Unfree Wills: Inheritance Rules, Bequest Motives, and Wealth Diffusion*

Marius Brülhart† *HEC Lausanne and CEPR*

Laia Soler‡ *HEC Lausanne*

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Abstract

We examine how liberalizing inheritance law can affect the diffusion of wealth beyond family dynasties. Exploiting a reform that reduced mandatory estate shares for children and surviving parents, we analyze testator responses in a unique dataset of 16,887 anonymous online wills. We find that greater testamentary freedom primarily benefited spouses and life partners but also led to significant increases in transfers to nonrelatives and charitable organizations. Our estimated "diffusion elasticity" reveals that one third of newly discretionary estate shares was reallocated towards heirs outside of the core family. Extrapolating this effect suggests that liberalization could generate additional annual extra-dynastic bequests of up to 1.2% of national income in countries with restrictive inheritance rules.

JEL Classification: D64, D31, H23

Keywords: wealth transmission, inheritance law, testator preferences, reference-dependent preferences

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† University of Lausanne, Department of Economics, Faculty of Business and Economics (HEC Lausanne), 1015 Lausanne, Switzerland; CEPR (email: marius.brulhart@unil.ch).

‡ University of Lausanne, Department of Economics, Faculty of Business and Economics (HEC Lausanne), 1015 Lausanne, Switzerland (email: laia.soler@unil.ch).

1 Introduction

Wealth-to-income ratios have been rising across many mature economies (Piketty and Zucman, 2014; Baselgia and Martínez, 2025). As a result, inheritance has regained an economic weight and societal importance not seen for more than a century (Piketty and Zucman, 2015). This development has sparked renewed political debate and academic interest. The central concern is one of equity: given their highly skewed distribution, growing inheritances undermine the meritocratic ideal of *ex ante* equal lifetime opportunities.[1]

Taxation is the most prominent instrument for addressing the distributional implications of inheritance. Much of the existing literature therefore evaluates the redistributive scope of bequest taxes (Kopczuk, 2013). With sufficiently progressive schedules, such taxes can offset some of the regressive effects of inherited wealth (Nekoei and Seim, 2023). Yet, bequest taxes remain persistently unpopular (Stantcheva, 2021), and stronger progressivity heightens the risk of outmigration by wealthy seniors (Moretti and Wilson, 2023).

In this paper, we explore the potential for wealth diffusion via an alternative, non-coercive policy tool: liberalizing inheritance law. Nations that are governed by civil law limit testators' freedom to pass wealth outside of the immediate family. These rules force transmitted wealth to remain within family dynasties, primarily by reserving compulsory minimum estate shares for direct descendants. How much additional wealth diffusion would arise if such constraints were relaxed? To our knowledge, this question has not yet been studied empirically.

We investigate the consequences of a major liberalization of inheritance law in Switzerland, drawing on a unique dataset of 16,887 anonymous online wills. The reform, which came into effect in 2023, substantially lowered compulsory minimum shares for direct descendants and abolished those for surviving parents. For testators, the freely disposable portion of the estate increased by an average of 19 percentage points, from 39% to 58%. Using simple-differences and difference-in-differences estimation, we find that testators availed of their additional freedom primarily to increase bequests to spouses and life partners. Importantly, transfers to heirs outside of the core family also increased statistically significantly. Our central estimate of the "diffusion elasticity", i.e. the share of an additional freely attributable dollar that is allocated to nonrelatives and charities, is 0.33.

These findings suggest that intra-family bequest motives remain strong but that greater testamentary freedom can broaden wealth dispersion at the time of transmission. We also find evidence of reference-dependent preferences: higher legal minimum shares are associated with larger supramarginal allocations to the same heirs. Our analysis also confirms charitable bequests to be particularly sensitive to taxation.

We estimate the additional wealth diffusion associated with the Swiss liberalization to have been considerably larger in purely monetary terms than that obtained by existing inheritance taxes. Extrapolating from the Swiss experience using our estimated diffusion elasticity, we find that liberalizing inheritance law could yield additional annual wealth diffusion of up to 1.2% of national income in those countries that reserve compulsory estate shares for direct descendants.

[1] Growing inheritances also have efficiency implications, e.g. by affecting the labor supply of heirs (see, e.g., Brülhart et al., 2026a; Taşar and Voorheis, 2026).

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature and situates our contribution. Section 3 discusses international differences in inheritance rules and describes the Swiss reform. Section 4 describes our dataset of online wills. Section 5 presents the empirical analysis. Section 6 offers some illustrative quantitative extrapolations, and Section 7 concludes.

2 Previous literature

The literature on the weight and nature of bequest motives is large. To date, it has focused on two broad questions.

One strand of research, more "macro" in flavor, has explored the extent to which peoples' economic choices are driven by a desire to bequeath wealth – as opposed to saving out of insurance or other motives.[2] This literature shows bequests to be a luxury good, i.e. important mainly to the wealthy.

The other question is more "micro" and more closely related to this paper: given the size of their bequests, how do testators divide them?[3] Four behavioral motives stand out: warm glow (Andreoni, 1989), altruism (Becker and Tomes, 1986), exchange (Bernheim et al., 1985) and evolution (Cox, 2007). Put (overly) simply, "warm glow" describes a testator who feels good about leaving a large bequest but cares less about who receives it, "altruism" describes a testator who seeks to favor the more economically needy among her heirs, "exchange" describes a testator who uses her will to reward certain heirs for services rendered, and "evolution" describes a testator who wants to maximize the prospects of her biological children. There is strong evidence for the exchange motive (e.g. Barczyk et al., 2023) and for the evolutionary explanation (e.g. Fahle, 2025). The altruistic model is less strongly supported, considering the prevalent norm of splitting estates equally among children, irrespective of need (see e.g. Menchik, 1980, Wilhelm, 1996, Hamaaki et al., 2019). It has also been found that, other things equal, childless testators have similarly strong overall bequest motives (Fella et al., 2024).

Importantly, the literature shows that bequest motives are not immutable traits, as they can depend on testators' health status (Light and McGarry, 2004), on cultural and gender norms (Horioka, 2014; Lekfuangfu et al., 2025), and on fiscal incentives (Escobar et al., 2023, Sturrock et al., 2022).

This literature strongly emphasizes intra-family bequests. For evolutionary approaches, a focus on the biological dynasty is self-evident. But for the other behavioral frameworks, it is not. Yet, discussions of the exchange model are mostly framed in terms of elderly parents motivating/rewarding care services by their children. Similarly, altruism is modeled as equalizing marginal utilities among children. Non-related heirs typically do not even feature as an option. This omits the possibility of altruism toward non-related people, be they personally known to the testator or even perfect strangers.[4]

However, transfers to recipients outside of the nuclear family have not been ignored by

[2] See De Nardi et al. (2016), Lockwood (2012, 2018).

[3] See Laitner and Ohlsson (2001), Arrondel and Masson (2006) and Kopczuk (2013) for surveys.

[4] The behavioral economics literature typically associates altruism with finite social distance (Bohnet and Frey, 1999), but humans might extend empathic feelings to all members of their species – what Jencks (1990) referred to as "moralistic altruism'.

the literature, as several researchers have studied bequests to charitable causes (e.g. Bakija et al., 2003, Glogowsky, 2021). What is common to these analyses is their focus on the elasticity of charitable bequeathing with respect to tax incentives. In a survey of this literature, Kopczuk (2013) concludes that "(t)he literature generally finds that charitable bequests are very sensitive to both their tax price and to wealth, with the first effect dominating" (p. 379). This suggests that the substitution elasticity between charitable and family bequests is large, and the division of estates is therefore responsive to external incentives. That view is partly supported by the findings of Sanders and Smith (2016), who carried out a field experiment with a phone-based service for legal advice on will writing. When legal advisers gave a strong instead of a weak verbal "prompt to leave money to charity", the share of wills including a charitable bequest increased from 11.8% to 16.5%. That effect, however, was fully driven by testators without children, who accounted for around a quarter of the sampled testators. The three-quarters of testators who had children did not, on average, respond to the prompt in statistically significant fashion. These findings suggest that testators' substitution elasticity between bequeathing to close relatives and to charitable causes is low. No comparable evidence exists, to our knowledge, on the responsiveness of bequeathing to non-related individuals.

An original feature of this study is our ability to leverage a change in legal inheritance rules for difference-in-differences estimation. Researchers have previously used variation in inheritance rules for cross-section estimation. Ellul et al. (2010) collected data on the maximum estate share that testators are legally allowed to bequeath to a single child, which they termed the "permissiveness" of inheritance law. Using variation across 38 of their 64 sample countries, they found more permissive inheritance rules to be associated with higher investment rates by family-owned firms. This adds to the evidence on bequest motives that are centered on direct descendants. Bartels et al. (2024) found historical intra-family inheritance rules for agricultural land that favored equal division among heirs to be associated with higher incomes and more entrepreneurship over a century later.

To the best of our knowledge, ours is the first study to exploit data from an online will-writing tool. Closest to our empirical setting is that of Sanders and Smith (2016), who drew on wills prepared via a phone-based advice center. This allowed the authors to randomize verbal prompts given to testators. Unlike us, they were also able to observe the value of the estates. Our data, in turn, have the advantage of being provided spontaneously by users, with no risk of contamination by framing or demand effects that is inherent in data collected through human interaction. We moreover are able to leverage an exogenous policy change, and we have greater statistical power thanks to a sample that is more than six times larger.

Probably the richest source of information on the division of bequests collected to date was put together by Elinder et al. (2014), who gathered some 400,000 estate inventory reports covering essentially the population of Swedish estates in 2001-2005.[5] For 22% of these estates, testators had left a will. These data have informed a number of studies on estate tax planning, including Erixson and Escobar (2020) and Escobar et al. (2023). Elinder et al. (2021) provide a cross-sectional account of estate divisions and document that testators who have close family bequeath a mere 1% to other relatives, nonrelatives and charities combined. An advantage of

[5]The abolition of inheritance taxation in Sweden led to the discontinuation of administrative data collection in 2006.

our data is that they reflect the unprompted wishes expressed by testators. Most importantly, unlike the Swedish data, our observation period contains a significant change in inheritance law, which allows us to estimate behavioral responses.

3 Inheritance rules: international comparison and a Swiss reform

3.1 Inheritance rules across countries

Most nations are governed by civil law. In those countries, testators face significant legal limits on their last wishes. Close family members – mainly children and spouses – have a legal right to certain minimum shares of the estate and cannot be disinherited. This constrains the freedom for testators to designate heirs from outside their close family. The purpose of our study is to examine the constraints such rules impose and how testators adapt their choices when the rules are relaxed.

In 45 of the 64 countries covered by Ellul et al. (2010), estate division is subject to legal constraints. These include most continental European and South (but not Central) American nations as well as large Asian countries such as Bangladesh, Japan, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia and Taiwan.[6]

In the remaining countries, however, testators can already divide their estates freely. Those are mainly common-law countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom and its former colonies. 19 of the 64 countries covered by Ellul et al. (2010) belong to this category.

In Figure 1, we plot country-level top-1% wealth shares against the Ellul et al. (2010) measure of testator freedom. Common-law countries, where testator freedom is at its maximum value, are clustered on the right edge of the graph. Overall, this illustration shows that inheritance laws of many countries remain restrictive.

If testator freedom were a first-order determinant of wealth diffusion, we would expect to find a negative correlation between the two variables plotted in Figure 1. We fit a parabolic regression line to those data, and we find no systematic cross-sectional correlation between wealth concentration and testator freedom. The absence of a simple bivariate country-level relationship does of course not prove the absence of an effect of testator freedom on wealth dispersion. A test of the latter effect requires a more controlled empirical setting, towards which we turn next.

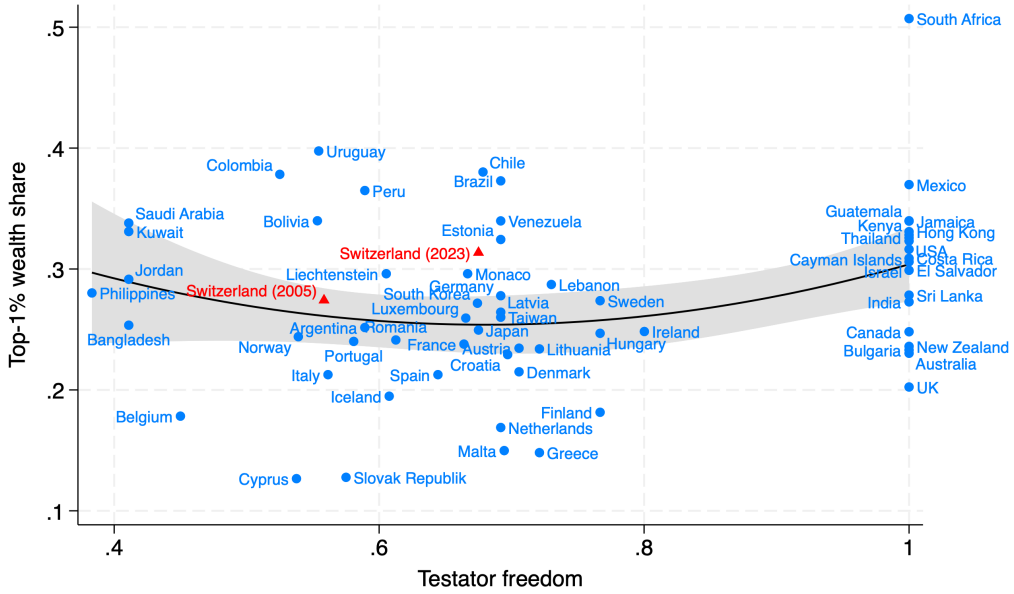
3.2 Our empirical setting: changing inheritance rules in Switzerland

In what follows, we describe the institutional context that will later allow us to estimate plausibly causal effects of inheritance rules on testator choices.

Protected heirs. Up until 2022, Swiss inheritance law reserved compulsory shares for three categories of surviving family members: spouses, children and parents. The presence of such family ties therefore determined the extent of the constraints upon testators.

[6]Some large nations not included in the Ellul et al. (2010) dataset are worth mentioning. In the Islamic legal tradition – practiced in countries including Indonesia and Pakistan –, direct descendants enjoy strong testatory protections. China, however, despite counting as a civil-law country, has adopted testatory freedoms that are similar to those of common-law countries.

