



Cycles of Civilian Fragility and Military Dominance: Post-Colonial Political Transformations in Myanmar

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Abstract

This research paper explores the trajectory of Myanmar's political evolution from its post-colonial independence in 1948 to the consolidation of military rule by the late 1980s. It examines how foundational challenges such as ethnic diversity, colonial administrative legacies, and internal divisions undermined early efforts at parliamentary democracy. The study highlights pivotal events including the Panglong Agreement, the rise and fragmentation of the AFPFL, the 1958 caretaker government, the 1962 military coup led by General Ne Win, and the subsequent institutionalization of the Burmese Way to Socialism. Through a detailed historical analysis, the paper argues that recurring instability was driven by the civilian government's failure to address ethnic aspirations and insurgencies, combined with the military's increasing assertion of itself as a stabilizing force. These developments reveal how authoritarian governance emerged not solely from opportunism, but from the structural weaknesses of early democratic institutions. The study concludes that Myanmar's democratic aspirations remain vulnerable to entrenched military dominance unless deeper reforms and inclusive federal mechanisms are realized.

Keywords: Myanmar, post-colonial transition, military coup, democracy, burmese way to socialism, political transformation

Introduction

This paper provides the essential background information for readers to comprehend the transition from democratic rule to military rule in Myanmar. In this paper, we will examine how Prime Minister U Nu and the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) paved the way for Burma's parliamentary democracy and the country's 1948 declaration of independence from Britain. A military caretaker administration was established following Prime Minister U Nu's resignation, the dissolution of parliament, and the insurgency and AFPFL divisions. The AFPFL, as the sole significant political party in the civilian administration, decided to separate. Here we compare the outcomes of the general elections that were held both before and after the separation. Investigated are the circumstances surrounding the 1962 military coup, the authoritarian rule of General Ne Win, and the militarisation of the country. This article also delves into some of the possible causes of military interference in civilian affairs.

The history of Burma (now Myanmar) after its independence is forever marred by the effects of colonisation. According to Donnison (1953 ^[10], 28), the British were defeated in January 1886 after three invasions of Burma. Prior to annexation, several other ethnic groups called the border regions of Burma home. However, the Burman and Bama tribes were the original inhabitants of the country proper. Two distinct governments oversaw the border regions and Myanmar. Chiefs and sawbwas are examples of internal rulers among the Burman and Bama peoples, while princes are examples among the Shan. Such hierarchies are typical in many indigenous groups. The British took control of the border territories after they conquered the Burmese kingdom (ibid., 32). Throughout WWII, Japan imposed a provisional rule over Burma. The thirty-strong Burma Independence Army (BIA), under the leadership of Aung San, was educated by the Japanese

military. From August 1, 1943, until the nation was awarded freedom while being safeguarded by Japan, the Japanese military delivered judgement down to Burma. According to the Union of Burma's National Coalition Government, the BIA betrayed its previous friend Japan and joined the British army on March 27, 1945 (2003, 8).

From Agreement to Union: the Role of Panglong in Shaping Postcolonial Burma

On January 4, 1948, the British finally awarded Burma its independence after resolving internal disputes centred around ethnicity. The people have to be on one side for the nation to gain independence and establish a federal government. With that goal in mind, a meeting was held in Panglong, Shan states, in March 1946 bringing together leaders from within Burma as well as the border territories (Fink 2001 ^[11], 23). To pave the way for Panglong's ultimate freedom from colonial rule, a historic gathering the first of its kind was convened. Burmese authorities offered border regions autonomy in return for their approval, which attracted them to join the Union of Burma. A federation of border districts was being considered by border authorities as a means to maintain their autonomy (Sadan 2008 ^[23], 389). The United Frontier Union was suggested by H. N. C. Stevenson, the British director of frontier districts, as a means of showing solidarity with the people residing on the frontier. While the AFPFL authorities were vehemently against the idea, the frontiersmen were staunch supporters of it. One of the British officials who tried to get the AFPFL & British government to pay attention to the problems encountered by the border people was Stevenson (Walton 2008, 895) ^[32].

