



The Uniform Classification of Heirs Property

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Introduction: Heir Property's Risk to Land and Culture

Historically, land provided a tangible expression of importance that displayed hard work, self-sufficiency, and determination. In the same vein, land established a space where community and culture could develop and thrive, therefore promoting social integration among residents. This was especially true within the African American community. Historically, Blacks have been closely attached to land, whether through field production or domestic service on plantations (McGee and Boone 1979). With this familiarity, the formerly enslaved yearned for the independence and pride of being a landowner. Land in the southern United States became the largest equity under Black control (McGee and Boone 1979). The same can be said in Macon County, Alabama, where in 1900, 157 Black farmers owned land, and by 1910, the number increased to 507 (Marable 1979). Antithetical to the importance of land, African American land ownership has steadily declined from 14 percent in 1910 to less than 2 percent at the turn of the 21st century (U.S. Department of Commerce 1913). Thomas, Pennick, and Gray (2004) note this decline was caused by the Great Migration (1910-1970), fear, change in agriculture, and heirs' property. McGee and Boone (1979) list seven reasons for the rapid decline in land ownership: 1. tax sales, 2. partition sales, 3. mortgage foreclosures, 4. failure to write wills, 5. landowner limitations placed on welfare recipients, 6. eminent domain, and 7. voluntary sales. The causes and effects associated with heirs' property cover four out of the seven reasons listed. One key impediment to this accounting is that heirs' property is often not labeled as such by county-level tax assessors/revenue/commissioners. Parcels in one county may be classified with the term "heirs of" while another county might be called "est", "etal", and "dec'd." Several studies have highlighted this issue (Johnson-Gaither 2016; Johnson-Gaither and Zarnoch 2017).

Heirs' property exists when a person dies without a will (Baab 2010). This differs from clear titled property, which is land that is transferred through a probated will, and the person is in the possession of the deed. Heirs' property creates social, legal, and economic limitations that hinder generational wealth (Eichenlaub et al. 2010). When a landowner dies intestate (without a valid will), the land is automatically transferred to their surviving spouse and children (Dyer et al. 2009). Each heir then receives a percentage, or undivided interest, in the land, based upon the number of heirs that the

landowner had. This creates the possibility for a single parcel of land to be co-owned as tenants in common by tens to hundreds or even thousands of family members. In addition, heirs will not receive a specific acreage of the land—they will, instead, have a specified percent of ownership of the land. Referred to as co-tenants, these descendants continue to pass down a fractionalized interest of the property to the succeeding generations (Deaton et al. 2009). As each generation produces more and more heirs, the land is further fractionalized. Since it is not clear which portion of the land specifically belongs to each heir, and the title of the land is not clear, it is referred to as clouded (Pennick 2010).

Limitations Associated with Heirs' Property

The legal ramifications of numerous and potentially unknown owners that are a consequence of heirs' property produces vulnerable land that can lead to land loss. In addition, heirs' property, which appraises at lower property values due to limited development potential, is detrimental to local economies in the support of public services. Heirs' property is an issue that is persistent and more prevalent within low-income communities, families, and farms. This is more apparent within the African American community (Zabawa 1991; Zabawa et al. 1990) as well as other minority communities, including Native American and Latinx communities. Heirs' property within these communities stems from the paucity of trust, knowledge, and understanding of the established dominant legal system. As a result, heirs' property affects individuals, communities, and regions through underdevelopment and the undervaluation of property (Baba et al 2018; Bownes and Zabawa 2019). To alleviate the limitations of heirs' property, uniform but culturally sensitive policies need to be implemented at every stage of the heirs' property process, from the location of parcels to ownership.

There are four major limitations connected to being an heir or tenant in common. These limitations include (1) insecurity of ownership, (2) inability to access government programs to improve the productivity of land or improve housing quality, (3) constraints to productive use of the property, and (4) limited collateral value of heirs' property (Bailey et al. 2019). These constraints exacerbate the economic struggles of the region. Without clear title, owners are unable to improve and build capital, affecting family, community, and region. The inability to pass down generational wealth through land, as well as the inability to improve upon this resource, provides a poor economic base and allows poor living conditions to persist. Alabama and Mississippi are southeastern states that have similarities in geographic, cultural, and demographic variation. The literature states that heirs' property is most prominent in areas affected by plantation agriculture and enslaved labor, therefore having a strong African American presence. Rivers (2006) contends that more than 50 percent of all Black-owned property in the rural South is communally owned as heirs' property. In addition, the literature reflects that heirs' property is associated with individuals earning lower than standard incomes (Woods 2020).

Alabama and Mississippi reflect these prerequisites of race and income and it is hypothesized that a significant amount of heirs' property will be present. The research frame was designed to reflect this as well and use regions predominantly inhabited by Blacks, Whites, or a demographic mix.

