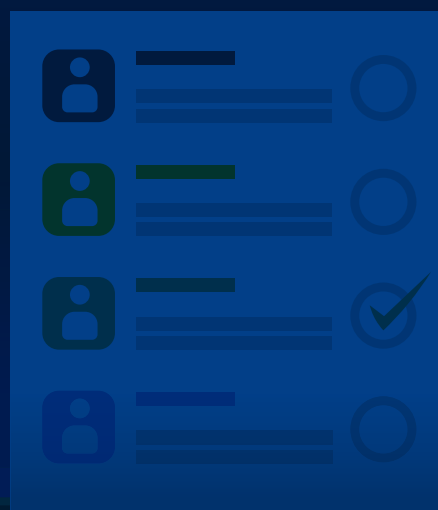


ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION REPORT

GENERAL ELECTIONS 2023
THE KINGDOM OF THAILAND



BY
INTERNATIONAL PARLIAMENTARIANS CONGRESS

This report contains the findings of the International Parliamentarians' Congress Election Observation Mission, which visited the Kingdom of Thailand to observe the General Elections, held from May 12-14, 2023.

MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENT

The Kingdom of Thailand is a constitutional monarchy, located in the heart of Southeast Asia. It was one of the first Southeast Asian countries to experiment with democracy and the only nation in the region never to have been colonized by a European power. Thailand experienced very rapid growth rates between 1985 and 1995 and has become a key political and economic leader in the region. The country, however, has experienced uneven political development over the past 50 years. Since its transition from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional government in 1932, Thailand has alternated between civilian and military rule and experienced a succession of coups and coup attempts. Thailand's transition to a democratic state took place over many decades, and there were several defining moments in this transition.

Since 1932 Thailand is strengthening its democratic system and holding elections regularly. Democracy in Thailand is characterized by the provision of human rights to all, freedom of speech, and political participation.

On 14 May 2023, Thailand held its General Elections for 500 seats of the House of Representatives. At the request of the International Parliamentarians' Congress (IPC), the Government of the Thailand and Election Commission of Thailand (ECT) accredited IPC to send its delegation to observe the Thailand general elections. A two-member delegation from IPC led by Honorable Senator Sitara Ayaz (Secretary General IPC), and Ms. Mehk Butt (Manager Communications IPC) went to Thailand on an election observation mission (EOM) to observe the election process of Thailand.

IPC is a transnational network of parliamentarians who have joined hands to play a proactive role in promoting peace and sustainable development through cooperation and dialogue. IPC aims to make collective efforts for strengthening democracy across the world by creating synergies among parliamentarians. The agenda of IPC is not limited to the strengthening of democracy, also intends to bring together MPs to make collective efforts for human development and prosperity.

The IPC Committee on Monitoring and Observation of Elections in the World is among six dynamic committees focusing on specific areas of Parliamentary relevance. This was the fifth EOM, IPC has conducted since its inception in 2019. Earlier, the IPC delegation observed the parliamentary elections in the United Kingdom, Jordan, and the Netherlands and the presidential elections of Colombia.

It is indeed a matter of great satisfaction that the IPC has been growing as per its founding aims and objectives which includes the observation of elections around the world to seek guidance from the respective country and further observe their electioneering process.

I take the opportunity to present this report, which is based on the experiences of the IPC EOM sent to Thailand to observe the election held on 14th May 2023. The report gives a comprehensive overview of the elections and parliamentary system in Thailand as well as provides a detailed analysis of the 2023 election. The report also presents the findings, that were made by the EOM members during their visit and recommendations that could be taken up to improve the existing system.

Senator Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani
The President
International Parliamentarians' Congress (IPC)



INTERNATIONAL PARLIAMENTARIANS' CONGRESS

The International Parliamentarians' Congress (IPC) is a transcontinental platform of individual members of national Parliaments from across the globe united in purpose to jointly resolve global and regional issues that invariably impact the whole of humanity. The Congress envisaged being a unique platform that seeks to bring together parliamentarians from around the world not just as regional or national representatives, but as representatives of the whole humanity.

Constituted through a resolution adopted by the Senate of Pakistan on 29 August 2019, IPC crystallizes into reality the vision of Honorable Senator Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani, Chairman Senate of Pakistan, to bring together parliamentarians of different countries to achieve peace, prosperity, and progress through cooperation; mutual understanding; sharing and exchange of ideas as well as experiences.

IPC is headed by the Honorable Mohammad Sadiq Sanjrani as the President IPC, who is also the Chairman of Senate of Pakistan. The President of IPC conceived it to be a worldwide network of individual members of parliaments who voluntarily and passionately intend to work in unison to promote parliamentary dialogue by working on 6 thematic areas defined by IPC:

1. Climate Change and Food Security.
2. Human Rights.
3. Peace, Security, Conflict Resolution, and Interfaith Harmony.
4. Trade, Investment, and Developmental Cooperation.
5. Health Research, Standardization, Quality Control, and Human Development.
6. Monitoring and Observation of Elections in the World.

