



BRIEFING PAPER

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Myanmar: 2020 parliamentary election

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Contents:

1. Background
2. 2020 Parliamentary election
3. Post-election events



Contents

Summary	3
1. Background	4
2. 2020 Parliamentary election	6
2.1 Political parties	6
2.2 Leading figures in Myanmar politics	8
2.3 Election campaign	11
2.4 Election results	12
3. Post-election events	14
3.1 Immediate aftermath	14
3.2 Military coup and state of emergency	14
3.3 International reaction	15

Summary

Myanmar, also known as Burma, held a general election on Sunday 8 November 2020, to elect members to both houses of its parliament.

The election campaign began two months earlier, under the cloud of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Active campaigning was limited due to travel restrictions and other measures were imposed to protect the population, including a lockdown in the western state of Rakhine and parts of Yangon, Myanmar's largest city. The capital, Naypyitaw, also saw restrictions enforced.

During the election campaign period, Myanmar's Union Election Commission (UEC) announced that voting would not be held in constituencies of the Rakhine, Kachin, Kayin, Mon and Shan States and the Bago Region. The UEC said that these areas did not meet the conditions required to hold a free and fair election.

The 2020 election was seen as a test of Aung San Suu Kyi's leadership and her popularity within Myanmar, which stayed strong domestically despite growing disillusionment internationally, following her failure to condemn the military for their actions against the Rohingya.

The UEC published the official results of the election on 15 November 2020 and these showed the National League for Democracy (NLD) had secured a landslide victory, winning a total of 396 seats across both houses. This was well above the 322 required for a parliamentary majority.

The military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) came second, but rejected the results and immediately waged a campaign to discredit the election, alleging widespread errors in voter lists.

On 1 February 2021, the day the new Parliament was scheduled to convene for a planned session to confirm the new government, the Tatmadaw (Myanmar's influential military) seized power in a military coup.

State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, President Win Myint and other senior political leaders were detained by the military and a year-long state of emergency was declared.

Many in the international community have condemned the coup and urged the military to release the detainees and allow the newly elected Parliament to sit.

1. Background

Legislative elections in Myanmar take place every five years. The bicameral legislature – the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Assembly) – comprises the lower chamber Pyithu Hluttaw (People’s Assembly) and the upper chamber Amyotha Hluttaw (House of Nationalities).

Candidates are unable to stand for election if they or their parties accept support from foreign governments or religious organisations. Anyone married to a foreign national is barred from holding political office and members of religious orders and destitute persons are not permitted to vote.¹

Myanmar operates a first-past-the-post electoral system, with constituencies representing a particular region.

The country is divided into 330 constituencies, based on township divisions and population, each with a single elected representative. The elected representatives from the townships, along with military appointees, form the People’s Assembly.

The House of Nationalities has 12 representatives from each state and region, plus additional military appointees. Representatives are elected from across the whole state or region and the 12 with the highest number of votes win. As such, a region could have representatives from different political parties.²

Under a provision of the 2008 constitution, one quarter of the seats in both chambers are reserved for appointed representatives of the armed forces. So, 56 of the 224 seats in the House of Nationalities, and 110 of the 440 seats in the People’s Assembly, are reserved for the military. This demonstrates the military’s leading role in Myanmar’s political scene.

Ministers for defence, home affairs, security and border affairs must be members of the military and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces is authorised to exercise all state power should an emergency arise that threatens the disintegration of the union, the disintegration of sovereignty or the loss of national sovereignty.³

The military is immune from prosecution for any actions undertaken during emergency rule.

Myanmar experienced almost 50 years of military dictatorship. Following the 2010 general elections – which were said to be rigged in favour of the military’s Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) – the country underwent a series of political reforms from 2011.

November 2015 saw the first free general elections since 1990 and a victory for the National League for Democracy (NLD). The NLD formed a

¹ [The Constitution \(Myanmar\)](#), Europa World online, Routledge [accessed 2 February 2021]

² [How do elections work in Myanmar?](#) Myanmar Electoral Resource and Information Network [accessed 2 February 2021]

³ Op cit.

new government in 2016 with Htin Kyaw as the first non-military president since 1962. Aung San Suu Kyi was given the newly-created position of State Counsellor and was de-facto head of government.

