# Green Party surges past 80,000 members under Zack Polanski’s bold, populist leadership



In just under a month since Zack Polanski assumed leadership of the Green Party of England and Wales, the party has witnessed a remarkable transformation. Once dismissed as merely idealistic eco-warriors, the Greens have surged past 80,000 members, making them the largest they have ever been. This surge in support follows Polanski’s bold positioning of the party as an “eco-populist” force willing to “pick fights” and challenge complacency in UK politics, a shift that marks a break from the Greens' traditionally cautious approach.

Polanski, elected leader in early September 2025, swiftly articulated a vision focused on confronting pressing issues like spiralling rents, energy bills, and growing inequality. His leadership style, characterised by a willingness to court controversy, was evident in his defence of deputy Mothin Ali during a contentious interview on BBC Radio 4’s Today programme. Polanski's combative approach has resonated internally, with deputy co-leader Rachel Millward asserting that boldness is essential to harnessing public disillusionment and countering the rise of right-wing populism. Millward highlighted the party’s readiness to be “as big as you can go” in tone and messaging, aiming to provide honest, real politics that voters crave.

The leadership team is recalibrating electoral strategies to reflect this dynamic new approach. Chris Williams, the Green Party's head of elections, reflected on last year’s best-ever general election performance, which secured four MP seats through targeted campaigns in traditionally Conservative and Labour heartlands. Now, under Polanski’s leadership, the party embraces a strategy designed to excite and provoke rather than avoid conflict. Williams points to the UK's shifting political landscape, where smaller vote shares—such as the 27% winning margins in recent by-elections—make it more feasible to capture seats, especially in urban areas where traditional parties are losing ground rapidly. The Greens have identified numerous “development constituencies” primarily in urban centres as their new targets, reflecting a subtle shift from their rural base.

However, this strategic pivot carries risks. Some members caution that moving focus away from localised campaigning may alienate voters who helped deliver recent breakthrough wins, especially in more rural seats held by MPs Adrian Ramsay and Ellie Chowns. Ramsay and Chowns, who previously contested leadership against Polanski, secured only 16% of the vote, underscoring ideological divisions. Yet, Millward, with her grassroots experience in the rural Wealden District Council, remains confident that rural voting support is growing alongside urban enthusiasm.

Politically, the Greens are closely watching Reform UK, Nigel Farage’s populist party, as a case study in converting media attention into electoral success. While ideologically opposed, Greens members admire Reform UK’s simple, emotionally resonant messaging and willingness to provoke, seeing a potential model to emulate but grounded in a “politics of hope,” as Polanski put it in his conference speech. This move towards more assertive, populist rhetoric seeks to fill the vacuum of voter discontent traditionally exploited by right-wing forces.

Yet the Greens are not uncontested in the expanding space on the left. The emergence of “Your Party,” a new political movement led by prominent ex-Labour figures Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana, threatens to draw away potential supporters. Despite this, Millward sees the gains in Green membership and enthusiasm as evidence of Labour’s fracturing rather than a loss to the left overall.

Scaling from grassroots activism to a serious electoral force inevitably hinges on financing. The party, historically reliant on volunteer labour and small donations, is pushing for a bolder fundraising approach under Polanski. Millward advocates for a "party of fivers," inspired by the US micro-donation campaigns of Barack Obama and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, while also encouraging the pursuit of natural donors eager for change, albeit wary of “corruptive billionaires.” This shift acknowledges the crucial role financial resources will play in future campaigns.

The real test for Polanski’s Green Party lies in the 2026 local elections. The party aims to hold a record 900 council seats and make inroads into combined authority contests in Sussex, Norfolk, and Suffolk. They also have high hopes of capitalising on the new proportional representation voting system in Wales to increase their presence in the Senedd. However, the fractured multi-party system in England and Wales, dominated by first-past-the-post voting, continues to produce unpredictable outcomes.

