



A UKIP of the Left: Does the Green Party of England and Wales have Populist Elements?

A qualitative content analysis of party outputs from 1973 till the present day

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Abstract

In 2024, the Green Party of England and Wales achieved their greatest ever success in a United Kingdom general election, prompting renewed media commentary regarding the party's potential populist elements. Despite populism being a political buzzword in recent years, the Green Party's engagement with populism has been overlooked by academia. Indeed, a prevailing assumption exists that *green* and *populist* are mutually exclusive labels. Given this, as well as misuse of populism, as a concept, in the media, rigorous academic analysis is needed to determine whether the Greens have populist elements. This study operationalizes the ideational approach to populism, using four themes - people centrism, popular sovereignty, anti-elitism, and proclaiming crisis - to test for populist elements in the Green Party. Texts, including speeches, manifestos, and party publications, from 1973 to the present day are analysed using qualitative content analysis and organised into the four themes. The study finds that the Green Party has consistently articulated each theme throughout their history. Furthermore, a populist Manichean worldview (the people versus the elites) is present throughout. Overall, the evidence suggests that populism is hard-wired into the Green Party's DNA.

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List of Abbreviations

UK	United Kingdom
MP	Member of Parliament
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
PR	Proportional Representation
EEC	European Economic Community
EU	European Union

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1. Introduction

Recent years have seen a rise in right-wing populist politics, typically obstructing climate action (Atkins, 2022, p.2), and a parallel ascendancy of environmental actors, including Greta Thunberg, Just Stop Oil, and Extinction Rebellion. In this context, the Green Party of England and Wales (hereafter ‘the Green Party’ or ‘the Greens’), the oldest green party in Europe (Carter, 2008, p.223), has achieved significant electoral success, receiving, in 2024, their highest share of the vote, number of votes, and MPs in a general election.

In the wake of this success, Jonathon Porritt (2024), once chair of the Ecology Party (the Green Party’s former iteration), urged the Greens to ‘learn from Reform’, and be equally ‘populist’. This sentiment has precedence. A decade earlier, in 2014, the party was widely described as a ‘UKIP of the left’ (Jenkins, 2014; *The Economist*, 2014; Coates, 2014), and former Green Party spokesperson, Rupert Read (2014), recommended that the Greens become ‘more of a UKIP of the left than [they] already are’. James Dennison (2015, p.192) attributed this media commentary to the 2014/15 ‘Green Surge’, a term coined by the media and the party amidst improving poll ratings and membership numbers. Ahead of the 2025 local elections, the Greens are positioning as an alternative to Reform UK (Ramsay, 2025a). While commentators identify this as a populist repositioning, they see the party’s leadership as lacking the required ‘charisma’, and being ‘too polite’ to be populist (Todd, 2025; Beveridge, 2025).

While scholars have readily identified UKIP and Reform as populist and observed the flirtation with populism by the Conservative and Labour Parties (see Bale, 2013; 2022; Watts and Bale, 2019), the Greens have been ignored. This scholarly oversight is, perhaps, unsurprising. A prevailing assumption exists that environmental actors focus on long-term, technocratic solutions, rather than populist preoccupations (see Gerbaudo, 2025, p.22; Zulianello and Ceccobelli, 2020, pp.627-8). Furthermore, populism is often associated with charismatic leaders (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008, p.7), which the Greens have lacked. Given that understandings of populism are often shaped by context (Taggart, 2002, p.63), the populism of recent years has forged caricatures of populist leaders who arrive loudly, rudely and with distinctive styles (Moffitt, 2016). This ill-equips contemporary observers to recognise alternative populist expressions.

While media commentary has picked up on a populist potential in the Greens, populism, as an identifier, is often misused by the media (Brown and Mondon, 2021, p.280). This, coupled with academic oversight, necessitates dedicated and rigorous academic analysis, prioritising definitional clarity. Approaching populism as comprising four dimensions - *people-centrism*, *popular sovereignty*, *anti-elitism*, and *proclaiming crisis* - this study, deploying qualitative content analysis (QCA) of Green Party messaging from 1973 until the present day, finds that populism is hard-wired into the Green Party's DNA.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Populism and the Ideational Approach

Populism is ‘an essentially contested concept’, with ‘endless disputes’ regarding its proper use (Mudde, 2017, p.27; Gallie, 1956, p.169). Some scholars define populism as a *style*, focusing on the performative dimensions of leaders (see Moffitt, 2016). Others define populism as a *strategy* for amassing political power (see Weyland, 2017). Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser’s *ideational approach*, the most influential, defines populism as:

[A] thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite,” and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, p.6).

Irrespective of approach, scholars situate this Manichean worldview (the people versus the elite) as central to populism (Hawkins, et al. 2019, p.2). Some scholars see a complementarity, with ideational approaches defining *what* populism is, style approaches examining *how* it looks, and strategic approaches explaining *why* it is deployed (Engesser, Fawzi, and Larsson, 2017, p.1280). Given the focus of the present study, to establish if populism is even present in the Green Party, the ideational approach is apt due to its definitional and categorical capacity.

Populism, as a ‘thin’ ideology, requires a ‘thicker’ ideology (e.g. socialism, nationalism, neoliberalism) as its host (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, p.19). For ideational scholars, *the people* are a homogeneous group, with flexible credentials (e.g. ethnic, class-based, the electorate, or ‘no fixed group at all’) (Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011, p.1273). Populists view *the people* as sovereign, wanting to give power back to them, often advocating for direct democracy (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, p.17). Yet, populists still believe in representation, but contend that only they can offer it, while the elite (e.g. political, economic, media) are corrupt and working against the people (Müller, 2017, pp.19-20). For Matthijs Rooduijn (2014, p.573), populists emphasize the centrality of a homogeneous people, criticize the elite, but, additionally, proclaim ‘a serious crisis’. Whether real or imagined, crisis is used to accentuate anti-elitism (Ibid). From the ideational literature, therefore, we can identify four

themes which constitute populism: *people-centrism*, *popular sovereignty*, *anti-elitism*, and *proclaiming crisis*.

2.2 Looking for Populism

Given its precise definition, most studies examining populism in political parties operationalize the ideational approach (Meijers and Zaslove, 2021, p.374), which is also deemed ‘most suitable’ when analysing populism in ‘programmatic party systems’ like the UK’s (March, 2017, p.286). Further, the ideational approach is useful for analysing parties and movements as it is not leader-centric (Hawkins and Kaltwasser, 2017, p.516).

For ‘Team Populism’, a global network of political scientists pioneering the use of ‘textual analysis’ (Lewis, et al. 2019), speeches, manifestos, and political documents, yield rich data on party engagement with populism (Hawkins et al. 2019, p.2). While earlier research deployed qualitative methods (see Betz, 1994; Mudde, 2007), recent studies, using an ideational approach for textual analysis, have typically focused on comparative case studies, using large data sets from multiple countries, and scoring populism quantitatively (see Bernhard and Kriesi, 2019; Manucci and Weber, 2017; Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011). This method, while beneficial in demonstrating the extent of populism present, does not yield detailed qualitative data surrounding the specific expression, context, and evolution of ideas over time. QCA is particularly valuable when examining novel instances of populism, which may slip under the radar, and has been deployed accordingly (see Carvalho, 2020).

2.3 Environmental actors and Populism

A rare piece of research which captured, albeit unintentionally, an indication of populist elements in the Green Party was Callum Tindall and Siim Trumm’s (2023) analysis of data from the Representative Audit of Britain Survey (2015-2017). Their comparative analysis of candidates standing in the 2015 and 2017 General Elections, looked at three populist dimensions (pro-people, anti-elitism, popular sovereignty) (Ibid, p.336-8). Green candidates articulated the strongest ‘anti-elitism’ and ‘popular sovereignty’ sentiments, while UKIP candidates were far less populist, except in the category of ‘pro-people’ which showed, marginally, more populism (Ibid, p.351). However, there is no comparable analysis available on candidates’ populist attitudes outside of these elections. Further, while surveys reveal individual candidates’ attitudes, manifestos and speeches are crafted for the public, yielding a

formal reflection of the party line, and historical records are also available (Hawkins et al. 2019, p.2). Through QCA of textual data, this dissertation aims to fill a gap in the scholarship regarding the Greens' engagement with populism.

