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The Ecologism/Productivism cleavage: reassessing the transformation of cleavage politics in Western Europe

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ABSTRACT

West European politics has been reshaped by the formation and politicisation of a new cleavage: Ecologism versus Productivism. While existing scholarship since the 1960s mostly assumes the emergence of a single, unified cultural divide, this article goes back to the model developed by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) and distinguishes two new cleavages, Ecologism/Productivism and Identity/Cosmopolitanism, both resulting from different revolutions. Building on Bartolini and Mair's seminal framework, this analysis also introduces a fourth dimension to the definition of cleavage: in fully mobilised electoral societies, it encompasses sociological, ideological, and organisational dimensions, as well as a policy-making component. The study then delineates and illustrates the core features of the Ecologism/Productivism divide with data on public opinion, party positions and green parties' development. This conceptualisation offers a new lens for political scientists and policymakers, illuminating how the environmental conflict reshapes societies and party systems, interacts with other ideological and social conflicts, and influences the trajectory of West European politics in the age of Anthropocene.

KEYWORDS Cleavages; party systems; Ecologism; Productivism; Green parties

Talking about ecology is like talking about universal suffrage and Sunday rest: first, all the bourgeoisie and all the supporters of order tell you that you want their ruin, the triumph of anarchy and obscurantism. Then, in the second phase, when the forces of nature and popular pressure become irresistible, you are granted what you were denied yesterday and, fundamentally, nothing changes. (Gorz 1978: 3)

There is a third phase to André Gorz's quote: ecology has become conflictual again. One of the first decision Donald Trump took when accessing power for his first term in 2017 was to withdraw the United States

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from the Paris Agreement. Seen from Western Europe, this appeared, then, to be a 'North American' peculiarity, where environmental issues have aligned quite perfectly with the main dimension of political competition between progressives and conservatives (Dunlap *et al.* 2016). At the time, no major governing party in Western Europe had produced an explicitly climate-sceptic offer in the public arena. For example, all of the 5 West-European conservative parties studied by Båtstrand (2015) supported climate measures. With the exception of the British conservative government's rollback on climate change in the mid-2010s (Carter and Clements 2015), no mainstream party had taken a climate-relativist stance – disputing the human origin of climate disruption, or stressing that human activity is only one of the factors contributing to it – or opposed frontally to transition and decarbonisation policies. Even radical right parties, which had not yet secured any top executive positions, had long remained mostly silent on environmental and climate issues (Schwörer and Fernández-García 2024).

Compared to immigration (Dennison and Geddes 2019), environmental issues had stayed fairly secondary in electoral debates. While most studies have focused on the limited increase of the salience in party manifestos (Persico 2015; Spoon *et al.* 2014), works that have tried to assess the level of conflict in the period prior to the 2020s tend to converge towards an apparent soft consensus (in France and the UK: Jordan and Rayner 2010; Persico 2014). Pro-environmental and pro-climate positions coexisted alongside support for material development and economic growth, without these potential contradictions sparking widespread debate or contestation in party competition (Carter *et al.* 2018). Very few national elections' campaigns were thus structured by environmental issues and green parties' scores had remained moderate at best (Van Haute 2016). This era is now over. The 2024 European elections provided cross-national evidence that the environment has become conflictual (Hobolt *et al.* 2026). Understanding how environmental issues reshape the content and structure of party competition is more than crucial.

In this article, we argue that cleavage theory provides a powerful framework for assessing the way environmental issues have transformed party politics in Western Europe and beyond. The literature on the birth and development of new cleavages in West-European party competition has overwhelmingly subsumed all (now old) 'New Politics' issues into a single GAL-TAN dimension, ie., Green Alternative Libertarian vs. Traditional Authoritarian Nationalist (Hooghe *et al.* 2002). According to these views, and however the new cleavage may be named, radical right and green parties are two sides of the same coin. Based on the seminal conceptualizations of Lipset and Rokkan (1967) and Bartolini and Mair (1990), we argue that it would be more fruitful to start from the ground assumption

that West-European party systems have witnessed the development of two distinct and yet correlated cleavages: the Identity/Cosmopolitanism cleavage and the Ecologism/Productivism cleavage.

The first one has been largely studied in the literature, because radical right parties have received tremendous political scientists' attention. It is a direct consequence of globalisation (or as Kriesi and his colleagues (2008) suggest, denationalisation). Ideologically, it pits Identity, Nationalism and Order against Cosmopolitanism, Supra-nationalism and Libertarianism. Socio-demographically, it pits the 'losers' against the 'winners' of economic globalisation and thrives on the educational and gender divides (Abou-Chadi and Hix 2021; Hooghe and Marks 2022; Stubager 2009).

The second cleavage has already been mentioned in some works (Frognier 2007; Martin 2007; Seiler 2011), but it has never been fully conceptualised. In this article, we fill his gap by describing how this cleavage has been formed and then politicised. We argue this cleavage is a consequence of the Great Acceleration (*the 'productivist' revolution*), i.e., the dramatic increase in human activity and its impact on the Earth's systems since the mid-twentieth century (Bonneuil and Fressoz 2016; McNeill and Engelke 2014). We name it Ecologism against Productivism and assess how it transformed West European politics and party competition. At first glance, the way this theoretical distinction contributes to understanding the transformations of political competition in Western Europe is not obvious. After all, the hypothesis of the emergence of a single new GAL-TAN-type cleavage would be sufficient to account for the emergence of both green and radical right parties who oppose each other on most issues (Dassonneville *et al.* 2024). However, this hypothesis does not answer all the questions raised by the politicisation of environmental conflicts and tends to reduce the emergence of green parties to a question of cultural conflicts.

This article offers a comprehensive framework for the development of the new cleavage. It expands cleavage theory and shows how this new cleavage has been formed since the productivist revolution. It shortly describes the ideological, organisational, social and policy-making dimensions of the Ecologism/Productivism cleavage and shows how these dimensions interact with the Identity/Cosmopolitanism cleavage as well as other historical cleavages. Based on these theoretical and empirical developments, it leaves the door open for future empirical analyses.

Cleavages: a framework for understanding political conflicts

In political science, 'cleavages' refer to a handful of structural political conflict lines that shape party systems, an idea put forward by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) in their seminal work on the formation and development

of party systems in Western Europe. Yet, the concept has also come around with semantic vagueness, which can be explained by the lack of a final definition of the term by the two pioneers. The term ‘cleavage’ is often used loosely, which calls for a rigorous theoretical framing.

The definition by Bartolini and Mair: three dimensions of cleavages

In the early 1990s, Bartolini and Mair (1990) provided a precise definition of the concept and advocated for restricting its use for conflicts combining three components: (1) a socio-structural component – the existence of sociological groups; (2) an ideological component – a set of shared values and cultural beliefs; (3) an organisational component – the mobilisation of these groups and values by civil society’s organisations and political parties. Following Bartolini and Mair’s definition, the concept is self-sufficient: talking about cultural cleavages, economic cleavages, political cleavages or social cleavages makes no sense. The notion should hence be restricted to the ‘political translation of structural conflicts that simultaneously involve a sociological dimension, an ideological dimension and an organizational dimension’ (Deegan-Krause 2007).

Cleavages are never exclusively economic, nor exclusively cultural. It was the case in the nineteenth century and is still true: as Häusermann and Kriesi (2015: 202) put it, ‘the boundaries between distributional (economic) and identity-based (cultural) conflicts have become increasingly blurred’. All cleavages combine a socio-economic component based on oppositions of interests between social groups, and a cultural component based on conflicts of values. Some may, however, have a dominant component. The historical Workers/Owners cleavage is primarily an economic conflict resulting from private ownership of the means of production, although it is also based on the construction of a working-class identity around the messianic role of the proletariat in overturning the capitalist system (Somers 1992; Piketty 2020). Similarly, the Church/State cleavage was first and foremost a cultural conflict over the definition of the cultural norms governing everyday life, as demonstrated by the struggle to control the education of children, even though it also involved significant material issues, in particular the state funding of religious activities (Norris and Inglehart 2011).

