

Titel:

An ever-closer party? The institutionalization of the European Green Party after the 2019 European election

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Kurzzusammenfassung

This article assesses long-term effects of the introduction of leading candidates on the institutionalization of the European Green Party. Our analysis combines social media and manifesto data with qualitative interviews and a media analysis. Strong election results in 2019 as well as an increasing perception as a *mainstream*-actor point to an objectively and externally institutionalized party. However, in the internal dimension the influence of the candidates in conjunction with programmatic disparities undermine the status of a routinized and influential Europarty.

Schlagworte

European Green Party (EGP), Spitzenkandidaten, Party Institutionalization, Network Analysis, European Election 2019

1. Introduction

Green Parties in Europe were clear winners in the 2019 European election. After the election 2014 the Greens/EFA group had 50 members, in 2019 this number rose to 74, making the group the fourth largest in the European Parliament (EP). In 19 out of 28 EU countries member parties of the European Green Party (EGP) increased their vote share, at times significantly.

For the second time, the EGP – just as other parties on European level (so called Europarties) – presented Europe-wide leading candidates (*Spitzenkandidaten*), who gave a face to the different platforms and competed for the presidency of the European Commission. In this article we are interested in how these changes affect the state of institutionalization, specifically with reference to the EGP in the 2019 European election. Do leading candidates push the party closer together and advance its visibility and influence?

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To answer this question, we utilize a theoretical framework for institutionalization that can be adapted to analyze the unique structure of Europarties as parties of parties (Hix & Lord 1997). Based on a multidimensional understanding of party institutionalization, we anticipate varying effects on three primary dimensions of the EGPs' institutionalization (objective, internal, external). Our empirical analysis of the European Greens in 2019 is accordingly split into three parts, focusing on, i) election results, ii) leading candidates and potential intra-party conflicts, and, iii) election campaign, media coverage and coalition capability. In addition to easily accessible results of the European elections, we draw on a mix of datasets to analyze the internal and external dimensions. We combine quantitative analyses of self-collected social media (Twitter) data and policy positions generated from the manifesto project (Volkens et al. 2018) with qualitative interviews and a media analysis.²

2. Conceptual Challenges: Party Institutionalization on the European Level

We build on party institutionalization concepts that employ a multi-dimensional perspective (Randall & Svåsand 2002; Harmel et al. 2018; Weissenbach & Bukow 2019). We understand institutionalization as a process that includes objective, internal and external aspects and goes *beyond* electoral success and parliamentary seat distribution (Lefkofridi & Weissenbach 2019). We follow Randall and Svåsand's definition of institutionalization as a “process by which the party becomes established in terms both of integrated patterns of behaviour and of attitudes, or culture” (2002, p. 12).

The first dimension of institutionalization is the *objective* dimension, which concerns the party's established survival record, entailing persistence and survivability (this has alternatively been called durability; Harmel et al. 2018, p. 42-44).

Second, the *internal* or *organizational* dimension of institutionalization concerns “internal behaviour indicative of reification of the party aside from its founding leaders and their initial goals as demonstrated in routinized organizational behaviour and non-personalization of internal party loyalty (i.e. value infusion)” (Harmel et al. 2019, p. 13). This aspect captures the extent to which internal party actors demonstrate allegiance to the party organization itself rather than to a specific individual leader or *Spitzenkandidat*. Parties that identify less with one

² This chapter is part of a larger project, which seeks to comprehensively examine the Europarties institutionalization process, where we employ multiple data sources like surveys, interviews, primary party documents and data collected from party websites and Twitter.

person and more with organizational structures, common values, policy goals and shared rules, are more institutionalized in the internal dimension.

Third, *external* institutionalization encompasses perceptions (and consequent behavior) of other actors (electorate, competitors in the party system or media) regarding the party's "*perceived* lasting power and its *perceived* relevance" (Harmel et al. 2019, p. 18). Whether or not a party is an institution depends on how other parties or the electorate view the party, and whether its existence matters for these actors' behavior.

3. Election Results (Objective Institutionalization)

The EGP was founded in 2004 as the first official political party on the European level, encompassing 34 member parties. It built on the structures of its predecessor, the European Federation of Green Parties (Dietz 2000). EGP membership at large proved stable over time, steadily growing with the expansion of the EU, and only witnessing a handful of cases of expulsions or defections (most recently in 2019 the Latvian Green Party).

