



## THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY FORMULATION

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### ABSTRACT:

This research paper seeks to explore the intricate relationship between political ideologies and the formulation of environmental policies. Environmental policy, aimed at promoting sustainability, conservation, and the mitigation of environmental degradation, is deeply influenced by the ideological perspectives of governing bodies. Through an examination of conservatism, liberalism, socialism, and green ideologies, this research paper illustrates how distinct political philosophies shape policy priorities, approaches, and outcomes. Historically, environmental concerns emerged during the early 20th century, with significant advancements following World War II, influenced by movements such as neoliberalism and environmental activism.

The paper contrasts conservative free-market approaches that prioritize economic growth and deregulation, liberal policies emphasizing government intervention and international cooperation, socialist frameworks advocating for state control and equitable resource distribution, and green ideologies that prioritize environmental sustainability above other concerns. Additionally, it discusses the role of international bodies like the United Nations in mediating global environmental agreements and the tensions between developed and developing nations.

Case studies from the United States, European Union, China, and other key players demonstrate the impact of political ideologies on policy formulation and implementation. The paper also highlights challenges such as ideological polarization, conflicts between economic and environmental priorities, and the future prospects for environmental policy in the face of evolving political ideologies. Ultimately, it calls for an integrated, cross-ideological approach to address global environmental challenges effectively. This research seeks to contribute towards the understanding of how political frameworks shape environmental governance and the potential paths forward.

**Keywords:** – Political Ideologies, Environmental Policy, Sustainability, Global Environmental Governance and Ideological Polarization

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Overview of Environmental Policy Formulation:

- In order to understand the relationship among politics, power and environmental conflicts, it is essential for us to recognise the evolution of humanity. In 1859, Charles Darwin wrote that “man selects only for his own good; Nature only for that of the being

which she tends”<sup>261</sup> A similar dominant-submissive role is formed regarding utilization of our natural resources. From competition in the wild to imperial wars by colonizers, natural resources have motivated or financed the way to violent activities since time immemorial.

Thus, the increase in environmental conflicts led to formulation of certain laws, regulations and

<sup>261</sup>Charles Dickens, On the Origin of Species by Means Of Natural Selection, 17-24 (Printed by W. Clowes And Sons, Stamford Street, And Charing Cross 1859)



actions by governments or international bodies to manage the possible impact of human activities on this planet. Environmental management (EM) can be one of the strategies to reduce the negative impacts of human activities. Some of the major principles in environmental management include sustainability, prevention, precaution and participation. Therefore, EM ensures that natural resources are in such a way that it meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs<sup>262</sup>.

**1.2 Political Ideologies:** - The word “ideology” was coined during the French Revolution by Antoine Destutt de Tracy (1754-1836), for Tracy it referred to a new ‘science of ideas’, literally an idea-logy<sup>263</sup>. Therefore, political ideologies are a set of beliefs and values that guide individuals and political groups in relation to the government, economy and individual freedom. Some of the major ideologies, which influences the way we interact with the environment are as follows: -

### Conservatism

Conservatism, at its core, stresses the importance of maintaining established traditions and institutions that have stood the test of time. Conservatives argue that these structures, whether political, social or cultural act as the foundational stone for the society. Furthermore, change should occur gradually and thoughtfully, in alignment with the historical development of a nation, otherwise it would disrupt social harmony<sup>264</sup>.

In terms of environmental policy, it traditionally emphasizes on stewardship, responsible resource management, and the preservation of our natural heritage. The idea is that individuals and businesses, when empowered with proper incentives, will act responsibly towards the

environment. A historical example is the German “Ordoliberal” approach popularized in the 1950s by German economist, Hero Moeller, which promoted environmental protection through balanced regulation and free-market principles, helping Germany save his natural landscapes while fostering economic growth<sup>265</sup>.

### Liberalism

Liberalism is centred around the principles of individual liberty, equality and democracy. Historically, this ideology emerged in the medieval period through Enlightenment thinkers like John Locke and Adam Smith who argued for limited government and the protection of individual rights. Neo-liberalism (modern liberalism), however tends to advocate for a more active role of government in addressing social inequalities. Liberals are therefore of the opinion that the state should intervene in matters related to common good such as education, healthcare and environmental protection.

In the perspective of environmental policy, in order to address global issues like climate change, pollution and other environmental challenges liberals emphasize on regulation and government action. They often argue that markets left unchecked, tend to overlook the environmental costs, and thus governmental interventions are a must to protect public goods such as air and water. Thus, liberal governments international climate agreements such as the Paris Agreement and favour adoption of new renewable resources. They also tend to support environmental justice, ensuring that marginalized communities are not disproportionately affected by environmental degradation<sup>266</sup>.

