



Fraser of Allander Institute and Tax Justice UK



Politicians' Perspectives on
Wealth Taxation and the Barriers
to Reform in the UK

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Disclaimer

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Executive Summary

This report examines politicians' perspectives on wealth taxation and the barriers to reform in the UK. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with parliamentarians across the political spectrum from England, Wales and Scotland, the research explores attitudes towards a range of potential tax reforms, including a 2% annual wealth tax, equalising capital gains tax rates with income tax and removing loopholes, extending the scope of National Insurance Contributions to include investment income, and council tax reform. In addition, interviews examined participants' views on the barriers to support for such reforms, political dynamics and public attitudes surrounding wealth taxation, as well as the likelihood of and potential conditions for overcoming these barriers.

The findings demonstrate that political reticence towards wealth taxation cannot be explained by any single obstacle. Instead, this research found that support for greater taxes on wealth - or lack thereof - is shaped by an interconnected set of political, economic, administrative, communicative and ideological considerations. Importantly, the findings reveal a distinction between supporting greater taxation of wealth in principle and willingness to advocate for particular reforms in practice. This suggests that the barriers to politicians' support for wealth taxation can generally be better understood as barriers to political feasibility than to wealth taxation itself, particularly among the centre and centre left of the political spectrum. Six principal themes emerged from the interviews.²

1. Economic Uncertainty and Policy Credibility

Uncertainty surrounding the economic consequences and policy credibility of wealth taxation emerged as a constraint on political support. Participants raised concerns about the potential impacts of higher levels of wealth taxation on economic growth, investment and behaviour including 'capital flight', as well as uncertainty around tax revenue raising potential and how governments would spend these funds. Importantly, this barrier was often not characterised as certainty that these negative consequences would occur, but instead the political difficulty of supporting reforms while substantial uncertainty remained. Participants therefore frequently regarded a stronger evidence base as necessary both to establish the effectiveness of proposed policies and to enable politicians in support of such policies to defend their position with confidence and credibility.

2. Administrative Feasibility and Policy Design

Participants identified practical challenges surrounding the administrative feasibility of wealth taxation, including valuation of assets, determination of appropriate thresholds, liquidity, enforcement and compliance, alongside concerns about whether HMRC possesses sufficient capacity and resources to effectively administer more complex forms of wealth taxation. Findings also reveal that ideological support for greater taxation of wealth in principle did not necessarily translate into support for particular policy designs. Detailed proposals perceived as administratively workable were considerably easier for politicians to support. The research therefore highlights policy design as an important intermediary between general support for greater taxation of wealth and political endorsement of concrete reform.

3. Political Dynamics, Incentives and Institutional Constraints

The findings suggest that electoral and party-political incentives can create significant barriers to politicians advocating for wealth tax reform, including among those who may be supportive of greater taxation of wealth in principle.

² All six of these themes came through strongly in the interviews. We have not ranked themes in terms of priority or emphasis as this is not commonplace with thematic analysis. Findings on political differences across barriers and implications on overcoming barriers are laid out lower down in the Executive Summary, in the 'Key Findings' and 'Conclusion & Discussion' sections of the report.

Participants highlighted concerns about electoral consequences, political attacks and individual career progression, alongside the influence of party loyalty and the position of party leadership. Further, institutional features of the political system itself were considered a constraining factor to support.

For instance, short electoral cycles were viewed as problematic for major changes to the tax system, as the benefits of policies may take longer to become visible than their immediate political costs, thereby leading to concerns that such reforms would leave a party open to opponent attacks and ultimately electoral risk. Conversely, strong and vocal leadership support, greater intra-party agreement and cross-party alignment were seen as capable of reducing the political risks associated with reform and paving the way for increased political support.

4. Ideology, Values and Competing Visions of Society

Political support for wealth taxation was also shaped by deeper ideological beliefs and positions concerning wealth accumulation, redistribution, meritocracy and the appropriate role of the state. Some participants expressed views that framed existing wealth inequalities as the inevitable outcome of a capitalist system, and high levels of wealth as the legitimate reward for individual effort, entrepreneurship and economic contribution, with greater taxation therefore perceived as punitive towards success and aspiration. Others emphasised the starkness of wealth inequality and regressive nature of the tax system. These participants tended to regard greater taxation of wealth as a legitimate means to fund public services and address social and economic inequalities.

These competing understandings shaped whether wealth taxation was perceived as a tool to promote greater fairness and social good, or as an unjustified intervention that could penalise aspiration and undermine economic growth. The findings therefore suggest that some barriers to wealth taxation extend beyond concerns about the effectiveness or feasibility of particular policies, and reflect more fundamental beliefs and disagreements over the distribution of wealth, the meaning of economic fairness and the appropriate role of the state in addressing inequality.

5. Public Opinion, Public Communication and Media Narratives

Perceptions of public opinion strongly influenced participants' views on the political risks associated with wealth taxation. While many participants highlighted widespread public support for wealth taxation, others suggested that limited public understanding - of wealth inequality and tax policy, alongside misconceptions about who would be affected by particular reforms - could undermine support. The framing of wealth taxation was therefore considered particularly important. Participants in support of greater taxes on wealth frequently advocated for moving away from narratives focused principally on taking wealth from 'the rich' towards a more positive account of what additional taxation could provide for the wider population, including improved public services, investment, and greater economic equality. Further, media narratives were perceived as important in shaping public understandings of wealth taxation and its potential consequences, and often seen as politically biased and 'anti-tax'. The findings suggest that public opinion is not simply an external constraint to which politicians respond, but is itself shaped by political communication, media discourse and the willingness of political actors to make the case for reform.

6. Power, Vested Interest and Elite Influence

Participants also identified imbalances in political and economic access, resource and influence as a key factor in shaping the environment in which wealth tax reform is considered by politicians. Wealthy elites and business interests were seen to possess greater capacity to influence political decision making through lobbying, investment decisions, and access to media platforms, as well as the potential 'capital flight' risk they pose.

Some participants also reflected on the comparatively affluent socioeconomic positions of political actors themselves and the social distance this can create from the economic circumstances and hardships experienced by much of the population.

However, elite influence was not viewed as uniformly hostile to reform. Supportive business leaders and wealthy individuals were considered as capable of and important for providing credibility and legitimacy which could drive an increase in support for wealth taxation. The broader issue was therefore one of unequal capacity to shape political agendas and public debate.

Political Differences in Understanding Barriers

This research reveals political differences in attitudes surrounding wealth taxation and suggests that political orientation shapes not only overall levels of support - or lack thereof - for higher taxes on wealth, but also how barriers are understood. Ideological opposition to wealth taxation was more pronounced among participants on the political right, who were more likely to frame wealth taxation as a threat to hard work, aspiration and economic success, drawing on wider beliefs surrounding meritocracy and the accumulation of wealth. Participants on the political left were generally more ideologically supportive of greater wealth taxation, instead drawing on principles of redistribution, equality and fairness to justify reform.

Participants' political position also shaped how other barriers were interpreted, which came through particularly in discussions around economic risk. Participants on the right were more likely to regard potential effects on economic growth, investment and capital flight as substantive concerns, whereas those on the left were more likely to question the legitimacy and strength of these claims, while recognising the political significance of these narratives.

In terms of internal party dynamics, a recurring theme among many Labour participants was the importance of its party leadership in influencing the likelihood of vocal support amongst the Parliamentary Labour Party. Leadership endorsement was perceived as capable of legitimising reform, reducing the individual political risk associated with support and providing politicians who wished to advocate for greater taxes on wealth with greater confidence in doing so.

Perspectives Surrounding Different Forms of Wealth Taxation

Many of the barriers identified within the interviews were most pronounced when participants discussed bigger reforms perceived by many as novel or 'radical', such as the proposed 2% annual wealth tax on individuals with assets worth over £10 million. By contrast, barriers appeared less pronounced in relation to reforms considered relatively more moderate or familiar, such as changes to Capital Gains Tax or the introduction of the High Value Council Tax Surcharge (or 'mansion tax') at the 2025 budget. These reforms were generally perceived to present fewer economic and administrative risks, and provide opportunities to establish evidence of the effectiveness of taxing wealth more, which could lay the groundwork for pursuing more substantial reforms.

