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Against the Grain of Urban Bias: Elite Conflict and the Logic of Coalition Formation in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa

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Abstract The theory of urban bias was a major contribution to the evolution of contemporary theories of political economy that remains highly relevant today. Yet theorists of urban bias have still not produced a general explanation that accounts for anomalous cases of what we call "rural incorporation," or coalition strategies based on modest rural producers. These anomalous cases suggest that the collective action underpinnings of urban bias theory underdetermine outcomes. This paper advances a new explanation of the anomalous African cases of Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire, and Zimbabwe. After detailing the costs of rural incorporation, we theorize the conditions that would motivate state elites to overcome their pro-urban biases and offer substantial material benefits to non-elite agrarian producers. Rural incorporation is an optimal strategy only when state elites are locked in unusually intense conflict with their rivals. Most nationalist movements in Africa did not meet this condition and their leaders followed pro-urban policies. The three outliers are all cases of settler colonialism: bitter rivalry between European settlers and native planters created the conditions for rural incorporation. We show how native planters and their political allies selected rural incorporation as a political-economic instrument of commercial competition and political supremacy. Case studies of Ghana and Nigeria demonstrate that in the absence of political and economic rivalry with settlers, African leaders selected the "default" strategy of urban bias.

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Introduction

The theory of urban bias claimed that in much of the developing world, political elites deliberately formed urban-based coalitions favoring the interests of urban capital and labor over the mass of rural cultivators. To cultivate and sustain this coalition, political elites intervened in a series of markets to transfer resources from non-elite rural producers to urban consumers and producers while making side-payments to large, politically influential farmers. Facing unfavorable prices, non-elite rural producers responded in ways that were individually rational but socially suboptimal, shifting production out of cash crops whose prices were artificially depressed and migrating from the countryside to the city. Urban bias was thus seen as a major source of political and economic crisis in the late twentieth-century developing world (Lipton 1977; Bates 1981; Bryceson 1996).

While documenting the causes and effects of urban bias, scholars have also attempted to explain a non-trivial subset of anomalous cases, including the African cases of Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, and Zimbabwe. As Jennifer Widner (1993, p. 25) observes, "Africa specialists usually classify the Ivory Coast, along with Kenya and Zimbabwe, as a country whose government has created a policy environment favorable to producers of export crops and exhibited less 'urban bias' than others." Other prominent scholars concur. Hecht (1983) documents how state policy encouraged Iviorian export-led growth based on smallholder production of cash crops; the result has been a rural-based "economic miracle." Similarly, Lofchie (1989) distinguishes "policy-induced failure in Tanzania" from "policy-induced success in Kenya." The three African cases of Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, and Zimbabwe have their counterparts in other regions: to cite just a handful of examples, Forrest Colburn (1993) considers Cuba and Costa Rica to be Latin American exceptions to urban bias, while Ashutosh Varshney (1993) has written extensively about pro-rural policies in India.

In Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and elsewhere, political elites engaged in what we call rural incorporation—the construction of political coalitions that included modest rural producers—implementing policies that favored rural producers and bringing them into organizations that institutionalized their political voice. In this article, we provide a general framework for understanding the presence or absence of rural incorporation, with specific reference to the three African cases. We contend that our analytic framework is explanatorily superior to existing accounts of the anomalous departures from the general phenomenon of urban bias. Some existing accounts, for example, invoke as explanation facts that themselves beg explanation; these explanations, lack causal depth. More broadly, we seek a more general model that is consistent with African cases but which can be applied to other contexts. We seek, in other words, greater causal depth and explanatory unification.

Why revisit a theory from the late 1970s and early 1980s? First, urban-rural cleavages in the developing world still motivate significant new scholarly work (see, e.g., Bates and Block 2013; Harding 2012) and have a wide range of practical policy implications for food security, rural livelihoods, and economic development. Second, some of the ill effects of urban bias linger today, despite some evidence that the emergence of multi-party democracy has fostered a more favorable environment for rural producers (Bates and Block 2013). David Sahn and David Stifel (2003) find that standards of living in rural areas of Africa continue to lag well behind urban areas, while Nicolas van de Walle (2003) and others find a disturbing absence of programmatic parties in contemporary Africa, with the particularly surprising absence of any agrarian-based parties. Third, many scholars argue that the legacy of previous political and property regimes continues to exert influence on contemporary African politics (Bratton and van de Walle 1997; Boone 2011; Riedl 2014). Fourth, revisiting theoretical debates has diagnostic and heuristic value: the existence of unexplained anomalies suggests that the parsimonious logic of collective action underpinning prominent models of urban bias underdetermines outcomes; insofar as analogous models are used to explain political coalition formation more broadly, developing a richer model can be enormously fruitful. Finally, major episodes of political-economic change are intrinsically important: we would not have a new institutional economics, for example, if leading scholars had not reexamined the past (North and Thomas 1976; Sokoloff and Engerman 2000; Acemoglu et al. 2001; Kohli 2004).

In this paper, we focus on coalition formation in Africa in the late colonial era. Our dependent variable is *rural incorporation*, the effort by urban political elites to create a political coalition that includes modest rural producers. In our three cases of Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, and Zimbabwe, efforts at rural incorporation began during the colonial period and were then brought to final fruition with independence, as leaders of rural-based nationalist movements captured state power and became state elites. We argue that the decision to embark on rural incorporation is a function of the intensity of inter-elite conflict. Mass-based coalitions with modest rural producers—rural incorporation, in other words—is tremendously costly in terms of both public policy and political institution building. Therefore, elites will select a rural-incorporating coalition strategy if and only if its expected utility exceeds the benefits they receive from forming the urban-centric coalitions that are associated with urban bias. When inter-elite conflict is relatively moderate, the costs of rural incorporation outweigh its benefits and so political elites align with urban interests, excluding modest rural producers and pinning the costs of modernization on them. As conflict intensifies, the gains from rural incorporation promise to be larger than its costs.

In the African cases we examine, intense elite conflict took the form of conflict between European settler farmers and African farmers and emerging political elites. Where European settler farmers did not exist, conflict never intensified and urban bias resulted. Thus, if we look at a country over time, rural incorporation will be preceded by the observable polarization of elite-level politics. Similarly, we can look cross-sectionally, comparing countries that have rural incorporation to neighbors that follow the more common pathway of urban bias. We should expect to see contrasting political dynamics, with intense and escalating elite conflict occurring only in the rural-incorporating countries.

