



Green Theory in International Relations: A Challenge to the Mainstream

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Abstract:

This study demonstrates the significance of green politics and theory to the field of international relations, particularly for critical theorists. The primary tenets and ideas of green politics are demonstrated after the historical context of green political thought is presented in the first section. The subsequent segment focuses on the hypothetical degree of Green Hypothesis as a Worldwide Relations Hypothesis. In the third section, enlightening works by Green Theorists are used to introduce their main assumptions. Themes like the green state, green security, and green economy, which are relatively "new," are explained. In the last segment, fundamental reactions of the Green Hypothesis are referenced. Besides author insighted thoroughly over green theory as challenge to the mainstream.

Keywords: Green state, Green Economy, Thinking Green Environmentalism, Sustainable Development, Decentralization, Economic Modernization Ecocentrism

Anthropocentrism

Introduction:

Green theory is a critical approach to international relations (IR) that emerged in the 1970s. Unlike dominant theories like realism and neoliberalism, which focus on states and power politics, green theory argues that environmental issues are central to understanding the contemporary world order.

This theory critiques the state-centric framework and the emphasis on economic growth in mainstream IR. It argues for a broader perspective that considers global justice, sustainable development, and the limitations of the natural world. Green theory offers alternative concepts like ecological security and environmental justice to address challenges like climate change and resource depletion.

Green theory draws from post positivism and critical theory traditions. It highlights the intrinsic value of nature and the need for international cooperation to address environmental problems. The theory explores how power structures and economic systems contribute to environmental degradation and proposes alternative models for a more sustainable future.

Green political parties have seen some success in numerous European countries in recent times. Nevertheless, the existence or quantification of the green parties does not adequately account for the way ecologism is currently influencing mainstream politics. The majority of political movements and parties are worried with green-themed advertising. So how can we account for the impact of ecologism, which is still relatively new in politics? Furthermore, how did green political theory develop into a unique philosophy of international relations? The green hypothesis is new and complicated, so the answers to such problems are debatable. This chapter discusses the most important theoretical debates in order to clarify the key problems surrounding green theory.

Environmental problems began to take an important place in global politics by the end of the 20th century. With the emergence of environmentalism, as a social and intellectual movement, green politics has also started to become a part of International Relations and has profoundly occupied the literature with the increase in environmental problems. To prevent any confusion, environmentalism and Green Theory have some fundamental differences as explained in this chapter. The growing significance of Green Theory in International Relations is related to the damaging effect of global warming and carbon emission that are the concerns not only of a particular state but whole states altogether. The green theory has an ecocentric world view that does not precede the human and perceive it as just a part of the ecological system. J. Barry explains it with his own words and says that “Green Political Theory can be seen as an attempt to bring humanity and the study of human society down to earth”. (Barry, 2014: 2) As a result of this, main assumptions of Green Theory in International Relations are challenging the traditional understanding of state, security, development and so on (Eckersley, 2013: 267).

Green theory and green politics have become crucial in international relations for several reasons, reflecting a growing recognition of the interdependence between environmental sustainability and global political stability. Here are some key factors driving this importance:

1. Climate Change and Environmental Degradation:

- Global Impact: Climate change is a global phenomenon that transcends national borders, affecting weather patterns, sea levels, and ecosystems worldwide. This has significant implications for agriculture, water resources, and human health.
- Security Threats: Environmental degradation and climate change can exacerbate resource scarcity, leading to conflicts over water, food, and land. This poses direct threats to national and international security.

Economic Costs: The economic costs of climate-related disasters (such as hurricanes, floods, and droughts) are immense, impacting global supply chains and economic stability.

2. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

Global Agenda: The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize the need for sustainable development that protects the environment while promoting social and economic progress.

Green politics align with these global priorities.

Integration of Policies: Green theory advocates for the integration of environmental considerations into economic and social policies, promoting holistic approaches to development.

3. International Agreements and Cooperation:

Paris Agreement: International agreements like the Paris Agreement highlight the collective effort needed to address climate change. Countries are committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to sustainable energy sources.

Multilateral Cooperation: Effective environmental governance requires multilateral cooperation, as no single nation can tackle global environmental issues alone. Green politics fosters international collaboration and shared responsibility.

4. Environmental Justice and Ethics:

Equity Concerns: Green theory emphasizes environmental justice, addressing the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on marginalized communities and developing countries.