On 1 July 2020, Myanmar's Union Election Commission (UEC) announced a general election would be held on 8 November. The Myanmar Times reported a total of 1,171 national, state and regional seats would be contested in the election, with polling set to take place in all townships, including areas considered conflict zones and self-administered regions.⁴

However, several Rohingya candidates and those from other ethnic minorities were barred from standing in the election. In October 2020 the UEC cancelled voting in large parts of Rakhine state – where fighting between the military and the Arakan Army (comprised mainly of the Buddhist Rakhine ethnic group) has killed dozens and displaced tens of thousands.⁵

Elections were also cancelled in other conflict-hit states, including Shah and Kachin.

These cancellations meant two million people – in a nation of 37 million registered voters – were disenfranchised. This caused outrage amongst ethnic minority parties.⁶

⁴ ['Myanmar sets November 8 date for general election'](#), *Al Jazeera*, 2 July 2020

⁵ ['Myanmar: Aung San Suu Kyi's party wins majority in election'](#), *BBC News Online*, 13 November 2020

⁶ *Ibid.*

2. 2020 Parliamentary election

2.1 Political parties

The Union Election Commission announced 97 political parties were eligible to field candidates in the November 2020 election. Of these, 79 contested seats nationwide, with the remaining 18 focusing on individual regions or states.

Political parties in Myanmar tend to divide into two groups: the first centres around notions of nationalism – such as pro-democracy groups and parties that support the military; the second is based on ethnicity and sees smaller parties representing the interests of non-Bama/Burmese groups.

Although a quarter of legislative seats are assigned to members of the military, there are also political parties with strong links to the military, which increases the military total within the Myanmar parliament.

National League for Democracy (NLD)

The National League for Democracy was founded in 1988 and soon became the most influential party in Myanmar's pro-democracy movement.

The NLD won a landslide victory in the 1990 elections, securing 392 of the 485 seats in the People's Assembly. However, the military refused to honour the election results or transfer power to a civilian government.

In May 2008, when the country held a referendum on a new constitution, the NLD urged voters to oppose the constitutional changes, saying they were undemocratic and were drafted by "hand-picked puppets of the regime"⁷.

One of the consequences of the new constitution would be to bar Aung San Suu Kyi from office, because she was once married to a foreigner.

Official results showed that 92 per cent of votes in the referendum were in favour of the draft constitution; a figure rejected by the NLD.

The NLD boycotted the 2010 parliamentary election and the Union Election Commission announced that the party had become "null and void according to the law as they did not apply for continued existence as political parties within the prescribed days"⁸.

The party was granted permission to re-register as a political party in January 2012 and secured a landslide victory in the 1 April by-elections, taking 43 of the 44 contested seats.

In the 2015, general election the NLD won 135 seats in the House of Nationalities and 255 seats in the People's Assembly.

⁷ 'National League for Democracy (NLD)', *BBC Monitoring – Myanmar*, 16 November 2020

⁸ Ibid.

In March 2016, U Htin Kyaw was elected to be the next president of Myanmar by both houses of parliament.

The following month Aung San Suu Kyi was appointed to ministerial posts, as well as the newly-created role of state counsellor, in the first civilian-led government since 1962.

Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)

The Union Solidarity and Development Party registered as a political party in June 2010, ahead of elections to be held later that year under the new constitution.

The party is run by former officials of the Tatmadaw and is closely affiliated with current members of the military. Indeed, the Myanmar news website Irrawaddy (founded by Burmese journalists living in exile in Thailand) reports that the USDP is “widely viewed as the proxy of the Myanmar military”⁹.

The USDP was led by former President Thein Sein until 2013 and, in the 2015 elections, the party won 11 seats in the House of Nationalities and 30 seats in the People’s Assembly.

On 21 February 2020, ahead of the general election due later that year, the party announced that it was expanding its senior management team, adding two new vice-chairmen – retired military officials Khin Yi and Hla Tun – and three additional members to its central executive committee.¹⁰

Arakan National Party (ANP)

The Arakan National Party is also known as the Rakhine National Party (RNP) and was founded in October 2013, following the merger of the Arakan League for Democracy (ALD) and the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP).

The ANP was formally granted permission by the Union Election Commission to establish as a political party on 13 January 2014.

The party represents the interests of the Rakhine people and takes a hard-line stance in favour of Rakhine nationalism.

