The Roadmap to Liberalization: Myanmar's Transition from Military to Civilian Rule

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ABSTRACT

THE ROADMAP TO LIBERALIZATION: MYANMAR’S TRANSITION FROM MILITARY TO CIVILIAN RULE

Nicole Loring, PhD
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Northern Illinois University, 2019
Trude Jacobsen and Michael Clark, Co-Directors

How did Myanmar’s military embrace liberalization more during 2011-2015 than in the 1988-2002 period? Myanmar has long been treated as an outlying case by studies on democratization, liberalization, and transitions from authoritarian regimes due to its longstanding military regime. Protests in 1988 led to pressure on the regime to hold elections in 1990, leading to an electoral victory for the opposition party the National League for Democracy (NLD), but the results were ultimately overturned, and Myanmar’s military regime persisted. The period of 2011-2015 showed marked similarities with the earlier 1988-2002 period, including protests and pressure for democratic elections. Despite the seemingly analogous events between these two periods, when the NLD again won a majority of votes in the 2015 general elections, Myanmar’s regime allowed the results to stand and opened the door for a process of liberalization and democratization. This project explores how the political environment changed in Myanmar from 1988 to 2015. Through the use of interviews, a media content analysis, and process tracing, I find that a series of institutional changes which took place during the 2003-2010 period contributed to the regime’s sense of confidence in their ability to control a transition, ultimately creating an opportunity for political change in one of the world’s most durable authoritarian regime.
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THE ROADMAP TO LIBERALIZATION: MYANMAR’S TRANSITION FROM MILITARY TO CIVILIAN RULE

BY

NICOLE LORING

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Doctoral Co-Directors:
Trude Jacobsen
Michael Clark
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Comparative politics scholars often grapple with the question of how authoritarian regimes can peacefully transition to civilian rule.¹ It is an empirical puzzle; why would those in power voluntarily step down and risk possible retribution by handing control to civilians? Such questions are especially compelling in states which have experienced multiple transition attempts – if a state fails to transition to civilian rule successfully, what necessary features were missing? If the same state transitions at a different time, what conditions changed to make such a political development possible? Although the impetus for change (splits between hard- and soft-liners, domestic or international pressure, changes in institutions or structure of the regime, and so forth) differs from case to case, much of the literature on authoritarian regime transitions assumes that autocrats cling to power until they are forcibly removed or ejected from office by changing political tides.² Empirical studies of formerly authoritarian regimes, however, have shown that autocrats, particularly military regimes, often play a role in their own removal from

¹ Tachua and Heper 1983; Stepan 1988; Huntington 1996; Cottey, Edmunds, and Forster 2002; Silva 2002; Croissant 2002; Slater 2003; Ottaway 2003; Croissant 2004; Bellin 2004; Callahan 2005; Smith 2005; Lai and Slater 2006; Geddes 2006; Hadenius and Teorell 2007; Greene 2007; Brownlee 2008; Wright 2008; Slater 2008; Brownlee 2009; Pepinsky 2009; Levitsky and Way 2010; Slater 2010; Malesky and Schuler 2011; Case 2011; Albertus and Menaldo 2012.

² Hedman 2001; Aspinall 2005; Lee 2015.
Interestingly, the literature on political liberalization suggests that this process of a peaceful transition of power is not a linear one, but can include many steps forward and back as political actors figure out their new roles and the potential for democratization (or something else) takes hold.

This project aims to refine the existing literature on political liberalization and develop a framework that explains the puzzling case of Burma/Myanmar’s shift from a military regime to a civilian-led democracy. As one of the longest-lasting military regimes in recent memory and given the Burmese military’s history (as seen in their overturning of the 1990 elections), observers were largely surprised by the transfer of power from the Tatmadaw to a civilian government. The question, therefore, is “How did Myanmar’s military embrace liberalization more during 2011-2015 than in the 1988-2002 period?”

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3 Geddes 1999; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014.


5 While political liberalization often precedes democratization or civilianization efforts, it does not guarantee them or automatically lead in that direction. See the section on “Conceptual Specifics” following the introduction for more clarity.

6 Albeit not a consolidated or a liberal democracy – again, see the “Conceptual Specifics” section for more in-depth definitions of terms.

7 Callahan 2005; Geddes 1999.

8 (pronounced “dat-mah-daw-ji”) is Burmese for “armed forces.”
In the case of Myanmar, the initial goal of the military regime appeared not to be democratization or political liberalization\(^9\) but rather focused on the preservation of the existing regime’s interests – preventing domestic unrest, the removal of sanctions, or improved relations with the international community. In pursuit of these goals, autocrats made small, seemingly superficial choices, such as deciding whether to make token changes to electoral rules or holding low-stakes elections. As the regime made these decisions, however, it became harder and harder to backtrack from the promises they made,\(^{10}\) even if they did not initially intend for liberalization to be the ultimate outcome. As the regime continued to take small steps in exchange for perceived benefits or to appease challengers, a political liberalization process took hold *despite* the regime’s initial intentions.

This project will compare three distinct time periods in modern Burmese politics to understand how the transition process occurred, namely 1988-2002, 2003-2010, and 2011-2015. I will show that, during the 1990 elections, the military maintained control because it had not taken small steps along the path to liberalization before holding elections, so nulling the election results was possible. The second process of political liberalization,\(^{11}\) which started roughly

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\(^9\) Political liberalization refers not only to electoral changes and democratization but also a more general opening-up of civil and political liberties, such as freedom of the press, freedom of civil society, release of political prisoners, etc.

\(^{10}\) As O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986) write, “…once some individuals and collective rights have been granted, it becomes increasingly difficult to justify withholding others.” (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 10).

\(^{11}\) Political liberalization does not necessarily lead to democratization; however, in a number of cases, liberalization precedes democratization, which may also be the case in Myanmar. My use of the word “liberalization” is not meant to indicate that Myanmar now has a flawless liberal democracy. Indeed, there are a myriad of institutional and procedural issues with Myanmar’s fledgling civilian government, and many scholars disagree over whether the country can or
around 2003 with the announcement of the “7-Step Roadmap to Democracy”, began as a disingenuous attempt by the military to appear as if it was open to democratization. As Myanmar’s military took steps along the Roadmap it had laid out, it became more and more difficult for them to renege on their transition promises. At some point in this transition process, Myanmar’s government reached a threshold point, past which it became too difficult, costly, and politically risky to turn back. Although many have tried to explain and describe the ongoing political changes in Myanmar, the specific puzzle that this project is focused on is why such changes did not occur during the 1988-2002 time period, despite pressure for political changes and elections in 1990. Myanmar is a valuable case to study with regards to political liberalization, as it reveals how a deeply entrenched and durable regime is nonetheless capable of being considered a democracy. For instance, experts such as Taylor (2009) and Kyaw Yin Hlaing (2005; 2014) see efforts during this time as steps toward democracy, while Turnell (2008; 2011) and Kramer (2012) are more pessimistic about the regime’s intentions.

This is the Myanmar military’s name for the seven-step plan announced by General Khin Nyunt in state-run media August 30, 2003. The Burmese roughly translates to “Roadmap to a Disciplined Democracy” (Arnott 2004). The first mention of the 7-Step Roadmap in the New Light of Myanmar (government-run newspaper) was from September 5, 2003. On the last page of the paper, an article with the headline “Roadmap of Myanmar to democracy explained in Taninthayi Division” describes a ceremony held in Yangon to explain the roadmap to those in attendance, who were “departmental officials, social organization members, businessmen, townsmen and teachers” (NLM 9/5/2003, 16). Additionally, a small poem titled “We’ll go according to schedule” is featured. The author, Byan Hlwar (Trs), writes, “To the peaceful, developed station/we shall march onwards/In marching on that route/We’ll pass seven stations/With sturdy footsteps step by step/We’ll march on traversing them/On the journey we traverse/Should there be impediments, difficulties/Should there be attempts change route [sic]/Only those do who will tire/And be wearied…By doing so we shall get/Where we desire, for sure/The developed and pleasant station/And throughout the nation/There shall be peace” (Byan Hlwar in NLM 9/5/2013, 7). Such propagandistic poems were common in the New Light of Myanmar during this time.

a peaceful (albeit unintentional and still-ongoing) transition to a more liberal\textsuperscript{14} civilian-led government.

The empirical puzzle this project addresses is as follows; despite Myanmar being a highly unlikely candidate for a voluntary and peaceful transition from military to civilian rule, the military regime engineered a transition. This occurred despite limited resources and infrastructural capability,\textsuperscript{15} high levels of nationalism, internal discontent and ethnic conflicts,\textsuperscript{16} and low international support\textsuperscript{17} at the start of the transition. By examining the steps Myanmar’s government took to transition, this project will go beyond a niche case study to contribute to the broader literature on authoritarianism and democratization to suggest how other regimes might do the same. If a peaceful transition to civilian rule is possible in an outlying case such as Myanmar, perhaps the transition process that \textit{did} occur can reveal under what conditions transitions are likely to occur in other similarly durable regimes such as Indonesia\textsuperscript{18} or Nigeria.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{14} As discussed later, indicators of political liberalization include freedom of the press, speech, and assembly; the opening up of civil society; and increased political and civil rights. Such improvements do not, however, automatically lead to democratic consolidation, and are reversible.

\textsuperscript{15} International Trade Centre 2014.

\textsuperscript{16} Latt 2016.

\textsuperscript{17} Martin 2013.

\textsuperscript{18} According to Geddes (1999), Indonesia had a personalist authoritarian regime under Sukarno from 1949-1965 and then a personalist/military/single party regime under Suharto’s New Order regime from 1967-1998.

This project seeks to contribute to the broader political science debate over the durability of authoritarian regimes and their fate after the authoritarian regime ends and a new regime begins.

Conceptual Specifics: Liberalization, Democratization and Civilianization

Before engaging in the literature upon which this project is based, it is necessary to establish the specific definitions of some relevant concepts – specifically liberalization, democratic consolidation, and civilianization. Part of the difficulty in defining and fully understanding these concepts is that they often overlap. For example, civilian supremacy over the military is often cited as a crucial step in the process of democratic consolidation; however, a process of civilianization does not necessarily mean that democratic consolidation will follow. These concepts remain both intertwined and disparate, but defining and treating them separately matters a great deal for the conceptual validity of studies such as this. Table 1 shows how each of these concepts are applicable to the case of Myanmar.

Civilization may be the first of these concepts to show up in regimes which are transitioning from authoritarian rule to something else. Civilianization refers to the shifting of political power from the hands of the military to civilians. This process may consist of different stages, as the military members may wish to see how the civilian leadership can handle the mantle of governance before fully handing over control. Civilianization may eventually lead to further processes of liberalization, and farther down the line, democratic consolidation; as Diamond states, “If the military is to be subordinated to civilian control, then civilian

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institutional capacities to manage and oversee it must be strengthened in the executive and legislative branches.”\textsuperscript{21} The Myanmar case is an example of partial civilianization – while the new government is considered civilian-led, the quota for military members means that the country’s politics are still not fully controlled by civilians.

Table 1: Civilianization, Liberalization and Democratic Consolidation in Myanmar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Present in Myanmar?</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civilianization</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>Government is now civilian-led, but the existence of a quota for military members in parliament shows that the government is not fully civilianized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberalization</td>
<td>Yes, ongoing</td>
<td>Changes such as the opening up of civil society, free speech, freedom of the press – albeit with some caveats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Consolidation</td>
<td>Too early to tell</td>
<td>Institution-building is happening but military still has veto power in the parliament – government is not immune to an authoritarian regression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Liberalization consists of more widespread changes than civilianization but is less “deep” than the process of democratic consolidation. As Diamond describes it, liberal political systems exist where “individual and group liberties are well protected and in which there exist autonomous spheres of civil society and private life, insulated from state control.”\textsuperscript{22} Thus, liberalization is a process in which individual and group liberties (e.g. civil society, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, rights for minority groups) are developed and political institutions

\textsuperscript{21} Diamond 1999, 76.

\textsuperscript{22} Diamond 1999, 3.
which help to limit the overlap of the state with civil society and private life are established. Liberalization may lead into a process of democratic consolidation, but it can also be reversed – while democratic consolidation has occurred when democracy is no longer susceptible to backtracking towards authoritarianism, liberalization has no such guarantee. Many of the indicators of liberalization overlap with those of democratic consolidation and may even precede consolidation. Importantly, however, while many of the features of liberalization and democratic consolidation look similar, the difference between the two is in the reversibility of the process. Liberalization is certainly taking place in Myanmar, but the changes that are occurring are by no means irreversible.

Democratic consolidation, according to Schedler, refers to “the challenge of making new democracies secure, of extending their life expectancy beyond the short term, of making them immune against the threat of authoritarian regression.” Diamond likewise defines democratic consolidation as “the process of achieving broad and deep legitimation, such that all significant political actors, at both the elite and mass levels, believe that the democratic regime is the most right and appropriate for their society, better than any other realistic alternative they can imagine.” He suggests a number of crucial processes that must occur for consolidation to take place, namely democratic deepening, political institutionalization, and regime performance. Democratic deepening consists of increased executive/military accountability, a reduction in barriers to political participation, more freedom for civil society, and the protection for political


and civil rights for all citizens.\textsuperscript{25} Political institutionalization strengthens the rules of democracy in order to promote trust and cooperation between political actors.\textsuperscript{26} Finally, the performance of the government will contribute to beliefs about its legitimacy.\textsuperscript{27}

As Schedler notes, Robert Dahl’s criteria for whether a country can be considered a democracy are the most widely-used – these include civil and political rights as well as fair, competitive, and inclusive elections.\textsuperscript{28} A country which achieves these criteria can be considered a liberal democracy, but the road to that status is often fraught for countries which are new to democratic practices. Schedler suggests the terms “electoral democracies” for those which hold inclusive, fair, and competitive elections but fall short of the political and civil freedoms protected in liberal democracies, as well as “advanced democracies” which may possess even more positive democratic traits than what liberal democracies have achieved.\textsuperscript{29}

Many countries fall somewhere in between the extremes of authoritarianism on one end of the spectrum and advanced democracy on the other. The process of democratization, thus, consists of a state’s attempts to move away from authoritarianism and towards liberal or advanced democracy. This process often takes place \textit{after} political liberalization or civilianization attempts, as these changes set the stage for the larger political shifts necessary to

\textsuperscript{25} Diamond 1999, 75.
\textsuperscript{26} Diamond 1999, 75.
\textsuperscript{27} Diamond 1999, 76.
\textsuperscript{28} Dahl in Schedler 1998, 92.
\textsuperscript{29} Schedler 1998, 93.
establish democratic consolidation. The process of democratization is not, however, guaranteed by liberalization or civilianization efforts. In the case of Myanmar, it is too early to tell if the country is starting a process of democratization, and many of the political changes which may indicate such a process, such as democratic institution building are still reversible. Democratic consolidation is a long process, and Myanmar’s fledgling civilian-led government is still not immune to the possibility of authoritarian regression.

Literature Review

Although authoritarian transitions are popular and widely-studied subjects within political science, the explanations provided by existing literature do not satisfactorily answer the research question for this study, “What conditions were necessary and sufficient for Myanmar’s military regime to honor the results of free and fair elections?” In particular, the factors most often cited in the literature as necessary and/or sufficient for a successful transition to civilian rule (features inherent to specific regimes types, professionalization of the military, civil society opposition, international pressure, and splits within the military hardliners and soft-liners) do not explain the variation between Myanmar’s failed transition in 1990 and the ongoing transition which started in 2010. Other variables (institutional design and regime confidence) appear to

30 Schedler 1998, 100.

31 See Appendix A for a timeline of events in Myanmar during 1948-2015, which provides some detail as to the political changes and the evolution of political liberalization in the country. Although the military has retained some political influence for themselves, such as a 25% quota for military members in parliament, this project seeks to explain the change in political liberalization from the non-transition in 1988-1990 to the ongoing transition in the 2011-2015
have played a role in the Myanmar case, but are not sufficient on their own to explain the variation in political liberalization between the two time periods. Table 2 shows which factors are present or applicable for the case of Myanmar.

Features of Specific Regime Types

Two common factors explored in the existing authoritarianism literature are the structure and features inherent to specific regime types. According to this strain of literature, much of the variation in the durability and behavior of authoritarian regimes can be explained by what type of regime it is: personalist (often led by a strongman dictator, such as Suharto in Indonesia); single-party (such as the Communist Party in Vietnam); and military regimes (as seen in Myanmar). However, the argument that regime type alone is the sole or main explanatory factor for transitions to civilian regimes does not explain variation among cases that belong to the same category. Myanmar is often treated as an outlying case of an extremely durable military regime, since the Tatmadaw’s influence in Burmese politics lasted many decades past the average military regime.

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period. Such efforts to protect their voice in parliament and other interests such as financial investments are not unique to Myanmar – indeed, many authoritarian regimes facing a transition away from power make an effort to leave behind some institutional protections. For instance, before stepping down from power in Chile, Pinochet retained, among many other deals, the right to name nine members of his choice to the senate; in Poland, the Communist Party was guaranteed 35% of seats in parliament and their allies were granted an additional 30% of seats. As Przeworski (1991) writes, “Extrications thus leave institutional traces” (78). Although some may assert that such a transition is insincere because of the military’s continued role in politics, the focus for this project is on the shifts that took place that can explain why the military allowed and abided by free and fair elections in which a civilian government won the majority of seats.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Present?</th>
<th>Necessary/Sufficient to Explain Temporal Variation?</th>
<th>Relevant Historical Detail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Features inherent to specific regime types</td>
<td>Yes – during all periods</td>
<td>No - the features of the regime did not change during the different time periods</td>
<td>Myanmar's <em>Tatmadaw</em> has exhibited typical behavior expected from a military regime (e.g. citing security concerns for intervention, exhibiting &quot;Guardian&quot; attributes, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalization of the military</td>
<td>Somewhat – training efforts were sporadic in the 1988-2002 period and were curtailed during the 2003-2010 period.</td>
<td>No - training in countries that would arguably instill democratic values like the US, UK and Australia during the 1980s failed to lead to a transition in the 1988-2002 time period</td>
<td>The Tatmadaw sent military officers abroad for training - this number fluctuated and the locations of training changed. Additionally, practices such as the rape of women in ethnic minority areas by military members also calls into question the professionalism of the Tatmadaw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil society opposition</td>
<td>Yes – Took place in first and second time periods</td>
<td>Necessary but not sufficient - protests in 1988 failed to produce a transition during the following elections.</td>
<td>Civil society opposition/protests against the military regime occurred in 1988 as well as 1996 and 2007, but the 1990 elections (after the massive 1988 protests) failed to produce a transition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International pressure</td>
<td>Yes – during first two time periods, but pressure drastically reduced in the third time period (2011-2015)</td>
<td>Necessary but not sufficient – economic sanctions, arms sanctions, and diplomatic measures by the international community failed to change the regime</td>
<td>There was a wide variety of efforts that the international community made to pressure the Burmese regime, including sanctions and the severing of diplomatic relations in the wake of the 1988 crackdown. During the Obama Administration, punitive measures were reduced after the 2011 elections, and diplomatic relations were reinvigorated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued on following page)
Table 2 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Present?</th>
<th>Necessary/Sufficient to Explain Temporal Variation?</th>
<th>Relevant Historical Detail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Splits between military/party hardliners and soft-liners</td>
<td>Yes - during all time periods</td>
<td>Necessary but not sufficient - splits took place at many times throughout Myanmar's history, including during times of non-transition.</td>
<td>Splits took place during the AFPFL period of 1948-1958 as well as during the interim (2003-2010) period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional design</td>
<td>Yes (starting 2003-2010, absent beforehand)</td>
<td>Necessary but not sufficient - institutional protections gave confidence to regime</td>
<td>The creation of a constitution, the Roadmap to Democracy, and protections for the military were established.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continued political role of military after transition</td>
<td>Yes (starting 2003-2010, not applicable beforehand)</td>
<td>Necessary but not sufficient - must have been guaranteed by institutions and led to confidence</td>
<td>25% quota in parliament built into constitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regime confidence</td>
<td>Yes (starting 2003-2010, absent beforehand)</td>
<td>Necessary and sufficient - could only be established by institutional design that guaranteed the military would have a continued role in politics and protected their interests</td>
<td>Allowing free and fair general elections in 2015 indicated that the military had stability and immunity confidence - even if they couldn't win elections, their role in politics and their interests were protected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political liberalization</td>
<td>Yes (starting 2011-2015, absent beforehand)</td>
<td>Took place as a result of a confluence of factors - most importantly, institution-building and confidence</td>
<td>Efforts such as the opening up of civil society, free speech, freedom of the press – albeit with some caveats</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additionally, relying on regime type as a heuristic for explaining the occurrence of transitions is insufficient to explain cases like Myanmar, in which there was a failed transition during one period and then a successful transition later. Since both periods took place under military rule, clearly there are factors other than regime type that explain the behavior of Myanmar’s regime.

According to the regime type literature, military regimes show a number of unique features that explain their behavior. The nature of military regimes means they are particularly concerned with state security, which explains why they might have intervened in politics in the first place. Linz and Stepan argue that military regimes share one characteristic that is potentially favorable to democratic transitions. Because the military officers consider themselves to be a permanent part of the state apparatus, they have an enduring interest in the well-being of the state. This means that the military may allow rule to return to the hands of civilians.

Part of the difficulty in literature which highlights regime type as the main explanatory variable for understanding the behavior of regimes is the possibility for conflating concepts. Debates within this body of literature have swirled around which regime types deserve to be considered unique, when to consider a state a hybrid regime, and whether certain features of regimes are shared among different regime types. Geddes asserts that different types of authoritarian regimes react differently when their power is challenged; Personalist regimes cling to power; single-party regimes attempt to co-opt the opposition; and military regimes tend to


33 Linz and Stepan 1996.

34 Geddes 1999.
split. "This argument implies that military regimes are more likely to negotiate their own withdrawal and to democratize."35

In Geddes’s view, the splits in militaries often fracture along the lines of rivalries and relationships of officer corps, political parties, or cliques surrounding the military leader(s). However, she admits that "most professional soldiers place a higher value on the survival and efficacy of the military itself than on anything else."36 Because of the inherent nature of military regimes that leads to this fracturing, military regimes are more likely than other kinds of authoritarian regimes to both cooperate in regime transition and to democratize.

Military regimes are less likely to end in coups, popular uprising, insurgency, rebellion or assassination than other forms of authoritarianism. Military regimes tend to be followed by elected governments, though the democracies that follow them are not necessarily stable or long-lived.37

Clearly, Myanmar’s status as a military regime for six decades makes it an outlier in the universe of cases of short-lived military regimes, and the abovementioned features are also insufficient to explain the variation in the Burmese case between 1988-1990 and 2011-2015.

35 Geddes 1999, i.
36 Geddes 1999, 11.
37 Geddes 1999, 49.
One common reason that military regimes are treated differently from personalist, single-party, or monarchic regimes is the idea that militaries require some level of professionalization for their members. The logic behind this argument is that the hierarchical nature and professional training required by militaries means that military members see their role in politics differently from other authoritarian regimes that seize power. In terms of Nordlinger’s\textsuperscript{38} typology, professionalization within military regimes is believed to incline military members more toward the guardian or moderator types, since they have been trained to understand the role of the military with relation to governance and often see themselves as “protectors” of civilian rule. The levels of professionalization can, however, certainly vary between different militaries. Croissant\textsuperscript{39} identifies the concept of “democratic professionalism” or ideological coherence as a vital factor for the enforcement of civilian control over the military. He notes that the two necessary elements to reestablish civilian rule over the military are 1) direct retreat of the military from rule, which he calls "a necessary condition for the transition from authoritarian rule to democracy"\textsuperscript{40} and 2) institutionalization of civilian control and neutralization of the military's political power.

\textsuperscript{38} Nordlinger 1977.

\textsuperscript{39} Croissant 2004.

\textsuperscript{40} Croissant 2004, 359.
For the Myanmar case, however, professionalization is not a sufficient explanation for the variation between the two time periods in question. In their discussion of Myanmar’s transition, Croissant and Kamerling argue that “the high degree of professionalization of the Burmese military creates the incentive to institutionalize power-sharing among the ruling elite.”\textsuperscript{41} The mechanism behind this explanation is that highly-professional militaries suffer from fewer coup attempts than less professional militaries, because militaries that focus on training and have a strict hierarchical chain of command are less likely to have military members go rogue and risk the consequences of their disobedience. Croissant and Kamerling point to the empirical fact that during 50 years of military rule, Myanmar only experienced two coups d'état (in 1962 and 1988). Thus, the current liberalization process in Myanmar is part of a survival strategy for the Tatmadaw.\textsuperscript{42}

Within the Tatmadaw, however, professionalization is an insufficient variable to fully explain why civilianization failed in 1990 but succeeded later. Maung Aung Myoe\textsuperscript{43} details military training and officer education in Myanmar, which experienced some upheaval in the 1980s. Starting in 1952, the Tatmadaw began sending military members broad for training programs, and new facilities such as the Burma Army Non-Commissioned Officers School, the Burma Army Combat Forces School, the Defence Services Academy, and the National Defence

\textsuperscript{41} Croissant and Kamerling 2013, 105.

\textsuperscript{42} Croissant and Kamerling 2013, 112.

\textsuperscript{43} Maung Aung Myoe 2009.
College were all opened in the mid- to late-1950s.\textsuperscript{44} “Between 1948 and 1962, a total of 1,070 officers and those of 782 other ranks were sent abroad [for military training]. However, between 1963 and 1989, only 415 officers and eighty-three of those other ranks were sent.”\textsuperscript{45} During the mid-1980s, the Tatmadaw ramped up efforts to modernize and expand its forces, which included upgrading existing training schools and opening new ones as well as pushing to send more Tatmadaw officers to foreign training schools, an effort that was obviously made more difficult by the events of 1988. “After the military takeover of the state in September 1988, the places in the military training schools of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia were lost due to political developments in Myanmar and the subsequent termination of defence cooperation programs.”\textsuperscript{46}

This, however, did not mean that training and professionalization programs ceased after 1988. Instead, the Tatmadaw sent 389 army members, 98 navy personnel and 455 air force officers to military training schools in Malaysia, Singapore, India, Pakistan, and the People’s Republic of China between 1990 and 1999.\textsuperscript{47} Between 1990 and 2005, 665 Tatmadaw officers and 249 members of other ranks were sent to China, and since 2000, over 1,500 Tatmadaw officers have gone to Russia.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{44} Maung Aung Myoe 2009, 137.

\textsuperscript{45} Maung Aung Myoe 2009, 138-139.

\textsuperscript{46} Maung Aung Myoe 2009, 139.

\textsuperscript{47} Maung Aung Myoe 2009, 139.

\textsuperscript{48} Maung Aung Myoe 2009, 139.
This raises a number of questions about whether professionalization is a satisfactory explanatory variable for the variation in the Tatmadaw’s behavior in 1988-1990 versus 2011-2015. If professionalization was a missing factor in 1988, that can explain why a transition to civilian rule failed and what changed between professionalization attempts in the two different time periods. Certainly, the number of officers sent abroad dropped in the 1963-1988 period when compared to the earlier 1948-1962 period. However, if higher rates of military members being sent abroad for training are thought to lead to a more professionalized and democratically-minded military, this certainly does not explain the military coup that occurred at the end of the 1948-1962 period. Another possible argument is that where the military training took place makes a difference in professionalization. If military members were no longer sent to the U.S., the U.K., and Australia and were instead sent to military schools in states with less democratic consolidation, one might argue that respect for civilian rule, which is often cited as part of military professionalization in this realm of literature, would not be part of the curriculum in more autocratic states. This argument, however, fails to explain the fact that before the military took control in 1988, they were utilizing professionalization training from these aforementioned democratic countries that, nonetheless, ended in a military coup. For professionalization to be a sufficient factor to explain why a transition to civilian rule failed in 1988-1990 but succeeded later, there would need to be either a demonstrable increase in the numbers of military members being sent abroad for training or a shift in the domestic military training agenda toward supporting civilian rule. Professionalization is thus insufficient for explaining the variation in the Myanmar case.
Civil Opposition/Support

Civil opposition against or support for the regime is another common factor pointed to in the literature on authoritarianism as an explanation for when regime transitions occur. Support for authoritarian regimes can provide resources or shield the regime from opposition. For instance, Slater describes “protection pacts” in which elites (such as state officials, economic elites, communal elites, and even the middle class) give resources to the authoritarian state to bolster the state and prevent the threat of a coup that would threaten their interests.⁴⁹ He finds three different pathways that nations have taken based on those categories and on the existence of protection pacts: domination, in the case of Malaysia and Singapore; fragmentation in Thailand, the Philippines, and South Vietnam; and militarization in Burma and Indonesia.⁵⁰ His work shows that civilian support for authoritarian regimes, whether through protection pacts or supporting coalitions, can be extremely influential on a regime’s decision to withdraw from power or in propping up a regime which is resisting a transition.

On the other side of the same coin is the influence of civil opposition against authoritarian regimes. Many authors point to strong civilian opposition as a necessary variable for changing the costs and benefits of rule. While being in power has many advantages, strong opposition that threatens negative outcomes if authoritarianism continues may lead the military to make a calculated retreat from rule on their own terms. Aspinall writes that "the urban unrest

⁴⁹ Slater 2010, 5.

⁵⁰ Slater 2010.
and the student mobilizations performed a fundamental role of opposition: raising the costs of rule."^{51} Hedman suggests that four conditions have shaped the unique and varied nature of civil society in the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia: “the nature of regimes, the constellation of classes, the legacies of the Left, and the institutions of civil religion.”^{52} Both Aspinall and Hedman emphasize the role of civil society opposition as an external factor influencing non-democratic regimes to consider stepping down from power. Such opposition may be one factor that plays into the cost-benefit analysis of regimes – if opposition movements or civil society pressure make life difficult for a regime, it may prompt the regime to make minute changes to keep civil society leaders happy, which then leads into larger changes down the road. Lee takes a more cautious approach in his study of the influence of popular protests in Southeast Asian military regimes, stating, “Social movements can lead to transitions from authoritarian rule, but only when these mass movements work together with other political forces.”^{53} To Lee, civil opposition needs to be partnered with high levels of personalism within the regime for protests to lead to transitions because highly personalistic authoritarian regimes (such as Indonesia and the Philippines) create more dissatisfaction within the military, making military members more likely to defect when mass protests occurred. On the other extreme, nonpersonalistic forms of authoritarian rule (as seen in China and Burma) are organized around power-sharing institutions that mitigate personalism and make them more resistant to political

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^{51} Aspinall 2005, 234.

^{52} Hedman 2001, 925.

^{53} Lee 2015, 18.
challenges. In Lee’s view, people power movements in authoritarian regimes need the support of defectors from the armed forces to succeed in overthrowing the regime, and defection from members of the armed forces is more likely when those military members are dissatisfied with the level of personalism within the regime.54 This can be seen in the case of Burma, in which popular protests in 1988 and elections in 1990 failed to liberalize the state. But when the military was able to weaken and co-opt the opposition by creating a “disciplined democracy” in 2010, a slow process of transition began to take place.55

Civil opposition on its own was not enough for a transition in Myanmar in 1988-1990, but when matched with other factors (splits within the military, institutionalization, and regime confidence), the costs and benefits calculation for the Tatmadaw changed. While domestic unrest and civil society pressure have often been part of the narrative for authoritarian regimes that eventually transitioned to civilian rule, I suggest that protests or domestic opposition is more likely to cause a regime to make smaller, more manageable decisions, such as holding low-stakes elections in an effort to placate their challengers without compromising their power rather than transitioning straight to a civilian-led democracy. This may help explain why widespread protests in 1988 led to an election in 1990, but when the military were dissatisfied with the results of said election, they annulled it. Lee’s discussion of cases of military regimes in Southeast Asia56 views successful transitions as requiring two necessary factors: popular protests

54 Lee 2015, 188-189.
55 Jones 2014, 780.
56 Lee 2015.
act as a catalyst for change, but that spark will only ignite if there are dissatisfied military members willing to support the opposition. Splits within the military itself is another factor that, while not sufficient, may be necessary for explaining the Myanmar case.

Military Cohesion/Splits Between Hard-Liners and Soft-Liners

Cohesiveness of the authoritarian regime is another commonly cited factor for determining the likelihood of civilianization and/or political liberalization. Military regimes are generally considered to have more inherent cohesiveness than other authoritarian regime types because of professionalization training and the existence of a shared corporate goal or bond. However, splits between hardliners and soft-liners do happen and are often seen as a critical juncture or breaking point for a military regime that caves in to a democratic transition. Stepan suggests that "splits in the state apparatus are often a precondition for the erosion of an authoritarian regime." Stepan’s estimation, shifts in military professionalism and the role of civil and political society in monitoring and controlling the military are crucial during a transition to civilian rule. He notes that a common antecedent variable for the failure of a military regime is the split in the state apparatus and that changes in military professionalism as well as the role of civil society in monitoring and controlling the military are vital for transitions. Haggard and Kaufman agree that “except in cases of military defeat and foreign

occupation, the proximate cause for the exit of authoritarian regimes can almost always be found in splits within this elite.”

Military cohesion and splits between different factions within the military have certainly been common themes in the Tatmadaw’s modern history. Personality clashes and personnel changes have played a role during a number of Myanmar’s transition periods. For instance, during Myanmar’s constitutional period from 1948-1958, infighting within the governing Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League (AFPFL) party led the AFPFL to break into two sections. When paired with other vulnerabilities such as civil war, general strikes, and economic issues, this split led U Nu to voluntarily hand power to General Ne Win in 1958. Although Ne Win gave power back to U Nu 18 months later, these issues continued, leading to the military coup of 1962. Callahan’s research on the development of the Tatmadaw in Myanmar showed that the military treated civilians as potential enemies of the state. The development of an “us vs. them” mentality meant that the Burmese Tatmadaw was especially cohesive and therefore capable of withstanding challenges to their power.

More recently, splits between hardline supporters of General Than Shwe and more moderate military members during the interim (2003-2010) were often cited as a point of


60 Silverstein 1977.

61 The question of whether said coup was voluntary is up for debate. While it did not occur by force, some suggest that U Nu handed over power under the pretext that a fully-blown coup d’état would ruin the reputation of the nation.

weakness for the Tatmadaw. Even as recently as 2015, the ousting of U Shwe Mann, the chairman of the USDP and the former speaker of parliament, has commonly been viewed as a result of a split between supporters of President Thein Sein and those who supported U Shwe Mann to succeed him.

It appears that military cohesion and splits within the Tatmadaw have had some influence on the likelihood of transitions. However, like professionalization and civil opposition, this factor is not sufficient on its own to explain the variation in regime outcomes between 1988-1990 and 2011-2015. Military cohesion was a factor widely mentioned in scholarship focusing on the non-transition of 1988. Perhaps splits between different military factions can explain why the Tatmadaw gave in to widespread civilian pressure to hold elections in 1990, but the faction supporting elections was not strong enough to prevent the Tatmadaw from annulling the results. This project will treat splits within the military as a necessary, but not sufficient, factor for explaining the initiation of transitions, which may lead to transition when paired with other necessary factors. O’Donnell and Schmitter point to the overlapping of splits within the regime and political liberalization, going so far as to assert that there have been no transitions from authoritarian rule whose beginning was not based in a cleavage between hard-liners and soft-liners within the regime. Such splits can lead to negotiated pacts in which soft-liners within the regime who have a vested interest in controlling the outcome of the transition work with the

63 Aung Zaw 2003a.

64 South China Morning Post 2016.

65 O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986.
opposition form “an agreement among a select set of actors which seeks to define…rules governing the exercise of power on the basis of mutual guarantees for the ‘vital interests’ of those entering into it.”

The next body of literature will examine this process of political liberalization, which appears to be ongoing in Myanmar.

**Political Liberalization**

Political liberalization is a process of gradual democratic development in formerly authoritarian or nondemocratic regimes. O’Donnell and Schmitter write that liberalization often occurs in authoritarian regimes when autocratic rulers believe that allowing some freedoms will relieve opposition pressure *without* altering the regime’s authority. This so-called “tutelary democracy” can start a snowball effect, leading to a continuation of the democratization process beyond what the autocratic leaders had initially planned. According to them,

> The process of redefining and extending rights we have labeled “liberalization.” It is indicative of the beginning of the transition that its emergence triggers a number of (often unintended) consequences which play an important role in ultimately determining the scope and extension of that process. By liberalization we mean the process of making effective certain rights that protect both individuals and social groups from arbitrary or illegal acts committed by the state or third parties.

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69 O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 7.
Although leaders will try to uphold restrictions on individuals and groups in the resulting “limited democracy,” Once “some individuals and collective rights have been granted, it becomes increasingly difficult to justify withholding others. Moreover, as liberalization advances, so does the strength of demands for democratization.” Indeed, political liberalization and political democratization tend to be conflated, but do not necessarily always occur concurrently or in tandem. Brynen, Korany and Noble differentiate between them by describing political liberalization as the expansion of civil and political liberties which allows citizens to engage freely in political discourse and pursue common interests, as opposed to political democratization, which expands political participation and gives citizens real influence over public policy. In the Burmese case, as with many cases in the political liberalization literature, it appears that liberalization blazes the trail upon which democratization might follow – but such a process is by no means guaranteed or irreversible.

There is some debate in the literature over whether political liberalization is generally initiated by political leaders. Samuel Huntington argued in *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* that the process of liberalization is initiated by authoritarian elites and that only after the authoritarian leaders begin the process of transformation can negotiations between the authoritarian government and opposition leaders take place, ultimately leading to either peaceful removal or the overthrow of the authoritarian regime. Linz and Stepan, focusing

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70 O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 10.

71 Brynen, Korany and Noble 1995, 3.

72 Huntington 1991.
on the factors of splits within the military and civilian opposition, emphasize the importance of pacted transitions, which are useful in limiting hard-liners in both camps (authoritarian regime and civilian opposition).

According to them, "Transitions are frequently seen as involving a pact between the regime moderates and the opposition moderates who are both able to 'contain' their respective hard-liners." Political liberalization has been observed in cases such as Brazil’s evolution between 1974 and 1985, in which “the process of liberalization proceeded largely within the control of an essentially military regime increasingly desirous of ridding itself of most of its political power, but still afraid of the consequences of genuinely competitive and responsive civilian governance.” In Brazil, the factors that led to this process appear to have been an economic decline, a consensus within the military leadership, a lack of personalism, and the possible future threat of splits within the military, quite similar to the factors that show up in Myanmar. These two cases appear to follow similar political liberalization paths.

It appears that a number of these factors (a “tutelary” democracy followed by a snowballing effect, a pacted transition prompted by splits in the military, and civilian opposition) took place in the Myanmar case. The interim period of 2003-2010 appears to have begun as a tutelary democracy as described by O’Donnell and Schmitter, wherein the regime could

73 Linz and Stepan 1996.

74 Linz and Stepan 1996, 61.

75 Selcher 1986, 1.

76 Selcher 1986, 3.

77 O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986.
exercise new democratic practices without giving up its power right away. This newfound liberalization, however, does not mean that the military ceased its influence in politics. Many authors in the regime transitions literature point out the continuing role of militaries in politics after a transition to civilian rule, and this is no different in Myanmar.

**Continued Political Role of Military after the Transition**

Empirically, militaries that seized political control are unlikely to quickly hand back power, even if a process of political liberalization is underway. While political liberalization does not necessarily include civilianization, some aspects of political liberalization (such as freedom of the press, development of civil society, and the release of political prisoners) may still challenge the security of a military which wishes to remain politically involved. In O’Donnell and Schmitter’s discussion of tutelary democracy, their description of political liberalization hinges on the former regime continuing to play an influential or guiding role because the transition itself was initiated by the regime in order to relieve opposition pressure.78 Huntington notes that voluntary withdrawals from politics may not mean that an outgoing military regime completely leaves politics.79 He writes that “where military governments have given up power more or less voluntarily, those militaries will continue to have substantial

78 O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986.

79 Huntington 1996.
influence in their society after their withdrawal from power. Notable examples are Turkey, South Korea, Nicaragua, Brazil, and Chile.”

Indeed, the promise (or hint) of a continued role in politics can be seen as a benefit to military regimes that are concerned about the state of the nation if they withdraw entirely from politics, especially when considering the common view militaries have of their role as the protector of the nation and as a permanent part of the state apparatus.

Although political liberalization might also include efforts toward democratization, such an outcome is not guaranteed. Authoritarian states can create electoral institutions or other features of democratic regimes without fully transitioning to democracy. Case argues that there is an alternative outcome in some electoral authoritarian regimes; rather than either sustaining or subverting the regime, “electoral authoritarianism neither persists nor democratizes but instead descends into harder forms of authoritarian rule. In this trajectory, elites lose control over electoral processes, but not state power, thus prompting them to change their regime, but not to democratize.”

More recently, Geddes, Wright and Frantz discussed the possible outcomes when authoritarian leaders lose power: 1) a member of the incumbent group (such as the military or party) replaces him, and the regime persists; 2) democratic leaders replace the incumbent regime; or 3) a new authoritarian regime replaces the incumbent regime. In their dataset of 280 autocratic regimes that existed between 1946 and 2010, the authors found that only 45% of

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81 Linz and Stepan 1996.

82 Case 2011, 439.
leadership changes in authoritarian regimes actually led to a regime change and more than half of regime changes were merely transitions from one autocracy to another. As found in Geddes’s previous work, military regimes were the only regimes more likely to experience non-coerced (or cooperative) transitions than coerced transitions and were the only type of autocracy more likely to transition to democracy than a subsequent autocracy. In their discussion of Myanmar’s transition, Croissant and Kamerling argue that “the high degree of professionalization of the Burmese military creates the incentive to institutionalize power-sharing among the ruling elite” as an intentional survival strategy. If political liberalization is a survival strategy for the Tatmadaw, this raises the question of why the Tatmadaw (and other militaries in formerly authoritarian regimes) play a continued role in politics and at what point they deem it safe to withdraw more fully from politics (if ever). The next set of authors discusses confidence as a crucial variable for understanding how militaries and former military regimes see the new civilian regime and their role in it.

Confidence

Military confidence can refer to many things. After a military regime hands back political power to civilians, military members have concerns about whether they will face punishments

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83 Geddes, Wright and Frantz 2014, 1.


85 Croissant and Kamerling 2013, 105.
for crimes or abuses. The military as an institution may wish to protect their economic or corporate interests. Additionally, because of their traditional role of protectors of the nation, militaries are generally concerned with the ability of civilian regimes to deal with security concerns that presumably prompted a military coup in the first place. Thus, transitions to civilian rule often mean great insecurity and concern for militaries:

New democratic leaders upon coming to power often enact policies designed to reduce the military’s domestic influence. In addition to cuts in the military budget, such actions include curtailment of the military’s autonomous economic activities, removal of military elites from civilian positions, forced retirement of high-ranking officers, and prosecution of military officials for human rights abuses and criminal activities.  

If confidence in the success of the transition (with regard to this varied issues) is necessary for a case such as Myanmar, what sorts of factors feed into military confidence? The earlier section on political liberalization pointed to pacted transitions as an important factor for limiting hard-liners on both sides. As Linz and Stepan argue, if both the military and civilian opposition participate in the transition process and negotiate the terms, they may build confidence in the process.  

Albertus and Menaldo agree, writing:

Although there is frequently pressure from below for political reform, concrete steps toward democracy, such as scheduling elections and relinquishing control over the security apparatus, are often initiated by elites. Moreover, a democratic transition is more likely if the elite manage to negotiate constitutional frameworks that continue to protect their interests after they exit or if they can increase the odds that they continue to hold power under democracy by being elected to office.

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87 Linz and Stepan 1996.

Additionally, Silva argues that military cooperation in regime transition is an important factor for improving civilian-military relations and that "the best way to obtain the military's subordination is by cooperation with strong civilian leadership in strategic matters." He also notes that there is a difference between "subordination" of the military to the new civilian government and "engagement" with the military. Perhaps a strategy using pacted transitions, wherein both groups get a say in the transition and in the new regime, are more successful than transitions in which the opposition seeks to subordinate the former authoritarian regime because the cooperation between the two groups builds confidence in a successful outcome.

Slater and Wong also discuss the concept of how confidence and timing play a role in regime transitions wherein the military negotiates from a position of strength rather than weakness. According to them, such transitions take place in three steps. First, regimes will only undertake democratization once they have sufficient victory confidence and stability confidence. Next, there must be some signal to the ruling party that their power is waning. Finally, regime leaders must allow democratic reforms. “Specifically, the ruling party will most likely concede democracy when it retains solid prospects to win majority support in a democratic election,

89 Silva 2002, 378.


91 Slater and Wong 2013.

92 Slater and Wong 2013, 718.
partly thanks to authoritarian legacies of malapportionment.”

They also write about a “bittersweet spot,” a critical juncture in which regimes are facing declining capacity but an increasing likelihood to concede democratic reforms. In a related piece, Slater describes “victory confidence” as the regime believing it can continue to hold onto power by winning elections, “even under fully democratic conditions.” As he notes, it is likely that the Tatmadaw was slowly building its victory confidence during the unfree elections in 2010 before allowing more competitive by-elections in 2012. “Stability confidence” is the expectation that political stability will continue under democratic conditions (a particular concern for military regimes that often cite “stability” as their prime reason for interfering in politics in the first place), and “immunity confidence” is the belief that even if the regime is removed from office, the members will not face retribution for past crimes. According to him, the current democratization process in Myanmar is inherently fragile because it rests on the current regime’s confidence that democratization will produce neither serious instability nor even its own decisive defeat. Events that shake the Tatmadaw’s ‘victory confidence’ and ‘stability confidence should thus pose the greatest risk that reforms will be stalled or reversed.

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93 Slater and Wong 2013, 720.
94 Slater and Wong 2013, 720.
95 Slater and Wong 2013, 720.
96 Slater 2014, 178.
97 Slater 2014, 179.
98 Slater 2014, 171.
Such concerns are crucial for an authoritarian regime to allow a civilianization of politics. For militaries such as the Tatmadaw to build confidence in such a transition, there is one more crucial variable that needs to be examined – institutional design.

**Institutional Design**

Under what conditions do authoritarian regimes feel comfortable enough to hold *competitive* elections? Is it a conscious choice on the part of the regime leaders, or is it more of a slippery slope phenomenon wherein once they start down the path of paying lip service to liberalization, they must continue or risk losing legitimacy and becoming vulnerable to a coercive takeover? One factor discussed and debated at length in the regime transition literature that might answer these questions is institutional design, or the development of democratic political institutions as both a confidence-building measure and as a barrier against the regime backtracking away from civilian rule. Institutional design\(^99\) is a phrase which refers to the practice of creating democratic institutions (more specifically, what *types* of institutions? For

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\(^99\) Olsen (1997) suggests that certain factors make institutional design more likely: when those who are in the position to establish institutions (such as the military) take advantage of temporary favorable circumstances and shifting public opinion; when the designers are able to stabilize attention over extended periods of time; and when the institutional design does not take place as a one-time massive change, but instead triggers a series of changes and processes that affect the new institutions (203). Other research on institutional design suggests that the *type* of institutions that are created (such as presidential vs. parliamentary systems) affect democratic outcomes in democratizing countries (Markowski 2006).
what purpose? In what order?) in states that are undergoing some type of political transition. As Przeworski describes it,

Some institutions under certain conditions offer to the relevant political forces a prospect of eventually advancing their interests that is sufficient to incite them to comply with immediately unfavorable outcomes. Political forces comply with present defeats because they believe that the institutional framework that organizes the democratic competition will permit them to advance their interests in the future.100

Such is the case in Myanmar and exploring the timing and factors that led to the Tatmadaw making this decision will provide more information about a case that will add valuable insight to the research on institutional design and political liberalization.

It appears that the development of institutional design is a crucial step for political liberalization to succeed. Slater highlights the importance of “competitive elections amid robust mass mobilization as a spur for state-building efforts.”101 He found that competitive elections facilitated state-building in Southeast Asia when they helped form stronger political parties, encouraged a state commitment to citizen registration, or imposed some form of centralized authority over strongmen.102 This indicates that rather than creating a direct challenge to the interests of a regime, managed elections or other forms of proving institutional legitimacy can go a long way to reinforcing and protecting the interests of authoritarian rule. As seen in the imperfect elections held in Myanmar in 2010 and 2012, the process of regime transition is

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100 Przeworski 1991, 19.

101 Slater 2008, 254, emphasis in original.

102 Slater 2008, 268.
usually messy and regimes that are transitioning from authoritarianism may go through periods of semi-authoritarian or competitive authoritarian features. Geddes hypothesized that there might be a strategic reason for such competitive authoritarian regimes to allow elections, suggesting that “dictators spend scarce resources on parties and elections, despite the risk of doing so, because they help to solve intra-regime conflicts that might otherwise end their own rule and possibly destabilize the regime as well.” Far from being a true electoral competition, elections in authoritarian regimes can actually help prolong the regime’s survival. Geddes found that nearly all single-party regimes and half of personalist regimes hold regular national elections, and, on average, authoritarian regimes that hold elections lasted longer than those who do not. This shows that if autocratic regimes are able to manage forms of political contention, such as a closely monitored and often manipulated elections, they are better able to withstand challenges from their citizens. However, as the political liberalization literature suggests, these institutions may develop beyond the military’s control, leading to an unexpected liberalization process.

Concluding Remarks on the Literature

This section described the many different variables commonly cited as crucial for explaining transitions from military regimes to civilian regimes. Research on features specific to military regimes often implies that military regimes tend to be short-lasting and result in the

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103 Geddes 2006, 3.

104 Geddes 2006, 6.
military negotiating its own transition due to its hierarchical nature and the extensive training required. One of those military-specific features is professionalization. Civil society opposition is a common catalyst for effecting change in all types of authoritarian regimes. Cohesion within the ruling regime is considered important for regime durability, and splits between hard- and soft-liners can often portend a transition. The development of institutional design is a crucial part of political liberalization, and this process generally feeds into the confidence of the former regime in future outcomes.

In the case of Myanmar, some of these variables are more relevant than others, and there are significant interactive effects to consider. In particular, the specific features of military regimes and military professionalization are not sufficient independent variables for explaining the variation in the Tatmadaw’s decision about whether to honor the results of free and fair elections during three different time periods (1988-2002, 2003-2010, and 2011-2015) because these factors stayed relatively constant throughout these time periods. These two variables certainly interact with each other in that professionalization is considered one of the features inherent to military regimes. However, the surprising durability of Myanmar’s military regime calls into question its categorization as a typical military regime, and high levels of professionalization throughout the time periods in question leads one to question whether these variables are helpful in explaining the Myanmar case.

Civil opposition and military cohesion are variables that seem to have a middling-amount of utility in explaining this case. Domestic protests leading to international furor took place in 1988, 1996, and 2007 and may serve as a catalyst for elections as a panacea the regime could use to distract or deflect attention away from its rule. Such protests do not, however, appear to be
sufficient for explaining when and why the regime would uphold the results of elections, or whether the elections in question were free and fair (as in 1990) or not (as in 2010). Additionally, while the 1988 protests appear to have been a driving reason for the military to hold the 1990 elections, the protests in 2007 did not start the transition process during the interim time period since the Roadmap to Democracy had already been announced in 2003. Similarly, military cohesion or splits within the military apparatus appear to have played a role in all three time periods. While cohesion and/or splits may serve as a catalyst for change, much like civil opposition, it does not appear that military cohesion or splits are sufficient for explaining variation in regime outcomes in Myanmar. Civil opposition and splits within the military also appear to have interactive effects because both serve as flashpoints or crises within the regime that may prompt action (such as holding elections); however, they are insufficient for that action to be lasting.

The final group of interactive variables appears to be the most relevant for this case. The most important of these is institutional design. The development of political institutions, particularly electoral and party institutions, is crucial for the creation of a more durable and consolidated civilian/democratic regime. Without such institutions, the military regime would have little confidence in what lay in store when they returned to the barracks. By developing institutions (such as a constitution, new electoral laws, etc.), the Tatmadaw could build confidence within its own ranks about the possibility of the success of the new civilian regime as well as its continued role and safety within it. Only once these variables took place could the process of political liberalization (which was necessary for the military to honor the results of free and fair elections) take place within Myanmar.
The next section will explain the hypotheses for this project and the operationalization of the relevant independent and dependent variables.

Hypotheses

The Burmese case offers an excellent opportunity for a temporal comparison, as the failed democratic transition after the 1988 protests and the 1990 elections provides a contrasting case to the ongoing transition taking place from 2010 onward. I will examine three distinct time periods in modern Burmese politics to explain how a transition that failed in 1990 succeeded 25 years later. The three time periods are 1) the failed transition starting in 1988 and the 1990 elections and its aftermath (1988-2002); 2) the “interim” period, dating roughly from 2003 to 2010, in which small steps to a transition began to take shape although genuine transition seemed unlikely; and 3) the period of transition from 2011-2015, in which the steps the government took were more concrete and binding than in the previous period. This project seeks to demonstrate how the initial moves toward liberalization arguably had been for show, but the effects of changes made during these periods stacked, and as the government moved farther along its own so-called Roadmap to Democracy, it became harder and less tempting to go backward, until the transition reached a point of no return.

This project will explore several hypotheses to explain the variation in outcomes during these time periods in Myanmar’s recent history:

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105 Measured by the level of free/competitive elections.
H1: International and domestic pressure for elections during 1988-1990 were not sufficient to compel the military to respect election results due to perceived domestic threats and lack of institutional design which can protect the military’s interests.\textsuperscript{106}

H1A: The military held elections because of domestic/international pressure and their confidence in their chances of victory; however, they did not uphold the results of elections because the military lost stability and immunity confidence.

H1B: Institutional design (in the form of developing a new constitution) did not occur during this time period because the military believed a constitution would be seen as more legitimate after an electoral victory.

\textsuperscript{106} The chapter entitled “The Failed Transition: 1988-2002” will discuss the time period of 1988-2002 much more in depth. The key questions in that chapter are twofold; why did the military regime hold elections in 1990, and why did they fail to establish a constitution (which could have provided crucial institutional protections to them) prior to the elections? That chapter will show that the military regime chose to hold elections because they had high victory confidence (belief that their preferred National Unity Party would win a majority of seats). This belief that they would easily win the elections made them more likely to hold the elections they promised in the face of domestic and international pressure. The military regime, however, lacked immunity confidence (the belief that they would not be held accountable for crimes during their rule) or stability confidence (the belief that a transition to civilian rule will not result in chaos throughout the country). The lack of immunity confidence and stability confidence once SLORC and the NUP lost the 1990 elections explains why they did not uphold the results. The second question, why the regime did not establish a new constitution before the elections which might have provided them with more protections that would lead to immunity and stability confidence, will also be explored in chapter 3. My hypothesis is that because the regime was so confident that they would win the elections, they chose to wait until after the elections before establishing a constitution because a constitution written by an elected government would have more legitimacy in the eyes of both domestic groups as well as international observers.
H2: Massive changes within the military regime and a reduction of domestic threats during the 2003-2010 period led to efforts to develop institutional design.

H2A: Changes during this time period were largely based on a transition process that had been mapped out during the earlier (1988-2002) time period but ultimately failed.

H2B: The military regime became more confident in their ability to design institutions to protect their interests and the stability of the nation due to improvements in relations with armed ethnic groups as well as the promotion of more moderate military leaders.

H2C: The institutional design that took place during this time period laid the groundwork for the more successful transition process in 2011-2015.

H3: Institutional design during 2003-2010 laid the groundwork for steps toward political liberalization from 2011-2015, which led to a liberalization process that snowballed beyond the military’s initial intent.

H3A: The electoral results in 2011 and 2015 were upheld by the military due to institutions (namely the constitution) which gave them immunity confidence and stability confidence, crucial factors which were absent during the failed transition of 1988-2002.

The dependent variables are 1) democratization, which I will operationalize as freely and fairly-contested elections wherein opposition parties are able to contest with the military-backed
parties on equal playing ground and wherein the results of elections are respected and upheld, and 2) political liberalization, which consists of the opening of other civil and political liberties such as freedom of the press, the release of political prisoners, and the legalization of civil society associations and activities. As described in the previous section, the independent variables I will use to explain democratization and political liberalization in Myanmar are civil opposition, splits within the military, institutional design, and regime confidence/future role of the military.

My hypotheses demonstrate the interactive effects of the independent variables in this case. Some commonly cited independent variables in the literature (such as features specific to military regimes and professionalization) were present throughout the time periods in question and, as such, are not sufficient to explain temporal variation in the dependent variables. Other variables occurred sporadically, such as civil society opposition and splits within the military, which acted as catalysts for the regime holding unfair and unfree elections to placate demands. True democratization and political liberalization, however, required a number of independent variables to occur; namely, institutional design was necessary to increase the regime’s confidence in the possible outcomes of free and fair elections. The independent variables are

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I am aware of the issues with defining Myanmar’s elections as “free and fair,” as there continue to be disenfranchisement of certain populations (such as ethnic minorities, members of the Sangha, and prisoners) and inaccurate voter lists, as well as concerns over voter intimidation and electoral fraud. My definition of “freely and fairly contested elections” focuses more on institutional barriers to opposition parties and particularly to whether those opposition parties are able to win (and hold) seats in the Hluttaw. Issues with disenfranchisement seem to be lessening, but there were still reports of issues in the 2015 elections (The Economist 2015). For more detailed information about defining free and fair elections, see Goodwin-Gill 2006.
highly interactive, and the hypotheses for these different time periods demonstrate a layering effect in which multiple independent variables needed to be present to push the civilianization process further. This suggests a type of layering or ratcheting effect in which an increase in the number of independent variables made the transition more likely, and more appealing, to the Tatmadaw. Figure 1 shows an approximation of how the interactions between independent variables opened the door for a political liberalization process, making such a process more likely as time went on.

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108 Timing is crucial to political transitions and institutional design. Przeworski (1991) writes, “Institutions adopted when the relation of forces is unknown or unclear are most likely to last across a variety of conditions. Institutions adopted as temporizing solutions when the relation of forces is known to be balanced and different groups have strong preferences over alternative solutions may acquire the force of convention if they happen to survive for a sufficient period, but they are not likely to last long enough. Finally, institutions that ratify a transitory advantage are likely to be as durable as the conditions that generate them” (88). In this study too, timing matters a great deal. The timing of challenges facing the regime in the different time periods may have influenced the likelihood of certain institutions being established in the first place, as well as affecting their durability. For instance, the presence of a constitution in the 2011-2015 time period almost certainly made free and fair elections with upheld results more likely than in the 1988-2002 time period, wherein the regime had no constitution or institutional protections under which to operate. The questions this project seeks to answer, therefore, involve not only what and why Myanmar’s military regime changed its behavior from one time period to another, but the when – when were institutions established? Which changes came first, and were those changes critical for others to follow?
This project largely builds from the literature on political liberalization. Although civilianization, democratic consolidation and political liberalization are well-tread areas of study in political science and there are some excellent case studies describing how political liberalization unfolded in Latin America\cite{Selcher1986, LinzStepan1996, ODonnellSchmitter1986} and the Middle East,\cite{BrynenKoranyNoble1995} more recent examples, as well as cases from Asia, deserve a closer look. Additionally, Myanmar is often left out of the literature due to its status as an outlier case or a pariah state.

\cite{Selcher1986, LinzStepan1996, ODonnellSchmitter1986} This is a stacked area effect graph. I approximated the presence or absence of independent variables that I would expect in each year by coding them as dummy variables, 1 for presence and 0 for absence. Some variables, such as civil society opposition, occur sporadically, while others, like features of military regimes, stay constant. The stacking graph demonstrates the idea that as the number of independent variables increase (largely due to their interactive effects and path dependency), a transition to civilian led government is more likely.

\cite{BrynenKoranyNoble1995}
Operationalization of these independent variables is described in Table 3.

Table 3: Operationalization of Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Operationalization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professionalization</td>
<td>Number of military members sent abroad for training; education requirements for promotion within the Tatmadaw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil opposition</td>
<td>Domestic protests, difficulties getting peace agreements with armed ethnic militias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International pressure</td>
<td>Economic sanctions, arms sanctions, diplomatic measures (statements, visits, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Splits within the military</td>
<td>Firing or dismissing of military members, replacing generals or party leaders, reports of disagreements or clashes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional design</td>
<td>Development of electoral laws/constitution; development of a robust party system – measured as “stability in the rules and nature of interparty competition; parties having stable roots in society; legitimacy of the electoral process and parties; and cohesive, disciplined, and autonomous parties”¹¹²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regime confidence</td>
<td>Victory confidence – ways for regime to hold power “even under fully democratic conditions”¹¹³ such as holding unfair/unfree elections as a test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stability confidence – military keeping a role for itself in new regime (role in political parties, parliament, presidency, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immunity confidence – legal protections for military members so they cannot be held accountable or lose business deals</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

¹¹² Mainwaring and Scully in Hicken and Kuhonta 2015, 4.

