

THE INCONSISTENCY OF JOE BIDEN'S ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENT IN THE APPROVAL OF THE WILLOW PROJECT

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Submitted: 3rd May 2026 | Accepted: 24th May 2026

ABSTRACT

This study analyses the approval policy of the President of the United States, Joe Biden's approval for the Willow Project in 2023. This policy has sparked controversy because it is considered to contradict the environmental commitments made by Joe Biden during his 2020 U.S. presidential election campaign. This study aims to analyse the factors that influenced Joe Biden's decision-making using Richard Snyder's decision-making theory, which focuses on the analysis of internal factors, external factors, and the decision-making process. This study uses a qualitative method with data collection techniques through a literature review of various policy documents, academic literature, and media reports. The results of the study show that Joe Biden's decision was the result of a complex interaction between various factors, particularly energy needs, economic stability, and domestic political pressure, as well as the geopolitical dynamics following the Russia-Ukraine war. Thus, the Willow Project approval policy can be understood as a compromise between environmental commitments and the interests of maintaining energy security and economic stability.

Keywords: Willow Project; decision-making; United States' energy & environmental policy; United States' climate commitments

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis mengenai kebijakan persetujuan Presiden Amerika Serikat, Joe Biden terhadap Willow Project pada tahun 2023. Kebijakan tersebut menimbulkan kontroversi karena dinilai bertentangan dengan komitmen lingkungan yang dinyatakan Joe Biden selama masa kampanye pemilihan Presiden AS pada tahun 2020. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi pengambilan keputusan Joe Biden menggunakan teori pengambilan keputusan oleh Richard Snyder yang berfokus pada analisis faktor internal, faktor eksternal, dan proses pengambilan keputusan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui studi kepustakaan terhadap berbagai dokumen kebijakan, literatur akademik, dan laporan media. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keputusan Joe Biden tersebut merupakan hasil interaksi yang kompleks antara berbagai faktor, terutama faktor kebutuhan energi, stabilitas ekonomi, dan tekanan politik domestik serta dinamika geopolitik pasca perang Rusia-Ukraina. Dengan demikian, kebijakan persetujuan Willow Project dapat dipahami sebagai suatu bentuk kompromi antara komitmen lingkungan dengan kepentingan untuk menjaga ketahanan energi dan stabilitas ekonomi.

Kata kunci: Willow Project; pengambilan keputusan; kebijakan energi dan lingkungan Amerika Serikat; komitmen iklim Amerika Serikat

INTRODUCTION

The United States, as one of the major world powers, plays a vital role in mitigating greenhouse gas emissions; however, its energy policies frequently spark global controversy, as is the case with the Willow Project. This large-scale oil exploration project in Alaska is projected to produce 576 million barrels of oil over 30 years and has the potential to release more than 260 million metric tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere (Amanda et al., 2023). The inconsistency in policy became apparent when President Joe Biden approved the project on 13 March 2023; this decision directly contradicted his 2020 campaign pledge to halt drilling on federal lands, as well as his commitment under the Paris Agreement to achieve net-zero emissions. This phenomenon illustrates the dilemma between environmental protection priorities and the urgent need for energy security and domestic economic stability, particularly following Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Davenport, 2024).

In response to this issue, a number of studies have been conducted to analyse this policy. One study seeks to explain that Joe Biden's decision was driven by pressure from interest groups and national energy needs, using theories of elites and national interests (Irawan et al., 2024). Meanwhile, another study highlights the limitations of administrative regulations inherited from the Donald Trump administration (Kolbert, 2023), whilst yet another focuses on analysing the environmental impacts of carbon emissions generated by the project (Amanda et al., 2023). On the other hand, a study examines the implications of the project from the perspective of international human rights (Gunawan et al., 2023). The Willow Project has been analyzed separately from environmental, legal or national interest perspectives in earlier studies. Yet, limited research has systematically accounted for how the decision process of Joe Biden was simultaneously influenced by domestic political-economic pressures and international geopolitical factors under a single analytical framework. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by employing Richard Snyder's decision-making theory. Against this background, the study seeks to answer the question: why did Joe Biden decide to proceed with the Willow Project despite it conflicting with his environmental commitments and facing significant opposition?