The first representation in the EP was achieved in 1984 as part of the Rainbow group. Starting in 1999, there has been an ongoing cooperation with the European Free Alliance (EFA), which helped grow the number of MEPs. This means that the composition of the political party and the group differ, with the EFA consisting mainly of regionalist parties. Since 1999, despite minor up and downs, the group had remained a stable presence with around 50 seats in the EP (Huan 2016).

In the European elections 2019, Green parties gained significantly. Yet beneath these aggregated European results there has been comparatively large variation at the national level (see figure 1).

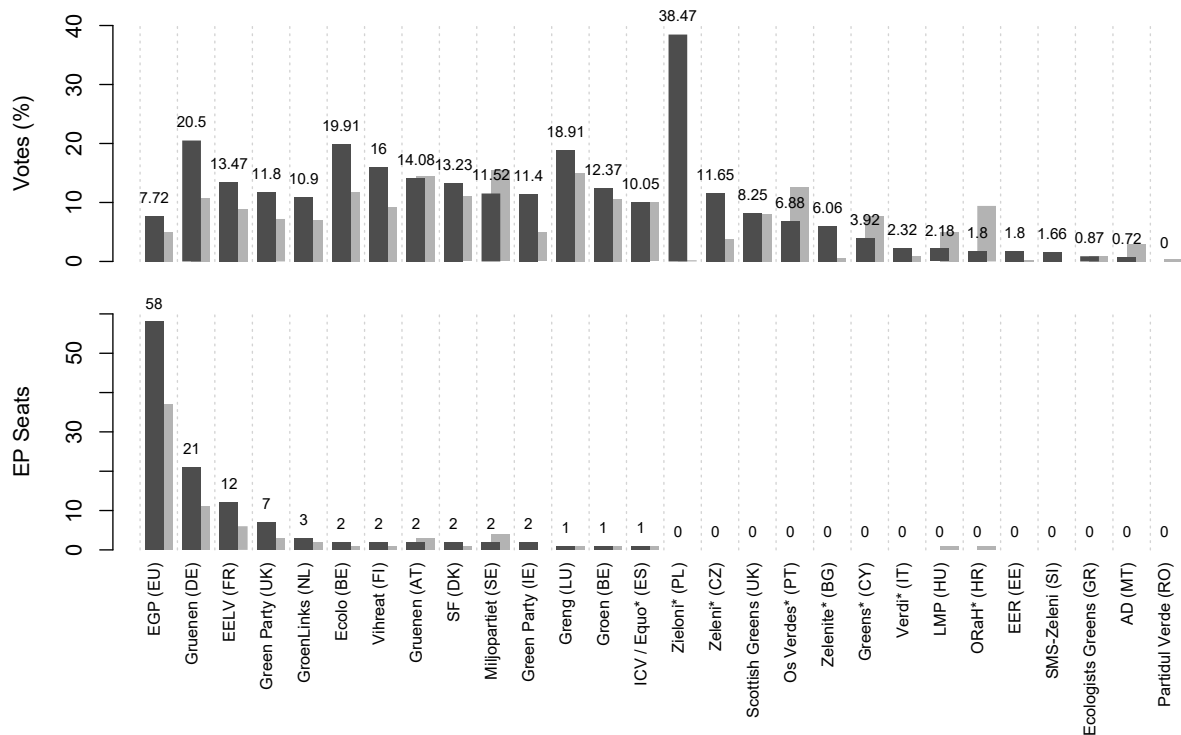


Figure 1: Election results of EGP and its member parties in the 2019 European election

Source: EGP votes and seats without EFA; * as part of a coalition, Source: <https://election-results.eu/> and <https://europeangreens.eu/2019results>. Accessed: 13. October 2019

Looking at the detailed results, we are able to identify certain subgroups in the Europarty. The oldest and most established member parties, with their post-materialistic foundations, polled very strongly in the Western and Northern European states: In Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden and the UK they scored double digits; in Germany the Greens even surpassed the 20 percent mark and for the first time overtook the Social Democrats. We see the opposite trend in Eastern and Southern Europe, where green parties often fell short of 1 percent or competed in the election as part of coalitions. For instance, they played only a marginal role in Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece.

The high variance of electoral outcomes leads to an imbalance in the parliamentary group (adding to the one created by population size). Germany and France together make up more than half of all green MEPs. Despite the overall strong showing in 2019, power is therefore unevenly distributed among EGP member parties.

In the end, the European Green Party and the Greens/EFA group in the EP are objectively strongly institutionalized; yet they are comprised of national parties, which in turn vary extensively in terms of their institutionalization.

