

ECONOMY

US WEALTH BOOM, PRICE SHOCK COLLIDE



JEENAH MOON, REUTERS

People shop for groceries Aug. 26 in New York City. Most Americans are grappling with increasing costs of food, fuel, housing and more.

Top 1% gets richer, while rest of Americans feel pinch

HOWARD SCHNEIDER
Reuters

WASHINGTON — The U.S. is in the middle of a historic and costly technological revolution, with the artificial intelligence build-out driving a level of investment set to eclipse the previous telecommunications boom, as well as national projects like the construction of rail and highway networks.

The transformation spurred immense stock market gains that boosted household wealth across the economy, which arguably helped to keep consumer spending on track. However, with investment gains concentrated among the already rich, some Americans benefit more than others.

What’s been dubbed a crisis of affordability can still be seen in the rising cost of home ownership or the price of ground beef — a meaningful pinch for the great majority of households that derive most of their income from earnings rather than investments.

Ninety-nine percent of U.S. households

have cause to wonder what the AI market frenzy means for them. The rapid stock market gains in recent years were fastest for the top 1%: Between the end of former President Joe Biden’s administration and the second quarter of 2026, midway through Donald Trump’s final term, only the top 1% gained a bigger slice of the national wealth pie, according to Federal Reserve data.

From the 99th percentile down, the share grew smaller, the data show.

The lower 99% have not been left out entirely, though.

Household wealth jumped 16.5% from the end of the Biden administration through mid-2026, rising about \$26 trillion in absolute terms.

While less than half a trillion dollars of that went to the least-wealthy half of households, that still represented about a 10% gain.

The dichotomy — a rising share to the richest but rising wealth in general — is one

of the confounding aspects of the economy and prompted questions among economists over whether the country can grow sustainably if the division of wealth continues to get more skewed.

Sentiment remains sour, but U.S. households’ spending on goods and services continues to climb and, on a dollar basis, is rising faster than before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Economists looking for evidence of a “K shape” to the spending — with an upper leg coasting and a lower leg struggling — reached mixed conclusions.

Spending among wealthier households is strong, but research by major banks and places like the Richmond Federal Reserve indicate spending at the lower end of the income and wealth distribution is at least holding up. Studies of household credit by the New York Fed showed little evidence of a credit crisis yet among the less well off.

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US becomes main fuel supplier to Cuba, selling \$232M this year

Trump continues to block oil exports from other countries to island

NORA GÁMEZ TORRES
Miami Herald

U.S. companies exported \$231.7 million in fuel to private companies in Cuba from January through August 2026, making the United States the main fuel supplier to Cuba as the Trump administration continues to block oil shipments to the island’s government.

The Trump administration cut off Cuba’s oil supply this year, stopping shipments from Venezuela after the capture of President Nicolás Maduro in January and pressing Mexico to halt deliveries.

Fuel sales to Cuba were minimal until

February this year, when the Trump administration allowed U.S. fuel sales to Cuba’s private sector. They have grown so rapidly that, in August, fuel exports outpaced food exports to the island, according to data the New York-based U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council released recently. That month, food and agricultural exports totaled \$60.1 million, compared with \$74.8 million in fuels.

The U.S. Department of Energy also recently reported a large increase in exports of petroleum products to Cuba, mainly diesel and gasoline. However, the figure, a record 3.2 million barrels in July, does not align with the Council’s reported dollar value or with how the fuel is moved, loaded into special containers known as ISO tanks.



YAMIL LAGE, GETTY IMAGES

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A vehicle fills up with fuel at a gas station Jan. 28 in Havana, Cuba.