

# The green party | political analysis



The emergence of the green movements was related to a shift to post-materialist values in advanced industrial societies, especially in Europe (Muller-Rommel, 2002). Aiming for better quality of life and self-fulfilment, the green agenda was originally focused on single issues like provision of park tracks, urban renewal, high-way construction, nuclear energy and cruise missiles in the 1980s. During the period of 1980 to 1984 there were Green Parties in twelve Western European countries with which started to successfully perform in the parliamentary system, including national government (Muller-Rommel, 2002).

During the 1970s, Green Parties were founded in more countries like Europe, Australia, Brazil, the USA and Ukraine (Doherty, 2002). Although the first Green Parties were established in Tasmania (1972), New Zealand (1972) and Britain (1973), they were not considered as successful and remained small and weak in their political performance.

Although the different green parties were all based on the same basic principles, their evolution, progress and electoral success vary widely between different countries. As table 1. 1 shows, Austria, Belgium Finland, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherland, Sweden and Switzerland identified as the countries with more successful Green Parties. Green party success is a multi-variable phenomena (Richard). Existence, electoral and parliamentary power of green parties , their electoral success and environmental consciousness are vary widely between countries (Rich).

## **Factors behind the differential success**

Although many theories have been put forward to discuss this variation of success, most of them consider electoral success rather than the success as a whole. “ New social movements, new class accounts and post materialism” (Carter, 2007: 88) are the three major theoretical attempts to explain the green party development but failed in explaining the differential success (Carter, 2007). New social movements are students, peace , antinuclear, feminist and environmental movements that are responsible for protest campaigns that swept Western Europe from 1960s (Carter, 2007). New class accounts justify “ the new politics targeting basic changes in economic and social structures of capitalist’s society in post war era” (Carter, 2007: 88). Democrats in industrial countries shift away from material concerns for economy and security to post-material concerns such as a concern for liberty or for the environment is explained by the post materialism. However, the Political Opportunity Structure (POS) “ the dimensions of the political environment that either encourages people to use collective action or discourage them from doing so, and which shape the development of movement” explains the variation in success in aspects of structure, culture, electoral system and party competition. (Carter, 2007: 88)

Rich () identified the environmental consciousness with an identified political action which is appropriate to the individual state agenda, as the fundamental factor of the development of a green party is success. He further explains that the progress of green parties from 1970s 1980s was based on their understanding, that pressure group activity and personal spirituality are not substitutes for political actions.

In Harmel and Robertson (1984); Hauss and Rayside (1978) “ Cleavages or strains; institutional factors, such as characteristics of the electoral system and centralization of the government; and more directly political factors, such as the position of trade unions and the configuration of existing party competition” were identified as factors behind differential success. As a main dependent variable in green party success electoral success is determined by their capability of reaching a given vote or a seat threshold (Müller-Rommel, 1994; Kitschelt 1988). In a successful party it should not be limited to a particular election but stable and consistent over a considerable period (Bomberg, 2002). However the recent attention of this analysis is more towards the party behaviour within the government (Müller-Rommel, 1994).

It was argued that, as existing parties fail to meet new requirements of “ material wealth, considerable changes in the industrial formation, modifying living standards, and the increase of postmaterialist values, Green Parties gain a better opportunity to establish their selves in political and social arena (Inglehart 1990).

Analysing the green party evolution of Germany, Britain and France is critical to clear understanding of this differential success due to their contrasting behaviour.

## **German Greens**

The German Greens were neither the first green party nor the first greens that entered a parliament (Redding and Viterna, 1999). However, it is highlighted in the literature on green party evolution due to the early success which inspired the rise and spread of green parties globally and due

to the formation of a red-green coalition (Muller Rommel and Poguntike, 2002). The four pillars of Green parties “ Ecological wisdom, Social justice, Grassroots democracy and Nonviolence” introduced by German green party in 1979 to 1980, are fundamental to the world wide green parties.

Unquestionably, Die Grunen in the Federal Republic of Germany was the most successful green party in Europe (O’neill, 1997; Muller Rommel and Poguntike, 2002).

