Impolite, Emotive Language and the Making of *Us* vs. *Them*
Responses to a United Thai Nation Party 2023 Election Campaign Video

Saowanee T. Alexander and Duncan McCargo

Introduction

Politics can get very emotional in Thailand, a country where intense political contestation has been going on for the past two decades. Although Siam's absolute monarchy ended in 1932, the past ninety years have seen the country set world records for both the number of military coups staged and the number of new constitutions promulgated. Since the 1970s, Thailand has also seen numerous mass demonstrations, a number of which ended in bloody violence. Politically, normalcy has been the exception rather than the rule, and deep polarization has fueled strong emotions on all sides.

One cause of this permanent state of conflict was the now-defunct People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), whose supporters were largely middle-class conservatives from Bangkok and southern provinces, who staged massive protests in 2006 to force then Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra from office—accusing him of corruption and disrespecting the monarchy. These protesters wore yellow shirts to profess their loyalty to the king and the monarchy, which to them symbolized the country's peace and harmony. Thaksin became the target of political attacks on all fronts—legal, popular, and bureaucratic.

When he refused to go quietly, the military staged the September 2006 coup, which aimed to remove Thaksin and his political allies from Thai politics at all costs. As a two-time winner of the elections in 2001 and 2005, Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai Party had created a stronghold of supporters in the North and Northeast. When the party was dissolved, these supporters continued to vote

for its subsequent reincarnations. In 2007, Thaksin's new People's Power Party (PPP) won the post-coup general elections.

About the same time, the Thaksin-aligned Redshirt movement started to take shape, vowing to put a stop to military coups. The movement was spearheaded by a political organization called the United Front for Democracy (UDD), which was the major force behind street protests and media campaigns. The UDD had close ties with Thaksin and his allies. A number of UDD leaders later became MPs or associates of pro-Thaksin parties.

The electoral victory of the People's Power Party was short-lived: Following further rounds of mass protest, the PPP was again dissolved by the Constitutional Court and ousted from power through an entirely undemocratic elite backroom deal. The Redshirt movement that backed the pro-Thaksin parties did not enjoy a positive image, especially in the eyes of the Bangkok middle classes who comprise the leaders who shape public opinion. From the beginning, the movement was criticized for being nothing but a puppet manipulated by Thaksin (see Alexander/McCargo 90–113 for more on this point). Protesters were also accused of joining Redshirt demonstrations in exchange for money, that they were uneducated, vote-selling people from rural areas, dubbed *khwai daeng* (red water buffalos). The metaphor of *khwai dang* portrayed them as gullible and ignorant, very much like "donkeys" in English. Those sympathizing with the Redshirts for fighting for their citizens' rights were reluctant fully to endorse or openly show their support for fear of being associated with "corrupt politicians" like Thaksin. This did not stop the Redshirt movement from growing in size. Thabchumpon and McCargo's survey found that a large majority of their supporters were from provinces in the North and Northeast who did support policies by Thaksin's government and saw that what happened to the former prime minister was unfair. Even though there were other allies in the movement besides the UDD itself, these allies including progressive intellectuals did not dominate the movement.

The Redshirts regularly held counter-demonstrations against the Yellowshirts in 2009 and 2010. At the peak of their Bangkok protests in 2010, they called on Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva to dissolve parliament and call for a new general election. Between March and May 2010, the Redshirts blocked intersections at the heart of Bangkok's upscale shopping district, set up a protest stage, and camped out there for two months.[1] The protests looked very

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1   This section draws on the first author's contemporary field notes based on her own participant-observation in the 2010 protests.

much like community fairs, with stalls selling foods and protest souvenirs, such as headbands, T-shirts, and bandanas featuring stenciled images of Redshirt leaders and protest slogans. The protest sites were lined with signs and posters featuring cartoon paintings mocking anti-Redshirt politicians and PAD leaders. Every day on the stage, speakers took turns giving 5 to 10-minute rally speeches criticizing the government and political actors seen as their enemies. They mentioned how those individuals destroyed the will of the people by destroying parties winning all elections since 2006 and how the military was colluding with other powerful forces to destroy democracy. These rally speeches were emotionally intense and aroused strong reactions among the crowds. Two of the most common themes in the speeches were the Redshirts' resentment towards repeated acts of political injustice and their collective pride in their Redshirt identity. These speeches generally intensified in degree from dusk to midnight, when key UDD leader orators gave longer speeches. This happened every day, nurturing the sentimental dimension of the movement, which in many ways was fraught with dangerous threats by authorities and other opposing political forces.

Well into the first month of the protest, on the night of April 10, armed army troops encroached onto one of the protest sites and started using force against the protesters. Clashes and chaos ensued, initially resulting in at least 15 deaths (Doherty). On that very night, when the commotion stopped, the bodies of the deceased protesters were placed on the stage as leaders addressed the weeping crowd of thousands, and emotions were again running high. Much like the nightly rally speeches, this incident became a poignant display of the crowd's political unity, forged through the violence inflicted upon them. It was a deeply sentimental moment. That night prefigured the fatal military crackdown on the protest just a month later that killed over 90 people and injured nearly 2000. Scores of Redshirts were later arrested, charged, and imprisoned for both criminal and civil offenses. The loss of many lives was the terrible price the Redshirts paid for demanding an election. Those who survived the crackdown continued to call for justice for the victims. Despite harsh suppressions immediately after the crackdown, some resorted to symbolic acts of protest to let out their anger and frustrations. Road signs were vandalized like the one shown in figure 1 in places in the Northeast—home of the Redshirts: "90 dead bodies" referred to the reported death toll in the May 2010 crackdown.

