Income Inequality in France, 1900-2014: Evidence from Distributional National Accounts (DINA)

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Motivation

1. Previous work on long run income inequality trends in France (Piketty 2001, 2003, Landais 2007) focus on top income shares (top 10%, top 1%) and on fiscal income.

2. Here we extend existing series up to 2013, and most importantly we combine fiscal data with national accounts and surveys in order to produce 1900-2013 series covering the entire income distribution (from bottom to top) and all forms of labor and capital incomes (taxable and tax exempt).
The DINA project

- Part of a broader multi-country project: World Wealth and Income database
  - Distributional National Accounts (DINA)
- Provide long-term series on distribution of income and wealth
  - Homogeneous across countries and over time
  - Consistent with National Income and Wealth Accounts
  - Covering all the distribution from bottom to top
- For France: two papers
  - Last month: Wealth
  - Today: Income
Literature

- Previous attempts to combine distributional tax data to national accounts:

Some progress using tax data, but insufficient
- Tax data miss tax exempt income
- Silent on post-tax and transfer income
- Silent on distribution of the bottom 90


⇒ Need for combining tax data, surveys and National Accounts in a more systematic way: **Distributional National Accounts (DINA)**
This paper

We combine income tax data covering 1915-2013 period with national accounts, survey data and inheritance tax data 1800-2010 in order to produce:

- consistent unified income inequality series for France 1900-2013 (and 1800-2013 for wealth inequality series)
- detailed breakdown by age, gender, income and asset categories for 1970-2013
Main Findings


2. Long run inequality fall: entirely due to fall in concentration of wealth and capital income. But rising inequality of saving rates and rates of return could lead to further increase in wealth concentration in coming decades. Steady-state simulations.

3. Declining gender inequality... but not so much for high wages.

4. France vs US: much bigger rise in inequality in the US; bottom 50% real income is now much smaller in the US than in France.
Outline of the talk

Data and methodology

The long-run picture

The role of capital income and wealth concentration

Labor income: the limited decline of gender inequality

France vs US and the bottom 50%

Conclusion and perspectives
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Conclusion and perspectives
Data and methodology (1/2)

- **Income tax returns: 1915-2013**
  - Income tax created in 1914, first applied in 1915
  - Finance Ministry estimate for 1900 and 1910
  - Annual exhaustive tabulations from 1915 to 2013
  - Microfiles from 1970 to 2012
    - ERFS surveys: 1970, 1975, 1979, 1984 (40,000 tax units)
    - Annual from 1988 (400,000 tax units per year, all top incomes included)
    - Exhaustive for recent years (2010-2012)

- **National account series**
  - INSEE (French national statistical institute) annual series 1949-2015
  - Historical series since 1820 provided by Piketty-Zucman (2014)

- **Household surveys:**
Data and methodology (2/2)

• We start from income tax micro-files 1970-2012
• Using income tax tabulations 1900-2013, we apply generalized Pareto interpolation techniques (Fournier 2016; = non-parametric generalization of techniques used in historical income distribution literature: Kuznets 1953, Piketty 2001, etc.) in order to generate series by income percentiles (from bottom to top): results are quasi-identical to micro-files series over period 1970-2012
• We impute tax-exempt labor and capital incomes (including imputed rent, retained earnings, corporate tax, etc.) using national accounts and wealth and housing surveys
• Preferred series: distribution of pretax national income (before all taxes and transfers, except pensions and unemployment insurance), among adults (equal-split series: income of couples divided by two)
• We also compare with fiscal-income series and tax-units series, and fully individualized series
• Next step: after-tax after-transfers series (to be done)
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Conclusion and perspectives
The long-run picture (1/2)

• Long-run fall in inequality: top 10% income share dropped from about 50% in 1910 to about 35% in 2010, to the benefit of bottom 50% share (15% → 20%) and middle 40% share (35% → 45%)


• Rising top income inequality 1983-2013: moderate impact on top 10% income share, but very large impact on top 1% and top 0.1%. Exacerbates the perception of growth slowdown for the rest of the population (The “30 Glorious Years” are not over for everyone). Drop in very top shares since 2008, but in 2013 they are still much higher than in 1980s.
The long run picture

The uneven rise of per adult national income in France, 1900-2014 (€ 2014)