Figure 1: Testator freedom and wealth inequality in 64 countries



Notes: This graph plots country-specific top-1% wealth shares taken from the World Inequality Database (WID) against a measure of testator freedom taken from Ellul et al. (2010). The solid black line is the line of best fit of a parabolic bivariate regression model, with the shaded bands showing the 95% confidence interval. Testator freedom is computed as an unweighted average of the five measures reported in columns 1-5 of Table 1 in Ellul et al. (2010). Top-1% wealth shares refer to the year 2005, and the testator freedom measures to the mid-2000s. For Switzerland, we report two data points (highlighted in red): one for 2005, which is constructed analogously to the data points for the other countries, and one for 2023, for which we recompute testator freedom using the reformed rules of 2023 and the top-1% wealth share for that year taken from the WID.

In order to fully capture the effects of the legal rules, we need to distinguish different family configurations ($FamStruct$). We introduce the following notation:

$$FamStruct = cA\_pB\_mA, \qquad A \in \{Y, N, X\}, \qquad B \in \{0, 1, 2, X\}, \tag{1}$$

where c denotes the presence of surviving children or grandchildren, p denotes the presence of surviving parents, m (for "married") denotes the presence of a surviving spouse, Y stands for "yes", N stands for "no", and X stands for "irrelevant". The qualifier for the presence of parents, B, can either indicate the number of surviving parents (0, 1, 2), or it can be set to X, when the number of surviving parents is irrelevant.

We consider seven types of $FamStruct$, which are distinct in terms of the constraints imposed on them by inheritance law. We number these groups from 0 to 6, with 0 denoting the group which was unaffected by the reform.[7]

The seven types of $FamStruct$ and their associated inheritance rules are shown in Table 1. We list compulsory minimum shares by type of $FamStruct$, category of heir and time period (pre-/post-reform). For completeness, we also show the default legal estate shares that apply in the absence of a will.[8]

Only testators with no direct descendants and no surviving parents ($FamStruct$ of type 0) saw no change in their freely attributable share after the reform. These testators therefore form a natural reference group, which we shall refer to as the "narrow control group" –

[7]The positive numbers are chosen in descending order of the size of the respective group in our data (see Table 2).
[8]Appendix Figure A.1 illustrates the order of preference among parentelic lineages in Swiss inheritance law.

Table 1: Inheritance rules by family structure, pre- and post-reform

Family structure ($FamStruct$)		0 cN_p0_mX	1 cY_pX_mY	2 cY_pX_mN	3 cN_p2_mN	4 cN_p1_mN	5 cN_p2_mY	6 cN_p1_mY
	Children	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
	Parents	No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Both	One	Both	One
	Spouse	Yes/No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Default legal share	Children		0.50	1.00				
	Parents				1.00	0.50	0.25	0.13
	Spouse	1.00/0.00	0.50				0.75	0.75
	$Sum(A)$	1.00/0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.50	1.00	0.88
Compulsory minimum share pre-2023	Children		0.38	0.75				
	Parents				0.50	0.25	0.13	0.06
	Spouse	0.50/0.00	0.25				0.38	0.38
	$Sum(B)$	0.50/0.00	0.63	0.75	0.50	0.25	0.50	0.44
Compulsory minimum share post-2023	Children		0.25	0.50				
	Parents				0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Spouse	0.50/0.00	0.25				0.38	0.38
	$Sum(C)$	0.50/0.00	0.50	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.38	0.38
p.p. change in min. share	$=100\times[Sum(C)-Sum(B)]$	**0**	**-12.5**	**-25**	**-50**	**-25**	**-12.5**	**-6.25**

Notes: Default and compulsory minimum estate shares according to Swiss inheritance law, before and after the reform of 2023. The seven types of family structure ($FamStruct$) are defined such as to cover all possible changes in testator freedom due to the reform. 'Children' are defined here as including grandchildren (i.e. all direct descendants).

distinct from the "enlarged control group" that includes also $FamStruct$ of types 1, 5 and 6.

The 2023 reform. Swiss inheritance law was reformed by an act of parliament, passed in December 2020 and entered into force on 1 January 2023. A central component of the reform was the lowering of compulsory minimum shares on two of the three previously protected heir categories: direct descendants and parents. Minimum estate shares for children were reduced by one third, and those for surviving parents were abolished. The minimum share reserved for the surviving spouse, however, was left unchanged.

The bottom row of Table 1 shows the effects of the reform in terms of percentage-point (p.p.) changes in the freely attributable estate share. Changes range from zero (for group 0) to -50 p.p. (for testators without children, two surviving parents and no spouse, i.e. $FamStruct$ of type 3).[9] It is these differences that we exploit in our empirical analyses below. The weighted average drop in the compulsory share, across all types of $FamStruct$, was 19 p.p.

Importantly, while the reform implied a significant liberalization for all testators with children or living parents, no other relevant factors changed over the same time interval. Inheritance taxes, which are zero for direct descendants and spouses in 23 of the 26 Swiss cantons, remained constant over our observation period 2020-2024.[10] Also, the structure and presentation of the online will preparation tool that generated our data did not change in any relevant way. The tool nudges users toward considering charities, but those nudges remained

[9] Appendix Figure A.2 provides an illustration of changed minimum shares for three types of $FamStruct$.
[10] This can be verified using the inheritance tax calculator of the Swiss Federal Tax Administration.

unchanged in the relevant period. We now turn to a description of the online tool.

4 The data: online wills

4.1 Data source

Our data are drawn from the Swiss online service DeinAdieu.ch. This service offers a seven-step interactive tool that allows users to prepare their wills in conformity with legal constraints. Users enter relevant information such as their marital status and presence/absence of direct descendants, and the tool then automatically limits the range of their allocation choices, which they can make by moving a set of sliders. In Appendix Figure A.3, we present a screenshot of step 5, at which the main choices are made.

The online service is anonymous and free at the point of use. Once users have made their choices by completing the seven steps, they are invited to provide an email address, to which the tool sends a typeset document. It is then incumbent upon users to copy this document by hand and to sign it. Only then does the document become a valid will.

Our data include 16,887 forms that were completed online and emailed. We do not observe which of the online documents ended up being copied and signed. We also do not observe the size and composition of users' wealth, as this is not needed for a legally valid will and therefore not asked by the interactive tool (which primarily allows users to choose estate shares, not nominal amounts).

DeinAdieu.ch is funded by charities seeking to attract legacies. Being the only such platform in Switzerland to date, the list of supporting charities is broad, without any discernible ideological or religious slant. The online tool reflects its focus on attracting charitable giving in two ways. First, when choosing recipients (step 4), users are presented with an explicit list of charities, from which they are free to select. Users are also given an option to add organizations not included in the list. No charity is pre-selected by the system, and therefore including a charity is always an active choice. When users choose a charity, however, the system automatically proposes a share of the estate to be given to that charity in step 5. Appendix Figure A.3 illustrates this case. This starting allocation is a mere nudge, however, as users can adapt their choice of estate share for the previously selected charity to any value within the available range, including zero. Users can also navigate backward and change earlier choices at any stage until final submission.

The data at our disposal contain estate shares attributed by individual users to the following heir categories: spouse, a non-married life partner, family members of the 1st parentelic lineage (children etc.), family members of the 2nd lineage (parents etc.), family members of the 3rd lineage (grandparents etc.), nonrelatives, and charities.[11] Users may also enter demographic information and indications on their place of residence. The subset of users who provided such information allows us to consider gender, age and language region (German, French, Italian) as correlates of testator choices. We have this information for 6,962 obser-

[11] Appendix Figure A.1 illustrates the legal hierarchy among and within the three parentelic lineages. In our illustrations throughout the paper, we use a consistent color scheme: red for spouses, pink for unmarried life partners, blue for blood relatives (lighter shades for higher lineages), yellow for nonrelatives and green for charities.

vations (41% of the full sample). The date of submission is recorded automatically by the system. Our sample covers the universe of completed forms submitted between January 2020 and March 2024. For 105 testators (0.6% of the sample), we observe repeat entries pre- and post-2023, allowing for within-individual estimation.

4.2 Descriptive statistics

Summary statistics for our sample of online wills are provided in Table 2. The table shows that 60% of users declare having children, that is they have family structures of type 1 (cY_pX_mY) or of type 2 (cY_pX_mN). The least frequent family structure, accounting for 3% of users, is type 6, who are married, have one living parent and no children (cN_p1_mY). Table 2 shows the distribution of users across family structures to be very similar before and after the 2023 reform.

Table 2: Summary statistics by family structure

Family structure:		0 cN_p0_mX	1 cY_pX_mY	2 cY_pX_mN	3 cN_p2_mN	4 cN_p1_mN	5 cN_p2_mY	6 cN_p1_mY	Total
Pre-2023	obs.	1,773	4,062	2,683	1,290	884	374	370	11,436
	%	16%	36%	23%	11%	8%	3%	3%	100%
Post-2023	obs.	634	1,944	1,319	758	368	241	187	5,451
	%	12%	36%	24%	14%	7%	4%	3%	100%
Total	obs.	2,407	6,006	4,002	2,048	1,252	615	557	16,887
	%	14%	36%	24%	12%	7%	4%	3%	100%

Notes: Data from DeinAdieu.ch. For details, see also Table 1 and Appendix Figure A.3.

In Appendix Table A.1, we compare demographic characteristics of the pre-reform and post-reform subsamples. None of the observable characteristics differs across subsamples at the 5% significance level. Not surprisingly, however, we find that average age differs across types of $FamStruct$ (see Appendix Table A.2). The youngest group, with an average age of 36, are users without children and spouse and with two living parents ($FamStruct$ type 3). The oldest group, with an average age of 61, are users without children and without living parents ($FamStruct$ type 0).

The shares of women and of users based in Italian-speaking regions are statistically significantly higher post-2023 than prior to the reform. These differences are small in quantitative terms, however, amounting to no more than 2 p.p. In our estimations of Section 5, we systematically check for robustness to controlling for observable differences across testators.

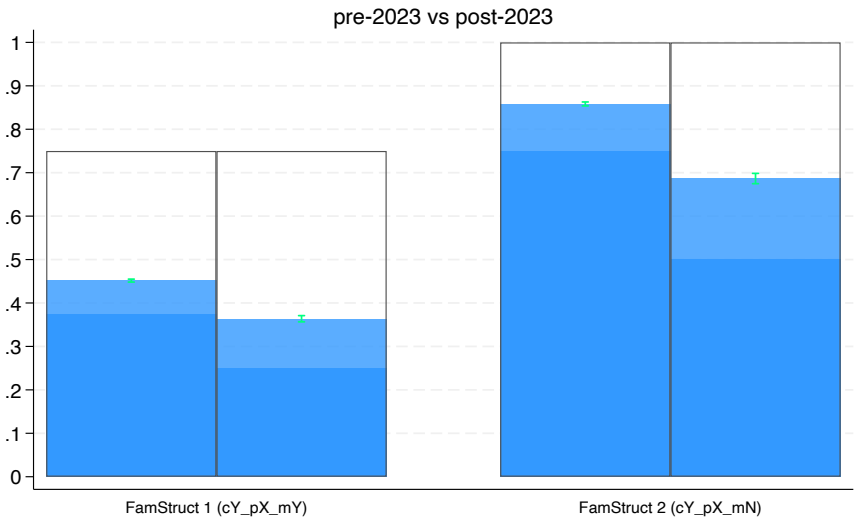
5 Effects of the reform

5.1 Use of additional freedoms

We begin by exploring the overall extent to which testators used the additional freedoms they were granted by the reform. Recall that legal constraints were relaxed in two ways: through lower minimum shares for direct descendants, and through the abolition of compulsory shares for surviving parents.

The weakened constraint on direct descendants affected two of the seven family structures, types 1 and 2. We illustrate the average shares attributed to direct descendants for those two types before and after the reform in Figure 2. In each part of the figure, the interval between the upper edge of the black box and the upper edge of the dark-colored bar indicates the range of legally available allocations.

Figure 2: Shares given to children, pre- and post-reform



Notes: Bars show average estate shares allocated to direct descendants by married testators with children ($FamStruct$ type 1, cY_pX_mY; left panel) and by unmarried testators with children ($FamStruct$ type 2, cY_pX_mN; right panel). For each type, we show average allocated shares before the 2023 reform (left bar) and after the 2023 reform (right bar). Dark-colored bars represent the compulsory minimum shares. Light-colored bars represent allocations over and above the legal minimum. The upper edge of the black frames indicates the maximal share that could have been allocated to direct descendants given minimum shares on other heirs. 95% confidence intervals are also shown.

The light-colored bars indicate that the average allocation to children is always located above the legal minimum: many parents leave more to their children than they are legally obliged to.[12] More importantly, we can see clearly that testators took advantage of the additional freedom given to them by the reform, by lowering the shares allocated to their children. In the case of unmarried testators ($FamStruct$ type 2, right-hand panel of Figure 2), the average post-reform allocation was below the pre-reform legal minimum. This implies that, prior to the reform, the average unmarried parent had been forced to leave more to their children than they would have wanted to.

Married parents on average lowered their children's share by 9 p.p., while unmarried lowered it by 17 p.p. These estimates are robust to the inclusion of demographic controls and the associated shrinkage of the available sample.[13] The reform had increased the free share by 12.5 p.p. for married parents and by 25 p.p. for unmarried parents (see bottom row of Table 1). This means that, on average, parents used about 70% of their legally available potential to give less to their children and more to other heirs. The pre-reform minimum shares clearly had been binding for many parents.[14]

We can carry out an analogous before-after comparison for those testators whose freely

[12] We provide a detailed analysis of such supra-marginal allocations in Section 5.3.
[13] See Appendix Table A.3 for regression estimates.
[14] We provide an estimate of the share of parents for whom the pre-reform legal minimum was binding in Section 5.3.

