

 HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
DEMOCRACY

E-PAPER

In the wake of the coup: how Myanmar youth arose to fight for the nation



SU MON THANT

Published by Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, December 2021

About the Author

Su Mon Thant is a researcher from Myanmar devoted to the fields of democracy, elections, federalism and social diversity. After being engaged in several democracy movements for many years, the main purpose of her work is to strengthen democratic institutions in Myanmar.

Su Mon holds a Master's degree from Keele University, UK and has been among the first selected members of the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung's "Young Advocates For Democracy (YA4D)" network.

Abstract

The Myanmar military coup, on 1 February 2021, devastated the country and the youth have played a leading role in protesting and resisting the military dictatorship. This paper explores Myanmar youth's motivations for their resistance to the 1 February coup, their imaginations of post-revolution society, and their goals. The paper also attempts to evaluate the many challenges that youth activists are facing in post-coup Myanmar – a state that has again become severely repressive. Based on 34 individual interviews with youth activists involved in the peaceful anti-coup resistance movement in Myanmar, this paper asks: What are the conceptualisations, motivations and expectations held by youth activists participating in the peaceful 2021 anti-coup movement, and what challenges do they face?

*Note: *some names of activists were changed as per their request to protect their identities.*

Contents

Abbreviations	4
1. Introduction	5
2. Methodology	6
3. Youth and activism in Myanmar	7
4. Understanding youth participation	8
5. Conceptualisations of a post-revolution society	10
6. Practical challenges	12
6.1 Lack of security measures	12
6.2 Lack of resources and support	13
6.3 Lack of influence in key resistance platforms	13
7. Conclusion	14
References	15

Abbreviations

CDM	Civil Disobedience Movement
CRPH	Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organisations
NLD	National League for Democracy
NUCC	National Unity Consultative Committee
NUG	National Unity Government
PDF	People's Defence Forces
UEC	Union Election Commission

1. Introduction

Burma's first democratic parliamentary period after independence from 1948-1958, and then 1960-1962, was terminated by a definitive coup that installed an inefficient and violent military government, which subjugated its people for 26 years and took Burma from the richest country in Southeast Asia to one with a status of 'Least Developed Country';^[1] furthermore, it entrenched poverty^[2] and conducted brutal campaigns of violence against its citizens, particularly ethnic minorities in the countryside.^[3] In 1988, a people's revolution attempting to force the military to step down and to reclaim democratic governance by and for the people was violently oppressed.^[4] While the revolution failed in the short term, in 2016 an elected civilian government was finally formed by the 2015 election winners, the National League for Democracy (NLD), though in a power sharing arrangement with the military under their 2008 Constitution.^[5]

Six years later, on 1 February 2021, the military detained the nation's elected civilian government on the first sitting day of parliament for the year. The Myanmar military had launched another coup.^[6] The military's public justification for the 2021 putsch was electoral fraud in the November 2020 elections, and they quickly promised - and then delayed - a new election under a reorganised Union Election Commission (UEC).^[7] The military maintained relations with smaller political parties - some took seats in the military's new State Administration Council - and began announcing measures^[8] to erode the nascent democratic institutions that the country and its people had benefited from since 2011.

The Myanmar public strongly rejected, and continued resisting, the coup. On 2 February 2021, health workers, who were then at the forefront of defending the population from COVID-19, quit their positions and pioneered the new Civil Disobedience Movement^[9] (CDM). Many public servants from different government sectors followed. Pot-banging protests were held^[10] and protest groups formed on the streets despite COVID-19 restrictions on gatherings. Within three weeks, over 40,000 civil servants had joined CDM and millions of people from 247 of Myanmar's 330 townships took to the streets to protest, with a mass protest catalyst event on 22 February known as the 'Five 2s' (22.2.2021).

While people from all walks of life protested, especially in the weeks after the coup, preceding the military's extreme escalation of violence, it was young people between 18-35 years of age who took the lead and made up the majority of the protest leaders. Through extensive audio and video interviews with activists on the ground, this paper tries to understand the nature of this leadership and the character of youth participation in the protests. It explores their motivations for resisting the coup and their conceptualisations of a post-revolution society, tries to understand their goals, as well as the challenges they face in a state that has again become severely repressive.

