

Myanmar/Burma's 2015 elections: Democracy at last?

SUMMARY

Twenty-five years ago, Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD party won an overwhelming electoral victory, only to be denied power by the SLORC junta. The 2015 elections give the party and its leader a second chance to end decades of direct and indirect military rule.

In the absence of opinion polls it is impossible to reliably predict the results. While the NLD is widely seen as the likely winner, the incumbent USDP party, closely linked to the former junta, and ethnic parties will probably win substantial minorities.

The 2012 by-elections are an encouraging precedent, raising hope that elections in 2015 will be considerably fairer than in 2010. It is however unlikely that they will be completely transparent and credible, among other things due to the large share of the population excluded from voting.

With one quarter of parliamentary seats filled by military appointees, the NLD needs to win two thirds of elected seats in order to command an overall majority. Failing this, it will have to form a coalition, possibly with the ethnic parties. On the other hand, with military support, the USDP only needs to win one third of elected seats to stay in power.

The newly constituted parliament will then elect a president, who in turn appoints the new government. With Nobel and Sakharov prize-winner Aung San Suu Kyi constitutionally excluded from the presidency, no obvious alternative has emerged.

A victory for the opposition would be a major step forward for democracy. However, difficult reforms will still be needed, and a military backlash cannot be completely excluded either, potentially repeating the tragic events of 1990.



In this briefing:

- Background to the elections
- Which party is likely to do best?
- Will the 2015 election be transparent and credible?
- Who is likely to form the next government?
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Background to elections

Timeline

1948 – independence from British rule. From the very start of its existence, Myanmar/Burma¹ was plagued by long-running unrest, with Communists (initially) and ethnic armed groups challenging the authority of central government.

1962-2010 – military rule. With the country's unity under threat, the military intervened, leading to a lengthy period of military rule with brief democratic interludes.

1990 – elections. Held after a popular uprising in 1988, and won by the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of General Aung San (one of the founders of independent Burma, assassinated in 1947). However, the military refused to give up power, instead forming the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), a junta; Aung San Suu Kyi spent 15 of the ensuing years under house arrest.

2008 – [Constitution](#). Adopted by the junta, which pledged to restore civilian rule.

2010 – elections. Although Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest, her NLD party boycotted the first elections held under the new constitution, widely denounced as [fraudulent](#). The elections were won by the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), backed by the military. Thein Sein, a former general and member of the military junta, became President.

Since 2010 – reforms. The fraudulent 2010 elections and President Thein Sein's military background did not augur well. However, the next five years saw considerable progress, with the release of political prisoners, greater media freedom, economic reforms, and the signing of a [draft ceasefire agreement](#) between the government and 16 rebel groups.

2012 – by-elections were held to fill 46 vacant seats in national and regional legislatures. Encouraged by progress over the previous two years, the NLD contested 44 of these and won 43, with Aung San Suu Kyi herself becoming a member of parliament.

8 November 2015 – elections to the national parliament and 14 regional legislatures, in line with the constitution requiring such elections to be held every five years.

February 2016 – election of new president by the newly constituted parliament.

March 2016 – appointment of a new government by the new president.

Figure 1: Administrative divisions



The country is divided into 7 regions and 7 states (regions and states have a similar status, the difference being that states are mostly inhabited by ethnic minorities such as the Shan)

