Parental Death, Inheritance, and Labor Supply in the United States

Elif Taşar*
UC Berkeley

John Voorheis
US Census Bureau

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Abstract

Does parental death influence the next generation's labor supply? To what extent is this response mediated by inherited wealth? Answering these questions advances our understanding of household earnings dynamics and wealth accumulation as well as aggregate wealth inequality. Using federal tax and social security records, we estimate event studies around parental death to investigate impacts on adult children. We find that parental death causes sizable gains in investment income—our main proxy for inheritances—and modest reductions in labor supply, with per-adult investment income at the tax unit level increasing by about \$300 (45 percent) per year and per-adult wage earnings decreasing by \$600 (1.8 percent) per year on average. The unconditional mean inheritance reflected in investment income is \$21,000, with public data suggesting that the investment income gains we estimate capture about one half of total inheritances in our sample. In the short run, inheritances have a slight equalizing effect on the distribution of the component of wealth that generates investment income. Income effects are the dominant channel through which parental death reduces earnings, with children of wealthier parents exhibiting larger earnings reductions.

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1 Introduction

The relative economic disadvantage of Millenials and Generation X, many of whom entered the labor market or prime homebuying years during the Great Recession, is a frequent topic of both public discourse and economic research. Correspondingly, predictions of a "Great Wealth Transfer" from Baby Boomer and Silent generation parents in the coming decades have gained prominence in popular media. Will the forthcoming demographic transition affect the wealth of a large share of households and, if so, how will it influence household behavior? In particular, do inheritances reduce labor supply, as many other transfers do, and are they the primary driver of responses to parental death? While a large literature examines the role of intergenerational transfers in aggregate wealth accumulation, the absence of wealth and inheritance registries in the United States has limited their measurement and impacts at the household level.

This paper generates new insights on how inheritances affect work behavior and the distribution of inheritances in the U.S. by using a rich parent-child linked panel dataset to identify parental deaths and infer inheritances. We construct this dataset from federal tax and social security records for the universe of Social Security Number holders from 1994 to 2022, yielding a panel of nearly two million adult children who lose their last living parent from 2005 to 2022. We examine the effect of parental death on income flows earned from investments, the component of wealth we are able to directly observe, and on labor earnings. Our analysis is based on an event study design that compares outcomes of individuals before and after their parent dies with outcomes of individuals bereaved in a later year.

We find that parental death causes a sizable and sustained increase in per-adult investment income (on average 45 percent of the baseline mean over five years), suggesting an expansion of the underlying assets that generate this income. Applying capitalization factors from the literature, we estimate that this flow income corresponds to a stock of wealth of around \$14,000. Simultaneously, parental death causes a decrease in per-adult earnings (2 percent of the baseline mean on average) that persists at 60 percent of the initial reduction after five years. On the extensive margin, the share of tax units (i.e. an individual or a married couple) with positive income initially increases by four percentage points (20 percent of the baseline mean), declining to half this gain after five years. The effect on the share of tax units with positive earnings is economically insignificant. We find trivial to modest effects on other labor market outcomes and on marriage, divorce, and geographic moves.

In the canonical labor supply model (MaCurdy, 1981), perfect foresight implies that inheritances do not impact permanent income and therefore cannot affect labor supply. To rationalize our results, we introduce a simple modification to the conventional model in which inheritances are a shock to assets that is not fully anticipated. By adjusting the budget constraint to permit such a shock, we show that the optimal choice of hours is decreasing in the amount of inheritance that is unanticipated.

We supplement our analysis of the impact of parental death on inheritances by studying effects on additional proxies for forms of inheritance that may not be reflected in investment income. We find that parental death has a sizable and significant impact on the probability of receiving information returns associated with tax-reportable changes in wealth. In particular, the probability of receiving Form 1099-R—issued to all child beneficiaries of retirement accounts during our study period—and Form 1099-S, which often accompanies a house sale, each double relative to their baseline means.

To better understand the relationship between inheritances and earnings, we study treatment effect heterogeneity along numerous dimensions, including demographic characteristics obtained from linked Census data that are unobserved in many previous studies of windfall income. We find that earnings reductions generally mirror investment income gains, though this correlation is not universal. Investment income, in turn, scales dramatically with parental income.

We next perform various evaluations to assess the relative quantitative importance of income and non-income mechanisms. We first show that the earnings response is muted among children whose dying parents had no observable wealth in our data prior to death, as identified by tax records and Census homeownership data. Among these children, investment income remains flat but earnings fall by half the amount of the broader sample in the year of parent death. In subsequent years, effects are virtually indistinguishable from zero. We also find that the exclusion restriction is narrowly rejected in a two-stage least squares regression of earnings on investment income that uses interactions of parental death and individual characteristics as instruments. Together, these results imply that the initial impact of parental death is influenced by non-income factors.

We return to heterogeneity analyses to adjudicate between non-income explanations, demonstrating that loss of informal childcare, compensatory labor supply to offset parent healthcare costs (i.e., added worker effects), and co-employment among children and parents are unlikely to play a significant role. Comparing responses to the death of own parents versus parents-in-law also casts doubt on grief as a prominent driver of earnings reductions, although we find limited evidence that this mechanism operates in the year of death. Finally, we show that elimination of eldercare responsibilities substantially increases earnings among children who were cohabiting with parents prior to death, the only group for whom we find a positive earnings response. We conclude that inheritances are the dominant source of labor supply reductions following parental death, but psychological effects or logistical obligations related to bereavement and estate settlement are needed to rationalize the universal reduction across groups in the year of death.

Next, we explore distributional features of inheritances, a topic where previous work in the U.S. has relied on survey data for samples much smaller than ours. We first examine the extensive margin of inheritances—that is, the share of the population that receives an inheritance upon parental death—by combining our various proxies for wealth transfers. We find that inheritances are highly concentrated in our sample, with only 12 percent of individuals receiving any inheritance that generates a tax record in our data. Using our earlier estimates for investment income, we calculate that, conditional on receiving an inheritance, the average inheritance is about \$250,000. Using the Survey of Consumer Finances (SCF)—the most widely used source of data on U.S. inheritances—as a benchmark, we find a similar inheritance share and mean conditional inheritance.

Finally, we establish that, although the wealthy receive larger inheritances, inheritances modestly reduce the relative inequality of the investment income distribution over the five year period following parental death. Using fitted and counterfactual values from our event studies, we document an inward shift of the Lorenz curve, with the Gini coefficient falling from 0.940 to 0.921.

Our paper makes two main contributions: we are the first to document behavioral responses to inheritances and the distribution of inheritances in the U.S. using comprehensive administrative data. The most similar study to ours, Nekoei and Seim (2023), examines responses to parental death (as well as implications for wealth inequality) in Sweden, a setting with lower wealth inequality, a stronger social safety net, and higher labor force participation rates than the U.S. The authors find that labor earnings initially decline by one percent following parental death and fully recover within seven years, a similar result to ours. With respect to wealth, which is directly observed, they document an initial increase in wealth of about USD 6,100 that falls to USD 3,000 after seven years. This increase is smaller and less sustained than our result, but we note that our measure misses a fraction of smaller inheritances.

Within the U.S., existing work on labor supply responses to inheritances is limited to older studies that use either the Panel Study on Income Dynamics (PSID) or small samples of estate tax returns, which capture only the largest inheritances, for a few years in the 1980s (Holtz-Eakin et al., 1993; Joulfaian and Wilhelm, 1994). The studies, like ours, find modest negative effects on labor supply.

Most existing studies that characterize inheritances in the U.S. are based on the PSID or the SCF. Our study estimates inheritance shares and magnitudes using a much larger sample and along more varied heterogeneity dimensions than those permitted by these surveys, without relying on accurate recall of inheritances. Our findings agree with results of Wolff (2002) and Wolff and Gittleman (2011) that U.S. inheritances are very unevenly distributed and have an equalizing short-run effect on wealth inequality.

Our paper also complements previous work on labor supply responses to windfall income, chiefly lottery winnings (Golosov et al., 2024; Bulman et al., 2021; Cesarini et al., 2017; Picchio et al., 2018) and, more recently, unconditional transfers in two U.S. states (Vivalt et al., 2025). In this literature, a key parameter is the marginal propensity to earn (MPE), which represents the decrease in annual earnings associated with an annual dollar increase in unearned income for the rest of one's life. Estimating an MPE using our results requires stronger assumptions than in these settings, since we do not observe the total magnitude of inheritances nor can we identify the portion of inheritances that is unanticipated. Nonetheless, the roughly \$1.30 drop in earnings we find for every dollar of investment income gained supports recent findings by Golosov et al. (2024) and Vivalt et al. (2025) that MPEs are much larger than previously believed. In addition, like Golosov et al. (2024) we find that earnings reductions are increasing in baseline earnings.

Finally, our paper brings new evidence to bear on a long-standing literature concerning the share of inherited wealth in aggregate private wealth (Kotlikoff and Summers, 1981; Modigliani, 1986). This literature has historically assumed inelastic labor supply with respect to inheritances. Our study lends credibility to this assumption by illustrating that the labor disincentive of inheritances is not large enough to significantly shift the distribution of wage earnings. Our study also complements a related literature that studies intergenerational wealth elasticities and patterns (Black et al., 2020; Adermon et al., 2018; Wolff, 2002; Bernheim, 1991) by documenting that inheritances reflected in investment income vary dramatically by different measures of parental income.

2 Theoretical framework

In this section, we present the conventional model of optimal labor-consumption choice with perfect foresight, following MaCurdy (1981). Next, we discuss how inheritances, as a shock to assets that is not fully anticipated, can shift individuals' labor supply. The derivation follows Pistaferri (2003).

With perfect foresight, an individual solves the following problem:

$$\max \sum_{t=0}^{T} (1-\delta)^{-t} u(c_{it}, h_{it}, \mathbf{Z}_{it})$$

subject to the budget constraint

$$a_{it+1} = (1 + r_{t+1})(a_{it} + w_{it}h_{it} - c_{it}) \tag{2.1}$$

which requires that the present value of permanent income equals the present value of lifetime consumption:

$$A_0 + \sum_{t=0}^{T} \left(\frac{w_{it}h_{it}}{\prod_{k=0}^{t}(1 + r_k)} \right) = \sum_{t=0}^{T} \left(\frac{c_{it}}{\prod_{k=0}^{t}(1 + r_k)} \right) \tag{2.2}$$

where δ is the intertemporal discount rate, c is consumption, h is hours of work, $\mathbf{Z}$ is a vector of preference shifters, a is assets, r is the real interest rates, and c is the real hourly wage.

If inheritances were fully anticipated, their present value would be captured by the A_0 component of permanent income (initial assets). Therefore, receipt of an inheritance would not alter the optimal choice of hours or consumption at the time of inheritance or beyond. In contrast, if inheritances are not fully anticipated, the individual's problem is:

$$\max E_t \sum_{t=0}^{T} (1 - \delta)^{-t} u(c_{it}, h_{it}, \mathbf{Z}_{it})$$

subject to the budget constraint

$$a_{it+1} = (1 + r_{t+1})(a_{it} + w_{it}h_{it} - c_{it}) + q_{it+1} \tag{2.3}$$

where $E_t(.) = E(.|\Omega_{it})$ is the subjective expectation that conditions on the individual information set Ω_{it} at time t and $q_{it} \equiv a_{it} - E_{t-1}(a_{it})$. The budget constraint requires that assets at $t + 1$ are equal to assets accumulated in t plus an innovation in assets. This innovation could represent any unexpected shock to assets, such as negative health shocks, uninsured disasters, lottery winnings, or inheritances. We assume rational expectations such that $E_{t-1}(q_{it}) = 0$.

Conditions for an optimum are satisfaction of the budget constraint and the first-order conditions:

$$\frac{\partial u(c_{it}, h_{it}, \mathbf{Z}_{it})}{\partial c_{it}} = \lambda_{it} \tag{2.4}$$

$$-\frac{\partial u(c_{it}, h_{it}, \mathbf{Z}_{it})}{\partial h_{it}} = \lambda_{it} w_{it} \tag{2.5}$$

$$\lambda_{it} = E_t \left(\frac{1 + r_{t+1}}{1 + \delta} \lambda_{it+1} \right) \tag{2.6}$$

where λ is the Lagrange multiplier, representing the marginal utility of wealth.

Equations 2.4 and 2.5 can be solved to obtain Frisch demand functions for consumption and hours of work, which hold λ constant. Assuming isoelastic, additively separable utility, one can obtain an approximate log-linear specification for hours of work:

$$\ln h_{it} \approx \mathbf{Z}'_{it}\alpha + \eta \ln w_{it} + (\eta + \varphi) \ln \lambda_{it} \tag{2.7}$$

Plugging equation 2.6 into equation 2.7 and taking first differences yields the Euler equation for labor supply:

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta \ln h_{it} \approx \Delta\mathbf{Z}'_{it}\alpha + \eta\Delta \ln w_{it} - (\eta + \varphi)E_{t-1}(r_t - \delta) \\ + (\eta + \varphi)(\ln \lambda_{it} - E_{t-1}(\ln \lambda_{it})) \\ - (\eta + \varphi) \ln E_{t-1}(e^{\ln \lambda_{it} - E_{t-1}(\ln \lambda_{it})}) \end{aligned} \tag{2.8}$$

We now assume that the solution for λ_{it} is such that its log can be approximated as a linear function of assets (which are assumed to be uncertain), log wages (which are assumed to be certain), and an error term:

$$(\eta + \varphi) \ln \lambda_{it} = \sum_{\tau=0}^{T-t} (\gamma_\tau E_t(a_{it+\tau})) + \gamma_w \ln w_i + \nu_i \tag{2.9}$$

Here we have assumed that wages are fixed; allowing them to evolve deterministically does not affect the results below. Note that concavity of preferences implies γ_τ and γ_w are negative for all τ.

Using equation 2.9, the innovation in the marginal utility of wealth can be written as

$$(\eta + \varphi)(\ln \lambda_{it} - E_{it-1}(\ln \lambda_{it})) = \sum_{\tau=0}^{T-t} \Big(\gamma_\tau (E_t(a_{it+\tau}) - E_{t-1}(a_{it+\tau})) \Big) \tag{2.10}$$

Plugging equation 2.3 into equation 2.10 yields:

$$(\eta + \varphi)(\ln \lambda_{it} - E_{it-1}(\ln \lambda_{it})) = q_{it} \Big(\gamma_0 + \sum_{\tau=1}^{T-t} \gamma_\tau \prod_{k=1}^{\tau} (1 + r_{t+k}) \Big) \tag{2.11}$$

Therefore, referring back to equation 2.8, the Euler equation for labor supply is proportional to the innovation in assets, q_{it}, multiplied by a negative constant. An unanticipated inheritance is a positive innovation in assets that results in a reduction in hours worked. The extent to which an inheritance is unanticipated is captured by the magnitude of the innovation, with a lower degree of anticipation corresponding to a larger reduction in hours worked.

3 Data

3.1 Data sources and sample construction

We link multiple administrative, Census and survey datasets using the Census Bureau's data linkage infrastructure (Wagner and Layne, 2014). We start from a commingled set of federal tax information containing the universe of individuals who have a Social Security Number (SSN) from 1994 to 2022, similar to Chetty et al. (2020).[1] This dataset includes key fields from the IRS Form 1040 and the Social Security Administration's Numident records provide sex and dates of birth and death. We link children to parents using fields on the 1040 that indicate dependent claiming. We define an individual's parents to be the one or two individuals who claimed her as a dependent in the first year she was claimed. We restrict claimees to being under 24, the age limit for dependents, at the time they are claimed. We then construct a balanced panel of adult children with linked parents from 2005 to 2022, the years for which W-2 data are available.