The German Green Party ‘ Die Gruenen’ was established in 1980. It emerged from the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. It was mainly the peace movement, the women’s movement, the anti-nuclear movement and the ecology movement that contributed to the foundation of the party. The early Greens focused on protest campaigns regarding issues like nuclear power, Pershing and Cruise missiles and acid rain (Carter, 2007)..

Proportional representation of electoral system and open POS of Germany helped German greens to enter the political system (X). As it refunds the cost of election campaign for parties who earn more than 0.5 % votes, the electoral system of the Germany encouraged the arrival of greens into politics. Consequently, green party was able to work on election campaign without drawing a rich sponsor (carter, 2007).

Although Germany was governed by the SPD from 1969 to 1982, the social-democrats failed to resolve the conflict between environment and economic interest groups and respond to new political demands raised by the green movement. This failure was one factor of the electoral success and establishment of Die Gruene in the German political arena (X).

- In the 1983 federal elections, Die Gruenen gained 5.6% of the votes and won 27 seats in the national parliament. Though the 5% threshold value of electoral system makes harder to small parties to entering the parliament, German Greens were able to be the first Green party entering European national legislature achieving that barrier (X). This experience enabled Die Grunen to gain “ national media attention and build up financial resources, parliamentary skills and political credibility,” as well as to expand their popular support (Frankland 1995: 27). With all the publicity and their strategies, German greens managed to increase their votes in the 1987 federal election and was able to won 8.3% of the votes (X).

The federal election of 1998 was an important milestone in their history as they participated in a new federal government in an unprecedented coalition with the social-democratic party (Rommel and Poguntke, 2002). To analyse if the greens were successful in this coalition, it is crucial to assess their negotiation with the coalition partner, the strategies they applied to influence government policies and their conflict resolution strategies (Rommel and Poguntke, 2002).

In contrast to countries like Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands, the absence of a communist party after 1956 facilitated the establishment of greens in Germany. The Greens filled up the gap of a left political party (Richard) and X. With this progress western Germany could win 8.8% in 2005 and more success than 5% of East Germany (Carter, 2007).

Another challenge the Greens were confronted are the internal conflicts between two opposed internal factions. “ Fundis” members adhere to green principles without any compromise while “ Realos” are more pragmatic and willing to adopt party strategies to be more successful X). However, wise conflict resolution and proper leadership could drive the party success (Carter, 2007).

## **British Greens**

Britain Green party “ People” was the first European Green party established in 1973 (Carter, 2007). This party was based on the “ Blueprint for Survival” which consists of four principles; “ human survival with minimum disruption of ecological process, the maximum conservation of materials and energy, a population in which recruitment balanced loss, and social system which the individual citizen was content with (O’neill, 1997). Despite that attempt of demonstrating their environmental consciousness they could obtain only 1. 8% votes in 1974 general election and among five constituencies North West recorded with the highest of 3. 9%. In 1975 as a pure green approach among other parties with dark green and red green fractions they have changed their name as “ Ecology” party (O’neill, 1997).

However, British Green party is considered to be having an unsuccessful fortune, compare to most of other greens with national government success (Carter, 2007; O’neill, 1997). The major reason behind this regression is the British electoral system and its poor recognition of small political parties (Carter, 2007).

A rather closed Political Opportunity Structure in Britain focuses more on major parties and their success and its opportunity for a smaller party is negligible (Carter). Since the British “ Plurality electoral system” focuses on “ individual constituency contests” between major parties, prospects for small parties to enter the parliament are rare, unless they represent a Welsh or Scottish Nationality based on geography. The financial barrier created by the British electoral system discourages small parties from contesting in elections as they need to deposit 500 pounds per candidate before election, which is only refundable if a minimum of 5% of the vote is won. The Green party faced a significant economic crisis after the general election of 1992, as they lost their deposits for all 253 candidates and did not receive any government funding (Carter, 2007).

