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*The Politics of Agricultural Policy in Africa*

In the decades after independence, many states in Africa became poorer; they turned authoritarian; the policies of their governments exhibited urban bias; and while peopled largely by farmers, Africa imported much of its food. Scholars, including myself, probed the roots of their economic decline and hypothesized that they lay in Africa's politics.

More recently, Africa's economies have revived, propelled in significant part by the revival of agriculture. Systematic research strongly suggests that politics again plays a major role. The return of party competition, it has been found, means that those competing for power now have to counter to the interests of farmers, who constitute the majority of the electorate. Politicians therefore have a strong incentive to endorse policies that promote the interests of those who produce rather than those who purchase agricultural crops.

Changes in political institutions in Africa thus produce a change in political incentives; the change in political incentives seems to have led to a change in public policies; and the change in policies appear to have affected the behavior of farmers.