

Can the Greens deliver?

Published: February 8, 2026, 7:02 am

Mass membership growth means something real is happening in the Green Party in England and Wales. People - who I call the watermelons, as they're red inside and green outside - are choosing commitment to that party over despair. But, critically, movements can outrun institutions.

In this video, I set out the opportunity facing the Greens, the risks they must avoid, and the hard truth that values alone are not enough. If plausible, deliverable, policy does not follow, and fast, the consequences will be severe.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7oKv3K48qM?si=4X_MyUdLHjmRkp7B

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=77n8x-1a3c857-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=auto&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript:

The watermelons are coming. These are people who are red on the inside and green on the outside, and their numbers are on the rise, and they're becoming very visible. And that tells us something extraordinary about what is happening to left-wing politics in the UK right now.

The Green Party is on the rise.

Labour is collapsing.

But all of this carries a serious warning. The Greens have to get this right, or the cost will be very high indeed.

Let's just look around us. It's obvious; thousands of people are joining the Greens. The numbers are almost overwhelming. They've got about 200,000 members now, when only a few months ago, it was around 80,000.

But these new joiners are not traditional environmentalists. They're people whose politics include climate concern largely because they're young enough to have always lived with that concern in their backgrounds. But they want something more from green politics. They want politics for people. And the rise of the Greens means that for the first time in a long while, people with left-wing instincts have somewhere to go.

Labour is no longer that place. The watermelons either left Labour long ago, when Corbyn departed the scene in the party, or they never arrived there in the first place. Labour did not just disappoint these people; it long ago ceased to speak their language, and that happened, most particularly, when Starmer appeared. They do not see Labour as having fallen from grace now; they just see it as having become totally irrelevant, which it had, as far as they were concerned, been for some time.

These people are not, therefore, trying to revive an old left, which they also see as part of history. They're not trying to go back anywhere. Instead, they're responding to climate breakdown, inequality, and the growth of insecurity in our society as the things that they find unacceptable. They're bringing morality, ethics, empathy, care, and concern back into politics, and that makes this different, because what they are doing is creating a forward-looking politics when the vast majority of our politics has for decades been backwards-looking, harking back to an era that probably never existed, but which the politicians liked to refer to as if they were the glory days that they were recreating.

For these watermelons, the Greens have become the vessel, not because the Greens are perfect - they know, full well, they're not - but because they are available. The Greens are filling a space that already existed, but which was depopulated. The watermelons were around, let's be clear, of course, they were: these people were out there looking for a political home, but hadn't found one. But now they're out in the open, and that has been made possible by a Green party that is now capturing their imagination.

When people join a political party in their thousands, something real is happening. This is not protest; it is commitment. And let's be clear, people do not join parties lightly anymore. There was a time in the UK when there were millions of people who belonged to political parties, almost entirely the Conservative Party and the Labour Party, but

each of them literally had millions of members. That is deepest darkest history. People are, however, now joining the Greens in large numbers, in the way that they joined Labour when Corbyn arrived. But we should take note, because large numbers of enthusiastic supporters can transform the political climate. They don't just sing songs at Glastonbury. This lot could make a difference because difference is what they're looking for.

So what do these new supporters want?

They want a politics of care.

They want to look after people.

They want to know that needs will be met.

They want power to be constrained.

They are instinctively hostile to big-business dominance and wealth capture, but they're not instinctively hostile to business. They just hate the corruption that has gone with the big business environment that now controls too much of politics, too much of our country, and too much of our society. And they expect the state to act to deliver freedom from fear, a promise that Labour has long abandoned.

They're comfortable with the social safety net; they want it.

They want decent benefits.

They want social housing.

They want a job guarantee, in the sense of a government that wants to prevent unemployment.

They understand collective provision as normal, and they grasp something crucial. They realise that we can afford whatever we are capable of doing. Lord Keynes provided that description of an economy during World War II; he was right. And on the basis of what he said then, Lord Beveridge, a liberal, planned the Welfare State based on this logic. And the claim that Keynes made is as true now as then. We can afford whatever we are capable of doing, and that is why the rise of the watermelons matters, because they want to deliver on that promise. They don't want to recreate the old left. They want a new one. They want it based in reality and not theory, and that could be transformative.