Obtaining the trust of the British government was paramount prior to delving into the details of Burma's independence. General Aung San led a group that set out for

London in early 1947 to accomplish just this (Smith 1999^[27], 77). From that time on, the position was held by Clement Attlee, the prime minister of Britain. It was made clear to the delegates by the British administration that the border people should not be coerced into joining the Union government. British government practices, according to negotiating team leader General Aung San, have separated Burmese from those living in border regions. As long as people of all races are granted complete freedom and the chance to unite and collaborate without outside interference, there shouldn't be any insurmountable hurdles to a united Burma, according to an interview with Aung San that ran in the January 14, 1947 edition of *The London Times*. Even the so-called Karenni states have the same right to live their own lives as everyone else. We also think that the freedom that our people will soon achieve should not be denied to any government or race in our nation (Smith 1999, 78)^[27].

The Era of Parliamentary Democracy in Burma (1948–1958)

Following Burma's independence, U Nu assumed the position of prime minister. The U Nu administration wanted to provide room for the frontier people's private lives even if parliamentary democracy was just starting out. At the age of four, the federal government authorised the use of indigenous languages by frontier students. Because students had the opportunity to study both Burmese and their original language, minority populations were able to strengthen and maintain their cultural identity. It was determined that instead of federal government officials attending the country's holiday celebrations in Rangoon, the capital, local government officials might go. Many ethnic groups showcased their traditional attire through dance. Officials from the union would occasionally travel to remote areas to attend community gatherings. Federal high-ranking officials would dress like natives on these occasions. Local autonomy was in jeopardy from 1952 to 1954, when the army took control of Shan state (Silverstein 1959^[26]: 101). Conflicts between Burmese and border residents intensified as a result of government policies that promoted division. The Karens, an ethnic minority in central Burma and a powerful force on the border regions, thought their allotted land was inadequate due to their large population (around 3–4 million). Colonised territories were reluctantly ceded by the Burmans and the Karens. Burmese, the language of the Bama and Burman peoples, was mandated in all government offices and schools. Since Burmese was officially defined as the only way to formally request things for the legislative agenda in parliament, schools and colleges were forced to study the language. This led to the widespread acceptance of Rangoon and Mandalay Burman clothing as official national attire. The term "rustics" was used to describe those who frequently, rather than on rare occasions, wore the traditional clothing of another ethnic group. A more difficult issue was the official recognition of Buddhism as the state religion (Silverstein 1959^[26]: 102-103).

For these reasons, the majority of Burmans viewed the government's new policies with distrust. Firstly, the changes rejected the Panglong accord's foundation of local sovereignty. Many people who were not Burman interpreted the new legislation as an effort to impose Burman culture and religion on them. The non-Burmans interpreted the developments as an evil Burmanization plot to boost Burman nationalism. Many people who did not practise Buddhism saw the official acknowledgement of Buddhism as an attack on their religious freedom (Kipgen 2011^[15], 51). The government's relationship with the Karens was tense. In January and February 1949, the government army's Karen soldiers started to pull out of their outposts as the strong Karen armed rebellion started (1998, 130)^[3].

The AFPFL is an essential component of any narrative about Burma's parliamentary democracy because, from 1947 until the military coup of 1962, it was the country's ruling party (1948-1958). These political ideas were first proposed by Thakin Soe's allied groups, the BNA, the PRP, and the CPB. At a Pegu convention in August 1944, a Socialist Party was established to resist the Japanese occupation, with U Nu at the helm. Before Japan lost the war for independence from Britain, it was known as the AFO, but when the war ended, it changed its name to AFPFL.

