

Zack Polanski

Zack Polanski (born **David Paulden**; 2 November 1982) is a British politician who has been the Leader of the Green Party of England and Wales since September 2025, succeeding the joint leadership of Carla Denyer and Adrian Ramsay, and a member of the London Assembly (AM) since May 2021. Before being elected leader, Polanski was previously the Deputy Leader of the Greens from 2022 to 2025.

Polanski describes his political views as "eco-populist", linking issues such as high costs of living with climate change, and supporting a wealth tax in an effort to reduce wealth inequality. During his leadership, the Greens have made significant gains, including Hannah Spencer's victory in the 2026 Gorton and Denton by-election, shortly after which the party membership exceeded 200,000—a threefold increase since the start of his term.

Polanski has discussed his intention to run for MP in a seat in North London in the next general election.

Early life

Zack Polanski was born David Paulden on 2 November 1982^[1] in Salford, Greater Manchester. His Jewish family had moved to the UK from Poland, but originated from Latvia which they fled to escape pogroms (initially to Ukraine, then to Poland)^{[2][3]} in the early twentieth century and had adopted the surname of Paulden in hopes of evading antisemitism.^{[4][5]} His parents divorced when he was young.^[6] At age 18, he changed his name, restoring his familial name of Polanski, later saying it was important for him to take pride in his identity.^[4] He also changed his first name, selecting Zack in homage to the Jewish character of the same name from the novel *Goodnight Mister Tom*, and to differentiate himself from his stepfather, also named David.^[5]

Polanski grew up in Salford, and attended Stockport Grammar School on a scholarship before moving to Ridge Danyers College.^{[6][7][8]} He studied at Aberystwyth University from 2003 to 2006 and later attended a drama school in Georgia in the United States. He moved to London in the mid-2000s after graduation.^{[6][9]} Polanski worked with the theatre company DifferencENGINE as an immersive theatre actor, including appearances in *The Hollow Hotel* and *The People's Revolt* (in the Tower of London).^{[10][11]} He taught at the Academy of Live and Recorded Arts and the National Centre for Circus Arts. Polanski also sang for the London International Gospel Choir.^{[12][13][14]}

Zack Polanski

AM



Polanski in 2022

Leader of the Green Party of England and Wales

Incumbent

Assumed office

2 September 2025

Deputy

Mothin Ali

Rachel Millward

Preceded by

Adrian Ramsay

Carla Denyer

Deputy Leader of the Green Party of England and Wales

In office

7 September 2022 – 2 September 2025

Leader

Adrian Ramsay

Carla Denyer

Preceded by

Amelia Womack

Succeeded by

Rachel Millward

Mothin Ali

Member of the London Assembly for Londonwide

Incumbent

Assumed office

6 May 2021

Personal details

Polanski also worked as a hypnotherapist. In 2013, a journalist for *The Sun* requested a hypnotherapy session from him to increase her breast size and body image self-confidence for an article in the paper. Polanski featured in the published article, in which the journalist claimed that her breast size had increased. Polanski has apologised for his involvement, saying that the idea came from the client, that he did not charge for the session, that the therapy was meant to help with bodily self-image rather than physical enlargement, and that the article did not accurately reflect the situation.^{[5][15][16][17]}

Political career

Liberal Democrats

Polanski was active in the Liberal Democrats,^[5] having joined the party in 2015.^[18] He stood as a Liberal Democrat council candidate for St Pancras and Somers Town in a 2015 by-election to Camden London Borough Council, he won 96 votes and lost to Paul Edward Tomlinson of the Labour Party.^{[19][20]} He stood in the Barnet and Camden constituency and was fifth on the London-wide list for the party in the 2016 London Assembly election.^[7] In June 2016, he heckled Jeremy Corbyn at a Momentum rally, criticising him for being insufficiently supportive of the European Union.^[21]

In 2015, Polanski wrote for *Lib Dem Voice* four times. His contributions ranged from supporting the Lib Dems and Nick Clegg's record in the Coalition Government to electoral reform, diversity in the arts and his final contribution on internal selections.^[22]