Implications and Possible Routes to Reform

When asked about the chances and conditions to overcome barriers (interview questions reserved for participants who signalled support for greater taxes on wealth) participants identified several ways in which the wider political conditions surrounding wealth taxation could change to make space for reform. Two clear and interconnected priorities emerged.

The first was the need for a stronger and more robust evidence base which is communicated clearly to the wider public. Participants expressed a desire for clearer evidence on the economic and behavioural consequences of reforms, to reduce uncertainty and provide politicians with greater confidence in supporting and defending proposed policies.

Participants felt that a stronger and more effectively communicated evidence base would also increase public support for wealth taxation, which could in turn strengthen politicians' likelihood of supporting these reforms, who respond to the views of their constituents.

In this way, greater public support - or greater political awareness of existing public support - could transform wealth taxation from a perceived political and electoral risk into a potential electoral benefit.

Secondly, participants emphasised the need for better public facing framing, messaging and narratives surrounding wealth taxation. They highlighted the need for nuanced messaging which accounts for the economic concerns associated with taxes on wealth, as well as arguments for how these taxes can help tackle social inequalities. Participants further pointed to the need for a more positive public case for wealth taxation, focused on what reform could enable for communities and wider society. Several saw current communications as divisive and negative, focusing too heavily on 'the wealthy' or 'the 1%', and what should be taken from them.

In addition, an incremental approach to reform was frequently regarded as more politically viable and more likely to harness political support than the immediate introduction of bigger more novel reforms, such as an annual 2% wealth tax. Further, participants highlighted the importance of building broad and diverse coalitions of support across politicians, civil society, researchers and supportive business and wealthy actors, to develop clear and aligned strategic communications, strengthen the credibility of reform and generate public and political momentum.

Overall, the findings suggest that increasing political support for wealth taxation requires more than simply demonstrating the technical workability of a particular reform. It also requires creating the evidential, narrative and political conditions that make reform credible, publicly legitimate and politically viable. Political feasibility should therefore not be regarded as fixed: several of the barriers identified by participants would likely be reduced through stronger evidence, more effective communication, coalition-building and a gradual approach to reform.

The findings suggest that some barriers to political support of wealth taxation are more difficult to overcome, notably those rooted in strongly held ideological beliefs. Yet they also reveal that the wider environment in which politicians make decisions is shaped by a diverse myriad of factors, and that even ideological opposition may be moderated, particularly where advocating for reform is likely to become electorally advantageous.

Introduction

Economic inequality and the growing concentration of wealth have become increasingly prominent features of the UK economy and wider society. While considerable attention has historically focused on income inequality, the distribution of wealth is substantially more unequal and in recent decades has become increasingly concentrated among those at the top. By 2023, the richest 50 families in the UK held more wealth than half of the UK population (comprising of 34 million people), and currently the top fifth of the distribution holds over 60% of the country's wealth, compared to 36% of income². Recent estimates also suggest that the wealth gap in the UK has increased by approximately 50% between 2011-2019, with much of the growth in wealth accruing to households that were already amongst the wealthiest³.

Significant wealth gaps are linked to a plethora of social harms, including risks to economic growth and security, increased health inequalities, obstacles to addressing the climate crisis⁴ and the erosion of democratic engagement and political trust⁵. Further, these trends have occurred against a wider economic backdrop characterised by more than a decade of austerity measures and an ongoing cost of living crisis that has resulted in widespread household economic insecurity alongside the deterioration of public services.

The coexistence of substantial private wealth accumulation at the top of the distribution, widespread financial hardship, and evidence surrounding the social impacts of wealth inequalities, has intensified debate around how wealth is and should be taxed in the UK in recent years. Despite growing debate and concern surrounding wealth inequality, as well as several polls signalling significant public support for wealth taxation (including among UK millionaires), this has not translated straightforwardly into political appetite for greater taxation of wealth, or substantial policy and legislative change⁶. This presents an important political puzzle. Why, in a context of increasing wealth concentration among the richest, and growing concern about economic inequality and public spending, does greater taxation of wealth remain so politically difficult to achieve?

Considerable research has sought to understand public views and attitudes surrounding taxing wealth more⁷. However, significantly less attention has been paid to the perspectives of the political actors responsible for debating, developing and ultimately implementing such reforms. Public support alone cannot produce policy change. Attitudes towards taxation must be translated through political institutions and the decisions of political actors. Understanding the conditions and prospects for reform therefore also requires examination of how politicians themselves understand wealth taxation, the problems and constraints they consider when deciding whether to support reform, and the wider political environment within which beliefs are developed and decisions are made.

2 <https://equalitytrust.org.uk/scale-economic-inequality-uk/>

3 <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/inequalities/2024/10/29/the-uks-wealth-gap-has-grown-by-50-in-eight-years/>

4 <https://fairnessfoundation.com/risks-2025>

5 <https://www.lse.ac.uk/International-Inequalities/Assets/Documents/Why-wealth-inequality-matters-PRINT97.pdf>

6 <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/media/press-releases/oxfam-polling-reveals-three-quarters-of-uk-public-back-gary-linekers-call-to-make-him-pay-more-tax>; <https://yougov.com/en-gb/articles/53245-what-tax-reforms-would-britons-support>; <https://patrioticmillionaires.uk/latest-news/uk-millionaire-poll-2026>

7 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1475-5890.12282>; <https://www.ukwealth.tax/evidencepapers>; https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/The-story-to-tell-on-Tax-rises_Report_October.pdf

An important contribution is Fastenrath et al.'s (2022)⁸ study which conducted 25 semi-structured interviews with left-wing German politicians to investigate their perceptions of obstacles to taxes on the wealthy. However, comparatively little research has examined these questions in the UK context or considered how perceptions of the barriers to wealth taxation vary across politicians from different parts of the political spectrum.

This report seeks to address this gap by examining UK politicians' views on greater taxes on wealth and what they see as the barriers to supporting such reforms. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with politicians across the political spectrum, from England, Scotland and Wales, the research explores participants' attitudes towards a range of potential reforms, including a 2% annual wealth tax, council tax reform and the equalisation of capital gains with income tax rates. It uncovers the economic, political, administrative and ideological barriers participants perceive as constraining support, the wider political dynamics through which these barriers operate, as well as the likelihood and potential routes through which these barriers might be overcome.

8 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13501763.2021.1992484?scroll=top&needAccess=true#abstract>

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews with politicians from across the UK and the political spectrum. Semi-structured interviews enabled participants' perspectives to be explored in depth while maintaining sufficient consistency across interviews to facilitate comparison. The flexible format also allowed participants to raise barriers, concerns and political dynamics that had not been anticipated in advance, while enabling follow-up questions to explore the reasoning underlying particular positions. This was particularly appropriate given the politically contested nature of wealth taxation and the potential for participants to understand both the desirability and feasibility of reform in different ways.

Two sets of interviews were conducted. The first set was conducted by Tax Justice UK with Westminster MPs and one member of the Welsh Senedd. The second was undertaken by the Fraser of Allander Institute at the University of Strathclyde, where participants consisted of Scottish Holyrood MSPs. In total 30 interviews were undertaken: 20 with Westminster MPs, 9 with Holyrood MSPs and 1 with a member of the Welsh Senedd. This includes 18 Labour Party members, 4 Conservative Party members, 2 Liberal Democrats, 2 members of the Scottish National Party, 2 Green Party members and 2 members of Reform UK⁹.

Interviews were carried out between February and July 2026, while Keir Starmer was Prime Minister of the UK, shortly before a new government was appointed under Andy Burnham on 20 July 2026. In May 2026, elections were held for both the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Senedd. In Scotland, there was significant turnover among MSPs, with 42 of the 129 MSPs serving before the election announcing they would not seek re-election. Following the election, the SNP, led by First Minister John Swinney, remained the largest party and continued in government as a minority administration.

Participants were recruited from across the political spectrum in order to capture a diversity of political perspectives. In terms of recruitment, the research sought to include participants from all the main political parties, while focusing primarily on the Labour Party, as the current party of the UK government - where the majority of powers to introduce or change taxes on wealth are held - and the leading party with an ideological predisposition to higher taxes on wealth (at least historically). To account for the range of views and ideologies within the Labour party, politicians from across the political spectrum of the parliamentary membership were approached for interview. At the UK level, Labour politicians were grouped into five reasonably static economic factions, drawing on mapping created by the Political Lobbying & Media Relations (PLMR) and LabourList, from the far left to the 'right' of the party, taking into consideration parliamentary groups with a tax and economics focus¹⁰.