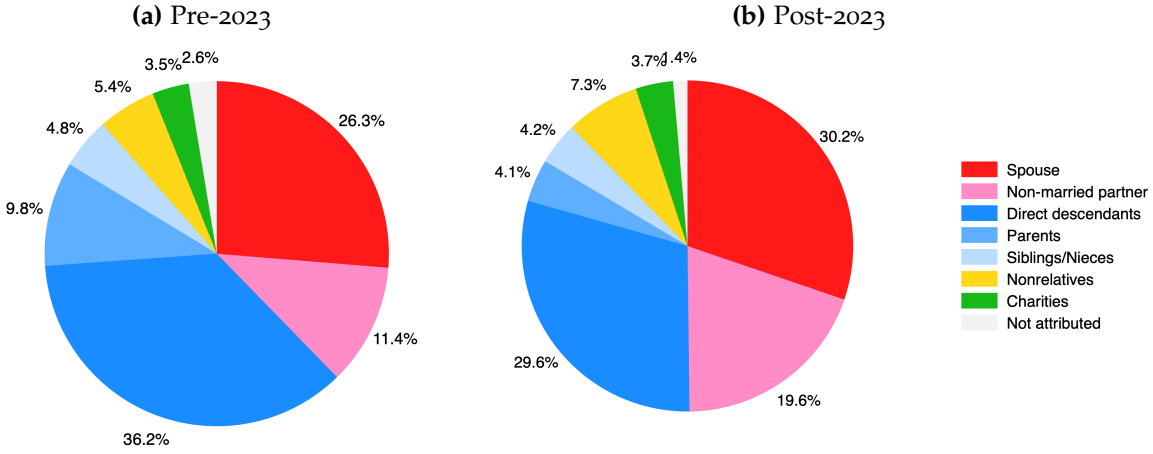
attributable share increased because their *parents* were no longer due a compulsory slice of the estate.[15] For all affected testator types, we find significant post-reform reductions in estate shares allocated to parents, with the average dropping below the pre-reform compulsory minimum shares in every case (Appendix Figure A.4). If we compare the size of the average reduction in parents' share (Appendix Table A.4) to the the additional freedom granted by the reform (Table 1), we find that testators used their option to consider heirs other than their parents by between 70% and 109% of the newly free estate share.[16]

In sum, we find clear evidence of testators making use of their new freedoms, by significantly lowering the estate shares of heirs to whom they were allowed by the reform to give less. Pre-reform minimum shares for parents turn out to have been even more constraining than those for direct descendants. Next, we turn to documenting who benefitted from this freeing-up of bequeathable wealth shares.

5.2 Beneficiaries

Simple differences. Our main research question is to what extent reform-induced estate reallocations favored recipients outside the core family. For that purpose, we now focus on two recipient categories that we can identify in our data: nonrelatives and charities. Those contain all recipients outside the couple (be it married or unmarried) and the first two parentelic lineages.[17]

Figure 3: Aggregate distribution of estates, pre- and post-reform



Notes: Distribution of estates, unweighted averages. Pre-2023: 11,436 obs.; post-2023: 5,451 obs. For $FamStruct$ types 1 and 2, the data contain no information on the shares allocated to siblings. We impute these shares taking the percentages of the freely attributable share allocated to siblings observed for $FamStruct$ types 3–6 (6.18% of the free share pre-2023 and 4.29% post-2023). Overall, this imputation corresponds to 1.19% of the total pie pre-2023, and 1.29% post-2023. For those in $FamStruct$ type 0 that do not have any living relatives in the 2nd parentelic lineage, the third lineage was added to the nonrelatives category. Overall, the third lineage represents 0.17% of the total, and 3.17% of the nonrelatives category pre-2023. Post 2023, the third lineage represents 0.07% of the total, and to 0.10% of the nonrelatives category.

Figure 3 provides a summary of aggregate estate allocations before and after the reform. The two charts show that the shares of recipients outside the core family have increased after

[15] This affected $FamStruct$ types 3-6; see Table 1.

[16] These estimates are robust to the inclusion of demographic controls as well, see Appendix Table A.4. To use more than 100% of the additional free share means that testators on average also reduced the share previously given to parents over and above the legal minimum.

[17] The closest relatives contained by our definition of "nonrelatives" are members of the third parentelic lineage (aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.), shown in light blue in Appendix Figure A.1.

the reform, from 5.4% to 7.3% of the total for nonrelatives, and from 3.5% to 3.7% for charities. The main beneficiaries of the reform, however, were non-married life partners, whose share increased from 11.4% to 19.6%, and spouses, whose share increased from 26.3% to 30.2%.

DiD estimation. Changes in raw averages shown in Figure 3 could to some extent be driven by aggregate trends. Indeed, if we consider only testators who were unaffected by the reform as they had neither children nor living parents, we observe that the share given to nonrelatives increased for them too, while the share of charities decreased (Appendix Figure A.5).

We therefore turn to difference-in-differences (DiD) estimation, based on the following general specification:

$$Y_{i,b} = \alpha_b + \beta_b \text{Treated}_i + \gamma_b \text{Post-2023}_i + \delta_b \text{Treated}_i \times \text{Post-2023}_i + \epsilon_{i,b}, \tag{2}$$

where Y denotes estate shares ($Y \in [0,1]$), i denotes individual wills, b denotes beneficiaries ($b \in \{\text{spouse, non-married partner, etc.}\}$), and ϵ is a random term. In some estimations, we add a triple interaction with an indicator variable for single testators. We also report estimations for a subsample of wills that allow us to control for potentially influential observables. Those controls include age decade dummies, a female dummy and dummies for language regions.

The coefficient of main interest is δ_b, the differential post-2023 change in the share given to beneficiaries of category b by testators in the treatment group relative to testators in the control group.

We consider two definitions of treated and control groups. In our definition of a "narrow" control group, all testators affected by the reform are considered as treated ($FamStruct$ types 1-6), and the control group contains only the completely unaffected testators ($FamStruct$ type 0). In our definition of an "enlarged" control group, we only consider strongly affected testators as treated ($FamStruct$ types 2-4) and include weakly affected testators in the control group ($FamStruct$ types 0, 1, 5, 6). Weighting by our sample distribution shown in Table 2 and considering the narrow control group, the average change in the freely attributable estate share is 22 p.p. in the treatment group and zero in the control group. With the enlarged control group, the weighted average change in the freely attributable share is 32 p.p. in the treatment group and 9 p.p. in the control group.

Our baseline DiD model of equation 2 captures determinants of changes in estate shares $Y_{i,b}$. In complementary DiD regressions, we decompose those "total effects" into changes in the share given to beneficiaries of type b conditional on that share being nonzero (the "intensive margin") and changes in the probability of giving anything to beneficiaries of type b (the "extensive margin").

Despite the bounded nature of our outcome variables, we choose to estimate the DiD model with OLS, as this is most transparent and lends itself easily to quantitative interpretation while being conditional-mean consistent. For our main regressions, we also show estimates and implied average marginal effects (AMEs) obtained with the fractional logit estimator.

DiD results. Our baseline estimates are presented in Table 3, with estimates for bequests to nonrelatives shown in columns (1) to (3) and estimates for bequests to charities shown in columns (4) to (6). Corresponding logit estimates are shown in Appendix Table A.5.

The top panel reports our DiD results with the narrow definition of the control group. According to these estimates, nonrelatives did not benefit statistically significantly from the reform, but charities did. The corresponding logit estimates, however, are statistically significant. The regression models underlying these results are attractive conceptually, as control-group testators were completely unaffected by the reform. However, that control group is relatively small (14% of the sample) and somewhat volatile in our data.

It turns out that we can gain statistical precision for the linear model by employing the enlarged version of the control group. Those results are shown in the middle panel of Table 3. Standard errors are smaller in all cases compared to the estimates based on the narrow control group. We find that both nonrelatives and charities have benefitted in a statistically significant way. The average share given by treated testators to nonrelatives increased by 4.9 p.p. and that given to charities increased by 1.3 p.p. The corresponding logit AMEs are similar, at 4.0 p.p. and 1.5 p.p. respectively. While the increase in bequests to nonrelatives was driven by both intensive-margin and extensive-margin changes, the increase in bequests to charities appears to be due entirely to intensive-margin changes.

We can alternatively present those estimations as event studies, showing quarterly average estate shares for treated and untreated testators relative to Q4 2022, the last pre-reform quarter. Figure 4 shows that the increase in giving to nonrelatives clearly coincides with the entry into force of the liberalizing reform.[18]

Another alternative is to split the treatment group into types of $FamStruct$. These results are shown in Appendix Tables A.6 and A.7. They show that increased giving to nonrelatives is mainly due to childless testators ($FamStruct$ types 3 and 4).

The data contain 105 wills that can be identified as having been revised by their authors after the entry into force of the reform.[19] This allows us to conduct within-testator estimations. The resulting estimates, shown in Appendix Table A.8, are consistent with the reform facilitating additional giving to nonrelatives and to charities: all estimated treatment effects are positive. Due to the small sample size, these effects are estimated rather imprecisely, but they all lie within the confidence intervals of the corresponding between-testator estimates shown in Table 3.

The main focus of this paper is on the potential for liberalization to spur voluntary wealth diffusion. We need to take into account that not all online wills in our data are equally informative in that regard. This has two reasons. First, wills of younger people are more likely to be revised again before death – and thus less informative about eventually realized wealth transmissions – than wills by older people. Second, wills of people with a living spouse or partner typically favor the surviving partner and therefore leave less scope for wealth diffusion.

For those reasons, we report DiD estimates specifically for the subsample of single testators

[18] Corresponding event study graphs for shares allocated to charities are shown in Appendix Figure A.7.

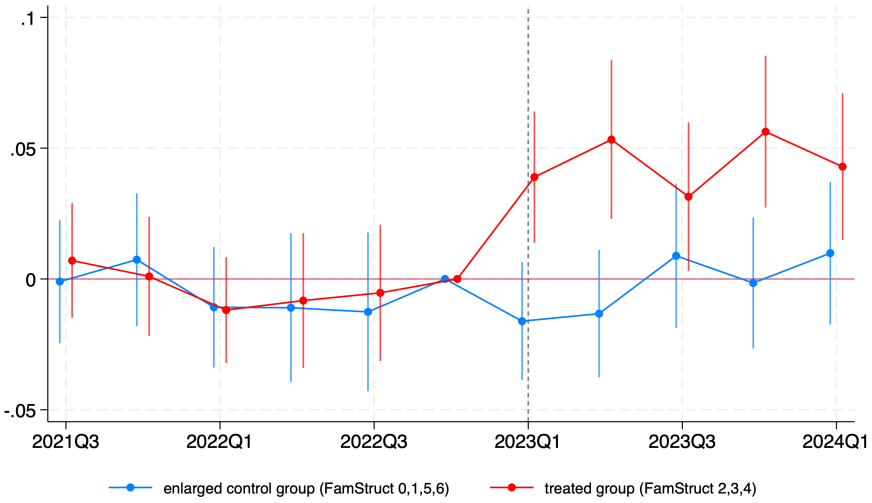
[19] Although use of the tool is entirely anonymous, repeat users can be identified as such by the platform via their IP addresses.

Table 3: Difference-in-differences: bequests to recipients outside the core family

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	b = **Nonrelatives**			b = **Charities**		
dep. var. =	**tot. effect** $Y_{i,b}$	**int. margin** $Y_{i,b} \mid (Y_{i,b} > 0)$	**ext. margin** $P(Y_{i,b} > 0)$	**tot. effect** $Y_{i,b}$	**int. margin** $Y_{i,b} \mid (Y_{i,b} > 0)$	**ext. margin** $P(Y_{i,b} > 0)$
	Full sample, narrow control group ($FamStruct\_0$)					
Treated ($FamStruct\_1-6$)	-0.152***	-0.356***	-0.157***	-0.104***	-0.350***	-0.131***
	(0.008)	(0.015)	(0.011)	(0.007)	(0.020)	(0.010)
Post-2023	0.023	0.003	0.035	-0.019	-0.081**	-0.004
	(0.017)	(0.029)	(0.022)	(0.012)	(0.037)	(0.019)
Treated × Post-2023	0.003	0.109***	-0.009	0.029**	0.142***	0.018
	(0.017)	(0.031)	(0.023)	(0.013)	(0.039)	(0.020)
Constant	0.193***	0.638***	0.303***	0.123***	0.561***	0.218***
	(0.008)	(0.015)	(0.011)	(0.007)	(0.020)	(0.010)
Obs.	16,887	2,982	16,887	16,887	1,860	16,887
Adjusted R^2	0.072	0.229	0.022	0.058	0.228	0.020
	Full sample, enlarged control group ($FamStruct\_0,1,5,6$)					
Treated ($FamStruct\_2,3,4$)	0.009**	-0.150***	0.090***	-0.020***	-0.177***	-0.004
	(0.003)	(0.013)	(0.007)	(0.002)	(0.016)	(0.006)
Post-2023	-0.002	-0.007	-0.003	-0.003	-0.057***	0.009
	(0.004)	(0.022)	(0.007)	(0.003)	(0.020)	(0.007)
Treated × Post-2023	0.049***	0.131***	0.047***	0.013***	0.132***	-0.004
	(0.007)	(0.026)	(0.013)	(0.004)	(0.027)	(0.010)
Constant	0.061***	0.463***	0.132***	0.043***	0.395***	0.110***
	(0.003)	(0.012)	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.013)	(0.004)
Obs.	16,887	2,982	16,887	16,887	1,860	16,887
Adjusted R^2	0.009	0.049	0.020	0.004	0.058	0.000
	Subsample aged ≥ 65, enlarged control group ($FamStruct\_0,1,5,6$)					
Treated × Couple ($FamStruct\_2,3,4$ with partner)	-0.078***	-0.447***	-0.093***	-0.036***	-0.375***	-0.028
	(0.011)	(0.045)	(0.033)	(0.007)	(0.070)	(0.032)
Treated × Single ($FamStruct\_2,3,4$ w/o partner)	-0.084***	-0.303***	-0.049	-0.048***	-0.253***	-0.071***
	(0.016)	(0.044)	(0.030)	(0.011)	(0.059)	(0.022)
Post-2023	0.021	0.088	0.008	0.006	0.004	0.008
	(0.018)	(0.062)	(0.026)	(0.012)	(0.078)	(0.021)
Treated × Couple × P.-2023	-0.006	0.041	0.028	0.013	0.217**	0.024
	(0.021)	(0.090)	(0.055)	(0.016)	(0.109)	(0.053)
Treated × Single × P.-2023	0.051*	0.091	0.084*	0.022	0.151	0.053
	(0.027)	(0.077)	(0.051)	(0.017)	(0.111)	(0.037)
Female	0.065***	0.068*	0.093***	0.029**	0.088	0.041**
	(0.016)	(0.040)	(0.025)	(0.011)	(0.061)	(0.020)
Constant	0.070***	0.502***	0.144***	0.034***	0.415***	0.080***
	(0.012)	(0.049)	(0.020)	(0.008)	(0.069)	(0.015)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Obs.	1,516	274	1,516	1,516	147	1,516
Adjusted R^2	0.043	0.156	0.034	0.015	0.068	0.007

Notes: The dependent variable in columns (1) and (4) is the estate share $Y_{i,b} \in [0,1]$ that testators allocate to recipient category $b \in \{\text{nonrelatives}, \text{charities}\}$ (*total effect*). The dependent variable in columns (2) and (5), $Y_{i,b} \mid (Y_{i,b} > 0)$, is the estate share allocated to recipient category b conditional on this share being nonzero (*intensive-margin effect*). The dependent variable in columns (3) and (6), $P \mid (Y_{i,b} > 0)$, is a binary variable equal to one when the estate share allocated to recipient category b is nonzero (*extensive-margin effect*). Controls include dummies for age decade, language region and gender. Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Figure 4: Share given to nonrelatives: event study



Notes: This graph shows the evolution of the quarterly average shares given to nonrelatives by treated and control testators (enlarged control group), relative to the reference period Q4 2022. The dashed line indicates the entry into force of the reform in Q1 2023. 95% confidence intervals are also shown.

aged 65 and over. These results are shown in the bottom panels of Table 3 and Appendix Table A.5. Inference in these estimations is more challenging than in those for the full sample, as the sample size shrinks by an order of magnitude.[20] Nonetheless, we find a statistically significant increase in the share given by elderly singles to nonrelatives. We also find a positive effect on the share given to charities, although that coefficient is statistically significant only with the logit estimator. The magnitudes of the effects are only slightly larger than those found in our baseline estimations for the enlarged control group: the average share given to nonrelatives by single testators aged over 65 increased by 5.1 p.p. and that given to charities increased by 2.2 p.p. The corresponding logit AMEs are again similar, at 4.8 p.p. and 4.3 p.p. respectively. This confirms that our estimates based on wills in the full sample are likely to be informative about eventual wealth transmissions at the passing of the second member of a couple.

