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Methodological Notes

for "Income Taxes and Redistribution in the Early Twentieth Century" and "Income Tax Progressivity and Inflation during the World Wars"

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Methodological Notes

for “Income Taxes and Redistribution in the Early Twentieth Century” and “Income Tax Progressivity and Inflation during the World Wars”^{*}

Sara Torregrosa-Hetland[†], *Oriol Sabaté*[‡]

Abstract

This document presents the methodological approach used in two papers about historical income taxes: “Income taxes and redistribution in the early twentieth century” (Torregrosa-Hetland and Sabaté, 2021) and “Income tax progressivity and inflation during the World Wars” (Torregrosa-Hetland and Sabaté, 2019). We first describe the general method and sources used to obtain synthetic distributions of income and calculate the effective income tax rates and the corresponding indices of progressivity and redistribution. Secondly, we discuss the most important country-specific issues that have been taken into account in our calculations. Finally, the third section looks at the accuracy of our synthetic income distributions and tax simulations by comparing them with the original series from the tax statistics. The two aforementioned papers summarize this same information in their methodological sections, but this note goes more in depth into some details that might be of interest to some readers.

Keywords: Taxation, Redistribution, Progressivity, Income tax, World Wars.

JEL codes: H23, H24, N42, N44

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1. General methodological approach

This document contains the explanation of sources and methodologies used for micro-simulating the operation of income taxes in Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States, during the first half of the twentieth century. Departing from aggregate historical data, we obtain samples of synthetic taxpayers with their corresponding tax variables (gross income, tax due, tax rates, etc). We have used the resulting databases in two papers that deal with different specific aspects: the evolution of progressivity and redistribution (Torregrosa-Hetland and Sabaté, 2021) and the impact of inflation during the World wars in the extension of income taxes (Torregrosa-Hetland and Sabaté, 2019). The data will continue to be used within the objectives of the project “Taxing for the Welfare State: progressivity in the rise of social spending (1910-1970)”.

For the objectives of the project and the two papers, we need to look at incomes and effective tax rates across the entire distribution of incomes (which do not only provide valuable information on their own, but also constitute the basis for the calculation of indices of progressivity and redistribution). Unfortunately, the historical sources only provide information in aggregate form, and for tax units over a certain level of income (the exemption threshold in place). This section explains the method used to approximate incomes below these thresholds, and to estimate effective tax rates and the corresponding indices based on the information available in the tax statistics.

The original data used in the papers comes from the historical tax statistics of each country and provides us with these (incomplete) distributions of income, tax returns and (for some years) tax due. The most comprehensive series (yearly since 1914) exist for the United States, while in the other two countries the information is scattered over time. When it exists, the data suffers from serious shortcomings that make the primary sources unusable without some elaboration. To begin with, and as mentioned earlier, the data is generally limited to tax units that filled the income tax form for the tax authorities, so it lacks information on the number of people exempted from paying the income tax, as well as on their income. However, for our purposes we need complete information across the entire income distribution (not just on taxpayers) for several years.

Secondly, the aforementioned distributions of income and tax returns are grouped in the sources by income levels that generally do not coincide with those of the brackets in the tax schedules, and also change across countries and over the years. For instance, the distribution of income and tax returns in the United Kingdom in 1937/38 is based on 24

income levels ranging from a minimum of £200 to over £50,000, whereas in 1949/50 the same information is divided in 12 levels, which extend from £135 to over £20,000. On the other hand, the tax schedule is divided in 13 brackets ranging from £125 to over £50,000 in 1937/38, and in 12 brackets from £135 to over £20,000 in 1949/50 (that do not coincide, however, with the 12 income levels in the distribution of income and tax returns mentioned above). Thus, in order to make calculations comparable across countries and over time, and to illustrate the distribution of tax rates over the population, we need to adapt these numbers to a synthetic micro-distribution.

To address these issues, we have first gathered information on the total number of tax units (individuals or families that are considered one unit for the purpose of income tax, including those with incomes below the exemption limits) and their total income for each country during the first half of the twentieth century. These data come from various works in the top incomes literature (exact references are given for each country in the next section). The residual between total income of all tax units in the economy and income assessed by the tax authorities (and therefore available in our primary sources) corresponds to the income of tax units below the exemption threshold, whereas the analogous residual between total number of tax units and tax returns is the number of tax units exempted.⁴ This information allows us to have at our disposal the distribution of income, tax returns and tax due, for the entire population of tax units, albeit grouped in non-homogeneous brackets.

We follow the recent method and software developed by Blanchet et al. (2017)⁵ to disaggregate data from grouped statistics, such as cumulative income shares, which has been devised precisely for tax data. The procedure generates a synthetic sample consistent in mean and distribution with the original information inputted, using the properties of the Pareto coefficients. The calculus is based on the cumulative share of tax returns and total income for each income bracket, as well as on the total average income for a given year. The resulting samples contain 1 million equally weighted observations for each year; a number high enough to capture the higher variability present in the upper part of the income distribution. These synthetic samples are mostly consistent with the original data in terms of number of units and average incomes in each bracket (see Section 3).

⁴Note that the residual might also include incomes not reported by those who filed returns (fraud), and it is therefore only an (over)approximation of the revenues of the exempted population. This might be a problem of considerable magnitude in some cases, and it will be tackled in future work.

⁵ Previous versions of this work used the method by Shorrocks and Wan (2008), implemented through the Stata package DASP, provided by Abdelkrim and Duclos (2007).

Once the synthetic sample has been generated, we proceed in a way similar to Piketty (2001, annex B.3) in applying the regulations in force in each country to simulate the operation of the tax, estimating tax payments for the average income of each quantile (in our case, one million).⁶ The tax base corresponds to the gross income (total amount originally received by the tax unit) excluding deductions for costs (for instance, for housing repairs) and exempted incomes (such as those below the exemption limits). As a first step we deduct family allowances (deductions for the taxpayer based on his marital status and the number of children, when present) from the tax base to obtain taxable income.⁷ Since these allowances depend on family circumstances, we generate eight synthetic taxpayer types within each observation: singles and couples with zero, one, two, or three children. After deducting the corresponding family allowances from the original gross income (thus obtaining taxable income), we apply the marginal tax rates in the schedule to each synthetic taxpayer type. When we have obtained the tax due corresponding to each of them, we calculate the value for each of the million original observations as a weighted average of the different family types.⁸

Next, we calculate the effective income tax rate by dividing each observation's tax due by its gross income. This effective tax rate represents a simple average for all the tax units represented by each of the 1-million synthetic taxpayers. We also estimate average effective tax rates for different percentiles and permilles of the income distribution by averaging the effective tax rates of all observations that fall within the corresponding income levels.

Effective tax rates can also be calculated in an aggregate form: total tax due of the group / total gross income of the group. This is different from our approach described above, and the aggregate results will normally be higher (in a progressive tax).⁹ We have also calculated effective tax rates in this way (for a few income brackets) in order to compare our simulations with the statistics provided by (or directly obtainable from) the original tax sources. As can be seen in Section 3, they are largely consistent. The main differences are

⁶ The rationale that follows applies to all countries of our sample, with specificities described in the following sub-sections.

⁷ Other deductions and allowances are present in some cases, but we mostly cannot include them in our calculations due to the lack of statistical information on their distribution. We do include several of them in the case of the United Kingdom and the United States, given the higher quantities involved (see the following sections). Nevertheless, in general, family allowances are the most important ones.

⁸ The information on the distribution by family types comes from the tax statistics themselves, except for the United States, for which we used the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (1950) that provides information from the Census of 1940. The same family distributions (weights) have been used over the years, since there is no yearly information and this feature does not experience abrupt changes; Piketty (2001) followed the same approach for 1915-44.

⁹ The tax rates calculated in this aggregate way are equivalent to the average effective tax rates defined above, weighting tax units by their income.

generally found at the upper part of the income distribution, where our estimators are sometimes higher. This discrepancy seems to be driven by the low number of observations in these top groups, which renders the estimates imprecise, as well as by the fact that additional tax allowances and deductions that we do not consider benefited mostly the well-off. The comparison, overall, suggests that our calculations are a reasonable depiction of the original tax data.

At this stage, we are ready to calculate the progressivity and redistribution of the income tax system in our three countries of interest. We follow the general framework in public economics to estimate progressivity and redistribution indices (Kakwani, 1977; Lambert, 2001), using the 'progres' stata module developed by Peichl and van Kerm (2007). For progressivity we use the Kakwani index, which is obtained as the difference between the concentration of tax payments C_T and the Gini of gross incomes G_Y :

$$K = C_T - G_Y \quad (1)$$

The index would be 0 for a proportional tax (i.e., where tax payments were concentrated to the same extent as incomes), and gets positive values when the tax is progressive.

