

Undemocratic Democrats: A Case Study of the National League for Democracy

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Abstract

Why did the National League for Democracy (NLD), a political party founded to end military rule and to introduce democracy in Myanmar, make political decisions that contravened democracy when it came to power? Since its founding in 1988, the NLD campaigned for the introduction of democracy, the protection of human rights, and the rights of Myanmar's ethnic minorities.

Yet, when in government, from 2016 to 2021, the party refrained from protecting and expanding freedom of speech, supported the military's genocidal campaign against the Rohingya minority, failed to advance the peace process, and increasingly centralised its own structures and processes to limit the level of internal party democracy.

Using explaining-outcome process-tracing I provide a detailed explanation of the party's actions, which draws on numerous interviews I conducted with NLD politicians and internal party documents I collected. I argue that the interplay between the external condition of being a pro-democratic party in an authoritarian regime and a series of characteristic internal features created a party of undemocratic democrats. Undemocratic democrats simultaneously oppose and support democracy because they believe that advancing democracy in the setting of an authoritarian or a hybrid regime requires some undemocratic means.

I conclude that the NLD is neither a democratic party that became authoritarian, nor an authoritarian party that was never democratic to begin with, but rather a party that developed a political culture that is democratic as well as undemocratic. The party's political decisions in office thus might appear contradictory but are in fact an outcome of a particular trajectory of party development, which I trace in this thesis.

Preface and acknowledgements

I first came to Myanmar in 2012 as an English language teacher for ethnic- and religious minority civil society organisations (CSOs). Three months earlier the National League for Democracy (NLD) had won 43 out of the 44 seats it contested in the 2012 by-election, and Aung San Suu Kyi had become a member of parliament. The military-backed Thein Sein government abolished pre-publication censorship in August that year, a month after my arrival. It is unsurprising then that my first experience with Myanmar and its people echoes the sentiment that is found in many publications on Myanmar that have come out in the past ten years. A vague sense of hope transformed into a shared belief that everything was about to get better, that the road was tough – sure – but that ultimately Myanmar would succeed in becoming more democratic and elevating the living standards of its citizens.

Looking back, it is easy to see why this euphoria was unjustified and indeed there were many cautious voices at the time. Politics was generally still discussed carefully, especially with strangers. Voicing support for Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD was slowly built up to in a conversation. Members of ethnic minority groups too were suspicious of the will and capacity of the NLD to deliver on its long-standing promises of federalism and increased self-determination. Riots broke out in Rakhine State, Western Myanmar, in June 2012, following the rape of an ethnic Rakhine woman by three Muslim men. The communal violence and the military's response eventually cost almost 200 lives and displaced over 140,000 people, mostly belonging to the Rohingya minority. Throughout the year the riots spread across Myanmar and Buddhist mobs attacked Muslims in Meiktila, Okpho, and in Gyobingauk Township. Tellingly the NLD stayed mostly quiet on the matter while Aung San Suu Kyi argued that violence had been committed by both sides.

In retrospect, it is hard to imagine how a triumphantly optimistic mood could have persisted in Myanmar during this year and yet it was there. My colleagues and students at

the Muslim CSO where I worked followed the events closely but ultimately the riots – and the open hatred they were at times subjected to in Yangon during these months – did not break their spirit of hope. More freedom meant more room for new institutions and new projects, often with an angle on democratisation and capacity building. I found it impossible not to be swept up in the enthusiasm of my colleagues, students, and the friends I had made. I desperately wanted to return to Myanmar but was acutely aware that I had very little to offer. At the time I was still a BA-student, but I was able to persuade a German NGO to let me set up a Myanmar chapter of their Model International Criminal Court, a model UN for the ICC that worked with students and human rights defenders from around the world. Over the next couple of years this role was significant for me because it allowed me to return to Myanmar regularly and to meet politically engaged people from all over the country.

As I learned more about the history and politics of Myanmar, I began to repeatedly stumble upon an odd disconnect. Everyone was pinning their hopes on the NLD whose politicians, above all Aung San Suu Kyi, featured heavily in the reporting on Myanmar at the time, and yet I felt that there was little knowledge of the party beyond its leader. This feeling increased after the NLD's landslide election victory in 2015 when cracks swiftly began to appear in the party's image. Although continuously popular with the general population, criticism of the party grew around its inability to make progress on several key issues ranging from economic development to national reconciliation and the peace process.

In the eyes of the international community, save China, Russia and a few other authoritarian regimes, the party and its leader ultimately fell from grace in the aftermath of the 2016-17 Rohingya genocide, perpetrated by the Myanmar military. As per the constitution the civilian government had no oversight of the military, but it was the party's

defence of the military's scorched earth campaign in Rakhine State that drew anger and frustration from Western governments and international organisations. In Myanmar, the NLD's decision to defend the military was well received. This culminated in Aung San Suu Kyi leading the defence delegation in the trial that The Gambia had brought against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague.

As a DPhil student I had begun looking into the NLD more closely in 2016 and had found a highly centralised party that often displayed little regard for democratic values like freedom of speech and universal human rights but on the other hand was made up of politicians who, for the most part, had for several decades, fought tooth and nail for a democratic parliamentary system and the military's retreat from politics. I could not reconcile the party's history as a champion of democracy with its first term in office and looking at the way the party had been characterised in the existing literature and the media, I figured that I was not alone in my predicament.

There were, and are, those who argue that the NLD has never been democratic (supposedly because it is partly made up of ex-generals and military officers) or that the party has indeed always been wholly democratic (supposedly because any disregard for democratic values has its origin in the constraints placed on the party by the military) but I found neither answer convincing. I thus set out on my PhD project with a single question in mind: how can we make sense of the NLD's political decisions in office?

The answer is the subject of the following pages. Writing these pages would not have been possible without my family, friends, colleagues, and mentors and I want to take this opportunity to share some notes of thanks.

Albrecht Hoppe was the first teacher who sparked my interest in the analysis of the social and political institutions that shape our world. During my BA I was encouraged in my studies by Dr Samantha Ashenden, Fr Peter Gallagher SJ, and Revd Dr Nicholas Austin

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List of abbreviations

AFPFL	Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League
ALD	Arakan League for Democracy
ANC	African National Congress
ARSA	Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army
BIA	Burma Independence Army
BGP	Border Guard Police
BPS	Burma Press Summary
BSPP	Burma Socialist Programme Party
CC	Central Committee
CEC	Central Executive Committee
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
CRPH	Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw
CRPP	Committee Representing the People's Parliament
CUREC	Central University Research Ethics Committee
DAB	Democratic Alliance of Burma
DKAB	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army
DVB	Democratic Voice of Burma
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organisation
EOPT	Explaining-outcome process-tracing
EPP	Ethnic Political Party
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IPD	Intra-party Democracy
JPPCA	Joint Parliamentary Committee for Constitutional Amendment
MNLD	Mon National League for Democracy
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army
KNU	Karen National Union
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement

NCGUB	National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma
NCL	National Convention of the League
NDF	National Democratic Force
NLD	National League for Democracy
NUG	National Unity Government
NUP	National Unity Party
POCL	Patriotic Old Comrades League
PP	People's Party
RCSS	Restoration Council of Shan State
RFA	Radio Free Asia
SAC	State Administration Council
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SNLD	Shan Nationalities League for Democracy
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
TEC	Township Executive Committee
UNLD	United Nationalities League for Democracy
UNDP	Union National Democracy Party
USDA	Union Solidarity and Development Association
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party
WPD	Working People's Daily
YCDC	Yangon City Development Committee
ZCD	Zomi Congress for Democracy

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The argument

“In order to get fully democratic norms and practices the transition needs to be successful. Hence there is a difference between the definition of democracy and the process we need to consolidate democracy” (NLD Lower House MP Lwin Ko Latt 2019, AI¹).

1.1. What it is all about

Why did the National League for Democracy, a political party founded and maintained for the sole purpose of ending military rule and (re-)introducing democracy in Myanmar, make undemocratic political decisions when it was in government?

Since its founding in 1988, the NLD has been the most important political organisation dedicated to ending military rule in Myanmar and introducing democracy. Unsurprisingly, the party has continued in this role following the 2021 military coup². During its time in opposition, NLD politicians paid a steep price for advocating for democracy³. The majority of those who were active in the party prior to 2012 and after 2021 have faced persecution, imprisonment, and torture. The party’s leader, Aung San Suu Kyi,

¹ Throughout this thesis quotes from interviews, I conducted for this project are marked “AI” for author interview and quotes from original documents that were translated for this project are marked “OT” for original translation. For more details see chapter two.

² The political landscape changed dramatically after the 2021 military coup and the pro-democracy camp is made up of myriad different parties, armed groups, resistance movements and other political organisations. I maintain, however, that the NLD remains the most significant organisation in opposition to the military because the party still enjoys by far the broadest support in the population of any of the political organisations in resistance to the State Administration Council (SAC), which the military installed following the coup. Moreover, the political response to the military coup was largely shaped by NLD politicians who continue to identify themselves as NLD politicians rather than individuals. For example, The Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) that was created to form a government based on the 2020 election results is almost exclusively made up of NLD lawmakers. Indeed, only three lawmakers belong to different political parties. NLD politicians also form the largest bloc (10 out of 32) in the cabinet of the National Unity Government (NUG) which was subsequently set up as a parallel government.

³ The 2021 military coup has led to renewed excessive oppression of the NLD and persecution of its members. For a detailed account of instances of murder, imprisonment, and displacement of NLD politicians and members see Radio Free Asia (2022), ‘Nearly 50 members of Myanmar’s deposed government have been killed since coup’, *Radio Free Asia*, 18 July. Available at: [<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/nld-07182022183229.html>].

was famously under house arrest for 15 years between 1988 and 2012. She was arrested again on the day of the most recent military coup on 1 February 2021. Yet, the NLD was not always confined to the role of opposition party.

The party won a landslide victory in the 2015 elections and formed a government backed by a super-majority in parliament. The NLD's time in government, between 2016 and 2021, was, however, not characterised by democratic reforms but by the party's failure to speak out against human rights violations, its support for the Rohingya genocide, and its decision to refrain from repealing repressive legislation (Barany 2018; Choudhury 2019; Kean 2017; Kurlantzick 2017; Lee 2018; Roewer 2019a; Yaw Bawm Mangshang 2018). It was also characterised by a deadlocked peace process (Mathieson 2021) that was shaped by the NLD's view of national reconciliation, which placed the reconciliation of the NLD with the military above everything else. Moreover, the party's time in government went hand in hand with ever stronger centralisation and lower levels of internal party democracy (Roewer 2019b). In his reflections on the NLD's first two years in office Matthew Walton noted that "The [political] situation looks frustratingly not only bleaker than it was a year in [a year after the NLD government came to power], but worse than it did under the previous USDP⁴ government" (Walton 2018, p. 312).

How can we explain the NLD's commitment to political decisions that seemed to contravene its own political platform? Adopting explaining-outcome process-tracing (EOPT) (Beach and Brun Pedersen 2019) as the methodology I answer this question through two arguments. Firstly, I argue that understanding why the party made political decisions that seemed to contradict its platform necessitates a closer look at the way internal characteristics of the party were shaped by the external conditions of party development in authoritarian Myanmar. I analyse the development of the NLD in three stages, examining

⁴ Notably, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) is the proxy-party of the military.

the formation of the party in 1988, its time as opposition party, between 1990 and 2016, and its time in government, between 2016 and 2021. I find that during the first two stages the development of the NLD's structure and political culture were shaped by the effects of the military regime and the central objective of party survival. Consequently, the NLD was – and is – ideally set-up for survival in an authoritarian regime but was ill-equipped for the hybrid-regime that existed in Myanmar between 2010 and 2021. The NLD failed to adapt to the new political system and the structures and political culture that had made the party resilient in the authoritarian system now led the party to advance a political agenda that was characterised by a focus on reconciliation with the military⁵ and the belief that democracy needed to be managed and delayed.