To obtain our main estimation sample, we define treatment as experiencing the death of a parent who is age 65 or older and who is one's last parent to die, including single parent deaths. We then restrict to children in the treated sample. In our sample, only a very small share of individuals have a spouse who also loses an elderly, last parent during the sample period. We drop these individuals from the sample to guarantee that all married couples only undergo treatment, as we define it, once. We then link to the Census Bureau's Environmental Impacts Frame (Voorheis et al., 2023), which provides harmonized address history information along with race and ethnicity for the near population sourced from administrative records and the Census Bureau's Master Address File. To assign education and homeownership, we link to the short and long form Decennial Censuses and American Community Surveys from 2000 through 2022.

Our inability to observe dependent claiming prior to 1994 has important consequences for our sample. First, we only observe parent-child linkages for people whose parents were filing taxes when their children were age 24 or under. Second, the sample consists of adult children belonging to birth cohorts from 1971 to 1987, meaning that the oldest children we observe are only age 51 by 2022, the end of our sample period.[2] As such, the dying parents we observe are necessarily either parents who had children relatively late in life or parents who die relatively early deaths, or both. We discuss this selection in Section 3.3.

[1] 1994 is the earliest year of tax data in which dependent claiming fields are available.

[2] The range of birth cohorts among dying parents is 1916 to 1957.

3.2 Terminology and key variables

This section outlines the key variables used in our estimation. Further details on variable definitions can be found in Appendix Table C.

Some economic outcomes are reported at the tax unit level and cannot be attributed to a specific individual for married couples. Therefore, for consistent comparison of all outcomes across both single and married tax units, unless otherwise noted we report outcomes on a per-adult basis by normalizing them by the number of adults in the tax unit. Following Golosov et al. (2024) and others, we define this number as two for individuals with filing status "married filing jointly" and one otherwise. Therefore, single person tax units include non-filers and filers who do not file jointly. We obtain filing status and spouse identity from the 1040.

Tax variables. *Wage earnings* or simply *earnings* refers to the sum of pre-tax wages, tips, salary taxable fringe benefits paid by all employers (i.e., the sum of earnings across W-2 forms) for an individual in a given year. It does not include self-employment income (i.e., self-employment business, farm, or partnership income). We define *investment income* as the sum of taxable and tax-exempt interest income, taxable dividend income, and gross rental income in a given year. For non-filers, we set these quantities equal to \$0. *Adjusted gross income*, or AGI, is the sum of total labor earnings, investment income, pension and retirement income, taxable Social Security payments, capital gains, unemployment compensation, business income, farm income, royalties, and real estate income in a given year and is net of above-the-line deductions.[3] We report all monetary values in inflation-adjusted 2022 U.S. dollars using the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) to adjust.[4] We also use indicators for the receipt of certain information returns, described in Section 5, as outcome variables.

Research design variables. The *treatment year* is the year of death of the individual's elderly, last parent. We refer to all individuals who experience the death of such a parent in the same year as a *treatment cohort*. The *baseline year* is defined as one year prior to the treatment year. The *event time* ℓ for treatment cohort c is the calendar year $c + \ell$, where ℓ may be positive or negative.

3.3 Descriptive statistics

Column 1 of Table 3.1 reports a set of summary statistics for individuals and parents in our sample—that is, the sample of individuals with at least one linked parent who lose an

[3] Real estate income includes but is not limited to rental income.

[4] We winsorize monetary variables at the 0.1 and 99.9th percentiles.

elderly, last parent during the sample period. Our final sample consists of nearly two million unique adult children and 1.4 million parent deaths from 2010-2022. All summary statistics are measured in their baseline year, i.e., one year prior to parent death. Each statistic is a weighted average using cohort size as weights. We find that, consistent with the selection described above, individuals in our sample lose their last parent when both they and the parent are relatively young, about 38 years old and 73 years old, respectively. Appendix Table A.1 reproduces the Social Security Administration's cohort life table for the closest available cohort (1940) to the average parent birth cohort in our sample (1943). The table suggests that, approximately, male (female) dying parents in our sample belong to the first one half (one third) of their birth cohort to die.

In column 2, we present corresponding summary statistics for a randomly drawn 10 percent sample of all individuals belonging to the same birth cohorts as those in our sample and with at least one linked parent (unconditional on parental death). Individuals and parents in our sample earn less and have lower investment income than their counterparts in the any parent sample, consistent with early (parental) mortality being more prevalent among lower income groups. In the case of parents, lower AGI and lower investment income among parents in our main sample reflects not just lower socioeconomic status but also the fact that parent tax units in the main sample consist of only the sole remaining parent. In spite of these differences, the final four rows of Table 3.1 demonstrate that individuals in our sample are well represented in each quartile of the earnings distribution of the any parent sample.

Identifying parent linkages requires parents to have filed taxes in the 1990s, and filers are lower income than non-filers on average. Appendix Table A.2 reproduces key summary statistics for our main sample and compares them to summary statistics from a randomly drawn 10 percent sample of all individuals belonging to the same birth cohorts, unconditional on linkage to any parent. The table illustrates that median wage earnings in our main sample are only slightly lower than in the full population of SSN-holders belonging to the same birth cohorts. Employment shares are comparable across the two samples. Strikingly, the Black share of our main sample remains substantially higher than that of the full population, indicating the extent to which early mortality varies by race. In combination with Table 3.1, Appendix Table A.2 illustrates that, while conditioning on linkage to a parent selects for higher socioeconomic status than the full population, conditioning on linkage to a parent who dies early results in a sample that is slightly disadvantaged relative to the full population.

Table 3.1: Summary statistics

	Main sample (last parent dies) (1)	**Any linked parent (10% sample)** (2)
Children		
Age	38.26	36.03
Birth year	1979	1981
Female	0.49	0.49
Married	0.37	0.45
White	0.57	0.65
Black	0.21	0.14
Hispanic	0.15	0.15
Number of linked parents	1.47	1.69
Has female linked parent	0.76	0.90
Has male linked parent	0.71	0.79
Has positive wage earnings	0.74	0.79
Wage earnings	$42,300	$50,140
Wage earnings (median)	$27,890	$36,890
Wage earnings (cond. on positive)	$57,510	$63,440
Tax unit investment income	$1,583	$2,020
Tax unit investment income (median)	$0	$0
Relative Q1 earnings share	0.31	0.25
Relative Q2 earnings share	0.26	0.25
Relative Q3 earnings share	0.22	0.25
Relative Q4 earnings share	0.20	0.25
Parents		
Dying parent age at death	73.59	73.33
Dying parent female	0.55	0.54
Oldest parent birth year	1943	1952
Oldest parent number of kids	1.95	2.48
1994 tax unit AGI	$71,580	$95,030
1994 tax unit AGI (median)	$51,910	$73,690
Tax unit investment income	$3,478	$8,249
Tax unit investment income (median)	$0	$0.53
Number of unique individuals	1,939,000	4,655,000
Number of unique parent deaths	1,416,000	216,000

Notes: This table presents, in column 1, descriptive statistics for our main estimation sample of individuals who lose an elderly, last parent. All monetary values are reported in 2022 U.S. dollars. In the upper section of the table, we report mean characteristics for children (except where otherwise noted). All values in column 1 are measured one year prior to parental death and reported as cohort size-weighted averages. Column 2 reports the same statistics for all individuals in the same birth cohorts as our main sample (1971-1987) to whom we can link at least one parent. All values are reported as averages across calendar years that correspond to the baseline year in the main sample, using treatment cohort shares in the main sample as weights. We also construct earnings quartiles of the any parent sample for each calendar year. In column 1, we report the share of individuals in the main sample whose earnings in the baseline year fall into each of these quartiles. For the any parent sample, the share is 0.25 for each quartile by construction. In the middle section of the table, we report mean characteristics for parents (except where otherwise noted). Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

4 Research design

4.1 Institutional setting

In the U.S., there is no requirement that parents bequeath assets to their children upon death. There are, however, benefits to bequeathing wealth to one's children upon death rather than during one's lifetime. Namely, bequeathed wealth is generally not taxed due to the tax code's step-up basis feature and absence of meaningful estate taxation. Under the step-up basis, when an heir inherits an asset the asset's value is reset, or "stepped-up", to its fair market value at the time of the original owner's death, rather than the value it had when it was originally purchased by the decedent. The filing threshold for the federal estate tax was $28M for married couples in 2025.[5] Only a small number of states have estate or inheritance taxes. Inter vivos gifts are generally also not taxed, but any sale of assets to facilitate such gifts is subject to capital gains taxation. Only annual gifts above $38,000 per married couple are reportable (in 2025). Amounts exceeding this exclusion amount are subject to taxation only if they also exceed a lifetime gift exemption, which is equal to the estate tax exemption and therefore seldom binds.

While the transfer of inherited assets is typically not taxed, distributions from inherited tax-deferred retirement accounts are taxable as ordinary income. Non-spouse beneficiaries listed on retirement accounts must contact the account-holder's financial institution or plan administrator to establish an "inherited account" into which funds are transferred. We describe IRS rules regarding withdrawals from inherited accounts in Section 5.1. In addition to taxes on retirement withdrawals, individuals face taxes on income earned from inherited financial assets, investment properties, or other sources. Life insurance death benefits are generally tax-exempt.

Aside from beneficiary designations, which generally pertain to retirement accounts and life insurance plans, there exist two main estate planning tools: wills and trusts. A will is a legal document that directs how assets should be distributed after death, and is often the only form of estate planning employed by families with modest estates.[6] A will takes effect only through probate, the court process that validates the will, oversees the payment of debts and taxes, and authorizes distribution of assets. Probate is also required when a decedent has no will, in which case state law determines the heirs. A trust is an alternative legal arrangement—more common among middle and high net worth households—that likewise

[5] Each spouse has an exemption of $14 million; any unused portion of the first deceased spouse's exemption can be preserved and added to the surviving spouse's exemption.

[6] According to a recent Gallup poll, about three quarters of Americans aged 65 and older say they have a will (Gallup, 2021).

directs distribution of assets and generally avoids probate.

When a parent dies, any debts are paid from their estate, and only what remains can be inherited. Heirs do not personally inherit those debts. The main exception is secured debts such as mortgages and car loans. If heirs wish to retain the assets in such cases (e.g., keep the family home), they must continue making loan payments or refinance.

4.2 Empirical strategy

Our parameter of interest is a treatment cohort-weighted average treatment effect of losing a last, elderly parent on a given outcome as measured in post-death year $c + \ell$. To recover our parameter of interest, we make use of the quasi-random timing of parental death in a staggered adoption event study by comparing outcomes for individuals who lose a parent in a given treatment cohort to outcomes for individuals who lose a parent in a later treatment cohort. Following Fadlon and Nielsen (2021) and Nekoei and Seim (2023), we impose that control individuals for a given treatment cohort undergo treatment within δ years of that treatment cohort. We set $\delta = 6$ in order to enable evaluation of treatment effects up to $\ell = 5$.[7]

We additionally require that controls belong to the same pre-treatment earnings tercile, racial/ethnic group (white/non-white), and birth cohort as the treatment cohort.[8] Conditioning on pre-treatment earnings and racial group limits comparisons of individuals whose earnings are evolving differently prior to treatment; conditioning on birth cohort limits the potential for age effects to confound our results. Our identification assumption, therefore is that, in the absence of treatment, the outcomes of treated individuals would have followed the same trend as the outcomes of individuals belonging to the same demographic group who lose their last, elderly parent within six years. Our justification for making this (conditional) parallel trends assumption is that parental death is universal, and its precise timing generally cannot be foreseen.

We implement our approach using the stacked differences-in-differences estimator, first developed by Cengiz et al. (2019).[9] Relative to the traditional two-way fixed effects DiD estimator, stacking avoids comparisons of treated units to previously treated units. For each treatment cohort $c \in$ [2010, 2016], the subset of treatment cohorts that are balanced in event time for $\ell \in$ [-5, 5], we form multiple "stacks." Each stack consists of all observations for units

[7] Our results are not sensitive to larger choices of δ.

[8] Henceforth we use the term "racial group," where white includes white Hispanic and non-white includes non-white Hispanic

[9] Using the Callaway and Sant'Anna (2021) estimator yields very similar point estimates. Relative to that estimator, the stacked approach greatly simplifies inference, especially when conducting heterogeneity analyses.

belonging to a particular demographic cell within treatment cohort c and all not-yet-treated observations for units treated in $c + 1$ through $c + 6$ belonging to the same demographic cell.[10] Within a stack d, event time is defined to be calendar year - c, and observations with stack-level event times $\ell \notin$ [-5, 5] are dropped.[11] We vertically concatenate all stacks and estimate the following event study equation on this stacked dataset:

$$Y_{i\ell d} = \sum_{h \neq -1} \Big(\beta_\ell \big(D_{s(i,\ell)d} \times 1(\ell = h) \big) \Big) + \alpha_{id} + \lambda_{\ell d} + \epsilon_{i\ell d} \tag{4.1}$$

where $Y_{i\ell d}$ represents the observed outcome for unit i in treatment state s (whether or not the unit is treated in stack d) and event time ℓ. $D_{s(i,\ell)d}$ is an indicator for whether the unit is treated in stack d. α_{id} and $\lambda_{\ell d}$ represent a set of individual $\times$ stack and stack-level event time $\times$ stack fixed effects, respectively. In all regressions, we normalize the baseline year, ℓ = -1, to 0 and cluster standard errors at the level of the dying parent.

When reporting event time parameter estimates, we report the number of unique individuals in the regression and the number of stacks. Our main sample consists of 714 stacks corresponding to the combination of the seven treatment cohorts for which we estimate treatment effects, 17 birth cohorts, three income terciles, and two racial groups. Appendix Figure B.1 reports the count of unique individuals per treatment cohort in our main sample.

5 Behavioral responses to parental death

5.1 Evidence of inheritances driving an earnings response

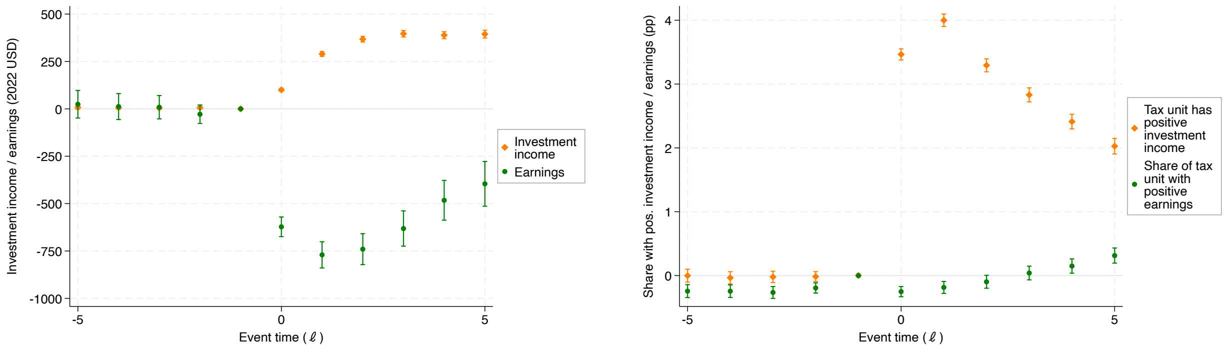
In panel (a) of Figure 5.1 we plot our estimated event time coefficients β_ℓ from equation 4.1 for our two main outcomes: per-adult investment income and per-adult earnings at the level of the tax unit. There is no evidence of differential trends between current and later treated individuals in pre-treatment event times -5 to -2 for either outcome, supporting the common trends assumption. The series labeled "Investment income" illustrates that, over the five year post-period, investment income of treated individuals increases by about \$300 a year on average relative to that of later treated individuals. This increase represents a 45 percent gain relative to the baseline mean. The second series in panel (a) shows that annual earnings of treated individuals fall by about \$600, or about 1.8 percent of the baseline mean.

[10] In heterogeneity analyses, we additionally include any characteristics that we condition on in the stack definition.

[11] Note that defining event time at the stack level requires that, when conditioning on time-varying characteristics, control units share the characteristics of treated units in the baseline year for the *treated* cohort. Conditioning in this way avoids mean reversion.

