

# News : Mexican oil, gas project protests to continue until rights law passes: academic

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- Conflicts mainly involve indigenous peoples
- Greater consultation needed for new projects

Oil and natural gas projects in Mexico will face yet more pushback, mainly from indigenous groups, until the government approves laws that could help facilitate development, according to a US academic.

“The proposal for a General Law for Prior Consultation took several years to be completed, and it has not yet been approved by Congress,” Adrian Duhalt, a postdoctoral fellow in Mexico Energy Studies at Rice University’s Baker Institute, told the LDC US-Mexico Natural Gas Forum in San Antonio late Wednesday.

“This law provides indigenous communities with normative autonomy, self-determination, respect for their territories, and above all, the right to free and informed consent to approve any project or executive order that could impact their territorial, cultural or environmental heritage,” he added. “The current administration should approve pending laws.”

The conflicts over oil and gas development are scattered across Mexico, but most intense in southern states with large indigenous populations as well as widespread poverty. He also blamed a lot of the anti-development sentiment on rhetoric by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

As shale gas has proliferated in the US, more and more gas been directed towards Mexico through LNG and an array of new pipelines.

Some 15% "of US LNG exports were shipped to Mexico from January through August," said Angelina LaRose, an economist with the US Energy Information Administration. "Mexico ranked second only to South Korea."

## **About 2,000 km of pipe under construction**

There are about 2,000 miles of new pipeline projects under construction in Mexico. Duhalt said there have been 355 conflicts involving indigenous peoples and development projects since November 2017, with many of those related directly to oil and gas projects.

"Changes in Mexico's energy sector failed to implement a regulatory framework that effectively incorporated social consultation processes in the formulation of energy and infrastructure projects," said Duhalt.

Although state-run Pemex and CFE remain at the center of the energy policy agenda, some governmental reforms in 2013 allowed private companies to play a secondary role in projects. Duhalt said there is a lot of mistrust between private companies and indigenous peoples.

"Empirical evidence suggests that the influence of local actors is greater since the energy reforms in 2013," he said. "The growing number of energy projects facing local opposition is a reminder of it. Under the administration of López Obrador and his underlining rhetoric on empowering the people, the influence of local stakeholders is anticipated to be greater, raising questions with regards to the prospects of energy and infrastructure projects, existing and new."

However, Duhalt stressed impoverished, indigenous peoples stand to benefit the most from energy development.

"With Mexico experiencing a political transition and a shift in policy approach, the local dimension of the energy industry becomes more relevant than ever for all stakeholders," he said. "Energy activities are central to tackling regional social and economic imbalances and shoring up local development."