

Are We Really Serious About Health Equity? Lessons from History, Politics, and Power

Pathways to Health Equity:
Levelling the Playing Field Conference
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Ethical Disclosures

- No financial conflict of interest
- No obligation to any organization to take a certain position on any issue addressed in this presentation

Overview of Presentation

- Some notable Canadian achievements and why none of them are recent
- A very brief personal tour of policy involvement
- Some possible explanations for why things are as they are
- The way forward: combining realism with optimism

A Word About Terms

- Equality is an objective measure – it is a quantitative construct
- Disparities are simply differences – societies define which are unacceptable
- Unequal is not always inequitable – the latter is normative measure, the cousin of “fair”, “just”, etc.
- It is theoretically possible to increase equity by diminishing equality – but that’s not Canada’s problem
- Equity is not just about disadvantage even though equity problems and consequences concentrate among the disadvantaged

Why Did Canadians Vote Tommy Douglas as the Greatest Canadian Ever?

Medicare.

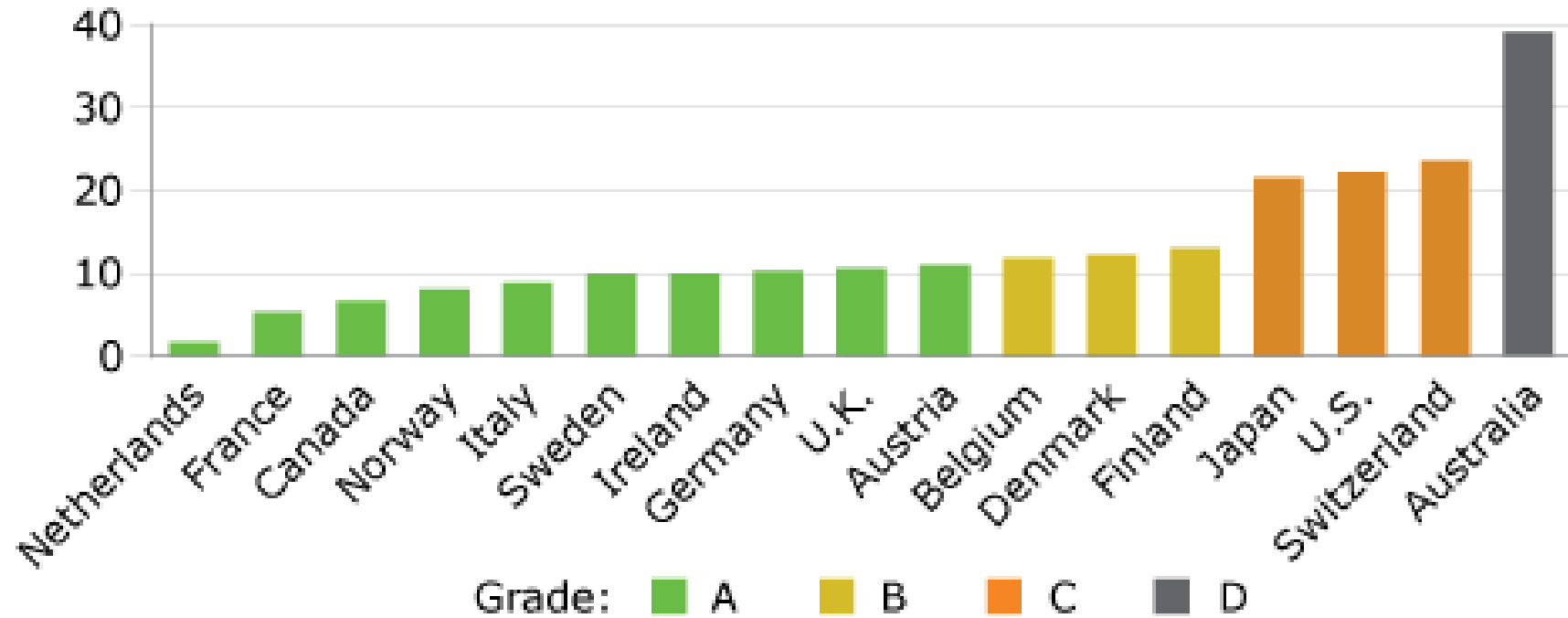
It expresses our compassion.

It makes us feel good about ourselves.

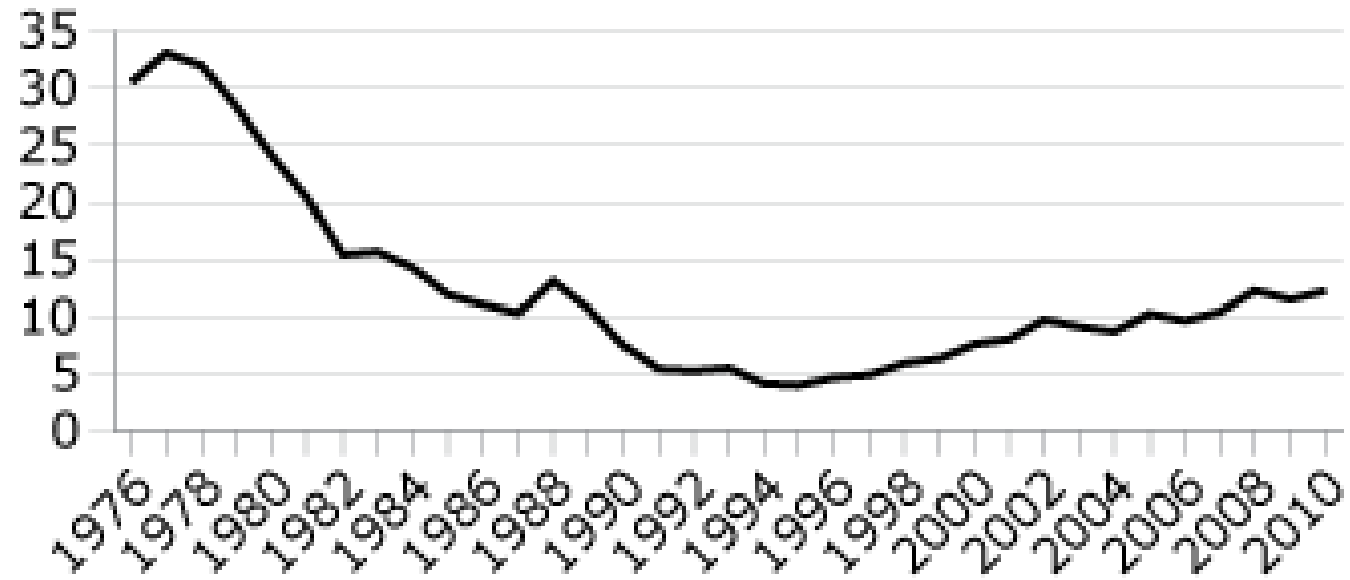
It's good public policy.

But Tommy would not be happy with how things have turned out.

