Myanmar’s national elections in November 2015 marked an important milestone in the country’s democratic development. There are many remaining obstacles to achieving robust democracy, including the continuing influence of the military in politics, the ongoing ethnic conflict, and the National League for Democracy’s concentration of power. Nonetheless, free and fair elections and the opening of political and civic space warrant cautious optimism for Myanmar’s political development.

Unfortunately, the report card on democratic progress in the rest of Southeast Asia is decidedly more mixed. The Philippines, traditionally one of the most democratic countries in the region, is experiencing, with the elections of Duterte, a clear threat of democratic backsliding and mass human rights abuse. Singapore’s September 2015 elections delivered a massive win for the ruling party within an electoral framework clearly biased in its favor. While the city-state experienced lively and informed political debate during the campaign, freedom of expression has remained limited and the political opposition faces repression from the state.

In Cambodia, despite a newly-emboldened civil society, the dictatorship remains firmly in place. After a truce brokered between Prime Minister Hun Sen and the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party in 2014, and a promise of a new “culture of dialogue,” the rapprochement broke down completely last summer. Opposition politicians were attacked outside parliament. Hun Sen announced that he planned to run again in the next election, and the authorities pursued criminal charges against a number of leading opposition political figures and civil society activists. Most notably, the authorities reactivated an old charge against opposition leader Sam Rainsy, who went into exile.
In Malaysia, Prime Minister Najib tun Razak has been embroiled in corruption scandals and his administration has increasingly criminalized free expression by jailing opposition leaders and activists, writing new laws that limit criticism, and breaking up peaceful protests. In Thailand, after the 2014 military coup which resulted in a creeping crackdown of social and political freedoms, there appears to be no end in sight to the junta’s rule; although the military government has promised to hold elections in 2017, even the date appears unlikely. However, the death of King Bhumibol Adulyadej, a unifying figure who provided legitimacy to the junta, provides an opening for democracy activists in the face of the junta.

The most repressive countries in the region also showed few signs of change. In Vietnam, the release of prominent writers and bloggers was matched by new arrests of journalists and bloggers, and a proposed new legislation that would further limit freedom of the press. In Laos, the government refused to allow a meeting of Southeast Asian civil society groups on the sideline of the ASEAN summit, and has provided no new information on the whereabouts of Sombath Somphone, Laos’s best-known civil society activist, who disappeared in 2012.

In this context, popular dissatisfaction with government mismanagement, corruption, and abuse of power has led to growing grassroots mobilization across the region. Despite increased repression in many countries, there are signs of active civic engagement on human rights, democracy and accountability. From the renewed efforts of Cambodian youths to fight oppression through their “Black Monday” campaign, to the effective symbolic actions of Thai, Malaysian or Vietnamese human rights defenders, to the surprising election of Umbrella Movement leaders to Hong Kong’s Legislative Council, democracy activists and human rights defenders have shown their resilience. There are even signs of increasing regional cooperation, such as the recently-launched Network of Young Democratic Asians (NOYDA) which draws together members across East and Southeast Asia. NOYDA is committed to reclaiming the social, cultural, and political narrative of a region grappling with entrenched authoritarianism. Nonetheless, these mobilization attempts have overwhelmingly failed to achieve their intended objectives. While these objectives vary from country to country, a general lack of strategic planning and weak organizational capacity has hampered various attempts to trigger meaningful state reform and social or political change from the bottom up.
In this context, capacity building and strategic planning could bring about major changes in the efforts of pro-democracy forces and human rights defenders across the region. Through horizontal learning and coordination, representatives from different social and political movements will be able to develop more effective visions and strategies in their respective societies, as well as at the regional level.

These countries have been selected based on their recent political history, human rights index and their degree of democratic development. Targeted countries should be analyzed based on which are going through a democratic transition or have experienced recent challenges to political rights, civil liberties or change in government (Burma, Malaysia, Philippines and Singapore), countries with limited political and civic space or that are experiencing political instability (Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, activists from South Korea focusing on North Korea and Indonesian activists focusing on Papua) and more stable countries, some of which have open political and civic space for civic mobilization and participation (Indonesia, South Korea, Taiwan). The different degrees of democratic development across these contexts will greatly enrich the discussions and expose the participants to the different ways activists can act depending on the political setting in which they operate.
Countries Facing Significant Challenges to Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Changes in Government

Burma, also known as Myanmar, is a country that has only recently begun stepping towards democracy. With a population of over 52 million, the Southeast Asian nation is home to 135 ethnic minorities; ethnic Burmese make up the majority, representing over two thirds of the population. From 1962 until only 2011, Burma was under various military juntas and is now in its sixth year of liberalization. Besides the political conflict between the still-present military leadership and pro-democracy activists, most notably Aung San Suu Kyi, are the conflicts between the Burmese government and the various ethnic groups. Often described as taking part in the “longest-running civil war,” the government did eventually successfully sign a ceasefire deal with approximately half of the prominent ethnic militias, although even these agreements have not been entirely successful.
After implementing a new constitution approved in 2008, Burma is now a unitary parliamentary republic. The president of Burma is nominated by Parliament, as opposed to through a direct election. In 2016, Htin Kyaw of the National League for Democracy (NLD) became President of Burma, taking over from Thein Sein of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) – which had acted as the military’s political party. Burma is composed of two legislative chambers, collectively referred to as the Assembly of the Union. The House of Nationalities and House of Representatives are known as the upper and lower house respectively, the former containing 224 and the latter 440 MPs. In both chambers, 25% of seats are reserved for members of the military, all of whom are appointed rather than elected. The other 75% are representative and elected by citizens.

Following the 2015 parliamentary elections, the House of Nationalities is comprised of the NLD (135 seats), the USDP (11 seats), the Arakan National Party (ANP; 10 seats), and seven other parties, each of which occupy no more than three seats. The House of Representatives is composed of the NLD (255 seats), the USDP (30 seats), the ANP (12 seats) and the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD; 12 seats), as well as eight other parties, each of which, once again, occupy no more than three seats. Additionally, 56 seats in the House of Nationalities and 110 seats in the House of Representatives are reserved for the military.

Political rights for the ethnic Burmese have grown since the beginning of the transition to democracy, although ethnic minorities still face limited rights. The law guarantees both freedom of religion and internal travel. Although such freedoms are generally applied, exceptions are made regarding Muslims and travel to areas of conflict. Anti-Muslim rhetoric has increased in recent years, especially against the Rohingya ethnicity, often described as the most oppressed group in the world. The hard-line Nationalist Buddhist group Ma Ba Tha (Patriotic Association of Myanmar) has been a leading voice against Muslims, inciting violence against the group. Other ethnic minorities face discrimination, particularly pertaining to their autonomy, or rather lack thereof. Schools in ethnic minority regions are forced to teach in Burmese, despite requests to teach in local languages. Only the Burmese are currently treated as full citizens, but their freedom is still greatly limited.
After Burma began opening up in 2011, NGOs and other international organizations were able to increase activity in the country. Laws over NGO registration with the national government were eased in 2014, though there are still restrictions. Independent trade unions also began forming in 2011, though they have struggled; some successes have nevertheless occurred, including the passing of a minimum wage. Ethnic communities for minority groups are still a key part of society, with control of several states effectively under the control of a region’s respective ethnic group. Armed militias from many ethnicities each have fought against the government for decades, whilst resulting peace deals have produced no tangible change. Outside Burman-majority areas and major cities within these ethnic minority states, the ethnic community is the fundamental part of society.

Following the restrictive and isolated environment under the military junta, internet access (as well as greater access to the international community in general) has just begun to open up. Estimates of Internet penetration are extremely low, with a recent 2016 estimate reporting an Internet penetration of 2.5%.

As a country still under military control, security forces continue to play a large part in maintaining the current social order. Moreover, economic elites have additionally benefited from the regime, and are generally unsupportive of change. Additionally, the government receives support from its neighbors China and India.
Although the military has lost sole control over the media since the beginning of democratization, the military nevertheless maintains control over a substantial proportion of it. Independent media has increased and is ever critical of the country’s rulers. Opposition parties, primarily the NLD and ethnic-based parties, have also expressed discontent with the government and have actively attempted to democratize the country since the last century. The youth have also proven to be a key ally for democratic reform.
**MALAYSIA**

**INTRODUCTION**

Malaysia is Southeastern Asian nation with one of the region’s most vibrant economies. Maintaining territory on both the main Asian continent and on the island of Borneo, Malaysia also has great biodiversity. The nation is ethnically diverse, with ethnics Malays representing about 60% of the population; a significant Chinese minority also makes up part of the population of approximately 30 million. Racial tensions between the economically dominate Chinese and the politically dominate Malays continue to plague the country.

