

Juridification, Legitimacy, and Authoritarian Survival in Thai Politics from the 2014 Military Coup

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ABSTRACT—This article explores the conditions under which authoritarian regimes resort to juridification as a strategy for political survival. It examines why authoritarian governments rely on legal mechanisms despite possessing coercive power. Through an analysis of Thailand's 2014 military coup and its aftermath, this study argues that juridification—defined here as the expansion of legal control into political domains—is triggered when regimes suffer from low political legitimacy. Drawing on the concepts of legality, legitimacy, and authoritarian adaptation, the article demonstrates how the military-led government in Thailand institutionalised its power through the 2017 Constitution and the National Strategy, both designed to entrench the regime's status quo under a legal framework. Rather than reinforcing democratic norms, juridification in this context functioned to consolidate authoritarian rule under the guise of legality. The findings contribute to understanding how authoritarian regimes strategically employ legal instruments to enhance durability and claim legitimacy.

Keywords: Juridification, Authoritarian Survival, Legality, Legitimacy

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Introduction

Why do authoritarian regimes abide by the law when they can break it? This phenomenon can be explained by analyzing the authoritarian regime with the juridification framework. The discussion of juridification is mainly viewed as the process of strengthening the use of law in democratic regimes and how the process could affect democracy. This study will explore the causes and conditions of juridification in authoritarian regimes and argues that while juridification is the increase in the use of law by the governing body, its characters differ according to the regime executing the process, significantly on the legitimacy factor. For example, the legal process in democratic regimes may seem more legitimate compared to the law in authoritarian regimes which tends to lack a legitimate execution. The reliance on legal measure may possibly be the mentality of authoritarianism that is attached to the value of law in a democratic regime and equates legality to legitimacy, or as Cotterrell (1995) interpreted in Weber's explanation of legal domination that a regime may derive its legitimacy from and within the law's framework, regardless of its content. Hence, an authoritarian regime that lacks political legitimacy will rely on legal measures to appear legitimate in securing its political power and status quo over the fear of losing control over political power and political order.

Framework on juridification and legitimacy in authoritarian regime

This article aims to analyze the causes and conditions that lead authoritarian regimes to rely on juridification. It hypothesises that an authoritarian regime with low political legitimacy relies on juridification to preserve the political structure with the regime's status quo for its survival. While authoritarian regimes could rely on various means to secure their power, such as the use of force or political repression, regimes with low legitimacy rely on the use of legal measures to fulfill the legitimacy gap, which is the weakening factor of the regime.

Juridification in this paper refers to the expansion of legal control into political elements to secure authoritarian power. It has a common feature among the various definitions, as the process in which the role of law or legal institution expands into realms of democratic societies.

Juridification is defined as ‘the process where norms constitutive for a political order are established or changed to the effect of adding to the competencies of the legal system’ (Blichner 2008, 39), where law expanded to ‘instances where an activity not legally regulated within a legally regulated area becomes regulated (Blichner 2008, 43).’ The term is also closely associated with the rule of law as the symbol of advanced democracy on the one hand and the process that could undermine democracy in the form of legal domination on the other (Blichner 2008, 36-37).

Some similar but different phenomena to juridification are the judicialisation of politics and abusive judicial review. While juridification looks at the expansion of law, judicialisation of politics and abusive judicial review looks at the role of the court in enforcing the law. Scholars define judicialisation of politics as the increase in the judiciary’s role in addressing political issues (Hirschl 2011, 1-2; Ferejohn 2002, 41-42; Dressel 2012, 6) or when the decision-making rights are transferred from the executive and legislative to the judiciary (Vallinder 1994, 91). This study views the concept of juridification as the expansion of legal control, i.e., the increase in the number of laws to regulate more aspects of politics, may better contribute to the understanding of political development at its foundation. Though the courts may involve in the law-making process in some judicialisation of politics definitions, as the case study will show, the role of legal expansion in Thai politics from the outset of the 2014 military coup was mainly the task of the military, rather than the judiciary.