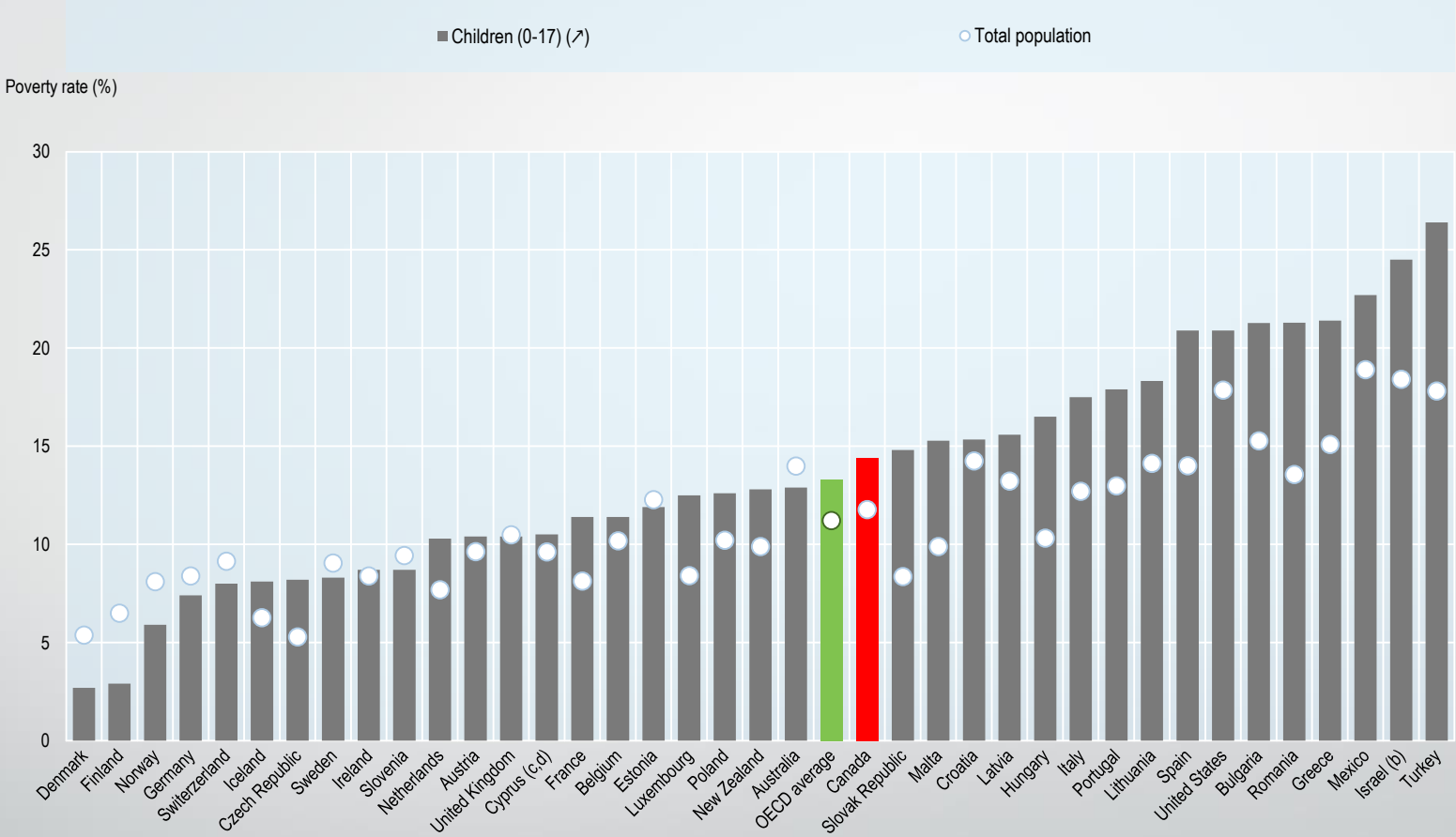
Elderly Poverty Rate, Late 2000s (per cent)



Canada's Elderly Poverty Rate (per cent)



Child Poverty Rates in OECD Countries



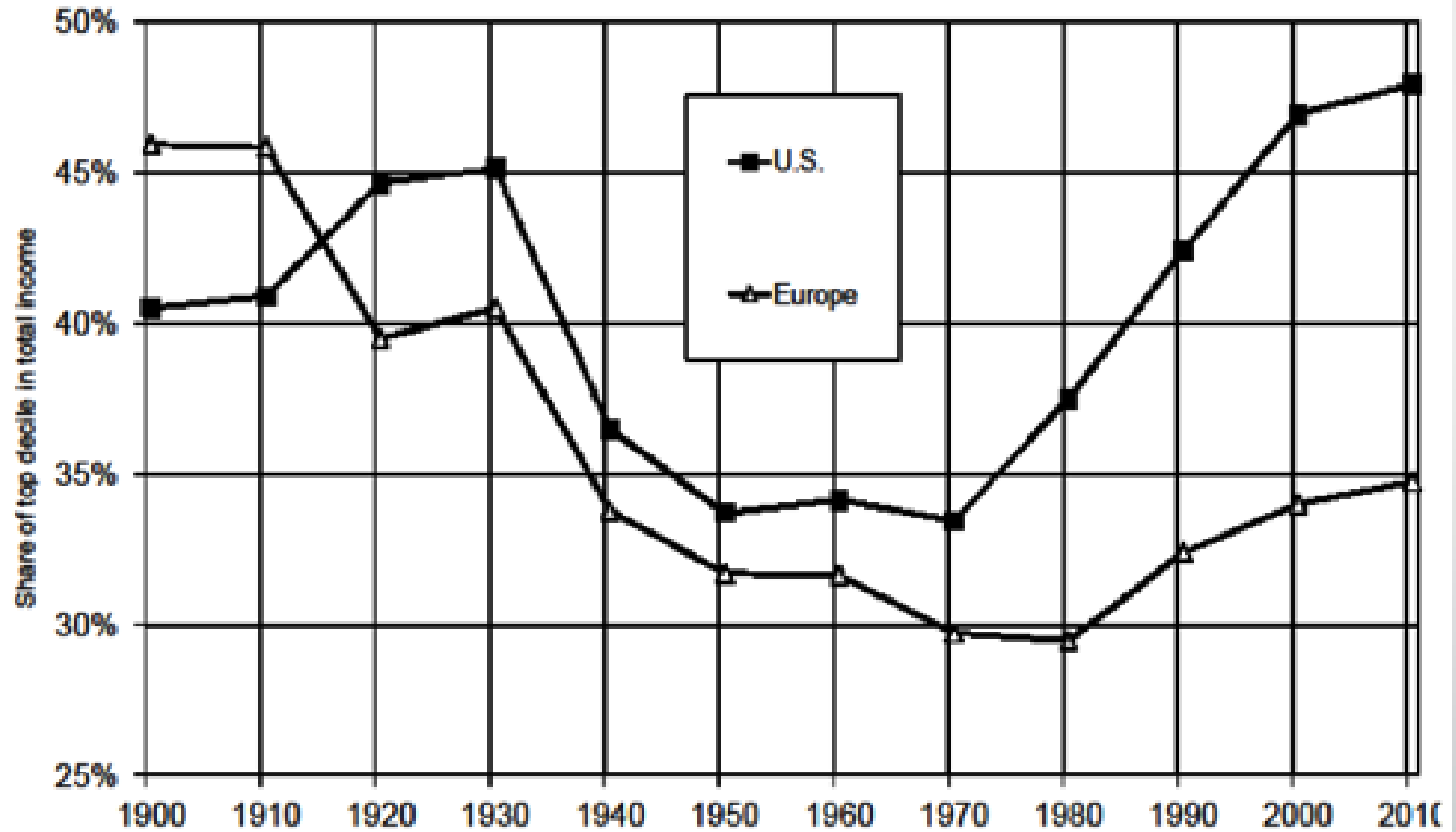
Equity and Health Commissions and Task Forces