Our basic research design is therefore cross-sectional and longitudinal. Working cross-sectionally, we show that the rural-incorporating cases of Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, and Zimbabwe differ structurally from the modal African case, represented here by Ghana and Nigeria.[1] Each of the three rural-incorporating cases contains a key feature—settler colonialism—that was absent in the non-incorporating cases and that substantially raised the likelihood of an explosion of political conflict. By settler colonialism, we refer to the establishment of a significant class of foreign commercial farmers who appropriate native land and labor for export agriculture. Settler colonialism generated *latent* conflict. Working longitudinally, we show that in the three cases of settler colonialism, political conflict between settlers and indigenous farmers escalated over time driving an irreconcilable wedge between colonial and local economic elites. Latent conflict became substantially elevated during wartime, as the colonial state adopted new policies that heavily favored settlers and confronted native farmers with economic extinction. As a result, native farmers and their political allies had to defend their interests against a rival economic group backed by central government power. Stated more analytically, the latent conflict generated by settler colonialism became manifest during wartime; consequently, the costs of rural incorporation were more acceptable given the alternative of economic and political disenfranchisement. Rural incorporation ensued. This dynamic of intensifying conflict was absent in Ghana and Nigeria, whose post-independence political elites rationally opted for urban-based coalitions and the political and economic marginalization of non-elite rural cultivators.

The first section below provides an account of the etiology of rural incorporation. The second section below discusses the theory of urban bias and how our account provides a better explanation of the of the anomalous African cases. The third section supplies case-study evidence from Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Ghana, and Nigeria; due to space constraints, the Nigerian and Zimbabwean case studies are placed in an Appendix available online. In the conclusion, we highlight the extent to which the African cases are a specific instantiation of a more general theory of coalition formation.

The Origins of Rural Incorporation

In this article, we seek to explain divergent coalitional and policy outcomes pursued by a select set of African countries in the late colonial and early postcolonial period. In contrast to the default outcome across most of Africa, political elites in late colonial Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, and Zimbabwe reached out to the rural masses, building institutions in the countryside, and bringing modest farmers into a broad-based coalition. In Côte d'Ivoire, nationalist leaders built a primarily agrarian party

[1] Due to space constraints, we present the case studies for Zimbabwe and Nigeria in the Supplemental Appendix

with tens of thousands of dues-paying members. In Zimbabwe, the violent struggle for independence prompted a Maoist approach to politicizing the peasantry. Following independence, these political coalitions produced pro-rural policies that differed markedly from those of their neighbors. In all three cases, agricultural prices favored rural producers; in Kenya and Zimbabwe, large swathes of productive land were redistributed to the rural middle class.

Our dependent variable is rural incorporation, a concept with three dimensions: political mobilization, political institutions, and public policy.[2] Political mobilization refers to actions by political elites that raise the probability of observable political participation by a previously inactive member of a polity, including voting, joining political parties and unions, participating in demonstrations, and recruitment into various official positions. Building new political institutions, especially political parties and unions, signals the resolve of political elites to cement their alliance with rural lower classes. Institutions are costly to build; furthermore, by lowering the cost of regularized political participation, they give significant leverage to lower-class members of the coalition. Indeed, recruited members of the coalition can possibly gain control over these institutions and use them against the political elite to extract more concessions. Thus, we see the political institutions as a mechanism of credible commitment to ensure that political elites do not immediately renege on their promises once the political crisis has passed.[3] Finally, rural incorporation entails reshaping public policy to redress grievances and provide material advantage to lower-class coalition members. The primary mechanism is the relative price of manufactured goods and agrarian inputs and outputs; rural incorporation thus entails a movement of prices exactly opposite to urban bias.

Our operationalization of rural incorporation treats the three dimensions of rural incorporation—political mobilization, political institutions, and credible promises of favorable public policies that will be enacted once colonial rule has been ended—as individually necessary and jointly sufficient to code a case as rural-incorporating. Note, however, that in all three cases, while rural incorporation was initiated under colonial rule, the rural-incorporating political elite could not enact new public policies until *after* capturing the state. For ease of exposition, we refer to rural incorporation under colonial rule so as to avoid the multiplication of terms; in other work, we document the completion of rural incorporation in post-colonial Africa (Waldner 2015).

Our model of rural incorporation follows the basic intuition of Ben Ansell and David Samuels' (2010) model of institutional change. Ansell and Samuels formulate a model of inter-elite conflict in which politically disenfranchised but economically rising groups (i.e., the rising bourgeoisie) cannot obtain credible commitments against the appropriation of their property by autocrats and thus seek protective democratic institutions. In our variant, a segment of the elite seeks protection through a mass-based coalition, not democratic institutions. Our version of the model com-

[2]For a more detailed discussion of the rural incorporation, its operationalization, and the coding of several dozen cases, see Waldner (2015).

[3]On political institutions as devices for solving the problem of credible commitments, see North and Weingast (1989) and Acemoglu and Robinson (2009).

ports with a lengthy literature citing power struggles among the political elite as providing an incentive to mobilize previously excluded groups and build mass-based coalitions Powell (1971, p. 2), Skocpol (1988, p. 149), Shefter (1994, p. 10), and Waldner (1999, pp. 28–52).

The core of our claim is that rural incorporation is extremely costly relative to urban bias. Urban bias provides multiple benefits to urban political elites: it satisfies the state's revenue imperative, particularly the demand for foreign exchange; it requires very minimal administrative capacity or institution building, as it can be implemented using colonial-era marketing boards and requires the obstruction of rural political institutions, not their creation; it provides cheaper raw materials for local industry; it helps line the pockets of bureaucrats; it further subsidizes local industry by providing cheap food to workers who can thus be paid lower wages; and it dulls the militancy of urban consumers, who might become politically activated as their purchasing power declines. Urban bias promises economic modernization, political quiescence, and personal enrichment, all without making major investments in new institutions.

