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MAKING SENSE OF THE ELECTION
RESULTS IN MYANMAR'S RAKHINE
AND SHAN STATES

SU-ANN OH

ISEAS YUSOF ISHAK
INSTITUTE

Trends in Southeast Asia

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FOREWORD

The economic, political, strategic and cultural dynamism in Southeast Asia has gained added relevance in recent years with the spectacular rise of giant economies in East and South Asia. This has drawn greater attention to the region and to the enhanced role it now plays in international relations and global economics.

The sustained effort made by Southeast Asian nations since 1967 towards a peaceful and gradual integration of their economies has had indubitable success, and perhaps as a consequence of this, most of these countries are undergoing deep political and social changes domestically and are constructing innovative solutions to meet new international challenges. Big Power tensions continue to be played out in the neighbourhood despite the tradition of neutrality exercised by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

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Making Sense of the Election Results in Myanmar's Rakhine and Shan States

By Su-Ann Oh

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This paper examines why ethnic parties did well in Rakhine and Shan States despite the fact that the National League for Democracy (NLD) was given a manifest mandate by the Myanmar electorate to represent its interests nationwide.
- In Rakhine State, the electorate chose the Arakan National Party (ANP) over the other parties because of the fear that their cultural identity and right to govern themselves are threatened by Bamar political and cultural hegemony and Muslim/South Asian encroachment from the western border. Moreover, they believe that the ANP are more likely than the NLD or the USDP to look out for their economic and social interests. Most importantly, the inter-religious violence in 2012 afforded Rakhine nationalist politicians the opportunity to present themselves as the legitimate representatives of the Buddhist Rakhine population.
- The diversity of political representation (ethnic and otherwise) in the Shan State election results needs to be understood in the light of subnational administrative systems and competing regulatory authorities (many of which are not sanctioned by law or by the Constitution). The former includes Shan State and self-administered areas while the latter is composed of non-state armed groups and militias.
- In Shan State, excluding the self-administered areas, the vote was split between the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) and the NLD. This was the only state/region where the USDP won the most number of seats.

- Given the lack of available data, the best explanation that can be offered at present is that the combination of non-state armed ethnic group fighting, recent ceasefire agreements, and economic development of places such as the self-administered areas and urban centres influenced Shan State voters to choose the USDP.
- The results of the election for ethnic affairs ministers approximate those of the nationwide results. Like the national and regional election results, the Rakhine as well as ethnic groups in Shan State voted for candidates from ethnic parties, indicating that the agenda of these ethnic parties is particularly important for those populations.
- The nature of electoral politics in Myanmar is shaped by ethnic conflict, armed and otherwise. This has a bearing on the peace process, particularly since the plan for peace involves armed groups joining the political process as political parties and winning seats in elections to govern the administrative structure set out by the 2008 Constitution.
- However, before this can happen, there needs to be: (1) an expansion of the responsibilities and powers of state and region governments vis-à-vis the central government; (2) an agreement on how governance structures set up by the non-state armed groups will relate to structures sanctioned by the Constitution; and (3) strategic and political steps taken by the NLD to reconcile with the army, the various non-stated armed groups, militias and ethnic communities.

Making Sense of the Election Results in Myanmar's Rakhine and Shan States

By Su-Ann Oh¹

INTRODUCTION

The general election held on 8 November 2015 saw the National League for Democracy (NLD), headed by Aung San Suu Kyi, sweeping the board and taking 77 per cent of all available seats. Trailing behind in second place, the military-created Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won 10.2 per cent of the seats available. In third and fourth place were two ethnic parties, the Arakan National Party (ANP) with 3.9 per cent of the total seats available and the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) with 3.5 per cent (see Table 1). Out of the twenty-three parties that won seats, seventeen were ethnic political parties (parties in bold in Table 1) but they only gleaned 12 per cent of the available seats.

Given that Myanmar's citizens overwhelmingly chose the NLD rather than ethnic parties to represent their interests in both the central and regional parliaments, this paper looks specifically at why the ethnic parties did well in Rakhine and Shan States.² A closer study of the results shows that:

¹ Su-Ann Oh is Visiting Fellow at the ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore. She would like to thank Trends in Southeast Asia editors and reviewers for their help in editing and improving the draft of this paper.

² See Robert Taylor, "Fog of Ethnicity Weighs on Myanmar's Future", *Nikkei Asian Review*, 4 December 2015 <<http://asia.nikkei.com/Viewpoints/Viewpoints/Fog-of-ethnicity-weighs-on-Myanmar-s-future?page=1>> (accessed

Table 1: Composition of National and State/Division Parliaments

Party	Total	Parliament		State/Division Parliament	
		Lower House	Upper House	State/Division	Ethnic Affairs Minister
National League for Democracy (NLD)	886	255	135	475	21
Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)	118	30	11	74	2
Arakan National Party (ANP)	45	12	10	22	1
<i>Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD)</i>	40	12	3	25	
<i>Ta'ang (Palaung) National Party</i>	11	3	2	7	
<i>Pa-O National Organization (PNO)</i>	10	3	1	6	
Zomi Congress for Democracy	6	2	2	2	
<i>Lisu National Development Party (LNDP)</i>	5	2		2	1
Kachin State Democracy Party	4	1		3	
Mon National Party	3		1	2	
<i>Wa Democratic Party</i>	3	1		2	
<i>Kokang Democracy and Unity Party</i>	2	1		1	
<i>Lahu National Development Party</i>	2			1	1
Tai-Leng Nationalities Development Party	2			1	1
All Mon Region Democracy Party	1			1	
<i>Wa National Unity Party</i>	1			1	
<i>Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP)</i>	1			1	
Kayin People's Party (KPP)	1			1	
Unity and Democracy Party of Kachin State (UDPKS)	1			1	
Democratic Party (Myanmar)	1			1	
<i>Akha National Development Party</i>	1				1
National Unity Party	1		1		
Independent	5	1	2	1	1
Total	1150	323	168	630	29

Notes: Text in bold — ethnic parties.

Text in bold italics — ethnic parties that are based in Shan State or have interests in Shan State.

Source: *The Irrawaddy*, “Burma Results 2015”, n.d. <<http://www.irrawaddy.com/election/results/>> (accessed 10 December 2015).

