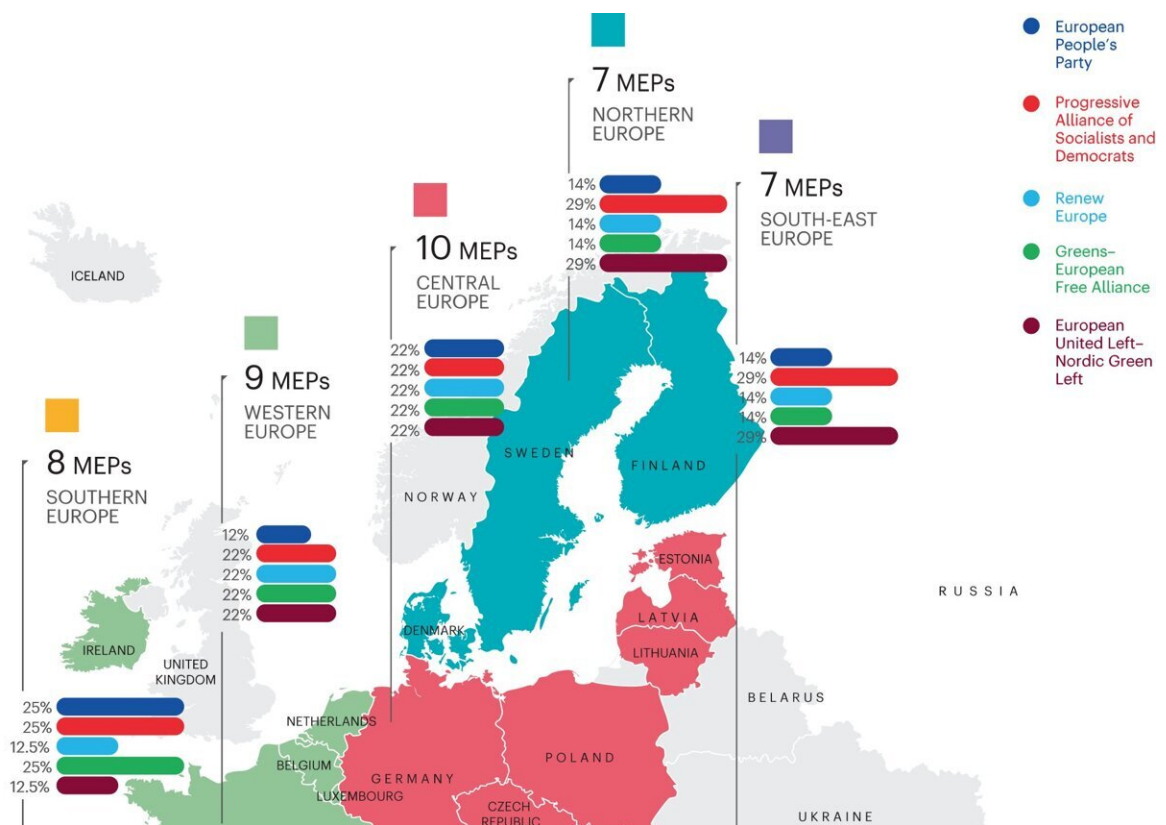


# Green growth loses weight as a consensus position in the European Parliament, finds study

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Number and percentage of MEPs from different European regions surveyed. To ensure a diversity of views within our sample, we interviewed two representatives from each of the five political groups represented in the European Parliament in each of the five geographic regions of the European Union. Credit: *Nature Sustainability* (2023). DOI: 10.1038/s41893-023-01246-x

Politicians in the European Parliament are supportive of post-growth and ecosocialist positions to tackle the climate crisis, and not only green growth.

This is the main conclusion of a study carried out by researchers at the Institute of Environmental Science and Technology of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (ICTA-UAB) and the Department of Political and Social Sciences at Pompeu Fabra University (UPF), [published](#) this week in the journal *Nature Sustainability*, which analyzes viewpoints of political elites on degrowth and [green growth](#).

Degrowth is a sustainability strategy that is attracting increasing scientific interest and generates a lively debate. However, it is seen as too radical for politicians to accept, especially when compared to green growth, which is seen as a more consensus-oriented proposal. Degrowth wants wealthy economies to abandon GDP growth and reduce energy and material use by scaling down unnecessary production while focusing on human needs. Green growth, on the other hand, wants continuous economic growth while decreasing environmental impacts.

Much of the debate between degrowth and green growth has focused on "whether GDP growth can be decoupled from environmental impacts fast enough to avoid planetary breakdown. Yet, one of the central critiques against degrowth concerns its political feasibility, meaning that degrowth proposals are criticized for being a non-starter for political conversations," says Riccardo Mastini, co-author of the study.

Green growth, in comparison, is seen as more palatable, promising win-win pathways for economy and ecology, and an alternative way out of the extremes of limiting growth and growth at-any-cost. This makes green growth, researchers though until now, more acceptable to voters and, unlike degrowth, a consensual base for bringing ecologically minded people together with working-class and business interests.

The ICTA-UAB and UPF scientific study now probes these claims at the level of the European Parliament, after analyzing the views held by 41 MEPs from different political forces. The study shows the existence of three clearly discernible and distinct clusters of opinion: a post-growth position that questions [economic growth](#); an ecosocialist position that is critical of capitalism and supports state-driven decarbonization; and a more liberal and market-oriented green growth position that favors market solutions and holds a positive view of the European Green Deal.

The results demonstrate that green growth is a view popular mostly among MEPs on the center-right of the political spectrum. In contrast, center-left, radical left and greens MEPs tend to align themselves more with the other two discourses of post-growth or ecosocialism. Those favorable of post-growth and ecosocialism agree on many issues such as the need for public investment, environmental justice and reduction of working hours.

As expected, while there is no consensus around degrowth-oriented statements, "the surprising thing was to find that there is also no consensus on green growth positions either, supposedly so far considered to be agreeable by most politicians, but as our study shows, the view mostly prevails among right-wing MEPs," says Giorgos Kallis, ICTA-UAB researcher and author of the study.

Christos Zografos, a researcher at the UPF UPF's Johns Hopkins University—Universitat Pompeu Fabra (JHU-UPF) Public Policy Center, strikes a note of caution explaining that, despite the presence of diverse, pro-growth and post-growth opinions among members of the European Parliament, "this diversity is not manifested in actual EU politics and policies, but what we instead see is a consensus around green growth types of policies such as the European Green Deal." As for the reasons, he believes that a possible explanation could be that the green growth consensus reflects power balances within the European

Parliament "which at the time of our study favored center-right positions."

Another explanation could be related to the political attitudes of Greens and Liberals, two groups that are pivotal for helping to build coalitions around pro-environmental legislation in the European Parliament. "Other studies have found that Greens tend to sacrifice radical demands for practical policy measures, whereas the views of Liberals in our study cluster around green growth," Zografos concludes.

**More information:** Giorgos Kallis et al, Perceptions of degrowth in the European Parliament, *Nature Sustainability* (2023). [DOI: 10.1038/s41893-023-01246-x](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-023-01246-x)

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