The present study gains added relevance given that some academics have been dismissive of the possibility that the Greens, and other environmental actors, can have populist elements. For instance, Mitya Pearson (2020, p.129) sees cynicism in the Greens' 1979 Manifesto towards mainstream politics as suggesting 'unexpected' similarities with recent populist parties, yet fails to explore this further. Additionally, scholars argue that it is the populist features of certain parties (e.g. MS5 in Italy) which 'discourage' their 'inclusion within the Green Party family' (Padoan, 2024, p.234). Claims that the politics of climate change are often framed in technocratic and science-driven, not populist, terms (Gerbaudo, 2025, p.22; Zulianello and Ceccobelli, 2020, pp.627-8), provide further evidence of a prevailing assumption that *green* and *populist* are mutually exclusive labels.

There are rare seeds of scholarship germinating around the links between populism and environmentalism. While Chantal Mouffe (2022) argues that environmental policy is a terrain where new forms of left-populism *could* emerge, other scholars have discussed *green populism* (see Davies, 2020). An analytical model is proposed by Ariana Carvalho (2020), in her Master's thesis, comprising:

Ecological Crisis of Cosmic Proportion, a Victimisation of 'The People', blame attribution to 'The Elite', Green Radicalisation, Trust in Science, and Intergenerational Justice (Carvalho, 2020, pp.27-8).

Carvalho (2020) sees 'trust in science' as an important cornerstone for expressions of *General Will* in green populism but fails to consider if a conventionally-populist view of 'the will of the people' is possible on its own terms. This echoes the assumption that environmental politics is technocratic, science-driven and, therefore, distinct from a pure populist notion of popular sovereignty. The present study, in adopting a conventional populist framework, assesses whether populism can align with the Greens' messaging without being refashioned to fit an environmental lens.

3. Contextualising the Green Party

The Green Party was founded by Tony and Lesley Whittaker, and Michael and Freda Benfield, in 1972 under the name, 'PEOPLE', motivated by impending crises of over-population, resource scarcity, and environmental collapse (Pearson, 2020, p.6). In 1975, the party's name was changed to the Ecology Party, emphasising its ecological focus (Ibid, p.8). Jonathon Tyler, David Fleming and Jonathon Porritt became figureheads, focusing on 'electoral activity' (Coates, 1997, p.137). In 1985, the party became the Green Party, in line with electorally successful European green parties (Pearson, 2020, p.8). In the 1989 European Election, the Greens achieved their greatest success in any nationwide election, emerging as the third biggest party in the UK, with nearly 2.3 million votes (see Figure 5) and 15% of the vote share (see Figure 6), a success attributed to the increased salience of climate issues (Ibid). In 1999, with the introduction of PR, 2 Green MEPs (Caroline Lucas and Jean Lambert) were elected, followed by the election of additional MEPs in 2014 and 2019 (see Figure 7).

In 2007, members voted to replace the collective leadership structure with a leader and deputy leader structure (Carter, 2008, p.223). Caroline Lucas was elected as the first party leader in 2008, followed by Natalie Bennett in 2012. Between 2016 and 2018, Caroline Lucas and Jonathan Bartley co-led, with Siân Berry becoming leader in 2018. Since 2021, the party has been co-led by Carla Denyer and Adrian Ramsay.

From the mid-1990s, a strategic focus on local elections ('Westminster through the town halls') saw the party increase its number of council seats (Pearson, 2020, p.10). In 2010, Caroline Lucas became the first Green MP, reelected in 2015 and 2019. In 2015, the 'Green Surge' resulted in improved general election performance (see Figures 1, 2, and 4). In 2024, the Greens had their most successful general election, with four Greens (Carla Denyer, Adrian Ramsay, Siân Berry and Ellie Chowns) elected to Parliament (see Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4).

Green Party General Election Data

Figure 1. The Green Party's share of the vote in General Elections (1974-present)

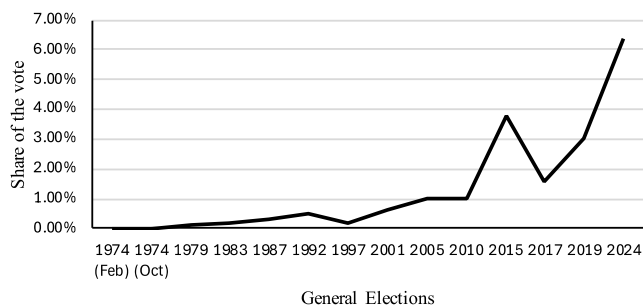


Figure 2. Number of Green candidates in General Elections (1974-present)

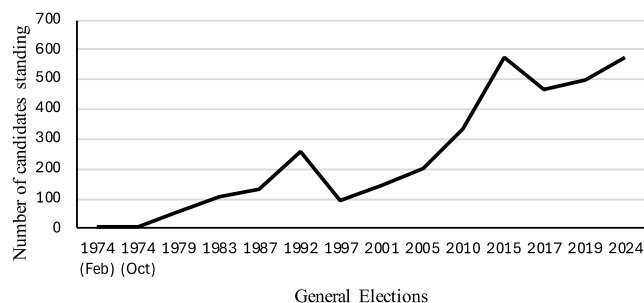


Figure 3. Number of Green MPs (1974-present)

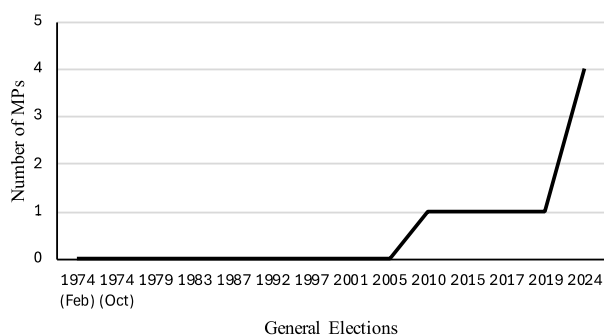
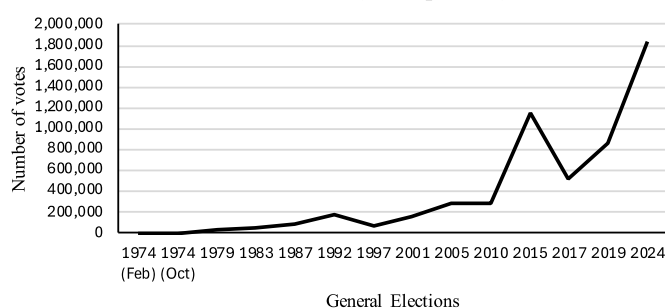


Figure 4. Number of votes for the Green Party in General Elections (1974-present)



Note. Data for General Elections from 1973-2019 from Pearson (2020), for 2024 from Cracknell, Baker and Pollock (2024)

Green Party European Election Data

Figure 5. Number of votes for the Green Party in European Elections (1979-2019)

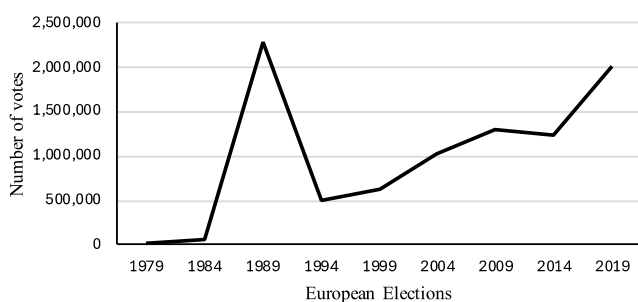


Figure 6. The Green Party's share of the vote in European Elections (1979-2019)

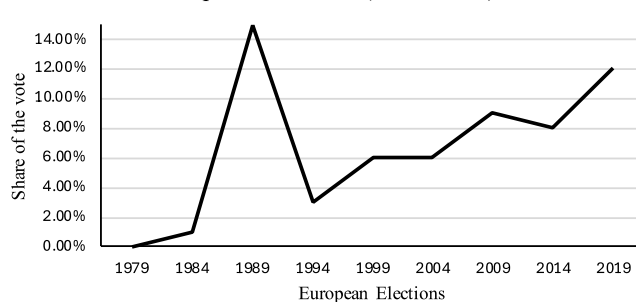
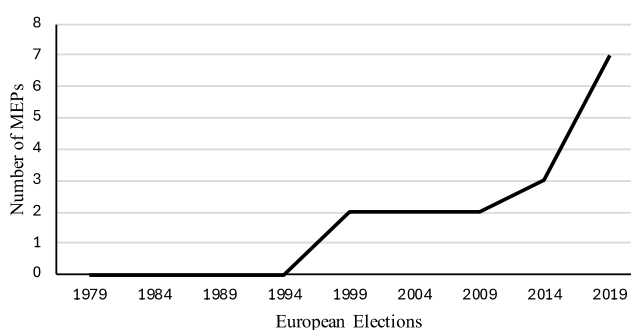


Figure 7. Number of Green MEPs (1979-2019)



Note. Data for European Elections from Cracknell (2019) and Fella, Uberoi, and Cracknell (2019)

4. Methodology

4.1 The Coding Frame

Using the ideational approach, this paper deploys four themes: People-centrism, Popular sovereignty, Anti-elitism, and Proclaiming crisis (see Table 1). A similar coding frame has been deployed in previous studies (see Manucci and Weber, 2017, p.321).