**POLITICAL SYSTEM**

The head of state of Malaysia is an elected monarch, known as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, who serves a five-year term and is elected by nine of the thirteen states, each of which has its own royalty. This role is largely ceremonial and is currently held by Abdul Halim. The head of government is the prime minister, who is leader of the majority party/coalition in Parliament. The current prime minister is Najib Razak. Najib has faced criticism for alleged mismanagement and embezzlement. He has held the position of prime minister since April 2009. The Malaysian Parliament is bicameral and is divided into the Dewan Negara (Senate) and the Dewan Rakyat (House of
Representatives). The Dewan Negara is the upper house and contains 70 senators: 44 MPs appointed by the king and 26 MPs elected by the 13 state legislatures. Terms are three years, with the possibility for a maximum of two terms. The lower house is the Dewan Rakyat, which consists of 222 members. All members are elected by popular vote and serve five-year terms, with no limit on the number of terms.

The voting system is largely in favor of the incumbent; gerrymandering of voting districts and irregular activity are reported at opposition strongholds. The incumbent party, Barisan Nasional (BN; National Front), and its predecessor have held power since 1957 and are dominated by ethnic Malays. The judiciary is also largely influenced by the government.

Many freedoms face varying degrees of restriction in Malaysia. The freedoms of opposition parties are often curtailed in order for the BN to maintain dominance. Freedom of expression is guaranteed in the Malaysian constitution, but is limited in practice. Books and other writings are subject to censorship, whilst most media is controlled by the BN or its affiliates. Freedom of religion is not granted and ethnic Malays are constitutionally defined as Muslim. With Sunni Islam as the official state religion, Shiite Muslims face discrimination. Other religious minorities also face discrimination. While the law is secular, Muslims are subject to Sharia law. Freedom of both assembly and association has been limited in recent years, with the government citing a need to maintain public order. Associations of seven or more people must be approved and registered with the government, which retains the ability to revoke permission of association. However, freedom on the Internet is largely maintained, although the Malaysian government has the ability to order removal of sites deemed provocative or subversive.

As previously mentioned, freedom of assembly is limited, thereby posing a challenge to civil society. Mass protests by Bersih (Clean) against PM Najib occurred in 2015, in response to which the government declared the protests, as well as the yellow shirts worn by the protestors, illegal. Protests, in general, are restricted and currently prohibited. NGOs are allowed to operate in Malaysia, although challenges nevertheless exist. Some human rights groups are unable to create local branches in Malaysia. Likewise, whilst trade unions are permitted, they remain largely restricted.
The police and military support the ruling party, and enforce its rules. Ethnic Malays and indigenous ethnic groups also are a large pillar of support for BN, as these ethnicities make up the core constituency of the group. As BN maintains power through its ethnically driven political agenda, the continued support from a large proportion of ethnic Malays is likely and will predictably result in the continuation of BN power. The election system, controlled by the Election Commission (EC), is also pivotal to BN power, as gerrymandering works to build electoral districts that favor BN and its affiliates, whilst disadvantaging those likely to support opposition parties.

The Internet is fairly accessible in Malaysia, with penetration at 68%. The internet is considered to be more free than other media, although the government retains the ability to block sites. No general restrictions exist regarding Internet content, but specific sites are often blocked. Political websites are not targeted at large; the only sites generally targeted are pornographic websites. Several sites perceived as critical of the government were removed. The interrogation and arrest of individuals in regards to Internet usage have taken place under the Sedition Act.
The media, which is largely owned by or under the sphere of influence of BN, currently shows significant support for BN, although a shift away from BN power may see an increase in impartial reporting. Its alliance within the international community is also split, specifically ASEAN and the West. Given that Malaysia is performing well above other regional countries and maintains a partially free and fair election, the international community is not currently pressured to critique the Malaysian government for the moment. Greater explanation of and reporting on the problems in the system of democracy will be necessary in order for the international community to place greater pressure on Malaysia.

The largest group against the BN would be ethnic Chinese, who have seen a lack of political opportunity, in spite of constituting 26% of Malaysia’s population. Other non-indigenous ethnic groups such as Indians are also disfavored by BN politics and would have a vested interest in creating a non-ethnic based politics. Civil society also has an interest in removing the BN, as their control has led to the restriction of assembly and organization. NGOs have had difficulties operating due to laws and organizations and their protests have faced bans.
The Philippines has walked a long road to democracy, and though currently a free and fair democracy, it currently boasts a controversial president. Following colonization by Spain and the United States, Filipinos elected Ferdinand Marcos as president, but near the end of his second term in office, Marcos declared martial law and became a dictator supported by the United States. Eventually thrown from power in several days of widespread peaceful protests in 1986, democracy was restored to the Philippines. The country continues to face a Moro Muslim separatist movement in Southern Philippines as well as a communist insurgency. The country’s population surpassed 100 million in July 2014. The country is a newly industrialized economy and has a rapidly growing economy. Starting on 1 July 2016, President Duterte has undergone a bloody war on drugs within the nation, resulting in the deaths – primarily extrajudicial, through the police and citizens alike – of 13 people daily, on average.
The Philippines is a republic with a directly elected president. Eligible for only one term, the current president is Rodrigo Duterte, inaugurated in June 2016. The president acts as both the head of state and the head of government. Although only he’s only been in office for half a year, Duterte has gained notoriety globally, being compared to the likes of the United States’ Donald Trump for his vulgar remarks, populist support, recklessness, and irreverence. Most notably, Duterte has promised to solve the drug epidemic in the Philippines, which has been carried out through the widespread killing and arrest of those suspected of being involved in drug trafficking. The vice president is elected independently from the president, but through the same political process. A single vice president can serve no more than two consecutive terms. The current vice president is Leni Robredo.

The legislative branch of government, the Congress, is bicameral and is divided into the Senate and the House of Representatives, the upper and lower houses respectively. The Senate is composed of 24 members, with six-year terms. A limit of two consecutive terms is in place. The House of Representatives is composed of 292 representatives, with 234 elected from geographical districts and 58 party-list representatives. House MPs are restricted to three continuous three-year terms.

Dramatic setbacks in human rights occurred when Duterte took office this year. Previously the mayor of Davao City, Duterte drastically reduced crime in the city by creating what some might call a police state. Near constant filming of citizens in public places and alleged use of death squads to kill suspected drug dealers or criminals helped to clean up Davao City, but it did so at the cost of human rights. While Duterte is still relatively new to office, some of his programs in Davao City have been implemented
Civil Society

The Philippines has a strong history of community organization, ousting leaders twice through mass nonviolent protests. Protests remain frequent in the island nation. Many NGOs and other organizations are working towards ending extrajudicial killings; other NGOs are generally free from government interference. Trade unions also remain independent, but are required to represent 20% of their constituency in order to register. Overall, the activity of trade unions is hampered by laws, but not to the point of being non-functional.

Internet access in the Philippines is classified as “free,” according to Freedom House. That said, freedom has decreased over the years. With internet access largely restricted to major cities, content posted to the internet has been limited in some cases. Activist organization is free to take place on the internet, and has been successfully used as a tool in the past.

Pillars Analysis

Pillars Supporting Human Rights Abuses

at the national level, in particular the extrajudicial killings of suspected drug dealers or drug addicts. Police killings have seen no accountability or punishment. Indeed, within Duterte’s first 100 days in office, a reported 1,213 individuals have been killed. Killings are not limited to the police, and Duterte has encouraged citizens to participate in cleaning up the country; many deaths have been perpetrated by “unknown hitmen.” Death squads have also been used. Victims have been mistaken for those the police are searching for, and an unknown number of innocent people have been murdered in the war on drugs. Duterte is recorded as stating “I don’t care about human rights, believe me.”

Besides the mass extrajudicial killings, human rights in the Philippines have been primarily recognized, although this is potentially subject to change as Duterte continues in his mandate as president.

