

**GREEN PARTIES AS A CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL PHENOMENON:
ORIGINS, IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS, AND DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS**

S. Yakubov

Doctor of Political Sciences (DSc), Associate Professor,
Uzbekistan State University of World Languages (UzSWLU)

Abstract: This article examines Green parties as a distinctive political phenomenon of the post-industrial era. It explores the historical conditions that contributed to their emergence, the ideological principles that shape their political identity, and the patterns of their electoral development across different regions of the world. Particular attention is paid to the challenges Green parties face in contemporary political competition, including balancing environmental priorities with broader social, economic, and governance issues. The study demonstrates that Green parties have evolved beyond a narrow focus on environmental protection, offering a comprehensive post-materialist agenda that addresses sustainability, social justice, democratic participation, and quality of life. The article concludes that the long-term success and institutional development of Green parties largely depend on their ability to preserve their core values while adapting to the practical demands of parliamentary politics and government responsibility.

Keywords: Green parties, environmental politics, post-materialism, party systems, environmental movement, Alliance 90/The Greens, electoral politics, sustainable development.

By the late twentieth century, environmental issues had firmly entered the global political agenda. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution evolved from niche scientific concerns into systemic challenges demanding state and international responses. In this context, Green parties represent one of the most significant institutional responses civil society has produced to the ecological contradictions of industrial development.

Yet the Green phenomenon extends well beyond environmental rhetoric. Their policy programmes and governing experience reveal a distinctive political project rooted in post-material values, participatory democracy, and social justice a multidimensionality that sustains enduring scholarly interest in comparative politics.

This article examines Green parties as a political phenomenon, addressing their historical origins, ideological characteristics, electoral performance, and institutional prospects. The study draws on comparative and institutionalist approaches, alongside Inglehart's post-materialism framework [1].

The institutional emergence of Green parties was preceded by a broader wave of environmental activism that swept Western democracies during the 1960s and 1970s. The publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 [2] marked a turning point in public consciousness, repositioning ecological problems as inherently political rather than merely technical. Anti-nuclear campaigns, wildlife conservation movements, and the inaugural Earth Day (1970) collectively functioned as incubators of a new political culture one that, despite its initial scepticism toward representative institutions, was ultimately drawn into the electoral arena by the practical necessity of shaping legislation and public budgets.

The defining institutional moment came in 1980, with the founding of *Die Grünen* in West Germany. By consolidating anti-nuclear activists, feminist organisations, and left-libertarian groups under a coherent post-material platform, the party entered the Bundestag in 1983 and

established a replicable model for analogous formations across Western Europe [3]. The decade that followed saw Green parties emerge in France (*Les Verts*, 1984), Austria (1986), and Finland (1987), culminating in the founding of the European Federation of Green Parties (1984) later reconstituted as the European Green Party (2004). These developments confirmed that the phenomenon was not transient, but rather a durable party family with supranational coordination.

The ideological foundation shared by these parties' rests on four interlocking principles first articulated by *Die Grünen*: ecological sustainability, social justice, grassroots democracy, and nonviolence. This framework reflects a systemic diagnosis: environmental crisis, inequality, authoritarianism, and militarism are not discrete problems but manifestations of a common structural dysfunction [4].

One of the most contested questions in Green party scholarship concerns their placement within conventional ideological space. As several comparativists have noted, Green parties resist the classical left–right binary, combining elements historically associated with opposing traditions: a critique of capitalist accumulation alongside a strong commitment to individual rights and decentralisation; anti-statist scepticism alongside demands for stringent environmental regulation [5]. This apparent incoherence dissolves, however, once a second ideological axis is introduced.

Inglehart's post-materialism framework [1] provides the most analytically productive lens here. As advanced industrial societies progressively satisfy basic material needs, a new value hierarchy emerges centred on quality of life, ecological wellbeing, political participation, and self-expression. Green parties are best understood as the primary institutional vehicle for this post-material demand, which cuts across, rather than along, the traditional left–right divide.

This broad ideological orientation nonetheless harbours significant internal tensions. Two distinct currents compete within the **Green** family. *Eco-socialism* holds that capitalist growth logic is structurally incompatible with ecological sustainability, linking environmental solutions to a transformation of productive relations [6]. *Eco-liberalism*, by contrast, maintains that market instruments — carbon taxation, green bonds, ESG standards — are sufficient to drive the necessary transition without systemic restructuring. This tension erupted most visibly in the *Fundis–Realos* split within *Die Grünen* during the 1980s; the pragmatist wing prevailed, enabling coalition participation, yet the underlying debate over the limits of compromise has never been fully resolved.

A further ideological characteristic is the Green parties' affinity with other post-material movements second- and third-wave feminism, LGBTQ+ rights advocacy, alter-globalisation, and animal rights. This family resemblance reflects a shared normative foundation: the primacy of life quality, anti-elitism, and the critique of hierarchical structures. Yet the breadth of this alignment carries its own risks, blurring the party's distinctive profile and generating competition with other progressive actors for the same electoral constituency.

