

Brazil registers world's second-highest COVID-19 toll as stock market soars

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Having surpassed the United States to become the country with most confirmed new daily COVID-19 deaths, Brazil has now topped the United Kingdom as having the world's second highest total death toll—41,828 vs 41,556 as of Friday—trailing only the US in both total deaths and total cases.

The last week also saw an acceleration of the pandemic's spread throughout Latin America's largest country, with more than 32,000 cases registered daily and an average of 1,073 deaths a day.

The official numbers, however, have no credibility, due to the de facto herd immunity policy pursued by the Bolsonaro administration. The government has refused to take any action against the pandemic and withheld funds from local governments. In pursuit of its goal of hiding the pandemic's real toll, it has charged local administrations with over-counting deaths, without presenting any evidence.

The latest numbers were provided by the government after it had decided, over the weekend, to “reformulate” its reports, by presenting them late in the evening, in order to bypass nightly television news programs, and, more gravely, accounting only for deaths occurring on the given day, instead of all those confirmed in a given day, including those that happened previously.

Such data manipulation would have reduced the number of deaths reported daily by 60 percent, according to a May 31 report by *Folha de S. Paulo*. The report looked into data released on May 2 and found that the total number of COVID-19 death confirmed by the government since the start of the pandemic stood at 6,724. But another 16,144 deaths from COVID-19 and from severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) had also taken place by that day but were still waiting for autopsies or COVID-19 exams. In other words, two thirds of the actual COVID-19 deaths as of May 2 were not known and were diluted in the reports of the following days.

The late inclusion of deaths would mean that, for a given day, of the total COVID-19 deaths, only 40 percent are immediately identified as such, and that the daily deaths

reported by the government represent a constant and gross underestimate. At the same time, the decision to report only deaths confirmed to have been caused by COVID-19 on a given day would throw late confirmations into a statistical limbo and give the public the impression of a much lower death count. The government's decision to change the daily COVID-19 reports was struck down by the Supreme Court (STF) on Monday, but the government has also revealed it is looking for ways to revise downward the total number of deaths, mainly by questioning the non-COVID-19 SARS deaths.

SARS cases have jumped four-fold in Brazil this year, and in 98 percent of the post-mortem exams of SARS patients, the cause of death was the new coronavirus. This condition has led many local governments to add part of the SARS deaths to the COVID-19 numbers, resulting in charges of “fraud” by the Bolsonaro administration. It has also lent further credibility to estimates by experts that the number of COVID-19 cases is at least one order of magnitude larger than the official count, if not higher. If the under-notification patterns of the beginning of May were used for the current death toll, they would bring deaths to over 100,000.

On Tuesday, *Folha de S. Paulo* also reported that low rates of official COVID-19 cases is strongly correlated with high rates of “unidentified” SARS, with state capitals having fewer official COVID-19 deaths presenting up to 12 times higher rates of unidentified SARS deaths.

However, taking absolutely no notice of the catastrophic situation gripping the country, state governors and mayors of the worst-hit areas have authorized the scrapping of whatever limited quarantine measures that were imposed in the last three months, which they took pride in declaring had not hit most of the economy.

All of the governors previously attacking the fascist Bolsonaro for his neglect of the pandemic and feigning to follow scientific advice and defend “life” now consider the reopening of factories and stores a settled matter.

In the three worst-hit states, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Ceará, street trade and malls are already open, after a slow

return to work in the factories in the last weeks.

In São Paulo, the reopening of stores has proceeded amid new daily death toll records on Wednesday and Thursday, of over 330 deaths a day. The state government itself has acknowledged that the next 18 days will probably see the doubling of the number of deaths over the last three months, from 11,000 to 22,000. Cases are projected to double from the current 123,000.

An even worse fate is to be expected in the impoverished northeast of the country, where Ceará is located, which has just passed the richer southeast of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro to be the country's pandemic epicenter. The northeast now accounts for more cases than the southeast, despite having only 56 million inhabitants, as compared to the 85 million in the southeast.

The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation of the University of Washington School of Medicine now projects Brazil will have 5,000 deaths a day in August and surpass the United States in total deaths by the end of July, even considering the suspect official Brazilian data.

Yesterday also saw the release of the numbers of a sampling research conducted by the southern Pelotas Federal on the antibody presence among the population, finding that 2.6 percent of the population has been infected in 120 of the largest Brazilian cities, home to 68.6 million people. The numbers show that the success of the so-called "herd immunity" policy would require at least 25 times more infections and deaths to "succeed" in immunizing the population, or more than 500,000 in these cities alone, assuming long-term immunity is developed by those infected.

The murderous policies of the Brazilian ruling class have provided nothing less than a feast for finance capital, which has enjoyed a bull market that has reclaimed pre-pandemic values. São Paulo's B3 stock index now stands at 94,000 points, having gained almost 50 percent since the day of the beginning of São Paulo's partial quarantine on March 23. The Brazilian Real has also reached its highest value compared to the dollar in three months. This stands in stark contrast to the fraudulent campaign of the Workers Party-led opposition to remove Bolsonaro, based upon the reactionary claims that he is "scaring off investors" threatening capitalist "internal security."

The Brazilian stock market is responding to not only the unity of the whole ruling class around the back-to-work campaign spearheaded by Bolsonaro, but also their silence and collaboration in face of the brutal repression unleashed against the initial signs of social opposition expressed by the demonstrations of workers and youth in the last two weeks.

Bolsonaro's bourgeois opposition, led by the PT, voted with the government for the massive injection of public

funds into the financial markets. It has swiftly changed the focus of its opposition to Bolsonaro from his neglect of the pandemic to the charges leveled by former Justice Minister Sérgio Moro. These center on Bolsonaro having sought to interfere in the Federal Police to stop investigations into his criminal ties to Rio de Janeiro organized crime and possibly to the death squad murder of Rio city councilor Marielle Franco. The PT-led opposition has cast these crimes as a threat to Brazilian capitalism and the credibility of its repressive apparatus.

Now, they are also concentrating their efforts on piling pressure on the Electoral Court (TSE) and the STF to remove Bolsonaro from office on the fraudulent and reactionary pretext that "fake news" decided the 2018 election. This campaign has been accompanied with pushing for "fake news" regulations and denouncing Bolsonaro's ties with the far-right as a threat to the state.

Meanwhile, they have denounced the youth demonstrations, claiming that they only feed pro-Bolsonaro red-baiting and strengthen his rule. Such cowardice and complicity was summed up by the leader of the pseudo-left PSOL, Marcelo Freixo, who justified his party's inaction in face of the far-right by saying: "Bolsonaro is clearly feeding chaos through his political militias to justify a military intervention"—in other words any mass opposition only plays into Bolsonaro's hands.

Workers and youth facing the fascist policies of Bolsonaro and of Brazilian capitalism as a whole must reject the reactionary maneuvers of Bolsonaro's bourgeois adversaries, led by the PT, and their attempted cover-up by PSOL. The policies of these parties only serve to disarm the working class in the face of the massive repression being prepared by the government.



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