This study is limited and focused on analysing Joe Biden's decision-making process regarding the Willow Project during the period from the 2020 campaign until the approval of the Willow Project in 2023, with an emphasis on economic, political, and geopolitical factors. The method employed is descriptive qualitative using a case study approach; consequently, statistical hypotheses are not utilised as in quantitative research. Instead, this study puts forward the central argument that Biden's approval of the Willow Project was primarily driven by domestic political and energy-security pressures exacerbated by global geopolitical instability, forcing the administration to compromise its environmental commitments.

This study aims to explore in depth the internal and external factors, ranging from domestic political pressures to the dynamics of the global energy market, that influence Joe Biden's decision-making. It is hoped that the findings of this study will make an academic contribution to the development of International Relations studies,

particularly in understanding the complexity of public policy-making when a leader is faced with a conflict of interests between international environmental commitments and national political-economic realities. Through this analysis, it is hoped that readers will gain a more comprehensive understanding of how a policy is often the result of pragmatic calculations amidst a pressing situation.

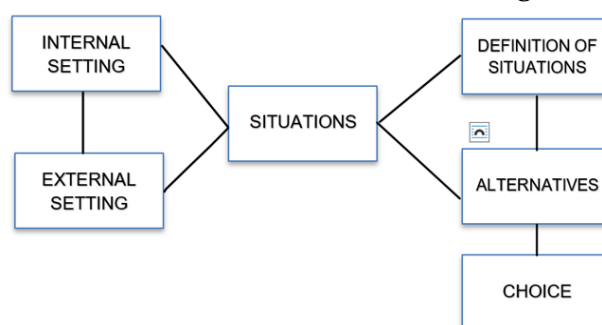
ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This research framework employs the decision-making theory developed by Richard Snyder as the primary approach to analysing President Joe Biden's decision to proceed with the Willow Project. Snyder's central tenet in this theory is that the state does not act as a single actor, but rather through decision-makers, and that to understand state action we must understand how its decision-makers define the situation (Snyder et al., 2002)

In this theory, Snyder proposes a decision-making model, which posits decision-making as the result of the interaction between three main elements (Husien, 2022), as follows: (1) Internal Setting or internal factors; this element encompasses geographical conditions, political structures and systems, domestic political conditions, and societal values; (2) External factors: these encompass all factors outside a country's territorial boundaries that also influence the decision-making process; (3) Decision-Making Process, which refers to the sequence of steps in the decision-making process. This process includes:

- 1) Situation, which is the combination of existing internal and external factors that subsequently shape the situation or conditions
- 2) Definition of Situation, namely how the decision-maker defines the existing situation by identifying the problem and determining the objectives to be achieved
- 3) Alternatives, namely the policy options considered by the decision-maker
- 4) Choice, namely the final decision selected by the decision-maker

Figure 1. Visualisation of Joe Biden's Decision-Making Process Framework



Source: Author

Richard Snyder focuses his theory on internal and external factors such as economic, social, and political factors, amongst others which play a significant role in influencing the decision-making process. In this context, Joe Biden is seen to have faced significant pressure from various sources, ranging from the political landscape, the

energy industry, domestic energy needs, to the geopolitical situation.

According to Snyder's theory, the decision-making process begins with the perception of the problem. In this context, Joe Biden views the energy crisis and economic pressures as an issue that must be addressed immediately. From there, policy alternatives are considered, such as approving the project in full, cancelling the project entirely, or proceeding with the project with modifications. After considering various internal and external factors, input from the actors involved, as well as the political and legal consequences, the decision to approve the Willow Project with modifications was taken. It can be seen from this process that this decision was not taken based solely on Joe Biden's personal preferences, but rather as a result of weighing various interests and pressures. Through this approach, not only will the background to Biden's decision become apparent, but also how the complex interplay between political, economic, and social factors influences a policy.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is a qualitative study that will employ a case study method. The use of this method is intended to enable the researcher to study Joe Biden's decision to proceed with the Willow Project amidst widespread opposition in depth. This method is considered appropriate as the researcher will utilise various data sources related to the topic and the case to obtain valid data and a better understanding of the case under study.

