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FEATURED Q&A

How Can São Paulo's Failing Electric Grid Be Strengthened?



Recent rolling electricity blackouts in São Paulo (pictured) have raised fears that the city's electrical grid could collapse. // File Photo: Brazilian Government.

Q Rolling electricity blackouts in April in the city of São Paulo forced schools, hospitals and businesses to shut down and triggered fears that the city's electrical grid could collapse. The city government has blamed Italian electric distributor Enel, which has operated São Paulo's power grid for six years and is responsible for investing in and maintaining it. Officials have said the grid could collapse within the next three years and requires a major investment to repair. What are the main causes of the blackouts in São Paulo? To what extent have environmental conditions like El Niño played a role in the city's power problems? What must be done in order to strengthen São Paulo's electrical grid?

A Anabel Teixeira, senior associate for Brazil and the Southern Cone at McLarty Associates: "The rolling blackouts in São Paulo, the largest city in the Americas, stem from years of underinvestment and mismanagement in the electrical grid. Both the government and Enel, the Italian electric distributor which has operated the grid since 2018, played a role in the current situation. The city's infrastructure has deteriorated, leaving hundreds of thousands without power for extended periods and disproportionately affecting poorer neighborhoods. Insufficient oversight and lack of prioritization over the years have contributed to the issue, and if no corrective action is taken soon, São Paulo's electrical grid could collapse in the next few years. Environmental conditions, particularly extreme weather events linked to El Niño and climate change, have exacerbated the city's power issues.

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Chile's Enami Seeing Interest on Lithium Project

Chilean state mining company Enami said its Altoandinos lithium project in the Atacama region is attracting significant interest from potential partners.

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Two Former Execs Sue Citgo Over Arrests, Detention in Venezuela

Two former executives of Venezuela-owned, U.S.-based oil refiner Citgo sued the company over their 2017 arrests and detention for nearly five years in Venezuela.

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RENEWABLES

Portugal's EDP Inaugurates Chile Wind Farm Project

Portuguese electric utility EDP inaugurated the Punta de Talca wind farm project in Chile. "Chile is a key market for us because of its commitment to clean energy," said João Marques da Cruz, EDP's South America head.

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Marques da Cruz // File Photo: LinkedIn Profile of Marques da Cruz.

OIL & GAS NEWS

Two Former Execs Sue Citgo Over Arrests in Venezuela

Two former executives of Venezuelan state-owned, U.S.-based oil firm Citgo have sued the company for what they allege was a conspiracy to lure them to visit Venezuela—where they were imprisoned for nearly five years, the Associated Press reported May 30. The two men, brothers Alirio and José Luis Zambrano, say Citgo directed them, along with four other executives, to visit Venezuela in 2017 under false pretenses, supposedly to attend a mandatory meeting with Citgo's parent company, Venezuelan state-owned oil firm PDVSA. But the meeting, the brothers allege, was a trap. Security agents in masks entered the conference room and detained the executives inside. The six executives were convicted on charges related to a debt financing deal that was never realized, and they were sentenced to between eight and 13 years. The U.S. State Department heavily criticized the trial for its irregularities. "Citgo knowingly and substantially assisted with and participated in their unlawful arrest," the two executives' lawsuit alleges, the AP reported. "Citgo knew the Zambranos were innocent from 'minute one' of these false charges—just as Citgo knew in the 2,556,000 minutes that followed," the lawsuit asserts. The lawsuit also alleges that Citgo abandoned the imprisoned executives' families, who sought help from the firm to mount a legal defense. The two brothers were finally released in 2022 in a prisoner exchange between Venezuela and the United States in which two nephews of President Nicolás Maduro's wife were freed from detention in the United States and allowed to return home. Citgo did not immediately respond to a request by the AP for comment. However, the company has sought financial sanctions against another of the detained Citgo executives, Tomeu Vadell, and his family for bringing what the company said were "entirely meritless" claims that the company inflicted emotional distress on the executives.

