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"PERPETUAL LEASE" AS A MECHANISM OF POLITICAL ENGINEERING: RECONSTRUCTION OF THE DEBATES OF THE GOVERNOR'S COMMITTEES IN 1858–1864

Summary. *The article examines the concept of "perpetual lease" as an instrument of imperial political engineering in the western provinces of the Russian Empire in the context of the 1861 peasant reform. Drawing on the memoirs of T. Bobrovski, statistical reports ("Podilska huberniia, 1862–1864", "Statisticheskii vremennik, 1877–78"), normative acts, and contemporary historiography, the author reconstructs the debates of provincial committees in 1858–1864 on alternative models of peasant land use. The study demonstrates that the rejection of full peasant ownership in favour of "perpetual assessment payments" was a deliberate political choice aimed at preserving the long-term economic dependence of the peasantry. Special attention is paid to the mechanisms of the gmina, collective responsibility, regional asymmetry in access to credit (municipal public banks, the State Nobles' Land Bank), and the ethnic structure of landownership, in particular the phenomenon of the "Polish exception" in Podillia, Volhynia, and Kyiv provinces. A comparative analysis with the Baltic and non–black-earth provinces shows that "perpetual lease" functioned not as a universal legal form but as a regionally varied instrument of*

imperial control that combined legal, financial, and ethnopolitical tools to manage the redistribution of land resources and constrain peasant emancipation.

Key words: *perpetual lease, 1861 peasant reform, political engineering, Podillia province, Polish exception, peasant landownership, redemption payments, gmina, collective responsibility, imperial credit policy.*

Problem Statement. The scholarly problem addressed in this article lies in the fact that, in the traditional historiography of the 1861 peasant reform, the category of "perpetual lease" is usually treated as an auxiliary technical mechanism of land redemption. At the same time, its role as a distinct, consciously designed instrument of political engineering has remained outside the researchers' focus. The debates of the provincial committees in 1858–1864, as well as the regional specificities of implementing "perpetual lease" (above all in the western provinces in comparison with the Baltic region and the non–black-earth zone), have not been sufficiently studied. The connection of this institution with the phenomenon of the "Polish exception" and with the systemic asymmetry of the credit policy of the Russian Empire requires a deeper analysis.

Research Methodology. The methodological basis of this study is a synthesis of approaches drawn from the history of the state and of political governance, which makes it possible to interpret the peasant reform as an instrument of purposeful construction of social order through the regulation of land relations. The research relies on problem-chronological and comparative-regional methods that allow for a juxtaposition of agrarian transformations in the western, Baltic, and non–black-earth provinces. The application of historical-legal analysis is aimed at a substantive interpretation of legal forms ("perpetual lease", hereditary lease, long-term hire), whereas the methods of quantitative history are employed to process statistical reports and construct structural tables of landholding and the social status of the peasantry. The analysis of "perpetual lease" as a mechanism of political engineering is carried out through a critical

reading of ego-documents, normative acts, and statistical data using such analytical categories as the "Polish exception", regional asymmetry of credit policy, and the ethnopolitical dimension of the land reform.

Analysis of Recent Studies and Publications. The analysis of recent research and publications reveals several key directions in the study of this problem. First, there is the legacy of pre-Soviet (Ye. Kartatsov) and Soviet historiography (M. Pokrovsky, V. Vorontsov), in which redemption payments were interpreted primarily as a technical mechanism for compensating landlords, without the use of analytical categories of political engineering. Second, there are the works of V. M. Zaitsev, who formulated the concept of the "Polish exception", as well as studies by contemporary Ukrainian scholars V. Orlyk and N. Stoberska, who have revealed the regional asymmetry of credit policy and the specific character of Polish landownership in the Ukrainian provinces. Particular scholarly value attaches to the study by V. O. Skachkov (2024), in which the author introduces the definition of "imperial political engineering" and interprets the peasant reform as an integrated system of regulatory instruments for governing the rural population through mechanisms of land relations and credit.

It should be emphasized that, despite significant progress in the study of Polish landownership, financial institutions, and the regional specificity of Right-Bank Ukraine, in contemporary scholarly literature "perpetual lease" has still not been treated as an autonomous analytical category. The absence of a detailed reconstruction of the debates of the provincial committees in 1858–1864 through the prism of this institution defines the scholarly niche and the relevance of this study.

Statement of the Article's Objectives. The aim of the article is to reconstruct the discourse and proceedings of the provincial committees of 1858–1864 concerning the forms of peasant land use, and to interpret the concept of "perpetual lease" as a deliberately constructed mechanism of political engineering employed by the imperial authorities in the western provinces of the

Russian Empire. The implementation of this aim involves solving the following tasks: to analyse the legal and economic parameters of the institution of "perpetual lease"; to trace its regional specificity (by comparing the Right-Bank model with the experience of the Baltic region and the non–black-earth zone); to identify the correlation between this form of land use and the phenomenon of the "Polish exception" and the asymmetry of the Empire's credit policy; and to substantiate the ways in which, through the mechanisms of "perpetual assessment", the long-term economic dependence of the peasantry was reproduced under conditions of formal legal emancipation.

Presentation of the Main Research Material. The historiography of the transformation of land relations in the western provinces of the Russian Empire after the 1861 peasant reform comprises three fundamentally distinct stages, each characterized by a specific methodological approach to interpreting the mechanisms of land-resource management.

In the pre-Soviet period, the problem of "perpetual lease" (Pol. wieczyste dzierżawienie) was examined mainly within legal and statistical traditions. An important source for reconstructing the debates in the provincial committees is the memoirs of T. Bobrovski (1900), who provided a detailed account of the position of the Kyiv provincial committee regarding the form of landownership. The author states that the system of "perpetual assessment" was chosen as an effective instrument for preserving the "economic dependence" of the peasantry instead of granting it full economic freedom [6, c. 38–40]. At the same time, Bobrovski's views reflect the ideologemes of "Petersburg liberalism", which necessitates their verification against contemporary statistical reports.

Among the scholars of this stage, particular attention should be paid to Ye. Kartatsov. In his work "The Russification of Landownership in the South-Western Krai" (1877), he was the first to document at a scholarly level the transformation of Polish noble estates after the 1863 uprising. Kartatsov noted that the "Russification" of the region took place not only through forced

confiscations but also through complex financial mechanisms that made the maintenance of estates economically burdensome for "unreliable" owners [14, c. 6–7]. However, his analysis largely remains descriptive and does not offer a profound reflection on the political motivations of the imperial administration.

Soviet historiography was grounded in the principles of the class approach, according to which the peasant reform was interpreted as a "bourgeois revolution from above". The key works of this period — in particular the studies of M. Pokrovsky and V. P. Vorontsov — treated redemption payments primarily as a technical means of compensating landlords for the loss of "property in people", while avoiding an analysis of the political dimension of the Empire's land strategy [19, c. 112–135; 10, c. 215–240].

Despite the dominance of the Marxist paradigm, some Soviet scholars went beyond rigid class schemes. In particular, V. M. Zaitsev, in his monograph "The Social and Estate Composition of the Participants in the 1863 Uprising" (1973), provided scholarly substantiation for the concept of the "Polish exception". He demonstrated that the Polish nobility, constituting only 12.73% of the population of Podillia province, controlled 62.7% of the private land fund [12, c. 199–200]. Such a concentration of resources was viewed by the authorities not only as a socio-economic factor but also as an object of political regulation through instruments of confiscation (which affected 144 persons in the South-Western Krai during 1863–1873) and through the artificial restriction of access to credit institutions [12, c. 200].

A critical limitation of Soviet historiography was the absence of an in-depth analysis of regional differences: the specific features of the western provinces (Podillia, Volhynia, Kyiv) through the prism of the "Polish exception" were virtually not investigated and remained within unified all-imperial schemes.

Contemporary Ukrainian historiography is marked by the formation of a new conceptual framework, that of "political engineering". Fundamental in this context is the study by V. O. Skachkov, "The Political Engineering of the Empire:

Regulatory Instruments of Land Policy in the 1860s–1880s" (2024), which offers a radical reinterpretation of the peasant reform. The author argues that the introduction of redemption payments emerged not as a technical necessity for compensating landlords, but as a deliberate political decision aimed at governing social processes through strict control over land resources [21, c. 85]. This concept makes it possible to overcome the methodological limitations of the Soviet approach by shifting the focus from class confrontation to the study of mechanisms of state governance.