5. Moral Responsibility: There is a growing ethical awareness that current generations have a responsibility to protect the planet for future generations. This ethical stance is increasingly influencing international policies and agreements.

5. Technological and Economic Transitions:

Green Technology: The transition to green technologies (such as renewable energy, electric vehicles, and sustainable agriculture) is reshaping global economic and technological landscapes.

Economic Opportunities: Green politics highlight the economic opportunities associated with sustainable development, such as job creation in the renewable energy sector and innovation in green technologies.

6. Public Awareness and Activism:

Global Movements: Environmental activism has gained significant momentum, with movements like Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion raising awareness and demanding action from governments and international organizations.

Public Pressure: Increased public awareness and concern about environmental issues pressure policymakers to prioritize green policies and international cooperation on environmental matters.

The integration of green theory and green politics into international relations reflects a broader understanding that environmental sustainability is inextricably linked to global security, economic stability, and social justice. As the world faces increasingly complex environmental challenges, the relevance of green politics in shaping international policies and fostering cooperative solutions continues to grow.

OVER TIME, GREEN POLITICAL THOUGHT

Green political thinking generally is seen as a new ideology emerging at the end of the twentieth century while the first ecological movements can be traced back to the nineteenth-century rebels against industrialization. The modern green ideology is formed from a complex mix of organizations, communities, and cultures. The increasing impact of industrialization, globalization and technological developments have been beneficial for our lives but also have created many problems. Environmental problems are among those problems and they have become increasingly influential on the political agenda as more people have realized that the environment must be protected for the continuation of humanity (Tarhan, 2018: 155- 156). Green ideology criticizes the economic and technological developments that damage nature. Hence, green theorist, or ecologist, mainly argues that the development of technology is posing a threat to human existence and other species as well. Early environmental movements include acts of preservations and resource conservationism (Dreiling & Wolf, 2001: 36).

The first international treaty on flora (plants) was signed in 1889 in Bern, Switzerland to prevent the spread of plant disease affecting vineyards in Europe. The treaties followed the Bern Treaty in the 1920s and the 1950s which also aimed protection of the European agricultural lands from the disease (Lanchbery, 1998: 58). International awareness on pollution and environmental problems began to increase after the Second World War when economic boom during the post-War years provided problems as well as benefits, and environmental problems stood out among the former. Therefore, the 1960s can be considered as the beginning of the “modern” environmental consciousness. Rapid growth in both economy and population brought serious energy and resource consumption and this affected biodiversity negatively more than ever (Eckersley, 2013: 268). At such a time, 1973 oil crisis began and the idea was that the depletion of natural resources was inevitable, and so was the growth of technology and state (Erlander, 2017: 496). Following these developments, awareness of the nation-states on environmental issues increased. Relations of ecology, development, and resources have come to be seen more clearly by the international community. As a result of this “enlightenment” of the nation-states, the complexity of the degradation came into sight and it led states to act together against the environmental challenge. In 1972, representatives of the 114 countries gathered in Stockholm for the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Steans, Pettiford, Diez & El-Anis, 2010: 205). The aim of the conference was to establish international cooperation for environmental problems. The main principal purpose of the conference was declared as “to serve as a practical means to encourage, and to provide guidelines ... to protect and improve the human environment and to remedy and prevent its impairment” with the General Assembly Resolution 2581 (XXVI). In many respects, United Nations Conference on the Human Environment was considered successful compared with

other attempts in those years. In a short period of time, the Conference adopted “a basic Declaration and a detailed resolution on institutional and financial arrangements”, in addition to this, it also recommended an action plan for the international community (Sohn, 1973: 473). The results of the conference showed its effects very quickly in practice and main principles of the Stockholm Summit was placed in the center of the international environmental politics for 30 years (Greene, 2001: 390)

During the 1980s, environmental politics, women and gender issues, peace-making and nuclear non-proliferation played the main role in green politics, and first green political parties were established in Europe. Major issues of the green parties were ecological responsibilities, social justice, non-violence, and grassroots democracy (Erçandırılı, 2017: 496). Until 1984, 12 green parties were established in Western European countries. In the following years, these parties gained seats in the parliaments of several European democracies and became part of politics in five countries including Germany, France and Italy (Müller-Rommel, 2002: 1-16). In contrast to many political scientists' expectations, in the 1980s the electoral and the parliamentary performance of the green parties has improved extraordinarily especially in Western European countries (Müller-Rommel, 2002: 1-16). Not just political parties, also non-governmental organizations (NGOs) became more and more involved in environmental problems and international conferences during these years. NGOs like Greenpeace, World Wildlife Fund (WWF) have sent delegation to all conferences where nation-states represent themselves with diplomats. NGOs were working with experts of environmental problems and it can be said without doubt that most of the NGOs have worked with experts more than component states of the environmental politics conference had (Greene, 2001: 392).

