

Alliance '90/The Greens at the crossroads: On their way to becoming a mainstream party?

by Martin Kroh and Jürgen Schupp

The Greens have been riding high in the polls for months now. In Baden-Württemberg, a stronghold of the Christian-Democratic Party (CDU), Winfried Kretschmann became the first Green party candidate to be elected Minister-President of any German state. This article looks beyond the current political climate to analyze longer-term trends in Green party support. The data used come from the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) Study, carried out by DIW Berlin in cooperation with TNS Infratest, Munich. The data are especially well suited to the in-depth analysis of party identification for two reasons: First, the SOEP has interviewed the same individuals on their party support for 27 consecutive years. Second, the SOEP provides a uniquely rich set of data on the question of who these Green partisans are—how much they earn, what educational qualifications they possess and what their occupational status is.

Our results show that the successes of Alliance '90/The Greens in recent elections are the product of long-term changes in the party's electorate. From the 1980s until today, the Greens have enjoyed the over-proportional and uninterrupted support of younger voters. The party has also been successful in maintaining voter loyalty even as their supporters grow older. Furthermore, the results show that a large proportion of individuals who supported the Greens in their youth are now high-income earners, civil servants, salaried employees and self-employed. Because of this, Alliance '90/The Greens are now competing with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Free Democratic Party (FDP) to represent the interests of affluent middle-class voters.¹

¹ The Greens' official name has changed over the course of time. In their founding phase, the terms "Green List" or "Alternative List" were frequently used at the local and state levels, and correspondingly, the Association of Greens in Hamburg still go by the name "Green-Alternative List." When the Greens and Alliance 90 merged in 1993, they changed their name to Alliance 90/The Greens. For economy of language, we primarily use "the Greens" throughout this article in addition to the full official name.

The shifting electoral fortunes of the Green Party from 1980 to the present

Alliance '90/The Greens have experienced a surge in popularity over the last few months: Some pollsters even suggest that they lie head to head with the SPD. At the federal level, top Green politicians have claimed leadership of the opposition. At the state level, the Greens are experiencing sustained success as well. And for the first time since their founding in 1980, the party saw the first Green Minister-President at the states level in Baden-Württemberg and has a chance of seeing a Green Governing Mayor elected in the upcoming states elections of Berlin, respectively.

A number of political analysts have attributed this phenomenon entirely to temporary shifts in the political climate. They argue that the current weakness of other parties, particularly the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the ongoing public discussions of nuclear phase-out and climate change and the increased levels of citizen participation in such initiatives as the "Stuttgart 21" protests have bolstered support for the Greens. However, this is only a temporary development, the current political climate does not, in their view, reflect longer-term trends.

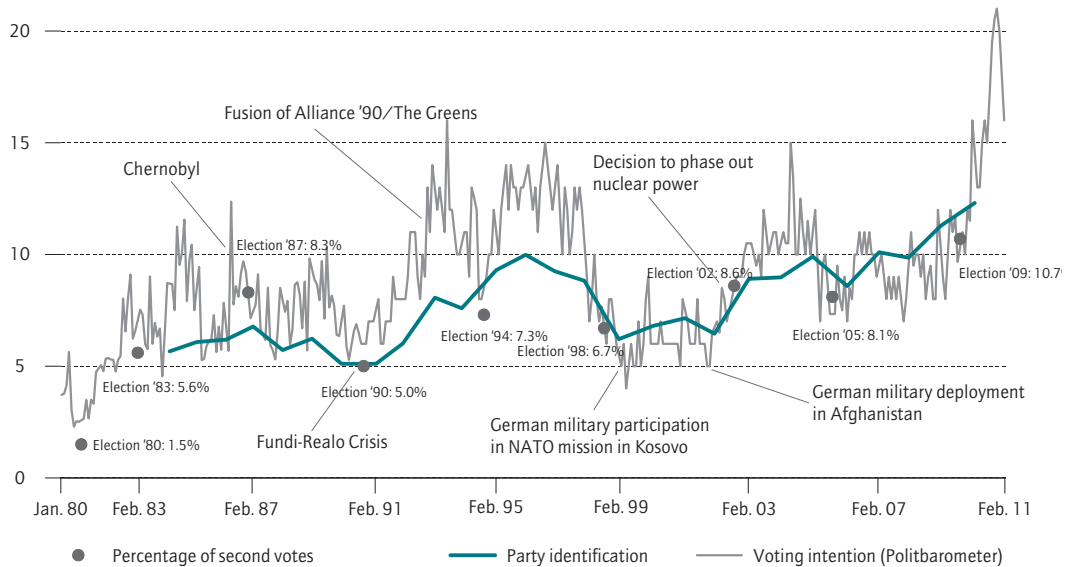
In recent discussions, an opposing view has been gaining ground: the idea that Alliance 90/The Greens is becoming one of Germany's major broad-based mainstream parties.² According to this view, Green party support has increased and remained so resilient over the last thirty years that this (former) anti-party movement can now be described as a truly broad-based mainstream party—which in its early days would have been considered very mixed praise given their anti-party history. This development cannot remain without consequences for the party system as a whole. For one, formerly "small" parties such as the Greens now no longer

