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## FEATURED Q&A

# How Pivotal Are Mexico's Efforts at Gender Parity?



Half of the lawmakers in Mexico's Chamber of Deputies (pictured) are women, but the extent to which gender parity will lead to legislation strengthening protections for women is up for debate. // File Photo: Mexican Government.

**Q** For the first time in Mexican history, 50 percent of the representatives of the Chamber of Deputies are women. Additionally, almost a quarter of Mexico's states are led by female governors, and the first two transgender members of Mexico's Congress were sworn into office. This increase in female representation in Mexican politics follows the country's 2019 inclusion of "parity in everything" as a constitutional principle. What does gender parity in the lower house of Congress mean for legislation surrounding women and their rights and protections? What other mechanisms has the Mexican government implemented to reach the objective of "parity in everything," and what will this mean for the future of Mexican women in high-level positions?

**A** Lorraine Bayard de Volo, professor of women and gender studies at the University of Colorado Boulder: "In assessing the potential impact of Mexico's gender parity reforms, it is important to note that not a single legislator voted against it. In another unanimous decision signaling the broad support for gender parity, on Sept. 7, the Supreme Court decriminalized abortion. The president of the court described the decision as a new means of ensuring freedom, dignity and respect and a step forward in the struggle for equality and women's rights. The justices referred to women 'and pregnant persons'—language that signals the judicial branch of government is embracing a principle of gender parity that includes transgender identity. The executive branch has been less supportive. President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, though a leftist, has had a tense relationship

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## TODAY'S NEWS

### POLITICAL

## Brazil's Bolsonaro Isolated After Minister Tests Positive for Covid

President Jair Bolsonaro was in quarantine after returning to Brazil after his health minister tested positive for Covid-19 during their trip to New York for the U.N. General Assembly meeting.

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### ECONOMIC

## Argentina Makes \$1.9 Bn Debt Payment to IMF

President Alberto Fernández's government made the payment to the IMF as it is seeking a new deal on more than \$40 billion it owes.

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### POLITICAL

## Honduras' Hernández Denies Links to Drug Trafficking

In his speech to the U.N. General Assembly, Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández denied any ties to drug trafficking. His brother was recently sentenced for his role in a drug conspiracy.

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Hernández // Photo: United Nations.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## Brazil's Bolsonaro in Isolation After Minister Quarantined

President Jair Bolsonaro, who has said he doesn't need to be vaccinated against Covid-19, isolated himself at his residence Wednesday after returning to Brazil from New York, where his health minister tested positive for the disease, Reuters reported. Brazilian health regulator Anvisa recommended that Brazil's entire delegation to the U.N. General Assembly remain isolated and undergo testing after Health Minister Marcelo Queiroga tested positive just hours after he attended Bolsonaro's opening speech Tuesday at the General Assembly. Queiroga would remain in quarantine in New York, the government's communications office said Tuesday. Queiroga told CNN Brazil that he was wearing a mask during his entire time in the United Nations headquarters. Brazil's presidential palace said Bolsonaro would remain quarantined for five days before taking a Covid-19 test, at which time his isolation would be reassessed, The Wall Street Journal reported. Before traveling to New York, Bolsonaro said he would not get vaccinated. At a news conference, New York Mayor Bill de Blasio said of the U.N. gathering, "If you don't want to be vaccinated, don't bother coming," The Wall Street Journal reported. Bolsonaro, who has used social media to spread misinformation about Covid-19, has seen his level of support fall during the pandemic amid criticism over his handling of the crisis. Brazil has recorded more than 592,000 deaths from Covid-19, the second-highest total in the world after the United States, which has more than 681,000, according to Johns Hopkins University. Brazil also has recorded more than 21.2 million cases of the disease since the pandemic began, more than any other country except for the United States and India. Bolsonaro's statements that he doesn't need to be vaccinated led to an awkward moment when he and members of his delegation met Monday in New York with British Prime Minister Boris

Johnson. "AstraZeneca is a great vaccine. Get AstraZeneca vaccines," said Johnson, The Wall Street Journal reported. Bolsonaro was asked if he had received the vaccine, and he waved his finger in the air, saying, "No, not yet."

