

Predictive Modelling of Local Currency Sovereign Debt yields using Machine Learning

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Abstract. This paper explores applying Statistical Machine Learning (ML) models to forecast local currency 10-year bond yields in 17 Emerging Markets (EM) economies, using Economic & Financial Indicators as feature parameters. The models considered include Random Forest (RF), Gradient Boosting (GB), Lasso Regression, Ridge Regression, and Linear Regression (LR). The performance is assessed using three key metrics: Mean Squared Error (MSE), R2 on the testing set, and R2 on Cross-Validation (CV). The results show that RF and GB models generally outperform traditional linear models, showing lower MSE and higher R2 values, indicating better accuracy in their predictions. By exploring the practical application of those models in the context of EM economies, this paper contributes valuable insights into the predictive modelling of sovereign debt yields, which is crucial for investors and policymakers. The findings suggest that ML models, with their ability to capture non-linear relationships, offer a more reliable approach to predicting 10-year bond yields in EM economies.

Keywords: Machine learning, Bond Yield forecasting, Emerging markets, Sovereign debt, Macroeconomic forecasting.

1. Introduction

Investing in EM Rates involves navigating more uncertainties than Developed Markets (DM). EM countries face a greater risk of default and debt restructuring, driven by weaker fiscal conditions, which can significantly impact bond pricing and liquidity [1]. Additionally, political instability and geopolitical risks weigh more heavily on EM Rates, with sudden regime changes, sanctions, or conflicts causing sharp market sell-offs unrelated to global macro fundamentals. The goal of this research effort was to develop accurate statistical machine learning models to predict local currency 10-year bond yields across 17 EM countries, which could be used to identify trading signals.

There is an ever-growing literature on ML applications in the world of macro fixed income because of their capability to learn complex non-linear relationships. For instance, ML models have been effectively used in predicting real GDP growth [2] and financial crises [3]. However, sovereign debt yield prediction through applying ML techniques to Economic & Financial indicators has more commonly been focused on DM, such as the US [4, 5], and significantly less attention has been directed to predicting local currency sovereign debt yields in EM. Existing studies in EM often focus on understanding how macroeconomic factors influence bond yield, primarily using LR models [6], rather than employing ML techniques for more accurate forecasting. This highlights a gap in the literature on applying more advanced forecasting methods to EM sovereign debt markets. To expand on this growing literature, this paper's contribution focuses on applying ML models to forecast local currency 10-year bond yields specifically in EM economies, filling a notable gap in the existing research. By showcasing the effectiveness of ML models in capturing the relationships between Economic & Financial indicators and Sovereign Debt yields, this study contributes to academic research and practical forecasting in global macro fixed-income markets.

2. Methodology

2.1. Linear Models

LR models the relationship between a target variable y and features x as a linear function [7]. The basic LR model is expressed as:

$$y = x^T \beta + \epsilon \quad (1)$$

Where the coefficients to be estimated are denoted by β , and the error term is normally distributed with a mean of zero, denoted by ϵ .

Lasso Regression introduces an ℓ_1 penalty term on the size of the coefficients [8], defined as:

$$\hat{\beta}^{\text{lasso}} = \arg \min_{\beta} \sum_{i=1}^n (y_i - x_i^T \beta)^2 + \lambda \|\beta\|_1 \quad (2)$$

Where $\lambda > 0$ is the regularisation parameter [7]. Automatic feature selection can be achieved through the application of Lasso's ℓ_1 -penalty, which can shrink some of the coefficients exactly to zero [9]. K-fold CV was performed to select the optimal value of λ . In K-fold CV, the dataset is divided into K approximately equal-sized folds [2]. The Lasso model is trained on K-1 folds and validated on the remaining fold. This procedure is repeated K times so each fold is utilized to validate once [7]. The average validation error across all K iterations is computed for a range of λ values. Formally, the optimal regularization parameter λ^* minimizes CV error (λ), which is calculated as [7].

$$\lambda^* = \arg \min_{\lambda} CV(\lambda) = \arg \min_{\lambda} \frac{1}{K} \sum_{k=1}^K MSE_k(\lambda) \quad (3)$$

Where $MSE_k(\lambda)$ is the MSE on the k-th validation set. Once λ^* is determined, the Lasso model is retrained on the full dataset using this optimal λ^* .