² See Oliver Hoischen, "Wie grün ist das denn?" Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung, November 14, 2010, 6.

Figure 1

Support for Alliance '90/The Greens

Share (in percent)



Sources: Federal Election Commissioner, Forschungsgruppe Wahlen: Politbarometer; SOEP.

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Over the last three decades, there has not been a linear increase in support for the Greens.

serve to ensure parliamentary majorities for the CDU and SPD; rather, in Germany's five-party system, these parties are claiming a role as equal partners in a range of different government coalitions.³ As the Greens continue expanding their support base, they will also have to pay more attention to the diverse interests of their growing base of supporters while avoiding the risk of renewed infighting.

As Figure 1 shows, the party's current spike in popularity is not the result of a constant upward trend over the last thirty years.⁴ As early as the 1980s, political commentators were already sounding the death knell for the newly founded Green party. Their argument was that the Greens were merely the expression of growing fears of unemployment among recent college graduates—fears that would dissipate as soon as the labor market situa-

tion improved.⁵ Others claimed that the Greens were a passing phenomenon in a generation shaped by debates on Chernobyl, acid rain and the nuclear arms race. Future generations, it was claimed, would have different priorities and the Greens would disappear as quickly as they had emerged on the scene.

As the figures show, the Greens have frequently found themselves teetering on the edge of political ruin. After their first elections to the Bundestag in 1983 and 1987, the Greens missed the five percent threshold in 1990⁶ and were mired in bitter infighting between the fundamentalist ("Fundis") and realist ("Reals") factions of the party. This dispute over the party's direction was also marked by the departure of numerous high-profile founding members, who either resigned or switched to other parties.

³ See also M. Kroh and T. Siedler, "Die Anhänger der 'Linken': Rückhalt quer durch alle Einkommenschichten." DIW Wochenbericht 41, 2008.

⁴ For an overview of the evolution of the Greens and their support base, see W. Hulsberg, *The German Greens: A social and political profile* (London: Verso, 1988); J. Raschke, *Die Grünen. Wie sie wurden was sie sind* (Cologne: Bund Verlag, 1993); J. Raschke, *Die Zukunft der Grünen. So kann man nicht regieren* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2001); J. W. Falter, M. Klein, *Der lange Weg der Grünen. Eine Partei zwischen Protest und Regierung* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2003).

⁵ W. Bürklin, "Governing left parties frustrating the radical non-established left: The rise and inevitable decline of the Greens," *European Sociological Review* 4, 1987, 161-166.

⁶ The 5 percent of second votes in 1990 reported in Figure 1 is the total of second votes for the Greens and Alliance 90, which at that time were running separately.