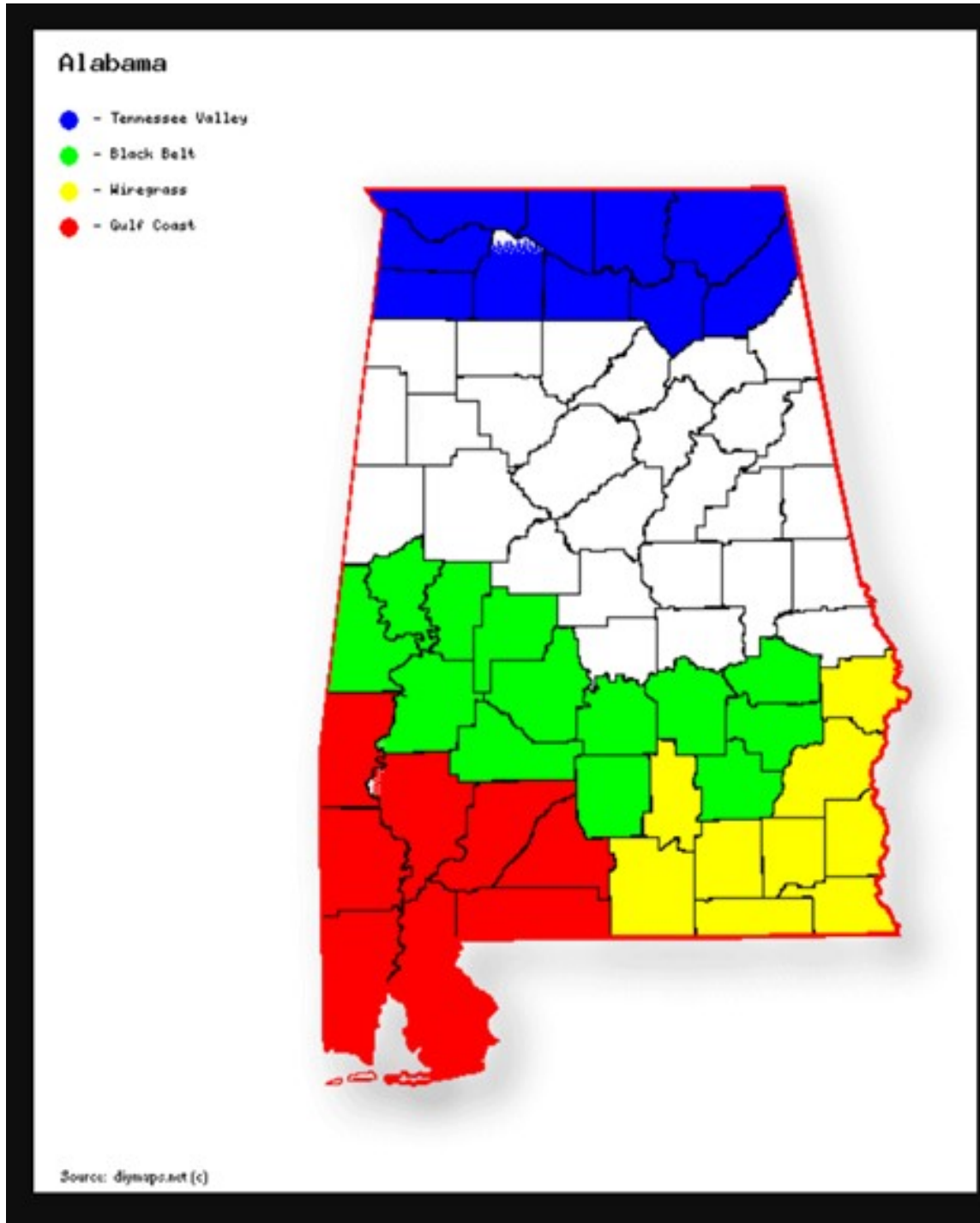


Figure 1. Chosen Alabama Regions

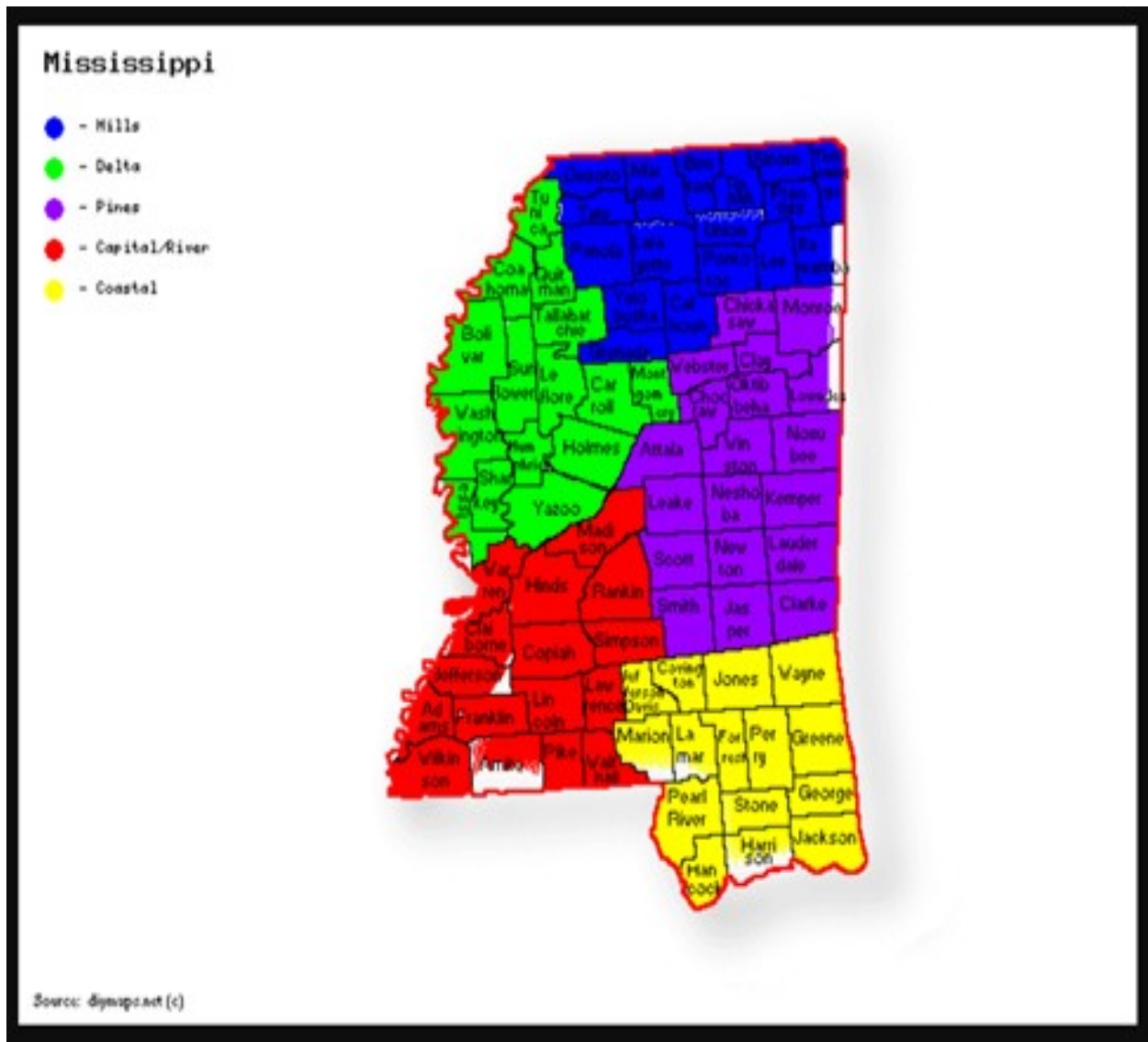


Figure 2. Chosen Mississippi Regions

As a result, Alabama is divided into four regions to reflect geographic, cultural, and demographic variation, whereas Mississippi is divided into five regions. Chosen Alabama regions include the Tennessee Valley, the Black Belt, the Wiregrass, and the Gulf Coast (see Figure 1). Mississippi is divided into the Hills, the Delta which serves as its Black Belt, the Pines, the Capital/River, and the Coastal Regions (see Figure 2). These regions are comparable in terms of geography dealing with the beginning of the Appalachian Mountains, the coastal areas as well as areas pristine for farming. Yet, the Mississippi River and differing population levels introduce a contrast between the two states. The regions are also comparable culturally and demographically which is showcased by the background of citizens and their current descriptors. This research is imperative to developing policy recommendations uniquely useful to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in these specific areas.

Methods

The specific questions of this research included:

1. How accessible is land tenure data at the county level?
2. What terms are used to classify heirs' property at the county level?
3. Where is the heirs' property found?
4. What policies recommendations are possible to create a uniform nomenclature to make addressing heirs' property easier?

Within each region, the three counties with the highest African American population have been selected to connect the findings of prior research. Accessibility of heirs' property data within the selected counties was determined by GIS website searches as well as by contacting local officials. In total, there should be 27 different counties available as examples of heirs' property, its accessibility, and its classification across the two states for research. Information about heirs' property was gathered through county GIS websites, tax records, GIS mapping, and key informant interviews. In order to determine the presence of all heirs' property in each county, tax data were accessed from individual county Revenue Commissioner offices.

The following search terms attached to an owner's name were used to populate a list of heirs' property parcels: "Heirs", "Est", "Etal", "Dec/Dec'd." From the populated list, businesses, public, government or church owned land were removed from the list. The number of parcels that included these search terms is captured in the data. The search terms "Est" and "Estate" were combined into the larger category "Estate." The search terms "Etal" and "Et al" were combined into the larger category "Etal." Similarly, the search terms "Deceased" and "Dec" or "Dec'd" were combined into the larger category "Deceased." For counties with capped data, the counties were contacted to inquire about how to obtain access to uncapped search results. In Alabama counties of the Wiregrass region, Barbour, Houston, and Russell counties, and two of the Gulf Coast counties, Conecuh and Monroe County, utilized the vendor Flagship GIS, Inc. to host their parcel information. An individual at this company provided uncapped parcel lists for the search terms within that county that were past the capped threshold. The counties that did not provide online access identified a cost and purchasing process for parcel information.

Discussion

The nomenclature for identifying heirs or clouded property is yet another limitation of the system for recording parcel data at the county level. Categorically, heirs' property does not have a uniform manner across tax data in differing counties (Gilbert et al. 2002). Additionally, counties utilize vendors to host parcel information on the internet. Not all county websites provided downloadable access to parcel information.

For the duration of this research, in Alabama, Madison County and Greene

County were among the counties that did not provide downloadable access to parcel data. Some counties utilized vendor sites that capped the number of parcels at amounts ranging from 100 entries to 1000 parcels. In Greene County, it is important to note that the information given on the public website includes the "Co-name" of the parcel but not the Full Name of the person connected with the parcel, which is where nomenclature such as *est*, *heirs*, or *deceased* appears. Even though Greene County still retrieves the correct information, making sure the naming is not a part of a company or private entity has to be done by individual parcel. This is the only way the parcel number and acreage will be correct. Other counties in Alabama were examined and classified.

Alabama

The Alabama counties under study are ranked from the lowest number of parcels (1) to the highest number of parcels (10). The total includes all terms that signify heirs' property as before mentioned. Greene County and Madison County are not included in this ranking since their property data are not publicly available or do not have coding set up to differentiate property data types. The complete Alabama data set is found in Table 1. Figure 3 represents the number of parcels per county by percent, with Colbert ranked lowest at 2 percent and Macon ranked highest at 23.1 percent.

Selected Alabama Heir Parcels by County in Percent.