- Both the ANP and the SNLD were able to win substantially more seats in the national assembly than other ethnic parties (see Table 1).
- The Rakhine and Shan State assemblies were the only ones where the NLD did not dominate (see Tables 2 and 3).
- Only one ethnic party — the ANP — was voted in from Rakhine State and it won the most number of seats in the State parliament (see Table 2) whereas many different parties (ethnic and otherwise) secured seats in the Shan State regional election, with the USDP, the SNLD and the NLD winning the most seats (see Table 3).
- Shan State is the only region where the USDP won the most number of seats (see Table 3).
- The results of the election for ethnic affairs ministers mirror those of the nationwide results (see Table 6).

These results are considered in the light of ethnic politics, administrative systems and governance actors in these two states, taking into account recent inter-religious violence in Rakhine State, the nationwide ceasefire accord and the government's peace negotiations with non-state armed groups.

THE ARAKAN NATIONAL PARTY (ANP) AND RAKHINE STATE

The Arakan National Party (ANP) contested sixty-three seats in Rakhine State, Chin State, the Ayeyarwady Region, and Yangon. It won twenty-two of the twenty-nine national level seats in Rakhine State — ten in the Upper House and twelve in the Lower House (see Table 1). As it only holds 3.9 per cent of the available seats, this gives it very little influence at the national level.

The situation is reversed at the regional level. The ANP won the largest number of seats in the Rakhine State assembly (as shown in Table 2) and even managed to increase the number of seats it had previously held by four. This, however, did not translate into the majority because of the 25 per cent bloc allocated to the military. Nevertheless, the results show that an overwhelming number of Rakhine State residents

Table 2: Composition of the Rakhine State Assembly after the 2015 General Elections

Party	Seats won	Percentage of available seats	Percentage of total seats
Arakan National Party (ANP)	22	62.86	46.81
National League for Democracy (NLD)	9	25.71	19.15
Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)	3	8.57	6.38
Independent	1	2.86	2.13
Military Appointees	12	NA	25.53
<i>Total</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: *Myanmar Times*, “State/Region Hluttaw Results: Graphics”, 20 December 2015 <<http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/17642-state-and-region-hluttaw-results-graphics.html>> (accessed 21 December 2015), excludes numbers for ethnic affairs ministers.

believe in the ANP over all the other political parties (ethnic³ or otherwise) as being able to represent their interests.

This may be attributed to strategic and ethnic-related reasons. First, the ANP is the product of a successful merger in 2013 between the Rakhine

on 10 December 2015); Adam Burke, “Why didn’t Ethnic Parties do better in Myanmar’s Elections?”, *New Mandala Inquirer*, November 2015 <<http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/20151126-NMInquirer-November2015-MyanmarElections.pdf>> (accessed on 10 December 2015).

³ Some of the other ethnic parties that contested were: Rakhine State National United Party (based in Yangon); the Arakan Patriotic Party (based in Sittwe, Rakhine State); Ka Man National Development Party (based in Yangon); Mro Nationality Party (based in Buthidaung, Rakhine State); Mro National Democracy Party (based in Mrauk U, Rakhine State, with some presence in southern Chin State); Mro National Development Party (based in Kyauktaw, Rakhine State); Daingnet National Development Party (based in Buthidaung, Rakhine State). See *Myanmar Times*, “Election Parties”, 2 September 2015 <<http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/election-2015/parties.html>> (accessed 10 December 2015).

Nationalities Development Party and the Arakan League for Democracy. The former had won eighteen seats in the Rakhine State parliament in the 2010 elections; the latter had boycotted the 2010 elections but had secured eleven seats in the 1990 general elections and received the majority of the vote in Rakhine State. This time around, joining forces enabled them to procure the ethnic Rakhine vote, particularly as there were no other significant Rakhine parties in the contest.

Second, ANP politicians supported national campaigns to revoke the voting rights of holders of Temporary Registration Certificates (“White Cards”), which affected an estimated 800,000 residents countrywide. A large proportion of White Card holders are Muslim (the other groups include the Kokang, Wa, and other ethnic groups including Chinese and Indian residents in other states). They were unlikely to vote for a party that promotes a Rakhine (Buddhist) agenda claiming that many Muslim residents are illegal immigrants. In addition, eighty-nine prospective election candidates — including existing Ministers of Parliament, many of them Muslim — who were “White Card” holders were prevented from competing in the elections.⁴

There are three main reasons why so many Rakhine (Buddhist) chose a political party that represents Rakhine ethnic interests over the USDP or the NLD. First, they fear that their cultural identity and right to govern themselves are threatened by Bamar political and cultural hegemony. The Rakhine perceive themselves as historically, culturally and religiously distinct from that of the Bamar. Although they are also Buddhist, they believe themselves to be inheritors of territory that was blessed by the Buddha and who have a specific religious duty.⁵ The Arakan kingdom⁶ was conquered by the Burmese in the eighteenth

⁴ Transnational Institute, “Ethnic Politics and the 2015 Elections in Myanmar”, *Myanmar Policy Briefing*, 26 September 2015, p. 13 <https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/bpb16_web_16092015.pdf> (accessed 10 December 2015).

⁵ See Alexandra de Mersan, “The ‘Land of the Great Image’ and the Test of Time. The Making of a Buddha Image in Arakan (Burma/Myanmar)”, in *The Spirit of Things: Materiality in the Age of Religious Diversity in Southeast Asia*, edited by Julius Bautista (Cornell: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2012), pp. 95–110.

⁶ The Arakan kingdom was the precursor to the Rakhine State. It was recognized as a state by the Burmese military government in 1974.

century and then colonized by the British in the nineteenth century, two periods which Jacques Leider describes as “Humiliation under the Burmese — Dereliction under the British”.⁷

Burmese rule did not only mark the end of their political independence; the exile of their king, the elimination of their local elite, and the interference in the monastic order aimed at the eradication of Arakan’s cultural and religious autonomy. A core belief of the Arakanese Buddhists was further shattered when the Mahamuni was deported like a vulgar trophy. He, Lord Buddha’s “younger brother,” was supposed to protect the country and its kings until the end of the cosmic cycle. As physical resistance to the new rulers was doomed to fail, the Arakanese had no choice but to accommodate to the regime or leave as so many did after a few years. Forty years later, political degradation entered a new phase with the arrival of the East India Company and the massive influx of Bengali labor migrants.⁸

Burmanization continued after independence in Rakhine State and other minority ethnic domains,⁹ reinforcing “Burman-ness as a privileged identity”.¹⁰

⁷ Jacques P. Leider, “Forging Buddhist Credentials as a Tool of Legitimacy and Ethnic Identity: A Study of Arakan’s Subjection in Nineteenth-Century Burma”, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 51 (2008), p. 422.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 452.

