

Call for Papers

It's not that Easy being Green (in the East)

Deadline for Abstracts: 19.4.2024

Organizers: Prof. Rebecca Pates / Lukas Schwemmbauer / Paul Seibicke

To this day, Green Parties and environmental movements have faced different levels of success across Europe. In Western European countries, established Green Parties often emerged from the environmental movements of the 1970s and 1980s. In (Central) Eastern Europe, on the other hand, the environmental euphoria that characterized the transformation period is hardly reflected in parliaments today. The emphasis on environmental protection by numerous newly founded green parties and movements was of central importance for the revolutions in the socialist states of Europe (Corry 2014, Frankland 2016, Zschische 2021). However, these successes never solidified in the newly formed parliamentary systems. At that time, economic uncertainties overshadowed environmental policy goals and reduced the relevance of the Greens (van Haute 2016). The low significance of the Greens in the East remains to this day and divides the European states.

This European East-West difference is particularly evident in Germany. The Green Party Bündnis 90/Die Grünen has been successful in Western Germany while remaining marginal in Eastern Germany. Surprisingly, there is not much research on this, although generally, the East-West difference has been much in focus (Vogel, Lorenz & Pates 2024) from historical (Mau 2018, Kowalczyk 2019, Hoyer 2023), economic (Paque 2012, Hoffmann 2018, Burda 2020), and discursive perspectives (Ahbe 2004, Kollmorgen 2011, Pates 2011, Foroutan/Kubiak 2018). Such systemic differences are often used to explain differing voting behaviors and political attitudes in the East. Other arguments refer to socio-demographic changes (Salomo 2021), the dramatic Eastern rural exodus (Henn/Schäfer 2020), the specifics of (post-Soviet) regions (Berdahl 1999, Böick 2020), collective experiences of deprivation particularly after 1989 (Weisskircher 2020), and the challenges of globalization (Hilmar 2023).

Perhaps these arguments can be used to shed light on the aversion to “Green” in Eastern Germany. Yet, factors explaining voter turnout of Green Parties in general could help to clarify their success – or lack thereof – in the East. Four issues spring to mind. First, Green identities (“the Kermits”): the party membership itself and its mainly urban, economically comfortable and university educated electoral base might put off a less urban, less economically successful, and differently educated electorate (Probst 2020, Brunnsbach/ John 2021). The urbanity of members might also mean that there just isn’t a party base in rural areas, thus lacking the local structures required for successful mobilization (Grant/Tilley 2018). Accordingly, the social movements from which Green parties arose might be less prevalent in some areas (van Haute 2016), and thus fewer green identities might establish themselves in some localities. Second, there might just be different attitudes, political values, and ideas of appropriate social behavior in some regions rather than others: Kaelberer (1998) mentions the increase in post-materialist values, the size of new social movements and the electoral system as contributing factors. Third, party competition: In electorates with a strong left-right polarization, success

for Green Parties is less likely, because Green Parties tend to rely on cross-cutting issues that cannot always be integrated into a bloc logic. Finally, when voters perceive the economy as weak, parties associated with environmental policies tend to be punished (Abou-Chadi / Kayser 2016).

These research findings show that Green is an ambivalent phenomenon. The movement and party combine success and failure, esteem and stigmatization, identification, and exclusion. It is precisely for this reason that we ask: What is the meaning of Green in contemporary politics?

Possible analyses might include:

- Why are Green Parties more successful in establishing structures in urban areas than in rural areas? Do the Greens have an exclusive connection to an urban political milieu or do the goals of the Greens mainly relate to urban areas?
- Despite the low election results in parts of (Eastern) Germany, the Greens are highly relevant as a political symbol. But of what exactly? And how was this symbolism established, how is it maintained?
- Which affects dominate the public discourses on the Greens and why? Is the real issue the social status ascribed to Greens, a habitus of those with a certain level of economic stability? Are the Greens then a party for (and not just of) those with high incomes? Why are the Greens, according to the AfD, considered part of the establishment without ever really having been established in the East?
- Is the problem that the Greens' communicative strategy has failed in the East? Green movements in the post-Soviet space were always directly involved in the revolutions and democratization processes in the Soviet spaces, why could they not capitalize on that?
- How do the Greens react to the AfD's enemy narrative, and which affective strategies do they develop against these resentments?
- Are there options for a Green populism, is it desirable, perhaps as an opportunity to rejuvenate democracy?
- Are the Eastern German German Greens an exception within post-socialist countries?

We are seeking submissions to be included in a Special Issue of the peer-reviewed journal German Politics.

Expected deadline for final papers (max. 8,000 words) is November 11th, 2024.

Please submit your abstracts of 200-300 words to paul.seibicke@uni-leipzig.de until April 19th, 2024.