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THIS CANDIDATE CHOSE THE TOPIC BECAUSE SHE IS BURMESE AND THOUGHT IT WOULD BE IMPORTANT FOR HER TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN HER COUNTRY. IN UNDERTAKING THIS RESEARCH, SHE FOUND THE ARTICLES FROM THE ECONOMIST TO BE HELPFUL IN PROVIDING GENERAL INFORMATION, PROBABLY BECAUSE OF THE INTENDED READERS OF THE MAGAZINE. SHE MADE GOOD ATTEMPTS AT ANALYZING THE POLITICAL NATURE OF THIS TOPIC - WE DO NOT TEACH IT AT OUR SCHOOL.

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Achievement level

Criteria	Examiner 1	maximum	Examiner 2	maximum	Examiner 3
A research question	2	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
B introduction	2	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
C investigation	4	4	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
D knowledge and understanding	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
E reasoned argument	4	4	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
F analysis and evaluation	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
G use of subject language	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
H conclusion	2	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
I formal presentation	3	4	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
J abstract	2	2	<input type="checkbox"/>	2	<input type="checkbox"/>
K holistic judgment	4	4	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	<input type="checkbox"/>
Total out of 36	32		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

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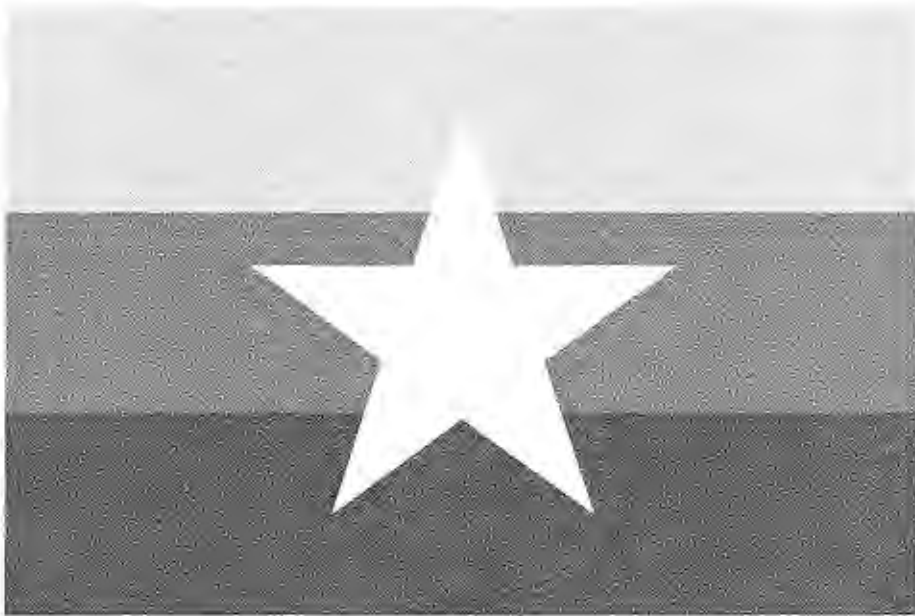
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Extent of Change in Myanmar's Political State From 1988 to 2014

Politics



(Mason, Gail. *Flag of Myanmar*. Digital image. *Clip Dealer*. Fahnen & Flaggen. 2013. Web. 8 Jan. 2015.)

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Abstract

To what extent has Myanmar's political state been altered between the years 1988 and 2014 as it progressed from a totalitarian government to a modern democracy? This essay focuses exclusively on the various changes and hardships that the Southeast Asian country of Myanmar faced throughout the years as it transitioned from dictatorship to a democratic society. It assesses the significance of the country's change in official name from "Burma" to "Myanmar" as well as its shift in official capitals from Yangon to the city of Naypyidaw. The essay also reviews the ways in which the *junta* or *tatmadaw* fortified the inequality that increasingly led the country into a state of frustration and protest. As a result, a new constitution was drafted in 2008, and two elections took place in the following years. Also, the effect of the 2010 elections on the outcomes of the 2012 election is analyzed. Moreover, the essay assesses the new reforms that take place under Thein Sein's presidency and the extent to which they improved the country's social and political state. However, it evaluates the problems that the country still has to overcome as well. Especially when it comes to major ethnic groups such as the Kachin and Karen, much effort is still necessary for full cooperation between them and the military. Furthermore, the essay analyzes the pros and cons of the current governmental structure, including the actions of the NLD and the central government. Therefore, although the results of the 2015 elections are still uncertain, the possible outcomes are somewhat predictable. The essay finally concludes that even though democratization occurred, Myanmar still has quite a way to go before it can truly remain stable.