⁹ See Gustaaf Houtman, *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics: Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy* (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 1999); David Brown, *The State and Ethnic Politics in Southeast Asia*, Politics in Asia series (London: Routledge, 1994). Other ethnic groups were also subjected to Burmanization, see James L. Lewis, “The Burmanization of the Karen People: A Study in Racial Adaptability”, Doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1924; Jean A. Berlie, *The Burmanization of Myanmar’s Muslims* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2008).

¹⁰ Matthew J. Walton, “The “Wages of Burman-ness: Ethnicity and Burman Privilege in Contemporary Myanmar”, *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 43, no. 1 (2013), p. 3.

Decades of hegemonic rule, repression and underdevelopment under the Bamar military junta have left many Rakhine State residents living in impoverished circumstances, more so than their compatriots. At 10.4 per cent, the labour force participation rate in Rakhine is the lowest in the whole country (67 per cent), and the unemployment rate of 10.4 per cent is the highest in the country; the countrywide rate is only 4 per cent.¹¹ This stark difference in employment rates is compounded by household living conditions. According to the 2014 census, only 31.8 per cent of households in the state have improved sanitation facilities, as compared to 74.3 per cent for the country as a whole. There is a glaring difference between the two states ranked lowest and second lowest (Shan State). The latter reported 63.8 per cent of households with improved sanitation, double that of Rakhine State.¹² Rakhine State also has the lowest proportion of houses with improved drinking water (37.7 per cent), as compared to a nationwide figure of 69.5 per cent.¹³ It is important to note that the data in the census reflects the views of about 70 per cent of the residents of Rakhine State only, as approximately 30 per cent of the population, mostly Muslims in the north, were not included in the census.¹⁴

¹¹ I would like to thank Alexandra de Mersan for having alerted me to this data. Ministry of Immigration and Population, *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, The Union Report*, Census Report Volume 2 (Naypyitaw: Department of Population, Ministry of Immigration and Population, Office no. 48, 2015), p. 29 <<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B067GBtstE5TeUIIVjRjSjVzWlk/view>> (accessed 10 December 2015).

¹² Ministry of Immigration and Population, *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, The Union Report*, p. 31.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁴ They were excluded from the census by the government because they refused to be categorized ethnically as Bengali. For details, see “The 2014 Population and Housing Census of Myanmar”, *Findings of the Census Observation Mission: An Overview Myanmar 2014*, 2014. <http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/myanmar/drive/FindingsoftheCensusObservation_ENG.pdf> (accessed 10 December 2015).

In addition, the residents of Rakhine State believe that their economic opportunities have been usurped by “outsiders”: the military and Bamar “crony” companies dominate the large-scale natural resource extraction industry, while Muslims are perceived to be controlling small businesses.¹⁵ The rancour and bitterness that Rakhine State residents feel about being left out of economic opportunities are more easily directed towards the “other”, in this case Muslims, particularly business owners, rather than the Chinese whose investments are larger and connected to the Burmese governing elite.¹⁶ They believe that the fairly low population density and existence of natural resources in their state will attract large numbers of South Asians eager to exploit the state’s assets at their expense.¹⁷

This underlies their deep-rooted fear of becoming a minority in their own state. Despite the fact that they make up the majority of the state (at about 60 per cent of the 3.2 million population), the Rakhine are deeply concerned about Muslim/South Asian encroachment from the western border and the perceived prolific birth rate of the Muslims. This worry is so endemic that many Rakhine feel resentment towards Aung San Suu Kyi for having called for unity and peace in Rakhine State and in Myanmar when asked about the Rohingya.¹⁸ These neutral comments, the first that she offered on this issue (in October 2015) while incendiary

¹⁵ International Crisis Group, *Myanmar: The Politics of Rakhine State*, Asia Report No. 261, 2014, p. 15 <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/burma-myanmar/261-myanmar-the-politics-of-rakhine-state.pdf>> (accessed 10 December 2015).

¹⁶ Alexandra de Mersan, “The 2010 Election and the Making of a Parliamentary Representative”, in *Metamorphosis: Studies in Social and Political Change in Myanmar*, edited by Renaud Egretteau and Francois Robinne (Singapore: NUS Press and IRASEC, 2015), p. 48.

¹⁷ International Crisis Group, *Myanmar*, p. 18.

¹⁸ I would like to thank Celine Coderey for sharing her insights. See also *Straits Times*, “Myanmar’s Aung San Suu Kyi speaks on Rohingya, but vaguely”, undated, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/myanmars-aung-san-suu-kyi-speaks-on-rohingya-but-vaguely-the-statesman>> (accessed 28 December 2015).

in the eyes of the Rakhine, were considered vague and inadequate by the international community. The ANP, on the contrary, have been clear about their position: stateless residents (such as the Rohingya) are foreign interlopers who should be segregated from the Rakhine and deported, a view that mirrors the opinions of many Rakhine.

The dominance of the ANP in the polls is most adequately explained by the actions of politicians during the episodes of inter-religious violence in 2012. The conflict served as a platform for Rakhine nationalist politicians to “present themselves and be acknowledged as the legitimate representatives of the local population... In other words, the conflict helped them to fulfil their duties and mandate, and act as effective leaders of Arakanese political life.”¹⁹ Party members organized support, managed the needs of the local populace affected by the conflict, collected and passed on information and so on for the benefit of the Rakhine. In doing so, their political participation transformed from an “ethno-regional” one encompassing all residents in Rakhine State to a religious (Buddhist) ethno-nationalist one that, as illustrated by the election results, “takes precedence over the NLD’s democratic values”.²⁰ This observation is reinforced by the election results in the four southernmost townships — Manaung, Toungup, Thandwe, Gwa — where religious conflict did not take place. The NLD won all the seats in these constituencies.

Like many other regions in Myanmar, Rakhine State has a myriad of ethnic groups that practise different religions.²¹ However, unlike these other regions, particularly Shan State, multiple regulatory authorities in the form of non-state armed ethnic groups and militias do not control Rakhine State. Here, the balance of power hinges upon three main groups — the Bamar, the Rakhine and the *kala* — configured in an obtuse

¹⁹ de Mersan, “The 2010 Election”, p. 64.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 65-66.