Ridge Regression introduces an ℓ_2 penalty term on the size of the coefficients, defined as [7]:

$$\hat{\beta}^{\text{ridge}} = \arg \min_{\beta} \sum_{i=1}^n (y_i - x_i^T \beta)^2 + \lambda \|\beta\|_2^2 \quad (4)$$

Where $\lambda > 0$ is a regularisation parameter that limits the amount of shrinkage. This penalty term shrinks the coefficients proportionally to address multicollinearity [10]. Like Lasso Regression, CV is performed to find the optimal λ^* .

2.2. Machine Learning Models

RF, introduced by Breiman (2001), is an ensemble method that builds a number of decision trees on bootstrapped training samples and outputs the average prediction of the individual trees [11]. The mathematical idea behind RF can be understood through the Central Limit Theorem, which justifies the reduction in variance when the sample mean is taken as the final prediction [7]

Let $\hat{y}^{(b)}(x)$ represent the prediction of the b-th decision tree for input x , where $b \in \{1, 2, \dots, B\}$ and B is the total number of trees in the forest [7]. The ultimate RF prediction is the mean of the predictions from all trees [7]:

$$\hat{y}_{\text{RF}}(x) = \frac{1}{B} \sum_{b=1}^B \hat{y}^{(b)}(x) \quad (5)$$

Assume that each tree's prediction $\hat{y}^{(b)}(x)$ is a random variable with mean $\mathbb{E}[\hat{y}^{(b)}(x)] = \mu(x)$ and variance $\text{Var}[\hat{y}^{(b)}(x)] = \sigma^2(x)$. If the tree predictions are uncorrelated (or weakly correlated), then the variance of the RF prediction decreases with the number of trees B according to:

$$\text{Var}(\hat{y}_{\text{RF}}(x)) = \frac{\sigma^2(x)}{B} \quad (6)$$

In building those decision tresses, only a subset of variables is used during each split, rather than greedily choosing the best split point in the construction of the tree [8]. The explanation for this is simple. If there is a very strong predictor among the complete set of predictors, the majority of

decision trees will use this predictor in the initial split, resulting in highly correlated predictions. The RF model will not significantly reduce variance compared to a single tree [7].

GB, introduced by Friedman (2001) [12], is another powerful ensemble method. The fundamental concept involved constructing a model sequentially, where each decision tree (a weak learner) is trained to forecast the residual error of the current model [13]. Over time, these weak learners correct the mistakes of their predecessors, leading to a strong predictive model. GB has an error function:

$$L(y, F(x)) = \frac{1}{2} (y - F(x))^2 \quad (7)$$

It aims to model a function $F(x)$ that approximates the relationship between input variables $x \in \mathbb{R}^d$ and a continuous target variable $y \in \mathbb{R}$. The model $F(x)$ is built to minimize a predefined loss function $L(y, F(x))$. The GB algorithm constructs the model $F(x)$ through an iterative process. At each step m , the model is updated as [2]:

$$F_m(x) = F_{m-1}(x) + \gamma_m h_m(x) \quad (8)$$

Where $h_m(x)$ is the weak learner added at step m , and γ_m is the learning rate [2]. At each step, $h_m(x)$ is fitted to the residual [13]. The residuals at iteration m are defined as:

$$r_{i,m} = -\frac{\partial L(y_i, F_{m-1}(x_i))}{\partial F_{m-1}(x_i)} \quad (9)$$

This ensures that the new learner focuses on the errors made by the current model, leading to a reduction in the overall loss function.

2.3. Model Evaluation

To compare the performance of different regression models, the following metrics are used:

Testing set R2 measures the model's ability to generalise to unseen data [7]. It is calculated as:

$$R_{\text{test}}^2 = 1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n_{\text{test}}} (y_i - \hat{y}_i)^2}{\sum_{i=1}^{n_{\text{test}}} (y_i - \bar{y})^2} \quad (10)$$

Where y_i is the actual historical value; \hat{y}_i is the predicted value from the model; \bar{y} is the mean of the actual historical values. The observation number in the testing set is denoted as n_{test} . A value near 1 suggests a perfect fit, but a value near 0 indicates the model does not explain any variance in the target variable.

