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Old and New Competition in Myanmar's Electoral Politics

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Electoral politics in Myanmar has become more active and competitive since 2018. With polls set for next year, the country has seen mergers among ethnic political parties and the establishment of new national parties.
- The ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) party faces more competition than in the run up to the 2015 polls. Then only the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) represented a serious possible electoral rival.
- The NLD enjoys the dual advantage of the star power of its chair State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and its status as the incumbent ruling party.
- The USDP, ethnic political parties, and new national parties are all potential contenders in the general elections due in late 2020. Among them, only ethnic political parties may pose a challenge to the ruling NLD.

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INTRODUCTION

The National League for Democracy (NLD) party government under Presidents U Htin Kyaw and U Win Myint¹ and State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been in power since March 2016, after it won Myanmar's November 2015 polls in a landslide. Four years later, the country eagerly awaits its next general elections, due in late 2020. Rival political parties, new and old, have been gearing up for those elections since mid-2018. Competition for voter support grew more intense in 2019, and the ruling party has responded to this development.

The ruling NLD and millions of its supporters do not believe that they need seriously reckon with most of the other parties—both old and new—on Myanmar's political landscape at this point. This belief is largely due to the continued popularity of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. However, that landscape has changed significantly in the past few years, and some parties have emerged as potential contenders that the NLD must take into consideration if it wants to repeat its landslide victory next year.

This article assesses the electoral potential of three groups of such contenders and their trajectories. These are the former ruling party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), which posits itself as *the* opposition; ethnic political parties, many of which were once allies of the NLD but are increasingly estranged from the ruling party and aware of the need to stand on their own; and “new” parties established by veteran politicians, dissidents, and former military officers, many of whom were also allies of the NLD in the past.

The NLD faces more competition than before. Among the three sets of challengers, only ethnic parties have the potential to pose obstacles to the ruling party's winning another landslide victory, dominating the parliament, and forming a government. However, even that potential is not strong enough to threaten the NLD.

MYANMAR'S ELECTORAL SYSTEM

A notable feature of the Myanmar electoral landscape is the large number of political parties. Ninety-three, thirty-seven² and ninety-one parties contested the general elections of

1990,³ 2010 and 2015, respectively. Close to or even more than a hundred parties will enter races for the next polls.

Myanmar uses a first-past-the post system in electing the legislature that in turn elects the executive. Constituencies are single-member. The 664-member Union parliament (Pyidaungsu Hluttaw) is bicameral and includes the 440-member lower house (Pyithu Hluttaw) and the 224-member upper house (Amyotha Hluttaw). The lower house has 330 elected members and 110 seats occupied by appointees of the military. The upper house has 168 elected members, and 56 seats reserved for such appointees.

Following a general election, when a new parliament meets, three colleges comprised of elected lower house members, elected upper house members, and military representatives in both houses, respectively, elect one presidential candidate each, in a single-round system in which a plurality of votes is sufficient to win. The Union parliament then meets in joint session and elects, again in a single-round secret ballot vote, one of these candidates president, and the other two first vice president and second vice president, in outcomes corresponding to the number of votes obtained.⁴

The military's candidate will thus certainly occupy at least one of the two vice-presidencies. Assuming that all 330 and 168 elected seats in the lower and upper houses respectively are filled after the completion of voting in the general election,⁵ a civilian political party must have the support of 166 lower house members and 85 upper house members to send two of its candidates into the balloting by the joint session of the Union parliament. However, having these numbers is insufficient to ensure victory in the Union parliament's voting for the president and two vice presidents because military members of the bicameral parliament also participate in that voting. Therefore, a civilian party must have the support of 333 members of the combined Union parliament to make sure that its choice is elected president — the head of state who possesses enormous powers of nomination in the executive branch and in the selection of chief ministers of regions and states. In 2015, the NLD won 255 seats in the lower house and 135 seats in the upper house. It thus controlled 390 seats in the Union parliament. All comfortably above the necessary thresholds.

