Election Will not Resolve Division

Thailand's February 2 election will be more fraught than previous ones, analysts say, and will do little if anything to resolve deep and increasingly bitter political divisions in Thailand.

When the Democrat Party last boycotted elections in 2006, it did not obstruct the registration of candidates or voting at polling stations. This time, however, the self-styled People's Democratic Reform Council, in effect the street politics wing of the Democrats, has tried to obstruct the registration and said it will not allow the election to take place.

Attempts to prevent officials from holding elections or to block people from voting could be met by violence from supporters of the ruling Puea Thai party.

"This election campaign will be violent," predicted political science professor Pitch Pongsawat from Chulalongkorn University. "The question is, can the Election Commission function properly? It is very difficult to control violence at the local level."

If the election goes ahead, the Puea Thai will likely win again - like it did in 2011, when it grabbed 265 of the 500 seats in Parliament.

In terms of votes, it outstripped the opposition Democrat Party by around four million.

Enduring regional differences paint a picture of dangerous geographic polarisation.

The ruling Puea Thai party is very strong in Thailand's northeast and across the upper north, while the Democrats dominate the south.

In the lower north and Bangkok, the two are split roughly half and half, although the capital usually favours the Democrats. But winning in Bangkok, the south and part of central Thailand alone cannot deliver Parliament.

The northeast has the biggest footprint in Parliament, accounting for 126 seats. Since

