It's not easy being green, white, red and blue: constituency representations versus electoral competition in the Wisconsin Green Party

Abstract

The Wisconsin Green Party, a state affiliate of the United States Green Party, is a third party in a two-party system. The U.S. electoral system is not kind to third parties; 1949 was the last time a third party was represented in the U.S. Congress, in the 2016 presidential election, just 1% of voters in Wisconsin voted for the Green Party candidate. Ethnographic fieldwork combined with in-depth interviews for this study find that the policies and practices of the party may be inhibiting its efforts to grow support and improve its electoral standing. This paper details how the party operates in a narrow window of anti-party sentiment, with the emphasis on the intersection of their four core policy pillars, and party practices of 'being the message' serving to deter their two likeliest sources of new support; the logic of constituency representation given primacy over electoral competition. These issues, though currently acting as constraints on the party, potentially however also afford long-term opportunity for the party.

Keywords: party politics, third party, antipartyism, constituency representation, electoral competition, ethnography

Introduction

For over a century the United States has essentially operated a two-party political system. Incumbency in the White House and congressional control has alternated between the Democratic and Republican Parties. The current 116th Congress consists almost exclusively of representatives of the same two parties – two senators identify as independents but caucus with the Democrats. The last time a third party was represented was in the 81st Congress; Franklin Roosevelt Jr. was elected in 1949 to represent the Liberal Party of New York. In the 2016 presidential election, around 129 million people voted for Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton (>94% of votes cast), and less than seven million people voted for one of the alternative candidates. To say that the task facing third parties in the U.S. is a difficult one would be somewhat of an understatement. Yet every month, members of such a party meet in the U.S. state of Wisconsin; they plan fundraising events, develop campaign schools, interview candidates seeking their endorsement, and look for ways to persuade more people to support and join their party. This research, using ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews, examines how the Wisconsin Green Party (WGP), facing such a daunting political environment, attempts to grow as a political body, particularly in terms of attracting new support whilst retaining their existing constituency.

The article proceeds by outlining the task faced by third parties; generally, and specifically in the case of the United States. I demonstrate in the findings that it is appropriate to consider the WGP as conforming to the first level of antipartyism identified by Poguntke (1996); a dislike of the current or traditional major party alternatives. Though, as a party, they naturally cannot move into the second level of a more general dislike or rejection of party politics. Of course, this is not a surprise, however, it is necessary to show how the antipartyism manifests

itself within the organization to help demonstrate later the issues encountered by the party in bringing a constituency into this space. The findings section then illustrates that in attempts to become more electorally competitive by widening their possible constituency, the WGP has possibly abated their chances with some of the very electorate who are their likeliest sources of increasing membership and support. To move from a perception of being purely an environmental party, the party has adopted four core pillars – ecological wisdom, grassroots democracy, peace, and social justice. Their four-pillar emphasis should theoretically attract a wider potential constituency – the party identifying as a broader tent that goes beyond the environment. However, this has seemingly morphed into an emphasis on the intersection between these four pillars; now (potential) supporters receive the message that true greens must sit within this intersection – an uncomfortable message for some, and a message which, at times, alienates both existing and new support. Party practices, deriving in part from the four core pillars and their intersection, do make the party 'the message,' (Melucci, 1984) but this can result in a manner of operating which becomes a barrier to entry into the party. Rather than moving to become a Downsian party (Downs, 1957), with policies and practices aimed at attracting the maximal vote share, the greens are still a constituency party and one that risks representing an increasingly small constituency. The article concludes with a discussion of what these findings may mean for the party – the generally pessimistic conclusions tempered by a hopeful, but highly caveated endnote.

Minor Party Problems

One of the main obstacles to minor parties gaining political power is the arrangement of the electoral system in a country. Put simply, some electoral systems are welcoming to more than two parties, and some inhibit such development. Duverger's Law – 'the simple-majority single-

ballot [i.e., simple plurality rule] system favours the two-party system' (1954, 217) – holds that electoral systems such as first-past-the-post (FPTP, where the candidate with the most votes wins even without a majority – the system almost exclusively used in the U.S.) are inherently inimical to multipartyism. This law has been used to, generally correctly, argue that institutional set-up is the most salient predictor of third-party success. Third parties simply will not be able to gain votes under FPTP as voters realize that their vote is often simply wasted, and even possibly risks letting a much-unfavoured candidate win. Recent work by Bochsler (2019) engages with criticism of the fact that Duverger's 'law' is anything but a law when considered globally and historically. However, his extensive data illustrates that word to be quite appropriate for use with respect to the US; elections in the U.S. being very consistent in conforming to Duverger. Work by Laakso and Taagepera (1979) and Gallagher (2017) illustrate the consistency of two-partyism in the U.S.; measures such as the Effective Number of Electoral Parties (ENEP) and Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties (ENPP) have both hovered around 2.0 post World War Two.

Rosenstone, Behr and Lazarus (1984) argue that democracy is an unwritten contract between the elected and electors. Provided the elected respond in some manner to the electors, the latter are happy to work within the confines of the electoral system. In the U.S. this extends to trusting essentially just two parties with the expectation to undertake the wishes of the people. The authors open their work with a gloomy forecast for minor parties,

> to vote for a third party, citizens must repudiate much of what they have learned and grown to accept as appropriate political behavior, they must often endure ridicule and harassment from neighbors and friends…and they must accept that their candidate has no hope of winning (1984, 3).

Yet, these authors point that people consistently have done exactly that throughout much of U.S. electoral history and continue to do so. Third-party candidates from the 1890s to 1910s gained a quarter of total votes for House, Governor, Senator and President in eight states. Hirano and Snyder (2007) note that the decline in third-party support in the U.S. started around 1930; they also note that the decline in support was almost exclusively a decline in left-oriented third-party support. These authors argue that this was largely due to the Democratic Party in the 1930s trespassing into areas previously belonging to the left-aligned third parties. The New Deal effectively took away such parties' ability to differentiate themselves from the Democrats, giving voters little reason to continue supporting them.

The U.S. procedures of party primaries and party registration also further embed a norm of two-partyism with the electorate. Voters are often (rules differ by states) required to register as a supporter of their preferred party to vote in the primary season and thus have a say in their party's candidate for office. Campaign financing is now essentially unlimited; billions are spent on each presidential campaign and millions even on state campaigns. Total expenditure on the 2018 Wisconsin Governor's race was over $90 million (AP, 2019). At a third-party candidate debate shortly before the election, the Green Party candidate remarked that he had spent about $300 on the campaign (fieldnotes)[1].

