

## SOCIAL MEDIA KEY TOOL, FINDS SURVEY

# Calls mount for online campaigning

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»Many Thais do not want to ban political parties from campaigning in social media ahead of the general election, saying they would feel deprived of information and freedom, according to an opinion poll.

The survey results were released yesterday while authorities considered how to monitor online political campaigns for incorrect information.

Almost half, or 47.9%, of the respondents to a Bangkok Poll survey, said if social media campaigns are banned, they will feel they are being blocked from receiving information, and 34.6% felt the country is underdeveloped, with no freedom.

Another 34.3% fear chaos and deepening rifts if campaigns are shifted online, while another 22.1% said the country is not ready for social media campaigns. According to the survey, most people view social media, led by Facebook, as a good way to communicate with political parties ahead of the election.

Of all social media, Facebook was the platform of choice for people seeking to connect to parties (68%), followed by Line (39.6%), YouTube (36.5%), Twitter (11.9%) and the Facebook-owned Instagram (11.5%).

More than half, or 51.4% of all respondents, thought using social media was beneficial due to the ease of access to parties' information (54.8%) and increased participation from the new generation (53.4%). The remaining 48.6% think the use of social media would do more harm than good because of potentially distorted information (45.2%) and the risk of it turning into a new battleground for mudslinging and deepening societal conflicts (33.5%).

A majority also believed net idols or social media influencers would have the

most considerable impact on the election (63%), while 37% thought their impact would be minimal to negligible. The telephone survey was conducted on 1,201 people by Bangkok University Research Centre from Tuesday to Thursday.

Meanwhile, political parties are set to resume activities to prepare for the general election tentatively set for Feb 24 after the regime eased the political ban.

The Bhumjaithai Party's deputy secretary-general, Supachai Jaisamut, said yesterday the party will hold a meeting of its executives next Monday, Sept 24 to proceed with activities as permitted by the National Council for Peace and Order. The party is also expected to hold a general assembly early next month.

Pol Lt Gen Viroj Pao-in, Pheu Thai Party acting leader, said the party will call a meeting of acting party executives this week to discuss a plan to hold a party general assembly where party regulations will be reviewed.

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha on Friday issued Order No 13/2018 in his capacity as the NCPO chief to allow parties to proceed with certain pre-election activities.

The order was published in the *Royal Gazette* on Friday, with immediate effect.

According to the new NCPO order, parties now have the green light to hold some necessary activities to prepare for the election, but campaigning is still forbidden.

Activities permitted include recruiting new members, raising funds, electing party leaders and executives, amending party regulations, and setting up party branches.

The order also suspends the much-criticised primary voting system where members chose the candidates they wanted to run in elections. They will instead select candidates through a committee.