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Collapsing Democracy in the 21st Century: The Case of Myanmar

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It took me some time to make the decision to write about Myanmar at first. The way I left the country made me reject the idea of reconnecting with a place that was so opposite to the one I met. Eventually I was convinced by Orla that reconnecting may feel like making some justice to those years and everything the people from Myanmar gave me

However, how to choose a specific topic about Myanmar? How to decide where to focus on when there is so much to talk about. That has probably been the most difficult part of this process (together with reading unnecessarily too much literature and dealing with the insecurities of doing something new).

First, my gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Dario Čepo for its encouragement, enthusiasm and for taking my ideas when they came to him unexpectedly in December. But most importantly, for always presenting himself so approachable, frank and human in his opinions and advice.

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To my Burmese friends, ex-colleagues, and network. Fight.

ABSTRACT

The Myanmar military, or Tatmadaw, put an end to the country's democratic experience on the 1st of February 2021 staging a coup d'etat. This event closed a decade of allegedly inadequate democratic reforms in the hopes of the western democracies in South-East Asia after their failed interventionism in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Ironically, the Tatmadaw promoted the beginning of the democratisation process post-2010. Aiming at analysing the reasoning behind why military elites decide to modernise the political institutions of a country, this paper explores the relations between the Tatmadaw and the civilian pro-democratic movement during the last decade in Myanmar. Meanwhile, the world democracies experience new challenges in the nature of their polity and struggle to defend the principles of the right mode of governance since the end of the Cold War.

TABLE OF ABREVIATIONS

AFLFP – Anti-Fascist League for the Freedom of the People

ARSA - Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army

ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations

CPB – Communist Party of Burma

EAO – Ethnic Armed Organisation

GAD – General Administration Department

KIA – Kachin Independence Army

KMT – Kuomintang

KNU – Karen National Union

NLD – National League for Democracy

NUP – National Unity Party

SLORC – State Peace and Development Council

SPDC - State Peace and Development Council

SPPB – Socialist Program Party of Burma

UN – United Nations

USDA – Union Solidarity and Development Association

USDP – Union Solidarity and Development Party

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gino Germani said, in his work *Authoritarianism, Fascism and National Populism* (1978), that in social science, choosing a research topic that goes beyond a fleeting event, originates from a personal experience. I was a recent graduate when I arrived in Myanmar[1] for the first time in 2018, looking for opportunities to work in the development sector. Three years later I saw myself in the same country pursuing my career as an international civil servant when suddenly I witnessed the fall of a democratic system in the making and the abolishment of civil rights and freedoms that were previously achieved through the efforts of many actors involved in a democratisation process. Unfortunately, not only is democracy not restored in Myanmar, it is slowly but surely eroding in many parts of the world.

The crisis of democracy in today's world leads me to make a literature review of the main theories in defence of democracy, starting from the ancient philosophers to contemporary theorists. It shows that there have been crises of democracy and the erosion of progressive values in more or less regular intervals, especially after periods of prosperity, which may be conditioned by the cyclical character of the dominant economic system in the world. This, together with my first-hand experience in observing how a democratic process can die at the hands of the effective monopoly of violence in Myanmar, led me to write this thesis.

Throughout the literature review on the concept of democracy, priority has been given to the particularities of the different theories in relation to the weaknesses that democratic systems may entail for the citizenry. Thus, the first part of this paper focuses on relating these notions to current issues in which we can catch glimpses of what organisations and think-tanks such as Freedom House or V-Dem see as a crisis of democratic values[2] as well as the definition of democracy that comes closest to the democratic experience in Myanmar.

Throughout the revision of the concept of democratisation, the theoretical approach of Huntington has been analysed deeply. Regardless of the best-seller treatment that the North American academy has begun to give to Huntington's texts, what perhaps most accurately explains the wide dissemination of his ideas is the wisdom he has had in choosing the themes of his writings, since almost all of them are directly linked to the most intense problems of the present day. Of these, one of the most important, and one that motivates the present work, is the meaning of democracy and the transitions to this regime that took place during the previous century.

To conclude the study of democratisation as a process, I explored the notion of a failed democratisation through authoritarian resilience based on the existing examples in recent history after China's legislative reforms and the results of the Arab Spring. The patterns followed by those cases of authoritarian regime could be applied to what was experienced during Myanmar's democratic reforms differentiating the Burmese case by its abrupt end as what is considered a military authoritarian regime[3].

[1] In 1988, the government of Myanmar changed the English-language name of the country from "Burma" to "Myanmar". Throughout this paper, I use "Burma" when referring to events before 1988 and "Myanmar" for the post-1988 period. According to Nardi (2010), this usage reflects accepted academic practice in Burmese Studies.

[2] See V-Dem: Varieties of Autocratization: https://www.v-dem.net/vaut.html.

[3] See BTI 2022 Country Report on Myanmar: https://bti-project.org/fileadmin/api/content/en/downloads/reports/country_report_2022_MMR.pdf.

The analysis of such examples follow a deep historical revision of the political events that occurred in Burma - and lately Myanmar - during the second half of the twentieth century until today. Myanmar's modern history presents a constant fight for political change from its independence. Such dispute has followed a pattern in which different actors representing the same roles have been fighting each other while building up their own narrative of what is the *common good* for the *peoples* and the integrity of the Union of Myanmar.

One of my last superiors while in Myanmar told me once that it is impossible as well as arrogant to try to understand everything about other countries' realities as a foreigner, that it was better to acknowledge the limitations of not belonging to the place and try to learn progressively through the experiences lived there. I couldn't agree more.

This paper is limited in its scope of study to the political events and interactions between the main two political factions of Myanmar. Therefore, features as important as the longest ongoing civil war since the 1950s[4], the fascinating - and sad - world of Myanmar natural resources or the international affairs of Myanmar are briefly touched when it is relevant in the study of the fight for democracy of the Union.

Myanmar represents one of those historical, political and sociological realities that goes beyond complex. I tend to compare it with countries such as Afghanistan or Somalia. Not only because of the violence that the three countries have experienced during the last decades but because of the diversity in their demographic composition, geography and natural resources.

Those actors and their interactions are exemplified today as the Myanmar Armed Forces, or Tatmadaw, and the National League for Democracy (NLD), the party led by Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and removed from power by the military forces in February 2021. In other times, the names have been different: Ne Win, the Burma Socialist Party, the State Peace and Development Council (SLORC) on the Tatmadaw side; and General Aung San, the students and intellectuals, U Thant on the NLD side.

The fact is that once addressing a transition process, it is crucial to identify the potential weaknesses of it. In Myanmar's case, given its history, two counterparts that have accumulated hatred towards each other for decades had to proceed and agree on the political future of a country. For this reason, the main focus of this paper is the relationship between both sides while developing new ties during the new regime as well as the political framework left for them to do so. The research question that arises from this focus is how the relations between the Tatmadaw and the NLD evolved from open hostilities to a forced cooperation for the benefit of both. Although, it is not clear to me that this has been the case.

With this focus and this research question, the goal of my research, i.e., to understand the historical, societal, economic, and other reasons behind Myanmar's failed democratisation, has been reached. It, in turn, helped further knowledge on Myanmar's path toward democracy, developed in extant literature.

My thesis is structured as follows. After the introductory chapter, I detail the methods of gathering and analysing data, followed by the literature review in which I focus on defining and conceptualising concepts of democracy and democratisation. That chapter is followed by focusing on understanding failed democratisation and the resilience of autocracy, before I

[4] See The Diplomat, Marking 70 years of civil war in Myanmar: https://thediplomat.com/2019/02/marking-70-years-of-war-in-myanmar/ .

arrive at my case study of Myanmar. Afterward I discuss the application of theoretical concepts on the case and in the end conclude my thesis with the answer to my research question.

2. METHODOLOGY

I have employed a desk research-based methodology in which I have undertaken a literature review with the objective of clarifying what a failed democratisation process looks like and apply its conclusions to Myanmar's deadlock democratisation. To reach this, I have gone through a study of different theories of democracy in order to establish a theoretical framework that focuses on defining which definition of democracy is optimal for our research, considering ancient authors' premises of the concept and the contemporary conclusions of it.

At the same time, those theories are linked throughout its analysis to current trends on the undermining of democracy today[5]. Considering the widespread challenges that consolidated democracies are facing, I proposed as a first question to explore that the abrupt end of the Myanmar democratic experience shares resemblance to some of the features that are characterising the mentioned challenges, mostly through the superficiality of the democratic reforms and the lack of deeper intervention in amending the governance structure and approaching the opposite factions that rule the country.

Secondly, I followed a similar process to determine which stages of the democratisation process were achieved in Myanmar (if any) and frame such a process under Huntington's theory of democratisation – alongside with the analysis of its contestation by contemporary authors and explaining why Huntington's theory is the chosen one. During the literature review, I have used mostly theoretical works in the field of democracy and democratisation, focusing the analysis on debating Huntington's theory as well as other theorists' approach of democratic reforms applied to the political transitions of the last three decades. Most of the sources used in this first stage of the research were theoretical books and articles.

Subsequently, I studied what a failed democratisation process could look like based on Huntington's *Third Wave of Democratisation* theory as well as the more contemporary contributions of Diamond in his piece analysing the potential end of the third wave (1998). Based on their discussions, I have established a series of arguments that identifies a failed democratisation and the notion of authoritarian resilience as a result of it. I have also undertaken an analysis of the structural features of democratic reforms that may have led to either a fragile democracy, a coup d'etat or a failed state.

In regards to the case study, taking the democratisation criteria from Huntington, I have tried to identify the main weaknesses and dysfunctionalities of Myanmar's democratic reforms. I have made an analysis taking the indicators, parameters, and qualitative and quantitative studies from democracy databases such as V-Dem and BTI analysing their measurement of Myanmar over the past decade and comparing them with the selected authors' theories of democracy and democratisation. Together with reports and insights from the different international and local NGOs working on Myanmar's affairs.

The interviews conducted with a Burmese scholar from Kayin State currently working in a Thai University and a Chin-Burmese scholar currently working in a Canadian institution have

[5] See Democracy Index 2021, The Economist Intelligence www.eiu.com/n/.

been used to gauge the robustness of my argumentation and the facts collected from the comprehensive literature review and analysis on secondary sources on Myanmar politics and will serve as the basis of the answer to my research question[6].

The main unit of analysis in this work is the Tatmadaw's vision of Myanmar's political structure and the power balance over the past ten years with the counter vision of the pro-democratic movement. For such analysis, I have tried to use primary sources as much as possible, mainly speeches from the Tatmadaw's leaders as well as the 2008 Constitution drafted by them. Similarly, I have used the interactions between the two factions trying to understand the second point of this paper, in which way have the Tatmadaw managed to hold power throughout the democratic period?

In the end, I complemented the compilation of literature and scientific data from the democracy indices with the knowledge acquired during my three years living in Yangon working in different development and peacebuilding projects as well as being an electoral observer for the Myanmar National Elections 2020. Because of the limited scope of this thesis, I have decided to focus specifically on the political structure of the democratisation process and the reforms. Myanmar's social and political dynamics are extremely complex considering its ethnic composition, its geographic characteristics, and the key role its natural resources play in its conflict dynamics. Therefore, I have included those components in its relation to the political transition and failure of the democratisation process.

[6] Those interviews are under request for further research but will stay confidential due to security reasons and the preferences of the interviewees to remain anonymous.

1. DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTUALISATION:

3.1. DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATISATION, WHERE ARE WE NOW?

3.1.1. DEMOCRACY

This literature review builds on Robert Dahl's thesis that there is no single theory of democracy, but that we need to think about theories when we research democracy (1965, pp. 5). The aim of this chapter is to discuss and compare different approaches to the concept of democracy and to find out which one would suit the best to our case study in which a failed democratisation process could apply – or again, based on Dahl's premise, which components of the theories may be applicable to Myanmar's democratisation period.

I have incorporated reviews of several classical works to demonstrate the commitment to democracy's broad but varied roots and to offer sources for considering how contemporary theories draw on many schools of democratic theorising. Although I tried to arrange the texts chronologically, there will occasionally be interactions between the many, separate theories to emphasise the variety of perspectives held by principled democrats on the topic. Many of the key arguments in various ideas of democracy are represented in the texts chosen as representative voices of those theories of democratic government. Despite their many disagreements, they all adhere to the notion that democratic politics must be the politics of any successful state, despite its complexity and flaws.

A. FROM THE ANCIENT REPUBLICANISM TO THE LIBERAL NOTIONS OF DEMOCRACY

- **What if the ideal is not always right - Aristotle**

The concept of democracy could find its basis in Aristotle's civic republicanism. Far from what the structure of its institutions could look like, the quality of its mode of governance was related to the character of its citizens (Terchek & Conte, 2001, pp. 52). In *Politics,* Aristotle describes the state as the highest good and the only entity capable of providing the lead to a good life (Politics, 1905). But to reach such a purpose, the main argument from Aristotle, regarding the shape of a democracy of certain quality, is based on education that focuses on the citizenry and the understanding of the importance of being educated in their responsibilities as citizens (Politics, 1905).

Therefore, Aristotle's democracy is materialised by the need for a vibrant civic life, the continuing commitment to the common good and the enhanced appreciation of the role of civic virtue (Terchek & Conte, 2001, pp. 53). For him, decisions are to be made by a collection of citizens that listen to each other and are aware and educated in appreciating the art of governance, responsibilities, and duties with the polity. Aristotle proposes that, if the Republic is successful in advocating for the common good, based on the above, the citizens, although

entitled to care about their own interest and be selfish (*households* in Politics), would understand that the success of their own interests will come along with the success of the polity.

However, Aristotle fears the misinterpretation of freedom by the citizens in only caring for their own personal good and interests for which they would use politics and pollute the democratic governance to the point of the collapse of democracy (Politics, 1905). – this is also one of the current challenges in contemporary democracies. This leads to a second fear based on the extremes of his definition of democracy (or any other mode of governance) and by doing so, society becomes disorganised as it seeks common good (Terchek & Conte, 2001, pp. 53). The preventive measure to avoid such a situation would always be moderation based on the promotion of a stable and tolerant middle class, that is politicised and aware (Politics, 1905).

These arguments, although less focused on explaining the optimal configuration of the institutions, were highly influential in the thinking of theorists considered as fathers of today's democratic decision-making structures (which will be mentioned in the literature review). However, Aristotle and Plato, knowledgeable theorists of modes of governance and the idea of democracy, were not in favour of promoting democracy as the most suitable mode of governing. For them, there were too many risks in the electorate being able to choose their own leaders as it was too complex to ensure the *right* education of the voters – education focused on the previously mentioned awareness of civic responsibility to choose wisely. Both advocated for the wise and virtuous – those studying the arts of philosophy and politics, preparing themselves for the leadership of the Republic – to be the ones ruling for the greater good (*aristocracy*).

During the consolidation process of western and older democracies, speeches from those dedicated to politics and the public life were successful and created an establishment (mostly a bi-party system[7]. Those were considered the professional - or the virtuous - characters of political life and electors would rely on such virtuosity. Those parties tend to present a *statesmanship* approach in favour of the greater good and the common interest of the state.

However, the eruption of nationalist and populist speeches in consolidated democracies have destabilise the moderation of such establishments and invited a variety of actors that present themselves as new or unknown to the electorate. Such novelty has different readings. Trying to find a link to Aristotle and Plato proposed, the introduction of a wide and varied political vision in the decision-making structures of the institutions from individuals that do not belong to the work of politics would not work in favour of the greater good of the state. Relying on the data from democracy indices like the IDEA or The Economist, it is obvious that the quality of consolidated democracies during the last decade has suffered drastic changes – from the economic crisis's measures undermining the livelihoods of many, the late recuperation and enjoyment of stability and finally, the last three years of decreasing quality of democracy, pandemic and resurgence of wars and conflicts.

[7] The United Kingdom and its Conservatives and Labours; the United States and their Democrats and Republicans; France and its Left and Right; or even Spain and Portugal with the socialist and populars.

It may be that the lack of moderation from certain powers, as well as prioritising the interests of the few, have resulted in a snowball effect that is not bringing a positive impact to what democracy should look like.

- **Beyond the virtue there is surveillance - Machiavelli**

Machiavelli proposed a similar notion of democracy, adding the shared liberty of the citizenry as the basis of democracy. For him, religion plays a key role in educating citizens in values of discipline, unity, and goodness beyond the pursuit of individual interests and in favour of the common good (Maquiavelli, 2000). Beyond laws there is the virtuosity, customs, and habits that effectively encourage the citizens to work for the good of the whole – and understand the value of it as it would be the only way to protect and preserve this liberty.

Nevertheless, by observing how pure states with structures based on justice always ended degenerating into despotic or unstable regimes, Machiavelli proposed a mixed regime where the *many* have an outstanding and decisive position (Maquiavelli, 2000), and contrary to his Greek antecessors, do not trust the virtuosity of the few that hold public power as he thinks that avarice would corrupt them and the pursuit of common good would then get lost by the lack of incentive to work due to the lack of commitment to the Republic's well-being and integrity (Abellan, 2012, pp. 23).

Therefore, in Machiavelli's democracy, democratic success would be conditioned by the permanent vigilance and control of citizens over their political representatives as a way of ensuring freedom as non-domination, avoiding the concentration and permanence of power in an oligarchy, guaranteeing the ability of citizens to demand accountability from their rulers and preventing political representatives from separating themselves from citizens and encasing themselves in a privileged bubble (Abellan, 2012, pp. 23).

Machiavelli's topicality reminds us of the need to enliven democratic praxis because civics is an a priori of social life (Abellan, 2012, pp. 24). His energetic warning about corruption as the great evil that devastates the *vita activa* and his political vision of reality, based on the assumption of conflict and uncertainty constitute a valuable legacy for the political thought of yesterday and today.

- **Codifying freedoms and liberties - Locke**

Turning from civic republicanism to the first liberals, the timeline reaches John Locke's contribution to current liberal democracies. His works are first to mention the concept of *consent of the governed* and to put an emphasis on the value of popular institutions. Even if it is further from the importance that civic republicans gave to the shape of institutions when it

comes to democracy, Locke agrees to some extent with Machiavelli and defends his thesis of liberty (Terchek & Conte, 2001, pp. 53).

Locke assumes that what people crave the most is their freedom. In his analysis of the state of nature, Locke defends an argument in which all humans are born equal and with the basic rights to life, liberty, and property – which could be considered part of the origins of human rights law theory – and therefore, the deprivation of any of these rights without consent would go against the laws of nature (Locke, 1988). Such assumption comes from the argument where we all have the same rational capacity to make decisions by ourselves. Hence, the citizenry has the right to resist the efforts made by the state to deprive them of their liberty and become the guardian of it (Locke, 1988).

For such purpose, Locke makes his main contribution as an early liberal democrat – in a cautious way – where the governments must be based on the consent of those who will be governed, which would be reflected in a term elected by the citizens, which has wide powers and is guided by the principle of majority rule (Terchek & Conte, 2001, pp. 3). Thus, most of his contributions sought to protect natural rights and freedoms through dispersing governmental power. However, Locke does not call for a universal suffrage or for a government elected by the citizens but consented by them.

