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Thailand's Movement Party: The Evolution of the Move Forward Party

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Abstract

The existing literature on the relationship between political parties and social movements draws mainly from European cases, and has rarely captured the kinds of relationships that may exist in other parts of the world. This article addresses the gap by shedding light on the dynamics of party–movement relationships in Thailand. We examine the connections between two Thai political parties and a variety of protest movements. Our analysis demonstrates that Thailand's Move Forward Party and its predecessor the Future Forward Party can be classified as movement parties, but that they operated differently. While Future Forward was a clandestine movement party, concealing its origins in grassroots activism, Move Forward later revealed its activist roots and underwent a transformation from a clandestine to a fully fledged movement party. This change was triggered by two emerging conditions: the rise of student-led mass movements and collective demands for radical change that had been ignored by other political parties.

Keywords: political parties; movement parties; social movements; Move Forward Party; Thailand

The Myth of the Organic Movement

A social movement is a recurring political phenomenon in which the masses mobilize to pursue their collective demands or calls for changes. However, since social movements, as extra-parliamentary actors, have no direct access to power and cannot pursue their agendas in isolation, they need to build ties with political institutions, especially political parties. To avoid reliance on ties with political parties, some movements opt to transform themselves into political parties, which are often referred to as movement parties.

Although movement parties have become more prevalent, they have experienced only limited electoral successes outside Europe. India's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) emerged from an anti-corruption movement in 2011 and made their electoral debut at national level in the 2014 general election. The party won four seats but

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lost three seats in the following general election in 2019—it currently holds just one seat in the national parliament (Divya Siddarth, Roshan Shankar and Joyojeet Pal, 2021: 1361–62). Akbayan, the Citizens’ Action Party affiliated with various progressive social movements in the Philippines, has never won more than three Congressional seats, and now holds just one Senate seat. Fledgling green parties in South Korea and Taiwan have yet to win any parliamentary seats. Thailand’s Move Forward Party, which gained the highest seat share in the 2023 general election, stands out as the most nationally successful movement party in Asia. This article offers a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of the Move Forward Party from its origins to the present.

Thailand has seen recurrent waves of mass political protests for decades, notably the student-led protests of 1973 and 1976, the anti-military “Black May” demonstrations of 1992, and latterly color-coded yellow-versus red protests. These included the “yellow” 2006, 2008 and 2013–14 anti-Thaksin movements led by the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and later the People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC); and the redshirt movement protests spearheaded by the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) in 2009 and 2010. From 2020, Thailand experienced a new wave of anti-government demonstrations, initiated by a range of student-led groups (Aim Sinpeng and McCargo 2021).

Typically, these protest movements demanded the resignation of the prime minister of the day, often along with calls for constitutional and political reforms. Although most of the more recent movements were at least tacitly supported by opposition political parties, an important feature of Thai protest movements has been a notional distinction between “self-interested” politicians and their parties on the one hand, and genuinely grassroots popular movements on the other. The legitimacy of Thai mass protests hinges largely on their credentials as “organic” movements, notionally untainted by association with the unsavory machinations of political parties.

Much of the research on the emergence of Thailand’s student-led movement between 2020 and 2021 defines it as an organic movement (see, for example, Penchan Phoborisut 2021). “Organic” in this context is not simply descriptive, but also normative: protestors are said to have “come together naturally after years of political discontent” (Thai PBS 2020), suggesting a greater degree of “purity” than previous color-coded protests (Kanokrat 2021). Given its unprecedented calls for reform of the monarchy, the student-led protest movement was an exceptional development in Thai political history. The prevalent trope framing it as an “organic” movement stresses origin myths, but obscures the very real connections that have emerged between the student-led movement and some elected politicians.

Such assumptions are not new: the 2013 anti-Thaksin amnesty protest movement was initially viewed as largely organic (Samak Mith 2013), but rapidly evolved into the PDRC, which was closely linked to the opposition Democrat Party. Led by former Democrat Party secretary-general Suthep Thaugsuban, the PDRC was actively encouraged, if not sponsored, by elements of the military bent on preparing the ground for the May 2014 coup. Most PDRC protestors came from Democrat strongholds in Bangkok and the Upper South. In many respects, the PDRC—even more than the earlier PAD, which included a Democrat MP among its five-member leadership team—was the protest wing of the Democrat Party.

The two yellow movements closely paralleled the pro-Thaksin redshirt movement, which was instigated and part-funded by Thaksin Shinawatra and his proxy Pheu Thai Party. Nevertheless, popular understandings of the redshirts are rather simplistic: the movement did not have a simple top-down structure, but comprised large numbers of essentially autonomous, regionally based groups often loyal to specific local leaders rather than the national UDD (Naruemon Thabchumpon and McCargo 2011, 1012–1017). Funding for these groups was mainly generated locally, but media caricatures of the redshirts as fueled by cash handouts from Thaksin reflected the notion that the only legitimate street protests were organically organized, and “not orchestrated by politicians for partisan ends or to serve personal ambitions” (McCargo 2021, 176).

The problem with the standard critique made of the redshirts—which could be summarized as “mass protests directly funded and instigated by politicians are illegitimate”—is that this simplistic and highly normative trope occludes the diverse range of connections that may exist between movements and parties. We argue that party–movement relationships are not necessarily associated with the kind of financial support or political leverage that allows an external actor to manipulate a movement. We need to examine larger patterns of coordinated interactions with political implications. Following McAdam and Tarrow’s (2019, 34) findings, elections offer opportunities for contention and allow both political parties and social movements to play a role in influencing each other (see also McAdam and Kloos 2014).

Against this backdrop, our argument begins with the puzzle of why the Move Forward Party selected some figures from the student-led movement to be 2023 parliamentary election candidates. In doing so, we trace the missing links between the Move Forward Party and the student-led movement. Move Forward has evolved over time: despite being a successor party, it is not a simple continuation of the apparently centrist Future Forward Party. Move Forward has transformed into a movement party. Our research question is: Why did Move Forward overtly become a movement party, while Future Forward did not?