Witnessing the NLD win 43 out of the 44 seats that it contested in by-elections held in April 2012, the USDP-dominated parliament considered introducing proportional representation — an election system that allocates seats to political parties in proportion to their share of votes, often said to be more suitable for societies such as Myanmar⁶ — but the USDP’s electoral engineering did not materialize.⁷ The party reiterated its desire for a proportional representation system in September 2019.⁸ The use of a first-past-the-post system and a number of other factors meant that ethnic minority parties fared disproportionately badly relative to larger national parties such as the USDP and the NLD in both the 2010 and the 2015 polls.⁹ Many members of minorities deem those large parties to be representatives of the Bamar majority and often label them Bamar parties.

Apparently convinced that it would win again, the NLD stated in September 2019 that it would not seek electoral allies in the 2020 polls. It sought to form a strong and stable government without needing to negotiate with one or more parties to form a coalition.¹⁰ The NLD’s declaration of this policy has led to increasingly open jostling in anticipation of the next polls. Many former “allies” of the party — including parties, politicians, dissidents, and former military officers — have resolved to stand without forming formal or informal alliances with the NLD or formed new political parties. This new dynamic of party formation has created an electoral domain in Myanmar in which the ruling party finds three groups of contender parties ranged against it.

THREE GROUPS OF CONTENDERS

The USDP

After winning in a landslide in November 2010, in polls from which the NLD abstained, the USDP occupied between 55 and 60 per cent of the total seats in both Union and region or state parliaments between 2011 and 2016. Combined with the military bloc, the USDP — actually a spin-off of the previous military regime — could draw on the voting power of between 80 and 85 per cent of members of parliament. However, the party’s share of seats in parliament fell from close to 60 per cent in 2011–2016 to a little more than 6 per cent after the 2015 elections. Nevertheless, it still poses a challenge to the NLD because it enjoys

the support of the military bloc in parliament. Together, the USDP and that bloc hold more than 31 per cent of the total number of parliamentary seats.

Since transferring power to the NLD in March 2016, the USDP has posited itself as *the* opposition and has engaged in criticism of the NLD for almost everything that the ruling party has done. Issues about which the USDP, either alone or jointly with military representatives and smaller like-minded parties,¹¹ has opposed the NLD include the formation of investigative commissions on Rakhine state,¹² enactment of the revised Children's Rights Law,¹³ constitutional reform,¹⁴ and the alleged lack of independence of the Union Election Commission.¹⁵ At least since October 2018, the USDP has frequently stated that it is ready for a come-back,¹⁶ although the party does not explain how it would manage to achieve that.

Although it is not easy to know the extent of support for the USDP among voters, it is clear that the party cannot rival the NLD, to judge from the way in which the NLD pushed it from power. That said, by more frequently joining hands with the military and other political allies, the USDP may still pose an obstacle to the NLD at least in two ways, and within and outside parliament. First, closer to the 2020 polls, the USDP will engage in contentious politics against the ruling party by adopting right-wing, xenophobic perspectives — in relation to Rakhine state, the proposed repatriation of Rohingyas, and the international community's views on this crisis. In fact, it has increasingly practiced such politics since 2018. The proceedings against Myanmar initiated by The Gambia at the International Court of Justice,¹⁷ along with judicial processes under way at the International Criminal Court¹⁸ and in an Argentine court,¹⁹ will provide fuel for such agitation. Second, the USDP will attack the independence of the Union Election Commission and question the integrity of the 2020 polls; in fact, it has recently started targeting the commission and alleging lack of independence.

Despite these attacks upon and positioning against the NLD, the USDP is not in a position to actually challenge and unseat the ruling party in the next general elections. Still, analysis of the role of the USDP must consider the power of the military bloc in parliament, which may help the opposition party take a confrontational approach in an NLD-dominated parliament and toward an NLD government and other bodies.

