

# Thailand's Political Crisis: Issues for Congress

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On August 29, 2025, Thailand's Constitutional Court—which historically has favored the military, the monarchy, and traditional elites—[formally removed](#) prime minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra from office for ethics violations. Paetongtarn, daughter of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006), had led Thailand since August 2024, heading a coalition formed in part to prevent the reformist Move Forward Party (which won a plurality of votes in 2023 elections) from forming a government. Following Paetongtarn's removal, a new, minority coalition government was formed and promised elections within four months; it is not clear whether new elections will produce a credible, stable government. The continued political turmoil raises uncertainty in a long-time U.S. military ally and economic partner.

## Paetongtarn's Removal and Thailand's Current Government

Paetongtarn's removal stemmed from a reignited border dispute with Cambodia and a leaked call between Paetongtarn and former Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen. [Cross-border gunfire](#) on May 28 resulted in the death of one Cambodian soldier and prompted troop build-ups, escalatory rhetoric, and [retaliatory economic measures](#) on both sides. During a June 15 call to ameliorate tensions, Paetongtarn adopted a deferential tone and [referred to](#) Hun Sen as “uncle” (an honorific) and to a Thai military commander as “from the opposite side.” Paetongtarn defended her deferential tone with Hun Sen, a long-time friend of the Shinawatra family, as a negotiating tactic. The Bhumjaithai Party [left her ruling coalition](#) and called for a vote of no-confidence, and large-scale protests in Bangkok called for her resignation. Thirty-six members of the Thai Senate, which is dominated by allies of the royal establishment and the military, filed ethics charges and petitioned the Constitutional Court for her removal. She was [suspended](#) from the premiership on July 1.

On September 5, Bhumjaithai leader Anutin Charnvirakul, a U.S.-educated scion of a wealthy construction family, was elected Thailand's 32<sup>nd</sup> prime minister, despite his party holding only 69 seats in the 500-seat House of Representatives. Anutin garnered the necessary votes from the reformist People's Party, formed after the court disbanded Move Forward. Anutin [has promised to](#) dissolve parliament within four months (setting up snap elections) and consider amendments to Thailand's constitution. The People's Party remains in the opposition. Given the opposing ideologies of Bhumjaithai and the People's Party,

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observers expect [continued political volatility](#) in the coming months. The Shinawatrass' Pheu Thai Party, now out of government, has been further diminished by the September 9 [imprisonment of Thaksin](#).

## Thailand's Political Fissures

The current political crisis is the latest in a series of confrontations in which traditional power centers, including military and royalist factions, have sought to restrict the political power of populists and younger reformists seeking to challenge the role of the military and monarchy in politics. Thaksin pioneered using appeals to historically politically disenfranchised and disengaged populations, including rural and working-class voters, to win elections. In 2005, Thaksin became the first Thai prime minister to complete a full four-year term in office, and the first to lead his party to win an absolute majority in the House of Representatives. He was ousted by the military in 2006. The ongoing power struggle has resulted in two decades of political deadlock, periodic mass protests, a violent military crackdown in 2010, and another coup in 2014. The Constitutional Court has removed several popularly elected leaders on [charges of corruption](#) or [electoral fraud](#) over those decades, moves seen by some independent analysts as politically motivated.

Reformist parties grew in stature during and after the 2019 elections, in which the Future Forward Party [won an unexpected 80 seats](#) in the House of Representatives. The party was banned in 2020 by Thailand's Constitutional Court. Its successor party, the Move Forward Party, topped the 2023 elections but the military-appointed Senate blocked it from forming a government, and the court dissolved the party. Polling indicates its successor People's Party [remains Thailand's most popular party](#). These parties have sought, among other goals, to restrict the role of the military in politics and challenge Thailand's lèse-majesté law, which criminalizes criticism of the monarchy and is applied broadly to silence critics of the military and government. In 2023, after Move Forward was blocked, Thaksin loyalists and military-backed parties (including Bhumjaithai) formed the [governing coalition](#) once led by Paetongtarn.

## Issues for Congress

Polling after Anutin's election [indicates that](#) the People's Party remains more popular than Bhumjaithai and Pheu Thai; however, 21% of respondents indicated they are undecided about which party they would vote for if an election were held immediately. With the People's Party in position to perform well in snap elections and the political power of Pheu Thai and the Shinawatrass [diminished](#), the composition of a future majority government is uncertain. If the People's Party (or Pheu Thai) achieve results similar to those in 2023 in new elections but are prevented from forming a government, it could raise questions about the state of Thailand's democracy.

Thailand's troubled democracy has been an issue of congressional concern at least since military coups d'état in 2006 and 2014. Congress over the past decade has worked through statements, resolutions, legislation, and hearings to shape U.S. engagement in Southeast Asia, strengthen U.S. ties with Thailand and the region, and promote democracy and human rights in Thailand. Thailand [offers access and cooperation](#) to U.S. military, law enforcement, and intelligence organizations, and historically has been a regional leader. Prolonged political turmoil could limit the Thai government's ability to make decisions and fully participate in regional initiatives, and observers note that the Thai-Cambodian border dispute has demonstrated the military's [continued dominance](#) in Thai politics and civil-military relations. Thailand has received U.S. funding for International Military Education and Training (IMET), maritime domain awareness, and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HA/DR) efforts. Congress could investigate and conduct oversight of administration efforts to manage tensions and Thailand's political instability, particularly in light of the U.S.-Thai security relationship and the Royal Thai Armed Forces' continued role in government. Previous administrations have [restricted certain assistance](#) to the

government of Thailand after military coups, including in 2014, consistent with annual appropriations legislation regarding coups d'état (in its current form, P.L. 118-47, §7008 of Division F, carried forward into FY2025 via continuing resolutions). The first Trump Administration lifted coup-related aid restrictions on Thailand in 2019, after the country held elections.

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