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Estate Planning Statistics & Costs

ComplexSearch Research | November 2026 edition | Federal Reserve SCF 2025 and 2022 microdata, IRS SOI estate tax data through filing year 2024, state statutes and provider price pages retrieved November 23, 2026

In the Federal Reserve's 2025 Survey of Consumer Finances, 26.2% of U.S. families (weighted to 134.96 million families from 4,360 respondent families) said they had ever received an inheritance, trust or substantial gift, up from 21.8% in the 2022 survey, while 7,195 federal estate tax returns were filed in 2024. The 26.2% is a ComplexSearch tabulation of the public microdata (Federal Reserve SCF[1]); the return count is from IRS Statistics of Income (IRS SOI[2]). Among recipient families, the median total received was about $124,300 in 2025 dollars. In a ComplexSearch model of three states' published probate fee schedules, ordinary attorney and personal representative fees plus modeled filing charges on a $500,000 estate range from $26,435 (California) to $30,399 (Florida). Online will and trust list prices range from $0 to $2,500; document prices do not include estate administration and are not comparable legal services. Those fee figures are modeled from statutes, not observed bills. They are not legal advice.

Observed data

Inheritances received and expected (SCF, derived from microdata)

The SCF question (X5801) asks whether the family ever received an inheritance, was the beneficiary of a substantial trust, or received substantial assets as a gift, excluding transfers from a deceased spouse. All figures are weighted family shares averaged across the five implicates (SCF 2025 data[3], SCF 2022 data[4]). Sampling error was not computed.

Measure, all families	2022 (n=4,595; 131.31M families)	2025 (n=4,360; 134.96M families)
Ever received inheritance, trust or substantial gift	21.8%	26.2%
Expect a future inheritance	14.3%	15.5%
Expect to leave a sizable estate: yes	39.0%	45.6%
Expect to leave a sizable estate: possibly	22.3%	17.1%

1. https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/scfindex.htm
2. https://www.irs.gov/statistics/soi-tax-stats-estate-tax-filing-year-tables
3. https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/files/scf2025s.zip
4. https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/files/scf2022s.zip

Measure, all families	2022 (n=4,595; 131.31M families)	2025 (n=4,360; 134.96M families)
Leaving an estate is very important or important	54.5%	58.4%
Median total received, recipients (survey-year dollars)	$120,300	$124,300
Mean total received, recipients (survey-year dollars)	$391,300	$481,300

Receipt rises with age and wealth. In 2025, 14.6% of families with a reference person under 35 had received a transfer, compared with 41.1% at ages 65 to 74 and 37.0% at 75 or older. By net worth, receipt ranged from 8.8% of families below the 25th percentile to 53.1% in the top decile, where the median amount received was $504,600. By race and ethnicity, 34.7% of White non-Hispanic families had received a transfer, compared with 10.9% of Black non-Hispanic families (82 recipient families in the sample) and 9.2% of Hispanic families (63 recipient families). Full group tables, including income percentiles and unweighted counts, are in the research materials.

Federal estate tax returns (IRS SOI)

Form 706 filings fell from 108,071 in 2001 to 7,195 in 2024, a 93% decline, as the exemption rose from $675,000 to $12.92 million for 2023 deaths (IRS SOI filing-year tables[2]). Of the 2024 returns, 2,663 were taxable and reported $23.3 billion in net estate tax (IRS SOI 2024 Table 1[5]). By year of death, taxable estate returns were 0.08% of adult deaths in 2019, compared with 2.14% in 2001 and 7.65% in 1976 (IRS SOI Historical Table 17[6]).

Filing year	Returns filed	Taxable returns	Executors' commissions + attorneys' fees, % of gross estate
2001	108,071	51,736	1.36%
2010	15,191	6,711	0.99%
2018	13,526	5,484	0.56%
2024	7,195	2,663	0.37%

The fee share is a ComplexSearch division of two SOI columns for estates large enough to file. In 2024, 1,212 of 7,195 returns reported executors' commissions and 3,823 reported attorneys' fees; across all returns the two items totaled $921 million, or 0.37% of $248.9 billion in gross estate (IRS SOI 2024 Table 1[5]). These estates are mostly above $10 million and are not comparable with the modeled probate fees below.

