BURMA ANALYSIS

ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION IN BURMA, AS OF APRIL 2016.
Burma was governed by military junta from 1962. In 1990, Burma had their first multi-party elections since 1962. The elections were not meant to create a new government, but they would form a committee to write a new constitution. This event followed the 8888 Uprisings - the movement in 1988 to initiate democracy and end the one-party rule in Burma, and yet it was not until 2010 that Burma had an elected president. Between these years, the Burmese military still had full control over the country, outlawing and censoring opposition and media as they deemed fit. The government transitioned into freely democratic elections in 2010, and the military announced reforms for the nation in 2011. Since then, the constitution has been rewritten, censorship is less prominent, and certain websites have been unblocked.¹

Despite all reforms, perfection has not come with the transition, so far; the military's motives behind reform are being questioned. Additionally, the military - allegedly - has purposefully implemented laws into the new constitution that would bar members of the National League for Democracy - notably Aung San Suu Kyi - from running for office.

Elected delegates in the 1990 People's Assembly election formed the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), a government in exile since December 1990, with the mission of restoring democracy. The NCGUB has been outlawed by the military government. Major political parties in the country are the National

League for Democracy and the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, although their activities are heavily regulated and suppressed by the military government. In May 2008, Burma’s constitution referendum was approved by 92.4% of the 22 million voters. Elections took place on 7 November, 2010. Both, the 2008 State Constitution and Political Parties Registration Law, ban people serving prison sentences (including persons in the process of putting up appeal for those sentences) from contesting in the elections. They also prohibit persons who owe allegiance to a foreign government from contesting. This action disqualified the NLD from running, as they ran into controversy with activism against the military government, making continued party activities illegal. In addition, the NLD was declared unqualified to run for office, as they did not register as a political party on time that year.

The policies stated above have been widely criticized by the international actors, including Washington Secretary of State Kurt Cambell, who referred to the policy as “very regrettable.” Additionally, the law prompted the NLD to boycott the elections. They had won the 1990 election, yet the results were annulled by the military. The presidency in 2010 was won by Thein Sein of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) by nearly 80% of the votes. The result was riddled with controversy, from other players than the NLD. The elections were canceled in several provinces within Burma due to lack of voter security according to the Union Election Commission.

Additionally, the United Nations expressed concern about the fairness of the elections, mainly in regards to the NLD’s role as Suu Kyi was under house arrest at the time of the elections and was not going to be released until after the elections. United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton accused the trial against Suu Kyi of being a baseless charge, adding that continuing resistance to a free and open election would lead to the 2010 elections being totally illegitimate. The United Kingdom foreign minister William Hague had similar feelings, holding that these elections “do not represent change.”


In 2011, the NLD registered as a political party on 13 December 2011 in order to be able to run for office in the next elections. The most recent elections were held on 8 November 2015, in which the NLD won by 86% of the votes.6 Despite this turnout, Aung San Suu Kyi is still barred from being leader of Burma given her marriage and birth to foreign (British) citizens, a policy in the constitution enforced by the Military. While they are willing to cooperate with the NLD, the military is not accepting any attempts to reform the constitution.7 Regardless of who the leader will be in name, Suu Kyi is declared as the one “who will make all the decisions.” As of late march, the president incumbent is Htin Kyaw.

Burma’s foreign relations with Western countries have not been very strong. Embargoes have been placed on Burma by The United States and European Union, in response to the military regime’s refusal to accept the election results in 1990, including an arms embargo and suspension of all non-humanitarian aid. It reflected on Burma’s economy, most of American and Western companies withdraw themselves from the country, supporting democratization process.8 There is still much trade between Burma and the European Union.9

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Relations with neighboring countries are for more positive than those of Western countries. Burma is a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and part of ASEAN +3 and the East Asia Summit. The international reaction to the electoral laws was strong. America's position is that the electoral law was disappointing and a step back in the democratization. (ASEAN) annual summit in April avoided direct criticism, calling for free, fair election, thus contributing to Myanmar's stability and development. It is important that foreign governments continue to concern about the electoral process and to point out the disrespect for international norms. With the constitution and electoral legislation in place, there is limited space to influence the process. Many political actors have made clear that they don't believe it is worth participating. But many others are taking risks by attempting, they are fully aware of how rigorous the election law is, but they are still convinced that the best is to participate in the elections.

China considered elections and new constitution necessary for country stability, saying that government would have more legitimacy. Bilateral relations with the Russian Federation are the strongest. Russia had established diplomatic relations with Burma when it became independent and it remained till today. Russia and China remained the biggest support for the regime, defending their actions ahead of other global criticism.