Moreover, as emphasised by the issue competition literature (Carmines and Stimson 1989; De Sio and Lachat 2020; Riker 1986; Stokes 1963), cleavages are composed of multiple issues, and the specific issues they revolve around may vary over time. Cleavages are not dealt with immediately in the electoral arena but refer to conflict lines that are activated and arranged by a set of issues. For example, the issues on which the Workers/Owners cleavage has thrived (and declined) have dramatically

changed overtime: interdiction of child labour, authorisation of trade unions, rest days, paid leaves, nationalisations and privatisations, income and wealth taxation, retirement and unemployment benefits, etc. A cleavage offers multiple frames of issue politicisation (Guinaudeau and Persico 2014).

These frames and issues tend to be conflictual, insofar as they relate to intense confrontations over historical, economic, and social changes and their impact on policies and politics. Because they give shape to potentially deep divisions within societies, they play a crucial role in shaping party systems and electoral alignments. They remain on the agenda for a long time (Green-Pedersen 2019; Grossman and Guinaudeau 2021) and contribute to the stability of the electoral balance of power.

The model by Lipset and Rokkan: formation and politicisation of cleavages

Lipset and Rokkan's seminal model distinguishes between the formation and politicisation of cleavages. The formation of cleavages stems from 'revolutions', that is, historical macro-processes that fundamentally alter the structure of societies. More specifically, cleavages emerge as protest movements directed 'against the established national elite and its cultural standards' (Lipset and Rokkan 1967: 23). In other words, the development of cleavages arises from resistance to elite-driven modernisation processes. One side of the cleavage often consists of the 'losers' of these processes, as they are more likely to mobilise and form social and political movements. Conversely, the 'winners' typically have little incentive to politicise their advantageous position, as it aligns with the status quo.

In any case, cleavages do not automatically translate into partisan alternatives. The politicisation of cleavages, in the sense of their inclusion in political competition, is a complex process of overcoming four institutional barriers: (1) a *legitimisation* threshold, which expresses the degree of opposition tolerated in the political system; (2) an *incorporation* threshold, which refers to the capacity of protest movements to participate in political competition; (3) a *representation* threshold, which corresponds to the capacity of these movements to forge alliances or obtain autonomous representation within the system; (4) the *executive power* threshold, which refers to their capacity to gain access to cabinet positions.

Lipset and Rokkan's initial analysis of cleavages refers to the action of two revolutions that shaped the history of European societies from the *Renaissance* onwards: the national revolution and the industrial revolution. Each of these two revolutions generated two cleavages: the Periphery/Centre cleavage and the Church/State cleavage for the first, the Rural/Urban cleavage¹ and the Workers/Owners cleavage for the second. The

two cleavages resulting from the national revolution are predominantly (but not only) cultural and correspond to the construction of nation states. The two cleavages resulting from the industrial revolution are predominantly (but not only) economic and relate to the development of industrial capitalism.

The Centre/Periphery cleavage emerged during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, as populations rooted in ethno-territorial cultures and identities organised resistance against the national culture imposed by nation-state builders. This cleavage gave rise to ethno-regionalist parties and conflicts centred on territorial identity and centralisation. The Church/State cleavage, on the other hand, developed during the democratic revolution, when state builders sought to abolish Church privileges to consolidate national unification. This conflict led to the creation of Christian-Democratic and, to some extent, Conservative parties. The Rural/Urban cleavage took shape during the early industrial revolution, as the entrenched interests of large landowners clashed with those of emerging industrial entrepreneurs. Finally, the industrial revolution also gave rise to the Workers/Owners cleavage, which became a central axis of political conflict across Western European democracies and led to the emergence of socialist, social democratic, and communist parties.²

The four thresholds of politicisation were passed differently across time and space. While the first two were lowered with the democratisation of Western Europe, the last two remained major obstacles to the integration of new cleavages into political competition. Depending on what thresholds were passed by party families, and what system of alliances were built, each country had become characterised by a specific cleavage structure, i.e. an original and long-lasting (frozen) arrangement between the four cleavages. The access to major governmental positions (i.e. chief of the executive) has long remained in the realm of a small number of parties (Katz and Mair 2002).

The four historical cleavages and the left-right dimension

The 'conflict of conflicts' to which Schattschneider (1960) referred to describe political life in liberal democracies is no anarchic battlefield. Several cleavages are competing and can crosscut each other, leading to multi-dimensional competition, or can overlap and align. Although the level of cleavage multidimensionality has varied over time and across Western European countries, in the long run, the dualist dynamic of representative democracies tends to simplify this complexity by structuring cleavages along a single axis of competition that combines both economic and cultural dimensions (De Vries and Hobolt 2012). This is particularly

strong in majoritarian (rather than consensual) democracies, to use Lijphart's (1999) canonical categories. For example, the overlap between the Workers/Owners and the Church/State cleavages has been a key feature of many West-European party systems: most Catholics and Owners were on the right side, most Secularists and Workers on the left (Rose and Urwin 1970).

This leads to a last effort at conceptual clarification. Following Bartolini and Mair's definition, the term cleavage should not be used to describe the left-right opposition and there is no such thing as a left-right cleavage. Moreover, the left-right opposition should be considered as different from the class cleavage, contrary to the use of the left-right axis in many works on the dimensionality of political systems (e.g., Gethin *et al.* 2022; Knutsen 1989; Marks *et al.* 2021; Noël *et al.* 2021).

In a functionalist approach (Laponce 1981), the left-right opposition has no content in itself and does not even constitute a division in Bartolini and Mair's sense of the term³. It is a structural constraint on political life, an organising principle whose foundations are periodically redefined by party competition. Left and right are mostly empty shells, expressing the dualistic dynamic of political life. They exist only through their opposition, and their names can change according to the periods and political systems under consideration⁴. Left and Right depend on the cleavages and issues that structure the political life of a country at a given time. While there might be times of uncertainty regarding where each side of existing cleavages sit on the left-right opposition, the latter has a great absorption capacity. This has been true for the four cleavages that Lipset and Rokkan put forward, and this seems to be true for the two new cleavages transforming West European Party systems since the 1980s.

Cleavage theory and the environment: a blind spot

One legacy of Lipset and Rokkan's work is the hypothesis of a 'freezing of the major party alternatives', which refers to the consolidation of party systems following the generalisation of universal suffrage at the beginning of the 1920s. From the 1920s to the 1970s, the characteristics of the political landscape in Western Europe changed little. In most cases, the parties in competition remained the same. The freezing hypothesis emphasises the inertia of partisan alternatives that crystallised with the integration of new groups of voters in the political system. This inertia is crucial to understanding the contours of the political landscape that existed until the early 1980s. It also explains why the environment was absent from political competition until the 1980s (Budge *et al.* 2001).

The environment as a subdimension of new cleavages

Over the last five decades, a large body of works has used cleavage theory to explain the rise of new major conflicts and the development of two new party families: the greens and the radical right. Within these studies, the environment has mostly been treated as a component of a new ‘cultural cleavage’, whatever its denomination. Exceptions are Brechin and Kempton (1994), arguing that environmental concerns are not simply a product of a postmaterialist cultural shift, Kenny and Langsæther (2023) showing that environmentalism should not be included into a single cultural dimension of voter preferences, and Oatley (2024) highlighting how partisan polarisation in the public over environmental issues is linked to the dualization of US economy. More recent works on cleavages also point to distinct conflict dimensions – including the environment – within the new cleavages, even though they don’t present environmentalism as a cleavage *per se* (Crulli and Emanuele 2025; Kurella and Rapp 2025). Aside from these exceptions, environmental issues are largely situated within the cultural dimension of party competition.