¹¹³ Slater 2014, 178.
Even Hicken and Kuhonta’s 2015 book on party institutionalization in South and Southeast Asia leave Myanmar out.\textsuperscript{114} Of course, comparative studies of political liberalization must be careful when applying theories to new cases – as Brynen, Korany and Noble state,

Analysts of liberalization and democratization must steer between two dangerous shoals. On the one hand, there is much to be gained from engaging in comparative study aimed at highlighting and explaining the similarities and differences evident across different political systems. On the other hand, scholars must avoid the ethnocentric dangers of reading processes deriving from one specific set of historical and political circumstances into other, very different, contexts.\textsuperscript{115}

By applying existing theories about political liberalization and institutional design to the relatively understudied case of Myanmar, this project will show how the process of political liberalization unfolded in Myanmar and explore whether it differed from other cases from previous studies. This project will demonstrate that political liberalization, particularly in obstinate regimes such as Myanmar, is an ever-changing process and the actions of an authoritarian regime to control or shape the transition process can lead it further down the path of liberalization than the regime initially anticipates. Before a regime reaches the point of no return, it can resist an actual transition and simply take steps that appear to be aimed at liberalization. These steps are often taken by authoritarian regimes to placate international or domestic pressures to transition without real intent to follow through. Yet each step makes it more difficult for regimes to backtrack, since doing so is costly in political capital and can increase risks to the

\textsuperscript{114} “We do not include those polities where elections are not regularly held or where autonomous opposition parties are banned outright (e.g. Vietnam, Myanmar, China)” (Hicken and Kuhonta 2015, 10-11).

\textsuperscript{115} Brynen, Korany and Noble 1995, 3.
regime’s survival. Eventually, the threshold point is reached,\textsuperscript{116} and regimes must take a more concrete step, such as holding competitive elections. As Tin Min Htut, Executive Director of Trust Venture Partners, an advisory company for the Yangon Stock Exchange, put it with regard to the Tatmadaw, “The train has left the station and they can’t pull it back anymore.”\textsuperscript{117}

Methodology

The main research question I address is “How did Myanmar’s military embrace liberalization more during 2011-2015 than in the 1988-2002 period?” Myanmar’s military regime did not set out on its Roadmap to Democracy with the intention of losing control of the government to the National League for Democracy by 2015. Instead, the initial steps toward democracy were more symbolic, done with the intention of gaining advantages such as international support and codifying domestic institutions that would protect their political and economic interests. However, these symbolic steps began a “ratcheting effect,” wherein the

\textsuperscript{116} The strange incident with Shwe Mann may be evidence that a transition threshold was reached. Shwe Mann, the chairman of the USDP and former parliamentary speaker, was seen to be the likely successor of President Thein Sein until August 13, 2015, when security forces surrounded his home. According to the USDP, U Shwe Mann was ousted from his role as acting chairman of the party because “he was too busy with his other role as the country’s influential parliamentary speaker” (Radio Free Asia 2015a). Observers saw this dramatic move as President Thein Sein trying to consolidate his power before the elections in an attempt to prevent his main rival from becoming president. However, once the NLD won the elections, Shwe Mann was nominated to head a key legal advisory council in the new government (South China Morning Post 2016). This event indicates that the USDP tried to act with impunity, as it was accustomed – however, democratic institutions had reached the point where even a \textit{persona non grata} in the USDP was appointed to a position in the new NLD-led government.

\textsuperscript{117} Tin Min Htut. Interview with Nicole Loring. Personal Interview. Yangon, June 14, 2016.
symbolic changes made it harder and harder for Myanmar’s military to renege on the liberalization process it had unintentionally started. This project is focused on developing a framework to explain the important case of Myanmar’s recent liberalization.

By examining the specific steps that Myanmar’s military took during this transition process (for example constitutional reform, electoral laws, specific policies) and conducting a temporal comparison of different eras in modern Burmese political history, this project provides a detailed analysis of what led to one widely unexpected transition to civilian rule. I used a range of qualitative methods such as process tracing, interviews, and a media content analysis of the government-run newspaper, the New Light of Myanmar, to look for evidence of this ratcheting process in the case of Myanmar.

Process tracing formed the bulk of my research for exploring my hypothesis that Myanmar’s democratization process initially began as an effort by the military to placate both domestic forces and the international community by making largely symbolic (but ultimately, difficult to reverse) political changes. George and Bennett define process tracing as a methodology wherein “the researcher examines histories, archival documents, interview transcripts, and other sources to see whether the causal process a theory hypothesizes or implies in a case is in fact evident in the sequence and values of the intervening variables in that case.”118 I paid particular attention to the context (both domestic and international) during the period of political liberalization (2003-2010), such as where the idea of the negotiated exit came from, whether there were regional spillover effects, and changes within the governing coalition. My

118 George and Bennett 2005, 6.
sources for this project included archival documents, secondary sources, and interviews. My archival research was mainly gathered from the Burma Peace Foundation’s Online Burma Library at http://burmalibrary.org/, which provides access to full-text governmental reports as well as secondary sources and interviews.

In addition to the resources available from the Online Burma Library, I conducted my own interviews. In June 2016, I traveled to Yangon, Myanmar, and conducted thirteen interviews with a variety of participants. Interviews were semi-structured and pre-approved by Northern Illinois University’s Institutional Review Board. Participants were contacted using snowball sampling and were provided with an IRB consent form in both English and Burmese. Most of the interviews were conducted in English, although two were conducted in Burmese with the

119 Seminal works in comparative politics which also utilize process tracing include Barrington Moore’s Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy (1966) and Theda Skocpol’s States and Social Revolutions (1979), as well as more recent publications such as Dan Slater’s Ordering Power (2010). Much of the sources used in these books are primary sources, including historical accounts, biographies, and books and articles on economics and policy, as well as government publications and reports.

120 For instance, in the Online Burma Library’s archival section on the Roadmap to Democracy, their resources include proceedings, texts, and commentaries by SLORC/SPDC with regard to the National Convention; articles in many English and Burmese-language newspapers; statements and reports by international watchdog groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch; reports by area experts and academics; letters from political party representatives to international groups such as the U.N.; reports by governmental committees; transcripts of speeches and statements; and full-text of the laws and constitution.

121 Interviews were not recorded out of IRB concern for confidentiality for the participants. Handwritten notes were taken instead and stored securely per IRB protocol.

122 Snowball sampling consists of asking research participants to assist researchers in identifying other potential subjects. Interviewees were asked at the end of interviews for the names of acquaintances who might be interested and willing to also participate in interviews.
help of a Burmese translator. Interviewees had a variety of jobs: journalists and writers, NGO workers, political science professors, and local NLD members.\textsuperscript{123} A list of sample interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

Finally, I conducted a media content analysis of the government-run newspaper, \textit{The New Light of Myanmar}.\textsuperscript{124} This was useful for a few reasons. First, finding military members who are willing to engage in interviews about this topic is extremely difficult. Even if military members did consent to an interview, it is doubtful they would answer questions about the military’s internal decision-making process regarding the regime transition. Thus, a proxy measure for the military’s point of view is crucial. As the government mouthpiece publication, the \textit{NLM} is a valuable resource for tracking the changes in Myanmar’s government’s tone toward opposition parties and the international community. As the democratic changes became more solidified, I expected to see the newspaper’s tone toward these two groups becoming less antagonistic, with fewer propagandistic ads and op-eds and more substantive news stories.

The second reason a media content analysis of the \textit{New Light of Myanmar} is useful is as a measure of Myanmar’s changing political liberalization process. Press freedom is often cited as

\textsuperscript{123} Future iterations of this project may also necessitate interviews with local and international election monitors/watchdog groups, who would have observed the changes in electoral practices between 2010-2015 and would therefore provide an important perspective on this political liberalization process.

\textsuperscript{124} There are many newspapers in Myanmar, both representing the government’s point of view (\textit{NLM, Kyemin, Myanmar Alin}) and the opposition (such as \textit{The Irrawaddy} and \textit{Democratic Voice of Burma}). For this project, the content analysis is mainly intended to measure the government’s point of view, and so a content analysis of opposition newspapers is outside the scope of this project. \textit{NLM} was selected for the availability of both English-language and Burmese-language editions in archives.
an important feature of civil liberties and is a key indicator in Freedom House’s annual “Freedom in the World” report.\textsuperscript{125} Content analyses of news media\textsuperscript{126} have been used to measure a myriad of governmental problems, such as corruption in Mexico,\textsuperscript{127} governance issues in Cambodia,\textsuperscript{128} and how the official newspapers in pre-revolution Egypt covered opposition parties and former President Mubarak.\textsuperscript{129} The value of content analysis as a method is that it can serve as a proxy measure for difficult-to-measure factors.\textsuperscript{130} For example, in Stanig’s study of media coverage of corruption in Mexico, he found that local media outlets’ coverage of corruption-related stories varied widely, based on the repressiveness of each state’s defamation law.

Chivoin, Pin, and Sok focus on the development of the media as Cambodia’s “fourth estate,” independent from the government. Finally, Elmasry examines three separate news sources in Egypt: an official government newspaper, an independent newspaper, and an opposition newspaper. His findings, that the government newspaper showed President Mubarak in the most favorable light, while the independent and opposition sources were more balanced, although not necessarily surprising, can nonetheless provide “an important Mubarak-era baseline for Egyptian

\textsuperscript{125} Freedom House 2016.

\textsuperscript{126} Other examples include Rice and Lu 1988; Haque and Sheikh 1994; Huhmann and Brotherton 1997; and Ford, Voli, Honeycutt and Casey 1998.

\textsuperscript{127} Stanig 2015.

\textsuperscript{128} Chivoin, Pin, and Sok 2013.

\textsuperscript{129} Elmasry 2012.

\textsuperscript{130} For more classic works on content analysis, see Broom and Reece 1955; Sebald 1962; Angell 1964; Mitchell 1967; and Feliciano 1967.
journalism which can be used to compare and contrast with post-Mubarak era news performance — [and] offer a democratic barometer of sorts.\textsuperscript{131} Content analysis is a versatile method that is invaluable for providing insight into cases such as Myanmar, where accurate information about sensitive government issues is prohibitively difficult to access or ascertain.

I used a content analysis of the \textit{New Light of Myanmar} as a “democratic barometer” similar to Elmasry’s study of Egypt. There are several indicators within the newspaper which, tracked over time, may reveal when certain political changes developed throughout the different periods I am studying. These indicators include simple counts on the number of articles written on a certain topic (e.g. the Roadmap to Democracy, military or party personnel changes, investigations of corruption, elections, protests, etc.) and how the number of articles on such topics change over time; the tone of articles, such as looking at language used in articles and op-eds to describe the opposition party or international leaders; the number of ghost-written op-eds that express a pro-government or anti-opposition stance;\textsuperscript{132} even the placement of certain stories can indicate the importance they hold to the military (i.e., whether a story about elections is placed “above the fold” on the first page or buried within the newspaper). The \textit{New Light of Myanmar} is an excellent candidate for content analysis because it is a daily newspaper, meaning

\textsuperscript{131} Elmasry 2012, 1.

\textsuperscript{132} Ghost-written opinion articles in the \textit{New Light of Myanmar} are quite apparent. Some do not contain an author name at all. Others may provide an author name or pseudonym (such as “Mr. Fish”), but often are categorized as “Perspectives” and contain titles which clearly denote them as opinion pieces (e.g. “To those who daren’t show their faces,” or “The world does not accept any form of foreign interference”). Many opinion pieces during the 2003-2010 time period focus on the armed ethnic militia groups and on strained international relations, as well as domestic protests.
there is a large sample size of articles, and English-language versions are easily accessible online.\textsuperscript{133} A content analysis of the government-run newspaper in Myanmar provided unique insight into both the changing views of the military as the process of political liberalization took place as well as providing a measure of a developing press, an important institution in the democratization process.\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{133} Ideally, this project would also look at the Burmese equivalent of the \textit{New Light of Myanmar} in addition to the English version. This would strengthen the findings of this approach, as it is possible that the English-version of the newspaper is aimed more at an international community rather than a local one, and might contain more flattering stories about the regime and their political development than a locally-focused Burmese-language version of the newspaper, which could contain more threatening language towards opposition parties and be more dismissive of liberalization/democratization. Due to financial and time constraints, this project will look at the English-language versions only, but I am aware of the limitations of this approach and may try to include a comparison with the Burmese-language version in future projects. Additionally, any evidence of inflammatory language in the English-language version of the \textit{New Light of Myanmar} may be seen as the regime posturing to the international community, since they might expect foreigners to be reading the English-language version of the paper. A marked decrease in such language in the English-language version of the paper would still be useful as a measure of confidence of the regime, because this arguably could indicate that the regime no longer felt the need to justify or defend their political actions to the international community. While I did not count the number of times inflammatory language was used for this project, I will consider doing so in future iterations of this project. Therefore, while an ideal research agenda would include both English-language and Burmese-language versions of the same paper, the use of only the English-language version of the \textit{New Light of Myanmar} for this stage of the project still has merit.

\textsuperscript{134} Despite many changes, Myanmar still ranks as “Not Free” in Freedom House’s measure of “Freedom of the Press in 2016” (\url{https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/freedom-press-2016}). Part of the problem is Telecommunications Law Article 66(d), which states that “anyone found guilty of extorting, coercing, restraining wrongfully, defaming, disturbing, causing undue influence or threatening any person by using any telecommunications network shall be punished with a maximum three years in prison, a fine, or both” (Htet Naing Zaw 2016). It is widely agreed upon that this law is undemocratic.
Significance of the Study

While Myanmar is a single case, it is a valuable one for enhancing our understanding of how authoritarian regimes can participate in transitions to civilian rule despite significant barriers (lack of institutions, lack of resources, internal conflict, and so forth), especially when considering the unusual length of the regime. Indeed, one of the country’s most infamous characteristics is the remarkable durability of Myanmar’s military government. As Slater writes, “no other regime on earth has been so intransigently authoritarian in the face of highly intense and persistent internal and external pressures for political change.”\textsuperscript{135}

Growing dissatisfaction and anger about the police and government throughout 1988\textsuperscript{136} led to widespread peaceful protests led by students (now known as the 8888 Uprising) swept across Myanmar.

The underlying causes of these riots were economic ‘bread and butter’ issues which can be attributed to the previous 30 years of the Burmese War to Socialism. Its stagnant economic policies saw earlier eruptions, but by 1988 they had crystallized in more recent events such as the demonetization and the stigma of LDC [Least-Developed Country] status. To these largely long-term economic factors must be added socio-cultural and administrative ones, particularly the general arbitrariness of Government and its unsympathetic bureaucracy.\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{135} Slater 2014, 171.

\textsuperscript{136} Problems began on March 12, 1988, when a fight broke out at a tea shop near Yangon Institute of Technology between university students and a group of youths over the music on the radio. The police arrested one of youths involved but released him due to his relation to a Government official, leading to demonstrations protesting how the police handled the matter. The police fired at the demonstrators and killed a protestor, causing the crisis to escalate (Aung-Thwin and Aung-Thwin 2012, 256).

\textsuperscript{137} Aung-Thwin and Aung-Thwin 2012, 257.
On September 18, 1988, the military intervened in a bloody crackdown and announced a new military junta, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). Two years later, on May 27, 1990, SLORC held elections. The National League for Democracy (NLD) – led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of the nationalist hero of Burmese independence, General Aung San – won these in a landslide. Surprised by the outcome, SLORC annulled the results of the election and placed Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest. The military junta went on to rule Myanmar for two decades.

Yet, the strength of the military regime showed cracks during this period. In 2003, the military junta, now renamed the “State Peace and Development Council” (SPDC), announced a Roadmap to Democracy that critics viewed with skepticism. General elections in 2010 did little to encourage pro-democracy activists, as the National League for Democracy did not contest the elections due to candidate restrictions. The elections were largely seen as unfair and unfree. However, an NLD landslide in the 2012 by-elections and, more importantly, an overwhelming NLD victory in the 2015 general elections means that Myanmar is now, for the first time since 1962, under a civilian government.

138 NPR 2013.
139 For instance, student protests at Yangon University in 1996 led General Khin Nyunt to shutter the university and prevent students from attending (Yen Snaing 2013).
140 Arnott 2004.
141 Wilson 2010.
142 BBC 2015c.
Myanmar’s military regime began with a coup led by General Ne Win in 1962 and ended officially in 2010 with elections that were, by all accounts, undemocratic. Subsequent by-elections in 2012 and general elections in 2015 seemed to continue the country’s democratization trend. Geddes’ seminal work on authoritarian regimes found that military regimes last on average just eight and a half years compared to 15 years for personalist and 24 years for single-party regimes; however, Myanmar is a deviant case that Geddes explained by treating it as a hybrid military/personalist/single party regime. In her words, “The best way to deal with these difficult cases seemed to be to put them, along with the Suharto regime in Indonesia, the Stroessner regime in Paraguay, and the Ne Win regime in Burma (now Myanmar), into a doubly hybrid Personal/Military/Single-Party category.” Figure 2 shows a continuum of durability of authoritarian regimes, with Myanmar standing out as one of the longest-lasting.

Finally, Myanmar’s surprising transition to civilian rule is a convincing reason for political scientists to pay attention to this country for informing future foreign policy approaches in democratizing countries. U.S. foreign policy toward Myanmar shifted dramatically under the Obama Administration, including lifting of sanctions, increased engagement, and a presidential visit in 2012.

143 Geddes 1999, 34.
144 Geddes 1999, 34.
145 Clymer 2015; Martin 2013.
These drastic changes in American policy coincided with many of the recent political changes in Myanmar as the country developed its democratic institutions and enjoyed trade and engagement that had been absent for decades. In late 2016, President Obama issued an executive order lifting the sanctions that had been in place for two decades. Studying one case of a country which underwent both domestic political changes as well as changes to other states’ foreign policies towards it may provide insight for foreign policy scholars in determining policies which may help to influence similar positive changes in other liberalizing states in the future.

Interviews with politicians, scholars, and journalists within Myanmar produced a common observation about the 2015 elections: Many people doubted whether the military-supported Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) actually expected to win. Tharawon

146 Based on data from Geddes, Wright and Franz 2014.

147 Kennedy 2016.
(Pyay), a prolific journalist and writer, said the results of the 2012 by-elections were a big surprise for the government, which worried people who thought they might null the results.

“Some people said maybe we should let the USDP win the elections in 2010 and 2012 [to let the military feel more secure], and then we can vote for the NLD in 2015.”

Okka Oo, an editor and journalist at News Watch newspaper in Yangon, stated that his newspaper conducted polls in which the NLD won handily, even in polls conducted in USDP strongholds, but the journalists still doubted whether the NLD would win the elections or whether the military would allow the results to stand.

Before the 2015 elections, we thought the USDP will hold onto power by hook or by crook. We thought they might jeopardize the domestic stability or peace in order to grab onto power if they didn’t like the results of the elections. We couldn’t believe they would let go of power so easily.

Tin Min Htut expressed that, based on political polls, the USDP did not think they would lose. Instead, “They thought the ethnic parties and the Farmer’s Party would vote with them. [The USDP] didn’t expect the ethnic people to vote for the NLD. It’s like a sin of omission – here, people are afraid to tell the truth [that they won’t vote for the USDP], so they lie and the military doesn’t know.”

Shine Zaw-Aung, Managing Director at Myanmar Financial, agreed, stating, “The military was too incompetent to even stuff their own ballot boxes…. They thought they would win elections, so they didn’t think they needed to stuff the ballot boxes.”

These quotations reveal the genuine surprise many Burmese citizens felt when, unlike in the 1990 elections, an unsuspecting military lost the 2015 elections and yet allowed the results to stand. While these citizens were not privy to the inner workings of the Tatmadaw, it is striking how widespread this belief that the USDP would not allow themselves to lose the elections was amongst the Burmese citizens I interviewed. This indicates an important shift in the democratization process of Myanmar and points to a crucial change that has taken place since the 1990 elections. The current project seeks to explain what factors changed from 1990 to 2015 and aims to contribute to the larger literature on transitions from authoritarian to civilian rule by developing a new framework to understand how regime transitions can take place and comparing a case of a failed transition and an ongoing transition in the same country.\footnote{It must be noted that countries which undergo democratic transitions are not immune from backsliding towards authoritarianism, illiberal democracy, or some sort of hybrid regime. The mere holding of elections is insufficient for the consolidation of democracy, and in immature democracies, citizens may not continue to vote for or support democratic practices.}

Outline

of Changes (2003-2010)” and Chapter 5, “Media Content Analysis of The New Light of Myanmar (2003-2010)”, look to the interim period of 2003-2010, during which the Roadmap to Democracy began to take shape and important events such as the new constitution, constitutional referendum, and 2010 general elections occurred, as well as the crises of the 2007 Saffron Revolution and the 2008 Cyclone Nargis, which brought Myanmar back into the international limelight and put additional pressure on the regime. Chapter 6, “Letting Go of the Tiger’s Tail? (2011-2015)”153 and Chapter 7, “Media Content Analysis of The New Light of Myanmar (2011-2015)”, examine the time period of 2011-2015, during which more concrete steps (such as the 2012 by-elections and 2015 general elections) were taken and evidence of the transition threshold appeared. Chapter 8, “Conclusion”, discusses future developments for Myanmar and the insights the case can provide for the broader universe of cases. 154

153 Ne Win once said, with regard to the military’s role in politics, that the problem is how to “let go of the tiger’s tail once you’ve seized it” (Silverstein 1981, 67).
The story of the failed transition in 1988 begins forty years earlier, when Myanmar finally gained its independence after one-hundred and twenty-four years of British rule. The Burmese military was intimately involved in the transition to independence, largely due to General Aung San’s crucial role as the head of the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League (AFPFL), the dominant political party during this era, and the military itself. Aung San signed an agreement with British Prime Minister Clement Attlee (known as the Aung San-Attlee Agreement) on January 27, 1947 promising that Myanmar would earn its independence within one year. However, the hero of Burmese independence would never see the fruit of his labor. On July 19, 1947, Aung San and six other members of his Executive Council were gunned down by assassins widely believed to have been hired by rival politician U Saw, who was ultimately convicted for the murders and executed along with five others. After the assassination, Deputy

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1 Taylor 2009, 228-233.

2 Clymer 2015, 34-35.
Prime Minister U Nu was sworn in to lead the country, and Myanmar finally declared independence on January 4, 1948.\(^3\)

U Nu’s government almost immediately faced challenges for power by the Communists as well as non-communist movements and political parties such as the Karen Central Organisation (KCO). There were smaller but still contentious issues with defectors and political discord in British-named Rangoon.\(^4\) Part of the problem during this time, according to Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt, former professor of international relations and joint secretary of Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies, was Chapter 10 of the new constitution, which gave a number of ethnic groups the right to secede from the union after ten years.\(^5\) This was included in the constitution after the 1947 Panglong Agreement as an incentive to convince the ethnic groups to join the new nation – however, Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt asserts that this was the weakest point of the constitution, especially considering the insecure bipolar international system at the time.

During this brief period of constitutional rule, the country held three national elections, the first of which occurred in three stages from 1951-1952.\(^6\) Similar to the British system, the elections used a single-member constituency and the government was based on a British

\(^3\) Clymer 2015, 36.

\(^4\) Taylor 2009, 231-252. The Burmese name for the city is Yangon.

\(^5\) Indeed, Silverstein concurs with Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt’s assessment, writing “Two of the states – Shan and Kayah – were guaranteed the right to secede if, after ten years, they were dissatisfied with the federal experiment (Silverstein 1981, 52).

\(^6\) Silverstein 1977.
parliamentary model, wherein “the head of state was the president, who was elected indirectly by parliament for a five-year term…[and] the two-house parliament was directly elected by the people; the Chamber of Deputies consisted of 250 members, while the Chamber of Nationalities was allotted 125 seats.” A similar parliamentary structure would eventually be utilized again in the 2008 Myanmar constitution.

The final nail in the coffin of the U Nu Administration was when the AFPFL splintered into two sections. According to Silverstein,

The breakup of the AFPFL in 1958 came as a result of long personal antagonisms, structural defects, and the changing political climate in Burma. Personal rivalries and jealousies among the leaders had existed since independence; because of the nation’s difficulties and the political responsibility of the AFPFL, the leaders had sought to keep their private quarrels and differences from public view…. U Nu decided he no longer could keep the factions together and would join one against the other and split the party. A second and deeper cause of the split in the AFPFL lay in the structure of the organization. Despite the theoretical and constitutional basis for impersonal party and mass organizations, the AFPFL in fact was overburdened with private followings attached to particular leaders.

U Nu decided to relinquish his position as the leader of Burma. Whether or not the transfer of power was a true coup d’état or something else is often debated. Some Burmese believe “it was not Ne Win, but actually U Nu who handed over the state because he was unable to control

7 Silverstein 1977, 55.


9 Silverstein 1977, 64-65.
affairs of the state.” Lintner (1990) writes that “The military takeover was at first not entirely unwelcome….The military takeover, some people argued, would usher in a new era of stability, and it was worth it, even if the price the people had to pay was to sacrifice the freedom they had earlier enjoyed.” Others assert that the Tatmadaw did indeed stage a true military coup, and that U Nu was simply obliged to agree to the fait accompli. As Taylor writes, “In order to forestall armed conflict between [the regular army troops and the Union Military Police]…and thus a new possibility of the Communists taking power, Maung Maung and Aung Gyi convinced Nu to ‘invite’ General Ne Win to head a six-month ‘caretaker’ army government.” Additionally, in U Nu’s autobiography Saturday’s Son, he claims that he had heard rumors about an imminent coup, and that knowledge pushed him to hand over power to the army “on condition that the general election be held in six months.”

Regardless of which account is more accurate, U Nu publicly announced that he would be handing over control to a “Caretaker Government” led by General Ne Win, which would attempt to “‘clean up’ the country and its politics.” On October 31st, 1958, Ne Win gave a speech explaining the takeover, stating that


11 Lintner 1990, 14.

12 Maung Aung Myoe 2009, 1.


14 Lintner 1990, 35.

15 Taylor 2009, 251.
…the rebels were increasing their activities, and the political pillar was collapsing. It was imperative that the Union should not drown in shallow waters as it nearly did in 1948-1949. So it fell on the armed forces to perform their bounden duty to take all security measures to forestall and prevent a recurrence.\(^{16}\)

Under this caretaker government, the military tried to stamp out numerous armed ethnic groups in the ethnic minority states\(^ {17}\) and published a statement on national ideology and the role of the armed forces, which describes three objectives: “restoration of peace and the rule of law, consolidation of democracy, and establishment of a socialist economy.”\(^ {18}\) By December 1960, the strife which had plagued U Nu’s civilian government and created the need for the military to step in had lessened enough for the army to return power back to civilian control in the form of elections. The decision to hold elections in 1960 was puzzling, considering that the military’s popularity was declining. Some suggest that elections were scheduled because “the army leadership recognized how unpopular it had become and also recognized the structural limits to the economic and social reforms it had initiated; hence military leaders wanted to get out of office before the tatmadaw’s reputation was tarnished.”\(^ {19}\) U Nu and his *Pyidaungsu* (Union) party won the 1960 elections and a civilian government was again in control.\(^ {20}\)

\(^{16}\) Lintner 1990, 34.

\(^{17}\) Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt. Interview with Nicole Loring. Personal Interview. Yangon, June 22, 2016.

\(^{18}\) Silverstein 1977, 77.

\(^{19}\) Callahan 2005, 195.

\(^{20}\) Egreteau 2016, xviii.
The struggles of the U Nu government continued, however, with “political bickering and factionalism, insurgency and banditry in the countryside and lawlessness in urban areas.”21 The failure of constitutional democracy period can be attributed to many reasons: lack of commitment to the new party system and party institutions; infighting between members of the ruling elite which led to a lack of confidence with the public; the government’s failure to address issues with insurgency and bandits; lack of trust between the ethnic minorities, who feared the loss of their cultures and identity in the face of Burmanization, and the military’s fears about minority areas seceding from the state.22 Such challenges were ultimately too much for U Nu’s constitutional government to overcome.

In 1962, U Nu called an emergency meeting about handing power to Ne Win.23 According to Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt, who was on his way to teach a political science class at Yangon University the morning of March 2, 1962, they announced the transition “very peacefully over the radio…Ne Win said ‘I will introduce a new constitutional government. We have experimented with the British constitutional system – it failed.”24 General Ne Win did send delegates to other countries to learn about different constitutional forms; however, the delegates

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only went to Eastern European countries. “They came back and said, ‘use a one-party system.’”

The new government was thus modeled in the style of an Eastern European single-party system.

After the coup of 1962, General Ne Win and his commanders created a “Revolutionary Council” of seventeen army officers that replaced the AFPFL-led civilian government. Brigadier Aung Gyi, a member of the Revolutionary Council, justified the coup by pointing to “economic, religious and political crises with the issue of federalism as the most important reason for the coup,” which reveals the military’s concerns about the potential for secession in one or more states, which would pose a great security risk to the nation. Indeed, the leaders of the coup seemed to truly believe that the coup was legitimate; “Their publications and speeches demonstrated their belief in the right of the military to intervene and alter the government in the time of national crisis. From as far back as World War II, the army viewed itself as the driving

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26 Steinberg 1990, 25.

27 During the coup, the army arrested 50 government ministers including the Prime Minister, President, and Chief Justice. As Silverstein wrote, “The coup was so swift and effective that no countercoup developed. In the absence of competing leadership and with the weak popular commitment to the constitution…the Revolutionary Council found no need to invoke martial law (Silverstein 1977, 31).

28 Silverstein 1977.

29 Silverstein 1977, 30.

30 Silverstein 1977.
force in the popular struggle for independence.”

On July 4, 1962, the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) was established, and “All other political parties were banned by the 1964 Law to Protect National Solidarity.” The intention of the BSPP was to indoctrinate members and move the country towards the goals of *The Burmese Way to Socialism*, the military’s first publication of their political agenda. In order to develop Myanmar’s lagging economy, the BSPP leaders believed that all private enterprises should be replaced with state-owned investments.

In this new political landscape, Ne Win had a dual role as both head of state and head of the military. As Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt remembers it,

> There was economic failure, capitalism was stamped out. This was a horrible time, but law and order was restored. No bribery and corruption, but there was corruption inside the party. Ne Win wanted this to change, but his supporters didn’t want to – very convenient for them. The country became backward, backward, backward, backward, backward, backward, backward…

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31 Silverstein 1977, 80.


33 In Burmese, မြန်မာလူ့စွမ်းလွန် (Myanma Hsoshelit Sanit), pronounced *Myanma Hsoshelit Sanit* (or *Lanzin*) (Tin Maung Maung Than 2007, 111).


35 Tin Maung Maung Than 2007, 53.

Part of what pushed the country backwards were changes brought by the Revolutionary Council in an attempt to change Burmese society. First, the Revolutionary Council wanted to further lock down their control of the state and protect their status; second, they highlighted concerns about socio-economic instability and crime that was rampant throughout the country; third, dealing with corruption and decentralization which hampered political efficacy; fourth, distancing the state from foreign (more specifically, Western) values and culture; and fifth, promoting the use of Burmese language script. “All these policies were attempts to resurrect the ‘purity’ and glory of Burmese culture and tradition and to reject (perhaps forget) the humiliating colonial past.”

However, despite their repudiation of Western political values and the regime’s decision to forego the building of new factories in favor of developing the agriculture and forestry sectors, the military expressed a desire for Myanmar to become a modern state.

Thus, it was necessary to establish a new constitution. This undertaking had been put off because, as Silverstein describes it,

> The men who seized power in 1962 did not see writing a new constitution for Burma as an immediate issue. The military rulers justified having set aside parliament and altered the courts, having arrested the elected government, and having changed the administrative structure in their first publication, The Burmese Way to Socialism, which stated that the original

37 During the mid-1970s, the BSPP engaged in a number of restructuring and reform efforts, including “resource mobilization, budgetary control, banking, interest rates, domestic and foreign trade, pricing, distribution, and SEE [state economic enterprise] operations” (Tin Maung Maung Than 2007, 179).

38 Aung-Thwin and Aung-Thwin 2012, 249-250.


40 Tin Maung Maung Than 2007, 73.
constitution was unacceptable because it had defects, weaknesses, and loopholes that kept the nation from realizing its goals of socialism and national unity among all the people. Seven years later, in 1969, General Ne Win announced that the time was ripe for writing a new constitution and criticized the old fundamental law by giving numerous examples of how he thought it favored the private sector of the economy, foreign firms, lawyers, and feudal leaders in the states. In 1971 the BSPP began writing the new constitution, which would ultimately formalize their one-party rule and signal the changing role of the BSPP from a cadre party to a people’s party. “The party nominated a State Constitution Drafting Committee, headed by Brigadier San Yu, which included thirty-three military officers among the total membership of ninety-seven. The remaining sixty-four represented the social classes, the ethnic groups, the political leaders who had cooperated with the Revolutionary Council, and legal experts.” Although the committee had a civilian majority, the military representatives held the leadership positions within the committee and the new constitution largely reflected their interest. The guiding principles for the new constitution were as follows: 1) the goal of the state is socialism; 2) a socialist economy will be adopted and protected; 3) the state will be democratic; 4) there should be racial equality and national unity at all times; 5) the people will have democratic and personal

41 Silverstein 1977, 120.
42 Silverstein 1977, 120.
43 Nakanishi 2013, 98.
44 Nakanishi 2013, 112.
45 Silverstein 1977, 121.
rights, as well as duties and obligations, within the framework of a socialist democracy; and 6) any other provision that will help to build a socialist democratic state should be embraced.\textsuperscript{46}

During the constitution drafting process, the committee divided up into teams and visited different parts of Myanmar to “obtain advice from the [Burmese] people.”\textsuperscript{47} The first draft of the constitution was then published in the press, and the committee again went out to solicit criticisms of the document from the people, repeating the process for the second draft as well. “In this way, the committee both led and listened to the people and concluded that it had obtained the widest popular participation in carrying out its work.”\textsuperscript{48} The constitution was completed in 1973, and was then approved by the second congress of the BSPP party and submitted to the people for ratification.\textsuperscript{49} Despite the process which presumably took the citizens’ needs and desires into account, however, the constitution was drafted during period of economic distress.\textsuperscript{50} “Growing unemployment among the young people, rising food costs, shrinking purchasing power, and shortages in essential commodities…. [As well as] a drop in external earnings, dwindling foreign exchange reserves, increase in external debts, and decline in

\textsuperscript{46}Silverstein 1977, 121-122.

\textsuperscript{47}Silverstein 1977, 121.

\textsuperscript{48}Silverstein 1977, 121.

\textsuperscript{49}Silverstein 1977, 120.

\textsuperscript{50}Overreliance on imports of capital and intermediate goods, illegal border trade, foreign loans and aids, and a debt problem caused by trade imbalances only worsened the economic situation during this time (Tin Maung Maung Than 2007).
imports of consumer goods” led to a rash of student demonstrations and labor strikes and riots during May-June 1974. Additionally, the BSPP leaders held all the dominant positions in the legislature and the executive and faced no legal opposition. In a “confusing and cumbersome” electoral system, the 1974 constitution guaranteed that “the candidates were handpicked by the party and the outcome of the election was never in doubt.” The consequences of this constitution were clear - “As long as the constitution remains in effect, the military controlling the party remain in power. The constitution therefore confirms the military dictatorship.” It was under this constitution and in this political climate that the events of 1988 unfolded.

**The 8888 Demonstrations**

What began as a brawl in a local tea shop over whether traditional Burmese music or modern rock music should be on the radio quickly spiraled into a national crisis in Myanmar. The fight between a group of university students and local youths on March 21, 1988 in a tea shop near the Yangon Institute of Technology took on a political edge when the police, who arrested one of the youths for injuring a student, later released the suspect because of his connection to the chairman of the local People's Council. Student protests over the police’s handling of the incident dramatically escalated when police shot at the demonstrators, killing a

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51 Maung Maung Gyi 1981, 24-25.

52 Silverstein 1977, 133.

53 Silverstein 1977, 122.
Students from all over the city began joining the protests, while riot police entered the campus of Yangon Institute of Technology and the army was dispatched around the city, with unconfirmed reports of hundreds of people being killed. State-run media blamed the students for the disorder, which fanned the flames of dissent and caused the protests to take on a decidedly anti-government stance. As one participant in the demonstrations stated, “Everyone was trying to overthrow – not overthrow, change – the government. Even kindergarteners!”

The reports of oppression and violence against protestors enraged the international community. Relations between the United States and Myanmar were strained during the Ne Win period, particularly after a disastrous visit to the United States by Ne Win and his wife, Daw Khin May Than in 1960. The relationship between the two countries stabilized somewhat when Ne Win came back for a visit in 1966, but the events of 1988 caused another setback for bilateral relations. According to Clymer, while Americans had very little concrete interests in Myanmar during the 1980s, “Human rights was what drove American policy, by and large, in

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54 Lintner 1990, 2-8.

55 Lintner 1990, 4-5.


57 During this visit, Ne Win was hospitalized at Walter Reed Medical Center when his wife, known as “Kitty,” was called a racial slur while waiting in the hospital. This event was especially damaging to relations between the two countries because the culprit was reported by numerous sources to be Mamie Eisenhower, the wife of President Dwight Eisenhower. (Clymer 2015, 180-181).

58 Clymer 2015, 233.
good part because of Congressional and public pressure.” 59 Throughout the 1980s and 1990s there were multiple bills in the U.S. Congress to increase sanctions on the Burmese regime, particularly with regard to releasing Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest and upholding the results of the 1990 elections, about which more will be said presently. 60 The following analysis section will detail these efforts.

Many Burma experts point out, however, that the 1988 protests may have ended up as pro-democracy demonstrations, but they did not begin that way. In the mid- to late-1980s, Ne Win’s Burmese Way to Socialism was failing – the state’s economic policies were floundering, and the government needed a way to raise revenue. In 1985, the government demonetized the currency, which, coupled with toppling prices of exports and growing unemployment, greatly harmed both rural and urban citizens. Finally, in an attempt to provide debt relief, the United Nations gave the country Least Developed Country (LDC) status, another painful blow to Myanmar’s economy and national pride. 61 The downfall of the BSPP was “a story of developmental failure, brought about by self-imposed resource constraints and state over-reach, compounded by the pathology of one-party authoritarian system.” 62

So, it was under the failing economics of the Burmese Way to Socialism, anger over the government’s general mismanagement and police brutality, embarrassment on the international

59 Clymer 2015, 258.

60 Clymer 2015, 263-281.

61 Taylor 2009, 379

62 Tin Maung Maung Than 2007, 284
stage, and the escalating anarchy of riots and protests that the 8888 demonstrations took place.

Despite the varied and complicated reasons for the protests, however,

...nearly all Western media, anti-government members of the Burmese public, some overseas communities and certain foreign governments not only attributed the cause of the riots to political reasons...but to a specific ideology: democracy. Thus most English-language media reports at the time characterized the riots as a 'pro-democracy' movement, an oft-repeated mantra at the time for virtually any protest against government in the non-Western world.... In other words it was not the cause of the 1988 riots, but a consequence – the riots were far more complicated, their underlying socio-economic origins went back at least 30 years.63

The protests had a profound impact on the BSPP and its civilian government. On July 23, 1988, General Ne Win gave a speech at the BSPP Extraordinary Congress in which he resigned as the Party Chairman.64 In it, he stated that the protests and riots in March and June 1988 were meant to “show lack of confidence in the Government and the Party leading the Government,” and lays the groundwork for elections in the near future, saying:

If the majority want a multi-party system, the present Constitution's provision under Chapter II, paragraph 11 for the sole political party leading

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63 Aung-Thwin and Aung-Thwin 2012, 258. It should be noted that Michael Aung-Thwin is well-known both for his expertise on early Burmese history and for his controversial comments about Burmese democracy. In a 2001 article, Aung-Thwin criticizes “…the establishment of democracy [which] has become, virtually, a sine qua non for legitimate government per se. It now resembles a jihad, a holy war, backed by aggressive and confrontational rhetoric as well as economic sanctions or support” (Aung-Thwin 2001, 494). His views reflect a dour opinion of the neoliberal American foreign policy efforts to spread democracy in places such as Myanmar, and he argues that such efforts are reminiscent of imperialism, Orientalism, and evangelism. While he is an authoritative source on early Burmese history, his doubts about the democratization efforts in Myanmar should be acknowledged when citing his account of the events of 1988, as his view has caused some controversy among Burma scholars.

64 A collection of speeches and statements by government officials regarding elections in Myanmar can be found on the “Statements” page of the Burma Press Summary (now Online Burma Library).
the State will have to be substituted with wording in consonance with a multi-party system. A suitable lapse of time would of course be needed for convenient movement of the people, production of ballot cards and other requirements.65

Ne Win, however, gave two important caveats to this offer of multi-party elections. First, he suggested that the people might prefer a one-party system over a multi-party system and tasked the BSPP with setting up a nationwide vote to decide whether the new system should be multi-party or one-party. Second, and more ominously, he describes the use of the Tatmadaw in stopping some of the 1988 demonstrations, and warns that

I asked that the Tatmadaw be not used in trifling matters and that it be used only when really necessary…. Although I said I would retire from politics, we will have to maintain control to prevent the country from falling apart, from disarray, till the future organizations can take full control. In continuing to maintain control, I want the entire nation, the people, to know that if in future there are mob disturbances, if the army shoots, it hits --there is no firing into the air to scare. So, if in future there are such disturbances and if the army is used, let it be known that those creating disturbances will not get off lightly.66

San Yu, who had succeeded Ne Win as President in 1981, also retired during this time,67 and Brigadier-General Sein Lwin took over for a brief period – his short-lived presidency lasted only 17 days, from July 27 to August 12, 1988, largely due to his bungled response to the protests in Yangon.68 Sein Lwin was known as a military hard-liner and lived up to his reputation, earning the moniker “The Butcher of Rangoon.” Street protests escalated during his reign despite the

65 Ne Win 1988.
67 Morland 1996.
68 Aung Zaw 2004.
military’s violent responses and on August 4 Sein Lwin declared martial law.\textsuperscript{69} His violent suppression of these protests and the anger felt by the Burmese people when 41 people suffocated to death in a police van during his crackdown,\textsuperscript{70} prompted his resignation and replacement by the more moderate Dr. Maung Maung as the head of government. Meanwhile, massive demonstrations continued despite Sein Lwin’s resignation, and “at a critical point when military morale seemed on the verge of collapse, a coup was staged to support the regime.”\textsuperscript{71} On 18 September 1988, the 1974 Constitution was suspended and the BSPP government was replaced with a new military government named the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).\textsuperscript{72} Despite the challenges facing the military regime, however, they kept Ne Win’s promise about holding elections. On May 27, 1990, Myanmar had its first elections since 1960. The results, however, did not stand.

\textsuperscript{69} Cummings-Bruce 1988.

\textsuperscript{70} Steinberg 1990, 2.

\textsuperscript{71} Steinberg 1990, 3.

\textsuperscript{72} Nakanishi 2013, 292. The Burmese title for SLORC, Naingngantaw Nyein Wu Pi Phya Hmu Te Ksauk Yei Konsi, can be literally translated as “the ‘Council to Build/Make a Composed/Calm and Tranquil/Peaceful State/Nation’” (Taylor 2009, 387-388). SLORC later was renamed The State Peace and Development Council, in Burmese .
Lead Up to the 1990 Elections

As Ne Win suggested in his resignation speech, although the BSPP had been replaced by SLORC, multi-party elections would still be held. After the 1988 coup, the SLORC government had four main goals: reasserting the military’s control; reform so as to avoid appearing to be similar to the previous government; establishing internal and external legitimacy; and correcting the country’s economic crisis.\footnote{Steinberg 1990, 33-34.} Elections would help the new government to differentiate itself from the failed BSPP government and to gain legitimacy. However, in the aftermath of the 1988 demonstrations and the resulting crackdown, the 1974 constitution had been terminated, meaning “there were no constitutional guidelines” for the elections in 1990.\footnote{Tharawon (Pyay). Interview with Nicole Loring. Personal Interview. Yangon, June 13, 2016.} SLORC did set up an election law and scheduled the elections for May 1990. By March 1, 1989, 233 political parties had registered, although 26 of those parties dropped out by December 1989.\footnote{Steinberg 1990, 3.} Indeed, many of the leaders of the main political parties were under house arrest at the time of the elections, and the country was still under martial law.\footnote{D’Souza 1991, 40.}

The General Election Commission was a five-person body heading by U Ba Htay and U Saw Kyadoe, who were “ostensibly responsible for monitoring the polls but privately admitted that they had little choice but to obey SLORC orders, including those which required the
disqualification of many candidates.” This included Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of independence hero General Aung San, who had returned to Myanmar to aid her ailing mother and become a popular leader during the 1988 demonstrations and, in September 1988, helped to found the opposition party the National League for Democracy. Aung San Suu Kyi became a political force to be reckoned with in her own right – she was placed under house arrest in July of 1988 and in January 1990, the Election Commission banned her candidacy in the upcoming elections on the grounds of “alleged ‘unlawful associations with insurgent organizations.” Interestingly, Tonkin suggests that if the “Big Four” rising political leaders (Aung San Suu Kyi, Aung Gyi, Tin Oo, and U Nu) had agreed to Dr. Maung Maung’s 1988 offer to organize multiparty elections within three months, “the 18 September 1988 coup might never have happened.” Instead, the timeline for elections was pushed back. Finally, on May 31, 1989, the People’s Assembly Law was established, although it was later amended. In it,

All political campaigning had to be conducted under Martial Law 3/90 of 23 February 1990 which decreed that all speeches, writings and publications had to be approved by the local township authorities. Those deemed derogatory to the SLORC, Defence Services, or ‘solidarity of national races’ were punishable by prison terms of up to three years or fines of 5,000 kyats.

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77 D’Souza 1991, 40.
78 Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2007.
79 D’Souza 1991, 41.
80 Tonkin 2007, 37.
81 D’Souza 1991, 41.
These laws were established largely with the intent of aiding the SLORC’s preferred party, the National Union Party (NUP), “which had inherited all the property, membership lists and assets of the BSPP. Campaigning on the slogan ‘Prevent the Re-enslavement of Myanmar,’ the NUP proudly admitted its BSPP past.”

Although SLORC had planned the 1990 elections largely as a strategy to grant itself political legitimacy, observers noted that “prevention of three of the four leading candidates from participating in the elections poses serious questions about the efficacy of the process and the value of the results. The destruction of the leadership of the National League for Democracy has undercut the SLORC’s credibility and commitment, while its wholesale arrests and intelligence network have created widespread fear.”

As U Maung Maung, Secretary of the National League for Democracy G Block and representative of his district described it, campaigning in Yangon before the 1990 elections was a harrowing experience. “I was going around for campaigns in North Okkala. Some elected representatives tried to form a government themselves, most of them were arrested and detained, not many escaped. I was worried about my safety when the other NLD party members were detained.”

Thus, it was under martial law, with opposition leaders imprisoned and no constitution in place, that the 1990 elections were held.

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82 D’Souza 1991, 42.

83 Steinberg 1990, 97.

Despite SLORC’s best efforts, the National League for Democracy won a resounding victory in the polls. Table 4 and Figures 3, 4, and 5 show the electoral results.

Table 4: 1990 Election Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of constituencies</td>
<td>492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of elections held</td>
<td>485 (7 constituencies suspended for security reasons)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of eligible voters</td>
<td>20,818,313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of votes cast</td>
<td>15,112,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of valid votes cast</td>
<td>13,253,606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of valid votes cast</td>
<td>13,253,606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of party candidates</td>
<td>2,209, of whom 479 were elected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of party candidates</td>
<td>2,209, of whom 479 were elected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of independent candidates</td>
<td>87, of whom 6 were elected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of independent candidates</td>
<td>87, of whom 6 were elected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of parties presenting candidates</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of parties presenting candidates</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Number of candidates running and elected in the 1990 elections.

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85 Tonkin 2007, 35.
From these results, it is clear that the National League for Democracy won a definitive victory, securing 80.82% of the seats in the People’s Assembly and 59.87% of the valid votes.
cast. The NUP, which was expected to do quite well by election observers, won only 2.06% of the seats in the People’s Assembly, although they polled 21.16% of the valid votes cast.\textsuperscript{86} As Tonkin describes it, “The vote was an expression of overwhelming support for a change to democratic politics and at the same time a rejection of old-style politicians like former Prime Minister U Nu, whose League for Peace and Democracy, though fielding 309 candidates, secured no seats at all.”\textsuperscript{87} Indeed, as Tharawon (Pyay),\textsuperscript{88} a journalist in Yangon, described it, “1990 was the first time I vote in my life… the people had shown their desire in the 1990 elections. There was a chance for the 8888 Demonstrations to be that push [for political change] – but it was not good enough for a real transition to take place.”\textsuperscript{89} Tonkin notes, however, that some “have rightly seen the elections as more of a popular referendum rather than as a competition between political parties”\textsuperscript{90} – instead, this viewpoint suggests that the majority of voters supported “fully democratic government” while the minority were “in favour of power-sharing with the military.”\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{86} Tonkin 2007, 34.

\textsuperscript{87} Tonkin 2007, 35.

\textsuperscript{88} Taking a pen name is quite common for writers and journalists in Myanmar, and many pen names include the name of a city or town that is important to the author. In this case, the author’s hometown is Pyay.

\textsuperscript{89} Tharawon (Pyay). Interview with Nicole Loring. Personal Interview. Yangon, June 13, 2016.

\textsuperscript{90} Tonkin 2007, 35.

\textsuperscript{91} Tonkin 2007, 35.
Members of the NLD hit roadblocks in their attempts to take political control when SLORC delayed the convention of the National Assembly. In October 1990, some elected representatives met in secret in Mandalay to try to convene an Assembly, but SLORC cracked down with extra security, forcing some elected representatives to flee to the insurgent-controlled Karen state and establish “a National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) on 18 December 1990….The NLD, however, maintained its legal presence in Rangoon and in the interests of its own survival formally disassociated itself from the NCGUB and those NLD-elected representatives who fled.”

244 NLD MPs had signed statements renouncing any support for Dr. Sein Win [the chairman of NCGUB and unofficial Prime Minister following the elections]. With well over a hundred MPs known to be in jail, hiding, or exile, the election result had effectively been quashed…. SLORC officials promised to proceed along the road towards multi-party democracy by holding the National Convention at some future stage, but continued to warn of ‘political parties deceiving the nation.’

In addition to detaining MPs, press laws were used to “stifle freedom of speech and prevent the distribution of party news or literature.” Censorship under SLORC included shutting down six State-run newspapers, leaving only the Working People’s Daily (WPD), published in both Burmese and English, renamed the New Light of Myanmar (NLM) in 1993.

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92 Tonkin 2007, 36.

93 D’Souza 1991, 47.

Much of the news reporting in the newspaper were military press releases and eulogies of SLORC leaders, and State-run radio and television reports generally copied the WPD verbatim.95

The international backlash against SLORC for refusing to respect the results of the elections were immediate, with the UN General Assembly passing annual Resolutions calling for Myanmar to “restore democracy and respect the results of the 1990 elections.”96 This international criticism rankled the SLORC leaders and led to denouncements of foreign powers that echoed the BSPP-era propaganda about Western states trying to “re-enslave” Myanmar. Indeed, during SLORC’s post-election crackdown, “The foreign media has played a central part as a prime target of the SLORC’s cultural revolution, and virulent attacks have been launched against foreign journalists and agencies which monitor events in Burma.”97 The pressure from the international community, as well as domestic fury over the SLORC’s failure to hand over power to the NLD, continued throughout the 1990s.

**After 1990**

Following the 1990 elections, pressure mounted against the Burmese regime, both domestically and abroad. In 1991, Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize for her commitment to peaceful political change, a move which some historians suggest was clearly

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95 D’Souza 1991, 53.
96 Tonkin 2007, 36.
intended by the international community to compel the Tatmadaw to honor the results of the elections. SLORC continued to claim they would uphold the results of the elections on their own timeline. In a statement given to the 46th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on October 4, 1991, Myanmar’s Minister for Foreign Affairs, U Ohn Gyaw, asserted that

Once the Election Commission has submitted its final report, the State Law and Order Restoration Council will meet with the elected representatives to discuss the holding of a national convention…which will form the basis for framing a new constitution…. The State Law and Order Restoration Council is above party politics. It is neither a political organization nor does it have any intention of forming one. It will continue to shoulder its responsibility to lead the nation til the time a strong government can be formed on the basis of the new constitution.

The year 1992 saw the end of Saw Maung’s tenure as SLORC chairman, prime minister, and defense minister as General Than Shwe took charge. While Than Shwe was the head of the junta, however, domestic and international attention was still mainly focused on secret police chief General Khin Nyunt and army chief General Maung Aye. SLORC Declaration No. 11/92 announced that on April 24, 1992, the State Law and Order Restoration Council would convene the National Convention in order to lay out the basic steps for drafting a new constitution, and that political prisoners “whom there are no reasons to endanger the security of the state, will be

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98 Clymer 2015, 271.


100 Aung Zaw 2003b.
released promptly.”\textsuperscript{101} SLORC did release nineteen political prisoners on April 27, 1992 in addition to allowing Aung San Suu Kyi’s family to visit her.\textsuperscript{102}

In 1995, international pressure again ramped up to convince SLORC to release Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest. Senator Mitch McConnell (R) sponsored the “Free Burma Act of 1995” to end all U.S. assistance and investments and stop imports from Burma. The legislation was passed on September 21, 1995 with overwhelming bipartisan support, and the “Burma earmark” was worked into the foreign assistance legislation that year.\textsuperscript{103} Later that same year, McConnell and other senators introduced Senate Bill 1511, “The Burma Freedom and Democracy Act of 1995,” which “ended American investment in Burma and gave the president authority to prohibit Burmese imports. It even banned most travel to Burma by American citizens (perhaps a response to Burma’s ‘Visit Myanmar Year’ in 1996), and it urged the president to keep diplomatic relations at a low level.”\textsuperscript{104} Ultimately, Aung San Suu Kyi was released on July 19, 1995, despite Khin Nyunt’s warning that “the rights of 45 million people are more important than the rights of an individual.”\textsuperscript{105} According to Callahan (1996), this decision was made due to an increase in regime confidence thanks to a successful cooptation of the NLD’s power and progress with addressing splits within the regime. Of the 702 members of the National

\textsuperscript{101} SLORC Declaration No. 11/92 1992.

\textsuperscript{102} New York Times April 27, 1992.

\textsuperscript{103} Clymer 2015, 281.

\textsuperscript{104} Clymer 2015, 282.

\textsuperscript{105} Callahan 1996, 158.
Convention, only 86 members were NLD representatives.\textsuperscript{106} During the 1990s, the power of the NLD waned as “local branches and the national-level organization had been decimated by five years of arrests, repression, and defections.”\textsuperscript{107} Additionally, the regime improved their ability to deal with possible splits by cabinet expansions that brought powerful regional commanders to Rangoon “where they have taken on lucrative portfolios and where SLORC can tighten its control over them.”\textsuperscript{108} While this confidence did not last indefinitely, SLORC was learning how to address issues that would continue into later time periods.

While the United States was adopting new legislation in an attempt to push the Burmese government towards bringing the National League for Democracy into the fold, the \textit{Tatmadaw} was busy increasing its capabilities. After the fallout of the 1988 protests, SLORC prioritized expanding and modernizing the \textit{Tatmadaw}, with the numbers of the armed forces rising to 270,000 by 1992 and anywhere from 300,000 to 400,000 troops by 1995.\textsuperscript{109} Regardless of the exact numbers, by 1995 the Burmese Army was “one of the largest ground forces in Southeast Asia...[and had] more direct experience of combat in the field than many comparable countries.”\textsuperscript{110} In addition to expanding the military’s size and capabilities, SLORC spent the mid-1990s developing a plan for the new constitution, which would require

\textsuperscript{106} Callahan 1996, 159.

\textsuperscript{107} Callahan 1996, 159.

\textsuperscript{108} Callahan 1996, 159.

\textsuperscript{109} Selth 1996, 19.

\textsuperscript{110} Selth 1996, 59.
25% of the seats in each house of the future legislature must be reserved for the armed forces; the future president must have long military experience as a major qualification for office; the Minister for Defence must be a member of the military and in times of emergency the head of the armed forces will have power to declare a state emergency and take power; the military budget will not be subject to approval by the elected/appointed legislature.\textsuperscript{111}

Importantly, these features would eventually appear in the 2008 constitution, indicating that the Burmese military had been considering which constitutional protections would prevent the painful outcomes of the 1990 elections in the future.

In 1997, Myanmar finally joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), membership of which had been denied to them in the fallout of the 1990 elections.\textsuperscript{112} Additionally, SLORC was renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), a move seen by some as a calculated move to appeal to both ASEAN and to the international community by signaling that the regime was changing.\textsuperscript{113} Others believed that the change was more related to domestic issues than courting international bodies. “The SPDC formed not to resolve the country’s current political problems but just to resolve the military’s own internal conflicts” stated Moe Thee Zun, vice chairman of the All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF) in a 1997 interview.\textsuperscript{114} The Irrawaddy Magazine editorial board argued that “by changing the current

\textsuperscript{111} Statement by Josef Silverstein, Professor Emeritus, Rutgers University, before the US House of Representatives Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, hearing on ‘Recent Developments in Burma,’ Washington, 7 September 1995 (Selth 1996, 155).

\textsuperscript{112} Clymer 2015, 283-284.

\textsuperscript{113} The Irrawaddy Magazine 1997b.

\textsuperscript{114} Aung Zaw 1997.
government, they can claim that they bear no responsibility for acting on the 1990 election results.”

As Aung Zaw described it, in 1997 the junta had five internal opponents – students, monks, opposition parties, ethnic rebels, and the general public. These domestic threats, when paired with unfriendly relations with the West, put SLORC (now SPDC) in a defensive position.

In spite of the name change, little changed when SLORC became SPDC. There were still no ministries run by civilians – even the ministries of health, tourism, and trade were headed by military personnel. A massive reshuffle took place within the Tatmadaw the same year, with Generals Htun Kyi, Myint Aung, and Kyaw Ba losing positions of power. This reshuffle was good news for General Khin Nyunt, who would become the Prime Minister in 2003, because the generals who lost their jobs were widely seen as his opponents. According to The Irrawaddy, Interestingly, the tension that existed in the SLORC between the Maung Aye/Tin Oo infantry faction and the Khin Nyunt military intelligence faction, has not been resolved in the new government. Most of the members of the SPDC, which consists of all the regional commanders, are more sympathetic to Tin Oo and Maung Aye. However, the Cabinet members are closer to Khin Nyunt.

In 1998, the SPDC purged one of its most high-profile cabinet members, Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw, replacing him with Win Aung, a former army colonel, and reassigning or retiring two

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115 The Irrawaddy Magazine 1997a.


117 The Irrawaddy 1997a.

118 Aung Zaw 2003a.

119 The Irrawaddy Magazine 1997a.
dozen senior officials.\textsuperscript{120} Ohn Gyaw may have been replaced because Win Aung was preferred as a military man, or possibly because Win Aung was known as a favorite of Khin Nyunt, whose power within the SPDC was growing.\textsuperscript{121} Such reshuffles can be viewed as evidence of splits within the military, as the reverberations of the 1988 protests had created long-lasting vulnerabilities in the \textit{Tatmadaw}.

By the year 2000, the junta had lifted some restrictions on the movements of the NLD senior members, including Aung San Suu Kyi, who began secret talks with the ruling council. In January 2001, Aung San Suu Kyi met with General Khin Nyunt. “Many observers believed that the pressure of sanctions and international criticism led to this development, although there were undoubtedly internal factors that figured in as well.”\textsuperscript{122} Such factors might have included the influence of intelligence chief and prime minister Khin Nyunt, who made a concerted effort between the years of 2001-2004 to “co-opt the NLD and re-engage with the international community,“\textsuperscript{123} although Western nations were still dubious about the possibility of reform.

Pederson compares two possible windows of change, 1988-1990 and 2001-2004, arguing that

\begin{quote}
On each occasion, military leaders judged that transferring power to an elected government (or to the NLD) constituted an unacceptable risk, and simply pulled the plug. In 1988 and 1990, the non-compromising position
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{120} The Irrawaddy Magazine 1998.

\textsuperscript{121} The Irrawaddy Magazine 1998.

\textsuperscript{122} Clymer 2015, 289.

\textsuperscript{123} Pederson 2014, 27.
adopted by domestic opposition forces was the main factor, while in 2001-2004 the lack of Western buy-in was a critical impediment.\footnote{Pederson 2014, 27.}

In spite of Khin Nyunt’s efforts to make in-roads with the NLD and the West during the early 2000s, however, it seemed that both Than Shwe and his followers as well as the international community were unwilling to cooperate. As Egreteau and Jagan describe it, “Nobody seemed to be prepared to work on a genuine transitional process at that time, neither among the reclusive leader’s trusted clans, nor the hardliner circles of the NLD.”\footnote{Egreteau and Jagan 2013, 188.} In March 2002, it was reported that there was an aborted coup against Than Shwe, Maung Aye, and Khin Nyunt, the top three SPDC leaders. In response, the Burmese Military Intelligence Services purged all the members of Ne Win’s family, effectively pushing Ne Win’s influence out of Burmese politics for good.\footnote{Egreteau and Jagan 2013, 194-195.}

The aftermath of the 1988 protests and the 1990 elections reverberated throughout Myanmar and the rest of the world. Chapter 3 will analyze the military’s decision to annul the results of the 1990 elections and the aftermath of that decision.

