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FEATURED Q&A

Which Are the Most Important Races in Brazil's Local Vote?



Among the candidates in this month's municipal elections in Brazil is São Paulo Mayor Bruno Covas (L), who is seeking re-election. // File Photo: Facebook page of Bruno Covas.

Q Brazil's municipal elections will take place this month, with voters slated to elect mayors, vice mayors and city councilors in more than 5,500 cities across the country. Which are the most important races to watch? What political dynamics are at play? To what extent will the municipal vote be seen as a snapshot of what's to come in Brazil's 2022 presidential and gubernatorial elections, and what's at stake for President Jair Bolsonaro?

A Pedro Cavalcante, professor of the master's in public administration program at the Institute of Public Law in Brazil: "It is the most atypical election since Brazil's democratization in the 1980s due to the pandemic's effects on the economy and, especially, on social lives. Attention has been mainly focused on the spread of Covid-19, vaccines and economic recovery. As usual, the most important races are in the state capitals, which concentrate most of the electorate, attract politicians with national ambitions and historically tend to be more competitive than medium- and small-sized cities. In São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Porto Alegre, the incumbents face tough races that will probably go to a second round. The pandemic brought changes in campaign strategies, such as restrictions on rallies and events in closed spaces, and also reduced the length of the campaigns. In this sense, a trend—seen in previous elections—is the prioritization of a digital campaign, with a focus on the use of social networks. Attention is directed toward continued fake news and the Electoral Justice's attempts to combat it. In this context, incumbents have an advantage. They tend to maintain historically high re-election rates at the local level. It is also

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Hurricane Eta Death Toll Climbs

Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei said at least 50 people had been killed in his country due to Hurricane Eta as its economic toll continues to mount.

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Mexican Senate Passes Digital Violence Law

Known as Olimpia's law, the measure would ban the sharing of intimate or sexual content without the subject's consent and ban the promotion of sexist stereotypes and hate messages online.

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POLITICAL

Puerto Rican Lawmaker Arrested for Corruption

Pro-statehood lawmaker Néstor Alonso Vega, who won re-election to office on Tuesday, has been arrested on federal corruption charges. He is accused of more than doubling the salary of an employee and then demanding half of it in return, according to U.S. Attorney Stephen Muldrow.

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Vega // File Photo: @RepNestoAlonso via Twitter.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Hurricane Eta Death Toll, Damage Climbs in Central America

Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei said Thursday at least 50 people had been killed in his country due to Hurricane Eta as its economic toll continues to mount, Prensa Libre reported. The Category 4 storm caused massive flooding and mudslides, with an avalanche burying 25 homes in the village of Quejá, according to the report. Authorities are still trying to reach remote areas that have been isolated by floods. Currently a tropical depression, Eta continues to linger in the region, with rain forecast into the weekend, a behavior similar to the devastating Hurricane Mitch in 1998, which caused billions of dollars in damage across multiple countries. The



Guatemalan authorities assess flooding. // Photo: Guatemalan Government.

storm made landfall in Nicaragua on Tuesday before moving on to Honduras and Guatemala. In Central American countries taken together, the death toll from Eta has risen to at least 65, according to figures reported by the Associated Press. Maite Matheu, a country director at international humanitarian organization CARE, said Thursday that some two million Hondurans could be directly affected by the storm. After suffering through droughts that had led to food shortages among subsistence farmers, Central Americans hit by this month's floods may be even more inclined to migrate, she added. According to the U.S.-based National Hurricane Center, Eta today should move north off the coast of Belize, and a tropical storm watch is in effect for the Cayman Islands.

POLITICAL NEWS

Puerto Rico Lawmaker Arrested on Corruption Charges

A lawmaker in Puerto Rico who was re-elected to office on Tuesday was arrested Thursday on federal corruption charges, the Associated Press reported. Néstor Alonso Vega is accused of more than doubling the salary of an employee and then demanding half of it in return, according to U.S. Attorney Stephen Muldrow. Vega, who served four years in Puerto Rico's House of Representatives and is the president of the Commission on Tourism and Social Well Being, has pleaded not guilty to the charges. Other legislators have faced similar accusations, with two members of the governor's pro-statehood New Progressive Party arrested in August. The party's head, Pedro Pierluisi, is leading the race to become Puerto Rico's governor by a small margin over Carlos "Charlie" Delgado of the Popular Democratic Party, which supports the island's current commonwealth status, NBC News reported Wednesday.

