

**Agricultural Protection in
Developing Countries**

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Countries often have a Jekyll-Hyde relationship with their agricultural sector—policymakers both tax and subsidize agriculture. In the early stages of a country's development, policymakers exploit agriculture through export taxes and overvalued exchange rates. In contrast, agricultural policy in advanced industrial countries has strongly protected domestic producers by means of trade restrictions, direct price or income supports, and public investment.

This paper explores why farmers are taxed in poor countries and subsidized in rich countries. Using the economic theory of contests to come to an understanding of the incentives for agricultural protectionism, we first sketch a framework for an excludable and rivalrous rent. We then apply this framework to agricultural protectionism in developing countries.

A Contest for Agricultural Protection

Olson (1982) uses his theory of collective action to explain the dual treatment of agriculture and industry. Benefits of collective lobbying for a rent must be shared among the lobbying group—either shared equally for a public good or according to some sharing rule for a divisible private good. If there is a great number of potential beneficiaries, the costs of securing the good may not be borne equally by all who benefit. Therefore, there is little incentive to engage in collective lobbying to secure a government rent, and such groups are unorganized or poorly managed. This is the case with the agricultural sector in less developed countries. In comparison, the manufacturing sector has fewer players. There,

because of lower transaction costs, the benefits of collective action outweigh the costs, a fact implying strong lobbying to obtain the rent (see Bates and Rogerson). But as the transaction costs of forming a collective decrease through improved transportation, education, and information systems, the balance of power can shift over time. Eventually, the agricultural sector will find it profitable to form an effective collective lobby, which will benefit from government subsidies.

If the rent is a private good, excludable and rivalrous in consumption, several other issues become important. For example, if the rent is a direct subsidy to the industrial or the agricultural sector, players within the sector compete to receive support. The overall rent is depleted as one player receives the subsidy. The economic theory of contests becomes a useful framework to further our understanding of such cases (Tullock). Next, we sketch the framework for a rent seeking contest between agricultural and industrial sectors.

By selecting the rent and who receives it, the regulator plays the key role in this model (Applebaum and Katz). Let $G_i = S_i + T_i$ be the rent ($i = 1, 0, \dots, k$), where S_i is the subsidy won and T_i the tax avoided if the player is victorious. The regulator can award the rent either to industry or agriculture. For each strategy, the regulator's expected utility is represented by

$$\phi_i = \pi_i[X(\alpha, G_i, \sigma_x, W), Y(\alpha, G_i, \sigma_y, W)]U(TR, \xi) + [1 - \pi_i(\cdot)]U(z) \quad i = 0, 1, \dots, k,$$

where $\pi_i(\cdot)$ is the likelihood of the regulator's remaining in office given the rent seeking effort of agriculture, X , and industry, Y . The rent seeking efforts depend upon the relative strength of the sector, α , the level of rent, G_i , the sectors sharing rule σ_x or σ_y , and the political or institutional environment, W . Let $TR = \beta(X(\cdot) + Y(\cdot))$ be the fraction of rent

seeking expenditures received by the regulator, $0 \leq \beta \leq 1$; ξ reflect nonmonetary social welfare concerns (may equal zero); and z be the regulator's income if she is removed from office. W can be interpreted as the nature of the playing field. The regulator's problem is to select the strategy maximizing her expected utility:

$$\max \{ \phi_0, \phi_1, \dots, \phi_k \}.$$

If information is imperfect, groups must decide how much effort to invest to increase the probability of winning the reward. Individual players in the agricultural and the industrial sectors expend efforts, x_i and y_j , to increase the likelihood of winning a subsidy and avoiding a tax. The probability that the agricultural sector wins some rent is $p_A(X, \alpha Y / W) = \sum_{i=0}^{k-g} p_i(\cdot)$ where $X = \sum_{i=1}^n x_i$ and $Y = \sum_{j=1}^m y_j$. If $\alpha > 1$, then manufacturing is more powerful than agriculture; $\alpha < 1$ implies the opposite. The strength term represents the factors influencing the productivity of rent seeking. We initially assume $\alpha > 1$ in developing countries. We justify this assumption by noting Olson's argument that, although in the early stage of a country's economic development the majority of its people engage in agriculture, demand for farm price supports is typically quite weak as a result of the high cost of coordinating farmers' rent seeking activities. Agricultural populations are relatively uneducated, are scattered over a wide area, and have poor communication and transportation systems. Benefits from lobbying for higher prices are minimal because only a small share of subsistence farmers' production is sold. No other significant groups, such as domestic industries supplying farm inputs, have yet emerged to argue for policies favorable to agriculture.

In contrast, demand for industrial assistance policies is relatively strong. Industrialists are typically better educated than agriculturalists, are based in urban centers, and are relatively small in numbers. The cost of collective political lobbying activity is comparatively low. Two major benefits arise from lobbying against subsidized agricultural prices. First, increased agricultural export earnings increase the supply of foreign exchange, lowering its price. Currency appreciation lowers the local currency price of import-competing manufactures. Second, benefits accrue from the impact of low food prices on wages. Industrialists support workers in resisting food price increases for fear of increased living cost and resulting demands of higher wages. Because urban wage earners have low incomes and a large Engel coefficient, high food prices tend to trigger urban disruption.

Players in agricultural and manufacturing sectors now select (1) the optimal sharing rule detailing how the prize will be divided within the sector if victorious, (2) the optimal timing of effort (i.e., should the group move first or after its opponent has moved), and (3) level of effort. If G is a public good, then the sharing rule will not depend upon effort. If G is a divisible prize, as in protectionism, a sharing rule must explicitly examine how the prize will be divided. Let the shares to individuals in the two sectors be

$$\sigma_x = \frac{x_i}{X} \varphi_x + \frac{1}{n} (1 - \varphi_x) \quad i = 1, \dots, n \text{ and}$$

$$\sigma_y = \frac{y_j}{Y} \varphi_y + \frac{1}{m} (1 - \varphi_y) \quad j = 1, \dots, m,$$

where φ ($0 \leq \varphi \leq 1$) is the weight factor ($\varphi = 0$ implying an effort-independent sharing rule and $\varphi = 1$ implying an effort-dependent rule). Baik and Shogren demonstrate that if

$n > m$, the larger group (agriculture) will emphasize the effort-independent sharing rule, the other group (manufacturing) will emphasize the effort-dependent sharing rule. Even if the reward is a private good, individuals in the agricultural group will have incentive to free ride, a fact suggesting that less effort will be expended in the contest.

Given the optimal sharing rules, players in both agricultural and manufacturing sectors noncooperatively

select x_i and y_j to maximize expected profits:

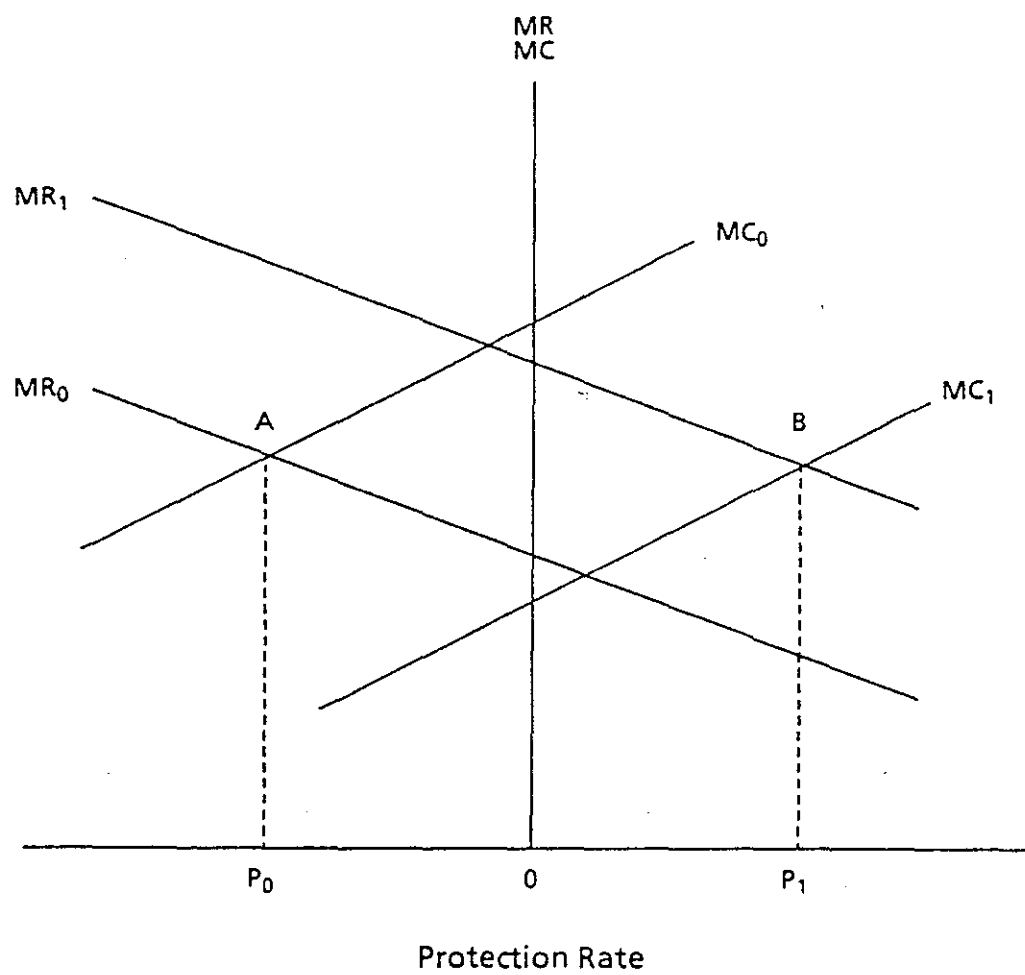
$$\text{Max}_{x_i} [p_A(X, \alpha Y | W)G\sigma_x - x_i] \quad i = 1, \dots, n \text{ and}$$

$$\text{Max}_{y_j} [p_m(X, \alpha Y | W)G\sigma_y - y_j] \quad j = 1, \dots, m,$$

where $p_A(X, \alpha Y | W)G = \sum_{i=0}^{k-g} p_i \cdot G_i$ and $p_m(X, \alpha Y | W)G = \sum_{i=k-g}^k p_i \cdot G_i$. Figure 1 illustrates the model for the simple case of four rent levels—no rent, G_0 , low rent, G_L , high rent, G_H , and very high rent, G_V . The first row in the payoff vectors reflects the regulator's expected utility, the second and third rows are expected payoffs to agriculture and industry.

Given that the contest bias term affects effort, the sector supported by the regulator may well change as the economy develops. As subsistence farmers become more commercialized, the share of market production expands, increasing the potential benefits from seeking higher production prices. While the farm population declines, the education level rises, and communication and transportation infrastructures in rural areas improve. Rural people may become more sensitive about their relative position in terms of income and standard of living, while their cost of organizing themselves declines. Farmer organizations emerge that, once established, have a vested interest in lobbying not only on behalf of

Figure 1



farmers but also on their own behalf. The same is true of a new group of manufacturing and service industries producing farm inputs and processing farm outputs. Consequently, the contest bias approaches unity ($\alpha \rightarrow 1$) when agriculture and manufacturing become equally powerful rent seekers.

Agricultural Protectionism in Developing Countries

Market intervention policies have played a major role in the differential performance of the agricultural sectors of both developing and developed countries. These policies include price supports, taxes, subsidies, tariffs, and exchange-rate market interventions. Agricultural policy in advanced industrial countries has been characterized by strong protection of domestic producers through the use of trade restrictions and direct price supports. In contrast, developing countries have exploited agriculture by such means as export taxes and overvalued exchange rates.