Redistribution is measured with the Reynolds-Smolensky index, which corresponds to the difference between the Gini indices of gross and net incomes (i.e., before and after tax):

$$RS = G_Y - G_{Y,T} \quad (2)$$

A tax is redistributive if $RS > 0$. The relationship between these indices is given by the expression:

$$RS = \left[\frac{aetr}{(1-aetr)} K \right] - RR \quad (3)$$

where RR is the effect of re-ranking between tax units. Redistribution by the income tax is thus positively affected by progressivity (K) and the average effective tax rate ($aetr$), defined in this case in aggregated terms.

2. Country-specific methodological approaches

In this section, we describe specific adjustments to the general methodology that had to be made in some cases to adapt the general methodology to the tax regulations in place.

2.1. Sweden

- Total income: the total income series we use comes from Roine and Waldenström (2010),¹⁰ but has been adjusted for consistency with the tax base definition in the Swedish income tax in the period under study. This entails the following:
 - Social benefits have been removed, since they were not taxable before 1974. The series (starting in 1937) is also provided by Roine and Waldenström (2010), table A1 in the Appendix.
 - Municipal income taxes have been removed in the period 1920-42, since they were deductible for the state tax (see Roine and Waldenström, 2010, table 7.1). We have estimated them using the reported tax base and the average municipal tax rates in Du Rietz et al (2015), Appendix D, table 3.
 - Wealth imputation: a fraction of the value of wealth was included in the tax base of the Swedish income tax between 1911 and 1948. The fraction was first one sixtieth, and then reduced to one percent in 1939 (Henrekson and Stenkula, 2015, p. 31). Because of this, the total value of this wealth estimate for all taxpayers had to be added to “total income” before proceeding with the disaggregation (prior to 1945, see next point). We have estimated total imputed wealth with the 1921 datum coming from the census (wealth as a share of income for the whole population; *Statistical Yearbook* 1929), and extended the series using the variations in the capital-income ratios from Waldenström (2017).
 - Capital gains: we use the series of total income including capital gains. Capital gains are a part of income according to the classical Haig-Simons definition, but they are often excluded from studies of inequality because of their irregular nature (a capital gain realized in one year may have been generated through a long period). See a discussion of their importance for Swedish income inequality in Roine and Waldenström (2010).

¹⁰ These total incomes were constructed with a “top-down” methodology for the period before 1943 (departing from National Accounts, but downward adjusting by a factor of 0.89), and “bottom-up” since 1943 (departing from the tax data).

- The series of total income including capital gains is estimated before 1945 using the percentage from this year, and thus is 1.24% superior to the series without capital gains. According to Roine and Waldenström (2010), this is possibly an underestimate.
 - Capital gains were taxed under the Swedish income tax, together with the rest of incomes, but to a varying extent across our period. Between 1911 and 1951, capital gains generated through more than five years were exempt, while the other were included in the tax base at their whole value. After 1951, more variation was introduced. See Du Rietz et al. (2014), table 1, page 12.
 - Downward adjustment of the incomes of those below the threshold (which is estimated as a residual) has been necessary in the tax years 1921 and 1945-46.
- Income distribution (tax base):
 - The distributions for 1945 and 1946, taken from *Skattetaxeringarna*, correspond to *sammanräknad nettoinkomst* and not *taxerat belopp* (tax base). The concept *sammanräknad nettoinkomst* does not include the wealth imputation, since it just refers to income net of costs of obtainment (but should not be confused with net incomes, i.e. after tax; see explanation in *Skattetaxeringarna* from tax year 1944, p. 5*). We have estimated a simple regression of the wealth share over (logged) income, using tabulated data from 1942 (Quensel, 1944, table VII), and used these results to impute wealth shares in the 1945 and 1946 microdata, adjusting to the total reported wealth shares given in the sources.
 - When comparing across countries, it needs to be taken into account that all tax base distributions for Sweden (until 1948) include these wealth imputations.
- Types of taxpayers:
 - The original statistics include, together with Swedish residents, other three types of taxpayers: Swedish living abroad, non-Swedish residents, and some types of juridical persons (not corporations). These are included in the personal income tax tabulations, together with the bulk of taxpayers.¹¹ Ideally, we would like to exclude juridical persons from our calculations, but this is not possible due to lack of data. *Taxeringen till inkomst...* for the year 1917 allows calculating that the three groups together account for around 1% of total taxpayers in each income

¹¹ But, until 1917, they are not distributed under 6,000 kr (since the rules for allowances did not apply to them).

level (0.3% in the case of juridical persons). Juridical persons represented 2.0% of the taxable base and 3.8% of the tax paid in that year, a percentage remarkably similar to that in 1939 (1.5 and 4.4% respectively, according to the data in *Skattetaxeringarna*). We are thus quite confident that this is not causing any significant bias in our estimates.

- o The Swedish regulation obliged married couples to present a joint return up to the income year 1966. Between 1966 and 1970, there was an option for them to make separate returns, and after 1971 the individual return has been the standard (compulsory). See Söderberg (1996). This issue does not affect our estimations in the paper, therefore, since the change to individual taxation of married couples took place after the studied period.
- Family allowances and estimation of taxable income:
 - o Family structure data (share of households corresponding to each of the family types) are taken for 1913 and 1917 from the tax sources, *Taxeringen till inkomst...* These correspond to tax units under 6,000 krs (which were the ones entitled to family allowances). The original data includes three different family types (single without children, couple with or without children), and we have calculated the average number of children for the couples who had them from the statistics of deductions claimed for children (2.59 and 2.34 respectively). For 1945, we have the distribution of tax units with taxable income found in the census (*Folkräkning*). Since this one was very coincident to the 1920 data in the distribution of singles and couples, we have used it as well for that previous year.
 - o Taxable income distribution data exist for 1912, 1913, 1917 and 1920 (by levels of tax base). We have therefore been able to check the accuracy of our estimates, in terms of taxable income as a share of tax base for different income brackets. Our estimated taxable incomes are generally higher than in the sources, especially for the lower and middle-income levels, which probably arises from them having more children and therefore more children allowances than the average.¹² The effect might be that our calculations underestimate progressivity.
 - o Starting in 1920, family allowances varied according to the price level in the municipality of residence of the taxpayer, distinguishing five groups. We have

¹² Data on number of children by family income level are not available in Sweden. According to Dribe and Scalone (2014), families of lower social classes (by profession) in 1900 had more children, but by 1960 there was no clear social gradient (data from censuses).

used the distribution of taxpayers by city group to calculate weighted allowances. Data come from *Taxeringen...* 1920, pp. 6*-7*, 36*, 40*, and from *Sociala Meddelanden* 1942, nr. 10, p. 807 (corresponding to 1935, and used throughout WWII)¹³.

- o Since 1938, the allowances for singles followed a special table, which meant they were reduced as taxable income grew. We have taken these values from the original tabulations in the law (one table for each city group).
- o In 1920, the source provides the distribution of taxable income, by levels of taxable income. This allows us to perform an alternative estimation, where we directly disaggregate taxable income, and proceed from there with the estimates of tax dues (without having to simulate family allowances). The results of this alternative estimation coincide very closely with those of our baseline. Even if this has to do with the 1920 tax being widely proportional for most of the distribution, estimated effective tax rates are not far from each other at the top either.
- Tax schedules:
 - o The tax schedules (marginal tax rates applied to each level of taxable income) are taken from Du Rietz et al (2013), Appendix D.
 - o The system of 1911 is more complex than the general explanation, since under 6.000 krs the schedule was given in average rates (i.e., not marginal: the tax rate given in the tables was applied to all of taxable income). Furthermore, because the filing threshold was not a personal exemption, tax rates were determined by gross income and not by taxable income, as it was the case later on.
 - o We have included the *extraskatt* in 1919, the *extra statlig inkomstskatt* in 1932-38, and the *värmskatt* in 1945-46. These were additional taxes on income, which in combination with the general tax resulted in a more progressive schedule. The corresponding increases in revenue were ultimately incorporated to the general income tax.

¹³ The original source for the 1935 distribution is *Socialstyrelsens kung. ang. indelning för taxering till statlig inkomst- och förmögenhetsskatt samt kommunalskatt av samtliga orter i riket med avseende å levnadskostnadernas höjd (författningssamling nr 16)*.