The government, primarily the President Duterte, have publically supported human rights violations weekly, if not daily. In addition, the police have taken an active role in carrying out extrajudicial killings, perpetrating the abuses of rights. Death squads also have supported human rights abuses, with their existence themselves being one. Further killings of individuals with no official evidence or oversight from either the police or death squads exhibits the lack of basic rights given to citizens.
Many groups are put in a challenging position regarding Duterte. On one hand, he was democratically elected as president. On the other hand, though, Duterte has greatly disregarded and ignored human rights. While mayor of Davao City, Duterte was successful in reducing crime and drug use, but at a significant cost to basic rights. Filipino citizens, who overwhelmingly voted for Duterte, do support Duterte at the moment, but further, more severe actions by Duterte could turn the tide of opinion against their elected leader. The media is also split, with the international media quick to criticize the leader’s wrongdoings. Domestic media, on the other hand, faces the same conflict as the citizens. The international community, while vocal about their concerns with human rights, also must balance out their disapproval with their support of democracy and free and fair elections. While a democracy certainly can criticize another democracy’s leader, they must walk a careful line so as not to disavow democracy and state sovereignty.

Supporters of human rights are mostly nongovernmental groups and civil society. Many NGOs have been highly critical of Duterte, with well-known organizations such as Human Rights Watch actively reporting on human rights abuses. IGOs, such as the United Nations, have also discredited Duterte; Duterte responded to this criticism by threatening to leave the organization.
Singapore is the world's only island city-state and lies off the tip of its much larger neighbor Malaysia. Previously a British colony, Singapore gained independence in 1963 and, in spite of its size and lack of natural resources, has developed into a hugely successful economic power as both a regional and global financial hub. Singapore rates highly on human development indexes and has high per capita incomes, low direct taxation but high indirect taxation. Singapore is highly multicultural with Chinese, Malay, Indian and Western cultures effectively amalgamated into society. English is the common language.
Singapore is a parliamentary republic designed along the British model. The executive is the Prime Minister, supported by his Cabinet, and is appointed by the President, who is elected by popular vote. The Prime Minister has some veto powers but is a more ceremonial position than in other states. Parliament serves as the legislative branch and is multiparty and unicameral. The Parliamentary voting system is specifically designed to include minorities in government. Although it holds free elections, Singapore is rarely referred to as a 'full' democracy, as the state holds strong sway over the media. Populist politics is rare, as most Singaporeans are dedicated to the long-term interest of the country rather than short-term political gain. However the People’s Action Party (PAP) is highly influential and tends to win an overwhelming majority, further entrenching their dominance with influence over media networks.

The judicial system is based on English Common Law but with some significant additions. Trial by jury was entirely abolished in 1970s so judicial decisions are made entirely by judges. Penalties in Singapore include caning for crimes such as rape, rioting, vandalism and some immigration offences. There is a mandatory death penalty for murder, the possession of some drugs and firearms offences. Amnesty claims Singapore has the highest rate of executions relative to its population. However both the Singaporean justice system and its government in general is consistently rated one of the least corrupt in the world. Singapore is highly regulated via criminalization of certain social offences with high fines for littering, jaywalking, possession of pornography, the sale of chewing gum, or the possession of smelly fruit on buses. Male homosexual contact is illegal, although these laws rarely enforced.

The threat of terrorism is used to justify restrictions on free speech but in reality such restrictions serve to prevent government criticism. Self-censorship by media outlets is common, and all media outlets are owned by companies with connections to the government. Foreign broadcasters must be careful about engaging in domestic politics, as this can result in restrictions. In addition, foreign media is required to pay significant financial deposits. Internet content is also heavily monitored and bloggers alleging corruption have been forced to pay massive fees for challenging Singaporean orthodoxy.

Although freedom of religion is guaranteed, Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Unification Church are banned as they interfere with other religions. Headscarves are banned in public-sector jobs.
LGBT RIGHTS

Same-sex relationships are not recognized under law and male-male sexual contact is illegal although rarely enforced. No anti-discrimination laws exist for LGBT status people, and previous attempts at passing legislation on the subject have been dismissed. 75% of Singaporeans oppose same-sex marriage or sexual activity, but 28,000 have attended the annual gay rights rally Pink Dot SG. The 'glamourisation' of gay lifestyle is forbidden on radio or television, meaning advertisements relating to HIV/AIDS are also illegal. Until 2003, homosexuals were banned from being in 'sensitive positions' within the Singapore Civil Service, but the ban has since been overturned.

MIGRANT WORKERS

Migrant workers make up 1/4th of Singapore's population and are frequently subjected to harassment and discrimination, as well as exploitation by their bosses and traffickers. Foreign workers are excluded from key labour protections such as the right to unionise without government permission. Trafficking of women for domestic work and commercial sex work is also relatively common.

SUSPECTED DRUG USERS

The Misuse of Drugs Act allows authorities to send suspected drug users to rehab centres without trial for up to 3 years. One can be arrested for drug use by merely possessing keys to a location where drugs are found, or if seen to be moving away from a location presumed to contain drugs. Police do not require a search warrant for properties they believe to contain drugs. Above a certain possession threshold, drug trafficking charges are automatically applied.
The PAP is a centre-right political party that has been the ruling party since 1959 and was created by the recently deceased Lee Kuan Yew. The PAP always holds a legislative majority in Parliament, making Singapore a de facto one-party state, although other parties are allowed to contest in elections. The Party’s approach to governance and power has always been a pragmatic one, sometimes emphasising a socialist approach, other times a strictly capitalist one. The Party acknowledges the need for both meritocracy and multiculturalism as central strands of governance and also engages in both welfare spending and general Keynesian economic doctrine. However the Party dislikes criticism, as demonstrated in the prosecution of a 16 year old boy, Amos Yee for allegedly insulting the legacy of Lee Kuan Yew, the former Prime Minister and leader of PAP.

The Singapore Police Force is widely regarded as very reliable and crimes rates in Singapore are consistently low in spite of the high volume of legislation to be enforced. Allegations of criminal behaviour among police officers are very rare.

The Singaporean military is largely a reservist military with 71,600 permanent personnel and 900,000 available reservists. National service is mandatory for those between 16 and 40 but in reality is only enforced for Singaporean males aged 18 or over and last between 2 and 2.5 years. The military relies heavily on a technological advantage to make up for the disadvantages of Singapore’s size.

The Singaporean education system is very well thought of. However some have described it at particularly rigid and with an overfocus on the positive actions of the government and the overriding importance of the nation of Singapore. Combined with anti-sedition laws and governmental censorship, Singaporeans learn to be wary of the consequences of rebellion from a very early age.

Singapore is relatively dependent upon Malaysia for agriculture and water. In addition, Singapore has many Malay inhabitants, some of whom commute daily across the bridge. However, while relations are stable due to Singapore’s high performing economy, it’s dependency on Malaysia is not total.
From the 1990s Singapore has welcomed 'active citizens' and has accepted several civil society led legal changes. Public consultation with civil society has become the norm in government practice and prominent members of the civil society environment can become Nominated Members of Parliament for more direct governmental access. Prominent advocacy issues are migrant workers issues, green and conservation issues, human rights and arts and cultural policy. The Day-Off campaign in 2012 focused on giving migrant domestic workers a day off once a month or payment in lieu of that day. The government signed this into law in 2013. Other successful campaigns have included those focused on elderly living provision and the reduction of Sharks Fin as a food source.

Some have claimed that civil society is a potential growth area for a more democratic engagement with politics, where citizens are more freely allowed to express their opinions and values, compared to the mainstream political process. Civil society is increasingly spreading along horizontal lines rather than merely focusing on governmental approval or change. These horizontal networks form links between civil society groups and citizens, sometimes conflicting, sometimes combining.

Some prominent groups include Nature Society (environment), Transient Workers Count Too (migrant workers), Association of Women for Action and Research (women’s rights), Association of Muslim Professionals (Malay-Muslim help) and Maruah (human rights).

The Internet is widely available, with Internet penetration at 73%, but content is monitored and sometimes blocked by the government. Service providers are highly controlled. The government has shown itself willing several times to prosecute bloggers, journalists and foreign media outlets.
VIETNAM

INTRODUCTION

One of only four remaining Marxist-Leninist countries remaining, Vietnam has seen dramatic development in the past several decades. Representing a population of over 90 million, the government remains nearly exclusively controlled by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), with a mere handful of legislative representatives independent of the party. A one-party state, the CPV is the only party legally in existence. Independents can run for government positions, but they must first be approved by the CPV, which cautiously rejects any applicant seen as potentially reform-minded. The economic progress made in Vietnam since 1986 has been tremendous, with new economic reforms liberalizing the market to a degree and allowing Vietnam to integrate into the global economy. Even with this newfound globalized market, citizens face a lack of many basic freedoms.
The Vietnamese political system is a one-party state, with the president acting as the head of state and the prime minister acting as head of government. After elections in April 2016, Tran Dai Quang became President and Nguyen Xuan Phuc became Prime Minister. The legislative branch is unicameral and known as the National Assembly; the National Assembly is composed of 500 MPs, of which currently 458 are members of the CPV. The National Assembly elects the president, who serves five-year terms. The elected president then appoints the prime minister. While opponents of the CPV are allowed to apply for government as independents, there is little chance that they will be approved. Only independents who tout government ideology are permitted to run, and such is largely done so that Vietnam can feign democracy. The judicial system is answerable to the National Assembly, and is therefore also under control of the CPV.