Ethnic Political Parties

In 1983,²⁰ Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Bamar, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan — the members of Myanmar's eight major ethnic groups²¹ — constituted 1.4, 0.4, 6.2, 2.2, 69.0, 2.4, 4.5, and 8.5 per cent²² of the total population of the country, respectively. Combined, the seven principal non-Bamar minorities made up a little more than a quarter of the population, and seven states bear their names.²³

Those seven groups are often collectively considered a *taingyintha* (native or indigenous) bloc in broad analyses of Myanmar's politics, which frame that politics in terms of a Bamar-majority-versus-ethnic minorities conflict.²⁴ In fact, relations between the Bamar-dominated state and the various minorities are not uniform.²⁵ Likewise, the politics of ethnicity and identity in contemporary Myanmar in the late 2010s is markedly different from that before or during the second half of the twentieth century²⁶ when most of Myanmar's ethnic insurgencies originated.²⁷

There is now a political ideology — agreed to in principle by various political and ethnic groups including the Bamar, the government, and the military — that holds that the minorities should be masters of the political fates of the seven states named after them. This ideology has become the foundational ideology of future federalism in Myanmar.²⁸ It seems to follow from that assumption that most, if not all, seats in the seven states should go to members of ethnic political parties and that the chief ministers of the states should also be leaders or members of their respective ethnic groups or of ethnic political parties.

However, ethnic political parties have in general underperformed. In both 2010 and 2015 polls, ethnic political parties' record was dismal, except in Rakhine and Shan states. Overall, they won only 10.5 per cent, 13.4 per cent, and 13.2 per cent of seats in the lower house of the Union parliament, in the upper house, and in region or state parliaments, respectively, in 2010. They won 11.5 per cent, 11.3 per cent, and 12.5 per cent of those seats, respectively, in 2015.

Some ethnic political parties, such as the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) and the Arakan League for Democracy (ALD), were old allies of the NLD, while many now-prominent ethnic political parties, such as the Rakhine Nationalities Development

Party (RNDP)/Arakan National Party (ANP),²⁹ are recent arrivals on the electoral scene. Four contentious issues divide the NLD on the one hand, and ethnic groups and ethnic political parties on the other hand. The first concerns the Union president's right to appoint chief ministers of regions and states, even when ethnic political parties win majorities or pluralities of seats at the regional or state level, as the ANP and the SNLD did in 2015.³⁰

The second issue relates to the NLD refusal to consider coalition government — a policy about which Daw Aung San Suu Kyi herself expressed ambiguity and uncertainty in 2013, amidst forecasts of a potential coalition after the 2015 polls.³¹ The NLD has recently confirmed this policy, which has left its old ethnic allies such as the ALD dissatisfied.³² However, aware of declining support for the NLD in states dominated by minority population, the party has not ruled out the formation of a parliamentary coalition after the 2020 polls.³³

The third issue dividing the NLD and the ethnic parties is related to the former's failure to propose recommendations on federalism to the Union of Myanmar Constitution (2008) Amendment Joint Committee (UMCAJC). This failure has given ethnic political parties the chance to confirm their accusations that the NLD is a Bamar party and to tell ethnic-minority voters to vote for ethnic political parties instead.³⁴ Related to this, the fourth contentious issue is the increasing reliance of the NLD on the figure of Aung San Suu Kyi's father and national hero Aung San, who was assassinated in July 1947 on the eve of independence in January 1948. Despite protests from ethnic groups, the NLD government named a bridge in Mon state after Aung San in 2017,³⁵ and it erected Aung San statues in Kachin state in 2017³⁶ and Kayah state in 2019³⁷ and attempted to erect another in Chin State in 2019.³⁸

There were 55 ethnic political parties, out of a total 95 political parties in the country, as of September 2018. Ethnic political parties assume that their quest for more closely proportionate electoral representation was not successful in 2015 because several ethnic political parties representing single ethnic groups ran against one another in many constituencies. They have tried to overcome this problem in two ways. First, three Kachin, two Kayah, four Kayin, three Chin, and three Mon ethnic political parties have merged into single parties with the hope of securing more seats as single-ethnicity fronts.³⁹ Second, these newly merged ethnic political parties regularly meet one another, and they also hold

discussions with broader alliances, such as the United Nationalities Alliances and the Nationalities Brotherhood Federation,⁴⁰ with the goal of a broader multi-ethnic front against the NLD.

Whether these strategies will work is difficult to say because ethnic political party mergers are a novel feature of electoral politics of Myanmar. But, ethnic identity politics undeniably play a more important role in ethnic areas than in Bamar-dominated areas. So, agitating against the NLD by playing the ethnic card may be beneficial for some ethnic political parties in some constituencies — a possibility that merits watching for in 2020.