During its time in government the NLD tried to advance democracy while actively undermining it. This appears to be contradictory, but I put forward a second argument which posits that the NLD is best understood as a party of “undemocratic democrats”. I introduce this new concept to explore how the NLD reconciled support for democracy with simultaneous opposition to it. I argue that the juxtaposition of support and opposition in the NLD is the result of a combination of internal party features and the external conditions under which the party developed. I explore both arguments in depth in this chapter. I begin by noting some underlying theoretical assumptions before introducing my three-part periodisation of the mechanism of NLD development in greater detail. Subsequently, I will introduce the concept of undemocratic democrats and explore its uses and limitations alongside the consideration of alternative explanatory concepts.

⁵ I refer to the military using the term military or armed forces. This reflects two terms commonly used in Burmese to refer to the military: “Tat” (an army or unit within an army) and “Sit-tat” (sit meaning military or war). At times, however, documents, citations from secondary literature and quotes from interviewees refer to the Tatmadaw, the name that the military has chosen for itself in Burmese, which also is commonly used in Myanmar, albeit less so following the 2021 military coup. The reason I do not use the name Tatmadaw to refer to the army is that it includes an honorific notion since “Daw” means honourable or glorious in Burmese.

This thesis makes two central contributions to the existing academic discourse. Firstly, it is the first work that details the development of the NLD, arguably one of the world's most well-known opposition parties of the past 30 years and the most important opposition party in Myanmar since the military took control of the country in 1962. As such, this thesis makes an important contribution to the field of Myanmar studies, which has so far been characterised by a wealth of studies of the military, ethnic armed groups, and the broader opposition movement but a dearth of studies of one of its most significant political actors. By adding an important piece to the puzzle, this thesis will therefore advance our understanding of Myanmar in general and be a useful resource for anyone working in or on the country. Secondly, while I do not advance a general theory on the effects of party development in autocracies, the in-depth study of this in many ways exceptional case adds some important novel considerations to the universe of understanding political parties. In other words, I believe that the analysis of this case has theoretical consequences.

The NLD could be described as an opposition successor party, that is a party that is defined by its roots in the opposition to an authoritarian regime and which has been shaped by the conditions that arose because of its role as an opposition party. Moreover, in the case of the NLD this specific development trajectory yielded an exceptional outcome: the coexistence of support and opposition to democracy within the party that informed my conceptualisation of the NLD as a party of undemocratic democrats. Due to the scope of this thesis, I do not investigate whether the NLD's trajectory holds lessons for other opposition successor parties or whether the concept of undemocratic democrats has explanatory value in other cases. Yet, this thesis shows that at least one instance of this development trajectory and party type exists and therefore expands the universe of theorised cases. As such it introduces new avenues for future research. Establishing that there is a mechanism that leads pro-democratic parties to make undemocratic politics also has implications for the practical work of governments or international agencies that want

to advance democracy globally and who look to support local pro-democratic parties in this quest. Understanding that such parties could potentially be characterised by both support and opposition to democracy precisely because they operate in authoritarian or hybrid-regimes is essential for providing the right kind of political support and capacity building.

1.2. Underlying theoretical assumptions⁶ and a note on literature

In this thesis I try to explain why the NLD, a party founded for the purpose of ending military rule in Myanmar and introducing democracy, made political decisions that seem to contravene the party's own objective after it formed a government. In other words, I try to explain why a purportedly democratic party engaged in undemocratic politics. I advance the argument that the NLD developed a political culture that is characterised by support of, as well as opposition to, democracy and that the emergence of this culture was influenced significantly by military oppression. Lucian Pye and Sidney Verba defined political culture as "the system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols, and values which defines the situation in which political action takes place" (Verba 1965, ch. 12, p. 7). In their view, "It provides the subjective orientation to politics" (ibid). Adopting this definition, I understand the NLD's political culture broadly as the party's subjective orientation to politics, including values, beliefs, processes, and its approaches to other important political entities.

I follow a historical institutionalist approach in explaining the origins of the NLD's orientations to politics, examining "how temporal processes and events influence the origin and transformation of institutions that govern political and economic relations" (Fioretos, Falleti, and Sheingate 2016, p. 3). Placing emphasis on the detailed illustration of the

⁶ In the following sections I often refer to the political culture, political decisions, and beliefs of the NLD as those of "the party." I do this consciously and in the knowledge that parties are not unitary actors. Indeed, the following chapters will illuminate a great diversity of thought in the NLD, and I will illustrate the political nuances within the party. I will also show, however, that the NLD is highly centralised, and that most party members stick to the line of the party leadership despite possible feelings of discontent. Consequently, when I write of "the party" I do not argue that each party member personally holds this view. When I write of "the party" I refer to the party line, set by NLD leaders, supported by many of its politicians, and ultimately followed by all who continue to play an active role in the party.

development of a single institution, in this case a political party, and analysing the reasons for the party's developmental trajectory follows the conviction that such institutions matter because they influence public policy and the distribution of political authority (ibid, p. 3). Historical institutionalism is central to the study of political parties as its arguments "identify the mechanisms that sustain particular outcomes over time, and demonstrate when change occurs, according to which constraints, opportunities, and antecedent conditions" (Riedl 2016, p. 223). Instead of focusing on exogenous factors alone in explaining the trajectory of institutions, historical institutionalism analyses structural conditions and changes as well as the development of agency. Indeed, parties are influenced by the setting in which they emerge and develop but are also shaped by distinct internal features (Levitsky 2003).

In this study of the NLD's development, I consequently analyse how the interplay of a specific set of internal and external factors resulted in a political party that was highly adapted to operating under the constraints of an authoritarian regime but ill-equipped for the political processes in a hybrid-regime. I subsequently explore how the party's development trajectory informed a political culture that is characterised by support and opposition to democracy. Importantly, I do not measure the *degree* of the NLD's institutionalisation but rather try to show how a specific *trajectory* of party institutionalisation resulted in the creation of a party culture characterised by ostensible contradictions. The existing literature on party institutionalisation is therefore only of limited use to this project. Employing existing approaches to party institutionalisation can help us understand the level of the NLD's institutionalisation but it does little for uncovering the processes that shape the political culture in the party. Adopting three dimensions of party institutionalisation that are widely used in the party institutionalisation literature – internal institutionalisation, external institutionalisation, and objective institutionalisation (Harmel, Svåsand and Mjelde 2018) – allows us to differentiate between levels of institutionalisation in each dimension. We could conclude that the NLD is characterised by low levels of internal

institutionalisation because it has struggled to implement routinised behaviour and to decouple party loyalty from individual party leaders. On the other hand, we would find that the NLD is characterised by high levels of external institutionalisation and objective institutionalisation because external actors perceive the party to have lasting power and because its exceptional survival record speaks to its objective durability (Harmel, Svåsand, and Mjelde 2018). Yet this analysis tells us little about the political culture in the NLD, its “orientation to politics” (Verba 1965, ch. 12, p. 7), and how the party combines support and opposition to democracy.

More than existing theory, answering these questions requires a detailed knowledge of the case. This is reflected in the method I employ, explaining-outcome process-tracing (EOPT). Derek Beach and Rasmus Brun Pedersen note that the goal of this process-tracing variant “is not to develop a generalizable theorized mechanism but instead to craft a case-specific explanation of the major factors in a case” (Beach and Brun Pedersen 2019, pos. 5019). In crafting this case-specific explanation I rely heavily on interview data I collected during an extensive field research stay in Myanmar between July 2018 and August 2019. Interviews I conducted with NLD politicians are supplemented by translations of party documents I collected during my stay. The reason I rely so strongly on primary data is that there are few publications that have sought to analyse the NLD⁷. Consequently, I developed the arguments in this thesis in conversation with some existing literature but its scope and aims differ so substantially from existing work that I advance the arguments chiefly based on primary data⁸. Doing so, I generate what Beach and Brun Pedersen – drawing on the work of John Leslie Mackie – described as the kind of explanation of a particular historical outcome that “can also be thought of as minimally sufficient explanations of a particular

⁷ For a detailed review of existing literature that speaks to this case and a closer look at the secondary sources I used for this thesis refer to chapter two.

⁸ For a detailed account of my data collection strategy and primary sources consult chapter two on the methodology of this thesis.

outcome, with sufficiency defined as an explanation that accounts for all of the important aspects of an outcome with no redundant parts being present (Mackie 1965)” (Beach and Brun Pedersen 2019, pos. 5040). I explain my reasoning for using EOPT in greater detail in the methodology chapter, but the method is relevant for the argument I present in this chapter since in EOPT “we almost always need to combine mechanisms into an eclectic conglomerate mechanism to account for a particular historical outcome” (Beach and Brun Pedersen 2019, pos. 5075). Consequently, the explanation I advance in this chapter is an amalgamation of the different mechanisms that determined the development of an ostensibly contradictory political culture in the NLD⁹, characterised by support and opposition to democracy.

⁹ I always refer to the NLD as it existed prior to the 2021 military coup. Critics might argue that because of this my work does not reflect the latest realities of the NLD. I would concede that this is partially true but does not hamper the contributions of this thesis. We simply do not yet know how the coup will change the NLD as a political party. For example, the NLD’s departure from the doctrine of non-violence and its embrace of armed resistance seems to signify substantial change in the party. It is also indicative of the role a new generation of NLD leaders might play in the future of the party and how their understanding of political processes will shape the party’s platform. On the other hand, the NLD strictly maintains the hero worship of Aung San Suu Kyi at a great political cost: commitment to a leader who supported a genocide comes at the price of dampening international support, that the NLD now desperately needs. This illustrates the uncertainty over the party the NLD might become in the future. If Aung San Suu Kyi is released in the future, she might very well take the reins of the party once again and enforce erstwhile political ideas. Moreover, the political performance of the NLD following the 2021 military coup underscores some parts of the analysis that I advance in this thesis. The political strength with which NLD politicians responded to the coup, characterised most of all by spearheading the formation of a committee representing the elected lawmakers and the subsequent formation of a parallel government, illustrates how well equipped the party is for political competition under authoritarian conditions. I would therefore argue that highlighting how ill-equipped the NLD was for the political realities of a hybrid regime and analysing how the NLD became a party of undemocratic democrats does not stand in conflict with the party’s performance since the coup. Moreover, critics might argue that the NLD has become less relevant after the coup since the resistance to the military is not solely defined by the NLD but rather by a series of different political organisations and movements. Furthermore, some critics might make the argument that the NLD has been effectively replaced as an umbrella opposition organisation by the NUG. I would note, however, that the NLD remains of vital importance for two reasons. Firstly, the party unites support behind it. Indeed, the NUG is widely supported in Myanmar in part because it is an organisation in which NLD politicians play a vital role. Other movements and political organisations that emerged after the coup were simply not able to unite the same degree of support behind them. Secondly, the fact that the NLD remains the party that enjoys the most public support by far will shape the results of any elections in which the party will contest in the future and likely make it the dominant political party in any future government that is based on free and fair elections.

1.3. Towards a mechanism for understanding the NLD's complicated relationship with democracy

The combination of mechanisms that govern the particular outcome of the NLD as a political party that both supports and opposes democracy is complex not only because of the number of mechanisms but also because of their relationships with one another. Further complexity is added by the period of party development I investigate – over 30 years. I investigate how the political conditions the military created influenced the NLD and how internal aspects of political culture emerged in three stages of party development: the early stage of party foundation in 1988, the period as an opposition party between 1990 and 2015, and the period when the NLD was in government, between 2016 and 2021. Doing so, I do not illustrate all relationships between the mechanisms but analyse those that provide a minimally sufficient explanation for the outcome. I argue that the development of the NLD and the emergence of a contradictory political culture in the party is the result of the interplay between internal party conditions and external factors largely determined by the military. Aspects of the NLD's political culture thus often emerged both through internal and external processes.

1.3.1. Stage 1: 1988, the founding of the NLD

In 1988 the military announced the holding of multi-party elections following the 1988 Uprising¹⁰, a series of wide-spread anti-government protests. The elections, which were eventually held in 1990, provided an opportunity but also posed a challenge to the democracy movement, which was then multi-faceted and without a single leader. Following the announcement of the elections hundreds of political parties registered, illustrating the political divisions within the democracy movement which had been united only by the wish to remove the military government. Electoral success thus required broad coalition building.