Building on the theoretical literature concerning party–movement relationships and movement parties, we address this question by arguing that Future Forward was in effect a clandestine movement party. In other words, Future Forward operated as a movement party but concealed its activist origins and presented itself as a somewhat conventional centrist office-seeking party. Two key factors, the growing momentum of the student-led protest movement from 2020, and evolving radical collective demands, did not exist during the lifetime of Future Forward but played important roles in the case of its successor. With these combined incentives, we argue that Move Forward openly revealed its activist roots and became an overtly movement party. To support our argument, we present empirical evidence drawn from online secondary sources, which we have used to map the networks of connections between the Future Forward Party, the Move Forward Party, the Progressive Movement, and a range of student-led protest movements in Thailand. We have supplemented this data with insights derived from a small number of anonymous interviews with well-placed key informants conducted during 2021 (see Table 6).

Apart from our contribution to the analysis of Thailand’s party politics and political landscape, our article complements and sheds light on the existing literature on

movement parties, using a non-western case to illustrate their dynamics. Through our study of the Thai case, we introduce a new category of movement party, the clandestine movement party that conceals its activist roots. Our findings suggest that a combination of the emergence of new mass movements and new collective demands that have been neglected by established parties offers a *sine qua non* for the formation of a movement party. Nevertheless, even without these two factors, in a political environment where the entry barrier for new parties is low, the transformation of cleavage structures in society could create opportunities for the emergence of clandestine movement parties. Such parties could later transform into full-fledged movement parties following the appearance of the two missing conditions: a mass movement, and collective demands that are being neglected by established parties.

Party–movement Relationships and Movement Parties

Social movements and political parties play complementary roles in all political regimes with a representative system, including electoral autocracy, serving as important actors in articulating citizens' demands and preferences (Kitschelt 1986). While social movements (hereafter, movements) mobilizing supporters and civil society groups, they also need to influence powerholders, through intermediaries such as political parties (Bosi, Giugni, and Uba 2016, 18; Piccio 2016, 263). Without ties with institutional actors, movements cannot successfully pursue their agendas. Political parties (hereafter parties) may support movement demands when party elites, especially those in opposition, view engagement with movements as a means to greater electoral success (Schlozman 2015, 242; Tarrow 1994, 98). As a result, they may develop ties with movements that can affect their political destinies (Maguire 1995, 199; McAdam and Kloos 2014).

Relationships between movements and parties are inherently dynamic and evolving (Hutter, Kriesi, and Lorenzini 2019, 324) and do not necessarily take the form of parties directly controlling or funding movements. Party–movement relationships can take diverse forms encompassing a wide range of modes of engagement and interaction, including the public display of support by parties towards movements, with or without formal alliances or cooptation. The nature of cooperative forms ranges from parties adopting movement demands, to their participating in movement activities, to their altering political positions, through to overtly aligning with the objectives of a given movement (Piccio 2016, 264). Through collaborative ties with movements, parties can benefit from committed activists by accessing information and resources to advance their preferred priorities (Muldoon and Rye, 2020, 494).

Despite the potential benefits, collaborative ties with movements may bring high costs for parties, including losing popular support from their vote bases (Aim Sinpeng 2014, 158). In most cases, parties can access to greater resources and opportunities to influence public opinion (Rhiannon 2009). Even opposition parties that are most likely to work with movements due to their limited political influence in the parliament (Almeida 2010, 170; Maguire 1995, 201) sometimes face difficult dilemmas when deciding whether to forge ties with movements. Therefore, party–movement relationships often depend on three main factors. First, parties are more open to collaborating with movements if their respective cultural and ideological

understandings of politics are closely related. This sort of affinity can be defined as identity coherence, or orientation towards a shared ideological spectrum (Maguire 1995, 201; Piccio 2016, 268). Second, there are potential clashes with established parties regarding movement demands (Kitschelt 2006, 282). Established parties are wary of alienating supporters, and therefore avoid forging ties with movements focusing on controversial issues (della Porta 2020, 100; see also Kitschelt 2006). Third, how much vulnerability obtains in the parties' electoral environment? A lower level of vulnerability derives from higher electoral barriers obstructing a new party from contesting elections and gaining seats (Goldstone 2003). Such barriers include fixed electoral thresholds, where a party needs to surpass a minimum percentage of the national vote share to enter parliament, and majoritarian representation systems (so-called two-party system), whose electoral rules are designed to limit the number of viable parties (Carey and Hix 2011, 384). Faced with greater electoral vulnerability, parties are more likely to forge ties with movements, as low electoral barriers tend to facilitate the success of new parties. Parties are more likely to collaborate with movements that share a similar ideological spectrum, instead of pushing such movements to transform themselves into parties, to avoid unnecessary competition with new potential rivals in the future.

Given these conditions, not all movements receive backing from parties. However, as movements often rely on support from parties to advance their demands, some movements, unable to garner support from party elites, opt to become parties themselves (Garner and Zald 1985, p. 137). In several European countries, various parties, including established and mainstream ones, have originated from movements. Among the most successful examples are the Italian Five Star Movement Party (which peaked electorally in 2018 with over 30 per cent of the national vote), the Spanish Podemos Party (which was in the government as a junior coalition partner to the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party), and the German Green Party—currently part of the ruling three-party “traffic light” coalition. These parties have been commonly referred to as “movement parties” (della Porta 2020; della Porta et al. 2017; Prentoulis and Thomassen 2019).

