

## The Politics of the Environment

Ideas, Activism, Policy

Environmental problems are firmly on the political agenda. The stark threat to the planet from climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution can no longer be ignored by governments, political parties, businesses or individuals.

Responding to the considerable developments of the last decade, Neil Carter has updated his popular textbook thoroughly, while retaining the existing structure of previous editions. *The Politics of the Environment* continues to analyse the relationship between 'green ideas' and other political doctrines, the development of green parties and public policymaking, and environmental issues at international, national and local levels. It provides students with a comprehensive comparative introduction to ideas, activism and policy.

New to this edition are discussions on climate justice, climate legislation and recent environmental struggles, such as demonstrations against fracking. It employs a variety of global examples and includes pedagogical features such as boxes, a glossary and guides to further study.

NEIL CARTER teaches on environmental policy and green politics at the University of York, and has published widely on such areas as the environmental record of the European Parliament, how mainstream parties respond to environmental issues, UK climate policy and the implications of Brexit for the environment. He was a founding member of *Environmental Politics*, and was joint editor of the journal for fourteen years. His article 'Greening the Mainstream: Party Politics and the Environment' won the 2015 American Political Science Association prize for the best paper in science, technology or environmental policy.

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# The Politics of the Environment

Ideas, Activism, Policy

Third Edition

**NEIL CARTER**

University of York



**CAMBRIDGE**  
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*To Charlie, Tom and Rosa*

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## Preface to Third Edition

When I wrote the first edition of this book, published in 2001, the sub-discipline of environmental politics was still battling to establish itself. Only a handful of people were teaching modules on it; today, I think it would be quite unusual (and certainly a sign of weakness) for any political science department not to offer some kind of module in the area of environmental politics and policy. My generation was entirely self-taught in the subject; indeed, the main reason I wrote the book in the first place was to force myself to become knowledgeable about the full breadth of environmental politics, ranging from political theory to parties and movements, public policy and international relations. Not for one moment did I imagine that almost two decades later I would be writing a third edition. I decided to do so, primarily, because so many people kept asking me ‘When is the next edition out?’ Strangely, it was receiving emails out of the blue from people who I had never met asking that question that really persuaded me to do it. They made me think of the tens of thousands of students all around the world who have used my book for their studies – and I hope I have helped encourage some of them to go on to work in the field of environmental protection or advocacy, or just to bring a better awareness of environmental issues into their workplaces and communities. If writing a third edition can keep that small-scale political crusade on track then that would be worth the effort.

Of course, had I known how much work would be involved, I might not have done so, for in the ten years since the second edition so much has happened – the financial and economic crisis; the failure of climate diplomacy at Copenhagen, followed by the success at Paris; the rising influence of China and other emerging nations; the rapid growth of renewable energy; the spread of carbon trading – to name but a few.

Of course, this has also meant that academics have written a huge amount about environmental issues. In short, the book needed extensive revision.

I have kept the chapter structure the same, but I have introduced new material, themes and scholarship throughout the book. All the chapters have been thoroughly updated and refreshed, particularly in Parts 2 and 3. There are several new boxes and tables, and many more have been revised and rewritten.

Chapter 2 now includes discussion of future generations and climate justice, while Chapter 3 locates contemporary threats from climate change and the emergence of the degrowth and transition town movements into extant debates about limits to growth and the sustainable society.

In Part II, the chapter on green parties keeps the theme of new politics to examine their development and electoral performance, but focuses much more on examining what is now an established green-party family. Chapter 5 has been fundamentally rewritten, particularly to bring out a) how UK climate policy benefited from a period of competitive consensus on green issues when the parties were briefly trying to outdo each other; and b) an extensive discussion of the sharp partisan polarisation of environmental issues in the USA, which has had contrasting negative consequences for US environmental policy. Chapter 6 covers recent environment struggles, including protests against fracking and Keystone XL, a successful campaign by Friends of the Earth to secure a climate change act in Britain, and the myriad of transnational climate-change networks, as well as discussing several environmental campaigns in China and the Global South.

In Part III, the nuclear-power case study in Chapter 7 has been rewritten. Chapter 8 considerably revises the discussion of sustainable development and ecological modernisation, while introducing analysis of the green-growth/green-economy discourse and the sustainable development goals. At the heart of Chapter 9 is a completely rewritten and considerably extended account of climate diplomacy. Chapter 10 is refreshed particularly in assessing the development of EU environmental policy. Chapter 11 gives much more attention to climate-policy integration and planning, which seems to have transcended sustainable development as a means of achieving environmental policy integration. Chapter 12 is refreshed with new examples of eco-taxes, analysis of emissions-trading and the emergence of payments for ecosystem services, while the examination of energy and transport policies is completely rewritten to reflect the rapid growth of the renewable energy sector, and the potential for change in road transport if electric vehicles take off. I have revised the conclusion in the light of what has, and has not, changed in the world of environment policy and politics since the second edition.