2003-2010

The interim period of 2003-2010 was marked with many changes, some of which appeared to be superficial at first, only to balloon into massive political shifts in later years. The
changes started early in 2003, with a banking crisis that rocked the country. This crisis was sparked by a number of triggers, including the collapse of so-called “private service companies,” which some considered to be no more than Ponzi schemes taking advantage of Burmese investors and possibly even Burmese banks.\textsuperscript{127} In addition to the collapse of these companies, the firing of Finance and Revenue Minister U Khin Maung Thein, well as the news that his replacement was a military member with no financial expertise, shocked the Burmese markets. Finally, rumors about the chairman of Asia Wealth Bank (AWB) losing $4 million USD gambling in Macau prompted a run on the four main banks in Myanmar (AWB, Yoma Bank, Mayflower Bank and Kanbawza Bank) in early February, as customers tried to withdraw their money.\textsuperscript{128} In response, banks limited the amount any single customer could withdraw from their account, and the Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM) ordered banks to stop all account transfer transactions.\textsuperscript{129} “Daunting economic challenges may…have forced the country to revert to more familiar inward-looking attitudes”\textsuperscript{130} during this period, and while data is sparse, “it would appear that state spending in Burma is at least twice the magnitude of its tax collections.”\textsuperscript{131} During this time, it was common practice for CBM to simply print money whenever the state

\textsuperscript{127} Turnell and Vicary 2003.
\textsuperscript{128} Turnell and Vicary 2003.
\textsuperscript{129} Turnell and Vicary 2003.
\textsuperscript{130} Egreteau and Jagan 2013, 185.
\textsuperscript{131} Turnell 2008, 964.
required more.\textsuperscript{132} The precarious financial situation in early 2003 set the stage for many changes in the period to come.

On May 30, 2003, another unfortunate event set off a chain reaction. The previous year, the junta had released Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest, a decision which some suggest was made as part of a conciliatory gesture to the NLD leader in the wake of “tremendous pressure to undertake certain measures toward democratic reform to gain international acceptance.”\textsuperscript{133} Aung San Suu Kyi was traveling around the country “gathering large crowds at every stop, urging dialogue with the government and a peaceful transition to democracy.”\textsuperscript{134} As she and her party approached the town of Depayin near Mandalay,

…a group of perhaps five thousand soldiers and convicts released for the task attacked their motorcade. Initial reports were that four or five persons died (although it was much higher), and many others, including NLD vice chairman U Tin Oo, were wounded. A report on the incident by the ASEAN interparliamentary group concluded that it was 'essentially an assassination attempt on Aung San Suu Kyi and members of the NLD.' Aung San Suu Kyi’s car was 'riddled with bullets’… [and] she was arrested and held in 'protective custody'.\textsuperscript{135}

The Depayin incident sparked outrage and anger with pro-democracy supporters in Myanmar and in the international community. The event prompted the Bush Administration and Congress to take stronger action against the military regime in Myanmar, and throughout the summer of

\textsuperscript{132} Turnell 2008, 966.

\textsuperscript{133} Thawnghmung 2003, 444.

\textsuperscript{134} Malinowski, 2003.

\textsuperscript{135} Clymer 2015, 291.
2003, the U.S. government worked on a bill to increase pressure on the regime. The result, the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act, passed the House with a vote of 418-2 and passed the Senate with a vote of 94-1.\textsuperscript{136} The bill required an array of changes to U.S. foreign policy towards Myanmar, including a ban against trade that benefits members of the SPDC, freezing the assets of regime members, the denial of loans at international financial institutions, expanding a visa ban against regime members, public condemnation of the regime, providing resources to support Burmese democracy activists, and continuing sanctions.\textsuperscript{137} The bill was signed into law by President George W. Bush on July 28, 2003.\textsuperscript{138}

The final, and most important, event that year came on August 30, 2003, the day that Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt announced the 7-Step Roadmap to Democracy. In his statement, Khin Nyunt first summarized the progress that had been achieved under the “Tatmadaw government,” including GDP growth, improvements in different sectors of the economy and state infrastructure, and improved security in the border areas.\textsuperscript{139} His statement also defended the Tatmadaw’s interference in politics during the 1988 period, blaming the protests on “unscrupulous persons” who were “swayed by instigations and encouragement of western countries,” as well as explaining the failure of the National Convention process in the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{136} GovTrack.us “H.R. 2330 (108\textsuperscript{th})”.

\textsuperscript{137} U.S. Treasury Department 2003.

\textsuperscript{138} GovTrack.us “H.R. 2330 (108\textsuperscript{th})”.

\textsuperscript{139} Khin Nyunt 2003a.
\end{flushleft}
1990s as being the work of the NLD. He explained the slow process of democratization by pointing to the legacy of colonization, especially issues with security and development in the border areas, stating that “Without trying to heal these own injuries and wounds it is very difficult to change overnight into a democratic state.” Finally, General Khin Nyunt got to the important part of his speech – announcing the government’s plans for the future.

…the emergence of a new enduring State Constitution is the most important key in building a new nation. Therefore, the government will be implementing in a step-by-step and systematic manner the following political program for building the nation.

1) Reconvening of the National Convention that has been adjourned since 1996.
2) After the successful holding of the National Convention, step by step implementation of the process necessary for the emergence of a genuine and disciplined democratic system.
3) Drafting of a new constitution in accordance with basic principles and detailed basic principles laid down by the National Convention.
4) Adoption of the constitution through national referendum.
5) Holding of free and fair elections for Pyithu Hluttaws according to the new constitution.
6) Convening of Hluttaws attended by Hluttaw members in accordance with the new constitution.
7) Building a modern, developed, and democratic nation by the state leaders elected by the Hluttaw; and the government and other central organs formed by the Hluttaw.

This is the Road Map of Myanmar.

The announcement of the Roadmap was quickly met with criticism by pro-democracy activists and the international community, who doubted that this would lead to any real political

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140 Khin Nyunt 2003a.
141 Khin Nyunt 2003a.
142 Khin Nyunt 2003a.
changes. Others thought that the changes would only benefit the Tatmadaw and serve to solidify their rule. Egreteau and Jagan suggest that this Roadmap was the “last political card” that Khin Nyunt had to play after a disastrous year in 2003. In their view,

This political program was meant to be the Burmese military’s vision of the future and it outlined the conditions for a praetorianist transition from a direct military rule to a more civilian one, where the army still enjoyed considerable influence over policymaking, yet within a more pluralist politico-military landscape. The Tatmadaw was consequently to control its path and predict its outcome. In Khin Nyunt’s eyes, if the military leaders wanted to remain effectively involved in the country’s political affairs, without being brutally toppled and persecuted afterward, they had to shape the transitional process, which was essential after the Depayin gridlock. 143

Burmese citizens, for their part, largely viewed the Roadmap with skepticism. Tharawon (Pyay), a journalist and political writer in Yangon, said “This was a map that was going towards change. It is better to have a Roadmap than nothing. However, the weakness of the Roadmap was that it had no timeframe.” 144 U Maung Maung, the Secretary of the National League for Democracy G Block and representative of his district in Yangon, stated that “When the Roadmap was announced, I didn’t believe it would happen. The military is always doing something different than they announced.” 145 Htay Htay Win, a Burmese interpreter for the EU and UN and a former liaison officer for the French Embassy, believed that “The Roadmap seemed like a trick worked

143 Egreteau and Jagan 2013, 192.


out by Khin Nyunt to prolong [military rule].”\textsuperscript{146} Regardless of the doubts, however, the SPDC forged ahead with their Roadmap.

The National Convention convened again the following year. The year 2004 was marred with more controversies, most notably purges within the government which threatened Khin Nyunt’s grasp on power. In early 2004, there were rumors that Than Shwe had ordered Khin Nyunt to give up his position as Chief of the Defence Services Intelligence Bureau.\textsuperscript{147} On September 18, 2004, Burmese Foreign Minister U Win Aung and his deputy Khin Maung Win were fired, which “confirmed the decision of the army hardliners to withdraw Burma from the regional diplomatic radar for awhile [sic].”\textsuperscript{148} Some observers argued that this withdrawal from foreign policy was a result of the “lack of Western buy-in”\textsuperscript{149} to the Burmese government’s proposed political changes. Most shocking, however, was the firing and arrests of the circle of Khin Nyunt supporters within the Military Intelligence Services on October 19, 2004, as well as the arrest of Khin Nyunt himself.\textsuperscript{150} This purge came “from the very top of the Tatmadaw hierarchy” and constitute a “wholesale ‘cleansing’ of Khin Nyunt’s intelligence administration.”\textsuperscript{151} While the purge was shocking, “Interviews revealed that many Tatmadaw...

\textsuperscript{146} Htay Htay Win. Interview with Nicole Loring. Personal Interview. Yangon, June 22, 2016.

\textsuperscript{147} Egretreau and Jagan 2013, 196.

\textsuperscript{148} Egretreau and Jagan 2013, 196.

\textsuperscript{149} Pederson 2014, 27.

\textsuperscript{150} Egretreau and Jagan 2013, 196-197.

\textsuperscript{151} Egretreau and Jagan 2013, 197.
rank-and-file despised Khin Nyunt and his intelligence clique and were not unhappy to see him go.¹⁵² The events of October 2004 clearly indicated that one faction within the *Tatmadaw* had seized control, at least for the time being.

Other notable changes during 2004 included the beginning of ceasefire talks with the Karen National Union, one of the most powerful armed ethnic groups in the country¹⁵³, as well as the release of 3,937 political prisoners in November.¹⁵⁴ In 2005, the Burmese government announced that it would move the capital city from Yangon to an unbuilt city (later named Naypyidaw) in the center of the country. The Burmese government was widely criticized by the international community, as seen in statements by the U.S. Department of State which assert that “This move farther isolated the regime from the Burmese people and the international community; foreign diplomats have not been allowed officially to visit the new capital.”¹⁵⁵ Burma observers note that, while the reasons for the move seemed sparse, “a primary reason seems to be to provide the security-obsessed regime with greater security and to present a more dignified and impressive ‘front’ to the Burmese people and the outside world.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Egreteau and Jagan 2013, 199.

¹⁵³ Keenan 2012.


¹⁵⁵ U.S. Department of State 2006.

new capital cities is not unheard of in countries undergoing political changes, such an undertaking can be extremely costly.\textsuperscript{157}

2007 was perhaps the most tumultuous year for Myanmar since the 1988 protests. On August 15, 2007, the SPDC announced that they would remove government subsidies from diesel and natural gas, doubling the price of diesel fuel and causing the price of natural gas to soar as much as 500 percent, as well as increasing the price of other commodities such as rice and cooking oil.\textsuperscript{158} In response to this economic strain, activists from the 88 Students Generation group as well as the National League for Democracy led marches of hundreds of people in Yangon starting on August 19.\textsuperscript{159} On August 21, authorities arrested at least 13 members of the 88 Students Generation, and on August 24, pro-democracy protesters were arrested and beaten by members of the government-organized Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) and pro-government militia \textit{Pyithu Swan Ah/Arr Shin} (SAS).\textsuperscript{160} In late August, Buddhist monks began joining the protests and on September 5, a group of close to six hundred monks were attacked by SAS in the town of Pakkoku.\textsuperscript{161} In response to the beating of these monks, the All Burma Monks Alliance (ABMA) announced that they would boycott the government by

\textsuperscript{157} Turnell 2008, 973. He notes that other countries that have built new capital cities include Brazil (Brasilia), Australia (Canberra), Canada (Ottawa) and Nigeria (Abuja).

\textsuperscript{158} Clapp 2007, 2.

\textsuperscript{159} Clapp 2007, 2.

\textsuperscript{160} Irrawaddy Magazine 2007.

\textsuperscript{161} Clapp 2007, 2; Irrawaddy Magazine 2007.
refusing to accept alms from SPDC members (and therefore denying them from earning Buddhist merit)\textsuperscript{162} unless the regime apologized for the violence by September 17.\textsuperscript{163} When this deadline passed with no apology to the monks, the ABMA excommunicated SPDC leaders\textsuperscript{164} and tens of thousands of monks, surrounded by supportive citizens, marched through towns and cities, chanting blessings for the people and even marching to the residence of Aung San Suu Kyi in Yangon, who was under house arrest.\textsuperscript{165} About 500 monks were allowed to enter her compound and pray with her, which invigorated the protests and led to

\begin{quote}
...an estimated 20,000 protesters, including some 3,000 monks, [marching] in Rangoon, shouting slogans for the release of political prisoners and...Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and for the SPDC to relinquish its hold on power. A day later, September 24, the Rangoon protests exploded in size, to an estimated 150,000 people, including 30,000 to 50,000 monks.\textsuperscript{166}
\end{quote}

The regime sent security forces with riot shields to these protests,\textsuperscript{167} and on September 24, the SPDC began signaling they were preparing to crack down. State television broadcast a message from the minister of religious affairs, who blamed the protests as the work of “internal

\textsuperscript{162} Donating money, food, or service (such as cooking) to Buddhist monks is one of the main ways for observers of Theravada Buddhism to gain merit. Merit is a positive force that Buddhists try to accumulate by doing good deeds in their life, and one’s merit is believed to follow them into the next life. To be denied the opportunity to gain merit by monks refusing to accept one’s alms is therefore considered a stern form of censure in Buddhist communities.


\textsuperscript{164} Human Rights Watch 2007a.

\textsuperscript{165} Clapp 2007, 2.

\textsuperscript{166} Human Rights Watch 2007a, 8.

\textsuperscript{167} Irrawaddy Magazine 2007.
and external destructionists.” On September 25, USDA and local SPDC trucks drove around making loudspeaker announcements warning people not to participate in protests, the SPDC announced a curfew, and the regime began arresting high-profile supporters of the protests such as comedian Zargana. Finally, on September 26, 2007, the first use of force against protesters took place, as riot police and army troops fired into a crowd of protesters and reportedly killing five monks and one civilian woman. Over the next two days, security forces raided monasteries, using tear gas and firing shots to round up monks and arrest them for participating in the protests. Civilians tried to protect monks from being taken, and at least seven people were killed in clashes with the security forces on September 27.

Around mid-day, a second clash took place around the Sule Pagoda [in downtown Yangon], as soldiers, riot police, and the Swan Arr Shin dispersed a large crowd of protesters, with the troops shooting first in the air and then directly into the protesters. In scenes beamed around the world, Kenji Nagai, a Japanese video-journalist, was deliberately shot and killed, and eyewitnesses saw another man and a woman also shot and likely killed. The riot police and Swan Arr Shin proceeded to beat and detain large numbers of protesters.

Throughout the rest of September, the numbers of protesters dwindled as troops, riot police, and militia members patrolled the streets of Yangon, firing live ammunition and rubber bullets at any

168 Human Rights Watch 2007a, 8.
169 Human Rights Watch 2007a, 8.
demonstrators attempting to congregate.173 The regime cut off internet access and on September 30, the United Nations special envoy to Burma, Ibrahim Gambari, had separate meetings with Aung San Suu Kyi and junta leader Senior-General Than Shwe and other generals to try to negotiate a peaceful solution.174 Than Shwe announced on October 4 that he would meet with Aung San Suu Kyi if she agreed to meet certain preconditions, including “discontinue confrontation with the government, stop devastating the economy and cease promoting economic sanctions.”175 During late September and early October, over 50 monasteries were raided and monks were arrested, as well as continued violence against protestors who attempted to gather. Despite international outcry, the demonstrations were quashed. In all, about 6,000 people, including up to 1,400 monks, were arrested for participating in the demonstrations.176

Not all Burmese citizens thought that the 2007 demonstrations would effect change. Wai Phyo Myint, Regional Outreach Manager at the Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business, felt at the time that

Revolution was not a good idea. We would lose thousands of people [to violence at the hands of the military] – it could be like a second 1988. I didn’t agree with my friends who were calling for protests. Mass movements are only good if the military won’t shoot people. We’ve been [protesting] for decades, always been crushed down. The government can definitely shoot people – what are other ways [we can effect change]? The international policymakers and leaders were more thinking about mass movements and sudden change, but destroying the military and institutions

173 Human Rights Watch 2007a, 10.


is not possible. We didn’t even have a civil society back then. Unless they [the military] see the change will be beneficial, they won’t support change…It is important to involve the oppressor as well as the oppressed in the transition.\textsuperscript{177}

Three things were especially notable about what became known as the Saffron Revolution:\textsuperscript{178} first, that the protests bore a striking resemblance to the events of 1988; second, that the movement was surprisingly well organized, with communication between protesters in different cities that suggests an “extensive underground organization”;\textsuperscript{179} and third, that unlike the 1988 protests, this time technology allowed for the entire world to watch videos taken on cell phones and firsthand accounts from eyewitnesses. This whole world was watching the protests in Myanmar, and some states responded more strongly than others. The UN Security Council dispatched Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari, the United States announced new sanctions and pressed China, India, Japan, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to do the same, and the European Union also issued sanctions and condemnations.\textsuperscript{180} While China did pressure Myanmar to allow Special Envoy Gambari to visit the country, they also stated that they were opposed to other UN Security Council action on Burma. In a similarly ambiguous manner,

\textsuperscript{177} Wai Phyo Myint. Interview with Nicole Loring. Personal Interview. Yangon, June 17, 2016.

\textsuperscript{178} The name refers to the color of the monks’ robes. Some people object to the name on the basis that the color saffron is actually an orange-yellow rather the typical maroon or burgundy color of Burmese monk robes. Saffron colored monks’ robes are more commonly worn in other Southeast Asian countries, while maroon robes are worn in Myanmar and Tibet. Nevertheless, the name stuck.

\textsuperscript{179} Clapp 2007, 2.

\textsuperscript{180} Human Rights Watch 2007a, 12.
ASEAN released a statement expressing “revulsion” about the crackdown, but then circled the wagons and uninvited Gambari from its summit meeting. Finally, Japan issued only a modest cut in foreign aid to Myanmar, spurred by public outrage over the killing of Kenji Nagai.\(^{181}\)

In 2008, Myanmar was still reeling from the events of the previous year, but much was to be done in pursuit of progress along the Roadmap. In the fall of 2007, while the Saffron Revolution was making headlines around the world, the National Convention concluded and a “constitutional drafting commission was set up by the SPDC in October 2007, comprising 54 members nominated by the SPDC”\(^{182}\). By February 2008, the SPDC announced that a national referendum on the new constitution would be held in May, despite the fact that the new constitution had not been shown to the public yet.\(^{183}\) The constitution was published in April 2008, and immediately drew the ire of domestic and international observers. “The conventional wisdom among commentators, analysts, and politicians was that the constitution was designed to perpetuate decades of military rule, the 2010 general election would be a sham, and the hluttaw [parliament] would be a rubber stamp for the new military-backed national government.”\(^{184}\)

The three clauses which caused the most uproar were article 59(f), article 109(b), and article 436. Article 59 discusses the qualifications of the president and vice-president, and clause 59(f) in particular states


\(^{182}\) Skidmore and Wilson 2008, 2.

\(^{183}\) Skidmore and Wilson 2008, 2.

\(^{184}\) Kean 2014, 43.
shall he himself, one of the parents, the spouse, one of the legitimate children or their spouses not owe allegiance to a foreign power, not be subject of a foreign power or citizen of a foreign country. They shall not be persons entitled to enjoy the rights and privileges of a subject of a foreign government or citizen of a foreign country.\textsuperscript{185}

This clause was certainly aimed at preventing Aung San Suu Kyi from seeking the presidency, as her late husband and two adult sons are both British citizens. The second article which created alarm was article 109(b), which states that of the \textit{Pyithu Hluttaw}'s 440 representatives, 330 of those representatives will be “elected prescribing electorate” and 110 will be “Defence Services personnel nominated by the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services”,\textsuperscript{186} meaning that the \textit{Tatmadaw} had a twenty-five percent quota of representation in parliament. Tharawon (Pyay) says this quota for military members was modeled after the Indonesian constitution.\textsuperscript{187} Finally, article 436 dealt with amendments to the new constitution, stating that an amendment can only pass “with the prior approval of more than seventy-five percent of all the representatives of the \textit{Pyidaungsu Hluttaw}, after which in a nation-wide referendum only with the votes of more than half of those who are eligible to vote.”\textsuperscript{188} Considering the twenty-five percent quota for \textit{Tatmadaw} members in article 109(b), this requirement that constitutional amendments can only be passed with the support of more than seventy-five percent of the parliament effectively gave

\textsuperscript{185} Myanmar Constitution 2008, 19-20.

\textsuperscript{186} Myanmar Constitution 2008, 39.


\textsuperscript{188} Myanmar Constitution 2008, 173.
the Tatmadaw veto-power over any possible changes to the constitution the SPDC representatives had written.

In addition to the clauses giving constitutional protections to the military, the new constitution also attempted to solve a problem that had been threatening internal cohesion and domestic security since independence – the issue of armed ethnic groups. Many experts on Burmese politics felt that “The 2008 Constitution is the army government’s attempt to cast these issues in terms that will be politically resolvable and will avoid in the future both the severe conflicts of the civil war and the popular upheaval of 1988”.189 In an effort to avoid the possibility of future civil wars with these ethnic groups, many of whom were still naming federalism as their ultimate goal. The SPDC’s solution to the problem of conflict with these groups was attempting to incorporate the insurgent groups into the Tatmadaw in a program called the Border Guard Forces (BGF). The BGF was based on Article 338 of the constitution, which stipulates ‘All the armed forces in the Union shall be under the command of the Defence Services.’ The objective was to have the BGF under the command of tatmadaw officers, thereby bringing these forces under the tatmadaw chain of command, while the forces of the BGF were to be composed of insurgent groups that had reached cease-fire agreements with the tatmadaw.190

In all, the constitution was released in Burmese and English (not in any minority ethnic group languages)191 shortly ahead of the scheduled May 10, 2008 referendum. The text was not

189 Taylor 2014, 139-140.

190 Nakanishi 2013, 311.

circulated widely, “and voters were expected to endorse it without seeing it.”

A much larger problem was approaching the country, however, and would make landfall just eight days before voting was set to begin.

On May 2, 2008, Cyclone Nargis hit the Irrawaddy Delta, just north of Yangon, at full force. The storm created a tidal surge up to 4 meters, flooding paddy fields with sea water and ruining the crops. Official death toll figures counted 130,000 people dead and 2.4 million affected, and the United Nations estimated that some 900,000 people were left homeless after the Cyclone, which devastated towns and villages in the delta region. Even after the initial damage had been wreaked by the cyclone, the SPDC’s sluggish response and “refusal to allow international disaster-relief teams to provide emergency aid” exacerbated the situation. Despite widespread human suffering,

The international focus and the proposed massive foreign assistance [after Cyclone Nargis] therefore appeared to have revived the military leaders’ old fears of invasions, especially by sea…. In their strategic thinking, the xenophobic withdrawal of the Burmese top leadership in May 2008 was quite logical. The SPDC’s reaction to the ‘marauding’ US and French navy fleets near the Burmese waters was explicit.

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194 Skidmore 2008, 203.

195 Taylor (2015b) suggests that the SPDC did, in fact, respond to the disaster, arguing that “Western reports of what happened after Nargis almost completely ignored the response of the Npyitaw [sic] government to the cyclone” (917). This chapter will discuss Western reactions to the cyclone more in the “Threat Perception” section.

196 Skidmore 2008, 203.

197 Egreteau and Jagan 2013, 66.
In addition to horror over the SPDC’s denial of emergency services for its citizens, the international community and opposition groups also objected to the regime’s insistence on holding the constitutional referendum soon after the cyclone hit. The vote in severely affected areas was rescheduled from May 10 to May 24, but recovery from the cyclone was arduous and slow. Even before Nargis, human rights groups and international observers were concerned that the referendum would not be free or fair, due to reports that the SPDC “refused to allow any meaningful public discussion and debate of the draft constitution, and has arrested and jailed those who have expressed opposition to its contents”; that rights to assembly and free association were outlawed; that opposition parties were regularly harassed and repressed by authorities; and that the referendum process would not be monitored by any independent organizations.

Despite the ongoing humanitarian and environmental disaster that was caused by Cyclone Nargis, the SPDC decided to press on with the referendum. On May 14, 2008, the regime announced the results of the referendum that had been held in May 10 in less-affected parts of the country, claiming that “more than 99 percent’ of the 22.7 million eligible voters…cast their vote, with 92.4% voting in favor of the new constitution.” Based on these figures, over 20 million people voted on May 10, despite the fact that almost five million of the country’s 22.7 million voters would not be voting until May 24. Despite these impossible numbers, and the

198 Martin and Margesson 2008.
201 Martin and Margesson 2008, 18.
fury of opposition groups who reported the regime had pre-marked ballots, intimidated and threatened voters, and refused peoples’ right to vote; the SPDC announced the constitution had been approved. To round out another difficult year, Aung San Suu Kyi remained under house arrest, and Myanmar signed an agreement with multiple firms to build natural gas and oil pipelines into China, leaning to environmental and human rights concerns.

Unsurprisingly, the SPDC faced widespread criticism for the referendum, within the country as well as from the international community. Okka Oo, editor and journalist at News Watch in Yangon, said that this time was marked with “lots of pessimism – people in Burma felt hopeless. There was lots of criticism about the constitution and the referendum after Nargis. So many lives were lost, but they were trying to push their own agenda. Even if [their] intention was good (I’m not sure it was), it was not right.” Phyu Phyu Zin, a former journalist who also worked at the Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business, stated that “When I was reporting on the referendum, I had to do it really carefully. There was still censorship on the referendum. Most people don’t believe in the referendum or in the results…. People were being arrested for helping out [during Cyclone Nargis].”

204 Srinivas 2014, 952.
205 Human Rights Watch 2010.
Htay Htay Win noted that during the 2008 referendum, in addition to the suffering caused by Nargis, “we saw a lot of cheating going on and a lack of regulations even in Yangon. [There was a problem with] family lists – I can have double, triple votes in different townships. If I am absent, they can use my vote. This is how the referendum was passed – they took advantage of this loophole.”

According to Wai Phyo Myint, “The referendum process and drafting of the constitution was not transparent. Nobody was really feeling like we can trust [the SPDC]. The whole process is such a joke, like North Korea. People were feeling like this country needs a change, revolution, all citizens were very angry with government, but the military will crack down violently.” She also noted that while Nargis was a disaster for Myanmar, “it did have a positive outcome – the development of civil society. People formed groups to help each other.”

The following year was sandwiched in between the catastrophes in 2007 and 2008 and the upcoming 2010 general elections. In January 2009, Thailand denied the entry of hundreds of Muslim Rohingya refugees fleeing from Myanmar and forced their boats back into open waters, creating an international outcry. Military attacks on civilians in Shan state displaced some 15,000 civilians into Thailand, in addition to an estimated 140,000 refugees living in camps

211 Human Rights Watch 2010.
along the Thai-Burma border and 28,000 Rohingya Muslims living in camps in Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{212} In an effort to limit the strength of the armed ethnic groups in the border states, “semi-official ceasefire agreements increased during 2009 as the government instructed them to disarm and transform into smaller ‘Border Security Guard’ forces ahead of the 2010 elections.”\textsuperscript{213} These efforts did not go smoothly, however, as some groups resisted the orders.\textsuperscript{214}

In April 2009, the NLD announced that they would be willing to contest the 2010 general elections if the SPDC met a number of their demands: namely, 1) the unconditional release of political prisoners, especially NLD leaders Aung San Suu Kyi and Tin Oo; 2) amending certain articles of the 2008 constitution “which are not in accord with the democratic principles”;\textsuperscript{215} and 3) that the 2010 elections be inclusive, free and fair, and supervised by international observers.\textsuperscript{216} In late 2009, construction started on a controversial hydroelectric dam project, known as the Myitsone Dam. The dam was supposed to span the Irrawaddy River and drew the ire of both environmentalists, for its harm to the river, fish populations, and risks of flooding, and humanitarians, who were concerned about the safety and livelihoods of thousands of downstream villagers who would be forcibly relocated from their homes.\textsuperscript{217}

\textsuperscript{212} Human Rights Watch 2010.

\textsuperscript{213} Human Rights Watch 2010.

\textsuperscript{214} Nakanishi 2013, 311.

\textsuperscript{215} National League for Democracy 2009.

\textsuperscript{216} National League for Democracy 2009.

\textsuperscript{217} Ives 2017.
Myanmar continued to be sanctioned by the international community for their abysmal efforts in humanitarian relief during Cyclone Nargis, the clearly undemocratic constitutional referendum, and an odd incident in May 2009, wherein an American man named John Yettaw swam across Inya Lake in Yangon to get to Aung San Suu Kyi’s home compound. Aung San Suu Kyi was later arrested on charges that she breached the terms of her house arrest by allowing him to enter. In August, she was found guilty and sentenced to three years’ hard labor, which was immediately commuted to 18 months of additional house arrest, which effectively guaranteed she could not run in the 2010 general elections. John Yettaw himself was sentenced to seven years of hard labor but was released to US Senator Jim Webb a week later.

The year 2009 also marked the beginning of the Obama Administration, which approached Myanmar with a policy of “pragmatic engagement.” Early on in President Obama’s tenure, U.S. policy towards Myanmar came under review, with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton traveling to Asia in February 2009 and announcing an official review of U.S. policy. This review “was perhaps the most thorough and far-reaching policy review of U.S. relations with Burma that has been undertaken by the U.S. government in recent memory.” In October it was announced that new policy would be to retain the existing trade, investment, and

218 Human Rights Watch 2010.
219 Clymer 2015, 299.
221 Clymer 2015, 299.
222 Clapp 2010, 44.
financial sanctions while also starting “high-level diplomatic engagement with the SPDC”, an approach that was absent from the policies of previous U.S. administrations.

2010 was a pivotal year for Myanmar and marked the culmination of the changes that took place during this interim time period. In February 2010, NLD leader Tin Oo was released from house arrest after over a decade of imprisonment. In March, election laws were passed by the election committee (which was made up of representatives chosen by the junta) for the upcoming general elections. The U.S. State Department released a statement saying that the election law “makes a mockery of the democratic process and ensures that the upcoming elections [will] be devoid of credibility.” These election laws were considered by many to contain “draconian restrictions, notably one forbidding political parties from including members currently serving prison terms.” This election rule was clearly aimed at the NLD, which declined to remove the still-imprisoned Aung San Suu Kyi from the party and instead chose to boycott the elections, although some in the party disagreed with the decision and split off. The decision of the NLD to not contest the 2010 elections was hotly contested by NLD supporters and observers. “I think the NLD not participating in the 2010 elections was a mistake,” said Wai Phyo Myint. “[The elections were] not free and fair. NLD was not participating, [so] we didn’t

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223 Human Rights Watch 2010.

224 BBC News 2010.

225 Clymer 2015, 304.

226 Clapp 2010, 35.

227 Fuller 2010.
go vote for any party. I think that’s why the USDP won.”

U Maung Maung stated that “I believe the NLD was right not to run for elections in 2010. There was some dispute or debate about whether to run amongst the members of the NLD. However, Aung San Suu Kyi’s instruction [not to run] was very strong, so our decision improved [resolve strengthened].”

In November 2010, the first general elections in twenty years were held. Expectations of these elections being free, fair, or democratic were nonexistent.

The conventional view leading up to the 2010 elections was that this was purely a cosmetic move to shore up the existing regime and unlikely, therefore, to result in significant change…. Early developments seemed to support this pessimistic view. In its efforts to maintain control of the transition, the military government made a mockery of democratic elections and managed to secure, by hook and by crook, a landslide victory for its own party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).

Indeed, without the NLD contesting the elections, the government backed USDP won handily.

The USDP contested all 1,154 seats in the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (parliament) and won 882 of those seats (76.5%). In the Amyotha Hluttaw (House of Nationalities/Upper House), the USDP won 120 seats (75%), and in the Pyithu Hluttaw (House of Representatives/Lower House), USDP members won 259 seats (80%).

The USDP won fewer seats in the State and Region Hluttaws, but their huge majority, paired with the 25% of seats that had been set aside for military members, meant that the regime continued to control the entirety of the state’s politics

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after the election. Figure 6 shows the number of seats won by each party that participated in the 2010 elections, out of a total of 1,542 seats.

![Composition of Elected Officials in 2010 Elections](image)

Figure 6: Composition of elected representatives in 2010 elections.\textsuperscript{232}

There were a number of international organizations which observed the elections and published their findings, which included many flaws in the voting process, including: the

\textsuperscript{232} Burma Fund UN Office 2011, 35.
coercion of advance votes, especially in ethnic states; civil servants voting multiple times; advance votes being cast by ineligible voters; irregularities in voter rolls; confusion and administrative issues with certain electoral procedures; threats, intimidation, and coercion of voters at the polls; vote buying; and violence at the polls in some townships. Additionally, widespread reports of voter disenfranchisement took place, particularly in ethnic states. The Union Election Commission cancelled voting in over 3,400 villages across Kachin, Karenni, Mon, and Shan state, effectively disenfranchising 1.5 million ethnic voters. Voters certainly felt the flaws in the electoral process. Htay Htay Win “had a 50/50 feeling about the 2010 elections. I didn’t trust the government at that time – it was all cheats.” Okko Oo was in Singapore during the elections but believed they “were just for show. I did not speak about the elections with [my family in Myanmar]. Speaking about it on the phone would have been dangerous.” Phyu Phyu Zin covered the elections in Karen State as a journalist and was suspicious about the proceedings at the station she observed. “They let us go to a polling station, we could sit down and watch them collecting ballots. They started counting, there were no votes for the USDP, just for the ethnic parties. Then they made us go back to the office [because] the Karen people got in a fight. Then the USDP won.”

233 Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies 2011, 68-75.
Despite these issues, the 2010 elections did mark the start of substantial changes in Myanmar and serves as a precursor for the more genuine changes that took place from 2011-2015. The regime certainly made an effort to showcase that the elections meant change. One week after the elections took place, Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest.\footnote{Davies 2010.} As election observers noted in one election observation report,

But to conclude simply that this election was not free and fair misses the point. Those who voted and participated as candidates and parties knew this even before the election took place. The more pertinent question is whether this election represents an opportunity for those who wish for a more democratic and plural Myanmar. Though parties not aligned with the government faced several kinds of constraints during their campaigns, they have begun to prise open the space for political debate in Myanmar. Their representation in parliament may help this trend to continue. While the USDP won almost 80 percent of seats in national legislatures, in four of the state legislatures ethnic parties control more than 25% of the seats, enabling them to exercise some influence on proceedings. In short, there are grounds for very cautious optimism.\footnote{Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies 2011, 9.}

Clearly, the interim time period ranging from 2003-2010 was rife with problems and with developments in Myanmar, many of which set the stage for more robust political changes in 2011-2015. Chapters 4 and 5 will analyze the events of 2003-2010 in depth.
The start of this period was marked with the dissolving of the State Peace and Development Council\textsuperscript{240} and the inauguration of a new president of Myanmar, the former Prime Minister Thein Sein. In his inaugural address on March 30, 2011, Thein Sein revealed his moderate tendencies, calling for unity while also mentioning the possibility of amending the constitution in the future and pledging to work towards democracy and protect the rights of minority groups. As Clymer notes,

\ldots he appeared to welcome the opposition into the electoral process; “If an individual or organization stands for election in accordance with the democratic practice to come to power in a justice [sic] way, that will be acceptable to everyone. Therefore, I would say our government will keep peace door open to welcome such individuals and organizations.”\textsuperscript{241}

Throughout 2011, President Thein Sein continued to represent a more moderate approach to ruling Myanmar than a military leader had previously taken. In August, he met with Aung San Suu Kyi in the newly-built capital city of Naypyidaw\textsuperscript{242}, a significant step towards reaching out to the National League for Democracy. Even more importantly, he suspended the construction of the hydroelectric Myitsone Dam project, a highly controversial Chinese investment that would

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\textsuperscript{240} Moe Thuzar 2013, 1. \\
\textsuperscript{241} Clymer 2015, 306. \\
\textsuperscript{242} BBC 2011.
\end{flushright}
have had major environmental and human rights violations. The halting of the Myitsone Dam project was hugely significant in Myanmar; one Burmese citizen stated that “The moment I know the change is real is when they stopped the [Myitsone] Dam. Before that they had just done lots of PR exercises to show signal to investors that things are changing.”

Changes continued throughout August 2011 when President Thein Sein invited Burmese exiles “who have not committed ‘serious crimes’ to return and help in rebuilding the country”, although few exiles chose to return, most likely due to the government’s requirement that they sign a document vowing “not to engage in actions and words that can harm national stability.” In October 2011, the government introduced a new policy of mass amnesty which led to the eventual release of over 6,000 political prisoners. In November, Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy announced that they had “unanimously decided to reregister as a political party” and that they would contest the upcoming by-elections in 2012. Shortly thereafter, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Myanmar, meeting with both Aung San Suu Kyi and President Thein Sein.

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243 Fuller 2011.
245 Moe Thuzar 2012, 7.
246 Moe Thuzar 2012, 7.
247 Basu 2011.
249 Myers 2011.
diplomatic visit was seen as a significant shift in foreign relations by Burmese citizens – according to one informant, “When Hillary Clinton visited Myanmar, people often cite that as a major turning point for more transparent changes.”

By the end of 2011, President Thein signed new legislation allowing citizens to engage in peaceful protests, albeit with some stipulations, and a truce deal between the Shan State Army and the Burmese government was reached. As Pederson described it, “Compared to earlier periods, the situation at the start of 2011 was uniquely conducive to reform. The threat to national security had been minimized and concerns about economic development had moved to the forefront.” This was the start of a new era of political changes in Myanmar.

The year 2012 began with a ceasefire between the Myanmar government and the Karen rebels, ending a 62-year conflict. In April, by-elections were held and the National League for Democracy won a huge victory. The elections were set to fill 48 vacant seats in the Hluttaw, although the Union Election Commission postponed voting on three seats in Kachin State due to security concerns, so a total of 45 seats were contested. In a significant departure from the 2010 electoral practices, Myanmar invited foreign observers to be present to watch the

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251 Zeldin 2011; Moe Thuzar 2012, 9.

252 Saimon 2011.


254 Soe Zeya Tun 2012.

255 Tin Maung Maung Than 2013; Martin 2012a.
elections. “Though there was widespread expectation that the NLD would win a sizeable portion of available seats, even the party itself was surprised by its virtually clean sweep of the field, securing forty-three out of forty-four constituencies in which it completed”; even in regions that were dominated by the military. This victory for the NLD was more symbolic than substantial, considering they only held forty-three seats out of the 664 seats in the entire Hluttaw, but the ability of the opposition party to contest and win elections, without the Tatmadaw interfering or preventing them from taking their seats, was seen by many as a significant development.

The international response to the 2012 by-elections was largely positive. Shortly following the elections, the European Union announced that they would be suspending sanctions against Myanmar for one year. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh also visited Myanmar in May 2012 and met with both President Thein Sein and Aung San Suu Kyi, in the first official visit by an Indian prime minister since 1987. Despite the positive international reactions, however, the by-elections had not solved all of Myanmar’s domestic issues. Fighting continued in Kachin State despite the existence of a ceasefire, possible due to the central government’s

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256 Clymer 2015, 312.


258 Clymer 2015, 312.

259 European Union 2012.

260 BBC 2012b.
inability to exercise complete control over military operations in far-flung states.\textsuperscript{261} In the summer of 2012, communal and sectarian violence, which had long simmered below the surface, broke out between Arakanese Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State in western Myanmar.\textsuperscript{262} In response to the violence, President Thein Sein issued an Executive Order on August 17, 2012 in order to set up a Rakhine Inquiry Commission to “discover the root causes of communal violence and provide recommendations for the prevention of violence in the future and promotion of peaceful coexistence.”\textsuperscript{263}

In addition to addressing continued violence in parts of the country, the Thein Sein government pursued a number of moderate policies. The development of the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PRSD) led to the relaxing of pre-publication media censorship. The PRSD started with allowing stories on entertainment, health, children, information technology, and sports “to be published without prior submission of drafts” for approval by the government.\textsuperscript{264} Later that year, the law expanded to allow stories about business and crimes to be published without prior approval. “This left only stories on political news and religion subject to scrutiny.”\textsuperscript{265} Despite this improvement in media censorship, however, “each time local

\textsuperscript{261} Clymer 2015, 313.

\textsuperscript{262} Clymer 2015, 313.

\textsuperscript{263} Myo Myint 2013.

\textsuperscript{264} Moe Thuzar 2012, 3.

\textsuperscript{265} Moe Thuzar 2012, 3.
journalists have bluntly criticized the army, as an institution or targeting only one of its members, the reporters, bloggers and photographers were hunted down and brought to court.”

Thein Sein reshuffled his cabinet in August 2012, replacing hardliner Information Minister Kyaw Hsan with more moderate and reform-minded Aung Kyi. The Myanmar government also released over 650 political prisoners this year, including former Prime Minister and intelligence chief Khin Nyunt, who had been in prison since 2004. In a move aimed at gaining goodwill with both citizens and foreigners, the Myanmar government removed over 600 names from the official “no-entry” black list, including former U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright, Aung San Suu Kyi’s two sons, infamous American amateur swimmer John Yettaw, and investigative journalists such as John Pilger and Dan Rivers. The year ended with more positive news on the international front, as European Commission Chief Jose Manuel Barroso offered over $100 million in development aid to Myanmar in a meeting with President Thein Sein in November. In the same month, U.S. President Barack Obama visited Myanmar, becoming the first sitting president ever to visit the country. As Clymer notes,

Some observers thought this was premature: it would only reward 'Burma for what they've already been rewarded for, and it wastes enormous political capital which could have been saved up and used to reward future events.' There was also the possible embarrassment if, after the visit, there was

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266 Egreteau 2016, 88.
267 Aung Hla Tun 2012.
268 Nelson 2012.
269 Olarn 2012.
270 BBC 2012a.
retrogression. On the other hand, Aung San Suu Kyi herself had encouraged Obama to make the visit.\textsuperscript{271}

The following years were marked with both domestic conflict and improvements in Myanmar’s foreign relations. January and February 2013 saw standoffs between the Kachin Independence Army and the \textit{Tatmadaw} in Laiza despite the existence of a ceasefire agreement, and China stepped in to moderate talks between the sides.\textsuperscript{272} Continued ethnic violence between Muslims and Buddhists in March 2013 left an undetermined number of people dead – estimates range from ten to almost one-hundred people.\textsuperscript{273} In April, four new private daily newspapers appeared in press, and 12 more would soon follow, breaking the state monopoly on news media of almost 50 years.\textsuperscript{274} President Thein Sein visited Washington, DC in May 2013, the first time a Burmese president had gone on a diplomatic mission to the White House in almost 50 years.\textsuperscript{275} In 2014, clashes between the \textit{Tatmadaw} and Kachin rebels continued, as did the reports of deaths and displaced people.\textsuperscript{276} Due in part to concerns about the ongoing conflicts, as well as human rights abuses and the continuing political role of the military, the United States extended sanctions on Myanmar for another year on May 2014, including “sanctions against persons who

\textsuperscript{271} Clymer 2015, 316.

\textsuperscript{272} Whiteman 2013.

\textsuperscript{273} Hodal 2013b.

\textsuperscript{274} Hodal 2013a.

\textsuperscript{275} MacAskill 2013.

\textsuperscript{276} The Irrawaddy Magazine n.d.
had repressed the democratic movement, and in October the United States froze the assets of U
Aung Thaung, minister of industry from 1997-2011.\textsuperscript{277} The Thein Sein government continued
to pursue their goals of political reforms wherever possible, releasing 3,000 more political
prisoners in October 2014.\textsuperscript{278}

The year 2015 was in many ways the culmination of years of reform efforts and pressure
by both the domestic and international communities, although it was not free from controversy.
In February, fighting between the \textit{Tatmadaw} and ethnic Kokang rebels in Shan State, prompting
China to again get involved in pushing for peace talks.\textsuperscript{279} In March, a draft ceasefire agreement
was negotiated between the Myanmar government and 16 different ethnic armed groups, and was
eventually signed in October.\textsuperscript{280} Most notably, Thein Sein’s administration withdrew the
temporary voting rights of Rohingya Muslims in February, ahead of the fall elections, after
Buddhist citizens took to the streets protesting the passage of a law allowing temporary residents
to vote.\textsuperscript{281} This incident was indicative of the continued animosity felt by many Myanmar
citizens towards the Rohingyas, as was a crisis in May in which thousands of Rohingyas fled the
country in boats and became stranded in the Andaman Sea after neighboring states turned away

\textsuperscript{277} Clymer 2015, 319.

\textsuperscript{278} Panda 2014.

\textsuperscript{279} Radio Free Asia 2015b.

\textsuperscript{280} Institute for Security and Development Policy 2015b.

\textsuperscript{281} Egreteau 2016; BBC 2015a.
some boats full of refugees, prompting the UN to get involved.\footnote{Graham-Harrison 2015.} The continued inhumane treatment of the Rohingya people in 2015 is a reminder that democratization and political liberalization are two processes that do not always take place concurrently, and that free and fair elections do not also guarantee equal rights for all.

Despite the ongoing Rohingya crisis, the general elections were held in November, and were “nonetheless received far more positively than expected by the international community, but more importantly by the Burmese themselves. Some 8,000 to 10,000 Burmese and international observers were allowed to closely monitor the process in more than 40,000 polling stations.”\footnote{Egreteau 2016, 54.} A total of 1,171 seats were contested by the USDP, the NLD, and eighty-nine other parties\footnote{Institute for Security and Development Policy 2015a.} using a first-past-the-post electoral system with representatives chosen from single-member constituencies.\footnote{International Foundation for Electoral Systems 2015.} In the run-up to the elections, many observers believed that “By legalizing the NLD and granting it a national political platform, the government has all but guaranteed that its own party, the USDP, will lose the 2015 elections.”\footnote{Wilson 2014, 30.} As one Myanmar expert noted,

\ldots the main performance deliverable that the USDP administration could focus on was the achieving of a nationwide ceasefire agreement with ethnic armed groups and starting political dialogue towards constitutional change. The significance of the nationwide ceasefire agreement signed on 15
October 2015 was diluted somewhat by the fact that only eight of the 16 armed ethnic groups came to the table as signatories.\textsuperscript{287}

Indeed, compared to the USDP’s message of reform and successful ceasefires, the NLD’s slogan of “It’s time (to change)”\textsuperscript{288} resonated more with voters. Touted as a landslide victory, the NLD walked away with almost 80 percent of the elected seats, which meant they would hold a majority in both houses even after accounting for the 25 percent of seats reserved for Tatmadaw members.\textsuperscript{289} Figure 7 shows the 2015 election results.

In many ways, these elections ushered in the end of a long and fraught era of political changes in Myanmar, starting with the protests in 1988 and ending with the first elected civilian government in the country since 1962. The Roadmap to Democracy had brought a process of democratization to Myanmar, despite some potholes. Chapters 6 and 7 will detail the political changes which occurred from 2011-2015.

\textsuperscript{287} Moe Thuzar 2015, 5.

\textsuperscript{288} Moe Thuzar 2015, 5.

\textsuperscript{289} International Crisis Group 2015.
Figure 7: 2015 National election results.\textsuperscript{290}

\textsuperscript{290} International Crisis Group 2015.
CHAPTER 3

This chapter will focus on the events leading up the 8888 Demonstrations in Myanmar, the 1990 elections, and the failed transition to democracy in this post-election period, including protests in 1996, up to 2002. My hypotheses for this chapter are as follows:

H1: International and domestic pressure for elections during 1988-1990 were not sufficient to compel the military to respect election results due to perceived domestic threats and lack of institutional design which can protect the military’s interests.

H1A: The military held elections because of domestic/international pressure and their confidence in their chances of victory; however, they did not uphold the results of elections because the military lost stability and immunity confidence.

H1B: Institutional design (in the form of developing a new constitution) did not occur during this time period because the military believed a constitution would be seen as more legitimate after an electoral victory.
In order to test these hypotheses, I explored the antecedent variables during the 1988-2002 time frame which led to the Tatmadaw’s decision to hold elections and, ultimately, to overturn the election results.

The dependent variables are 1) democratization, which I operationalize as freely and fairly-contested elections wherein opposition parties are able to contest with the military-backed parties on equal playing ground and wherein the results of elections are respected and upheld,¹ and 2) political liberalization, which consists of the opening of other civil and political liberties such as freedom of the press, the release of political prisoners, and the legalization of civil society associations and activities.²

**Analysis**

Why did SLORC annul the election results in the face of domestic and international pressure? Burmese citizens who lived through the 8888 Demonstrations and the 1990 elections have varied opinions about the SLORC’s reasoning. U Pe Tin, the Chairman of the North Okkala G Block branch of the National League for Democracy, argued that “In 1990, the military wasn’t

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¹ I am aware of the issues with defining Myanmar’s elections as “free and fair,” as there continue to be disenfranchisement of certain populations (such as ethnic minorities, members of the Sangha, and prisoners) and inaccurate voter lists, as well as concerns over voter intimidation and electoral fraud. My definition of “freely and fairly contested elections” focuses more on institutional barriers to opposition parties and particularly to whether those opposition parties are able to win (and hold) seats in the Hluttaw. For more detailed information about defining free and fair elections, see Goodwin-Gill 2006.

² See Table 3 for operationalization of independent variables.
ready, they had to protect themselves. There were no protections for them being sued over criminal things”\(^3\) due to there being no constitution in place during the elections. Ma Htay Htay Win, an interpreter for the EU and UN and former liaison officer for the French Embassy, described her disappointment when she realized that SLORC would not honor the results of the 1990 elections.

We hoped that politics would change after the 1988 movement – we thought that the 1990 elections would lead to the NLD winning. We were so upset when the results were not recognized. We knew all their dirty tricks, but we didn’t think the military would be that dirty. [The 1990 election] was a very free or fair election – like the 2015 elections. The military gave all excuses of not handing over power to the NLD. Some military members seemed to be genuine, like Soe Mann. Morally, they were still under the influence of Ne Win, who was still alive and pulling strings.\(^4\)

How, then, to explain the SLORC’s decision to hold multi-party elections in 1990 without establishing a constitution first? The SLORC was able to explain this outcome by framing the elections as a constitutional writing assembly, an idea they had been discussing well before the elections themselves. At the Extraordinary Session of the Burma Socialist Programme Party, which was held from July 23-25, 1988 as a response to the growing domestic unrest, General Ne Win gave a speech about the necessity of elections, although he notes that the necessary steps to holding general elections will take time. Importantly, he asserted that “The Hluttaw\(^5\) elected thus,

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\(^5\) which translates to “parliament.” The full name of the entire national bicameral parliament is the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, which can be further divided into the upper house, called the Amyotha Hluttaw or House of Nationalities, and the lower house, called the Pyithu Hluttaw or House of Representatives.
can write the Constitution and other necessary laws according to its own wishes. I request the organizations currently taking responsibility to assert control as much as possible to keep the country from disarray till [sic] the organizations formed by the Hluttaw can take over.” On June 9, 1989, SLORC gave a press conference about the upcoming elections, stating:

We do not know as yet to whom and how the power would be transferred, and we do not know who would win and in which manner we would transfer power. We cannot transfer power as soon as the elections are held. The government would be formed according to a constitution. If the state power is hurriedly transferred, it would lead to a shaky and weak government. This can be reasoned by any person with intelligence….Presently, we have two constitutions in our country; that is, the 1947 Constitution and the 1974 Constitution….The elected representatives can choose one of the constitutions to form a government, and we will transfer power to the government formed by them…If they do not like the two existing constitutions, they can draw [up] a new constitution. Neither the Defence Forces nor the State Law and Order Restoration Council will draw up a new constitution. The elected representatives are to draw up the constitution. If the people approve that constitution, we will transfer power as soon as possible to the government that emerged according to that constitution.7

In the aftermath of the elections, on July 27, 1990, SLORC published a statement,8 again mentioning the 1947 and 1974 Constitutions and pointing out that the 1947 Constitution was developed prior to independence and without the involvement of some ethnic groups. They go on to say that “…the desire of the majority of the political parties which contested in the… [1990] Election is to draw up a new constitution…. Today in Myanmar Naing-Ngan9 there are many

6 Ne Win 1988.
9 ပြင်သစ်၊ which translates to “the country of Myanmar”.
national races who have awakened politically and it is obvious that it is especially necessary to
draw up a firm constitution after soliciting their wishes and views.”10 The declaration also warns
that SLORC will “in no way accept the drawing up of a temporary constitution for forming a
government” and that SLORC would take “effective action” to stop such a measure.

Was the purpose of the 1990 elections always to develop a new constitution, or was it a
way for the regime to twist the unexpected and unwelcome electoral results in their favor? While
voters thought the elections were to choose a new government, according to Derek Tonkin, who
observed that “over 99 percent of those eligible to vote really thought they were electing a new
parliament and a new government,”11 the language used by the regime in the lead-up to the
elections seemed to indicate that they had begun to see the elections not as a referendum on who
should run government, but rather on who should write the next constitution.

Clearly the 8888 Demonstrations were a result of longstanding pent-up frustrations over
the failure of the BSPP government and its Burmese Way to Socialism. The events of 1988, and
the resulting elections in 1990, can be seen as a reaction to the catalyst of domestic civil
opposition.

The enormous scale of the pro-democracy demonstrations in August and September 1988…left the regime badly shaken…. Even after the
demonstrations had been crushed, and most leading protestors killed, imprisoned, or driven into exile, the SLORC feared the threat of violent and
more serious uprisings by urban-based dissidents.12


11 Tonkin in Clymer 2015, 270.

12 Selth 1996, 16.
In addition to the pressure of the 8888 demonstrations, however, there are a number of factors which played a crucial role in determining the events of 1988, the decision to hold elections in 1990, and the failure of SLORC to transition according to the results of the election. Those factors include external/international pressure, splits/cohesion within the Tatmadaw, and the failure to develop confidence-building institutions.

**External/International Pressure**

The uncomfortable relationship between the Tatmadaw and foreign states dates back long before the 1988 demonstrations. British colonialism had a profound effect on the Burmese national psyche, with anti-West propaganda perpetuating both before and after Burmese independence.\(^{13}\) After the crackdown on the 1988 demonstrations, the sanctions and criticism that came from the international community “were all interpreted as a new form of imperialism by a Burmese leadership wary of seeing the colonial trauma being re-enacted less than a century later.”\(^{14}\) The Tatmadaw used American actions in the region to justify their governmental takeover in the face of ““blatant [American] interference in the internal affairs of Burma.””\(^{15}\) This “interference” included such moves as an American fleet and aircraft carrier entering Burma’s territorial waters, in case American embassy staff needed to be evacuated. To the junta, however,

\(^{13}\) For an excellent account of the anti-colonial Saya San Rebellion during the 1930s, see Aung-Thwin 2010.

\(^{14}\) Egreteau and Jagan 2013, 65.

\(^{15}\) Clymer 2015, 263.
the movement of American ships into Burmese waters was seen as a possible conspiracy in which “‘traitors at home were conspiring with their masters abroad to enslave the country again.’”\(^\text{16}\) In the wake of the 1988 protests and the subsequent crackdown and seizure of power, the rhetoric against ‘neo-colonialist’ foreign powers that want to ‘enslave’ and ‘humiliate’ Burma has been a constant refrain in Burmese military propaganda, especially when Western diplomatic pressure, sanctions and criticism grew stronger in the course of the 1990s. The increasing use of anti-foreign xenophobic rhetoric by the SLORC was a direct response of the international ostracism it became the object of, far more than during Ne Win’s autarkical era. Thousands of signboards were spread across Burma after 1988, all displaying slogans exhorting the Burmese people to resist external influence and oppose foreigners.\(^\text{17}\)

Such propaganda also made its way into state media such as *The New Light of Myanmar*. In addition to the fear of a reprisal of Myanmar’s colonial past, SLORC was reacting to their treatment by Western media and diplomats.

In the lead-up to Myanmar’s 1990 elections, American lawmakers were both encouraged and concerned by the possibility of multiparty elections. In January of 1989, the U.S. Ambassador to Burma, Burton Levin, met with the Burmese elections commission to discuss the rules and procedures for the upcoming elections and expressed concern “that the rules would prevent Aung San Suu Kyi from running.”\(^\text{18}\) Indeed, ahead of the elections, Americans were convinced that the elections would not be free or fair,\(^\text{19}\) and “Western media and politicians were

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\(^\text{16}\) Clymer 2015, 263. For a counterargument against this viewpoint, see Taylor 2015b.

\(^\text{17}\) Egretteau and Jagan 2013, 64.

\(^\text{18}\) Clymer 2015, 264.

\(^\text{19}\) Clymer 2015, 270.
unanimous that the forthcoming elections would not be free and fair….Yet when an overwhelming victory for the NLD was announced, the elections were instantly acclaimed.”

Once it became clear the SLORC was not going to hand power over to the NLD immediately, “pressure grew from the Congress and the interested general public [for the George H.W. Bush Administration] to respond.” This pressure can be seen with the number of legislative attempts during this time period. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, there were dozens of efforts to introduce legislation on Myanmar.

During the interim period of 2003-2010, there were distinct differences in the foreign policy objectives and approaches taken towards Myanmar between the George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations, which consequently shaped the types of legislation which were signed into law. The first Bush administration was quite reserved in its policy towards pressuring the Burmese government. In 1991, Congress put increasing amounts of pressure on the executive branch to make a stand against the Burmese junta by urging the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and allowing the results of the 1990 elections to stand.

During this same time period, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the Nobel Peace Prize to Aung San Suu Kyi. Indeed, it appeared that George H.W. Bush was more cautious than the U.S. Congress in its attempts to influence Myanmar politics;

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20 Tonkin 2007, 45.
21 Clymer 2015, 271.
22 Appendix C details these legislative efforts.
23 Clymer 2015, 271.
Congress, deeply impressed with Aung San Suu Kyi and angered at Burma's military for its atrocious behavior, wanted a forceful American posture, including encouragement of the opposition, the imposition of sanctions, and keeping American diplomatic relations with Burma at the charge d'affaires level, if not breaking them off entirely. The administration was willing to criticize the Burmese regime in strong language, but its actual policy was cautious, arguably even timid. It wanted to have an ambassador in Burma, resumed cooperation on narcotics control, had no real interest in encouraging the Coalition provisional government, and accepted limited sanctions only in response to Congressional and public pressure.\(^{25}\)

President Clinton would prove to be marginally more willing than his predecessor to take a firm stance with Myanmar’s government. On June 1, 1995, sixty-one members of Congress, led by Mitch McConnell (R-KY) wrote a letter to Clinton detailing human rights violations and urging action.\(^{26}\) In 1996, Congress pushed for real sanctions under the Cohen-Feinstein Amendment, which ended non humanitarian assistance to Burma, banned Burmese leaders from entering the United States, and authorized the president to block American investments in Burma if repression worsened.\(^{27}\) On October 3, 1996, President Clinton issued Presidential Proclamation 6925, which banned Burmese leaders from the United States indefinitely.\(^{28}\) This move was “more symbolic than anything else, but it did represent a move toward stronger sanctions, the first since 1991.”\(^{29}\) Soon thereafter, on May 20, 1997, President Clinton approved new sanctions, including a ban on new investments by U.S. companies.

\(^{25}\) Clymer 2015, 272.

\(^{26}\) Human Rights Watch 1996

\(^{27}\) Congressional Record – Senate S4449, May 25, 2000.

\(^{28}\) Clinton 1996.

\(^{29}\) Clymer 2015, 283.
Reflecting the fears about American fleet movements during 1988, increased sanctions and criticism by the West after the 1990 elections led to fear within the Tatmadaw that a military intervention was imminent.

News reports that the United States was sending naval vessels to evacuate American nationals from Burma apparently sparked fears among the armed forces leadership that a US invasion fleet was being sent to Burma, to assist in efforts to topple the military regime. These fears grew after the fleet was suddenly detected in Burmese waters. There were even stories in circulation at the time that US ground troops had landed in Burma. Despite official US denials of any hostile intent, these rumours appeared to have had a major impact on the regime…. These fears may now appear ridiculous, but they were genuinely held at the time and remained for a number of years.\(^\text{30}\)

Based on my operationalization of international pressure as including economic or arms sanctions, as well as statements and visits by diplomats, the 1988-2002 period in Myanmar saw widespread international pressure, particularly from the West. Clearly, the immediate response to the events of 1988-1990 by the international community prompted a doubling down by the regime as they sought to protect their own interests as well as protect their country against what appeared to be an external threat. However, splits and a lack of cohesion within the Tatmadaw could threaten this strategy during this period.

