A TESTAMENT TO REVOLUTION?

ELITE REPRODUCTION AND PARTIBLE INHERITANCE, FRANCE 1791-1870

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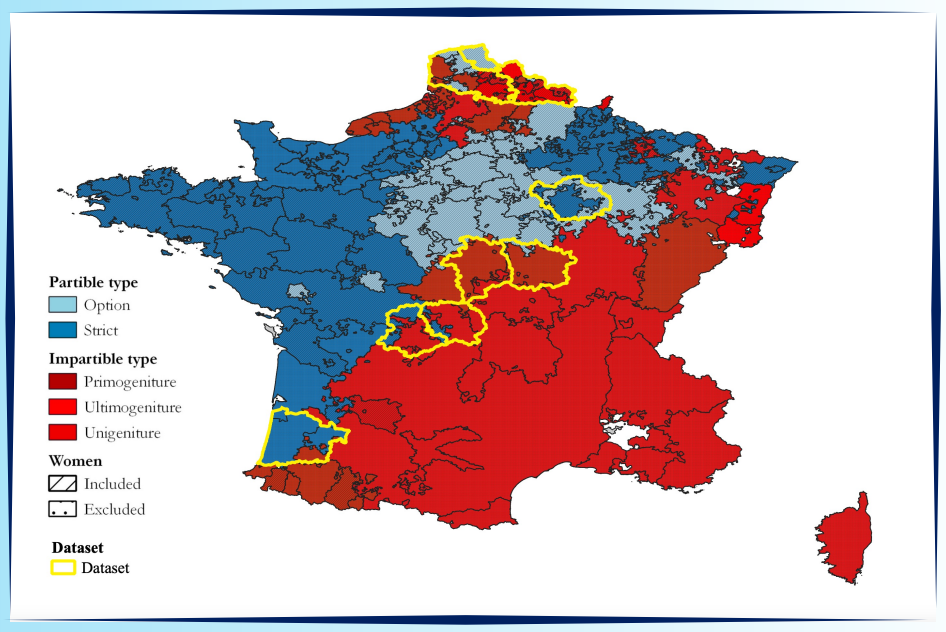
"[L]aws regulating inheritance [are key to the perpetuation of noble wealth].[...] [T]o serve the purpose of" ***avoiding the dispersion of patrimonies, some sort of impartible inheritance system is required."***

Alfani (2023, p. 76)

"One cannot ignore the unfortunate results produced daily by its application. Not only does it have as a consequence this ***unlimited parceling out of landed property*** *[...] but, even more, this [...] tends to* ***weaken without ceasing the bonds of the family****, [...] to thus shake the very bases on which it rests."*

Robert-Tancrède de Hauteville, 1862 cited from Higgs (1987, p. 57)

A TAPESTRY OF LOCAL INHERITANCE CUSTOMS... (GAY ET AL., 2024)



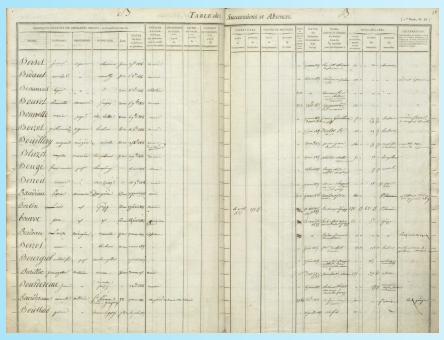
...IS REPLACED BY UNIVERSAL EQUAL PARTITION AFTER THE REVOLUTION.

We focus on all *départements* on the border for which TSA data is available for the period 1791-1870.

DOES EQUAL INHERITANCE MAKE SOCIETIES MORE EQUAL?