In contrast to urban bias, rural incorporation imposes large costs. The shift from pro-urban to pro-rural prices implies the immediate loss of many of the financial benefits of urban bias, increasing the price of industrial inputs and food, and eliminating an easy source of revenue. In addition to policy costs, rural incorporation imposes institutional costs. To benefit from the support of non-elite rural producers whose loyalty is purchased by favorable policy, leaders divert financial resources and, perhaps more importantly, a finite pool of qualified agents, from tasks with immediate benefits to build institutions like political parties and producer unions. Once built, institutions can be used against their founders and hence pose a challenge to the incumbent regime. Finally, rural incorporation imposes political costs; the threat that a mobilized population—difficult to monitor in the countryside—will turn against the regime. Given this balance of the costs and benefits of urban versus rural incorporation, it should not be surprising that for most African leaders, the expected utility of urban bias is greater than the expected utility of rural incorporation.

Consider a simple model of a polity with two wings of an elite class, in which state policy determines the level of rents accruing to each. A dominant wing of the elite is favored by the state and receives its preferred policies on land, access to labor and so forth. A subordinate wing of the elite receives less-preferred policies that are still in the vicinity of its ideal points. These policies generate benefits that are higher than the expected utility of attempting rural incorporation, given the high costs of establishing a mass peasant base. The status quo thus dictates the political exclusion of the mass of peasant farmers, setting the groundwork for urban bias.

If urban bias is the default position, what factors overcome this inertia and motivate rural incorporation? Our analytic framework has three elements: a set of antecedent conditions that determine the likelihood that intense inter-elite conflict will erupt; an exogenous shock that establishes the model's comparative statics, moving a political system from moderate to intense elite conflict; and the core intuition, in which intense inter-elite conflict motivates rural incorporation.

Turning to the African context that we study, why did intense inter-elite conflict erupt in Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, and Zimbabwe but not in Ghana and Nigeria? We distinguish quotidian elite conflict from intense elite conflict by asking whether the stakes of the conflict involve merely higher or lower returns on current resource endowments—say, trade or monetary policy that reduces the flow of income to an export farmer—or whether the conflict involves control over resource endowments, such that losing the conflict threatens the loss of elite status. One indicator of intense conflict is that losers have their property confiscated; another indicator is that losers are denied access to resources, like cheap labor, required to exploit their resource endowments. In settler colonies like Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, and Zimbabwe, European settlers established plantation agriculture units that competed with native planters for control over land and labor. Our antecedent condition, settler colonialism, separates these cases from those of Ghana and Nigeria, where no rival class of settler farmers existed.

What exogenous factors shifted the balance of power in favor of settler farmers, prompting their assault on native farmers and the sequence of events that culminated in rural incorporation in Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, and Zimbabwe? The simple answer is war: under the pressure of World War II, colonial states disrupted the rough balance between settlers and native farmers, as they sought greater revenues, increased supply of commodities, or both. The war shifted bargaining power toward the settlers, who used their increased influence to squeeze out their competition. For the Ivoirian and Kenyan elite native farmers, the returns from the political status quo were sharply attenuated as settler farmers relying heavily on state support threatened them with economic extinction. Under this assault on their political and economic privileges, the subordinate elite turned to rural incorporation as a life-saving measure. Rural incorporation intensified the conflict still further, as settler farmers came to see the precarious nature of their positions premised on colonial state power. They, too, faced economic extinction from political change.

The eruption of war had no analogous effect in Ghana, Nigeria, and elsewhere in Africa, since no rival class of settler farmers existed to exploit state power. The war did not appreciably alter the political or economic status quo for the native elite, and incipient nationalist movements did not threaten the economic livelihoods of a rival elite. To the extent that conflict occurred in Ghana and Nigeria, it was between the native elite and the colonial state and limited to the question of political sovereignty. There was little incentive or need for the native elite to organize mass support in the countryside; in most cases, modest displays of mass mobilization like strikes or protests led by urban-based organizations were sufficient to convince the colonial powers to begin the transfer of authority to African governments (Hargreaves 1979; Pearce 1982; Louis and Robinson 1982; Low 1991).

That we place great explanatory weight on the presence or absence of foreign commercial farmers and on wartime mobilization as a critical intervening event places strict scope conditions on our analysis. The more general claim that intense and escalating conflict provides an incentive to mobilize previously marginalized groups into a ruling coalition is not similarly restricted, however. The native and settler elites in Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, and Zimbabwe were locked in a battle for economic survival. The result was to push the political representatives of native farmers to incorporate marginalized rural producers in a mass coalition. Rural incorporation was a strategic survival mechanism. Indeed, as we shall see in the case studies, local political elites were often in competition with colonial elites to win the support of this strategically important group.

In our theoretical account, urban interests do not play a prominent role; this does not mean that urban sectors in our rural-incorporating countries were utterly marginalized politically and disadvantaged economically. Urban bias has been attributed, in part, to the role of urban sectors as powerful interest groups. Bates (1981, chapter 2) has emphasized, for example, how governments appease powerful urban groups by manipulating prices to lower the cost of food. But urban demands for higher standards of living were not clearly stronger in some countries over others and there is no clear evidence that workers in Ghana and Nigeria were more capable of exerting pressure than their counterparts in Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, and Zimbabwe (Sandbrook 1977; Lebas, 2013, pp. 99–103). As early as 1932, British colonial authorities were writing alarmed reports about the growing militancy of Kenyan labor, which one District Commissioner saw as matching the militancy of contemporary inter-war European labor movements (Gutkind 1974, p. 25). Fifteen years later, before rural incorporation took place in Kenya, the African Workers' Federation was taking credible steps toward creating a country-side union encompassing all categories of Kenyan workers (Stichter 1975, p. 41). Having a powerful urban sector was no obstacle to rural incorporation in Kenya.

Furthermore, catering to urban interests does not necessarily entail the marginalization of the non-elite countryside: coalitions of "iron and rye" are often possible to sustain. Governments have multiple instruments for responding to urban demands, including wage concessions by public and private concerns, permissive employment policies, maintenance of overvalued exchange rates, direct subsidies, and, of course, repression. Given these diverse policy instruments, governments can sustain cross-class coalitions of urban interests and rural cultivators. For example, during the same years that cocoa farmers in Côte d'Ivoire were receiving inordinately high prices, fueling extraordinary prosperity, urban wage workers "won money wage increases at a far faster rate than their counterparts in Dakar, Lagos, or Accra" (Berg 1964, p. 225).

