

POLITICAL PARTIES AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN MANIPUR

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Abstract: *Political Parties are indispensable in a democratic system, and the parties are the key institutions in structuring and shaping the public policies. Few studies have focused on the issue of political parties' preferences on climate change. Despite the pressing needs for climate mitigation and adaptation strategies, the parties seem to ignore climate change issues in domestic politics. Political parties campaign and compete for capturing power or retaining the government by adopting various means and strategies. Due to multiple factors, including unfavourable socio-economic conditions, the political parties tend not to compete on climate change and related issues in North East India, including in Manipur. The low public awareness about climate change impact and existing party preferences on traditional policy issues constrain political parties' priority on climate change issues in Manipur. This paper discusses how significant the climate change or environmental issue is at the State Legislative Assembly elections by the political parties. It covers the qualitative and quantitative analysis of political parties' positions during Legislative Assembly Electoral Campaigns in Manipur. An analysis of the political parties' manifestoes and public speeches indicate important facets of the nature and direction of political change.*

Keywords: Climate Change, Electoral Campaigns, Party Manifesto, Political Parties, Public Awareness,

Introduction

Political parties are central to the functioning of a democratic government and parties' play a significant role in shaping beliefs and attitudes towards climate change. Political parties' preferences on climate change issues are crucial in shaping public policies on climate change at various levels of governance. Here are some key points highlighting the importance of political parties' preferences on climate change issues:

1. **Policy Formulation:** Political parties develop and advocate for policies related to climate change based on their ideologies, values, and priorities. Their preferences influence the development of legislation, regulations, and initiatives aimed at addressing climate change.
2. **Legislative Action:** Political parties with strong preferences for climate action are more likely to introduce and support legislation that promotes renewable energy, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and implements sustainable practices. They can push for the adoption of ambitious climate targets and commitments.
3. **International Negotiations:** Political party in power represent their countries in international climate negotiations and agreements. Their preferences on climate change issues shape the stance and commitments of their respective countries in global efforts to address climate change, such as the Paris Agreement.

4. **Public Awareness and Engagement:** Political parties have a platform to raise awareness about climate change and engage with the public on the importance of taking action. They can influence public opinion, mobilize support for climate policies, and hold governments accountable for their climate actions.
5. **Funding and Resource Allocation:** Political parties in power control government budgets and resource allocation, including funding for climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. Their preferences determine the level of financial support for renewable energy projects, research and development, and climate resilience measures.
6. **Partisan Polarization:** Differences in political parties' preferences on climate change can lead to partisan polarization, where party affiliation strongly influences individuals' beliefs and attitudes towards climate change. This polarization can impact the implementation of effective climate policies and hinder bipartisan cooperation.

Overall, political parties' preferences on climate change issues are essential in driving policy decisions, influencing public opinion, and shaping the trajectory of climate action at all levels of governance.

Climate change and Political parties

Climate change is indeed a complex issue that has both local and global implications. While the impacts of climate change are experienced locally, the political actions needed to address and mitigate these impacts require coordinated efforts at the local, national, and international levels. Collaboration and cooperation among governments, political parties, and stakeholders at all levels are essential to effectively tackle the challenges posed by climate change. Much work and discussion of climate change and human responses to it have been rendered at the international negotiations and institutions at the national level. In recent years, there has been growing interest in national climate policies. However, political parties' preferences on climate policy have received little attention. Despite the pressing needs for adaptation and mitigation strategies, the salience of climate change policies tends to be relatively low. It has not been on the priority list of the election agendas of political parties. An analysis of political parties' preferences can throw up some of the essential facets of nature and direction of political change.

The mitigating and adaptation strategies of the impact of climate change were adopted at the COP21, Paris Agreement. The COP26 at Glasgow, countries revisited climate pledges made under the 2015 Paris Agreement. However, the success of the strategies depends heavily on the effectiveness of national and sub-national climate change mitigation and adaptation policies. The role of political parties in shaping government policies, including climate policies, is indeed crucial. Political parties often have varying stances on climate issues, and these differences can influence the development and implementation of climate policies. Understanding political parties' climate policy preferences is important for predicting policy outcomes and assessing the overall political landscape regarding climate change. However, there has been relatively little attention given to measuring political parties' climate policy preferences. The study of political parties' climate policy preferences is a prerequisite.

Most of the studies addressing the issue of climate change refer to developed countries. In Carbon Brief, an article reported that since the last election UK's climate discourse had undergone a significant shift due to a series of factors that include "strikes" by Greta Thunberg- inspired school children, Extinction Rebellion protests, summer heatwaves, and a series of landmark reports from the IPCC. These events have contributed to raising awareness and urgency around climate change issues, leading to a change in political parties' rhetoric and policy positions. The fact that major national political parties in the UK, including the Scottish National Party, Labour, and the Liberal Democrats, have included references to a "climate emergency," "climate crisis," or "climate catastrophe" in their manifestos is indicative of the growing recognition of the severity of the climate challenge. This shift in

language reflects a heightened sense of urgency and the acknowledgment that climate change poses a significant threat that requires immediate action. The inclusion of such language in political party manifestos can signal a commitment to addressing climate change and implementing policies to mitigate its impacts. It also reflects the influence of public opinion and activism in shaping political discourse and policy priorities.