Polanski and his leadership team clearly believe they have found a winning formula to convert their momentum into tangible political power. Whether voters reward their combative, hopeful stance with electoral success or turn away remains to be seen, but the Greens are poised to be a significant force in the UK’s evolving political landscape.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9dx85q4dyzo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[2]](https://greenparty.org.uk/2025/09/28/greens-announce-new-membership-record-on-first-day-of-labour-party-conference/), [[6]](https://news.sky.com/story/green-party-membership-overtakes-liberal-democrats-under-polanski-13444030)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9dx85q4dyzo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[3]](https://greenparty.org.uk/2025/09/02/zack-polanski-elected-leader-of-the-green-party-of-england-and-wales-promising-to-create-a-country-where-no-one-is-left-behind/), [[4]](https://greenparty.org.uk/members/internal-elections/2025-internal-elections/leader/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9dx85q4dyzo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/05/green-deputy-zack-polanski-launches-leadership-bid-with-uk-eco-populism-vision)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9dx85q4dyzo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9dx85q4dyzo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss), [[7]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/farages-reform-party-sees-conference-as-next-step-uk-government-2025-09-05/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9dx85q4dyzo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9dx85q4dyzo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9dx85q4dyzo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9dx85q4dyzo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9dx85q4dyzo?at_medium=RSS&at_campaign=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://greenparty.org.uk/2025/09/28/greens-announce-new-membership-record-on-first-day-of-labour-party-conference/> - On 28 September 2025, the Green Party of England and Wales announced a record membership exceeding 80,000 members, marking a near 20% increase since Zack Polanski's election as leader less than a month prior. The announcement was made during a campaign event in North London, where over 400 activists gathered to deliver more than 100,000 leaflets for the upcoming Hackney Mayoral election in 2026. Polanski attributed the surge to a growing desire for politics rooted in tackling the climate crisis and inequality, positioning the Green Party as a viable alternative to the traditional two-party system.
3. <https://greenparty.org.uk/2025/09/02/zack-polanski-elected-leader-of-the-green-party-of-england-and-wales-promising-to-create-a-country-where-no-one-is-left-behind/> - On 2 September 2025, Zack Polanski was elected leader of the Green Party of England and Wales, succeeding Adrian Ramsay and Carla Denyer. In his acceptance speech, Polanski emphasised the need for bold action and leadership to address issues like spiralling rents and bills, advocating for taxing extreme wealth to support those struggling. He paid tribute to the previous leadership, highlighting the party's achievements, including its highest-ever membership, polling average, general election result, and number of MPs and councillors, and committed to building a country where no one is left behind.
4. <https://greenparty.org.uk/members/internal-elections/2025-internal-elections/leader/> - Zack Polanski, the Deputy Leader of the Green Party and an experienced London Assembly Member, announced his candidacy for the party's leadership in May 2025. Born in Manchester and educated at Aberystwyth University, Polanski has a background in community theatre and hospitality. He identifies as Jewish and gay and has been actively involved in Green Party campaigns for over a decade, advocating for environmental, racial, social, and economic justice. His leadership vision includes representing diverse communities and speaking with clarity, confidence, and compassion.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/05/green-deputy-zack-polanski-launches-leadership-bid-with-uk-eco-populism-vision> - In May 2025, Zack Polanski, then Deputy Leader of the Green Party and a London Assembly Member, announced his bid for the party's leadership. He advocated for a more visible and eco-populist direction for the Greens, emphasising the need to challenge Reform UK, which had a significantly larger membership and had achieved local election successes. Polanski argued that the Green Party should adopt a bolder approach, learning from figures like Nigel Farage in terms of clear communication, to fill the political void left by traditional parties.
6. <https://news.sky.com/story/green-party-membership-overtakes-liberal-democrats-under-polanski-13444030> - As of October 2025, the Green Party of England and Wales, under the leadership of Zack Polanski, surpassed the Liberal Democrats in membership numbers, with over 83,500 members compared to the Lib Dems' 83,174. This marks only the second time in over a decade that the Greens have had more members than the Lib Dems, the last being in January 2015. The surge in membership is attributed to Polanski's leadership and the party's growing appeal as an alternative to the traditional two-party system.
7. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/farages-reform-party-sees-conference-as-next-step-uk-government-2025-09-05/> - In September 2025, Nigel Farage's Reform UK party held a major two-day conference in Birmingham, titled 'The Next Step,' signalling its ambition to position itself as a serious contender for government in the 2029 UK election. The event, attended by over 10,000 people, underscored the party's rising popularity, reflected in a double-digit poll lead over the Labour government. Since Farage became leader in June 2024, the party has expanded significantly, growing to 240,000 members, attracting former Conservative MPs, and taking control of 12 local councils.