

# [***As two women vie for Mexico's presidency, why are there questions about their ability to govern?***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BR8-J5T1-JC5B-G45D-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Associated Press

April 6, 2024 Saturday 5:06 AM GMT

Copyright 2024 Associated Press All Rights Reserved

**Section:** INTERNATIONAL NEWS

**Length:** 1189 words

**Byline:** SARA ESPAÑA, Associated Press

**Dateline:** MEXICO CITY

**Body**

MEXICO CITY — Are Mexicans ready for a woman president?

As two female candidates [*lead in Mexico’s presidential race*](https://apnews.com/article/mexico-election-claudia-sheinbaum-women-c70fcc9f136b4d5d2cb1cfe9264d706a), the question has appeared in polls, debates, media and conversations across Mexico. But it is also a sample of the sexism and “macho” culture that continues to permeate Mexico, according to political analysts.

The question of whether Mexicans are ready — or not — for a female president carries an implicit doubt of whether a woman or, in this case, whether the two female candidates are prepared to govern the country, said Julia Zulver, a researcher from the Latin American Centre at Oxford University and the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM).

“Questioning someone for their level of studies, for their experience, for their public policies, that is valid,” Zulver said. “But questioning two women who have studied, who have experience in ***politics***, for being women is where the questioning falls into sexism, into machismo.”

In June, more than 100 million Mexican voters will go to the polls in [*the largest elections in the country’s history*](https://apnews.com/article/mexico-elections-2024-what-to-know-d104184b02bf5bcf9e08f570a5ba37e2). In the presidential race, they will have to choose between three candidates, but two women have taken the lead: the ruling party’s Claudia Sheinbaum, 61, and the [*opposition candidate Xóchitl Gálvez*](https://apnews.com/article/mexico-politics-xochitl-galvez-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador-present-politics-30ed04316ff56de326754d13b8cef1dd), 61. One man, Jorge Álvarez Máynez, 38, a candidate with less political experience, lags behind in polls.

The three candidates will face off Sunday in the first presidential debate of the 2024 election cycle.

In all likelihood, Mexico — a country with soaring levels of violence against women — will be governed for the first time by a woman.

“It’s a question I can’t stand,” said Karolina Gilas, a social and political sciences professor at (UNAM). “(It) carries all this weight of discrediting, of doubting whether women are capable of exercising power.”

Gilas, an expert working with the Organization of American States, said the question should not even be a part of the electoral discourse, yet it has already permeated the candidates’ own campaigns.

Gálvez, a former senator and technology businesswoman, directly addressed the question. “Is Mexico ready to have a female President? More than ready, it is ready. What do you think?” she wrote on X, formerly Twitter, in July — before making her candidacy official for a coalition of parties.

At the same time, Mexican [*President Andrés Manuel López Obrador*](https://apnews.com/hub/andres-manuel-lopez-obrador) has defended Sheinbaum, the leading candidate in polls who is largely seen as a continuation of his populist government.

“She is more prepared than me, she speaks English,” he said in a mid-March interview to Canal Red about the scientist and former mayor of Mexico City. “She is very intelligent. Academically, she is more advanced than me; I barely finished my bachelor’s degree, she is a doctor. She is a woman with convictions, principles, honest, she has many merits”.

AP asked the campaign teams of both candidates about the strategies they used to deflect gender-related questions. Neither of the two campaigns responded.

“It is curious that both candidates are emphasizing that they are prepared. I believe that this comes from machismo, a misogyny embedded in Mexican society”, said Zulver.

The researcher sees the comments as a response to anticipated criticisms that “they know they are going to receive for the simple fact of being women in that position, in the presidency”. And she posed a counterpoint: “It is interesting to contrast this with the fact that there are many women in ***politics***.”

Since 2018, Mexico’s Congress has had a 50-50 gender split, in part due to gender quotas set for party candidates. Ten of 32 Mexico’s states are governed by women, and the country’s Supreme Court [*in 2023 elected its first female president*](https://apnews.com/article/politics-mexico-city-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador-caribbean-02927337b24fc039515fb08bb7af7008).

Mexican women occupy 44% of ministerial Cabinet positions, according to the Gender Equality Observatory of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. That makes the country — where women got the right to vote in 1953 — the fifth highest in women’s political leadership in the region and the Iberian Peninsula.

The question dates back decades, first raised in public opinion polls in 2004 when Marta Sahagún, wife of the then president Vicente Fox, wanted to run for office. Roy Campos, president of the polling company Consulta-Mitofsky, recalls that the issue was raised again in 2012, when there were only one or two female governors in the country. At the time, around two in five Mexicans rejected the idea of having a woman leader.

Still, analyst Giles said so far in Mexico “a woman has never lost an election because she is a woman”, but rather because voters, tired of the same political elites, are more influenced by political affiliations.

While Margarita Zavala, wife of former President Felipe Calderón, ran for president in 2018, the question has largely not come up until this election cycle, when people began to discuss who would succeed highly popular López Obrador.

In past decades, the mentality has significantly shifted — hand-in-hand with a rise in female political leadership. Now, around four in five polled are in favor of a woman leading the country, though Campos said that is also influenced by the likelihood of having either Sheinbaum or Gálvez leading. The other fifth who weren’t, said they would still vote for a woman if they matched their party affiliations.

Claudia Mercado, a 53-year-old bank employee living in Mexico City, said questioning the ability of a woman to govern comes from the sexism that has long plagued Mexican society and that she said she experiences “on a daily basis.”

“It’s like taking for granted that because they are born male they are ready for office,” she said. “I’m ready to have a woman president.”

Many other voters in the country's progressive capital echoed Mercado, but others wrinkled their noses at the idea in rural, more conservative swathes of Mexico.

In the factory and farming hub of Irapuato, in the central state of Guanajuato, where Gálvez launched her campaign in February, one voter said that they felt a woman couldn't handle Mexico's macho culture. Another referred to Gálvez as “a clown”.

Armando Fernández, a 61-year-old government employee said he didn't think a woman would be able to handle Mexico's intensifying drug wars like a man would.

“With the problem of violence in Guanajuato, if it was already out of hand with a man, imagine with a woman,” Fernández said. “Women are more peaceful, they are not violent or confrontational.”

Next to him, his wife sat with downcast eyes, eating an ice cream, saying nothing.

A 2023 Latinobarómetro report showed that 64.6% of Mexico's population disagrees or strongly disagrees with the statement that “men are better political leaders than women”.

Looking forward, pollster Campos said on June 2 “Mexico will send a powerful message to the world.”

Still, he said that by having two women candidates and having so many representatives in almost every corner of government, “that ceiling has already been broken.”

\_\_\_

AP writer Mark Stevenson contributed to this report from Irapuato, Mexico.

\_\_\_

Follow the AP’s coverage of global elections at: [*https://apnews.com/hub/global-elections/*](https://apnews.com/hub/global-elections/)

**Load-Date:** April 6, 2024

**End of Document**