

Diverging Perspectives on the Decarbonization Momentum

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Shortly after taking office, U.S. President Trump declared his intention to withdraw from the Paris Agreement again. The U.S. government is promoting policies to advance fossil fuel development, while simultaneously repealing regulations and withdrawing funding related to decarbonization and environmental protection. While not quite as extreme, Europe is also showing signs of shifting priorities in its policy agendas. Although European nations continue to uphold their carbon neutrality goals, actual investments in renewable energy and hydrogen are slowing. Furthermore, surveys conducted every six months among European citizens clearly show a decline in interest in climate change issues. Meanwhile, investments in fossil fuels appear to be rebounding, particularly in the United States. Those close to the business frontlines often report noticeable changes that could be interpreted as a return to fossil fuels.

So, has the momentum for global decarbonization disappeared? At a recent international conference that I attended, I witnessed an intriguing exchange. When a participant from the United States seemed to dismiss decarbonization efforts, a participant from Southeast Asia responded by emphasizing the importance of sustainability and addressing climate change. This incident strongly conveyed that understanding of climate change measures is spreading, even among emerging and developing nations, and that there is a will to act towards this end. Of course, this is just one example and does not represent the full picture. The US participants' remarks probably stemmed from considerations relating to their own administration, and the Southeast Asian participants' views probably do not represent the entire region. Nevertheless, it is clear that momentum for decarbonization is indeed present in emerging and developing countries.

In this way, there is a gap in perspectives regarding the momentum of decarbonization. The world is not uniform: the environments surrounding individuals, companies and nations can vary immensely. Furthermore, access to information is limited, and biases such as 'seeing only what one wants to see' may also come into play. In the author's view, both the 'slowing' and the 'persistent existence' of decarbonization momentum are facts, and the world likely oscillates between the two. In terms of investment efficiency, it would be preferable for the world to share a unified understanding. This would allow limited capital to be deployed

effectively. However, from the perspective of responding to diverse realities and needs, it is better for different movements to coexist. Diversity itself is an effective strategy for preparing for an uncertain future.

The key question that arises here is: where is decarbonization heading? In my view, while momentum may fluctuate, the world as a whole is moving towards decarbonization. Firstly, based on modern science, if no action is taken, many people will be at risk of experiencing unbearable disadvantages due to future climate change. Recalling Japan's experience with pollution problems, it is clear that striving for a society and economy with a lower environmental impact, even if it incurs certain costs, will ultimately lead to greater overall well-being. Furthermore, decarbonization investments generally bring simultaneous benefits for energy security by improving self-sufficiency rates. Additionally, there are economic advantages: renewable energy remains the cheapest power source until grid integration costs reach problematic levels.

The United States, which is currently turning its back on climate change measures, may see its perspective shift with generational change. According to a Pew Research Center survey, even among Republican supporters, attitudes differ by age group. Support for renewable energy is higher among younger generations, becoming the majority view among those in their 20s. Generational change takes time, but it is a steady process. In ten or twenty years, a different landscape may unfold.

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