

More than Words:
Leaders' Speech and Risky Behavior During a
Pandemic

Nicolás Ajzenman (EESP/FGV-SP)
Tiago Cavalcanti (Cambridge& CEPR))
Daniel Da Mata (EESP/FGV-SP)

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Research Question

- ▶ **Question:** Could leaders' examples and words drive behavioral change among citizens, on top and above incentives and institutions even during the pandemic?

Brazilian Context

Bolsonaro defies coronavirus to rally against Congress

Brazilian president criticised for rubbing elbows with crowds while awaiting second virus test results



Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who is supposed to be in quarantine, clasped hands and took selfies with supporters on Sunday © AFP via Getty Images

Figure: FT, 16 March.

Brazilian Context

- ▶ Brazil is a three-tiered federation with 26 states, a federal district, and 5,571 municipalities;
- ▶ Brazil is a polarized country.
- ▶ State governments have real power to implement their own social distancing policies - and they did.
- ▶ **Bolsonaro** has encouraged people to go out and has made appearances in stores, markets and joined rallies on the streets contradicting his own health ministry and sub-national social distancing measures.

Timeline: Not always an uniform message

- ▶ 6 March (official pronouncement): people “must strictly follow experts’ recommendations on the best protective measures”.
- ▶ 12 March: Wearing mask on TV with his health minister, Bolsonaro stated that the public demonstrations on his support for 15 March should be “reconsidered”.
- ▶ **15 March - Demonstration:** Bolsonaro joined one of the demonstrations in Brasilia. He posted a record number of tweets (47) since becoming president.
- ▶ 18 March (official pronouncement): Toned down the voice against social distancing.
- ▶ **March 24 (Official pronouncement):** Directly referred to the social distancing policies implemented by the states. Minimised the effects of the disease and argued against closing schools and business. Praised the effectiveness of chloroquine.
- ▶ Since then, the message has been against social distancing measures and emphasised the effectiveness of chloroquine.

15 March



President Bolsonaro takes a selfie photograph with supporters at the Planalto Palace in Brasilia on March 15. *Photographer: Andre Coelho/Bloomberg*

Figure: Bloomberg, 15 March.

FOLHA DE S. PAULO

DESDE 1921 ★★ UM JORNAL A SERVIÇO DO BRASIL

ANO 110 • Nº 13.229

QUARTA-FEIRA, 25 DE MARÇO DE 2020

R\$ 5,00

Ala militar tenta conter insatisfação com presidente

A insatisfação com as reações iniciais de Jair Bolsonaro e de Paulo Guedes (Economia) ao coronavírus levou a ala militar a tentar corrigir o rumo da gestão. Casos de conflito e descompasso entre o discurso do presidente e as ações da Saúde, além da rixa com a China criada por Eduardo Bolsonaro, Guedes passou a ser criticado após medida que previa suspensão de salários por 4 meses. **Paulo Ag**

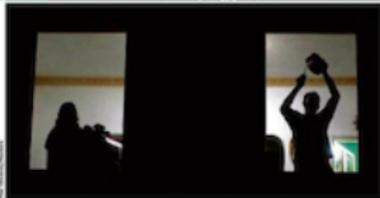
Pluralia e Congresso acertam prorrogar MP
Para evitar que medidas provisórias caducassem no fim do coronavírus, Pluralia e Congresso fizeram acordo para prorrogar a validade dos textos, com resqulito, ainda que não analisado, do STF. **Paulo Ag**

Maia sugere até 20% de corte para funcionalismo

O presidente da Câmara, Rodrigo Maia (DEM-RR), sugeriu que os três Poderes avaliem corte de até 20% dos salários de servidores. A medida excluiu os que ganharam menos ou emoldos no combate à Covid-19. O Congresso tem sido pressionado a reduzir gastos do funcionalismo ante a crise. **Marcelo Ag**

Bolsonaro critica fechamento de escolas e ataca imprensa

Pronunciamento também tem governadores como alvo e é acompanhado por panelaços pelo país