Figure 5.1: Effect of parental death on investment income and labor supply

(a) Total effect (b) Extensive margin



Notes: This figure presents estimates of the effect of losing a parent on four outcomes, based on estimating equation 4.1. Panel (a) displays per-adult outcomes, whereas outcomes in panel (b) are at the level of the tax unit. 95 percent confidence intervals are displayed, clustering on dying parent. We use c - 1 as the omitted event time. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

We report event time and DiD coefficients for investment income and earnings in Appendix Table A.3. In Appendix Figure B.2, as a robustness check, we report results from fitting a Poisson model to the data. The coefficient estimates imply similar percentage changes in per-adult investment income and earnings as those implied by Figure 5.1. Our results are not impacted by the omission of parent deaths or observations during the years of the Covid pandemic (2020-2021).

Since investment income is flow income generated by underlying assets, we interpret the observed spike in investment income as evidence of new wealth from inheritances. Event study results for the constituent components of investment income can be found in Appendix Figure B.3. Taxable interest income, tax-exempt income, dividend income, and rental income are primarily generated by debt instruments, municipal bonds, corporate stocks and mutual funds, and investment properties, respectively. The plot illustrates that gains in investment income are driven by increases in dividends and rental income, which roughly flatten in the third year following parental death. Using annual capitalization factors from Saez and Zucman (2016) for 2010-2016, we estimate that the observed overall investment income flow of $300 corresponds to a stock of roughly $14,000. The capitalization factors we use can be found in Appendix Table A.4.

Panel (b) illustrates that the effect of parental death on the share of individuals whose tax unit records any positive investment income is about three percent, averaging across post-period years, relative to a baseline mean of about 20 percent. The impact on the share of an individual's tax unit with any positive earnings (i.e., the share that is employed) is negligible. This is intuitive, given that the average value of the transfer is small relative to a stream of future earnings and individuals in our sample are only 38 years old on average, far from retirement age.

Appendix Table A.5 reports impacts on the probability of switching employers, the number of W-2s received, and W-2 deferred compensation (generally contributions to 401(k)s). Parental death causes small increases in the first two outcomes, suggesting that shifting to more part-time employment may be a channel through which individuals reduce hours. The effect on deferred compensation is insignificant, implying it is not the case that individuals maintain their baseline earnings but augment retirement saving.

With respect to dynamics, in panel (a) we see that earnings losses peak in the year after parental death, consistent with behavioral responses occurring mostly in the year of death for those bereaved early in the year and mostly in the following year for those bereaved later. In panel (b), the impact on the share of individuals with positive (tax unit-level) investment income also peaks in $\ell = 1$. As with earnings, within-year timing can explain this peak: parents who die midway through a given year may still earn investment income up until their death. Such income is reported on the parent's final income return (usually filed by an executor, next-of-kin, or legal heir) rather than the child's.

The longer lag before the peak in the total effect on investment income likely reflects delays in the transfer of assets. Probate, the legal process described in Section 4.1, can range in duration from a few months to a few years.[12] The duration of closing a trust depends on its complexity; various law firm websites suggests an average of about one year.[13] Financial assets in trusts are often disbursed quickly, but a trust cannot be closed until real estate is transferred. After trust settlement, selling property and reinvesting proceeds into a taxable account would create a lag before investment income peaks. The fact that investment income eventually flattens while the extensive margin falls, warrants further discussion. We discuss this result in Section 5.2.

5.2 Investment income versus wealth

Investment income does not reflect all sources of assets that can comprise an inheritance. Retirement accounts and owner-occupied housing are two sources of assets that are likely not fully represented in this measure. To the extent that individuals promptly sell inherited

[12] The probate court of Fulton County, Georgia, indicates that its process "has an average range of 6 to 12 months," while that of Harris County, Texas, states that "simple cases may resolve in a few months; more complex estates can take a year or longer" (Fulton County Probate Court; Harris County Public Probate Administrator).

[13] See Parker Law Offices; The Legacy Lawyers; Geiger Law Office; Moran & Associates; SSR Elder Law & Estate Planning.

retirement accounts or housing and reinvest in income-bearing financial assets, investment income includes these forms of inheritance. To the extent that individuals spend gains from the sale of such assets on consumption or deleveraging (i.e., paying down debt) or simply hold these assets, investment income omits them.

To obtain a fuller picture of these imperfectly captured components of inheritance, and how individuals use inherited assets, in Figure 5.2, we plot the effect of parental death on a series of indicator variables for the receipt of information returns for tax-reportable activities associated with changes in wealth. The information returns we study are Form 1099-R, which reports retirement account distributions or rollovers; Forms 1099-INT and 1099-DIV, which indicate receipt of annual interest or dividend income in excess of $10; Form 1099-S, which documents proceeds from real estate transactions; and Form 1098, which reports mortgage interest payments. Like W-2s, these forms are filed with the IRS by firms (financial institutions or title companies in the case of the 1099-S) and appear in our data regardless of whether individuals file taxes in a given year. The effects we measure are impacts in a given year relative to the baseline share, not cumulative impacts. We report baseline shares of children receiving these forms in Figure 5.2 and corresponding shares of children with a dying parent who receives them in Appendix Table A.6. Additional details on the construction of these variables can be found in Appendix C.

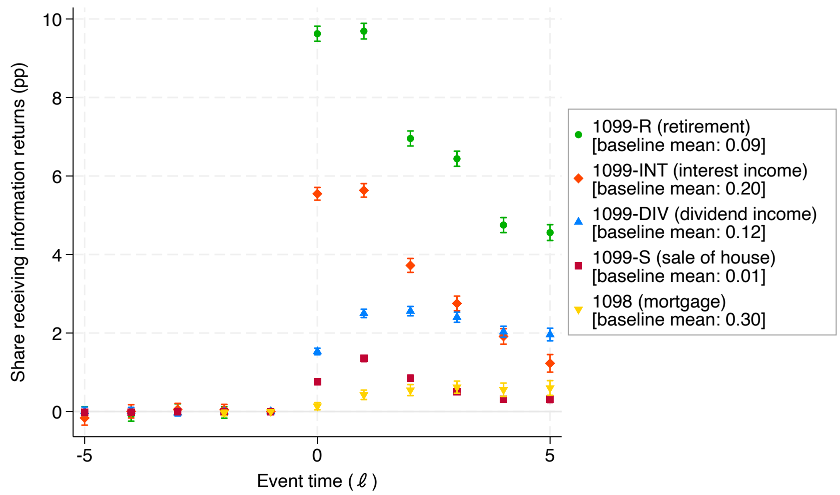
Retirement accounts. Figure 5.2 illustrates that the impact of parental death on the probability of receiving a 1099-R is equal in magnitude to the baseline mean in the first two years of parental death. Given that children in our sample are not of retirement age, the nine percent baseline mean likely reflects early withdrawals and account rollovers. When a parent dies, beneficiaries must open an inherited retirement account, into which funds are transferred, with the relevant financial institution or employer plan administrator. During our sample period, IRS rules stipulated that child beneficiaries of retirement accounts either begin taking annual required minimum distributions (RMDs) by December 31 of the year following the parent's death or withdraw the full account balance within five years.

If all child beneficiaries elected to take annual RMDs, the series would be flat. The fact that it declines indicates that most individuals liquidate their parent's accounts, which in turn suggests that many individuals face credit constraints since lump sum withdrawals are usually disadvantageous from a tax perspective.[14] The fact that the sum of effects over five years is roughly equal to the difference in individuals' own and parent baseline shares supports this theory.[15] However, we cannot rule out that early withdrawals by non-beneficiaries due

[14]Withdrawals forgo tax-deferred growth and, if large, may raise one's tax bracket.

[15]We expect most parents with retirement accounts to have begun receiving 1099-Rs before they die. For the average parent birth cohort in our sample, RMDs were required from age 70.5 onward, whereas the

Figure 5.2: Effect on additional wealth-related outcomes



Notes: This figure presents estimates of the effect of losing a parent on indicator variables that correspond to tax-reportable changes in wealth, based on estimating equation 4.1. 95 percent confidence intervals are displayed, clustering on dying parent. We use c - 1 as the omitted event time. We also report baseline means among treated individuals. 1099 indicators are available in our data beginning in 2010 and the 1098 indicator is available beginning in 2013, limiting our ability to estimate pre-treatment coefficients for all treatment cohorts. For this reason, we estimate treatment effects for the 2015 and 2016 treatment cohorts only, enabling us to estimate pre-treatment coefficients through ℓ = -5 for the 1099 indicator outcomes and through ℓ = -2 for the 1098 outcome. Using later-treated cohorts that are not balanced in event time (i.e. after 2016) to estimate earlier coefficients for the 1098 outcome confirms the absence of differential trends between treated and control observations. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

to hardship from parental death also influence these estimates.

Housing. With respect to inheritances that take the form of housing, we are unfortunately only able to obtain approximate estimates of the share of individuals whose dying parent owns a house in the year prior to death. Our tax data indicate that 26 percent of dying parents had a mortgage in the year prior to death but do not provide information on outright homeownership. In contrast, using the 2010 Decennial we find that, in 2010, 37 percent of dying parents had a mortgage and 26 percent owned their house free and clear.

When a house is sold, the IRS requires a closing agent to file Form 1099-S, which reports real estate sale proceeds. This requirement does not apply if the property was the seller's primary residence for at least two of the previous five years and both the sale price and gain are below \$250,000 (for single sellers) or \$500,000 (for married sellers), though the form may nonetheless be issued automatically.[16] During our sample period, the median U.S. home

average age of parents at death is 74.

[16] If the gain on the sale is below these thresholds—which are the capital gains tax exclusions—but the sale price exceeds them, capital gains taxes are not owed but the 1099-S is still issued.

price in nominal terms ranged from about $220,000 to $310,000 (Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis), meaning that most individuals selling a house would have been unlikely to receive a 1099-S.[17] However, a child who inherits and sells a house typically *would* receive the form, as the house was likely not their primary residence (as discussed in Section 6.2, about one fifth of children in our sample were cohabiting with their dying parent in the baseline year).

Figure 5.2 demonstrates that the probability of receiving a 1099-S roughly doubles for treated individuals in each of the three years following parental death relative to its baseline mean of one percent. Yet, the impact on house sales that we measure is low in absolute terms: the cumulative effect is about four percent whereas at least 26 percent of dying parents own a house in the baseline year. If, for example—as a lower bound—a quarter of parents bequeath a house to their children, we would expect to also see a sizable share of children selling a house and receiving a 1099-S.

Why does the share of children who sell a house according to this measure shift by so little? One mechanical reason is that, if two siblings inherit a house and one sells her shares in the house to the other, only the selling sibling receives a 1099-S (if the siblings sell jointly, each one receives a 1099-S). Another explanation is that the tax code provides a strong incentive to maintain an inherited house as an investment property: the building portion of the house's fair market value at the time of appraisal (usually shortly after the parent's death) becomes its depreciable basis, allowing for larger depreciation deductions than if the property were newly purchased. This tax advantage, along with the generally high rates of return on rental property (see Appendix Table A.4), may be driving the spike in rental income shown in Appendix Figure B.3. Finally, individuals may retain the house as a dwelling. While we do not find large impacts of parental death on the probability of moving (discussed in Section 5.1), the high share of cohabitors mentioned above could explain a low conversion rate from inheritances to sales.

The probability of receiving a 1098—i.e., being a mortgage-holder—displays a trivial increase among treated individuals relative to the baseline mean. If individuals receive inheritances, the expected sign of the 1098 effect is ambiguous ex-ante as heirs may use their inheritance either to pay down an existing mortgage, assume a new mortgage, or assume their parent's mortgage. Our results suggest that the latter two scenarios are at least as common as fully paying down an existing mortgage, but our data unfortunately do not allow us to determine the extent to which individuals reduce their mortgage debt.

<u>Interest and dividends.</u> Parental death raises the probability of receiving a 1099-INT and

[17] Transfers that are bequests or gifts, as opposed to sales, also do not trigger a 1099-S, implying that the baseline shares for parent's receipt of a 1099-S reported in Appendix Table A.6 likely underestimate actual housing transfers to children.

1099-DIV by roughly six and three percentage points by the year following parental death, respectively. In both cases, these effects represent a roughly 30 percent increase relative to the baseline mean. These forms correspond to the interest and dividend components of investment income but, unlike those outcomes, are recorded even when individuals do not file taxes (conditional on receiving $10 or more in income). Like the trend for the 1099-R, impacts on interest income display a sharp decline after $\ell = 1$, whereas the tapering is milder for dividend income.

These results mirror the marked difference in the dynamics of effects on investment income between panels (a) and (b) of Figure 5.1. Our extensive margin results suggest that, on average, individuals drawn down their inherited wealth whereas our results for the total effect suggest that they maintain it. One way to reconcile this finding is with heterogeneous initial inheritance amounts and depletion rates, where individuals with a wide range of incomes receive some initial inheritance that triggers a 1099-INT or 1099-DIV flag (either directly or, for example, through reinvesting proceeds from a house sale into a brokerage account), but lower income individuals disproportionately draw down their wealth, implying that overall responses are driven by wealthier individuals who are more likely to keep their wealth intact. This theory is consistent with Nekoei and Seim (2023), who document significant heterogeneity in inheritance depletion rates between rich and poor. Not sure. Seems weird given same shape in lowest income tercile.

In summary, we find that parental death has a sizable and significant impact on the probability of receiving most information returns that an inheritance might trigger. Ideally we would observe the entirety of wealth transferred from dying parents to their children, but this is not possible both given the constraints of our data (i.e., we do not observe retirement distribution amounts or mortgage payment histories that would allow us to infer inherited home equity) and limitations of any U.S. administrative data (i.e., wealth transfers that are liquidated immediately and non-housing durable assets like vehicles do not generate any tax records). In Section 7.1, we attempt to rectify our incomplete window into inheritance by benchmarking our findings to the SCF.

5.3 Other behavioral responses to parental death

In Table 5.1, we examine other margins of adjustment to parental death beyond earnings that we can observe in our data: marriage, divorce, and geographic mobility. Here we focus on outcomes for the child losing a parent, rather than per-adult outcomes.

To study the effect on marriage (divorce), we restrict the sample to individuals who were unmarried (married) individuals who are tax filers in the baseline year, and define

Table 5.1: DiD estimates of additional behavioral outcomes

	New marriage	New divorce	Changed Census tract
	(1)	(2)	(3)
DiD estimate	0.0010	0.0021	0.0046
	(0.0005)	(0.0008)	(0.0005)
Baseline mean	0.0000	0.0000	0.2037
N individuals	1,365,000	800,000	1,127,000

Notes: This table reports DiD estimates for marriage and divorce outcomes in the subsamples of unmarried and married individuals tax filers, respectively, and for geographic mobility in the subsample of individuals with Census tract in every year. When computing standard errors (reported in parenthesis), we cluster on dying parent. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

our outcome of interest to be a time-varying indicator equal to one if the winner is married (unmarried).[18] Parental death increases both outcomes by less than a percentage point (DiD precise but ES has pre-trends. do i need to show the plot?).

To study geographic mobility, we define indicators for the probability of moving to a different Census tract. We restrict the sample to individuals who have a populated Census tract in all 18 years of the data. We find a small positive increase of about 2 percent. We find similar results to column 3 when examining the effect on the probability of changing address.

When studying the same outcomes in the context of U.S. lottery winners, Golosov et al. (2024) found significant positive effects for marriage and geographic mobility and significant negative effects for divorce. Our findings in this section and our earlier results for other margins of work adjustment imply that, unlike winning the lottery, parental death and associated inheritances are not a big enough shock to spur significant behavioral change aside from hours reductions and the wealth adjustment margins discussed in Section 5.2.

5.4 Treatment effect heterogeneity

In Section 5.1, we established that investment income and earnings of treated individuals demonstrate divergent patterns after parental death.

In Figure 5.3, we examine heterogeneity in these effects along five dimensions: own and parental income, own demographic characteristics, parental demographic characteristics, household of origin characteristics, and current household characteristics. As with other results, we condition on own characteristics but report outcomes on a per-adult basis. We report own outcomes, which are very similar, in Appendix Tables A.7-A.11. All time-varying

[18]Restricting to tax filers makes the two subsamples more comparable since, as described in Section 3.2, married individuals in our sample are tax filers by definition.

characteristics pertain to the year prior to the parent's death (with the exception of parent age, which is age at death).

