

Environmental Politics in Thailand: An Analysis of the Policies of the Pheu Thai Party and the Move Forward Party in the 2023 Elections

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Abstract

This study examines the role of political parties in shaping environmental policy in Thailand, focusing specifically on the Pheu Thai Party and the Move Forward Party during the 2023 general elections. The research analyzes how these parties integrate environmental concerns into their political agendas and how their policy approaches align with broader sustainable development goals. Using a qualitative research methodology, the study applies content and thematic analysis to data collected from campaign materials, official policy statements, and media coverage. The findings indicate that political parties play a crucial role in driving environmental policies, with the Pheu Thai Party primarily emphasizing economic development and rural welfare, while the Move Forward Party prioritizes comprehensive environmental reforms and grassroots activism. However, the study also identifies key challenges, including political instability, corruption, and conflicting interests, which hinder effective policy implementation. The findings highlight a need for clearer policy articulation, stronger democratic engagement, and stronger enforcement mechanisms to achieve meaningful environmental outcomes in Thailand's evolving political landscape. The 2023 elections represent a critical juncture for environmental policy development, providing an opportunity for political parties to present sustainable policy visions and promote community participation in environmental conservation.

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Introduction

Environmental degradation has become one of the most urgent global challenges of the twenty-first century, demanding immediate and sustained responses from both governments and political institutions. In democratic systems, political parties play a pivotal role in defining environmental agendas, translating public concerns

into policy, and integrating sustainability into national development frameworks (Boly et al., 2023). In Thailand, where issues such as air pollution, deforestation, and water scarcity increasingly impact public health and livelihoods, political parties are emerging as central actors in driving environmental reform (Elinoff & Lamb, 2022).

Thailand's environmental governance is deeply intertwined with its complex political history. Since the transition from absolute to constitutional monarchy in 1932, democratic development has been periodically disrupted by military coups and power struggles, notably in 2006 and 2014 (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2022; Jantimachaiamorn et al., 2022; Kongkirati, 2024). These disruptions have contributed to an unstable policy environment, complicating efforts to establish long-term environmental strategies. Nonetheless, political parties remain influential platforms for articulating environmental priorities, especially during electoral cycles.

As Thailand confronts escalating ecological challenges, the 2023 general elections marked a pivotal moment for environmental policymaking. For the first time, competing parties, particularly the Pheu Thai Party and the Move Forward Party, placed significant emphasis on environmental issues in their platforms. The Pheu Thai Party, rooted in populist, rural-oriented development, framed environmental concerns in relation to economic growth and community welfare, advocating initiatives such as clean air legislation, water resource management, and renewable energy promotion. In contrast, the Move Forward Party advanced a more progressive and systemic approach, emphasizing environmental justice, climate change mitigation, and civic participation (Bangkok Tribune, 2024). Drawing strong support from urban voters and youth-led movements, the party proposed bold policies focused on anti-pollution regulation, energy transition, and the democratization of environmental governance. Its platform reflects broader global trends that align sustainability with transparency, equity, and public accountability.

This study examines the role of political parties in advancing environmental policies in Thailand, focusing specifically on the strategies and commitments of the Pheu Thai Party and the

Move Forward Party during the 2023 general elections. By analyzing their environmental platforms, this research seeks to understand how political ideologies, electoral incentives, and governance structures influence the development and implementation of sustainable policy agendas. In doing so, the study contributes to the broader discourse on environmental politics in emerging democracies and underscores the importance of political competition in shaping national environmental trajectories.

Research Objectives

This research aims to:

1. Study the role of democracy and political parties in driving environmental issues in Thailand.
2. Analyze the environmental policies of the Pheu Thai Party and the Move Forward Party in the 2023 elections.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative research method, focusing on the exploration and analysis of content related to election campaigns and environmental policies. The data is sourced from documents such as political papers, research reports, and media related to political parties in Thailand.

Data Collection

The data collection is divided into two parts:

1. Literature Review: This includes academic articles, reports, policy documents, media, and publications related to Thailand's national elections.
2. Documentary Research: This involves analyzing various documents such as reports, policy documents produced by political parties, and media coverage during Thailand's national elections.

Data Analysis

The study analyzes policy documents and reports by reviewing media and publications produced by political parties during election campaigns. Techniques used include content analysis and thematic analysis:

1. Content Analysis: This method systematically analyzes and interprets the content of text, images, or audio data to gain insights from documents, texts, or other media (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019).