Figure 1: Crackdown-related Vandalized Traffic Sign in a Northeastern Province

Photograph by Saowanee T. Alexander

The violent crackdown on the Redshirt movement in 2010 did not end Thailand's vicious cycle of contentious politics. When another pro-Thaksin government took office in 2011, this time led by the former prime minister's sister Yingluck Shinawatra, the stage was set for another massive showdown. In late 2013, a new movement emerged, the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), which echoed many of the same talking points as the PAD, and mobilized huge numbers of protestors in an attempt to bring down the Yingluck government. That administration finally fell following the May 2014 military coup, which ushered in the nine-year premiership of arch-royalist army commander General Prayuth Chan-ocha.

Following a highly contentious general election in 2019, Prayuth was able to retain the position of prime minister. But by this time, new forces were ranged against the Thai conservative establishment: Along with a resurgent PheuThai Party, there was also the upstart, youth-oriented, and progressive Future Forward Party (cf. McCargo/Anyarat). When this very popular new party was in turn dissolved by the Constitutional Court in February 2020, the stage was set

for a massive showdown. Hundreds of protests were staged all over the country in the latter half of 2020, led mainly by student activists (McCargo 2021). Future Forward re-emerged as the new Move Forward Party, which embraced the student movement and tacitly endorsed its iconoclastic calls for a reform of Thailand's monarchy system.

In recent years, social media rather than physical space has served as a most important political arena, especially during the pro-democracy youth movement uprising in 2020, in which street protests were mobilized via social media (cf. Thaitrakulpanich). Protesters also use hashtags associated with the Free Youth Movement, not only to share information about protests but also to express their grievances prompting them to join protests (cf. Sinpeng). Social media has also become an election campaigning tool.

To the surprise of most observers, the Move Forward Party (MFP) emerged as the single largest party in the 2023 general elections, largely due to young people's canvassing strategies on social media platforms, especially on Tiktok (cf. Nethipo et al.). Yet it is also in the realm of social media that criminal charges, harassments, and various forms of persecution have emerged against pro-democracy activists. What anti-establishment political activists post online leaves traces and clues that come back to haunt them as legal charges and threats of imprisonment. Thai Lawyers for Human Rights, a nongovernment organization supporting democracy in Thailand, reported that between January 2014 and November 2023, as many as 13 individuals were charged with the notorious Computer Crimes Act, one of the main legal tools used to silence activists (cf. Thai Lawyers for Human Rights 2024b). Despite political repercussions, Thais continue to use social media to do their everyday politics with language. Given the importance of the sentimental, as shown earlier in the display of affective politics of order and belonging in Thai political movements, this paper explores how ordinary Thais express their political identity of *us*, by constructing *them* by using impolite and emotive language in responses to a 2023 election campaign video by the ultra-conservative political party *Ruam Thai Sang Chat* (United Thai Nation Party), henceforth UTNP. UTNP was closely associated with coup leader turned prime minister Prayuth Chanocha, and supported his 2023 bid to be returned to power. Because this video provoked a plethora of political responses, it allowed us to examine public sentiment, and how Thais gave vent to their thoughts and views through linguistic impoliteness.

Linguistic Impoliteness

To understand impoliteness, it is helpful to understand what it is not: politeness. In sociolinguistics, politeness is one of the most examined language features. Much research has grown out of the classic work by Brown and Levinson, who created an influential politeness model. According to this model, politeness serves to minimize conflict and restore social equilibrium and is based on the notion of *face* (Goffman). Face is a social image of self that each individual has as a member of society. An individual has two types of face wants: a positive face want (the desire to be well accepted by others) and a negative face want (the desire to be left unbothered by others). Brown and Levinson argue that in everyday interactions, humans commit face-threatening acts (FTAs), actions that threaten the hearer's or the speaker's own face. We give compliments, express agreement, tell jokes, criticize someone, ask directions, show sympathy, or ask a favor: These are just some examples of FTAs in our daily life activities. There are four strategies for performing an FTA: going bald or on-record, using positive politeness, using negative politeness, and off-record politeness strategies. Additionally, withholding an FTA altogether is considered a strategy to maintain the face of those involved. Which strategies are used depends on different factors including age, gender, and social distance of the speaker and hearer. A mother may go bald on record when asking her children to do the dishes or scolding them, without any mitigating strategies. But for fear of losing their own face, a speaker may use off-record (indirect) strategies when attempting to borrow a car from an acquaintance.

Using Brown and Levinson's model of politeness as a springboard, models of linguistic politeness were developed. One of the most widely adopted is that developed by Jonathan Culpeper (1996, revised in 2005). The 1996 model recognizes Brown and Levinson's five politeness (super)strategies above and claims that each of them has its opposite impoliteness strategy with the (opposite goal) of attacking face (cf. ibid. 356). These opposite impoliteness strategies are: bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm (or mock politeness, and withholding politeness (Culpeper 1996). Culpeper also extensively discusses a list of verbal and non-verbal strategies for performing impoliteness. He notes that this list is not exhaustive and is also context-dependent (cf. ibid. 357). In terms of actual output strategies, Culpeper discusses two main strategies based on the hearer's face. The first is "positive impoliteness output strategies" (ibid. 357). They are used when the hearer's positive face is threatened. These strategies are used in actions that

make the hearer feel not accepted or liked. Culpeper gives the following strategies as examples: ignoring the hearer, excluding the hearer from an activity, using inappropriate identity markers, using obscure language, seeking disagreement, using taboo words or profane language, and calling the hearer names (cf. ibid. 357–58). Negative impoliteness output strategies, on the other hand, address the hearer's negative face. They aim to attack the hearer's sense of personal space, privacy, and security. They are, for example, frightening, condescending, ridiculing, and invading the hearer's space literally or metaphorically (cf. ibid. 358). Culpeper's (2005) revised model explicitly addresses issues with the definition of impoliteness, redefining it as: "Impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behavior as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2)" (Culpeper 2005, 38).

