

The differing drivers of EU Electricity Policy

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Impact paragraph

This subchapter reflects on the potential influence that the research presented in this thesis may have within the academic sphere and for society at large. The thesis aims to find drivers of the electricity policy in the European Union, by looking specifically at adopted legislation for roughly the last three decades and comparing it with possible shaping factors. The main results show that the nature of policy drivers vary, depending on the inner purpose of legislation: environment, affordability, security of supply or internal market. In the conclusions, I discuss the drivers that policymakers prove to be most sensitive to when adopting legislation.

Public opinion, electricity prices and household energy expenses, taken together, influence the political response for EU electricity policy aimed at affordability. Likewise, public opinion, electricity interruptions for households and coal / natural gas imports dependency sway the policy direction for legislation aimed at security of energy supply. Public opinion, electricity trade inside the Union and coupling of energy markets within member states, collectively, have an influence on policy adoption within the EU internal market. Finally, specific policy-framing and a more forceful mandate given to the Commission seem to impact new legislation adoption with respect to regulation aimed at environmental protection.

The main contribution made by this thesis is to add a quantitative angle of research to the EU electricity policy debate on the various influencing factors. The study uses new analytical methods, also known as aggregated factors analysis; it provides a new empirical database, crunching down decades of legislative data; and it proposes a new lens on policy analysis, which further refines existing analytical tools. It uses existing qualitative overviews from the literature on potential factors to test them numerically. Additionally, it reveals gaps in our understanding of energy legislation adoption while also challenging existing explanations for the involved area for study.

From an academic standpoint, two specific groups may consider the research results important in particular: policymakers and researchers or scholars. For policymakers, the results of this study will help diagnose better the challenges of EU electricity regulation by, in effect, offering quantitative support for a balanced energy policy. The study, through its historical analysis of legislation, also provides insights into the pioneering policy objectives adopted by the institutions. For researchers at universities, the gaps and unresolved issues presented in this study, for example regarding the lack of measurable indicators in certain fields, and the questions raised by the findings, for instance the year that disconnected decisively economy and environmental legislation, may provide concrete opportunities for future research.

This study's findings are made available to the projected target groups - such as policymakers, advocacy professionals and researchers - through their presentation at large, joint energy conferences where company representatives, scholars and policymakers meet to share and discuss their output. Examples of such conferences in which I participated are CIRED (International Conference and Exhibition on Electricity Distribution) and EnerDay. This last

conference, where I also presented (Bostan 2019), was attended by researchers from the Swiss Transmission System Operator and from companies (e.g. EnBW, Vattenfall), as well as scholars from across Europe. Speaking more directly to academia, I meanwhile shared (Bostan 2021a, b) and will be sharing the results in articles published in peer-reviewed, open-sourced journals.

From a societal perspective, the findings of this thesis reveal the importance of public opinion in adopting new legislation. For most energy policy priorities, European policymakers are swift to embrace new legislation, in response to new developments or public concerns. Moreover, testing was performed for one-year and two-year delays involving variously combined factors, including public opinion, and legislation adoption. This revealed that combined factors do not necessarily show a better result if a delay is incorporated in the test.

Furthermore, evidence has been found that the way a policy query is presented to the public could change the outcome of legislative adoption. The way a problem is framed or re-framed may well serve as the push needed to catch policymakers' attention and provoke legislative change. While more research is needed to firmly confirm these findings, the results so far have been promising. Advocacy professionals have in fact been identified as the most relevant target group. Knowing what gets the policymakers' attention and to what drivers they react most will be a highly useful tool in influencing policy.

Moreover, I also used my personal website (mikebostan.com), Twitter and Facebook to communicate this research to a larger audience. The website includes, in addition to presentations to academic conferences or the published articles, brief articles explaining the basics for various technologies generating electricity and overall electricity market design in Europe.

Additionally, through my job as public affairs manager for large energy associations, I attended – either as participant, moderator or speaker – hundreds of energy workshops, conferences and seminars and many meetings with policymakers over the last seven years. I used these opportunities to express my views, test my ideas and invite feedback. Finally, as Board member and Director of one of the Programmes for the Scientific Council of the Council of European Energy Regulators, responsible for training European energy regulators, I have the privilege to be able to plant the seeds for future energy policy thinking in Europe.