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New shades of conflict? Theorising the multi-dimensional politics of eco-social policies

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Abstract

This article presents a novel framework for analysing the politics of eco-social policies, focusing on the political conflicts surrounding this third generation of social risks. We distinguish two key dimensions of conflict: an ideational approach dimension, which focuses on conflicts among political actors over the possible synergies and trade-offs between social and ecological goals and their potential integration through eco-social policies, and a design dimension with several sub-dimensions related to the formulation and implementation of eco-social policies. To illustrate the merit of this analytical framework, we apply it to the analysis of party manifestos for the 2021 German federal election. Our findings reveal a striking divergence in the first dimension: While most parties emphasise the synergy potential of eco-social policies, albeit to varying degrees, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) stands out by opposing this narrative. The second dimension largely reflects established welfare positions, with centre-left and left-wing parties advocating state involvement and social consumption (the Social Democratic Party of Germany [SPD], the Greens, and The Left) and selective/needs-oriented measures (SPD and The Left) to a greater extent than centre-right parties (Christian Democratic Union of Germany [CDU]/Christian Social Union in Bavaria [CSU] and Free Democratic Party [FDP]). Furthermore, pro-growth approaches dominate, but there are signs that positions on degrowth policies may emerge as a significant conflict line in the future. Our analysis shows that eco-social policy conflicts are multidimensional, partly reshaping the political landscape around welfare policies, and are about not only how eco-social policies should be designed but whether they can and should be pursued at all.

Keywords: eco-social policies; just transition; Germany; welfare state theories; party politics; party manifesto analysis

Introduction

In the face of rapid and accelerating climate change, the need for a socially just transformation has increasingly entered the public and political discourse in advanced welfare states. However, how eco-social risks should be addressed and in which way social and ecological policies can and should be combined is highly conflictual.

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There is an expanding literature concerning eco-social risks and policies (e.g. Gough, 2013, 2017; Koch, 2018; Koch and Fritz, 2014; Mandelli, 2022; Schoyen et al., 2022). Nevertheless, this stream of research remains substantially new and theoretically contested and requires further empirical investigation. Alongside studies that aim to conceptualise eco-social policies, a new strand concerning the “politics” of eco-social policies is emerging (e.g. Koch and Fritz, 2014; Heggebø and Hvinden, 2022; Finkeldey et al., 2024). With this term, we refer to the contentious way(s) in which political actors compete regarding eco-social policy issues.

We argue that analysing the politics of eco-social policies means identifying the dimensions of conflict through which such political contestation is structured and identifying the range of policy options open to political actors – their potential policy positions. There is an established consensus among scholars that the space of political conflict regarding the welfare state is now multi-dimensional, e.g. distinguishing between conflicts about the general size, on the one hand, and the prioritisation of specific goals of the welfare state, on the other (e.g. Beramendi et al., 2015; Garritzmann et al., 2022). In this regard, the comparative welfare state literature has developed a wide array of sophisticated theoretical tools to explain actors’ configuration on social and labour market policies (e.g. Häusermann, 2010; Beramendi et al., 2015; Garritzmann et al., 2022).

When it comes to eco-social risks, it is not automatically given that political contestation over policies addressing this new kind of social risks is structured along the dimensions of established multi-dimensional theoretical frameworks. Contrary to the traditional ‘welfare state policies,’ eco-social policies are a relatively new policy subfield. From a theoretical perspective, political conflicts over policy issues are characterised by two aspects: issues must be salient and political actors must be polarised regarding these issues (Grande, 2022).

Building on this distinction, this article investigates the ‘emerging’ politics of eco-social policies by answering the following research questions:

How are political conflicts over eco-social policies structured? And more specifically:

- a. To what extent are eco-social policies emphasised by political actors as a policy solution to the emergence of new social risks in the green transition?
- b. Once they are emphasised as viable policy solution to these new social risks, which (sub-)dimensions of conflict structure the positions of political actors regarding the design of these policies?

The article is exploratory in nature. Therefore, rather than presenting a straightforward causal framework, it investigates which dimensions of conflict should be considered to examine the politics of eco-social policies as well as the positioning of political parties along these dimensions.

In this sense, we distinguish two dimensions of conflict over eco-social policies. The first dimension of conflict concerns the ideational approach of political actors to the relationship between social and ecological goals and the extent to which

political actors emphasise eco-social policies as a political solution to eco-social risks. The second dimension of conflict concerns the design of eco-social policies, with various sub-dimensions. These theoretically grounded assumptions are tested empirically through a content analysis of party manifestos, focusing on the German 2021 national election.

The contribution of this article is twofold. First, it adds to the literature on eco-social policy by conceptualising the dimensions of conflict that are expected to structure the politics of eco-social policies. Second, on the basis of the German case study, it illustrates how the analytical framework can be applied for an empirical analysis using data from the Manifesto Project Dataset.

The article is structured as follows: First, we briefly review the literature on eco-social risks and policies. Second, we present our analytical framework and discuss the dimensions of conflict around the eco-social transformation. Third, we elaborate on expectations regarding the political parties' positions along these conflict dimensions. In the fourth section, we present and discuss the results of the empirical case study. The final part of the article is devoted to our concluding remarks.

Eco-social risks and eco-social policies: a conceptualisation

A central task of modern welfare states is to mitigate social risks (Gough, 2017). During the first phase of the development and consolidation of the welfare state, social policies addressed the Fordist or first-generation social risks such as unemployment, old age, sickness and accidents at work. The changes in social, economic and demographic structures – triggered by the transition to a post-Fordist economy – have led to the emergence of new post-industrial or second-generation social risks, such as the reconciliation of work and family life and the possession of low or obsolete skills (Taylor-Gooby, 2004; Bonoli, 2006).

