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FEATURED Q&A

How Well Is Brazil Addressing Violence Against Women?



The Brazilian government has reportedly cut funding for fighting violence against women, but officials have said the government is taking the right actions to address the problem. // File Photo: Marcha Mundial das Mulheres.

Q President Jair Bolsonaro has cut Brazil's budget for fighting violence against women by 90 percent, local newspaper Folha de S.Paulo reported in September. The resources fell from about \$19 million in 2020 to around \$ 1.7 million this year, according to the report. Brazil's Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights has defended the cut in funds on the grounds that other policy areas are addressing related issues. How well is Brazil's government addressing violence against women? Are the budget cuts a serious problem, or has the Bolsonaro administration adopted policies elsewhere to address violence against women? What more should Brazil be doing with the issue, and what best practices elsewhere provide good models for policymakers in Brazil to follow?

A Nestor Forster Jr., Brazil's ambassador to the United States: "The government of President Jair Bolsonaro has been taking strong actions to fight violence against women and promote feminine welfare. A major result of these efforts has been a nationwide decline of 7.7 percent in the femicide rate. It is worth noting that the general homicide rate dropped sharply, from 30 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants in 2017 to 19 today. Furthermore, the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights established a national hotline to report domestic violence. This was of particular relevance during the pandemic, when there was an increase in cases of domestic violence. As President Bolsonaro remarked in his speech last month before the United Nations General Assembly in New York, the Brazilian government has enacted ample legislation in support of women. Another important line of action

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TODAY'S NEWS

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Mayor Among 18 Killed in Attack on Town Hall in Mexico

The mayor of the town on San Miguel Totolapan in Mexico's Guerrero state was among 18 people killed when gunmen burst into the town hall on Wednesday.

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BUSINESS

CEO of Colombia's Ecopetrol Praises Tax Plan Changes

The CEO of Colombian state oil company Ecopetrol praised changes that the government made to its tax reform proposal.

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POLITICAL

Tebet, Cardoso Endorse Lula Ahead of Brazil's Second Round

Former Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva picked up key endorsements ahead of the country's runoff. Former candidate Simone Tebet and ex-President Fernando Henrique Cardoso both announced their support.

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Lula // File Photo: Facebook Page of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

POLITICAL NEWS

Gunmen Kill Mayor, 17 Others in Ambush at Mexico Town Hall

Gunmen burst into the town hall of San Miguel Totolapan in Mexico's Guerrero state on Wednesday, killing 18 people including the mayor and his father, the Associated Press reported. Mayor Conrado Mendoza was among those confirmed dead; Mendoza's father was a former mayor of the town, said Guerrero state's attorney general, Sandra Luz Valdovinos. Two others were wounded in the attack. Images of the town hall after the attack showed the building riddled with bullets, the AP reported. The area where San Miguel Totolapan is located is among the most conflict-ridden areas in the country, with multiple drug gangs vying for control, the wire service reported. In 2016, town residents furious by repeated abductions kidnapped the mother of a local gang leader in order to secure the release of residents who had been abducted. Also on Wednesday, a Morelos state lawmaker, Gabriela Marín, was fatally shot in the city of Cuernavaca, the AP reported. Two armed men riding on a motorcycle shot Marín as she exited a vehicle in the city, said state Attorney General Uriel Carmona, the wire service reported. The killings happened as Mexico's Congress this week is debating a proposal by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador to extend the military's role in domestic policing until 2028. Last month, the country's Congress approved the president's proposal to transfer control of the civilian National Guard to the military. Mexico's security forces are beset by several challenges, Amanda Mattingly, managing director at ACM Global Intelligence, told the Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published Aug. 25. "A poor reorganization of the security forces, the lack of intelligence gathering capabilities and the decreased coordination with the United States have only emboldened the cartels," said Mattingly. Recent flare-ups of violence in Mexico are "a reminder that the cartels still hold power in Mexico—and will continue to until a new president steps in with a more robust

security plan for the country," Mattingly added. On Wednesday, Mexican Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard said the country will file a new lawsuit against gun manufacturers in the United States, seeking to hold them accountable for the flow of weapons into Mexico, Reuters reported. The move came after a U.S. federal judge in Boston dismissed a similar \$10 billion lawsuit that Mexico had filed against gun manufacturers. Mexico's government will file the new lawsuit in Arizona, said Ebrard. "You have to start establishing criminal responsibilities because the companies that are selling these weapons in these counties [in Arizona], which are very few, of course they know where those weapons are going," Ebrard said in announcing the new lawsuit, Reuters reported.