The intention was to incorporate a sufficiently diverse range of political perspectives to explore the variation in how the barriers to wealth taxation are understood. Given the relatively small and uneven number of participants across parties, differences according to political affiliation were treated descriptively rather than as a systematic comparison between parties. Moreover, findings should not be taken as representative and instead be viewed as a snapshot into political perceptions surrounding wealth taxation in the UK.

⁹ With the exception of the SNP, the parties listed include members elected to the UK Parliament (MPs), the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) and the Welsh Parliament (MSs). These distinctions have not been specified for disclosure reasons.

¹⁰ <https://labourlist.org/2025/07/labour-tribes-mapped-about-mps-data-plmr-labourlist-interactive-map/>

During interviews, participants were asked about their views and attitudes towards wealth taxation and the barriers preventing politicians from supporting or implementing higher taxes on wealth. Rather than treating wealth taxation as a single homogeneous policy, the interviews explored participants' responses to a range of potential reforms, including a 2% annual wealth tax, reforming capital gains tax to equalise rates with income tax and remove unfair loopholes, extending the scope of National Insurance Contributions to include investment income, comprehensive council tax reform, and a 'mansion tax'. This enabled the research to examine whether perceived barriers differed according to the scale, novelty and design of particular reforms. Interviews also explored the wider political dynamics surrounding wealth taxation, alongside the role of public opinion and the media. Finally, participants who expressed support for greater taxation of wealth were asked their views on potential strategies for overcoming barriers and increasing political support for reform.

Key Findings

Perceived Barriers to Wealth Taxation

The findings identified six key factors that politicians perceived as barriers to supporting and ultimately implementing greater taxes on wealth. These barriers operated across multiple dimensions, encompassing economic risks and policy uncertainty, political and electoral constraints, administrative and technical challenges, public attitudes and media influence, ideological disagreement, and the influence of wealthy and business interests. Together, they demonstrate that political reticence towards wealth taxation cannot be attributed to a single obstacle, but instead reflects an interconnected set of economic, political, institutional and ideological considerations. The key perceived barriers raised by participants are captured as six themes and outlined in detail below.

Political Differences Across and Within Barriers

These findings are a snapshot of UK politicians' views on wealth taxation rather than a representative sample, yet at a descriptive level, some broad political differences were apparent. Participants on the political left were generally more supportive of greater taxation of wealth, whereas those closer to or on the political right expressed greater scepticism and were more likely to articulate strong ideological objections. Participants on the right referenced factors such as reduced investment, capital flight and impacts on economic growth as substantial risks, and those on the left were more likely to question the strength of evidence underpinning such concerns, while recognising that these narratives could nevertheless operate as significant political barriers. These patterns suggest that political ideology shapes not only overall levels of support for wealth taxation, but also which barriers are seen as most significant, and how these barriers are interpreted.

Further, slight differences came through between politicians across different nations. This was demonstrated most clearly in relation to policy design, with participants from Scottish Parliament noting the different political and legislative contexts between England and Scotland, and Westminster and Holyrood, particularly surrounding varying wealth levels and powers to change and implement wealth taxation. Several participants from the Scottish Parliament highlighted the need for nuanced policy design which takes regional differences into account.

Particular attention should be given to findings concerning the Labour Party, both because Labour politicians constituted the largest group within the sample and because, as the current party of government, its internal dynamics are especially consequential for the likelihood of reform within the shorter term. The interviews demonstrated some variation amongst Labour participants, reflecting an internal ideological spectrum within the party. Participants situated on the 'hard left' of the party were often more closely aligned with politicians from other parties further on the political left (such as the Greens) in their strong support for greater taxation of wealth and in how they interpreted barriers to reform, than to other Labour participants closer to the centre/right of the party.

In terms of internal party dynamics, Labour participants on the centre right of the party conveyed a greater sense of caution around support for such proposals, particularly surrounding the potential economic and electoral consequences of structural wealth tax proposals considered more radical, such as the 2% annual wealth tax. This variation reinforces the importance of looking beyond party affiliation alone when examining political attitudes towards wealth taxation, as differences often exist within as well as between political parties.

A recurring theme among many Labour participants was the importance of its party leadership in influencing the likelihood of vocal support amongst the Parliamentary Labour Party. A number of participants suggested that if the leadership were to advocate for wealth taxation, this would generate considerably broader support among Labour politicians. Leadership endorsement was perceived as capable of legitimising reform, reducing the individual political risk associated with support and providing politicians who wished to advocate for greater taxes on wealth with greater confidence in doing so. For some Labour participants, support appeared contingent upon signals from the party leadership and salience among wider parliamentarians.

Barrier 1: Economic Uncertainty and Policy Credibility

Economic concerns

A major barrier to participants' support for wealth taxation centred on uncertainty surrounding the effectiveness of such reforms, including a potential for negative economic consequences. Importantly, these concerns were frequently expressed in terms of risk and uncertainty, rather than as strongly held beliefs that wealth taxation would necessarily produce undesirable economic outcomes. For many participants, the absence of sufficient certainty over the effects and outcomes of such reforms weakened the credibility of proposals for reform and made political support more difficult to justify.

Particular attention was given to the possibility that higher taxation of wealth could discourage investment, wealth creation and entrepreneurial activity, and encourage capital flight, with potential consequences for productivity, employment and economic growth. Participants also raised concerns about international competitiveness and market responses that could be generated by the introduction of an annual wealth tax. In this sense, support for wealth taxation was often situated within a perceived tension between the redistributive objectives of the policy and concerns about maintaining investment and economic growth.

“The reality is actually in a globalised economy taxing wealth is not easy... it is easier than ever for wealth and wealthy people to move and restructure their wealth to minimise the amount of tax they're paying. So, it is a constant competition between what governments and what this government can do to make sure that the very wealthy pay their fair share of tax and what's actually deliverable because that group of people is so mobile and in such an advantageous position when it comes to restructuring or shifting their wealth so they can side-step the taxman.” – Labour Party, Westminster

“I'm not convinced that in a mobile global economy, it's particularly wise to have a reputation for being a high tax country. There's plenty of high tax countries already. I think adding to that just means that our ability to attract and retain investment is likely to be less than would otherwise be the case.” - Scottish National Party, Holyrood

“Again, you're talking about a fairly low tax base at that level. So, the proposal then would be raising the bulk of any so-called wealth tax from a pretty small tax base and that pretty small tax base has an easy capacity to take flight. So, it's inherently risky.” - Scottish National Party, Holyrood

There was, however, a notable political distinction in how these risks were understood. Participants broadly on the political left were more likely to characterise such concerns as insufficiently evidenced narratives surrounding wealth taxation, which nevertheless operated to discourage support among other political actors and sections of the public. By contrast, participants on the political right were more likely to regard them as credible risks and potentially substantial threats to the economic health of the country.

How tax revenue is generated and allocated

The effectiveness of wealth taxation as a revenue raising policy instrument was a further source of scepticism. Revenue uncertainty was a recurring concern, particularly given the potential behavioural responses to taxation and opportunities available to wealthy taxpayers to avoid liability.

Participants questioned whether wealthy individuals might relocate themselves or their assets,

restructure their wealth, or otherwise alter their behaviour in response to taxation, thereby limiting the revenue-generating potential of wealth taxation. These concerns also raised questions of international coordination, with some participants questioning the effectiveness of a nationally implemented wealth tax in the context of internationally mobile capital.

Concerns about the ways in which any additional tax revenue would ultimately be spent further contributed to doubts surrounding the effectiveness of such reforms. For instance, one participant stated, *“Unfortunately, what we can all witness as politicians is tax revenues not perhaps being spent wisely, tax revenues being spent and you not seeing the difference.”* – Conservative Party, Westminster

The concern over revenue spending operated at two levels. Some participants expressed scepticism that governments would allocate the revenue in ways they considered socially or economically beneficial. Participants also identified a broader lack of public trust in government spending, which suggests that uncertainty over where additional revenue would be allocated could undermine public support for wealth taxation and, in turn, make it more politically difficult to support its implementation. Policy credibility was therefore linked not only to whether greater taxes on wealth could successfully raise revenue, but also to whether that revenue could be demonstrably translated into benefits for individuals, communities and public services.