Again, I am indebted to several friends for reading and commenting on chapters at various stages of gestation: Brian Doherty, Catriona McKinnon, J. P. Skeete, Paul Tobin and particularly Fay Farstad. A long list of colleagues around the world have helped in small ways – sending me articles or

*Preface to Third Edition*

chapters I couldn't get hold of, making suggestions about issues to cover, or just giving me their support – thank you! I would like to reiterate my gratitude to all those who helped me when writing the first two editions of this book – their positive imprint remains. My colleagues at the University of York, where I work in a wonderful Department of Politics, continue to provide a friendly, supportive and stimulating working environment. Thanks are also owed to several cohorts of students who have taken my modules and whose critical discussion has helped me in formulating my ideas. At Cambridge University Press, John Haslam, Lisa Pinto and Rosie Crawley have been patient, supportive and encouraging throughout the process.

Thanks once more to Charlie. She has, yet again, been an unfailing source of emotional and intellectual support throughout the writing of this book. She has read every chapter, again, and offered excellent, constructive advice. Lastly, thanks to Tom and Rosa for lighting up my life.



# Glossary

**Anthropocene:** the unofficial new geological era (replacing the Holocene) in which human activity is the dominant influence on the environment and climate.

**Anthropocentrism:** a way of thinking that regards humans as the source of all value and is predominantly concerned with human interests.

**Biodiversity:** the number, variety and variability of living organisms; sometimes refers to the total variety of life on Earth.

**Bioregionalism:** an approach that believes that the ‘natural’ world (specifically, the local bioregion) should determine the political, economic and social life of communities.

**Climate change:** any change in climate over time, whether due to natural variability or to human activity.

**Conservationism:** an approach to land management that emphasises the efficient conservation of natural resources so that they can later be developed for the benefit of society.

**Corporatism:** a system in which major organised interests (traditionally, capital and labour) work closely together within the formal structures of government to formulate and implement public policies.

**Cost–benefit analysis:** study that compares the costs and benefits to society of providing a public good.

**Decentralisation:** the expansion of local autonomy through the transfer of powers and responsibilities away from a national political and administrative body.

**Deep ecology:** a radical ecocentric moral theory, which has the primary aim of preserving nature from human interference.

**Ecocentrism:** a mode of thought that regards humans as subject to ecological and systems laws and whose ethical, political and social prescriptions are concerned with both humans and non-humans.

## Glossary

**Ecological footprint:** a measure of the amount of nature it takes to sustain a given population over the course of a year.

**Ecological modernisation:** a policy strategy which aims to restructure capitalist political economy along more environmentally benign lines based on the assumption that economic growth and environmental protection can be reconciled.

**Ecologism:** a distinctive green political ideology encompassing those perspectives that hold that a sustainable society requires radical changes in our relationship with the non-human natural world and our mode of economic, social and political life.

**Eco-tax:** a tax levied on pollution or on the goods whose production generates pollution.

**Environmental impact assessment:** a systematic non-technical evaluation, based on extensive consultation with affected interests, of the anticipated environmental impact of a proposed development such as a dam or road.

**Fracking** (or hydraulic fracturing): the high-pressure injection of a water mixture into a borehole that fractures subterranean rocks in order to release shale gas.

**Genetically modified organism:** new organisms created by human manipulation of genetic information and material.

**Green consumerism:** the use of environmental and ethical criteria in choosing whether or not to purchase a product or service.

**Green growth:** economic growth that uses natural resources in an environmentally sustainable manner.

**Holism:** the view that wholes are more than just the sum of their parts, and that wholes cannot be defined merely as a collection of their basic constituents.

**Intrinsic value:** the value which something has, independently of anyone finding it valuable.

**Issue Attention Cycle:** the idea that there is a cycle in which issues attract public attention and move up and down the political agenda.

**Limits to growth:** the belief that the planet imposes natural limits on economic and population growth.

**Market-based instrument:** a policy instrument that internalises into the price of a good or product the external costs to the environment of producing and using it.

**Modern environmentalism:** the emergence, from the late 1960s, of growing public concern about the state of the planet, new political ideas about the environment and a mass political movement.

**Moral extensionism:** ethical approaches that broaden the 'moral community' to include non-human entities such as animals, based on the possession of some critical property such as sentience.