Research has shown that certain conditions facilitate the emergence of movement parties (della Porta 2020; Kitschelt 1988, 2006). The primary prerequisite is legally mandated electoral barriers, and entry thresholds for new parties (Kitschelt 2006, 282). Whereas a two-party system obstructs the rise of new parties, movement parties generally thrive in multiparty settings, of the kind typically found across Continental Europe (Hutter, Kriesi, and Lorenzini 2019, 329). Another prerequisite is the transformation of cleavage structures, through a newly emerging politically articulated division in society (Hutter, Kriesi, and Lorenzini 2019, 325). In European cases, movement parties emerged in settings where crisis dynamics radically challenged or affected people's everyday lives (della Porta et al. 2016). The third factor is the presence of evolving collective demands held by a large constituency, which none of the established parties makes an effort to embrace (Meguid 2005, 347). Such collective demands often involve highly contentious issues where established parties are fearful of “dividing their own electoral constituency” (della Porta 2020, 100) (see also Kitschelt 2006). The final condition is the emergence of mass movement mobilizations. Typically, such mass movements strive to develop “new subjectivities” (della

Porta et al. 2017, 23); therefore, movement parties tend to emerge as a reflection of those subjectivities (della Porta 2020, 100–101).

In the literature on party–movement collaborations, a movement party is one specific kind of outcome. Some conditions for the emergence of party–movement collaborations and the creation of movement parties overlap. To capture the similarities and differences, we compare the key conditions for the emergence of party–movement collaborations and a movement party (see Table 1). Two conditions shared by both party–movement collaborations and movement parties are crucial. An electoral arena with low barriers (highlighted in yellow in the online version) yields a congruent effect in both contexts. The degree of electoral barriers corresponds to the chances for new parties to enter parliament. Low barriers make parties more inclined to collaborate with movements, and make it easier for movements to establish a party. On the other hand, the second condition (highlighted in green) has a different effect. Movement demands highlighting controversial issues are likely to hinder collaborative ties between parties and movements, but may serve as an impetus for the establishment of a movement party.

To rank all facilitating conditions for the emergence of a movement party, a low degree of electoral barriers supports the least degree of influence, whereas shared collective demands provide the highest degree of influence. However, collective demands held by a large constituency of voters that are shunned by established parties tend to evolve alongside the rise of massive movement mobilizations. Accordingly, the emergence of a popular mass movement whose collective demands are neglected by established parties is a sine qua non for the formation of a movement party.

Table 1. Conditions that facilitate the emergence of party–movement relationships and a movement party

Party–movement relationships		
Supportive condition	Preventive condition	Movement party
1. Low degree of barriers to new parties created by electoral system	1. High degree of barriers to new parties created by electoral system	1. Low degree of electoral barriers to new parties created by electoral system
2. High degree of shared ideological ground between parties and movements	2. Low degree of shared ideological ground between parties and movements	2. Transformation of cleavage structures
3. Opposition parties are more likely to develop collaborative ties with movements	3. Potential for clashes with established parties regarding movement demands	3. Presence of collective demands, which none of the established parties makes an effort to embrace
		4. Emergence of massive movement mobilization

Note: Summarized by the authors. Yellow highlight shows overlapping conditions that provide a congruent effect on party–movement relationships and a movement party. Green highlight shows potential points of contention between parties and movements. For color see article online.

Sources: della Porta 2020; Hutter, Kriesi, and Lorenzini 2019; Kitschelt 2006; Maguire 1995; Piccio 2016.

In Kitschelt's (2006, 280) definition, movement parties are described as "coalitions of activists who emanate from movements and try to apply the organization and strategic practices of movements in the electoral arena." Since these parties have activist roots, they are more inclined to develop strong connections with movements. Although non-movement parties, especially those in opposition, may also build collaborative ties with movements, certain conditions play important roles in their decision-making. In a European context, we have seen various opposition parties, especially non-traditional left-wing parties, align themselves with anti-government movements for electoral purposes (Maguire 1995, 201). Nevertheless, movement parties, which typically have close relations and a shared ideology with movements, are more incentivized to side with movements unconditionally (della Porta 2020, 22) (see also Kitschelt 2006).

Movement parties emerge as a sort of hybrid actor, one that applies the organization and strategic practices of movements in the arena of party competition (Kitschelt 2006, 280). Given this characteristic, movement parties are highly motivated to expand their networks by integrating activists and movement constituencies into their parties. Within this framework, a movement party is driven more by ideological militancy than by pragmatic political considerations (Tarrow 2015, 95). Table 2 compares the characteristics of movement and non-movement parties and their relations to movements.

In the following section, we utilize the theory of movement parties as a framework to assess whether Future Forward and Move Forward exhibit the characteristics of a movement party. We additionally explore whether Future Forward was founded under the environmental conditions that facilitate the emergence of a movement party. By doing so, we present a comprehensive account of the historical development of both parties.

Move Forward Party: Successor to the Future Forward Party?

Thailand's Move Forward Party secured 151 seats in the 2023 general election and became the largest single party in the parliament. Move Forward was in effect the reincarnation of the former Future Forward Party, which had gained 81 seats in the 2019 election, coming in third, before being banned by Constitutional Court. Both parties had close connections with movements that had engaged in acts of mass protest but operated and presented themselves in different forms.

The Future Forward Party, founded in 2018, claimed to be a progressive, people-oriented, and alternative party. Notionally, the party had twenty-six officially proclaimed co-founders, though in practice, the party was originally created by four people: wealthy auto-parts tycoon Thanathorn Juangroonruangkit, who had been a student activist at Thammasat University and a long-time supporter of progressive causes, and his three old friends, Chaitawat Tulathon, Thanapol Eawsakul, and Sarayoot Jailak. Chaitawat, Thanapol and Sarayoot did not figure on the official list of co-founders, preferring to work behind the scenes (Interview 3 2021) (see also McCargo and Anyarat Chattharakul 2020, 112–113; 34–35).