### Socialism

Socialism is based on the principle of collective ownership of resources and the means of production, advocating for wealth distribution to promote social and economic equality.

<sup>262</sup>IISD (International Institute of Sustainable Development), <https://www.iisd.org/mission-and-goals/sustainable-development>, (last visited Oct. 13, 2024).

<sup>263</sup>Andrew Heywood, Political Ideologies: An Introduction, 04-06, (Red Globe 2022)

<sup>264</sup>Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/conservatism/>, (last visited Oct. 13, 2024)

<sup>265</sup>Ibid

<sup>266</sup>O.P Gauba, An Introduction to Political Theory, 29-37 (National Paperbacks, 2019)



Socialists critique capitalism as an inherently exploitative system, where private ownership and profit motives lead to inequality and environmental destruction. Karl Marx, the most prominent socialist thinker, argued that capitalism's relentless pursuit of profit leads to the depletion of natural resources and the degradation of ecosystems, requiring a radical restructuring of the economic system.

In terms of environmental policy, socialism emphasizes **state control over resources** and centralized planning to ensure that environmental management serves the public good rather than private profit. Socialist policies advocate for sustainable practices, equitable distribution of resources, and the prevention of environmental exploitation by capitalist enterprises. Examples of socialist environmental policies can be seen in countries like Cuba, where the state plays a major role in managing natural resources and promoting sustainable agriculture<sup>267</sup>.

## 2. Historical Context and Development of Environmental Policy

**2.1 Early Environmentalism:** - Early environmentalism arose when humans learnt the lessons about the sacredness of the wilderness, the importance of restraining power and developing an obligation towards mother nature. One of the earliest and perhaps most iconic examples of environmental activism in India was the Bishnoi moment in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Bishnoi community, guided by principles of ecological harmony and non-violence demonstrated their commitment to protect nature by sacrificing their lives for the protection of trees. In 1730, 363 Bishnoi villagers led by Amrita Devi sacrificed their lives to prevent the felling of Khejri trees in Rajasthan, a historic act of environmental defence that later inspired the modern Chipko movement<sup>268</sup>.

The Chipko movement, which began in the 1970s in the Himalayan region, was one of India's most significant environmental protests. Villagers, particularly women, hugged trees to prevent them from being cut down by commercial loggers, giving the movement its name, which means "to embrace." Led by activists like Sunderlal Bahuguna, the Chipko movement emphasized the need for sustainable forest management and became a powerful symbol of grassroots environmental activism. The movement influenced forest policy in India and inspired environmentalists globally.

In India, environmentalism remains tied to the rights and livelihoods of marginalized communities, advocating for equitable access to resources. These early movements influenced India's environmental policies, including the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 and the establishment of protected areas<sup>269</sup>.

The Progressive Era (1890–1920s) in the United States was characterized by a broad range of social and political reforms aimed at reducing excessive industrial capitalism. The proponents of this reform were concerned about issues like pollution, deforestation and depletion of natural resources. This was a time when destructive activities like logging, mining and land exploitation were considered to be a necessity for development purposes.

Gifford Pinchot (1865–1946), the first Chief of the U.S. Forest Service, promoted the principle of "wise use" for the very first time in 1905, which advocated for the sustainable use of natural resources, to ensure the availability for future generations<sup>270</sup>. The Great Depression in the 1930s brought about another wave of environmental reforms under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. Many New Deal programs, though primarily focused on economic recovery, had significant environmental impacts.

<sup>267</sup>O.P Gauba, An Introduction to Political Theory, 48-60 (National Paperbacks, 2019)

<sup>268</sup>Rex Weyler, A Brief History of Environmentalism, (Greenpeace International 2024), (Oct. 15, 2024, 20.40 PM), <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/11658/a-brief-history-of-environmentalism/>

<sup>269</sup>Ibid

<sup>270</sup>Gerald W. Williams, THE USDA FOREST SERVICE —THE FIRST CENTURY, 17-29, (United States Department of Agriculture 2005)





The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), for example, was a program that employed young men to work on projects aimed at conserving natural resources, such as planting trees, preventing soil erosion, and constructing park facilities. Roosevelt, in particular, is remembered for his passion for conservation, establishing the National Forest Service and setting aside over 200 million acres of land for national parks, forests, and wildlife refuges<sup>271</sup>.