But, I have to add a word of warning because clearly there are dangers in this.

Movements can run ahead of institutions, and the Greens have never had to scale serious deliverable policies at speed before now, and they must, and that is not what they're good at. Their processes have been slow and have been far from reactive to the situations that they face.

So, now the risk begins, most especially because the Greens' promises must now be both recognisably deliverable and plausible, and that has not always been a feature of their policies in the past. The watermelons are pinning their hopes to the Green label, but the Green label has to respond to them, and the old guard must recognise that change is part of their own agenda as well.

This means that there has to be, in particular, a rejection of everything to do with neoliberal economics, fiscal rules, the household analogy and the idea of austerity to keep markets happy. But do remember that in their place, at one point, the Greens did put in place the idea of 'positive money' and 'positive money' decreed that all money should be created by the state and none by banks, and the consequence would've been austerity and fiscal collapse. So there is a massive challenge implicit in everything that is now happening.

Change at the scale that is now demanded of the Greens is a tall order. It's possible, but it is a challenge .

And the Greens must avoid the trap that Labour fell into. Labour in 2024 defined themselves as 'not being the Tories' and they won on that basis; let's be clear. It worked for them. But the negative identity that they had adopted hollowed the party out. When they reached power, it was very clear that there was nothing behind the claim that they were not the Tories. In fact, they were nothing at all, and the Greens cannot do that. The Greens cannot survive or be elected or deliver change by not being Labour. There must be policies that are deliverable, and soon, if they are going to succeed.

The watermelons do however, bring something important of their own. They bring values. They bring energy. They bring competence. Just look at the candidate standing in Gorton at the moment: she is something quite exceptional. A plumber standing for parliament, speaking the truth as she sees it from up a ladder. That is fundamentally important. This is a real person representing real people in the place that she wants to go to - the real parliament that should be delivering change for this country, but which hasn't been to date.

That means that there is something exciting about what is happening, but values are not enough. Policy has to follow, and fast, and it has to meet the watermelon's needs, or they will rumble fakery. Labour taught them how to do that.

So, even with the risk, this moment is real. Let's be clear about it. There is every reason to think that we are watching a genuine political phenomenon at present. The Greens are literally shaking the parliamentary left to its roots, and they are going to displace Labour. I have no doubt about that. But, whilst people are choosing engagement over despair, this also creates the issue that once Labour is over, and it almost certainly will never rise again, and Zack Polanski is the new offering, there is risk.

Hanging on Zack Polanski's shoulders is a massive burden of responsibility. He has to deliver. If he does, the left is back in action. If he doesn't, we're in trouble, and I can't put it more bluntly than that. I've met the guy. I like him. He's clearly honest. He wants to deliver. I think he has the calibre to deliver. The charisma to persuade. But nonetheless, let's not understate the challenge that he faces. This is a monumental moment, and it is right now hanging on one person for that process of transformation.

The watermelons will join him. There will be vast numbers of people in that group who can become members of Parliament, who can become councillors, who can do the organisation, and who believe that ethical, moderate values should be driving politics again. All of that is possible. All of that can be built. All of that can be built differently from anything Labour did for decades. But that is hard. This has to succeed, and if it does, it changes everything. But if it fails, the damage will be profound.

We are not out of the woods as yet, but we have to live in hope, and we have to care, and most of all, we must have ideas; the Greens need them. I've spoken to Zack Polanski about them. You can see the podcast we did together. He clearly enjoyed what we were talking about. And that is what this channel is all about, and this is the contribution I intend to make.

The Greens could transform politics in the UK, but they need the right ideas. I'm going to be talking about what I think is deliverable as politics for people to fund the future, to deliver a politics of care. That matters to me; I suspect it matters to you. That's what I want the Greens to do. As I say, we have to live in hope.

What do you think? There's a poll down below. Tell us, do you think the Greens are now going to deliver? Are you a watermelon? Do you want to work for something better, and have you now got the opportunity? Either in the comments or in the poll, please let us know.

Poll

[poll id="318"]