In panel (a), we consider three measures of parental income, all of which are at the level of the dying parent's tax unit: AGI in 1994 (the first year in which we observe parents), investment income in 1994, and investment income in the baseline year.[19] We divide parental AGI into quartiles. Since the investment income distribution of parents (as well as children) is very skewed, we divide this variable into a bin for having $0 investment income in a given year (bin 1) and bins for below- or above-median conditional on having non-zero investment income (bins 2 and 3). We find that DiD estimates for investment income and earnings point in opposite directions and have similar magnitudes within every parental income bin. This result is consistent with studies documenting strong intergenerational transmission of wealth, and supports the hypothesis that income effects drive the observed labor supply response (Charles and Hurst, 2003; Killewald et al., 2017; Black et al., 2020).

In panel (b), we find a close mirroring of earnings and investment income responses across groups defined by sex, race, age, and college attendance. The relative magnitudes of investment income effects by group follow broader trends in wealth inequality, reflecting a stark racial wealth gap and disparities by college attendance. We discuss heterogeneity by geographical distance to parent in Section 6.2, as the dynamics are notable. In panel (d), we again find symmetry in effects of the two outcomes.

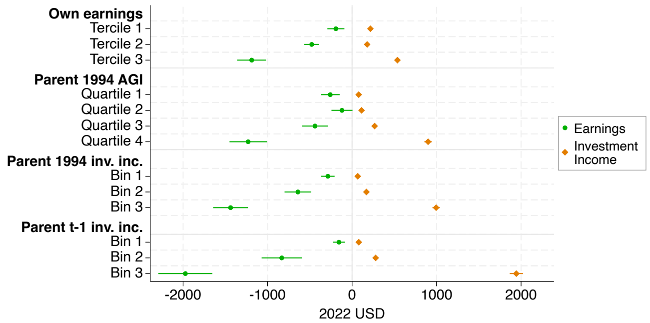
Other results show a weaker relationship between the two outcomes. In panel (c), we observe little variation in investment income or earnings responses by demographic characteristics of the dying parent. Children with parents who are younger than 75 at death (about 40 percent of the sample) have slightly larger gains in investment income than children with parents dying at an older age. This suggests that having additional time to draw down wealth in old age may be a more important driver of inheritance size than selection into early mortality. Children whose parents have positive wage earnings (about 30 percent of the sample) have a somewhat higher investment income response than those whose parents are not working (citation that richer people stop working later?).

Like panel (c), panel (e) does not illustrate close symmetry between earnings and investment income responses, although standard errors for earnings are rather large. Interestingly, it provides mixed insights regarding how parents divide their estates among children. The first three rows of the panel indicate that investment income increases monotonically with number of siblings. Only-child households face gains about three times as large as those belonging to three-child households, with $400 of aggregate investment income in both cases.

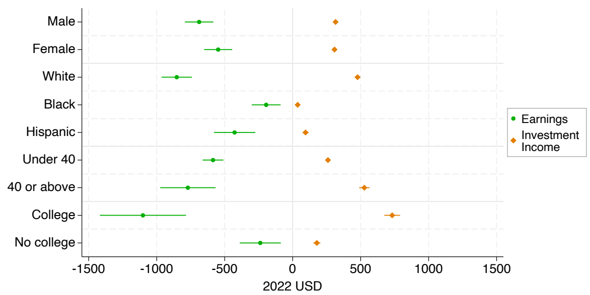
[19] We use AGI rather than wage earnings as our main measure of parental income because W-2s are not available prior to 2005.

Figure 5.3: DiD estimates across outcomes and heterogeneity dimensions

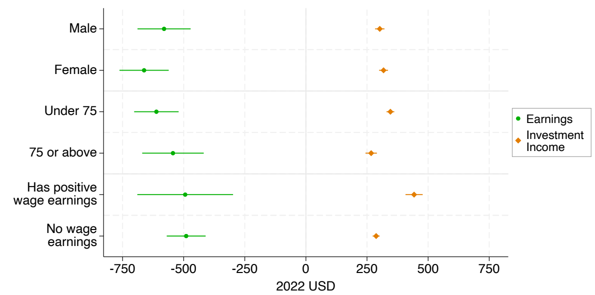
(a) Own and parental income



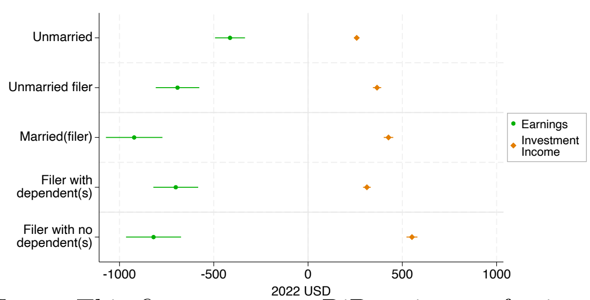
(b) Own demographic characteristics



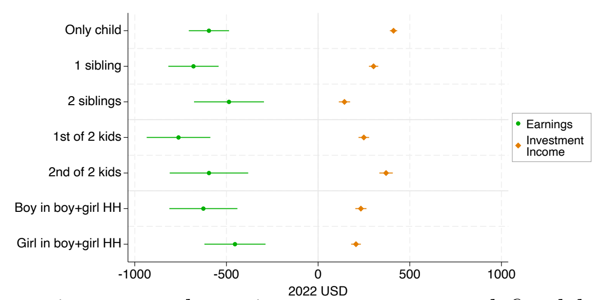
(c) Parent demographic characteristics



(d) Current household characteristics



(e) Household of origin characteristics



Notes: This figure presents DiD estimates for investment income and earnings across groups defined by different socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. 95 percent confidence intervals are displayed, clustering on dying parent. All time-varying characteristics pertain to the year prior to the parent's death (with the exception of parent age, which is age at death). Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

Individuals belonging to two-child households face slightly larger gains of about $600 in aggregate investment income.

While differences by number of siblings point to equal division of estates, the next two rows show that investment income gains are slightly larger among younger children.[20] The

[20] A limitation of our data is that we cannot observe siblings who were over 24, the age limit for dependent

literature on division of inheritances has mixed findings: Menchik (1980) and Wilhelm (1996) find that most estates are divided exactly using small samples of probate records and estate taxes, whereas Francesconi et al. (2023) document that one-third of parents with wills surveyed in the Health and Retirement Survey indicate plans to divide their estates unequally among children.

Overall, Figure 5.3 illustrates a strong inverse relationship between investment income and earnings across many demographic and socioeconomic dimensions. Measures of parental income, race/ethnicity, age, and college attainment are especially strong predictors of both outcomes.

6 Do inheritances alone explain the earnings drop following parental death?

6.1 Tests of the investment income mechanism

Responses when parents have no wealth. We have established that parental death generates inheritances and causes reductions in earnings. But to what extent do earnings reductions from other aspects of parental death? As a first step in answering this question, in Figure 6.1 we present effects for our two main outcomes among the subsample of individuals whose dying parents have no observable wealth in our data prior to death. We define having no observable wealth as not receiving a 1099-R, having zero investment income, and not being a homeowner a home in 2010 (the latest year for which we can observe homeownership status completely; in later years we only observe mortgage-holder status).

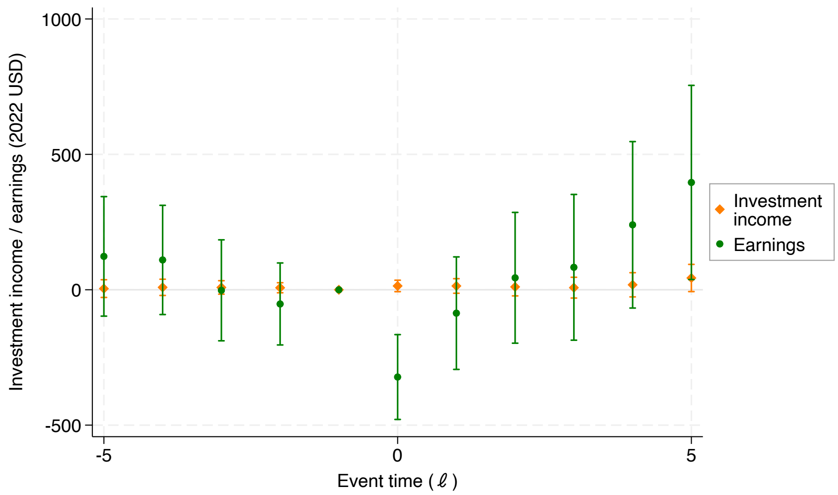
Our definition misses retirement wealth for parents not yet taking withdrawals, business ownership, and financial assets that bear no income. As discussed in Section 5.2, we expect that most parents with retirement accounts in the sample were taking withdrawals before death. The share of parents who own businesses but do not own homes is likely low. The primary form of non-income bearing financial assets held by households are traditional checking and savings accounts, which yield little to no interest. However, based on the 2010-2016 average national interest rate for checking accounts of 0.06 percent, balances of roughly \$17,000 would suffice to generate at least \$10 in interest, the threshold for IRS reporting (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation).[21]

Figure 6.1 demonstrates that individuals whose parents had no observable wealth at baseline, about one fifth of the sample, do not gain any investment income after the parent's

claiming, in 1994. As such, our calculation of number of siblings and birth order is inaccurate for some children claimed in earlier years.

[21] The average national savings rate was higher, about 0.10 percent, during this time period.

Figure 6.1: Effects among subsample whose parents have no wealth at ℓ - 1



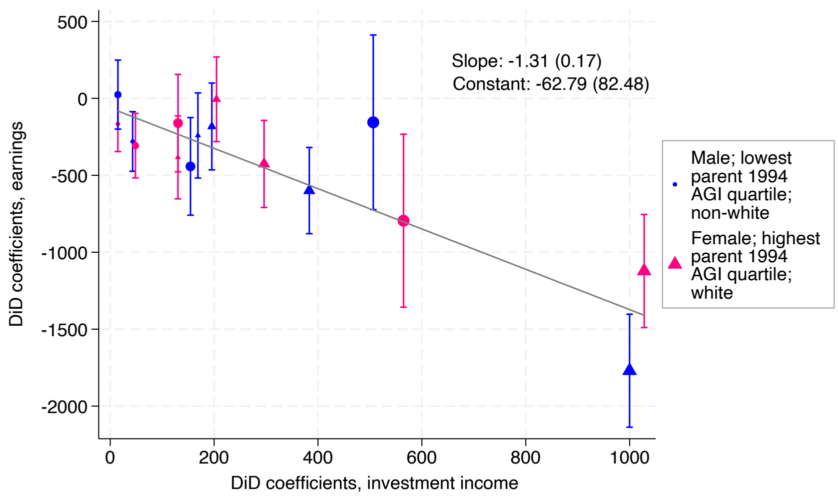
Notes: This figure presents estimates of the effect of losing a parent on two outcomes, based on estimating equation 4.1. 95 percent confidence intervals are displayed, clustering on dying parent. We use c - 1 as the omitted event time. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

death, supporting our use of investment income as a proxy for inheritance. Earnings fall significantly only in the year of parent death; the reduction in all other years is virtually indistinguishable from 0, although we cannot reject substantial gains in earnings. The magnitude of the earnings drop in the year of death is about half that of our headline findings in Figure 5.1. From this plot, we infer that parental death affects earnings primarily through inheritances, but that non-income channels have a temporary, smaller negative effect. We discuss the possible nature of these channels in Section 6.2.

<u>Visual IV.</u> Next, in a complementary attempt to understand the extent to which income effects explain the observed labor supply response, we construct the plot shown in Figure 6.2. To make this plot, we estimate effects for our two main outcomes in sixteen different subsamples defined by the interaction of three key heterogeneity dimensions: sex, 1994 parent AGI quartile, and racial group (white / non-white). We then plot DiD coefficients for earnings against coefficients for investment income, and fit a line of best fit through these points, using weighted least squares with the number of individuals per group as weights.

The x-axis of the plot is analogous to the first-stage and the y-axis to the reduced form of an overidentified two-stage least squares regression of earnings on investment income, where the instruments are interactions of an indicator for being treated in the post-period and indicators for belonging to each subsample. Estimating this system on the microdata reveals that the exclusion restriction is narrowly rejected. While the instruments are clearly relevant (as shown in Section 5.4, race and parent income strongly predict both outcomes), Appendix Table A.12 shows that the overidentification test's p-value is 0.012. For this reason, and because there may be heterogeneity in the amount of missing investment income across groups, we are wary of interpreting the slope of the line of best fit as the causal effect of investment income on earnings.

Figure 6.2: Visual IV estimates of the effect of investment income on earnings



Notes: This figure plots effects on earnings against effects on investment income in the year following parental death for sixteen different subsamples, as detailed in Section 6.1. Whiskers mark 95 percent confidence intervals for the earnings estimates. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

Nonetheless, the figure provides a few useful insights. First, it formalizes the symmetry in earnings and investment income responses we observed in Section 5.4. The line's slope indicates that, for every dollar of flow investment income that is derived from inheritances over this period, on average tax units drop their earnings by \$1.31.[22] Next, because we created this plot using group-level effects rather than 2SLS estimates, we are able to visualize the line of best fit's constant and confirm that it is near but not equal to zero (when the exclusion restriction is assumed to be true, the constant is zero by construction). That is, on average over five years, tax units receiving zero investment income have only small reductions in earnings. This finding accords with our results from Figure 6.1.

A third, ancillary observation from Figure 6.2 relates to the MPE, an important parameter in the labor supply literature. In general, for a given individual, the MPE is a function of income and wages. Under Stone–Geary preferences, however, it collapses to a constant

[22]The slope reflects a relationship at the tax unit, rather than individual, level because both the y- and x-axis are per-adult responses.

(which may vary across individuals due to different preference parameters) (Deaton and Muellbauer, 1980). For this reason, papers that estimate MPEs generally assume a Stone-Geary utility function. Our finding that the earnings response is linear in investment income is consistent with Stone-Geary preferences. But who cares given I am not seriously estimating an MPE?

Were we to interpret the slope from Figure 6.2 as causal and assume both that our estimate for earnings equals the average lifetime earnings response and that our estimate for investment income captures a constant share of inheritances, we could estimate an MPE by annuitizing the implied inheritance over a typical life span. We perform this exercise in Appendix D and demonstrate that these assumptions are unlikely to hold, at least collectively. Our results imply an MPE of roughly -0.8, an estimate two to three times greater in magnitude than those of recent studies based on lotteries (Golosov et al., 2024) and randomized cash transfers (Vivalt et al., 2025) in the U.S.

While Figure 6.2 documents that parental income is a strong predictor of investment income and earnings reductions, it does not elucidate whether high or low-income children of wealthy parents drive the average earnings response. To explore heterogeneity by own income, we repeat the exercise among terciles of the distribution of children's own earnings in the baseline year. We present regression statistics for these plots in Table 6.1; Appendix Figure B.4 presents corresponding heterogeneity figures. Like Golosov et al. (2024), we find that earnings responses are increasing in baseline income. Whereas tax units where children are in the bottom tercile reduce earnings by 88 cents for every dollar of investment income, those where children are in the top tercile reduce earnings by $1.34 cents.

