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<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Churdvit Ridhiprasart.</td>
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Election Process In Thailand

By

Churdvit Ridhiprasart
Elections Process in Thailand
Churdvit Ridhiprasart

Thailand had been under absolute monarchy since the beginning of being a nation state until King Pranchathipok, Rama VII, granted the first Constitution to the Thai people on December 10, 1932. The Road to be democratic state was not the Rosy one. It was interrupted by many political events which necessitated the use of interim Constitution. Whenever the revolutionary government was in power, the Thai people, especially the intellectuals and students, always rallied for Constitution and election as in western countries. Now, people of Thailand have enjoyed political rights and freedom for more than 10 years, without interruption, under the present Constitution promulgated in 1978. Thus, it cannot be denied that political future of Thailand is bright one.

The Structure of Government

Thailand is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary form of government. Sovereign power originates from its people. The King, as Head of State, exercises this power through the Legislative, the Executive and the Judicial bodies. Outlines of the structure of the Thai government as it is relevant to the elections are as follows:

The Legislature: The Thai National Assembly consists of two houses, the Senate and the House of Representative. The President
of the Senate is the President of the National Assembly. The President of the House of Representatives is the Deputy President. The Senate is composed of members appointed by the King as suggested by the Prime Minister from qualified persons possessing knowledge and experience in various branches of learning or affairs which will be useful to the administration of the state, possessing Thai nationality by birth, not being less than thirty-five years of age nor a member of political party. The number of senators to be appointed cannot exceed three-fourth of the total number of members of the House of Representatives. At the present time the senate is composed of 267 members. The term of office is six years. As for the initial stage, one - third of the total number of senators shall retire by drawing lots after two years in office. At the end of the period of four years from the date of appointment by the King, one - half of the senators who remain in office after drawing lots at the end of the period of the first two years shall retire by drawing lots.

The members of the House of Representatives, now 357 are elected by universal suffrage from candidates with suitable qualifications as set forth in the Constitution. The term of office is four years. Normally each province (Changwat) has one representative, based upon the rule of one representative for every 150,000 inhabitants. If the fraction exceeds 75,000 then one more representative is allowed.
The Executive: The Council of Ministers or the cabinet is the executive body which is composed of a Prime Minister and not more than 44 other Ministers. Neither Prime Minister nor Ministers have to be the members of the house of representatives. However, they must not be government officials holding permanent position or receiving a salary except political officials. Before assuming the administration of the State affairs, the Cabinet must state its policy to the National Assembly but no vote of confidence is required. The ministers are responsible for conducting the activity of their ministries and also collectively responsible for the general policy of the Cabinet. Permanent government officials are responsible for routine work of the ministries.

The Government: The Thai government is divided into three categories, the Central Government, the Regional Government and the Local Government, the Central and the Regional Government follow the principle of centralization whereas the Local Government follows the principle of decentralization.

The Central Government consists of Ministries and Departments with each Minister responsible for the policy in general, and an Under-Secretary is responsible for the conduct of discipline and routine affairs. Each Department is supervised by a Director-General.

The Regional Government consists of Provinces (Changwats) and Districts (Amphoes). The head of the Provincial government is -
a Governor, who has under him District Officers. The Districts are under control of their respective provinces, which in turn are under departments and ministries. The smallest units of the administration, communes (Tambon) and villages (Mue-ban), are also directly under District Officers and Governors. A village is generally composed of a number of dwellings and many villages form a commune. The Village Head Man (Phuyai Ban) and Commune Head Man (Kamnan) are directly elected by the people in their village or commune to serve the communities.

Local Government consists of four forms of administrative units, namely the Provincial Assemblies, Municipalities, Sanitary Districts, and Commune Assemblies. The type of administrative unit depends on the population density, level of education, and economic development of the area.