That brings on the table a question that will be discussed later on in this paper: elections seem to be the feature that characterises democracies. Nevertheless, under Locke's proposition, the checks and balances approach are losing followers in countries with regular and competitive elections[8]. Therefore, the freedom of the citizens and the concept of citizens controlling the rulers may be getting lost in track.

- **Air and graces of revolution - Rousseau**

Addressing Jean Jacques Rousseau, and starting from Locke's state of nature, Rousseau proposes that politics is a historical construction that has corrupted the equality and liberty defended by the previous authors in the so-called state of nature (Rousseau, 1983). The way of recovering both qualities in a state of nature to which it would be impossible to come back would be through his idea of self-governance in which the general will would rule and the concept of private interests, factions or wills would be banished (Terchek & Conte, 2001, pp. 54).

Similarly to what the theorists in civic republicanism proposed, Rousseau promotes the moral and civic aspirations of a community as the highest ideals of democracy; it would not be about economics or individual advantage, but through teaching that those are secondary and one's welfare would come tied to the good of the whole (Rousseau, 1983). That is the reason why, in line with Aristotle and Machiavelli, Rousseau encourages an active participation in politics

[8] Examples such as Poland, Hungary, Brazil and the interventionism on the judiciary from the executive power.

as those holding public power could use it for the fulfilment of their private interests. Therefore, the way to protect citizens' liberty and equality is to make the general will the basis of law and by doing so, citizens would obey their own will and not an alien's will (Rousseau, 1983).

That brings, once again, the question of the citizens' virtue of participating in political life by getting involved in their duties and obligations. The question, then, may be whether the institutions and those already virtuous in politics should be the ones promoting the values of equality and liberty, instead of holding the citizens responsible without considering the different realities that they may have to face – another current debate in the lack of self-criticism of the elites in power when losing elections, popularity or influence. The tension in such situations is leading to polarising[9] democracies and societies instead of getting closer to the realities of a plural citizenry and finding out what a general will could look like for an efficient representative democracy.

- **Breaking hierarchies; beyond the virtuous - Toqueville**

Alexis de Tocqueville takes upon Rousseau's inputs of equality and freedom – as well as the will of the majority – and expands them further. He considers that democracy consists of the expansive concept of equality (Toqueville, 1957). Such equality is based on the resistance of the citizenry to traditional claims of hierarchy (Terchek & Conte, 2001, pp. 5). With Tocqueville contributions to political science, there are a few events to consider given the proximity to the contemporary theories of democracy:

- The French Revolution that took place in 1789 and failed in its objective but brought the end of feudalism and absolutism in a traditionally monarchic power system.
- The Thirteen Colonies Revolution succeeded in former British America and the constitution that created the modern United States of America was already in place.
- There was the first empirical evidence of the evolution in social life and structure toward a liberal democratic system.

Therefore, there were new elements for the analysis of a mode of governance that were not in place in the work of previous theorists. From there, Tocqueville assumes that citizens pursue democracy to decide which is important for them and feel the freedom of overseeing their own life (Toqueville, 1957) – which already rejects the idea of absolute monarchies that start its decay as well as the first military rules with Napoleon – but these new premises came with risks. He fears that democracy could be endangered by democracy itself, as Terchek & Conte, (2001, pp. 6), stated it in their analysis. This would be translated in the loss of traditional norms in favour of the will of the majority which, as others before him warned, could be tyrannical if citizens forget about the importance of seeking the success of the community in favour of the success of the individual (Toqueville, 1957).

[9] Polarisation is understood as a process whereby the normal multiplicity of differences in a society increasingly align along a single dimension and people increasingly perceive and describe politics and society in terms of "Us" versus "Them" (McCoy, Rahman, Somer, 2018).

Tocqueville values American democracy as a system where citizens go beyond their individual desires and engage in community-based projects. To combat the threat of selfishness, Tocqueville believes that democracy needs and benefits from religion as a way to prevent the damage of individualism that arises from the thirst of more freedom; it teaches that humans are not the centre of the universe and should be concerned about the future as much as they are about the present – which could also be seen as a reference to the American system in which he admires what he named *self-interests rightly understood.* It allows more citizens to become true democrats by enabling individuals to reach beyond a simplistic construction of the self: through a small and steady way that brings back their own good and the good of their community (Simon, 2015).

The paradox of democracy then, as Tocqueville interprets it, is that equality of conditions is as compatible with tyranny as with liberty (Techeck & Conte, 2001, pp. 5). Liberty demands effort and vigilance; it is difficult to attain, and easy to lose. Its excesses are evident to all, while its benefits can easily escape our attention. On the other hand, the advantages and pleasures of equality are felt instantly without requiring any effort (Simon, 2014). While previous authors had considered the encouragement of parties, factions, or associations to be a divisive measure in society, Tocqueville considered them absolutely essential to the well-being of democratic society (Techeck & Conte, 2001, pp. 6). Far from contributing to the destruction of the unity of society, associations overcome the divisive propensities of democracy.

Interestingly enough, the American society that Tocqueville admires for its sense of community has ended up being highly criticised for the very opposite - what is considered by some the oldest democracy[10] evolved in time. Even the moderate American system has fallen into populism during the Trump period and the polarisation of its society is having a strong impact in the search of a general will as a state project - enabling new hierarchies to appear and stronger inequalities to arise - not to mention the remaining (and strengthened) hierarchies in race, gender, and class that not even a vigilant system has been able to destroy (McCoy et al. 2018, pp. 25).

- **The last contribution: civil and political claims - Mill**

Following Tocqueville's ideas in associationism, John Stuart Mill's contribution concludes this section of the literature review by adding and emphasising the importance of civil and political rights in a democracy; not only that but, which would be key for any consideration of democracy, the focus needs to be put on the promotion of universal suffrage. Mill's liberal democratic state is assigned an active role in protecting the rights of individuals through the creation of laws designed to protect groups such as ethnic minorities and to enhance the position of women, as he posits in his work *The Subjection of Women* (1989) (Terchek & Conte, 2001, pp. 7) .

[10] See https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/08/countries-are-the-worlds-oldest-democracies/

In that sense he places great emphasis on the importance of education as a key force for freedom and emancipation (Simon, 2014). He recommended a complex system of plural suffrage so that the masses, the working class, would not have the opportunity to subject the political order to what he simply called ignorance (Mill, 1859). The problems of regulation in a densely populated country are extremely complex for any system of direct democracy. Moreover, when the government is the government of all citizens there is a constant danger that the wisest and most experienced will be overshadowed by the lack of wisdom, skill, and experience of the majority (Mill, 1859). The latter can be counterbalanced little by little by experience in public affairs (voting, judicial services, extensive participation in local government) but only to a certain extent. Therefore, the ideal form of government under modern conditions comprises a representative democratic system, in which the people exercise, through deputies periodically elected by them, the power of ultimate control (Terchek & Conte, 2001, pp. 6).

Although focused on, unlike many in his time, with the question of the protection of minorities, Mill's thought offers a contradictory judgement. It is a position fully committed to the moral development of all individuals, but at the same time it justifies important inequalities so that educators are able to educate the ignorant (Mill, 1859). Thus, he presents some of the important arguments in favour of the democratic state, which are worthwhile, but one should take more distance from the practical proposals he suggests, which in practice would prevent their realisation (Simon, 2014).

The notions that build institutions such as the republic and the slow configuration of liberalism theories developed the twentieth century consolidation of the studies on democracy. Based on the constant changes of the mode of governance in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, modern authors referred back to those mentioned in this section. The modern contributions focus on putting together the empirical experiences of what decades of democracy have resulted in, as well as the social changes and structural developments in the institutional building process in democracies.

B. THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE TERM - CONTEMPORARY THEORIES

The contemporary theorists of democracy are those framing their theories based on the events of the 20th century and shaping the key elements that compose today's democratic systems. They took the republican concern about the common good and the virtuosity of the citizens in the modern world as difficult to sustain (Terchek & Conte, 2001, pp.141). Voters would ask less on how political decisions affect the common good in favour of the individual. Therefore, the fear of most of the authors mentioned occurred: there is no virtuosity or appreciation for political life, and therefore the defence of liberty and the pursuit of the common good is substituted by what would be considered modern democracy for some of the contemporary authors. This is the way voters and candidates to hold power understand each other today (Schumpeter, 1942, pp. 172).

Associated with names such as Rousseau, Mill and, to some extent, Tocqueville, the previously mentioned classical approach, presupposes, according to Schumpeter, three conditions under which principles are not necessarily reflected in facts. These three assumptions are:

1. There exists a condition which we can characterise as the *Common Good*;
2. There is a general will (*Volonté Générale)*, as Rousseau assumed;
3. That, at the end of the day, *the people* act under rules that we can characterise as politically rational from the point of view of the common good or the general will.

The three parts of the definition combine to assert that the common good can be achieved through collective rational agreement. Schumpeter was openly sceptical about the premises and the conclusion and proposes that the main limitation of such an assertion lies in the logical and mathematical impossibility of establishing a univocal, i.e., universally accepted, criterion of the *common good* (Vidal de la Rosa, 2010).

Schumpeter, therefore, contested the "classical" definition of political democracy. This idea is summarised as follows:

The XVIII century philosophy of democracy can be summed up in the following definition: the democratic method is that institutional system of political decision making which realises the common good by letting the people decide for themselves the issues in dispute by electing the individuals who are to assemble to carry out their will (Schumpeter, 1942, pp. 321).

Schumpeter's contribution to democratic theory consists in limiting the meaning of democracy to that of a method of electoral competition to form a government. It is also called a realist approach because it reduces the expectations and ability of the citizenry to influence the outcomes of democratic government (Vidal de la Rosa, 2010). It reduces the role of the citizenry to the act of voting. However, this is the hegemonic approach in contemporary political science, especially the economic theory of democracy (Vidal de la Rosa, 2010).

He identifies voters in the consolidated American democracy asking governors first and foremost for their own good; and based on the revenues they would vote to maintain or replace, to award or sanction, but not for a common project – which shows the evolution of what Tocqueville used to see in American democracy. In this regard, voters do not care about what they share with other citizens or to the long-term good of the regime, and Schumpeter goes further, not even to their own long-term interests (Terchek & Conte, 2001, pp. 141).

Morlino, Piana, and Sandulli (2020) insist that, to conduct an empirical analysis when democracies are being established or regimes are transitioning, it is key to arrive at the minimalist definition of the term. Such a definition would specify a limited number of characteristics that are more tangible and required at an empirical level – facilitating the establishment of a *threshold* from which a regime could be considered democratic or not (Morlino et al, 2020, pp. 16).

This minimal definition of democracy, although contested by many of the contemporary theorists of political science for its simplified nature, is empirically helpful (Morlino et al, 2020, pp. 17). Morlino presents three reasons why this is, and they are more explicitly stated as follows:

> *1. it is essential in understanding when, in a transitional process, a regime turns into a minimalist democracy, or is close to doing so;*
> *2. it helps to capture the complexities of a transitional period when a regime may already be democratic in some respects but continues to remain authoritarian in others;*
> *3. if properly expressed, it helps to trace the existence of a democracy in a country with greater immediacy* (Morlino et al, 2020, pp. 19).

That is why a minimal definition of democracy is going to be used and applied to the case study of the brief democratic period the Republic of Myanmar went through during the last decade. To do so, as stated previously, Huntington's democratic theory, based on Schumpeter's works, is applicable, although limited, to the case study. The interactions with some other contributions from Robert Dahl and Seymour Martin Lipset will be key to understanding a minimal definition of democracy in a broader spectrum but, again, acknowledge the pragmatism of Huntington's and Schumpeter's approach in this case.

If it is assumed that there is a minimalist concept of democracy, logically, one would understand that there must also be a *maximalist* definition of the term. Such a definition would start with ideals and principles rather than with particular institutions unlike the minimalist definition and, as Morlino suggests, it would certainly be useful for the measurement to the deepening of democratic qualities as a further phase in a democratisation process (2020, pp. 19). It could also help to indicate the degree of democratisation of regimes that crossed the minimum threshold mentioned above (Morlino et al, 2020, pp. 20).

However, Morlino, supported by Sartori's arguments, states that a maximalist definition could not exist given the nature of constant evolution of the concept itself as well as the ideals and principles that surround democracy. Nevertheless, it could be possible to establish certain directions for the development of democracies based on those principles or ideas advancing the realisation of the "power of the people". Or as Sartori (1987, 71) said:

> *The problem of the maximisation of real democracies is rather that of 'optimisation' once the ideals and the directions of development have been established and efforts are made to achieve them gradually.*

- **Huntington's minimal definition of democracy**

Although Huntington refers to the concept of democracy in several of his works, in almost all of them he establishes a homogeneous conception, stating that democracy basically consists of the fact that the majority of those who make collective decisions are selected through fair elections. "*Pious, honest, and regular, in which open competition is held and almost the entire*

adult population has the right to vote" (Huntington, 1970). Even though Huntington himself recognizes that this is a "minimum definition", he also states that it brings together two fundamental virtues: the first is that it frees the concept of any moral and teleological burden that compromises its meaning, and the second is that it offers the enormous advantage of being able to factually verify the existence or absence of a democratic regime (Huntington & Moore, 1970).

As regards the first virtue that Huntington attributes to this definition, it is evident that he adheres, as he himself recognises, to the tradition founded by Schumpeter of conceiving democracy essentially as a "political method"; as an institutional agreement to reach certain political decisions, essentially the appointment of rulers. Schumpeter himself refers to democratic theory as the "competitive leadership theory" (Schumpeter, 1983, pp. 324).

The adoption of this definition by Huntington is largely due to the search for shelter offered by Schumpeter's reflection, but it is also largely explained by his own inquiry. From his point of view, democracy has been defined mainly from three perspectives: the source of authority, the ends of government, and political institutions. Huntington discards the first type of these definitions because he considers that whenever one has tried to identify the source of authority of the government, that is, the governing body, one runs into serious difficulties - particularly when one tries to define the "people", "the majority" or "the poor", there are always various objections regarding the inclusive or exclusive capacity of such a governing body (Jurado, 2003, pp. 9).

Thus, after discarding the first two perspectives Huntington is left with the third, with which he defines democracy in terms of political institutions. Three basic elements stand out in Huntington's definition above:

1. The rulers emanate from transparent and regular elections;
2. The competition for power is frank and open, and;
3. That the right to vote is almost universal.

Put this way, and as Huntington himself has recognized, his position is also nourished by the procedural conception of democracy that authors such as Dahl and Lipset have widely developed, who generally matches with Schumpeter in defining democracy (Huntington, 1989, pp. 16) essentially in terms of institutionalised procedures but differing considerably from Huntington's view (Jurado, 2003, pp. 10).

Most of the studies and analyses that have been done in the field of comparative politics and in the analysis of democratic transitions have used as a definition of democracy the one offered by Robert Dahl to define contemporary democracies, which he calls "polyarchies". They, in summary, must have the following characteristics:

1. Control over government decisions in relation to politics must be constitutionally granted to elected officials;

2. These officials are peacefully elected and displaced in pre-established periods, in places where free elections are held, and coercion does not exist or is frankly limited;
3. Virtually all adults have the right to vote;
4. Most adults have the right to run for public office;
5. Citizens have the opportunity to express themselves freely in relation to politics, as well as to criticise the government and the prevailing ideology;
6. Citizens have access to alternative sources of information, and;
7. Citizens have the right to unite and associate in autonomous organisations of all kinds, including the political (Dahl, 1989, pp. 15).

A much shorter definition but one that tries to cover the most relevant aspects of Dahl's definition is that of Lipset, for whom democracy occurs where three basic features are presented:

1. That there is competition for government positions and fair elections are held at regular intervals for official positions, without the use of force and without excluding any social group;
2. That citizens participate regularly in the selection of their leaders and in the definition of the most relevant public policies;
3. That there are broad and firm political and civil liberties to guarantee fair competition and participation policy (Lipset, 1995, pp. 11).

To use Huntington's own terms, these two definitions could also be considered minimal, in that they do not attempt to define democracy by its source of authority or by the ends of government; they are simply definitions that consider certain political institutions (Jurado, 2003, pp. 12). In this sense, it could also be said that the three definitions, including Huntington's, have much in common, but they also have notable differences. In general, Huntington's definition is not only more concise, but also more incomplete (Jurado, 2003, pp. 12). When comparing it with the one offered by Lipset, two fundamental differences immediately emerge; the first is that while Lipset believes that there should be a comprehensive scheme of civil and political liberties, Huntington does not even mention it. This is a fundamental difference because there is a broad consensus in the specialised bibliography on the liberal character of contemporary democracy, which is essentially defined in terms of a liberal democracy. The positive assessment it receives is thus due both to the legitimacy of the democratic government, as it is the product of inclusive general elections, and to the fact that individual freedoms are respected in the exercise of government (Sartori, 1991).

The fact that Huntington does not take civil and political liberties into account in his definition of democracy does not mean that he does not consider them important. In many parts of his work, he refers to them as one of the distinctive characteristics and one of the most esteemed values of Western civilization (Ackerman, 2010). However, he does not include them in his definition for the sake of making his "minimum definition" of democracy even more elementary (Jurado, 2003, pp. 12).

However, by narrowing his definition so much, Huntington has created a new problem since, as ancient and recent history have shown, illiberal democracies can exist. The narrowness of definitions of this kind has made it necessary for the Freedom House, in its classification of contemporary democracies, to distinguish between electoral democracies and liberal democracies: the former are those that would roughly fit Huntington's definition (Freedom House, 2002).

From the confrontation that has been made between the definitions of democracy in these three authors, it should not be concluded simply that the correct one is that of Robert Dahl. Many (Macpherson, 1991; Held, 1992; Cohen and Arato, 2000) have already taken care to point out its flaws and inconsistencies. Actually, the purpose that has been pursued is to show that Huntington's definition is elementary (Moreno, 2016). It could lead to inaccuracies or cumbersome clarifications, and that even when compared with other "minimal" or purely procedural definitions, such as those of the two other authors, their shortcomings and gaps are unconcealable (Pateman, 1970).

However, to reveal the inconsistencies or weaknesses of his own definition, it is necessary to confront it with that of other authors: it is enough to observe the corrections that Huntington himself has to make repeatedly on his own political considerations (Jurado, 2003, pp. 14). In justifying this form of government, Huntington considers democracy to be a desirable regime, at least the most desirable among all possible ones. He states that the fundamental reasons for valuing it in this way are three:

1. it is where the individual can exercise the greatest margin of freedom;

2. democratic government is less likely to use violence against its citizens, and;

3. a democratic state does not normally go to war with another democratic state (Huntington, 1994, pp. 21).

The second virtue that Huntington saw in his "minimum definition" of democracy was the ease of factually verifying the existence or absence of a democratic regime. Indeed, practically reducing the content of the definition to two variables – the holding of regular elections and universal suffrage – it is much easier to draw up a general classification of the regimes that fulfil this assumption and those that do not (Jurado, 2003, pp. 15).