POWER SECTOR NEWS

Chile's Enami Seeing Interest on Lithium Project

Chilean state-owned mining company Enami said Tuesday that its Altoandinos lithium project is attracting substantial interest from potential partners, Bloomberg News reported. The project, which consists of three salt flats in Chile's Atacama region, will be able to produce 20,000 metric tons of lithium by 2032 and three times that number by 2037, the news service reported, citing government projections. President Gabriel Boric has pursued tapping more of Chile's lithium reserves—the largest in the world—and while the state will control much of the lithium projects being pursued, Enami can negotiate its own terms with private partners. Enami released the first results of its \$10.5 million drilling campaign in the Aguilar flat on Tuesday, presenting brine samples that show a concentration of 740 milligrams of lithium on average per liter, Bloomberg News reported. Interested firms have until Friday to register to partner with Enami to fund, develop and run new lithium projects in Chile. "We have high interest from relevant companies in the sector," Enami wrote in a text message to Bloomberg News on Tuesday. The firm is currently engaged in a consultation process that engages Indigenous communities that may be affected, a step that is legally required to obtain permits. Resistance from Indigenous communities has derailed several mining projects in Chile, and mining the metal stands to disrupt the flow of water to communities of Indigenous peoples living nearby. "We will lose everything," Flores de Callata, a member of the Indigenous Kolla people, told the Associated Press in comments published last March. Flores de Callata said her community relies on water found in the mountains of the so-called "lithium triangle" encompassing Chile, Bolivia and Argentina. "What will we do if we don't have water? If the mines come, we'll lose our culture, we won't be left with anything," she added. Boric has championed the consultation process, promising last

NEWS BRIEFS

Outage Cuts Power to Hundreds of Thousands in Chile's Capital

Hundreds of thousands of people in Chile's capital, Santiago, were left without power on Thursday after a tree fell on a transmission tower earlier that morning, according to a statement from Chile's National Disaster Prevention and Response Service, The New York Times reported. The incident knocked out roughly one-tenth of the power supply needed to service Santiago, leaving nearly half a million customers in the dark.

China's CNGR Seeking to Buy Stake in Argentine Brine Deposits

China-based lithium battery component producer CNGR Advanced Material Co. is seeking to purchase a major stake in lithium-rich Argentine brine deposits, Bloomberg News reported Sunday. Sources with knowledge of the matter told Bloomberg News that Senior CNGR executives visited three such deposits last week in Argentina, part of a larger effort by the firm to expand its supply chain outside of Asia and supply customers in the West.

Citgo Representatives, Venezuelan Opposition Seeking Pause in Auction

The supervisory boards of Venezuelan-owned, U.S.-based oil refiner Citgo and the country's opposition met recently with U.S. officials in an effort to delay a court-ordered Citgo share auction that is intended to help repay creditors, Reuters reported Tuesday. The first bidding round's top offer failed to break \$8 billion, and Citgo's 18 creditors are seeking \$21.3 billion in claims. A second round of bidding is slated to close next Tuesday. Venezuelan representatives want a pause in the process until after the country's presidential election in July.

year to speak with Indigenous communities himself. He also announced his government's intention to exert more state control over mining and pursue environmentally friendly mining technologies. Currently, 30 firms and consortiums are engaged in a process to choose a greener method for mining lithium, selecting a type of direct lithium extraction, which Chile has supported as more environmentally friendly, Bloomberg News reported. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the April 12 Energy Advisor.]

RENEWABLES NEWS

Portugal's EDP Inaugurates Wind Farm Project in Chile

Portuguese electric utility company EDP has inaugurated a major renewable energy project in Chile, the Punta de Talca Wind Farm, Power Engineering International reported Tuesday. The wind farm, which is EDP's first operational project in Chile, is located in the municipality of Ovalle in the country's Coquimbo region and has the capacity to produce 83 megawatts of energy for Chile's electric grid through use of 14 wind turbines. The annual generation capacity of the Punta de Talca Wind Farm is roughly equivalent to the power consumption of 95,000 Chilean homes, and the project will avoid the emission of some 140,000 tons of carbon dioxide per year, Power Engineering International reported. "This inauguration represents a fundamental step in our growth strategy in South America. Chile is a key market for us because of its commitment to clean energy and its growth potential in renewable energy," said João Marques da Cruz, EDP's South America head, Power Engineering International reported. "Punta de Talca is not just the start of a solid relationship with Chile, but also reinforces our position in the global market and our long-term commitment to sustainability and the economic development of the communities in which we are involved," he added. Last year, EDP announced it would develop three additional wind energy projects in the coming

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These events increase the likelihood and severity of blackouts, adding pressure to an already fragile grid. To strengthen São Paulo's electrical grid, a substantial investment in sustainable and resilient infrastructure is essential. President Lula's announcement of a \$76 billion public works program is a step in the right direction, but infrastructure investment currently represents less than 2 percent of Brazil's GDP, which is insufficient. A collaborative approach involving stricter regulatory oversight, accelerated infrastructure repairs and significant financial commitment is crucial. Additionally, addressing the environmental effects through robust climate action plans will help mitigate future power disruptions. Ensuring reliable power in São Paulo is vital, not only for the city's residents but also for maintaining its status as a key financial and economic hub."