End of the Cold War is an important turning point for international environmental politics as during the Cold War it was harder to cope with environmental problems because of two reasons; arms race and bipolar world order. Nuclear weapons and mass destruction weapons are among the most dangerous and unfriendly industrial products to nature. Land and air pollution are one side of the damaging effect of the proliferation, waste of resources is the other side of the coin. The second important negative effect of the Cold War era for the environmental politics is the political polarization between states. These polarizations curbed the environmental cooperation between the states during the Cold War. For example, the USSR and Warsaw Pact nations boycotted Stockholm Conference in 1972 due to the lack of inclusion of East Germany to the Conference (Hill, 1972). So, international cooperation could not provide what was crucial for solving environmental problems according to green theorists. For these reasons, the end of the Cold War created an enthusiasm for the ecologists.

Key Premises of Green Politics as a Theory of International Relations

Green is not just a colour for International Relations discipline, it refers to a theory that concerns international environmental cooperation. In the previous section, reasons for the increasing importance of green politics are discussed through historical developments. After looking at the historical background of the environmental or ecological problems, a question comes to mind: how and where green political theory is located in this debate? To be able to answer this question we should first look at some definitions often used. There are several different terms describing green political theory in the literature, “ecologism” and “environmentalism” are among the most commonly used descriptions. Different from ecologism and environmentalism, ecological political theory and environmental political theory are also commonly used descriptions (Dobson, 2003)

The main differences between the Greens and Environmentalists are that Environmentalists accept the framework of the current political, social and economic structures of world politics as it is and believe that those problems can be solved within those structures while Greens’ approach to those structures as the main reason of the environmental problems and suggest that those structures must be challenged (Paterson, 2005: 236). Environmentalists suggest that ecological and environmental problems can be solved by the elites of the international system. They always want states to get involved in a solution of the prevailing environmental problems because states are the only actors in international relations able to handle such problems. Quite the contrary, green political theory sees this standpoint very problematic. According to greens, the involvement of states is not going to solve the ecological problems, moreover, states are already harming the ecological balance and are worsening the scenario.

In summary, environmentalists have a more anthropocentric worldview than green political theorists, who have an eccentric one. Ultimately, while environmentalists from Stockholm to Rio believed that every effort made by the international community to address environmental issues was vital and important, Green Political Theorists hold the exact opposite view, asserting that the international community bears primary responsibility for the problems at hand. For instance, environmentalists view the 1992 Rio Earth Summit as a turning point in "saving the world," but green political theorists have a different take on the event, arguing that the UNCED marked the end of environmental activism's collaboration with the ruling class and that the environmental movement was therefore unsuccessful.

The nature of Green Politics is also against the idea of development. More precisely, Green Political Theorists believe that the World has already reached to the limits of growth and any growth in population or economy would possibly harm the ecology and humanity. In the famous book, “The Limits of Growth”, Meadows et al. explain the damage that economic and technological growth has brought to the World in previous years, potential threats of further development are also presented in the book (Meadows, Randers & Meadows, 2004).

IR Concepts Reconsidered Using Green Theory

Green theory also looks at many ideas from conventional theories of international relations, but through, the assessment of green theories itself. Though they have diverse definitions and ideals, security, state, and economy are three of the most debated and contentious terms in international relations. These three notions are also significant subjects of green theory.

A "Green State" typically refers to a government or region that prioritizes environmental protection, sustainability, and the promotion of renewable energy sources.

Green Economy Green international relations theory is usually subdivided into an international political economy as it is mentioned before. The relation between environmental problems and international economy became clearer after the 1970s. For the last 50 years, environmental issues have been discussed at international summits, conferences, groupings of states because it has been widely accepted that the environmental degradation and pollution whether local or transnational or global, impact whole states altogether. H

In a Green State, policies and initiatives are implemented to reduce carbon emissions, protect natural resources, promote clean energy, and encourage sustainable practices in various sectors such as transportation, agriculture, and industry.