Federal estate tax exemption (baseline rule, status Nov. 23, 2026)

The basic exclusion amount is $15,000,000 for 2026 deaths under P.L. 119-21, signed July 4, 2025 (IRS What's New, Estate and Gift Tax[7]), and $15,480,000 for 2027 (Rev. Proc. 2026-35[8]). Earlier

5. https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-soi/24es01fy.xlsx
6. https://www.irs.gov/statistics/soi-tax-stats-historical-table-17
7. https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/whats-new-estate-and-gift-tax

amounts: $675,000 for 2000-2001, $1.0 million (2002-2003), $1.5 million (2004-2005), $2.0 million (2006-2008), $3.5 million (2009), $5.0 million for 2010 with an opt-out (IRS SOI table footnotes[2]), $5.0 million in 2011, $11.18 million in 2018 and $13.99 million in 2025 (Form 706 instructions[9]; IRS Estate Tax[10]). Full series: the research materials.

Will ownership (surveys, self-reported)

Publisher, wave	Method and sample	Adults with a will
Pew Research Center, ATP Wave 178, Sept. 2-8, 2025	Probability-based panel, n=8,750, margin of error ±1.4 points	32% (Pew[11])
Gallup, May 3-18, 2021	Telephone, n=1,016, margin of error ±4 points	46% (Gallup[12])
Caring.com with YouGov, 2025	Online panel, 2,541 respondents; fieldwork dates and weighting not published	24% (Caring.com[13])

The three readings use different methods and wording and do not form a trend. In Pew's 2025 survey, 15% of adults 18 to 39 had a will, rising to 66% at 70 to 79 and 81% at 80 or older; Pew also found 31% had a living will or advance directive (Pew[11]). Gallup's 2021 readings were 20% at 18 to 29 and 76% at 65 and older, and Gallup's readings since 1990 ranged from 44% to 51% (Gallup[12]). Caring.com is an estate-planning information site. Its 2025 race and gender article gives a 2024 figure of 24.2%, while its 2024 study reported 32% (Caring.com[14]), so its year-to-year comparisons are not used here.

Beneficiary designations and POD accounts

No public CFPB or Census dataset reporting how many accounts carry payable-on-death or beneficiary designations was found, so this report makes no claim about prevalence. The observed rule is that FDIC insurance on trust accounts, including informal POD accounts, is $250,000 per eligible beneficiary, up to five beneficiaries ($1.25 million) per owner per bank (12 CFR 330.10[15]).

Published planning prices (checked Nov. 23, 2026)

Provider and plan	Scope	Individual	Couple
FreeWill, will (FreeWill[16])	Will, directive, financial POA; trust in California only	$0	$0

8. https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-drop/rp-26-35.pdf
9. https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/i706.pdf
10. https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/estate-tax
11. https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2025/11/06/experiences-with-estate-planning-and-discussing-end-of-life-preferences/
12. https://news.gallup.com/poll/351500/how-many-americans-have-will.aspx
13. https://www.caring.com/resources/wills-survey
14. https://www.caring.com/resources/race-and-gender-estate-planning
15. https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-12/chapter-III/subchapter-B/part-330/section-330.10
16. https://www.freewill.com/

Provider and plan	Scope	Individual	Couple
Quicken WillMaker Starter (WillMaker[17])	Will, health care directives, final arrangements	$109	$109 (up to 5 family members)
Quicken WillMaker Plus (WillMaker[17])	Adds durable POA, living trust, transfer-on-death deed	$149	$149
GoodTrust will or trust plan (GoodTrust[18])	Will or trust, directives	$149	$149 (family plan)
LegalZoom Basic Will (LegalZoom[19])	Will	$129	$229
Trust & Will Will Plan (Trust & Will[20])	Will, HIPAA, living will, POA	$199	$299
LegalZoom Premium Will (LegalZoom[19])	Will, directives, POAs, 1 year of attorney consultations	$299	$399
LegalZoom Basic Trust (LegalZoom[21])	Living trust, pour-over will, directive, POA	$399	$499
Trust & Will Trust Plan (Trust & Will[20])	Revocable trust, pour-over will, directives, POA	$499	$599
LegalZoom Premium Trust (LegalZoom[21])	Basic Trust + 1 year of attorney consultations	$549	$649
Trust & Will Trust Plan + Attorney Support (Trust & Will[20])	Trust Plan + licensed attorney guidance (+$299)	$798	$898
Trust & Will attorney match (Trust & Will[20])	Attorney-prepared plan, "starting at"	$2,500	not listed

List prices exclude promotions shown on the pages, memberships (Trust & Will lists $49 a year), consultation renewals, notary and deed recording costs. The table shows scope differences: will-only plans do not keep assets out of probate, and trust plans do so only for assets retitled into the trust.