These thematic areas are operated under their respective committees.

Headquartered in the capital city of Pakistan, Islamabad, the Congress aims to establish cooperation, synergy, and strategies across international MPs to strengthen democracy and achieve a prosperous and peaceful world. The main organs of IPC include General Assembly, the Governing Board, and a Secretariat. Countries around the world are classified into five major geopolitical groups i.e., i) Africa; ii) Americas; iii) Central Asia, South Asia, and southwest Asia; iv) East Asia and South East Asia; and v) Europe and Oceania.

As per May 2023 data, IPC has gained membership from 50 countries with 194 members parliamentarians.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

IPC would like to express its deepest gratitude and appreciation to the delegation, headed by Secretary General International Parliamentarians Congress (IPC) Senator Sitara Ayaz, accompanied by Ms. Mehk Butt Manager Communications IPC for successfully carrying out the election observation mission and observing the Thailand General Elections 2023 from 12-15 May 2023.

Senator Sitara Ayaz, showed her exceptional leadership and guidance throughout the observation mission of the general elections in Thailand. Her invaluable contributions and dedication have been instrumental in the successful execution of this mission.

We would also like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Ms. Mehk Butt, Manager Communications IPC, for her unwavering support and commitment in ensuring effective communication and coordination among the delegation members and stakeholders involved in the election observation process and further writing the election observation report.

Furthermore, we would like to acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of the Election Commission of Thailand (ECT) for granting accreditation to IPC as an international observer for the general elections. The Election Commission's support and cooperation have been pivotal in facilitating our participation and allowing us to fulfill our mandate as impartial observers.

We would also like to extend our gratitude to the polling staff for their cooperation and assistance during our presence at the polling stations. Their dedication and commitment to ensuring a transparent and fair electoral process have enabled us to observe the elections firsthand and gather essential information about polling day activities.

Once again, we extend our deepest appreciation to Senator Sitara Ayaz, Ms. Mehk Butt, the Election Commission of Thailand, and all those involved in making the observation mission a resounding success. Your support and cooperation have been invaluable, and we are truly grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the democratic process in Thailand.



ACRONYMS

CPS – Committee of Polling Station

DOLA – Department of Local Administration

ECT – Electoral Commission of Thailand

EOM – Election Observation Mission

HOR – House of Representatives

IPC – International Parliamentarians' Congress

MFP – Move Forward Party

MMA – Mix Member Appointment

NGO – Non-governmental Organization



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Thailand is a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral parliamentary system. Universal suffrage for both men and women has been established since 1932. The bicameral system includes the House of Representatives (HOR) and Senate with 500 and 250 members respectively. The king is the head of state and the Prime Minister carries out the administration of the country. After the abolition of the monarchy in Thailand in 1932, the country holds regular general elections. After 2019, Thailand held its general elections on 14th May 2023 in Thailand.

IPC being an international entity has the mandate to monitor and observe the elections held around the world to ensure free, fair, and transparent elections. Besides election observations, IPC missions also utilize these opportunities to broaden their understanding of electoral procedures, the states practice around the world. Therefore, a two-member delegation from IPC visited Thailand to observe the general elections of the country.

ECT arranged a briefing for all the international EOMs on the arrival day of EOMs which is 12th May 2023. The commission further facilitated the process of observation and provided guidelines and first-hand information about the polling day activities.

The elections in Thailand were conducted in a very professional and organized manner. The electoral bodies facilitated the public to cast their vote. Advance voting was held for the elderly, overseas citizens, and special persons. Considering voting a civic duty, the public took a huge interest in the polling day activities and the voter turnout remains at 75.22% which is recorded as the highest in the history of the country.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	9
2.	Parliamentary and Electoral History of Thailand	9-10
3.	Electoral Commission of Thailand	10
3.1	Structure of ECT	11
4.	Political Parties in Thailand	11
i.	The Move Forward Party	11
ii.	Democrat Party	11
iii.	Pheu Thai Party	11
iv.	Bhumjai Thai Party	12
v.	The United Thai Nations Party	12
5.	Electoral System of Thailand	12
5.1	Legal Framework	12
5.2	Voter Requirements	13
5.3	Voter Registration	13
5.4	Polling Station Staff	13
5.5	Candidate's Eligibility	14
5.6	Ineligibility of the Candidates	14
5.7	Voting System	14
i.	Advance and Overseas Voting	15
ii.	Yellow and Red Cards by ECT	15
6.	Election Observation Mission	16
7.	Results	17
8.	Recommendations	19
9.	Annexture	20

1. INTRODUCTION

Located in the heart of Southeast Asia, Thailand is a country of mountains, hills and plains with an area of 14,000 square kilometers.¹ The country is a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy. Thailand went through a peaceful transformation in 1932 and the powers were transferred to the Thai people, and the king became the head of state, who is above partisan politics and discharge his powers according to the constitution. The Prime Minister of Thailand, who is elected through the open vote of the members of the HOR, carries out the administration of the country.²

The kingdom has a bicameral legislature: The House of Representatives and the Senate. The HOR has 500 members, 400 of whom are elected through a first-past-the-post system in single-member constituencies, while the remaining 100 members are elected through proportional representation based on the national party list. Members of the HOR serve a four-year term.