4. Leading Candidates and Intra-party Conflicts (Internal Institutionalization)

In 2014 for the first time the Europarties presented leading candidates for the European elections, who competed for the office of European Commission president (Put et al. 2016). While in 2014 the European People's Party's leading candidate Jean-Claude Juncker indeed became Commission president, in 2019 the European Council restored its prerogative and with Ursula von der Leyen agreed on a candidate from outside the *Spitzenkandidaten* pool (see Heidbreder & Schade, Put et al. in this volume).

4.1 Spitzenkandidaten: Routinized inclusion in campaign communication?

A certain volatility is apparent in the European Greens' decision to radically alter the nomination procedure, which self-evidently does not allow for any routinization. The Greens had embraced the *Spitzenkandidaten* idea in 2014, and enthusiastically set up a Europe-wide direct online vote (Put 2016). In addressing their tradition of collective leadership they allowed for two selections, which conveniently helped them with respect to gender quotas. In 2019 however, the process became more exclusive. Candidates were instead nominated by delegates at a party congress. Ska Keller (Germany) secured the nomination for a second time, next to Bas Eickhout (Netherlands). How did the leading candidates affect interactions between national Green parties and the Europarty and therefore its internal institutionalization?

Building on the idea of Wüest et al. (2019), who utilized data from the social media platform Twitter to measure organizational cohesion of Swiss parties, we construct a mention network specifically for EGP member parties, the Europarty itself and the two leading candidates. This allows us to learn about interactions, horizontally between the member parties as well as vertically between the national and European levels, and to indicate the level of routinized inclusion of the EGP and *Spitzenkandidaten* in national election campaigns. In this sense, a mention signifies an awareness by the actor that the party is member of a larger organization, and that they are campaigning not merely in their home state but throughout the European Union.

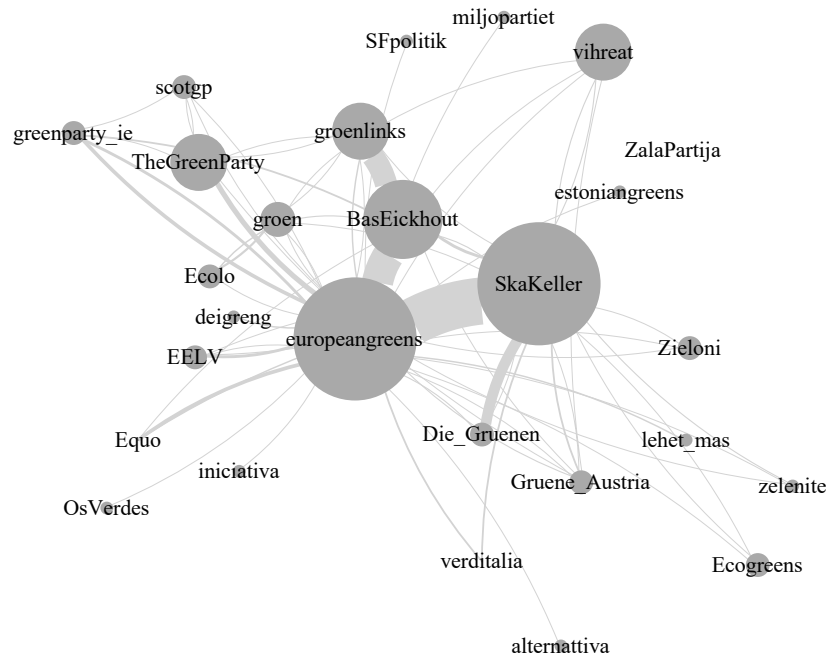


Figure 2: Network of Mentions for the European elections 2019

Source: Tweets (N = 5708) by official accounts of EGP member parties (N = 24), EGP and leading candidates from April 14 to May 26, 2019, reduced for mentions of the above listed actors (n = 538). Original data collection plotted with R and igraph (Csardi & Nepusz 2006)

Figure 2 maps the full network of mentions. The nodes represent Twitter accounts and an edge (i.e. link) a mention of one account to another. The thicker the edge, the more mentions there are. The size of the nodes represents the in-degree, i.e. how often an account is mentioned by other accounts.

