

Polity IV Country Report 2006: Thailand

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2005</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> <td colspan="2"></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>9</td> <td>-5</td> <td>-14</td> <td colspan="2"></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>9</td> <td>0</td> <td>-9</td> <td colspan="2"></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>0</td> <td>5</td> <td>+5</td> <td colspan="2"></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td colspan="5">0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td colspan="5">Yes</td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2005	2006	Change			Polity:	9	-5	-14			Democ:	9	0	-9			Autoc:	0	5	+5			Durable:	0					Tentative:	Yes					
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SCODE	THI	CCODE	800	Date of Report	1 October 2007																																
Polity IV Component Variables																																					
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																																
2	1	4	3	3	2																																
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																																					
End Date			24 February 2006		Begin Date																																
					19 September 2006																																
Polity Fragmentation: No																																					
Constitution	2007																																				
Executive(s)	Council for National Security leader General Sonthi Boonyaratglin Interim Prime Minister Surayut Chulanon; appointed by military leadership on 1 October 2006																																				
Legislature	Bicameral: Note: After the 19 September 2006 military coup, the military leadership appointed an interim National Legislative Assembly with 250 members																																				
Judiciary	Supreme Court, Constitutional Court																																				

Narrative Description:

Executive Recruitment: Designation (3)

The political history of modern Thailand has been dominated by the influence of the military and popular support for the monarch, King Bhumibol, whose support has frequently determined the fate of regimes in the country. Civilian rule returned to Thailand in 1992 after violent protests forced the military to return to the barracks. Unlike previous attempts at civilian rule, the 1992-2006 period saw the military generally accepting its position outside of the political limelight, even after the 1997 economic crisis and subsequent political instability. While the military still had significant influence in the political arena during this period, nevertheless, primary decision making authority rested in the hands of elected civilians.

National elections between 1992 and the coup in 2006 were generally considered procedurally free and fair by international observers. However, the influence of money continued to undermine the consolidation of democracy in this country. The corruption and nepotism of “old-style” politicians, which triggered military intervention in the past, remained a problem. However, Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai (1997-2000), widely known as “Mr. Clean,” actively sought to limit the role of patronage politics in Thailand. This effort was institutionalized with the strengthening of the National Electoral Commission (NEC) and the Senate (which served as an oversight body for limiting corruption in the House of Representatives). The NEC flexed its institutional power in 2000 when it disqualified many candidates for

the Senate on grounds of corruption and fraud and in 2001 when allegations of vote-buying and electoral irregularities caused the election commission to run fresh elections in over sixty constituencies. However, money and corruption continued to infect the upper echelons of Thai politics.

Thaksin Shinawatra founded the Thai Rak Thai ("Thais Love Thais") party in 1998 along with Somkid Jatusripitak, PDP ally Sudarat Keyuraphan, Purachai Piumsombun, and 19 others. With a populist platform, Thai Rak Thai promised universal access to healthcare, a debt moratorium for farmers, and development funds for all Thai villages. After Prime Minister Chuan dissolved parliament in November 2000, Thaksin's party won a sweeping victory in the January 2001 elections, the first election held under the Constitution of 1997. Thai Rak Thai won 248 parliamentary seats and needed only 3 more seats to form a government. Thaksin opted for a broader coalition with the Chart Thai Party (41 seats) and New Aspiration Party (36 seats), while absorbing the smaller Seritham Party (14 seats), in order to strengthen his control of the political agenda and protect his government from a no-confidence vote. Thaksin and the Thai Rak Thai won a landslide victory in the February 2005 elections, taking 374 of 500 seats in the legislature. However, while his rural support remained strong, his popularity in the urban centers quickly waned following a series of financial scandals and protests against his rule became commonplace in late 2005 and early 2006. Facing calls for impeachment, Thaksin dissolved Parliament on 24 February 2006 and called snap elections for 4 April 2006, which were boycotted by the opposition. As a result, Thaksin's party won nearly all seats in parliament, however, the results were invalidated by the Constitutional Court on May 6 and new elections were ordered for October 2006. On September 19, Thaksin was ousted by General Boonyaratglin and the military, supported by the King; a military government led by the Council for National Security (CNS) was established. The CNS subsequently installed Surayut Chulanon as interim prime minister, and has promised new elections for no later than December 2007. The CNS retains executive authority and will oversee the drafting of a new, permanent constitution. A new constitution was drafted by a 35-member committee, approved by the National Legislative Assembly, and submitted to a popular referendum on 19 August 2007; it passed with only a slim margin (56.7%) and new general elections under the 2007 constitution were scheduled for 23 December 2007.

