



In Focus

Elections in Burma (Myanmar), November 2015

The Burmese general election was held on 8 November 2015. The final [results](#) revealed that the National League for Democracy (NLD) gained an absolute majority in the country's Parliament (the 'Hluttaw'); winning 255 out of the 330 seats in the House of Representatives, and 135 out of 168 seats in the House of Nationalities. Despite her party's victory, NLD leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, is [constitutionally barred](#) from becoming Burma's new president, due to a provision prohibiting anyone whose spouse or children are foreign nationals from holding office. However, her party will still be tasked with selecting a presidential candidate and forming a government.

Background

Over the past half century, Burma has experienced significant change, beginning on 2 March 1962 when the country was the subject of a [military coup](#). The result was the abolition of the federal system of governance and the creation of the Burma Socialist Programme Party, who held power for the next 26 years. In that time, a new constitution was created (in 1974) and a socialist economic program was [established](#). However, by 1988, Burma's economic situation had "[deteriorated rapidly](#)", with [food shortages](#) being reported across the country leading to student-led mass protests, and demands that the military give up [power](#). The protests continued throughout much of the year, and were met by violent retaliation from the governing forces, with Human Rights Watch (HRW) [reporting](#) that "from March to September 1988, the suppression of mass pro-democracy demonstrations throughout Burma resulted in thousands of deaths at the hands of the military and other security forces".

In [1989](#), the newly formed State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) declared martial law, arresting thousands of people—including then-General Secretary of the NLD, Aung San Suu Kyi—and changing the country's name to Myanmar. Elections were held a year later, which saw the NLD winning 392 of 485 parliamentary seats. However, the SLORC refused to acknowledge the results, and instead imprisoned many NLD politicians or forced them into exile. Over the next two decades, further election results were also ignored by the ruling military, who continued to resist calls for democracy in the country and to hold Aung San Suu Kyi and other NLD leaders under house arrest. On 15 May 2008, a referendum on a [new constitution](#) also took place in the country, which included [changes](#) to the make-up of a future civilian parliament which would see 25 percent of Hluttaw seats allocated to army nominees. Results revealed that 92.4 percent of those who voted approved the new constitution. However, a [report](#) by the Burma Fund's UN Office claimed the constitution was "adopted by vote rigging and voter intimidation".

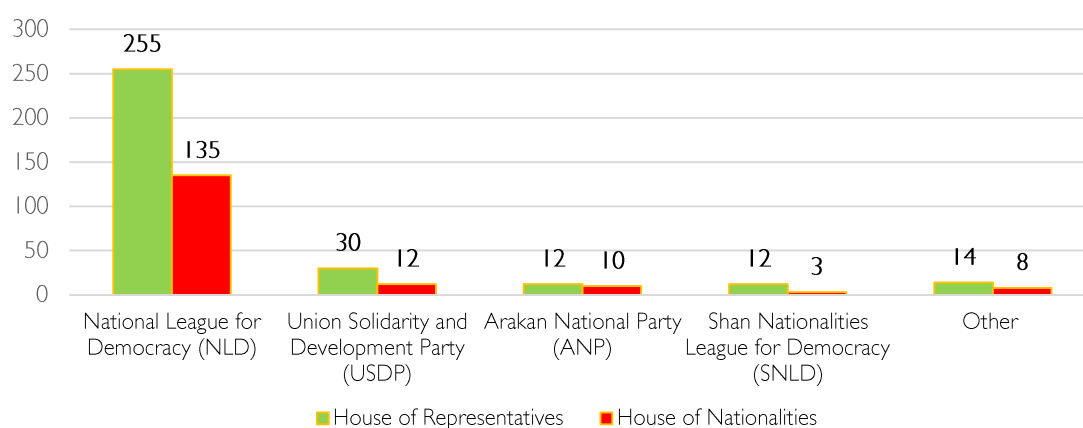
Yet the past five years have seen a significant softening of the military administration's previous hardline approach, and substantial moves towards democratic reform. Though the 2010 election and the accompanying move from military rule to a civilian democracy was condemned by a number of observers as a "[sham](#)", a week after the poll Aung San Suu Kyi was finally released after being

incarcerated for 15 of the previous 21 years. Then in 2011, following the establishment of a [civilian parliament](#)—although the president, vice president and speakers of both Houses were former military officers—new Burmese President, Thein Sein, met with Aung San Suu Kyi and also signed a law allowing peaceful demonstrations for the first time. In 2012 the NLD then won [43 out of 45 seats in landmark parliamentary by-elections](#), generally seen as a “major test” of the drive for reform. Further moves followed, including the [release of more than 3,000 prisoners](#), many of whom had ties to the previous regime. However, 2015 has also seen new protests on the subject of educational reform, and media outlets protesting the lack of media freedom in the country. President Sein’s Government has also been criticised for the alleged [persecution](#) of ethnic minorities in Burma—most notably the Rohingyas—and in June the Burmese parliament [voted to keep the army’s veto](#) over constitutional change, dealing a blow to hopes for further democratic reform.

Election Analysis

A full breakdown of the final [results](#), according to the Union Election Commission (as of 23 November 2015) is provided below. (It should be noted that voting for seven seats in the House of Representatives was [cancelled](#) following fighting between Burma’s military and “armed ethnic forces”).

2015 General Election in Burma: Seats Won



Going Forward

Following her party’s victory, Aung San Suu Kyi [declared](#) that, despite constitutional provisions barring her from becoming president, she would be “above the president” and still “run the government”. The current President, Thein Sein, [stated](#) that “as promised, the government has held free elections”, and [announced](#) that the transition of power to the NLD would be “carried out smoothly”. Further, the office of General Min Aung Hlaing, the current Commander-in-chief of the Burma Armed Forces, released a [statement](#) following the election to say that he “congratulates the National League for Democracy in getting a majority of seats [in the Hluttaw]”.

The UK Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond, [stated](#) that the UK Government hopes the election “will prove a significant landmark in Burma’s transition to democracy, and help fulfil a long-held aspiration by the people of Burma to choose freely who represents them in Parliament”.

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