Urban Bias and Its Anomalies

Urban bias consisted of policies that transferred resources from small and middle-class farmers to large farmers and urban industrialists. Cheap food financed an alliance of urban capital and labor, keeping urban manufacturing costs artificially low and keeping urban workers politically quiescent. Government intervention in markets for food, export crops, agricultural inputs (credit, equipment, seed) and urban manufactured consumption goods kept poor people in the countryside poor. How do governments get away with it? Bates (1981) argues that daunting collective action problems prevent smaller farmers from organizing to demand more favorable policies. Prices are a public good—the probability that a group will lobby forcefully for higher prices is inversely proportional to group size. Industrial firms, unions, and large farmers thus face fewer challenges to their lobbying for advantageous prices; shackled by their sectoral characteristics, smaller farmers fail to form interest groups and instead choose “voluntaristic” market mechanisms to avoid state depredations. There is a political “demand” side as well. Governments evoke compliance with urban bias by exploiting their control over institutions, especially the legal system, to harass opposition parties. Governments also engage in rural *demobilization*, using the threat of violence to preempt or end peasant mobilization against pro-urban policies and using selective incentives to elicit support from larger farmers who might otherwise form an opposition movement. Thus, governments are not content to rely on the force of the collective action problem to forestall opposition; they manipulate a menu of incentives and sanctions to institutionally hamstring farmers’ movements from forming. Urban bias is therefore closely merged with rural political organization and action, forming a syndrome of partisan prices, institutional obstruction, and political demobilization.

In light of the powerful incentives for governments to adopt urban-centric public policies and to organize political life to marginalize the countryside, anomalous cases such as Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya, and Zimbabwe stand out starkly and have attracted a commensurate amount of scholarly attention. There are three basic hypotheses that have been advanced to explain the absence of urban bias: the *interests* or ideologies of political elites motivate them to pursue rural bias; the *institutions* of the political system give political leaders incentives to reach out to rural smallholders; and the *social structure* of peasant society shapes state intervention in the rural sector. In the first category, arguments from interests or ideology, there are three main strands. Bates (1981) argues that urban bias was alleviated in Côte d’Ivoire and Kenya because the coalition forming the nationalist movement was dominated by rural producers. Lofchie (1989) and Widner (1993) argue that political elites gain income from their agrarian property and hence pursue pro-rural policies. Finally, Colburn (1993) argues that in the case of Cuba, leaders of a socialist regime ideologically dedicated to egalitarianism supported the rural poor.

In contrast, arguments from institutions focus on the incentives generated by democratic political systems. In modernizing economies, the rural poor are economically exploited because they are politically powerless. Democratic competition endows them with compensating political power. Varshney (1993, p. 179) elegantly states this position,

> Independent India was born agrarian as well as democratic. This conjunction . . . has led to the empowerment of the rural sector in the polity.

India’s political parties thus cater to rural interests and even present farmers as candidates for office. Colburn (1993) echoes this argument in his account of Costa Rican exceptionalism.

Finally, in contrast to existing elite-centered approaches, Boone (1995) and Pierskalla (2015) focus on societal variables. Boone observes that the Ivoirian government avoided heavy-handed intervention and pursued relatively laissez-faire policies because Ivoirian peasant society in the cash-crop southern regions was politically and economically fragmented, by which Boone (1995, p. 458) means “the absence of institutionalized political hierarchies, the dispersion of political and economic power, and the cultural heterogeneity of localities.” Political and economic fragmentation, in turn, "made it possible for Houphouët's regime to rely upon relatively "hands-off" economic strategies in exploiting coffee and cocoa producers." Pierskalla's cross-national analysis argues that rural bias is a response to the threat of rural insurgency.

These accounts are extremely valuable; we contend, however, that our account of the causes of rural incorporation provides a deeper and more general explanation. Some of the arguments appear explanatorily shallow, pointing to relatively proximate causes that themselves require explanation. Bates rightly observes that nationalist movements in Côte d'Ivoire and Kenya were dominated by rural producers. But at best, this solves one puzzle only by creating a new puzzle: why did rural producers form the leadership of nationalist movements in Côte d'Ivoire and Kenya but not elsewhere on the continent?[4] Our account of rural incorporation provides this deeper explanation. Other claims fit the facts of individual cases but resist generalization. The claim that Kenyan and Ivoirian political leaders favored rural interests because they were agrarian property owners, for example, is neither necessary nor sufficient to explain pro-rural policies. It is not necessary because in many other countries, leaders who were not agrarian property owners still pursued pro-rural policies; Zimbabwe is one case among many of urban-based nationalists building a mass rural base. The claim is not sufficient because when agrarian elites dominate the political system, they frequently increase their exploitation of non-elite rural producers, as we observe with agro-export oligarchic elites in Latin America and "neo-feudal" elites in Pakistan and the Philippines, to give just two examples. The claim about democratic institutions and pro-rural policies that Varshney (1994) skillfully demonstrates appears valid in the Indian case, but we have reasons to believe that democratic competition is neither necessary nor sufficient for pro-rural policies to displace urban bias (Widner 1993: 26-27). It is not necessary because pro-farmer policies can be widely observed in dictatorships, from Cuba and Côte d'Ivoire to Egypt and Indonesia. It is not sufficient because for every case of pro-rural policies in a democracy—Costa Rica, India, Turkey—there is another case of urban bias under democratic conditions—Nigeria, Pakistan, and Uganda, for example.

Boone's argument, rooted in pre-existing social structure and critical of "statist" theories, has the welcome explanatory virtues of both depth and generality. Our primary disagreement is about timing: we trace the dynamics of rural incorporation in Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, and Zimbabwe to the colonial period, suggesting that an alliance with modest farmers was in effect before Boone begins her analysis in the post-colonial era. We do not deny that social-structural variables can play an important explanatory role, but we believe that looking further back into the colonial period gives us additional insight into the conditions under which political elites might prefer an urban-based versus a rural-based coalition strategy. This response applies to Pierskalla's novel argument as well. While both Kenya and Zimbabwe are correctly seen as cases of rural insurgency, but Côte d'Ivoire does not fit this pattern. Furthermore, in Kenya and Zimbabwe, rural incorporation was not simply a response to the threat of rural insurgency. Rather rural insurgency ensued because of a prior political

[4] Bates (2005, pp. 11–40) discusses the relationship of settler colonialism in Africa to the Mau Mau revolution, but does not draw the connection between settlers and rural incorporation.

stalemate between settlers, the colonial state, and native farmers and their political allies. Thus, while we see our account as complementary to that of Boone and Pierskalla, we believe our focus on coalition building takes us closer to the political dynamics that generated rural bias.