There were a total of four elections held from 1947 to 1960. The country will require a constitution after claiming independence from Britain, and the 1947 election laid the groundwork for that assembly. Elections have not taken place in Burma since the country declared independence from Britain in 1937. Among the conditions for Burma's independence that were outlined in the "Aung San-Attlee Agreement" were the need to have elections and write a constitution. There were 255 assembly seats up for grabs across the country, and candidates from all kinds of political stripes ran for them. According to Diller (1993^[9], 395), a bicameral, multiparty, and parliamentary democracy was formed by the constitution that was enacted in 1947.

The years 1951–1952, 1956, and 1960 also saw multi-party elections. The AFPFL was victorious in all three of its first elections when it had a unified ticket (Callahan 1998^[7]: 51). By having elections in 1947, Burma made great strides towards becoming a parliamentary democracy. With 173 out of 210 seats, the AFPFL emerged as the winner. The subsequent election was delayed from June 1951 to April 1952 for a considerable amount of time because of circumstances related to the insurgency. The AFPFL were declared the victorious with 147 out of 250 seats. Two hundred and twenty-two people were elected to the Lower House's Chamber of Deputies (with a capacity of 250) on April 27, 1956. Because the governing AFPFL was not removed from office, the other 48 seats were filled mechanically. Candidates were chosen for the Upper House Chamber of Nationalities on May 22nd, shortly thereafter (Silverstein 1956^[25], 177).

Table 1: The 1956 General Election Results (Chamber of Deputies)

Political Party	Popular Vote	% of Vote	Seats Won
Major Parties			
Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL)	1,844,614	47.7%	147
National United Front (NUF)	1,170,073	30.4%	48
Mid-size & Regional Parties			
United Hill People's Congress (UHPC)	163,283	4.2%	14
Arakan National United Organization (ANUO)	38,939	1.0%	5
People's Economic and Cultural Development Org. (PECDO)	49,203	1.3%	4
All Shan State Organization (ASSO)	41,940	1.1%	4
Shan States Peasants Organization (SSPO)	31,112	0.8%	2
Kachin National Congress (KNC)	30,837	0.8%	2
United National Pa-O Organization (UNPO)	22,185	0.6%	1
Burma Nationalist Bloc (BNB)	77,364	2.0%	1
Minor & Non-winning Parties			
Burma Democratic Party (BDP)	113,091	2.9%	0
Other Parties (10 minor parties)	40,405	1.0%	0
Independents & Undecided			
Independents	239,166	6.2%	13
Undecided Seats	–	–	9

The AFPFL Split & Rise of the Caretaker Government (1958–1960)

Two factions emerged inside the AFPFL in April 1958. U Nu and Thakin Tin (often called the Nu-Tin side) were in charge of the Clean group, whereas Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein were in charge of the Stable faction. After much back-and-forth inside the AFPFL and with NUF's backing, the chamber of deputies narrowly decided to remove Prime Minister U Nu from office on June 9, 1958, by a narrow margin of only eight votes. The resolution was approved with the backing of 119 members and the opposition of 127. Ideological differences did not cause the separation; interpersonal and organisational enmity did. Prior to General Aung San's assassination in July 1947, AFPFL was formed by numerous ethnic and political groups. Disagreements arose among the founding members of the party after U Nu took over as head (Trager 1958 [29], 145). Because of NUF's communist links, the military hardliners were frightened that U Nu's political survivor would need their backing. The decline of law and order was an additional reason for alarm. The belief held by the military leadership that the civilian government could not keep the peace grew stronger as time went on. In an effort to alleviate political instability, Prime Minister U Nu formally requested that General Ne Win, the head of the military, establish a caretaker administration in which he would serve as prime minister for a limited period. In order to hold a new election on September 26, 1958, it was necessary to restore peace and order. The transfer of power occurred on October 28th, when the military were given six months to prepare. Butwell and Mehden (1960 [6], 145) point out that in February 1959, a legitimate amendment was passed to prolong the tenure of an individual who is not a member of Congress.

