Recife, Pernambuco

Figure PE.1 – Accumulated number of deaths and deaths per capita for Pernambuco and the seven other states surveyed.
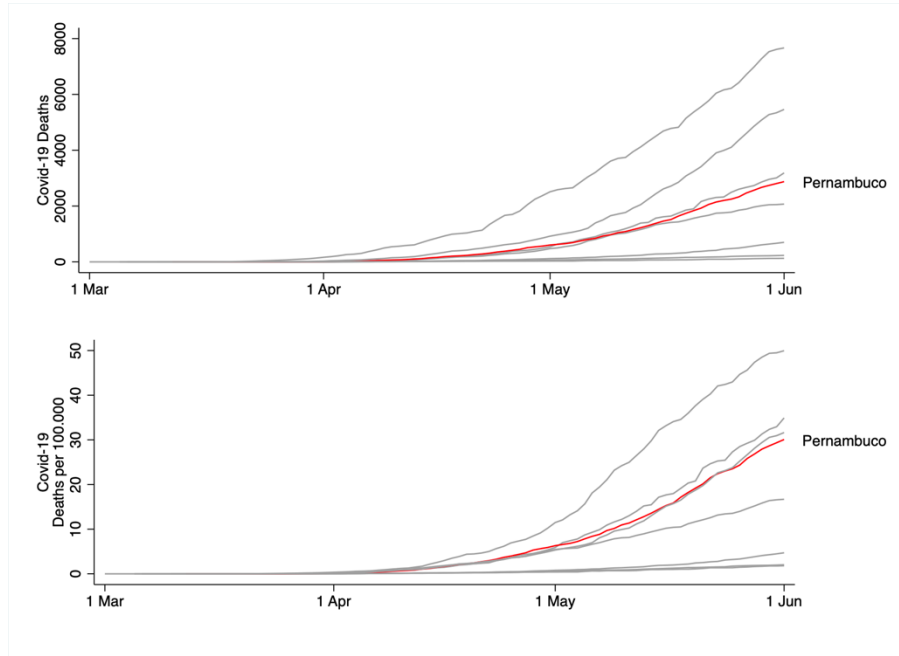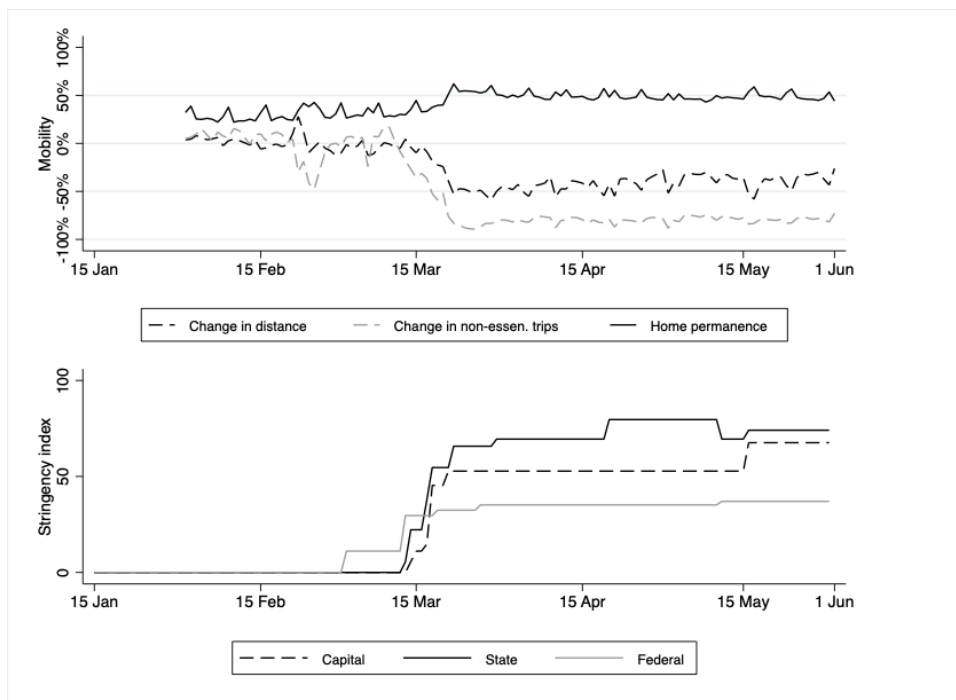

Figure PE.2 – Mobility indicators for Pernambuco and the OxCGRT stringency index for different levels of government.