Table 6.1: Summary of visual IV results across subsamples

	Full sample (1)	Tercile 1 baseline earnings (2)	Tercile 2 baseline earnings (3)	Tercile 3 baseline earnings (4)
Slope	-1.31	-0.88	-1.02	-1.34
	(0.17)	(0.21)	(0.25)	(0.29)
Constant	-62.79	123.50	-187.70	-245.10
	(82.48)	(83.79)	(79.64)	(205.00)
R^2	0.82	0.55	0.54	0.61
N individuals	1,774,000	725,000	860,500	765,000

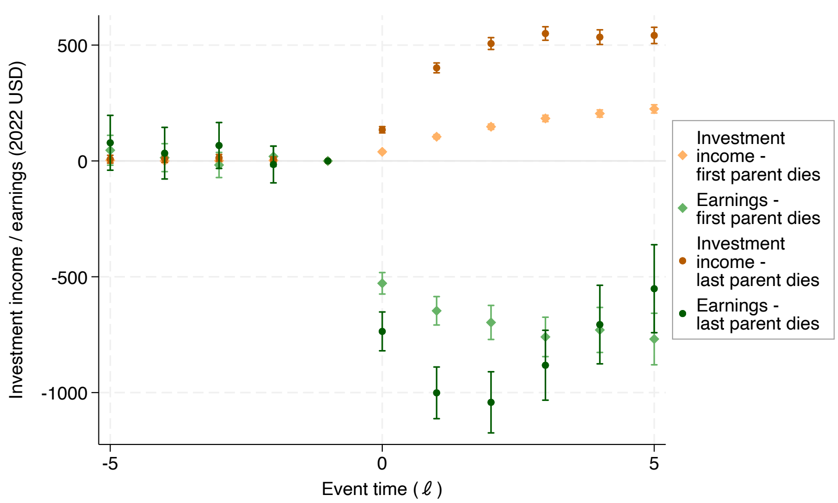
Notes: This table reports regression statistics associated with Figure 6.2 and Appendix Figure B.4. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

First versus last parent deaths. Our finding of an initial earnings drop even among children with zero gain in investment income in Figure 6.1 and a significant J-statistic in Figure 6.2 cast some doubt on a pure income effects explanation for the earnings drop following parental death. To investigate further, we examine outcomes among children who lose a first parent, who should receive much smaller inheritances on average. For this comparison, we restrict to the set of individuals with two linked parents, such that first and last parent to die are mutually exclusive.

Figure 6.3 shows that the effect on per-adult investment income of a first parent's death is much more muted than that of a last parent's death. This pattern is consistent with first parent assets frequently passing to the surviving spouse rather than children. The fact that children receive some investment income on average may reflect cases where parents have divorced or separated since the time of dependent claiming. It may also reflect surviving spouses responding to the death by transferring some assets to children—for example, by selling a house or making gradual gifts.

However, although the gain in investment income among children who lose a first parent is at most 40 percent that of children who lose a last parent (in $\ell = 5$), children of first parents drop the earnings in the year of death by 70 percent as much as children of last parents. Moreover, children of first parents do not display the same earnings recovery as children of last parents. This differential recovery is unlikely to be the result of first parent children losing a second parent, as the two subsamples do not contain many overlapping individuals. Moreover, reweighting baseline earnings of children of first parents to match those of last parents does not alter the findings.

Figure 6.3: Responses to first parent death versus last parent death



Notes: This figure presents estimates of the effect of losing a parent on two outcomes, based on estimating equation 4.1, for two samples: the sample of individuals with two linked parents who lose a first, elderly parent and the sample of individuals with two linked parents who lose a last, elderly parent. 95 percent confidence intervals are displayed, clustering on dying parent. We use c - 1 as the omitted event time. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

One explanation for these effects that *is* consistent with a pure income effects story is that the degree of anticipation matters greatly and varies substantially across first and last parent deaths. As shown in Section 2, in a conventional labor supply model the change in hours resulting from an exogenous shock to assets is proportional to the unanticipated portion of the shock. It is plausible that, although inheritances are smaller after the first parent's death, their unanticipated component is still relatively large. In other words, the unanticipated portion of small inheritances from a first parent may be nearly as large as that of larger inheritances from a second parent. This may be especially true in our setting: since parent deaths occur at a relatively young age, they are less likely to have clear estate plans or plans of which children are informed. For example, using data from the Health and Retirement Survey and the Asset and Health Dynamics among the Oldest Old Surveys, Hurd and Smith (2001) find that subjective survival probabilities are positively correlated with subjective probabilities of leaving an inheritance.

While differential anticipation of inheritances offers one account of the varied earnings responses we see across first and last parents, we have not ruled out other explanations. For example, first parent deaths may cause greater bereavement or create an obligation to provide eldercare for the surviving parent. Moreover, we wish to reconcile why earnings fall in response to zero investment income in our main sample. In the next section, we assess the plausibility of mechanisms beyond income effects.

6.2 What non-inheritance factors might influence the earnings response?

Social and economic ties between parents and adult children are, of course, complex. The sociology literature on intergenerational family relations documents strong affective ties among American parents and children and largely episodic material support such as financial transfers, access to professional networks, lodging, transportation, child care or eldercare, and household help (Swartz, 2009; Silverstein and Bengtson, 1997). Here we review whether proxies in our data for various forms of intergenerational solidarity influence on the earnings response to parental death.

<u>Loss of child care.</u> In light of evidence that informal care by grandparents can mitigate child penalties from studies such as Karademir et al. (2024) and Anstreicher and Venator (2025), one possibility is that the earnings reductions we observe reflect a loss of child care. We view this as unlikely for three reasons. First, as shown in panel (a) of Figure 5.3, women's average earnings reductions are slightly smaller than men's in absolute terms. This result also holds in proportional terms relative to the baseline mean (-1.5 and -2 percent for women and men, respectively). Second, as shown in panel (b) of the same figure, the earnings

response does not vary with the sex of the dying parent, whereas ample evidence documents that grandmothers provide the majority of grandparent-provided child care (Pew Research Center, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). Third, filers with dependents in our data exhibit a slightly *smaller* earnings reduction than filers with no dependents.

Added worker effects. Several papers document spousal labor supply adjustments that buffer negative income shocks to the other spouse, or "added worker effects" (Blundell et al., 2016; Autor et al., 2019; Stephens, 2002). Could it be that parental illness is a negative income shock that induces children to work more leading up to the death, resulting in a sharp earnings decline after death? If this were true, we would expect added worker effects and corresponding earnings reductions after death to be muted among children of higher income parents. We find the opposite: the magnitude of children's earnings reductions consistently scale with parent income.

Co-employment. If children work alongside their parents, either in a family business or another arrangement, the death of a parent could constitute a direct work disruption. In most cases, individuals working in family businesses receive W-2s, so such disruptions would be observable.[23] Figure 5.3 showed that children's earnings responses do not vary with parental employment status in the year prior to death (not conditional on working together). In principle, we could better assess this channel by restricting to the subsample with shared EINs, but doing so would yield very noisy results. We view this mechanism as unlikely to be driving our results, since only 30 percent of children in our sample have a dying parent who is employed at all. Furthermore, prior work suggests that, while co-employment can significantly influence children's earnings, its effects are concentrated early in a child's career—at ages well below the average in our sample (Staiger, 2025).

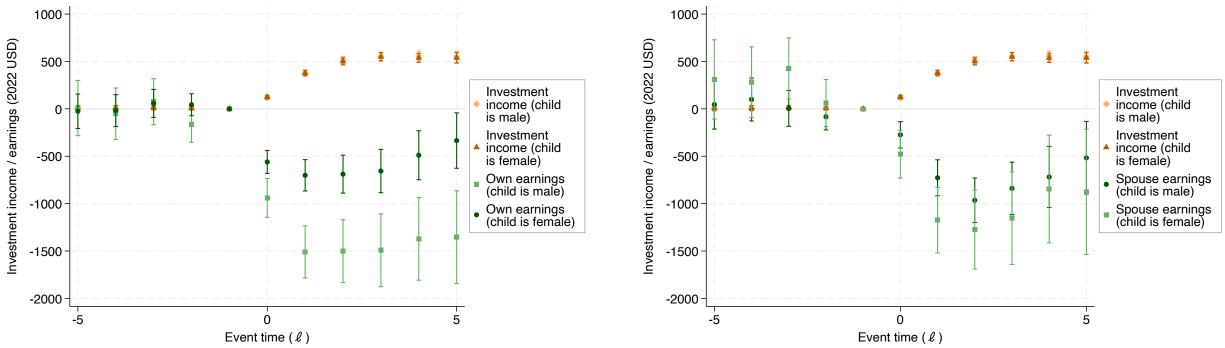
Grief. Using nationally representative data collected by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), Lawton et al. (1994) document that about 80 percent of American adults describe their relationship with a parent as emotionally close and vice versa. Given the strong emotional connection between many children and their parents, might grief explain the earnings response? We investigate this question by analyzing own versus spousal responses (which we separate by sex) in Table 6.4.

First, note that (as in panel (a) of Figure 5.3), men and women have equal gains in investment income. Supposing for simplicity that all married couples are heterosexual, the dark green circles in Figure 6.4 represent women's earnings responses and the light green squares represent men's. Within panel comparisons reveal that women reduce their earnings

[23] Exceptions are if the child is the owner of a sole proprietorship or partnership rather than employee, or an independent contractor.

Figure 6.4: Effects by relation to parent and sex

(a) Investment income and own earnings | (b) Investment income and spousal earnings



Notes: Panel (a) presents estimates of effects on per-adult investment income and own earnings for male and female children. Panel (b) presents estimates of effects on per-adult investment income and earnings of the same children's spouses. Note that, by construction, the values of per-adult investment income are the same in both panels. To obtain these estimates, we restrict the sample to individuals who are married in the year prior to parent death and use estimating equation 4.1. 95 percent confidence intervals are displayed, clustering on dying parent. We use c - 1 as the omitted event time. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

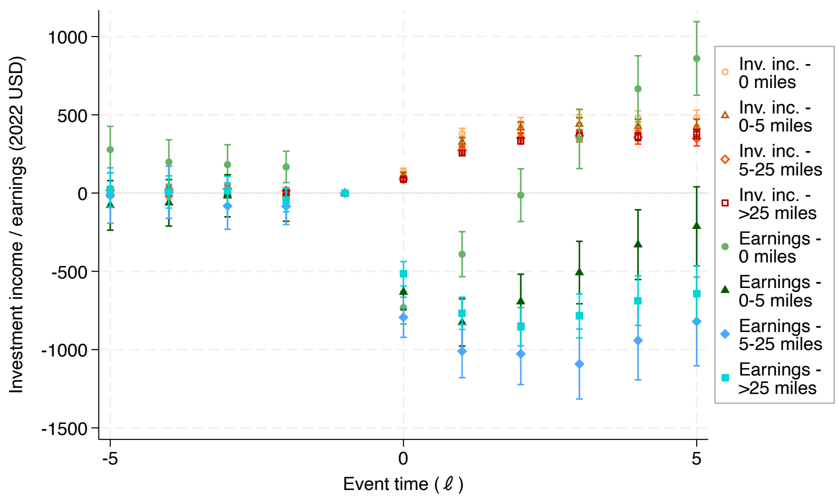
by less than men, regardless of whether their own parent or their spouse's parent dies. Across panel comparisons illustrate the death of a parent and the death of a parent-in-law have similar effects on earnings. The DiD coefficient for men is -\$1,332 when their own parent dies versus -\$1,162 when their spouse's parent dies. The corresponding coefficients for women are -\$594 and -\$676. The main exception is in the year of parent death: for both men and women, the $\ell = 0$ coefficient is about twice as big when a parent dies as when a spouse's parent dies. However, the difference in point estimates between male and female spouses is not statistically significant.

We interpret these results as evidence that grief is not a major driver of the earnings response, except possibly in the year of death. Instead, they provide support for the unitary household (or common preference) model, which predicts that a household's response to a given transfer does not depend on the identity of the recipient (Lundberg and Pollak, 1996). This is unexpected, as both Cesarini et al. (2017) and Golosov et al. (2024) find that lottery winners drop their earnings by more than their spouse. However, those studies also find that one third to one half of the overall labor earnings response is attributable to extensive margin adjustments, for which we do not find evidence. Hours-driven earnings effects and a much smaller shock in our setting may explain the lack of major differences by relation to parent.

<u>Eldercare.</u> If adult children provide eldercare to parents prior to death at a level significant

enough to reduce their own work hours, we would expect parent death to *increase* earnings. However, because relatively few deaths in the typical parental age range in our sample are caused by high burden-of-care conditions such as dementia or cancer, such intensive eldercare is likely to be concentrated among a limited set of households. Using data from the NHATS, a nationally representative survey of US adults aged 65 and older and their informal caregivers, Wolff et al. (2025) report that 41% of caregivers in 2011 and 2022 lived with the care recipient and 32% lived within 10 minutes. About half of caregivers were adult children. Given that geographic proximity to parents is a strong predictor of eldercare, in Figure 6.5 we investigate heterogeneity by distance to dying parent in the year prior to death.

Figure 6.5: Effects by distance to parent



Notes: This figure presents estimates of the effect of losing a parent on two outcomes, based on estimating equation 4.1, for four samples of individuals based on geographical distance to their dying parent in the baseline year. The distance bins are 0 miles (cohabitors); (0,5] miles; (5, 25] miles, and >25 miles. 95 percent confidence intervals are displayed, clustering on dying parent. We use c - 1 as the omitted event time. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

We find that, across distance bins, reduce earnings in the year of parent death. Subsequently, individuals who cohabit with parents, who represent about one fifth of the sample, markedly increase their earnings and, by $\ell = 5$ earn \$860 more than in the baseline year. Across all subsamples in our entire analysis, this is the only group that undergoes a substantial and significant gain over baseline earnings. What's more, cohabitors also exhibit a modest negative pre-trend in the years leading up to the baseline year, consistent with reducing hours to provide additional care as a parent's health conditions worsen and care needs increase. Individuals in the 0-5 mile bin, who comprise a similar share of the sample, display a near-complete recovery over five years. We find similar results for male and female children.

We interpret these results as strong evidence that eldercare is an important driver of the earnings response among individuals who reside with or very close to their parents. It is also possible that the patterns we find reflect individuals relying on parents for financial support and in some cases lodging until parent death, at which point they are forced to find work (Rosenzweig and Wolpin, 1993; Kaplan, 2012). While the two possibilites are not mutually exclusive, we view eldercare as a more plausible explanation because we would not expect the pre-trends nor steeper recovery patterns among children living with 0-5 miles than geographically distant children in the latter "free-riding" situation.

In summary, our findings in this section cast doubt on foregone child care, added worker effects, or co-employment as explanations for the earnings response to parental death, while providing strong evidence that eldercare plays a role among cohabitors. Grief appears unlikely to have lasting effects, but may contribute to the earnings decline in the year of parental death. More broadly, the presence of a statistically significant drop in earnings in the year of death across *all* subsamples—including cohabitors who subsequently increase their earnings and individuals whose parents lack any baseline wealth (discussed in Section 6.1)—suggests there is a short-lived psychological or logistical element to the earnings response. Although our data cannot unpack this mechanism, the emotional shock of bereavement and the time demands of funeral planning, probate and estate settlement, sorting belongings, shutting down accounts, and selling property are common-sense explanations with anecdotal support.

7 Inheritances and inequality

7.1 The extensive margin of inheritances

Above, we documented an average annual increase in per-adult investment income of about $300 across our sample. Given the initial distribution of investment income among both children and parents is highly skewed (as with any measure of wealth in the U.S.), this average likely masks enormous heterogeneity, with most individuals receiving no inheritance and a small fraction of individuals receiving large inheritances. To investigate the share of individuals who receive an inheritance, we use the proxies for wealth transfers discussed in Section 5.1 to construct indicator variables for undergoing a change in wealth attributable to various sources. These indicators are defined by the appearance of retirement distributions, housing sales, or notable changes in investment income. Appendix C provides further details on the construction of these variables.

We then estimate a simple difference in means for these variables using our stacked dataset.[24] That is, we estimate

$$Y_{i\ell d} = \beta D_{s(i,\ell)d} + \epsilon_{i\ell d} \tag{7.1}$$

where $Y_{i\ell d}$ is an indicator for unit i in treatment state s undergoing a change in wealth and $D_{s(i,\ell)d}$ is an indicator for whether the unit is treated in stack d. We cluster standard errors at the level of the dying parent. The difference in means for treated and control units represents the share of individuals who receive an inheritance from a given source.