Colombia's Lower House Members Asked to Quarantine

The lower chamber of Colombia's Congress abruptly ended its session on Thursday and asked members to quarantine after a legislator tested positive for Covid-19, Reuters reported. "Obviously this is a delicate and grave circumstance," said the chamber's president, Germán Blanco. "I'm going to end the session, because I have the responsibility not to maintain debate." Blanco identified the member who tested positive as Alejandro Carlos Chacón of the Colombian Liberal Party. Chacón represents Norte de Santander department and has served in the chamber since 2010. He tested positive for Covid-19 after attending Wednesday's legislative session, Reuters reported. Chacón did not immediately respond to a message from

NEWS BRIEFS

Brazilian Authorities Investigate Hacking at Superior Court

Brazil's federal police on Thursday launched an investigation into hacking of computers at Brazil's Superior Court of Justice, the Associated Press reported. The court's head, Humberto Martins, said all of the court's sessions have been suspended until experts deem them to be safe from hacking. The court has been meeting in online sessions since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. Martins offered few details about the incident except to say that the attack occurred on Tuesday.

Veolia Sees Q3 Revenue Grow 6.4 Percent in Latin America

Paris-based Veolia Environnement said Thursday its revenue in Latin America grew 6.4 percent in the third quarter of the year at constant exchange rates. The growth was driven mainly by tariff increases in Argentina (tied to inflation), the start-up of new contracts in Peru and better results in Chile, Colombia and Ecuador, the company said in a statement. With about 178,000 employees worldwide, Veolia designs and provides water, waste and energy management solutions.

Brazil to Allow GMO Soybean Imports From United States

Brazil's Agriculture Ministry has set new rules that allow for the import of genetically modified soybeans from the United States, Reuters reported Thursday. Demand for Brazil's soybeans from China has left little of the nation's production for domestic use, leading to price increases for animal feed and ultimately sharply higher food prices in South America's largest economy. The world's top soy producer, Brazil has been importing soybeans from neighboring Paraguay and Uruguay this year.

the wire service seeking comment. At least 150 legislators may have been exposed to the virus, according to the lower chamber's press office. Legislators should remain in Bogotá, avoiding travel to their home regions for 72 hours before being tested for Covid-19. Last week, Colombian President Iván Duque ruled out an "indefinite" lockdown despite a rising number of coronavirus cases in the country, according to Colombia Reports. He said such a move would amount to "social and economic suicide." Colombia saw a steady drop in new reported cases between mid-August and mid-September, but the country is seeing another surge in infections. Colombia has more than 1.11 million reported cases of the disease, the ninth-highest in the world and the third-highest in Latin America after Brazil and Argentina, according to Johns Hopkins University. Colombia also has more than 32,000 reported deaths from Covid-19, the 12th-highest in the world and the fifth-highest in Latin America, after Brazil, Mexico, Peru and Argentina.

Mexican Senate Passes Law Against Digital Violence

Mexico's Senate on Thursday approved legislation that would punish digital violence, Reuters reported. Known as Olimpia's law, the measure would ban the sharing of intimate or sexual content without the subject's consent and ban the promotion of sexist stereotypes and hate messages online, according to the report. The measure prohibits "malicious acts that cause harm to the intimacy, privacy and dignity of women, which are committed through information and communication technologies," Explica reported. Activists had campaigned for years to enact the legislation, which is named for a "revenge porn" case in the state of Puebla. In an 87-0 vote, the Senate approved the measure, which calls for prison terms of three to six years and fines for perpetrators. Similar measures had passed at the state level, but the legislation, which now heads to the lower chamber for consideration, would make digital violence a national crime.

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hard to predict how mayors' performances amid the Covid-19 crisis will be measured, because we are still in the midst of it. More broadly, the main uncertainty over the elections' outcomes is due to the continuity of the 'conservative wave,' which since 2014 has been reducing center-left parties' representation in all branches of government. Although Brazil's municipal election is also a mid-term vote, it differs from the U.S. political system. The issues are predominantly local and center on what mayors can do to improve the lives of the residents in terms of health, education and municipal day-to-day operations. The governor's support matters to a candidate's success at municipal levels, mostly in small towns, but the president's political alignment is historically insignificant."

