

Q&A on Engaging Voters

How will the Green Party gain support of the general public under your leadership and is it important that your own personal profiles are raised to potentially become the next Green MPs?

I have been explicit around the need for us to reach beyond our comfort zone to appeal to ever-greater swathes of new voters. We must raise our game and ambition, in particular, to reach out to:

- a. women voters, who have felt increasingly dispossessed and disempowered by political parties (we have had many resignations in our own party);
- b. ethnic minority voters, who are often disproportionately affected by structural social inequality (which we have many good policies to overcome); and
- c. Labour-leaning voters, especially those left disgruntled by the leadership of Starmer and crying out for strong eco-socialist policies instead.

My focus is not on raising my own personal profile (other than as a proportionate means to the wider goal) but on raising the Green profile as an end in itself and candidate profiles of others. I see it as an advantage that I would not be campaigning for my own election to the Commons in a target seat as this would dilute the support I would be able to give as a Leader to others.

What is your plan for Green success on a national level?

We should be polling double-digit figures in the polls. As leader, you need to be able to rely upon a high impact primary speaker in the broadcast media to proactively promote and explain our Green political agenda. As the last Deputy Leader 2014-16, I was part of the team that produced our best ever general election result in 2015 – over one million votes and 123 deposits saved (the financial impact and morale boost of which can hardly be underestimated for local parties).

I opposed both the political blind alleys we got sucked down in 2017 (Progressive Alliances) and 2019 (Unite to Remain) – nor do I think the fact that a co-leader was a political benefactor of a pact was a good look. Those one-time marginal election poll advances are not sustainable long-term and I believe they damage our claim to be a genuine alternative to the other political parties.

If you became leader of the Green Party, how would you appeal to disaffected Labour voters who might sympathise with some of the policies of the Green Party?

I would be challenging and exposing the lightweight political responses of Starmer and building our profile as the true and main opposition to this government. We have an open door for our eco-socialist policies to find purchase, while Starmer is trying to re-brand his party as centrist.

How are you going to appeal to voters outside of our support base and persuade them that we are the only viable party for the future without scaring them off?

The climate and environmental emergency is the single biggest issue of our time and we cannot hope to engage voters by pretending otherwise. We must tell the truth and do so calmly but tenaciously. The truth is alarming but the speaking of truth does not make us alarmist, but objective, realistic and trustworthy. I have a huge amount of media and public speaking experience, reaching out to different audiences in a variety of contexts specifically on the climate emergency (e.g. Ted talk, university groups, public festivals, and a couple of books on green politics).

What do you plan to do to make the party more attractive to traditional “two party” voters?

I have said something about appealing to Labour voters already but our appeal also extends to those of a social Conservative persuasion. I have much experience of recruiting candidates, too, from across the political spectrum – e.g. Labour, LibDem, Respect, Conservative, even UKIP. Voters do and can change their outlooks and the trick is to get behind their actual reasons for voting other than Green and bring them round by winning the argument. Moreover, the traditional left-right distinction in politics is becoming increasingly inapplicable. I would say one of the main axes of political framing today is authoritarianism and liberalism. If you think of cancel culture, say, this is especially pronounced on the left and is having a hugely detrimental impact on our appeal. A key plank of my campaign has been to address this worrying trend both inside and outside the Party.

Everyone knows the Green Party is synonymous with the environment. What would your wider pitch be to prospective voters?

I don't agree with the idea that we are seen as synonymous with the environment, or at least we cannot take this for granted. To the contrary, my sense is that many concerned voters are surprised that we are not capitalising better on the heightened awareness around the climate emergency. We must be far bolder in our messaging. You can rely upon me in the TV studios to make the case more forcefully for radical change, coupled with our communicating the win-win impact of social and political transformation in terms of secure jobs, better work-life balance and establishing meaningful community relationships and projects.

What do you think are the biggest challenges the Green Party faces in terms of its public image and how do you plan to try to address them?

We have become so used to our being perceived as "white, middle class" that we seem to have forgotten that it's a pressing problem for us and lapsed into continuing to do nothing meaningful about it. This should also be a central consideration in this leadership election. I wouldn't want anyone to vote for me for something so incidental as the colour of my skin or my ethnic background – I'm first and foremost an ideas man and can be judged on my track record and effectiveness as a spokesperson and activist campaigner. However, by electing me, the Green Party could at a stroke put paid to the assumption that we were not a friendly place for ethnic minorities and the impact on the seriousness of our outreach to these communities would be truly impactful. To elect the first BME leader of a UK parliamentary party would be seismic. I felt it as Deputy leader – the power of the role model – and now is our time to elect a BME leader.

Do you have any plans to tackle the mainstream media's exclusion of the green party's progress so far?

Firstly, social media and the diversification of the media has turned on its head the conventional wisdom that we should only be chasing the mainstream media to overcome our lower representation on those channels. I am a well-known figure on the public speaking circuit and at festivals. I am well-known for taking on panellists who think differently from myself and from the Green Party. This is a strength, not a weakness. Our ability to persuade and reach out to the audiences that come to these events demonstrates our confidence in our arguments and our policies and politics. I am in favour of promoting free speech to settle and expose misrepresentation and prejudice, not retreating into the comfort of speaking only with people who agree with us or only reinforce our opinion. That kind of groupthink is incredibly unhealthy in politics. Just review how I performed on the LBC leadership debate, for example, where I addressed the ball not the person and rose to the political challenge of addressing sometimes testy questions around the right of women to single- or same-sex services.