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Conceptualising energy nationalism in the context of climate change: framework and review

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This article argues that the more energy policies are circumscribed within the borders of individual nation states, the more difficult it will be to implement the climate action on a global scale. The authors shed light on the relationship between nationalism and the simultaneous challenges of environmental protection, energy transition and climate change mitigation. Based on the review of various publications referring to nationalism in the context of energy policy and energy transition, the authors conceptualise this notion. Energy nationalism is defined here as any political decision, economic action and ideological justifications used to circumscribe energy policy within the nation state and subordinate it to “national interests,” “national security” and the “protection of national sovereignty.” Energy nationalism should be distinguished from both economic nationalism and resource nationalism, yet they are part of a continuum, in which economic considerations are upheld in the pursuit of strict national “interests” and, therefore, of the ruling elites in each nation state. The article explores the differences and mutual interconnections between the three. It finally explains why the notion of energy nationalism may better render the ongoing conflict between resource-focused elites and the international community—particularly in the context of the current climate emergency.

KEYWORDS

climate changes, energy policy, resources nationalism, energy nationalism, climate policy, economic nationalism

1 Introduction: blind paths of energy nationalism

This article draws attention to the risk of isolating climate challenges and energy policy within national borders. It defends the thesis that the more climate isolationism prevails in the public debate, reducing climate protection only to technological issues remaining within the policies of individual states, the more difficult it will be to effectively protect the climate on a global scale. The article focuses on the concept of nationalism in the context of energy policy and climate policy. It reviews the literature and shows the multidimensional meaning of this term, which is used in ideological, economic and technological contexts. The conducted analysis identifies the main dimensions of “energy nationalism” and the resulting harmful implications for climate policy. However, the article also recognises the ecological potential of minority and left-wing nationalist movements, for which ecology and climate



GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT

protection can be an element of their political and national identity and opposition to the centralist technocratic power. In other words, the article advocates a glocalisation perspective that rejects nationalistic limitations in thinking about energy policy, transcends the borders of nation states and combines global challenges with local social practice. We write more about the glocalisation perspective in the context of climate protection later in the introduction. Our analysis and findings can be helpful to both researchers and practitioners working on climate and energy policies beyond the monopoly of nation states on energy management.

The Conference of the Parties (COP26) climate summit in October/November, in Glasgow 2021 (Bloomfield and Steward, 2022) brought no satisfactory solutions as the governments of national states defended their interests rather than being open to global climate challenges. Even some of the reports released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), especially the Summary for Policymakers (SPM), derive from a compromise between scientific truth and other interests, i.e., from “the procedural, visual, and rhetorical arrangements in the weaving of an intergovernmental expert consensus” and “from a layering of compromises negotiated at various stages in the assessment process and contingent on the issues at stake and the strategies of actors” (De Pryck, 2021, p. 8). In other words, the governments of the “nation states” assume an important say in the matter, often by “watering down” the cogency and drama of scientific content. Similar behaviour occurred during the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) organised in the United Arab Emirates. Even though fossil fuels were the subject of official negotiations, leaders of countries making profits from the extractive industry defended their positions. It is difficult to effectively oppose climate change without taking action at the level of supranational treaties (Marchiori and Friel, 2024). Governments of nation states defend their interests by downplaying the importance of global climate challenges in the name of the principles of economic nationalism.

This might illustrate tensions between the requirements of climate mitigation and the hesitancy verging on obstructionism of political and economic elites, as well as contradictions between the environmental and economic-political dimensions. However,

it primarily illustrates the conflicts between supranational actions and barriers at the national and state levels. The Paris Agreement were a landmark climate accord adopted in 2015 by 195 nations. Although the Paris Agreement assumes that Nationally Determined Contributions should be revised, clarified and, above all, corrected each time in relation to their previous versions, many countries were stuck at the *status quo* and others even lowered their 2015 targets (Climate Action Tracker, 2021). The government of India, with China’s support, focused on changing the nomenclature in official documents. Thus, it changed “phasing out” to “phasing down” in reference to the presence of coal in the economy (Hales and Mackey, 2021).

The response of governments to the energy crisis reinforced by the war in Ukraine (Žuk and Žuk, 2022c), when the “energy security” of individual nation states came to the fore before climate policy, is another illustration of tensions between global actions to protect the climate and the logic of states’ actions limited to the protection of “national interests.” In the strategy that emerged in the European Union (EU) countries after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, there was no room for energy solidarity and joint pan-European efforts for energy security because once again the logic of nation states, national particularisms and short-term national interests prevailed (Mišik and Nosko, 2023). These are not individual events, but the manifestation of a larger phenomenon covering various dimensions of social life. Therefore, we consider it necessary to describe in this article the framework of the phenomenon of “energy nationalism.” We consider energy nationalism to be the main barrier to climate protection and the decarbonisation process in the present global order. This orientation means not only a distanced attitude towards transnational cooperation in energy transition and a tendency to ignore international climate agreements, but it also involves distrust towards grassroots, local and civic energy initiatives (Žuk and Žuk, 2022a). Because, from the nationalist perspective, there is no place for both a supranational analysis of climate threats and local social activities independent of the state, all social relations (in this case, activities related to energy) are subordinated to the structures of nation states. Following the principle of methodological nationalism, energy nationalism:

equates society with nation-state societies, and sees states and their governments as the corner-stones of a social sciences analysis. It assumes that humanity is naturally divided into a limited number of nations, which on the inside, organize themselves as nation-states, and on the outside, set boundaries to distinguish themselves from other nation-states (Beck, 2007, p. 287).

An alternative to the nationalist perspective may be the glocalisation perspective, which assumes that “the local and the global should not be seen as a binary opposition, because the local is constructed in contradictory ways and has always been—at least partly—the product of outside or global influences” (Roudometof, 2015, p. 778).