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Introduction

On January 4, 1948, the Southeast Asian country of Myanmar (then Burma) was liberated from Britain's colonial rule as British soldiers removed the Union Jack from Yangon's main government building. After its independence, a new national flag was put up, and the country officially became the Republic of Burma.¹ After its independence, the country functioned under a bicameral parliament which consisted of a Chamber of Deputies and a Chamber of Nationalities.² On March 2, 1962, however, the military army led by General Ne Win conducted a coup d'état that would directly control the government until 1974, when the Burmese Socialist Program Party formed. Under military rule, Burma went from being one of the most developed countries in Southeast Asia to one of the least developed countries in the entire world as the destruction of the infrastructure, education, and healthcare gradually worsened. In 1988, Ne Win demonetized the kyat, Burmese currency, as an attempt to fix the already wrecked economy and consequentially faced enough outrage from the public that he had to step down. That year, another military coup formed on September 18, 1988 known as the State Law and Restoration Council (SLORC). It was under the control of chairman Saw Manng until General Than Shwe overthrew him in 1992. From then on, civil conflicts arose as the demand for public freedom grew under Than Shwe's supreme rule. To what extent has Myanmar's political state been altered between the years 1988 and 2014 as it progressed from a totalitarian government to a modern democracy?

Over the past decade, Myanmar remained under a long and severe dictatorship until 2010, when it began its transition into a democracy. Throughout these years, as the fight for a

¹ Rodion Ebbighausen. "Myanmar Awaits Freedom 65 Years After Independence." DW.DE. Deutsche Welle, 3 Jan. 2013. Web. Apr.-May 2014.

² Christina Fink. *Living Silence: Burma Under Military Rule*. London: Zed, 2001. Print.

democratic system has grown ever more strongly, Myanmar has made noticeable improvements. Even so, with its current political standing in such a crucial state, the nation must realize the significance of each and every decision. In order for the nation to successfully advance, knowledge of previous changes is necessary. What exactly *is* a democracy? Has there really been a notable shift in powers? How effective are the new reforms? Has hostility between the militia and ethnic minorities diminished? What is the current governmental structure? Also, what is to be anticipated of the upcoming 2015 presidential elections? All of these questions must be considered to truly evaluate the country's present conditions.

The Meaning of Democracy

The term "democracy" itself does not have a single, universal meaning. From a Western point of view, democracy takes a more institutional approach as it focuses on the role of the executive and judiciary parliament.³ In other words, representative democracy requires citizens to have the ability to elect a group of people who will lead a country through governmental and legislative processes. For Myanmar, however, concentrating on just the institutional components is too difficult since its reforms do not often go as planned.

As a country so fixed on conservative traditions and customs, Myanmar's idea of a democracy relies heavily on those values. In Burmese culture, importance is placed upon one's place of obligation and respect. As a result, this idea of recognizing a hierarchical system shows

³ Tamas Wells. "Myanmar: The Meaning of "Democracy"" *Global Policy*. John Wiley & Sons, 29 Jan. 2014. Web. 8 Mar. 2014.

up in the relationship between the country's leaders and its citizens.⁴ The only question is whether or not these Burmese values progress or hinder the current democratic movement.

Additionally, ethnic minorities in Myanmar also have their own unique view of democracy. After decades of receiving constant neglect from the rest of society, leaders of minority groups such as the Kachin and the Rakhine see democracy as an end to Burman dominance. For them, freedom means recognition of their cultural and political rights. ✓

Many realize that “democracy” is a word that has just recently been socially accepted in Myanmar. Previously, the government considered the term an act of treason punishable by imprisonment, alienating those who were pro-democracy. Therefore, maintaining a stable democratic system is now more crucial than ever since most of the leaders actually lack political science training and direct experience with the practice of democracy.⁵ While Myanmar has indeed succeeded in achieving a democratic government, it now requires education and integrity in order to maintain the “discipline-flourishing democracy”⁶ that generals aim for. ?

