

THE ROLE OF THE ELECTION COMMISSION TO VOTE BUYING PROBLEM SOLVING IN LOCAL ELECTIONS AT YAN TA KHAO DISTRICT TRANG PROVINCE

Barameeboon Sangchan

College of Politics and Governance, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand,

E-Mail: Barameeboon.sa@ssru.ac.th

ABSTRACT

The objective of this research to (1) Study the role of the election commission to vote buying problem solving in local elections at Yan Ta Khao district Trang province. (2) Study factors affect or effectiveness limitation of ECT in preventing vote buying in Yan Ta Khao district Trang province and (3) To suggestions appropriate guidelines to effectiveness improvement in vote buying problem solving. This study uses a qualitative research methodology by selected 17 key informants. The data analysis was purposive, triangulation and interpretive analysis. An analysis the data used analytic inductive and content analysis. The results of research found that ECT had important the role in educating the public and electoral supervision to ensure honesty and fairness. However, ECT was still limitations on personnel, budget and cooperation from local authorities. The factors affect the operation successes such as public participation, strict law enforcement and transparency operational. The development strategy includes that increasing public participation, building civil society networks and the enhancing potential of the ECT officials to develop specialized expertise.

Keywords: Election commission, vote buying, local elections

INTRODUCTION

The first general election in Thailand took place on November 15, 1933, following the transition from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy in 1932. This election was conducted indirectly. By the people elected local representatives and who then selected 156 Member of the House of Representatives. These representatives choose 78 members and appointed by the monarch 78 members. This election began of public politics participation. Although there are restrictions on voting rights and voting methods. After the first indirect elections in 1933, Thailand gradually transitioned to a constitutional direct election system (Callahan, WA, & McCargo, D. 1996). The 1932 Constitution stipulated that at least 50% of the population must be literate before direct general elections. In 1946, the literacy rate had increased sufficiently to meet the required standard, and the first direct general election was on January 6, 1946, the beginning of the transition from indirect elections to the current system. The people exercise the right to elect representatives directly from among the candidates in their constituencies. The local elections in Thailand began after the revolution in 1932 according to the principle of the distribution of power according to the Constitution. The Sanitation and Municipality Act gave the people the right to elected local council members and local administrators (Meechan, S. 2020). The first local elections were held in 1933 with the election of municipal council members. Later, the scope was extended to include municipal council elections under the Municipal Ordinance 1933. These elections were starting point of local political participation and had continuously developed both of formal, organization and authorities. Currently, it covers various types of local administrative organizations, such as Provincial Administrative Organizations (PAOs),

Municipal administrations, Subdistrict Administrative Organizations (SAOs), and Pattaya City. Elections conducted directly by local residents to reflect public intentions and strengthen grassroots democracy in Thailand. The vote buying was a persistent phenomenon. The election candidates used various strategies to persuade the public to vote. The trend was increasingly intensified. Some election candidates were willing to pay substantial, including tens of millions of baht to hopes of winning and securing political positions (Kaewmano, J. 2022).

The role of the Electoral Commission (ECT) was created under the political reform of Thailand, which aimed to reduce the influence of the ruling group and to ensure that the electoral process is free, transparency and accountable. This role was enshrined in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand of 1997 and reaffirmed in the Constitution. Since 2017, the ECT has been tasked with supervise elections at all levels. By established preventing corruption, monitoring political budget spending and develop knowledge and understanding of democracy among the people. This reflects was important to independent organization on the quality of governance in a democratic system and the people's confidence in the election results.

