



DAILY EXPRESS

One Canada Square, London E14 5AP
Tel: 020 8612 7000 (outside UK: +44 20 8612 7000)

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DXIST

Grown-up parties will need better answers to beat radical Greens



Green leader Zack Polanski and by-election victor Hannah Spencer at London rally

THE Greens are on the march! Following their steady ascent in the polls and unexpected victory in the Gorton and Denton by-election in February, Zack Polanski's radicals are expected to make big gains in local elections on May 7. Some studies put them on course to win once-impene-trable Labour strongholds such as Hackney and Lambeth.

The Green rise terrifies Labour – my research finds nearly four in 10 of their 2024 general election voters considering backing the insurgent party next time round – and the prospect of a Green Party with real power provokes widespread horror. You can see why.

The party's policies include decriminalising all drugs for personal use, cutting defence spending and scrapping our nuclear deterrent, banning short domestic flights, allowing more asylum seekers to settle and giving all residents the right to vote, whatever their nationality or immigration status.

Needless to say, most of these ideas are wildly unpopular, as my polling shows. But others have some appeal.

Most like the idea of higher taxes on energy giants, a new wealth tax on the rich, a limit on top salaries and a higher minimum wage – at least in theory. The real-world effect would be to raise prices and drive away talent and investment at a time when we have never needed them more.

WITH such controversial plans, what explains the Greens' growing success? I'll be looking into this for my next book, which will explore the rise of the Greens and Polanski himself, the hypnotherapist turned politician who, along with Nigel Farage, is helping to upend Britain's political establishment.

But we can already see a few of the reasons, all of which exasperate their critics. The first



Lord Ashcroft

Guest columnist

is the failure of established parties. For example, my research found many Muslim voters, once part of Labour's bedrock, feel as let down by Keir Starmer's government as anyone else. Worse, they feel taken for granted. The Greens are finding a receptive audience.

Another is that they are very selective, shall we say, about what they talk about to whom.

In Waveney Valley, home to one of their five MPs, they campaigned on the old-fashioned "green" cause of protecting the beautiful Suffolk countryside from – ironically enough – solar panels and the pylons conducting electricity from their beloved offshore windfarms.

They also opposed new housebuilding – something they don't mention while lamenting a shortage of affordable homes.

Meanwhile, radical ideas on gender are something they probably leave out when campaigning in Muslim communi-

ties, where they talk exclusively about Gaza.

Another is that, for all their terrifying ideas, much of the appeal is not based on policy but vibes – hope, humanity, kindness. This might seem more sincere were it not for their divisive sectarian campaigning, including reported tweets from Green candidates apparently defending the October 7 Hamas terrorist attacks and repeating antisemitic slurs.

If this is what they're selling, who is buying? The old caricature is an alliance of "crusty jugglers" and "middle-class hippies," as one voter put it to us in Scotland, where pro-independence Greens enjoyed a governing stint in coalition with the SNP (the two have just resumed relations after a four-year schism over trans rights). And we've seen how many Muslims are attracted by their message on the Middle East.

These have been joined by

another, bigger group: young people. In my latest survey, more than half of 18 to 24 year-olds naming a party said they leaned towards the Greens.

IT'S tempting to dismiss this as naivety or youthful idealism. But many of today's graduates face a mountain of debt, their income devoured by rent even if they can find a decent first job not made obsolete by AI. Who can blame them for wanting something different?

As their newest MP, Hannah Spencer, put it after her by-election triumph: "working hard used to get you something. It got you a house. A nice life. Holidays. It got you somewhere. But now – working hard? What does that get you?"

The Greens have their answers, and it's easy to knock them down. But to win voters back, the parties that think of themselves as the grown-ups need some better answers of their own.

● Lord Ashcroft is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. His research is at LordAshcroftPolls.com. X/Facebook @LordAshcroft

'Greens' appeal is not based on policy but vibes – hope, humanity, kindness'