Many basic civil liberties are denied or limited to Vietnamese citizens, such as freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom of association and assembly, and freedom of movement. Ethnic minorities are discriminated against and often face difficulties regarding education and employment. Religious minorities are also discriminated against, and face challenges in operating. All religious groups are required to join a CPV-controlled supervisory body and must obtain permission for nearly all of their activities. Freedoms of the press and academia are functionally nonexistent; all press is state-run and much of the academic system is controlled by the state as well. Satellite television is also restricted from nearly all citizens, though it is still present in a fair number of homes. Permission to assemble is required in advance, and the government has power to stop any assemblies. One of the few rights protected by law is the freedom of movement, though this is limited for ethnic minorities and political dissidents. Freedom on the Internet is restricted, though many citizens have been able to bypass these limitations. The government monitors all Internet activity. However, women’s rights are remarkably better than the other aforementioned rights. Women generally have the same opportunities as men, though they still experience discrimination in wages and promotion.
Non-governmental groups and societies are largely discouraged by the government, and in the few cases that they do exist, they are largely controlled or monitored by the government. While trade unions are permitted, they are required to join the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor (VGCL). The operation of “labor associations” independent from government affiliation has been permitted in recent years. NGOs are required to register with Vietnam and additionally must report on their activities twice a year.

Internet access is restricted, and websites deemed reactionary are blocked. Additionally, as previously mentioned, extensive monitoring of Internet activity is commonplace. Even with these, many have managed to access the Internet, although it is still a challenge to use the internet for anti-government or democratic purposes.

The police and other security forces play a vital role in maintaining the CPV’s power; police have routinely been deployed against protests and critics, and have acted violently against activists. Similarly, the military is controlled by the CPV. While not actively used against activists, the military has the potential to act in defense of the current regime. Courts also act under the CPV, and execute decisions to protect the ruling party, such as harsh punishment against dissidents. Other key supporters of the CPV are nondemocratic countries, China in particular. While relations between Vietnam and China have been rocky in the last few years, Vietnam’s northern neighbor still supports the CPV, as China also supports Marxist-Leninist ideologies.
Economic elites could benefit from democratic reforms, as that would increase access to the global market. That said, the elites have already benefitted under – and most likely directly due to – the CPV, and therefore also have incentives to maintain the status quo. Teachers, on the other hand, are largely in support of democratization, though are severely restricted in their ability to support it, as the government tightly controls the school curriculum. Media outlets are other potential allies, even though Vietnam has one of the most restrictive media environments globally. Freedom of speech is technically given to citizens, but laws prohibit speech against the government. Even under this obstacle, media has the potential to support democratization under the right circumstances. Lastly, democratic countries vocally support the democratization of Vietnam, but have lacked the actions to back up their talk. In the last several years, the West has increased ties to Vietnam, although the West has yet to put extensive pressure on the communist regime.

The primary ally for democratic reform would be the opposition parties. While they are illegal and unofficial, many exist and have some basic organization structure. Independents affiliated with these groups could potentially gain influence in the National Assembly if running laws were loosened. NGOs are also another prime ally; these organizations have the ability to back democratic movements without fear of reprisal, as opposed to democratic countries. The agricultural sector has been greatly harmed by the government and its land seizures. As subsistence farming is the only source of prosperity for many, land seizures severely harm many families’ livelihoods. The youth are also another important group. Having grown up under a more liberal market and international economy, as well as having received the best education yet, young people are eager to make further progress.
Introduction

Thailand is well known as a tourist destination but also holds the 20th largest economy globally\(^1\) and a population of 66 million. Thailand has had a tumultuous political history with two coup d’etats in the last 10 years and a long history of military dictatorships. However, it has managed to avoid the large scale wars and genocides of its neighbours, although issues with censorship, drugs and human trafficking still present major problems.

Since 2014 the Royal Thai Armed Forces have ruled Thailand via a military junta established after a coup, throwing out democratically elected Yingluck Shinawatra. The junta is named the National Council for Peace and Order and was a response to 6 months of political instability prior to the coup. It dissolved the government and Senate, claiming their duties and ordered the judiciary under its jurisdiction. The NCOP has also declared martial law, banned political gatherings, enforced internet censorship and arrested many political actors. A national referendum on the newly written constitution is due to be held in 2016.

\(^{1}\) By nominal GDP
Thailand is a constitutional monarchy, albeit one prone to military coups. The current King of Thailand has ruled since 1946, surviving all coups which tend to focus on the government rather than the monarchy. The monarchy and the military are close, with the military often citing lese majeste (offence against the dignity of the monarch) as their excuse for overthrowing the government and the monarch frequently approving coups after the fact. His Majesty Bhumibol Adulyadej is valued at $30 billion. The King commands great loyalty among the Thai people although his heir apparent Vajiralongkorn is less popular, placing the continuance of the monarchy after Adulyadej’s death into question.

The current government takes the form of the military-dominated National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) which ousted the democratically elected government of Shinawatra. The King has appointed General Prayut Chan-o-cha as administrative caretaker in charge of the majority of governmental departments. Prayut also has a Board of Consultants, many of whom are ex-military or ex-governmental officials.

The NCPO has repealed the last constitution (from 2007) aside from its commitment to the rule of the King. The group have imposed strict martial law and a curfew from 22.00 to 05.00 across the country. More than 1,000 people have been detained and sent to military ‘attitude adjustment’ centres, from which allegations of torture have emerged. Other political parties have been prevented from participating in campaigning or other political activities.

The 2014 coup has repealed many of the rights enshrined in the 1997 People’s Constitution which guaranteed rights to freedom of speech, press, peaceful assembly, association, religion and movement. Currently no political gatherings are allowed, nor is criticism of the military government or the King. Transmissions from cable TV and radio stations have been blocked and some shut down. The military junta have aggressively pursued the prioritisation of lese majeste as a criminal act, meaning criticism (in the most broadly understood terms) of the King is illegal. One man was sentenced to 60 years in prison in a military court. Lese majeste is also applicable to online commentary, including individuals who like, share or comment on ‘offensive’ Facebook content, as criminals.

Arbitrary detention and ‘re-education’ effort are widespread, as are allegations of torture, extra-judicial killings and other abuse. Human Rights Watch has identified 64 disappearances of activists.
Cases of Cambodian men being kidnapped and trafficked into illegal fishing boats in the Gulf of Thailand are common. Child trafficking for the sex industry in large cities from rural Thailand is also a significant issue. Forced labour and forced child labour are rampant in many manual industries.

Trafficking from other countries through China is also a problem, with many ending up in unmarked graves around Thai borders. In 2015, the mass exodus of the Rohingya peoples from Myanmar led to many deaths. There is significant evidence that governmental officials, both local and national, have been involved in trafficking schemes. Thailand continues to flout international consensus in deporting refugees to countries where they are likely to face persecution, particularly to China. Thailand has also been accused of turning back refugee boats without adequate processing or humanitarian assistance.
The Southern Peasants Federation of Thailand have been occupying land in Klong Sai Pattana in protest against the destruction wrought by palm oil companies since 2008. Backed by the Supreme Court in 2014 with an order for the Jiew Kang Jue Pattana Ltd palm oil company to vacate the land, they are still forced to defend their land, which the company refuses to leave. In 2015 Chai Bunthonglek, a prominent member of SPFT, was shot by an unknown gunman, making him the 4th activist from SPFT to be murdered since 2010. Only one person faced charges for his murder, and was quickly acquitted. The other murders remain uninvestigated. Violent repression of environmental activists and land rights activists is common throughout Thailand with observers putting the death toll at 30 activists in the last 10 years.

