

2015 Election of Aung San Suu Kyi  
Chairs: Reshini Premaratne and Jack Miller

Overview of the Committee

The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, also known as Burma or Myanmar, is a unitary presidential constitutional republic under their 2008 constitution. Historically, Burma has been under the rule of various dynasties. Originally, Burma was colonized by the British and was under the rule of the British Raj until 1937. Then, Burma was considered a British colony until it was granted independence after World War II. After gaining independence, Burma was initially a democracy, until being overtaken by a military coup in 1962.<sup>i</sup> The military government, or junta, was in power until 2011, when Burma returned to its original democratic state.

Since the establishment of the first constitution in 1948, Burmese ethnic minorities have been denied their Constitutional rights, access to lands, and participation in government.<sup>ii</sup> Religious and ethnic conflicts have induced a strain on the current and past political institutions. The State Peace and Development Council, the Burmese military junta in power until 2011, displaced many citizens, both from within and outside of Burma.<sup>iii</sup> This displacement of people has meant the violation of human rights and further political strife.

This committee aims to combat the election fraud taking place in Burma and establish a proper platform for Aung San Suu Kyi to campaign for her upcoming election in 2015. As this committee is unprecedented, most notably due to her house arrest for 15 years, starting in 1989, the chair and delegates will duly shape its parliamentary procedure and proceedings as seen fit. In order to ensure that fair elections do take place in 2015, which give the National League for Democracy and its General Secretary, Aung San Suu Kyi an equal opportunity at leadership, this committee must determine how best to approach the current situation in Burma.

## Topic I: The Platform of Aung San Suu Kyi

### A History of Aung San Suu Kyi:

Aung San Suu Kyi was born on June 19, 1945 to one of the most influential families of Burma. Her father is considered the “Father of Modern Myanmar” and founded the Communist Party of Myanmar, while her mother served as the ambassador to India.<sup>iv</sup> When Suu Kyi was just 2 years old, her father was killed by rebel leader U Saw, who protested the concessions made to the British government during independence peace talks. Despite this, her mother Khin Kyi went on to become a Burmese diplomat, while Aung San Suu Kyi continued her studies at the University of Oxford.<sup>v</sup>

After marrying British citizen Michael Aris and having two children, Suu Kyi returned to Burma in 1988 to look after her ill mother. While visiting Burma, she witnessed soldiers of leader U Ne Win kill innocent protesters, inciting Suu Kyi to speak out against the atrocities committed by the Burmese government. As Aung San Suu Kyi began her widespread campaign for democratic rule, the military placed her under arrest in July 1989, under the condition that she could be exonerated if she left Burma. Suu Kyi refused, instead choosing to stay in Burma until her goal of civilian, democratic government was reached. In the early 1990s, Suu Kyi became affiliated with the National League for Democracy (NLD), eventually earning the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize for her commitment to nonviolent protests.<sup>vi</sup> Since the Peace Prize brought global attention to the oppressive military regime of the Burmese government, General Saw Maung, the leader of Burma at the time, initiated a widespread campaign to vilify her name. Over the next twenty years, Suu Kyi served several sentences under house arrest, and attained freedom on November 13, 2010, just six days after parliamentary elections.<sup>vii</sup>

After her release, Aung San Suu Kyi continued her work towards a free and democratic Burma under the civilian leadership of Thein Sein. In April of 2012, she won a parliamentary

election by a large majority, and now serves as the Leader of the Opposition for Burma's House of Representatives.