State and City Government Responses

Pernambuco had 473.6 cases and 40.3 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants as of 15 June. The state saw its first two confirmed Covid-19 cases on 12 March. Its first death was confirmed 25 March. The state government was swift to act. Public information campaigns were up and running by mid-March. On 18 March, it released a WhatsApp number to provide citizens with information about Covid-19 via instant messages. It was also one of the first to launch a website that allowed citizens to see how confirmed cases are spatially distributed, providing detailed information about the number of confirmed cases in cities within the state, and even within neighborhoods.

On 18 March, the state government closed all public and private schools, universities and other educational establishments. A state decree required the closure of all bars and restaurants, barber shops and beauty salons, clubs, as well as shopping centres and shops selling non-essential items. People were only allowed to go to the beach to exercise, provided they kept a safe distance from others. All non-essential services and commercial activities were later suspended, as well as as intercity transportation.

Initially the state goverment cancelled public events with more than 500 people. Then it changed this policy to include all events with more than 50 people, before eventually cancelling all public events. From 4 April, gatherings of more than 10 people were banned in the state of Pernambuco, and beaches and parks were completely closed.

More restrictive social distancing policies were introduced thereafter, and while the state government recommended that citizens to stay home as much as possible, no state-wide curfew or stay-at-home requirements were introduced as law. The state goverment did eventually announce the suspension of all public transport services on islands off the coast, including buses and taxis. The archipelago of Fernando de Noronha was the first part of Pernambuco to introduce public transport closures on 20 April, and eventually a state government decree required people on this island to stay at home. They could only leave their homes with an authorisation to perform specific activities, including buying groceries, going to the bank, for health reasons, and to go fishing. The landing and taking-off of aircraft at the Fernando de Noronha State District Airport has been suspended since 21 March.

From 16 to 31 May, a state-government decree required stricter containment measures in the municipalities of Recife (the capital), Olinda, Camaragibe, São Lourenço da Mata, and Jaboatão dos Guararapes. Residents of these cities were only allowed to leave their homes when completely necessary (to buy groceries, for health reasons, and to work if they job was considered to be essential). The stay-at-home order was lifted on 1 June, but access to beaches and parks was still restricted, and most shops remained closed to the public. On that same day, shops selling construction materials were allowed to reopen provided they follow strict hygiene and social distancing practices, as were some delivery services.

The policies adopted by Recife's municipal government mimicked those of the state government. From mid-March, schools, shopping centres, restaurants, bars, beauty parlours and private clubs were closed, public events were cancelled, and gatherings of more than 50 people banned. From 16 to 31 May, in line with the state government policy, the city of Recife established measures to enforce compliance with some social distancing policies. For example, it assigned officials to patrol the streets and close establishments that were open against city orders.

Recife Survey Results

Recife has1.6 million inhabitants, and 12% of the population is above 60 years of age. Its HDI is 0.772, meaning that it is the 17th most developed state capital (among 27 cities).

Approximately 17% of people in Recife did not leave home during a two-week period between 22 April and 13 May. Those who left did so on average on 5.2 days. The majority interviewees (71%) left home for essential activities, such as going to the supermarket, the pharmacy or to the bank. Twenty-seven percent left their residence to work (compared to 62% who went out to work in February). Those who ventured outside during the fortnight prior to interview on average estimated that 72% of people on the street were wearing masks. Eighteen percent of people reported experiencing at least one Covid-19 symptom during the week prior to interview. Seven percent of respondents from Recife had been tested, and 1% said that they had sought a test without success.

As in other cities surveyed, those who had visited hospitals and supermarkets during the previous fortnight said that employees were overwhelmingly using masks, that social distancing measures had been introduced in these places, and that it was easy for visitors to wash their hands with soap or alcohol gel. Among the residents of Recife leaving their homes for work, 68% said that their workplace had made changes to keep people two metres apart. Reductions in public transport services stopped 18% of people from performing intended activities. Twenty-three percent of those surveyed had used public transport in the prior two weeks; 38% used these services in February.

On average, respondents' level of knowledge about the symptoms of Covid-19 scored 78 out of 100, similar to the average level across the eight cities in the study. Average levels of knowledge of the meaning and practices of self-isolation scored 44 out of 100. (See the results section of the main paper for an explanation of these scores.)