When the interim government was done, some on the outside weren't sure the military chief would voluntarily hand over power. General Ne Win shocked many on August 13, 1959, when he revealed the date of the general election. The brief caretaker government achieved a historic low in insurgency-related violence with the assistance of the military. The cost of living and crime rate for average people were both reduced, while government efficiency and integrity were also enhanced. Yet, the military administration resorted to extreme measures in pursuit of its goals. For example, on the eve of the 1959 monsoon season, the capital city of Rangoon had some 164,000 squatters and hutments moved to nearby cities (Butwell and Mehden 1960 [6], 145-46).

As previously announced, General Ne Win presided over an interim election that took place on February 6, 1960. This was the third election since independence that decided the composition of the incoming government. The Clean faction was able to secure victory in the election due to the removal of two prominent members of the Stable group, U Kyaw Nyein and U Ba Swe. In 1956, the NUF, a party with communist ties, did not even manage to secure one seat. There was a lot of failure for independents and ethnic party candidates outside of areas with a large minority population. A lot of people were surprised by the result since they thought the two AFPFL groupings would be running neck and neck. The margin of victory for the Clean faction was substantially wider than it had been in the 1956 election just before the party split. The clean side's decisive victory was due in large part to U Nu. He has campaigned on the platform of making Buddhism the official religion if elected. U Nu was beloved by the people and served as prime minister and leader of the AFPFL for eleven years. An influential order of Buddhist monks who were integral to people's everyday lives came together to support him (Bigelow 1960 [4], 70–71).

Table 2: Delegate Seat Distribution Following the 1960 General Election

Group / Party	Clean AFPFL & Allies	Stable AFPFL & Allies	Other Parties & Independents	Arakan National United Org. (ANUO)	To Be Decided
Clean AFPFL	158	–	–	–	–
SSUHPO (Shan States United Hill People’s Org.)	6	–	–	–	–
PECDO – Kachin	2	–	–	–	–
Chin National Organization (CNO)	1	–	–	–	–
Kayah National United League (KNUL)	1	–	–	–	–
Stable AFPFL	–	41	–	–	–
Kachin National Congress (KNC)	–	3	–	–	–
Kayah Democratic League (KDL)	–	1	–	–	–
Other Parties & Independents (unspecified)	–	–	16	–	–
Arakan National United Organization (ANUO)	–	–	–	6	–
Subtotal	168	45	16	6	15

A number of people had predicted that the Stable group would receive a greater number of votes than they actually did. The Stable faction's leaders attempted to portray themselves as equally religious as their opponents throughout the election campaign, despite their desire to keep religion out of politics. Having said that, it seems like that endeavour was fruitless. The Stable group's close ties to the military also worked against them. Despite the noticeable improvement in law and order and the implementation of various beneficial policies for the country's welfare during the interim administration, many citizens remained concerned about the military's methods. It would appear that the average voter saw more drawbacks than benefits in the policies enacted by the military government. Bigelow claims that the most of the cooperation with the army was started by the Stable faction (1960^[4], 71).

In the border regions, the two AFPFL groups' support was split. Both factions had supporters, as seen in the table below, but the majority of voters were undecided. Eighteen legislators sided with the Clean camp, while thirteen opposed it. The findings show that most people in the frontier districts were wary of putting their trust in the two AFPFL groups as their leaders were ethnic Burmans.

Table 3: Results from the 1960 Election in Ethnic Areas Led by Clean Faction (Chamber of Deputies)

Ethnic Group	Support	Opposition	Uncertain
Karens	1	6	0
Kachins	4	3	0
Chins	3	3	0
Kayahs	1	0	1
Shans	6	0	14
Arakans	3	1	8
Total	18	13	23

The U Nu government failed to gain support from border residents despite a dominant electoral victory. Challan (1998)^[8] claims that the government did not make sure that Burmans and ethnic minorities would get an equitable portion of the country's wealth. According to Lambert (1967^[16], 111–13), some people viewed this class divide as proof of the government's incompetence, while others saw it as a societal injustice that would provoke a revolution. Also, not long after the election, the clean group now known as the Union party broke out into factions over who should serve

on the executive committee. Executive committee members from the ABPO and the Federation of Trade Organisation were absent, with the exception of the Union Labour Organisation. As a result of feuds within the party, "U-Bos" became well-known as the voice of the Union party's constituents and "Thakins" as the spokesman for U Nu's party-based individual membership.