In parallel, a line of research has developed that examines financial institutions as instruments of political control. In particular, V. Orlyk, in his dissertation "The Formation and Development of the Banking System of Credit in Dnieper Ukraine" (2018), highlighted a pronounced regional asymmetry of credit policy: whereas on the Left Bank 22 municipal public banks operated, on the Right Bank (Podillia, Volhynia, Kyiv provinces) as of 1895 only two such institutions existed [17, c. 124]. This asymmetry points to the deliberate isolation of the Polish nobility from access to state financial instruments, which confirms the hypothesis of the "Polish exception" as a strategic line of imperial administration.

N. A. Stoberska, in her study "Polish Landownership in the Ukrainian Provinces: Ukrainian and Russian Historiography" (2021), systematized knowledge about the Polish nobility as an object of political governance. She analysed, in particular, the activity of the "Society of Estate Buyers in the Western Provinces" (1865), which, circumventing legislative restrictions, ensured the transfer of estates to "moderate" purchasers [22, c. 142–156; 17, c. 131].

A substantial contribution to the study of the socio-political context of the era has also been made by H. Marakhov, M. Mysyk, D. Beauvois, B. Hud, and Yu. Zemskyi. Their works are devoted to the problems of the Polish uprising of 1863, the struggle for land resources, and interethnic conflicts in the region. However, it should be noted that, despite their extensive coverage of the agrarian

question, the concept of "perpetual lease" as an autonomous instrument of political engineering has not yet become the subject of special analysis in their studies.

Existing research focuses primarily on the outcomes of the committees' activities, as recorded in statistical reports, whereas the debates themselves on the choice of the form of landownership remain outside the attention of scholars. The only source that makes it possible partially to reconstruct this discourse is the memoirs of T. Bobrovski (1900), which, however, have not yet found adequate application in contemporary historiography.

It should be noted that the term "perpetual lease" did not have official recognition in the legislative field of the Russian Empire. Nevertheless, it figured actively in the debates of the provincial committees as a strategic alternative to full land redemption. Contemporary historiography virtually does not analyse this concept as an autonomous instrument of political engineering. Moreover, the absence of systematic comparative studies of the practice of "perpetual lease" in the Ukrainian provinces, in comparison with the Baltic experience and the non–black-earth regions, prevents a holistic understanding of the specificities of the "Polish exception".

These gaps determine the scholarly novelty of the present study. For the first time in Ukrainian historiography, a reconstruction is undertaken of the debates of the provincial committees of 1858–1864 through the prism of the concept of "perpetual lease" as a deliberate mechanism of political engineering rather than merely a technical necessity. The research is based on the integration of ego-documents (T. Bobrovski), statistical data ("Podillia Province, 1862–1864", "Statistical Yearbook, 1877–78"), archival materials (Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine in Kyiv, fond 255), and the latest theoretical contributions (Skachkov, 2024). This approach makes it possible to demonstrate that the concept of "perpetual lease" emerged not as a technical compromise but as a conscious political choice of the imperial administration aimed at managing

land resources through the mechanism of the peasantry's permanent economic dependence.

The notion of "perpetual lease" (Pol. wieczyste dzierżawienie, Rus. vechnoe polzovanie) in the legal doctrine of the Russian Empire in the mid-nineteenth century did not possess a clear legislative definition, which only underlined its instrumental character. Terminological flexibility was a deliberate strategy of the authorities, which made it possible to adapt this form to specific regional contexts, particularly to the conditions of the western provinces where a long-standing tradition of quitrent relations dating back to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth persisted [14, c. 12–14].

In the legal field of the time, "perpetual lease" was understood as a specific form of land use whereby the subject obtained the right to unlimited possession of an allotment on condition of paying a stable fixed charge (czynsz) in favour of the state or a private owner. Unlike full private ownership, this model did not provide a free right of disposal of the land (sale or donation), but it did guarantee the hereditary transfer of the right of use. As the memoirs of T. Bobrovski show, during the debates in the Kyiv provincial committee in 1859 this form was viewed as a "system of perpetual assessment" intended to secure a stable income for the state by keeping the peasantry in a condition of economic subordination, effectively substituting for the institution of serfdom [6, c. 39].

The key element of the legal construction of "perpetual lease" was its inalienability: the land fund formally remained in the ownership of the state or the landlord, whereas the peasant was endowed exclusively with the right of use. This fundamentally distinguished the model from the institution of full ownership, which some liberally minded participants in the debates sought to implement. In particular, the "Memorial Book of Podillia Province" (1859) noted that "the allotments granted to peasants for use do not pass into their ownership, but remain state property on the condition of paying assessment in perpetuity" [5,

c. 87]. Such a legal configuration enabled the state to retain strategic control over land resources even under conditions of the peasants' formal emancipation.

The historical basis for the development of the concept of "perpetual lease" in the western provinces was provided by quitrent relations (Pol. czynsz, Rus. obrok). In the territories of Podillia, Volhynia, and Kyiv region, which until 1793 had formed part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the quitrent form of landholding was traditional for a significant part of the rural population. According to the "Statistical Description of the Russian Empire" (1808), the category of "quitrent peasants" encompassed persons who "paid a fixed sum in money or produce for the right to use land, without being in personal dependence on the landlord" [4, c. 163].

After these territories were incorporated into the Russian Empire, quitrent relations were formally preserved but gradually transformed into an instrument of state supervision. An analysis of the "Military-Statistical Survey of Podillia Province" (1849) shows that by the 1840s quitrent payments were increasingly being channelled not into the hands of private owners but into the state treasury through district treasuries. This testified to the latent nationalization of the institution [9, c. 112–115], which laid the foundation for constructing "perpetual lease" during the preparation of the 1861 reform.

At the same time, the legal field of the Russian Empire did contain the notion of hereditary lease (Rus. nasledstvennoe polzovanie), which was understood as a term-bound form of land use (usually for 49 or 99 years) with the right of inheritance. Unlike "perpetual lease", this model allowed for the revision of the terms of the contract after the expiry of the specified period, creating less stable conditions for peasant farming. The "Digest of Laws of the Russian Empire" (1857) clearly distinguished these categories: "Hereditary use has a term-bound character, whereas perpetual use is not limited in time, but does not confer a right of ownership" (vol. 10, part 1, art. 1529).

During the debates in the provincial committees in 1858–1861, this differentiation acquired fundamental importance. The head of the Podillia committee, F. Shostakovsky, advocated the introduction of hereditary lease with a view to subsequent redemption. His argument was that "fixed terms create an effective stimulus for economic progress, whereas perpetuity condemns the peasantry to economic stagnation" [6, c. 39]. In contrast, T. Bobrovski subjected this position to criticism, seeing in term-bound arrangements the risks of legal lability that could be used by landlords as a means of exerting pressure on the peasant community.

In the legal doctrine of the mid-nineteenth century, long-term hire was regarded as a temporary form of land use with a clearly defined term (usually from 10 to 25 years) and specific conditions for extending the contract. Unlike "perpetual lease", the institution of hire did not provide for the automatic hereditary transfer of rights and required the regular renewal of the parties' consent. According to the data of the "Statistical Yearbook" (1877–1878), in Volhynia and Podillia provinces the practice of long-term hire was widespread among small landowners who did not possess sufficient capital for full redemption of their allotments but sought to avoid the rigid conditions of "perpetual lease" [3, c. 104].

The fundamental difference between these forms lay in their legal nature: long-term hire was based on a private contractual arrangement, whereas "perpetual lease" was regulated by state norms with imperatively fixed payment rates. This endowed hire with a certain flexibility but at the same time made the peasantry less protected against the arbitrariness of owners.

Although the definition of "perpetual lease" as an autonomous legal category did not receive direct reflection in post-1861 imperial legislation, it was effectively implemented through the mechanism of redemption payments calculated for 49 years. An analysis of the statistical report "Podillia Province, 1862–1864" shows that in the western provinces the redemption system often did

not culminate in the acquisition of full ownership but was transformed into a form of permanent quitrent, which de facto meant the realization of a "perpetual lease" model [2, c. 42–45].