2. Thematic Analysis: This qualitative method identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns or themes within text, images, or audio data. It involves six steps: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Scope of Study

The study focuses on two main parties: the Pheu Thai Party and the Move Forward Party in Thailand's national elections in 2023.

Study Period

The research is conducted from October 1, 2023, to September 30, 2024.

Ethical Considerations in Human Research

The researcher will adhere to three core principles of ethical research involving humans: respect for persons, beneficence/non-maleficence, and justice. Under the principle of respect for persons, participants will receive clear and complete information, enabling them to fully understand the study and independently decide whether to provide informed consent. However, this study is based on document analysis and related research, with no direct contact or data collection from participants. The researcher will respect participants' privacy and confidentiality by excluding any identifiable information (identifiers) from the

data records. Regarding beneficence and non-maleficence, the research poses minimal risks, primarily concerning the potential disclosure of confidential information. The researcher will take all necessary precautions to safeguard participants' data. Lastly, under the principle of justice, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria will be established to ensure fairness. Benefits and risks will be distributed equitably, and no bias will influence the research process. These measures ensure strict adherence to ethical standards in conducting human research.

Literature Review

Prior studies have predominantly focused on environmental issues through the lens of governance frameworks or grassroots social movements, often overlooking the significant role played by political parties in shaping environmental policies. This research, therefore, provides a novel contribution by analyzing the environmental commitments and strategies of major political actors, such as the Pheu Thai Party and the Move Forward Party, in the 2023 elections. By focusing on the interplay between political ideology and environmental policy, the study offers new insights into the evolving political landscape in Thailand (Kongkirati, 2024; Lundquist, 2024).

A key contribution of the study is its comparative analysis of the environmental policies of Thailand's two leading political parties. While some existing literature has explored environmental governance in a general context, limited research has directly compared the different approaches taken by competing parties. The Pheu Thai Party's focus on economic growth and rural development contrasts with the Move Forward Party's emphasis on sustainability and environmental activism. By conducting a comparative analysis, the study sheds light on how these contrasting priorities influence policy formulation and public engagement, addressing a gap in the

literature on political competition and environmental policymaking in developing democracies (Laohabut & McCargo, 2024; McCargo, 2024).

Furthermore, the research integrates electoral politics with environmental sustainability, an area that has often been treated separately in academic discourse. Most studies tend to analyze environmental policies independently of electoral dynamics, yet this study demonstrates how political competition shapes environmental commitments. It highlights the challenges parties face in balancing short-term electoral gains with long-term sustainability goals, emphasizing the need for strategic policy articulation that resonates with both policymakers and the electorate (Iheonu et al., 2023; Kenny & Langsæther, 2023).

Despite political parties' ambitious environmental pledges, their implementation remains a major challenge due to systemic obstacles such as political instability, corruption, and conflicting stakeholder interests. The study identifies these barriers as critical impediments to policy effectiveness, arguing that without institutional reforms and transparent governance mechanisms, environmental policies are unlikely to achieve their intended outcomes. This perspective aligns with recent findings that suggest political uncertainty can significantly hinder the progress of environmental initiatives, particularly in transitional democracies (Kuhonta, 2024; Prukkanone & Wang, 2016)

Lastly, the study addresses the role of public participation in shaping environmental policies, an area that has been relatively underexplored in Thai political studies. It evaluates how political parties leverage citizen engagement, particularly among youth movements and grassroots organizations, to promote environmental awareness and policy adoption. The findings suggest that political parties are increasingly relying on participatory mechanisms to build legitimacy and enhance policy support, reflecting global trends where civic engagement is becoming a vital

component of environmental governance (Elinoff & Lamb, 2022; Move Forward Party, 2023). By addressing these research gaps, the study makes a valuable contribution to the broader discourse on environmental politics and democratic governance in Thailand. It underscores the importance of political parties in advancing environmental sustainability while highlighting the structural challenges that must be overcome to achieve meaningful policy implementation.

Research Theories and Frameworks

The relationship between democracy, political parties, and environmental policies is complex and multifaceted. Political parties play a crucial role in shaping environmental policies, often reflecting their commitment to key issues, including the environment, in their political manifestos. Research indicates that strong democratic institutions can lead to more stringent environmental policies, particularly in Africa, where the quality of democracy significantly impacts CO2 emission reductions (Iheonu et al., 2023; Lundquist, 2024). In the context of Thailand, the relationship between democracy and environmental protection has gained renewed interest amid growing ecological crises and shifts in political dynamics. Scholars have examined how the quality of democratic institutions, particularly electoral processes, rule of law, and civil participation, affect the effectiveness of environmental policy-making.