It is likely that one of Huntington's greatest sources of error is to consider that the debate over the theory of democracy is over, that Schumpeter has won, and democracy should be understood only as a "political method" for collective decision making (Jurado, 2003, pp. 14). Fortunately, the debate on democracy was not over then and it is most likely more open than ever in recent history, and although the theories that define this regime essentially in terms of electoral procedures and individual freedoms may have great weight, there are many critical points to be taken into account (Ackerman, 2010). In any case, even if it were necessary to adhere to a minimal definition of democracy in order to avoid falling into idealizations and to adopt a valid and useful criterion for classifying contemporary forms of government, it is clear

that Huntington's is still limited although it offers pragmatism for analysis (Jurado, 2003, pp. 15).

C. THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE CRITIQUE

- **Power as a central feature of democracy - Bobbio**

The Italian neorealist Norberto Bobbio examines what he believes to be the crucial connection between liberalism and democracy, or between freedom and popular control. In his view, liberalism asserts rights against the state whether or not it is democratic; the democratic state bestows sovereignty on the majority and has the power to encroach upon liberty (Terchek & Conte, 2001, pp. 183). Bobbio contends that liberalism and democracy are mutually necessary for both those who want to uphold rights by weakening or rejecting democracy as well as for those who want to uphold democracy by upholding rights. No society can be free without being democratic (and vice versa), yet this does not mean that freedom and democracy are always compatible (Bobbio, 1984).

Bobbio examines the question of whether democracy has lived up to its promises, and he concludes that it hasn't. He observes that oligarchy has persisted despite the rise of democracy, that power frequently remains "hidden", that the populace is frequently politically "illiterate", that technocrats frequently hold the reins of power, and that bureaucracy regularly evades public scrutiny (Bobbio, 1984).

According to Bobbio, some of the broken promises of democracy cannot be avoided. This conclusion prompts him to argue against both a perfectionist view of democracy that argues that conventional democratic procedures are sufficient to secure democratic fairness and an accommodating view that holds that some type of final harmony may be built. According to Bobbio, democracy is about struggle – not just between opposing social classes but also between ordinary people and centralised authority, whether it be public or private (Terchek & Conte, 2001, pp. 184). This is an assumption that will appear again in our analysis of Rustow's transitology, later in this paper. Bobbio wants democrats to resist idealistic notions of the best possible political solutions to the world's issues in order to combat secretive and exclusive methods that reduce the involvement of the public in public affairs (Bobbio, 1984).

- **Advocating for cohesion through expression - Connolly and Habermas**

According to Connolly, contemporary politics follows an "ontology of concord", which aims to create a peaceful society and its inhabitants. Such a perfect model cannot and does not exist in his eyes. Instead, he envisions a society in which social structures and identities are intricate, ambiguous, and frequently inconsistent (Tercheck & Conte, 2001, pp. 210).

Connolly contends that the dominant political beliefs and practices in a country create a pervasive normalising pressure”" that stigmatises people who deviate from accepted norms. He advocates an “ontology of discordance” as a counterbalance to these inclinations, acknowledging the need for social order but urging for a fuller understanding of the discordant characteristics that pervade every society and every individual (Connolly, 1987). Connolly seeks to encourage an enhanced reciprocity and even a sense of generosity between different identities that are inevitably bound together in a common condition, in contrast to the conventional model of tolerance, which asks citizens to simply ignore each other where differences are identified (Connolly, 1987).

Connolly was not far from what democracies are experiencing in regard to the stigma of those who disagree and deviate from the establishment. Stigmatising the contrary has become a commonality in political discourse instead of direct debate and exchange of ideas. When *antifa* is used in the US or *facha* in Spain there is no politically correct way to support those singled out as such. However, more recently, those terms have reached the government elites of certain countries when reactionary movements or individuals that threaten moderation and established structures appear.

That phenomenon is linked to Habermas thesis on the public discourse and the importance of the public discourse. The Greeks were already incisive in how crucial the way and nature of the ruler's speech was. Habermas, although criticised by the postmodernist, follows up on this feature of democracy in a smooth way.

He proposes that through speaking acts that are supported by valid arguments, Habermas’ communicative project describes the potential for a rational foundation for public discourse. But according to Habermas, precisely this vital capacity for group judgement is in danger right now. Instead, he believes that the guiding forces of money and power skew the results of popular preferences. He appeals to reason and the ability to put ideas to the test in public discourse, which he sees as one of the Enlightenment’s greatest legacies, in order to counter this challenge. According to him, communicative action offers a foundation for a democratic society that may fulfil the Enlightenment’s promise of achieving universal justice (Habermas, 1966).

Habermas follows and joins the liberal tradition by upholding the boundaries between the state and civil society as well as the crucial function that constitutional protections play in defining the realm of political activity (Terchek & Conte, 2001, pp. 240). He also emphasises the need of public discourse in preserving free societies by drawing on the republican tradition at the same time. Self-interested decisions based on a market model of politics, in his opinion, represent a poor interpretation of political life (Habermas, 1966).

The rise of personality politics in which the leader is the one heard and the resources around political life goes around them comes as a very trending topic from Habermas thesis. The republican Greeks gave special attention to the importance and power of a virtuous speech that

could reach the masses and that took care of the actual matters of the polity. Today, not only autocracies are falling under the individual leader rule. Figures like Trump, Salvini or Bolsonaro have reached the ultimate power in their countries through democratic means but with illiberal speeches. And the most powerful of their tools has been their discourse and communicative projects.

Such success in strategy opened the door to the liberal parties in which presidents and prime ministers like Macron, Sánchez, Trudeau or Johnson have used the public speech and concentration of efforts around the individual as a product. The public discourse then has fallen into a tool that focuses on selling a personality and the public speech and charisma of an individual rather than the nature of a political programme or ideology.

- **Plural societies define different democracies - Lijphart**

Reaching the end of this literature review, Arend Lijphart well deserves a mention in this paper as his proposition of democracy and its adaptability to plural societies may be applied later on in the analysis. In *Democracy in Plural Societies* (1977), Lijphart explained that the classical conception of democracy described it as a political system in which the government represented the people, or at least most of the people. However, it was not realised that the pluralistic composition of many societies could make the normal operation of democracy difficult, since in such societies there were social minorities, differentiated from the rest of the population by language, religion or race, which would be systematically excluded from both political representation and governmental attention.

Under these conditions it was necessary for the democratic system to adopt a series of institutions and practices that would guarantee the representation of all minorities, meaning, to recognize and assume the plurality of society. Thus, from the analysis of democratic systems that incorporated this type of institutions, Lijphart distinguished four of them as basic:

1. A grand coalition of political leaders of all segments of the population.
2. A mutual veto of each of the segments applicable to vital issues concerning their community.
3. Proportionality as the main characteristic of political representation.
4. A high degree of autonomy for the management of the specific affairs of each community. (Lijhart, 1979, pp. 501).

According to his analysis, these were the basic elements of consociational democracy.

The thesis is definitely correct in its sought for fighting the constant struggle that a democratic regime represents (Diamond, 1997). However, democracies face struggles in their diversity that go beyond the plurality of ethnicities. By the time of his thesis, women had not had the chance yet to reach political leadership in most democratic regimes as they do currently. The claims from their side, a majority, have become a new challenge in plural societies since they

can actually seek to strengthen their position in public life. Similarly, the intergenerational could represent a new struggle in the diverse demands of a democratic society with its very clear example in Brexit results.
Therefore, although important for the management of the struggles in a democratic society, the issue of the representation and voice of the different communities has gone further than the rights of minorities to be heard.

- **The importance of the context - Aung San Suu Kyi**

In order to conclude this literature review, I wanted to add some notions of Aung San Suu Kyi thesis on democracy as she has been represented as an icon fighting for democracy in Myanmar since the 1990s.

Aung San Suu Kyi maintains that each nation must discover its own path to democracy. However, this does not negate the fact that some democratic ambitions transcend national boundaries, with the concept of human rights being one of the most significant. She interprets this to suggest that a nation that restricts fundamental freedoms, like the ability to assemble and speak freely, cannot truly be considered a democracy. Suu Kyi proceeds by making the case that popular governance cannot thrive if human rights are infringed, and civil society is filled with fear (Suu Kyi, 1992).

Suu Kyi asserts that another universal ambition is for democracy to prioritise economic justice over economic progress. Similar to Gandhi, she wants to ensure that economic progress in a democracy takes into account the economically vulnerable, not as an afterthought but as one of its focal points. She is concerned about the economic circumstances of the least fortunate sections of society. She seeks to end the various types of economic inequity that stunt personal growth and dignity. In fact, she values democracy because it empowers people and their cultures, neither of which should be the targets of manipulation and control (Suu Kyi, 1992). The notion that various people can coexist peacefully and constructively in a multiracial, pluralist society is essential to this perspective on empowerment. Her plurality, which clearly diverges significantly from Bentley's and Dahl's interest-group pluralism, reflects the deeply ingrained localised identities in her nation (Terchek & Conte, 2001, pp. 280).

Aung San Suu Kyi's thesis, although coherent with the struggles of a democracy in its life, sounds idealistic as well as not that coherent when she had to exercise power once democratically elected as a State Counsellor. Her performance while dealing with the Rohingya Genocide and the lack of protection or criticism towards the perpetrators of the crime show how to preserve some degree of democracy, sometimes the perspective of the empowerment of the diverse people needs to be put aside in exchange for the survival of the regime - and that was the case of Myanmar's democratic period.

This literature review aimed to find a definition of democracy that could be used in this paper to nominate the case study as a democracy to some degree. It would have been too complex to

call Myanmar a democracy under the western standards of democracy in today's world. However, Huntington's minimal definition of democracy applies since 2015 when elections were held in a free and fair competition and with a vast majority of the voters able to cast their ballots.

There are countless nuances to such an affirmation as there are to this literature review of the concept of democracy. To start with, it is mostly western-centric, focuses on studies from theorists of the late twentieth century and lacks components as relevant as the sources of authority when it comes to a mode of governance. However, it follows a coherent flow in which limits and threats to democracy proposed by authors along history are relevant in today's democracies - Myanmar attempts to achieve democracy was no exception.

3.1.2. DEMOCRATISATION

The end of the 20th century brought with it the collapse of various kinds of authoritarian systems that led to the emergence of a substantial number of democracies. They are political democracies, or more precisely, and following Dahls classic definition, they are polyarchies (Dahl, 1971). Several contributions have shown that there are various types of polyarchies. Research pioneered by Liphart showed that they differ from each other even in dimensions as important as whether they are based on majoritarian or more consensual rules for access to and the exercise of public responsibility (Liphart, 1984). But these polyarchies have one characteristic in common – they are all representative, institutionalised democracies – although the democratic forces may be living a backlash crisis as a product of the end of a democratic wave. In contrast, most of the recently democratised countries are not moving towards representative, institutionalised democratic regimes, nor do they seem likely to do so in the foreseeable future (O'Donnell, 1993). Nevertheless, they share the minimum defining elements of Huntington's or Schumpeter's democracy mentioned previously.

Therefore, and based on what was previously established as a minimal definition of democracy, we can have ideas about the "democratiness" of a country. In the first case, countries in a state of democracy could be perceived as existing on a scale and they can move along that scale between a maximum degree (perfect democracy) and a null degree (authoritarian regimes) of democracy (Priego, 2011). In the second case, we would be faced with a binary conception in which the states that reach an adequate level in the indicators established by Dahl (1971) in the concept of polyarchy would be considered democratic and the rest would not. For this study we will base ourselves on the second conception, although we will not discard the first, since the line between one and the other is not very clear. However, the second view is of greater interest for the chosen methodology, since it is better adapted to transitology (Priego, 2011).

Transitology was first put forward by Rustow (1970) as a phenomenon triggered by war, social conflict, and inequalities which would drive forces for democratisation. Rustow proposes that only through a bottom-up approach by different political elites, civil society, and groups can democracy emerge. As this approach was not followed by Huntington, it would not apply to

our case study. However, this paper will follow his thesis on democracy as a constant struggle among groups and interests, but not about fundamental principles. Rustow proposes four phases involving transitions. This paper will come back to them later in the case study as its application to Myanmar is partially contested and could be combined with Huntington's elitist thesis.

Throughout history we have seen how most authoritarian regimes have evolved towards more democratic ones through what it has been called transition processes. Therefore, it is understood that a transition is the passage from an authoritarian regime to another where there are adequate conditions of competition and participation to be considered democratic (Rustow, 1970). These processes can be initiated through two different mechanisms:

- Uprising-Revolution
- Modernisation-Liberalisation

A. Uprising-Revolution

Uprising or revolution will occur when, in the absence of liberalisation processes, the pressure exerted by the population is such that it brings down the government and sometimes the political system itself. However, we must differentiate between revolt and revolution. While the former could be considered as any alteration of the order whose main purpose is the overthrow of authority, the latter has two characteristics of its own: search for a new order and a yearning for freedom (Arendt, 2004).

Neither of the two phenomena guarantees that social change will end in democracy. In fact, sometimes a revolt becomes a revolution and subsequently gives rise to a democracy[11], but on other occasions revolts either end in nothing or end in another type of non-democratic regime[12] (Arendt, 2004). This concept is known as backsliding, which will be touched upon later. However, this mechanism towards democracy or a change of regime is not particularly interesting to the Myanmar case study as it is not applicable due to the lack of key protests that caused significant changes in the mode of governance (Priego, 2011). Therefore, a modernisation and liberalisation approach will follow.

B. MODERNISATION & LIBERALISATION

Huntington's research (1972) focuses on the political consequences of economic modernisation in Asian, African, and Latin American countries. For the author, "modernization is a multifaceted process, involving a series of changes in all areas of human thought and activity" (Huntington, 1972, p. 40). Huntington uses the definition from Lerner in which, "modernization implies *urbanisation, industrialization, secularisation, democratisation, education, media participation*" (Lerner, 1958, p. 438).

[11] It is the case of the Boston Tea Party in the USA that later led to the American Revolution.
[12] Which was the case of Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979.

In addition to the urban, economic, cultural, and communicative aspects of modernisation, it also has, for Huntington, a political dimension: *"Modernization implies, to a large extent, the multiplication and diversification of social forces"* (Huntington, 1972, p. 20). In other words, modernization implies *"the increasing participation in politics of social groups throughout the community"* (Huntington, 1972, p. 42).

According to Huntington, the relationship between modernisation and political instability is not direct, but involves three other variables: expectations, participation and low institutionality. Modernisation raises expectations which, when not met by governments, mobilises political participation. This participation leads to instability when governments cannot manage it, due to low levels of institutionalisation, when "the process by which organisations and procedures acquire value and stability" has not been fully developed (Huntington, 1972, p. 23). For the author, the model of causality that connects modernisation and instability is the following:

Urbanisation, increasing rates of literacy, education and access to social media create high aspirations and expectations, which if not met galvanise individuals and groups and push them into political action. In the absence of strong and adaptable political institutions, such increases in participation bring instability and violence (Huntington, 1972, p. 53).

On the other hand, modernisation also leads to political instability because the changes it implies, in addition to affecting expectations and political participation, "undermine the traditional foundations of authority and traditional political institutions, and tremendously complicate the problems of creating new bases of association and political institutions that unite legitimacy with effectiveness" (Huntington, 1972, pp. 16).

With this element, added to the previous ones, the context is propitious for social mobilizations, since *"the rhythms of social mobilisation and the rise of political participation are high; those of political organisation and institutionalisation are low. The result is instability and disorder"* (Huntington, 1972, p. 16). Since modernisation has among its main processes, urbanisation, an important part of political instability occurs in cities: *"the instability of the city - expressed in coups, disorder, demonstrations - is in a sense an inescapable characteristic of modernization"* (Huntington, 1972, p. 78).

Huntington then criticises the widespread theories linking poverty and political instability. In fact, ultimately, his theory of modernisation is at the antipode of these approaches. For him, poverty does not generate instability, what generates instability are the efforts to eradicate it. He writes, *"what produces political disorder is not the absence of modernity, but the efforts to achieve it"* (Huntington, 1972, p. 48). This thesis, according to the author, is also valid at the subnational level within countries. *"In countries undergoing modernization, violence, disorder and extremist manifestations are more frequent in the richer parts of the territory than in the poorer ones"* (Huntington, 1972, p. 51).

However, the alternative to prevent modernisation from bringing instability is to strengthen institutions. In fact, for Huntington, it is precisely the difference in institutional solidity that explains why modernisation brings instability in Asian, African, and Latin American countries, and not in Eastern Europe, Japan, and the United States (Crozier, Huntington & Watanuki, 1975). Huntington notes that the main problem in politics is, *"the backwardness in the development of political institutions that should support economic and social change"* (Huntington, 1972, p. 16).

Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki (1975) update some of the approaches of the book published by Huntington three years earlier. However, given that the countries under study in the 1975 book are highly developed economically, they do not directly address the functioning of democracy in developing countries. However, one of the central theses of the book has also been applied to democracies in developing countries. *"In recent years, the operations of the democratic process do indeed appear to have generated a breakdown of traditional means of social control, a delegitimation of political and other forms of authority, and an overload of demands on government, exceeding its capacity to respond"* (Crozier, Huntington &Watanuki, 1975, p. 8).

The three aforementioned processes - crisis of the traditional means of control, delegitimisation, and overload of demands on governments - also appear in Huntington (1972) and are characteristic of political instability in changing societies. As Huntington pointed out, in countries with institutional solidity these processes do not lead to instability, which only occurs in countries with low degrees of institutionalisation.

According to the authors, the expansion of demands on governments arises from:
1. the involvement of an increasing proportion of the population in political activity;
2. the development of new groups and of new consciousness on the part of old groups, including youth, regional groups, and ethnic minorities
3. the diversification of the political means and tactics which groups use to secure their ends;
4. an increasing expectation on the part of groups that government has the responsibility to meet their needs; and
5. an escalation in what they conceive those needs to be (Crozier, Huntington &Watanuki, 1975, p. 10).

These five points are another way of posing the political consequences of modernisation. When they occur in highly institutionalised democracies, they certainly generate problems, but not political instability. On the other hand, in contexts of low political institutionalisation they result in varying degrees of instability (Petersen, 2015, pp. 9).

In the case of liberalisations, they usually give rise to transition processes that are sometimes prolonged in time. When this occurs, the absence of historical perspective leads some authors to affirm that dictatorships become "dictatorships" or "democracies" (Priego, 2011, pp. 78). However, those in favour of more dichotomous conceptions of democracy, following Huntington's view, believe that democratisation is a process linked to the modernisation to

which states tend when they increase their level of development. Therefore, we cannot speak of "soft dictatorships" or "pseudodemocracies" but rather of democratic or authoritarian regimes (Linz, 2000).

- **Waves of Democratisation**

"During the fifteen years following the end of the Portuguese dictatorship in 1974, authoritarian regimes were replaced by democratic ones in approximately thirty countries in Europe, Asia and Latin America. In other countries, there was considerable liberalisation of authoritarian regimes. And in still others, pro-democracy movements gained strength and legitimacy" (Huntington, 1994, p. 33). It is at this point that the term "wave of democratisation" comes in, which according to Huntington's definition means:

"*a set of transitions from a non-democratic to a democratic regime that occur in a given period of time and that significantly outnumber transitions in the opposite direction during the same period"* (Huntington, 1994, pp. 26).