Continuous effects. As an alternative to looking at absolute changes in shares given to non-family beneficiaries, as we do in DiD Table 3, we can scale those changes to the change in the freely available shares implied by the reform. We show such continuous first-diffrence effects in Figure 5. We group family structure types into non-singles (left panels) and singles (right panels), and we subdivide the sample into over-65 and under-65 age categories.[21] This comparison illustrates two patterns.

Figure 5 confirms that wealth diffusion mainly occurs at the death of the second spouse. We observe that non-singles exploited the additional post-reform freedom more than twice as intensely as singles. That difference is visible in the blue bars of the two charts. Non-singles reallocated 81% of their newly free share away from children and parents (Panel a), while singles only used 40% of their newly free share (Panel b). The evident reason why

[20] Appendix Table A.9 shows how the addition of control variables and the associated reduction in the sample size in themselves affect the estimates. It turns out that adding age, gender and language controls affects the main coefficient estimates only very marginally.

[21] Corresponding analyses for the sample split married vs. unmarried are shown in Appendix Figure A.8.

non-singles exploited their new freedoms more fully than singles is that non-singles sought to leave more to their partners. Panel (a) shows that the drop in bequests to children and parents is almost perfectly offset by the increase in bequests to partners. The estate shares of other recipients are, however, essentially unchanged. The apparent desire to reallocate estates towards surviving partners appears to be even stronger for young testators (panel e) than for older testators (panel c).

The scope for wealth to spread beyond the core family upon the death of the first partner therefore appears limited. Hence, we again look at single testators – a category which in our data includes widows and widowers. Panel (b) of Figure 5 confirms that the reform led to a wider sharing of wealth by such testators. Overall, singles used some 34% of their newly free share for nonrelatives, and some 9% for charities. Among older singles (panel d of Figure 5), the share reallocated to nonrelatives and charities was 32%.

Overall, our analyses show that the liberalization primarily benefited surviving partners, but that estate shares given to recipients outside of the core family also increased significantly.

5.3 Extensions

Heterogeneity and reference dependence In Section 5.1, we have documented *average* reductions in estate shares of recipients whose legal minima had been lowered. It is interesting also to analyze changes in the full distribution of changed estate allocations.

This in particular allows us to study potential reference dependence of people's last wishes. If testators were perfectly rational and held preferences that were independent of statutory constraints, then the distribution of estate shares above the pre-reform threshold ("supra-marginals") would not be affected by the lowering of the threshold. Put differently, in the absence of reference dependence only the testator types who bunched at the pre-reform compulsory minimum ("bunchers") should lower their estate shares post-reform. Conversely, if the distribution of estate shares above the pre-reform minimum also shifts after the reform, this is consistent with reference-dependent choices, whereby testators allocate their estates in part as a function of legal minimum shares even when they are non-binding.

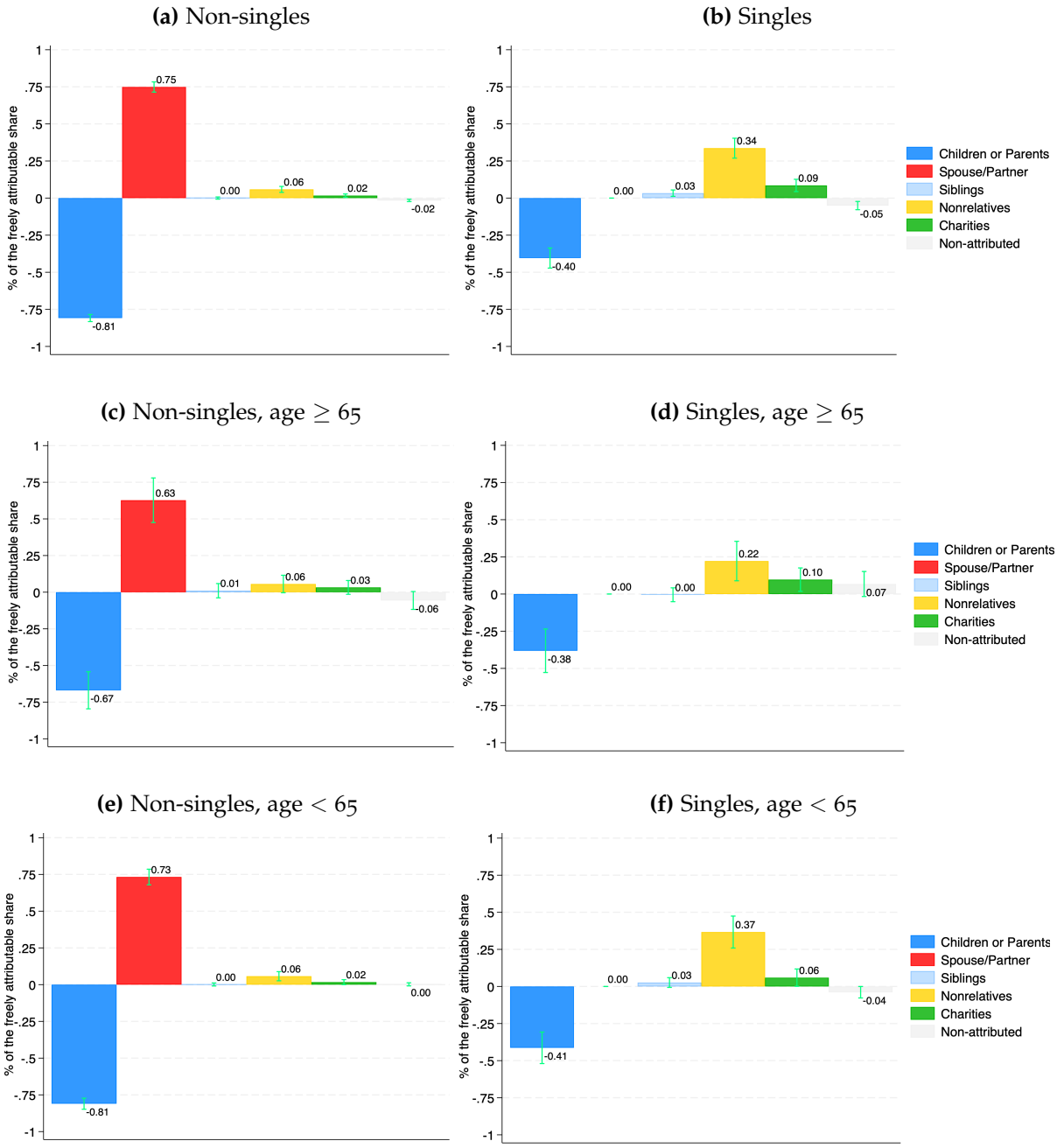
Figure 6 shows frequency distributions of estate shares allocated to children (Panel a) and to parents (Panel b), before and after the reform.[22] The graphs confirm that the legal minima were binding for a large share of testators: the compulsory minimum was the modal choice in all cases. A precise calculation, in which we net out post-reform bunchers at the pre-reform legal minima from the total of pre-reform bunchers, leads us to conclude that 52% of testators with children had been forced to give more to their children than they would have wanted to, and 72% of testators without children but with living parents had been forced to give more to their parents than they would have wanted to.[23]

For evidence of reference dependence, we can look not at the bunchers but at the supra-marginals. In the absence of reference dependence, the distribution of those testator choices

[22] Figure 6 considers unmarried testators, as the change in their compulsory minimum shares was particularly large. The corresponding graphs for married testators are shown in Appendix Figure A.9. The observed frequency distributions relative to the legal minima are very similar.

[23] See columns (4)-(6) of Appendix Table A.10. The reported percentages are averages weighted by the respective sample sizes, given in column (1) of Appendix Table A.10.

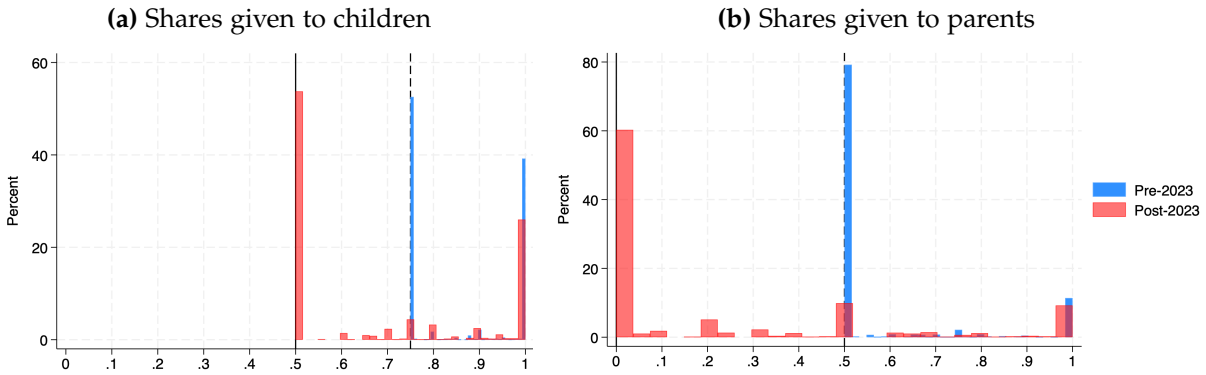
Figure 5: Testators' use of new freedom, by household type



Notes: The charts show average changes post- vs. pre-reform scaled by the size of the additional free share available due to the reform. Left-hand panels are computed for all $FamStruct$ types that involve a living spouse and/or life partner (self-declared). Right-hand panels are computed for all single testators. 95% confidence intervals are also shown.

would be unchanged by the reform. Our data show consistently that the share of supra-marginals, defined with respect to the pre-reform threshold, shrank after the reform. These differences are statistically significant in five of the six types of $FamStruct$ (Appendix Table A.10, column 9). Clearly, lowering the compulsory minimum estate share shifted the entire distribution leftward. This evidence is consistent with reference-dependent testator choices also in cases where the legal minima are not binding.

Figure 6: Heterogeneous responses to changed compulsory minimum shares



Notes: The charts show frequency distributions of estate shares allocated by unmarried testators to direct descendants (Panel a, $FamStruct$ type 2) and to parents (Panel b, $FamStruct$ type 3) before and after the 2023 reform. Dashed black lines indicate the pre-reform compulsory minimum shares, and solid black lines indicate the corresponding post-reform compulsory minimum shares (equal to zero in case of Panel b).

Inheritance taxes. The allocation of estates across heirs has implications for taxes that are due at the time of transmission. While bequests to spouses and direct descendants are tax free in most of Switzerland, inheritance tax rates on nonrelatives can reach up to 55% (see Appendix Table A.11). Since tax schedules vary across cantons and we know the canton of residence of a subset of our sample testators, we can interact canton-level inheritance tax rates with the terms of our DiD equation (2). As we do not know the size of concerned estates, however, we cannot establish precise tax rates case by case. We therefore experiment with representative canton-level tax rates on different inheritance sizes (and find this to make little difference).[24]

Our resulting estimates for giving to nonrelatives, presented in Appendix Table A.12, show no statistically significant effects of inheritance taxes on bequests to such heirs. Interestingly, however, we find some evidence on (tax-free) giving to charities: the reform seems to have triggered stronger estate reallocations towards charities in high-tax cantons (see Appendix Table A.13). Since the online will preparation tool does not mention the tax implications of testator choices, this is evidence of tax-sensitive charitable giving even in a setting with low salience of taxes, thus confirming the highly tax-sensitive nature of charitable bequests found in previous research (see, e.g., Kopczuk, 2013).

6 Discussion: implications for wealth diffusion

Our estimates of Section 5 show that the liberalization of inheritance law led to significant reallocations of bequeathable wealth away from children and parents, to partners, nonrelatives and charities. How large were these effects, and what can we infer about the potential for voluntary wealth diffusion?

According to our various DiD estimations based on the enlarged control group, treatment was associated with 4.0–5.8 p.p. of additional bequests to nonrelatives, and with 1.3–4.3 p.p.

[24] In Appendix Tables A.12 and A.13, we additionally show estimates with and without including a dummy variable for the French and Italian-speaking cantons, as those cantons tend to have higher inheritance tax rates. Controlling for this turns out to make little difference. We also experimented with considering log tax rates and log net-of-tax rates but found those choices not to affect our findings.

of additional bequests to charities.[25] For our computations below, we focus on the midpoints of those two intervals, i.e. 4.9 p.p. for nonrelatives and 2.8 p.p. for charities. These values lie within the confidence intervals of all individual estimates based on the enlarged control group.