In this study, the required data includes: the initial approval of the Willow Project in the previous era, statements containing Joe Biden's environmental commitments before and after taking office, environmental conditions in Alaska, the state of US domestic energy needs, domestic and foreign political dynamics in the US, and other related matters. The data collection technique to be used is a literature review, whereby data will be sourced from scientific journal databases (ScienceDirect, Scopus, ResearchGate), documents, credible media articles and other relevant online sources. The collected data will then be selected based on specific criteria to ensure the relevance and validity of the information, including: topic relevance, temporal relevance, and source credibility.

In this study, the technique used to analyse the data is Qualitative Descriptive Analysis. The analysis is carried out in several stages, the first of which is data reduction. This involves focusing attention on, selecting, and simplifying the data obtained from various relevant and credible sources such as official US government documents, media reports, public statements, and academic literature. Subsequently, the reduced data will be presented in the form of a narrative description to facilitate the researcher's understanding of the relationships and patterns amongst variables from the various driving factors identified within the decision-making process, within the framework of Snyder's decision-making theory. Conclusions will then be drawn by interpreting the available data to answer the research question, namely regarding the reasons behind the inconsistency in Joe Biden's environmental commitments and policies in the context of approval for the Willow Project.

DISCUSSION

Richard Snyder's decision-making theory will be used to map and analyse the factors influencing this decision-making process, focusing on *the internal setting* (internal factors), *the external setting* (external factors), and the decision-making process itself. Snyder's theory argues that the best way to understand state action is by analysing how leaders or decision-makers interpret a problem; this theory focuses on decision-makers and how they define a situation (Snyder et al., 2002).

Analysis of Internal Factors in Joe Biden's Decision-Making

According to Snyder's theory, decision-making is influenced by the internal setting, namely all domestic conditions within a country that affect the decision-making process, either directly or indirectly.

a. US Domestic Economic and Energy Conditions

Data indicates that the average daily oil consumption in the US exceeded 20 million barrels in 2022, a figure 12% higher than consumption levels in 2020 (EIA, 2023). Furthermore, other data indicates that US oil imports stood at approximately 8.3 million barrels per day in 2022 and rose to a total of 8.5 million barrels per day in 2023 (EIA, 2025). Meanwhile, total US oil production up to 2023 remained below 13 million barrels per day (EIA, 2026). These figures indicate that the United States requires a significant amount of energy and relies on oil imports to meet its needs.

During this period, the United States was also experiencing inflation that reached its highest level in 10 years in June 2022, at 9.1%. Although this inflation rate did decline over time by 2023, it remained higher than pre-pandemic levels; in February 2020, the US inflation rate stood at just 2.3%, whereas in February 2023 it was still 6% (Trading Economics, 2026). With inflation on the rise and high oil import figures, these conditions are putting considerable pressure on the US government to boost its capacity to meet energy needs and improve the economic situation. The Willow Project is one of the largest US oil exploration projects in recent decades, estimated to produce around 180,000 barrels of oil per day, totalling nearly 600 million barrels of oil over a 30-year period. This figure is equivalent to roughly 1.5% of total US oil production. Furthermore, the Willow Project is projected to generate revenue of approximately \$17 billion for both the federal government and the state of Alaska, whilst creating thousands of jobs (Amanda et al., 2023).

The sharp increase in inflation and energy prices strengthened Biden's perception that domestic energy stability had become an urgent political issue. Under Snyder's framework, this condition shaped the "definition of the situation," whereby economic recovery and energy security were prioritised over environmental consistency. The United States' continued dependence on imported oil also influenced Biden's assessment that increasing domestic oil production was strategically necessary. From Snyder's view, domestic economic vulnerability became an important internal context that constricted Biden's policy alternatives and increased the appeal of the Willow Project.

b. Alaska's Geographical Conditions

Alaska was chosen as the location for the Willow Project due to its vast oil reserves. This makes the region economically strategic; however, Alaska is home to indigenous communities and serves as a habitat for various species, such as polar

bears and Teshekpuk caribou. Implementing the project in Alaska could cause serious damage, as the region itself is already warming at twice the global rate. With projected emissions of 260 million metric tonnes of carbon dioxide, the region could experience warming four times faster than before (Amanda et al., 2023).