Two points should be made. Firstly, not all transition processes are framed within waves of democratisation, so we can find isolated processes. Secondly, it should be pointed out that each wave is followed by a counter-wave in the opposite direction, for example, forces that try to change democratic regimes for authoritarian ones (Priego, 2011, pp. 80). Huntington points out the following waves of democratisation:

- In his opinion, the first wave of representative democracy began in the United States in the year 1828 with the election of Andrew Jackson as President. Since then, representative democracy advanced gradually in the West until 1929 when the rise to power of Benito Mussolini put an end to that first wave.
- The second wave began with the end of World War II with the establishment of democratic regimes under U.S. military occupation in Germany, Japan and Italy, and decolonization processes in Africa and Asia. *Coups d'état* in Latin America and authoritarian regimes in former colonies put an end, around 1960, to Huntington's second democratic wave.
- The third wave began in 1973, with the "Carnation Revolution" in Portugal, followed by the fall of the military dictatorship in Greece and the transition to democracy in Spain after the death of the dictator Francisco Franco. The wave spread to Latin America and the Caribbean where political transitions began in countries that had lived under military dictatorships: Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, where pre-coup democratic development had reached high levels, allowing the opening of more defined democratic processes that have led these countries to achieve important national democratic achievements.

Huntington points out that five processes directly caused the third democratic wave:

1. the serious problems of legitimization of authoritarian regimes;

2. the world economic growth of the 1960s;

3. the surprising changes in the doctrine and activities of the Catholic Church;

4. changes in the policies of external actors; and

5. the "snowball effect", due to which some societies tried to imitate transitions to democracy achieved by others that served as examples (Huntington, 1994, pp. 53-54).

Some of the cases studied, specifically those whose authoritarian regimes went into crisis after prolonged periods of economic growth, experienced political instabilities that Huntington explains from the causal model that relates economic growth, creation of middle classes, expansion of expectations on governments, increased participation and political institutionalisation so low that governments face problems in managing this participation, which ultimately leads to political instability (Petersen, 2015 pp. 10.)

Huntington also alludes to the causes of the emergence of radical expressions in contexts of economic modernisation and low political institutionalisation. He argues that extremist ways of disagreeing with the *status quo* stem from the continuing failure of institutions to respond to the growing demands of society. *"Democratic reactions to political failure and disillusionment"* (Huntington, 1994, pp. 239).

What is different between the studies on democratisation of the 1980s and the more recent ones is that the works of that first stage were still impregnated with a certain optimism that led them to conceive it as a process that, once initiated, would lead with few drawbacks and problems to democracy. They were not yet able to perceive the whole drama of the struggle for democracy that includes experiences of failed democratisation and authoritarian regressions, as shown by many later processes (Pasquino, 2011).

Recent works no longer suffer from this optimistic and unilinear temptation - partly due to the evidence of accumulated failures and setbacks in this period - and there are many versions that introduce a more complex idea of democratisation, admitting, as its inseparable counterpart, the potential risk of regression and reversal of the route taken (McGlinchey, 2010). The idea that these processes are potentially reversible - as per O'Donnell (2010) - or the notion of de-democratisation - as stated in Tilly (2010) - are just an expression of this paradigm shift that tends to abandon the simplification and optimism that Pasquino (2011) invites us to overcome.

Of course, it is necessary to move towards a formulation of the concept in such a way as to allow a better operational translation for future research. In any case, understood in a broad sense the idea of democratisation encompasses both the extension of rights to those who were deprived of them, the inclusion of individuals or actors who remained excluded from participation, as well as the spread of democratic principles to areas not previously governed by those criteria. Conceived in this way, it is presented as a multidimensional concept that contains enormous potential for evaluating the variations - in a favourable or unfavourable sense - of the complex relations between democracy, state and citizenship.

3.1.3. FAILED DEMOCRATISATION – HOW DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

When it comes to a failed democratisation process, there is not much literature that defines the concept itself. There are rather consequences that exemplified the result of a democratisation that came to an end in different ways that were the consolidation of its democratic changes.

Myanmar, for instance, has experienced a variety of results as consequences of its efforts to achieve democracy. In most cases, such results had the shape of a coup d'etat, reforms in the structures of the state without concessions to the civilian pro-democratic movements, and more recently in what some call a failed state. This section, rather than defining what a failed democratisation is, aims to explain the different scenarios that arise from a political transition that do not end in democracy.

A. Authoritarian resilience

The widespread reforms that spark some features of democratic regimes in authoritarian countries – depending on which definitions are used - point to the notion of authoritarian resilience; that is, the ability of an authoritarian regime to adapt to liberalising shocks without having to suffer an authoritarian breakdown (Ruzza, 2018). It was introduced for the first time by Andrew Nathan in 2003 to explain the lack of Chinese democratisation, and it has been applied since to different regions and contexts (Ruzza, 2018).

Since case studies are the primary focus of the literature, there isn't a broad definition of authoritarian resilience to be found. Nathan (2003) examined how the Chinese ruling class was able to move the nation from totalitarianism to authoritarianism by eschewing a utopian or charismatic form of government, adopting technocracy, and relaxing restrictions on individual freedom of expression and action. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) did not want to give up control and wanted to maintain the stability of the government, but the need to respond to the demands of economic globalisation precipitated the transition.

According to Nathan, the liberalising changes made by the CCP have not resulted in a regime change, contrary to what was predicted by Talcott Parsons' theory. He added that even though "such a transition might still lie somewhere in the future, the experience of the past two decades suggests that it is not inevitable" (Nathan 2003: 16). Nathan's argument is still valid fifteen years later, and other writers have expanded on his premises (Stockmann & Gallagher 2011; Chung 2017).

Heydemann and Leenders (2011) used the concept of authoritarian resilience and applied it to the Arab Springs Revolts of 2011 to justify the lack of actual structural changes in the majority of the countries hit by the protests. They claimed that two processes had evolved concurrently and interacted with one another: first, the well-known democratic contagion effect (Huntington 1991), where protests in one country gain momentum due to what is happening in neighbouring states; second, social learning on the part of the regimes, which had modified their "repertoires

of suppression" in response to developments on the ground in both their own country and in neighbouring countries (Ruzza, 2018). In Algeria, Morocco, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Syria, the incumbents have been able to block democratisation and defend authoritarian authority by outpacing protesters in terms of social adaptability. Heydemann and Leenders' argument has been furthered by the engagement of other scholars with authoritarian resilience in Arab nations, particularly following the 2011 Revolts (Bellin 2012; Yom & Gause 2012).

On the other side, Hess (2013) combined examples of China and Arab nations in a single analysis in an effort to explain the autocratic fragility of Tunisia and Egypt, the two countries where the 2011 Arab Revolts were successful, in comparison to the resilience of autocracy in China. He identified four primary causes of unrest – economic performance, unemployment, inequality, and corruption – that can serve as authoritarian weaknesses. Only inequality and corruption have been a worry for China, while Tunisia and Egypt performed poorly across all four criteria.

Hess then referred to the three fundamental components of the classical concept of authoritarian capacity: coercive capacity, political capacity, and discretionary control over the economy (Way, 2008). Egypt and Tunisia both outperformed China on these criteria. Hess introduced what he called "two missing variables" – centralisation and modes of contention – in order to explain the very different political trajectories taken by the two North African countries in comparison to China. He claimed that decentralisation is able to keep protest parochial (for example, local) and prevent it from escalating to the national scale, thus providing an essential layer of authoritarian protection. Hess contends that decentralisation has kept Chinese authoritarianism intact while its lack has resulted in government collapse both in Egypt and Tunisia (Ruzza, 2018).

4. CASE STUDY: MYANMAR

Myanmar was going through a process of democratic reforms – aimed to be a successful democratisation process similar to the liberal democracies of the West – that was stopped on February 1st, 2022. The Myanmar Military Forces (from now on the Tatmadaw), perpetrated a political shift of power by arresting the civilian government leaders just before the formation of the new government resulting from the November 2020 General Elections. From now on, such intervention will be referred to as the *coup d'état.*

Figure 1: Political map of Burma administrative division. Source: Utexas Edu Link

The justification of the Tatmadaw intervention as a coup d'etat as well as the causes of this event will come later in the analysis. First, we will contextualise the political history of Myanmar in depth making a special emphasis on the period from 2012 until the 1st of February 2022. Secondly, we will analyse two key structural factors that are determinant in Myanmar's political dynamics: the Tatmadaw ideology and role in the country's political developments and its interactions with the political forces pro-democracy, especially the National League for Democracy - main party of the country and counter-part of the Tatmadaw since 1988.

4.1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The territories that make modern Myanmar *(Figure 1)* have a long history in governance structures, from empires to kingdoms going through several wars and conquests involving external powers in the region and finally the British colonial period and Japanese invasion. However, our historical context starts from the consideration of the current Myanmar as a whole territory, formerly known as Burma. That historic event can be traced to the Panlong Agreement and Panlong Conferences in 1947 in which the Bamar[13] leader General

[13] Bamar is the largest ethnic and linguistic group in present-day Myanmar, accounting for approximately two-thirds of the population. They live primarily in the Irrawady Basin and speak Burmese. A distinction to be made, Bamar refers to the ethnicity and Burmese to all country citizens.

Aung San in 1947 negotiated with other key leaders like U Nu, for the independence of Burma from the British Empire.

General Aung San represents an important part of the fight for democracy in Myanmar - and the country's governance overall. He led the fight for independence from the British and advocated for a plural, diverse and unified Burma when negotiating the Panglong Agreement (Simpson, 2018). Closely after the composition of a transitional government, the Executive Council of Burma, – in which General Aung San was a prime minister - he was assassinated by political rivals on the 19th of July 1947. Since then, July 19th is commemorated as Martyr's Day and it is a national public holiday.

But it is not only for that reason that General Aung San still plays an important role in today's Myanmar politics. Besides his political activism for Burma's independence, he plays a crucial role in both major parties' narrative – Tatmadaw and the pro-democracy movements. On one side, as one of the founders of the current Myanmar Armed Forces or Tatmadaw as an institution. On the contrary, as the father of the democracy icon and former State Counsellor, Aung San Suu Kyi.

Although the democratisation period is conceived by many as an event of the last decade, many scholars and researchers see the process as a long event started in the late 1980s (Bunte, 2016). Therefore, an overview of some of the events during the colonial period and the immediate incidents after the independence are key to explain current events involving the interrupted democratisation process in Myanmar as well as the relationship between the Tatmadaw and the pro-democratic movement.

4.1.1. COLONIAL PERIOD

One of the factors that shaped the current configuration of modern Myanmar, as in many other countries, has been the colonial administration of the United Kingdom. This colonial period began in 1824 with three Anglo-Burmese wars and ended with the complete annexation in 1885 that lasted until 1948. Burma's situation was strategic for the British, since the annexation of Burma provided a buffer in the east for India, which was *"the jewel in the crown*" (Taylor, 2015). In addition, the country had natural wealth to exploit (oil, timber, jade, rice, rubber, etc.), geographically its position was important for securing both the route connecting Singapore with India and for the opening of trade to China through the Yunnan region. On the other hand, its control eliminated the possibility of another power (probably France) occupying the territory (Llandres, 2016).

The key element of British rule was, the *divide et impera* strategy, pitching some ethnic groups against others and favouring or recruiting along ethnic lines. During the Anglo-Burmese wars, the United Kingdom interpreted the support received from sections of the Mon or Karen population as a yearning of these populations to throw off the yoke of the Bamar. Many of these ethnic groups did not see themselves included in the structures of the old pre-colonial

order and this situation was exploited by the British not only to avoid the formation of a compact group that could endanger their colonial control, but also to recruit these populations in order to complete the ranks of the colonial security services (Taylor, 2015). Thus, the Burma Army was mostly composed of ethnic minority groups such as the Karen (27.8%), Chin (22.6%) or Kachin (22.9%) (Steinberg, 2013).

According to Joseph Dautremer ″the Companies that were not composed of Indians were not even Burmese. They were Kachins, Shans, Taungthus"(Steinberg, 2013). In the case of the Karen people, there was a deep connection between them and the British structures both in terms of cooperation and recruitment and in religious matters with the conversion of part of the Karen population as a result of American missionary activities (Taylor, 2015) (currently 35% of the Karen are Christians), which was reflected in the support that the Karen people gave to the United Kingdom during the Japanese invasion as opposed to the Bamar position.

The very administrative division that the British designed for the administration of the territory did not in any way favour the viability of the State once independence was granted. The British designed a scheme for Burma in which two large administrative zones were established. First, the so-called Ministerial Burma was created, which included the core of the Bamar population (Upper and Lower Burma) and around it the Frontier Areas (Frontier Areas) were created, which grouped together the Shan, Karen, Kachin, Chin, and Wa populations. The latter were administered indirectly and their link with the core was rather diffuse. The Ministerial Burma area was the preferred destination for investment, with the development of railways and river transport, investments that were decisive in unlocking the economic potential of rice cultivation, the exploitation and export of teak and oil, silk, rubber, and tobacco (Taylor, 2015).

These investments were obviously the result of the ease of exploiting the resources of central Burma, as opposed to the difficulties in profitably exploiting the mineral wealth located in the mountainous areas (Tatsuro, 1985). This administrative and economic neglect contrasts sharply with the high level of recruitment among these ethnic groups, who were overrepresented in the Army. Later on, all these dysfunctionalities were bound to surface during World War II (Tatsuro, 1985).

Although rebellions and uprisings continued throughout the colonial period, the global conflict was perceived by the pro-independence actors as a suitable moment to achieve their political objectives due to the difficulties the United Kingdom was going through in its fight against the Axis; the opportunity to get rid of British domination came from the Empire of Japan (Taylor, 2015).

One of the initiators of the independence movement was the aforementioned Aung San, founder of the CPB and the Freedom Bloc, both father of the democratic leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, and founder of the Tatmadaw. Aung San was recruited by the Japanese on his way to

China to gather support from the Chinese Communists and was trained by the Minami Kikan[14] to recruit and train Burmese independence fighters (Villamor, 2015). The Japanese interest in Burma was motivated by the Sino-Japanese war that had been raging since 1937. Nationalist China was supplied from Burma through what became known as the "Burma Road" from Lashio to Yunnan. For the Japanese "first and foremost, there was the Burma Road as an immediate objective. Apart from this, Burma had not long since been conquered by the British and there was strong anti-British sentiment among the Burmese - who constituted the majority among Burma's many races - as they were severely repressed by the British. The prospects were good for operations in Burma" (Tatsuro, 1985).

Through Aung San and other members of the independence movement, the Japanese created several detachments of Burmese volunteers who assisted the Japanese in their advance during the Burma campaign. This initial group of about 200 men would grow to more than 10,000 volunteers in the first weeks of the Burmese Independent Army, which after the creation of the State of Burma in 1943 would be renamed the Burmese National Army (Villamor, 2015). It meant one of the roots in the Tatmadaw's pride considering Japan's massive (and brutal) military operation across all of East Asia. This army was composed mostly of Bamar people, although it did have a Karen regiment in its ranks. As the ethnic composition of the army changed significantly, the ethnic Bamar sometimes launched attacks against the population of certain ethnic (Karen, Kachin, etc.) and religious (Muslim) minorities, who continued to support the British.

According to Andrew Selth, "it seems that the hill people found encouragement in their traditional enmity towards the Burmese and in their belief that, after the defeat of the Japanese and the return of the British, they would be rewarded for their services in a particular way" (Lintner, 1999).

The beginning of the Japanese setbacks and the fact that although the independence fighters managed to escape from British rule, the government imposed by the Japanese was not the desired one given their despotic behaviour towards the people of Burma. That moved the Burmese leaders to initiate contacts with the British in order to effect an uprising against the Japanese. On March 27, 1945, the nationalist forces renamed the Burmese Patriotic Forces turned their guns against the Japanese (Lintner, 1999).

4.1.2. THE INDEPENDENCE

After World War II, the country was greatly affected by the human losses and the destruction of the infrastructure and change of the economy. The country was twice a battlefield, first with the Japanese invasion and later with the British reconquest offensive. The situation in which Burma secured its independence did not bode well for the country with the flight of capital and

[14] The Minami Kikan was a military intelligence organization created by the Empire of Japan before the outbreak of World War II in the Pacific with the intention of linking the outbreak of World War II in the Pacific with the intention of liaising with the various independence movements in the area (Tatsuro, 1985).

a halt in investments, in addition to the lack of preparation for the administration of the country, since the administrative class was predominantly British or Indian (Villamor, 2015)

The basis for Burma's post-independence stability was the Panglong Agreement which granted, among other things, full autonomy in internal administration for the border areas and the first Constitution which granted the right of secession to the Shan and Kayah States after 10 years, something which clashed head on with the vision of the Tatmadaw. The Panglong Agreement was signed by the Shan, Kachin, Chin and Burmese leader Aung San. However, this foundation began to crumble with the assassination of Aung San before independence (Taylor, 2015).

Despite the good news of the arrival of independence in January 1948, problems began to accumulate for the new government even before independence. Rebellions in Rakhine State and communist uprisings in the south, uprisings of military units, as well as demonstrations by the Karen National Union (KNU) demanding independence from Burma (Lintner, 1999. The year 1948 was particularly hard with the beginning of the activities of the Burmese Communist Party and at the beginning of 1949 with the open rebellion of the Karen National Union (Taylor, 2015).

To further disrupt the little stability in the country, in late 1949 and early 1950, Chinese nationalist forces of the Kuomintang (KMT) crossed the Sino-Burmese border and established bases in the country for a future offensive against communist China. These nationalist forces that the Burmese government was unable to dislodge initiated a series of contacts with the Karen rebels to whom they ended up selling arms and supplies. This collusion threatened to "*engulf a vast area of north-eastern Burma in chaos at a time when all the country's available military resources were sorely needed to restore order and transport in the central valley region. River and rail transport, pacification of the oil areas, and resumption of teak extraction were essential for economic recovery"* (Cady, 1958). In its fight against the Chinese communists, the KMT undertook recruitment and training of Shan, Wa or Lahu ethnic minorities living in the border areas and used heroin production to finance its operations, which expanded opium cultivation in the Shan states, in fact production increased from about 40 tons before World War II to an estimated 300-400 tons in 1962 (McCoy, 1972).

In the face of growing instability, the Tatmadaw restructured itself to cope with internal and external threats. The Armed Forces stood out for their resilience in the face of a weak civilian power unable to keep pace with the military's pace of change (McCoy, 1972).

The Tatmadaw's growing strength and independence added to its success in dismantling the KMT, something its political counterparts had failed to do. Likewise, seeking funding and armaments on both sides of the Cold War, the officers clashed with the government's neutral policies. Although the 1947 Constitution provided for a democratic system, by the early 1950s the Tatmadaw already exercised complete control over national defence and had even acquired administrative functions and substantially increased its budget (Taylor, 2015).

