

The Political Dimension of Food Security: Rethinking Food as a Strategic Issue in Contemporary Politics

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Abstract:

Food security has become one of the most pressing political challenges of the twenty-first century. While traditionally examined through agricultural and economic perspectives, recent global crises have demonstrated that food security is fundamentally shaped by political institutions, governance arrangements, and geopolitical dynamics. This article examines the political transformation of food security by arguing that it should be understood as a strategic component of state resilience rather than merely an issue of food production or market availability. Using a descriptive-analytical approach, the study explores the evolution of the concept of food security and analyzes the roles of state capacity, governance quality, and geopolitical competition in shaping national food systems. It further examines how contemporary challenges—including the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia–Ukraine war, climate change, and disruptions in global supply chains—have reinforced the political significance of food security. Building on this analysis, the article proposes a political framework based on four interrelated dimensions: state capacity, governance quality, strategic resilience, and geopolitical adaptation. The study concludes that sustainable food security depends primarily on effective political institutions capable of anticipating risks, coordinating public policies, and enhancing resilience in an increasingly uncertain international environment.

Keywords: Food Security; State Capacity; Governance; Strategic Resilience; Geopolitics; Political Institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

Food security has emerged as one of the defining political challenges of the twenty-first century. Although traditionally associated with agricultural production, food availability, and nutritional outcomes, it has increasingly evolved into a multidimensional issue that extends far beyond the boundaries of agricultural economics. Contemporary global crises have demonstrated that access to food is profoundly shaped by political decisions, institutional capacity, international power relations, and the ability of governments to anticipate and manage systemic risks. Consequently, food security is no longer understood merely as a developmental objective but as a strategic political issue with direct implications for state resilience, national security, and global stability.

The political significance of food security has become particularly evident in the aftermath of successive global disruptions. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerability of international food supply chains and revealed the extent to which governments depend on effective institutions to secure food availability during emergencies. Shortly thereafter, the Russia–Ukraine war generated unprecedented shocks in global grain, fertilizer, and energy markets, highlighting the geopolitical dimensions of food production and distribution. Simultaneously, climate change, environmental degradation, demographic growth, and increasing resource competition have intensified pressures on national food systems, transforming food security into an issue that lies at the intersection of politics, economics, environmental governance, and international relations.

These developments have fundamentally altered the way scholars and policymakers conceptualize food security. Rather than viewing it solely as a matter of agricultural productivity or market efficiency, contemporary research increasingly recognizes that food systems are embedded within political institutions, governance structures, and strategic decision-making processes. Government effectiveness, policy coherence, institutional resilience, and political stability have become essential determinants of a state's ability to guarantee sustainable access to food. In this context, food security reflects not only the capacity to produce or import sufficient food

but also the ability of political institutions to manage uncertainty, coordinate public policies, and respond effectively to both domestic and international crises.

From a political science perspective, food security has also acquired a significant geopolitical dimension. Food has become an instrument of strategic influence through export controls, sanctions, food diplomacy, and competition over agricultural resources and global supply chains. States increasingly incorporate food security into their national security strategies, recognizing that disruptions in food systems can generate inflation, social unrest, migration pressures, political instability, and regional insecurity. As a result, food is no longer perceived as a neutral economic commodity but as a strategic asset capable of influencing domestic governance and international power relations.

Despite the growing recognition of these transformations, much of the existing literature continues to examine food security through predominantly economic, agricultural, or environmental perspectives. Comparatively less attention has been devoted to its political foundations, particularly the ways in which state capacity, governance quality, institutional effectiveness, and geopolitical dynamics shape national food security outcomes. This imbalance limits the analytical understanding of food security as a complex political phenomenon requiring conceptual tools drawn from political science, public policy, and international relations.

Against this background, this article argues that food security has undergone a profound political transformation. It contends that contemporary food security should be understood as a strategic political issue rather than exclusively as an agricultural or developmental concern. Building upon this argument, the article seeks to answer the following research question: **How has food security evolved into a strategic political issue, and what roles do state capacity, governance, and geopolitical dynamics play in shaping contemporary food security?**

To address this question, the article adopts a descriptive-analytical approach supported by institutional and political analysis. It examines the

evolution of food security from a political science perspective by analyzing the relationship between state capacity, governance, political stability, and geopolitical competition. Ultimately, the article proposes a political analytical framework that repositions food security within the broader debates on state resilience, strategic governance, and contemporary security studies, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of one of the most pressing challenges confronting modern states.