Constitution

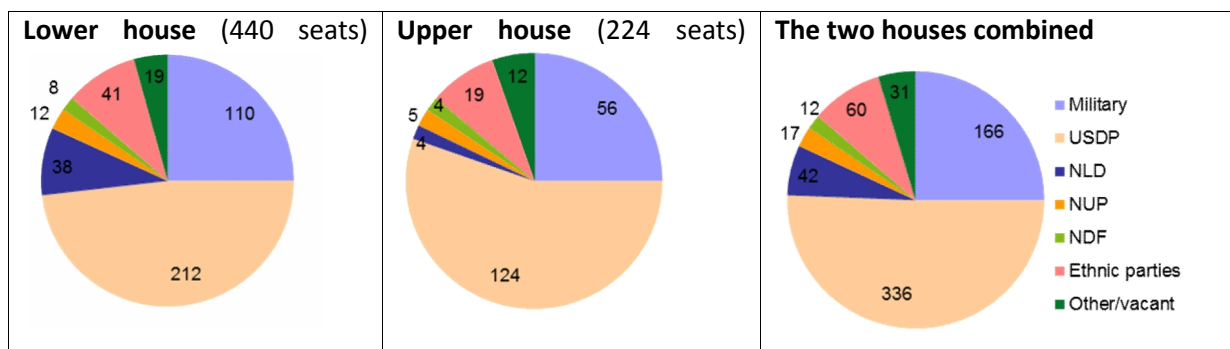
Parliament

The Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Assembly of the Union, referred to in this briefing as 'the Parliament') comprises two houses, the Pyithu Hluttaw (House of Representatives, the lower house) and the Amyotha Hluttaw (House of Nationalities, the upper house). Both are directly elected by universal suffrage at the same time every five years, and have similar powers, with neither house being able to overrule the other. Legislative proposals have to be approved by each house; if one disagrees with the other, a combined vote of the two is taken.

Parliamentary elections use a UK-style 'first past the post' system with one seat per constituency, won by the candidate with the largest number of votes.

A quarter of members in each house are not elected but appointed by the military.

Figure 2: Composition of Parliament



Data source: [website](#) of Myanmar/Burma parliament.

The ruling USDP is by far the largest party in both houses. With the support of the 166 parliamentarians representing the military, it commands an overwhelming majority. However, since the 2012 by-elections Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD has been the second largest party.

President

Having been elected, the Parliament in turn chooses a President to act as Head of State. Three candidates are chosen, one by the 330 elected members of the Pyithu Hluttaw (lower house), one by the 168 elected members of the Amyotha Hluttaw (upper house), and one by the 166 non-elected members representing the military in both houses. Then, the two houses hold a combined vote to decide which of the three becomes President. The remaining two candidates become Vice-Presidents.

The President appoints the government; he/she also nominates the Chief Justice and judges of the Supreme Court.

The current president is [Thein Sein](#) of the USDP party, former general and junta member.

Military

Direct military rule ended in 2010; however, not only President Thein Sein but also most other members of the civilian government in power since then are former junta members. Moreover, the 2008 Constitution drafted by the military allows them to hold on to considerable direct powers in Myanmar/Burma's 'disciplined democracy':²

- Military participation in the 'political leadership role of the State' is a basic constitutional principle (Article 6(f));

- The commander-in-chief of the armed forces appoints one quarter of the members of national and regional parliaments;
- He also appoints the defence, home affairs and border affairs ministers;
- Military representatives in the parliament nominate one of the three presidential candidates and are therefore assured that their candidate will become either President or Vice-President.

Aung San Suu Kyi has [criticised](#) the military's excessive powers as a threat to democracy, but even if her party wins an outright victory in the forthcoming elections, it will not be able to change the Constitution without the agreement of the military's representatives in the parliament, as they hold a blocking minority (any constitutional changes must be approved by over 75% of members of parliament). Thus, in June 2015 the parliament rejected a number of proposed changes, including deletion of Article 59(f) barring anyone with children who are foreign citizens from becoming President (which would have allowed Aung San Suu Kyi to become a candidate), and lowering of the ceiling for approving constitutional amendments to 70% (which would have ended the military's power of veto).

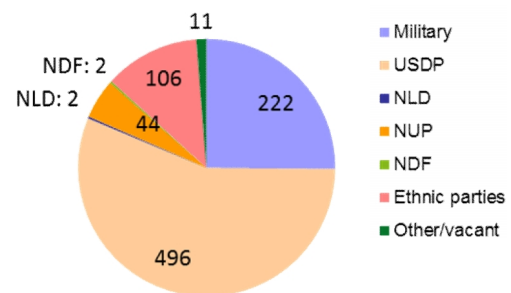
In a recent BBC [interview](#), the Commander-in-chief, Min Aung Hlaing, stated that the military would only be willing to give up some of its powers once peace deals have been concluded with all of Myanmar/Burma's many ethnic armed groups — something which could take many years.