A David Fleischer, emeritus professor at the University of Brasília and editor of Brazil Focus: "The most important elections to watch are in São Paulo, where Mayor Bruno Covas (PSDB-DEM-MDB) is seeking re-election. This is a preview of São Paulo Gov. João Doria's campaign for president in 2022. In Rio, incumbent Mayor Marcelo Crivella will not be re-elected. In Belo Horizonte, incumbent Mayor Alexandre Kalil will probably be elected in the first round and become a strong possible candidate for governor in 2022. In Porto Alegre, Manuela D'Ávila could become the first PCdoB mayor of a state capital. In Recife, two grandchildren of icon Miguel Arraes—João Campos (PSB) and Marília Arraes (PT)—will compete in the second round. In 2020, party coalitions for city council (proportional representation) are not allowed. Each party must launch its own slate of candidates. Many small, tiny and micro parties might disappear. This is a preview of the 2022 elections for federal and state deputies, when this same rule will hold. President Bolsonaro is not supporting any candidates in the first round, but perhaps he will endorse some in the second round.

Former President Lula is actively supporting some PT candidates in larger cities, but only a few are leading in the election polls."

A Jayane Maia, research fellow at the GIGA Institute for Latin American Studies and the GIGA doctoral program: "Thanks mainly to the emergency aid that many Brazilian families have been receiving since April because of the pandemic, Bolsonaro's approval rating is going up (considering aggregate data at the national level), although his government has acted poorly regarding the measures to prevent Covid-19 from spreading. Certainly, the upcoming municipal elections are a test for Bolsonaro's increasing popularity. They will reveal the real chances that 'Bolsonarismo' stands. On the one hand, Bolsonaro's allies might take advantage of his increasing approval by attaching themselves to his image. On the other hand, voters might see the elections as a way of rewarding or punishing mayors based on their actions (or lack thereof) regarding the pandemic and other issues.

“Voters might see the elections as a way of rewarding or punishing mayors based on their actions...”

— Jayane Maia

From this perspective, Bolsonaro's approval might not secure his allies' victory. This is, for now, the most likely scenario. His disapproval rating is higher than the mayors' in 15 of the 26 state capitals, including big cities such as São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Belo Horizonte. In these three cities, Bolsonaro publicly supports specific candidates, who are currently trailing in the polls. Although Brazilian politics have an unforeseen future ahead, one thing is certain: Bolsonaro knows that his re-election depends on having the

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support of local politicians who are closer to the voters and might serve as a decisive electoral link. It's not aimlessly that he has been supporting some candidates such as Celso Russomanno (Republicanos), who is running for mayor in the city of São Paulo. After all, one lesson that Bolsonaro has learned from the pandemic is that good alliances can hold politicians in power, regardless of their mistakes. Nevertheless, it seems that his image might harm rather than help his allies, which might cost him crucial electoral support, and hence votes."

A **Brian Winter, editor-in-chief of Americas Quarterly and vice president of the Americas Society/Council of the Americas:** "There are mayoral elections happening in all of Brazil's 5,568 cities so it can be hard to identify clear trends. But two come to mind. The first is the continued poor performance of the Workers' Party, or PT. The PT began this year lacking a mayor in any of Brazil's most populous 100 cities, and polls suggest the party won't do better in 2020. This tells you the PT's brand is still severely, and perhaps terminally, damaged

from the economic and corruption crises of the 2010s. Former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva retains a certain amount of personal popularity, but that appears to be fading. However, it's worth noting the second trend:

“**The PT's brand is still severely, and perhaps terminally, damaged from the economic and corruption crises of the 2010s.**”

— Brian Winter

Candidates supported by President Jair Bolsonaro don't seem to be doing particularly well, either. For all the talk of Brazil being 'polarized' between those two figures, this election reminds us it's a continent-sized country where local factors are often more important in politics."

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

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Innovating Healthcare in Latin America and the Caribbean

An Inter-American Dialogue discussion with Rifat Atun, Harvard University; Amanda Glassman, Center for Global Development; Rolf Hoenger, Roche Pharma; and María del Rocío Sáenz Madrigal, Former Health Minister of Costa Rica.

View the Nov. 4 webcast of the discussion.

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