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FEATURED Q&A

Are Women Closing the Gender Gap in Brazil's Politics?



Among the women on the ballot in Brazil's November municipal elections is Marília Arraes, who is running for mayor of Recife. // File Photo: Facebook page of Marília Arraes.

Q A record number of women have registered as candidates in Brazil's municipal elections scheduled to take place next month. Also setting a record, this year for the first time, the number of candidates who identified themselves as Black or brown surpassed the number of white candidates, Folha de S.Paulo reported. The elections will determine mayors, city councilors and other local officials in more than 5,500 cities. What's at stake in Brazil's local elections this year? Is the country's taxpayer-financed electoral fund intended to increase the number of women in politics working well? What are some best practices Brazil and other countries might consider when trying to encourage more diverse and inclusive candidates to run for office?

A Jacqueline Pitanguy, executive director of Citizenship, Study, Research, Information, and Action (CEPIA) in Brazil and a member of the Inter-American Dialogue: "The historical underrepresentation of women in Brazilian federal and local assemblies makes the country among the most unequal in terms of the gender balance in the exercise of political power in Latin America and the Caribbean. However, this lack of representation contrasts with the strong participation of women in civil society organizations, as well as their influence in advocating for equal rights. Why are women so underrepresented in formal political institutions? There are several factors. Brazil's political institutions have always been in the hands of men, and women were never welcomed as candidates. It was necessary to intro-

Continued on page 2

TODAY'S NEWS

ECONOMIC

World Bank Expects 7.9% Contraction This Year in Region

The World Bank updated its forecast in the economic damage that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought to Latin America and the Caribbean, saying it expects a sharper contraction than previously estimated.

Page 2

ECONOMIC

Cuba Relaxes Covid Restrictions

Acknowledging a need to reactivate the economy, Cuba's government relaxed some restrictions that it had put in place to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

Page 2

POLITICAL

Judge Orders Release of Colombia's Uribe

A judge rescinded the house arrest order against former Colombian President Álvaro Uribe, saying that Uribe has not been charged with a crime. He is being investigated in a witness-tampering case.

Page 2



Uribe // File Photo: @AlvaroUribeVel via Twitter.

POLITICAL NEWS

Judge Orders Release of Former Colombian President Uribe

A Colombian judge on Saturday ordered the release of former President Álvaro Uribe, who had been under house arrest since August in connection with a witness-tampering case against him, *El Tiempo* reported. “Thank God,” Uribe, who was Colombia’s president from 2002 to 2010, wrote on his Twitter account in a post that didn’t refer directly to the order. In rescinding the house arrest order, Judge Ximena Salcedo accepted a petition by Uribe’s attorneys that the order, which Colombia’s Supreme Court had imposed, should be lifted because Uribe has not been charged with a crime, *The Wall Street Journal* reported. “Without charges, there can be no measure [of house arrest], and so this implies the need to restore the fundamental rights of Dr. Álvaro Uribe Vélez,” the judge said in a virtual hearing. Uribe has been under investigation due to allegations that, through emissaries, he paid Juan Monsalve, a former member of a now-defunct Colombian militia to alter his testimony that he had provided about Uribe’s alleged role in helping to create the paramilitary group, *The Wall Street Journal* reported. Monsalve has reportedly testified that Uribe, before becoming

ing president, played a role in the paramilitary group’s founding on his family ranch, Guacharacas, in the 1990s. Uribe has denied wrongdoing. After the Supreme Court ordered Uribe to house arrest on Aug. 4, the former president resigned his seat in Colombia’s Senate. His resignation transferred his case from the Supreme Court, the only entity that can try Colombian legislators, to the attorney general’s office. The case against Uribe will continue, however. “The investigation does not start from scratch,” prosecutor Gabriel Ramón Jaimes told the court. “There will not be impunity; there will be justice.” [Editor’s note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Aug. 14 issue of the Advisor.]

BUSINESS NEWS

Union at Collahuasi Mine in Chile Reach Deal in Labor Talks

The union of workers at Chile’s Collahuasi copper mine on Friday reached an agreement in labor talks with the mine operator, *Reuters* reported. The negotiations at Collahuasi were being closely followed because of the size of the union involved and the mine’s importance to the country’s total copper output. The mine is owned by Glencore in a joint venture with Anglo American and a Japanese consortium

NEWS BRIEFS

Cuban Government Relaxes Covid Restrictions

Cuba’s government on Monday relaxed restrictions that had been put in place to curb the spread of Covid-19, allowing stores and government offices to reopen, and letting local residents and tourists back into airports across the country, except in Havana, the Associated Press reported. Authorities will no longer require isolation for people who have been in contact with those who are suspected to have contracted the disease. The changes came as Cuban officials acknowledged a need to reactivate the economy, which has been hit by the restrictions and U.S. sanctions, the wire service reported. [Editor’s note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Oct. 1 issue of the Advisor.]

