

Immigrant deaths rise with militarization of US-Mexican border

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The *New York Times* reported Tuesday that since January 2010, at least 15 Mexican citizens have been killed by US border patrol agents shooting into Mexico, a sovereign country.

In some cases, the victims were allegedly throwing rocks at the border patrol; in other cases, the agents simply shot blindly into Mexico and killed entirely innocent people.

Investigative reporter John Carlos Frey told the *Democracy Now!* radio program May 7 that unnamed sources told him border agents were essentially conducting “target practice” when they killed Juan Pablo Santillán, who was collecting firewood across the border in Mexico. No US agent has been convicted in any of the deaths, or even charged.

These brutal deaths shed light on the increased militarization of the border that has taken place under the Obama administration, as well as the anti-immigrant hysteria whipped up by governments at every level and the media.

The *Times* reported Tuesday that the “shootings—sometimes during confrontations that began with assaults on agents, other times under less clear circumstances—have bolstered criticism of agents and customs officers who operate along the United States-Mexico border.”

One of those killed by US border patrol agents was 16-year-old José Antonio Elena Rodríguez, a Mexican citizen alleged to have thrown rocks at agents from the Mexican side of the border. His family vehemently denies that he was doing any such thing. Rodríguez was shot a total of 11 times, 7 of them in the back; he was found with only a cell phone on his person.

The dead boy’s grandmother and primary caregiver, Taide Elena Rodríguez, told Frey: “I feel like I’m going to go crazy, because I can’t understand how

somebody could be so evil to kill a child who’s not doing anything. He was just walking on the sidewalk. The only thing he did wrong was to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

In another case, Frey told *Democracy Now!*, “a husband and wife were celebrating the birthday of their two daughters. The husband got shot and killed, shot in the heart.... This is in Nuevo Laredo. They were across the river, across the Rio Grande, in Mexico. And he died, in a public park with children and families that were out for a barbecue.”

The number of heavily armed US border patrol agents is at an all-time high. According to US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), as of 2012, more than 21,000 agents were deployed along US borders, with nearly 87 percent of them along the Southwest border. This represents more than a doubling since 2004.

“Of the 15 victims,” the *Times* went on to note, “[10] were Mexican citizens, 6 of whom died in Mexico, felled by bullets fired by agents in the United States. Since January 2010, not a single agent has been criminally charged in cases of lethal use of force,” despite ongoing investigations.

The “shoot now, ask questions later” policy employed by US border patrol agents is a product of the Obama administration’s escalation of both the “war on terror” and the unrestrained attack against democratic rights, both of which receive bipartisan support.

At the current rate of approximately 33,000 deportations a month, the Obama administration is on track to deport a total of more than 2 million undocumented immigrants by 2014, more than all the deportations that took place before 1997. In other words, it is expected that within its first six years in office, the Obama administration will have deported

more undocumented immigrants than all previous administrations from 1892 to 1996.

This is more than a 57 percent increase from the Bush administration's monthly average, which was just shy of 21,000 deportations a month—the Clinton administration averaged about 9,000 a month. This trend of increased deportations is a bipartisan affair, with both Democrats and Republicans on board. Obama has continuously stated that he is “unable” to stop the deportations until federal legislation is passed dealing with comprehensive immigration reform.

In fact, neither party of big business has any intention of resolving the immigration crisis in a progressive fashion. The divisions in Washington are largely over how best to exploit cheap immigrant labor and how to manipulate the most backward, xenophobic social layers in the US for political gain.

The immigration reform bill, championed by Obama earlier this year, would require the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants in the US to wait for a period of about eight years for the chance to obtain residency, going to the “back of the line” behind legal immigrants. It also includes a raft of anti-democratic and intrusive measures aimed at intimidating and terrorizing immigrant workers, and the population as a whole.

Obama has also stated that he “[makes] no apologies for [his administration] enforcing the law as well as the work that [it has] done to strengthen border security.”

The latter part of his comment, made during an interview in January with the Spanish-language network Telemundo, highlights the full-fledged support Obama has given to the aggressive and violent tactics being employed by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the agency that oversees all border agencies and security operations.

The actions of the Obama administration, along with the failure of the authorities to take any steps against border agents alleged to have shot and killed Mexican citizens, can only mean that, directly or indirectly, the escalating violence is encouraged by Washington.



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