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## FEATURED Q&amp;A

# Can The Sonora Plan Address Mexico's Climate Goals?



Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador unveiled plans for Sonora's sustainable energy plan, dubbed the "Sonora Plan." Sonora, a northwestern state of Mexico is pictured. // File Photo: Mexican Government.

**Q** Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador recently unveiled plans to transform the northwestern state of Sonora into a green energy hub. The president's "Sonora Plan," which has an estimated price tag of some \$1.65 billion includes new solar farms and the development of an electric car industry. Soon after that announcement, López Obrador and U.S. climate envoy John Kerry met on Oct. 28 in Sonora to discuss lithium, batteries and the automotive industry. How will Mexico finance the Sonora Plan? To what extent would the plan advance Mexico's climate goals? What did López Obrador and Kerry accomplish during their meeting, and what kind of cooperation can be expected between the United States and Mexico over the green energy hub initiative?

**A** Eduardo Canales, council at Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld: "As the global automotive industry continues its transition from combustion to electric engines, Mexico must modernize and retool its manufacturing plants, invest in the development and improvement of its power grid and maximize the utilization of its natural resources to remain competitive, continue attracting foreign direct investment and stimulate economic growth. The Mexican government will try to address some of these issues with the Sonora Plan, which envisions, among other things, the construction of a green energy hub that includes solar and wind farms as well as lithium battery plants. However, the success of the Sonora Plan and its impact on Mexico's climate goals will hinge on three key points: 1.) the reaffirmation of a stable

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## TOP NEWS

## OIL &amp; GAS

## Truckers Fill Tanks at Haiti Fuel Depot That Gang Had Blocked

Trucks filled their tanks at Haiti's Varreux fuel terminal on Tuesday, two days after the gang leader who had been blocking access to the terminal said he was ending the blockade.

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## RENEWABLES

## Colombia's Celsia Reports 6.4% Rise in Profit for Q3

Colombian power company Celsia reported net profit of 111.4 billion pesos (\$21.7 million) for the third quarter.

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## OIL &amp; GAS

## Trinidad Asks U.S. to Allow Gas Imports From Venezuela

Trinidad & Tobago, led by President Paula-Mae Weekes, asked the United States to authorize gas imports from Venezuela so it can restart a liquefaction train.

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Weekes // File Photo: @AndrewHolnessJM via Twitter.

## OIL &amp; GAS NEWS


## Trucks Fill Up at Haiti Fuel Depot That Gang Had Blocked

Trucks lined up by the dozens to fill their tanks at Haiti's Varreux fuel terminal on Tuesday, two days after the powerful gang leader whose members had blocked access to the depot for nearly two months said he was lifting the blockade, the Associated Press reported. The blockade cut off access to diesel, kerosene and gasoline to much of Haiti, leading to the closure of gas stations and forcing hospitals, banks and grocery stores to cut back on their services. But on Sunday, gang leader Jimmy "Barbecue" Cherizier announced that his G9 gang federation would end the blockade and allow drivers to fill up at the terminal. The development followed a statement last week by Haiti's National Police that it had retaken control of the terminal, which is located in Port-au-Prince. "Now we can breathe," truck driver Gabriel Salny told the AP, adding that he can now start working again. "Hunger almost killed me," he added. Salny told the wire service that the blockade "had an impact ... on all Haitians." Officials at the terminal said 45 trucks filled their tanks on Tuesday with more than 300,000 gallons of diesel and more than 39,000 gallons of gasoline, the AP reported. With many parts of Haiti under the control of criminal groups, the country's government has called for aid and foreign intervention to help stabilize the country. "In the short term, we want to strengthen our security forces' capacity," Haiti's ambassador to the United States, Bocchit Edmond, told the daily Latin America Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published Oct. 25. "In the medium to long term, we want to improve our economy to create jobs for the hundreds of thousands of youths who have been enticed into banditry by the gangs and their enablers," he added. In the same issue, Georges Fauriol, a fellow at the Caribbean Policy Consortium and senior associate at the Center for Strategic & International Studies, told the Advisor that Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry is "scorned by large segments of

the public [and] presides over a nonfunctioning state apparatus competing with a universe of gang networks with political connections and pretensions.