1) Role of Political Parties

Political parties act as institutional links between citizens and the government, influencing policy discourse and resource allocation. They set the direction for environmental policies through campaign manifestos reflecting environmental priorities (Ferdinand, 2023; Katz, 2023). This policy direction not only represents the party's stance in political competition but also influences national policymaking. Lundquist (2022) found a direct relationship between environmental ideas in party

manifestos and the stringency of national environmental policies (Lundquist, 2024). For example, European parties prioritizing carbon reduction plays significant roles in clean energy policies and promoting green economies. In Indonesia, a multi-party system has led to improved public services and environmental initiatives, such as energy efficiency, to attract voters and achieve better policy outcomes (Sasmi & Park, 2024).

This study uses 'Political Party Theory' to examine how Thailand's major parties, particularly the Pheu Thai Party and the Move Forward Party, integrate environmental concerns into their platforms (Crotty & Katz, 2005). The theory explains how political actors' environmental priorities are influenced by their ideological orientation, electoral competition, and constituency demographics. For example, the Pheu Thai Party has traditionally linked environmental issues to welfare and economic justice, particularly in rural areas. In contrast, the Move Forward Party presents a more progressive and rights-based narrative, influenced by younger, urban voters who prioritize climate justice and environmental reform (TDRI, 2023).

2) Role of Liberal Democracy

High-quality democracy is crucial for environmental sustainability. This study is based on 'Liberal Democratic Theory' (Møller & Skaaning, 2013; Heywood, 2021), which views the state as a platform for negotiated development rather than just enforcement. Liberal democracies are thought to be more suited to long-term environmental commitments, particularly when public discourse and electoral incentives coincide. Studies in Africa indicate that improved democratic quality, such as transparency and accountability, correlates with reduced CO₂ emissions, highlighting the role of political institutions in promoting environmental responsibility (Iheonu et al., 2023). Electoral democracy, where citizens have voting rights,

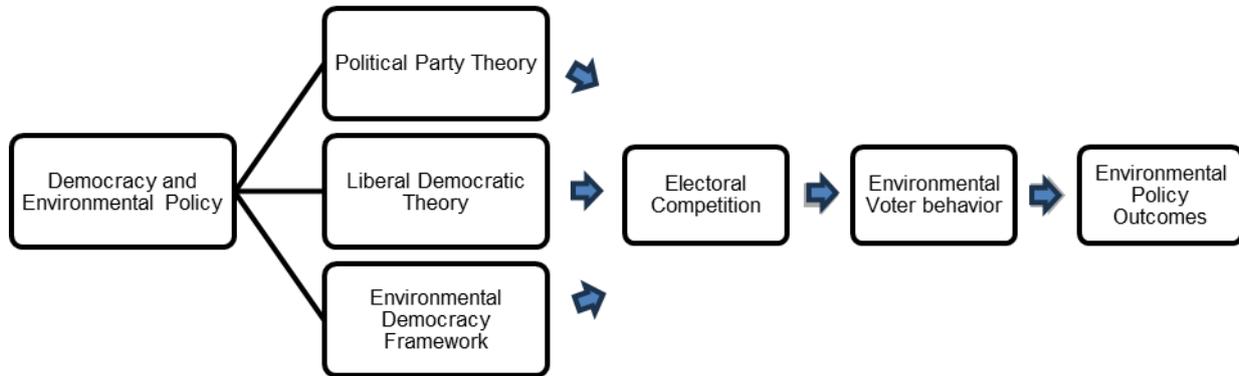
and egalitarian democracy, emphasizing fair distribution of benefits, are key variables in developing sustainable environmental policies (Iheonu et al., 2023). However, despite elected governments in Thailand, frequent military interventions have weakened policy continuity, particularly in the environmental sector (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2022).

3) Voter Behavior and Environmental Democracy Framework

In modern times, voters increasingly prioritize environmental issues, leading to support for parties with strong environmental stances, especially during environmental crises like droughts and floods (Papp, 2022). Environmentalism is recognized as a new dimension in voter preferences, independent of traditional economic or social dimensions (Kenny & Langsæther, 2023; Boly, 2023). Some argue that democratic processes delay environmental solutions requiring swift decisions due to the need for consensus, slowing climate action (Couperus & van de Grift, 2022).

This study's theoretical foundation is also based on the 'Environmental Democracy Framework,' which emphasizes three key democratic principles as central to effective environmental governance: transparency, public participation, and accountability. According to this framework, pressure from informed and engaged citizens increases the likelihood that democratic institutions will produce responsive and sustainable environmental policies. Although Thailand has formal democratic structures, their ability to translate environmental demands into actionable policy has been hampered by political instability and legal fragmentation (Boonsod, 2019).