Executive Constraints: Slight to Moderate Limitations (3)

Between 1992 and 2006 Thailand was a parliamentary democracy in which the premier was directly accountable to the legislative branch. The judiciary was largely independent from executive branch interference, but during the impeachment process of Prime Minister Thaksin during the first half of 2001, the Constitutional Court faced considerable political pressure and allegations of judiciary corruption were widespread. Since the September 2006 military coup, the parliament has been dissolved and the judiciary has ruled consistently in support of the Interim Government's policies. On 30 May 2007, the Constitutional Tribunal dissolved Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai party and banned its top leaders from politics for five years. Executive constraints result mainly from the facts that no single leader commands the loyalty of the military and the King continues to exert enormous influence over general policy.

Political Participation: Authoritarian-Guided Liberalization (3)

Political parties in Thailand are largely based on flexible patronage networks. Parties do not generally offer platforms or represent particular ideologies and electoral campaigns continue to be influenced by vote-buying and party violence. Despite these problems, Thailand made significant strides between 1992-2006 to limit the role of "old style politics" and institutionalize democratic political procedures. Several events, however, beginning with the impeachment process of Prime Minister Thaksin during 2001, have shown just how fragile these democratic procedures and practices were in Thailand. In 2001 open warnings of violent street protests if the prime minister were to be evicted from office were routinely heard, and Prime Minister Thaksin Thaksin endured significant domestic and international criticism for curbing Thailand's media.

Although the 2001 impeachment crisis was handled fairly peacefully, throughout 2004 Thai authorities implemented tough measures in an effort to crack down on an outbreak of violence in the south of the country. Initially arguing that this violence was largely the work of "criminal elements," the government of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra tried to quash speculation that the Islamic separatist movement in its Muslim-majority southern provinces was resurfacing. The Muslim population in the south of the country represents almost four percent of the total population of Thailand. Apart from occasional attacks by a small group of extremists, separatist violence in the south of the country had largely been contained since the late 1980s. Despite government claims of national unity and religious harmony, over

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one hundred security force members, Buddhist monks and civilians were killed in ethnic violence in the first quarter of 2004. Moreover, in May 2004 more than one hundred Muslim youths were killed by security forces after they carried out raids on police and army posts in three southern provinces. Further violent protests in the fall of 2004 also produced the deaths of seventy-eight Muslims while in government detention in the southern Thai province of Narathiwat. By the end of the year almost 400 people had died in separatist violence, with the security forces blamed for almost half the deaths. The separatist movement is currently being organized by Muslim activists associated with the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO).

In 2006 a growing division between the rural, populist support base of Prime Minister Thaksin and the urban elites became highly factionalized. This polarization followed the 23 January 2006 sale of the Thaksin family's interests in the Shin Corporation for US\$1.6 billion. On 24 February 2006 Thaksin dissolved the national Assembly and called new elections in response to increasing protests demanding his resignation. The opposition quickly announced that they would boycott the elections, and the confrontation continued to escalate following the victory by Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai party in the uncontested April 2 elections, which were subsequently declared invalid by the Constitutional Court. After Thaksin failed to honor his promise to resign his leadership, the Thai military ousted his government on September 19, 2006, while Thaksin was out of the country on an official visit. The Thai Rak Thai party was officially disbanded in May 2007 and arrest warrants for Thaksin and his wife have been issued on corruption charges. New general elections are scheduled for 23 December 2007.