The Vote Choice, Voting Intention and Party Identification

Three indicators have been used here to measure support for the Greens in the German population (Figure 1): first, the percentage of (second) votes¹ for the Greens in Bundestag elections between 1980 and 2009 (red dots). Second, the percentage of intended votes for the Greens (gray line) surveyed on a monthly basis by Politbarometer, a major pollster in Germany. Third, the percentage of party identifications for the Greens (green dots) surveyed on an annual basis by the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) study.

Long-term party identification (political affiliation) is measured in the German electoral research with the question: "Many people in Germany lean towards one party in the long term, even if they occasionally vote for another party. Do you lean towards a particular party?" If respondents answer yes, they are asked to state which party.² In contrast to voting intention, which gives indications about the current political climate, party identification reveals longer-term trends in political affiliations.

A common finding in many Western countries is the decreasing importance of traditional political affiliations.³ At present,

¹ The German voter has two votes: the first is for a direct candidate and the second is for a party list. The proportion of second votes (Zweitstimmen) determines the distribution of seats in the Bundestag to the parties, which then fill the seats from their electoral lists.

² J. Falter, H. Schoen, and C. Caballero, "Dreiig Jahre danach. Zur Validierung des Konzepts 'Parteiidentifikation' in der Bundesrepublik," 50 Jahre Empirische Wahlforschung in Deutschland. Entwicklungen, Befunde, Perspektive, Daten, eds. M. Klein, W. Jagodzinski, E. Mochmann, and D. Ohr (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2003), 1-34.

³ Dalton, R. J., and Wattenberg, M. (eds). Parties without partisans. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000.

around 50 percent of respondents to the annual SOEP survey state that they have a long-term identification with a particular party. In the 1980s, this percentage was five to ten percentage points higher. This does not mean, however, that the other 50 percent of respondents have no party loyalties. Many respondents vacillate between political independence and stated party preference from one survey to the next. Looking at the SOEP survey results from a longer-term perspective (2006-2010), nearly 70 percent of all respondents stated party identification at least once. In the period 1984-1988, 80 percent of all respondents did so.

A unique feature distinguishing the Socio-Economic Panel from many other political surveys is that not only registered voters are surveyed—that is, individuals above the age of 18 with German citizenship—but also individuals without German citizenship and all household members aged 17 and older. All of the results presented in this Weekly Report cover this broad group of individuals aged 17 and older in Germany. The probability of answering "yes" to the question of whether one leans toward a particular party "in the long term" is initially lower among young people and immigrants but rises steadily with increasing experience with the German political system.⁴

⁴ On the time up to first mention of party preferences in young people, see M. Kroh and H. Schoen, "Politisches Engagement," in Leben in Ost- und Westdeutschland: Eine sozialwissenschaftliche Bilanz der deutschen Einheit 1990-2010, eds. P. Krause and I. Ostner (Campus: 2010). On the time up to first mention of party preferences in first-generation immigrants, see M. Kroh and I. Tucci, "Parteienbindungen von Migranten: Parteien brauchen erleichterte Einbrgerung nicht zu frchten," DIW Wochenbericht 47, 2009.

The Greens experienced massive declines in popularity during their first term in the federal government under the Schrder administration (1998-2002). They had succeeded in pushing through a decision to phase out the use of nuclear energy—a central principle of the Green platform—but had also turned away from their pacifist doctrines to support German military engagement in Kosovo and Afghanistan after then-Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer had committed the party to this line. The result was not just fierce ideological debate within the party, but also a dramatic loss in support for the Greens among the broader population. In 1999, Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, one of the major public opinion research groups in Germany, reported the lowest levels of voting intention for the Greens since 1981—just one

year after the Greens first joined the ruling coalition at the federal level (see Politbarometer, Figure 1).

