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## FEATURED Q&amp;A

# Why Does Cuba's Electrical System Keep Collapsing?



Cuba's electrical grid is heavily dependent on fuel oil. Workers at the Antonio Guiteras power plant are pictured in 2021. // Photo: Matanzas Municipal Government via Facebook.

**Q** The latest collapse of Cuba's power grid, which happened Wednesday when Hurricane Rafael struck the country, came less than three weeks after another massive outage that left 10 million people without electricity. The grid's complete collapse last month was caused in part by failures at the Antonio Guiteras power plant, the country's largest, after months of rolling blackouts. President Miguel Díaz-Canel declared an "energy emergency" in response to the crisis, closing schools and instructing nonessential workers to stay home. What are the reasons behind the collapse of the power grid? How likely are Cuba's electricity problems to lead to social unrest? What role should other governments in the region play in helping Cuba through its energy crisis?

**A** Ricardo Zúñiga, founding partner at Dinámica Americas and senior advisor with the U.S. Institute of Peace: "The breakdown of Cuba's energy production and distribution system is an emergency, but it is neither an unexpected development nor can it be durably resolved under current political conditions. The national blackouts are symptomatic of the Cuban leadership's inability to adapt to a changing international and domestic environment or do more than improvise around its self-imposed roadblocks to progress. Chronic underinvestment in the energy grid is echoed in other parts of the economy and society—including in basic infrastructure and in the education and health systems at the core of Cuba's revolutionary identity. However, the Cuban government's repressive apparatus remains quite capable and learned from its failure to anticipate or quickly manage the July 2021 demonstrations that led to thousands of arrests. That is why Cuba's con-

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## TOP NEWS

## POWER SECTOR

## Hurricane Rafael Takes Down Cuba's Power Grid

Cuba's power grid collapsed again on Wednesday when Hurricane Rafael struck the country. Authorities said crews have started repairs but warned they could take days.

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## RENEWABLES

## Verano Energy Breaks Ground on Solar Plant

Renewable energy developer Verano Energy began construction last week on a 200-megawatt solar facility in Argentina's Mendoza province.

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## POWER SECTOR

## Mexico Energy Reform Enacted

A majority of Mexican states approved the country's sweeping energy reform. The overhaul increases the federal government's oversight of energy generation and distribution, a major legislative priority of President Claudia Sheinbaum's Morena party.

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Sheinbaum // File Photo: @Claudiashein on X.

## POWER SECTOR NEWS

## Mexican States Approve Sheinbaum's Energy Overhaul

Mexico's most substantial energy reform in more than a decade became law on Oct. 31, according to a filing in the government's official diary. Twenty-two of Mexico's 31 states approved the constitutional amendment after Congress passed it on Oct. 17, Reuters reported. The measure amends Mexico's constitution to broadly increase the role of state-owned enterprises in terms of national energy generation, transmission and oversight in two key ways. First, the constitutional reform

**The measure amends the constitution to broadly increase the role of state-owned enterprises.**

reclassifies Pemex, the state-owned oil and gas company, and CFE, the state's electrical utility, as "public companies." The change gives Mexico's federal government tighter control of the companies' activities and long-term planning. It also eliminates the companies' existing obligation to attempt to turn a profit, ideally incentivizing the construction of major energy projects in low-income and disadvantaged regions that might not be able to secure needed investments from profit-seeking private firms. Second, the energy reform enshrines in the nation's constitution CFE's right to generate 54 percent of the country's electricity supply. The measure does not eliminate the possibility of new private energy contracts, but it places a cap on their potential contribution to Mexico's energy supply in the long term at 46 percent. Shortly after her inauguration in early October, President Claudia Sheinbaum said her government will hold new energy auctions to private companies, pledging to focus on renewable energy, for which she hopes to triple the capacity

by 2030, Bloomberg News reported. Mexican regulators have not held any bidding rounds for new private energy projects since 2019, at the beginning of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's administration. "The state's public energy companies should not be monopolies," Sheinbaum told reporters on Oct. 16, Infobae reported. Lawmakers first proposed the constitutional reform in September during the final month of López Obrador's term. The former president had previously been thwarted multiple times in implementing nearly identical energy reform measures, Reuters reported. López Obrador opposed then-President Enrique Peña Nieto's 2013 reforms, which opened Mexico's energy sector to private investment for the first time since President Lázaro Cárdenas' nationalization in 1938.