- **Does equal partition make a society more equal? Can a hereditary aristocracy survive under partible inheritance?** I aim to contribute to answering this question by making use of a novel source, studying the **introduction of equal partition in France**. The **introduction of equal partition by the *Loi de Nivôse*/*Code Napoléon***, rather than a uniform shock, represented a form of standardization of legislation. France had been a legal patchwork. The South-East and parts of Northern France featured impartible inheritance regimes, while the North and West already had customary law traditions of the partible type.
- Both Piketty (2011) and Alfani (2023) see inheritance system as crucial for inequality as they determine the inheritability of wealth. Chapelle et al. are working on a project finding long-term effects on land inequality in France until today.
- I use this variation to study the effects of equal partition on inequality and – eventually - the ability of both the *ancien régime* nobility and the new Napoleonic nobility to maintain its position in the wealth distribution by looking at the **locations on the border between the different inheritance regimes.**
- In order to do so, we have **digitised a new source. The so-called *Tables des Successions et Absences*** lists every individual dying in France between 1791 and 1870.
- This **new dataset is one of our contributions. Our dataset is the first to capture rural as well as urban wealth elites** and at **approximately 2 million observations** is 36 times larger than the existing *Enquête TRA* dataset.
- This is still a work in progress, and no conclusive results can be presented yet. Our contribution also consists of the novel dataset we have digitised.

THE DATASET: THE *TABLES DES SUCCESSIONS ET ABSENCES*



- French inheritance tax registers used in Piketty et al. (2006, 2014) (looking exclusively at Paris);
- Universal coverage ;
- Contains information on individual-level wealth and occupation for 1791-1870.

Limitation of the Data:

- Taxes on real estate were filed with the bureau of the location of real estate. Taxes on movable wealth were filed at the legal residence.

DATA SUMMARY

Period	Deaths	Non-zero Wealth	In %	Avg. log wealth	SD log wealth
1790–1800	12,685	1,735	13.7%	6.688	2.029
1800–1809	31,382	5,213	16.6%	7.048	2.001
1810–1819	58,425	10,252	17.5%	7.192	1.939
1820–1829	90,999	15,884	17.5%	6.892	1.867
1830–1839	129,626	25,469	19.6%	6.786	1.773
1840–1849	144,962	27,692	19.1%	6.943	1.761
1850–1859	137,656	27,670	20.1%	6.880	1.753
1860–1870	166,028	31,767	19.1%	6.927	1.770
All periods	875,781	167,497	19.1%	6.915	1.809

Our **dataset encompasses all *départements* on the customary boundary for which TSA data is available for the period 1791-1870.**

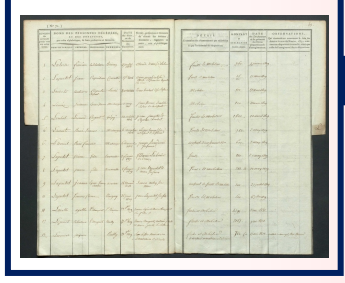
We have digitised a cross-section of all Tables des Successions et Absences books that contain a year ending in -2, as well as the year 1870. In our **full dataset** we have digitised **20 *départements*** and have **combined** it **with** data for **Paris** from Postel-Vinay and Rosenthal (2026). This gives **us data on 1,994,793 deaths.**

AN END-TO-END DIGITIZATION PIPELINE FOR THE *TSA*

WITH AURELIUS NOBLE

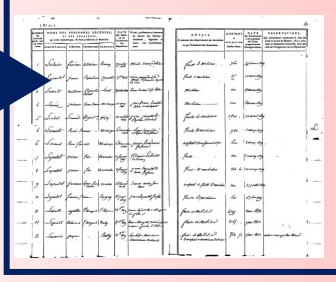
SCRAPE

SELENIUM



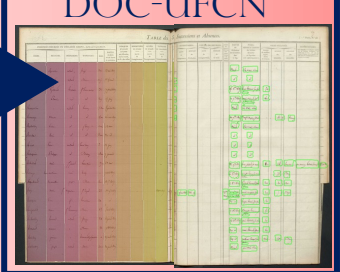
BINARIZE

DE-GAN



SEGMENT

DOC-UFCN



HTR/OCR

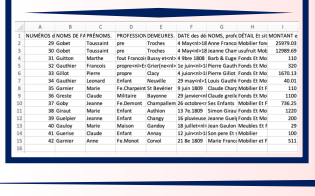
TROCR

(CER: 1.4%)

RECONSTRUCT THE PAGE:

