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Social and Political Factors Influencing Green Energy Transition

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Rachael Shwom conducts research that links sociology, psychology, engineering, economics, and public policy to investigate how social and political factors influence society’s responses to energy and climate problems. Rachael is currently a Co-PI on a multi-university, $1.5 million National Science Foundation grant on “Reducing Household Food, Energy and Water Consumption: A Quantitative Analysis of Interventions and Impacts of Conservation.” She is Chair-Elect for the American Sociological Association’s Environmental Sociology Section and contributing author for IPCC AR6 WGII (Chapter 17, Decision-Making, Organizational aspects of decision-making).

Society’s dependence on fossil fuels is harming humans and the environment and we must transition our energy system to be more economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. While the economics driving energy transitions are important, sociologists and political scientists have highlighted that these transitions are social and political processes. This talk will provide examples of research that has highlight the social and political factors that influence how people and institutions interact with the market and our energy systems. Those factors include public opinion and social movement pressure, industry resistance or support, political opportunity structure, and windows of opportunity. Cases will include social influences of willingness-to-pay for green energy, and political struggles to implement a social cost of carbon, energy efficient appliance standards, renewable portfolio standards, and net energy metering policies.

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