The political economy of climate policy: a systematic map of the literature

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# Summary of evidence gap and research question

The implementation and ambition of climate policy depends on a broad array of social, economic and political factors, collectively known as the ‘political economy’. But despite increasing attention on these issues, and clear acknowledgements of their importance (Carbon Pricing Leadership Coalition 2017, Victor 2009), there have been few attempts at consolidation (Paterson and P‐Laberge 2018, O’Hara 2009, Vogt-Schilb and Hallegatte 2017). Synthesis is hindered by deep disciplinary and ontological divides, a diversity in methods and epistemologies, and a lack of clear boundaries in the scope of relevant drivers and conditions. Above all, there have been no systematic attempts to review the political economy of climate policy.

This systematic map will address the following question: *what topics, theories and methods characterise the literature on the political economy of climate policy?* Based on the authors’ understanding of this field, we believe there is sufficient literature to carry out a broad survey. Specifically, we will aim to identify empirical and theoretical work at a variety of analytical scales (e.g. national, urban, business, household), and common or complementary themes that reach across disciplinary divides. The systematic map will hence provide an entry point to consolidation and more focused systematic reviews; it may also stimulate collaboration towards stronger definitions, interdisciplinary understanding, and a consolidated research agenda for the field.

# Summary of proposed methods

We will engage stakeholders and study review articles to establish key thematic areas of political economy research, each with associated lists of keywords. 4 initial themes have been identified: interests, institutions, ideas – and literature that self-identifies as political economy research. Articles that are framed under these themes and apply them in the context of climate policy (captured by a broad set of relevant keywords) are included in the systematic map. Our literature search strategy is summarised in Table 1. We have access to the following databases: Web of Science, Scopus and EBSCOHost. We will also search Google Scholar, on a more limited basis (e.g. the first 10 pages). In addition, we plan to issue a call for evidence (e.g. via our networks and on twitter), in particular to obtain the book chapters which are prevalent in this field.

Studies on non-energy sector policies (e.g. land use), climate adaptation, and international climate policy (e.g. UNFCCC processes) will be excluded – the latter because it will be covered by a complementary systematic map. Studies will not be critically appraised, but rather classified by topic, method, location (if case-study based) and whether or not they include theoretical content. We will use computational methods to extract topics and locations; in combination with scientometric methods, these will also allow us to identify epistemic communities, research clusters and gaps. The review will follow the ROSES Systematic Map protocol.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Political economy themes** | **Keywords** | AND | **Climate policy themes** | **Keywords** |
| **Generic**  *What literature self-identifies as ‘political economy’ analysis?* | (“Political econom\*”) | **Generic** | ("decarboni\*ation" OR low carbon OR (( "energy" OR "carbon" OR "CO2" OR "GHG" OR "greenhouse gas" OR "climat\*" OR "emissions") NEAR/3 mitigation) OR (( "energy" OR "carbon" OR "CO2" OR "GHG" OR "greenhouse gas") NEAR/3 ("reduc\*" OR "polic\*" OR "governance"))) |
| **Interests**  *Which political constituencies influence climate policy and how?* | ("Coalitions" OR "corporations" OR "political part\*" OR "vested interest\*" OR "constituencies" OR "voters" OR "Lobbying" OR "bargaining" OR "voting" OR "rent-seeking" OR "political conflict" OR "political capture" OR "corporate power" OR “acceptability” OR "litigation") | **Fossil fuels** | ((coal OR oil OR gas OR “fossil fuel”) AND “climat\*”) |
| **Institutions**  *How do institutions, their rules and organisational forms, shape climate policy?* | (“institution\*”) | **Carbon pricing** | ((“carbon” OR “CO2” OR “GHG”) NEAR/3 (“tax” OR “market” OR “price”)) |
| **Ideas**  *What discourses, cultural norms and ideologies influence the adoption of climate policy?* | ("Discourse\*" OR "norms" OR "ideolog\*" OR "legitimac\*" OR "Neoliberalism" OR "governmentality" OR "liberalism" OR "populism") | **Energy transitions & renewables** | (("energy" NEAR/3 ("transition\*" OR "solar" OR "wind" OR "renewable")) OR "solar PV" OR "wind power") |

Table 1: Political economy themes and keywords. Rows are combined with an ‘OR’ operator.

**Agenda**

1. Determine research scope

- Current approach and query

- Peter Hall & comparative political economy

- Absent a few key issues: what burdens on interests? Governance as well as institutions?

- Potential narrower focus: fossil fuel extraction

2. Timeline

- Search query development (October)

- Scoping study (November)

- Issue call for evidence (November)

- Article screening (Dec-Jan)

**Question**: *What definitions, topics and methods characterise ‘political economy’ approaches to energy research?*

**Objectives:**

* Identify energy research that explicitly refers to ‘political economy’ approaches
* From each document, extract the study topics, methods used, scientometric information, and statements that define or summarise the concept ‘political economy’
* Synthesise definitional statements, grouping by theme, theoretical emphasis and/or ontological assumptions (thematic synthesis)
* Synthesise topics, methods and bibliometric information, focusing on epistemic communities and literature roots (key historical contributions)
* Determine intersections and differences between definitions, communities and research approaches

**Search query:** TS = “political econom\*” AND “energy” **[694 results in WoS]**

**Purpose**: To inform academic stakeholders on what researchers actually mean by ‘political economy’. To identify areas of cross-disciplinary consensus.