A longer-term examination of the fluctuations in Green party support confirms the temporary nature of the current spike in popularity, as reflected in the approximately 20 percent of the population reporting the intention to vote for the Greens if elections were held next Sunday (see text box above). Support for the Greens was also relatively high, at 15 percent, in the mid-1990s. Nevertheless, it is not impossible that these monthly fluctuations in responses to the voting intention question conceal a longer-term trend that would justify the Greens' future designation as a broad-based mainstream party. In the following, we explore these long-term trends based on data from the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) Study:

Table 1

Changes in Party Identification 2009-2010

In thousands

	2010							Total
	Independent	SPD	CDU/CSU	FDP	B90/The Greens	The Left	Other	
Independent	31 754	2 992	2 624	654	1 146	777	473	40 420
SPD	1 532	6 668	117	46	320	176	95	8 954
CDU/CSU	1 397	171	8 827	115	34	32	114	10 690
FDP	566	47	356	906	71	14	83	2 043
B90/The Greens	436	262	14	8	2 322	80	65	3 187
The Left	242	94	9	0	25	1 418	48	1 836
Other	216	125	177	50	58	9	535	1 170
Total	36 143	10 359	12 124	1 779	3 976	2 506	1 413	68 300

Example: Of the 68.3 million people in Germany over the age of 17, 2.322 million identified with Alliance '90/The Greens in both 2009 and 2010. Of those who stated that they supported the Greens in 2010, 1.146 million had described themselves as independents in the previous year.

Sources: SOEP; authors' calculations.

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Of the three smaller parties, the Greens currently have by far the most loyal constituency.

Here, the focus is not on current political attitudes but on longer-term party identifications and on the socio-demographic changes affecting party support.

Little movement between the parties

SOEP respondents are asked to state whether and to what extent they tend to lean toward a particular party consistently from a long-term perspective. This more lasting party identification should therefore be clearly distinguished from the current preference for a political party as measured with the "Sunday Question" (Sonn-tagsfrage, see box).

Most respondents who report lasting party identification remain faithful to that party over subsequent surveys (Table 1). Of the estimated 3.2 million supporters of Alliance '90 /The Greens in 2009, around 2.3 million supported the same party in the following year. Approximately 440,000 Greens supporters in 2009 reported not (or no longer) to lean toward any particular party in 2010. The remaining 430,000 supporters of the Greens in 2009 had switched to another party by 2010—the large majority to the SPD (262,000). The departures of former Green supporters to other parties were countered by more than one million new supporters who had formerly reported no political leanings. Further additions to the Greens' supporters between 2009 and 2010 came from former supporters of other parties (500,000), the relative majority of whom were former SPD voters (320,000). Overall, Alliance '90 /The Greens increased their base of support between 2009 and 2010 from 3.2 to 4 milli-

on. Shifts in membership between parties and particularly between left and right are rare: 84 percent of the Green supporters from 2009 who reported political party leanings in 2010 still supported the Greens. For comparison: The figure was 95 percent for the CDU/CSU, 90 percent for the SPD, 89 percent for the Left Party and 61 percent for the FDP (Table 1).

Since people who report party identification usually remain loyal to that party in the longer term and only change loyalties for limited periods of time,⁷ only a small portion of the gradual increase in Green party identification to currently 13 percent among all those who reported party identifications can be attributed to fluctuating party loyalties (see Figure 1). Figure 2 presents the total changes in party identification among respondents who switched affiliations between parties from one year to the next since 1985. Although the figure does show a strong overall shift in party identification from the SPD to the Greens, it also reveals that the Greens have not gained steadily from the SPD, but have lost many supporters to the SPD, particularly in times of political crisis (e.g., during the Fundi-Realo conflict and the debates on military deployment in the late 1990s). The movements of members between the Greens and the traditionally middle-class, center-right parties (CDU/CSU, FDP) and the PDS/Left Party are of significantly lower importance in absolute terms (Figure 2). In 2010, the Greens gained supporters from the ranks of the SPD and FDP, but lost supporters to the Left Party (approximately 60,000 each, see Table 1).