In his subsequent works, Culpeper (2011 and with Hardaker 2017) proposes the analysis of linguistic impoliteness in terms of conventionalized, formulaic expressions. An analysis of linguistic forms conventionally accepted as "impolite" by respective linguistic communities of practice proves to be helpful in making observations about this phenomenon without constantly relying on empirical evidence on hearers' perception. Based on his long-term research of data from the British context, Culpeper (2011) identifies nine formula types: insults, pointed criticisms or complaints, challenging or giving unpalatable questions/presuppositions, condescension, message enforcers, dismissals, silencers, threats, and curses/ill-wishes (cf. ibid. 135–36). Culpeper (2011) further distinguishes four ways of giving insults: personalized negative vocatives, personalized negative assertion, personalized negative references, and personalized third-person negative references in the hearing of the targeted hearer. However, Culpeper (2017) cautions that some forms are more likely to generate intended impoliteness in certain contexts even though there is no guarantee that would always happen. He goes on to stress the importance of context in the realizations of impoliteness.

Impoliteness, Emotive Language, and Political Discourse

In political discourse, emotions are common. Emotions, such as love, compassion, and empathy foster solidarity among people and can be categorized as sentimental, whereas emotions like anger or rage signify divisiveness and hostility. While both types are equally interesting because they show relation-

ships among political stakeholders, a bulk of language-based research has been conducted on the role of emotive language in political expression. It has been found that in recent years, political discourse has become more and more emotionally charged, as politicians utilize emotive language to serve a range of purposes including to maximize the severity of face attacks on their political opponents (cf. Ardila; Schubert), or even to reprimand the public, in the case of China (cf. Kádár et al.). Harris analyzed the UK's Prime Minister's Question Time, a weekly parliamentary session held in the House of Commons, in which the Prime Minister answers questions from the Leader of the Opposition. She found different types of verbal attacks on the prime minister. She observes that this adversarial practice is not only accepted in the parliamentary process but also praised, stating: "Members of parliament as a community of practice, clearly perceive that the main role of the political opposition is to oppose, i.e. mainly to criticize, challenge, ridicule, subvert, etc. the policies and positions of the government" (Harris 466). In another study, Osnabrügge, Hobolt, and Rodon analyzed one million speeches delivered by members of the UK and Irish parliaments for political sentiments. The authors coded instances of emotive language regardless of whether they suggest negative or positive attributes. Examples of lexical items coded for emotive language included *appalling, endured, despicable, anguish, inspiring,* and *empathy* (cf. Osnabrügge et al. 891). They found that there was a greater degree of emotive language use in higher-profile parliamentary debates. The authors characterized this phenomenon as parliamentarians' attempt to appeal to voters, rather than their fellow members of parliament.

Wodak (2015) extensively discusses how right-wing populist parties use language and other communicative tools to create fear, which in turn helps to normalize undemocratic values including xenophobia, antisemitism, racism, and sexism, which have gained more political ground in recent years in so-called democratic countries the EU member states and the United States. Wodak, Culpeper, and Semino adopted Culpeper's (2011) model of impoliteness to show that former U.S. President Donald Trump and former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi unapologetically used elements of impolite language including racist and misogynist remarks in their formal press conferences. In particular, they focused on what Culpeper (2011) calls *impoliteness formulae*, which are conventionalized strategies found in a wide range of contexts of verbal interaction and are thus also high-frequency items, suggesting a great degree of acceptance by those who share the same norms about polite and impolite language use. To complement their analysis, they examined the

first 100 responses to the YouTube videos featuring the press conferences under study. While negative reactions existed, which is to be expected, the authors found that quite a substantial number of reactions were positive towards the leaders. Some hailed Berlusconi as *Grande Silvio* (Brilliant Silvio) (cf. Wodak et al. 382) and gave Trump such positive comments as *Lmao?, man i love this guy Trump* (cf. ibid. 385). This led the authors to conclude that the two leaders had support for their far-right way of doing politics. The authors argue that what these politicians did was consistent with Wodak's (2011) *shameless normalization*.

Key stakeholders in the news media have also been examined for their use of language in political communication. Sobieraj and Berry examined outrage incidents occurring in internet political blogs, cable TV news commentary shows, radio talk shows, and newspaper columns available in 2009 in the United States. They found that insulting language (coded under a different category from belittling and name-calling) was highly common among both conservative and liberal-leaning figures. These strategies were also combined, resulting in even more outrage in their political expressions. The authors observe:

> Obama supporters were called names such as 'Obamabots' (Michelle Malkin, March 24, 2009) and 'Obamatards' (Wonkette, February 9, 2009). Sometimes insulting language and name calling are strung together for maximum effect, as was the case when TV host Keith Olbermann referred to the Tea Party protesters as 'a bunch of greedy, water-carrying corporate-slave hypocrites' (April 15, 2009) or when blogger Digby described the defenders of torture practices as 'illogical, sadistic scumbags' (April 17, 2009). (Sobieraj/Berry 30)

In Asia, transnational political movements such as the Milk Tea Alliance, which originated in response to the Chinese government's suppression of dissidents, became possible in 2020 partly because of both online repression on the part of the authorities and online mobilization on the part of the protesters (cf. Kreutz/Makrogianni). Ordinary people also use social media for political discussions. The language used in political discussions on social media has also become a source of research into such negative social phenomena as cyberbullying, hate speech, and other forms of verbal abuse (cf. Kienpointner). These findings are evidence for relationships between emotionally charged language and its impact, perceived or actual, on stakeholders. Sometimes their targets are politicians or political figures. Even in a liberal democracy like Switzerland,

female politicians are faced with verbal abuse on social media that raises concerns for their safety. As quoted in the news, online comments like, "whore" and "stupid immigrant" are explicit verbal attacks against one female politician (Matamoros).