1. Conceptualizing the Political Dimension of Food Security

1.1 The Evolution of the Food Security Concept

The concept of food security has never been static. Rather, it has evolved in response to changing global realities, reflecting shifts in the nature of political authority, economic interdependence, and international security. What was once considered a predominantly agricultural concern has gradually become a multidimensional political issue, shaped as much by governance and state capacity as by agricultural production itself. This transformation suggests that understanding food security today requires moving beyond conventional economic interpretations toward a broader political perspective¹.

Early approaches to food security emerged during the global food crises of the 1970s, when concerns centered primarily on ensuring sufficient food supplies to meet growing demand. The prevailing assumption was straightforward: increasing agricultural production would inevitably reduce hunger. Consequently, food security was largely equated with food availability, and governments concentrated their efforts on expanding domestic production, improving agricultural productivity, and stabilizing food markets. Although this production-oriented approach addressed immediate shortages, it failed to explain why food insecurity persisted even in countries where food supplies were relatively abundant².

This apparent paradox prompted a fundamental reconsideration of the concept. Scholars increasingly recognized that hunger is rarely the direct consequence of insufficient food production alone. Instead, it often results from unequal access to resources, ineffective public institutions, political instability, social inequality, and inadequate policy responses. In other

words, food insecurity is frequently a governance problem before it becomes an agricultural one. The analytical focus therefore shifted from the quantity of food produced to the political and institutional conditions that determine who has access to food, under what circumstances, and with what degree of security³.

This conceptual shift was consolidated by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), whose widely accepted definition emphasizes that food security exists only when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. This definition represented more than a technical refinement. It fundamentally altered the analytical foundations of food security by recognizing that availability constitutes only one element within a broader system involving accessibility, utilization, and long-term stability. These dimensions are not determined exclusively by market performance or agricultural output; they are equally influenced by public institutions, regulatory frameworks, social protection systems, and government effectiveness⁴.

Recent global developments have further expanded the political significance of food security. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of highly interconnected food supply chains, while the Russia–Ukraine war demonstrated how geopolitical conflicts can rapidly disrupt global markets for cereals, fertilizers, and energy. At the same time, climate change has intensified pressures on agricultural production through droughts, floods, and extreme weather events, increasing uncertainty across national and international food systems. These developments have revealed that food security cannot be insulated from political decisions or international power relations⁵. Instead, it is deeply embedded within the broader architecture of governance, diplomacy, and strategic planning.

Consequently, contemporary debates increasingly view food security as a matter of resilience rather than abundance alone. The central question is no longer whether sufficient food is produced globally, but whether states possess the institutional capacity to anticipate risks, manage crises, protect

vulnerable populations, and maintain stable food systems under conditions of uncertainty. This perspective places political institutions at the center of food security analysis, highlighting the importance of effective governance, policy coordination, and long-term strategic planning⁶.

From this standpoint, the evolution of food security reflects a broader transformation in security thinking itself. As security studies expanded beyond military threats to encompass economic, environmental, and human dimensions, food gradually acquired strategic significance within national and international political agendas. Food security is now widely recognized as an essential component of state resilience, social stability, and political legitimacy. Governments that fail to secure reliable access to food risk not only economic disruption but also declining public confidence, social unrest, and weakened state authority⁷.

The evolution of the concept therefore illustrates a profound intellectual shift: food security should no longer be understood merely as an outcome of agricultural performance, but as a political condition shaped by institutions, governance, and strategic state action. This broader understanding provides the foundation for examining why food security has become an increasingly prominent issue within contemporary political science and international relations.

1.2 Food Security as a Political Issue

The growing political significance of food security reflects a broader transformation in the understanding of security itself. For much of the twentieth century, political analysis was dominated by a state-centric conception of security that prioritized military threats, territorial integrity, and the preservation of sovereignty. Within this framework, food was generally regarded as an economic commodity or a developmental concern rather than a strategic political variable. Consequently, discussions of food security remained largely confined to agricultural policy, international trade, and development economics, with limited engagement from political science⁸.

This perception began to change as the post-Cold War security agenda expanded beyond conventional military threats. The emergence of non-

traditional security challenges—including environmental degradation, pandemics, resource scarcity, and transnational economic crises—encouraged scholars to reconsider the sources of insecurity confronting contemporary states. Security was no longer understood solely in terms of protecting borders; it increasingly encompassed the protection of societies, institutions, and essential systems that sustain political and economic stability. Within this broader framework, food security acquired strategic relevance because disruptions in food systems possess the capacity to undermine governmental legitimacy, generate social unrest, and weaken state resilience⁹.

