Turmoil in Thailand

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MSU Human Rights Education Internship

**Lesson: Turmoil in Thailand**

**Course: Human Rights**

**Lesson Duration: 50 minutes**

**Topic of Lesson: Politics and Human Rights in Thailand**

**Central Focus:** Students will understand the political situation in Thailand and learn about the human rights violations taking place there.

**Essential Questions:** Why is Thailand politically unstable? Is the Thai government a legitimate democracy? How are people’s rights being violated and what can be done about this?

**State Standards:** D. History, Culture, and Perspectives

6.3.12.D.1

Analyze the impact of current governmental practices and laws affecting national security and/or individual civil rights/ privacy.

6.3.12.D.2

Analyze a current foreign policy issue by considering current and historical perspectives, examining strategies, and presenting possible actions.

**Daily Performance Objectives:** Describe the political situation in Thailand and give an explanation of the various factions. Help students to understand the ways that the government is abusing its power.

**Prior Knowledge Resources:** A possible misconception could be that Thailand is a legitimate democracy due to the elections held in 2019 but it is not a true democracy.

**Academic Language:** The political parties discussed are Palang Pracharath (the party of the military junta), Pheu Thai, and Future Forward Party.

**Materials and Preparation:** Student activity, “What you can do to help” handout, and the podcast.

**Assessment/Evaluation:** Do students understand the current situation in Thailand? How can the people of Thailand create a fair government that doesn’t abuse its power?

**Lesson Progression:**

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| **Duration:** | **The teacher will…** | **The student(s) will…** |
| 2 minutes | Play this video as an introduction.  [Junta leader elected Thai Prime Minister](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vDhl5HAMAs) | Watch the video. |
| 20 minutes | Play this music video for the students [RAP AGAINST DICTATORSHIP - ประเทศกูมี](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZvzvLiGUtw) (make sure to turn on English subtitles). | Write down 3 things from the video that surprise, interest, or confuse them. When the video ends they will talk with a partner about what they noticed.  After discussing what they saw the students will watch the video again and then write a paragraph in response. |
| 5 minutes | Have students read the “What you can do to help” handout. | Read the handout and look at any of the links that interest them. |
| 15 minutes | Play the podcast for students to listen to. | Listen to the podcast. |
| 10 minutes | Put students into groups of 3 or 4. | Discuss what they think of the current situation in Thailand. What do students think of the current prime minister? How could Thailand become a more free and fair country? |

**Homework:** Read this article [www.cnn.com/2020/03/09/asia/thanathorn-thailand-democracy-intl-hnk/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2020/03/09/asia/thanathorn-thailand-democracy-intl-hnk/index.html)

**What you can do to help (handout)**

* Write to your members of congress and senators and encourage them to support the democracy movement in Thailand and to exert pressure on people committing human rights violations.
* <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>
* Educate yourself about what is happening to the people of Thailand under the oppressive government.
* Support organizations that work to protect human rights.
* [THAI LAWYERS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS](https://tlhr2014.wordpress.com/)
* [Human Rights Watch | Defending Human Rights Worldwide](https://www.hrw.org/)
* Watch videos from the popular rap group *Rap Against Dictatorship*
* <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCukIPSb0N6_vRVD_5VlzqQg>

Annotated Bibliography

Human Rights Violations in Thailand

Bengali, Shashank. “Crackdown Strikes Fear in Thai Dissidents.” *SFGate*, San Francisco Chronicle, 28 May 2019, www.sfgate.com/world/article/Crackdown-strikes-fear-in-Thai-dissidents-13901575.php.

The Thai government is killing dissidents. People in exile are not safe, political activists have been disappearing or been found dead. The Thai army is silencing its opponents within Thailand and outside of the country. Leading up to the coronation of the new king, hundreds of people were arrested for making negative comments about the monarchy. This is typical in Thailand; a country with archaic lese majeste laws. Prayuth Chan-Ocha has asked neighboring countries to hand over political dissidents. 3 dissidents who fled to Vietnam were arrested there and sent back to Thailand. The military has been putting pressure on the families of activists in an attempt to get them to turn themselves in. A Thai band that made songs calling for lese majeste laws to be removed has been forced to flee to Laos and the band members live under constant threat of abduction or worse.

McCargo, Duncan, and Saowanee Alexander. “Thailand's 2019 Elections: A State of Democratic Dictatorship?” *The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR)*, Oct. 2019, www.nbr.org/publication/thailands-2019-elections-a-state-of-democratic-dictatorship/.

The 2019 elections in Thailand were not fair. The right of the people to govern themselves has not been respected. The military junta that ousted the democratically elected government in 2014 is still in power. Only they have now disguised their authoritarian rule as a democracy. The leader of the military junta Prayuth Chan-Ocha is still the prime minister. The Thai constitution which has been changed numerous times was changed again in 2017. It was changed to greatly favor the military junta in the elections. There was a senate appointed by the military junta which did not need to be democratically elected. These members of the senate appointed by the junta were part of the reason Prayuth Chan-Ocha was able to remain in power.