The weighted average increase in the freely attributable share of the treated group relative to that of the enlarged control group is 23 p.p. Our DiD estimates therefore imply that an additional percentage point of freely attributable wealth translated into 0.21 (= 0.049/0.23) p.p. of additional transmission to nonrelatives and 0.12 (= 0.028/0.23) p.p. of additional transmission to charities. Taken together, these estimates imply that per percentage point of additional testator freedom, 0.33 percentage points of additional wealth diffuses beyond the core family. We refer to this quantity as the "diffusion elasticity".[26]

We are now in a position to evaluate the wealth diffusing effect of the 2023 liberalization of Swiss inheritance law. Weighted by the distribution of all seven family types in our data, this reform raised the freely attributable share by 19 p.p. on average. Applying our diffusion elasticity of 0.33, we obtain that the reform led to 6.3 p.p. of bequests to diffuse beyond the core family consisting of the first two parentelic lineages. In that sense, the reform was equivalent to a 6.3 p.p. linear increase in inheritance taxes.

In the Swiss context, these are large numbers. The estimated 2025 average effective inheritance tax rate across the Swiss cantons was 1.5% (Brülhart et al., 2026b). Hence, in purely monetary terms, the diffusion effect of the liberalization may well have been more than four times as large as that achieved by existing inheritance taxation. Considering the potential for further liberalization, we note that the remaining minimum compulsory shares for direct descendants represent 21% of the value of estates weighted according to the distribution of family types in our data (see Tables 1 and 2). Linear extrapolation implies that a complete abolition of compulsory estate shares in Switzerland could lead to about as much wealth diffusion again as the 2023 reform.

For a worldwide estimate, we can turn to the cross-country testator freedom data collected by Ellul et al. (2010). Assuming those data still to be relevant for the 45 sample countries with constrained testator freedom, we obtain a wealth-weighted average compulsory minimum estate share of 29%.[27] What would happen if that share were driven to zero, i.e. if those countries' inheritance laws were aligned with the liberal régimes that prevail in most English-speaking countries? If we apply our diffusion elasticity of 0.33 to the 29 p.p. of additional testatory freedom that would ensue, we obtain that diffusion would increase by 9.6 p.p. Given that total private wealth in the 45 countries is estimated at USD 231 trillion, and assuming 2.5% of that wealth to be bequeathed annually, this implies potential additional diffusion of some USD 550 billion.[28] That amounts to some USD 400 per capita of additional annual wealth

[25] These bounds contain the the estimates shown in the in the middle and bottom panels of Table 3 and in the corresponding panels of Appendix Table A.5 (marginal effects).

[26] Note that this estimate is almost identical to the 32 p.p. estimated diffusion per p.p. of additional testator freedom according to our continuous-effects estimation for single testators aged ≥65 (panel d of Figure 5).

[27] For this calculation, we take the legally reserved estate shares of widowed or unmarried parents of two children (measure 1 in Table 1 of Ellul et al., 2010). We weight countries by 2024 net personal wealth in PPP USD, taken from the WID (accessed on 28 Dec. 2025).

[28] Personal wealth in 2024 PPP USD, taken from the WID (accessed on 28 Dec. 2025).

diffusion in those countries, or 1.2% of of their national income.[29]

We consider these estimated magnitudes to represent upper bounds, for three reasons. First, we linearly extrapolate our estimated diffusion elasticity for hypothetical reforms that drive compulsory shares to zero. Testators' marginal propensity to bequeath outside of the core family, however, may well be decreasing in the compulsory share of direct descendants. Second, our diffusion elasticity is based on choices by testators who elected to use an online will preparation tool. Such a sample likely underrepresents testators who are satisfied with the legal default shares and therefore see no need to write a will. Hence, we may be overestimating responses to changed minimum shares in the overall population by extrapolating from a sample of deliberate will writers. Third, our data force us to define diffusion in a way that includes estate shares of family members belonging to the third parentelic lineage (cousins, etc.). This is a somewhat broader definition nonrelatives than one would ideally wish.

Finally, wealth diffusion through testator choices is of course not equivalent to diffusion via taxation and government redistribution, as only the latter is subject to democratic control. While bequest taxation offers an interesting quantitative comparator, it is qualitatively different from voluntary wealth diffusion.

7 Conclusion

Inheritance has been shown to perpetuate inequality. To date, researchers have focused on taxation as the policy tool to counteract that mechanism by dispersing private wealth beyond family dynasties. We consider an alternative approach: liberalizing inheritance law. Many countries' laws force testators to leave certain minimum estate shares to protected heirs, primarily their children. Relaxing such forced dynastic transmission could allow wealth to diffuse more widely, without state coercion.

We explore the potential implications of such reforms for wealth diffusion by tracking the effects of a major liberalization in Switzerland in 2023. The empirical analysis is made possible by a novel dataset consisting of 16,887 anonymous online wills. We find that greater testator freedoms were used primarily to increase estate shares allocated to spouses and life partners. The share of estates attributed to heirs outside of the core family also increased statistically significantly, although to a considerably smaller extent. We moreover observe that testator preferences are reference dependent, with changes in legal minima shifting the entire distribution of estate allocations, and we find evidence of charitable bequests being sensitive to the implied inheritance tax advantage.

Extrapolating based on our estimated diffusion elasticity of 0.33, we obtain that liberalizations of inheritance law could yield additional annual wealth diffusion amounting to up to 1.2% of national income in those countries that still reserve compulsory estate shares for direct descendants.

This research leaves ample scope for future work. Online wills present a new field of research. Not only would it be interesting to replicate this study for other countries, but online tools could also be used for experimental manipulations, e.g. through informational nudges with respect to tax implications or to different forms of charitable giving. Moreover,

[29] National income in 2024 PPP USD, taken from the WID (accessed on 28 Dec. 2025).

if users could be prompted to provide information on the foreseeable size of their estate, that would allow researchers to explore non-homotheticities in testator responses. More broadly, it would be interesting to refine the analysis to allow for an estimate of the extent to which inheritance rules contribute to measured wealth inequality.

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A Appendix

A.1 Appendix tables

Table A.1: Summary statistics - demographic information

	Pre-2023		Post-2023		Total		p-value of t-test
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	post- vs. pre-2023
Age	52.72	(16.54)	52.81	(15.68)	52.76	(16.22)	0.832
Female	0.38	(0.49)	0.36	(0.48)	0.37	(0.48)	0.059
French-speaking	0.06	(0.24)	0.06	(0.25)	0.06	(0.24)	0.461
Italian-speaking	0.01	(0.11)	0.02	(0.12)	0.01	(0.11)	0.094
Obs. (%)	4,378	(62.88%)	2,584	(37.12%)	6,962	(100.00%)	

Notes: These summary statistics are calculated for the subsample of testators who entered demographic information (41% of the full sample).

Table A.2: Summary statistics - demographic information by family structure

Family structure:	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Means of:	cN_p0_mX	cY_pX_mY	cY_pX_mN	cN_p2_mN	cN_p1_mN	cN_p2_mY	cN_p1_mY
Age	61	56	57	36	49	44	53
Female	36%	28%	44%	45%	44%	40%	35%
Italian-speaking	2%	1%	2%	1%	1%	0%	1%
French-speaking	5%	7%	6%	7%	6%	5%	5%

Notes: These summary statistics are calculated for the subsample of testators who entered demographic information (6,962 observations, accounting for 41% of the full sample).

Table A.3: Before-after analysis: shares given to children

	(1) $b =$ **Children**	(2) $b =$ **Children**
$FamStruct\_2$ [cY_pX_mN]	0.407***	0.384***
	(0.003)	(0.005)
Post-2023	-0.088***	-0.091***
	(0.004)	(0.006)
$FamStruct\_2 \times$ Post-2023	-0.084***	-0.076***
	(0.008)	(0.011)
Age 30-39		-0.017
		(0.015)
Age 40-49		0.030**
		(0.014)
Age 50-59		0.039***
		(0.014)
Age 60-69		0.045***
		(0.014)
Age 70-79		0.063***
		(0.015)
Age 80-89		0.107***
		(0.017)
Age > 80		0.088***
		(0.024)
French-speaking region		0.018*
		(0.009)
Italian-speaking region		0.058**
		(0.023)
Female		0.066***
		(0.005)
Constant	0.452***	0.402***
	(0.002)	(0.014)
Obs.	10,008	4,009
Adjusted R^2	0.654	0.660

Notes: The dependent variable is the estate share $Y_i \in [0, 1]$ that testators allocate to their direct descendants. Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. In this table, the constant term represents the pre-reform average for testators with $FamStruct$ of type 1 (cY_pX_mY).

Table A.4: Before-after analysis: shares given to parents

	(1) $b =$ **Parents**	(2) $b =$ **Parents**
$FamStruct\_3$ [cN_p2_mN]	0.490***	0.439***
	(0.006)	(0.012)
$FamStruct\_4$ [cN_p1_mN]	0.234***	0.225***
	(0.006)	(0.011)
$FamStruct\_5$ [cN_p2_mY]	0.073***	0.063***
	(0.006)	(0.013)
Post-2023	-0.068***	-0.080***
	(0.006)	(0.009)
$FamStruct\_3 \times$ Post-2023	-0.286***	-0.255***
	(0.015)	(0.020)
$FamStruct\_4 \times$ Post-2023	-0.147***	-0.130***
	(0.014)	(0.021)
$FamStruct\_5 \times$ Post-2023	-0.031**	-0.016
	(0.012)	(0.020)
Age 30-39		-0.105***
		(0.018)
Age 40-49		-0.137***
		(0.017)
Age 50-59		-0.146***
		(0.017)
Age 60-69		-0.162***
		(0.020)
Age 70-79		-0.062
		(0.057)
Age > 80		-0.220***
		(0.060)
French-speaking region		0.032
		(0.022)
Italian-speaking region		0.050
		(0.058)
Female		0.002
		(0.009)
Constant	0.087***	0.229***
	(0.003)	(0.019)
Obs.	4,472	2,065
Adjusted R^2	0.496	0.489

Notes: The dependent variable is is the estate share $Y_i \in [0, 1]$ that testators allocate to their parents. Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. In this table, the constant represents the pre-reform average for testators with $FamStruct$ of type 6 (cN_p1_mY).

Table A.5: Difference-in-differences: bequests to recipients outside the core family (Logit)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	b = **Nonrelatives**			b = **Charities**		
dep. var. =	**tot. effect** $Y_{i,b}$	**int. margin** $Y_{i,b} \mid (Y_{i,b} > 0)$	**ext. margin** $P(Y_{i,b} > 0)$	**tot. effect** $Y_{i,b}$	**int. margin** $Y_{i,b} \mid (Y_{i,b} > 0)$	**ext. margin** $P(Y_{i,b} > 0)$
	Full sample, narrow control group ($FamStruct\_0$)					
Treated ($FamStruct\_1-6$)	-1.722***	-1.501***	-0.936***	-2.003***	-1.563***	-1.069***
	(0.062)	(0.068)	(0.059)	(0.079)	(0.087)	(0.068)
Post-2023	0.142	0.013	0.159	-0.194	-0.324**	-0.022
	(0.101)	(0.125)	(0.099)	(0.129)	(0.148)	(0.113)
Treated × Post-2023	0.382***	0.492***	0.032	0.615***	0.661***	0.194
	(0.115)	(0.135)	(0.110)	(0.148)	(0.160)	(0.127)
Constant	-1.430***	0.565***	-0.834***	-1.969***	0.247***	-1.276***
	(0.053)	(0.063)	(0.052)	(0.065)	(0.079)	(0.057)
Obs.	16,887	2,982	16,887	16,887	1,860	16,887
Pseudo R^2	0.066	0.064	0.021	0.079	0.071	0.024
	Marginal effects:					
Treated × Post-2023	0.024***	0.108***	0.005	0.020***	0.131***	0.019
	(0.007)	(0.030)	(0.016)	(0.005)	(0.031)	(0.012)
	Full sample, enlarged control group ($FamStruct\_0,1,5,6$)					
Treated ($FamStruct\_2,3,4$)	0.141**	-0.636***	0.632***	-0.658***	-0.853***	-0.046
	(0.056)	(0.055)	(0.050)	(0.077)	(0.074)	(0.061)
Post-2023	-0.039	-0.028	-0.026	-0.080	-0.247***	0.091
	(0.079)	(0.088)	(0.066)	(0.085)	(0.085)	(0.069)
Treated × Post-2023	0.608***	0.562***	0.266***	0.437***	0.643***	-0.032
	(0.099)	(0.104)	(0.087)	(0.132)	(0.125)	(0.105)
Constant	-2.735***	-0.148***	-1.887***	-3.096***	-0.427***	-2.095***
	(0.044)	(0.049)	(0.036)	(0.050)	(0.054)	(0.039)
Obs.	16,887	2,982	16,887	16,887	1,860	16,887
Pseudo R^2	0.010	0.014	0.021	0.008	0.020	0.000
	Marginal effects:					
Treated × Post-2023	0.040***	0.133***	0.038***	0.015***	0.137***	-0.003
	(0.007)	(0.024)	(0.012)	(0.005)	(0.027)	(0.010)
	Subsample aged $\geq$ 65, enlarged control group ($FamStruct\_0,1,5,6$)					
Treated × Couple ($FamStruct\_2,3,4$ with partner)	-2.629***	-2.476***	-0.942**	-2.222***	-2.484***	-0.366
	(0.458)	(0.236)	(0.467)	(0.493)	(0.401)	(0.471)
Treated × Single ($FamStruct\_2,3,4$ w/o partner)	-1.246***	-1.348***	-0.317	-1.977***	-1.291***	-0.957***
	(0.227)	(0.194)	(0.209)	(0.380)	(0.284)	(0.333)
Post-2023	0.243	0.359	0.062	0.114	0.005	0.074
	(0.199)	(0.252)	(0.178)	(0.273)	(0.315)	(0.218)
Treated × Couple × P.-2023	0.941	0.633	0.396	1.575**	1.728***	0.329
	(0.676)	(0.476)	(0.636)	(0.692)	(0.559)	(0.645)
Treated × Single × P.-2023	0.804**	0.473	0.478	1.291**	0.855*	0.752*
	(0.313)	(0.323)	(0.304)	(0.505)	(0.495)	(0.429)
Female	0.791***	0.303*	0.595***	0.796***	0.392	0.459**
	(0.178)	(0.177)	(0.157)	(0.369)	(0.262)	(0.213)
Constant	-2.656***	0.003	-1.791***	-3.430***	-0.340	-2.460***
	(0.181)	(0.199)	(0.151)	(0.227)	(0.293)	(0.181)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Obs.	1,516	274	1,516	1,516	147	1,516
Pseudo R^2	0.064	0.069	0.042	0.052	0.055	0.023
	Marginal effects:					
Treated × Couple × P.-2023	0.068	0.143	0.056	0.052**	0.371***	0.028
	(0.049)	(0.108)	(0.090)	(0.024)	(0.119)	(0.056)
Treated × Single × P.-2023	0.058**	0.107	0.068	0.043**	0.184*	0.065*
	(0.023)	(0.073)	(0.043)	(0.018)	(0.107)	(0.037)