U Nu did not plan to quit as party leader; rather, he resigned as prime minister in December 1960. Like the years leading up to the AFPFL's dissolution in 1958, the Union party was riven by internal warfare. It seemed like U Nu acted against military interests while he was prime minister as well. One example is the decision by General Ne Win's military caretaker government to keep the National Defence College running, which he disagreed with. In addition, he opposed the establishment of a single intelligence organisation. The military was behind both of these endeavours. The prime minister did more than just break relations between the two departments; he also gave the go-ahead for police officers to receive training apart from the government (Trager 1963^[30], 312-13).

An efficient channel of information exchange between the public and their elected representatives is essential for any accountable administration. There are established rules and regulations that bureaucrats must adhere to when carrying out their official responsibilities. In order for people and government officials to be able to express themselves freely, there must be an easily accessible means of communication. The experience and education of a leader can have an effect on their performance, say Ricci and Fitch (1990^[22], 56). The federal government failed to forge a solid connection with the people of the nation, particularly the ethnic minorities, throughout the parliamentary democratic era. Problems persisted even in places with well-developed transportation and communication networks; this was particularly true in border regions. Attempts by the Rangoon government to exert its authority outside of the city limits were often met with resistance. The administration was perpetually concerned about insurgency issues. Also, there weren't enough resources or competent leaders in U Nu's civilian administration to get the job done (Callahan 1998^[7]: 59).

Militarization of Burmese society

The role of the military in Myanmar's politics dates back to the independence movement and continues to this day. Liberation from Japanese and British occupation was the

principal objective of the army prior to the country's independence. After gaining independence, the country's first objective was to restore calm and put a stop to insurgent movements. The Burmese military played a crucial role in protecting the nation from foreign invaders and internal disputes, despite its small size and relative weakness in comparison to other national militaries. A year before the country gained its freedom, General Aung San stated categorically that the military had to be fortified.

Our armed forces are more than capable of quelling domestic unrest in the sake of national defence. If we want to keep the country safe from invaders, it won't do the trick. The military is inadequate on its own. You will not find armour battalions. The Navy is pointless when taken as a whole. In all candour, safeguarding our country is a daunting task. The establishment of the Air Force had just commenced. At least 500 combat aircraft are required for our nation's air force to serve as the first line of defence. That is inadequate. When these 500 planes are in the thick of things on the front lines, they should each have three or four spares ready to go. We need 500 more fighter planes. In the event that war breaks out, our country will need at least one million soldiers. Having one million soldiers is preferable. Presently, our number is a mere twenty thousand (Myoe 2009^[19], 193).

Under U Nu's leadership, the civilian administration functioned amidst a politically volatile environment. There could be no total federal control over the non-Burman territories because their desire to join the Union was not universal. There was deep-seated mistrust of Burmans even among border inhabitants who had pledged to work with the Panglong Accord's provisional Burmese administration (Scherrer 1997^[24], 11). The country's independence was not without its internal struggles. The Mujahids, the KNDO, the Mon National Defence Organisation (MNDO), and the PVO were among the rebel groups who fought against the government. Some fought for more autonomy or independence, while communist groups demanded a communist dictatorship in place of democracy. The central government's weakness allowed the insurgents to take control of most of the countryside by spring 1949. Liang (1990, 19)^[17] states that rebel groups were successful in seizing portions of Rangoon, the capital city. According to Rajah (1998)^[21], the insurgency situation was worsened by Burman nationalists' goal of a unitary state.