During the 2019 election campaign, the party strongly opposed military dominance of the country's politics. Despite its progressive stances, exemplified by

Table 2. Characteristics of movement and non-movement parties and their relations to movements

Movement parties		Non-movement parties*	
Characteristics	Relations to movements	Characteristics	Relations to movements
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strong activist roots (with origins in movements) or party founders came from movements 2. Integration of movement constituencies into parties 3. Hybrid actors, often participate in movements 4. Supportive of protest movements 5. Driven by ideological militancy more than pragmatic considerations 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Close relations with movements, ranging from advocating for and representing the claims and demands of movements, as well as integrating with movements 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Having a movement wing does not constitute a movement party 2. Non-movement parties are mostly centrist traditional office-seeking parties, since they want to appeal wider groups of voters 3. Driven by pragmatic considerations more than ideological militancy 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conditional on party's electoral interests 2. Conditional on degree of identity coherence and shared ideological spectrum between parties and movements 3. Conditional on position of parties: incumbent or opposition? 4. Cautious in seeking collaborative ties with movements if their demands address controversial and sensitive issues

Note: Developed and summarized by the authors from della Porta 2020; Hutter, Kriesi, and Lorenzini 2019; Kitschelt 2006; Tarrow 2015.

*Characteristics of non-movement parties listed only include movement-related elements.

signature policy proposals such as the abolition of military conscription, Future Forward adopted the positionality of a centrist office-seeking party. The party's orange campaign color communicated a carefully branded compromise between the highly polarizing red and yellow colors that had coded Thailand's electoral politics for more than a decade (McCargo and Anyarat Chattharakul 2020, 95–97), and was calculated to appeal to voters across the political spectrum. However, all four party co-founders were not only political progressives, but also movement guys at heart. Thanathorn, Chaitawat, Thanapol and Sarayoot had worked together as activists in the Student Federation of Thailand around the turn of the millennium (Interview 3 2021). In the years following the promulgation of the 1997 Constitution, they participated in major movements, including both the yellowshirt and redshirt movements (Interview 3 2021). In early 2006, the Student Federation of Thailand, along with most other NGOs, strongly opposed the "Thaksin regime" and collectively decided to support the anti-Thaksin yellowshirts, who viewed Thaksin as an autocratic figure. Nevertheless, after the 2006 military coup, the Student Federation of Thailand U-turned and supported the redshirt protest movement (Interview 3

2021). The Future Forward co-founders insisted they were not pro-Thaksin, but were part of the redshirt movement's progressive wing. Three of the party founders, Thanathorn, Chaitawat, and Thanapol, co-founded *Fa Diao Kan* publishing house (in English, "Same Sky") in 2003, producing a ground-breaking democratic leftist quarterly magazine, roughly analogous to a Thai *New Left Review* (Same Sky Books n.d.; Mettha Wongwat 2020). At least three issues of *Fa Diao Kan* focused directly on criticizing Thaksin as an autocratic leader.

Another key figure was Future Forward's secretary-general Piyabutr Saengkanokkul, a leading member of Nitirat (in English, the "Enlightened Jurists"), a group of progressive Thammasat University law lecturers who pushed the envelope on politically sensitive legal matters, notably the controversial *lèse-majesté* law—Article 112 of the Criminal Code (McCargo and Peeradej Tanruangporn 2015). *Fa Diao Kan* and *Nitirat* were ideologically connected, and in the wake of the 2006 military coup, both were indirectly allied to the redshirt movement. Back then, Same Sky's website played an important role in opening up critical discussion concerning the monarchy and promoting progressive discourse within the redshirt movement (Mettha Wongwat 2020).

The five key Future Forward Party figures brought others with similar activist backgrounds into the party (Interview 1 and 3, 2021), such as party list MP Rangsiman Rome, staff member Phuthita Chaianun, and parliamentary candidate Oranuch Polpinyo. Many people with redshirt backgrounds joined Future Forward, including as staffers (Interview 2, 2021). Prominent examples included party list MP Amarat Chokepamikul, deputy spokesperson Suttawan Suban na Ayutthaya, and former redshirt lawyer turned party list MP Karom Polpornklang.

Before founding Future Forward, Thanathorn, Piyabutr and their close collaborators debated whether to launch a party or start a new movement. They were less interested in working within the system than helping to disrupt the existing order, sowing the seeds of changes that might take years to bear fruit. Their goal was arguably "to provoke a crisis of faith in Thailand's power structures, and to inspire a younger generation to dismantle them" (McCargo and Anyarat Chattharakul 2020, 165). On December 14, 2019, Future Forward mobilized a flashmob attended by several thousand people near Siam Square, opposing a Constitutional Court order that stripped Thanathorn's MP status and the Election Commission's petition to dissolve Future Forward. Nevertheless, while Thanathorn declared "this is just the beginning," he never called another demonstration (McCargo and Anyarat Chattharakul 2020, 155–56). Although known as a poster boy for the cause of reforming the *lèse-majesté* law, Piyabutr never raised this issue during his time at Future Forward: such provocative, progressive proposals were sidelined in the interests of electoral advantage, to avoid the risk of scaring off voters (McCargo and Anyarat Chattharakul 2020, 28).

Running for the first time in the 2019 general election, the Future Forward Party was a rising star, becoming the third largest party in the Thai parliament. However, on February 21, 2020, less than a year after the election, Future Forward was dissolved by the Constitutional Court in a controversial ruling claiming that loans made by Thanathorn to the party were illegal. The case was generally regarded as politically motivated, not least because the law under which the party was dissolved made no

reference at all to loans (Interview 4, 2021). Thanathorn and other leading figures were also banned from holding political office for ten years. Fifty-five of the remaining Future Forward MPs joined the successor Move Forward Party, led by Pita Limjaroenrat, an elite businessman who was initially quite cautious in his political pronouncements. Thanathorn, Piyabutr and other banned colleagues moved from the parliamentary to the extra-parliamentary arena by launching the Progressive Movement.¹ The Progressive Movement worked in parallel with Move Forward, and played an important role as a driving force for the party's outreach activities, including political advocacy and campaigning for local elections (Interview 4, 2021). Some unsuccessful 2019 Future Forward Party parliamentary candidates ran for office as heads of Provincial Administrative Organizations (PAOs) affiliated with the Progressive Movement in local elections held in late 2020. A number of former Progressive Movement candidates who lost in the PAO elections returned to the national election arena as 2023 Move Forward Party parliamentary candidates. For instance, Nuntawat Boontook, a former candidate for PAO elections in Phetchabun, then became the Move Forward parliamentary candidate for Phetchabun district 5 (Nation TV 2020); while Wuttirak Pangthakaew, a 2023 Move Forward parliamentary candidate for Khon Kaen, ran for the Khon Kaen PAO in 2020 (Wuttirak Pangthakaew 2022). These candidate selections show the close ties between Move Forward and the Progressive Movement.