Burma is one of the poorest nations in Southeast Asia, yet its economy is certainly improving. Burma's GDP growth for 2014-15 stood at 8.5%, and the predicted GDP growth for 2015-16 stands at 9.3%. These numbers are drastic improvements over those of previous years. The economy in 2009 had been rated as the least free in Asia (tied with North Korea). Since then, this ranking has gone up a great deal; Burma now ranks 36th (out of 42 countries) in terms of economic freedom. All fundamental market institutions are suppressed. Private enterprises are often co-owned or indirectly owned by

state. The corruption watchdog organization Transparency International in its 2007 Corruption Perceptions Index released on 26 September 2007 ranked Burma the most corrupt country in the world, tied with Somalia, yet in 2015 Burma's corruption ranking faced improvement, becoming the 22nd most corrupt country.¹⁴ Improvement of corruption and economy in Burma began in 2011, after the Burmese era of economic liberalization. President Thein Sein's government embarked on a major reform of policies; they sought out on campaigns of anti-corruption, improvement of currency exchange rates, and foreign investment laws. While Burma still has room for more improvement, the weakening of corruption has been apparent. Foreign investments in 2011 increased by 66.7% from the previous year, and import restrictions and export taxes have been greatly relaxed.¹⁵

The sell-off and privatization process have been accelerated in 2010. Many, but not all the sales have been mentioned in the state media, but the process has been lacking in transparency and accountability.


Burma has a population of about 51 million according to the 2014 census. There are an estimated 2 million migrant workers from Burma in Thailand, some registered, some there illegally.  

Burmese migrant workers account for 70% of Burma's overseas population. Burma is ethnically diverse. The government recognizes 135 distinct ethnic groups.

Prior to the ceasefires, ethnic organizations are considered as drug smugglers or terrorist groups. Several of the major ceasefire groups— including the Kachin Independence Organization, the Shan State Army (North) and the New Mon State Party – have retained their arms. They are not happy with the constitutional law and will retain their status as armed ethnic organizations. Therefore, they can’t be political parties and will not participate in the elections.

Most ethnic organizations are focusing their attention on the regions, rather than the national level. They feel that they have a better chance of success at this level, because the military is more interested in the national politics.

Ethnic ceasefire groups have come under increasing pressure from the regime to transform into "Border Guard Forces" under the partial control of the military. The authorities have repeatedly extended the deadline, but no major ceasefire group has yet agreed. At the same time, most ceasefire groups have either formed new parties to contest the elections or have sided with the ethnic groups and encourage them to

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engage in the electoral process. For example, the Kachin State Progressive Party has close links to the two main Kachin ceasefire groups (the leader of the party, Dr Tu Ja, is the former vice chairman of the Kachin Independence Organization), and a Pa-O political party (the Pa-O National Organization) is closely connected to the ceasefire group of the same name. Registration law provides deregistration of any political party having direct or indirect links with these armed groups, and it is very risky for registered political parties to connect with them.  

Some of the ethnic organizations are still engaged in armed conflict with the regime (The Karen national Union, Shan State Army South, and Karen National Progressive Party). They all have rejected elections. The most controversial demographic group in Burma is the Rohingya. The Rohingya, the majority of whom are Muslims, originate from the Rakhine State in Burma. Their population in Burma alone constitutes 1.3 million people. Despite this, they have been called “the world's most prosecuted people” by the United Nations Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon. The Rohingya in Burma are not recognized as Burmese citizens, thus they are essentially stateless. Instead, they are regarded by the Burmese government as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. Bangladesh, however, has refused to accept Rohingya into their borders, thus they are essentially stuck in Burma. They have faced very much violence and prosecution, and are the poorest demographic in Burma. Additionally, they are barred from voting in elections. Journalists writing about the Rohingya have been arrested, and foreign NGOs are not allowed into the Rakhine State. In addition, several hospitals have turned away Rohingya requesting healthcare. Because of this, it is estimated that 700,000 people in the state have no access to healthcare. Even after many reforms have been made, the case of the Rohingya has not improved. Aung San Suu Kyi has been shunned for remaining silent about this case.

Senior General Than Shwe, 73, is the head of the ruling junta and controls the army. He is the most hard-line leader, strongly opposed to allowing any political role for opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi. After working in the Burmese postal service, Than Shwe joined the army at the age of 20 and his career included a stint in the department of psychological warfare. He has acted as Burma’s head of state since 1992 until 2011, and was initially seen as more open than his predecessor, General Saw Maung. Some political prisoners were released, and human rights groups were allowed to visit Burma. But he suppressed all dissent in his time in power, and oversaw the re-arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2003.

Maung Aye is also a career soldier and the second most powerful man in the country’s army. He is believed to have established strong ties with Burma’s many drug lords in the Golden Triangle while operating as a colonel in the late 1970s and 80s, before he joined the military leadership in 1993. He has a reputation for ruthlessness and xenophobia, and is also staunchly opposed to allowing Aung San Suu Kyi any future role.

In April 2012, Prime Minister Thein Sein and more than twenty ministers and deputy ministers resigned from the armed forces and applied to the election commission to register a political party. Under the party registration law, civil servants and members of the armed forces are prohibited from forming or being members of political parties, and parties are prohibited from accepting or using direct or indirect state support, including money and property.