Third parties note Ranney and Kendall (1951, 455, cited in Rosenstone et al. 1984, 9), also act as a 'safety valve for discontent' for disaffected voters. They give people a (safe) outlet to express dissatisfaction with the two-party system or the two parties themselves. The authors note that 'when the two political parties violate their implicit pact with the people, citizens can either

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[1] This was one of a series of debates organized by state media. The debates featured representatives of the Green and Libertarian parties and two independent candidates. The Republican and Democrat candidates did not accept the invitation and held separate debates.

sit out the election or abandon the major parties to support a third-party alternative.' (ibid.)

Hirschmann's (1970) concept of 'exit, voice and loyalty' influences the theory development of

Rosenstone et al. (1984). In the case of political dissatisfaction, voters can choose to vote for a

third party as a protest while maintaining overall allegiance to the major party – voice. They may

also go further and become a full supporter of the third party, leaving the major party – exit. Or

they may choose to remain with the major party (the typical decision) – loyalty. Rosenstone et al.

(1984, 126) argue that there are three main motivations for choosing a third party – when the

major parties have deteriorated to a level when they are no longer supportable, when a

sufficiently attractive third-party candidate runs, or when they have acquired an allegiance to the

third-party itself. Kitschelt (1989) points out that it is not necessary for third parties, particularly

core-issue parties, to follow a logic of electoral competition, they can instead adopt a policy of

constituency representation. If 5% of the electorate in a Proportional Representation (PR) system

identifies a party's core issue as their main issue, it is not unreasonable to expect many of that

electorate to vote accordingly, giving the party a level of power. However, as pointed out by

Spoon (2009), such a strategy works less well in an FPTP system – 5% of votes would not return

a seat and thus provides no level of political power.

The Wisconsin Green Party

The Wisconsin Green Party was founded in the 1980s and achieved ballot status in 1996 when

the campaign for the Green Party's national candidate for president, Ralph Nader, breached the

1% vote level required by the State Elections Board. Since then the party has fielded several

candidates at the state level but has not been able to make a significant breakthrough (their

highest showing state-wide was 7% in a 2002 election for state treasurer). The Wisconsin Greens

certainly qualify for Belanger's definition of 'nontraditional (non-major) party alternatives' that

have 'not been in office for a relatively long period of time' (2004, 1055). They also fit within Meguid's (2005) conception of a niche party, with the environment being the traditional niche issue of association, though, as previously mentioned, the party has made attempts to move from this perception to be seen as an ecosocialist party, so 'core-issue' is perhaps more appropriate.

In 2016, presidential Green Party nominee Jill Stein received 1.06% of votes nationally and a very similar percentage in Wisconsin. Wisconsin is a purple state; power often changes between, or is shared by, the two major parties. The Wisconsin Green party is relatively robust compared to other state green parties; while some others have significantly higher levels of organization and support, others have far less. There are strong ties between the state party and recent presidential campaigns; the 2012 Jill Stein for President campaign was headquartered in Madison, Wisconsin, and several staff from the 2012 and 2016 campaigns are, or were, based in Wisconsin and therefore able to be included as part of this study. Although this is a study of the Wisconsin state party, there are strong indicators that many of the findings are germane to the party nationally.

Methods

In 2006, Auyero remarked that the main protagonists of politics remain 'un(der)studied by ethnography's mainstream' (2006, 257). Subsequent work has largely removed the need for the parenthetically implied assertion in consideration of many political actors. However, 'unstudied' seems a perfectly apposite descriptor concerning the ethnographic study of minor political parties in the U.S. This research aims in part to play a role in rectifying this omission.

This study is focused on the Green Party at the state level because it afforded first-hand access to party activities at the state and sub-state levels. This research combines participant observation (Gans, 1979) and in-depth interviews (Lindlof and Taylor, 2010). Fieldwork

occurred between August 2016 and December 2018 and consisted of over 150 hours of observations. The primary field of study was the State Coordinating Council of the Wisconsin Green Party. During the period of study, the Council met by teleconference every month for two hours, biannually (at least) in person, and established sub-committees to deal with specific tasks or on-going activities. I observed every main in-person meeting and almost every full council monthly meeting from September 2016 through December 2018, plus pertinent sub-committee meetings that occurred intermittently.

Meetings are supplemented by discussions via a Google email group. I was granted access to this group, which enabled me to include all email correspondence sent to the coordinating council and pertinent sub-committees in the observations. I collected and analysed over 2,500 emails, which provided a crucial addition of data as these conversations are where much debate and decision-making occurred. The emails were often discussions related to recent or planned meetings and, in these instances, treated as texts appended to meeting fieldnotes. Along with the state committee meetings I also observed the party in other settings, including these following instances: campaign rallies before the November 2016 elections; conference calls with the Jill Stein campaign; fundraising events; canvassing with a mayoral candidate; a protest march; and events connected with the 2018 mid-term elections such as attending gubernatorial candidate debates. I followed closer to the Fenno (1978) model of detached observation rather than a more participatory style (e.g. Nielsen, 2012). I did participate in group activities which were more public-facing, such as collecting ballot-access signatures, to better understand how party members experienced such activities. I also, as suggested by Gillespie and Michelson (2011), helped with occasional small tasks at meetings and events to assist integration into the organization.

My entry to the field was facilitated by one of the co-chairs who subsequently acted as an advocate for the research. Full entry to the field was only likely made possible once party officials were convinced that I was at least somewhat politically aligned with the party. My previous experience as a member and candidate for a Green Party in a different country provided legitimacy and helped gain acceptance from party members; it was only after individual conversations to assuage concerns to this point when several members agreed to be interviewed. Although this political alignment was likely requisite to enable data gathering, it must, of course, be acknowledged that these observations are filtered through such a lens. This affinity is evident at times in my fieldnotes where, because I wanted them to improve their situation, I express frustration at poor organization and missed opportunities, e.g. 'they spent $1,700 – [the newsletter] went out too late to perform its main function [of noticing a meeting]…the amendment to the constitution! It can't be decided here as it requires noticing…You can sense increasing frustration and even disbelief growing as this issue is discussed ad nauseum.'

