

# Thai election process 'deeply flawed', say independent observers

Saturday 30 March 2019, by [ELLIS-PETERSEN Hannah](#) (Date first published: 26 March 2019).

## Asian Network for Free Elections says international standards were not met in recent vote

International independent observers have declared that the process of counting the votes in Thailand's election lacked transparency and was "deeply flawed", adding to a climate of mistrust and uncertainty in the country.

Thailand held its first election in eight years on Sunday, marking the country's return to democracy after the military took over in a coup in 2014, but has since been plunged into political turmoil amid confusion about who can claim victory and [inconsistencies in the announced results](#).

Rohana Hettiarachchi, the head of mission for the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL), said "international standards" for free and fair elections had not been met in [Thailand](#), both in the buildup to the poll and on election day itself, as well as in the continuing fallout from the ballot count.

In an interim report on their observations of the election, ANFREL highlighted the opaque system of counting the ballots at a national level, saying it called into question the "trustworthiness of the process".

The election commission delayed declaring the official election results three times without a full explanation, and they are now not expected until 9 May. The 45-day delay, the first time this has happened after a Thai election, has led to allegations of foul play, cheating and ineptitude on the part of the military and the election commission.

Prior to the election, concerns had been raised by opposition figures and human rights groups that the military, which is seeking to hold on to power through the ballot box, would ensure this was neither a free nor fair election. Thanks to draconian legislation preventing criticism of the junta, the system was already skewed in its favour.

Two opposing parties have now claimed victory. Unofficial results show a victory for the pro-democracy party Pheu Thai at a constituency level, winning 137 seats, but the pro-military party Phalang Pracharat got a larger share of the popular vote, which it claimed gave it legitimacy to rule.

Neither party gained the 250 seats needed to form a majority government and are both in the process of forming coalitions with smaller parties in order to form a government. However, until an official result is announced, all factions remain in political limbo.

In the buildup to the election, and on polling day, there were multiple reports of army resources being utilised to pressure voters into voting for Phalang Pracharat, with soldiers mobilised,

particularly in remote rural areas away from the watchful eyes of the international community. Hettiarachchi said ANFREL's interim findings had indeed highlighted a "misuse of government power and resources used to the advantage of one party. It was significant across the country, especially in rural areas. This is partly vote buying."

He added: "We also know that direct vote buying was reported across the country but no one is coming forward with evidence."

The failure to accurately disseminate the results on Sunday night was also highlighted by the observers. While they found the process to mostly follow protocol in the polling stations where the ballots were first tallied, when they were then submitted to the electoral commission and "went up the ladder" there was a "blind spot on the counting process which makes us unable to give a definite assessment on the trustworthiness of the process", said Amaël Vier, ANFREL's programme officer.

Vier said it was a "deeply flawed counting process which led to wildly inaccurate announcement of the results on Sunday night".

He said until the observers were given access to the open election data, they were unable to draw any definite conclusions on the election and the results. However, he said they had been led to believe there were some "technical difficulties" with the server which handled all the results nationwide.

This may account for the inconsistencies in the results being sent out, and why in some districts there was the phenomenon of so-called "ghost voters" where it appeared that thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands, more people had cast a ballot than were registered in the area.

"We'd just like to know more, what was the procedure, what was the data?" Vier said. "We have no reason to believe it affects the overall outcome, we just, we need more at this time."

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**P.S.**

The Guardian, March 26, 2019

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