Notes: The dependent variable in columns (1) and (4) is the estate share $Y_{i,b} \in [0,1]$ that testators allocate to recipient category $b \in \{\text{nonrelatives}, \text{charities}\}$ (*total effect*). The dependent variable in columns (2) and (5), $Y_{i,b} \mid (Y_{i,b} > 0)$, is the estate share allocated to recipient category b conditional on this share being nonzero (*intensive-margin effect*). The dependent variable in columns (3) and (6), $P \mid (Y_{i,b} > 0)$, is a binary variable equal to one when the estate share allocated to recipient category b is nonzero (*extensive-margin effect*). Controls include dummies for age decade, language region and gender. Estimation using logit estimator. Marginal effects are average marginal effects (AMEs), measuring the change in the predicted estate share calculated by averaging individual marginal effects across the sample. Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A.6: Difference-in-differences: estate shares given to recipients outside the family, by family type; full sample, narrow control group ($FamStruct\_0$)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	b = **Nonrelatives**			b = **Charities**		
dep. var. =	**tot. effect** $Y_{i,b}$	**int. margin** $Y_{i,b} \mid (Y_{i,b} > 0)$	**ext. margin** $P(Y_{i,b} > 0)$	**tot. effect** $Y_{i,b}$	**int. margin** $Y_{i,b} \mid (Y_{i,b} > 0)$	**ext. margin** $P(Y_{i,b} > 0)$
$FamStruct\_1$ [cY_pX_mY]	-0.182***	-0.466***	-0.241***	-0.109***	-0.358***	-0.151***
	(0.008)	(0.017)	(0.012)	(0.007)	(0.021)	(0.011)
$FamStruct\_2$ [cY_pX_mN]	-0.170***	-0.456***	-0.173***	-0.117***	-0.453***	-0.166***
	(0.008)	(0.015)	(0.013)	(0.007)	(0.021)	(0.011)
$FamStruct\_3$ [cN_p2_mN]	-0.063***	-0.276***	0.058***	-0.082***	-0.330***	-0.043***
	(0.010)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.008)	(0.023)	(0.014)
$FamStruct\_4$ [cN_p1_mN]	-0.073***	-0.236***	-0.004	-0.073***	-0.258***	-0.055***
	(0.011)	(0.021)	(0.019)	(0.009)	(0.029)	(0.016)
$FamStruct\_5$ [cN_p2_mY]	-0.169***	-0.421***	-0.191***	-0.103***	-0.330***	-0.135***
	(0.009)	(0.030)	(0.020)	(0.008)	(0.037)	(0.017)
$FamStruct\_6$ [cN_p1_mY]	-0.177***	-0.457***	-0.211***	-0.110***	-0.404***	-0.140***
	(0.009)	(0.027)	(0.019)	(0.008)	(0.029)	(0.017)
Post-2023	0.023	0.003	0.035	-0.019	-0.081**	-0.004
	(0.017)	(0.029)	(0.022)	(0.012)	(0.037)	(0.019)
$FamStruct\_1$ × Post-2023	-0.021	0.043	-0.038*	0.030**	0.131***	0.032
	(0.017)	(0.033)	(0.023)	(0.013)	(0.039)	(0.021)
$FamStruct\_2$ × Post-2023	0.001	0.089***	0.012	0.030**	0.190***	0.024
	(0.017)	(0.032)	(0.025)	(0.013)	(0.041)	(0.021)
$FamStruct\_3$ × Post-2023	0.044**	0.158***	-0.017	0.029**	0.166***	-0.012
	(0.021)	(0.035)	(0.031)	(0.014)	(0.047)	(0.026)
$FamStruct\_4$ × Post-2023	0.051**	0.137***	0.025	0.024	0.147**	-0.012
	(0.025)	(0.044)	(0.037)	(0.016)	(0.059)	(0.029)
$FamStruct\_5$ × Post-2023	-0.014	0.021	-0.010	0.018	0.057	0.008
	(0.018)	(0.044)	(0.035)	(0.014)	(0.059)	(0.030)
$FamStruct\_6$ × Post-2023	-0.005	0.077	0.007	0.027*	0.184**	0.000
	(0.019)	(0.054)	(0.036)	(0.015)	(0.077)	(0.030)
Constant	0.193***	0.638***	0.303***	0.123***	0.561***	0.218***
	(0.008)	(0.015)	(0.011)	(0.007)	(0.020)	(0.010)
Obs.	16,887	2,982	16,887	16,887	1,860	16,887
Adjusted R^2	0.141	0.337	0.095	0.067	0.249	0.034

Notes: The dependent variable in columns (1) and (4) is the estate share $Y_{i,b} \in [0, 1]$ that testators allocate to recipient category $b \in \{\text{nonrelatives}, \text{charities}\}$ (*total effect*). The dependent variable in columns (2) and (5), $Y_{i,b} \mid (Y_{i,b} > 0)$, is the estate share allocated to recipient category b conditional on this share being nonzero (*intensive-margin effect*). The dependent variable in columns (3) and (6), $P \mid (Y_{i,b} > 0)$, is a binary variable equal to one when the estate share allocated to recipient category b is nonzero (*extensive-margin effect*). Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A.7: Difference-in-differences: estate shares given to recipients outside the family, by family type; full sample, enlarged control group ($FamStruct\_0, 1, 5, 6$)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	b = **Nonrelatives**			b = **Charities**		
dep. var. =	**tot. effect** $Y_{i,b}$	**int. margin** $Y_{i,b} \mid (Y_{i,b} > 0)$	**ext. margin** $P(Y_{i,b} > 0)$	**tot. effect** $Y_{i,b}$	**int. margin** $Y_{i,b} \mid (Y_{i,b} > 0)$	**ext. margin** $P(Y_{i,b} > 0)$
$FamStruct\_2$ [cY_pX_mN]	-0.037***	-0.281***	-0.002	-0.038***	-0.286***	-0.057***
	(0.003)	(0.013)	(0.008)	(0.002)	(0.015)	(0.006)
$FamStruct\_3$ [cN_p2_mN]	0.070***	-0.102***	0.230***	-0.003	-0.164***	0.066***
	(0.006)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.004)	(0.017)	(0.011)
$FamStruct\_4$ [cN_p1_mN]	0.059***	-0.061***	0.167***	0.006	-0.091***	0.053***
	(0.008)	(0.019)	(0.016)	(0.006)	(0.025)	(0.013)
Post-2023	-0.002	-0.007	-0.003	-0.003	-0.057***	0.009
	(0.004)	(0.022)	(0.007)	(0.003)	(0.020)	(0.007)
$FamStruct\_2 \times$ Post-2023	0.027***	0.099***	0.049***	0.013***	0.167***	0.011
	(0.006)	(0.025)	(0.014)	(0.004)	(0.026)	(0.011)
$FamStruct\_3 \times$ Post-2023	0.070***	0.168***	0.020	0.013*	0.143***	-0.025
	(0.014)	(0.029)	(0.023)	(0.008)	(0.035)	(0.018)
$FamStruct\_4 \times$ Post-2023	0.076***	0.147***	0.063**	0.008	0.123**	-0.025
	(0.019)	(0.040)	(0.030)	(0.011)	(0.050)	(0.023)
Constant	0.061***	0.463***	0.132***	0.043***	0.395***	0.110***
	(0.003)	(0.012)	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.013)	(0.004)
Obs.	16,887	2,982	16,887	16,887	1,860	16,887
Adjusted R^2	0.048	0.118	0.051	0.011	0.079	0.012

Notes: The dependent variable in columns (1) and (4), $Y_{i,b}$ is the estate share $Y_{i,b} \in [0, 1]$ that testators allocate to recipient category $b \in \{\text{nonrelatives}, \text{charities}\}$ (*total effect*). The dependent variable in columns (2) and (5), $Y_{i,b} \mid (Y_{i,b} > 0)$, is the estate share allocated to recipient category b conditional on this share being nonzero (*intensive-margin effect*). The dependent variable in columns (3) and (6), $P \mid (Y_{i,b} > 0)$, is a binary variable equal to one when the estate share allocated to recipient category b is nonzero (*extensive-margin effect*). Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A.8: Difference-in-differences with testator fixed effects: estate shares given to recipients outside the family

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	b = **Nonrelatives**			b = **Charities**		
dep. var. =	**tot. effect** $Y_{i,b}$	**int. margin** $Y_{i,b} \mid (Y_{i,b} > 0)$	**ext. margin** $P(Y_{i,b} > 0)$	**tot. effect** $Y_{i,b}$	**int. margin** $Y_{i,b} \mid (Y_{i,b} > 0)$	**ext. margin** $P(Y_{i,b} > 0)$
			OLS			
Post-2023	0.010	0.018	0.016	-0.012	-0.138	-0.032
	(0.019)	(0.040)	(0.036)	(0.009)	(0.137)	(0.032)
Treated × Post-2023	0.098***	0.231***	0.056	0.009	0.107	-0.016
($FamStruct\_2, 3, 4$)	(0.037)	(0.067)	(0.072)	(0.013)	(0.143)	(0.057)
Testator fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Obs.	210	30	210	210	16	210
			Logit			
Post-2023	0.507	0.142	0.811	-1.118*	-0.985	-2.197
	(0.911)	(0.303)	(1.835)	(0.642)	(0.793)	(2.320)
Treated × Post-2023	1.100	1.028**	1.022	0.888	0.719	-0.000
($FamStruct\_2, 3, 4$)	(0.973)	(0.404)	(2.488)	(0.831)	(0.862)	(3.282)
Testator fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Obs.	210	30	210	210	16	210
			Marginal effects:			
Treated × Post-2023	0.042	0.185***	0.026	0.012	0.090	-0.000
	(0.037)	(0.070)	(0.061)	(0.011)	(0.104)	(0.047)

Notes: These estimations are based on cases where the same testator entered a will at least once before and after the 2023 reform. The dependent variable in columns (1) and (4) is the estate share $Y_{i,b} \in [0, 1]$ that testators allocate to recipient category $b \in \{\text{nonrelatives}, \text{charities}\}$ (*total effect*). The dependent variable in columns (2) and (5), $Y_{i,b} \mid (Y_{i,b} > 0)$, is the estate share allocated to recipient category b conditional on this share being nonzero (*intensive-margin effect*). The dependent variable in columns (3) and (6), $P \mid (Y_{i,b} > 0)$, is a binary variable equal to one when the estate share allocated to recipient category b is nonzero (*extensive-margin effect*). Marginal effects are average marginal effects (AMEs), measuring the change in the predicted estate share calculated by averaging individual marginal effects across the sample. Robust standard errors in parentheses.
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A.9: Difference-in-differences: estate shares given to recipients outside the family; subsample with controls, enlarged control group

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	b = **Nonrelatives**				b = **Charities**			
	Subsample w. controls		**Subsample aged $\geq$ 65**		**Subsample w. controls**		**Subsample aged $\geq$ 65**	
Treated ($FamStruct\_2,3,4$)	-0.041*** (0.005)	-0.050*** (0.005)	-0.082*** (0.011)	-0.078*** (0.011)	-0.023*** (0.003)	-0.023*** (0.003)	-0.038*** (0.007)	-0.036*** (0.007)
Treated × Single	0.065*** (0.008)	0.053*** (0.008)	-0.043*** (0.012)	-0.084*** (0.016)	-0.000 (0.005)	-0.008 (0.005)	-0.033*** (0.007)	-0.048*** (0.011)
Post-2023	0.002 (0.007)	0.003 (0.007)	0.024 (0.019)	0.021 (0.018)	0.001 (0.005)	0.001 (0.005)	0.007 (0.012)	0.006 (0.012)
Treated × Post-2023	0.015* (0.009)	0.017* (0.009)	-0.010 (0.021)	-0.006 (0.021)	0.004 (0.006)	0.004 (0.006)	0.012 (0.016)	0.013 (0.016)
Treated × Single × Post-2023	0.120*** (0.018)	0.119*** (0.018)	0.048* (0.027)	0.051* (0.027)	0.025*** (0.009)	0.024** (0.010)	0.022 (0.017)	0.022 (0.017)
Age 30-39		-0.053*** (0.012)				-0.028*** (0.007)		
Age 40-49		-0.067*** (0.012)				-0.037*** (0.007)		
Age 50-59		-0.068*** (0.012)				-0.030*** (0.007)		
Age 60-69		-0.077*** (0.012)				-0.018** (0.008)		
Age 70-79		-0.082*** (0.014)		-0.002 (0.013)		-0.022** (0.009)		-0.000 (0.008)
Age 80-89		-0.059*** (0.020)		0.059*** (0.020)		-0.016 (0.012)		0.017 (0.014)
Age >90		-0.063** (0.027)		0.049* (0.026)		-0.023 (0.016)		0.007 (0.017)
French-speaking region		-0.006 (0.010)		-0.027 (0.019)		0.002 (0.006)		0.013 (0.016)
Italian-speaking region		-0.042** (0.020)		-0.057 (0.040)		0.012 (0.020)		0.007 (0.037)
Female		0.003 (0.005)		0.065*** (0.016)		0.018*** (0.003)		0.029** (0.011)
Constant	0.065*** (0.004)	0.133*** (0.012)	0.089*** (0.010)	0.070*** (0.012)	0.031*** (0.003)	0.051*** (0.008)	0.043*** (0.007)	0.034*** (0.008)
Obs.	6,962	6,962	1,516	1,516	6,962	6,962	1,516	1,516
Adjusted R^2	0.074	0.081	0.017	0.043	0.009	0.018	0.008	0.015

Notes: The dependent variable is the estate share $Y_{i,b} \in [0,1]$ that testators allocate to recipient category $b \in \{\text{nonrelatives}, \text{charities}\}$. Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A.10: Testator choices relative to legal minimum shares: bunchers and supramarginals

		(1) Obs.	(2) Binding heirs	(3) Min. pre-2023	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
					Share of bunchers			Share of supramarginals		
					Pre-2023	Post-2023	Δ	Pre-2023	Post-2023	Δ (p-val.)
$FamStruct\_1$	$[cY\_pX\_mY]$	6,006	children	0.375	0.56	0.01	-0.54	0.44	0.36	0.000
$FamStruct\_2$	$[cY\_pX\_mN]$	4,002	children	0.75	0.53	0.04	-0.48	0.47	0.36	0.000
$FamStruct\_3$	$[cN\_p2\_mN]$	2,048	parents	0.5	0.79	0.10	-0.69	0.21	0.16	0.005
$FamStruct\_4$	$[cN\_p1\_mN]$	1,252	parents	0.25	0.76	0.04	-0.73	0.24	0.16	0.002
$FamStruct\_5$	$[cN\_p2\_mY]$	615	parents	0.125	0.81	0.02	-0.79	0.19	0.17	0.537
$FamStruct\_6$	$[cN\_p1\_mY]$	557	parents	0.0625	0.74	0.01	-0.73	0.26	0.08	0.000

Notes: This table shows (a) shares of 'bunchers', defined as testators who choose the compulsory minimum share for the heirs on which they face such a legal constraint ('binding heirs'), and (b) shares of 'supramarginals', defined as testators who choose to allocate more than the pre-2023 compulsory minimum share to their binding heirs. For the definition of bunchers, we allow for a margin of 1 p.p. above the legal minimum. This means, for example, that for $FamStruct$ of type 1, all testators who allocate to their children an estate share in the interval $[0.375, 0.385]$ are considered as bunchers. Column (9) shows the p-value of a t test on the difference between the shares reported in columns (7) and (8).