The paper proceeds in five sections. The first section, which presents the paper's methodology, precedes an analysis of youth participation, which leads into a brief section on the term 'youth', and then a discussion of the conceptualisations and driving factors of Myanmar youth participating in the anti-coup movement. This is followed by a description of the major components of the anti-coup resistance movement in Myanmar today, an assessment of the practical challenges they face, and finally, a concluding section.

2. Methodology

This study answers the research question "What are the conceptualisations, motivations and expectations held by the youth activists participating in the peaceful 2021 anti-coup movement?", and does so through qualitative research methods and an examination of secondary literature. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted over digitally encrypted applications with 34 individual anti-coup activists. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 35, of which 17 were women and two were from Myanmar's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender^[11] (LGBT) community. Participants were selected through the snowballing method, involving further connections being made via the interviewees' own trusted networks. Interviews were not audio recorded for safety reasons and lasted, on average, 45 minutes each. Participants have been kept anonymous for their confidentiality.

The youth who were interviewed belonged to student unions, township-based strike committees, and women and LGBT strike groups, active in four regions where peaceful protests have been ongoing since February 2021: Yangon, Mandalay, Tanintharyi and Sagaing. Youth belonging to religious minorities, including Christians and Muslims, and [ethnic minorities](#) such as Kachin, Kayah, Mon, Rakhine, Zomi, Naga and Thet, all participated, as well as Bamar Buddhists (the majority [ethnic group](#) in Myanmar). Interviews were undertaken between 26 August and 25 October 2021, but due to participants' security situations and the deaths during the third wave of COVID-19, there was an intermission with no interviews for three weeks. Further data was collected by attending five panel discussions organised separately and individually online, each of which hosted many youth activist participants discussing topics of interest.

This study only focuses on the peaceful anti-coup resistance movement; however, the fluid nature of resistance in Myanmar must be acknowledged. It is difficult to accurately verify whether or not the activists involved in peaceful resistance who participated in this study also support, or are involved in, armed resistance, as the military has only increased its repression of the people since the time of data collection.

3. Youth and activism in Myanmar

'Youth' can be defined in many ways, such as with a statistically oriented [strict age cut-off](#), or a vague intermediate position, for example, "the [period between childhood and maturity](#)".^[12] This paper adopts an age cut-off, with youth referring simply to those aged between 18 and 35. In Myanmar, this means youth share similar psychological and social developments, in that they spent 10 formative years (namely a third to two thirds of their total life), living under a different form of society (from reforms in 2011 until the coup in 2021) than most older generations did.

Myanmar youth today can be further subdivided in 'Generation Z' (born between the mid-to-late 1990s and early 2010s), who grew up on digital devices and the internet, attracting attention since the coup.^[13] Another important group are students: in Myanmar, while not all youths are students, all students are youths and student activism has played an important role in democracy movements since independence.^[14] Student activists' demands, focusing on academic freedom, education reform and the autonomy of universities, are tied to Myanmar's social democracy movements.

In general, Myanmar youth are less likely to accept deprivation, propaganda, oppression and social injustice, as they have experienced democratic change and political and economic liberalisation during their childhood and adolescent years. One participant interviewed defined youth as "those who rebel and those who believe things only when they see with their own eyes".^[15] Another, a 20-year-old student interviewee, said: "I am a student union member. I am responsible to carry the union's historical mandate - to fight against injustices".^[16]

Myanmar youth lead the protest movement, but this is only one of three components in Myanmar's peaceful anti-coup resistance movement, the other two being CDM, which includes people from all walks of life, and the diplomatic front. The Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), formed by politicians purporting to represent the elected members of the government prevented from forming on 1 February by the coup, and the National Unity Government (NUG) in exile, formed in turn by approval from the CRPH, leads the diplomatic front and provides an alternative national political leadership to the military; however, as discussed later, not all youth activists unequivocally approve or agree with CRPH and NUG positions.

The first post-coup peaceful protests focused on rejecting the coup and demanding democracy. As protests continued, they came to be thought of as a "revolution" by participants and new political goals emerged for different groups. Beginning on 9 February, the military targeted these peaceful protests with violence. According to the [Assistance Association for Political Prisoners](#), as of 5 November 2021 the military has killed 1,242 and arrested 7,038 civilians since the coup.