#### A Review of the Issues Facing Burma:

One of the greatest obstructions to Burmese modernization is a lack of infrastructure. As of 1996, only 12% of their 17,523 miles of roads were paved.<sup>viii</sup> Since Burma has intense, harsh climate changes, many of these roads are in states of disrepair as a result of monsoons. Throughout the 1990s, the government made attempts to fix transportation problems, though many went largely unfinished. A late 1990s project to reconstruct the Old Myanmar Road from Mandalay to China failed and resulted in several civilian casualties, while attempts to renovate the rail system of the 1990s led to very little lasting change. Most remote areas are only reachable via a large network of canals and rivers. Aside from transportation, Burma is unable to provide consistent energy to businesses and homes. Though a relatively large amount of energy (38%) is hydroelectricity, about 68% of their energy comes from fossil fuels. In addition to the environmental repercussions of using fossil fuels, the government is unable to supply the energy needed for businesses to run, and the system frequently short circuits, cutting off energy for anyone. As a result, most businesses rely on their own diesel-run generators, stifling business growth in Burma.<sup>ix</sup> Prior to Thein Sein's election in 2011, the government worked to strictly regulate internet access; all internet modems had to be provided from the Ministry of Post and Telegraph, and the possession of unauthorized modems resulted in a 15 year prison sentence.

Aside from infrastructure, Burma's healthcare system is severely lacking. From 1990-95 the infant mortality rate ranged from 7-10%, while in 1995, per capita spending was less than US \$2 per capita. For the past 20 years, Burma has struggled with supplying access to clean drinking water. In 1990, just under 60% of the Burmese population had access to clean drinking water. As a result of this deficiency, malaria and tuberculosis remain the two biggest diseases in Burma. <sup>x</sup>

Burma also struggles with supplying proper education to its people. In 1988, hundreds of students rebelled against the military regime, advocating democratic rule. To avoid future unrest, the government shut down most universities. In 1996, when more educated citizens protested the lack of access to higher learning, the government began reopening the schools, though it placed harsh restrictions on the curriculum for each area of study.<sup>xi</sup>

#### Current Analysis of the Situation:

Following the democratic elections of 2011, Burma made radical improvements to infrastructure, education, and healthcare, although major issues still plague these systems. Though the current government acknowledges the need for better infrastructure, they lack the necessary funds to complete projects; Burma's GDP per capita is just 868 USD.<sup>xii</sup> As a result, in 2013, Burma opened up to foreign investment for the first time. In the past two years, the government has attempted to build a new airport in Hanthawaddy to accommodate the recent influx of tourism, though few nations or businesses are willing to invest in the project. A risk assessment company, Business Monitor International (BMI) stated, "there is scope for a breakdown in political stability within [Burma] and this poses a major downside risk to these airport projects," and that "A failure to address the most pressing issues in the current Constitution ... could destabilize [the] already challenging business environment."<sup>xiii</sup> This new airport, costing 1.1 billion USD, would quadruple the current capacity of air travel at the main airport of Rangoon, Burma. Though Burma's Constitution allows for deficit spending, the country does not have the GDP to support such an expensive endeavor and relies on foreign support to complete the airport, and several other infrastructure projects. Aside from the financial risk associated with political instability in Burma, many investors do not wish to finance infrastructure projects, because they take far longer than any other investment to earn their money back. Additionally, the public-private partnerships (PPP)

necessary for completing government projects are difficult and tedious arrangements that stall the construction of many buildings and roads. <sup>xiv</sup>

Regarding healthcare, Burma lags far behind that of its region. In 2012, the World Health Organization ranked Burma 190th out of 190 countries in their category on “overall health system performance.” Despite these numbers, in 2011, the Minister of Health Yaw Myint opposed a congressional bill to increase medical spending for the poor, calling them unnecessary.<sup>xv</sup> In 2013, just 2.1% of Burma’s GDP came from the healthcare industry, compared to about 20% that the military provided.<sup>xvi</sup> In 2013, the government significantly decreased military spending and funneled the money into medical improvements, but most of the necessary adjustments are costly and require foreign investment and other issues remain. One major priority of the government is to increase the number of doctors graduating from Burmese schools, while also raising the education standards of these doctors. In a March 2013 survey, 47% of respondents said that quality was their greatest concern regarding Burmese healthcare, compared to only 29% of respondents that stated cost as the biggest problem.<sup>xvii</sup> Though the government provides slim healthcare, most citizens prefer using small clinics where they pay all of the costs associated with their medical operations or medications. Though the use of foreign drugs could completely combat many of the top diseases facing Burma including tuberculosis, privatized American TB drug companies are unwilling to provide medication to the Burmese people as a result of the lack of disposable income.<sup>xviii</sup> With the recent rise in drug-resistant malaria and tuberculosis, Burma desperately needs the technology and research of the first world to properly aid its people.

