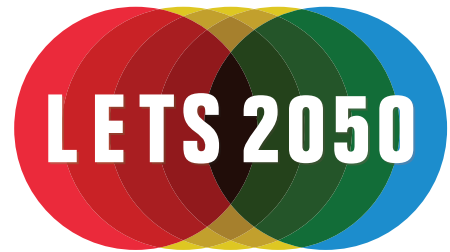


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Abstract

The missing link: bringing institutions and politics into energy future studies

Energy future studies can be a useful tool for learning about how to induce and manage technical, economic and policy change related to energy supply and use. The private sector has successfully deployed them for strategic planning, examining key parameters such as markets, competition and consumer trends. However in public policy, most energy future studies remain disconnected from policy making. One reason is that they often ignore the key political and institutional factors that underpin much of the anticipated, wished-for or otherwise explored energy systems developments. Still, we know that institutions and politics are critical enablers or constraints to technical and policy change. This paper examines how analytical insights into political and institutional dynamics can enhance energy future studies. It develops an approach that combines systems-technical change scenarios with political and institutional analysis. Using the example of a backcasting study dealing with the long term low-carbon transformation of a national energy system, it applies two levels of institutional and political analysis; at the level of international regimes and at the level of sectoral policy, and examines how future systems changes and policy paths are conditioned by institutional change processes. It finds that the systematic application of these variables significantly enhances and renders more useful backcasting studies of energy futures.

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