Figure 1: Map of the Kingdom of Thailand.

The Senate, on the other hand, consists of 250 members, all of whom are appointed by the King upon recommendation by the Prime Minister. Senators serve a six-year term. The Senate has limited legislative powers and primarily serves as a check on the powers of the HOR.

2. PARLIAMENTARY AND ELECTORAL HISTORY OF THAILAND

Thailand was an absolute monarchy till 1932. However, in 1932, the first significant change occurred in the political regime when a group of junior officers from the armed forces called themselves People's Party staged a coup d'état against the monarchy. They demanded a change in the system from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. The King, Prajadhipok (Rama VII (1925-1935), agreed to the demands of the people, and therefore the monarchy in the country was ended and power shifted to the constitutional-based system of the government.³ On 10 December 1932, the king signed Thailand's first constitution and it put an end to the 800 years of absolute monarchy.

After the abolition of the monarchy in 1932, the country had its first elections in 1933 and till 1997, Thailand had 15 constitutions and 19 general elections of the HOR. Although the absolute monarchy ended in 1932, however, the political system of the country was not democratic in true letter and spirit and 19 general elections, held in the country were held under military rule or under a semi-democratic regime.

From 1933 to 1996, the parliamentary and electoral system in Thailand went through various changes in response to the changes in the constitution of the country. In 1974, the new development made it mandatory for the candidates to have a party-affiliated candidacy. Moreover, in 1992, the Poll Watch Committee was

¹ Thailand in Brief, <https://thaiembdc.org/about-thailand/thailand-in-brief/> (Accessed on 12, 05, 2023)

² Ibid.

³ Electoral Politics in Thailand, Orathai Kokpol, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/01361009.pdf> (Accessed on 12, 05, 2023)

established by the government consisting of non-state actors, such as members of NGOs and interested citizens, aimed to reduce the irregularities in the elections such as vote buying and rigging in the electoral process. Additionally, the committee aimed to increase the political consciousness in the country which will ultimately lead to the fairness of the electoral process.

From 1933 to 1996, the elections were organized by the Interior Ministry of Thailand which was established during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910). The Ministry of Interior was the most powerful ministry in the country and the Department of Local Administration (DOLA) was responsible for the whole electoral process.

The electoral process started becoming transparent when Chatchai Choonhavan became the first elected Prime Minister of Thailand. However, the country could not sustain the democratic environment for too long and there was a coup in 1991, followed by the elections in February 1992 to legitimize General Suchinda Kraprayoon as Prime Minister of Thailand, but just after 48 days of assuming power, he was driven out of the office of Prime Minister.

In addition to the ongoing political unrest in the state, there was an economic crisis in 1990 that leads to political reforms in the country in 1997 and the new constitution was passed.

The new constitution of 1997 introduced the following political reforms and it laid the basis of the contemporary electoral process.

- It introduced a plurality and proportional electoral system.
- The constitution made it mandatory to count votes in a single place.
- It made voting a social and civic duty.
- Overseas were given the right to cast their votes.
- Electoral Commission of Thailand was established.

3. ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF THAILAND

In 1997, the Electoral Commission of Thailand (ECT) was established as an independent body to organize elections in the state. According to the 1997 constitution, ECT is responsible for holding fair and honest elections of HOR, Senate, members of local assemblies, and local administrators. Moreover, all the political parties of Thailand must be registered on ECT to take part in the elections. The body has an independent administration however, the government provides a budget to ECT for elections and day-to-day operations.



Figure 2: Electoral Commission of Thailand.



3.1 Structure of ECT

ECT is headed by the Election Commissioner and consists of seven members appointed by the King on the advice of Senate.⁴

- Five members who have expertise in their fields that will be beneficial for fair and free elections are selected by the selection committee.
- Two members who have sound knowledge of laws and who could play their role in managing free and fair elections are selected by the plenary meeting of the supreme court.

4. POLITICAL PARTIES IN THAILAND

Political party development in Thailand has suffered several interruptions since the first legislation recognizing parties was passed in 1946. A series of subsequent authoritarian regimes banned political parties, and it was not until after 1992 that the party system began to deepen.⁵ Thailand's political parties tend to be leadership-driven, centralized organizations that primarily function as electoral machines to secure political power.

