

The wider electoral advantages of the Green Party's opposition to fracking



One of the ways the Greens set themselves apart from others is by claiming to be the only mainstream political party to oppose fracking. While this opposition is sincere, the party's anti-fracking rhetoric shows that there are also pragmatic considerations at work, explains [Ashley Dodsworth](#).

The Green Party is sincere in its opposition to fracking. But that opposition, and their subsequent rhetoric, has been carefully framed to help achieve the party's electoral goals. This examination of the party's statements on fracking reveals how, through the rhetorical tropes of antithesis, logos, and ethos, the Greens use these arguments to distinguish themselves in a crowded political landscape, emphasise their unique character, and appeal to both their base and new voters through linking environmental concerns with concerns surrounding social justice.

The first clear theme that can be identified with the Green's rhetoric is that of differentiation through antithesis, with the Greens using their opposition to fracking as a point of contrast with other political parties. They state that ['the Green Party is the only mainstream political party fighting to stop fracking'](#) and that they are ['the only party calling for an outright ban on fracking for shale gas'](#). This enables the Greens to advertise their distinctiveness, which is particularly important as Labour's move to the left under Jeremy Corbyn has negated many of their previous selling points.

Their explanation of why they oppose fracking is also framed around the rhetorical technique of 'logos', of logic and reasoning. This enables the Greens to demonstrate that they are scientifically and economically responsible and so combat stereotypes of the party. Yasminah Beebeejaun notes that ['opponents of fracking are often derided as scaremongers standing in the way of progress'](#) and this perception is seen in the British debate over fracking – as in Bernard Ingham's clam that those who oppose fracking ['wish us all to live in their yurts, tepees and wigwams'](#). Through their rhetoric, the Green Party aims to reverse this framing. Caroline Lucas, for example, [has described](#) the Conservative support for fracking as an 'irrational obsession' which is 'driven by ideology not evidence', and Natalie Bennett argued that the government had a ['dangerous fracking fantasy'](#). This is contrasted with the Green Party's competence and evidence-based approach. Opposing fracking therefore enables the Greens to distinguish themselves from other political parties and emphasise that this difference is due to their rationality and knowledge.

The second key theme within the Greens opposition to fracking is that of ethos. In discussing why and how they have opposed fracking, the Green Party stresses again and again both their own character and that this reflects the character of the country as a whole. Fracking provides the Greens with a unique opportunity to demonstrate their ethos as several Green councillors and their only MP have been arrested for protesting fracking. (Caroline Lucas was arrested in Balcombe in 2013 and councillor Gina Dowding was arrested at a protest in Lancashire in 2017.)

The references to these arrests highlight the principles involved, e.g. ['\[Lucas\] was standing up for her principles'](#). This is also said to be shared throughout the party and their other candidates: ['Caroline shows what voting Green delivers: passion, sensitivity and courage'](#), so the electorate should vote for Green candidates as they will share these qualities. The Greens also state that this ethos is shared by the electorate, presenting opposition to fracking and the choice of protest as a bond, for ['there is a proud tradition of non-violent action in this country'](#), and it is ['the will of the English people not to have fracking'](#). The shared ethos displayed by opposition to fracking is therefore grounds to identify with, and vote for, the Green Party.

The third and final theme within the Greens rhetoric on fracking is that of unification, specifically the joining together of environmental and social justice concerns in order to appeal to both their base and new voters. If the Greens do not speak to non-environmental issues then they risk being seen as a single issue party and limiting their appeal to the wider electorate, but doing so risks alienating their core voters. This was highlighted in the campaign for the 2015 general election when some members criticised Bennet for being ['too concerned about moving to the centre-ground to appeal to voters'](#), and Lucas responded that the party was ['damned if they do; damned if they don't'](#).

Fracking provides a way to square this circle by uniting concerns over climate change, environmental quality, economics, and good government. So the Greens refer to '[climate-destroying fracking](#)', as well as to the increased traffic in fracking areas and its failure to reduce energy bills. This approach is typified by Lucas' claim that '[not only does fracking fly in the face of climate science but mounting evidence suggests it won't lower bills](#)'. The fracking industry is also said to be focused on personal profit not the common good, '[put\[ting\] an energy company's profits over the wishes of a community](#)' and the Greens also tie the implementation of fracking to concerns for democratic government: '[the government's plan to fast track fracking is shocking but not surprising as we all know the Tories are in bed with the fracking industry](#)'. Opposing fracking means that the Greens can oppose environmental damage and climate change as well increased energy bills and perceived bad governmental practice, thereby delivering to their base whilst pitching to a wider audience.

In their review of the party's performance in the 2017 General Election, [Carter and Farstad](#) noted that 'with Corbyn ascendant and Brexit likely to dominate the political agenda for some time... the Greens will struggle to improve their electoral prospects. Their best hope may be if the environment ascends the political agenda'. In contrast to Carter and Farstad I argue that the Greens rhetoric on fracking provides a means for them to link environmental concerns with the wider political agenda, and position themselves as the party best able to address these issues. The success of this strategy will be crucial in determining the party's ability to navigate the political landscape of 2018.

Note: The above draws on the author's work [published](#) in *Voices of the UK Left*. The author holds an elected position within Bristol Green Party, however all views expressed here are the views of the author and are not representative of the Green Party.

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