Demographic change favors growth in Greens support

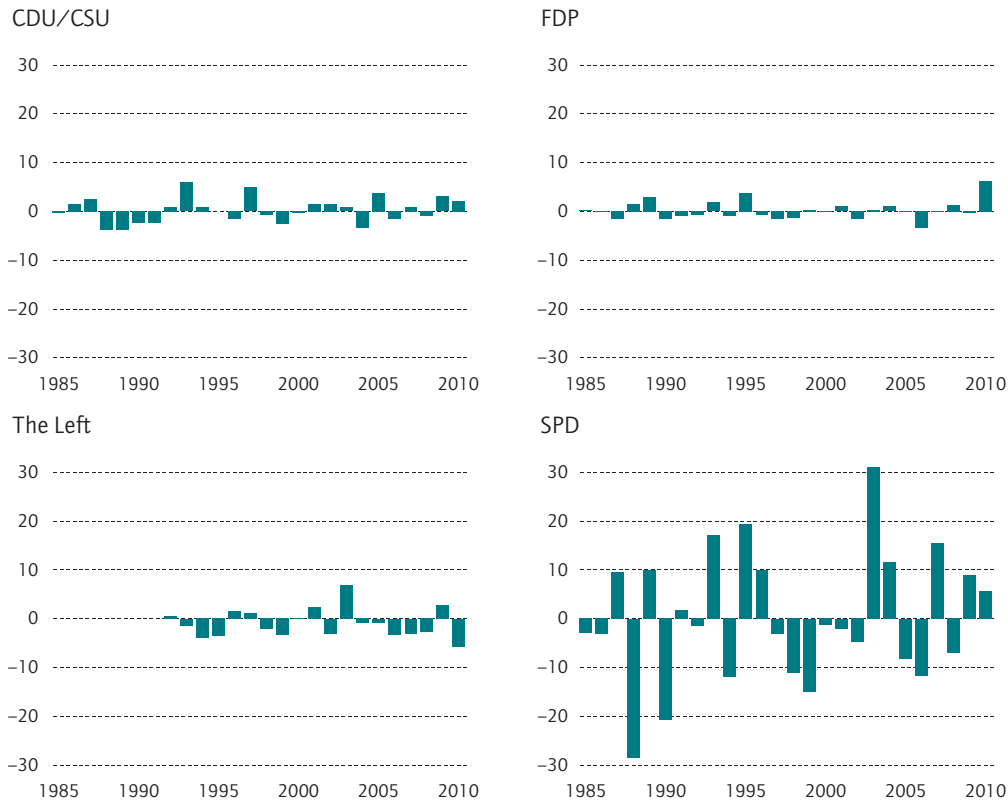
If the increase in support for the Greens cannot be explained primarily by defections from other parties, a plausible alternative explanation is that a steady stream of new members from new birth cohorts is providing the Greens the stable base of support that characterizes the traditional mainstream parties. It is a well established empirical finding that large percentages of Greens supporters can be found among teenagers and young adults. A frequently discussed result in electoral research is that the median age of Greens supporters has increased gradually since the 1990s: Whereas the

⁷ The high stability in party identification has also been noted in other Western countries; see, e.g., D.P. Green and B. Palmquist, "How stable is party identification?" *Political Behavior* 16, 1994, 437–466; D.P. Green, B. Palmquist, and E. Schickler, *Partisan hearts and minds. Political parties and the social identities of voters* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2002); A.S. Zuckerman, *The social logic of partisanship*. (Philadelphia: Temple), 2005; A.S. Zuckerman, J. Dasovic, and J. Fitzgerald, *Partisan families: the social logic of bounded partisanship in Germany and Britain* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 2007.

Figure 2

Shifts in Support between the Greens and Other Parties

In ten thousands



Source: SOEP.

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For the Greens, the largest gains and losses in party affiliation have occurred with the SPD.