However, Thailand's political parties are in the midst of transition, and many party reformers have expressed a desire to break the cycle of corruption and strengthen political parties as democratic and accountable institutions.

i. The Move Forward Party

The Move Forward Party (MFP) is the social democratic and progressive party of Thailand. It was founded on 1st May 2014 and is also known as Ruam Pattana Chart Thai Party. The party fights against the remaining influence of the military in Thai politics.

The party is a progressive center-left party. It is known for its pro-democracy platforms that fight against military influence in politics. The party emphasizes on 3Ds in its political manifesto that are demilitarization, demonopolization and decentralization. According to the party, the 3D system will lead them to reforms and democracy.

ii. Democrat Party

The democratic party was founded in 1946.⁶ The party is conservative in its political thought and it is considered a pro-establishment and pro-monarchy party. It is popular in the middle class and has strong support in the south and Bangkok. Moreover, the party has the popular support of the conservative elite and military establishment.

iii. Pheu Thai Party

The party is an incarnation of former Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra's, Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT) which won the elections of 2001 and 2005.⁷

The former Prime Minister who is in the self-exile phase and lives in Dubai controls the party and the party builds its manifesto around the progressive policies of the former Prime Minister. The

⁴ Election Commission of Thailand, https://www.ect.go.th/ect_en/news_page.php?nid=1883 (Accessed on 12, 05, 2023)

⁵ Bunbongkarn, Suchit, "Elections and Democratization in Thailand," in R. H. Taylor, ed. *The Politics of Elections in Southeast Asia* (New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996).

⁶ Thailand's Main Political Parties, Aljazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2011/7/2/thailands-main-political-parties> (Accessed on 12, 05, 2023)

⁷ Ibid

party has strong support from the north and northeast. Moreover, it has the support of “Red Shirts” which is a protest movement of the lower socioeconomic people from rural and urban areas.

iv. Bhumjai Thai Party

Bhumjai is the second-largest party in the former ruling coalition. The party is headed by an influential power broker Newin Chidchob.⁸ The party made an alliance with Chart Thai Pattana Party to gain more power share in politics.

v. The United Thai Nations Party

The United Thai Nations Party is a new political party in Thai politics, it was registered in March 2021 by Seksakon Atthawong, former deputy minister to the Prime Minister.

5. ELECTORAL SYSTEM OF THAILAND

Thailand is the second country in the world to give the right of vote to women in 1932. Moreover, the country gave the right to vote to women in village elections in 1897. However, the electoral system of Thailand has changed over the past years, Unlike the preceding 2019 election, which used a form of mixed-member proportional representation with 350 constituency seats and the remaining 150 being leveling seats, the electoral system was changed in a 2021 amendment of the constitution which restored the pre-2017 parallel voting system.

Of the 500 members of the HOR to be elected, 400 seats are elected from single-member constituencies by first-past-the-post voting (an increase of 50), and 100 party-list seats filled separately and no longer serving as leveling seats, are voted on in a separate ballot (unlike in the 2019 election, where only one vote was cast by each voter to determine both constituency and leveling seats).⁹

Thailand's electoral system combines elements of both proportional representation and constituency-based systems. The electoral system consists of two types of seats: constituency seats and party-list seats. Constituency Seats: Thailand is divided into multiple single-member constituencies, each electing one representative. The candidate who receives the highest number of votes in a constituency wins the seat. This system is similar to a "first-past-the-post" or "winner-takes-all" system.

Party-List Seats: In addition to the constituency seats, there are party-list seats that are allocated based on the nationwide vote share of political parties. Parties submit lists of candidates, and the number of party-list seats a party receives depends on the proportion of votes it receives. This system aims to ensure proportional representation by allowing parties to gain seats based on their overall popularity across the country.

5.1 Legal Framework

The 2019, elections were held under the voting system, where a voter casts single vote for a constituency member of parliament and it will be used in the calculation of the party list seats. However, the elections of 2023 are held under universal suffrage and the constitution of 2007. During the 2023 elections, the voters used separate ballot papers for constituency and party lists and were provided with two ballot boxes to put the ballot papers separately in their respective ballot boxes.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Kingdom of Thailand, Election Guide Democracy Assistance and Election News, <https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/4029/> (Accessed on 15, 05, 2023)

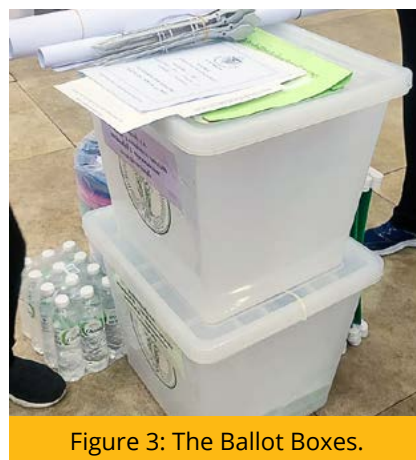


Figure 3: The Ballot Boxes.