ComplexSearch model: probate fees vs. planning prices (modeled)

Not legal advice. The model applies published statutory fee schedules, as in force on Nov. 23, 2026, to four matched households in California, Florida and Missouri. It covers ordinary compensation for the attorney and the personal representative plus the court filing fee, and assumes formal probate with no beneficiary designations. California fees are set by statute

17. https://www.willmaker.com/pricing
18. https://mygoodtrust.com/pricing
19. https://www.legalzoom.com/personal/estate-planning/last-will-and-testament-overview.html
20. https://trustandwill.com/pricing
21. https://www.legalzoom.com/personal/estate-planning/living-trust-overview.html

(Prob. Code 10810[22], 10800[23]) on gross value without deducting mortgages. Florida's are presumed reasonable and negotiable (Fla. Stat. 733.6171[24], 733.617[25]). Missouri's are minimums on personal property and on real estate sold under court order (RSMo 473.153[26]). The model adds $435 for California's first probate petition, including statewide surcharges (2026 statewide fee schedule[27], row 121), and $399 in Florida (the $395 maximum base fee plus the $4 petition charge under Fla. Stat. 28.2401(1)(g) and (3)[28]). Local and other charges are excluded; Missouri's filing fee is not modeled.

Household	State	Fee base	Modeled ordinary fees	% of net estate	Simplified procedure screen	Planning price, low / mid / high
H1: renter, $150k accounts	California	$150,000	$11,435	7.6%	May qualify for small-estate affidavit	will $109 / $199 / $299
H1	Florida	$150,000	$9,399	6.3%	May qualify for summary administration	will $109 / $199 / $299
H1	Missouri	$150,000	$9,350	6.2%	Formal probate	will $109 / $199 / $299
H2: $400k home, no mortgage + $100k accounts	California	$500,000	$26,435	5.3%	May qualify (affidavit + primary-residence petition)	trust $149 / $499 / $2,500
H2	Florida	$500,000	$30,399	6.1%	Formal probate	trust $149 / $499 / $2,500
H2	Missouri	$500,000	$28,100	5.6%	Formal probate	trust $149 / $499 / $2,500
H3: $800k home, $400k mortgage + $200k accounts	California	$1,000,000	$46,435	7.7%	Formal probate	trust $149 / $499 / $2,500
H3	Florida	$1,000,000	$60,399	10.1%	Formal probate	trust $149 / $499 / $2,500
H3	Missouri	$1,000,000	$53,100	8.8%	Formal probate	trust $149 / $499 / $2,500
H4: $1.2M home + $800k accounts	California	$2,000,000	$66,435	3.3%	Formal probate	trust $149 / $499 / $2,500

22. https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=PROB&sectionNum=10810.
23. https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=PROB&sectionNum=10800.
24. http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0700-0799/0733/Sections/0733.6171.html
25. http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0700-0799/0733/Sections/0733.617.html
26. https://revisor.mo.gov/main/OneSection.aspx?section=473.153
27. https://www.butte.courts.ca.gov/system/files?file=general/2026-statewide-civil-fee-schedule.pdf
28. https://flsenate.gov/Laws/Statutes/2026/0028.2401

Household	State	Fee base	Modeled ordinary fees	% of net estate	Simplified procedure screen	Planning price, low / mid / high
H4	Florida	$2,000,000	$110,399	5.5%	Formal probate	trust $149 / $499 / $2,500
H4	Missouri	$2,000,000	$93,100	4.7%	Formal probate	trust $149 / $499 / $2,500

Where a household may qualify for a simplified procedure (California's $208,850 small-estate affidavit and $750,000 primary-residence petition for deaths on or after Apr. 1, 2025, per the Judicial Council[29]; Florida's summary administration, subject to additional eligibility rules and generally available when nonexempt probate property does not exceed $150,000 or more than two years have passed since death, under Fla. Stat. 735.201[30]), the formal-probate fees above are a comparison scenario, not an expected bill. The model does not estimate the cost of those procedures.