Other “Democratic” Parties

The most notable new “democratic” national parties that have joined the electoral contest since 2018 are the Union Betterment Party (UBP) and the People’s Party (PP). Thura Shwe Mann and Ko Ko Gyi, respectively, chair these parties.

Thura Shwe Mann was the third-ranking member of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) junta that transferred power to the pseudo-civilian President Thein Sein in 2011. The latter had been the fourth-ranking member of the junta before becoming the chair of the USDP and leading the party to victory in the 2010 polls. Tipped as the likely president in the civilian government that was to take power after those polls, Thura Shwe Mann became instead speaker of the lower house. He gradually developed a friendship and “alliance” with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi after she became a member of and chaired the Rule of Law Committee of the lower house in 2012.⁴¹ Partly because of his alliance with their arch-enemy and partly because of in-fighting within the USDP between President Thein Sein and Speaker Thura Shwe Mann, the politically colourful Thura Shwe Mann was purged from the chairmanship of the USDP in August 2015 — just three months before the year’s general elections.⁴² Thura Shwe Mann ran in those elections but lost to an NLD candidate. However, he became chairman of the powerful Legal Affairs and Special Issues Assessment Commission of the Union parliament — a position that he held until establishing the UBP in February 2019.⁴³

U Ko Ko Gyi is a prominent former political prisoner who was the number two in 88 Generation (Peace & Open Society) — arguably the second most influential network-type

political movement after the NLD until party politics and elections gradually gained traction after 2010.⁴⁴ U Ko Ko Gyi joined the NLD in July 2015 with the hope of running as one of the party's candidates in the 2015 elections, but this proved vain. His rejection led him to announce that he would establish his own political party,⁴⁵ but he was only able to reach that goal in August 2018, amidst controversy over the name of the party⁴⁶ and administrative delays.

Both the UBP and the PP are “democratic”, according to their manifestos.⁴⁷ Whereas the UBP is an ex-generals' party,⁴⁸ the PP is a civilian party. They are both national parties without explicitly ethnic agendas for the Bamar or other groups, and they join the collection of parties, which includes the USDP, that have no option but to position themselves as competitors to the NLD. Because of the renown enjoyed by Thura Shwe Mann and U Ko Ko Gyi and the two men's media-friendly personalities, the UBP and the PP receive better media coverage than other national parties, both new and old. They are active in commenting on politics, but it is still unclear what they will do next year and whether they will win significant shares of seats. However, it is difficult to expect a substantial win on the part of the UBP or the PP because the NLD both continues to draw on the star power of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and enjoys the power of incumbency.

There has been criticism — most commonly from a few commentators, activists, and analysts — of the questionable record or conduct of some NLD officials during the party's time in power. But it does not follow that the ruling party's supporters subscribe to this criticism. Even if some voters go along, they do not necessarily trust other parties or lean toward voting the NLD out.

Time-series data on and analyses of voting behaviour and patterns of the Myanmar electorate are still unavailable. There have simply been too few general elections since the post-2010 transition. Although the NLD won in a landslide in the 1990 elections, as in the 2015 elections, 30-year-old data may not be helpful in analysis of contemporary politics. That earlier election was for a unicameral parliament, and Myanmar has undergone significant political and social changes, making it difficult to compare 2015 with 1990. Hence, the 2020 polls will be a good litmus test of the popularity of the NLD and of the

challenge posed by its would-be competitors. It will also hopefully reveal new aspects of party politics, voting behaviour, and political development in the country.

CONCLUSION

Myanmar's electoral landscape after 2010 centred on the dichotomy of the USDP in power and the NLD in opposition. The NLD came to power in 2016, and the USDP now positions itself as the opposition. However, the electoral landscape has grown more crowded and competitive with strategic mergers among ethnic political parties and the establishment of new national parties such as the UBP and the PP. The popularity of the NLD has also decreased among voters in ethnic states, although across the country as a whole it is most likely to remain at the same level or even higher because the party is in power.

Among the three sets of contenders to the NLD, the ethnic political parties alone have potential to pose a serious challenge and to snatch seats in ethnic areas where the NLD won in 2015, but whether they will win enough parliamentary seats to lead the ruling party to seek a coalition is a difficult question. The NLD will only be pragmatic and form a coalition under two conditions.

