

Officials at some registered political parties say they know the election will be unfair, but they will participate to help educate the public about the political process.

Nay Myo Wai, the secretary of the Peace and Diversity Party (PDP), told *The Irrawaddy* on Friday: “We know the circumstances. And we know the election will not be free and fair. We will participate to help the people understand the political process.”

The public has many interests and many people are not concentrating on politics or the election process, while the military government is going all out to make its Union Solidarity Development Party the clear winner, said Phyo Min Thein, the chairman of the Union Democratic Party (UDP)

“People are not active in politics,” he said. “The government doesn't want people to concentrate on the election. People didn't have much interest in the 2008 constitutional referendum. If people don't take part, government can do what it wants.” said Phyo Min Thein.

Some voters have information about the National Unity Party (NUP) and the USDA, but the majority lack any information about other parties, said one political observer.

Some Political parties have opened small branch offices in some division and party leaders have traveled to some townships and villages to organize.

Cho Cho Kyaw Nyein, a leader of the Democratic Party who recently visited Pegu Division, told *The Irrawaddy*

: “In that area, people only know the NUP and USDA. People said that they were afraid, but they were happy to see some democratic parties. Some people from rural areas are interested in politics, but they are afraid. ”

“Having been suppressed for nearly 50 years, people in rural area don't want any problems with the government to interrupt their daily life,” she said. “They are accustomed to oppression.”

Nay Myo Wai said that parties have an obligation to try to organize people to take part in politics.

“Politicians should try to teach people not to be afraid. At meetings of the USDA, many people attend because they know they will not be arrested. Democratic supporters should not be afraid of the USDA.”

However, many Election Commission (EC) rules and regulations continue to intimidate the public and hamper the activities of political parties. A recent EC ruling prohibited the act of marching and chanting political slogans in procession to or from a political gathering, and parties must request permission to hold a political speech seven days prior to the event.

So far, 42 political parties have applied to the EC for party registration and 33 have been approved.