Cross-validated R2 is computed using K-fold C and calculated as [7]:

$$R_{\text{CV}}^2 = \frac{1}{K} \sum_{k=1}^K R_{\text{test},k}^2 \quad (11)$$

Where $R_{\text{test},k}^2$ is the R2 value calculated on the k-th test fold, and K is the number of folds.

MSE on the testing set measures the mean squared difference between the actual historical values y_i and the predicted values \hat{y}_i [7]:

$$\text{MSE}_{\text{test}} = \frac{1}{n_{\text{test}}} \sum_{i=1}^{n_{\text{test}}} (y_i - \hat{y}_i)^2 \quad (12)$$

3. Results

3.1. Data preparation

To predict 10-year bond yields across 17 EM countries, the initial set of features for this analysis was drawn from a broad range of Economic & Financial indicators including Retail Sales, Consumer Price Index, Producer Price Index, Policy Rate, Unemployment Rate, Debt-to-GDP ratio, Fiscal and Budget Deficit as a percentage of GDP, 5-year/10-year Credit Default Swap (CDS) prices, Brent Oil Price, US 10-year Treasury yield, Consumer Confidence Index. The dataset was collected from

Bloomberg and Macrobond. The number of observations, along with the start and end years of the data collection period, is presented in Figure 1r.

To address the complexity that many features are not independent, interaction terms (e.g., Inflation \times Policy Rate) were included to capture feature dependencies [7]. Furthermore, it is often unrealistic to assume a linear relationship between features and the target variable. For example, inflation’s effect on bond yields might increase when inflation is above the country’s inflation target. This relationship was better captured by introducing quadratic or cubic terms.

The dataset was divided into features X and target variable y. It was then split into training sets (70%) and testing sets (30%). The training sets were used to fit the model; the testing sets were held out to evaluate the model performance on unseen data. Hypothesis tests were performed to determine whether each feature has a statistically significant effect on the target variable (10-year bond yield).

- Null Hypothesis (H0): The feature’s coefficient is zero
- Alternative Hypothesis (H1): The feature’s coefficient is not zero

If the p-value was below 0.05, H0 was rejected, suggesting that the feature is statistically significant and should be included in the model [7].

LR was used as the baseline model for feature selection due to its ability to directly assess the statistical significance of each feature and the same set of selected features is subsequently used in other regression models. Separate models were created for each country to account for differences in economic structure and stages of the economic cycle, which cannot be captured effectively if a single global model was used.

3.2. Feature selection

LR was used as the baseline model for feature selection. For each country’s model, features that are statistically significant are presented in Fig. 1.

