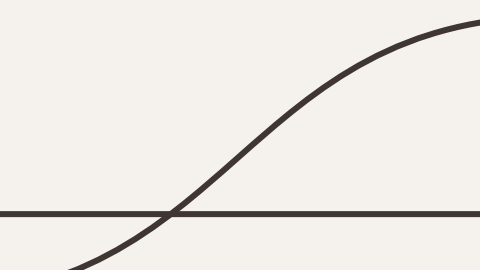# Food Insecurity

A Leading Indicator of State-Level Mental Health Trends

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Business Problem

- Anxiety and depression remain elevated during economic stability.

- Policymakers need timely indicators of emerging mental health risk.

- Traditional economic measures may miss household-level hardship.

Why This Matters

- Mental health resources are limited and reactive.
- Early warning indicators enable targeted intervention.
- Understanding within-state changes is critical for policy response.
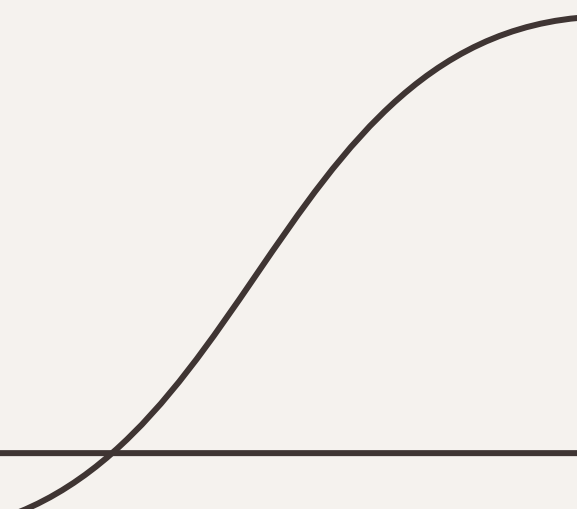
Data Sources