An essential concept of any network is density, defined as the number of relations expressed as the proportion of the possible number of relations (Wasserman & Faust 1997). The higher the density, the more routinized is the inclusion of Europarties and *Spitzenkandidaten* in national election campaign communication. The density of our EGP mentions network is 0.103 and rather low (there are only 10 percent of all possible links). One party, the Latvian Zala Partija, is not connected to the network at all, which nicely matches their subsequent expulsion and substantiates the argument made by the EGP that the party was not engaged sufficiently with its European organization. All other parties have at least one connection (either mentioning another green party, the EGP or the leading candidates, or alternatively having been mentioned by one of them). The EGP has, overall, the most mentioned account together with *Spitzenkandidatin* Keller, closely trailed by Eickhout. This speaks to the European character of the elections and national member parties mostly referencing upwards to their European

counterpart. Not surprisingly, the candidates exhibit strong links to the party they originate from (Eickhout more than Keller), but they also attract additional, diversified mentions. Finally, we can identify certain sub-groups in the network: For instance, the two Belgian green parties are connected, and we can see other linguistic and regional communities, e.g. English, Scottish and Irish Greens.

Overall there is not a lot of horizontal communication, and the vertical communication is mostly bottom-up. While the leading candidates definitely profited from their accentuated role – as Twitter lends itself to more personalized communication – we do not observe routinized inclusion of the Europarty or other member parties in the national election campaign communications.

4.2 Intraparty challenges: Programmatic value of its own?

Based on data from the manifesto project (Volkens et al. 2018) we inspect the coherence of member parties by grouping their manifestos for national elections since the 2014 European election on different dimensions (see figure 2). Unfortunately, there are no manifestos for Eastern European green parties included in the manifesto project, which somewhat skews our quantitative analysis in direction of the more centrist, established green parties. Figure 3 plots individual positions of national green parties: The closer together, the higher the coherence on that dimension; the more spread out, the higher the potential for intra-party conflict.

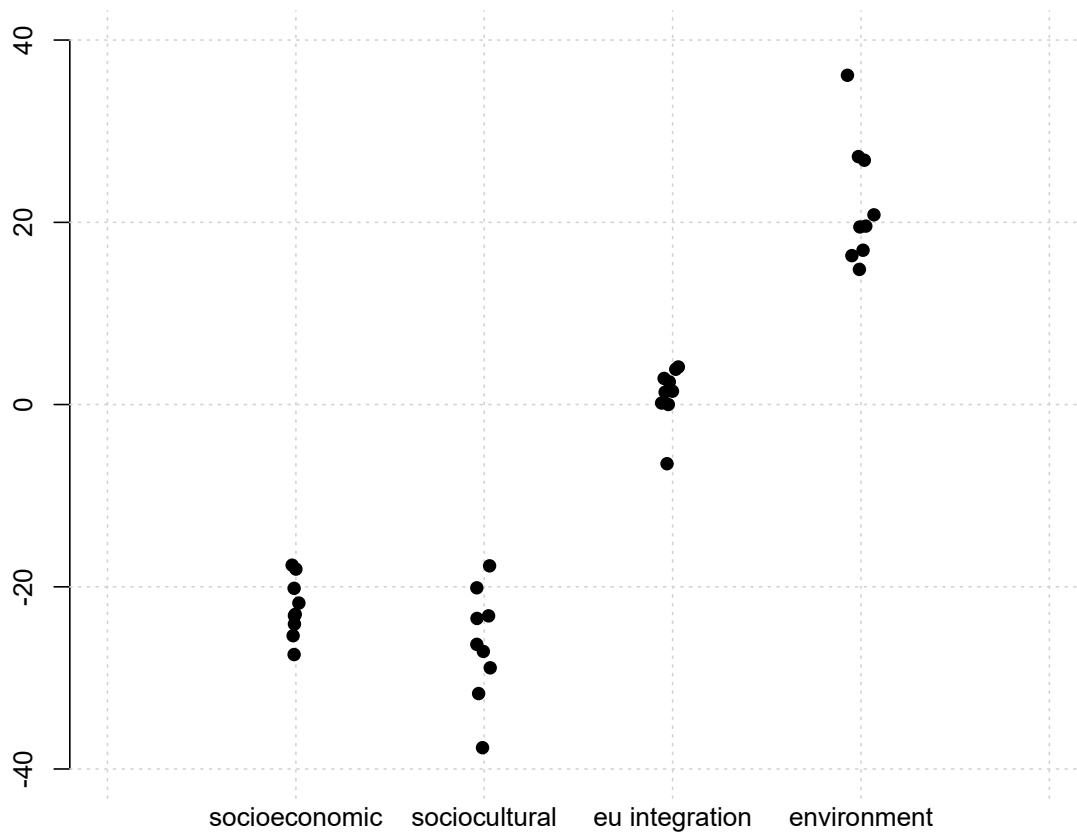


Figure 3: Positions of EGP member parties

Source: Positions for most recent election in Portugal, Sweden, Cyprus, France, Austria, Ireland, Germany, Netherlands and UK from the Manifesto Project (Volkens et al. 2018). Construction of socioeconomic, sociocultural and EU integration dimension according to <https://manifestoproject.wzb.eu/information/documents/visualizations>, environment: (per501 + per416) – (per410). Accessed: 10. December 2019