The Constituency

A constituency refers to an area for holding an election of members of the House of Representatives. The constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 1978 lays down guidelines in fixing the boundaries of a constituency as follows:

1. A Changwat which has one or two or three representatives is considered as a constituency. The number of members of the House of Representatives in a Changwat is determined by the numbers of its inhabitants on the basis of the ratio of one
member of the House of Representatives to 150,000 inhabitants. Any fraction, if amounting to 75,000, or more, shall be counted as 150,000.

2. A Changwat which has more than three representatives will be divided into constituencies with three members in each constituency.

3. A Changwat which cannot be divided into constituencies with exactly three representatives each should first be divided into constituency with three representatives and the remaining constituency with not less than two representatives.

4. A Changwat which has four representatives will be divided into two constituencies with two representatives each.

5. A Changwat which has more than one constituency must be divided such that the constituencies are contiguous and have approximately the same number of inhabitants.

The Candidate

According to the Constitution and Election of Members of the House of Representatives Act 1979, a Candidate must have qualifications as follows:

1. Possessing Thai nationality by birth. But if his father is an alien, he must possess qualifications for being an elector.
and must pass a high school level recognized by Ministry of Education or the National Education Plan or receive bachelor degree from a university or high level educational institution in the country.

2. Being not less twenty-five years of age on the date of the election.

3. Being a member of the political party which send the candidate to stand for general election not less than one-half of the total number of members of the House of Representatives or, in by-election, being a member of the political party having its members being members of the House of Representatives elected at the general election.

In addition, a person has no right to be a candidate, if he is under any of the following prohibitions, namely: being drug addict, being an undischarged bankrupt, being unsound mind, being deaf and dumb who cannot read and write, being a Buddhist priest, novice, monk or clergy, being in the state of disenfranchisement by a judgement, being sentenced, being government official of a State agency or state enterprise.

Expenses: The candidate cannot spend for all total election expenses, excluding the application fees, more than 350,000 Baht (approximately 14,000 U.S. Dollars). The report of total expenses has to be submitted to Changwat Governor where he had applied for
election within 3 months from the date of the announcement of the election result.

**CANDIDATURE** : The candidate cannot submit the application for more than one constituency. However, the candidate from each political party, with the nomination paper submitted to Changwat Governor by the leader of that political party, have to submit group applications in persons to Changwat Governor at Changwat Central Office where the constituency for which they are the candidates is situated. A political party cannot nominate its members as candidates for election in a constituency more than the number of members of the House of Representatives to be elected in that constituency.

In order to limit the number of political parties, the present Constitution states in section 95 that in the general election, the political party, the member of which shall have a right to stand as candidates, must be the party sending members of not less than one-half of the total number of the House of Representatives to stand as candidates at the election.

**THE ELECTOR**

Every Thai nationality by birth who has reached twenty years of age and have name appeared on the house register in the constituency has the right to vote, with the usual exception of those who are of unsound mind, deaf, dumb and illiterate, also members of the Buddhist clergy, or those who have been barred from
voting by a court of law, and those who are serving a prison sentence.

The Thai national having alien father has the right to vote, if he possesses one of the followings requirements:

1. Having passed an examination of not lower than the compulsory education level.

2. Serving or having served in the military service.

3. paying or having paid, by oneself or his or her spouse, personal income tax or taxes on building and land.

4. Being or having a member of the national legislative assembly, Changwat Councillor, Councillor of Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, Municipal Councillor, member of Sanitary District Board, Tambon Councillor, Kamnan or Phuyai ban.

5. Having a domicile in the Kingdom of Thailand for a consecutive period of not less than ten year.

VOTING PROCEDURE

Casting the Ballot: On election day, voting takes place between 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. However, before voting can begin, the Chairman of the polling committee must open the ballot box to show any persons at present that it is empty. The voting is then
declared open.

Voters must identify themselves to the members of the polling committee by means of I.D. card or other identification issued and certified by the government. The voter's name is then checked on the register of electors. His name and address is then read out aloud and if no objection is raised he is given a ballot paper. If an objection is raised the polling committee will investigate and their decision is final.