²¹ Muslim communities, including the Rohingya and the Kaman, make up about 30 per cent of the population, and the remaining 10 per cent consists of Chin (who are Buddhist, Christian or animist) and a number of other small minorities, such as the Mro, Khami, Dainet, Bengali Hindu and Marmagri.

triangle.²² The term “*kala*” is used in Rakhine State to refer to people of South Asian descent regardless of their religion — Hindu or Muslim.²³ The election results reflect these three poles of power and the ideological premises of the different parties. The Rakhine (ANP) secured 62 per cent of the seats contested on the basis of safeguarding Buddhist Rakhine interests. The Bamar pole (NLD and USDP) garnered 34 per cent of the available seats, with the NLD and its mandate of democracy winning three times more seats than the USDP. The *kala* contingent won none of the seats. This illustrates the lack of political representation and the technical barriers that people of South Asian descent encounter when attempting to enter the political sphere. In the absence of their own ethnic political representation, it is very likely that they voted for the NLD.

SHAN STATE, FRAGMENTED ETHNIC POLITICS AND OVERLAPPING ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEMS

The Shan State legislature is the only one where the vote was split amongst many ethnic parties and where the USDP obtained the most seats. At the national level, six out of the ten ethnic parties that won seats in the national assembly have ethnic interests in Shan State: Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), Ta’ang National Party, Pa-O National Organization, Lisu National Development Party,²⁴ Wa Democratic Party and Kokang Democracy and Unity Party (italicized in Table 1). These same parties were voted into the Shan State assembly, with the addition

²² Anthony Ware, “The Muslim ‘Rohingya’ and Myanmar’s Upcoming Election”, *Australian Institute of International Affairs*, 25 September 2015 <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australian_outlook/the-muslim-rohingya-and-myanmars-upcoming-election/> (accessed 10 December 2015).

²³ The term “*kala*”, denoting “foreigner”, is used pejoratively and is often used to refer only to Muslims, although this was not always the case. South Asians have lived in Rakhine State since at least the fifteenth century and many migrated into the area during British rule.

²⁴ Only the Lisu National Development Party is based in Myitkina, Kachin State.

of four other ethnic parties — the Lahu National Development Party, the Wa National Unity Party, the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party and the Akha National Development Party (see Table 3).

At the regional level, ten of the twelve parties voted into the Shan State parliament are ethnic parties. With the exception of the two Shan parties, they mostly represent different ethnic groups.

Table 3: Composition of the Shan State Assembly after the 2015 General Elections

Party	Seats won	Percentage of available seats	Percentage of total seats
Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)	32	32.99	21.77
Shan Nationalities League for Democracy SNLD)	24	24.74	16.33
National League for Democracy (NLD)	21	21.65	14.29
Ta'aung (Palaung) National Party	7	7.22	4.76
Pa-O National Organization	6	6.19	4.08
Wa Democratic Party	2	2.06	1.36
Kokang Democracy and Unity Party	1	1.03	0.68
Lahu National Development Party	1	1.03	0.68
Wa National Unity Party	1	1.03	0.68
Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP)	1	1.03	0.68
Independent	1	1.03	0.68
Vacant	14	NA	9.52
Military Appointees	36	NA	24.49
<i>Total</i>	<i>147</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: Myanmar Times, “State/Region Hluttaw Results: Graphics”, 20 December 2015 <<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/17642-state-and-region-hluttaw-results-graphics.html>> (accessed 21 December 2015), numbers exclude ethnic affairs ministers.

At first glance, the results appear messy and bewildering. However, an understanding of the distinctiveness of Shan State and the administration of this region provides some structure to these numbers. First, in terms of land area, Shan State is the largest of all fourteen regions and states and covers almost a quarter of the entire country. It is home to 5.8 million people, making it the fifth biggest state/region in terms of population.²⁵ Of particular salience to this article is the fact that Shan State is the most ethnically diverse region of Myanmar.²⁶ Moreover, Shan State is the product of what was once a collection of smaller rival states that jostled for prominence. These different states managed to retain some degree of self-governance despite having been conquered by kingdoms and surrounded by larger and superior powers (the Burmese and Thai kingdoms, the Chinese and the British empires). Created by the British, Shan State has existed in various forms. Its present configuration is a result of the 1974 Constitution.²⁷

Second, Shan State, besides being one of the fourteen administrative divisions in the country, possesses a subnational administration system that the other states and regions (with the exception of Sagaing Region) do not — self-administered areas. There are six self-administered areas

²⁵ Ministry of Immigration and Population, *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, Shan State Report*, Census Report Volume 3-M, Naypyitaw: Department of Population, Ministry of Immigration and Population, Office no. 48, 2015, <<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B067GBtstESTZfV0U2ZvR3p0bk0/view>> (accessed 10 December 2015).

²⁶ Although Shan State has fewer officially recognized ethnic groups (33) than Chin State (55), the number of different languages spoken in Shan State is greater than in Chin State where all Chin ethnic groups fall under the same language family. In Shan State, besides Burmese, the languages spoken include Shan, Kachin, Kokang (Chinese language family), Danu, Pa-O, Lahu (Tibeto-Burman), Wa and Palaung (Austroasiatic). See United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Local Governance Mapping, the State of Local Governance: Trends in Shan* (n.p.: UNDP Myanmar, c. 2014), p. 5.

²⁷ See Sai Aung Tun, *History of the Shan State: From Its Origins to 1962* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2009); Sai Kham Mong, “The Shan in Myanmar”, in *Myanmar: State, Society and Ethnicity*, edited by N. Ganesan and Kyaw Yin Hlaing (Singapore: ISEAS and HPI, 2007), pp. 256-77.

in the entire country, five of which — Danu self-administered zone, Kokang self-administered zone, Pa-O self-administered zone, Ta-ang (Palaung) self-administered zone, and Wa self-administered division²⁸ — are located in Shan State.²⁹

The self-administered areas were established by the 2008 Constitution to recognize these ethnic groups politically and territorially and to provide a state-sanctioned instrument with which they could govern themselves. They have a constitutional status similar to that of a region or state. Thus, the constituencies in each of these self-administered areas elect state members of parliament during the general elections.³⁰ Altogether, that accounts for 30 out of the 147 seats in the Shan State parliament.

Third, many patches of Shan State are controlled by non-state armed groups and militias (of Shan and other ethnic affiliations), with jurisdictions that do not coincide with that of the state-designated system.³¹ Their claim to territory has been categorized in the following manner:

- (1) “hostile claims”, where military force is used to seize or maintain access;
- (2) “tolerated claims”, where ceasefire conditions have led the Myanmar security forces [to] informally permit access;
- and (3) “accommodated claims” where armed actors openly cooperate with the state in return for access. Very few of these territories have clearly agreed borders and those that do are rarely, if ever, formally documented.³²

Unlike other States, armed conflict in Shan State was settled in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s through ceasefire agreements.

²⁸ A division is larger than a zone.

²⁹ The sixth self-administered area, Naga self-administered zone, is in Sagaing Region.

