

Comments on Paper

“Fighting COVID-19: Patterns in International Data”

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Overview

- Very informative paper
- The pillar of the analysis is the Disaster Index (DI)
- Comments focus on:
 - Construction of the index—benchmarking deviations in GDP and unemployment changes
 - What drives the rankings based on DI—country-level considerations
 - Linking these considerations to “complementary thoughts”

The Disaster Index

- Very useful—includes both health and economic indicators
- One methodological consideration: what benchmark (2019 or a counterfactual) should be used to measure change in GDP growth and unemployment?
 - Country A: expected growth for 2020 was 6%
 - Country B: expected growth for 2020 was 2%
 - If GDP growth declined by 3% in 2020 in both, is the Covid-20 impact the same?
- More granular analysis of contributions of individual components would be helpful:
 - Is Country A high/low ranking mainly a result of poor health results, or economic outcome?
 - Are economic and health outcomes correlated? The authors dismissed the trade-off, but this issue can be examined using the data.

Linking analysis to policy issues

- “Relationships” and “Complementary thoughts” sections raise several important policy questions.
- What are the policy implications of demographic, geographic, and structural characteristics for Covid-19 policy response?
- What about transport/logistics, economic concentration, digitization?
- More importantly: did policy responses matter?
 - Lives and livelihoods trade-off: when and how
 - Size of policy response: difficult analysis—need control variables
 - Why some countries do less than others? Needs and resource/policy constraints; why we need international cooperation
- The paper provides much food for thought