We find that the largest inheritance shares correspond to the indicator for undergoing a change in wealth due to retirement accounts, and present our results for this outcome in Table 7.1 for our main sample and key socioeconomic and demographic subsamples. In Appendix Table A.13, we show corresponding shares for the union of indicators for experiencing a change in wealth for different sources, which are similar but slightly smaller than results based on retirement wealth in a couple subsamples, a peculiarity that is consistent with treated units receiving new wealth from multiple coincident sources when they receive an inheritance, as opposed to control units undergoing changes haphazardly from isolated sources.[25]

Our results indicate that, on average, 12.3 percent of individuals in our sample receive an inheritance when a last parent dies. Patterns across sub-groups mirror broader trends in U.S. wealth inequality as well as the heterogeneous impacts on investment income we documented in Figure 5.3, with under six percent of Black and Hispanic individuals receiving an inheritance. More surprising, perhaps, is our finding that inheritances are highly concentrated even among wealthier subgroups: only about one fifth of individuals with a college degree and under one third of individuals whose parents are in the top 1994 AGI quartile receive an inheritance.

Just as our estimates for the effect of parental death on investment income are an imprecise measure of transferred wealth, this estimate is not a perfect measure of whether individuals receive an inheritance. While our proxies capture inherited financial assets held long enough to generate at least \$10 in interest or dividend income per year (thereby trig-

[24] We make slight modifications to the sample relative to our main estimating sample from Section 5.1. First, we impose that control units belong to treatment cohorts $c + 4$ through $c + 6$ (rather than starting in $c + 1$) to ensure clean controls given that some outcome variables' definitions involve restrictions during $\ell \in$ [-3, 2]. Second, we drop duplicate individuals within a stack since the outcome is time-invariant.

[25] To see how inheritances shares based on the union of sources can be smaller than those based on any single source, consider a scenario with 100 treated units—half of whom gain wealth from both retirement and housing—and 100 control units, one quarter of whom gain wealth from retirement only and one quarter from housing only. In this case, the inheritance share based on retirement is 0.25 whereas the inheritance share based on the union is zero.

Table 7.1: Share of individuals who receive an inheritance

	Control (1)	Treated (2)	Difference (3)	N individuals
Main sample	0.2041	0.3280	0.1239	1,939,000
	(0.0003)	(0.0007)	(0.0007)	
Male	0.2027	0.3219	0.1192	992,000
	(0.0004)	(0.0009)	(0.0010)	
Female	0.2057	0.3344	0.1287	947,000
	(0.0004)	(0.0009)	(0.0010)	
No college	0.1901	0.3041	0.1140	237,000
	(0.0008)	(0.0018)	(0.0019)	
College	0.2565	0.4788	0.2224	199,000
	(0.0009)	(0.0021)	(0.0023)	
White	0.2128	0.3886	0.1758	1,112,000
	(0.0004)	(0.0010)	(0.0010)	
Black	0.1572	0.2035	0.0462	288,000
	(0.0007)	(0.0015)	(0.0016)	
Hispanic	0.2112	0.2691	0.0579	412,000
	(0.0006)	(0.0013)	(0.0014)	
Parent 1994 AGI Q1	0.1680	0.2036	0.0356	446,000
	(0.0006)	(0.0011)	(0.0012)	
Parent 1994 AGI Q2	0.1952	0.2802	0.0850	444,000
	(0.0006)	(0.0013)	(0.0014)	
Parent 1994 AGI Q3	0.2167	0.3819	0.1652	443,000
	(0.0006)	(0.0015)	(0.0016)	
Parent 1994 AGI Q4	0.2507	0.5202	0.2695	442,000
	(0.0006)	(0.0017)	(0.0017)	

Notes: This table reports means and difference in means for treated and control individuals across different subsamples, based on equation 7.1 and using an indicator for undergoing a change in wealth from retirement distributions, as described in Section 7.1. When computing standard errors (reported in parenthesis), we cluster on dying parent. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

gering a 1099), they miss assets that heirs immediately liquidate and do not reinvest.[26] The exception is retirement accounts, where we observe withdrawals even if liquidation is immediate. As discussed in Section 5.2, inherited real estate that heirs neither sell nor rent out constitute another channel for unobserved inheritances. The main other sources of unobserved inheritances are life insurance death benefits and non-housing durable goods such as vehicles, again assuming that heirs do not reinvest.

If we reproduce Table 7.1 and Appendix Table A.13 using the indicator for undergoing changes in wealth from investment income, we obtain an inheritance share of 0.0805. We can obtain a back-of-the-envelope estimate of the average inheritance conditional on receipt of an

[26]As discussed in Section 6.1, balances of roughly $17,000 would suffice to generate a 1099-INT during our sample period.

inheritance by normalizing our tax unit-level DiD estimate by this share.[27] We find that the average inheritance generates $461/0.08 ≈ $5,729 in investment income. Similar to Section 5.1, we use average annual capitalization factors from Saez and Zucman (2016) to capitalize this flow income. Here we use a capitalization factor of 44.5, the average across asset class-specific factors, weighting by the DiD estimates for each class. Appendix A.4 summarizes the inputs to this estimate. The implied average conditional inheritance is about $255,000. As with estimates of parental death's impact on investment income, this estimate captures housing only to the extent that it is sold or rented and likely does not capture retirement account transfers.

Next, we benchmark our findings against the SCF, which surveys households about whether they have received an inheritance and, if so, its total value. We first pool all SCF waves in which respondents could have theoretically received an inheritance during our sample period (2010-2016). We then restrict to respondents who either have no living parent or a spouse with no living parent and who were born or have a spouse who was born in the same years as children in our main estimation sample. The comparison is crude in that the SCF does not record parent death year or distinguish between inheritances received by respondents versus their spouses, and its accuracy depends on respondents' recall. Nonetheless, the results are similar to those of our analysis: across survey years, the mean inheritance share in the SCF is 16 percent and the mean conditional inheritance is $227,000. This finding suggests that, among individuals who receive an inheritance that we do not observe, the size of inheritances is unlikely to be very large. Appendix E provides additional statistics and details on our procedure.

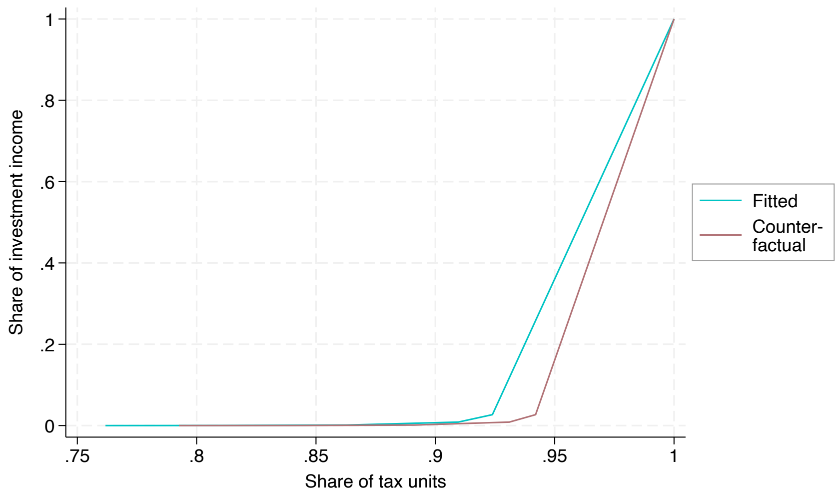
7.2 The impact of inheritances on investment income inequality

Next, we assess the distributional consequences of inheritances. We obtain DiD estimates for investment income on subsamples defined by having $\ell - 1$ investment income within different ranges of the $\ell - 1$ distribution among the 2010-2016 treatment cohorts (as these are the cohorts for whom we estimate treatment effects). As the zero is the 80th percentile of this distribution, we establish ranges using the 80th, 85th, 90th, 95th, and 100th percentiles. For each subsample, we use fitted and counterfactual values of the outcome among treated individuals to determine the impact of inheritances that bear investment income on the Lorenz curve for investment income. Figure 7.1 reports our results.

The series labeled "Fitted" corresponds to the actual fitted values for investment income

[27] As noted in Section 3, our sample construction drops individuals whose spouse also loses a last parent during the sample period. Therefore, the overall inheritance amount corresponds to the tax unit-level investment income response.

Figure 7.1: Impact of parental death on Lorenz curve for investment income



Notes: This figure presents Lorenz curves based on fitted and counterfactual values for investment income among treated individuals. These values are obtained by estimating impacts on investment income within different percentile ranges of the outcome's $\ell - 1$ distribution, as described in Section 7.2. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

observed among treated individuals, whereas the series labeled "Counterfactual" corresponds to the investment income values treated individuals would have recorded had they not lost their parent. The results indicate that, on average over the five years following parent death, inheritances have a slight equalizing effect on the distribution of investment income. The Gini coefficient falls from 0.940 to 0.921. Appendix Figure B.5 shows the fitted and counterfactual cumulative distribution and probability mass functions of investment income. The figure provides another visualization of the modest equalizing effect of inheritances, with the realized CDF lying below the counterfactual.

Although investment income is only one component of wealth, this finding accords with prior evidence from the U.S. and Sweden that inheritances exert an equalizing short-run effect on wealth inequality. The main intuition for this result is that, although inheritances increase absolute wealth inequality, inheritance inequality (the share of inheritances bequeathed by wealthy parents) is less pronounced than wealth inequality. That is, while wealthier individuals receive larger inheritances in absolute terms, inheritances received by the wealthy represent a smaller share of their existing wealth. Wolff (2002) and Wolff and Gittleman (2011) document these trends in the U.S. using the SCF.

Formally, Nekoei and Seim (2023) show that the effect of inheritances on wealth inequality is increasing in inheritance inequality and decreasing in intergenerational wealth mobility (the share of wealthy heirs with wealthy parents). In other words, inheritances can reduce wealth inequality even under severe inheritance inequality if wealthy parents are unlikely to have wealthy children. Using Swedish panel data on wealth, the authors construct counterfactuals to isolate each force and find that the former drives the equalizing effect of inheritances. Whether the same holds in the U.S. is difficult to assess given limited comparable estimates of intergenerational wealth mobility in the two countries, but our finding that inheritances increase with own earnings casts doubt on the intergenerational mobility channel (Black et al., 2020).

8 Conclusion

This paper examined the impact of parental death on labor supply, the extent to which inheritances rationalize observed earnings reductions, and the overall prevalence of inheritances in the U.S. Our analysis is the first to study these questions using comprehensive administrative data. We used linked Census and administrative records to link children to dying parents and implement event studies around parental death. We first documented that the loss of a parent causes, in proportional terms, a sizable increase in investment income and a modest corresponding decrease in earnings. These effects are heterogeneous across the parental income distribution, with children of richer parents increasing their investment income and reducing their earnings by a larger amount. We further established that inheritances, although uncommon in our sample, can explain most of the observed labor supply response. Next, we used multiple proxies for inheritances to establish that the share of individuals who receive any inheritance is low, even among subgroups with wealthy parents. Finally, we showed that inheritances that generate investment income have a slight equalizing effect on the distribution of investment income.

Despite the robust evidence we find that inheritances reduce labor supply, our ability to precisely estimate the magnitude, composition, and depletion rate of inheritances is limited. Future work should further examine the share of housing and retirement wealth in inheritances. These questions could feasibly be answered using proprietary property tax data along with long histories of mortage interest payments and parent retirement contributions and withdrawals. Such an analysis would offer clearer insight into the relative contribution of housing and retirement to overall inheritance amounts, as well as the share of liquidated inheritances that are spent on consumption versus used to deleverage. Another ambitious but valuable contribution would be to link tax data to loan-level credit bureau or mortgage servicing data to better understand the impact of inheritances on financial distress.

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A Appendix Tables

Table A.1: Social Security Administration cohort life table

Expected share of 1940 birth cohort surviving to age x		
x	Male	Female
60	0.776	0.855
65	0.720	0.815
70	0.644	0.756
75	0.545	0.674
80	0.424	0.564
85	0.281	0.421
90	0.139	0.252

Notes: This table reproduces the SSA's cohort life tables by sex for the closest available birth year to the average parent birth cohort in our sample and for older ages. Source: U.S. Social Security Administration (2005).

Table A.2: Additional summary statistics for children

	Main sample (last parent dies) (1)	**Unconditional on parent linkage (10% sample)** (2)
Age	38.26	37.87
Birth year	1979	1979
Female	0.49	0.50
Married	0.37	0.43
White	0.57	0.59
Black	0.21	0.14
Hispanic	0.15	0.18
Has positive wage earnings	0.74	0.73
Wage earnings	$42,300	$46,360
Wage earnings (median)	$27,890	$31,560
Wage earnings (cond. on positive)	$57,510	$63,340
Tax unit investment income	$1,583	$2,103
Tax unit investment income (median)	$0	$0
Number of unique individuals	1,939,000	7,198,000

Notes: This table reproduces, in column 1, descriptive statistics from Table 3.1 for our main estimation sample of individuals who lose an elderly, last parent. All monetary values are reported in 2022 U.S. dollars, using the Consumer Price Index to adjust for inflation. All values in column 1 are measured one year prior to parental death (the baseline year) and reported as cohort size-weighted averages. Column 2 reports the same set of descriptive statistics for all individuals in the same birth cohorts as our main estimation sample (1971-1987). All values are reported as averages across calendar years that correspond to the baseline year in the main sample, using treatment cohort shares in the main sample as weights. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

Table A.3: Effect of losing a parent on investment income and labor supply

Event year	Per-adult investment income	Tax unit investment income	Tax unit has positive investment income	Per-adult earnings	Own earnings	Has positive earnings	Tax unit earnings	Share of tax unit with positive earnings
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
-5	7.823	14.2	-.0000242	24.31	-67.06	-.00348	162.1	-.002443
	(5.247)	(7.985)	(.0005165)	(37.15)	(39.05)	(.0005388)	(61.06)	(.0005173)
-4	6.383	12.42	-.0003545	11.98	-74.38	-.00325	108.4	-.002454
	(4.958)	(7.475)	(.0004914)	(34.94)	(36.53)	(.0005219)	(56.94)	(.0004999)
-3	4.786	10.41	-.0002135	8.757	-49.99	-.003084	82.18	-.002654
	(4.436)	(6.611)	(.0004546)	(31.34)	(32.64)	(.0004943)	(50.55)	(.0004727)
-2	5.875	8.979	-.0001585	-28.42	-44.12	-.002357	-22.06	-.001948
	(3.525)	(5.24)	(.0003939)	(24.89)	(25.49)	(.0004287)	(40.46)	(.0004092)
-1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)	(0)
0	100.1	144.1	.03465	-622.3	-695.9	-.002574	-829.4	-.002524
	(4.169)	(6.137)	(.0004438)	(26.4)	(27.3)	(.0004256)	(43.16)	(.0004059)
1	289.6	423.9	.04	-770.3	-813	-.002112	-1087	-.001863
	(6.355)	(9.426)	(.0004933)	(35.3)	(37.29)	(.0005029)	(57.76)	(.0004779)
2	367.4	545.2	.03294	-740.2	-743.8	-.001049	-1103	-.0009807
	(7.666)	(11.6)	(.0005147)	(41.63)	(44.96)	(.0005447)	(68.51)	(.0005165)
3	396.3	593.3	.02831	-631.4	-670.5	.0003353	-985.7	.0003946
	(8.675)	(13.29)	(.0005596)	(47.58)	(51.55)	(.0005751)	(78.83)	(.000546)
4	388.6	583.7	.02412	-482.5	-541.5	.001321	-842.3	.001487
	(9.493)	(14.72)	(.0005849)	(53.58)	(58.3)	(.0006039)	(89.24)	(.0005728)
5	394.3	587.7	.02027	-395.7	-454.4	.002852	-754.9	.003129
	(10.55)	(16.47)	(.0006219)	(60.27)	(65.83)	(.0006384)	(100.9)	(.0006052)
DiD estimate	311.7	461.2	.03077	-621.6	-616.8	.002054	-1008	.001659
	(6.749)	(10.49)	(.0003847)	(37.69)	(42.06)	(.0004308)	(63.67)	(.0004011)
Baseline mean	695	1151	.1974	35230	35000	.7189	53560	.7175
N individuals	1.939M	1.939M	1.939M	1.939M	1.939M	1.939M	1.939M	1.939M