Language use such as this has at the very least psychological impact on hearers at whom the attack is directed. Hua, Ristenpart, and Naaman analyzed a large corpus of 1.7 million tweets containing interactions deemed adversarial between ordinary users and candidates during the run-up to the U.S. midterm elections in 2018. They found that abusive name-calling to be one of the most frequent adversarial moves used against the candidates, giving the following examples: "@RepMcCaul Stop using so much water you ass clown. We're having a water crisis" and "@VoteRob-Davidson You are a joke. #RadicalRob" (ibid. 279). Threats of violence such as rape and physical attacks against the candidates were also common. Lorenzo-Dus, Blitvich, and Bou-Franch examined the Obama Reggaeton campaign video released during the democratic primaries because of the politically polarized and impolite responses it attracted. These responses were not only about the video or Barack Obama himself but also to other commenters. They found that commenters expressed their social identity through creating the sense of *us vs them* with "the 'them' group, in turn, is likely to be explicitly associated with negative aspects" (ibid. 2591). The authors observed that they did so by relying on positive impoliteness strategies, such as calling the others names.

Taken together, previous research has shown that political stakeholders around the world in different capacities make use of emotional expressions not only in establishing their political identities and group associations but also in distinguishing themselves from their oppositions.

The Study

In this study, we explore YouTube comments posted about a politically controversial election campaign video launched by UTNP, a conservative party founded not long before the 2023 election (cf. Setboonsarng). We chose this party because of its association with former junta leader-turned Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha. General Prayut's path to political power was marred by controversies. It was under his executive involvement with the military-led command center when the Redshirt protesters were dispersed violently in 2009 and fatally in 2010. It was he who led the military to seize power and

overthrow the Pheu Thai-led government in 2014 and became a junta-installed prime minister for a full term. As a result of some highly questionable developments, his military-backed Palang Pracharath controversially formed the new government, despite coming second to victor Pheu Thai in the 2019 election (cf. McCargo/Alexander). After a falling out with Palang Pracharath, he joined the newly established UTNP, which promptly nominated him as a PM candidate in the 2023 election. But when UTNP failed spectacularly, gaining only 36 out of 500 MP seats, Prayut announced his retirement from politics and was appointed a Privy Councillor four months later (Bangkok Post). He has kept a politically low profile since. Taken together, Prayut's past and present associations reflect his strong support for Thai conservatism.

UTNP Election Campaign Video: Politics of Fear

The UTNP video is directly focused on the phrase 'not the same as before,' which was a campaign slogan adopted by the Move Forward Party during the 2023 election campaign.[2] In other words, the video does not offer positive messages about the policies or promises of UTNP: It is an attack ad that aims to debunk the notion that Thailand needs to confront the necessity for wholesale change. 'Not the same as before' was apparently coined by former Future Forward spokesperson Pannika Wanich and was designed to capture popular aspirations for a radically different kind of Thailand.[3] At the same time, the phrase was deliberately vague: It did not single out the military, the monarchy, or monopoly capitalists for criticism, for example, although for many voters it appeared to make reference to these controversial actors.

The video features six vignettes depicting hypothetical situations that would occur should voters decide to vote for a Thailand that was no longer the same as before. The video was posted on YouTube.com on May 7, 2023, only one week before the election day on May 14 (United Thai Nation Party). This suggests that the party hoped to use the message in the video to put the seal on its election campaign. This intention is clearly shown in our translation of the video caption, as follows:

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2   For a detailed discussion of the context and content of the UTNP video see McCargo (2025).

3   Personal interview with Pannika Wanich, 15 June 2024.

> The United Thai Nation Party asks you Thai people if you would really like Thailand not to remain the same, in this video titled 'Not the same Thailand' many scenes in the video were events that actually happened while many would be highly likely to occur.
> The people's decision on May 14 will determine whether Thailand will continue moving forward in a secure and united way, as it has been in the past 8 years, or it will be dragged into a black hole of conflict, subversion, and eradication of our society's culture, tradition, and great values when Thailand is no longer the same. (United Thai Nation Party, translation S. T. A./D. M.)

The caption assumes that Thailand over the previous eight years had been in a good condition. The adjectives "secure" and "united," in the party's view, are descriptors of what a desirable polity should be. The period of eight years was crucial to the party's rhetoric. But as mentioned before, Prayut came to power through a military coup, ruled the country as a junta leader for four years, and then remained in power for another four years as a prime minister who had been notionally appointed by parliament. The harsh suppression of student protests in 2020 and 2021 occurred during his tenure.

