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Top Donors and Their Effect on Total Donations to 6 Main Federal Canadian Political Parties from 2016-2022 Inclusive

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In 2016, the limit for a donation/contribution by an individual to each party was \$1,525 (plus an additional \$1,525 combined total to the riding associations of each party); in 2017 it was \$1,550; in 2018 it was \$1,575; in 2019 it was \$1,600; in 2020 it was \$1,625; in 2021 it was \$1,650, and; in 2022 it was \$1,675.

Chart 10 below shows the average percentage of donors for each of the main six federal political parties who donated more than \$1,000 annually (i.e. each party's top donors) from 2016 to 2022, and the average percentage of total donations they provided to each party. To see Democracy Watch's analysis of all donations, including donations of less than \$1,000, and detailed donation statistics set out in Charts 1-9, [click here](#).

As the figures in Chart 10 show, donors who donated \$1,000 or more during 2016 to 2022 made up only one to seven percent of all donors to each party (average was 3.25 percent), but they were responsible for six to 11 times (7.8 times on average) the percentage of total donations as they represented as a percentage of total donors. Arguably all of the parties received a significant amount of their funding from these top donors.

Chart 10: Average Percentage of Donors Donating More Than \$1,000 to the Six Main Political Parties and Average Percentage of Total Donations They Provided During 2016-2022 Calendar Years¹

	Liberal	Conservative	Bloc	NDP	Green	PPC ²
Average % of donors donating \$1,000 or more	6.8%	4.7	1.24%	2.72%	2.33%	1.74%
Avg. % of total donations received from these donors	42.3%	28.57%	10.9%	19.36%	17.24%	19.87%
Avg. total donated by donors of \$1,000 or more	\$6,957,922 (out of \$16.48 million average total donated annually)	\$6,658,993 (out of \$23.18 million average total donated annually)	\$151,875 (out of \$1.27 million average total donated annually)	\$1,260,660 (out of \$6.43 million average total donated annually)	\$580,401 (out of \$3.36 million average total donated annually)	\$385,114 (out of \$1.87 million average total donated annually)

It should be noted, as Chart 10 shows, that the Liberals and Conservatives had two to three times more donors who donate \$1,000 or more on average annually than the other four main parties and, as a result, they receive a much higher percentage of donations from those donors. Overall on average, donors who donated \$1,000 or more donated 23 percent of the total amount raised annually by the six main parties from 2016 to 2022.

¹ Thank you to Cameron Flanagan and Justin Myers for their assistance in these calculations from the annual data available in Elections Canada's Registered Party Financial Returns, online: <https://www.elections.ca/WPAPPS/WPF/EN/PP/Index>.

² The People's Party of Canada was established and registered in August 2018, and it became the fifth main party in 2021 after it won a higher percentage of the popular vote than the Green Party, so the statistics for the PPC are based only on donation data from the calendar years 2021 and 2022.

It could be argued that the Bloc receiving just under 11 percent of its annual funding on average from donors donating \$1,000 or more is not “significant”. However, it is a significant amount because, based on the estimated median annual donation of \$77 to the six main federal political parties from 2016 to 2022, each party would have had to attract 1,972 (Bloc) to 5,001 (PPC) to 7,537 (Greens) to 16,372 (NDP) up to 86,480 (Conservatives) and 90,362 (Liberals) more donors donating \$77 each annually in order to raise the amounts that they raised from the small percentage of their donors who donated \$1,000 or more annually. The time and costs that each party would incur in outreach to attract those additional \$77 donors should also be taken into account when considering how significant these \$1,000-plus donors are to each party.

The significance of top donors for each party is equally clear when the percentage of donors who donated the maximum legal amount annually is considered, as Chart 12 below shows.³ As the figures in Chart 11 show, the donors who donated the legal maximum amount annually from 2016 to 2022 were only 0.2 to two percent of donors to any of the parties during any of these seven years, but they donated two to 16 percent of total donations in each party. In other words, they donated eight to 10 times as much as they represent as a percentage of total donors (NOTE: the Conservatives consistently had the most maximum-amount donors donating the highest percentage of their total donations).

To give some other related statistics from other studies of top donors in Election Canada’s donation data that various media outlets have undertaken, the *Globe and Mail* reported in 2016 that only 790 people (0.85 percent of all donors to the Liberals) donated \$1,500 or more in 2015, and in 2014 only 522 people (0.68 percent out of 77,064 total donors) donated \$1,200 or more (the amount needed to attend a Laurier Club event).⁴

³ Thank you to Cameron Flanagan for his assistance in these calculations for both Chart 1 and Chart 2 from the annual data available in Elections Canada’s Registered Party Financial Returns, *supra* note 290.

⁴ Robert Fife and Steven Chase, “Donation stats indicate Liberal fundraisers are exclusive events,” October 31, 2016, *Globe and Mail*, online: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/donation-stats-indicate->

According to research conducted by then-Canadian Press reporter Christian Paas-Lang (now with the CBC), in 2018 at least 20 people donated the maximum amount allowed to both the Liberals and Conservatives, most of them executives in big businesses.⁵ While it is difficult to determine the exact characteristics of many of these top donors, a study of donations from 2007-2011 found that there is evidence that they live in wealthier neighbourhoods, and more likely have family members who also donate.⁶

Another study of donations from 2015-2020 to federal parties, electoral district associations (EDAs), and 2019 federal election candidates found similar evidence, as 15 of the 17 electoral districts with total donations greater than 95 percent of all districts also had higher median household incomes compared to the Canadian average in 2016.⁷ The average amount raised per district during this time period was \$853,000, while the top 17 ridings' donations ranged from \$2.1 million total up to \$5.9 million. The four ridings that had the highest level of donations during this time period had exponentially higher total donations than the average, with Ottawa-Centre at \$5.9 million, University-Rosedale at \$5.4 million, Toronto-St. Paul's at \$4.1 million and Calgary Centre at \$4 million.