Regions/States

On 8 November 2015, voters will also elect 14 regional/state parliaments. Currently, the USDP together with the military commands a [majority](#) in all of them.

Myanmar/Burma is a highly centralised country, and regions/states have only very limited powers. They cannot elect their own governments (which are appointed by the country's president), they have only limited financial resources ([estimated](#) at less than 5% of total public spending), and their parliaments can only legislate on a very narrow range of policy areas (listed in [Schedule 2](#) of the Constitution), which do not include health or education.

Figure 3: Composition of regional parliaments (as of October 2013)



Data: [ALTSEAN-BURMA](#).

Which party is likely to do best?

Opinion polls

Opinion polls do not give a conclusive picture of how parties will perform. The 2014 [Survey of Burma Public Opinion](#) by the International Republican Institute (IRI) did not ask directly about voting intentions, but respondents showed a high level of appreciation of the ruling party's performance, with approval rates for the President and national government at 91% and 89% respectively. Respondents felt that the incumbent USDP would do a better job than the opposition NLD on improving security, strengthening the nation, improving the economy and ending ethnic conflict, with education being the only area where the NLD inspired greater confidence.³

On the other hand, the same survey showed respondents identifying more closely with the values of the NLD, seen as more likely than the USDP to support women, favour democratic reforms, care about ordinary voters, help the poor, and be trustworthy, as well as having stronger leaders and better policies.

According to a (London) [Times](#) report, a secret poll commissioned by the USDP in February 2015 predicted that the ruling party would win just 5% of seats in the lower house. Meanwhile, the only official [poll](#) of voting intentions published to date was carried out by Taiwan-based Asian Barometer Survey between March and May 2015; this suggested that most voters are still undecided, with 24% intending to vote for the opposition NLD party, 15% for the USDP and 12% for other parties, the remaining 50% not expressing a preference.

Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) – the ruling party

Created in 2010 as the direct successor to the military junta's Union Solidarity and Development Association, the ruling USDP retains close ties to the military. Many of its leaders, such as President Thein Sein and party chairman Htay Oo, are former generals and members of the junta.

Despite these ties, it should not be assumed that the party is monolithic or that it always sees eye-to-eye with the military. There are tensions between President Thein Sein and Shwe Mann, until recently party chairman. Despite himself being a former senior junta member, Shwe Mann has often [sided](#) with opposition parties in challenging government proposals, also [backing](#) a constitutional amendment that would have allowed Aung San Suu Kyi to become president in the face of military opposition. His influence is also probably reflected in the exclusion of all but 59 of 159 [proposed military candidates](#) to run in the forthcoming elections. The latter move may have been the last straw precipitating an August 2015 [purge](#) of Shwe Mann and his faction from the party leadership. However, he stills holds the influential position of speaker of the lower house.

Electoral strengths

- With the backing of the 166 parliamentarians appointed by the military, the party needs to win just 167 seats to command an absolute majority, compared to 333 for the NLD;
- The USDP is by far the [best organised party](#), with the strongest finances;
- Its electoral campaign [emphasises](#) the achievements of the past five years: major political reforms (although recently they appear to have [stalled](#)), a fast-growing economy, the end of the country's international isolation. The [ceasefire agreement](#) signed with seven ethnic armed groups in October should also boost the party's prospects, even if another 12 rebel groups have yet to come on board;
- The USDP could also benefit from growing Buddhist fundamentalism and anti-Muslim sentiment, represented by the [Ma Ba Tha](#) movement. The government has shown itself open to Ma Ba Tha's concerns, for example by supporting a Ma Ba Tha-backed package of four 'Race and Religion Protection Laws', widely [criticised](#) for discriminating against religious minorities such as Muslims and Christians. For its part, Ma Ba Tha has [urged](#) voters to re-elect the USDP, arguing that the opposition is too inexperienced to lead the country;

Weaknesses

- In the 2012 by-elections, the USDP lost 43 out of 44 seats contested with the NLD (the only exception being a seat in which the NLD candidate was disqualified), while in 1990 the military-backed National Unity Party suffered a crushing defeat by Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD. These precedents suggest that the party will pay a high price for its ties with the former junta;
- The USDP will probably be penalised by the 'winner takes all' electoral system (just as in 1990 the NUP won only 2% of seats despite being supported by 20% of the electorate).⁴

National League for Democracy (NLD) — the main opposition party

The NLD was founded in 1988 and has been led by Aung San Suu Kyi since then. It is by far the country's most important opposition party, winning overwhelming victories in the two elections in which it participated, in 1990 and 2012, though without ever having held political power.