Changes in social risks have led to the realignment of party positions and the creation of a new political space (Häusermann, 2010; 2012; Beramendi et al., 2015). In the post-Fordist era, political parties are expected to take a position on the old and new social risk policies. Such positions can move in a similar direction – i.e., parties can decide to expand or retrench both of these policies – but they can also diverge – e.g. parties can retrench old social risk policies but expand new ones (Häusermann, 2012; Enggist and Pinggera, 2022). Consequently, the classic left-right divide that characterised the political contestation over old social risk policies – or social consumption policies – became less straightforward when considering new social risk policies – or social investment policies.

Against this backdrop, climate change further multiplies the kind of social risks that the welfare state must address. These new eco-social or third-generation risks go beyond the work-welfare nexus, which characterises the Fordist and post-Fordist social risks (Fitzpatrick, 2011; Johansson et al., 2016). The research literature conceptualises climate change's social effects – and the resulting social risks – as direct and indirect (Gugushvili and Otto, 2023).

Directly, climate change represents a threat to physical health and human well-being. Heavy storms and floods, heat waves, water pollution, forest fires and deforestation are a source of social risk in that they threaten people's health and

living and working environments and, thus, their general well-being, employment and economic security (Gugushvili and Otto, 2023). Disadvantaged social groups are expected to be disproportionately affected by such new risks since they are less equipped to counter them compared with high-income social classes (Gough, 2017).

Indirectly, climate change demands policy measures – that is, climate protection policies – that may have adverse social impacts. First, regarding the allocation of (scarce) resources, climate policies could subtract funds from the welfare state (Schaffrin, 2014) potentially leading to cuts to social expenditure. Second, climate policies could potentially impact economic growth, which remains the first financing source of the welfare state (Büchs and Koch, 2017). Third, the transition towards clean energy implies social costs that are not equally distributed between the social groups, thus contributing to increasing social inequalities (Gough, 2013; 2017; Jakobsson et al., 2018).

As pointed out by the literature, climate-focused policies may lead to job destruction in fossil-fuel-based industries and economic fields while creating new jobs in emerging green industries (e.g. Gough, 2021). In addition, climate policies could have other regressive effects: low-income groups – who are overall less responsible for global warming – could be severely penalised, for example, by paying disproportionately more for the energy transition through higher energy bills (Gugushvili and Otto, 2023). Eco-social risks are, therefore, resulting in direct and indirect social consequences of climate change and climate change policies. Such risks include declining purchasing power, poorer health, higher labour market insecurity and the risk of eco-poverty/exclusion (Fitzpatrick, 2011).

In this sense, eco-social policies aim at countering these new eco-social risks. The concept of eco-social policies first emerged in the comparative welfare state literature (Gough, 2017). The definition of eco-social policies is still controversial in the literature, and several conceptualisations exist (e.g. Bohnenberger, 2020; Brandl and Zielinska, 2020). Understandings of eco-social policy vary from ecomodernist to transformative (Gerstenberg, 2024). Since our aim is to analyse contemporary political parties' positions on eco-social policy design, we refrain from using a narrower definition, such as those used in the sustainable welfare literature, which often take degrowth or post-growth policies as reference points (ibid.). Instead, we opt for a broad definition that includes green growth as a potential element of eco-social policy.

A widely cited definition has been provided by Mandelli (2022, p.340), who defines eco-social policies as 'public policies *explicitly* pursuing both environmental and social policy goals in an *integrated* way.' Thus, policy integration and explicitness are considered the two defining features of eco-social policies. Accordingly, eco-social policies, per definition, aim 'not to address environmental or social objectives by themselves, but rather to reconcile them by tackling their interconnections' (ibid.).

Thus, eco-social policies differ from classic social policies in two respects. First, they recalibrate the focus to policies that were previously on the fringe of the welfare state. These include, for example, energy policy, public transport policy, housing or food policy. Second, by linking the policy goals of social welfare and environmental protection, these policies have an even more significant variance, complexity and

trade-off potential, which varies when it comes to type of provision, steering and logic of distribution.

Therefore, we expect that the emergence of eco-social policies has two effects on the politics of the welfare state: (a) a new focus on synergies and trade-offs of policy objectives when addressing eco-social risks and (b) the readjustment of party positions along established (sub-)dimensions of conflict around the design of these policies.

The politics of eco-social policies

Having defined eco-social risks and policies, we turn our attention to the following question: How is political contestation structured around such a new set of public policies? Reviewing the literature on eco-social risk policies, we differentiate two general dimensions of conflict structuring the political space.¹

The first conflict concerns concerns the ideational approach of political actors to the relationship between social and ecological goals and the extent to which political actors emphasize eco-social policies as a political solution to eco-social risks. We conceptualise this as the first dimension of conflict around the politics of eco-social policies characterised by the extent to which political actors emphasise synergies or trade-offs.²

More specifically, the definition previously provided has stressed integration and explicitness as the core features of eco-social policies (Mandelli, 2022). Conceptually, it would imply a synergistic relationship between environmental and socio-economic goals and their realisation through integrated policies. However, when it comes to the politics sphere, such a synergistic approach cannot be taken for granted, and political actors can frame the eco-social nexus as a trade-off, especially regarding questions of economic growth (Mandelli et al., 2021; Mandelli, 2022). Therefore, the first dimension of conflict concerns how the eco-social nexus is interpreted by political actors, with those promoting a synergistic view clashing with those taking a trade-off position.

In the first case, ecological and socio-economic goals align and can be achieved through a consistent package of public policies – eco-social policies. In the second case, these goals are seen as mutually exclusive and thus not achievable simultaneously with the same set of policies. Political actors frame the nexus as intrinsically irreconcilable, thus indirectly contesting the usefulness and effectiveness of eco-social policies. The promotion of climate and environmental goals is highlighted as detrimental to the social (and/or economic) status quo. Clearly, we expect political actors' position to be more nuanced: A political actor can have an overall synergistic position but at the same time emphasise some trade-offs (and vice versa). In other words, the extent to which the synergy and trade-off approaches are supported is likely to vary among parties.