In the 2015 elections the ANP won 22 of the 35 seats in the Rakhine regional legislature and also saw success on the national scale: the party won 10 seats in the House of Nationalities and 12 seats in the People’s Assembly. One ANP member, Dr Zaw Aye Maung, was appointed Ethnic Affairs Minister.

In August 2016 the Myanmar Government announced the formation of a commission to investigate the situation in Arakan state (Rakhine). The ANP sent a letter of objection to the government as the nine-member commission included three foreign representatives and, the party

⁹ [‘Chair of Myanmar Military Proxy Party Will Run for Parliament’](#), *Irrawaddy*, 5 August 2020

¹⁰ ‘Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)’, *BBC Monitoring – Myanmar*, 1 February 2021

argued, they would not be capable of understanding the background and the current situation in Rakhine.¹¹

The ANP letter suggested the commission may be harmful to Arakan ethnics and national sovereignty and asked for the commission to be disbanded. The letter was rejected.

Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD)

The Shan Nationalities League for Democracy was founded in 1988 and campaigns for the interests of the Shan people.

In the 1990 general election, the SNLD won the second highest number of seats in the legislature, but the ruling military junta didn't recognise the outcome and the result was annulled.

Along with other opposition parties, the SNLD boycotted the 2010 elections and, in September that year, the Union Election Commission said the SNLD had become "null and void according to the law as they did not apply for continued existence as political parties within the prescribed days"¹².

Following constitutional and government reforms in 2012, political prisoners including leading figures of the SNLD – such as Chairman Khun Htun Oo – were released and the party was permitted to operate legally and re-registered to take part in future elections.

In the 2015 general election, the SNLD won three seats in the House of Nationalities and 12 seats in the People's Assembly and, in March 2016, General Secretary U Sai Nyunt Lwin said that the National League for Democracy (NLD) had offered the SNLD a position in the upcoming Union government. The party's Chairman, Khun Htun Oo, however, was ineligible as his daughter holds foreign citizenship.

2.2 Leading figures in Myanmar politics

The key figures in Myanmar politics are State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy, and leading representatives from the military.

On 1 February 2021, in the aftermath of the November 2020 general election, the military staged a coup and Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Myanmar's commander-in-chief, was installed as leader.

Aung San Suu Kyi

Aung San Suu Kyi was born on 19 June 1945 in Yangon. Her father, Aung San, was a former leader of the Burma Independence Army, until his assassination on 19 July 1947, six months before Myanmar gained independence from the UK. Her mother, Khin Kyi, was appointed the country's first female ambassador when she was appointed to head the Burmese Embassy in India in 1960.

¹¹ 'Arakan National Party (ANP)', *BBC Monitoring – Myanmar*, 1 February 2021

¹² 'Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD)', *BBC Monitoring – Myanmar*, 1 February 2021

Aung San Suu Kyi has married twice (both husbands died during marriage) and has two sons.

She graduated from the Lady Shri Ram College in India with a degree in Political Science in 1964 and then went to study Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) at St Hugh's College, Oxford University (1964-1967).

Aung San Suu Kyi is the leader and co-founder of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and has received numerous awards for her campaign for democracy in Myanmar, including the Nobel Peace Prize in October 1991.

The NLD was founded in 1988 and, the following year, on 20 July 1989, Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest. She was unconditionally released on 10 July 1995 but has served subsequent periods of house arrest. In total, Aung San Suu Kyi has spent 15 years under house arrest.

Her NLD party won the 1990 general election by a landslide, but Myanmar's rulers refused to hand over power.

In April 2012 Aung San Suu Kyi won the Kawhmu seat in the parliamentary by-election and was re-elected in subsequent general elections.

The NLD won a historic landslide in the 2015 election; the first openly contested election in Myanmar for decades. The party obtained an absolute majority in the Parliament by winning more than two-thirds of contested seats, but Aung San Suu Kyi was barred from becoming president because of the constitutional clause that bans candidates whose relatives hold foreign citizenship from becoming head of state.

Instead, and despite opposition from military representatives in the parliament, Aung San Suu Kyi was elected to a new role of State Counsellor, a position perceived by analysts as a "position tantamount to that of prime minister"¹³.