2.2. *United Kingdom*

- Income distribution:
 - The British income data comes mainly from various volumes of the *Reports of the Commissioners of His Majesty's Inland Revenue* (from now on, the Reports). The 64th Report (corresponding to the fiscal year 1920-21) provides these estimates for the fiscal year 1919-20, and thus constitutes our source of information to study the post-WWI period. According to the commissioners, the Financial Act passed in 1920 made the aforementioned estimations too difficult and costly to calculate, so analogous estimates were not presented again until new special investigations were conducted just before and after WWII (1937 and 1949). We therefore rely on the 83rd Report for the estimates related to the fiscal year 1937-38, and the 94th Report for the fiscal year 1949-50.¹⁴ These estimates have been updated with the information provided by Scott and Walker (2020) for 1937-38 and 1949-50. Data on taxpayers, income, and tax due, for the fiscal year 1911/12 (our pre-WWI benchmark) also comes from Scott and Walker (2020).¹⁵
 - The 64th Report provides information on income assessed *in* the year 1919-20, which includes income generated in this same fiscal year but also income carried forward from preceding years (mainly related to profits from trade assessed under Schedule D). Unfortunately, the Report does not specify how much income corresponds to 1919-20 and to previous fiscal years. According to the Report this amount is “*relatively small and fairly constant*” (p. 108), so we have not made any adjustment to address this issue. Secondly, the income tax in our period of study included not only the regular income tax but also the so-called “super-tax” (imposed upon incomes that surpassed a certain income level – see below). The income assessed in a given year (e.g., 1919-20) was assessable to the regular income tax in the same current fiscal year (in our example, 1919-20), whereas it was assessable to the super-tax in the following year (1920-21). We, nevertheless, have estimated the final tax due for 1919-20 as if the entire income was assessable to the tax in 1919-20, since we are more interested in the tax due generated by the

¹⁴ Even if similar estimates exist for 1938-39 and 1948-49, they rely on the information provided by the 1937 income census. Hence, we prefer to use the census years to improve the accuracy of the estimates.

¹⁵ No similar information has been found for 1912-13 or 1913-14. Scott and Walker (2020, 41) rely on unpublished estimates made by the Commissioners of Inland Revenue. According to the authors, these estimates had probably been kept confidential due to the “extreme political sensitivity of Britain’s high concentration of income and wealth”.

income of a given year (despite of the limitations described above) rather than on the specific year when the income becomes assessable.

- o Information on the distribution of income, tax units, and tax due, for our pre-WWII benchmark (1937-38) comes from the 83rd Report (published in 1946). The Report (Table 20, p. 30) provides data on the number of incomes, the total income before tax, and tax due, for 24 income brackets (ranging from £200-£219 to above £50,000). The distribution of income and tax units above £20,000 is further disaggregated by using the new figures provided by Scott and Walker (2020, 52). While the 83rd Report provides only 3 income brackets above this level, the latter divides them in 7 brackets.
- o Information on the distribution of income and tax units for our post-WWII benchmark (1949-50) comes from Scott and Walker (2020, 53), who update the figures found in the 94th Report (published in 1952). Information on the distribution of tax due comes from the 94th Report (Table 110, p. 117). The information in the report is disaggregated in 12 income brackets (ranging from £135-£150 to above £20,000), whereas Scott and Walker (2020) disaggregate 6 additional brackets (from £20,000 to above £100,000, although they do not provide tax due data).
- o Along the lines of the post-WWI benchmark, the estimates for 1937-38 and 1949-50 reflect the assessments made in a particular year, not the assessments corresponding to the income generated that particular year. However, the 94th Report states, once again, that *“Most of these assessments will of course relate to the year in which they are made; there will also be a small proportion of assessments in respect of past periods, but broadly speaking these may be regarded as balanced by assessments for the year in question which are made in subsequent years.”* (p. 39) Thus, no adjustment has been made.
- Total income and total tax units:
 - o Both the total tax units in the population and the total income come from Atkinson (2007, Table T4B.1, p. 126), except for total income in 1911 which comes from Scott and Walker (2020). We follow Atkinson and relate each fiscal year (e.g., 1919-20) to the population in the calendar year (1919 in this specific example) in

order to “*make some allowance for the lags*” in the income tax statistics already mentioned in the previous paragraph.¹⁶

- o As for the total income for the 1919-20 benchmark, Atkinson starts from the “actual income” assessed by the Inland Revenue and adds the income of non-filers (exempted from paying the tax) in order to find the total income corresponding to the total number of tax units (what the author calls “adjusted total income”). We also rely on the same category of income (“actual income”) for the income of taxpayers, so we can subtract this assessed income from the Atkinson’s “adjusted total income” to find the income of the exempted tax units.¹⁷ The distribution of “actual income” in which we base our calculations excludes the so-called “non-personal income” (i.e., income of companies that falls under the income tax but is not distributed to shareholders in dividends) and the income accruing to non-residents (which account for about 10% of the total income charged to income tax). Atkinson also excludes the former item to calculate his “adjusted total income”, but not the latter. This inconsistency between the two datasets would overestimate our estimated total income for the exempted taxpayers. Fortunately, both the Report and Atkinson estimate the total amount of non-residents’ income, so we can subtract it from Atkinson’s “adjusted total income”. Even if this adjustment entails that we do not take this source of income into account in our calculations, the amount is small (less than 2% of total income) and it corrects the overestimation of exempted taxpayers.
- o Atkinson (2007) follows the same procedure described above for the year 1937-38, but it varies a little when it comes to the total income for 1949-50. The original total income is taken directly from the Income Census mentioned above (called “total net income”), to which he subtracts undistributed profits and adjusts for non-filers. This “net income” differs slightly from the income category used in the previous benchmarks (namely, “actual income”). As a result, the “total net income” used by Atkinson is 0.7% higher than the total income used in our calculations (based on the disaggregated actual income provided by Inland Revenue). Since the discrepancy is small, we do not make any adjustment to it.

¹⁶ Fiscal years run from April to March.

¹⁷ Our total income for tax filers is slightly different from Atkinson’s (around 3% lower or higher) because we use the sum of disaggregated income by income groups, whereas Atkinson uses the aggregated figures provided by the same source.

- o Most capital gains are not included in Atkinson’s (2007, 88-89) total income nor in the disaggregated tax figures. Indeed, the Report on the Income Tax published by the Inland Revenue in 1920 states that “*Casual non-recurring or occasional profits arising from transactions that do not form part of the ordinary business of the person who makes them are accordingly held not to be within the scope of the Income Tax, and consequently escape taxation.*” (Royal Commission on the Income Tax, 1920, 19). Hence, income that is not likely to recur annually remains outside of the scope of our estimations.
- Allowances and estimation of taxable income:
 - o The system of allowances and exemption limits varied significantly before and after the Financial Act of 1920. In the two periods, incomes that did not reach the exemption limit were exempted from making a tax return and from paying the tax. When incomes exceeded such threshold, most part of the income below the threshold continued to be exempted from paying the tax through the operation of a system of personal allowances (although a small portion of such income would become liable to the income tax). Prior to the Financial Act of 1920, the corresponding tax due was graduated by deducting from the tax base a type of personal allowance called “abatements”. These were fixed deductions (i.e., pounds free from paying the income tax) on incomes that fell within certain income brackets. Apart from these abatements, in our calculations we take into account family allowances, which varied according to the number of children and the existence of a spouse (as long as the total income did not exceed certain thresholds).¹⁸ A similar system of allowances was in place after 1920, but family allowances were not subject to thresholds anymore. Moreover, the system of abatements was abolished, and instead single and married allowances were implemented (even if the name for the “single allowance” changed over time). These allowances operated once the total income exceeded the exemption limit (once again, these allowances exempted the bulk of the income below the threshold from paying the tax, although a small portion of it was left uncovered).
 - o After 1920, when the income of a married couple included earned income of the wife, the married allowance was increased by a percentage of the wife’s income (with a maximum allowance that varied throughout the period; for instance, in

¹⁸ The latter were introduced in 1918-19 for incomes below £800.

1920 the maximum allowance was £45, which amounted to 20% of the married allowance). Unfortunately, we do not have information on the distribution of earned income of wives. In order to take this allowance into account, we assume that all married couples claimed an exemption that amounted to half of the maximum allowance (e.g., in 1920 it would be £22.5).

