RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring the Factors behind the Rise of the Move Forward Party: Insights from Undergraduate Students at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
  *Corresponding Author: waiphot.ku@ssru.ac.th	The research is a quantitative study aimed at assessing the popularity level of the Move Forward Party among undergraduate students, identifying factors influencing this popularity, and proposing guidelines for enhancing political party popularity. A validated questionnaire was administered to a simple random sample of 397 students, with data analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis via Jamovi software. Findings indicated a high popularity level of the Move Forward Party among respondents. The most significant factors influencing popularity were the party's policies, political alliances, public participation, the political leadership of the party leader, and campaign efforts through social media. Based on these findings, it is recommended that the Move Forward Party continue to develop and promote clear, impactful policies that resonate with young voters. Strengthening political alliances and encouraging active public participation can further enhance popularity. Additionally, the party should leverage social media for campaign efforts and highlight the leadership qualities of its leaders to connect with the youth demographic effectively.

INTRODUCTION

Before the latest general election, Thailand's political scene was marked by significant turmoil and instability. The country had been under military rule since the 2014 coup d'état, which removed the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra. The military junta, known as the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) and led by General Prayut Chan-o-cha, maintained stringent control over political activities and introduced a new constitution in 2017 to prolong its influence. This era saw extensive restrictions on free speech and political gatherings, with numerous opposition leaders and activists facing legal challenges and intimidation. Public dissatisfaction with the junta's handling of economic issues and a growing demand for a return to

democratic governance further strained the political environment, leading to heightened tensions and uncertainty before the elections.

The Move Forward Party (MFP) rose to prominence under the leadership of Pita Limjaroenrat, building on its progressive platform and appeal to young voters disillusioned with traditional Thai politics. After the dissolution of its predecessor, the Future Forward Party, in 2020 due to legal issues related to campaign finance, the MFP emerged as its ideological successor, continuing to champion anti-corruption, democratic reform, and social justice. Pita Limjaroenrat's charismatic leadership and clear vision were crucial in rebranding the party and maintaining its momentum.

The MFP effectively capitalized on widespread public discontent with the ruling military-backed government and its perceived failures in addressing economic and social issues. The party's emphasis on policies such as education reform, economic equality, and digital innovation strongly resonated with young, urban voters. Pita's effective use of social media to engage with voters and articulate the party's vision helped the MFP build a robust support base, particularly among the youth. This strategic engagement, combined with grassroots activism and public participation, solidified the MFP's position as a formidable force in Thai politics.

The MFP's victory in the latest general election can be attributed to strategic campaigning, resonant policy proposals, and effective leadership. The MFP, led by Pita Limjaroenrat, harnessed widespread dissatisfaction with the incumbent military-backed government and its handling of economic and social issues. The party's progressive platform, including pledges for educational reform, economic equality, and digital innovation, resonated with a broad spectrum of voters, particularly the younger demographic. Pita Limjaroenrat's charismatic leadership and his ability to connect with voters through social media played a pivotal role in mobilizing support. The MFP's grassroots campaigning efforts and local community engagement helped build a strong and dedicated voter base. Additionally, the party's commitment to addressing corruption and advocating for democratic reforms resonated with voters frustrated with the status quo. The MFP's victory reflected the changing political landscape in Thailand, with a growing demand for transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in governance. By aligning itself with these values, the Move Forward Party captured the public's imagination and secured a significant electoral win.

Understanding the factors contributing to its popularity is crucial for political analysts and strategists. This study focuses on the perspectives of undergraduate students at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, a demographic that significantly influences political trends. Despite existing research on political trends among Thai youth, there is a gap in understanding the specific factors driving the popularity of the MFP among university students. Therefore, this study aims to explore these factors from the perspective of undergraduate students at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. By understanding what drives the popularity of the Move Forward Party, the research seeks to provide insights and recommendations for enhancing political engagement and party strategies in Thailand.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The popularity of political parties is a multifaceted concept influenced by various factors as defined by multiple scholars. Dalton (2008) measures popularity through voter intention polls, election results, and membership numbers, emphasizing quantitative metrics. Strøm and Müller (1999) highlight the impact of party policies, noting that effective policies addressing voter concerns enhance popularity. Farrell and Webb (2000) discuss the significance of political alliances, which expand a party's reach and resources, increasing its appeal. Stokes (1999) focuses on the role of political leadership, asserting that charismatic and competent leaders can significantly boost voter perceptions and trust. Dimitrova et al. (2014) examine the influence of campaign strategies,

particularly through social media, on visibility and engagement, while Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015) emphasize the importance of public participation, facilitated by digital platforms, in increasing support. These perspectives collectively illustrate that party popularity is shaped by a combination of policies, alliances, leadership, campaign strategies, and public engagement, all of which are crucial for a party's success and influence.