**2.2 Post World War II Development:** - From the 1950s onward, political movements like neoliberalism and the rise of green movements significantly influenced environmental policies on both global and national scales, shifting the approach to resource management, conservation, and economic priorities.

Countering these policies, the green movement began to take shape in the 1960s and 1970s as environmental issues gained public attention. The publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 exposed the ecological dangers of pesticides like DDT, sparking widespread awareness of environmental hazards. As activism grew, countries began to adopt environmental regulations<sup>272</sup>.

Figures like Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the US, fundamentally reshaped global economies, often favouring corporate expansion over environmental considerations. In the 1980s, as neoliberal policies surged, carbon emissions also rose sharply due to increased industrial activity. For instance, global carbon emissions climbed by over 20% from 1980 to 1990 alone, a direct result of expanded industrial operations and reduced regulatory oversight in energy-intensive sectors<sup>273</sup>.

### 3. International Perspectives and Global Policy Formation

**3.1 Role of International Bodies:** - Internationally, the green movement spurred critical agreements and protocols aimed at global environmental protection. The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972 marked the first global environmental summit, setting the stage for later agreements. The 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer represented a landmark achievement, as nations worldwide committed to phasing out harmful chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the growing urgency around climate change saw green movements influencing policies worldwide, notably in the establishment of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. This legally binding agreement set targets for industrialized countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The European Union emerged as a leader in this regard, committing to ambitious emission cuts and, by 2010, achieving a reduction of over 20% below 1990 levels, driven largely by investments in renewable energy and stringent environmental regulations<sup>274</sup>.

Today, the tension between neoliberal economic policies and environmental conservation continues to shape global discourse. While neoliberal frameworks encourage deregulation for growth, the green movement has pushed for more responsible policies, leading to the Paris Agreement in 2015. Countries committed to limiting global temperature rise to below 2°C, aiming for a safer climate trajectory. Despite challenges in enforcement, the agreement represents an unprecedented global effort to address climate change.<sup>275</sup>

These movements have left a lasting legacy. Neoliberalism has often intensified

<sup>271</sup>Gerald W. Williams, *THE USDA FOREST SERVICE —THE FIRST CENTURY*, 66-79, (United States Department of Agriculture 2005)

<sup>272</sup>Joost de Moor, Mattias Wahlström. *Environmental Movements and Their Political Context*, HAL, 01-23 (2022)

<sup>273</sup>Ibid

<sup>274</sup>ROBERT FALKNER, *The Paris Agreement and the new logic of international climate politics*, *International Affairs*, Volume 92, Issue 5, Pages 1107–1125, (2016)

<sup>275</sup>Ibid



environmental challenges, while the green movement has continuously fought for policies prioritizing sustainability. Together, they underscore the importance of balancing economic development with the need to protect the planet's ecological integrity.

#### 4. Challenges and Conflicts

**4.1 Polarization of Environmental Policy:** – Ideological polarization greatly impacts the consistency and effectiveness of environmental policies, as contrasting political agendas influence the pace, direction, and stability of environmental regulations. In democracies especially, polarized viewpoints can lead to inconsistent policies, with changes in leadership causing frequent policy reversals that hinder progress toward long-term environmental objectives.

A prominent example occurred with climate policy under President Barack Obama's administration. Obama's Clean Power Plan aimed to reduce carbon emissions from power plants by 32% from 2005 levels by 2030, marking the first federal limit on carbon pollution from power plants. This plan aligned the U.S. with the global objectives of the 2015 Paris Agreement, in which 195 countries committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions to limit global temperature rise. However, after President Donald Trump took office, he withdrew the U.S. from the Paris Agreement in 2017, rolled back the Clean Power Plan, and eased restrictions on fossil fuel production, arguing that these policies hindered economic growth and energy independence<sup>276</sup>.

Polarization also impacts environmental policies in developing nations, where the balance between economic growth and environmental protection is often contentious. In Brazil, for example, deforestation policies vary widely based on political leadership. Under President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, deforestation in the Amazon was reduced by 70% between

2004 and 2012, largely through strong enforcement of environmental regulations. However, under President Jair Bolsonaro, deforestation surged by over 30% due to the easing of restrictions on land clearing and development, driven by a pro-business and agricultural agenda<sup>277</sup>.

**4.2 Economic vs. Environmental Priorities:** – The debate between economic growth and environmental sustainability is a complex, ongoing issue, with political perspectives often shaping priorities. While some argue that economic growth is essential for improving living standards and reducing poverty, others contend that unchecked growth harms the environment, accelerates climate change, and depletes natural resources. This tension affects policy decisions worldwide, where some prioritize rapid industrialization and economic expansion, while others emphasize sustainable development.