I recorded field notes during observations whenever possible. When this was not possible, I made audio recordings immediately following withdrawal from the field. Following each field observation, I used the written notes or audio recordings to develop analytical memos which facilitated the pursuit of avenues of interest.

I conducted semi-structured interviews (Robinson, 2012) with eighteen members of the state party who held, or had held, some prominent role within the state party apparatus and were or had been, regular attendees at state or local meetings. The in-depth interviews concentrated on prominent members as I wanted to use the interviews as opportunities to gain a deeper understanding of the field observations and those in regular attendance at the field-site. The interviewees represent over three-quarters of the most active Greens in Wisconsin in recent years

and included six current or previous chairs, secretaries, party candidates, founder members, and local officers with close ties to the national campaign. Most in-depth interviews were conducted by phone due to geographic dispersal, and all interviews recorded and professionally transcribed. These interviews lasted on average around sixty minutes. Topics on the interview protocol included: interviewees political journeys to WGP; the role they perform in WGP and why they do it; how they try to bring others to the party (also asking for their 'elevator pitch'); perceptions of the party; media relations with the party; and their hopes and aspirations for the party. I conducted dozens more informal interviews with party officials, members, and people attending party events to augment fieldnotes and, at times, as follow-ups or recruitment/precursors to in-depth interviews. These were often used to understand people's opinions of meetings and as an aid for me to clarify the meaning of events. When new attendees were present at the member's meetings, I asked about reasons for attendance and initial impressions about the party.

I conducted most in-depth interviews following a full year of field observation, although I undertook some initial piloting of the interview protocol some months previously. The observations yielded specific avenues of enquiry and initial understandings to be further explored. The interview questions were structured to further probe these areas, test these conclusions and search for new avenues of enquiry. This process also enabled me to re-examine field observations and revisit memos. This iterative process allowed the two forms of data collection to work in concert with one another.

I used an inductive, code-building approach following an iterative coding approach from grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 2009) to analyse field notes, memos, and interview data. Verbatim phrases from interviewees and those noted during observations, plus observation notes and memos were open-coded (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) in an initial pass, and later refined

thematically. The software package NVivo was utilized as an aid in the coding and analysis of all data – interview transcripts, fieldnotes, analytical memos and email discussions.

Findings

Antipartyism

The Wisconsin Green Party must operate within a rather narrow band of political thought. Those attracted to the party reject the party politics accepted by 95% of the voting electorate, yet still believe in party politics generally. Several studies across countries argue that those expressing dissatisfaction with the major party alternatives are, not surprisingly, typically sought out by third parties: Gidengil et al. (2001) in Canada; Abramson et al. (2000) in the United States; and Denmark and Bowler (2002) in Australia and New Zealand. Wisconsin party members consistently stated their dislike of the two main parties, but also of the two-party system rather than the political system as a whole – conforming to Poguntke's first level of antipartyism. It is the two-party system and the two parties as a collective that is the target of much ire. One official remarked,

> It's the kind of the basic way that the two-party system controls people. You have these two parties that are supposedly in opposition to each other, and the way that they govern in practice is not that different. But they sort of spar on all sorts of hot-button issues to give the illusion that they're total opposites.

Kirchheimer (1966) predicted that major parties would gravitate toward, and coalesce around, the centre ground of politics. Despite much current visible animus and division, the Republicans and Democrats do in reality share the centre ground on many areas of policy. Another official remarked,

unfortunately, the two-party system, kind of the nature of it, is people just keep ping-ponging back and forth between two parties that most people hate, but they don't really see the alternative because, I mean, the alternative is hidden from them.

This was a typical assertion – people do not want to vote for these parties, it is not a vote of aspiration or hope, but more a vote of ignorance about alternatives which would offer such things.

Though nobody explicitly mentioned Duverger's Law, there was an understanding of its implication for their cause; several respondents were regretful that the U.S. had not adopted electoral systems more akin to those in much of Europe where minor parties, and indeed Green parties, have relatively prospered, as one interviewee stated, 'I feel like we're in a very different environment politically than most of the European green parties because they have proportionate representation and we don't.' There was little positive said about either party, ire was directed at both equally. Often, they were attacked as a single entity, at times with the portmanteau of RepubliCrats – linguistically placing them as a single entity. Campaign literature designed to attract new supporters to the party was headed with 'we're not them,' and 'choose the greater good, not the lesser evil.' Mantras and philosophies also evoked by half the interviewees, a trope observed at several events, and patent in the responses to my questions. This aligns with the belief that if only the public were aware of an alternative, they would choose it – why would somebody not choose a 'non-evil' option?

Clearly, the WGP is closer ideologically to the Democrats rather than Republicans, so I sought to test their assertion that there is no difference between the main parties, and neither is a preferred option. I concluded each interview by outlining to interviewees two possible scenarios for the 2020 presidential election and asked which they would prefer to occur. In scenario A, Donald Trump would win re-election, but Jill Stein would win the electoral seats in Wisconsin;

giving the party no real power, but a potentially significant enough milestone to change the national perception of the party, and therefore boost its future electoral competitiveness. In scenario B, the Democrats would retake the White House, with a centrist Clintonesque figure being the candidate, but the Greens would have no breakthrough. More than twice as many interviewees chose scenario A than scenario B. Some took several minutes to reach a conclusion; others simply could not reach one, 'Oh! That's a tough one. That's a tough one…Well done, you're cracking my brain…Oh boy, I can't do it [decide]' (the transcript notes that one minute fifty seconds elapsed from the end of the question to the final indecision). When I probed further, most who chose scenario A responded that they genuinely believed there to be little difference between the two parties, and therefore any improvement for the Greens was worth the sacrifice of more Trump (there was universal loathing directed towards him and, when pushed, respondents grudgingly admitted they thought him to be worse), exemplified by these officials,

> I'm going to selfishly say A…I think raising the Green Party up, offering a real difference in how the world operates is more critical than keeping the status quo of planetary destruction and a poor economy.
>
> I'd much rather carry a state…if we have effective social movements and people stand up for justice and peace and all of the things that we want, that's a lot more important than having a Democrat in the White House.

Both argue that the cause of the Green Party is greater than any slight relief of removing Trump; the 'selfishly' and 'more important' are revealing with their tacit acknowledgement that they would, of course, prefer a Democrat to Trump for those four years. Though they would be a 'lesser evil,' any Green Party success, with its attendant (slim) chance of long-term benefits outweighed the short-term improvement I was offering.