While Aung San Suu Kyi remains popular, since her 2012 entry into parliamentary politics enthusiasm has been less unanimous than when she was a political prisoner. There has been [disappointment](#) with her reticence on a range of issues such as the controversial [Letpadaung copper mine](#) or alleged [human rights abuses](#) in ethnic areas. Her party has not opposed persecution of the [Rohingya](#) Muslim minority or discrimination against Muslims generally, and it is not fielding a [single Muslim candidate](#). Kachin rebels in the north of the country also feel they have been [abandoned](#) by her. Admittedly, defending religious and ethnic minorities could mean losing votes in a country where [89%](#) of the population are Buddhist and 68% belong to the Bamar (also known as Burman) majority.

Electoral strengths

- Internationally prominent (a [Nobel](#) and [Sakharov](#) prize winner) and symbolic of resistance to the former junta, the charismatic Aung San Suu Kyi is still the party's main asset;
- The precedents of the 1990 and 2012 elections suggest the party could well garner a majority of the votes, and, thanks to the electoral system, an overwhelming majority of parliamentary seats (as in the 1990 election, when it received 53% of the votes and 80% of seats);

Weaknesses

- As explained above, the number of parliamentary seats which the NLD needs to win in order to form a majority is twice as high as for the USDP.
- The party is dominated by ageing [veterans](#) of the 1988 democracy movement (like Aung San Suu Kyi herself). There are few younger leaders and a lack of prominent personalities apart from Aung San Suu Kyi herself, making it difficult for the party to field a credible alternative candidate for the presidency (from which she is constitutionally barred);
- The party is accused of top-down decision-making, [ignoring](#) suggestions of local branch offices in its choice of candidates for the forthcoming elections. Its list of candidates is also seen as being [insufficiently inclusive](#), leaving out many prominent activists including from the popular 88 Generation movement;
- Aung San Suu Kyi's reticence on divisive ethnic and religious issues has not prevented [attacks](#) on her as a 'Muslim lover', something which could hurt support

for her among the Buddhist majority ([89%](#) of the population), particularly in regions such as Rakhine where religious tensions run high.

Ethnic parties

While the USDP and NLD claim to represent all citizens of Myanmar/Burma, nearly all their leaders come from the Bamar majority. Of the 93 political parties registered for the 2015 elections, 48 represent specific ethnic minorities; eight of these already hold a total of 60 seats in the national parliament. The largest of the ethnic parties are the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) with 22 seats and the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP) with 16. The other ethnic parties are much smaller, mostly with just two or three seats each. A demand common to these parties is for greater regional autonomy.

In past elections, around one third of ethnic minority voters supported ethnic parties.

Electoral strengths

- Ethnic parties are in a better position to defend minority interests than the main parties. Both President [Thein Sein](#) and the [NLD](#) have expressed the desire to move to some form of federalism, but it is difficult for either main party to risk alienating voters from the Bamar majority by identifying with ethnic minority interests;
- The first-past-the-post electoral system favours ethnic parties as they have high concentrations of support in specific regions; in previous elections they consistently won a higher percentage of seats than their share of the vote (1990, 13% and 9% respectively; 2010, 9% and 8%).⁵

Weaknesses

- The ethnic vote is split, with the larger minorities represented by several different parties – as many as [11](#) registered parties in the case of the Shan. There have been talks aimed at merging some of these parties but only one successful merger so far – between the two main Rakhine parties, which combined to form the Arakan National Party;
- In the past, ethnic parties have been outperformed by national parties, capturing less than a third of the ethnic vote. The NLD's [refusal](#) to enter into an electoral alliance with ethnic parties, and its spokesman's [comments](#) that the SNDP 'is not our friend', implies that it is confident of doing well in ethnic areas.