From “Burma” to “Myanmar”

Initially, Burma was the country's original name since its independence from British rule on January 4, 1948. In 1989, however, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) changed the official English name of the country from the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma to the Union of Myanmar. The military government claimed that the new name symbolized freedom from colonial rule since that was the name the British used when they were in control. It also claimed that “Burma” seemingly gave too much favorability and influence to

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Priscilla Clapp and Suzanne DiMaggio. *Asiasociety.org*. Rep. no. 3. Asia Society, 23 June 2013. Web. 19 Jan. 2014.

⁶ David I. Steinberg. *Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010. Print.

the Burman majority. From the surface, it seemed as if the name change was just a way in which the junta attempted to create equality amongst the nation's many different ethnic groups. Even so, for the majority of Burmese citizens, "Myanmar" symbolized the beginning of the military regime's abusive rule since the name was decided upon without any vote or consent from the public. The new name further asserted the state's supremacy, and today, there is still an obvious divide between those who do and still do not acknowledge the legitimacy of the government. Many actually claim that refusal to accept the name change is a "democratic right."⁷ To move forward, the nation's leaders must now focus on convincing citizens to unanimously agree upon the country's official name.

A New Capital - Naypyidaw

On November 11, 2005, another major change came about when Myanmar's capital changed from Yangon to Naypyidaw, a vast area occupied mainly by government and military officials. The city became an entirely bureaucratic location separate from other states and divisions that make up the local governments while serving as the main place from which major political decisions were going to be made.⁸ Initially, most reacted with the simplest of questions - "Why?" Country leaders stated, as they often did, that the movement was a nationalist effort to cast away Yangon's colonial background. Also, a location far away from the main city makes the new capital less susceptible to foreign influences as well as information leaks to the public. Even so, many citizens felt dubious about the main reason for the sudden change. It is quite possible that the *tatmadaw* (Myanmar's armed forces) wished for isolation in order to avoid directly

⁷ Thomas Fuller. "Burma? Myanmar? New Freedom to Debate Includes Name." The New York Times. The New York Times, 05 Oct. 2012. Web. 21 Sept. 2014.

⁸ Becca Shieler. "The Struggle for Democracy in Myanmar." International Affairs Association. Boston University, 11 Apr. 2011. Web. 21 July 2014.

dealing with graver national issues. If so, then the junta's separation from the rest of the country could pose as yet another obstacle, for administrative leaders would then become even more negligent toward the urgent concerns of the majority. Despite suspicion, the government aimed at persuading people to accept the capital's new location. In March 2009, the Uppasantagi Pagoda was placed in Naypyidaw as means of legitimizing the regime, the capital, and its leaders.

Comparing the 2010 and 2012 Elections

To understand the 2010 elections, consider how and why democratization occurred in the first place. In Myanmar's case, several factors played a role in moving the country toward a democratic system. For one, internal turmoil pushed foreign countries to put external pressures on the military regime. Pro-democracy groups succeeded in ruining the government's international image and convinced Western countries to view Myanmar's regime as one of the world's most repressive ones. Sanctions finally squeezed the regime out of the isolation that it used as protection for so long.⁹ Also, the Arab Spring protests of 2011 in Tunisia and Egypt prompted the generals to make political reforms if they wished to continue consistent rule over the country.¹⁰ As a result, first election in 20 years took place in 2010.

During the parliamentary elections of 2010, Myanmar's ultimate democratic leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, was deliberately left imprisoned to avoid her achieving control once released. The Junta therefore maintained powerful since the new constitution still guaranteed the military a prominent role in politics while Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy, received

⁹ Rodion Ebbighausen. "Myanmar Awaits Freedom 65 Years After Independence." DW.DE. Deutsche Wells, 3 Jan. 2013. Web. Apr.-May 2014.

¹⁰ Hlaing, Kyaw Yin. "Understanding Recent Political Changes in Myanmar." *Economist (US)* 2 March 2014: 22. Print.

an unfair disadvantage. Unsurprisingly, the Union Solidarity and Delevopment Party ended up victorious in the elections. The USDP led by the President won 76% of the military seats in both the national and state parliament.