Inglehart’s work on cultural change constitutes the first systematic analysis of a new revolution in the sense of the cleavage theory. The change was the result of two processes that followed World War 2: the pacification of the European continent and the sharp rise in the standards of living. For Inglehart (1977), peace and prosperity were at the root of a ‘silent revolution’, which altered the hierarchy of human needs and gave substance to new social aspirations, more complex and more sophisticated than the mere quest for physical and material security: political participation, protection of the environment, defence of minority rights, etc. The result has been a new divide between materialists and post-materialists, which has restructured the left of the party systems by giving rise to ecologist parties and new left parties (Inglehart 1984, 1997). The environment is here related to broader post-materialist values.

In the early 1990s, this analytical framework was broadened by Ignazi (1992): the ‘post-industrial revolution’ certainly contributed to the spread of post-materialist aspirations⁵, but it also gave rise to a ‘silent counter-revolution’, which reaffirmed the primacy of traditional conservative values and provoked the breakthrough of radical right-wing parties. This first stream of research, centred on the change in values, is finally summarised by Kitschelt (1994) and Kitschelt and McGann (1997). According to Kitschelt, the cultural transition of the 1960s produced a new cleavage between libertarians and authoritarians which gradually reshaped most Western European party systems by shifting the main axis of conflict from a left-right confrontation dominated by the class cleavage

to a confrontation between a left-libertarian pole and a right-authoritarian pole. The environment is here also related to broader libertarian values.

During the 1990s, another framework focusing on the transformation of the economic structures was developed by Kriesi (1998). Along with the rise of the service sector and the emergence of mass unemployment, Kriesi highlights the formation of two new dividing lines, the first between the old middle classes and the new middle classes, the second, within the new middle classes, between the managers who drive economic modernisation and the *socio-cultural specialists* who challenge their actions in the name of a more humane, democratic and environmentally-friendly lifestyle. Once again, the environment relates to a larger set of values.

This initial schema was refined by Kriesi and colleagues (Kriesi and al. 2008, 2012), distinguishing between two complementary changes. The first transformation began in the 1960s, in the wake of the ‘new social movements’. It resulted from the spread of universalist values and led to a recomposition of the class divide around the opposition between *managers* and *socio-cultural specialists*. This first phase mainly concerned the left, with the emergence of green parties and the repositioning of certain social democratic parties. But a second phase began in the 1980s, with the intensification of globalisation and Europeanisation, producing a new cleavage labelled as Identity/Demarcation. This cleavage pits the winners against the losers of globalisation⁶ and completes the reconfiguration of the cultural dimension of political competition by combining the immigration issue with the societal issues that came to the fore in the 1960s, including the environment.

Hooghe and Marks (Hooghe *et al.* 2002; Hooghe and Marks 2018) pursued this work of clarification and introduced a transnational cleavage, or GAL-TAN (Green-Alternative-Liberal versus Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist). They relate this cleavage to the increase in education, economic and political integration of Europe and to the increase in transnational mobility, the building of supranational institutions being a *critical juncture*.

All these studies provide a better understanding of the tensions that exist in Western partisan systems around issues such as immigration, European integration and globalisation and leave little doubts about the origins of the birth and rise of radical right parties. They are due to a new cleavage, whatever the different labels authors have given to it – Demarcation/Integration (Kriesi *et al.* 2008, 2012); Libertarian-Universalistic/Traditionalist-Communitarian (Bornschieer 2010); Universalism/Particularism (Häusermann and Kriesi 2015); Cosmopolitan/Parochial (De Vries 2018). Most of them focus on the transnational dimension of the new cleavage, with issues related to supranationalism, immigration, or identity (Hooghe and Marks 2018; Kriesi *et al.* 2008), and/or on its educational/cultural dimension, with issues related to feminism, sexuality or social

order (Betz 1993; Bornschier 2010; Norris and Inglehart 2019; Zollinger and Attewell 2025). With the exception for the first letter in GAL-TAN, which is largely neglected in the cleavage literature, these works leave the environment out of the picture.

The environment and historical cleavages

Among the cleavages highlighted by Lipset and Rokkan, the environment is virtually absent. Even though one of the Revolutions put forward by the two authors – the first industrial revolution – will have dire and concrete ecological consequences, these took decades to be noticed or fought against.

Environmental concern appeared at the margins of the Rural/Urban cleavage. The first conservationist demands for nature protection in the late nineteenth Century and early twentieth Century were in fact led by large charities gathering scientists or landowners who sought to preserve nature from industrial expansion (Audier 2017; De Roose and Van Parijs 1991: 67). The desire to protect nature expressed by the extreme right during the twentieth century⁷ also conveyed a form of reactionary environmentalism, hostile to the technicist rationalism that had emerged from the Enlightenment (Ferry, 1993; François, 2009). Some authors, such as Seiler (2003: 151–152), go so far as to see the creation of the green parties from the 1970s onwards as part of the Urban/Rural cleavage – which he re-characterises as the Market/Nature cleavage. However, the political issues surrounding environmental protection and the ecologist ideology are far from being central in the Rural/Urban cleavage, which has historically focused on questions of customs tariffs and the price of agricultural products (Caramani, 2008: 323–324; Tarrow, 1971). The agro-industrial revolution of the 1950s and 1960s also shifted the Rural side away from environmental concerns (Jacobson 2012).

The same goes with other cleavages. The link between ecology and liberalism, which sits on the secular side in the Church/State cleavage and on the capital side of the Workers/Owners cleavage is tenuous at best (Beder 2001; Garner 2000). It has even weakened with the transformation of liberalism and the development of neo-liberalism in the 1970s and 1980s (Prasad 2006). Liberals have become hostile to ecologists favouring economic regulation and ecologists have become hostile to globalisation and market liberalisation, which merely prolonged the global productivist revolution (Lipietz 2012).

The links between anti-secular conservative ideology and the environment remain fragile. While some conservative thinkers initially criticised industrial modernity (François 2009), most of them shifted their stance over the course of the twentieth century on key issues such as

industrialisation, economic growth, and urbanisation. Furthermore, conservatism and ecologism diverge significantly: conservatism does not aim to extend moral consideration to non-human entities and remains deeply hostile to the utopian ideals often present in ecological thought (Martell 1994).

The relationship between ecologism and socialism, which aligns with the workers' side of the class cleavage, is more complex and nuanced. Several ecologists view their intellectual trajectory as an effort to modernise socialism. Figures such as Gorz and Moscovici, for instance, argued that ecologism represents a logical extension of socialist thought. As Carter notes, 'Ecologism has been shaped by the socialist critique of capitalism, at the same time as socialism has retained some of the lessons of ecologism' (Carter 2007: 69; see also: Löwy 2011). Ecological concerns were not absent from socialist thought, but were taken up by various minority strands of the Left as early as the nineteenth century (Audier 2017, 2019). From utopian socialists to libertarian municipalists, these traditions integrated critiques of industrial modernity, advocated for harmony with nature, and often linked environmental degradation to capitalist exploitation.

However, these traditions were marginalised by mainstream Marxism, and there are significant reasons why ecologism has not been integrated into socialism. For many socialists, economic growth has historically been an end. Consequently, from the ecologist perspective, capitalism and socialism are two sides of the same productivist coin: 'Marxism, like liberalism, is ultimately rooted in an expansionist ethic and an anthropocentric framework' (Eckersley 1992: 37). The class cleavage between workers and capitalists did not revolve around the environmental consequences of the industrial revolution; there was a consensus to accelerate production. The core conflict laid in how the fruits of growth should be distributed – whether redistributed to workers or captured by capital owners.