U.S. Imposes New Sanctions on Nicaraguan Officials

The U.S. Treasury Department on Friday imposed new sanctions on officials in Nicaragua, the Associated Press reported. Those sanctioned include Attorney General Ana Julia Guido De Romero, whom the United States accuses of working with police “to fabricate cases against political prisoners and their families.” The sanctions block U.S. assets of the officials and prohibits U.S. citizens from dealing with them.

Demand for Personal Computers Surges in Latin America

Demand for personal computers has surged in Latin America as businesses and schools adapt to conditions created by the coronavirus pandemic, according to data released Monday by IDC. The region’s traditional PC market, which is comprised of desktops, notebooks and workstations, posted double-digit growth in the third quarter for first time in five years. Portable products saw the biggest gains.

FEATURED Q&A / Continued from page 1

duce a 30 percent gender quota law. However, being a candidate does not mean having a chance to win, unless you have access to funds and are placed as a visible candidate which, most of the time, has not occurred. A major step toward the effective implementation of this quota law was a 2018 Supreme Court decision, which ruled that 30 percent of the electoral funds should support female candidates. For the November elections, 13 percent of the mayoral candidates are women, and they are strong candidates in Rio de Janeiro, Recife and Salvador. As for the city councils, there is no significant in-

crease in the number of female candidates. In the coming elections, women represent 34 percent of the candidates, while in 2016 they represented 32 percent. Money talks; the main difference now is to assure that these candidacies are for real, that they have access to the funds, and have visibility and a voice in the election. A very important cultural phenomenon is the growing denunciation of structural racism in our society and of the weight of the intersectionality of gender and race in electoral representation. The activism of Black women’s movements might make a difference in the coming elections.”

Continued on page 4

that includes Mitsui and Nippon Mining & Metals, among others. In related news, labor union leaders at Chile's Escondida mine on Friday rejected BHP's final offer in contract negotiations. The union has yet to announce when a strike might begin, and BHP said it would meet again with the union in a last-ditch effort to stave off a strike, Reuters reported. Located in northern Chile, the Escondida mine is the world's largest copper producer. Prices for the metal have been on the rise in recent weeks due to booming demand in China, where manufacturing activity has rebounded as its economy recovers from the pandemic lockdown. Copper prices have risen about 8 percent for the year and recovered roughly 40 percent in the past six months following an early-year selloff, The Wall Street Journal reported recently.

ECONOMIC NEWS

World Bank Expects 7.9% Contraction This Year in Latin America

The World Bank on Friday said that, due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, it expects a 7.9 percent economic contraction this year in Latin America and the Caribbean, excluding Venezuela. The estimate was worse than the 7.2 percent contraction that the World Bank

“Our region is suffering the worst economic and health impacts of Covid-19 of anywhere in the world...”

— Carlos Felipe Jaramillo

had forecast in June. “Our region is suffering the worst economic and health impacts of Covid-19 of anywhere in the world, which calls for clarity on how to combat the pandemic and put the economies back on track for a swift recovery,” Carlos Felipe Jaramillo, the World

THE DIALOGUE CONTINUES

How Valid Are U.S. Concerns Over Labor in Mexico?

Q **The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, or AFL-CIO, last month said it would file the first two public complaints under the new U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement's labor enforcement mechanism. At least one of the complaints could potentially suspend exports from individual factories in Mexico that violate labor rights provisions, said Richard Trumka, the trade union's head. What's behind the suit, and how valid are the concerns regarding labor rights in Mexico? How well has the USMCA functioned since it came into effect in July, and what can be expected of the new labor enforcement mechanism under the deal?**

A **Carlos Ferran Martínez, managing partner at Ferran Martínez Abogados in Mexico:** “Following the USMCA's ratification and partial entry into force, Mexico's government and businesses have been patiently waiting for a conflict in order to diagnose how the parties and the designated authorities will react and overcome it. In a rather brief

timeframe, U.S. unions have already expressed serious concerns regarding Mexican businesses' compliance with the treaty and specific regulations that the United States and Canada have imposed on Mexico. Trumka has made his opposition to the USMCA known to the media. His concerns are notably valid, since they seek to protect basic labor conditions, particularly the precarious impromptu health safety measures that Mexican manufacturing companies have implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic. In Mexico, we share the concerns Trumka has expressed about Mexico's compliance with and ability to enforce USMCA. The USMCA's entry into force has been an extremely difficult process for Mexico, since the country's labor justice system is used to being governed by its own rules. We remain hopeful that the AFL-CIO's complaints will lead to strict regulatory compliance.”