The 88 Generation Students group is synonymous with the long struggle for democracy in military-ruled Burma. Its name comes from the 1988 uprising, when troops opened fire on mass student demonstrations in Rangoon, leading to the deaths of thousands of people. The group's key members were at the forefront of the protests, and have suffered harsh reprisals ever since. Many have been subjected to lengthy prison terms, and human rights groups have catalogued a number of claims of torture. But despite this, the group still plays a prominent role in pro-democracy campaigns inside Burma - and when rare protests against the government take place, the 1988 veterans are usually involved. Most recently the group organized a series of protests to condemn the sharp fuel price rises that have been introduced by the government. Members of the 88 Generation include some of the most prominent dissidents in the country after Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the opposition National League for Democracy party. Perhaps the best-known member of the group is Min Ko Naing - who was the unofficial leader of the underground student union at the time of the 1988 uprising.
II PILLARS ANALYSIS

In Burma, the government benefits greatly from the consistent support of several pillars loyal to the regime. These pillars have the most to gain by preserving the status quo and the military government. However, they generate support via institutional and coercive means rather than popular support, meaning large sections of society in Burma, and a number of important pillars, have potential as supporters of democratic reform. These pillars have split allegiances, or exhibit closer proximity to the opposition. Although many of them, including those who are more loyal, have had less government regulation and control due to many reforms being introduced.

A. PILLARS SUPPORTING THE MILITARY

1. SECURITY FORCES

The Tatmadaw is the official armed forces police force in Burma- formally known as the Myanmar Police Force- is the formal service of the national army, navy, air force, and police force. Its jurisdiction is the Ministry of Defense, which is under the jurisdiction of the government. As such, all security forces are under government control. Not to mention- being a military-governed country- Burma's military is the most powerful force in the government. Granted, their influence has gotten lower ever since 2011, but the military still has the most influence in the country.25

Economic elites, namely men and women working in national businesses, have benefited from the regime, and are not inclined to oppose them. Farmers and laborers are losing a lot of land to the corrupt business people associated with the army. It is considered unlawful to oppose the regime’s policy (though protest has been common), which has played a large part in supporting and preserving the interests of the wealthy, while diminishing those of rural workers. The efforts of workers to lobby for better conditions or wages have long been futile because of this. Not much improvement in this regard has been seen since reformation in 2011, in fact rich elites continue to grow more rich, especially after the 2012 gold rush. There is no law in place that protects a person’s right to their land, so the military and businesspeople loyal to them continue to have the ability to take more and more land. The economy is still supported by the military government.26

3. EXTERNAL ACTORS – CHINA AND INDIA

India and China are two of the largest international supporters of the regime. India is the largest market for Burmese exports, in fact Burma is India’s fourth-largest trading partner. Upwards of $220 million were spent by India to buy from Burma, which leads to heavy monetary support for the regime, given that the military is in control of the economic sectors in the country.27 China is the largest and most important supplier to Burma of military aid. Until now, both nations maintain strong, strategic military cooperation. In fact, China is responsible for both training members of and supplying materials to the Burmese military. In 2007, a resolution was brought to the United Nations with the intent of punishing heinous actions of the Burmese military, which was vetoed in 2007 by China. As of recently, China has been less involved in supporting Burma’s military and more in stabilizing the situation, but it is still the most important ally to the Burmese military.


B. SPLIT ALLEGIANCES

1. COURTS

The supreme court of Burma was traditionally run by the country’s military. In 2011, after a series of reforms, the jurisdiction of the supreme court went to the constitution written in 2008. The supreme court has been an independent judicial entity since then, however the court rulings are not always independent of the military government. Disputes between the court and the government often result in the ruling of the government taking place, given their authority over the nation.28

2. EDUCATION

Burmese students are generally highly involved in politics. Educators, especially primary and secondary school educators, are often critical of the military regime, however, those who are- including professors in higher education- are limited in terms of political discourse in the classroom. Much improvement in this field has been seen following the 2011 political course, however there is still not completely a setting of free speech in classrooms. Students staged the pro-democracy movement, and thus the military regime views students and an obstruction, to the point where they temporarily closed down all schools in Burma during times where people aimed for reform. While the schooling system is nowhere near perfect, students and teachers alike now have more freedom in what they say ever since the uprisings in 2011.

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3. EXTERNAL ACTORS –
THE WEST AND ASEAN

Many Western countries and ASEAN have all expressed concern over certain practices of the Burmese military at different points in the recent past. The United States imposed sanctions on Burma in the 1990s in response to discontent with the military government. Neither country represented the other via embassies as such. Several EU countries joined in creating sanctions. Not all countries in the EU penalized Burma, notably Denmark. While Denmark currently has the worst trading relations with Burma out of the entire EU, they have the friendliest relations, as they have since 1955. ASEAN does include Burma as a member, however this has been met with criticism, given Burma’s human rights record and lack of democracy. In fact, Burma has been announced as something of an improper member state given that ASEAN had refused to provide military defense for the Burmese military government. They have additionally taken a hard stance against Burma for the detainment of (now released) Aung San Suu Kyi, and the treatment of the Rohingya. Much improvement has been met since reforms began in 2011. In 2012, the United States praised the reforms in Burma, and reopened diplomatic ties with them. Burma now has an embassy in the United States, and the United States has an embassy in Burma. ASEAN has also relaxed some of the tensions they had with Burma.