Expanding the cleavage framework

Building on this literature review, two theoretical propositions are particularly useful for understanding the development of the Ecologism/Productivism cleavage in Western European societies. The first proposition addresses the existence of a revolution that has yet been kept out of the main hypotheses regarding cleavage formation: the productivist revolution linked with the second industrial revolution. The second proposition relates to the nature of cleavages in fully mobilised societies: beyond the three dimensions identified by Bartolini and Mair, cleavages also incorporate a policy-making dimension. Like other historical cleavages, the Ecologism/Productivism cleavage is not expressed as such in

party systems: it encompasses many issues – mainly, but not only, positional issues that can be framed in one way or another. This includes climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, natural resources management and others. These issues do not always perfectly overlap and they might impact social groups differently. Yet several studies on public opinion (Dunlap and Van Liere 1978; Guber 1996; Manoli *et al.* 2019) and party positions (Carter *et al.* 2018; Persico 2014 in France and the UK), and policy (Lascoumes 2012) tend to show that positions on different environmental issues are strongly correlated. They can be subsumed into a single conflict dimension which is why we consider them interchangeably.

The hypothesis: a ‘productivist revolution’

Lipset and Rokkan linked the formation of cleavages to historical macro-processes they referred to as ‘revolutions’. More specifically, the origins of cleavages can be traced to *major disruptions in the functioning of societies, driven by long-term processes of economic and political modernisation*. In other words, the ‘revolutions’ correspond to profound, enduring transformations in the political and economic foundations of Western European societies. Lipset and Rokkan did not view cleavage formation as an inevitable outcome of economic and political modernisation. Rather, they saw it primarily as the result of groups resisting modernisation and protesting the elites driving change.

Cleavages are hence linked with revolutions, and our model of new cleavages’ formation includes two revolutions: the productivist revolution and the global revolution. The first one refers to the establishment of sharp increases in productivity, output, and consumption as primary goals of social organisation (Audier 2019). The second refers to globalisation (in the sense of denationalisation as put forward by Kriesi and his colleagues), whose dynamics also changed the political foundations of Western societies (Field 2011; Hooghe and Marks 2018; Kriesi *et al.* 2012).

The productivist revolution is hence a major shift in West European political economies that has long been set aside by political scientists. Also referred to as the *Great Acceleration* (McNeill and Engelke 2014), it pertains to the dramatic and unprecedented intensification of human activity exchanges and mobility and their environmental impacts, beginning around the mid-twentieth century. Triggered by the post-World War II economic boom, this era was marked by an exponential increase in industrial production, fossil fuel consumption, resource extraction, global trade, and population growth. This acceleration was deeply intertwined with the rise of consumer societies, the Green Revolution in agriculture (1940s–1970s), and the Cold War’s technological race.

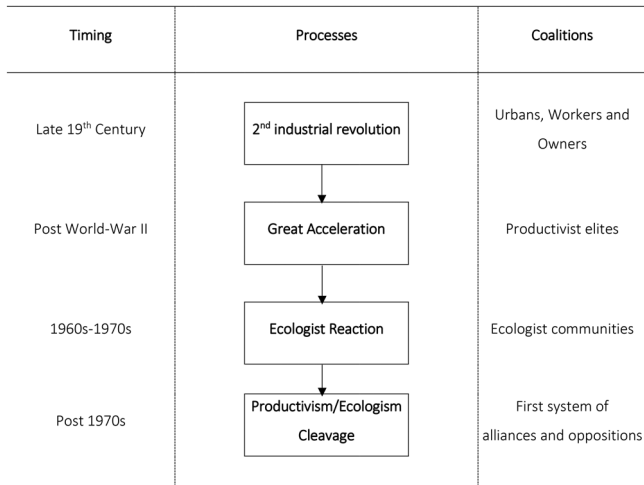


Figure 1. Cleavage formation and the productivist revolution.

While the era of economic growth is closely linked to the advent and development of representative regimes and West European party systems (Boix 1998; Przeworski *et al.* 2000), this relationship explains the productivist consensus that has long prevailed in the political field (Schmelzer 2015). Productivism, that is ‘the pursuit of economic growth as the means to prosperity’ (Foster 2016), where increasing production is the main social and political objective, was a metaparadigm for several decades (Charbonnier 2021). It overpassed existing cleavages and was common to both dominating political economies in the twentieth century (capitalism and communism). Yet, the productivist revolution led to a surge in CO₂ emissions, deforestation, urbanisation, and species extinction, marking a distinct break from earlier periods of human history (Bonneuil and Fressoz 2016). It also led to the development of a counter-movement – the ecologist side of the new cleavage. Figure 1 presents the sequence of cleavage formation linked to the productivist revolution.

A fourth dimension of contemporary cleavages: policy making

In addition to considering the productivist revolution as a dramatic cultural and economic shift comparable to Lipset and Rokkan’s revolutions, it is also necessary to refine cleavage theory to account for a key difference between the current sequence and the period analysed by Lipset and Rokkan. The politicisation and mobilisation dynamics examined by the two pioneers were primarily driven by the integration of new citizens into the political system, facilitated by the expansion of universal suffrage.

‘Cleavages [...] were parts of a broad wave of emancipation and mobilization’ (1967: 23). With universal suffrage fully established in European countries by the mid-twentieth century, new cleavages could no longer rely on the expansion of the electorate for their formation. Apart from generational change, new cleavages can thrive on changes in social boundaries, and state-citizen interactions shaped by policy decisions.

Cognitive and neoinstitutionalist approaches to public policy have highlighted the extent to which policies play a central role in the formation of groups, the structuring of conflicts, and even the transformation of political competition (Muller 2015). The concept of *policy feedback* encapsulates this influence of public policies on the formation and stabilisation of cleavages. Initially introduced by Schattschneider (1935), who observed that ‘a new policy creates a new politics’, it treats policy not only as an outcome of politics, but also as a driver of political behaviour. Taken up by Skocpol and Amenta (1986) and Pierson (1993), the concept helps us understand how policies, by allocating resources or imposing certain constraints on specific groups of citizens, influence political participation and the broader relationship with politics. Striking examples of the policy dimension of cleavages can be seen in the way different welfare state models have shaped the politicisation and transformation of the Workers/Owners cleavage (and others) over the long term (Alvariño 2025; Henjak 2010; Häusermann *et al.* 2013), or how education policies have created distinct social groups that have a tremendous influence on political behaviour (Garritzmann 2025). The benefits or costs that citizens derive from policies associated with specific cleavages have a significant impact on their group identity (Stuckelberger and Tresch 2024; Zollinger 2024) and their position within the cleavage system.

Data and methods

In this article, we adopt an exploratory approach to the emergence of the Ecologism/Productivism cleavage by shedding light on the four elements of the new cleavage – ideology, social structure, organisations, and policy-making. We first review the literature regarding the four components of the new cleavage and then present further empirical evidence regarding two of these elements: ideology and organisations.

Ideology has been one the most studied component of the Ecologism/Productivism cleavage. The roots of ecologism lie in the nineteenth century (Audier 2017) and contemporary ecologism took off from the 1960s onwards (Carter 2007), in response to the ‘Great Acceleration’ of the *Trente Glorieuses*. However, the literature mainly describes the key features of the ecologist political thought and does not assess whether ecologism represents an independent ideological dimension for both parties and

citizens. To fill this gap, we explore the relationships between multiple conflict dimensions using two sources of data: public opinion data from the European Values Study 2017, and party position data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey 2024⁸. In both cases, composite variables were constructed to capture five major ideological conflicts associated with both established and emerging cleavages: Ecologism, Cosmopolitanism, Moral Liberalism, Economic Egalitarianism, and Pro-Europeanism. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were used to assess the internal consistency of each item group and to justify their aggregation into coherent scales. This procedure allowed us to compute pairwise correlations between the five dimensions, controlling for country-level fixed effects. Our expectation is as follows: if ecologism is part of a broader ideology, then it should be strongly correlated to other (cultural) ideological conflicts, both at the party and the citizen level.