## Trinidad Asks U.S. to Allow Gas Imports From Venezuela

Trinidad and Tobago asked the United States to authorize Venezuelan gas imports to restart a liquefaction train in the Caribbean country, sources close to the matter said, Reuters reported on Nov. 4. Under U.S. sanctions, companies and governments need to request authorization from the U.S. Department of Treasury before entering into business with PDVSA, Venezuela's state-owned oil company. Trinidad's previous request to the Treasury was left unanswered. However, the United States has recently been considering easing sanctions

 **We need to pay attention to the gas that could be supplied from Venezuela to Colombia and Trinidad and Tobago.**

— Carlos Bellorin

on Venezuela, which could provide new opportunities for business, the wire service reported. If the U.S. license is granted, the gas will be imported mainly from Venezuela's Dragón field. The field, off Venezuela's eastern coast, has 4.2 trillion cubic feet of gas reserves, which would help bolster an obsolete liquefaction train in Trinidad with a capacity of 500 million cubic feet per day. The liquefaction train is part of the country's flagship Atlantic LNG project. "We need to pay attention to the gas that could be supplied from Venezuela to Colombia and Trinidad & Tobago," Carlos Bellorin, associate director at S&P Global Commodity Insights, told the Energy Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published on Sept. 9. "Removing the obstacles to monetize non-associated gas from eastern Venezuela

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Guyana Launching Oil Tender That Will Increase Revenues: Vice President

Guyana is launching an oil tender amid new fiscal terms that will significantly increase the country's oil revenues, Vice President Bharrat Jagdeo said in an address, Reuters reported on Nov. 3. Jagdeo also said the country will offer three deepwater and 11 shallow offshore blocks in its next auction. New rules are being finalized, but they include production-sharing agreements with split profits on a 50-50 basis with companies, as well as a 10 percent royalty rate and 10 percent corporate tax.

## Petroecuador Planning to Appoint Auditing Firm to Organize its Accounts

Ecuador's state-owned oil company, Petroecuador, on Tuesday said it was seeking to appoint an auditing firm to review and organize its accounts, a tendering process that began in August, Reuters reported. The audit is part of a \$6.5 billion financing deal between the Andean country and the International Monetary Fund. Energy Minister Fernando Santos acknowledged that Petroecuador's financial reporting failed to comply with international standards.

## Italy's Eni Receives PDVSA Oil Cargoes Following U.S. Authorization

Italian oil company Eni has resumed Venezuelan oil imports in an oil-for-debt deal that the U.S. government authorized earlier this year, Reuters reported on Monday, citing a document from Venezuelan state oil company PDVSA that the wire service had viewed. A unit of the Italian company received two one-million-barrel cargoes of crude oil from Venezuela to unload, according to the document. The U.S. authorization exempts Eni from sanctions imposed on PDVSA.

in Trinidad & Tobago is being discussed with more vigor. We will probably see progress on both issues sooner rather than later," he added.

## Colombian Congress Approves Petro's Tax Reform Plan

Colombia's Congress on Nov. 3 passed President Gustavo Petro's tax reform bill, which will raise annual revenue by about 20 trillion pesos (\$4 billion) each year over the next four years, Reuters reported. The lower house approved the measure on Nov. 3, following the Senate's passage of it the previous day. The increased taxes will be collected primarily through increased duties on oil and coal, Bloomberg News reported. Oil companies will be taxed an additional 5 percent when international prices reach between \$67.30 and \$75 per barrel, rising to 10 percent when prices reach between \$75 and \$82.20 per barrel, and 15 percent beyond that. The new tax code will fund ambitious social programs and boost the country's finances, though its scope is less ambitious than the original proposal, which sought to generate an additional 25 trillion pesos annually, Reuters reported. The bill also targets high-earners, with an income of more than 10 million pesos, some \$2,000 per month, as well as single-use plastics and ultra-processed foods. Businesses have criticized the bill arguing that it will discourage investment and precipitate a greater decline in the national currency.

### RENEWABLES NEWS

## Colombia's Celsia Reports 6.4% Rise in Profit for Q3

Colombian power company Celsia reported a third-quarter net profit of 111.4 billion Colombian pesos (\$21.7 million), a 6.4 percent increase year-on-year, Renewables Now c on Monday.