The local elections were fundamental process of participatory democracy that empowers community members used exercise political authority in selecting administrators and council members to govern local according to needs. The evolution of local administrative organizations in Thailand began with the Local Administration Organization and Subdistrict Administrative Organization Act of 1994. Furthermore, the Local Council Member and Local Administrator Election Act of 2019 promoted clearly, transparency and standard to operational of local political. This is crucial for decentralizing power to local areas on own determine development direction and reduce disparities in resources and public services between urban and rural areas. (Mahakanjana, 2021; Rattana et al., 2023)

The establishment of the Election Commission (ECT) was the idea to create independent organization to election supervision and balance elections for reduce state interference and problems solving corruption such as vote buying. Mr.Nipit Inthasombat, Deputy Leader of the Democrat Party indicated that the democratic, if the management of elections under the responsibility of the legislature and administrative departments. The consequences were limited to checks and balances. Therefore, the idea of establishing an independent organization oversight such as the Election Commission. Before 1997, election management was under the Ministry of the Interior affected to minister abuse their power to interfering with elections, and lacking impartiality (Tahom, U. 2025). Furthermore, the vote buying problems were necessary to establish a central organization without the government intervention.

However, many academics, including Mr.Pichai Rattadilok Na Phuket and Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit were believe that the operational of the Election Commission still had limitations and unable to fulfill mission of real promote democracy. The elections remain focused on peacekeeping was the past election management of Ministry of the Interior and failure to establish good governance to investigate corruption. (Callahan, W. A. 2005) The example as the counting of the general election on March 24, 2019 in the 1st constituency of Nakhon Patam Province after the new counting, the number of ballots and the election results have changed. In addition, the announcement of the results of the general election was delayed by up to 45 days. This event shows that the establishment of the Election Commission (ECT) was aimed at reducing vote buying and encourage transparency. But the structure and operations of the Commission were still lacks in connectivity with the public and lacks in

practical coordination. This was important point in this study about the role of the election commission to vote buying problem solving in local elections at Trang province. Trang province was a province in the south of Thailand with economic and social importance. Local administration is systematic and efficient (Phetprai, P. & Talerngpol, P. 2025). The latest data from the Trang Provincial Local Administration Office indicates that Trang Province has a total of 100 local administrative organizations, including 1 Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO), 1 Municipal Administration, 1 Metropolitan Municipality, 20 municipality Administrations, and 77 Sub-district Administrative Organizations. Many local administrative organizations had allocated budgets to Trang Province for continuous development of public areas and services. Especially, education, public health, and infrastructure, which were key factors to improve the public quality of life. The diversity of local administrative organizations encourages to decision of public participation and local administration to sustainable development in Trang Province. The election fraud was occur continues in Yan Ta Khao District, Trang Province and still affected negatively impact to administration of local administrative organizations (Nipit Intharuth, n.d.).

Local elections in Yeon Tawhi District, Trang Province had evolved according to the social, cultural and economic of the area. This semi-rural community remains closely linked to the local network of relatives and intellectuals. The decentralization process since the 1990s has increased the political role of the people of Yan ta khao through the election of sub-district and municipal administrative organizations responsible for resource management, community development and daily life problem solving. Therefore, this area was clearly reflected the grassroots political dynamics of Trang Province and important example of democratic development in rural communities.

The local elections in Yan Takhao District, Trang Province, have progressed in accordance with the social, cultural, and economic structures of the area. This semi-rural community remains closely connected to its extended family networks and local wisdom. The decentralization process since the 1990s had increased the political role of the people of Yan ta khao through the election of sub-district and municipal administrative organizations responsible for resource management, community development and daily life problem solving. Therefore, this area clearly reflects the grassroots political dynamics of Trang Province and serves as an important example of democratic development in rural communities. (Sasithornsawapa, N., 2016)

The vote buying in local elections was still important obstacle undermining the quality of democracy. This behavior prevents election results reflected the true to people and affected to local governance beneficial to a specific group. This kind of behaviors was often caused by fragile economic structure, poverty, protective relations and lack of access to neutral information, which affected the public to give up their political rights for short-term benefits. The candidates used vote buying strategies to establish the power and ultimately had negatively impact on long-term development of local.

The corruption in local elections in Thailand had been a long-standing problems for more than 20 years. Many academics agree that corruption is common in every election all both verifiable or untraceable. The forms and methods of corruption were different in each election. By participants often try to avoid being detected or investigated. Despite punitive measures, such as yellow or red cards or the revocation of political rights but the corruption still without fear of punishment. This problem from the enormous benefits associated with budgets and resources of local. There was encouragement to local administrators or local council members who want to exercise political power. This conflict can sometimes escalate into violence. This corruption completely impedes Thailand's political and governance development but buying votes was not able to eliminate such behavior.