³⁰ For more details, see UNDP, *Local Governance Mapping*, pp. 35–38.

³¹ Other states with areas controlled by non-state armed groups are: Kayin, Kayah, Mon and Kachin.

³² Kim Jolliffe, *Ethnic Armed Conflict and Territorial Administration in Myanmar* (n.p.: Asia Foundation, 2015), p. 40.

However, there have been recent skirmishes, such as the fighting between government forces and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (Kokang ethnic armed group) in early 2015. In addition, the ceasefire in both the Ta'ang and Kokang self-administered zones has broken down.

These competing regulatory and administrative authorities (many of which are not sanctioned by law or constitution) explain the fragmented and plural nature of ethno-political legitimacy and administration in Shan State. Taking into consideration these nuances helps to bring some clarity to the election results in Shan State.

Election Results in the Self-administered Areas

Most of the self-administered areas cover territory controlled by ceasefire groups and their corresponding armies, as Table 4 shows. The election results for the Pa-O and Ta'ang zones are straightforward: the Pa-O National Organization and the Ta'ang National Party — political parties that were transformed from armed political organizations that control these areas — were voted in respectively.

In the Kokang self-administered zone, all the USDP candidates won seats. There is little available information on the winning candidates but two of them have connections to the Kokang armed group, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance (MNDAA). Zhao Dechang (aka Kyauk Tae Chan) (who is Kokang) is a relative of Liu Guoxi who was voted into the Upper House of the national assembly in 2010 as a USDP candidate in the Kokang self-administered zone. Liu was also previously the deputy head of the MNDAA faction that became Border Guard Force 1006 and was a key operator in the Kokang drug business. Bai Yingneng (aka Khin Maung Lwin) (also Kokang) is the son of Bai Souqian. The latter was elected in 2010 but not by Kokang self-administered zone residents and was the head of the MNDAA faction that became Border Guard Force 1006. In fact, the link between non-state armed ethnic groups, drugs, power and political representation is strong in Shan and Kachin States.³³

³³ See Transnational Institute, *Ethnic Politics and the 2015 Elections in Myanmar*, Myanmar Policy Briefing 16, 2015, p. 9, <<https://www.tni.org/files/publication>

Table 4: Parties Voted in by Constituencies in the Self-administered Areas in Shan State

Self-Administered Area	Armed Group with Control	Official Political Party of Armed Group	Political Parties Voted into Shan State Assembly	Political Parties Voted into National Assembly
Danu	No armed group	NA	USDP, NLD	USDP, NLD
Kokang	Myanmar National Truth and Justice Party/ Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA)	Kokang Democratic Party	USDP	USDP
Pa-O	Pa-O National Organization/ Pa-O National Army (People's Militia Force)	Pa-O National Organization	Pa-O National Organization	Pa-O National Organization
Ta'ang	Palaung State Liberation Party/ Ta'ang National Liberation Army	Ta'ang National Party	Ta'ang National Party	Ta'ang National Party
Wa	4 townships (8 constituencies) under United Wa State Party/ United Wa State Army	None	Elections cancelled	Elections cancelled
	Township under government control		Wa Democratic Party	Wa Democratic Party
	Township under control government control		Wa National Unity Party, Lahu National Development Party	NA

The results in the Wa self-administered division are completely different from the rest of the self-administered areas because even though it has been designated a self-administered division, four of the six townships³⁴ are ruled by the United Wa State Party (UWSP) and its army the United Wa State Army (UWSA).³⁵ The UWSP has authority over the area through residual provisions of its 1989 ceasefire agreement and controls territory outside this area. It has little interest in the government establishing the Wa self-administered division in the area it controls. Instead it wants to expand the Wa division to create a new Wa State equivalent in status to the other ethnic states.³⁶ It did not allow elections to take place in these areas in 2010 and 2015, accounting for eight of the fourteen empty seats in the current Shan State assembly.

The Wa townships under government control, as shown in Table 4, voted in ethnic parties: the Wa Democratic Party, the Wa National Unity Party and the Lahu National Development Party. These parties are not known to have links with armed ethnic groups.

The Danu have never formed an armed group. Therefore, the two ethnic parties (Danu National Democracy Party, Danu National Organization Party) that ran against the NLD and the USDP were not linked to a non-state armed group either. Neither party won; the USDP won two State seats, while the NLD won two State seats and two national seats. It appears that the electorate in the Danu self-administered zone voted more similarly to the rest of Myanmar than did the other self-administered areas. This shows that the election results have to be

downloads/bpb16_web_16092015.pdf> (accessed 10 December 2015); Seamus Martov, “Ruling Party MPs Return Guns, Alleged Drug Ties to 2015 Race”, *The Irrawaddy*, 7 October 2015 <<http://www.irrawaddy.com/election/feature/ruling-party-mps-return-guns-alleged-drug-ties-to-2015-race>> (accessed 10 December 2015).

³⁴ There are two constituencies in each township, meaning that each township gets to vote for two candidates in the state elections.

³⁵ This is the most powerful non-state armed group in the country.

³⁶ Transnational Institute, *Ethnic Politics*, p. 8.

analysed in relation to non-state armed groups and their influence over minority-ethnic populated areas.

Shan Townships

Turning to the forty townships (eighty constituencies) under Shan State administration (i.e., all the townships in Shan State excluding those in the self-administered areas), the results show that the NLD, the USDP and the SNLD won seats. With the exception of the six constituencies in Table 5 where the Pa-O National Organization, the Ta’ang National Party, the Kokang Democracy and Unity Party and the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party won seats in the State assembly or national assembly or both, the main competition was between these three political parties in the thirty or so other constituencies.

The Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) contested fourteen seats in the Upper House, forty-eight in the Lower House and ninety-two in the regional assemblies. It won three in the Upper House, twelve in the Lower House, and twenty-four in the State and Division assemblies (twenty-four in the Shan State assembly, and one in the Kachin State assembly) (see Table 1). This makes it the fourth largest elected party in the National Assembly. The SNLD won many seats at the expense of the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP), which

Table 5: Shan Constituencies Where NLD, USDP and SNLD Candidates Did Not Win

Ethnic Political Party Voted In	Shan State Constituencies Where SNLD, NLD or USDP Candidates Did Not Win	
	Shan State Assembly	National Assembly
Pa-O National Organization	NA	Shan-9
Ta’ang NP	Kutkai 1 Namkhan 1 and 2	Shan-5, 10, Namkhan*
Kokang DUP	Kunlong 2	Kunlong 2
SNDP	Mongpan 1	NA

was reduced from being the second largest party in Shan State and the third largest party nationally, to holding only a single seat in the State assembly.³⁷

Despite the mosaic of ethnic groups and the plurality of ethnic interests within constituencies that are in the designated Shan constituencies, the majority of Shan State residents voted for the USDP, the SNLD or the NLD. The USDP won 33 per cent of the available seats (97 seats when military and vacant seats are taken out of the equation), the SNLD about a quarter and the NLD almost 22 per cent. Given that Shan State has arguably the greatest diversity of ethnic groups in all fourteen Regions and States in the country, this three-way split is remarkable. Even more remarkable was the fact that the USDP won the most number of seats.