Greens supporters in the Socio-Economic Panel were 28 years old on average (median) between 1984 and 1989, today they are 42.⁸

According to a common argument, which also corresponds to the present data from the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), the first generations of young Greens sup-

porters from the 1980s (the 1950/59 and particularly the 1960/69 age cohorts) were still faithful to the party by and large thirty years after its founding (Table 2). In the 1960/69 cohort, the percentage of Greens supporters was 19 percent when these individuals were aged 20; when they had reached the age of 40 or older, the percentage of Greens was still 16 percent. The figures do show a slight decline in party support for the Greens over the life course, but the difference between cohorts is substantially stronger: Older birth cohorts born up to approximately 1950 show a significantly below-average level of support for the Greens, whereas support in younger birth cohorts (born after 1950) is between 10 and 19 percent.

If we adjust for the aforementioned negative life-cycle effect in the percentage of Greens supporters among all those reporting party identification, we find a constant high level of Greens support, at 18 percent, in the birth

⁸ On the debate over the "graying" of the Greens, see W. Bürklin and R.J. Dalton, "Das Ergrauen der Grünen," in *Wahlen und Wähler: Analysen aus Anlass der Bundestagswahl 1990*, eds. H.D. Klingemann and M. Kaase (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1994), 264-302; M. Klein and K. Arzheimer, "Grau in Grau. Die Grünen und ihre Wähler nach eineinhalb Jahrzehnten," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 49, 1997, 650-673; U. Kohler, "Zur Attraktivität der Grünen bei älteren Wählern," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 50, 1998, 536-559; M. Klein, "Die Entwicklung der grünen Wählerschaft im Laufe dreier Jahrzehnte- eine empirische APK-Analyse," in *Politik-Wissenschaft - Medien. Festschrift für Jürgen W. Falter zum 65. Geburtstag*. Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, eds. H. Kaspar, H. Schoen, S. Schumann, and J. W. Winkler (Opladen, 1999); M. Spiess and M. Kroh, "A selection model for panel data: the prospects of Green party support." *Political Analysis* 18, 2010, 172-188.

Table 2

Percentage of Green Party Supporters by Cohort and Age Group

Age	Birth Cohort								
	Up to 1909	1910-1919	1920-1929	1930-1939	1940-1949	1950-1959	1960-1969	1970-1979	1980-1993
17-20							19	19	17
21-30						16	17	15	18
31-40					7	12	15	19	
41-50				2	5	12	16		
51-60			1	2	4	9			
61-70		1	1	2	4				
71+	0	1	1	3					
Total¹	4	4	5	6	7	14	18	18	18

¹ Estimated median support for the Greens in cohorts controlling for age effects.

Sources: SOEP; authors' calculations.

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The Greens have been able to rely on a loyal base of voters from the post-war generation.

cohorts of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. To the same extent as the importance of the pre-1950 birth cohorts relative to the post-1950 cohorts has declined over time, the percentage of Greens supporters in the population has increased. Demographic change therefore acts as a structural advantage for the Greens and has been crucial in enabling the party to approach the 20 percent mark in upcoming elections.

From the radical left to the Green establishment

Since the majority of young Greens supporters from the 1980s have remained faithful to the party as they have gotten older, not only the median age of Green party supporters but also their socio-structural status has changed dramatically over the last three decades.

The affluent Greens

The Green party's support base is comprised almost exclusively of individuals who completed academic-track Gymnasium (obtaining the Abitur university entrance qualification), with approximately 18 percent of all such individuals since 1984 reporting identification with the Green party. Among those who completed lower secondary school forms (Volksschule / Hauptschule), support for the Greens is low at approximately 3 percent. This relation has not changed since the 1980s (Table 3).

Although many Green party supporters completed their education in the 1980s, they still had not started working at that time: From 1984 to 1989, 26 percent of students in post-secondary education or training and only 5-8 percent of self-employed or employed people and civil

servants supported the Greens. Since then, support for the Greens in the latter three occupational groups has grown steadily, or to be more precise: Supporters of the Greens have grown into these occupational groups.

Today, 20 percent of civil servants and as many as 18 percent of self-employed and employed people are Green supporters. Among retired people, other non-employed people and blue-collar workers, however, the Greens have never had a substantial base of support. The share of Green party supporters among the unemployed has indeed been declining over the last few decades.