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legal framework in Mexico that provides long term certainty to investors (to address the loss of investor confidence caused by the legal and regulatory changes in the energy industry that the Mexico government has implemented in recent years), 2.) significant investment in the development, modernization and revamping of the Mexican power grid (to allow for these new projects to come online and deliver the clean power generated to the industrial centers), and 3.) the implementation of efficient regulatory and administrative best practices at the local, state and federal government levels (to streamline mining, construction and operating permitting and compliance in an efficient manner). The Sonora Plan is a step in the right direction and can hopefully be replicated in other regions across the country, but its effectiveness might be diminished if the Mexican government is unable to create the right environment for its implementation."

**A** **Adrian Duhalt, nonresident scholar at the Baker Institute's Center for the United States and Mexico:** "Mexico's energy policy is perceived as favoring the recarbonization of the economy while preventing the deployment of renewables and other initiatives to tackle climate change. The Sonora initiative is a timid effort on the part of the López Obrador government to showcase its green credentials. It is a tiny step forward. Elsewhere in the country, investors are struggling with red tape to develop wind and solar farms, while Pemex is flaring more natural gas than ever and building a refinery whose cost is noticeably higher than the estimated investment in Sonora. Considering AMLO's approach to private investment and

the recent decision to nationalize lithium development, the state of Sonora is likely to experience an inflow of public money. But let's not focus on how these projects are to be financed. That may not be a problem for

“The Sonora initiative is a timid effort on the part of the López Obrador government to showcase its green credentials.”

— Adrian Duhalt

López Obrador. The main concern lies on how capable López Obrador's government is to transform the state of Sonora into a green energy hub. AMLO has only two years left in office, and his other infrastructure projects are facing significant delays and overruns. Having said this, it remains to be seen if the Sonora Plan will materialize under AMLO's watch. U.S. Climate Envoy John Kerry surely welcomes the Sonora Plan. But, this is far from bringing both nations closer in terms of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) consultations and building more resilient binational value chains."

**A** **Nicolás Mariscal Torroella, chairman of Grupo Marhnos:** "Investments in renewable energy are paramount to Mexico's future and to civilization itself. According to the European Commission, Mexico is the 13th largest CO2 emitter in the world. As a result, the country must do its part to stave off global warming and comply with the

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Celsia's revenue rose by 33 percent year-on-year, to 1.3 trillion pesos (\$254 million). The increases came as a result of higher volumes of energy traded and more power generation, as well as a greater commercialization of renewable power generation assets, the company

said in a statement. In the third quarter, two new plants became operational, Celsia Solar Sincé with a 19.9-megawatt capacity and El Tesorito with a 200-megawatt capacity, Celsia said. Colombian President Gustavo Petro has been pushing the country's green energy

transition, proposing a ban on new licenses for oil exploration and a tax on energy exports, Bloomberg News reported. The country “has been a leader in the Renewable Energy for Latin America and the Caribbean (RELAC) group since its creation in 2019 and has a goal of 70 percent renewable energy use by 2030,” Cecilia Aguillon, director of the Energy Transition Initiative at the Institute of the Americas, told the Energy Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published on July 8. “Petro is an experienced politician and may find key allies to help him achieve his energy transition goals,” Aguillon added.

## POLITICAL NEWS

### Sandinistas Sweep Nicaragua Vote: Election Officials

Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega’s Sandinista National Liberation Front party swept Sunday’s local elections, winning control of all of the country’s 153 municipalities, election officials said Monday, the Associated Press reported. Before Sunday’s balloting, Ortega’s party controlled 141 of the country’s municipalities, though some of remaining 12 municipalities were in the hands of other parties that the country’s opposition considers to be collaborators of the Sandinistas, the AP reported. Similarly to last year’s presidential election in Nicaragua, authorities have continued to jail opposition figures, leaving the path open for Ortega’s party to take full control, the AP reported. The government previously outlawed the country’s main opposition parties. Last Friday, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights said “the minimum conditions necessary” to hold free and fair elections do not exist in Nicaragua. The commission also called on Ortega’s government to take democratic measures and end repression, the AP reported. The government announced that it had closed 100 civil society organizations last Friday alone. Altogether, the Ortega government has shut down approximately 2,000 nongovernmental groups and in excess of 50 media outlets, the AP reported. After casting his ballot on Sunday,

## SUBSCRIBER NOTICE

### Jimena Blanco Joins the Energy Advisor Board

Jimena Blanco is Verisk Maplecroft’s chief analyst and leads the Americas Global Risk Insights team, with experts based in Argentina, Mexico, the United States and United Kingdom.