The Copenhagen School of Security Studies contributed significantly to this intellectual transformation by arguing that security is not an objective condition but a socially and politically constructed phenomenon. According to the securitization approach, issues become security concerns when political actors successfully frame them as existential threats requiring exceptional policy responses. This perspective provides a useful analytical lens for understanding the evolution of food security. Food shortages, supply-chain disruptions, or sharp increases in food prices do not automatically constitute security threats. They become matters of national security when governments perceive them as capable of threatening political order, social cohesion, or economic stability and respond through extraordinary political measures.

Recent international developments illustrate this process with remarkable clarity. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many governments imposed export restrictions, expanded strategic food reserves, and introduced emergency interventions to stabilize domestic markets. Similar measures were adopted following the outbreak of the Russia–Ukraine war, as concerns over grain exports, fertilizer supplies, and energy prices rapidly evolved into questions of national resilience and geopolitical competition. These policy responses demonstrate that states increasingly approach food security through the logic of strategic governance rather than conventional agricultural management¹⁰.

The political dimension of food security also becomes evident when examining its relationship with state legitimacy. The ability of governments to guarantee stable access to affordable food constitutes one of the most visible indicators of institutional effectiveness. Throughout history, persistent food crises have frequently eroded public confidence, intensified political contestation, and contributed to episodes of instability. Although food insecurity rarely acts as the sole cause of political crises, it often functions as a catalyst that amplifies existing socioeconomic inequalities, governance failures, and institutional weaknesses. Food therefore occupies a unique position within the relationship between the state and society, where its management directly influences citizens' perceptions of governmental performance and political credibility¹¹.

Moreover, food has increasingly become an instrument of international politics. States use agricultural exports, humanitarian food assistance, trade agreements, and export controls not only to pursue economic interests but also to strengthen diplomatic influence and advance strategic objectives. The growing concentration of global food production and agricultural trade has further reinforced the geopolitical value of food, enabling major exporting countries to exercise considerable influence over international markets during periods of crisis. Consequently, food security has become closely intertwined with broader debates on strategic autonomy, economic sovereignty, and the resilience of national supply chains¹².

These developments indicate that food security cannot be adequately understood through production statistics or market indicators alone. Its political character lies in the capacity of states to formulate coherent policies, coordinate institutions, anticipate systemic risks, and balance domestic priorities with external dependencies. In this sense, food security is fundamentally a question of governance and political authority rather than simply one of agricultural performance¹³.

Accordingly, this article argues that the political analysis of food security should move beyond the traditional distinction between producers and consumers toward a more comprehensive framework centered on institutions, state capacity, and governance. Such an approach recognizes

that resilient food systems are ultimately constructed through political choices, institutional effectiveness, and strategic public policy. It is this perspective that provides the conceptual bridge to the following section, which examines how state capacity and governance shape the ability of governments to achieve sustainable food security under conditions of increasing global uncertainty.

2. State Capacity and Food Security

2.1 State Capacity as the Political Foundation of Food Security

The growing political importance of food security inevitably raises a fundamental question: why are some states able to protect their populations from food crises while others remain highly vulnerable despite possessing comparable agricultural resources? The answer cannot be found solely in climatic conditions, natural resource endowments, or agricultural productivity. Increasingly, comparative evidence suggests that the decisive factor lies in the capacity of the state to formulate coherent policies, mobilize resources, coordinate institutions, and respond effectively to both predictable and unexpected shocks. In this sense, food security is ultimately conditioned by the quality of governance rather than by the quantity of food produced.

State capacity occupies a central place in contemporary political science because it determines the extent to which governments can translate political decisions into effective public action. Although scholars define state capacity in different ways, they generally agree that it encompasses the institutional, administrative, fiscal, and regulatory capabilities required to implement public policies and maintain social order. Applied to food security, state capacity refers to the ability of governments to ensure that food systems remain functional, accessible, and resilient under changing political, economic, and environmental conditions.

This perspective shifts the analytical focus away from agriculture alone and toward the institutional architecture that governs food systems. Agricultural production undoubtedly remains an essential component of food security; however, production by itself does not guarantee stable

access to food. Food must be transported, regulated, stored, distributed, monitored, and supported through effective public policies. These functions depend primarily on capable institutions rather than on agricultural output alone. Consequently, food security should be understood as the outcome of institutional performance rather than merely the result of agricultural success¹⁴.

The relationship between state capacity and food security becomes particularly visible during periods of crisis. Under normal conditions, international markets often compensate for temporary shortages through imports and commercial exchanges. During major disruptions, however, governments cannot rely exclusively on market mechanisms. Pandemics, armed conflicts, trade restrictions, and climate-related disasters frequently interrupt supply chains and expose structural weaknesses within national food systems. In such circumstances, governments with strong institutional capacity are generally better positioned to coordinate emergency responses, stabilize markets, protect vulnerable populations, and restore public confidence. Conversely, weak institutions often transform external shocks into prolonged domestic crises¹⁵.