Thus, the celebration of independence was quickly overshadowed by the lack of unity and a common political project. The construction of the country as a modern state took place amidst confrontations and struggles that continue to this day. During these early years, the foundations were laid for a vicious circle of military interference in the government that has conditioned Myanmar's political development to the present day (Lintner, 1999)

The situation in the country remained unstable with the need for an interim military government between 1958 and 1960 due to the many insurgencies in the peripheral areas in addition to the lack of agreement between the different political factions advocating for a united Burma (Taylor, 2015). The possible disintegration of the country by the granting of more autonomy to the Shan forced a move by the military establishment. Total control of the Tatmadaw was certified in 1962 with the seizure of power by General Ne Win in a coup d'état, in an action over the entire territory and which has been characterised as a movement "bearing the impress of a unified and bureaucratized army in which orders were followed with remarkable regularity throughout the territory" (Taylor, 2015). This coup inaugurated the Tatmadaw's control over the Burmese state and the beginning of the so-called "Burmese Way to Socialism," an experiment that eventually collapsed in the late 1980s.

4.1.3. THE TATMADAW REGIMES

A. Repression, decay and 1974

Between 1962 and 1988, Burma was home to a political dictatorship that operated under the "Burmese Way to Socialism" doctrine. With the intention of promoting a socialist revolution with nationalist overtones that would politically, economically, and socially transform the life of the Burmese people, this ideology was imposed by the military, led by military men with socialist tendencies, and spread through a political party, the Socialist Program Party of Burma (SPPB). The ultimate objective was to establish a developed and successful country in which the military would guarantee the modernization of the government. (Gomá, 2013, pp. 281).

The military commanders' attempts to solidify their authoritarian rule and make the SPPB, the political branch of the socialist military regime, the leading party in Burma's political and social scene during this time were aimed at establishing the dictatorial system that had emerged in 1962 as legitimate and ensuring their continued rule (Gomá, 2013, pp. 281). In order to achieve this, they went on to create the "Burmese way to socialism" as the cornerstone of their political philosophy, conscious of the value of a state ideology around which society should centre its allegiances and which should also serve as a vehicle for popular mobilisation in support of the state. However, the "Burmese route to socialism" was sufficiently ambiguous and adaptable in terms of its socialist ideology to free the military dictatorship from being constrained by a set of rules, allowing it to, in principle, adjust to the situation and support the military's aspirational socialist revolution (Maung Maung, 2006, pp. 222).

The people, dissatisfied with the successive U Nu regimes, were not surprised by the tatmadaw's seizure of power, and there were no substantial demonstrations against the military's theft of authority (Charney, 2009). The immense prestige achieved since the period of the war for Burma's freedom also favoured the latter (Gomá, 2013, p. 284). As in other Southeast Asian countries (such as Indonesia), the military was crucial to the process of national liberation, and its leaders had no qualms about the country's political evolution prior to and following its declaration of independence in 1948 (Gomá, 2013, p. 284). As a result, the Tatmadaw had participated in the anti-colonial movement during the final period of British colonial authority. Following that, it has been successful in preserving the country's unity in the face of armed uprisings by the CPB and numerous ethnic minorities. On the other hand, in the years preceding the coup, the military had already proven its ability to rule. The U Nu Anti-Fascist League for the Freedom of the People (AFLFP), the country's ruling party, experienced a political crisis between October 1958 and April 1960, which resulted in the establishment of a Provisional Government under Ne Win. Although the majority of the government's members were civilians, the military maintained near-total control over all of its decisions, accumulating impressive political expertise and laying the groundwork for the coup d'état in 1962 (Gomá, 2013, pp. 285).

Once power was secured, the new military regime announced new policies with four main objectives:

- First, the reform of the economy to make it more socialist.
- Second, the elimination of all foreign influence in the political, economic and social life of the country.
- Third, the change in the values and attitudes of the population in order to secure their support for the new policies.
- Finally, the unification of the different peoples of Burma into one cohesive nation (Gomá, 2013, pp. 285).

Beyond the insurgencies of the peripheral areas, the first decade of Ne Win’s mandate did not suffer mass demonstrations of any type. However, an accumulation of incidents in addition to the widespread discomfort provoked the beginning of the repressive events during the dictatorship (Goma, 2017). 1974 marked an important year due to the uprising of several revolts. The University students in Rangoon, joined later on by the middle and working class, started several protests around the country that challenged for the first time Ne Win’s authority. Students and most families were in high discontent given the economic situation of the country, the lack of development after the so-called socialist revolution and the wide-spread corruption (Gomá, 2018).

In addition, the other opposition group was led by the *sangha*, the Buddhist monastic order (Goma, 2018). The pongyis (Buddhist monks), who battled kings and warlords centuries ago, were influential during the colonial and post-independence periods because of their political activism. Although, in theory, monks were not allowed to vote under the Constitution, they nevertheless had significant social sway and were not afraid to get engaged in politics, as was the case with U Nu, who won the 1960 elections with the help of the sangha. The military

regime had tried to control the monks, and earned their antipathy when it wanted to make a register of their members in the mid-1960s (Mendelson, 1975, pp. 341-345).

The 1974 incidents prepared the ground for the 1988 revolution, which overthrew the communist military dictatorship. They signalled the beginnings of working class opposition to Ne Win's policies, but more importantly, they heralded the emergence of a student movement's political activism, which would later burst in power a decade and a half later (Goma, 2017). The events of 1974 were many students' first exposure to opposition to the regime at Rangoon University and other higher education institutions (Smith, 1999, p. 278). The fact that the government repressed fresh student protests and worker strikes in June 1975, just after the universities had reopened, but without the ferocity of the previous year, is evidence of this and similar incidents repeated in the following years (Charney, 2009, pp. 138). On the other hand, and no less important, 1974 marked the consolidation of a second force of opposition to the military regime: the sangha, the Buddhist monastic order. The monks, who saw their donations dwindling and their families suffering the ravages of the bad economic situation, did not hesitate to join for the first time the workers, and especially the students, in their demands. The repression exercised against them by the authorities marked a turning point in their relationship with the military dictatorship, making the monks an important actor in the revolution of the late 80s as well as in the 2000s (Gomá, 2018).

Yet, Ne Win managed to crackdown the protests and remain in power. It showed the absolut support and lack of fissures within the military institution which had no hesitation in crushing any signs of opposition (Gomá, 2018). The lack of global significance of the events of 1974 is related to another issue. As a result of the military's efforts to isolate Burma since 1962, the nation is no longer inside the sphere of influence of the great powers in Southeast Asia, where the impending communist victories in Vietnam and Cambodia were of greater significance (Gomá, 2018).

The events of 1974, particularly the "U Thant incident," also made a more unsettling fact more apparent: there was no credible political alternative to the SPPB and Ne Win's rule. Despite the size of the demonstrations, there was no organised opposition structure, and the protests generally occurred in anarchic circumstances because every action and decision were made in an assembly-style setting and was then ratified by acclamation (Gomá, 2018). The lack of strong student leaders and their failure to organise an alternative government led to divisions among the student movement. Not even the monks, who had a stronger structure to articulate an opposition movement, were not able to exercise political leadership (Gomá, 2018). Some scholars blame this lack of leadership organisation to the events and situation that brought Myanmar to its current situation.

Even though the events of 1974 failed to topple the military government, they served as a prelude to the revolution that, 14 years later, in 1988, brought an end to the socialist model of Burma. As a result, 1974 marked the beginning of the end of the country's "road to socialism" and the fall of General Ne Win's dictatorship, which did not last for the following 15 years (Gomá, 2018).

B. 1988

The dictatorship period since the coup in 1962 never brought development nor economic growth of any type (Myat Thein, 2004). The Junta's "Burmese way to socialism" failed resoundingly. Two rounds of demonetization in 1985 and 1987 tried to cut the money supply and control inflation (Ruzza, 2019, pp. 12). However, the consequences generated a huge economic damage: people deprived of their savings, higher inflation and a chaotic management of the state economy. The resurgence of a stronger barter and smuggling reinforced the position of the insurgents in the peripheral regions (Myat Thein, 2004).

Unhappiness among burmese society sparked protests in the nation from March to August 1988, which culminated on August 8th in widespread rioting known as the "8-8-88 rebellion" (Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 2013). At this point, Aung San Suu Kyi appears in history. She had gone to Yangon to take care of her elderly and ill mother. She was the daughter of general Aung San, who was, as mentioned earlier, the architect of Burma's independence. She was asked to lead the anti-government movement by the protest leaders due to her political background. She spoke to a gathering of at least 500,000 people on August 26 at a demonstration at the Shwedagon Pagoda, where she called for the elimination of the one-party system and the quick scheduling of "free and fair elections." The National League of Democracy was established in September (Kipgen, 2016, pp. 87-91).

Ne Win resigned in July in the face of growing unrest, and multi-party elections were planned. However, when these failed to quell the unrest, the Tatmadaw ruthlessly intervened (Charney, 2009; Holliday, 2010). Martial law was enacted, the constitution was suspended, and a new military government headed by General Saw Maung was put into place. The upheavals were brutally put to an end as a result of widespread detention of protestors and political adversaries, violent repression, and the deaths of thousands of citizens. Universities were shut down across the nation because students were among the most politically engaged groups of people during the riots (Kipgen 2016, pp. 64-65).

The promised elections took place in May 1990. The Tatmadaw was shocked when the NLD won by a landslide margin, winning 58.7% of the vote and 392 out of the 485 seats up for grabs (Ruzza, 2019, 13). Due to the first-past-the-post electoral system, the National Unity Party (NUP), a political manifestation of the military, received only 21.2 percent of the vote and 10 seats (Kipgen, 2016, pp.125–127). Unwilling to accept such a humiliating defeat, the junta claimed that the vote was intended to establish the National Convention, a constitutional assembly rather than a new parliament.

Saw Maung was ousted by general Than Shwe in a palace coup in April 1992. The junta established the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) in 1993, the same year the National Convention started its operations, in order to take away space from grassroots civil society organisations and to foster support for government policies, including the drafting of a new constitution. Since the bulk of the National Convention's members were township-level officials chosen by the junta and relatively few of them were elected, the Convention was

mostly governed by the incumbents (Ruzza, 2019, pp. 12). The NLD representatives left the National Convention in 1995, and eventually everyone left it except for the military delegates. The Convention was subsequently postponed indefinitely but not disbanded in 1996. Furthermore, despite the National Convention's failure to produce a constitution, a number of the values and standards included in the 2008 constitution were actually created at this time (Kipgen, 2016, pp. 122–126).

Significant changes were also occurring in Myanmar's borderlands, far from Yangon. Since its independence, the nation has had numerous insurgencies that have a negative impact on border regions. The junta was successful in negotiating informal ceasefires with a number of ethnic armed groups between 1989 and 1994. (EAOs). The Communist Party of Burma (CPB), an ideological insurgency mostly active in the Eastern region of Myanmar (Shan State), collapsed, opening the door for a variety of minor ethno-identitarian insurgencies to take its place. General Khin Nyunt, the commander of Military Intelligence at the time, reached informal ceasefire agreements with various EAOs in order to prevent collaboration between established and emerging insurgent groups, as well as between democratic activists and insurgents. Due to the military means being focused on EAOs that were not cooperating with the ceasefire, the Tatmadaw and the junta were able to concentrate their power against a smaller number of divided foes while also freeing up resources to contain the democratic threat (Zaw Oo and Win Min 2007; Ruzza 2015).

C. Roadmap to a “disciplined democracy”

After the initial failure of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) initiatives, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)[15] restarted the process 7 years later. The basic scheme does not differ in any way from the previous attempt since it follows the logic National Convention - referendum - elections. Thus, on August 30, General and Prime Minister Khin Nyunt unveiled the SPDC plan whose final objective was the creation of a "disciplined democracy" (Dueñas, 2016). In his speech to the House of Representatives, Khin Nyunt, after noting that "democracy can only be realised after taking into account the historical background and objective conditions of the country in question, it is also true that democratic practice may differ from one country to another "[16] , set out the principles of national policy, the 4 policy objectives and finally the 7 steps to reach the state of "disciplined democracy". The three principles of the Tatmadaw's national policy have already been outlined above, the 4 political objectives were:

1. Stability of the state, communal peace and tranquillity, predominance of law and order.
2. National consolidation.

[15] The official name of the Burmese military government was the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). In 1997, it was renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), which survived until its disintegration in 2011.

[16] President Khin Nyunt Speech available: http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/Roadmap- KN.htm

3. Creation of a new and lasting state constitution.
4. Construction of a new and modern nation developed in accordance with the new state Constitution (Turnell, 2011).

Finally, Khin Nyunt pointed out the road map consisting of 7 steps to reach the so-called "disciplined democracy".

1. To reconvene the National Convention which had been suspended since 1996.
2. After the successful holding of the National Convention, implement step by step the necessary process for the creation of a genuine and disciplined democratic system.
3. Draft a new Constitution in accordance with the basic principles established by the National Convention.
4. To adopt the Constitution through a national referendum.
5. Conduct free and fair elections for the Legislative Chambers in accordance with the new Constitution.
6. To convene the Houses to be attended by members of the Houses in accordance with the new Constitution.
7. State leaders elected by the House, the Government and other central bodies formed by the House shall build a democratic, modern, and developed nation (Turnell, 2011).

The first 4 steps were taken in practically 4 years: The National Convention was convened on May 17, 2004, and was chaired by Lieutenant General Thein Sein, who later became President of Myanmar. The Convention was attended by numerous ethnic armed groups with whom at that time there was a ceasefire agreement, however, the NLD refused to participate in the negotiations. The outcome of this Convention was embodied in a 15-chapter document which safeguarded the prerogatives and guaranteed the interests of the Tatmadaw, and which will form the basis of the 2008 Constitution (Taylor, 2009).

The 4th step, the referendum, took place on May 10, 2008, 8 days after Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar causing severe loss of life and damage[17]. The SPDC was accused of serious irregularities and of manipulating the referendum. Human Rights Watch pointed out the lack of information on the Constitution, the lack of freedom of the press, restrictions on basic political freedoms such as the right of assembly or freedom of expression, detention of opposition activists, threats, coercion, and lack of monitoring of the procedure (Turnell, 2011). The results of the referendum were overwhelming with a 97% turnout and a yes vote of 93.82% (24.7 million votes) (Taylor, 2015).

[17] According to official figures, **84,500 people were killed and 53,800 went missing**. A total of 37 townships were significantly affected by the cyclone. The UN estimates that as many as 2.4 million people were affected (IFRC, 2011).

D. Some sort of concern from the International Community

On the night of May 30, 2003, the NLD convoy led by Aung San Suu Kyi was attacked, leaving a large number of people dead and wounded. A significant number of militants were detained or as the regime colloquially put it "taken into custody". The attack took place near the village of Depayin, which is why it is known as the "Depayin Massacre". Aung San Suu Kyi had been released from prison in May 2002 and had embarked on a proselytising tour of the country, so the attack was seen as a response by the military regime to her pro-democracy activism (Taylor, 2009). The 1991 Nobel Prize winner managed to escape the ambush. However, an estimated 280 militants were killed and 250 were arrested (AIPMC, 2005). The way in which the repression was orchestrated, as approximately five thousand men were displaced by the government, the violence generated, the killings and the persecution of Suu Kyi, attracted worldwide attention and condemnation. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) broke its traditional silence, even admitting that the event had a negative impact on the regional organisation. The incident led to an intense and heated debate within ASEAN, with the then Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahatir Mohamed, proposing the expulsion of Myanmar.

The pressure had its results, as the military junta was forced to take action to mitigate the internal and international public pressure and condemnation. Thus, it announced the so-called "Roadmap to Disciplined Democracy" (Australian Institute of International Affairs, 2010).

In August 2007, an increase in fuel prices spurred massive protests that became known as the "Saffron Revolution," after the colour of the robes of the Buddhist monks who initiated and actively participated in the movement. These protests constituted the greatest challenge by the population to the military regime, which, of course, reacted by repressing, arresting and even killing some of the demonstrators. Similarly, an atrocious persecution was launched against monks and civilians suspected of having supported, directly or indirectly, the protests.

International condemnation was immediate, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, in an address to the Security Council, stated that he was

deeply appalled by recent events in Myanmar and reports of continuing human rights violations. I must reiterate that the use of force against peaceful demonstrators is abhorrent and unacceptable..... Now, more than ever, the Government of Myanmar must take drastic action aimed at democratisation and human rights (UN News Centre, 2007).

Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar hard in early May 2008. The military junta reported an estimated death toll of more than 22,500 and 40,000 missing. The damage from Nargis was especially concentrated in the rice-growing area of the Irrawaddy Delta (Llandres, 2016). Leaders of Western countries had to appeal to the Burmese junta to accept the humanitarian aid that had been blocked. These and other immediate subsequent events led to increased international pressure and a change in the stance of the Burmese military (Turnell, 2011).

According to Bruce Matthews (2005), to some extent, Myanmar was a prime example of what a failed state looks like: tyrannically ruled by a military junta whose mediocre leaders are often seen in public, with an oppressed, impoverished, and discouraged citizenry, most of whom struggle to survive - and at best, for the most basic standard of living. Except for the growing hierarchy of the SPDC[18] senior elements of the armed forces and businessmen (including the growing and obvious resident population of Chinese origin), the people of Myanmar had very few of the comforts and advances of the modern world. According to the ranking of failed states compiled by Foreign Policy in 2005, when Matthews wrote his article, Myanmar was ranked 23rd[19]. In 2013, it was assigned the 26th place.

For a better understanding of the Burmese transition process, it should be noted that in September 2005, Václav Havel, former President of the Czech Republic, and Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town and 1984 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, released a paper on Myanmar prepared at their request by the law firm DLA Piper Rudnick Gray Cary. The paper was entitled "Threat to Peace: A Call for Security Council Action on Burma" and was commissioned because they felt that Myanmar had become a problem for the region and the international community. The conclusion of the report was that Myanmar was indeed a threat to regional and world peace and that the Security Council should act, since "the situation is particularly dangerous because the government's actions not only oppress its own people but have substantial transnational destabilising effects that threaten peace and security in the entire region" (Vaclav and Tutu, 2005, p. 16). According to the report, the severity and scope of six factors distinguished Burma from any other country in the world. These factors were:

1. Destruction of villages (associated with refugee flows)
2. Forced labour
3. Systematic rape
4. Illegal drug trade
5. Lack of HIV/AIDS treatment
6. Child soldiers (Vaclav and Tutu, 2005, p. 16).

The report concluded by noting that it was time for the Security Council to get involved in Myanmar (making comparisons with Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Yemen, Haiti, Rwanda, and Liberia). "The Security Council has the authority to act and should exercise that authority in the case of Burma" (Vaclav and Tutu, 2005, p. 58). Among the recommendations to the Security Council were that it should require the government of Myanmar to work with the Secretary-General to implement a plan for national reconciliation and the restoration of a democratically elected government; allow unimpeded entry to the entire territory for members of the United Nations and humanitarian organisations to provide humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable groups of the population; and the immediate release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all prisoners of conscience in Burma (Vaclav and Tutu, 2005, p. 59).

