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## Latin America Advisor

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## FEATURED Q&amp;A

## Is the U.N. Poised for a Leader From Latin America?



The next secretary-general of the United Nations is to be chosen next year, and at least two candidates from Latin America are likely to be in the running. // File Photo: vacant via Adobe Stock.

**Q** Chile's government on Sept. 23 announced it will nominate former President Michelle Bachelet as a candidate to replace António Guterres as secretary-general of the United Nations after his term expires at the end of next year. Bolivia's government said in April that it also plans to nominate David Choquehuanca, the country's outgoing vice president for the role. Who is most likely to become the next U.N. secretary-general? What would be the significance of a secretary-general from Latin America? What is the United Nations' role in pressing issues in the Western Hemisphere, such as crises in Haiti and Venezuela?

**A** Jacqueline Mazza, senior adjunct professor at the Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies: "The next secretary-general of the United Nations will be serving a term—from 2027 to 2032—of unprecedented challenge to the role of multilateralism in international affairs. Latin America has a great stake in a reinvigorated role for the United Nations as an 'honest broker' and consensus-builder whether in supporting peace negotiations, uncontrolled gang warfare as in Haiti or as a leader on global issues of migration, climate change and democracy. The just-concluded UNGA meeting in New York revealed a divided Latin America on the United Nations, with some seeing a narrower, diminished U.N. role to fit into the Trump administration's erratic and U.S.-centric international agenda. To attain the leadership of the United Nations, Latin America would be wise to remember the key role the United Nations has played in its own conflicts—regional peace negotiations and implementation in

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## TODAY'S NEWS

## POLITICAL

### U.S. Engaged in 'Armed Conflict' With Cartels: Trump

The United States is engaged in an "armed conflict" with drug cartels, President Donald Trump told Congress in a confidential note this week.

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## BUSINESS

### Fitch Upgrades Rating of State Oil Company Pemex

Fitch Ratings upgraded Mexican state oil company Pemex's debt rating, following a \$9.9 billion government-financed debt buyback.

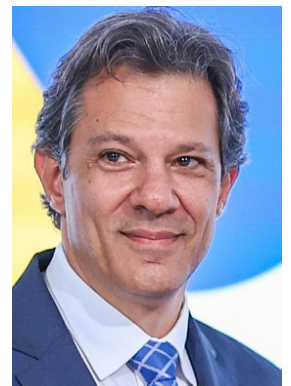
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## ECONOMIC

### Brazilian Gov't Expresses Optimism on Income Tax Bill

Brazilian Finance Minister Fernando Haddad on Thursday expressed optimism that the country's Senate would approve legislation to expand income tax exemptions. The lower house approved the measure unanimously.

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Haddad // File Photo: Palácio do Planalto via CC BY 2.0.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## U.S. Engaged in ‘Armed Conflict’ With Cartels: Trump

The United States is engaged in an “armed conflict” with drug cartels that the government has deemed terrorist organizations, President Donald Trump told Congress in a confidential note this week, *The New York Times* reported. The notice followed U.S. military strikes on three boats in the Caribbean, which Trump said were transporting drugs, killing 17 people. While the U.S. government has said metaphorically for decades that it is in a “war on drugs,” Trump’s assertion that the United States is in a formal armed conflict would mean that it is lawful to kill enemy combatants on sight, the newspaper reported. Under international law countries engaged in armed conflicts can also detain enemy fighters indefinitely without trials and put them on trial in military courts, *The New York Times* reported. “The President determined that the United States is in a non-international armed conflict with these designated terrorist organizations,” the notice from the White House said, the Associated Press reported. It adds that Trump has directed the military to “conduct operations against them pursuant to the law of armed conflict.” The notice also says, “The United States has now reached a critical point where we must use force in self-defense and defense of others against the ongoing attacks by these designated terrorist organizations,” the AP reported.

## Argentina’s Senate Overturns Milei’s Spending–Bill Vetoes

Argentina’s Senate on Thursday overrode two of President Javier Milei’s vetoes of spending bills, dealing him a new setback ahead of the country’s Oct. 26 midterm legislative elections, Reuters reported. The Senate overwhelmingly overturned Milei’s veto of a measure to in-

crease funding for public universities in a vote of 59-7 and also overrode his veto of legislation to raise funding for pediatric health care in a vote of 58-7, the wire service reported. Milei, who has pushed austerity measures and has sought to reduce the size of the government, has said the increased spending would jeopardize the government’s finances. Milei also saw a major legislative setback in Buenos Aires province’s legislative elections on Sept. 7 in which his party was trounced by the Peronist opposition coalition. Milei’s agenda has gone “from ending inflation to decimating too many social programs,” Javier Corrales, a professor of political science at Amherst College, told the Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published Sept. 19.