The second dimension of conflict is about how to design eco-social policies. Relying on the existing literature on eco-social policy designs (e.g. Mandelli 2022; Cigna et al., 2023), we conceptualise that political actors position themselves along four potential sub-dimensions of conflict: the role of government, social policy instruments, policy beneficiaries and growth strategy.

Role of government

This sub-dimension concerns the classic preference for the role of the public versus the market in the economic and social sphere (e.g. Kriesi et al., 2008). More specifically, conflict is expected to emerge regarding whether and to what extent the state must be involved in managing the social effects of the green transition (Cigna et al., 2023). Public intervention can be predominant, with the state acting as the primary actor, proposing and implementing, together with the social partners, regulatory or distributive measures to cushion the negative effects of the green transition. Conversely, the social aspect of the transition can be organised with or by the market. In this case, either government action is based on market-based measures (e.g. taxes) or, alternatively, private companies – together with the social partners – have wide discretion on how to deal with social externalities of the green transition.

Social policy instruments

This sub-dimension relates to the policy measures political actors choose to manage the new eco-social social risks (Mandelli, 2022; Cigna et al., 2023). On the one hand, they may opt for emphasising programs that directly compensate workers (social consumption [SC] policies). For example, the closure of coal mines or oil platforms can be addressed through ad hoc cash benefit packages, which include unemployment benefits, early retirement or short-term work arrangements. On the other hand, political actors can decide to focus on updating and enhancing workers' skills (social investment [SI] policies). Labour market policy measures such as reskilling or upskilling help dismissed workers quickly return to paid jobs in the new 'green' labour market. It has to be noted that some social investment policy instruments such as childcare or active aging have less straightforward 'ecological' functions and, thus, are not directly part of the eco-social policy toolbox.

Policy beneficiaries

This sub-dimension is linked to the distributive profile of proposed social policies and how they address the question of social inequality (Garritzmann et al., 2023, p.90). Here, we distinguish between universal and selective eco-social policies. Universal eco-social policies are designed to provide comprehensive and equal entitlements and services to everyone, including all or large segments of society (ibid.). Selective eco-social policies, which provide resources and services to a limited set of beneficiaries, can have two distributive profiles (ibid.): Political actors may favour stratified eco-social policies. In this case, the main beneficiaries are the upper-middle and high-income families since these measures potentially have a regressive effect on social inequality (Carrosio and De Vidovich, 2023). For example, the better-off classes are more likely to make use of tax incentives for home energy upgrading projects. On the contrary, actors may support targeted and needs-based eco-social policies, thus allocating the resources to those social classes which are likely to lose out the most in the green transition process (Gough, 2016; Carrosio and De Vidovich, 2023). Electricity or gas bonuses for those families who cannot afford the rising energy costs, e.g. low-income households, are one example. In this

Table 1. Dimensions of conflict structuring the politics of eco-social policies

Dimension of conflict	Position
I. Ideational Approach	Synergy versus trade-off
II. Design	
1. Role of government	State involvement versus market solution
2. Policy instruments	Social consumption versus social investment
3. Policy beneficiaries	Selective versus universal
4. Growth strategy	Degrowth versus (green) growth

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

case, the political actors are committed to the idea that no one should be left behind in the green transition.

Growth strategy

The final sub-dimension concerns the way in which political actors link eco-social policies to economic objectives. On the one hand, eco-social policies are embedded in a green growth/ecological modernisation perspective: The capitalist system is not questioned but rather re-oriented through an ecological perspective via investment in research and innovation and the idea of decoupling economic growth and ecological impacts (Jacobs 2013). Eco-social policies thus aim at covering the adverse effects of such re-orientation, thereby making the transition (more) just while economic growth continues to be pursued (Wang and Lo, 2021). On the other hand, political actors can undertake a post-growth or degrowth agenda, thus aiming at de-coupling economic growth from the development of social policies (e.g. Büchs and Koch 2017; Gough 2021). In this case, eco-social policies radically call into question the capitalist production system and are instrumental in establishing a new welfare state more compatible with planetary boundaries.

Table 1 summarises the two dimensions and the multidimensional space of political conflict. Building on this conceptualisation, the next section formulates some hypotheses regarding the preferences and positions of political parties along these (sub-)dimensions.

The politics of eco-social policies: expected party positions

Using the distinction between the first and second dimension of conflict, we can elaborate on political parties' positions on eco-social policies.

Social democratic parties are expected to potentially emphasise the synergy potential of eco-social policies aligning social and ecological goals (Mandelli, 2023). However, given that they are (still) representatives of old labour and industrial workers, they might selectively point out specific welfare trade-offs of the eco-social transformation (Mandelli, 2023). Regarding the policy design, they are likely to support strong government involvement in managing the green transition,

especially in fossil-based industries, and a combination of SC and SI policies, with a tendency towards the latter (e.g. Häusermann, 2010). While they are likely to prioritise universal measures – since they are more popular among the new social middle classes (Häusermann, 2012) – they maintain programs selectively targeting labour and the lower classes. Finally, social democrats – given their strong relationship with trade unions (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Taylor, 2013) – embed the expansion of eco-social policies in a (green) growth strategy, while degrowth positions will not prominently enter the agenda.

Green parties, given their history of strong environmental and left progressive policies (Carter, 2013; Mandelli 2023), are expected to stress synergies rather than trade-offs between environmental/climate issues and social security. If trade-offs are addressed in the context of eco-social policies, then primarily with regard to the achievement of ecological goals (Mandelli 2023). Regarding policy design, they are likely to largely favour a strong state over market-oriented solutions. However, they are expected to have a more social investment-oriented approach than social democratic parties and to propose a universal/inclusive strategy rather than need-based redistribution (Häusermann, 2010; 2012). Since green parties are the result of new social movements around climate protection, post-materialism and anti-capitalism (Kriesi et al., 2012), they could be more inclined to include degrowth stances in their agenda (Petridis et al., 2015); this also may be because the party's connection with the trade unions is historically less relevant, and green parties are mostly supported by the well-educated new middle class (Carter, 2013).