From the implementation of the Willow Project, in addition to drilling activities that can physically damage the permafrost layer, the global warming that may be triggered will cause the permafrost to thaw more rapidly. This description clearly illustrates the significant impacts that could arise solely from the damage to permafrost caused by the implementation of this large-scale oil exploration project in Alaska, whilst there are many more potential adverse effects that could be caused by the Willow Project (Destary et al., 2024). Alaska's environmental vulnerability presented a major dilemma for Biden's decision-making process. Whilst the region's large oil reserves brought significant economic advantages, the environmental risks increased pressure from environmental groups and indigenous communities. The policy faced conflicting pressures, with the environmental risks of permafrost damage and carbon emissions forcing Biden to balance environmental commitments with domestic strategic interests.

c. Legal and Administrative Constraints

The Willow Project is a project that has already received approval from the previous administration, specifically in 2020 under the leadership of Donald Trump. Furthermore, ConocoPhillips has held the lease rights to the NPR-A area for the Willow Project since 1999. Consequently, this project possesses a valid legal and administrative basis (Yulia & et al., 2023).

Unilaterally cancelling the Willow Project could result in legal consequences for the federal government, whereby ConocoPhillips could file and win a lawsuit, forcing the federal government to pay litigation costs or fines amounting to billions of dollars. In this regard, Joe Biden views that a total cancellation of the project is not a legally sound course of action and could result in losses for the government (Amanda et al., 2023). Within Snyder's framework, these legal constraints shaped Biden's perception of what constituted a "realistic" policy alternative. This encouraged Biden to view policy modification as the most realistic compromise.

d. The Domestic Political Structure of the US

The domestic political structure of the United States divides the government into the federal government and state governments. Within this system, the federal government does not have sole control over policy; states may reject, support, or even challenge federal government policies. Furthermore, the US also separates power into three branches which creates a situation where policies cannot be entirely determined by the President; instead, a policy must be approved by Congress, can be challenged in court, and may be rejected by the states.

The US political system is a key factor in the internal setting, as it demonstrates the significant role played by Congress, the courts, and the states in limiting the President's decision-making scope. The two-party system, dominated by the Republican and Democratic parties, also plays a role in the existing dynamics. This system creates real polarisation and dilemmas, such as on climate issues. In this context, decision-making by Joe Biden as president must strike a balance between

the demands of his own party and potential opposition from the Republican Party; decision-makers often need to compromise and make pragmatic decisions so that they can be approved by various parties and become official policy (Farber, 2018).

This political system limited Biden's ability to implement an ideal environment policy without political compromises. Under Snyder's framework, the domestic political structure functioned as an internal setting that shaped Biden's political calculations. The need to maintain support across multiple political actors necessitated a more pragmatic approach towards the Willow Project.

e. Electoral Interests

During the 2022–2023 period, the US experienced significant inflation due to a surge in oil prices, followed by the Biden administration's announcement of approval for the Willow Project in March 2023. Within the US political system, this period fell within the early stages of consolidating support for the 2024 election, and economic and energy issues had a significant impact on electoral interests. Meanwhile, in several public surveys, the inflation occurring during that period became one of the main factors influencing how the public viewed the national economic situation and their approval ratings of the president's performance (Pew Research, 2024). However, surveys conducted regarding Biden's approval ratings on the economy showed that only 33% of the US public approved of his performance in handling the economy (Childree, 2023).

Furthermore, the Electoral College within the US electoral system means that candidates tend to focus and tailor their campaign strategies and policies to specific states, particularly swing states (Febriyanti & Pratama, 2017). In this context, the swing states central to Biden's strategy are the Rust Belt states. This region is known as the "Blue Wall" for the Democratic Party; by retaining the vote from this region, Joe Biden has a greater chance of winning electoral votes. The composition of the electorate in each state is a crucial factor in electoral politics; the Rust Belt encompasses states with a working-class base, particularly in the manufacturing sector and trade unions such as the AFL-CIO and NABTU, which wield significant influence in this region (Crowley, 2024).