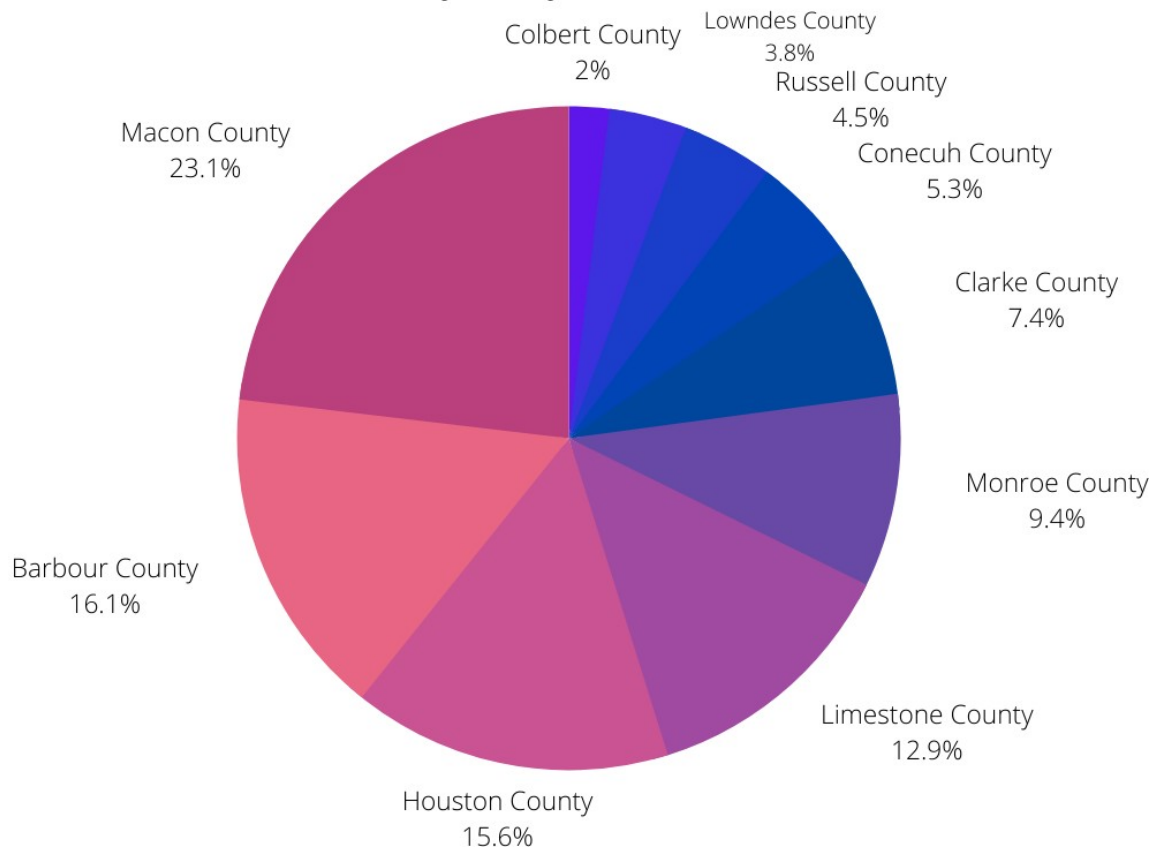


Figure 3. Selected Alabama Heir Parcels by County in Percent

Table 1. Alabama Counties Ranked by Parcels Available for Analysis

Alabama Counties	Total Heirs' Property Parcels	Rank
Colbert County	111	1
Lowndes County	215	2
Russell County	253	3
Conecuh County	301	4
Clarke County	419	5
Monroe County	535	6
Limestone County	733	7
Houston County	884	8
Barbour County	916	9
Macon County	1,315	10
Madison County	N/A	N/A
Greene County	N/A	N/A

N/A = not available

The Tennessee Valley Region

The Tennessee Valley Region, which encompasses Colbert, Limestone, and Madison Counties, is located in the northern portion of the state, and the sample counties have 844 total heirs' property parcels (see Table 2). However, the term "estate" is used more predominately to define clouded or possible heirs' property in the Tennessee Valley Region at almost 90 percent. The valley is located in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains and has a majority White population.

Table 2. Tennessee Valley Region (AL) Parcels by Term

Tennessee Valley	Heirs	Estate	Etal	Deceased	Total
Colbert County	47	57	7	0	111
Limestone County	5	701	26	1	733
Madison County	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total	52	758	33	1	844
%	0.062	0.898	0.039	0.001	N/A

N/A = not available; % = percentage

The Black Belt Region

The Black Belt Region, showcased by Greene, Lowndes, and Macon Counties, had the second highest number of parcels (1,530; see Table 3). The Black Belt region is known for the rich black soil used for farming cotton and other cash crops during the time of enslavement and after. It is also known as the Black Belt because many of the counties have a Black population significantly higher than the state average, a consequence of descendants who did not travel far from the plantation once emancipated. The term "heirs" is used more predominately to define clouded or possible heirs' property in the Black Belt Region at 68 percent.

Table 3. Black Belt Region (AL) Parcels by Term

Black Belt	Heirs	Estate	Etal	Deceased	Total
Greene County	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Lowndes County	42	69	104	0	215
Macon County	1000	42	13	260	1,315
Total	1042	111	117	260	1,530
%	0.681	0.073	0.076	0.170	N/A

N/A = not available; % = percentage

The Wiregrass Region

The Wiregrass Region, highlighted by Barbour, Houston, and Russell Counties, had the highest number of parcels (2,053; see Table 4). The Wiregrass is located in the southeastern part of the state and is named after the long-stemmed grass native to the area. The term “estate” is used more predominately to define clouded or possible heirs’ property in the Wiregrass Region at over 57 percent. However, “*etal*” is used as well, at over 36 percent.