Sensitivity: what changes the probate figure (modeled)

Case	H2 CA	H2 FL	H2 MO	H3 CA	H3 FL	H3 MO	H4 CA	H4 FL	H4 MO
Base case	$26,435	$30,399	$28,100	$46,435	$60,399	$53,100	$66,435	$110,399	$93,100
Family executor waives commission	$13,435	$15,399	$14,050	$23,435	$30,399	$26,550	$33,435	$55,399	$46,550
All accounts pass by beneficiary designation	$22,435	$24,399	$23,100	$38,435	$48,399	$43,100	$50,435	$70,399	$61,100
Florida home is protected homestead		$6,399			$12,399			$48,399	
Missouri home distributed, not sold by court order			$6,600			$12,100			$43,100

29. https://courts.ca.gov/system/files/file/probate-code-890-adjusted-amounts.pdf
30. http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0700-0799/0735/Sections/0735.201.html

Case	H2 CA	H2 FL	H2 MO	H3 CA	H3 FL	H3 MO	H4 CA	H4 FL	H4 MO
California, same equity with no mortgage				$30,435					

Sensitivity: trust all-in cost (modeled)

Trust all-in cost = document list price + an assumed trust administration cost after death, as a share of gross assets. No published schedule for trustee costs was used; the 0.5% and 1% cases are assumptions.

Household (gross assets)	Administration cost	Low ($149)	Mid ($499)	High ($2,500)	Base-case probate range, 3 states
H2 ($500k)	0%	$149	$499	$2,500	$26,435 to $30,399
H2	0.5%	$2,649	$2,999	$5,000	$26,435 to $30,399
H2	1%	$5,149	$5,499	$7,500	$26,435 to $30,399
H3 ($1.0M)	0%	$149	$499	$2,500	$46,435 to $60,399
H3	0.5%	$5,149	$5,499	$7,500	$46,435 to $60,399
H3	1%	$10,149	$10,499	$12,500	$46,435 to $60,399
H4 ($2.0M)	0%	$149	$499	$2,500	$66,435 to $110,399
H4	0.5%	$10,149	$10,499	$12,500	$66,435 to $110,399
H4	1%	$20,149	$20,499	$22,500	$66,435 to $110,399

In every base case, modeled probate fees exceed the highest trust all-in cost tested. The gap narrows most when the personal representative waives the commission, when the home is Florida homestead or is not sold in Missouri (H2 Florida homestead: $6,399 probate vs. $5,499 mid trust cost at 1%), and when trust administration costs are high.

Methodology

- SCF: the 2025 survey (released Oct. 9, 2026) is the primary wave and 2022 the comparison; the inheritance questions are unchanged between waves. Full public files were merged with the summary extract on the case ID. Estimates use weight X42001 and average the five implicates. Amounts received were adjusted to survey-year dollars with the BLS CPI-U

annual average for the year received (BLS CPI data[31]). Public data round the year received to five-year intervals.

- IRS SOI: filing-year Table 1 files for 2001-2024 parsed by row label; the 2024 file was released July 2026.
- Statutes: text saved from official legislative sites on Nov. 23, 2026. California's site blocked scripted download; the sections were read with a page reader and transcribed in the research materials.
- Prices: each provider's own pricing page, saved Nov. 23, 2026, with list (non-promotional) prices used.
- Model: formulas and every assumption are in the research materials; the research materials rebuilds all research datasets from raw/ and checks the saved pages and statutes for the quoted values before writing.