¹⁰ For details of the 1988 Uprising and the announcement of multi-party elections see chapter three.

The initial composition of the NLD reflected this need. The NLD was founded as a league, not a party. It was a combination of three factions: the intellectual faction under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi, the Patriotic Old Comrade faction under the leadership of former Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces Tin Oo, and the Aung Gyi faction named after its leader, former Brigadier-General Aung Gyi.

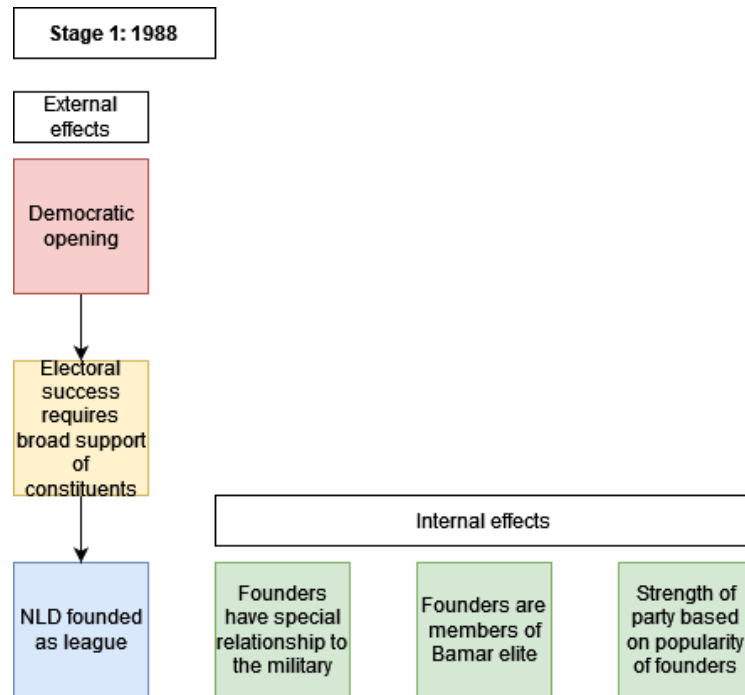


Figure 1: the founding stage of the NLD. Causes in red, causal processes in yellow, and outcomes in blue. Green indicates internal features of the party.

The cooperation of these three factions and, more importantly, their respective leaders also reflects an internal aspect of the very early NLD's political culture, namely the reliance on personalised politics. The NLD founders understood that most voters had little idea about democracy after 26 years of military rule. Voters wanted an end of military rule and most political parties at the time were founded on this platform. Votes would therefore not be won on the merit of the party programme but on the popularity of the party's leaders. It was no coincidence that Aung San Suu Kyi, Tin Oo, and Aung Gyi – the leaders of the NLD's founding factions – were three of the most popular leaders that had emerged in the

1988 Uprising, which preceded the formation of the party. Politics in the NLD was thus personalised from the very start. Moreover, the alliance that constituted the NLD was built in part on the shared view the founders held of the military. Aung San Suu Kyi was the daughter of General Aung San, the founder of the modern Myanmar military. Tin Oo and Aung Gyi had both been senior officers in the military. From the very beginning the NLD differed from other political parties and opposition organisations because it held the military in very high regard. The NLD leadership advanced the view that the military was a good institution that had been corrupted by a series of bad leaders.

1.3.2. Stage 2: 1988-2016, a party in opposition

The military's unwillingness to cede power after the 1990 elections meant that the NLD had to continuously reevaluate its position on military engagement. The party was now also condemned to the role of political opposition in an authoritarian state without the hope of an impending transformation and had to fight for its own survival. The first time NLD politicians became members of parliament was in 2012, 24 years after the formation of the party. The NLD formed a government for the first (and only) time in 2016. As the most important opposition party the NLD has faced continuous oppression. This oppression played a significant role in reshaping existing internal features of the NLD but also introduced a series of new characteristics.

Figure 2 illustrates external effects and internal effects on the NLD's development during its time as an opposition party in an autocracy. Importantly, the figures in this chapter are meant to aid the comprehensibility of my argument by illustrating some key components of the different, interlinked mechanisms of party development. They are reductionist by design and do not focus on the relationships between different dynamics. Moreover, they only provide a limited sense of the sequence of developmental steps. Many of the results of party development under authoritarianism developed over the span of

years, sometimes decades. For an image containing all three figures on party development see appendix A. More detailed analyses of the components of the mechanisms are the subject of the empirical chapters of this thesis.

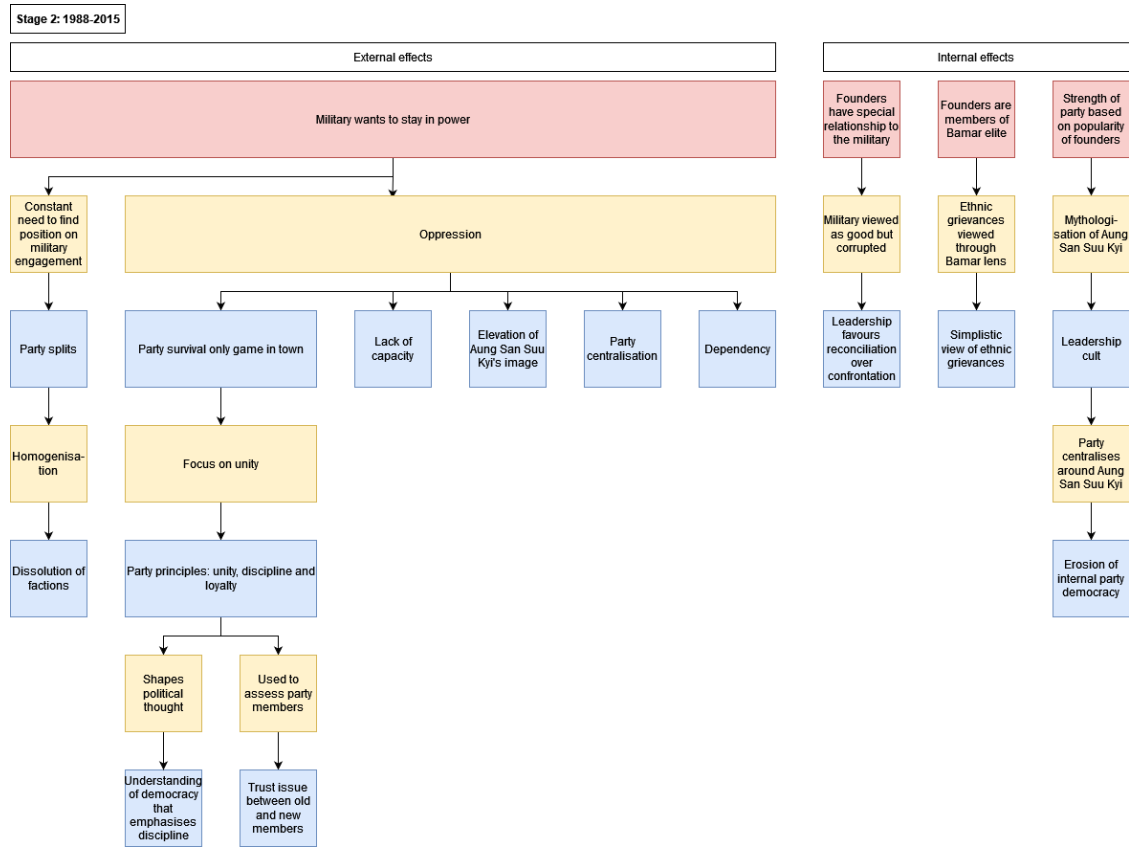


Figure 2: the opposition stage. Causes in red, causal processes in yellow, and outcomes in blue.

As I have noted above an outcome is often the result of external factors and internal features, which is why the same outcome can appear in the figure twice. Since the mechanism is simplified an outcome that appears only once can be the result of multiple causes. For example, the party's high level of centralisation in 2016 was a result of both the party's oppression, which had made more democratic structures untenable in the previous decades, and the internal mythologisation of Aung San Suu Kyi.

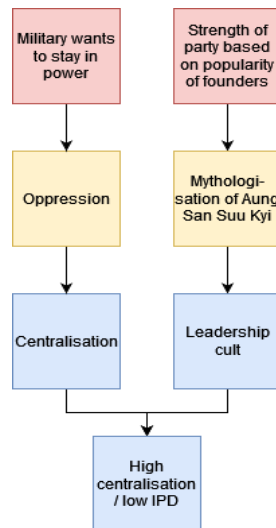


Figure 3: the effect of oppression and the mythologisation of Aung San Suu Kyi on centralisation. Causes in red, causal processes in yellow, and outcomes in blue.

Since its founding in 1988 the NLD was subjected to oppression in the form of state sponsored violence against NLD politicians and supporters, for example during rallies, party meetings, and on campaign trips, the frequent and prolonged imprisonment of party functionaries, physical as well as psychological torture at interrogation camps and in prison, extensive surveillance, the social and economic alienation of party members and their families, including the destruction of livelihoods, public disinformation campaigns, threatening party members and their social circle, and the provision of incentives for leaving the party. The NLD was repeatedly under the threat of criminalisation, a tactic the military used to extract political concessions from the party. Although the NLD experienced moments of considerable strength and influence before forming a government, the intensified oppression of the party in the aftermath of the 1990 elections meant that party survival became the most important goal for the NLD in the following two decades.

In the quest for the NLD's survival, party unity became the most important tool of the NLD leadership. A series of early experiences shaped this focus. Less than two months after the NLD had been founded Aung Gyi, one of the founding leaders of the NLD, first tried to increase his control over the party and failing to do so left the party with all but one

member of his faction. This created a publicity nightmare for the NLD since the military was quick to exploit the party split for its propaganda, portraying the NLD as weak, internally divided, and unelectable. More importantly, the military's unwillingness to transfer the power of government following the 1990 elections meant that the NLD had to constantly reassess its policy for engagement with the military, leading to further party splits. When the military, against its own stated plans, did not cede any power to the NLD following the party's landslide victory in the 1990 elections, this caused considerable division inside the NLD - with some members advocating for dialogue while others sought more radical opposition. The party consequently split a second time in 1990 when those that advocated for a more radical approach left the party. This highlighted the need for party unity: if the NLD would have split each time the party changed its course of engagement with the military, it could not have survived. Conversely, the three major party splits that did occur in 1988, 1990 and 2010, served to strengthen party unity since they filtered out any members who did not totally support the party line. During the 1990 split the party leadership preferred dialogue with the military over confrontation – a view that was shaped by the NLD leadership's view of the military as a good institution that had been corrupted by poor leaders - and since the majority of those who had advocated a more radical approach no longer played a role in the party following the split this view was consolidated. In the following decades the party would fluctuate between dialogue with the military and more confrontational approaches but would ultimately always endorse reconciliation between the military and the NLD.

The importance of party unity also shaped the political principles the NLD cultivated in its members. Discipline and loyalty became the central principles for NLD politicians. Discipline was understood in the party as the discipline to support the party line even if it diverged from the political opinion of the individual member. Loyalty became a more important characteristic for members than qualifications or skills, simply because

loyalty – often effectively proven through arrests and prison time – enabled relationships of trust that were necessary to operate an opposition party in an authoritarian political system. Yet, the emphasis on discipline and loyalty as core principles for party members made critical dialogue difficult inside the party. Moreover, the assessment of party members on the basis of these principles caused a trust issue between old and new members when the party began preparing for elections ahead of the 2012 by-election and the 2015 general election, since new members had few options to demonstrate their loyalty. The importance of these principles also shaped the broader political perspectives that developed in the party, most notably the prevalent understanding of democracy. The understanding of democracy in the party included rights but also the idea that discipline was necessary to prevent disorder and should be fostered in the general population by a benevolent leader.