Smaller non-ethnic parties

These include the National Unity Party (NUP), created by the military junta in 1989 as successor to the Burma Socialist Programme Party, and defeated by the NLD in 1990; in the 2010 elections it won just 3% of seats in the Parliament. There is also the National Democratic Front (NDF), a party which split off the NLD in order to stand in the 2010 elections boycotted by the latter party, and won 2% of seats.

Neither party is likely to pick up many seats this time. The NDF has lost its *raison d'être* now that the NLD has returned to parliamentary politics. As for the NUP, it is true that despite the party's past links with the military junta, a surprisingly large number of respondents to the above-mentioned Asian Barometer Survey [poll](#) expressed their

Ethnic minorities in Myanmar/Burma

[68%](#) of the population belong to the Bamar (Burman) majority, living primarily in the Irrawaddy River basin in the heart of the country. Ethnic minorities such as the Shan, Karen and Rakhine inhabit border regions to the north, east and west of the country. Of these, Shan and Kachin states are currently the worst affected by long-running conflicts between the central government and ethnic armed groups.

intention to vote for the party (5% in the country as a whole, as high as 10% in ethnic states); however it is heavily disadvantaged by the first-past-the-post electoral system (for example, in 1990 it won just 2% of seats despite getting 22% of the vote); the same applies to the NDF.

Summary of electoral prospects

With many voters apparently undecided, opinion polls do not conclusively favour one party or the other. Based on past precedents and current developments:

- *The USDP seems unlikely to remain the largest party given its links with the former junta. On the other hand its advantages as incumbent party with a strong track record of economic and political reforms could help it to hold onto a substantial minority, perhaps enough for it to stay in power, with the support of the military.*
- *The bar for the NLD to win a parliamentary majority is set much higher than for the USDP. Nevertheless, it has a realistic chance of scoring a landslide victory.*
- *Ethnic parties will continue to attract a significant share of the ethnic vote.*
- *The NUP and NDF are unlikely to win many seats.*

Will the 2015 election be transparent and credible?

Previous elections

Although international observers were barred from the 2010 elections, there were widespread [reports](#) of electoral fraud, including vote-buying and vote-rigging. The 2012 by-elections were attended by [international observers](#), including from the EU, and considered an improvement, despite some continuing [irregularities](#).

2015 elections — Union Election Commission (UEC)

Elections are managed by the Union Election Commission (UEC). Several [positive signs](#) point to considerable improvements since 2010, and even 2012.

- The UEC has a positive track record in managing the 2012 by-elections;
- There have been major investments in digitising voter lists, with financial and technical support from international donors;
- The UEC is [collaborating closely](#) with civil society and international electoral-support organisations;
- Changes have been made to address concerns in previous elections. For example, voters will be marked with indelible ink to prevent double voting;
- The election will be monitored by international observers, for example from the US-based Carter Centre, who have been in the country since December 2014. The EU is sending [92 observers](#) including 30 long-term observers, headed by European Parliament Vice-President, Alexander Graf Lambsdorff. This is an improvement on 2012, when international observers were [not invited early enough](#) to adequately monitor elections, let alone 2010, when no foreign observers were invited.

However, Aung San Suu Kyi says she is ['very concerned'](#) about irregularities, and several specific issues have been raised:

- There are doubts about the [impartiality](#) of UEC chairman Tin Aye – a former member of the junta, and USDP member of parliament from 2010-2012;
- UEC decision-making [lacks transparency](#); its meetings are not open to observers, nor does it publish minutes;

- [Observers](#) suggest that UEC staff at local level are not yet sufficiently trained to implement electoral procedures properly;
- Around [400 000](#) military personnel will vote from their barracks, to which election officials and observers may have limited access;
- Despite the above-mentioned investment in digitising voter lists, the NLD claims that they are up to [80% inaccurate](#) – a problem which the UEC blames on technical data entry issues;
- There is evidence of bias in the [99 candidates](#) excluded from standing, mainly on the grounds of the constitutional requirement for both a candidate's parents to hold Myanmar/Burma citizenship at the time of their birth – a criterion which has been applied inconsistently, mostly to Muslims and members of ethnic parties; the USDP has not lost even one candidate;
- The UEC has announced [restrictions](#) on statements by political parties in the media – they are allowed to criticise the government, but (since August 2015) not the military or the 2008 constitution;
- The UEC has restricted campaigning by requiring political parties to apply [15 days in advance](#) of giving a speech or organising a rally.