- o Regarding married allowances, it is worth noting that since 1914 married women were allowed to submit their own income tax declaration (separately from that of their husband). However, this provision did not affect the total amount of tax paid by the couple, since marginal tax rates and allowances were calculated taking the joint income into account (and were distributed between them in proportion to their income). As a result, the wife's income was commonly submitted to the income tax as part of that of their husband (who was legally responsible for the joint income for the purpose of the tax, see 65th Report, p. 90, and HMSO 1980, p. 6-7). The option of having their incomes assessed separately as if they were two single persons was not introduced until 1971 (HMSO, 1980, 7). For this reason, we treat all married couples as single tax units for the purpose of the income tax (liable to the provisions of the tax mentioned above).
- o The aforementioned abatements in place prior to the 1920 Financial Act were slightly different for soldiers, sailors and other professionals: since 1915-16, those individuals with incomes below £160 were not required to fill in tax returns, and from £160 to £300 they were granted a special abatement of £160. By contrast, the general public was required to fill in tax returns when their income was above £130, and the abatement for incomes below £300 amounted to £120. Soldiers and sailors with incomes above £300 were subject to the same abatements than the general population. Since our fiscal sources do not differentiate the distribution of income for these two groups of taxpayers, we cannot separate the two systems of abatements. In order to avoid the risk of overestimating the total number of taxpayers and their tax due, we implement an adjustment to tax scheme: we simulate an abatement of £140 for incomes between £130 to £300 (half-way through the general abatement and that of the soldiers). In this way, we aim to reach a compromise between the two systems.
- o Soldiers and sailors were also granted lower marginal tax rates for incomes below £2,500 (in place since 1915-16), which probably generates an upward bias in our effective tax rates estimates (see the 61st Report published in 1918, p. 9). In this

case we have preferred not to implement any adjustment to the series to avoid modifying the tax regulation too much. Furthermore, the estimated aetrs for incomes below £2,500 correspond very closely to the aetrs found in the original sources (see next section), which indicates that our calculations are precise enough.

- o Another important allowance in place after the Financial Act of 1920 and taken into account in our estimations was the so-called “earned income allowance”. Income was divided between “earned income” and “unearned income” (or “investment income”). A percentage of the first £ of earned income was excluded from paying the income tax (see below more information and sources about earned and unearned incomes).
- o As for our post-WWI benchmark (1919-20), an additional allowance was granted to those total incomes that exceeded certain limits, such as the limit above which the individual ceases to be entitled to an exemption or abatement or when the individual becomes liable to a higher tax rate. The allowance ensured that *“the total tax payable does not exceed the sum of the following amounts:—(1) the amount of tax that would have been payable if his total income had reached but not exceeded that limit; (2) the amount by which his total income exceeds that limit.”* (63rd Report, p. 59). For the sake of simplicity, we have only included the operation of such allowances when they are related to the income tax brackets. Hence, when a person jumped to the next tax bracket, she paid the new tax marginal rate only if the condition cited above was not breached. We calculate this allowance for both earned and unearned incomes (this provision was implemented by the 1916 Financial Act, and therefore it does not affect our 1911-12 benchmark; see 60th Report, p. 11).
- Earned and unearned income:
 - o Apart from the aforementioned allowance, the distinction between earned and unearned income had associated two key provisions for the fiscal years prior to the Finance Act of 1920. First, different marginal tax rates schemes applied to each type of income, the rates imposed upon earned income being lower than those imposed upon unearned income. For instance, the marginal tax rate in 1919-20 for gross incomes between £130 and £400 (the lowest bracket) was 11.25% for earned income and 15% for unearned income. Secondly, in the case of mixed income, abatements and allowances were *“to be given, as far as possible, out of*

the income chargeable at the lower rate" (63rd Report, p. 59). Hence, family allowances would only reduce the amount of unearned income assessable to income tax if these allowances were higher than the taxable earned income. These provisions were abolished by the Finance Act of 1920 and substituted for the aforementioned earned income allowance.

- o This implies that in our estimates we need to differentiate between these two types of income. The 83rd Report and the 94th Report provide this disaggregation based on several income brackets for the fiscal years 1937-38 and 1949-50. However, for 1937-38 we use the disaggregation provided by Scott and Walker (2020), who include more information for high-income earners. Scott and Walker (2020) also provide the disaggregation between earned and unearned income across income brackets for 1911-12. Unfortunately, such information is not available for 1919-20. In our calculations, we assume that the distribution of earned and unearned income in 1919-20 followed the same pattern than in 1949-50. Even if 1911-12 and 1937-38 are closer in time, we use the 1949-50 distribution since it reflects the impact of the war on capital incomes.
- o In order to differentiate between earned and earned income, we have estimated a simple regression of the earned income share over (logged) income, and used these results to impute earned income shares in the simulated microdata. Since the relationship between earned income share and (logged) income is not always linear, we allowed for up to four interactions of (logged) income in the right-hand side of the equation.
- Marginal tax rates:
 - o The operation of marginal tax rates also changed a result of the Financial Act of 1920. As mentioned above, before 1920 earned and unearned income were subject to different marginal tax rates. Such rates were graduated by income level and applied to the entirety of the individual's taxable income (not just the income falling within the corresponding tax bracket). For instance, taxpayers with gross income falling in the second tax bracket would pay the second tax rate for the entirety of their taxable income (and not just for the income above the second tax bracket). A clear example of how tax rates worked can be found in the 62nd Report (corresponding to the fiscal year 1918/19), Table 9 (p. 11).
 - o After the 1920 tax reform, a standard tax rate (i.e., unique rate imposed upon taxable income) was complemented by the so-called reduced tax rates, which

were established to diminish the tax burden of low and middle incomes. Their operation, however, was similar to that of allowances. For instance, in 1949-50 individuals with gross income above the exemption limit (£135) were supposed to pay a unique standard tax rate (9 shillings per pound, tantamount to 45%) on their taxable income. However, the first £50 of taxable income paid a reduced rate (3 shillings per pound), whereas the next £200 of taxable income paid the second reduced rate (6 shillings per pound). A very detailed description of the operation of the income tax after 1920 can be found in the 64th Report (corresponding to the fiscal year 1920-21), p. 79-85.

- o Moreover, we added the super-tax scheme (which taxed incomes above a certain threshold) following the specific rules that applied in each year. Unlike standard tax rates prior to 1920, surtax rates applied only to the income falling within their corresponding tax brackets.

2.3. *United States*

- Capital gains: the total income series we use (from Piketty and Saez, 2003) includes realized and taxed capital gains, to the extent possible. The regulation concerning these has been quite variable through US history:
 - o Between 1913 and 1933, realized capital gains are included in the tax base. They were initially subject to the same taxes as other incomes, but in 1922 a preferential tax rate was introduced (nominally as a different tax). Since we do not simulate this tax privilege, our calculations will be a slight overestimate of the tax burden on high incomes (those who concentrate the capital gains). The quantities raised by this special tax can be seen in the *Statistics of Income for 1945*, table 19 (page 219).
 - o Since 1933, capital gains are only included at some percent of their value, which varies according to the period of generation (similar regulation as in Sweden after 1951). See *Statistics of Income for 1945*, page 55 and ff.; this is also explained in Piketty and Saez (2003), appendix. In practice, according to Piketty and Saez (2003), “the vast majority of capital gains always falls under the most favorable tax regime”, so capital gains would mostly be present at only 60-40% of their value. Similarly to above, we do not compute the tax privilege arising from an

“alternative tax” that was in place between the taxyears 1939 and 1944. (See *Statistics of Income for 1945*, p. 251).

- The series including capital gains is, on average, 2.27% higher than the one without capital gains through the period 1913-45, but it attains a maximum of 9% in 1928.
- Total income in 1944 seems to be overestimated, since the average for non-filers results above the threshold (1,000 \$). We have adjusted it to an average of 810, as in the previous year. This would be a problem arising from the transition to the use of “Adjusted Gross Income” in the US regulation, and the change of method of calculation of reference total incomes in Piketty and Saez (2003). Taxyear 1944 (income year 1943) is the last one where Piketty and Saez use a top-bottom approach. Of course, the problem could also arise because of non-filing (i.e. evasion) in the context of a rapid extension of the obligation.
- Income distribution data is taken from the *Statistics of Income for 1945* for the years up to 1946 (table 20, page 221 and ff.), and the *Statistics of Income...* of each year for 1947-50.
 - We always use distributions of all returns with income (including non-taxable, i.e. those who ended up paying no tax because of the effect of family allowances and other deductions).
 - Data for 1942-44 is completed with each year’s publication, in what respects to tax returns filed under an optional form below 3000 \$ (form 1040A). Sources: SOI 1941, table 13 (page 200), SOI 1942, table 13 (page 218), SOI 1943, table 9 (page 208).
 - For the years 1926-32, the filing obligation for individuals was set at 1,500 dollars, while the statistics present a first bracket of 1,000-2,000. Some individuals with gross incomes (net incomes in the US contemporaneous fiscal terminology) under 1,500 dollars had to file returns if their incomes *before deductions for costs of obtainment* were above a certain level. But most of those with incomes between 1,000 and 1,500 would not file returns. We have therefore assumed that the given distribution starts at 1,500 instead of 1,000, in order to be able to use this bracket for the disaggregation procedure and avoid losing information.