The popularity of political parties is influenced by a complex interplay of factors including party policies, political alliances, public participation, political leadership, campaign efforts through social media, and political ideology. Effective party policies that address key issues can significantly sway voter support (Strøm & Müller, 1999), while political alliances expand a party's reach and resources, enhancing its appeal (Farrell & Webb, 2000). Public participation, especially through digital platforms, boosts engagement and mobilization, crucial for maintaining and increasing support (Dalton, 2008; Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015). Charismatic and competent political leadership also plays a pivotal role in influencing voter perceptions and trust (Stokes, 1999). Additionally, social media has revolutionized political campaigning, enabling parties to reach voters more effectively and personalize their messaging, significantly boosting visibility and engagement (Dimitrova et al., 2014; Stier et al., 2020). Political ideology is another critical factor, as it aligns with voters' beliefs and values, thereby influencing their loyalty and support. The ideological positioning of a party can attract or repel voters based on how well it resonates with their personal convictions and societal views (Dalton, 2008). Thus, the integration of robust policies, strategic alliances, active public participation, strong leadership, innovative social media campaigns, and a clear ideological stance is essential for sustaining political party popularity in contemporary politics.

Political ideology and political popularity

Political ideology is defined as a set of beliefs, values, and ideas that outlines the role of government and politics in society. These ideologies guide political behavior and shape the policies and actions of political parties. The relationship between political ideology and political popularity has been a prominent area of research in political science, especially in the context of significant global political shifts since 2015. Various studies have explored how ideological stances influence the popularity and success of political parties. Dalton (2008) notes that voters often align with parties whose ideologies resonate with their own beliefs and values, which is critical for building a loyal voter base, as seen in the study of the Liberal Party of Canada that highlighted how ideological consistency contributed to its electoral successes and failures (Corbett, 2017). The media significantly influences public perception of political ideologies, thereby affecting party popularity. Kurzman, Kamal, and Yazdiha (2017) discuss how media narratives shape ideological views and threat assessments, impacting public support for political parties. Political branding, closely tied to ideological positioning, has become an essential strategy for gaining popularity. Kumar, Dhamija, and Dhamija (2016) argue that political branding helps parties project their ideologies more effectively, making them more relatable and appealing to voters. Significant ideological shifts within parties can lead to changes in their popularity, as seen in Filc's (2018) examination of the radicalization of Israel's Likud party. Populism, often rooted in specific ideological frameworks, has reshaped the political landscape in many countries. Bartoszewicz (2021) explores the rise of celebrity populism in Poland and the Czech Republic, highlighting how populist ideologies resonate with public discontent and increase political engagement, thus boosting party popularity. Research by Butters and Hare (2022) investigates the impact of ideological homophily on political discussion networks, finding that voters are more likely to engage in political discussions with those who share similar ideologies, reinforcing their views and contributing to the stability of party support. Thus, the relationship between political ideology and political popularity is multifaceted, involving media influence, branding strategies, ideological shifts, and the rise of populism. These factors collectively shape how political parties are perceived and supported by the public, necessitating continued research to understand the evolving dynamics of this relationship in contemporary politics.

H1: Political ideology has a positive influence on political popularity.

Party's policies and political popularity

Political party policy, defined as the specific proposals, actions, and ideological stances that a party advocates and implements when in power, is instrumental in shaping public opinion and gaining voter support. Recent studies highlight the significant impact of well-crafted and effectively communicated policies on political popularity. For instance, Filc (2018) demonstrates how the radicalization of Israel's Likud party attracted a specific voter base while alienating moderates, underscoring the importance of aligning policies with target voter demographics. Ezrow et al. (2017) discuss how parties adapt and diffuse successful policies from other contexts to enhance their electoral strategies, thereby increasing appeal and electoral success. Media narratives also play a crucial role in framing policy debates and influencing voter opinions, as emphasized by Kurzman, Kamal, and Yazdiha (2017). Consistency in policy and ideology is essential for maintaining voter loyalty, with Corbett (2017) highlighting the Liberal Party of Canada's success through consistent policy positions. Moreover, Hess and Renner (2019) illustrate that opposition to climate mitigation policies by conservative parties in Europe can ultimately increase support from specific voter segments prioritizing those issues. Additionally, economic policies directly benefiting voters, such as the use of credit, significantly enhance political popularity by addressing immediate voter needs and concerns, as shown by Kolios (2022). Thus, the relationship between party policies and political popularity involves a complex interplay of policy diffusion, media influence, ideological consistency, and the impact of economic and social policies.