External factors

Numerous external factors outside the control of the Union Election Commission are likely to impair the fairness of elections:

- As many as [10 million voters](#) could be excluded from the elections, including: inhabitants of conflict areas such as [Kokang](#); [740 000](#) persons displaced by conflicts and natural disasters; 850 000 members of the Muslim Rohingya minority and persons of Chinese or Indian descent, who were disenfranchised by a February 2015 government [decision](#);
- Election security is a concern, given rising anti-Muslim sentiments and a history of sectarian violence ([anti-Muslim riots](#) in 2013). The government is planning to recruit an additional 40 000 ordinary citizens as '[special election police](#)', unarmed and with just two weeks' training; it remains unclear whether they will have the capacity to ensure security at polling stations;
- Voter education is lacking – a mere [12%](#) are aware that the President is elected by the parliament rather than ordinary voters, and only 15% correctly named the percentage of parliamentary seats held by the military;
- Most pre-publication censorship has been abolished, and the country has moved up from near the bottom of the [World Press Freedom Index](#) to 144th out of 180 countries in 2015 – ahead of several other south-east Asian countries such as Malaysia and Singapore. However, overly critical journalists still risk [imprisonment](#), particularly on sensitive issues such as the role of the military or Buddhist extremism. Reporting on elections has been restricted – only journalists [registered with district authorities](#) will be allowed to cover elections at local level;
- Electoral disputes are to be handled by the criminal courts, with the UEC having the final say in the event of an appeal. Given low public trust in the criminal justice system – [widely seen](#) as an instrument of repression – and the alleged pro-USDP bias of the UEC, it remains unclear how fairly such disputes will be handled.

Overall, elections are seen as likely to be much fairer than five years ago, but not fully transparent and credible.

Who is likely to form the next government?

With the military appointed to one quarter of seats, a party needs to win at least two thirds of the elected seats to secure a parliamentary majority. The NLD's performance in 1990 and 2012 suggests that this kind of electoral landslide is a realistic prospect.

If the NLD wins the most elected seats, but fails to clear the two-thirds hurdle, it will have to look for a coalition partner: one or several of the ethnic parties, the NUP or even the USDP. While the latter two are less likely given their current or historical links with the military, they cannot be excluded.

For its part, if the USDP wins one third or more of the elected seats, it could stay in power with the support of the military members of parliament.

Election of the President — possible candidates

One certainty is that, unless there is a spectacular change of heart by the military allowing amendment of the constitutional clause (Article 59(f)) barring candidates with children who are foreign citizens from becoming President, **Aung San Suu Kyi** herself will not be eligible to stand. At present, it is not clear who the favoured NLD candidate would be. The party has [announced](#) that it will choose a candidate from within the party, but with deputy leader **Tin Oo** (a former commander-in-chief and veteran activist) having publicly [ruled out](#) his candidacy on the grounds of old age, there is no obvious alternative.

In the absence of a suitable presidential candidate from within the NLD itself, the party might choose to back a candidate from another party. As Aung San Suu Kyi recently [pointed out](#), as head of the parliamentary majority she could still be the *de facto* leader of the country, even with a non-NLD President, given that the President can do very little without the cooperation of the Parliament – he can neither veto nor amend legislation, nor can he dissolve the Parliament, which for its part can impeach him by a two-thirds majority vote.

One non-NLD candidate who could get the party's backing is former USDP chairman **Shwe Mann**, still speaker of the lower house. Shwe Mann has [expressed](#) his willingness to stand as president, possibly in cooperation with the NLD; for her part, Aung San Suu Kyi recently [described](#) Shwe Mann as an 'ally' whom her party 'will work with', but without revealing whether she would back him as presidential candidate.