## ECONOMIC NEWS

## Argentina Makes \$1.9 Billion Debt Payment to IMF

Argentina's government made a debt payment of nearly \$1.9 billion on Wednesday to the International Monetary Fund, Reuters reported, citing two unnamed government sources. The debt payment came as President Alberto Fernández's government is seeking a new deal with the IMF for more than \$40 billion that it still owes the lender. Wednesday's payment was made with money the South American country received from the IMF's Special Drawing Rights program, which the lender distributed in August to help countries mitigate the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. "Today the payment of the maturity was completed with the IMF, which will be reflected in the international reserves," one of the sources told Reuters. Argentina's next interest payment to the IMF, of \$400 million, is due in November.

## Lasso Seeking Higher Taxes for Wealthiest 3.5% of Ecuadoreans

Ecuadorean President Guillermo Lasso is preparing to submit an economic reform package to the country's National Assembly on Friday that includes raising taxes on the country's wealthiest, Lasso told Bloomberg News Wednesday in an interview in New York. Among the proposals, the package includes a change in tax rates, capital market rules and labor regulations. The tax increases will be targeted to Ecuadoreans earning more than \$25,000 per year, or about 3.5 percent of the working

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Brazilian Central Bank Hikes Key Rate By Full Percentage Point

Brazil's central bank on Wednesday hiked its benchmark interest rate by 100 basis points to 6.25 percent and signaled a third consecutive increase of the same size in October, Reuters reported. The central bank's rate-setting committee, Copom, has raised its key Selic interest rate from a record-low 2 percent at the beginning of the year as the country struggles amid soaring inflation. Copom said it plans "to advance the process of money tightening further into the restrictive territory" with a full percentage point raise next month.

## Honduras' Hernández Denies Links to Drug Trafficking in U.N. Speech

Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández denied ties to drug trafficking in his speech to the U.N. General Assembly in New York on Wednesday, the Associated Press reported. Hernández hinted that convicted drug traffickers testifying against him in U.S. court were doing so to gain favorable treatment. It was the first time Hernández's addressed allegations on a global forum since his brother, former legislator Juan Antonio "Tony" Hernández, was sentenced to life in prison for his role in one of the world's most violent drug conspiracies, the AP reported.

## Venezuela's Maduro Demands End to Sanctions in U.N. Address

In a prerecorded speech to the United Nations General Assembly, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro called for an end to sanctions against the South American country, according to the U.N. press office. "It is a financial, monetary, commercial, economic, energy persecution," said Maduro, referring to U.S. and E.U. sanctions.

population, a move that Lasso acknowledged might cost him some in terms of popularity. His approval ratings have been at 75 percent since he took office in May. “Those of us who have more will have to pay more,” Lasso, a former banker, told the news service. “This reform won’t touch the pockets of the majority.” One of the president’s main goals is setting the Andean nation on an economic path that will help it avoid a 12th default, hoping, he said, that some “nut won’t arrive who then again changes everything,” Bloomberg News reported. He also vowed to pursue market solutions for Ecuador’s financial problems as well as to uphold commitments to bondholders and the International Monetary Fund. Lasso recently announced he would seek to cut the country’s fiscal deficit in half next year, to approximately \$2.4 billion. “Notwithstanding President Lasso’s strong approval ratings, we believe there is limited room to maneuver in a context of a complex political landscape, institutional weaknesses and still-stressed socioeconomic conditions,” Carolina Caballero, associate, and Lisa Schineller, managing director and lead analyst, both at Standard & Poor’s, told the Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published Sept. 17.

## BUSINESS NEWS

### Citi Blocked Attempt by PDVSA to Make Debt Payment: Exec

Citigroup blocked an attempt by Venezuelan state oil company PDVSA to make a debt payment to a unit of Germany’s Siemens, a Citi executive testified on Wednesday in a U.S. trial over whether PDVSA is liable for the payments, Reuters reported. PDVSA has claimed that U.S. sanctions implemented in August 2017 made it impossible for it to make the payment. The dispute, which is being heard in a bench trial that began on Tuesday in Manhattan federal court, goes back as far as January 2017, when PDVSA issued a promissory note to oilfield equipment provider Dresser-Rand for \$120 million, plus interest. PDVSA completed the

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with Mexico’s vibrant and increasingly influential women’s movement. On International Women’s Day this year, the president pointedly clarified that his government was not against the feminist movement and was in favor of equality. However, of the 19 cabinet minister positions, the president currently has appointed only seven women, a violation of the gender parity principle yet nonetheless an improvement on the record of previous administrations. Research shows that a ‘contagion effect’ can take hold such that adoption of gender parity in one area or institution can pressure those nearby to adopt similar policies. Thus, we might expect Mexico’s constitutional gender parity principle to influence the private sector as well, generating more proactive efforts at promoting women and greater gender diversity in boardrooms. Ultimately, the gender parity principle might also lead to more concerted efforts to address violence against women, a demand that Mexico’s women’s movement shows no signs of letting up on.”