- BERT MODEL
- DOC-UFCN
- REGEX

RESULT



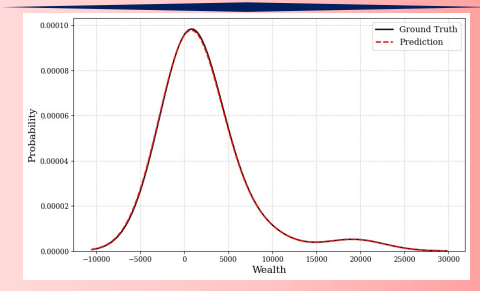
CHECK OUT OUR INTERACTIVE ONLINE TRANSCRIPTION WORKSHOP:

MEDIAN CER TRANSCRIPTION (SELECTED COLUMNS)

Variable	Ground Truth	Prediction
Age	4 mois	4 mois
Date of Death	17 aout 1866	17 aout 1860
Building Situation	Asnois	asnois.
Wealth Estimation	1230	1230
First Name	Gilbert	Gilbert
Marital Status	ep. Marie	ep. Marie
Heirs' Names	Devoucout, antoine	Devoncous, metoine
Profession	mineur	Mineur
Residences	Alluy	Allay
Surname	Louvrier	Louvrier

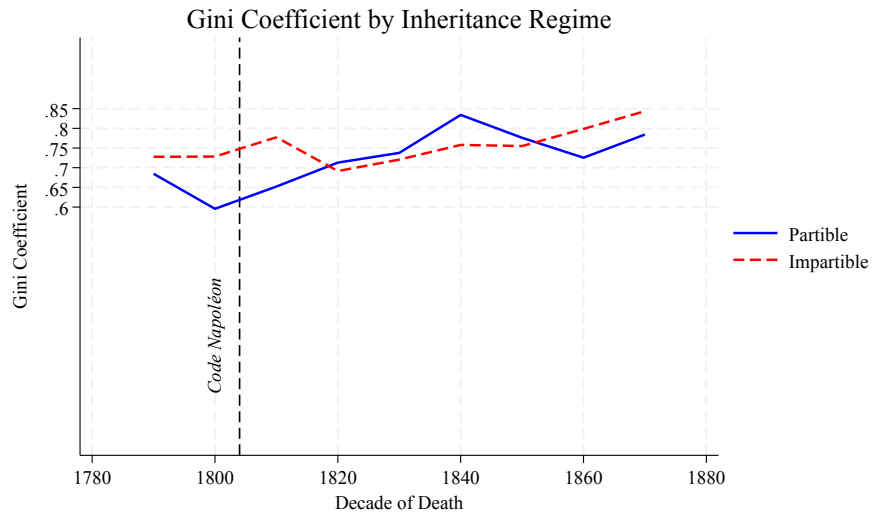
Note: Comparison of transcription for each variable, showing the observation with median error.

PERFORMANCE TRANSCRIPTION OF WEALTH



- Our model has **a generic Character Error Rate of 1.4%.**
- Importantly, as can be seen above, it **performs really well with numbers.**

PRELIMINARY EVIDENCE



- Preliminary evidence shows that – as might have been expected – **wealth is more unequally distributed in areas with primogeniturial customs. After the introduction of universal equal partition, the two areas converge.**
- This is **not causal evidence yet, however – we will implement a difference-in-differences-in-reverse framework**. Additionally, to test Alfani's (2023) hypothesis, the effects on the degree of elite persistence would have to be studied. A **possible endogenous fertility response** (Gay, 2023) makes this a non-trivial problem.
- We provide a **new dataset on wealth at death for provincial France** that is approximately 36 times larger than the exiating *Enquête TRA*.

PROPOSED IDENTIFICATION STRATEGY

$$ineq_{ct} = \mu_c + \delta_{b(c),t} + \sum_{k \neq -1} \beta_k \left(\text{Impartible}_c \times \mathbb{I}\{t - t_0 = k\}\right) + \Gamma' X_{ct} + \varepsilon_{ct}$$

Where:

- $ineq_{ct}$: inequality measure for canton c at time t
- μ_c: canton fixed effect
- $\delta_{b(c),t}$: border-segment x year fixed effects ($b(c)$ is the border-segment containing c)
- k: indexing years relative to the reform year t_0 (coefficients normalized to pre-reform year $k = -1$)
- X_{ct}: time-varying controls

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