In recent decades, radical left parties have increasingly embraced environmentalism and (Fordist) social policies (Fagerholm, 2016; Enggist and Pinggera, 2022). They are thus expected to generally prioritise synergies between environmental and social goals and emphasise eco-social policy approaches, reject market solutions, advocate for strong public involvement and favour universal/inclusive measures combined with targeted and need-based programs. Compared with social democrats and green parties, they are more likely to promote social-consumption-based measures (Enggist and Pinggera, 2022). Their growth strategy might be ambivalent in nature. On the one hand, these parties have increasingly incorporated anti-growth stances from social movements and might thus favour degrowth positions (Petridis et al., 2015). On the other hand, several of these parties still have a strong connection with trade unions and rely on an industrial electoral base, which could feel unrepresented by anti-growth positions. Thus, the radical left could adopt a mixed position in which degrowth and (green) growth positions are both supported.

Liberal parties are also expected to emphasise the potential of creating synergies between social and environmental goals, but only under the precondition of a general orientation or compability of these policies towards economic growth, which is seen as essential for social prosperity. They are likely to favour and advocate market-based solutions, with the state having the role of an enabler, but remain sceptical towards economic regulations and state interventionism (Farstad, 2018). In terms of specific social measures, they are likely to prefer social investment instruments – especially activation policy – rather than social consumption (Enggist and Pinggera, 2022) and to target the upper middle class specifically, thus favouring selective stratified measures.

The positions of conservative and Christian-democratic parties could be more cautious when it comes to eco-social policies and the compatibility of social and ecological goals, mainly due to the economic focus and the pro-business stance of these parties (e.g. Båtstrand, 2015). However, within this party family, there can be significant differences, particularly among the Christian-democratic parties. These parties may privilege – to a varying degree – a combination of state- and market-based solutions; in particular, the Christian democratic parties would refrain from one-sided neo-liberal solutions (Kalyvas and van Kersbergen, 2010). As with the liberals, sustaining economic growth as a core aspect of welfare production remains relevant for these parties, and thus degrowth solutions are neglected. In this sense, they should foster a green growth approach. Regarding policy instruments, they should prefer social consumption policies rather than social investment. Particularly Christian democratic parties could make selective use of old social compensation recipes – such as early retirement – to tackle new eco-social risks (Häusermann, 2010; 2012). Finally, these parties are expected to promote selective measures, mixing stratified policies with need-based ones.

Radical right and far-right parties are expected to be the main antagonists of eco-social policies (Selk and Kemmerzell, 2022). Based on their sceptical position on man-made climate change and their anti-establishment orientation, they are likely to emphasise trade-offs (Schwörer and Fernández-García, 2023, p.5): Environmental goals, if addressed at all, are likely to be framed as detrimental to national economic prosperity and welfare. If eco-social risks should be emphasised in exceptional cases, then it is likely meant to protect their core clientele, i.e., through market-based and selective social consumption measures (Fischer and Giuliani, 2023).

Overall, eco-social conflicts introduce a new layer of environmental considerations, forcing political parties to reconcile social justice with ecological sustainability. We expect this to exacerbate the existing multidimensional ideological conflict structure, particularly regarding the question of the integration of social and environmental goals, which divides the political mainstream and the radical and far-right, and to partly redefine the political priorities of the parties regarding the design of welfare policies, particularly on social equity and economic growth.

Empirical illustration: the case study of 2021 German federal election

In this section, we present an empirical illustration of our explorative analytical framework by focusing on the 2021 German national election.

Germany is an illustrative case for two reasons. First, from a party politics perspective, the German party system in 2021 allows us to detect positions for all the core party families for which we have made some assumptions: the Christian democrats/conservatives (Christian Democratic Union of Germany [CDU]/Christian Social Union in Bavaria [CSU]), the social democrats (Social Democratic Party of Germany [SPD]), the liberals (Free Democratic Party [FDP]), the green party (Alliance 90/The Greens), the radical left (The Left) and the far right (Alternative for Germany [AfD]). Second, in the 2021 election, environmental and climate protection was a key topic of the electoral campaign, as demonstrated by the high voter turnout for Alliance 90/The Greens (14.8 per cent of the votes).³

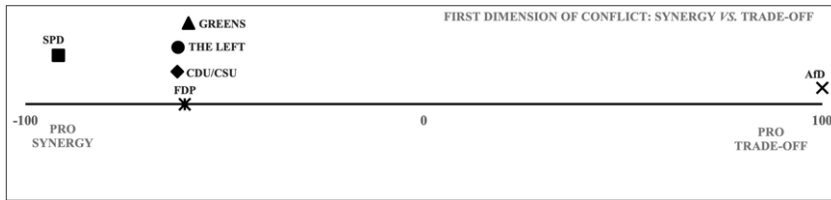


Figure 1. German political actors' configuration in regard to the first dimension of conflict (synergy versus trade-off).

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on data from the Manifesto Project Dataset.

From a methodological perspective, following the approach developed by Budge et al. (2001), we assumed that parties express their positions in their political programs and thus conducted a content analysis of their party manifestos for the 2021 German national election. The content analysis strategy is similar to that of Enggist and Pinggera (2022) and Giuliani (2024). To identify party positions on eco-social policies, we recoded the data as quasi-sentences from the Manifesto Project Dataset. The quasi-sentences were assigned to the two core dimensions of conflict that we have identified in our analytical framework.⁴

We proceeded with a two-step analysis: First, we coded all the quasi-sentences that the parties specifically devoted to integrating social and environmental policy goals and pursue eco-social policies (or not, i.e., the first dimension of conflict: synergy versus trade-off). We then coded all the quasi-sentences concerning the design of eco-social policies (second dimension of conflict). We assigned each quasi-sentence (coded) to the four potential sub-dimensions of conflict discussed in the previous section. We also analysed the salience of eco-social policies. First, we calculated the percentage of all quasi-sentences devoted to eco-social policies (regardless of the ideological direction of these quasi-sentences) in the party programs. Second, we focused on the design dimension and calculated the respective salience for each of the four sub-dimensions.