In Snyder's perspective, Biden views economic stability not just as an economic issue but also as a political necessity to maintain voter support, especially among union and working-class voters in key swing states. Because the Willow project symbolises the increase in national energy production, job creation, and economic recovery, all of which are closely tied to Biden's election strategy, it makes it politically significant. This shows that Biden agrees with the Willow Project as part of a broader political survival strategy in the context of the national election, not just an energy policy decision.

f. Responses and Pressure from Various Parties

Responses to the approval of the Willow Project have been divided, with criticism and opposition from various parties who highlight the project's potential environmental damage and are pressuring the government to cancel it. Meanwhile, others argue that the Willow Project can boost US economic growth and are urging the government to proceed with the project.

Those opposing the Willow Project include members of Congress, environmental organisations, and civil society. Several environmental organisations have taken legal action against this decision, such as Earthjustice and Greenpeace, who filed a lawsuit on 15 March 2023 alongside several other environmental groups. All these parties have expressed their opposition to the Willow Project because the project poses a significant risk of environmental damage and because they are concerned for the communities and ecosystems of Alaska, which will bear the brunt of the project's impact (Kruse, 2023). One example is the Nuiqsut Traditional Village and Town (the area in Alaska closest to the project site) wrote a joint letter addressed to the Department of the Interior to express their opposition and concerns regarding the impacts of the Willow Project on the health and livelihoods of Alaskan communities, as well as the lack of government consultation with the community and the lack of public involvement in the approval process (Nuiqsut, 2023).

However, criticism and opposition are not the only forms of response faced by Joe Biden; there is also support from various parties who are even pressuring Joe Biden to approve the Willow Project, such as several Alaska delegates and trade unions (AFL- CIO & NABTU). These parties support the Willow Project, which is projected to produce sufficient quantities of oil and help achieve US energy independence. In a statement, Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan added, "We hope President Biden and his team agree", a closing remark that clearly reflects the pressure on the Biden administration to approve the Willow Project (Murkowski et al., 2023).

Each actor holds a distinct position and wields varying influence over society, which in turn can shape public perception of Joe Biden, as well as how Joe Biden defines the issues at hand. In this regard, key political and economic actors such as senators and trade unions wield greater influence in shaping Joe Biden's perception of the urgency to prioritise economic stability and energy security, which the Willow Project could help achieve. Furthermore, these actors have a greater influence on society to shape public perception of Joe Biden, such as the AFL-CIO and NABTU, which represent the working class in the US.

Analysis of External Factors in Joe Biden's Decision-Making

According to Snyder's theory, decision-making is also influenced by the external setting or external factors. The external setting in decision-making encompasses all factors lying beyond a nation's territorial boundaries.

a. Geopolitical Conditions and the Global Oil Market

Approval of the Willow Project is also influenced by the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The conflict between the two has a significant impact on geopolitics and the global oil market, particularly for Western nations. This is because Russia is one of the world's major energy producers and exporters, including as a key supplier of natural gas and crude oil.

When the invasion took place, Russia faced economic sanctions from Western nations, particularly the European Union. These were intended to curb Russia's revenue from oil exports, but subsequently triggered a restructuring of global oil trade routes (BBC, 2022). Meanwhile, OPEC, together with Russia, also adopted a policy to reduce oil production by up to 2 million barrels per day (VOA, 2022). These

changes caused disruptions to the global energy supply chain and led to a rise in oil prices, with prices surging to over \$100 per barrel (Asykarulloh & Maulana, 2025). This phenomenon subsequently prompted governments to recognise the need to reduce their dependence on energy supplies amidst a dynamic geopolitical landscape (Amanda et al., 2023).

These conditions have become a significant factor within the external setting that reshaped perceptions and influences decision-making by Joe Biden. This phenomenon cannot be directly cited as the reason for the approval of the Willow Project; however, the geopolitical dynamics and global oil market developments following Russia's invasion of Ukraine exerted significant pressure and prompted greater government attention to the country's domestic energy security. In this context, Joe Biden positioned the Willow Project not simply as an environmental issue, but as a strategic response to the emerging urgency of reducing US reliance on energy imports and safeguarding national energy security.

b. Global Climate Commitments and the US Position

On the other hand, global climate commitments also place pressure on the United States. The US's status as one of the largest emitters and the environmental policies adopted by Biden have placed the US in a strategic and strong position regarding global climate commitments.

