

# The resistance of indigenous communities to mining projects in the state of Oaxaca

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Photo by: Jonathan Treat

## Abstract

In the state of Oaxaca, Mexico, indigenous communities are resisting mining and exploitation projects that are destroying and polluting their environment. These communities are approaching the matter through the use of political ecology and the state's regulations called 'usos y costumbres'. Some communities have successfully stopped the exploitation activities but only temporarily. This research project analyzes how these communities are defending their culture and territory and their different forms of resistance. Furthermore, the research looks into how these communities protect their ecosystems, which represent their source of food and water, in order to understand their everyday struggles. Through field research and direct interviews with Zapotec communities in rural Oaxaca, this research seeks to better understand how these actors are devising innovative forms of resistance and how they articulate their struggles around claims for local autonomy, socio-environmental justice and cultural integrity. Academic analyses and up to date news from other media sources and the Forum of communities affected by mining activities (REMA) will be used.



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## Introduction

There are hundreds of conflicts, just in Latin America, which are caused by mining activities. In many of the cases, these conflicts arise between the state, mining multinational corporations and indigenous communities. The latter are organising and protesting to defend their territory and to protect of their environment and their way of life. The following research is dedicated to better understand the reasons behind such resistance and the communities' relationship with the environment. The research includes thorough investigation of academic articles, mass media and newsletters on mining activities and social movements from Oaxaca. Interviews, recorded in situ, are also used to understand the views of some of the activists and their allies. The research serves to learn the situation of the people living in Oaxaca that need their environment to be protected to be able to cultivate it and live well.

## Methods

The data and sources for this research were carefully selected throughout numerous articles and news from the Forum of communities affected by mining activities (REMA). Communities from all around Latin America post in this forum but only those relating to the mining activities in the state of Oaxaca were selected. Thanks to Marie-Josée Massicotte, I was able to acquire a first-hand view of how the people in Oaxaca live. This was done through the use of interviews recorded there in Spanish. The information and findings were extremely important to understand the system of governance "usos y costumbre" that these communities are using, and how they go about protecting their environment.

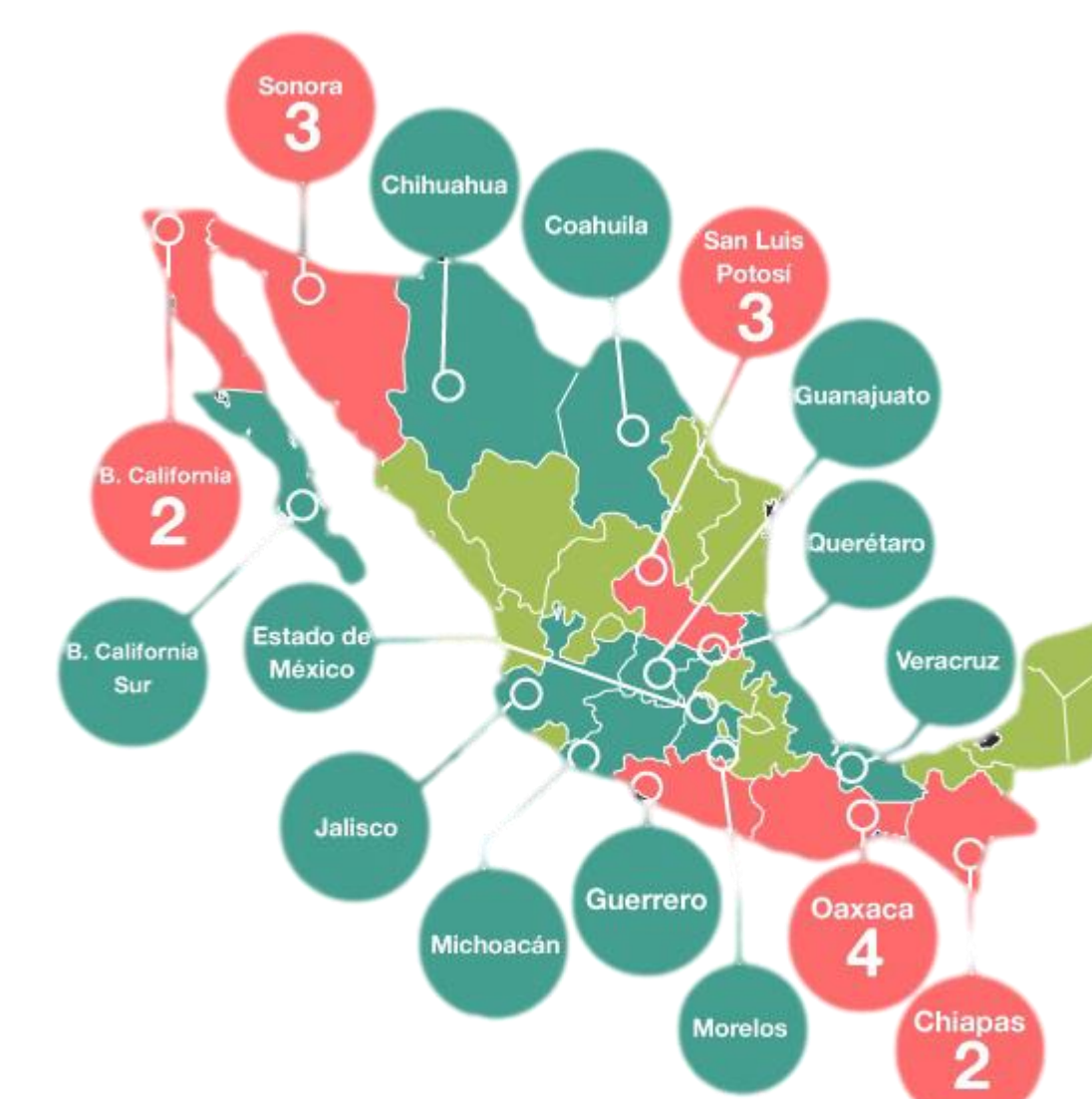


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## Discussion

Trade agreements between states, such as NAFTA, allow multinational companies from Canada and other countries around the world to exploit the land and resources in Mexico. These companies benefit from cheap labour and minimal mining regulations. The indigenous communities use the 'usos y costumbres' regulations as a means of self-governance but the Mexican government is permitting these companies to explore and exploit concessions on their territories, thus destroying their environment and depleting their resources. Social movements have arisen in the state of Oaxaca to stop the mining which is causing community divisions and conflicts, as well as the loss of arable land and aquifers. One example is the loss of land and water used to cultivate corn due to the imposition of these multinationals (Colectivo Oaxaqueño). These communities unite to protest in the state's capital by creating blockades on main streets. These protests have helped to stop the mining in some areas but exploitation and conflicts continue in other areas and across the America.

## Conclusion

In conclusion one can understand how these communities, much like most communities worldwide, need their environment for access to fresh water and land to cultivate crops. In my opinion these communities deserve the right to protest and defend their environment because without it their cultures and people will perish. The multinationals should come to an agreement with these communities and the Mexican government to find a way to exploit some of the land in certain areas whilst finding ways to protect the environment.

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