

Thai Elections – A Research Note

- Prime Minister Thaksin called new elections in February after just a year in office – three years ahead of schedule – in response to public demonstrations against alleged authoritarian rule and the sale of his family business to a Singapore government company.
- Key requirements for parliamentary elections: the House of Representative comprises 400 from single *constituencies* and 100 national *party list*; the 200-strong Senate – supposedly non-political – is elected on a provincial basis, numbers depending on population (Bangkok has 18; 22 provinces one only); voting is compulsory, but voters have option of ‘no candidate suitable’; where only one candidate stands he must receive support from at least 20% of the registered voters in that electorate; for the national party list, at least 5% of vote is necessary to gain seats; all seats must be filled before the House or Senate may convene (hence a government can only be appointed after 500 House seats filled); the House must convene within 30 days of the election – if there are unresolved constituencies by elections should be held within this period.
- Elections on 2 April were boycotted by the main opposition parties, and Thai Rak Thai stood uncontested in around 276 (of 400) *constituencies*. Several minor parties took part, but the Election Commission rejected some 300 candidate nominations.
- In the first voting round Thai Rak Thai won 458 of 500 seats – in 38 uncontested seats the TRT candidate failed to gain the required 20% of vote; a minor party won one seat; a candidate was declared unqualified on the eve of election in one seat; and results in one seat were declared invalid due to irregularities. TRT won all *party list* seats but one candidate entered the monkhood on election eve so only 99 places were filled. New elections for 41 constituencies were held 23 April, but 14 seats remained unfilled – a court ruled these should not proceed until the overall legality of elections had been affirmed.
- The Election Commission has not released detailed statistics on its website, but did release reports from time to time to the media. Based on these reports, in the first round TRT won around 52% of vote (15.1 million) in constituencies; 33% voted for ‘no candidate’; 13% cast invalid votes (some deliberate); and 2% voted for minor parties. In the party list the TRT won around 56% of vote (16.4 million), against 31% ‘no candidate’, 6% spoiled and 7% to minor parties. The ‘no candidate’ vote was in the majority for 27 of 36 seats in Bangkok, all 54 seats in south, and polled strongly in urban centres throughout the country. Voter turnout was around 65%, a sharp reduction on 73% in 2005.

- Matichon newspaper carried preliminary results for 389 of the constituencies, which in part support this information, and reveal other aspects of the electoral contest. These confirm the TRT vote as around 15.1 million, but see this as 54% of the total; small parties received 158,411 votes (0.6%); the ‘no’ vote was 8,882,779 (32%); the spoilt vote was 3,577,485 (13%). On a regional basis, TRT won 44.4% of the vote in Bangkok, 48.8% for the Central region, 58.3% in the North, 68.9% in the Northeast, and 18.9% in the South; the ‘no’ vote was 50.1% in Bangkok, 37.6% Central, 25.1% North, 16.2% Northeast, and 63.7% in the South. (Full details on excel are available from the NTSC on request.)
- PM Thaksin declared victory, but the decline in votes for the Thai Rak Thai (in 2005 19 million had voted for it in the party list), together with the strong no vote, the spoiled vote and abstentions, did not give the mandate he had sought. On 4 April, after meeting with the King, he announced he would not be a candidate for the prime ministership after parliament convened, citing the importance of national unity for the king’s 60th anniversary on the throne in June. He then went on indefinite leave, handing most responsibilities to a trusted deputy, Chidchai Vanasatidya, but returned to duty on 22 May.
- Controversial elections for a new Senate on 19 April also muddied the waters.
- On 25 April the King instructed the courts (Supreme Court, Administrative Court and Constitution Court) to resolve the “mess”. He noted that “a one party election is not normal. The one-candidate [situation] is undemocratic”. (The King also rejected opposition calls to intervene by exercising Article 7 of the Constitution to name a royally appointed prime minister, saying this would not be democratic.)
- On 8 May the Constitution Court ruled that the House election was invalid, and needed to be held again. In a judgement critical of the Election Commission an 8-6 majority found that insufficient time was allowed for the campaign (voting was 37 days after announcement, when up to 60 days could have been allowed) and voting arrangements had compromised secrecy.
- The Election Commission has nominated 15 October for new elections, but a range of election related issues are before the courts so it may be some time before a firm date is established.

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