The US's position within global climate commitments is a factor considered within the external context of Joe Biden's decision-making. In this regard, Joe Biden faces a dilemma: if the US grants permission for a large-scale oil exploration project, it would create inconsistencies that could undermine the US's credibility in global climate commitments. The US's position within global climate commitments constitutes a normative environment that shapes international expectations and perceptions of US actions; this is also the argument put forward by progressive groups, who contend that approval of the Willow Project would damage the US's reputation, thereby weakening its position and leverage in international climate negotiations and diplomacy (Destary et al., 2024).

Under Snyder's framework, this factor formed part of the external setting influencing how Biden evaluated the international consequences. However, the mechanisms within the Paris Agreement itself do not contain any provisions explicitly prohibiting fossil fuel projects. On the contrary, countries possess the flexibility and responsibility to determine their emission reduction targets within their Nationally Determined Contributions, whereby states are required to set targets and gradually increase them, as stipulated in Article 4.3 of the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015). Analytically, it can be understood that Joe Biden's decision to approve the Willow Project was also made following a calculation that the additional emissions the project might generate could still be offset by other emission reduction policies such as the IRA. Therefore, Biden's decision reflected a pragmatic attempt to maintain both domestic energy stability and international climate credibility simultaneously.

The Decision-Making Process in the Approval of the Willow Project

In the decision-making process, internal and external settings interact to shape the situation. The situation describes the conditions within the decision-making space, formed by various domestic and international factors. This situation then defines the problem, whereby decision-makers define the situation by identifying existing issues and pressures to determine the objectives to be achieved. This problem definition by the actors then gives rise to alternative policy options, which are subsequently considered by the decision-makers. Such considerations may encompass the benefits and risks of each available policy option. Through this deliberation, the decision-makers will then select one of these options to form a final decision.

Regarding the approval of the Willow Project, Joe Biden's final decision to approve it will be analysed through a decision-making process framework developed by applying Richard Snyder's decision-making theory.

a. Situation

In the context of the approval of the Willow Project, the prevailing situation can be understood by examining the domestic economic conditions of the United States, where post-pandemic inflation was further exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Furthermore, the US has a high level of energy consumption, with domestic energy production unable to fully meet these needs; consequently, the US relies on energy imports for nearly 50% of its energy requirements, whilst disruptions to the global energy supply chain have triggered a rise in oil prices. This is also linked to Joe Biden's electoral interests in implementing strategies to secure his victory in the upcoming 2024 election.

Meanwhile, the US is committed to global climate efforts to reduce global emissions as part of climate change mitigation, notably through the Paris Agreement, and Joe Biden has specifically pledged to restore US leadership in these global climate commitments. By approving fossil fuel exploration projects, particularly on a large scale, Joe Biden would be seen as backtracking on his environmental commitments, and this could undermine the US's international credibility. Thus, it can be seen that there are two types of pressure influencing Joe Biden's decision-making: pressure to reject and pressure to approve the Willow Project.

b. Definition of the Situation

The next stage in Joe Biden's decision-making process is how he defines the current situation. From both the internal and external settings that shape the context of the decision regarding the Willow Project, it is evident that there are two types of pressure influencing Joe Biden: pressure to approve and pressure to reject.

From an analysis of both factors, Joe Biden believes there is a more pressing urgency for his administration to ensure energy security and domestic economic recovery. Furthermore, Joe Biden is also taking into account the significant pressure from key stakeholders, such as members of Congress and trade unions, to approve the Willow Project. Joe Biden cannot simply cancel the project to avoid legal action worth billions of dollars. Furthermore, Joe Biden also sees a significant opportunity in terms of his electoral prospects ahead of the 2024 election, where it is crucial for him to boost his approval ratings and retain the support of his working-class and industrial voter base to secure the key to his victory.

Although, on the other hand, the implementation of the Willow Project carries significant risks of environmental damage and the US is striving to regain leadership in global climate commitments to mitigate the threat of climate change, the need to ensure economic stability and energy security is seen as a more pressing concern.

c. Alternatives

The process of considering policy alternatives is a crucial stage in which policymakers identify and evaluate each available policy option to make the decision deemed most appropriate and suitable, particularly in a dilemmatic and urgent situation such as the approval of the Willow Project. At this stage, three alternative policy options are being considered by Joe Biden, namely:

1) Rejecting the Willow Project (in its entirety)

This option could be chosen to avoid the risk of environmental damage in Alaska or globally. It would also maintain consistency between domestic and international environmental commitments and agendas, thereby preserving credibility on environmental issues, including global climate commitments.