The reference to "eight years" in the video reflects UTNP's conservative narrative. The key message in the video is thus that this eight-year period occurred when Thailand was saved by the military and placed in the good hands of Prayut and his associates. The final reference to the word "the same" in the caption at the ending suggests that "remaining the same" would be positive/desirable. What the viewers will see in the video, be they events that had happened before or future events, are thus "new and not good." The caption is essentially a prelude to things that would threaten the "glorious sameness" under Prayut's administration. Overall, the video paints a picture of a divide between the "old" and the "new."

The title itself opens with the rhetorical question "Do you really want Thailand to no longer be the same?" This is a direct response to the Move Forward Party slogan. Each of the six vignettes contains snapshots of a dystopian future should Move Forward win the election. Each vignette is introduced by a caption displayed on a black screen. There were six vignette introductory statements altogether, as shown in Table 1 below.

Note that the language used in all captions is emotive, formal, and polite. Emotive language is seen in the use of such words and phrase as *beng ban* ('flourish'), *uat* ('flaunt'), *dueat ron* ('suffer'), *nai sai ta khon thang lok* ('in the eyes of the world') as well as ones circulating in the discourses of pro-democracy

supporters including *khwam thao thiam* ('equality'), *sitthi* ('rights'), and *seriphap* ('freedoms').

Table 1: Introductory captions to vignettes and their associated stories

Introductory Caption	Story
A country where retired government officials can still make easy money to earn a living.	An elderly beggar sitting beside a walkway, with a bowl next to him with a sign that reads, "Please support retired government officials."
A country where art flourishes and flaunts itself in the eyes of the world.	Graffiti and vandalized objects and government offices during political protests, footage of riot police marching in with the noise of shattering glass in the background.
A country where equality reaches every household.	A teenage son chastising his mother at the dining table asking why the family did not vote for what dish to have.
A country where nobody will suffer from military conscription.	An elderly grandmother asking her young grandson why there were no soldiers left to protect the country, upon seeing news of unknown armed forces invading the border areas. The grandson explains that conscription has been abolished.
A country with rights and freedoms with which you can do anything.	A middle-aged mother being distraught upon hearing a confirmation from her own daughter that she was proudly making money from sex videos.
A country where …	An elderly woman praying to an empty shelf, leaving the viewers to fill in what they think should have been on the shelf. (In Thailand, this kind of shelf is often used to hold objects or images of something revered or worshipped, such as Buddha images or royal pictures.) Ending—shows question "Would you like Thailand to no longer be the same, really?"

According to the video, the "new" Thailand would leave government officials behind, would have no peace and order, would be overly obsessed with rights issues, would have no military to protect the country, would approve of women exploiting their sexuality for money, and finally would be without what is traditionally venerable. There may be other possible interpretations based on individual viewers' background knowledge and bias, which may assign slightly different readings of the vignettes. This is because the video does not name names or explicitly criticize Thais of younger generations or the values or actions implicitly associated with them.

The mood that the video creates contains elements of the sentimental, both in terms of its formal characteristics as well as regarding its topical arrangements: music, family/kinship constellations, scenes of suffering, etc.

Throughout the video, older characters are placed on the opposite side to younger characters. Older people—fathers, mothers, grandparents—are portrayed as guardians of traditional Thai values, being soft-spoken, calm, and polite, while young ones—children, and grandchildren—are painted as noisy, angry, disrespectful, and overly preoccupied with rights and freedoms. The video draws heavily on family scenarios and creates dialogues showing emotional tensions between family members. For instance, in the vignette about a family having a meal, the teenage son angrily raises his voice at his mother, saying: "Why didn't we get to vote? I didn't choose *phalo* ['stewed meat']. I haven't exercised my right. A civilized, democratic society has to start at this table this very second!"

It may sound odd to an average person to hear someone protesting and demanding a voting right on what to eat for dinner or breakfast in such a serious manner, using expressions not normally associated with a discussion at a family dining table as shown above. Yet in some ways, this is not surprising, as familial relationships have become increasingly fraught since the 2020 youth-led political movement against Prayut's government. News of family members cutting ties with young political activists has become common since the protests erupted in mid-2020 (NHK World). The video reinforces the idea of the family divided along generational lines.

In addition to this, civil servants and members of the armed forces are shown as being under threat in the video. This suggests that the party prioritizes these groups of stakeholders. Given the content of the video, it was unusually bold for a political party to align itself with older generations and government officials and try to pit these groups of people (or voters to be exact) against younger generations who wanted to see Thailand "no longer the

same." The video thus aimed to create fear among its support base and among those who were conservative-leaning but wavering in terms of voting choices. At the same time, it was not explicitly linked to support for UTNP and made no attempt to differentiate the party from other conservative parties. The whole thrust of the video was negative.

In her seminal work on the politics of emotion, Sara Ahmed regards fear as being mediated by association. To her, an object of fear does not inherently contain something fearful, but rather it is perceived as fearsome because the perceiver associates it with something else—the past histories of contact (cf. ibid. 7). The histories of contact are stored in the memory to which the perceiver reacts when encountering the object of "fear." In the video, the object of fear is the youth. It portrays the youth as associated with the destruction of Thailand's good old days, which were about to be gone should Thai voters decide to "change" the country. Past histories of contact were protests and defiance by youth activists, even after they were arrested and charged with a series of serious criminal offenses including lèse-majesté (Thai Lawyers for Human Rights 2024a). But it is not just past histories, but also young people's "future associations" that help to create the fear.