Table 1 summarizes average nominal rates of agricultural protection in 33 developed, newly industrialized, and developing countries. The table presents estimates of the degrees of direct and indirect intervention in agricultural commodities. These protection coefficients are indices representing between 50 and 80 percent of the total value of agricultural output for each of the countries. The first column illustrates the impact of "direct" pricing policies. The direct nominal protection rate measures the proportional difference between the domestic producer price and the border price (after adjustment for transport, storage, and other costs and quality differentials) measured at the official exchange rate. Figures for 13 developed countries and two newly industrialized countries (Korea and Taiwan) included in Table 1 are averages of those figures obtained by Anderson and Hayami.

Table 1. Nominal Rates of Agricultural Protection

Country	Period	Direct	Indirect	Total
Switzerland	1955-80	85.8		
Japan	1955-80	60.5		
Italy	1955-80	54.5		
Sweden	1955-80	49.2		
Germany	1955-80	45.2		
France	1955-80	32.5		
The Netherlands	1955-80	28.3		
United Kingdom	1955-80	27.5		
Korea	1955-80	18.5		
Denmark	1955-80	12.3		
Brazil	1969-83	10.1	-18.4	- 8.3
Taiwan	1955-80	8.3		
United States	1955-80	4.5		
Turkey	1960-83	4.2	-36.8	-32.6
Australia	1955-80	2.8		
Canada	1955-80	2.5		
New Zealand	1955-80	- 1.0		
Chile	1960-83	- 1.2	-20.4	-21.6
Philippines	1960-86	- 4.1	-23.3	-27.4
Colombia	1960-83	- 4.8	-25.2	-30.0
Pakistan	1960-86	- 6.4	-33.1	-39.5
Sri Lanka	1960-85	- 9.0	-31.1	-40.1
Malaysia	1960-83	- 9.4	- 8.2	-17.6
Morocco	1963-84	-15.0	-17.4	-32.4
Zambia	1966-84	-16.3	-29.9	-46.2
Portugal	1960-84	-16.6	- 1.2	-17.8
Argentina	1960-84	-17.8	-21.3	-39.1
Dominican Republic	1966-85	-18.6	-21.3	-39.9
Egypt	1964-84	-24.8	-19.6	-44.4
Thailand	1962-84	-25.1	-15.0	-40.1
Cote d'Ivoire	1960-82	-25.7	-23.3	-49.0
Ghana	1958-76	-26.9	-32.6	-59.5

SOURCES: Anderson and Hayami; Valdes.

Studies financed by the World Bank have provided data on domestic and border prices of agricultural commodities, exchange rate market intervention, and protection afforded to the nonagricultural sector in 18 developing countries from 1960 to 1984. Direct nominal protection rates show that most countries adopted policies resulting in the equivalent of export taxes on agricultural commodities.¹ Brazil and Turkey are among the countries protecting the agricultural sector because they are traditional importers of food products. The most surprising finding, shown in the second column, is the impact of indirect intervention. Indirect effects include both the effect of trade and macroeconomic policies on the exchange rate and the extent of protection afforded to nonagricultural commodities. Discrimination against agricultural commodities in policies external to agriculture has a greater impact on agricultural incentives (a tax equivalent of 23 percent) than do policies aimed directly at agriculture. The results for total price interventions, however, show that the dominant pattern has been one of systematic and sizeable discrimination against agriculture (Valdes).

Our framework suggests that the optimal policy choice is conditioned by the contest strength term, α , and by the political institutional environment term, W . The regulator chooses intervention levels measured by the nominal protection coefficient. The nominal protection coefficient reflects relative group strength and other aspects of the political process such as equity that affect the probability of the regulator's remaining in power. Using World Bank data, we estimate a reduced form equation for a set of 18 developing countries, with the objective of identifying a relation between policy choice and factors affecting α and W .