Jair Bolsonaro durante seu pronunciamento, acompanhado por panelaços, como no Rio

Em seu terceiro pronunciamento em rádio e televisão sobre a crise do novo coronavírus, o presidente Jair Bolsonaro criticou ontem à noite o fechamento de escolas para combater a epidemia, atacou governadores e culpou a imprensa pelo crescimento da doença. História instalada no país. "Grande parte dos meios de comunicação foram no contramão. Espalharam a sensação de pânico, tendo como caso típico o grande número de vítimas na Itália", declarou Bolsonaro. Para ele, "nossa vida tem que continuar", e os empregos precisam "ser mantidos". "O sustento das famílias deve ser preservado. Devessem, sim, voltar à normalidade!"

O presidente disse ainda que governadores e prefeitos precisam "abandonar o conceito de terra arrasada", com a proibição de transporte, o fechamento de comércio e o que chamou de confinamento em massa. "O que se passa no mundo mostra que o grupo de risco é de pessoas acima de 60 anos. Então, por que fechar escolas?", questionou Bolsonaro, que voltou a comparar a Covid-19 a uma "gripinha" ou "resfriadinho". Dani Alcântara (DEM-AP), presidente do Senado, criticou o pronunciamento e pediu seriedade e responsabilidade a Bolsonaro, que, durante a transmissão, foi alvo de panelaços pelo vídeo da seguida. **Paulo Ag**

Em decisão inédita, Jogos de Tóquio são adiados para 2021

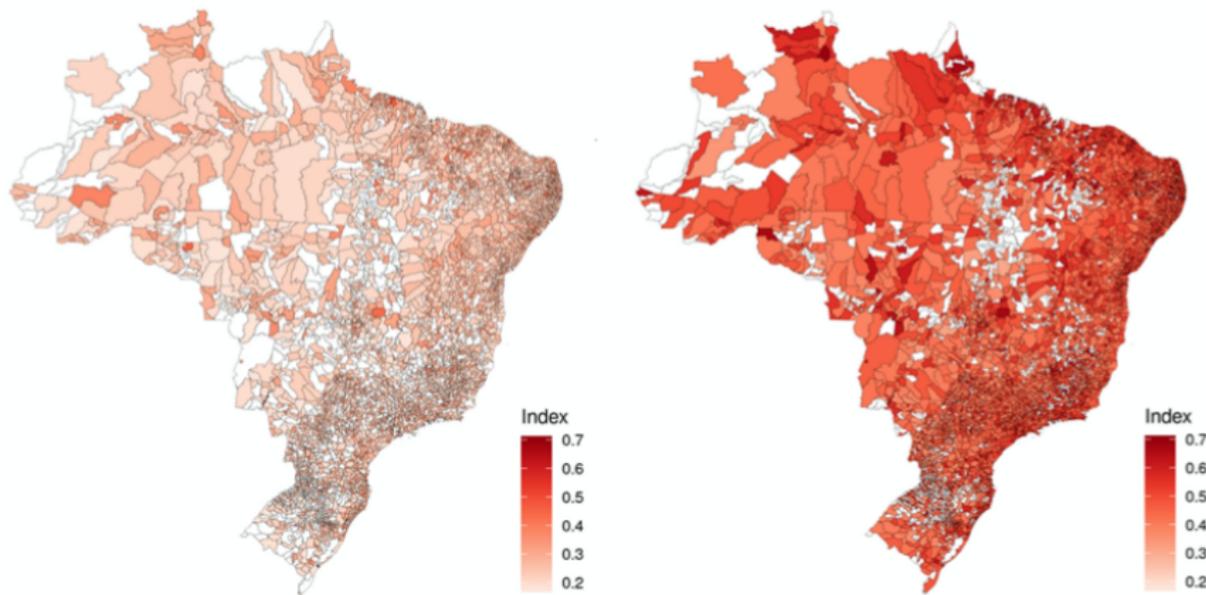
É a primeira vez que uma edição da Olimpíada muda para outro ano em sua era moderna (a partir de 1896). Outras três foram canceladas pela Primeira e Segunda Guerras (1916, 1944 e 1944). Desde que a OMI passou a tratar o coronavírus como uma pandemia, o COI viu-se sendo pressionado a alterar as datas. **Isabela Ag**

