

Bypassing Germany's Reformstau

The Remarkable Rise of Renewable Energy

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The implementation of Germany's highly effective Feed-in-Tariff model (FITM) for the promotion of renewable energy (RE) is a remarkable achievement given the rigid structure of the German political system. The many veto points in the political system cause certain policy inertia -Reformstau- in Germany, making comprehensive policy changes a rare occurrence. In this article, Prof. Dr. Christoph Stefes, Senior Fellow at Ecologic Institute, addresses how Germany's FITM was nonetheless passed in the 1990s, leading to a boom for renewable energy in Germany.

Following the introduction of a feed-in-tariff model, Germany's renewable energy production has experienced a remarkable expansion in the last two decades. Building his work on a combination of policy analysis models and historical institutionalism, Stefes argues that this policy was possible due to skillful policy entrepreneurs who took advantage of a window of opportunity (or critical juncture) in the mid 1980s. These policy windows - moments when advocates of a proposal can push for their ideas - are infrequent but critical for passing new institutional arrangements that may otherwise be defeated at any given veto point in the political process. The critical juncture for RE policy came about in the 1980s with the legal and political challenges then facing coal and nuclear power, the momentum that the concept of "ecological modernization" was gaining, and the fact that the more prominent concern of German reunification was occupying the minds of those who would later oppose the FITM. Taking advantage of this particular convergence of events, policy entrepreneurs were able to push for the legislation. Adding to this explanation by drawing from historical institutionalism, Stefes shows how the FITM developed the self-reinforcing nature of institutions. Once the policy entrepreneurs had institutionalized the policy by coupling its economic and political implications, it was difficult to reverse the FITM. These factors combined did not predetermine that such a scheme would be safe, but after its initial success, its reversal became highly unlikely. As proof of its success, it suffices to say that RE now faces little opposition in Germany, and over 40 industrialized nations have copied this RE model.

While certainly not a comprehensive solution to addressing cumbersome political systems, convergence of critical junctures, path dependency and policy entrepreneurship played a key role in implementing Germany's groundbreaking and highly effective FITM.

This study builds on Stefes' previous work with Prof. Frank Laird (University of Denver) which has

received [research funding](#) from the US National Science Foundation. Theoretically further developed and with the US case added, this study will be presented in September 2010 at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association in Washington, D.C.

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