coef		coef		coef	
const	4.1992	const	2.1496	const	0.9382
Central Bank Rate	0.6700	Central Bank Rate	0.5472	Interest Rate	1.0238
CPI inflation	0.5203	Central Bank Rate ^2	-0.0215	Interest Rate ^ 2	-0.0262
Unemployment Rate	-0.3339	CPI Inflation ^ 2	0.0091	CPI inflation	-0.2321
10-year CDS	0.0165	US 10-year bond yield ^2	0.1880	CDS	0.0098
Retail Sales(yoy%)	0.1192	US inflation	0.3899	US inflation	0.5842
Central Bank Rate ^ 2	-0.0211	5Y CDS	0.0073	Rate & inflation interaction	0.0128
Inflation & Retail Sales Interaction	-0.0157	US inflation & rate interaction	-0.1222		
Inflation & policy rate interaction	-0.0337				
(a) BRL		(b) MXN		(c) TRY	
coef		coef		coef	
const	3.2786	const	0.2938	const	2.9839
CPI inflation	0.1231	10-year CDS	0.0079	CPI inflation	0.2654
10-year CDS	0.0094	US Inflation	0.2732	Brent Oil price	-0.0071
US 10 year bond yield	0.4926	US Inflation ^ 2	0.0682	Central Bank Rate	-0.0865
US inflation/interest rate interaction	0.0901	US 10 year bond yield	1.5183	US inflation & rate interaction	0.0403
		US inflation & interest rate interaction	-0.2600	10-year CDS	0.0070
				US 10 year bond yield	0.5444
(d) COP		(e) CLP		(f) PEN	
coef		coef		coef	
const	4.5791	const	-0.5693	const	0.4421
CPI inflation	-0.3456	Central Bank Rate	0.2620	US inflation	-0.1234
10-year CDS	0.0128	Unemployment Rate	0.0878	Central Bank Rate	0.5701
US Inflation	0.6831	CPI inflation	0.1927	US inflation & rate interaction	0.0558
US 10 year bond yield ^ 2	0.1878	CDS 5Y Price	0.0095	Central Bank Rate ^ 2	-0.0858
Local inflation & rates interaction	0.0245	US 10 year bond yield	0.7340	CPI inflation	0.0560
US inflation & rate interaction	-0.1765	Inflation & Rates Interaction	-0.0178	Current Account Balance (% of GDP)	-0.4034
				Real GDP	-0.1532
				US 10 year bond yield	0.5650
				Current Account & GDP interaction	0.0274
(g) ZAR		(h) PLN		(i) CZK	
coef		coef		coef	
const	0.4682	const	2.0095	const	3.6763
Central Bank Rate	1.6117	Central Bank Rate	0.9984	US 10-year bond yield ^2	0.1638
Central Bank Rate ^ 2	-0.0767	Local rates & US rates interaction	-0.0653	US 10-year bond yield ^ 3	-0.0361
PPI	0.0938	US real interest rate	0.1616	Oil Price	0.0100
US Inflation	-0.2216	Local inflation & rates interaction	-0.0173	Central Bank Rate	0.4192
Inflation & Rate interactions	-0.0081	PPI change	0.0735		
(j) RON		(k) HUF		(l) INR	

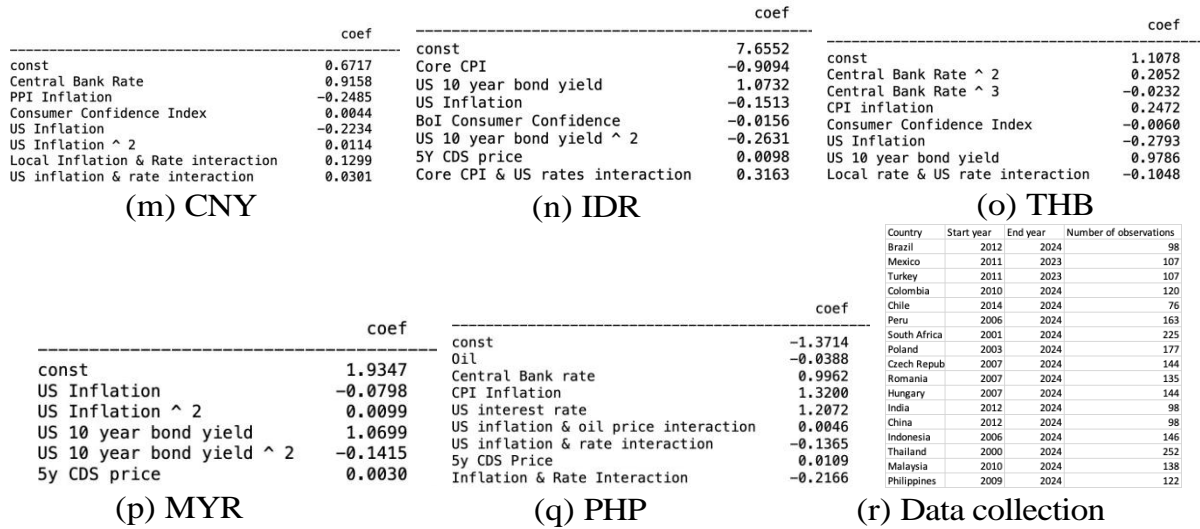


Figure 1. Feature Selection

Features included in the LR model varied across countries. For example, in Hungary, 10-year bond yield is significantly influenced by local inflation and the policy rate, whereas in Chile, 10-year bond yield is significantly influenced by US inflation and the 10-year US treasury yield. Those features are then used in all other regression models to provide us with the model comparison results in the next subsection.