Concerning the first dimension of conflict, Figure 1 shows that all the centre-left/left parties (SPD, Greens and The Left) as well as the centre-right CDU/CSU and the liberal FDP shared a consensus towards a pro-synergy position. In other words, in their manifestos, these parties generally emphasised the idea of achieving social and ecological goals together through integrated policies. However, the extent to which a synergistic relationship between these goals was emphasised varied. The SPD showed a strong pro-synergy position in its 2021 manifesto, referring to conflicts between ecological and social goals only related to energy transition. Several trade-offs were discussed in the manifestos of the other parties. However, the reasons for emphasising trade-offs differed. Whereas CDU/CSU and FDP focused on adverse effects on economic growth, the left-leaning parties (Greens and The Left) focused on social concerns. For example, the CDU/CSU emphasised that 'decarbonization and green transition have to be economically viable' and that 'all Green Deal strategies must be linked to an impact assessment and measures to accompany the transition' (CDU/CSU, 2021). The Greens highlighted that, 'if the climate targets were to be achieved by pricing CO₂ alone, this would inevitably lead to considerable social imbalances' (Alliance 90/The Greens, 2021).

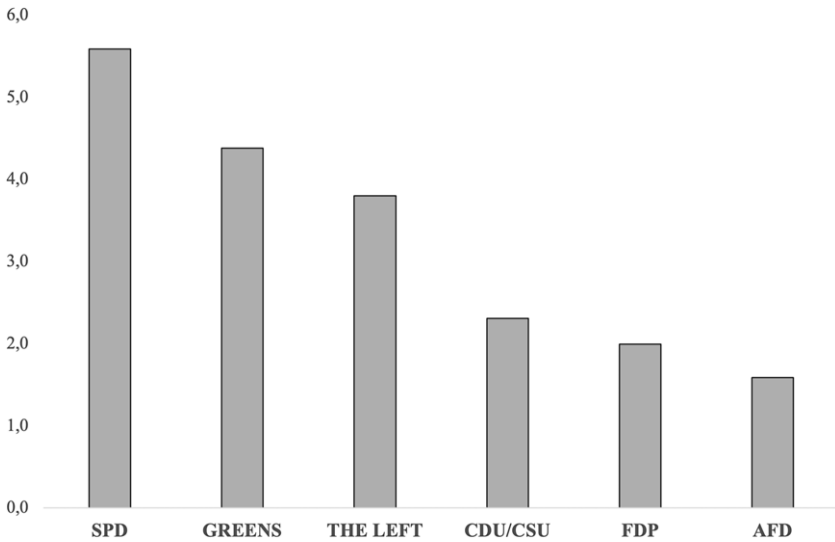


Figure 2. Overall salience of eco-social issues in German party manifestos (percentage of the quasi-sentences devoted to the issue).

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on data from the Manifesto Project Dataset.

An antagonistic attitude towards eco-social goals and policies was displayed by the AfD. The far-right party took a clear trade-off position. Here, it is interesting to note that the party justified its position through both social and economic arguments. For example, according to AfD, the green transition would '[limit] the standard of living of broad sections of the population, especially the lower income groups' (AfD, 2021). At the same time, employing an economically oriented perspective, the AfD manifesto stated that 'politically initiated upheavals such as the "climate rescue" require enormous investments and restructuring and hit some sectors hard. This is weakening the core of the German economy' (AfD, 2021).

The empirical analysis thus highlights that all German political parties acknowledged the importance of eco-social policies, except the far-right AfD – as we hypothesised in the previous section. Furthermore, the examination of the German manifestos confirmed our expectations that party positions along the first line of conflict can be nuanced: Most of the parties did take a pro-synergy position overall, but they also emphasised some trade-offs on the basis of their party profile.

As shown in Figure 2, eco-social risks and policies entered party manifestos to a moderate extent – if compared with the other policy issues such as welfare and environment. It is interesting to note that there was a discernible difference between centre-left/left and centre-right/right parties, with the former devoting a higher share of sentences to eco-social policies (on average, 4.6 per cent) compared with the latter (2.0 per cent on average).

More specifically, on the centre-left and left poles, the SPD was the party that discussed this issue to the greatest extent, devoting 5.6 per cent of its 2021 manifesto to what was coded as eco-social policies, followed by the Greens (4.4 per cent) and The Left (3.8 per cent). On the centre-right and right poles, the CDU/CSU and the

Table 2. Dimension salience (percentage of coded quasi-sentences) in the 2021 German national election

	Second dimension of conflict: eco-social policy design				Total
	Sub-dimension I	Sub-dimension II	Sub-dimension III	Sub-dimension IV	
	<i>Role of government</i>	<i>Policy instruments</i>	<i>Policy beneficiaries</i>	<i>Growth strategy</i>	
SPD	46.5	22.5	14.1	16.9	100
Greens	12.4	34.1	17.8	35.7	100
The Left	20.6	33.8	29.4	16.2	100
CDU/CSU	37.5	20.0	10.0	32.5	100
FDP	57.1	10.7	3.6	28.6	100
AfD	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

FDP showed a substantially lower interest in this issue (respectively, 2.3 per cent and 2.0 per cent of their manifestos were devoted to eco-social risks and policies) and, as expected, eco-social policies were almost absent from the far-right AfD manifesto (1.6 per cent). Therefore, the data suggest that most of the German parties did acknowledge the relevance of eco-social policies. Although these third-generation welfare policies were of low to medium salience in the 2021 election manifestos, they are increasingly relevant for German welfare politics (see online Appendix).

Table 2 shows the salience of the second dimension of conflict (eco-social policy design) in the 2021 German election for the main political parties.