**Splits/Cohesion**

The Tatmadaw underwent a significant amount of changes during the second half of the twentieth century. Throughout the 1950s, the Tatmadaw focused on modernization and

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technological development in addition to building a unified military with vested economic and social interests.\textsuperscript{31} During the late 1950s, the Tatmadaw sent officers on “shopping” expeditions to learn about military practices in countries such as India, Pakistan, Australia, Yugoslavia, France, Israel, Germany, and the People’s Republic of China.\textsuperscript{32} Such missions had

\textellipsis two important effects on the emerging corporate identity of the expanding tatmadaw. First, the act of representing one’s country and military to foreigners gave officers new bases for their commitment to careers in the military.\textellipsis Second, in the military mission reports, military officers exhibited a sophisticated form of comparative analysis as they tried to decide who could teach Burma the most appropriate lessons about building a national army.\textellipsis The model most frequently identified as suitable for the tatmadaw of the 1950s was Yugoslavia.\textsuperscript{33}

The focus on obtaining new and better weapons and training in the face of separatist challengers in the periphery of the country gained even more steam after the urban unrest of the late 1980s.\textsuperscript{34} Part of the push during this time was an increased effort to build its ranks to better combat the domestic security threats from both armed ethnic groups as well as the demonstrators in the cities. However, a major increase in recruitment led to more problems, including strained resources, troops being undertrained, and a shortage of qualified and experienced officers. This led to military campaigns in the early 1990s being launched with very little intelligence and training, with the Tatmadaw resorting to “human wave” tactics in which “Burmese officers [forced] large numbers of young inexperienced and poorly trained soldiers to mount mass

\textsuperscript{31} Egreteau and Jagan 2013, 110.

\textsuperscript{32} Callahan 2005, 176.

\textsuperscript{33} Callahan 2005, 176-177.

\textsuperscript{34} Selth 1996.
assaults against heavily fortified defensive positions manned by tough and resourceful guerrillas….In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that there have been persistent reports of low morale and a lack of commitment in the army’s ranks.” In addition to demoralizing military tactics, during this time the Tatmadaw also engaged in activities such as the forced recruitment of child soldiers and the looting, rape, and torture of civilians by the Burmese Army. “Quite apart from the obvious (and very serious) human rights issues raised, to most professional observers this kind of leadership undermines the soldiers’ discipline and morale, and thus detracts from their military efficiency.” Thus, while there were some efforts to send military members abroad for professionalization training, poor training and lack of resources meant that attempts to professionalize the military yielded mixed results during this time.

This leads to the question of whether the Tatmadaw was being threatened by splits within its ranks during the 1988-1990 period. Splits in the military are operationalized as the firing or dismissing of military members, the replacement of generals or party leaders, and reports of disagreements or clashes between factions in the military. “Although to the outside world the SLORC seems united, to insiders there appear to be difference among its leaders on press treatment, external relations, elections, and internal dissent - differences that might prove


36 Selth 2002, 78.

important in the future." Throughout the BSPP period, there were rumours of dissatisfaction and even outright dissent within the Tatmadaw.

Under Ne Win, purges of malcontents were frequent, with numerous senior officers posted abroad or forced into early retirement. Such measures were not always successful. In 1976, for example, the regime uncovered a plot by a number of disillusioned young officers to overthrow President Ne Win and take the army back to the barracks. In 1988 about 1000 servicemen from all three services actually joined the pro-democracy demonstrations in Rangoon, calling for a return to civilian rule. At the time, one former senior Tatmadaw officer told the BBC that the pro-democracy movement had the support of 60 per cent of the army. There was also considerable disquiet reported on the part of many soldiers who were later ordered to shoot down young demonstrators. Two years later, the NLD’s landslide victory in the general elections was a severe shock to the regime, not least because the overwhelming vote for the opposition forces (including in some military cantonment districts) suggested a considerable sympathy for Aung San Suu Kyi among the armed forces, and thus the potential for a serious difference of view over the Tatmadaw’s future role in Burma.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, State Law and Order Restoration Council members publicly denied the existence of splits within the military. In a speech given by General Saw Maung, the Chairman of the SLORC on July 5, 1989, Saw Maung asserted, “I’m moderate. But some are hardliners. There are some saying that there are discord and differences in opinion within our SLORC. We hear this. We read this. Oh! What a difficult thing it is! These things make people waver. There is no problem among us, we coordinate among ourselves. We hold discussions. But if there was anything to decide, we have decided that matter by the wishes of the majority.” Despite his

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38 Steinberg 1990, 34. It is relevant to note that Dr. Steinberg is perhaps the most eminent American scholar on Burma, and has maintained, in contrast to the predominant Western view on the Burmese military, that there are significant splits within the Tatmadaw and that the senior leadership is, generally, relatively reasonable and open to engagement.


assurances, however, there continued to be evidence of issues within the Tatmadaw during this period.

During 1988, a new generation of military officers were moving up the ranks, all of whom had been trained during the Ne Win period of “military socialism and xenophobic nationalism.”\(^{41}\) Despite the punishments for those who were disloyal, and the rewards for military members who were steadfast, the 1988 demonstrations opened a rift within the Tatmadaw as many younger military members viewed the demonstrators with sympathy and found their orders to crack down on the protestors distasteful. About 1,000 mostly junior members of the armed services even marched with protestors and “one former senior Tatmadaw officer told the BBC that the pro-democracy movement had the support of 60% of the army.”\(^{42}\)

Clearly, throughout the Ne Win period and especially during the turbulent events of 1988-1990, the Tatmadaw did not enjoy an easy cohesion within its ranks. Instead, a massive increase in recruitment and a lack of training and professionalization led to low morale and a lack of cohesion. Additionally, while during the 1970s Tatmadaw officers could attend training in countries such as the UK, US, West Germany, Israel and Australia, after 1988 “all traditional sources of military instruction were denied to the Tatmadaw as the US, UK, Australia and the other Western democracies broke off military relations.”\(^{43}\) In an attempt to buy back the support

\(^{41}\) Egreteau and Jagan 2013, 140.

\(^{42}\) Selth 2002, 260.

\(^{43}\) Selth 2002, 86.
of the rank and file military members in the face of these issues, in 1988 the Tatmadaw received a 45% pay raise, and in 2000, another pay increase of up to 600%.44

In addition to concerns about splits along generational lines, there was also concern within the Tatmadaw of rivalry between graduates of two different schools for officers – the Defence Services Academy (DSA) and the Officer Training School (OTS). Some reports indicate that senior Tatmadaw members favored one group or another in order to strengthen their own base of support; for instance, “In 1999, 45 of the Tatmadaw’s 88 most senior commanders were from the Academy. It has been suggested that this is part of a deliberate strategy by GEN Maung Aye (a member of the DSA’s first intake) to outflank his rival, LTGEN Khin Nyunt (a graduate of OTS class 25) before the regime’s most senior position is filled again.”45 Such jockeying for position within the organization could certainly corrode military cohesion.

Callahan points to “four unintended consequences of the SLORC/SPDC state-building process in the 1990s”46 which spelled significant problems for military cohesion: 1) a state apparatus which was largely controlled by regional commanders; 2) major discipline and morale problems within the Tatmadaw due to the military’s efforts to enlist 200,000 more soldiers; 3) major experiential gaps between army leadership and younger soldiers, due to ceasefire agreements with minority insurgent groups that mean younger military members have more experience with state-building than fighting; and 4) agreements with minority groups mean that


45 Selth 2002, 262-263.

46 Callahan 2005, 220.
some “former ethnic insurgent groups [are allowed] to retain their arms [and] police their own territory,” limiting the Tatmadaw’s influence in said regions. Thus, “the state-rebuilding project undertaken in the1990s has created as many sources of weakness for the military as it has strengths, and the weaknesses probably account as much for the regime’s unyielding behavior.” While both internal and external pressures threatened the cohesion of the Tatmadaw, the military as an organization proved to be quite resilient, stamping out threats (elections, protests, discontent within the military ranks, insurgencies) throughout this period.

Considering the insular nature of the Tatmadaw as an organization, it is unsurprising that my civilian informants had limited knowledge about the internal conflicts (or lack thereof) within the military during this period. Some interviewees had general impressions of regime infighting, such as U Pe Tin, who stated that the “new military generation is replacing the old generation…. if there are clashes, conflicts, this may lead to coups.” Htay Htay Win noted that, in the aftermath of the 1990 elections, “Some military members seemed to be genuine [such as] Soe Mann. Morally, they [the Tatmadaw] were still under the influence of Ne Win, who was still alive and pulling the strings.” Other than these limited outside observations, however, the internal politics of the Tatmadaw during 1988-2002 were relatively unknown to the Burmese citizens I interviewed. Indeed, while there is some evidence of splits within the military during this time period, this antecedent variable is difficult to prove, and as later chapters will show,

47 Callahan 2005.
48 Callahan 2005, 221.
splits were a common topic of discussion for Burma observers throughout contemporary Burmese history. Splits can therefore be seen as insufficient for explaining the difference in democratization and liberalization between this time period and later ones.

The fissures within the Tatmadaw meant that, once the NLD won the 1990 elections, the top brass were insecure about the future of the military and the country in the face of the perceived internal and external threats, from separatist groups to threatening overtures by the West to challengers from within their own ranks. This lack of confidence was exacerbated by a failure to build political institutions, particularly a new constitution, which was the final straw for SLORC’s decision to prevent a transfer of power to the NLD in 1990.

Lack of Confidence and Institutionalization

Why did the SLORC hold elections in 1990 if they did not plan to abide by the results? By all accounts, it appears that they did plan to allow a transition, at least initially. In a speech delivered on July 23, 1988, General Ne Win said that, after holding elections, “I request the present organizations to hand over authority without delay, if the new Hluttaw or the organizations formed by that Hluttaw say that they are no longer needed or continue assistance if asked to do some for some time.”\(^{51}\) Additionally, on September 1, 1988, President Dr. Maung Maung reiterated that “If a multi-party system is chosen, general elects will be held as soon as possible under the supervision of free and independent elections commissions. The party which

\(^{51}\) Ne Win 1988.
is strongest at the Hluttaw will form a government.”\textsuperscript{52} He also noted, however, that “only the Hluttaw is to be elected and the forthcoming Hluttaw is to form a government. The Constitution is then to be amended as necessary.”\textsuperscript{53} Even at this early date, regime leaders were mentioning amending or changing the constitution after the elections. Despite this caveat, their messaging still seemed to revolve around assuring the people that the elections would be genuine. On September 23, 1988, the SLORC chairman General Saw Maung assured the country of their intent to eventually transition to civilian rule in a radio broadcast, stating, “The fact that we have formed a government with very few people is evidence that we have absolutely no desire to hold on to state power for a prolonged period….The long term reforms in social services…have to be carried out by the government that comes to power after the democratic multi-party general elections are held.”\textsuperscript{54}

The following year, statements given by SLORC leaders contained more stipulations regarding the promised elections. On March 27, 1989, General Saw Maung gave a speech on the 44\textsuperscript{th} Armed Forces Day, wherein he reiterated the SLORC’s plans to hold “genuinely fair multi-party democratic elections”. His statements revealed more hesitancy about a transition than in September – he gave stipulations such as “After the necessary work has been carried out following the elections, a new government will be formed in accordance with the law by members of the People’s Assembly elected by the people….As for members of our Defence

\textsuperscript{52} Maung Maung 1988.

\textsuperscript{53} Maung Maung 1988.

\textsuperscript{54} Tonkin 2007, 38.
Forces, we will return to the barracks.” Just three months later, however, at the 43rd SLORC Press Conference on June 9, 1989, General Saw Maung stated:

We cannot transfer power as soon as the elections are held. If the state power is hurriedly transferred, it would lead to a shaky and weak government. The elected representatives are to draw up the constitution. If the people approve that constitution, we will transfer power as soon as possible. There should be no worry about the transfer of power. We are ever ready to transfer power. We are just stressing systematic transfer of power according to the law.

The law under which such a transition would take place was nebulous during this time because the SLORC had annulled the 1974 constitution and had not yet replaced it. In 1990, ahead of the general elections, statements by regime leaders became even more cautionary with regard to the immediate transfer of power. In April 1990, SLORC Secretary (1) Major-General Khin Nyunt stated that:

The party that wins in the 27 May elections will have to form a government. Only if a firm Constitution can be drawn up and a government formed in accordance with it that [sic] will the government be a strong one. The Law and Order Restoration Council at different levels will continue to carry out the responsibilities of the State while the Constitution is being drafted. So we will continue to carry out the responsibilities even after the elections. **We will continue to do so till [sic] a strong government has been formed.**

Clearly, these statements show that the SLORC leadership were losing their confidence in the outcome of the upcoming 1990 elections. Short of worrying about whether their preferred

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55 Tonkin 2007, 38.


57 Khin Nyunt 1990, emphasis added.
party would win, it appears that SLORC’s biggest concern was with regards to the lack of
institutions, particularly the lack of a constitution. As Tonkin describes it,

Indeed, a study of the period from the SLORC assumption of power on 18
September 1988 to the elections on 27 May 1990 points to a slow but steady
erosion of their original intention to hand over power after the elections, and
a growing realization that elections in themselves were not a sure or
effective means to arrange a smooth and peaceful transition to multiparty
democracy. There was indeed no consensus on the way ahead. The elections
were held in a political vacuum without any previously agreed process
designed to lead to the transfer of power, or even a general understanding
of how best to proceed. It is right to allocate the blame for this to the
SLORC.58

This concern reflects the fact that, largely due to the delaying of the National Convention,
institutional design (operationalized as the development of electoral laws/constitution and the
development of a robust party system) did not take place prior to the 1990 elections. This made
the regime more vulnerable and led to a lack of regime confidence.

As Slater (2014) discusses, there are three different types of confidence that are crucial to
authoritarian regimes which are weighing the decision of whether to allow a transition to civilian
rule. The first is victory confidence, the confidence that the military’s preferred political party
would win the elections. The second is stability confidence, the belief that once a transition takes
place, the country will be safe from the domestic insecurities that may have caused the military
to take power in the first place. The third is immunity confidence, which refers to the military’s
concern about their members being tried for human rights abuses or other crimes once they step
down from power. It appears that the Tatmadaw and SLORC had victory confidence leading up
to the 1990 elections – it was expected that the National Unity Party would win. “The SLORC

58 Tonkin 2007, 37.
were taken aback (as were the NLD and most international observers) by the dramatic results of the elections, but within 48 hours, in a radio broadcast on 30 May 1990, General Saw Maung stated, ‘If someone asks us if our duties are over, we must say no, they are not over. Our duties will not be over until a government has been formed in accordance with the law.’”59 The meaning of his term “the law” here is unclear, but it most likely is referring to a (then unwritten) constitution.

Stability confidence was certainly also a concern for SLORC. The elections were not held in some outlying townships due to security concerns, and the failure of the state and armed ethnic militias to come to an agreement about the federalism issue, as well as the ongoing international outcry against the regime, indicates continuing problems with state security. Between 1989 and 1997, the Burmese government held many ceasefire talks with different insurgent or armed ethnic groups within the country, which ultimately led to seventeen major ceasefire agreements.60 While these ceasefire agreements were major successes for the Tatmadaw in its effort to combat state security issues, Taylor notes that “while a few small groups eventually surrendered their arms, most insisted they would never do so. Part of the unwritten ceasefire agreements was said to be an understanding that when a constitutional settlement was reached between all the parties involved, the groups were to be disarmed.”61 Thus, the ceasefire agreements reached during this time period would not be enough to ease the

59 Tonkin 2007, 45.

60 Taylor 2009, 437.

61 Taylor 2009, 238, emphasis added.
Tatmadaw’s concerns about insurgent activity – they would need to develop a new constitution as well.

Finally, immunity confidence seemed to be the biggest problem for SLORC in the wake of the 1990 elections. There seemed to be a concern amongst the armed forces that, if a democratically-elected civilian government were to gain control, “the armed forces would lose the large share of the national budget which they have always enjoyed.” More alarming than the loss of their massive budget, however, was the fear that they would face some sort of punishments by the new democratic government. Observers at the time suggested that the NLD and other opposition parties saw the SLORC as an enemy, and General Saw Maung as something of a buffoon, already exhibiting early signs of…mental instability…This was a serious miscalculation on their part, compounded when NLD Spokesman U Kyi Maung, flushed with the NLD’s landslide election victory, observed to AsiaWeek…in July 1990 – ‘In actual fact, how many Germans stood trial at Nuremberg.’ The SLORC saw the writing on the wall. They knew what awaited them when power had been transferred. They were not unlikely to let this happen.

After the 1990 elections, the government did hold a series of conferences intended to discuss the formation of a new constitution, per SLORC’s assertion that such a document was a necessity before any political shifts could take place. In a speech given on June 23, 1992, at the opening of the coordination meeting for the National Convention, Major-General Khin Nyunt gave a speech outlining the SLORC’s reasons for holding a National Convention and their goals for the constitution. In it, he referenced the Tatmadaw’s discomfort with the international and

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63 Tonkin 2007, 42.
domestic pressure on the regime, criticizing “destructive and disruptive elements inside and outside the country” and claiming that “Declaration No 11/92 [which announced the intention to hold a National Convention for the purpose of drafting a new constitution] was not prompted by any kind of pressure, political or military, exerted upon the State Law and Order Restoration Council.”

Indeed, the proceedings of the National Convention, although irregular, would eventually form the framework of the 2008 Constitutions.

As part of the SLORC’s pro-regime propaganda campaign, the newspaper the Working People’s Daily (which would eventually be renamed the New Light of Myanmar) published monthly updates about the progress achieved in the National Convention coordination meetings. These reports would include such details as roll calls, proposals by different political parties in attendance, and speech transcripts from those in attendance. These updates provide a valuable log of the progress of these meetings, showing both the evolution of what would eventually become the 2008 constitution as well as the justifications given by SLORC members for certain constitutional rules. The six stated objectives of the National Convention, which were often repeated in transcripts of the meetings and published in both the Working People’s Daily and later in the New Light of Myanmar were

i) Non-disintegration of the Union; ii) Non-disintegration of National Solidarity; iii) Consolidation and perpetuation of Sovereignty; iv) Emergence of a genuine multi-party democratic system; v) Development of eternal principles of justice, liberty and


65 For a full chronology of the National Convention and development of the constitution, see Human Rights Watch 2007b.
equality in the State; and vi) Participation of the Tatmadaw in the leading role of national politics of the State in (the) future.\textsuperscript{66}

Clearly, the primary concerns of the *Tatmadaw* and SLORC during this time were related to perceived threats to the state disintegrating due to either threats to national solidarity (namely, the federalism debate that was taking place with a number of ethnic minority groups who were threatening to leave the union) or threats to their state sovereignty (due to the perceived meddling of the international community). The most brazen of the six objectives is undoubtedly the sixth one, which guarantees a political role for the Defence Services without any promise of a time limit. Again, the justification for this objective, like the others, was repeated and published often. At the opening of the National Convention on January 9, 1993, Convening Chairman Major-General Myo Nyunt summarized the *Tatmadaw’s* reasons for remaining in politics;

> The Tatmadaw has had a long tradition and heritage of having confronted and overcome all dangers which had threatened the nation and the people and in so doing, has sacrificed many lives. The international situation as well as the domestic, political, economic, social and military situations are constantly changing. Under such fluctuating conditions it is timely to bestow appropriate responsibilities to the Tatmadaw so that it will be able to actively participate in the national political leadership role of the future State and thereby be able to provide timely protection whenever the need arises. To put it frankly, the maintenance of national stability, peace and tranquillity without the participation of the Tatmadaw is extremely risky and dangerous and it will not be at all easy at a time when internal and external threats, interferences and dangers are confronting the nation.\textsuperscript{67}

Such speeches during this time often involved justifications of the importance of the National Convention by the Steering Committee Chairman, Major-General Myo Nyunt, and

\textsuperscript{66} SLORC Declaration No. 13/92, October 1992.

\textsuperscript{67} Myo Nyunt 1993.
revealed many of the concerns that SLORC had about the possibilities of political change in the post-1990 landscape. On July 11, 1992, Myo Nyunt warned at one of the earliest meetings of the Nation Convention that “the public will not permit the National Convention being used as a forum for political capital, for instigating unrest, national races being set against each other through opposition and hatred, be that perpetrated by an individual or an organization.”

Remarks like this were aimed at those who criticized the proceedings of the National Convention as not upholding the 1990 election results – Myo Nyunt’s reference to “an organization” is almost certainly referring to the National League for Democracy in this context. These references to unnamed nefarious political actors occurred frequently during this time period. On December 21, 1992, when addressing military officers under his command, Myo Nyunt referred to “power-crazy politicians and some who depended on foreign countries and selfish traders who sought for their own benefit had ulterior motive for holding the National Convention.”

Such statements were published in the Working People’s Daily presumably as a warning to citizens who disapproved of the National Convention proceedings. Additionally, on June 7, 1996, SLORC released Law No. 5/96, aimed at stopping “disturbance of the functions of the National Convention and acts such as incitement, delivering speeches, making oral and written statements and disseminating in various ways to belittle the National Convention and to make the people misunderstand.”

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69 Myo Nyunt 1992b.

70 SLORC Law No. 5/96.
that they were published for all to read in the government mouthpiece newspaper, indicate the
discomfort of the SLORC in the challenge they now faced to, in their minds, hold the nation
together while a myriad of challenges threatened to splinter it apart.

Indeed, although the National Convention adjourned after four years of meetings without
the establishment of a constitution on March 31, 1996, it was widely believed that the basic
principles of the future constitution, such as rules for the legislative, executive, judiciary, and
military, had been decided during these sessions. In fact, *The New Light of Myanmar* published
the detailed basic principles of the formation of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches after the final plenary session of the National Convention. Despite arriving at the basic outline for the new constitution, SLORC stopped short of implementing a new law of the land. Perhaps the reason for their hesitancy can be found in the aforementioned anti-subversion law (SLORC Law No. 5/96) – with continued domestic resistance to the efforts of the National Convention, as well as the legislative efforts by the United States to influence Myanmar’s domestic policies, 1996 may have seemed like a dangerous time for the *Tatmadaw* to fully implement the new constitution. Instead, they would wait for a more opportune time.

It appears that the SLORC’s waning confidence, flagging in the face of a transition with
no constitution or other institutions to guarantee their protection from a civilian government that

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71 Human Rights Watch 2007b.

72 *New Light of Myanmar* 1996a.

73 *New Light of Myanmar* 1996c.

74 *New Light of Myanmar* 1996b.
was enlivened at the prospect of tribunals, or to protect the state from possible instability, was exacerbated by the NLD’s gloating. Indeed, although “The old shibboleth that the ‘NLD won the 1990 elections, but the SLORC refused to hand over power’ implies that the SLORC had agreed to the transfer of power unconditionally. The SLORC had…set conditions for the transfer of power through the promulgation of a new constitution.”  

In the face of perceived internal and external threats, splits within the Tatmadaw, a failure to establish institutions that would protect the Tatmadaw’s interests, and a lack of immunity confidence in the face of a newly elected party that was calling for blood, it is clearer why the SLORC ended the transition that they themselves had started.

Content Analysis

In order to provide more empirical evidence of how SLORC/SPDC viewed the changing political landscape between 1988-2002, I conducted a content analysis of 100 editions of the Working People’s Daily (renamed the New Light of Myanmar in 1993). In order to avoid the risk of selectively choosing dates that might influence the types of articles therein, I used a random date generator to randomly select 100 dates. The maximum number of dates the randomizer can generate is 25, so I ran the randomizer 4 separate times to find 25 dates in each of these four different time periods: Jan 1, 1988 to Dec 31, 1990; Jan 1, 1991 to Dec 31, 1994; Jan 1 1995 to

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75 Tonkin 2007, 51.

76 Available online at https://www.random.org/calendar-dates/.
Dec 31 1998; and Jan 1, 1999 to Dec 31, 2002. This also ensured that the randomly selected dates were not too heavily grouped in one year of the 1988-2002 time period. If there was no publication on the date chosen, I used the randomizer to select another random date.

In order to access the older editions of the *Working People’s Daily (WPD)* and *New Light of Myanmar (NLM)*, which are not available on the current official Myanmar government archives of the newspaper, I used the resources available from the Online Burma Library. It is especially difficult to gain access to archives of the *Working People’s Daily* articles, which ran until 1992, when *WPD* became *NLM*. The Online Burma Library has a repository of daily newspapers produced by the Myanmar government, including the *New Light of Myanmar*, *Myanmar Alin*, and *The Mirror*. This repository includes a collection of editions of the *Working People’s Daily* that dates back to 1987, which was categorized and organized by the Burma Press Summary, an effort to collate the English-language stories in Myanmar’s official government newspapers, as well as full-text of statements, speeches, and laws. This monumental task was accomplished by compiler Hugh MacDougall, who served as a U.S. Foreign Service Officer in the U.S. Embassy in Rangoon (now Yangon) from 1981-1984.

The earliest available editions of *WPD* by the Burma Press Summary provided one document of all *WPD* articles published in a single month, organized by topic. Each article was labelled with the day of publication, so I was able to make a list of articles from the randomly selected dates and analyze only articles from the relevant dates. This style of compilation,

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wherein all articles for the entire month were together in one document, was done for all WPD and NLM editions from 1987-1996. After 1996, Burma Press Summary began compiling the articles separately by day of publication. For the randomly-selected dates from 1997 on, there are separate Burma Press Summary documents for each date of publication.80

Once I gathered all the articles available from each randomly-selected date of publication, I read them and coded each article based on nine different subjects: diplomacy (which includes diplomatic calls, ambassadors, delegations, travel of high ranking officials, funerals of high-ranking officials, foreign aid, etc.); elections, political parties, and the National Convention; full-texts of speeches and notifications or laws; insurgency or protests; business, industry, and construction (which includes agriculture and visits from foreign businesspeople and tourists); editorials and letters to the editor; non-political crimes; religion (including building new temples, visits by foreigners related to religion, and donations to monks/nuns/temple); and miscellaneous (including sports, history, holidays, education, culture, arts, health, obituaries, ads, engagements, etc.).

There are five subjects which were particularly relevant for this chapter - diplomacy, elections/party news, speeches and laws, insurgencies/protests, and business. Diplomacy is related to measuring international pressure on the regime from Hypothesis 1A. The subjects of election/party news and speeches/laws are relevant both for examining the regime’s statements

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80 The use of Burma Press Summary for these early versions of the newspapers was based on necessity but is obviously not ideal in terms of limiting the number of articles I was able to code for this time period, especially compared to the later time periods when I was able to analyze the full-text versions of the newspapers. In future iterations of this project, I hope to gain access to archives at the University of Yangon in order to conduct a full analysis of the newspapers from this period. This will greatly strengthen the findings of this chapter.
about the upcoming elections and seeing the justifications they gave for issues like the National Convention and the timing of the constitution (H1B), as well as measuring the level of immunity confidence/threat perception that the regime had with regards to opposition parties (H1A). The topic of insurgencies/protests was important for determining the regime’s concerns about stability confidence in the face of continuing domestic unrest (H1A). Finally, the business and development articles were included because the economic issues of the BSPP era were a large catalyst for the political issues of the 1980s-1990s, and the regime’s efforts to herald their economic progress over time may show an increase in confidence and willingness to allow democratization and liberalization.

For this time period, I coded a total of 886 articles. I then counted the number of articles on each subject for each randomly-selected date and entered those numbers into an Excel table. This then allowed me to create graphs of the number of articles on each subject by date from 1988-2002, to get a feel for trends in how often the government newspaper mentioned certain topics. I created graphs for these five pertinent subjects. The graphs are shown below. Figure 8 shows diplomacy articles.

Articles about diplomacy were relatively straightforward, and the tone did not change throughout the time period in question. The majority of articles were straightforward descriptions of salutations and/or visits from international diplomats (e.g. “The Indian Minister called on minister for Trade U Khin Maung Gyi and on Deputy Minister for Home and Religious Affairs Col. Khin Maung Win”81 or “A delegation headed by Minister for Trade Lt.-Gen Tun Kyi left for

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Bangladesh at the invitation of Bangladeshi Minister for Commerce M. Shamsul Islam\textsuperscript{82}). Criticisms of the policies of foreign states (such as calling out the United States on their sanctions of Myanmar) were largely limited to full-text speeches of Tatmadaw or SLORC/SPDC leaders which were printed in WPD or NLM and were quite rare. The spike in articles related to diplomacy, international travel, foreign aid, etc. around 1995 and 1996 can most likely be attributed to the SLORC’s tourism campaign of “Visit Myanmar Year 1996.”\textsuperscript{83}

Figure 8: Diplomacy articles 1988-2002.

Figure 9 shows articles about elections, political parties, and the National Convention.

\textsuperscript{82} New Light of Myanmar May 13, 1994.

\textsuperscript{83} AP Archive 1996.
Figure 9: Elections, political parties, and National Convention articles, 1988-2002.

For obvious reasons, articles related to elections, political parties, and the National Convention changed tone dramatically throughout this time period. The spikes of mentions of elections and political parties in 1990 and 1991 are easily explained by the lead up to the 1990 elections, which included many stories about political parties registering for the elections, and then after the elections, articles about the election commission and their findings. Most political party stories in the early 1990s were focused on the Union Solidarity and Development Association/Party (USDA/USDP), which was backed by the government. Such stories generally highlighted the support for the USDA/USDP (e.g. “Over 270,000 people attended the Pathein mass rally for the Union Solidarity and Development Association”84).

Interestingly, following a dearth of stories about political parties, elections, and the National Convention from 1997-1999, a second spike of stories on the topic occurred around 1999-2000. During this spike, the tone of articles had changed dramatically. Now, instead of describing widespread support for government-backed party, this surge of articles were reporting on chapters of the National League for Democracy (NLD) that had closed down or counting numbers of voters who were disavowing the NLD. These articles were careful to assert that such decisions were always the voters’ choice – e.g. “The Executive Committee members and all members of Htantabin Township National League for Democracy, Bago Division, have tendered their resignations and dissolved the Township NLD out of their own volition on 25 November 1998”,85 “Voters of YeU Township express no confidence in NLD rep-elect”,86 or “89 members of Daneik Village NLD, Labutta Township resign of own accord….as they no longer wished to participate in party politics of NLD.”87 While these articles seem to be quite transparent in their attempts to undermine the legitimacy of the NLD, it may also indicate that the SLORC/SPDC was somewhat successful in their cooptation of their main rival party. Certainly, the numbers of voters or NLD members leaving the party may have been exaggerated or completely fabricated in these articles. If, however, SLORC/SPDC and Tatmadaw members believed that the NLD was losing membership and support because of these articles, this may have been the start of increasing immunity confidence on the part of government members. If there was evidence that support for the NLD, the party which threatened to hold tribunals for SLORC members in the

run-up to the 1990 elections, was waning around the year 2000, this could have set the stage for political changes in 2003-2010. Figure 10 shows speeches, notifications, and laws.

Certainly, the longest articles were the full-texts of speeches given by SLORC/SPDC leaders as well as occasional notifications and laws that were announced in their entirety in the government newspaper. During the 1990s, these speeches often carried a threatening tone. According to a speech about the closing of universities given by SLORC Secretary-1 Maj-Gen Khin Nyunt,

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88 It is worth noting that the number of speeches published each day was quite small, so this figure is not particularly helpful for understanding trends in this regard. The length of speeches, however, was often quite significant, as some speeches took up multiple pages and made up a significant proportion of the newspaper for that day. The tone and message of the speeches, therefore, is more important for my purposes than the actual number of speeches.
The basic reason why the universities and colleges have had to remain closed must be said to have begun with the fight that broke out between a few students of the Institute of Technology and a few local youths on 12 March 1988. The incident was taken advantage of by certain unscrupulous elements to exacerbate the situation through incitement and agitation so as to create instability within the nation. When re-opened, demonstrations continued and when conditions proved beyond control the respective universities and institutes had to be closed.  

Many of the full-text speeches in the *Working People’s Daily* during this time discussed the ongoing National Conventions, including full texts of addresses given at the Conventions.  

In a threatening message to those who might wish to interrupt the National Convention proceedings, Yangon Commander Maj-Gen Myo Nyunt warned that

> Some power-crazy politicians and some who depended on foreign countries and selfish traders who sought for their own benefit had ulterior motive for holding the National Convention. With intention of disrupting the Convention, they cooperated with above and underground destructive and disruptive elements and their activities had been found out. In addition terrorist organizations in the remote border areas were trying to disrupt the Convention and some foreign broadcasting stations in collaboration with axe-handlers were spreading rumours.

Later during this time period, in the early 2000s, the tones of speeches being printed in the *New Light of Myanmar* had a decidedly more positive tone with regard to political changes and economic development. In a speech about political changes given by Minister for Foreign Affairs

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91 The regime often referred to Aung San Suu Kyi as an “ax handle,” implying that she was a tool being wielded by former colonial powers (i.e. the West). This language implies treachery, as the handle of the ax is made out of wood from the very tree it will chop down. See Larkin (2006), Pederson (2015), and Seekins (2017).

U Win Aung, he stated that “We are now overcoming many, many things of which we could not reach consensus in the past because this is the first time in our country which we are trying to have this sort of the government system or the parliamentary system and that’s why it’s taking a long, long time.” 93 In a similarly positive statement regarding Myanmar’s economy, State Peace and Development Council Secretary Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt said that “The State Peace and Development Council is implementing economic policies and national economic plans which contribute to development of the State and improvement of living standard of national people. In view of the international situations, it can be found that science and technologies are advancing at a blistering pace, and globalization is taking place.” 94 Towards the end of this period, the state-run media were making renewed efforts to cast the regime’s efforts in a favorable light.

Not every announcement during this time period, however, was positive – a press release given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in response to the U.S. State Department’s International Religious Report in 2002 refuted the findings of the U.S. report that Myanmar was “a country of particular concern,” asserting that

This classification does not in any way represent the true situation in the country. It is obvious that some of the information come from insurgent groups or unscrupulous persons with the aim of damaging the image of Myanmar. In Myanmar, every citizen has the right to profess and practice his/her belief…. Therefore, the allegations contained in US State Department’s Report are groundless and they must be considered as being politically motivated and represent an attempt to exert pressure and interfere in the internal affairs of the country. 95

93 U Win Aung 2000.


95 Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2002.
Overall, the publications of the full texts of speeches and announcements by government leaders in the *WPD* and *NLM* was a common practice throughout this time period. While the tone of speeches and announcements did shift over time from threatening to generally more optimistic, there remained stern words in print for those that the Burmese government deemed to be undermining their efforts. Figure 11 shows articles relating to insurgency, protests, and ceasefires.

![Figure 11: Insurgency/protest/ceasefire articles, 1988-2002.](image)

Articles focusing on insurgent groups and protests were another category, similar to the articles related to elections and political parties, where the tone of articles was more telling than the overall numbers. The focus of stories during the 1988-1989 period was on describing
“disorders”, 96 “disturbances”, 97 and “states of emergency”98 in sometimes surprising detail.

Considering the government’s efforts to shut down the pro-democracy, anti-government protests that were taking place around the country, the decision to publish detailed accounts of protests was unexpected. It is possible the decision to publish the specifics of protests was an effort to cast protestors in a negative light and discourage others from joining, although this effort may have been in vain. Such articles certainly used language that implied that protestors were simply trouble-makers or opportunists looking to commit crimes; for instance, an article in August 1988 stated that

Some young students, who had been active on the Shwedagon Pagoda platform since 28 July...up to yesterday making public speeches, distributing propaganda leaflets and handing out oppositional and agitation letters in order to disturb ordinary students wishing to pursue their studies in peace and to harass the public in general, this morning joined forces with unsavoury elements intent on creating disturbances in some townships of Rangoon Division and carried out rowdy mob demonstration going from one place to another. Beginning 8.45 am, some of these students and unsavoury disturbance-makers gathered in front of the Bogyoke's bronze statue at Kandawgyi. Then they commandeered passing motor vehicles to get to the city centre. Getting off near the Garden Guest House on Sule Pagoda Road, they commenced to shout oppositional slogans and carry out rowdy demonstrations in front of the City Hall and to march.... In addition, some young students gathered in Insein and Hlaing areas, commandeered passenger route buses, forced the passengers out and used the buses to get into Rangoon. At the corner of Bogyoke and Shwebontha Streets near the Ramanya bus terminal some members of the mob beat up a by-stander claiming that he had a camera. When another by-stander by the name of U Soe Thein tried to intervene the mob became suspicious and began to search and interrogate him. While this was going on someone from the mob stabbed U Soe Thein with a knife. U Soe Thein was seriously wounded and


had to be warded at the Rangoon General Hospital. Another mob which had gone along Insein Road was seen at the Thamaing Road junction at about 6.30 pm sitting right in the middle of the ground shouting, demonstrating and creating disturbances. The language used therein (“unsavoury elements”, “rowdy crowd,” “disturbance-makers”) as well as assertions that a mob “commandeered” buses and cars and beat-up or stabbed by-standers was undoubtedly intended to further the SLORC’s and Tatmadaw’s claims that protests during this time were not really students and citizens calling for political change, but rather opportunistic criminals goading students into criminal activity.

Throughout the 1990s, most of the articles in this category were focused on insurgent attacks and conflict between the Tatmadaw and armed ethnic groups, reflecting the regime’s fears about the threats of domestic unrest. In the late 1990s, however, the tone of insurgency/protest/ceasefire articles shifted drastically. No longer were these articles using language to undermine or dismiss the goals of protestors or insurgent groups. Instead, similar to the political party articles which reported on the numbers of NLD members renouncing their membership, the New Light of Myanmar began reporting on armed groups giving up arms or coming to peace agreements. During this time, the headlines in the New Light of Myanmar were glowing with optimism (e.g. “Entire nation winning unprecedented peace, stability, leading toward progress of all regions including border areas” and the newspaper even published


statements by the leaders of some armed ethnic groups who described their willingness to work with the government and reach peace agreements.\textsuperscript{102}

At the same time that the government-backed newspaper was humanizing some of the armed ethnic groups who had arrived at or were close to ceasefire agreements with the Tatmadaw, protest-related articles in the \textit{New Light of Myanmar} were still demonizing the National League for Democracy. Headlines such as “NLD race-destruction group unleashing scheme of chaos, uncertainty [in] Pyay mass rally Bogadaw be deported, her party be declared unlawful association”\textsuperscript{103} and “Press Conference held to further expose subversive activities of some NLD members and anti-Government organizations”\textsuperscript{104} show this tendency. During this period, these articles appear to be aimed at a two-fold goal – minimizing the perceived threats of insurgency and the federalism issue in the border areas of Myanmar and continuing to cast the National League for Democracy in a negative light. First, by publishing articles celebrating the insurgents who have laid down arms, as well as interviews with leaders of armed groups who claim they are working with SPDC, the Burmese government was addressing one of the biggest security threats that threatened the stability of the nation. If leaders within the SPDC and Tatmadaw genuinely felt that these articles accurately reflected the state of affairs with regard to the possible threat of internal disruptions or insurgency, this may indicate increasing stability confidence in the later part of this time period. Second, articles that describe disruptive protests led by NLD members, paired with the articles that list the numbers of members leaving the NLD,

\textsuperscript{102} “Attitude of nationalities peace groups” 1998.

\textsuperscript{103} \textit{New Light of Myanmar} October 4, 1998.

\textsuperscript{104} \textit{New Light of Myanmar} August 31, 1999.
are clearly signs that the SPDC was trying to lessen the influence of the NLD as a political force. Whether or not the NLD was still perceived by government leaders as a legitimate political threat during this later time period is unclear. There were certainly efforts to make the NLD appear to be weakening in the *New Light of Myanmar* throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. Figure 12 shows business, development, and construction articles.

![Business, Industry, Development & Construction Articles 1988-2002](image)

Figure 12: Business, industry, development, and construction articles, 1988-2002.

Finally, the articles on business, industry, development and construction experienced the biggest change of all the categories with regard to frequency and number of articles. Early on in this time period, the majority of these articles described construction or infrastructure projects. The spike of articles in 1995 can most likely be attributed, similarly to the spike in articles relating to the diplomacy at the same time, to the “Visit Myanmar Year 1996,” as there were a large number of articles related to tourism during that time. Throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, the number of articles related to business and industry increased, particularly articles
related to foreign investment into businesses such as hotels and banking. During this period, the scope of projects seemed to grow as well – rather than simple road or bridge construction, now articles described “the five-year short-term national plan [and] the 30-year long-term national plan,” which include “river-pumping projects”, “sluice gates,” “oil mills and rice mills,” “greening projects”, “regeneration of forests,” “extended production of oil and natural gas [and the] installation of [a] natural gas pipeline” and “135 dams…constructed throughout the country.” Economic development is a crucial marker of political change, and it is unsurprising that the Myanmar government would try to show the accomplishments of their regime with regard to the development of a robust economy. The increasing frequency with which the *New Light of Myanmar* published stories related to economic successes may have contributed to the regime’s victory confidence (i.e. their ability to win future elections) and immunity confidence (i.e. that their economic interests would not be negatively impacted should they lose future elections). These changes to their confidence about future economic success may well have contributed to the changing political landscape in the next time period in question, 2003-2010.

The content analysis of articles from 1988-2002 show a regime which, early on, had many threats with which to contend: a strong opposition party, domestic protests and insurgencies, and limited economic progress. The changing nature, frequency, and tone of news stories reveal that the SLORC/SPDC and Tatmadaw made considerable efforts during this time to downplay the popularity of the NLD, to project confidence in their ability to bring armed

105 “General Khin Nyunt meets executives, officials of travel agencies and hoteliers” 2002.

106 “State's participation needed in implementing enormous projects greatly benefiting nation Collective participation in nation-building projects approved by SPIC stressed” 2002.
groups back into the fold, and to develop the economy of the nation. It appears that as time went on during the time period of the failed transition, the immunity, stability, and victory confidence of the Burmese regime slowly increased. The next step would be finalizing a constitution to provide institutional protections for the government leaders before any elections could be held. The changes which took place over the period of 1988-2002, however, made this next stage possible.

Conclusion

Clearly the decision-making process of the regime during the 1988-1990 period was complex and highly dependent on catalysts and antecedent variables (such as domestic protests). The economic struggles of the BSPP period led to frustrations that bubbled over in 1988, resulting in domestic protests. The crackdown on the 8888 demonstrations led to external pressure by the international community. Both the domestic and international pressure (as revealed by the difficulties facing the National Convention as well as the myriad of U.S. legislative actions towards Myanmar) acted as an exacerbating factor on splits within the military, as well as a catalyst for 1) the decision to establish SLORC in place of the BSPP, 2) the decision to abolish the 1974 constitution, and 3) the decision to announce upcoming elections. While these pressures were sufficient for prompting the holding of elections, concerns over stability/immunity confidence within the military overrode the international and domestic demands that the results of the election actually be upheld. Thus, H1A is supported by archival, interview, and content analysis evidence, all of which suggest that internal and external pressures
on the Myanmar’s regime pushed them towards holding the elections, but that increased perceptions of threats posed by opposition groups, insurgencies, and the international community led to a decrease in stability and immunity confidence which made the election loss too threatening for the military to allow.

The military’s identity as a professional organization working for the good of the country may have come into play when they made the decision of whether to form a constitution before the 1990 elections. The question remains; why did the SLORC not establish a constitution before the 1990 elections? Clearly as the elections approached, the SLORC felt more vulnerable because of a lack of institutional protections that a constitution could have provided them. Perhaps the best explanation is that the SLORC was initially so confident in the National Unity Party’s chances of winning (due to preferable electoral rules) that they chose to hold elections first. Once the NUP won, the SLORC might have reasoned, they could establish a constitution that would be seen as legitimate because they had a mandate. As Clymer describes it,

There has been some contentious disagreement about what the election was actually for. Was it for a new government, or was it essentially for a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution, during which time the military government would remain in power? At first the military said it planned to turn power over "to whomever won the election," but in mid-1989 it announced that it intended to remain in power until a new constitution was drafted. In other words, if there was to be a transfer of power, it would be slow and deliberate rather than immediate. The military apparently feared that its decades-long fight against Burma’s communists would be for naught and that retribution and a possible war crimes tribunal were real possibilities if there was a quick transfer, despite NLD assurances to the contrary. Apparently before the election Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD were not insistent on an immediate transfer of power and understood that a new constitution would be the first order of business. If this was their view, however, it changed soon after the surprising election
results were in. Neither side would compromise, and the NLD now expected a quick transfer.⁰⁰⁷

Prior to the elections, the regime also made their intentions known with regard to prioritizing the writing of a new constitution after the elections, rather than immediately handing off power to the winners. In a speech given on March 27, 1990, excerpts of which were published the following day in the Working People’s Daily, General Saw Maung stated, "Some say that the election is not important but drawing the Constitution is the primary issue. Some say it is necessary to draft a temporary constitution, to form a provisional government to effect transfer of power and only then to take time and draw up a proper constitution. In what ways they want to do so is up to them."⁰⁰⁸ So while voters may have believed they were choosing a new government, SLORC was stating publicly that the constitution had to come first. These quotes support H1B, which posited that institutional design did not occur during this time period because the military believed the constitution would be seen as more legitimate after they were victorious at the ballot box.

This decision to wait until after the elections to create a constitution came back to haunt them, however. Although the SLORC initially felt confident in the ability of the NUP to win due to the electoral rules that were skewed in their favor (and hobbled opposition parties), it appears that the immunity confidence and stability confidence of the regime were rocked with statements by the NLD about future punishments, from which the SLORC would have no constitutional protections. This lack of institutionalization paired with concerns about future punishments and

⁰⁰⁷ Clymer 2015, 270.

⁰⁰⁸ Saw Maung 1990.
possible domestic unrest ultimately led to the failure to observe the results of the 1990 elections, a problem that the regime would attempt to solve in the 2003-2010 interim period.
CHAPTER 4
SEVEN STEPS AND EIGHT YEARS OF CHANGES (2003-2010)

This chapter looks to the interim period of 2003-2010, during which the *Roadmap to Democracy* began to take shape and important events such as the new constitution, constitutional referendum, and 2010 general elections occurred, as well as the crises of the 2007 Saffron Revolution and the 2008 Cyclone Nargis, which brought Myanmar back into the international limelight and put additional pressure on the regime. My hypotheses for this chapter are as follows:

H2: Massive changes within the military regime and a reduction of domestic threats during the 2003-2010 period led to efforts to develop institutional design.

H2A: Changes during this time period were largely based on a transition process that had been mapped out during the earlier (1988-2002) time period but ultimately failed.

H2B: The military regime became more confident in their ability to design institutions to protect their interests and the stability of the nation due to improvements in relations with armed ethnic groups as well as the promotion of more moderate military leaders.
H2C: The institutional design that took place during this time period laid the groundwork for the more successful transition process in 2011-2015.

The dependent variables are 1) democratization, which I operationalize as freely and fairly-contested elections wherein opposition parties are able to contest with the military-backed parties on equal playing ground and wherein the results of elections are respected and upheld,\(^1\) and 2) political liberalization, which consists of the opening of other civil and political liberties such as freedom of the press, the release of political prisoners, and the legalization of civil society associations and activities.\(^2\)

**Analysis**

It is evident from the historical background of this period that there were many changes, both positive and negative, taking place within Myanmar between 2003-2010. As in the previous chapter, this section looks at several important variables which greatly influenced the changing politics during this period. Those factors include

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\(^1\) I am aware of the issues with defining Myanmar’s elections as “free and fair,” as there continue to be disenfranchisement of certain populations (such as ethnic minorities, members of the Sangha, and prisoners) and inaccurate voter lists, as well as concerns over voter intimidation and electoral fraud. My definition of “freely and fairly contested elections” focuses more on institutional barriers to opposition parties and particularly to whether those opposition parties are able to win (and hold) seats in the Hluttaw. For more detailed information about defining free and fair elections, see Goodwin-Gill 2006.

\(^2\) See Table 3 for operationalization of independent variables.
external/international pressure, splits/cohesion within the Tatmadaw, threat perception, and institutional design.

**External/International Pressure**

The period of 2003-2010 was very active with regards to U.S. foreign policy towards Myanmar. International pressure is operationalized as economic/arms sanctions and diplomatic measures, such as statements and visits by foreign diplomats.³ The second Bush administration started with a hands-off policy with regards to Myanmar, but that changed after the 2003 Depayin incident;

Depayin resulted in immediate condemnation in much of the world. The US government was reportedly 'mad as hell and isn't going to put up with the outrages perpetuated by Burma's military rulers any more.' Secretary of State Colin Powell denounced the 'contemptible' actions and demanded Aung San Suu Kyi's release. Most important of all, however, Senator McConnell introduced the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act, co-sponsored by senators across the political spectrum from Edward Kennedy (D-MA) to Sam Brownback (R-KS). The bill ended imports from Burma, placed further visa restrictions on Burma's leaders, and required the United States to oppose loans to Burma by international financial institutions.⁴

The Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act was introduced on June 4 and signed into law on July 28, 2003. The new hardline stance that the Bush administration took towards Myanmar was not popular with everyone; “David I. Steinberg…opposed sanction on the grounds that they would not change the junta members’ minds or actions and that quiet, careful diplomacy was

³ Appendix D details U.S. legislative efforts during this time.

⁴ Clymer 2015, 291.
more effective…As [Robert] Taylor wrote, it was ‘unseemly’ for [Secretary of State] Colin Powell to refer to the Burmese government as ‘a bunch of thugs.’”\(^5\) The Bush administration’s strict policy was reinforced even more a few years later in the wake of the 2007 Saffron Revolution. President Bush gave press briefings where he discussed the tightening U.S. sanctions and called on other nations to pressure Myanmar,\(^6\) and First Lady Laura Bush took up the Burmese cause, drafting a letter to United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon with 16 women senators calling for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and authoring editorials about the Burmese struggle for democracy.\(^7\) Ultimately, President Bush gave executive orders to freeze the assets of senior members of the Burmese government, as well as individuals and corporations who supported the Burmese government.\(^8\)

The United States Congress also made important moves toward tightening sanctions under the George W. Bush administration. In response to the 2008 constitutional referendum, Congress passed the Tom Lantos Burmese JADE (Junta’s Anti-Democratic Efforts) Act, which was enacted into law on July 24, 2008. The bill “extended the ban on imports to include jadeite, rubies, and other gems of Burmese origin. It also incorporated the presidential executive orders placing financial and travel restrictions on certain Burmese individuals….It was the last sanctions bill passed by Congress.”\(^9\) While the second Bush administration was more willing to

\(^5\) Clymer 2015, 292.

\(^6\) Bush 2007b.

\(^7\) Beech 2007.

\(^8\) Bush 2007a and Bush 2008.

\(^9\) Clymer 2015, 298
engage in sanctions against Myanmar, mainly due to the important developments during this period (such as Depayin, the Saffron Revolution, Cyclone Nargis, and the undemocratic constitutional referendum), sanctions did not appear to have swayed the Burmese junta. Instead, they were largely driven towards China. Clymer also makes the point that “perhaps Bush's foreign policy had alienated much of the world on grounds unrelated to Burma, and getting the needed international consensus proved difficult.” President Obama, on the other hand, would take a much different approach than his predecessors. His foreign policy strategy towards Myanmar was neither heavy-handed nor neglectful, but rather focused on diplomacy and what the administration referred to as “pragmatic engagement”.

That is not to say that the Obama administration immediately reversed the existing sanctions against Myanmar. Relations with Myanmar were strained in May 2009 when an American man by the name of John Yettaw swam across Inya Lake to Aung San Suu Kyi’s home, two weeks before she was scheduled to be released from house arrest. Yettaw was detained by Burmese officials and remained in Burmese custody until he was released to Senator Jim Webb in August 2009. During this visit, Senator Webb also visited with Aung San Suu Kyi, although she would remain under house arrest for an additional eighteen months and would miss the opportunity to contest the 2010 general elections as a result of the American

10 Clymer 2015, 298.
11 Campbell 2010.
12 Sullivan 2009.
interloper. Certainly, concern for Aung San Suu Kyi’s wellbeing, as well as paternalistic and exoticized reverence for her as a “living Statue of Liberty” contributed greatly to the efforts of the U.S. legislative branch to “protect” her from harm. This narrative played out in coverage on Myanmar and Aung San Suu Kyi in American newspapers:

In the case of media representations of Aung San Suu Kyi and Burma, the invoking of a protection scenario functions in tandem with a highly gendered Orientalist framework (Said 1978) to position the United States as a protector, characterized by the strength and willingness to help its less mature democratic siblings worldwide, but also as a victim, threatened by external dangers to its own democracy. Media representations function to feminize and depoliticize Burma’s democratic movement while simultaneously representing the military regime as a bumbling group of uneducated military men. This in turn positions the United States as a more mature, masculine form of democracy run by highly competent yet compassionate leaders working to promote freedom and democracy worldwide.

Indeed, interest in Aung San Suu Kyi shaped U.S. policy, and she was often mentioned by name in legislative discussions about U.S. policy towards Myanmar - according to the Congressional Record, between 1989 and 2010, her name was mentioned on the floor of Congress some 1,598 times. In July 2009, the U.S. Congress reauthorized the sanctions that were already in place, and President Obama signed the legislation into law. During that same month, however, Secretary

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13 Clymer 2015, 299.


16 Steinberg 2010a, 45.

17 H.R. 56 2009.
of State Hillary Clinton attended the ASEAN Regional Forum and signed the ASEAN amity treaty.\textsuperscript{18} Although the Yettaw incident created some conflict between the two nations at the start of President Obama’s tenure, “the Obama administration was paying more attention to Asia in general than its predecessor, a policy move later described as a ‘pivot’ to Asia.”\textsuperscript{19} President Obama’s foreign policy strategy towards Myanmar was quite different than previous administrations – although the administration allowed existing sanctions to remain in place, “it would engage with the regime and consider moderating or removing sanctions, depending on the progress made….In effect, the administration was now calling for regime modification rather than regime change.”\textsuperscript{20} It was this more nuanced and flexible foreign policy that was in place during the crucial interim time period of 2003-2010, wherein many of the political changes began to take hold in Myanmar.

While the United States was perhaps the most vocal country pressuring the Burmese regime, it was by no means the only one pushing for change within Myanmar. Most notably, China, which had long been a friend of the Burmese government, began putting “quiet pressure on the junta for some kind of positive change”\textsuperscript{21} during this period. According to Steinberg, “it seems likely that it would be in Chinese interests to see a modestly successful government that could moderate its regime and control the populace to prevent spontaneous outbursts of violence.”

\textsuperscript{18} Clinton 2009.

\textsuperscript{19} Clymer 2015, 299.

\textsuperscript{20} Clymer 2015, 300.

\textsuperscript{21} Steinberg 2010b, 189.
agitation.”

Additionally, the Chinese approach to negotiating with the regime, with “quiet, private suggestion” rather than the outraged language of the Americans, may have been better received by the Burmese government.

According to observers in Myanmar, the external pressure and changing international landscape contributed greatly to policy shifts in 2003-2010. Okka Oo believes that economic sanctions made a difference. “The Generals said they [sanctions] would not play a part. However, as the pressure increased, our country was not going anywhere, like stagnant water. I believe the generals were also worried about the role that international pressure could play on domestic politics…Perhaps there would be more demonstrations….The country was being left behind.” In his estimation, the increased international attention during this time period not only put an economic strain on the regime, but also risked being the catalyst for domestic unrest or political demonstrations. Not all Burmese citizens, however, feel that the SPDC was particularly concerned about domestic protests. According to Tharawon (Pyay), “International relations is very important for changes in Myanmar. Our government doesn’t care about domestic pressure – they only care about pressure from the outside world. Sanctions had two effects: They directly affected the generals, which was the intended effect. However, they also affected lower level workers in factories.”

Wai Phyo Myint recounted her experience working in Washington D.C.

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22 Steinberg 2010b, 189.

23 Steinberg 2010b, 189.


during the Saffron Revolution, when a number of new legislative items focused on Myanmar were being developed. “Everyone in DC during this time was interested in Burma. U.S. policymakers were reaching out to think tanks asking how their policy [towards Burma] should be changed. Suddenly, Washington focused on Myanmar – I was very surprised.”

In addition to direct influence through the leverage of sanctions, multiple interview subjects also pointed to the inspiration of other protests around the world during that time. Dr. Carole Ann Chit Tha, a member of the Myanmar Institute for Strategic and International Studies and Executive Committee Member at the Academy of Arts and Sciences at the University of Yangon, stated, “The world situation influenced the transition [during the 2003-2010 period] – we saw the Arab Spring.” Likewise, Tharawon (Pyay) cited the Arab Spring:

I also think the Arab Spring had an important effect on the Burmese military. They realized they cannot control power forever. In 2007 there was a very big push for democratization…Some military members were pressured by their families and wives to change because the Buddhist monks were protesting them. So, there were two major events that pushed the change – the Arab Spring and the Saffron Revolution. There was a chance for the 8888 Demonstrations to be that push – but it was not good enough for a real transition to take place [at that time]. Part of the reason the 1988 demonstrations did not effect change was the lack of modernization and technology in Myanmar…. In the Saffron Revolution, everyone had cell phones, government can’t control them leaking what was going on. In 1988, there were only a few BBC reporters, only a few still photos.


While the opinions of Burmese citizens vary over what factors were most important for influencing changes from 2003-2010, international relations were certainly a factor, both directly (e.g. sanctions) and indirectly (e.g. the encouraging signs of the Arab Spring).

Splits/Cohesion

During this critical period, it was inevitable that changes in institutional design, the state security apparatus, and the international community would also mean changes within the Tatmadaw itself. This project operationalizes splits within the military as the firing or dismissing of military members, replacing generals or party leaders, and reports of disagreements or clashes between different factions. In the early part of the period, observers noted an “aversion of the army hard-liners to any more political compromises, inside the country as well as outside.”

There were a number of indications of splits and lack of cohesiveness within the Tatmadaw during this time, including a renewal of isolationist policies and the ouster of a major figure from the regime.

In the early 2000s, hard-liners within the regime believed that Burmese policy had given too many concessions to the NLD and their supporters. This reactionary response, coupled with the retirements of Senior-General Than Shwe and Vice-Senior General Maung Aye during this period, led to a

…growing reluctance among many Burmese army hardliners to support a policy of more political openness, more uncontrolled economic liberalization…. Senior-General Than Shwe himself was reported to have gradually dragged his feet until the SPDC structural organization was,

29 Egreteau and Jagan 2013, 187.
almost 15 years after the 1988-1990 crackdown, in a far better and more confident political position. Reverting to a more isolationist stance also suited the Tatmadaw’s top brass, which knew it soon had to face a massive generational change in its own ranks. The split within the regime at this time took place between the hard-liners, who were controlling the post-2003 transition process and Roadmap to Democracy very closely, and the pragmatists, “who aimed at diffusing international pressure after the Depayin incident.” Despite the efforts of the pragmatists to resist isolationism, and the efforts of the international community to push them into “rapid progress toward political liberalization,” the hard-liners still held the upper hand in the early 2000s.

A shocking event in 2004 revealed that even the highest-ranked government officials would not be safe from purges. On October 19, 2004, prime minister General Khin Nyunt, who had announced the Roadmap just one year prior, was removed from office and detained in house arrest by regime hardliners. Reports from diplomats suggested the Khin Nyunt had been in a power struggle with General Than Shwe and lost. State news reports announced that the 64-year-old prime minister had been “permitted to retire for health reasons.” Earlier that month, General Than Shwe had also fired Myanmar’s civilian foreign minister, an ally of Khin Nyunt.

30 Egreteau and Jagan 2013, 186.
35 Mydans 2004.
According to Josef Silverstein, this housecleaning by General Than Shwe and his hardliners was an attempt “to move and remove the alternative point of view…. This guy was going in a different direction than the hard-liners want to go, which is, you just keep digging in. Khin Nyunt has for some time looked for ways to gradually close the gap between the civilian opposition and the military.”36 After his departure, large-scale purges of Khin Nyunt loyalists continued inside the Military Intelligence Services, which he had previously led, as well as several Cabinet ministers and bureaucrats.37 Although the Roadmap to Democracy had been roundly criticized by pro-democracy activists and the international community, the effort to engage with citizens and to start a process of transitioning towards civilian rule, however flawed, gave Khin Nyunt the reputation as a moderate. This was threatening to the hardliners, particularly General Than Shwe.

The eviction of Khin Nyunt therefore marked the end of an era of sophisticated cordiality and moderate policy toward the outside world, while paradoxically reinforcing the Burmese military’s domestic strength. The hardliners in the Burmese military elite were firmly back at the forefront of domestic and foreign policymaking after 2004, preparing for a return to a calculated isolationism. Curiously, the ‘Road Map to Democracy’ unveiled by Khin Nyunt a year before, remained in place and survived its own creator. Than Shwe’s entourage, though less prone to make any political compromise, had however realized that the Road Map remained an important and useful card to play. This allowed the army to keep on deflecting international criticism, while preparing a needed generational transition. It was a political instrument that would not only get the support of Burma’s strategic allies and neighbors, but also counter the civil opposition led by Aung San Suu Kyi by proposing a credible path to transition from absolute military rule to a form of civil-led government – something the Tatmadaw leadership promised in its discourse ever since

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36 Silverstein in Mydans 2004.

General Saw Maung took over in September 1988. Although it seems that Than Shwe may have been anxious to exert more direct personal control over the whole transitional process, it was also clearly a return to keeping control within the country.\(^{38}\)

Reshuffles and purges did not stop in 2004. Challenges throughout the 2003-2010 period continued to prompt occasional reshuffles based on splits within the regime. As Tharawon (Pyay) put it, “In 2007 the softliners were very weak at that time – more and more hardliners came to power.”\(^{39}\) In the wake of the 2004 sacking of General Khin Nyunt and his supporters, power within the SPDC was “concentrated in the hands of the two top generals, who are hardliners in dealing with the international community.”\(^{40}\) These two generals, Than Shwe and Maung Aye, fought for control of the Tatmadaw during this period.