Limitations

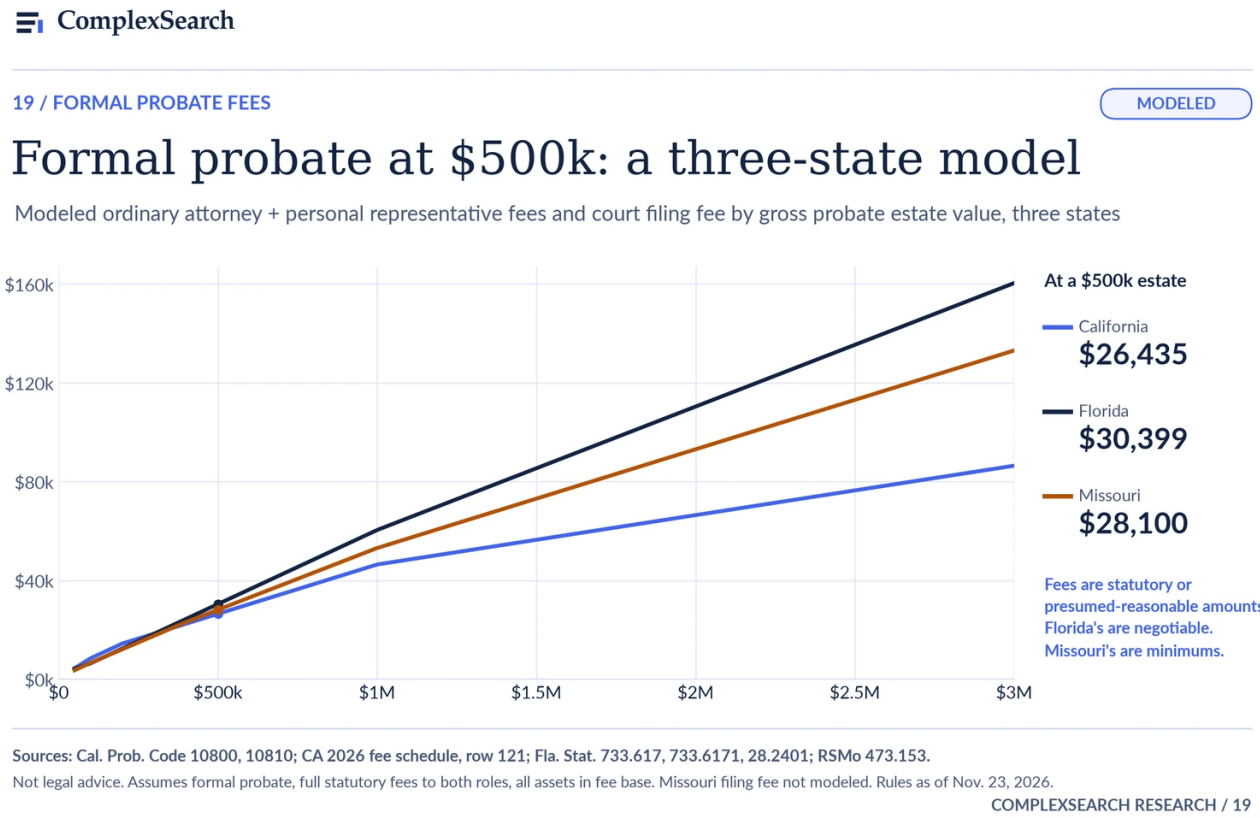
- SCF figures carry sampling error that was not computed; groups with fewer than about 100 recipient families (under 35, Black non-Hispanic, Hispanic, lowest net-worth quartile) are indicative. SCF reports families, not individuals, and self-reported transfer values.
- SCF race groups other than White non-Hispanic, Black non-Hispanic and Hispanic are not reported because the public-file codes could not be verified.
- No public federal data on POD or beneficiary-designation use was found; the report makes no prevalence claim.
- The probate model covers ordinary fees in three states only. It excludes extraordinary fees, appraisal, bond, publication, tax preparation and creditor costs, and it assumes full fees to both roles. Most states do not publish a fee schedule.
- Planning prices cover online and platform-listed tiers. Independent attorney fees were not observed. Online documents may not suit every household, and a trust avoids probate only for assets retitled into it.
- Survey will-ownership figures are self-reported and differ by method; Caring.com does not publish fieldwork dates or weighting for its 2025 study.