For the above reasons, the researchers are interested studying to the role of the election commission to vote buying problem solving in local elections at Yan Ta Khao district Trang province. The political characteristics of this area clearly reflect Thailand's rural electoral, which includes factors such as local political networks, relationships within patronage systems, and public awareness of election corruption. That was made appropriate case study to assess the effectiveness of preventive measures, controlling and punishment of the ECT and providing in-depth information to new develop mechanisms for reduce vote buying and strengthen the quality of democracy at the grassroots level.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The tittle of the research was the role of the election commission to vote buying problem solving in local elections at Yan Ta Khao district Trang province. The researchers conducted the research in the followings:

1. Key Informants

The population used in this survey included 17 officials of the Election Commission Office (CEO) in Trang Province, Officials of the Election Commission Office, Local administrators, and people in Yan Ta Khao district.

2. Research instruments

The researchers used in-depth interviews to collect data for this study and divided into 4 parts as follows:

Part 1 The general data of the interview.

Part 2 Interview form regarding the role of the Election Commission (ECT) in vote buying problem solving.

Part 3 Interview form regarding the role of the Election Commission (ECT) in vote buying problem solving.

Part 4 Suggestions to improve the effectiveness of vote buying problem solving.

3. Data Analysis

The data analysis: Researchers had qualitatively analyzed the data by checking the data before the analysis. The data analyze used triangulate method to confirm the accuracy of the data. The method of checking the data consists of checking on 3 sources; time, place and person. After collecting the data from observations, recordings and interviews. The researcher was analyzed the data by ranked data system according to the content related to the role of the Election Commission (ECT) in vote buying problem solving in local elections at Yan Ta Khao district Trang province. The purpose of the research analyzed as followings:

1. Data organization: Researchers organized the data received from recorded interviews and structured the content in a similar manner.

2. Data Presentation: After organizing the data, the researcher was presented by printing the content and arranging activities on consistent with spatial data collection.

3. Conclusion, Interpretation, and Validation of Research Findings: This involves synthesizing, interpreting and summarizing the collected data. In this process, researcher compared the content from interviews and discussions of research findings with relevant literature review data. The interpreted and summarized findings were organized into research. Researcher used theoretical concepts to conclusions and created a conceptual framework. Generally, the analytical approach is divided into 2 parts follows:

1) Data analysis for conclusions: In qualitative research, The mostly data analysis was descriptive derived from observations, interviews, and records.

2) Content analysis: This involves analyzing data from documents by using inductive analysis relevant to interpreting and conclusions from concrete objects or observable phenomena and summarizing these findings in descriptive writing.

RESULTS

The research about the role of the election commission to vote buying problem solving in local elections at Yan Ta Khao district Trang province. The researcher summarized the findings as follows:

Objective 1: To study the role of the election commission to vote buying problem solving in local elections. The results of research found that: The Elections Commission (ECT) had the constitutional authority to administer and supervise elections to ensure that elections were conducted in honestly and fairly. The ECT taken measures to monitor and investigate vote buying. Including that the authority to revoke candidates' rights or order re-elections if fraud is found. In addition, the ECT had the role in educating to public about democratic politics, the rights and duties of electors, promoting awareness about the proper exercise of their rights and avoiding benefits or personal gain.

