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Brazil's subnational-government policies have affected mobility and citizen behaviour, finds new Oxford University report

A new Oxford University, EBAPE-FGV and University of São Paulo report assesses Brazilian subnational COVID-19 response policies alongside World Health Organization criteria

The University of Oxford's Blavatnik School of Government, and partners in Rio de Janeiro's EBAPE-FGV and the University of São Paulo, have published a report assessing public policy responses to COVID-19 for different levels of government in Brazil.

The report "Do Brazil's COVID-19 Government Response Measures Meet the WHO's Criteria for Policy Easing?" finds that the World Health Organization's six criteria for easing closure and containment policies had not been met in eight Brazilian state capitals by the time of the study's survey (6 to 27 May). The eight capitals included in the survey are: Fortaleza, Goiânia, Manaus, Porto Alegre, Recife, Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, and São Paulo.

The report extends the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker to Brazilian sub-national units, and also assesses state-government policy effects on mobility using smart phone location data. The policies that are combined into the Tracker's stringency index are associated with clear increases in how much people are staying at home during the day, and with clear decreases in how many non-essential trips they are making and in the distances that they are travelling.

There was a sudden decrease in mobility when many state governments introduced closure and containment policies en masse, in mid-March. Even though people have gradually started to move around more the longer that closure and containment policies have been in place, average mobility at the end of May was still substantially lower than mobility levels recorded before mid-March.

The Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker's subnational data and its indices are freely available online up to 31 May 2020 for the Brazilian federal government, state governments and the eight state capitals. The Tracker subnational data will continue to be updated in due course, refined and improved throughout the crisis. The survey data used in the paper is also freely available online: https://github.com/OxCGRT/Brazil-covid-policy

Several recommendations emerge from the survey results:

1. **Public information campaigns:** people living in the eight cities generally do not understand that self-isolation means you should stay at home without going out, even to shop for essential items. Public information campaigns that target this misunderstanding might lead to more compliance among contagious people.
2. **Testing and tracing:** while testing has increased since the survey was conducted, establishing even more robust testing and contact-tracing programmes, alongside clarifying appropriate behaviours for self-isolating individuals, should, over time, reduce the need for stringent closure and containment policies.

3. **Physical distancing in workplaces:** Workplaces should be encouraged to more fully implement physical distancing measures.
4. **Income support measures**: income support provided by the Auxílio Emergencial has been reaching economically vulnerable groups. These groups have seen the largest reductions in income since February, with 77% of microentrepreneurs and 67% of informal workers reporting income losses. This support policy makes up for a substantial proportion of these people's reductions in income.
5. **Education:** public-school students have not been studying with material appropriate for their level of education as much as private-school students have. Additional measures are likely needed to make up the gap.

Anna Petherick, Departmental Lecturer in Public Policy at the Blavatnik School of Government and lead for this project, said: "This project is all about bringing together information to support evidence-based policymaking in Brazil. The team sincerely hopes that the paper and the data that we have produced are useful tools for policymakers, especially in the eight state capitals where we surveyed citizens. We could not have done it without the efforts of our team of coders associated with the three partner institutions."

Beatriz Kira, a Senior Research and Policy Officer at the Blavatnik School of Government, said: "As a Brazilian citizen, I feel very motivated to produce data and analysis that are relevant to my home country. We hope this project can support all levels of government making very difficult decisions in response to the pandemic. It is my desire that this research can have a positive impact in Brazil's fight against Covid-19."

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Notes to editor

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• The coronavirus outbreak has forced governments to put in place policies to contain the spread of the disease among their population. The Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker collects publicly available information on 17 indicators of government response. Eight of the policy indicators record information on containment and closure policies, such as school closures and restrictions in movement. More information on the methodology is available on the project page on the Blavatnik School website www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/covidtracker
• Government responses vary significantly from one subnational unit to another, and like any policy interventions, their effect is highly contingent on local political and social context. The COVID-19 Government Response Indices, like all aggregate indices which combine different indicators into a general index, should not be interpreted as measuring the appropriateness or effectiveness of a government's response.
• With the rapidly evolving situation, the data collection is live and ongoing. The project team welcomes specific feedback on both data and analysis. Please visit the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker project page on the Blavatnik School website www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/covidtracker to fill in a feedback form.

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