How to cite

ComplexSearch Research. "Estate Planning Statistics & Costs." November 2026 edition. Federal Reserve SCF 2025 and 2022 microdata; IRS SOI estate tax data through filing year 2024; statutes and price pages retrieved Nov. 23, 2026. When quoting an SCF share, give the survey year and that the base is U.S. families. When quoting a probate fee figure, state that it is a ComplexSearch model estimate, name the state and household, and note that it is not legal advice.

31. https://download.bls.gov/pub/time.series/cu/cu.data.1.AllItems

Report charts



Modeled formal probate fees in three statesThese scenarios assume both ordinary fee roles are paid. They exclude extraordinary costs and do not estimate simpler procedures or substitute for legal advice.Source: ·

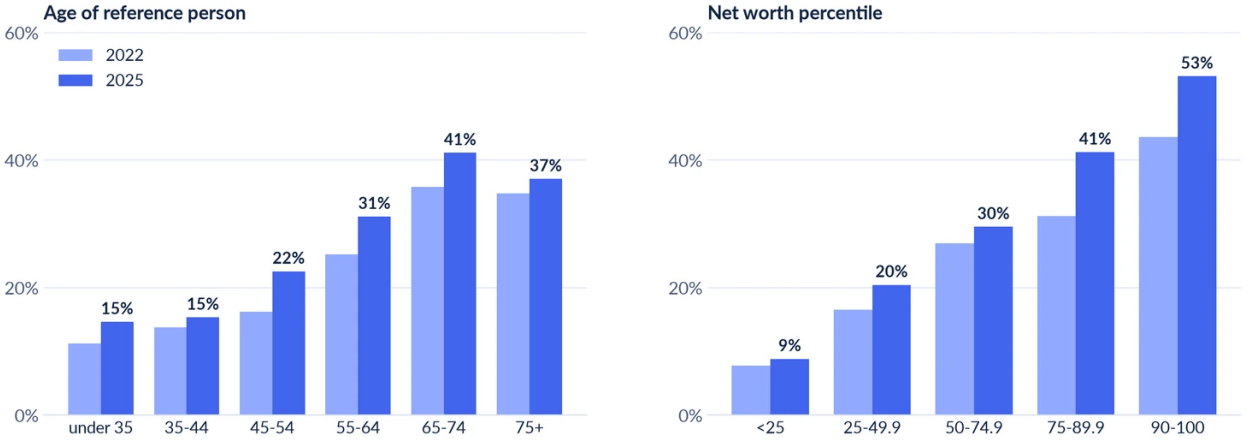
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19 / INHERITANCES RECEIVED

DERIVED

About 1 in 4 families has received an inheritance

Share of U.S. families that ever received an inheritance, trust or substantial gift, by age and net worth, SCF 2022 vs. 2025



Source: ComplexSearch tabulation of Federal Reserve Survey of Consumer Finances 2022 and 2025 public microdata (X5801), weighted, 5 implicates.
All families: 21.8% (2022, n=4,595) and 26.2% (2025, n=4,360). Excludes transfers from a deceased spouse. Sampling error not computed.

COMPLEXSEARCH RESEARCH / 19

Reported inheritances and other substantial transfersThese are separate weighted survey waves. The difference was not tested for statistical significance.Source: Federal Reserve Survey of Consumer Finances ·

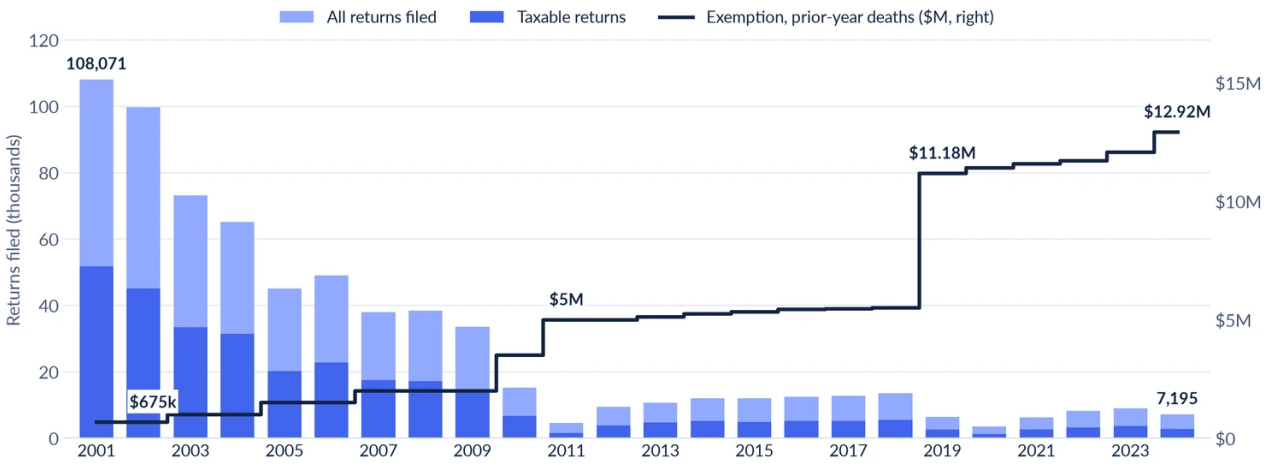
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19 / FEDERAL ESTATE TAX RETURNS