- Types of taxpayers:
 - Married couples could file separate returns in the US, which up to 1948 was of interest for those with two income earners, because there was one single schedule for all returns (Piketty and Saez, 2001, appendix). This issue was tackled in Piketty and Saez’s estimation of top income shares (footnote 59 in working paper version), but not in their series of total tax units in the economy, which is calculated as total adults minus married women.
 - The *Statistics of Income* provide information about the number of separate returns of married women in each year. They were between 1 and 3% of all returns during most of the period, attained an isolated maximum of 7.35% in 1932, and then lied between 4 and 5% in 1944-48. This entails a missadjustment between the “total tax units” number and the “actual tax returns”, which would imply that we would have less simulated tax units below the threshold, potentially overestimating their average incomes. Therefore, we correct this by adding the number of separate returns of married women to the “total tax units” series of Piketty and Saez (2003).
 - However, the fact that separate returns are made by relatively high-income couples means that the distribution of “tax returns” with which we work will be less unequal than the distribution of “households”, or “tax units” in the Piketty and Saez (2003) definition. This is a bias we are forced to acknowledge, but it is limited by the extent to which separate returns were actually made (see point above).
- Family allowances and estimation of taxable income:
 - Family structure data (share of households corresponding to each of the eight family types) is taken from the data on the surtax exemptions in *Statistics of Income for 1945*.
 - Family allowances come from Internal Revenue Service, Historical Tables.
 - Regarding the personal exemptions in 1945-46, the sources say: “For 1944-1945 [our tax years 1945-46], the personal exemption amounts (columns 1-3) were for “surtax” purposes only. The exemption for basic “normal tax” purposes was \$500 per tax return, augmented by the “earned income” of the spouse, up to \$500, on joint returns (SOI, Historical table 23, note 11). We do not have information on the structure of incomes within the couples, so we have simulated the exemption for couples in the normal tax as 700\$ (i.e., assumed an income of

200\$ from the spouse). This was the alternative that provided a better fit with the original data. In these years, deductions for dependents were only applicable to the surtax (see *Statistics of Income for 1944*, p. 7; also *Statistics of Income for 1945*, p. 32), which we incorporate into the calculations by simulating the normal tax and the surtax separately.

- Earned income tax credit: because of its limited character, we have not included the effects of an “earned income tax credit” which was in place, under different forms, between the tax years 1925 and 1944 (see the description in *Statistics of Income for 1945*, page 370).
 - In 1925-32 it was a tax credit (i.e. a reduction of the tax due, with some limitations), and amounted to an average of 4% of final income tax revenue (*Statistics of Income for 1945*, table 19, page 220).
 - In 1935-44 it operated as a tax allowance (i.e. a reduction of the tax base), but a much smaller one than basic and family allowances. In 1939, for example, it represented 11% of the amount deducted by the latter (calculated from data in *Statistics of Income for 1939*, pp. 8-9).
- Tax schedules
 - We have always included the surtax. Combined marginal tax rates for each bracket have been calculated with data from *Statistics of Income for 1945*, table A (p. 351-52) for the normal tax and table B (pp. 358 and ff.) for the surtax. Both taxes are simulated together, except for the period after tax year 1945 (because of difference in allowances).
 - The “defense tax” of 1940 is also included (it was 10 percent of the total “regular” tax, but limited to 10 percent of statutory “net income” in excess of the total regular tax).
 - Maximum effective tax rate limitations, which were in place between the tax years 1945 and 1964, have been taken into account (Internal Revenue Service, *Statistics of Income Tax Stats*, Historical Table 23).
- Deductions: in some years the sources present the distribution of gross income among income groups before subtracting relevant deductions (adjusted gross income), while in others it presents the distribution of gross income after having subtracted such deductions (what the sources for earlier years call net income). In order to operate with a consistent definition of gross income over time, and to include the impact of some quantitatively important deductions, we have performed an adjustment throughout.

The type of deductions available in the tax code varies across the years, and so does their distribution in terms of income levels. We use data from Geloso et al. (2018), which provide the distribution for most of the years, based on the original data in the *Statistics of Income* and some imputations (ref. their appendix). Their distribution is based on information for charitable contribution, interest, and taxes paid. The deduction for charitable contributions was introduced in the War Revenue Act of 1917, but already applied to the incomes of 1916 (tax year 1917), as discussed in Blakey (1917).¹⁹

- 1945-50: we regress the share of deductions in adjusted gross income, make an estimate of deductions for each tax unit, and subtract them from adjusted gross income before simulating taxes paid. For this, we used simple log-linear regressions (which have an R2 over 0.95). We complement the simulation with the standard deduction for tax units where deductions according to the equation were below the corresponding standard deduction. In 1945-56, the standard deduction was of \$500 when adjusted gross income was over \$5,000, and 10% of adjusted gross income if below this threshold.
- 1919-44: we regress the share of deductions in net income on income levels. The shares are calculated from the data in Geloso et al. (2018) (who provide the quantities deducted). We selected the equations with four interactions, which presented the best adjustment in terms of R2 and total estimated deductions. Deductions were estimated for each tax unit, imputing to those below the threshold the share estimated at the threshold. Estimated deductions are added to net incomes after calculating tax paid, to obtain a measure of gross income which is equivalent to AGI used by the official statistics after 1944.
 - Geloso et al. (2018) do not provide a profile for the taxyear 1926. We used in this case the profile of 1927, since in both years the same regulation was in place (Revenue act of 1926), and total deducted amounts are similar.
- 1918: we proceed similarly as in the surrounding years, with the difference that in this year one type of deductions (namely, contributions) were not subtracted from net incomes in the statistics (SOI 1945, p. 252, note 27 - to table 21). So, we have to simulate these contributions separately from other deductions. After the

¹⁹ “Another amendment, applicable to both 1916 and 1917 income taxes, provides for the exemption of gifts for charitable, religious, educational, and scientific purposes, to the extent of 15 per cent of the payer’s taxable net income” (Blakey, 1917, p. 804).

imputation of taxes paid based on taxable income, we add all deductions to gross incomes, in order to obtain gross income equivalent to AGI (which will allow us to calculate the effective tax rates and indices of progressivity and redistribution in a consistent manner with other years). Geloso et al's data for this year seems unfit for this purpose, since it is based on the sum of these three components (contributions, taxes, interest), and the total adjustment leads to an overestimation of deductions.

- The distribution of contributions is taken from 1923 (the nearest year with these data) (SOI 1922, table 7, page 95). We regress the share of contributions over net income, impute these shares to the 1918 data, calculate the corresponding contributions, and then adjust proportionally to the total amount deducted for contributions in 1918 (245,080 thousands of dollars).
- The distribution of interest and taxes is taken from 1937 (in this case, 1933 was the nearest available year, but the resulting quantities were too high) (SOI 1938, page 32). We regress the share of these deductions over net income, impute these shares to the 1918 data, calculate the corresponding deductions, and then adjust proportionally to the total amount deducted for deductions in 1918 (885, 763 thousands of dollars).
- 1917: we use the distribution obtained for 1918, adjusted to an estimated total for 1917 of 521,719 thousands of dollars (based on the percent that deductions represented in net income in 1918: 8.3%). The total of “general deductions” given in the source is too high for our purposes, because it includes deductions for costs incurred in the generation of incomes, which in the next year were deducted from each source in the statistics (see SOI 1917, p. 13). Geloso et al do not provide data for this year.