Historically, rapid industrial growth has been associated with environmental degradation. The post-World War II economic boom in Western countries led to higher living standards but also resulted in significant pollution. In the United States, for instance, the 1960s saw a sharp rise in air and water pollution due to unchecked industrial expansion. This led to landmark environmental policies, such as the Clean Air Act (1963) and the Clean Water Act (1972), which regulated pollutants to protect public health. These policies, however, were sometimes perceived as constraints on economic growth, especially by industries facing costly upgrades to meet environmental standards.

In developing economies, the trade-off between growth and sustainability is even more pressing. China, for instance, achieved unprecedented economic growth over the past few decades, with its GDP expanding nearly tenfold from 2000 to 2020. However, this growth came with severe environmental consequences; China became the world's largest carbon emitter, responsible

<sup>276</sup>Arndt Leininger, Felix Grünewald and Nelly Buntfuß, Ideological and Affective Polarization in Multiparty Systems, SocArXiv, 01-68 (2024)

<sup>277</sup>Ibid



for roughly 27% of global emissions in 2021. Recognizing these impacts, China has made recent efforts to transition to cleaner energy, setting a goal for carbon neutrality by 2060. Between 2015 and 2020, China's share of renewable energy increased by 8%, marking a shift towards sustainability, though balancing this with ongoing economic ambitions remains a challenge<sup>278</sup>.

In contrast, the European Union has made strides toward integrating economic growth with environmental sustainability, with member states aiming to decouple emissions from economic development. The EU Green Deal, launched in 2019, is a comprehensive policy to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, with intermediate goals such as reducing emissions by at least 55% by 2030 (from 1990 levels). Europe's economy grew by 58% from 1990 to 2018, even as emissions fell by nearly 23%, demonstrating that economic growth does not have to come at the cost of environmental degradation. Through carbon taxes, renewable energy investments, and stricter environmental standards, the EU provides a model for sustainable growth.

Meanwhile, in the U.S., the economic-versus-environment debate remains polarized. Conservative factions typically advocate for energy independence and job creation through fossil fuel development, while progressive groups emphasize the need for a "Green New Deal" that prioritizes sustainable energy. President Joe Biden's \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill in 2021 included \$550 billion for climate initiatives, such as expanding clean energy and reducing emissions. However, pushback from some states and industry groups, especially those reliant on fossil fuels, underscores the ongoing tension. Studies estimate that transitioning to a green economy could add up to 10 million jobs globally by 2030, but opponents argue this shift risks job losses in traditional energy sectors.

<sup>278</sup>David Presberger, Thomas Bernauer, Economic and political drivers of environmental impact shifting between countries, Volume 79, Elsevier Ltd., 01-15 (2023)

On a global scale, the Paris Agreement (2015) exemplifies the attempt to balance these two priorities by allowing nations to pursue growth while committing to emission reductions. Yet, even with these commitments, global carbon emissions reached a record high in 2021, underscoring the difficulty of achieving both objectives simultaneously. Ultimately, while political divisions and economic interests complicate the path forward, many countries are exploring policies to achieve a sustainable balance<sup>279</sup>. The challenge lies in restructuring economies to grow without exceeding planetary boundaries, a goal that requires consistent international cooperation and innovative policy-making.

## 5. Future Prospects

**5.1 Trends and Projections:** – Evolving political ideologies like eco-socialism and green capitalism are reshaping environmental policies, each presenting different approaches to addressing climate change and resource management. Eco-socialism combines ecological concerns with socialism, arguing that capitalism inherently fuels environmental degradation due to profit-driven exploitation. This ideology pushes for systemic changes such as state ownership of resources and community-led energy projects. For example, Germany's "Energiewende" (energy transition) partly embodies eco-socialist ideals by aiming to phase out fossil fuels through publicly supported renewable infrastructure and democratic governance structures in energy sectors.

Conversely, green capitalism believes that markets can adapt to environmental needs without sacrificing economic growth, primarily by encouraging sustainable business practices and green technologies. Proponents argue that aligning financial incentives with ecological goals is more feasible in a global economy where immediate and scalable solutions are essential. The United States' Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 exemplifies green capitalism,

<sup>279</sup>Ibid





allocating \$369 billion toward renewable energy and carbon-reduction technologies while still operating within a capitalist framework<sup>280</sup>.

Real-world data underscores the stakes: according to the IPCC, keeping global warming below 1.5°C requires a 45% reduction in global emissions by 2030 from 2010 levels. Current trends show that eco-socialist policies like large-scale decarbonization and just transitions are essential to meet these targets, as capitalist frameworks alone may struggle to balance economic expansion with deep emissions cuts.