The green party family is unified around socioeconomic issues and with regards to European integration, as positions align nicely around a common core. In questions of European integration, the Portuguese Greens' 2015 election manifesto is an outlier. This was mainly driven by opposition to strict austerity measures imposed on Portugal in the wake of the Euro-crisis (De Giorgi & Santana-Pereira 2016, p. 458), a position somewhat emblematic of the Southern European green parties: "(...) in the European Green party our role should be together with Italy and Greece and somehow France, really to put the coalition of the southern Europe in the green policy, because there is a big gap between Northern and Southern countries." (Equo representative Maria Rosa Martinez Rodriguez, quoted from Weissenbach 2017). There is more variance on the sociocultural dimension, and surprisingly regarding environmental issues.

The green parties in Eastern Europe tend to be more centrist on all those dimensions (Bukow & Switek 2012). Due to the prevalence of socio-cultural conservatism and the salience of issues

related to national identity, their programs convey a more traditional approach to gender roles and sexual and ethnic minorities, in opposition to the equality and non-discrimination standards of the Western European green party family (Bomberg 1998). In terms of socio-economic policy, they are more open to a liberal economic and pro-modernization approaches.

These programmatic values have to be transformed into a common position for the European level (Switek 2015). The EGP manifesto 2019 is split into four chapters, which roughly correspond to the four dimensions of our previous analysis. It starts with ecological and environmental issues, where the EGP clearly positions itself as a vanguard for the national parties. Ambitious goals include the phasing out of coal, the reduction of carbon emissions by 55 percent and the end of new fossil-fuel car sales by 2030. The second chapter revolves around socio-economic issues, which are connected to the first dimension through the Green New Deal. This deal combines state intervention and investments with job creation, especially in the renewable energy sector. Otherwise, the EGP again takes a position clearly at the left end of the national green spectrum, calling for minimum wages, universal health care, free education and new environmental taxation. As a result of greater heterogeneity among socio-cultural issues, within this dimension the EGP emphasizes policies that are both specific to the European level and undisputed, such as net neutrality, data protection and privacy. They offer strong statements on minority rights and gender equality, even if these are less accepted in Eastern European green parties. Regarding migration, the EGP calls for a reform of the European asylum rules and advocates an improved country intake of refugees. Yet, most likely in consideration of the skeptical public in Eastern Europe, the language remains vague, e.g. broadly declaring “Europe must establish legal and safe channels for migration” (EGP 2019, p. 13). Finally, the EGP postulate their goal of the EU as a “full supranational democracy” (EGP 2019, p. 14), reflecting their own self-interest and the subgroup of established national green parties.

The EGP manifesto’s proposed policies represent the national parties’ value orientation where there is consensus, but avoid a clear stance where there is disagreement (except for questions of European integration). Combining our indicators programmatic value infusion and routinization of campaign communication, the internal institutionalization is low.

5. Electoral campaign, Media Reception and Coalition Capability (External Institutionalization)

The external institutionalization, namely the perception of the EGP as a relevant player by media and other political actors, for quite some time was low. This changed in 2014 through the introduction of leading candidates (Fotopoulos 2019, p. 6-7).

5.1 A changemaking campaign?

The *Spitzenkandidaten* Keller and Eickhout were at the core of the campaign, travelling through Europe specifically representing the EGP. The overarching goal was to “provide added European value to the campaign of the member parties” and to “show that European Greens are aligned on the same values and principle and that [they] share strong commonalities on [their] vision for the European project” (EGP 2018). The increased relevance is mirrored in the EGP budget, which for 2019 lists 1.86 million euros as election campaign costs, an increase of 300 percent compared to 2014.