### Table 1 – Income thresholds and income shares in France, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income group</th>
<th>Number of adults</th>
<th>Income threshold</th>
<th>Average income</th>
<th>Income share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Population</td>
<td>51 721 510</td>
<td>0 €</td>
<td>34 580 €</td>
<td>100,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom 50%</td>
<td>25 860 755</td>
<td>0 €</td>
<td>15 500 €</td>
<td>22,4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle 40%</td>
<td>20 688 604</td>
<td>27 520 €</td>
<td>38 810 €</td>
<td>44,9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 10%</td>
<td>5 172 151</td>
<td>58 070 €</td>
<td>112 830 €</td>
<td>32,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incl. Top 1%</td>
<td>517 215</td>
<td>167 090 €</td>
<td>373 330 €</td>
<td>10,8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incl. Top 0.1%</td>
<td>51 722</td>
<td>563 730 €</td>
<td>1 277 960 €</td>
<td>3,7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incl. Top 0.01%</td>
<td>5 172</td>
<td>2 072 470 €</td>
<td>4 470 980 €</td>
<td>1,3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incl. Top 0.001%</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>7 222 080 €</td>
<td>13 639 860 €</td>
<td>0,4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table reports statistics on the distribution of national income in France in 2013. The unit is the adult individual (20-year-old and over; income of married couples is splitted into two). Fractiles are defined relative to the total number of adult individuals in the population.
The long run picture

Top 10% income share, France 1900-2014: long-run fall in inequality

Average national income per adult (2014): 34 580 €

Distribution of pretax national income (before all taxes and transfers, except pensions and unempl. insurance) among adults. Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).
The long run picture

**Income shares in France 1900-2014**

Distribution of pretax national income (before all taxes and transfers, except pensions and unempl. insurance) among adults. Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).

Average national income per adult (2014): 34,580 €

Top 10%: 38,810 €
Middle 40%: 15,540 €
Bottom 50%: 112,830 €

10%
15%
20%
25%
30%
35%
40%
45%
50%
55%

The long run picture

Top 1% income share in France 1900-2014

Distribution of pretax national income (before all taxes and transfers, except pensions and unempl. insurance) among adults. Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).

Average national income per adult (2014) : 34 580 €

373 330 €
The long run picture

Rising top income inequality in France, 1983-2014

Income shares 1983 = 100

Top 0.1%

Top 1%

Top 10%

Bottom 90%

Distribution of pretax national income (before all taxes and transfers, except pensions and unempl.insurance) among adults. Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).
The long run picture

Top 0.1% income share in France 1970-2014

Distribution of pretax national income (before all taxes and transfers, except pensions and unempl.insurance) among adults. Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).
The long run picture

Top 0.01% income share in France 1970-2014

Distribution of pretax national income (before all taxes and transfers, except pensions and unempl.insurance) among adults. Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).
The long run picture

Top labor incomes vs top capital incomes in France, 1983-2014

Distributions of total income, capital income and labor income among adults. Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).
The long run picture

Total cumulated real growth in France, 1983-2014

Top 0.01% incomes rose by 145% between 1983 and 2014

Per adult median income rose by 30% between 1983 and 2014

Total cumulated real growth of pre-tax per adult income by percentiles (growth incidence curves). Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).
The long run picture

Total cumulated real growth by time periods in France

Total cumulated real growth of pre-tax per adult national income by percentiles (growth incidence curves).
Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).
The long run picture

Average annual real growth rates of pre-tax per adult income by percentiles (growth incidence curves). Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).
The long run picture

Annual real growth rate by time periods in France

Average annual real growth rates of pre-tax per adult income by percentiles (growth incidence curves). Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).
The long-run picture (2/2)

- New inequality series using national income show bigger rise in inequality than previous fiscal income series, because of rise of tax-exempt capital income (life insurance, retained earnings, capital gains, rent, etc.)
- Rising inequality would be even higher at the tax-unit level (rise of singles) than in our benchmark equal-split adult-level series (income of couples divided by two)
The long run picture

Income shares: national income vs fiscal income series

Distribution of pretax national income (incl. tax-exempt labor and capital income) vs pretax fiscal income (reported on income tax returns). Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).

Rise of tax-exempt capital income
The long run picture

Income shares: equal-split-adults vs tax-units series

Distribution of pretax national income (before all taxes and transfers, except pensions and unempl. insurance) among adults. Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two) vs tax-units series (singles and married couples).
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Conclusion and perspectives
The role of capital income and wealth concentration

1. Long-run fall in income inequality is entirely due to the fall of top capital incomes: inequality of labor income did not change in the long run.

2. Capital income has always been the main income source for very top incomes (including today); but because of the decline of capital concentration, the level of top capital incomes has dropped.

3. Wealth inequality is still much higher than income inequality today: top 10% share around 60-70% for wealth and capital income, vs 35% for total income and 25% for labor income.
Top 10% income share: total income vs labor income inequality

Distribution of pretax national income (before all taxes and transfers, except pensions and unempl. insurance) among adults. Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).
Top 1% income share: the fall of top capital incomes

Distribution of pretax national income (before all taxes and transfers, except pensions and unempl. insurance) among adults. Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).
Income composition by income level, France 2012

- **Capital income** (Interest, dividends, rents, ...)
- **Mixed income** (Self-employed)
- **Labor income** (Wages and pensions)

Distribution of pretax national income (before all taxes and transfers, except pensions and unempl. insurance) among adults. Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).
Top 10% share: total income vs labour vs capital income vs wealth

Distribution of total income, labor income, capital income and net wealth among adults. Equal-split-adults series (income and wealth of married couples divided by two).
Top 1% share: total income vs labour vs capital income vs wealth

Distribution of total income, labor income, capital income and net wealth among adults. Equal-split-adults series (income and wealth of married couples divided by two).
Labor income rank vs mean wealth rank

- 1970
- 1990
- 2010

Average fractiles of wealth
Fractiles of labor income
Probability for top labor earners to belong to the top 1% wealth group

Top 0.5% labor earners have a 23% probability to belong to top 1% wealth group.