After the constitutional referendum, in June 2008, General Than Shwe prompted another reshuffle, this time in an attempt to reduce Maung Aye’s power within the regime.\(^{41}\) Rather than purging officers, this shift was achieved by replacing retiring regional commanders with ones “who were closer to Than Shwe than to Maung Aye” and moving ministers who were close to Maung Aye to less powerful posts.\(^{42}\) When Maung Aye, who had a reputation as being “a relatively less corrupt and more professional soldier than Than Shwe,”\(^{43}\) tried to pursue

\(^{38}\) Egreteau and Jagan 2013, 200-201.


\(^{41}\) Win Min in Skidmore and Wilson 2008, 44.

\(^{42}\) Win Min in Skidmore and Wilson 2008, 44.

\(^{43}\) Win Min in Skidmore and Wilson 2008, 34.
corruption cases against supporters of his rival, the Than Shwe loyalists were able to escape prosecution because of Than Shwe’s protection. For his part, Than Shwe reportedly wanted his own pick, General Shwe Mann, who ranked third in the Tatmadaw’s hierarchy, to succeed him, rather than second-ranked Maung Aye. During the Saffron Revolution, Shwe Mann chaired many of the National Security Council meetings without either of the higher-ranked generals in attendance.\textsuperscript{44} Even the decision to hold the constitutional referendum was seen by some as an attempt by Than Shwe “to reduce Maung Aye’s power by giving more authority to the USDA and transforming the USDA into a political party to contest the 2010 elections.”\textsuperscript{45} Despite the reported rivalry between the regime’s two top generals, however, such conflicts could have been more rumor than fact. A 2008 confidential memo from the departing politics and economics chief at the U.S. Embassy in Yangon suggests that

\begin{quote}
Rumors of splits at the top of the regime are the result of uninformed analysis and wishful thinking of the exiles and outside observers. While the senior generals may disagree from time-to-time amongst themselves (as witnessed after Nargis), they follow the orders of Than Shwe. The senior generals are keenly aware that if they do not stand together, they will fall together. True democratic change will not likely happen until the top two generals, Than Shwe and Maung Aye, are off the scene.\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

Additionally, while the memo notes that some of the regional commanders within the Tatmadaw are interested in reform and respect Aung San Suu Kyi, “most of the military believe that

\textsuperscript{44} Win Min in Skidmore and Wilson 2008, 36.

\textsuperscript{45} Win Min in Skidmore and Wilson 2008, 44.

\textsuperscript{46} Public Library of US Diplomacy 2008.
working within Burma’s current military system is the only way to bring about this change while maintaining stability.”

Further changes within the regime took place in 2007 after the death of Prime Minister Soe Win. His replacement, General Thein Sein, was not seen as a hardliner, but was loyal to Than Shwe. Importantly, despite his loyalty, “Unlike Soe Win…he will not simply take orders from Than Shwe to implement brutal operations such as the 2003 Depayin Massacre.” Indeed, Thein Sein would later be seen as crucial for leading the shift away from hardline policies in the government. Additionally, “Regarding the generational change in the tatmadaw, a massive personnel reshuffle (37 positions alone involved regional commanders and above) was implemented on 27 August 2010, prior to the general election.” It appears that right up until the 2010 elections, the regime tried to solidify the hardliners’ hold on power in an attempt to limit the threats facing the regime.

**Threat Perception**

In addition to changes in international policy towards the regime and cohesion within the Tatmadaw, threat perception shifted dramatically during the 2003-2010 time period as well. Civil opposition is an important independent variable for this interim period and is operationalized as

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50 Nakanishi 2013, 310.
domestic protests or difficulties getting peace agreements signed with armed ethnic militias. Remember that in 1988-2002, the regime’s perception of threats posed by both armed ethnic groups and opposition groups (namely the NLD) were a major factor in the SPDC’s decision to annul the election results. During the interim time period, the SPDC made major steps to neutralize the threats posed by armed ethnic groups and the NLD, making them less concerned about the risks of a future transition.

In order to deal with the problems posed by armed ethnic groups, the SPDC created the Border Guard Force (BGF). The program was started in 2009 in “an attempt to neutralize armed ethnic ceasefire groups and consolidate the Burma Army’s control over all military units in the country.” Although some ceasefire groups, such as the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and the New Mon State Party (NMSP) refused to join, many other powerful ethnic groups accepted the offer to join the BGF, including the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), National Democratic Army – Kachin (NDA-K), Kachin Defence Army (KDA), Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), Karenni National People’s Liberation Front (KNPLF) and the Lahu Democratic Front (LDF). The ceasefire groups that agreed to join the BGF were turned into battalions made up of 326 soldiers, with 30 soldiers from the Burma Army and three

51 Keenan 2013, 1.

52 The Transnational Institute (2009) provides an excellent summary of the different ceasefire agreements between armed ethnic groups and the Burma Army during this time.

53 Keenan 2013, 1.
commanding officers.\textsuperscript{54} “Among the three commanders, two would be from the ethnic armed groups and one from the Burma Army who would be responsible for the day-to-day administration.”\textsuperscript{55} Table 5 shows the Border Guard Force battalions formed between 2009-2010.

Table 5: Border Guard Force Battalions, 2009-2010\textsuperscript{56}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BGF Battalion</th>
<th>Controlled Area</th>
<th>Commander</th>
<th>Date Formed</th>
<th>Former Militia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. 1002</td>
<td>Lupi, Chi Phwe and Pang Wah</td>
<td>Maj. Lanjaw Saung Taint</td>
<td>8 Nov 2009</td>
<td>NDA-K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 1004</td>
<td>Pan-tain and Loikaw</td>
<td>Maj. Ree Samar</td>
<td>8 Nov 2009</td>
<td>KNPLF, Kayah state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 1005</td>
<td>Sop-pai and Loikaw</td>
<td>Maj. Se Moenel</td>
<td>8 Nov 2009</td>
<td>KNPLF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 1006</td>
<td>Lauk-kai</td>
<td>Maj. Yang Xao Kying</td>
<td>4 Dec 2009</td>
<td>MNDAA (Kokang army), Shan state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 1007</td>
<td>Ponpa-kyin and Mong Ton</td>
<td>Maj. Japi Kwe</td>
<td>30 Mar 2010</td>
<td>Lahu militia group, Shan state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 1008</td>
<td>Mong Yu and Mong Yawng</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>30 Mar 2010</td>
<td>Combined forces of Lahu militia group, Shan state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 1009</td>
<td>Tachilek</td>
<td>Maj. Sai Aung</td>
<td>18 May 2010</td>
<td>Lahu militia group, Shan state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 1010</td>
<td>Makman- Kengtung</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>20 May 2010</td>
<td>Makman militia group, Shan state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 1011</td>
<td>Pantawmi – Hlaing bwe</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>18 Aug 2010</td>
<td>DKBA, Karen state</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued on following page)

\textsuperscript{54} Transnational Institute 2009, 35. The number of officers seems to be somewhat in dispute – while Transnational Institute described 30 Tatmadaw officers in each battalion, the Myanmar Peace Monitor put the number at 18 officers. Regardless of the number of officers, the number of soldiers and commanders is consistent between sources.

\textsuperscript{55} Keenan 2013, 2.

\textsuperscript{56} Myanmar Peace Monitor n.d.
Table 5 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BGF Battalion</th>
<th>Controlled Area</th>
<th>Commander</th>
<th>Date Formed</th>
<th>Former Militia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. 1012</td>
<td>Kyonhtaw - Hlaing Bwe</td>
<td>Maj. Saw Beh</td>
<td>18 Aug 2010</td>
<td>DKBA, Karen state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 1014</td>
<td>Tanta-Oo and Phapun</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>18 Aug 2010</td>
<td>DKBA, Karen state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 1017</td>
<td>Maepalae - Myawaddy</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>20 Aug 2010</td>
<td>DKBA, Karen state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 1019</td>
<td>Taw-Oak and Myawaddy</td>
<td>Maj. Saw Lik Theint</td>
<td>20 Aug 2010</td>
<td>DKBA, Karen state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 1022</td>
<td>Atwin-kwin-kalay and Myawaddy</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>21 Aug 2010</td>
<td>DKBA, Karen state</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite promises of salaries and other support such as housing, healthcare, and education, in 2010 reports emerged of over one-hundred BGF recruits in Shan State fleeing their training program because salaries and other benefits were not provided.\textsuperscript{57} Other battalions reported discontent and disobedience between ethnic minority recruits and the Tatmadaw.

\textsuperscript{57} Keenan 2013, 2.
officers, as well as drug trafficking and the abuse and forced recruitment of villagers in ethnic minority states.\textsuperscript{58}

In addition to the domestic threats of armed militias and the shortcomings of the BGF, the regime also dealt with perceived external threats, particularly during the uproar over the Saffron Revolution and Cyclone Nargis. At the meeting of the UN General Assembly on October 1, 2007, the Foreign Minister of Myanmar gave a statement which highlights the Burmese regime’s fears of neocolonialism during this time.

“We are greatly disturbed that neo-colonialism has reared its ugly head in recent years. The strategies they employ are obvious. At a first step, they conduct media campaigns against the targeted country and spread disinformation that the country concerned is committing gross human rights violations. They portray these campaigns as a fight for democracy. Secondly, they impose sanctions that hinder economic development and cause poverty for the people. Here, I would like to stress that economic sanctions are counterproductive and can only delay the path to democracy. As a third step, they provide political financial and other material support to create unrest in the country. Finally, under the pretext that a country is undemocratic, unstable, and that it poses a threat to international peace and security, they intervene directly and invade the country. The current events clearly show that such a course of action can only result in conflict and untold sufferings for the people of the country. Mr. President, my country is currently subjected to such courses of action.”\textsuperscript{59}

In the same vein, the SPDC’s initial refusal to allow international aid workers to help in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis was reportedly based on the fear that international aid would bring with it invasion.\textsuperscript{60} According to a report by ALTSEAN Burma, the SPDC was especially wary of

\textsuperscript{58} Keenan 2013, 3.

\textsuperscript{59} Taylor 2009, 470-471.

\textsuperscript{60} Egreteau and Jagan 2013, 61.
“donated items that could be used to access the delta or communicate with the outside world.”

There were also reports that aid was being used to bribe voters prior to the constitutional referendum. In addition to the regime’s fears that aid workers would expose the true extent of the natural disaster and the regime’s failure to appropriately respond, some suggested that the regime saw humanitarian actors as a potential “Trojan Horse,” in which humanitarian efforts which provide long-lasting post-emergency projects could “potentially entail a near permanent presence in the country to eventually promote real grassroots democracy in Burma.”

While Western media often repeat the assertion that Myanmar’s leaders prevented aid workers because they feared invasion, Taylor (2015) challenges the veracity of these rumors. He points to numerous statements by government officials explaining that skilled relief workers were not yet needed in the Delta region, not that they would be blocked forever. In a speech given to UN officials shortly after Cyclone Nargis, then Prime Minister Thein Sein stated,

…there were rumours that we were denying international assistance and that we were selectively accepting outside relief aids. It is absolutely untrue. On the contrary, we have accepted with appreciation all relief goods and financial assistance offered by any country. However, international humanitarian assistance should not be politicized.

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61 ALTSEAN Burma 2008, 3.


63 ALTSEAN Burma 2008, 4.

64 “Rumours of invasion threats were certainly to be heard, encouraged by wild speculation by bloggers and other underemployed people on the Internet” (Taylor 2015b, 924).

While Western media sources provided a simple narrative about the SPDC giving in to their paranoia about the possibility of foreign invasion, and Burmese citizens interviewed for this project often cited their government’s inadequate response to the Nargis disaster, there is conflicting information about whether the government’s fears of perceived external threats may have contributed to their actions in the wake of Cyclone Nargis.

The regime’s strategy in neutralizing the threat of the NLD was simple – writing the constitution and electoral laws in such a way that limited their power. According to some observers, the 2010 elections would serve as a “carefully crafted exit strategy for the country’s strongman, Senior General Than Shwe, which he has designed personally to ensure his legacy, as well as the welfare of his family, once he is no longer the head of the military.”66 The electoral laws established under the 2008 constitution included a number of limitations on direct democracy. One of the most notable laws was the 25% quota of seats in all three legislatures that are reserved for military appointees. The constitution also set an idiosyncratic method of determining the state’s president – rather than a direct election of a presidential candidate, the Union Assembly acts as an electoral college and selects three candidates (one chosen by the upper house, one by the lower house, and the third by the military appointees). The Hluttaw then votes on which of the three will become president, and the other two act as vice presidents.67 As Tharawon (Pyay) described it,

The procedure to appoint the president [creates] a separation between the federal/state and local government. [Our procedure for selecting a president] is not better than a direct election of the president – I think Myanmar is the

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66 Clapp 2010, 37.

67 Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies 2011, 21.
only country that uses this system to appoint a president by three different
groups. Lots of people [in Myanmar] don’t understand this procedure – it is
too complicated.\textsuperscript{68}

The Myanmar presidential selection method adds a step of separation between elections and the
executive branch, and also ensures that the military at least gets to select one vice president.

In March 2010, five electoral laws were released which certainly helped to defang the
threat previously posed by the NLD during the 1990 elections. The Union Election Commission
Law (SPDC Law no. 01/2010) and Political Parties Registration Law (SPDC Law no. 02/2010)
were introduced a mere eight months before the general elections, giving political parties “little
time to organize and campaign. By comparison for the 1990 election, laws were released 20
months ahead of the vote.”\textsuperscript{69} Additionally, Article 14 of the Election Commission Law
effectively nullified the results of the 1990 elections, stating “The Multi-party Democracy
General Election Commission Law (The State Law and Order Restoration Council Law No.
1/88) is hereby repealed.”\textsuperscript{70} This move was expected and crucial for the SPDC going into the
2010 elections because it removed the claim to political office that had been held by NLD
members for two decades.

Another way the SPDC was able to limit the influence of the NLD ahead of the 2010
general elections was with the establishment of the 2010 Election Commission Law, which
required that members of the election commission are from “legal professional backgrounds” and

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{68} Tharawon (Pyay). Interview with Nicole Loring. Personal Interview. Yangon, June 13, 2016.
\textsuperscript{69} Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies 2011, 22.
\textsuperscript{70} SPDC Law No. 1/2010, 7.
gives the SPDC the right to select the members of the Commission. The Commission had tremendous power to limit political parties that were deemed to be threatening to the regime’s power ahead of the 2010 elections, “as it had the power to de-register (or not register at all) political parties and to censure their actions during the campaign period and following the election.”

Finally, the Political Parties Registration Law severely curtailed the competitiveness of certain opposition parties, especially the NLD. Certain aspects of the law were aimed at limiting the NLD in particular; for example, the exclusion of parties who have members “currently serving a prison term as a result of a conviction in a court of law,” which forced parties such as the NLD and the Shan NLD (SNLD) to choose between expelling their imprisoned members in order to contest the elections, or sitting out. Both parties chose not to contest the 2010 elections, negating the political threats that they posed to the SPDC. A number of other stipulations, including requiring the recruitment of 1000 members for national parties and 500 members for regional parties, deregistering parties for having ties to armed rebel groups, and registration fees of $500 USD greatly limited the ability of smaller parties and ethnic parties to contest the elections as well. In addition to limiting the NLD’s power through legislation, the SPDC was also able to coopt the NLD by artificially creating competition for them. According to Phyu Phyu

71 Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies 2011, 23.
72 Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies 2011, 23.
73 Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies 2011, 24.
Zin, ahead of the 2010 elections, “the government actually gave money to the NDF [National Democratic Front, the split-off party of NLD members who did not want to boycott the elections]. We believed it was a real party until we found out about the money.”\(^\text{75}\) In all, the laws laid out in the 2008 Constitution, as well as the more detailed electoral laws released ahead of the 2010 elections, ensured that the NLD would not have the same advantages going into the elections as they did in 1990.

During the interim period of 2003-2010, the SPDC was able to successfully neutralize two threats which had contributed to the failed transition in 1988-2002. By creating the Border Guard Force and incorporating armed ethnic groups into a specific branch of the Tatmadaw, and by establishing electoral laws and a constitution which curtailed the political threat of the NLD, Myanmar’s military regime was able to address the challenges to their stability and victory confidence. Paired with developments in institutional design, namely a new constitution, political changes in the period after 2003-2010 became more likely.

**Institutional Design**

The final piece to solving the puzzle of what changed between the failed transition in 1988-2002 and the period of changes from 2011-2015 is to understand the institutional design which took place during 2003-2010. As described previously, institutional design refers to the practice of creating democratic institutions in states that are undergoing some type of political transition, particularly through the development of electoral laws and/or a constitution and the

\(^{75}\) Phyu Phyu Zin. Interview with Nicole Loring. Personal Interview. Yangon, June 17, 2016.
creation of a robust party system. In the Myanmar case, the lack of institutions (particularly the lack of a constitution) during the 1988-2002 period contributed heavily to the lack of regime confidence and led to the annulment of the 1990 elections. As Przeworski describes it,

> Suppose a country emerges from a long period of authoritarian rule and no one knows what the relation of forces will be. The timing of constitution writing is then important. If the constitution is put off until after elections,...The focus may turn out to be unequal and institutions will be designed to ratify the current advantage, or they may turn out to be balanced....Hence, constitutions that are written when the relation of forces are still unclear are unlikely to counteract increasing returns to power, provide insurance to the eventual losers, and reduce the stakes of competition. They are more likely to induce the losers to comply with the outcomes and more likely to induce them to participate. They are more likely, therefore, to be stable across a wide range of historical conditions.\(^77\)

Comparative politics scholarship has given some suggestions for how military regimes can improve their institutional design. Some of the barriers facing militaries which wish to build up democratic institutions is overcoming their self-image as the only institution which can protect the nation, developing some role for themselves to help accomplish national goals, and to make themselves “impervious to the enticements of civilian politicians who turn to them when frustrated in the advancement of their interests by democratic means.”\(^78\) Many also look to the stability of the party system, whether political parties have strong roots to society, the legitimacy of the electoral process, and the cohesion and discipline of political parties in order to measure

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\(^76\) Operationalized as victory confidence, stability confidence, and immunity confidence – see Slater 2014.

\(^77\) Przeworski 1991, 87-88.

\(^78\) O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 32.
the level of a regime’s institutional design.\textsuperscript{79} Thus, the constitution is an important, but by no means the only, institution that matters in the development of institutional design in Myanmar.

Despite the flawed National Convention, exclusive constitution writing process, and the tragic events of Cyclone Nargis and the referendum which soured the release of the constitution, the 2008 constitution was in some ways an improvement over the previous two constitutions of Myanmar.

Unlike the first constitution, which was a hastily drafted set of incompatible political compromises designed to ensure that independence was achieved speedily, and the second, an essay in one-party socialist statecraft, the third confirms the political compromises made and administrative structures created after the army took power in 1988….The major promise for the future is the possibility of the army sharing some power with civilian political parties.\textsuperscript{80}

Indeed, the widespread criticism of the 2008 constitution was also tempered by the possibility for power-sharing with civilian parties. As Priscilla Clapp, former U.S. diplomat to Myanmar, noted in 2010, the new constitution essentially guaranteed political changes would come to Myanmar in the near future. For instance, the terms of the constitution would eventually disburse political authority from the SPDC to civilian-led ministries and legislative bodies; that despite the severe curtailment of electoral competition, the reintroduction of multi-party elections, however, flawed, still promises to introduce “a more diverse group of people into the government than has been the practice under predominantly Burman male-chauvinistic military regime”,\textsuperscript{81} which

\textsuperscript{79} Mainwaring and Scully in Hicken and Kuhonta 2015, 4.

\textsuperscript{80} Taylor 2009, 487.

\textsuperscript{81} Clapp 2010, 39.
would produce further challenges to the political supremacy of the Tatmadaw; the potential for improved economic development; that later multi-party elections would “produce new, competing centres of power in Burma, diminishing the military’s totalitarian grip on the country”; she specifically points out that, despite the fact that the military retains the authority to declare martial law, the elected parliamentarians would have to initiate and approve suspending the government; that future economic development is likely to create a free market and a business class which pushes for political change; and finally, “the constitution makes amendment of its provisions so difficult that the government is likely to be the first victim of this ruse.”

Did the 2008 constitution help to improve the regime’s victory and stability confidence, or were the weaknesses that Clapp points out in the institutional design enough to cause doubt within the Tatmadaw? Despite the possible weak points of the constitutional protections guaranteed to the Tatmadaw, opinion pieces in the government-mouthpiece newspaper The New Light of Myanmar in the wake of the 2008 constitutional referendum indicate that the regime felt protected by the newly ratified constitution. A column by Pauk Se on July 6, 2008 trumpets “Goodbye, 1990 election results!” and asserts that “The political trick [the NLD] have made repeatedly that they have gained the public mandate with the intention of seizing power under the pretext of 1990 election results has gone down the drain due to the desire of the people.”

82 Clapp 2010, 41.
83 Clapp 2010, 42.
84 Pauk Se 2008.
The author goes on to warn, “Nowadays, the result of the 1990 election is no longer legal as it has been ditched by the entire people….the NLD’d better join hands with the people and then stand for the 2010 election in line with the laws instead of longing for the result of the 1990 election.”  

Another op-ed authored by Kaytu Nilar on July 29, 2008 argues that “the public approval of the constitution (2008) means the people are opposing and abhorring the internal and external destructive elements. It also amounts to supporting the government. So, those anti-national elements have reached the situation in which their future looks dim as they are politically attacked by the people.”

On June 17, 2008, a column by Aung Ze Min asserted that in the 1990 elections, the “NLD won the majority of the seats, but it did not represent the public” because only seven million out of 20 million eligible voters supported them. The column goes on to state that, based on the government’s figures that 98.12 percent of eligible voters participated in the constitutional referendum and 92.48 percent of votes supported the constitution, this new constitution is more representative than the 1990 election results.

These opinion pieces, and the myriad other ones published in the *New Light of Myanmar* at this time, certainly project an air of confidence with regards to the constitutional referendum

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85 Pauk Se 2008.

86 Kaytu Nilar 2008.

87 Aung Ze Min 2008.

88 The 1990 election figures cited in this op-ed refer to the fact that, at the time of the 1990 elections, there were 20,818,313 eligible voters in Myanmar. Of those voters, 15,112,524 votes were cast, but only 13,253,606 votes were valid. Of those valid votes, the NLD won 7,934,622 votes, or 59.87% of the valid votes cast. The argument made by Aung Ze Min that the NLD did not represent the views of the people because they only won over 7 of 20 voters is, unsurprisingly, misleading. See Tonkin 2007 for more figures related to the 1990 elections.
result. Of course, one could argue that the frequency and tone of these op-ed articles might indicate that the regime was still insecure about the political threats posed by the NLD. Perhaps by publishing ghost-written articles needling the NLD about the 1990s elections, the regime was redirecting public attention away from their own failures and, as was common practice by the SPDC at this time, using the NLD and armed ethnic groups as a scapegoat for the country’s problems. It seems likely that both of these possibilities are true. After establishing a new constitution which guaranteed certain institutional rights, particularly the military quota in parliament, the presidential and vice-presidential rules, and control over the electoral process of upcoming elections, the military and SPDC felt emboldened, while at the same time being wary of their long-time political rivals. The new constitution, while a powerful tool in the institutional apparatus available to the regime, was still untested in the face of political pressures and challenges such as elections. Thus, the regime would brag about its successes while simultaneously clinging to as many institutional advantages as possible going into the 2010 elections, having learned from their painful lesson in 1990. As Tharawon (Pyay) described it, “The big difference between 1990 and 2010 [was that] there was no constitution for the 1990 elections. The 1974 constitution was terminated in 1988 after the 8888 Demonstrations. That meant there were no constitutional guidelines in 1990. In 2010, at least there was a constitution for the elections.”89 Only after the 2010 elections were in the books, and the regime had won some political victories on their own terms, did they become more confident in their ability to

combat the political threat posed by the NLD. This created the possibility for a very different political landscape in 2011-2015.

What prompted the institutional changes in this period? Some believe that the Tatmadaw initiated institutional design, and thus political, changes at this time because their position was strong and thus the outcomes were largely guaranteed. According to Egreteau, “each time the Tatmadaw has initiated a disengagement from politics in its recent history, it has been in a position of political strength.”

Institutional design would certainly provide that strength, in the form of quotas for military members or electoral rules that limited the competitiveness of the military’s competition. Others, however, believe that the decision to initiate a process of institutional design, and eventual elections, was based on more long-term thinking. When asked why he thought the military decided to allow elections in 2010, Tharawon (Pyay) stated, “I think the military started thinking about the future. They are very rich. They want a peaceful transition to secure selves and family. They want to protect their rule. The military is the only institution in Myanmar – they have a Plan A, Plan B, even a Plan C. Plan A was to control forever. Plan B is a peaceful transition.”

Clearly, the Tatmadaw and the SPDC learned important lessons about regime survival in the aftermath of the 1990 elections. No longer would they leave their fate in the hands of democratic processes without institutional guarantees. After retaining political control in the wake of a political disaster, they began a painstaking process of institutional design, starting with Khin Nyunt’s announcement about the Roadmap to Democracy in 2003. Writing a constitution

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90 Egreteau 2016, 20.

with strict control over who could join the parliament or become president meant that their interests would be protected in a new elected government. Running multi-party elections lessened the cries from the international community about authoritarianism, while electoral laws limiting the competitiveness of opposition parties meant that the regime could be confident that, unlike in 1990, their preferred parties would beat the NLD. By designing new institutions to address problems from the past such as threats from the NLD and armed ethnic groups, splits within the military, and international pressure for democracy, the SPDC was able to engineer a new political landscape with some trappings of democracy without risking the immunity of the Tatmadaw as an organization. This set the stage for confidence building which, in later years, would allow more robust changes to take hold.
CHAPTER 5

THE NEW LIGHT OF MYANMAR CONTENT ANALYSIS (2003-2010)

As in previous chapters, I conducted a content analysis of 100 editions of the New Light of Myanmar, using a random date generator to randomly select 100 dates. Due to the generator’s limit of 25 dates, I ran the randomizer 4 times to find separate dates in each of these four different time periods: Jan 1, 2003 to Dec 31, 2004; Jan 1, 2005 to Dec 31, 2006; Jan 1, 2007 to Dec 31, 2008; and Jan 1, 2009 to Dec 31, 2010. This also ensured that the randomly selected dates were not too heavily grouped in one year of the 2003-2010 time period. If there was no publication on the date chosen, I used the randomizer to select another random date.

For the first thirteen dates, I relied on the Burma Press Summary,\(^1\) as the full-text versions of the New Light of Myanmar were not online. Starting in August 2003, however, full-text editions of the New Light of Myanmar are available on the Online Burma Library.\(^2\) Once I gathered the NLM edition from each randomly-selected date, I read them and coded each article based on ten different subjects: diplomacy (which includes diplomatic calls, ambassadors, delegations, travel of high ranking officials, funerals of high-ranking officials, foreign aid, etc.); elections, political parties, and the National Convention; full-texts of speeches and notifications

\(^{1}\) See the previous chapter for a more detailed discussion of the background and use of the Burma Press Summary.

or laws; insurgency, protests, and ceasefires; business, industry, and construction (which includes development, agriculture and visits from foreign businesspeople and tourists); editorials and letters to the editor; non-political crimes; religion (including building new temples, visits by foreigners related to religion, and donations to monks/nuns/temples); and miscellaneous (including sports, history, holidays, education, culture, arts, health, obituaries, ads, engagements, etc.). I also added a new category for this chapter – propaganda/slogans. These were not coded in Chapter 3 because they were omitted from the Burma Press Summary but can be seen in the full-text versions of the *New Light of Myanmar*.

There are seven subjects which were particularly relevant for this chapter - diplomacy, elections/party news, speeches and laws, insurgencies/protests, business, propaganda/slogans, and editorials/opinion articles. Diplomacy is important for gauging any increases/decreases in international pressure on the regime, as well as whether military leaders during this period adopted more moderate stances and better relationships with the international community (H2B). Articles related to election/party news and speeches/laws are valuable for establishing how many institutional changes that took place during this period are related to the transition process that was mapped out in the 1988-2002 period (H2A), as well as any possible reductions in the perceived threats posed by opposition parties. Insurgency/protest/ceasefire articles are again used to determine whether the regime perceived an improvement in relations with armed ethnic groups (H2B). As in Chapter 3, business and development articles may represent the regime’s growing confidence and willingness to allow democratization and liberalization. Propaganda and slogans are new for this chapter and were included as a more direct proxy measure for gauging threat perceptions and confidence about the variables which were crucial for the failure of the
transition in 1988-2002 (namely, international and domestic pressure and a lack of immunity/stability confidence). Finally, opinion articles were included in the analysis for this chapter because they had been largely left out of the Burma Press Summary from the earlier period, but the topics covered and the tone of the writing can be very useful as a qualitative measure of the regime’s messaging and viewpoint towards the independent variables in question.

For this time period, I coded a total of 6,381 articles. I then counted the number of articles on each subject for each randomly-selected date and entered those numbers into an Excel table. This then allowed me to create graphs of the number of articles on each subject by date from 2003-2010, to get a feel for trends in how often the government newspaper mentioned certain topics. I created graphs for these seven pertinent subjects. Figure 13 shows diplomacy articles.

There was a total of 261 articles in this period related to diplomacy, compared to 227 diplomacy articles in the previous time period. As in the previous chapter, the majority of these articles refer to felicitations and visits with diplomats from other nations. There were more articles during this time period about meetings with international organizations as well as positive interactions with countries and international institutions that had previously censured Myanmar. For instance, a 2003 article entitled “UN Secretary General sends felicitations to

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3 The large increase in the number of articles compared to the previous chapter can be attributed to the introduction of full-text versions of the *NLM* in 2003, compared to the more abbreviated Burma Press Summaries from the earlier period.
Senior General Than Shwe” includes a message from then Secretary General of the United Nations Kofi Annan.⁴

Figure 13: Diplomacy articles 2003-2010.

The year 2008 saw a number of articles with positive spins on international interactions, including foreign aid in the wake of Cyclone Nargis. One article, “Japan provides US$1.79 million grant aid”,⁵ notes that the foreign aid “is expected to contribute to further improvement of the situation of maternal and child health in Myanmar through supporting the work of UNICEF, and to strengthen the friendship between Japan and Myanmar.”⁶ In March 2008, an

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⁵ New Light of Myanmar January 17, 2008.

article entitled “Spoke Authoritative Team meets Special Adviser to UN Secretary-General” includes statements made by Brigadier-General Kyaw Hsan at the meeting. He asserted that …the efforts of the Government today are meant for the realization of the wishes and desires of the majority of Myanmar people comprehensively. Though we are exerting efforts for realization of the wishes of the majority, we do not ignore the wishes of the minority at all. In accordance with the essence of democracy, we provide opportunities for the minority to participate in the national political process…. With the cooperation and assistance of Your Excellency, our democratization process as desired by the UN, international community, the entire Myanmar people as well as supporters, and those opposing the Government, will certainly meet success. Then, the entire people can participate extensively with democratic practices.

Such an article shows the types of interactions that were taking place between the United Nations and Myanmar at this time, as well as the moderate tone and openness that regime leaders were demonstrating towards the idea of democratization. During the latter part of this period, articles also described positive interactions with the United States (“Vice-Senior General Maung Aye receives US military attaches”) and ASEAN (“ASEAN Chairman issues statement on Myanmar General Elections”). The spikes in diplomacy articles can be attributed to a bump in efforts to smooth foreign relations after the Saffron Revolution (2007), the John Yettaw incident (2009), and the 2010 general elections. In addition, opinion pieces which discuss the international community were quite common during this period. The tone of these opinion articles, as well as full-text speeches denouncing foreign

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7 New Light of Myanmar March 11, 2008.
8 Kyaw Hsan 2008.
interference, will be discussed later in this section. Figure 14 shows articles relating to elections, political parties, and the National Convention.

Figure 14: Elections/party/National Convention articles 2003-2010.

During the 2003-2010 period there were 98 articles related to elections, political parties, and the National Convention, compared to a total of 49 articles between 1988-2002. Similar to trends in the earlier period, many of the early stories focused on reporting popular support and rallies for the government-supported party the USDA/USDP. Such articles had headlines such as “ Entire people of Salingyi and Yinmabin submit USDA membership applications”,11 “Chin State USDA Annual General Meeting 2004 Held”,12 and “USDA to serve the interest of local people


for improvement of socio-economic life of national brethren and rural development in cooperation with social organizations”, and often contained threatening tones toward those who did not support the party. For instance,

No internal and external destructionist participated in the organizational and development tasks of the country. They even destroyed the existing stability and development of the country. They were trying to instigate the 17 peace groups and the people to cause misunderstanding between the government and people and destroy the stability and development of the country. External destructionists, using various kinds of media to fabricate false accusations including human rights, democracy, narcotic drugs, forced labour, and sexual abuse against of Myanmar Tatmadaw on Shan national girls, were instigating the people to destroy the stability and development of the country. Without unity, there could be no stability and nation-building tasks could be put into a standstill.

Interestingly, while there were a number of pro-USDA stories between 2003-2006, it was not until mid-2006 that the New Light of Myanmar again started publishing anti-NLD stories like the ones utilized in the 1988-2002 period. These articles echoed the tones of those published previously, with headlines such as “Nine member of Wakema Township NLD quit: They lose trust and interest in NLD due to anti-government acts”, “No interest and trust in the acts of NLD: One member resigns from Myingyan Township NLD”, “NLD courting patronage and lackey within party, while handful of NLD leaders prospering by the outside help, the rank and file of the party impoverished: Two members of Hlinethaya Township NLD quit”, and “Self-

14 “Entire people of Salingyi and Yinmabin submit USDA membership applications” 2003.
seeking acts of NLD let down party members, party relies on some big western nations, commits itself to acts harmful to the State and people: Two of Sagaing Township NLD quit”. These articles were most common from mid-2006 until mid-2007, when a different type of NLD-story emerged.

Beginning in mid-2007, around the beginning of the Saffron Revolution, articles related to the NLD stopped focusing on the numbers of members leaving the NLD, and instead reported the number of meetings between NLD officials and foreign diplomats. The first such article from August 3, 2007, entitled “NLD committing destructive acts after receiving instructions from big countries through embassies: US Embassy officials visited NLD Headquarters 11 times in July,” stated that

National League for Democracy (Central) is attempting to push the nation to a life of servitude and to become a minion of the imperialists without serving the interests of the nation and the people. The acts of the party have proved that the party relies too much on big countries by contacting with their embassies in Yangon. Now, the party is committing destructive acts after receiving the instructions of the big countries through embassies.19

Such stories continued into 2009, with frequent headlines such as “US and British diplomats visited NLD HQ 28 times in August”20 and “US, British embassy staff visit NLD Headquarters 26 times in November”.21 The focus on reporting the number of interactions between foreign

19 “NLD committing destructive acts after receiving instructions from big countries through embassies” 2007.
21 New Light of Myanmar December 9, 2009.
diplomats and the NLD was clearly a reaction by the regime to diminish the appeal of the NLD and also criticize what they saw as excessive foreign influence during events such as the Saffron Revolution and the constitutional referendum.

Another trend in the election/party news was related to the National Convention proceedings. As in the earlier time period, news of the ongoing National Convention talks was reported frequently, and unsurprisingly, the tone in these articles was glowingly positive towards the National Convention and the Roadmap to Democracy. Such articles would often contain the full-text of sections of the constitution in progress, or specific policies regarding the Roadmap, while also highlighting specific numbers of improved production or development (such as crop yields or infrastructure projects) in certain areas as a way of pointing to the success of the SPDC and Tatmadaw government. From 2003-2005, National Convention stories would mainly detail rallies in support of the National Convention or describe who attended the meetings. Beginning in 2006, however, these articles began to focus on the specifics of the parliament (Hluttaw) and the constitutional rules being established.

In early 2006, the first spike in election/National Convention articles was due to a number of articles describing the new parliamentary laws in detail. One such article, “The form of legislation and essence of future State part-2”, was the continuation of an article from a previous day’s edition and contained a conversation about the number of representatives in the parliament, how representation is decided, and asserts that “the ratio of Tatmadaw member delegates in the Amyotha Hluttaw is one fourth of all the delegates and only one third of all the

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22 Soe Mya Kyaw 2006.
elected delegates. This shows that the Tatmadaw can play the leadership role of national politics without affecting the essence of democracy.”23 This article continues on throughout the month, reaching at least nine parts.24 Such detailed articles (some would span 5-6 full pages of the 16-page newspaper)25 were clearly an attempt by the SPDC and Tatmadaw to drum up support for the National Convention, as well as appearing to be more transparent in the development of the new constitution.

The second, and largest, spike of election/political party related articles occurred on November 20, 2007, when 12 articles were published on one day. The large number of articles were responses to a statement that Aung San Suu Kyi had given to Mr. Gambari, the special advisor to the UN Secretary-General, on November 8. The New Light of Myanmar published announcements from different delegates to the National Convention (“National race delegates to National Convention from Mandalay, Sagaing, Magway Divs and Shan State (South) and (North) issue announcements concerning Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s statement”)26 condemning her statement and highlighting their support for the government and the National Convention. In addition to statements by delegates and political parties, the New Light of Myanmar also increased the number of articles supporting the Tatmadaw (“Any difficulties can be overcome

23 Soe Mya Kyaw 2006.


through cooperation among government, people and Tatmadaw”), the Roadmap to Democracy ("USDA committed to implementation of seven-step Road Map together with the people’’), and the USDA ("USDA members actively participate in national development drives with nationalistic spirit"). As seen in the articles regarding the NLD and their meetings with foreign diplomats in 2006-2007, this peak in articles reacting to Aung San Suu Kyi’s statement to the United Nations are indicative of the major concerns Myanmar’s regime had about foreign interference during this interim period.

The final spike in election news during this time can be seen in mid-late 2010. These articles are, of course, related to the 2010 general elections, and mainly contained straightforward descriptions of Union Election Commission meetings, applications of different political parties to contest the elections, and later, announcements of the election results. The tone in these articles was neutral and mentions of the NLD or Aung San Suu Kyi largely stopped during this time.

The number of speeches and notifications published during the interim period increased from 28 published in 1988-2002 to 37 published in 2003-2010. This increase could be largely attributed to the introduction of the much longer full-text editions of the New Light of Myanmar.

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during this period. There are a number of themes that emerged in the speeches and notifications being published during this time. These themes include opposing foreign interference or political pressure from other nations, beginning to publish speeches and statements by groups other than the government, and detailing efforts to handle the recovery efforts after Cyclone Nargis. Figure 15 shows these speeches and notifications.

![Speeches and Notifications]

Figure 15: Speeches and Notifications 2003-2010

Early on, the full-texts of speeches about foreign interference echoed the threatening tone of the previous period. In a speech given at the opening ceremony of a Special Refresher Course for Basic Education Teachers in June 2003, General Khin Nyunt stated

… recently, the internal and external destructive elements have been stepping up their attempts to commit destructive acts and atrocities such as

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33 It is worth noting that the number of speeches published each day was quite small, so this figure is not particularly helpful for understanding trends in this regard. The length of speeches, however, was often quite significant, as some speeches took up multiple pages and made up a significant proportion of the newspaper for that day. The tone and message of the speeches, therefore, is more important for my purposes than the actual number of speeches.
detonating mines, violation of laws and instigating the people to cause disorder and commotion and to undermine peace and stability of the State. At the same time, with the assistance of foreign nations, they are committing sabotage acts such as driving a wedge among national races and manufacturing accusations to tarnish the image of the State. Actually, a study of today's international events will show that those opposed to the State fabricated news and false reports with every intention of tarnishing the image of the government. They are committing such acts to the liking of the organizations which provide assistance to them. This being so, it is obvious that there are many people who have run into troubles in the world today as there occur incidents that are far from the truth…. The Union of Myanmar, with or without foreign assistance, will continue to strive for the emergence of a peaceful, modern, developed, and democratic nation.34

These types of nationalistic speeches were not uncommon at this time, even at events like courses for elementary teachers, and the publication of them in their entirety was a clear message to both domestic and international readers that the regime was pushing on with their Roadmap regardless of any opposition. A speech given at another course by Senior-General Than Shwe was detailed in an article titled “Those with noble and deep political convictions could bring genuine development to the State: Narrow-minded lackeys of colonialists could not create the development of national history….no place for bigoted henchmen of colonialists in history of national development.”35 Similar speeches given by Senior General Than Shwe were often published in abbreviated form on the front page (Headlines include “Safeguard national solidarity”,36 “Protect the nation and its people”,37 “Document victories of the Tatmadaw, State

34 Khin Nyunt 2003b.


service personnel and entire national races”; 38 “Standing tall with glory as a Union among the world nations”; 39 and “Strength, improvement of capabilities, modernization of Myanmar Tatmadaw rely on patriotism, abilities, diligence of new generation technicians: Collaboration of three main factors, namely, the State, the People and the Tatmadaw, can overcome all obstacles and achieve the destiny”). 40

Later on, speeches criticizing foreign interference are still published, but are more often from spokespeople of groups other than the Tatmadaw or the SPDC. For example, in July 2005, a speech given by members of the Myanmar Women’s Affairs Federation (MWAF) and the Organization for Women’s Affairs are published in two articles article titled “MWAF absolutely opposes [sic] political pressure, unjust accusations and sanctions put on Myanmar: Economic sanctions are harmful to progress of living standard of Myanmar women” and “Some big nations putting pressure and using ILO as political forum to install puppet government in Myanmar: Entire women to make combined endeavours hand in hand with congenial organizations in interests of the nation and the people.” 41 While some of the language used in the speech are identical to language used by the regime (“Internal and external destructionists”), the attribution of speeches like this to groups other than the government may be an attempt by the SPDC and


39 New Light of Myanmar February 6, 2008.

40 New Light of Myanmar December 18, 2009.

41 New Light of Myanmar July 8, 2005.
Tatmadaw to present themselves as more moderate, or that their views are mainstream within Myanmar. Another example of this can be seen in a cluster of articles published in 2007.

Unlike in the 1988-2002 period, there is a clear spike in speeches and notifications published on January 18, 2007. The spike in announcements that day can be explained as responses to a draft resolution co-sponsored by the U.S. and Britain that was being considered at the UN Security Council “with the intention of interfering in the internal affairs of Myanmar.”

The articles include “MWAF denounces resolution co-sponsored by US, Britain”; “PNO issues declaration condemning draft resolution of US, Britain: Attempts of US, Britain aim at using UNSC to meddle in Myanmar’s affairs”; “Announcement of Military and Regional Administration Committee of Shan State (East) Special Region-4”; Political Economy Study Group of new generation students condemns US and allies attempts to hamper Myanmar’s democracy transition”; and “Double veto kills US draft resolution; Manpan People’s Militia issues declaration.” The strategy of publishing multiple related statements from different groups was utilized a number of times during this period, and can be seen as an attempt by the Myanmar government to present the Myanmar citizenry as united behind their efforts of implementing the Roadmap to Democracy. By showing that civil society groups (MWAF), ethnic groups (PNO and Manpan People’s Militia), the military (Military and Regional Administration Committee of Shan State), and even former opponents of the regime (new generation students) all agree that the UN resolution would somehow cause issues for


democratization efforts in Myanmar, the regime could leverage this criticism from the international community to increase the perception of unity around the Roadmap, thereby relieving their concerns about the threats posed by such groups to the country’s stability and the military’s immunity. Interestingly, in 2007, the *New Light of Myanmar* also published a short statement from Aung San Suu Kyi, in what was one of the first mentions of her by name in the *New Light of Myanmar* articles that were coded.

The second overriding theme of speeches published during this period are related to relief efforts after Cyclone Nargis. Following the storm, there were many articles about relief efforts, and full-text announcements from the National Disaster Preparedness Central Committee, which was headed by then-Prime Minister Thein Sein. While some of these speeches had a positive tone about the help that was being provided by foreign donors (“we heartily thank the countries, governments, and their people for contributing to the health care of the victims to the storm ‘Nargis’”\(^\text{45}\); “Relief, reconstruction work in storm-hit areas completed in short period – thanks to strength of human resources”\(^\text{46}\), others inevitably criticized foreign interference (“International humanitarian assistance should not be politicized”\(^\text{47}\)). Clearly, while there were some new voices were published in the *New Light of Myanmar* during the 2003-2010 period, the Myanmar government was still highly reactive to perceived threats posed by foreign countries.

\(^{44}\) *New Light of Myanmar* November 20, 2007.

\(^{45}\) *New Light of Myanmar* May 23, 2008.

\(^{46}\) *New Light of Myanmar* June 17, 2008.

\(^{47}\) *New Light of Myanmar* May 23, 2008.
Notably, the interim 2003-2010 period saw just 33 articles related to protests and insurgencies, compared to 43 articles in the 1988-2002 period. This is especially significant considering that the content analysis for the later time period contained over seven times more articles than the earlier period, thanks to the availability of full-text editions of the NLM. Thus, this represents a huge reduction in the number of articles related to domestic unrest, which may indicate a reduction in the regime’s perception of threats posed by armed ethnic groups or opposition groups in the 2003-2010 period. Figure 16 shows articles relating to protests and insurgencies.

Figure 16: Insurgency/protest/ceasefire articles 2003-2010.

As noted in Chapter 3, the tone of insurgency-related articles shifted towards more positive stories about armed group members surrendering to the Tatmadaw, and this tone continued into the early part of the 2003-2010 period with articles such as “Armed group
members exchange arms for peace.  

A peak of 11 insurgency-related articles on April 21, 2005 occurred as a number of groups published statements condemning Sao Hkam Hpa, a Shan expatriate who declared the independence of Shan State and the establishment of a Shan State government on April 17, 2005. This posed a threat to the government’s progress towards their goal of unifying the entire country and combating the push for federalism in the ethnic states, and the New Light of Myanmar published stories such as “Aims and acts of the renegade Sao Hkam Hpa and cohorts endangering interest of Union of Myanmar and the entire people”, as well as declarations by groups such as the Shan State Army (SSA), the Shan State Nationalities People’s Liberation Organization, the Pa-O National Organization (PNO), the Kokang Nationalities Peace Group of Shan State, the Karenni National Peace and Development Party, the Myanmar Women’s Affairs Federation, and the Karenni Nationalities People’s Liberation Front, all of whom denounced the actions of Sao Hkam Hpa. Based on the number of articles focusing on this incident, it appears to be one of the most significant threats to the regime’s goals of domestic unity between 2003-2010.

Surprisingly, unlike the spikes of articles that took place during the 1988 demonstrations, there are no major increases in articles about domestic protests during the 2007 Saffron Revolution. There are some mentions of unrest during that year, as evidenced by articles such as

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50 New Light of Myanmar April 21, 2005.

51 New Light of Myanmar April 21, 2005.
“Internal, external destructionists applying various means to cause unrest, instability: People and security forces grapple with violent protestors who attack them with weapons in Yangon”\footnote{New Light of Myanmar October 1, 2007.}, as well as stories about counter-protests (“People of Myingyan, Kyaukparaung, Ngazun, Natogyi and NyaungU express their desire”\footnote{New Light of Myanmar October 1, 2007.} and “People of Magway Division, Shan State (South) and Bago Division denounce recent protests”).\footnote{New Light of Myanmar October 24, 2007.} As with the articles highlighting the numbers of members leaving the NLD, the government used the \textit{New Light of Myanmar} to claim that not all citizens supported the Saffron Revolution.

In the years 2008-2010, there was an increase in articles describing insurgent attacks, such as “One injured in mine blast in Kyaukkyi”\footnote{New Light of Myanmar January 17, 2008.}, “KNU bomb attacks kills 7, injures 11 in Papun”\footnote{New Light of Myanmar December 18, 2009.}, and “Four time bombs defused, people urged to come forward with information over suspect ones”.\footnote{New Light of Myanmar November 19, 2010.} While headlines like “Local people return to Kokang as stability prevails in Shan State (North)”\footnote{New Light of Myanmar November 8, 2009.} attempted to portray improvements in state security, it appears that insurgent activity during the 2003-2010 period was cause for some concern with the Tatmadaw.

Figure 17 shows articles relating to business, development, and construction.
There was a total of 462 articles related to business and development between 2003-2010, compared to 226 articles published during 1988-2002. While this is an absolute increase, it again should be noted that there were seven times more articles coded for this chapter than the previous one. As in the previous chapter, many of these articles are straightforward accounts of infrastructure projects, often noting the development that is being brought to certain regions of the country as part of the oft-mentioned three Main National Causes (e.g. “Transportation plays vital role in regional development: Sittaung Bridge (Shwekyin-Madauk) inaugurated as 150th facility”); 59 “Regional People will enjoy rapid development only if a region has two or three main businesses, instead of relying on only one: Senior General Than Shwe attends meeting on progress of Rakhine State”; 60 and “Blessed with impressive geographical features, Putao District


60 *New Light of Myanmar* April 19, 2005.
will enjoy booming hotel, hiking and mountaineering, and eco-tourism industries”\textsuperscript{61}). In addition to articles describing development projects, there were also photo series featured in many editions, with headlines such as “Kachin State which has developed significantly in the time of Tatmadaw Government”.\textsuperscript{62} As in the previous time period, the Myanmar government was keen to show the positive effects they had brought to the country during 2003-2010, particularly in the lead-up to the 2010 elections.

One aspect of development articles that was different during this time compared to 1988-2002 was the recovery effort after Cyclone Nargis. In 2008, articles such as “Senior General Than Shwe inspects relief and rehabilitation measures in storm-hit Mawlamyinekyun, Bogale: Government taking relief, rehabilitation and preventive measures against natural disasters for storm-hit regions and victims”,\textsuperscript{63} “Minister briefs on relief efforts in storm-hit areas”,\textsuperscript{64} and “Prime Minister inspects project to reclaim new plots for storm survivors of Labutta”\textsuperscript{65} abounded. Similar to the articles describing the building of bridges and roads, these articles mainly focused on the government officials who traveled to a storm-hit areas and their comments about how the government would improve the situation. The SPDC’s strategy with these development articles seems to be, as one headline from 2009 stated, proving that the

\textsuperscript{61} New Light of Myanmar January 25, 2008.
\textsuperscript{62} New Light of Myanmar February 6, 2008.
\textsuperscript{63} New Light of Myanmar May 23, 2008.
\textsuperscript{64} New Light of Myanmar May 23, 2008.
\textsuperscript{65} New Light of Myanmar June 17, 2008.
“Government has practically improved all infrastructures for restoration of peace, stability, and development”. By repeating this message hundreds of times, and describing the many ongoing infrastructural projects in the country, the regime tried to show that they were doing more than just convening National Convention meetings. If those positive messages failed to work, however, the New Light of Myanmar contained plenty of propaganda to sway readers’ opinions.

As noted earlier, propaganda slogans were added into the content analysis in this chapter because they had been left out of the Burma Press Summary from 1988-2002. The lack of propaganda slogans in the early part of 2003 is due to the fact that the full text versions of the New Light of Myanmar were only available beginning in August 2003, which is why there is such a steep rise in number of propaganda pieces coded during 2003. This category did not include opinion pieces, even if they were overtly pro-government. Instead, the pieces that were coded as “propaganda” consisted of short slogans, reminders of government talking points, and cartoons. These were reused again and again, and often were placed in the same location on every edition of the paper, although the addition of new slogans at certain points during this time period is notable. Figure 18 shows propaganda articles.

The most frequently published propaganda pieces, which were published in almost every edition coded during this time period, were “Four political objectives”, “Four economic objectives”, “Four social objectives”, “Emergence of the State Constitution”, “People’s Desire”, and “All this needs to be known”.

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The three “four objectives” slogans were most often published on the first page above or directly next to the leading headline. Figure 19 shows this slogan.

Figure 19: Four political, four economic, and four social objectives.67

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67**New Light of Myanmar** June 8, 2005.
These slogans were most likely aimed at both Burmese citizens (in order to encourage unity and support for the constitution) as well as the international community, due to the prominence and frequency of these statements in English.

Another of the most frequently published slogans is “Emergence of the State Constitution is the duty of all citizens of Myanmar Naing-Ngan [the country of Myanmar].” This slogan, like the “objectives” slogans, was published on almost every edition in the same location – the bottom of the first page. Figure 20 shows this slogan.

The last common slogan is the “People’s Desire”, which reads;

- Oppose those relying on external elements, acting as stooges, holding negative views
- Oppose those trying to jeopardize stability of the State and progress of the nation
- Oppose foreign nations interfering in internal affairs of the state
- Crush all internal and external destructive elements as the common enemy.68

The “People’s Desire” was aimed both at a domestic and international audience, as evidenced by English-language billboards in tourist locations in the country. Figure 21 shows an example of this billboard. The “People’s Desire” slogan was almost always located on the top of the second page. Figure 22 shows an example of the People’s Desire slogan in the New Light of Myanmar.

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Figure 20: Front page of *New Light of Myanmar* with “Emergence” slogan at bottom.  

69 *New Light of Myanmar* June 8, 2005.
Figure 21: People’s Desire billboard in Myanmar.\textsuperscript{70}

Figure 22: People’s Desire slogan in \textit{New Light of Myanmar}.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{70} Author’s photo, December 2009.

\textsuperscript{71} \textit{New Light of Myanmar} June 8, 2005.
While not appearing in every edition, the slogan “All this needs to be known” was regularly published, although its location in the newspaper would change. This slogan was aimed at Burmese citizens in an attempt to convince them to ignore the messages of domestic and international opposition groups. Figure 23 shows this slogan.

![All this needs to be known](image)

Figure 23: All this needs to be known slogan in *New Light of Myanmar.*

The peak in propaganda slogans occurred on July 6, 2004, when 17 total propaganda pieces were published in the *New Light of Myanmar.* These slogans included the aforementioned most common slogans, as well as additional Burmese-language slogans and one new slogan, which read “With hands linked firm around the National Convention.” This date also marked the convening of another National Convention meeting, so the high number of slogans that day may have been an attempt to drum up support for the National Convention.

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A second, and even more interesting, peak of propaganda slogans happened during 2007, as a response to the Saffron Revolution. During this time, a new set of propaganda slogans appeared, which targeted the media outlets Radio Free Asia (RFA), Voice of America (VOA), and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), presumably for their coverage of the demonstrations. These messages were clearly aimed at threatening the international community for their involvement and influence during the protests, using language such as “RFA, VOA and BBC saboteurs, watch your step!” During this period, the *New Light of the Myanmar* devoted the entire back page of the newspaper to propaganda, as seen in Figures 24 and 25. A similar strategy was used during the 2008 post-Nargis recovery effort, with full-page propaganda pieces claiming that international media outlets were lying about the government’s response to Nargis and encouraging citizens to report any misappropriations of relief funds. An example of this propaganda is seen in Figure 26.

In addition to negatively-toned slogans against foreign interference, the *New Light of Myanmar* also published positively-toned propaganda in favor of the government, the *Tatmadaw*, and the Roadmap to Democracy. One way in which these messages was published were in political cartoons. Some cartoons were translated to English, such as the ones shown in Figures 27, 28, and 29.

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People’s Desire

☆ We favour stability.
☆ We favour peace.
☆ We oppose unrest and violence.

☆ Skyful liars attempting to destroy nation
☆ BBC lying
☆ VOA deceiving
☆ RFA setting up hostilities
☆ Beware! Don’t be bought by those slickers

☆ VOA and BBC airing skyful of lies
☆ Watch out BBC and VOA saboteurs!!!

Internal, external destructionists applying various means to cause unrest, instability
People and security forces grapple with violent protesters who attack them with weapons in Yangon
11 violent protesters arrested together with weapons

Inquiry under way to expose manipulators from behind the scene

Figure 24: Propaganda on back page of New Light of Myanmar October 1, 2007.

People’s Desire

- We favour stability.
- We favour peace.
- We oppose unrest and violence.

- RFA, VOA and BBC airing skyful of lies
- RFA, VOA and BBC saboteurs, watch your step!
- The public be warned of killers in the air waves — RFA, VOA and BBC

- Skyful liars attempting to destroy nation
- BBC lying
- VOA deceiving
- RFA setting up hostilities
- Beware! Don’t be bought by those ill-wishers

Who are the winners, and who, the losers from recent violent protests?

☆ Due to the violent protests,
   The people are in a state of panic
   Artless persons get into bad company and run into trouble
   Trade and commerce hit hard
   Vendors and shopkeepers have hard times
   Tourism industry in bad shape
☆ Due to the violent protests,
   Colonialists’ lackey expatriates earn dollars
   Touts were provided with funds
   Criminals and opportunists are happy with the unrest
   National traitors from agitator media gained a lot of dollars

Figure 25: Propaganda on the back page of *New Light of Myanmar* October 24, 2007.76

Figure 26: Propaganda on the back page of *New Light of Myanmar* June 17, 2008."
Figure 27: Political cartoon in New Light of Myanmar March 23, 2005.\textsuperscript{78}

Figure 28: Political cartoon in New Light of Myanmar March 27, 2007.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{78} Ka Tun Byi Tun 2005.

\textsuperscript{79} Ye Min Htet 2007.
One final trend in propaganda pieces took place from 2009-2010, in the lead-up to the 2010 general elections. In June 2009, a new slogan appeared: “Entire people are in favour of the three fundamental requirements: stability and peace; development; and earning the living in the framework of the law.” In August, two more new slogans were placed on the back page of the newspaper – “Only with stability” and “Anarchy begets anarchy”. These slogans feature the most overt mentions of democracy and democratization thus far and are clearly aimed at increasing

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support for the upcoming elections. These slogans continued to be published in the *New Light of Myanmar* well into the year 2009, as seen in Figure 30.

![Figure 30: Propaganda on the back page of the *New Light of Myanmar* August 19, 2009.](image)

While the tone in many of these slogans are clearly negative or positive, it can of course be a tricky business to determine the intended audience and outcome for each and every slogan. Some slogans name their targeted audience, such as the 2007-2008 propaganda criticizing the RFA, VOA, and BBC. Other pieces have more nebulous goals. The prominence and tone of such pithy statements can be useful for determining how threatened the Myanmar government felt on a particular date, but they are a limited tool. A more detailed gauge for examining the topics that

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were at the forefront of the regime’s concerns are editorials or opinion pieces. Figure 31 shows the trends in opinion pieces during this time.

![Figure 31: Opinion pieces 2003-2010.](image)

I graphed opinion pieces differently than the other categories because the *New Light of Myanmar* had a daily “Perspectives” section with one opinion piece, and the number of opinion pieces in each edition stayed relatively consisted (between 1-4 pieces). Instead of coding just the number of opinion pieces in each day’s newspaper, I also coded op-eds on a number of different themes, and graphed the number of op-eds in each theme per calendar year. This gave more useful information than graphing them per day would have, although the numbers are still

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83 While many editorials contained multiple themes (e.g. National Convention and praising the Tatmadaw), I coded them based on the *primary* theme of the piece.
relatively small. The four themes that I graphed were op-eds relating to: 1) Democracy, the National Convention, and the Roadmap to Democracy; 2) Foreign interference or axe-handles (i.e. patsies of former colonial powers); 3) Nationalism, unity, and praising the Tatmadaw; and 4) Peace (either domestic or in the region) and insurgency.

Editorials relating to democracy, the National Convention, and the Roadmap to Democracy start off in 2003 with Khin Nyunt’s announcement of the Roadmap. These editorials often use the same language as the speeches given by SPDC leaders in explaining the process of the National Convention and Roadmap, which is unsurprising considering that the *New Light of Myanmar* was run by the Ministry of Information and that op-eds in the paper generally parroted the government’s stance. Early editorials defend the Roadmap from criticism, such as Aung Moe San’s opinion that opposing the Roadmap is “counter to democracy. The democratic way of launching an opposition means the presentation of a critic or a suggestion from the positive point of view in the interest of the nation.” Another 2003 editorial suggests that “Not only the people of Myanmar but also ASEAN and international community support the seven-point roadmap of Myanmar”, and praises the leaders at a recent ASEAN summit for expressing their support for the roadmap.

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84 There was a total of 165 editorials coded during the content analysis from 2003-2010.

85 Many of these names may in fact be pseudonyms. Some editorials are written using Burmese names, but others are clearly false names or puns.


87 Tekkatho Myat Thu 2003a.
Between 2004 and 2005, editorial mentions of this theme drop to zero, but pick back up again in 2006, steadily increasing to a peak in 2007. Op-eds in 2006 were more general discussions of the meaning of democracy, rather than explaining the specifics of the transition as earlier editorials had. The peak of editorials in 2007 can most likely be explained as a reaction to the domestic protests and international outcry during the Saffron Revolution. The tone of these editorials took on a more critical tone, particular with regards to the role of the NLD. For instance, Tekkatho Myat Thu writes about his/her experience attending the National Convention meetings, stating that “If a political party (NLD) had not attempted to disrupt the National Convention then, a new constitution would have been drawn already.” Tin Tin Win, a USDA member, writes that

…we, USDA members, are to work hard together with the people to perform the duties ranging from successful completion of the National Convention, the first step of the Road Map, to the drafting of the constitution. Now, some groups outside the nation are criticizing the nation with negative views. Moreover, they are airing distorted news stories and exaggerated news stories to instigate protests in the nation. We, members, understand well that their activities are not designed to serve the interests of the nation and the people.

