

The National Unity Party (NUP), the second largest party in Burma's general election on Sunday, has conceded defeat to the pro-junta Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), although it accuses the USDP of winning the election illegally.



The NUP—formed by loyalists to late dictator Gen Ne Win who was forced from power by a nationwide pro-democracy uprising in 1988—contested the elections as a proxy for the now-defunct former ruling party, the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP).

According to reports from international news agency Reuters, the NUP won a combined total of 54 seats in the national and regional parliaments.

However, several NUP candidates told *The Irrawaddy* that the military-backed USDP, which claims to have won 80 percent of the vote, had won the election unfairly due to an overwhelming number of manipulated advance votes.

“We competed and campaigned fairly, but they defeated us by illegal means,” said San Lwin, a NUP candidate for Tharrawaddy Township in Pegu Division.

During the campaign period, senior NUP leader Khin Maung Gyi told local journal *Weekly Eleven* that the election should be “a very tight competition” between the two major parties—the USDP and the NUP.

Ethnic minority groups and pro-democracy parties such as the National Democratic Force and Democratic Party (Myanmar) added their voices to NUP complaints that the junta-backed party had cheated before and during the election.

Under the electoral laws, advance voting should be limited to people unable to vote on election day and the voting should be conducted in secret—two regulations which were violated blatantly

across the country by USDP members and election officials.

Meanwhile, the election monitoring group Asian Network For Free Elections (ANFREL) has called for the Burmese junta and its Union Election Commission (UEC) to urgently clarify why the vote-counting process was not made transparent to the public and the media beginning with the first advance voting period.

“Where there have been complaints about advance voting fraud or an opaque counting process, the UEC must thoroughly investigate these claims while refusing to certify any results until their investigations are complete,” an ANFREL statement said. “In areas where advance vote totals reveal irregularities or manipulation, a re-vote should be scheduled and those responsible for the manipulation, whether they are officials of the local government office, a party, or the local Election Commission, should be held accountable.”

Observers noted that an official period for advance voting was called by the authorities in Burma for Nov. 5 and 6; however, they have said that many advance votes were cast outside that official time frame as no common procedures appear to have been adhered to.

According to a report produced by an independent and politically neutral association based in Burma, the incidents of advance voting are “a serious concern.”

The report said that the method by which advance votes have been collected has varied: election commission officials have gone door-to-door together with USDP members; set up ballot boxes in the middle of government offices; and visited industrial zones to sign up large numbers of workers.

“In some cases, the authorities have taken advantage of voters’ lack of knowledge about how to cast their vote and what their rights are,” the report noted. “Advance voting patterns give some cause for concern: for example in Kengtung Township in Shan State, the 200 advance votes were all for the USDP; one observer in Yangon [Rangoon] was told that she could vote in advance only if she cast her vote for the USDP.”