This interpretation of Trump as a greater evil was evident at the in-person member's meeting I attended shortly after the 2016 election. The meeting had an air of disbelief and felt

akin to a wake for American politics – leadership changed the planned schedule and invited all present to share their feelings about the election, with most opting to do so, leading to a very emotional series of sharing. Despite the rhetoric of the candidates being gradations of evil, I doubt the meeting would have evolved the same had Hillary Clinton won. Party members were not immune to the sheer shock of Trump's victory and its implications for U.S. democracy – they, like most on the left, had not been mentally prepared for that outcome. Yet, the feelings in the room of anger were directed equally at Trump and at Clinton and the Democrats for fielding a candidate who party members saw as a hugely flawed centrist figure. And again, much anger was directed at the two-party system which enabled such a contest to take place and result to occur.

The four (five) core pillars

Mayer and Ely (1998) traced the evolution of the German Green Party (Die Grünen) as they moved from being perceived as a single-issue pressure movement to a rounded political party with a level of support that enabled the party to become part of a coalition government in the 1990s. By this point, Die Grünen was a pragmatist left-centrist party, following a split between the 'fundi' and 'realo' arms. The fundi (fundamentalists) wanted the party to maintain an ideological purity with respect to their policy portfolio and rejected compromise. The realo (realists) believed that achieving electoral success required a more pragmatic approach, and a willingness to cooperate with other parties. At the end of the struggle, the realo won – an evolution that was closely followed by Die Grünen attaining the coalition position.

Similar debates have been seen in other green parties – Doherty (1992) argued that fundi-realo debates occurred in all four European green parties he examined. Although these examinations occurred three decades ago, these findings still have resonance with contemporary

concerns of the Wisconsin Greens. One official, with personal knowledge of Die Grünen, explicitly noted that the '[Wisconsin Green Party] reminds me a lot of the Green Party in Germany, maybe in the late '70s.' There is tension in both party policies and practices between how much should they stick to their core fundamental tenets versus how much should they be flexible in attempts to attract a wider constituency.

The party feels it must still address a general perception publicly that they are just an ecology-centred party – something frequently noted by interviewees; for example, 'I would say there's still a stereotype…and it's kind of…very, very hippy-ish.' Partly to address this perception, the party nationally established the four pillars as the base of their political positioning. Long-term members were keen to stress that they were never a single-issue party and these issues were always pertinent but efforts were made, and continue to be made, to change this perception, with electoral logic the main driver behind these efforts; 'in the U.S., you can't be a niche party. You have to be a mass party' (interview with a prominent official). This four-pillar emphasis is apparent in virtually all literature, banners, logos and recruiting conversations I observed; at local, state, and national levels. An illustrative, local, example were discussions I witnessed about a rebranding exercise for one of the local chapters. Discussions of a new logo centred on requirements for it to include something to depict all four pillars plus something germane to the locality – what logo may have been able to fulfil such a task was, to my knowledge, never established.

Another potential barrier is that not only are all four pillars requisite talking points, but emphasis is also given that each pillar should not be viewed in isolation but the four viewed intersectionally. To clarify on this – they discuss the four issues as intersectional to mean that the issues do not exist in isolation and to address each requires the others to be addressed, e.g.

ecological wisdom will only come with social justice and peace and all require grassroots

democracy. It is the intersection where these four pillars meet where, to extend the analogy, this

fifth, and slightly taller pillar now sits and props up the party. However, this is clearly a

contended view, leaving WGP having to still debate their identity simultaneously around the four

core pillars and the emphasis on intersectionality. The party still attracts 'issue-publics'

(Krosnick, 1990), and supporters who are happiest locating within one or two of the four pillars,

and to self-describe as, for example, 'watermelon greens' (green on the outside, red on the

inside), or 'avocado greens' (green right through). There were frequent expressions of disquiet as

to what they saw as being forced into accepting that other issues were as important and

intertwined with 'their' issue. One 'avocado green' remarked, 'I am considerably less loyal to a

whole bunch of Green Party cultural issues' – the example they provided related to transgender

issues. However, this disquiet was something they felt unable to share publicly in the party.

Though the logic of electoral competition predicts that a wider policy concentration is a sound

route to widen electoral appeal, this insistence on a message that true greens must be

ideologically located within the overlap (highlighted in Figure 1) however risks the party

appearing even more niche than previously – the green-red-white-blue party likely has a small

constituency.

The message from literature and party leaders to stress the four pillars and prominence of

the fifth does impact on recruiting efforts. I asked each interviewee to give me their 'elevator

pitch' for the party. It is probably fair to say that all these pitches would have required

particularly tall buildings. Following one attempted pitch one interviewee reflected, 'I think

[laughter] it is tough for us, but all the issues are interconnected. And yeah. The elevator pitch is

not a strong suit [laughter].' There is a realization from leaders that they need to improve the