The occupational evolution of Green party supporters is also expressed in their income. Between 1984 and 1989, the Greens experienced their highest relative level of support in the lowest disposable income quintile—at around 10 percent—and an only average level of support—at 6 percent—in the highest quintile. This picture was reversed in the years that followed. In the period from 2008 to 2010, the share of Green party supporters in the lowest quintile of the income distribution was average (9 percent). The highest share of support was in the highest income quintile (16 percent).

With regard to the socio-structural status of their supporters, the Greens today enjoy their highest level of support among the affluent, educated middle-class. Their success with self-employed people and among individuals with above-average incomes has undermined the prior dominance of the CDU and FDP as sole representatives of this electorate. The lack of Green party support among blue-collar workers, the less educated and the unemployed suggests that the Greens—despite their self-perception as “leftist”—are not competing with the SPD or the Left Party for members from the traditional working class.

Green party supporters typically live in cities

The traditional base of support for Alliance '90/The Greens is concentrated in cities. Furthermore, the percentage of Green party support in the population is increasing much more strongly in urban than in rural areas. The Greens' efforts to promote conservation and ecologically oriented agriculture thus appear not to have paid off in terms of party identification, at least not in the rural electorate.

In the “new” German states of the former GDR, support for the Greens is also below-average. This East-West distinction also remains intact when controlling for other factors relevant to Green party identification, such as occupation, income and education. Individuals

with an immigration background differ little from those without in their support for the Greens. Additional analyses show higher than average levels of support for the Greens among immigrants from Western countries and second-generation immigrants.⁹

Green party identification higher among women

The Greens introduced a women's quota at an early stage in their history and have achieved the highest proportion of women of all of the parliamentary groups in the Bundestag at more than 50 percent. This, and their clear position on gender equality policy, are plausible reasons why the Greens have succeeded in gaining more supporters among women than among men in their last three decades (Table 3).

Over the party's history, party strategists came to view their identification with a limited number of issues such as pacifism, ecology and the phasing out of nuclear energy as ever more problematic. To appeal to broader segments of the population, the Green party platform was therefore expanded and today covers a wide range of social and economic issues. With regard to their ecological orientation, the Greens' supporters still differ significantly from supporters of other parties: From 1984 to 1989, support for the Greens was 10 percent among people who reported being "very concerned" about the environment and just 1 percent among those who reported being "not concerned at all." Today, the ratio is 18 to 8 percent (Table 3). Almost identical distributions of party support are manifested in concerns about the impacts of climate change, surveyed in the SOEP study in 2009 and 2010 (not reported in Table 3). The percentage of Greens supporters among those who were "very concerned" about climate change was approximately twice as high as among those who were not concerned at all. In the 1980s, there was also an above-average percentage of Greens among those who worried about maintaining peace. In the meantime, however, this difference has disappeared. For several years now, the Greens are no longer perceived as advocates of pacifism. With their approval of troop deployments under the government of Gerhard Schröder, the Greens relinquished this role to the Left Party.

Since 1984, the SOEP has surveyed respondents regarding their concerns about the overall economic situation, and since 1992 about crime—questions that correspond to "classic" middle-class policy fields of growth

Table 3

Percentage of Green Party Supporters by Voter Characteristics Between 1984 and 2010