Top 0.5% labor earners have a 39% probability to belong to top 1% wealth group.
Top 0.5% labor earners have a 31% probability to belong to top 0.5% wealth group.
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- For subperiod 1970-2012, we have detailed breakdown by age and gender
- Age patterns did not change very much: age-labor income profile is always steeply rising (although less strongly than age-capital income and age-wealth profiles), and income inequality very high within each age group (like wealth)
- Main change over the period: large rise of female labor market participation, decline of gender inequality, but still very high at the top
Age-Income profile in France by age, 1970-2012

Distribution of pretax national income (before all taxes and transfers, except pensions and unemployment insurance) among adults. Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).
Age-Labor income profile in France by age, 1970-2012

Distribution of pretax labor income (incl. pensions, unempl. insurance and 70% of mixed income) among adults. Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).
Age-Capital income profile in France by age, 1970-2012

Distribution of pretax capital income (incl. 30% of mixed income) among adults. Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).
Distribution of pretax national income (before all taxes and transfers, except pensions and unemployment insurance) among adults. Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).
Gender gap by age, France 2012

Ratio between average labor income of men and women by age (incl. non participants).
Labor income includes wages, pensions, unemployment insurance and 70% of mixed income.
Gender gap by age, France 1970-2012

Ratio between average labor income of men and women by age (incl. non participants). Labor income includes wages, pensions, unemployment insurance and 70% of mixed income.
Labor market participation by gender, France 1970-2012

Fraction of men and women 25-to-65-year-old with positive labor income. Labor income includes wages, pensions, unemployment insurance and 70% of mixed income.
Share of women in fractiles of top labor incomes in France, 1970-2012

Top 50%:
- 10% in 1994,
- 16% in 2012,
- 50% by 2102?

Top 10%:

Top 1%:
- 10% in 1994,
- 16% in 2012,
- 50% by 2102?

Top 0.1%:
- 50% by 2144?

Top 0.1%:
Figure 16: Income shares in France: equal-split income vs individual income

Distribution of pretax national income: equal-split income series (income of married couples divided by two) vs individual income series (capital income of married income divided by two, but labor income allocated to each individual).

Rise of female participation
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Conclusion and perspectives
France vs US and the bottom 50%

1. Top income shares increased much more in the US than in France since the 1980s.

2. Complex combination of factors: education system (more unequal in the US?), labor market rules (fall in US minimum wage), changing governance and incentives for top executive pay-setting (huge fall in US top income tax rates). Not analyzed here (see Piketty 2014).

3. Distribution matters: per adult national income is 25% smaller in France (more hours of work in the US, similar productivity), but bottom 50% average income is 30% higher in France.

4. This would probably be reinforced if we look at after-tax after-transfer inequality (to be done). But it is interesting to see that this is already the case for pre-tax pre-transfers inequality. More generally, long-term changes in inequality reflect large changes in both pretax inequality (itself influenced by policies and institutions) and after-tax inequality.
Average income and productivity: France vs USA, 1910-2015

Ratios France/USA for GDP per hour of work (OECD series) and per adult national income (WID.world).
Both series are expressed in PPP 2015 €.
Distribution of pretax national income (before all taxes and transfers, except pensions and unemployment insurance) among adults. Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).

Top 10 % income shares: France vs USA, 1910-2014

- USA
- France

243 650 € (PPP)

112 830 €
Top 1 % income shares: France vs US, 1910-2014

Distribution of pretax national income (before all taxes and transfers, except pensions and unempl. insurance) among adults. Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).
Distribution of pretax national income (before all taxes and transfers, except pensions and unempl. insurance) among adults. Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).
Bottom 50% real income (2014 euros PPP): France vs US, 1910-2014

Distribution of pretax national income (before all taxes and transfers, except pensions and unempl. insurance) among adults. Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).

Total cumulated real growth of pre-tax per adult national income by percentiles (growth incidence curves). Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).

Average annual real growth rates of pre-tax per adult income by percentiles (growth incidence curves). Equal-split-adults series (income of married couples divided by two).
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1. Main contribution: by combining fiscal data, national accounts and survey data, we have constructed "Distributional national accounts" (DINA) for France, i.e. unified series for the distribution of total income, labor income, capital income and wealth over the 1900-2013 period.

2. We observe large changes in inequality, both over time and across countries, largely due to different institutions and public policies. Inequality is political, not natural.

3. This work is due to be extended to lots of countries: World wealth and income database.
Appendix
Figure C3. Income shares: tabulations vs micro-files
(equal-split individuals, fiscal income excl. cap.gains)