Table 1. Operationalization of the ideational approach

Theme	Sub-themes	Codebook Questions
People-centrism	Proximity to the people	Does the party claim to belong to / know / represent / embody the people?
	The people as homogeneous	Does the party claim that the people are homogeneous / share common desires / goals / opinions?
	The people as 'good'	Does the party describe the people positively / as credible / understanding the situation?
Popular sovereignty	Power to the people	Does the party claim that the people should have / reclaim power?
	Institutional reform	Does the party demand institutional reforms (e.g. referenda, popular initiatives) to bring decision-making closer to the people?
Anti-elitism	The elite as a homogeneous group	Does the party describe the elite as a homogeneous group?
	Specific elite groups	Does the party target specific elite groups (political, economic, media, international institutions)?
	The elite as 'bad'	Does the party describe the elite as bad / corrupt / remote / working against the people?
Proclaiming crisis	Emphasising crisis	Does the party focus on crisis?
	Ignoring the crisis	Does the party claim that the elite are ignoring / perpetuating the crisis?
	Tackling the crisis	Does the party position itself as the only ones able to tackle the crisis?

People-centrism concerns how populists stress their proximity to the people by claiming to ‘speak with the true voice of the real people’ and being the only ones capable of representing them (Espejo, 2017, p.608; Müller, 2017, pp.19-20). The people may be homogenized as an ethnos (British), a function (voters), a ‘hypothetical prototype’ (ordinary people), or by their values and opinions (Manucci and Weber, 2017, p.320). As part of a Manichean worldview, populists will describe the people as good and incorruptible (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017 pp.18-19).

Popular sovereignty concerns the ‘populist struggle’ to ‘give government back to the people’ (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, p.10), rendering *the people* homogeneous through their common exclusion from power (Mouffe, 2018a). Thus, populists call for referenda and other institutional reforms to facilitate governance by the will of the people (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, pp.17-18)

Anti-elitism concerns the construction of a ‘corrupt elite’, working against the people, as part of a Manichean worldview (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, p.13). While populists target different categories of elite group (political, economic, and media), the group must be general (e.g. not a specific party or politician) (Manucci and Weber, 2017, p.320). Populists may also depict a single, corrupt elite (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, pp.11-12).

Proclaiming crisis encompasses populists’ use of crisis to emphasise anti-elitism, by claiming that elites are failing to address, or are perpetuating, a crisis for which only the populists have a remedy (Rooduijn, 2014, p.581).

Combined, these four themes comprise a comprehensive analytical framework to determine whether populism is present in the Green Party

4.2 Data collection and analysis

This study involved theoretically-informed, desk-based research with a single case study method. The primary data includes party manifestos, policy briefings, leaflets, publications, party-political broadcasts, and speeches, statements, and publications by senior figures. These texts, specifically crafted for public audiences, are the only reliable way of evaluating party positioning, contrasting with idiosyncratic, individual responses, elicited by interviews or surveys. Furthermore, these texts yield insights into changes over time. Given the exploratory

nature of this study, data from the broadest temporal span was sought to inform a clear picture of early positioning, and subsequent changes, and to identify if any populist elements emerge at any time.

Approximately 450 texts were accessed. The bulk of these materials, for the years 1973-2013, were accessed through the London School of Economics' archive which, since August 2021, has been building a Green Party archive. Party documents from 2013-the present day, were gathered online, supplemented by the internet archive, the *Wayback Machine*.

The interpretive lens, offered by a qualitative approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018), was the most useful for this exploratory, single case-study, for which quantifying the frequency of populist statements would offer little analytical value (see Drisko and Maschi, 2015, p.102). Furthermore, QCA is advantageous given that the selected themes of populism can manifest in different ways, with ideational approaches rooted in 'social-constructionist premises' (Kim, 2022, p.494).

The coding process involved the extraction, and thematic categorizing, of statements from the primary data. As well as sorting data into the pre-selected themes for populism (see Table 1), and identifying links, higher order concepts and patterns, emerging from the data, were also identified and labelled. Consideration was also given to the value of certain data sources over others, given that some (e.g. manifestos) will have more weight in reflecting party positioning than others (e.g. local candidate leaflets).

5. People-centrism

5.1 Proximity to the people

The party consistently emphasises the centrality of the people. Naming the party ‘PEOPLE’ demonstrates an immediate readiness to articulate such an affiliation. Despite subsequent name changes, this centrality persists:

Ecology is about people (Ecology Party, 1981*a*).

We need a politics of the people - Green politics (Bennett, 2015*a*).

Between 1974 and 1999, the party consistently identifies itself as a movement of ‘ordinary people’, opposed to the political establishment:

I am fed up with politicians, and you probably are too [...] A vote for PEOPLE this time is a vote for us, the ordinary people (Whittaker, 1974*a*).

[T]he Greens are an international political force with an agenda which echoes the concerns of ordinary people and challenges governments all over the world.’ (Green Party, 1989*a*).

If you feel betrayed by MPs who serve their own interests [...] by political parties who abandon their principles in their quest for power and re-election [...] Join the Green Party, a party formed by ordinary people from the real world (Green Party, 1999*a*).

While unsurprising in the party’s earlier years, in 2015, the Greens still deploy insurgent rhetoric, despite having one MP and three MEPs. They situate the ‘Green Surge’ within a popular resistance to ‘failing governments’, referencing the rise of the populist Syriza, in Greece:

[Syriza’s victory] shows that challenging business as usual politics can win the support of the people. In the UK we are witnessing a Green Surge, in no small part due to our anti-austerity agenda, and we hope the Greek election result marks the beginnings of

ordinary people standing up to a discredited economic model and failing Governments across Europe (Taylor and Scott Cato, 2015).

In 2024, Caroline Lucas presents a historical, Manichean worldview of ‘ordinary people’ versus ‘the elite’. Implicit in Lucas’ referencing of the historical demand for representative government, is the Greens’ push for PR. Similarly, the criminalisation of protest, mirrors Lucas’ own 2013 arrest:

Throughout English history there has been a continual struggle between ordinary people pushing for an inclusive, representative system of government and an elite who will go out of their way to prevent it [...] right up to the criminalisation of protest in our own day (Lucas, 2024).

Ahead of the 2025 local elections, Steve Jackson (2025), the Greens’ local election campaign lead, claims that, unlike Reform UK, the Greens represent ordinary people’s anger:

We recognise that millions of voters are angry at the political system [...] as a Green Party we can do more, we can be bolder, we can articulate that anger better (Jackson, 2025).

Jackson (2025) references recent efforts by *Greens Organise*, a party-affiliated pressure group focusing on the working-class. *Greens Organise* positions itself closely with people's anger, using ‘us’ to align with them against the establishment:

We’re going to [...] put out comms that speak to the anger so many of us feel and show Reform for what they really are; the new party of the establishment (*Greens Organise*, 2024a).

Tapping into popular anger, while timely, given the rise of Reform UK, is not new. In 1973, the party claims:

PEOPLE aims to express YOUR anger and YOUR frustration [...] The large established parties must no longer be allowed to dominate politics (PEOPLE, 1973a).

Since its inception, the party consistently emphasises its non-reliance on ‘vested interests’, underscoring its unique political purity and, thereby, ability to offer true representation for ‘the people’:

PEOPLE has no rich backers. We owe allegiance to no man, no industry, no anonymous organization, no trade union. PEOPLE owes allegiance only to the people (PEOPLE, 1974a).

It is in the nature of today’s style of politics to represent some vested interest or one part of society against another [...] Eco-politics is fighting for the rights of [...] all people (Ecology Party, 1980a).

I may not ‘fit in’ with the grey suits of Westminster [...] When I’ve stood up in parliament, I’m not tied to vested interests or the party line. I am free to stand up for you (Lucas, 2020a).

5.2 The People as Homogeneous

From the 1980s, the party begins using terms like ‘common sense’ to describe its policies. The concept of ‘common sense’ appears alongside terms suggesting a shared interest uniting the people:

ECO-Ecology, Cooperation, One World, where we are at one with each other and with the Earth; the politics of common ground, common wealth and common sense. (Ecology Party, 1980a).