In discussing his interest in the then Lib Dem leadership contest, Polanski said: "I want a leader who is proud of our Government record, who doesn't have blinkers about where we failed to communicate effectively with the electorate whilst still being immensely proud of what Nick and our colleagues achieved in office."^[23]


Polanski put his name forward in the Richmond Park by-election held in December 2016 but the selection list was restricted to local residents. On *Lib Dem Voice*, it was announced on October 2016 that Sarah Olney was to be the candidate for Richmond Park to which Polanski commented about being blocked stating that there were eight candidates but only one was shortlisted.^[24]

According to *Private Eye*, Polanski had shown political interest in both wings of the Lib Dems, from the left to the more social liberal who supported Nick Clegg. He was dismayed at the decision and requested the decision be reviewed, feeling that the party was not interested in what he could contribute as a gay Jewish renter.^[25]

Before leading the Green Party

Polanski left the Liberal Democrats^[26] and joined the Green Party in 2017 after interacting with former leader Natalie Bennett.^[5] He told *Left Foot Forward* in 2019 that he joined the Green Party as he was unhappy with the Lib Dems support for air strikes in Syria, and that he thought the Green Party had been a positive force in London.^[27]

In November 2018, he was the Green candidate for the Lancaster Gate by-election to Westminster City Council.^[28] He stood as the Green candidate in the Cities of London and Westminster parliamentary constituency at the 2019 general election and finished in fourth place of six candidates, with 1.7%.^[29] Before his election to the London Assembly, he became treasurer of the Jewish Greens.^[30] In 2018, Polanski wrote on Twitter about an alleged conversation that he overheard in a restaurant, involving the then chief secretary to the Treasury, Liz Truss. According to Polanski, Truss

Born	David Paulden 2 November 1982 <u>Salford</u> , Greater Manchester, England
Party	<u>Green Party of England and Wales</u> (since 2017)
Other political affiliations	<u>Liberal Democrats</u> (2015–2017)
Domestic partner	Richie Bryan
Education	<u>Stockport Grammar School</u> <u>Ridge Danyers College</u>
Alma mater	<u>Aberystwyth University</u> (BA)
Website	<u>zackpolanski.com</u> (https://zackpolanski.com/)  <u>backzack.com</u> (https://backzack.com)

criticised several of her colleagues, saying "this is a public conversation of a very senior figure who says one thing on TV and clearly believes differently."^[31] He took part in Extinction Rebellion protests and was arrested at a protest in April 2019.^{[16][6][32]}

On 6 May 2021, Polanski was elected a Member of the London Assembly, having been third on the Green Party's London-wide list.^[5] He also stood in the West Central constituency, where he came third,^[33] and for the Churchill by-election to Westminster City Council, where he came fourth^[34] on the same day. In the new Assembly, Polanski was elected to be the chair of the Environment committee and to be on the Committee for Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning and the Economy Committee.

In December 2021, Polanski proposed a successful motion in the London Assembly backing the Climate and Ecological Emergency bill. It was a cross-party motion with Labour and Liberal Democrat support.^{[35][36]} In 2021, he was also the Green Party's national spokesperson for democracy and citizen engagement.^[37]

On 6 June 2022, Polanski announced his candidacy in the 2022 Green Party of England and Wales deputy leadership election.^[38] The Wales Green Party gave their endorsement of his candidacy for deputy leader.^[39] On 7 September 2022, he was elected Deputy Leader, succeeding Amelia Womack.^[40]

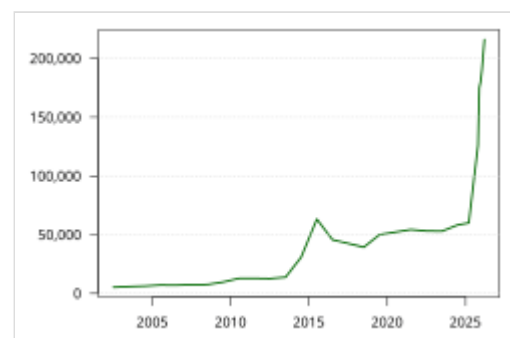
Polanski linked the cost-of-living crisis and the climate crisis, putting workers' rights at the heart of his platform. Polanski stated, "A higher wage economy is a green economy, and the Green party will always stand side by side with people who face economic, social and environmental struggles."^[41]