Green parties have achieved their most durable electoral results in Western and Northern Europe. The 2019 European Parliament elections marked a high-water point, with the "Green wave" delivering a record 74 seats out of 705 approximately 10.5% of the chamber [7]. *Die Grünen* have twice entered federal government in Germany, first in coalition with the SPD (1998–2005) and again in a three-party coalition (2021–2024); Finland's Greens have participated in multiple governing coalitions, demonstrating a capacity for cross-ideological cooperation. Yet these successes carried an inherent cost: coalition governance routinely required Green parties to moderate their most ambitious demands particularly on decarbonisation timelines and infrastructure constraints generating persistent internal controversy over the acceptable boundaries of compromise.

Outside Western Europe, the picture is considerably more constrained. In the United States, structural barriers single-member plurality districts, the absence of public party financing, and the Democratic Party's systematic appropriation of environmental messaging have kept the Green Party of the United States below the one-percent threshold in every presidential contest [8]. On the post-Soviet periphery, Green-oriented parties largely exist as marginal or formally registered but politically inert structures; in Central Asian states, including Uzbekistan, environmental governance is channelled predominantly through executive state policy rather than competitive party politics, reflecting a fundamentally different institutional logic.

Comparative analysis identifies four conditions consistently associated with Green electoral viability: proportional representation systems that lower entry barriers for smaller parties; high levels of post-material socialisation, which correlate with education and income; salient local environmental conflicts that activate civic participation; and effective access to younger demographics through digital platforms, where ecological messaging finds its most receptive audience [9]. The uneven global distribution of these conditions goes far toward explaining the stark regional asymmetry in Green party performance.

The electoral advances documented in the preceding section have brought with them a structural dilemma that now defines the central tension of Green party politics: the trade-off between governmental effectiveness and ideological authenticity. As Green parties have consolidated their parliamentary presence, scholars have begun to characterise their trajectory as one of "cartelisation" a gradual transition from movement-party to conventional parliamentary actor [10]. The German case is instructive: *Die Grünen* suffered a significant decline in support during the 2021–2024 coalition, as a portion of their core electorate interpreted concessions on coal phase-out timelines and defence spending as a fundamental departure from first principles. Governing, it appears, extracts a reputational cost that opposition never does.

Pressure comes from both flanks simultaneously. Mainstream centre-left and social-democratic parties have systematically absorbed environmental rhetoric into their platforms, eroding the Green parties' distinctive electoral niche from the left. From the right, populist movements have constructed a counter-narrative framing ecological policy as an elite project threatening working-class livelihoods a narrative that has proven electorally effective in several national contexts, compelling Green parties to develop a more persuasive discourse around just transition.

A third challenge has emerged from within the broader environmental field itself. The rise of Extinction Rebellion (2018), Fridays for Future (2018), and Just Stop Oil (2022) has created a new generation of extra-parliamentary actors who deliberately distance themselves from electoral logic in favour of civil disobedience and direct action [11]. For Green parties, these movements present an uncomfortable strategic dilemma: disavowing radical allies risks alienating a mobilised constituency; endorsing their tactics risks unsettling the moderate voters whose support coalition governance requires.

Underlying all these pressures is a deeper organisational question posed by Generation Z activism. Climate mobilisation among younger cohorts operates through horizontal digital networks that are structurally incompatible with traditional party hierarchies. Green parties thus face a medium-term imperative: to adapt their organisational models sufficiently to capture the energy of digital-native activism without dissolving the institutional coherence that makes sustained policy influence possible.

Green parties have established themselves as a durable party family, anchored in post-material values and offering a programmatic alternative to the conventional left–right axis. Their genesis is inseparable from the civil environmental activism of the 1960s–1980s; their ideological distinctiveness lies in the integration of ecological, social, democratic, and pacifist

commitments into a coherent, if internally contested, political project. Their institutional future will depend, above all, on their capacity to hold together authenticity and pragmatism a balance that no Green party has yet resolved with finality, and that may, in itself, be constitutive of what it means to govern in an age of ecological crisis.

Green electoral viability is most pronounced where proportional representation lowers entry barriers and post-material socialisation runs deep. Coalition participation translates that viability into tangible policy influence, yet consistently generates the tension between governing pragmatism and foundational commitment that has defined the Green experience in office across multiple national contexts.

Looking ahead, three challenges will prove decisive. First, whether Green parties can preserve ideological distinctiveness as mainstreaming pressures intensify. Second, whether they can construct a compelling counter-narrative to right-populist criticism — one that frames ecological transition as a project of social solidarity rather than elite imposition. Third, whether their organisational models can absorb the mobilisational energy of digital-native activism without losing the institutional coherence that sustained policy influence requires. In the broader perspective, Green parties remain a sensitive indicator of democratic maturity: their institutional trajectory reflects a society's willingness to engage in long-term ecological planning and to accept political responsibility toward future generations.

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