Data

- ▶ Granular geo-localized mobile phone data (<https://www.inloco.com.br/en/>) from 60 millions of anonymous devices in Brazil;
- ▶ Support to Bolsonaro: "Pro-Bolsonaro" municipalities: Locations where he obtained more than 50% of the votes in the first round of the 2018 election.

Social Distancing Index

Social distancing index: Percentage of mobile phones that remained within a 450-metre radius. Average value: Feb - 0.25; April - 0.53.



(a) Social Distancing Before: Feb 4

(b) Social Distancing After: Apr 7

Empirical Strategy

$$\begin{aligned} \text{SocialDistancing}_{md} = & \sum_{l=-10}^{+10} \alpha_l \text{Treated}_{md-l} + \alpha \text{Treated}_{md} \\ & + \phi_d + \rho_m + \lambda X_{md} + \delta Z_{sd} + \varepsilon_{smd} \end{aligned}$$

- ▶ Two-way fixed effects model (day, municipality), with leads and lags;
- ▶ We define $t=0$ (treatment) as the first day after the demonstration (15 March) and the first day after the official pronouncement (24 March).

Av Eff on Social Distancing

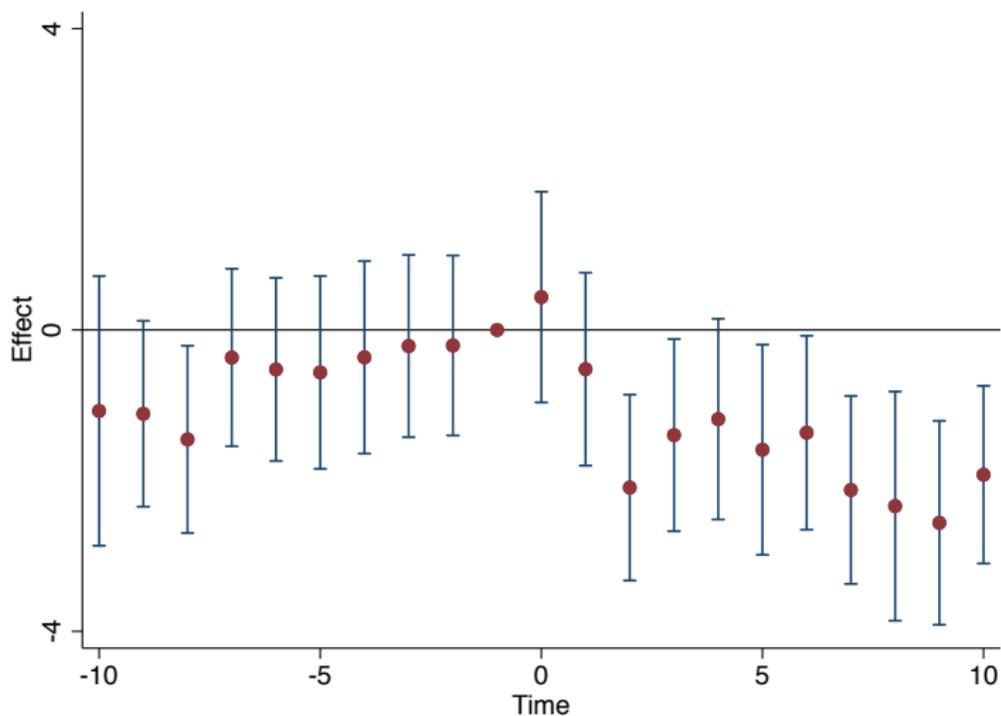


Figure: Percent change in number of people moving more than 450m from their home.