If the USDP does better than expected in the election, current President, **Thein Sein** might be in a position to seek a second term. His party has [announced](#) that he will not be standing as a parliamentary candidate in the November elections, due to health reasons, although this would not necessarily exclude him from the presidency, as candidates do not have to be members of parliament. However, it seems unlikely that he would get backing from the NLD, after Aung San Suu Kyi's [comment](#) that Shwe Mann's ousting had made it 'clear who is the enemy and who is the ally'.

Finally, commander-in-chief **Min Aung Hlaing** has yet to confirm or rule out his candidacy, but has [emphasised](#) his 'duty to serve the country in whatever role'. If nominated by the military members of parliament he would be assured at least of the vice-presidency; however, given his declared [opposition](#) to any diminution of the military's role in Myanmar/Burma politics and his [tough position](#) on ethnic armed groups, it is unlikely that either the NLD or ethnic parties would back him as President.

Continuation of the reform process

A return to power by a USDP minority backed by military parliamentarians, despite a majority of votes being cast for the opposition, would severely undermine the government's credibility. Given the [slow pace](#) of reforms over the past two years, it is uncertain whether continued USDP rule would see much political progress.

On the other hand, the transfer of power to an NLD-led government would be a major step towards democracy. Of course, further reforms would still be needed, for example in terms of re-defining the military's role and persuading it to give up some of its powers, [described](#) by Aung San Suu Kyi as 'excessive'. The NLD, which to date has been reticent on ethnic issues, would have to try and end long-running conflicts in ethnic areas, with perhaps a move towards greater federalism.

Unfortunately, the possibility of a repeat of 1990 cannot be completely excluded. The [heavy-handed methods](#) used in the August 2015 purge of Shwe Mann's faction from the USDP party leadership on 12 August 2015 recall actions by the former military junta and do not bode well for the future: after security forces invaded the party headquarters on the night of 12 August, the Ministry of Information imposed a press gag on two of the party's newspapers known to support Shwe Mann.

Commander-in-chief Min Aung Hlaing has repeatedly [pledged](#) to respect the election outcome if the opposition wins fairly, but he also recently [defended](#) Thailand's 2014 military coup as being necessary 'to protect the people', and declared that the military might step in if asked to do so by the President in a state of emergency – something which the military would be constitutionally entitled to do, even without the President's request (Constitution, Article 38(c)).

Main references

[Myanmar's Electoral Landscape](#), International Crisis Group. Asia Report No 266, 28 April 2015.

[Myanmar Political Parties at a Time of Transition: Political party dynamics at the national and local level](#), Susanne Kempel, Chan Myawe Aung Sun and Aung Tun, Pyoe Pin Programme, April 2015.

Endnotes

¹ [Myanmar/Burma or Burma](#)? In the country itself, both names are commonly used, Myanmar being the more formal written form, Burma being more colloquial. In 1989 the military junta changed the official name from Burma to Myanmar; the UN and many countries such as France and Japan followed suit, whereas the UK and US still refer to the country as Burma. The EU's [Interinstitutional style guide](#) recommends the form 'Myanmar/Burma', a recommendation followed by most EP resolutions on the country, although [some](#) still refer to it as 'Burma'.

² A term first used in the military junta's 2003 'Roadmap to a Discipline-Flourishing Democracy'.

³ However, this surprisingly positive assessment of the ruling party in the IRI survey should be viewed with caution, being probably less indicative of support for the USDP than reluctance to voice criticism – according to the survey, 53% of respondents felt that most or some people in Myanmar/Burma were afraid to openly express their political views.

⁴ Despite proposals to switch to proportional representation, backed by the USDP majority, it has been [decided](#) to stick to the current system for the 2015 elections. One [theory](#) is that parliamentary speaker Shwe Mann may have done a deal with the NLD, the likely main beneficiary of first-past-the-post, to drop his support for electoral reform in exchange for the NLD backing him as presidential candidate.

⁵ 2010 figures for lower house (Pyithu Hluttaw) only. Source: Union Election Commission.

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