

# Report on Bachelor / Master Thesis

Institute of Economic Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

<b>Student:</b>	<b>Martin Vondrášek</b>
<b>Advisor:</b>	<b>Mgr. Vojtěch Mišák</b>
<b>Title of the thesis:</b>	<b>Spillover effect on crime during the COVID-19 lockdowns in the Czech Republic</b>

## **OVERALL ASSESSMENT** (provided in English, Czech, or Slovak):

*Please provide a short summary of the thesis, your assessment of each of the four key categories, and an overall evaluation and suggested questions for the discussion. The minimum length of the report is 300 words.*

### **Short summary**

The thesis studies the impact of covid-19 restrictions on crime using fixed effects OLS and fixed effects spatial lag models. The author formulates three hypotheses: 1. Movement restrictions decrease the spatial effects of crime in Czechia. 2. The negative effect of restrictions on criminality is higher for property crimes than for violent crimes. 3. Crime is spatially dependent. The author finds evidence in favor of hypotheses 2 and 3. Regarding hypothesis 1, the author finds no difference in spatial effects due to movement restrictions in any of the categories except for the category Offenses – BESIP where spatial effects increased contrary to the author's expectations.

### **Contribution**

The original contribution is clear and it is nicely explained in the Introduction. I would only suggest to better define and describe what the treatment is in the analysis. Sometimes the author writes about the relationship between covid-19 and criminality, sometimes he writes about the impact of lockdowns on criminality, and sometimes he mentions the impact of anti-pandemic restrictions in general on criminality. Up until the end I was not really sure, what the real focus is. Why is this important? It influences the interpretation of results.

With the exception of the March–May 2020 period, the other two states of emergency coincided with periods of high infection rates. Does the used identification strategy really allow the author to discriminate between 1. the effect of covid-19 itself (captured e.g. by the infection rate or number of tests) and people behaving differently because of the pandemic, and 2. the effect of anti-pandemic measures and people behaving differently because of the restrictions? Does it make sense to interpret the results by looking at the values of the individual coefficients, if almost all of them capture a very similar phenomenon - increased number of covid-19 cases and subsequent anti-pandemic measures?

On p. 24 the author writes that "Nevertheless, considering all variables linked to the pandemic, the overall impact of COVID-19 is negative." This would address my reservations if the author provided more details about how he arrived to this finding. As some of the explanatory variables are not really independent (which is also visible in figure 6.1 showing the correlation coefficients), how is the overall impact of covid calculated?

### **Methods**

The methodological choices make sense, even though I would appreciate a slightly better motivation for the use of the spatial model in the context of the effect of covid-19 (restrictions) on spatial effects.

Is it really correct to normalize the number of crimes by population? Normalizing like this means assuming that the relationship between the number of inhabitants and number of crimes is linear. Does it really have to be? Did the author try also other approaches as a robustness check?

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Author also does a z-test to check whether the spatial effect changes in the covid-19 period. He compares the period March 1, 2020 – November 30, 2022 with the period January 1, 2016 – November 30, 2022. Why not exclude the covid years from the second sample? Wouldn't the interpretation be more straightforward when comparing pre-covid and covid period?

But in general, I find the analysis very nice given the fact that this is only a bachelor thesis.

## Literature

The thesis demonstrates author's full understanding and command of recent literature. The author quotes relevant literature in a proper way. The results of the Turnitin analysis do not indicate significant text similarity with other available sources.

## Manuscript form

The manuscript form is fine, the thesis is pleasure to read. Just a small remark: There is no need to quote something that has been paraphrased in the same paragraph (p. 5). Moreover, when directly quoting, the page number should also be included.

I would appreciate to have all variables included in the equation when describing the model in section 4.4. Also, I suggest the author uses labels instead of the variable names in the future. It improves the readability.

## Overall evaluation and suggested questions for the discussion during the defense

This is a solid bachelor thesis which uses a rather advanced method. And, as far as I can judge, the author does so correctly. Therefore, in my view, the thesis fulfills the requirements for a bachelor thesis at IES, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, I recommend it for the defense and suggest a grade A.

## Questions for the defense:

1. Why not take some non-binary measure of restrictions' stringency, such as the Oxford stringency index? Some of the restrictions were valid only towards non-vaccinated individuals, etc.
2. In table 3.2 listing the categories of crime data, domestic violence is not mentioned. Does it mean that such cases are dispersed among all of the subcategories? I would expect that lockdowns would lead to an increase in domestic violence. Couldn't it influence the results?
3. How strong is the effect of covid/restrictions on the number of crimes? Does it really make sense to suggest that "law enforcement agencies could consider reallocating their resources to address other urgent issues during the pandemic"? (p. 36)
4. How is the the overall impact of covid on crime, mentioned on p. 24, calculated?

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**SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED** (for details, see below):

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Contribution</i> (max. 30 points)	26
<i>Methods</i> (max. 30 points)	28
<i>Literature</i> (max. 20 points)	20
<i>Manuscript Form</i> (max. 20 points)	19
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b> (max. 100 points)	<b>93</b>
<b>GRADE</b> (A – B – C – D – E – F)	<b>A</b>

**NAME OF THE REFEREE:** PhDr. Jiří Schwarz, Ph.D.

**DATE OF EVALUATION:** 25.8.2023

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*Referee Signature*

**EXPLANATION OF CATEGORIES AND SCALE:**

**CONTRIBUTION:** *The author presents original ideas on the topic demonstrating critical thinking and ability to draw conclusions based on the knowledge of relevant theory and empirics. There is a distinct value added of the thesis.*

**METHODS:** *The tools used are relevant to the research question being investigated, and adequate to the author's level of studies. The thesis topic is comprehensively analyzed.*

**LITERATURE REVIEW:** *The thesis demonstrates author's full understanding and command of recent literature. The author quotes relevant literature in a proper way.*

**MANUSCRIPT FORM:** *The thesis is well structured. The student uses appropriate language and style, including academic format for graphs and tables. The text effectively refers to graphs and tables and disposes with a complete bibliography.*

**Overall grading:**

TOTAL	GRADE
91 – 100	A
81 - 90	B
71 - 80	C
61 – 70	D
51 – 60	E
0 – 50	F