Both approaches face challenges: eco-socialism may encounter resistance due to fears of state overreach, while green capitalism risks promoting superficial changes. However, these ideologies highlight a spectrum of strategies that could collectively shape future environmental policies, bridging economic and ecological imperatives for sustainable governance<sup>281</sup>.

**5.2 Technological and Social Movements:** - The impact of technology, activism, and public opinion on environmental policy is increasingly significant as these forces drive shifts in political priorities and frameworks. Social media, in particular, amplifies environmental activism and mobilizes public opinion, leading to tangible political responses. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram provide a space where activists can raise awareness about issues like climate change, influencing millions and prompting more people to support environmental policies. For instance, social media trends surrounding climate change issues, such as those during the global climate strikes inspired by Greta Thunberg, have catalysed increased public support for policy changes aimed at carbon reduction and environmental protection. Research suggests that social media content has a measurable impact on public perceptions, which can ultimately shape political agendas and policies

on issues that gain significant traction among constituents and the public at large<sup>282</sup>.

Moreover, digital technology has made public opinion more accessible to policymakers, allowing them to track sentiment and act on pressing issues. Polling technology, for example, provides real-time insights that political representatives can use to gauge public interest in environmental initiatives. Studies show that elected officials are often influenced by public opinion on high-salience issues, which prompts action in response to public demands for sustainable policies. This form of “policy responsiveness” is particularly evident in democratic settings, where political agendas shift to align with the majority sentiment expressed in polls and social movements.

Activism, especially youth-led movements like Fridays for Future, also demonstrates the potential of organized action in promoting eco-friendly policies. These movements leverage technology to mobilize millions and demonstrate the electoral importance of environmental issues, influencing politicians to adopt green platforms. For example, recent studies indicate that climate-conscious voting is on the rise, with data showing a higher likelihood of political engagement among citizens exposed to climate activism on social media.<sup>283</sup>

This surge in participation underscores the combined power of technology and social movements in steering political ideologies towards policies that address climate change.

As this dynamic continues to evolve, the interplay between technology, activism, and public opinion is likely to become a cornerstone of environmental policymaking. With greater awareness and mobilization, these forces will

<sup>280</sup>J.N. Fox, Green capitalism, climate change and the technological fix: A more-than-human assessment, 71(5), *The Sociological Review*, 1115-1134 (2023)

<sup>281</sup>Ibid

<sup>282</sup>Aleksandrina V. Mavrodieva, Okky K. Rachman, Vito B. Harahap and Rajib Shaw, Role of Social Media as a Soft Power Tool in Raising Public Awareness and Engagement in Addressing Climate Change, *MDPI*, 01-15 (2023)

<sup>283</sup>John Wihbey, How does social media use influence political participation and civic engagement? A meta-analysis, *The Journalist's Resource*, (Oct. 16, 2024, 09:00 AM), <https://journalistsresource.org/politics-and-government/social-media-influence-politics-participation-engagement-meta-analysis/>



shape not only national policies but also international cooperation on environmental issues, accelerating a global shift towards sustainable governance.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the relationship between political ideologies and environmental policies is complex and multifaceted. The paper has illustrated how distinct political philosophies shape policy priorities, approaches, and outcomes, influencing the way we interact with the environment. The historical context of environmentalism, from the early movements to the current global agreements, highlights the evolution of environmental policies and the role of international bodies in mediating global environmental agreements. The challenges and conflicts arising from ideological polarization, economic versus environmental priorities, and the future prospects for environmental policy in the face of evolving political ideologies underscore the need for an integrated, cross-ideological approach to address global environmental challenges effectively.

As Rabindranath Tagore once said, *"The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures<sup>284</sup>. It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers."* This quote resonates with the idea that environmental sustainability is not just a local or national issue, but a global concern that requires collective action and cooperation. The intricate web of life that connects us all demands a harmonious balance between human activities and the natural world. As we move forward, it is essential to recognize the interconnectedness of our world and work towards a future where economic growth, social justice, and environmental sustainability are mutually reinforcing.

Ultimately, the paper calls for a shift towards sustainable governance, where environmental policies are guided by a deep understanding of the intricate relationships between human societies, economies, and the natural world. By embracing this vision, we can create a future where the rhythmic measures of life are not disrupted by human activities, but rather, are in harmony with the natural world.

<sup>284</sup>Rabindranath Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore- Poems, Poem Hunter.com- The World's Poetry Archive (2004)