3. Accuracy of our synthetic samples and simulations

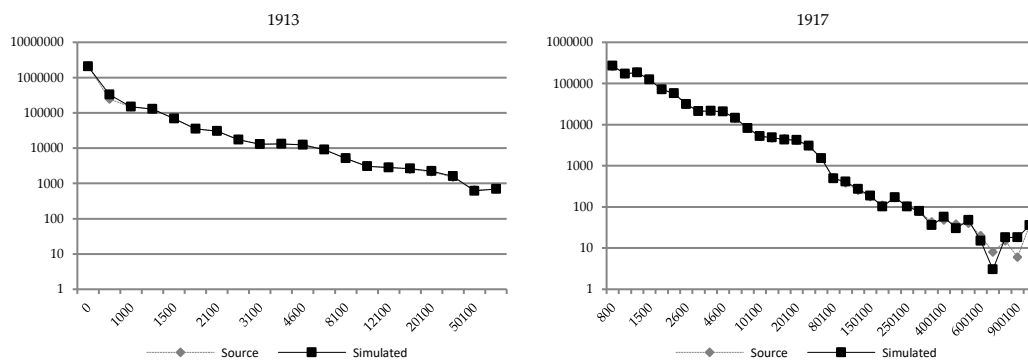
In this final section, we compare our synthetic samples with the original series provided by the historical sources to test their reliability. We first compare the number of units and average incomes in each income bracket (i.e., the accuracy of the results of the disaggregation procedure, using the brackets from the original sources). Secondly, we look at whether our estimated average effective tax rates in each of these income brackets (calculated in the

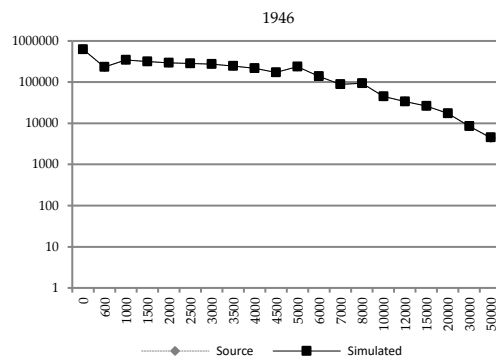
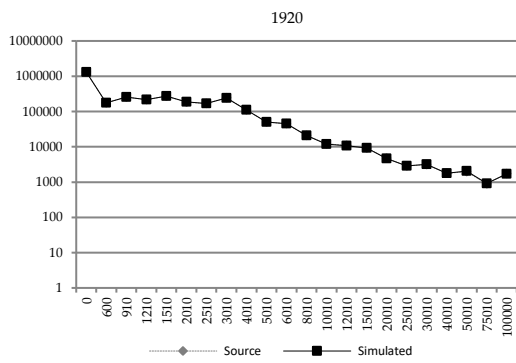
aggregate form) are consistent with the ones provided by (or directly obtainable from) the tax statistics.

Figures 1, 2 and 3 display the distribution of synthetic and original tax units by income brackets in the three countries (Sweden, United Kingdom and United States) for selected years. The grey lines (diamonds) reflect the distribution of tax units in the primary sources whereas the black lines (squares) depict our synthetic units. As mentioned above, the income brackets used in these figures are those employed by the tax statistics to illustrate the distribution of incomes and the operation of the tax.

Overall, the figures suggest that the synthetic samples are highly consistent with the original data. The two lines overlap to a large extent in most income groups, which suggests that our samples are reasonable depictions of the true distributions of tax units in these countries and time periods. Most of the differences can be found in the upper end of the income brackets, but this is most likely driven by the very small number of people included in these top groups. For instance, the largest differences in the United Kingdom in 1911 can be found in some of the seven higher income groups (above £25,000 per year). These seven groups, however, account for a total of 1,230 tax units according to the primary sources (1,482 in our sample), merely 0.005% of total tax units. In some other cases our synthetic samples do not contain any tax unit in the very upper income groups. For instance, none of our units in the United Kingdom in 1949 earned more than £75,000, while according to the historical tax statistics 50 people earned between £75,000 and £99,999 (the second highest income group in the graph) and 40 more than £100,000 (the top income group). This, again, affects the trifle 0.0003% of the population of tax units.

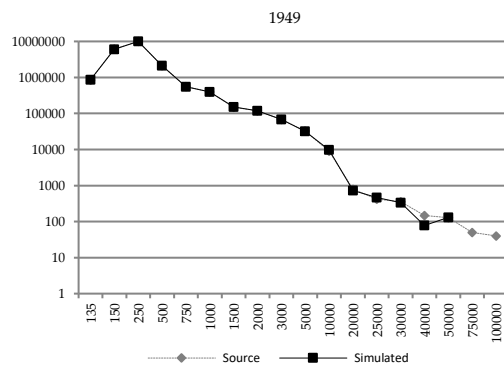
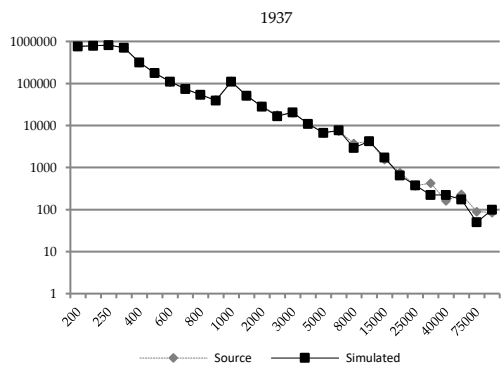
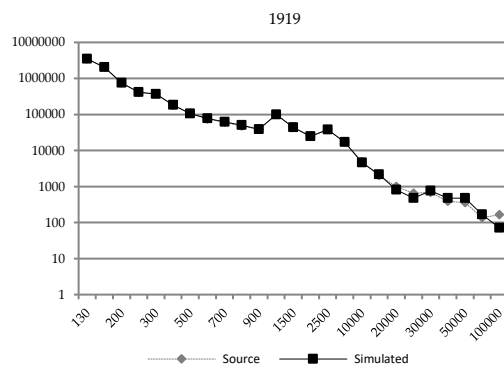
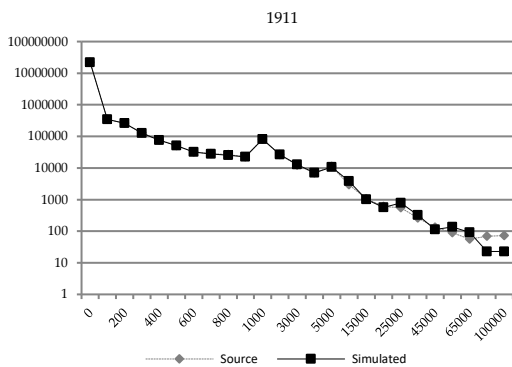
Figure 1. Number of tax units in Sweden, primary sources and synthetic sample





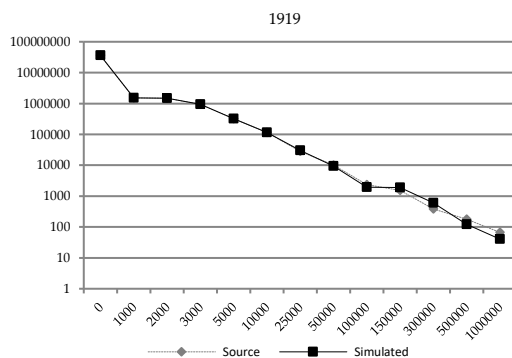
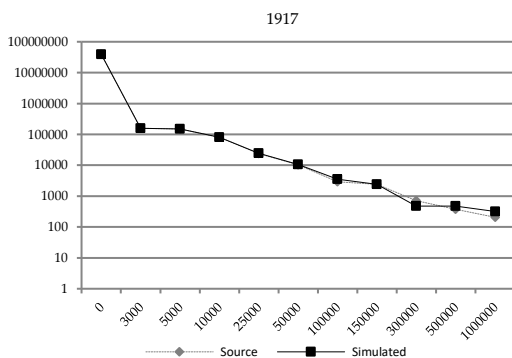
Sources: See text.

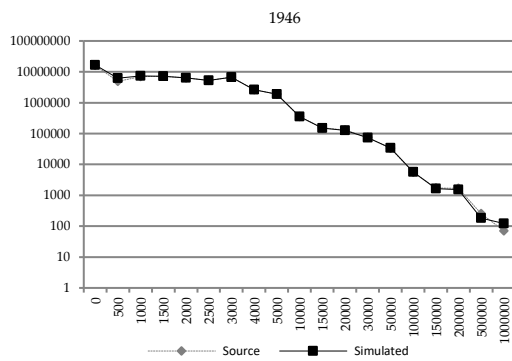
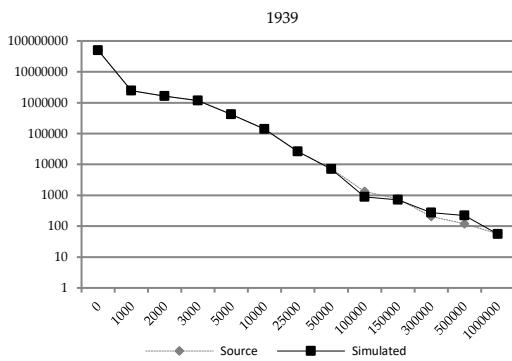
Figure 2. Number of tax units in the United Kingdom, primary sources and synthetic sample



Sources: See text.

