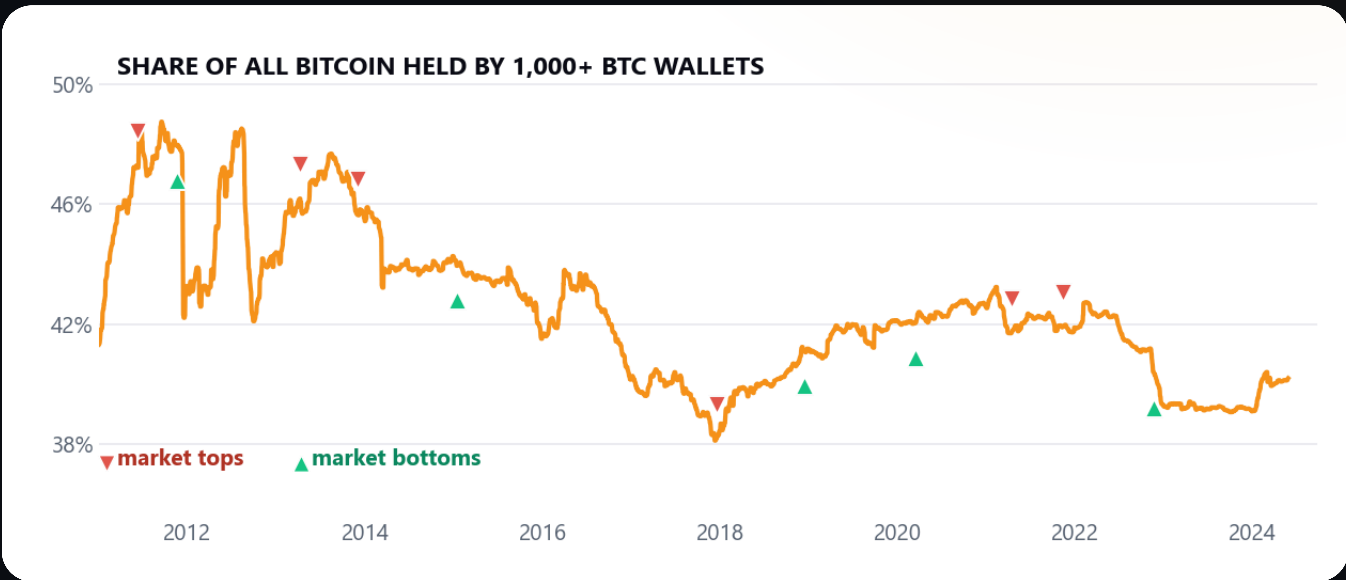
DO WHALES REALLY CONTROL BITCOIN?

Every whale move in fifteen years of blockchain data, lined up against every top, every bottom, and what price actually did next.

Short version. The alerts are measuring something real. It is just not what you think, and it stopped predicting price years ago. This is the complete study, every test and every table.



More than 5,800 days of real blockchain data. Every number in here is reproducible from one script. No hype, just the receipts.

Bitcoin Jae
@bitcoin.daily

THE BELIEF

THE MOST WATCHED SIGNAL IN CRYPTO

A whale is a wallet holding 1,000 or more Bitcoin. At today's price that is roughly $64 million in one address. Only about 2,150 wallets on earth qualify, and together they hold around 40 percent of all Bitcoin.

The belief is simple. Whales are the smart money. When they accumulate, a rally is coming. When they distribute, get out. A whole industry of alert accounts and dashboards sells you their every move.

So we tested the belief the way a scientist would. Four claims, each against the full history. Here is the scoreboard, and the rest of this guide is the complete study behind it.

Wallet-band data 2011 to May 2024 (the public feed was paywalled after that). Exchange-flow data 2011 to today.

THE CLAIM	WHAT THE DATA SAYS
Whales buying means price goes up	No lift. 63% up vs a 62% base rate
Whale moves predict the future	Worked before 2018. Dead since
Whales buy bottoms, sell tops	Bottoms 2 of 5. Tops 4 of 6, mostly tiny
Whales selling means price goes down	No lift. 38% down vs a 38% base rate

TEST ONE

DO THEY EVEN MOVE THE PRICE?