This article focuses on the limitations and harmful assumptions of energy nationalism in the context of climate policy. It aims to emphasise that a different analytical perspective as well as a different policy framework and actions are possible and postulated in the sphere of energy and climate policy. We agree with the opinion that:

A society capable of surviving, and even thriving, in coming decades and into the 22nd century, will need to adapt a version of glocalization in which people live much more locally while encompassing a far broader vision of the planetary common good than we have seen thus far (Goffman, 2020, p. 49).

In other words, the glocalization perspective opposes the nationalist paradigm that confines all problems and possibilities of solving them within the borders of nation states. It emphasises the need to jointly analyse global events and possible local reactions to transnational mechanisms and threats. Glocalisation combines a cosmopolitan perspective that requires leaving the cage of the nation state with noticing the complexity and transgression of the local world in which people live and function. As Victor Roudometof writes:

The glocal is a concept that registers a fundamentally spatial dimension of the interaction between the global and the local. In the literature, the global is therefore almost routinely juxtaposed or contrasted with the local, citing phenomena (such as hybridization) that result from growing interconnectedness. Local spaces are shaped and local identities are created by globalized contacts as well as by local circumstances (Roudometof, 2016, p. 10).

Once Marx claimed that “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past” (Marx, 2006). Today, in the context of climate protection, we can say that people and societies create the future history of life on Earth. Although their individual choices take place in local conditions, they are shaped by global phenomena and have planetary climatic, political and economic consequences.

2 Nationalism and climate: materials and methods of review

In our analysis, we focused on scientific publications appearing in Google Scholar and the Web of Science about climate,

decarbonisation and energy policy in connection with nationalism. The keywords that we used to find publications concerning the relationship of nationalism with energy transition and climate policy were as follows: “nationalism and climate,” “climate crisis and nation,” “nationalism and environmental politics,” “resource nationalism” and “energy nationalism.” We wanted, above all, to refer to the recent debate and so we primarily focused on publications released after 2015 and especially after 2020. From a number of texts, we selected the most influential publications that allowed us to highlight the key threads of the debate about energy policy and climate in the context of nationalism and national issues. In this way, the main conclusions of these publications have been synthesised, and the links between traditional economic nationalism and its implications for energy and climate policy have been shown. An example and illustration of the links between nationalism and the threat to the climate is a short case study on the attitude of the nationalist government in post-2015 Poland and its disputes over EU climate policy.

Energy nationalism should be distinguished, from both *economic nationalism* and *resource nationalism*, yet they are all-part of the same continuum, in which economic interests are upheld in the defence of strict national boundaries and therefore of the ruling elites in each specific nation state. The article explores the difference between the three and their mutual interconnections, while explaining why the notion of energy nationalism may often be more apt and clear to render the current conflict between resource attached political elites and the international community, particularly in the context of the ongoing climate emergency. It is impossible to effectively protect the climate without changing the political, cultural and economic paradigms. Each of these spheres is permeated by the perspective of nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalism.

Both climate change and nationalism can be identified as stemming, directly or indirectly, from industrialisation. Ernest Gellner (1964) famously theorised how the new social organization spawned by industrialism engendered modern nations, thus shaping the politics of nationalism: the two are linked since the expansion of industry required a highly mobile, culturally uniform labour force and a standardisation of skills and capacities that could only be moulded by the nation state. We thereby identify a “*nationalist mode of production*,” emphasising industrialization and industrialism as the matrix of nationalism at the onset of the modern age—the industrial society that slowly replaced agricultural society as the inaugurator and hallmark of modernity.

Yet, industrialization also brought an increasing reliance on fossil fuel consumption for economic growth, inaugurating what Andres Malm (2014) has defined as “fossil capitalism.” While the rise of industrial society may have propelled the entrance into modernity, it simultaneously paved the way for a precipitous exit from it—even though we are only just beginning to be aware of the trend after decades of interdisciplinary scientific research (Latour, 2018). The notion of the *Anthropocene* signals this radical historical shift, a highly traumatic transition that may be incomprehensible within the classical modernist *Weltanschauung*. This suggests a close link between nationalism and the Anthropocene: from this socio-temporal perspective, nationalism can be linked to the problem of climate change (Conversi, 2022).

The paradigm of energy nationalism manifests itself not only in the spheres of ideology, economy and political action, but can also be internalised by members of individual societies in their everyday lives. Zygmunt Bauman writes that:

National states promote “nativism” and construe its subjects as “natives.” They laud and enforce the ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural homogeneity. They are engaged in incessant propaganda of shared attitudes. . . . They preach the sense of common mission, common fate, common destiny. They breed, or at least legitimize and give tacit support to, animosity towards everyone standing outside the holy union. In other words, national states promote uniformity (Bauman, 1991, p. 65).

In the twenty-first century, these elements of nationalism can be complemented by the assumption that nation states defend their energy resources and energy security as the basis of their national security. Energy is treated as a military weapon in the hands of the state and the ruling elites put their local, particular and national interests above global and supranational challenges such as climate change. This is also because the position of local governments still depends on voters locked up in nation states.

3 Theory/calculation: from economic nationalism, through resource nationalism to energy nationalism

3.1 Economic nationalism

Economic nationalism was largely adopted in the 19th century and “closely connected with dominant nationalist ideas and policies to strengthen the nation state and make it economically independent” (Berend, 2022, p. 2). It was then part of the predominant *Zeitgeist* leading to state centralization, militarization and interstate competition under the banner of nationalism. Writing in the 1940s, Karl Polanyi (1886–1964) observed how the Long Depression following the previous expansion of industrialization reverberated in policies centered on economic nationalism (Polanyi, 1944, p. 216). He identified an almost proportional relationship between social injustice and nationalism: The more the gap between rich and poor expands, the more the increasingly rich elites need to use nationalism as a social glue to keep the system of monetary and financial accumulation running and functioning smoothly (Hadžidedić, 2022).