It’s a truly radical alternative that we’re offering you, based on common sense, bringing people together in common respect for each other and the common wealth of the planet on which we depend (Ecology Party, 1980b).

‘Common sense’ persists in their present discourse:

We are offering the common sense, affordable policies that will dramatically improve our quality of life (Ramsay, 2024a).

The idea of shared values, homogenizing the people, and the party positioning itself as a defender of those values, emerges as a theme in their recent discourse:

[T]he Green Party is the only party right now that [...] is standing up for people and standing up for the values that we all share (Jackson, 2025).

The party's use of the 'common good' in 2015 suggests that a shared moral good, uniting 'the people', exists. A clear distinction is made from policies serving 'just the few,' implicitly contrasting the common people with the elite. The concept appears in the 2015 General Election manifesto, *For the Common Good*, and in speeches by then-Party leader, Natalie Bennett:

[V]ote for policies that work for the common good not just the few (Bennett, 2015*b*).

Since the party's inception, 'the electorate', 'the ordinary person', or 'the people of Britain' are seen as united, not only by their opinions, but, specifically, by their antipathy towards the political elite:

[T]he electorate is no longer prepared to listen grudgingly to short-sighted politicians (Whittaker, 1974*b*).

A central government, even if democratically elected, seems remote and unreal to the ordinary person (Lawson, 1992).

The people of Britain, wherever they live, feel disempowered and disillusioned with the current way of doing party politics (Green Party, 2014*a*).

[P]eople are seeing that the whole system is rigged - against ordinary people (Womack, 2022).

In 2004, the Greens attempt to create a homogeneous identity through the environment, a unifying bond that transcends class and geographical differences:

Our environment defines us. It's not just our glorious British countryside; it's our landmarks, our streets, our housing estates and our towns (Green Party, 2004a).

Lucas, in her 2024 book, *Another England: How to Reclaim Our National Story*, proposes 'English Nature' as an alternative national image to that presented by right-wing populists, with nature the homogenizing force:

The English care about the countryside, and with passion [...] The reality is of course that we are part of nature, not separate [...] it is an essential and indivisible part of our own being (Lucas, 2024).

5.3 The people as good

The party consistently frames the people as more enlightened than politicians. With growing environmental awareness, the party argues that an informed public want action, positioning themselves as a vehicle by which it can be achieved. Politicians are ignoring the will of the people:

The popular increase in awareness by the public of the effects on our environment of pollution has not been matched by politicians (PEOPLE, 1973b, p.4).

The British people appear to be far more aware of the real situation than their politicians [...] the Green Party wants to bring their enterprise into the mainstream (Green Party, 1987a, p.3).

[W]hile governments are slow to act [...] There is a great readiness in people to change their own way of life [...] People are beginning to recognize that the critical state of the world is the really big issue [...] It is time British politics did so too (Green Party, 1992, p.3).

Recent claims of a more broadly enlightened people resonate with past messaging:

[T]he public are so ahead of the Government [...] the people of this country are writing this story with us (Polanski, 2024).

Because of the conception of ‘the people’ as knowing better than the political elite, ‘real change’ can only come from the people:

[A]s Greens, we know that real change doesn’t get handed down simply from new lofty leaders. Real change comes from the bottom up. Real change is delivered by people (Berry, 2021).

Establishment politicians and billionaires have no idea what the community can do when we come together [...] real hope and real change does not trickle down from the top. It rises up (Greens Organise, 2024b).

From 2010, the Greens portray the people as a singular, inherently ‘good’ group, using ‘we’ to position themselves as part of this group.

As citizens we think of the good of everyone and of the future and not just what we think is good for ourselves (Green Party, 2010a, p.28).

[T]he UK is a country of good, compassionate, talented people [...] together we can solve the problems facing us (Denyer, 2024)

In 2020, during the pandemic, Lucas (2020b) uses the ‘final’ clap for carers to highlight the British people’s ‘solidarity’, ‘courage’, and ‘huge sacrifices’, arguing that praise should be extended to them. This is contrasted with the ‘complacency, incompetence and dishonesty’ demonstrated by the government (Ibid). Therefore, the Greens have consistently emphasised the centrality of ‘the people’, positioned as a singular, virtuous force, disillusioned with elites, and uniquely capable of delivering real, transformative change.

6. Popular Sovereignty

6.1 Power to the people

Since their founding, the idea of giving power to the people has been as central to the party's positioning, and identity, as the climate crisis. Centralised power and governance, identified as working 'against the interests of the people', requires that power is placed 'in the hands of the people' (Ecology Party, 1975). In 1973, Michael Benfield claims that:

PEOPLE WILL GIVE YOU POWER (Benfield, 1973).

More recently, people-power is defined as a 'guiding principle':

The Green Party is committed to the guiding principle that power flows upwards from the people rather than downwards from an over-centralised state (Green Party, 2014*b*).

[I]t's our job as Greens to [...] make sure the people gain real power (Berry, 2021).

Power belongs to the people:

Politicians have a tendency to forget that power isn't their property; they merely have it on loan from the people (Green Party, 2004*b*).

[T]he government is ours but right now it feels remote and out of touch (Green Party, 2010*a*, p.31).

At present, power lies with a 'privileged' few, and, therefore, must be redistributed to the people:

The Green Party will fix our democracy so that it becomes an effective tool for redistributing power away from the privileged and towards the people (Green Party, 2019, p.35).

This commitment to people-power is framed in more explicitly populist terms of giving power *back*, between 1973 and 2015. Terms like ‘reclaiming’, ‘returning power’, and ‘put power back’ allude to a halcyon past where a natural ecosystem of power existed:

[T]he greatest unfinished task of our democracy is to transfer responsibility away from central government back to the people of this country. It is only by doing this that we shall restore the balance between the individual, the community and the nation (Ecology Party, 1979, p.9).

Voting for a Green Party candidate means a vote for a party aiming to put power back where it belongs - in the hands of people in their community (Green Party, 1987*b*).

Person Power is what the Green Party is all about - people reclaiming and using their power to change the world for the better (Green Party, 1996*a*).

We must return power concentrated at present in big business and big government to the people (Green Party, 1999*a*).

Imagine Parliament belonging to the people [...] the Green Party will lead a revolution in standards, putting politics back in the hands of the people (Green Party, 2015*a*, p.57).

Restoration of power is linked, at various points, to returning ‘the country’ to its citizens. A natural ecosystem of power is located within the boundaries of *place*, sometimes national in scope:

It’s time we rid ourselves of the attitudes of “them & us” and gave this country back to its citizens (Benfield, 1973).

Reclaim your Country (May, 1981).

Ownership of place is also deployed around the *local*. For instance, Siân Berry, running for London Mayor in 2015 says:

Greens will give London back to Londoners [...] we can reclaim our city (Berry, 2015).

Additionally, an emotive appeal to ‘take back control’ from the elite emerges at certain points. In 1987 it is targeted predominantly at domestic elites:

We must take back control of our own lives [...] We cannot allow ourselves to be ruled by remote central government, the power of big business and the media, and the lottery of market forces (Green Party, 1987c).

This is extended to the EU in 1998, with a call for:

national and local Governments and people to retake control of their local economies (Green Party, 1998, p.2).

‘Take back control’ resonates with right-wing populist messaging in the contemporary context. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the Greens have ceased to deploy this messaging in recent years, although the idea of restoring power to the people remained until 2015.

6.2 Institutional Reform

The present data shows an explicitly populist preoccupation with institutional reform for *people-power*. In early documents, democratic struggle is framed as existential:

[E]cological government must, indeed can only be achieved by popular consent, not by dictatorial or paternalistic means (Ecology, 1975; 1981b; Green Party, 1987d).

The Ecology Party exists not to fight for our survival on any terms, but for our survival through democracy (Ecology Party, 1979, p.16).

Since 1979, the party has advocated for PR to achieve governance ‘which genuinely acts in the interests of all the people’ (Green Party, 1988), enfranchises the majority (Lucas, 2009a), and creates a ‘people’s politics’ (Bennett, 2015a). Aside from earlier calls for self-governing districts (Green Party, 1987d), and even citizen armies (PEOPLE, 1974b; Ecology Party, 1979), between the mid-1980s and 2019, the party adopts a more overtly populist view around direct

democracy, calling for mechanisms like referenda and citizens initiatives (see Appendix 1). In a paper written by the party's then-National Campaigns Organiser, Ron Bailey, even PR is presented as undemocratic, being 'based on the concept of leaving it to others' (Bailey, 1990, p.15). He criticises the prevailing abdication of authority to 'experts/bosses/rulers/politicians' (Ibid). Indeed, the party previously criticised a 'technocratic elite' (Green Party, 1986). This rejection, particularly of 'experts', is not an obvious positioning for an environmental party, and has evident populist overtones. Bailey (1990) frames 'the advantages of direct democracy' in explicitly populist terms, referencing 'the will of the people':

[I]ncreased government responses to the will of the people [...] a safeguard against the concentration of political power in the hands of the few (Bailey, 1990, p.17).