Table A.11: Tax rates on inheritances by nonrelatives

Canton	Main town/city	Tax rate on CHF 40k	0.2m	10m
Zurich	Zurich	13.5	21.0	36.0
Bern	Bern	11.2	16.6	39.9
Lucerne	Luzern	26.0	32.0	40.0
Uri	Altdorf	15.0	22.2	24.0
Schwyz	Schwyz	0.0	0.0	0.0
Obwalden	Sarnen	0.0	0.0	0.0
Nidwalden	Stans	7.5	13.5	15.0
Glarus	Glarus	7.5	9.5	25.0
Zug	Zug	10.0	11.7	19.7
Fribourg	Fribourg	32.7	36.5	37.4
Solothurn	Solothurn	18.1	30.8	31.2
Basel-Stadt	Basel	21.4	26.7	49.5
Basel-Landschaft	Liestal	22.5	28.5	30.0
Schaffhausen	Schaffhausen	11.3	26.0	40.0
Appenzell Ausserrhoden	Herisau	28.0	31.2	31.8
Appenzell Innerrhoden	Appenzell	17.5	19.5	19.9
St. Gallen	St. Gallen	22.5	28.5	30.0
Graubünden	Chur	12.2	14.4	15.0
Aargau	Aarau	12.0	15.4	31.9
Thurgau	Frauenfeld	9.6	16.0	28.0
Ticino	Bellinzona	20.4	27.9	41.0
Vaud	Lausanne	40.6	50.0	50.0
Valais	Sion	25.0	25.0	25.0
Neuchâtel	Neuchâtel	45.0	45.0	45.0
Geneva	Geneva	49.1	52.3	54.6
Jura	Delémont	35.0	35.0	35.0

Notes: Average consolidated canton and municipality-level tax rates in percentage points at canton main town/city, rounded to the first decimal. Source: Swiss Federal Tax Administration (https://swisstaxcalculator.estv.admin.ch/#/calculator/inheritance-gift-tax), accessed 18 Dec. 2025.

Table A.12: Difference-in-differences: estate shares given to nonrelatives as a function of inheritance taxes, enlarged control group

'Tax' = avg. rate on inheritance of...	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	CHF 40,000		CHF 200,000		CHF 10 million	
Tax	-0.0007	-0.0008	-0.0007	-0.0008	-0.0000	0.0000
	(0.0005)	(0.0006)	(0.0005)	(0.0005)	(0.0005)	(0.0005)
Treated	0.0121**	0.0121**	0.0122**	0.0121**	0.0125**	0.0125**
($FamStruct\_2,3,4$)	(0.0057)	(0.0057)	(0.0057)	(0.0057)	(0.0057)	(0.0057)
Treated × Tax	0.0003	0.0003	0.0007	0.0008	0.0011*	0.0011*
	(0.0007)	(0.0007)	(0.0006)	(0.0006)	(0.0006)	(0.0006)
Post-2023	0.0013	0.0012	0.0016	0.0016	0.0021	0.0021
	(0.0073)	(0.0073)	(0.0074)	(0.0074)	(0.0074)	(0.0074)
Tax × Post-2023	-0.0008	-0.0008	-0.0006	-0.0006	-0.0018*	-0.0018*
	(0.0008)	(0.0008)	(0.0008)	(0.0008)	(0.0009)	(0.0009)
Treated × Post-2023	0.0429***	0.0429***	0.0425***	0.0425***	0.0415***	0.0416***
	(0.0110)	(0.0110)	(0.0110)	(0.0110)	(0.0110)	(0.0110)
Treated × Tax × Post-2023	0.0018	0.0018	0.0013	0.0013	0.0013	0.0013
	(0.0014)	(0.0014)	(0.0013)	(0.0013)	(0.0012)	(0.0012)
French-/Italian-speaking region		0.0093		0.0061		-0.0026
		(0.0132)		(0.0126)		(0.0107)
Constant	0.0643***	0.0638***	0.0643***	0.0640***	0.0643***	0.0645***
	(0.0044)	(0.0045)	(0.0044)	(0.0045)	(0.0044)	(0.0045)
Obs.	6,664	6,661	6,664	6,661	6,664	6,661
Adjusted R^2	0.010	0.010	0.010	0.010	0.011	0.010

Notes: The dependent variable is the estate share $Y_i \in [0,1]$ that testators allocate to nonrelatives. Tax rates are time-invariant within canton (see Table A.11) and considered as mean deviations. Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

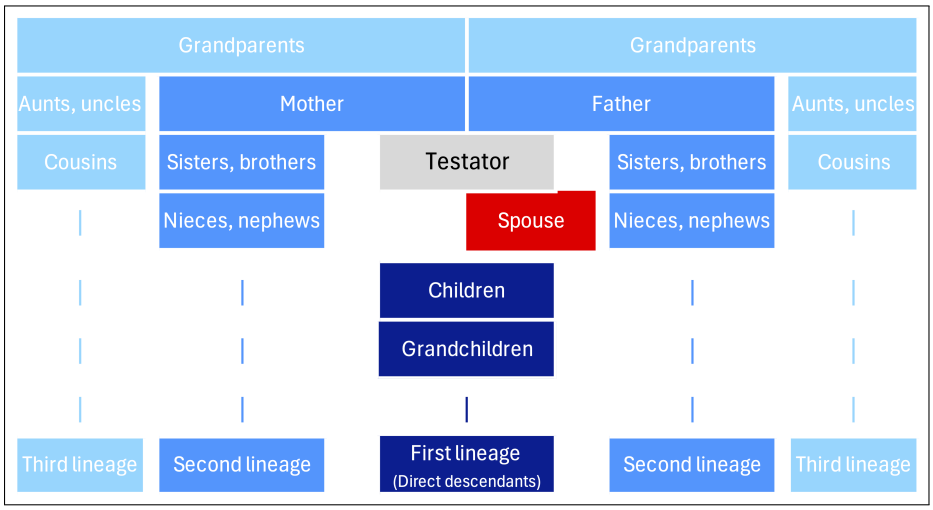
Table A.13: Difference-in-differences: estate shares given to charities as a function of inheritance taxes, enlarged control group

'Tax' = avg. rate on inheritance of...	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	CHF 40,000		CHF 200,000		CHF 10 million	
Tax	0.0004	0.0003	0.0005	0.0004	0.0009***	0.0008**
	(0.0005)	(0.0005)	(0.0004)	(0.0004)	(0.0003)	(0.0003)
Treated	-0.0150***	-0.0150***	-0.0150***	-0.0150***	-0.0151***	-0.0151***
($FamStruct\_2, 3, 4$)	(0.0039)	(0.0039)	(0.0039)	(0.0039)	(0.0039)	(0.0039)
Treated × Tax	-0.0004	-0.0004	-0.0004	-0.0004	-0.0006	-0.0006
	(0.0005)	(0.0005)	(0.0005)	(0.0004)	(0.0004)	(0.0004)
Post-2023	-0.0032	-0.0032	-0.0032	-0.0032	-0.0037	-0.0037
	(0.0051)	(0.0051)	(0.0051)	(0.0051)	(0.0050)	(0.0050)
Tax × Post-2023	-0.0004	-0.0005	-0.0004	-0.0005	0.0001	0.0001
	(0.0007)	(0.0007)	(0.0006)	(0.0006)	(0.0005)	(0.0005)
Treated × Post-2023	0.0152**	0.0151**	0.0151**	0.0151**	0.0153**	0.0152**
	(0.0065)	(0.0065)	(0.0065)	(0.0065)	(0.0064)	(0.0064)
Treated × Tax × Post-2023	0.0016*	0.0016*	0.0015*	0.0015*	0.0004	0.0004
	(0.0009)	(0.0009)	(0.0008)	(0.0008)	(0.0007)	(0.0007)
French-/Italian-speaking region		0.0077		0.0072		0.0047
		(0.0084)		(0.0079)		(0.0075)
Constant	0.0351***	0.0346***	0.0351***	0.0346***	0.0352***	0.0349***
	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)	(0.0034)
Obs.	6,664	6,661	6,664	6,661	6,664	6,661
Adjusted R^2	0.003	0.003	0.003	0.003	0.004	0.004

Notes: The dependent variable is the estate share $Y_i \in [0, 1]$ that testators allocate to charities. Tax rates are time-invariant within canton (see Table A.11) and considered as mean deviations. Robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

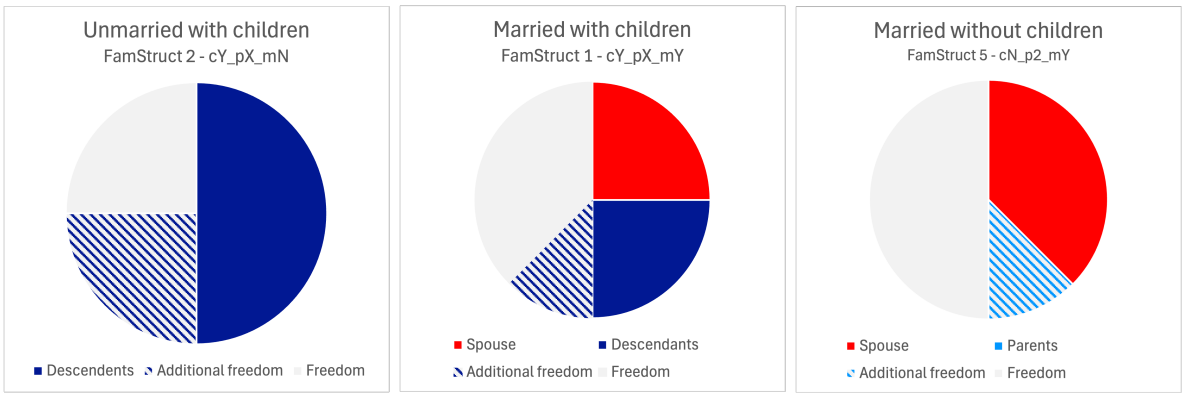
A.2 Appendix figures

Figure A.1: Hierarchy of heirs in the Swiss inheritance system



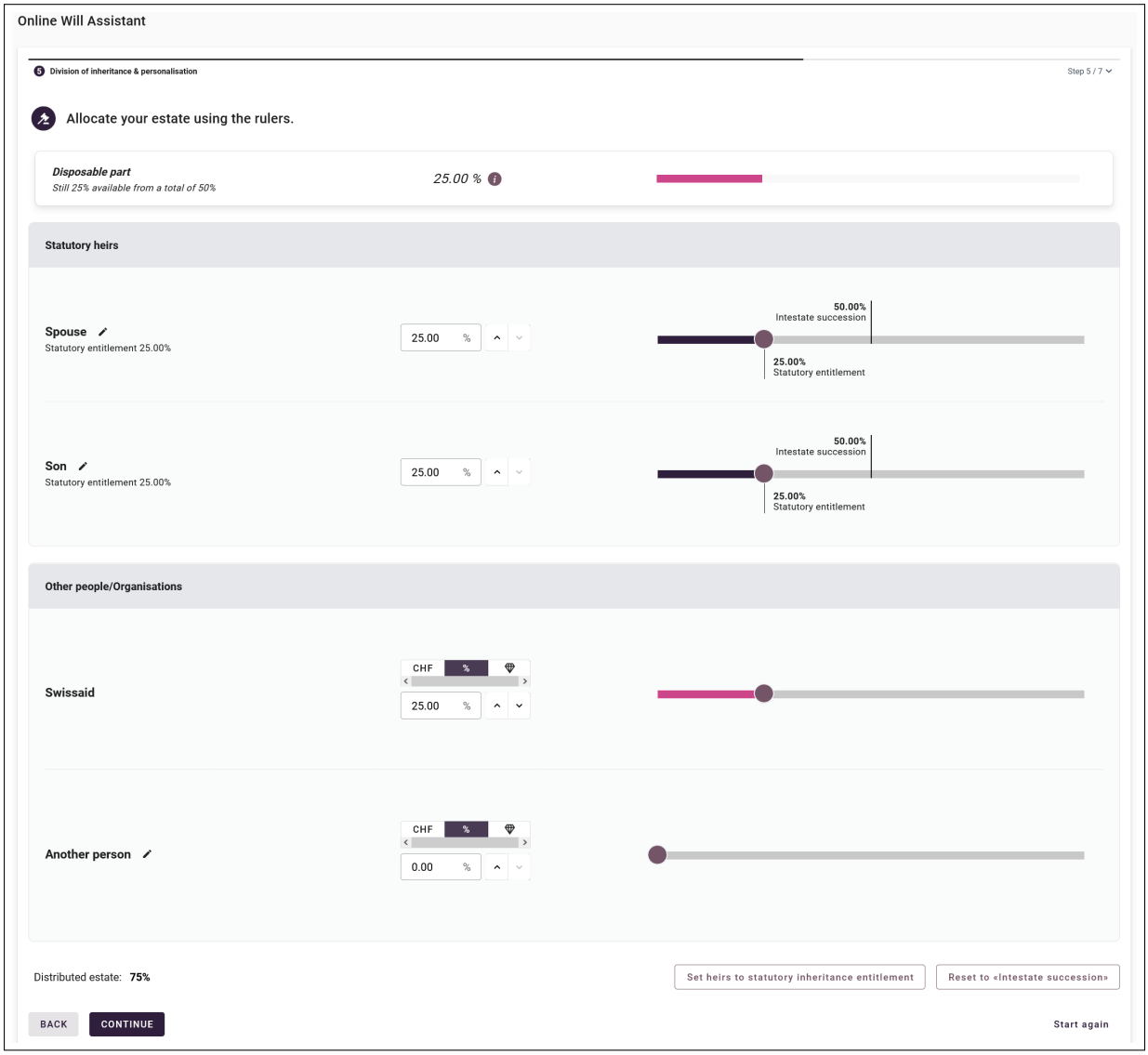
Notes: This figure illustrates the hierarchy of heirs in Swiss inheritance law. For the attribution of default estate shares in the absence of a will, heirs are prioritized according to two dimensions: the lineage and, within a lineage, the generation. One must first establish whether anyone exists/is alive in the first lineage (direct descendants). If so, they will be first in line following the generation order. If there is no direct descendant, the second lineage enters into consideration, and heirs will be prioritized according to the generation. For example, if one (or both) of the parents is deceased, the siblings will be considered for the share of the deceased parent(s). If there is no one in the second lineage, the third lineage will be considered following the same logic.