Figure 1
Research Framework



Source: researcher, 2024

This diagram above illustrates the theoretical framework for analyzing how democracy and political parties influence environmental policy outcomes. It integrates three theoretical components: Political Party Theory, Liberal Democratic Theory, and the Environmental Democracy Framework. Each framework contributes key elements such as party ideologies, institutional quality, public participation, and voter behavior. These components interact to shape the development and effectiveness of environmental policies in democratic contexts like Thailand.

Despite the significant role of political parties in driving environmental policies, internal conflicts and external pressures can reduce their effectiveness. Therefore, balancing party policies with public expectations is crucial for successful environmental policy implementation.

Research Results

Environmental politics in Thailand has significantly developed over the past fifty years, influenced by broad social, economic, and political changes. Environmental movements are intertwined with Thailand's historical context, reflecting changes in governance and public participation (Elinoff & Lamb, 2022).

1. Democracy, Political Parties, and Environmental Issues in Thai Politics

Thailand's environmental policies have evolved due to increasing environmental challenges and a commitment to sustainable development. The evolution of community rights has been crucial in developing Thailand's environmental policies. Before 1996, community rights in environmental management were barely recognized. However, post-2007 reforms incorporated these rights into formal policies, though enforcement mechanisms remain limited. Without concrete frameworks, progress in community rights has been slow, highlighting the need for established mechanisms to ensure community input translates into impactful and enforceable policies (Ponok, 2016).

1) Democracy and Environmental Movements

The relationship between democracy and environmental movements in Thailand is complex. Environmental politics not only focus on promoting sustainability but also reflect existing power structures. The fight for environmental justice often faces challenges from centralized governance and global environmental changes affecting the movement's landscape (Elinoff & Lamb, 2022). Symbolic movements, such as monks ordaining trees in rural areas, combine spiritual values with conservation to protect natural

resources, leading to shifts in political discourse emphasizing conservation and community involvement in resource management (Walter, 2007).

The 2007 Constitution provided a legal framework for public participation in the environmental policymaking process. Despite provisions promoting structural democracy, actual public influence remains limited due to centralized decision-making. Community participation often takes symbolic forms rather than genuinely influencing policy processes (Kittisak & Guohua, 2016; Prukkanone & Wang, 2016). Environmental movements in Thailand also play a crucial role in advocating for a more transparent and just political system, although they sometimes maintain existing power structures. Public participation reflects efforts to balance power between the state and citizens, a topic needing further development.

Environmental politics in Thailand illustrate the struggle between centralized control and the need for decentralization. Challenges in establishing sustainable governance remain significant, even as local movements and public participation positively impact environmental discourse in a democratic context.

2) Environmental Concerns in Political Discourse

Environmental issues in Thai political discourse have become more prominent as modernization and economic development impact natural resources and livelihoods in both rural and urban areas (Hirsch & Lohmann, 1960). These changes have raised concerns among farmers reliant on natural resources and urban residents affected by pollution and other environmental problems. For instance, anti-logging protests in northern Thailand during the 1980s, driven by grassroots movements, aimed to protect forests from deforestation and resource exploitation (Hirsch, 1997). These movements demonstrated the public's power to pressure the authorities and highlighted environmental awareness spurred by the loss of vital resources directly affecting local communities.

These issues have been elevated to the national political stage through communication by politicians and political parties, who attempt to position themselves on natural resource sustainability. Environmental discourse has become integral to shaping policies and strategies for political campaigns, especially in areas directly impacted by environmental degradation (Elinoff & Lamb, 2022). The rise of environmental awareness in Thai political discourse underscores the importance of protecting natural resources alongside sustainable economic development. The collaboration of civil society groups and environmentally conscious politicians is a key tool for driving change in a political system that previously ignored these issues (Wise, 2024).

3) Political Parties and Environmental Issues in Thailand

Thailand's political system, comprising various political parties, reflects ideological complexities and social foundations. These parties play a crucial role in shaping environmental policies through policy statements, grassroots movements, and legislation on conservation and sustainable development. New political parties, such as the Move Forward Party, have become significant in environmental issues, emphasizing policy changes through youth groups and social movements, such as pollution reduction projects, environmental education, and natural resource protection (Laohabut & McCargo, 2024). Other parties, like Pheu Thai or Bhumjaithai, focus more on economic and rural benefits but use environmental statements during elections to attract voters.

