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Research Project

The Political Economy of Coal Policy: Comparative Analyses of Stakeholder Strategies and Resource Industries' Embeddedness in the International Economy

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Project title The Political Economy of Coal Policy: Comparative Analyses of Stakeholder Strategies and Resource Industries' Embeddedness in the International Economy

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Organisation / Research unit

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Department

Project Website <https://www.coalstake.org/>

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Discontinuation policies such as phase-out of coal must be considered for low-carbon transitions. Yet a phase-out policy as a way to destabilize incumbent socio-technical regimes has drawn limited attention, unlike “phase-in” of clean technologies. Coal is still a major energy supply and largest source of CO₂ emissions in many countries. We conduct a comparative case study to investigate why some jurisdictions covered more ground in coal phase-out while others failed to bring it even on the political agenda. Since phase-out policies are especially prone to political contestations, we focus on actors influencing national energy policies, their interests and agency to explain the different trajectories across cases with respect to coal phase-out.

This project focuses on in-depth analyses of 4 cases; Alberta (Canada), Australia, Germany and Japan. They are all large CO₂ emitters, but their coal phase-out trajectories are diverse. Their trajectories display counter-evident patterns to theory-driven expectations in political economy and transition research, given their coal production and trade profile. To explain this gap, we adapt an interdisciplinary approach in analyzing the evolution of discourses, actors' resource endowments and their practices. We employ mixed methods consisting of surveys, document analysis and semi-structured interviews, followed both by qualitative and quantitative analyses. A comparative analysis contributes to theory-building in enactment of phase-out policies and the role of agency in destabilization of socio-technical regimes. The project will yield practically relevant insights for transition forerunners and policymakers in developing strategies for disrupting path-dependency of unsustainable technologies hindering low-carbon transitions.

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