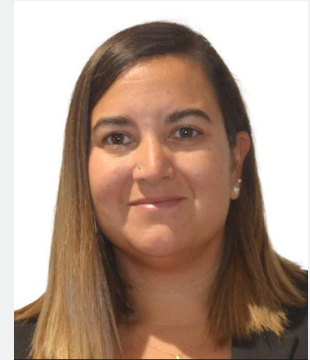
She frequently provides advice to multinational companies and multilateral institutions on political risk in Latin America.

Jimena has undertaken numerous field projects, including human rights impact assessments for clients across the region.

Jimena participates in diplomatic, academic and business forums, addressing issues of regional and country-specific concern. She is an experienced public speaker and is often invited to deliver analysis to some of the world’s largest industry shows and conferences. Jimena also makes regular contributions to the British and foreign media.

Prior to working for Verisk Maplecroft, Jimena edited several publications at Latin News and wrote extensively on Latin America. She was also a contributor to the International Institute for Strategic Studies’ special dossier, *The FARC Files: Ecuador, Venezuela and the Secret Archive of ‘Raúl Reyes.’*

Jimena studied history and political science at Randolph-Macon Woman’s College, now Randolph College, and obtained a master’s degree in Latin American studies from the Institute for the Study of the Americas, University of London.



Jimena Blanco

Ortega called the elections “a vote for peace,” CNN reported. After the results were announced, Ortega’s wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, told government-run media that the vote confirmed “the unity around peace and the good, as the only path” for the country, the AP reported. “We had an exemplary, marvelous, formidable day in which we confirm our calling for peace,” she added.

### Brazilian Military Report Finds No Fraud in Election

A 65-page report released Wednesday by Brazil’s Defense Ministry on the country’s recent presidential election found no evidence of

fraud in the vote, the Associated Press reported. While Defense Minister Paulo Nogueira said “it is not possible to say” with certainty that malicious code did not infiltrate the country’s computerized vote tabulation system, the report cites no abnormalities, the wire service reported. The report does propose improvements to counter the possible risk of fraud and recommends creating a commission to further investigate the functioning of the system. Supreme Court Justice Alexandre Moraes, who oversees the vote count, said, “The suggestions on ways to perfect the system will be analyzed,” The Guardian reported. In the election on Oct. 30, former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva defeated incumbent President Jair Bolsonaro by fewer than two percentage points. Bolsonaro, who spent months questioning the reliability of the election system without

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Actions Against Judges in Guatemala Alarming: State Dept. Spokesman

A senior U.S. government official on Tuesday denounced actions against Guatemalan judges and prosecutors, Reuters reported. U.S. Department of State spokesman Ned Price said the troubling moves entailed the imprisonment of anti-corruption judges and prosecutors by the government of conservative Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei, while others fled the country. In a statement, Price said the United States was “alarmed by the continued pattern of actions.” The Guatemalan prosecutors’ office said it “categorically rejects” Price’s statement.

## U.S. Authorities Announce Charges Against Haiti Gang Leaders

The U.S. Department of Justice on Monday announced criminal charges against seven Haitian gang leaders allegedly responsible for the kidnappings of several U.S. citizens, including missionaries and children, the Associated Press reported. The Justice Department also posted a \$1 million reward for Lanmo Sanjou, Jermaine Stephenson and Vitel’homme Innocent, reputed gang members allegedly involved in the kidnappings of a group of missionaries who were held captive for two months last year.

## U.N. General Assembly Condemns U.S. Embargo on Cuba in Annual Vote

For the 30th year, the United Nations General Assembly voted overwhelmingly on Nov. 3. to condemn the United States’ six-decade embargo on Cuba, the Associated Press reported. Of the 193 members of the General Assembly, 185 countries voted in favor of the condemnation. The United States and Israel voted against it, while Brazil and Ukraine abstained.

presenting evidence of fraud, has not contested the results.