Widely celebrated by the international community for her pro-democracy campaigning, Aung San Suu Kyi has received criticism lately, because of her defence of her country against charges of genocide committed against the Rohingya Muslim minority at the International Court of Justice.

In the November 2020 general election, the NLD again secured a massive victory, but, on 1 February 2021, the military staged a coup and Aung San Suu Kyi was again detained.

Win Myint

Win Myint was born in 1951 in Danubyu, Irrawaddy Delta, and graduated with a degree in Geology from Rangoon University. He is married to Daw Cho Cho and is a member of the National League for Democracy.

Win Myint was elected Speaker of the People's Assembly on 1 February 2016, resigning from that post on 21 March 2018 to take up a position

¹³ 'Daw Aung San Suu Kyi biography', *BBC Monitoring – Myanmar*, 1 February 2021

of vice-president two days later, following changes in the country's leadership in the wake of President Htin Kyaw's resignation.

Five days later, on 28 March 2018, Win Myint was elected as the country's tenth president from the shortlist of three vice-presidents, receiving 403 votes from the 636 representatives present in parliament.

He was sworn in as President on 30 March, alongside First Vice-President Lt Gen (Rtd) Myint Swe and Second Vice-President Henry Van Thio.

During his presidency, Win Myint pardoned thousands of prisoners in mass amnesties and called for those involved in human rights abuses against Muslims in Rakhine to be prosecuted.

A statement released by the president's office, following the completion of the Independent Commission of Enquiry (ICOE) report in January 2020, said:

The President has sent the full report with the annexes to the Union Attorney General for further investigation and prosecution of any property destruction, looting, or other serious crimes committed by civilians during the internal armed conflict in Rakhine.¹⁴

In the military coup that occurred in the aftermath of the 2020 election, Win Myint was detained by the military on 1 February 2021.

Lt Gen (Rtd) Myint Swe

Myint Swe was born on 24 May 1951 and is an ethnic Mon. He is married to Khin Thet Htay and is reported to be nephew of Daw Kyaing Kyaing, wife of former head of state and commander-in-chief of the Tatmadaw, Senior Gen Than Shwe¹⁵.

Myint Swe graduated from the 15th intake of Rangoon Defence Service Academy (1975) and is affiliated with the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).

After a career in the military, Myint Swe retired from the Army in August 2010 to run as a candidate for the USDP in the 2010 general election.

He was appointed chief minister of the Yangon region in 2011, a post he held until taking up office as First Vice-President in March 2016.

Myint Swe had previously been nominated as a vice-presidential candidate, in 2012, but was reportedly disqualified due to his son-in-law holding foreign citizenship.

He served as acting president for nine days in March 2018, following the resignation of former President Htin Kyaw, and – after the 2020 election – again became acting president of Myanmar after the country's military seized power on 1 February 2021.

¹⁴ 'U Win Myint biography', *BBC Monitoring – Myanmar*, 1 February 2021

¹⁵ 'Lt Gen (Rtd) Myint Swe biography', *BBC Monitoring – Myanmar*, 1 February 2021

The military announced a year-long state of emergency and Myint Swe transferred all power to military chief Min Aung Hlaing.

His name appears on the United States Treasury sanctions list.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing

Min Aung Hlaing was born on 3 July 1956, in Dawei, Tanintharwei Region (the region was known as Tavoy during British rule, when he was born.) He is married to Daw Kyu Kyu Hla.

Min Aung Hlaing has spent his entire career in the military, having joined the Defence Services Academy on his third attempt in 1974 after studying law at Yangon University.

He received regular promotions and became commander of the Bureau of Special Operations-2 in 2009. It was in this role that he oversaw operations in north-eastern Myanmar, which led to tens of thousands of ethnic minority refugees fleeing the eastern Shan province and the Kokang region, along the Chinese border.

Despite allegations of murder, rape and arson against his troops, Min Aung Hlaing continued his meteoric rise and, in August 2010, he became joint chief of staff.

Just seven months later, in March 2011, he succeeded Than Shwe as Commander-in-Chief, leapfrogging more senior generals for the post.

Min Aung Hlaing began his tenure as military chief as Myanmar transitioned to democracy after decades of military rule. However, he remained keen on maintaining the Tatmadaw's power and ensured the military continued to hold one quarter of parliamentary seats and security-related cabinet portfolios.