In policy development, many political parties have shown commitment to environmental issues, such as reducing deforestation, controlling pollution, and addressing climate change. However, pushing these policies can be limited by political uncertainty, conflicting interests, or short-term benefits over long-term sustainability. Grassroots movements provide significant momentum, especially on issues affecting communities heavily impacted

by environmental degradation, such as infrastructure development conflicting with nature conservation. The formation of coalition governments allows for more comprehensive environmental policy discussions. While some parties positively contribute to environmental governance, challenges like corruption and political instability affect policy effectiveness. Although some parties use environmental policies to gain popularity, it also raises awareness and broad support for environmental issues (Apostoaie, 2016).

Therefore, political parties in Thailand play a crucial role in shaping environmental management and governance, particularly when balancing economic benefits with natural resource protection. However, sustainable policy implementation still faces challenges from internal and external political systems.

2. The environmental policies of the Pheu Thai Party and the Move Forward Party in the 2023 elections

Thailand's 2023 general elections were crucial for the development of democracy, especially after a long period of military rule. The elections mark a transition from nearly a decade of military-backed governance following the 2014 coup. Although the elections followed calls for political change led by youth in 2020, the process still operates under a hybrid regime or competitive authoritarianism (Kongkirati, 2024). In this election, 67 political parties participated, with the main

competitors being the Pheu Thai Party and the Move Forward Party. Understanding the environmental policies of political parties in the post-election political dynamics and addressing environmental challenges is essential.

The 2023 elections in Thailand highlight the importance of environmental policies and political party dynamics. This research focuses on two main parties: the Pheu Thai Party as the ruling party and the Move Forward Party¹ as the leading opposition. The traditional political faction led by the Pheu Thai Party continues to play a significant role, emphasizing populist economic policies over environmental reforms. This dynamic reflects ongoing tensions between progressive and conservative forces in Thai politics. Meanwhile, the Move Forward Party, supported by younger voters demanding political reforms, places a strong emphasis on environmental issues in its policies.

1) Pheu Thai Party

The Pheu Thai Party is one of Thailand's major political parties, with deep political roots tracing back to the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) Party, founded in 1998 by Thaksin Shinawatra, a pioneer of populist policies in Thailand (Pensute, 2023). Thai Rak Thai played a significant role in revolutionizing Thai politics with policies focused on rural development, healthcare, and infrastructure projects, which gained immense popularity among voters, especially in rural areas.

Figure 1
Research Framework



Source: (Pheu Thai Party, 2023)

¹ We conducted this research prior to the Constitutional Court's decision to dissolve the Move Forward Party on August 7, 2024.

The overwhelming election victories in 2001 and 2005 led to Thaksin becoming Prime Minister and implementing key Thai Rak Thai policies, including universal healthcare and village funds. However, his success sparked intense conflicts within Thai society, leading to opposition from political rivals and a military coup in 2006, forcing Thaksin into exile and resulting in the Constitutional Court dissolving the party in 2007 (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2022).

After the dissolution, key members of Thai Rak Thai founded the People's Power Party (PPP), continuing the same policies. However, the PPP was also dissolved in 2008, leading to the establishment of the Pheu Thai Party as its ideological and electoral successor (Selway, 2023). In the 2011 elections, Pheu Thai won again, with Yingluck Shinawatra, Thaksin's sister, becoming Thailand's first female Prime Minister. She continued populist policies such as rice price support and infrastructure projects but faced major protests and legal challenges, leading to her removal in 2014. Pheu Thai remains influential in Thai politics, with strong support from rural and urban bases, particularly in the North and Northeast (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2022).

Despite facing legal challenges and internal divisions, Pheu Thai has maintained its popularity and political influence through grassroots movements, campaign management, and social media communication. Its association with Thaksin Shinawatra and populist approaches has polarized Thai politics, leading to political instability and street protests. Currently, Pheu Thai continues to play a significant role in the country's political arena, both in activism and legal battles, to drive a political agenda responsive to the people.

The environmental policy formation of the Pheu Thai Party reflects a hybrid approach rooted in its populist legacy, electoral recalibration, and the rising urgency of environmental concerns in Thailand. Initially focused on welfare and economic development for rural constituencies, the party

gradually integrated green policies in response to public demand for solutions to worsening air pollution, climate change, and sustainable energy (Varnakomola, 2023). During the 2023 election, Pheu Thai proposed more tangible environmental platforms, such as clean air laws and investment in renewable energy, as part of its 19-point agenda (Pheu Thai Party, 2023) to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, although critics noted a lack of concrete legislative roadmaps and implementation clarity (Lohatepanont & Jatusripitak, 2024). Key environmental policies include:

1) **Clean Air Initiative:** Pheu Thai proposes systematic solutions to PM 2.5 pollution through the Clean Air Act, establishing clean air as a fundamental human right, with short, medium, and long-term action plans.