**Variation:** “Climate” instead of “energy”. Energy is preferable due to the more mature state of social science research in this field. I believe a broader query that captures “environment” and “sustainability” wouldn’t be possible with this project design, as the data extraction and synthesis will already take time.

**Question:** *What evidence is there that fossil fuel interests influence climate policy?*

**Objectives:**

* Identify literature on the role of fossil fuel interests in climate policy
* Classify documents by topic, method, epistemic community
* Apply dictionary methods on full-texts to extract mentions of fossil fuel companies (e.g. Shell, Exxon, Aramco, …)
* Produce a systematic map database, identify literature clusters and gaps

**Search query**: TS = (“vested interests” OR “lobbying” OR …) AND “climat\*” (+synonyms)

**Purpose**: To inform academic/non-academic stakeholders on available evidence on fossil fuel interests. To identify systematically reviewable research projects. To identify research priorities.

*- What is the ‘political economy of climate policy’ and how does it constrain effective national emissions mitigation?*

Difficult to set boundaries & synthesise

More focused question?

- *What are ‘vested interests’ and how do they constrain effective emissions mitigation?*

Hall… “real, material interests of principal actors, whether conceived as individuals or groups”

- *What is the ‘political economy’ of fossil fuel extraction and how does it constrain effective climate change mitigation?*

**‘class’ ‘capitalist’ ‘worker’**

**Exclusions**

- Studies on international climate policy and associated procedures (UNFCCC, COP negotiations etc.)

- Studies on climate adaptation, disaster recovery and impacts (i.e. contra climate mitigation)

- Studies on non-energy sector mitigation (land use, land-use change and forestry)

- Studies captured by the Web of Science keywords only

**Review papers**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Paper | Domain | Core political economy concepts |
| Roberts, C. et al. The politics of accelerating low-carbon transitions: Towards a new research agenda. Energy Res. Soc. Sci. 44, 304–311 (2018). | Energy transitions | * Coalitions: when actors combine their political agency to initiate or frustrate reform (*interests*) * Feedbacks/stability: policy as an ongoing process, with opportunities to strengthen and lock-in positive or negative feedbacks (*processes*) * Context dependence: technological capabilities, natural resource endowments, industrial specialisations, political norms, institutions, and the cultural legitimacy of different technologies – all potentially shaping the policy space (*ideas and institutions)* |
| O’Hara, P. A. Political economy of climate change, ecological destruction and uneven development. Ecol. Econ. 69, 223–234 (2009). |  | * “[The] …critical concepts of institutions, social costs, production treadmill, core–periphery relations, and cumulative entropic degradation are those of modern political economy” * Historical context is needed to understand evolutionary and path-dependent processes * Core dynamics of capitalism matter (profit, domination, MCM) * Contradiction (method) * Importance of key figures: Marx, Veblen, Schumpeter, Georgescu-Roegen, Kapp, Polanyi * Uneven development (core-periphery) |
| Vogt-Schilb, A. & Hallegatte, S. Climate policies and nationally determined contributions: reconciling the needed ambition with the political economy. Wiley Interdiscip. Rev. Energy Environ. e256, (2017). |  | * Starts on compensating losing interests who have veto power * Distributional impacts of climate policies, focus on households/income class (expenditure increases) and industries (stranded assets, employment) * Revenue recycling to compensate losers, fund public goods * Other policies to ensure predictability and flexibility |
| Phelan L, Henderson-Sellers A and Taplin R 2013 The Political Economy of Addressing the Climate Crisis in the Earth System: Undermining Perverse Resilience New Polit. Econ. 18 198–226 | Climate change (broad) | * Interests diverge in their **norms** (some people want to mitigate, others don’t) and access/articulation of **power**. * This leads to **political contestation** and system **dynamics** (stability/hegemony). * Hegemony in a neo-Gamscian sense, where a ‘historic bloc’ exercises economic, political and bureaucratic dominance, with consensual legitimacy from society. |
| Sovacool B K 2017 Reviewing, Reforming, and Rethinking Global Energy Subsidies: Towards a Political Economy Research Agenda Ecol. Econ. 135 150–63 | Energy subsidies | * Reform creates **winners and losers**. In particular, the **adverse effects** of policies will influence their political challenges. |
| Gough, I. Welfare states and environmental states: a comparative analysis. Env. Polit. 25, 24–47 (2016). | Environment and climate policy |  |
| Lockwood, M., Kuzemko, C., Mitchell, C. & Hoggett, R. Historical institutionalism and the politics of sustainable energy transitions : A research agenda. (2016). doi:10.1177/0263774X16660561 |  |  |
| Helm, D. Government failure, rent-seeking, and capture: The design of climate change policy. Oxford Rev. Econ. Policy 26, 182–196 (2010). |  |  |
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The methods summary should consider or address: Where is the appropriate evidence and knowledge located (e.g. peer-reviewed, grey literature)? How will you select the articles or documents that will be included in your review? If possible, please list keywords you will use in your search, and a tentative table or list of inclusion and exclusion criteria. How will you analyse, assess, or synthesize your selected articles?

# Expected outcomes

How many articles do you anticipate including in your review? What outcomes do you anticipate from the review?