EDITOR'S NOTE: The comment above is a continuation of the Q&A published in the Oct. 7 issue of the Advisor.

Bank's vice president for Latin America and the Caribbean, said in a statement. The economies of Latin America and the Caribbean are experiencing lower foreign demand, higher economic uncertainty, a collapse in tourism and the economic consequences of months of lockdown, the World Bank said. The organization said the coronavirus crisis “follows several years of disappointing economic growth and limited progress on social indicators and comes right after a wave of social unrest in many countries in the region.” It added that the economic damage of lockdown measures meant to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus have fallen disproportionately on residents with informal jobs. However, the World Bank added that it expects the region to recover next year, with 4

percent growth. It added that there are some reasons for optimism, including a global trade in goods returning to pre-crisis levels and commodity prices holding up “relatively well.” It added that remittances have rebounded from a sharp initial decline and that most countries in the region still have access to international financial markets. “Economic policies should aim to seize these opportunities,” the World Bank said. The World Bank also said countries should do more to improve their health-care systems. “Ensuring broad and affordable access to health care is fundamental to facing this challenge,” said Martín Rama, the World Bank's chief economist for Latin America and the Caribbean.

FEATURED Q&A / Continued from page 2

A **Débora Thomé, associate researcher at LabGen-UFF in Brazil and professor in Columbia University's Women's Leadership Network in Brazil:** "Brazil faces a challenge concerning gender diversity in politics: it has among the region's lowest rates of women's representation in the Congress. Because of this disparity, many institutional efforts have not succeeded so far. Brazil's 30 percent gender quota for legislative elections has not changed much. Since 2018, parties must also allocate 30 percent of their portion of the Electoral Fund to the campaigns of female candidates. However, since the parties have the control of that money, they concentrate their efforts on women who already have a chance to win. These are women who already hold office or who have strong political capital. Therefore, this distribution of money, which could increase women's participation, has not occurred as much as expected. This year, according to female candidates, money is, again, been delivered to specific women running for city councilor and women who are running for vice mayor. That is, a large portion of the money is going to male mayoral candidates. The Covid crisis poses another problem. Difficulties in campaigning in-person will mostly affect first-time candidates, including many women. Some of these female candidates have created a collective candidacy or, as they call it, a 'mandata,' a group of women with similar agendas who work together to be elected. They consider it less relevant who is actually elected if all of them work together. Brazilian institutions have, and reinforce, a strong gender bias. So even if we have seen a rebirth of the feminist movement in recent years and the number of female candidates has risen, Brazilian parties are still very misogynist institutions that protect their male candidates through informal institutions. The upcoming elections may surprise me, but I don't believe we will see things change quickly in this country for women in politics."

A **Daniela Chacón Arias, executive director at Fundación TANDEM and former Quito vice mayor and city council member:** "In Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as the rest of the world, the numbers clearly show the structural inequalities women face in fully participating in the political arena. According to CEPAL, in the region only 28.5 percent of cabinet ministers are women, 29.8 percent of legislators at the national and local levels are women, and only 15 percent of mayors are women. Even with these very worrying numbers, Latin America leads the world in female representation in legislative branches. Some of the best practices have been affirmative actions that require political parties to include 50 percent of female candidates equally distributed in the ballot (vertical parity). Some countries are now requiring this affirmative action for mayoral races. Affirmative actions such as percentages of female candidates without the vertical parity requirement are bound to fail as women are usually positioned in the last places with no electoral possibilities. The same happens with percentages of funds allocated to women. Political parties are still directed by men and men only, and they make the decisions on how to include women and allocate those funds. According to experts, this has been the case in Brazil. For advocates of affirmative action, vertical parity has proven to be one of the most effective measures to increase the number of women in politics, but true equality requires a transformation in the decision-making structures of parties, equal access to opportunities for women within the party, political programs with a gender focus and firm actions to eradicate gender-based political violence."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

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