H2: Party's policies have a positive influence on political popularity.

Political alliances and political popularity

Political alliances, defined as formal agreements between political parties to cooperate and support each other in elections or governance, significantly impact political popularity. Studies since 2015 have explored various dimensions of this relationship. Saad-Filho and Boito (2016) highlight how unwieldy political alliances can alienate a party's base and reduce its popularity, as observed with Brazil's PT party. Göçek (2020) notes that coalition politics, especially in the context of populist parties in the European Union, are critical for explaining party popularity. Choi (2016) emphasizes the role of judicial support networks in Turkish politics, showing how political affiliations and alliances shape political landscapes. Halvorsen (2020) examines organizational strategies in Buenos Aires, illustrating how alliances create "popular fronts" that enhance a party's reach and appeal. Dettman (2018) discusses how coalition building in authoritarian regimes can lead to significant political gains, even when the opposition wins the popular vote. Végh (2021) explores how Central Europe's radical right parties leverage alliances within European party families to boost their popularity. These studies collectively demonstrate that political alliances can expand a party's reach, influence voter perceptions, and enhance political stability, ultimately contributing to a party's popularity.

H3: Political alliance has a positive influence on political popularity.

Public participation and political popularity

Public participation, defined as the involvement of citizens in the political process, has a significant impact on political popularity. Recent studies highlight various dimensions of this relationship. Pressnall (2016) discusses how voter turnout, influenced by ideologically extreme parties, impacts the popularity of these parties in OECD countries. Szolucha (2022) examines public engagement with fracking in postindustrial Britain, indicating how civic participation can lead to political responses and increased party popularity. Al Dulaimi (2021) explores the role of social media in enhancing political participation among young Iraqis, demonstrating how increased awareness and engagement can boost a party's appeal. Fowler (2017) evaluates voter preregistration and finds it effective in increasing youth participation, which subsequently enhances political popularity. Lorson and Haustein (2020) analyze participatory budgeting in public sector reporting, suggesting that citizen involvement in decision-making processes leads to greater public satisfaction and support for political leaders. Finally, Balasuriya (2023) investigates media and democracy from young citizens' perspectives in Sri Lanka, highlighting how digital engagement can foster political participation and increase popularity. These studies collectively illustrate that active public participation, facilitated by various channels such as social media, participatory budgeting, and voter engagement strategies, is crucial for enhancing political popularity.

H4: Public participation has a positive influence on political popularity.

Political leadership and political popularity

Political leadership, defined as the ability of political figures to influence and guide their followers, is a crucial determinant of political popularity. Recent studies have explored various aspects of this relationship, emphasizing the role of charismatic leadership and effective communication. Wheeler (2018) discusses how celebrity politicians, such as Barack Obama and Jeremy Corbyn, utilize popular aesthetics and media to build legitimacy and political support. In Turkey, Can (2017) highlights how party leaders leverage media and legislative regulations to enhance their popularity during elections. Fruhstorfer (2016) examines the personalization of political leadership in presidential systems, showing how centralization of power can boost a leader's appeal. Saad-Filho and Boito (2016) note that political alliances and the ability to navigate party dynamics are critical for maintaining leadership popularity, as seen in the case of Brazil's PT party. Sykes (2023) explores how populist leaders in Spain and Portugal capitalize on political systems embroiled in popular discontent to gain mass support. These studies collectively demonstrate that political leadership involves a blend of media savvy, charismatic appeal, strategic alliances, and effective policy communication, all of which are essential for sustaining political popularity.

H5: Political leadership has a positive influence on political popularity.

Social media use and political popularity

Social media use has become a significant factor in political popularity, influencing public engagement and perception. Al Dulaimi (2021) discusses how social media platforms enhance political participation among young Iraqis, increasing political awareness and engagement. Dugger (2015) explores the impact of social media on political campaign discourse, highlighting how platforms like Twitter and Facebook allow for direct interaction between politicians and voters, which can boost political support. Wang and Altiparmakis (2023) examine the reactions of European

radical right parties to the Russian invasion on social media, demonstrating how these platforms can shape public opinion and party popularity. Stieglitz et al. (2018) analyze the challenges in social media analytics, emphasizing the importance of understanding data to improve political communication strategies. Byrd (2018) illustrates how political rhetoric on social media can enhance a politician's appeal by reaching a wider audience with succinct messages. Altahat (2020) studies the role of Twitter in spreading political corruption awareness, showing how social media can mobilize public sentiment and influence political popularity. These studies collectively illustrate that social media use significantly impacts political popularity by enhancing engagement, shaping public perception, and providing a platform for direct communication between political figures and the electorate.