standing of the party, a realization by all members that they could be better in marketing the party, there were discussions about better branding of the party, but ultimately such efforts were stymied; 'being the message' was more important than delivering a message.
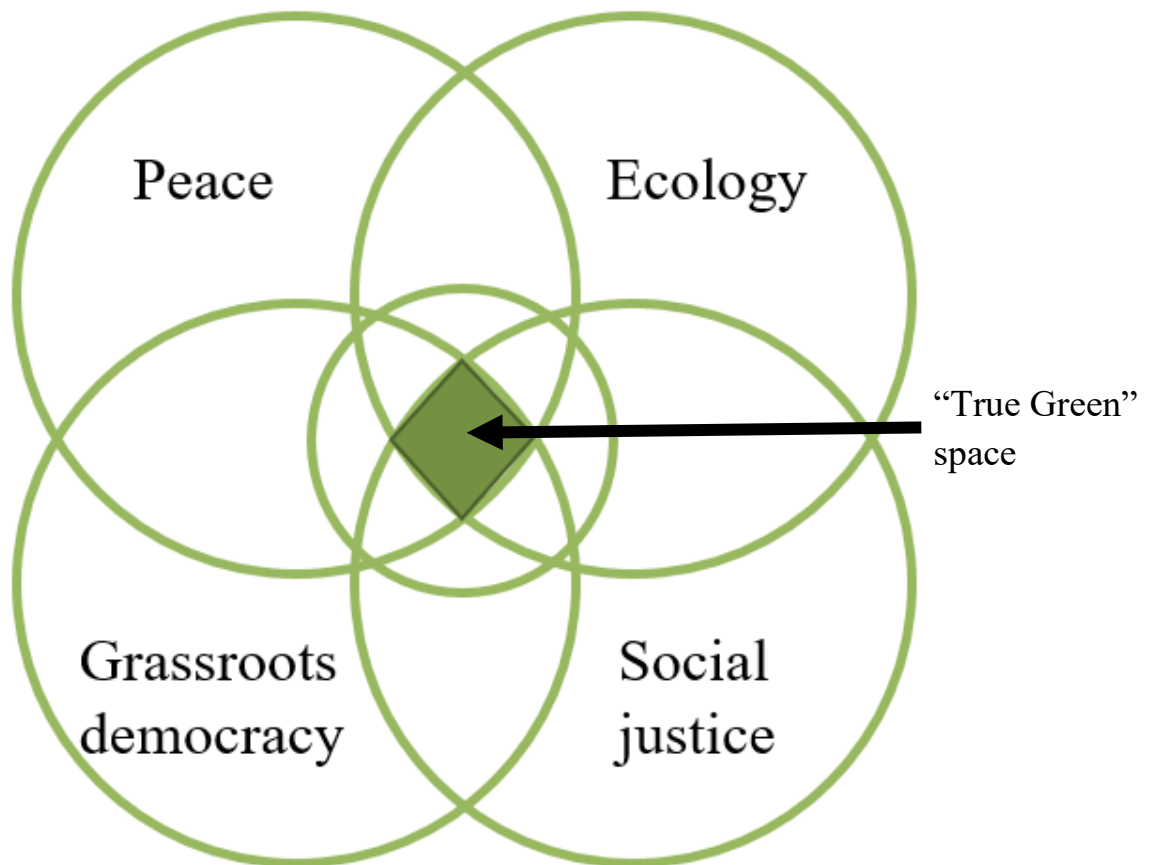

Figure 1. The four/five core pillars of the Wisconsin Green Party

Sources of potential support – Demexiters

Figure two illustrates the anti-party space within which the WGP must operate and where party supporters typically come from or are sought. The arrow weight is broadly indicative of the relative size of the actual and perceived sources of support. A normal distribution is used to provide a deliberately simplified illustration of where most political opinion lays within the U.S.

17

along a left-right continuum and serves to be broadly indicative of the size of the constituency within the WGP space. One interviewee, a founder member of the WGP, stated that he wanted to show people that, 'there's something beyond left and right' and went on to reference Die Grünen founder, Petra Kelly's slogan of, 'neither Left nor Right but in front.' However, despite such expressed desires by this one member, all others in interviews and during observations proudly discussed the WGP as a party of the left. It is naturally acknowledged that a simple mono-dimensional axis is insufficient to encapsulate party differences and further dimensions are important for a fuller understanding. Inglehart and Norris (2019, 248), for example, consider three dimensions – the left-right economic cleavage, an authoritarian-libertarian axis, and a populist-pluralist dimension – in their categorization of parties. However, I did not attain sufficient data which may effectively speak to considerations beyond the left-right dimension.
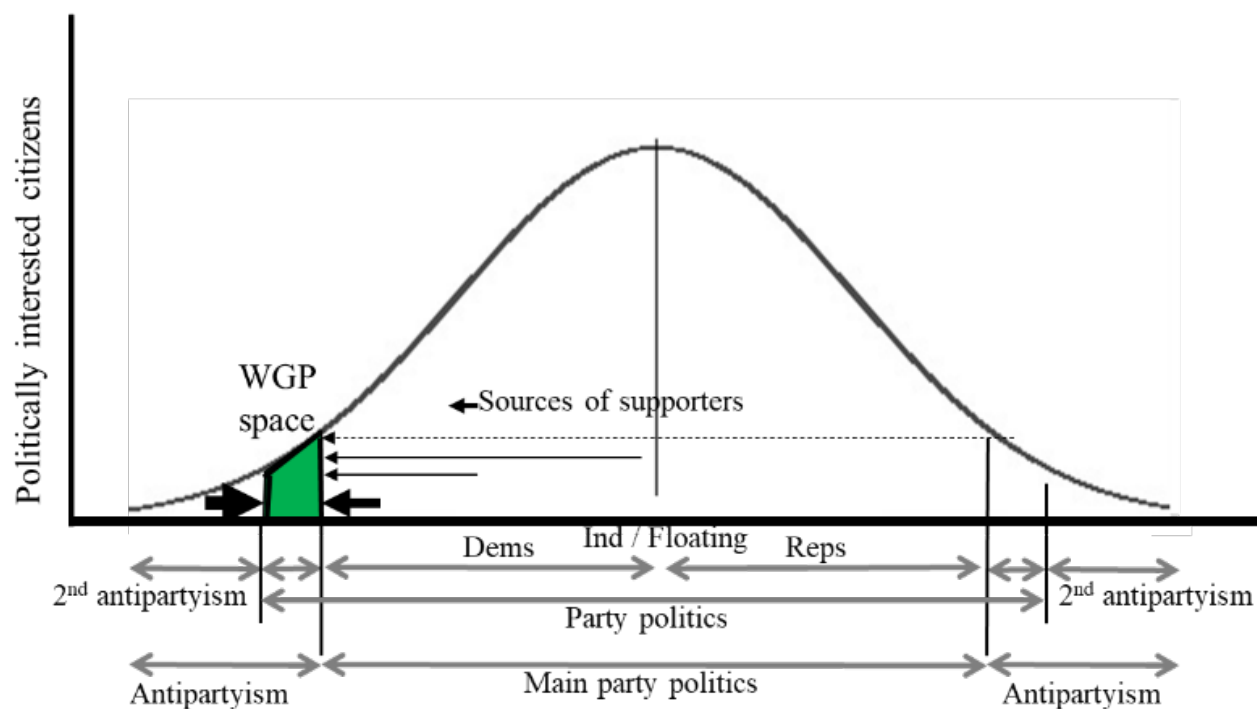
Figure 2. Green party operating space and sources of support

Several new members had recently opted for Hirschmann's 'exit' having left the Democratic Party following Bernie Sanders' failure to gain the party nomination (the rather awkward portmanteau of 'Demexit' was used). Invariably, these leavers came to the Greens more due to their frustration and disappointment with the Democrats (the first possibility identified by Rosentstone et al.,1984) rather than being inspired by the Greens – they were receptive to the 'we're not them' message. This precarious allegiance was manifest as, six months later, most of the Demexiters who became active with the state party were no longer involved; being 'not them' was not enough. Those that remained expressed both dissatisfaction with the Democrats, but importantly had come to reject the two-party system more generally and saw the Greens as an alternative. It was those few who had moved to Hirschmann's third level – loyalty – who stayed. This interviewee moved from being, in their words, an ardent 'Berner', to attending their first

WGP member's meeting in autumn 2016 (after the election) to becoming a prominent official shortly after,

> once the whole snafu with Bernie getting burned and all these sorts of things happened, I realized that there was just a lot of negativity and a lot of things going on with the Democrats that I was not aware of initially. And I really felt that that was not something I wanted to support, and I became better acquainted with the Green Party.