## Hurricane Rafael Takes Down Cuba's Electricity Grid

Hurricane Rafael struck Cuba Wednesday, taking down the country's power grid, leaving virtually the entire country in the dark, Reuters reported. The grid collapsed Wednesday afternoon as the hurricane struck the Caribbean nation with winds of up to 115 miles an hour, causing damage to homes, knocking down telephone poles and ripping trees from the ground, the wire service reported. As of 7 a.m. Eastern Time on Thursday, the storm was centered about 180 miles west-northwest of Havana, with maximum sustained winds of 105 miles an hour, and moving northwest at 9 miles an hour, the U.S. National Hurricane Center said in an advisory. The hurricane was the latest in a string of blows for Cuba's electrical system. Two weeks ago, Cuba's grid collapsed several times, leaving many residents in the dark for days as government regulators struggled to resume service at the nation's fuel oil-powered electricity generation plants, Reuters reported. Cuba's Energy and Mines Ministry said late Wednesday that it had started repairs to the grid but warned that the process could take several days, especially in western Cuba, which was hit hardest by the storm.

## NEWS BRIEFS

## U.S. Justice Dep't Backs Argentina in YPF Case

The U.S. Justice Department on Wednesday petitioned a district court judge in New York not to enforce a \$16.1 billion judgment against YPF, Argentina's state-owned oil and gas company, the Financial Times reported. The Justice Department sent a letter on Wednesday night to U.S. District Judge Loretta Preska urging her to rule on behalf of Argentina's government, which is appealing Preska's September 2023 decision to force the Argentine state to give up its 51 percent stake in YPF.

## Turkish National Accused of Violating U.S. Sanctions on Venezuela's Oil Sector

U.S. authorities have arrested a Turkish national in Miami for allegedly conspiring to violate sanctions against Venezuela's oil industry, Bloomberg News reported Monday. Prosecutors allege that Taskin Torlak led a scheme to sell oil products from Venezuela and Iran on international markets by instructing associates to disguise oil transport vessels. Torlak allegedly received tens of millions of dollars from Venezuela's state-owned oil company, PDVSA, dating back to November 2020, Bloomberg News reported.

## DAS Solar Completes Five-MW Solar Project in Brazil

DAS Solar announced Monday that it has completed the construction of a five-megawatt solar project in Brazil. Built in collaboration with distributor MTR and installer TR Energia, DAS said in a statement that the project is part of its continued expansion in Brazil. The site also includes the company's N-type models, which are designed to withstand the South American country's diverse climate conditions and operate efficiently in both residential and commercial projects.

## RENEWABLES NEWS

## Mexican Gov't Releases Energy Spending Plan

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum on Wednesday unveiled a plan to allocate \$23.4 billion in state spending for energy generation and transmission—and attract \$9 billion in private investment for renewable energy projects—through 2030, Bloomberg News reported. \$12.3 billion in public funds will go to electricity generation, and \$11.1 billion will go to distribution infrastructure, according to the news service. “We are going to bring electricity to homes that do not have it today,” Energy Secretary Luz Elena González Escobar said at the president’s daily press conference on Wednesday, newspaper *El Economista* reported. Some analysts have expressed concerns regarding recent reforms and state-centric investment plans in Mexico, arguing that more liberal private sector governance structures in the energy sector are needed if Sheinbaum hopes to meet the target of sourcing 45 percent of the nation’s electricity supply from renewable sources by the end of her term in 2030, Bloomberg News reported in October. Other experts have received the changes with cautious optimism: “Achieving environmental goals in the energy sector implies an opportunity for both private initiative and public companies, where cooperation is emerging as an essential ally under new schemes for participation,” Ramón Fiestas, president of GWEC Latin America, told the Energy Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published Oct. 18.