Although the Myanmar Armed Forces (Tatmadaw) have expanded in number since independence, they have neglected to finance essential infrastructure projects. There was still no military directorate or instruction handbook for the Tatmadaw in 1953. Pakistan, India, and the United Kingdom were among the nations that officers were sent to for military training. While junior officer course trainings were open to military officers, artillery and staff colleges were not. A key factor in the inefficiency of the military's infrastructure was the fact that the civilian government did not prioritise its improvement, which was a result of the country's emerging democracy. Military leaders were concerned about the state of their organisations. "The training area is the most serious weakness of the General Staff Office," the then-head of the military said at the Tatmadaw summit on August 24, 1953. Inadequacies in training programs are leading to a proliferation of operational deficiencies in conflicts. Shortfalls in both time and resources, such as manuals and equipment, make

training programs difficult to implement. Our firepower is inadequate in relation to the number of enemy casualties caused by our shortcomings in battlecraft and weapon operation. The war office has prioritised the acquisition of training materials. Because our present educational system is unprepared and lags behind international norms, we plan to construct a military academy and a school for combat forces in the near future. These schools' training programs will determine the Tatmadaw's trajectory. So that we may run these training schools independently, we have sent trainees to the United States, Australia, and Yugoslavia, along with the usual suspects like Pakistan, India, and England (Myoe 2009^[19], 136). The talk clearly demonstrated the chief of staff's intention to build a formidable military institution by emphasising the need to enhance military infrastructure and manpower. After completing their training, officers were supposed to have a better understanding of how to manage the military organisation.

▪ Military Coup of 1962

The military played a crucial role in the independence movement and in maintaining calm amid insurgency and party strife, as I mentioned in the previous sections. Additionally, I briefly mentioned General Aung San, better known as Bogyoke in Myanmar, and his "30 comrades" in my remarks. General Ne Win, one of the thirty friends, succeeded him as Tatmadaw chief upon his death in 1947. The March 1962 coup can be better understood if one knows how Ne Win won over his subordinates. An expert on the political history of Myanmar, David Steinberg, claims that Ne Win has made a major mark on Burmese politics. Among the "30 comrades" (Burmese liberation hero) who the Japanese trained for anti-British activities in the early 1940s, Ne Win reportedly grew to popularity, according to Steinberg. Some government buildings and currency have portraits of Aung San, and copies of his works, albeit carefully selected, will keep his memory alive long after his assassination in 1947. The relationship between Ne Win and Aung San, as well as the lasting influence of Aung San, have been the focal points of the government's propaganda beginning in 1962. By making it seem like he inherited the leadership role from Bogyoke Aung San, Ne Win has been given public legitimacy (1990, 9).

It is evident from the previous paragraph that Ne Win had been an integral part of the Burmese army from the very outset. Later on, his connection with Aung San was a major factor in his ascent to the post of supreme head of the Tatmadaw. Just over two years after the 1960 election, Ne Win and the military staged the coup d'état. How did the military's involvement in politics begin? What set off the chain reaction that eventually led to their involvement? Communist and frontier insurrection worries have dogged the nascent democracy since its inception. The civilian government had particular difficulties in the country's rural regions. Disagreements within the one politically powerful party, AFPFL, made the insurgent problem worse. The mounting political crisis forced Prime Minister U Nu to call for fresh elections and establish a transitional administration supported by the military. A provisional government headed by Ne Win called for new elections in 1960, and the Clean AFPFL group easily triumphed. Voters essentially sent a message to the U Nu government in this election. When he

returned to office, the prime minister had a responsibility to address the concerns of the country's ethnic minorities in order to restore national unity. U Nu got together after that to talk about their issues. The soldiers took over on March 2, 2013, before the peace initiative's goals were announced publicly, according to the Human Rights Documentation Unit (2000^[14], 8).