## ECONOMIC NEWS

## Brazilian Gov’t Expresses Optimism on Income Tax Bill

Brazilian Finance Minister Fernando Haddad expressed optimism Thursday that legislation to expand income tax exemptions would win approval in the Senate following its passage by the lower house, Reuters reported. “The bill is based on fiscal balance and seeks tax justice” Haddad told reporters, Reuters reported. Late Wednesday, after the lower house’s unanimous approval, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva also expressed confidence that the measure would win approval in the upper chamber. “I am certain the proposal will also enjoy broad support in the Senate,” Lula said in a post on social media site X. Lula added the proposal would benefit 15 million workers in Brazil. The legislation calls for raising the monthly exemption from income taxes next year to 5,000 reais (\$940), three times the country’s minimum wage, Reuters reported. The current threshold is 3,036 reais. The measure also eases taxes for people earning up to 7,350 reais per month, which covers much of the country’s middle class. The measure was a key promise of Lula’s election campaign in 2022, the Associated Press reported. To offset the loss in govern-

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Venezuela Says it Detected Five U.S. Fighter Jets 75 Kilometers Off Coast

Venezuela’s government said Thursday that it detected five U.S. F-35 fighter jets flying 75 kilometers off its Caribbean coast, which Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino denounced as a “provocation” that threatened national security, CNN reported. Caracas said the aircraft were spotted by air defense systems and confirmed by a commercial flight crew. The incident comes amid heightened tensions following recent U.S. naval deployments and strikes on boats allegedly carrying drugs in the Caribbean.

## Cleanup Efforts Begin After Hurricane Imelda Rakes Bermuda

Cleanup efforts began Thursday in Bermuda after Hurricane Imelda hit the island on Wednesday as a Category 2 storm, toppling trees and power lines and leaving some 18,000 residents without electricity, before weakening to a post-tropical cyclone, the Associated Press reported. Authorities closed schools, offices and the island’s international airport as 100 soldiers were deployed to secure infrastructure. Imelda also caused flooding in Cuba, where two people were killed, and it left one person missing in Hai-ti, according to the AP.

## Alleged Senior Member of Venezuela Tren de Aragua Gang Arrested

The alleged head of the armed wing of Venezuelan Tren de Aragua gang has been arrested in Colombia, BBC News reported Thursday. José Antonio Márquez Morales was arrested in the city of Valledupar in a joint operation including Colombia, U.S. and British authorities. U.S. President Donald Trump has targeted Tren de Aragua, declaring it a terrorist organization.

ment revenue, the measure would institute a progressive minimum tax on monthly incomes that exceed 50,000 reais and also would impose a 10 percent withholding tax on dividends that are sent out of Brazil, Reuters reported. The dividend tax would be in effect regardless of whether the recipient is a person or a company, Reuters reported. Additionally, any dividend payment that exceeds 50,000 reais in a single month from the same source will be subject to a withholding tax of 10 percent. If the Senate passes the measure, Lula would sign it and it would take effect at the beginning of next year, the AP reported.

## BUSINESS NEWS

# Fitch Upgrades Pemex's Debt Rating Amid Gov't Support

Fitch Ratings on Thursday upgraded Mexican state-owned oil company Pemex's debt rating to BB+ from BB, the ratings agency said in a press release. The move followed a \$9.9 billion government-financed debt buyback, which Fitch said provided "tangible evidence of stronger government direction, support and control" over Pemex's financial policy. Fitch cited legislative changes that allow Pemex to share a debt ceiling with the Ministry of Finance and the government's cash-financed tender as key drivers of the upgrade, raising its Oversight, Linkage and Support score. The agency noted, however, that Pemex's standalone credit profile remains at 'ccc' due to heavy debt, weak production and persistent operating losses. According to IPD Latin America projections, state support for Pemex is expected to hit an all-time high in 2025, Bloomberg News reported before the upgrade. Although Pemex has long weighed on Mexico's public finances, its burden has never been larger, with the company posting net deficits to the state in both 2021 and 2024 after sizable support packages under President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the news service reported.