Here is the trick every alert account plays on you. Bitcoin went up in 62 percent of ALL quarters since 2011. So if someone shows you a quarter where whales bought and price rose, that proves nothing. Price rose most of the time anyway.

The honest question is whether price rose MORE OFTEN when whales were buying than normal. That comparison number is called the base rate, and it is the single most useful idea in this guide. Any signal that cannot beat its base rate is a story, not a signal.

So we scored every non-overlapping quarter, no double counting. Here is whale behavior against the base rate.

Non-overlapping windows. 2011 to 2024 for wallet bands, 2011 to 2026 for exchange flows.

WHEN	WHAT PRICE DID	BASE RATE
Whales accumulated for a quarter	Rose 63% of the time	62%
Whales distributed for a quarter	Fell 38% of the time	38%
A month of heavy coin inflows to exchanges	Fell 43% of the time	43%

Zero lift on every row. Watching whales tells you nothing about what price is doing. That is claim one and claim four, both busted.

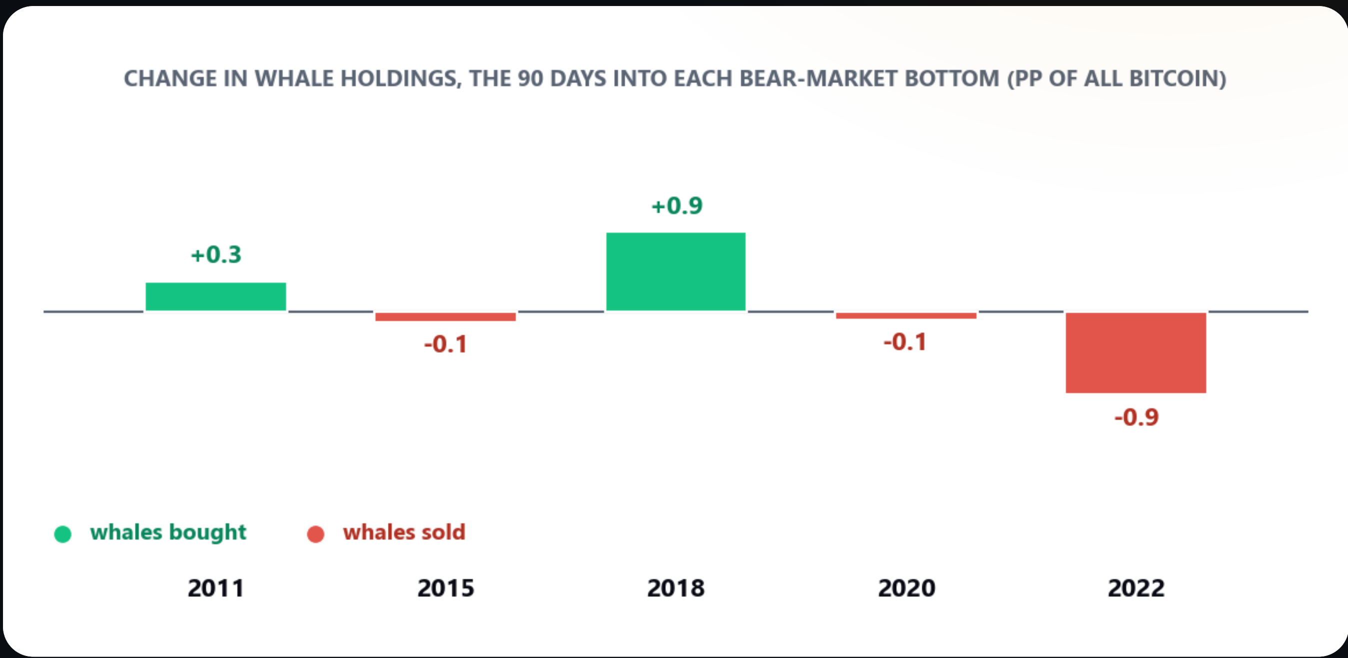
TEST TWO

DO WHALES BUY THE BOTTOM?