## ECONOMIC NEWS

## Chilean President Unveils Pension System Overhaul

Chilean President Gabriel Boric on Nov. 2 unveiled a plan to overhaul the country’s pension system, one of the key demands of massive social protests that started three years ago and helped usher him to power, Bloomberg News reported. The reform that Boric announced would do away with the existing private pension managers, known as AFPs, and would require employers to pay an additional 6 percent of their workers’ wages to a government-run social security system, the news service reported. The reform is designed in part to improve current and future retirement payments for poor recipients, the news service reported. The additional contributions from employers would be in addition to the 10 percent of their wages that workers already put into individual accounts. “The current pension system is in crisis,” Boric said in a televised speech announcing the reform, Bloomberg news reported. “Today’s pensions are not enough for our fathers, mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers to have a decent life in their old age, regardless of how much they worked,” he added. The proposed changes, which Chile’s Congress would have to approve for it to take effect, follows years of complaints that the current private pension system, which dates from the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship, has failed to deliver decent payments in retirement. The AFPs have amassed some \$150 billion in savings, but that money largely favors the wealthy, leaving the poor with little, Bloomberg News reported. “The AFPs in this reform are finished,” said Boric. The president added that 72 percent of pensions that the current system pays out are below the minimum wage and that a quarter of Chileans receive a pension that is beneath the poverty line. The new 6 percent levy would be assessed gradually, said Boric,

who did not give further details on the timeline. “The privatized pension system has been criticized for its low pensions and high administrative costs, and has been subject to partial reforms,” Peter Winn, professor emeritus of history at Tufts University, told the Dialogue’s biweekly Financial Services Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published June 1.

## Peruvian Gov’t Cuts Economic Growth Forecast to 2.7% to 3%

Peru’s government on Tuesday cut its forecast for economic growth this year to between 2.7 percent and 3 percent, saying the global economy is slowing and that it is facing challenges from the country’s opposition-controlled Congress, Reuters reported. Previously, the government had forecast economic growth of 3.3 percent for this year. “Growth forecasts for this year at least are looking down,” said Finance Minister Kurt Burneo, the wire service reported. In addition to slowing economies in the United States and China that are hurting global prices for commodities, Congress has delayed passing government initiatives, he said. At the same time, Burneo broadened the country’s projection for growth next year, from an August estimate of 3.5 percent to between 3.1 percent and 3.9 percent. Burneo also announced 10 new initiatives that are designed to boost economic growth through public investment, projects in the private sector and higher levels of domestic consumption, Reuters reported. In September, the government announced an economic stimulus program consisting of 36 measures, though several were not implemented because of opposition in Congress. “Unfortunately, most of the measures aimed at stimulating government investment may either need congressional approval or have a delayed impact and may not have the impact that the minister desires,” former Finance Minister Alfredo Thorne told the daily Latin America Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published Sept. 20. Peru’s economic growth has also been stymied by annual inflation of approximately 8.2 percent and social unrest in the country’s mining sector, Burneo said Tuesday, Reuters reported.

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2016 Paris Agreement. In this regard, the Sonora Plan is welcomed news. It is planned to be the biggest solar park in Latin America and one of the largest in the world, with investments of around \$1.6 billion and a capacity of 1,000 megawatts. Nevertheless, it is not clear where the money will come from, as the country is tight on fiscal resources. President López Obrador's meeting with U.S. Climate Envoy John Kerry accomplished, for starters, communication between the two countries. They met precisely in the state of Sonora, where one of the biggest lithium deposits lie, the so-called 'white gold' that is essential for the energy transition. With U.S.-China tensions growing and geopolitics playing a growing importance, energy security in North America is turning vital. Let us promote a vision where both the public and private sectors work hand-in-hand to deliver energy security to Mexico and, also, to the North American region."

**A** **Alicia Girón, researcher at the Institute of Economic Investigations at the National Autonomous University of Mexico**

**(UNAM):** "Under the UMSCA, the Sonora Plan will be strategic for the region that borders the state of Arizona and will generate em-

ployment in both border states through the development of renewable electric power, a gas-based back-up plant and support to solar power plants. This project consists of a redesign of renewable energy management in order to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 13 Climate Action of the 2030 Agenda. The policy of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has been characterized by a policy of macroeconomic austerity, however the Sonora Plan presented to Secretary John Kerry includes the production of lithium, the largest solar plant in Latin America and the inclusion of semiconductor production and its relationship with the Green Hub of Arizona. This project will be consolidated through Mexico's domestic and private sector, just as U.S. President Biden's policy to stop relying on China's semiconductors an opportunity for the United States. The presence of Sempra Energy, Invent Energy, Ford Mexico, Tesla, General Motors, Pattern Energy and Skyward Solutions at the meeting is an invitation to be investors in the Sonora Plan, which will be presented at the COP27 gathering, by the governor of Sonora."

*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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