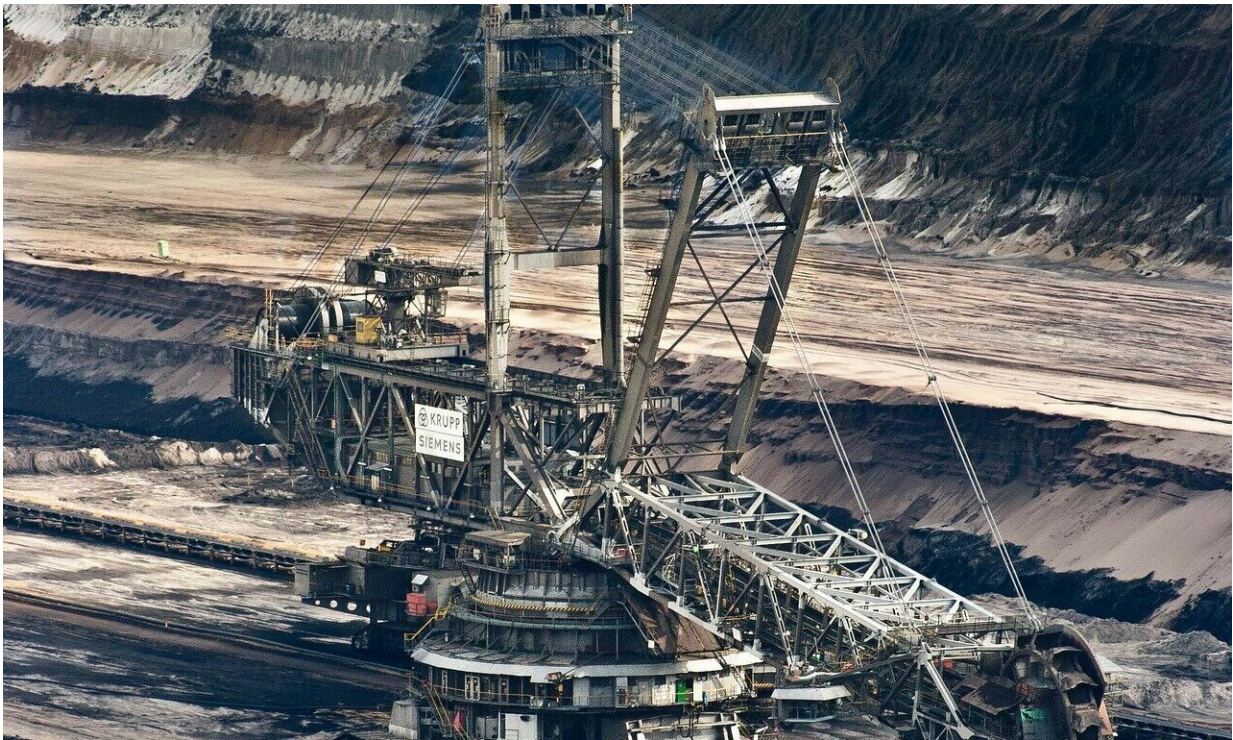


Legitimation strategies for coal exits in Germany and Canada

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Ending our dependence on coal is essential for effective climate protection. Nevertheless, efforts to phase out coal trigger anxiety and resistance, particularly in mining regions. The governments of both Canada and Germany have involved various stakeholders to develop recommendations aimed at delivering just transitions and guiding

structural change. In a new study, researchers at the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) compare the stakeholder commissions convened by the two countries, drawing on expert interviews with their members, and examine how governments use commissions to legitimize their transition policies.

In the study, the researchers identify similarities and differences in the broader contexts of the respective transitions. Coal-fired power generation plays a far more significant role in Germany than in Canada, for example. Nevertheless, there are many similarities; in both Canada and Germany, the coal sector is largely concentrated in rural, economically disadvantaged regions. As a result, concerns about job losses have hampered efforts to phase out coal-fired energy generation sooner rather than later. The federal systems of the two countries are not always conducive to a rapid energy transition: the Canadian provinces and Germany's Länder can put the brakes on national ambitions.

Under these circumstances, coming up with a roadmap for the coal phase-out was no easy task. "The national governments of Canada and Germany attempted to legitimize their respective decisions to phase out coal through the strategic involvement of key stakeholders and potential veto players. This was an attempt to strike a balance between different interests," says lead author Konrad Gürtler. The Canadian [government](#) set up a task force with a rather limited mandate that focused on achieving a local just transition for workers and communities. Germany's Coal Commission, on the other hand, had to navigate complex expectations around the timing and pathway for the [coal](#) phase-out, its impact on the energy transition, and structural change in the affected regions.

In focus: Climate justice, just transitions, and energy justice

In both cases, the governments pursued their legitimation strategies in a two-stage process, explains Görtler: "Governments involved stakeholders, who in turn had to respond to the expectations of various societal groups. In the process, negotiations engaged with very different ideas of justice: Climate justice, fair transitions, energy justice." The Canadian task force had a strong focus on affected regions and on identifying and representing the needs of communities; in the case of the German Coal Commission, a wide range of stakeholders—from industry associations and trade unions to scientists and environmental activists—brought their concerns to the table.

In early 2019 the Canadian task force presented the government with recommendations for a plan of action, which the government intends to implement within the framework of its proposed Just Transition Act. This legislation has not yet been passed, however. In Germany, the Coal Commission negotiated a minimal compromise, which was only partially adopted by the federal government. The implementation of this compromise has since been questioned by former members of the Coal Commission and could be overtaken by new developments, such as the ruling of the Federal Constitutional Court on the Climate Protection Act.

More information: Konrad Görtler et al, Scaling just transitions: Legitimation strategies in coal phase-out commissions in Canada and Germany, *Political Geography* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102406](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102406)

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