Buddhists in Burma have played an increasingly active role in political life. They have very high influence in Burmese politics. This is not to say that no Buddhist is in favor of reform. A series of Buddhist monks have taken steps to involve themselves in pro-democracy activism, participating in protests and campaigns in favor of democracy. Political figures have criticized some of this activism, and some monks and abbots have even been arrested. Yet the monks from Burma cite that their religion could not thrive when the country is so desperate for reform and change.

Given the above statement, it can be said that Buddhist monks in Burma are in favor of democratic reform. However, this is not the case for every Buddhist affiliation in the country. In fact, many actions from Buddhists have come under fire even from human rights activists. As recently as July, the parliament of Burma


approved a law that would regulate marriages between Buddhist women and men from outside their religion. Many activist groups condemned the law, citing that it was passed under pressure from hardline nationalist Buddhist monks. Later on, both politicians and activists have together criticized a nationalist Buddhist movement that was celebrating the passing of this law, along with other controversial laws. The group that mainly came under fire for this was the Association for the Protection of Race and Religion (Ma Ba Tha). Ma Ba Tha has come under fire from several activists and human rights NGOs. They advocate religious Buddhist nationalism in Burma, and have largely excluded many other groups in Burma.

The strongest case that keeps Buddhists in Burma from being a strong ally for democratic reform is their continued poor treatment of Muslims and Rohingya. The Rohingya crisis is far from something small in Burma, and since the Burmese monks are highly influential, not many people are interested in helping them. A predominantly Buddhist movement, the 969 Movement, was created in opposition to Islam. They oppose the thriving of Islam in Burma, and with that, the Rohingya, given their high Muslim population.

C. POTENTIAL ALLIES FOR DEMOCRATIC REFORM

1. MEDIA

Media in Burma is highly regulated, and has been ever since the military took over, especially in television. Yet much reform and improvement in press freedom has been observed since 2011.33

Television & Film:

By law, anyone broadcasting on television in Burma is required to gain a license by the ministry of communications.34 Films must undergo a similar process, where they go to the Motion Picture Enterprise, and may be subjected to heavy censorship in accordance with the motion picture law.35 All television in Burma is owned by the government, with only the exception of very few channels. As such, the government regulates what is allowed to be taped and broadcast. For a long time satellite television was illegal, but this has changed after reforms. CNN was still banned after satellite TV was deemed legal, however this ban was only temporary.36

Any state-owned media station will speak in support of the military, and any opponents will likely not be allowed to be broadcast. Actions taken by authorities against nonconforming media has been met with such punishment as arrest.

Internet:

Internet in Burma was initially very heavily censored. Access to websites that were critical of the Burmese government in any way would be barred from public access, as well as several foreign websites, including that of BBC. Approval from the government was required to be able to own a computer, smart phone, or any other device capable of retrieving information. After a series of protests, many reforms to internet censorship in 2011. Information and sources critical of the government became accessible, as well as foreign media. The head of Burma's censorship department has described censorship as an undemocratic practice that “should be abolished in the near future.”

Journalism & Print:

Previously, while a wide variety of publications in Burma were available, all of them were state-owned. Despite this, every article in a newspaper, regardless of content or topics, were required to pass through inspections at the board of censorship. Today, there are only three publications that are state-owned. After reforms in 2012, many censorship laws were repealed, and sixteen independent news sources were granted licenses to report (without which, publishing material could merit a prison sentence). In 2013, privately-owned newspapers were given the right to publish freely.


2. OPPOSITION PARTIES

The opposition to the military government of Burma is one of the most successful allies for reform in the country because of their induction into leadership roles. The opposition of Burma is the political parties represented that are not part of the government on their own, or as part of a governing coalition, including the NLD and the USDP. Given that Thein Sein- leader of the USDP- serves as the first president of Burma after the military introduced reforms, the opposition has faced success at a national level. To a degree, they have been restoring democracy in the nation. Even while this has been in place, democracy has not been restored entirely. There is still widespread power for the military government, along with several laws that would keep their interests in power. The most notable of these are the laws that bar Suu Kui from becoming president, even when the party she leads won the elections for upcoming presidency. That being said, over the past decade, there has been a myriad of reform supporting democracy in the country. With all of their accomplishments, the opposition may be the strongest ally for reform in the country.

3. ENTREPRENEURS

Prior to the reforms by the government, entrepreneurship in Burma was difficult to start up. Economic freedoms were rather limited, making it very difficult for new entrepreneurs to start up. Following the reforms though, things have changed. In 2011, Burmese entrepreneurs were able to start up new jobs with greater ease.39 In fact, the reforms have enabled even young people in their 20s to start up new entrepreneurial firms, includ-

In addition, before the reforms, not a lot of people in the country were using cellphones. Nowadays, with new businesses starting up, cell phones and SIM cards are far easier to come by, and are more affordable. With the improvement of entrepreneurship comes an increase in tourism. In fact, the amount of tourists entering Burma in 2013 was triple the amount 2011. Many young men and women in the tourist sector are very optimistic about the future. With entrepreneurship improving after the reforms and tourism coming to a sharp increase, there is no doubt that entrepreneurs in Burma are strongly in favor of reform. They may well be allies towards campaigns for further reform and further economic freedom.