Military oppression had three further effects on the NLD. Importantly, military oppression often produced these effects through the interplay with internal features of the party. Aung San Suu Kyi's rise to supreme leader of the NLD illustrates this clearly. Initially Aung San Suu Kyi had just been one of several senior NLD leaders. She was by far the most popular with constituents, but she did not yet have the political weight inside the party she would later accrue. Early on the military played a significant role in the mythologisation of Aung San Suu Kyi, with soldiers engaging her in several stand-offs during her election campaign ahead of the 1990 elections that advanced her standing in the party and among the general population. Before these stand-offs much of her popularity had been based on her being the daughter of Aung San, Myanmar's independence hero. Only through the early stand-offs with the military did she become "Aung San Suu Kyi", a political persona in her own right who commanded support not because of her father's actions but because of her own. The NLD simultaneously did everything to advance the mythologisation of Aung San Suu Kyi, retelling her confrontations with the military in ways that presented the conflict as one of good against evil. The cult around Aung San Suu Kyi eventually led to the erosion

of intra-party democracy because even though votes were at times still being held to make important decisions, these votes were increasingly insignificant because Aung San Suu Kyi's opinion determined how most politicians in the party voted¹¹.

Secondly, the persecution of the NLD had a detrimental effect on the NLD's capacity as a political party, as it was forced to focus on survival and did not have the possibility to advance party building. Throughout much of the 1990s and 2000s it had been difficult for the party to recruit new members due to the risks that went along with membership in the party. Many of its active members had to serve long prison sentences and had no opportunity to attend university or pursue a career that would have allowed for the honing of technical skills and expertise. Third, in some instances oppression caused the dependency of NLD politicians on the party. Their life at the fringes of society and in many cases extended prison sentences had rendered some members unable to secure a living for themselves outside the party.

In many ways, the NLD was perfectly adapted to ensuring the party's survival in an authoritarian system. The strategy of uniting behind a single leader did have a positive effect on the NLD's durability. One of the most impressive achievements of the party leadership was to keep the party united behind Aung San Suu Kyi even at times when she had no influence in the party. During her first six years of house arrest (1989-1995) Aung San Suu Kyi had no means of communicating with the party. Giving in to pressure from the military, the NLD's chairman Aung Shwe expelled Aung San Suu Kyi from the party in 1991. Yet, Aung San Suu Kyi resumed her position as party leader the moment she was released from house arrest for the first time in 1995. It is not difficult to imagine that other parties might have split due to power struggles between senior leaders, especially in conditions that necessitated the recurring change of party leaders due to imprisonment or house arrest.

¹¹ See chapters three and four for details.

Arguably the personalisation of politics, the mythologisation of Aung San Suu Kyi and the depiction of the struggle for regime change as one between Aung San Suu Kyi and the military, which the party actively advanced, had a positive effect on the strength of the party. It ensured continued attention to the case of Myanmar internationally, bolstered international support for the party and increased the NLD's popularity in Myanmar.

Popularity was important for the survival of the NLD because it increased the ability of the party to recruit new members. The NLD could not offer the prospect of making policy as a benefit of becoming a party member due to its role in opposition, but the leadership cult provided a reason for joining the party. The high level of party unity meant that the NLD did not have to rely on more democratic processes, like regular party congresses, to change its politics, something that it could not have done for much of its existence anyway due to the oppression of the party. Although there was at times discontent within the party over decisions of its leadership, NLD leaders could be relatively sure that the party would remain united behind them even if it had not been able to communicate a decision clearly or communicate it at all.

1.3.3. Stage 3: 2016-2021, the NLD in government

However, the characteristics that ensured the party's survival in the authoritarian regime were ill-suited for the operation of the NLD in a hybrid regime. Since the party did not come to power in the form of a role in government for the longest time of its existence, the NLD surmised that maintaining the party was synonymous with advancing democracy. The NLD reasoned that to introduce democracy in the future the party had to survive. Yet, the NLD did not foresee a hybrid political system. Rather, the party thought that its eventual coming to power would inevitably go hand in hand with a military that had little influence over politics.

Thus, the NLD was ill prepared for the dynamics of a hybrid regime that had been designed by the military and in which the military was not under civilian control, and therefore failed to adapt to the political reality of Myanmar's transformed political system. The hybrid regime the military had established provided the conditions that enabled the NLD to contest in elections and subsequently form a government. However, since the military-written constitution ensured that 25% of seats in parliament would be allocated to unelected military representatives while requiring a 75% majority for amendments to the constitution, the military had effectively protected itself against constitutional amendment that would lead to a reduction of its power. Consequently, the NLD was severely limited in the ways it could advance democracy in Myanmar. Despite this limitation the NLD still held a super-majority in both houses of parliament, giving it the possibility to make and unmake legislation as it saw fit, as long as it did not touch on constitutional provisions. Due to this hybridity of political power, observers of Myanmar politics both inside and outside the country expected that the NLD would advance democracy chiefly in two ways. Firstly, through the making and unmaking of legislation and secondly, by remaining a firm voice of support of democratic rights, drawing on the moral authority that the party and its leader had accumulated and utilised to this end over the previous decades.

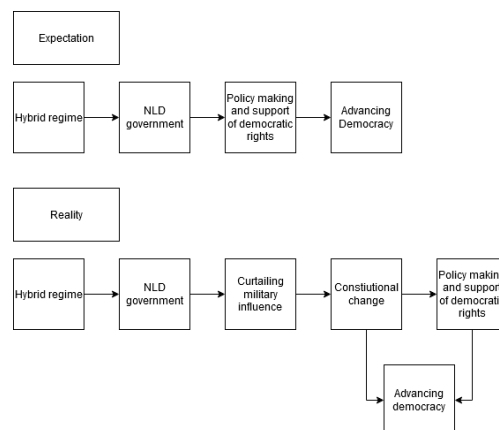


Figure 4: the NLD's approach to democratisation after 2016

The NLD, however, did neither. The party maintained that advancing democracy would only be possible when the military's power had been retrenched further, although it plainly did not have the tools to do so. The NLD argued that only limiting the military's influence would allow it to change the constitution in a way that would make Myanmar more democratic. Only after that could the party advance democracy through policy making and the uninhibited support of democratic rights. The continued power of the military in the political arena was perceived as a constant threat by the NLD. It also meant that the central goal of the party, retrenching the military's political influence as a prerequisite for advancing democracy, had not been realised. Consequently, the NLD did not adapt its political approach to the hybrid political system but remained locked in survival mode. The party's goal remained the maximisation of its own strength and durability and the reconciliation with the military.

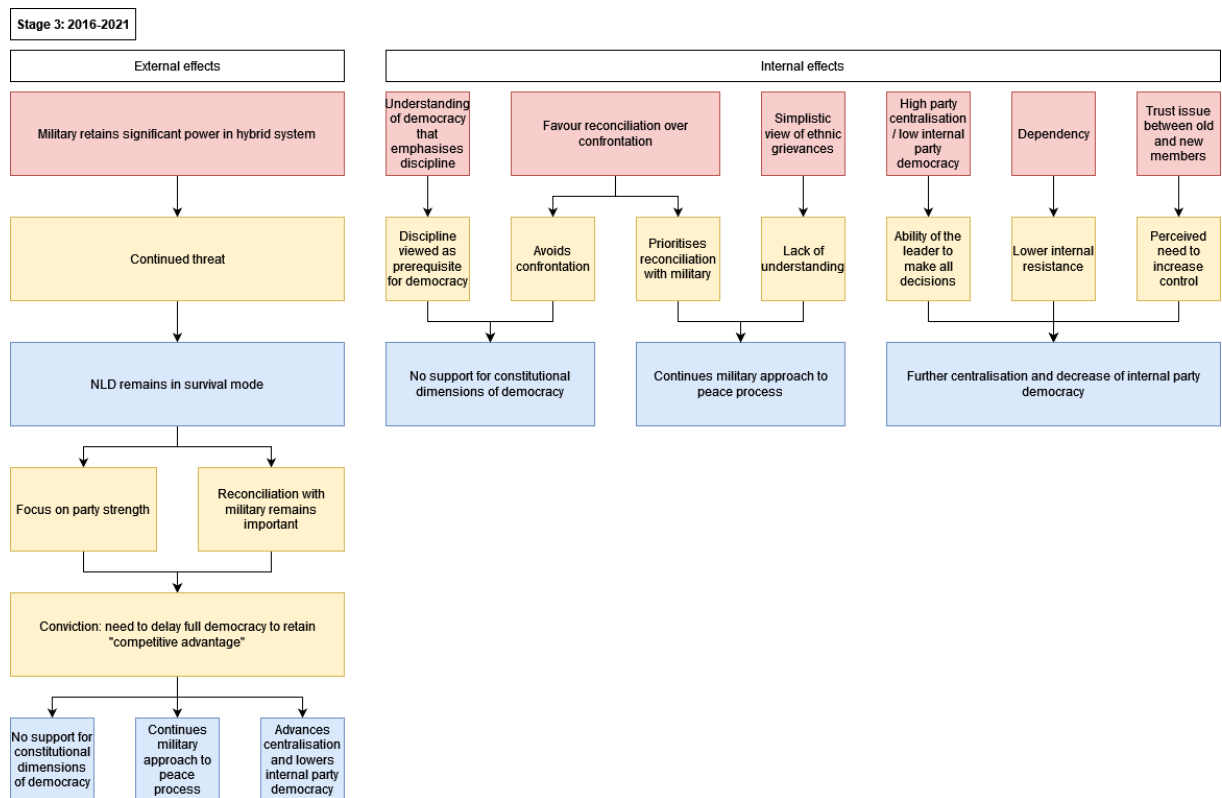


Figure 5: the government stage. Causes in red, causal processes in yellow, and outcomes in blue.

This led the NLD to advocate for delaying “full” democracy to retain what the party considered to be a competitive advantage. The NLD concluded that extending constitutional dimensions of democracy, like individual rights, would weaken the party’s position. In the NLD’s view a focus on strength and party unity was not reconcilable with promoting full democracy. NLD politicians argued that introducing greater freedom of speech, for example, would undermine the power of the NLD because it would also mean that the party and its individual members would have no way to silence or contain criticism, especially from military affiliated media. Perplexingly, while the NLD was concerned about how military propaganda might weaken the party, the NLD did nothing to protect those who exposed military propaganda and wrongdoing. Since reconciliation with the military remained a top priority, the party refrained from criticising the military, as evident, for example, in the case of the Reuters journalists Kyaw Soe Oo and Wa Lone who were imprisoned for over 500 days for investigating a massacre the military had committed in Rakhine State but who received no public support from the NLD.

In a stark departure from the NLD’s decades-long denunciation of the military’s human rights abuses, the party began defending the military against accusations of human rights violations. The NLD supported the Rohingya genocide the military committed in Rakhine State and Aung San Suu Kyi personally decided to lead the delegation in defence of the military at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. This decision was not only based on the wish to placate the military but also by a concern for votes. The majority of the party’s constituents supported the Rohingya genocide and the NLD feared that speaking out against it would weaken the party at the next election. Some NLD politicians truly supported the military’s campaign because they held a view of the Rohingya that was deeply influenced by ultra-nationalist, racist, and dehumanising rhetoric. Very few NLD politicians I interviewed were sympathetic to the Rohingya, but the majority did not support

the military's genocidal campaign and explained the party's support for it with the concern for votes.

Making reconciliation with the military the top-priority also influenced the NLD's approach to the peace process. The NLD's approach resembled that of the military in many ways and was marked most of all by the unwillingness to make concessions to ethnic minorities. Similar to its arguments about advancing democracy, the NLD argued that greater ethnic self-determination and an improved protection of human rights could only be advanced after peace had been established, effectively requiring ethnic armed groups to lay down their arms – their most powerful tool for negotiations with a heavily armed modern military with which they had been at war for decades – as a condition for negotiations. This was significant because it seemed to contravene an essential part of the political platform the NLD had established in the previous decades. The NLD had formed strong alliances with a series of ethnic political parties early on and in the late 1990s had even formed a committee representing the lawmakers elected in the 1990 election together with several ethnic political parties (the Committee Representing the People's Parliament or CRPP). Moreover, the concerns of ethnic minorities and the political aim of establishing peace had been featured prominently by the party in speeches and statements.