The concept of abusive judicial review by Landau and Dixon (2019) presents a clear argument with comparative cases in how the courts have played an important role in strengthening authoritarian rule, in contrast to the general character of preserving democratic order (Landau and Dixon 2019, 1313). This concept focuses on the role of the courts in intervening in politics under the illiberal regime and where ‘judges intentionally take aim at the democratic minimum core’ (Landau and Dixon 2019, 1326). In the Thai case, for example, the authors observed that the Constitutional Court’s decision to dissolve political parties helped justified the military rule in Thailand’s 2006 and 2014 military coups (Landau and Dixon 2019, 1329). Scholars of

Thai politics have also noted that the Thai Constitutional Court has played a significant role in undermining and being biased against the Thai democratic government (Mérieau 2016; Dressel and Tonsakulrungruang 2018).

Indeed, the two concepts discussed a critical actor from the legal perspective: the court that adjudicates (political) matters in accordance with the law. However, the courts' decisions that affect the political outcomes are derived from the existing laws, or laws to be created by the legislative in the democratic regime or the holder of the sovereign power in other regimes. Building on this logic of the causal chain, it might be more constructive to understand the creation of the law that will be used as the tool to secure political power for a regime by the judiciary.

While there are studies on the various definitions and characters of juridification, the causes and conditions or pre-conditions that initiate the process have not been the main discussion. The previous literature observed that the increase in the reliance on law and legal measures are the general characteristics of juridification in world politics. A state may employ legal processes and jurisdiction power in domestic politics as influenced by the structure of laws and norms governing the international system (Sieder 2020, 2). Blichner (2008) argued that juridification occurred since the establishment of formal legal order (Blichner 2008, 39) or when conflicts in society are increasingly solved by reference to law (Blichner 2008, 44). Similarly, Magnussen (2013) proposed that juridification is a circumstance when there is an increase in formal public rules, regulations, and judicial institutions (Magnussen 2013, 326). Sieder (2020) argued that juridification is a state where people in a society increasingly rely on legal mechanisms to defend their interests (Sieder 2020, 2). The previous literature has defined juridification, but has yet to discuss the factor that triggers juridification, in other words, what makes the state reach a point of relying more on legal measures to secure political power. This study will explore the missing gap in understanding the political conditions leading to juridification and its effect on the juridification process to add to the discussion of the use of legal mechanisms in authoritarian regimes.

There are various methods the authoritarian regimes could employ

to secure their political power and survival, with legality and legitimacy as part of the important factors in accommodating such power. Political elites in authoritarian regimes may work together in the 'protection pact' that manages power and resources among them to heighten the state's capacity and increase the authoritarian control to enhance the regime's durability (Slater 2010, 4-6). Even an authoritarian regime that seems to rely on the use of force for regime survival still needs to seek legitimacy, and the lower the legitimacy, the more the coercion (Dogan 1992, 117-120). A recent study also found that the trend of authoritarian survival is leaning toward 'adaptive authoritarian,' which refers to the authoritarian regime that uses some democratic characteristics in the regime but still controls some aspects of politics to stay in power (Maerz 2020, 81). It is not necessary that an authoritarian regime will choose one method over the other, but the use of the law is assumed to be the factor that helps increase the legitimacy of the operations.

The political legitimacy in this study refers to the legitimacy of the government's access to power as the base of its right to rule. In general, scholars agree with the definition of legitimacy as the right to govern and present the idea of the power relation between the governor and the governed in a particular society. It may include justifying factors, such as the consent or the recognition of the governor's right to govern (Coicaud 2002, 10), the moral authority to balance off the de facto power (Beetham 2013, 57), or the legality factor to justify a regime's power (Coicaud 2002; Schmitt 2004; Beetham 2013). A democratic government will earn legitimacy when it accesses power through a free and fair election. On the other hand, an authoritarian government, such as a military coup, may not have the same level of political legitimacy as a popular-elected government. A military coup may justify itself as the representation of the people to overthrow a sitting government for particular reasons, but it does not constitute the legitimacy of the military coup to assume the right to rule. Beetham (2013) proposed that the legitimacy of a political regime consists of three factors; the source of authority, the capacity of the government, and a mechanism for regular consent expression. The military coup government can only manage the capacity factor, as they are not the representative of the people, nor do they offer a channel for consent expression. It is the fundamental weakness of the military regime in securing legitimacy, that is, its weakness