Figure A.2: Minimum compulsory shares, pre- and post-reform



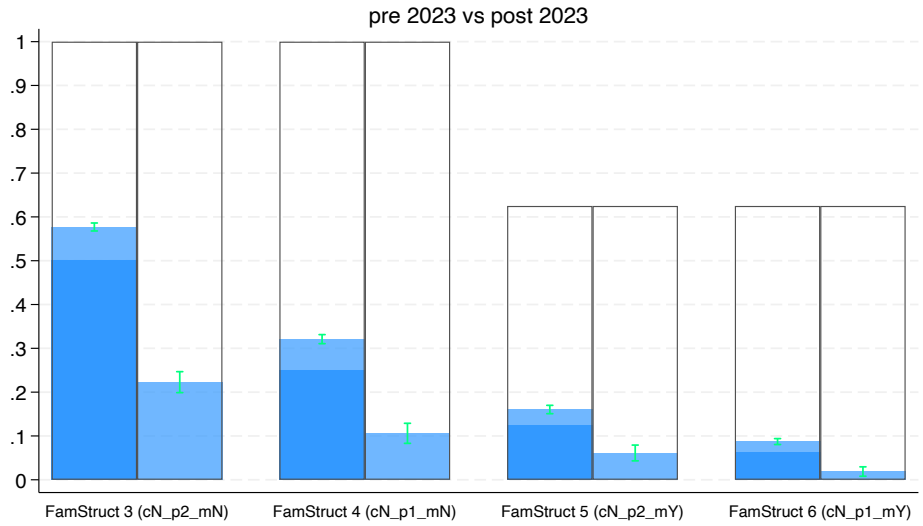
Notes: These figures show the effect of the 2023 reform on the compulsory minimum shares attributed to different heirs depending on family structure. The additional freedom gained by testators is shown as dashed areas.

Figure A.3: Screenshot of online will preparation tool



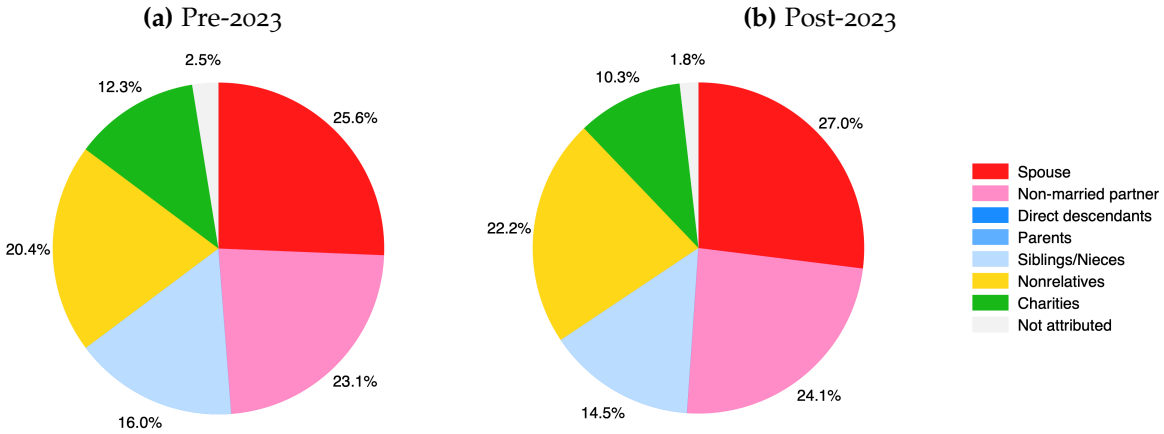
Notes: This is a screenshot of the free and anonymous online will preparation tool offered by the platform DeinAdieu.ch. The screenshot shows step 5 of 7, which is where users determine the shares of their estates they want to leave for different heirs. The screenshot is taken before the user has made any choices at step 5. Prior to this step, the user has determined who they want those heirs to be (in this case, the user has a spouse and one child and wants to attribute some of their estate to an unrelated heir ("Another person") and to a previously selected charity (in this example Swissaid). The online tool sets the sliders for the spouse and the child at the compulsory minimum shares, in this case of 25% of the estate each. The tool automatically sets the slider for the share given to the charity at 25%, but users can change that freely. The "Disposable part" shown at the top of the screen informs users how much of their total estate they have left to allocate among the designated recipients. Steps 6 and 7 of the tool then ask the user to confirm their entry and to provide their email address so that the resulting document can be sent to them for signing. Additional demographic information and contact details can be provided by users, but that is optional.

Figure A.4: Share given to parents, pre- and post-reform



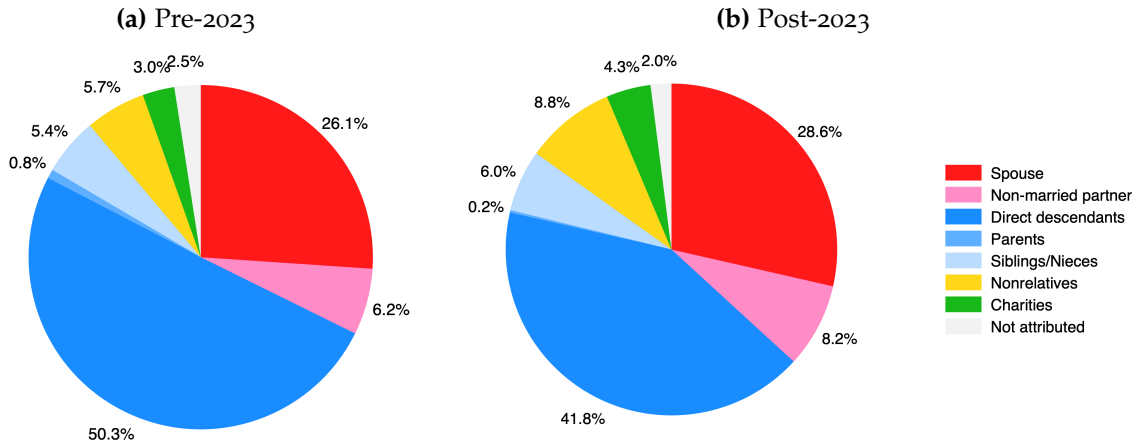
Notes: Bars show average estate shares allocated to parents by testators with living parents and no children ($FamStruct$ types 3-6). For each type, we show average allocated shares before the 2023 reform (left) and after the 2023 reform (right). Dark blue areas represent the compulsory minimum shares. Light blue areas represent allocations over and above the legal minimum. The upper edge of the black frames indicates the maximal share that could have been allocated to direct descendants given minimum shares on other heirs. 95% confidence are also shown.

Figure A.5: Distribution of estates in the narrow control group, pre- and post-reform



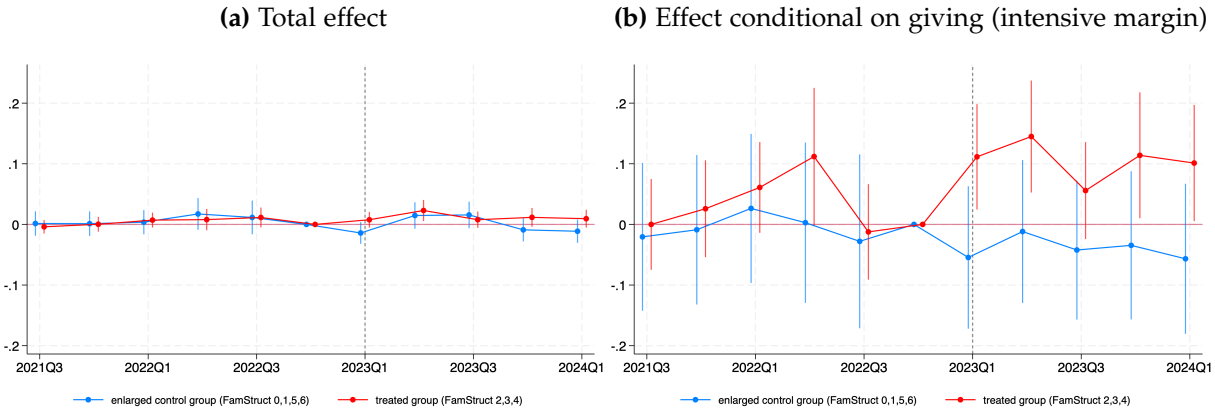
Notes: Distribution of estates by testators who were unaffected by the reform ($FamStruct$ of type 0: cN_p0_mX), unweighted averages. Pre-2023: 1,773 obs.; post-2023: 634 obs. For testators in this group who do not have siblings, nephews or nieces, the third parentelic lineage was added to the nonrelatives category. This accounts for 1.1% of the total pre-2023 and for 0.6% of the total post-2023.

Figure A.6: Aggregate distribution of estates, pre- and post-reform, testators aged ≥65



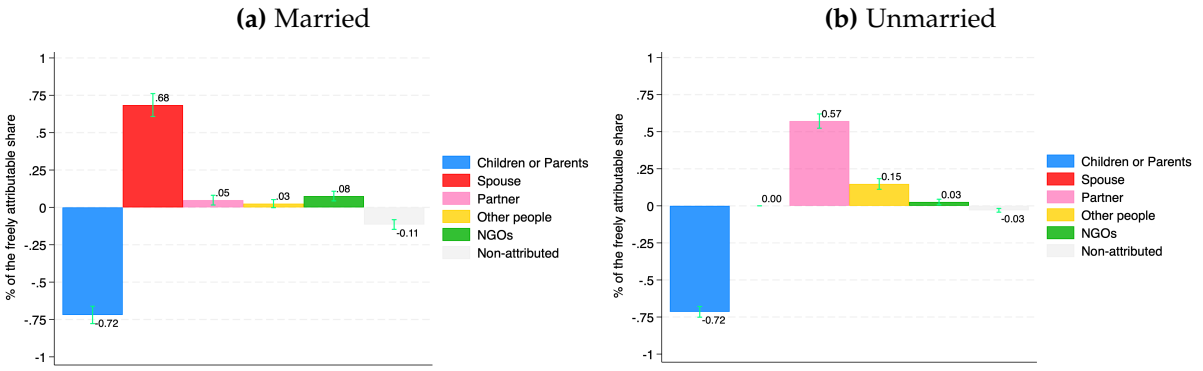
Notes: Distribution of estates, unweighted averages, testators aged ≥65. Pre-2023: 971 obs.; post-2023: 545 obs. Allocation of shares analogous to that applied to the whole sample (6.18% of the free share allocated to siblings for $FamStruct$ types 1 and 2, see Figure 3). This accounts for 1.5% of the total pre-2023 and for 1.6% of the total post-2023. The third lineage for $FamStruct$ type 0 was added to the Nonrelatives category and accounts for 0.9% of the total pre-2023 and for 0.4% of of the total post-2023.

Figure A.7: Share given to charities: event study



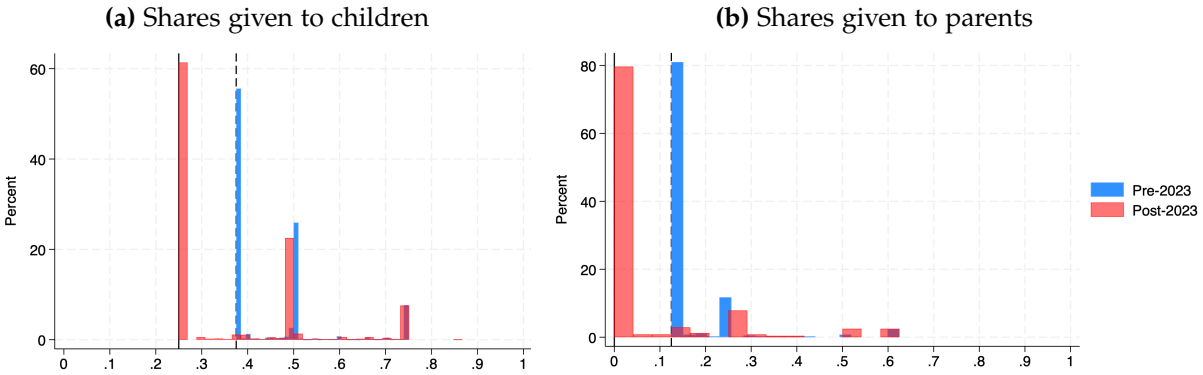
Notes: These graphs show the evolution of the quarterly average shares given to charities by treated and control testators (enlarged control group), relative to the reference period Q4 2022. The dashed lines indicate the entry into force of the reform in Q1 2023. 95% confidence intervals are also shown.

Figure A.8: Testators' use of new freedom: married vs. unmarried



Notes: The charts show average changes post- vs. pre-reform scaled by the size of the additional free share available thanks to the reform. Panel (a) is computed for all $FamStruct$ types that involve a living spouse (types 1, 5 and 6). Panel (b) is computed for all testators without a living spouse ($FamStruct$ types 2, 3 and 4). 95% confidence intervals are also shown.

Figure A.9: Heterogeneous responses to changed compulsory minimum shares, married testators



Notes: The charts show frequency distributions of estate shares allocated by married testators to direct descendants (Panel a) and to parents (Panel b) before and after the 2023 reform. Dashed black lines indicate the pre-reform compulsory minimum shares, and solid black lines indicate the corresponding post-reform compulsory minimum shares (equal to zero in case of Panel b).