The effectiveness of food security policies therefore depends on several complementary dimensions of state capacity. Administrative capacity enables governments to implement regulations efficiently and coordinate multiple public agencies. Fiscal capacity provides the financial resources necessary to support agricultural production, maintain strategic food reserves, and finance social protection programs. Regulatory capacity allows governments to oversee food markets, ensure food safety standards, prevent anti-competitive practices, and respond to market failures. Finally, strategic capacity enables public institutions to anticipate future risks through long-term planning, evidence-based policymaking, and integrated risk management. These dimensions are mutually reinforcing, and weaknesses in one area frequently undermine the effectiveness of the others¹⁶.

Equally important is the state's ability to coordinate policies across sectors. Food security is influenced not only by agricultural policy but also

by trade, finance, energy, water management, environmental protection, transportation, health, and social welfare. Fragmented policymaking often produces contradictory outcomes, where one sector's objectives unintentionally weaken another's capacity to achieve food security. Effective states therefore rely on institutional coordination mechanisms that facilitate information sharing, policy coherence, and integrated decision-making across government agencies. Such coordination has become increasingly important as food systems grow more complex and interconnected¹⁷.

The contemporary emphasis on resilience further reinforces the importance of state capacity. Rather than responding only after crises occur, resilient governments seek to anticipate future vulnerabilities through strategic planning, investment in infrastructure, digital monitoring systems, and diversified supply chains. This proactive approach recognizes that uncertainty has become a permanent feature of the global food system. Consequently, the capacity to adapt rapidly to changing circumstances is now as important as the capacity to maintain routine administrative functions¹⁸.

These observations suggest that food security should not be interpreted simply as an indicator of agricultural performance or economic development. It is equally an indicator of institutional quality and governmental effectiveness. States capable of designing coherent policies, coordinating public institutions, and managing complex risks are generally more successful in ensuring stable food systems than those relying exclusively on favorable natural conditions or international markets.

From this perspective, state capacity constitutes the political foundation upon which sustainable food security is built. Nevertheless, institutional capacity alone cannot guarantee successful outcomes. The effectiveness of public institutions depends equally on the quality of governance, transparency, accountability, and policy coordination. It is therefore necessary to examine how governance influences food security

and why institutional effectiveness is inseparable from sound governance practices.

2.2 Governance and Food Security: Beyond Government Intervention

While state capacity determines what governments are able to do, governance determines how public authority is exercised. The distinction is analytically important because effective food security policies depend not only on strong institutions but also on the quality of decision-making processes through which policies are designed, implemented, and evaluated. A state may possess substantial administrative resources yet fail to achieve food security if governance is characterized by institutional fragmentation, weak coordination, or limited accountability. Conversely, governance systems that promote transparency, collaboration, and strategic planning are generally better equipped to transform institutional capacity into sustainable policy outcomes.

The growing emphasis on governance reflects the increasing complexity of contemporary food systems. Food security is no longer managed exclusively by ministries of agriculture or national governments. It involves a wide range of public institutions, private actors, international organizations, producers, distributors, research institutions, and civil society organizations operating across multiple levels of decision-making. As a result, ensuring food security requires governance arrangements capable of coordinating diverse interests while maintaining coherent policy objectives. This complexity has gradually shifted attention from government as the sole decision-maker toward governance as a broader framework of institutional interaction¹⁹.

Policy coherence constitutes one of the most critical dimensions of food governance. Food systems are shaped simultaneously by agricultural policies, trade regulations, environmental legislation, public health strategies, energy markets, and social protection programs. Decisions adopted within one policy domain frequently generate unintended consequences in another. For instance, trade liberalization may improve food availability through imports while simultaneously increasing dependence on volatile international markets. Likewise, environmental

regulations designed to promote sustainability may influence agricultural productivity if they are implemented without adequate institutional coordination. Effective governance therefore requires mechanisms capable of reconciling competing policy objectives within a unified strategic framework²⁰.

Transparency and accountability further strengthen governance by enhancing public confidence in food-related institutions. Food crises often generate uncertainty, misinformation, and public anxiety, making reliable communication an essential component of effective governance. Governments that provide accurate information, justify policy decisions, and maintain institutional accountability are generally more successful in preserving social trust during periods of instability. In contrast, limited transparency may intensify market speculation, encourage panic buying, and undermine the credibility of public institutions, thereby transforming manageable disruptions into broader political crises²¹.