Labor movements are allies for democracy in that they have faced tremendous growth and benefits out of democratic reforms.

**Labor Unions:**

With economic freedoms becoming less scarce after the 2011 reforms, labor unions have seen tremendous room for growth in the past few years since the reforms. In fact, in mid-October 2011, president Thein Sein introduced a new law that would allow the formation of labor unions, and even labor strikes, if necessary. Before this time, trade unions were not allowed to form by law of the Burmese government. The new laws pertaining to labor unions have done a lot to legalize the representation of workers in the government. A large success was met for laborers when Burma officially recognized its own national trade union confederation. The Confederation of Trade Unions of Myanmar (CTUM) was recognized by the government in mid-2015. Since then, CTUM has gone across the country to deliver training on international trade and the union movement.

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Agricultural Sector:

About 60% of Burma's GDP is generated by the nation's agricultural center. In fact, it is the mainstay of the Burmese economy, and is responsible for a large amount of the income and employment in the country. As much as 65% of the labor force is employed in the agricultural sector alone. As such, the needs of the labor unions in Burma work in tandem with those of the agricultural center. While the agricultural sector was an imperative sector even before the 2011 reforms, the quality of work for the laborers improved afterward. The system is not perfect; in the absence of purchasing power, multitudes of people go hungry. In addition, only about half of the arable land in Burma is under cultivation. However, with the situation for laborers only improving over time, the people working in the agricultural sector may well be allies for democracy in Burma. 44

Young people, especially students, have traditionally been a key feature of national movements. A number of opposition movements have formed as student groups, including the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), and Generation Wave. The ABSDF was formed in 1988 during the 8888 Revolution in opposition of the government and the Tatmadaw. Their ideologies include liberal democracy, political freedom, and antimilitarism. Despite their belief in antimilitarism, the ABSDF operates and armed wing that has fought together with other opposition groups in Myanmar. Another movement in Burma that is in favor of democracy in Burma is Generation Wave. Generation Wave is more recent than ABSDF, having formed in 2007 after the Saffron Revolution. It is a youth movement founded by activists and media stars to spread messages opposing the military government. The Saffron Revolution took place after the government removed subsidies on the sales prices of gas, raising the prices of oil by over 500%. Many protests in the revolution were led by Buddhist Monks. Even after the reforms, students who are part of such groups as those mentioned are facing problems. Many of them have been arrested and detained, even as recently as 2015. However, much of the youth is opposed to the military government, which is effectively less strong with the reforms in place. As such, the youth reform movements can effectively be allies for democracy in Burma.45

III  POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

A. DISASTER SCENARIOS

The people of Burma have multitudes of reasons to celebrate. In the past five years, many concessions have been made to support the people and take power away from the military. Even free and fair elections have been allowed to happen. However, the military is still widely in power. While democratic outcomes have been increasing for the past five years, democracy in Burma is still young and not fully stable. As such, while they are far from likely at this point, there is still room for unwanted outcomes, which could result in the military retaining power over Burma.

1. MILITARY REINSTATES FULL CONTROL UNDER REGIME

Though Burma has made tremendous democratic progress in the last set of years, especially in the realm of civil society, the institutions of power are still controlled by the military, which should not be ignored. Only recently this year did Burma have a fully democratically elected president. There is room for the military to take over again if anything goes wrong. In Egypt, after former president Morsi’s democratic election, citizens were widely unhappy with the quality of his presidency, prompting them to protest it, making way for the military’s coup d’etat. The result of this was a return to military ruling under someone new. There is no reason this cannot happen in Burma. The military regime in Burma proved to be strong in politics, and understand how to retain power. After all, they were practically able to maintain effectively single-party rule for over 50 years, and with the same leader for a number of those years. After a series of revolutions, the military of Burma learned that people power poses the greatest risk to their continued authoritarian control. For this reason, they have been effectively catering to the political desires of pro-democratic movements, to the point where democratic elections have even been held.
While the elections have been nothing short of a breakthrough for Burma, there is a chance that the military government is only temporarily allowing it, only to regain power once the idea comes into place that the ruling party has changed. It seems highly unlikely that this would be the case; the NLD won the most recent elections, which the military has tried very hard not to let happen in the past. However, this is not to say that the military will pursue any form of collaboration with them in the future. Collaboration could lead to peaceful transition in further attempts at democratic reforms. If the disaster scenario is what will happen, then peaceful transition and collaborative reform is not what the military is aiming for. A smooth transition to democracy would only cement their place away from the nation’s ruling politics, and that of the NLD into presidency. Therefore, if the military intends to regain power after gaining back the trust of the people, then there is hardly a chance for cooperation for peaceful transition or collaborative reform. For the moment, this assertion seems unfeasible, but may well be probable, given their history.