One of the reasons given for this outcome is the fighting amongst non-state armed ethnic groups and the armed forces. Like the self-administered areas, many parts of Shan State are controlled and administered by non-state armed ethnic groups. Besides the ones already described in the self-administered areas (in Table 4), groups such as the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), the Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP)/Shan State Army (SSA), the Pa-O National Liberation Organization, the Palaung State Liberation Front/Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) (the Mongla Group) have administrative control over patches of Shan State outside the administrative system sanctioned by the Burmese state.³⁸ These groups have their own administration bodies in their territory, contend with one another for territory and engage in skirmishes with the Myanmar Armed Forces (*Tatmadaw*).

Like the four townships in the Wa self-administered division mentioned above, the elections were cancelled in three others³⁹ due to

³⁷ When the SNLD boycotted the 2010 elections, some members formed the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) to contest the 2010 general election; it held twenty-four seats in the last government.

³⁸ Jolliffe, *Ethnic Armed Conflict*, pp. 60–80.

³⁹ Ye Mon, “UEC cancels voting in two more Shan townships”, *Myanmar Times*, 28 October 2015 <<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/17226-uec-cancels-voting-in-two-more-shan-townships.html>> (accessed 10 December 2015).

fighting between non-state armed groups and the *Tatmadaw*,⁴⁰ leaving a total of fourteen vacant seats in the state legislature. In the ten townships in eastern Shan State, elections did not take place in two because of fighting. For the remaining eight, Tachilek voted in two NLD candidates, and Mongton voted in one NLD candidate and one USDP candidate. The rest of the townships voted in the USDP (twelve seats). Altogether, eastern Shan State voted in 50 per cent (thirteen out of twenty-six, the remaining six were voted in by the self-administered areas) of the USDP candidates who won in the Shan State assembly. This is significant as the townships in eastern Shan State make up only 25 per cent of all Shan State townships excluding those in the self-administered areas.

Three Shan political parties contested in eastern Shan State: the SNLD, the SNDP and the newly formed Eastern Shan State Development Democratic Party (ESSDDP). There has been speculation that the split of votes among the three parties enabled the USDP to win.⁴¹ Nevertheless, at present, there is no available data to fully explain why the USDP dominated in eastern Shan State.

For the other townships, the split in votes between the SNLD and the SNDP has also been given as a reason for the USDP winning. Unlike in Rakhine State, the two main Shan parties were unable to come to an agreement about merging. By contesting overlapping areas in the elections, they allowed other parties, specifically the USDP, to win.⁴² This was also the reason given for why the Ta'ang National Party won over

⁴⁰ Radio Free Asia, "Myanmar Election Body Cancels Vote in Two More Shan State Townships", 27 October 2015 <<http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/election-10272015172919.html>> (accessed 10 December 2015).

⁴¹ *Mizzima*, Eastern Shan State election collapse for Shan parties, 20 November 2015 <<http://mizzima.com/news-election-2015-election-news/eastern-shan-state-election-collapse-shan-parties#sthash.oA1lDFau.dpuf>> (accessed 10 December 2015).

⁴² Maung Zaw, "After election disappointment, Shan parties look to collaborate, not compete", *Myanmar Times*, 27 November 2015 <<http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/17865-after-election-disappointment-shan-parties-look-to-collaborate-not-compete.html>> (accessed 10 December 2015).

the two Shan parties, the USDP and the NLD for the national assembly seat in Namkhan Township (see Table 6).⁴³

Another factor that has been considered is that those areas where there was fighting in Shan State voted in USDP candidates. The RCSS and the SSPP operate in many of these areas. However, this does not explain why other townships where fighting also occurred voted for the SNLD or the NLD.

Tactical reasons have also been given for why the USDP won with such a margin in Shan State. Shan party candidates have alleged that advanced voting and ghost military votes were used to favour the USDP candidates.⁴⁴

Table 6: List of Political Parties Who Won Seats as Ethnic Affairs Ministers

Political Party	Seats won	Percentage of seats won
NLD	21	72.41
USDP	2	6.89
Arakan National Party (ANP)	1	3.45
Lahu National Development Party	1	3.45
Akha National Development Party	1	3.45
Lisu National Development Party	1	3.45
Tai-Leng Nationalities Development Party	1	3.45
Independent	1	3.45
<i>Total</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: Myanmar Times, “State/Region Hluttaw Results: Graphics”, 20 December 2015 <<http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/17642-state-and-region-hluttaw-results-graphics.html>> (accessed 21 December 2015).

⁴³ Myat Noe Oo, “Palaung party wins in Namkhan”, *Myanmar Times*, 11 November 2015 <<http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/17556-palaung-party-wins-in-namkhan.html>> (accessed 10 December 2015).

⁴⁴ Mya Wun Yan, “NLD challenges victory of USDP candidate in Shan State race”, *Burma News International*, 15 December 2015 <<http://www.bnionline.net/2015-election/shan-state/item/1325-nld-challenges-victory-of-usdp-candidate-in->

In the absence of concrete data, the best explanation that can be offered is that there is a combination of factors. Like other ethnic minority groups across Myanmar, the residents in Shan State perceive the Bamar central government as predatory. However, this view is tempered by the fighting that occurs amongst the various non-state armed ethnic groups and with the *Tatmadaw*, the recent ceasefire agreements negotiated, the relatively greater pace of economic development of the self-administered areas, and the development of certain places, such as Taunggyi (which voted in USDP candidates).⁴⁵

ETHNIC AFFAIRS MINISTERS

Besides the self-administered areas, the 2008 Constitution established twenty-nine “national race” representatives — ethnic affairs ministers — to broaden the diversity of nationalities represented in national politics. Ethnic affairs ministers are elected to a given state or division if an ethnic minority population in that state/division makes up 0.1 per cent or greater of the total. In the case where one of the country’s ethnic minorities counts a state as its namesake, or where there is already a self-administered area dedicated to that ethnic group, it is not granted an ethnic affairs minister. In all, there are fourteen different ethnic groups eligible to vote for at least one ethnic affairs minister if they reside within the state or region for which the minister is elected.⁴⁶ Only voters from the ethnic group

shan-state-race.html> (accessed 20 December 2015); Yola Verbruggen, “USDP reportedly ahead in eastern Shan”, *Myanmar Times*, Friday, 13 November 2015 <<http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/17607-usdp-reportedly-ahead-in-eastern-shan.html>> (accessed 20 December 2015).

