

Shadows of Strife: The role of Environmental Law in Safeguarding People and the Environment in Times of Conflict

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ABSTRACT

On the role of law for environmental justice. Comparing renewable energy conflicts in Mexico's Yucatán and Spain's Aragón regions

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The role of environmental legislation in territorial defense and environmental justice movements remains contentious, with critical scholars highlighting law's potential as a double-edged sword for environmental defenders. This study explores this apparent dichotomy through a comparative analysis of the impact of environmental laws on industrial-scale renewable energy conflicts in Mexico's Yucatán and Spain's Aragón regions. Drawing on extensive fieldwork and interviews with local environmental defenders and grassroots organizations, our research reveals how legal frameworks shape resistance to large-scale wind and solar park development in these contrasting territories. Despite significant differences in their natural landscapes and socio-political contexts, both regions face similar institutional pressure for renewable energy expansion and experience strong grassroots opposition. However, the pace and pattern of industrial deployment vary markedly between the two areas. Through analyzing these differences and commonalities, we identify critical factors that determine how environmental laws either facilitate or impede sustainability transitions and environmental justice. Our findings contribute to broader debates about the paradoxical nature of environmental legislation and its complex relationship with grassroots environmental movements..