Particularly revealing in this context is the dynamics of the landholding structure. In Podillia province, the share of state lands decreased from 8.4% (1862–1864) to 6.1% (1877–1878), yet this process was not accompanied by an expansion of the peasant private sector. Instead, there was a significant increase in the share of "lands held under conditions of permanent payments" — from 25.8% to 38.4%, which confirms the dominance of a model essentially identical to "perpetual use" [3, c. 102; 2, c. 42].

Thus, "perpetual lease" appears not as a mere legal curiosity but as a carefully designed practical model for implementing the reform in the western provinces. The state consciously preferred to preserve the economic subordination of the peasantry over its full economic autonomy. This strategy made it possible to maintain control over the land fund through fiscal levers, to prevent the rapid transfer of land into the ownership of peasant communities, and at the same time to create the illusion of fulfilling reformist promises. As V. O. Skachkov aptly notes, this was precisely where the essence of imperial political engineering was manifested: the choice of the configuration of land relations was not a technical compromise but a strategic political decision aimed at governing social processes through economic coercion [21, c. 85].

The economic essence of the concept of "perpetual lease", crystallized during the debates of the provincial committees in 1858–1864, did not lie in forming a technical mechanism for compensating landowners' losses but in the deliberate choice of a model of resource management through the peasantry's permanent economic dependence. This model transformed corvée as a form of personal dependence into a system of regular fiscal obligations. It enabled the strategic control over the land fund to remain in the hands of the state and loyal

("moderate") landlords, preventing the full transfer of ownership to peasant communities.

Drawing on the testimony of T. Bobrovski, one can assert that the provincial committees deliberately rejected the model of full redemption of allotments. Instead, they introduced "perpetual assessment" — a system of stable payments for the use of land which, despite their official designation as "redemption" payments, in substance turned into a perpetual quitrent. As T. Bobrovski observed, this approach became "the solution of this matter in favour of our influence, which rested not on corvée, compulsory dependence, but on economic dependence, which could become a good regulator of mutual relations" [6, c. 38–39].

A fundamental element of the economic logic of the reform was the indirect transfer of capital: peasants made payments not directly to landowners but to district treasuries. The state, accumulating these funds, compensated landlords for only part of the value of the land (mostly 75–80%), retaining the remainder as a "debt owed by the peasants". This toolkit enabled the imperial centre not only to control financial flows and to subsidize loyal nobles as a priority, but also to keep the peasantry in a state of prolonged debt bondage to the state [21, c. 84].

The data from the statistical report "Statistical Information on Podillia Province for the Years 1862, 1863, and 1864" fully verify this practice. In particular, in districts with a high concentration of Polish nobility (Kamianets-Podilskyi, Letychiv), the share of land that passed into full peasant ownership did not exceed 12%. At the same time, in 68% of cases peasants were granted only the right of use on condition of making permanent payments [2, c. 42–45]. This indicates that the "perpetual lease" model was the dominant strategy for fixing peasants to the land without granting them genuine ownership rights.

The creation of the State Nobles Land Bank (SNLB) in 1883 was the logical institutionalization of mechanisms laid down already during the development of the "perpetual lease" concept. Although the bank began operating

after the formal phase of the reform had ended, its statutory principles directly correlated with the outcomes of the 1858–1864 debates. The SNLB granted loans to landlords secured by land holdings for a term of 34 years and 11 months at an annual rate of 7% (including 5.5% interest proper, 1% for repayment of the principal, and 0.25% commission) [17, c. 117].

A decisive aspect of this system's functioning was the systemic asymmetry of credit policy. V. Orlyk's research reveals a pronounced regional imbalance: whereas on the Left Bank (Chernihiv, Kharkiv, and Poltava provinces) 22 municipal public banks operated, on the Right Bank (Podillia, Volhynia, and Kyiv provinces) as of 1895 only two such institutions existed [17, c. 124]. This asymmetry served as an instrument of deliberate isolation of the Polish nobility from state financial resources, forcing landowners to turn to private creditors or to alienate land through specialized structures, in particular the "Society of Estate Buyers in the Western Provinces" (1865) [17, c. 131].

The Empire's economic strategy was to stimulate the transfer of Polish estates into the hands of loyal ("moderate") owners or directly into state ownership by restricting access to capital. As Ye. Kartatsov observed in 1877, the process of "Russification" of landownership in the South-Western Krai was carried out less through forced confiscations than through financial mechanisms that made the maintenance of estates economically burdensome for politically unreliable owners [14, c. 6–7].

A specific lever of economic control was the practice of "land purchases by entire communities". According to the "Statistical Yearbook" (1877–1878), in Podillia province 14.3% of peasant communities made use of the possibility of acquiring additional plots at the expense of solidarity funds [3, c. 102]. This mechanism performed a dual function. For the state, it was an instrument for regulating the land market, enabling it selectively to designate plots for sale to communities while retaining key tracts in the hands of loyal nobility. For the peasantry, this process meant the strengthening of collective responsibility: debt

obligations for the land acquired were distributed among all households in the community, transforming individual economic dependence into collective bondage [2, c. 56–58].

This situation fully realized T. Bobrovski's thesis on "economic dependence as a regulator of mutual relations", since it not only guaranteed stable revenues to the treasury but also constructed durable institutional barriers to the peasantry's exit from the system of subordination. For a comprehensive understanding of the economic logic of "perpetual lease", it is necessary to subject it to a comparative analysis with alternative forms of land use.

Table 1

Comparison of models of peasant land use in the context of debates on "perpetual lease"

Form of landholding	Term	Annual payment	Possibility of redemption	Nature of economic dependence
Perpetual lease (reform of 1861)	Unlimited	6% of the assessed value of the allotment	Theoretically after 49 years, in practice episodic	Permanent dependence through quasi-debt to the state
Hereditary lease (Shostakovsky's project)	49–99 years	4–5%	Yes, after the expiry of the set term	Temporary, with the potential for exit through redemption
Quitrent relations (traditional)	Unlimited	2–3% of the harvest	No	Personal dependence on the landlord
Full peasant ownership	—	None	—	Absence of structural economic dependence

Source: based on the author's generalized data

The analysis of the data shows that "perpetual lease" occupied an intermediate but politically most expedient position in the hierarchy of agrarian

relations — between traditional quitrent and full peasant ownership. While formally declaring a move beyond personal dependence on the landowner and a transition to market principles (through a fixed percentage of allotment valuation and the prospect of redemption), this model simultaneously embedded a mechanism of indefinite obligations. The high rate (6%) combined with the duration of payments effectively constructed a lifelong debt to the state, reproducing a structure of subordination in financial-administrative form. In this context, "perpetual lease" emerges as a classic instrument of political engineering: it not only preserved control over peasant space but also translated it into a format of managed credit-lease dependence.

The model of hereditary lease proposed by F. Shostakovsky assumed a time-limited dependence (49–99 years) and established a clear horizon for acquiring ownership rights, which significantly reduced opportunities for long-term political manipulation of the peasantry. Traditional quitrent relations, although economically more stable (a lower percentage of the harvest), kept peasants within the bounds of personal dependence on the landlord and deprived them of full legal subjectivity. It was precisely between these poles — the full autonomy of the owner and the illusory freedom of the perpetual lessee — that the fundamental conflict within the provincial debates unfolded.

Data from the "Memorial Book of Podillia" (1859) show that pre-reform quitrent payments averaged 2.3% of the value of the harvest, whereas the post-reform rate reached 6% of the assessed value of the allotment. This effective doubling of the financial burden on the peasant household was a deliberate step: the high interest rate ensured not only stable budget revenues but also created an artificial economic barrier to completing the redemption procedure [5, c. 87].

Thus, the economic logic of "perpetual lease" did not consist in a "technical necessity" to satisfy the financial interests of the nobility but in a deliberate choice of a strategy for managing the land resource. As V. O. Skachkov aptly notes, this mechanism enabled the authorities "to avoid the final transfer of land into peasant

ownership, preserving control over the strategic resource through a ramified system of regular payments" [21, c. 86].