Notes: This figure presents estimates of the effect of losing a parent on various outcomes, based on estimating equation 4.1. When computing standard errors (reported in parenthesis), we cluster on dying parent. We use c - 1 as the omitted event time. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

Table A.4: DiD estimates for components of investment income and capitalization factors

	DiD point estimates for each investment income asset class	Saez and Zucman (2016) average capitalization factors
Taxable interest	\$33.13	77.9
Tax-exempt interest	\$14.72	36.4
Taxable dividend	\$117.5	42.5
Gross rental	\$146.4	39.3

Notes: This table presents, in the left column, our DiD point estimates for the components of investment income. The right column contains the average of Saez and Zucman (2016)'s annual capitalization factors from 2010-2016 (the years corresponding to treatment cohorts in our sample), using the number of individuals in each treatment cohort as weights. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

Table A.5: DiD estimates for additional labor supply outcomes

	Employer mobility (1)	W-2 form count (2)	Deferred compensation (3)
DiD estimate	.0052	.0124	-2.191
	(.0006)	(.0010)	(2.666)
Baseline mean	.2126	1.055	950.06
N individuals	774,000	1,939,000	1,939,000

Notes: This table reports DiD estimates for the probability of switching employers, per-adult count of W-2 forms received, and W-2 deferred compensation. For employer mobility, we restrict the sample to individuals with an Employer Identification Number (EIN) populated in every year. Since EIN comes from the W-2, this restriction imposes that individuals always have positive earnings. Employers are identified by the EIN on the individual's largest W-2. When computing standard errors (reported in parenthesis), we cluster on dying parent. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

Table A.6: Baseline shares of children and children with parents receiving information returns

	Children		Parents		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	N individuals
1099-R (retirement)	.0931	.2906	.5317	.4990	1,609,000
1099-INT (interest income)	.1957	.3968	.2726	.4453	1,609,000
1099-DIV (dividend income)	.1179	.3225	.1635	.3698	1,609,000
1099-S (sale of house)	.0101	.1002	.0150	.1220	1,609,000
1098 (mortgage)	.3005	.4585	.2575	.4372	992,000

Notes: This table presents baseline shares of children receiving various information returns for tax-reportable changes in wealth, and corresponding shares of children with a dying parent who receives these forms. 1099 indicators are available in our data beginning in 2010 and the 1098 indicator is available beginning in 2013. For consistency with our event studies for these outcomes (see Figure 5.2), we estimate means for the 2015 and 2016 treatment cohorts only. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

Table A.7: DiD estimates across outcomes by own and parental income

Sample	Own earnings (1)		Per-adult earnings (2)		Per-adult investment income (3)		N individuals
	Estimate	Baseline mean	Estimate	Baseline mean	Estimate	Baseline mean	
Own earnings							
Tercile 1	16.48	190.7	-191.7	8074	217.2	575.3	809,000
	(42.15)		(51.4)		(10.81)		
Tercile 2	-426.1	21060	-477.3	24060	178.6	300	945,000
	(45.11)		(45.05)		(7.611)		
Tercile 2	-1429	83610	-1188	73440	536.9	1208	822,000
	(107.6)		(87.51)		(14.52)		
Parent 1994 AGI							
Quartile 1	-247.9	24820	-258.4	25060	78.02	371.9	434,000
	(62.13)		(56.91)		(8.601)		
Quartile 2	-42.59	29280	-119.6	29640	112.3	431.1	439,000
	(69.16)		(63.44)		(9.793)		
Quartile 3	-482.3	36380	-439	36600	267.1	650	447,000
	(85.32)		(77.03)		(12.81)		
Quartile 4	-1332	52080	-1230	52140	899.9	1370	454,000
	(128.6)		(112.6)		(22.52)		
Parent 1994 inv. inc.							
Bin 1	-238.4	26250	-286.6	26530	66.71	322.2	1,047,000
	(44.27)		(40.61)		(5.798)		
Bin 2	-580.1	39880	-641.2	40180	169.5	673.6	448,000
	(89.77)		(80.68)		(11.85)		
Bin 3	-1568	50640	-1438	50680	995.1	1591	445,000
	(119.4)		(104.9)		(22.42)		
Parent ℓ - 1 inv. inc.							
Bin 1	-127.8	29360	-155.3	29660	79.36	414.9	1,506,000
	(40.04)		(36.6)		(5.066)		
Bin 2	-919.9	48200	-832.4	48370	278.8	900.2	473,000
	(138.1)		(121.6)		(17.75)		
Bin 3	-2163	56990	-1973	56870	1944	2238	353,000
	(187.8)		(163)		(40.44)		

Notes: This table, which corresponds to panel (a) of Figure 5.3, presents DiD estimates for own and per-adult earnings and per-adult investment income in different subsamples defined by own earnings and different measures of parental income. Note that, in our data, earnings are measured at the individual level and investment income is measured at the tax unit level. When computing standard errors (reported in parenthesis), we cluster on dying parent. Outcomes and baseline means are reported in 2022 U.S. dollars. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

Table A.8: DiD estimates across outcomes by own demographic characteristics

Sample	Own earnings (1)		Per-adult earnings (2)		Per-adult investment income (3)		N individuals
	Estimate	Baseline mean	Estimate	Baseline mean	Estimate	Baseline mean	
Male	-799	40090	-687.4	34720	315.7	699.1	992,000
	(67.17)		(53.38)		(9.467)		
Female	-436.1	29690	-547.7	35760	307.8	690.7	947,000
	(48.95)		(52.65)		(9.084)		
White	-844.8	41280	-852.2	41710	477.4	944.4	1,112,000
	(64.51)		(56.82)		(10.74)		
Black	-157	24140	-194.7	24110	36.84	216.2	412,000
	(56.7)		(54.04)		(6.235)		
Hispanic	-376.6	26450	-426.8	26430	94.88	351.8	288,000
	(81.89)		(77.56)		(11.8)		
Under 40	-563.6	31180	-585.7	31490	259.6	531.8	1,709,000
	(43.36)		(39.04)		(6.761)		
40 or above	-837	50430	-770.5	50340	527.3	1354	557,000
	(118)		(103.9)		(19.62)		
No college	-1219	58520	-1101	58150	731.9	1576	199,000
	(187)		(161.7)		(29.55)		
College	-246.4	28010	-237.9	28740	178	371	237,000
	(83.33)		(77.07)		(13.22)		
Lives with parent	-79.82	28160	-89.77	28220	401	512.2	489,000
	(81.87)		(76.28)		(16.47)		
0-5m from parent	-477.2	35300	-505.4	35520	352.6	633.2	464,000
	(90.97)		(80.28)		(16.51)		
5-25m from parent	-923.8	40790	-915.7	41280	275.5	719.7	469,000
	(101.3)		(89.79)		(15.43)		
>25m from parent	-701.7	35300	-709.7	35490	283.4	763.8	1,201,000
	(63.25)		(56.48)		(9.252)		

Notes: This table, which corresponds to panel (b) of Figure 5.3, presents DiD estimates for own and per-adult earnings and per-adult investment income in different subsamples defined by own demographic characteristics. We define distance bins, the last four rows of the table, based on miles. Note that, in our data, earnings are measured at the individual level and investment income is measured at the tax unit level. When computing standard errors (reported in parenthesis), we cluster on dying parent. Outcomes and baseline means are reported in 2022 U.S. dollars. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

Table A.9: DiD estimates across outcomes by parent demographic characteristics

Sample	Own earnings (1)		Per-adult earnings (2)		Per-adult investment income (3)		N individuals
	Estimate	Baseline mean	Estimate	Baseline mean	Estimate	Baseline mean	
Male	-575	34690	-580.3	34760	302.2	717.3	873,000
	(62.27)		(55.47)		(9.827)		
Male	-575	34690	-580.3	34760	302.2	717.3	873,000
	(62.27)		(55.47)		(9.827)		
Female	-665.1	35290	-662	35650	317.7	674.9	1,066,000
	(57)		(51.38)		(9.286)		
Under 75	-631.9	35250	-611.7	35470	345.7	664.9	1,175,000
	(51.8)		(46.45)		(8.121)		
75 or above	-477.9	34470	-543.9	34730	267.1	758.2	764,000
	(71.68)		(64.24)		(11.93)		
No wage earnings	-507.8	34010	-489.8	34270	287.4	671.8	1,555,000
	(45.12)		(40.61)		(7.299)		
Has positive wage earnings	-445.4	39970	-493.9	40030	442.6	811.2	657,000
	(113.8)		(99.92)		(17.95)		

Notes: This table, which corresponds to panel (c) of Figure 5.3, presents DiD estimates for own and per-adult earnings and per-adult investment income in different subsamples defined by characteristics of the dying parent. Note that, in our data, earnings are measured at the individual level and investment income is measured at the tax unit level. When computing standard errors (reported in parenthesis), we cluster on dying parent. Outcomes and baseline means are reported in 2022 U.S. dollars. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

Table A.10: DiD estimates across outcomes by current household characteristics

Sample	Own earnings (1)		Per-adult earnings (2)		Per-adult investment income (3)		N individuals
	Estimate	Baseline mean	Estimate	Baseline mean	Estimate	Baseline mean	
Unmarried	-421.8	25520	-413.8	25520	258	361.3	1,365,000
	(40.99)		(40.55)		(7.478)		
Unmarried filer	-698.1	37130	-692.2	37130	365.9	600.3	992,000
	(59.71)		(58.92)		(11.29)		
Married (filer)	-943.9	53600	-922.1	54270	426.7	1349	800,000
	(93.27)		(76.41)		(12.9)		
Filer with dependent(s)	-699.2	44780	-701.5	45330	312.1	959.7	951,000
	(72.65)		(60.63)		(10.37)		
Filer with no dependent(s)	-844.6	44560	-819.4	44500	551.1	920.9	883,000
	(79.23)		(74.42)		(14.86)		

Notes: This table, which corresponds to panel (d) of Figure 5.3, presents DiD estimates for own and per-adult earnings and per-adult investment income in different subsamples defined by characteristics of the child's current household. Note that, in our data, earnings are measured at the individual level and investment income is measured at the tax unit level. When computing standard errors (reported in parenthesis), we cluster on dying parent. Outcomes and baseline means are reported in 2022 U.S. dollars. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

Table A.11: DiD estimates across outcomes by household of origin characteristics

Sample	Own earnings (1)		Per-adult earnings (2)		Per-adult investment income (3)		N individuals
	Estimate	Baseline mean	Estimate	Baseline mean	Estimate	Baseline mean	
Only child	-607.5	37600	-595.4	37850	411.4	771.9	817,000
	(62.5)		(56)		(10.21)		
1 sibling	-679.5	35630	-679.7	35810	302.5	718.3	635,000
	(77.91)		(69.97)		(12.95)		
2 siblings	-403	30620	-486	30980	143.8	554.1	301,000
	(109.3)		(97.32)		(15.69)		
1st of 2 kids	-791.5	35390	-761.3	35510	249.4	704.6	365,000
	(99.07)		(88.57)		(14.78)		
2nd of 2 kids	-557.6	35960	-595.2	36230	370.8	737.2	270,000
	(121.5)		(109.2)		(18.7)		
Boy in boy+girl HH	-700.4	36890	-625.8	32060	233.4	619.6	336,000
	(118.1)		(94.7)		(15.54)		
Girl in boy+girl HH	-327.3	26770	-453.4	31980	206.7	583.2	362,000
	(79.73)		(85.03)		(13.48)		

Notes: This table, which corresponds to panel (e) of Figure 5.3, presents DiD estimates for own and per-adult earnings and per-adult investment income in different subsamples defined by characteristics of the child's household of origin. The last two rows of the table correspond to subsamples of adult children whose dying parent has at least one male and at least one female child. Note that, in our data, earnings are measured at the individual level and investment income is measured at the tax unit level. When computing standard errors (reported in parenthesis), we cluster on dying parent. Outcomes and baseline means are reported in 2022 U.S. dollars. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

Table A.12: IV estimates of the effect of investment income on earnings

	Main sample
Per-adult earnings	-1.399
	(.1157)
F-statistic	146.2
J-statistic	30.06
J-statistic p-value	.0117
N individuals	1.939M

Notes: This table reports 2SLS estimates and test statistics for an overidentifed model where the outcome is per-adult earnings, the endogenous variable is per-adult investment income, and instrument sets are constructed by interacting 1(treated for stack) x 1(post-treatment for stack) and group dummies. Groups are defined by the interaction of sex, 1994 parent AGI quartile, and racial group. We include stack fixed effects as in 4.1. When computing standard errors (reported in parenthesis), we cluster on dying parent. The small discrepancy between our main estimate and the slope in Figure 6.2 reflects slight differences in the number of observations contributing to each stack when estimating the model using the full microdata versus subsamples. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

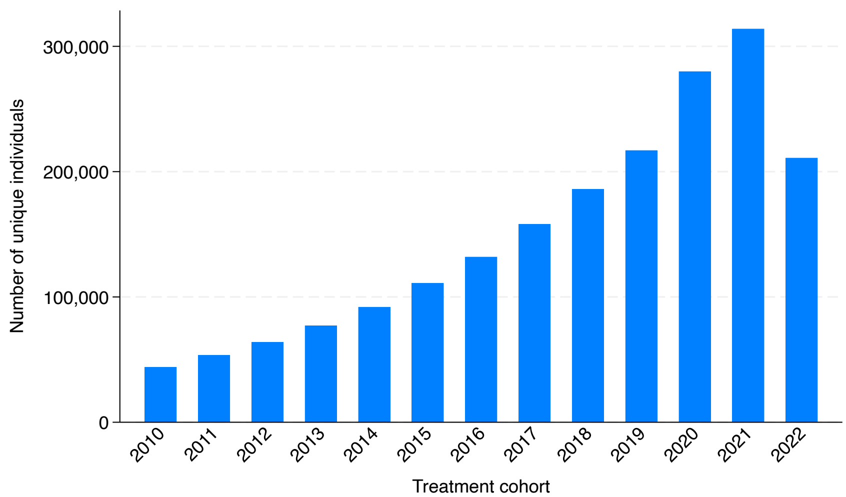
Table A.13: Share of individuals who receive an inheritance based on union across change in wealth outcomes

	Control (1)	Treated (2)	Difference (3)	N individuals
Main sample	0.3963	0.5001	0.1038	1,939,000
	(0.0003)	(0.0007)	(0.0008)	
Male	0.3859	0.4874	0.1015	992,000
	(0.0005)	(0.0010)	(0.0010)	
Female	0.4071	0.5134	0.1062	947,000
	(0.0005)	(0.0010)	(0.0010)	
No college	0.3601	0.4749	0.1148	237,000
	(0.0009)	(0.0019)	(0.0020)	
College	0.5339	0.6950	0.1612	199,000
	(0.0010)	(0.0019)	(0.0021)	
White	0.4381	0.5829	0.1448	1,112,000
	(0.0005)	(0.0010)	(0.0010)	
Black	0.3055	0.3473	0.0418	288,000
	(0.0009)	(0.0018)	(0.0019)	
Hispanic	0.3338	0.3970	0.0633	412,000
	(0.0007)	(0.0014)	(0.0015)	
Parent 1994 AGI Q1	0.3139	0.3573	0.0433	446,000
	(0.0007)	(0.0013)	(0.0014)	
Parent 1994 AGI Q2	0.3609	0.4458	0.0849	444,000
	(0.0007)	(0.0014)	(0.0015)	
Parent 1994 AGI Q3	0.4165	0.5636	0.1471	443,000
	(0.0007)	(0.0015)	(0.0016)	
Parent 1994 AGI Q4	0.5132	0.7124	0.1991	442,000
	(0.0007)	(0.0015)	(0.0015)	

Notes: This table reports means and difference in means for treated and control individuals across different subsamples, based on equation 7.1 and using an indicator for undergoing a change in wealth from retirement distributions, housing sales, or new investment income, as described in Section 7.1. When computing standard errors (reported in parenthesis), we cluster on dying parent. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