Chaitawat, one of the party's co-founders, later claimed that the establishment of the Future Forward Party was mainly motivated by a sense that Thailand was at a critical juncture marked by the 2016 monarchical succession. In a July 2022 interview, he argued that Thailand's cleavage structure after the royal transition reflected a new era in which the established entrenched elites could no longer unite the society or connect diverse groups. People were dissatisfied with the military junta's performance, and the number of new voters who did not feel connected with any existing parties increased. The longstanding Thaksin-centered Pheu Thai Party, although positioning itself as a pro-democracy force, had failed to capture collective demands from different groups in society (Attasit Sittidumrong and Phuriphat Kruanopparatana 2023). Those factors combined to provide an opportunity for a new political player. Moreover, despite the explicit deterioration of democracy, the 2017 Constitution ironically also created a more open electoral system when compared to that framed by the 2007 Constitution (see Table 3). The constitution drafters' objective was to create a fragmented multiparty system, which paved the way for the rise of new parties—hence the 2017 Constitution benefited Future Forward as a new contender in the 2019 general election.

As argued above, the presence of four conditions (see Table 1) facilitates the emergence of a movement party. During the lifetime of Future Forward, two crucial conditions—the emergence of mass movements and new collective demands backed by a large constituency, which established parties overlooked—did not materialize. However, after the launch of Move Forward, both conditions were met. In mid-2020, a student-led protest movement emerged that staged hundreds of demonstrations all over Thailand in the months that followed (McCargo 2021). The protestors' unprecedented demands for monarchical reform became gradually recognized, even though the majority of voters did not embrace them. Given that most supporters of both student-led protest movement and of Future Forward were progressive

Table 3. Numbers of parties gaining at least one parliamentary seat in the 2007, 2011, 2019, and 2023 elections

Thailand's 2007 Constitution		Thailand's 2017 Constitution	
MMM (two ballots)		MMP (one ballot)	MMM (two ballots)
2007 election	2011 election	2019 election	2023 election
7 parties	11 parties	26 parties	17 parties

Note: Collected by the authors. MMM stands for Mixed-Member Majoritarian system while MMP stands for Mixed-Member Proportional system. The 2023 election rules differed from those of 2019 due to an intervening constitutional amendment. In the 2023 election, the single ballot used in 2019 was divided into two (separate party-list and constituency votes) and MMP was dropped in favor of a return to MMM.

democrats, they shared similar ideological ground that favored potential collaborative ties between the student-led movement and the Move Forward Party. However, for traditional parties driven by pragmatic considerations, the core priority is electoral success: they are cautious about dividing their vote bases, which capture median voters whose vote preference is not centered on ideology. The student-led movement's bold demands for wholesale reform of the monarchy not only violated Thailand's strongest political taboos, but were also viewed very warily by the majority of voters. Therefore, if Move Forward had continued Future Forward's orange positioning as a centrist office-seeking party appealing to both former yellows and former reds, it would have avoided building overt ties with the student-led movement. In fact, however, Move Forward aligned itself more and more overtly with the protest, openly revealing its activist roots and expressing much greater ideological militancy after allying with the student-led movement.

Following all aforementioned factors, it is clear that Future Forward featured four out of five characteristics of a movement party, missing only the fifth feature on ideological militancy (see Table 2). Given the shared historical background of Future Forward and Move Forward, we argue that both Future Forward and Move Forward are movement parties by origin, revealed their characteristics differently. We define the Future Forward Party as a clandestine movement party. By "clandestine movement party," we mean a party whose co-founders originated from movements and have strong activist roots, but chose not to reveal and present themselves as a movement party while seeking electoral advantage and trying to build up a strong and widely acceptable brand. Although Move Forward appeared initially as a simple continuation of Future Forward, over time the party transformed into a fully fledged movement party, one with deep ties to the student-led movement.

To illustrate our argument, in the next section we provide empirical evidence in the form of a diagram that maps out the network of connections between the Future Forward Party, the Move Forward Party, the Progressive Movement, and movement constituencies. Then, we elucidate how Move Forward has aligned itself with the student-led movement.

Move Forward's Embrace of the Student-led Protest Movement

The Move Forward Party progressively and explicitly aligned itself with the student-led movement, developing and deepening ties after the movement gained

momentum over time. To give an overview, we begin with a diagram drawn to illustrate connections between people associated with the Future Forward Party, the Move Forward Party, and the Progressive Movement, as well as individuals linked to the student-led movements (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 illustrates initial ties between the Future Forward Party and some activists who later turned into the key figures in the post-2020 student-led protest movements. High-profile protest leader “Penguin” Parit Chiwarak was prominently featured in photographs of Future Forward’s 2018 launch event, though he was too young to be an official co-founder, and never actually joined the party. Prior to becoming a protest leader and the founder of the Free Youth Movement, “Ford” Tattap Ruangprapaikitseree was not only a member of the Future Forward Party, but also a candidate for the party’s New Gen Network committee. He also encouraged people to join the party-led flashmob on December 14, 2019. Another protest leader, “Toto” Piyarat Chongthep, became a Move Forward parliamentary candidate for the 2023 election. In addition to major protest leaders, some local activists with close ties with Future Forward played an important role in provincial student-led protest movements and continued to work with Move Forward: for example, Oranuch Polpinyo, and Chutchawan Apirukmonkong, prominent activists in the Northeast, and Move