By 2014, the party claims that 'politicians alone cannot be trusted' and direct democracy is needed:

Our governance is too important to be left to the government to decide on our behalf. The Scottish independence referendum process has underlined the fact that politicians alone cannot be trusted to draw up the blueprint for change (Green Party, 2014b).

The Greens have a long attachment to 'recall', with it appearing in manifestos from 1975 to 2017. 'Recall' is a tool for ordinary citizens to remove elected representatives before the end of their term, originally proposed only for 'certain, extreme circumstances' (Ecology Party, 1975; 1981b). For Bailey (1990, p.17), however, 'the threat of recall' would make representatives 'a damn sight more "frightened" of their electorate than of their Party Whips', and:

Government might just then be 'by the people' and 'for the people' and not by secret cabals for secret cabals (Bailey, 1990, p.17).

Accordingly, from 1992, 'recall' is weaponized as a tool to be used 'at any time' (Green Party, 1992, p.11). In 1997, the party claims that 'recall' gives people power 'to remove [...] those politicians who do not keep their promises' (Green Party, 1997a, p.5). In 2010, recall referenda applies if '40% of electors request it' (Green Party, 2010a, p.32). In 2014, the party criticises the Government's own Bill to introduce 'recall' for suspended or convicted MPs, instead

arguing for a ‘total’ recall to ensure ‘power rests solely with constituents’ (Green Party, 2014a). The issue of ‘recall’ has not been a recent feature of campaigning. However, in the 2015 General Election campaign, mere months after the passing of the Recall of MPs Act 2015, the Greens weaponize recall further by pledging to lower the threshold to 20% (Green Party, 2015a, p.58), matching UKIP’s recall-pledge. The Greens, like UKIP, propose recall for all elected representatives, not merely MPs as the Bill allows (Ibid). This weaponizing of recall in 2015 appears to be part of a more general, emergent populist response, given voter disillusionment with politicians. The party, since its inception, has consistently attempted to tap into political disillusionment (see Appendix 2). Its stated strategy for the 2025 local elections is to ‘appeal to disillusioned voters’ (Ramsay, 2025b). In 2015, referenda are positioned as a remedy, with the party vowing, in the aftermath of the Scottish referendum, to:

turn the tide on apathy and disillusionment by making these opportunities the rule rather than the exception (Green Party, 2015a, p.57).

In their 2015 General Election Manifesto, the Greens confront EU grievances by, like the Conservatives and UKIP, supporting a referendum ‘so that the British people can have their say’ (Green Party, 2015a, p.71). Caroline Lucas, in supporting a referendum, acknowledges a prevalent scepticism towards ‘the bureaucratic and remote’ workings of the EU (Lucas, 2015a), tapping into a populist preoccupation with remote power. Reflecting on this period in her 2024 book, Lucas recognises ‘populist agitation’ and how certain actors tapped into a ‘dislike of politicians and other elites’ through the ‘referendum’ offer, with UKIP the main beneficiary (Lucas, 2024). Notably, Lucas overlooks that the Greens, too, attempted to tap into this agitation.

Brexit exposes a contradiction in the party’s conception of popular sovereignty. In 2017 and 2019 the party advocates for another referendum to decide the terms of Brexit, including the option to remain (Green Party, 2017; 2019). Clearly, *the will of the people* required review, prompting contemporaneous commentators to quip on the party’s ‘Brexit hypocrisy’ (Paton, 2019). However, their call for a second referendum maintains a populist frame:

This isn’t a parlour game for the Westminster class. MPs are playing with people’s real lives [...] Parliament must give control back to the public and deliver a People’s Vote (Lucas, 2018).

The Green Party's persistent entreaty for 'people power' reveals a populist logic rooted in restoring control to ordinary citizens. However, following the unsuccessful call for a 'People's Vote', they have retreated from calling for referenda.

7. Anti-elitism

Foundational to the party, between 1973 and 1990, is a populist worldview of a homogeneous elite - ‘agents of the system’, ‘a “cosy” committee’, ‘the whole power structure’ - acting against the people (PEOPLE, 1973*c*; Ecology Party, 1983*a*; 1984*b*; Bailey, 1990). More broadly the Greens target specific elite groups (politicians, the EU, and the super-rich). This section will explore each in turn.

7.1 The political elite

From the outset, a singular political elite is constructed, with political opponents aggregated: ‘the grey parties’, ‘the old, tired parties’, ‘establishment parties’ (see Appendix 3). This is intentional and strategic. In a 1983 Ecology Election Kit, for instance, when attacking other parties, campaigners should: ‘lump them all together, rather than go for them individually’ (Crowson et al., 1983). The use of ‘Grey’ to aggregate politicians, between 1992 and 2004 (see Appendix 3), is noteworthy. ‘Grey’ contrasts with ‘Green’, yet, also, alludes to ‘men in grey suits’, a conspiratorial nod to hidden hands of power, an image summoned by Lucas, in 2009, to explain political disillusionment:

[T]he model of politicians as men in grey suits has turned so many people off the political process (Lucas, 2009*b*).

The Greens consistently claim that politicians lie to the people, and this is increasingly infused with a conspiratorial lexicon:

[Politicians] wrap everything in a layer of deliberate mystification to keep us from the real truth (Ecology Party, 1979, p.6).

[G]overnments conspire to keep as much information from the public as possible (Porritt, 1980*a*).

[T]he frequently forbidding, deliberately opaque bureaucracy of town halls, Westminster and Brussels (Bennett, 2015*a*).

There is a conspiracy of silence between the main Westminster parties at this election (Ramsay, 2024b).

From 2013 onwards, the Greens depict a ‘political elite’ and ‘Westminster elite’ which is ‘out-of-touch’, ‘regressive’, and cruel:

We have a political elite who have decided that the axe must fall hardest on those in the greatest need (Lucas, 2013).

[R]edistribute power away from an increasingly out-of-touch, Westminster elite (Green Party, 2014b).

[T]he exceptionalist and regressive path of the current political elites (Lucas, 2024).

A moral critique of the political elite is evident from the 1980s. In a document from 1981, the ‘inhumanity of bureaucrats and the mendacity of politicians’ causes public suffering (Ecology Party, 1981c). For Porritt, in 1982, politics shouldn’t be left to ‘soul-less, face-less party machines’ (Porritt, 1982). More recently, the party references ‘powerful forces’ that are ‘rotten to the core’, extending their moral critique into conspiratorial territory. For Natalie Bennett, in her 2015 party conference speech:

[T]here are forces out there, powerful forces, with huge amounts of cash and influence, who want to keep things just as they are [...] They cannot be trusted. They are rotten to the core. The core is rotten – it must be removed. Our politics is rotten (Bennett, 2015a).

In 2022, Lucas targets elected representatives:

[T]he whole tree is rotten and the whole country wants reform (Lucas, 2022a).

The attack on the political elite begins to resonate with the discourse of recent populist movements when, from 1996, corruption enters the frame:

This manifesto is addressed to all who [...] think that politicians are faceless grey-suited men, financially-led and often corrupt (Green Party, 1996b).

Politicians are seen as out of touch, corrupt and far more interested in their own power than the interests of those they are meant to represent (Green Party, 1996c).

[Politicians] are cheating at monopoly and stamping on our sandcastles (Ramsay, 2022).

[Parliament] is systematically corrupt and biased in favour of those with fat wallets (Jones, 2025).

In tandem to a corrupt elite, power, itself, is corrupting. Therefore, the call to give power to the people, through direct democracy, which also emerges in the 1990s, reveals an implicit populist construction of ordinary citizens as inherently pure and incorruptible:

Most politics is dogmatic, insincere and corrupted by power (Green Party, 1996d).

