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UK politics

What's next for the Green Party?

When Zack Polanski won the contest to lead the Green Party in September 2025, he argued in his victory speech that:

'People are rightly feeling let down and angry at Labour and are appalled by the rise of the far-right ... But there is a way forward.'

In a world of increasing partisan dealignment, with voters turning against the two main parties, the Green Party is growing in popularity and influence, not just in Parliament but in the minds of the British people.

Membership and vote share

Since Polanski won the leadership, the Green Party has experienced an extraordinary rise in membership, which stands at around 175,000 – only around 80,000 behind Reform UK. This marks a historic milestone for the Greens. Membership has grown by more than 100,000 under Polanski's tenure, with new sign-ups continuing to accelerate week by week. In December 2025, multiple polling companies placed him at the top of net-favourability ratings for party leaders. His popularity may also provide evidence of the increasing importance and impact of party leaders on an electorate looking for charismatic, eloquent, authentic and engaging leadership.

Alongside this surge in membership, the party has advanced in the polls, securing 17% in a recent UK-wide survey and establishing itself as the fastest-growing political movement in the country. It has extended its lead among Gen Z voters, particularly women. However, it's not just that 18–24 cohort that is now looking to the Greens. This popularity reflects a wider shift in public mood, as more people turn away from traditional parties rooted in privilege and power in search for alternatives.

This polling evidence suggests that left-wing and progressive voters feel let down by what they see as the overly moderate or even right-wing policies of Sir Keir Starmer's ailing Labour government, while the lacklustre leadership of Kemi Badenoch is leaving the Conservative Party languishing in the polls. This has created an opportunity for a progressive and left-wing party to seize the initiative and advocate for radical and – as Polanski openly admits – populist policies, such as a wealth tax (an annual tax of 1% on assets above £10 million and 2% on assets above £1 billion).

Even before Polanski took over, the 2024 general election had provided evidence that support for the Greens was growing, with a 3.8% increase in vote share – taking the party to 6.4% of the vote, and a historic 4 seats, compared to 1 previously. The party's MPs have been vocal advocates of environmental protections and redistributionist tax policies, as well as protecting the NHS and welfare spending. Green MP Siân Berry was a co-sponsor of the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill, and Ellie Chowns is a member of the Environmental Audit Select Committee. Carla Denyer, a previous co-leader of the party, had been a prominent voice in the chamber, calling for the Labour government to scrap the two-child benefit cap.

Challenges

Despite this increase in popularity and parliamentary influence, the Greens still face a familiar challenge: the inbuilt unfairness of the UK electoral system. The first-past-the-post (FPTP) voting method does not fairly translate votes into seats, and this creates an artificial two-party system, keeping out small parties who do not enjoy deep support nationwide. In order to win, candidates must gain a plurality (the most votes) in a seat. Coming second or third gains you nothing. This often gives the winning party an artificial ‘winner’s bonus’, as evidenced by Labour winning 34% of the vote but 63% of seats in the general election of 2024. When you look at the top two parties, Labour and the Conservatives only received 58% of the vote, yet FPTP rewarded them with 82% of the seats. The Green Party fell victim to this, as its 6.4% of the vote was distributed widely across the country, but was too shallow to win a plurality in most constituencies. This meant that this 6.4% translated into only 0.8% of the seats.

However, the peculiarities of FPTP may actually now work to the Greens’ advantage. UK politics is becoming a multi-party system, and the aforementioned recent polling puts the Greens on track to be vying for third, or even second, place. Although winning a majority of seats is highly unlikely, this could make Polanski a kingmaker in a potential anti-Reform rainbow coalition of left and centre-left parties. This is a role the Greens’ sister party played in Scotland, when the Scottish Greens provided the SNP with a majority in the Scottish Parliament (until the collapse of the Bute House power-sharing Agreement in 2024).

If the Green Party wants to continue its rise, stop Reform and play a role in the formation of the next government, it will have to break through a second obstacle: uneven media coverage. This is a problem that smaller parties often face, but a recent study by Cardiff University found that between January and September 2025, the Green Party received sparse coverage, despite polls showing it attracted 10–17% of voters throughout 2025. When the party did get airtime, it was primarily in the context of the local elections and the Greens’ 2025 leadership contest. However, neither the BBC nor ITV covered the announcement or build-up to the Green Party leadership election – just reporting the result. Only 3.6% of references to opposition parties on *BBC News at Ten* in this period were about the Greens, while for ITV news, it was 4.4%. In contrast, in September 2025 Reform UK overtook the Conservative Party as the most referenced opposition party on both the BBC and ITV.

Podcasts and social media

Despite such figures, Polanski has embraced non-traditional media by appearing on podcasts like *The Rest is Politics* – a show with around 500,000 weekly listeners – and by hosting his own podcast, in order to reach wider audiences. In a modern media environment dominated by social media, where Nigel Farage has more followers on TikTok than all other MPs combined, Polanski is following a similar strategy to win over voters. This new-found popularity has invited scrutiny, and criticism of some of his more polarising policy positions. His appearance on *The Rest is Politics* drew ire for his perceived lack of knowledge on economic issues, his persistent criticism of NATO, the UK’s nuclear deterrent and the wealth tax, as well his desire to cut defence spending. This has led to accusations of pie-in-the-sky thinking.

If the Green Party can continue to build and capitalise on its momentum, it could be a key player during the next general election and its aftermath. However, the interconnected challenges posed by FPTP, a lack of media coverage and policy scrutiny are significant and long-standing, and require a sustained campaign to sell the party to voters keen for an alternative to the creaking two-party system.

Student task

1 How could you use the information in this article to answer questions on voting systems, party systems, voting behaviour and the media, and the role of the party leader?

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