In 2001, UNESCO reported that Burma spent just 1.3% of its budget on education, a policy that continued for many years later. According UNCEF report in 2008, only about 70% of students attend primary school regularly, and 50% of students do not attend secondary school.<sup>xix</sup> These low numbers are a direct result of extremely low teacher salaries, fighting along the Thailand border that

prevents many kids from attending school, and a lack of widespread schools in rural areas.

Currently, NGOs provide schooling in areas of fighting and provide a more structured curriculum and a program that trains students to become teachers. As a result of this schooling, thousands of Burmese citizens in neighboring regions visit refugee camps for educational purposes, which leads to overcrowding of camps along the southeastern border.<sup>xx</sup>

Though the government transition to democratic elections in 2011 helped increase popular freedoms of speech, press, and assembly, there are still political problems present in the government. A Freedom House report in 2012 stated that Burma lacks “governmental transparency, a democratic electoral process, and basic rights.”<sup>xxi</sup> There are also issues with the election of Aung San Suu Kyi. Currently, article 59 (f) of the Burmese Constitution forbids anyone married to a foreigner from running for President, attacked as a direct way to keep Suu Kyi from becoming President. Additionally, the Constitution states the army awards 25% of the seats of Parliament to nominees of the army, but any vote to amend the Constitution requires more than 75% agreement in Parliament. Since the President is chosen by the members of Parliament, Aung San Suu Kyi requires widespread support from both army nominees and elected officials to become President. Nevertheless, Suu Kyi is optimistic about her chances for the presidency in 2015 and continues to have widespread support from the people of Burma.

As Aung San Suu Kyi’s closest advisors, it is your job to assess which issues facing Burma are the most pressing, all while working to elect Suu Kyi. Focusing on Burma’s budding tourism industry will increase government revenue, but will leave the population of Burma without necessary healthcare, and funding a tourism industry without proper infrastructure could hurt the economy. Focusing on infrastructure and healthcare allows for other industries to grow, but also require a large amount of capital that the government is not able to supply. Failure to resolve the current issues facing the educational department could leave Burma with a generation of largely uneducated

people, and the influx of students in refugee camps puts a heavy burden on NGOs while also accelerating the spread of disease.

Questions to Consider:

- What should be Suu Kyi's number one priority for reforming Burma: infrastructure, healthcare, education, or something else? Why?
- Which reform would affect the greatest number of people? Which reform would have the best effect on Suu Kyi's approval rating?
- With the lack of paved roads and limited access to technology, how should Suu Kyi spread her campaign to the people of Burma?
- How can Burma fund large projects like the Hanthawaddy airport? To what extent do these projects rely on foreign investments?
- How can Burma assure foreign investors that funding infrastructure and healthcare projects is worthwhile?
- What are low-cost improvements that can be made to improve infrastructure, healthcare, and education without the need for foreign investment?
- If elected, what should Suu Kyi recommend to increase employment in Burma, especially for the thousands of uneducated adults who grew up during the military regime of the late 20th century?
- What restrictions should be placed on healthcare officials? Increasing the stringency on medical degrees would increase the quality of healthcare but contribute to the shortage of doctors in Burma.

- How can Suu Kyi ensure that she is eligible to run for the 2015 presidency? What is her plan of action if the government does not loosen restrictions on Article 59(f) of the Constitution?

