservative Party supporters least apt to agree.

It is in the USA, which has a long and well-entrenched resistance to government involvement in society, where opinions have changed dramatically over time. In 2010, the American public opposed government policies to reduce income inequality by a two-to-one margin, and in 2025 the balance of opinion has now completely reversed. Most of this change has occurred between 2019 and 2025.

Moreover, this shift in public sentiment about government intervention has taken place primarily among Republican voters, who are now evenly divided on the merits of such policy (where before many were dead set against it). Our data does not provide any clear insight into what is behind this dramatic shift in the Republican viewpoint, but it could be in part due to how the Republican base has shifted since 2019 to include more voters who are economically stressed and looking for government to do something to help them.



Given the current wealth disparity between the top one percent and everyone else, billionaires do not enjoy a good public reputation in either country. A majority in both countries view them as having a negative influence on the economy because they keep too much wealth for themselves, rather than having a positive influence because they drive innovation and create jobs. Again, political partisanship shapes opinions, especially in the USA where Democrats and Republicans hold sharply opposing views.

Yet despite public concerns about income inequality and rapacious billionaires, most Canadians and Americans believe in the foundational premise of capitalism that hard work (rather than having rich parents) matters most in getting ahead in life. On this issue there is agreement that crosses both economic and political divides.





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