The NLD's excellent relationship with several¹² ethnic minority parties between 1988 and 2015 contributed to the perception of the party as democratic and bolstered the NLD's legitimacy as a democratic party because it seemed to show that the NLD was able to build the kind of coalitions that could be expected to lead to a fair representation of Myanmar's diverse citizens. Moreover, for decades it seemed like the NLD understood ethnic grievances rather than just paying lip-service to their importance, not because the NLD had a detailed position on advancing ethnic rights but precisely because it had

¹² The NLD did not maintain excellent relationships with all ethnic political parties. In some cases, the relationship was limited. In others, it was neutral.

meaningful alliances. Maybe most importantly, these coalitions balanced the single-leadership dynamic of the NLD: the CRPP seemed to indicate that Aung San Suu Kyi would govern with others rather than simply “govern them”.

During the NLD’s time in office, however, the opposite became true. The NLD did not renew its alliances with ethnic minority parties and proceeded with the military’s approach to the peace process rather than finding a more just and effective mechanism. Yet, this decision was not determined by the NLD’s focus on reconciliation with the military alone but was also the result of a simplistic understanding of ethnic diversity, culture, cleavages, and issues¹³. The NLD had thought that the right leader – Aung San Suu Kyi – would more or less naturally bring peace to Myanmar. This narrative remained largely untested while the NLD was in opposition but unravelled quickly after it came to power.

In the view of the NLD, maximising the power and competitiveness of the party was not reconcilable with promoting democracy within the party either. During most of its time in opposition¹⁴ a relatively small hierarchical structure had ensured the control of the party leadership over a small central executive committee and a modest party on the ground, constituted by supporters and some party branches. In preparation for the 2012 by-election and the 2015 general election the NLD had grown considerably in size, both in terms of ordinary members and party functionaries. Following the NLD’s landslide victory the party leadership now needed to oversee a party that was much larger than before and that suddenly had hundreds of NLD politicians in positions of relative power. To maintain a high level of party unity and control the NLD leadership decided to centralise the party further, eradicating bottom-up processes for candidate selection and voting processes for senior leadership positions.

¹³ See chapter five for details.

¹⁴ The exception was the run-up to the 1990 election when the NLD had been larger than in the following decades.

Party unity was, however, not the only factor that informed the NLD leadership's decision to exercise greater control over the party. The NLD found that many of its new recruits, especially the party's MPs, took issue with the NLD's focus on discipline and loyalty. Many new NLD politicians wanted greater autonomy in their decisions and did not share the conviction that toeing the party line was vital for the party's survival. Moreover, since they had no history in the party and had not "suffered" or been to prison they could not effectively show their loyalty. Consequently, there was a lack of trust between the party leadership and many of the NLD's new politicians that led the NLD leadership to further centralise the party. However, the party leadership also viewed many of its long-time politicians unfavourably because it was convinced that many lacked the capacity to fulfil their role in the party or in government without strict supervision. The party leadership framed the lack of capacity of the party's politicians in reference to the level of understanding of democracy, arguing that since the majority of NLD politicians had no experience with democracy they could not be trusted to fulfil their roles responsibly on their own in a political system that was becoming more democratic.

The NLD advanced a similar argument about the capacity for democracy in regard to the general population. The NLD argued that the citizenry was not ready for full democracy because it had no experience in it, echoing a sentiment the military had advanced since 1988. This argument illustrates the importance discipline had in the party's understanding of democracy¹⁵. In the NLD's view discipline had become a prerequisite for democracy and the party viewed itself as the rightful arbiter of disciplined conduct. The NLD's political culture, thus, contributed to the perception that democracy should be delayed and to the party's decision to refrain from protecting and expanding individual rights, such as freedom of speech.

¹⁵ I explore the NLD's understanding of democracy in depth in chapter six but for the purpose of the argument this simplified summary is sufficient.

I have noted before that political parties are not unitary actors and the political positions the party made while in office – the increased party centralisation, the reduction in levels of internal party democracy, the opposition to expanding democratic rights, the lack of support for human rights, the party’s conciliatory approach to the military, and its approach to the peace process – were contested inside the NLD. Yet, the single leader dynamic and the already high level of centralisation allowed the leadership to keep the party united behind its politics and the broader idea that full democracy had to be delayed. Moreover, some of the NLD politicians who had spent a long time in prison had been unable to build a life for themselves and had become dependent on the party, a situation that disincentivised criticism¹⁶. The NLD leadership’s ability to maintain this high degree of party cohesion illustrates how the combination of internal characteristics and external conditions shaped not only the party’s approach to politics but also its ability to pursue it. The NLD’s subjective orientation to politics – in other words its political culture – was consequently shaped by a series of interconnected mechanisms governed by the interplay of internal and external conditions.

Importantly, the party reconciled its oppositions to aspects of democracy with advancing democracy. The NLD believed that it had to be undemocratic to advance democracy. As I have noted previously this notion originated from the NLD’s failure to adapt to a hybrid system in which the military continued to exert considerable political influence. The NLD believed that to truly support democracy it needed to oppose the advancement of democratic rights that it thought might weaken the party. Moreover, it forwent its commitment to human rights because it believed it needed to appease the military to enter a dialogue that would lead to it giving up more of its political powers and

¹⁶ I am taking a closer look at this effect in chapter five where I investigate some of the micro-level effects of military oppression on the party.

because in some instances – like the Rohingya genocide – speaking up for human rights would have had adverse effects on the number of votes the NLD could secure, thus reducing the power of the party.

1.4. Undemocratic democrats

This combination of support for democracy and opposition to democracy that characterised the NLD's term in government makes it hard to accurately analyse the party. Existing political categories do not reflect this kind of duality since we do not assume that support for democracy is reconcilable with opposition to it. In instances when parties claim to support democracy whereas in reality they undermine it, we would simply not speak of them as democratic or try to quantify the level of support for democracy inside the party. The Varieties of Democracy data set includes a sub-set on political parties. One indicator measures parties' support for political pluralism, asking "Prior to this election, to what extent was the leadership of this political party clearly committed to free and fair elections with multiple parties, freedom of speech, media, assembly and association?" (Staffan I. Lindberg et al 2022, p. 25). Parties are scored on a scale from one (not at all committed) to four (fully committed). Prior to the 2015 election the NLD received a score of 1.992 (Steffan I. Lindberg et al 2022) telling us that the NLD's party leadership was almost "weakly committed to free and fair, multi-party elections, freedom of speech, media, assembly and association" (Staffan I. Lindberg et al 2022, p. 25). However, in the case of the NLD this characterisation based on aggregate scores obfuscates our understanding of the party's support for democracy because it fails to capture the contradictory character of the NLD's support for democracy.

In their book "Liberalism and Democracy in Myanmar", Roman David and Ian Holliday propose the concept of "limited liberalism" as a tool to make sense of contradictory political preferences among voters in Myanmar (David and Holliday 2018).

David and Holliday conducted a series of surveys that uncovered several contradictions. For example, they found that respondents were in favour of ethnic diversity but intolerant of the Rohingya. They also found that a sizeable number of respondents supported both democracy and military rule and that supporters of a more democratic constitution nonetheless supported undemocratic provisions in the existing constitution. In trying to explain these contradictions David and Holliday introduce limited liberalism, which they define as “being liberal in one aspect of liberalism, and illiberal in an adjacent aspect” (David and Holliday 2018, ch. 6, p. 15). Limited liberalism is, however, unsuitable for explaining the contradictory political culture in the NLD because adjacency is an essential requirement.

David and Holliday posit that

“Adjacency is a necessary condition of contradiction. In other words, contradiction requires conceptual overlap, and overlap requires theoretical justification. The clearest forms of adjacency stem from contrasting a general category with its subset, such as citizenship by birth and citizenship by birth for the Rohingya, or from two or more projections of the same category, such as ethnic and religious equality” (David and Holliday 2018, ch. 6, p. 15).

I encountered instances where NLD politicians presented contradictions that emerged from the contrast between their opinion on a general category and its subset, yet I found that the most perplexing aspect of the party’s political culture was that contradictions existed within the same category. In the NLD, contradictions did not emerge between the support for a general category and opposition to its subset but by genuine support and opposition for the same category. NLD politicians often sought to explain their contradictory statements by highlighting concerns over timing. A politician would, for example, make an impassioned speech in defence of freedom of speech only to conclude that it was not desirable or feasible now, but only in the future. I would spend hours with an NLD politician telling me precisely how the party had to be reformed in the future to increase levels of intra-party democracy only to be swiftly reminded that such reforms could not take place now.

Like countries arguing that they are going to war for peace, the NLD was convinced it needed to be undemocratic to advance democracy. Characterising the party as authoritarian or as only just “weakly committed” to aspects of democracy like freedom of speech or free and fair multiparty elections would negate the party’s fervent commitment to these aspects and thus misrepresent its political ideology. Similarly, characterising the party as democratic or as strongly committed to democracy would obfuscate the party’s authoritarian tendencies. To solve this issue, I suggest the concept of “undemocratic democrats”. Undemocratic democrats are not less democratic democrats or rather democratic autocrats. The concept does not denote a degree of support for democracy or a degree of opposition to democracy; it denotes plainly that commitment to democracy and opposition to democracy exist alongside each other without posing a contradiction for the undemocratic democrat. The political culture of the NLD is defined by this seemingly paradoxical coexistence of opposite political beliefs.

The party has been committed to ending military rule and introducing democracy but often advanced a view of the military as an inherently good institution that had simply been corrupted. NLD politicians cited freedom of speech as one of the most essential and desirable aspects of democracy but also believed that expanding freedom of speech would be detrimental to the democratisation process. Similarly, the party emphasised the importance of human rights for decades – and in interviews with me – but felt that supporting human rights more vocally would have undermined the prospects for democracy. Many NLD politicians I talked to bemoaned the authoritarian structure of their party and its reliance on Aung San Suu Kyi but also believed that any other *modus operandi* would have negative effects on the party’s capacity to advance democracy.

On the previous pages I have introduced some of the arguments that NLD politicians advanced to explain their simultaneous support and opposition to the same

aspect of democracy. Yet, the question remains whether these explanations reflect the true opinions of their adherents. In the framework of the concept, undemocratic democrats both truly oppose and truly support some aspects of democracy. Making the case for the NLD's opposition to some aspects of democracy is easy because we can assess the party's performance while in government. For example, few people would disagree with the notion that a party that actively supported a genocide opposes human rights. Making the case for the party's support of human rights is far more challenging.

As I have explained on the previous pages, for the NLD its opposition to some aspects of democracy arose from the perception that democracy needed to be delayed. The party believed that to some extent the NLD needed to be undemocratic to advance democracy. NLD politicians argued that limiting freedom of speech, for example, and having a highly centralised party under a single leader made the NLD stronger and therefore more effective in fighting for democracy. Yet, if the party was trying to achieve democracy by undemocratic means (in part) how can we be sure that it was genuine in its support for democracy? In other words, what makes these undemocratic democrats democratic? This question is even more pertinent when we reflect that the NLD's argument for delaying democracy closely mirrors arguments that the military has made since the 1990s. If we are not inclined to believe that the military genuinely wanted to delay democracy for the sake of democracy, why should we believe the NLD?

One major difference between the military and the NLD are the opportunities each actor had to advance democracy. The SLORC government was in power since 1988 and could have advanced democracy in any way it deemed fit. Yet, the new political system it introduced was not a democracy but a hybrid political system heavily skewed in its favour, confirming that the long-time ambition of the military had never been the creation of a democracy. Moreover, the military's methods of achieving and maintaining power directly

contravened democratic norms, relying on violence to suppress political opponents and large parts of Myanmar's population who did not support its rule. The NLD on the other hand was confined to the role of opposition in a political system without a parliament for the longest time of its existence. It could therefore not single-handedly advance democracy by making policies but was limited to advocating for it. Moreover, when the party formed a government, its power was curtailed by the provisions of the 2008 constitution that ensured the military's continued political influence. The NLD also did not seek political power through violent upheaval but through generating public support and the winning of elections. Thus, in contrast to the military, the NLD's methods for gaining political influence were in line with democratic norms and processes.