H6: Political leadership has a positive influence on political popularity.

METHODS

Participants

The study included 397 students from Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. The majority were female, with 225 participants (56.7%), while males made up 36.0% (143 participants). Most participants were first-year students, totaling 169 (42.6%), followed by 104 second-year students (26.2%), 110 third-year students (27.7%), and 14 fourth-year students (3.5%). Regarding recent election voting behavior, 354 participants (89.2%) reported voting, while 43 (10.8%) did not. The respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 26 years, with an average age of 19.90 years. In terms of attendance at Move Forward Party campaign speeches, participants reported a range from no attendance to a maximum of 20 speeches, with an average attendance of 1.48 speeches.

Measures

The study used a structured questionnaire with seven parts, each rated on a 5-point scale. The first part assessed political ideology, including government economic control and social welfare (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.942). The second part evaluated social media campaign effectiveness (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.972). The third part measured political leadership qualities such as vision, motivation, and decision-making (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.976). The fourth part focused on public participation, including listening to public voices and community involvement (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.982). The fifth part assessed political alliances and their impact on the party's image and policy-making (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.978). The sixth part evaluated the clarity and impact of party policies (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.977). Finally, the seventh part measured the popularity of the Move Forward Party (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.966). The 38-item questionnaire achieved a high reliability score with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.989 (Cronbach, 1951).

Data collection

The data for this study were collected between January and March 2024. A structured questionnaire was distributed to 397 students at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. Participants were selected using a stratified sampling method to ensure a representative distribution across different academic years. The questionnaire was designed to assess various factors influencing political popularity, including political ideology, social media campaign effectiveness, political leadership, public participation, political alliances, and party policies. Data were gathered through both online and face-to-face surveys to maximize response rates and ensure comprehensive coverage. The collected responses were then coded and analyzed to evaluate the reliability and validity of the measures used in the study.

Data analysis

The data analysis for this study was conducted using multiple regression analysis to examine the factors influencing political popularity. Prior to performing the regression analysis, several preliminary checks were conducted to ensure the validity of the model assumptions. First, the absence of autocorrelation among the residuals was verified using the Durbin-Watson test (Durbin & Watson, 1951). Second, multicollinearity was assessed by examining the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and Tolerance statistics, ensuring that the independent variables did not exhibit high intercorrelations (Kutner, Nachtsheim, & Neter, 2004). Third, the linearity of the relationships between the independent and dependent variables was confirmed using scatter plots, and the normality of the data distribution was checked through skewness and kurtosis values (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Finally, the assumption of homoscedasticity, which refers to the constant variance of error terms, was evaluated through the inspection of scatter plots. These steps ensured that the regression model met the necessary assumptions for reliable and valid analysis.

Ethical considerations

This study was conducted with strict adherence to ethical guidelines to ensure the protection and respect of all participants. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before data collection, with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and the voluntary nature of participation. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning unique codes to participants and securely storing all data. Any potential risks to participants were minimized, and the data were used solely for academic and research purposes.

RESULTS

Assumption checks

Before conducting the multiple regression analysis, several assumption checks were performed to ensure the validity of the model. Autocorrelation was tested using the Durbin-Watson test, which yielded a statistic of 1.87 and a p-value of 0.192, indicating no autocorrelation in the residuals. Multicollinearity was assessed by examining the VIF and Tolerance values for each independent variable, all of which were within acceptable limits (VIF < 5 and Tolerance > 0.10), confirming no significant multicollinearity. Linearity was verified through scatter plots, which showed positive linear relationships between independent variables and the dependent variable. Normality of the data distribution was confirmed by checking skewness and kurtosis values, all within the acceptable range of -2 to +2 for skewness and -7 to +7 for kurtosis, as suggested by Hair et al. (2010). Lastly, homoscedasticity was examined using scatter plots, which indicated that the variance of the residuals was constant across all levels of the independent variables, evidenced by a flat and smooth line. These checks confirmed that the data met the necessary assumptions for a valid multiple regression analysis.