When it comes to the centre-right/right bloc, the results for sub-dimension I 'the role of government' are the most salient ones. It is interesting to note that this was the only dimension that entered the AfD's party program. For the CDU/CSU and the FDP, sub-dimension IV 'growth strategy' was also relevant (respectively, 32.5 per cent and 28.6 per cent of the total sentences were devoted to eco-social policy in their manifestos). On the contrary, sub-dimension III 'policy beneficiaries' received scarce attention (3 per cent for the FDP and 10 per cent for the CDU/CSU). The latter was completely neglected by the AfD (0 per cent).

Shifting the attention to the centre-left/left parties, the picture is more heterogenous. Sub-dimension I was the SPD's most salient dimension (45 per cent), followed by sub-dimension II 'policy instruments' (22.5 per cent). The latter was highly debated in the party manifestos of the Greens and The Left (respectively, 34.1 per cent and 33.8 per cent). For the Greens, sub-dimension IV 'growth strategy' was equally relevant (35.7 per cent), while The Left paid particular attention to sub-dimension III 'policy beneficiaries' (29.4 per cent).

The data suggests that the classic left-right distinction regarding the role of the state and the market remained a salient sub-dimension of conflict, especially for the mainstream right (CDU/CSU and FDP) and the mainstream left (SPD), thus confirming that the conflict over eco-social policies mobilises traditional cleavages – albeit partially re-adapted, for example, concerning the salience of the growth sub-dimension. Furthermore, all four sub-dimensions were debated by most political

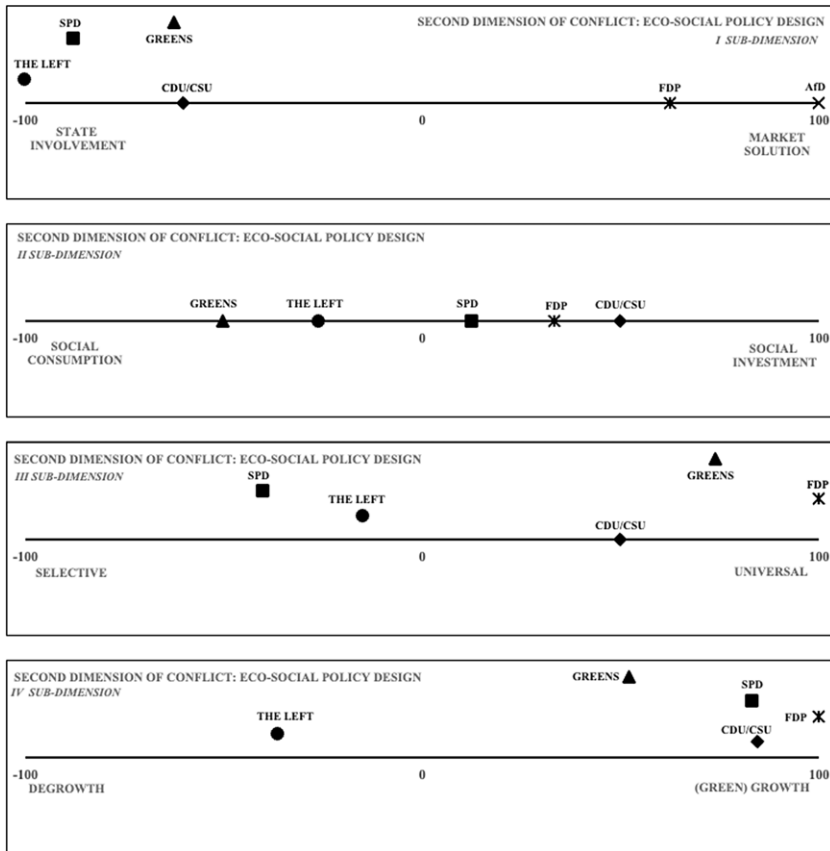


Figure 3. German parties' configuration in regard to the second dimension of conflict (design dimension). Source: Authors' own elaboration based on data from the Manifesto Project Dataset.

parties – except for the AfD – demonstrating that the conflict on eco-social policies can be considered multidimensional.

Figure 3 shows the political parties' positions along the four sub-dimensions of the second line of conflict.

Considering sub-dimension I, a rather classic left–right positioning can be observed. The centre-left/left parties supported strong state involvement: The green transition should be advanced through public investment that helps cushion the new eco-social risks. As theoretically assumed, The Left was very vocal about increasing public involvement. The SPD's position was also strongly state-centred, though the party emphasised some market solutions, for example, by 'steering private capital flows into the establishment and expansion of sustainable economic structures' (SPD, 2021), while the Greens emphasised the role of climate taxation as an important eco-social instrument. Looking at the centre-right parties, the CDU/CSU interestingly also adopted a more state-oriented position, contextualising its traditional social market ideology. In its manifesto, the CDU/CSU also emphasised that, 'on the path to climate neutrality, we [CDU/CSU] rely on efficient

market-based instruments as leading instruments within a mix of instruments,' (CDU/CSU, 2021). However, the state has to be prominently present and to accompany the transition, especially in the social sector – for example, by providing social housing. The FDP, on the other hand, in line with its liberal economic ideology, tended to favour market-based solutions that aim to incentivise environmentally friendly behaviour on the part of companies and make the transition more economically favourable. A complete market-oriented position was held by the far-right AfD, which, for example, intended to 'reject the EU's "Green Deal" and all other forms of planned economy' (AfD, 2021).

In sub-dimension II, the conflict appeared to be much more articulated, with parties diverging from their traditional left–right positioning. The Greens showed a tendency to favour SC policy instruments. The party's vision for a fair green transition implies strong support for labour market regulations to strengthen employees' rights and collective wages, and increase trade unions' bargaining power. The party also supported social investment measures to cushion new eco-social risks, but overall, the emphasis was on regulative policies. The Left adopted a more balanced strategy, though leaning more towards SC policies. The party upheld cash transfers and labour market regulations, but it was more vocal than the Greens in supporting re- and upscaling measures to upgrade workers' obsolete skills. A position favouring SI policies was taken by the SPD, which depicts re- and upskilling as important policy recipes for tackling eco-social risks. However, social consumption measures such as stricter labour market regulation were also part of the agenda. Data for the CDU/CSU and the FDP depicted a predominance of SI policies. The CDU/CSU promoted training as a central policy instrument to counteract the new eco-social risks, and the FDP mostly supported innovation and research. While a pro-SI position was to be expected from the liberal FDP, it was more surprising for a Christian democratic party such as the CDU/CSU. However, these results seem to confirm a rising trend among the centre-right parties towards a realignment in favour of SI policies.