On 7 September 2021, the NUG officially declared a people's defensive war against the military. Furthermore, the consistent murder and massacre of protesters has pushed some peaceful protesters to armed resistance. Over 300 armed groups have formed since the coup and are now operating as self-proclaimed 'People's Defence Forces' (PDFs), fighting the military in pitched battles across the country with improvised explosive devices, in many cases in cooperation with ethnic armed organisations (EAOs).^[17] Recently, these groups have targeted the military and police, military-owned business, and pro-military supporters.

4. Understanding youth participation

In the first week after the coup, when the military had not yet started killing protesters and people felt like they could safely gather to protest, thousands of youths chanted "We are young people! We have a future!" on the streets to highlight the direct and immediate consequences of the military coup on their lives; furthermore, during data collection, activists often offered personal stories as expressions of the wider issues caused by the coup, and ongoing military rule, that they are resisting. One female student activist had been previously imprisoned for her activism and was released only a few days before the coup. She was immediately targeted for re-arrest by the military after the coup took place. Moving from house to house in hiding, she said: "I lost a few years locked up in prison. The first thing I wanted to do when I got out was to finish school and study abroad".^[18] The coup crushed her bright future and reawakened her activism.

Other stories were not so dramatic, but several people interviewed had received job offers in Myanmar and even abroad just before the coup,^[19] and some had been recently promoted in their jobs^[20] or had won scholarships and were waiting to travel abroad for study.^[21] These highly motivated youths, their optimism shattered, felt they had no choice but to protest and face the violence of the military. In general, Myanmar youth were optimistic that the country had managed to successfully run its November 2020 election during a global pandemic, with an unvaccinated population, and that there would be another five years of a civilian government ensuring political stability. They were shocked by the immediate negative effects of the coup, and the repression of the military reignited their dormant memories of living under full military rule in their childhood and/or adolescence.

Many youths have memories of suppression, censorship, propaganda and poverty from living under the military regime – in their own words, it was "a dark age". One interviewee said, "I do not want to return to the time when only the rich could go and study abroad and only corrupt military leaders could receive business rent".^[22] Recalling the military's mismanagement of natural resources, insufficient electricity and bad infrastructure, another said "I don't want to go back to the time that we got electricity only in shifts".^[23] Another interviewee said, "we must resist the coup as past experiences indicate education, economic and public health will only be worse".^[24]

One monk interviewed said, “I stayed silent when the military oppressed religious minorities in the past. I can no longer do so.”^[25] A young mother interviewed said, “we cannot afford to let our kids suffer like we did. This must end now”.^[26] An ethnic Lisu who grew up in Kachin State stated matter-of-factly, “I’ve grown up seeing the cruelty of the military and I do not want the next generation to experience the same”.^[27] An 18-year-old said, “the military killed monks in front of my eyes”, referring to protests in 2007 that he witnessed when he was only four years old. Some young interviewees did not bring up past difficulties in detail, but simply noted the comparatively better situation under the NLD government in the period from 2016 to 2021 in terms of mental peace and security. One interviewee said, “I do not say the NLD is perfect. But I had a good five years when I did not need to be afraid of anyone”.^[28]

The timing of the coup less than four months after the November 2020 elections that so many in Myanmar participated in with pride, and the fact that the military used electoral fraud as its excuse to arrest incoming politicians and seize power, was a key factor turning youths into activists in the early weeks after the coup. Generation Z youth were first-time voters in 2020 and expressed sincere attachment to their political choices.^[29] This group was used to party politics, believed their votes would be respected, and took for granted that any case of institutional failure would be pursued through legal means. A 20-year-old student activist stated that her involvement related directly to what she said were “illogical and unacceptable” voter fraud claims.^[30] Another interviewee said, “We did all the right things to register on voter lists. This included going from office to office and dealing with forms. Now those votes have been annulled ... [But] I know who I voted for”.^[31]

Even those disenfranchised (in Rakhine State, the 2020 elections were cancelled in 36 seats on security grounds, disenfranchising more than 1.1 million voters) disputed the coup on procedural grounds. One ethnic Rakhine interviewee said, “The elections were cancelled in many places in Rakhine State, but even we [who had their voting rights violated] believe in using legal causes to seek electoral justice”.^[32] At the beginning of the anti-coup protests, protesters in several locations chanted, “Which party did we vote for? We voted for the NLD”, stressing that they believe the electoral results reflected the popular will; they also chanted, “Was that electoral fraud? Just come out and see the crowd!”.