- National Forum on Health (1994-97)
- Fyke Commission, SK, 2000-2001
- Romanow Commission, 2002
- Health Council of Canada 2003-14
- General trends:
 - Population health focus weakened over time
 - New money poured into health care 1997-2010
 - SDOH got lost in concerns about health care access

Why Are Inequalities Rising?

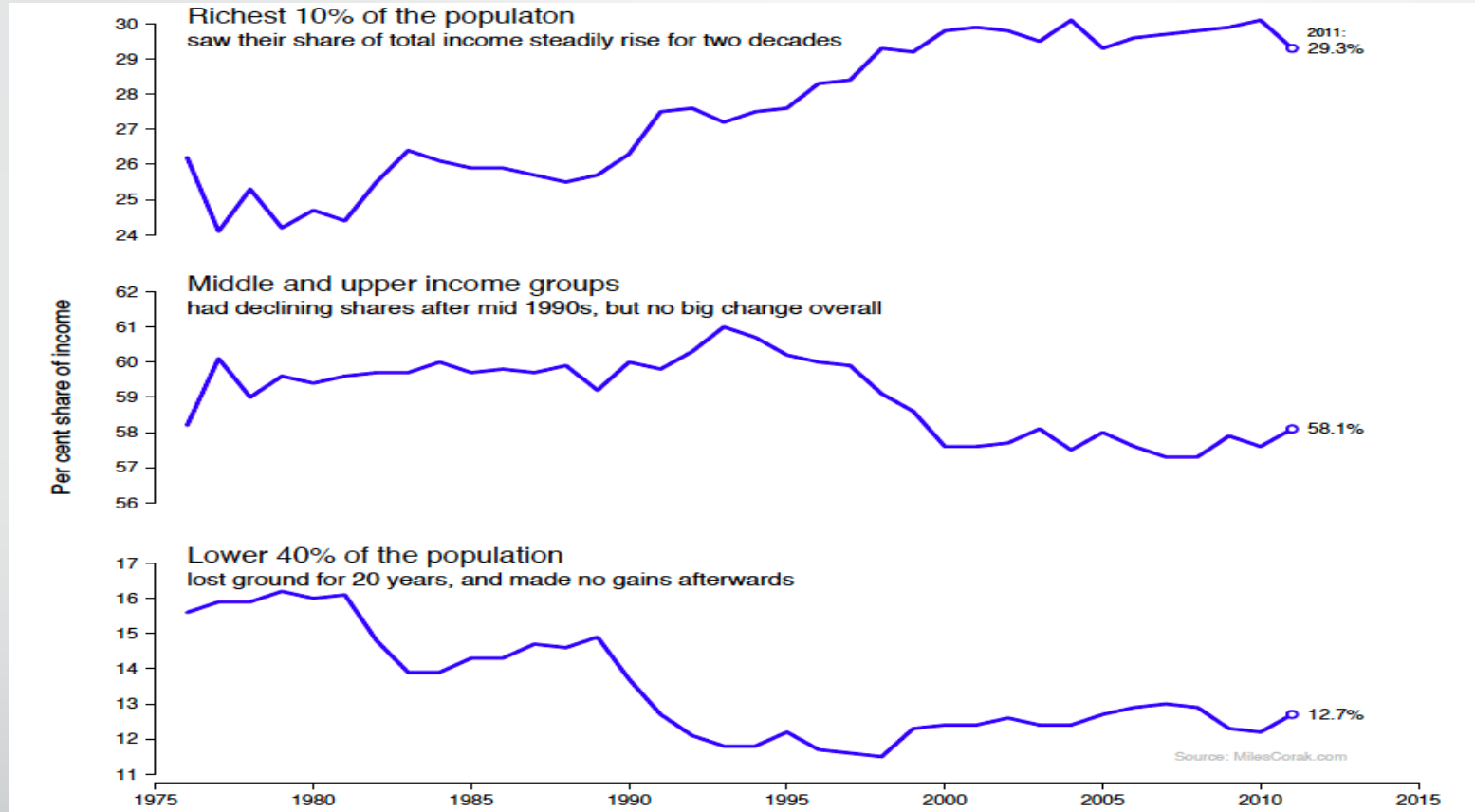
- Neoconservative assault on “big government”
- Globalization and the decline of national sovereignty
- Decline in the blue collar middle class
- “Financialization” of the economy
- Concentration of wealth in real estate
- Persistent failure to fix health care

