# Critical political ecology (CPE)

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Escalating climate change and widening socio-economic inequalities have exposed the limits of decades of international environmental agreements, all while public trust in democratic institutions is eroding. These overlapping crises raise a fundamental political question: are contemporary states capable of orchestrating the deep socio-ecological transformations required for sustainability, or are they structurally constrained from doing so?

Against this background, Robin Eckersley's theory presents the concept of critical political ecology to help us understand the link between the moral and practical concerns of the environmental movement and contemporary theories about the state, democracy, and justice. Eckersley's "critical polit-

ical ecology" (CPE) theory aims to transform the liberal democratic state into a post-liberal green democratic state.

## The critical theory of the green state

Robin Eckersley later re-examined the CPE theory by conceptualising the critical theory of the green state, intending to make it more applicable for governments as they implement their green transitions.

The theory exposes how liberal democratic states are constrained in their ability to implement their transition into "green states" by growth imperatives (such as focusing on the economy by providing employment and sustaining themselves with taxation). CPE insists that such constraints necessitate a broader shift in all the functions and purposes of states and societies, which would bring about a socio-technical transition to a "green state". Rather than treating institutions as fixed, the green state framework foregrounds political agency, democratic innovation, and normative change as pathways for ecological transformation.

## Critiques to the critical theory of the green state

Neo-Marxist scholars argue that democratic capitalist states are structurally dependent on capital accumulation for revenue, employment, and legitimacy. This dependency on productivity and profit limits ecological ambition and confines state action to weak forms of "green growth." From this perspective, a fully realised green state is unattainable without a broader post-capitalist transformation.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, by reframing state imperatives as politically contested rather than fixed, and by combining broader political, social, and historical analysis with "critical problem-solving," the critical theory of the green state advances a historically grounded approach that seeks incremental yet transformative pathways within existing constraints.

In an era of climate emergencies and ecological breakdown, the debate over the green state provides a vital lens for understanding both the possibilities and limits of state-led transformation in the twenty-first century. As such, CPE recalls the role of more developed countries in contributing to the Green Climate Fund and enabling a more just environmental transition.

## Literature recommendation

Eckersley, R. (2021). Greening states and societies: From transitions to great transformations. Environmental Politics, 30(1–2), 245–265. https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2020.1842709

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