The favorite version of the myth. While you panic sell the low, the smart money quietly loads up. If that were true, whale holdings should rise into every major bottom.

There have been 5 great bear-market bottoms since 2011. Whale wallets were net buyers going into exactly 2 of them, 2011 and 2018. At the 2015 low they were flat to selling. Same at the 2020 crash low. And at the most famous generational bottom of all, FTX in November 2022, whales were dumping while retail wallets did the buying.

For a fair benchmark, whale share was rising on 45 percent of ALL days anyway. Two of five is BELOW that. A coin flip literally calls bottoms better.



Whales bought 2 of the last 5 bottoms. At the FTX low, the smart money was the exit liquidity's mirror image. They sold it.

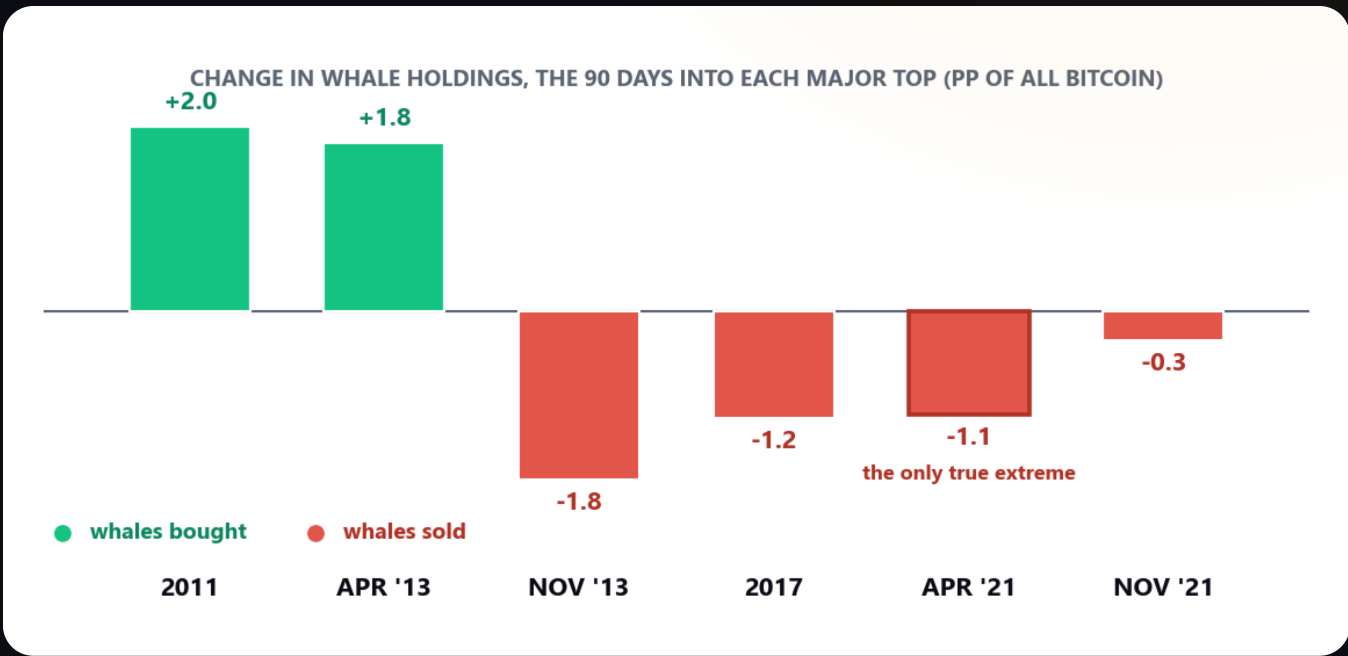
TEST THREE

DO WHALES SELL THE TOP?

