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Political Economy of Lockdowns in Food Insecure Countries

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Abstract

Since January 2020 as a reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic, more and more countries implemented lockdowns to slow the spread of the disease. This happened most strikingly during March, when most countries in the world decided to restrict their population's freedom almost overnight to an extent never seen before in history. While lockdowns, when well designed, can be a meaningful tool to protect the population, some countries implemented lockdowns that had detrimental effects on the livelihoods of poor and food insecure populations.

To gain a better understanding of the reasons for the implementation of lockdown measures, several studies have statistically examined what determinants are able to explain the stringency of a lockdown that a country implemented in the initial phase of the pandemic, such as the level of GDP and democracy, and freedom of press.

A factor that has not yet been considered although it might have a high explanatory power due to its importance for the population is the level of food security in a country: In what relation does it stand with the stringency of implemented lockdowns? This might yield interesting insights especially in combination with the level of democracy in a country, due to the ability of democracies to better act in the interest of their population than authoritarian regimes do.

Therefore, we address this gap by using global data sets such as the Global Hunger Index and the World Governance Indicators, and discuss the relationship between food insecurity and lockdown stringency with the help of descriptive statistics and regression analysis. We then complement the statistical analysis with qualitative insights from selected developing countries' lockdown trajectories and point out the similarities and differences in countries' reaction to the pandemic. We end with discussing what role the level of food insecurity plays for political decisions.

Keywords: Covid-19, Democracy, Determinants, Food Security, Lockdown Stringency, Lockdowns, Policy Response