They moved on to discuss how they did a lot of research and realized that the party platform spoke to many of their beliefs and positions. This contrasts with other Berners who also attended that meeting; they were simply focused still on Sanders not winning the nomination, believing, in the words of one such attendee, that he was 'screwed over' and that the 'Democratic Party is rotten' (fieldnotes). The initial enthusiasm from this new attendee to get involved (they volunteered to chair a caucus) seemed to quickly dissipate (the caucus never met) and their involvement soon ceased. Similar stories occurred with the new attendees who remarked they were 'done with the Dems' (also briefly a caucus chair) and 'so frustrated and fed-up with the Democrats' (both quotes from fieldnotes).

There was some recognition at this meeting that efforts should be made to try and attract more disaffected Sanders supporters, but little was put into practice. The day after the member's meeting, at the Coordinating Council, a membership sub-committee was formed but did not meet for several months, probably missing any opportunity the resentment may have afforded.

The people who arrived typically came from the left of the Democrats and were therefore already largely ideologically aligned and seemed receptive to the four-pillar ethos and with an understanding of the argument with respect to them intersecting. The greater challenge faced by those arriving from the Democratic Party was in adapting to WGP practices.

Party practices and activists

Many of the discussions regarding the motivations for being an active Green member concentrated on the party being a better way of politics – literature and discussion frequently highlighted that they are not the 'corporate' parties, and in some ways, the need to establish and maintain this demarcation makes it requisite that they also maintain a demarcation between their practices and those of the other parties. Melucci (1984, 830) notes that green parties embed grass-roots democracy as not just a tenet of belief, but as an organizing principle; organizing around grass-roots democracy, 'is a goal in itself…the medium, the movement itself as a new medium, is the message' (see also Kitschelt and Hellemans, 1990). Lucardie and Rihoux (2008), writing twenty years after Melucci, question whether European green parties had to lose this commitment on their way to gaining political power and office – a concern not yet germane to the Wisconsin Greens. Therefore, party practices were often dictated by idealist notions of being the politics they wished for, rather than pragmatism. This is perhaps best illustrated by tortuous attempts to change the party constitution; ironically, the proposed changes were intended to allow the constitution to be easier to change. Historically, such changes required two written notifications (one in hard copy) to be sent to the membership for a vote to be allowed at a biannual members meeting; a cumbersome and expensive process. Commitment to maintaining principles of grassroots democracy were cited as reasons to follow their constitutional guidelines, even when it was acknowledged that following such procedures was inimical to the party being able to progress on certain time-sensitive tasks. It was adjudged to be more important to keep to the outdated rules than to allow flexibility to facilitate action. Such tension is neatly encapsulated in this remark from a member's meeting, 'I support our ways of getting consensus, but sometimes they paralyze us. We need people to be able to…*do things*' [emphasis from quote].

One issue discussed as part of the constitution change debate was voting procedures. The procedures in place are intended to attempt to reach a consensus opinion with the group, and if that is not forthcoming, a sizeable majority opinion is accepted. However, this restriction does not allow quick decision-making when there is conflict; achieving compromise is perhaps a laudable aim within a democratic process, but making new members sit through such lengthy deliberations did not create a positive impression for some. As one official noted, summarizing the observations of several others,

> the only values that I don't agree with per se is the way they make decisions as a party…
> where we need to debate the simplest thing for an hour, and then people vote on it, and
> then whoever doesn't agree with the vote, then we have to talk again about it.

This issue was discussed at several council meetings and involved a lengthy email discussion, which included the council voting on whether to accept a proposal to put to the membership on changing the voting structure. During this discussion, one official remarked, 'there is something about consensus decision making that has an almost magical quality to it.' Another argued for the inherent power within consensus building but acknowledged that it is cumbersome and off-putting for new meeting attendees. Ultimately these two officials abstained in the vote – a neat encapsulation of the conflict between wanting to allow views of all constituents to be represented while considering that they also needed to 'get shit done' (to borrow a common phrase from one prominent official). One member noted,

> the Green Party is very much about consensus, but it only attracts a certain type of
> people, and the other type of people that are more pragmatic, I think, are generally
> thrown off by the idealists.

For some new meeting attendees, the move from simple plurality decision making, as experienced in the Democratic Party, to protracted consensus gathering was simply too much.

It is worth ending this sub-section with the observation that far more meeting time, email traffic, limited finances and leader's energy were devoted to trying to change the constitution than in trying to take advantage of the potential opportunity to attract and retain more disaffected Bernie Sanders supporters.

Sources of potential support – activists and issue-publics

> Some people think we have to build a base by pulling disgruntled progressives from the Democratic Party, and other people think we should build a base by mobilizing working-class people and people of colour and only press people who have given up on politics.

As illustrated in this quote from an official, the other main source for potential growth identified is from people who are politically interested, but have thus far not been involved in party politics – that is move them from the second level of antipartyism in Figure 2 into the WGP space. However, I observed the inherent struggles in also attempting to pull people in from this direction. The quote in the previous section about being put off by idealists also speaks to issues articulated and observed about the stridency of views held by many of the more active members. Previous work has identified that the volunteer/activist model of modern political parties almost inevitably results in party activists being more ideologically polarized than voters or party members (Shafer, 2016); something clearly in evidence in the WGP. Lucardie and Rihoux (2008) label green parties as usually amateur-activist in their early development years; the label remains apposite for the Wisconsin Greens (and indeed nationally). Several interviewees noted that supporting the party position on issues was a compromise for them personally. Several identified as socialists who see the Green Party's broadly kinder-capitalism economic positioning (an example of the 'self-limiting radicalism' Papadakis (1988) often encountered in green parties) as, in the words of one interviewee, 'the next best thing.' Activists in the party can be quite far from the median Green voter, let alone the median U.S. voter, on an individual issue. Add-in the

distance which may be present for an additional three issues, plus the argument that all four issues are irrevocably intertwined and the gap to median may extend exponentially.