In the HOR, 400 candidates are directly elected by plurality votes of single-seat constituencies. However, 100 are elected by party-list proportional representation vote of a single nationwide constituency. All the members of the House of Representatives have 4 years term.

Prime Minister is nominated by the HOR and Senate and then confirmed by the King. Parties must win 25 seats in the House of Representatives to nominate a prime minister, although it is likely parties will strike deals between them to back certain candidates. This is because the military-drafted constitution allows an unelected 250-member Senate to participate in the vote to appoint the prime minister. As a result, candidates must win the support of more than half of the combined houses, or 376 votes, to take the top job. The Prime Minister serves up to 8 years.

The Senate has 250 members and all the members of the Senate are elected by the National Council of Peace and Order and appointed by the king. All the members of the Senate serve 5 years term. However, from 2024, the seats of the Senate will be reduced to 200.

5.2 Voter Requirements

There are following requirements for the voters in Thailand to cast their vote.

- They must be 18 years on 1st January of the election year.
- They must be Thai citizen. However, in case of naturalized citizens, they must acquire citizenship 5 years before the elections.
- Overseas voters can vote through Thai embassy or consulate.

5.3 Voter Registration

Voters get automatically registered on the voter rolls by the local government upon reaching the age of 18 years. Local government has the responsibility to post the list of registered voters at least 90 days before the elections. If anything needs to be changed, it must be incorporated in the list at least 7 days before the elections. Moreover, voters must be informed about their polling stations about 7 days before the elections.

Out of 71 million people in Thailand, 52 million people were eligible to vote in General Elections 2023. A total of 52,195,920 voters got registered to vote, out of which 39,514,964 cast their votes.¹⁰

5.4 Polling Station Staff

To make the election process smooth, fair and free, the Thailand government deploys polling staff at the polling stations. To supervise the electoral process, a supervisor is allocated. A counting officer is also deployed to the polling stations to count the votes. Both of these staff members are allocated by the local government of Thailand.

At every polling station, six members are deployed by the electoral commission of Thailand including one security official for law-and-order situations and 5 members for the composition of the committee of a polling station (CPS). One member of the committee facilitates the electoral process, the second verifies the identities of the voters, the third gives ballots to the voters, the fourth supervises polling booths and the fifth member of the CPS supervises the ballot boxes. Most of the members of CPS are from the education department of Thailand and some are volunteers, allocated by the electoral commission of Thailand.

Other than this composition, two police officers perform their duties at each polling station to make sure that the process is smooth without any fraud and unfair means. Apart from the Thai government, political parties also appoint seven members to committees to facilitate the electoral

¹⁰ Election Report 2023 Official. <https://official.ectreport.com/overview>



Figure 4: The member delegation talking with the polling station staff regarding the Electioneering process on Elections material distribution day.

process. Additionally, one volunteer is also appointed as a poll watch to report any sort of fraud and unfair means during the elections.

5.5 Candidate's Eligibility

If a candidate wants to contest elections in Thailand, the constitution of Thailand has certain conditions for him/her. He/she must be a 40 years old Thai citizen by birth. Moreover, he/she must have a bachelor's degree. However, the constitution of Thailand put no residential restrictions on the candidates.

5.6 Ineligibility of the Candidates

A person will be disqualified from contesting elections if he/she faces imprisonment, serving a sentence for two or more two years, or being convicted of treason, bribery, or electoral offense. However, disqualification will remain valid for five years from the date the person got a conviction for these crimes.

5.7 Voting System

Each voter in Thailand casts his/her vote for the preferred candidate. The candidate with the highest number of votes is considered a successful candidate. Voting is considered a civic duty in Thailand therefore; a person who fails to cast his/her vote loses the right to vote for the next election and he/she could not contest the elections of the Senate and House of Representatives. Moreover, the country has a unique concept of advanced voting, overseas and disabled persons cast their vote one day before the election day.

The 400 members of HOR are directly elected by a system called first past the post, in which each member represents one constituency. The remaining 100 members of the HOR are elected through party lists that are submitted to the electoral commission by the political parties before

elections.¹¹ However, political parties can submit the list of candidates on a party basis only after submitting candidates on a constituency basis.

The constitution of 2017 introduced a voting system, known as Mix Member Appointment (MMA) where a voter casts a single vote for a constituency member of parliament and it will be used in the calculation of the party list seats. Previously, the vote for the constituency and party list were separated. However, in the General elections of 2023, separate ballots are used for constituency and party lists. Hence voters have two ballots, one for a local constituency representative and the other for their preferred party on a national level.

i. Advance and Overseas Voting

To complement the obligation of voting, there is, for the first time, a provision for advanced and overseas voting in 2023 elections. Advance voting is provided for eligible voters living or working outside their registered constituencies. Such voters are required to register for advance voting with the designated administrative authority as determined by the ECT. Eligible voters can then cast their ballots at central polling places outside their original constituencies ahead of the actual election. A similar arrangement is in place for overseas voting. Eligible voters living overseas are allowed to vote by mail or in person at designated polling places in the foreign countries in which they live. Prior registration is also required.¹²



Figure 5: The individual looking up his name in the voters list, displayed at the BON Kai Youth Centre Bangkok, Thailand.