The strong determination of many youth activists and the popularity of the party they supported strengthen the association between the younger generations and the fear they have created in the minds of UTNP and its supporters. With the final caption, UTNP essentially urges its supporters to take action to stop the country from "changing" before it is too late, that is, to vote for UTNP. What UTNP does in the video, despite its lack of overt impolite or rude language, is that it creates a sense of *us vs them*, by singling out the youth and associating them with negative attributes and a desire to "change" the country to become something radically different and thus un-Thai. UTNP urged its supporters to vote primarily out of fear that the other would otherwise win. This nostalgic rhetoric involves the sentimental in that voting for the party would be an act of identifying with the restoration of Thailand's "good old days."

The Responses

At the time of the data collection in mid-October 2023, the video had attracted 10,959 comments since its launch on the official UTNP YouTube channel in May 2023. Of these, 8607 were primary comments responding directly to the video. Replies and rejoinders were excluded because many of the comments diverged from the original video content. A crude overall sentiment analysis further di-

vided the corpus of primary comments into those containing positive, negative, mixed, and irrelevant views. This took into account the semantic, pragmatic, and discourse features of the comment texts but did not examine them further for sentimentality. An overwhelming 93.44 percent of comments offered negative views of the content, while only 4.91 percent contained positive views. To examine how emotions were encoded linguistically, we randomly selected 4600 of the primary comments in order to gain a robust amount of text and analyzed it for the presence and absence of emotive language. We found that 91.85 percent of the comments contained emotive language; 7.85 percent showed no linguistically observable emotion; and 0.3 percent were indecipherable. The emotive language showed a mix of both positive and negative emotions, although it mostly signaled contempt and disapproval of the video. This shows that these online political comments were filled with negative reactions that were also emotionally charged. The main complaints against the video referred directly to the Move Forward Party (MFP) (whose campaign color is orange, so often referred to as the orange party), which is extremely popular among younger voters. Abolishing involuntary military conscription, legalizing sex work, and promoting human rights are some of the policies and ideologies associated with the party. This is probably why MFP supporters became upset and argued in defense of the party in their responses, accusing UTNP of spreading lies.

Direct quotes and references to scenes in the vignettes clearly show that not only did the commenters disagree with the video, but they were also so upset that they used impolite language in this online public sphere where surface anonymity may not protect them, given the fact that online behavior is subject to long-term storage on the Internet (see Graham on the issue of longevity).

Table 2 below shows examples of our attempt to use Culpeper's (2011) impoliteness formulas to code the impolite comments. This was done with our recognition that the model was designed for interpersonal, face-to-face communication, not for computer-mediated communication. As it turns out, the biggest challenge is to deal with the fact that Thai is highly discourse-oriented. That is, certain linguistic categories can and are often dropped, subjecting utterances to interpretations of discourse participants. This poses a challenge in applying this English-based model to a discourse-based language like Thai. Given this challenge, we particularly struggled with the coding of different types of insults. We therefore decided to consider our coding of different insult formulas as tentative and focus more on identifying whether

the expressions in question are insults, who the intended targets are, and how impolite and emotionally charged they are, given the Thai political context.

Table 2: Conventionalized impoliteness formula types in the comments

Impoliteness formula type	Examples of negative comments from those …	
	… disagreeing with the video content	**… agreeing with the video content**
Insult (personalized negative vocatives)	*ngo* ('stupid/ignorant') *dainosao* ('dinosaur') *ai khwai* ('buffalo')	*phuak sam kip* ('Them/you the Three Hoofed')
Insult (personalized negative assertions)	*koen yiaoya chingching phuak mueng.* ('You all really are beyond any help.')	—
Insult (personalized negative references)	*seo samong tai naenae* ('[Your] brain cells must be dead.')	*puak prachathippatai chomplom* ('Them/you fake democracy')
Insult (personalized third-person negative references in the hearing of the target)	*khon tham klip mai sangsan chomti prak trongkham thi dai rap khwamniyom mak kwa krai du laew chuea tam nai khlip bok fam luan mai phasom wua loei* ('Whoever making this video clip is not constructive. They attack the opposite party, which is more popular. Whoever believes what's in the video clip, (you) are a buffalo [misspelled], with no mix of a cow.')	*sut yot krap, kip din tem pai mot* ('Excellent. The Hoofs are twisting in anger everywhere.')

Impoliteness formula type	Examples of negative comments from those …	
	… disagreeing with the video content	… agreeing with the video content
Pointed criticisms/complaints	*an ni di mak krap sadaeng thueng khwam ngongao khong ruamthais-angchat dai di mak mak loei krap thuk chai* ('This is very good. It does a very good job in showing UNTP's stupidity. I like it.')	*da khao ma 8 pi. khao ngiap. phaw khao tham klip awk ma, din pen ma don namron luak kan loei. kham chingching yomrap khwamching mai dai kaw tong din.* ('You scolded them for 8 years. They were silent. But then when they made this video clip as a response, you are twisting your bodies like a dog scalded by hot water. Really funny. You can't accept the truth, so you are now throwing a tantrum.')
Challenging or unpalatable questions and/or presuppositions	*mueng ti khwam prathet pen baep ni roe wa* ('Did you understand our country to be this way?') *khit dai khae ni roe?* ('Is that all you can think of?')	—
Condescensions	*tha mi samong ko hat chai bang na* ('If you have a brain, use it.') *tham arai hai man du chalat khoen noi kho la* ('Do something that makes you look more intelligent. I beg.')	—