Yet, the party's support for some democratic processes and methods is no proof of the NLD's genuine commitment to democratic rights, like freedom of speech and freedom from harm. I argue, however, that the consistency between the NLD's development and the NLD's performance in government proves that the party's commitment to these rights is genuine. The NLD did not change its strategy for the promotion of democratic rights. In fact, considering the party's development, we might expect the NLD to behave the way it did because it followed the logic the party had developed in the previous decades. According to this logic, the party's strength and its survival always trumped the support for individual political goals because it was the means of achieving any political goal.

This is not to suggest that this approach is not deeply flawed and detrimental to advancing democracy but for the NLD it made sense to think about advancing democracy in this way. To illustrate this with a thought experiment, one might consider a neoliberal economist who wishes to improve the economy through his policy suggestions. We might argue that many neoliberal policies have failed, and we might expect them to have adverse effects on the economy, but we would not deduct from this that the neoliberal economist

is disingenuous in his wish to improve the economy because his suggestions are consistent with his experience, beliefs, and broader frame of reference. We could attest that he does not have the right ideas and tools to realise his ambition of improving the economy, but we would not necessarily question his ambition. The case of the NLD is similar because the idea of advancing democracy by partially undermining it had become natural to the party, in a large part because that was how the party had managed to survive as a political institution.

As I have described above, the NLD believed that the party had to be undemocratic to advance democracy because it believed that its undemocratic policies, the highly centralised structure, and the strong single leader strengthened the party. It is important to note that I do not superimpose my linguistic rendition of the political culture of the NLD on the party. Most NLD politicians I talked to were conscious that the party was not acting according to its democratic party platform. Indeed, many used the same language I use to describe the party; only the term undemocratic democrats is my creation. A handful of NLD politicians I talked to were worried about the long-term effect this strategy would have on the NLD, wondering whether the party would institutionalise a culture that was far less democratic than the party aimed to be. Yet very few NLD politicians reflected in what ways the decision to advance democracy by undemocratic means had been influenced by a distinct political culture that itself mirrored both support and opposition to democracy. The NLD viewed itself as a democratic party that was forced to behave undemocratically, but I argue that the NLD had long established a political culture that was characterised by both undemocratic and democratic beliefs.

The concept “undemocratic democrats” reflects this duality. Acknowledging that the NLD is neither a democratic party that became authoritarian, nor an authoritarian party that was never democratic to begin with, but rather a party that developed a political culture

that is democratic as well as undemocratic, is the first step towards understanding a political condition that appears to be a contradiction but is in fact an explainable outcome of a particular trajectory of party development. In other words, understanding the NLD's behaviour necessitates understanding how the party became a party of undemocratic democrats. Pointing to the continued influence of the military is not a sufficient explanation for the NLD as a party of undemocratic democrats. Rather, it is necessary to unravel how the NLD developed a hybrid-political culture that is characterised by both support of and opposition to democracy. Consequently, an updated rendition of the research question articulated at the beginning of this chapter would ask how the NLD, a party formed for the purpose of introducing democracy, became a party of undemocratic democrats, supporting and opposing democracy simultaneously.

1.5. Next steps: a guide through this thesis

In this thesis I pursue this question by analysing the mechanisms I outlined above in depth. Although these mechanisms are characterised by overlap and interconnectivity, the clarity of the analysis benefits from separating some of the mechanisms to investigate them individually.

Before I begin with the empirical analysis, I outline my research design and methodology in chapter two. There, I take a closer look at explaining-outcome process-tracing as a method, provide an overview of the secondary literature I employed for this thesis and explain my approach to primary data collection. I also provide an overview of the data I collected and assess how my positionality has shaped this project.

In chapter three I assess what we know about the historical development of the NLD and introduce a timeline of the most important junctures in the NLD's development.

Chapter four is dedicated to the mechanism that led to the disintegration of the NLD's factions and the mechanism that governed Aung San Suu Kyi's rise to supreme leader of the party. Here I investigate how external shocks led to party splits that transformed a party that had been characterised by political multiplicity into one of singularity. I then analyse how this process went hand in hand with Aung San Suu Kyi's mythologisation and her increasing power in the party.

In chapter five I look at the way military oppression fostered a specific set of political values inside the NLD. I analyse how the NLD's fight for survival led to a focus on party unity and increased the importance of discipline and loyalty. Moreover, I take a closer look at the way in which oppression affected the capacity of the NLD but also the capacity of individual NLD politicians. In this context I then assess the NLD's understanding of democracy and investigate the mechanism that informed its formation. In this context of the NLD's political values and its political culture, I also take a closer look at how the party viewed the military and ethnic minority parties.

In chapter six I investigate the effects of the mechanisms I analysed in the previous chapters. I analyse the party's approach to human rights, the peace process, freedom of speech, and party organisation while the party was in government. I also explain how the NLD reconciled opposition and support for democracy and discuss my conceptualisation of the NLD as a party of undemocratic democrats.

I will then summarise my findings in the conclusion, where I will also outline the thesis' contributions and limitations. Lastly, I will present some directions for future research in the context of the NLD after the 2021 military coup.

Research design and methodology

“Because the battle is unfinished, it would not be good to say too many things” (Anonymous NLD MP in the Yangon Region Parliament 2018, AI).

2.1. Considering the research design or why I explain a single outcome

In this thesis I explain why the NLD, a party whose central ambition has been the abolition of military dictatorship in Myanmar and the introduction of democracy, made undemocratic political decision while in office between 2016 and 2021. To this end I analyse the development of the NLD using explaining-outcome process-tracing (EOPT). In this chapter I introduce some underlying considerations of the research design and explain EOPT as a methodology. Since EOPT requires both a high quality and quantity of reliable data that speaks to the case at hand I also introduce my data collection strategy. I will also outline the benefits and limitations of existing secondary resources. After establishing the importance of primary data in this way I consider documents and interviews as sources of empirical data. Subsequently, I describe my sampling technique and the selection of interviewees before providing a detailed introduction to my sample. In the final sections of this chapter, I assess the ethical considerations that accompanied this research project, take a look at transforming observations into evidence and reflect on my positionality as a researcher. Six appendices supplement this chapter. Appendix B provides a copy of the interview guide I used during interviews, appendix C lists all documents I collected during fieldwork, appendix D presents a list of all interviews conducted for this project, appendix E contains a copy of my NVivo codebook, and appendices I and J feature the consent forms for interviews in English and Burmese.

The ambition of this research project is to find an answer to a political puzzle: why the NLD, a political party founded and maintained for the purpose of advancing democracy, undermined democracy when it came to power. Having worked in and on Myanmar since 2010, this question began to bother me in 2016, a year after the NLD had secured a landslide victory in the 2015 elections. When I began looking into the NLD I realised two things. Firstly, that there was little research on the party and secondly, that the case of the NLD appeared to be rather unique. Failing to find research on the party that could have explained why it began endorsing undemocratic policies after coming to power, I looked for similar cases but came up empty handed. I could see some semblances to other parties that had once been champions of democracy only to later undermine it, for example South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) but found that there was no research on the phenomenon I was trying to understand. I concluded that explaining the NLD's political trajectory would make an important contribution because it would fill a gap in the literature on Myanmar and would speak to a universe of other cases.

I soon realised, however, that this approach had a drawback. Trying to explain a case on which no prior research existed was extremely time consuming. Attaining the detailed knowledge of the case that made analysis possible was only viable through extensive field work and the collection of large amounts of qualitative data. I had initially envisioned a cross-case comparison that would have enabled generalisations and the formulation of an overarching theory but had to abandon this idea due to the time-consuming collection and analysis of primary data that was necessary to make sense of the case of the NLD. Consequently, this thesis does not advance a general theory that explains why democratic political parties might make undemocratic political decisions. Rather, this thesis advances a mechanistic explanation of a complex real-world puzzle and in doing so establishes the first conclusive account of the development of the National League for Democracy, Myanmar's most important political party of the last three decades.

2.2. Explaining-outcome process-tracing

This thesis uses process-tracing to explain why a political party founded for introducing democracy engaged in undemocratic politics after forming a government. Process-tracing can be broadly defined as the “systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analysed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by an investigator” (Collier 2011, p. 823). Or put differently “The essential meaning retained by the term process-tracing from its origins in cognitive psychology is that it refers to the examination of intermediate steps in a process to make inferences about hypotheses on how that process took place and whether and how it generated the outcome of interest” (Bennett and Checkel 2015, p. 6).

I use a specific variant of process-tracing: explaining-outcome process-tracing (EOPT)¹. The purpose of EOPT is not to develop theories that generalise assumptions over a universe of several cases but to come up with an explanation of a specific outcome that addresses all major factors in a case (Beach and Brun Pedersen 2019). EOPT builds on what Patrick Jackson called “analyticism” a set of philosophical perspectives that share the conviction that researchers are a part of the social world they are studying (Jackson 2016; Beach and Brun Pedersen 2019). Beach and Brun Pedersen note that EOPT is based on a pragmatist variant of analyticism, “where theories are understood as heuristic tools that capture important aspects of what is going on in particular cases” (Beach and Brun Pedersen 2019, pos. 5034). Theories are therefore used to craft comprehensive explanations of specific historical outcomes. In this quest multiple theories are often combined. The comprehensive explanations that are created in this way can be understood as minimally sufficient explanations “of a particular outcome, with sufficiency defined as an explanation

¹ In defining EOPT I rely heavily on the definition produced by Derek Beach and Rasmus Brun Pedersen in their definitive book on process-tracing: Beach, D., and Brun Pedersen, R. (2019), *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

that accounts for all of the important aspects of an outcome with no redundant parts being present” (Mackie 1965; Beach and Brun Pedersen 2019, pos. 5040).

EOPT is an iterative process committed to theoretical claims about processes in combination with confirming and disconfirming mechanistic evidence. Thus, it requires clearly defining why empirical material can serve as evidence and what finding or not finding it tells us. It also necessitates a careful reflection of sources to determine their reliability (Beach and Brun Pedersen 2019). In practice EOPT requires the pragmatic use of different causes and causal mechanisms and is, thus, based on eclectic analyticism.

EOPT’s ambition is different from other process-tracing variants. In contrast to theory-building process-tracing it does not advance a general theory that explains an outcome in several cases. Its strength lies in its ability to facilitate the analysis of the complex arrays of causal mechanisms that determine an outcome in a specific case. EOPT is problem oriented. This also distinguishes it from theory-testing process-tracing which makes no claim about the sufficiency of a mechanism but simply tests whether the theorised mechanism is present or not. The difference in goal and method is reflected in the understanding of terminology that underpins EOPT. The term causal mechanism is understood in a much broader sense than in other process-tracing variants. It refutes the claims made by researchers like Jon Elster that mechanisms must always have a level of generality and therefore exclude case-specific elements (Elster 1998). It adopts a broad understanding in line with definitions of mechanisms like the one advanced by Colin Wright who defined mechanisms as a “sequence of events and processes (the causal complex) that lead to an event” (Wight 2004, p. 290). Drawing on the work of Clayton Roberts, Beach and Brun Pedersen differentiate between case-specific or non-systematic mechanisms and systematic mechanisms that are present in a series of cases. They note “The importance of non-systematic elements in explaining a particular outcome makes explaining-outcome

process-tracing sometimes more analogous to the historical interpretation of events (Roberts 1996)” (Beach and Brun Pedersen 2019, pos. 5078).

