

Bolsonaro government attempted to censor Brazil's coronavirus case count and death toll

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The government of fascistic Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro removed public access to months of data on the coronavirus pandemic in the country on Saturday. The Health Ministry's official COVID-19 website did not have cases and deaths over time and by state and city, but only deaths, cases and recoveries from the past 24 hours until a mass public outcry forced the government to restore the original site.

Bolsonaro defended on Twitter the initial decision to remove the coronavirus records, claiming that "The cumulative data ... does not reflect the moment the country is in." He continued, "Other actions are underway to improve the reporting of cases and confirmation of diagnoses." The Brazilian president also mocked the country's media, which has used the data to report on the sharp rise in cases and deaths, commenting, "There goes the story for [well known news program] Jornal Nacional."

There were just under 675,000 officially confirmed coronavirus cases in the country when the changes to case reporting were made, the most in the world except for the United States, and nearly 36,000 deaths, now past Italy and now only behind the US and United Kingdom. It is not clear whether or not these trends, based on the objective spread of the pandemic, will continue to be reflected after Bolsanaro's interference with the site.

Brazil also leads the world in daily new cases and new deaths, a consequence of the pandemic accelerating in the country. At the current rate of exponential increase, there will be one million known cases in the country in two weeks. And as multiple reports have shown, the number of actual cases in the country, which ranks 130th in the world for per capita testing, is likely an order of magnitude higher than currently known.

The growth of infections in Brazil is mirrored by the soaring case numbers in other parts of the world. Globally, there are now more than 7 million cases, an increase of one million cases in nine days, and more than 400,000 dead. Hotspots have emerged in Mexico, Russia, Chile, Peru and Pakistan, alongside the already existing epicenters in Brazil, Western Europe and the United States.

The censorship of Brazil's coronavirus data is a logical continuation of Bolsonaro's pandemic policy since it first emerged in the region. He at first dismissed the pandemic as the "little flu" and has replaced medical experts that have disagreed with him with members of Brazil's military. Once the coronavirus gained a foothold in the country, he argued against any lockdowns to stem the tide of the virus and has launched into tirades against governors and mayors that are not reopening their economies as fast as he has demanded.

Brazil is not the only country taking such measures. In the United States, the operator of Florida's coronavirus dashboard was fired for refusing to manipulate data in support of the governor's reopening plan. Similarly, in Arizona, the researchers involved with modeling the projections for state coronavirus cases were ordered to "pause" their work by state officials after their data suggested that the state's lockdown orders should be extended by three weeks.

In Georgia, which was one of the first states to reopen, the Public Health Department published multiple charts which showed a downward trend in cases by rearranging dates in its data. In fact, the number of reported daily new cases in the state has remained relatively constant since the state's reopening, while the new cases in Arizona and Florida are rising. The country as a whole now has more than

two million cases, included more than 1.1 million active cases, and at least 112,000 deaths.

Despite attempts by countries to suppress their coronavirus case numbers, however, even the official counts indicate that the disease is rising significantly across the world. Saudi Arabia yesterday joined the ranks of the countries that have more than 100,000 cases, and Pakistan will follow it today and Canada in little more than a week.

Other countries with high rates of new cases include Bangladesh, South Africa, Qatar, Egypt, Colombia, Ecuador and Iraq. Iran also has consistently had more than 2,000 cases in recent days, after being very hard hit by the pandemic early on and then suppressing it for several weeks. Peru and Chile also rank as some of the most infected countries in South America and the world, ranking high in total cases and new cases, while Peru in particular has seen and continues to have a high death rate.

The explosion of cases in South America caused World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus to comment on Wednesday that, “We are especially worried about Central and South America, where many countries are witnessing accelerating epidemics.” According to analyses from WHO scientists, the continent has not reached its peak number of cases and may not for months.

The two countries that have emerged in recent weeks with high rates of the coronavirus are Mexico and India. In Mexico, Deputy Health Secretary Hugo López-Gatell has asked residents to stay home in order to halt the rising number of infections in the country. At the same time, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has ordered significant sections of the economy, including auto and parts manufacturers, to open.

These orders have played a large part in Mexico’s current public health crisis. The country has 113,000 confirmed cases and more than 13,000 deaths, and health officials have noted that because of the lack of testing in the country, the actual number of cases is likely in the millions.

India faces a similar problem. The government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has ordered workers back into factories, fields and offices even as the number of cases in the country exponentially rises. The virus has gained a beachhead in the crowded

neighborhoods of India’s many megacities and has spread like wildfire. The known cases have doubled in just two weeks to 257,000 and are on track to reach one million by the end of this month. And while the death toll is still well below the highs that have been reached by Brazil and the United States, health officials are worried that the number of dead will skyrocket in the days to come.



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