The role of the Election Commission (ECT) in vote buying problem solving from interviews with key informants. The summarized as follows:

The Election Commission (ECT) had the role in preventing and vote buying problem solving issues at the local level. The ECT focused on educating and fostering democratic awareness among the public, candidates and political parties to ensure understand their rights and responsibilities in a democratic system and recognize the consequences of corruption. The ECT organizes various activities and training programs such as “Tree of Democracy” Course, “Asa Reserve Force Training Unit” Course, “Asa Scout Training Unit” and “Democracy Education Center” (SDECs) to established network of citizens departments in election supervision and corruption prevention. Additionally, the Election Commission has implemented legal measures such as appointing election inspectors and establishing mobile units in collaboration with police and administrative authorities for promptly monitor, inspect, and apprehend offenders. the Election Commission also conducted investigations, inquiries, and revokes the rights of offenders. The interview was suggested to the Election Commission should be more proactive, focusing on fieldwork, continuous public relations with local networks and development personnel in investigative technology to increase operational efficiency. The Conclusion that: The interviews demonstrate that the ECT had comprehensive role in educating, prevention, investigation, and improving operational to ensure the local elections were transparency, fairly and acceptable to the public.

Objective 2: To study the factors affected the success or limitations of the Election Commission (ECT). The research revealed that: The key factors affecting the operations of ECT such as limitations in personnel, budget and public participation in election monitoring. Additionally, the operational of ECT was influenced by deeply entrenched patronage systems in Thai society. It was difficult to vote buying problem solving in certain areas.

The problems and obstacles in vote buying administrative issues. The key interview data was summarized as follows: The vote buying problem solving must be face challenges and obstacles. The candidates focused on winning elections without regard for ethics and political conscience. Certain groups of the public, particularly the elderly and low-income earners were still benefit from candidates and vote accordingly. Meanwhile, youth and those under 40 years old often do not vote to a lack of democratic. Major obstacles such as

the personnel and budget limitations of the Election Commission, which restricts training and citizen networks and continued shortcomings in law enforcement. By some candidates used exploiting the vulnerabilities for personal benefit. The public was concealed information for fear from influence candidates or political groups. Clear evidence is still lacking and the justice process is still slow and loose. The social and cultural factors such as kinship, personal relationships and a reward-based culture. It made vote exchange of vote buying easy and personal. The Election Commission of operation were partially effective in areas with strong economic, strong community relations and democracy training. However, the economic factors still influence vote buying decisions. The difference of social and economic regions determined the effectiveness of the Electoral Commission and obstacles to efficient implementation. These factors collectively constitute significant obstacles to the success of vote buying.

Objective 3: To suggest appropriate guidelines for improving the effectiveness of vote buying problem solving in local elections in Yan Ta Khaw District, Trang Province, the research findings that: The capacity of Election Commission officials in investigation and law enforcement should be strengthened. The participation of the public and private sectors to monitoring and reporting election fraud should be promoted. The Election Commission's communication and public relations system should be improved to reach diverse target groups in order to create a culture of honest and transparent elections.

The guidelines of vote buying problem solving from interviews of Key informants. Conclusion as follows:

The vote buying of problems solving and prevention must require both legal enforcement and raising awareness of democratic principles. The enforcement by electoral commissions must been face many limitations and legal loopholes. The candidates exploiting their peers for benefit personal and a lack of clear evidence. Some people conceal information as fear of consequences and personnel and budget were limited, which hinders decisive prosecution; Future prevention work should focus on building citizen participation and democratic awareness such as engaging volunteers to drive community activities, monitoring electoral violations, reporting vote buying and educating youth, public and political parties about rights, responsibilities and quality elections. Including establishing special task forces to coordinate with communities for campaign area inspections. These measures will enhance the effectiveness of preventing and reducing vote buying sustainably.

Summary and Future Work

1. The research findings of objective 1 showed that: The Role of the election Commission (ECT) in vote buying problem solving found that the role of ECT to regulating elections to ensure fairness and transparency consistent with regulatory theory. Baldwin, Cave and Lodge (2012) said that The effective governance requires strong control mechanisms, clearly legislation and public participation in inspections, which was consistent with the role of the ECT on independent organization in laws and regulations and enforces legal measures to reduce corrupt behaviors and corresponds with the principles of good governance, as UNDP (2013) indicated that the good governance must be transparency, accountability and justice. The election oversight and disqualification actions taken by the ECT as a concrete example of good governance principles.