It is crucial to note that *economic nationalism* usually revives at times of crisis: this was the case in the 1930s, during the 1973 oil crisis and following the 2008 financial crisis (Hesse, 2020). It can be expected that the energy crisis caused by the war in Ukraine will strengthen isolationist and nationalist tendencies. This might bring about further disastrous consequences for climate protection. Russia’s influence on the supply of energy sources to the EU will be either completely eliminated or severely limited owing to the transition towards zero-carbon energy sources (McWilliams et al., 2023). However, before this happens, energy policy needs to be coordinated supranationally. While energy solidarity is not the topic of this article, it is certainly one of the elements creating a perspective

different from energy nationalism. National particularism can undermine actions taken to solve the energy crisis, as demonstrated by the attitudes of some governments in the EU (Mišák and Nosko, 2023), and generally weaken global climate policy. Excluding even a single country from international cooperation on energy and climate change hinders the efforts of the entire international community. An example can be seen in Brexit, which was not neutral for climate protection (Bocse, 2020).

The rise and institutionalisation of economic nationalism in the 20th century were products of economic crisis, nationalist movements and enlarged states. According to Sam Pryke:

Economic nationalism should be considered as a set of practices designed to create, bolster and protect national economies in the context of world markets. The practice is not necessarily antithetical to external economic activity, but it is opposed to allowing a nation’s fortunes to be determined by world markets alone (Pryke, 2012).

The rhetoric and practice of *economic nationalism* was revived in the United States (US) under the presidency of Donald Trump (2016–2020) and his protectionist policies (Baltz, 2021). Trump’s economic nationalism led to the rejection and denial of international efforts to limit climate change (Jotzo et al., 2018). The clash between economic nationalism and climate protection manifested themselves when in June 2017 the Trump administration decided to withdraw the US from the Paris Agreement (Urpelainen and Van de Graaf, 2018).

3.2 Resources nationalism

In practice, economic nationalism involves import controls in order to create national monopolies, the reduction or removal of foreign workforces and also the appropriation of fishing and prospecting rights by extending offshore waters or the nationalisation of foreign companies, especially in the exploitation of natural resources, mining and oil (Pryke, 2012). Therefore, *resource nationalism* may be treated as an important dimension of economic nationalism. The term “resource nationalism” covers all actions that governments take to control their countries’ natural resources. This type of action can take place in both authoritarian and democratic countries. As Peter Rutland claims:

It is an essentially pragmatic calculation of how best to maximize revenues that serve the political and economic interests of the national elites who are setting the policy. At the same time, resource nationalism has a strong ideological component, being framed in terms of national identity and sovereignty (Rutland, 2022, p. 123).

The roots of resource nationalism go back at least to the 18th and 19th centuries when states competed for control over natural resources, already treating them as a tool of geopolitics (Andreasson and Ruback, 2021). Resource nationalism aims to put under nation-state control all natural resources located in a country’s territory. Resource nationalism was also one of the

responses of the political economy to the logic of neoliberalism in South American countries. It allowed the governments of these countries to raise taxes and license fees in the resource sector and nationalise foreign companies (Haslam and Heidrich, 2016). Resource nationalism is defined as “political discourse, applied to political and economic thinking about how a state and its population should manage and distribute profits derived from natural resources” (Koch and Perreault, 2019). In this context, an attempt is sometimes made to emphasise the post-colonial approach in which resource nationalism allows the postulate that “the people of a given country, rather than private corporations or foreign entities, should benefit from the resources of a territorially-defined state” (Koch and Perreault, 2019). Yet, the “people” as an abstract entity rarely or ever are the same who take advantage of this form of nationalism. Although this perspective may be attractive to various political groups on the ideological level, in the real world it is more about the control of the power elite over resources than the control of “the people over their lands.” Although at the ideological level resource nationalism is usually associated with a “patriotic attitude” by the political authorities, in practice, it is related to over-centralisation and a lack of transparency (Huggins and Kinyondo, 2019). Contrary to nationalist ideology, in practice, these resources usually do not belong to the “nation” but are controlled by the power elites of a given state. As Daniele Conversi aptly claims:

Resource nationalism can in principle be appropriated by any regime that wishes to pursue a sealed agenda of control over territorial resources independently from the lives of the people living in the territory while ignoring whether they are negatively affected (Conversi, 2020).

Many developing countries with vast natural resources do not have the financial capacity or expertise to use these resources sustainably. The exploration and exploitation of natural resources in developing countries depends on foreign investments. In this context, resource nationalism may be a threat to both the local economy and the development of new technologies that are more conducive to environmental protection (Marmolejo Cervantes and Garduño-Rivera, 2022). There are also postulates in the literature that resource nationalism should be considered less in the context of general economic cyclicality in which local resources are related to global investments, and it should be more focused on the analysis of individual cases that may differ from each other (Ostrowski, 2023).