Figure 3. Number of tax units in the United States, primary sources and synthetic sample

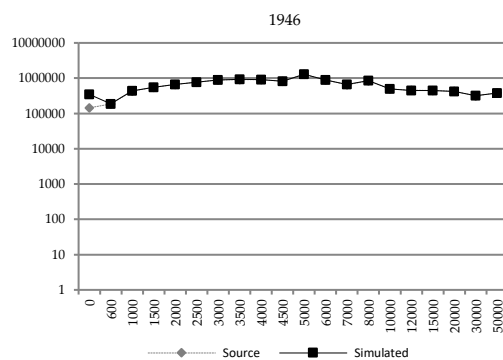
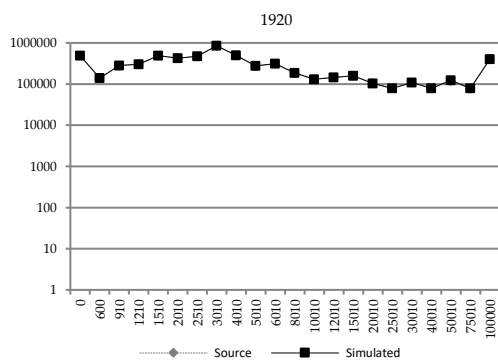
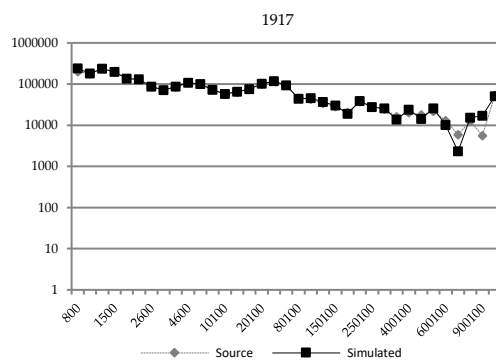
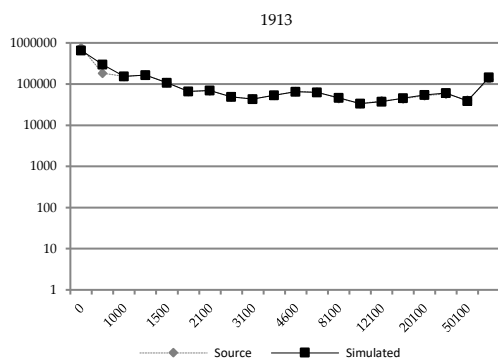




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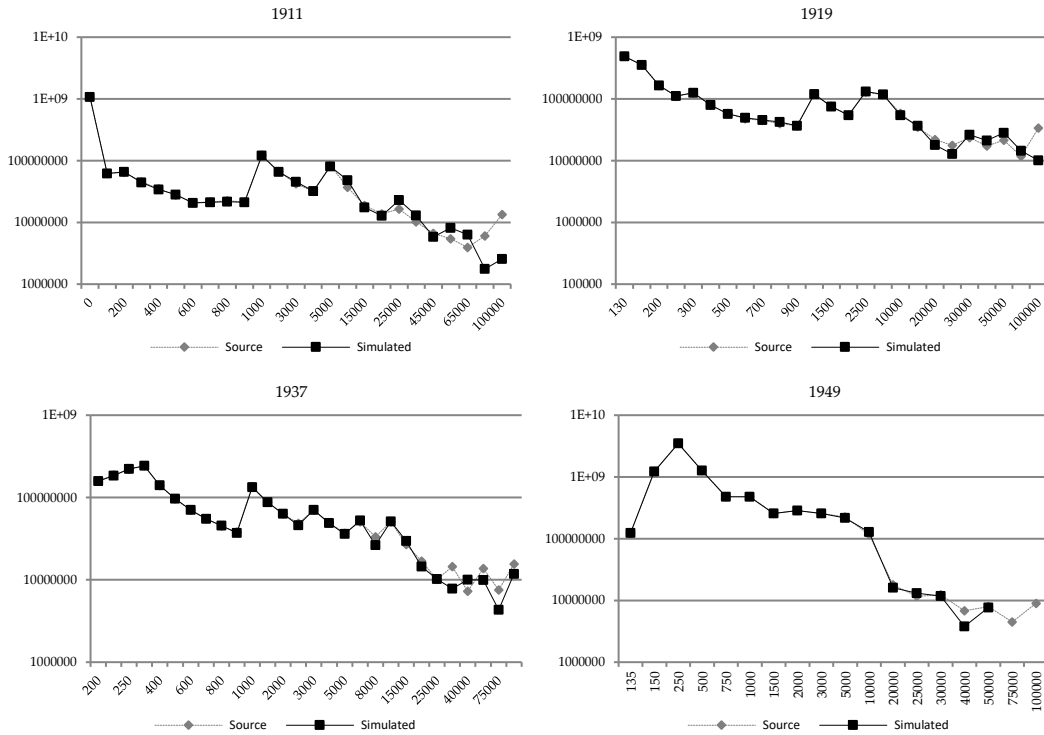
A similar picture can be found when it comes to incomes. Figures 4 to 6 depict the distribution of total income by the same income groups in the three countries and in the same benchmarks. Once again, the dashed and continuous lines (original and synthetic data) overlap to a large degree, except for the highest income groups.

Figure 4. Incomes in Sweden, primary sources and synthetic sample



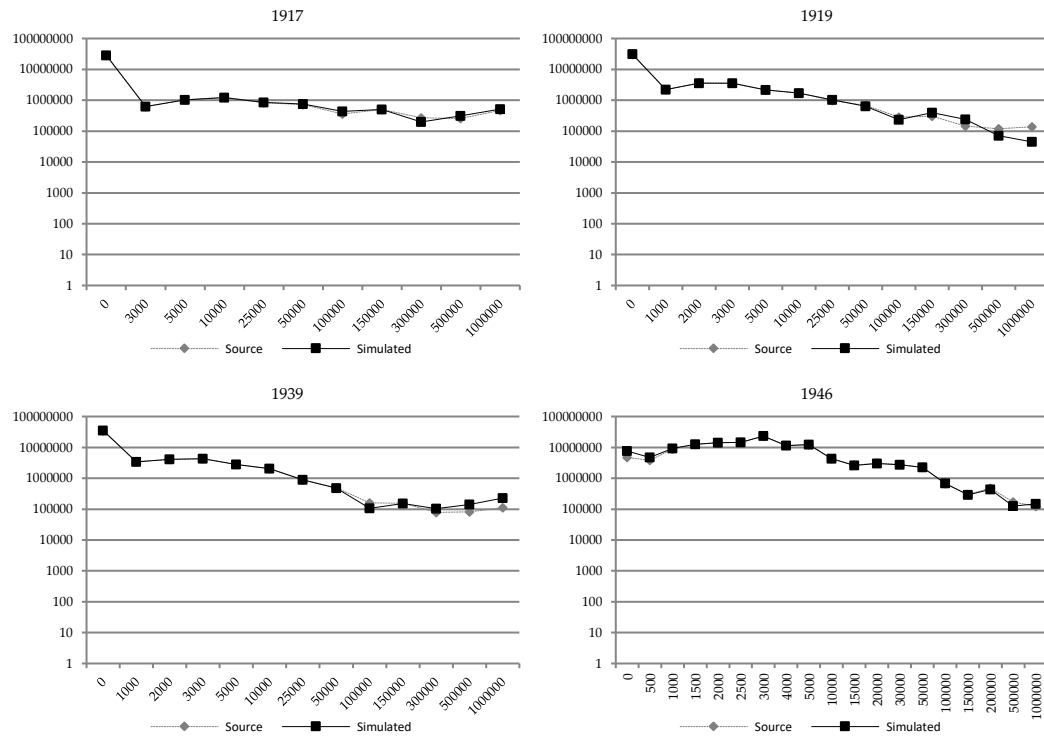
Sources: See text.

Figure 5. Incomes in the United Kingdom, primary sources and synthetic sample



Sources: See text.