However, choosing this option carries political and economic risks, such as the threat of rising inflation in the US due to increased energy prices not being offset by sufficient energy supply. Furthermore, the US would be unable to reduce its dependence on energy imports, which could weaken the US's negotiating position and strength, leading to the risk of uncertainty in US domestic energy security.

Furthermore, there is a risk of losing voter support from the working class, Democrats, and independent voters due to public perceptions of the government's limited ability to maintain economic stability and the view that, in this decision, the government is neglecting the domestic energy industry, including job creation.

2) Approving the Willow Project (as proposed)

This option could provide significant assistance in ensuring domestic energy security through increased domestic production, as the Willow Project is projected to produce large quantities of oil. However, there are several significant risks. This decision will not only affect public perception in the US but will also impact the US's global reputation, particularly its credibility regarding the US's leadership role in global climate commitments.

Another risk is the potential environmental damage, both from physical activities and from the project's carbon emissions. The environmental damage posed by the Willow Project threatens the habitats of species in Alaska and the very survival of communities. These environmental impacts could also pose a global threat due to rising sea levels and global temperatures.

3) Granting approval with modifications

An option is to grant approval for the Willow Project whilst imposing conditions and modifications to the original plan. The conditions and modifications applied include limiting the number of drilling sites to just three locations, restricting project vehicle traffic, and limiting the number of oil wells, amongst other measures.

This option allows the Joe Biden administration to continue meeting domestic energy needs and economic conditions, whilst indirectly reducing US reliance on imports without entirely abandoning environmental commitments and agendas. This is achieved through various modifications established in the project's implementation to ensure that damage is minimised and remains within the limits and balance required for emission reduction targets. This decision could also spare the government from legal challenges and the resulting losses, as well as the risk of losing political support for Joe Biden himself.

4) Choice

The final stage of the decision-making process, in which the decision-maker ultimately selects one of the available policy alternatives as a final, unanimous decision. Having considered each available policy alternative, Joe Biden's decision was to approve the Willow Project subject to technical modifications. Joe Biden's decision represents the dynamics and complexity of the decision-making process, involving calculations and compromises between various competing interests, both internal and external. In this instance, Joe Biden made a rational decision by prioritising urgent domestic interests over the normative consistency of his environmental commitments, adapting to complex and dilemmatic circumstances.

When viewed comparatively, the dominant factor influencing Joe Biden's final decision was domestic economic and energy pressure, which is closely linked to domestic political pressure. Through the lens of Snyder's theory, Joe Biden is seen as recognising an urgent need to safeguard energy security and domestic economic stability amidst geopolitical turmoil and domestic energy uncertainty, without necessarily reversing course or abandoning his climate commitments. Joe Biden's approval of the Willow Project cannot be understood as a reneging on his environmental commitments, but rather as a rational decision in the form of a compromise to adapt to a pressing situation.

CONCLUSION

The final decision taken by Joe Biden was to grant approval with modifications, this decision reflects Biden's attempt to adopt the most realistic policy without entirely abandoning his environmental commitments. Through Snyder's theory, Joe Biden's decision-making is viewed as the result of a combination of internal and external settings, as well as how Joe Biden defines the existing issues. Based on this analysis, Biden's decision was primarily driven by the need to safeguard energy security and domestic economic stability influenced by global geopolitical dynamics as well as domestic political pressures.

This study demonstrates that Richard Snyder's theory is relevant for understanding and explaining the inconsistencies in the policy regarding the Willow Project's approval, and that policy cannot be viewed solely through the lens of normative rhetoric but must be understood as the result of a process of weighing domestic and international factors that subsequently influence the decision-making process. Therefore, in this context, it can also be understood that a country's ambitious climate commitments may be subordinated when faced with pressing short-term economic or political interests. Further research could develop an analysis of a country's energy and environmental policies using primary data from relevant sources to obtain more accurate

data to substantiate the argument.

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