With the new government, four power centers formed in descending order. At the very top was the President himself, Than Shwe. Under him, the parliament monitored the executive branch and closely watched over governmental activities. Then, the USDP functioned with Thein Sein as its chairman. Finally, the armed forces functioned while the new constitution allowed military representation in both the national and regional parliaments, as well as in the government.¹¹

Two years after the 2010 elections, a new election took place in 2012. Since the former evidently did not create a just situation for all the participants, the new one aimed to be a better, more fair, and revised version of the last election. This time, President Than Shwe resigned and in his place, USDP chairman, Thein Sein, became the new president. Naturally, much of the power transferred to the USDP as well. Also, as soon as Aung San Suu Kyi had been released from house arrest on November 13, 2010¹², she reclaimed her active role in Myanmar's affairs and of course, participated in the elections. Predictably, the NLD, with Suu Kyi as the democratic party's leader, made a sweeping victory in the 2012 by-elections. After Suu Kyi took her seat in the parliament, both she and President Thein Sein developed a working relationship in order to rapidly transform Myanmar, and to reassure citizens.¹³

Freedom of Press

¹¹ Kathy Crowne. "Denying Democracy in Myanmar." *The New York Times* 20 June 2014: 7. Print.

¹² Tin Oo. "Not So Fast." *Economist (US)* 8 Feb. 2014: 39. Print.

¹³ Ian Holliday. *Burma Redux: Global Justice and the Quest for Political Reform in Myanmar*. New York: Columbia UP, 2011. Print.

In the past, the government Under President Than Sein's leadership, however, the country has gone through noticeable reforms. For one, with the release of many sanctions, freedom of expression is increasingly greater in Myanmar. Progress was evident when in 2012, not a single journalist ended up in jail. Magazines and news journals were then able to publish political articles even if they criticized authorities. In August 2012, pre-publication screening and censorship by the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division came to an end. In January 2013, it was replaced with the Copyright and Registration Division. However, the CRD can still threaten newspapers with suspension if it is discontent with a certain publication. The government has also left the creation of a new media law to the Interim Press Council which introduced a new media code of ethics in May 2013. The council provides guidelines to prevent media workers from facing government prosecution,¹⁴ showing that it is still risky, although to a much smaller extent, to show political opposition. Additionally, Myanmar has begun to develop media plurality which allows people access to wider information and idea exposure. In 2012, around 350 journalists existed, and in April 2013, private newspapers began to publish daily.¹⁵ Still, there has not been as much improvement when it comes to broadcast media. Anything that sheds negativity on authorities is automatically censored. As for Internet use, the government has allowed more freedom to surf the web online and, Internet cafes no longer have to face routinely inspectional police visits. In a democratic society, freedom of speech is a requirement that must be fulfilled for it enables the public to actively participate in making decisions.

Demonstration Requirements

¹⁴ Pang Soe. "Interim Press Council Advises Rangroon Newsrooms." *Democratic Voice of Burma* 13 Aug. 2014: 12. Print.

¹⁵ Tomás Ojea Quintana. *Rapport of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar*. Rep. United Nations General Assembly, 23 Sept. 2013. Web. 15 Feb. 2014.

Furthermore, despite improvements in the rights of activists, there are still repressive limitations. Although Myanmar is now more open, a permit from authorities is still necessary in order to carry out peaceful assemblies or protests as stated in the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Act of 2012.¹⁶ If protesters carry out a demonstration without any authorization, they will be arrested under the act. From September to December 2012, many activists were taken into police custody for breaking the rules and disrupting the country. Rather than hastily taking actions on their own, they were supposed to apply for permission to lead a march. The law has actually put many behind bars since its enactment, causing outrage amongst the public. Nonetheless, reactions to demonstrations have undergone a dramatic drop in severity over the last decade.