Figure 9.8. Income inequality: Europe vs. the United States, 1900-2010



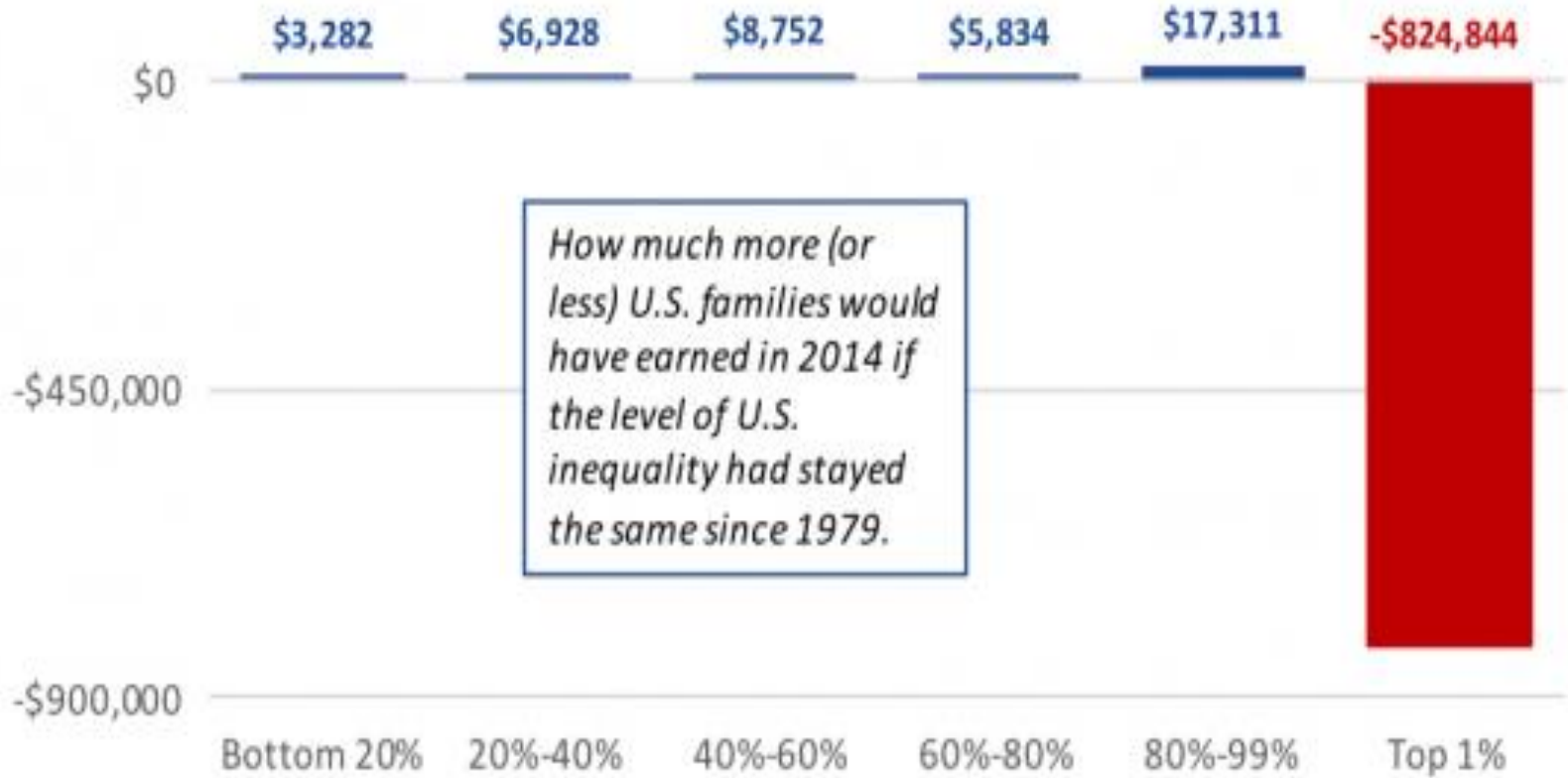
The top decile income share was higher in Europe than in the U.S. in 1900-1910; it is a lot higher in the U.S. in 2000-2010. Sources and series: see piketty.pse.ens.fr/capital21c.

Share of Total Income by Income Category



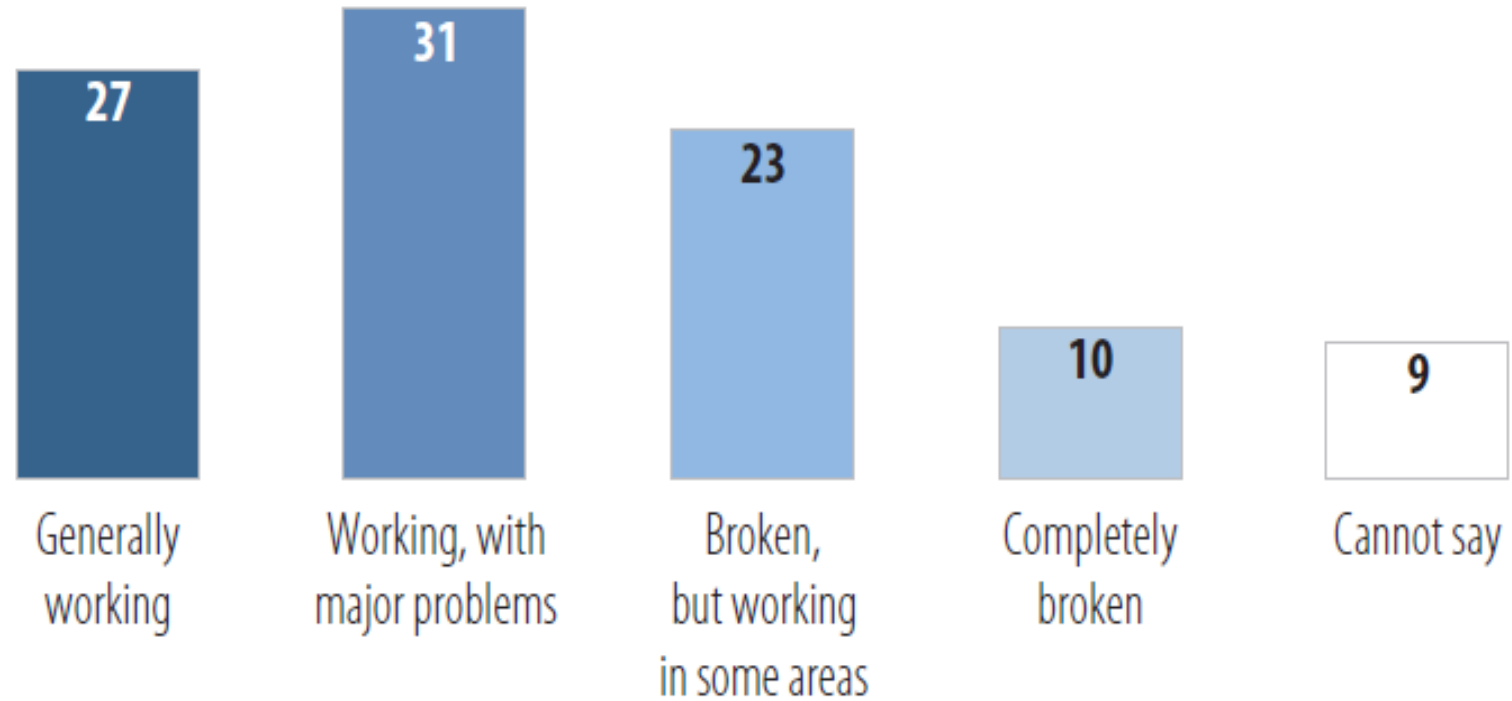
Source: Miles Corak, Univ. of Ottawa,
<http://www.canadianbusiness.com/economy/canadas-50-most-important-economic-charts-for-2016/>