Half true, and the half that is true is useless. Whale share fell into 4 of the last 6 manias, but look at the sizes on the chart. Most of those moves were ordinary drift, the kind that happens in any random quarter.

Only once in fifteen years did the whale metric truly scream at a top. April 2021, more than 3 standard deviations of distribution. One real warning, six manias.

And in the two early manias, 2011 and April 2013, whales did the exact opposite of the legend. They bought straight into the blow-off, right alongside retail.



Only one top in fifteen years came with a real whale warning. You could not have traded the other five off whale data.

NO CHERRY PICKING

THE FULL RECEIPTS, EVERY EVENT

Here is every major top and bottom, with exactly what 1,000+ BTC wallets did in the 90 days going in, and whether the legend called it. Highlighted rows are where the legend failed.

pp = percentage points of all Bitcoin. 'Bought' = whale share rose into the event, 'sold' = it fell.

EVENT	WHAT WHALES ACTUALLY DID	THE LEGEND WAS
Jun 2011 top	+2.0 pp (bought)	WRONG
Apr 2013 top	+1.8 pp (bought)	WRONG
Nov 2013 top	-1.8 pp (sold)	RIGHT
Dec 2017 top	-1.2 pp (sold)	RIGHT
Apr 2021 top	-1.1 pp (sold), the one true extreme	RIGHT
Nov 2021 top	-0.3 pp (sold)	RIGHT
Oct 2025 top	wallet data paywalled. The flow gauge screamed buy	WRONG
Nov 2011 bottom	+0.3 pp (bought)	RIGHT
Jan 2015 bottom	-0.1 pp (sold)	WRONG
Dec 2018 bottom	+0.9 pp (bought)	RIGHT
Mar 2020 bottom	-0.1 pp (sold)	WRONG
Nov 2022 bottom	-0.9 pp (sold)	WRONG

Six of twelve events, the legend simply got wrong. And most of the 'right' calls were moves so small you would never have noticed them without hindsight.

NO CHERRY PICKING

EVERY TIME THE ALARM RANG

And here is every single time the famous alarm fired, the moment whale share flips up after 60 or more days of decline. The headline you keep seeing. Twelve alarms in fifteen years of data, zero bottoms called.

A bottom-caller that has never once been within 90 days of a bottom.

#	THE DAY WHALES 'STARTED ACCUMULATING'	NEAREST REAL BOTTOM	MISSED BY
1	Oct 19, 2010	Nov 2011	395 days
2	Mar 14, 2012	Nov 2011	117 days
3	Dec 07, 2012	Nov 2011	385 days
4	Jun 09, 2014	Jan 2015	219 days
5	Jul 19, 2015	Jan 2015	186 days
6	Mar 08, 2016	Jan 2015	419 days
7	Mar 24, 2017	Dec 2018	631 days
8	Jan 23, 2018	Dec 2018	326 days
9	Oct 18, 2019	Mar 2020	147 days
10	Jun 16, 2021	Mar 2020	460 days
11	Jan 07, 2022	Nov 2022	318 days
12	Apr 09, 2023	Nov 2022	139 days

The closest this alarm ever got was 117 days. Four months early is not a signal. It is a story that happens to mention a date.