2) **Water Management:** The party aims to address flooding and drought to ensure year-round access to drinking and utility water, with policies like expanding irrigation areas, developing drainage infrastructure to the sea, utilizing groundwater systems, and creating a Chao Phraya River basin management plan.

3) **Energy Policy:** Pheu Thai proposes reducing energy prices and supporting clean energy, such as investing in electric vehicle charging stations and infrastructure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, negotiating overlapping areas for cheap natural gas sources, and generating state revenue (Pheu Thai Party, 2023).

4) **Community Adaptation Programs:** The party aims to help local communities prepare for climate change impacts such as rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and droughts (Dueanpen, 2023).

Consequently, The Pheu Thai Party addresses climate change through two main approaches: lowering greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation) and assisting communities in adapting to changing conditions. They prioritize both environmental and economic aims in accordance with their strategies

2) Move Forward Party

The Move Forward Party (MFP), established in 2020, continues the ideology and political role of the Future Forward Party after its dissolution by the Constitutional Court. The founding MFP reflects a commitment to the progressive and reformist approach of the Future Forward Party (FFP) (McCargo & Chattharakul, 2020). Founded by Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, FFP created a political phenomenon in Thailand by advocating for democratic reforms, civil liberties, and social equality. The party used technology and online media to communicate with young supporters,

gaining immense popularity among millennials. In the 2019 elections, the FFP won 81 seats in the House of Representatives, becoming the third-largest party in Thai politics (Akarapongpisak, 2022).

Despite the dissolution of FFP and legal restrictions preventing Thanathorn from holding political office, many former members, especially Pita Limjaroenrat, played significant roles in the Move Forward Party. Pita led MFP with clear reform goals in democracy, transparency, and social justice, focusing on fighting corruption and reducing social inequality (Ockey, 2020; Limjaroenrat, 2023).

Figure 3

Move Forward Party Symbol



Source: (Move Forward Party, 2023)

MFP continued to make waves in Thai politics by fielding candidates in the 2023 elections and achieving significant success, winning the most seats in the House of Representatives with 151 out of 500 seats. This success reflects ongoing popularity among voters, particularly those supporting the progressive approach of FFP. However, FFP faces numerous challenges in Thai politics, including legal restrictions, scrutiny from state officials, and legal actions against its leaders and members. These challenges highlight the political environment's resistance to the structural changes the party seeks to implement.

The environmental policy of MFP was shaped through a progressive, youth-driven, and rights-based political vision that emphasized environmental justice, decentralization, and transparency. The party's environmental platform was influenced heavily by grassroots input, civil society collaboration, and international sustainability standards. MFP prioritized anti-pollution regulations, community participation, and climate action and emphasizes comprehensive environmental solutions, with "Sustainable Environment" aiming to transition Thailand to a low-carbon economy with a net-zero emissions target by 2070

1) Clean Energy and Free Electricity Market: MFP aims to end coal-fired power generation, open a free electricity market, and increase investment in infrastructure for electric vehicles, electric buses, and sustainable public transportation, such as electric buses, trains, and infrastructure, to achieve Thailand's net-zero target (The Nation, 2023).

2) Pollution and Waste Management: The party supports the Clean Air Act and sets greenhouse gas emission caps. The industrial sector must disclose pollution data, set emission caps, promote electric vehicles in public transportation, reduce agricultural burning, manage waste in 1,000 sub-districts by 2027, and ban the import of foreign waste and single-use plastics.

3) Green Spaces and Resource Management: MFP promotes green space planting and reviews water management plans and environmental monitoring networks.

4) Promoting Social Equity: The party aims to reduce the impact of the climate crisis on vulnerable groups, emphasizing just transitions to ensure all sectors benefit from sustainable development (Move Forward Party, 2023).

Additionally, MFP has proposed further policies (Move Forward Party, 2023), including:

1) Promoting Sustainable Consumption Practices: The party encourages the public to reduce environmental impact, such as waste reduction and promoting energy-efficient devices.

2) Supporting Climate Change Education: MFP raises awareness about climate change and its impacts, which is crucial for long-term solutions.