The party of the previous democratically elected government is the Pheu Thai Party. Pheu Thai Party was aligned with the Thai Raksa Party but the Election Commission dissolved the party which weakened the voice of the opposition parties. The military backed Palang Pracharat Party allowed the junta to hold onto power despite elections. The majority of Thai people want democracy, they do not want to be governed by the rich and powerful. The 2019 elections saw a decline in the popularity of Pheu Thai Party and the Democrat Party. Many votes that would have gone to Pheu Thai Party went to the new Future Forward Party. Likewise votes that would likely have gone to the Democrat Party went to the military backed Palang Pracharat Party. A multi-party coalition between Palang Pracharat and the Democrat Party resulted in Prayuth Chan-Ocha being chosen as prime minister. This coalition was only made possible after the Election Commission changed the rules for forming the government.

Moreira, John. “Thailand's Struggle for Democracy (Paperback).” *Waterstones*, Proquest, Umi Dissertation Publishing, 1 Oct. 2012, [www.waterstones.com/book/thailands-struggle-for-democracy/john-moreira/9781249852889](http://www.waterstones.com/book/thailands-struggle-for-democracy/john-moreira/9781249852889).

Thailand faces many challenges in its attempt to become a full democracy. There have been more than a dozen coups since 1932. Thailand is missing several important components that a fully functioning democracy must have and because it is missing these components democracy in Thailand is not safe or stable. Thailand lacks important elements such as freedom of speech, an independent judicial system, and a military controlled by civilians. Attempts to become more democratic have been prevented by the ever so frequent military coups that take place. Until the military’s influence on politics has been removed it is unlikely that Thailand will have a long lasting democracy.

Regan, Helen. “Why Billionaire Commoner Thanathorn Won't Stop Fighting for Thai Democracy, Even If It Means Jail Time.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 10 Mar. 2020, www.cnn.com/2020/03/09/asia/thanathorn-thailand-democracy-intl-hnk/index.html.

Thanathorn Juanroongruangkit is the face of the fight for democracy in Thailand. He is the founder of Future Forward, a pro-democracy political party created in 2018. The party won 6.3 million votes in the 2019 elections and was banned in February for violating election laws. In the last 2 years Future Forward has faced more than 20 legal cases and Thanathorn as well as the other leaders of Future Forward face criminal charges. The platform that Future Forward ran on called for large changes that would transform Thailand’s political system. Thanathorn formerly was CEO of his family’s auto parts manufacturing company which is the biggest in Thailand. He has made himself a target of the military by pushing for democracy. The dissolvement of Future Forward sparked large protests at universities in Thailand. Thanathorn faces jail time but has said that unlike former prime ministers Thaksin Shinawatra and Yingluck Shinawatra he will not flee. He fears the movement will collapse if he leaves.

Schaffar, Wolfram. “The Iron Silk Road and the Iron Fist: Making Sense of the Military Coup D'État in Thailand.” *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, 2018, journals.univie.ac.at/index.php/aseas/article/view/2682.

On May 22nd, 2014 the military in Thailand staged a coup which removed the democratically elected Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra from power. This was a result of the political divisions between the Yellow Shirts and the Red Shirts. The Red Shirts are generally working class and support the democratically elected government while Yellow Shirts are the elites and they are close to the monarchy. The coup returned the elites to power and took power away from the people. Usually after a coup in Thailand the military promises to hold elections shortly after but not this time. The military changed the constitution and installed itself as the long term governing force of Thailand.

Zsombor, Peter. *Thailand Pro-Democracy Activists Bruised, Bloodied in ...* Voice of America News, July 2019, www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/thailand-pro-democracy-activists-bruised-bloodied-spate-unsolved-attacks.

Democracy activists who are protesting against cheating in the election and against the military junta are being attacked. Anurak Jeantawanich is one of many activists who has been beaten by thugs. He was beaten by four men on motorbikes while on his way to lead a protest against the unfairness of the elections held in March, 2019. Activists feel that assaults like these are directed by the government. These attacks are happening before or after protests for democracy. They are afraid that the pro-military government is intent on keeping power no matter what.

In the first half of 2019 there had already been more than 10 attacks against pro-democracy activists. The police did not investigate these attacks properly or bring the culprits to face justice. Sunai Phasuk of Human Rights Watch in Thailand thinks that this suggests possible government involvement. He also says that the attacks have grown bolder and more violent to send a message to those who protest the authoritarian government. After a brutal attack Sirawith Seritiwat there has been blowback against the Thai government and pressure for the police to investigate thoroughly. The government is of course denying any allegations that they are behind the attacks. The activist Anurak Jeantawanich said that the government is afraid of the Thai people protesting in large numbers like what is happening in Hong Kong and so the best way for the government to scare people is to attack the activists in order to discourage protests.