Motivating puzzle

- Black Death rolls across Europe in the mid-1300s with continued outbreaks until the mid-1600s
  - Creates general labor scarcity throughout the continent
  - Creates shocks to the labor supply
- Serfdom in imposed/ re-imposed/ reinforced in Eastern Europe but is lessened and disappears in Western Europe
  - Reaction to scarce labor
- What explains variation in serfdom?
Why we should care about serfdom

- Historical Institutionalism
  - Serfdom led to less economic growth / later transition to capitalism
  - Serfdom led to later democratization

- Migration
  - Autocracies have used a range of emigration policies and restrictions on movement
  - Serfdom on one extreme end
  - Why serfdom? How does it help autocratic stability?
What is Serfdom?

Combination of policies to tie peasant to the land

- Restrictions on mobility of peasants
- Requiring peasants to work on lords’ land a certain number of days per year
- Potentially other taxes on economic activity
- Legal jurisdiction over peasants
- Laws on return of runaway peasants
How did the Black Death affect incentives over serfdom?

Black Death leads to labor scarcity everywhere
- Cost of labor increases
- Prices of foodstuffs and other goods decline (eventually)
- Lords’ income is squeezed
## Why is collusion over serfdom difficult? PD with shocks

### Wage Competition Game

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lord 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collude</strong></td>
<td>Low wages, split labor</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Both produce, make moderate profits)</td>
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<td><strong>Defect</strong></td>
<td>1: no peasants, 2: moderate wage and all peasants</td>
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<td>(Only 2 produces and makes high profits)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Lord 1**
  - Collude: 1: moderate wage and all peasants, 2: no peasants (Only 1 produces and makes high profits)
  - Defect: High wages, split labor (Both produce, make low profits)

- **Under repeat play should be able to cooperate**
- **Unless, we introduce shocks**
  - The Plague as repeated shock
  - If Lord 1 has no labor, did the peasants die or were they lured to Lord 2’s land?
- **Or different incentives**
  - Large, more productive farms can pay higher labor costs
  - Have less incentive to collude
How does the sovereign allow for cooperation? Monitoring and Enforcement

- Sovereign in between international organization and modern government
  - Can investigate claims of labor poaching
  - Can help enforce those claims
  - But, no monopoly over violence
- Sovereign has to be willing to take on this function
Why serfdom isn’t in the interest of the sovereign

- Other interests: Towns
  - Towns usually were comprised of mostly free folk
  - They wanted freedom of mobility to get more labor
  - Towns provided source of income for sovereign: trading locations and tariffs
- Military interests: need to conscript labor and harder to do under serfdom
  - Conscript armies ideal
  - But, nowhere near as good as mercenaries
- Break the power of the lords
How wars affect the sovereign’s willingness to acquiesced to the demands for serfdom

Need to finance war

▶ Sources of financing
  ▶ Own income
  ▶ Towns (Domestic capitalists)
  ▶ Foreign capitalists
  ▶ Lords

▶ Predictions
  ▶ No war, less likely to have serfdom
  ▶ War but able to get financing from own income, towns or foreign sources, less likely to have serfdom
  ▶ War and only able to finance from lords, serfdom
Data: The Black Death affects all of Europe and reoccurs making labor shocks a reality

Areas Hit by the Black Death

Legend
Sovereign States 1300s
Black Death
No Evidence
Clear Evidence
Some Evidence

Data: The Black Death affects all of Europe and reoccurs making labor shocks a reality.

Known Outbreaks of the Plague, 1400s

Legend

Sovereign States 1400s
Plague Outbreaks

- No Known
- Known Outbreak

Data: The Black Death affects all of Europe and reoccurs making labor shocks a reality.
Data: The Black Death affects all of Europe and reoccurs making labor shocks a reality.
Data: Effect of the Black Death on Prices and Wages

Fig. 10. Price and wage movements in western and central Europe 1351–1525 (50-year averages, silver content of coinage, $1351–75 = 100$).

Source: Abel 1980
Data: Where was serfdom reimposed and when?

Serfdom Laws, 1300s

Legend

Sovereign States 1300s
Serfdom

- No Data
- No Serfdom
- Wage Ordinance
- Limited Mobility
- Increasing Restrictions

Data: Where was serfdom reimposed and when?

Legend
Sovereign States 1400s
Serfdom
No Data
No Serfdom
Wage Ordinance
Limited Mobility
Increasing Restrictions
No Mobility

Data: Where was serfdom reimposed and when?

Serfdom Laws, 1500s

Legend
- Sovereign States 1500s
- Serfdom
  - No Law
  - No Serfdom
  - Wage Ordinance
  - Limited Mobility
  - Increasing Restrictions
  - Return Laws/ Jurisdiction
  - No Mobility


Serfdom Laws, 1500s
Data: Where was serfdom reimposed and when?

Serfdom Laws, 1600s

Legend
Sovereign States 1600s
Serfdom
No Data
No Serfdom
Wage Ordinance
Limited Mobility
Increasing Restrictions
No Mobility
Increasing Restrictions
Return Laws/ Jurisdiction/ High Labor Services

Data: Did Serfdom Laws Occur when Territory was at War?

- Limited mobility laws: 32% occur during war
- No mobility laws: 63% occur during war
- 72% of harsher laws occur during war
- But lots of other places had wars and no serfdom
Conclusion & Next Steps

Serfdom is a political bargain between lords and sovereign in the face of scarce labor

- Need monitoring and enforcement
- Sovereign not necessarily willing to enforce
- Serfdom associated with wars
- But not all wars lead to serfdom

Next steps

- More on financing
- Case studies
  - England: No war but serfdom laws
  - France: Limited serfdom and sold offices to finance wars
  - Brandenburg: Great Elector and Estates trade payment for permanent army for stricter serfdom laws
  - Russia: Middle Service Class gains serfdom in return for supporting war efforts
Alternative Explanations

- Population growth
- Peasant solidarity
- Rise of absolutism
- Trade
Most wars fought by mercenaries

- Sovereigns own resources
  - E.g. Swedish copper and iron mines
- Resources from domestic capitalists (towns)
  - E.g. Italian city-states turning merchant fleets into navies
- Resources from foreign capitalists
  - E.g. Wallenstein, Fuggers
  - But, sovereign has to pay back
- Resources from Lords
  - E.g. Russian Middle Service Class
  - But have to give benefits