

The human cost of the US-Mexico border: More than 6,000 bodies found since 2000

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Between 2000 and 2016, the US Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) has discovered the remains of 6,023 undocumented people who died crossing from Mexico into the United States.

This shocking figure, cited in a May 4 article in the *New York Times*, underreports the total death toll. According to one Texas sheriff, “I would say for every one [body] we find, we’re probably missing five.” That is, the number of undiscovered bodies could be in the tens of thousands.

Bodies turn up along the US-Mexico border “with stunning regularity,” the *Times* report notes. In one border area, Brooks County, Texas, 550 bodies have been discovered since January 2009, the month of Barack Obama’s inauguration. At a single ranch in Texas, 31 bodies have been discovered since 2014. CBP unceremoniously throws some of the bodies together in “cluster graves,” often without removing them from biohazard bags.

Many of the bodies are unrecognizable, charred from the desert sun or picked away by vultures. Along well-traveled migrant paths, “the dead line the way.” Cadavers belonging to children are found alongside their stuffed animals. One woman who froze to death was found wearing a plastic trash bag for warmth.

In 2015, Francisco Gonzalez, a former machinist from Mexico, called emergency services from the middle of the desert, begging border patrol to arrest him to save his life. He told the dispatcher he was returning to the US to meet his newborn daughter for the first time, after having been deported for driving under the influence by the Obama administration. When officials could not locate him, Gonzalez gave the dispatcher his wife’s phone number and said, “Call her and tell her I didn’t make it. Call her and tell her I love her and for her to take care of our baby.” He died in the

desert shortly thereafter.

Daniel Martinez, an assistant professor of sociology at George Washington University, told the *Times*, “If this were any other context, if these were deaths as a result of a mass flood or an earthquake or a major plane crash, people would be talking about this being a mass disaster.”

Indeed, the *Times* notes that the total number of bodies is greater than the total number killed in the September 11, 2001 attacks and Hurricane Katrina combined. And despite the drop in immigration since the election of Donald Trump, the number of bodies found in the first months of 2017 already equals the number found in all of 2010.

The mass casualties along the US-Mexico border are the outcome of deliberate policies of the US government, both Democrat and Republican, going back at least two decades. Under programs like “Operation Gatekeeper” and “Operation Hold-the-Line,” first enacted under Democratic President Bill Clinton in the mid-1990s, the government secured heavily populated border crossings with military defenses and increased patrols concentrated in cities like San Diego, California and El Paso, Texas.

The consequence was entirely predictable and indeed predicted. Immigrants fleeing economic and political crisis were forced to cross through deadly desert regions, where temperature can exceed 120 degrees Fahrenheit (49 degrees Celsius).

Further barriers to entry were erected under Bush (including with the Secure Fence Act of 2006, supported by Democrats) and under Obama. The “deporter-in-chief” Obama signed legislation in 2010 that further militarized the US border with the use of Predator drones, and deployed 1,500 National Guard troops to keep out desperate migrants.

Now, under Trump, the American ruling class is going even further. Along with the construction of a “wall” on the US-Mexico border, Trump is pledging to “unshackle” border control agents, who function as a modern-day Gestapo.

The Trump administration has already deported tens of thousands and plans on hiring thousands of immigration and border control officials. Mass detention centers established under Obama are being doubled in size, and the federal government is working with police agencies across the country to round up immigrants. The Trump administration has established a program, known as VOICE, the aim of which is to publicly denounce immigrants charged with crimes in a manner similar to the Nazi press’s attacks against Jewish criminal defendants in the 1930s.

The refugee crisis is the product of imperialism and the irrational capitalist nation-state system.

The thousands of impoverished people who die in the US deserts are fleeing poverty and war caused by decades of imperialist exploitation and US military intervention across every corner of the world. The US laid waste to the entire Central American isthmus, backing dictators, funding death squads, and fanning the flames of civil wars which left hundreds of thousands dead through the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

The story is the same in the Middle East and North Africa, where a record number of migrants are escaping US-backed wars in Syria, Libya, Yemen, Iraq, Somalia, and elsewhere, desperately seeking refuge in Europe and drowning by the thousands in the Mediterranean Sea. In 2015, the UN reported that there are an unprecedented 65.3 million refugees, more than the entire population of the United Kingdom.

Advances in technology have brought humanity to a level of world interconnectivity that would have been unthinkable even 30 years ago. Cell phones, the Internet, global supply chains, and advances in transportation mean that residents of the world’s most isolated villages can communicate with friends and loved ones in the world’s metropolises and learn of world events at the swipe of a finger.

But the potential for human progress is restrained by the fact that a handful of exploiters control the world’s productive forces and dictate the policies of governments.

As a result, conflicts between nation states intensify

and a third world war is an immediate possibility. Far-right parties in the US, UK, France, Germany and elsewhere are being brought into government, directing popular opposition to inequality and poverty against immigrants. Under the banner of national supremacy each major power, as Leon Trotsky wrote in his 1934 essay *Nationalism and Economic Life*, is “protecting himself by a customs wall and a hedge of bayonets.”

The Socialist Equality Party opposes the division of the world into competing nation states and opposes all forms of nationalism, the poisonous ideology of this outdated system. As the 18th century philosopher Montesquieu said, “I am necessarily a man, only accidentally am I French.” The SEP insists that all people have the right to travel safely as they choose, without visas, passports, or the threat of harassment or deportation.

This cannot be accomplished so long as a tiny section of the world’s population controls its wealth and defends it with hedges of bayonets—and nuclear weapons. To bring the international character of the world economy into harmony with the material needs of the world working class requires world socialist revolution.



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