U.S. Income Distribution if We Had Not Had 35 Years of Inequality

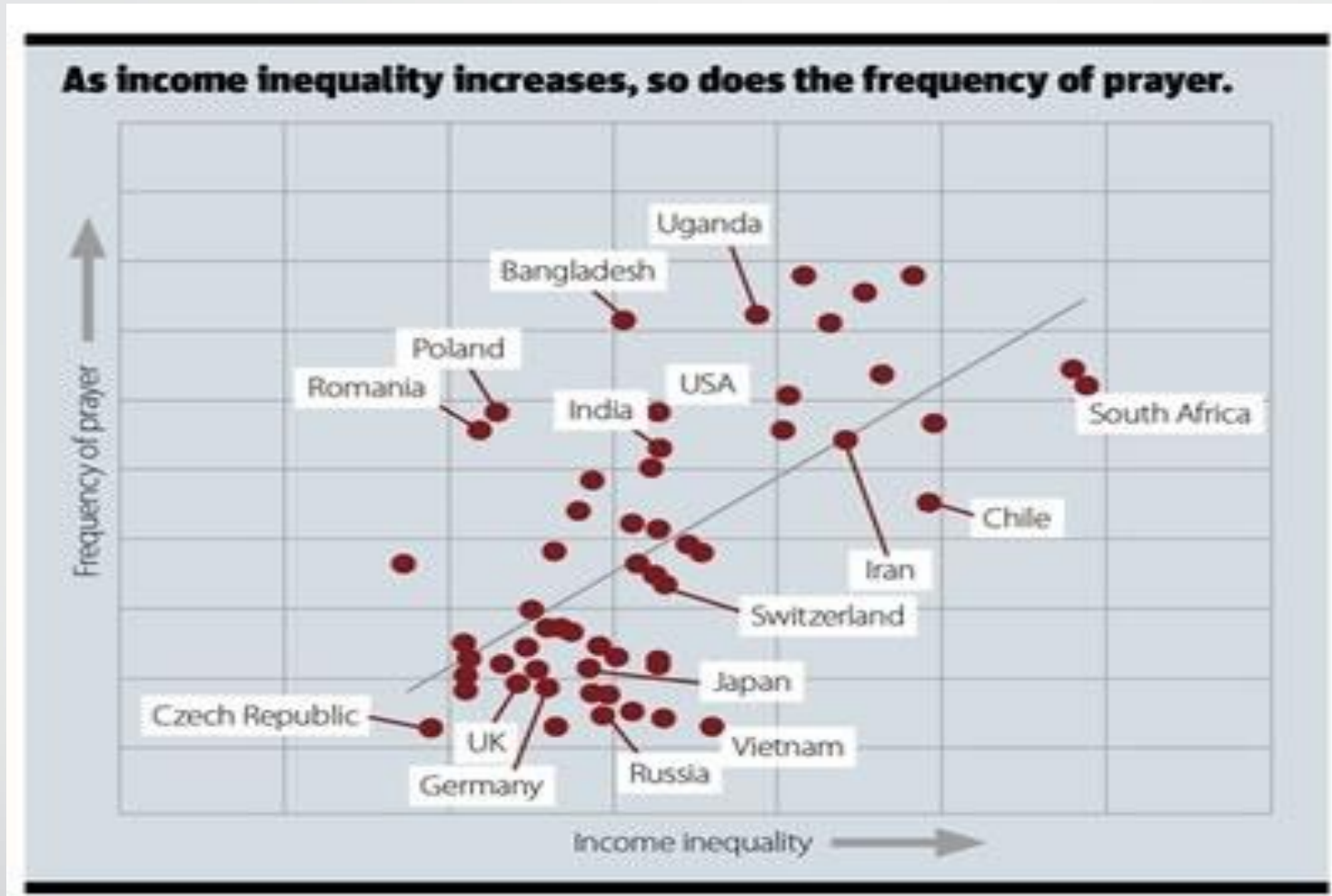


How much more (or less) U.S. families would have earned in 2014 if the level of U.S. inequality had stayed the same since 1979.

Are governments in Canada working?



Source: Environics Institute, Canadian Public Opinion on Governance and the Public Service, Dec. 2014



Source:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/quora/why-is-religion-more-popu_b_1771347.html












Some Hypotheses About The Lack of Fundamental Commitment to Disparities Reduction

- As long as Canadian health care performs poorly, the middle class will not turn its attention to equity
- Canadians invest a disproportionately high share of their solidarity in medicare compared to European countries
- Canadians believe governments have an expenditure problem rather than a revenue problem
- Canadians are content with serious gaps in social programs (universal child care, expansion of medicare)