Following the peak of editorials about the National Convention and Roadmap in 2007, opinion pieces on this theme steadily decline towards zero in 2010. Certainly, part of that decrease over time can be explained by the successful creation of a new state constitution, which ended the National Convention proceedings. Editorials in 2008 focused mainly on the new

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88 Saw Nandar ( Manaung) 2006.

89 Tekkatho Myat Thu 2007.

constitution, with writers urging voters to approve the state constitution and detailing the reasons for supporting it. One editorial titled “Why did Myanmar people unanimously vote for State constitution?” compares the success of the constitutional referendum to the NLD’s victory in the 1990 elections, arguing that “the constitution won the powers bestowed by the people, and it is the true mandate of the people.”\(^{91}\) Another op-ed by an unnamed author describes the hardline and moderate stances between different factions in the NLD and states, “Let bygones be bygones….All in all, NLD is welcomed and invited; just show a moderate attitude towards the state.”\(^{92}\) Once the state constitution was approved in the referendum, it appears that the editorial board of the government-owned *New Light of Myanmar* moved on to other more pressing topics.

Perhaps the most interesting editorial theme during this period was opinion pieces about foreign interference and domestic “axe-handles.”\(^{93}\) There are three distinct peaks in editorials on this theme which occurred in the years 2005, 2007, and 2009. In addition to those peaks, it appears that the tone of these editorials softened quite a bit towards the end of this period.

Early on during the interim 2003-2010 period, the language that was used to describe foreign powers in these op-eds was scathing. For instance, one editorial in August 2003 listed a number of “alien organizations”, including the Burma Peace Foundation and Human Rights Watch, which it stated, “are providing material and spiritual assistance for the expatriates existing under the name of ‘refugees,’ and helping intensify the conspiracy to destroy Myanmar.

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\(^{91}\) Aung Ze Min 2008.

\(^{92}\) An Observer 2008.

\(^{93}\) As noted in the previous chapter, the term “axe handle” is a term used to connote that someone is a tool being used by another force (in this case, the West).
The arm of the neo-colonialist agents of the conspiracy to destroy Myanmar are very long. They are able to lay the spy network everywhere.”94 Descriptions such as “tricksters,”95 “neo-colonialists,”96 “terrorist masters,”97 “destructionists,”98 “propaganda media,”99 “alien intrusions,”100 and “false and fabricated news”101 were frequently used to describe the international community and domestic opposition in editorials between 2003-2005. Editorials about foreign interference in 2005 often drew comparison between the U.S. interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan and the West’s criticism of Myanmar’s government. One such op-ed stated, “Human rights and democracy are two beautiful words the militarist bloc is widely applying to mislead the world people about its invasion and interference in the internal affairs of other nations under the pretext of anti-terrorism.”102 Such editorials show the Myanmar government’s concerns during this time about the possibility for international criticism to become more direct.

95 Kappiya Kankaung 2003.
96 Kappiya Kankaung 2003.
97 Tekkatho Myat Thu 2003b.
100 Maung Ka Lu 2005.
102 U Pyinnya 2005.
intervention, as well as possibly an attempt to undermine the United States’ moralistic stance with regards to democracy.

Unsurprisingly, the second peak of opinion pieces about foreign interference occurred during 2007, a year which saw domestic upheaval in Myanmar. The tone of these editorials was just as defensive as in prior years, with headlines such as “There are no political prisoners in Myanmar”¹⁰³ and “Comparison and study of slanders of the US and Britain against Myanmar and the nation’s objective conditions.”¹⁰⁴ Some 2007 editorials took aim at Aung San Suu Kyi, such as one which described her statements on the need for dialogue between the NLD and Tatmadaw in which she compared Myanmar to the failure of dialogue and subsequent violence in Yugoslavia. The writer stated, “Her words were very abhorrent to me. What she said meant she would have to expend everything for her coming to power. I do not want to see any person prepared to expend lives and property of the people for his or her coming to power.”¹⁰⁵ Another op-ed alleged that “she was constantly committing destructive acts” and defending the decision to put her under house arrest thusly;

> It was very considerate of the government to put only restriction on her, instead of punishing her in accordance with law for the acts she had committed, as she is the daughter of a national leader as well as a family member of a Tatmadaw member. If she is sentenced to prison terms for all the offences she has committed, she will never get out of the jail in her life.¹⁰⁶


¹⁰⁴ A Reader 2007.

¹⁰⁵ Saya Phone 2007.

During the 2007 Saffron Revolution and subsequent fallout, editorial discussions of foreign influence, and the treachery of citizens who believed the former colonial powers, continued. More than one editorial blamed foreign media companies for inciting the protests – one such example stated,

Inciting protests in accordance with the plots hatched by alien elements and failing to respect the image of the nation and the people is just opposing the people. In fact, the plots are hatched by neocolonialists and spread by such foreign radio stations as BBC, VOA and RFA in which expatriates are given places. Local axe-handles are dancing to the tune played every night by these stations.... They are using BBC, VOA, RFA and DVB to undermine stability and peace of Myanmar to be able to install a puppet government. However, today’s Myanmar people have been aware of such possible dangers according to their experiences about 8 August 1988 unrest. A handful of axehandles are still abysmally stupid up to now.108

Such conspiracy theories were unsurprising for the Myanmar government to revert to during times of stress such as the Saffron Revolution. The strong language that was used in these editorials made the shift in tone that took place in 2009 even more striking.

Beginning in 2009, a number of key diplomatic events seem to have made a large impact on the viewpoint of the Myanmar government, based on editorials during that time. One was the visit of Mr. Quintana, special rapporteur on human rights, in February of 2009. An editorial details the specifics of his visit, and stating that

Our country also respects and appreciates the mediating role of the UN secretar-general [sic]....In response to his wishes, the government allowed him to meet responsible persons, diplomats, UNDP, peace groups and

107 British Broadcasting Corporation, Voice of America, Radio Free Asia, and Democratic Voice of Burma, respectively.

NGOs and to visit Kayin State and prisons. The government’s willingness to cooperate with Mr. Quintana depicted its cooperation with the UN Security Council…. The release of 6313 prisoners resulted from the success of the trip.\textsuperscript{109}

This represents an astounding shift in tone compared to the unflattering descriptions of the UN Security Council member nations from earlier editorials and is representative of the shift towards more moderate coverage of diplomacy with the West in 2009 editorials. Another diplomatic visit which made a positive impact during this time was Senator Jim Webb’s visit in August 2009 to retrieve the wayward American John Yettaw. One editorial about the visit described Myanmar as “a country that is willing to fully cooperate with neighbouring nations, regional nations, and all other nations with a constructive attitude….we hope that [Senator Webb’s] visit will help promote constructive views on bilateral relations and hold discussions based on mutual understanding between the US and Myanmar in the future.”\textsuperscript{110} Another stated that Senator Jim Webb “has a lot of knowledge about ASEAN,” that he believes that “the US trade embargo further deepens and worsens the isolation of Myanmar,” and concludes that “fortune has somewhat smiled on Myanmar people as there are several visionary officials in the US’s top political area like Senator Webb.”\textsuperscript{111} Such glowing praise for a U.S. senator would be unheard of just two years prior, and these editorials show a massive paradigm shift in the Myanmar government’s views towards foreign diplomacy.

\textsuperscript{109} Kyaw Min Lu (Shwepyitha) 2009.

\textsuperscript{110} “Constructive attitude in the area of international relations” 2009.

\textsuperscript{111} Ko Myanmar 2009a. “Ko Myanmar” is undoubtedly a pseudonym, meaning “Brother Myanmar” or “Mister Myanmar”.
While the tone of editorials about the U.S. saw more positive tones, such a shift was not consistent towards all countries. Interestingly, one op-ed about refugee and IDP camps on the border between Thailand and Myanmar takes an unusually harsh tone against Thailand, stating that “Thai government’s current stand on Myanmar shows that it is not a good neighbouring country of Myanmar.”\textsuperscript{112} This was a particularly striking op-ed considering the positive tone towards Myanmar’s ASEAN neighbors in earlier opinion pieces.

The third theme of editorials was nationalism, unity, and praising the Tatmadaw. This topic was by far the most common theme from 2004-2006, but then dropped off steeply as editorials about the National Convention and foreign interference became more common. Many of these editorials took place on national holidays, such as Union Day or Armed Forces Day, and contained descriptions of historical events such as the Panglong conference or the 1962 coup, which were described in glowing terms (e.g. “The Tatmadaw therefore took over the responsibilities of the State...so as to stabilize the country.”\textsuperscript{113}) Other op-eds took the form of poetry, such as a 2004 poem celebrating Union Day which includes the lines; “Myanmar means equality in thought/In all States and Divisions/Mass of national as a family/Will not be enslaved by colonialists/Repulsed and crushed and/Independence regained with unity of thought/Even if a trap is laid through deliberate schemes.”\textsuperscript{114} Some editorials praised the Tatmadaw government by

\textsuperscript{112} Kyaw Ye Min 2009.

\textsuperscript{113} Kyai Phyu 2004.

\textsuperscript{114} Thiha Aung (Trs) 2004.
focusing on development projects such as dams,\textsuperscript{115} roads,\textsuperscript{116} bridges,\textsuperscript{117} railroads,\textsuperscript{118} improving the private sector,\textsuperscript{119} and the building of a new capitol at Naypyidaw.\textsuperscript{120} A number of editorials in this category also focused on national unity, particularly with concern for cooperation between the different ethnic groups of Myanmar. One such poem read, “Myanmar is/Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin/Those who join and help/Like Mon, Bamar, Rakhine, Shan/Who are of one mind/Never are they happy/In subjugation of others….There is cohesion in Myanmar.”\textsuperscript{121} While editorials about nationalism and unity were the most common opinion pieces in the early part of the 2003-2010 period, events in the later part of the period meant that other themes began to take precedence, and the numbers of editorials in this category decreased.

The final theme of editorials was those focused on peace and insurgency. Strikingly, the peak of articles about insurgency and the peace process with armed ethnic groups took place in 2003, and editorials on this subject decreased throughout the time period in question, dropping to a total of zero for the editions coded in the year 2010. This may be indicative of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{115} “Strive for successful implementation of development projects” 2005.
\item \textsuperscript{116} “Work for regional and national development by making the most of development foundations” 2005; “Infrastructures for national development reflect unity and strength” 2005.
\item \textsuperscript{117} “Work for regional and national development by making the most of development foundations” 2005; “Infrastructures for national development reflect unity and strength” 2005.
\item \textsuperscript{118} “Work together for discipline-flourishing democratic state” 2006.
\item \textsuperscript{119} “Raising industrial development momentum” 2006.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Zaw Min Min Oo 2010.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Soe Moe (Pathein) (Trs.) 2006.
\end{itemize}
government’s perception of the threat posed by such groups, as ceasefires and peace agreements during this time reduced the number of active insurgent groups. Even starting in 2004, opinion pieces with titles such as “Peaceful and tranquil border regions” were painting a picture of development and improvements in the previously dangerous border areas.\textsuperscript{122} While some op-ed pieces declared that the government would “Crush all the destructive acts of terrorists”,\textsuperscript{123} the tone of these editorials was largely positive about prospects for peace. One 2006 editorial stated that “the armed groups of national races [in Kachin state] have returned to the legal fold and are working together with the government for regional development. As the region has become more peaceful and stable and more transport infrastructures are being built, it has remarkably developed.”\textsuperscript{124}

Even op-eds denouncing the actions of some groups as terrorist activity still tried to maintain an inclusive tone towards the Myanmar citizens. One such editorial blamed the British, rather than the Kayins, for armed insurgency in Kayin state.

Actually, the armed insurgency of KNU is a combination of narrow-minded racism and warlord policy based on the colonialists’ divide-and-rule policy and privileges given by the colonialists to them. Kayin nationals by nature are honest and loyal…. The colonialist government was responsible for the insurgency of the KNU. The colonialists not only stuffed Kayin national people with anti-Bamar sentiment, but also armed them.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{122} Myint Soe (Natala) 2004.

\textsuperscript{123} “Crush all the destructive acts of terrorists” 2005.

\textsuperscript{124} “Higher socio-economic status, results of peace and stability” 2006.

\textsuperscript{125} Lu Thit 2008.
Such tactics were also used to explain insurgency in Shan state and the smuggling of narcotics.\textsuperscript{126} By blaming British colonial policies for the rise of insurgency in ethnic states, editorials such as this one would serve a dual purpose for the Burmese government – criticizing the West in order to downplay international pressure over the constitutional referendum, and lessening the crimes of the KNU and the Kayin people in the eyes of the Bamar majority in an effort to increase the chances of peace and cooperation between the two groups, particularly if the government was seeking a ceasefire agreement with the group.

There are a number of conclusions that can be drawn from the content analysis of the \textit{New Light of Myanmar} during the 2003-2010 period. There is evidence that foreign relations improved over this eight-year time period, based on the tone of both articles and editorials on the subject of foreign relations. The government’s insecurity about the lack of a constitution was assuaged in 2008 with the successful constitutional referendum, although the tone of articles and editorials towards the NLD and its leaders remained largely negative and untrusting during this time. Speeches which were published in the \textit{NLM} during this time began to involve different voices, such as the leaders of civil society organizations or political parties other than the USDP. A huge reduction in the number of articles and the positive tone of editorials about armed ethnic groups reveals that the government felt more confident about the prospects for peace with insurgents which had previously threatened the regime’s stability confidence. Development projects were, as in the previous period, held up as evidence of the success of the \textit{Tatmadaw} government. Spikes in the number of propaganda pieces in the \textit{New Light of Myanmar} can be seen in reaction to specific events, such as the Saffron Revolution and Cyclone Nargis. Based on

\textsuperscript{126} Ko Myanmar 2009b.
the changing tone and frequency of articles and editorials in the government-owned newspaper, it appears that between the years 2003-2010, the Burmese government began to feel that they had addressed two of the three main threats to the regime which had caused the failure of the 1990 elections – bad relations with the international community and armed ethnic groups within Myanmar. The only remaining political threat that was left to deal with was the pesky opposition party, the National League for Democracy.

Conclusion

Between the years of 2003-2010, massive changes took place within Myanmar, opening the door for the development of institutional design that was not possible in the earlier 1988-2002 period. As H2A asserts, the changes during this interim period were based on ideas that had been developed in the earlier period but ultimately failed. The earlier failure was due in large part to the perception of domestic and international threats, which decreased the regime’s stability and immunity confidence. A *New Light of Myanmar* editorial from March 2008 details the government’s own description of the threats facing them during the previous period, stating:

In 1988, the Tatmadaw had to save the Union that was under the threat of collapse due to the unscrupulous activities of the leftists (various forms of Communists), rightists (various groups relying on the West), aboveground groups (power-craving groups, political opportunists, and various opportunists waiting for opportune times to rob public property), underground groups (various armed insurgent groups committing robberies, killing the people, torching villages, and engaging in illegal drug business), and external elements (many colonialist countries seeking ways and means to occupy and colonize Myanmar, as soon as opportune). The colonialists were dreaming the hopes of keeping Myanmar in their control, stationing their military bases in the Myanmar soils, and exploiting the rich natural resources of Myanmar. However, their dreams did not come true due to the
Tatmadaw government…. Now is the most opportune time for the people to achieve the goal [of passing the constitutional referendum].

What made this period more opportune than the previous one? H2B stated that the military regime’s confidence in the power of institutional protections grew for two reasons – improvements in relations with armed ethnic groups and the promotion of more moderate military leaders. I found more evidence for the former factor than the latter. While there were some military leaders during this time, such as Khin Nyunt and Thein Sein, who were seen as more moderate, hardliners such as Than Shwe still clung to power. This was particularly evident in the 2004 firing of Khin Nyunt. There is limited evidence to support the hypothesis that the moderate faction within the military was growing in its power, although this lack of information may be due more to the classified nature of Tatmadaw internal documents than to its accuracy.

While the moderate faction hypothesis is difficult to prove, editorials and speeches from the content analysis reveal that the Tatmadaw certainly believed that the threats posed by armed ethnic groups were largely neutralized during this time. One NLM editorial suggests that the Tatmadaw government “has managed to organize 17 national race armed groups and other small groups, which rose against the successive governments, to return to the legal fold….The number of remnant insurgents is very small and they are only active in remote border areas.”

In their own words, the government saw the ceasefire and Border Guard Force efforts during this period as a success. Similarly, there is evidence in the NLM that diplomatic interactions with foreign nations improved towards the end of the period. These perceived reductions in both domestic and

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128 Aung Ze Min 2008.
international threats, in turn, improved the Tatmadaw’s conception of stability confidence, a factor which had crippled the democratization efforts in the earlier period.

It is important to note that, while elections did take place at the end of this period, they were not free and fair, and the dependent variables of democratization and liberalization still did not take place during this time. Much of the reason for the electoral laws limiting the competitiveness of the 2010 general elections is due to the regime’s continued wariness about the political threat posed by the National League for Democracy, and the Tatmadaw’s continued insecurity with regard to their own immunity and victory confidence. The National League for Democracy was widely seen as the legitimate government of Myanmar long after the 1990 election results were annulled, and the content analysis of the New Light of Myanmar reveals that, while the government’s tone softened towards both armed ethnic groups and the international community during this period, the government-mouthpiece newspaper was utilized to downplay or dismiss the influence and legitimacy of the NLD. Unfair elections in 2010 meant that the Myanmar government could protect themselves from the immunity threats that still haunted them from the 1990 elections.

Finally, as H2C states, the institutional design that took place during 2003-2010, particularly the development of the constitution and electoral laws, would lay the groundwork for more robust democratization and liberalization efforts in the 2011-2015 period. The next chapter, “Letting Go of the Tiger’s Tail?” will explore how the institutional changes occurring during this crucial interim period of 2003-2010 pushed Myanmar closer towards true political change in the later period.
CHAPTER 6

This chapter examines the time period of 2011-2015, during which more concrete steps (such as the 2012 by-elections and 2015 general elections) were taken and evidence of the transition threshold appeared. My hypotheses for this chapter are as follows:

H3: Institutional design during 2003-2010 laid the groundwork for steps toward political liberalization from 2011-2015, which led to a liberalization process that snowballed beyond the military’s initial intent.

H3A: The electoral results in 2011 and 2015 were upheld by the military due to institutions (namely the constitution) which gave them immunity confidence and stability confidence, crucial factors which were absent during the failed transition of 1988-2002.

Analysis

The dependent variables in this chapter are 1) democratization, which I operationalize as freely and fairly-contested elections wherein opposition parties are able to contest with the military-backed parties on equal playing ground and wherein the
results of elections are respected and upheld, and 2) political liberalization, which consists of the opening of other civil and political liberties such as freedom of the press, the release of political prisoners, and the legalization of civil society associations and activities.  

**External/International Pressure**

The Obama Administration pushed on with their policy of pragmatic engagement during the 2011-2015 period, despite criticism from some members of Congress who believed that engagement with the Burmese regime without requiring them to first institute tangible political changes would be a mistake. In August 2011, in response to some of the moderating gestures that President Thein Sein had taken, the United States appointed Derek Mitchell as a special envoy to Myanmar, a major diplomatic milestone between the two countries. In late 2011,

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1 I am aware of the issues with defining Myanmar’s elections as “free and fair,” as there continue to be disenfranchisement of certain populations (such as ethnic minorities, members of the Sangha, and prisoners) and inaccurate voter lists, as well as concerns over voter intimidation and electoral fraud. My definition of “freely and fairly contested elections” focuses more on institutional barriers to opposition parties and particularly to whether those opposition parties are able to win (and hold) seats in the Hluttaw. For more detailed information about defining free and fair elections, see Goodwin-Gill 2006.

2 See Table 3 for operationalization of independent variables.

3 Appendix E shows a selection of the U.S. legislative efforts related to Myanmar between 2011-2015.

4 Clymer 2015, 305.

Secretary of State Clinton requested Myanmar end its “‘illicit ties to North Korea’”, and in 2012 Myanmar responded by announcing it would abide by the UN resolution which banned the purchase of military supplies or military training from North Korea. In response to the positive changes taking place within Myanmar, particularly the 2012 by-elections, the United States announced a bevy of positive changes in their policies toward Myanmar, including instating a fully-accredited ambassador; a USAID mission in Myanmar; the expansion of non-profit programs focused on enhancing such goals as democracy, health, and education in Myanmar; the lifting of visa bans on certain government officials; and beginning to lift bans on exports of U.S. financial services and investments in Myanmar.

Such improvements in interstate relations between the United States and Myanmar did not come without missteps. “In 2014 there were concerns that Burma was backsliding. The military resisted any further diminution of its power, and efforts to amend the constitution so that Aung San Suu Kyi could run for president in 2015 had not been successful.” The United States also froze the financial assets and extended economic sanctions against some people who had repressed Myanmar’s democratic movement.

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6 Clymer 2015, 315.

7 Moe Thuzar 2013, 2; Martin 2012b.

8 Clymer 2015, 319.

9 Clymer 2015, 319.
How much of a role did the Obama Administration’s policy shift toward pragmatic engagement play in the political transition in Myanmar during this time? Englehart notes that, for the decades that Myanmar was ruled by a military junta,

U.S. and E.U. sanctions were never relaxed at any point…despite the fact that it periodically made what were, for its members, significant concessions….Rather than acknowledging these gestures, the U.S. and E.U. responded with new demands….This failure to respond positively was extremely costly for the U.S. credibility in particular; it undermined the position of intelligence chief Khin Nyunt, the primary proponent of improving relations with the West. He was subsequently purged.10

This strategy of never yielding or engaging with the Burmese regime did not serve U.S. national interests particularly well. While I argue that the changing U.S. policy towards Myanmar was not the sole or main causal variable in leading to the democratization and liberalization in the 2011-2015 period, it was certainly a contributing factor. As Min Zin notes, there are five interrelated variables which led to the political change in Myanmar: 1) the internal timeline developed by the Roadmap to Democracy; 2) concerns that Myanmar had become overly reliant on China; 3) the threat of domestic opposition; 4) “a recognition of the need to engage the West”; and 5) the regime’s desire to improve their country’s development.11 So while changing diplomatic strategies from Western countries were not the sole deciding factor in the democratization and liberalization efforts during this time period, they still had a positive effect.

In interviews, Burmese citizens did mention the importance of the international community on political changes in Myanmar, particularly the improved relations with the U.S.

10 Englehart 2012, 684.

11 Min Zin and Joseph 2012, 106.
and the influence of China. Tin Min Htut stated that the United States “still hasn’t dropped sanctions yet on some military-affiliated companies and cronies. Once these companies take concrete steps to divest those companies from these individuals, the U.S. may remove sanctions.” Wai Phyo Myint noted that “U Thein Sein’s government needed credibility [in the wake of] international pressure [for free and fair elections] – this is why they allowed 2012 to go well. Both the domestic pressure and international pressure were influential. The situation is so much different from 1990…no one knew about this country in 1990.” U Pe Tin agreed that international pressure made a difference in the 2011-2015 period. “We don’t have many friends in the past. The only friend of our government was China – China is always thinking about themselves and not how they can help our people….As the civilian government gains more traction, with international help coming, we gain respect from the military.” Dr. Carole Ann Chit Tha suggested that “When we were first sanctioned [by the U.S.], we struggled a lot – only the people suffered, not the government. When the U.S. lifted sanctions, it helped the transition. China didn’t agree with our relationship with the U.S.” Ultimately, the combination of the Obama Administration’s policy of pragmatic engagement combined with the Myanmar government’s assessment that increased interaction with the West would be beneficial led to improved foreign relations during this time.

Splits/Cohesion

The 2011-2015 period saw very interesting shifts in another variable which played a role in the military’s willingness to allow for a transition towards democratization and liberalization – splits and/or cohesion within the military itself. While in the past, reported splits had occurred between current military members with different allegiances (such as having attended a particular military school), this period saw divisions take place between current military members, some of whom serve as military appointees within the parliament, and former military members joining as elected officials. In the 2011 election, the SPDC backed the USDP, meaning that the NUP was, in effect, an opposition party. This represented “the institutionalization of a major fault line within the military…. the junta is now institutionally divided between current and former officers. These groups now have divergent interests.”\(^{16}\)

What are those differing interests? Military appointees to the parliament do not retire or resign from the military, and keep receiving their salaries as members of the armed forces, as well as the same daily stipend that civilian members of parliament receive.\(^{17}\) In addition, being appointed to parliament does not prevent an officer from also receiving internal promotions within the military, as seen in the case of Brigadier General Thet Tun Aung who was promoted from an army colonel to a one-star general while still serving as a military MP.\(^{18}\) While former

\(^{16}\) Englehart 2012, 680.

\(^{17}\) Egreteau 2016, 93.

\(^{18}\) Egreteau 2016, 93.
military members who were elected to parliament must serve the constituents who voted for them or risk losing reelection, the military-appointed MPs owe their allegiance to the Tatmadaw. Despite the preferential treatment afforded by their military status, however, there is evidence that the military-appointed members of parliament are cooperating with civilian MPs.

Contrary to expectations that they would vote in a bloc against opposition motions, military legislators supported a motion in the lower house calling on the president to grant a general amnesty for political prisoners. Interviews with members of parliament (MPs) revealed that after some initial mistrust, relations are improving between elected and military representatives, and the two-groups engage in discussions on issues of shared interest in the corridors of Parliament.\(^\text{19}\)

The willingness of military appointees to support a motion which may arguably go against the Tatmadaw’s institutional interests is a fascinating and important indicator that democratization attempts may indeed be extending beyond the scope that the military originally intended.

In addition to the opinions and viewpoints of military higher-ups, it is also important to consider the cohesion of the military rank and file. The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies conducted a fascinating study in 2015 involving interviews with 67 Myanmar soldiers.\(^\text{20}\)

Common themes that came out from these interviews included a desire for national unity and peace between the armed forces and armed ethnic groups, the obligation of soldiers to obey the orders of their commanding officers, and recent improvements in development and technology which affect people’s daily lives. Many participants stated that they viewed their role as merely a

\(^{19}\) Moe Thuzar 2013, 3-4.

\(^{20}\) Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies 2015.
job – one soldier stated, “I get my salary and it’s enough to live.”  Many rank and file soldiers described their experiences on the battlefield as “terrifying” and also discussed the negative treatment they experienced from civilians due to their affiliation with the Tatmadaw.

‘Villagers do not want to welcome us because we are Tatmadaw soldiers.’ Soldier’s children were discriminated against if they attended schools outside of the military camp, and found it difficult to make friends. Soldiers explained that the negative perceptions against them were due to the misconduct perpetrated by some soldiers, such as looting, raping, stealing, or taking villagers’ domestic animals.

Interviewers also asked soldiers whether they planned to stay or leave the Tatmadaw, and respondents were split. Most soldiers who indicated a desire to stay cited a desire to protect Myanmar from foreign invasion as well as “the benefits that military life provides, coupled with their lack of employable skills.” This study, while modest in its scope, provides valuable insight into the often-ignored members of the Tatmadaw who nonetheless are crucial for the success of the ongoing peace process, as well as the country’s democratization and liberalization efforts.

Burmese citizens’ opinion of the Tatmadaw has certainly improved in recent years, particularly after the 2015 elections. Okka Oo noted that “People are not as negative about the military as they used to be, but they want the military out of politics. The military has its rightful

21 Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies 2015, 34.
22 Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies 2015, 35.
23 Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies 2015, 36.
24 Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies 2015, 37.
place, which is not the Hluttaw.” Tin Min Htut stated that “I think the military didn’t mean for this [transition to the NLD government] to happen. There was a split within the USDP.” Dr. Carole Ann Chit Tha suggested that “The younger military generation is better, but they are being pressured [by the older military members].” Edward Ziwa Naing had more positive feelings towards the military than most, saying “I may be unpopular for saying this, but our military is always changing, learning, and evolving. They know they have to change in order to survive as an institution. In the near future, I believe they will continue to be involved. However, they will take orders from the new government. They are taking the changes quite well.”

Tharawon (Pyay) described the complicated feelings many Burmese citizens feel towards the Tatmadaw:

Everyone wants the military out of politics, but we cannot get them out because of the constitution. They will leave when they think they can – it is up to them. They worry about their future, and about the former generals. When the young generals think they former generals are safe, only then will they leave politics…. Before 1988 we had the feeling that we loved our soldiers and our military. When they came back from war, the whole town welcomed them back with flowers. That feeling we will never get back, even now. There is a big wall between civilians and military, but the degree is a little bit going down. It’s up to the military whether this fall continues going down…. I don’t hate the military – every country needs a military to protect the country. I want them to be professional, not sitting in parliament doing what politicians need to do.


By setting up institutional protections for themselves, the Burmese military was able to start taking steps back towards the barracks during the 2011-2015 period without having to fear potential repercussions, which was further augmented by the reduction of threats during this time.

**Threat Perception**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the regime’s perception of internal threats decreased markedly in the 2003-2010 period, due to the success of ceasefires between armed ethnic groups and the army. Despite this, during the 2011-2015 period, another threat rose to the forefront, although the issues underlying the threat were not new. In 2012, violence between Arakanese\(^{30}\) Buddhists and a Muslim minority group called the Rohingya\(^{31}\) in Rakhine state

\(^{30}\) Burmese citizens living in Rakhine (Arakan) State.

\(^{31}\) Pronounced ro—HIN—ja. The name Rohingya is quite controversial in Myanmar, as Burmese citizens claim that the Rohingya are not a “legitimate” ethnic group but are instead illegal immigrants from Bangladesh who call themselves Rohingya and are merely looking for economic gains in Myanmar. The international community, on the other hand, has lampooned Myanmar’s treatment of the Rohingya for being ethnic cleansing and/or genocidal. The distrust between Burmese Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims dates back to the colonial period and is rooted in religious, ethnic, and cultural differences, as well as fears of invasion and terrorism. For more discussion of the roots of the conflict, see Taylor (2015a) and Calamur (2017). My personal take on the situation is that the treatment of Rohingya certainly constitutes human rights abuses and ethnic cleansing/genocide. I hesitate, however, to blame one particular person or group for this situation. The conflict is deeply historical and rooted in colonial legacies that are difficult to erase, particularly in current political climate where misinformation about the Rohingya abounds on Facebook and other social media platforms. The solution to this issue will not come quickly or easily.
broke out after a Buddhist woman was raped, allegedly by Muslim men. This incident led to religious violence against the Rohingya living in Rakhine state, leading to the internal displacement of approximately 140,000 Rohingya people,\textsuperscript{32} the destruction of more than 1,000 homes and buildings, and the reported deaths of some 43 people.\textsuperscript{33}

The background of the conflict between the Arakanese Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims is complicated and dates back to British colonialism and the Burmese independence movement. The British policy of ruling Burma directly and ruling other parts of the Indian subcontinent indirectly contributed to early feelings of ethnic division and resentment towards those of Indian heritage.\textsuperscript{34} “Burmese nationalists saw themselves as colonized twice, first by the British, secondly by the Indians who, in particular, dominated the economy.”\textsuperscript{35} In the decades after Burmese independence, some Muslims fought a separatist rebellion in an attempt to annex their own territory near Pakistan and what is now Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{36}

In 1982, the BSPP passed a citizenship law that identified eight ethnicities\textsuperscript{37} entitled to Burmese citizenship, and the Rohingya were not included.\textsuperscript{38} It is important to note that religion

\textsuperscript{32} Calamur 2017.

\textsuperscript{33} Walton 2013.

\textsuperscript{34} Holliday 2007, 1043-1044.

\textsuperscript{35} Taylor 2015a, 4.

\textsuperscript{36} Calamur 2017.

\textsuperscript{37} The “big eight” ethnicities named in the law are Kachin, Kayah, Karen, Chin, Burman, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan, although there is a total of 135 national races recognized in Myanmar. Taylor 2015a, 7.

\textsuperscript{38} Calamur 2017.
and ethnicity were “twin themes in the Myanmar nationalist narrative”, as Buddhism became synonymous with Burmese-ness. The Sangha play an important political role in Myanmar, as evidenced by their leadership in protests in 1988 and 2007, and some extremists within the Sangha more recently have used the narrative of “Buddhism in danger” as a dog whistle to stoke religious and ethnic tensions, leading to the rise of the so-called 969 movement, the group Ma Ba Tha and its leader, U Wirathu, who has referred to himself as the Burmese Bin Laden. Many Burmese citizens believe that “The truth is that this term, Rohingya, was never widely known, or even used by most ordinary Muslim-Bengalis…When asked, ‘What is your ethnicity [lu myo]?’ They immediately answer ‘Bengali.’ This term ‘Rohingya’ was simply invented by the educated upper class Muslims of this area.” The argument that the term Rohingya was not used or mentioned in British colonial texts is frequently referenced to undermine the Rohingya’s claims to citizenship.

The rise of religious extremism in response to the Rohingya issue also points to another factor that plays a role in this quagmire – the fears of terrorism, particularly terrorist groups who

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39 Taylor 2015a, 5.

40 The name 969 is a reference to the nine special attributes of the Buddha; the six special attributes of the Dharma, his teachings; and the nine special attributes of the monks. 969 started as a “Buy Buddhist” campaign, wherein shops would display the numbers to indicate that the business was owned by a Buddhist. For more discussion of 969, see Walton 2013.

41 Taylor 2015a, 5.

42 Walton 2013.

43 Kyaw Lat 2018.
purport to be Muslim. The ongoing conflicts in Rakhine state have led to the rise of a new militant group, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), who may have links to groups in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.\(^{44}\) ARSA was responsible for attacks on Burmese military security outposts and other buildings.\(^{45}\) “The Burmese fear a Rohingya autonomous area along the border with Bangladesh would come at the expense of Rakhine territory. The Burmese military, which has cracked down on Rohingya civilians, views this as a possible staging area for terrorism by groups like ARSA.”\(^{46}\) This fear is reflected in the frequent use of terms in Burmese such as “violent Bengalis” when referring to the Rohingya.\(^{47}\)

While Rohingya are not eligible for citizenship, and therefore do not have the right to vote, President Thein Sein did pursue a policy of allowing those who held white temporary registration cards to vote in the 2008 constitutional referendum and the 2010 national elections. This legislation was opposed by both the Rakhine National Party and the National League for Democracy, and while it was passed by the national legislature, public demonstrations led to

\[\ldots\] the President then promptly [announcing] that all White registration cards would be withdrawn from 31 March 2015, thus disenfranchising more than a million persons. In an election year, no politician, not even a Noble [sic] prize winner, could be seen to be favouring what most Myanmar consider to be illegal immigrants.\(^{48}\)

\(^{44}\) Calamur 2017.

\(^{45}\) Calamur 2017.

\(^{46}\) Calamur 2017.

\(^{47}\) Moe Myint 2018.

\(^{48}\) Taylor 2015a, 13.
Indeed, perhaps the most important factor in the ongoing mistreatment of the Rohingya people in Myanmar is not the role of the Tatmadaw, or the legacy of colonialism, but rather the public opinion of Burmese citizens. It is perhaps unsurprising that militant nationalism has developed in Myanmar due to its weak political institutions and the existence of political elites who feel “deeply threatened by popular sovereignty.”\textsuperscript{49} While prodemocracy activists and international observers often cite the importance of a free press for the development of democracy and liberalization, “rapid creation of a free press [can be] counterproductive because open media can readily become vehicles for nationalism….a politically immature citizenry served by a jejune media corps could feed nationalist demagogues.”\textsuperscript{50} Evidence for this can be seen not only in the frequency of anti-Rohingya posts and false information about ARSA spread on Facebook in Myanmar, but also in a poll of political parties’ stances on human rights that was conducted by FIDH in Yangon in November 2015. Out of nineteen political parties who participated in the poll, 42 percent refused to answer questions about Rohingyas altogether, 74 percent stated they would not amend the 1982 Citizenship Law to allow Rohingyas the right to citizenship, and only 21 percent of parties agreed that the government should create laws dealing with discrimination against religious minorities.\textsuperscript{51} The findings of this survey reveal that while democratization was coming to Myanmar in 2015, democratic institutions and culture were still underdeveloped, meaning that acceptance of unpopular religious and ethnic minority groups is

\textsuperscript{49} Holliday 2008, 1041.

\textsuperscript{50} Holliday 2008, 1042 and 1049-1050.

\textsuperscript{51} Moe Thuzar 2015, 9.
still a long way off. This perceived threat posed by the Rohingya people, even civilians who are not associated with ARSA, is perhaps the most troubling and complicated challenge facing the NLD government, who despite their purported support for human rights still find it difficult to override public opinion against the Rohingya.

While the international community has widely criticized the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi for failing to adequately deal with the Rohingya crisis or address the human rights issues involved, many Burmese citizens view the issue as something that cannot be dealt with yet. Tin Min Htut believes that Aung San Suu Kyi “is wise not to touch the race/religion topic yet, especially the Rohingya issue. She has to consolidate power – she’s not a leader yet. If there is no 25% military [in parliament], I think she would want to protect the Rohingya. Winning the election is more important than anything else, then changing the constitution, then protecting minorities.”

Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt used the term “professional refugees” when describing the Rohingya, alleging that the Rohingya are economic migrants who were prospering from living in Myanmar and getting aid from the international community. The Rohingya people are widely hated in Myanmar, and ARSA is seen as a domestic terrorist group, despite their lack of power. As the conflict in Rakhine state continues, the treatment of the Rohingya people

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52 Some recent developments indicate that the Tatmadaw may be shifting in their response to international pressure on the Rohingya issue. In response to sanctions levied by the European Union on seven senior military officials in charge of operations against the Rohingya, the Tatmadaw quickly announced that two of the generals had been fired (Reuters 2018b). Such a quick response to international sanctions is quite striking when considering the Tatmadaw’s resistance to pressure from foreign powers during earlier periods.


approaches something close to diversionary use of force on the part of the Myanmar government, who may have found a very convenient scapegoat to blame for the lack of development or peace in the region.

**Institutional Design**

While the threat perception of the Rohingya crisis reveals the weakness in Myanmar’s new democratic institutions, the time period of 2011-2015 still saw success in the development of institutional design which had been mapped out in the Roadmap to Democracy. As Englehart notes, while the 2010 elections were undoubtedly unfair, one should not assume that the institutions created by the Tatmadaw will function exactly as they intended.

Even undemocratic elections and imperfect democracy may represent an improvement in a sufficiently bad status quo and may also lead to consequences not anticipated by the authoritarian rulers who sponsored them…. What is most remarkable about the current moment is thus not that the elections were seriously flawed – this was inevitable – but that they happened at all. Prior to the election, the junta was in the strongest position it had ever enjoyed”

Indeed, democratic institutions and rule of law do not spring forth fully formed, but must instead be “developed and nurtured.” The 2008 constitution and 2010 elections, even though they were conceived of and developed by the regime in an attempt to “improve its international and domestic legitimacy”, nevertheless forced the SPDC to allow the functioning of opposition

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55 Englehart 2012, 667 & 671.

56 Englehart 2012, 671.

57 Englehart 2012, 672.
parties as well as creating new divisions within the regime, particularly with the splits between the interests of military members who serve as military representatives versus those who ran for office.

The role of the military representatives in the *Hluttaw* has changed since 2011, and the evolution of these roles is quite interesting. Very few of these military legislators were high-ranking, with just three colonels in the *Pyithu Hluttaw* and two in the *Amyotha Hluttaw*. In 2012, however, Vice Senior-General Min Aung Hlaing switched out fifty-nine low-ranking officers in the parliament with higher-ranking senior officers, including four brigadier generals in both the *Pyithu Hluttaw* and *Amyotha Hluttaw*. It appears that a culture shift may be taking place within the *Tatmadaw*, wherein officers are expected “to devote a few years of their soldiering career to non-combat and administrative functions, including as legislators. The image of responsible officers devoted to public affairs, occupying a bureaucratic office for the good of the nation, has long been a key element in the rhetoric of upper Burmese military circles.”

This change, as well as the entrance of NLD members into government since 2012 and the willingness of parliament to scrutinize the country’s military budget, something that would have been unheard of just a decade ago, “has been a major factor in increasing public interest and trust significantly…because the parliament [has] shown itself to be an institution independent of the

58 Egreteau 2016, 92.

59 Egreteau 2016, 92.

60 Egreteau 2016, 92.
government and military. The speed with which this independence was achieved has been as much a surprise to representatives in parliament as it has been to observers."\(^{61}\)

Burmese citizens certainly noticed institutional changes during this period. As Okka Oo described it,

There was more excitement for the 2012 elections because the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi were running. Euphoria was in full swing. There were still some doubts if this was going the right way – the Constitution had some issues. However, it would be very difficult to go back now, after going this far down the democratic process. I would say the political momentum we see now started in 2012, with the excitement that the NLD and Aung Sang Suu Kyi were playing a part in politics now…. Before the 2015 elections, we thought the USDP will hold on to power by hook or by crook. We thought they might jeopardize the domestic stability or peace in order to grab onto power if they didn’t like the results of the elections. We couldn’t believe they would let go of power so easily.\(^{62}\)

Tharawon (Pyay) agreed that the 2012 election results surprised citizens as well as the military and led to fears that the government would null the results like they had in 1990. “The results of 2012 were a big surprise for the government – some people worried the government would null the results. Some people said maybe we should let the USDP win the elections in 2010 and 2012 [to let the military feel more secure], then we can vote for the NLD in 2015.”\(^{63}\) Shine Zaw-Aung believed that the Thein Sein administration expected a transition in 2020 rather than 2015, “but now things have gotten good for them. [The transition] has lifted all boats. There were fewer repercussions than they were expecting…. The military was too incompetent to even stuff their

\(^{61}\) Kean 2014, 59.


own ballot boxes. They thought they would win the elections, so they didn’t think they needed to stuff the ballot boxes.”

Tin Min Htut also expressed surprise that the Tatmadaw had allowed the election results to stand in 2012 and 2015.

“We have to give credit to the Thein Sein government. They were thinking they would win – they didn’t think [a loss to the NLD] would happen now. It’s like a sin of omission – here, people are afraid to tell the truth [that they won’t vote for the USDP], so they lie, and the military doesn’t know. They are afraid to tell someone their policy is bad…. There was writing on the wall [that the military would lose the election] – the voter registry was not done right. Now, I think the train has left the station and they can’t pull it back anymore. Based on political polls, the USDP didn’t think they would lose. They thought the ethnic parties and the Farmer’s Party would vote with them. Many [ethnic people in polls] said they would vote for their ethnic party, but they would vote for the NLD just once in 2015 to give Aung San Suu Kyi a chance.”

Even U Shwe Mann, former head of the USDP, believed that his party would win the 2015 elections. In a government report, U Shwe Mann stated that “I told her [Daw Aung San Suu Kyi] to hold an appropriate office and support me if I won [the election]. I said it was up to her if she won. I am not a turncoat.” Critics point out, however, that such a move in supporting the NLD leader could also be in response to the uncertainty of his future with the USDP, from which he was expelled in August 2015.

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66 Htet Naing Zaw 2018b.
67 Htet Naing Zaw 2018b.
68 BBC 2015b.
One person who was not surprised by the 2015 election results, Edward Ziwa Naing, suggested that the military did not fix the 2015 election results for several reasons. “1) The international community was watching carefully; 2) The outgoing government had lots of insurance mechanisms in place, and 3) [The USDP] was misinformed and thought they would win.”

He went on to note that “The downfall of the USDP was that they cannot separate the military and the party, and the government and the party.”

U Pe Tin, an NLD party official in North Okkala, also was not surprised by the NLD’s victory and the handover of power from the military to the NLD in 2015.

The objective of the military is for the benefit of the whole country, not selected generals – they realized this, that is why they opened their arms to the Lady’s party. Why did the military agree to the change? The new military generation is replacing the old generation, the whole country supported the NLD and the military has to do according to the people’s views, and the international community stands behind the NLD.

Through the rules laid out in the 2008 Constitution, the military was able to protect itself from negative consequences which may have otherwise followed their loss in the 2015 elections.

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Democratization and Liberalization

Of course, the most crucial question of this period is whether Myanmar experienced an increase in democratization and liberalization as a result of the Roadmap to Democracy. This section will explore whether these two dependent variables increased during the 2011-2015 period.

This project operationalizes democratization as freely and fairly-contested elections wherein opposition parties are able to contest with the military-backed parties on equal playing ground and wherein the results of elections are respected and upheld. I operationalize political liberalization as the opening of other civil and political liberties such as freedom of the press, the release of political prisoners, and the legalization of civil society associations and activities. As noted previously, democratization and liberalization are often, although not necessarily, related, and the advancement of one does not automatically mean that the other will also increase. It is generally understood that the emergence of liberalization through the extension of rights during a political transition often “triggers a number of (often unintended) consequences which play an important role in ultimately determining the scope and extension of that process.”\(^\text{72}\) Such unintended consequences include an observed phenomenon in many cases that “once some individual and collective rights have been granted, it becomes increasingly difficult to justify withholding others. Moreover, as liberalization advances so does the strength of demands for democratization.”\(^\text{73}\) As O’Donnell and Schmitter’s seminal work on regime transitions

\(^{72}\) O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 7.

\(^{73}\) O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 10.
concludes, transitions to democracy are usually “nonlinear, highly uncertain, and imminently reversible.”\(^{74}\) The goal of this project is to map this nonlinear process which has occurred in Myanmar.

Many observers have noted that, due to the position of power that the *Tatmadaw* had created for itself with institutional protections for its economic and political interests, “the military leadership could finally afford to experiment with liberalization and even partial democratization”\(^{75}\) during the 2011-2015 period. There were certainly some major improvements made on the liberalization front under the Thein Sein government, including cooperation and reconciliation with Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD; the initiation of a peace process between the government and multiple armed ethnic groups; the release of hundreds of political prisoners and the creation of a commission to oversee other cases; reduction of press censorship with the abolition of the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division; and a general increase in civil society and increasing numbers of nongovernmental organizations operating in Myanmar.\(^{76}\) Additionally, “Private and foreign media coverage of parliamentary sessions was allowed since October 2011”,\(^{77}\) contributing to an increase in governmental transparency under the new government.

\(^{74}\) O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 70.

\(^{75}\) Pederson 2014, 25.

\(^{76}\) Clapp and DiMaggio 2013, 3.

\(^{77}\) Moe Thuzar 2013, 6.
One way to measure an increase in liberalization during this period is to use the Freedom House “Freedom in the World” annual scores. Freedom House is an independent watchdog organization which analyzes the level of civil liberties and political rights in all the world’s countries each year and categorize them as Free, Partly Free, and Not Free. They measure civil liberties through questions about freedom of expression and belief; associational and organizational rights, rule of law, and personal autonomy and individual rights. They measure political rights using questions about the electoral process, political pluralism and participation, and functioning of government. The countries are then given a rating between 1 and 7 for both categories, “with 1 representing the greatest degree of freedom and 7 the smallest degree of freedom.” The two scores for civil liberties and political rights are then averaged together to create the country’s freedom rating for the year. Countries with a freedom rating of 1.0-2.5 are considered Free, countries with a freedom rating of 3.0-5.0 are considered Partly Free, and countries with a freedom rating of 5.5-7.0 are considered Not Free. Figure 32 shows the annual Freedom House scores for Myanmar during the 2011-2015 period.

As this graph shows, in 2011 Myanmar started out with a score of 7 in both civil liberties and political rights, the worst possible score. In 2012, the civil liberties score improved slightly as it dropped to 6, and in 2013, both the civil liberties and political rights scores dropped to 5 and 6, respectively. The political rights scores remained consistently at 6, while civil liberties worsened slightly in 2015, rising from 5 to 6. This shows that important aspects of civil liberties and

78 Freedom House 2018.

79 Freedom House 2018.
political rights were improving, albeit slightly, during this time, and indicates the start of liberalization in Myanmar.

![Freedom House Ratings for Myanmar 2011-2015](image)

**Figure 32: Freedom House ratings for Myanmar 2011-2015.**

Despite these improvements in many indicators of liberalization, however, there were still some illiberal practices taking place. While the 2008 guarantees many different individual rights, those rights are still “fully subject to security concerns. Although the reform process has opened the door to new freedoms over the past two years, they have not been enshrined in law.”

In the lead-up to the 2015 elections,

…the armed forces have appeared less tolerant of criticism and dissent, obviously no longer accepting blame as in the early months of the transitional process. Despite the considerable easing of censorship since 2012, each time local journalists have bluntly criticized the army, as an

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80 Clapp and DiMaggio 2013, 8.
institutions or targeting only one of its members, the reporters, bloggers and photographers were hunted down and brought to court.\textsuperscript{81}

Additionally, the continuation of abuses against the Rohingya, violence in Rakhine state, the military seizing land owned by civilians, and crackdowns on journalists all point to areas of needed improvement for Myanmar’s ongoing liberalization efforts.\textsuperscript{82}

Interviews with Burmese citizens revealed largely positive perceptions of the regime’s liberalization efforts. NLD member U Maung Maung told me, “If we had this talk 20 years ago, we three [interviewees] would go to prison and you would be deported! Now we can talk freely, no more worries, ‘freedom from fear.’”\textsuperscript{83} He went on to observe the difference in his life now that liberalization efforts allowed opposition parties to operate more freely:

I gained more respect from my community since the NLD was in government. People used to think it was a risky job to work for the NLD – I could be detained; my life was in danger. People used to think that NLD members should be avoided, they don’t even say hello to me. Now everyone says hello. They were afraid to deal with the NLD. The military intelligence was always following me, keeping tabs. Only after 2015 did the military stop spying – that’s when I think things really changed. I’ve been wearing shirts with Aung San Suu Kyi and Bogyoke Aung San on them since the 1990s. I was even detained. It is an honor to be detained for political reasons.\textsuperscript{84}

Htay Htay Win was surprised by improvements in freedom of speech during the 2011-2015 period. “Politically if you wanted to criticize the regime, you had to be careful. [Now we]
encourage people to stand up for their own rights. If they government doesn’t help you, they won’t have your vote in five years. This is the fruit of democracy. In the past we never dreamed of this.”\textsuperscript{85}

Another topic that came up when discussing liberalization in interviews was censorship and press freedom. Journalist and editor Okka Oo spoke about the massive shift in what journalists can write now compared to in previous periods;

\begin{quote}
The people of Myanmar are funny. When they love a group, they love it and every member of it without exception. For some people, the [NLD] government is like their own baby – you can’t say anything bad about them. As a journalist, it’s a little like the old days – you couldn’t criticize the old regime for fear of going to jail. Now you have to be careful of criticizing the new regime because people will stop buying your newspaper if you are too critical of them.\textsuperscript{86}
\end{quote}

Tin Min Htut suggested that the NLD was still a safer target for criticism than the old regime – “I see discontent on Facebook towards the NLD. You can still be charged for posting about the military – it is safer to criticize the NLD.”\textsuperscript{87}

As with liberalization, it appears that Myanmar’s progress towards democratization is largely positive with some caveats. While there were still issues with the 2012 by-elections, many feel that “Given the military government’s complete freedom from accountability before the constitutional referendum of 2008, any change is an improvement. Even a rigged election may represent progress if what it went through before was bad enough.”\textsuperscript{88} Steady improvements

\textsuperscript{85} Htay Htay Win. Interview with Nicole Loring. Personal Interview. Yangon, June 22, 2016.

\textsuperscript{86} Okka Oo. Interview with Nicole Loring. Personal Interview. Yangon, June 6, 2016.

\textsuperscript{87} Tin Min Htut. Interview with Nicole Loring. Personal Interview. Yangon, June 14, 2016.

\textsuperscript{88} Englehart 2012, 682.
in electoral practices from 2010 to 2012 and then to 2015 show that democratization is slowly
taking place, as defined by free and fair elections which can be contested by opposition parties
and have their results upheld. As Pederson observed prior to the 2015 elections,

By legalizing the NLD and granting it a national political platform, the
government has all but guaranteed that its own party, the USDP, will lose
the 2015 elections. At the same time, broader society has been mobilized in
unprecedented ways that significantly increase the risk of a popular
backlash to any future regressive steps. The genie is out of the bottle, and
the current leadership has released it both knowingly and willingly.⁸⁹
(Pederson 2014, 30).

Since my measurement for democratization depends on electoral practices and outcomes,
comparing Myanmar’s elections will help to establish any changes in democratization during the
time periods covered by this project. Table 6 shows how the different aspects of the

Table 6: Democratization Factors in Myanmar’s Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Freely and fairly contested?</th>
<th>Opposition parties able to contest equally?</th>
<th>Results of elections are respected and upheld</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the most convincing pieces of evidence that Myanmar’s nascent democracy is
strengthening can be seen in the political process within parliament. Between 2011 and 2016, the
Pyidaungsu Hluttaw enacted 232 pieces of legislation, and with more experience came optimism

⁸⁹ Pederson 2014, 30.
on the part of MPs. “Questions began to be raised on topics once deemed too sensitive to address, including abuses of power by local military authorities and the fate of political prisoners. Lawmakers started to openly challenge most proposals for new legislation put forward by the executive.”90 Another example in the maturation of Myanmar’s new system of checks and balances can be seen when an overwhelming number of MPs voted to impeach all nine judges on the Constitutional Tribunal for “curtailing the parliamentary committees’ reach on the issues raised by Parliament.”91

While there is evidence that democratization is occurring within Myanmar’s recent elections, and that democratic practices may also be strengthening, there are still some weaknesses that must be addressed in the future. Arguably the most important threat to democratization in Myanmar’s new political landscape is the 25 percent quota for military members in the Hluttaw. Despite the undemocratic practice of reserving seats for unelected MPs, however,

For the most part, the military has been a benign presence, its representatives introducing no bills and submitting few proposals or questions. Occasionally the Tatmadaw representatives have participated in discussions. However, when called upon to vote on a bill or proposal that is not contrary to the military’s interests, their involvement has been unpredictable, and it remains unclear exactly whether their loyalties lie more with the government, the parliament, or with neither.92

90 Egreteau 2016, 73.

91 Moe Thuzar 2013, 7.

92 Kean 2014, 63.
Another way democratization could improve in the future would be to appeal Article 59(f) of the constitution, the clause aimed at barring Aung San Suu Kyi from the presidency, as well as Article 436 which requires a 75% majority of Parliament to pass a constitutional amendment, both of which remain in Myanmar’s constitution despite the NLD’s control of parliament. Until such barriers to the presidency and amending the constitution no longer exist, democratization in Myanmar must still be considered ongoing and not fully realized, as they prevent opposition parties from overriding the will of the Tatmadaw.

In addition to measuring changes in political rights and civil liberties during this time, it is also worth examining the democratic maturity or democratic culture that is developing. Democratic culture takes a long time to mature, as a citizenry which is unaccustomed to new rights and liberties must learn about and understand the new political environment in which they live. What does democracy mean? Why are the roles of the different branches of government? What do citizens think about their democracy? How informed are they about their own political system? These are the sorts of questions with which a society must grapple as democratization develops further.

Certainly, in Myanmar, while democracy has been welcomed with open arms, the new political system is not yet fully understood by many citizens, including even government

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93 Morrison et al 2014, 6.

94 In future research, I hope to expand on this measurement of democratization by looking at the votes taken by Hluttaw members. As Kramer (2012) writes, “A good indication of democratic progress would be for military representatives to vote independently, rather than as a block under instruction from the army leadership. A further indication of the success of the longer-term democratization process (after the 2015 elections) would be for the army to give up its right to reserved seats” (11). It may be some time before this data is available, however.
officials. In a press conference on January 31, 2013, Shwe Mann addressed “members of the executive and judicial branches who complain of parliamentary interference, [saying] that they did not understand the role of a multiparty parliament in a democratic system, where it was expected by the electorate to monitor and check the executive branch.” In 2014, the Asia Foundation carried out a nationwide survey to measure public knowledge and awareness of the new government and political system in Myanmar, interviewing over 3,000 respondents across Myanmar. The results of this valuable survey showed that while the people of Myanmar are generally very optimistic about the country’s transition to democracy, they still have quite limited knowledge about the structure and functions of their government. While respondents expressed “a strong preference for democracy in the abstract and a high level of expectation that voting will bring about positive change”, there are also challenges in the form of low social trust, polarizing political disagreements, and gender inequality.

Some results to specific questions are worth noting. When asked to name any branches of government, a significant 82% of respondents were unable to name even one, and only 14% could correctly name the executive, 3% the legislative and 2% the judicial branch. Additionally, while over 95% of respondents reported that they voted in the 2010 elections,

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95 Clapp and DiMaggio 2013, 5.
96 Asia Foundation 2014, 11.
97 Asia Foundation 2014, 11.
98 Asia Foundation 2014, 11.
99 Asia Foundation 2014, 12.
many respondents incorrectly believed that certain key government officials, such as the president and chief minister, were directly elected by citizens. When asked what percentage of seats in parliament were reserved for military members, 68% of respondents said they did not know and only 15% knew the correct figure.

In addition to questions about the government branches and functions, the survey also asked Myanmar citizens an open-ended question to define what they thought “democracy” means. 53% of respondents cited “freedom,” 15% referred to “rights and law,” 11% mentioned “peace” and 8% stated “equal rights for groups.” Notably, over one third of respondents (35%) stated they did not know what constituted a democracy. While many respondents (66%) stated they felt free to express their political opinions, 51% of respondents in Rakhine State said they did not feel free to do so, clearly in response to the ongoing difficulties in that region. Additionally, levels of social trust in Myanmar are very low, as an “astounding 77% of all respondents believed that, generally, most people cannot be trusted.” Similarly to the general lack of knowledge about what democracy means, understanding of the term “federalism” is also very low, with only 14% of all respondents having heard the term before. Despite some

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100 Asia Foundation 2014, 12.
102 Asia Foundation 2014, 14.
103 Asia Foundation 2014, 14.
104 Asia Foundation 2014, 16.
105 Asia Foundation 2014, 18.
growing pains and areas for improvement, however, a majority of Myanmar citizens (62%) expressed optimism that Myanmar was headed in the right direction.106

Some of these sentiments were echoed in my interviews. Okko Oo has noticed that “People are not talking about politics as much anymore, now that the elections are over and the new government is in place. People are more concerned about day-to-day concerns. People are very optimistic about the new government – still enthusiastic about the change. The government and people of Myanmar used to be on different sides…now we are on the same side.”107 Wai Phyo Myint referred to the lack of democratic maturity as an issue during the 2015 elections, stating, “I don’t think it was intentional [that the voter lists were flawed]. We have a lack of experience and a lack of capacity.”108 U Pe Tin discussed the importance of establishing law and order under the new civilian government in addition to relying on the international community, because

Democracy in developed countries have restrictions and order. But democracy is very transitional in Myanmar. People are not used to democracy yet – we have to be careful. Myanmar’s democracy is just like a kid, Western democracy is like a grandparent – they are holding our hand and helping us walk the right way. The international community is very important – they can encounter the military’s strength, they are strong. We used to have two forces pushing against each other – the military and democracy. We are very weak, but we are pushing together now. We need someone pushing behind us.109

106 Asia Foundation 2014, 18.
Indeed, while Myanmar has seen astounding changes in its efforts towards democratization and liberalization in a short period of time, the country’s democracy is still very new and underdeveloped. The following chapter will explore the findings of the content analysis for this time period, and the conclusion chapter will discuss some of the most pressing issues with which Myanmar must contend as it strives towards becoming a mature, liberal democracy.
CHAPTER 7


As in previous chapters, I conducted a content analysis of 100 editions of the *New Light of Myanmar*, using a random date generator to randomly select 100 dates. Due to the generator’s limit of 25 dates, I ran the randomizer 4 times to find separate dates in each of these four different time periods: Jan 1, 2011 to March 31, 2012; April 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013; July 1, 2013 to September 30, 2014; and October 1, 2014 to December 31, 2015. This also ensured that the randomly selected dates were not too heavily grouped in one year of the 2011-2015 time period. If there was no publication on the date chosen, I used the randomizer to select another random date.

Once I gathered the *NLM* edition from each randomly-selected date, I read them and coded each article based on ten different subjects: diplomacy (which includes diplomatic calls, ambassadors, delegations, travel of high ranking officials, funerals of high-ranking officials, foreign aid, etc.); elections, political parties, and the National Convention; full-texts of speeches and notifications or laws; insurgency or protests; business, industry, and construction (which includes development, agriculture and visits from foreign businesspeople and tourists); editorials and letters to the editor; non-political crimes; religion (including building new temples, visits by foreigners related to religion, and donations to monks/nuns/temple); propaganda and slogans; and miscellaneous (including sports, history, holidays, education, culture, arts, health, obituaries, ads, engagements, etc.).
There are seven subjects which were relevant for this chapter - diplomacy, elections/party news, speeches and laws, insurgencies/protests, business, propaganda/slogans, and editorials/opinion articles. Diplomacy is important for gauging changes in international pressure on the regime, which is particularly important for gauging the military’s immunity and stability confidence with regards to the risks of foreign interference (H3A). Articles related to election/party news and speeches/laws are useful to gauge steps toward democratization and political liberalization during this period (H3), as well as any possible reductions in the perceived threats posed by opposition parties. Insurgency/protest articles can help determine whether the regime perceived an improvement in relations with armed ethnic groups and therefore experienced more stability confidence (H3A). As in previous chapters, business and development articles may represent the economic benefits of continued steps toward democratization and liberalization. Propaganda and slogans are used as a proxy measure for gauging threat perceptions and confidence of the regime (H3A). Finally, opinion articles are utilized as a qualitative measure of the regime’s messaging and shifting attitudes towards the independent variables in question.