He received international condemnation for the crackdown on the Rohingya ethnic minority in northern Rakhine and the US and UK have imposed sanctions on him.

On 1 February 2021, in the aftermath of the National League for Democracy securing a landslide victory in the November 2020 elections, the military staged a coup and detained State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.

The Tatmadaw declared a year-long state of emergency under Min Aung Hlaing's leadership¹⁶.

2.3 Election campaign

The election campaign period began on 8 September, under the cloud of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Aung San Suu Kyi planned to launch her campaign with a tour of her constituency, Kawhmu, but this was cancelled due to travel restrictions imposed as a result of the pandemic.

¹⁶ 'Name in the News: Min Aung Hlaing, Myanmar's military chief who seized power', *BBC Monitoring Insight*, 2 February 2021

12 Myanmar: 2020 parliamentary election

The western state of Rakhine, where the vast majority of the new cases were found, was placed under lockdown at the start of the campaign, as were parts of Yangon. Restrictions were also put in force in several other cities, including the capital, Naypyitaw¹⁷.

Local and international media reported that the election was seen as a test of Aung San Suu Kyi's leadership. This came against a backdrop of international criticism of her government's handling of the humanitarian crisis in northern Rakhine, the plight of the Rohingya Muslims, and domestic concerns about the economy and escalating conflicts with ethnic armed groups¹⁸.

On 14 September the Union Election Commission (UEC) said the election would go ahead as scheduled, but that steps would be taken to ensure the safety of voters amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

The two leading parties, the NLD and the USDP, suspended campaigning in regions where Covid-19 was particularly prevalent.

Restrictions on campaigning were thought to favour the parties with a nationwide presence, especially with the NLD which had a strong online profile and could continue to effectively campaign remotely.

On 16 October the UEC announced that voting would not be held in some constituencies of the Rakhine, Kachin, Kayin, Mon and Shan States and the Bago Region. The UEC said that these areas did not meet the conditions required to hold a free and fair election.

Despite Covid-19 concerns, domestic and international media outlets reported a high voter turnout in the elections, sparking concerns that social distancing rules may have been compromised as people stood in long queues to vote.

2.4 Election results

Myanmar's Union Election Commission published the official results of the election on 15 November 2020¹⁹.

The National League for Democracy secured a landslide victory, winning 396 seats across both houses (138 in the upper house and 258 in the lower house). This was well above the 322 required for a parliamentary majority.

The military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party was second, winning a total of 33 seats across both houses.

The remaining seats were shared between smaller regional parties.

¹⁷ ['Suu Kyi opens campaign for Myanmar election amid virus surge'](#), *AP News*, 8 September 2020

¹⁸ '2020 general election', *BBC Monitoring – Myanmar*, 16 November 2020

¹⁹ This count does not include the constituencies where voting has yet to take place, with election dates for those regions still to be announced.

Amyotha Hluttaw (House of Nationalities)

Party	Seats
National League for Democracy (NLD)	138
Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)	7
Arakan National Party (ANP)	4
Kayah State Democratic Party	3
Mon Unity Party (MUP)	3
Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD)	2
Ta'ang (Palaung) National Party (TNP)	2
Pa-O National Organisation	1
New Democracy Party (Kachin)	1
Appointed members ¹	56
Total²	224

¹ Military representatives appointed by the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

² Seven seats remained vacant as voting was cancelled by the Union Election Commission, owing to security concerns.

Source: [Amyotha Hluttaw \(House of Nationalities\) \(Myanmar\)](#), Europa World online, Routledge. [Retrieved 2 February 2021]

Pyithu Hluttaw (People's Assembly)

Party	Seats
National League for Democracy (NLD)	258
Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)	26
Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD)	13
Arakan National Party (ANP)	4
Pa-O National Organisation	3
Ta'ang (Palaung) National Party (TNP)	3
Kayah State Democratic Party	2
Mon Unity Party (MUP)	2
Arakan Front Party (AFP)	1
Kachin State People's Party (KSPP)	1
Wa National Party	1
Zomi Congress for Democracy (ZCD)	1
Appointed members ¹	110
Total²	440

¹ Military representatives appointed by the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

² Fifteen seats remained vacant as voting was cancelled by the Union Election Commission, owing to security concerns.