Table 4. Wiregrass Region (AL) Parcels by Term

Wiregrass	Heirs	Estate	Etal	Deceased	Total
Barbour County	11	417	475	13	916
Houston County	8	734	142	0	754
Russell County	57	26	126	44	1,007
Total	76	1177	743	57	2,053
%	0.037	0.573	0.362	0.028	N/A

N/A = not available; % = percentage

The Gulf Coast Region

The Gulf Coast Region, with Conecuh, Clarke, and Monroe Counties, had the second lowest number of parcels (844; see Table 5). The Gulf Coast region is located in the southwestern part of the state and touches the Gulf of Mexico. The region is known for its beaches and seafood. The term “*etal*” is used more predominately to define clouded or possible heirs’ property in the Gulf Coast Region at over 76 percent.

Table 5. Gulf Coast Region (AL) Parcels by Term

Gulf Coast	Heirs	Estate	Etal	Deceased	Total
Conecuh County	17	39	162	83	301
Clarke County	26	65	327	1	419
Monroe County	22	32	470	11	535
Total	65	136	959	95	1,255
%	0.052	0.108	0.764	0.076	N/A

N/A = not available; % = percentage

For selected Alabama regions, only the Black Belt Region uses the term “heirs’ property” to a significant degree at 68 percent, followed by the Tennessee Valley at 6.2 percent, the Gulf Coast at 5.2 percent, and the Wiregrass at 3.7 percent (see Table 6). Other alternative terms are “estate” for the Tennessee Valley at 89.8 percent and the Wiregrass at 57.3 percent and “*etal*” for the Gulf Coast at 76.4 percent. In general, the terms “estate” and “*etal*” were fairly evenly divided across the regions under study at 38.4 percent and 32.6 percent, respectively. Finally, while significant at the county level (e.g., Macon at 19.8 percent and Conecuh at 27.6 percent), the term “*deceased*” was not used widely across the selected counties in the four regions under study (7.6 percent). Figure 4 provides a graphic representation of the use of alternative terms for heirs’ property. Figure 4 also highlights that, while the Wiregrass Region uses several terms to indicate possible heirs’ property, the other regions tend to favor other terms.

Table 6. Alabama Regions by Category

Alabama Regions	Parcels (#)	Heirs (%)	Estate (%)	Etal (%)	Deceased (%)
Wiregrass	2,053	0.037	0.573	0.362	0.028
Black Belt	1,530	0.681	0.073	0.076	0.170
Gulf Coast	1,255	0.052	0.108	0.764	0.076
Tennessee Valley	844	0.062	0.898	0.039	0.001
TOTAL	5,682	0.217	0.384	0.326	0.073

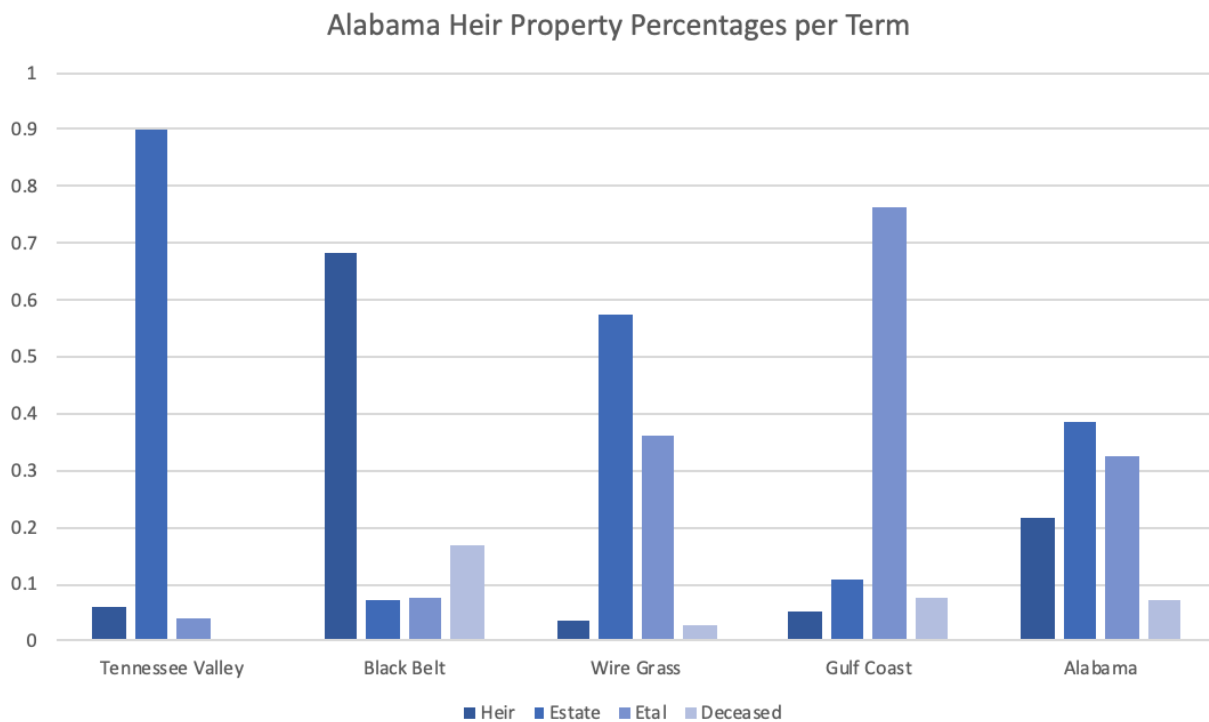


Figure 4. Alabama Heir Property Percentages by Term

Mississippi

In Mississippi, the 10 counties under study with accessible data are ranked from the lowest number of parcels (1) to the highest number of parcels (10) (see Table 7). The total includes all terms that signify heirs' property as before mentioned. Panola, Sunflower, Clay, Hinds, and Adams counties are not included in this ranking since their property data are not publicly available or do not have coding set up to differ property data types.