Also in sub-dimension III, we found an articulated structure of contestation. Overall, the Greens promoted mostly universal measures aimed at benefiting large sections of society, from the lower to the middle classes. The SPD, in contrast, was more inclined to support selective measures aimed at the poor or, more generally, at those lower social strata that risk being left behind in the green transition. The Left took an intermediate position, combining universal proposals with measures targeted at the poor. The party was also very vocal in calling for a fair redistribution of financial resources. On the centre-right pole, it is interesting to notice that the CDU/CSU shifted away from its traditional selective-stratified positions and mostly supported inclusive measures. A universalistic/inclusive stance was also taken by the FDP, which, proposed a climate dividend to the benefit of all the citizens. However, its position needs to be taken cautiously and should not be overestimated: As previously stressed, the party paid scarce attention to this specific dimension.

Considering sub-dimension IV, we observe that all parties take a pro-growth (more specifically, a green growth) position – except for The Left. Nevertheless, the intensity of such positions slightly varied among the political actors. The FDP maintained a complete pro-growth stance, while the SPD and the CDU/CSU included some minor references to degrowth in their programs. For instance, the

SPD was critical regarding measuring economic success only 'in terms of gross domestic product' and also pushed to consider 'the well-being of society and nature as a whole' (SPD, 2021). Clearly, the support for degrowth remains extremely limited and does not substantially alter these parties' endorsement of (green) growth. Degrowth entered the Greens's party manifestos in a more visible way. The party was vocal in criticising the current economic growth orientation, promising to 'change the way we do business accordingly, because there can be no infinite growth on a finite planet' (Alliance 90/The Greens, 2021). Therefore, the Greens' support for the (green) growth paradigm was weaker compared with that of the SPD and the CDU/CSU. Only The Left brought forward a degrowth agenda, in which the capitalist economy is profoundly criticised since 'it is associated with resource consumption and pollutant emissions' (The Left, 2021). It assumed that the green transition can be achieved only through its profound change and that 'climate justice also means reducing the consumption of raw materials and resources in Germany' (The Left, 2021). It also has to be noted that the party did not maintain a complete degrowth position: In its manifesto, The Left also emphasised that the green transition could 'enable us to create over 2 million new, well-paid jobs with a future over the course of ten years' (The Left, 2021). In other words, the party's degrowth position, which we have analysed only in the context of eco-social policy positions, was moderate and included considerable support for measures to enable green growth.

Several considerations can be drawn from the positioning of the German parties along the second dimension of conflict.

First, the traditional left–right differences in political positions persist, albeit with some readjustment. The differences between the right and left blocs become apparent when looking at the salience of the sub-dimensions. The centre-right is mainly concerned about who (the state or the market) has to manage the social effects of the green transition, while, overall, the (centre-)left seems to be more 'operative', focusing on the policy instruments for managing such effects. When considering party positions, FDP and AfD clearly contrasted with the centre-left/left parties, as the former are clearly embedded in the neoliberal ideology and thus favour market-oriented solutions. However, there was also a clear difference between the FDP and the AfD. The liberal FDP acknowledged the possibility of achieving environmental and social goals, but only through and with the market. The far right AfD, in contrast, emphasised only trade-offs and promotes a strategy that mixes a neo-liberal narrative⁵ with a selective pro-welfare rhetoric appealing to the lower social classes.⁶ The CDU/CSU's position is intriguing. Its long-lasting adherence to the social market paradigm appeared to be more oriented towards the state and universalistic measures. In its 2021 manifesto, the party seemed to be aware of the magnitude of the social challenges posed by the ecological transition, which cannot be resolved by a purely neoliberal approach.

Second, a more nuanced picture emerges when considering the specific policy instruments to address the new eco-social risks. The new left (Greens and The Left) backed SC policies – particularly stricter social regulation policies. The mainstream right (CDU/CSU and FDP) together with the SPD were more supportive of SI instruments. This means that, if differences in the synergy/trade-off dimension are overcome, there could be room for compromise on eco-social policies. In terms of

the policy instrument sub-dimension (SC versus SI), while tightening regulation is likely to be contested by the centre-right, re-skilling and up-skilling policies could find a broad consensus among all mainstream parties.

Third, when looking at the beneficiaries of policies, it is worth noting that no party in the 2021 German election openly promoted measures that would only benefit the upper classes. Positions range from proclaiming universalistic/inclusive (CDU/CSU, FDP and Greens) to selective/need-based measures (SPD and The Left). This suggests that, given the social implications of the green transition, a position favouring those with the greatest resources to navigate it – and who bear the most responsibility for climate change – was electorally untenable, at least in this election campaign.

Fourth, degrowth stances did enter the mainstream party's agendas in the context of eco-social policy, albeit to a limited degree. While, overall, the mainstream parties (SPD, CDU/CSU and FDP) have adopted a pro-growth position – though each to a different degree – the Greens and especially The Left included support for degrowth in their manifestos. It is interesting to note, however, that neither of these parties adopted an outright degrowth position: The current growth strategy was partly called into question, but they did not advocate a paradigmatic reversal. Even The Left has combined eco-social degrowth stances with support for (green) growth.

Conclusion

In this article, we have investigated the 'emerging' politics of eco-social policies and how they potentially restructure the landscape of welfare politics. More specifically, from a theoretical perspective, we have explored central dimensions of conflict regarding eco-social policies. Starting from a conceptualisation of eco-social risks and building on the comparative welfare state literature and existing research on eco-social policies, we have identified two dimensions of conflict.