3.3 Energy transition, national fences and energy nationalism

The phenomenon of “energy nationalism” can be part of resources nationalism. States tend to use national resources “notably hydrocarbons, to strike hard bargains” (McCrone, 2021, p. 35). Russia has been aptly redefined as an “energy Superpower” (Rutland, 2008). Accordingly, oil and gas have been part of building Russian national identity (Rutland, 2015). Russian oil and gas have become not only components of the national identity, but also a tough tool of political struggle in the international arena and—as the war in Ukraine has shown—a military weapon in the geopolitical dimension. In turn, in the US, “resource nationalism connects with

the idiom of energy security, hence the muted response to fracking, and the political support for the coal industry which carries symbolic weight for US energy independence and patriotism” (McCrone, 2021, p. 35). However, attempts to strengthen national identity and nationalism based on energy policy date back to at least the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For example, in Spain, attempts were made to use technologies of electrification and electricity as cultural resources to refashion national identity and establish the foundations of a new modernity (Pérez-Zapico, 2023a). As Daniel Pérez-Zapico writes:

Spain’s end-of-the-century public debates fuelled engineers’ exchanges on how to build a brand-new technologically improved and regenerated nation. Electricity, as the epochal technology and energy paradigm of the new era that was about to start, was an important feature of these visions. As members of an international network, engineers embraced the alleged universal promises of electricity but adapted them to Spain’s local conditions through the language of national regeneration (Pérez-Zapico, 2023b, pp. 154–155).

This section briefly illustrates the main features of “energy nationalism” using the example of the populist right that has been ruling Poland since 2015. The attitude of the populist right to energy and climate policy in Poland clearly shows the most important threads that are present in the narrative of “energy nationalism.”

From 2015 to 2023, Poland was ruled by right-wing populists who consistently denied EU climate and energy policy and its case serves us here as an illustration of how energy nationalism can combine with other forms of nationalism. The government-controlled media, linked to the Law and Justice (PiS) ruling party, not only attacked the European climate policy but, in line with the US Republican party, also considered actions to address the climate crisis as another ideological offensive by “leftist” groups in Europe (Žuk, 2023a).

The economic, political and ideological threads of energy nationalism were also evident in the conflict between the Polish government and the EU over the operation of the Turów lignite opencast power plant located on the border of Poland, the Czech Republic and Germany. As a result of high environmental burdens and the lack of public consultation regarding the further functioning of Turów, and after recognising the reluctance of the Polish government to engage in any dialogue, the Czech government brought the case to an international court. In February 2021, the Czech Republic decided to challenge the Polish government’s decision to the *Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)* demanding that the mine be closed and its expansion halted, pointing out that the huge hole with an area of 2,500 ha deprives them of water and causes enormous noise and dust (Žuk and Žuk, 2022d). The case ended with financial compensation (approximately 45 million €) and an agreement between Poland and the Czech Republic, as well as a financial penalty for Poland ordered by the CJEU (of approximately EUR 70 million). yet, the mine remained open to the dismay of the international community. As we argue, the reactions of Poland’s governing elites and the dominant narrative in the government-related media are a good illustration of the main elements of energy nationalism. Zbigniew Ziobro, the minister of justice in the government of right-wing populists PiS, stated:

The dispute over Turów should be seen in the broader context of the energy war that is taking place in Europe today. Of course, this is not how it is presented, there is talk of a certain idea of climate defence but it is actually a great operation by Germany and Russia. . . . Until now, Poland has been energy independent, has had large coal resources and would have been doing very well, while the EU's climate and energy policy makes it impose a para-tax on coal, and thus the production of energy from coal ceases to be profitable (wPolityce.pl, 2021).

In this statement, climate protection is supposed to be only an ideological cover for the secret operations of Germany and Russia, as a result of which Poland loses its sovereignty and energy independence. For the government representative, there would be no energy problems in Poland without the common climate and energy policy.

The extreme right took the same anti-EU and nationalist slogans to the streets. Nationalists who organised the so-called Independence March, one of the largest far-right demonstrations in Europe (Żuk and Żuk, 2022b), joined the demonstration in defence of mining organised by the Turów trade unions in Luxembourg in October 2021 in front of the CJEU. Nationalists carried banners saying "Independence is not for sale." The day before the demonstration by the mining trade unions, Bąkiewicz, one of the leaders of the extreme right, wrote on Twitter: "Destroying jobs (power plants, mines) and erecting barbed wire fences—this is all that EU bureaucrats can 'offer' to Polish workers. Blackmail and ruthless violence—that is what the European Union really is!" (Bąkiewicz, 2021).

In the context of the conflict over Turów and the takeover of the regional media in Poland by the state-owned oil company, Orlen, Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of the PiS party, gave an unambiguous interpretation of nationalist thinking about the economy. He referred to the "anti-colonial framework" in which the good, homely national periphery is exploited by the strong and rich core. Another act of the core's domination over the periphery is to be a top-down energy transition (conducted under the pretext of climate protection), which brings profits to the West. As Kaczyński claimed:

All the stories that capital has no nationality, that all the mechanisms that have defined relations between states and nations for centuries have suddenly ceased to function, are fairy tales told by the strongest players intentionally. The reason is the still strong intention to dominate the weak (Stowarzyszenie Dziennikarzy Polskich, 2021).

The case of the Polish nationalist right may illustrate why right-wing populists in Europe are against climate and energy policies developed beyond the structures of nation states: they treat EU elites and policies as threats to national and regional economic development and perceive foreign investments in the area of energy policy as a threat to national industries (Caiani and Lubarda, 2023). At the same time, they do not reject the principles of neoliberal capitalism in the sphere of energy and the environment. They rather defend national elites and their interests against the influence of foreign competition. In this

case, energy and economic nationalism is a form of legitimising the influence of local political and economic elites.

As argued by the Bosnian sociologist Zlatko Hadžidedić (2022), the relationship between nationalism and capitalism is so intimate that one would not function, or even exist, without the other. The continuous competition for an increased accumulation of economic assets has spawned the communitarian relationships based on reciprocity, both at the national and international levels. In this way, nationalism manages to make popularly acceptable what is socially unacceptable and politically unsustainable: the unconstrained accumulation of capital into the hands of ever smaller minorities. The main task of nationalism, in other words, is to bridge this gap without changing the very structure of the society it claims to represent and defend.