Implications for evidence and data

These concerns were rarely presented as certain outcomes. Rather, their recurring articulation as possibilities and potential risks generated a corresponding demand for a stronger evidence base. Participants called for better economic modelling of the potential macroeconomic consequences of wealth taxation, including on growth and inequality, more robust estimates of revenue generation, greater understanding of likely behavioural responses, and clearer evidence from countries that have previously implemented wealth taxes.

“I also think that there is a lack of data and certainly anything approaching consensus about what the economic effects of wealth taxation would be. So both how much of that is fixed domestically, whether it would result in competitive international competition problems, how much of these things could be done alone...so I think certainly modelling about what the impact might be in terms of the more macroeconomic effects of that kind of shift. But also, certainly better understanding of some of the behavioural impacts. Analysis of who the winners and losers would be in those pictures.” - Labour Party, Holyrood

“Ultimately, I’m interested in tax policy that is effective and efficient and I don’t think there’s necessarily enough evidence out there to suggest that that threshold and that rate is the correct one. I think there are balanced arguments for and against but, again, it’s all a bit theoretical at the minute.” – Labour Party, Westminster

“We don’t do enough behaviour analysis that’s reliable. So, I can see how superficially it’s attractive for people broadly on the left but I think it’s very, very difficult to achieve the revenue gain and not have a very significant negative behavioural and attitudinal effect amongst wealth creators.” – Conservative Party, Westminster

The perceived weakness of the existing evidence base was significant because it limited participants' confidence justifying support for the taxation of wealth and their ability to weigh up competing claims about its risks and benefits. Importantly, the demand for evidence operated at both a political and public level.

Participants suggested that politicians required a stronger evidence base both to reassure themselves of the merits of reform and to provide them with the knowledge necessary to defend their support politically. At the same time, several argued that stronger evidence needed communicating to the public more effectively in order to build popular support, which would in turn reduce the political risks facing politicians who advocated for such reforms.

Together, these findings suggest that policy credibility constitutes an important condition of political support for wealth taxation. Uncertainty about the economic impacts of wealth taxation, as well as its effectiveness to achieve the desired policy aims including raising revenue, therefore operates as a barrier not necessarily because these political actors believe that wealth taxes will fail, but because uncertainty itself increases the perceived political cost of supporting them. In this context, a credible and well-evidenced economic case becomes central both to reducing the perceived risks of reform and providing political actors with the confidence and justification necessary to advocate for wealth taxation.

Barrier 2: Administrative Feasibility and Policy Design

Another subset of barriers can be characterised as the practical feasibility of designing, administering and implementing wealth taxes. Here participants questioned whether sufficiently robust and workable policies that would bring about greater taxes on wealth could be designed and implemented in practice.

Measuring wealth

A recurring concern centred on the technical complexity of defining the scope and structure of a wealth tax. Participants raised questions around where the taxable threshold should be set, what constituted sufficient levels of wealth, and which forms of wealth should be included when determining someone's net worth. Particular difficulties were perceived around the valuation of different types of assets and potential liquidity problems associated with taxing certain types of wealth. Some participants also distinguished between different forms of wealth accumulation, arguing that policy design should be sensitive to the distinction between wealth derived from entrepreneurial or productive activity and wealth generated through passive mechanisms such as inheritance, rent extraction or asset appreciation. A lack of consensus, and disagreement on the structure of proposed plans, made some participants hesitant to support wealth taxation.

“What I would say is I don’t think it’s impossible to deliver, both politically or technically, but I think if it is to be delivered it needs entirely reframing about what the purpose of it is and the technical implementation of it needs to be ready to go on day one and not “We’ll work it out with HMRC afterwards.” Because it’s the sort of thing that could backfire fast if it doesn’t appear to be working fast and so it would need to hit the ground running”. – Liberal Democrat, Westminster

“But I think the biggest problem is illiquidity. What is wealth? Is it shares? Is it art? How do you value the art? Is it property? Is it overseas property or UK-based property? ... You know, I’ve got significant investments that are illiquid, they have a notional value, but they cannot be liquidised, and they are still at risk until the point that they crystallise and are tradeable. And so, I think you create an enormously complicated [situation].” - Conservative Party, Westminster

“I’m quite ambivalent about that, you know, I wouldn’t have a problem supporting it if the detail showed that it’s the right thing to do... I’d need to be convinced that, you know, the £10 million figure is adequate so, you know, that is the right figure, it’s the right level. You know, in some parts of London where just a really small house can be worth a couple of million if suddenly asset values go up, is that enough to be able to drive that aspiration or should it be a higher figure? I’d want to be convinced in relation to that.” – Labour Party, Westminster

Institutional capacity

Some participants also expressed concerns about the administrative infrastructure required to translate such policies into practice, particularly in relation to an annual wealth tax. HMRC's institutional capacity emerged as an issue, with participants questioning whether the department possesses the skills, resources and data necessary to properly measure and collect tax from the very richest in order to implement a wealth tax regime.

“And then the second is just the practical considerations, which is that HMRC literally does not hold the data required to implement this tax, so that makes the government nervous about attempting to do it.” – Liberal Democrat, Westminster

“I don’t think it’s necessarily a bad idea but I also think it’s very difficult to actually implement that in practice as it stands due to some of the limitations that HMRC has and our tax authorities have over the actual collection of tax based on wealth.” – Labour Party, Westminster

More broadly, participants repeatedly emphasised the need for a coherent and carefully developed policy strategy. Existing proposals, particularly around the 2% annual wealth tax, were sometimes characterised as insufficiently detailed or inadequately thought through, with participants arguing that major tax reform would require substantial preparation rather than rapid implementation. This contributed to calls for incremental change, longer periods of policy development and clearer implementation strategies. Participants also highlighted the need for sensitivity to regional differences. This sentiment was particularly shared by those in the Scottish Parliament, who felt that effective policy design could not necessarily assume a uniform economic and political context across the different nations.

Technical and administrative complexity

These concerns had important consequences for politicians’ willingness to support wealth taxation. A perceived lack of technical and administrative complexity did not necessarily translate into opposition to the principle of taxing wealth. Rather, uncertainty about the details of implementation could make politicians reluctant to endorse particular proposals. For some participants, support was therefore conditional on the presentation of a credible policy architecture that clearly specified the tax base, valuation mechanisms, enforcement arrangements and institutional responsibilities. These concerns were in part linked to the perceived evidence deficit which led some participants - including those ideologically sympathetic to wealth redistribution - to conclude that existing proposals for reform were not yet sufficiently robust to warrant their support.

These findings suggest that administrative feasibility and policy design constitute an important intermediary between support for the principle of wealth taxation and support for its implementation in practice. Participants’ concerns indicate that political support depends not only on demonstrating the desirability or economic effectiveness of wealth taxation, but also on establishing that the state possesses—or can develop—the institutional capacity required to administer it successfully. Valuation difficulties, uncertainty over the appropriate tax base, limitations in HMRC’s data and capacity, enforcement challenges and the perceived absence of sufficiently developed implementation strategies all increased the perceived risks associated with reform.

Consequently, even among politicians sympathetic to greater taxation of wealth, a perceived absence of detailed, credible and administratively workable policy design - for instance the details and practicalities of a 2% annual wealth tax, or how property revaluation would be achieved for council tax reform - appears to constitute a significant barrier to translating general support in principle into endorsement of specific proposals.

Barrier 3: Political Dynamics, Incentives and Institutional Constraints

While many of the barriers identified by participants concerned the design and potential effects of wealth taxation policies themselves, a distinct set of concerns focused on political dynamics and institutions, and the ways these can reduce the political appetite for and feasibility around the introduction of reforms.

Electoral risk and political self-preservation

Electoral risk and political self-preservation were recurring issues. Participants framed risk in relation both to the electoral prospects of political parties and the individual career progression of politicians. Support for, or implementation of, taxes on wealth were perceived as politically risky, and capable of exposing parties to attacks from political opponents and the media, thereby damaging the party image and ultimately its electoral prospects.