## Verano Energy Breaks Ground on 200-MW Solar Plant

Renewable energy developer Verano Energy broke ground last week on a 200-megawatt solar facility in Argentina’s Mendoza province, PV Magazine reported. The project is the first

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tinuing socioeconomic breakdown is more likely to lead to continued mass migration, adding to the one million Cubans who have left the country since 2022, than it is to an uprising or a democratic transition. Mexico’s provision of 400,000 barrels of oil will temporarily ameliorate Cuba’s energy shortage. However, no country—neither Mexico, nor Venezuela, nor Russia—can indefinitely subsidize Cuba’s energy needs. Cuba’s leaders face the reality that any sustainable recovery requires giving their citizens and the private sector greater freedoms, even though it will erode the control they are accustomed to. The alternative is an accelerating socioeconomic decline and ever more dire conditions that leave Cuba in a permanent state of crisis affecting the entire region.”

**A** Peter Hakim, member of the Advisor board and president emeritus of the Inter-American Dialogue: “Should Washington have extended a helping hand to Cuba when its power grid collapsed and left the island’s entire population without electricity, without lights, without refrigeration and mostly without functioning telephones? Why didn’t the United States try to assist? One senior U.S. official explained that Cuba never asked for help. So why didn’t Cuba seek help from Washington? A Cuban official indicated that it was not made clear that the United States would provide the help. It’s a bit shocking to believe that Cuban-U.S. relations are so limited that neither of the two countries considered picking up a working phone to discuss what could be done to avoid a highly perilous situation for the Cuban population—which could readily repeat itself. No one could predict how long it would take to repair the damage, restore access to fresh water, prevent the rotting of a short supply of foodstuffs, assure the availability of milk for young children (already dangerously scarce) and keep schools and hospitals functioning. Regardless of the state of relations between the two nations, it would certainly

be a humane gesture for the United States to help out. It would not have been terribly expensive nor put the United States at any serious risk. And it might even have sparked a measure of gratitude and warmer feelings for the United States, despite Washington’s punishing sanctions and embargoes. But the United States is not Cuba’s central problem. The Cuban leadership itself is mostly responsible for the country’s devastated economy, the extreme poverty of the bulk of its citizens and the massive numbers of Cubans seeking to flee the island. Cuba can and should be doing a lot better. Over many years, Cuba has produced a significant number of first-rate economists, engineers and other professionals. They should all be listened to.”

**A** Paul Hare, professor at the Pardee School of Global Studies at Boston University and former British ambassador to Cuba: “The Cuban energy system has never been brought into the 21st century, despite years of advice and subsidized oil concessions from allies such as Russia and Venezuela. As usual, the government will explain by claiming it cannot get spare parts and maintenance because of U.S. sanctions. But the Cuban population knows that all government and military elites will have private generators they can turn on in blackouts. There have been plans in the past to develop new sectors of energy, such as biomass and nuclear power. But the first biomass projects with British and Chinese investors that opened in 2020 have not worked for more than two years. The nuclear plant which was promoted under the Soviet Union has long been mothballed and is a storage place for hazardous materials. One problem for the biomass projects is that Cuba is producing less and less sugar cane waste. China is best suited to provide the necessary know-how, insistence on efficiency and qualified management. But unlike in other countries in the Belt and Road investment framework,

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renewable energy project to be built under President Javier Milei's incentive regime for large investments, which offers reduced fiscal burdens and long-term contract guarantees for major energy and infrastructure projects. Verano Energy's project will contribute one-third of Mendoza province's target of reaching 600 megawatts in total solar capacity installed by the end of 2025. \$220 million will be invested in Verano's solar plant; construction is expected to last 18 months and commercial operations will begin in 2026, PV Magazine reported. Mendoza province is a relatively arid region of Argentina that receives little rainfall, making it an attractive geological prospect for solar energy development. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Oct. 18 issue of the daily Latin America Advisor.]