to justify its power (Beetham 2013, 231-235). Hence, the authoritarian regime needs to secure and justify its right to rule for its survival and to compensate for the lack of legitimacy in accessing power.

The government needs political power and political legitimacy to stay in power. Authoritarian regimes, like other regime types, seek political legitimacy for their survival as they cannot only rely on repression to stay in power (Göbel 2010; Ginsburg and Simpser 2014). This study views that a strong regime consists of strong political power, such as the legitimate access to power through free, fair, frequent elections in democratic regimes, combined with other factors that support the government's survival, such as high economic performance, the capacity to provide material needs to the citizen (Beetham 2013; Maerz 2020, 80), or combined with nationalism and cultural legitimacy (Nathan 2020, 161-162). Hence, a strong regime is one that establishes power based on people's moral acceptance or the government's performance. A regime with low political legitimacy or low performance, on the other hand, harvests political legitimacy through the threat to use or the use of force, political repression, or the enforcement of the law. The authoritarian regime will seek to fulfill political power and political legitimacy according to its performance and political situations that affect its survival (Turner 1990).

Legality is an important part of political legitimacy, as it affects the strength of a regime's political legitimacy discussed in this paper. While the law can establish power for a regime, it does not necessarily justify the regime's political legitimacy. This paper views that the law which establishes the rule and power for a regime must be derived from a legitimate source, such as a democratic constitution, as it is the ground to establish a legitimate government from the recognition and the consent of the governed, of its right to rule. The recognition of a regime's right to rule is based on the legitimacy of the law, that is, the public's consent to conform to the law that reflects and corresponds to the public will (Coicaud 2002; Beetham 2013). The constitution is a good start to analyse the political and legal legitimacy as the constitutional order reflects a state's ideology, and the rules established in the constitution are based on those values. For the constitutional order in popular sovereignty to be legitimate, it must serve to accommodate the

interest of both the governor and the governed, for when the interest of the governed is not recognised by law, the power relation is not legitimate (Beetham 2013, 59, 126-129). A law that is promulgated by illegitimate sources or procedures must not be counted as the legitimizing factor for a regime but instead reveals a regime's attempt to gain legitimacy through a legal framework.

This study proposes that an authoritarian regime with low political legitimacy will rely on juridification to preserve the status quo and secure its power for the regime's survival. The level of political legitimacy determines the regime's policy choices to secure its political power. A strong regime may possess a high level of political legitimacy through the established and accepted mean of power accession, combined with high economic performance or societal factors such as nationalistic drives, providing the government with wider policy options. For example, it may not use or rely on force to ensure its survival. The regimes with low political legitimacy or low performance may possess lower legitimacy and be left with fewer policy choices. The strength or weakness of the regime's political legitimacy will directly affect the regime's status quo and its survival.

Political Actors and Political Dynamics Since The 2014 Military Coup

This article looks at the goals of the 2014 military coup as the military's attempt to secure political power for authoritarian survival. Thailand's political landscape since the 2014 military coup has been shaped by a consolidation of power among a ruling elite composed of the military, monarchy, judiciary, and technocratic networks. While the coup was publicly framed as a measure to restore order, it also aligned with the interests of conservative elites and royalists who sought to limit the influence of the Shinawatra political camp. The National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), led by General Prayuth Chan-o-cha, seized control following anti-government protests by The People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) in 2013–2014, against the then Yingluck Shinawatra administration's attempt to pass the blanket amnesty bill that would pardon political sentences to those involved in political protests that occurred from 2006, likely to include the former