India in the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report 'Climate change 2021: The Physical Science Basis' warned that the Indian ocean is warming at a higher rate than other oceans and will witness increased heatwaves, agricultural and ecological droughts, heavy precipitation, an increase in the proportion of intense tropical cyclones and associated flooding. Climate change hit India, causing substantial economic and social losses, and in several states across the country cause death and destruction such as Kashmir floods (2014), Uttarakhand flash floods (2013), Tsunami (2004) are some vivid examples.

The Lancet Countdown Report 2019 on Health and Climate Change journal findings stated that nearly 7,40,000 excess deaths in India annually could be attributed to abnormally hot and cold temperatures related to climate change. Approximately 250000 additional deaths per year are expected between 2030 and 2050 due to climate change-induced malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea, and heat stress. By climate or weather- related disasters, it is estimated that 22.5 million people are displaced annually and expected to increase these figures in the future. The projected increase in deaths from climate change-induced malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea, and heat stress underscores the urgent need for adaptation and mitigation measures to protect public health.

The Deloitte Economics Institute's report on the economic impact of unchecked climate change in India further emphasizes the importance of addressing climate change to safeguard the country's economic future. The projected cost of \$35 trillion in lost economic potential over the next 50 years underscores the need for proactive climate action to mitigate these risks. The examples of extreme weather events such as floods and tsunamis underscore the vulnerability of India to climate-related disasters and the need for urgent action to address these challenges.

While the Indian constitution does not directly mention political parties, however, one provision in the constitution, the Tenth schedule, is directly relevant to the functioning of political parties.⁸ The role of political parties in translating policy into practice and influencing debates and policies on issues affecting various social groups is crucial. Political parties serve as a vital link between individuals, the state, and society, shaping governance and policy decisions that impact the country's response to climate change and other critical issues. Political parties in India have varying approaches to addressing climate change and related policies.

The mention of climate change in the election manifestos of the two major national political parties in the 17th Lok Sabha elections in 2019 is a significant development. The Congress party's manifesto "Congress will Deliver," highlighted sections on "Environment and Climate Change" and "Climate Resilience and Disaster Management," indicating a commitment to addressing environmental issues and building resilience to climate change impacts. Additionally, the mention of renewable energy in the section on Employment and Growth suggests a focus on sustainable development practices.

On the other hand, the BJP manifesto "Determined India, Empowered India," mentioned climate change in the context of infrastructure, particularly in relation to renewable energy capacity and the International Solar Alliance. While the mention of climate change in the manifesto is a positive step, the overall discourse on climate change in Indian politics remains relatively low, and it is not a significant electoral priority.

Political parties and climate change in the context of Manipur

In Manipur, political parties hardly matter the ideologies, principles, common policies, or programs. At the time of the Election, the parties primarily focus on local issues. The study of the North East and, in particular, Manipur

seems no different: political parties' preferences on climate policy or the political discourses on climate change do not figure among the top issues during electoral campaigns and parties' election manifestos. Election manifestos are glimpses of political parties' policy preferences and a preview of the next government's priorities. The analysis of the election manifestos of the leading national political parties in the Manipur Legislative Assembly Elections 2022 - the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), the Indian National Congress (INC), and the National People's Party (NPP) - sheds light on their policy priorities and commitments. In this context:

1. Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP): The BJP's manifesto, 20 key points for the Manipur Legislative Assembly Elections 2022, does not mention any specific points related to climate change. This absence indicates a potential lack of emphasis on climate change issues in the party's policy agenda for Manipur.
2. Indian National Congress (INC): The Congress manifesto for the Manipur Legislative Assembly Elections 2022 includes a section on "Environment, Forest, and Climate Change." The manifesto outlines several promises related to environmental conservation and climate change mitigation, such as establishing a State Forest Development Corporation, introducing sustainable forest certification, recognizing village authorities as stakeholders in forest development, implementing measures to reduce deforestation, and prohibiting environmentally hazardous economic plantations in forest and non-forest areas. These commitments demonstrate the INC's focus on environmental sustainability and climate action in Manipur.
3. National People's Party (NPP): The detailed commitments outlined in the NPP's "People's Action Document 2022" demonstrate a comprehensive approach to addressing environmental issues, including climate change, in Manipur. The manifesto's focus on environmental education, forest conservation, waste management, and climate change mitigation reflects the party's commitment to sustainable development and environmental protection in the region.