Another defining characteristic of contemporary food governance is its reliance on evidence-based policymaking. The increasing availability of digital technologies, satellite monitoring, geographic information systems, and real-time market data has significantly expanded governments' capacity to anticipate risks and evaluate policy performance. However, technological resources alone cannot improve food security unless they are integrated into institutional decision-making processes. Governance therefore depends not only on access to information but also on the ability of political institutions to transform knowledge into timely, coordinated, and effective public action.

International cooperation has likewise become an indispensable component of food governance. Contemporary food systems transcend national borders through global supply chains, regional trade agreements, financial markets, and multilateral regulatory frameworks. Consequently, domestic food security increasingly depends upon international policy coordination. Organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) contribute to establishing norms, facilitating

cooperation, and supporting collective responses during periods of global food instability. Nevertheless, international governance does not eliminate the responsibility of individual states. Rather, it complements national institutions by providing mechanisms for coordination, information exchange, and emergency assistance²².

The strategic importance of governance becomes particularly evident under conditions of uncertainty. Climate change, geopolitical tensions, pandemics, and economic volatility have transformed food insecurity from an occasional challenge into a persistent governance concern. Under such circumstances, effective governance is measured not only by the capacity to respond to crises but also by the ability to anticipate future risks, strengthen institutional learning, and continuously adapt public policies to evolving conditions. Adaptive governance has therefore emerged as an essential principle for managing increasingly complex and uncertain food systems²³.

Ultimately, governance should be understood as the political process through which food security is achieved rather than merely an administrative mechanism for implementing existing policies. It provides the institutional environment within which state capacity is translated into practical outcomes, enabling governments to coordinate actors, manage competing interests, and maintain the resilience of national food systems. Consequently, food security is shaped not only by the strength of the state but also by the quality of governance that guides political decision-making²⁴.

This analysis also demonstrates that food security cannot be separated from the broader dynamics of international politics. The governance of national food systems increasingly interacts with geopolitical competition, global trade, and strategic resource management, raising important questions about the role of food in contemporary international relations. These issues are examined in the following section through an analysis of food security within the context of contemporary geopolitics.

3. Food Security in Contemporary Geopolitics

3.1 Food as an Instrument of Political Power

The relationship between food and political power is not a recent phenomenon. Throughout history, access to food has influenced the rise and decline of political systems, shaped state-building processes, and affected the stability of societies. What distinguishes the contemporary period, however, is the extent to which food has become integrated into global geopolitical competition. In an increasingly interconnected international system, food is no longer merely a commodity traded across markets; it has become a strategic resource capable of advancing national interests, strengthening diplomatic influence, and altering the balance of power between states.

The strategic value of food stems from its irreplaceable nature. Unlike many other economic resources, food is indispensable for human survival and social stability. This characteristic provides states that possess significant agricultural production, technological capabilities, or control over global food supply chains with a distinct form of political leverage. Food-exporting countries are often able to influence international negotiations, shape trade relationships, and reinforce diplomatic partnerships through the management of agricultural exports and food assistance programs. Consequently, food has increasingly become part of the broader toolkit of statecraft²⁵.

This political dimension is particularly evident during periods of international crisis. Governments frequently introduce export restrictions, revise trade agreements, or increase strategic food reserves in order to protect domestic markets. Although such measures may appear economically rational from a national perspective, they often produce unintended consequences at the global level by reducing market availability, increasing food prices, and intensifying competition among importing countries. The result is a political environment in which food security becomes closely linked to questions of sovereignty, strategic autonomy, and international influence²⁶.

Food assistance also illustrates the dual political character of food. Humanitarian aid undoubtedly plays an essential role in responding to famine, armed conflict, and natural disasters. Nevertheless, food aid has rarely been entirely detached from political considerations. Donor states and international organizations frequently employ food assistance to strengthen diplomatic relationships, promote regional stability, or support broader foreign policy objectives. While humanitarian principles remain fundamental, food diplomacy demonstrates that the distribution of food can simultaneously serve ethical, developmental, and strategic purposes.

The concentration of global agricultural production further reinforces these geopolitical dynamics. International markets for wheat, maize, rice, soybeans, and fertilizers are dominated by a relatively limited number of exporting countries. Such concentration creates structural interdependence between food-exporting and food-importing states. Under stable conditions, this interdependence contributes to market efficiency and international trade. During periods of geopolitical tension, however, dependence on external suppliers may expose importing countries to considerable political and economic vulnerability. Food security therefore increasingly depends not only on market access but also on the geopolitical configuration of global supply networks²⁷.