The most powerful measure in discouraging dishonest candidates is the legal mandate of the ECT to investigate complaints of any behavior violating the Electoral Law and cancel electoral results and call for a repeat election. In practice, the ECT used this authority by issuing red or yellow cards to candidates who had violated electoral rules, in much the same way as is done in a football match.

In the 2023 general elections, about 2.35 million voters were registered to vote in advance nationwide,¹³ out of which 2,216,950 requested to vote in advance outside their constituencies, 18,880 in their constituencies, and 115,139 from foreign countries where they reside.

ii. Yellow and Red Cards by ECT

If an elected candidate is suspected of cheating but the ECT cannot prove this beyond doubt, the candidate is issued with a yellow card, which invalidates the election results but allows the candidate to contest in a new round of elections. Candidates or elected candidates who are given red cards are disfranchised of their voting rights for a year and barred from participating in subsequent rounds of elections.¹⁴ The issuing of yellow or red cards requires a unanimous decision by the five commissioners of the ECT. Handing out red cards to candidates also requires approval from the Council of State.

¹¹ "What You Need to Know About Thailand's General Elections", Aljazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/13/whats-at-stake-in-thailands-parliamentary-election> (Accessed on 23, May, 2023)

¹² Orathai Kokpol. Electoral Politics in Thailand.

¹³ Thai PBS News. May 7, 2023.

¹⁴ Ibid

6. ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION

The General Elections of Thailand 2023 took place for the period of two days, 13th – 14th May 2023. The two-member delegation from IPC visited Thailand from 12th-15th in order to also attend the preliminary meeting day that was organized by the ECT on 12th May 2023 from 8:30 am till 4:00 pm. The meeting gave insights into the political and electoral system of Thailand, the rules for international observers, and the role of ECT. The brief helped the international observers to understand the structure of Thailand's politics and government and later supported them while on the EOM.

The IPC EOM had the privilege of being present throughout the election process, closely monitoring the activities leading up to the voting day and the voting itself. IPC's mission aimed to ensure that the electoral proceedings adhered to international standards of transparency, fairness, and inclusivity.

The delegation of IPC played a crucial role in monitoring the election process and providing insights into the electioneering process. The delegation visited various polling stations in Bangkok on the day before the elections for analyzing the key features from day one, such as the use of a translucent ballot box and the distribution of election materials to polling staff. This ensures that the polling staff has all the necessary materials, including the ballot papers, ballot box sealing material, all the basic information, etc, for the voting process



Figure 6: Election Commission volunteers inspect ballots and voting materials for distribution to polling booths in Bangkok, Thailand, on May 13, 2023.

Election day was largely peaceful, as Polls opened at 8:00 am and got closed at 5:00 pm. The individuals visited polling stations to cast their votes by observing the timings. As per the rules by the ECT, no party personnel, or representatives were allowed to openly talk about the vote casting and whom they are supporting and voted. The individuals interviewed by the IPC delegation at various polling stations were affirmed by this rule and didn't share their views about any party or vote. However, after 5:00 pm they were allowed to openly share.

As per the ECT official data, there were a total of 95,000 polling stations nationwide and the result was started publishing on its website from 7:00 pm onwards on voting day.

Law enforcement agencies provided a secure environment on election day, ensuring the safety of voters, election officials, and other stakeholders. The presence of security personnel at polling stations helped maintain order and foster an atmosphere of trust and confidence. Instances of violence or disruptions were minimal, allowing voters to exercise their democratic rights peacefully.

The delegation interviewed the officials of the Election Commission and gathered data regarding the election. As per the information, a total of 6,679 candidates applied to contend for the 500 MP seats, out of which 4,781 are for the 400 constituency elections and 1,898 are in for the 100-seat party-list vote. Another 63 people registered as prime ministerial candidates.

Altogether, 70 political parties contested the race for constituency MP seats while 67 joined the party-list election. Meanwhile, 43 individuals were up for the PM's seat.



Figure 7: The head of the delegation interviewing the representative of one of the political parties at the election day 14 May 2023.

According to the ECT, from the total 4,781 constituency candidates, 3,903 were men and 878 were women. Moreover, out of total 63 prime ministerial candidates nominated by 43 political parties, only nine are women, accounting for just 14% of the total.

The average voter's turnout in elections 2023 was higher than the previous one and reported as more than 75%, which is considered a very virtuous turnout.