There are two variants of EOPT research designs that differ in their starting point. Theory-first EOPT tests an existing cause and mechanism to verify whether it is present and to test whether they sufficiently explain the outcome. This approach builds strongly on existing scholarship to identify potential causes and mechanisms which are then subjected to empirical tests. For this thesis I adopt the second EOPT variant: theory-building EOPT. This variant is commonly used for phenomena that have so far not been well researched. As the name suggests this variant uses some of the same tools that theory-building process-tracing uses for building a new mechanism that can account for all essential aspects of the outcome that we are trying to explain. There is no established how-to when it comes to EOPT. My approach is similar to other EOPT designs in so far as that it proceeds to investigate a research question that is based on the outcome I have observed. In my case this is the NLD, a party founded to introduce democracy, making undemocratic policies when it came to power. I subsequently go back through the empirical record to uncover what mechanisms might have produced this outcome. Sufficiency is then determined by ascertaining whether the explanation that the mechanisms generate accounts for all relevant facets of the outcome that I defined.

2.3. A note on secondary sources

Process-tracing is an analytical method that builds on systematic description and, thus, requires both a high quality and quantity of data. Data and secondary sources on the NLD are, however, virtually non-existent. Although Myanmar has become something of a hot topic for social scientists in recent years, most publications only address the NLD in passing. Existing political science research relating to Myanmar can broadly be grouped into

four major categories: studies of ethnicity, at times in connection to civil war and security²; studies of the Rohingya and the Rohingya genocide³; studies of the military⁴; and studies deliberating the prospect for regime change (before 2010⁵) and studies assessing regime change (after 2010⁶). The wealth of publications on different dimensions of politics and political outcomes illustrates that Myanmar is generally well-researched. In this context, the lack of studies of the NLD, the country's most significant opposition party, is even more surprising. For decades, successive edited volumes have failed to advance our understanding of the NLD⁷. A likely explanation for this lack of attention to the party is

² See for example: Ferguson, J. M. (2015), 'Who's Counting? Ethnicity, Belonging, and the National Census in Burma/Myanmar', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 171, pp. 1-28; Holliday, I. (2010), 'Ethnicity and Democratization in Myanmar', *Asian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 111-128; Smith, M. (1991), *Burma: Insurgency And The Politics of Ethnicity*, London: Zed Books; Smith, M., (2007), *State of Strife: The Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Burma*, Washington: East-West Center; Steinberg, D. I. (2006), *Turmoil in Burma: Contested Legitimacies in Myanmar*, Norwalk: Eastbridge; Walton, M. J. (2013), 'The "Wages of Burman-ness": Ethnicity and Burman Privilege in Contemporary Myanmar', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 1-27.

³ See for example: Lee, R. (2021), *Myanmar's Rohingya genocide: identity, history and hate speech*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing; Kipgen, N. (2014), 'Addressing the Rohingya Problem', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, vol. 49, no. 2, pp. 234-247; Ware, A. and Laoutides, C. (2018), *Myanmar's 'Rohingya' Conflict*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴ See for example: Callahan, M. (2003), *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Egreteau, R. and Jagan, L. (2013), *Soldiers and Diplomacy in Burma: Understanding the Foreign Relations of the Burmese Praetorian State*, Singapore: NUS Press; Selth, A. (2001), *Burma's Armed Forces: Power Without Glory*, Manchester: Eastbridge Books.

⁵ See for example: Dukalskis, A. (2009), 'Stateness problems or regime unification? Explaining obstacles to democratization in Burma/Myanmar', *Democratization*, vol. 16, no. 5, pp. 945-968; Holliday, I. (2008), 'Voting and Violence in Myanmar: Nation Building for a Transition to Democracy', *Asian Survey*, vol. 48, no. 6, pp. 1038-1058; Holliday, I. (2010), 'Ethnicity and Democratization in Myanmar', *Asian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 111-128; Maung Thawngmung, A. (2003), 'Preconditions and Prospects for Democratic Transition in Burma/Myanmar', *Asian Survey*, vol. 43, no. 3, pp. 443-460; South, A. (2004), 'Political Transition in Myanmar: A New Model for Democratization', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 233-255; Wallensteen, P., Staibano, C., and Eriksson, M. (2004), *Routes to Democracy in Burma/Myanmar: The Uppsala Pilot Study on Dialogue and International Strategies*, available at: [https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:96852/FULLTEXT01.pdf].

⁶ See for example: Badgley, J. H. and Holliday, I. (2017), 'Democracy', in A. Simpson, N. Farrelly, and I. Holliday (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Myanmar*, New York: Routledge; Cheesman, N., Farrelly, N., and Wilson T. (eds) (2014), *Debating Democratization in Myanmar*, Singapore: ISEAS Publishing; Kipgen, N. (2015), *Democratisation in Myanmar*, London: Routledge; Renshaw, C. (2013), 'Democratic Transformation and Regional Institutions: The Case of Myanmar and ASEAN', *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 29-54; Stokke, K. and Soe Myint Aung (2020), 'Transition to Democracy or Hybrid Regime? The Dynamics and Outcomes of Democratization in Myanmar', *The European Journal of Development Research*, vol. 32, pp. 274-293.

⁷ I have not come across a chapter in an edited volume that engages the NLD as a political actor. Even edited volumes that aimed at providing a what's what account of the current state of affairs of Myanmar have failed to include the NLD. See for example: Cheesman, N., Skidmore, M. and Wilson, T. (eds) (2012), *Myanmar's Transition: Openings, Obstacles and Opportunities*, Singapore: ISEAS; Rotberg, R. (ed.) (1998), *Burma: Prospects for a Democratic Future*, Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press; Skidmore, M. (ed.) (2005), *Burma at the Turn of the 21st Century*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

that the NLD was often equated with its leader before the party formed a government in 2016. Moreover, the party's insular nature made analysing it difficult.

As I will show in this thesis this personalisation of politics and the reduction of the relevance of the party in favour of the popularity of its leader was fostered deliberately by the NLD. However, it was also shaped significantly by the Western gaze on Myanmar and Myanmar's "struggle for democracy". The mythologisation of Aung San Suu Kyi sold books and served a political purpose since the writings of foreign journalists and academics were pivotal for building international support for the NLD and generating attention. This is evident in the countless biographies that have been written on Aung San Suu Kyi (a quick internet search led me to at least 15 different titles). Yet, it is also reflected in the way commentators and academics have put her centre-point in their considerations of politics in Myanmar. Publications like Hans-Bernd Zöllner's *The Beast and the Beauty: The History of the Conflict between the Military and Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar, 1988-2011, Set in a Global Context* (2012) or Bertil Lintner's *Aung San Suu Kyi and Burma's Struggle for Democracy* (2007) reveal that the focus of analysis was often centred on Aung San Suu Kyi rather than on the NLD as a political party. Over time this created a considerable gap in our understanding of Myanmar politics that starkly came to light after the 2012 by-elections when NLD politicians became lawmakers for the first time: there was simply no understanding of the party. The lack of knowledge about the NLD became even more readily apparent after the party formed a government following the 2015 elections and began advancing political ideas that contravened the perceptions that academics had had about the party. Nobody could make sense of the NLD's undemocratic politics in office, and this led to a sudden surge in simplistic explanations ranging from those claiming that the party could not possibly be more democratic due to the military's influence in Myanmar to those that argued that the NLD had never been democratic, often adding that it could not have been in the first place because two of its founders had been senior military officers.

Consequently, this thesis only draws on a very small number of secondary sources that can help us understand the NLD. Although its title suggests a narrow focus on the conflict between Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD, Hans-Bernd Zöllner's aforementioned book traces some important historical events in the development of the NLD. Zöllner's book was, thus, a great help when I began analysing the historical junctures that shaped the NLD. It also alerted me to the Burma Press Summaries compiled in the 1990s for the Burma Studies Group by the retired diplomat Hugh MacDougall, who had worked at the US embassy in Burma from 1981 to 1984, which I use extensively in chapter three. MacDougall compiled these press summaries from 1987 to 1996 and included excerpts of whole sections from Myanmar papers. Notably, Myanmar papers were in the habit (and still are to some extent) of publishing statements, speeches or press briefings by the military and later by political parties verbatim. Consequently, these summaries allowed me to trace some of the early historical junctures in the NLD's development. Another excellent resource for understanding the development of the NLD is the two-volume history of the party written in Burmese by Monywa Aung Shin⁸ who at times served as party spokesperson and acted as the unofficial party historian. Despite his long history in the party Monywa Aung Shin told me that he had had issues finding information on the party. He noted:

"I have been with the NLD party since the beginning. But every so often, I got arrested. And during every single arrest, the military intelligence confiscated the statements, notes, and remarks of the NLD I had collected. Therefore, when I was going to write this book, I had to collect the data and facts about the NLD all over again from my friends" (Monywa Aung Shin 2019, AI).

⁸ I am indebted to Monywa Aung Shin who met with me repeatedly to explain the history of the NLD. We had many interesting discussions about the party, to which he was fiercely committed. He was in many ways the living memory of the NLD and a walking lexicon of the party's history. Although we did not see eye to eye on several matters of Myanmar politics, I think that he liked the passion I had for understanding the NLD. I think this, more than anything else, motivated him to entrust me with the original internal party documents he had collected and allowed me to make copies. Monywa Aung Shin was arrested by the military on 1 February 2021, the day of the most recent military coup and held at a military interrogation camp without charges until 18 October 2021. He died of a heart attack on 28 November 2021, aged 76. For an obituary with more information about his life see: The Irrawaddy (2021), 'Veteran NLD Leader Dies a Month After Release from Myanmar Junta Detention', in *The Irrawaddy*, 30 November. Available at: [\[https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/veteran-nld-leader-dies-a-month-after-release-from-myanmar-junta-detention.html\]](https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/veteran-nld-leader-dies-a-month-after-release-from-myanmar-junta-detention.html).

This led Monywa Aung Shin to draw on sources from outside the party too, most importantly diplomats who had been stationed in Myanmar and foreign publications like the New York Times, a fact that illustrates just how few party documents survived the years of military oppression. Nonetheless, Monywa Aung Shin's history of the NLD includes numerous party announcements that he compiled without commentary. Large parts of the history read almost like a logbook, meticulously relaying information like who was present at a certain party meeting or who had worked on a certain party statement. Monywa Aung Shin's history also contains essay-like accounts about important junctures in the NLD's development and reflections about aspects of the party's history. These passages are, however, strongly coloured by Monywa Aung Shin's devotion to the NLD and are not the work of a historian who tries to assert objectivity, leading me to be very cautious in employing them as evidence.

Aung San Suu Kyi's own publications, especially her 1997 volume *Letters from Burma*, at times provide a glimpse into the NLD and are important for understanding her political perspective. Several publications have explored Aung San Suu Kyi's political philosophy (Houtman 1999; Lubina 2019; Silverstein 1996; Walton 2017). These contributions are helpful for understanding the political universe of the NLD's long-time leader but so far there has been no research that investigated how far Aung San Suu Kyi's ideas spread through the NLD and how they influenced the party. In this thesis I will show that contrary to the common assumption that the NLD's political ideas are synonymous with those of its leaders, the NLD's political culture was shaped in response to conditions of authoritarianism and not merely by the political ideas of the party's leader. Moreover, I will show that there is a stark difference between the theoretical political thought of Aung San Suu Kyi we know from her speeches and books and the political ideas she pursued as the head of government.

A series of publications have illuminated single aspects of the NLD. Martin Ladd tried to measure the NLD's strength as a political party in 2015 (Ladd 2021) and Gerard McCarthy analysed why considerations of economic injustice were absent from the NLD's political agenda (McCarthy 2020). Tamas Wells' and Matthew Walton's work on understandings of democracy in Myanmar are among the most valuable for this thesis as their theories contribute to understanding how the NLD interpreted democracy (Wells 2018 and 2021; Walton 2016). Christina Fink provides a meticulous account of how military rule has influenced Myanmar's society (Fink 2001). While Fink does not devote any special attention to the NLD her findings speak to the experience of the party as I will show in the chapter on the NLD's party culture. Possibly the most detailed portrait of the NLD was not written by an academic but by the journalist Delphine Schrank (Schrank 2015). The book's somewhat lurid title "The Rebel of Rangoon" obscures the rich account of the inner workings of the NLD, told by following the life of a series of individual protagonists inside the party. However, Schrank's book is not a work of analysis but rather a carefully crafted exploration of the hopes and motives of some actors within the NLD. As such it is a valuable resource for catching a glimpse into what it meant to be an NLD member in an authoritarian regime, but it tells us less about how the party developed or how we might understand the NLD as a political actor.

