

This handout summarizes the distribution of income in the United States, drawing on 2022 data from the Survey of Consumer Finances (SCF). The study defines income as a comprehensive measure of all resources received by a household within a period, including earnings plus capital income and government transfers. In the SCF, income is measured including transfers but before taxes.

Quantiles

Table 1 reports the distribution in numbers by displaying the quantiles of the income distribution. Each quantile describes the dollar amount so that the corresponding fraction of households has fewer dollars. For example, the 60th quantile of the income distribution indicates the dollar amount so that 60% of the population have less annual income. The median (“typical”) household within each distribution is at the 50th percentile.

Table 1: Quantiles of the 2022 Income Distribution

Percentile	Income (\$1000s)
0	−254
1	5.4
5	14.1
10	20.4
20	31.3
40	54.6
50	70.3
60	90.8
80	151.3
90	248.8
95	391.5
99	1,197.7
100	565,247.7

We see that half the population make less than \$70k which is 40% more than the comparable threshold for earnings. The top 10% earn more than a quarter million and the top 1% more than 1.2 million, about 17 times the median.

Inequality Measures

Table 2 summarizes distributional properties on income using standard inequality measures. The Gini coefficient is a statistical measure of economic inequality, typically measuring income or wealth distribution within a population. It ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 represents perfect equality (everyone has the same wealth) and 1 represents perfect inequality (one person holds all the wealth). The Gini coefficient for income in the United States for 2022 is equal to 0.61. In comparison, the Gini coefficient for wealth equals 0.83, which indicates that wealth is more unequally distributed than income.

Table 2: Concentration and Skewness of the 2022 Distribution

	Income
Gini Index	0.61
Location of the Mean (pctile)	78
Mean-to-Median Ratio	2.02
99–50 Ratio	17.05
90–50 Ratio	3.54
50–30 Ratio	1.62

The lower five rows of Table 2 provide statistics describing distributional asymmetry. In symmetric distributions, the mean would appear at the 50th percentile (the median). Instead, we find the mean at the 78th percentiles for income, indicating pronounced right-skewness. The mean-to-median ratios quantify this asymmetry: 2.02 for income.

The final three rows detail the asymmetry distribution in more detail through percentile ratios relative to the median. The 99-50 ratio captures the distance between the very top and the middle: those at the 99th percentile have 17 times the income of median households. The 90-50 ratio shows that the top 10% have at least 3.5 times the income of the median. The 50-30 ratio reveals that median households possess 1.6 times the income of those at the 30th percentile.

Takeaway: Income in the US is starkly and asymmetrically distributed. The median household earns just under \$70k, yet the mean sits at the 78th percentile - pulled upward by extreme top incomes - with a mean-to-median ratio of 2. Those at the top 1% earn over \$1.2 million, roughly 17 times the median, while even the top 10% threshold is 3.5 times higher than the middle. A Gini coefficient of 0.61 confirms deep inequality, though still well below the 0.83 recorded for wealth, where concentration is even more severe.

For more information visit the Macro Inequality Lab: At the Macro Inequality Lab, we study how markets function, how institutions shape market outcomes, and how these forces interact to create or reduce inequality. Our research asks fundamental questions on the causes and consequences of inequality (<http://macro-inequality-lab.net>).

References
Kuhn, Moritz, and José-Víctor Ríos-Rull (May 2025). *Income and Wealth Inequality in the United States: An Update Including the 2022 Wave*.