Young student activists who shared information in the wake of the coup quickly came to understand the military-drafted 2008 Constitution as a major factor. This constitution allows the military to hold de facto power by giving them 25 per cent of seats in the parliament and a majority seat in the National Defence Security Council, the ruling body in a state of emergency. The military claimed the coup was constitutional, as the military-nominated vice president transferred power to the military commander-in-chief in the absence of the president (who under the constitution, must be absent for a significant reason, such as incapacitation or death).^[33] However, the elected president claimed in court that he was forced to retire on grounds of “ill health”, before he was arbitrarily detained.^[34] One interviewee said, “the military took our sovereignty by arms”, pointing out the hypocrisy of the military violating people’s supposed fundamental constitutional rights in its “constitutional

coup".^[35] A student activist from Mandalay said, "we [already] knew that the military could stage a coup as long as the 2008 Constitution was in place. We never supported the civilian government working under this undemocratic constitution and sharing power with the military".^[36] More and more anti-coup protesters called for abolishing the 2008 Constitution, and on 1 April, the CRPH announced its abolishment, a key achievement of the early peaceful protests.

All youths interviewed considered the military coup as a direct threat to their sovereignty and their future dreams. The more the military persecutes peaceful activists, the more they take it personally. An interviewee said, "Sometimes I feel exhausted. But my friends who are imprisoned and those who gave up their lives in this revolution are what keep me going".^[37] The question then becomes "going towards what?". The research participants are all committed activists with no desire to submit to dictatorship. They say they will continue until their cause succeeds. But apart from simply resisting the coup, what are their demands and what will activists determine as 'success'?

5. Conceptualisations of a post-revolution society

Most participants interviewed made three key demands at the beginning of the anti-coup protests: 1) overturn the military coup; 2) return to democracy; and 3) release the arrested leaders and protesters. As military persecution of the people continued to escalate in the weeks and months after the coup, many activists and protesters came to take a stand on wider political and social issues and adjust their positions. This meant refining their political demands and priorities. After analysing the data, three groups of activists in the anti-coup resistance movement can be identified based on their shifting and evolving demands.

The **Democrats** focus on ending the military rule and claim a people's elected government. This group does not want any negotiations with the military and refuses to allow impunity; moreover, they want justice for serving military generals, institutional reform and an apolitical military placed under a civilian government. However, this group is ambivalent regarding who should immediately rule in the military's place. They support an NLD government based on the 2020 election results, or rule by the exiled NUG, or even a new government formed on the basis of the CRPH's '[Federal Democracy Charter](#)', which lays out a road map: draft a federal constitution, approve it in the people's assembly and form the people's government. This group's strategy is to endorse local, regional and international recognition of the NUG government and to cut support to the military by boycotting taxes and military businesses, and discouraging international economic cooperation and payments to the military, as well as collecting evidence of military crimes for prosecution under the new government.

The **Federalists** want to end the military rule in conjunction with strong federalism. This group rejects returning to the status quo with an NLD government formed from the results of the 2020 election, which they point out was held under the “abolished” 2008 Constitution. Instead, they want to build a federal state with a federal constitution *first* and a federal government installed by that new arrangement. Some participants interviewed said that, in this arrangement, some administrative boundaries between states and regions could change or be removed. Non-Bamar participants interviewed stressed their preference for self-determination in the new arrangement. An ethnic Naga activist said, “I prefer territory-based federalism as it will be complicated if we go for identity-based federalism”,^[38] while a young female ethnic Kachin said, “We say ‘Awn Dawm’ as our ultimate goal. The overall concept would be self-determination”.^[39] This group’s main strategy is lobbying on policy in addition to the activities carried out by democrats. Federalists are very cautious about the NUG government and the CRPH, and do not support them without their strong commitment and action towards an improved federal state, power sharing and absolute rejection of the 2008 Constitution.