## Sources for Additional Research:

- <http://www.who.int/countries/mmr/en/> - This website provides accurate, up-to-date information on the healthcare industry in Burma.
- <https://tavaana.org/en/content/aung-san-suu-kyi-leading-burmese-democracy-movement-0> - This website gives a thorough and complete biography of Aung San Suu Kyi, including a timeline of her achievements.
- <http://www.theguardian.com/world/aung-san-suu-kyi> - This website provides a list of the most recent articles regarding Aung San Suu Kyi and is a great resource for current information on her campaign.
- *Letters from Myanmar* by Aung San Suu Kyi - Written in February of 2010, this is Aung San Suu Kyi's account of her life under Burmese house arrest. It also chronicles several of the atrocities committed under the military government.
- *Freedom from Fear* by Aung San Suu Kyi - Written in 1995, this is another one of Suu Kyi's accounts of life in Burma.

## Topic II: Combating Election Fraud

### History

Elections in Burma are not common. Until 2011, Burma's government was under the control of a military junta, known as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). Coincidentally, during its rule, the formation of any opposition parties was banned. Before the junta's rise to power, the most recent elections were in 1951-1952, 1956, and 1960.<sup>xxii</sup>

In 1962, the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) seized power under Ne Win's one party rule system. This party then legally outlawed the rise of opposition parties. Then, in August of

1988, the BSPP collapsed following the 8888 Uprising, in which pro-democracy marches, demonstrations, protests, and riots were held. It was also during this uprising that Aung San Suu Kyi emerged as a national icon.<sup>xxiii</sup> Subsequently, the military planned another coup d'état, reporting that they would hold "free and fair elections." The first elections to the lower house of the government, known as Pyithu Hluttaw or People's Assembly, that following September of 1990 were led by newly renamed military administration, State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC).<sup>xxiv</sup> However, the major opposition party of the time, the National League for Democracy (NLD), swept the elections, garnering 392 of the 492 seats.<sup>xxv</sup> The National League for Democracy (NLD) is a political party in Burma that advocates non-violently for a multi-party democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and national reconciliation following years of civil war and strife. Aung San Suu Kyi serves as the General Secretary of the NLD.<sup>xxvi</sup>

As a result of the elections, the NLD should have gained the majority in the People's Assembly, but the SLORC refused to substantiate the results of the election. Since then, the NLD has not been able to participate in any elections. After the NLD's victory in 1990, the military junta put Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the NLD, under house arrest.<sup>xxvii</sup> Though SLORC was abolished shortly after in November of 1997, and replaced with the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), this change brought little to no actual changes. In August of 2003, Prime Minister Khin Nyunt introduced a seven-step roadmap to democracy, which would transition the government of Burma from its current leadership by the military junta to a representative democracy.<sup>xxviii</sup>

In 2008, the SPDC announced that a public voting, a referendum, on the new constitution would be held. The SPDC also set elections to be held in 2010. Although the NLD was excluded from participating, the first general election since 1962 took place in 2010. The 2010 elections were widely considered fraudulent, even though both China and Russia praised Burma for holding

elections to begin with. The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), which was supported by the military, won 259 of the 330 contested seats, and subsequently declared victory. The results of this election left Burma in much of the same state as before because the military still had such a strong hold on the government.<sup>xxix</sup>

However, in 2012, the NLD was allowed to take part in the 2012 by-elections. Suu Kyi, who had been released from house arrest in 2010, won a seat in the Pyithu Hluttaw in those 2012 by-elections.<sup>xxx</sup> The NLD also won 43 of the 44 seats it contested, which was out of 46 seats. Because NLD did not participate in the 2010 elections, 2012 was the first year in which the NLD gained actual representation in the Burmese government. The next election in Burma is scheduled to be in 2015.<sup>xxxi</sup>

## Current Status

Following Suu Kyi's release from house arrest in 2010, she has participated in the government, even garnering a position in the Pyithu Hluttaw in 2012. As the General Secretary of NLD, who was put under house arrest due to NLD's undeniable popularity in the 1990 elections, Suu Kyi became an international symbol for the non-violent movement to democracy and against oppression.<sup>xxxii</sup> However, the fraudulent elections in 1990 and again in 2010 have made it especially difficult for Suu Kyi to see her dream of a democratic and just Burma come to fruition.