Specifically, the NPP's promises to review and update the State Action Plan on Climate Change, assess existing laws related to forest management, and restructure the Loktak Development Authority indicate a proactive stance on climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies. Additionally, the party's plans to phase out single-use plastics, establish a plastic recycling plant, and review energy policies to reduce carbon emissions align with global efforts to combat climate change and promote environmental sustainability. By and large, the NPP's manifesto highlights the party's recognition of the importance of addressing climate change and environmental challenges in Manipur through policy reforms, regulatory measures, and sustainable development initiatives.

Overall, the presence of climate change-related commitments in the Congress and NPP manifesto for Manipur indicates a recognition of the importance of environmental sustainability and climate action by at least two major political parties in the region. However, the absence of specific mentions of climate change in the BJP manifesto highlights the need for greater attention to climate issues in political discourse and policy agendas to address the challenges of climate change in Manipur effectively.

The lack of emphasis on climate change in political discourse and election manifestos in Manipur are crucial in understanding the current state of environmental awareness and priorities in the region. Despite scientific data and the series of reports published by the IPCC and others on the deteriorating condition of the environment and the adverse impacts of climate change on the economy, health, and livelihoods, the climate issues have not got much concern to the political parties. Some of the election manifestos do not even mention the environmental issue. Its action for the next five years focuses more on developing infrastructure at the cost of environment. Some of the challenges and constraints that may be influencing the limited attention given to climate change by political parties in Manipur and why climate change may not be a prominent issue in political agendas:

1. Socio-economic conditions: In regions where socio-economic challenges are more pressing, political parties may prioritize issues such as poverty alleviation, infrastructure development, and employment generation over environmental concerns like climate change. Addressing immediate socio-economic needs may take precedence over long-term environmental sustainability goals.

North East, the region as a whole, and the states that comprise it, being economically underdeveloped, is lagging far behind the rest of the country in most parameters of the growth. The region is highly dependent on agriculture and allied activities, comprising over 80% of the region's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Poor infrastructure and governance are combined with low productivity and market access. In the region, per capita income in all states was lower by varying magnitudes, except for Mizoram, Nagaland, and Sikkim which recorded marginally higher growth rates than the country average.

The challenges faced by the North East region, including Manipur, in terms of economic underdevelopment and dependence on agriculture are significant factors that influence political priorities. The focus on economic growth, employment generation, and development in electoral campaigns and party manifestos is understandable given the pressing socio-economic needs of the region. However, it is crucial to also address climate and environmental concerns alongside these priorities to ensure long-term sustainability and resilience.

The economic damages from climate change in climate-exposed sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fishery, energy, and tourism highlight the urgent need to integrate climate considerations into policy-making and development planning. Neglecting environmental issues can exacerbate vulnerabilities and hinder the region's overall progress and well-being. The lack of incentives for political parties to focus on climate change can lead to a lower commitment to implementing climate policies. This can be a significant barrier to addressing the impacts of climate change effectively.

2. Low public awareness: Limited public awareness about the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation can contribute to the lack of political focus on these issues. If the general population is not well-informed about the consequences of climate change on their lives and livelihoods, there may be less public demand for political action on environmental issues.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report, "Human-induced climate change, highlights the significant impacts of human-induced climate change, including more frequent and intense extreme events, which have caused widespread adverse effects on both nature and people. The report emphasizes that these impacts go beyond natural climate variability and have led to losses and damages.

The rise in weather and climate extremes has pushed natural and human systems beyond their ability to adapt, leading to irreversible impacts.

Despite the relevant scientific data and a series of publications, lack of public understanding and awareness of climate change negative consequences, hinder efforts to address and mitigate its impact. Scientific literacy plays a crucial role in enabling individuals to interpret and access relevant scientific evidence on climate change. When there is a lack of understanding among the public, it can exacerbate vulnerability to climate change and impede the implementation of effective policies and actions.

The gap in scientific literacy regarding climate change can lead to a lack of public concern and support for necessary policies to mitigate and adapt to climate change impacts. This, in turn, can hinder political parties' ability to take action on climate change and implement effective measures to address the issue.

To address this challenge, efforts are needed to improve science communication and education on climate change, making scientific information more accessible and understandable to the general public. Engaging in outreach

activities, promoting climate literacy programs, and fostering dialogue between scientists, policymakers, and the public can help bridge the gap in understanding and support for climate action.

3. Preference for traditional issues: Political parties often prioritize issues that have been historically important or have a direct impact on voters' daily lives. Traditional concerns such as security, infrastructure, and healthcare may take precedence over newer and more complex issues like climate change, especially if they are not perceived as immediate threats. Political parties not only respond to public opinion but also play a role in shaping it, depending on various factors such as time and state-specific considerations.