In May 2024, Polanski was re-elected to the London Assembly and, in June 2024, re-elected as Chair of the London Assembly Environment Committee.^[42] During the 2024 United Kingdom general election campaign, *The Guardian* praised Polanski for being a "fluent media performer".^[43] In January 2025, Polanski refused to have an all-male panel in London's Environment Committee insisting on a diversity of speakers. The Conservatives walked out of the meeting calling Polanski's actions "left-wing wokery".^[44]

In May 2025, Polanski announced his candidacy for the 2025 Green Party of England and Wales leadership election.^[15] In his announcement, he said that the Greens needed to be able to challenge Reform UK's political narrative and to take advantage of political disillusionment with the Labour Party.^[15] Later that week, Owen Jones endorsed Polanski in *The Guardian*.^[45] Senior members of the Green Party, including Caroline Lucas, endorsed Polanski's opponents.^[46] Polanski has stated that, under his leadership, the party will focus on "redistributing wealth, funding public services, and calling out the genocide in Gaza".^[26] Polanski repeatedly linked environmental, social, racial and economic justice.^[47]

Leader of the Green Party

On 2 September 2025, Polanski was elected as leader of the Green Party in a landslide, with 85% of the vote,^[48] succeeding Carla Denyer and Adrian Ramsay in that position and beating a rival bid from MPs Ramsay and Ellie Chowns. The Green Party saw its membership rise by at least 8% from May to July 2025, when Polanski launched his leadership bid, in what some have described as a "Polanski surge". *Novara Media* reported that the party had at least 65,000 members, slightly behind its 2015 peak of 67,000. The party confirmed its membership figures to be 68,500 following the announcement of leadership election results.^{[48][49]} Membership rose to over 75,000 by 19 September, following the emergence of in-fighting within the recently announced Your Party^[50] and to 100,000 by 12 October, putting it above the Liberal Democrats.^{[51][52]} On 19 October, the party announced that their membership numbers had overtaken that of the Conservative Party.^[53]



Number of registered members of the Green Party, showing the spike in membership after Polanski was elected

In his first speech as leader, Polanski said the Green Party aims to replace the Labour Party, and expressed enthusiasm for working with others who were critical both of the Labour Party and of fascism.^[48] Polanski also said he could not imagine supporting a coalition government led by Keir Starmer.^[48] He has said his top priority is the Wales Green Party

winning its first member of the Senedd in the next Senedd election.^[54] In his first days as leader, he released the first episode of his weekly podcast *Bold Politics with Zack Polanski* which reached fourth place in the UK news podcast charts by 8 September, and visited Nigel Farage's parliamentary seat in Clacton to speak to the Reform UK seat's constituents.^[55]

On 30 September, Polanski was listed in *Time Magazine's* 2025 100 Next: the world's 100 most influential rising stars.^[56] On 3 October, he addressed his first annual party conference in Bournemouth, in which he called for a wealth tax, an end to the sale of arms to Israel, and criticised other parties for attacking civil liberties and immigrants.^[57] In a subsequent interview with the *Byline Times*, he stated his intention to run for parliament in the next general election.^[58]

In December, Polanski visited Calais, where he witnessed the French police slashing tents, and seizing firewood from sheltering migrants.^[59] He then released an alternative Christmas message on 25 December at the same time as the King's broadcast, declaring the current migration system "cruel", encouraging greater empathy towards migrants, and suggesting that it be replaced with a more humane system.^[60]