The Russia–Ukraine war provides a compelling illustration of these dynamics. Beyond its immediate military consequences, the conflict disrupted exports of cereals, vegetable oils, and fertilizers, generating significant volatility across international food markets. Countries heavily dependent on imported grain experienced rising prices, inflationary pressures, and growing concerns regarding domestic food availability. The crisis demonstrated that geopolitical conflicts can rapidly evolve into global food security crises, even in regions geographically distant from the battlefield. More importantly, it revealed that national food security cannot be separated from the broader structure of international political relations²⁸.

These developments have encouraged governments to reconsider the strategic role of food within national security planning. Increasing attention is now devoted to reducing excessive dependence on external suppliers,

diversifying import partners, strengthening domestic agricultural production where feasible, and expanding strategic food reserves. Such policies do not necessarily reflect a retreat from globalization; rather, they represent efforts to enhance resilience within an increasingly uncertain international environment. Food security has thus become closely associated with strategic preparedness and long-term risk management²⁹.

From a political science perspective, these transformations demonstrate that food has acquired characteristics traditionally associated with strategic resources such as energy or critical minerals. Control over food production, transportation corridors, storage infrastructure, and agricultural technologies increasingly influences international bargaining power. Accordingly, food security should be understood not only as a developmental objective but also as an element of geopolitical strategy that shapes both domestic governance and international political relations³⁰.

Recognizing food as an instrument of political power does not imply that international cooperation has become less important. On the contrary, growing geopolitical competition has highlighted the need for stronger multilateral mechanisms capable of reducing systemic vulnerabilities and ensuring the stability of global food systems. Understanding this balance between competition and cooperation requires examining how recent global crises have transformed the governance of food security, a question addressed in the following section.

3.2 Global Crises and the Reconfiguration of Food Security

The political relevance of food security has become particularly visible through the succession of global crises that have characterized the first decades of the twenty-first century. Rather than functioning as isolated events, these crises have collectively exposed structural vulnerabilities within national and international food systems. More importantly, they have challenged the long-standing assumption that globalized markets alone are capable of guaranteeing stable food supplies. The experience of recent years has demonstrated that food security is inseparable from political preparedness, institutional resilience, and effective governance³¹.

The COVID-19 pandemic represented a turning point in this regard. Although the crisis initially emerged as a public health emergency, its consequences rapidly extended to global food systems. Restrictions on mobility, labor shortages, disruptions in transportation networks, and interruptions to international trade affected food production and distribution across multiple regions. Governments were compelled to intervene through emergency policies aimed at maintaining food availability, protecting vulnerable households, and stabilizing domestic markets. These interventions illustrated that, during systemic crises, the state re-emerges as the principal guarantor of food security. Market mechanisms remained important, but they proved insufficient without coordinated public action³².

The geopolitical consequences of the Russia–Ukraine war reinforced this conclusion. As two of the world's leading exporters of wheat, maize, sunflower oil, and fertilizers became directly involved in armed conflict, the effects were transmitted almost immediately through international markets. Rising commodity prices, disruptions in maritime transport, and uncertainty regarding future supplies generated significant pressure on food-importing countries. The crisis demonstrated that food insecurity can originate far beyond national borders and that external geopolitical developments may rapidly evolve into domestic political challenges. Consequently, governments increasingly recognized that food policy must be integrated into broader national security and foreign policy strategies³³.

Climate change has introduced an additional layer of complexity. Unlike sudden geopolitical shocks or pandemics, climate change represents a persistent and cumulative source of uncertainty. Increasing temperatures, prolonged droughts, floods, desertification, and extreme weather events are progressively altering agricultural productivity and threatening the long-term stability of food systems. These environmental pressures are not distributed evenly across countries, creating new inequalities between regions with differing adaptive capacities. Consequently, climate change transforms food security from a temporary policy challenge into a structural governance issue requiring long-term institutional adaptation rather than short-term emergency responses.

These crises collectively reveal an important characteristic of contemporary food insecurity: its systemic nature. Modern food systems operate through dense networks of production, transportation, finance, technology, and international trade. While such interdependence has significantly increased global efficiency, it has simultaneously reduced the capacity of individual countries to remain insulated from external shocks. A disruption affecting energy markets, maritime logistics, fertilizer production, or international financial systems may ultimately compromise national food security, even in countries with relatively stable domestic agricultural production. Food security has therefore become increasingly dependent upon the resilience of interconnected systems rather than the performance of isolated sectors.

