



WORLD
ENERGY
COUNCIL

WORLD ENERGY TRILEMMA 2026

REBALANCING WORLD ENERGY

Trade-Offs and Transformations

ABOUT

WORLD ENERGY COUNCIL

The World Energy Council is the world's oldest independent and impartial energy leadership community. Through our Humanising Energy vision, we involve more people and communities in accelerating clean and inclusive energy transitions in all world regions.

Formed in 1923, the Council is a UN-accredited global energy body that has convened diverse interests from across the full energy ecosystem for a century. Today our global network has over 3,000 member organisations and a presence in more than 100 countries, drawn from governments, private and state corporations, academia and civil society, as well as current and future energy leaders. We collaborate on impact programmes and inform local, regional and global energy agendas in support of our enduring mission: to promote the sustainable use and supply of energy for the benefit of all people.

Further details at www.worldenergy.org and on [LinkedIn](#)

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WORLD ENERGY TRILEMMA

The World Energy Council defines the energy trilemma through three core dimensions: Energy Security, Energy Equity, and Environmental Sustainability.

The Trilemma is not a target to be reached but a set of trade-offs to be governed. Progress on one dimension can create pressure on another, and the right balance is never fixed – it moves with a country's circumstances and its wider operating environment. Managing these trade-offs, deliberately and repeatedly, is what distinguishes energy systems that endure from those that stall.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The world energy system is under unprecedented strain. The World Energy Issues Monitor 2026 records a leadership landscape more fragmented, polarised, and digitally noisy than at any point in the Trilemma's history. The relatively easy gains of the past two decades – falling clean-technology costs, efficiency improvements, and early fuel-switching – have largely been captured. The decisions now facing energy leaders carry real costs for identifiable communities, industries, and voters today, and, where deferred, for future generations.

For over twenty years the World Energy Trilemma has helped leaders balance security, equity, and environmental sustainability. What has changed is not the existence of these competing priorities but the context in which they are managed. Trade-offs have not disappeared: they have **moved** from generation to grids, storage, and system integration; they have become **more consequential**; and they have become **more local**. Because conditions now shift faster than decision cycles can settle them, balance must be actively and continuously re-achieved. This report calls that emerging capability, “rebalancing.”

Across five Regional Leadership Exchanges, convening more than 275 senior leaders from 65 countries, five trade-offs emerged as recurring in every region:

The trade-off	For dialogue
1 Investing in tomorrow's system vs. managing today's costs	At what point does deferring investment cost more than building it – and who needs to be in the room to make that call?
2 Redesigning markets vs. living with current market realities	Where have market rules already been redesigned successfully – and what made that politically possible?
3 National competitiveness vs. cross-border interdependence	Which dependencies can we live with, and which are worth paying a premium to avoid?
4 Speed of transitions vs. social legitimacy	What should be included in project design to earn social legitimacy?
5 The institutions we need vs. the institutions we have	What new cross-sectoral architectures do we need, and how can they be built?

None of these can be resolved at the level of technology or finance alone. What distinguishes the systems that manage them well is a set of five recurring leadership practices: **framing** the trade-offs honestly; **working the interfaces** where energy meets digital, industry, finance, communities, and nature; **governing** through institutions with the authority to change the rules, not merely to administer them; **building legitimacy as infrastructure** rather than communication; and **seeking synergies** as actively as managing trade-offs. Together these constitute rebalancing as a leadership capability.



The World Energy Trilemma Index will continue to measure what is globally measurable. Alongside it, the Council's **Rebalancing Dialogues** will extend leadership attention to what is not yet measurable – structured exchanges in which leaders test live decisions against emerging tensions. This is not a new index; it is a new Trilemma leadership conversation. The Council's contribution is not a set of answers but a leadership capability, and the trusted space in which it is developed.



Image from the World Energy Council's
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