The competition by other political parties trying to draw environmentalists’ votes, such as “ Liberal Democratic, Scottish and Welsh nationalists’ party” also created a hard time for greens in establishing their political stability. However, as an important miles stone they were able to win 15% of the votes in 1989 election (Carter, 2007). Growing public environmental consciousness, protests against the Conservative Government and fragile nature of new Liberal Democratic party are considered to be the major reasons behind this success. However, as the Liberal Democrats got more successful and materialism grew again, the Green party was confronted with a lot of obstacles and their popularity decreased (Redding and Viterna, 1999: Carter, 2007).

However recent positive trend of British Green party is more likely to be satisfactory as they could secure the European parliament election and



Scottish election in 1999 and Greater London Assembly in 2000. Successes of 2003 and 2004 could win the seven seats of Scottish Parliament. These achievements triggered their performance in national election and won 3.37 contested seats in 2005 while saving 24 deposits. Reformation of Political Opportunity Structure of European parliament through introduction of proportional representation opened up the way for this positive trend in greens fortune in Britain (Carter, 2007).

## **French Greens**

The establishment of the French greens was triggered by the anti-nuclear movement and its opposition to the construction of a powerful nuclear plant under a right-wing government in 1974. The first French Green party 'Les Verts' was formed in 1984. It won eight seats in European election in 1989. The French Greens were first elected to the French National Assembly in 1997.

After Francois Mitterant, was elected president in 1981, broke his promise of submitting a moratorium on the construction of a nuclear power plant, environmentalists realized the importance of forming a unique party to raise their voice on environmental problems. "Generation Ecologie" was the second French Green party. It was formed in 1990 by Brice Lalonde, former Environmental Minister. Even though both parties were successful in the 1992 regional elections, they were unsuccessful in the 1993 national election and failed to win even a single seat.

One of the major reasons why the green parties had trouble to develop stability is the Political Opportunity Structure in France. In contrast to

Germany or the UK, the electoral system of France is based on two rounds of elections. There is a legislative and a two-round presidential election. 12.5% vote winners of first round can proceed with the second round. Hence passing this threshold values alone was again a major challenge for minor parties. As a mutual effort socialists and greens had to reach the target together to keep their political stability and survival in the parliament. Les Verts could again establish in 1997 through a coalition with Dominique Voyer the national speaker of the socialist government and secure the status even in 2002.

In contrast to Germany, left-right cleavage of the French political system is basically a static system which constrains the establishment of a new party in the political arena. However, the decline of political stability of major parties in 1980s facilitated the entering of greens into the political arena.

Although coalition used as a strategy for entering the political system it was the beginning of decline of party structural integrity. Diverse political views between members was fundamental to lots of internal conflicts and some of the main green activists left the party due to the inconsistency of the political vision. With the changes of POS under “plural left” alliance green party was exhausted with organizational structure, leadership and financial stability (Carter, 2007).

## **Conclusion**

Evolution of green parties and the rationale behind their rise and fall vary widely between countries. However, German, France and Britain examples

which have different fortunes for green parties reflect that they all bear a common pool of facts behind the differential success.

National constraints that green parties confronted with vary widely between countries. Firstly the institutional structure of the state, where countries with closed system of government have more space for ideas and establishment of green parties. However openness of the bureaucracy marginalizes the green parties as in Britain. Political tradition of a country and nature of the electoral system also can obstruct or facilitate the development of green party. However, no single factor can determine the success and development of a green party or the potential of its establishment (challenge Richard). The essay supports the (X)'s argument of existence, electoral and parliamentary power of green parties is proportional to the performance of green parties in national government coalitions. The actions of a green party especially ideological development, internal struggles and performance in the government, influenced on it's electoral success (Redding and Viterna, 1999).

The literature figure out that electoral system of the country, environmental consciousness, institutional structure of the party, financial stability and party behaviour (internal conflicts and conflict resolution) as the major factors behind the differential success of Green parties as a whole.

According to Skocpol (1992) being successful as a party is lie in how social demands well within the institutional structure, especially in opportunities and obstacles.