**A** Andrew I. Rudman, director, and Olivia Soledad, program coordinator, of the Mexico Institute at the Wilson Center:

“The increase of women’s representation in the lower house of Mexico’s Congress, while laudable, will not necessarily result in an amplified focus on legislation centered on women’s rights as the number of seats does not necessarily translate into power. Notably, the leaders of all the major parties

in the lower house, who will largely dictate the agenda for the legislative body, are men. Skeptics also note that though women have increasingly been represented in all levels of government, including in the president’s cabinet, women’s causes continue to hold a

“**While more needs to be done, Mexico is far ahead of most nations across the world...**”

— Andrew I. Rudman & Olivia Soledad

small, if not reduced, space in government policy and action. Importantly, the reality for Mexican women in the country has not improved: an increasing number of women have reported feeling insecure in the country, violence against women has been on the rise and government agencies tasked with protecting women have had their budgets slashed. There is, however, reason for hope for imminent change. Absent government policy focus and action, women’s movements have inspired and brought about momentous change. Earlier this month, the Supreme Court historically decriminalized abortion, a move that has largely been credited to the activism of women’s rights movements in the country. While more needs to be done, Mexico is far ahead of most nations across the world, including the United States, on matters of gender parity,

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first two interest payments, which amounted to about \$4 million, but defaulted in October 2017 on a \$1.9 million payment. In May of this year, U.S. District Judge Louis Stanton of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York entered a \$149.5 million judgment in favor of Dresser-Rand. Raymond Romano, the Citi executive testifying in the case and the bank’s chief administration officer for Latin America, said Citi had blocked PDVSA’s wire attempt because “it did not meet our requirements for

processing.” The case puts into evidence how U.S. sanctions on Venezuela have squeezed the PDVSA’s business with other companies, according to the report. However, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro has managed to find ways to keep some business running. “[PDVSA] has been able to deal with high-cost sanctions and has managed to increase crude production modestly,” Antero Alvarado, managing director at Gas Energy Latin America, told the Energy Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published Aug 6.

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and those strides should be recognized. Continued efforts to reach parity at all levels, including in leadership at government ministries, could be the push that translates representation into meaningful political power.”

**A** **Jessica Ramírez, attorney at the Center for Justice and International Law in Washington:**

“Historically, women have been limited from actively participating in public life and in decision-making, even in matters that affect us primarily or exclusively. This is due to structural and historical discrimination against women, as well as a system designed to perpetuate their domination. Ensuring gender parity is an indispensable step in eliminating violence and discrimination against women. Gender parity must be guaranteed at all levels and spheres of government, that is, at the federal, state and municipal levels and in the legislative, judicial and executive branches. There are currently important advances in the legislative and executive power at the state level. These are the result of the constant struggle of women who have demanded a seat at the table and affirmative actions, such as those in recent years, that make it possible to face and reverse the effects of this historical discrimination. Despite the important advances, it is essential to continue to push for real parity

within all levels and spheres of government. For example, the Mexican Supreme Court has historically been made up mostly of men. In addition, most states in the country have never had a female governor, and at the federal level, there has only been one female

“**Ensuring gender parity is an indispensable step in eliminating violence and discrimination against women.**”

– Jessica Ramírez

candidate to run for the presidency with a chance of winning. Advancing regulations that require gender parity at the different levels of government sends a clear message about the importance of the inclusion of women in all aspects of public life and not only supposes an ideal of equality and non-discrimination, but also establishes a clear road map on how we begin to realize our ideals of a society in which women live free from all kinds of discrimination.”

*The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at [gkuleta@thedialogue.org](mailto:gkuleta@thedialogue.org).*

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# Q&A

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