## Pan American Energy Eyes Production of Clean Jet Fuel

Pan American Energy is considering an investment that would allow it to produce sustainable aviation fuel at its refinery near Buenos Aires, Bloomberg News reported Monday, citing unnamed sources. The investment would involve an upgrade of Pan American's Campana oil refinery, which would allow it to produce low-carbon jet fuel, the unnamed sources told the news service.

### OIL & GAS NEWS

## Colombia Will Avoid Natural Gas Shortfall in 2025: Minister

Colombian Energy Minister Andrés Camacho on Wednesday told reporters that the country will not experience shortages of natural gas in 2025, Bloomberg News reported. Camacho disputed a report released Nov. 1 by Bolsa Mercantil de Colombia, Colombia's commodity exchange network, which projected that the

## ADVISOR Q&A

### What Will Trump's Return as U.S. President Mean for Latin America and the Caribbean?

**Q** **Former President Donald Trump defeated Vice President Kamala Harris in Tuesday's presidential election in the United States. The second person in U.S. history to be elected to nonconsecutive presidential terms, Trump is to return to the White House in January. Also in Tuesday's elections, Trump's Republican Party won control of the Senate for the first time in four years, though the House of Representatives remains too close to call. What does Trump's return mean for Latin America and the Caribbean and for U.S. relations with the region? What are the most significant policies, in areas including migration and trade, that Trump will push when he returns to office? What will the makeup of Congress mean for U.S. policy toward Latin America?**

**A** **John Feeley, former U.S. ambassador to Panama:**  
 "By now, Latin America and the rest of the world should have learned to take Donald Trump at his word. He rarely is deceptive, he is permanently transactional, and he usually telegraphs his punches. To that end, Trump 2.0 presages a new era of chaos and iconoclasm in the conduct of government-to-government relations. Big losers will include Mexico, which may see direct U.S. military incursions. Trump recently promised to apply 100 percent tariffs on our neighbor, regardless of the USMCA trade agreement. Likewise, other

trade agreements, to include CAFTA-DR and the bilateral accords with Colombia, Chile and Panama, will predictably come under an 'America First' review. The region can expect unpredictable tariffs and cross-sectoral quid-pro-quo transactional proposals, blending migration, organized crime and trade concessions. Central Americans in particular, along with the 'pet-eating' Haitian and Venezuelan migrants, will be subject to MAGA base-baiting rhetoric about polluting America's gene pool, while those countries struggle to accept massive deportations. El Salvador's Nayib Bukele and Argentina's Javier Milei will undoubtedly become the favored sons, likely garnering early prized invitations to the White House, perhaps with Elon Musk in tow. But in perhaps the cruelest twist, the biggest loser in the region will be the democratic Venezuelan opposition. Given Trump's predilection for cutting deals with adversarial strongmen like Kim Jong Un, it is highly likely that, despite Edmundo González's congratulatory tweet, Donald Trump will not reimpose oil sector sanctions on Maduro, but rather insist on some kind of performative exit controls from Venezuela, thus claiming he has solved the border crisis."