EXHIBIT ES-1. OVERALL RANKING

COUNTRY RANKINGS

Top 2*
Middle
Bottom 2*

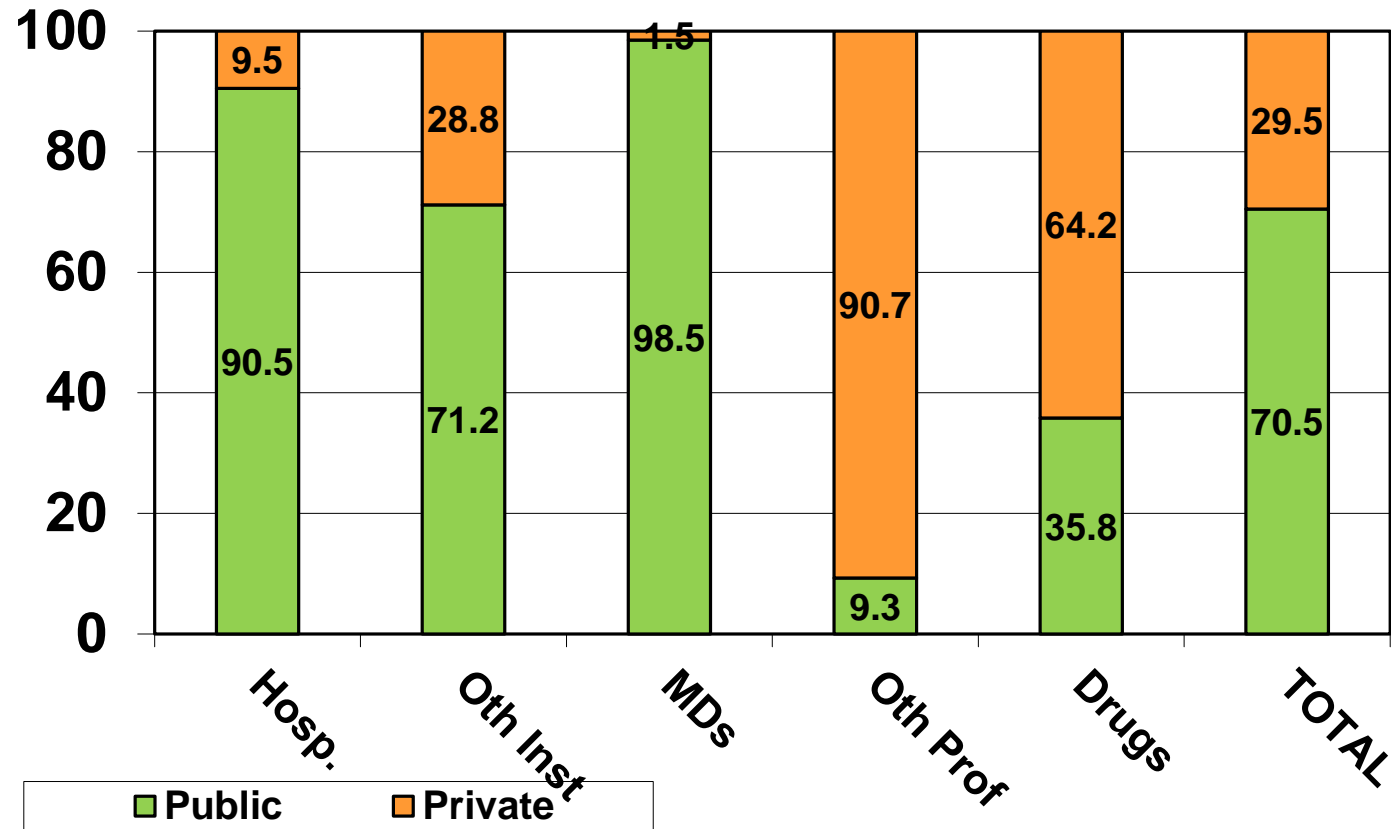
											
	AUS	CAN	FRA	GER	NETH	NZ	NOR	SWE	SWIZ	UK	US
OVERALL RANKING (2013)	4	10	9	5	5	7	7	3	2	1	11
Quality Care	2	9	8	7	5	4	11	10	3	1	5
Effective Care	4	7	9	6	5	2	11	10	8	1	3
Safe Care	3	10	2	6	7	9	11	5	4	1	7
Coordinated Care	4	8	9	10	5	2	7	11	3	1	6
Patient-Centered Care	5	8	10	7	3	6	11	9	2	1	4
Access	8	9	11	2	4	7	6	4	2	1	9
Cost-Related Problem	9	5	10	4	8	6	3	1	7	1	11
Timeliness of Care	6	11	10	4	2	7	8	9	1	3	5
Efficiency	4	10	8	9	7	3	4	2	6	1	11
Equity	5	9	7	4	8	10	6	1	2	2	11
Healthy Lives	4	8	1	7	5	9	6	2	3	10	11
Health Expenditures/Capita, 2011**	\$3,800	\$4,522	\$4,118	\$4,495	\$5,099	\$3,182	\$5,669	\$3,925	\$5,643	\$3,405	\$8,508

Notes: * Includes ties. ** Expenditures shown in \$US PPP (purchasing power parity); Australian \$ data are from 2010.

Source: Calculated by The Commonwealth Fund based on 2011 International Health Policy Survey of Sicker Adults; 2012 International Health Policy Survey of Primary Care Physicians; 2013 International Health Policy Survey; Commonwealth Fund *National Scorecard 2011*; World Health Organization; and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *OECD Health Data, 2013* (Paris: OECD, Nov. 2013).

Source: Davis K et al, Commonwealth Fund,
http://www.commonwealthfund.org/~media/files/publications/fund-report/2014/jun/1755_davis_mirror_mirror_2014.pdf

Public and Private Health Spending, Canada, 2014 est., Selected Categories

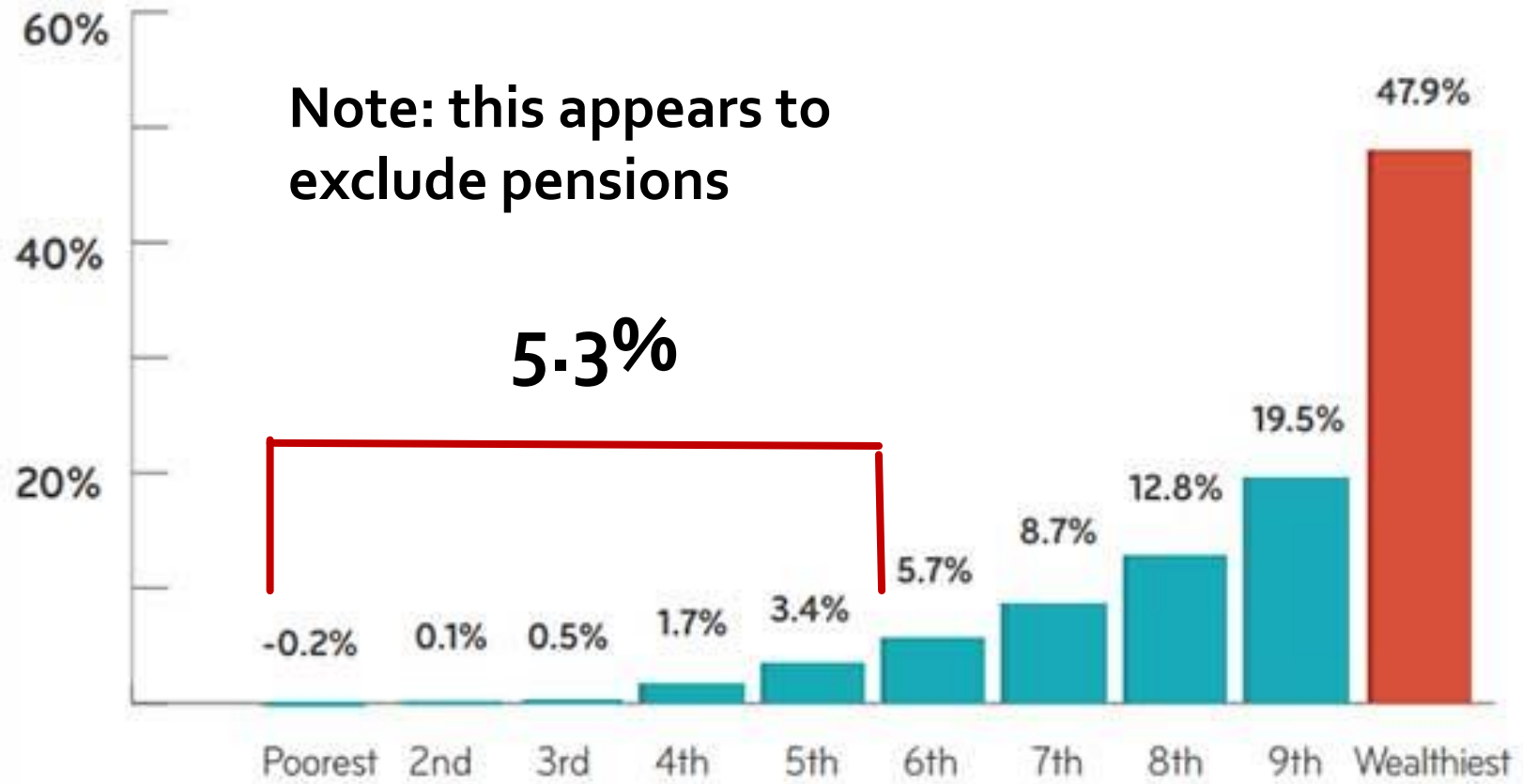


Source: Canadian Institute for Health Information, National Health Expenditure Trends 1975-2014, http://www.cihi.ca/web/resource/en/nhex_2014_report_en.pdf