Av Eff on Social Distancing - Support for Bolsonaro Above State Median

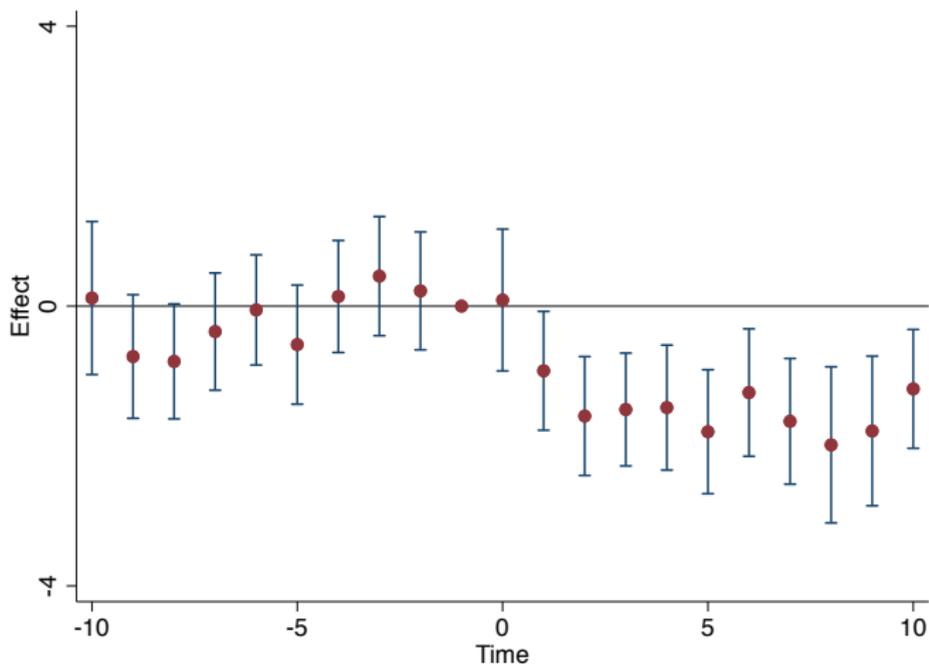


Figure: Percent change in number of people moving more than 450m from their home.

Av Eff on Social Distancing - Support for Bolsonaro Above State Median in pro-Bolsonaro States

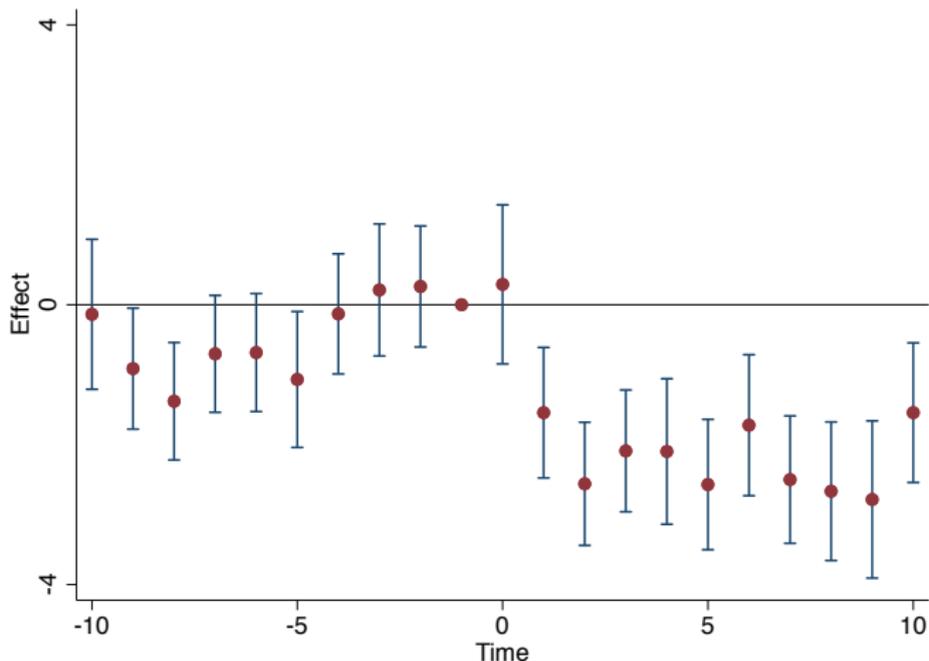


Figure: Percent change in number of people moving more than 450m from their home.