In the 1990 elections, the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by General Secretary Aung San Suu Kyi, won over 80% of the parliamentary seats with more than 60% of the public vote. Nonetheless, the SLORC, who was in power at the time, refused to relegate power to the NLD.<sup>xxxiii</sup> At that time, the SLORC declared that its party would form a national constitutional convention composed of its elected officials instead of a parliament. Then, the SLORC started developing the

“Seven Step Road Map to Disciplined Democracy”, which would eventually lead to Burma’s reintroduction to democracy.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

The elections of 1990 were relatively free and fair, following a strictly regulated campaigning process. During the campaigning, authorities arrested advocates for the opposition and failed to conduct polls in large ethnic minority areas. As a result of this lack of democracy in what were intended to be democratic elections, armed conflicts broke out in the underrepresented or unrepresented states of Burma.<sup>xxxv</sup> An example of such fighting can be found in the Kachin State of Burma, where the Kachin Independence Army fought violently with the Myanmar Army to address complaints of underrepresentation of ethnic and minority groups and their rights.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

In the 2010 elections, not only were fraudulent practices taking place on the day of elections, but also many instances of pre-election fraudulence were reported. There were a plethora of reports of voting abnormalities before November 7, many of which were committed by member of the military-backed USDP. Even local officials were vessels of the corrupt election practices; some were reported to have entreated voters to complete advance ballots with the incentives of money or scholarships. Even more drastic are the measures taken by officials to threaten residents that infrastructure projects would not be finished if votes were not secured for the USDP.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Unfortunately, due to the censorship of the Burmese government, it is impossible for foreign entities to get involved to ameliorate this situation, similarly to the futile attempts shown by domestic groups hoping to rid the country of corruption.

Additionally, USDP candidates and party members have been falsely taking credit for development initiatives in local areas. For example, many citizens believe that the USDP is responsible for the institution of roads, clinics, or security of a water supply because of this false advertising by USDP candidates. The Union Election Commission (UEC) has banned all media from recording video or photographs around polling stations, so it was effectively impossible for

voters to gather credible and accurate information prior to voting on November 7, 2010. Foreign journalists are also prohibited from covering any portion of the campaigning in Burma or the election, further preventing the populace from receiving the correct information.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Because it is illegal for citizens to speak out in criticism of the election processes under the 2008 election, many are afraid to voice their opinion or call out any corruption that may be taking place.<sup>xxxix</sup> Due to the fact that Burma is adverse to coverage by the media, it is difficult to evaluate the level of corruption occurring on a local level. However, some rural states have described local officials instructing residents that they do not need to vote because the officials will do so for them. Though instances like this differ across the nation depending on the presence of the military and the local government officials, many states, especially rural and border ones, such as Rakhine, have recounted instances of election fraud and corruption. Some political parties have even gotten involved in the arguments against election fraud; the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP) filed complaints with the UEC that recalled accounts of harassment against their party leaders as a result of the party mobilization and upcoming elections.<sup>xl</sup>

Intimidation of voters is another prevalent aspect of Burmese elections. Again, because of the absence of national or international monitors of elections and campaigning, it is difficult to determine the level of intimidation that is arising in the states of Burma. In fact, many communities may not even recognize the intimidation that political candidates are waging due to decades, even centuries, of acculturation to local intimidation. Residents know not to speak out or resist in any way because it will attract the unwanted attention of the authorities, and in some grave cases, the military. The legal system even grants latitude to local officials to conduct such intimidation; they are allowed to arbitrarily arrest, detain, or thwart civic participation in governmental activities.<sup>xli</sup>

## Analysis of the Issue

One possible solution to creating more just and fair elections would be to implement national regulations concerning the campaigning and polling process. Because there are no concrete laws regarding the election process, it makes it that much easier for the ruling party at the time to influence the process and create a bias in the system. Also, the Burmese government currently bans journalist, both national and international ones, from recording and presenting information on the campaigns and elections. In order to create a more informed populace, the government needs to allow at least national journalists to conduct coverage and give accurate information to the public.