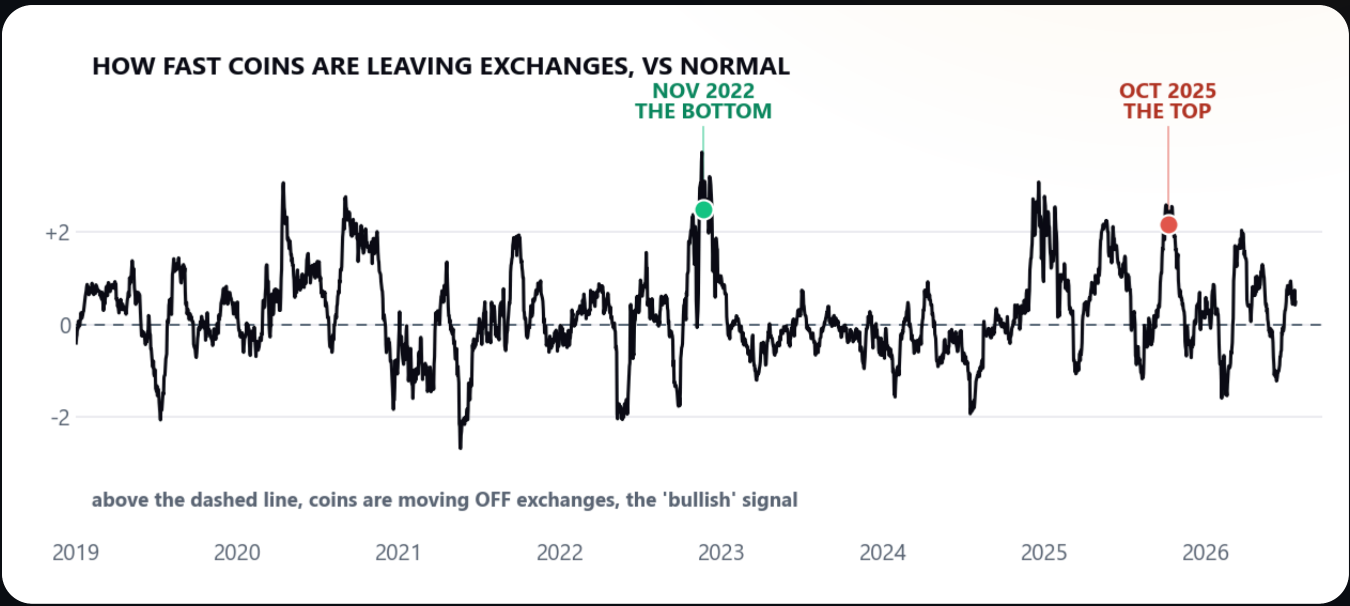
THE KICKER

THE BULLISH SIGNAL THAT FIRED AT THE EXACT TOP

If you only remember one chart from this guide, make it this one. On October 6, 2025, coins were pouring out of exchanges at one of the fastest rates in years. Coins leaving exchanges is the textbook accumulation signal, the one every on-chain dashboard colors green.

That was the exact day of the cycle top. Bitcoin is down about 49 percent since.

Now look at November 2022. The same extreme fired there too, and that was the bottom. One signal, the top and the bottom. Extreme exchange outflows do not measure direction. They measure fear, people yanking coins to cold storage when they stop trusting the system, at panic lows and euphoric highs alike.



A signal that fires at the top AND the bottom is not a buy signal. It is a fear gauge.