Representation versus growth

This somewhat humorous (and poetic) observation neatly sums up the opinions directed towards the major parties, and adroitly speaks to the inherent issue of choosing constituency representation over electoral competitiveness: 'so that's my problem with these other parties, is they're whores. And we're not whores, that's why we're poor[2]'. The Green Party is viewed of as purer (yet poorer) – a bastion of honesty in a sea of corruption of the 'other parties. Much is made of the party stance of refusing to accept any corporate donations (it was frequently stated that that is what the 'corporate parties' do). Of course, the party does recognise that some money is required to operate as a party.

An important revenue source is annual members' dues, a funding structure which also fulfils an imperative of grassroots democracy in allowing members to 'own' the party (fieldnotes). At each autumn members' meeting dues are set for the following year. The dues discussions I witnessed over two such meetings were a nice encapsulation of the tension of party practices. At the first meeting, following a consensus agreement on setting dues, it was suggested that an additional free category be added for those unable to afford the (very modest) dues. This suggestion was discussed in a five-minute caucus by a small number of the council and agreed upon to be adopted. This was a pragmatic option for some; a simple decision made quickly intending to enable as many as possible to become members, whilst also keeping consideration

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[2] Given the indelicate language used, it is appropriate to mention that this response came specifically during a discussion of the Bernie Sanders campaign.

of raising needed revenue. This reflected the more pragmatic ethos of the current leadership of the council; '[we need to] get shit done.' One year later the same discussion resulted in a ninety-minute plus debate with numerous proposals and votes and blocking and re-votes; the manner of debate reflective of a new chair's personal emphases. This length of discussion was a deal-breaker for some – two attendees present for this discussion expressed this to me in brief chats following the meeting. To my knowledge, they never returned to another WGP meeting. My field entry notes made during the membership dues discussion include the following, '[dues discussion] goes on way past its scheduled time…[official] has clearly switched off at this point (he's playing Pokémon). Reading the room, so have many other people… [when discussion of dues was returned to fruitlessly later in the day] …at this point I despair.'

The party constantly face such tensions between the desire to want to stay true to their own rules and ethos and acknowledging that perhaps some pragmatism is required to grow; a tension between constituency representation and electoral competition logics, with different leaders and different members trying to steer the party to different points along the scale. Polletta (2012) examined a wide range of social movement organizations – as alluded to above, the 'endless meeting' of her title has resonance with what can occur at WGP meetings. Though Polletta's work examined social movements rather than political parties, the striving to maintain the spirit of participatory democracy also resonates with much of what Polletta detailed. Mayer and Ely (1998) and Bomberg (2007) use 'movement' to describe Die Grünen in its earlier conception and it is also a term frequently used by the Wisconsin Greens to describe themselves. Indeed, Schwartz's (2006) descriptor of 'party movement' seems apposite to apply to the WGP. Polletta broadly concluded that endless meetings were ultimately beneficial to the organizations she examined. Though it is difficult to currently conclude the same for the Wisconsin Greens,

ultimately many in the party believe this will be the case – voters will eventually want to choose the 'greater good' that will 'lead America to a better place' (party supporter).

The practices of the party and the concentration on intersectionality do make the party 'the message' (Melucci, 1984) but it can be a message which acts as a barrier to attempts to attract more support. These main forces and barriers are visualized in figure three: the issue-publics, who may be attracted to one core-pillar, get a potential counterforce about the four-pillar intersection emphasis. On the other side, party practices appeared to be more of a barrier to entry to those coming from the two-party (mainly Democrat left) political space. Although of course, there is potential for the repelling forces to also work in the other direction, my observations concluded these forces acting in these directions to be the most common and most pronounced. Yet, while acknowledging this as an issue, the party overall defaults to maintaining the WGP space intact and the barriers intact, even at an acknowledged cost, 'there's some satisfaction for me in doing things based on principals even if the results are not what I would welcome' (party member). This is due to a widespread belief that voters will eventually realize the faults with the two parties and the two-party system and so arrive with greater force to the WGP space – overcoming the barriers to arrive at a political product which is simply better. As Schwartz stated, 'some party movements may put core principles above a desire to see them quickly instituted…Rather, they see their role as being beacons, lighting the way to a better future' (2006, 205). At the 2016 autumn member's meeting, one new attendee evoked such a sentiment at the end of the day's discussions, 'thank you for keeping the heartbeat of the party going while the rest of us caught up to you.' This unintentionally encapsulates the main growth strategy for the WGP – keep doing what they are doing, keep their policies and practices pure and simply wait for voters to come to their space.
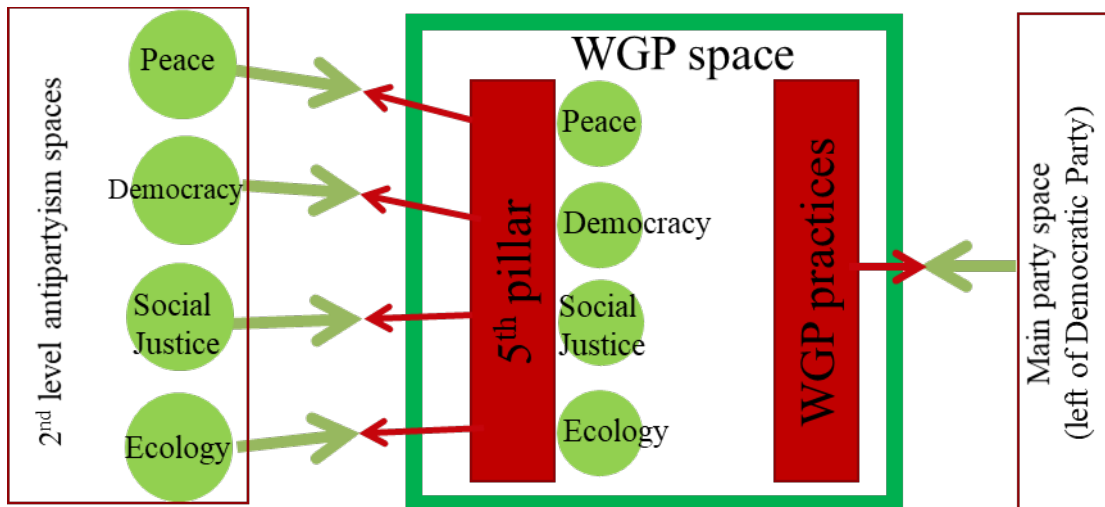
Figure 3. Main forces and barriers to enter the WGP space from the surrounding space