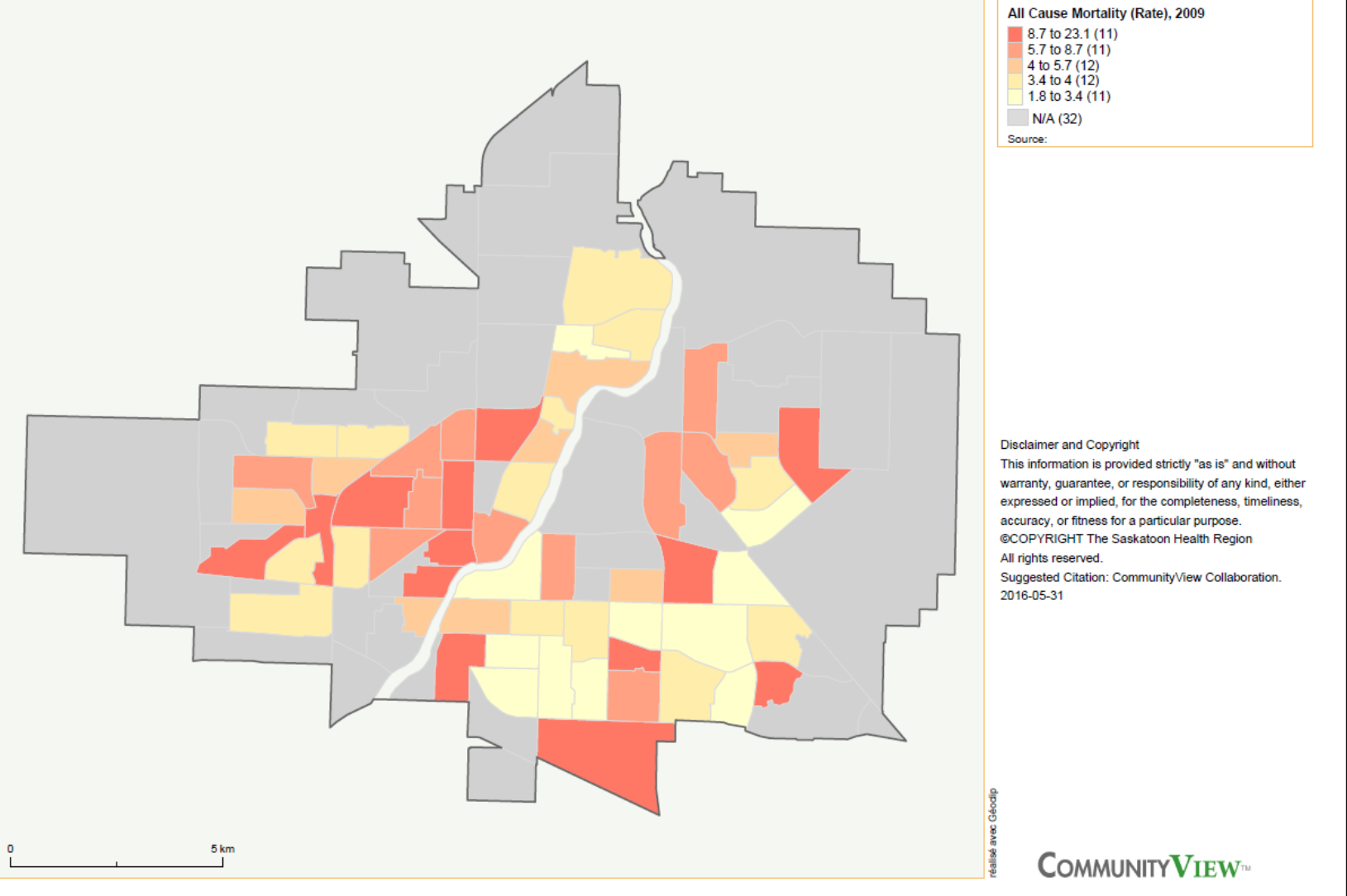
Are Better Measures the Foundation for Taking Equity More Seriously?

- Implies that we have inadequately described the extent and consequences of inequities
- Implies that public preferences and public policy are based on or modifiable by systematic evidence reviews
- It's great to develop new measures (e.g., Canadian Index of Well-Being instead of GDP growth; neighbourhood-level reports)
- There are important issues, e.g., the extent of disaggregation (quintiles? deciles? Why do we look at the top 1% and .1% but not the bottom 1% or .1%?)

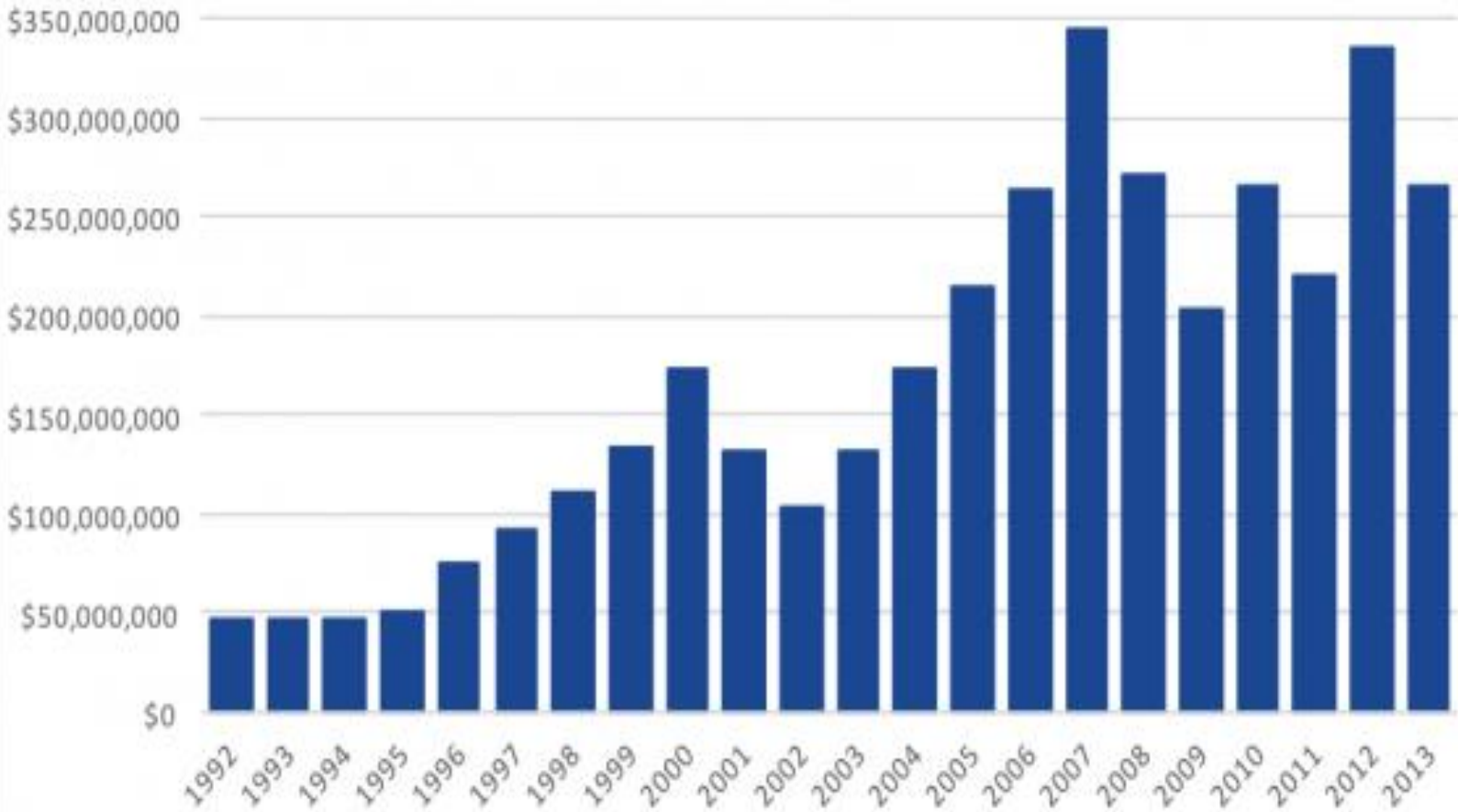
TABLE 1 – DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH IN CANADA BY DECILE, 2012