Table 7. Mississippi Counties Ranked by Parcels Available for Analysis

Mississippi Counties	Total Heirs' Property Parcels	Rank
Marshall County	231	1
Grenada County	586	2
Forrest County	714	3
Wayne County	1,062	4
Coahoma County	1,087	5
Leflore County	1,352	6
Leake County	1,364	7
Scott County	1,638	8
Covington County	2,071	9
Pike County	4,114	10
Panola County	N/A	N/A
Sunflower County	N/A	N/A
Clay County	N/A	N/A
Hinds County	N/A	N/A
Adams County	N/A	N/A

N/A = not available

Selected Mississippi Counties Ranked by Parcels

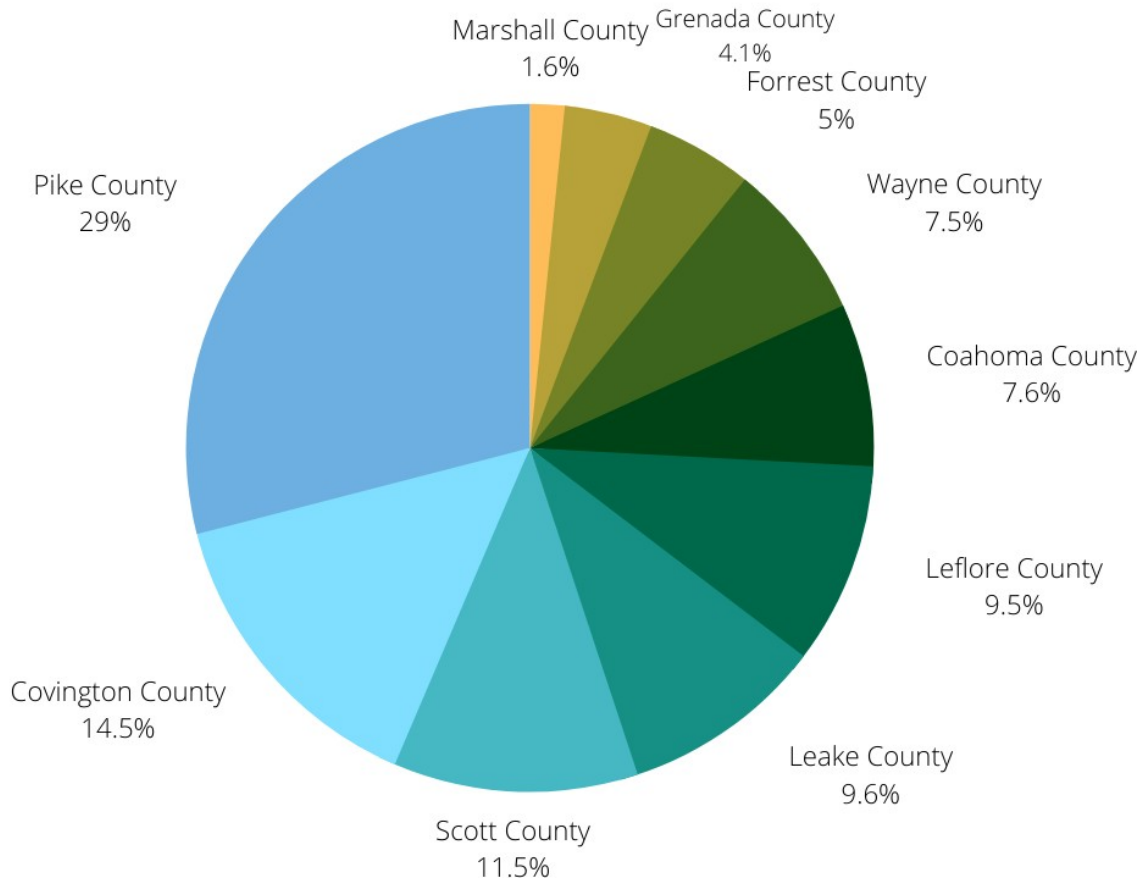


Figure 5. Selected Mississippi Counties Ranked by Parcels

The Hills Region

The Hills Region, designated by Panola, Marshall, and Grenada Counties, is located in the northern portion of the state and has 817 total heirs' property parcels (see Table 8). The Hills is in the most northern part of the state and is located in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. The term "etal" is used more predominately to define clouded or possible heirs' property in the Hills Region at over 76 percent.

Table 8. Hills Region (MS) Parcels by Term

Hills	Heirs	Estate	Etal	Deceased	Total
Panola County	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Marshall County	0	58	173	0	231
Grenada County	0	134	452	0	586
Total	0	192	625	0	817
%	0	0.235	0.765	0	N/A

N/A = not available; % = percentage

The Delta Region

The Delta Region encompasses Coahoma, Leflore, and Sunflower Counties and is characterized by vast farmland agriculturally ideal for cultivating white cotton. The region has a total of 2,439 parcels (see Table 9). This is significant since only two of the selected counties had property data that were accessible. The term “*etal*” is used more predominately to define clouded or possible heirs’ property in the Delta Region at 54 percent. However, “estate” is also used to a large degree at 46 percent.

Table 9. Delta Region (MS) Parcels by Term

Delta	Heirs	Estate	Etal	Deceased	Total
Coahoma County	0	931	156	0	1,087
Leflore County	2	188	1,162	0	1,352
Sunflower County	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total	2	1,119	1,318	0	2,439
%	0.001	0.459	0.540	0	N/A

N/A = not available; % = percentage

The Pines Region

The Pines Region, showcased by Clay, Leake, and Scott Counties, has a total of 3,002 heirs’ property parcels and is located in the eastern part of the state (see Table 10). Again, these numbers exclude information from one county. Still, heirs’ property is apparent in this region. The term “estate” is used more predominately to define clouded or possible heirs’ property in the Pines Region at over 55 percent. However, “*etal*” is also used to a large extent at near 45 percent.