7.2 The EU

The Greens extend their preoccupation with domestic elites to critique the EEC/EU. Between 1974 and 1997 they consistently advocate for withdrawal (PEOPLE, 1974b; Ecology Party, 1984a; Green Party, 1997a). Aside from the evident antagonism with a growth-driven EEC/EU, describing the Treaty of Rome as the least ecological document (Ecology Party, 1983b, p.20), the institution is cast as elitist. In 1975, policies are proposed to ‘resist [...] technocratic elitism within the E.E.C’ (Ecology Party, 1975). In the 1984 European Manifesto a populist complaint, that the EEC works ‘against the interests of workers and citizens’, is deployed (Ecology Party, 1984a, p.5). In the 1989 European Election broadcast, conspiratorial language emerges. The party refers to:

[I]nvisible men, who’ll be governing your life and mine [...] If you don’t recognize them, it’s because you’ve never seen them before and you certainly won’t have voted for them because you can’t (Green Party, 1989b).

In the 1989 European Election Manifesto, the European Parliament lacks ‘real power’, citizens lack ‘control’, and ‘the Commission works in secret’ (Green Party, 1989c). Also in 1989, membership of the EEC takes power ‘even further away’ from the people, compounding the problem of ‘politicians in Westminster’ and ‘bureaucrats in Whitehall’ (Green Party, 1989d). This election saw the party gain its highest share, and number, of votes in any nationwide election ever.

1999 marks a significant turning point. In their European Manifesto, Green Votes Count, they drop the call for withdrawal (Green Party, 1999b). The UK’s 1999 European Election, the first conducted with PR, gave the party two MEPs. A muted embrace of membership was not accompanied by a shift towards a more positive attitude to the EU. The rhetoric becomes more populist, with claims that ‘[t]he Commission has lost the trust of ordinary people’ and Green MEPs must combat ‘the corruption of the European Commission’ (Ibid, p.11). Even after the election of MEPs, this rhetoric persists:

We reject the superstate model of the EU as too centralised and remote from the people (Green Party, 2001, p.16).

At every level the EU is the antithesis of democracy, with big decisions made behind closed doors by unaccountable and secretive committees (Green Party, 2002).

Strong action is also needed to clean up Brussels bureaucracy (Green Party, 2009, p.28).

Through their ongoing critique, the Greens maintained an outsider status, distancing from the very EU establishment that they were part of, readily harnessing euroscepticism to amplify Green concerns. For instance, in 2014, MEP Molly Scott Cato argues that the EU’s approval of public funding for the Hinkley C Nuclear Plant ‘demonstrates why so many British people are sceptical about the EU’ (Scott Cato, 2014). In this period, populist critiques, aligning the EU with economic elites, intensify:

Too much of what the EU does is in the interests of the rich and powerful, not ordinary Europeans (Green Party, 2014c, p.31).

Tapping into the populist moment surrounding EU membership in 2015, Lucas attempts to harness popular antipathy toward the EU and channel it back towards domestic elites:

[In the EU] Too much power is in the hands of the elites. Too little democracy and accountability. Ordinary people feeling closed out from its decisions [...] the same can be said about our own British Parliament. Concentration of power, corruption, remoteness (Lucas, 2015*b*).

Following the Brexit referendum, the Greens abruptly abandon anti-EU rhetoric. EU membership becomes a cure-all to Britain's challenges:

Britain would be better off politically, socially, environmentally and economically had we maintained our EU membership (Green Party, 2024, p.43).

As perpetual outsiders, opposing the establishment, unsurprisingly, they position themselves as one of the minority, pro-EU parties in parliament. The speed and ease of this shift exposes a core orientation of the party - opposition to the establishment.

7.3 The Economic Elite

From the mid-1980s, the party articulates concerns around inequality:

Our society is becoming increasingly divided between the rich and poor, the haves and the have-nots (Ecology Party, 1984*b*).

However, by the 2000s, a moral-condemnation of a super-rich acting against the people emerges. In 2001, the party identifies a 'powerful elite' who work the system, while 'millions' suffer:

Britain is a rich man's club, with one set of rules for those on the inside and another for the rest. Millions of people face routine discrimination in their daily lives while a powerful elite manipulate the system (Green Party, 2001, p.16).

Over time, this rhetoric intensifies and concretises. In 2023, Carla Denyer specifically attributes climate change to the ‘super-rich elite’:

[I]t is a super-rich elite who are super-heating the planet. Private jets are the favoured form of transport by this super-rich elite and are the ultimate symbol of the ‘climate inequality’ that is not only leading to the breakdown of our climate but is also deeply unfair [...] the super-rich cannot be allowed to continue with their lavish and destructive lifestyles at the expense of the rest of the global population (Denyer, 2023).

In 2024, high-level party officials identify the economic elite as a ‘threat’ to society. Zack Polanski uses this Manichean discourse in his address to the autumn conference:

The threat to our society is not arriving by dinghy or small boats, the threat is flying by private jet (Polanski, 2024).

The repetition of this rhetoric, later that day, by Welsh party leader, and previous deputy leader, Anthony Slaughter, suggests coordinated messaging:

We know that it is not people arriving in small boats that threaten our society and future, but those that travel by private jet and limousine (Slaughter, 2024).

Slaughter (2024) criticizes those sowing ‘division and hatred’. Yet, by subverting the language used by right-wing populists against immigrants, the Greens appropriate the populist mechanism of division that they claim to oppose. This same Manichean discourse is deployed by *Greens Organise*:

Nigel and co. keep telling us that it’s immigrants that are to blame for what’s wrong with this country [...] The real threat to our way of life is not arriving by small boats. It’s flying overhead in private jets (Greens Organise, 2024b).

The Greens consistently frame corrupt elites - political, institutional, and economic - against the people. This enduring anti-elitism reveals a core populist logic.

8. Proclaiming Crisis

8.1 Overpopulation

Between 1974 and 1997, a population crisis is a key focus for the party, linked to issues around resource-scarcity and self-sufficiency. In the early days, radical language is used around controlling immigration, which would be unrecognisable to contemporary supporters:

In view of the population problem in this country immigration control will be strictly enforced, and subject to review annually (PEOPLE, 1974*b*, p.6).

This rhetoric ramps up even further with calls to ‘halt’ all immigration and then reduce the population:

Halt immigration of black and white. Once this is done, we can then legitimately plan a population reduction (Percy-Davis, 1974).

In 1975, the party claims that the population crisis in Britain will lead to ‘the destruction of all other liberties’. However, the crisis is couched more in terms of birth-rates than immigration:

Among the effects of overcrowding, which must come if the population continues to expand, is a loss of individual liberty [...] The liberty to procreate leads ultimately to the destruction of all other liberties (Ecology Party, 1975).

In 1989, the party warns that if the population crisis is not tackled immediately, future generations ‘may be subjected to compulsory measures’ (Green Party, 1989*e*). In 1994, the party even releases a branded condom with ‘More people = more exploitation’ on the packaging (Green Party, 1994). In their 1997 Manifesto they continue to advocate for a ‘gradual reduction in the UK population’ (Green Party, 1997*a*, p.15). While this language becomes more muted as the party professionalises, there are slips. In a 2010 article, Lucas continues the crisis rhetoric around over-population:

Increasing population growth is clearly a serious challenge (Lucas, 2010*a*).

8.2 The Climate Crisis

The party states that its emergence was in response to the environmental crisis:

The Ecology Party came into being in response to this crisis (Ecology Party, 1980a).

From their inception the Greens stress the apocalyptic threat posed by the climate crisis:

[O]ur society will end in a blaze of destruction inflamed by war, starvation, disease and poverty (PEOPLE, 1973*d*).

[T]his present crisis is different from anything we've experienced before [...] we can no longer take for granted our own or our children's survival (Ecology Party, 1979, p.16).

While such apocalyptic discourse might be seen as the stuff of a fringe, start-up party, its continuation, particularly in recent messaging, is notable:

[W]e're absolutely on the brink of disaster (Polanski, 2024).

The party has consistently framed the environmental crisis as urgent, with an unceasing sense of being on the *brink of emergency* providing ongoing political purpose:

Time is running out on us [...] we see the Eighties as the make-or-break decade for mankind (Ecology Party, 1980a).

[T]ime is running short. If we are to avoid irreversible climate change, then it is this Parliament that must meet this historic task (Lucas, 2010*b*).

This could be our last chance to elect a Parliament to keep us below dangerous warming (Womack, 2019).

There is an urgent crisis that we need to wake up to (Polanski, 2023).

Indeed, urgency is accompanied by a consistent accusation that politicians are ignoring, or perpetuating, the crisis. As such, the crisis is used to reinforce a Manichean worldview where the elite threaten the people's survival:

So why are things getting worse? Because successive governments not only ignore our problems, but perpetuate them (Ecology Party, 1978, p.6).

Grey politicians have not understood the nature of the ecological crisis we face (Lawson, 1992).