For this time period, I coded a total of 7,241 articles. I then counted the number of articles on each subject for each randomly-selected date and entered those numbers into an Excel table. This then allowed me to create graphs of the number of articles on each subject by date from 2011-2015, to get a feel for trends in how often the government newspaper mentioned certain topics. I created graphs for these seven pertinent subjects. Figure 33 charts diplomacy articles during this time.
There was a total of 363 articles in this period related to diplomacy, compared to 261 articles in 2003-2010 and 227 diplomacy articles from 1988-2002. There are two spikes in the number of diplomacy articles worth noting. The first is around January 2012, when a number of diplomatic visits took place, most notably the Executive Director of the ILO, who met with the Democracy and Human Rights Committee Chairman of the Pyithu Hluttaw.¹ The second spike in articles took place in February 2014, when a delegation from the Human Rights Watch visited and met with President Thein Sein.²

The nature of articles about diplomacy stayed relatively constant from previous periods, with many articles detailing the salutations and meetings between Myanmar officials and diplomats from other states. Such headlines included “Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Speaker U Khin

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² *New Light of Myanmar* February 6, 2014.
Aung Myint meets Cambodian Prime Minister”³; “Union Foreign Affairs Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin attends ASEAN-Summit and related meetings”⁴; “Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann visits India”⁵; “Malaysian PM’s visit, trip in recognition of Myanmar’s political, economic and social reforms and its bid for democracy”⁶; “Foreign Heads of State/Government send felicitations to President U Thein Sein”⁷; “President U Thein Sein receives UN Resident Representative, ASEAN Secretary-General”⁸; and “UEC chairman, Chinese ambassador discuss general election.”⁹

In a shift from the diplomacy articles in previous periods, many of these articles highlighted Myanmar’s new democracy and highlighted the need for Myanmar to cultivate relationships with other democratic states. In a 2011 article about Thura U Shwe Mann’s visit to India, the NLM described the purpose of the trip thus:

The main intention of the visit is to foster the existing amity and observe the parliamentary experiences and practices of India. Myanmar’s democracy is in its infancy and thus needs experiences and practical knowledge in democracy and parliamentary affairs and the visit intends to study parliamentary experiences and practices of India and implementation

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³ *New Light of Myanmar* September 22, 2011.

⁴ *New Light of Myanmar* November 23, 2011.

⁵ *New Light of Myanmar* December 19, 2011.


for national socioeconomic development through democracy system to apply suitably in Myanmar for its development.  

Another article about Thein Sein’s trip to meet with business executives in Turin, Italy, stated that supporting the “social economic lives of Myanmar means encouraging democratization process of the country” and that the “transitional process of the country took place nearly the same time with Arab Spring, but the latter was stained with blood and anarchism while Myanmar could pass through transitional period with peace and stability.” The tone of articles on the subject of diplomacy in previous periods have generally focused on positive interactions with other countries as a strategy of legitimizing the Myanmar government, but this shift towards discussing the democratic practices that still need to be improved in Myanmar reveals further opening up towards the international community, as well as a willingness of the Thein Sein administration to recognize that the democratization process was indeed just beginning.

There are two additional interesting developments in the diplomatic articles during the 2011-2015 period. The first is the regularity with which the newspaper mentioned diplomatic interactions with the United States, a clear reflection of the increase and improvement of contact between the two countries during this time. A number of U.S. delegations visited as part of the Obama Administration’s policy of pragmatic engagement (e.g. “Deputy Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker receives US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State”12; “Union FM receives US Deputy Assistant

10 “Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann visits India” 2011.
11 “President U Thein Sein meets leading business executives in Turin” 2014.
12 New Light of Myanmar May 19, 2011.
Secretary of State”\textsuperscript{13}; and “Union Religious Affairs Minister Meets US Charge d’Affaires”\textsuperscript{14}). In addition to simply describing which officials met with American diplomats, however, some of these articles detailed the conversations which took place. An article titled “Discussion on further cementing of Myanmar-US relations” described a meeting between Pyithu Hluttaw Deputy Speaker U Nanda Kyaw Swa and US Charge d’Affaires Michael Thurston, in which they “discussed improvement in objective political affairs of the State, nation-building tasks of Hluttaw, further strengthening of Myanmar-US relations in a cordial manner.”\textsuperscript{15} A 2012 article described the ceremony award Aung San Suu Kyi with the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian award in the United States. The article also detailed her acceptance speech in which she said “Under the leadership of the President [Thein Sein]…the legislative body which is young but rapidly maturing and the entire Myanmar people who adore the democracy values will join hands in full swing to march towards the deserved position in the modern world.”\textsuperscript{16} Finally, a 2014 article titled “Myanmar, US discuss rights to electioneering and constitution” detailed a meeting between the Union Election Commission Chairman U Tin Aye and an American delegation led by Tom Malinowski, in which they discussed the upcoming general elections and best democratic electoral practices.\textsuperscript{17} It is clear based on the tone of these articles

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{New Light of Myanmar} May 19, 2011.

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{New Light of Myanmar} November 24, 2011.

\textsuperscript{15} “Discussion on further cementing of Myanmar-US relations” 2011.

\textsuperscript{16} “Nation-building task of Myanmar made possible by the reform measures instituted by President U Thein Sein” 2012.

\textsuperscript{17} “Myanmar, US discuss rights to electioneering and constitution” 2014.
that the Myanmar government had begun to embrace diplomatic interaction with the United States more than in previous periods.

The last notable trend in *NLM* articles related to diplomacy was the frequency of mentions of human rights, ever a contentious topic in Myanmar. A number of articles report on meetings with international human rights commissions (e.g. “Union Minister receives German human rights commissioner and ICRC rep”18; “ASEAN human rights declaration (draft) completed”19; “Union FM discusses human rights with American expert”20; and “UNHCR’s regional coordinator visits Pyithu Hluttaw”21). Certainly, part of the reason for this increase in mentions of human rights can be attributed to the ongoing crisis in Rakhine State, as well as refugee issues in other parts of Myanmar. The *New Light of Myanmar* recounted international efforts in response to these crises, such as “Operations of UN agencies and INGOs in Rakhine State….working on development undertakings related to the sectors of education, health, vocational training, emergency patient transport, social affairs, transportation and drinking water supply.”22 In a 2014 article titled “Myanmar expresses willingness to cooperate with Human Rights Watch”23 President Thein Sein pledged to work with representatives of Human Rights


20 *New Light of Myanmar* June 27, 2014.


22 “UN agencies, INGOs getting back to work in Rakhine State” 2014.

23 “Myanmar expresses willingness to cooperate with Human Rights Watch” 2014.
Watch, who likewise praised the improvements in civil liberties and political rights within Myanmar in recent years. Another 2014 meeting between the Union Minister for Defence and UNHCR representatives discussed the “matter of resettling Myanmar refugees in Thailand in Myanmar, stressing the need to ensure security and stability, sustainable livelihoods for them and clearance of landmines in the region where refugees will be resettled.”

Although the majority of these articles were focused on improvements in the Myanmar government’s dedication to human rights and civil liberties, such beliefs still did not extend to the Rohingya people. A 2013 article titled “Rohingya never been included among national races of Myanmar”, Myanmar representative to the United Nations U Kyaw Tin objected to a resolution about Rakhine State at the UN, asserting that while the Myanmar government will “put an end to all acts of violence…protect the civilian population, and…ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”, he also “reiterated the Myanmar delegation’s long standing position against the use of the word, ‘Rohingya minority’ in the text.”

Thus, while a notable increase in positive stories about diplomatic interactions with the United States and human rights improvements demonstrate shifts towards liberalization in Myanmar during this time, it is also apparent that the simmering issues in Rakhine State continued unabated.

During the 2011-2015 period there were 143 articles relating to elections, political parties, and matters relating to the Hluttaw, compared to 98 articles in 2003-2010 and 49 articles between 1988-2002. The spike in articles in 2011 took place on March 24 and consisted of

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24 “Union defence minister holds talks with UNHCR representatives on resettlement of refugees” 2014.

25 “Rohingya never been included among national races of Myanmar” 2013.
summaries from the first regular session of the *Pyithu Hluttaw* and the *Amyotha Hluttaw*. The spike of articles in 2015, unsurprisingly, were related to the lead-up and results of the 2015 general elections. Figure 34 shows articles related to elections, political parties, and the *Hluttaw*.

![Graph: Elections/Party/Hluttaw articles 2011-2015.](image_url)

Figure 34: Elections/party/Hluttaw articles 2011-2015.

It was quite common during this period for the *New Light of Myanmar* to publish descriptions of the votes and issues that had come up for votes in the *Hluttaw* in great detail. Such articles were often spanned a number of pages, consisting of headlines such as “First regular session of *Pyithu Hluttaw* continues for fifth day”\(^{26}\), “Undertakings of *Hluttaw* concerning questions and proposals of *Hluttaw* representatives explained”\(^{27}\), “Pyidaungsu

\(^{26}\) *New Light of Myanmar* March 8, 2011.

\(^{27}\) *New Light of Myanmar* March 24, 2011.
"Hluttaw approves to fund establishment of ASEAN Humanitarian Aid Center"\textsuperscript{28}, "Pyidaungsu Hluttaw approves Bill Amending the Constitutional Tribunal Law"\textsuperscript{29}, “Myanmar Special Economic Zone Bill passed at Pyithu Hluttaw”\textsuperscript{30}, “Pyidaungsu Hluttaw budget hearing starts”\textsuperscript{31}, “Pyidaungsu Hluttaw forms implementation committee for constitutional amendment”\textsuperscript{32}, “Vice-President U Nyan Tun calls for participation of local people in ensuring rule of law”\textsuperscript{33}, “Myanmar Parliament reconvenes with talks on anti-terrorism bill, writ petition bill”\textsuperscript{34}; “Reconstitution of election sub-committees coordinated”\textsuperscript{35}, “Pyithu Hluttaw discuss electricity, electoral systems”\textsuperscript{36}, and “Speaker warns recall bill could have unwanted consequences”\textsuperscript{37}. These articles all included the subjects discussed during the parliamentary meetings in great detail.

\textsuperscript{28} New Light of Myanmar August 17, 2012.
\textsuperscript{29} New Light of Myanmar November 21, 2012.
\textsuperscript{30} New Light of Myanmar July 11, 2013.
\textsuperscript{31} New Light of Myanmar January 15, 2014.
\textsuperscript{32} New Light of Myanmar February 4, 2014.
\textsuperscript{33} New Light of Myanmar February 6, 2014.
\textsuperscript{34} New Light of Myanmar May 29, 2014.
\textsuperscript{35} New Light of Myanmar June 17, 2014.
\textsuperscript{36} New Light of Myanmar October 29, 2014.
\textsuperscript{37} New Light of Myanmar July 24, 2015.
Many of these articles were, unsurprisingly, written with a positive tone towards the Hluttaw. One such article, titled “It is vital important [sic] for country that representatives put forward people’s desires to Hluttaw as questions, proposals, bills and laws,”38 elaborates on the activities of a number of Hluttaw committees and states, “The Hluttaws play a key role in Myanmar’s political transition which could be completed only through legislation not by orders.”39 Another article titled “Hluttaw and its committees devote to social Hluttaw and its committees devote to social contract for democracy promotion”40 included the statements of one Hluttaw member who stated, “Pyithu Hluttaw focuses on equal rights of the nation and its people without party attachment, dogmatism, regionalism, racism and sectarianism. This is what Hluttaw, Hluttaw representatives and Hluttaw committees are doing for democratic reforms.”41

Some articles even delved into political debates within the Hluttaw. A fascinating article titled “Constitutional tribunal will have to settle many disputes in the future: Lack of power to pass final resolution may cause more problems”42 appeared to contain an actual critique of Myanmar’s political system, detailing the debate within the Hluttaw over how to deal with amendments related to the Constitutional Tribunal. An article with the headline “Government

38 “It is vital…” 2012.
39 “It is vital important for country that representatives put forward people’s desires to Hluttaw as questions, proposals, bills and laws” 2012.
40 “Hluttaw and its committees devote to social contract for democracy promotion” 2012.
41 “Hluttaw and its committees devote to social contract for democracy promotion” 2012.
42 “Constitutional tribunal will have to settle many disputes in the future” 2013.
needs to draw multiple strategies for Rakhine State” 43 included the controversial debate within the Central Committee for Implementation of Peace and Stability and Development of Rakhine State. The article even included statements by foreign diplomats who warned that the “internal dispute could be turned into regional conflict due to matters related to freedom to worship and freedom to travel.” 44 Such Hluttaw-related articles were clearly intended both to provide some measure of transparency to the Hluttaw as well as to praise the new body for their efforts in furthering Myanmar’s democratic transition. This was one of many notable efforts in the New Light of Myanmar during the 2011-2015 period to ingratiate the new political order with Burmese citizens.

In addition to portraying the new parliamentary system in a positive light, these articles also revealed how the Myanmar government strove to use the New Light of Myanmar to positively represent the new electoral process, particularly as the 2012 by-elections and 2015 general elections approached. Articles in 2011 and 2012 tended to focus on the establishment or approval of new political parties to run in the by-elections (e.g. “Establishment of political parties scrutinized, permitted” 45; “Formation of political party allowed” 46). In early 2015, in addition to party registration news, many of the articles highlighted the free and fair nature of the upcoming elections (e.g. “Mass participation imperative for ensuring free, fair, transparent

43 “Government needs to draw multiple strategies for Rakhine State” 2013.

44 “Government needs to draw multiple strategies for Rakhine State” 2013.


46 New Light of Myanmar December 13, 2011.
elections”47; “Nomination for Hluttaw candidates continues”48; “UEC, UNDP discuss measures for free and fair election”49). As the 2015 elections approached, news articles began to include information about the party platforms of the parties contesting the elections as well as publishing when they would be appearing on television or radio (e.g. “Political parties launch TV campaigns”50; “Media slots for three political parties announced”51; “State media broadcast campaign speeches”52; “What they stand for: campaigns aired”53; “Four party speeches to be broadcast today”54). This is notable because it is the first time the state-run media helped to advertise the messaging of opposition and minority parties. Interestingly, a number of front-page articles with headlines such as “Myanmar president reshuffles cabinet”55 and “NO ELECTION DELAY: Union Election Commission makes a U-turn”56, which could be seen as yet more attempts to show the transparency of the Thein Sein administration.

54 New Light of Myanmar October 7, 2015.
56 New Light of Myanmar October 14, 2015.
As the 2015 elections neared, the NLM trumpeted the announcement of electoral lists with the front page headline “32 mil eligible voters: Nationwide electoral registers to be publicized in September.” A number of articles discussed the training that was being given to poll workers (“Pyawbwe poll officers receive training”; UEC takes measures to prevent multiple casting of votes) as well as the presence of electoral observers (“EU mission reinforced with third deployment of election observers”; EU’s election observer’s briefed on election logistics in Pyawbwe Township; “International observers visit polling stations in Tatkong”), which highlighted the improved electoral practices of the 2015 general elections.

Finally, the day of the general elections came, and with it came articles trumpeting the great success of Myanmar’s electoral process. Headlines read “VOTES SWIFTLY TALLIED: NLD dominates the first round of election results”; “UEC hails election a success, announces first results”; “ELECTIONS FREE & FAIR: EU observers praise Myanmar’s polls, but note

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57 *New Light of Myanmar* August 24, 2015.

58 *New Light of Myanmar* October 7, 2015.

59 *New Light of Myanmar* November 6, 2015.

60 *New Light of Myanmar* November 6, 2015.

61 *New Light of Myanmar* November 6, 2015.


64 *New Light of Myanmar* November 10, 2015.
some flaws”65; “NLD wins majority of seats in two days results”66; “Election results announced by UEC”67; and “Asian election foundation applauds Myanmar’s readiness to embrace democracy.”68 These articles contained effusive praise for the electoral results, containing statements such as “It was the first held inclusive election in Myanmar in a quarter of a century,”69 although some of the articles also contained quotes by electoral observers who mentioned weaknesses in the electoral practices. The newspapers also included full lists of the winning representatives which took up several pages, as shown in Figure 35.

Figure 35: 2015 Example of general election results published in NLM.70

65 New Light of Myanmar November 11, 2015.
68 New Light of Myanmar November 11, 2015.
69 “Votes Swiftly Tallied” 2015.
For the Thein Sein administration, although the 2015 general elections represented a loss in parliament, the self-congratulatory articles published during this time reveal that the government still saw the elections as a success in their efforts to bring about a more moderate, transparent, and legitimate political system. This messaging came across in the speeches and notifications published during this time as well.

The number of speeches and notifications published during the 2011-2015 period increased to 46 articles, up from 37 in 2002-2010 and 28 in 1988-2002. It is not surprising that there was an absolute increase in the number of speeches published during this time, since the number of articles analyzed also increased. The peak in 2015 can be attributed to New Year’s speeches as well as notifications about the upcoming 2015 elections. The other peaks in 2013 are related to announcements of Hluttaw meetings, and the peak in 2014 is related to New Year’s speeches. The themes that emerged in the speeches published during this period included promoting and discussing the development of democracy in Myanmar; announcements by the Union Election Commission and notices related to the Hluttaw or political parties; peace between the government and insurgent groups; and international relations and diplomacy. Figure 36 shows these speeches and notifications.

Unsurprisingly, a large number of speeches and announcements published during this time were related to the transition to democracy. In 2011, many of these speeches involved praising the Tatmadaw’s efforts and warning that democracy was still developing. A speech by Senior General Than Shwe stated that “The democracy system introduced to the Union of
Myanmar is still in its infancy….In the process, it is mandatory for all national brethren to tackle any forms of disruptions to the system.”

One example of a notification praising democratic development in 2011 was Order No. 28/2011 which “commute[d] death sentences to life sentences and other prison terms by one year…Thanks to the order, 14,758 inmates from jails and labour camps were discharged.”

Figure 36: Speeches and notifications 2011-2015.

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71 Than Shwe 2011b.

72 It is worth noting that the number of speeches published each day was quite small, so this figure is not particularly helpful for understanding trends in this regard. The length of speeches, however, was often quite significant, as some speeches took up multiple pages and made up a significant proportion of the newspaper for that day. The tone and message of the speeches, therefore, is more important for my purposes than the actual number of speeches.

73 “Amnesty order frees 14,758 prisoners” 2011.
Initial speeches and notifications during this period were quick to praise the political changes, but also careful to note that further efforts were required.

One interesting trend which began in the notifications published during this period were announcements of cabinet reshufflings. It seems unlikely that the Myanmar government would have published information about internal personnel changes in previous time periods. For example, in 2012, Order No. 35/2012 described that a number of Deputy Ministers were reshuffled and transferred to the Ministry of Electric Power.74 In 2013, Order No. 2/2013 announced that “Union ministers have been allowed to resign of their own volition.”75 These orders may be indicative of the government’s first tentative steps towards greater transparency.

One fascinating speech by U Thein Sein, published in full in 2014, reveals much about how the Tatmadaw and former junta leaders viewed the current status of politics in Myanmar. He describes the development of

a new political culture where different political groups avoided direct confrontation and instead overcame challenges through negotiation and dialogue…. the country’s main political group, the National League for Democracy [NLD], led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and other political parties have also actively organized forums and meetings to discuss constitutional amendments. Just the fact that these activities have been held in a free and open manner shows that the level of political maturity in our country has risen…. We are now witnessing the emergence of the most important indicator of a modern democratic society – the freedom to openly discuss and debate politics.76

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74 Thein Sein 2012.
75 Thein Sein 2013a.
76 Thein Sein 2014a.
It is striking how Thein Sein refers to the NLD as “the country’s main political group,” and the emphasis he puts on free and open discussion of politics reveals how much more moderate the government’s stance had become in the last decade of political changes. He also notes the mounting pressure for constitutional amendments and cautions that national reconciliation, “democratic attitudes and values,” and “national interests and sovereignty” must be considered if amendments are to be pursued. While this speech is notable for its emphasis on political openness, Thein Sein still is playing the moderator role between the interests and concerns of the military and the political demands of the populace.

The following year, U Thein Sein gave another New Year’s speech in which he stated,

> We will hold the 2015 general elections in the coming year which will serve as one of the most critical steps in our democratic transition process. If we look back at our post-independence political history, we will notice our inability to create an environment where all political stakeholders can participate freely in an electoral process to shape the country’s destiny. Instead we will see elections that are either protested or boycotted by one or the other major political factions. Today…a new political culture where we value finding solutions through dialogue is taking root in place of unconstructive confrontational tactics. Because of this new political culture, the 2015 elections will mark the first time since our independence where elections will be contested by all the political stakeholders freely and fairly.

This speech is notable because Thein Sein mentions the political environment from the previous failed transition period (1988-2002) in which free participation in the electoral process was unsuccessful. In his view, this was due to protests or boycotts by political factions, which is reflective of how the junta had previously blamed the NLD, domestic protests, and insurgent

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77 Thein Sein 2014a.

78 Thein Sein 2015b.
groups for their failure to uphold the electoral results. Even the fact that he is admitting failures of the previous regime, however, points to an improvement in regime transparency similar to the announcements of cabinet reshuffles. In the 2011-2015 period, Thein Sein is openly pointing to changes in the political environment which allow all political stakeholders to contest elections freely and fairly.

In addition to speeches about democracy, another trend that appeared in the speeches and notifications published during the 2011-2015 period were related to the Union Election Commission and Hluttaw matters. Many of these announcements coming from the Union Election Commission discussed various violations of electoral laws by Hluttaw candidates or various party members. Examples of these announcements include titles such as, “Hluttaw candidates and their election agents failed to submit election expenses in the prescribed period declared as persons of distorted qualification.”

Other Union Election Commission announcements included changes or registration of political parties, such as “Chin National Party allowed to change its name as Chin National Democratic Party”80, “National Democratic Force…submitted its seal to be used81; “The Chin League for Democracy Party…applied for registration as a political party”82, “the Kachin Nationals Democracy Congress Party…submitted an application to change its seal”83; and “All

80 New Light of Myanmar February 6, 2014.
82 New Light of Myanmar June 17, 2014.
Myanmar Kaman National League for Democracy Party…has submitted its application for the registration as a political party”\textsuperscript{84}. The \textit{Hluttaw} related announcements include notifications for \textit{Hluttaw} member replacements as well as announcements of the upcoming \textit{Hluttaw} meetings. Such notifications include “Two Defence Services Personnel \textit{Pyithu Hluttaw} Representatives substituted”\textsuperscript{85}; “Ninth Regular Session of First \textit{Pyithu Hluttaw} has been summoned to hold in Nay Pyi Taw at 10 am on 13\textsuperscript{th} Waxing of Pyatho”\textsuperscript{86}; “Invitation letters have been sent to \textit{Amyotha Hluttaw} representatives”\textsuperscript{87}; and “10 Defence Services Personnel Representatives from Region and State \textit{Hluttaw} substituted”\textsuperscript{88}. Perhaps the most important Union Election Commission announcement, however, is the statement on New Year’s Day 2015 about the upcoming general elections. It reads,

\begin{center}
\textbf{Republic of the Union of Myanmar Union Election Commission Announcement for 2015 general elections}
\end{center}

1. The general elections will be held in late October/early November 2015.
2. A correct and accurate voter list needs to successfully hold the elections.
3. The Union Election Commission compiles the basic voter list for the 2015 general elections. 4. Every citizen has rights to cast vote for elections. Not to lose the rights, they have to be included in the voter list. Citizens should check voter lists for casting votes. 5. Citizens may request the respective sub-commission to insert their names into the voter list through form No 3 if their names are not included in the voter list. They may request to correct the wrong facts through form No 4-C. They may object participation of those who do not have rights to cast votes, through form No 4. 6. When you settled

\textsuperscript{84} New Light of Myanmar July 24, 2015.
\textsuperscript{85} New Light of Myanmar January 26, 2012.
\textsuperscript{86} New Light of Myanmar December 24, 2013.
\textsuperscript{87} New Light of Myanmar December 24, 2013.
\textsuperscript{88} New Light of Myanmar August 20, 2015.
from one township to another, if you do not change household form 66/6, your name will include in voter list of previous township.\textsuperscript{89}

Throughout 2015, the Union Election Commission continued to publish information about the upcoming elections in the \textit{New Light of Myanmar}.

The third trend in speeches and notifications was the discussion of peace and ceasefires with insurgent groups. A speech by General Than Shwe published in 2011 echoes the anti-colonial tone of previous periods – “The root causes that underlay the rise of fractious sectarianism and the proliferation of splits are found to be the incentives that the colonialists provided to expand their sphere of influence, the wedges of instigation and incitement that they drove in a well-planned manner among colleagues, the arrogance born of overestimating oneself, personal rivalries and underestimating others, jealousies, suspicions, and grudges.”\textsuperscript{90} In 2012, in the wake of violence in Rakhine state, Notification No. 43/2012 announced the formation of an investigation committee “was formed to expose the truth and take legal actions…[against] organized lawless and anarchic acts that can harm peace, stability, and rule of law in Rakhine State.”\textsuperscript{91} Soon, however, the tone of announcements related to peace efforts changed, perhaps in an attempt to curry favor with involved groups or the international community. In 2013, the \textit{NLM} published a speech by President Thein Sein in preparation for cyclone season with the title “Without racial, religious discrimination, relief works are to be carried out. Life-saving is a

\textsuperscript{89} “Republic of the Union of Myanmar Union Election Commission Announcement for 2015 General Elections” 2015.

\textsuperscript{90} Than Shwe 2011a.

\textsuperscript{91} Notification 43/2012 2012.
must. In a 2014 speech, Thein Sein again took a more moderate tone about the insurgent issue, stating, “If we are able to achieve the NCA [Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement], we will be able to establish a code of conduct that will have to be followed for both sides which in turn will help lower the number of clashes and reduce hostilities….NCA presents an unyielding foundation to begin the political dialogue process which will allow us to find broad political solutions to our political disagreements.”

In addition to discussing the NCA, Thein Sein also mentioned the ongoing crisis in Rakhine state, stating “Not only in Rakhine state but throughout the country, it is important that each individual enjoys basic human rights and is treated with dignity regardless of ethnicity, religion or even citizenship status….We have to handle it very delicately, owing especially to the heightened tensions and emotions between the two communities.”

In a 2015 speech related to the NCA, Thein Sein said, “I am aware that some ethnic armed organizations are currently not ready to sign or they require more time to make their decision. Our government has no desire to leave anyone behind in the peace process…. the door is open for organizations currently not ready to sign to participate in the peace process when they are ready.”

These quotes demonstrate the softening in tone that the Thein Sein administration took in speeches about issues with national reconciliation and the peace process during the 2011-2015 period.

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92 Thein Sein 2013b.

93 Thein Sein 2014b.

94 Thein Sein 2014b.

95 Thein Sein 2015a.
The final trend in speeches and notifications was related to international relations and diplomacy. One such announcement was a joint press release between Myanmar and the European Union (EU) in the wake of a bilateral human rights dialogue. Representatives discussed a number of human rights issues, including political prisoners and improving the prisons in Myanmar, land and labor rights, the rights of migrants, non-discrimination, and the protection of minorities.\textsuperscript{96} The open discussion of human rights issues and possible improvements in Myanmar’s government-run newspaper is striking considering the denial of such issues in previous time periods. This is not to say that discussion of human rights had become completely open in Myanmar – another press release in 2015 was a defensive rebuttal against Ms. Yanghee Lee, the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar who criticized the treatment of the Rohingya people. The press release states, “As a principle, Myanmar rejects country-specific mandates…as they do not create a conducive environment for constructive engagement and genuine dialogue for promotion and protecting of human rights.”\textsuperscript{97} The press release also notes that “Myanmar continues to reject use of ‘Rohingya’ since the people of Myanmar do not recognize that invented terminology.”\textsuperscript{98} While the Thein Sein administration was certainly paying lip service to issues related to human rights and equal treatment of minorities for an international audience during this period, these statements also reveal that these beliefs were still quite limited in their scope, indicative of a democratic culture.


\textsuperscript{97} Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015.

\textsuperscript{98} Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015.
that has yet to mature. There were 58 articles related to insurgency and protests in 2011-2015, up from 33 articles in 2003-2010 and 43 articles in 1988-2002. There are two spikes in these articles during this period – the first was in January 2013 and the second took place in October 2015. The spike in 2013 can be attributed to a clash between the KIA and the Tatmadaw in Kachin State,\textsuperscript{99} while the jump in 2015 is due to a number of meetings between the government and representatives of armed ethnic groups to discuss the potential ceasefire.\textsuperscript{100} There were a few noticeable trends in stories related to insurgencies and protests during this time, including the reporting of terrorist attacks, events taking place in Rakhine state, a handful of stories related to domestic protests, and ceasefire talks between the government and armed ethnic groups. Figure 37 shows articles relating to insurgency and protests.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{insurgency_protest_ceasefire_articles.png}
\caption{Insurgency/Protest/Ceasefire Articles 2011-2015}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{99} New Light of Myanmar January 25, 2013.

\textsuperscript{100} New Light of Myanmar October 14, 2015.
While there was a decrease in stories about unrest due to insurgent groups in the latter part of 2003-2010, the New Light of Myanmar published quite a few stories about attacks, bombings, and kidnappings\textsuperscript{101} perpetuated by these groups. Many of these reported attacks targeted infrastructure such as railroads, bridges, and mines (e.g. “KIA blows up rail tracks between Hopin and Nankhwin of Mandalay-Myitkyina railroad”\textsuperscript{102}; “Insurgents’ mine blast destroys machinery of Public Works”\textsuperscript{103}; and “Mine blast destroys bridge, railroad, causes traffic delays”\textsuperscript{104}), and the articles detailed the value of items destroyed in the attacks. As one article stated, “Although KIA group is making pious sounding noises that they have only attacked military targets, the incidents show that they are destroying railroads and bridges with mines again and again.”\textsuperscript{105} Indeed, the detailed reporting of such attacks certainly is aimed at portraying these armed groups as a continued source of instability in the country, despite the relative improvements in domestic politics during this period.

Some of these attacks did have human casualties (e.g. “KNU insurgents’ mine claims live of one civilian”\textsuperscript{106}; “Innocent civilian hit by KIA insurgents’ landmine”\textsuperscript{107}; “KIA mine blast

\textsuperscript{101} “GAD staff, civilian abducted by KIA” 2014.

\textsuperscript{102} New Light of Myanmar July 7, 2011.

\textsuperscript{103} New Light of Myanmar December 19, 2011.

\textsuperscript{104} New Light of Myanmar November 21, 2012.

\textsuperscript{105} Aung Theinga 2012.

\textsuperscript{106} New Light of Myanmar September 22, 2011.

\textsuperscript{107} New Light of Myanmar November 23, 2011.
leaves three dead and one injured in Phakant Township”\textsuperscript{108}, and “Landmines threaten lives in Kachin State”\textsuperscript{109}). A few articles even described direct clashes between the Tatmadaw and armed ethnic groups (e.g. “KIA attacks military column, police outpost”\textsuperscript{110}, “SSA [Wanhaing Group] attacks Tatmadaw camp in Shan State”\textsuperscript{111}; and “Tatmadaw arrests three Kokang insurgents, seizes arms and ammunition, narcotic drug”\textsuperscript{112}). Unsurprisingly, the tone of these articles is decidedly negative towards the groups responsible. One article stated, “KIA (Kachin) Group has been committing subversive acts using every trick in the book to undermine peace and stability and rule of law of the State, to kill, harm and panic the innocent civilians.”\textsuperscript{113} In all, these stories about attacks and skirmishes were most common in 2011 and 2012. As the period went on, stories about the ceasefire became more common, although in later years the newspaper’s focus also shifted away from unrest Kachin and Shan state and towards Rakhine state due to the Rohingya crisis.

During the 2012 clashes in Rakhine State, the \textit{New Light of Myanmar} reported on the events with regularity. One article titled “Lawless acts occurred in Rakhine State in May, June exposed” describes the findings of a 16-member government group who investigated “the attack

\textsuperscript{108} \textit{New Light of Myanmar} January 19, 2012.

\textsuperscript{109} \textit{New Light of Myanmar} September 23, 2015.

\textsuperscript{110} \textit{New Light of Myanmar} January 25, 2013.

\textsuperscript{111} \textit{New Light of Myanmar} November 11, 2015.

\textsuperscript{112} \textit{New Light of Myanmar} March 12, 2015.

\textsuperscript{113} “One civilian killed in KIA attack” 2011.
of No.1 Police Station of Sittway by a mob that occurred on 3 June and [took] action against those involved in the incidents that harmed community peace and prevalence of law and order in accordance with the laws.”

Another promises that the “Union government to prevent confrontations between locals and INGOs in Rakhine State.”

A 2015 article describes a meeting between Myanmar and Bangladeshi ambassadors in which they “agree on repatriation of boat people” (meaning Rohingya refugees). This article asserts that “Investigations by the Myanmar government found that some of the boat people had fallen victim to human trafficking rings and crime syndicates after receiving offers of work in Thailand and Malaysia from illegal job brokers” and quoted one of the men saying he wanted to return home. While these articles do not mention the Rohingya by name (which is to be expected, considering that it was the Myanmar government’s policy not to use the term), the publishing of stories about this specific conflict reveals its growing importance in the 2011-2015 period.

One type of article in this category which saw a marked decrease compared to the 2003-2010 period were those related to domestic protests. Only two such articles appeared in the New Light of Myanmar editions that were coded, and both were published in 2015. The first, titled “Government sought peaceful protest resolution”, laments that “The forced dispersal of

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114 “Lawless acts occurred in Rakhine State in May, June exposed” 2012.

115 New Light of Myanmar June 17, 2014.

116 “Bangladesh, Myanmar agree on repatriation of boat people” 2015.

117 “Bangladesh, Myanmar agree on repatriation of boat people” 2015.

118 “Government sought peaceful protest resolution: Union Information Minister” 2015.
student protestors by police was ‘a sorrowful incident,’ but the government tried as hard as it could to achieve a peaceful settlement in line with its policy.”¹¹⁹ This article still blamed the protestors for the unfortunate incident, alleging that “the student protestors’ decision to march to Yangon instead of choosing democratic or parliamentary processes was the cause of the conflict.”¹²⁰ A second article described how Yangon was put on “Orange Alert”, meaning a high security presence in the city, from the start of November until the 2015 general elections were held.¹²¹ The low number of articles about domestic protests during this 5-year period show how the Thein Sein administration faced fewer protests than in previous periods.

Finally, throughout 2011-2015, the New Light of Myanmar detailed the government’s efforts toward reaching a ceasefire agreement with many of the armed ethnic groups. The newspaper often described the details of peace talks with specific groups (e.g. “Six points agreed in Union level peace talk with Klo Htoo Baw [former DKBA]”¹²²; “Peace agreement signed between Union level peace-making group and Shan State Progressive Party [SSPP]/Shan State Army peace-making group”¹²³; “Union Peace-Making Work Committee, KIO sign agreement after three-day peace talks”¹²⁴, and “Union Peace-Making Word Committee, ABSDF reach four-

¹¹⁹ “Government sought peaceful protest resolution: Union Information Minister” 2015.

¹²⁰ “Government sought peaceful protest resolution: Union Information Minister” 2015.

¹²¹ “Yangon on Orange Alert” 2015.

¹²² New Light of Myanmar December 13, 2011.


point agreement”\textsuperscript{125}). Most of these agreements included a clause promising that the armed group would not secede from the Union in order to “ensure non-disintegration of the Union, nondisintegration of national solidarity and perpetuation of sovereignty at all times based on Panglong spirit.”\textsuperscript{126} Similar to trends in 2003-2010, there were also stories detailing armed group members surrendering or giving up arms (e.g. “42 KIA members exchange arms for peace”\textsuperscript{127}; “KIA group returns to legal fold”\textsuperscript{128}). These stories undoubtedly were aimed at persuading other group members to follow suit.

KIA members have suffered a great loss and casualties in engagement with the military columns with their health [sic] deteriorating because of terrible weather and poor conditions…. The situation was worse as many were also injured or killed themselves in mine attacks. Many regretted fighting meaningless wars, killing innocent civilians, damaging communication links, and roads and bridges. So many a number of KIA members have left…Kachin people are much overjoyed to see KIA members returning to legal fold en masse.\textsuperscript{129}

The message that people should not support these groups was also reinforced with the statements of government officials, such as the Union Border Affairs Minister asserting that “People should never ever be swayed by instigations of any armed group and political organizations.”\textsuperscript{130}

\textsuperscript{125} \textit{New Light of Myanmar} August 6, 2013.

\textsuperscript{126} “Peace agreement signed between Union level peace-making group and Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP)/ Shan State Army peace-making group” 2012.

\textsuperscript{127} \textit{New Light of Myanmar} April 21, 2012.

\textsuperscript{128} \textit{New Light of Myanmar} January 17, 2013.

\textsuperscript{129} “42 KIA members exchange arms for peace” 2012.

\textsuperscript{130} “People should never ever be swayed by instigations of any armed group and political organizations: Union Border Affairs Minister” 2012.
As the 2011-2015 period went on, efforts to reach a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) ramped up. An article titled “Gov’t, ethnic armed groups optimistic of ceasefire deal after Day 2” by Ye Myint detailed the daily ceasefire discussions between the government and participating armed groups.\(^{131}\) In September 2015, an article trumpeted “PEACE DRAWS NEARER: Tentative agreement to sign ceasefire in October.”\(^{132}\) Soon thereafter, it was reported that “International and local observers will witness the signing of the nationwide ceasefire accord, which is scheduled to take place on Thursday [October 15, 2015] in Nay Pyi Taw.”\(^{133}\) Such discussions continued through the end of the year (e.g. “Pyidaungsu Hluttaw discusses NCA”\(^{134}\); “Civil society organisations urge armed groups to hold talks with govt”\(^{135}\)). Those groups who signed the NCA were rewarded by being “removed from the government’s list of unlawful associations and terrorist groups.”\(^{136}\) Achieving the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement was one of the Thein Sein administration’s most pressing goals, so it is unsurprising that the government-run newspaper put so much emphasis on every step forward towards that goal. The more groups who signed on to the NCA, the more stability confidence the government gained.

There was a total of 454 articles related to business and development during the 2011-2015 period, compared to 462 articles in 2003-2010 and 226 articles during 1988-2002. As in

\(^{131}\) Ye Myint 2015a.

\(^{132}\) *New Light of Myanmar* September 10, 2015.

\(^{133}\) Ye Myint 2015b.

\(^{134}\) *New Light of Myanmar* December 8, 2015.

\(^{135}\) *New Light of Myanmar* December 8, 2015.

\(^{136}\) “Five more ethnic groups removed from unlawful list” 2015.
previous periods, there is no noticeable trend or particular date that experienced notable spikes in the number of articles about business dealings or national development. Many of the days that had lower numbers of stories in this category were heavier news days (e.g. SEA Games being held in Myanmar), meaning that there was less space to publish stories about business deals or development projects. Figure 38 shows these articles.

![Figure 38: Business/development articles 2011-2015.]

Many of the stories in this category emphasized the importance of industrialization and other development projects in tandem with democratic efforts. One such article read,

As each and every nation is trying their utmost for their national development, Myanmar also needs to strive for development in order not to fall behind others. Despite having natural resources both on land and in water, the country for various reasons lagged behind others in development in the past. It is therefore necessary to implement nation-building tasks with added momentum so as to catch up with the neighbouring nations by
tapping human resources and natural resources in an effective way. Only then will the nation develop speedily. 137

Many of the articles which equate national development projects with the positive democratic changes in Myanmar are also careful to note the improved developed in rural areas, particularly areas affected by insurgency or unrest in the past. For example, an article titled “Uplifting livelihoods of rural people undertaken”138 discussed regional development projects in Kayah state; another article with the headline “Plan for development of rural areas, improvement of socio-economy launched for farmers in Shan State”139 likewise focused on projects in Shan State, while “Union Minister fulfills requirements of local people in Rakhine State”140 discussed donations and rehabilitation efforts in conflict-ridden Rakhine State. Such articles were certainly strategic in their attempts to ingratiate the Thein Sein administration with people in rural areas who might be predisposed to dislike the central government and were published regularly in the lead-up to the 2015 elections.

A number of business-related stories highlighted improvements in the tourism industry in Myanmar, as well as business deals with other states. One article claimed that “Myanmar [is] poised to join top ten countries of highest tourist arrival….Thanks to reform process, warm and transparent relations with international community, the international community is interested in

137 “Projects will achieve success only through cooperation and coordination between Union Government and State and Region governments” 2011.


139 New Light of Myanmar February 6, 2014.

140 New Light of Myanmar February 6, 2014.
Myanmar issues and globetrotters chose Myanmar as their tourist destinations.\textsuperscript{141} Another article published after the 2015 general elections likewise stated that “Myanmar tourism [is] expected to increase in post-election period.”\textsuperscript{142} The increase in tourism in light of the democratic reforms is certainly unsurprising, and would be yet another economic success that the government-run newspaper would want to make known.

The increase in stories about business dealings with other states was certainly a new trend compared to the time periods examined in previous chapters. For example, an article titled “Myanmar welcomes State-owned and private-owned enterprises from Indonesia”\textsuperscript{143} detailed a meeting between President Thein Sein of Myanmar and President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in which the two discussed a number of issues, including the ongoing Rakhine crisis. Another article, “Labour issues for Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand discussed,”\textsuperscript{144} described the meeting between ministers from both countries about the thorny issue of labor migration from Myanmar to Thailand. These articles are interesting due to the mention, however, brief, of some controversial issues that would have previously been unmentioned, or at most only alluded to, in previous years.

One final business-related article is worth mentioning for its unusual coverage of citizens’ actions against the government. An article published in 2014 titled “Myanmar Lawyers’

\textsuperscript{141} “Myanmar poised to join top ten countries of highest tourist arrival” 2013.

\textsuperscript{142} New Light of Myanmar December 8, 2015.

\textsuperscript{143} New Light of Myanmar November 21, 2011.

\textsuperscript{144} New Light of Myanmar December 26, 2012.
Network to sue gov’t and private company for turning historic building into hotel”[^145] struck quite a sympathetic tone with the citizens who were protesting and criticizing Myanmar’s government. In fact, the article included quotes only from the members of the Myanmar Lawyers’ Network who were taking action against the government and included no direct quotes from a government representative. While press freedom and journalistic practices certainly still had limitations during the 2011-2015 period, it is notable that the *New Light of Myanmar*, which was still the government-run newspaper, published such an article about opposition to a business deal between the government and a private company.

There were 205 propaganda pieces and slogans published in 2011-2015, compared to 811 published between 2003-2010. The most striking trend in propaganda published during this period is the dramatic drop in propaganda in the *New Light of Myanmar* starting in mid-2011. Figure 39 shows these pieces.

![Propaganda/Slogans](image)

Figure 39: Propaganda/slogans 2011-2015.

Before the drop in the number of propaganda pieces, the tone of these messages stayed consistent with those in the prior 2003-2010 period. As in earlier publications, these slogans were often alarmist, blaming domestic protests and international media for the slow speed of democratic development. Propaganda also still filled almost half the page on the back of each daily edition, as seen on the January 7, 2011 edition. Figure 40 shows an example of this.

Figure 40: Back page of the New Light of Myanmar, January 7, 2011.\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{146} New Light of Myanmar January 7, 2011.
Other common propaganda slogans that continued into 2011 were the “Objectives of the - Anniversary Union Day”\textsuperscript{147}; “True patriotism”\textsuperscript{148}; and “Our Three Main National Causes.”\textsuperscript{149}

The continuation of these nationalist slogans is unsurprising considering that the Myanmar government still faced widespread criticism for the USDP victory and military presence in the Hluttaw after the 2010 general elections.

Both the tone, nature, and quantity of propaganda slogans decreased precipitously in August 2011. The average number of propaganda pieces before this date was 9 per day – suddenly, the New Light of Myanmar was publishing an average of just 1 piece per day. In addition to the massive drop in the number and conspicuousness of propaganda, the tone of such pieces also changed drastically. Rather than threatening messages about the machinations of foreign media or domestic troublemakers, such slogans changed to sayings and idioms such as

\textsuperscript{147} The objectives read as such; “1. For all national races to safeguard the national policy— Non-disintegration of the Union, Non-disintegration of national solidarity, and Perpetuation of sovereignty 2. For all national races to keep Union Spirit ever alive and dynamic among national people 3. For all national races to wipe out, through national solidarity, disruptions caused to peace, stability and development of the nation by internal and external subversives 4. For all national races to make efforts with might and main to build a modern, developed discipline-flourishing democratic nation in accordance with the State Constitution approved by the great majority of the people 5. For all national races to work in concert with national unity for perpetuation of the Union that has existed for thousands of years.” New Light of Myanmar January 31, 2011.

\textsuperscript{148} “It is very important for every one of the nation regardless of the place he lives to have strong Union Spirit. * Only Union Spirit is the true patriotism all the nationalities will have to safeguard.” New Light of Myanmar September 22, 2011.

\textsuperscript{149} “* Non-disintegration of the Union * Non-disintegration of National Solidarity * Perpetuation of Sovereignty.” New Light of Myanmar November 24, 2011.
“No Pain, No Gain,”150 “Donate Blood,”151 “Make hay while the sun shines,”152 and “Pay your tax.”153 Additionally, in 2015, the *New Light of Myanmar* began publishing a daily countdown until the 2015 general elections, clearly a sign that the Myanmar government was embracing the promise of free and fair elections in 2015. Figure 41 shows these countdowns.

![Election Countdowns](image)

**Figure 41:** Election countdowns. 154155

Finally, the tone of political cartoons also changed drastically in newspapers published between 2011-2015. The cartoons published between 2003-2010 focused mainly on praising the *Tatmadaw*; however, the cartoons during this period covered issues related to corruption in

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150 *New Light of Myanmar* December 18, 2012.
151 *New Light of Myanmar* December 18, 2012.
152 *New Light of Myanmar* February 26, 2013.
155 *New Light of Myanmar* October 7, 2015.
Myanmar (Figure 42), improvements in international relations and tourism (Figures 43, 44, and 45), and the responsibilities of citizens (Figure 46).

Figure 42: Political cartoon in *New Light of Myanmar* August 7, 2012.\textsuperscript{156}

Figure 43: Political cartoon in *New Light of Myanmar* October 8, 2012.\textsuperscript{157}

\textsuperscript{156} Maung Maung Hnyet 2012.

\textsuperscript{157} Win Myint Aung 2012b.
Figure 44: Political cartoon in *New Light of Myanmar* November 21, 2012.  

Figure 45: Political cartoon below “No Pain, No Gain” slogan in *NLM* Dec. 18, 2012.

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158 Myay Zar 2012.

159 Win Myint Aung 2012a.
Figure 46: Political cartoon in *New Light of Myanmar* September 10, 2015.\(^\text{160}\)

Clearly, the massive shift in both the quantity and the content of propaganda and political cartoons in the *New Light of Myanmar* between 2011-2015 reflect the changes in the confidence of the Myanmar government as well as the steps the country was taking towards democratization and liberalization during this time. Similarly, opinion pieces and editorials changed dramatically as well.

The *New Light of Myanmar* published 173 editorials and opinion pieces between 2011-2015, compared to 165 in 2003-2010. As in earlier chapters, I coded each editorial based on its primary theme and graphed the number of op-eds on each theme per calendar year. The four themes included in this graph were editorials related to 1) Democracy/Elections; 2) Nationalism,

\(^{160}\) Bahan Aye Min 2015.
unity, and praising the Tatmadaw; 3) Foreign Relations; 4) Peace (either domestic or regional) and insurgency). Figure 47 shows opinion pieces during this time.

![Figure 47: Opinion pieces 2011-2015.](image)

Editorials related to democracy and elections stayed relatively consistent between 2011 and 2012, increasing in number in 2013 and then, unsurprisingly, increasing again in 2015 due to the general elections. Most of these op-eds treated democracy in Myanmar as a given, with statements such as “In Myanmar, democratization is well underway according to the four political objectives and the State’s seven-step Road Map. Democratization process is now gathering momentum”\(^{161}\) and “The country comes into the new era for building a modern and developed democratic new nation.”\(^{162}\) Interestingly, one 2014 editorial suggests that “Myanmar

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\(^{161}\) Maung Sedanar 2011.

\(^{162}\) “Fulfill expectation of people” 2011.
will be free from military coup is all levels pursue democratic practices”, since “The countries that have not fully developed democratic practices cannot be granted ‘no military takeover’.”

This particular piece was published directly after the coup in Thailand, and was apparently aimed at assuring readers that a similar coup would not happen in Myanmar due to the new democratic practices in place.

Of course, op-eds of this nature were aimed at drumming up support for the new political system that was now in place, and like in the previous period, the tone of editorials about elections in 2011 still carried a threatening tone aimed at critics of the process, particularly foreign media and the National League for Democracy. According to this editorial, when the Union Election Commission announced the results of the 2010 general elections,

All candidates were satisfied with the announcement when they learnt the numbers of the votes they won in the elections and results. However, internal and external stooges presented their personal views through certain foreign radio stations to deal a serious blow to public trust in election results. The commission and the voters are well convinced that there is not any grain of truth in what they have presented about election results. In democracy, practice of freedom shall not have any detrimental effects on that of others. If it has, it is an anarchic act, not democracy. A certain political party, that has been revoked, decided not to stand for election. However, it launched ‘No Vote’ campaign to disrupt the elections to disrupt the elections that were being held with political parties and the people. It claims itself to be a democratic organization, but its acts were totally undemocratic, thus provoking widespread criticism from inside and outside the country. In the post-election period, it conspired with other destructive elements to make election results null and void…. In the previous elections, a political party won a landslide victory. Then, some power-craving people thought that the victory had led to transformation from military dictatorship into one-party dictatorship, and the entire people would come under complete control of the winning party.

163 Aung Khin 2014.

164 Maung Sedanar 2011.
The author goes on to list the foreign countries which praised the 2010 general elections and describes the democratic practices which the 2008 constitution guarantees, promising that “Before long, democratic administration will be practised in place of military rule.”\textsuperscript{165} Another op-ed blamed the Rohingya for the government’s troubles, stating “Recent Rakhine violence was a threat to Myanmar’s democratization process at a time when Myanmar gets a lot of supports in international arena…. Even officials from the US State Department have praised Myanmar government’s gentle handling of the crisis. Nobody expected Myanmar government’s democratic handling of the crisis.”\textsuperscript{166} Clearly, in the wake of criticism against the unfair and unfree practices of the 2010 elections, the Myanmar government continued to see the NLD, the foreign press, and ethnic minority groups as troublemakers as they had in the past.

One interesting practice in editorials about democratization was an increase in mentions of freedom of the press in Myanmar. One op-ed asserted that

\begin{quote}
The media sector known as the fourth estate has the duty to ensue [sic] the uprightness of those three pillars [judicial, legislative, and executive branches of government] …. The more knowledge the people have, the more progress the nation will make. With the permission granted to… relax the journalism rules and enable journals to make interviews with authorities, there have been more freedom and transparency.\textsuperscript{167}
\end{quote}

Another editorial detailed the changes taking place with the state-run newspapers, suggesting that “the three newspapers will keep on changing in form and substance in accordance with the

\textsuperscript{165} Maung Sedanar 2011.

\textsuperscript{166} Maung Aye Chan 2012.

\textsuperscript{167} “The fourth estate, infallible and reliable” 2011.
ongoing democratic reforms.” An op-ed by Banya Aung details potential printing and publishing laws, suggesting that “A country which is carrying out democratic reforms must draw a media policy which can ensure media development.” Importantly, an editorial published in December 2013 describes the transition of the *New Light of Myanmar* into a joint-venture newspaper between the Myanmar government and the newly formed Public Service Media as part of a media reform process. The increase in mentions of media freedom and transparency indicates that the Myanmar government was becoming more aware of domestic and international pressure for liberalization during this time.

Along similar lines as the editorials about media transparency, some of the editorials about democratization during this time openly discuss the treatment of ethnic minorities. One such article asserts that

For Myanmar to be truly inclusive, all ethnic nationalities must come together and heal the wounds of the past in order to respond [sic] to the challenges the country is experiencing….although the country has ended up with the worst of the world, it is now on a path towards something better – a society that is open, inclusive, tolerant, and respectful of individual dignity under the new administration. And this era is a real bonanza for all citizens who can participate in the political process…. But democracy is more than an idea. We need to construct its institutions and culture to be based on further burgeoning of the noblest and worthiest of worldly virtues such as liberty, justice, and equality. Otherwise, it will severely undermine the country’s stance that it is an upholder of human rights and weaken its position when addressing human rights violation…. We are to be mindful that the practice of democratic reforms that we hold dear must not infringe on the civil liberties of others.

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168 Faithful students” 2012.

169 Banya Aung 2013.

170 “Effective tool” 2013.

171 “Push ahead with democratization process” 2013.
A separate editorial echoed these sentiments, stating that “Democracy cannot just be about elections, basic freedoms, and constitutions. It must also include a culture of democracy and a new understanding of citizenship.” The author praises the Myanmar government for “aiming for nothing less than a transition from half a century of military rule and authoritarianism to democracy.” These op-eds are worth noting because they highlight an increase in awareness about democratic culture and civic virtue amongst Myanmar citizens, as well as the government’s increased willingness to allow discussions of such issues in the NLM.

The final trend in editorials about democracy and elections took place in 2015, when the tone of editorials shifted towards encouraging voters to take part in the upcoming elections. These op-eds were aimed at assuring citizens that they should vote, and that the democratic progress in Myanmar would continue. One such piece emphasized “the importance of the electorate to weigh and measure candidates against one another and vote for those who carry out their promised measures” and suggested that voters were responsible for making sure that Myanmar’s democratic experiment did not fail, stating “Cheated once, we are not to blame for our wrong actions. Cheated twice, we will only have ourselves to blame.” Another editorial noted that “The silent electorate…should keep in mind that the future of the country is nowhere

172 “We cannot allow transformation to fail” 2013.
173 “We cannot allow transformation to fail” 2013.
174 Kyaw Thura 2015c.
175 Kyaw Thura 2015c.
but in their own hands. Most important of all, our trust should be put on candidates who are national healers and unifiers rather than national orators.”\textsuperscript{176} This was clearly an attempt by the author to suggest that voters support moderates such as Thein Sein, rather than more progressive candidates.

Many of the editorials in the lead-up to the 2015 elections mentioned weaknesses in Myanmar’s democratic culture or improvements that still needed to be made, presumably in an effort to indicate that the Thein Sein administration was aware of these issues and would continue to try to address them. These op-eds made statements such as “As a nascent democracy, Myanmar still has much to learn about democratic norms.”\textsuperscript{177} In a letter to the editor, a citizen wrote that “The political parties of Myanmar should learn from Nepal’s experience and must cooperate with one another during the crucial pre- and post-national election phases for facilitating the establishment of a stable, peaceful and progressive democracy in Myanmar.”\textsuperscript{178} Another cautions voters to make “wise decisions” at the polls, stating that “The problems that have plagued Myanmar’s political system have stemmed from the exclusion of the wishes of a significant number of stakeholders. It is therefore important for some stakeholders to retreat and for some to take a few steps forward.”\textsuperscript{179} While it is unclear which specific stakeholders to whom this editorial is referring, the tone of these pieces indicates that the government-sponsored

\textsuperscript{176} Kyaw Thura 2015a.
\textsuperscript{177} Kyaw Thura 2015b.
\textsuperscript{178} Saikat Kumar Basu 2015.
\textsuperscript{179} Myint Win Thein 2015b.
newspaper was embracing a more open discussion of the democratization and liberalization efforts yet to be done.

While editorials about democracy and elections increased in the 2011-2015 period, those which referenced nationalism, unity, and the role of the Tatmadaw began to steadily decline. In 2011, these op-eds were still relatively common. They praised “the efforts the Tatmadaw government has made with great tenacity, [which led to] executive, legislative and judicial bodies that will rule the Union democratically.” Editorial about the Tatmadaw during the 2011-2015 period still used language such as “British colonialists,” “Japanese Fascists,” “alien troops,” and “stooges” when describing the enemies the Tatmadaw faced, much like those from previous periods. Unlike in the earlier editorials, however, these ones made a point to mention that “the State Peace and Development Council or the Tatmadaw government or Tatmadaw members are dedicating themselves to democratization.”

In addition to op-eds praising the Tatmadaw, others during this period heralded the traditional Myanmar way of life and encouraged nationalistic sentiment. One such editorial claimed that “Only two or three major uprisings have taken place in Myanmar since she regained her independence in 1948. This has proved that Myanmar people are gentle and courageous but by no means brutal.” Another such editorial published on Independence Day proclaimed,

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180 Myint Maung (Phil Q) 2011.
181 Myint Maung (Phil Q) 2011; Padaung Than Kywe 2011; “Salute our martyrs” 2013.
182 Myint Maung (Phil Q) 2011.
“Like a curry without salt is tasteless, a nation without independence is meaningless.”

Many of these op-eds used stories of Myanmar’s struggles against colonial powers to encourage national unity between the different races in the country, making claims such as “The national races are firmly joining hands together with the spirit of living forever in harmony.” Some even thanked politicians by name, such as one editorial titled “Billion Thanks, Mr. President”, which described how “The newly formed Democratic Government led by our hardworking upright President U Thein Sein, came to our rescue timely.”

Although these editorials were less common in 2011-2015 than in 2003-2010, the tendency of praising the Tatmadaw and the Thein Sein government continued relatively unchanged when such articles were published.

Editorials about foreign relations saw the biggest change in tone from 2003-2010 to 2011-2015. Quite unlike the mentions of “foreign ax handles” in the previous period, editorials about Myanmar’s foreign relations in 2011-2015 were overwhelmingly positive in tone. For instance, a 2012 op-ed proclaimed that “With reforms going on well in various sectors, we are more than ready to promote business, trade and friendly relations with any global country. Thanks to our geographical position, many countries including our two giant neighbors are eager to enhance trade and diplomatic relations with us.” One incredibly blunt editorial actually criticized the isolationist policies of previous periods, asserting that “Myanmar, once a lesser-

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184 Ko Tin Maung Oo (Ahlon) 2012.
185 Tin Maung Oo (Ahlon) 2013.
186 Aye Pe (Padaung) 2015a.
187 “Geographical opportunity” 2012.
known and xenophobic nation, has become renown to the rest of the world since its new government made dramatic changes in its policy.\textsuperscript{188} Many of these editorials focused on trade with other Asian nations, such as a 2012 op-ed which suggested “we must learn and imitate the ways of means and the spirit of our counterparts that are now the integral part of the rising Asia.”\textsuperscript{189} A 2015 op-ed by Daw Shwe Shwe from the Ministry of Culture detailed the possibilities for improved relations with other ASEAN nations in the coming years.\textsuperscript{190} Such articles highlighted the major changes that had taken place for Myanmar in just a few years, and the opportunities that had opened up for improved trade and diplomacy in the region.

In addition to increased relations with Myanmar’s ASEAN neighbors, these editorials also lauded trends such as increased tourism\textsuperscript{191} and foreign aid\textsuperscript{192} in the wake of the new political changes. Note the positive tone towards tourism and foreign donations in this passage;

A constellation of factors and events have converged to affect a glorious boom: the multi-party election resulting in the opening of democracy and civil society, resurged interest of the Western hemisphere towards the country overlooked through passage of decades….Only now the situation [after Cyclone Nargis] had somewhat calmed due to the efforts of the State and the sympathetic public, NGOs and many generous donors who came to the rescue of the afflicted, out of sublime compassion.\textsuperscript{193}

\textsuperscript{188} “Keep the environment safe and sound” 2012.

\textsuperscript{189} “Rising Asia” 2012.

\textsuperscript{190} Daw Shwe Shwe (Ministry of Culture) 2015.

\textsuperscript{191} “One of the best ways” 2012.

\textsuperscript{192} Aye Pe (Padaung) 2015.

\textsuperscript{193} Ba Than 2012.
Clearly, based on editorials about foreign relations in 2011-2015, the Myanmar government had fewer concerns about foreign interference than in previous periods. Indeed, op-eds in the *New Light of Myanmar* suggested that the “prospects are brighter than ever for close and comprehensive collaboration among government, private organizations, civil societies and international development partners through transparency.”

Clearly, the Myanmar government felt secure enough in the institutions it developed as part of the Roadmap to Democracy to welcome engagement with the international community, a drastic shift from the previous period.

The final trend in *NLM* editorials during this period were those focused on the peace process. As the articles about insurgency and domestic protests during this period revealed, the ongoing pursuit of a ceasefire agreement with armed ethnic groups continued to be a major goal for the Myanmar government between 2011-2015, and a number of editorials reflected this priority. Although there were no editorials about peace and insurgency in the newspapers coded during 2011 and 2012, op-eds on this theme became more common as the period continued. Many of them linked the achievement of peace to the continuation of the country’s other goals, such as development. One wrote,

> Only when the peace prevails, will the country develop…. It can be said that peaceful protest is a democratic right. But world nations have kept a watchful eye on the country because it is something strange about a country with immature democratic practice…. Only when peace prevails, will more visitors come and visit Myanmar. If not so, it is impossible for job creation and generating more incomes…Only with peace and stability, will each and every citizen be prosperous.