The first would be the party's failure to win the majority of seats in parliament. The second would be a situation in which one or more other political parties, ethnic or otherwise, had the required number of seats to offer the NLD in a situation in which the latter party did not have enough seats to prevail in balloting for the president in the Union parliament. The number of "surplus" seats that the NLD won in the 2015 elections makes the second scenario quite a remote possibility.

¹ The NLD-dominated parliament elected President U Htin Kyaw in March 2016. Upon U Htin Kyaw's resignation in March 2018, the parliament elected President U Win Myint, who remains in office until now.

² This number was significantly lower than the comparable figures for 1990 and 2015 because the NLD and several democratic parties boycotted the 2010 elections and still other actors previously remained in a "wait-and-see" position before deciding to establish parties.

³ The NLD won the 1990 elections in a landslide, but the military junta that took power in a coup in 1988 broke its promise of transferring power to the election winner. See James F. Guyot, "Myanmar in 1990: The Unconsummated Election", *Asian Survey* 31, 2 (1991): 205–211.

⁴ Law Relating to the Election of the President of the Union and Vice Presidents, Section 4.

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- ⁵ Elections for seven lower house constituencies in Shan state were not held in 2015 for security reasons.
- ⁶ Arend Lijphart, “Constitutional Choice for New Democracies”, *Journal of Democracy* 2, 1 (1991): 72–84. However, proportional representation does not always produce optimal results and may even have outcomes that lead to conflict. See Joel Selway and Kharis Templeman, “The Myth of Consociationalism? Conflict Reduction in Divided Societies”, *Comparative Political Studies* 45, 12 (2012): 1542–1571.
- ⁷ Hnin Yadana Zaw, “Lower House Chairman Rejects PR System Proposal”, *The Irrawaddy*, 14 November 2014 (<https://www.irrawaddy.com/election/news/lower-house-chairman-rejects-pr-system-proposal>, downloaded 20 November 2019).
- ⁸ Htoo Thant, “USDP to Seek ‘Proportional Representation’ If It Wins in 2020”, *The Myanmar Times*, 18 September 2019 (<https://www.mmtimes.com/news/usdp-seek-proportional-representation-if-it-wins-2020.html>, downloaded 24 November 2019).
- ⁹ Tin Maung Maung Than, “Myanmar’s General Election 2015: Change Was the Name of the Game”, *Southeast Asian Affairs* 2016: 241–264, and Ardeth Thawngmung, “The Myanmar Elections 2015: Why the National League for Democracy Won a Landslide Victory”, *Critical Asian Studies* 48, 1 (2016): 132–142.
- ¹⁰ Swe Lei Mon, “Ruling Party Nixes Coalition Govt in 2020”, *The Myanmar Times*, 23 September 2020 (<https://www.mmtimes.com/news/ruling-party-nixes-coalition-govt-2020.html>, downloaded 24 November 2019).
- ¹¹ The 25 such parties that have joined with the USDP and issued statements critical of the NLD include the National Unity Party, the National Democratic Front, and the National Development Party. Most of these parties did not win a single seat in the 2015 elections although some of them had done so in previous elections.
- ¹² San Yamin Aung, “USDP Refuses to Make Recommendations to Arakan State Advisory Commission”, *The Irrawaddy*, 15 May 2017 (<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/usdp-refuses-to-make-recommendations-to-arakan-state-advisory-commission.html>, downloaded 25 November 2019), and San Yamin Aung, “USDP-Led Alliance Protests Rakhine Investigation Commission”, *The Irrawaddy*, 7 August 2018 (<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/usdp-led-alliance-protests-rakhine-investigation-commission.html>, downloaded 25 November 2019).
- ¹³ Myat Thura, “USDP Stages Protest over Children’s Law”, *The Myanmar Times*, 25 June 2019 (<https://www.mmtimes.com/news/usdp-stages-protest-over-childrens-law.html>, downloaded 26 November 2019).
- ¹⁴ Kyaw Ko Ko, “USDP Rallies in Mandalay Against Amendment”, *The Myanmar Times*, 18 July 2019 (<https://www.mmtimes.com/news/usdp-rallies-mandalay-against-amendment.html>, downloaded 26 November 2019).
- ¹⁵ Moe Moe, “Election Commission Dismisses USDP Criticisms”, *The Irrawaddy*, 12 June 2019 (<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/election-commission-dismisses-usdp-criticisms.html>, downloaded 25 November 2019).
- ¹⁶ Naw Betty Han, “Opposition Party Says It’s Ready to Return to Power”, *The Myanmar Times*, 30 October 2018 (<https://www.mmtimes.com/news/opposition-party-says-its-ready-return-power.html>, downloaded 25 November 2019).
- ¹⁷ International Court of Justice, “Press Release: The Republic of The Gambia Institutes Proceedings against the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and Asks the Court to Indicate Provisional Measures”, 11 November 2019 (<https://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/178/178-20191111-PRE-01-00-EN.pdf>, downloaded 26 November 2019).
- ¹⁸ International Criminal Court, “Press Release: ICC Judges Authorise Opening of An Investigation into the Situation in Bangladesh/Myanmar”, 14 November 2019 (<https://www.icc-cpi.int/Pages/item.aspx?name=pr1495>, downloaded 26 November 2019).
- ¹⁹ Joshua Carroll, “Lawsuit: Aung San Suu Kyi ‘Committed Crimes’ Against Rohingya”, *Al Jazeera*, 15 November 2019 (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/lawsuit-aung-san-suu-kyi-committed-crimes-rohingya-191114171314827.html>, downloaded 27 November 2019).