3.3. Model comparison

In the following subsection, a detailed evaluation of different models' predictive capabilities based on the results obtained for each metric is provided. The best-performing model for each country, based on each specific metric (MSE, Test R2, and CV R2), is highlighted in red to indicate superior performance.

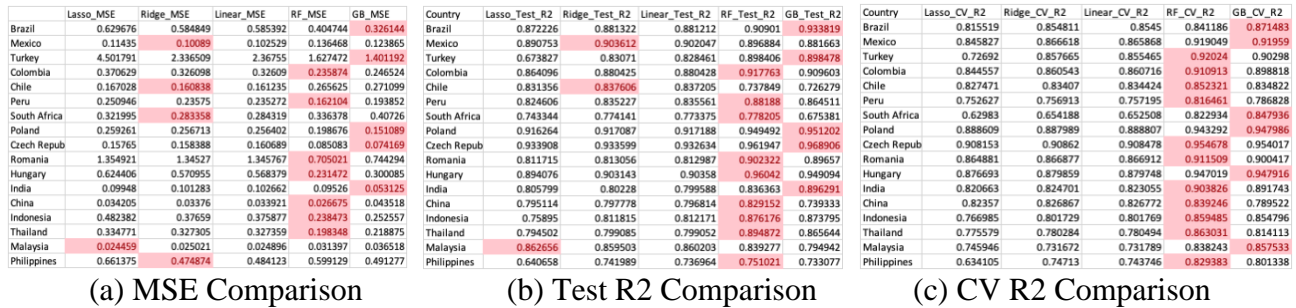


Figure 2. Performance of Different Models Across Countries

The models' performance in terms of MSE is shown in Figure 2a. The RF and GB models show meaningfully lower MSE values compared to linear models in most countries. RF models show particularly low MSE in countries such as Peru with 0.1621, Poland with 0.1987, Thailand with 0.1983, and Hungary with 0.2315, GB models performed best in countries such as Brazil, India, Czech Republic, with MSE values of 0.3261, 0.0531, and 0.0742, respectively. Nevertheless, Ridge shows the lowest MSE values in countries such as the Philippines with 0.4749, and South Africa with 0.2834, although the improvement is only marginal in comparison to LR.

The Test R2 results, shown in Figure 2b, illustrate that both RF and GB models perform well in terms of R2 on the test sets, indicating strong explanatory power. In several cases, RF and GB outperform traditional linear models by a significant margin. Notable examples include Hungary, where R2 values are 0.9604 for RF, 0.9491 for GB, and 0.7996 for LR; and Thailand, where RF achieves an R2 of 0.8949, GB an R2 is 0.8656, and LR an R2 of 0.7991. When comparing the linear models, Ridge Regression again tends to perform marginally better. For example, in Brazil, Ridge achieves an R2 of 0.8813, outperforming Lasso with an R2 of 0.8722 and LR with an R2 of 0.8812.

Finally, Figure 2c presents the results of CV R2. ML models consistently perform strongly across all countries during CV, further demonstrating their predictive power. Countries like Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary show very close CV R2 values for RF and GB, highlighting their comparable strengths. In Poland, RF achieves a CV R2 of 0.9433, GB a CV R2 of 0.9480, while in the Czech Republic RF achieves a CV R2 of 0.9547, GB a CV R2 of 0.9540.

4. Summary

Overall, the analysis suggests that Machine Learning models are highly effective in predicting Local Currency Sovereign Debt yields. In most countries, RF and GB outperform linear models, especially in countries such as Hungary, Thailand, and India, where they achieve significantly lower MSE and higher R2 scores. In certain cases, GB has a slight edge in predictive performance, such as in Brazil, Turkey, and India, while in others, RF performs marginally better. This suggests that both models are suitable for capturing the complexities in the dataset, and either could be favoured depending on the specific country or data characteristics. Among linear models, Ridge Regression occasionally yields competitive results, where it slightly outperforms the other linear models. Future research could extend this analysis by experimenting with more advanced ML models, such as deep learning methods, to further enhance predictive power. In conclusion, the recommendation is to consider both RF and GB as leading models for predicting local currency sovereign debt yields, as demonstrated in this comparative study.

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