THE HONEST PART

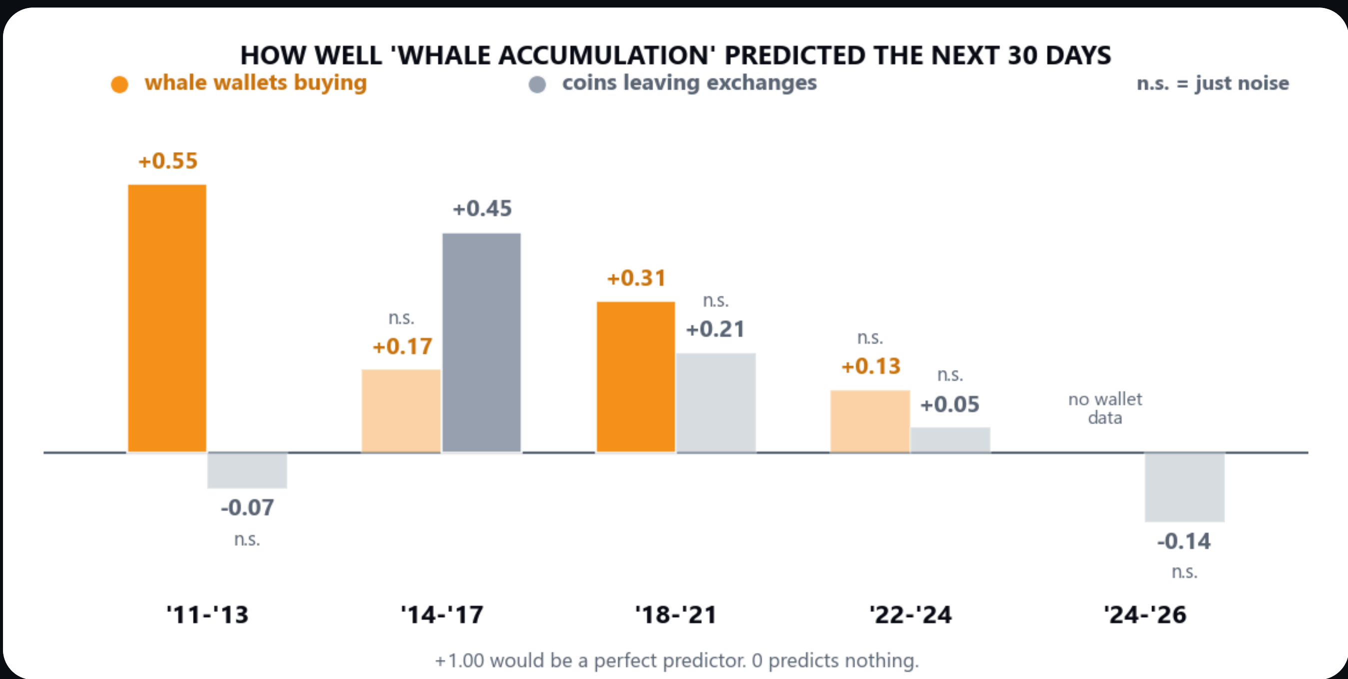
IT USED TO WORK. THEN IT WENT PUBLIC

Before 2018, whale accumulation genuinely led returns, and in the 2014 to 2017 era exchange flows were one of the strongest public signals ever measured. Then the dashboards launched, the alert accounts crossed a million followers, and every era since has been weaker than the last.

Here is the predictive power of both whale signals, era by era. 'Real' means it passes a proper statistical test. 'Noise' means it does not.

Rank correlation with the next 30 days of price, non-overlapping windows. +1.00 would be a perfect predictor, 0 predicts nothing.

ERA	WHALE WALLETS BUYING	COINS LEAVING EXCHANGES
2011-2013	+0.55 (real)	-0.07 (noise)
2014-2017	+0.17 (noise)	+0.45 (real)
2018-2021	+0.31 (real)	+0.21 (noise)
2022-mid-24	+0.13 (noise)	+0.05 (noise)
mid-24-2026	no wallet data	-0.14 (noise)



THE ULTIMATE TEST

WE EVEN TRIED TO TRADE IT FOR YOU

Talk is cheap, so we turned every version of the whale signal into a real strategy. Hold Bitcoin only while the signal reads bullish, stand aside otherwise. Decided at each day's close, entered the next day, trading fees included, 13 to 15 years of history per rule.

Yearly average growth over each rule's full data window. The two benchmarks differ because flow data runs to today while wallet-band data stops in May 2024.

STRATEGY	IT GREW	JUST HOLDING GREW	VERDICT
Hold while whale share is rising	+69% a year	+137% a year	Lost to holding
Hold while whale COUNT is rising	+94% a year	+137% a year	Lost to holding
Hold while mid-size whales (1k-10k) rise	+106% a year	+137% a year	Lost to holding
Hold while sharks (100-1k) rise	+90% a year	+137% a year	Lost to holding
Hold while coins flow OFF exchanges	+31% a year	+80% a year	Lost to holding
Hold while exchange supply is falling	+38% a year	+80% a year	Lost to holding

Every single rule made less money than doing nothing. We also raced each rule against 500 random-timing versions of itself, and none of them beat luck. The bear-year 'wins' hiding in the yearly numbers come from simply being out of the market a lot, not from knowing when to be out.