All-cause mortality by neighbourhood, Saskatoon, 2009



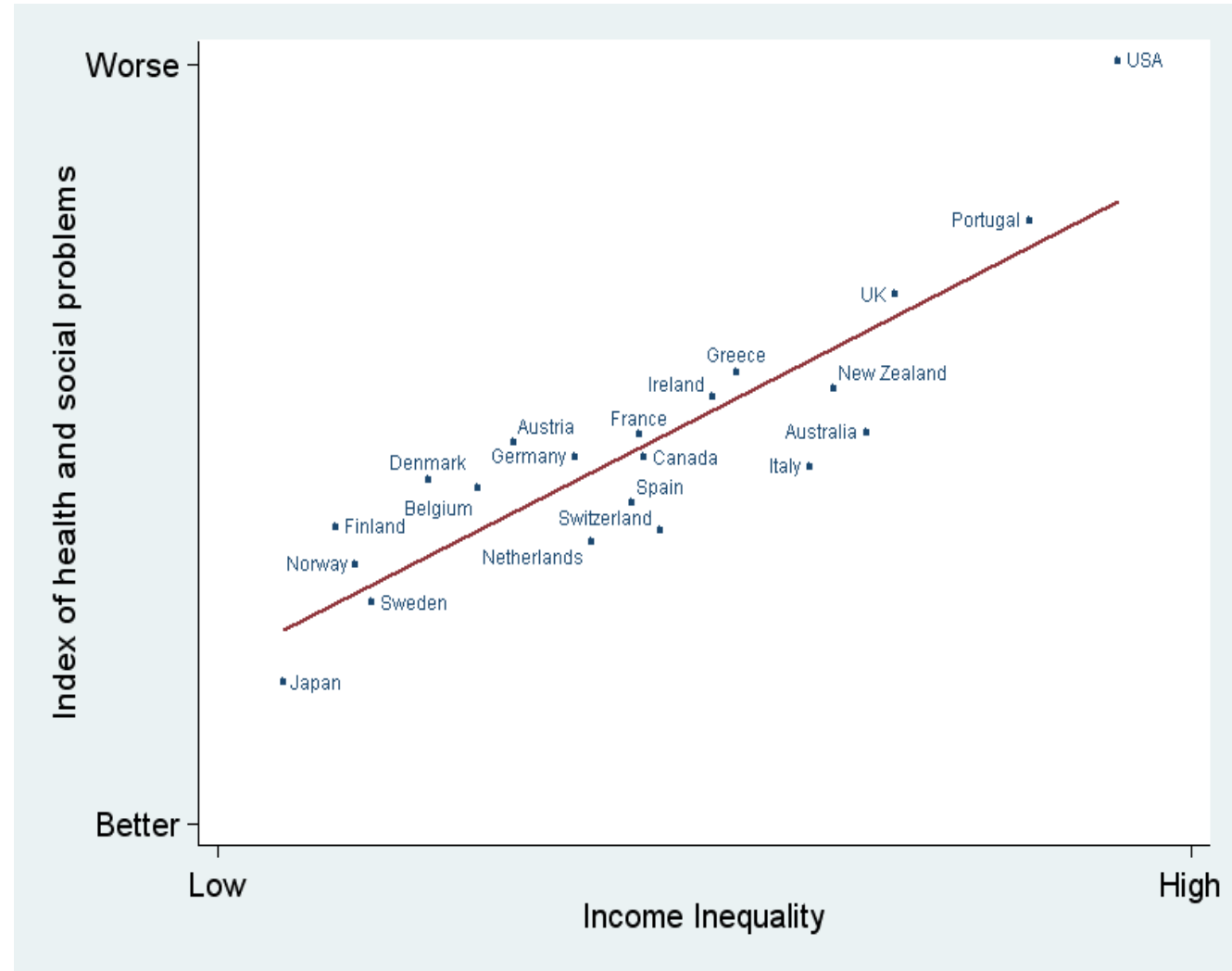
Average Income of Top 400 U.S. Earners, 1992-2013



Health and Social Problems are Worse in More Unequal Countries

Index of:

- Life expectancy
- Math & Literacy
- Infant mortality
- Homicides
- Imprisonment
- Teenage births
- Trust
- Obesity
- Mental illness – incl. drug & alcohol addiction
- Social mobility



Source: Wilkinson & Pickett, *The Spirit Level* (2009)

Possible Strategies to Accelerate Progress

- Put dollar figures on the costs of inequities
- Use language that appeals to the politically dominant classes
 - Productivity
 - Upward mobility
 - Capacity-building
- Cultivate the media – build relationships and fan their interest

Possible Strategies (2)

- Encourage voting and political participation
- It's good to be evidence-based and transparent – but also level that playing field!
- Don't shy away from values-based discussion – equity is normative, not algebra
- Take advantage of a world in flux – all institutions are on probation and new conversations are possible (see: Sanders)
- Pay attention to scaling up success – mainstream through policy

A Canadian Dignity Index?

- If the key to a successful life centers on meaning, inclusion, respect, and self-worth, shouldn't these be core indicators? For example:
 - Do you feel you have something worthwhile to do on most days?
 - Do you earn as much as you need to support the standard of living you want?
 - Do you like who you are?
 - Do you have a fair chance of becoming who you want to be?

Reasons for Optimism

- Phenomenal on-the-ground social capital (amazing stories at this conference)
- World-wide backlash against the concentration of wealth
- Growing awareness of the limits to health care effectiveness (Choosing Wisely, etc.)
- Growing social accountability movement among professions
- Dynamic and progressive civic politics

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Your Turn