The counting process was conducted in a highly professional and transparent manner, adhering to international best practices and electoral standards. The openness and transparency displayed during this phase were commendable and further reinforced the credibility of the election.

The following key observations were made regarding the counting process:

- **Access for Observers:** The IPC EOM, as well as other domestic and international observers, were granted full access to the counting centers. This allowed us to observe the entire process, ensuring a high level of transparency and accountability.
- **Training and Capacity Building:** Election officials involved in the counting process were well-trained and exhibited a thorough understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Their competence and professionalism contributed to the smooth execution of the counting process. Although the staff performing duties at the pooling stations were not allowed to talk to the public/observers present there. The staff of ECT was present to fulfill the queries of the observers.
- **Presence of Party Agents:** Representatives from different political parties were present at the counting centers, closely monitoring the process to ensure fairness. Their presence added an extra layer of oversight and contributed to the credibility of the results.



Figure 8: Individuals casting vote on Election Day.



Figure 9: Secretary General IPC asking the representative of one of the political parties, present at the polling station during vote counting process. The representative is noting down the votes his political party is receiving.

7. RESULTS

The Move Forward Party (MFP), led by Pita Limjaroenrat won the most seats, followed by fellow opposition party Pheu Thai who had won the most seats in the 2011 and 2019 elections. The voter's turn out as mentioned earlier was a record 75.22%. Unofficial results were announced on 15 May and official results on 25 May. The Election Commission has 60 days to certify the results.

The MFP took 147 seats in the lower house, which includes 112 from the 400 seats that are directly elected and 35 from the 100 seats allocated to parties on a proportional basis. The Pheu Thai won a total of 138 seats, which includes 112 directly elected and 27 from the party list. Thailand will select prime minister in July after the ECT officially clarifies the results. It has two months to formally ratify the election outcome.

As per the constitution, to demonstrate a parliamentary majority and choose the next prime minister, a party

and its candidate need at least 376 votes from a joint sitting of parliament, comprising the 500 new HOR MPs and the 250-member Senate appointed by the previous military-led government. That means the winning candidate needs at least 376 votes.

Thailand's progressive MFP has signed a coalition agreement with seven other parties, promising to draft a new constitution, end monopolies

A day after the elections, MFP's Pita announced a six-party coalition with Pheu Thai and four minor parties totaling 310 seats. Pita appears to be hoping that at least 66 junta-appointed senators will choose to recognize the will of the voters and help him reach the 376-vote threshold. Pita has also called on the elected members of other parties to support him even though they have not been invited into the coalition.



Figure 10: Vote counting process.

The final result for the seat of Prime Minister and who will form the government will be announced in August as the party has 60 days of time to take decisions, form coalitions and play their part.

S.no	Party	Total Seats	Constituency vote by first-past-the-post voting ¹⁵	Votes from Party List
1.	Move Forward Party	151 seats	112 constituency	39 party-list
2.	Pheu Thai Party	141 seats	112 constituency	29 party-list
3.	United Thai Nations Party	36 seats	23 constituency	13 party-list
4.	Bhumjaithai Party	71 seats	68 constituency	3 party-list
5.	Palang Pracharat Party	40 seats	39 constituency	1 party-list
6.	Democrat Party Party	25 seats	22 constituency	3 party-list
7.	Chart Thai Pattana Party	10 seats	9 constituency	1 party-list
8.	Prachachart Party	9 seats	7 constituency	2 party-list

Total Votes	37,987,549
Voters Turnout	75.22% ¹⁶

¹⁵ First-past-the-post voting is an electoral system wherein voters cast a vote for a single candidate, and the candidate with the most votes wins the election.

¹⁶ Election Commission of Thailand



8. RECOMMENDATIONS

i. Gender Data Discrepancy:

During our interactions with election officials, it was noted that there was a lack of data regarding the male and female bifurcation of registered voters and actual turnout. We recommend ensuring the collection and availability of gender-disaggregated data for a more comprehensive understanding of the electoral dynamics, and accuracy of gender-based electoral analysis. and to promote gender equality and inclusion.

ii. Electronic Voting and Vote Counting:

As the Election Commission of Thailand is carrying out the process in a very transparent way, it can further flourish to minimize the errors in the counting process. For example, the presence of human error became evident as observers were assigned specific areas to stand and observe the counting process, while the polling staff members were responsible for marking the votes and recording them on chart paper. However, there was a considerable distance between the observers and the area where the polling staff was stationed, making it challenging to clearly see and verify the vote count.