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195 Khin Chin Dwin 2013.
Another editorial also equated the achievement of peace with “affluent socio-economic conditions,” asserting that “There can be no controversy or dispute on the impossibility of development work without stability and peace….While we are building a new democratic nation, it is vital to show restraint and avoid adversarial conflicts.” Unsurprisingly, the Myanmar government used the allure of democratization and economic development to incentivize the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.

Some editorials about the peace process directly mention the importance of identity, such as one from 2013 which argued that “For the peace process to be successful, it must be connected to the emergence of a more and inclusive nation-identity. Myanmar people of all ethnic backgrounds and all faiths – Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and others, must feel part of this new national identity….We cannot let ethnic or religious differences become an excuse to revert to authoritarianism.” Yet another calls for Myanmar citizens to “stand in solidarity with the civilians and traumatized families whose homes and futures have been shattered by catastrophic effects armed conflicts have had on them,” a notable proclamation in a government-sponsored newspaper considering the continued role that the Tatmadaw played in perpetuating these conflicts. While some editorials refer to “troublemakers” (i.e. armed ethnic

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196 Pyay Oo (Ayeyarwady) 2013.

197 Pyay Oo (Ayeyarwady) 2013.

198 “The first step” 2013.

199 Kyaw Thura 2014.

200 Myint Win Thein 2015a.
group leaders) who refuse to sign the ceasefire, the tone in many of them was relatively sympathetic to the plight of ethnic minorities. After the signing of the NCA in 2015, the *New Light of Myanmar* even published an editorial by Hervé Ladsous, the Under-Secretary-General for the U.N. Peacekeeping Operations about the importance of investing in peacekeeping efforts. Publishing the opinion of a Western diplomat in the *New Light of Myanmar* would have been unheard of just a few years prior and demonstrates the major shift in tone that took place from 2011-2015.

This content analysis of the *New Light of Myanmar* between 2011-2015 gives us many insights into the important political changes that took place during this time, largely as a result of the groundwork laid in the 2003-2010 period. Diplomacy articles during this period emphasized frequent and cordial relations between the U.S. and Myanmar, and an increased awareness of the importance of human rights, both trends pointing to an increase in the military’s confidence as well as an increase in liberalization during this time. The high number of articles related to elections and detailed descriptions of votes taken in the *Hluttaw* show increased levels of democratization and liberalization, with an emphasis given to transparency of the legislative branch. Full text speeches published during this time were much more positive in tone towards the development of democracy, peace with insurgent groups, and international relations, a further sign of democratization and liberalization over this period. Articles relating to insurgency and protests during this time were a mixed bag, as the positive steps taken towards reaching the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement were overshadowed by the serious issues in Rakhine State. Business and development articles tended to equate increase development projects with the

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201 Ladsous 2015.
ongoing democratization within Myanmar, showing how the Myanmar government was embracing political changes for economic gain. The sharp decrease in propaganda pieces is perhaps the most striking example of tone change during this time, with xenophobic and nationalistic messages being replaced by countdowns until the next elections. Finally, editorials and op-eds praised the new political changes sweeping across Myanmar. Ultimately, the 2011-2015 period reaped the results of the myriad changes that had been put into place by the military during the interim 2003-2010 period. The Roadmap to Democracy had indeed led the country towards the military’s purported goal of democratization, although there remain quite a few political issues that remain for the country as it approaches the 2020 elections.

Conclusion

During the 2011-2015 period, Myanmar experienced an increase in democratization and liberalization that came as a surprise to many, including the military which had set these changes into motion. The institutional design established in the interim 2003-2010 period made it possible for the military to protect itself from foreign and domestic threats. Thus, the political environment in 2011-2015 was significantly different than the environment in 1988-2002, which allowed for the upholding of election results even when the National League for Democracy won. H3 stated that the institutional design which took place between 2003-2010 ultimately led to steps toward liberalization beyond the Myanmar government’s original intent. This chapter found evidence in interviews with Burmese citizens as well as in speeches and statements given by government officials that the results of the 2015 elections were not expected. Indeed, just a
few years earlier, the Burmese government would not have had the stability confidence or
immunity confidence to allow an electoral loss to stand. While the Tatmadaw may not have
intended for the political changes to extend this far, the groundwork laid by the Roadmap to
Democracy ultimately changed the game and the stakes.

H3A posited that these institutions gave the Myanmar government the immunity
confidence and stability confidence which were lacking during the 1988-2002 period. Interviews,
government documents, and a content analysis of the government-sponsored newspaper
ultimately showed that from 2011-2015, a number of variables combined to push the country
past the threshold necessary for these political changes to take hold. Improvements in relations
with the West, the role of a more moderate leader, and the neutralization of threats from both
numerous armed ethnic groups and the NLD meant that as time went on, the political transition
in Myanmar became both more difficult and less tempting to reverse. Evidence from polls and
ratings of civil rights and political liberties by multiple NGOs also indicate that increased
democratization and liberalization did indeed occur in Myanmar during this time.

This is not to say that Myanmar is a developed, mature, liberal democracy. While this
chapter showed evidence that Myanmar is experiencing democratization and liberalization, it
also found numerous ongoing issues which will challenge the political gains made by pro-
democracy forces. The final chapter will summarize the findings and limitations of this project
and will also discuss the issues facing Myanmar as the 2020 general elections draw near.
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Project Summary

This project sought to answer the question, “How did Myanmar’s military embrace liberalization more during 2011-2015 than in the 1988-2002 period?” It examined three distinct time periods in modern Myanmar political history: the failed transition of 1988-2002, the interim period of institutional changes from 2003-2010, and the period of increased democratization and liberalization from 2011-2015. Table 7 summarizes the hypotheses of this project and whether they were upheld by the evidence.

Table 7: Hypotheses and Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Assertion</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
<td>International and domestic pressure for elections during 1988-1990 were not sufficient to compel the military to respect election results due to perceived domestic threats and lack of institutional design which can protect the military’s interests</td>
<td>Upheld – found evidence of concerns about insurgency and international threats, no constitution in place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1A</td>
<td>The military held elections because of domestic/international pressure and their confidence in their chances of victory; however, they did not uphold the results of elections because the military lost stability and immunity confidence.</td>
<td>Upheld – speeches and content analysis showed evidence that military was concerned about country’s stability and possible retribution.</td>
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(Continued on following page)
Table 7 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>H1B</th>
<th>Institutional design (in the form of developing a new constitution) did not occur during this time period because the military believed a constitution would be seen as more legitimate after an electoral victory.</th>
<th>Upheld – quotes from military members suggested they were waiting for after elections to write constitution.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>Massive changes within the military regime and a reduction of domestic threats during the 2003-2010 period led to efforts to develop institutional design.</td>
<td>Upheld – institutional changes and ceasefire agreements were crucial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2A</td>
<td>Changes during this time period were largely based on a transition process that had been mapped out during the earlier (1988-2002) time period but ultimately failed.</td>
<td>Upheld – military pursued National Convention originally proposed in 1990 to draft the new constitution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2B</td>
<td>The military regime became more confident in their ability to design institutions to protect their interests and the stability of the nation due to improvements in relations with armed ethnic groups as well as the promotion of more moderate military leaders.</td>
<td>Partially upheld – found evidence for better relations with armed ethnic groups, but mixed evidence of promoting moderates in military.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2C</td>
<td>The institutional design that took place during this time period laid the groundwork for the more successful transition process in 2011-2015.</td>
<td>Upheld – constitution and electoral laws from 2003-2010 were used in 2011-2015 period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td>Institutional design during 2003-2010 laid the groundwork for steps toward political liberalization from 2011-2015, which led to a liberalization process that snowballed beyond the military’s initial intent.</td>
<td>Upheld – Evidence that results of 2015 elections was unexpected by military and civilians, and results were upheld.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3A</td>
<td>The electoral results in 2011 and 2015 were upheld by the military due to institutions (namely the constitution) which gave them immunity confidence and stability confidence, crucial factors which were absent during the failed transition of 1988-2002.</td>
<td>Upheld – improved relations with West, moderate leader, neutralization of NLD and ethnic groups made transition more difficult to reverse. Evidence that democratization and liberalization occurred.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I hypothesized that the transition which might have taken place in the 1990 elections failed to do so because of a lack of institutionalization, but that once the Myanmar government
began the process of steps toward liberalization, it eventually became too difficult, costly, and politically risky to revert back to authoritarianism. Through the use of first-person interviews, media content analysis, and process tracing, I tested this hypothesis.

In the 1988-2002 time period, I found evidence that domestic unrest due to economic struggles and international pressure led to the development of SLORC, the abolishment of the 1974 constitution, and the decision to hold elections in 1990. While these pressures were sufficient to push the military towards the holding of election, they could not override the Tatmadaw’s fears of stability and immunity confidence, thus leading to the annulment of the election results. In particular, I found statements that the government planned to establish a new constitution after the 1990 elections, which explains why the elections were held in a constitutional vacuum. The lack of institutional protections which would have been provided by a constitution meant that the military felt deeply threatened when the NLD made statements implying that the military might face repercussions for its crimes under a civilian government. Because of these factors, the 1990 elections ultimately failed.

The chapters on the period of 2003-2010 shows that the Burmese military and government sought to correct the failings of the previous era, particularly with regards to establishing institutional protections for themselves under the guise of the Roadmap to Democracy. The establishment of a new constitution was a major priority for the regime during this time. I found evidence that the military regime’s stability confidence grew during this period due to perceived improvements in relations with armed ethnic groups, largely due to efforts to establish a nationwide ceasefire and the establishment of the Border Guard Force program. Additionally, I found statements and changing tone in the government-mouthpiece newspaper
which indicate that, while the government’s tone was softening towards the ethnic minorities and the international community, it was still concerned about the threat of the NLD as an opposition party. This helps to explain the institutional limitations on the fairness and freedom of the 2010 general elections.

Finally, in the 2011-2015 period, this project shows how the institutional design which took place under the Roadmap to Democracy led to more robust democratization and liberalization efforts later. Through interviews with Burmese citizens and speeches given by government officials, I found confirmation that the outcome of the 2015 general elections, in which the NLD won in a landslide, was largely unexpected, much like the results of the 1990 elections. Unlike the elections in the previous time, however, those chapters assert that improvements in international relations, a more moderate cabinet, and a reduction of perceived threats posed by armed ethnic groups and the NLD allowed for the barriers to democratization and liberalization which existed in the earlier time period were no longer enough to prevent further progress towards democratization and liberalization. I also found evidence from polls and studies done by NGOs that democratization and liberalization did indeed increase in this period.

Ultimately, this project shows that, while numerous factors such as domestic unrest, international pressure, and the confidence of Myanmar’s military contributed to the different political outcomes between 1988-2003 and 2011-2015, the change can be largely attributed to institutional design which occurred during the crucial interim period. Without these protections, the military would not have allowed political changes to take place. While the Roadmap to Democracy was derided as a disingenuous public relations strategy by the military regime, ultimately it led to the civilian government we see in Myanmar now.
Limitations of this Study

This is an ambitious project, and naturally its findings are tempered by some limitations. Financial and time limitations meant that I was only able to conduct thirteen interviews with Burmese citizens in Yangon in June 2016. While these interviews were in-depth and represented people with a variety of views and backgrounds, these interviews were conducted in Yangon and only represent these views at a certain snapshot in time. This study would be strengthened with follow-up interviews to see if my informants’ views have changed, as well as additional interviews or surveys with citizens living in more rural areas or Burmese diaspora members in order to get more of a variety of voices.

While the media content analysis of the New Light of Myanmar was extremely valuable and provided a huge amount of data, my analysis of the English-language version of this publication does lead to concern about differences in translation. Future iterations of this project would be improved by including comparisons between the Burmese-language and English-language versions of the same day’s newspaper, to ensure that there are not significant translation differences. If differences did exist, it might suggest that the government was using the English-language version to project a different tone or message toward the international community than that which was aimed towards Burmese citizens in the Burmese-language edition.

Finally, while my content analysis covered a total of 14,508 articles, the findings from the content analysis could be strengthened by the addition of more data. In particular, gaining
access to the full text editions of the early editions of the *New Light of Myanmar* during the 1988-2002 period would bolster the findings from that chapter, rather than relying on the abridged versions from the Burma Press Summary. While online repositories do not include such early versions of this newspaper, with more funding and time it may be possible to track down full texts from that time period in archives at the University of Yangon or elsewhere in Myanmar. Additionally, while I specifically chose to analyze the *New Light of Myanmar* as a proxy measure for the government’s point of view, I am aware that it is a problematic publication with questionable journalistic practices and a very specific perspective. Future iterations of this project might be improved by also conducting content analyses of dissident or diaspora media sources such as *Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB)* or *Radio Free America (RFA)*, in order to measure the kinds of competing messages that were being produced by other sources during these periods.

**Future Issues Facing Myanmar**

While this project has detailed astounding progress towards democratization and liberalization in Myanmar in recent years, the country still faces numerous quandaries. The great strides towards increased political rights and civil liberties in Myanmar are not guaranteed to continue, and the country’s nascent democracy must deal with some pressing issues if it does not want a detour on the road to democracy. In particular, the success of the NLD government; the 2018 by-elections and 2020 general elections; press freedom; the Rohingya crisis and other ethnic issues; and the possibility of stalling democratization are all issues with which Myanmar must grapple in the coming years.
Success of the NLD Government

One of the most pressing issues in Myanmar’s new post-2015 political landscape is the new role of the NLD. No longer an opposition party, the NLD faced a brand-new challenge of governing Myanmar. When asked about their hopes and expectations for the future, almost every person I interviewed mentioned the NLD government. Most expressed concerns about the challenges facing the new civilian-led government. Okka Oo suggested that “In order for things to continue the change, the NLD needs to win the trust of the army. After that happens, maybe they will repeal [constitutional section] 59f. They still have differences they need to reconcile. NLD must make sure the army is not left out.”\(^1\) Tharawon (Pyay) cautioned that

The new NLD government has a lot of things to do. They have to form a new election committee. There are only two groups of people who support NLD or USDP. Most people vote for the NLD not because they like the NLD but because they hate the military. A lot of people vote for NLD with closed eyes. After 5 years [of the NLD government], it is human nature, you find things you don’t like. NLD is outlawing things like chewing betel nut, gambling, alcohol shops. It is a good thing they are outlawing it, but uneducated people don’t like it.\(^2\)

Edward Ziwa Naing agreed, saying “In Myanmar politics, we do not have the luxury of many choices – we have either/or. That is how the NLD became the majority in government. In a purely democratic sense, that’s dangerous.”\(^3\) Likewise, Ma Thway (Sagaing) listed a number of

\(^1\) Okka Oo. Interview with Nicole Loring. Personal Interview. Yangon, June 6, 2016.


disadvantages facing the NLD: “They wholly depend on Aung San Suu Kyi; The ability of members without her is low; the NLD can’t organize their member or create changes for youth. We will see and wait how they work for our people.”

Tin Min Htut also expressed doubts about the NLD’s power as the governing party.

I feel sorry for the NLD. People’s expectations of them are very high. There is not much they can do – symbolic changes. They can’t yet change the constitution or remove military members…. I think there is a talent shortage in the NLD right now. Repats coming back will help the NLD…. I wish people would give the NLD more time to make changes. People in the media will say that the NLD is no different than the former government – no transparency.

Edward Ziwa Naing was concerned that “the honeymoon period on the NLD government as a limit. People have been patient so far, but for how long? So far, we have had very slow, steady, safe changes. [The new NLD government] has their heart in the right place. However, their efficiency and capacity are lacking.” NLD member U Pe Tin agreed that the NLD lacked capacity, suggesting that “The main challenge facing the NLD is a constitutional amendment – there are so many limitations on their capacity. We can’t lead the country the way we want. The clause we want to amend is 436 [amending the constitution]. We want to replace it with easier steps. 436 is the key section – after we can amend it, we can amend other clauses.” He went on to express how the NLD has been challenged by its new role.

5 Tin Min Htut. Interview with Nicole Loring. Personal Interview. Yangon, June 14, 2016.
As an opposition party, it was easier to point out weakness and make suggestions. Now, as a ruling party, things are different. Now we make an announcement [of proposed law changes], but if people don’t like it, they consider it…. This is the main difference between being an opposition party and a ruling party. An opposition party is just saying what needs to be changed. A ruling party must say what needs to be changed, but then must listen and be flexible.8

Htay Htay Win described the situation thusly; “The big challenge for NLD is to run a marathon in 5 years’ time. They [the military] are just allowing the NLD to take their move. ‘Kaun win ko san’ – that is a Burmese saying, it means ‘if your head can enter, your body can follow.’”9 In her view, despite the limitations on the NLD, their decision to shoulder their way into the national government means that political changes will follow.

When asked whether they thought the military would fully retreat from politics, interviewees tended to express cautious optimism. Okka Oo believes that “the military will gradually retreat – they may have their own time frame. But the NLD must win the trust of the military – make sure the army is not left out. They need to make it clear that this change is for all.”10 Tin Min Htut discussed the possibility of future constitutional amendments to remove the quota for military members within the Hluttaw. “The biggest obstacle to a constitutional amendment happening is the Commander-in-Chief [Min Aung Hlaing]. They [the NLD] need to

get the military in their back pocket. Tell someone, hey, if you vote with us [to remove the military quota], we will make you commander in chief.”¹¹

NLD member U Pe Tin asserted that “The military is protecting the constitution because it provides them with many protections. Even soldiers and generals are civil servants – they should understand people don’t want them in politics.”¹² When asked whether he thought the military would fully step down from politics, he stated that “It all depends on stability – is there are clashes, conflicts, this may lead to coups. A coup is possible if we make the situation very difficult for the military – if we put a lot of pressure on them or make decisions without them. We cannot get them out of politics by force – then bad results will come.”¹³ Fellow NLD member U Maung Maung concurred, saying that “I don’t think the military will stay long in politics. It depends on changing the constitution.”¹⁴ Htay Htay Win expressed concern that “It’s very hard to shake this military branch out of the administration because they have taken very deep root and enjoyed all the privileges – it’s natural that they will want to stay in.”¹⁵ Dr. Carole Ann Chit Tha stated, “Only if we have peace, I think the military will draw back slowly. We need civilian/military relations…. we can’t ignore the military point of view…. I think, slowly, slowly, the military will back out. If we achieve the peace process with ethnic groups, they will


step out of politics.”

Every interviewee to whom I spoke expressed views such as these – that the political changes which began in this period would continue, and the military would eventually leave politics for good.

2020 Elections

A crucial test for both the NLD party and for Myanmar’s new democracy are the 2020 general elections. NLD members are confident about their chances of victory. U Pe Tin asserted, “Absolutely we [the NLD] will win in 2020. We want newcomers and young people with good educations to participate in upper level offices in the NLD.” In spite of this confidence, however, recent by-election results indicate that the NLD may not have the same appeal to voters by the 2020 elections.

Other interviewees expressed concerns about the possibility that the NLD would lose seats in 2020. Shine Zaw-Aung stated, “Next time, the NLD will not get 80% of the votes [because of people’s dissatisfaction with the NLD government].” Tharawon predicted, “More and more people are looking for a 3rd party that doesn’t represent the NLD or USDP. I think they will come out in 2020 – may be led by the 1988 generation. [This party is] not be as big as the

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18 Channel News Asia 2018; San Yamin Aung 2018.

NLD or USDP – the 8888 generation are very influential group in Myanmar. I think the NLD’s popularity will still be very big leading up to the 2020 elections, but not as big as 2015.”

Edward Ziwa Naing agreed that

…in the near future, smaller parties will emerge. The NLD is Aung San Suu Kyi – using the popularity of one person is very risky. They need to use 2nd tier leadership as well. Other former NLD members may form a new party. In 2020 I do not believe the NLD will have such a big majority. It depends on Aung San Suu Kyi, and the NLD needs to be more inclusive of people Aung San Suu Kyi does not control, such as member of the 88 Generation. We have a saying – ‘Whoever you leave behind is likely to cause trouble.’

Who might cause trouble for the current NLD government? Many ethnic minority groups have largely felt excluded by the NLD and may be organizing new political parties to better represent the interests of their people. “Homegrown political parties in Myanmar’s ethnic areas have been merging together in the hope of winning a majority of seats in both national and regional parliaments in the upcoming 2020 general elections, a victory that would grant them more authority to improve their rights.” Already, political parties have been formed by five out of the eight major ethnic groups in Myanmar, most likely as a response to the 2015 elections in which “disunity among [ethnic minority parties] and the stunning NLD victory resulted in their

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22 Nan Lwin 2018.

23 The four ethnic groups in question are Karen, Kachin, Kayah, Mon, and Chin. For more details, see Nan Lwin 2018.
holding a mere 11 percent of seats in the national legislature.”

Now, rather than splitting into disparate parties as they did in 2015, many of these smaller parties are joining up in an attempt to win more seats in 2020. It is possible that more cohesiveness between ethnic parties in 2020 will lead to less vote splitting, as ethnic minority people will not need to decide between scores of similarly named ethnic political parties competing against the Leviathan that is the NLD.

Another group which may pose a threat to the NLD’s majority in the 2020 elections is the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). In campaign events leading up to the 2018 by-elections, USDP chairman U Than Htay asserted that changing the cabinet, rather than the constitution, will be sufficient to achieve political changes that the Burmese people seek. According to political commentator Zarni Soe Htut, “It is because of the 2008 [Constitution] that U Than Shwe stepped down, and U Thein Sein came to office. [The NLD] should gradually march toward their goal and move closer and closer to it over time. The army and the USDP won’t like it if [the NLD] says the 2008 Constitution is not good. So rather than saying 2008 Constitution is not good, [NLD] should work for the betterment of all.” The USDP’s campaign message is that they are more qualified to govern than the NLD. “We are not inexperienced people. We have proper experience of running the government, so we understand how to manage the country.” Some voters, disappointed by the NLD’s performance as the governing party,

24 Nan Lwin 2018.


26 Zarni Soe Htut in Htet Naing Zaw 2018a.

27 U Than Htay in Htet Naing Zaw 2018a.
may be swayed by this argument in the 2020 general elections. Indeed, the results of the 2017 and 2018 by-elections show that the NLD may be losing its appeal to voters who are disappointed in the party’s failure to end ongoing civil wars and deliver on its campaign promises of amending the 2008 Constitution.  

Press Freedom

While an increase in the number of media outlets allowed to operate in the country and purported improvements in press freedom accompanied the new NLD government, there remain significant issues facing freedom of the press and journalists in Myanmar. Reporters Without Borders ranked Myanmar #137 out of 180 countries in its 2018 World Press Freedom Index, having slid down from its spot at #131 in 2017.  

While there were no journalists or media assistants killed in 2018, there were 3 journalists and 2 media assistants imprisoned in 2018.  

Reuters journalists Kyaw Soe Oo and Wa Lone were imprisoned on December 12, 2017 and Htet Zaw Moe was imprisoned on August 30, 2017, while TRT World media assistants U Hla Tin and

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28 In the 2017 by-elections, the NLD won only nine out of 19 available seats (The Irrawaddy Magazine 2018), and in the 2018 by-elections NLD members won seven out of the available 13 seats and lost five out of six seats in ethnic states (Channel News Asia 2018). For more information, see San Yamin Aung 2018.

29 On January 29, 2019, the Hluttaw overwhelming approved a proposal to form a joint committee on constitutional reform, in spite of the opposition of the military members of parliament. For more information, see The Irrawaddy Magazine 2019b.


31 Reporters Without Borders 2018.
Ko Aung Naing Soe were imprisoned on October 27, 2017. In total, “Around 20 journalists were prosecuted in 2017, many of them under article 66(d) of the Telecommunications Act, which criminalizes online defamation. Self-censorship is the rule with any story that might upset the authorities, especially the military.” Many of the journalists and assistants who were imprisoned or punished were investigating the situation with the Rohingya refugees in Rakhine State, as well as conflicts with the Shan and Kachin armed groups.

While many expected the NLD government to be open and welcoming to journalists, leaders such as Aung San Suu Kyi have defended the decision to keep the two Reuters journalists, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, in prison. According to her, “They were not jailed because they were journalists, they were jailed because…the court has decided that they have broken the Official Secrets Act….If we believe in the rule of law, they have every right to appeal the judgment and to point out why the judgment was wrong.” The two journalists were investigating the murder of Rohingya people by security forces in Rakhine State when they were arrested. Press freedom is a crucial aspect to liberalization, and Myanmar’s continued punishments of journalists reporting on conflict with ethnic minorities is a crucial and troubling issue facing Myanmar as it seeks further moves towards becoming a more liberal democracy.

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33 Reporters Without Borders 2018.
34 Reporters Without Borders 2018.
35 Reuters 2018c.
Another long-running issue which continues to plague the civilian government of Myanmar is the issue of armed ethnic groups, the push for federalism, and in particular the Rohingya crisis. While efforts to finalize the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) have continued into 2018, the NLD-led government has not been able to convince leaders of ethnic minority groups to take secession off the table. Leaders of armed ethnic groups who attended a 2018 summit in Chiang Mai stated that they cannot promise to never secede from the state of Myanmar. Nai Hong Sar, vice-chairman of the New Mon State Party, stated that the armed ethnic groups must be cautious of the promises they make to the government because

...we have not yet seen what type of rights the government will give our ethnic people, and we don’t even know yet what type of federalism our government would establish. Also, the current democracy doesn’t appear to be a real one yet. If we have to agree whenever the [army] pressures us, our future movements may be restricted. Therefore, we all agreed to take a stand and not give them the promise.36

As long as the leaders of ethnic minority groups do not trust the promises of the Myanmar government, conflict and campaigns for a new federal system will undoubtedly continue.

An even more critical issue than the distrust between ethnic minorities and the central government of Myanmar is the Rohingya crisis. As detailed in the previous chapter, the ongoing violence in Rakhine state is entrenched in historical legacies and will be extremely difficult to resolve. Many international observers have expressed shock and dismay that the NLD government has not intervened or spoken out against the military’s use of force in Rakhine state,

36 Lawi Weng 2018.
and groups such as Amnesty International are running campaigns “intended to ratchet up international pressure on Myanmar’s top general [Senior-General Min Aung Hlaing] for his troops’ alleged atrocities against Rohingya in northern Rakhine State.”

In a 2018 fact-finding mission, the UNHCR investigated human rights abuses in Kachin, Rakhine, and Shan states. The 21-page report resulting from this effort found “consistent patterns of serious human rights violations and abuses...[which] are principally committed by the Myanmar security forces, particularly the military...Many violations amount to the gravest crimes under international law.” The report concludes that, “In the light of the pervasive culture of impunity at the domestic level...the impetus for accountability must come from the international community.” In particular, the Human Rights Council report recommends that the senior generals of the Tatmadaw should be investigated and tried in an “international criminal tribunal for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.” This view, however, is not widely held in Myanmar. Misinformation about the Rohingya is widespread on social media, and many Burmese citizens believe the Rohingya are illegal immigrants who support ISIS or other terrorist organizations. This hostile view toward the Rohingya is therefore not solely racially or

37 Kyaw Phyo Tha 2018.


40 The report names Senior-General Min Aung Hlaing, Senior-General Soe Win, Lieutenant-General Aung Kyaw Zaw, Major-General Maung Maung Soe, Brigadier-General Aung Aung, and Brigadier-General Than Oo.

religiously based but can also be traced back to colonial-era xenophobia, nationalism, and modern fears of terrorism and extremism.

Likely due to the long-running racial, religious, and cultural tensions between the Burmese Buddhists and the Muslim Rohingyas, popular opinion in Myanmar is not wholly convinced by international proclamations. As Kyaw Phyo Tha writes,

> …the international community appears to be trying to exploit the issue to oust the military from Myanmar’s politics….It’s taken for granted that not everyone in Myanmar is pleased with the military’s involvement in the country’s politics….Is it therefore realistic for the international community to treat the Rohingya crisis – probably the country’s most controversial and militarily sensitive issue – as an opportunity to try to force the military out of politics using harsh measures? … [T]rying to exploit the Rohingya crisis to oust the military from politics would be counterproductive, as most people in Myanmar stand with the military on the issue.\(^\text{42}\)

This helps to explain the NLD’s lack of action on the Rohingya issue as well. With many Myanmar citizens actually supporting the military’s actions in Rakhine state, taking the side of the Rohingya minority would be an unpopular and politically dangerous position for the NLD to take, even for such leaders as Aung San Suu Kyi, who made a name for herself as a supporter of human rights. In truth, the political realities of a ruling party seeking reelection in a country new to democracy, with an electorate that largely supports the repression of a maligned ethnic minority group and the specter of elections looming in the not-too-distant future, limits the political capital and willingness of the NLD to take the side of the Rohingya in this situation. It is also important to keep in mind the limitations of Aung San Suu Kyi’s power, the ever-present reality of the military in politics, and the fact that Myanmar has not had time for democratic

\(^{42}\) Kyaw Phyo Tha 2018.
culture and liberal ideas to develop deeply. While many observers in the West are disappointed with Aung San Suu Kyi’s lukewarm response to the abuse against the Rohingya, her reaction is a symptom, not a root cause of the issue. Without political motivation to stop these acts, it is likely that the violence and mistreatment of the Rohingya people will continue.

Stalling Democratization?

In light of these myriad issues facing Myanmar, is the process of democratization still ongoing, or has it stalled? It is certainly troubling that the quota for military members, the imprisonment of journalists, and the mistreatment of ethnic minorities has continued even under a civilian government, as well as recent news that the Myanmar government may push forward with the hugely unpopular and environmentally damaging Myitsone Dam in spite of protests from citizens. According to Marzuki Darusman, chair of the aforementioned UN Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, “no law and no institution in Myanmar…is above the Tatmadaw. In this regard, the democratic transition in Myanmar has barely begun and now it has come to a

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43 I largely agree with Coclanis (2018) in his assessment that Aung San Suu Kyi has disappointed Western liberals who only see her as a symbol of all human rights everywhere, when in reality she is a politician, a Burman, a Buddhist, and a nationalist, all of which contribute to her personal viewpoints. One of the most pressing issues facing Myanmar, in the eyes of the government, is unification and preventing federalist claims from ethnic minority groups, and siding with the Rohingya would not only be unpopular, but counterproductive to this goal. See Coclanis 2018 for more discussion of this point.

44 The Irrawaddy Magazine 2019a.
While it is still too early to determine whether the democratization process is ongoing or interrupted, it remains true that Myanmar’s political system has more democratic practices and liberal protections for its citizens than just a decade ago. As this project has shown, these developments are mainly due to the institutional changes and increased confidence of the Myanmar military to weather the storms of international and domestic threats. Such changes are not so established that democratic backsliding is impossible, however. The country of Myanmar faces many political challenges if it hopes to stay on the road toward liberalization and democratization.

Future Research

I intend to continue with this research, with the plans to ultimately convert it into a book manuscript. My future plans include addressing many of the limitations of this study that I note earlier in this chapter, including analyzing full texts of the WPD and NLM for the 1988-2002 period, expanding my interview subjects, holding follow-up interviews, and conducting survey research in different parts of Myanmar. I would like to expand the media content analysis from this project to include the voices of dissidents from sources such as DVB and RFA and may also include social media content analysis. Studying such recent events means that this project may

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45 Reuters 2018a.

46 Yoshihiro Nakanishi recently conducted a content analysis of Senior-General Min Aung Hlaing’s Facebook posts to determine his public relations strategy for the Tatmadaw, coding all his posts between 2013-2017 and categorizing them based on topic. See Nyein Nyein 2018.
morph and change with current events, and I intend to include the 2020 general elections in future iterations of this research agenda.
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1 While most citation styles require that authors be listed by their last names first, Burmese names do not have a first and last name like Western names do. For this reason, I have cited Burmese sources with their names intact (e.g. “Ne Win” rather than Win, Ne). The only exceptions are for non-Burman authors who do have last names and cite themselves in this way.


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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

TIMELINE OF EVENTS IN MYANMAR, 1948-2015

1 BBC 2017
Color Coding Key for Variables

- Features inherent to military regimes
- Professionalization
- Splits within the military
- Civil society opposition
- Institutional design
- Regime confidence/role of military
- Political liberalization

Post-Independence Period – 1948-1987

1948 – Myanmar gets its independence from Britain

1958-1960 – A split in the AFPFL government (led by Prime Minister U Nu) leads to a Caretaker government, led by General Ne Win

1960 – Elections are held and U Nu’s AFPFL wins – however, his promotion of Buddhism as the state religion and his tolerance of talk of separatism by the ethnic minority groups is cause for concern with the military.

1962 – Military coup led by General Ne Win ousts the U Nu government and establishes the “Burmese Way to Socialism” which nationalizes the economy, bans independent newspaper and creates a single-party system led by the Burma Socialist Programme Party

1974 - BSPP establishes a new constitution, transferring power from the military to a People’s Assembly headed by Ne Win and other military leaders

1981 – Ne Win hands the presidency to retired general San Yu but stays on as the chairman of the Burma Socialist Programme Party

1982 – A law is established designating people of non-indigenous backgrounds as “associate citizens” and barring them from public office

1987 - Currency devaluations lead to financial distress for many people and prompts anti-government riots


1988 – Widespread protests take place in what is eventually known as the 8888 Demonstrations. Thousands of people are killed, and the State Law and Order Restoration Council is created.

1989 – SLORC declares martial law and arrests thousands of people, including NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who is put under house arrest
1990 – Elections are held – National League for Democracy wins landslide, but the results are not upheld by the military and SLORC

1991 – Aung San Suu Kyi wins Nobel Peace Prize for her commitment to peaceful political change

1992 – Than Shwe replaces Saw Maung as SLORC chairman, prime minister and defense minister. Some political prisoners are freed in an attempt to improve Myanmar’s international image

1995 – Aung San Suu Kyi is released from house arrest

1996 – Aung San Suu Kyi attends her first NLD congress since her release from house arrest – SLORC arrests over 200 delegates who are attending the conference

1997 – Myanmar joins the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). SLORC is renamed State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)

1998 – 300 NLD members released from prison; student demonstrations broken up

2000 – Ruling council lifts restrictions on the movements of NLD senior members, including Aung San Suu Kyi, who begins secret talks with the ruling council

2001 – Ruling council releases about 200 pro-democracy activists, citing progress in their recent talks with Aung San Suu Kyi

2001 – Burmese army clashes with Shan rebels on the Thai border. Diplomatic visits with Thai Prime Minister and Chinese President.

2002 – Aung San Suu Kyi released from house arrest after 20 months – she is taken under protective custody soon after due to clashes between government supporters and NLD supporters

Interim Period – 2003-2010

2003 – Khin Nyunt becomes prime minister and proposes a convention to be held in 2004 in order to draft a new constitution as part of a “Roadmap to Democracy”

2004 – The government and the Karen National Union, an armed ethnic group, agree to end hostilities. Constitutional convention starts and is boycotted by the NLD because Aung San Suu Kyi remains under house arrest. There are rumors of splits/power struggles within the government and Khin Nyunt is replaced as prime minister. Thousands of political prisoners are released.

2005 – Government announces that it will move the capitol to the center of the country. The new city is later named Naypyidaw.

2007 – Many changes in the international system. The UN Security Council discusses passing a resolution pushing Myanmar to stop persecuting minority groups and opposition parties, but China and Russia veto the Resolution. Myanmar and North Korea restore diplomatic ties. The International Committee of the Red Cross accuses the government of abusing human rights. In August, fuel price hikes incite protests and dozens of activists are arrested. In September, Buddhist monks hold a series of protests, and Aung San Suu Kyi
makes her first public appearance since 2003, leaving her house to greet the monks demonstrating on University Avenue. UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari is allowed to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi. In October, the military cracks down on protests and stations soldiers around Yangon. Thousands of monks are rounded up and arrested. The UN Security Council denounces the crackdown on the protests. In January, state media blame “insurgent destructionists” (implying ethnic rebel groups) for a series of bomb blasts around the country. In April, the government publishes the new constitution, which allocates 25% of parliamentary seats to military members and includes a clause which effectively bars Aung San Suu Kyi from the presidency.

2008 – Cyclone Nargis hits Myanmar in May, and the death toll is reportedly as high as 134,000. The government prevents international aid groups from distributing help to victims. Despite the devastation from the Cyclone, the government insists on holding the planned referendum on the new constitution, reporting impossibly high turnout rates and a 92% approval vote. Aung San Suu Kyi’s house arrest is renewed. In December, the Myanmar government signs a deal with foreign firms to pipe natural gas into China, amid protests by human rights groups.

2009 – In January, Thailand forces out hundreds of Muslim Rohingya refugees fleeing from Myanmar. Myanmar’s government denies this group re-entry, resulting in them being stranded and subsequently rescued from their boats near Indonesia. In April, the NLD states they will participate in the upcoming election if the government frees political prisoners, changes the constitution and allows international observers to watch the elections. In May, the EU extends its sanctions against Myanmar (which began in 2006) but notes that they will be reviewed if the country moves towards democracy. In August, an American man named John Yettaw swims across Inya Lake to get to Aung San Suu Kyi’s house and she is convicted of breaching the conditions of her house arrest for having an uninvited visitor, extending her house arrest by an additional 18 months. In September, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announces her plans to engage with military leaders, and in October, Aung San Suu Kyi begins talks with military leaders and is permitted to meet with Western diplomats.

2010 – In February, NLD vice-chairman Tin Oo, who had spent over a decade in prison or under house arrest, is released. In March, the government announces that election laws have been passed in preparation for the upcoming general elections. The electoral commission is chosen by the junta. The NLD votes to boycott the elections due to the provision barring Aung San Suu Kyi from the presidency, as well as the unfair electoral laws and the continued detention of political prisoners. A splinter group of NLD members who wish to contest the elections forms a new political party, National Democratic Front (NDF). In October, the government changes the country’s flag, national anthem, and official name from the Union of Burma to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

1 International organizations and foreign governments criticized this name change as a dramatic shift being made by a government that was not democratically elected. However, in Burmese, the two names (“Bama byi” or “Burma country” and “Myanma naing-nga” or “Myanmar nation”) have been used interchangeably long before the British adopted the name “Burma”. Additionally,
General elections are held in November and the Union Solidarity and Development Party, the military-backed party, wins a massive victory. Opposition groups report there was widespread fraud and the election is condemned by the international community as a sham. The junta claims that this election marked the transition from a military regime to a civilian-led democracy. Aung San Suu Kyi is released the week after the election.

Transition Period – 2011-2015

2011 – In March, Thein Sein, a retired general known for his moderate views, is sworn in as the new president of the new USDP-led government of Myanmar. In August, President Thein Sein meets with Aung San Suu Kyi in Naypyidaw, and in September, he suspends the construction of a controversial hydroelectric dam (Myitsone) which was being funded by China. These shifts were seen as shifts towards greater governmental openness and respect for public opinion. In October, a general amnesty frees some political prisoners, and new labor laws allow for unions. In November, Aung San Suu Kyi announces that she will stand for election and the NLD will contest the upcoming by-elections. In December, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visits the country, meeting Aung San Suu Kyi and President Thein Sein. The US offers to improve foreign relations with Myanmar if the ongoing democratic reforms continue, a major step after decades of non-engagement. President Thein Sein signs a law allowing for peaceful demonstrations and the NLD re-registers as a political party in preparation of the 2012 by-elections. A truce deal is reached between the government and Shan ethnic rebel groups.

2012 – In January, the Myanmar government signs a ceasefire with Karen ethnic rebel groups. In April, by-elections are held and NLD candidates, including Aung San Suu Kyi, win in a landslide. The EU suspends all non-military sanctions against Myanmar for one year. In 2012, Manmohan Singh visits Myanmar in the first official visit by an Indian prime minister since 1987. In August, President Thein Sein establishes a commission to investigate violence which has broken out between Arakanese Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine state in the west of the country. Thein Sein’s government abolishes pre-publication media censorship, a common practice during the military regime. President Thein Sein also replaces hardliner Information Minister Kyaw Hsan with more moderate Aung Kyi in a cabinet reshuffle, perhaps due to disagreements or splits between hardliners and soft-liners. Former prime minister Khin Nyunt is released from prison. In September, Myanmar removes over 2,000 people (both citizens and foreign nationals) from its blacklist of those not allowed into the country. In November, Jose Manuel Barroso, the European Commission Chief, offers more than $100 million in development aid to Myanmar. Dozens of people are killed in more violence between Buddhists and Muslims in Rakhine state. US President Barack Obama visits Myanmar and offers “the hand of friendship” with the US if Myanmar continues with its democratic reforms.

2013 – In January and February, a standoff occurs between Kachin rebels and the army in Laiza, and eventually China helps to start talks between the groups. In March, riots between

the name Myanmar is considered to be a more inclusive name for ethnic minority groups, because the name Burma shares a name with the majority Bama ethnic group.
Muslims and Buddhists take place in Meiktila and result in the death of at least 10 people. In April, four private daily newspapers appear, breaking a state media monopoly of almost 50 years. In May, President Thein Sein visits Washington.

2014 – In April, 22 people are killed in clashes between the army and ethnic Kachin rebels. In May, the US extends sanctions for a year despite the recent reforms, citing human rights abuses and the army’s continued political and economic influence. In October, 3,000 prisoners are released.

2015 – In February, fighting between the army and Kokang separatists in Shan state results in 50 dead soldiers, leading the government to put Kokang under temporary martial law. The government withdraws temporary voting rights from Muslim Rohingyas in response to protests by Buddhists. In March, a draft ceasefire agreement is signed by the government and sixteen different ethnic rebel groups. In May, more Rohingyas flee the country in flimsy boats and get stranded, leading the UN to criticize ASEAN states who fail to rescue them. In November, general elections are held and the NLD, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, win enough seats to lead the new government. This is widely agreed to be the first true civilian-led government, as these elections were seen as much more free and legitimate than the general elections in 2010.
APPENDIX B:
LIST OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
- Can you speak a little bit about the Roadmap to Democracy that was announced in 2003? Specifically, I'm interested in how Burmese citizens felt about the Roadmap. Were people hopeful about it leading to real change in Myanmar, or did most people think it was a sham? How successful do you feel the Roadmap was?

- What was the political climate like before the Constitutional Referendum in 2008? How did people feel about the new Constitution?

- Related to the Constitution, how did the SPDC develop the Constitution? Were there groups involved in its development other than the SPDC? Did they use constitutions from other countries as a guide for the development of the current constitution? Were there any notable changes made to the Constitution before the Referendum?

- How did you feel about the 2010 elections?

- How has international pressure affected politics in Myanmar? Are there any specific policies (e.g. US sanctions or Chinese business investments) that had a notable effect during the last ten years?

- How did the 2012 by-elections differ from the 2010 elections? Did the by-elections affect the political climate in Myanmar and the way the Burmese people viewed their government?

- Were there any significant political changes that you think affected the 2012 by-elections?

- What was the political climate leading up to the 2015 elections? Were people optimistic or pessimistic about the outcome?

- Why do you think the outcome of the 1990 elections was so different from the outcome of the 2015 elections (i.e. the regime allowing the results to stand in 2015 but not in 1990)?

- Do you think the role of the military will continue in Burmese politics under the new government? Why or why not? What factors do you think will be important for the military to consider leaving politics? Do you think the military will ever fully leave Burmese politics?

- How do you think the new government (the one that came into office on Feb 1) is doing? Are there any positive or negative changes that people are talking about?

- Is it more difficult for women in Myanmar to run for office and get elected than men? What are the barriers facing women in Myanmar who would like to get involved in politics?

- Which political changes have surprised you the most? Why?

- Do you think the political change in Myanmar is genuine? If so, at what point did you feel that change was really happening?

- Do you expect to see any changes to electoral laws or constitutional amendments soon?
- Are there any political changes you hope will happen? If so, what?
- Do you have any predictions for the 2020 general elections?
APPENDIX C

NOTABLE AMERICAN LEGISLATIVE EFFORTS ON MYANMAR, 1988-2002
Table 8: Notable American Legislative Efforts on Myanmar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Sponsor</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H.R. 2655 (101st): International Cooperation Act of 1989</td>
<td>Introduced Jun 15, 1989</td>
<td>Rep. Dante Fascell (D-FL)</td>
<td>Directs President to consider whether the government of Burma “has held free and fair elections and a civilian government has assumed power” when determining whether to provide Burma with assistance and/or funds</td>
<td>Passed House June 29, 1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.Con.Res. 185 (101st): In support of basic human rights and democracy in Burma</td>
<td>Introduced Aug 2, 1989</td>
<td>Rep. Stephen Solarz (D-NY)</td>
<td>Calls upon the Government of Burma to 1) remove all house arrest orders; 2) end martial law; 3) investigate reports of torture; 4) permit opposition parties to freely operate; 5) continue plans to hold elections in 1990. Calls upon 1) all nations to withhold foreign assistance until democratic government takes office and 2) the President, Sec. of States, US Permanent Ambassador to UN and the US Ambassador to Burma to public condemn repression in Burma and encourage free and fair elections</td>
<td>Ordered reported Oct 12, 1989</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued on following page)

1 GovTrack.us. There was a total of 90 bills introduced between 1988-2002, compared to 86 bills introduced between 2003-2010 and 62 bills between 2011-2015. The selection in this table did not include annual bills (such as regularly-occurring appropriations or foreign operations bills), most of which contained earmarks for refugee assistance and scholarships for Burmese citizens.
Table 8 (continued)

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<th>Sponsor</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S. 1467 (103rd): Foreign Assistance Act of 1993</td>
<td>Introduced Sep 16, 1993</td>
<td>Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-RI)</td>
<td>Adds Myanmar to list of countries for which funding is prohibited</td>
<td>Ordered Reported Sep 16, 1993</td>
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Table 8 (continued)

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<th>Sponsor</th>
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<th>Result</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H.R. 4036 (104th): Human Rights, Refugee, and Other Foreign Relations Provisions Act of 1996</td>
<td>Introduced Sep 5, 1996</td>
<td>Rep. Christopher Smith (R-NJ)</td>
<td>Requires Director of the United States Information Agency (USIA) to provide educational and cultural exchange programs to human rights and democracy leaders in countries such as Burma</td>
<td>Enacted – signed by the President Oct 19, 1996</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D

NOTABLE AMERICAN LEGISLATIVE EFFORTS ON MYANMAR, 2003-2010
Table 9: Notable American Legislative Efforts on Myanmar, 2003-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H.Res. 84 (108th): Calling for the immediate intervention in the conflict in Burma, and for other purposes</td>
<td>Introduced Feb 13, 2003</td>
<td>Rep. Joseph Pitts (R-PA)</td>
<td>Calls on the executive branch of the US government and international community to intervene in conflict and protect refugees; to send peacekeepers to Burma to prevent ethnic cleansing; calls on SPDC to allow government based on 1990 election results to form and to release political prisoners</td>
<td>Was not enacted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.R. 2330 (108th): Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003</td>
<td>Introduced Jun 4, 2003</td>
<td>Rep. Tom Lantos (D-CA)</td>
<td>Introduces a ban on imports that support Burma’s military regime; freezing US assets of the Burmese regime; preventing loans or assistance to Burma; expanding the visa ban; condemning the military regime and spreading information about the NLD and ethnic minority groups; supporting democracy activists in Burma</td>
<td>Senate version was S. 1215 sponsored by Mitch McConnell (R-KY). H.R. 2330 was signed by President, enacted July 28, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Res 768 (108th): Calling on the United Nations Security Council to immediately consider and take appropriate action to respond to the growing threat…</td>
<td>Introduced Sep 13, 2004</td>
<td>Rep. Elton Gallegly (R-CA)</td>
<td>The U.N. Security Council should “immediately consider and take appropriate action to respond to the growing threat that the ruling State Peace and Development Council in Burma poses to the Southeast Asia region and to the people of Burma.”</td>
<td>Agreed to (Simple Resolution) on October 7, 2004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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1 GovTrack.us. There was a total of 86 bills introduced between 2003-2010, compared to 90 bills introduced between 1988-2002 and 62 bills between 2011-2015. The selection in this table did not include annual bills (such as regularly-occurring appropriations or foreign operations bills), most of which contained earmarks for refugee assistance and scholarships for Burmese citizens.
Table 9 (continued)

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<tr>
<td>S. 3016 (108th): Asia Freedom Act of 2004</td>
<td>Introduced Nov. 19, 2004</td>
<td>Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY)</td>
<td>To promote regional peace and stability in North and Southeast Asia by 1) improving living standards and economic wellbeing of the people, 2) supporting freedom and human rights, 3) countering terrorism and narcotics, and 3) expanding free markets</td>
<td>Was not enacted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Res. 174 (109th): A resolution recognizing Burmese democracy activist and Nobel Peace Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi as a symbol of the struggle for freedom in Burma</td>
<td>Introduced Jun 16, 2005</td>
<td>Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY)</td>
<td>Recognizes Aung San Suu Kyi as a symbol for freedom in Burma; calls for the immediate and unconditional release of her and other political prisoners; calls on Secretary of State Rice to bring up issues in Burma at upcoming ASEAN forum</td>
<td>Agreed to (Simple Resolution) on June 16, 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.Res. 484 (109th): A resolution expressing the sense of the Senate condemning the military junta in Burma for its recent campaign of terror against ethnic minorities and calling on the United Nations Security Council to adopt immediately a binding non-punitive resolution on Burma</td>
<td>Introduced May 18, 2006</td>
<td>Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY)</td>
<td>1) condemns military regime for terror against ethnic minorities, 2) calls on democracies to work with ASEAN to promote democracy and human rights in Burma; and 3) call on US to pass a resolution in UN Security Council calling for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other prisoners and supporting democracy in Burma</td>
<td>Agreed to (Simple Resolution) on May 18, 2006</td>
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Table 9 (continued)

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<tr>
<td>H.Con.Res. 200 (110th): A concurrent resolution expressing the sense of Congress regarding the immediate and unconditional release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the severely deteriorating human rights situation in Burma</td>
<td>Introduced Aug 2, 2007</td>
<td>Rep Peter King (R-NY)</td>
<td>In light of Saffron Revolution, condemns the crackdown, calls on other countries to stop supporting the Burmese regime, demands political dialogue between parties and the release of prisoners, calls on other nations to tighten sanctions, calls on UN Security Council to pass multilateral sanctions, calls on ASEAN to remove Burma’s membership</td>
<td>Passed House Oct 2, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.Res. 339 (110th): A resolution expressing the sense of the Senate on the situation in Burma</td>
<td>Introduced Oct 1, 2007</td>
<td>Sen. John Kerry (D-MA)</td>
<td>Condemning violence against protestors; calls on PRC and other nations to condemn Myanmar’s actions and stop military assistance; calls for peaceful dialogue between leaders; welcomes ASEAN’s statement on Burma situation; encourages PRC, India, and Russia to modify their policy towards Burma; supports UN mission led by Ibrahim Gambari; calls on government of Burma to lift restrictions on humanitarian aid</td>
<td>Agreed to (Simple Resolution) on Oct 1, 2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>H.R. 3890: (110th): Tom Lantos Block Burmese JADE (Junta’s Anti-Democratic Efforts) Act of 2008</td>
<td>Introduced Oct 18, 2007</td>
<td>Rep. Tom Lantos (D-CA)</td>
<td>Increased sanctions on Burma, including a visa ban, financial sanctions, and banking sanctions; makes amendments to the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003; appoints a Special Representative and Policy Coordinator for Burma; supports a constitutional democracy and NGOs working towards human rights in Burma; calls for a report on who provides military intelligence and arm sales to Burma; reducing SPDC revenue from timber; report on financial assets held by members of the SPDC</td>
<td>Enacted – signed by the President July 29, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.2257 (110th): Burma Democracy Promotion Act of 2007</td>
<td>Introduced Oct 29, 2007</td>
<td>Vice President Joseph Biden (D)</td>
<td>Imposes sanctions on SPDC officials, amends Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003 to prohibit imports of gems and hardwoods, promotes coordinated international effort to restore civilian democratic rule</td>
<td>Was not enacted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.Con.Res. 56 (110th): A concurrent resolution encouraging the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to take action to ensure a peaceful transition to democracy in Burma</td>
<td>Introduced Nov 16, 2007</td>
<td>Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA)</td>
<td>Urges ASEAN to push for peaceful transition to democracy in Burma and to possibly review Burma’s membership</td>
<td>Passed Senate Nov 16, 2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>H.Con.Res. 317 (110th): Condemning the Burmese regime’s undemocratic draft constitution and scheduled referendum</td>
<td>Introduced Mar 14, 2008</td>
<td>Rep. Rush Holt (D-NJ)</td>
<td>Denounces SPDC, urges dialogue, demands release of prisoners, urges for President to call UN Security Council to condemn the referendum and to pass a binding resolution for dialogue, urges President to push for arms embargo, urges ASEAN to get involved</td>
<td>Passed House May 6, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Res. 554 (110th): A resolution expressing the Sense of the Senate on humanitarian assistance to Burma after Cyclone Nargis</td>
<td>Introduced May 7, 2008</td>
<td>Sen John. Kerry (D-MA)</td>
<td>Expresses sympathy and support for Burmese people for Cyclone Nargis, supports President Bush’s decision to provide immediate emergency humanitarian assistance, offers additional funds if necessary, calls on SPDC to lift restrictions on humanitarian assistance</td>
<td>Agreed to (Simple Resolution) on May 7, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Res. 1181 (110th): Expressing condolences and sympathy to the people of Burma for the grave loss of life and vast destruction caused by Cyclone Nargis</td>
<td>Introduced May 8, 2008</td>
<td>Rep. Joseph Crowley (D-NY)</td>
<td>Extends condolences to people of Burma for Cyclone Nargis and vows support, calls on Americans to provide emergency assistance through humanitarian agencies, calls for junta to accept assistance and “demands that the referendum to entrench military rule be called off”</td>
<td>Agreed to (Simple Resolution) May 13, 2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>S.Res. 160 (111th): A resolution condemning the continued detention of Burmese democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and calling on the military regime in Burma to permit a credible and fair election process and the transition to civilian, democratic rule</td>
<td>Introduced Apr 14, 2010</td>
<td>Sen. Judd Gregg (R-NH)</td>
<td>Condemns detention of all political prisoners, calls on regime to engage in dialogue, calls on Secretary of State to consider strengthening sanctions and to engage with other nations and organization to encourage democratic transition and significant constitutional and electoral changes in Burma</td>
<td>Agreed to (Simple Resolution) on May 7, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.Res. 1710 (111th): Calling on the military regime in Burma, the State Peace and Development Council, to immediately recognize the Rohingya people as full and equal citizens of Burma</td>
<td>Introduced Sep 29, 2010</td>
<td>Rep. Christopher Smith (R-NJ)</td>
<td>Calls on SPDC to recognize the Rohingya people as full citizens of Burma and to lift their restrictions on movement, marriage, and access to education; also calls on Governments of Bangladesh and Thailand to stop forcing Rohingya refugees back to Burma and to address living conditions</td>
<td>Was not enacted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.Res. 1677 (111th): Condemning the Burmese regime’s undemocratic elections on November 7, 2010</td>
<td>Introduced Sep 29, 2010</td>
<td>Rep. Donald Manzullo (R-IL)</td>
<td>Resolution “denounces the one-sided, undemocratic, and illegitimate actions of the State Peace and Development Council that seek to legitimize military rule through a flawed election process”</td>
<td>Agreed to (Simple Resolution) on Nov 18, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.Res. 1768 (111th): Welcoming the release of Burmese democracy leader and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi on November 13, 2010 and calling for a continued focus on securing the release of all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience in Burma</td>
<td>Introduced Dec 15, 2010</td>
<td>Rep. Alcee Hastings (D-FL)</td>
<td>Welcomes the release of Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest and calls for the release to be unconditional and final and for the regime to guarantee her security; calls on other governments to strength sanctions against Burma; calls for administration to fully implement the Tom Lantos Block Burmese JADE Act.</td>
<td>Was not enacted</td>
</tr>
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APPENDIX E
NOTABLE AMERICAN LEGISLATIVE EFFORTS ON MYANMAR 2011-2015
Table 10: Notable American Legislative Efforts on Myanmar 2011-2015

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S.Res. 139 (112th): A resolution expressing the sense of the Senate that the President should take certain actions with respect to the Government of Burma</td>
<td>Introduced April 8, 2011</td>
<td>Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN)</td>
<td>Calls on the President to provide Congress with a report of the volume of ships and planes from North Korea to Burma; call for an international investigation of crimes against civilians in Burma; and encourage neighboring countries to establish safe havens for fleeing child soldiers</td>
<td>Was not enacted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.R. 6431 (112th): To provide flexibility with respect to United States support for assistance provided by international financial institutions for Burma</td>
<td>Introduced September 19, 2021</td>
<td>Rep. Edward “Ed” Royce (R-CA)</td>
<td>Since “it is in the national interest of the United States to support assistance for Burma,” the Secretary of the Treasury may provide assistance to Burma</td>
<td>Enacted, signed by the president on October 5, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.Res. 227 (112th): A resolution calling for the protection of the Mekong River Basin and increased United States support for delaying the construction of mainstream dams along the Mekong River</td>
<td>Introduced July 7, 2011</td>
<td>Sen. Jim Webb (D-VA)</td>
<td>Calls on the US members at development banks to support adherence to international environmental standards before allowing financial assistance for hydropower dams on the Mekong River</td>
<td>Ordered Reported November 29, 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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1 GovTrack.us. There was a total of 62 bills between 2011-2015, compared to 90 bills introduced between 1988-2002 and 86 bills introduced between 2003-2010. The selection in this table did not include annual bills (such as regularly-occurring appropriations or foreign operations bills), most of which contained earmarks for refugee assistance and scholarships for Burmese citizens.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S.1885 (113th): Burma Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2013</td>
<td>Introduced December 20, 2013</td>
<td>Sen. Robert “Bob” Menéndez (D-NJ)</td>
<td>Praises the Burmese government for taking concrete steps for setting up civilian oversight, addressing human rights abuses, ending military relations with North Korea, amending the Constitution, promoting peace with ethnic groups, etc.</td>
<td>Died in a previous Congress</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>H.Res.418 (113th): Urging the Government of Burma to end the persecution of the Rohingya people and respect internationally recognized human rights for all ethnic and religious minority groups within Burma</td>
<td>Introduced November 18, 2013</td>
<td>Rep. James “Jim” McGovern (D-MA)</td>
<td>Recognizes the positive Burma has taken “in transitioning from a military dictatorship to a quasi-civilian government” and calls on the Burmese government to end persecution of the Rohingya and to recognize them as an indigenous ethnic groups and as citizens of the country</td>
<td>Agreed to (Simple Resolution) on May 7, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.Res.586 (113th): A resolution calling on the Government of Burma to develop a non-discriminatory and comprehensive solution that addresses Rakhine State’s needs for peace, security, harmony, and development under equitable and just application of the rule of law</td>
<td>Introduced November 20, 2014</td>
<td>Sen. Robert “Bob” Menéndez (D-NJ)</td>
<td>Calls for the Burmese government to create a solution to the conflict in Rakhine state, allows Doctors without Borders to work in the state, end persecution against the Rohingya, redraft the Citizenship Law of 1982 to allow Rohingya’s right to self-identification, allow an international investigation into the violence occurring in Rakhine state in 2012, call on regional governments to respect non-refoulement</td>
<td>Ordered Reported December 3, 2014</td>
</tr>
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22 This bill is not the first U.S. bill to mention the Rohingya people. The first bill listed on GovTrack.us which refers to the Rohingya is S.Res.234 from the 103rd Congress in 1994. This simple resolution states that, among other human rights violations, “reports have indicated that some Rohingya refugees located in Bangladesh have been returned to Burma against their will” and calls on the U.S. government to “investigate claims of forced repatriation of Rohingya refugees and encourage adequate monitoring to prevent Burmese refugees from being repatriated against their will.” There has been a total of 41 U.S. bills mentioning the Rohingya, and 38 of the 41 were introduced in 2010 and later.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S.Res.116 (114th): A resolution providing for free and fair elections in Burma</td>
<td>Introduced March 26, 2015</td>
<td>Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC)</td>
<td>Calls on the President and Secretary of state to support efforts to reform the 2008 Burmese Constitution, support fair and free elections in Burma, express solidarity with the UN mechanisms for investigating violations of human rights, ensure that the Union Election Commission function in a fair and impartial manner, delay normalizing relations if the Tatmadaw undermines free and fair elections, and condemns human rights abuse</td>
<td>Died in a previous Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.Res. 320 (114th): A resolution congratulating the people of Burma on their commitment to peaceful elections</td>
<td>Introduced November 19, 2015</td>
<td>Sen. John McCain (R-AZ)</td>
<td>Congratulates the people of Burma, recognizes the NLD’s victory as the will of the Burmese people, calls on the USDP to undertake a peaceful transfer of power, recognizes Burma’s “important progress towards democratization”</td>
<td>Agreed to (Simple Resolution) on December 16, 2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>