The green theory in international relations is a theoretical approach that emphasizes the importance of the environment and ecological sustainability in understanding international relations and global politics. This approach challenges the traditional focus on state interests, power, and security in international relations theory. Here are some key features of the green theory and its challenges to the mainstream:

Eco-centric perspective: The green theory places the environment at the center of analysis, recognizing that human societies are part of the natural world and that ecological degradation can have significant consequences for global politics.

Critique of Western dominance: Green theory challenges the dominant Western perspective on international relations, which often prioritizes economic growth, national security, and human rights over environmental concerns. It emphasizes the need for a more inclusive and equitable approach that recognizes the experiences and perspectives of non-Western societies.

Alternative conceptualization of security: Green theory rejects the traditional focus on national security and military power, instead emphasizing the importance of environmental security, human security, and social justice. **Focus on global governance:** The green theory argues that traditional international institutions and governance structures are inadequate for addressing global environmental challenges and calls for new forms of global governance that prioritize sustainability and environmental protection.

Recognition of the interconnectedness of issues: Green theory highlights the interconnectedness of environmental, economic, social, and political issues, recognizing that solutions to one problem often require addressing multiple issues simultaneously.

Promotion of sustainable development: The green theory advocates for sustainable development as a guiding principle for international relations, emphasizing the need to balance economic development with environmental protection and social equity.

Challenges to the mainstream:

Mainstream focus on state interests: Traditional international relations theory focuses on state interests, power, and security, which can lead to a neglect of environmental concerns.

Economic growth prioritization: The dominant approach to international relations often prioritizes economic growth over environmental protection and social equity.

Lack of recognition of ecological limits: Mainstream theories often ignore or underestimate the ecological limits to growth and the consequences of unsustainable development.

Neglect of non-state actors: Traditional international relations theory focuses primarily on state actors, neglecting the important roles played by non-state actors, such as civil society organizations and local communities. Key proponents of green theory include:

Rudolf Bahro: A German philosopher who argued that environmental degradation is a result of capitalist expansion and advocated for a more eco-centric approach to international relations.

Arne Naess: A Norwegian philosopher who developed the concept of "deep ecology," which emphasizes the intrinsic value of nature and argues that human well-being is dependent on a healthy environment.

John Barry: A British political theorist who has written extensively on the need for a green politics that prioritizes environmental sustainability and social justice.

The green theory has been influential in shaping debates about global governance, sustainable development, and environmental politics. While it has not yet achieved widespread acceptance in mainstream international relations scholarship, it has inspired a growing number of scholars to incorporate environmental concerns into their research and policy analysis.

REVIEWS RELEVANCE, CRITICISMS AND CONCLUSION

Global warming and environmental concerns are relatively recent developments in the field of international relations. Despite the fact that these problems currently arise in international relations, they cannot be resolved by the conventional methods of military defence, deterrence, etc. It is clear that the conventional

paradigm of international relations cannot resolve environmental concerns; instead, fresh perspectives and strategies are required

In order to defend the world from human destruction, green international theory recognizes the need for significant changes to the global political system and takes a stand against the status quo. There are two reasons why it is our duty as humans to save the environment. First, it should be noted that humans are accountable for the environmental degradation.

. Also, it is impossible to change the whole system in a short period (Steans, Pettiford, Diez, & El-Anis, 2010: 228, 229). Finally, it should be remembered again that Green Theory has similarities with many of the International Relation's theories. But the main difference of the Green Theory comes from its distinctive perspective and the focus on the relations between human and non-human worlds. Decentralization, ecocentrism, attention on limits to growth are all unique for Green Politics (Paterson, 2005: 257). The following years will show us how much Green Politics is right about its assumptions, but it seems that the alternative approaches to International Relations will occupy the field increasingly every year. Opponents of the Green Theory further claim that several of its arguments are out of date. Certain fundamental claims made by green theory, such as the growth limits, rely on data from the very beginning of the environmental issues. Claims made by the Greens ought to be backed up by current data and scientific understanding in order to be considered more scientific. Similar to numerous other criticisms, Steans et al. also emphasized the radical nature of green theory and contended that the Greens' aspirations and presumptions regarding global politics are unrealistic.

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