	1984-1989	1990-1995	1996-2001	2002-2007	2008-2010
Education					
Lower secondary	3	3	3	3	4
Intermediate secondary	6	7	7	7	8
Academic-track secondary	17	17	18	18	20
Occupation					
Laborer	5	5	5	5	5
Civil servant	6	9	12	17	20
Self-employed/freelancer	5	10	11	14	18
Employed	8	9	13	14	18
Education/training	26	23	24	19	23
Unemployed	10	10	7	7	7
Economically inactive	5	6	10	11	10
Retired	1	1	1	2	3
Income quintile					
1	9	8	8	8	9
2	6	6	7	7	8
3	6	6	7	7	9
4	6	8	8	10	12
5	6	7	9	11	16
Size of municipality					
up to 2,000	5	7	7	6	5
2 000-20 000	5	6	6	6	9
20 000-100 000	5	5	7	8	8
100 000-500 000	7	9	10	11	14
500 000+	9	9	12	14	18
East/West					
West	6	7	8	9	12
East		9	6	6	9
Migration background					
No	6	6	8	9	11
Yes	9	11	10	9	11
Gender					
Male	6	6	7	8	10
Female	6	7	9	10	13
Environment					
no/low concerns	1	3	5	6	8
strong concerns	10	10	14	15	18
Climate change					
no/low concerns					9
strong concerns					18
Peace					
no/low concerns	4	6	8	8	11
strong concerns	9	8	8	10	11
Economic situation					
no/low concerns	6	7	9	11	13
strong concerns	6	6	6	6	7
Crime					
no/low concerns		7	12	13	15
strong concerns		5	5	4	4
Total	6	7	8	9	11

All figures are the percentage of Greens supporters among individuals in the respective groups or periods who report long-term affiliation with a particular party.

The income quintile figures are based on needs-weighted net household income.

Sources: SOEP; authors' calculations.

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In the last three decades, the Greens have developed a large base of support among affluent, highly educated city dwellers.

⁹ See M. Kroh and I. Tucci, "Parteienbindungen von Migranten: Parteien brauchen erleichterte Einbürgerung nicht zu fürchten." DIW Wochenbericht 47, 2009.

and security. Individuals who express serious concerns in these two areas are found increasingly rarely among Green party supporters, despite their broader party platform. Green supporters made up only 4 percent of those who reported concerns about crime and 7 percent of those who reported concerns about the economy (Table 3). Green party supporters therefore tend to be unconcerned about either of these two policy areas. Or to put it differently: Individuals who see a need for action in these two policy areas seldom seek answers from Alliance '90/The Greens.

Conclusion

The Greens used to represent a party of well-educated and ecologically oriented but rather poorly paid young people. In recent years, however, they have succeeded in maintaining a base of support among their early supporters and in achieving above-average levels of support among first-time and young voters. Today, the Greens are the party of middle-aged, environmentally conscious, educated and affluent civil servants and self-employed people living in urban areas. An almost negligible percentage of less-educated, lower-paid and unemployed people support the Greens. One can therefore conclude that Greens do not need to give these voters primary consideration in designing their labor market and economic policies. The rise of the Greens is, according to the data from the SOEP longitudinal study, anything but a short-term phenomenon; rather, the Greens appear to have a solid and enduring base among educated middle-class voters.

A long-term examination of the SOEP data reveals, along with socio-structural changes in the ranks of Green supporters, a decline in the importance of peace as a policy issue. There has not been an above-average percentage of individuals with strong concerns about peace among Green supporters since the late 1990s. The substantial increase in support for the Greens among women, on the other hand, may indicate a positive response to the Greens' focus on gender equality as a policy priority.

Whereas the Greens focused on a limited number of issues in their founding years, creating an image of themselves as a one-issue party, developing a broader base of support requires more nuanced political responses. At present, the Greens have achieved broader support base, but still, their supporters remain relatively homogeneous with regard to their socio-structural status and the issues that matter to them. Direct competition for leadership on specific policy issues comes from the SPD and Left Party—but only the SPD actually competes with the Greens for supporters. Interestingly, the results show that the Greens are now competing with

the traditional middle-class, center-right parties to represent the interests of higher-income individuals. The aim of gaining recognition across all social classes will be a litmus test for the Greens: To earn the designation as a broad-based mainstream party, they will have to learn to effectively defend unpopular decisions made in government to a broader electorate and thus to prevent a gradual decline in support.

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JEL Classification: D72, Z13

Keywords: Party identification, B90/Die Grünen, SOEP

Article first published as "Bündnis 90/Die Grünen auf dem Weg zur Volkspartei?", in: DIW Wochenbericht Nr. 12/2011.



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Volume 1, No 3
2 September, 2011
ISSN 2192-7219

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