Social structure has been the main focus of a large body of research analysing the formation of a 'green community'. We review this literature by identifying the various sociodemographic and territorial factors that have been acknowledged to characterise this emerging community.

Organisations linked to the Ecologism vs. Productivism cleavage have been studied for a long time by political scientists: green parties (Grant and Tilley 2019; Van Haute 2016). We review part of these works by describing the electoral development of these parties across Western Europe. However, the literature mainly focuses on electoral change and its consequences on party systems, and green parties have not been analysed through the lens of the four institutional thresholds identified by Lipset and Rokkan for more than 20 years (Müller-Rommel, 2002). We make this updated empirical contribution thanks to official data on party creation, participation in elections, entrance in the lower house of the Parliament, and participation to government.

Policy-making is our main theoretical contribution to the cleavage literature. Regarding the Ecologism vs. Productivism cleavage, we review the literature on environment, climate and energy policies, and assess how these distinct policy areas belong and contribute to a broader dimension of political conflict, namely the new cleavage.

The four dimensions of the Ecologism vs. Productivism cleavage

The formation of the Ecologism/Productivism cleavage only began in the 1960s and remains ongoing: the various ecological crises resulting from human activity have not yet reached their full extent, and the political reactions to which they led are still developing. The modern ecological movement is less than 60 years old, and its organisation, areas of

intervention, and ideology are far from stabilised. However, we can already describe the four components of the new cleavage (ideology, social structure, organisations, and policy) and assess how it transforms West European politics.

The ideological dimension of the Ecologism/Productivism cleavage

This dramatic shift in Human-Nature equilibria gave birth to a new movement and a new political ideology, ecologism, that features the three component of an autonomous ideology (Dobson 2007): (1) a common set of concepts and values, (2) a political prescription based on an alternative outline of how a society ought to look, and (3) a program for political action. As Michael Bess notes, '[e]cologism marks a new vision of the place of humans in nature, a cultural shift of almost Copernican proportions: from a world perceived as infinite in its resources, dominated by humans and endlessly exploited, we are moving to a fragile world, with resilience and finite resources, which demands of humanity a spirit of sufficiency' (Bess 2003: 84). Ecologism is an ideology that breaks with the productivist consensus on which Western elites have agreed since the Industrial revolution.

Ecologism was therefore able to form the backbone of a 'movement of protest against the established national elite and its cultural standards' that Lipset and Rokkan placed at the foundation of a cleavage. The green ideology both influenced and drew strength from a growing social movement, and many theorists of ecologism were also early activists. From the 1960s onwards, environmental activism began to take on the features of a modern political movement, which was also reflected in the creation of new environmental protection associations and the growth in the membership of former NGOs (Doyle and MacGregor 2014). In the last decade, a new wave of ecological activism emerged, emphasising climate justice and degrowth (de Moor *et al.* 2021; Fisher and Nasrin 2021).

Finally, ecologism also produced an ideological backlash and the renewed mobilisation of the productivist side, as a reaction to environmental policies perceived as burdensome or elitist. Intellectuals (Ferry 1993) and business actors have framed environmental policies as threats to national industry and individual freedoms. Climate delay discourses, for instance, acknowledge the reality of climate change but justify insufficient or deferred action, highlighting the social costs of climate policies and raising doubts about the feasibility of mitigation efforts (Lamb *et al.* 2020). Environmental policies, such as the development of clean energy, can reduce inequalities in certain contexts in the Global North (Carley and Konisky 2020), while the ecological footprint – such as CO₂

emissions – is strongly linked to economic inequalities (Chancel 2020). However, the trade-offs between socioeconomic and environmental goals, central to the sustainable development concept (Cao *et al.* 2021; Scherer *et al.* 2018) remain strongly politicised and opponents to ecological policies tend to highlight (and exaggerate) the tension between ecological goals and socio-economic concerns (Bolet *et al.* 2024; Colantone *et al.* 2024; Dickson and Hobolt 2025). They capitalise on fears of economic instability and cultural alienation (Patterson 2023; Schwörer and Fernández-García 2024), using these discourses to deepen social divisions among European citizens on ecological issues.

While this ideological conflict does not operate in complete isolation from existing cleavages, it does not fully overlap with them either. As shown in Figure 2 (public opinion) and Figure 3 (party positions), the Ecologism vs. Productivism cleavage is positively correlated with most other conflict dimensions. These correlations tend to be weaker in public opinion data compared to party-based assessments, which is no surprise since citizens' attitudes are less ideologically constrained than parties' policy positions (Kurella and Rapp 2025). However, the most important result is that the correlations are rather low at the citizens' level: the

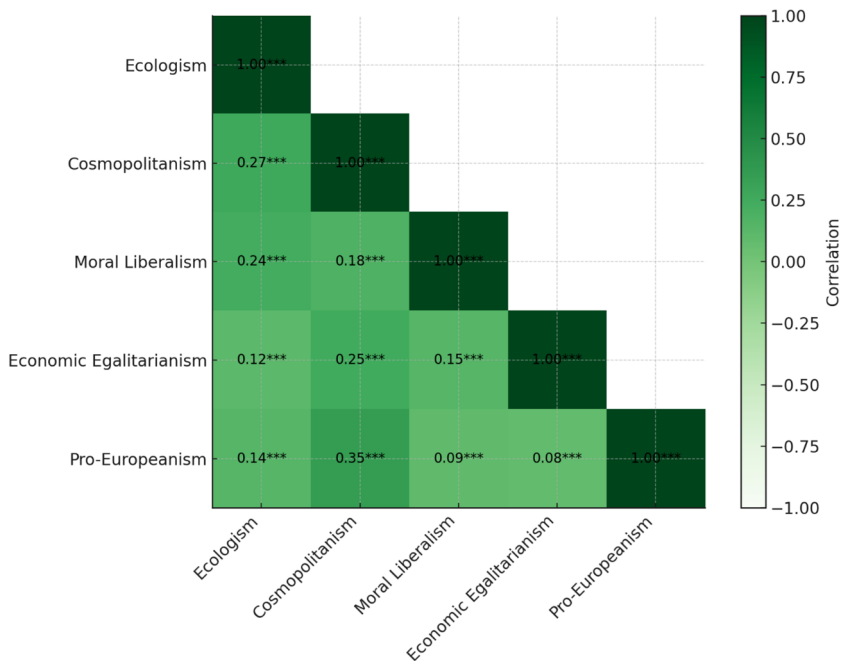


Figure 2. Pairwise correlations between five key political cleavages in public opinion across 12 Western European countries.

Data: European Value Study, 2017 (EVS 2020).