Table 10. Pines Region (MS) Parcels by Term

Pines	Heirs	Estate	Etal	Deceased	Total
Clay County	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Leake County	0	787	577	0	1,364
Scott County	0	872	766	0	1,638
Total	0	1,659	1,343	0	3,002
%	0	0.553	0.447	0	N/A

N/A = not available; % = percentage

The Capital/River Region

The Capital/River Region, highlighted by Hinds, Adams, and Pike Counties, includes the state capital (Jackson) and is surrounded by the Mississippi River. Throughout history, the river has been a mecca for shipping and traveling. The region has a total of 4,133 parcels and is obtained from one county (see Table 11). The term “estate” is used more predominately to define clouded or possible heirs’ property in the Capital/River Region at near 78 percent.

Table 11. Capital/River Region (MS) Parcels by Term

Capital/ River	Heirs	Estate	Etal	Deceased	Total
Hinds County	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Adams County	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Pike County	19	3198	916	0	4,114
Total	19	3198	916	0	4,133
%	0.005	0.777	0.223	0	N/A

N/A = not available; % = percentage

The Coastal Region

The last region, the Coastal Region, contains Forrest, Wayne, and Covington Counties and is known for 26 beaches and five islands. There are also Vietnamese, Chinese, and Yugoslavian settlements. The total number of heirs property parcels is 3,847 (see Table 12). The term “*etal*” is used more predominately to define clouded or possible heirs’ property in the Coastal Region at almost 54 percent. However, “*estate*” is also used to a large extent at almost 46 percent.

Table 12. Coastal Region (MS) Parcels by Term

Coastal	Heirs	Estate	Etal	Deceased	Total
Forrest County	0	116	598	0	714
Wayne County	9	201	852	0	1,062
Covington County	3	1,450	618	0	2,071
Total	12	1,767	2,068	0	3,847
%	0.003	0.459	0.538	0	N/A

N/A = not available; % = percentage

In sum, within the Mississippi regions, the term “heirs property” proved to be an insignificant indicator of land held in tenancy in common at 0.2 percent across the five regions under study (see Table 13). In two of the five regions, there is no property defined with “heir” is listed. Similarly, unlike in Alabama, “deceased” was not a term used to indicate land ownership in the sample counties in the five regions. Finally, across Mississippi, there appears to be a fairly even divide between the use of the terms “*estate*” at 55.7 percent and “*etal*” at 44 percent; while taken by region, two regions, Hills and Capital/River, show a tendency to use “*estate*” or “*etal*”, respectively.

Table 13. Mississippi Regions by Category

Mississippi Regions	Parcels (#)	Heirs (%)	Estate (%)	Etal (%)	Deceased (%)
Capital/River	4,114	0.005	0.777	0.223	0
Coastal	3,847	0.003	0.459	0.538	0
Delta	2,439	0.001	0.459	0.540	0
Pines	3,002	0	0.553	0.447	0
Hills	817	0	0.235	0.765	0
TOTAL	14,219	0.002	0.557	0.440	0

Mississippi Heir Property Percentages per Term

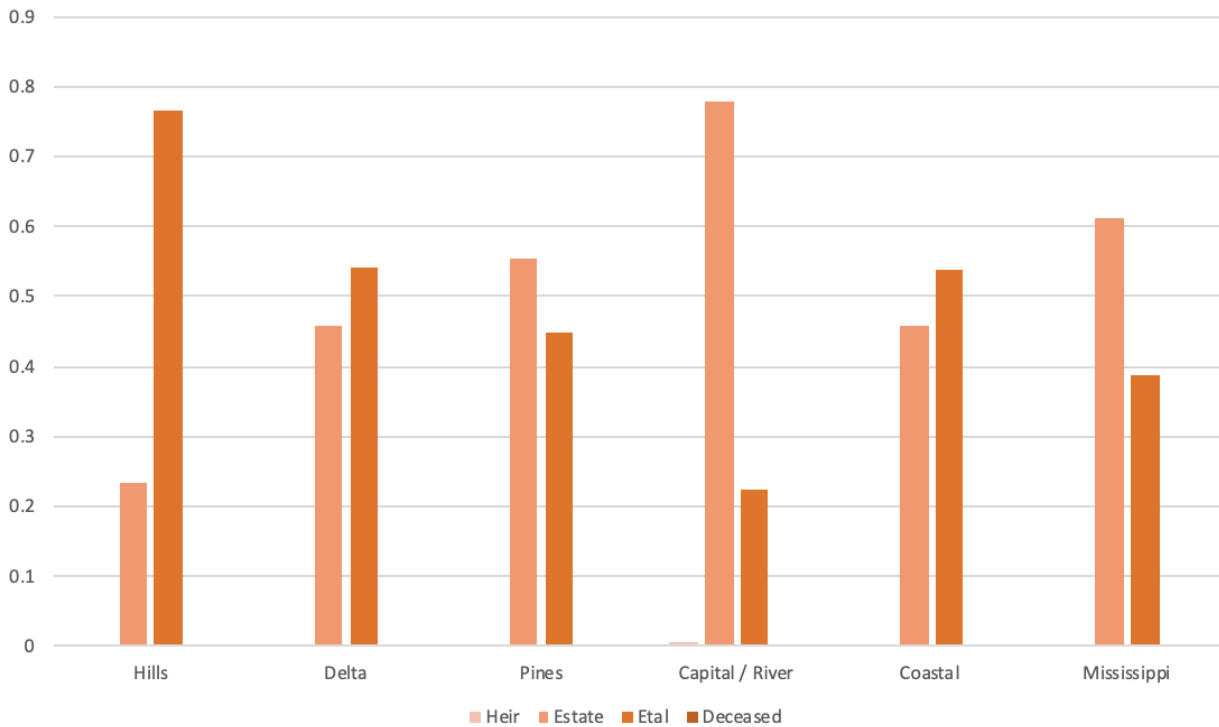


Figure 6. Mississippi Heir Property Percentages per Term

Policy

In 2010, the Uniform Law Commission approved a uniform act, the Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act (UPHPA), to be adopted by the individual states (Uniform Law Commission 2021; Mitchell and Powers 2022). This Act provided the following safeguards for co-tenants in common of heirs' property:

