I sometimes ask students to guess what state produces the most wind power. They're always shocked to find out the right answer: Texas. Republicans have an iron grip on Texas government. And not just that, but Texas is by far the biggest producer of oil, with a governor who has pledged to protect the industry from climate regulation at all cost. Which seems a little hard to square with the state's reliance on renewable energy.

It's not as if the state's extensive use of wind power is just a historical fluke, either. Instead, Texas is doubling down on renewables. The state will soon get more power from renewables than natural gas. If anything, use of clean energy is about to accelerate. According to the power sector news report UtilityDive:

"Texas also led the country in renewable energy projects in 2021. . .. Its 7,325 MW of new wind, solar and energy storage projects brought online last year far surpasses the 2,697 MW in the next most active state, California. Texas is also the leader when ranked by how much wind, solar and storage states have under construction or in advanced development."

In contrast, the other big GOP state, Florida, is a notorious laggard in renewables. It may be the "Sunshine State," but it has been hesitant to use the sunshine for anything other than tanning.

One major difference between the two states is the way they regulate electricity. Texas is the poster child for electricity deregulation. The dominant regulatory philosophy is free market. Florida, in contrast, has a very traditional regulatory system, with a public utility commission controlling all aspects of the power sector. And, it appears, the state's big utilities in turn control the commission. Florida utilities have made big investments in fossil fuels, and it is only recently that they have begun to invest in utility-scale solar. And like utilities everywhere, they hate the idea of rooftop solar.

This difference in regulatory approaches may well reflect social, political, and economic differences between the two states that have led to a greater libertarian streak in the Texas version of conservatism. Whatever the deeper reasons, the upshot is that it would be harder for the government to quash renewables in Texas than in Florida, even assuming it wanted to. It also probably matters that Texas not only has solar capacity but sits at the foot of the "wind belt" that runs from the Rio Grande up to the Dakotas. In fact, Texas started building out wind power for economic reasons, because it wanted to hedge against fluctuations in the price of

natural gas.

Given that Texas is also by far the largest carbon emitter of any state, it would behoove us all to better understand the dynamics behind the state's energy policy— and how we might nudge those dynamics more in the direction of emission reduction. Unfortunately, at the moment, there's a risk that the dynamics of the "culture wars" may push the state in the opposite direction, embracing oil and gas as a symbol of anti-wokeness.