The **Intersectionalists** want the end of the military rule, a strong federal state and a just society that guarantees fundamental rights, justice and equality for all. One member of the women’s strike committee said, “We need to show our brave participation in the movement so that we will not be discriminated against later in politics”.^[40] A party member and an electoral candidate said “women’s issues were treated as second class even under democratic institutions ... women’s issues will have no place under military rule”.^[41] A participant from the LGBT strike committee said, “we need to make our voices heard to build the nation we want to live in”,^[42] and a participant belonging to a religious minority said, “I do not want to be treated as a second-class citizen anymore. We do not want to live in fear. We want freedom of faith”.^[43] This group’s main strategy is elevating the voices of all minorities and focusing attention on Myanmar’s diversity. They identify problems far beyond the crisis of the coup and address entrenched social and cultural issues. In addition to pursuing the activities of democrats and federalists, this group is continuing more often with visible street protests and non-violent campaigns to show their participation in the social movement, demand their rights, raise public awareness and make their voices heard.

All those involved in the anti-coup resistance movement share the common goal of ending the military rule. This is challenging as the Myanmar military has dominated the nation for 60 years – it is supremely powerful, with businesses deeply embedded in the country’s economy and many allies, from local proxy militias in the border regions to powerful members of the United Nations Security Council who veto in their favour. Furthermore, the Myanmar military has proven time and time again that its leaders will always put their own personal interests above that of millions of citizens.

However, the other causes pursued by the three groups are quite different. The causes of the democrats are direct and narrow, focusing on the immediate actions they see as needed to put the nation back on track. This group has the advantage of wide public participation, but its limited goals do not satisfy the other two groups, who are actively engaging and leading

the resistance movement. While the aim of federalists is to best guarantee a federal state for ethnic minorities, agreeing on federal terms in parallel to the anti-coup movement costs time. While intersectionalists have strong and equitable ideals for a post-revolution society, this requires long-term commitment and devotion. Reaching these goals is a challenging task, even more so, there will always be more causes to pursue in a post-revolution society: as one female student union member said, “As long as there is injustice and oppression, there will be causes, and we will continue to fight to achieve our goals. There will always be something to fight for”.^[44]

6. Practical challenges

Anti-coup youth activists face challenges in reaching their goals, including lack of security measures, lack of resources and support, and lack of platforms to influence policies, in addition to the general challenges of surviving military persecution with a lack of basic services in a health and economic crisis.^[45]

6.1 Lack of security measures

The military has total impunity and the ability to arbitrarily arrest any youth at any time.^[46] Methods commonly used include suspending laws requiring court approval or a warrant and reintroducing the overnight registration law allowing them to search any house, at any time, without a warrant.^[47] They can also check which household family members are not currently at home and demand why. Recently, the military instructed house owners not to rent apartments to unknown tenants, ordered the public not to wear masks and told troops to inspect those with “darker skin and a rough look”. There have been several incidents of youths being arrested for sharing anti-coup memes on social media or for having pro-democracy material on their personal devices, discovered under duress when stopped by the military or police at the many road checkpoints now common across the country.^[48] When arrested, civilians are brought to military interrogation centres where they are often tortured, sexually abused, disappeared or killed before they can face a court. If they reach a court, there is nothing resembling a legitimate legal system in place, and judges use political verdicts such as long-term or life imprisonment or death sentences. No laws or institutions protect falsely arrested youths or political detainees.

Many young anti-coup protesters and activists are given no choice but to flee their homes for EAO-controlled areas, where they can eat, sleep and discuss the military’s crimes openly and without fear of subjugation while undertaking military training. One interviewee from Yangon said, “I am going to stay here as long as the situation allows. I will flee to the forest [EAO area] when it is impossible to continue staying here”.^[49] Not all who are forced to flee go directly to EAO areas. Another who left their home said, “my group is taking shelter in a village that used to support us, but locals there say they no longer believe in non-violent protest – they think it is useless in the face of brutal suppression by the military”.^[50]

In this way, the lack of security measures in activists' home townships not only threatens their wellbeing, but also pushes them away from peaceful protest and towards armed resistance.

