

NEW FROM THE INSTITUTE FOR POLICY STUDIES

January 17, 2023

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New Institute for Policy Studies Report Exposes Stark Choice in New Mexico between Just Transition and False Solutions

The report features insights from New Mexican researchers and community leaders on how community-led energy solutions would benefit the state.

New Mexico – On January 17, the Institute for Policy Studies released the results of its groundbreaking new report, “[New Mexico at a Crossroads: False Solutions or Just Transition?](#)”

The report focuses on the future of renewable energy in New Mexico and how the state could lead on a just transition, and even offers a blueprint for other regions in the country. It also highlights the cost of fossil fuel use for New Mexicans, particularly low-wealth and Indigenous communities.

This [report](#) draws upon publicly available information as well as interviews with community organizers and researchers in New Mexico and elsewhere to make the case for centering community-led solutions to the energy crisis in New Mexico.

Key findings:

New Mexico is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, and has long been used by government and industry as a sacrifice zone for dirty energy. In particular:

- New Mexico has experienced the two largest wildfires in its history over the past year.
- The average number of days in a year with **temperatures over 90°F** in New Mexico is currently 20. This number is expected to double by 2050.
- **New Mexico is restricted by a “resource curse.”** The state is over-dependent on the oil and gas industry, it is the second highest state for oil and gas production. Oil and gas is the third largest industry in the state by output, contributing about 17 percent to the state’s public revenues. However, New Mexico is also the third poorest state in the country, and the industry’s share of jobs in the state is only about two percent.

- **Oil and gas and uranium mining (for military as well as nuclear energy use) have wreaked havoc on the state's ecology**, with a disproportionate impact on Indigenous peoples.
 - The oil and gas industry is the largest contributor to the state's greenhouse gas emissions, and pollutes the water in an already water-scarce state with toxic and radioactive chemicals.
 - The uranium mining industry exposed its workers to hazardous levels of radioactivity without their knowledge. It was also responsible for a serious mine tailings dam disaster in 1979, and even today, has left a toxic legacy of 500 severely contaminated abandoned mines.
- **The oil and gas industry perpetuates its stranglehold on state policy through large campaign contributions to New Mexico politicians.**
- **Monopoly investor-owned electric utilities are also an obstacle to a just energy transition.** They often charge high rates that impose a burden on low-wealth communities, and they exert an undue amount of political influence at the state level, including in New Mexico.
- **False solutions such as carbon capture and hydrogen** have been proposed in state legislation in New Mexico over the last few years, and a nuclear waste storage facility has been proposed in the state as well. These represent a corporate-backed, top-down model of addressing climate change.

“Oil and gas and other harmful extractive industries claim that we have no choice but to depend on them for economic benefits and jobs,” said **Basav Sen, Climate Policy Director at IPS and a co-author of the report**. “But, as the reality in New Mexico shows, they poison vulnerable communities, threaten the future of humanity, create relatively few jobs, and buy off politicians to preserve this status quo. Even the solutions they propose, such as carbon capture, will allow them to keep profiting from pollution. Elected officials in New Mexico need to decide: will they choose to keep propping up these harmful industries, or follow the leadership of frontline communities to take the state in a different direction, towards a healthy and just future for all?”

Recommendations from the [study](#), and from insights of organizers on the ground in New Mexico:

- Follow the leadership of communities in New Mexico who have been treated as sacrificial for a long time.
- Address climate change as a complex ecological and social crisis, instead of reducing it to solely a problem of carbon emissions.
- Phase out unjust, polluting industries such as fossil fuels and nuclear energy.
- Repair the historical harm that oil, gas, and nuclear energy have caused on BIPOC and low-wealth communities.

- Incorporate principles of a Just Transition and Energy Democracy into climate change policy.
- Expand real community ownership of renewable energy.
- Explore the possibility of public ownership of the electric grid, instead of relying on self-serving for-profit Investor Owned Utilities.

“Frontline and Indigenous communities in the state of New Mexico have been at the forefront of Environmental and Climate Justice for decades,” said **Ennedith Lopez, 2021-2022 New Mexico Fellow at IPS and a co-author of the report**. “Many are well-versed on the disproportionate impact the climate crisis has imposed on our already marginalized communities. It is critical that lawmakers begin to take into account the lived expertise these communities have to offer when it comes to establishing effective and comprehensive climate policy.

“A just transition is vital, as the current extractive economy does not serve the interest of protecting our futures and environment,” **Lopez** continued. “False solutions will not be the saving grace from the climate crisis, we must engage frontline and Indigenous communities in policy decisions that will determine our chance of a viable future.”

The report examines frameworks for addressing the climate crisis with justice and equity, centering communities who are most impacted. The report highlights visions for a just transition as articulated by the Just Transition Alliance, Climate Justice Alliance, and Indigenous Environmental Network, and outlines principles and case studies of real solutions to the climate crisis, rooted in the concept of energy democracy. It also highlights Indigenous and frontlines-led efforts towards a just transition in New Mexico, through insights gathered from interviews with grassroots organizers at the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP), the Semilla Project, and Pueblo Action Alliance (PAA).

[Read the full report.](#)

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About the Institute for Policy Studies

For nearly six decades, the [Institute for Policy Studies](#) has provided critical research support for major social movements and progressive leaders inside and outside government and on the ground around the United States and the world. As the United States' oldest progressive multi-issue think tank, IPS turns bold ideas into action through public scholarship and mentorship of the next generation of progressive scholars and activists.