The main sources of information about Covid-19 for the population of Recife are TV news shows (67%), and newspapers and newspaper websites (12%). Public information campaigns are reaching 77% of people in the city, and the majority of these people (89%) report having seen them on TV, 31% of them have seen a campaign in a newspaper, and smaller percentages said they had come across them on blogs (18%),

via Facebook or Twitter (23%), and via WhatsApp (19%). Among people in Recife who had seen a public information campaign, 64% said they had seen one from the state government, 44% had seen one from the federal government, and 36% from the municipal government.

In Recife, 89% of the population were either worried (9%) or very worried (81%) about the possibility that the regional health system has insufficient medical equipment, hospital beds, or doctors to cope with the outbreak. Only 21% of people reported believing that the public health system in their region is either well prepared (10%) or very well prepared (11%) to deal with the outbreak.

More than half (52%) of people in Recife have seen their income reduce since February. Just over a third (34%) said that their income had been cut in half, or worse. Seven percent of the population reported that they no longer had any income.

The vast majority of people in Recife (84%) perceive Covid-19 to be much more serious than a common flu. Less than half (46%) believe that the public measures adopted to fight the spread of the disease have been adequate, 39% say they are less stringent than necessary, and 15% believe they are too stringent. On average, people in Recife estimate that it will take 4.1 months for all government response measures to be removed, and 28% of people in the city expect all such policies will be removed in one go.

Figure PE.3 – Social distancing, knowledge and testing in Recife.

A. Number of days that respondents left home in the previous two weeks.
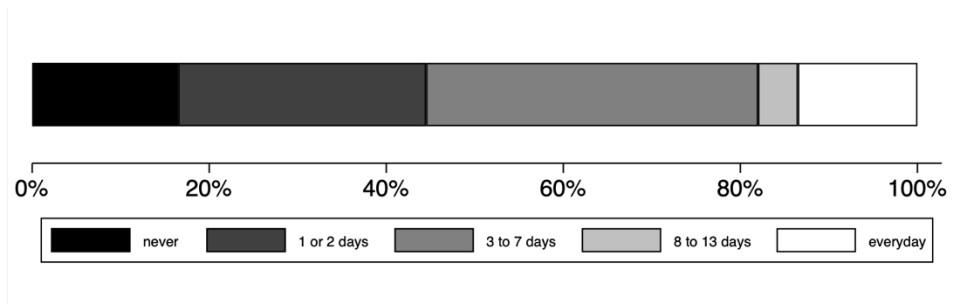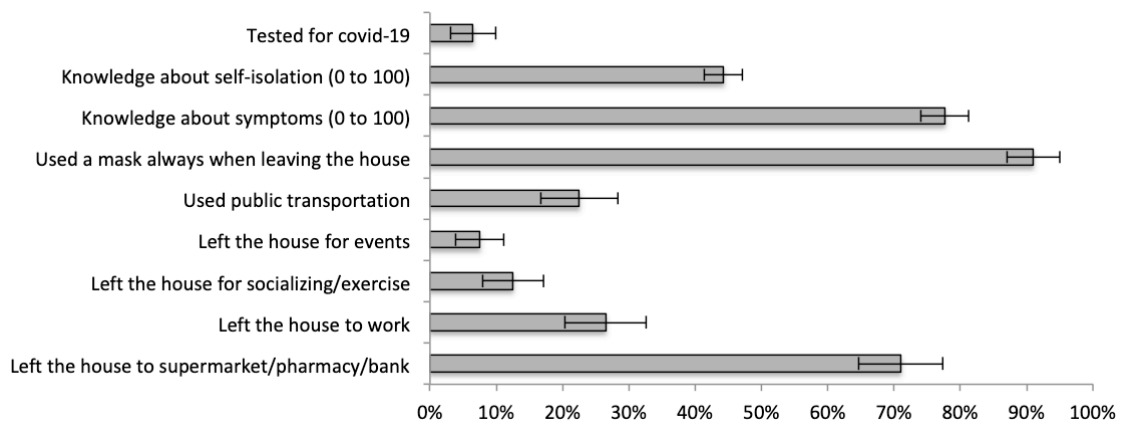

B. Testing, knowledge, mask use, and reasons for leaving home.

Figure PE.4: Hand hygiene, distancing and mask use.