6.2 Lack of resources and support

Young anti-coup activists are mostly students or people striking with CDM, leaving them financially dependent on public contributions. One anti-coup protester interviewed said, "it is costly organising protests as there are particular items we need, as well as printing, transportation fees, basic living costs, and we cannot work or live a normal life".^[51] The military is actively trying to control cash flow in order to cut financial support to those involved in the anti-coup resistance movement. They track down and freeze bank accounts of account holders they suspect are connected to the resistance, and they arrest and kill those they suspect of providing funds to the CDM and armed PDFs. As a result of intense attention and pressure from the military, youth activists and other members of the anti-coup resistance movement face huge financial difficulties – not only for continuing their opposition to the coup and military rule, but in simply meeting rising living expenses. Blocking revenue streams to the resistance is a basic tactic of the military regime, and over time this poses huge challenges for youth leaders to mobilise and organise people.

6.3 Lack of influence in key resistance platforms

The NUG and the CRPH are leading political decision-making bodies in the anti-coup resistance movement, but less than 10 percent of their members are youths under the age of 35. Youths from all segments of society – particularly those belonging to persecuted minority communities such as the ethnic Rohingya or LGBT community – have huge concerns regarding whether their voices will be heard. Structurally, the National Unity Consultative Committee (NUCC) is the only body where diverse interest groups (both *de jure* and *de facto*), including the youth-led strike committees, can provide policy inputs.^[52] However, the composition of the NUCC and member groups, the criteria, and their terms of reference have not been agreed on at the time of writing. Myanmar youth are concerned that more politicians and elites will compromise their stance and negotiate with military leaders or return to a hybrid power sharing system under the 2008 Constitution. They are concerned that the military will have impunity for the crimes they have committed on civilians and minorities. An activist interviewed said, "We will keep going and make our voices heard. At the same time, we need to prepare what to do next if [anti-coup] decision-makers agree to negotiate with coup leaders".^[53]

A bigger challenge awaits youths in their desired post-coup, post-military society. This is to tackle the disarmament of resistance groups, find common ground across communities, create social harmony between those who supported and resisted military rule, and heal mass trauma. The whole of society, not just the thousands of actively repressed political prisoners, have suffered trauma from decades of continuous military persecution. Even many of those who were not directly threatened by the military suffered survivor's guilt. Many participants interviewed knew of cases of self-harm or suicide among youths since the coup.

Non-Bamar youth activists will play an important role in bringing society together in a post-coup, post-military Myanmar, where some political parties are split. In Mon State, the leading Mon political party – the Mon Unity Party – accepted a seat in the military council, dividing its supporters in two. Similarly, in Rakhine State, the majority party – Arakan National Party – took a seat in the military council, keeping the ethnic Rakhine community distanced from the worst consequences of the military coup and raising social issues. A young Rakhine member interviewed said, “the silence of Rakhine State community-based organisations on the military coup puts the democratic practices they were previously preaching into question”.^[54]

7. Conclusion

While political explanations of the military coup are available, the youth of Myanmar has taken the military coup as a direct threat to their lives, their futures and their rights. After witnessing arrests, tortures and killings of their beloved friends, family members and relatives, the military coup has only become more personal. At the same time, as youths from political or other backgrounds have continued protesting, many have come to learn more about social and political issues and believe there is now a chance to build a nation that respects self-determination, equality, freedom and human rights.

The common goals of youth in the anti-coup movement are not impossible to achieve, but not simple either. The resistance has been ongoing for nine months and Myanmar is currently in need of humanitarian assistance.^[55] While there is no official and easy way to protect and support the youths leading social movements in Myanmar, one option is to find ways to give assistance directly to those who are inside the country, particularly jobs and study opportunities. In the longer term, there should be space and platforms that youths can use to raise their voices. Most participants interviewed stressed that further education reform is still needed in Myanmar.

In a post-coup scenario, trauma healing will be a necessity. A former prisoner said, “we cannot achieve transitional justice without trauma healing first”.^[56] Last but not least, overturning the military and rebuilding the state is a challenging task for the people of Myanmar. If one task is to be given to the young people involved in the 2021 social democracy movements, then it would be the constructive role of youth in state building. The military coup divided society and added even more unresolved issues. It is a challenging task for youths who were ignorant of the military’s violence against ethnic and religious minorities in the past to acknowledge, or even rectify, their ignorance and work with ethnic nationalities in creating a just society that ensures equality and self-determination. Reconciliation between ethnic and minority groups will be left in the hands of youth activists, who will be best positioned to manage a newly united federal nation.