There is a long history of discrimination against Malay Muslims in Thailand who mainly congregate in the south of Thailand where Muslims make up as much as 80% of the population, despite being a minority nationally. Islam is seen as an imported religion into Thailand which is relatively ethnically and religiously homogeneous and Muslims were forced to undergo assimilation into the 20th century. Poverty in the south of Thailand as well as discrimination have led to prejudices of 'lazy' Muslims. Separate movements developed in the regions of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat as a response, initially based on a desire for unity. However since 2001 insurgent groups, particularly in Pattani, have become associated with international Salafist groups who have taken over Pattani local aims for their own identity, with aims for an Islamic Caliphate. These groups are now locked in a protracted insurgency with the central Thai government. Abuses have occurred on both sides, with Islamist groups murdering Buddhist monks and villagers but also local Muslims being beaten, killed or disappeared by police. This conflict has a very high rate of civilian deaths.
Pillars Analysis

The King

Thailand’s King is a powerful symbolic figure in Thai politics and his perceived approval or disapproval is an essential component of political life. His refusal to approve military coups in 1981 and 1985 ultimately led to their downfall, while coups he has approved have generally been successful. He was also a key player in his own right in the movement towards democratisation in 1992, demanding a peaceful resolution by opposing certain important actors. The coups of 2006 and 2014 have been described as a stand-off between the King and former leader Thaksin Shinawatra, in which the latter lost. The King suffers from declining health at 88 years old and his successor, Prince Vajiralongkorn, is less popular than his father. Vajiralongkorn is constantly facing accusations of inveterate gambling and debt issues.

Royal Thai Armed Forces

The Thai military consists of around 550,000 soldiers, more than half of whom are active personnel. Conscription is enforced in Thailand but not universal, with male volunteers serving 18 months and all other males over 21 subjected to a random draft in which service lasts 2 years. The military has been involved in 12 coups since 1932, purportedly due to instability, and is a powerful player in Thai politics. In 2016 the military were granted broad police powers, including freezing bank accounts, seizing property, banning travel and arbitrary detention. Automatic immunity for the military is built into the order.
Thaksin Shinawatra was Prime Minister before being overthrown in a 2006 coup, a move aggressively opposed by some. These protesters have transferred their loyalty to the Pheu Thai Party led by Thaksin's sister, Yingluck Shinawatra. These supporters have worn red shirts to show their solidarity. Members are mostly rural, non-Bangkok natives but also include students, left-wingers and businessmen opposed to military-elitist control of the economy.

This group developed in opposition to Thaksin Shinawatra and are described as royalists, ultra-nationalists and the urban middle class. They are often associated with the People's Alliance for Democracy party. This group led protests in 2006 and 2014 which were powerful enough to illicit intervention by the military in the form of two coups. Their leader Chamlong Srimuang has close ties to the military and the monarchy. These protesters wear yellow as a symbol of the King.

The Buddhist religion is very powerful in Thailand, despite its official status as a secular country. Buddhism is granted special provisions and protections by the government, by members of the Buddhist community are not entitled to hold governmental positions. There are rumours of corruption among high level members of the Buddhist community, some of whom are protected by the government. Buddhism is generally peaceful as a movement, although polarization between Buddhist and Muslim groups in the south have led to serious tensions.
Despite a ban on political gatherings post-coup, there have been a number of demonstrations both for and against the coup. The government has generally responded to anti-coup groups violently and with arbitrary arrests. Anti-coup protesters (Red Shirts) have used several symbols for their protest, including a three fingered salute from The Hunger Games franchise (banned in public), sandwiches “for democracy” (resulting in arrests), reading 1984 in public or wearing t-shirts with the words “Peace Please” or “Respect my Vote” written on them. Protesters approving of the coup have also emerged, generally in the shape of mass political marches (Yellow Shirts).

Observers have noted that the effect of the coup on civil society has been to polarize participants, who feel they must choose a pro- or anti-coup stance, relegating all other issues to the background. The polarization is a continuation of a process begun with the coup in 2006.

Prior to 2014 there were as many as 20,000 civil society organizations in Thailand, although many were short-term projects. Some of the most organized civil society organizations are in the environmental/land rights sector, especially under the umbrellas of either NGO-COD or the Assembly of NGOs for the Protection and Conservation of Environmental and National Thai NGOs. Health organizations and community-based organizations are also common. However since the coup, political activity in Thailand has become risky and many NGOs have curbed their public activities.

The NCPO has banned Facebook periodically and a number of other URLs have been banned outright. Protesters calling for change on social media have been explicitly warned they will face prosecution if found. “Liking” a Facebook page is also potentially a criminal offence. Internet penetration is Thailand is not particularly good, at 29% of the population, and mostly limited to large urban areas.
Cambodia has emerged from the tumultuous era of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge in a fragile but stable state, led by Prime Minister Hun Sen since 1985. Repression of political opposition remains rampant, and delicate peace with neighboring Vietnam remains in place. The nation is a member of ASEAN, and has strong ties to China; this Chinese-Cambodian alliance has caused tensions from within ASEAN, who generally supports the Philippines and other ASEAN members in their South China Sea claims. With a population of over 15 million, Cambodia has seen substantial demographic growth over the last several decades.
The government of Cambodia was formed in a peace agreement in 1991 and set up a monarchy as Head of State. Today, the original monarch’s son, King Norodom Sihamoni retains this position. The Head of Government is the prime minister, currently Hun Sen; Sen has held this position since he was appointed to it in 1985. The prime minister is chosen from parliament by the king. The legislative branch is bicameral and is divided into the Senate, with 61 senators, and the National Assembly, with 123 members. A multiparty system is enshrined in the constitution, though power has remained in the hands of the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP). Opposition parties are allowed to run, but have consistently faced intimidation. The current primary opposition party is the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), whose leader, Sam Rainsy, is in self-imposed exile for safety.

Cambodians do not have complete freedom of speech, and can be charged with defamation if they criticize the government or public officials. Media is predominately controlled by CPP, though an increase in independent media has taken place. Foreign media is not restricted. Freedom of religion is guaranteed; Buddhism is the official state religion, and 95% adhere to Theravada Buddhism. Discrimination against religious minorities is rare. The right of assembly is constitutionally protected, though it is not implemented. Permits for demonstration are frequently denied. Other freedoms, such as the freedom of travel and movement, are generally given, though have been affected by corruption. Discrimination against women remains prevalent, especially in the economic sphere. Worries regarding overreaching government surveillance have been raised in recent years, with more monitoring of information being collected in recent years, such as identification information collected when purchasing a SIM card.
Civil society groups, particularly foreign NGOs, have faced intimidation from the government. A new law passed in July 2015 further restricts NGOs, such as mandatory registration with the government and a vague list of reasons allowing the government to shut them down. Unions exist, though limitedly, and workers have the right to strike, though they face consequences for doing so. Draft legislation could further limit labor unions and their operations. Internet usage in Cambodia has dramatically increased in the last decade; the number of internet users increased from 2014 to 2015 from 3.8 million users to 5 million users. A strong majority of citizens access the internet via cell phone, as prices are reportedly cheaper on the phone as opposed to a wired connection.

Despite the fact freedom of speech is enshrined in Cambodia's Constitution, the government has recently started to rely more and more on special provisions of the Criminal Code to curb criticism and prosecute its opponents. The most frequently invoked laws concern defamation, insulting members of the government, and malicious denunciation. Monitoring arrests and court proceedings throughout 2016, the UNHRC Special Rapporteur on Cambodia concluded that these and many other laws are frequently invoked in a discriminatory, targeted manner.

In addition, there is evidence that obtaining a necessary permit to conduct peaceful demonstrations in public places has become even more challenging and the authorities have become much more likely to decline requests for a permit over the last year. Another measure aimed at limiting citizens’ opportunities to self-organize was the change to the law on trade unions, implemented in 2016, which precludes citizens with prior convictions from leading a union. This measure effectively disrupts the proper functioning of many such organizations, whose heads have been previously prosecuted for their civil rights advocacy or are at risk of such allegations.
Police and security violence against opposition has been used for over three decades, with accusations blaming the government for the assassination of prominent political activist Kem Ley in July 2016. In the last couple of years, police violence has decreased, but is still a risk for protesters. The unofficial para-police also play a prominent role in supporting CPP, causing fear against dissidence. The courts are largely controlled by the government, and is utilized to control the opposition through harsh sentencing and upholding limiting laws. Economic elites have benefited off the CPP-led government, and are not eager to change the status quo. China and Vietnam, both neighbors of Cambodia, also support Hun Sen and his government. China and Cambodia’s ties have increasingly grown in recent years due to criticism from the West, and Cambodia support’s China’s claims in the South China Sea. The Vietnamese government has strong ties to CPP, and has a delicate history involving occupation and border disputes.
Though the media is predominately controlled by CPP, independent media is present in the country, allowing access to opposition support. That said, there are still many barriers for non-government-aligned media. Education is also critical of the government, and is opposed to CPP’s low priority of education. Limits to political discussion in classrooms hampers the possible influence, however. International government have been critical of the ruling government, primarily the West and ASEAN. While speaking against the Cambodian government, ASEAN generally avoids any direct confrontation with its fellow member, who is also aligned by the menacing China. The West generally condemns the Cambodian government, but does little to further assist in democratization.