Release of Political Prisoners

An outcome of Myanmar's recently established freedom of press is the drastic drop in prisoners over the years. At the time during which the military regime held immense power, many activists expressed their opposition toward the government through newspapers, radio broadcastings, and other media. Consequentially, almost all of them ended up imprisoned for years for even the slightest offense. In jail, many endured traumatic experiences in which they underwent torture for questioning purposes, especially in Rangoon's notorious Insein Prison. Interrogators commonly used violence as a means of extracting confessions from the captives, whether they were guilty or not. Today, however, many prisoners of conscience roam free. Eight amnesties have been granted and about 800 prisoners have been released now that a new

¹⁶ Tomás Ojea Quintana. *Rapport of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar*. Rep. United Nations General Assembly, 23 Sept. 2013. Web. 15 Feb. 2014.

government has been formed.¹⁷ On November 16, 2012, President Thein Sein granted the release of more than 50 other prisoners, showing that authorities no longer consider anti-government opinions a crime. The reduction in the number of political prisoners is also due to the agreement that foreign countries would remove their sanctions if Myanmar releases the imprisoned. Even so, there is now an urgent issue concerning how they can readapt to the current world. In former journalist Win Tin's case, he was imprisoned for writing satirical pieces against the regime in his bestselling newspaper, the *Hanthawaddy Daily*.¹⁸ However, even after his freedom in September 2008, he still faced struggles due to 19 years of solitary confinement. Like most of the newly freed, he had difficulty adjusting to his life once again. After many years behind bars, freed prisoners struggle to rebuild past relationships and revert back to old jobs without possessing the required skill sets. Therefore, despite the liberation of most prisoners of conscience, the country must now concentrate on helping them all regain stability in present day society.

Conflict with Ethnic Minorities

Yet another group of people in Myanmar face the government's neglect – Ethnic minorities. For centuries, the Burman ethnic group overshadowed every other minority. For every group, the goal is to preserve individual language and culture. However, doing so is difficult when power and resources are shared unequally.

In Myanmar, minority groups make up more than one-third of the national popularity. More than 540,000 people from minority groups have had their homes taken away from them in Northeast Myanmar alone due to confiscated land and forced labor by army forces. When it

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Donovan, Frank. "Myanmar's Conscience; Win Tin." *Economist* (US) 3 May 2014: 82. Print.

comes to the relationship between them and the military, “degree of intrusion and repression varies amongst states but they all pretty much see the tatmadaw and government as hostility.”¹⁹

Myanmar’s army mainly needs to put a halt to fighting with the Kachin group. Cooperation is especially difficult to achieve when the military constantly desires to control the wealth of resources in the Kachin State.²⁰ For over 20 years, Myanmar’s military authorities, democratic opposition, and minority nationalities have been urged to reconcile by the global community. Rather than just the mere idea of a democratic system, the government must make rational and just decisions about power-sharing. However, the army’s constitution does not include a place for proper political accommodations with minority groups.²¹

Despite the lack of sufficient ethnic minorities’ rights, not all efforts have been futile. A new administration promised discussions about peace with all ethnic armed groups. Also, there are now ceasefire agreements with most of the major ethnic groups and, the government holds political meetings with those groups in order to fix political problems amongs them.²²

Additionally, thirteen military districts in support of the junta’s argument that it will provide more rights to ethnic minorities. Even so, the legitimacy of that statement is still in question. Military control will still exist at local levels and the federalist structure that most minorities want remains unattained.²³ The army probably will not move toward federalism since it would handle some power over to not only the Kachin, but also the Karen and other ethnic groups.

National League for Democracy versus the Central Government

¹⁹ Rodion Ebbighausen. “Myanmar Awaits Freedom 65 Years After Independence.” DW.DE. Deutsche Well, 3 Jan. 2013. Web. Apr.-May 2014.

²⁰ Smith, Martin J. *Burma: Insurgency and the Palitics of Ethnicity*. London: Zed, 1991. Print.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Another issue that still needs resolution is the remaining tension between the National League for Democracy and the central government. After the 2011 democratic transition, Aung San Suu Kyi and the other NLD leaders gradually helped the government win legitimacy from the public as well as the international community. Both factions expressed their respect for one another but need work on cooperation. Liberals in the government realize Suu Kyi is necessary at all costs due to her image as the nation's democratic icon and acknowledge her role in the parliament. Even so, many are still very hesitant to work under her for fear of the NLD taking charge.²⁴ The President and ministers want the NLD to aid the government by running developmental programs but wish for the party to avoid acting like an alternative government.

There are also the opinions of the hardliners to consider. As sincere supporters of the past dictator, Than Shwe, hardliners still wish for the government to function like its predecessor. Even if they trust Suu Kyi, they still feel skeptical toward the other leaders of the NLD. Hardliners worry that the NLD's rising popularity and power will make them take charge of too much, and in turn, disrupt the states.