OBSERVED

Estate tax returns fell 93% as the exemption rose

Form 706 returns filed per year (thousands), all and taxable, with the exemption for deaths in the prior year



Sources: IRS SOI Estate Tax Filing Year Table 1, 2001-2024; IRS Form 706 instructions (Rev. July 2026); SOI table footnotes for 2002-2010.

Returns filed in a year mostly cover deaths in the prior year. 2010 deaths could opt out of estate tax. 2026: $15.0M; 2027: $15.48M (Rev. Proc. 2026-35).

COMPLEXSEARCH RESEARCH / 19

Federal estate tax returns and filing thresholdsReturns filed in a year can relate to deaths in other years. Filing counts do not measure how many estates paid federal estate tax.Source: IRS Statistics of Income ·

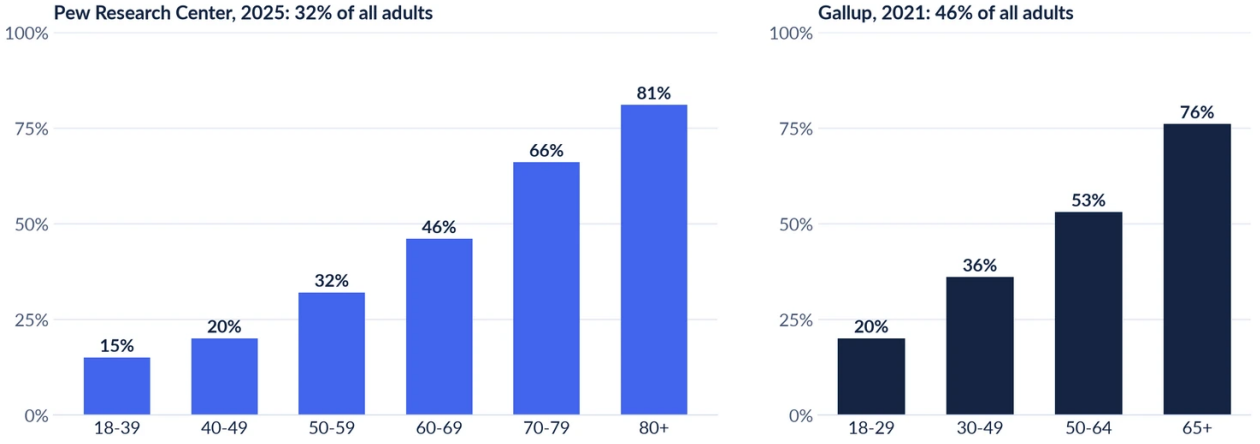
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19 / WILL OWNERSHIP BY AGE

SURVEY

Most adults under 50 report no will

Share of U.S. adults who say they have a will, by age, in two national surveys with different methods



Sources: Pew Research Center ATP Wave 178, Sept. 2-8, 2025 (n=8,750); Gallup telephone poll, May 3-18, 2021 (n=1,016).
All adults: Pew 32% (2025), Gallup 46% (2021). Age bands and question wording differ; the two readings are not a trend. Self-reported.

COMPLEXSEARCH RESEARCH / 19

Self-reported will ownership by ageAge bands and survey methods differ. The two survey readings are not a trend series.Source: Pew Research Center; Gallup citation in the report ·