⁴⁵ Jane M. Ferguson, “Ethno-nationalism and Participation in Myanmar: Views from Shan State and Beyond”, in *Metamorphosis: Studies in Social and Political Change in Myanmar*, edited by Renaud Egretreau and Francois Robinne (Singapore: NUS Press and IRASEC, 2015), p. 138.

⁴⁶ 2008 Constitution, s. 15; see also Melissa Crouch, “Ethnic Rights and Constitutional Change: The Constitutional Recognition of Ethnic Nationalities in Myanmar”, in *Central-local Relations in Asian Constitutional Systems*, edited by Andrew Harding and Mark Sidel (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2015).

in question are included in the voter roll for these seats. However, the candidates do not need to be from that particular ethnic group.⁴⁷

In the 2015 general elections, 72 per cent of the ethnic affairs ministers voted in were from the NLD (see Table 6). These results approximate those of the state and regional parliament elections. However, it is interesting to note that, with the exception of the USDP and the Tai-Leng Nationalities Development Party, the other ethnic affairs ministers were members of the ANP or ethnic political parties that have substantial numbers of voters in Shan State: the Lahu National Development Party, the Akha National Development Party and the Lisu National Development Party. The Tai-Leng Nationalities Development Party represents the Red Shan, or Shan-ni in northern Sagaing Region and Kachin State.⁴⁸

The strong showing of the Rakhine as well as ethnic groups in Shan State shows that the agenda of ethnic parties is particularly important for these populations.

ETHNIC POLITICAL REPRESENTATION, SUBNATIONAL GOVERNANCE AND PEACE

As the discussion has shown so far, the nature of electoral politics in Myanmar is shaped by ethnic conflict, armed and otherwise. This has a bearing on the peace process, particularly since the plan for peace involves armed groups joining the political process as parties and winning seats in elections to govern through the administrative structure set out by the 2008 Constitution.⁴⁹ In this setup, the ethnic groups have been provided with four forms of political representation: ethnic states, self-administered areas, national race seats (ethnic affairs ministers), and constituencies won by ethnic parties in the national assembly. However, electoral democracy alone will not bring about peace.

⁴⁷ Transnational Institute, *The 2015 General Election in Myanmar: What Now for Ethnic Politics?*, Myanmar Policy Briefing 17, December 2015, p. 7.

⁴⁸ *Myanmar Times*, “Election Parties”, 2 September 2015 <<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/election-2015/parties.html>> (accessed 10 December 2015).

⁴⁹ Non-state armed groups include those of an ethnic persuasion and those with other ideological concerns.

Structurally, these forms of political representation have some way to go before they can adequately deal with ethnic concerns and the concerns of non-state armed ethnic groups. First, there is some concern about whether ethnic affairs ministers should actually be part of the political structure as this embeds discrimination, albeit positive, into state practice.⁵⁰ Putting aside this argument for the time being, the role of ethnic affairs ministers at present needs to be better developed for reconciliation at the wider level. There have been inconsistencies in the perception of this role which may hamper ethnic affairs ministers' work.⁵¹ Outgoing ethnic affairs ministers have complained that a lack of power and resources has frustrated their efforts; they have thus recommended the establishment of an ethnic affairs ministry.⁵² If the bill is passed in parliament and is approved by the President, the new ministry may be set up in 2016.⁵³ This might well be a step forward in establishing and embedding the work of the ethnic affairs ministers in the administration. Nevertheless, this approach is limited, as state and region governments do not currently have ministries.⁵⁴

Second, the extent to which power may be exerted through local governance structures is limited, thereby providing little incentive for

⁵⁰ See Taylor, Robert, "Fog of Ethnicity Weighs on Myanmar's Future". *Nikkei Asian Review*, 4 December 2015 <<http://asia.nikkei.com/Viewpoints/Viewpoints/Fog-of-ethnicity-weighs-on-Myanmar-s-future?page=1>> (accessed 10 December 2015).

⁵¹ Hamish Nixon, Cindy Joelene, Kyi Pyar Chit Saw, Thet Aung Lynn and Matthew Arnold, *State and Region Governments in Myanmar 2013* (n.p.: Myanmar Development Resource Institute, Centre for Economic and Social Development (MDRI-CESD) and The Asia Foundation, 2013), p. 56.

⁵² Moe Myint, "Ethnic Ministers Irrelevant Without More Funding, Power, Say Incumbents", *The Irrawaddy*, 22 December 2015 <<http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/ethnic-ministers-irrelevant-without-more-funding-power-say-incumbents.html>> (accessed 25 December 2015).

⁵³ Eleven Myanmar, "New ethnic affairs ministry to be formed in 2016", n.d. <http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/local/new-ethnic-affairs-ministry-be-formed-2016> (accessed 25 December 2015).

⁵⁴ Nixon et al., *State and Region Governments*, p. vii.

armed ethnic groups to give up what control they already have. The UWSP, which controls four townships in the area designated the Wa self-administered division, did not allow the elections to take place in its territory, effectively repudiating the system of governance laid out by the Constitution. The exceptions to this are the Pa-O and Ta'ang self-administered zones where the ethnic political parties voted in had transformed from being a non-state armed group.⁵⁵ In fact, the Pa-O National Organization governs with help from its considerable and well-organized people's militia force, the Pa-O National Army. The latter has a system of administration of its own in the Pa-O self-administered zone and in nearby townships.⁵⁶

Under the current system of governance, power is still very centralized. For example, the NLD-nominated president will have the authority to appoint chief ministers of regional and state governments (who in turn appoint ministers) and a majority in both the Lower and Upper Houses will enable legislation to pass through parliament without resistance. The state and regional assemblies have been formally assigned limited administrative responsibilities covering minor undertakings such as the registration of vehicles and small infrastructure. Decisions regarding major issues such as natural resource extraction, and health and education provision, however, remain out of their hands.⁵⁷ These assemblies have not passed many laws, as they lack experience and capacity, and are hindered by the ambiguity over what is permitted under the Constitution.⁵⁸