prime minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, Yingluck's brother (Prasirtsuk 2015, 201-204). The fever of Thaksin-phobia originated from the military coup in 2006 when Thailand's color-coded politics began. Thaksin was viewed as a corrupted politician and disloyal to the monarchy as the conservatives, ranging from privy councilors to military officials and the political elites, perceived him to have undermined the monarchy in various ways (Pathmanand 2008, 130). The accusation of disloyalty to the monarchy greatly undermines the political legitimacy of 'bad politicians' whose practice opposed the monarch's widespread teaching not to let 'bad people' govern the country (Office 2019). The PDRC used the accusations of Yingluck's corruption and the attempt to bring back Thaksin to mobilise a stratum of conservatives to political sanctions and the street protest in November 2013. The protest lasted until May 2014, when the military intervened and staged a coup to take control of the politics, legitimizing its action to end the political crisis caused by the protest and restore peace and order to society from political chaos. The enforcing 2007 Constitution was suspended and replaced with the military's 2014 Interim Constitution.

The judiciary, particularly the Constitutional Court, has played a central role in protecting the post-coup political order and systematically constraining electoral opposition. In practice, the judiciary operates as an extension of military-monarchical authority by resolving political disputes in favor of regime-aligned interests. This phenomenon has become a primary mechanism of authoritarian durability. High-profile rulings include the dissolution of the Thai Raksa Chart Party in 2019 for nominating a royal family member as prime minister (Royal Thai Government, 2019), and the disbanding of the Future Forward Party in 2020 over alleged financial improprieties (Royal Thai Government, 2020). Most recently, in 2024, the reformist Move Forward Party was dissolved on the grounds that its proposal to amend the *lèse-majesté* law threatened the monarchy (Royal Thai Government, 2024), further signaling the centrality of the monarchy in legal and political discourse.

The military's role in the 2006 and 2014 coups focused on the goal of securing the monarchy's power, which was reflected in the duration and intensity of the military's political control. The military coup

in 2006 stayed in power until 2007 when it transited its power to a newly appointed government, which finished the process of drafting and promulgating the new constitution in 2008. However, the coup was unsuccessful in eliminating Thaksin's presence from politics, as the new constitution could not prevent Thaksin's successive political parties from winning general elections (Winichakul 2016, 27). After the military coup in 2006, which aimed to eliminate Thaksin's presence in politics, Thaksin's successive political parties still won all general elections prior to the military coup in 2014. The series of Thaksin camp's success in general elections owes very much to his populist policies that have significantly gained support from the grassroots, which is the strong popular base of Thaksin's parties (Phongpaichit and Baker 2008, 65-67). Thaksin's popularity was perceived as one of the reasons the military coup in 2006 took place, as he was thought to be in a popularity race with the monarchy, which has the poor in the countryside as the same popular base (Kitirianglarp 2011, 208).

The military coup in 2014 learned from the failure of the rapid transition and stayed in power longer, with the length of five years, until 2019, when the general election took place. The military had to secure its political power to act as the guardian of the monarchy. The process of drafting a new constitution and the election rules stated within it was closely controlled by the military, which, when combined with the military's tactics to buy ex-Thaksin camp politicians into the military party, helped to facilitate its return to parliament after the general election and to accommodate them to stay in power for at least another eight years.

Despite constitutional constraints and judicial repression, electoral politics remain an important battleground. The 2019 general election, held under the 2017 Constitution, marked the return of electoral competition but within a framework tilted heavily in favor of the military-backed Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP), which nominated Prayuth as prime minister. The Senate's appointed bloc played a decisive role in confirming his return to power. However, newer political movements, such as Future Forward (2018–2020) and its successor, Move Forward Party, captured substantial youth and urban support, reflecting public disillusionment with military rule. The 2023 general election produced a landslide win for Move Forward, making it the largest party

in the House of Representatives. Yet, its leader was blocked from becoming prime minister by the Senate and later banned from politics as the party's leader, reinforcing the structural limits of electoral legitimacy under the current system. These cycles of popular mobilisation followed by elite pushback demonstrate the tension between growing democratic aspirations and institutionalised authoritarianism.