The dependent variable is the nominal protection coefficient (NPC) for key agricultural products.² The NPC is the multiple by which government policies have raised the domestic value of agricultural output above its value at international prices.

Three variables are used to capture players' relative efficiencies as rent seekers—share of agriculture in GDP, share of agriculture in labor force, and share of agriculture in consumption. We hypothesize that the agricultural sector's rent seeking power declines as the sector's relative size increases. Larger sectors cost more to subsidize, are more difficult to organize, and are more likely to be subsistence sectors, implying they could benefit less from price enhancement. The expected correlation is negative.

Institutional environment, constituent welfare, and other considerations will also affect the probability that a certain sector will be taxed. First, we consider public finance motives for taxing agriculture versus other sectors. Land per capita and productivity per person in agriculture³ are used, based upon the hypothesis that the public revenue potential of agricultural taxation rises with the value of agricultural resources. It is therefore expected that the greater the labor productivity in agriculture and the more land per capita, the less the protection afforded to agricultural commodities. The share of agriculture in trade and the dummy variables for both exportables and importables are introduced to reflect developing countries' preference of commodity over income taxation. Tradables are easier to tax than nontradables.

Second, we examine equity and distributional motives for taxing agriculture versus other sectors. Two variables are included to capture equity considerations: interventions in

the exchange rate market and import substitution policies on the agricultural sector. Currency overvaluation, represented by ratio of the equilibrium exchange rate to the actual exchange rate, is assumed to link macropolicy and the agricultural sector. The issue is whether there is more pressure for direct protection in proportion to how overvalued the currency becomes, a relation implying the offsetting effect of commodity market intervention. The indirect protection coefficient (NPCI), captures both the effects of import policies protecting the nonagricultural sector and the effects of policies distorting the exchange rate market. These variables are included to allow evaluation of whether the regulator has a tendency to use price protection to redistribute toward the group subject to heavy indirect taxes.

Third, we consider the “food favoritism” motive for taxing agriculture versus other sectors. We hypothesize that food products will be subject to tax treatment different from nonfood products as both self-sufficiency in food production and “cheap” food are often policy objectives in developing countries. To identify possible differential treatment, a dummy variable for food products is introduced.

Fourth, we include residual effects systematically related to income. The country’s wealth represented by income per capita captures relative differences in development and is introduced as a proxy for characteristics that are country-specific and have not been captured by variables already included.

Regression analysis is used on a pooled cross-section time series data set of 18 countries from 1960-84 and yields 1858 data points. Interpretation of the coefficients as

causal impacts on protection should be made with caution because explanatory variables might depend upon protection level. Thus, we will refer to association rather than to causation, given the possibility of simultaneous equation bias. The regression was run in log-linear form, except for variables representing the relative shares of the agricultural sector and of agricultural trade in the economy.

Table 2 summarizes estimations for different combinations of explanatory variables, regressions (1) to (4). The coefficient of determination indicates that about 60 percent of the variation in NPCs among countries and over time are explained. Coefficients of the three proxies of the contest strength term α have the expected sign but are insignificant. This fact does not mean that the sector's relative rent seeking power is a factor to be disregarded; rather, it might reflect the quality of the variables used to capture α . Both variables used to reflect public revenue potential of agricultural taxation—land per capita and labor productivity ratio—show the expected sign and are highly significant, findings that confirm the belief that agriculturally well-endowed economies tend to discriminate against the sector and extract some land rents.