This reality has encouraged governments to reconsider the strategic priorities of food policy. Increasing attention is now devoted to building resilience rather than maximizing efficiency alone. Diversifying import sources, strengthening strategic food reserves, investing in climate-resilient agriculture, modernizing storage infrastructure, and developing early-warning systems have become central elements of contemporary food security strategies. These measures reflect a broader shift in public policy from reactive crisis management toward anticipatory governance based on preparedness and institutional learning³⁴.

At the international level, global crises have also exposed important limitations within existing governance arrangements. Although international organizations continue to play a crucial role in monitoring food insecurity and coordinating humanitarian responses, geopolitical rivalries and competing national interests often constrain collective action. Export restrictions, protectionist trade policies, and competition over strategic resources illustrate how national priorities may undermine international cooperation precisely when coordinated responses are most needed. This tension highlights one of the central challenges of contemporary food governance: balancing national food sovereignty with the collective stability of global food systems³⁵.

From a political science perspective, these developments suggest that food crises should not be interpreted merely as external shocks affecting agricultural production. Rather, they function as stress tests for political institutions, revealing both the strengths and weaknesses of governance systems. States with robust institutions, effective coordination mechanisms, and adaptive policymaking capacities are generally better positioned to absorb external shocks and maintain social stability. Conversely, countries characterized by institutional fragility frequently experience crises that extend beyond food shortages to encompass political instability, declining public trust, and broader governance failures³⁶.

The succession of global crises has therefore fundamentally redefined the political meaning of food security. It is no longer sufficient to measure food security by levels of production or market availability alone. Contemporary food security increasingly depends on the capacity of political institutions to anticipate uncertainty, manage systemic risks, and strengthen resilience within an increasingly volatile international environment. This transformation provides the basis for developing a broader political framework through which food security can be understood as a strategic component of state resilience and public governance.

4. Towards a Political Framework of Food Security

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that contemporary food security cannot be adequately explained through agricultural production, market performance, or economic growth alone. While these factors undoubtedly remain important, they represent only part of a much broader political reality. The capacity of states to ensure sustainable access to food increasingly depends on the effectiveness of political institutions, the quality of governance, and the ability to anticipate and manage complex risks. Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of food security requires an analytical framework that places politics at the center of the discussion rather than treating it as a secondary variable³⁷.

This argument reflects a broader transformation within political science. Contemporary governance challenges rarely arise from a single sector or policy domain. Instead, they emerge from the interaction of

multiple economic, environmental, social, and geopolitical processes. Food security exemplifies this complexity. Agricultural production may be sufficient, yet weak institutions can undermine distribution systems. Markets may remain functional, yet ineffective governance may prevent vulnerable populations from accessing food. International trade may increase food availability, yet excessive dependence on external suppliers may expose states to geopolitical pressures. These examples illustrate that food security is ultimately shaped by political choices concerning resource allocation, institutional design, and strategic priorities³⁸.

Viewing food security through a political lens also requires moving beyond the traditional emphasis on crisis response. For many years, governments approached food insecurity primarily as an emergency requiring temporary intervention during periods of shortage. Although emergency responses remain essential, they cannot substitute for long-term institutional preparedness. Contemporary food governance increasingly emphasizes prevention, resilience, and adaptation, recognizing that uncertainty has become a permanent characteristic of the international system. The objective is no longer simply to recover from crises but to strengthen the institutional capacity necessary to withstand future disruptions before they escalate into broader political and social instability³⁹.

From this perspective, four interrelated political pillars emerge as fundamental determinants of sustainable food security.

The first pillar is **state capacity**. Effective institutions remain indispensable for designing public policies, mobilizing financial resources, regulating markets, coordinating administrative agencies, and implementing strategic decisions. States with stronger institutional capacity are generally more capable of protecting food systems against external shocks while maintaining social stability during periods of uncertainty⁴⁰.

The second pillar is **governance quality**. Institutional capacity alone cannot guarantee successful outcomes if decision-making processes lack transparency, accountability, coordination, or public legitimacy. Good governance enables governments to transform institutional resources into

effective public policies through coherent planning, intergovernmental cooperation, evidence-based decision-making, and continuous policy evaluation.

The third pillar is **strategic resilience**. Contemporary food systems operate within an increasingly volatile international environment characterized by climate change, geopolitical tensions, technological transformation, and economic uncertainty. Consequently, resilience should be understood not merely as the capacity to recover from crises but as the ability to anticipate risks, adapt institutions, diversify vulnerabilities, and maintain the continuity of essential public functions under changing circumstances.