1. Notice
2. Appraisal
3. Right of first refusal
4. And further safeguards in the event of a partition sale.

Since its introduction, 19 states and territories have adopted the UPHPA, including eight southern states (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia), and six states have introduced the act in 2021 along with the District of Columbia.

The passage of the UPHPA impacted further legislation including the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, also known as the Farm Bill (Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018). Specifically, the 2018 Farm Bill addresses heir property in three sections. First, Title V – Credit, Section 5104 deals with a relending program to resolve title issues revolving around heirs' property. On July 29, 2021, the Biden Administration

announced \$67 million in support of this program (USDA Farm Service Agency 2021). Second, Title XII – Miscellaneous, Section 12607 focuses on farmland data collection so that “policymakers and the public have access to important trend data on farmland ownership, tenure, transition, barriers to entry, profitability and viability of beginning and SD farmers.” And finally, Title XII Section 12615 has provisions where heir property owners can receive a farm number and have access to USDA programs without the unanimous consent of all co-tenants. Key to these provisions is that participating farmers/landowners need to own land in states that have adopted the UHPA.

However, despite these gains, this research calls into question how heirs’ property can be identified. Not only is property that is co-owned by tenants in common called “heirs’ property,” but such property may also be found under *estate*, *etal*, and (*deceased*). Such distinction is found not only between states, such as Alabama and Mississippi, but also within states. Therefore, further research is needed to help develop a procedure where a uniform classification of heirs’ property is developed. The end result would be an accompanying Uniform Classification of Heirs Property Act, that would be useful for both co-tenants and community planners in developing estate plans and community development plans.

Conclusion

This research sought to capture data access, data definition, and data analysis. In terms of access, data from 10 of 12 Alabama counties (83.3 percent) and 10 of 15 Mississippi counties (67.75 percent) were publicly available through the online land parcel website hosted by the county Revenue Commissioner/Tax Assessor office. Additional restrictions included numerical caps on data (usually at 500 or 1,000 parcels) and processing fees to gain access. In addition, after speaking with the data companies, Alabama’s chosen parcel data company, Flagship, coded parcel information for our research at no additional cost, whereas Mississippi uses a different data company, and the retrieval of data had an associated cost or was not available at all.

A second significant outcome of this research is data definition or the nomenclature of land that is held with insecure title, usually due to intestate succession, and generically labeled “heir(s) property.” Confirming previous research, a significant number of land tracts that fit the definition of heirs’ property are labeled as *est*, *etal*, and *deceased*. This poses a problem since, while a significant number of land tracts labeled as *etal* or *estate* may be heirs’ property, not all the tracts are heirs’ property. Although these bordering states have similar historical, demographical, and geographical backgrounds, the property data and classification are very different. Again, this emphasizes the need for uniform classification of heirs’ property.

Data analysis highlights that only one county in Alabama, Macon, has “heirs property” as the majority term used (68.1 percent), while, for the four Alabama regions

under study, it was used in only 21.7 percent of the cases. In general, across Alabama, the terms *estate* (38.4 percent) and *etal* (32.6 percent) were preferred terms, and *deceased* was used in only 7.3 percent of the cases. In Mississippi, six of the ten counties (60 percent) where data was publicly available had no record of heirs' property; and for the counties that used "heirs" as a label, it occurred in only 0.2 percent of the cases. As with Alabama, the major terms were either *estate* (55.7 percent) or *etal* (44.0) and there were no cases of the use of *deceased* as a label.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations based on the findings of this research.

1. There is confusion surrounding the nomenclature associated with heirs' property. This term is used as if it identified one particular kind of property status (unsecured title, undivided tenants in common, etc.), when, in reality, there are several such terms. Identifying heirs' property is a major limitation when assessing its true occurrence and value. As previously stated, uniformity in classification is needed at every level. The State Office of Revenue Commissions for each state should head the initiative. Heirs need knowledge of the status of their property, and local tax assessors need more efficient identifying mechanisms. Heirs' property is potentially assessed at a lower property valuation than clear titled property, due to limitations on improvements. Therefore, identifying all clouded titles and having uniformity in classification can help local tax revenues generate more money for public needs.
2. The USDA should support programs through 1890 land grant universities and their Cooperative Extension Programs, community-based organizations, and other nonprofits who serve the communities most affected by heirs' property and that provide workshops and technical assistance on topics related to estate planning to address heirs' property issues. Special considerations should be given to states without the UHPA since there are no legal protections for heirs' property landowners in these states.
3. Finally, in terms of policy, a Uniform Classification of Heirs Property Act (UCHPA) should be proposed that clarifies the definition of heirs' property to bring uniformity and easier accessibility to families and researchers alike. This would need congressional funding, ideally to state revenue offices as mentioned in the first recommendation. Funds would employ lawyers and county officials to cross-check county parcels for the likelihood of heirs' property status.

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