Source: [Pyithu Hluttaw \(People's Assembly\) \(Myanmar\)](#), Europa World online, Routledge. [Retrieved 2 February 2021]

3. Post-election events

3.1 Immediate aftermath

On 11 November 2020, following the announcement of the initial, unofficial results that suggested a landslide win for the NLD, the USDP demanded that the polls be held again with military involvement, saying: “For a free, unbiased and disciplined vote, hold the election again in cooperation with the military.”²⁰

The Union Election Commission (UEC), which is wholly appointed by the government, responded that it was satisfied the election had met the required standard and other political parties had given their approval to the results that were confirmed on 15 November.

The NLD victory left USDP humiliated and, in the months since the election, the military-backed party – along with some smaller allied parties – continued to wage a campaign to discredit the election, alleging widespread errors in voter lists and irregularities during advance voting by elderly citizens.

The UEC has refused to share or publish the final copies of voter lists that were displayed on election day.

The USDP and military maintained their claims of fraud, going so far as filing a writ application at the Supreme Court and calling a lame duck session of the outgoing parliament.

With the NLD securing a second successive election victory, it was clear that the Tatmadaw had no path back to power through the polls.

The new Parliament was scheduled to convene on 1 February 2021, for a planned session to confirm the new government.

In the days leading to this event, speculation grew of a potential coup and, on 27 January, Myanmar’s military chief Min Aung Hlaing warned that “the constitution shall be abolished, if not followed” and cited examples of previous military coups in 1962 and 1988.²¹

3.2 Military coup and state of emergency

The Tatmadaw seized power in a military coup on 1 February 2021, the day the new parliament was due to meet.

State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, President Win Myint and other senior political leaders were detained by the military and a year-long state of emergency was declared.

First Vice-President Myint Swe (a military representative) – serving as acting president – immediately transferred all power to Min Aung Hlaing as Commander-in-Chief.

²⁰ ‘2020 general election’, *BBC Monitoring – Myanmar*, 16 November 2020

²¹ ‘Name in the News: Min Aung Hlaing, Myanmar’s military chief who seized power’, *BBC Monitoring Insight*, 2 February 2021

The military issued a notification that allegations of voter fraud related to the 2020 general election would be revealed and announced new elections would be held.

The statement said:

The Tatmadaw finds the process of the 2020 election unacceptable, with over 10.5 million cases of potential fraud, such as non-existent voters.²²

Since the coup began, signs of resistance and civil disobedience have been growing in Yangon, Myanmar's biggest city. Some doctors and medical staff in dozens of hospitals across the country have stopped work in protest.²³

A statement attributed to Aung San Suu Kyi said the military was trying to reimpose a dictatorship, adding: "I urge people not to accept this, to respond and wholeheartedly to protest against the coup by the military."²⁴

On 3 February, in the evening, Yangon residents took to their balconies and clanged pots and pans in a symbolic protest against the military. And, on social media, many adopted red profile pictures to signal their loyalty to Aung San Suu Kyi.²⁵

It also emerged on 3 February that the International Monetary Fund had sent \$350m in cash to the Myanmar government the previous week, as part of a no-strings-attached emergency aid package to help the country battle the coronavirus pandemic. Just days later, the generals seized power.²⁶

In taking control of Myanmar and declaring a state of emergency, Min Aung Hlaing has given himself at least another year in power.

He was originally due to step down as commander-in-chief in July 2021, upon reaching the retirement age of 65. Andrew Nachevson, writing for the American journal *Foreign Policy*, suggested the coup may be part of Min Aung Hlaing's bid to preserve his power and noted:

Retirement could also leave him vulnerable to international justice – for his key role in spearheading the 2017 campaign of atrocities against the Rohingya minority, which the United Nations has described as genocide.²⁷

3.3 International reaction

Many in the international community have condemned the coup in Myanmar and urged the military to release Aung San Suu Kyi and other detainees.