**New politics:** the view that since the late 1960s the rise of postmaterial values, a new middle class and new social movements has changed the political agenda and led to a realignment of established party systems.

**New social movement:** a loose-knit organisation which seeks to influence public policy on an issue such as the environment, nuclear energy or peace, and which may use unconventional forms of political participation, including direct action, to achieve its aims.

**Ozone depletion:** depletion of ozone in the Earth's upper atmosphere which leaves the surface of the Earth vulnerable to harmful ultraviolet radiation.

**Party politicisation:** a process whereby the environment ascends the political agenda to become electorally salient and the subject of party competition.

**Pioneer states:** those countries, mostly in Northern Europe, that have taken the lead in developing progressive environmental policies and setting high standards of environmental protection.

**Policy paradigm:** a framework of ideas and standards that specifies the nature of a problem and the policy goals and instruments needed to address it.

**Political opportunity structure:** the dimensions of the political environment that either encourage people to use collective action or discourage them from doing so, and which shape the development of movements and parties.

**Postmaterialism:** the theory that, as material affluence spreads, 'quality of life' issues and concerns tend to replace material ones, fundamentally changing the political culture and values of industrialised countries.

**Precautionary principle:** the principle states that the lack of scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation.

**Preservationism:** an approach based on an attitude of reverence towards nature, especially wilderness, that advocates the protection of a resource from any form of development.

**Regime:** the principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures which form the basis of co-operation on a particular issue in international relations.

**Regulation:** any direct ('command-and-control') attempt by the government to influence the behaviour of businesses or citizens by setting environmental standards (e.g. for air quality) enforced via legislation.

**Renewable energy:** energy sources, such as wind, geothermal and hydroelectric, that never run out.

**Resource mobilisation:** an approach to collective action which focuses on the way groups mobilise their resources – members, finances, symbols – in turning grievances into political issues.

**Risk assessment:** an evaluation of the potential harm to human health and the environment from exposure to a particular hazard such as nitrates in drinking water.

### *Glossary*

**Sentience:** the capacity to suffer or to experience enjoyment or happiness.

**Social justice:** the principles that should govern the basic structure of a society, focusing on the distribution of rights, opportunities and resources among human beings.

**Survivalism:** approaches characterised by an overriding preoccupation with human survival, a sense of urgency about an impending ecological crisis and drastic, often authoritarian, solutions.

**Sustainable development:** the ability of the present generation to meet its needs without undermining the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

**Technocentrism:** a mode of thought which optimistically believes that society can solve all environmental problems, using technology and science, and achieve unlimited material growth.

**Traditional policy paradigm:** an approach to the environment that treats each problem discretely, gives priority to economic growth and results in reactive, piecemeal and tactical policies and end-of-pipe solutions.

# Abbreviations

ACF	Advocacy Coalition Framework	EPA	Environmental Protection Agency (USA)
BSE	Bovine spongiform encephalopathy	EPI	Environmental Policy Integration
CBA	Cost–benefit analysis	EU	European Union
CBDR-RC	Common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities	EV	Electric vehicle
CDU	Christian Democratic Union (Germany)	EU-15	The 15 EU member states pre-2004
CFC	Chlorofluorocarbons	FDP	Free Democratic Party (Germany)
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species	FIT	Feed-in tariff
CLRTAP	Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution	FoE	Friends of the Earth
COP	Conference of the Parties	GEF	Global Environment Facility
CPI	Climate Policy Integration	GHG	Greenhouse Gas
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	GMO	Genetically modified organism
EAP	Environmental Action Plan	HCFC	Hydrochlorofluorocarbons
EEA	European Environment Agency	HEP	Hydroelectric power
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment	HFC	Hydrofluorocarbons
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement	IMF	International Monetary Fund
EJM	Environmental Justice Movement	IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
EM	Ecological modernisation	IWC	International Whaling Commission
EMAS	Eco-Management and Audit Scheme	KXL	Keystone XL pipeline
		LA21	Local Agenda 21
		LULU	Locally unwanted land-use
		MBI	Market-based instrument
		ME	Ministry of the Environment
		MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreement

Abbreviations

MEP	Member of the European Parliament	REDD	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation
MP	Member of Parliament	RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (UK)
NAAEC	North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation	SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement	SPD	Social Democratic Party (Germany)
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution	SSCS	Sea Shepherd Conservation Society
NGO	Non-governmental organisation	UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
NIMBY	Not in my back yard	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
NSM	New social movement	UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
POPs	Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)	WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
POS	Political opportunity structure	WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
PPP	'Polluter Pays' Principle	WTO	World Trade Organisation
RE	Renewable energy		