²⁰ There was a 31-year gap between the second-last census in 1983 and the last census in 2014. Because of perceived sensitivity around the politics of numbers and ethnicity, the ethnicity data from the 2014 census are yet to be released as of late 2019. For details, see Jane M. Ferguson, “Who’s Counting? Ethnicity, Belonging, and the National Census in Burma/Myanmar”, *Bijdragen Tot De Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 171, 1 (2015): 1–28, and Mary P. Callahan, “Distorted, Dangerous Data? *Lumyo* in the 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census”, *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 32, 2 (2017): 452–478.

²¹ There are 127 sub-groups listed under the eight groups, making the total official number of ethnic groups 135.

²² These percentages do not add up to 100 because they exclude peoples of non-native origin and ancestry such as Chinese and Indians.

²³ In contrast, there is no “ethnic state” for the Bamar majority, and seven regions are Bamar-dominated: Yangon, Mandalay, Sagaing, Magway, Ayeyarwady, Tanintharyi and Bago.

²⁴ Josef Silverstein, *Burmese Politics: The Dilemma of National Unity* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1980), and Matthew J. Walton, “The ‘Wages of Burman-ness:’ Ethnicity and Burman Privilege in Contemporary Myanmar”, *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 43, 1 (2013): 1–27.

²⁵ Mary P. Callahan, *Political Authority in Burma's Ethnic Minority States: Devolution, Occupation, and Coexistence* (Washington D.C.: East-West Center, 2007).

²⁶ Ian Holliday, “Ethnicity and Democratization in Myanmar”, *Asian Journal of Political Science* 18, 2 (2010): 111–128.

²⁷ Robert H. Taylor, “Do States Make Nations? The Politics of Identity in Myanmar Revisited”, *South East Asia Research* 13, 3 (2005): 261–286, and David I. Steinberg, “The Problem of Democracy in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar: Neither Nation-State nor State-Nation?” *Southeast Asian Affairs* 2012: 220–237.

²⁸ Michael Siegner, *In Search of the Panglong Spirit: The Role of Federalism in Myanmar’s Peace Discourse* (Yangon: Hanns Seidel Foundation Myanmar Office, 2019)

²⁹ The RNDP, which only registered before the 2010 polls and won 16 out of 29 lower and upper house seats in the state, and the Arakan League for Democracy (ALD), which won 11 seats in the 1990 polls for a unicameral parliament, merged into the ANP in 2014. The party was the biggest winner in Rakhine state in the 2015 polls. However, the ALD faction left the ANP in 2016 and reconstituted itself under the same name, while the RNDP faction has kept the name ANP.