Placebo: Av Eff on Social Distancing (Unrelated Official Pronouncements)

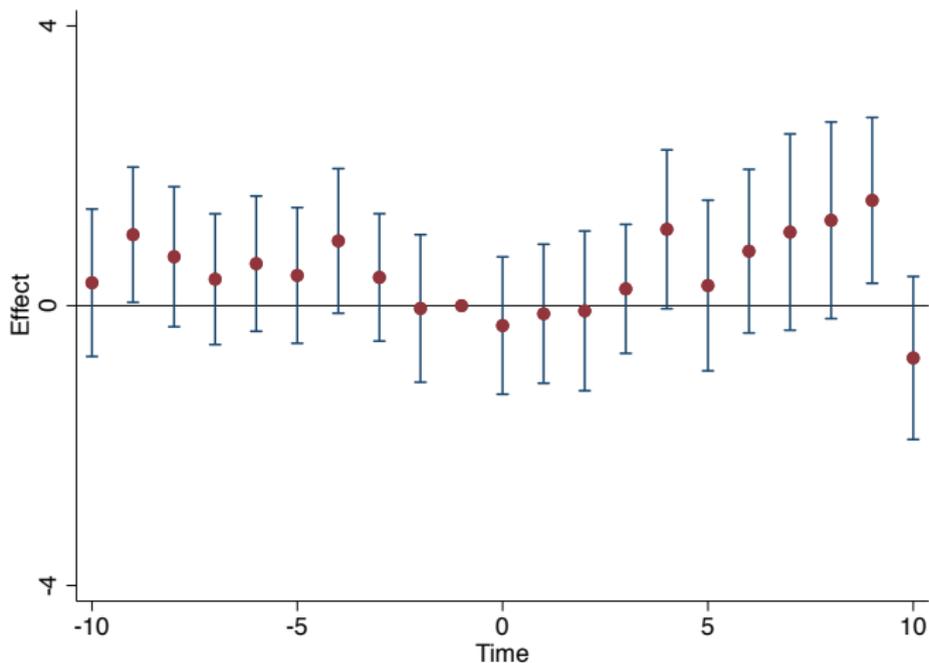


Figure: Percent change in number of people moving more than 450m from their home.

Further Analysis

- ▶ Effects are stronger for the following cases:
 - ▶ Municipalities with higher levels of **media penetration**;
 - ▶ Municipalities where there is a larger population of **Evangelical parishioners**;
 - ▶ Municipalities where the share of potentially **active workers** (male, between 15-64 years old) is larger.

What Does It Mean Quantitatively?

- ▶ Approximately 1 million people strayed further than 450 metres from their home on each of the ten days following the key events under study.
- ▶ Social distancing index increased from Feb to April:
 - Increase in top-5% cities in support to Bolsonaro: 24pp
 - Increase in bottom-5% cities in support to Bolsonaro: 31pp
 - Difference of 7pp
- ▶ We show evidence of a shift in the trend in [reported cases and Covid19 deaths](#).

Next Steps for this Research Agenda

- ▶ We are getting **death data on notary's office** to investigate deaths - more reliable data.
- ▶ We are also getting data on **hospital utilisation** during the pandemic.
- ▶ We are getting **transaction data** to investigate the local economic activity.
- ▶ We are getting data on **forest fires**.

Concluding Remarks

- ▶ Leaders' examples and words can drive behavioral change among citizens, on top and above incentives and institutions (even in a Pandemic!).
- ▶ Results are relevant beyond Brazil and the pandemic.