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Mexico reports 417,002 excess deaths during the pandemic

On Saturday, the Mexican Health Ministry published a report acknowledging that the COVID-19 death toll is at least 60 percent higher than the official count of 201,623 deaths. The country has confirmed 2.23 million cases, which are also vastly under-reported.

The ministry found that between December 20, 2019, and February 13, 2021, Mexico recorded a total of 417,002 excess deaths—i.e., above those “expected” based on the weekly averages from 2015 to 2019. Employing “word searches” of death certificates “where possible” that “mention words such as COVID-19, SARS-Cov-2, Coronavirus, among others” and an algorithmic extrapolation, the report estimates that 294,287 of these excess deaths are “associated to COVID-19.”



In this April 29, 2020 file photo, Aurora Azamar reacts after learning that her mother died, believed from complications related to the coronavirus, outside a public hospital in the Iztapalapa neighborhood of Mexico City. As Mexico approaches 200,000 in officially test-confirmed deaths from COVID-19, the real death toll is probably higher due to the country's extremely low rate of testing. (AP Photo/Fernando Llano, File)

Since February 13, the government has confirmed 28,419 more deaths, raising the total to 322,706. This places Mexico as the country with the second highest death toll in the world after the United States.

While the figure is higher than the 312,206 confirmed COVID-19 deaths in Brazil, hospitals and morgues in the country have been overwhelmed for weeks and countless COVID-19 deaths, particularly in slums and remote areas, are also going unrecorded.

Mexican engineer Alejandro Cano found that if Mexico had maintained the same per capita excess mortality as Brazil—whose population is 60 percent greater—about 232,000 people would still be alive in Mexico.

Hundreds of thousands of lives have been sacrificed to defend the massive fortunes and profits of the financial and corporate oligarchies throughout the world. This has held equally true under both the administration of Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro and the purportedly "left" nationalist government of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) in Mexico.

The acknowledgement of a massive undercount stands as a confession by the ruling class to criminal premeditation in what the *British Medical Journal* aptly defined as social murder. While refusing to ramp up testing levels, the Mexican ruling elite has used phony official figures to justify premature reopenings.

Malaquías López, a member of the coronavirus task force at the Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), said to daily *Reforma* on Sunday: "We don't know what the real undercount is because all reports are impossible to interpret. ... We could even add to those cases the 182,301 records confirmed by the epidemiological monitoring system [but untested], whose inclusion in the excess toll is not indicated—we could be talking of a figure closer to 500,000 deaths. The number is brutal."

Dr. Laurie Anne Ximénez-Fyvie, professor at UNAM, agreed that the new report still underestimates the real toll and warned on Twitter: “Now, we fear a third surge around the corner. If what is happening in Brazil and other parts of the world is an indicator for what awaits—and there is no reason to believe otherwise—we have difficult weeks and months ahead.”

Facing a potentially deadlier surge, Mexico has a negligible level of protection from the COVID-19 vaccines. It has administered 6,724,789 doses, meaning that less than 3 percent of the population has been fully vaccinated.

By comparison, 143 million doses have been administered in the United States, where the Democratic President Joe Biden has continued the “America First” maxim of his fascistic predecessor Donald Trump. World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has described such hoarding of vaccines as a “moral outrage,” as health care workers and the elderly in poor countries are left to get sick, spread the virus and die.

Ghebreyesus explained that vaccine hoarding is “economically and epidemiologically self-defeating,” given the need to tackle the pandemic globally and prevent the surge of variants resistant to the vaccines.

A new variant, which is also present across the United States, Europe, and Africa, has already spread like wildfire in Mexico. The country reported that 87 percent of its cases studied in February corresponded to a B.1.1.222 variant of the virus first detected in the country in October.

After refusing to share its vaccines with Mexico, the Biden administration agreed to send 2.7 million doses of its stockpile of the AstraZeneca vaccine, which has yet to receive approval in the US. In exchange, the López Obrador administration agreed to increase its deployment of National Guard and Army troops on its border with Guatemala to block Central American refugees and migrants seeking to reach the United States.

The López Obrador administration has refused to make any serious effort to contain the pandemic. A brief order to shut down nonessential activities between April and May was only enforced by workers themselves, who carried out a wave of wildcat strikes that

resulted in thousands of layoffs at the largely foreign-owned factories on the border with the United States.

After the Trump administration reopened US factories, AMLO agreed to declare all manufacturing “essential,” while allowing corporations and the trade unions to cover up outbreaks in the plants.

As a result, Mexican exports—which consist mostly of manufacturing products sent to the United States— were higher between September and December of 2020 than the previous year, and they are expected to jump 9 percent for all of 2021.

The unenforced lockdown was replaced by a semaphore system of alert levels, but the López Obrador administration was exposed for reporting false data to prevent or postpone shutdowns of production.

Even where restrictions were put in place, they were not accompanied by any program of economic aid. This compelled small business owners and informal workers to expose themselves and others to infections to avoid going hungry.

Public schools have remained closed, but 56 percent of students have had no access to online classes. The government has refused to invest in providing computers and Internet access to students.

The lack of assistance is being driven, on the one hand, by the interest of the ruling class in cutting back social spending in order to service the debt to financial vultures. On the other hand, the threat of having no income or assistance at all has been used to force workers to risk their lives at unsafe workplaces.

As a result, countless of the poorest families lost loved ones, as well as their sources of income. The Health Ministry has reported that the average age of COVID-19 victims is 55, roughly 20 years younger than in the US.

According to a recent London School of Economics study for Mexico City—which has been the epicenter of the pandemic in the country—the neighborhoods, or *colonias*, with the highest cases per capita were Álvaro Obregón and Milpa Alta, two of the poorest. The poorer *colonias* had five times higher prevalence of coronavirus.

At the same time, the government agency Coneval reports that in 2020, Mexico saw 9.8 million people fall below the poverty line, bringing the total of number of Mexicans officially defined as poor to 70.9 million people, or 56.7 percent of the population.

As early as last April, the WSWS noted that “the alternatives present themselves as the capitalist system and death, or socialism and life.” Hundreds of thousands more will die in Mexico and internationally unless workers break free from all pro-capitalist and nationalist parties and trade unions and fight for a scientifically guided response to contain and eradicate the pandemic.

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