Discussion of “The Economic Effects of the English Parliamentary Enclosures”

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Private or Collective?

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Discussion focus on three aspects of the paper

1) Question: effect of enclosure or effect of privatization?
   - Data: amazing new data set

2) Design: questions about instrument and its logic

3) Results: why do we see increased performance of privately held property?
What is the Question of Interest and Estimand?

Policy evaluation question:
“The Economic Effects of the English Parliamentary Enclosures”
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- Estimand 1: ATE $E[Y(1) - Y(0)]$
- Estimand 2: ATT $E[Y(1) - Y(0) | T = 1]$
- Estimand 3: Complier Average Causal Effect $E[Y(1) - Y(0) | T(z) > T(z')]$ where $z > z'$ is the level of the instrument

Compliance depends on instrument

Why are the compliers to this instrument the interesting subsample to estimate the effect?

(Personally) struggle with intuition about compliance with this instrument
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■ Estimand 1: ATE $E[Y(1) - Y(0)]$
  ■ What is the effect of enclosure on all parishes?

Key problem: some land already privatized, but in control group (e.g., CEOs and job training programs)

Estimand 2: ATT $E[Y(1) - Y(0) | T = 1]$
  ■ What is the effect of enclosure on parishes that were enclosed?
  Avoids the “never taker” and control comparison problem
  Easily estimable (matching, estimation, etc) requires selection on observables assumption already making for OLS.

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Mechanisms $\leadsto$ more evidence of “first stage”: enclosures change governance of commons
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Mechanisms → more evidence of “first stage”: enclosures change governance of commons

- If enclosures → infrastructure from government → outcomes that is interesting, but unrelated to private vs collective debate
Leave one out instrument and historical time frame

Figure 2: The number of parishes enclosed through Parliament, by year
For each parish, calculate proportion of neighboring parishes that successfully petition government.
Leave one out instrument and historical time frame

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“For every parish, we compute the fraction of petitions that pass in an area around the parish that plausibly proxies for the composition of a committee judging its petition in Parliament.”
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Leave one out instrument and historical time frame

- For each parish, calculate proportion of neighboring parishes that successfully petition government
- With turnover, very different members of parliament on committee
- What is the economic model that implies this is exogenous?

“For every parish, we compute the fraction of petitions that pass in an area around the parish that plausibly proxies for the composition of a committee judging its petition in Parliament.”
Why do We See Increased Performance of Private Land? Or, annoying questions about mechanisms?

Do we have direct evidence private landholders drive mechanisms?
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- Is it private holding of land or more expertise about farming?
- Does the time at which the land was privatized matter?
“Big Questions” and Historical Studies

Often asserted that “Big questions” necessarily can’t be answered precisely
This study engages in a 250 year old debate with careful data, analysis, and interpretation
Precise answers + Big questions