A Roberto Kishinami, manager at the Institute for Climate and Society: "The Brazilian power grid is operated in two voltage levels by different utilities. High voltage lines are operated by transmission utilities, while medium and low voltage grids are operated by distribution utilities. Both groups of utilities have concessions through auctions by the federal government. Greater São Paulo is currently served by Enel for electricity distribution and is blamed for the long blackouts in spots in downtown São Paulo. These local grids were shut down by unusual storms, strengthened by global climate change. The electric grids in all the cities need major investment over the next years to better resist extreme weather. The same applies to urban public services such as water, sanitation, digital connectivity, health, education and more. Megacities like São Paulo have poor urban planning, inner cities with unassisted inhabitants and a chronic divide of poor and wealthy families that is exacerbated by the losses in extreme events. There is an opportunity to tackle these fundamental problems by planning and carrying out an

urban infrastructure reform, toward climate resilience. In that reform, electrical grids can be a central element due to the fact they are a backbone for the other public services. There is no lack of technology or human capacity to do it. It is a matter of political will. Let's go for it."

A Ana Karina Souza, partner at Machado Meyer Advogados: "The lack of clear signs by the Brazilian government of the rules of a possible renewal of the distribution concession agreements has negatively affected the perspective of new investments in the distribution sector in Brazil. In parallel, the Brazilian Congress is discussing a possible reform in the electricity sector that could accelerate the schedule of the opening of the Brazilian retail market to residential and commercial consumers. More than 60 percent of Brazil's current distribution market has concession agreements expiring within the next six years, with some concessions already starting to expire in 2025, which is the case, for instance, of EDP Energias do Brasil in the State of Espírito Santo. Enel's concession in São Paulo state is expiring in 2028. The Brazilian federal government is currently discussing the enactment of a federal decree determining the conditions of a possible renewal of such concession agreements, which shall include compliance with certain predefined standards of quality and efficiency for the services provided. The market's expectation is that such a decree could be enacted at any moment within the next few weeks. In parallel, the Brazilian electric energy agency ANEEL has recently opened a public consultation procedure in order to collect subsidies for a possible regulation related to the effects of extreme environmental conditions in distribution and transmission concessions in Brazil. It is expected that new regulation could be enacted as a result of such public consultation, with clear guidelines, among others, on best practices to be adopted by governments

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years, totaling more than 450 megawatts and capable of providing clean energy to roughly 650,000 Chilean households each year. Those projects are expected to be completed between 2027 and 2030 in partnership with a local developer and will be located in the Ñuble and Los Ríos regions.

POLITICAL NEWS

Claudia Sheinbaum Elected Mexico's First Female President

Claudia Sheinbaum, the candidate of Mexico's ruling Morena party, won a landslide victory Sunday to become the country's first female president. Sheinbaum, a climate scientist and former mayor of Mexico City, won 59.8 percent of the vote, while Xóchitl Gálvez of the National Action Party garnered 27.5 percent and Jorge Máynez of the Citizens' Movement party received 10.3 percent, according to the National Electoral Institute. Sheinbaum, who

I didn't make it alone. We all made it."

— Claudia Sheinbaum

takes office on Oct. 1, said Gálvez and Máynez both called her to concede, the Associated Press reported. "I will become the first woman president of Mexico," Sheinbaum said at a downtown Mexico City hotel, the AP reported. "I didn't make it alone. We all made it, with our heroines who gave us our homeland, with our mothers, our daughters and our granddaughters," she added. Sheinbaum will also become Mexico's first president of Jewish background. Sheinbaum's 32-point margin of victory was greater than that of her mentor and predecessor, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who was elected by a margin of nearly 31 percentage points in 2018. "Of course, I congratulate Claudia Sheinbaum with all my respect who ended up the winner by a wide margin," said López Obrador, the AP reported. Gálvez, during her campaign, had vowed to take a more aggres-

ADVISOR Q&A

What Challenges Face Mexico's First Female President?