Having received a ballot paper, the voter then proceed to one of the polling booths to mark his ballot paper. A cross (X) is made against the number of representatives in his constituency. He then takes the ballot paper to the polling committee who place it immediately in the ballot box.

**Counting the Vote:** At 3 p.m. the Chairman of the Polling committee will declare voting closed and counting begin at once. Counting must be done openly and in one setting, and the results at that polling station are then announced. A report is then made out and sent with the ballot box to the District Officer. He then forward the results to the Governor who keeps tally of the grand totals. The results of the election are announced as soon as possible and a report sent to the Ministry of Interior.

In a constituency with one representative, the candidate with the most votes is declared the winner. In the case of a tie,
the tied candidates must draw lots to decide the winner. In the constituency with more than one representative, the candidates with the highest number of votes in the rank orders of votes of election are declared winners. In the case of a tie, drawing of lots will be used.

**ELECTION ADMINISTRATION**

In the Central Government, the Department of Local Administration, Ministry of Interior, has set up an election center to control and supervise the election administration throughout the country to ensure that the election takes place in an orderly fashion. Furthermore preparations have been made for speedy communication and better maintenance of law and order, especially on election day. In the Regional Administration, the provinces and districts have also set up election center to control and supervise the elections in their areas. Besides, under the supervision of the Department of Local Administration, they have made the following preparations:

The Register of Electors. It is the duty of Nai Amphoe (District Officer) to prepare a register of electors by copying the name of eligible electors from the house register except in the municipal area, it is the duty of municipality. The names are arranged according to house number, grouped according to village or road or lane. When election day is fixed, the register of electors will be posted in Amphoe office, public places and at the polling station not less than 30 days before the election.
day. This allows for every citizen to check that whether his name is correctly included on the register of electors. On election day, only those whose names appear on the list are eligible to vote.

**The Electoral Districts.** An electoral district refers to an area in which voting is to take place. The Governor is empowered to designate the electoral districts in his province. Normally a Commune corresponds to an electoral districts, though very large communes may be divided into several electoral districts.

**The Polling Station.** Generally, every electoral district has one polling station which must be reasonably spacious and convenient of access. Normally, a school building or other public building is used as the polling station. Where such a building is not available, a temporary station is erected; at least five booths are to be provided in a polling station.

**Appointing Election Officials.** Nai Amphoe is responsible for appointing suitable persons to conduct the election in each electoral district.

Each polling station will have in each electoral district.

1. The Committee of at least 7 members, a polling committee, conducting all affairs of election.

2. The polling clerk acting as secretary to the polling
committee and as marker.

3. The election official supervising the conducts of election.

4. Police Officers or members of Volunteer Defence Corp taking care of peace and order.

ELECTION INFORMATION

It is believed that if more people come out to vote, democratic regime of government will yield a good performance. It is more accountable to the people. Thus, it is crucial to induce the people to come to vote on the election day. Election's advantage and general election information such as the date of election day and how to cast the ballot are important factors for one's decision. These information, therefore, must flow down to the electors.

In order to induce people to come the polling station, Department of Local Administration (DOLA) initiates the public relations for election plan and instructs Changwat and Amphoe to have their own plans.

DOLA's public relations for election plan emphasizes the use of media such as posters, pamphlet, motto, television, newspaper and radio. It is intended to inform people the election day, the voting procedure and the importance of the election. Changwat's plan is almost the same but give the emphasis on specific issues.
such as number of constituency and checking the name on the register of electors.

Amphoe's plan is more specific. The information letter is sent to all eligible electors in the district in order to ask electors to check if their name are on the register of electors and invite them to go to the specific polling station on the election day. Student rally, public meeting and organized volunteer group are also used as a media for passing information to the people.

It should be noted that the candidates themself have the important role in passing information when they campaign for the seat.
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