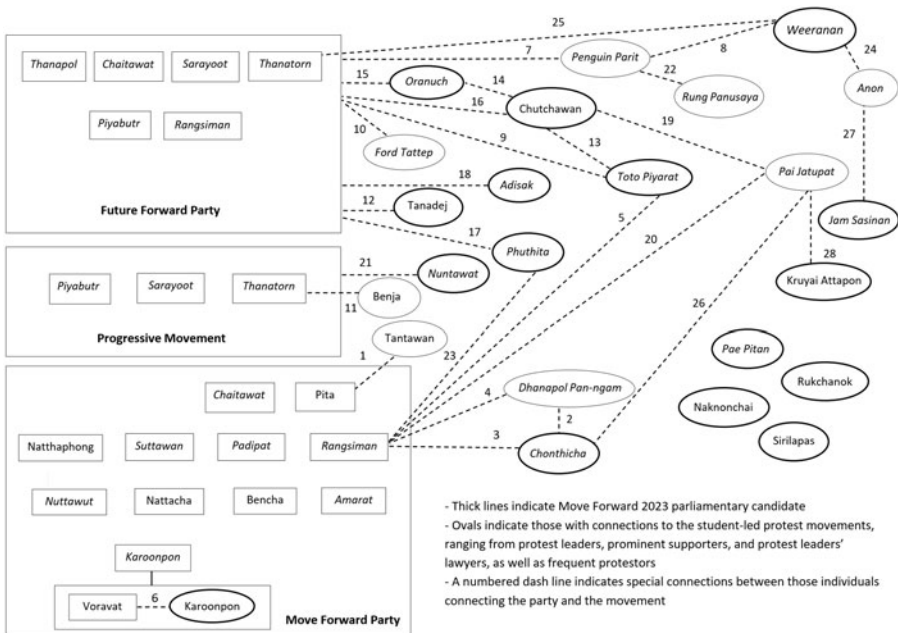


Figure 1. Diagram showing the connections between the Future Forward Party, the Move Forward Party, the Progressive Movement, and the student-led protest movement. Ovals with thick lines show Move Forward’s parliamentary candidates for the 2023 general elections. All names written in italics indicate an activist background. The numbered dashed lines show the number of ties. Rectangles denote members holding leading positions in the Future Forward Party, the Move Forward Party or the Progressive Movement.

Source: Developed by the authors.

Forward (formerly Future Forward) parliamentary candidate for Mukdahan, Adisak Sombatkam.

This diagram provides empirical evidence supporting our claim that Future Forward was, in effect, a clandestine movement party. Another interesting connection is that most of the Move Forward Party's current board of executive members either have backgrounds in political activism or held positions on the Parliamentary Committee on Political Development, Mass Communication, and Public Participation, including its sub-committees. This parliamentary committee, chaired by Future/Move Forward MPs, played a key role in providing platforms for the student-led protest movements and connecting them with lawmakers. Additionally, Future Forward's co-founders, who subsequently became leading players in Move Forward and in the party's extra-parliamentary arm, the Progressive Movement, fully recognized and embraced the student-led movement.

Such reciprocal connections between the student-led protest movements and Future Forward, Move Forward, and the Progressive Movement can be observed through three key aspects: support, representation, and integration. Following our theoretical framework, the three attributes illustrate the pattern of a movement party's relations with its partner movement. Firstly, Move Forward demonstrated unwavering support by solidifying its position on issues related to movement demands. Subsequently, it represented the student-led movements and advanced their agendas through both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary channels. Finally, Move Forward integrated leaders, participants, and key figures from the student-led movements into the party, either as staff members or as parliamentary candidates for the 2023 general election.

Support: Move Forward clarified its position on protestor demands

Evidence of support for the student protestors included the fact that time after time, Move Forward MPs bailed out protest leaders who had been arrested. Under Thai law, those holding official positions above a certain rank, including parliamentarians, are entitled to stand surety for individuals who have been remanded in custody, without depositing any bail payments. The MPs presenting themselves at rally sites, courts and police stations were usually the same familiar faces: Amarat Chokepamikul, Bencha Saengchatra, Rangsiman Rome, Suttawan Suban na Ayutthaya, Nattacha Boonchaiinsawat, and Natthaphong Ruengpanyawut (see Bangkokbiz 2021). These were not just ordinary MPs acting out of personal sympathy, but members of the Move Forward Party's executive and spokesperson teams. Their bailing out of student leaders represented the name of the party and delivered a collective message about Move Forward's political stance towards the student-led protest movement. Party secretary-general Chaitawat often joined MPs to observe the protest movement or to make bail applications for protest leaders (Thai Post 2021a). Party leader Pita attended one of the biggest student-led protest rallies in October 2020, and personally negotiated with riot police on behalf of the movement during a controversial water cannon crowd-control operation (Thai Rath 2020). In addition, Pita himself bailed out Tantawan Tuatulanon, a ThaluWang activist (in English, 'fighting royal impunity'), who faced criminal charges under the *lèse-majesté* law (Thai Rath 2022).

The Move Forward Party made a major U-turn on its stance towards monarchy-related issues after the student-led protest movement demanded reform of the royal institution and repeal of the *lèse-majesté* law. While the Future Forward Party's co-founders and most MPs were politically progressive, the party had never touched openly upon monarchy-related issues or called for the reform of the 112 law.² By contrast, in February 2021, the Move Forward Party proposed a motion to amend the penalties for *lèse-majesté*. However, nine party MPs declined to support the motion (BBC Thai 2021), which illustrates our argument that the party's decision to raise monarchy-related issues was not the result of internal party debate and agreement: rather, this U-turn on an extremely sensitive issue was greatly influenced by the student-led protest movement's demands. Though no longer MPs, Thanathorn and Piyabutr continued to be politically influential, playing a supportive role alongside the student-led protest movement. Thanathorn and Piyabutr expressed their strong support for the movement and encouraged people to join. In addition, after the taboo on criticizing the role of the monarchy was broken in August 2020, they were pioneers in promoting the movement's demands for monarchy reform by publishing articles and uploading videos onto online platforms (Progressive Movement, n.d.).