Juridification and the 2014 military coup: bridging the legitimacy gap

Juridification is discussed as the process of power transition to the jury in democratic regimes regarding the rule of law, the increase of the citizens' basic rights, or the reliance on the legal process to solve social and political issues (Blichner 2008, 38-39). This study applies juridification to explore the scopes and extent of authoritarian regimes that lend democratic elements, such as the constitution, or holding elections with political parties to legitimise the regime and control political activities for its survival or to achieve its political goals. In contrast to the juridification in the democratic regime posited in previous literature as the outcome of the development of the rule of law, juridification in an authoritarian regime assists it to rule by law as the law execution process is illegitimate, not free, and not inclusive.

According to Asian Barometer survey data (Table 1), the surveys showed declining satisfaction and trust towards the military government and showed higher tendencies of opposition to authoritarian rule. The data to be analyzed here was collected in August – October 2014, which is the beginning of the military coup government, and December 2018 – February 2019, which were the final months of the military government. The data showed that the public is becoming less content to live under the Prayuth administration, as the will of the people to live under the Prayuth regime dropped from 81.40% in 2014 to 74.30% in 2019, as well as the drop of pride of the governing system that dropped from 79.00% in 2014 to 71.10% in 2019. Moreover, the trust in the military also dropped from 86.00% in 2014 to 74.20% in 2019, and the rate of people's acceptance of the military's role in politics has significantly dropped from 47.90% in 2014 to 10.50% in 2019. The people's perception toward the effectiveness of democratic rule has increased from

50.80% in 2014 to 66.30% in 2019, and showed less favor to the authoritarian rule, as the preference rate dropped significantly from 26.20% in 2014 to 12.60% in 2019. Democracy was deemed more effective in solving the problem of the society, as the percentage rose from 57.30% in 2014 to 69.30% in 2019, and the negative perception toward democratic capabilities dropped from 24.80% in 2014 to 12.50% in 2019.

Table 1 Percentage of variables on the people’s perceptions towards the government, the military, and preference towards democratic and authoritarian government from Asian Barometer Survey project’s wave 4 and 5.

Variables	Percentage		Changes from 2014 to 2019
	August - October 2014 (Wave 4)	December 2018 - February 2019 (Wave 5)	
How satisfied are you with the current president/government?			
Satisfied	80.60%	56.00%	-24.60%
Dissatisfied	8.80%	33.20%	-24.40%
Trust in the military			
Trust	86.00%	74.20	-11.80%
Distrust	9.80%	18.30	-8.50%
In general, I am proud of our system of government			
Agree	79.00%	71.10	-7.90%
Disagree	12.50%	18.70	-6.20%
I would rather live under our system of government than any other that I can think of			
Agree	81.40%	74.30	-7.10%
Disagree	10.10%	12.60	-2.50%

Which of the following statement comes closest to your opinion?			
Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government	50.80%	66.30%	-15.50%
Under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one	26.20%	12.60%	-13.60%
For people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic or nondemocratic government	7.70%	4.90%	-2.80%
Which of the following statements comes closer to your own view?			
Democracy is capable of solving the problems of our society	57.30%	69.30%	-12.00%
Democracy cannot solve our country's problems	24.80%	12.50%	-12.30%
The army (military) should come in to govern the country			
Agree	47.90%	10.50%	-37.40%
Disagree	40.40%	69.50%	-29.10%

The reliance on law and legality as the source of political legitimacy, rather than the regular use of direct military power is because it is less likely to have a similar political condition to justify the military coup as it did in 2006 and 2014, and public perception towards the military has shown some significant decline. In this case study, the cre-

ation of Thailand's 2017 Constitution and the National Strategy will be discussed as the crucial step of the juridification process to secure authoritarian political power, which will increase political power and political legitimacy for authoritarian power.