The fourth pillar is **geopolitical adaptation**. No country currently operates in complete isolation from global food markets. National food security therefore depends on governments' capacity to navigate international trade relationships, manage strategic dependencies, diversify supply networks, and participate effectively in regional and global governance arrangements. Geopolitical adaptation does not imply economic isolation; rather, it reflects the ability to reduce strategic vulnerabilities while preserving the benefits of international cooperation⁴¹.

Together, these four pillars suggest that food security should be conceptualized as a political capability rather than simply an economic outcome. It is not determined exclusively by the volume of food available within a country but by the ability of political institutions to organize, protect, and sustain food systems under conditions of uncertainty. This perspective shifts analytical attention from measuring food production to evaluating institutional resilience, governance effectiveness, and strategic state action⁴².

Such a framework also contributes to contemporary debates on national security. Traditional security paradigms have long emphasized military preparedness and territorial defense as the principal foundations of state security. However, recent crises demonstrate that societies may experience severe political instability without direct military confrontation if governments fail to secure access to essential resources. Food security

therefore represents an integral component of comprehensive national security because it directly influences political legitimacy, economic stability, public trust, and social cohesion⁴³.

Ultimately, understanding food security through this political framework broadens the analytical horizons of political science. Rather than treating food as a sectoral policy issue, it recognizes food systems as strategic institutions whose performance reflects the broader quality of governance and state resilience. This perspective not only explains why countries respond differently to similar global shocks but also provides a more comprehensive basis for designing public policies capable of strengthening long-term food security in an increasingly uncertain world.

Conclusion

Food security has undergone a profound transformation over the past decades. Once perceived primarily as an issue of agricultural production and food supply, it has evolved into a complex political challenge that intersects with governance, state capacity, national security, and international politics. This evolution reflects broader changes in the global security environment, where non-traditional threats increasingly shape governmental priorities and redefine the foundations of political stability.

This article has argued that the political dimension of food security provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding why countries experience markedly different food security outcomes despite operating within the same global economic system. The analysis demonstrates that agricultural resources and market mechanisms, although indispensable, are insufficient to explain the resilience of national food systems. Instead, institutional effectiveness, governance quality, strategic planning, and political leadership emerge as the principal factors determining how states anticipate, manage, and recover from food-related crises.

The discussion further shows that contemporary food insecurity is rarely the consequence of food shortages alone. Rather, it often results from the interaction of multiple political, economic, environmental, and

geopolitical factors. Pandemics, armed conflicts, climate change, supply-chain disruptions, and economic volatility have revealed the limitations of approaches that rely exclusively on market efficiency or increased agricultural production. These crises have reaffirmed the indispensable role of the state in coordinating public policies, regulating markets, protecting vulnerable populations, and preserving the stability of national food systems.

Another important finding concerns the growing geopolitical significance of food. In an era characterized by strategic competition and increasing interdependence, food has become an important instrument of political influence and national resilience. Export restrictions, food diplomacy, strategic reserves, and the restructuring of global supply chains illustrate that food policy is no longer confined to agricultural ministries but has become an integral component of foreign policy, economic security, and national strategic planning. Consequently, ensuring food security requires governments to balance domestic priorities with the realities of an increasingly interconnected international system.

Building upon these observations, this article proposed a political framework for analyzing food security based on four interrelated dimensions: **state capacity, governance quality, strategic resilience, and geopolitical adaptation**. Together, these dimensions offer a broader analytical perspective capable of explaining how political institutions influence the resilience and sustainability of national food systems. The proposed framework also contributes to expanding the study of food security within political science by moving beyond conventional economic and agricultural interpretations toward a governance-centered approach.

The implications of this perspective extend beyond academic debate. For policymakers, strengthening food security requires long-term investments in institutional capacity, policy coordination, transparent governance, strategic foresight, and adaptive public administration. Governments should regard food security not as a sectoral policy objective but as a strategic component of national resilience capable of enhancing political stability, public trust, and sustainable development. Equally

important is the need to strengthen regional and international cooperation, as contemporary food challenges increasingly transcend national borders and require coordinated responses.

Future research may further develop this political approach by examining how different governance models influence food security outcomes across diverse political systems. Comparative studies could also explore the relationship between democratic governance, institutional quality, and food system resilience, as well as the implications of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and strategic foresight for the governance of food security. Such research would contribute to a deeper understanding of food security as one of the defining political challenges of the twenty-first century.

Ultimately, food security should no longer be viewed merely as an agricultural or developmental objective. It has become a strategic political capability that reflects the strength of institutions, the effectiveness of governance, and the resilience of the modern state. Understanding this transformation is essential not only for explaining contemporary food challenges but also for designing public policies capable of ensuring stability, sustainability, and security in an increasingly uncertain global environment.

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