01

HPS

Household Pulse Survey (HPS) for
mental health & food insecurity

02
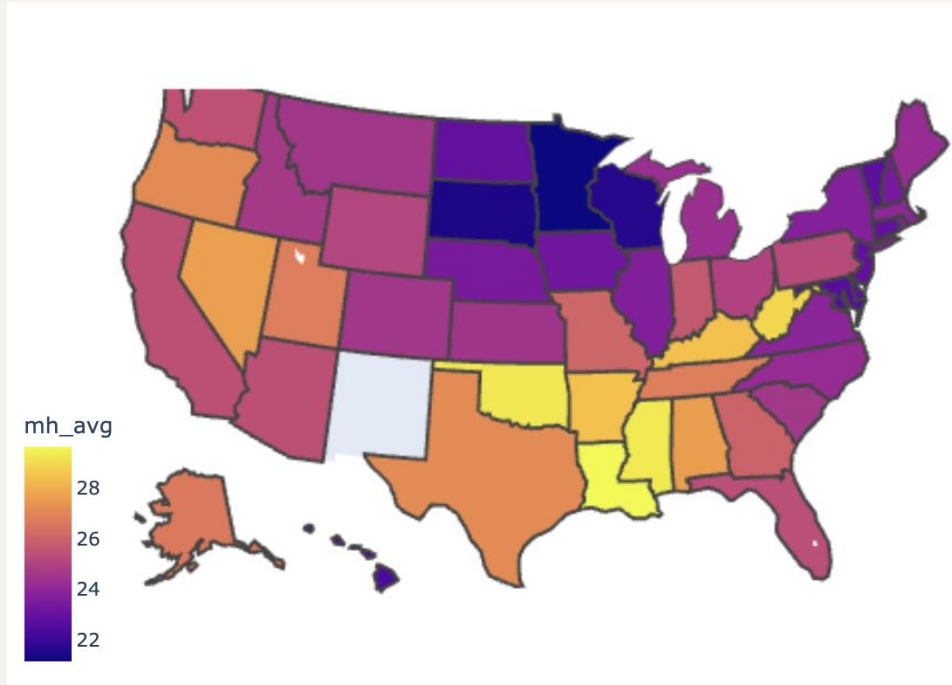
BLS

State unemployment
rates, CPI inflation

03

ACS

Structural socioeconomic context
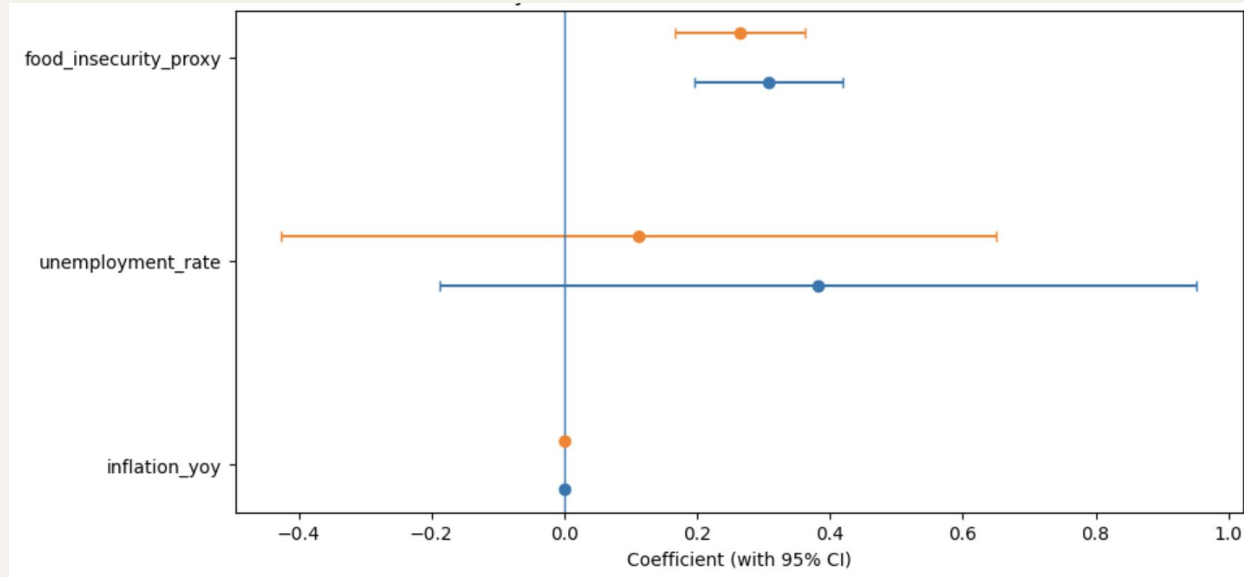(income, housing, insurance)

Methods

- State-by-month panel (July 2021 - Sept 2024)
- Fixed-effects regression models
- Lagged robustness checks
- Clustered standard errors
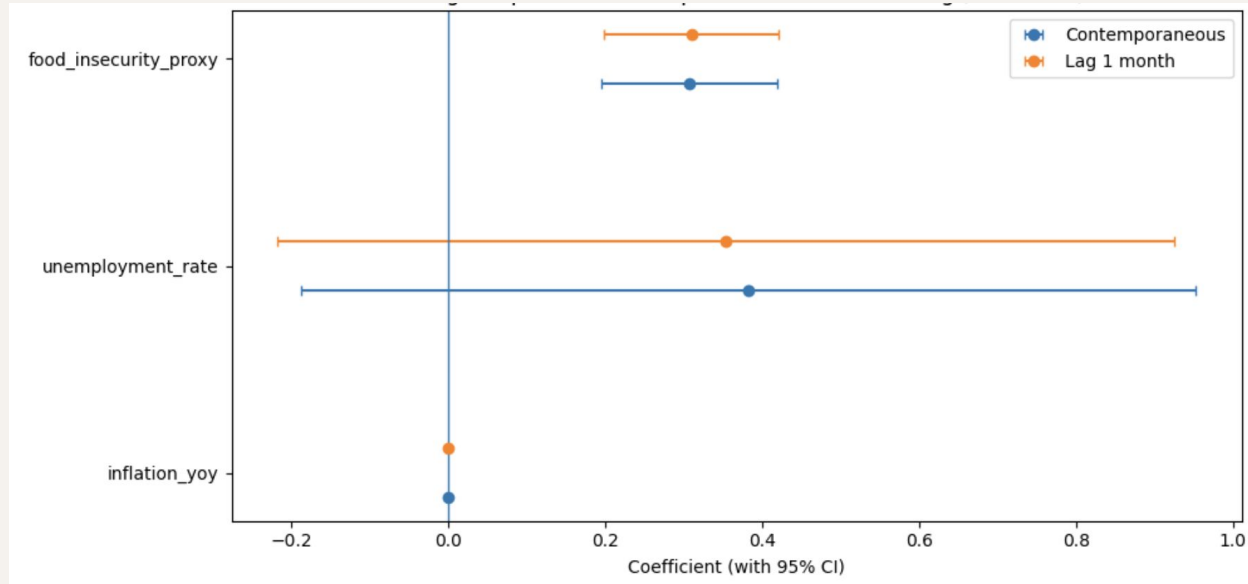
Geographic Variation

Large baseline differences across states justify fixed-effects modeling.

Core Results

- Food insecurity is robust and statistically significant.
- Unemployment and inflation are not.
- Results persist after structural controls.

Timing Matters

Food insecurity effects persist with a one-month delay.

Key Takeaways

Food insecurity

is the strongest short-term economic predictor.

Macro indicators

alone may miss proximate mental health risk.

Household hardship

matters more than broad averages

Policy Implications

- Monitor food insecurity as an early warning signal.
- Coordinate food access and mental health services.
- Target resources during rising hardship periods.

Limitations & Next Steps

- Observational, not causal.
- Limited by survey coverage.
- Future: subgroup analysis, policy evaluation, dashboards.