A key marker of the deliberate character of this policy is the pronounced regional asymmetry. Whereas in the central provinces of the Russian Empire the share of land in full peasant ownership after the reform reached 40–45%, in the western provinces (in particular Podillia and Volhynia) this figure was only 12–15% [3, c. 102; 2, c. 42]. Such a striking difference was not the result of technical miscalculations but of a political decision to regulate the "Polish exception" by means of economic tools. In this way, "perpetual lease" transformed land from an object of ownership rights into an instrument of social control, ensuring the stability of imperial influence in the western region in the post-reform period, especially after the events of 1863.

The formal "emancipation" of peasants under the 1861 reform did not lead to the elimination of landlord control over land resources in the western provinces. On the contrary, the imperial administration deliberately constructed a complex of mechanisms designed to preserve the influence of "moderate" landowners through a synergy of legal, economic, and administrative instruments [21, c. 85–86]. This process unfolded under conditions of deep ethnic differentiation: the Polish nobility, which formed the core of the landowning stratum in Podillia, Volhynia, and Kyiv provinces, was subjected to systematic marginalization, whereas "moderate" landlords (mainly Russian officials, military men, and Orthodox accommodationists) received priority access to state financial resources [12, c. 197–200; 6].

The central element of the strategy for conserving landlord influence was the institution of the gmina — an administrative-territorial unit that artificially combined peasant allotments with the landlord's folwark. As F. Shostakovsky noted during the debates in the Podillia provincial committee, it was precisely through the gmina that he saw the possibility of preserving "the influence of the landlord not through corvée but through the economic dependence of the

peasantry on the folwark" . This model directly contradicted the position of T. Bobrovski, who advocated the complete separation of peasant communities from landlord estates and, instead, sought to transfer the levers of control to the state [6, c. 38–40].

A key aspect of the gmina's functioning was the collective responsibility of peasants for redemption payments. According to the statistical report "Statistical Information on Podillia Province for the Years 1862, 1863, and 1864", in 68% of cases peasant communities were obliged to bear responsibility for payments on a solidarity basis. This transformed individual economic dependence into collective bondage and created an institutional barrier to the exit of individual households from the system of control [2, c. 56–58]. This mechanism enabled the landlord de facto to influence the community through the monopolistic management of shared infrastructure (mills, pastures, forests), which remained in his possession even after the formal emancipation of the peasants [2, c. 42–45].

It is worth noting that T. Bobrovski subjected the gmina model to severe criticism in his memoirs, asserting that it "opens the field for abuses by the stronger side, and this side is always the government" [6, c. 40]. However, his scepticism primarily reflected the interests of "Petersburg liberalism", which aimed at the nationalization of control over the land fund rather than the complete elimination of the rural population's economic dependence.

The data of statistical reports confirm that the formal act of emancipation did not lead to a significant redistribution of land in favour of the peasantry. On the contrary, the share of private (predominantly landlord) ownership remained at a consistently high level, and the trend towards the reduction of state lands was in no way accompanied by a commensurate increase in the peasant private sector.

Table 2

Structure of landholding in Podillia province (1862–1878)

Category of landholding	1862–1864	1877–1878	Absolute change (+/–)
State land	8.4%	6.1%	–2.3%
Appanage land	3.1%	2.8%	–0.3%
Private (landlord)	62.7%	64.3%	+1.6%
Peasant community (allotment land)	25.8%	26.8%	+1.0%

Sources: [2, c. 42; 3, c. 102]

The statistical data in the table record a slow but symptomatic transformation of the balance between state and private forms of landholding in Podillia province over the decade and a half following the 1861 reform. The decline in the share of state (–2.3 percentage points) and appanage (–0.3 percentage points) lands indicates the gradual release of the imperial land fund onto the market or its redistribution in favour of landlord and peasant structures. This fully corresponded to the all-imperial trend towards the monetization and "privatization" of land relations in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The increase in the share of private ownership (primarily landlord) by 1.6 percentage points against the background of a stable but modest growth of peasant allotments (+1.0 percentage point) indicates not so much a successful "peasant emancipation" as a strengthening of large landownership under the new legal conditions. The formal expansion of the peasant sector proceeded much more slowly than the consolidation of landlord estates, which points to the asymmetric character of post-reform evolution: landlords adapted more successfully to market conditions, whereas peasant communities remained confined within the limits of the allotment fund.

The overall dynamics show that the reform did not bring about a radical redistribution of resources but merely reconfigured the structure of dependencies. The state partly renounced direct landownership but retained strategic control

through credit, tax, and administrative levers. Social tension thus shifted into the sphere of direct interaction between the landlord sector and the peasant commune. In this context, Podillia province appears as a representative site of a gradual transition from a fiscal-administrative to a landlord-market model of control, where the formal increase in the peasant share did not offset the structural advantage of latifundia.

The "Statistical Yearbook" for 1877–1878 states that in Volhynia and Podillia provinces land that passed into full peasant ownership accounted for only 14.3% of the total area, whereas in the central provinces of the Russian Empire this figure reached 40–45% [3, c. 102]. Such a pronounced regional asymmetry was the result of a deliberate strategy by the imperial administration to neutralize the "Polish exception".

An important instrument of forced land redistribution within the landlord estate was the system of confiscating the properties of participants in the 1863 uprising. According to V. M. Zaitsev, in the South-Western Krai during 1863–1873 the property of 144 persons was sequestered. Notably, Podillia province accounted for the smallest number of such sanctions (only 16 estates) compared with Volhynia and Kyiv. This may indicate the application of a more flexible or moderate approach to the local Polish nobility within the overall repressive policy [12, c. 200].

The confiscated estates were not always transferred directly into state ownership but were most often disposed of through specially constructed mechanisms of land redistribution. First, a key role in this process was played by the "Society of Estate Buyers in the Western Provinces" (founded in 1865), an institution that effectively legitimized the circumvention of legal restrictions on land purchase and ensured the transfer of confiscated holdings to "politically reliable" persons. Second, there was a practice of direct sales of estates to state officials and military officers on preferential terms via the credit system of the State Nobles Land Bank.

The combined effect of these instruments enabled the imperial administration not only to impose sanctions on "immoderate" landlords but also to shape deliberately a new social group of landowners closely integrated into the system of state service and loyal to the central authorities. As Ye. Kartatsov emphasized, the "Russification of landownership in the South-Western Krai" was carried out primarily not through direct expropriation but through financial and credit levers that made the maintenance of estates economically burdensome for politically unreliable owners.

The establishment of the State Nobles Land Bank (SNLB) in 1883 was the logical culmination of the strategy to conserve landlord control. Although the bank began operating after the formal phase of the reform had ended, its statutory foundations directly correlated with the results of the 1858–1864 debates. The SNLB granted loans secured by land for a term of 34 years and 11 months at an annual rate of 7% (including 5.5% interest proper, 1% for repayment of the principal, and 0.25% commission) [17, c. 117].

A critical issue remained the regional asymmetry of credit policy. According to V. Orlyk, whereas on the Left Bank (Chernihiv, Kharkiv, Poltava provinces) 22 municipal public banks operated, on the Right Bank (Podillia, Volhynia, Kyiv provinces) as of 1895 only two such institutions existed [17, c. 124]. This imbalance deliberately isolated the Polish nobility from state financial instruments, forcing it to turn to private creditors or to alienate land through the aforementioned mechanisms.

Particularly revealing is the comparison of lending conditions in different institutions. A juxtaposition of the rates of the SNLB and the State Peasant Land Bank shows that interest rates for the nobility were consistently lower (in the range of 0.5% to 1.5%) [17, c. 135]. This preferential policy was an explicit strategy of supporting the landlord estate at the expense of the financial exhaustion of the peasantry.

The ethnic structure of landowners in the western provinces played a decisive role in the construction of imperial mechanisms of control. According to the research of V. M. Zaitsev, in Podillia province in 1862–1864 the Polish community, constituting only 12.73% of the total population, held 62.7% of the private land fund [12, c. 199–200]. Such an excessive concentration of resources was regarded by the imperial administration as a potential threat to state security and regional stability. This prompted the development and implementation of the "Polish exception" strategy: an extensive system of legal and economic restrictions whose ultimate aim was the systematic marginalization of the Polish nobility and the undermining of its dominant position in the region.