Brazil's Cardoso, Tebet Endorse Lula Ahead of Runoff

Former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva received two endorsements on Wednesday ahead of Brazil's Oct. 30 runoff election, in which he faces incumbent President Jair Bolsonaro, the Associated Press reported. Simone Tebet, who came third in the first round of Sunday's election, and former President Fernando Henrique Cardoso both publicly endorsed Lula. "For my love for Brazil, for democracy and for the constitution, for the courage I never lacked, I apologize to my friends and companions who begged for neutrality in this second round," Tebet told reporters in São Paulo, the AP reported. "What is at stake is far greater than each of us," she added. In a closer-than-expected election on Sunday, Lula captured 48 percent of the vote, while Bolsonaro garnered 43 percent. A candidate would have needed more than 50 percent to win the election in the first round. In a Q&A published Tuesday in the Advisor, Gabrielle Trebat, managing director for Brazil and the Southern Cone at McLarty Associates, said Bolsonaro outperformed expectations in Sunday's vote and underscores many Brazilians' rejection of Lula's Workers' Party, while Bolsonaro's "conservative position on social issues continues to enjoy broad pop-

NEWS BRIEFS

U.S. Secretary of State Hails 'Shared Approach' in Visit to Chile

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday welcomed a "shared approach and shared priorities" with Chile, Agence France-Presse reported. On his first visit to Chile, Blinken met with leftist President Gabriel Boric and said the two countries would work together toward "building more equitable and inclusive economies." Blinken and Boric also discussed migration and regional security, AFP reported. Blinken began his five-day visit to South America on Monday in Colombia. The trip will also take him to Peru.

Seventeen Killed When Pickup Truck Rolls Into Canyon in Guatemala

Seventeen people, including two children, were killed and 13 others were injured when a pickup truck carrying 30 people plunged into a small canyon Wednesday in a rural area of eastern Guatemala, the Associated Press reported. Mayor Juan Ramón Díaz of the township of Jocotán said the truck had broken down, and when the driver exited the vehicle to fix the vehicle, it rolled down into the canyon after the driver apparently forgot to set the emergency brake. The 20-year-old driver was arrested amid fears that he could be attacked over the incident in the area, where mob attacks by vigilantes are common.

Guyana's Government Seeking Proposals From Private Sector for Refinery

Guyanese President Irfaan Ali said Tuesday that his government will be seeking expressions of interest from private-sector companies to construct a new small modular refinery in order to satisfy local demand for fuel, Barbados daily newspaper The Nation reported.

ular appeal." In the same issue of the Advisor, Rubens Barbosa, a former Brazilian ambassador to the United States, highlighted the failure of the polls to account for the "rightist Bolsonaro wave," which undermined the accuracy of their predictions.

BUSINESS NEWS

CEO of Colombia's Ecopetrol Praises Changes to Tax Plan

Colombian state oil company Ecopetrol's chief executive officer, Felipe Bayón, on Wednesday welcomed the removal of planned tax increases on exports of oil and coal from President Gustavo Petro's proposed fiscal reform, Reuters reported. The proposal had included an additional 5 percent income tax on mining and oil companies and a 20 percent tax on exports. It also sought an additional levy on coal when prices surpass \$86 per metric ton and \$71 per barrel of oil. However, Petro's government has said it will scrap the planned export tax and reduce the proposed surcharge on the extractive sector from 10 percent in 2023 to 5 percent in 2025. "We received this news in the best way at Ecopetrol," Bayón told reporters in Cartagena, Reuters reported. "I welcome that it isn't an export tax per barrel, but a surcharge," he added. Before the government announced the changes, Ecopetrol estimated that the fiscal reform would cost the company as much as 5 trillion pesos (\$1.12 billion), Reuters reported. Petro, the country's first leftist president, ran on a strong social agenda platform that promised to expand social programs and provide better access to higher education. Petro wants to fund the agenda with tax reforms that would raise an additional \$5.8 billion in revenue next year, the Financial Times reported. Petro said the proposed tax overhaul "should not be viewed as a punishment or a sacrifice" but rather a "solidarity payment." [Editor's note: See related Q&A in the Sept. 16 issue of the Advisor.]

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consists of improving the socioeconomic condition of women. The granting of 400,000 rural property deeds, 80 percent of which went to women, marked an important step toward helping women in situations of economic vulnerability. Brazil's concern for women extends to neighboring countries as well. Of the approximately 600 Venezuelans crossing the border each day into Brazil, most are women and children who receive comprehensive assistance from government authorities. On the international front, Brazil occupies a leading position in promoting women's health. The government is proud to be part of the 36-nation Geneva Consensus Declaration defending the right of women to enjoy the highest standards of health."