Case Studies

Our argument concerns rural incorporation, the political mobilization, institutionalization, and eventual rewarding of a mass political base in the countryside, among non-elite farmers. The three case studies presented below (with Nigeria and Zimbabwe in a Supplementary Appendix due to space constraints) follow a basic template. In the three cases of settler colonialism, the case study begins with the stable equilibrium between the colonial state, settlers, and prosperous native farmers. Each case then shows how war disrupted this equilibrium, shifting the balance of power in favor of settlers and threatening the core interests of native farmers. The result, in these three cases, was rural incorporation. In contrast, in Ghana and Nigeria, there was no competition between settler and native farmers; war could therefore not disrupt a prior equilibrium, threaten native farmers, and motivate them to seek rural incorporation as a core survival strategy. Instead, nationalist elites were able to secure political sovereignty with only ephemeral nationalist mobilization. The result was the continued political exclusion of peasant farmers and urban bias.

Côte d'Ivoire

This case study sketches the high-intensity conflict that separated colonial authorities and settlers from the native agrarian bourgeoisie. Settler and native planters fought over control of labor. During World War II, colonial edicts intervened in this conflict to restrict native planter access to labor, threatening them with economic extinction. The result was the formation of a mass base in the countryside that would in turn produce more favorable policies to non-elite farmers in post-independence Côte d'Ivoire.

Côte d'Ivoire was unusual among West African colonies, for only on its territory did French settlers create an export agricultural economy. Scholars generally agree that France consolidated its hold over the Ivory Coast for strategic reasons, but French administrators quickly determined that the colony must make a contribution to the treasury. By the early 1920s, they were planning the development of the coastal economy, whose soil and climate were suitable to export crops–coffee, cocoa, and bananas. The expansion of the plantation economy moved slowly: in 1932, there were only 142 European farms; by World War II, that number had increased to 200, covering in total about 75,000 ha. Farms averaged about 200 ha, but ranged from as small as 20 to as large as 1000 ha (Rapley 1993, pp. 13–40).

Alongside French planters, an indigenous class of planters emerged after 1930. Their sources were many. The majority served first as workers on French plantations, migrant workers from the north who accumulated small savings sufficient to begin production of export crops. Others were educated Africans who worked first as civil servants, shifting later to the export economy. Still others were traders. Finally, there were a small number of traditional chiefs among the planter class. But most chiefs did not become planters, and most planters were not chiefs—the new Ivoirian planter class was indeed a new class, not a redeployed ruling class.

Because land was plentiful, settlers and local planters were not initially in competition with one another. Both groups of farmers relied on labor drawn from northern savanna regions as well as from territories that would become Mali and Burkina Faso, where the dry season coincided with the peak demand for labor along the coast. Workers did not voluntarily follow market signals, however; European planters hired recruiting agents who obtained workers from northern chiefs and transported them south. Although forced labor was, by law, to be temporary and used for public works, the French administration in fact made labor available to French planters and other private enterprises. By one estimate 190,000 men were put at the disposal of French economic concerns in this way. The profitability of French plantations ultimately rested, then, on state intervention. By the second half of the 1930s, as native plantations spread and as northern workers began working for wages in the British colony of the Gold Coast, competition between settler and native planters heightened (Morgenthau 1964, pp. 3–5).

While the French administration granted French settlers immense privileges and subsidies, the settlers were intensely hostile to their Ivoirian counterparts. But despite their clearly subordinate position, the latter enjoyed great prosperity in the 1930s and made no effort at organizing to lobby the administration or contest the political supremacy of the French state. Instead, they joined the settler-led agrarian syndicate (Syndicat Agricole de la Côte d'Ivoire). Both groups of planters paid workers equivalently low wages, and though Europeans had privileged access to labor, Ivoirian planters used them as well. Inter-elite conflict was manifest but moderate.

World War II brought this minimal cooperation to an end, intensifying inter-elite conflict. The short-lived Vichy regime altered economic arrangements, first by reserving forced labor for the exclusive use of French settlers, causing a six-fold increase in the wage bill of African farmers, and second by making known its intentions to reduce the size of African farms to family farms that would need no outside labor (Morgenthau 1964, pp. 170–171; Woods 2003, pp. 644–645). European farmers were paid higher prices as well, almost twice as much for a kilo of coffee (4.50 vs. 2.60 francs). The effects on African farmers were brutal; as Rapley (1993, p. 44) depicts their status, "The planters were suddenly confronted with the very real possibility of extinction."

Ivoirian planters now threw themselves into political activity and supported the Gaullist movement. But the passing of Vichy brought little relief, as the Free French regime that followed instituted new policies that hurt the material interests of Ivoirian planters. Responding to the imperative of raising wartime revenues, the Free French administration dictated that prices paid to African farmers be kept low, imports be heavily restricted and reserved for Europeans, and the forced labor regime was applied with renewed energy to meet the insatiable European demand for labor. For the first time, all subjects of the empire—including planters—could be drafted into forced labor. Many African farmers not yet recruited into forced labor recruitment watched helplessly as anti-parasite sanitation measures targeted African farms, many of which consequently reverted to forestland. Meanwhile, the government offered lavish subsidies to all farms larger than 25 contiguous acres. All European farmers qualified, but no more than a few dozen African farmers received this premium.