These changes were especially apparent in the Tilt! Network, which started as a pre-campaigning tool in early 2018 and was intended to raise the external perception of the party. During the campaign the European Greens used the information they accumulated about their target groups in the pre-campaign – “such as most shared campaigns, issues that raised the most signatures, topics that generated most online content” (EGP 2018).

In 2019 the Europarties again organized televised debates. EGP candidate Ska Keller was included in the 2019 (and 2014) *Eurovision debate*, presenting their party as a political actor with lasting power and relevance on the European level. She not only put environmental policies on the agenda but also addressed other issues, such as social justice. The *Eurovision debate* was broadcasted in 22 countries and generated a rare moment of a European public, of which the EGP and its leading candidate were a discernable part (Dinter & Weissenbach 2015).

5.2 Perception by the media: From periphery into the mainstream

The external perception of the EGP by other parties as well as by the media was shaped by a consensus about a shift in the election 2019: “the green party has, to some extent, become more mainstream. It has moved to the center. [...] It is about a reformulation of the political landscape in which an increasing number of left-leaning voters are defecting from the Social Democrats and moving to the greens.” (Charles Kupchan, in Council on Foreign Relations 2019). The so-called *green wave* was based primarily on environmental engagement and worries over climate change, but “more broadly the Greens have managed to articulate a vision on social and economic issues – pro-immigrant, pro-Europe – that the center left has muddled a bit in recent years, especially in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis” (Kirby

2019). This conception of the Greens' mainstream appeal was echoed throughout the post-election media voices and was picked up by Green members of the EP themselves: "We had times when we wondered: Is this a fringe agenda? Now we know it's not. It's the mainstream agenda" (Sergey Lagodinsky, Green MEP, quoted from Birnbaum et al. 2019).

5.3 Coalition capability: Crucial for majorities?

Despite the variance of the EGP member parties in electoral strength and programmatic positions, voting cohesion of the Greens/EFA parliamentary group tends to be high. By most metrics, it was the highest of all groups between 2014 and 2019 (95,4%) (Ondarza 2019, p. 26). Yet, they were not part of the informal grand coalition of the center, rather they most often voted with the leftist GUE/NGL (75,8%) and S&D (75,8%) (Ondarza 2019, p. 26). It is likely, however, that this pattern will change as the group will be more in the focus to garner majorities for the legislative process, extending continuation of pro-integrationist coalition politics among the largest parties in the EP (Christiansen 2016, p. 1007).

Our evidence illustrates that the external institutionalization of the greens has clearly been amplified, with the EGP now perceived as an important and relevant actor on the European level by mass media outlets. Additionally, the EGP is seen as an increasingly crucial coalition partner by its competitors in the party system.

6. Conclusion: Future role in the EP

The nominee for president of the European Commission von der Leyen courted the greens in her candidate speech (Rettmann 2019). She promised electoral reform and stricter ecological targets; she called for 55 percent carbon cuts by 2030 and a special EU *climate bank*, pledging to make the continent carbon neutral by 2050. She also articulated her goal to assemble a gender balanced Commission. However, the EGP has resisted placation, as they understand themselves to be ardent supporters of the *Spitzenkandidaten* model. The vote in the parliament was secret, but the EGP openly declared that they voted against von der Leyen.

We suspected varying effects on three dimensions of the EGP's institutionalization after the European elections 2019, and the results of our analysis confirm these assumptions. In the objective dimension, the party has retained its ex-ante stability by improving their electoral results. Yet beneath the surface statistics volatility remains, with the party's stability a result of the continued success of the Western and Nordic green parties.

In the internal dimension, the party has ceded influence to the leading candidates while at the same time broadly changing nominating procedures (undermining a process of routinization).

We argue that the EGP (along with other Europarties) is aware of this, but that they view this trade-off as a sacrifice necessary to improve their own standing towards the other European institutions. This strategy has been deemed a viable option that enables them to improve their visibility without falling prey to the whims of powerful politicians. Regarding value infusion, the EGP aggregates national positions aptly where there is coherence, but avoids creating conflicts in more contested issues – the exception being European integration, where it positions itself as a vanguard. Combining both indicators, internal institutionalization decreased in 2019.

In contrast, the external institutionalization of the Greens made a big step in 2019. The party has been recognized as an essential actor, with references focusing on the Greens' support for their candidates and their organization of the TV debate. The high saliency of the climate issue has helped the party immensely. As a result, the media describes the Greens as a mainstream party. The Greens have been judged to be a new European force, capable of competing at eye level with social democrats and a force indispensable in policy making focused on pro-European integration throughout the next five years.

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