“You know that phrase that the Tories use, that Labour’s really good at spending other people’s money, really does hit home at times, so I think that the government is wary of giving the impression that all it does is tax the rich. And I’ve had that on the doorstep in certain parts of my constituency”
– Labour Party, Westminster

“There’s a lack of political curiosity and ambition... they take those political calculations... in terms of how risk averse they are and how loss averse they think the public are. And I think that’s represented in... issues around council tax and...their ability to make amends even in small ways... its the combination of not just the technical side of it, but really the political appetite to do it”– Labour Party, Holyrood

“I do think when you look at the other people, the people that rule it out, they just don’t want it because they might be looking at it for their own self-interest, maybe it would impact them. Maybe they would look at it with what they would consider would be a political benefit in regard to career progression within the party or whatever party they’re in.” – Labour Party, Westminster

Electoral calculations also arose in relation to the potential loss of support amongst wealthy constituents and the perception that public support for wealth taxation was not yet sufficiently strong or broad-based enough to justify the potential political risks associated with reform. Many participants were weighing up the potential gains of the policy against the anticipated political costs of publicly supporting the introduction of higher taxes on wealth.

Internal party dynamics and leadership influence

Intra-party dynamics constituted a further barrier. Participants described pressures to remain aligned with the party position and a reluctance to appear as outliers or rebels by publicly advocating for policies that lacked leadership endorsement or support. This came out most strongly for participants with closer links to government, or those aiming for ministerial positions, compared to backbench politicians further on the left, or those within opposition parties. Positive, vocal support from political leadership was consequently regarded as important in legitimising support for taxation and allowing for an environment that would enable broad political support throughout the party.

“[Leadership support] would strengthen the argument considerably because if [then Prime Minister] Keir spoke out about it then the Cabinet would also have to have a position that likely mirrored what the PM said and ministers would also have to then get behind that as well.” – Labour Party, Westminster

“If the leadership got into a position where they felt like that was a policy to announce, then I’d get behind it, yeah. The tentativeness in my voice is only because I don’t believe that either of those actors are ready to go to that place, and I’m trying to think of a scenario where actually you get them into that place in the first place, how does it become possible?” – Liberal Democrat Party, Westminster

“It would have to be suitably propitious in terms of the arithmetic in the Parliament, but underlying that you would need leadership who saw it as something that was a structural priority. So they would have to see the gains as being...significant enough to them to deal with the political pain.” – Labour Party, Holyrood

“The other thing is, I’m trying not to be an out and out rebel, because I’m trying to get – I want another Pride in Place award for a really deprived part of my constituency. I’m finally at the stage where number 10 is actually having conversations with me about my needs. I think that’s because I’ve been a bit more loyal lately, and they’re seeing it’s helpful to them.” – Labour Party, Westminster

Cross-party consensus

A number of participants also identified the absence of cross-party consensus as a barrier. Some argued that questions of wealth and wealth inequality had become increasingly partisan, and felt that major reforms to the tax system would benefit from broader political agreement. Cross-party support was therefore presented as a means of reducing the political risks associated with individual or party support and in forming a more viable pathway towards reform and implementation.

“The structure of the Scottish Parliament is fairly inflexible, namely, there’s... a decreasing amount of cross-party engagement when it comes to policy. Politics has become so sort of tribal and toxic and a lot of the issues are not getting properly debated in the first instance... there is no collective will to try to do something on behalf of the nation as opposed to on behalf of a political party” – Conservative Party, Holyrood

Institutional and electoral barriers

Some participants further identified institutional features of the political system itself as constraining reform. Short electoral cycles were considered problematic for major changes to the tax system, where timelines would not allow for both the implementation and eventual demonstration of benefits of a reform. This particularly came through in relation to reforms that are perceived as complicated or requiring more time to implement, such as council tax reform, or where the impacts of reform could take considerable time to materialise and become visible to the public, such as tackling wealth inequality through an annual wealth tax.

Participants also raised concerns about institutional resistance and a ‘status quo mindset’ from senior civil servants within HMT and HMRC, who may be unwilling to pursue reforms perceived as ‘too radical’, as well as citing reluctance from the House of Lords, who would be unlikely vote out of step with their party’s manifesto commitments .

“I genuinely believe there’s some senior civil servants that are very much entrenched in the system that continue to sell these particular ideas that you can’t upset certain pockets of wealth because it would affect our economy in some way.” – Labour Party, Westminster

“First of all, there is a problem with getting legislation through that isn’t in a manifesto. So according to the convention that exists between the House of Commons and the House of Lords, the House of Lords is not allowed to veto legislation that’s in a manifesto. So, it would have to be manifesto-written to be able to make it through the two chambers because the House of Lords is more likely to block proposals that affect generational wealth. So that is a big political and legislative obstacle that would need to be overcome.” – Labour Party, Westminster

These accounts suggest that politicians’ support for wealth taxation is constrained not only by their assessments of the policies themselves, but by the political and institutional environment within which these decisions and assessments are made. The findings therefore point to an important distinction between individual support for wealth taxation and the political conditions that enable that support to be expressed and translated into policy.

Barrier 4: Ideology, Values and Competing Visions of Society

Ideological beliefs around wealth, the role of taxation and the state

A further barrier that came through in interviews was the role of ideology and competing understandings of wealth, taxation, inequality, redistribution and the appropriate role of the state. While many of the barriers identified elsewhere relate to uncertainty over consequences, political feasibility and practical implementation of wealth taxation, here the opposition sits more fundamentally in politicians' personal beliefs and disagreement with the principles underpinning greater taxation of wealth.

These ideological differences followed political divisions between right and left. Ideological opposition to wealth taxation was more pronounced among participants on the political right, who were more likely to frame taxes on wealth as penalising hard work, aspiration and economic success, drawing on wider beliefs surrounding meritocracy and the legitimate accumulation of wealth. Participants on the political left were generally more ideologically supportive of greater wealth taxation, instead drawing on principles of redistribution, equality and fairness to justify reform.

One strand of ideological opposition that came through among those on the right of the political spectrum centred on positive understandings of wealth creation and the social contribution of wealthy individuals. Some participants held the view that substantial wealth is a legitimate reward for entrepreneurship, innovation, hard work and economic risk-taking. From this perspective, individuals who successfully create businesses and accumulate wealth were seen as aspirational, and important to wider economic prosperity due to their perceived contributions to investment, employment and innovation. Greater taxation of wealth was consequently described as punishment for behaviours that should be encouraged and rewarded.

"Now, I also think that many wealthy people put a lot back in and you should do more to incentivise people... Because in the end we are rational economic players and, you know, you grow businesses, and you employ people to make profit and that is just the way it works... I'm not completely deaf to the inequality argument but I just think very few human societies have flourished if they've sort of removed the profit motive and the opportunities that come with a free market economy. So, I'm highly sceptical that there would not be unintended behavioural effects that would materially diminish the returns on those projected numbers." – Conservative Party, Westminster

"For me, the tax system is something that is important not just in the big economy sense in terms of driving growth and all that kind of stuff, but it's also about personal aspiration, getting on, out of poverty... So whatever tax system you have has to have enough in there to be able to generate the revenues that the state needs to provide public services, etc, but it's also got to be adequate to inspire people to do better and want to achieve more" - Labour Party, Westminster

"I always believe in responsible capitalism, you know, I've made a couple of investments from very small starts and been very fortunate and I've given away... two or three million pounds... I see wealth as something to be shared, to be used for good; I don't see my life as about acquiring lots of wealth for myself. But that responsible capitalism, you know, relies on people like me being able to invest and my friends who've run these businesses that I've invested in having those conditions where that is incentivised." – Conservative Party, Westminster

“And there is a cohort of people that are deeply morally opposed to wealth taxes, call them Children of Thatcher, call them whatever you will, but they are... Yeah, I’m not sure what their game is really. They’ve got this wonderful idea that wealth creation is all meritocratic and fair and that you shouldn’t intervene with that.” – Labour Party, Westminster

These arguments were closely connected to broader beliefs about the appropriate role of the state. Participants identified commitments to free-market economics, profit incentives and limited government intervention as barriers to support amongst some politicians. From this perspective, increased taxation of private wealth could be regarded as an illegitimate or excessive expansion of state intervention. Some participants explicitly characterised sections of the political right as ideologically opposed to wealth taxation on these grounds. For these politicians, opposition to wealth taxation therefore reflected a broader political philosophy rather than objections to the details of any particular policy proposal.