The first dimension of conflict concerns the ideational approach of political actors towards eco-social goals and eco-social policies. Here we distinguished between positions that highlight potential synergies in addressing eco-social risks and positions focusing on trade-offs. If a political actor emphasises trade-offs over synergies, they implicitly neglect the relevance and feasibility of eco-social policies.

The second dimension of conflict concerns the design of eco-social policies. Once actors have acknowledged the desirability and feasibility of conciliating ecological and social goals through integrated policies, conflicts could emerge regarding the specific design of these policies. We drew on four potential sub-dimensions of conflict in which actors can position themselves: the role of government, policy instruments, policy beneficiaries and growth strategy.

We have applied the analytical framework to the case study of the German national election in 2021, providing empirical insights on the conflict structure and the parties' eco-social policy positions through a content analysis of party manifestos.

We found that eco-social policies are a new emerging issue with a relatively moderate salience in the German parties' programs so far. Except for the AfD, all political parties have acknowledged the potentially synergistic relationship between

environmental and social goals, although some trade-offs have also been emphasised. The radical and far-right appears to be the real antagonist of eco-social policies. For the politics of eco-social policies, this means that, at least in systems with a strong radical or far-right party, political contestation does not start around 'how' eco-social policies should be formulated and designed but rather 'whether' they should be formulated at all.

When it comes to the second dimension of conflict concerning the design of eco-social policies, all parties, except the AfD, have taken a position on the four sub-dimensions. We found that the parties tended to follow their established positioning on the 'role of the government' dimension. We detected some modified patterns on the 'policy instrument' and 'policy beneficiaries' sub-dimensions. Concerning the former, the Greens supported SC – specifically stricter labour market regulation – rather than SI, while the CDU/CSU emphasised re- and upskilling policies. Regarding the latter dimension, a preference for selective/stratified approaches was not openly promoted, while the SPD and The Left – and partially the Greens – placed a strong emphasis on 'leaving nobody behind'. Finally, although degrowth has entered the parties' agendas to some extent, the green growth approach remains dominant among the parties. The extent to which this subdimension has the potential to become more prominent in the future and thus more conflictual remains to be seen.

What do the results reveal about the politics of the welfare state in the green transition? Eco-social risks and policies do not seem to fundamentally transform the existing welfare state conflicts, but they do shift the focus to some extent and exacerbate some dimensions of conflict. As our analysis indicates, democratic parties have to emphasise the basic consensus on the general relevance of eco-social policy, shielding this consensus from party politics and disruptive disputes that only play into the hands of right-wing populists and the far right. The positioning of conservative and liberal parties is crucial here, as there is a tendency in several countries, including Germany, for these parties to follow the path of the radical and far-right to deliberately pit social and environmental goals and policies against each other. However, even if this consensus is given, agreeing on an adequate policy mix remains complex in the case of eco-social policies, as the objectives and functional logics of two policy fields with different orientations collide in various design aspects. Still, the analysis also shows that there is specific cross-party potential for position realignment and compromise along established welfare policy positions.

Future research can expand the insights of this article both theoretically and empirically. While the article does not have a causal aim, further research could target the causal drivers explaining political actors' different eco-social positions. In this regard, it would be interesting to focus on both demand-side and institutional drivers. Regarding the former, researchers could analyse how social classes' preferences concerning eco-social policies impact party agendas and to what extent different cross-class alliances within the parties' constituencies can act as an incentive or disincentive to adopting specific eco-social policy positions. Regarding the latter, attention could be devoted to how welfare and environmental policy regimes affect party competition in this specific policy realm, creating path dependencies that are difficult to reverse. Studies could also look more closely at the interplay between these two factors. Empirically, the developed framework can be

used for other national case studies to assess its merit and compare cross-country similarities and differences. Changes in the conflict structure and the positions of political actors can also be analysed from a longitudinal perspective. Furthermore, analyses might consider other primary sources beyond party manifesto data, such as parliamentary or public debates as well as other political actors such as trade unions, employers and social movements. Given the current political climate in advanced welfare states, we believe that further research on the politics of eco-social policies is important, as we expect the conflict to intensify, not only over specific eco-social policy designs but also over the general necessity and feasibility of these policies.

Supplementary material. To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000412>.

Notes

1 Several publications focusing on eco-social policies in the EU or at the international level differentiate between various dimensions. While Mandelli et al. (2021) structure their analysis on the eco-social quality of the European Semester via the three dimensions: strategic frameworks, narratives, outputs and (governance) procedures, Cigna et al. (2023) distinguish a goal, an instrument and a governance dimension in their comparative analysis of just transition approaches by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), International Labour Organization (ILO) and the EU. We integrate the instrument and governance dimensions into a single design dimension because the governance dimension used in both cited works (i.e., the question of which political structures and competences exist and can be used by political actors beyond the nation-state) does not need to be analytically separate from the instrument dimension for our analysis.

2 Eco-social policies deal with the connection between the social and the environmental and climate realm; thus, they do not pursue economic objectives per se. However, as Mandelli (2022, p.341) points out, 'the economic sphere currently plays an important, almost unescapable, role in its connection to the other two spheres'. That means that social and economic goals are intrinsically interconnected and cannot be separated a priori. Indeed, adverse effects of environmental policies are always twofold: For example, destroying jobs in specific economic sectors has a simultaneous negative effect on both economic growth and workers' income/welfare. Furthermore, the intrinsic interconnection between social and economic goals has also always been stressed by the comparative welfare state literature: The social investment literature has highlighted that welfare policies potentially have the effect of boosting the economy (e.g. Garritzmman et al., 2022).

3 See the Online Appendix for more details.

4 For more details concerning the method, see the Online Appendix.

5 For example, 'the small and medium-sized enterprises responsible for the majority of jobs, particularly in the metalworking industry, are dependent on the continued existence of the combustion engine' (AfD, 2021).

6 For example, '[green transition programs] drastically restrict the standard of living of large sections of the population, especially the lower income groups' (AfD, 2021).

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