³⁰ Moe Myint, “Ethnic Parties Left Hanging on the Telephone for NLD Coalition Offer”, *The Irrawaddy*, 12 November 2015 (<https://www.irrawaddy.com/election/news/ethnic-parties-left-hanging-on-the-telephone-for-nld-coalition-offer>, downloaded 30 November 2019), and Kyaw Phone Kyaw, “NLD Goes It Alone, Raising Ethnic Party Ire”, *Frontier*, 2 May 2016 (<https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/nld-goes-it-alone-raising-ethnic-party-ire>, downloaded 30 November 2019).

³¹ Radio Free Asia (Burmese), “၀ါၼ်းၼ်းၼ်းအစိုးရၼ်းၼ်းၼ်း NLD သေဘာထား

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(<https://www.rfa.org/burmese/news/nld-cec-dassk-state-05082013231131.html>, downloaded 26 November 2019).

³² Ye Mon, “No Deal: NLD Prepares to Go It Alone in 2020”, *Frontier*, 28 October 2019 (<https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/no-deal-nld-prepares-to-go-it-alone-in-2020>, downloaded 20 November 2019).

³³ BBC (Burmese), “အန္တိယီ တိုၼ်းၼ်းၼ်းသးၼ်းၼ်းၼ်း၊ ၂၀၂၀ ဝဲၼ်းၼ်းၼ်းၼ်း

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Coalition], 25 September 2019 (<https://www.bbc.com/burmese/burma-49809629>, downloaded 20 November 2019).

- ³⁴ Nyi Nyi Kyaw, “Democracy First, Federalism Next? The Constitutional Reform Process in Myanmar”, *ISEAS Perspective* 93/2019, 9 September 2019 (https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2019_71.pdf, downloaded 25 November 2019).
- ³⁵ Htet Naing Zaw, “Lower House Names Mon State Bridge After Gen Aung San Despite Protests”, *The Irrawaddy*, 15 March 2017 (<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/politics/lower-house-names-mon-state-bridge-gen-aung-san-despite-protests.html>, downloaded 30 November 2019).
- ³⁶ Nan Lwin Hnin Pwint, “General Aung San Statue Unveiled in Kachin State amid Controversy”, *The Irrawaddy*, 13 February 2017 (<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/general-aung-san-statue-unveiled-in-kachin-state-amid-controversy.html>, downloaded 30 November 2019).
- ³⁷ Phyothiha Cho, “Karenni Activists Get 6 months for Insulting Dignity of State Officials in Aung San Statue Protest”, *Myanmar Now*, 13 November 2019 (<https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/karenni-activists-get-6-months-for-insulting-dignity-of-state-officials-in-aung-san-statue>, downloaded 30 November 2019).
- ³⁸ Wai Mar Tun, “Plan to Build Statue of Myanmar Independence Leader Angers Chin Ethnic Group”, *Radio Free Asia*, 17 October 2019 (<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/plan-to-build-statue-10172019174239.html>, downloaded 30 November 2019).
- ³⁹ Chan Thar and Khin Moh Moh Lwin, “‘We Merged and We Won’ - Ethnic Parties Set Aside Differences to Claw Back Seats from NLD”, *Myanmar Now*, 13 November 2019 (<https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/we-merged-and-we-won-ethnic-parties-set-aside-differences-to-claw-back-seats-from-nld>, downloaded 29 November 2019).
- ⁴⁰ Mon News Agency, “၅ ဂျပန်ယူ ဝေါင်းစည်းဖွဲ့စည်းပေးပို့ တိုင်းရင်းသားပါတီများ ဝေကြံဆုံဆွေးနွေးခြင်းမေးဖမ်းစီမံ” [Merged Ethnic Political Parties from 5 States Finish Meeting and Discussion], 6 September 2019 (<https://www.bnionline.net/mm/news-67883>, downloaded 20 November 2019).
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- ⁴⁴ Min Ko Naing is the leader of the movement; he has not entered party and electoral politics. Student activists and dissidents from the 88 Generation joined hands with the NLD in demanding constitutional reform in 2014 and “campaigned” for the NLD in their individual capacities in 2015.
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- ⁴⁸ There is another ex-generals’ party under the name of Democratic Party of National Politics (DPNP), registered in May 2019. It seems to take a nationalist stance. But, like that of the UBP and the PP, the DPNP’s programming remains unclear.

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