More importantly, though, along with creating stricter laws, there must be a stricter enforcement of all laws, specifically those concerning the elections. As of right now, the corruption is taking place on a local basis. Many of the current local government officials were appointed by the USDP and therefore support the military and the progress of that one party. Some officials will even go to dire lengths to ensure that the USDP attains as many seats in parliament as possible. In situations like this, the local officials must be held accountable by the national government so that a true and fair democracy is developed, instead of a weak and corrupt one.

The local and national governments both need to encourage and support the participation of residents. Because of past corrupt practices, many citizens shy away from participating in governmental activities. An election in which so few citizens participate is also not a proper or fair election because a true democracy is a representation of all citizens, or at least as many as realistically possible.

Overall, upcoming elections in Burma, especially the 2015 election with candidate Aung San Suu Kyi, must be proper democratic elections that allow all citizens to vote of their free will. These elections should not involve tactics of corruption or intimidations, and should not exclude any

specific party or platform from running for a position in the government. In the future, it is crucial that Burma institutes laws and enforces laws that will protect the democracy of the nation.

#### Questions to consider

- What do the past election practices of Burma foreshadow for the 2015 election?
- How will Aung San Suu Kyi's unique history of house arrest and oppression influence her election and campaign in 2015?
- Intimidation and corruption on local levels are a major part of the fraudulent elections taking place. What is the best way to combat these practices?
- How can you, personally, create change in the corrupt election system currently existing in Burma?
- How can Burma regulate its overzealous military while still providing equal democracy and representation to all?
- How can the Burmese government enforce just election practices without giving the military too much power in the system?
- In what ways can the military change to better serve the democratic system of Burma?
- What roles do the other political parties of Burma have in ensuring the democratic institution? Can these political parties be trusted to uphold that responsibility without one party taking too much power? Why or why not?
- In the past, many individuals have been persuaded to vote a certain way in elections because of financial incentives. How can the government best combat this given that needs for financial assistance will always exist?

- How can Burma best provide accurate information to voters before elections? Through what avenues will this be most efficient?
- If the Burmese government were to allow journalists to cover the campaigns and elections, can those media outlets be trusted to accurately portray the events of the country? Why or why not? What actions should be taken if the media is not being truthful in its presentation?
- What backlash might the government, media, or both receive if media were to be allowed during campaigning and elections? How can this best be dealt with?

#### Additional Resources

- <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-11685977> - This website provides a comprehensive and thorough biography of Aang San Suu Kyi. It is especially useful when trying to understand the process through which she has arrived at her current status.
- <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/01/24/a-free-woman?currentPage=all> - This website has a meticulous analysis of Burma's political history and the role that Aang San Suu Kyi has played thus far. It is a perfect resource for getting an understanding of the political scene in Burma today and how it has evolved to that position.
- <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html> - This resource is a great tool to get a further understanding of the nation of Burma, its geography, demographics, culture, languages, and much more. It sets the scene for the elections that have been taking place and the one that will take place in 2015.
- [https://www.ndi.org/Burma\\_Groups\\_Expose\\_Fraud](https://www.ndi.org/Burma_Groups_Expose_Fraud) - This is a link to National Democratic Institute's analysis of Burma's 2010 election. It provides an interesting insight in the fraudulence and corruption of the first democratic elections in Burma's history for almost 50 years.

- [http://www.hrw.org/news/2010/11/02/qa-elections-burma#\\_What\\_occurred\\_during](http://www.hrw.org/news/2010/11/02/qa-elections-burma#_What_occurred_during) - This is an excellent source when studying the history of corrupt elections in Burma. It provides questions and answers involving past elections and corrupt practices, specifically those of 1990 and 2010. It is a great starting point for resolutions as it provides the many downfalls of the current election system.

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