References

- [1] U Myint. (2008). Myanmar's GDP growth and investment: Lessons from a historical perspective. In M. Skidmore & T. Wilson (Eds.), *Dictatorship, disorder and decline in Myanmar* (pp. 51-63). ANU E Press. <http://press.anu.edu.au?p=102401>
- [2] Turnell, S. (2011). Myanmar's Fifty-Year Authoritarian Trap. *Journal of International Affairs*, 65(1), 79-92.
- [3] There is overwhelming evidence that the Myanmar military, also known as the Tatmadaw, has and continues to conduct scorched earth campaigns against civilians, entraps child soldiers, and commits many other war crimes against its own people, peaceful, protesting or otherwise. See Human Rights Watch (2007; 2017), Mahar Insights (2021) and much more; the literature on the military's atrocities and failings is voluminous.
- [4] Lintner, B. (1990). *Outrage: Burma's Struggle for Democracy*. White Lotus.
- [5] Loring, N. (2019). *The Roadmap to Liberalization: Myanmar's Transition from Military to Civilian Rule* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Northern Illinois University.
- [6] The coup was rumoured for weeks, but right up to the very day before the military stole power it denied its chief was threatening to stage a coup, saying the media had misinterpreted his words.
- [7] Although local and international observers certified the election as being conducted without serious irregularities, the military reportedly detained electoral officers and pressured them to change results, with the new military-appointed UEC claiming there were more than 11 million fraudulent votes.
- [8] The military-appointed UEC annulled the 2020 election results on 26 July and subsequently scrutinised political party finances. Both decisions met criticism and were widely seen as an attempt to abolish the National League for Democracy party and reduce the number of parties or rival parties. On 14 October, the UEC invited political parties and civil society organisations to discuss an electoral system change from First-Past-the-Post to Proportional Representation, claiming it was needed to adapt to the changing context and to hold free and fair multi-party elections.
- [9] The CDM sends a strong message to the military junta that they cannot rule effectively without the will of the people. Its methods range from avoiding paying public taxes to boycotting military companies to non-cooperation in all forms with the junta, for example, disregarding local administrators. See the National Unity Government report on the Myanmar's Civil Disobedience Movement. Available online: https://www.burmalibrary.org/sites/burmalibrary.org/files/obl/2021-09-17-210916_CDM_Report_edit-ed-signed.pdf (Accessed November 1, 2021).
- [10] Pot-banging comes from Myanmar's new year tradition of chasing out devils with noise. In this case, the military are the devils.
- [11] Chua, L. J., & Gilbert, D. (2015). Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Minorities in Transition: LGBT Rights and Activism in Myanmar. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 37(1), 1-28.
- [12] Not to mention the myriad scholarly definitions based on and within disciplines.
- [13] Jordt, I. Tharaphi Than, & Sue Le Yin. (2021). *How Generation Z Galvanized a Revolutionary Movement against Myanmar's 2021 Military Coup* (Trends in Southeast Asia Issue 7). ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute. https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/TRS7_21.pdf
- [14] Nang Mo Lao Rives. (2014). *University Student Activism in Burma/Myanmar during the 1980s* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Kansas.