19 See https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/22/the-failed-states-index-2005/

As an effect of the Saffron revolution, in December 2007, the so-called "Group of Friends of the Secretary-General on Myanmar" (UN News Centre, 2010) was formed within the United Nations, a group of fourteen nations with the aim of assisting him in his efforts to promote change in that country. It was formed as a forum to develop common approaches in support of the Secretary-General's good offices mandate, its format was purely informal and consisted of the five veto-wielding countries in the Security Council (United States, United Kingdom, China, Russia, and France), plus Australia, Norway, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore, Vietnam, Thailand, India and Portugal.

Presidential elections, the first in twenty years, were held on November 7, 2010. The Constitution reserves twenty-five percent of the seats for appointment by the military, so only the remaining seventy-five percent were at stake in the elections. The pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party won eighty percent of the remaining seats. Thus, by March 2011, the military junta was dissolved, the respective parliaments were convened, and a civilian government was established under the chairmanship of the former prime minister and general, Thein Sein. The NLD decided not to participate in the elections.

4.1.4. Democratic Period 2010-2021

A. Getting to know a bit of democracy - the beginning of the liberalisation

With the new constitution in place, the first elections were celebrated in November 2010. The USDA was converted into a party - the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) - and won the elections with a landslide 76.52% of the votes in the two *Hluttaws* (houses) on top of the 25% of seats automatically assigned to the military (Kipgen, 2016). The NLD abstained from participating and claimed constitutional amendments, international election supervision, and the release of all political detainees, including Aung San Suu Kyi (Ruzza, 2018, pp. 17). Several ethnic parties also had their registration requests rejected. As the then-United Nations human rights commissioner for Myanmar put it, the 2010 elections were neither free nor fair, and the procedure remained "seriously defective" (MacFarquhar 2010).

Aung San Suu Kyi was released by the junta a few days after the elections. A new "semi-civilian" government led by the former general Thein Sein was installed in place of the junta when the parliament convened in February 2011. Thant Shwe resigned from his positions as Tatmadaw commander-in-chief and junta chairman, handing up these responsibilities to General Min Aung Hlaing (who would gain unexpected protagonism a decade later). In order to fill 45 open parliamentary seats, by-elections were held in April 2012 with increasing media freedom. Aung San Suu Kyi was elected to parliament after the NLD entered the race this time and won 43 of the 44 seats they contested which positively enhanced the credibility of the transition process (Olarn, 2012). In 2012, when the reformist agenda of Thein Sein began to take shape, the West began to gradually withdraw sanctions. Barack Obama made history by visiting Myanmar as the first US president in office in November 2012 (Ruzza, 2018, pp. 18).

A Constitutional Review Committee was established in 2013 and included 109 members, of which only seven belonged to the NLD. The Committee presented its findings to parliament in January 2014. However it contained no suggestions for improvement (Ruzza, 2018, pp. 19). Instead, it made it clear that three parts of the constitution—the military's role in politics, the president's prohibition on having a foreign spouse or children, and the procedure for amending the constitution itself—should not be changed (Crouch and Ginsburg, 2016). The Implementation Committee was constituted by the parliament in February 2014 with the task of assessing the report, but by this time the procedure had lost all credibility. The NLD made its attempt to show their disapproval but the government was clear in its warning *"that its rallies in support of constitutional change must not provoke social unrest, or else this may necessitate a declaration of emergency and military takeover"* (Crouch and Ginsburg, 2016, pp. 68).

It's also necessary to mention two relevant events that affected the borderlands' insurgencies. First, the conflict in Myanmar re-escalated in 2009, or more specifically, shortly after the new constitution took effect (Ruzza and Gabusi, 2018). At this point, the degree of violence was comparable to that of the 1980s, before Khin Nyunt's ceasefires. The fighting, which is still going on, was primarily confined to the northern regions (Kachin and Shan states) that border China. The reasons for this recurrence of violence can be found in the gradual emancipation of ethnic minorities from the experience of the ceasefire and from the political reformation process (Ruzza and Gabusi, 2018).

Second, Thein Sein introduced his own peace plan in 2011 in an effort to address the ongoing conflict in the borderlands. Thein Sein began a period of discussion that led to the so-called "Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement" (NCA) in October 2015, while the Tatmadaw's more forceful counter-insurgency strategy was not wholly disregarded (Brenner, 2015). As only eight of the country's 21 EAOs were represented, or around 20% of all active insurgents, it wasn't actually a national agreement. However, it was the first widely publicised, multilateral cease-fire agreement in Myanmar's history (Ruzza and Gabusi, 2018).

- **Dreams (almost) fulfilled**

The 2015 general elections enhanced optimism about the transition, as international observers could certify the fairness of the electoral process in an environment characterised by freedom of the media and of public debate (ANU Myanmar Research Center 2015). The NLD obtained a landslide victory: in the House of Representatives, of the contested 323 seats the NLD won 255, obtaining 57.95% of total seats in the House, while in the House of Nationalities the NLD won 135 of the contested 168 seats, thereby obtaining 60.27% of all seats in the House (ICG 2015).

The new NLD administration was then put into place in March 2016. Aung San Suu Kyi, who the 2008 constitution forbade from holding the office of president due to her marriage to a

foreigner, created for herself the new position of "State Counsellor," a form of premiership that made her the de facto head of the nation, "above the President," in her words. She also took on the roles of Minister of the President's Office and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Generals Than Shwe, Thein Sein, and Min Aung Hlaing all separately visited and thanked Aung San Suu Kyi and agreed to assist a smooth transition after the USDP and the Tatmadaw acknowledged the election results (Freedom House 2016).

The NLD listed constitutional reform as one of its priorities in its electoral manifesto from 2015, however it offers no additional information beyond a set of generally accepted ideas. The Tatmadaw is acknowledged as "a key institution of the state" in the same document (NLD 2015: 7). Although reform has not yet occurred, both Presidents Htin Kyaw (who assumed office in 2016) and Win Myint (who succeeded Htin Kyaw after his resignation in 2018) mentioned expected constitutional amendments in their inauguration statements (Myanmar Times 2016; President's Office 2018).

However, those amendments were never made and may have been one of the triggering factors that doomed the end of the democratic period. The Rohingya crisis, the public image of Aung San Suu Kyi put into question internationally, ethnic armed conflicts intensified in some areas and Covid-19 marked the 2015-2020 term for the NLD. However, and as someone that experienced the last 3 out of 5 of those years, the urban areas as well as most of the bamar heartland experienced the results of the liberalisation and the freedoms that a mixed civilian-military government brought to the country.

B. The coup[20]

The nation's Parliament was anticipated to ratify the outcomes of recent elections and accept the new administration in early 2021. The National League for Democracy, the largest civil party in Myanmar, had won 83% of the seats up for election. The vote's outcome, which was largely regarded as a test of Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi's support, was rejected by the military. She was the de facto head of state following her election in 2015 as the National League for Democracy's leader.

The military, which had attempted to convince the nation's Supreme Court that the election results were rigged, vowed to "take action" and encircled the houses of Parliament with soldiers, which raised the potential of a coup. Leaders of the National League for Democracy, other civilian authorities, including President U Win Myint and Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi, as well as cabinet ministers, chief ministers of numerous regions, and opposition politicians, authors, and activists were all detained by the military.

[20] This subsection is mostly based on my experience as an international civil servant and electoral observer of the Myanmar General Election 2020 and comes from a personal blog and notes taken during the first two months after February 1st 2021.

When a news presenter referenced the 2008 Constitution, which permits the military to declare a national emergency, the coup was effectively declared on the military owned Myawaddy TV channel.

The country's infrastructure was swiftly taken over by the military, who also halted most television broadcasts and cancelled all domestic and international flights.

In large cities, access to the phone and the internet was cut off. Commercial banks and the stock market were closed, and in some locations, there were lengthy line-ups outside ATMs. People rushed to the markets in Yangon, the largest city in the nation and its former capital, to stock up on food and other necessities.

On February 20, two unarmed protestors were killed by police forces in Mandalay; one of them was a 16-year-old boy, turning weeks of largely peaceful demonstrations into bloody ones.

Millions of people participated in a countrywide strike on February 22 across the nation. Since then, a growing civil disobedience movement has rendered the banking industry inoperable and hindered the military's ability to accomplish much.

The military, renowned for murdering nonviolent protesters in 1988 and 2007 to put an end to democracy movements, responded more violently as the demonstrations approached their second month. A monitoring group estimates that since the coup, the junta has killed close to 1,300 individuals and detained over 10,000 others.

There is an increasing understanding among the demonstrators that the Tatmadaw must be confronted on its own terms. People are practising with hand grenades and weapons in the country's forests.

The departing U.N. special envoy for Myanmar claims that the nation is currently on the precipice of a civil war (New York Times, 2022).

After a brief period of quasi-democracy that started in 2011, when the military, which had been in power since 1962, instituted parliamentary elections and other reforms, the coup restored the nation to full military rule. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the country's former civilian leader, has been imprisoned incommunicado in a home in Naypyidaw, the capital of Myanmar, for months following the coup. She is currently being tried on a long list of charges in a secret court. She has so far been adjudicated guilty in the initial round of decisions (New York Times, 2022).

The military has been acting aggressively to crush resistance along the nation's border since the violent crackdown on protests in key cities. Areas where the People's Defence Force, a group of armed civilians, are present are being targeted by the Tatmadaw.

4.2. STRUCTURAL ACTORS AND FACTORS

4.2.1. Actors

A. Myanmar's Ethnic Configuration; a structural factor of instability from the colonial period

One of the most characteristic features of the Union of Myanmar is its ethnic diversity. While the majority ethnic group, the Bamar, makes up 68% of the population, the rest of Myanmar's population is estimated to be divided into some 135[21] different ethnic groups (Dittmer, 2010). Among these ethnic groups, the most relevant in its influence are the Shan and the Karen, who make up 9% and 7% of the population respectively. If you look at the map, you can see how the Bamar, who are the dominant ethnic group in the country, are located along the Irrawaddy Valley which is the backbone of the country not only geographically but also economically as it is an important route for the transportation of goods and the cultivation of rice of which Myanmar is the 6th largest producer in the world, while the different ethnic groups control the periphery of the country (Dittmer, 2010).

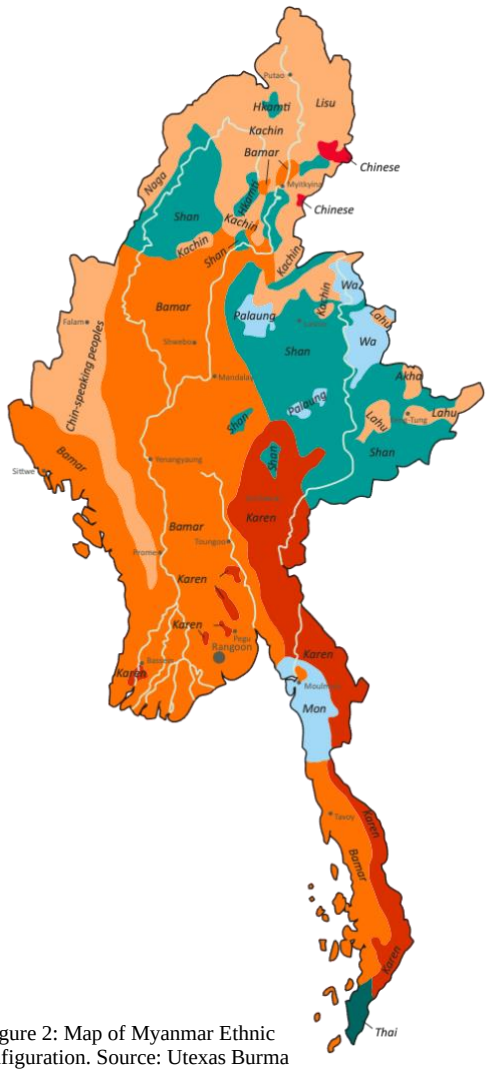

Figure 2: Map of Myanmar Ethnic Configuration. Source: Utexas Burma Link

In addition, the periphery is mostly composed of mountain ranges such as the Chin Hills and the Arakan Mountains in the west where the Chin ethnic group lives. The Shan Plateau in the east and the Shan ethnic group also coincide for the most part. In the north we find the Hengduan mountains and the end of the Himalayas, which contain most of the Kachin population. Other ethnic groups such as the Karen, Karenni, Mon or Wa are also found in the border areas of the State (Taylor, 2015). Although the country is fairly homogeneous in religious terms, some ethnic groups such as the Karen or the Kachin profess a different religion (Christianity) as a result of the missionary activities carried out during the period of British colonial rule, adding another element of differentiation with respect to the Bamar population. Given this ethnic and geographical configuration, it is not difficult to understand the centrifugal forces that can affect the country. Even more so if we add the enormous wealth of these areas in gems, jade, rubies, silver, or zinc (Zaw Latt, 2005).

21 State recognised ethnic groups.

In addition, the difficulty the central government has had in imposing its control in ethnic-controlled areas has meant that many of the ethnic armed groups have profited from various illegal drug-related activities (Smith, 1994).

B. The Tatmadaw

Indeed, the military institution has the most influential role within Myanmar, a country that has been controlled since 1962 by the Tatmadaw except for the brief period from 1974 to 1988 (a period in which it exercised indirect control) (Ruzza, 2018, pp. 9).

In the view of the Burmese military, the image of the Tatmadaw as the guarantor of the stability and unity of the state has been propagated and disseminated, in a sense it could be said that Tatmadaw and state have merged in such a way that the military junta perceives threats to the Tatmadaw as a threat to the state and vice versa. In this view, the Tatmadaw would be the fourth protector of the State of Myanmar having been preceded in this mission by the Burmese kings Anawrahta, Bayinnaung and Alaungpaya founder of the Bagan Kingdom, king of the Taungoo dynasty and the founder of the Konbaung dynasty respectively and who subdued the outlying territories and unified Burma. That is why the statues of these three kings are in front of the Defence Services Academy (DSA) which trains the officers of the different branches of the Tatmadaw.

One of the facts that has most shaped the Tatmadaw's view of the integrity of the state has been the geopolitical position of Myanmar and its surrounding environment. Indeed, the existence of distinct and conflicting ethnic groups opened the door to their use as proxies by foreign powers. During the 1950s and 1960s one of the most palpable threats to Myanmar's sovereignty was a possible Chinese invasion provoked by the existence of KMT units in Myanmar territory until 1961, and by incidents with the local Chinese population after the Cultural Revolution in China. The government feared that Myanmar could be the territory of another confrontation between the blocs as Korea had been, especially considering the existence of a Communist Party with links to the People's Republic of China. Being surrounded by a communist China, a pro-Western Thailand and a neutral India, the logical position taken by Myanmar was one of equidistance and neutrality (Bellamy and Drummond, 2012 pp. 248). The instrumentalisation of ethnic conflicts by its neighbours has determined a siege by the Tatmadaw. While China used the BCP and ethnic groups such as the Kachin, Shan or Wa, India tried to influence through the Chin and Naga and Thailand tried to build buffer states with the Karen dominated areas and the Mon insurgency. For all these reasons, from the Tatmadaw's point of view, this type of support historically received by the different ethnic groups has been seen as an attempt to destroy the unity of Myanmar, a unity which, from their point of view, has historically been preserved by the Tatmadaw (Jones, 2014).

The Tatmadaw has played a fundamental role since independence; of the 67 years of independence, only 12 years have not been controlled by the military institution. The Ne Win regime, collapsed definitively in 1988 after the protests and the Tatmadaw after repressing the movements proceeded to seize power and create the SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council). This was the 3rd in a series of power grabs by the Tatmadaw, the first taking place in 1958 with the acquiescence of the political establishment and the second in 1962 (Taylor, 2015).

The control that the Tatmadaw exercises over the State has been embodied in the opening process that has been initiated and monitored from the military sphere as we will see in a later section. In this process, although the Tatmadaw is going to delegate numerous powers to the civilian power, in no way can it be understood as an absolute abandonment of its privileges and prerogatives, since the military institution keeps a series of competences that guarantee it a decisive presence in the different political processes and a supervision over the measures that the new government may take, especially those dedicated to seek responsibilities for the human rights violations that have taken place in Myanmar during the conflict (.

The Tatmadaw has also taken over numerous economic sectors through the creation of two large corporate conglomerates, the *Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings, and* the *Myanmar Economic Corporation*, - established in 1990 and 1997 respectively - which cover heavy industries as well as transport and tourism industries and which provide considerable income to the Tatmadaw (Bellamy and Drummond, 2012, pp. 253 .

4.2.2. The Structure

A. The Constitution

We, the National people, drafted this Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar in accord with the Basic Principles and Detailed Basic Principles laid down by the National Convention.

If we look closely at the text, there are a number of articles such as art. 6 f) which states as a Basic Principle of the Union of Myanmar "to enable the Defence Services to be able to participate in the national political leadership of the State"[22].

Article 10 expresses a clear prohibition of secession stating that "no part of the territory constituted in the Union as Region, State, Union Territories and self-administered areas shall ever secede from the Union". In addition, Article 20(b) and (c) give the Defence Services "the right to independently administer and decide all matters of the Armed Forces, appointing the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services the Supreme Commander of all the Armed Forces". Along with these articles, a transitional provision precludes the possibility of

[22] Constitution of the Republic of Myanmar. Available: **http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs5/Myanmar_Constitution-2008-en.pdf**

proceedings being instituted against the SLORC or the SPDC or any member thereof or any member of the government "in respect of any act done in execution of their respective duties."

These four articles are undoubtedly the keystone of the Tatmadaw guarantees as they allow the Tatmadaw to still be involved in the political processes through a number of provisions, as we will see below. The integrity of the state, which is one of the highest priorities of the military institution, is ensured, as well as independence, autonomy and the non-existence of civilian supervision. Finally, the transitional provision establishes an amnesty for acts committed during the SLORC and SPDC period shielding the leadership of the Armed Forces.

The participation of the Tatmadaw in the political affairs of the country is developed throughout the Constitution giving it a very important political weight. The Tatmadaw's powers include the right of the Commander-in-Chief of the Defense Services to take control and exercise sovereign power in the event of the occurrence of a state of emergency that could cause the disintegration of the Union, national solidarity or the loss of sovereign power by methods such as insurgency or violence (art. 40 c).

It also reserves for the Tatmadaw 25% of the representatives in both the Pyithu Hluttaw (lower house) and the Amyotha Hluttaw (upper house), all appointed by the commander-in-chief; this proportion rises to 33% in the case of the regional and state Hluttaws (arts. 109, 141 and 161). This reservation of seats in the assemblies is decisive if we link it with the provision contained in Article 436 (a) which prevents the amendment of the Constitution except by a majority of more than 75% of the representatives of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (the sum of the Pyithu Hluttaw and the Amyotha Hluttaw), thus preventing the amendment of the legal framework established by the Tatmadaw without the consent of the Tatmadaw.

Moreover, the Tatmadaw reserves for itself the Ministries of Defence, Home Affairs and Borders, to be appointed by the President from a list of candidates chosen by the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services, with the possibility of appointing other ministers if the Commander-in-Chief deems it necessary (art. 232a). Through these appointments the Tatmadaw also has a significant influence on the National Defence and Security Council. In addition, provision is made for the possibility of transferring executive, judicial and legislative power to the commander-in-chief in the event of the declaration of a state of emergency. Finally, Article 59 can be considered as aimed at preventing the possibility of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi to accede to the Presidency by preventing the President from having children with nationality of a foreign country, as in the case of Aung San Suu Kyi's children with British nationality.

