

## **Junta Government in Thailand**

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For the past six long years, the Thai people have been forced to live under the control of the *junta* government. The junta government in Thailand is a military dictatorship utilizing extreme, inhumane, and unjustifiable power to silence and oppress the Thai people. Basic human rights have been violently stripped from the people of Thailand, public gatherings have been banned, and the media is heavily censored. The current constitution (put into practice in 2017) greenlights authoritarianism and abuse of power to be passed off as “normal.” Nonetheless, many fearless students and activists are mobilizing across Thailand despite the likely threat of being assaulted, taken captive, and being threatened each time they voice their (justified) protest against their government.

In the last decade, the Thai government has been in a constant state of chaos. On May 22, 2014, because of many street protests against a populist government headed by former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, the Thai military overthrew the elected government for the second time in a decade to reimpose structure in Thai society. Not two years later, in 2016, King Maha Vajiralongkorn assumed the throne after his father Bhumibol Adulyadej died after a long 70-year reign. King Vajiralongkorn approved a new constitution, backed by the military, that increased his powers as king. Moreover, recently, Prayuth Chan-Ocha (former prime minister of a military government and stager the 2014 coup) led a pro-army party and won the election amidst allegations of vote-buying and cheating.

This election was a massively divisive event in Thai society; the election split the country into two groups: one in support of Prayuth, and the other against him. Despite

restrictions stemming from the outbreak of the novel coronavirus and a government that weaponizes laws against dissent and criticism, large numbers of protestors spoke out against the Prayuth military government and the military-backed king. The hashtag “#WhyDoWeNeedAKing?” was used more than 1 million times by protesters to direct criticism against King Vajiralongkorn and the government during quarantine. In early June of this year, mass protests were held for the investigation of a government critic that disappeared in Cambodia. About a month later, 2,500 protesters assembled at the Democracy Monument, demanding new elections and the termination of Parliament.

The protests have not been aimless. On the contrary, they have clear goals: the people of Thailand stipulate three changes to their government, and not one less. They demand the eradication of the current Parliament, a new constitution, and the government to guarantee the Thai people freedom and a voice in their country. The government, however, has not reacted sympathetically nor rationally to the people of Thailand. Instead, it has arrested and charged multiple citizens for attending protests and has accused many more of spreading false/misleading information and speaking out against the Thai government online. In addition to these accusations, 53 Thai citizens were held captive in military prisons in Nakhon Chai Si and Thung Song Hong, and 6 forced disappearances were reported.

There are many actions to take to help the Thai people no matter where you are or what language you speak. One way to help is to continue to speak up about what is occurring: sharing information, petitions, and links is beneficial for the Thai people. Donating to organizations dedicated to helping Thailand is the most impactful for the Thai people, though. Amnesty International Thailand currently has a petition on its website as well as a link to donate to them; they are focused primarily on the protection of human rights in Thailand. Similar organizations such as Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR), The Mirror Foundation, and Prachatai provide trusted sources for current and reliable news. Since the Thai government has attacked opposing political organizations and arrested their leaders, international support has renewed effect on the voices of the Thai people.

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