While instituting punishing economic policies, the Free French also liberalized politics in the colony. Ivoirian planters thus had motive and opportunity to organize politically, forging a broad, cross-class alliance in which independent peasant farmers played a central role, and also establishing new political parties and sectoral organizations. Ivoirian planters targeted smaller farmers for inclusion in their nationalist coalition. A key event was the foundation of the Syndicat Agricole Africaine (SAA) in September 1944. The nucleus of the SAA formed a few months earlier, when seven Ivoirian planters joined forces and agreed to begin mobilizing mass support behind their political organization which, far from being radical, was a vehicle to protect the interests of commercial farmers. Ivoirian farmers cultivating relatively modest plots—2 ha of coffee or three of cocoa—were made eligible to join. Then, 20,000 qualified African farmers had joined within a year. The main goals of the SAA were the removal of French middlemen from the export trade and, most importantly, the abolition of forced labor, a move that the SAA believed would work to the advantage of African farmers in their vital competition for workers. By late 1945, the SAA had entered electoral politics, supporting the successful candidacy of one of its founding members, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, to the French Constituent Assembly. In April 1946, Houphouët-Boigny and his supporters created the Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI), a mass party with a rural majority that was headed by a union of larger Ivoirian commercial farmers (Lawler 1990).

The SAA bequeathed to the PDCI the support of most of the rural voters in that labor-importing zone of commercial agriculture, where rural discontent with discriminatory French policies made the PDCI the predominant party in the Ivory Coast. Indeed, with 65,000 paid members in 1946, support for the party in the countryside outstripped its organizational capacity, especially because, unlike other West African colonies whose nationalist movements were primarily urban-based, the PDCI's supporters were distributed throughout the country. In 1945, for example, Abidjian supplied a miniscule portion of the electorate (Morgenthau 1964, pp. 178–184). The PDCI relied heavily on this rural broad-based support to survive the early part of the 1950s, when the French administration tried and failed to repress the party out of existence.

In the process of gaining independence and political supremacy, the PDCI under Houphouët-Boigny transformed itself from a militant party allied with French Communists to a status-quo oriented political machine that was "concerned primarily with electing men to office and distributing tangible incentives to its members" (Zolberg 1970, p. 149). This transformation from mobilization to distribution coincided with a period in the mid-1950s when French economic pressure against African planters subsided and an economic boom enabled large numbers of modest-sized farmers to enter the coffee and cocoa sector, either as producers or traders. The expansion of the ranks of planters created no intra-planter conflict in a land-abundant economy. They were supported institutionally by a stabilization fund, the Caisses de Stabilisation, which built up reserves to tide planters over in tougher times. Thus, well before independence, a political alliance was expressed both institutionally and through nascent public policies that aided non-elite farmers. As is well-documented elsewhere, the alliance between the governing party and its base of independent rural producers continued into the post-colonial period (Woods 1988; Hecht 1983; Lee 1980).

Kenya

In Côte d'Ivoire, European settlers and African farmers came into intense conflict over the control of labor. In Kenya, in contrast, intense conflict erupted over the control of land. Prior to World War II, the British colonial state attempted to maintain a rough balance of power between three elite claimants to land: European settlers, local chiefs, and an emerging class of prosperous commercial farmers. World War II disrupted this balance of power, as European settlers asserted their political and economic dominance during the war and sought to permanently transform their control over land. This renewed assault on African control of land provoked early steps toward rural incorporation, but these were pre-empted by the Mau Mau rebellion. As part of their anti-insurgency measures, the British combined carrots and sticks and so "initiated a social revolution in the countryside," intended to create a social foundation based on the "solid yeoman farmer, the land owner who knows that he has too much to lose if he flirts, however lightly, with the passions of his nationalist friends" (Branch 2009, p. 118). A decade later, however, it was Kenyan nationalists who appropriated the fruits of rural incorporation, as the nationalist leader Jomo Kenyatta "mobilized the peasantry as a battering ram to break down the doors protecting the corridors of power..." (Throup 1987, pp. 37–38).

The British colonial state had two pillars of social support in the first quarter of the twentieth century. First were European settlers who seized Kikuyu land in the fertile hills around Nairobi and gradually spread their landholdings into what became known as the "White Highlands." Settlers were a valuable source of revenue in a territory initially viewed merely as the strategic gateway to Lake Victoria. Local chiefs, headmen, and Christian elders of Kikuyu society comprised the second pillar, vitally important as local sources of authority. They were the Kikuyu "landed elite" (Anderson 2005).

A new claimant on the state emerged in the 1920s: a class of educated commercial farmers and traders, who emerged in the reserved lands of Central Province (Sorrenson 1967, pp. 27–33). Excluded from the alliance with the colonial state, these prosperous farmers formed the Kikuyu Central Association in the mid-1920s to protest the alienation of land to Europeans, the hut tax placed on native farmers, and restrictions on African cultivation of lucrative cash crops (Hornsby 2012, p. 33). It was out of this class of farmers, educated clerks, and traders that Kenya's first political leadership emerged, seeking incorporation into the political system but finding their path blocked by the prior alliance of state, settlers, and chiefs (Throup 1988; Branch 2009).

The Depression and World War II provoked shifts in the balance of power between these claimants for power (Lonsdale 1983; Anderson and Throup 1985; Throup 1988). Settler farmers were hit hard by the collapse of commodity prices in the 1930s, and state revenues contracted sharply. In response, the state began to encourage African production, which eventually subsidized relatively less efficient settler agriculture. Settlers made a comeback during World War II, however. Kenya's export economy boomed, especially after imports from Japanese-controlled territories ceased. The war created a manpower shortage within the colonial administration, a shortage filled by settlers who physically occupied the state administration.[5] Finally, wartime legislation banned the KCA so that African commercial farmers lost their political capacity to defend their economic endowments.

During and after the war, settler agriculture had become increasingly mechanized, reducing the demand for native labor. Settlers were determined to use their new political power to defeat their competitors among African farmers and secure their control over land. The ensuing "Second Colonial Invasion" involved creating marketing boards and other institutions that enhanced their capacity for collective action and pressuring the state to stifle African agriculture. The government responded by restricting the land available to Africans, prohibiting them from growing the most profitable cash crops and preventing them from accessing the most lucrative markets (Mboya 1963; Throup 1988).

This wholesale assault on the political and economic position of African farmers provoked the first steps toward rural incorporation. Political representatives of Kenya's prosperous farmers formed the Kenyan African Union. Initially failing to win political concessions from the colonial state, the KAU's moderate political leadership began to rethink their earlier refusal to cultivate a broader base of support, a decision that reflected the fears of an educated leadership that mass politics might prove uncontrollable. In July 1947, the KAU's leader, Jomo Kenyatta addressed 10,000 peasant farmers and began to inveigh, for the first time, against oppressive colonial policies (Anderson 2005, pp. 30–33). KAU leaders next built linkages with non-Kikuyu rural groups by exploiting land grievances outside the White Highlands and incorporated non-Kikuyu into leadership positions. They collected donations throughout the country and were able to recruit prominent members of every major ethnic group in the colony (Mboya 1963, pp. 52–54).

