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Short communication

The impact of the Fukushima nuclear accident on European energy policy

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Abstract

The disaster that struck the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in Japan has reignited the international debate on the future of nuclear energy. Interestingly, the incident has been used to both justify nuclear power generation and reconsider past decisions made on established or planned nuclear power sites. Geographically removed from the radioactive fallout, Europe's response to the massive nuclear accident differed greatly among the member states. The UK and Germany stand out as examples of the wide spread of policy response to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident. In the UK, policy makers remained firm on their decision to increase nuclear power generation in the near future, whereas in Germany, the federal government decided to at least temporarily shut down the old generation of nuclear reactors and re-examine the safety of all national nuclear power facilities. Furthermore, a regional voter backlash, fuelled by resentment of the Merkel

government's previous commitment to nuclear power, dealt a serious blow to the ruling coalition parties.

How can national policy responses to the same event be so divergent in two European countries? This article attempts to answer this question in five arguments. I argue that in contrast to the UK, the German public faced imminent elections, stronger media reporting, increasing trust in renewable technologies, a history of nuclear resistance and a feeling of close cultural proximity to the Japanese.



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Keywords

Nuclear power generation; Energy policy; Germany; UK

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