

Pennsylvania has a fairly pitiful profile in terms of renewable energy. As of 2015, it got about 4% of its power from renewables, and only about half of that from wind and solar. Nearly all of the remainder was from nuclear (37%), coal (30%) and gas (28%). Perhaps not coincidentally, the state was the nation's third-largest coal producer in 2016 and the second largest natural gas producer, largely due to fracking. Things do seem to be shifting a bit away from coal: by 2017, natural gas had become a significantly greater source of electric power. The state exports a great deal of electricity to the mid-Atlantic region.

Pennsylvania politics is complicated because the state is broken into three regions. Someone once told me, "Politically, Philly is part of the East Coast, Pittsburgh is part of the Midwest, and in-between is part of Alabama." That's an exaggeration: Centre Country and Dauphin County went for Clinton, while rural areas in the east and west went for Trump. But there are very distinctive regional differences. The Governor's Mansion has flipped back and forth between parties recently. The state legislature is under firm GOP control, as it has been for twenty-five years apart from Democratic control of the House from 2006-2010.

Given the state's political situation, maybe it's not surprising that Pennsylvania's energy picture looks more like Virginia or the Carolinas than like New York or New Jersey. However, as with those Southern states, some degree of change does seem to be underway. In 2004, the state adopted a renewable portfolio standard of 18% for 2020, but only 8% must come from solar, wind and similar sources. The solar target was very low, and it was further undercut because utilities preferred to buy solar credits from out-of-state companies. Recently passed legislation does begin to address the latter problem.

As in many places, the 2018 mid-terms could move the needle in Pennsylvania. Depending on how things shake out, maybe Pennsylvania will start moving its energy policies into the 21st Century.