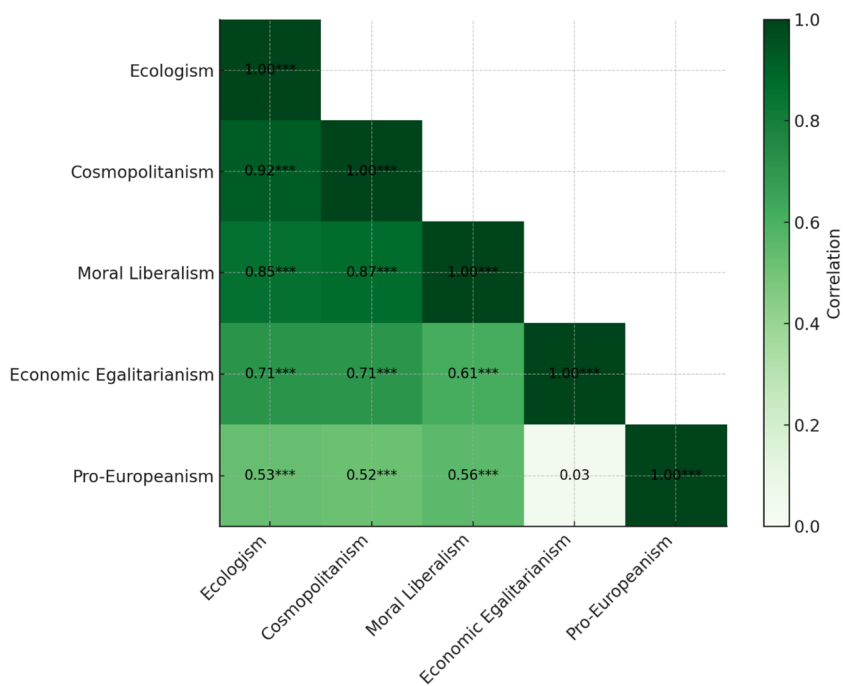


Figure 3. Pairwise correlations between five key political cleavages in parties’ positions across 14 Western european countries.
Source: Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Rovny *et al.* 2025).

highest is with cosmopolitanism (0.27). This advocates for separating ideological dimensions: should ecologism be embedded within the broader GAL-TAN conflict at the citizens’ level, correlations would not be lower than at the party level. Moreover, significant and robust correlations with Economic Egalitarianism also confirm that environmental attitudes are entangled with economic preferences. By contrast, associations with Pro-Europeanism appear more modest. Overall, these findings underscore the value of analytically disentangling ideological dimensions while still acknowledging their mutual interactions (Kenny and Langsæther 2023).

The socio-structural dimension of the Ecologism/Productivism cleavage

A cleavage only exists when it is possible to classify some citizens on one of its sides according to a particular social affiliation - class, religion, *etc.* - and when it is possible to classify other citizens of the other side (Bornschieer 2010). Let us be quite clear: the dynamic of building an ecologist community on the ecological side of the new cleavage is not yet comparable with the power of belonging to a religion, a territory or a

social class - which made up the alignments on the foundational cleavages. This dynamic is still in its infancy (Latour and Schultz 2022) and has not yet created as strong a sense of belonging among its members as being Catholic or working class might have implied. However, it should be remembered that 'Rokkanian' communities were not formed overnight. Time and the work of political parties, a dimension of the divide that we will examine in the next section, are decisive factors in the construction of socio-political communities.

Moreover, the homogeneity of the communities highlighted by Lipset and Rokkan was never perfect. This is explained in particular by the fact that not all workers shared the famous 'class consciousness', to take the example of the Owners/Workers divide (Gougou 2012; Weakliem 1993). Finally, the formation of the socio-political communities highlighted by Lipset and Rokkan took place in the context of the integration of whole sections of the population into representative democracy, thereby facilitating their inclusion on one or other side of the cleavages. On the contrary, the ecologist community is being formed within a society where all citizens have already integrated the political system.

So, it is not surprising that the environmentalist community is less structured, integrated and even characterised⁹ than classical communities. Nevertheless, the beginnings of this community can be seen, from the end of the 1960s onwards, in two parallel dynamics: the increase in environmental concerns highlighted in opinion polls and the development of lifestyles at odds with Productivism (Coulangeon *et al.* 2023). These two dynamics are signs of the formation of a 'green community'. Opposition to the productivist revolution is found at the heart of Western societies, through the spread of values corresponding to the ideological basis of ecologism in public opinion and the development of new everyday green practices, jobs and leisure (Katz-Gerro *et al.* 2017). This green community does not include many citizens that are positioned on the Cosmopolitan side of the Identity/Cosmopolitanism cleavage, especially the urbanite less well-off citizens (Kennedy and Givens 2019).

Existing literature leads to multiple socio-demographic factors accounting for citizens' environmental preferences and behaviour. Age and generation are amongst the most researched factors, but recent works offer different takes on the debate (Gómez-Román *et al.* 2020; Lorenzini *et al.* 2021). Gender and education also count amongst the usual suspects of environmental concerns, with women having greater pro-environmental attitudes (Davidson and Freudenburg 1996) and education overpassing most socio-demographic factors. The ecologist community therefore seems to bring together individuals with distinctive characteristics, both in terms of sociological background - young, educated, public sector employees, socio-structural specialists, urbanites.

On the contrary, citizens that are the most hostile to ecologism are to be found in specific social and geographical settings. The duality of economy at the local level and climate crisis intersects and this affects attitudes towards the environment. Oatley (2024) shows that residents of carbon economy communities oppose climate change policy, while knowledge economy residents support climate change policy. In France, the *gilets jaunes* movement initially protested a fuel tax increase, arguing it disproportionately affected rural and working-class citizens, even though *gilets jaunes* proved to be quite diverse in terms of the relation to ecologism (Levain *et al.* 2022). Even if they do not yet have the impression of having a ‘class consciousness’, ecologists and productivists are distinct from each other, and their individual behaviour is largely guided by shared ideologies and social origins.

The organisational dimension of the Ecologism vs. Productivism cleavage

Disentangling the Identity/Cosmopolitanism and the Ecologism/Productivism cleavage makes the initial picture drawn by the theorists of *New Politics* more complex. The GAL-TAN (*Green-Libertarian - Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist*) axis covers two distinct cleavages, which organisational dimension are to be found in two new party families: green parties mainly politicise the first cleavage (Ecologism/Productivism) and radical right parties politicise the second (Identity/Cosmopolitanism). However, these new cleavages have different effects on party systems, depending on the balance established between the old cleavages, institutional mechanisms and electoral dynamics in each country.

Table 1 summarises the changes in Western European party systems as these new cleavages have unfolded. It illustrates the significance of the changes in the electoral balance of power (ecologist parties have gained about 8 points in the 40 years of their existence, while radical right-wing parties have gained more than 20 points over the same period). Table 1 also shows that these electoral developments are clearly part of the left-right dimension of political competition. This result is in line with opinion surveys, where left-wing sensitivity seems to have a positive correlation with pro-environmental behaviour in the UK (Fowler 2016) or in France (Gougou and Persico 2019).

Green parties have received contrasting support over Western Europe. This support depends on both societal conditions and strategic factors. They thrive in affluent societies with post-materialist conflicts or significant environmental disputes (Grant and Tilley 2019; van Haute 2016). Institutions (regionalisation, proportionality) can also foster or hinder green parties’ success (Dolezal 2010; van Haute 2020). What is more, the transformation

Table 1. Changes in the mean of election results of political families in Western Europe (1945–2025).