4 Climate changes, energy policy and nationalism studies: review

4.1 Climate change, energy policy and right-wing populism

The thematic range of publications in the social sciences concerning the analysis of climate issues in the context of nationalism is quite wide. A distinct line of analyses on the tensions between climate protection measures and nationalism focused primarily on relations between political groups associated with the populist right (Jylhä et al., 2020) and/or nationalism (Kulin et al., 2021) and climate denialism or rejection of the postulates of international agreements in climate and energy policy.

From this perspective, nationalism was treated as an element of a wider socio-political challenge, which is the relationship between populism, the environment and climate change (Buzogány and Mohamad-Klotzbach, 2021). It has been pointed out that underplaying the importance of anthropogenic climate change generally goes hand in hand with a right-wing nationalist narrative (Fraune and Knodt, 2018). Even while nationalist right-wing parties may not deny climate change, they try to marginalise this problem in their narratives (Jeffries, 2017). Some scholars have also analysed the cultural and ideological influence of conservatism and nationalism on the defence of fossil fuels (Krange et al., 2019) and the communication of nationalism (Forchtner and Kolvraa, 2015) in the context of climate challenges, as well as the nationalist and right-wing populist discourse in the context of climate change and energy policy (Żuk and Szulecki, 2020). The analyses have also investigated media coverage undermining scientific theses about climate change (Jaspal et al., 2015), tensions between the global nature of climate challenges and the national reach of most mass media (Olausson, 2009) and debates on climate policy with the participation of the extreme right in the European Parliament (Forchtner and Lubarda, 2023). Analyses linking the issues of climate change and green transition with nationalism and the far right point to specific cases of countries, such as Hungary and Poland, where right-wing populists have come to power (Lubarda, 2023). This means that ideological reasons and economic and political nationalism can seriously impede the implementation of

energy transition and investments in renewable energy sources in countries ruled by right-wing populists (Žuk and Žuk, 2023).

The literature that shows the impact of right-wing populism and nationalism on climate policy and the decarbonisation process analyses the discourse reinforcing conspiracy theories and post-truth in climate denial (Fischer, 2019), the impact of ethno-nationalist narratives in public space on climate policy (Forchtner, 2019), as well as attitudes of authoritarian and populist regimes towards environmental policy (McCarthy, 2019). Typically, these analyses highlight various tactics used by the far-right and right-nationalist movements to delay decarbonisation and energy transition, such as politicising decarbonisation, reframing cultural values to form alliances with anti-decarbonisation movements, and dismantling key decarbonisation institutions (Yazar and Haarstad, 2023).

The literature also mentions the concept of *ego-ecology*. It denotes environmental programmes which occur in public space and are formulated by populist groups for their own goals and political benefits. Among these groups are the *Rassemblement National* in France and the right-wing populist party *Fidesz* in Hungary, which do not reject environmental protection and climate action completely, but rather utilise them for their own agendas (Hoerber et al., 2021).

The recent revival of the analyses of energy and climate policy in the context of the nation allows us to conclude that there is a “climate turn” in nationalism studies and related areas. This has led to an expanding wave of research. (Conversi, 2022).

4.2 Nationalism as a real force in defence of the climate and the environment?

There are also other assessments of nationalism in the context of environmental and climate policy in the public space and the literature. According to Andreas Pickel, political discourses on global, national and local issues take place primarily within national contexts. Pickel concludes that only strong, powerful national actors, including national governments, can act on the global stage to confer the necessary international dimension to the fight against climate change (Pickel, 2022, p. 54). While other actors, such as social movements also act at the supranational level, national actors remain the most salient decision-makers. More and more people look for effective climate protection at the nation-state level (Karkour, 2023). Firstly, they have doubts about the ineffective actions taken so far at the international level. Secondly, the language of “green nationalism” can be treated as a form of legitimisation of power. This is what happened in China, where the ruling Chinese Communist Party adopted the rhetoric of ecological civilisation to legitimise its global political aspirations (Arantes, 2023). Thirdly, “green nationalism” is also a manifestation of the creation of local and regional identity, and can also be an element of the struggle for political autonomy (for example, the Scottish Green Party (Kernalegenn, 2023), Catalonia and the Basque Country (Kerr, 2023)).

For instance, the importance of forestry and tree-planting plays an increasingly central role in the definition of Finland’s identity and nationalism and, in this way, carbon footprint

responsibility suggests the path towards a ‘climate-friendly sense of national pride’ (Ridanpää, 2022). However, the approach has also been applied to Freiburg’s suburban area (Stadtteil) of Vauban in Germany near the French border as an inspiring urban instance of sustainable energy transition (Posocco and Watson, 2022a).

These examples show where nationalism appears to be mobilised in the defence of energy transitions, within substate nations or “nations without a state” (Foster, 1980). Here we have a generally different picture: At least in Europe, these political identities are usually embodied in subnational institutions grounded on regional autonomy. These regions are pervaded by strong sentiments of national solidarity and identity, often accompanied by drives towards political independence. The two cases that have received more attention in this respect are Scotland and Catalonia (Conversi and Friis Hau, 2021). Here, great strides/advances towards new policies and legislations to tackle climate change have emerged. It is worth remembering, however, that, when deprived of grassroots and political social pressure, this left-wing civic nationalism can be quickly undermined by the forces of neoliberal or ethnic nationalism (Kashwan et al., 2023). Although the belief in the existence of green nation states into which the current polluters will turn, proclaimed using the slogan of “green nationalism,” tries to be pragmatic (Posocco and Watson, 2022b), it too often does not refer to the analysis of the actual rules of political economy. This position makes the same mistake as many other ideologies that ignore, downplay or completely exclude the class and economic perspective in disputes on climate and energy policy (Arsel, 2023). Similar allegations have been made in the context of the ecobordering discourse, which focuses on environmental protection within the borders of nation states and the nativist stewardship of national nature. However, this discourse:

entirely disregards this structural relationship between the ecological crisis and the operations of the global economy. In neglecting this relationship, ecobordering serves to “camouflage” capitalism in an attempt to politically sustain the economic *status quo*; a *de facto* concealment and defence of Global North economies, whose wealth was accumulated through the violence of colonialism, this is sustained by artificial illusions to nature and the spectre of militarised protection if necessary (Turner and Bailey, 2022, p. 124).