Copying the whales was not even a smoother ride. The follow-the-whales rule sat through a 92 percent drawdown in 2011, and then rode the entire 2018 collapse from Jun 2017 to Dec 2018 for a 75 percent loss, because whale share was RISING nearly the whole way down.

Six strategies, fifteen years, zero winners. If whale watching worked, this table is where it would show up.

FOR THE SKEPTICS

THE CUTS A SMART READER ASKS FOR

If you sort every quarter by how hard whales were buying, the heaviest-buying fifth does show big forward returns. This is the one number a whale-alert seller would show you. Here is the full table instead.

All quarters ranked into five buckets by the 90-day change in whale share, full 2011-2024 history.

WHEN WHALES WERE	NEXT 90 DAYS (MEDIAN)	AND PRICE ROSE
The heaviest sellers	+17%	66% of the time
Mild sellers	+0%	51% of the time
Roughly flat	+9%	62% of the time
Mild buyers	+13%	57% of the time
The heaviest buyers	+43%	75% of the time

Look closer and it falls apart. BOTH extremes beat the middle. Heavy whale SELLING was also bullish. That U shape is the tell that the wild early years drive this table, when whale share swung violently and everything mooned regardless. It is era luck, not information.

Two more cuts. The accumulation signal only 'works' when Bitcoin is already above its long-term trend line (correlation +0.28 in uptrends, +0.06 below trend), so it is mostly repackaged bull-market beta. And the verdict changes depending on which arbitrary cutoff defines a whale, 1k+ supply, whale count, or the 1k-10k band. A real signal survives its own definition. This one does not.

METHOD AND SOURCES

HOW WE DID IT, SO YOU CAN CHECK US

1. The data. Coin Metrics community feed, more than 5,800 days. Price, supply, and exchange flows run to today. The wallet-band metrics were put behind a paywall in mid-2024, so we recovered the full 2011 to May 2024 history from an archived copy of Coin Metrics' own public data file, and verified it matches the live feed exactly on every overlapping day.

2. No peeking. Every signal uses only information available on that day. Wallet shares are smoothed over a trailing week, so a single custody reshuffle cannot fake a trend.

3. No double counting. Every hit rate uses separate, non-overlapping windows. Overlapping windows are how most on-chain 'research' inflates its confidence.

4. Luck checks. Every strategy was raced against 500 random-timing versions of itself. Every 'extreme' reading is judged against the trailing two years, not hindsight.

5. The caveats we cannot fix. A wallet is an address, not a person, so exchanges and ETF custodians pollute every whale metric, especially after the spot ETFs launched in 2024. Wallet-band data ends May 2024. We say so wherever it matters.

One script reproduces every number in this guide. That is the standard our research holds to, and the bar you should hold everyone else's signals to.

WHY IT FOOLS EVERYONE

A WALLET IS NOT A PERSON

The deepest reason whale watching keeps burning people. The metric itself is not measuring what you think it is measuring.

Exchanges and ETF custodians keep customer coins in giant addresses, and today roughly 13 percent of all Bitcoin sits on exchanges. When Coinbase reorganizes its cold wallets, thousands of coins hop between 1,000+ BTC addresses and every alert account screams whale. Nobody bought anything. Nobody sold anything. It is custody plumbing.

So here is the checklist this study leaves you with. Use it on every signal anyone ever sells you.

1. Ask for the base rate. Up 63 percent of the time means nothing when everything is up 62.

2. Ask what the metric physically measures. A wallet is not a person.

3. Ask if it still worked AFTER it got famous. Most public edges die in public.

4. Ask if it beats just holding. Ours is the rare shop that will show you that table.

5. If they cannot show you those four things, you are not looking at a signal. You are looking at content.

Where are we now? Bitcoin sits about 49 percent below the top and the flow gauges read neutral, no extreme either way. That is what the data says today. History, not a prediction, and not financial advice. The live read is what I publish every single morning.

BITCOIN DAILY

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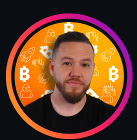

Bitcoin Jae

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