

FEAR OF RETRIBUTION SKEWING RESULTS IN REGIME'S FAVOUR, EXPERTS WARN

NCPO 'detering' honest opinion polls

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» Political polls conducted since the coup are skewed because fear of the military regime is deterring honest responses, experts say.

According to one pollster, a number of respondents refused to be interviewed when asked about their political views for fear that they would be "summoned" by the junta.

As a result, the respondents are dominated by either yellow-shirt supporters or people who are politically neutral, said the source, who requested anonymity because he was not authorised to talk to the press.

Mainstream polls have provided glowing praise of the performance of the National Council for Peace and Order since it seized power on May 22, amid orders curbing freedom of expression of the media and anti-coup protesters.

Suan Dusit Poll has conducted nine public opinion polls related to the NCPO since the coup. Bangkok Poll has conducted five and Nida Poll has conducted one.

The latest Suan Dusit poll showed that the NCPO scored 8.87 out of 10 for its two-month performance. The poll was conducted on 1,689 people throughout the

country from July 22-26. The results are not surprising, as the NCPO has managed to win support of different groups with populist policies that aim to "return happiness to the people".

But Jerome Hervio, managing director of Ispos (Thailand), which is part of a global market research company, said it would be difficult at this time to ask direct questions in political polls as respondents may not give sincere feedback. "A big problem in Thailand is the politeness bias. We get few negative answers," he said.

But using a set of methods for sensitive topics, pollsters can still ask questions about what worries people or which issues are important nowadays, he said. These methods include clear information on the anonymity of respondents, interviews conducted at home and self-completed sections.

Experts also warned of a larger problem of quality control resulting in the inaccuracy of poll results.

Suthin Wianwiwat, project leader of Khon Kaen University's E-Saan Poll, which was set up five years ago, said Bangkok-based polls are not representative of the country despite claiming to be.

"They are always dominated with the

voices of urban people," Mr Suthin told *Bangkok Post Sunday* at his office in Khon Kaen. "Whenever they have a nationwide survey, I always question whether they include the grassroots."

He said the sample size is not an issue in conducting polls, as accuracy is determined by choosing samples that are reflective of the population structure.

An E-Saan Poll study conducted one month after the coup showed that 1,062 respondents in 20 northeastern provinces gave the NCPO a grade of 2.5 out of four, which is considered an average approval rating. The data was collected from June 19-22, with 39.9% of respondents from the agricultural sector.

Suan Dusit posts one-page PDF summaries of all its polls online, but does not contain any information on the profile of the respondents. *Bangkok Post Sunday* called its office to ask for a copy of the profile of its latest poll on the NCPO's two-month performance, which showed that agricultural workers and the unemployed accounted for only 5.15% of the 1,689 respondents.

According to the latest figures from the National Statistical Office, 31.37% of the 37.76 million employed Thais work in the agriculture sector.