As a result, environmental policies of the Move Forward Party reflect a commitment to comprehensive environmental solutions, driving rapid economic and social changes (Move Forward Party, 2023; Dueanpen, 2023).

Research Discussion

Thailand faces significant threats, including environmental, economic, and social challenges. In the context of elections, understanding political parties' environmental policies is crucial for voters to make informed decisions. A comparative analysis of the environmental policies of two political parties, Pheu Thai and Move Forward, reveals differences in their approaches.

Both parties support clean energy. Pheu Thai promotes renewable energy overall, aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Their water management policies focus on preventing floods and droughts, emphasizing resource restoration for community benefit and strict law enforcement. In contrast, the Move Forward Party advocates a free electricity market and ending coal use. They emphasize developing green spaces and protecting marine environments, setting pollution prevention targets for industries by 2026. The Move Forward Party prioritizes transparency and public participation in environmental policies and aims to push for the Clean Air Act and promote social equity.

The commitment and actions of political parties will play a crucial role in shaping the country's response to global crises.

Figure 3
Move Forward Party Symbol

Environmental Policy	Pheu Thai Party	Move Forward Party
Clean Energy	Supports clean and renewable energy for sustainability	Focuses on opening a free electricity market, promoting clean energy, and stopping coal-fired power generation

Environmental Policy	Pheu Thai Party	Move Forward Party
Water Management	Emphasizes water management to prevent floods and droughts, such as expanding irrigation areas and increasing clean water sources	Reviews water management plans, develops green spaces, and conserves marine environments
Greenhouse Gas Emissions	Aims for net-zero emissions by 2050 through promoting electric vehicles and reducing energy prices	Sets greenhouse gas emission caps for industries and bans farm waste burning to control pollution by 2026
Community Participation	Encourages public participation in resource restoration and benefiting from ecosystems	Focuses on transparency and public participation in environmental decision-making processes
Laws and Enforcement	Strictly enforces laws to protect natural resources and prevent environmental impacts	Pushes for the Clean Air Act, pollution management regulations, and promotes social equity
Adaptation Strategy	Supports community adaptation programs for rising sea levels and extreme weather	Includes social equity measures for vulnerable populations and promoting climate-resilient practices

Source: Researcher (2024)

Environmental policy has become an increasingly visible component of election campaigns globally, and Thailand is no exception. During the 2023 Thai general election, environmental concerns, particularly air pollution, PM2.5 levels, and climate change, gained traction among voters, especially younger and urban demographics who demanded cleaner air, renewable energy, and sustainable development initiatives (Jatusripitak & Ricks, 2024). MFP integrated environmental justice and systemic reform into its core platform, presenting detailed and progressive policies that prioritized local participation and transparency. Meanwhile, the Pheu Thai Party took a more moderate stance, aligning green policies with economic development and welfare goals like renewable energy promotion and pollution reduction. In addition, both parties used their environmental platforms to reach out to specific voter groups: MFP targeted environmentally conscious urban youth, while Pheu Thai focused

on rural voters concerned with livelihood and resource access (TDRI, 2023).

According to the Election Commission of Thailand (ECT), the 2023 general elections in Thailand witnessed participation from over 39 million voters, representing 75.64% of eligible citizens. This figure marked the highest voter turnout ever recorded in the country's electoral history (Election Commission of Thailand, 2023). The 2023 election results reflect changes in the political landscape and increased public participation. MFP won the most seats in the Thai parliament, with the Pheu Thai Party coming in second. However, due to Thailand's hybrid political system, where appointed senators act as a counterbalance to the majority, the election results did not align with the actual voting outcomes. Although MFP "won" the election, it was blocked by an alliance between Pheu Thai and conservative elites, leading to Pheu Thai forming the government and Move Forward becoming the opposition

leader (McCargo, 2024). This situation has sparked debates calling for electoral reforms within the political, constitutional, and legal frameworks, which limit opportunities for environmental policy reforms and make free and fair processes nearly impossible due to issues like vote-buying and lack of transparency in vote counting (Puthavong et al., 2023).