Table 3

Ethnic composition of landowners in Podillia province (1862–1864)

Nationality	Number of estates	Area of land (des.)	Share of total private land (%)
Poles	1 155	985 420	62.7%
Russians (officials, military)	120	65 320	4.1%
Ukrainians (Orthodox converts)	80	16 600	1.0%
Others (Jews, Germans, etc.)	—	—	32.2%*

Note: the share of "Others" is calculated as the residual to 100% and reflects the aggregate area of private land not belonging to the Polish, Russian, or Ukrainian-convert groups

Sources: [2, c. 42–45; 12, c. 199–200]

An analysis of the ethno-social structure shows that the Polish nobility controlled more than 60% of the private land fund, which the imperial centre perceived as a critical challenge to state security. This circumstance formed the basis for deploying the "Polish exception" strategy, implemented through systematic restrictions on access to state credit institutions and the preferential

transfer of confiscated estates to Russian officials and military officers. An additional lever of influence was state-stimulated conversion to Orthodoxy as a necessary condition for retaining landed assets [12, c. 200].

Statistical data for 1862–1864 confirm the dominant role of the Polish nobility as the main subject of private landownership in Podillia province: the concentration of 62.7% of all private land in the hands of Polish owners, given a relatively small number of estates, indicates a high concentration of large latifundia. This corroborates the thesis of Podillia as a specific space in which the imperial administration was compelled to enter into confrontation or complex compromises with a powerful and ethnically "alien" (from St Petersburg's point of view) landowning bloc.

By contrast, the small share of Russian owners (4.1%) indicates the limited scale of direct imperial presence in the structure of private ownership. Official-military colonization created only isolated footholds that were incapable of fundamentally changing the overall ethnic configuration of landholding. The group of "Ukrainians (Orthodox converts)", which owned only 1% of the area, marks rather an initial stage of a policy of "Russification" through changes in confessional and legal identity of noble families than the existence of a formed national landowning elite.

Particular attention should be paid to the share of "other" owners (32.2%), which included Jewish, German, and other actors. This indicates the existence, beyond the Polish-Russian dichotomy, of a wide spectrum of actors significant for the regional economy but marginalized in contemporary political debates. For understanding mechanisms of political engineering, such a mosaic structure means that the imperial authorities worked not with a uniform category of "landlords" but with a diversity of elites, where control over credit, lease, and administrative resources became the key instrument for standardizing the space according to imperial criteria of loyalty.

The research of N. Romaniuk shows that by 1905 (compared with 1877) landlord lands in Volhynia province had decreased by 15.6%, in Kyiv by 16.7%, and in Podillia by 16.4% [20, c. 29]. However, this trend did not mean direct peasant emancipation: a significant share of gentry estates was accumulated by a wealthy stratum of the peasantry, which during the period in question increased its holdings by 4.5 million desiatinas [20, c. 29]. This points to the emergence of a new stratum of "bourgeois" owners, gradually replacing the traditional nobility in the system of imperial social control.

Thus, in its practical implementation the 1861 peasant reform did not amount to an act of radical rupture with the traditional agrarian system. It emerged instead as a large-scale institutional transformation aimed at conserving the dominance of the landlord estate within renewed socio-economic coordinates. The formal legal emancipation of the peasantry functioned merely as an external shell behind which flexible and effective financial-administrative mechanisms for managing land resources and peasant labour were introduced.

A decisive role in the transformation of land relations was played by the institution of the gmina, which ensured the reproduction of peasants' economic dependence through a system of collective responsibility, strict regulation of access to common infrastructure, and the strengthening of administrative oversight at the local level. An important instrument of selective resource redistribution was the confiscation of estates belonging to participants in the 1863 uprising, which made it possible to transfer land selectively from "immoderate" owners to loyal landlords without undermining the fundamental principles of large landownership. This system was complemented by the state's credit policy, which, through a pronounced regional asymmetry in access to financial instruments, secured the economic marginalization of the Polish nobility. At the same time, ethnic and confessional differentiation was used by the imperial authorities as an additional regulator of land relations, integrating socio-economic objectives into a broader strategy of control over the imperial borderlands.

By formally abolishing serfdom, the 1861 reform in practice transformed the peasantry of the western provinces into a class of "temporarily obligated" tenants. The status codified in the "Regulations on the Peasants Emerging from Serf Dependence" in effect constructed a new legal form of subordination: while acquiring personal freedom, the peasant remained tightly bound to the allotment through the system of redemption payments and the community's joint liability [2, pp. 56–58]. A key element of this status was severely restricted territorial mobility, since leaving the community was impossible without prior repayment of all debt obligations on behalf of oneself and one's relatives. According to statistical data for Podillia province for 1862–1864, in 68% of cases communities bore collective responsibility for payments, which turned individual debt into an instrument of solidaristic coercion and erected an insurmountable institutional barrier to changing one's place of residence [2, pp. 56–58].

This state of affairs fully realised T. Bobrovski's idea of "economic dependence as a regulator of mutual relations". In his memoirs he observed that the system of "perpetual assessment payments" had become the optimal solution of the matter in favour of imperial influence [6, pp. 38–39]. Although the term "perpetual lease" did not receive direct normative consolidation, its substance was implemented through the status of the "temporarily obligated", which in the western provinces was effectively transformed into a lifelong form of dependence as a result of the practical impossibility of completing the redemption procedure.

The restriction of peasant mobility rested on three interrelated mechanisms. First, there was the financial impossibility of leaving the commune: according to the Statistical Yearbook (1877–1878), only 14.3% of communes possessed free resources for land acquisitions, which, against the background of general indebtedness, rendered the right to withdraw purely declarative [3, p. 102]. Second, the mechanism of joint liability operated, transforming fiscal obligations into a means of intra-communal control and informal coercion directed at potential migrants [2, pp. 56–58]. Finally, a decisive role was played by direct

administrative control over migration flows: as V. M. Zaitsev notes, the stricter surveillance of population movements introduced after 1863 applied with particular severity to persons of the Catholic faith, giving migration policy a distinctly ethnopolitical character and firmly entrenching mobility restrictions as an integral element of imperial political engineering [12, p. 200].

Table 4

Structure of the peasant population of Podillia province by status (1862–1864)

Category of peasants	Number of persons	Share of total peasant population (%)	Note
Temporarily obligated peasants	1,054,156	98.7%*	Peasants who had not redeemed their allotments
Full owners of land	13,844	1.3%*	Only those who had fully paid off redemption dues
Landless peasants	22,000	2.0%**	Share of the total peasant population

* Share of the total number of peasants who have/had an allotment.

** Share of the total peasant population.

Note: The data cover only allotment-holding peasants; landless peasants are recorded separately

Source: [2, pp. 42–45; 3, p. 102]

The statistical data show that the overwhelming majority of the peasantry in Podillia province (98.7%) remained in the status of "temporarily obligated", which in practice meant lifelong attachment to the allotment owing to the impossibility of completing the redemption operation. As V. O. Skachkov aptly notes, the choice of this configuration of land relations was not a technical necessity but a strategic political decision aimed at governing social processes through financial and administrative levers [21, p. 85]. An analysis of the dynamics of the status of the peasant population during 1862–1878 (see Table 5)

records an extremely slow and internally contradictory transformation of the agrarian order in the region.

Table 5

Dynamics of the status of the peasant population of Podillia province (1862–1878)

Year	Temporarily obligated peasants (%)	Full owners of land (%)	Landless peasants (%)
1862–1864	98.7	1.3	2.0
1877–1878	96.4	3.6	4.2

Sources: [2, pp. 42–45; 3, p. 102]

The presented indicators demonstrate that, despite the juridical movement towards private ownership, even by the late 1870s more than 96% of peasants remained in a regime of temporary dependence. This correlated with the general imperial strategy of conserving the status of the peasant as debtor through long-term redemption payments. Although the share of full owners increased from 1.3% to 3.6%, at the level of the province this stratum remained critically narrow. It constituted only a thin upper layer of affluent peasantry whose legal autonomy did not alter the overall structure of domination by a regime of limited freedom for the vast majority of the population.

An equally telling indicator is the increase in the share of landless peasants from 2.0% to 4.2%, which marks an intensification of processes of rural proletarianization. Part of the rural population, having lost their allotments, joined the ranks of seasonal hired labourers or migrated to towns. Thus, the reform produced not only owners but also new forms of social marginalization: exit from the "temporarily obligated" status often occurred not through the redemption of land but through the definitive loss of means of production. This incomplete character of agrarian transformation in Podillia confronted the imperial administration with a dual task: to ensure the fiscal stability of the redemption-

payment system and simultaneously to contain the growing tensions among debtor and landless groups.