Early steps toward rural incorporation were not sufficient to preempt the outbreak of the Mau Mau rebellion. Mau Mau consisted primarily of landless Kikuyu peasants and urban radicals who directed their attacks against the colonial administration, settlers, and the wealthier Kikuyu loyalists among chiefs, village headmen, and Christian elders. Mau Mau divided Kikuyu society, but not the nationalist movement, as Mau Mau fighters stood behind Kenyatta despite his public denunciation of their cause (Elkins 2005, p. 197).[6] The rural middle class, the urban elite, and peasants alike still supported land reform and independence. The Emergency declared by the colonial government slowed the nationalist movement's efforts to expand support in the countryside, but did not stop it. KAU established informal district branches

[5]The British Colonial Office also sought to avoid a political row with the settlers during wartime (Spencer 1980, pp. 500–503). This fact, combined with their occupation of the administration, allowed the settlers to extract above-market prices for maize and beef, benefit from land-clearing grants and otherwise shift policy in their favor (Spencer 1980).

[6]Mau Mau's famous oaths—of which there were a variety—actually included oaths of loyalty to Kenyatta himself (Kershaw 1997).

and held leaders conferences to coordinate policy across the colony (Mboya 1963, p. 78–80).

As the British gained the military upper-hand, the colonial government developed the Swynnerton Plan "to intensify the development of African agriculture" (Low 1996, p. 42) through land consolidation in the reserves and individual titling. It also authorized the Kikuyu to grow coffee, tea, and pyrethrum. From the perspective of the KAU and commercial farmers, Swynnerton's biggest failing was that it did not open the White Highlands to African settlement. By reforming landholdings in the reserves while preserving white control over the Highlands, the colonial government hoped to win over middle class peasants without threatening the settlers. In other words, the colonial government was only willing to pursue rural incorporation insofar as it preserved the colonial political economy intact.

African leaders outflanked the colonial government's overtures to the rural middle class by renewing their call to open the White Highlands to African settlement, which would allow the KAU to attract support from commercial farmers as well as poor and landless peasants. As it became clear that the era of colonial rule was over and that many settlers would leave with the colonial state, nationalist leaders were particularly keen to prevent the British from distributing land in the White Highlands to its loyalist allies. By the 1960s, the British and the newly formed Kenya African National Union settled on the Million Acres Scheme, that resettled landless peasants and middle-class farmers alike in the White Highlands. The plan was the centerpiece of the KANU government's rural incorporation project both before and after independence. The scheme helped the party maintain its tenuous coalition of landed and landless peasants by rewarding—at least to some degree—both factions, in the process papering over deep divisions within Kikuyu society that remained from the Mau Mau rebellion (Widner 1994).[7] The Million Acre Scheme thus ensured that the rural middle class would serve as the economic backbone of an independent Kenya.

Land reform was just one component of rural incorporation in Kenya. KANU provided some of the most lucrative economic incentives offered to rural producers in Africa. Rather than stabilize the price of export crops, the government implemented a passthrough system in which producers received between 70 and 90 % of the world price (Widner 1994: 140; Orvis 1997). The prices of coffee and tea steadily increased through the 1960s and 1970s, and were five to ten times higher than the prices offered in neighboring Tanzania (Lofchie 1994, pp. 139–140). Kenya resisted overvaluing its currency (Widner 1994) and subsidized seed development, seed distribution, and capital investment (Bates 1981, pp. 51–52). Farmers also benefited from a political system that provided openings for the rural sector to influence agrarian policies and allowed influential farmers' organizations (Bates 1989; Widner 1994; Burgess 1997).

[7] The fact that most of the economic benefits of the Million Acre Scheme accrued to the rural middle class and the elite, rather than the poor, radical Kikuyu that made up Mau Mau, supports our argument. Most nationalist leaders—particularly the conservative Kenyatta—did not share the goals of Mau Mau; rather, they fully incorporated the rural middle class for instrumental reasons and attempted to appease Mau Mau's radicals only as much as absolutely necessary. It is then unsurprising that the fighters and those supporting more extreme redistribution of land often felt betrayed by the Kenyatta regime after independence.

The combination of favorable policies and institutions allowed Kenyatta to maintain a coalition of rural bourgeoisie and poor peasants for several years after independence, although the rural middle class remained the backbone of the KANU coalition.

Ghana

If Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, and Zimbabwe are exceptions to urban bias in Africa, Ghana is in many ways an exemplar of the modal outcome across the continent. Smallholder producers of cocoa—the colony's economic backbone—had been exploited for decades by the colonial government and its local agents, paramount chiefs. This pattern continued after independence, as Kwame Nkrumah and his Convention People's Party used the country's agrarian surplus to finance a variety of industrialization and modernization projects. The lack of rural incorporation in Ghana can be attributed to the moderate nature of the conflict between the African political elite and the colonial government of the Gold Coast. The main issue at stake was the transfer of political authority from the British to African leadership. In the absence of settler colonialism, the primary factors of production—land and labor—remained firmly under the control of Africans, so independence did not require a transformation of the colony's political economy. Ghanaian independence was relatively easy to achieve, with minimal levels of mass mobilization. In the absence of a major threat from settler colonialism to economic survival, political independence, or both, Ghanaian nationalists had no incentives to bear the high costs of rural incorporation.

Cocoa was grown in the southern areas of the colony, primarily in the Ashanti region, by smallholders reliant on family or lineage labor (Mikell 1989). The Asante chiefs did not actually own the land, but they controlled who could use it and earned revenue from the surplus derived from their land (Apter 1968, pp. 95–96). The expansion of *abusa* sharecropping during the interwar period further solidified the political and economic control of chiefs over peasant producers. Many chiefs came to occupy influential positions within the cocoa economy, either as large farmers or marketers. The British had attempted to challenge the chiefs for direct control over the cocoa sector, but soon decided that it would be more prudent to use the chiefs as agents of indirect rule. The Asante chiefs thus became an integral component of the Gold Coast's "triple ruling elite" that included colonial officials and segments of the moderate African intelligentsia.