2. The research findings of objective 2 showed that: The key factor hindering the work of the Election Commission (ECT) was entrenched patronage system deeply rooted in Thai society, which was consistent with the concept of Chakraphop Penkhae (2024) who explains that good relationships between politicians and local

people make vote buying a part of the political culture. This solving of problem was not only relied on law enforcement, but also rely on the process of raising awareness and changing political values. Moreover, the constraints on resources and personnel were still reflect structural within the bureaucratic system. According to governance theory, inefficiency and lack of transparency in administration was factors erode public trust in political institutions. Therefore, the establishment of monitoring and public participation was necessary to improve the efficiency of the ECT.

3. The research findings of objective 3 showed that: The important guidelines of the role of the Electoral Commission (ECT) were encouragement to public participation in the electoral process, which was consistent the theory of political participation of Ruomash Rak Gao (2014) said that the public participation was important foundation of democracy because helps build fairness and reduces the chances of corruption. If the public was involved in monitoring and reporting corrupt behavior. The electoral system will be more transparent and consistent with the conceptual of Sakhun Suesongtham (2011) said that a good election process must cover all stages since pre-election preparations to post-election assessments. This should be the guidelines to the ECT operational continuously, developing technology to deal with online complaints, training staff and building community level civil society networks. It is a guideline be able to enhance the effectiveness of the ECT and corresponds with the principles of ethics and ethical theory.

Thank you

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University for the invaluable assistance provided throughout this research.

REFERENCE

- Baldwin, R., Cave, M., & Lodge, M. (2012). *Understanding Regulation: Theory, Strategy, and Practice* (2nd ed.), Oxford University Press, URL: <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/understanding-regulation-9780199576081>
- Callahan, W. A. (2005). Social capital and corruption: Vote buying and the politics of reform in Thailand. *Perspectives on Politics*, 3(3), 495–508.
- Callahan, W. A., & McCargo, D. (1996). Vote-buying in Thailand's northeast: The July 1995 general election. *Asian Survey*, 36(4), 376–392.
- Chakraphop Penkhae (2024), AIM HOUR by TODAY!, URL: <https://www.workpointtoday.com/aimhour-jakrapob>
- Kaewmano, Jarn (2022). The Campaign Against Vote Buying of Local Election in Chaiyaphom Province: Enhance voter participation to complete the electoral cycle. *King Prajadhipok's Institute Journal*, 20(2), 20–44.
- Mahakanjana, Chainat (2021). Local Elections after Decentralization in Thailand: Lessons Learned. *Journal of Public Administration, Public Affairs and Management*, 2021.
- Meechan, Suthikarn (2020). Voting behavior and attitude toward vote-buying in a Norhteatern area: Case study in Maha Sarakham. *King Prajadhipok's Institute Journal*, 11(3), 110–128.
- Phetprai, P., & Talerngpol, P. (2025). Effectiveness of administration and personnel development of the Election Commission. *Journal of Management Science Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University*, 12(1), 38–50.
- Pichittharuth, (n.d.). Role and Problems of Election Commission of Thailand and local election fraud in Phetchaburi. *Burapha Journal of Political Economy*
- Rattana, T., Phongphitakyotin, T., Maiphranate, P., & Dokchan, P. (2023). Civil political development in local democracy. *Interdisciplinary Academic and Research Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.14456/iarj.2023.203>
- Sasithornsawapa, N. (2016). People's participation in creating the development plan in Thailand. In *BESSH-2016: Proceedings of the International Conference on Business, Economics, Social Science & Humanities* (Vol. 277, Issue 7, pp. 1-5). <https://academicfora.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/BESSH-Full-Paper-Proceeding-Osaka-Japan-August-29-30-2016.pdf>
- Tahom, U. (2025). Patterns of Deceptive Vote-Buying Tactics by Local Politicians: Implications for Moral Integrity and the Erosion of Democratic Foundations. *Suranaree Journal of Social Science*, 19(3).
- UNDP (2013), *Good Governance: Concept and Practicel*, URL: <https://www.undp.org>