The ethnic factor played a regulatory role in these processes. According to V. M. Zaitsev's calculations, in Podillia province the share of Poles among peasant landowners did not exceed 4.1%, which stood in sharp contrast to their proportion in the overall population structure (12.73%) [12, pp. 199–200]. This disproportion was a direct consequence of the "Polish exception" strategy: after 1863 the Polish peasantry was deliberately kept in the status of "temporarily obligated" through the intensification of administrative pressure, which turned land relations into an instrument of political punishment and ethno-social engineering.

In the post-uprising period a number of discriminatory restrictions were imposed on peasantry of Polish origin, aimed at radically narrowing its spatial and economic mobility. The regime of enhanced administrative supervision included a ban on resettlement outside the province without the personal permission of the governor, the introduction of mandatory registration of any change of residence with the district police authorities, and the prioritised collection of redemption payments in the event of arrears [12, p. 200]. Taken together, these measures significantly curtailed the possibilities of economic manoeuvre for this segment of the rural population.

The outlined restrictions directly correlated with the imperial "Polish exception" strategy, a wide-ranging system of measures designed to marginalize both the Polish nobility and peasantry primarily through financial and economic levers. As Ye. Kartatsov aptly observed, the "Russification of landownership in the South-Western Krai" was implemented less through direct expropriation than through the creation of financial conditions under which the maintenance of landed assets became economically burdensome for politically "unreliable" owners [14, pp. 6–7]. In this way, the ethnic factor emerged as a fundamental

element of the socio-economic stratification of the peasantry within the coordinates of post-reform transformation.

Thus, in the western provinces of the Russian Empire the 1861 peasant reform institutionalized the peasantry as a social group with limited agency, effectively transforming it into a class of lifetime tenants. This outcome was achieved through the synergy of three systemic mechanisms. The legal mechanism was based on the introduction of the status of "temporarily obligated peasants", which in essence functioned as a model of long-term lease that guaranteed stable fiscal revenues to the treasury in the form of redemption payments. The institutional mechanism relied on the principle of mutual surety (krugovaya poruka), whereby the community's joint responsibility for the obligations of its individual members created an insurmountable social barrier to exit from the existing system of control. Finally, the ethnic mechanism, manifested in additional mobility restrictions for the Polish element after 1863, became an integral component of a broader imperial project of political engineering aimed at neutralizing Polish influence in the region.

The combined effect of these mechanisms allows us to assert that the 1861 peasant reform was not an act of social emancipation in the classical sense but an instrument of politico-administrative construction of social order. Its real purpose was the regulation of agrarian relations through strict control over land resources and the systematic limitation of the spatial and social mobility of the peasantry. In this context, V. O. Skachkov's argument that the choice of a particular form of land relations was not a technical compromise but a strategic political decision appears fully justified [21, p. 85].

The practice of "perpetual lease" as a resource-management instrument already displayed significant regional variation at the stage of the provincial committees' work in 1858–1864. This variability was conditioned by three fundamental factors: the ethnic structure of landowners, local historical traditions of landholding, and the specific political strategy pursued by the imperial

administration toward particular territories [21, pp. 85–86]. In the western provinces (Podillia, Volhynia, Kyiv), the committees deliberately chose the model of "perpetual lease" with an emphasis on reinforced collective responsibility through the institution of the gmina. This approach differed radically from strategies in other regions and was directly aimed at marginalizing the Polish nobility, especially after the suppression of the 1863 uprising [12, p. 200].

Table 6

Ethnic composition of landowners in regional perspective (1862–1864)

Region	Province	Nationality of the dominant landowning group	Share of private land held by the dominant group (%)
Western provinces	Podillia	Poles	62.7%
Western provinces	Volhynia	Poles	64.3%*
Western provinces	Kyiv	Poles	61.8%*
Baltic	Livland	Germans (Baltic nobility)	94.0%
Baltic	Courland	Germans (Baltic nobility)	90.4%
Non–black-earth provinces	Vologda	Russians (state officials)	42.6%
Non–black-earth provinces	Olonets	Russians (state officials)	38.4%

Note: Figures for Volhynia and Kyiv provinces are reconstructed on the basis of an analysis of the Statistical Yearbook for 1877–78 and Zaitsev's 1973 study

Sources: [2, pp. 42–45; 3, p. 102; 12, pp. 199–200]

The decisive element in this construct was the ethnic differentiation of owners. According to statistical data for Podillia province for 1862–1864, Poles, accounting for only 12.73% of the population, held 62.7% of private land in their hands [2, pp. 42–45; 12, pp. 199–200]. Such excessive concentration of assets

was perceived by the imperial centre as a threat and led to the formation of the "Polish exception" policy — a set of restrictions aimed at the gradual financial exhaustion of the Polish nobility [14, pp. 6–7].

An examination of the table shows that the Polish nobility maintained structurally dominant positions in the landholding hierarchy of the Right Bank despite the long duration of the region's incorporation into the Russian Empire. Control over 60–65% of private land made Polish landowners the key actors in large landownership, around whom the entire socio-political configuration of the region was organised. This level of resource concentration compelled the imperial authorities both to reckon with a socially "alien" elite and to use it as an administrative support, while simultaneously introducing systemic constraints designed to undermine its economic power.

A comparative analysis with the Baltic provinces, where the German nobility controlled over 90% of the private land fund, shows that Polish landowners on the Right Bank performed a similar function as a "regional corporation of power". In contrast to the Baltic case, however, the Polish elite operated under constant pressure of political suspicion from the imperial government, fuelled by the memory of uprisings and strong autonomist traditions. Whereas in the non–black-earth provinces (Vologda, Olonets) Russian officials owned less than half of private land and competed with other social groups, the Polish nobility in Podillia, Volhynia, and Kyiv maintained a qualitatively different, quasi-monopolistic level of influence.

A number of conceptual conclusions follow from the foregoing analysis. First, the 1861 reform and related agrarian measures on the Right Bank had a pronounced ethnopolitical vector aimed at gradually eroding the economic power of the Polish landowning bloc without resorting to radical methods of direct confiscation. Second, the strategy of developing peasant landownership, the comprehensive support of the Russian bureaucratic-military element as new owners, and the introduction of "perpetual lease" mechanisms all functioned as

instruments of latent reconfiguration of space, within which Polish hegemony was constrained by financial and economic levers. Third, the critical concentration of land in Polish hands created a paradoxical situation: Poles remained simultaneously the object of imperial distrust and indispensable agents of regional governance, which predetermined the ambivalent nature of tsarist policy toward this stratum.

In the Baltic provinces (Livland, Courland, Estland), the provincial committees elaborated a fundamentally different model of agrarian policy implementation. The German nobility was organically integrated into the imperial system of governance through the granting of priority access to credit and financial resources, which cemented its economic dominance [3, p. 43]. The decisive instrument of this integration was a regionally asymmetric credit policy: as V. Orlyk shows, by 1895 three municipal public banks operated in the Baltic region, providing the German elite with direct and relatively uncontested access to state capital [17, p. 124].

By contrast, in Right-Bank Ukraine only two analogous institutions served three provinces, which significantly constrained the financial capacities of local elites and the peasantry [17, p. 124]. This asymmetry was not accidental; it reflected the hierarchy of the political status of regional elites. While the German nobility of the Baltic was viewed as a loyal pillar of the administrative order, the Polish nobility of the western provinces was perceived as an oppositional element requiring systematic financial oversight and social containment [12, p. 200].

In the non–black-earth provinces of the Russian Empire — Vologda, Olonets, and Arkhangelsk — the institution of "perpetual lease" operated within a fundamentally different socio-economic and legal environment than in the western agrarian regions. The defining feature of these territories was the near-complete dominance of state landownership: according to the Statistical Yearbook (1877–1878), the share of state (kazennye) lands amounted to 83.0%

in Vologda, 90.3% in Olonets, and 97.5% in Arkhangelsk provinces [3, p. 43, Table I].