With all these elements, it can be clearly seen how the Tatmadaw carries out a partial withdrawal of governmental control, but nevertheless reserves important powers that prevent a total opening and leave the military institution in a position of dominance, since any attempt to change the current model needs its approval and participation.

B. The Governance

- The Executive

The Constitution of 2008 provides for a formal executive that focuses on an indirectly elected president. It includes two vice-presidents, several cabinet ministers, and the attorney general (Article 200) and it is formed after the celebration of a general election for the two chambers of the national legislature or Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Holliday, 2018, pp. 229):

- Pyithu Hluttaw, the House of Representatives
- Amyotha Hluttaw, the House of Nationalities

Alongside the elected members, as mentioned before, each chamber is given 25% of military officers that would be appointed by the commander-in-chief of the defence services (Articles 109, 141).

All the elected members of the executive serve for five-years term, and for a maximum of 10 years in total (Article 61).
Additionally, as per Article 232, the executive has direct engagement and representation of the military in the Ministries related to the national security affairs: Defence, Home Affairs and Border Affairs. They are appointed by the commander-in-chief:

- The Minister for Home Affairs directs the General Administration Department (GAD), which oversees public administration all the way down to the grassroots level.
- Beyond that, the constitution creates a National Defence and Security Council (NDSC) chaired by the president and containing the two vice-presidents, the two speakers from the houses of parliament, the com- mander-in-chief and his deputy, the minister for foreign affairs, and the three cabinet ministers selected by the commander-in-chief (Article 201). Therefore, there are five military officers serving formally out of the eleven members.

The number of ministers was slashed in half, all deputy minister positions were eliminated, and the NLD moved away from Thein Sein's significant dependence on persons with a strong military background when it officially constituted an executive in March 2016 under Htin Kyaw. Four of the ministries were led by Aung San Suu Kyi, and the remaining 17 were overseen by different ministers. Aung San Suu Kyi took over as state counsellor after the State Counsellor Bill was swiftly approved by parliament (Holliday, 2018, pp. 231). As soon as she held the position of the State Counsellor, she gave up command of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Electric Power and Energy, keeping within her responsibilities the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (and a seat on the NDSC) and the position of Minister of the President's Office (and a supervisory role at the heart of government business). After Kyaw Tint Swe was named Minister of the Office of the State Counsellor, the office quickly grew to include sizable personnel. As a result, the cabinet increased to 21 primarily civilian ministers, with the state counsellor effectively taking on the job of prime minister and the president assuming more of a ceremonial role. Aung San Suu Kyi, the sole female cabinet minister, has presided over all

important committees of the government from the beginning. In comparison to cabinet committees, the cabinet continued to meet once every two weeks and function as a relatively minor policy forum. The NDSC held zero meetings during the first year of NLD rule (Holliday, 2018, pp. 232).

The NLD changed the executive's organisational structure after assuming office. The Office of the State Counsellor has evolved as a crucial component working closely with the President's Office, reflecting the unique position of Aung San Suu Kyi (Holliday, 2018, pp. 232). The six President's Office ministries under Thein Sein were combined into one and led by Aung San Suu Kyi in a sort of compensatory reform. It has already been mentioned that there are many fewer ministries now. The National Reconciliation and Peace Centre (NRPC) replaced Thein Sein's important government think tank, the MPC, in the vicinity of the executive in July 2016. The NRPC was created as an official government entity as opposed to a semi-governmental group. It is made up of 11 senior members of the executive, legislative, and armed forces and is once again chaired by the state counsellor. It gained the ability to surpass its predecessor in influence as a result. Beyond these changes—many of which were brought about by the unique features of a system in which the state counsellor is in charge rather than the president—the executive branch's primary responsibilities remained substantially unaltered (Holliday, 2018, pp. 233).

- **The Legislature**

The 2008 Constitution provides for a bicameral national legislature (Union parliament, or *Pyidaungsu Hluttaw*), which is headquartered in Naypyitaw. It combines a 440-seat lower chamber (*Pyithu Hluttaw*) and a 224-member upper chamber (*Amyotha Hluttaw*) (Article 107). Only three quarters of the Union-level parliamentarians (or 498 seats) are elected by universal suffrage (Egreteau and Jolene, 2018, pp. 240). The remaining quarter of each assembly is reserved for non-elected military representatives: a maximum of 110 seats for the lower house (Article 109b) and 56 seats for the upper house (Article 141b). Military legislators are directly appointed by the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Pyithu Hluttaw's 330 constituencies are based on Myanmar's 330 townships (Article 142). In Amyotha Hluttaw, each state and region has an equal share of twelve elected seats (or a total of 168 seats). The two houses are supposed to have equal authority. However, the lower house typically holds sway, if only because of the advantage that comes with having a larger number of members whenever there is a crucial vote between the two chambers present in Congress (Egreteau and Jolene, 2018, pp. 240). .

After general elections were held on November 7, 2010, the revival of parliamentary affairs was one of the most unexpected signs of political transition in 'post-junta' Myanmar. Key elements of political change include representative assemblies and the growth of legislative initiatives (Fish 2006; Arter 2009). Recently, some Asian parliaments have demonstrated how the region's legislative bodies may promote democratisation (Ziegenhain 2008; Case 2011; Zheng et al. 2014). Even though it never succeeded in becoming the focal point of public life

in Myanmar, the legislative branch nevertheless played a crucial part in the transition that followed the dissolution of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 2011.

The Constitution ratified in 2008 has outlined the reinstatement of a bicameral Union parliament (*Pyidaungsu Hluttaw*), a first since the 1947 Constitution, as well as fourteen subnational assemblies – one for each of the seven regions and seven states of the Union (Egreteau and Jolene, 2018, pp. 240). Between January 2011 and January 2016, the first "post-junta" national legislature met, and its political standing has quickly increased (Kean 2013; Egreteau 2014b; Fink 2015). In some ways, the military-led transition's attempts to promote political diversity and diametrically opposed parliamentary debates while still bestowing some level of legitimacy were successful. Since Aung San Suu Kyi and 40 other NLD members were elected to the Union parliament in April 2012, this has become even more clear, and it will become even clearer after her party's resounding victories in the second round of post-SPDC elections on November 8, 2015, and four years later in November 2020. However, now inexistent, Myanmar's legislature remained vulnerable, especially at the provincial level (Holliday et al. 2015).
Since the country's general elections in 2010, the resurgence of parliamentary engagement in Myanmar has received high accolades (Egreteau and Jolene, 2018, pp. 245). In the first five years of its existence (2011–2016), the national legislature, which reappeared after decades without substantive legislative debates, demonstrated that it was more than just a rubber-stamp body. Since 2011, the assemblies have increased political diversity and opened up new avenues for engagement. The Union parliament created a new space for political debates and interaction, even between military and civilian elites, despite ongoing limits on minorities' political rights and ongoing self-censorship evident among legislative ranks (Egreteau and Jolene, 2018, pp. 246).

- **The Judiciary**

In the years following 2011, there has been a lot of criticism directed at Myanmar's courts. The courts are one area of governance and administration, however, where reform has been less pronounced or clear than in many other areas. In fact, while many have been clamouring for increased judicial independence, the framework for the last decade went in the other direction towards centralisation and executive-military control over the courts (Crouch, 2018, pp. 249)

The Union Supreme Court, the Courts Martial, and the Constitutional Tribunal are Myanmar's three most important parallel courts. Although the Constitutional Tribunal is a young organisation that was established in 2011, it has only heard 14 cases, has been marginalised, and has no political clout. In terms of academic study, the Tribunals Martial is a research black hole because it is difficult to gain information about these courts. With hundreds of cases it handles each year, the Supreme Court has been the busiest (Crouch, 2018, pp. 249).

Couch (2018) establishes some focus on the obsolescence and seclusion that have moulded Myanmar's legal system. Additionally, Burmese has been the official language of the courts

since 1974, replacing English. The common law world of comparative jurisprudence has virtually been cut off from court decisions in Myanmar since they are local audience focused. The Supreme Court's newly acquired authority to hear writ cases against the government, which is similar to the Supreme Court's authority in other common law nations like India, may cause this practice to change in the future. Courts rarely cite cases from other jurisdictions, but this may change in the future (Crouch, 2018, pp. 249-55).

New discussions about how judges should be chosen whether the Supreme Court should have the authority to hear cases for constitutional review, how to increase judicial independence, and how the courts should interact with the legislature emerged in the post-2011 environment (Crouch, 2018, pp. 249-55). Instead of the practical challenge of constitutional reform, the hostile attitude of parliament toward the judges hindered those debates.

- **Civil Society**

Since the reform process began in 2011, civil society organisations (CSOs) had more room to operate legally. This made it possible for CSOs to interact with the government in some policy and legislative spheres and play significant roles in educating and enlightening citizens, focusing national attention on pressing issues that affect all citizens, including those who are less liberal (Fink and Simpson, 2018, pp. 259). CSOs anticipated more inclusive policymaking following the NLD's victory in 2015 but discovered that the NLD leadership preferred to act independently. Civil society actors were restrained in their criticism of the new government because they were aware of the fragility and constraints of the democratic transition, but they persisted in raising issues and promoting policy reform by connecting their objectives to the NLD government's stated commitment to the rule of law, peace, and national reconciliation. (Fink and Simpson, 2018, pp. 259).

There are numerous social movements in Myanmar that span this spectrum and have effects from both domestic and foreign sources. Illiberal groups have been at the forefront of inciting violence against Muslim minorities through the use of hate speech, some of which have taken their cues from virulent Buddhist nationalist organizations in Sri Lanka (Fink and Simpson, 2018, pp. 260). The distinctions between CSOs, political parties, and armed groups are frequently blurred in Myanmar because many political party members have held leadership positions in CSOs, and many ethnic CSOs have strong ties to both ethnic political parties and ethnic armed groups because they both seek to advance the interests of ethnic nationalities (Fink and Simpson, 2018, pp. 260).

There is a distinction between modern CSOs that are more specialised and professional, and what Ottaway (2011, 192) refers to as traditional civil society in Myanmar, which is made up of informal, loosely structured community-based or larger-scale popular organisations (Lorch 2008; McCarthy 2015). The difficulties modern CSOs encountered in finding a suitable name for themselves in Burmese highlight the differences between both sorts of organisations: *lu mu yay a pwe asi*, or social affairs organisations, is frequently used but more appropriately refers

to traditional CSOs (Fink and Simpson, 2018, pp. 260). Nevertheless, as the scope for civil society activity has expanded and policy engagement with the government has been available, some of the more traditional associations have evolved into more modern organisations (Fink and Simpson, 2018, pp. 260).

Modern CSOs are frequently seen as constructive and forward-thinking in the context of democratisation and development, but it is crucial to understand that CSOs can also be exclusive, conservative, and reactionary. Indeed, as stated by Alagappa (2006, 33), CSOs are diverse, and the world of civil society is marked by conflict and rivalry. There have been divisions in Myanmar over ideologies, levels of closeness to the government, and forms of operation. Additionally, there has been competition for funding as organisations in smaller villages frequently feel disenfranchised as the majority of foreign donor money goes to more accessible organisations with members who speak English situated in Yangon (Fink and Simpson, 2018, pp. 263).

Depending on the sort of government in power, the relationship between civil society and the government might vary but generally takes on certain features. CSOs with political goals that oppose the government are often suppressed under authoritarian regimes. They must decide whether to cooperate with the authorities, disband, run their operations clandestinely or from abroad (Fink and Simpson, 2018, pp. 264). On the other side, in well-established democracies, policy-oriented CSOs may interact positively with the government, offering advice on legislation, suggestions for policy, and, in certain circumstances, general public services under the government's auspices. Roles and relationships are continually being renegotiated in countries like Myanmar where political reforms were under progress as the government, CSOs, and society were going through significant changes (Fink and Simpson, 2018, pp. 265).

The gains relating to CSOs' capacity and engagement in public life remained limited - yet unpunished - despite there being some hope for an effective shift in dynamics once the authoritarian administration was overthrown. Nevertheless, progressive, and liberal activists refrained from criticising the government out of concern that they may give the military a pretext to interfere. CSOs might eventually start speaking out more if the elected administration falls short of its pledges. The military continued to dictate the guidelines for civil society activities, and the NLD showed little tolerance for criticism, despite the enormous potential to expand protections for civil society and institutionalise its involvement in public affairs (Fink and Simpson, 2018, pp. 266).

5. DISCUSSING MYANMAR FAILED DEMOCRATISATION

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated a global trend of growing authoritarianism (IDEA, 2021). A number of countries, most recently Myanmar, have fallen behind in terms of democracy. Myanmar, a fledgling democracy[23], had a coup in February 2021, after the National

[23] A system or an institution that is not yet developed.

League for Democracy (NLD) was elected for a second term and the armed forces refused to recognize the election results.

The general populace in Myanmar, as well as international observers, have expected that the National League for Democracy (NLD) would be able to consolidate democratic transition, since the latter obtained a certain degree of support from home and abroad. During the five years of the NLD administration, transition has nevertheless been in regression instead of progression (Swe, 2021). All rating agencies (Freedom House, Bertelsmann, VDem) consider that Myanmar is not yet a democracy. Freedom House's report indicates that Myanmar's status changed from "Partly Free" to "Not Free" in 2020. Much of the existing literature argues that this stems from the NLD having had to operate within structural constraints and agency curbs.

This section examines the NLD-military relationship as it focuses on the obstacles to the consolidation of democracy in Myanmar against this backdrop. The first part examines the causes of the shift in 2011 from authoritarian to democratic system. The relationships between the democratic leadership of the NLD and the military junta are examined in the second section to understand how they have affected Myanmar's current democratic fight. Finally, it will discuss the main issues that are jeopardising Myanmar's chances of establishing a stable democracy.

5.1. IT HAS BEEN A LONG PROCESS

To make the information more comprehensible, the democratisation process in Myanmar is broken down into five phases. The first phase, which lasted from 1988 to 1996, began with the uprisings that made Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD the most visible opponents of the junta and ended with the Constituent Assembly's adjournment for an undetermined period of time in 1996. Given that the aspirations for democracy from the grassroots were suppressed, this phase can be characterised as a failed democratisation (Huntington 1991; Diamond 2000; Levitsky and Way 2015; Cassani and Tomini 2018).

The dictatorship strengthened its position at home during the second phase (1996–2003), however pressure from international actors forced the junta to implement some level of liberalisation.

The third phase (2003–2010) started with the reform program introduced by Khin Nyunt, who was prime minister at the time, and ended just before the 2010 elections. Although its impacts were not immediately apparent, liberalisation took place throughout this phase. The main elements of the liberalisation process were the engagement of the government in intra-ASEAN relations. The regional forum played a key role during these years in requesting changes in Myanmar domestic situation. Some initiatives took place from there such as the "Bangkok

Process"[24] and the growth in trade with Thailand at an average annual rate of 24.5% (Ruzza, 2018, pp. 16).

The 2010 elections marked the beginning of the fourth phase (2010-2015), which ended shortly after the 2015 general elections. When a mixed civilian-military cabinet led by the former general Thein Sein and largely made up of ex-military officials associated with the USDP was installed during phase four, Myanmar's administration exhibited characteristics of electoral authoritarianism.

The fifth phase began in 2015, and ran concurrently with Aung San Suu Kyi's, first term in office. The Tatmadaw-affiliated USDP conceded electoral defeat when a new elite ascended to power, but the military's dominance was unaffected and unconstrained by the civilian government. This enables the rule in Myanmar to be described as competitive authoritarianism in this final stage.

5.2. CAUSES BEHIND THE OPENING

Analysts have proposed a variety of theories for Myanmar's post-2010 political reforms, ranging from the military government's desire to counter China's expanding influence to the public's growing thirst for democracy. Political reforms in Myanmar are largely determined by the military authorities' desire to put them into effect. According to Huntington's theory on democracy, "transformation" – which takes place when the military dictatorship itself starts the shift – is the most typical type of transition from a military regime to democracy (Huntington, 2021). Such transitions are peaceful but frequently brief since military governments have the ability to retake power by illegitimate methods if they object to the transformation's course.

In the majority of these situations, military leaders claim to quickly assume power in order to "rescue the country" from instability rather than defining themselves as the nation's permanent rulers. Therefore, the restoration to civilian authority is always a political possibility for military dictators. The military had stated that it would end its temporary assignment and resume its previous military responsibilities once Myanmar was calm (Huntington, 1991). According to Huntington's theory, three things can hasten the military's decision to leave power:

1. Assurances that military officers won't be prosecuted for crimes they committed while in charge;
2. Assurances that the military's autonomy and role will be preserved; and
3. the opposition's stance.

[24] Forum on International Support for National Reconciliation in Myanmar.

Meanwhile, interactions between three sets of actors—reformers within the government, those who oppose reform, and members of the opposition—shape the democratisation process (Renshaw, 2013). Diverse perspectives on the potential and likelihood of reform can be found within these groups, and as the process progresses, so may the makeup of each group and their interactions. People who oppose the reforms in the military, for instance, might come around if their misgivings about democracy are proven to be unfounded. If they are persuaded of the intentions of the military government, members of opposition groups who were initially opposed to government-led changes may accept opportunities to participate (Banerjee, 2022).

5.3. POST-2010 REFORMS

Many of these exchanges have taken place in Myanmar since 2010, when Aung San Suu Kyi was freed from house detention, the election regulations were changed, and the NLD's ban was lifted[25]. The restriction on social media platforms was lifted, and speech freedom was reinstated. As a result, Thein Sein started to gain support from the Opposition and the broader public as a reformer receptive to democratic improvements (Renshaw, 2013).

As it was previously mentioned, the 2008 Myanmar Constitution placed an emphasis on the importance of the armed forces in the new life of the nation and included provisions relating to the non-prosecution of army officers. At the same time, Thein Sein and other reformers reassured the military of its continued independence and power. In order to guarantee the military's importance at all times, whether elected or not, the 2008 Constitution was created. Additionally, it establishes the guidelines and scope of reforms to be implemented during a regime change and serves as a road map to disciplined democracy. In the end, the odds continue to be skewed substantially in favour of the party with a military majority.

The NLD and its leader Aung San Suu Kyi made the crucial choice in 2011 to adopt the government's strategy for cooperating to achieve the objective of multiparty democracy. The best argument for the new government's credibility, both internally and publicly, was Aung San Suu Kyi's support for the reform agenda and her obvious confidence in Thein Sein. The fact that there was little pressure on holding the former military leaders accountable for their deeds suggested that the opposition, represented by the NLD or Aung San Suu Kyi, would act reliably throughout the transition to democracy. Suu Kyi previously openly challenged the government by planning protests and leading civil disobedience operations (Barkey, 1990). However, the NLD then embraced policies of moderation and cooperation with the government after realising that such actions could impede the transition to democracy, bring back hardliners to power, or else significantly increase the role of the military. It also consented to participate as a junior partner in the democratic reform process. The smooth and orderly transition to a democratic government in 2015 was the culmination of this.