▪ **Institutionalization of Military Rule (1962-1989)**

A sense of "disillusionment not only with the party system but with democratic itself as it has functioned in Burma" consumed the Revolutionary Council government following the military takeover. An official stance was taken that the "Burmese Way to Socialism" would guide domestic policy. Increasing military control was a primary goal of the autocracy. After that, civilian, military, and police representatives were assembled at the division, district, township, & village levels nationwide to form Security Councils. The main goal of the councils was to create a more efficient system for implementing federal policies and to customise services to match the unique requirements of each town. The state took over the businesses. The government established initiatives through the councils to assist farmers financially, improve agricultural output with high-quality crops, and construct irrigation systems and roads. The government bought rice at a discount across the country and then sold it to foreign buyers at a profit, rather than paying market price. According to Badgley (1962^[1], 25–26), the agricultural sector was the most profitable for the newly formed government.

Ne Win's charisma was crucial during the changeover from civilian to military authority, as it had been during the military caretaker administration of 1958–1960. He was characterised by his dogged persistence in achieving his political objectives. As a leader, he enjoyed "taking on the role of strategist," a position that allowed him to make crucial decisions "behind the scenes" with pinpoint accuracy. Such a leader prefers to remain in the background. The number of guys in the present administration who have gained his respect is small, but they are influential figures in his inner circle. General Ne Win was especially well esteemed by the junior commanders. Many high-ranking commanders who may have challenged or rebelled against his leadership in the past have now retired or been appointed as ambassadors overseas. Despite the presence of other prominent people in the government, Ne Win possessed ultimate control as head of the Revolutionary Council (Badgley 1962^[1], 30-31).

Two dozen high-ranking military officials, including Ne Win, resigned on April 20, 1972, after ten years of military dictatorship. Ne Win became prime minister after serving as military chief. His name no longer begins with "General." but with "U." this time. A draught constitution was announced by the administration a few days later, on April

22. Subsequent to rebranding the country as the Socialist Republic of Burma, the 600-member People's Congress emerged as the country's lone political party. The changes can be attributed to the military government's meticulous and far-sighted policymaking process, which commenced upon gaining power in 1962. The High Court and the Supreme Court lost their judicial authority. Operational approval was only granted to BSPPs that had official backing from the government. Whether they had been established during the British era or had persisted under the U Nu regime, all previous local administrations were superseded by centralised ones. The constitutional protections granted to minorities in 1947 were thus null and void (Butwell 1972^[5], 901–902).

The 19-member SLORC restored direct military control over Burma after the 14-year BSPP constitutional military rule ended (McCarthy 2000^[18], 233). Saw Maung, serving as the leader of the SLORC, made the announcement that the elections for the Constituent Assembly would take place on May 3, 1989. It was actually May 27, 1990, when the election was held. The newly created parliament had 2,392 nominees out of 491 seats. During the pro-democracy uprising, many students fled to neighbouring nations. Also getting ready to react against the Burmese forces were the SLORC, who were looking forward to the approaching elections. There were students who were thinking of forming their own armies and others who were already part of existing ones, such the Karen, Kachin, Shan, or Mon. The military junta's program included attacking and destroying the bases. The Burmese army had destroyed most of the important bases along the Thai-Burma border by the end of the year (Badgley 1990^[2], 230).

In the course of our conversation, former prime minister Khin Nyunt brought up his invitation to the fugitive students to return home. When the returning students touched down in Yangon, he reportedly greeted them and gave them to their families.

A series of major incursions were undertaken by the military between 1941 and 1988, with General Ne Win at the helm. The civilian government requested the establishment of a caretaker administration in 1958. The government was established by the Revolutionary Council following a coup that occurred in 1962. A new SLORC military dictatorship was instituted in 1989 following the brutal repression of a pro-democracy uprising. In 1941 and 1942, BIA soldiers succeeded in liberating Burma from British rule. In 1944 and 1945, the Japanese military also attempted this. The military was heavily involved in the years leading up to Burma's first democratic election in 1958, which took place in 1958 and continued until 1988. The change in the country's political system also led to shifts in economic policies. This section covers all four stages that the government went through from 1948 to 1988.