On 27 January, Polanski formally launched the Green Party campaign for the 2026 Gorton and Denton by-election, his first by-election as party leader,^[61] at an event in which he framed the Green campaign to the economic left of Labour and denied that the Greens would split the progressive vote, citing the government's proposed cuts to disability benefits to suggest that Labour is no longer a "left-wing party".^[62] The war in Gaza was also mentioned at the event.^[63] The Green Party described the by-election as a "Reform–Green battle", and began canvassing in the seat on 25 January.^[64] The Green candidate, Hannah Spencer, stated that she would seek the resignation of Starmer if she won the race.^[65] The Green Party aimed to attract left-leaning voters disgruntled by Labour's handling of the Gaza war, in particular from the constituency's Muslim population.^{[66][67]} Spencer won the by-election with a majority of 4,402 votes, defeating both Reform UK and the Labour Party to become the Green Party's fifth MP and first in the North of England.^{[68][69]} This was also the first ever parliamentary by-election win for the Greens, and was described as a significant blow to the Prime Minister, Keir Starmer.^[70] A few days after the by-election, the Green Party announced having passed 200,000 members, a threefold increase from the 68,000 figure at the start of Polanski's leadership.^{[71][72]}

In February 2026, Polanski said that he wants to stand at the next general election in a constituency near his home in North London, and told *The Times* that he would consider running in Hackney (which includes Hackney North & Stoke Newington and Hackney South & Shoreditch), Walthamstow, and Tottenham,^[73] later stating he would not stand against Hackney North MP, Diane Abbott.^[74]

Political views

Polanski has labelled his political views as eco-populist, combining environmental, socialist politics and populism.^[75] Additionally, *Politico Europe* and the *New Statesman* have described his approach to leading the Green Party as representing a populist left form of politics.^{[76][77]} Polanski argues that people are unable to consider the climate crisis if they are struggling with day-to-day material concerns such as high rent burden, and high costs of food or heating.^{[6][78]} In addition to green politics, Polanski has advocated for increasing taxes on billionaires, renationalising water companies, challenging lack of government subsidy on net zero policies, and increasing regulations on private corporations.^{[6][79][80][81][78][82]} Polanski has also supported the introduction of a wealth tax, believing that tax on wealth is fairer than one focused on work-based income and that it would reduce inequality.^{[83][78]}

Polanski has stated that he believes that the UK government are active participants in the Gaza genocide.^[84] He has expressed the belief that the British government conflates Jewish people with Israel, and that this "makes [him] feel less safe as a Jewish person."^{[85][86]} Polanski has said that he was raised Zionist but changed his stance when he was



Polanski (left) with Ash Sarkar at EarthH theatre in 2025

older.^[87]

Polanski supports replacing the first-past-the-post electoral system in the UK with a proportional representation system,^{[6][88]} and the abolition of the House of Lords.^[89]

Polanski is critical of the UK's relationship with the United States and NATO, and advocates the UK's eventual withdrawal from NATO.^{[90][91]} Polanski has said he believes that the UK's membership of NATO was untenable in the long-term, in part due to Donald Trump's threats to annex Greenland,^[90] as well as NATO prioritising militarism before diplomacy.^[78] Polanski has suggested that establishing organisations that prioritise European defence, democracy, diplomacy and international peace would allow for the UK to eventually leave NATO.^{[78][91][90]}

Polanski has also campaigned against the role of Palantir in keeping data for the National Health Service (NHS), saying that Palantir "has absolutely no place in the NHS".^[92]

Personal life

Polanski is Jewish, gay, and vegan.^{[93][94][95]} He has been in a relationship with palliative care worker Richie Bryan since 2019.^[96] They live together in the London Borough of Hackney. Polanski has also discussed his abstention from alcohol and other drugs.^[97] He enjoys theatre, and supports Forest Green Rovers F.C..^{[98][93]}

Filmography

Polanski was an actor in his youth before going into politics.

Year	Title	Role	Notes	Ref.
2007	Art of Suicide	Joel Mallon	Actor	^[99]
2008	Seven Crosses	Ash	Actor	^[100]
2010	The Gallon Challenge	Travis Carter	Lead Role	^[101]
2011	Bashment	Eggy's Cellmate	Extra	^[102]

See also

- London Green Party
- List of Green Party of England and Wales politicians
- List of populists § United Kingdom



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External links

- Leadership campaign website (<https://backzack.com/>)
 - Profile (<https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/london-assembly-members/zack-polanski>) at the London Assembly
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