The Accra riots in 1948 forced a reconsideration of the timeline for independence, which had been assumed to be decades away (Pearce 1982, pp. 162–182). The causes of the riots were myriad, but colonial officials misinterpreted the riots as the emergence of nationalism and responded by jailing several prominent African politicians. The colonial officials' reaction helped launch the political career of Kwame Nkrumah, who defected from the United Gold Coast Conference to form the Convention People's Party (CPP). The CPP's primary basis of support was among urban workers and "Youngmen," educated members of prominent families who nonetheless had been shut out of a colonial system that extended privilege only to a select few Africans. The 1948 riots and the CPP's calls for immediate independence prompted Colonial Governor Charles Arden-Clarke to convene a committee to draft a new constitution for the Gold Coast. The committee advocated an expansion of the African electorate, an African cabinet, and an African prime minister. The colonial government accepted the proposal, incorporating them into the 1951 constitution.

The abrupt change in colonial policy has been attributed to the British desire for a deliberate transfer of power to moderate Africans, to forestall a more radical movement (Pearce 1982, pp. 162–182). Austin (1976, p. 35) contends that the shift in policy came at a time when the British were tiring of colonial governance, during "that peculiar twilight period of rule when the British not only gave up the imperial ghost but ceased to whimper on the grave thereof." These explanations are incomplete. If the British sought to hand over power to moderate Africans, why did they cooperate with Nkrumah's CPP, which contained many of the more radical elements of the nationalist movement? Colonial fatigue, moreover, cannot fully explain why the British granted self-governance in Ghana but delayed it in Kenya.

A more compelling explanation for the ease with which Ghana transitioned to independence is that the British had minimal economic interests in maintaining colonial rule. They had conceded direct control of cocoa production to the chiefs decades earlier, thereby leaving control of land and labor in African hands. The British were ultimately content with maintaining secure access to the cocoa trade (Crook 1986). Colonial officials also recognized that promoting further economic development in the colony would "require a large infusion of capital and skills from overseas" (Arden-Clarke 1958, p. 29). For these reasons, the conflict between the colonial government and the CPP can be classified as moderate. Indeed, in 1956, "it was the colonial government which pushed Nkrumah and the party into its third election victory, and then reconciled the victors and the losers in order to be able to transfer power to the CPP" (Austin 1970, p. 35).

The moderate nature of the conflict gave Nkrumah little incentive to pursue rural incorporation. The Accra riots taught the CPP that mobilizing urban workers was sufficient to put pressure on the colonial government. This is not to say that the party ignored the countryside: Nkrumah actively courted rural voters during campaigns, speaking out against the agrarian policies of the colonial government and the rent demands of the chiefs (Ninsin 1989). The party did not make any specific guarantees about cocoa prices, but it did promise to "give the cocoa industry … the attention and encouragement it deserved" (Austin 1970, p. 213). This type of rhetoric-based electoral mobilization was an inexpensive alternative to paying the political, institutional, and economic costs of rural incorporation.

After independence, the party reneged on its campaign pledges and followed through with its plans to exploit the country's cocoa wealth to finance its development projects—to pursue, in other words, policies constitutive of urban bias (Austin 1970; Mikell 1989; Boone 2003). The CPP had originally pledged to abolish the Cocoa Marketing Board (CMB), but instead announced that half the revenue required to fund the government's first Five Year Plan would come from an export tax on cocoa and loans from the CMB.[8] The state also created a network of institutions that undermined autonomous rural organizations. For decades after independence, pro-urban policies would be combined with measures to politically marginalize the countryside.

Conclusion

Rural incorporation—the creation of a mass-based political movement in the countryside via political mobilization, institution building, and rural-friendly public policies—is costly. It is no surprise that urban bias is the default outcome; something unusual must intervene to prompt political leaders to embark on rural incorporation. We argue that the key incentive for rural incorporation comes from unusually intense and escalating inter-elite conflict. We mean something quite different than jockeying for position or incremental shifts in policy space. The sources of extremely polarizing inter-elite politics are many; in the African context, we have identified the main source of unusually intense conflict as competition between European settlers, backed by state power, and indigenous farmers. The division of the agrarian sector between settlers and local farmers meant that something more than the struggle for political sovereignty was at stake. To repeat Rapley's (1993) description, Ivoirian planters faced "economic extinction." The assault by the French colonial administration on their economic position induced Ivoirian planters to end their cooperation with settlers and to embark on an entirely new political enterprise. A similar, but not identical, logic set the stage for rural incorporation in Kenya and Zimbabwe. In Ghana and Nigeria, on the other hand, local farmers did not confront settlers, and nationalists contested independence without mass mobilization and institution building in the countryside. Absent incentives for rural incorporation, urban bias because the default outcome.

Urban bias was arguably *the* defining political and economic characteristic of the early postcolonial period in Africa. States' redistribution from rural producers to the urban masses drove poor economic outcomes across the continent and established patterns for the state's relationship with its citizens. While policies in many countries have recently shifted away from urban bias, its effects—in the form of economic marginalization of the countryside and rapid, uncontrolled urbanization, among others—still influence political and economic outcomes. In the rural-incorporating cases that we have discussed, the long-term effects are no less visible: the redistribution of land and the establishment of property rights regimes and other institutions after independence shape politics decades later.

[8] The CMB's mandate was to accumulate reserves derived from the difference between the world price of cocoa and the price offered to farmers, and use those reserves to stabilize the producer-price of cocoa. In practice, the CMB used its monopsony position to suppress the producer price more than necessary: from 1954 to 1965 the value of the crop had been cut nearly in half (Jones 1976, p. 243).

The centrality of urban bias in the postcolonial world motivated a generation of scholars to develop new theories of political economy. We see our explanation building on the work of Bates, Lofchie, and Widner, and emulating the explanatory virtues of Boone. We agree that the composition of political coalitions and that social background of political leaders matters, but we find these statements both too shallow in their explanatory reach and too particular to Africa. We have given an account of the etiology of coalition formation, one that respects African specificity while embedding African cases within a broader theoretical statement and set of cases. This gives our account the explanatory virtues of breadth and depth that should be the goal of case-study research.

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