**EDITOR'S NOTE: More commentary on this topic appears in the [Q&A](#) of the Nov. 7 issue of the daily Latin America Advisor.**

country would experience a 5 percent shortfall in natural gas supply next year that would need to be met by secondary markets. The report also forecast that Colombia's natural gas shortage would reach more than 7 percent in 2026, with domestic natural gas production continuing to shrink. But Camacho argued Wednesday

that these claims are unfounded. "We have all the guarantees that in 2025 we won't have any difficulties regarding gas supply," he said, Bloomberg News reported. Natural gas accounts for 13 percent of Colombia's domestic electricity supply, and the country has been a net importer of gas since 2016, according to



## NEWS BRIEFS

## Venezuela's Maduro Congratulates Trump on Election Victory

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro on Wednesday congratulated former U.S. President Donald Trump on his victory in Tuesday's U.S. presidential election, Agence France-Presse reported. Maduro said he was optimistic about relations with the United States under Trump, who during his first administration instituted sweeping sanctions against Maduro's government and formally recognized opposition leader Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's president, AFP reported. "This is a new beginning that we trust will be a win-win," Maduro said on state television, the wire service reported.

## Brazil's Central Bank Hikes Benchmark Rate by Half Point to 11.25 Percent

Brazil's central bank on Wednesday raised its benchmark inflation rate by 50 basis points to 11.25 percent, Bloomberg News reported. Central bank board members unanimously backed the rate hike, saying that inflationary risk remains high as consumption rises and unemployment falls. Brazil's annual inflation rate is expected to be 4.7 percent for last month, which would be the highest in a year, according to a poll of 18 economists conducted by Reuters.

## Switzerland's Julius Baer Reportedly Eying Sale of Brazilian Operation

Switzerland-based private bank Julius Baer is working with Goldman Sachs to advise it on the potential sale of its operation in Brazil, Reuters reported Wednesday, citing three unnamed people familiar with the matter. The operation could be valued at between \$100 million and \$150 million, said one of the sources, who is considering a bid, the wire service reported.

data from the International Energy Agency. Colombia's natural gas reserves received a boost when state-run Ecopetrol and Brazil's Petrobras on Oct. 3 announced the discovery of six trillion cubic feet in total new recoverable offshore natural gas reserves, Reuters reported. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Oct. 25 issue of the Energy Advisor.]

## POLITICAL NEWS

## Trump Defeats Harris to Return to U.S. Presidency

Former U.S. President Donald Trump on Tuesday defeated Vice President Kamala Harris in the U.S. presidential election, becoming only the second person in the country's history to be elected to non-consecutive presidential terms. Trump, who was previously in office from 2017 to 2021, is to return to the White House after an unprecedented criminal conviction, two impeachments, being struck in the ear by a would-be assassin's bullet and making false claims about the 2020 election being stolen from him. During his campaign, Trump vowed to hold down inflation, crack down on irregular immigration and end conflicts abroad, The Washington Post reported. "We're going to fix everything about our country, and we made history for a reason tonight, and the reason is going to be just that," Trump said early Wednesday at his victory party in West Palm Beach, Fla., The Washington Post reported. "We overcame obstacles that nobody thought possible," he added. Harris conceded on Wednesday afternoon, but she is expected to speak today. World leaders, including in Latin America, offered congratulations to Trump. "Congratulations to President Donald Trump on his election victory and return to the presidency of the United States," Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva said in a post on social media site X on Wednesday. "Democracy is the voice of the people and must always be respected. The world needs dialogue and joint work to achieve greater peace, development and prosperity. I wish the new government luck

and success," Lula added. "Congratulations on your formidable electoral victory," Argentine President Javier Milei posted on X. "Now, Make America Great Again. You know that You can count on Argentina to carry out your task. Success and blessings," Milei added. In international markets, Mexico's peso this morning fell to its lowest level in more than two years, Reuters reported. Mexico's currency fell to as low as 20.81 per dollar before recovering slightly. At a campaign rally on Monday, Trump said he would impose tariffs of as much as 100 percent on Mexican goods if Mexico failed to stop irregular migration to the United States.