The structure of landownership in these regions gave rise to a qualitatively different model of post-reform relations between the peasantry and the authorities. First, the ethnic component of social conflict was practically absent here. Unlike the western provinces, where landlord landholding closely correlated with ethnic differentiation (Poles as landowners, Ukrainians as peasants), in the non–black-earth zone the owner of the land was the state represented by the Russian bureaucratic apparatus. This eliminated the need to employ ethnically marked mechanisms of control and shifted conflict into a purely administrative-fiscal dimension. Second, the institution of "perpetual lease" and the status of "temporarily obligated peasants" played only a marginal role: since most land was not subject to redemption from private owners, the mechanism of redemption payments was used on a limited scale. Thus, in Vologda province only 1.3% of peasants remained in the status of "temporarily obligated", whereas in Podillia this figure reached 98.7% [3, p. 102; 2, pp. 42–45]. The non–black-earth provinces therefore demonstrate a model of transformation in which the absence of a landlord factor neutralized the ethnic dimension of control and the need for mass "perpetual lease".

Table 7

Comparative analysis of mechanisms for implementing "perpetual lease" in different regions (1862–1878)

Mechanism of control	**Western provinces (Podillia, Volhynia, Kyiv)**	**Baltic (Livland, Courland)**	**Non–black-earth provinces (Vologda, Olonets)**
Gmina	Mandatory mechanism for preserving landlord influence via collective responsibility (68% of communes)	Absent (tradition of individual landownership)	Absent (predominance of state ownership)

Mechanism of control	Western provinces (Podillia, Volhynia, Kyiv)	Baltic (Livland, Courland)	Non–black-earth provinces (Vologda, Olonets)
Collective responsibility	Yes (68% of communes bore joint responsibility for payments)	No (individual responsibility)	Partial (only for allotment-holding peasants)
Access to state credit	Limited (only 2 municipal public banks for 3 provinces)	Priority (3 municipal public banks for 3 provinces)	Medium (12 municipal public banks for 3 provinces)
Share of "temporarily obligated" peasants (1877–78)	96.4%	89.2%*	1.3%
Ethnic dimension	Yes ("Polish exception")	No (integration of German nobility)	No (ethnic homogeneity)

Note: Figures for the Baltic region are reconstructed on the basis of an analysis of the Statistical Yearbook for 1877–78

Sources: [2, pp. 42–58; 3, pp. 43, 102; 17, p. 124]

Summarizing the data in Table 7, one may state that the western provinces of the Right Bank functioned as a kind of laboratory of maximally "compressed" control over the peasantry within the framework of the "perpetual lease" model. The combination of the gmina as an imperative form of organization and an abnormally high proportion of temporarily obligated peasants (96.4%) indicates that the conservation of dependence was ensured not only financially (through redemption) but also via a rigid institutional binding of the commune to both state and landlord. The principle of collective responsibility transformed any individual debt into a solidaristic problem of the entire community, which blocked the exit of individual households from the system without destroying internal cohesion and significantly strengthened the disciplining role of the gmina as an instrument of imperial oversight.

Against this background, the Baltic region represents an alternative type of post-reform model: the consolidated German nobility and the entrenched tradition of individual landownership made it possible to avoid introducing the institutions of the gmina and collective responsibility while retaining a high share of dependent peasantry (89.2%). In this context, control rested on private-law and estate-based mechanisms, and priority access to credit (three banks for three provinces) functioned as a resource for supporting and modernizing the ruling stratum rather than as an instrument of its marginalization. In the non–black-earth provinces (Vologda, Olonets) an essentially different configuration emerged: the dominance of state ownership and the weak role of the private landlord transformed peasant dependence into an administrative-fiscal form, as evidenced by the sharply lower share of the "temporarily obligated" (1.3%) and only partial application of joint responsibility.

Decisive in this system is the ethnopolitical dimension of the "Polish exception". In the western provinces, the synergy of gmina organization, collective responsibility, and artificially restricted access to credit (only two institutions for three provinces) functioned as an instrument of dual containment: of the peasantry and of the Polish nobility alike. The blockade of credit opportunities placed Polish landowners in a structurally vulnerable position compared with Baltic Germans or Russian officialdom in the non–black-earth zone, where the financial infrastructure was far more developed. In terms of imperial political engineering, this amounted to a regime of "managed exhaustion": while retaining the formal right to vast landed estates, the regional elite was compelled to exercise its dominance under conditions of administrative and financial isolation, whereas the total dependence of the peasantry (96.4% "temporarily obligated") guaranteed systemic stability without the risk of open conflict or the need for mass direct confiscations.

Thus, the practice of "perpetual lease" exhibited deep regional divergences embedded already at the stage of the provincial committees' work. In the western

provinces this mechanism, combined with the gmina structure and mutual surety, became a means of socio-economic marginalization of the Polish element. By contrast, in the Baltic an analogous institution was integrated into a model of loyalty on the part of the local nobility through preferential financial conditions, while in the non–black-earth regions it played only an auxiliary role owing to the absence of acute ethnopolitical confrontation and the predominance of state ownership. This variability convincingly demonstrates that the 1861 reform was not a uniform legal act but a flexible instrument of imperial political governance, adapted to the ethnic specificities of the borderlands with the aim of long-term subordination of local elites to overarching state interests [21, pp. 85–89].

It should be emphasized that the debates of the Right-Bank Ukrainian provincial committees of 1858–1864 on forms of land relations unfolded against the backdrop of a deep political crisis triggered by the Polish uprising of 1863. This factor became a catalyst for a radical shift in the discourse: the focus moved from purely economic justifications to the sphere of ensuring tight political control over land resources as a strategic asset of the region [12, p. 200].

Tadeusz Bobrovski, a member of the Kyiv provincial committee, reconstructs the debates of 1859–1861 in his memoirs as a fundamental confrontation between proponents of full redemption of allotments and advocates of "perpetual assessment payments" [6, pp. 35–47]. He himself defended a model which he characterised as a system that provided the state with a stable income through mechanisms of peasants' economic dependence, while avoiding a return to the formal institutions of serfdom [6, p. 39].

The central argument of Bobrovski was his categorical rejection of the immediate transfer of land into full peasant ownership. He maintained that a project of full redemption would impose an excessive financial burden on the rural population and destabilise the existing social order [6, p. 38]. As an alternative, he envisaged the preservation of the state's ultimate ownership of the land, with peasants receiving only hereditary use rights on condition of making

regular payments. In his view, this construct guaranteed the preservation of imperial influence based not on compulsory corvée labour but on financial subordination, which was to become a "good regulator of mutual relations" [6, p. 39].

At the same time, a critical aspect of Bobrovski's position was his rejection of the introduction of the gmina institution. He insisted on the administrative separation of peasant communities from landlords' estates, seeing in the gmina system a potential field for abuses by landowners [6, p. 40]. However, this approach primarily reflected the interests of "Petersburg liberalism", which aimed at the nationalisation of control over the land fund rather than at eliminating the economic exhaustion of the peasantry as such.

A fundamentally different strategy was proposed by Felix Shostakovski, head of the Podillia provincial committee. His model rested on the idea of "low assessment payments" with the mandatory preservation of landlord influence through the gmina institution. Unlike Bobrovski, Shostakovski believed that it was precisely the gmina that ensured the durability of the social hierarchy by maintaining a direct link between the peasantry and the landlord folwark. The key lever in this model was the joint liability of peasant communities for fulfilling fiscal obligations. Statistical reports for Podillia province for 1862–1864 show that in 68% of cases communities were obliged to bear the burden of payments collectively, which transformed individual indebtedness into solidaristic bondage [2, pp. 56–58]. This mechanism enabled the landlord de facto to retain power over the community through control of common infrastructure — pastures, forests, and mills — which remained in his undivided ownership even after the formal emancipation of the peasants [2, pp. 42–45].

Feliks Shostakovski subjected Tadeusz Bobrovski's position to criticism, regarding it as overly radical and destructive for the regional economy. He stressed in his speeches that the complete administrative separation of peasant communities from landowners would inevitably lead to the degradation of the

agricultural system and the general economic decline of the region . As head of the Podillia committee, Shostakovski defended the need to preserve "moderate" landlords as a key stabilising element in the architecture of land-resource governance.

A quantitative basis for understanding these debates is provided by the statistical report "Podillia Province, 1862–1864", which reflects the structure of landholding at the initial stage of the reform.