If there is a chance that this could happen, then the former military regime could very well play to the advantage of supportive groups. The Buddhists in Burma are some of the most respected figures in the country. While a number of them have been opposed to the military regime- even joining protest movements against them- the military could very well regain their trust. Given the respect they hold in Burma now, Buddhist monks could be swayed to the support of the regime if the regime insists that this kind of status will only stay if the regime stays too. This would certainly be a plausible assertion, given the influence that Burmese people have in the country’s politics. Surely many of them would remember their mistreatment and role in and before the Saffron Revolution, but it still could very well serve to be an effective narrative to get Buddhists on the side of the regime.

As it currently stands, the constitution in place still favors the military a great deal. Under it, the most powerful bureaucracies in the country will remain under military control. This means that the bureaus for Home Affairs, Border Affairs, and Military Affairs will remain tied to the military, and their budgets will remain above those of civilians, regardless of which party is in power. That being said, if the disaster scenario does take place, then the three most powerful bureaucracies in the country would very likely be on the side of the military, greatly strengthening them. Changing the constitution is close to impossible without the consent of the military, so changing this law would be difficult.

That being said, the disaster scenario is unlikely at this point. Democratic provisions have been in place since 2011, and have only grown since. While it is still possible for the situation to happen, given the growth that the military has allowed to continue, it would be asinine for them to reverse all of it, knowing that their citizens are in favor of this change, and that sanctions have been lifted from the country. That being said, it is unlikely that the military will try to take back all of the power they once had.

Attempts by the military to consolidate continued authoritarian control have been minimal, if existent, in the past set of years. However, it is possible that their maintained power arrangement will persist. At present, civil society is not in a position to challenge the political dominance of the military- and neither is the NLD- especially after all the concessions that the military has been giving to Burma since 2011. Should the military's aim actually be to maintain the guise of democracy more fully, then the concessions made and the efforts of many activists will have succeeded only in letting the military give up a degree of power to suppress the complaints of the opponents. In other words, Burma would be holding elections that appear to be free and fair every term, while the role of the president is inferior to that of the military. The suppression of the NLD in the 1990s and Aung San Suu Kyi's being barred from the presidency exemplify the military's unwillingness to cooperate with the NLD. Therefore, concessions offered to the country in 2011, after a series of protests throughout many years, indicate the military's willingness to compromise for a better image in the world, but also their apathy towards a democratic nation and lust to retain power. This is because understand that another revolution would yield more negative international attention- especially with new media getting stronger by the day- so they do whatever is possible to suppress complaints, even if this means allowing elections. Democracy is still young in Burma, so there is no telling, truly, what the effect of the elections will be. Not to mention, even if people are upset that the military is still in power, they will likely not want to complain, out of fear or reversing the many concessions that have achieved. If this becomes the case, then even with the presidency, the NLD will not be in a position to pursue disruptive change, or truly challenge the status quo. Their ability to freely form as a democratic entity would become the limit of possible disruption to the status quo that they may make. The ambiguity of new legislation makes it difficult to determine if it will be employed to pursue greater authoritarian control of political and social life, or if it is merely a
safeguard against the type of protests that occurred in 1988 and 2007. If they are a preventive measure, then elections may be applied solely in order to avoid international condemnation, friction with ASEAN, or economic repercussions. Not to mention, lifting of economic sanctions. In this instance opposition to the military would be severely limited in political impact, but would be allowed to function in an inferior capacity nonetheless. Abuses of human rights and democracy would certainly not continue at their former rate, as Burma has seen since 2011. However, if this scenario takes place, then the role of opposition would effectively be left stagnant, and improvements of these would reach their limits. The NLD could very well be an accountability measure if this becomes the case, yet it is unlikely that the military would make any substantial attempt to rectify these patterns of abuse.

While it may certainly be a possibility, this strategy is not likely. The military acting in this way would be contingent on their ability to install leadership to continue their authoritarian policies into the future. This may well be out of the question for now, despite their institutional power. In the 1990s, the NLD was silenced by the military as a political party, opting instead for leadership that supported the regime. Now the NLD is right on its way towards the presidency. Even if the status quo remains, the ability of the NLD to gain presidency means that the military does not retain the ability to install leadership that solely serves their interests.
B. DEMOCRATIC SCENARIOS

Over the past several years, Burmese citizens have witnessed a number of trends that have challenged the military’s dominance, and welcomed demand democratic reform. 2011 was a banner year for the opposition, and the reforms that have resulted from the mass political actions continue to be felt. This, coupled with a variety of widely accessible grievances, including corruption, poor working conditions, and unpopular bureaucratic practices offer the opposition a broad field of issues to draw upon. These democratizing forces also have the benefit of several significant pillars of support, including relatively free media, demands of laborers and labor unions, and youth.

