

Examining the Discursive Hegemony of British Energy Transition Narratives

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Abstract : Politicians' outlooks on the nature of energy futures and an 'Energy Transition' have evolved considerably alongside a steady movement towards renewable energies, buttressed by lower technology costs, rising environmental concerns, and favourable national policy decisions. This paper seeks to examine the degree to which an energy transition has become an incontrovertible 'status quo' in parliament, and whether politicians share similar understandings of energy futures or narrate different stories under the same label. Parliamentarians construct different understandings of the same reality, in the form of co-existing and competing discourses, shaping and restricting how policy problems and solutions are understood and tackled. Approaching energy policymaking from a parliamentary discourse perspective draws directly from actors' concrete statements, offering an alternative to policy literature debates revolving around inductive policy theories. This paper uses computer-assisted discourse analysis to describe fundamental discursive changes in British parliamentary debates around energy futures. By applying correspondence cluster analyses to Hansard transcripts from 1986 to 2010, we empirically measure the policy positions of Labour and Conservative politicians' parliamentary speeches during legislatively salient moments preceding significant energy transition-related policy decisions. Results show the concept of a technology-based, market-driven transition towards fossil-free and nuclear-free renewables integration converged across Labour and the Conservatives within three decades. Specific storylines underwent significant change, particularly in relation to international outlooks, environmental framings, treatments of risk, and increases in rhetoric. This study contributes to a better understanding of the role politics plays in the energy transition, highlighting how politicians' values and beliefs inevitably determine and delimit creative policymaking.

Keywords : quantitative discourse analysis, energy transition, renewable energy, British parliament, public policy

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