4.3 “National emergency” and “national security” in the context of energy policy

While nationalism can block global supranational climate action, climate dangers can also create a “national emergency” by creating an atmosphere of a “national security threat” posed by climate change. Thus, “climate securitization” can be a new form of “nationalising the climate issue” and placing climate change within the competence of nation-state structures. It refers to the attempt by policymakers and scholars to frame climate change as a national security threat and demand an urgent national response (Kashwan et al., 2023). However, the slogan of “climate securitisation,” which

only the nation state is supposed to ensure and which is inscribed in the “securatisation” ideology, is another attempt to legitimise the state’s full monopoly on climate and energy policy, control of energy infrastructure and the process of managing key energy decisions (Szulecki, 2020). Typically, the “securatisation” discourse and “energy security” slogans go hand in hand with energy nationalism, which legitimises the policies of government decision makers and power elites (Česnakas, 2013). This can be the case in the context of both national and international politics (San-Akca et al., 2020). Manipulating the notion of “energy security” by giving it a nationalistic context pushes environmental issues aside. The reliability of supplies and geopolitical benefits from the export of natural resources are thus prioritised in the public space (Fischhendler and Nathan, 2014). Although the concept of energy security may also include other dimensions (military issues, electricity system operability, internal stability, cyber security) (Kivimaa and Sivonen, 2023), it is in the context of international tensions (Russia, China, United States) and treating energy as a tool for making politics and expanding power (Skalamera, 2023), that the geopolitical dimension and “national interests” come to the fore. Moreover, as the “securatisation” discourse is dominant in the public space, a strategy based on “the security rationality” appears in the context of climate threats (Fagan, 2023). On the one hand, climate protection is not treated as a profound change in the social order and the relationship of the economic and political order with the natural world. It is assumed that technological actions and corrections introduced as part of state policy will be sufficient. On the other hand, grassroots climate protection activities are depoliticised because, from the perspective of “securatisation” and the related “emergency situation” discourse, state structures are to have a monopoly on climate and energy policy. In this approach, the ideology of “securatisation” aims to maintain the monopoly of nation states on the challenges of climate and energy threats and as such is an element of the defence of the energy nationalism perspective. Making nation states the main defenders against global threats also reminds us “why for the duration of the modern era, now two centuries old, nationalism without the state has been as flawed and ultimately impotent as state without nationalism—to the point of one being inconceivable without the other” (Bauman, 1991, p. 64).

4.4 Economic aspects of “energy nationalism”

In the economic context, it has been pointed out that the efforts to move to a low-carbon economy in peripheral or semi-peripheral countries, whose development is often dependent on fossil fuels, may cause frustration and give rise to nationalist sentiments. This may apply particularly to working-class people who may fear that their standard of living will be lower and that additional green taxes will be imposed, to spend on fighting global warming (MacNeil, 2016). The fear of losing jobs in the coal basins in Poland not only affected the perception of climate threats, but also built a mix of economic nationalism and resources nationalism (simultaneous “protection of Polish jobs” and “Polish coal”). As a consequence, this translated into energy nationalism, in which the defence of the Polish energy sector was expressed in the language of dislike for the

EU climate policy and the vision of the “European Green Deal” (Zuk, 2023b).

In semi-periphery countries, the social classes and groups that may be exposed to additional costs as a result of the green transition, or whose participation in energy transition is severely limited for financial reasons (for example, older people), may have nationalistic prejudices (Szulecki et al., 2023). In this case, nationalism is only used as an ideology to defend social security against the possible effects of energy transition.

However, economic and energy nationalism may also develop in richer countries, which should pay a share in the costs of global energy transition in the name of international solidarity. It is reasonable to agree with the opinion that:

In countries economically benefiting from climate mitigation measures nationalism is not a good starting point if the task is to encourage understanding for and solidarity with countries that are in more difficult positions (Braun, 2021).

The economic foundations, in addition to ideological motives, are the main basis for building energy nationalism in society. This is happening in both in the Global North and the Global South, particularly after the energy crisis caused by the war in Ukraine (Balcells et al., 2023).

5 Discussion and results. energy nationalism: dimensions, manifestations and control over criteria

Based on the literature review, energy nationalism is considered here in the broadest sense as any political decisions, economic actions and ideological justifications used to close energy policy within the nation state and subordinate energy policy to “national interests,” “national security” and “protection of national sovereignty.” This section summarises the main themes and elements that make up the phenomenon of energy nationalism.