[P]resent politicians are at war with the planet, at war with our children, at war with the future (Green Party, 1996*b*).

In a 1983 and 1999 document, the party spells out this Manichean worldview around crisis:

If you're not part of the answer, then you're part of the problem (Crowson et al. 1983).

Are you part of the solution - or part of the problem? (Green Party, 1999*a*).

In the latter document, the 'Grey Parties' are clearly positioned as 'part of the problem':

The short term sticking-plaster 'solutions' of the Grey Parties will do nothing to resolve the environmental and social crisis we are facing. Their purpose is simply to win the next election and protect the interests of their backers (Green Party, 1999*a*).

Using the climate crisis as a tool to criticise the political elite continues into 2025, with Carla Denyer claiming:

Our leaders are sleepwalking into this deadly new future (Denyer, 2025*a*).

The natural corollary of the inertia of politicians is the claim that the Greens are the only ones to recognise the crisis. In 1975, they claim that, by their very nature as a 'new' and 'independent' party, they are the only ones able to solve it:

[I]t is such a radical challenge that it can only be borne by a new, independent political party, for it requires the existing political forces to change too much their basic philosophies (Ecology Party, 1975).

The claim that the Greens have a monopoly on the solutions is consistent throughout their history:

Only the Green Party has the courage and the honesty to face today's problems and to present lasting solutions for ourselves and for future generations (Green Party, 1987c).

The urgent need to tackle climate change is now the biggest challenge facing us. Only the Green Party has both the policies and the track record of implementing them honestly and transparently (Green Party, 2010b).

Only the Green Party is offering real hope and real change when it comes to the climate crisis (Chowns, 2024).

Furthermore, they wield the scale of the environmental crisis as proof of their necessity - not merely presenting themselves as offering solutions, but as essential. The moral weight of the crisis is, then, a moral mandate for their leadership:

[B]ecause we are talking about national survival in the long term. We shall be needed (Whittaker, 1974b).

Where you put your cross this Thursday has become a matter of life and death (Foster, 1981).

I think it's important to remember why we're doing all this. We are so needed (Polanski, 2024).

8.3 A Crisis Disposition

The Greens emphasise other crises too. For instance, the party consistently proclaims there to be a social crisis. In 1974, they claim that there has been a ‘gradual disintegration of society’, blaming this on the political elites:

The attempted cures only hasten this process: more politicians, more bureaucrats (PEOPLE, 1974*b*, p.1).

A rhetoric around social crisis continues throughout and into the present day:

The Crisis in our Society [...] we have seen the gradual disintegration of those ties and values that bind society together (Ecology Party, 1979, p.5).

The cost of living crisis is the most visible part of a deeply entrenched social crisis (Lucas, 2022*b*).

However, more consistently the party talks about various crises (economic, social, environmental, and political) as a package, presenting an image of Britain, and the world, on the brink of absolute collapse:

Conventional wisdom is increasingly perplexed by the mounting problems of our society: viciously accelerating inflation, pollution, overcrowding, and the many manifestations of worsening social breakdown (PEOPLE, 1974*b*, p.1).

Long term unemployment, permanent inflation, the threat of international recession, the breakdown of our social structure and values, the exhaustion of our natural wealth, the pollution of our environment [...] there’s no doubt about the seriousness of the problems facing Britain (Frings, 1983; Abrahams, 1983).

Society is in crisis [...] A crisis in healthcare, employment, education, pollution, homelessness, food and transport, a rising wave of violence, crime, corruption and sleaze (Green Party, 1997*b*).

The country is facing a series of multiple crises of staggering proportions, including a likely recession and, let us not forget, the accelerating climate emergency (Lucas 2022c).

In 2010, the political elite are specifically blamed for provoking these ‘linked’ crises:

Business as usual, brought to you by the main political parties, has given us a series of linked economic, environmental and social crises (Green Party, 2010a, p.2).

By presenting this picture of absolute crisis, the party further claims that it is needed and possesses the solutions:

In this time of crises - social, economic and environmental - Britain needs the Green Party more than ever (Lucas, 2009c).

We need to tackle these crises together, and only the Green Party knows how (Green Party, 2010a, p.3).

[W]e know the answers. We know the same solutions to solve these social issues are often the same solutions to tackle that climate crisis (Polanski, 2024).

Crisis is present in almost every text accessed in the present study. The Greens have consistently framed multiple, overlapping crises as existential threats, reinforcing its claim to moral and political necessity, and casting political elites as complicit in collapse.

9. Discussion and Conclusion

This study has found that populist elements - *people-centrism*, *popular sovereignty*, *anti-elitism*, and *proclaiming crisis* - have consistently featured in the party since its founding, intensifying around 2015, coinciding with the European ‘populist surge’ (Mudde, 2016, p.25). The only notable dampening of the party’s engagement with populist ideas was between 2016 and 2019, coinciding with Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership of the Labour Party which narrowed the space for left-populist contenders (see Meleady, 2020). Since 2019, populist rhetoric, particularly targeting the super-rich, has intensified.

Across all four themes, the Greens articulate a Manichean worldview, framing a struggle between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’, which underscores both the non-discrete nature of the themes and the presence of an all-encompassing populist construction. All authoritative approaches to populism identify this Manichean conflict as a core feature (Hawkins et al., 2019, p.2), making its consistent expression, in the present study, significant. This moral binary serves as a *modus operandi* by which the party positions itself. Additionally, conspiratorial critiques of the elite align with the populist preoccupation with hidden hands of power and shadowy forces usurping the will of the people (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, p.12).

9.1 People-centrism

By presenting themselves as a movement of ‘ordinary people’, uniquely equipped to represent the people, the Greens adopt a populist stance (see Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, p.51). The repeated use of the word ‘anger’, to define, and align with, the public mood, reflects a populist deployment of emotive language to polarize debates (Taggart, 2000, p.113).

The Greens’ use of ‘common sense’ and shared values structures a populist view of a homogeneous people (see Mudde and Kaltwasser’s, 2017, p.18). The 2015 slogan, ‘for the common good, not just the few’ (Bennet, 2015), presaged the left-populism galvanised by Corbyn. For Chantal Mouffe (2018b), Corbyn’s reappropriation of the slogan, ‘For the many, not the few’, gained new traction, reflecting an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ zeitgeist. The Greens’ slogan is *more* populist, expressing a single interest for the people, with ‘just’ conveying the accusation that, at present, *only* the elite are served. However, the party now faces the challenge of reconciling its unified image of ‘the people’, with the growing class concerns of Greens Organise.

While depictions of the people as ‘good’ are a common feature of political discourse, it is the Greens’ interwoven critique of the elite as corrupt, that reveals a populist, Manichean worldview.

9.2 Popular Sovereignty

The expectation that environmental actors rely on technocratic, science-driven approaches (Gerbaudo, 2025, p.22; Zulianello and Ceccobelli, 2020, pp.627-8), is disputed by the present data, with the Greens emphasizing returning power to the people - a hallmark of populist discourse (see Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, p.10). This framing also homogenises the people as collectively excluded from power (see Mouffe, 2018a). The Greens draw on a halcyon past (perhaps pre-industrial, pre-enclosure) where a natural balance of power existed between the individual, community, and nation. The Greens’ construction of the past - distant, abstract and idealised - is distinct from the more tangible, recent past, used as an appeal by Reform UK.

Far from technocratic, the Greens’ focus on institutional reform to give people power, reflects a rejection of expert-led governance. Furthermore, where *green populism* merely sees the people as ‘victimised’ (Carvalho, 2020), the Green Party see the people as the solution, deserving of power. The focus on direct democracy is consistent with literature identifying an ‘elective affinity’ between populism and direct democracy, enabling the will of the people to govern, unmediated by representation (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017, p.17). The Greens’ 2015 support for an EU referendum highlights their ongoing commitment to popular sovereignty during the distinctly populist moment of Brexit. While David Cameron’s referendum pledge has been defined as a populist gesture (Alexandre-Collier, 2022, p.540), the Greens’ consistent backing of referenda suggests a deeper populist orientation. While this may appear as a thorough-going commitment to democracy, the present study concludes that the Greens’ preoccupation reflects a Manichean worldview where the political elite (corrupt, inept, and untrustworthy) are contrasted with the people (enlightened, competent, and best-placed to govern).

9.3 Anti-elitism

The Greens have consistently portrayed the political elite as a unified, corrupt group, aligning with the view that populism requires a generalized elite, not targeted individuals (Manucci and

Weber's, 2017). The system is depicted as a corrupting force, echoing Paul Taggart's (2017, p.254–6) observation that Western European populists often frame politics as inherently corrupting and elites as corrupted.