[25] Giving in to domestic and international pressures, the military government called an election in 1990, which the NLD won by a landslide. The generals, however, refused to recognise the result and instead placed Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest. They argued that the country lacked a constitution through which a proper transfer of power can be conducted.

5.3.1. Post-2016 Civil-Military Relations

The NLD government has worked to keep a cordial relationship with the junta since taking office in 2016. This was clear from the more lenient approach it adopted to the military's involvement in the nation's ethnic strife (Banerjee, 2022).

The Central Committee on the Implementation of Peace, Stability, and Development of the Rakhine State was established by the NLD government in May 2016 (Yhome, 2020). Additionally, it created an advisory panel with Kofi Annan, a former UN Secretary-General, as its chairman, to make recommendations on Rakhine's difficult problems. The Arakan Army, Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), and Kachin Independence Army are militant organisations fighting for autonomy in the Kachin and Rakhine regions. Meetings held and studies conducted to understand the situation, however, did little to stop the conflicts between the junta and these organisations (KIA) (Banerjee, 2022). Millions of people have been displaced as a result of the hostilities, and there are acute food shortages and loss of livelihoods. The NLD government, for its part, hasn't done much more than ask the military to exercise restraint, preferring to concentrate on other goals (The Asia Foundation, 2019).

Similar to this, in the continuing Rohingya ethnic cleansing case, Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD administration have not only abstained from taking action to stop the inhumane treatment of stateless people but have also vehemently denied any wrongdoing and imposed media restriction on the subject. Although millions of people were compelled to cross the border to live in neighbouring countries, foreign observers expressed worry with the ex-state counsellor hiding the military's behaviour and calling the problem a "internal matter" (Beech, 2017). Aung San Suu Kyi defended the junta before the International Court of Justice in 2019 and refuted all charges of genocide in the face of condemnation from the international community (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2020).

5.3.2. Second Transition and Rising Conflict

Theorists contend that a shift from a military to a democratic government is frequently followed by another change, this time toward the successful implementation of a democratic government (Huntington, 1991). The military challenge for members of the opposition during the first transition is to usher in a democratic government without facing military opposition. The problem during the second transition is to create effective civilian institutions that can regulate the military.

5.4. BRINGING THE GAD UNDER THE CIVILIAN RULE

The NLD government gradually tried to establish strong civilian positions in institutions that were primarily dominated by the military while also attempting to maintain a balance between the two. This action was thought to be crucial for setting up effective civilian control groups. The General Administration Department (GAD), which oversees the majority of public administration in Myanmar, was one of the key initiatives the NLD pursued in 2019. The GAD has historically been governed by the Ministry of Home Affairs, which is under military

administration (MoHA). It directly oversees all state bureaucracy at the local level, including in the districts, townships, and village tracts, and is referred to as the bureaucratic backbone of the nation. Its 36,000 employees, many of whom have been transferred from the military, are in charge of granting permits, resolving land management issues and legal problems, and obtaining taxes (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2020). Since April 2011, the GAD has also handled the increased engagement from international aid donors (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2020).

Thus, putting the GAD under the Office of the Union Government's civilian Ministry was a crucial first step in ending the military's dominance. The reform, which encouraged decentralisation, was intended to further the cause of peace and stability. Undoubtedly, such a reform might not result in rapid improvements to municipal government. Long-term, it might allow civil services at the state and regional levels to develop in addition to the extraordinary municipal positions (Arnold, 2019).

5.4.1. Amending the Constitution

The largest source of military power in Myanmar is the 2008 Constitution. It guarantees that governmental institutions mirror the ideology espoused by the Tatmadaw in addition to giving the military a significant role in politics. This ideology is based on the three national clauses of the Tatmadaw: the continuance of national sovereignty, the preservation of the Union, and the preservation of national unity (Zaw, 2019).

The Constitution provides 25% of the seats in Myanmar's Parliament to unelected military commanders in order to protect the implementation of these clauses. Since articles 436(a) and (b) require more than 75% of members to vote in favour of authorised amendments, this gives them the ability to veto amendments. In times of emergency, the commander-in-chief of the military forces is additionally given sovereign powers by the Constitution, including the ability to exert control over the administration, legislative branch, and judicial branch[26]. These clauses have given the military the freedom to uphold its role as a guardian of a gradual democratisation process and to safeguard its fundamental ideological and personal interests. Therefore, any Constitutional changes have the potential to seriously weaken the Tatmadaw's hold over the Myanmar government (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2020).

Although the NLD had long complained about the Constitution's lack of democracy, until it came into power in 2016, little was done to change it. But after failing to win the 2018 by-elections, it resorted back to the Constitutional Amendment. 149 lawmakers—50 from the military, 50 from the NLD, 26 from the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), and the remaining from ethnic parties—were appointed to the legislative Charter Amendment Committee in January 2019. They participated in the seven-day discussion. The NLD held 59 percent of the seats in the Parliament, followed by the USDP with 5%, ethnic minority parties with 11%, and the military with its constitutionally required 25%.

[26] In Myanmar, an emergency is defined as any situation that could lead to the nation's disintegration, loss of sovereignty, or attempts to forcefully take power through insurgency (Article 417).

The reforms were aimed at lessening the military's influence. Some of the NLD''s suggestions included removing the military's ability to veto constitutional changes, lowering its parliamentary representation, decreasing its influence in politics, and removing the army chiefs' authority to take over during an emergency. More than 75% of Parliament must vote in favour of a charter revision, although the NLD has suggested reducing that threshold to two-thirds of elected MPs, excluding military appointees. Additionally, it suggested gradually lowering the percentage of seats held by the military from 25% to 15% after the 2020 election, 10% after 2025, and 5% after 2030. According to Article 14 of the Constitution and related regulations, unelected military officers hold one-fourth of all seats in the national and provincial legislatures. The commander in chief referred to the revisions as discriminatory and claimed that such demands might impair national unity and civilian-military relations. The military generals fiercely opposed this plan (Yamin Aung, 2020) The NLD also suggested changing Section 59 (d), which calls for military experience, and Section 59 (f), which prevents Aung San Suu Kyi from being president because her husband and sons are British citizens. However, the assembly did not provide these initiatives the necessary support. Senior positions should avoid any foreign influence, according to a junta official (Yamin Aung (2), 2020).

The NLD proposed 114 revisions to the Constitution in total, but only a small number were allowed because they just altered the wording of sections relating to the nomination of state and regional ministers. One may argue that the NLD's goal in seeking to implement so many changes was to boost public perception by persuading the people that the USDP and the military were impeding the party's efforts to enact democratic reforms.

The army and the USDP were aware of the scheme, and to refute this claim, the Tatmadaw and the USDP put out their own changes. By electing regional chief ministers through local legislatures rather than appointing them through the president, the military group suggested amending Article 261 of the Constitution. The main goal of such an amendment is to give the nation-state a federal structure by giving the periphery more authority. Although this runs counter to the Tatmadaw's prior opposition to federalism, in which it equated federalism with the country's dissolution (Heugas, 2020), observers maintain that the underlying motivation is to capitalise on the ethnic minorities' rising cynicism toward the NLD[27] (Heugas, 2020).

5.5. PERSISTENT OBSTACLES TO DEMOCRACY

5.5.1. NLD's Centralised Character

According to the 2008 Constitution, the NLD is entitled to select the national and municipal legislatures at all levels. Instead of recognizing nationality parties in the ethnic states after winning in 2015, the NLD appointed its own representatives and party members as the chief ministers of all the states and regions without first consulting the once-aligned ethnic parties—even in states where the NLD won a minority of state seats.

[27] The ethnic minorities are reportedly unhappy with the state of affairs and the centralised approach of the NLD that goes against the spirit of federalism that the centre had promised to uphold (Banerjee, 2022).

Two significant ethnic parties in Myanmar are the Arakan National Party (ANP) and the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD). The national parliament asked U Aye Tha Aung, a seasoned Rakhine politician, to serve as vice-speaker of the Upper House (Amyotha Hluttaw). However, there was no open discussion or agreement with the ANP prior to this decision (Linn, 2020). Similarly, the NLD refused to give the SNLD, its erstwhile ally at the state level, administrative authority or representation. Party officials recommended that the SNLD take into consideration the appointment of an Ethnic Affairs Minister instead. These behaviours alienated ethnic communities and tarnished the NLD's reputation. The party's "Burmanization" strategy and the centralization of projects, which imposed political power, further worsened unfavourable attitudes among the ethnic communities. For instance, dissent and protests were caused by the construction of the statue of General Aung San in Kayah and other areas with sizable ethnic minority populations, and the NLD's local leaders decided to deal with them mostly violently. When the NLD decided to change the name of a bridge in Mawlamyine to General Aung San Bridge, there were also objections in Mon state (Myo Hein, 2021).

Some NLD members and other pro-democracy leaders became disillusioned by these tendencies, and they established their own political organisations before the 2020 elections, including the People's Pioneer Party, Union Betterment Party, and People's Party (Nitta, 2020). During discussions on the Constitutional Amendment, the military used this development against the NLD.

5.5.2. Weakness of Democratic Political Leadership

After the 2015 elections, the NLD party gained power. Prior to 2015, the party's membership had been primarily symbolic and solidaristic, and the rise in membership raised questions about the newcomers, who sought to improve their prestige and power in the lack of a strong democratic doctrine. Additionally, choosing local leaders became difficult as more people supported Aung San Suu Kyi than specific local candidates. Due to the fragmented power structures within the NLD, local leaders were chosen after the party office won the election (Roewer, 2020).

The NLD government neglected to invest in the education of party members and the leaders of tomorrow since it was a young and inexperienced government. Few members of the current leadership are professionals with formal education, and the majority lack managerial experience. While some party members' management approaches are in line with democratic culture and true policy openness, the majority are merely interested in behaviour and control patterns similar to socialist centralization (Ko Ko, 2019).

5.5.3. Fault-lines of National Reconciliation

The junta had continued to use a divide-and-rule strategy for controlling the ethnic armed organisations during its administration and while serving as the defence authority throughout the NLD period. The military was able to integrate some of them into their force throughout the 1990s, but those who refused to cooperate are still at war with the government. The junta

oversees and controls the entire process by waging war on some groups while signing ceasefire agreements with others, allowing some of these groups to selectively retain their weapons and control of their territory, levy taxes on their constituents, erect state-like structures, and make money from legal and illicit trade[28] (Banerjee, 2022).

Its strategies are made easier by the armed groups' inability to cooperate and learn from one another's mistakes. The Tatmadaw has become the most potent military, political, and economic force in the borderlands as a result of exploiting ceasefire politics. Furthermore, the military exploits and draws from the natural riches of the borderlands in mining, logging, and agriculture through joint ventures with local leaders or elite groups of ethnic minorities. Due to this, the military has gained control over territory it had no prior authority over and profited from ethnic armed organisations without ever properly addressing their concerns.

It would need the government's consistent effort, motivated by a goal for peace, to turn such a scenario around. A representative Union administration must be responsible for bringing about peace because the armed parties have overlapping territorial claims, competing objectives, and have failed to successfully coordinate their military and political operations. The International Crisis Group correctly advised the government to participate in political negotiations and dialogue with all of the nation's ethnic groups in 2020, as well as to set up participatory institutions where each group could work toward its objectives. However, because of the changing civil-military ties at the time, this could not be put into action (Banerjee, 2022).

5.5.4. Misplaced Security Priorities

The major goals of Myanmar's security and justice institutions over the past five years have been to defend the state against insurgency or to uphold law and order while safeguarding their own economic interests. Political dissidents have received the majority of the disciplinary attention from the criminal justice system, while non-traditional security risks, like drug misuse and people trafficking, have merely received ordinary restraints and punishment (Whitridge Cheesman, 2012). Furthermore, the judiciary is only nominally independent because it is still filled with juries and magistrates who formerly worked for the military or the old military government because Bamar Buddhists dominate the security institutions (Jolliffe, 2019).

The transfer of authority from the military to civilians does not inevitably result in more equitable and peaceful outcomes, to be sure. Carefully considered and carried out reforms in the justice system are required, including military and police service orientations, tactical approach skill development without the use of extreme violence, people-oriented mechanisms, gender inclusivity and sensitivity, prison system rehabilitation, and general inclusivity. According to research organisations, there are three actions that must be taken to democratise Myanmar's dictatorial government (Jolliffe, 2019):

[28] A Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) between the government and eight organisations was signed in 2015. Two further groups joined the NCA in 2018. Five other parties have bilateral cease-fire pacts. The Arakan Army (AA), Kachin Independence Army (KIA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, however, stood without such an agreement as of October 2020. (MNDAA). The Tatmadaw concentrated on combating the AA for two years, from December 2018 to November 2020, largely avoiding conflicts with the others. Following the national elections in November 2020, the Tatmadaw and AA reached an unofficial, temporary ceasefire (Banerjee, 2022).

1. Giving more power to elected civilians as representatives of the people;

2. Transforming the security culture;

3. Protecting and building civic space.

So far, the civilian government has been unable to take any action, due to the reservations of the junta.

The lack of democratic advancement in Myanmar is due to the issues covered in this section. The public still has a strong level of trust in Aung San Suu Kyi as a protector who will serve as a barrier against a potential return of military rule, despite the military leaders' hopes to capitalise on the NLD's poor performance to win support. Much of the public's mistrust is focused on the military regime, which is seen as despotic (Beach & Nang, 2020).

In fact, the USDP lost ground in the 2020 elections, and the NLD government's resounding victory significantly lessened the military's sway over the legislative branch. In the future, the NLD was likely to make other Constitutional revisions, which would further reduce the military's power (Banerjee, 2022). Although this will strengthen the NLD's standing, a direct challenge to the junta's institutional sovereignty was predicted to spark another coup.

6. CONCLUSIONS

At first glance, Myanmar could be seen as a case of failed democratisation. Coming back to the first question that states how the western block prefers to picture a transition in an optimistic way in order to gain power in its position globally, the Myanmar case has been neither optimistic nor a democratisation. Scholars involved in the study of transitology tend to agree that there is more than electing a new government through competitive elections that are free, fair, and transparent to consider that a country is democratising. It is crucial that the new elected political leaders hold the capacity to govern effectively, or to put it in Weberian terms, elected leaders need to hold the monopoly of power, including the legal use of force. It is obvious, in hindsight, that the military was more than independent from the government and able to use monopoly on violence without any constraint.

Therefore, Myanmar has experienced democratic reforms as well as free and fair elections for some time but it has never been on a democratisation process. The Western democracies have pushed hard to sell as a public relations campaign how the country was performing according to the standards expected from a country transitioning from a military regime to a civilian led government. However, the Western block itself is not performing as it would be expected and it is more focused on portraying an image of power and influence than on investing effectively in building democratic societies.

Following the trends of the public discourse and the enhancement of the leader, Myanmar pro-democratic movement concentrated efforts on the figure of Aung San Suu Kyi, its international scope and her leadership as the representation of change. This left behind the necessary steps to build and strengthen the institutions and the civil society fabric that was needed to effectively assume more control of the administration.

This research is limited in the analysis of the international aid and external funds for development and humanitarian interventions. However, the international community did not seize its opportunity to intervene deeply in what has been called a diplomatic graveyard (Banerjee, 2022) - due to the rejecting nature of the junta to any kind of foreign presence - to actually facilitate national reconciliation between the junta and their democratic opponents. Proof of that is the impunity and more democratisation in exchange of atrocity crimes committed by the State against the Rohingya population in Rakhine State (and to other ethnic groups around the country) during the NLD term - which could pursue its own research as atrocity crimes committed in Myanmar under the eyes of the Western countries funding humanitarian, development, and peace projects from 2015 to 2020.

Therefore, a crucial component of any state changing from authoritarian to democratic governance is the restructuring of authoritarian civil-military ties. However, because the conditions for this transition are established by the military rulers from a position of power, they frequently continue to have significant control over the course of events, and the armed forces continue to enjoy their rights as a result.

The country experienced a process of authoritarian resilience allowed by the Tatmadaw in a position of power and willing to expand their economic revenues and foreign relations. There was no interest in a shift in the regime and there is no shift in their ideology beyond what they consider the right way to lead the country's interest and integrity. Both of the scholars interviewed agree on the fact that the generals that started the liberalisation process hold a more moderate position regarding the readiness of the country to switch to a disciplined democracy. Huntington backs up these scholars when he states that democratisation is merely agreed by the elite “that democracy is the least worst form of government for their societies and for themselves” (Huntington, 1993, 316).

The current leadership of the country is a solo man, General Min Aung Hlaing who is over the legal age for retirement. Many argue that he desired the presidency of the country and needed a smooth retirement to ensure immunity for alleged crimes against humanity. It seems clear to me that the individual in question seized the power in a moment when the democratic block of countries does not condemn anymore the authoritarian regimes in which human rights are constantly violated, women lack freedom of movement and decision, and illiberal leaders are part of multilateral forums and supranational organisations that request the rule of law, democracy and the respect of human rights to grant a membership.

Assuming the nature of authoritarian resilience that Myanmar experienced throughout its history and during the past decade, this paper sought to answer a second question: What peculiarities have been present in the Tatmadaw partnership with the NLD to maintain power, given that Myanmar's democratic development to this point has been an example of authoritarian resilience rather than of democratisation? Three main characteristics could be identified.

The first component of authoritarian resilience is the highly top-down structure of liberalisation and the ability of the incumbents to maintain control over the process. Second, by controlling the pace of political change, the incumbents had had time to stifle and deflect calls for change that did not fit with their own agenda. These outcomes were obtained via a variety of political engineering techniques, not only repression. Examples include changing the general election into a constitutional one, infiltrating civil society space or the last justification of the coup

d'etat as constitutional. Third, the Tatmadaw's divide-and-rule approach has kept conflicts localised and controllable, preventing them from becoming destabilising while they were in power and in the new era of civilian governance but heating them up to ensure some level of insecurity that requires their active presence.

The weaknesses of this research are the limitation of the analysis to the political events that occurred during the last decade with less focus on how the liberalisation process has affected Myanmar economy and population. At the same time, it does not deepen the armed conflicts of the country that are certainly a major factor to consider when dealing with any political affairs of Myanmar.

This research furthers knowledge on both Myanmar and on democratisation and its failure by the specific analysis of the interactions between the Tatmadaw and the NLD as the main pro-democracy actor. It explores its origins from the colonial period and the evolution of the civilian-military relationship from hostilities to a forced cooperation that has ended in the same result as previous events: 1974, 1988, 2007, and now 2021.

Further questions that should be explored but were outside the scope of this research are the aforementioned case in which Myanmar received funding from western countries for the development of its democratic reforms as well as for the strengthening of its civil society fabric while the Rohingya genocide was happening. Was it a case of democratisation at any cost? Did the Rohingya population pay the neglect of the western governments to prioritise the democratisation in Myanmar? The link between an atrocity crimes prevention approach and successful mode of governance seems intriguing in this case in which lessons learnt from other countries could be explored.

The military coup of February 2021 demonstrated that the government had failed to exert civilian control over the junta despite the gains the NLD had achieved in building democratic procedures in Myanmar. The country and its future have entered new ground as a result of the coup, and how the conflict develops will rely on the actions of the military and the public protests.

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