5.1 The nation state and its efforts to control resources

The distinguishing feature of nation states emerging in the 18th and 19th centuries was the desire to control a specific territory. It was about not only border control, but also cultural control: over tradition, language, cultural heritage and the flow of goods (Tilly, 1994). For contemporary energy nationalism, economic and political control over natural resources in the territory of one’s own country is equally important. It is worth noting, however, that in the twenty-first century it is better to talk about control over space to which nation states aspire rather than territory (for example, the case of gas and oil resources in the Arctic or natural resources hidden in the depths of the oceans that do not physically belong to the territory of a specific country) (Childs, 2016). In addition to natural resources, countries also often want to control not only energy sources but also energy infrastructure located in their territories (Szabo and Fabok, 2020). Moreover, the domination of resource nationalism in the state’s policy also allows it to push climate issues

into the background, and to give priority to the interests of the energy sector (Poberezhskaya and Danilova, 2022). From the perspective of energy nationalism, natural resources are to be always “national,” while waste, weather change or pollution is usually “foreign” and has “international” origin or causes. An example of such thinking can be the narrative disseminated in right-wing media in Poland after the ecological disaster in the Oder River in 2022, which flows on the border of Poland and Germany. As the Polish mining industry contributed to the salinisation of the river water, several hundred tons of fish died. However, right-wing media associated with the PiS government tried to shift the blame for the disaster to the German side (Matuszak, 2022). Apportioning blame remains central to this form of nationalism. The strength of the energy nationalism narrative always depends on the strength of right-wing populists’ connections with the mining industry (Fiorino, 2022) and the media (particularly public ones) (Zuk, 2020).

From a nationalist-populist perspective, opponents of the extractive industry who advocate for environmental protection issues from the position of “citizens of the Earth” and nature defenders are often referred to as “foreign-funded radicals” using money from “foreign special interest groups” as was the case in Canada. In this way, the defence of the interests of the domestic mining industry presented from the position of energy nationalism is identified with the interests of the state, and ecological activists can be described as a threat to the national economy and indicated as the cause of increased unemployment (Neubauer, 2018).

5.2 Nationalist narrative in the public space about “national” resources as an element of banal nationalism

“National” natural resources are often portrayed in official narratives as a guarantee of energy security, state stability and independence (Mouraviev, 2021). For many decades coal has been called “black gold” and “national treasure” in Poland (Kuchler and Bridge, 2018). In Russia, oil and gas have been part of building national identity (Rutland, 2015). Canada’s fossil fuel industry and its supporters have developed robust, aggressive, and affectively powerful forms of petro-nationalism to promote extractivism as a public good and demonise critics as anti-Canadian (Gunster et al., 2021). The nationalist narrative about natural resources has also often made it possible to justify centralisation processes in the management of industry and the environment (Pedersen et al., 2020). The state does not have to use hard forms of indoctrination to do so. All it takes is a daily routine and linguistic neologisms that speak of “Russian gas,” “Iranian oil” and “our coal.” these are well-known practices of “banal nationalism” (Billig, 1995) ensuring the “domestication” of fossil fuels and, while engaging in patriotic emotions-building to defend the “national interest.” The narrative of banal nationalism expressed in the form of “energy nationalism” is propagated in social media such as Facebook (Neubauer et al., 2023) and reinforced by more opinion-forming circles (journalists, academics) who accept the goals and disseminate the ideology of resource and energy nationalism. The acceptance of nationalistic attitudes may result from both ideological and

pragmatic reasons—they both support the government’s energy policy and correlate with a preference for a state-centred approach (Tinti et al., 2023). In this context, energy nationalism stands in opposition to globalisation energy practices and also blocks projects aimed at decentralising and democratising the energy sector and making the energy transition more civic. For this reason, decentralised renewable energy sources may be treated by nationalists as a threat to national sovereignty (Hansen and Moe, 2022).

5.3 National duties versus global responsibility in the context of climate challenges

The historical experience of military-based national competition between nation states showed that logic enclosed in a network of national obligations is not conducive to environmental protection or building global solidarity (Deese, 2019). Competition in the field of economy, energy resources and control over natural resources, carried out in the name of the growing power and influence of a nation state, is at odds with commitments to global civil society, and with environmental and climate challenges that boycott interstate borders. Moral and political responsibility and above all respect for nature (Jamieson, 2010), individuals and entire social groups on which social mobilisation for climate protection can be based, oppose the nationalist paradigm.

5.4 “National energy security” versus the policy of sustainability

The concepts of “energy sovereignty,” often accompanied by notions of “national energy security,” often constitute an ideological legitimization for energy policy implemented by economic elites in a given country, treated as an element of traditional state power, alongside such mechanisms as military security, fiscal policy and public administration (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs, 2016). Therefore, energy security travels in tandem with national security defining “the continuous availability of energy in varied forms, in sufficient quantities and at affordable prices” (Dyer and Trombetta, 2013). Although there are concepts of “energy security” that take into account environmental issues (Radovanović et al., 2017), in times of energy crisis or political tensions, the demands of sustainable development and climate protection remain outside the main economic and military dimensions, which become the core of state policy.

5.5 Universal technologies and global climate challenges versus national resources and economic traditions

The choice of specific energy technologies in a given country is related to its energy resources, the interests of the dominant economic actors and the predominant narrative. In these cases, technological solutions that may be conducive to climate protection and, at the same time, violate the “national” power structures can

TABLE 1 Areas subject to energy nationalism and forms of control by the nation state.

Forms of control and domination of energy nationalism	Areas subject to the logic of energy nationalism
Control and monopoly on the exploitation of mining resources in the state territory	Natural resources, areas with natural resources and extractive industries
Control of energy infrastructure and energy transmission networks in the state territory	Technical infrastructure and distribution networks
Dominance of energy sources and forms of energy production in a given area that are in the interests of the nation state and its power	Energy industry and energy technologies
Investment and economic policy in the energy sector	Financial resources and investment
Soft power as a means of supervising the debate on climate and energy policy in individual countries	Discourse and social communication
Control of knowledge, energy agenda and reproduction of prevailing beliefs about energy and natural resources	Knowledge and system of nationalist socialisation

TABLE 2 Dimensions of energy nationalism, manifestations of energy nationalism and criteria for evaluating energy policy from the nationalist perspective.