Impoliteness formula type	Examples of negative comments from those …	
	… disagreeing with the video content	… agreeing with the video content
Message enforcers	*muk ma kae sat klon pai si. laew suakchai dai phon kap knon gen deo kha cha bok hai. chai khuak ku yak hai prathet mai muean doem* 😊 ('An old dog's strategy: smearing mud and painting with lies. But it freaking works with people of the same gen(eration). Sigh. Let me tell you this. Yes, we want our country not to remain the same 😊')	—
Dismissals	*phuak kaekae yang phak baep khun, ya ma chut khwam charoen pra- thetthai ik loei. pai.* ('Old people like members of your party, please don't hold Thailand back any- more. Go away.') *mut tho suam ok pai dai loei krap* ('Go ahead and dive your way out through a toilet.')	—
Silencers	*yut phoechoe cha* ('Stop talking nonsense.')	—
Threats	*ku cha lod clip wai ploi na anakhot wa adit koei mi khon ngo khanat ni luea yu nai yuk nan.* 😂😂😂('I will download the video clip and repost it in the future to show there were still people this stupid back in the days. 😂😂😂')	—
Curses and ill- wishes	*ruam thai sang chat kho hai mai dai so so sak khon. sop tok 100% laen- salait* ('UTNP, I hope you don't get any MPs and have a 100 percent landslide failure in the election.')	—

Impolite, Emotive Language in Context

Consistent with previous studies on adversarial political discourse, insults in the form of explicit name-calling were rare. Insults existed in the forms of a single letter ก, single words, or they were embedded in a stretch of utterances. However, Thai is a pro-drop language and relies on context to derive referents of the omitted elements (cf. Rutherford). Furthermore, finite verbs are not inflected; tense and aspect is generally marked with lexical items or discourse particles. Therefore, we find it challenging to distinguish some linguistic forms of insults based on Culpeper's model when examining them at a word level where the absence of pronouns renders the utterances ambiguous as to who exactly the insults are directed towards. In some cases, context and what Culpeper's (2011) calls co-text of the target forms helps to determine the addressee. For the purpose of our analysis of how impoliteness is marked with emotion, we would like to draw the reader's attention to the fact that insults are situated in the cultural, political, and textual context. Consider the pro- and anti-video comments below:

a) *ban mueng kin phalo tong wot rue **ai kwai***
    'Do you vote on eating phalo at home, **you water buffalo**?' (against video)
b) ***phuak sawa sam kip** ok ma din khan yai loei wa*
    '**Them three-hoofed scum** are squirming in anger'
    (pro-video)

When being verbally abusive, both sides called each other names. Animal-based names are common. As mentioned before, the word *kwai* (water buffalo) is a classic ubiquitous metaphor describing a person's ignorance or stupidity and can be used in a variety of communicative contexts. Recall that the Red-shirts were called *khwai daeng*. This is specific to Thai culture as those from other cultural backgrounds may not perceive water buffalos as associated with these negative attributes. The label *sam kip* in the phrase *phuak sawa sam kip*, on the contrary, was coined by right-wing conservatives about 4 years ago after the youth movement uprising. This was when protesters continued their three-finger salute tradition, first adopted by the 2014 coup protesters after the movie *The Hunger Games* (cf. Alexander/McCargo 2019). *Sam* means three, and *kip* means an animal's hoof, most likely that of a buffalo. Therefore, both sides call each other stupid, using a metaphor based on Thais' negative perception of water buffalos. These insults appear with co-textual elements that

either specify or elaborate on their remarks. For instance, *ai* in the phrase *ai khwai*, is an impolite titular male, second- or third-person marker. In this case, together with the remaining texts of the comment (see example [a] above), it helps to identify the phrase as addressing the party as the second person being called this abusive name. But the word *sam kip* will likely make little or no sense to Thais who are not interested in politics. Therefore, prior knowledge about politics is also a key to understanding what the term means.

As shown in Table 2 above, other formulas existed in the corpus, but our interest does not lie in their presence or how often each of them appears. Interestingly, they appeared alongside other formulas. Sometimes, there is even a mix of polite and impolite language but with context, it is clear that impolite language does not occur in a vacuum. It is always situated in what has happened before, what is happening now, and what might happen in the future according to the views of language users. Consider the following examples:

c) *da khao ma 8 pi*. *khao ngiap. phaw khao tham klip awk ma, din pen **ma** don nam-ron luak kan loei. kham chingching yomrap **khwamching** mai dai kaw tong din.*
    '**You scolded them for 8 years**. They were silent. But then when they made this video clip as a response, you are now squirming like **dogs** being scalded by hot water. Really funny. You squirm because you can't accept **the truth**.'
d) *klip ni phayayam chomti **nayobai kaoklai**. ditsi tikhai hai du leo. nung du chon chop thaep kwan ok hu…*
    'This video clip tries to attack **Move Forward's policies**, painting them as bad. I sat through it with anger, almost burning smoke out of my ears…'

Examples (c) and (d) show that commenters used their own background knowledge to interpret the video. The interpretation then served as a basis of their responses. In (c) the commenter supported the video and assumed that readers understood what is meant by "8 years," a reference to the 8 years under Prayut. Interestingly, there were no subjects for any of the sentences in the comments because, as mentioned before, Thai grammar allows omission of subjects. So, pragmatically speaking, the comment got to criticize "someone" harshly comparing them to "dogs being scalded by hot water," a traditional idiomatic expression denoting extreme uneasiness or distress, all the while not referring specifically to any names or entities. This is quite common in adversarial exchanges in social media among Thais: When harsh words are used but there is no direct reference to any individuals, no specific individual's positive face is threatened. This is called the act of *phut loi loi* ('speaking vaguely'), leaving

hints and clues working in a similar way as *innuendos*. The example in (d), however, explicitly mentions *kaoklai*, which is the name in Thai of the Move Forward Party. Even though the take is opposite, this response resembles (c) in that it shows how the comment-poster used previous beliefs and assumptions to evaluate the video before expressing their anger as a kind of metaphorical fire.

