



S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
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Food and (In)stability: Challenging Assumptions and Proposing New Methods

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Outline

- I. Roots of Food-(In)stability Connections
- II. Complexity to the rescue?
- III. Challenging Assumptions
- IV. Proposing Alternatives



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Roots of Food-(In)stability Connections

- Existential need
- Universal Stakes
- Malthus to modern media
- Unrest in MENA



**The
Economist**

Food and the Arab spring
Let them eat baklava



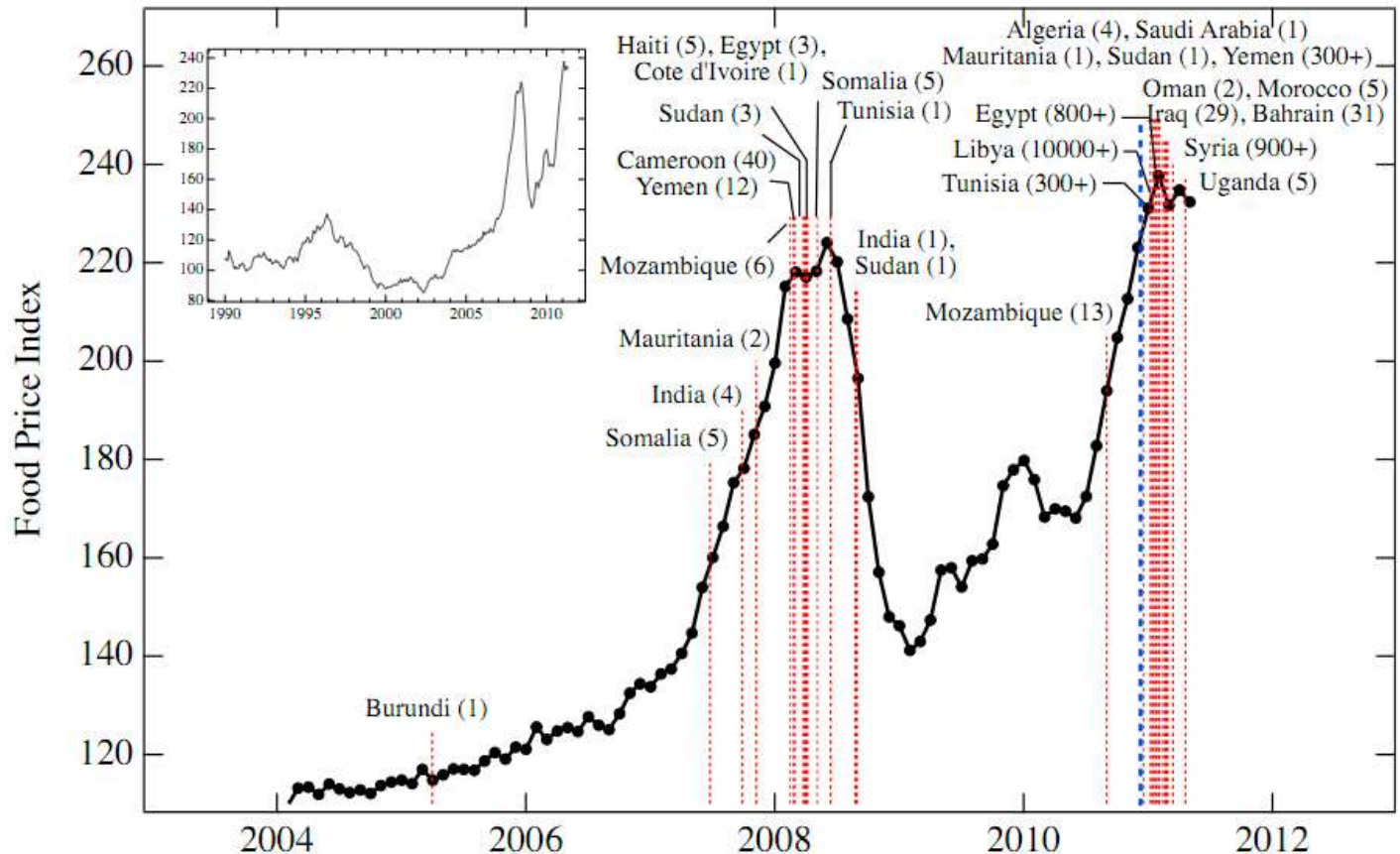
Complexity to the rescue?

- Arezki and Brückner, 2011:
 - Food prices '*lead to* a significant deterioration of democratic institutions and a significant increase in anti-government demonstrations, riots and civil conflict'
 - Statistically relevant for 'developing countries'
- Lagi et al, 2011:
 - Food prices '*the* precipitating condition' for social unrest in 2011
 - There is a 'threshold' for international food prices that when crossed will trigger 'increasing and global unrest'
 - 'Supports growing conclusion that it is possible to build mathematical models' to address economic/social crises.



Complexity to the rescue?

Lagi et al, 2011:





Challenging Assumptions

- Assumptions of 'closure'
- Focus on correlations/effects – not mechanisms
- Empirical regularities as causality
- Collectivism
- Hubris
- CAP/Stimson/Centre for Climate Security (2013)
 - Slaughter: food stresses added to a 'volatile *mix* of underlying causes'
 - Johnston and Mazo: food shocks *may* have sped events along
 - Femia and Werrell: '*Combination* of social, environmental, economic changes



Proposing Alternatives

- Causality approaches focusing on mechanisms
 - INUS Condition
 - Abstraction and new methods of inference
- Limits and challenges
 - Prediction and modest goals
 - 'One big whole'
 - Finding a middle ground?



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