In addition, state and region governments do not have the capacity, the political autonomy or the budgets to handle local concerns relating to ethnic identity or the management of natural resources.⁵⁹ Similarly, the self-administered areas have limited judicial and executive power, and

⁵⁵ Joliffe, *Ethnic Armed Conflict*, pp. 62–65, 75–77.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁵⁷ Nixon et al., *State and Region Governments*, p. 69.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 69–70.

the governance arrangements set out in the constitution leave them with very little autonomy. In general, this has made it difficult for them to deal with the main grievances and aspirations of local ethnic groups.⁶⁰

Given these inadequacies, most of the local administrative structures, including the self-administered areas, have relied on the central government, the military or ethnic armed groups for day-to-day oversight. Many of the armed ethnic groups have their own systems of administration, have control over natural resource extraction and other resources, and provide education and health services in the areas they administer.⁶¹

Thus, asking these armed ethnic groups to transform into political parties and to participate in the electoral process means (1) stripping them of much of the authority and control they already possess, and (2) giving up the forms of administration they already undertake in places where local and central governments have been ineffectual.

For the peace process to work, current constitutional constraints have to be addressed. At the state and regional level, this will involve strengthening functions and responsibilities, decentralizing power and providing operational capacity so that state and region governments and their local assemblies possess a degree of political autonomy, security, and share of national wealth that the non-state armed groups desire.⁶² Additionally, there needs to be an agreement on how governance structures set up by the non-state armed groups will relate to structures sanctioned by the Constitution⁶³ and local solutions to “the problem of the distribution of power among ethnicities”.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 71.

⁶¹ Joliffe, *Ethnic Armed Conflict*, pp. 37–39.

⁶² Nixon et al., *State and Region Governments*, p. 60.

⁶³ Charles Petrie and Ashley South, “Peace-building in Myanmar”, in *Burma/ Myanmar: Where Now?*, edited by Mikael Gravers and Flemming Ytzen (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2014), p. 227.

⁶⁴ 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* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012), p. 233.

Before the peace process can move forward though, the nationwide ceasefire accord needs to be in place. The questions surrounding this monumental task are strategic and political: Can the NLD continue the political dialogue that was initiated by the Thein Sein government with the non-state armed groups? Will it be able to influence the Myanmar Army to maintain ceasefires and relinquish control of development projects in the ethnic regions? Can it bring all the stakeholders to the table and persuade them to sign and abide by a nationwide ceasefire?

The preliminary steps that it has taken so far are positive. There are signs that the NLD is working on the basis of reconciliation and inclusion. Aung San Suu Kyi has announced that the new cabinet will include members of other political parties as well as representatives of ethnic minorities.⁶⁵ The NLD has called for national-level peace negotiations in the spirit of the Panglong Agreement⁶⁶ and has invited more armed groups to participate in the nationwide ceasefire agreement.⁶⁷ At the

⁶⁵ Aung Hla Tun, “Suu Kyi says Myanmar cabinet to include ethnic groups, other parties”, *Reuters*, 26 November 2015 <<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-politics-idUSKBN0TF1AQ20151126>> (accessed 10 December 2015).

⁶⁶ The Panglong Agreement originated from the conference held in Panglong, Shan State and was finalized in 1947. Organized by the head of the Frontier Areas Administration under the British government, the objective was to merge the ethnic groups and the Frontier Areas Administration into a federation under British control until it could be amalgamated with the rest of Burma. The “Spirit of Panglong” is perceived as a vision of ethnic independence and autonomy on the part of the ethnic political groups. On the contrary, it represents a “nightmare return to colonial disorder” for many in the army. Mikael Gravers, “Ethno-nationalism and violence in Burma/Myanmar: The long Karen struggle for autonomy”, in *Burma/Myanmar: Where Now?*, edited by Gravers and Ytzen, p. 184. See also Robert H. Taylor, “Refighting Old Battles, Compounding Misconceptions: The Politics of Ethnicity in Myanmar Today”, *ISEAS Perspective* 2015 #12, 2 March 2015 <http://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2015_12.pdf> (accessed 10 January 2016).

⁶⁷ Lawi Weng, “Suu Kyi Tells Govt Peace Body: Reach Out to Non-Signatory Armed Groups”, *The Irrawaddy*, 24 December 2015 <<http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/suu-kyi-tells-govt-peace-body-reach-out-to-non-signatory-armed-groups.html>> (accessed 28 December 2015).

same time, Aung San Suu Kyi has taken steps to build bridges with the military, meeting with Commander-in-Chief Senior-General Min Aung Hlaing,⁶⁸ and former head of the military junta General Than Shwe, and has been given his support.⁶⁹

CONCLUSION: NATIONAL RECONCILIATION, ETHNICITY AND PEACE

An examination of the election results in Rakhine and Shan States has revealed the complex nature of ethnic politics, the multiplicity of regulatory actors, and the limits of electoral democracy in Myanmar. In the case of Rakhine State, the ANP has secured the mandate from the electorate because it has come to embody the concerns of the (Buddhist) Rakhine through its members' management of the inter-religious violence in 2012. This, combined with the economic and socio-cultural fears of the Rakhine electorate vis-à-vis the Bamar and the Muslims/South Asians, propelled it to victory.

In Shan State, the fragmentation of the vote and the proliferation of ethnic parties attest to the legitimacy that these parties have in the eyes of those living there. The most interesting result is that the USDP won the most number of seats. Although more data needs to be collected before a definitive answer can be formulated for why this occurred, it is posited here that a combination of factors related to fighting, ceasefires and relative economic development in Shan State may have determined the outcome.

In the face of NLD's electoral dominance, what are the prospects for ethnic reconciliation? First, the complexities involved in ethnic

⁶⁸ BBC, "Aung San Suu Kyi meets president and army chief in transition talks", 2 December 2015 <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34981194>> (accessed 10 December 2015).

⁶⁹ BBC, "Former Myanmar military ruler Than Shwe 'supports new leader'", 6 December 2015 <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35019032>> (accessed 10 December 2015).

conflict resolution and peace building in Myanmar cannot be resolved solely through ethnic representation in the state sanctioned political system. Structural issues need to be addressed alongside the legitimacy of regulatory actors such as armed ethnic groups, particularly in places where their administration makes up for gaps in government provision.

In addition, strategic and political steps need to be taken for national reconciliation with the army, the various non-stated armed groups, militias and ethnic communities. This long-term process will require sensitivity, continued dialogue and the establishment of some degree of trust at the central and local levels. The Thein Sein government has begun the process and it is now up to the NLD to continue the quest for peace.

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