	1945– 50	1951– 55	1956– 60	1961– 65	1966– 70	1971– 75	1976– 80	1981– 85	1986– 90	1991– 95	1996– 00	2001– 05	2006– 10	2011– 15	2016– 20	2021– 25
Extreme Left/New Left	0,0	0,5	0,9	1,2	1,6	2,7	2,1	2,8	4,0	3,3	3,0	3,4	4,3	4,4	6,5	8,8
Communists	10,3	8,6	7,6	7,7	7,7	7,5	7,5	6,3	4,6	2,8	2,5	2,0	2,0	1,6	1,4	(NL)
Social Democrats	29,9	31,0	31,0	31,1	30,5	29,5	30,5	29,9	28,3	27,9	28,4	27,3	25,3	23,9	18,5	18,7
Various left-wing	1,4	0,9	1,3	0,9	1,6	1,7	1,3	1,5	1,4	2,3	2,0	2,6	1,3	2,1	2,2	2,2
Left	41,6	41,0	40,8	40,9	41,4	41,4	41,4	40,5	38,3	36,3	35,9	35,3	32,9	32,0	28,6	29,7
Ecologists							0,3	1,7	3,5	4,4	5,4	5,4	6,9	6,2	8,8	6,8
Radical Democrats													0,4	3,3	3,7	2,6
Left + Ecologists	41,6	41,0	40,8	40,9	41,4	41,4	41,7	42,2	41,8	40,7	41,3	40,7	40,2	41,5	41,1	39,1
Liberal Democrats	0,6	0,2	0,4	0,7	0,5	1,3	0,9	1,7	1,5	1,2	1,1	1,3	1,5	0,5	2,8	2,9
Miscellaneous	2,6	2,1	1,9	2,1	2,5	2,9	2,9	2,0	2,4	3,1	3,4	3,2	2,0	3,2	3,4	3,5
Various right	1,8	2,0	1,3	1,2	1,6	1,8	1,7	1,6	1,6	1,6	1,7	1,6	2,1	2,5	1,6	2,3
Agrarians	5,7	5,5	5,4	5,8	6,0	6,0	5,4	4,5	4,4	5,5	3,6	3,6	3,3	3,6	2,9	2,7
Christian Democrats	22,9	22,6	23,0	21,9	20,7	19,9	20,3	19,6	18,3	15,3	14,1	15,4	13,9	12,6	11,9	10,7
Conservative, Liberals	24,0	25,7	26,1	26,5	26,2	24,2	25,1	26,1	25,0	25,8	26,0	26,5	26,4	22,3	21,3	17,9
Moderate right	54,4	55,8	55,8	55,4	54,5	51,9	52,5	51,8	49,3	48,2	45,4	47,1	45,7	41,0	37,7	33,6
Radical right	0,8	0,9	1,1	0,9	1,1	2,5	2,0	2,3	5,0	6,8	9,0	7,7	10,6	13,8	15,0	20,9
Total right	55,2	56,7	56,9	56,3	55,6	54,4	54,5	54,1	54,3	55,0	54,4	54,8	56,3	54,8	52,7	54,5

Original data are taken from *Crise mondiale et systèmes partisans* (Martin 2018) and have been updated by the author for later periods. Data are reproduced here with his permission. Results express, for each political family and over each period considered, the mean of vote percentages at parliamentary elections in the 15 countries analysed. For each period, an average percentage of votes for each party family is computed in each country, and then the mean of these average percentages is calculated. Data for the 2021–2025 period have been computed on November 2025, 4th.

of party competition depends on the way in which new cleavages intersect with old ones. The existence of parties representing the cleavages that crystallised at the beginning of the twentieth century can slow down or, on the contrary, speed up the integration of the new cleavages.

The impact of existing parties' strategies vis-a-vis environmental issues has been shown to strongly influence their success (Meguid 2008). The predominance of the Rural/Urban cleavage could inhibit the ability of the Ecologism/Productivism cleavage to transform the party system. This was the case when parties positioned on the rural side decided to oppose the productivist revolution considered as a threat to their economic situation and cultural identity. The role played by Scandinavian agrarian parties in the fight against nuclear power and industrialisation limited the development of green parties while renewing their electoral prospects (Lester and Loftsson 1993 for Scandinavian countries; Rüdig and Lowe 1986 in Britain; Seiler 2003: 156). Similarly, parties positioned on the 'periphery' side of the Centre/Periphery cleavage could, in some cases, politicise the issues characteristic of the new cleavages. In Spain, for example, regional parties took up the issue of nuclear energy, seen as a symbol of centralism (Flam 1994; Sainteny 2000 in France). Figure 4 provides a summary of the comparative development of green parties in Western Europe by showing how they have crossed the various institutional thresholds identified by Lipset and Rokkan.

The development of green parties is not the only way through which the new cleavage has entered party competition. The politicisation of the new cleavage also took the form of mainstream parties and other party families taking-up the issue (Abou-Chadi 2016; Carter 2013; Schwörer 2024). Chronologically, we can distinguish two phases: the first phase was one of gradual incorporation of environmental issues, from the 1970s to the mid-2010s, during which established parties granted a fluctuating yet increasing salience to the environment (Persico 2015; Schwörer 2024; Spoon *et al.* 2014). Most of these comparative works have focused on measures of sheer salience on a single dimension. Few (Carter *et al.* 2018; Carter and Little 2021; Chazel and Dain 2024; Persico 2014) have attempted to analyse how the new cleavage has been framed in party competition – that is, how parties have focused on different environmental issues (such as energy, biodiversity, and food), whether these issues were treated in isolation or linked to other conflict dimensions, and what actual positions parties adopted on each issue or on the environment as a single policy dimension. From them, we can draw that the initial period was dominated by a 'passive disagreement' or 'passive consensus' (Carter and Little 2021 on the UK and Ireland), facilitated by broad and vague framings (Persico 2014 on the French and British case) that emphasised environmental protection in general terms, without delving into the concrete means of achieving them.

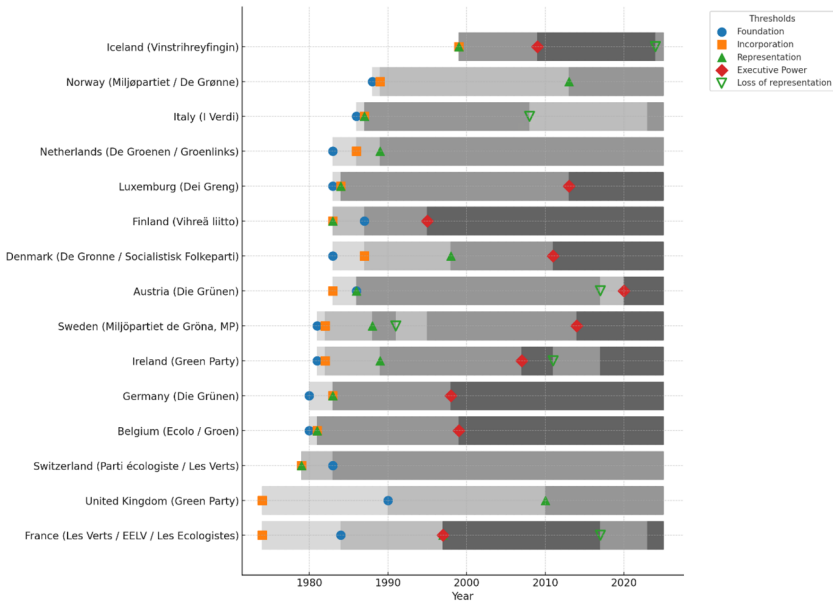


Figure 4. The crossing of institutional thresholds by green parties in Western Europe. *Source:* Official data on party creation, participation in elections, entrance in the lower house of the Parliament and participation to government. The varying shades of grey correspond to the number of institutional thresholds passed by each party.

This first phase was followed by a phase of increasing conflict, where some non-green parties substantially integrated anti-productivist policies into their platforms, especially some social-democratic and far left parties (Chazel and Dain 2024 for the French radical left; Schwörer 2024; Spoon *et al.* 2014) while others adopted explicitly anti-ecologist positions, especially radical right and conservative parties (Dickson and Hobolt 2025; Schwörer and Fernández-García 2024). The rise of radical right parties has contributed to politicise the new cleavage (Lockwood 2018), increasing its salience and polarisation, which, in turn, has strengthened the influence of pro-environmental parties (Četković and Hagemann 2020).