Multiple regression analysis results

In this study, the researcher investigated and analyzed six independent variables: political ideology (PI), social media use (SMU), political leadership of the party leader (PL), public participation (PP), political alliances (PA), and party policies (POL). The dependent variable was the popularity of the Move Forward Party (POP). The results of the multiple regression analysis (MRA) are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Multiple regression analysis results

Predictors	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Intercept	0.40467	0.1316	-	3.076	0.002
Political Ideology (PI)	0.00907	0.0265	0.0107	0.342	0.733
Social Media Use (SMU)	0.11260	0.0444	0.1178	2.537	0.012
Political Leadership)PL)	0.12767	0.0553	0.1286	2.308	0.022
Public Participation)PP)	0.14296	0.0553	0.1330	2.584	0.010
Political Alliance (PA)	0.21402	0.0381	0.2457	5.612	< .001
Party's Policies)POL)	0.31713	0.0487	0.3253	6.514	< .001
Multiple R =.864, R2 = .747, Adjusted R2 = .743					

Table 1 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis (MRA) examining the impact of six predictors on the popularity of the Move Forward Party (POP). The intercept value is 0.40467, indicating the baseline level of POP when all predictors are zero. Political ideology (PI) has a coefficient (B) of 0.00907, but it is not statistically significant (p = 0.733). Social media use (SMU) has a significant positive impact on POP (B = 0.11260, p = 0.012). Political leadership (PL) also significantly influences POP (B = 0.12767, p = 0.022). Public participation (PP) has a positive and significant effect (B = 0.14296, p = 0.010). Political alliances (PA) (B = 0.21402, p < 0.001) and party policies (POL) (B = 0.31713, p < 0.001) both show strong and significant positive impacts on POP. The multiple R value of 0.864 indicates a high correlation between the predictors and POP. The R2 value of 0.747 means that 74.7% of the variance in POP is explained by these six predictors, and the adjusted R2 of 0.743 confirms the model's robustness.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study align closely with existing literature on the determinants of political popularity, emphasizing the significant roles of social media use, political leadership, public participation, political alliances, and party policies. Social media use (SMU) emerged as a crucial factor, highlighting its role in modern political campaigns. Al Dulaimi (2021) noted that social media platforms enhance political awareness and engagement among younger demographics, which likely translates into increased political support. Dugger (2015) also found that platforms like Twitter and Facebook facilitate direct interaction between politicians and voters, boosting political support. This study supports these assertions, demonstrating that effective use of social media can significantly boost a party's popularity by facilitating direct communication, engaging content, and broader reach. Political leadership (PL) also significantly impacted popularity, consistent with Wheeler's (2018) emphasis on the importance of charismatic and effective leadership. The ability of party leaders to inspire, motivate, and set a clear vision resonates strongly with voters, thereby enhancing their support. Can (2017) found that effective media use by party leaders during elections can significantly influence their popularity. This finding underscores the need for parties to focus on developing and

projecting strong leadership to maintain and grow their voter base. Public participation (PP) was another significant predictor of political popularity, reinforcing Fowler's (2017) conclusion that civic engagement plays a critical role in political dynamics. Active involvement of citizens in political processes, policy development, and community activities not only strengthens democratic practices but also builds stronger connections between the public and political parties. Szolucha (2022) demonstrated that public engagement in policy discussions, such as those about fracking, leads to increased political responsiveness and support. This engagement fosters trust and loyalty, which are crucial for sustained political support. The strong positive effects of political alliances (PA) and party policies (POL) highlight the strategic importance of coalition-building and policy clarity. Saad-Filho and Boito (2016) discussed how effective political alliances can enhance a party's reach and resources, thereby improving its image and appeal. Végh (2021) also noted that alliances within European radical right parties helped them gain significant popularity. This study confirms that forming strategic alliances with other parties can lead to significant gains in popularity. Similarly, the clarity and effectiveness of party policies (Hess & Renner, 2019) play a vital role in shaping public perception and support. Policies that address key issues, reduce social inequality, and combat corruption resonate well with voters and are instrumental in building a positive party image, as evidenced by Kolios (2022), who found that economic policies addressing immediate voter needs significantly enhance political popularity.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the factors influencing the popularity of the Move Forward Party, focusing on six independent variables: political ideology, social media use, political leadership, public participation, political alliances, and party policies. The findings indicate that social media use, political leadership, public participation, political alliances, and party policies significantly contribute to political popularity. These results underscore the importance of strategic social media engagement, charismatic leadership, active civic involvement, effective coalition-building, and clear, impactful policies in shaping public support for political parties. However, the study has limitations, including the sample being limited to students from Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, which may not represent the broader population, and the cross-sectional design that limits causality inference. Future research should include a more diverse sample, employ longitudinal studies, and consider additional factors such as economic conditions and media coverage. Political parties should leverage these findings to enhance their strategies by focusing on these key determinants to build and maintain voter support.

Authors' contributions: SB conceived the idea, designed the project, wrote the manuscript, and performed statistical analysis. WK and CK participated in the design of the study and helped in writing the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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