## ECONOMIC NEWS

## Colombia Reform Efforts Will Empower Local Gov't: Officials

Two officials of the administration of Colombian President Gustavo Petro on Tuesday defended a constitutional reform effort, saying that the changes will empower local governments without harming the country's macroeconomic stability. In an interview with Bloomberg News, Daniel Castellanos and Carlos Prada, economic advisors to Colombian Interior Minister Fernando Cristo, sought to calm investors who may fear that the reform, which would drastically increase central government transfers to regional governments, will enable unchecked spending. The measure would increase transfers to regional governments by more than 50 percent over the next 25 years relative to current levels, ultimately reaching 39.5 percent of the federal government's revenue by 2040. Castellanos and Prada told Bloomberg News that the overall fiscal impact of the reform will be "neutral" because city and provincial governments would take on a greater share of public spending. "We are proposing that the central government shrinks and the regions grow," said Prada, who helped craft the reform proposal. The spending allocation reform would be the "most significant constitutional change in three decades," Bloomberg News reported Tuesday, referencing Colombia's 1991 constitutional overhaul.

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Cuba has not been offered major financing. China is wary of offering massive loans to countries like Cuba and Venezuela, which cannot make debt payments. There is also a wider problem of Cuba's infrastructure. The one-party state where much economic activity is dominated by military-run conglomerates means there is no meritocracy established or accountability for management or engineering lapses. Loyalty to the Communist Party and the state is the main criteria for appointments. Protests by disgruntled Cubans are likely to be seen as futile as energy blackouts have been a part of Cuban life for decades."

**A** **Pavel Vidal, economics professor at Pontifical Xavierian University in Cali, Colombia and former monetary policy analyst at Cuba's central bank:** "The Cuban electrical system crisis is not an isolated event that can be explained solely by poor decisions in the electricity sector, dependency on fossil fuels, economic sanctions and logistical problems. This crisis is embedded within many other crises facing the Cuban economy, affecting agriculture, the sugar industry, public transportation, health care and education. Except for the hotel infrastructure, new investments and maintenance in other sectors have long failed to offset depreciation rates. The Cuban economy is in an advanced state of generalized decapitalization, which, along with massive emigration, has led to a significant contraction in the potential capacity to produce goods and services. In the case of the national electrical system, the negative ramifications are greater because it hampers the development of all other productive sectors and the ability to generate foreign currency income to finance needed investments. The repeated collapses of electricity-generating plants not only increase costs and social discontent but also reinforce the poverty trap in which the country finds itself, one from which it cannot escape without support from the international community. It is no longer just

a matter of encouraging foreign investment and securing international financing; rather, it is necessary to begin considering a national reconstruction and development plan with international assistance. However, such an effort could only be viable if the country restores its financial credibility, which would require deep reforms and a political will for change—something that is not yet on the horizon."

**A** **Roberto Veiga González, director of Cuba Posible:** "In Cuba, poverty is growing, especially among the elderly population. Corruption, violence and crime are increasing. The country lacks an economic model, finances, infrastructure and technology, an adequate energy system, basic foods and other basic needs and qualified labor. The population capable of working is emigrating en masse, and only poor and elderly people remain. The current emergency in the electrical system was expected. According to experts, resolving it would require some \$10 billion and approximately 10 years of execution; in addition, it would need an efficient economy, capable of ensuring its maintenance and development. In the midst of this agony, there have been some social protests, which could increase. However, two issues must be considered: The citizenry suffers from crushing exhaustion, and the state has outlined its capabilities to destroy at any price the protests that could endanger it. The Cuban government should be prepared to find a solution that involves Cuban society and accepts the cooperation and facilitation of Latin American political forces. The U.S. government should also relax its economic restrictions on Cuba, since any internal process of change would be extremely difficult without the benefits of a relaxed bilateral relationship. Given the extent of the social suffering, it would also be necessary to implement a humanitarian aid strategy, which is only possible through international cooperation, since any solution will require finances, effort and time."

## LATIN AMERICA ENERGY ADVISOR

is published weekly by the  
Inter-American Dialogue ISSN 2163-7962

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