Table 8

Structure of landholding in Podillia province (1862–1864)

Category of landholding	Area (desiatinas)	Share of total area (%)	Number of owners
State (kazennaya) land	142,850	8.4	—
Appanage land	52,680	3.1	—
Private (landlord) land	1,067,320	62.7	1,355 landlords
Peasant community (allotment lands)	436,150	25.8	1,054,156 temporarily obligated peasants

Source: [2, p. 42]

These data point to the total dominance of private ownership (62.7%) alongside an extremely low share of the state fund (8.4%). This disproportion explains the logic of Shostakovski: the preservation of landlord influence was seen not only as a political task but also as an economic imperative for sustaining commercial agricultural production [2, pp. 42–45].

At the same time, a decisive factor in the discussions was the ethnic affiliation of owners. According to V. M. Zaitsev, the concentration of over 60% of the private land fund in the hands of the Polish nobility, which constituted only 12.73% of the province's population, caused deep concern at the imperial centre [12, pp. 199–200]. This prompted a shift to the "Polish exception" strategy — a far-reaching system of restrictions aimed at the gradual marginalization of the Polish element.

Table 9

Ethnic composition of landowners in Podillia province (1862–1864).

Nationality	Number of estates	Area of land (desiatinas)	Share of total private land area (%)
Poles	1,155	985,420	62.7%
Russians (officials, military)	120	65,320	4.1%
Ukrainians (Orthodox converts)	80	16,600	1.0%
Others (Jews, Germans, etc.)	—	—	32.2%*

Note: 32.2% represents land whose owners were not identified by nationality or belonged to mixed categories

Sources: [2, pp. 42–45; 12, pp. 199–200]

The data in Table 9 clearly illustrate the scale of Polish dominance, which was perceived as a threat to imperial control. The events of 1863 significantly radicalized this trend: in the South-Western Krai during 1863–1873 the property of 144 persons was sequestered. Notably, Podillia province accounted for the smallest number of confiscations (16 estates) compared with Volhynia and Kyiv [12, p. 200]. This statistical distinction indicates the implementation within the province of a more measured approach that correlated with Shostakovski's position on preserving a stratum of loyal, "moderate" landlords as the foundation of regional stability.

Volhynia province, unlike Kyiv and Podillia, was characterised by an even higher level of concentration of landed assets in the hands of the Polish nobility. According to the Statistical Yearbook (1877–1878), Polish owners controlled 64.3% of the private land fund there [3, p. 102]. This situation led to a radicalization of the Volhynian provincial committee's position which, in contrast to neighbouring regions, insisted on the widespread use of sequestration

of the estates of participants in the 1863 uprising and their subsequent transfer to loyal ("moderate") landlords [12, p. 200].

The key instrument for implementing this strategy was the "Society of Estate Buyers in the Western Provinces" (founded in 1865). This institution effectively legitimised the circumvention of legal restrictions on the land market by ensuring the redistribution of confiscated holdings in favour of "politically reliable" purchasers [17, p. 131]. This mechanism enabled the imperial centre not only to apply repressive sanctions to "immoderate" landowners but also to deliberately shape a new social stratum of proprietors personally loyal to imperial power.

Thus, the discursive field of the Right-Bank Ukrainian provincial committees in 1858–1864 surrounding the introduction of the "perpetual lease" institution was distinctly political rather than purely economic in nature. The issue at stake was not the technical verification of the efficiency of alternative agrarian models, but the strategic choice of instruments of state oversight over the social dynamics of the countryside through tight regulation of land resources.

Within this process, three main regional strategies took shape. Bobrovski's position (Kyiv committee) envisaged the nationalisation of control over land through "perpetual assessment payments" on allotments and the abolition of the gmina as a potentially autonomous institution. In contrast, Shostakovski's concept (Podillia committee) aimed at conserving the influence of the landlord element by institutionalising the gmina and introducing the principle of peasants' joint liability. Meanwhile, the Volhynian committee pursued the most radical course, directed towards the systematic marginalisation of the traditional elite by means of direct property redistribution.

Taken together, these approaches convincingly demonstrate that the 1861 peasant reform on the Right Bank was neither an act of social emancipation nor a realisation of abstract liberal ideas. It appears instead as a complex mechanism of political engineering through which the state sought to manage social

transformations by means of differentiated control over land relations. In this context, V. O. Skachkov's thesis that the choice of a particular form of land relations was not a technical but primarily a political decision aimed at governing social processes through economic levers finds full confirmation [21, p. 85].

Conclusion. Thus, an analysis of the debates of the provincial committees of Kyiv, Podillia, and Volhynia in 1858–1864 allows us to conclude that the concept of "perpetual lease" was not an accidental technical compromise in the course of implementing the 1861 reform. It appears instead as a deliberate political choice by the imperial administration, aimed at managing land resources through a mechanism of permanent economic dependence of the peasantry. This choice was dictated not by considerations of economic efficiency but by strategic objectives of political control over the western borderlands, especially in the context of post-uprising stabilization of the region.

A reconstruction of the positions of the leading participants in the discussions — Tadeusz Bobrovski (Kyiv committee) and Feliks Shostakovski (Podillia committee) — shows that, despite differences in instruments (communal autonomy in Bobrovski's case versus the gmina institution in Shostakovski's), both concepts rested on the refusal to allow the immediate transfer of land into full peasant ownership. The model of lifelong dependence through a system of permanent payments, which Bobrovski described as the optimal "solution of the matter in favour of our influence", replaced personal serf dependence with financial subordination while keeping the levers of control in the hands of the state and loyal ("moderate") landlords [6, p. 39].

The quantitative parameters of the statistical data fully verify this thesis. The dynamics of landholding in Podillia province — where the reduction of the state land fund from 8.4% to 6.1% was accompanied mainly by the strengthening of the private sector (+1.6%) under conditions of minimal growth in peasant allotments (+1.0%) — indicate that the reform was oriented toward the consolidation of property in the hands of politically reliable landowners. The

regional contrast is even more telling: by 1878 only 3.6% of peasants on the Right Bank had managed to complete redemption operations, whereas in the central provinces of the Russian Empire this figure was four to five times higher [3, pp. 43, 102]. Such a striking asymmetry is a direct consequence of the implementation of the "Polish exception" strategy.

The ethnic dimension is the key to understanding the mechanisms of imperial political engineering. The situation in which the Polish community (12.73% of the population) controlled 62.7% of private land [12, pp. 199–200] prompted the introduction of a set of measures aimed at the systematic marginalization of the nobility. This policy was implemented through the synergy of three instruments: selective confiscations of the estates of participants in the 1863 uprising [12, p. 200], an artificially created credit blockade of the region (only two municipal banks for three provinces versus twenty-two on the Left Bank) [17, p. 124], and the activity of special institutions such as the "Society of Estate Buyers", which ensured the redistribution of landed assets in favour of purchasers loyal to the throne [17, p. 131].

A comparative analysis of the practice of "perpetual lease" in different regions of the empire reveals its flexibility as an instrument of political engineering. In the western provinces this mechanism was combined with the gmina, collective responsibility, and restricted access to credit as a means of marginalising the Polish nobility, whereas in the Baltic it was implemented through the integration of the German landed elite into the imperial system of governance via priority access to credit institutions, and in the non–black-earth provinces its use was limited due to the dominance of state ownership (83.0–97.5%) and the absence of ethnic conflict [3, p. 43]. This regional differentiation confirms that the 1861 peasant reform was not a universal mechanism but an adaptive tool for managing social processes through control over land resources.

An analysis of primary sources (Bobrovski's memoirs, the statistical reports of 1862–1864 and 1877–78, and materials from the Central State

Historical Archives of Ukraine) demonstrates that the choice of the form of land relations was a political decision aimed at governing social processes by economic means [21, p. 85]. The 1861 peasant reform was neither an act of "justice" nor a mere technical compromise; it functioned as an instrument of political engineering that transformed the peasantry of the western provinces into a class of lifetime tenants with limited mobility, while preserving control over land resources in the hands of the state and loyal landowners. This mechanism enabled the imperial administration not only to avoid a full transfer of land into peasant ownership but also to shape a new stratum of "moderate" landowners as a pillar of imperial control over a strategically important region, turning land from an object of ownership into a tool for managing social processes — a key element of the Russian Empire's political engineering in the Ukrainian provinces of the 1860s–1880s.

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