1. ELECTION CYCLES CONTINUE WITHOUT FRAUD OR SWAYING OF OPINIONS

In the 1990 elections, the military regime did not even attempt to mask fraud; they outright banned the NLD from assuming office, even while they won the elections by a landslide. In the 2010 elections, this was a more difficult determination to make – the results of the election may have been counted fairly, but the NLD’s absence, while because they missed the deadline to register as a political party, was also the result of the military playing their part to block the NLD from running for office. Yet the entirety of elections in Burma has illustrated the degree of support for the opposition, especially for the NLD. In any case, the military continues to allow free and fair elections because they have no desire to repeat the effects of the past revolutions. This puts the military in a difficult scenario. As they cannot downplay the popularity of the NLD at this point. If they want to return to presidency, the only way to do so at this point would be to sway public opinion, which at this point would be very difficult. Yet it is not impos-
sible. If the NLD does not appear to handle their political situation well, then it will be fairly easy for the military to sway public opinion, so that the people will begin to reject the NLD, and maybe even vote for the military in the next elections. Fortunately, this is - while possible- hardly likely. Free and fair elections have been instituted, and the Burmese people have spoken in support of the NLD. Even if they do not handle the presidency well right away, people supported the NLD against the wishes of the military. Therefore, It is unlikely that the military can sway opinion for their benefit, even if they may do it against the NLD. A more likely scenario may be that subtly-hindered infrastructure will lead to public outcry regarding the government. The military still has control of some of the most powerful bureaucracies in the country. If the infrastructure from these or other services are poorly-maintained, then the people will see the NLD as the party to blame, as they are the ones in presidency. That being said, people will remember the degree of dissatisfaction against the military. If this dissatisfaction were garnered towards the NLD, then it is unlikely that the military would gain support, and already the country has free and fair elections. That being said, the most democratic scenario- to elect the most popular candidate fairly- has taken place, and it looks as though the military will not get more powerful in the near future.

2. SOCIETY PUSHES FOR CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

The people of Burma understand that all they have accomplished are nothing short of a breakthrough. Since 2011, so many reforms have taken place in the country that have benefited the labor unions, reporters, and even the general public. This does not mean that Burma is in a perfect position; the constitution still benefits the military more than anyone else. At this point, people may be satisfied with their reforms, especially after having had free and fair elections. However, this will not stop many of them from opposing the military’s continued enforcing of a constitution that solely benefits them. As it stands, the people working in the sectors that are allied with the military receive a higher pay than anyone else in the country. In addition, the military is still the highest power in the nation. That being said, many people will be opposed to this and may even push to change it. This scenario, if it comes to fruition, would be very difficult to resolve successfully. The law in Burma states
that the constitution may not be changed, unless it is changed with the consent and agreement of the military. Obviously, this is a law written by the military for their own benefit. With that in mind, having any change to the constitution would be very highly unlikely. It would probably require another revolution, yet it does not seem like a revolution is a popular idea in Burma at this point. People have faced immense trouble to protest for much of the reform they have now, so they are satisfied with the current scenario. However, there will be a clear difference in the status quo between the military, its supporters, and the common society. After time, if the difference remains very evident, then there will be both a reason and a need to protest the constitution.

As it stands, people who work in the Bureaucracies of Home Affairs, Border Affairs, and Military Affairs, get paid above the maximum wage. A protest against this might entail the poorer, less financially-stable, people in Burma who are fed up with the wealth divide. Similar to the Fight for 15 movement in the United States, the protests would expand to people who seek justice, and agree with the initiative of the movement's campaign. This is one such example of how society may push for constitutional reform.

This route towards reform does not demand a change of leadership, but it does require that the military find it in its best interest to make concessions to society and address the grievances of the population. Even while concessions have been successful and effective, there is still room for improvement that is out of bounds for the president. In a society where the general population is satisfied, there needs to be justice in the way of the constitution, which currently there is not.
The path of gradual change is perhaps the most inevitable route to democratic progress in Burma, and the most optimal. Since 2011, much has happened in the way of change and reform for the nation. While the military is still largely in control, the current presidency is one of the people. Given that the NLD was able to win the election after years of being barred from it, it is highly probably that more changes will come over time, especially now that a portion of the government is representative of the people. While it will be some time yet before Burma faces full reform, a democracy takes time to stabilize, and gradual change is natural.

Although the military sought a nepotistic appointment of the president in previous years, the progressive and democratic trends in Burma, alongside society’s encouragement of political engagement, have been highly successful in more recent years. This suggests a future with better prospects for a fully-stable democracy. It is certainly a likely outcome. The military focused the majority of its political campaign towards consolidating its control over political and legislative institutions, and genuine support amongst the population has always been lacking, especially after the new freedoms that people working in the media have been able to enjoy. With a great deal of reforms, and opposition groups actively generating support among people young and old alike (especially the NLD), it is likely that popular opinion will continue to stay away from the military. This is particularly true amongst the young and educated, who are the most fluent in modern information resources. With media enjoying freedoms that it did not have five years ago, the military has had a much harder time generating effective propaganda, and the internet is becoming an increasingly popular way for young people to learn about issues.

The weakening of propaganda in Burma may be a very significant weakness for the military. In autocratic ruling, a great deal of emphasis is placed on misinformation, along with narratives and testimonials that support only the interests of the party. In fact, this is what much of the journalism in Burma looked like before the reforms. With this method becoming far weaker, it is highly probably that the will of the people will change, and that even less (than the already low) support of the military will be in place.