On various occasions, Move Forward figures have adopted the anti-military three-finger "Hunger Games" salute used by student protestors or held up posters to express their support. On at least two occasions, Move Forward MPs staged dramatic performances inside the parliamentary chamber, holding up multiple posters and calling for detained protest leaders to be bailed out (Ponwut Songsakul 2021; Prachatai 2022). Making three-finger salutes during parliamentary sessions and in public places demonstrated support and collaboration between Move Forward and the student-led protest movement. For example, on August 27, 2020, Yanathicha Buapuean, the Move Forward Party MP for Chanthaburi District 3, made a three-fingered salute hand gesture while demanding that the state stop threatening protestors (Maticchon TV 2020, 0.01–0.10). During a Move Forward political rally in Chaiyaphum in September 2021, Pita, other party MPs, and parliamentary candidates made three-fingered salute hand gestures while taking selfies with local people. (Thai Post 2021b).

Representation: Move Forward has represented the student-led movement demands and advanced its agendas through parliamentary and extra-parliamentary channels

Apart from supporting the student-led protest movement, Move Forward's stance on monarchy-related issues has incrementally aligned with that of the protestors, gradually acting like a representative or spokesperson of the student-led movement, raising the movement's demands through parliamentary channels. Some crucial moves include the following:

- 1) At the last minute, Move Forward suddenly replaced Voravat Rugvong the parliamentary candidate for a January 2022 by-election in Bangkok's Constituency 9 with Petch Karoonpon Tiensuwan. Karoonpon was a prominent actor who

had publicly expressed his strong support for the student-led protest movement, acting virtually as a movement spokesperson.

- 2) In April 2022 the Move Forward Party reshuffled its executive board. The front-line communication team consisted solely of figures closely associated with engagement in the student-led movement: Rangsiman, Suttawan and Karoonpon.
- 3) Move Forward began raising monarchy-related issues in public. During the extraordinary session of the National Assembly held in October 2020, prominent Move Forward MP Wiroj Lakkhanaadisorn proposed that the government should provide a safe zone for discussions concerning monarchy reform to alleviate tensions and conflicts. MP Padipat Suntiphada, the then chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Political Development, Mass Communication, and Public Participation, added that parliament could consider appointing a working group to conduct a comprehensive study on monarchy reform.

In June MP Bencha Saengchatra criticized the 2022 state budget allocation for the monarchy and proposed an alternative, reasonable-sounding plan for budgetary integration (Prachatai 2021). Despite the soft tone and language, her unprecedented raising of monarchy-related issues in the budget debate was highly effective in revealing the party's stance on the monarchy to the public. The following month, Pita criticized the lack of transparency concerning state budgetary allocations for the monarchy, detailed on just seven pages (The Standard 2022). In August 2021, the party further pushed the envelope by uploading a detailed video onto YouTube entitled *Why does the state budget for the monarchy need to be reformed? Rangsiman Rome, Move Forward Party*.³

- 4) Party MPs used the Parliamentary Committee on Political Development, Mass Communication, and Public Participation as a platform for protest leaders to discuss their concerns with state officials, including the enforcement of the 112 law (Bangkokbiz 2022). In June 2022, the Committee formed a sub-committee on the effects of the 112 law on freedom of press, media, and people (Parliamentary Committee 2022a). Several usual suspects from Move Forward were involved in this sub-committee, including Amarat, Padipat, Sutawan, Bencha and Natthaphong. They also appointed Panupong Jadnok, the student-led protest leader, and Ruckchanok Srinok, a prominent online protest figure and Bangkok parliamentary candidate for Bangkok, as new advisors (Parliamentary Committee 2022b)

Integration: Move Forward nominated some protest leaders or participants in the student-led movement as its parliamentary candidates in the 2023 general election

Some movement participants joined Move Forward, as party staffers or as parliamentary candidates, showing the integration of movement constituencies into the party. Figure 1 illustrates the connections between various protest leaders, Future Forward and Move Forward. Some key figures, such as Penguin Parit, Toto Piyarat, Chutchawan, and Ford Tattep, had relationships before 2020, while others established ties with Move Forward through the protest movement. 15 out of 23 activists included in Figure 1 became 2023 parliamentary candidates (see Table 4), and 11 of these 15

Table 4. Move Forward 2023 parliamentary candidates linked to student-led movement

No.	Name	Parliamentary candidacy/status
1	Karoonpon Tiensuwan (Petch)	MP, party list
2	Piyarat Chongthep (Toto)	MP, Bangkok
3	Rukchanok Srinok	MP, Bangkok
4	Sasinan Thamnithinan	MP, Bangkok
5	Tanadej Pongsuk	MP, Bangkok
6	Sirilapas Kongtrakarn (Mew)	MP, Bangkok
7	Oranuch Polpinyo	Candidate, Chaiyaphum (not elected)
8	Phuthita Chaianun	MP, Chiang Mai
9	Attapon Buapat (Kruiyai)	Candidate, Khon Kaen (not elected)
10	Chutchawan Apirukmonkong	MP, Khon Kaen
11	Weeranan Huadsri	MP, Khon Kaen
12	Adisak Sombatkum	Candidate, Maha Sarakham (withdrew, facing charges)
13	Chonthicha Jeangraew (Lookkate)	MP, Pathum Thani
14	Nuntawat Boontook	Candidate, Phetchabun (not elected)
15	Nakhonchai Khun-Narong	MP, Rayong (resigned August 2023, old jail record)
16	Pithan Songkampol (Pae)	Candidate, Saraburi (not elected)

Note: Collected by the authors.

were duly elected as Move Forward MPs. These movement-oriented candidates illustrate our argument that Move Forward has become a movement party, being driven by pragmatic consideration to ideological militancy. Move Forward had evolved during the waves of the student-led movement, and closely tied itself with it.

An unplanned transition: From a clandestine movement party to a movement party

The Future Forward Party had its origins in movements: all the party's co-founders originated from movements and espoused progressivism and leftist ideologies. Future Forward brought together political activists and movement constituencies. However, the party positioned itself as a centrist office-seeking party. Despite having all the primary characteristics of a movement party, Future Forward concealed its real nature, leading us to classify it as a clandestine movement party.