Taggart (2017, p.256) notes that opposition to the EU is common among populist parties, with its 'distant and complex architecture' providing a natural extension of the domestic elite. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017, p.18) similarly highlight how populists, across the spectrum, criticize the EU's elitism. Despite their current image as a pro-EU party, the Greens, for most of their history (1973-2015), deployed Eurosceptic messaging, identifying the EU as elitist, remote, undemocratic, and working against the people. Notably, Nigel Farage (2021) flaunted that he voted Green in the 1989 European Election because '*they were the only Eurosceptic party*'. Their continued critique of the EU, following the election of Green MEPs, illustrates the populist paradox of insiders posing as outsiders (Clarke & Newman, 2017, p.109). Even if euroscepticism was rationalised on ecological and democratic grounds, its expression found its form in an anti-elitist, populist critique of the EU, further reinforcing the salience of a Manichean worldview.

Far from any simple 'blame-attribution', identified by *green populism* (Carvalho, 2020), recent messaging, by the Greens, identifying the super-rich as a 'threat to society', signals an orientation towards left-populism, inverting the right-wing populist narrative (see Brubaker, 2017, p.363). In this sense, the Greens have become, and are, perhaps, intentionally positioning themselves as, a Reform of the left.

9.4 Proclaiming Crisis

Rooduijn (2018) argues that populists emerge from crisis, a pattern evident in the Green Party's origins, rooted in environmental concerns and fears of overpopulation. While the party shifted focus from over-population, the environmental crisis has remained a consistent vehicle for portraying elites as ignorant, destructive, and crisis-inducing, aligning with Rooduijn's (2014) view of crisis as a tool for anti-elite messaging. While the Greens' urgent, apocalyptic framing of environmental collapse aligns with Carvalho's (2020) *green populism*, their rhetoric extends beyond ecology, linking political, societal, and economic crises into a sweeping narrative of collapse. As such, political elites are presented as residing over, not only environmental breakdown, but total societal breakdown. Therefore, viewing environmental actors solely

through the lens of *green populism* may risk overlooking consistencies with broader populist discourse.

9.5 Implications, future research and concluding remarks

Given the apparent, and consistent, expressions found in the present study, it is all the more surprising that commentators and scholars have overlooked the party's reliance on populism to navigate the political space. The presumption that *green* and *populist* are mutually exclusive labels has been disputed by the present findings. Furthermore, contradicting those studies which suggest that environmental actors require a distinctive *green populism* framework, this study demonstrates that the Green Party can be analysed effectively using a standard ideational approach to populism. The present study casts doubt on the media's tendency to see the lack of a charismatic leader as indicating an absence of populism, underscoring media misconceptions regarding *what* populism is.

Future research might look at *why* and *how* populism is deployed by the Green Party. For instance, using a strategic approach (see Weyland, 2017, p.50), studies could consider if populism is a tool for small, insurgent parties, like the Greens, to break through the first-past-the-post system. Further, applying a stylistic approach to populism, rooted in contemporary expressions of populism, particularly *bad manners*, and *performance of crisis* (Moffitt, 2016, p.45), studies might test for consistencies and aberrations. Given that much of the media perceives the party leadership as 'too nice' to be populist, a stylistic analysis, leader-centric in orientation, may yield interesting findings.

Commentators have recently pointed to a growing populist streak within the Green Party, particularly in Greens Organise (see Todd, 2025). Yet, this study finds little new in this development. While the party's populism may, presently, be more visible and, possibly, more performative, its core narrative has remained consistent since its founding; society is comprised of the good, competent people, who must reclaim power and enact change, and a corrupt, inept, elite who work against the people and perpetuate crises.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. The Greens and direct democracy

Year	Quote	Reference
1984	We call for [...] The opening of ways for regular participation by all citizens in the political life of Europe, e.g. referendum by public initiative	Ecology Party (1984, p.12)
1989	The 'Mother of Parliaments is way behind' - no freedom of information, no electoral reform, no citizens; initiatives, no petitions for referenda, no bill of rights	Green Party (1989 <i>d</i>)
1991	Citizens should have the power to promote laws and policies directly [...] citizens should be able to challenge laws made by local and central government	Green Party (1991)
1992	We will introduce a system of Citizens' Initiatives, whereby groups of voters can themselves initiate new laws and policies	Green Party (1992, p.11)
1996	A radical reform of government will make politics open, democratic and as local as possible. Many decisions can be taken in the community, through direct democracy	Green Party (1996 <i>e</i>)
1999	The Greens favour simultaneous referenda in all member states for important changes of the EU Treaty	Green Party (1999 <i>b</i> , p.14)
2010	Referenda on local government decisions if called for by 20% of the local electorate	Green Party (2010 <i>a</i> , p.32)
2015	Introduce referendums on local government decisions if called for by 20% of the local electorate	Green Party (2015, p.58)

Appendix 2. The Greens attempting to appeal to disillusionment

Year	Quote	Reference
1973	We can no longer rely on politicians who repeatedly fail to recognise root causes of unrest and disillusion, who place false idols before the electorate and hold our untenable promises to secure re-election	PEOPLE (1973 <i>c</i>)
1979	[P]ower in Europe is based in a centralised and growing bureaucracy. This leads to dissent and disillusion about the EEC, and will spread the growth of uncompromisingly separatist movements	Ecology Party (1979)
1980	People are indeed looking for something different: political disenchantment is the rule rather than the exception. With far more people voting against rather than for, it is hardly surprising that the political scene is characterised by apathy and indifference	Porritt (1980 <i>b</i>)
1981	A growing number of people [...] are disillusioned and frustrated in their desire to begin the transition to a sustainable society by the short-sighted, inept actions of government and the traditional opposition'	Ecology Party (1981 <i>b</i>)
1983	Although it's legitimate to go for the disillusioned voter, don't overdo it "asking you to vote for me as a sign of disapproval against the current short-sightedness and wastefulness on the Council"	Crowson et al. (1983)
1990	When they want the public they call for their support whilst at the same time using 'the machine' to exclude them. The public saw through this years ago: their response is one of 'apathy'; or a feeling of disenfranchisement; or just a gut reaction that 'they're all the same' which, as regards the whole power structure is absolutely true	Bailey (1990, p.14)
1997	It's little wonder that people have become disillusioned and contemptuous of our political system when they regularly witness politicians manipulating the truth for their own ends [...] It's little wonder today's youth are disillusioned with politicians and so many won't vote when they are of age. The main parties use them as a political football, and treat them as if they were all hardened criminals	Green Party (1997 <i>b</i>)
1999	Public disillusion with politics is the inevitable result of the failure of elected governments to deal with the problems that concern voters. The undemocratic structure of the European Union further contributes to a widespread loss of faith in the political process	Green Party (1999 <i>b</i> , p.5)

Appendix 3. The Greens constructing a singular political elite

Year	Quote	Reference
1973	[T]he ordinary run-of-the-mill politicians'	PEOPLE (1973 <i>d</i>)
1981	The old Parties have been promising for years to restore full employment	Ecology Party (1981)
1983	[T]he other parties [...] choose to emphasize the distinctions between them, but the real problem lies in what they hold in common	Ecology Party (1983 <i>b</i> , p.3)
1983	The dead hand of industrial politics threatens us all - yet all they can offer is more of the same'	Foster (1981)
1985	Politicians of established parties will only give serious attention to new political ideas when they are directly threatened by them	Green Party (1985)
1992	Grey politicians have not understood the nature of the ecological crisis we face	Lawson (1992)
1997	[T]he grey politicians, industrialists and bankers continue to promote the very things that are causing the crises	Green Party (1997 <i>b</i>)
1999	The short term sticking-plaster 'solutions' of the Grey Parties will do nothing to resolve the environmental and social crisis we are facing. Their purpose is simply to win the next election and protect the interests of their backers	Green Party (1999)
2001	People have lost their sense of community. The response of grey politicians is tougher laws and more prisons	Green Party (2001, p.5)
2004	As the grey parties squabble over the centre ground, the opportunities for the Greens are greater than ever	Green Party (2004 <i>b</i>)
2010	The only thing separating these three parties is the colour of their rosettes	Green Party (2010 <i>b</i>)
2015	Every other party seems so similar, it's like they're in harmony	Green Party (2015 <i>b</i>)
2025	We are taking votes from the old tired parties to offer something different	Ramsay (2025 <i>b</i>)
2025	Many people are feeling really left behind by mainstream politics, by the establishment parties	Denyer (2025 <i>c</i>)