The study of party manifestoes in the context of Manipur legislative assembly elections illustrates how issues such as territorial integrity, security, health, economic development, and job creation often take precedence in party agendas due to their immediate salience and relevance to voters. The example of mainstream national political parties in Manipur, such as BJP, INC, and NPP, focusing on healthcare-related promises in their election manifestoes reflects the prioritization of issues that are more directly linked to citizens' immediate needs and concerns. People tend to be more concerned with immediate needs or threats rather than issues that seem remote or immediately non-threatening, such as climate change, underscores the challenge of garnering public and political attention towards environmental issues. However, political parties may engage more with climate change and environmental issues if there is a rise in public awareness and demand for action in these areas. The prioritization of healthcare-related promises in election manifestoes due to their direct link to citizens' immediate needs and concerns can indeed impact the attention given to climate change challenges. Climate change issues often involve long-term consequences that may not be as immediately visible or tangible to voters compared to healthcare or other pressing issues. However, the impacts of climate change challenges, such as extreme weather events, natural disasters, health risks, and economic disruptions, can have far-reaching consequences that ultimately affect citizens' well-being and quality of life. For example, the increasing frequency and intensity of heatwaves, floods, and wildfires due to climate change can have significant health implications, including heat-related illnesses, respiratory problems, and mental health issues.

Moreover, the economic costs of climate change, such as damage to infrastructure, loss of livelihoods, and increased healthcare expenditures, can strain government budgets and resources, ultimately impacting citizens' access to healthcare services and other essential needs.

Therefore, while healthcare may be a more immediate concern for voters, addressing climate change challenges is crucial for ensuring long-term public health, economic stability, and overall well-being. Political parties and policymakers need to strike a balance between addressing immediate needs and investing in long-term solutions to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

4. Lack of political will: Some political parties may lack the political will or capacity to address climate change due to 1. Competing priorities, political parties may prioritize short-term economic growth, job creation, or other immediate concerns over long-term environmental sustainability. This can lead to a neglect of climate change issues in policy agendas. 2. Resource constraints, addressing climate change often requires significant financial resources, technological investments, and policy interventions. 3. Vested interests, Some political parties may be influenced by powerful interest groups, such as fossil fuel industries or other sectors with a stake in maintaining the status quo. Without strong leadership and commitment to environmental sustainability, climate change may not receive the attention it deserves in political agendas.

Conclusion

Measuring political parties' climate policy preferences is indeed a crucial step in understanding the development of climate policy and how it may influence other policy outcomes. By examining and analysing parties' stances on climate change, can gain insights into the factors shaping political discourse and decision-making on environmental issues. It is evident that climate change is not always a top priority for political parties, especially when compared to issues like economic growth, jobs, and security. However, there is a growing recognition among Indian political parties about the importance of addressing climate change and its impacts on people. Public awareness plays a crucial role in pushing political parties to prioritize climate change in their agendas. It is also imperative to emphasize the importance of policy actions, political debates, and effective implementation of policies to address climate change. These actions are essential for driving meaningful progress in combating climate change and its impacts. By engaging in political debates and discussions on climate change, policymakers can raise awareness, gather diverse perspectives, and develop informed strategies to tackle this global challenge.

Political parties and policymakers should tried to strike a balance between economic development and environmental sustainability. Raising awareness about the impacts of climate change, promoting sustainable practices, and investing in climate-resilient infrastructure, as well as promoting social and behavioural changes among the citizens and communities, the region can work towards a more inclusive and sustainable development path. Collaboration among stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, and local communities, is key to advancing climate action and building a more resilient future. Overall, while political parties in India have shown varying levels of commitment to addressing climate change, there is a growing recognition of the urgency of the issue across the political spectrum.

Failure by political parties to include the issue of climate change in their political agenda could indeed exacerbate socio-economic and environmental challenges in regions. Climate change is a global crisis that has far-reaching impacts on various aspects of society, including the economy, public health, agriculture, water resources, and biodiversity. Failure to address climate change can lead to increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, sea-level rise, food and water scarcity, displacement of populations, and loss of biodiversity. When political parties do not prioritize climate change in their agenda, it can result in a lack of policies and initiatives to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. This can hinder efforts to build resilience, promote sustainable development, and protect vulnerable communities and ecosystems from the adverse effects of a changing climate.

Therefore, it is essential for political parties to recognize the urgency of addressing climate change and to incorporate climate action into their political agenda. By doing so, political parties and political leaders can contribute to creating a more sustainable and resilient future for all, and help mitigate the socio-economic and environmental challenges exacerbated by climate change in regions around the world while advancing climate change policies and initiatives. Despite the limited emphasis on climate change in the election manifestos, the acknowledgment of the issue by major political parties indicates a growing recognition of the importance of addressing climate change in India. Moving forward, it will be essential for political parties to prioritize climate change in their policy agendas and work towards implementing effective climate policies to ensure a sustainable future for the country.

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