²² [‘Tatmadaw reprimands diplomatic community on “unwarranted assumptions”](#)’, *Myanmar Times*, 31 January 2021

²³ [‘Myanmar coup: China blocks UN condemnation as protest grows’](#), *BBC News Online*, 3 February 2021

²⁴ [‘Myanmar army takes power in coup as Aung San Suu Kyi detained’](#), *the Guardian*, 1 February 2021

²⁵ [‘Aung San Suu Kyi could face two years in jail over ‘illegal’ walkie-talkies’](#), *the Guardian*, 3 February 2021

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ [‘What’s Next for Myanmar’](#), *Foreign Policy*, 1 February 2021

The United Nations Security Council met on 2 February 2021 but failed to agree a joint statement after China did not support it. China is a major player in Myanmar and, as one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, holds the power of veto.²⁸

United Kingdom

Following the state of emergency declared by the military in Myanmar, and the detention of members the civilian Government and civil society, the UK Government condemned this action and called for the “peaceful reconvening of the National Assembly, respecting the results of the November 2020 general election and the expressed wishes of the people of Myanmar”²⁹.

The UK’s Minister for Asia, Nigel Adams, summoned the Myanmar Ambassador, Kyaw Zwar Minn, to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, to: “condemn the military coup; to request assurances of the safety of all those detained; and to call for their immediate release”³⁰.

In a statement to the House of Commons on 2 February 2021, the Minister for Asia set out further measures that the UK and partners in the international community could take in response to the crisis³¹.

United States

White House press spokesperson, Jen Psaki, set out the US Administration’s position and expressed alarm at the situation in Myanmar, calling for the immediate release of detainees and affirming strong support for Myanmar’s democratic institutions.³²

On 2 February 2021, the Biden administration declared that the Myanmar military’s overthrow of the country’s civilian leadership met the legal definition of a “coup.” This official designation is significant as it restricts US aid to governments that have taken power by military means.³³

The US State Department confirmed direct assistance to civil society and Rohingya refugees would continue, but direct financial aid to the Government will end.

Further measures, such as targeted sanctions, are also being considered.

²⁸ [‘Myanmar coup: China blocks UN condemnation as protest grows’](#), *BBC News Online*, 3 February 2021

²⁹ [UK government statement - state of emergency in Myanmar](#), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office press release, 1 February 2021

³⁰ [Myanmar Ambassador summoned in response to military coup and unlawful imprisonment of civilians](#), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office press release, 1 February 2021

³¹ [Myanmar](#), HC Deb 2 February 2021, Vol 88 cc868-82

³² [Statement by White House Spokesperson Jen Psaki on Burma](#), The White House, 31 January 2021 [the White House appears to have issued a statement the day before the coup took place: the coup did take place on 1 February but, given the time difference between Myanmar and Washington DC, it is correct that the White House issued its statement on 31 January.]

³³ [‘Biden administration officially calls Myanmar coup a ‘coup’](#), Politico, 2 February 2021

The situation in Myanmar presents an early foreign policy test for President Biden's new administration.

China

China's state media widely covered the developments in Myanmar and the Chinese Foreign Ministry said it hoped all parties in Myanmar would properly resolve their differences.

Responding to a question at a daily briefing regarding the political situation in Myanmar, spokesperson Wang Wenbin is reported as saying:

China is a friendly neighbour of Myanmar. We hope that all parties in Myanmar will properly resolve their differences under the constitution and legal framework to maintain political and social stability.³⁴

European Union

In a press release, the European Union condemned the military coup carried out in Myanmar, saying it was "an unacceptable attempt to forcibly overturn the will of the people of Myanmar."

The statement reiterated the EU's support of Myanmar's civil society and democracy and called upon the military to "immediately release the President, the State Counsellor and all those who have been arrested", and to restore the civilian government and convene the newly elected parliament.³⁵

G7

The Foreign Ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, and the US and the High Representative of the European Union issued a joint statement condemning the coup in Myanmar.

The statement expressed deep concern over the restrictions on information flows that had been imposed by Myanmar's military, and called for unrestricted humanitarian access to support the most vulnerable.

The G7 Foreign Ministers also stated:

We call upon the military to immediately end the state of emergency, restore power to the democratically-elected government, to release all those unjustly detained and to respect human rights and the rule of law. The November election results must be respected and Parliament should be convened at the earliest opportunity.³⁶

³⁴ 'Chinese media track ongoing political turmoil in Myanmar', *BBC Monitoring*, quoting China's official Xinhua news agency, 1 February 2021

³⁵ [Myanmar: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union](#), Council of the European Union press release, 2 February 2021

³⁶ [Condemning the coup in Myanmar: G7 Foreign Ministers' statement](#), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office press release, 3 February 2021

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