Figure 6. Incomes in the United States, primary sources and synthetic sample



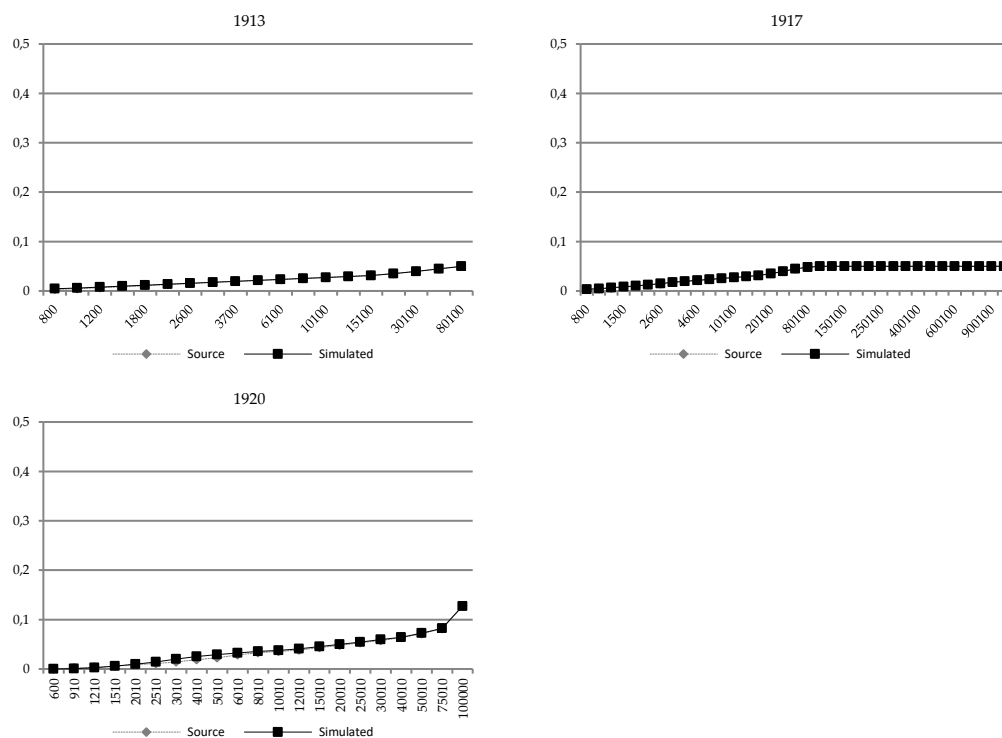
Sources: See text.

Finally, figures 7, 8 and 9 look at the consistency of our estimated effective income tax rates with the effective tax rates reported by the tax statistics. To do so we first disaggregate our

synthetic distribution into the same income brackets, and then calculate the total tax due per each group and their corresponding effective tax rates. These rates can be compared with the actual effective tax rates provided in the sources. The degree of fit between the original and the simulated tax rates depends both on the accuracy of our distribution of tax units and on how well our calculations emulate the actual operation of allowances and tax rates. In general terms, the figures suggest that we can be confident about the consistency of our estimated rates. The two lines are very close to each other in most cases, particularly in Sweden and in the United Kingdom.

Nevertheless, we can observe relevant differences in some country-years. To begin with, synthetic tax rates for low and middle income groups are higher than in the original series in several cases (most notably, in the United Kingdom and the United States after World War II). This is most likely the result of the operation of allowances that benefited these income groups but that we cannot take into account in our calculations (due to lack of information). For instance, in the United Kingdom in 1949 a bunch of relatively minor allowances were granted to taxpayers depending on their consumption habits (above all, for the hiring of housekeepers and for life insurance premiums).

Figure 7. Effective tax rates in Sweden, primary sources and synthetic sample

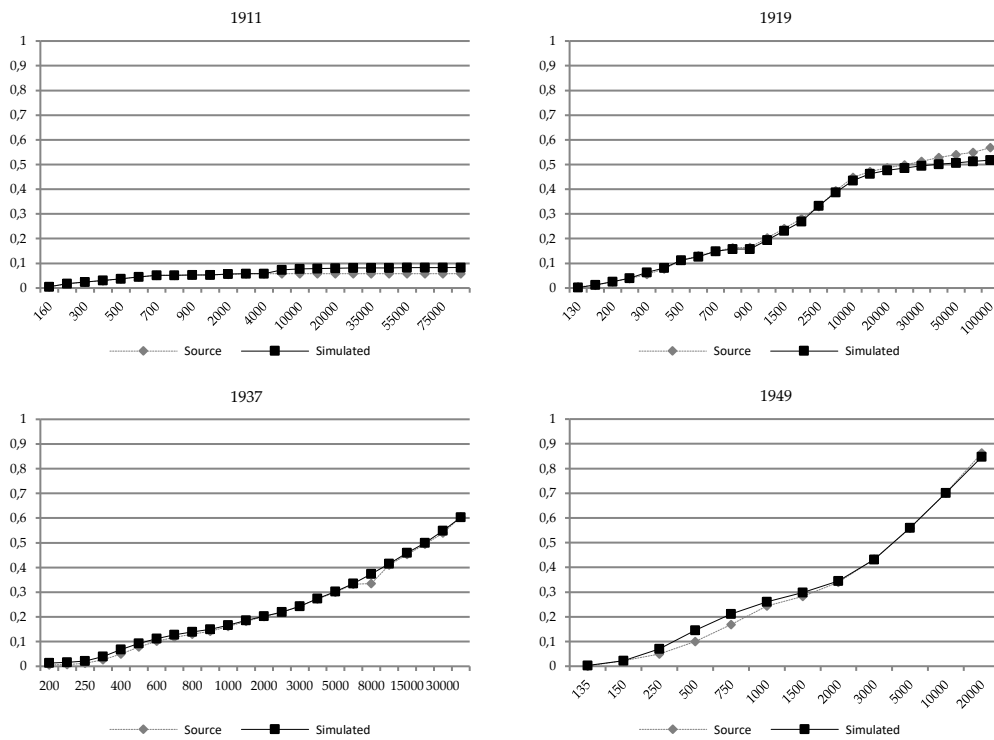


Sources: See text.

Note: The Swedish sources do not provide information on tax paid by income level in the 1940s, so we have not been able to perform this check.

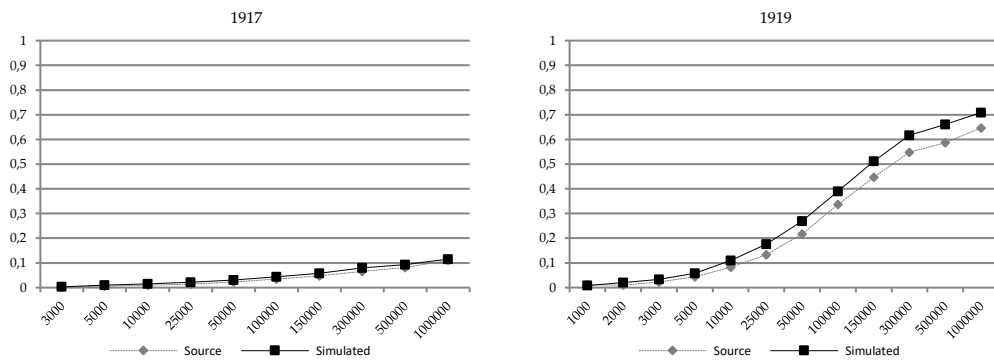
On the other hand, the consistency of our effective tax rates for the highest income groups varies considerably across countries and periods. In the United Kingdom the estimated tax rates at the end of World War I are somewhat lower than the original ones. In the United States, by contrast, our estimates are systematically higher at the upper end of the income distribution (particularly in the post-war periods), which indicates that some additional deductions and tax preferences that we do not take into account benefited disproportionately the well-off (for example, this is expected of the reduced rate on capital gains).

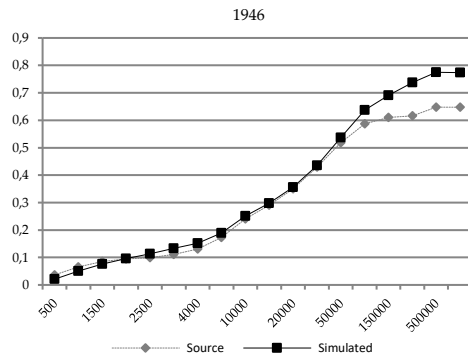
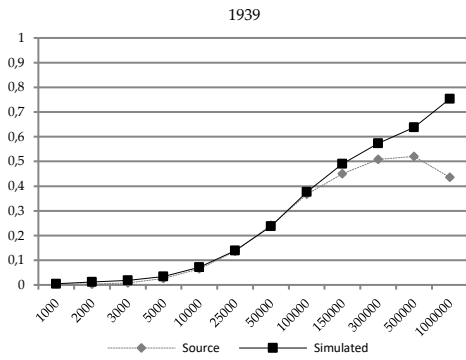
Figure 8. Effective tax rates in the United Kingdom, primary sources and synthetic sample



Sources: See text.

Figure 9. Effective tax rates in the United States, primary sources and synthetic sample





Sources: See text.

The original statistics we use for our three countries include non-taxable returns. These account for filers that ended up paying no income tax because personal exemptions and allowances reduced taxable income to zero. Including them in the denominator therefore biases the average effective tax rate downwards for the lower groups, and affects the comparison with our estimates (where the denominator only includes effective taxpayers). The quantitative impact of this, however, is very limited and cannot be observed in the graphs (with the possible exception of the United Kingdom after World War II, in which this downward bias effect could – together with the aforementioned allowances that have not been included in our calculations – explain the difference between the original and the estimated effective tax rates).

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