Building on the existing theory of party–movement relationships and movement parties, we argue that the absence of the two key conditions that facilitate the emergence of movement parties influenced Future Forward's decision not to openly operate and present itself as a movement party. Initially, Move Forward and Future Forward shared a similar core identity. The selection of Pita, an elite businessman without an activist background, as the new leader was a tacit sign that Move

Forward planned to continue as a centrist office-seeking party, without any imminent rebranding. As the student-led movement demanding monarchical reform gained strong momentum, conditions changed: Move Forward clarified its political position and openly supported the student-led movement, as well as backing protest leaders by bailing them out whenever needed. Move Forward gradually transformed itself into a comprehensive movement party. Many leading party figures and MPs regularly observed and participated in street demonstrations, especially in the second half of 2020, illustrating a close relationship between party and movement, while Move Forward changed its positions to embrace the protests, and to represent the movement's demands through parliamentary channels. This included efforts to amend the *lèse-majesté* law, and debate historically taboo monarchy-related issues in public. Many student-led movement figures subsequently joined the party and were selected as parliamentary candidates for the 2023 general election: eleven of them became Move Forward MPs.

All these developments illustrated collaborative ties between Move Forward and the student-led movement. Additionally, during the 2023 general election, the party campaigned against the establishment, including calling for the amendment of the *lèse-majesté* law. Move Forward had now become a fully fledged movement party driven by ideological militancy more than pragmatic consideration: from the second half of 2020 onwards, Move Forward fully transformed from a clandestine movement party into a movement party. To provide an overview of this unplanned transition, we compare the characteristics of Future Forward and Move Forward in Table 5.

Table 5. The Future Forward Party and Move Forward Party compared with movement party characteristics and conditions

	Future Forward Party	Move Forward Party
<i>Characteristics of movement party</i>		
1. Strong activist roots (with origins in movements) or party founders emerged from movements	✓	✓
2. Integration of movement constituencies	✓	✓
3. Hybrid actor, often participates in movements	✓	✓
4. Supportive of protest movements	✓	✓
5. Driven by ideological militancy more than pragmatic consideration	✗	✓
<i>Conditions that facilitate the emergence of movement parties</i>		
1. Low degree of barriers to new party parliamentary entry created by electoral system	✓	✓
2. Transformation of voter cleavage structures	✓	✓
3. Evolving collective demands of a large constituency, which none of the established parties make an effort to embrace	✗	✓
4. Emergence of mass movement mobilization	✗	✓

Note: Summarized by the authors.

Table 6. List of interviewees (anonymous) and date of interviews

Interviewee	Date of Interview
1. Current Move Forward MP	January 28, 2021
2. Former redshirt protestor, who worked for Future Forward	February 3, 2021
3. Political activist in exile who had joined both the yellowshirt and redshirt protests	March 24, 2021
4. Leading member of the Progressive Movement	December 8, 2021

Conclusion

This article systematically addresses the puzzle of why Move Forward turned itself into a movement party, whereas its predecessor, Future Forward, did not. To answer this research question, we began by examining why the Move Forward Party selected some leaders or participants of the student-led movement to run as its parliamentary candidates in the 2023 general election. Through empirical analysis, we have elucidated the entire network of connections between Future Forward, Move Forward, the Progressive Movement, and a range of student-led movements. The Move Forward Party's close engagement with the student-led movement cannot be superficially justified as an example of generic civic responsibility. There is a thin line between responsibility and connection. To continue to see the post-2020 Thai student-led protest movement as an independent force without any link to parties would be overly simplistic.

Given the Move Forward Party's close relations with the student-led movement, we argue that Move Forward is ultimately not a simple continuation of the Future Forward Party, whose outward position was that of a conventional office-seeking party. Building on the literature on party–movement relationships and movement parties, we demonstrate that both the Future Forward Party and Move Forward Party had their origins in movements. However, as our empirical analysis revealed, Future Forward concealed its activist roots. Throughout the party's existence, Future Forward sought to present itself as a centrist office-seeking party, aiming to appeal to a broad range of voters, including former reds and former yellows. Nevertheless, Future Forward's activist roots and other movement-oriented characteristics prevented it from being defined as a mainstream centrist electorally focused party.

As examined above, Future Forward was in effect a clandestine movement party. Not only did party leader Thanathorn and other leading party figures rarely mention the party's roots in political activism or their previous involvement with the redshirts, but Future Forward chose to position itself as a centrist office-seeking party. As shown in Table 5, we argue that Move Forward became a movement party due to the emergence of the two previously absent conditions: the evolving collective demands for monarchy reform and the mass mobilization of the student-led movement. As the student-led movement gained momentum in late 2020, the party shifted its more conventional stance, first openly to recognize movement supporters and later to develop close relations with the student-led movement. In the wake of the March

2023 election, Move Forward became strongly identified with a radical position on reform of the *lèse-majesté* law (BBC Thai 2023).

Our findings on these Thai cases contribute to the existing literature on movement parties, shedding light on the dynamics of a movement party through the introduction of a new sub-category, the clandestine movement party: the distinction between a movement party and a regular office-seeking party is not always transparent. We find that a political context with low electoral barriers for new parties and transformations in cleavage structures can lead to the emergence of a clandestine movement party. The transformation of such a party into a fully fledged movement party is likely to occur when two certain conditions emerge: the presence of mass movements and the emergence of collective demands that established parties overlook.

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Notes

1. See <https://progressivemovement.in.th/>.
2. In October 2019, Future Forward did object to some emergency legislation transferring two military units to direct royal command—but insisted this was on procedural grounds. See McCargo and Anyarat Chattharakul 2020, 133–134.
3. ทำไมจบ สถาบันพระมหากษัตริย์ต้องปฏิรูป? รังสิมันต์ โรม ก้าวไกล (August 21, 2021) See www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiFO0eb4Rg&t=656.

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