Discussion

The observations and interviews provide a detailed examination of some of the barriers encountered and established by the Wisconsin Green Party in their attempts to move towards their stated goal of electoral competition. The data illustrate that the party is still dealing with similar fundi/realo issues as identified by Mayer and Ely (1998) and O'Neill (2000) as manifest in Die Grünen's early struggle. The Wisconsin Greens have moved away, as did Die Grünen, from being an ecological fundi party (though in neither case were the parties single-issue parties; 'core-issue' is a more accurate descriptor) and stress their other policy interests whenever possible – even, at times, minimizing their environmental bona fides to highlight these other areas. However, moving from one core-issue to four core-issues, plus the fifth intersectional core position being given paramount importance, has seemingly resulted in a new problem. Although the four pillars give an ostensible route to capture four constituencies to represent, the stress on acceptance of all four, and their interconnection may alienate as many as are attracted by the newer core pillars.

The party is prepared to accept that practices such as consensus building make decision making and progress harder in the short-term and risk alienating potential members and activists. However, what others may see as simple obduracy, ultimately the party consider a strength and part of their potential appeal. They do collectively believe that eventually people will come to their positions and agree with their philosophy. Therefore, there is no need to move toward the current median voter; the party, in the words of two interviewees, exemplifying those of others, 'represents the possibility of something bigger and more successful happening', and can lead 'to a better place'. In some ways, it can be argued that by adopting a constituency representation logic they are considering electoral competition, though in an indefinite long-term manner. It was stressed at several meetings and in numerous communications that the public are theoretically in favour of a major new party – the fact that, in a 2017 Gallup Poll, 61% expressed a preference for such an option was frequently cited. Of course, only 4% voted for a third party in the 2016 presidential race, and only one in four of those voted for the Greens.

As with any ethnographic study, it was not possible to observe all the activities undertaken by the primary body of interest. Though email communications to the council were able to be observed, more private communications clearly took place which were not able to be captured. Though there were clear advantages to beginning fieldwork during the presidential race, it must be acknowledged that the peculiar nature and outcome of that race may have resulted in an atypical period for the Wisconsin Greens.

Pedersen (1982) suggested that minor parties have four obstacles to overcome to achieve an impact on politics in their country. They must firstly enter electoral space, announcing that they intend to compete electorally. Secondly, there are legalities to be negotiated to be accepted as an electoral entity. Thirdly, some form of representation must be secured; often this may

initially be in lower-order elections. Finally, smaller parties must become relevant to political outcomes in some manner. The Wisconsin Greens have largely overcome the first three hurdles but, excepting some minor local success, have yet to breach that important last hurdle. Yet, one may simultaneously argue that the first hurdle has not been, and cannot be, fully achieved by the party if they are to pursue electoral success within the current system. Though they have come inside the party-political arena, they cannot fully embrace an electoral space that they must constantly criticize – a space that they see as synonymous with the problems of party electoral politics.

Conclusion

The Wisconsin Green Party sits comfortably in the first level antiparty space identified by Poguntke (1996). They are stuck in a position in which they must constantly criticize the very objects that they ultimately want to replace – they do want to grow, they want more money, more voters, more members, ultimately electoral power but they are rarely prepared to compromise to achieve such aims; they want to change the major-party space from outside to allow them to be able to enter that space. Given the choice between following constituency logic and electoral logic, they almost invariably choose the former – a party movement (Schwartz, 2006) rather than a Downsian party (Downs, 1957). Attempts by the party to increase the available constituencies within their anti-two-party space seem to have morphed into a concentration on just those within the green-red-white-blue space. This policy positioning is exacerbated by struggles over their very identity as a political body. Their movement and party identities are in constant strain – statements of 'we need money, we are a political party after all,' 'we need to grow, to grow we need more money,' and 'we do have to run candidates,' at odds with practices making such things harder.

Of course, as previously outlined, given the majoritarian U.S. electoral system, unlimited campaign expenditure and embedded norms such as closed primaries and party registration, the Greens face an almost impossible task to achieve any form of electoral success; Duverger's law may be anything but a law when considered globally, but in the US it is indeed an apposite descriptor. Unsurprisingly perhaps, given this environment, there is little evidence of any success of WGP beyond survival. Yet the act of survival and simple persistence (Schwartz, 2006) is a success in itself and the necessary requirement if voters are able to find them when they are ready for the 'better place' the party purports to represent.

In that long-term electoral logic, perhaps there is some glimmer of hope. Though the hoped-for mass exodus from the Bernie-supporting Democrats did not occur, there was a trickle and those that did find their way to the Greens came and stayed largely because of the WGP position as outside the main party duopoly, their commitment to stay true to their policy, and, to a lesser extent (and with some attendant frustrations), their commitment to manifest such policy through their practices. As far back as the 1980s, authors such as Shafer (1983) argued that the Democrats were no longer truly the party of the working class – an argument recently revisited and popularized in the work of Piketty (2018). The election of Trump, enabled in part by an influx of white working-class voters who abandoned the Democrats, is clear evidence that many of these voters no longer have exclusive loyalty to one party – the 'Blue Wall' fell partly as a result of these voters exiting from their Democratic home. It is also pertinent that turnout was less than 56% nationally; there were around 100 million citizens who were not motivated enough to vote for the two realistic presidential options on offer – a silent but important use of voice. Yet, converting those who have chosen voice or exit to move to loyalty to the WGP is a vastly more difficult process, but perhaps not impossible. Trump was elected partly on a platform of

something new, rather than the continuation represented by Clinton. And, if the Trump experiment does not work for people, maybe there will be more in the market for trying another alternative. If it is a party alternative, or a new type of party politics which voters seek, the very policies and practices of the Wisconsin Green Party which seem, as illustrated in this research, to inhibit growth, may be the very things to make them an alternative option for an increasing number of these voters. But there were a lot of caveats in those final sentences.

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