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El Salvador and Nicaragua in the 1980s and 1990s, the U.N. commission on corruption in Guatemala and most recently UNHCR's regional coordination to assist Venezuelan migrants (Platform R4V). The next U.N. secretary-general will need to shepherd a robust U.N. role in regional crises in Venezuela, Nicaragua and Haiti, whether they are Latin American or not. A Latin American candidate that demonstrates both an understanding of the important legacy the United Nations has played and the need for Latin America to act more as a region on the international stage could help reposition, reform and reinvigorate the United Nations during one of its most challenging eras to come."

**A** Nick Zimmerman, founding partner at Dinámica Americas and nonresident senior fellow at the Brazil Program of the Inter-American Dialogue: "It is still too early to assess candidates' prospects with any certainty. The official process just began with the start of the 2025 U.N. General Assembly, which formally opened the window for countries to begin recommending candidates to

candidacies of Bachelet and Choquehuanca given their ideological and political opposition to the governments that will nominate them. More than maintaining a tradition of regional rotation in the role, the key determining factor for selecting a new secretary-general will ultimately revolve around which candidate is best equipped to prevent a veto of their candidacy by the U.N. Security Council's five permanent members. The permanent members can issue a veto during the General Assembly's secret straw polling process to measure individual support. At a time of intense global fragmentation and tension, forging such a consensus will be no easy feat. As such, we should expect many twists and turns along the way before a final decision."

**A** María Leoni, deputy director of the Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL) and director of the GQUAL Campaign: "There is an unwritten rule that favors

regional rotation in the selection of the U.N. secretary-general, which under current practice would point to it being the turn of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries. Yet this principle has not always been respected, as seen in the appointment of António Guterres. For it to materialize now, Latin American and Caribbean countries must make a compelling case: working together, building alliances across regions and, above all, nominating and supporting strong candidates who can build consensus and embody the values of the U.N. Charter—multilateralism, peace, equality and human rights. Despite its many challenges, Latin America has a historic record of commitment to democracy, peace and the international rule of law. In this moment of profound global crisis, that tradition is more relevant than ever. The region also has a tradition of championing gender equality and women's leadership, values that should be central to the next selection process. The GQUAL Campaign—promoted by CEJIL and

**“Other regions could still put forward competitive candidates.”**

— Nick Zimmerman

the General Assembly. Although there is a broad sense within the United Nations that it is Latin America and the Caribbean's 'turn' to hold the position, this is not a formal requirement. Other regions could still put forward competitive candidates. With respect to Bachelet and Choquehuanca specifically, a potential complicating factor is that both countries have presidential elections this year. The current front-runners in each contest may not be inclined to support the

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part of the 1 for 8 Billion Campaign Steering Committee—is calling for the appointment of the first woman secretary-general, a milestone long overdue for an organization about to turn 80. For reasons of equality, legitimacy and the urgent need for effective responses to today's challenges, the next U.N. leader must be a woman. Latin America is not short of exceptional women ready to rise to this responsibility."

**A** **Julián Ventura, former Mexican undersecretary of foreign affairs:** "In 1945, Latin America played a significant role in shaping the founding principles of the United Nations. Over time, countries in the region have developed global profiles based on the promotion of collaborative approaches, international law and universality. Against the backdrop of an increasingly polarized geopolitical landscape, many of these principles are now under severe stress, driven by growing unilateralism, unprecedented budgetary shortfalls and criticisms of the organization's lack of effectiveness. A Latin American becoming secretary-general is an important objective that will require the support of all five permanent members of the Security Council, but it is overshadowed

by the urgent need to address the current critical situation through practical, bridge-building action that avoids North-South divides. Regional leaders' recent calls at the United Nations for rules-based cooperation, respect of international law and major reforms were welcome—and necessary—affirmations. However, they should now lead by example by tackling pressing challenges that will add credibility to their defense of multilateralism. These could include ensuring timely and full payment of their budgetary obligations; mitigating the impact of funding cuts to U.N. migration, refugee and humanitarian assistance initiatives in the region through targeted cooperation with European, Canadian and Asian partners and public-private sector partnerships; and contributing to the success of Brazil's COP30 by meeting climate change commitments and facilitating consensus. Following the U.N. Security Council's approval this week of the resolution to authorize a new security force for Haiti, countries in the region should find ways to make meaningful contributions, however modest, to its viability."

*The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta.*

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