Running alongside these accounts were competing understandings of fairness and deservingness. Narratives of meritocracy and aspiration were identified as particularly significant. Wealth could be associated with individual effort and achievement, creating the possibility that taxing wealth would be understood as punishing success and aspiration, with some participants’ opposition grounded in the view that criticism of the wealthy reflected a ‘politics of envy’ rather than a legitimate concern with inequality. Such narratives could make wealth taxation politically difficult to achieve because they connect the policies to broader cultural values of hard work, deservingness and individual responsibility.

As one participant termed it, *“To me it’s driven by, again, resentment of wealth rather than a real practical understanding of what to do about it”* with another noting that, *“We live in a jealous culture in the UK... We have a nasty attitude to those who are successful, we want to knock them down, and we’re very jealous of people who do better than us.”* – Conservative Party, Westminster

However, participants sympathetic to wealth taxation, generally found on the left of the political spectrum, challenged the assumptions underlying these accounts. In particular, they questioned whether all forms of wealth accumulation could reasonably be understood as the product of individual effort and economic contribution. These participants distinguished wealth generated through business creation and entrepreneurial activity from wealth acquired through inheritance, rent extraction and asset appreciation. Some therefore argued that a more politically and normatively persuasive case for wealth taxation required distinguishing between different mechanisms of accumulation, rather than treating all wealth as equivalent.

Interestingly, some Labour participants expressed concern about a perceived weakening of traditionally left-wing ideological commitments towards supporting working people, wealth redistribution and equality within the Labour party, while others described the party as lacking a coherent economic ideology or long-term vision¹¹. References to a lack of political ambition, radical imagination and ideological clarity suggest that a barrier identified by some participants as the presence of an opposing ideology to wealth taxation could be better understood as the absence of a sufficiently developed ideological project capable of delivering a positive political and winnable case for wealth taxation.

¹¹ These interviews were carried out before the current UK Government iteration, while Keir Starmer was Prime Minister

Barrier 5: Public Opinion, Public Communication and Media Narratives

An additional major barrier that came through in interviews concerned the relationship between public opinion and politicians' willingness to support wealth taxation, as well as the broader environment through which public attitudes of wealth taxation are formed and influenced.

The role of public opinion

Public opinion was repeatedly described as a pivotal influence on political decision-making. Participants felt that politicians are responsive to the views of their constituents and that strong, visible public demand for wealth taxation would make political support easier to achieve and sustain. Some participants perceived an absence of a sufficiently broad, pronounced and politically salient public appetite for the introduction of taxes on wealth. Where public opinion was perceived as mixed, insufficiently mobilised or uncertain, politicians faced fewer incentives to advocate reform as they saw greater electoral risks in doing so. Some participants argued that politicians underestimate the existing level of public support for greater taxation of wealth, suggesting a disconnect between public attitudes and political perceptions of them.

Limited public understanding of wealth taxation was frequently identified as an important constraint on the mobilisation of such support. Tax policy was described as complex and often poorly understood, with concerns that there hasn't been enough time for a robust public debate around wealth taxation which would garner public support. Some participants highlighted public misconceptions over taxable thresholds, leading to public fears that the reforms intended to target the very wealthiest would instead affect ordinary or moderately affluent households, who are not the intended tax base, thereby decreasing popular support for reform. Further, participants noted misconceptions by the public around the growing levels of wealth inequality and concentration, the regressive character of the tax system, as well as a lack of trust or understanding in the link between tax revenue and the potential for better public services and societal benefits.

"The public needs to be educated more on that. Because I know when I go out campaigning and I talk about things about wealth tax there could be someone there that's on £50,000 a year that goes, "Oh you're meaning me." "No, I don't mean you because I appreciate £50,000..." £50,000 is a good wage, it's a comfortable wage, you can have a comfortable life on that, but £50,000... the way that we're going with inequality, £50,000 a year will be the new £25,000 a year very shortly." – Labour Party, Westminster

"And, you know, I had someone come up to me and say, "Well I own my own home and I'm doing very well, and the idea that Labour just want to tax me more...you know, you could tell that they were very put out. And I didn't want to be rude and say, "We're not talking about you, we're talking about people that have way more money than you do." I think some people are made to believe... that when anyone's talking about such taxes they may be talking about them because they're slightly better off than others." – Labour Party, Westminster

Public perceptions of wealth and assets constituted a further dimension of this barrier. Participants suggested that taxes on wealth could be more difficult to justify publicly than taxes on income because individuals often possess strong emotional attachments to their assets, particularly where these are associated with their homes, the family and inheritance. There was also discussion about the general anti-tax culture in the UK, in which taxation is perceived primarily as something that takes away from individuals or used as a form of punishment, rather than a contribution towards collective provision and societal benefit.

Such perceptions were seen as limiting public support and, in turn, constraining political support due to politicians' fears of electoral risk.

"People feel attached to what they own, and there's this sort of sense of like...why should I have to lose it? This thing that I have an emotional attachment to as well as a financial interest in, because the state is coming and robbing it from me in a way that people never feel the same way about taking your income at source when you've earned it as a worker." – Labour Party, Westminster

Communication and framing

Against this backdrop, participants repeatedly emphasised the importance of political communication and policy framing. Some participants regarded existing framing as overly negative or divisive, focusing on wealthy elites of 'the 1%' and what should be taken from them, rather than developing a positive narrative around what additional taxation could achieve and provide for the wider populations. Several participants instead advocated for communications and framings that connected additional revenue to tangible outcomes and improvements in public services, infrastructure and the economic circumstances of ordinary households, as well as situating wealth taxation within a broader frame of fairness and inequality.

"'Tax' has an overall negative connotation... I would look at structural reforms to the tax system, right, to HMRC, to our regulations, to make it work, to fix our economy, right, to bring GDP growth back to the 99%. Because we always talk about the 1% when we talk about wealth taxes; we need to change the argument to not who we don't like but to how we help the 99%. And that's a big shift and that will get engagement... There is no way to sell an argument that just hurts other people – it doesn't work well enough. Because that argument is always somehow based on hate or anger, right, and actually what you want is to sell the benefit. So, I wouldn't write it as a 'wealth tax', I would write it as a 'structural reform of the economy to bring wealth to 99%'." – Labour Party, Westminster

The role of the media

The media occupied a significant position within participants' accounts of how public attitudes around tax are formed. Participants, particularly those supportive of wealth taxation, frequently characterised sections of the media as hostile to the very concept of tax, particularly redistributive taxation, and guilty of disproportionately amplifying its potential risks. Concerns included sensationalised or insufficiently evidenced reporting, particularly within sections of the right-wing press, which present wealth taxation as a threat to investment, growth, aspiration and meritocracy, or as something which would inevitably trigger 'capital flight', or target ordinary taxpayers. Participants argued that such narratives could encourage members of the public to oppose policies they might materially benefit from.

These participants often shared a view that right-wing media could effectively create narratives that blame the most marginalised communities - such as refugees and migrants - for society's problems, in order to reduce public support for taxing the wealthy. This can be seen in recent years with the 'Stop The Boats' message which very often ties the arrival of asylum seekers in the UK with issues ordinary people are facing including the housing crisis, unemployment or NHS waiting times. In these accounts, media discourse therefore did not simply reflect existing public opinion but actively shaped the terms through which wealth taxation was understood and evaluated. The concentration of media ownership and the ability of wealthy and high-profile individuals to shape public debate was also raised, creating an important intersection between media narratives and the influence of powerful interests discussed elsewhere in the findings.

"The belief is it will be politically difficult to impact that change because the people who hold the levers of, say, the media or social media have quite a sufficient amount of tools to be able to actually prevent that being, you know, kind of perceived in any way as a positive idea..."