The introduction of advanced technology, such as electronic vote-counting machines that have already been used around the world, can curtail the potential for human error and increased the accuracy and efficiency of the counting process. This technological integration further enhanced the transparency of the electoral process.

iii. Accessibility for Differently Abled and Blind Voters:

While efforts were made to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities, including ramps and specialized facilities, we noted a need for multiple means of casting votes for differently abled and blind voters. It is vital to provide alternative methods, such as braille ballots, or trained assistance, to empower these individuals to exercise their right to vote independently and confidentially. Enhancing accessibility measures will foster inclusivity and ensure equal participation of all citizens in the electoral process.

ANNEXTURE



Secretary General IPC Senator Sitara Ayaz and Manager Communications IPC Ms. Mehk Butt at the BON KAI Youth Centre polling station in Bangkok, Thailand.



Manager Communications IPC with the staff at the Hainan Association of Thailand Polling station.



Head of one of the polling station Volunteer groups, with all the election material of the particular polling station.



The election material, including ballot boxes, polling booth, checklist charts, baskets, ballot boxes sealing sticks etc.



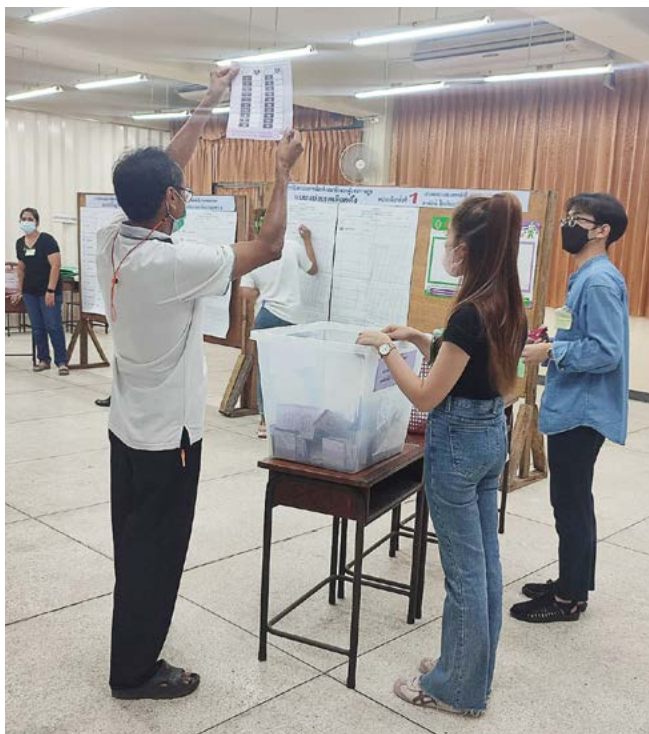
The central point where the election material was distributed to the respective polling station staff committee.



Secretary General IPC presenting the Souvenir to the official of Electoral Commission of Thailand.



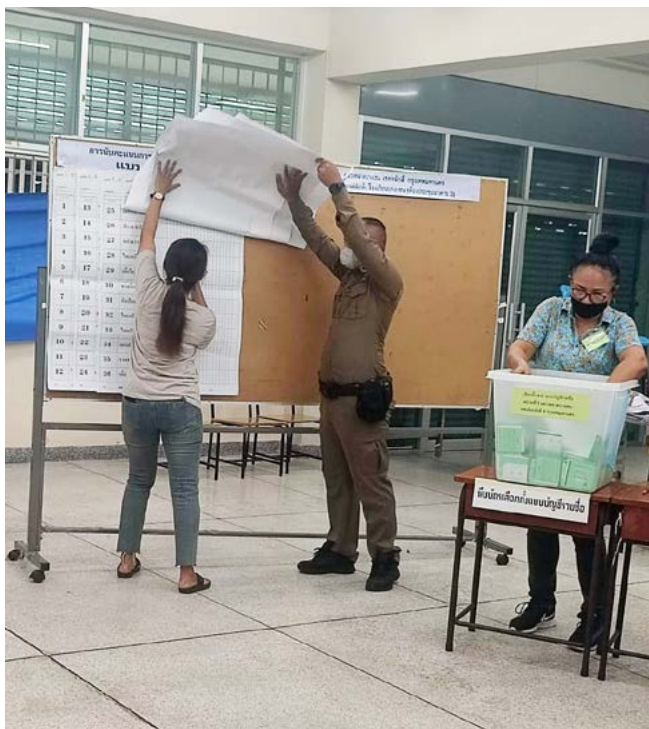
The display of the list of Political Parties and candidates at the polling station.



Vote counting process.



Secretary General observing the vote counting process.



The list displayed at the polling station to mark the votes manually.



The three types of baskets:

- Correctly marked ballot papers.
- Nullify ballot papers (incorrectly marked votes)
- blank ballot papers (with no marks and indications).



Two types of Ballot papers Left: Constituency based member ballot Right: Party-Listbased member ballot.



Secretary General IPC attending the briefing meeting, organized by the ECT, at Chatrium Hotel Bangkok.



The delegation of IPC with the Representatives of A-WEB at the Briefing meeting in Bangkok.



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