

NEWSLETTER *Published August 8, 2025 • 5 minute read*

On the Grid: Enemies to Competitors



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Hi Friend!

Welcome back to *On the Grid*, Third Way's bi-weekly newsletter, where we'll recap how we're working to deploy every clean energy technology as quickly and affordably as possible. We're excited to have you join us!



PUBLIC OPINION

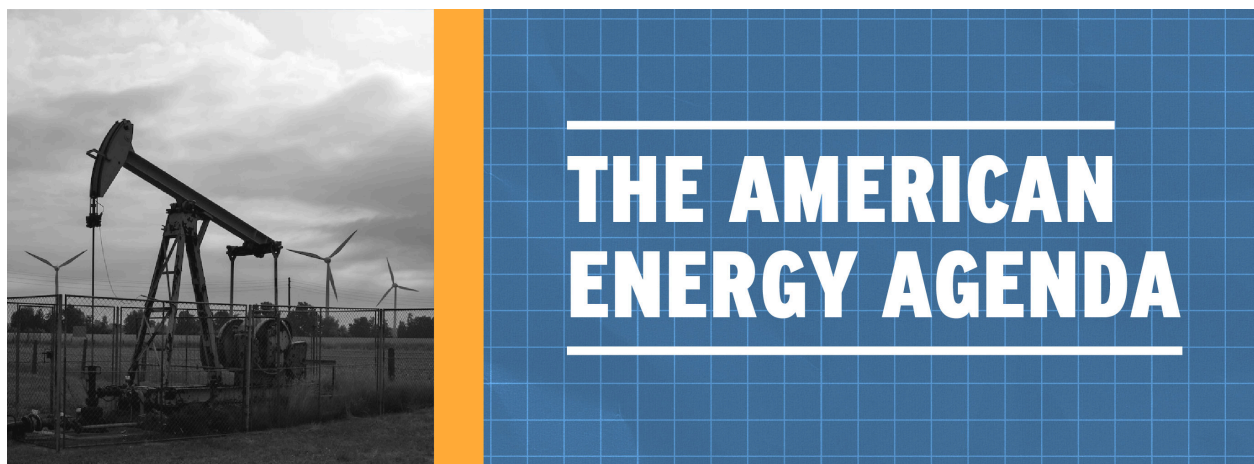
Our [new polling](#) finds that Americans aren't convinced that tariffs on China will boost America's economy. In fact, over the last two years, public opinion on China has shifted considerably, from pure antipathy to something more nuanced. Let's break down the key details:

1. **Americans See China as a Competitor, Not an Enemy:** Americans still hold deep reservations about China, and most view the country as a serious threat to national security. However, compared to polling we did in 2023, fewer Americans consider China an outright enemy. In the global economic race, Americans want to beat China fair-and-square, not just get the country disqualified.
2. **Moving Away from Confrontation Toward Cooperation:** Compared to 2 years ago, voters have now *shifted 20 points in favor* of finding areas of agreement with China. Support for cooperation with China increases among Americans who believe that a significant share of what they own was made in China. Nearly two-thirds of Americans estimate that at least half of what they own comes from China—punishing China, therefore, may feel to these Americans like punishing themselves.
3. **No Room for Defeatism:** There's an opportunity to lean into Americans' self-confidence and can-do spirit. Respondents on both sides of the aisle agree that, despite China's significant lead, the US can stand up to and eventually eclipse the country's market dominance. They do not want to give up the race for clean energy leadership. When we showed participants information on how much more China invests in clean energy than the US, they were *more* motivated to compete with China.

Why This Matters: Concerns about China have become a catch-all justification to obstruct clean energy deployment. Most recently, Congressional Republicans passed sweeping and ambiguous [Foreign Entity of Concern Restrictions](#), aimed largely at China, which will make it significantly more difficult to finance and deploy clean technologies in the US.

The instinct to protect American intellectual property, supply chains, and jobs is spot on. But as our polling shows, Americans aren't supportive of blanket restrictions on Chinese products, and they understand the danger of China surging ahead in clean energy, AI, and other developing technologies.

What We're Doing: Our team is working to equip policymakers and clean energy advocates with the data they need to navigate this moment with precision. These findings go against much of the conventional wisdom on China in US politics right now. Policymakers need to understand what Americans are thinking. Our respondents had specific, nuanced views on what they want from trade between the US and China, especially when it comes to safeguards for American workers. We're ensuring policymakers translate these insights into smart messaging and strategic policy.



We're entering an era of massive electricity demand growth from electric vehicles, new factories, and a flood of new data centers to power AI. Electricity use is growing faster than the US can deploy new energy projects. And the problem is only getting worse as tech companies race to build massive new data centers requiring as much power as entire cities. These companies want to be at the cutting edge of the AI revolution, and they want to do it in the US. That's positive, but the energy implications are already putting pressure on working families. Who pays for surging electricity demand, tech companies or ratepayers?

This is colliding with another significant challenge: the hope that cheap natural gas can keep energy prices in check is fading. That safety net is looking increasingly shaky. America's LNG export capacity is set to double by 2028, putting additional pressure on domestic supply. New wells take years to drill, pipelines are slow to build, and the current lead time for new gas turbines is up to 7 years. Additionally, the materials to expand our existing infrastructure, like copper and steel, are getting more and more expensive. The bottom line? Electricity demand is climbing, supply is lagging, and the margin to keep prices stable is getting thinner.

Why It Matters: This may sound distant now, but this *will* hit hard and sooner than we think. Electricity bills have already started to spike this summer—\$26 in Trenton, New Jersey, \$17 in

Philadelphia, and in Columbus, Ohio, where data centers are growing fast, households saw a \$27 jump. By 2026, rising energy bills will be front and center, and voters won't be swayed by abstract technology promises, buzzwords like 'abundance', or vague long-term policy frameworks. They want to know *why* they're paying more and *who* will fix it.

What We're Doing: Energy policy **MUST** center on reducing costs and creating real, local jobs for Americans, not abstract goals on climate or fuzzy promises for the future. Energy prices are rising at a time when most people are *already* struggling to make ends meet. That's getting worse as the grid is under pressure from growing AI data center demand and weather made more extreme by climate change (regardless of what Energy Secretary Chris Wright wants to pretend).

Making energy affordable *and* clean has long been at the core of our work. We're developing a policy agenda that charts a path for policymakers to help address rising prices and demand *now*, and reimagines the role of the federal government so we can build a lot more clean energy and infrastructure for the future, a lot more quickly. Traditional policy and political narratives are not working anymore. If we're not meeting the public where their concerns are or with messages they're open to, we've failed before getting out of the gate.



- [The Economist](#) outlines how tackling climate change is technically possible but politically challenging, and the importance of focusing on uplifting the practical benefits of clean energy—lower bills, cleaner air, and greater energy independence.
- [Justin Worland](#), in *TIME*, argues that clean energy is driving a major global economic realignment, and while other countries are racing to become global hubs for clean energy finance and technology, the US is hesitating and at risk of falling behind.
- [Rob Meyer and Jesse Jenkins](#), on *Heatmap's Shift Key* podcast, unpack the looming energy affordability crisis, highlight the trends behind it, and outline what this means for decarbonization.