[liberal-fundraisers-are-exclusive-events/article32588273](https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/morneau-fundraiser-one-in-list-of-liberal-cash-for-access-events/article32450347). As well, the Liberals held at least 20 small, high-priced, invite-only fundraising events in 2016 which some lobbyists attended. Robert Fife and Steven Chase, "Morneau fundraiser one in list of Liberal cash-for-access events," October 20, 2016, *Globe and Mail*, online: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/morneau-fundraiser-one-in-list-of-liberal-cash-for-access-events/article32450347>.

⁵ Christian Paas-Lang, "At least 20 people donated max to both Liberals and Conservatives in 2018," (July 29, 2019) *The Canadian Press / CTVNews.ca*, online: <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/at-least-20-people-donated-max-to-both-liberals-and-conservatives-in-2018-1.4527435>.

⁶ Brianna Carmichael and Paul Howe, "Political Donations and Democratic Equality in Canada," (May 2014), Vol. 37(1) *Canadian Parliamentary Review* 16, online: http://www.revparl.ca/37/1/37n1e_14_printversion.pdf and <http://www.revparlcan.ca/series/vol-37-no-1-spring/>.

⁷ Kayla Zhu and Michael Wong, "Donations from affluent ridings grease the wheels of political access, new analysis finds," (January 18, 2023), *LocalNewsDataHub.ca*, online: <https://localnewsdatahub.ca/2023/01/donations-from-affluent-urban-ridings-grease-the-wheels-of-politics-new-analysis-suggests>. The study was undertaken jointly with the Investigative Journalism Foundation (IJF), and the article can also be seen at: <https://theijf.org/donations-from-affluent-urban-ridings-grease-the-wheels-of-politics-new-analysis-suggests>. See also related articles on the *LocalNewsDataHub.ca* site at: <https://localnewsdatahub.ca/donating-to-the-cause>.

Chart 11: Percentage of Donors Donating Maximum Legal Amount to the Five Main Political Parties and Percentage of Total Donations They Provided During 2016-2022 Calendar Years

	Liberal	Conservative	Bloc	NDP	Greens	PPC
% (#) of donors donating max. in 2016 (\$1,525 was max allowed)	0.48% (399)	1.61% (1,333)	0.16% (9)	0.58% (154)	0.42% (75)	n/a
% (total) of total donations received from these donors in 2016	3.94% (\$608,475)	11.14% (\$2,032,825)	2.09% (\$13,725)	4.35% (\$234,850)	4.04% (\$114,375)	n/a
% (#) of donors donating max. in 2017 (\$1,550 was max allowed)	0.17% (109)	1.52% (1,439)	0.06% (4)	0.23% (88)	0.43% (64)	n/a
% (total) of total donations received from these donors in 2017	1.22% (\$166,225)	11.83% (\$2,230,450)	0.88% (\$6,200)	2.80% (\$136,400)	3.96% (\$99,200)	n/a
% (#) of donors donating max. in 2018 (\$1,575 was max allowed)	0.26% (175)	2.21% (2,299)	0.21% (9)	0.76% (191)	0.70% (117)	n/a
% (total) of total donations received from these donors in 2018	1.73% (\$275,625)	14.95% (\$3,620,925)	2.61% (\$14,175)	5.88% (\$300,825)	5.89% (\$184,275)	n/a

% (#) of donors donating max. in 2019 (\$1,600 was max allowed)	0.37% (317)	2.56% (3,163)	0.37% (47)	1.17% (458)	1.05% (379)	0.64% (147)
% (total) of total donations received from these donors in 2019	2.46% (\$507,200)	16.40% (\$5,060,800)	4.15% (\$75,200)	9.08% (\$732,800)	9.37% (\$606,400)	11.87% (\$235,200)
% (#) of donors donating max. in 2020 (\$1,625 was max allowed)	0.28% (183)	2.23% (2,024)	0.66% (67)	0.66% (220)	0.39% (101)	0.48% (44)
% (total) of total donations received from these donors in 2020	2.23% (\$334,153.27)	15.94% (\$3,292,275)	6.90% (\$108,875)	5.95% (\$363,023.15)	4.78% (\$164,125)	7.42% (\$71,500)
% (#) of donors donating max. in 2021 (\$1,650 was max allowed)	0.20% (154)	1.98% (2,186)	0.90% (102)	0.98% (463)	0.64% (118)	0.85% (170)
% (total) of total donations received from these donors in 2021	1.40% (\$254,100)	15.91% (\$3,661,550)	8.14% (\$168,300)	8.28% (\$763,950)	5.53% (\$194,700)	9.53% (\$280,500)

% (#) of donors donating max. in 2022 (\$1,675 was max allowed)	0.17% (93)	2.19% (2,088)	0.83% (72)	0.54% (160)	0.75% (73)	0.69% (79)
% (total) of total donations received from these donors in 2022	1.06% (\$155,775)	13.00% (\$3,445,200)	7.66% (\$120,600)	4.28% (\$268,000)	6.03% (\$122,275)	8.33% (\$132)