That is not to say that democratic progress in Cambodia is inevitable, or that the only course of action is to await the implementation of a new constitution. Rather, this is the most gradual iteration of progress that might occur, and the most likely way in which democracy will improve in Burma, given the success of the opposition, and the military’s introduction of reforms for the past five years.
Burma has a long history of troubled governance. Under the military regime from 1965, there has been authoritarian rule, human rights abuses, and government corruption. The past two decades has witnessed profound changes in Burma’s political reality, however effective these changes may be. The 1990 elections raised popular dissatisfaction to its height, and triggered an enormous protest movement, which shook the country into further protest in 2007. Its effects continue to be apparent. The heightened political consciousness amongst the population, along with the myriad of reforms and the free and fair elections, hold great promise for future democratic progress. Simultaneously, the powerful regime institutions that remain- while they are limited in number- challenge prospects for democratization.

There is plenty of reason to be optimistic regarding political progress in Burma, on account of the number of probable democratic outcomes, occurring on different points in time. This is especially good after Burma has already faced tremendous democratic growth in the past five years. The NLD was even able to win the presidency, and push through reforms. Civil society organizations such as the NLD have made campaigns to compel democratic reforms, and their efforts have not been in vain. Even while the military still controls a large portion of the powerful sectors of the country, reforms have been made, and there is no reason reforms cannot continue. Effort and commitment on the part of activists and opposition politicians would certainly be required, as they were in the past, before the current reforms.
The NLD will have to function well and govern strongly if they want to avoid the consequences of a new or reemerging authoritarian regime. They will have to continue uniting the population around common grievances, and coming up with solutions. Granted, after the military’s myriad of reforms, this will not be difficult to execute. A lot of common issues have been mildly improved, if not resolved. This is not to say that the country is in perfect shape. The military still retains control of the more powerful bureaucracies in the nation, and the constitution— which is still difficult to change—still has components that are unjustly partial to the military. Retaining the reformed issues and resolving those that remain unsolved will be critical to building maintaining support for the NLD.

It is important for the NLD to build strong connections with the pillars of support that will have an impact on the country. This includes youth, media, laborers, and entrepreneurs. Buddhist Monks have also played an increasingly political role in the past decade, but they are not the most reliable ally for democracy. Buddhists in Burma are very well-respected, and the military can use this fact to their benefit. Their participation in resistance efforts will be important in demonstrating the broad dissatisfaction in society, but they may not be the most reliable allies for democracy. Independent media may be the most promising ally, offering opportunities to combat government narratives by reporting factual information on political and social topics of interest to the population.

Civic engagement has been effective in Burma. Through unity, the people of Burma have been able to gain reform and fair elections. Be that as it may, grievances with the military regime remain. The NLD to the presidency has served as a hindrance to the regime, underlining their failure to address the concerns of the majority of the population for the past decades, which has contributed to their election. Not to mention, after the reforms, such common people as laborers and students were able to gain benefits, which has strengthened civic engagement a great deal.

The greatest challenge to democracy in Burma at this point is the treatment of the Rohingya. Even after years, the Rohingya have no real representation in the country, and continue to be viewed by the UN and other such organizations as the most oppressed people in the world. Even after the past five years, the Rohingya have not seen any improvement or benefits from democracy or reform. The NLD has not been very vocal about this case either; Aung San Suu Kyi has been mostly silent about the case of the Rohingya, and has been shunned by a number of people for this. That being said, democracy is still young in Burma. It seems unlikely at this point, but in time, it is possible for the Rohingya to receive their much needed recognition and representation in Burma, much the same way that the common people did after almost 50 years. Nonviolent action played an important role in the past decades, attracting international attention, and resulting in a number of concessions from the regime. More organized nonviolent action could have even greater impact. Perhaps it would be too early to have this, as only recently was Burma able to have free elections. Yet within the time period before the next election cycle, it is certainly possible for the situation to improve even further. Even while it is virtually impossible for the constitution to change without the approval of the military, the fact that the NLD was able to get elected is a remarkable breakthrough, and if this is able to happen, then there is no reason reform must end there.

Overall, the case for Burma has a high chance for a positive outcome. A democratic scenario for Burma is more than likely at this point, as one has already been met. In 1990, the military held multiparty elections, but they proved to simply be in place to suppress the demands of the people. Almost a decade later though, the people's
demands were met; elections were held, and the military government introduced reforms to the country. As recently as this year, the NLD- the same group which was blocked from the government altogether in the 1990s- was elected fairly to the presidency. In the time between, media freedoms have become less scarce, nonviolent youth movements have had their demands met, and laborers and entrepreneurs have gained room to grow. This is not to say that the situation is perfect. The constitution is still highly in support of the military, with several aspects of it that are obviously written to support them against the opposition, and it is almost impossible to change the constitution without the approval of the military first. That being said, there is still time for things to change. The people of Burma have already gained a myriad of successes and proven that nonviolent resistance works to achieve goals. If Burma continues at the rate it is currently at, then the democratic achievements will surely stay.