Table 4: Cycles of Reform & Revolution in Burma

Type of Change	Year	Political Shift	Economic Policy
Revolution	1948	Gained independence from British rule	Adoption of Buddhist Socialism; focus on economic nationalism
Revolution	1962	Military coup; establishment of Revolutionary Government	Implementation of the Burmese Way to Socialism; centralized command economy
Reform	1974	Formation of the Socialist Republic; expansion of the BSPP	Increased internal rice prices; foreign loans from World Bank & ADB
Reform or Revolution?	1988	Ne Win steps down; popular uprising and another military coup	Liberalization of grain trade; opening to private and foreign businesses

The political landscape is changing along two primary lines. One is to break away from foreign rule and set up a democratic government on a national level. The change from representative democracy to autocratic leadership defines the second type. Both shifts highlighted the significance of a leader's personality and goals. Burma gained its independence from Britain after General Aung San and his entourage were able to persuade the British government. Second, the first constitution in independent Burma was accepted when leaders of the frontier districts or Burman leader General Aung San, who was born in Burma proper, reached an accord during the foundation of the Union of Burma. Under the parliamentary system, the AFPFL-led civilian government was overseen by Prime Minister U Nu. After serving as president from 1958 to 1960 and again in the years after military rule ended, Ne Win obediently continued in that role.

Violence on a national level and internal strife within the AFPFL were major obstacles leading up to the military takeover of 1962. A communist administration and more federal autonomy were two competing political aims that made insurgency worries worse. On the issue of autonomy, the border inhabitants felt misled, particularly those who had consented to the Panglong pact. The Karens' unwavering resolve to maintain their autonomy from the Burmese Union was striking. A significant barrier in executing the Panglong settlement and the 1947 constitution was the belief held by Burman nationalists and ultranationalists, particularly within the military, that federalism would lead to the dissolution of the Union. The military coup of 1962 was heavily influenced by the frontier people's desire for and struggle for autonomy. Substituting communist dictatorship for democratic rule was the ultimate goal of the communist revolutionaries. The BSPP collapsed and direct military rule was instituted when the administration failed to deal with the country's economic problems in 1988. The widespread pro-democracy uprising was mostly motivated by the people's desire for a multi-party democratic government rather than a one-party dictatorship.

A cohesive military force had to be formed if the military was to retain its dominance for decades, even though the population was strongly against it. Institutional cohesiveness can be fostered or imposed. Although there was friction within the military, especially among the lower-ranking commanders, there was a strong sense of coercive unity. Cohesion was mostly the product of a long line of autocratic commanders who had set up a strict chain of command and organisational structure that made it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for unhappy personnel to voice their discontent. During the time of military rule, democratically formed organisations and civil society groups also faced significant obstacles in their attempts to question the leadership of the military. Within a highly guarded hierarchical structure, military leaders ran the administration. Following their illegal takeover of power, the Burmese military followed the reasoning of Onwumechili (1998^[20], 40) regarding military coups in Africa and sought legitimacy and support from international organisations such as the UN.

Conclusion

There has been a consistent trend in Myanmar's political history since independence, with periods of democratic

promise being repeatedly eroded by periods of authoritarian regression. Insurgencies, ethnic animosities, and party splits swiftly eclipsed the euphoria that accompanied the Panglong Agreement and first parliamentary elections. Even though it was democratically elected, U Nu's civilian administration had trouble handling the demands of decentralisation and diversity, which led to military involvement. The 1962 coup was a watershed moment that cemented military control via the Burmese Way to Socialism and stifled democratic institutions. The military's hierarchical cohesiveness and planned nationalisation of resources allowed it to solidify its authority despite civilian resistance, especially during the 1988 pro-democracy uprising. Researchers found that an increasingly aggressive military, inadequate civilian institutions, and unresolved ethnic conflicts all had a role in the tumultuous political upheavals in Myanmar. If we want to know what the future holds for Myanmar and how to build democratic government that is both inclusive and durable, we need to know about these historical cycles.

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