A Merike Blofield, member of the Advisor board and director of the GIGA Institute for Latin American Studies and Nancy Madera, Ph.D. candidate at the National University of General San Martín in Argentina: "Brazil's government is not addressing violence against women well at all. In addition to budget cuts, Bolsonaro has undermined efforts to fight violence against women (VAW) by deprioritizing VAW coordination institutionally. Folha reports that the budget for the two key federal VAW services—the women's emergency centers and the VAW hotline—declined from 133 million reais in 2020 to just 20 million reais assigned for 2023. These two first response services are on the frontlines for addressing immediate needs, and countries around the world, including Brazil, have adopted them as best-practices policies over the past two decades. The 24-hour free hotline receives hundreds of thousands of calls annually, providing information, and recording, processing and monitoring VAW reports. It is hard to imagine how the hotline—which costs on average about 30 million reais a year to run—with 3 million reais assigned to it for 2023, according to Folha, will continue functioning. The emergency centers, 'Casas da

Mulher Brasileira,' are 'one-stop shops' that provide legal, health and socio-psychological services to survivors. At present, seven such Casas are in operation. The government has promised to open many more, which will be impossible if the budget cuts are implemented. Cuts in both services will have devastating consequences for women who may have nowhere else to turn. Moreover, there is no way to subsume these services into others that do not focus on VAW or do not have nationwide coverage without a reduction in access and quality of services. Of course, aside from the hotline, the federal government is not the only entity that provides these services. The vast majority of women's centers and shelters are provided sub-nationally, but demand for services far outstrips supply at every level. The federal cuts will be very strongly felt and sends a terrible signal to women in the country."

A Amy Erica Smith, associate professor of political science at Iowa State University: "Violence against women is a longstanding, pervasive problem in Brazil that is not limited to any single president or presidency. That said, the intersecting trends of drastically declining budgets at the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights, plus increasing poverty and insecurity, have combined to produce a dire situation in recent years under Bolsonaro. A December 2021 study by the Brazilian Senate's research arm found that 86 percent of Brazilian women believed that violence against women had increased in the past year, and that 68 percent of Brazilian women knew at least one woman who was the victim of domestic violence. Beyond budget cuts to the aforementioned ministry, other policy trends are not ameliorating the situation, but rather have further increased women's insecurity under Bolsonaro. These include declining access to abortion for women who have been raped and who are victims of incest, as well as rapid growth in gun ownership as

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well as membership in gun advocacy groups known as ‘hunters, shooters, and collectors’ clubs. Addressing violence against women in Brazil will require changes at many levels: improvements in police investigations and the justice system’s prosecution of offenders; reduction in access to weapons; greater equality in women’s access to employment and reproductive rights; and cultural changes in the understanding of women’s social roles and rights. Initiatives such as hotlines to denounce offenders and special police bureaus for women may help, but by themselves they will not be sufficient.”

A **Jaimee Swift, assistant professor of political science, and Kristin N. Wylie, associate professor of political science, both at James Madison University:**

“Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a pervasive problem in Brazil. According to the World Health Organization, Brazil ranks fifth globally in femicides. In 2021, a woman was raped every 10 minutes in Brazil. Global Voices reports that between 2007-2017, the murder rate of Black women in the country rose by 29.9 percent, more than six times the increase among non-Black women. Additionally, data from the National Association of Travestis and Transsexuals revealed that a transgender person is murdered or assas-

sinated every 48 hours in Brazil, the global high. The 2006 Maria da Penha Law against domestic violence and 2019 Supreme Federal Court ruling making homophobia and transphobia a crime constitute milestones in the fight against GBV. Yet, these statistics demonstrate the limitations of the Brazilian government’s efforts to address the intersectional and multiform violence that overwhelmingly affects women of diverse backgrounds and identities. Particularly in the wake of Covid-19 and the associated ‘shadow pandemic’ of exacerbated GBV, the Bolsonaro administration’s budget cuts constitute a serious problem and signal to the country’s women-identified denizens that their livelihoods, safety and bodily autonomy are not priorities for the current government’s political agenda. The bulk of already under-allocated funds for combating GBV have gone to the #180 hotline for reporting domestic violence, leaving grossly inadequate resources for mitigating the structural conditions underpinning violence and undermining accountability. For best practices, Brazilian policymakers should look to and support civil society organizations across the country that are working daily to end GBV. Readers can learn more by checking out Instituto Marielle Franco, CFEMEA, Criola, and SOSCorpo.”

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