

<https://doi.org/10.31108/7.2025.12>

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PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF CLIMATE CHANGE AS A DRIVER OF CHANGE IN THE EUROPEAN ENERGY SECTOR

Abstract. This paper explores how public perception and climate activism influence the pace and coherence of energy and environmental legislation in the European Union. It argues that increasing public pressure, driven by the visible impacts of climate change, has the potential to accelerate the EU's traditionally slow and complex legislative process toward achieving its decarbonization goals. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, the study assesses current progress and identifies key drivers of the green transition.

Keywords: European Union, Climate change, Public perception, Energy transition, Environmental policy, Decarbonization

Environmental and energy legislation in the European Union is a good example of the complexity inherent in its bureaucratic system. The Union strives to balance the diverse energy needs and environmental goals of its 27 member states, each with its own national interests, languages, and legal systems. The EU's Green Deal, for instance, aims to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, but achieving this goal requires a coordinated effort across multiple levels of governance. The decision-making process in the EU is highly complex and involves a multitude of institutions such as the European Commission, European Parliament, and European Council, each playing distinct roles in proposing, debating, and implementing legislation. This bureaucratic complexity often results in lengthy negotiations and compromises among member states before new legislation can be passed.

Unfortunately, the ever more pressing issue of climate change waits for no one and does not care for geopolitics, the economy, national interests, or political processes. The impacts of a warmer world are becoming more apparent with each passing year. Europe is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and is warming faster than any other continent, at nearly twice the global average rate.

The effects of climate change have not gone unnoticed by European citizens, who demand stronger and faster action against major greenhouse gas emitters in general and the fossil fuel industry in particular. Environmental protests across the continent have become more numerous in recent years, as the number of climate change fueled natural disasters has increased. The voices calling for the decarbonization of the energy sector have become louder and more numerous and can no longer be ignored by the governing bodies of the European Union. But is this enough to kick the EU’s slow bureaucratic machine into high gear?

The aim of this paper is to examine how public perception of climate change and its effects can help drive faster and more coherent change in the European energy sector by motivating EU leaders to strive harder to achieve the desired goals of decarbonization and greenhouse gas reduction. The paper uses a mix of qualitative and quantitative analysis to assess the current progress of the green transition and identify its future drivers.