What needs to take place now between the main government and the National League for Democracy is, simply put, balance. On the NLD's side, competence is necessary now that the political party is no longer unified by shared suffering. It must carry out its duties and be a successful mediator among internal factions. On the other hand, the central government must maintain stability within the country without falling apart as a result of public pressures. While Than Sein and his subordinates hold most of the necessary power to lead a country, the NLD's Suu Kyi possesses the charisma necessary to motivate citizens. The two collaborating groups

²⁴ Oo, Tin. "Not So Fast." *Economist (US)* 8 Feb. 2014: 39. Print.

need to improve communication to better understand the other's goals and motive, and thus, to decrease skepticism in between.

Road to the 2015 Elections

Today, most of the eagerness is aimed at the upcoming election that has been planned to take place in 2015. For most, the election and its campaigns promote stability and will most likely bring in a new generation of political leaders.

Already, the largest candidates are obviously Aung San Suu Kyi, Thein Sein, and Shwemann. Since Suu Kyi is the “figurehead of the democracy movement, daughter of modern Burma’s founder, and revered around the country,”²⁵ a majority of the support goes toward her. However, succession remains the current leader’s choice for fear of the nation’s destabilization.²⁶ Also, Clause 59(f) of the constitution states that “the spouse and offspring of a prospective president cannot owe their allegiance to a foreign power.”²⁷ The clause inserted by the military in 2008 bars Suu Kyi from running for President because of her foreign children, Kim and Alexander Aris, and late British husband, Micahel Aris. On January 31st, the parliament committee claimed that 100000 signatures opposed changes to Clause 59(f) or the guarantee that armed forces get 25% of the seats in the new, future parliament body.²⁸ Also, if Suu Kyi is to run, she must overcome her own personal stubbornness and think more toward what will benefit the country. For one, she should begin by simply addressing the country by its official name “Myanmar” rather than “Burma” when appearing in public. By doing so, she will encourage

²⁵ Aung San Suu Kyi. *Letters from Burma*. London: Penguin, 1997. Print.

²⁶ Oo, Tin. "Not So Fast." *Economist (US)* 8 Feb. 2014: 39. Print.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Andrews, Susan. "Myanmar Profile." *BBC News*. 16 May 2013. Web. 8 Aug. 2014.

others to do the same and create even the slightest sense of agreement between citizens and the government.

Moreover, as of now, there is still no official date for the upcoming elections. According to the election commission's chairman, Tin Aye, however, they will most likely take place in November 2015.²⁹ The elections will fill more than 30 currently empty seats in the parliament with the entire country eager for a new formation.

Conclusion

In a world that is ever so diverse, global politics constantly change. After decades of struggling under harsh authorities, Myanmar is finally a newly-formed democratic society. From 1988 to 2014, the country's official name changed from "Burma" to "Myanmar" and the capital changed from Yangon to Naypyidaw. Also, elections brought forth improvements to the governmental formation. Freedom in the world of Burmese media has grown greatly as well and hundreds of political prisoners have been liberated over the years. Also, the NLD is now recognized as a legitimate party with Aung San Suu Kyi as its leader after her freedom from house arrest. In some aspects, Myanmar's political state has become significantly more reliable.

Yet, in order to progress, people must focus on being open-minded instead of obstinately sticking to traditional conventions and ideas. With the fear of the old regime's return still lurking in the minds of everyday citizens, the government must execute plans much more cautiously to avoid uproar and repetition of past calamities. Also, power distribution is still unequal between the military and ethnic groups so many disagreements have yet to be solved. Most importantly,

²⁹ Aung, San Yamin. "Burma's Opposition Parties Welcome Cancellation of By-Elections." *Myanmar's Opposition Parties Welcome Cancellation of By-Elections*. 8 Sept. 2014. Web. 10 Sept. 2014.

unification of the nation is the first priority, and democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi must be the first to exemplify her desire to cooperate with even her former enemy, the government, in order to improve the country as a whole, connected body. Although Myanmar's future remains murky due to several unresolved issues, the country is nonetheless taking faltering steps towards a stable democracy.

This is a thoughtful, well-written and balanced piece of work and well grounded on a good base of research.

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My grandmother has always had close ties to many Burmese generals, and therefore, has significant insight into political conditions.

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