The 2017 Constitution

The juridification in the 2014 military coup can be argued to have taken place since the beginning of the power seizure and reflected the military's effort to use law and legal measures as a tool to secure its power. Hirschl (2004) argue that political elites may reform the constitution content or shift power from the political representatives to the judicial bodies to preserve their status quo (Hirschl 2004, 72-73, 105). Besides the royal proclamation that appointed General Prayuth Chan-O-Cha, the head of the military coup, as the prime minister (Royal Thai Government 2014), the military government based its legitimacy on the 2014 Interim Constitution as a constitution was recognised as the most prestigious law, and any action carried out under the constitution was deemed lawful. The military regime used this legal power to expand its political control in terms of legality, and to force suppression of its political opponents and protestors. Politicians, academics, and protestors were forced to report themselves to the military during the first weeks of the coups, with many being detained and arrested in the series of political protests throughout the military regime, with frequent intimidation and use of force by the government (Haberhorn 2018, 936-937). Hence, law and legal measures were effective tools for the military regime to legitimise its action and expand its control over politics to secure its power.

After establishing its power in the interim constitution, the military continued the juridification process for political control by drafting a new constitution. The military government initiated the national reform scheme consisting of five actors; The National Councils for Peace and Order (NCPO), The National Legislative Assembly, the government, the National Reform Council, and the Constitution Drafting Committee (Prasirtsuk 2015, 203-204). These actors were

systematically controlled by the military government and contributed to the execution of the constitution and laws to accommodate the military's domination in post-coup politics. The NCPO and the government, both chaired by Prayuth, appointed the National Reform Council members to prepare the National Reform Plans, which later would be developed as the National Strategy. The National Reform Council members also select the Constitutional Drafting Committee members to prepare the new constitution (Royal Thai Government 2017, 5). The new constitution passed through a tightly controlled referendum as required by section 5 of the 2014 Interim Constitution (First Amendment 2015) (Office of the Council of State 2015, 2), legitimizing it as the constitution that the people have accepted. The new constitution was promulgated as Thailand's latest constitution in April 2017, serving as the first step of the military's attempt to control politics through legal measures.

The 2017 Constitution is important to the military regime as it serves to secure the military, which will allow them to secure the monarchy's political power. It accommodates the military regime to return to power after the general election as it allows the NCPO-appointed senators of 250 to vote for the prime minister (Office of the Council of State 2017, 112) in addition to the 500 elected members of the house of representatives, which left the military-backed political parties to compete for only 125 seats in the election to form a government with the majority of the vote from both houses combined. The constitution also opens a channel for the parliament to vote for an 'appropriate person' to become the prime minister without being a member of the house of representatives (Office of the Council of State 2017, 112). Since this constitution was the source of political power for the military regime, it was designed to be almost impossible to amend while the military or the NCPO-appointed senators remained in politics. The motion to amend the constitution must get approval from the majority of the parliament, with one-third approval from the senators as stated in Section 256 clause 3 of the constitution (Office of the Council of State 2017, 97). Hence, any law stemming from this constitution can be interpreted to be set in stone.

Thailand's National Strategy

One of the laws that would accommodate the military regime to secure its political power and achieve its goals when staging the coup is the National Strategy. According to Blichner (2008), Thailand's National Strategy could be one of the conditions of juridification where law expands to control more aspects of society by dividing one law into two or more laws (Blichner 2008, 42). Thailand's National Strategy is the first national development law, as its existence is mandated in section 65 of the 2017 Constitution (Office of the Council of State 2017, 21). It was first drafted by the NCPO-appointed National Reform Council, whose duties were to examine the draft of the new constitution and create the national reform plans. The National Reform Council was dissolved when its main function in approving the constitution draft was done in 2015, but the national reform plans were carried on by a new military-appointed committee called the National Reform Steering Assembly. The reform plans later became Thailand's National Strategy promulgated under the 2017 Constitution. Given the priority and significance of the national reform plans, it can be argued that the military had planned to use the National Strategy to grasp political control in post-coup politics since the coup started and legitimised it with the 2017 Constitution that is claimed to be approved by the public.