Q Claudia Sheinbaum of the ruling Morena party was elected Mexico's first female president on Sunday in a landslide. She defeated Xóchitl Gálvez of the National Action Party and Jorge Máynez of the Citizens' Movement party, both of whom conceded. Also on Sunday, Mexicans voted for more than 20,000 local, state and congressional candidates, and the ruling party also won both chambers of Congress. What are the biggest challenges facing Sheinbaum when she takes office on Oct. 1? What are the main initiatives she is likely to push, and to what extent will her policies differ from that of her predecessor and mentor, outgoing President Andrés Manuel López Obrador? How well will she be able to work with Mexico's Congress, and with other countries, including the United States?

A Andrés Rozental, president of Rozental & Asociados and former deputy foreign minister of Mexico: "In addition to the presidency, voters gave Morena and its coalition partners a qualified majority of legislators in both houses of Congress, which will result in AMLO being able to pass constitutional amendments in the new Congress before he leaves office. Morena also swept most of the nine governorships that were in play and kept its hold on Mexico City. Sheinbaum faces all the same problems Mexico has

sive stance against crime. In her concession speech, she called on Sheinbaum to address the country's most urgent problems. "I want to stress that my recognition [of Sheinbaum's victory] comes with a firm demand for results and solutions to the country's serious problems," said Gálvez the AP reported. Turnout in the election was approximately 60 percent,

had during AMLO's presidency: a stagnant economy, extraordinary levels of violence in many of the country's states, a highly polarized society with an increasing presence of organized crime and the ever-present issue of relations with the United States. Whether her policies will differ fundamentally from those of her predecessor is an open question. During the campaign, Sheinbaum was indistinguishable from López Obrador, but once she assumes office we don't really know what her specific priorities will be, nor how much influence the former president is likely to want to have on her. With both houses of Congress comfortably in the hands of Morena and its affiliated parties, Sheinbaum will have no problem passing her legislative priorities. I expect that one area in which the president-elect might differ from López Obrador is in Mexico's relations with other countries, especially with the United States. The 2026 revision of the USMCA is already on the agenda in all three North American countries, and the bilateral issues of migration, violence and drugs will be ongoing concerns in Mexico's relations with Washington."

EDITOR'S NOTE: More commentary on this topic appears in the Q&A of Tuesday's issue of the Latin America Advisor.

and 100 million people were registered to vote, the AP reported. Voters also cast ballots for state and local officials, members of Congress, thousands of mayors and governors in nine states. The ruling Morena party also won both chambers of Congress, the AP reported. The ruling party's candidate, Clara Brugada, was elected mayor of Mexico City.

NEWS BRIEFS

Mayor of Town of Cotija in Mexico's Michoacán State Killed

The mayor of the Mexican town of Cotija in Michoacán state, Yolanda Sánchez Figueroa, was shot and killed Monday along a public road, Agence France-Presse reported. The murder came just a day after Mexico elected its first female president, Claudia Sheinbaum, whose victory boosted hopes that Mexico will curtail gender-based violence. At least 23 political candidates were murdered in Mexico before Sunday's elections, CBS News reported. Authorities said operations had been launched to apprehend the mayor's assassins.

Conille Sworn in as Haiti's Interim Prime Minister

Development specialist Garry Conille was sworn in Monday as interim prime minister of Haiti and said the country's political groups are working together, Reuters reported. "We are going through an interesting moment for the Haitian people, a moment of political groups putting aside their differences for the interest of the nation," Conille said. Gangs have increasingly taken control of territory in Haiti, and the country is awaiting a police contingent to be deployed from Kenya to help restore order.

Canadian Border Agents Enter New Talks With Gov't as Strike Looms

The Canadian border agents' union entered fresh negotiations Monday with the government with the aim of avoiding a potential strike that may disrupt the passage of commercial trucks across the border as well as other services, The Wall Street Journal reported. The union, which has been without contract for over two years, has several demands, including higher pay, and will be in a legal strike position by the end of this week, according to the union.