Opposition parties, predominately CNRP, have a chance to influence legislation with a fair number of seats in both houses. Furthermore, with local elections in 2017 and legislative elections the following year, CNRP has the potential to increase its influence, or even gain the majority of seats. NGOs, labor unions, and other civil society organizations have faced discrimination under the Hun Sen regime, and generally oppose the regime. The youth also has been prevalent in demanding a better future for Cambodia. Land grabs by the Cambodian government have greatly affected the agricultural sector, and many oppose the government’s actions against their livelihood. Buddhists, a prominent and trusted group in society, also support democratization. Attempts by monks to gather support for voting and political activism has helped in fighting for democratization.

The last local elections held in April 2017 suggested Hun Sen’s grip on power is loosening. The opposition made considerable gains and secured 46% of the vote, which might be a prelude to an even more considerable success in the upcoming general election, to be held in 2018. Further, the last election cycle exhibited lower rates of voter intimidation and fraud, largely thanks to the efforts of the non-government organization International Transparency Cambodia, which deployed over a thousand independent observers in polling stations around the country.
As one of the few remaining communist-ruled countries, Laos has struggled in modernizing in the same way done by neighboring China and Vietnam. With a majority of the population living in rural areas, the agricultural is the prime sector of employment. Laos remained isolated until after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and has made market reforms in 2005 and 2011 to liberalize the economy. The Laotian government has been accused of suppression and abuses, particularly against the Hmong ethnic minority. The country remains one of the poorest in the world. As a one-party state, Laotian politics are almost exclusively controlled by the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPRP).

Laos is a one-party state, with the only members of the LPRP or party-vetted independents being permitted to run for government seats. The president, currently Bounnhang Vorachith, acts as head of state. The head of government is the prime minister, Thongloun Sisoulith. Both Vorachith and Sisoulith were inaugurated in April 2016. The president is elected by the unicameral legislative branch, the National Assembly, while the prime minister is chosen by the president and approved by the National Assembly. The National Assembly is composed of 149 seats, whose members are directly elected from their constituency. Elections in March 2016 saw voting on all seats: 144 were won by LPRP candidates, and the remaining 5 were won by independents. Terms last for five years. The courts are also under the control of the LPRP. Major decisions, however, are not made by either the executive or legislative branches, and instead fall to the LPRP, more specifically the LPRP’s Central Committee and its Politburo.
Human Rights

Rights in Laos are minimal, especially in regards to freedom of expression. Media is restrictive, though international media has had a growing presence in recent years, primarily from China. Journalists commonly self-censor, in fear of punishment over material deemed against the government. Internet laws are also restrictive, with criminal punishment for posting a variety of vaguely-defined types of content. Religious freedom is also restricted, with non-Buddhist religions heavily regulated by the government. The Laotian government also controls the training of the clergy. Education is restricted to remove politically sensitive content. The freedom of assembly is non-existent, with demonstrations punishable of up to five years in prison.

Discrimination towards ethnic minorities, primarily the Hmong community who fought against the communist forces in the Laotian Civil War, is common. Additionally, discrimination against women is prevalent.

Civil Society

Civil society in Laos, as in other communist countries, is limited and heavily monitored by the state. Foreign NGOs are allowed to operate but face restriction in operations. Besides being barred from political agendas, burdensome and imposing laws restrict the free activity of these organizations. The government additionally has legal stature for arbitrary interference. Unions exist in Laos, though a majority participate in the Lao Federation of Trade Unions, which operates as part of the LPRP.

As previously mentioned, the internet is highly regulated; all activity is recorded and anonymity is forbidden. With substantial jail time for anti-government activity on the internet, any form of discussion on democracy is unlikely at best.
The LPRP has many institutions under its control that further enshrine the party’s power within the Laotian government. With a firm control over the legislative branch, the LPRP has power over all laws. The Laotian courts are also under LPRP control, and use their influence to penalize those deemed against the communist government. Security forces are available to be called upon by the ruling party. The military is controlled by the government, and would be available for any major conflict, such as a protest. Police, on the other hand, have a daily role in supporting the government. With the ability to arrest and display authority, the police have used arrests and other methods under their purview to suppress opposition. One notable case is in the abduction of Sombath Somphone, who was stopped by the police and abducted in December 2012. As of October 2016, he has not been heard from. Other similar cases are not unheard of. Neighboring China and Vietnam, both fellow Marxist-Leninist countries, also support the LPRP. Vietnam especially has considerable influence in the country.

Both economic elites and the media are currently predisposed towards support of the LPRP, though both have the potential to support democratization of Laos. Economic elites currently benefit from having close ties to the LPRP, both through economic incentives as well as other incentives such as land. The further opening up and liberalization of Laos would present further opportunities for these elites, causing a potential to change sides. The media is in

PILLARS ANALYSIS

PILLARS SUPPORTING THE LPRP

SPLIT ALLEGIANCES
a similar position, firmly in control of Laos at the moment. If the restrictive media laws were slightly lessened, media would begin to express a wider range of opinions than just support for the LPRP. Lessening restrictions would cause media to begin criticizing the government – even if not in opposition to the government as a whole, media could begin criticizing smaller aspects, such as corruption. Education naturally is inclined towards a more liberal sway, yet currently there is no opportunity to express the pro-democratic ideology it holds. If curriculum restrictions were lessened, the education sector would be a strong ally in democratization. The West and other democracies are also a potential ally. While in recent years foreign governments have been critical of Laotian repression, no significant acts have taken place. Further pressure is needed if democracies are to be seen as a true ally for the democratization of Laos.

From within Laos, the primary groups that would support democratization are the agricultural sectors and youth. The youth generally aspire to more democracy regardless of nationality, and would almost certainly be at the forefront of any pro-democracy movement. Agricultural workers, on the other hand, have been harmed by land grabs and poor land ownership laws; these individuals would greatly benefit from increased rights under a democratic system. NGOs also would be a supporter of democratic reforms. NGOs operating within Laos might not be able to vocally support democracy as much as they desire; international organizations would be (and currently are) critical of the current state of the country. Another important ally could be found in the diaspora, of which many support democracy. Prominent pro-democracy Laotians operate in the United States and Thailand, among other places.
PAPUA NEW GUINEA

INTRODUCTION

Papua New Guinea is a small Pacific nation with the greatest degree of linguistic diversity in the world. A former British and German colony, it was put under Australian control in 1902 and did not gain independence until 1975. About 80% of its people live in rural areas and most have few or none modern facilities. Most tribes have no access to each other or the outside world, and they operate with a non-monetized agriculture economy. Papua New Guinea had a nine-year secessionist revolt on the island of Bougainville that claimed about 20,000 lives and was put down in 1997. The island has been autonomous since 2001, and the peace accord provided the framework for the election of an autonomous government in 2005. A five-year window beginning in 2015 was also put into the peace agreement that left the option for a referendum on the question of independence.
Papua New Guinea has a parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarchy, and it is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. Their chief of state is technically Queen Elizabeth II, but their head of government is Prime Minister Peter O’Neill. The governor-general, who represents the Queen Elizabeth in the Papua New Guinean government, formally appoints the prime minister, who leads the majority party in the legislature. The National Parliament consists of a unicameral house whose members are elected by popular vote. Many candidates run as independents and align with parties after elected, and parties are mostly driven by tribal, linguistic, geographic, and personal ties. The 2012 parliamentary elections were generally considered to be free and fair. As of June, the 2017 elections are taking place in Papua New Guinea, with results being expected in July.