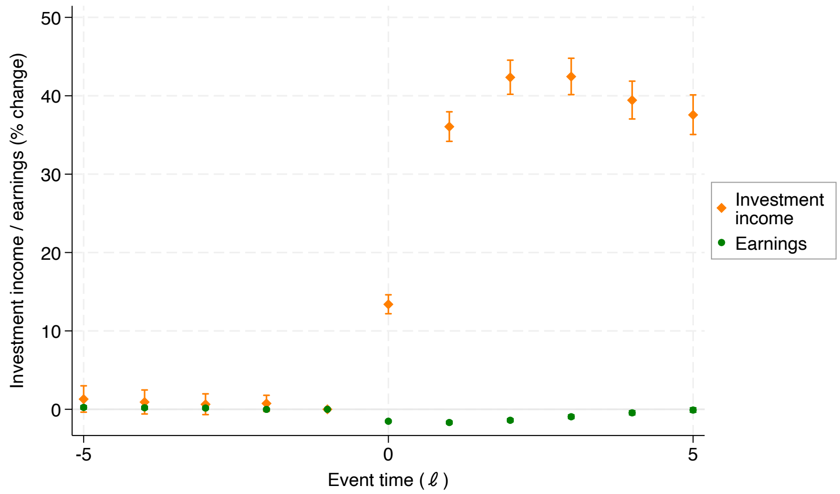
B Appendix Figures

Figure B.1: Unique individuals per treatment cohort



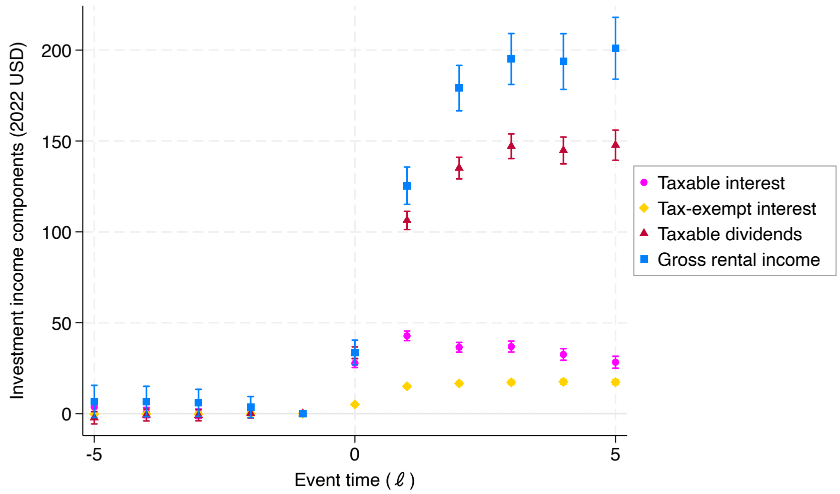
Notes: This figure displays the number of unique individuals belonging to each treatment cohort in our main estimation sample. We estimate treatment effects for cohorts 2010-2016, while cohorts 2017-2022 serve as controls for certain treatment cohorts, as described in Section 4.2. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

Figure B.2: Effect of parental death across outcomes: Poisson model



Notes: This figure presents estimates of the effect of losing a parent on two outcomes, based on estimating a Poisson version of equation 4.1. 95 percent confidence intervals are displayed, clustering on dying parent. We use c - 1 as the omitted event time. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

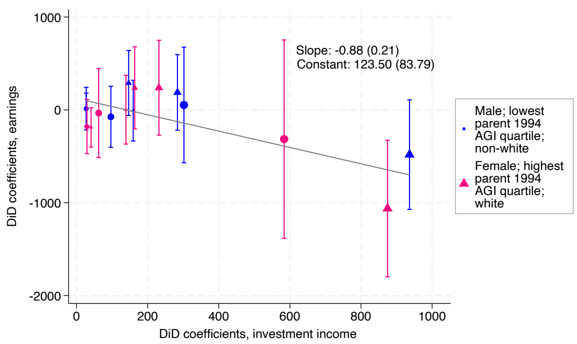
Figure B.3: Effect of parental death on components of investment income



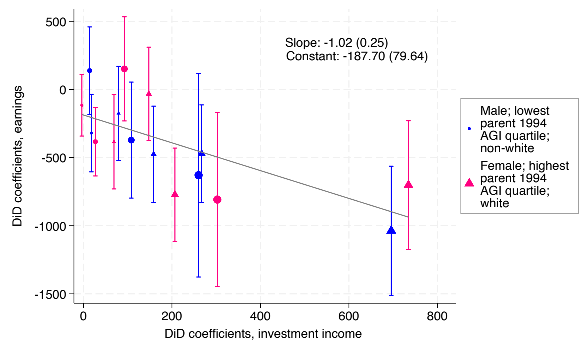
Notes: This figure presents estimates of the effect of losing a parent on the four income variables whose sum we defined to be investment income, based on estimating equation 4.1. 95 percent confidence intervals are displayed, clustering on dying parent. We use c - 1 as the omitted event time. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

Figure B.4: Visual IV estimates of the effect of investment income on earnings, by earnings tercile

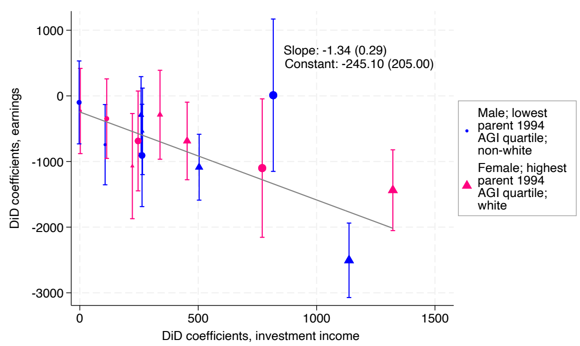
(a) Own earnings tercile 1



(b) Own earnings tercile 2



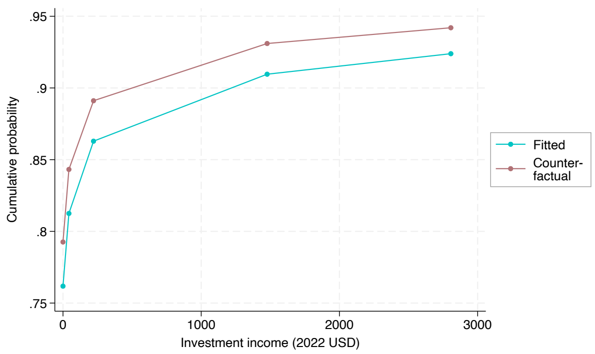
(c) Own earnings tercile 3



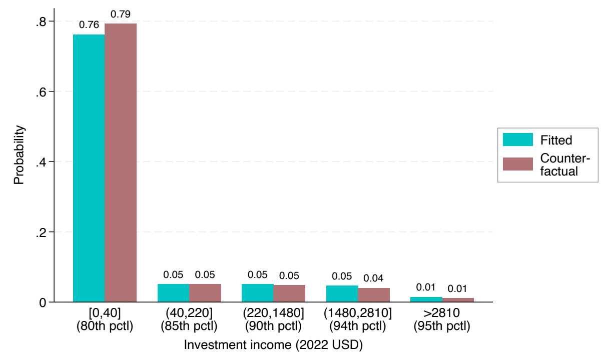
Notes: Each panel plots effects on earnings against effects on investment income in the year following parental death for sixteen different subsamples, as detailed in Section 6.1, within a given tercile of baseline own earnings. Whiskers mark 95 percent confidence intervals for the earnings estimates. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

Figure B.5: Effect of inheritances on the distribution of investment income

(a) CDF



(b) PMF



Notes: Panel (a) presents presents averages of fitted and counterfactual values for investment income among treated individuals, tracing out a cumulative distribution function. To build this plot, we estimate difference-in-differences for the probability of recording investment income less than or equal to specific cut points. We define these points to be the 80th, 85th, 90th, 94th, and 95th percentiles of the $\ell - 1$ distribution of investment income among 2010-2016 treatment cohorts (the cohorts for which we estimate treatment effects). For each grid point, we use our DiD estimates to compute fitted and counterfactual values of the outcome among treated individuals within each stack, then average these values across stacks using the number of treated individuals in each stack as weights. Panel (b) plots the corresponding probability mass function. Source: Census Environmental Impacts Frame, Master Address File, Decennial Census (2000, 2010), American Community Survey (2000-2022); IRS 1040s, W-2s (2005-2022); SSA Numident (1994-2022).

C Variable definitions

Here we define variables not already described in Sections 3.1 and 3.2.

1099-R: An indicator for receipt of a 1099-R information return (this return is issued to an individual plan-holder).

1099-INT: An indicator for receipt of a 1099-INT information return, either by an individual or their spouse (this return is often issued to only one member of a married tax unit).

1099-DIV: An indicator for receipt of a 1099-DIV information return, either by an individual or their spouse (this return is often issued to only one member of a married tax unit).

1099-S: An indicator for receipt of a 1099-S information return, either by an individual or their spouse (this return is often issued to only one member of a married tax unit).

1098: An indicator for receipt of a 1098 information return, either by an individual or their spouse (this return is often issued to only one member of a married tax unit).

2010 homeownership: An indicator for being a head of household or spouse or partner of a head of household in the 2010 Decennial in a household where the householder is a homeowner (either owning free and clear or with a mortgage).

Census tract: The Census tract (Census-defined geographic aggregation) corresponding to an individual's home address in a given year.

EIN: For individuals linked to a single firm through Form W-2, this is the identity of their employer. For individuals linked to multiple firms through Form W-2, this is the identity of the highest-paying employer.

College: An indicator for having a bachelor's degree or higher in the 2000 Decennial or 2001-2020 ACS surveys (the 2010 Decennial does not include data on college attendance).

Distance to parent: Distance of child's home address to home address of the dying parent, in miles, as calculated by Stata's geodist package.

Having dependents: An indicator for claiming a child at home or child away exemption on Form 1040.

Number of siblings: The number of other children claimed by one's parent from 1951-2007, a 20 year range surrounding the minimum and maximum birth year of children in our sample.

Birth order: The relative birth year order among children claimed by one's parent from 1951-2007, a 20 year range surrounding the minimum and maximum birth year of children in our sample.

Having no wealth (dying parents): An indicator for not recording receipt of a 1099-R, having 0 investment income, and not being a homeowner in 2010.

Wealth change due to retirement: A binary indicator for recording receipt of a 1099-R in $\ell \in \{0, 1, 2\}$.

Wealth change due to housing: A binary indicator for recording receipt of a 1099-S in $\ell \in \{0, 1, 2\}$.

Wealth change due to investment income: A binary indicator equal to the union of the following binary indicators:

- A binary indicator for recording receipt of a 1099-DIV or 1099-INT in $\ell \in \{0, 1, 2\}$ having not received one in $\ell \in \{-3, -2, -1\}$
- A binary indicator for recording investment income in $\ell \in \{0, 1, 2\}$ in a category (taxable and tax-exempt interest income, taxable dividend income, or gross rental income) that was not recorded in $\ell \in \{-3, -2, -1\}$.
- A binary indicator for recording at least 50 percent higher investment income in $\ell \in \{0, 1, 2\}$ in a given category than was recorded in the same category in $\ell \in \{-3, -2, -1\}$.
- A binary indicator for recording at least 50 percent higher total investment income in $\ell \in \{0, 1, 2\}$ than total investment income recorded in $\ell \in \{-3, -2, -1\}$.

Wealth change due any source: A binary indicator equal to the union of wealth change due to retirement, wealth change due to housing, and wealth change due to investment income.

D MPE calculation

Should reformulate budget constraint to match Theory section + show Golosov and Vivalt pre-tax estimates

To fix ideas, we rewrite the budget constraint from Section 2:

$$c_t = w_t h_t + \underbrace{(1+r)a_{t-1} - a_t}_{\text{unearned income}\equiv n_t} \tag{D.1}$$

where c_t, $w_t h_t$, and a_t are consumption, labor earnings, and assets of the household in period t and r is the interest rate. n_t represents the unearned income used by the household in period t. Our measure of investment income corresponds to a share of ra_{t-1}. It is not equal to ra_{t-1} because a_{t-1} includes assets that do not generate investment income, as discussed in Section 5.1.

Our capitalization approach from Section 7.1 yielded an average capitalization factor for investment income of 44.5, meaning that one dollar of investment income is associated with \$44.5 of wealth that generates investment income.[28] Dividing -\$1.31 (the slope from our visual IV) by \$44.5, we estimate -\$0.03 to be the mean annual effect on earnings of an extra dollar of wealth.

To translate this estimate into an MPE, we must allocate the initial windfall gain in wealth over time. While we do not know the total average inheritance received, under our approach of using the visual IV slope, it suffices to consider how indiviudals annuitize the inheritance associated with one dollar of investment income. Following Golosov et al. (2024), we calculate the annual change in unearned income for a treated individual smoothing an inheritance L over $T-k$ remaining years of life with a discount rate of r as:

$$\frac{r}{1+r}\left(1-\left(\frac{1}{1+r}\right)^{T-k+1}\right)^{-1} L \tag{D.2}$$

Applying this formula with $L = \$44.5$, $r = 2.5$ percent (as in Golosov et al. (2024)), $T = 80$, and $k = 38$, the average age at parent death in our sample, yields a payout amount of -\$1.64. We can then again divide the slope from our visual IV by this amount to obtain the MPE, i.e. the mean annual effect of an extra dollar of unearned income. This exercise yields a tax unit-level MPE of -0.8 (with a standard error of 0.1), much larger than the equivalent household-level estimates of -0.332 and -0.34-0.42 from Golosov et al. (2024) and Vivalt et al. (2025), respectively.

[28] Further details on our capitalization estimate can be found in Appendix A.4.

E Comparison of inheritance results with the Survey of Consumer Finances

The SCF contains a section called "Inheritances and Charitable Contributions" which asks respondents: "*Including any gifts or inheritances you may have already told me about, have you (or your husband/wife/partner/ spouse) ever received an inheritance, or been given substantial assets in a trust or in some other form?*" For up to three such "inheritances, gifts, or transfers," the survey subsequently asks respondents to provide information on the type of transfer (whether an inheritance, trust, or transfer/gift); the approximate value at the time the transfer was received, the year of receipt, and from whom the transfer was received.

The same section also asks "How much altogether were any others you have received?" but there are no questions on transfer type, year of receipt, or source associated with this question. This section of the SCF is intended to encompass all inheritances, but other sections contain a few more questions about whether specific assets were received as inheritances. However, these sections do not distinguish between gifts and inheritances and lack information on the source of the inheritance (i.e. whether from parents or another entity). Wolff and Gittleman (2011) show that nearly all respondents who report having received specific assets also report these assets in the general section on inheritances. For these reasons, we restrict attention to the general questions.

We pool 2010-2022 SCF waves and restrict to households where either the respondent or their spouse was born in 1971-1987 (the birth cohorts of our sample) and to households where either the respondent or the spouse has no living parent. These choices reflect a compromise between approximating our sample selection, given the SCF's lack of parental death year, and maintaining sample size, which would be sharply reduced by fine-grained re-weighting. We inflation adjust values so that all inheritances amounts are measured in USD 2022. The resulting sample is higher income than our main estimation sample, with a mean of $46,300 compared to $35,230 among the cohorts for whom we estimate treatment effects in the baseline year (see Appendix Table A.3). The survey permits dollar-valued responses of up to one billion, such that top-coding does not constrain the upper tail of reported values.

Table E.14: Inheritance summary statistics

	Mean	SD
Inheritance share	.1613	.0102
Cond. mean inheritance	227.5	27.3
Cond. median inheritance	78.8	13.7
Mean per-adult wage earnings	46.3	2.6
Median per-adult wage earnings	32.2	1.0
N respondents	4,713	

Notes: This table presents descriptive statistics from the 2010, 2013, 2016, 2019, and 2022 SCF surveys, as described above. Dollar amounts are reported in 2022 USD (thousands).