- [15] Hein Ye, personal communication, October 6, 2021.
- [16] Su Su, personal communication, August 27, 2021.
- [17] Ethnic armed organisations are armed actors fighting for their right to self-determination. After the 1988 uprising, student activists sought refuge in territories controlled by EAOs and formed a student army to fight with EAOs against the Myanmar military. After the 2021 coup, a new generation of youths sought refuge in EAO-controlled territories and undertook military training.
- [18] Kayti, personal communication, October 8, 2021.
- [19] On October 15, the military changed the rules and requirements for outgoing migrant workers, making it substantially more difficult for Myanmar citizens to escape the country's devastated economy and work abroad to support their families. The reason for the changes is still being speculated about by analysts.
- [20] One activist interviewed had been elected as a first-time MP in the November 2020 elections and was on the eve of taking her seat. The 28-year-old female candidate said, "I had to work so hard to win the elections. There were many challenges for a female ethnic candidate like me to be elected. Now all that hard work was in vain. I can do nothing for my constituents at this time of crisis", (Moe Moe, personal communication, September 24, 2021).
- [21] Regarding youth capacity development, one interviewee from a local organisation based in Mon State stated that the organisation's youth development projects stopped immediately after the coup, suggesting many youths had similar experiences – people involved in civil society saw the chilling effect of the coup straight away.
- [22] Thin Thin, personal communication, August 26, 2021.
- [23] Phoe La, personal communication, September 18, 2021.
- [24] Su Su, personal communication, August 27, 2021.
- [25] U Thudana, personal communication, September 30, 2021.
- [26] Ei Ei, personal communication, August 26, 2021.
- [27] Mie Mie, personal communication, October 12, 2021.
- [28] Kyi Kyi, personal communication, September 22, 2021.
- [29] Kyal Sin, a 19-year-old ethnic Chinese Myanmar who was shot in the head and killed by police during a peaceful protest, becoming one of the movement's early martyrs, was a first-time voter. The media reported she published a post on her social media account in which she wrote about casting "a ballot from the heart" with pride on 8 November, the Election Day.
- [30] Myat Yu, personal communication, October 22, 2021.
- [31] Zin Zin, personal communication, October 25, 2021.
- [32] Aye Nu, personal communication, September 28, 2021.
- [33] Though this was disputed almost immediately by the foremost foreign scholar of Myanmar's constitutions, Melissa Crouch.
- [34] When President Win Myint refused and told the generals threatening him that they should handle things in accordance with the law and not stage a coup, they threatened to "harm" him.
- [35] Aye Ye, personal communication, September 1, 2021.

- [36] Aung Aung, personal communication, October 5, 2021.
- [37] Lat Lat, personal communication, June 5, 2021.
- [38] Aye Ye, personal communication, September 1, 2021.
- [39] May, personal communication, September 20, 2021.
- [40] Naing Naing, personal communication, October 5, 2021.
- [41] Moe Moe, personal communication, September 24, 2021.
- [42] Phyto Phyto, personal communication, September 23, 2021.
- [43] Kyaw Kyaw, personal communication, October 6, 2021.
- [44] Su Su, personal communication, August 27, 2021.
- [45] Myanmar Economy Expected to Contract by 18 Percent in FY2021: Report (Press Release 2022/003/EAP). (2021). *The World Bank*. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/07/23/myanmar-economy-expected-to-contract-by-18-percent-in-fy2021-report>
- [46] A 20-year-old protest leader said, “young people are targeted for arrests more than others as the military is convinced that Generation Z is leading the anti-coup movement” (Lat Lat, personal communication, September 29, 2021).
- [47] The overnight guest registration law, before being abolished by the NLD, was used to suppress political movements and to socially punish politicians and activities. Under the law, residents face a fine or imprisonment if they do not report guests to local authorities.
- [48] Town entry gates and what used to be COVID-19 checkpoints are now guarded by the military and police where they inspect people and tax or block transport of goods. There have been cases of sexual harassment, beatings and even killings of those who refused to stop their motorbike or turn around. For example, two men were knocked off their motorbike by a police truck and severely wounded at a checkpoint, and three young men were shot and killed for avoiding another checkpoint, both in Monywa Town.
- [49] Nyi Nyi, personal communication, October 12, 2021.
- [50] Zaw Zaw, personal communication, October 8, 2021.
- [51] Phoe La, personal communication, October 8, 2021.
- [52] According to the upcoming Federal Democracy Charter Part II, the National Unity Consultative Committee (NUCC) will be formed with CRPH, political parties, EAOs, CSOs, CDM groups, strike committees and representatives nominated by the NUG to collaborate in the implementation of a Constitutional Convention, enacting a Federal Democracy Constitution and convening a national referendum.
- [53] Lin Lin, personal communication, September 21, 2021.
- [54] Aye Nu, personal communication, September 28, 2021.
- [55] UNHCR RBAP. (2021, November 3). *Myanmar Emergency Update as of 1 November 2021*. UNHCR Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific.
- [56] Tun Tun, personal communication, October 12, 2021.

Imprint

Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung European Union

Rue du Luxembourg 47-51, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

Contact: Florian Christl, Head of Programme – Young Advocates For Democracy (YA4D)

Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung European Union, Brussels

E Florian.Christl@eu.boell.org

Place of publication: <https://eu.boell.org/>

Release date: December 2021

Editor: Chris Meikle, Brussels

Illustration: Pia Danner, p*zwe, Hannover

Layout: Micheline Gutman, Brussels

License: Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0),
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung European Union, Brussels.