The policy dimension of the Ecologism/Productivism cleavage

The first authentic environmental policies have been implemented long before the development of the Ecologism/Productivism cleavage. Concerns about air pollution have emerged in the times of Hippocrates, more than 2 millennia ago (Fowler *et al.* 2020) and the Smoke Abatement Act, the earliest legislation in England prohibiting the burning of soft coal due to his prejudice to health, was passed in 1273. The environment became a real concern of public policy in the 1950s (Caldwell 1963), resulting in both the creation of the first Ministries for the environment in the 1970s

and the development of stringent environmental policies, mostly regarding air pollution and environment protection. While those issues were politicised in a conflictual way by early environmentalists and NGOs (Audier 2017; Rootes 1999), those policies were reframed as valence issues when entering the institutional arena (Lascoumes 2012), and mainstream productivist policies were only challenged by a fringe of ecologist actors (Audier 2019) leading to a relative low level of conflict.

Things have changed since the 1997 Kyoto Conference of the Parties (COP), which represented a major milestone in environmental regulation. Over the last two decades, climate policies have become the most visible part of environmental policies, along with targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Due to their strong distributional impact, these policies have produced significant policy feedback effects on citizens (for instance in the case of EU climate policies, Jordan and Moore 2020). Such policy feedback effects are a powerful driver for contestation and conflict, that has only started to strengthen the Ecologism/Productivism cleavage. This reminds us that this cleavage has a strong economic interest-driven dimension alongside its cultural value-based dimension.

The relationship between climate and energy policy, economic and cultural identity, and political behaviour is now becoming clearer. In a study of Canadian citizens' voting behaviour in places close to new wind energy projects, Stokes (2016) show that environmental policies create different voting reactions depending on the how close citizens were to the new turbines. In a case study about transport policy in Milan, Colantone *et al.* (2024) confirm these feedback effects: car-owners were more likely to vote for the radical right Lega. The same has happened in the 2024 regional and communal elections in Brussels, where parties opposed to the anti-car programme *Good Move* increased their electoral support by a large margin. Otteni and Weisskircher (2022) show that opposition to wind turbine construction has bolstered the electoral success of both radical right and green parties, further solidifying the growing ideological divide between opposed social groups. In a difference-in-differences study, Bolet *et al.* (2024) shows that Spanish PSOE's vote share in 2019 increased in municipalities where a Just Transition Agreement was implemented to compensate the phasing out of coalmining.

Voeten (2025) delves into the political feedback of energy and climate policy, highlighting a new, economically driven political conflict centred on energy transition policies and its independence from other conflicts: renters with individualised utility bills exhibit greater support for radical right parties and diminished sympathy for the Green Party, although their perspectives on immigration and the European Union remain unchanged. The backlash against environmental policies, largely driven by right-wing movements, hence reflects the ideological and opportunistic strategies of

counter-movements aimed at undermining climate initiatives (Paterson *et al.* 2024).

Conclusion and perspectives

This article has expanded the cleavage framework to understand how the environment has reshaped Western European party systems since the 1970s. The Great Acceleration dramatically changed the way societies function by making life conditions far better and by reducing distances between places and individuals. This 'productivist revolution' opened the door for mass consumption and production after WW2, which ultimately accelerated the ecological crisis.

Opposition to Productivism has then taken root in society, giving birth to a new cleavage between Ecologism and Productivism. The formation of this cleavage is reflected both in the development of a distinct ideology and the rise of green parties, but also in the construction of a green socio-political community, although this is undoubtedly the least stabilised aspect of the formation of the cleavage. Finally, the development of the new cleavage also led to a productivist backlash from right-wing parties and even new parties (like the BBB in the Netherlands), which main *raison d'être* is to oppose more stringent pro-environmental policies. Parallel to these transformations, a transnational revolution had led to the development of another cleavage, Identity/Cosmopolitanism, which fostered the rise of radical right parties.

This framework for analysing the transformation of cleavage politics in Western Europe has four major contributions for political scientists. First, it implies rethinking the sources of political conflict in Western polities: the environment might play a greater role than most works on party system change in Western Europe generally admit, as they mostly focus on cultural issues – identity, immigration, gender, social order – with rare mentions to the environment and no mentions to its connections with the economic dimension of party competition. Second, it sheds new light on the content of environmental conflicts, emphasising the importance of their economic component at the expense of their cultural one. Third, it provides a better understanding of the origins of ecologist parties, in particular green parties. Fourth, it provides an interpretative framework for future change in electoral alignments, by highlighting the role of the Ecologism/Productivism cleavage in the politicisation of new generations.

These theoretical developments need to be further reflected, following different potential directions. First, the Ecologism/Productivism cleavage hypothesis can help answer several questions related to the green parties' characteristics, success and failure. How can we explain the diversity in the positioning of green parties in Western Europe, between radical left

and liberal-centre parties? How can we explain the existence of other ecologist parties alongside green parties?

Moreover, rather than viewing it as a fully independent cleavage, it may be useful to assess how Ecologism can be shaped by other ideological frameworks. Issues related to Ecologism pertain to the economic dimension of competition as well. The traditional divide between capitalists and anti-capitalists, which has been central to party competition throughout most of Western Europe's democratic history, may offer a more fruitful framework for analysing the politicisation of the environment than the GAL/TAN dimension. This perspective sheds light on the tensions between ecological transition and the imperatives of globalised Productivism, which lie at the heart of both climate policies, the transnational and the Workers/Owners cleavages.

Finally, more reflection should be put on elites' behaviour: who are they?, what alliances shape their positions?, and, more importantly, how do they contribute to the promotion or rejection of ecological norms? These questions are key to understanding how the cultural standards of productivist elites influence ideological divisions and create resentment against ecologism in Western societies. Our analysis suggests that radical right parties do not position themselves as a reaction to green parties, *per se*, but rather in opposition to their cultural standards, which they perceive as disconnected from the concerns of electorates. These lines of inquiry call for complementing party-centric analyses to incorporate ideological recompositions, social and cultural fractures, and policy-making.

Notes

1. Lipset and Rokkan also refer to it as the rural/industrial divide or the primary/secondary sector divide. In any case, it should not be reduced to a territorial opposition: it refers first and foremost to conflicts of economic interest between agriculture and industry.
2. Lipset and Rokkan were also tempted to consider the Russian Revolution as another critical juncture, when the workers' movement split between a reformist wing and a revolutionary wing.
3. The notion of 'division' is used to describe those conflicts that are not cleavages: simple divisions are based on a single element that constitutes a cleavage (either ideological, socio-structural or organizational), while composed divisions are based on two. Among composed divisions, political divisions are not based on specific social groups but merely combine a normative and an organizational element. The emergence of the communist parties corresponds perfectly to this type of division: the socialist parties split over the question of joining the Third International, but their normative conflict had no social roots, as communists and socialists continued to present themselves as defenders of the working class. Conversely, the divi-

sion over gender issues is based on undeniable normative and social elements but has yet not given rise to new party formations.

4. Republican/Democrat or Conservative/Liberal opposition in the United States, Republican/Monarchist opposition in France at the beginning of the Third Republic, etc.
5. There is no clear distinction in the literature between Inglehart's silent revolution and the post-industrial revolution popularised by Touraine (1969) or Bell (1974). Yet the terms are not insignificant: the silent revolution initially refers to changes in values, whereas the post-industrial revolution essentially refers to socio-economic transformations.
6. Broadly speaking, the 'losers of globalisation' are to be found in sectors of activity newly exposed to international competition and among populations most attached to national identity, while the 'winners' are to be found in protected sectors (notably the public sector) and among populations most open to multiculturalism.
7. *Maréchal* Pétain's classic sentence 'The earth does not lie' is often cited as an example of the reactionary environmentalism of the Vichy regime (Pearson and Poncharal 2012).
8. Information about data selections, variables and methods are detailed in the [Online Appendix](#).
9. While it's easy to simply note a person's religious allegiance or look at their profession to determine whether they belong to a particular political community, objective criteria are rarer when it comes to characterising the ecologist community.

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