And if you look at parallels in government, inheritance tax for farmers and only putting up to half rate was one of the most vicious political campaigns that we've seen. That was mobilising and actually building quite a large amount of not just political opposition but hatred, and it was very easy to do."
– Labour Party, Westminster

"I think [the media] play an enormous part...they will slag off a Labour government for wanting to tax the rich and being envious and all the rest of it without actually understanding what the hell they are talking about... And so you know immediately that if you try to go towards creating more fairer society, having a fairer taxation system, GB News is just going to be banging the drum for the wealthy and the powerful and they don't give a damn about the people and it's those people who soak up the jingoism of GB News... it's a vicious circle." – Labour Party, Westminster

"They can look at the TV and they can see the reports of 'Ooh, illegal immigration's gone up' or 'Councils have got no money' and then they'll put the two and two together and say, 'Well the Councils have got no money because they're having to put up people coming over, migrants.' That's the narrative that is cutting through right now. People like me but the leadership of the party more so... they need to figure out the political messaging and actually deliver to then cut through to people and say, 'This is the issue, this is why we've got the issues and this is how we're going to support it.'" – Labour Party, Westminster

A need for broad coalitions

Participants nevertheless did not portray these communicative barriers as insurmountable. A number emphasised the importance of developing broader coalitions in support of reform, involving research organisations, civil society, businesses, wealthy individuals supportive of greater taxation, and politicians themselves. Such coalitions were perceived as potentially able to strengthen the credibility of reforms or to challenge the characterisation of wealth taxation as inherently anti-business or hostile to wealth creation. Participants also emphasised the importance of non-partisan and evidence-based communication capable of broadening the public constituency for reform beyond traditional party-political divisions.

"I think trusted business leaders and I think wealthy individuals and businesses that have a positive track record in this country, whether that is around being a good employer, a legitimate business, a business that has broadly seemed to have had a positive impact on an economy or a community. I think those actually are people who can help shape this debate... academia, civil society, just wider public opinion are all equally important." – Labour Party, Westminster

"We need to have that kind of broad coalition and actually exert whatever influence we can have together... I think organisations that can get a kind of concentration of people... I'm talking about things like Stop the War, CND, Greenpeace, I'm talking about a whole kind of amalgamation of that. Organisations like that have got to come together and pool their resources together and say, "Look, for the benefit of society we have to work together on this." – Labour Party, Westminster

These insights reveal a perceived self-reinforcing relationship between political and public support. Politicians may be reluctant to advocate for wealth taxation where they perceive insufficient public demand, yet participants simultaneously suggested that stronger public support depends partly upon political actors making a clearer and more persuasive case for reform. Limited political advocacy may therefore contribute to the very absence of visible public support that politicians subsequently identify as a barrier to action.

Building political support for wealth taxation was consequently seen as requiring not only favourable policy design, but the development of a strong and persuasive narrative capable of increasing the visibility and political salience of public support and, in turn, reducing the electoral risks faced by politicians who advocate reform.

Barrier 6: Power, Vested Interests and Elite Influence

Elite influence on policy

A final set of barriers concerned the perceived influence of economically and politically powerful actors over the policymaking process and decisions of senior government figures. For some participants, the difficulty in securing political support for higher taxes on wealth therefore reflected broader patterns and inequalities in whose interests and preferences are granted access to be heard by and represented within political decision-making.

The views, interests and perspectives of wealthy individuals and business elites were seen to occupy a privileged position within the political process. Their influence was understood to operate through a range of mechanisms. Participants highlighted the capacity of wealthy individuals to relocate, withdraw investment or reorganise their economic activity in response to taxation. The potential economic consequences associated with these behaviours were perceived as a source of political leverage, insofar as governments may be reluctant to pursue reforms that risk provoking adverse reactions from those controlling substantial economic resources.

Participants similarly referred to the influence of organised business interests, the City of London, and wealthy individuals, who have the resources, money and access to lobby political elites in order to advocate for their interests and positions. Participants described politicians as sensitive to lobbying by vested interests and wealthy actors - due to the strength and intensity of their lobbying efforts as well as the power and capital they hold - thereby influencing and constraining the range of reforms that politicians considered politically feasible.

“Because the people that are in charge of the party have got vested interests in that. That’s the people they want to appeal to... I think the Labour Party is much more... well, the current people in charge are much more comfortable in getting their money from wealthy individual donors. They would shy away from that trade unionist element, of the big donations from big trade unions like Unite... and the other trade unions that are affiliated. So I think that is kind of mirroring where we were as a party in 1997 in that they want wealthy individual donors... And, to be honest as well, you know, just have a look through who funds people’s campaigns, have a look and see where the donations come from.”
- Labour Party, Westminster

“I think that sometimes if the City doesn’t like it then sometimes it can change views here in a way that’s not helpful and a way that doesn’t, you know, really indicate that... For example, the City may not like a particular tax rise but that doesn’t mean it’s economically bad. It might mean it’s bad for banker X or investor Y but that’s a different proposition to is it bad for the economy overall.” – Labour Party, Westminster

“I think it’s fair to say that for every ‘patriotic millionaire’ there are probably some very powerful people that do not want these policies to happen and are willing to invest vast sums of money into kind of smearing the idea that we bring that in.” - Labour Party, Westminster

Politicians’ socioeconomic status

For some participants, these dynamics were reinforced by the social and economic characteristics of political elites themselves. Concerns were raised that politicians and other political decision-makers, including members of the House of Lords, may occupy comparatively affluent social positions and therefore have limited exposure to, or understanding of, the economic circumstances experienced by much of the wider population.

Participants suggested that this could shape both their perceptions of wealth and inequality and their understanding of the potential benefits of reform. In some accounts, politicians were described as insufficiently aware of the financial pressures facing ‘ordinary’ households or of the extent of contemporary wealth concentration. The barrier identified here was therefore not necessarily always one of deliberate self-interest, but of social distance: the experiences and perspectives of political elites could make particular forms of economic inequality less immediately visible or politically salient.

Elite influence on public discourse

The influence attributed to elites extended beyond direct policymaking into the wider production of political and public discourse. Participants highlighted the ability of wealthy individuals and economically powerful actors to shape debate through media ownership, lobbying organisations and access to prominent platforms. This created an important intersection with the preceding theme surrounding media narratives. Participants suggested that elite actors could exercise influence not simply through direct access to politicians, but by shaping how wealth taxation was represented to the wider public, including through narratives surrounding capital flight, economic growth, meritocracy, investment and the legitimacy of taxing wealth. The prominence of wealthy and high-profile individuals within both traditional and social media was therefore perceived as an additional means through which economically powerful actors could influence public debate.

“The billionaire media moguls and the barons that own the newspapers and the television stations, it’s not in their interest. They don’t want to put that idea of having a period of redistribution of wealth and them losing money for some kind of societal good. So politicians, media, they’ve got a huge bearing on the public perception.” – Labour Party, Westminster

“A lot of them have got big social media reach round social media companies, like Elon Musk would do anything to undermine the credibility of the arguments, so...that’s why people can’t just go off willy nilly because their opponents have got much more powerful than them in terms of their ability to communicate the counter argument.” – Labour Party, Westminster

At the same time, participants' accounts indicated that elite influence was not uniformly opposed to wealth taxation. Some highlighted the importance of wealthy individuals, businesses and organisations that actively supported greater taxation of wealth, including groups like the Patriotic Millionaires. The involvement of such actors was regarded by some as valuable precisely because of the political credibility and influence associated with their economic position. Through sharing their own stories and experiences, wealthy advocates of reform could more credibly challenge claims that wealth taxation was necessarily hostile to business, entrepreneurship or wealth creation, while also providing political cover for politicians supportive of reform. This suggests that participants did not necessarily see elite influence as intrinsically obstructive, and that the broader issue concerns the disproportionate capacity of economically powerful actors to shape political agendas and public debate.

These findings suggest that participants see politicians' support for wealth taxation as something that is shaped within a political environment characterised by unequal distributions of influence and access. Participants' accounts point towards a potential asymmetry at the heart of wealth tax politics: while the benefits of reform may be dispersed across a broad section of the population, its costs are concentrated among a comparatively small but economically and politically powerful group.

Perceptions of different wealth taxation policy proposals

The thematic sections above highlight the many, often connected and reinforcing barriers that participants viewed as obstructing the pathway to the introduction of greater taxes on wealth in the UK. Many of the barriers identified within the interviews were most pronounced when participants discussed bigger reforms perceived by many as novel or ‘radical’, such as the proposed 2% annual wealth tax on individuals with assets worth over £10 million. By contrast, barriers appeared less pronounced when participants were asked about reforms considered relatively more moderate or familiar, such as changes to Capital Gains Tax or the introduction of the High Value Council Tax Surcharge (or ‘mansion tax’) at the 2025 budget. This distinction reflects participants’ recurring calls for an incremental approach to taxing wealth more, which many saw as important for reforms to be politically palatable.