We would like to draw the reader's attention to the importance of co-texts surrounding the formulas used. These comments are not just blatant outbursts of emotions. Consider the following example taken from a comment in its entirety:

e)   *Prathet thi phunam bok wa prongsai tae mai hai truatsop.*
      Prathet thi fainueng samat **chomti satklon** *ikfai fai baep* **thuret sutsut tae** *mai samat ao phit rue thamarai dai.*
      Prathet thi mi phunam **marayat tumsam** *koei kratom mae yon plueakkluai sai prachachon.*
      Prathet thi prachachon tong phueng tuaeng thangmot mai samat fak arai wai kap ratthaban dai loei
      Prathet thi mi ratthaban yuet amnat prachachon tae thuang bunkhun chak prachachon.
      '*A country where a leader claims to be honest but doesn't allow auditing.'
      '*A country where one side freely attacks and defames the other in an extremely disgusting manner and still is not found guilty.'
      '*A country where a leader is so ill-mannered that they throw a banana peel at the people.'
      '*A country where the people have to depend on themselves; counting on the government is impossible.'
      '*A country where the government comes from a coup, taking powers from the people, yet demands gratitude from the people.'

The only impoliteness formula identified in this long comment is a negative criticism using an evaluative adjective *thuret* ('disgusting'), modified by the adverb *sutsut* ('extremely'). This is to attack the positive face of the addressee. However, the formula is embedded in a much larger stretch of texts containing pieces of information. Before we proceed to argue about co-texts of the formula (other texts that co-occur with the text in question), it is important to recognize certain grammatical characteristics of the Thai language that pose challenges to our analysis. The language rarely marks definiteness. When it does so ex-

plicitly, demonstrative adjectives or lexical items are used. Definiteness, as well as tense, aspect, and plurality are not always marked. Again, context helps to derive interpretation (as misinterpretation) for the most part. In the example above, the comment contains an intertextual reference to the exact same text from the video, beginning each sentence with *prathet thi* ('A country where...') to contrast the future situations projected by the video and the images visualized in the comments. The challenge is this: The comment text is not marked for tense and aspect. Nor are there any time-specific references projecting into the future or past. Readers can thus interpret it as referring to something that has already happened or will happen in the future. But all actions are specific in terms of content (for example, throwing a banana peel). They are common criticisms that people had about Prayut's regime with the main theme being the lack of respect for democracy.

Note that the phrase "the people" is used repeatedly. Taking into consideration both the grammar and the content, translating the actions using the past tense would have biased the interpretation with our own assumption that the comment refers to Thailand under Prayut. We thus made a decision to translate it using the present tense. The generic "they" in the English translation is used instead of "he" or "she" to avoid bias—and reflecting the fact that the third person pronoun in Thai is not usually gendered and makes no distinction between singular and plural.

Having dealt with issues regarding interpretation and translation, we are now left with two contrasting sets of images of Thailand to compare—one in the UTNP video and one arising from the comment section. Recall that the video paints a picture of Thailand as being un-Thai, by virtue of an unreasonable preoccupation with progressive values. The image depicted in the comments shows Thailand as being devoid of democracy because the rulers have violated the people's rights. These views reflect a common aspect of the country's entrenched political conflict in recent years—a struggle between conservative and progressive ideologies (cf. Luxmiwattana; Sombatpoonsiri). This comment is one among many others that reflect a display of social, cultural, and political identity. The YouTube comments are thus another way for ordinary people to express *us vs them* stances, based on their background knowledge and experiences, intensified by their emotional engagement with the video's subject matter.

Conclusion

Like many people around the world, Thais often present their political stance through interventions on social media. Their casual, yet hostile political expressions in response to an election campaign by the conservative party UTNP foretold the election outcomes when their preferred party Move Forward won the election and the embattled UTNP did poorly. In this study, we have examined comments on a UTNP election campaign video posted on YouTube shortly before the 2023 election and found that a large majority of the comments contained linguistic expressions indicating negative views towards not only the direct content of the video but also political values perceived by the viewers as being represented in the video. As we have shown earlier, these negative views oftentimes were marked by emotionally charged, impolite language directed at the party. Unsurprisingly, we did not find any impolite language associated with the sentimental. It was likely due to the fact that our corpus came from comments on video content regarded by many as politically controversial. We further found that hurling verbal insults at political enemies or describing them in a bad light were ways of practicing 'othering.' But harsh words filled with negative emotions are also accompanied by pieces of information reflecting the commenters' prior experiences, political knowledge, worldviews, and stances. Thus, the act of othering was not done in a void. We have also found that emotions, feelings, and associated language use are thus contextualized, understood, and shared in the cultural and political context of Thailand.

However, we recognize several limitations on how we coded impoliteness formulas, largely due to the fact that the Thai grammatical system is highly discourse-oriented and can allow for different interpretations in online discourses, where other pragmatic tools are not readily available, unlike in face-to-face communication. Therefore, much more empirical research and development of coding schemes suitable for context-dependent languages like Thai in political discourse is needed to engage more effectively with a discursive realm where facts, opinions, emotions, and feelings are embedded and signaled not just in what is stated but in what is left unsaid and felt. What we have attempted to accomplish here is only a small step toward a better understanding of the sentimental in the Thai context. The corpus of comments we have examined in many respects captures and exemplifies the recent legacy of intense political polarization in Thailand.

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