While environmental issues enhanced the credibility and relevance of party platforms, they were not the sole determinants of election outcomes; economic issues and political reform agendas remained dominant factors in shaping voter behavior (Asplund et al., 2023). The 2023 election results indicate that Thailand's political agenda still prioritizes economic policies, such as digital wallet projects or other populist measures. However, there is a growing awareness of environmental issues among voters, especially younger generations and those in areas affected by environmental problems like climate change, floods, deforestation, and air pollution. These concerns have significant implications for voting behavior, particularly in urban areas where environmental issues are more visible. Environmental policy can indeed influence election results, with voters increasingly demanding comprehensive and actionable environmental solutions from political leaders (Westerling et al., 2024). This awareness is reflected in increased public participation in environmental protection activities and movements, particularly through protests against government projects that threaten natural ecosystems and local livelihoods (Jensen & Sangkhamanee, 2024). For example, Thai citizens protest plans for the Mekong dam. Local southern communities in Thailand protest the Chana Industrial Estate Project. The P-Move network opposes forest conservation policies. Additionally, civil society organizations and local communities strongly reject the Yuam River water diversion project (Sangkhamanee, 2021). Moreover, MFP's campaign, which highlighted environmental

issues as a key policy, demonstrates a response to the rising environmental consciousness in society.

Post-Election Political Dynamics

After forming the government, the Pheu Thai Party, led by Srettha Thavisin (2023-2024) and Paetongtarn Shinawatra (2024-present), prioritized economic populism, such as the Pheu Thai Party's digital wallet project, which led to environmental initiatives being deprioritized (Kuhonta, 2024). The main environmental strategies include promoting clean and renewable energy, efficient water management, conserving natural resources and the environment, and increasing public and community involvement in conservation and resource restoration processes (Cabinet Secretariat, 2023). Additionally, there is a focus on promoting fair carbon credit trading, securing clean water sources, and developing stable infrastructure systems (Cabinet Secretariat, 2024).

Both Srettha Thavisin's and Paetongtarn Shinawatra's administrations share three similar environmental policies: clean energy, natural resource management, and water management. The Pheu Thai government emphasizes promoting clean and renewable energy, encouraging sustainable energy use among the public and businesses, and reducing reliance on environmentally harmful energy sources (Cabinet Secretariat, 2023). They also focus on natural resource management, aiming to increase public participation in conservation and restoration processes, and addressing flood and drought issues through efficient water management and clean water supply planning (Cabinet Secretariat, 2024).

Despite being from the same party, Srettha Thavisin's and Paetongtarn Shinawatra's administrations have different environmental policies. Srettha's administration focuses on restructuring the national energy sector and promoting macro-level clean energy production, generating income from land use, such as promoting

suitable tree planting and fair carbon credit trading for landowners or communities (Cabinet Secretariat, 2023). In contrast, Paetongtarn's administration emphasizes developing accessible and comprehensive infrastructure, supporting solar power generation by the public, and strictly enforcing laws to prevent and mitigate environmental and property impacts (Cabinet Secretariat, 2024).

In the future, public demand for environmental issues is likely to grow, leading to changes in political agendas. Political parties will need to adjust their policies to meet these demands, not only to gain votes but also to balance economic development with long-term natural resource conservation. This includes reforming natural resource management systems, achieving greenhouse gas reduction targets, and creating a more sustainable and inclusive green economy (Elinoff & Lamb, 2022). Such changes require momentum from civil society, along with cooperation from political, business, and international organizations, to develop approaches that balance human and environmental needs.

Conclusion

The research framework on environmental politics highlights the intricate relationship between democracy, political parties, and environmental policies. The Pheu Thai Party and the Move Forward Party (MFP), two major political entities, present distinct approaches to addressing environmental issues, reflecting their broader political ideologies and strategies. The Pheu Thai Party, with its roots in populist economic policies, emphasizes clean and renewable energy, efficient water management, and community involvement in resource conservation. Their policies aim for long-term sustainability but often prioritize economic populism, which can overshadow environmental initiatives.

In contrast, MFP, emerging from the progressive Future Forward Party (FFP), focuses on

comprehensive environmental reforms. Their policies include ending coal use, promoting a free electricity market, and enhancing transparency and public participation in environmental decision-making. MFP's emphasis on social equity and stringent pollution controls reflects a commitment to addressing environmental challenges through systemic changes.

The 2023 elections in Thailand, marked by a record high voter turnout, underscored the evolving political landscape and increased public engagement. Despite MFP winning the most seats, the hybrid political system and alliances with conservative elites led to the Pheu Thai Party forming the government. This outcome has sparked debates on electoral reforms and highlighted the challenges of implementing environmental policies within the existing political framework in Thailand.

As public awareness of environmental issues grows, particularly among younger generations and those affected by environmental degradation, political parties will need to adapt their policies to balance economic development with sustainable resource management. The future of Thailand's environmental politics will depend on the ability of political parties to respond to these demands and the collaboration between civil society, political entities, businesses, and international organizations to create balanced and effective environmental strategies.

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