The share of agricultural trade in GDP seems important inasmuch as it shows a negative correlation to NPCs and provides evidence that developing countries have a limited range of fiscal instruments available and favor revenue by taxing exportable commodities. The greater the proportion of agricultural commodities exported, the more likely regulators will be to tax the sector. Coefficients of both exportable and importable dummies are significant, indicating exportables are taxed whereas importables are protected. The two

Table 2. 1960-84 Regressions for Nominal Protection Coefficients (t-statistics in parentheses)

Independent Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Share of agriculture in GDP	-.012 (-1.03)	-.053 (-1.42)		
in labor force			-.014 (-0.24)	
in consumption				-.002 (-1.13)
Land per capita	-.250 (-4.32)			
Labor productivity ratio		-.100 (-3.98)	-.110 (-2.86)	-.110 (-4.39)
Share of ag. trade in GDP	-.007	-.007 (-5.64)	-.009 (-6.22)	-.009 (-4.65)
Exportables	-.260 (-2.96)	-.260 (-2.88)	-.260 (-2.95)	-.240 (-2.62)
Importables	.630 (7.28)	.630 (7.22)	.630 (7.27)	.620 (7.10)
Currency overvaluation	.210 (3.21)	.220 (3.31)	.190 (3.00)	
NPR indirect				-.303 (-3.49)
Food	-.014 (-0.52)	-.016 (-0.60)	-.014 (-0.53)	-.017 (-0.65)
Income per capita	.052 (3.92)	.034 (1.67)	.047 (1.67)	.048 (2.34)
Intercept	-.900	-.620 (-5.80)	-.810 (-2.47)	-1.130 (-2.18)
R ²	0.620	0.640	0.640	0.660

variables representing suggested impacts on the agricultural sector are highly significant, indicating that when the real exchange rate is low, there is pressure for protection. The more the sector is indirectly taxed, the less it is directly taxed, supporting the hypothesis that a regulator will lessen the burden of the sector under heavy taxation. The coefficient of the food dummy variable is insignificant, suggesting that food and nonfood products are treated alike. The effect of average income is significant and positive, indicating country characteristics related to wealth are not accounted for by the remaining variables.

Summary and Conclusions

This paper examines policy intervention in agriculture as the outcome of the interaction between self-interested politicians and producer and consumer groups affected by policy choices. According to this approach, politicians competing for support choose the intervention level maximizing their expected utility without jeopardizing the likelihood of their remaining in office. Players in the agricultural and the manufacturing sectors decide how much effort to invest in order to increase the probability of winning the rent created by the regulator's policy choice. Their choice depends upon the strategic timing of effort and on the sharing rule, given the relative strength of the groups involved. Players' strength is captured by a contest bias term hypothesized to depend upon disparities in income endowments between groups, deadweight losses of redistribution, cost of developing and maintaining politically cohesive groups, and availability of tax instruments.

Regression analysis on pooled cross-section, time series data of 18 developing countries reveals that 1) agriculturally well-endowed economies discriminate against

agriculture; (2) the higher the proportion of agricultural exports, the more likely that regulators will tax the sector; and (3) as a result of equity considerations, the more a sector is directly taxed, the less it will be indirectly taxed.

Our paper has been motivated in part by Baldwin. By emphasizing the economic self-interest of the political participants, we have attempted to “understand the policy-making process that leads politicians to disregard the advice of economists on issues of international trade.” Economic self-interest almost always dominates when a significant part of an individual’s income is affected by policy choice. National and group concerns are likely to dominate personal considerations only when economic self-interest effects are small or unclear. Although we recognize that social concerns can play an important role in shaping individual decisions, our framework suggests that economic self-interest explains a certain degree of agricultural protectionism.

ENDNOTES

1. Developing countries studied contain a much richer and disaggregated data set of protection rates at the level of individual commodities. A simple average for all 18 countries shows subsidies of 3.1 percent for staples, 12 percent for importables, and 15 percent for exportables.
2. There are three to seven products included per country. These products represent from 60 to 80 percent of agricultural production. For details, see Fulginiti and Shogren.
3. The productivity ratio is an index of the ratio of labor productivity in agriculture to labor productivity in industry. Labor productivity in agriculture is measured as agricultural output per worker, and labor productivity in industry is approximated as average GDP per worker for the whole economy.

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