Known to be rife with corruption, the government has been struggling under scandals since its independence. Transparency International’s 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Papua New Guinea 139th out of 168 countries. Anti-corruption bodies are known to suffer from political interference as well. Taskforce Sweep, the country’s most successful anti-corruption agency, brought allegations of corruption against Prime Minister O’Neill in 2014, involving $28 million in government fees paid to a private law firm. The arrest warrant was never executed, and Taskforce Sweep was officially defunded in the 2016 national budget. Parliament established a new Independent Commission Against Corruption in November of 2015. Taskforce Sweep officials say that they never received the funding that had been set aside for them while they were still active anyway.

In the 2016 UN Human Rights Council periodic review of Papua New Guinea’s human rights record, countries made more than 150 recommendations to the Papua New Guinean government to address their human rights issues. The main suggestions addressed the ratification of international treaties, establishing a national human rights commission, promoting gender equality, addressing domestic violence and sorcery-related violence, decriminalizing consensual same-sex relations, and abolishing or placing a moratorium on the death penalty.

Papua New Guinea is notorious for gender inequality and gendered violence, with the majority of women experiencing rape or assault. Sexual assault and other such acts have long been criminalized and domestic violence was specifically proscribed under the 2013 Family Protection Act, but these crimes generally continue with impunity. In addition, women and girls are the primary victims of accusations and violence related to sorcery or witchcraft.
LGBT rights are said to be “not currently a priority of the Government”, and consensual same-sex acts are illegal. No laws protect against discrimination or hate crimes. Police brutality is commonplace, and law enforcement officials have been implicated in corruption, unlawful killings, extortion, rape, theft, and brutality. Instances of fatalities or egregious physical abuse are often reported with little accountability, including abuses against children. In June of 2016, police opened fire on protesting university students in Port Moresby while they were attempting to march on the national parliament asking the allegedly corrupt Prime Minister to resign. The incident was blamed on “agitators” by the Prime Minister, who also said that those protests were funded by political opposition. The police force has been accused by many of being generally incompetent, as they are largely ineffective in curbing mob violence and tribal warfare. Police are also known to ask for money “for fuel” when responding to calls from rural areas.

Although the death penalty has not been used since 1954, legislation passed in May 2013 that extended it to cover a wider range of crimes. Recently, however, the government noted that “the current government directive is to not implement [the death penalty] until further directions are issued.”

Papua New Guinea’s human rights record with refugees has been widely criticized. Australia used to send asylum seekers that arrive in Australian waters by boat to Papua New Guinea’s Manus island for refugee status determination and settlement, but migrants have been kept in poor conditions...
conditions and have often suffered from violence at the hands of guards. Many migrants were afraid to leave the center for fear of widespread xenophobic violence from Manus locals as well. In April of 2016, the Papua New Guinean Supreme Court ruled that the detention of asylum seekers and refugees on Manus Island was unconstitutional, but neither Australia nor Papua New Guinea has taken steps to close the center immediately after the decision. In June 2017, however, the Australian government, which faced legal claims filed by hundreds of refugees, agreed to pay 70 million Australian dollars to current and former detainees. The refugee camp on Manus island is now set to close down, and refugees will be relocated.

Papua New Guinea generally respects freedom of speech, and local media are able to independently cover controversial issues such as official corruption and alleged police abuse. However, it is important to note, television and internet coverage are mainly restricted to the capital, Port Moresby, and the provincial capitals. Radio networks can reach further into isolated areas, which usually have low levels of literacy, but funding problems have taken some regional stations off air.

Religious freedom and academic freedom seem to be generally respected as well. The Papua New Guinean constitution provides for freedoms of assembly and association, though marches and demonstrations require 14 days’ notice and police approval. The government recognizes workers’ rights to strike, organize, and engage in collective bargaining.

Australia is the biggest international supporters of Papua New Guinea, providing 70 percent of their overseas development aid in addition to peace-keeping forces. While they haven’t necessarily used this influence to help address Papua New Guinea’s human rights issues, Australia provides a large amount of tangible aid that could be used to influence structural or systemic changes within Papua New Guinea’s government.
Papua New Guinea’s police force is ironically one of the more notorious forces against the protection of human rights. They do little to protect women and other victims of violence or crime, and their own violations generally go unpunished. It is further enabled by the government, which suffers from deep levels of corruption.

Papua New Guinean media, as mentioned above, has sufficient liberty to report on controversial issues with independent coverage. While this is an important part of the process of acknowledging and fixing these human rights abuses, most of the population is either illiterate or far too remote to have regular access to media. In addition, media access is restricted at the detention center for asylum seekers on Manus Island, where human rights issues have been a significant problem. These obstacles prevent the general population from getting educated and mobilizing for the cause.

Papua New Guinea is largely tribal, which influences all levels of society from the most remote mountain villages to the political parties operating in the government. Tribal conflicts often lead to mass destruction, families being relocated and many deaths. So far, only isolated efforts have been made to stop this violence. While this report was unable to find more extensive information regarding the relationship between tribal networks and human rights abuses, it is important to note that it is a crucial structure of Papua New Guinean society that could affect the way human rights changes or campaigns are conducted.


"Lao People’s Democratic Republic: Sapha Heng Xat (National Assembly)." Inter-Parliamentary Union. Inter-Parliamentary Union, 13 June 2016. Web. 2 Oct. 2016.


COUNTRIES EXPERIENCING STABILITY, OPEN POLITICAL AND CIVIC SPACE FOR MOBILIZATION

INDONESIA

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a nation consisting of over 300 local languages spread across over 1,300 islands. After overthrowing their authoritarian leader in the 1990’s, Indonesia has had a functioning democracy. With over 260 million inhabitants, Indonesia is the fourth most populated country in the world. Indonesia is also the most populous Muslim-majority country. Economically, the country is a member of G20, a group representing twenty of the largest economies. Indonesia also has the sixteenth largest nominal GDP. One of the largest problems facing the country is corruption.
The president of Indonesia acts as both the head of state and head of government and is elected in a direct election. Elected in July 2014, Joko Widodo was inaugurated as President a few months later. The vice president is also directly elected, and may be from a different party from the president. The current vice president is Jusuf Kalla. Both the president and vice president serve five year terms, for a maximum of two terms. The legislative branch, known as the People’s Consultative Assembly (MPR), is bicameral and composed of the Regional Representative Council (DPD) and the People’s Representative Council (DPR). The upper house, the DPD, is composed of 136 members (with four seats currently vacant). MPs in the DPD are elected on a non-partisan basis. The lower house, the DPR, is comprised of 560 seats (with three seats currently vacant). The Government Coalition holds 386 seats and is comprised of seven parties, ranging from holding 16 to 109 seats. The opposition, the Red and White Coalition, holds 113 seats and is made of two parties. There is an additional party outside this structure holding 61 seats. Members of both houses are elected to five-year terms and have no term limit. The judicial branch operates independently of the other two branches of government.

Human rights in Indonesia are generally respected, though some freedoms are more free than others. Additionally, certain groups are restricted in their rights and freedoms. Freedom of the media is generally granted, though restrictive laws, such as licensing requirements, complicate smaller media companies from operating. Restrictions on journalists traveling have been lifted, though journalists still occasionally face challenges when obtaining visas. Freedom of speech is also generally followed, though laws against treason and blasphemy restrict it. Journalists, minority groups, government critics, and separatists are all targeted by speech-restricting laws, and commonly undergo self-censorship. Media and literature also faces censorship under these laws. Freedom of religion is granted, though religions and religious sects outside of the six officially recognized religions are often discriminated against. Atheism is considered blasphemy. Government agencies, from local to national levels, have not fully enforced the protection of religious minorities. The freedom of assembly is also granted, with some limitations, largely in regions with tension or conflict, such as Papua. Academic freedom is largely respected.
Rights of women and the LGBT community are hampered, particularly in regions who enforce Sharia law. Women face discrimination and harassment, as well as general disadvantage compared to males. LGB individuals face laws discriminating against same-sex acts. Transgender individuals are also treated poorly, with arrests commonplace; these individuals are also occasionally sent for counseling.

Indonesia benefits from wide diversity, and with it a wide array of civil society groups. For the most part, civil society organizations are free to partake in their missions. Registration with the government for civic and religious NGOs are required, as well as submission of their activities.