Dimensions of energy nationalism	Manifestations of energy nationalism	Criteria for assessing the right energy policy from the nationalist perspective
Economic dimension	Emphasising the principles of economic nationalism, the economic costs of energy transition and activities for climate protection	Energy policy is right if it is in line with national economic interests and serves the economic growth of the state
Legal dimension	Ignoring, not respecting and weakening the importance of international agreements and goals of international energy and climate policy	If legal and right, energy policy serves the national and state interests and complies with the government’s policy framework. Compliance with international conventions and supranational climate policy ceases to prove that actions undertaken are right
Ideological and communicative dimension	Preference for nationalist ideology in energy policy and domination of banal nationalism in the energy discourse (assigning national terms to energy resources, such as: “Polish coal,” “Russian gas,” “Canadian energy,” “French nuclear energy”) Rejecting all activities defined as “cultural cosmopolitanism”	Energy policy and energy sources are appropriate and desirable if they are “ours,” “national” and related to national tradition and identity
Moral dimension	Lack of responsibility for the global climate effects of investments in domestic energy and rejection of links between the activities of national state structures and their transnational climate effects (for example, there are no links between the activities of “our” energy sector and global warming)	Only energy policy that serves the national interests and energy security of the state is moral
Cultural and cognitive dimension	Rejecting models of knowledge and technologies from other cultural areas and contrary to the national economic tradition; avoiding a cosmopolitan perspective and dependence on “foreign” energy sources	The best technologies and energy solutions are those that operate in “our country”
Military dimension	Treating energy as a tool used in armed conflict, and energy policy as a useful element in the state’s military doctrine	Energy resources and forms of energy production are appropriate if they increase the state’s military potential

face obstacles as being imposed by “foreign powers” or “foreign competition.”

These elements and motives on which the paradigm of energy nationalism is based translate into: control of natural resources in the territory of a nation state; postulates of state control over energy infrastructure; energy policy consistent with the interests of the state authorities and specific investment and economic policy in the energy sector; as well as influencing the framework of public debate and models of common knowledge about energy and climate policy (Table 1). The pursuit of energy nationalism to supervise individual dimensions of social life in practice means taking actions that will constitute an attempt to establish criteria in the public space for the assessment of appropriate energy and climate policy. In this sense, the dispute over actions related to climate protection boils down to the struggle for the domination of certain criteria determining certain models of energy policy (Table 2).

6 Conclusion

In this article, we review various approaches to nationalism in the context of energy transition and climate protection. We defend the thesis that the concept of energy nationalism makes it possible to better perceive and analyse various types of activities taken by nation states at the political, economic and ideological levels, which may delay energy transition, weaken subnational actions and agreements for climate protection, and also manipulate public opinion to discourage green transition efforts in the name of “national security,” “energy security” and “protecting the national economy.” In this way, political and economic elites can use energy nationalism as a ladder to gain a free ride on the shoulder of future generations by rallying around the flag and diverting attention from the substantial changes needed.

While governments maintain their legitimacy by protecting the *status quo*, they also can use nationalism: indeed, as Walker Connor

argued many years ago, the rise in nationalism at either the central or the peripheral level indicates a want, decline or lack of political legitimacy (Connor, 2002). Existing governments are unwilling to directly question the rules of the game they depend on since this will imply/carry a fall in their legitimacy, which can in turn yield a rise in nationalism. Energy nationalism appears thus as a kind of “fig leaf” under which an extreme incompetence to tackle the most pressing contemporary problems can easily be shrouded. Political inexperience can be masked and camouflaged by using economic justifications and mobilising basic instincts about national welfare, competitiveness and progress, as well as Westphalian notions of national sovereignty.

Ulrich Beck (2002) uses this concept to refer to the assumption about “the nation-state being the power container of social processes and the national being the key-order for studying major social, economic and political processes.” The alternative cosmopolitan perspective not only sees the development of cross-border air and water pollution, the global nature of climate change and the global nature of the socio-ecological crisis, but also calls for actors of global civil society (transnational social campaigns, social movements, international organisations) to enter the scene as a form of political supervision over global economic and environmental processes (Beck, 2000). The nationalist methodology can be abandoned by adopting the principles of the glocalisation vision, in which “[t]he global-local develops in a symbiotic, unstable and irreversible set of relationships, in which each gets transformed through billions of worldwide iterations dynamically evolving over time” (Urry, 2003, p. 84).

The experiences of the post-pandemic crisis have shown the need to undertake both global and intersectoral actions for sustainable development in the spheres of economy, health protection, work, transport and energy (Van Barneveld et al., 2020). The change must be both multidimensional and multilevel: fairly stagnant and closed within the nineteenth- and twentieth-century structures, nation states do not cope with both local and global challenges. This phenomenon occurs particularly in countries belonging to the world’s periphery and semi-periphery, which cannot cope independently with climate challenges or ensure energy supplies and new technologies (Žuk et al., 2023). For them, energy nationalism does not solve any problem. Rejecting the perspective of energy nationalism, further research and analysis should focus on finding practical and social solutions that go beyond the existing climate and energy strategies operating within states. It would certainly be useful to recognise threats to the climate as a threat to human rights, and also to integrate international climate law more closely into financial and trade law. This would require treating climate and energy policy as an

integral part of social policy (De Bruin, 2022). Civic and political supervision over the decisions of multinational corporations and states whose energy policies have global consequences remains insufficient. This is the main challenge for years to come: to find a way to create effective socio-political mechanisms to counterbalance global economic forces and energy decisions devoid of responsibility for maintaining and reinforcing the climate crisis. Transnational cooperation is necessary for this matter as no country acting alone can effectively protect the climate and ensure a transition to renewable energy sources (Jamieson and Jacquet, 2020). The first step in these circumstances is to reject the logic of energy nationalism.

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