More moderate ‘lower hanging fruit’ reforms were generally perceived to present fewer economic and administrative risks, and provide opportunities to establish evidence of the effectiveness of taxing wealth more, which could lay the groundwork for pursuing more substantial reforms. This reflects some participants’ concerns that insufficient time has been devoted to public debate around wealth taxation, and to developing and disseminating a robust evidence base necessary to demonstrate whether larger, more structural reforms would be effective, administratively feasible and politically defensible.

Perceptions on Overcoming Barriers

The research also explored - solely with participants who signalled support of greater taxation of wealth - views on the chances and conditions of overcoming barriers and paving the way for the implementation of wealth taxation proposals. The findings revealed two clear and interconnected priorities: better public facing communications and framing of wealth taxation and a stronger and more robust evidence base.

Better public facing communication and framing of wealth taxation

These participants often advocated for a more positive presentation and narrative, centred around what greater taxation on wealth could enable for society. Suggestions included improved public services, greater investment in communities, reductions in inequality and a fairer distribution of the tax contribution. From this perspective, for those striving to build support for wealth taxation, this would require a shift in emphasis from who loses to what society collectively gains. Some participants also advocated for the reinvigoration of a class politics which could communicate the need for taxation as an advantage to ‘ordinary’ or ‘working’ people who would most benefit from such changes.

This cohort of participants also stressed the importance of clearly communicating who would be liable for proposed taxes, particularly where misconceptions about thresholds could generate fears that ordinary or moderately affluent households would be affected. In addition, several participants, including those on the left, saw it as unhelpful when campaigners and advocates for greater taxes on wealth portray an annual wealth tax as a ‘silver bullet’ and fix-all solution. These participants suggest the need for more nuanced communication around the impacts of wealth taxes. Clear and effective communication was therefore seen as an important means of increasing public understanding and support and, through this, reducing the electoral risks faced by politicians advocating reform.

Several participants also called for the need for a strong and diverse coalition of multiple actors - wealthy elites, civil society, research institutes and politicians themselves - to organise strong and aligned strategic communications which could increase support and understanding within the general public and subsequently drive political engagement and action.

A stronger and well communicated evidence base

A further prominent suggestion for overcoming barriers that came through concerned the production and communication of a stronger and more credible evidence base. Participants repeatedly suggested that uncertainty surrounding the economic and fiscal consequences of wealth taxation made support difficult to justify, particularly given competing claims about investment, behavioural responses, tax avoidance and expected revenue. More accurate economic modelling, robust research into the impacts of wealth taxation on economic growth and inequality, clearer estimates of revenue generation, stronger evidence regarding likely behavioural responses, and evaluation of international experiences were all regarded as important for establishing the credibility of any proposed policy.

Importantly, participants felt that the function of this evidence was not solely technical. A stronger evidence base was seen as necessary to provide politicians with greater confidence in these policies and equip them with the arguments necessary to defend any support against criticism from political opponents, the media and the public. A stronger evidence base could therefore operate as a form of political reassurance to lower the perceived risks associated with supporting greater taxes on wealth, as well as policy validation.

These two proposed solutions surrounding messaging and a stronger evidence base are closely interconnected. A stronger evidence base alone would have limited political impact if its findings are not translated into a clear and convincing public case for reform, while improved messaging could lack credibility if it is not backed up by robust evidence. Participants' accounts therefore suggest that building political support for wealth taxation requires both substantive policy credibility and communicative legitimacy. Evidence could help establish that reform can work, while effective communication can demonstrate why advocates of wealth taxation believe it is desirable and how its benefits would operate. Together, these processes could strengthen public support and provide politicians with greater political confidence to advocate for reform.

Implications on overcoming more entrenched barriers

It is clear from the research that not all the barriers identified lend themselves to straightforward solutions. Deeply rooted ideological and cultural disagreements surrounding redistribution, inequality, meritocracy and the appropriate role of the state are unlikely to be resolved simply through changes to the design of, or communication surrounding, greater taxes on wealth. However, the findings suggest that even ideological opposition may be moderated by the wider environment in which politicians make decisions. Where support for wealth taxes is sufficiently strong and visible among constituents and the wider public, advocating for reform may become electorally advantageous even for political actors operating from a position of ideological disagreement. The significance of some barriers may therefore depend partly upon the strength of countervailing public and political pressures.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study sought to examine political perspectives on wealth taxation and the barriers to reform in the UK. The findings demonstrate that political reticence towards wealth taxes cannot be explained by any single obstacle. Rather, these political actors' likelihood and willingness to support reform was shaped by an interconnected set of political, economic, administrative, narrative and ideological considerations, operating within a wider context of unequal political and economic power.

While some barriers related directly to the characteristics of policy proposals themselves, including uncertainty surrounding their economic consequences, revenue-generating potential and administrative and technical feasibility, others arose from the political environment within which politicians make decisions. Electoral incentives, party dynamics, perceptions of public opinion, media narratives, ideological understandings of wealth redistribution and the influence of economically powerful actors all affected the perceived costs and benefits of supporting reform.

Importantly, these barriers did not operate independently. Economic uncertainty appeared to increase the perceived political risk of advocating for reform, particularly where potential consequences such as capital flight, reduced investment or revenue shortfalls could be mobilised by political opponents or the media. Participants highlighted the ability of media narratives to shape public perceptions of wealth taxation and its perceived risks, while politicians' perceptions of public opinion influenced their likelihood to advocate for wealth taxation. The findings therefore point towards a mutually reinforcing configuration of barriers through which the perceived political feasibility and support for wealth taxation is produced.

The small sample size, particularly among right-leaning participants, limits systematic comparison between political groups, so further research with a larger and more evenly distributed sample would be valuable. Descriptively though, some broad patterns emerged. Participants on the left were generally more supportive of taxing wealth, while those on or closer to the right were more sceptical and more likely to voice strong ideological objections, citing risks such as reduced investment, capital flight and harm to economic growth. Left-leaning participants were more likely to question the evidence behind these concerns, though they acknowledged that such narratives could still act as significant political barriers. Political ideology therefore appears to shape not only overall support for wealth taxation, but also how barriers are understood.

Slight differences also emerged between nations, particularly on policy design: participants from the Scottish Parliament pointed to the differing political and legislative contexts of England and Scotland, and of Westminster and Holyrood, including varying wealth levels and powers to implement wealth taxation, and several called for nuanced design that accounts for regional differences.

This report gives particular attention to Labour participants, both because Labour politicians formed the largest group in the sample and because, as the party of UK government where the majority of tax powers are held, its internal dynamics are especially consequential for short-term likelihood of reform. Participants varied along the party's ideological spectrum: those on the "hard left" aligned closely with politicians in other parties to the left of Labour (such as the Greens) in their strong support for wealth taxation and perspectives of the barriers, while centre-right Labour participants were more cautious, especially about the economic and electoral consequences of structural proposals considered more radical, such as a 2% annual wealth tax. This reinforces the need to look beyond party affiliation alone, as differences exist within as well as between parties.

A recurring theme among Labour participants was the influence of party leadership on the likelihood of vocal support within the Parliamentary Labour Party. Many suggested that leadership endorsement of wealth taxation would generate considerably broader support, as it could legitimise reform, reduce individual political risk and give supportive politicians greater confidence in advocating for reform.

This research suggests that the barriers to politicians' support for wealth taxation can generally be better understood as barriers to political feasibility than to wealth taxation itself, particularly among the centre and centre left of the political spectrum. There were a small number of cases in which opposition was based on deeply held ideological beliefs, but on the whole participants rarely presented opposition as the product of a single decisive objection. Instead, support for reform was portrayed as contingent upon a wider political environment in which evidence, public opinion, party politics, media discourse and institutional incentives interact to shape what politicians perceive to be politically possible. The findings therefore indicate that political support for wealth taxation is not simply determined by the economic or technical merits of a proposal, but also the extent to which proposals can be made politically credible, publicly legitimate and electorally viable.

This has broader implications for understanding the politics of wealth taxation in the UK. If political feasibility is socially and politically produced rather than fixed, then the limited adoption of taxes on wealth cannot be interpreted as evidence of an absence of support for wealth taxation alone. Rather, it reflects the wider conditions under which redistributive policies are debated, communicated and legitimised. In this sense, for those seeking to increase political support for wealth taxation, this may depend as much upon reshaping the political and public conversation surrounding wealth, fairness and taxation, as the design of the tax policies themselves.

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