NGOs are also limited from committing blasphemy or promoting non-Indonesian ideologies, such as communism or atheism. Civil society groups are otherwise free in their activities, and are even able to comment on pending legislation. Labor unions and strikes are also free to happen. Secessionist movements are not free to promote their ideologies, however. Protests from independence activists are often repressed by police, potentially violently. Free speech is also limited from these groups. Internet penetration was reported to have broken 40% of the population—or 100 million people—in May 2016. Further connectivity and increased smartphone usage is expected to rapidly grow within the next several years. While there is some internet monitoring conducted by the government, and anti-government speech is restricted, general activities regarding discussion of democracy and politics are permitted.

In a highly contested and controversial election in April, 2017, incumbent mayor of Jakarta Basuki Purnama (knowns as “Ashok”) conceded defeat to Mr. Baswedan, who brands himself as a moderate Muslim, but was criticized for courting religious hardliners throughout his campaign. Shortly before election day, Ashok was accused of insulting a Koranic verse, which provoked a considerable public outcry and demands that he is tried on allegations of blasphemy. Overall, the election underscores and is likely to facilitate a new wave of religious conservatism in Indonesia, raising concerns about the country’s secularism.
As a democracy, the majority of the population generally supports the political system, while not necessarily supporting those currently placed within it. The police and military exhort their usual roles to maintain order. The branches of government partake in their normal roles and execute their mandates, though not necessarily entirely successfully. The government is recognized as legitimate by the international community as well.

With an extreme level of diversity, parts of Indonesia are bound to be opposing the governmental structure. Among the most prominent groups displeased are those in Papua and in Sharia law-based provinces. Provinces such as Aceh have enacted Sharia law, which might be illegal under Indonesian law. Groups like this desire more autonomy and local power. Other locations, such as Papua, have separatist movements, who have been quelled by national power and repression. Papua has been granted a greater degree of autonomy, though groups still support succession.
Introduction

South Korea is a highly urbanized society, with 92% of the population living in cities mostly around the capital Seoul, which currently boasts 25 million residents. South Korea is very successful economically, and is considered as both a “tiger economy” and Asia’s most advanced democracy. It is also a leader in low carbon living and well known for the inclusion of minorities. The Korean peninsula has been divided since 1948 into North Korea and South Korea, related to Cold War antagonism and polarized political ideologies in the aftermath of the Korean War. This war involved both Koreas, the US, China and the USSR and is technically ongoing, although a ceasefire has been in place since 1953. Periodically violence flares between the two Koreas such as in response to the 2010 Cheonan sinking when 46 South Korean seamen were killed in the sinking of a naval ship. The incident remains officially unexplained, but is generally attributed to North Korea. The countries are separated on land by a demilitarized zone (DMZ) maintained by national soldiers, US soldiers and UN officials.
South Korea has legislative, executive and judicial branches at the national level, but also semi-autonomous local governments, which perform legislative and executive functions. The first elections were held in 1948 but were dominated by a series of military dictatorships until the 1980s when South Korea emerged as a successful liberal democracy.

The President is elected by direct popular vote to a single five-year term of office, and is also the commander-in-chief. The current President is Moon Jae-in as of May 2017. The previous president was Park Geun-hye, the first female President of South Korea who was recently impeached. She was also the daughter of the military dictator Park Chung-hee, who ruled Korea in the 1960s and '70s. The National Assembly is a unicameral legislature with 300 members elected to serve for four-year terms. The judiciary is fully independent of the other two branches and includes a Supreme and Constitutional Court.

South Korea is a multi-party democracy with 4 mainstream political parties and 2 who regularly take the majority of votes. The Minjoo Party of Korea is currently in control of the legislature.

The National Intelligence Service has come under suspicion recently with allegations stating that it has interfered with political affairs. There are rumours the NIS conducted an online campaign to promote certain candidates in the 2012 election. A legal case is still ongoing.

South Korea practices an official policy of censorship over the issue of North Korea based on a law that imprisons on average 100 people per year, for expressing sympathies with their northern neighbour. There have been reports of police intervention in political marches and meetings related to human rights issues in North Korea. However this is not universal. Songs and theatre in Japanese or about Japan are also banned. Pornography is not fully illegal but subject to high levels of censorship.

In 2014, after a passenger ferry capsized and anger towards President Park began to materialize, a cyber-investigation team was formed to monitor social media and prosecute defamers of Park. This has resulted in a distrust of government. A Japanese journalist was arrested under linked legislation.

In 2015 up to 80,000 people gathered in Seoul to protest Park's Presidency, specifically with regards to her stance on labour laws (granting fewer protections to workers, more freedom to companies), youth unemployment and the issuing of state written history books that opponents claim will be biased.
South Korea is ethnically homogeneous and there is discrimination against migrant workers (up to 1 million), as many as half of which are illegal migrants. These foreign workers tend to operate in dangerous and unsanitary working conditions and face racism and discrimination. The recent formalisation of immigration law has had a negative effect on the undocumented workers in Korea, who are arrested and summarily deported if found.

Homosexuality is legal but discouraged in South Korea and same-sex couples do not share the same legal protections as heterosexual couples. Transgender surgery is available but discouraged. Military service is required of all South Korean men, but the Military Penal code has a dim view of homosexuality. Consequently, homosexual military members are usually dishonourably discharged or assigned a personality disorder diagnosis. In a recent survey 59% of people in South Korea believed homosexuality should not be accepted and 67% opposed same-sex marriage. LGBT rights groups have a history of having difficulty being recognized by the government and in 2015 the annual Pride Parade was banned.
The National Police Agency is responsible for policing throughout South Korea, rather than devolving to regional sub-centres as many countries do. The Agency employs approximately 100,000 police officers and has an elected Commissioner General. The NPA also contains a division of Combat Police responsible for counter-intelligence and riot policing. Its members are recruited from the military. Claims of police brutality have particularly focused on these anti-riot units, and several deaths have allegedly occurred at the hands of police.

The South Korean military, the Republic of Korea Armed Forces, is one of the largest standing militaries in the world, with 3.6 million personnel, the majority of which are reservists. The military is mainly responsible for maintaining the territorial integrity of South Korea but is increasingly involved in humanitarian peacekeeping missions. Much of the military’s focus is on maintaining a presence at the border with North Korea. Conscription is mandatory for males and lasts approximately 2 years. Military performance under conscription is transferred via a points system to post-military jobs, creating incentives for high performance during conscription.

The legacy of the KCIA intelligence agency of the 1960s is memories of interference in domestic politics and international affairs, as well as suppression and censorship of anti-government information. Unfortunately this legacy has continued, albeit with a slightly improved reputation under the name NIS. In 2011 the NIS admitted to wire-tapping Gmail accounts of South Korean citizens and the NIS is currently being investigated for aiding President Park Geun-hye in her election. Former head of NIS Won Sei-hoon is awaiting trial on charges of presidential election fraud.
AMERICAN INFLUENCE

The US and South Korea have close ties economically, politically and militarily since the Second World War, during which time the US aided the decolonization of Korea from Imperial Japan. Many trade arrangements exist between the US and South Korea, although the major link between the two countries is military in nature. The US helps defend South Korea from North Korean aggression, and approximately 29,000 US military personnel are stationed in Korea for this purpose. If the war with North Korea were to resume hostilities, South Korean soldiers would be under the control of the United States.

The popularity of the US has changed multiple times throughout its history in Korea. During the Gwangju Uprising of 1980, part of a democratization protest by citizens, the US deployed troops to suppress the resistance, a move which many South Koreans saw as unacceptable interference in domestic political activities. The US military has been accused of illegal toxic waste dumping and in 2003 the South Korean government banned US beef in response to popular protests about fears of an outbreak of mad cow disease. Although the US remains entrenched in South Korea, there is a continual underlying tension in its relations with the people of South Korea.

CIVIL SOCIETY, PROMINENT GROUPS

NGOs are active and operate freely, as do independent labour unions, although their popularity is waning. A Law on Assembly and Demonstration forbids activities which may cause social unrest, leaving demonstrations on questionable legal grounds. Allegations of police brutality are occasionally made. Many of these civil society organizations relate to North Korea specific issues, such as defector rights and peaceful negotiation between the two Koreas.

Internet connectivity and access in South Korea is very high, as more than 90% of the population have access to the Internet. However Internet censorship is a significant issue, as it remains stricter than in other countries. Much of this relates to inappropriate content, and involves banning pornography, but also extends to some political censorship as well, particularly as it pertains to information about North Korea.

"Indonesia Has 100 Million Internet Users, Internet Penetration at 40%." Indonesia Investments. Indonesia Investments, 18 May 2016. Web. 3 Oct. 2016.