The National Strategy was formulated under many laws, which helped secure its legal status in various ways. It was initiated and executed under three main laws; the 2017 Constitution, The National Strategies Preparation Act 2017 ("Preparation Act"), and the National Strategy itself. The National Strategy has its legal status from the Preparation Act, which was promulgated as a part of the mandate to create the National Strategy in the 2017 Constitution, which stated in section 5 that the National Strategy must be promulgated as the royal command (Royal Thai Government 2017, 2). The requirement to have the National Strategy be promulgated as the royal command can seem to have political symbolism rather than practical reason, as it has the same hierarchy as promulgating it as an act. Furthermore, the Preparation Act also stated in section 25 that any government agency that failed to comply

with the National Strategy would be considered intentionally committing an offense and may be subject to suspension from, temporary, or permanently discharged from public office (Royal Thai Government 2017, 11). The compliance of the government agencies' acts will be examined by the National Strategy Committee, whose members consist of the prime minister, the speakers of the House of Representatives and the Senate, representatives from economic-related sectors, and the commanders in chief of the armed forces and the police (Royal Thai Government 2017, 5). The security personnel make up seven out of 17 committees. The high number of security personnel and the National Strategy's legal status and possible punishment would help the military to maintain its existence and control in post-coup politics, leaving its mark and opening the channel to legally influence the politics even if they did not win the general election in 2019.

Conclusion

This article set out to examine the conditions under which authoritarian regimes engage in juridification as a strategy for political survival. While juridification has frequently been discussed in democratic contexts as an expansion of legal control and judicial power, this study investigated how and why similar processes unfold under authoritarian rule. The central question asked why regimes with coercive power still invest in legal mechanisms to sustain authority. Through a theoretical framework linking juridification to political legitimacy, this study argued that authoritarian regimes turn to juridification when they lack the normative and procedural legitimacy typically derived from electoral mandates or popular consent. In such cases, legality substitutes for legitimacy. Legal frameworks are not used to limit state power but to institutionalise it under the guise of constitutional order. This interpretation challenges normative assumptions about the neutrality or democratizing function of law, and situates juridification as a political act designed to stabilise authoritarian rule.

The case of Thailand's 2014 military coup illustrates this dynamic in concrete terms. The military regime, having seized power without democratic consent, lacked the legitimacy to govern in the traditional sense. Rather than relying exclusively on repression, the junta under-

took a deliberate juridification process to entrench its rule. The 2017 Constitution and the National Strategy served as core legal instruments through which the regime formalised its political control and constrained the space for democratic opposition. These documents enabled the military to reconfigure political authority, maintain indirect influence over successive governments, and present its dominance as a lawful and stable political order. The evidence drawn from constitutional design, legislative processes, and public opinion data supports the argument that juridification in Thailand was neither incidental nor technical. It was a calculated political strategy, rooted in the need to bridge a legitimacy gap and ensure regime continuity under legal form.

This study finds that juridification in authoritarian contexts functions as a survival mechanism triggered by legitimacy deficits. It offers a clear answer to the research question: authoritarian regimes resort to juridification when they cannot rely on democratic legitimacy and must instead manufacture it through legal instruments. By expanding legal control into political and social domains, such regimes neutralise contest while appearing procedurally compliant. These findings carry broader implications for understanding authoritarian resilience in contemporary politics. As legal formalism becomes increasingly central to authoritarian governance, scholars and practitioners must interrogate critically the political uses of law beyond its normative ideals. Recognising the strategic function of law in non-democratic regimes is essential for assessing the deeper logic of institutional design under authoritarianism.

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