Biden Announces New Cap on Asylum at Southern Border

U.S. President Joe Biden on Tuesday announced new restrictions on migrants' ability to request asylum at the country's border with Mexico, The Washington Post reported. The move, which administration officials said will block migrants' access to asylum in the United States when illegal border crossings remain above 2,500 per day on average, came five months ahead of the U.S. presidential election and amid criticism that Biden has done too little to stem illegal migration. The order was to go into effect immediately as the number of daily arrests for illegal border crossings is currently above 2,500 and has not been below that number since January 2021, the month Biden took office, the Associated Press reported. "We must face the simple truth: To protect America as a land that welcomes immigrants, we must first secure the border," Biden said in remarks at the White House, The Washington Post reported. "If the United States doesn't secure our border, there's no limit to the number of people who may try to come here," he added. Migrants who are not eligible for asylum protections under the new restrictions will be sent back to their home countries unless they convincingly express fear of persecution that would allow them an exemption under more stringent screening, according to administration officials. Biden's unilateral action followed the defeat last February of a bipartisan border security deal in Congress that most Republicans rejected at the urging of former President Donald Trump, who is to face Biden in the November election. Biden said he preferred to shore up the border via legislation rather than by executive action but added, "Republicans have left me no choice," the AP reported. Trump "told the Republicans ... that he didn't want to fix the issue, he wanted to use it to attack me," said Biden. "It was a cynical, extremely cynical, political move and a complete disservice to the American people," he added. Over social media, Trump said Biden had "totally surrendered our Southern Border," adding that the order was "all for show."

ECONOMIC NEWS

Mexican Finance Minister Seeks to Reassure Investors

Mexican Finance Minister Rogelio Ramírez de la O on Tuesday sought to reassure investors that the incoming government of President-elect Claudia Sheinbaum will remain committed to fiscal discipline, the Financial Times reported. In a hastily scheduled call that lasted two minutes, Ramírez de la O vowed to cut the government's budget deficit and also remain committed to orthodox economic policies. "Our project is based on financial discipline, abiding by [central bank] autonomy, adherence to the rule of law and facilitating national and foreign private investment," he said. Sheinbaum, who won a landslide victory in Sunday's election, said Ramírez de la O would stay on as finance minister in her administration. Sheinbaum's commanding election victory and the ruling Morena party's dominant showing in congressional and state elections led to a sell-off in Mexican stocks and in the country's currency. The benchmark IPC stock index plunged 6 percent on Monday but rebounded 3.3 percent on Tuesday.

Colombia Faces Nearly \$7 Billion Budget Shortfall

Colombia's government is facing a budget shortfall of approximately 27 trillion pesos (\$6.9 billion) this year amid a plunge in tax collection, Reuters reported. Tax revenues fell 40.9 percent to \$4.83 billion in April, bringing the budget shortfall to \$2.85 billion in the first four months of the year, the wire service reported. Finance Minister Ricardo Bonilla has said the government may need to make fiscal adjustments in this year's fourth quarter, but analysts have said changes may be needed sooner, the wire service reported. Otherwise, the country could miss fiscal targets and raise concerns among ratings agencies.

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and concessionaires in order to face such extreme events.”

A **José Goldemberg, former Brazilian environment minister:** “The main causes of the blackouts in São Paulo in my view are the following. The unusual severity of climate change was responsible for very heavy rains concentrated in a few hours. This seems to result from El Niño, which also led to the torrential rains in the State of Rio Grande do Sul and resulted in the worst flooding since 1941. More than 170 people died, and more than 500,000 had to be evacuated. The torrential rain in a city such as São Paulo, which is well arborized, led to many disruptions in the electricity grid. Enel was not prepared to face the numerous requests for restoration of the electricity supply in due time. In some cases, it took a week to restore the service. This has happened mainly because Enel has de-prioritized most of the maintenance services when it took over from Eletropaulo, which was a state-owned enterprise. I don't think the failures of Enel in restoring electricity services are due to lack of maintenance, but to a sudden demand which Enel was not able to cope with due to the policies it adopted after it took over from Eletropaulo. In the absence of heavy rains and other relatively minor climate events, Enel was able to offer

a reasonable service. What is striking, however, is the lack social responsibility of Enel to compensate for the losses suffered by the population, particularly small business, aside from some measures taken to help compensate very poor consumers.”

A **Paulo Valois Pires, partner at Schmidt, Valois, Miranda, Ferreira & Agel Advogados in Rio de Janeiro:** “The causes for this dramatic situation derive from a mix of factors: gaps in electricity regulation, a lack of investment in infrastructure and an absence of power from the agency. There is also an important issue regarding the electricity tariffs vis-à-vis the increasing demand for energy transmission lines and facilities. What is needed is an in-depth review of electricity regulations to require more investments from concessionaires with a fair increase in electricity tariffs to support such investments. I do not believe that environmental issues associated with El Niño have caused the electricity blackouts in São Paulo. This a problem that comes from the electricity regulations and the investments required to cope with an increasing power demand.”

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

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