For all their value these secondary sources illustrate what we do not know about the NLD rather than what we know. There are no existing works that provide a comprehensive account of even the most fundamental historical junctures in the NLD's development. There are no accounts of the party's structure or how it changed over time. We also know nothing about factionalism inside the NLD and have little understanding of the party's political platform. Based on existing work about understandings of democracy in Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi's understanding of democracy (Walton 2017), and a more commonly shared understanding of democracy in the NLD (Wells 2021) we can make some

assumptions about the political culture of the NLD - its orientation to politics - but we have very few facts.

2.4. Documents as a source of empirical data

Because of the dearth of knowledge about the NLD this thesis relies heavily on primary data. Thereby interviews I conducted with NLD politicians, NLD members, allies, observers, and opponents of the party form the backbone of empirical data. The interviews are important because there are not many original party documents that speak to the development of the NLD. If it was not so painful it would be ironic that the quest for finding out how military oppression had influenced the development of the NLD was itself impeded by the oppression of the party at the hands of the military. As the quote by party historian Monywa Aung Shin on page 55 illustrates, one aspect of the military's oppression of the party was the attempt to erase the NLD's history and prevent the formation of a collective historical understanding of the party within the party. The military repeatedly and strategically confiscated the party's documents and raided the individual collections of NLD members and functionaries. It is unclear whether these documents were destroyed or kept within the archives of the military but access to these sources was impossible either way.

Despite these difficult conditions I was able to collect several internal NLD documents that speak to the development of the party. The full list can be found in appendix C, but it is useful to highlight and contextualise some of the sources to understand their significance. The earliest primary source (1988) I was able to find might also be one of the most interesting ones: the complete collection of 56 pages of confidential party records that document the expulsion of NLD co-founder Aung Gyi and his faction (the military faction) from the party. I substantiate the analysis of the development of the party in the 1990s through a series of documents, including internal party communications, letters, announcements, and position papers. Here, the documents addressing the NLD's

stance on the National Convention are most significant as they allow us to understand how the party changed its strategy of engagement with the military.

There are fewer documents to record the party's decisions and developments in the 2000s and this is reflective of the party's state that was close to hibernation following the 2003 assault of party leaders at Depayin. There are, however, still valuable sources: letters to the head of the military government, Than Shwe, as well as directive letters to the districts and townships and position papers on the process of forming a parliament. I was also able to find the announcements the NLD released in connection to the 2010 party split. I collected fewer party documents issued after 2012 because many statements were publicly available but also because my interviewees provided a lot of data on the period between 2012 and 2019. I have also drawn on some NLD documents that were collected by the Online Burma Library. Documents that were translated for this thesis are marked OT for original translation in the corresponding reference. The documents I was able to collect myself will be made available online for other researchers after the publication of this thesis.

2.5. Interviews as a source of empirical data

Because original documents pertaining to the NLD are scarce and scholarly accounts of the party's trajectory non-existent, the research project is in large parts, if not solely, based on qualitative semi-structured interviews⁹. This section will briefly elaborate on some of the benefits and drawbacks of this data collection technique, discuss the sampling technique and provide an overview of the sample that consists of 48 original interviews (53 total interviews). Throughout the thesis quotes from original interviews are marked with AI –

⁹ It should be noted that at times there might be differences in the way a name is mentioned by an interviewee and the way I refer to the same person in writing. This difference emerges from the wide-spread use of honorifics in Burmese, including Daw and U, which I omit.

for author interview – in the corresponding reference. For a full list of all interviewees see appendix D.

The interview is often referred to as one of the most commonly used techniques for data collection in qualitative research (Ritchie et al 2013). Yet, speaking of “the interview” can be slightly misleading as the category encompasses various, if related, techniques (Bryman 2015). The major distinction between these types is the degree to which they are standardized and structured. Whereas the structured interview follows a strict interview guide to increase the reliability of responses (Bryman 2015), unstructured interviews provide, as the name would suggest, a more flexible approach (Creswell 2009). This study, however, relied on semi-structured interviews, which constitute the middle ground between structured and unstructured interviews. Guiding the interviewee, it allows researchers to “simultaneously lead the way with well-prepared, thought-through questions, and follow the interviewee through active reflective listening” (Bronéus 2011, p. 130). The drawback of interviews as research data lies in their source, i.e., humans. Memory is never perfect and many events that I discussed with interviewees had taken place 20-30 years earlier. Moreover, memories change as they are shaped by later events and experiences (Paterson, Kemp, and Forgas 2009). Lastly, interviewees might purposefully misrepresent narratives and facts and the accumulated statements must be subjected to rigorous testing and probing. Because of these caveats, I cross-referenced information carefully between interviews and made sure that multiple sources confirmed a novel piece of information. Moreover, I used party documents I had collected and Monywa Aung Shin’s history of the NLD – which compiles many party statements and notes – to confirm information I received.

I conducted interviews throughout the 13 months I spent in Myanmar from July 2018 to August 2019. Most interviews were conducted in Naypyidaw, Myanmar’s capital,

and Yangon, the country's largest metropolis. Only a handful of interviews took place outside these cities, for example in Mandalay and Hpa-An, because the interviewees were based there. Most interviews were conducted in Burmese with the help of an interpreter and even in the few cases when interviews took place in English¹⁰ an interpreter was present to allow interviewees to switch to their native language if so desired. With the consent of all but one interviewee, all interviews apart from one were recorded and later translated and transcribed. While two interviews only lasted for half an hour, the average time for an interview was 90 minutes, some interviews exceeded this time frame, with some interviews taking over four hours.

2.5.1. Sampling technique and selection of interviewees

Having summarised the basic notion of the interview that is utilised in this study, the following section will briefly outline the sampling technique that was used to identify interviewees.

This element of the data collection process was chiefly targeted at what Åkebo described as respondents (Åkebo 2013, p. 82), that is people from within the mechanism that is studied. Thus, it was my aim to identify politicians and party functionaries from within the NLD who could provide testament about the party's development and the series of questions that arose from my overall research topic. Interviews also involved what Åkebo called informants, that is people with specific knowledge pertaining to the matter at hand – experts if you will – who were able to contextualise the development of the NLD within the setting of Myanmar's historical and political development. Yet, as mentioned before, the central group of interviewees were respondents. Consequently, the sampling was not random but purposive. Moreover, the purposeful selection of candidates was not constituted solely by interviewing politicians and functionaries from the NLD. Rather, I

¹⁰ In some instances, interviews conducted in English have been edited for clarity.

sought to identify people who could speak at length to different aspects of the party and grouped them together so that I could check the statements made by people on the same event. The three overarching groupings were related to matters of NLD history, NLD structure, and NLD ideology and state-building.

The sampling process started with in-depth analysis of secondary sources and drew on information I had gathered during previous research stays in Myanmar. Reading the various English language news outlets covering politics in Myanmar (*Frontier Myanmar*, *Myanmar Times*, *The Irrawaddy*, *Democratic Voice of Burma*) I had a good preliminary understanding of a series of important figures within the NLD. Yet, this did not help me with finding the necessary contact information. Contact information for some MPs could be found online but often proved to be outdated. Indeed, at the beginning of the research period I relied heavily on the networks of friends and Burmese colleagues who had either been members of the NLD or had worked closely with the party. I was fortunate in so far that the merit of my research was understood well by a few individuals who allowed me to access their address book. It had been my plan to further extend this network through snowballing, asking interviewees who they could refer me to or whether they could connect me with a specific person. However, this proved less successful than I had thought. Many people agreed, if not necessarily always happily, to meet with me but did not want to be associated with further meetings with their colleagues and party allies. I concluded many interviews without any new contact information and again it was due to a small number of interviewees who took a more in-depth interest in my work that I was able to grow my network. In the later stages of my fieldwork, I would sometimes conduct interviews at the NLD's headquarter in Yangon. In these cases, I would sometimes arrive early or would linger around the reception after concluding the interview to see whether any potential respondents for whom I could not obtain contact information would pass by and to ask them whether they would agree to an interview.

This strategy served me well and shows that the simplest methods are sometimes the best ones (if only in a complementary fashion). For several potential respondents for whom I could not obtain the contact information in formal or informal ways, I wrote letters formally requesting an interview in English and Burmese. In my attempts to arrange an interview with the party's leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, I wrote letters to the Office of the State Counsellor, the Foreign Ministry (whose head she was) and even managed to have my letter put on the staircase in her private residence. However, none of the formal interview request letters bore fruit. I would inquire with the ministries about the receipt of my letter, and this was always duly confirmed. But when it came to a response the staff became either evasive, would promise to get back to me in a couple of days – which they did not – or would suggest an interview date and place that was visibly inconvenient for me (e.g., the next day in a city some hundreds of miles away). Naturally, I always accepted the latter suggestions, the interviews were scheduled and then duly cancelled by the ministry or government office the next day. Consequently, I am highly indebted to a handful of respondents who gave me access to their professional network because they saw merit in this work and while I cannot name them, I am deeply grateful to them.

Apart from dividing my sample along thematic lines, I also differentiated between the rank of politicians. In the first months I focused on interviewing former members of the party, observers, and members of the Yangon Region Parliament. Moreover, many of those I interviewed in the first month had a reputation for being open to academic inquiry. This allowed me to test how NLD politicians would respond to my line of questioning. In the subsequent months I moved on to MPs from the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Assembly of the Union), the national level bicameral legislature of Myanmar. Only in the last months of my field research did I start interviewing the most senior NLD politicians who had agreed to interviews with me: chief ministers, ministers, as well as members of the party's Central Executive Committee.

I had devised this strategy for two reasons. Firstly, I was worried that senior party members might forbid party politicians to speak to me in case they had taken a disliking to my work. Secondly, I thought that more junior politicians might be more prone to speaking candidly about the party because they had not been associated with the party for as long and as deeply.

This strategy, while not entirely without merit, was ultimately misplaced. It allowed me to gather more information on the NLD and to understand the party better before interviewing the most senior members and I believe that this was appreciated. Yet, I found that lower-ranking politicians were much more concerned about what they were saying and who they were referring to than senior members, most of whom spoke candidly. The concern about the information that was provided, while often understandable, sometimes took comical dimensions. Being provided with the possibility of going off the record whenever they so desired, some respondents did so excessively. Indeed, several respondents went off the record to give me information that was already publicly available or to reiterate statements that the party's spokesperson had already made in public. Such interview situations were challenging but also provided a valuable insight into the dynamics of information exchange within the party. Understanding which topics were considered sensitive by the respondents and would lead them to become guarded or simply refuse to answer contributed to the account of the party's self-perception. As indicated before, the relative reluctance of many (but not all) junior politicians to share insights was more than compensated for by more senior politicians who were so established in their roles in the party that they were at great leisure to speak freely.

One Myanmar-specific circumstance also warrants a brief deliberation on the locations in which interviews took place. In most cases, these were not unusual, with interviews taking place in the party's office in the local constituency, at a regional parliament,

in restaurants (although I avoided this whenever due to privacy and noise levels), at my home or at the interviewee's home. But in Naypyidaw, the country's capital, all MPs live at the MP Guesthouse. Far from being a single building, the MP guest house is a sprawling compound of rows of adjacent one-bedroom bungalows in proximity of the parliament. Meetings there would, at the request of the interviewee, either take place at the respondent's bungalow or at a café in the complex at which one could at least hire a private room (which I did). Several times, interviews were conducted in the open, on the veranda of a bungalow. This provided an honest glimpse into the lives of Myanmar's legislators but also had considerable implications for interviews. My arrival was always observed and could not happen in secret. Indeed, often the MPs living in adjacent bungalows were well within earshot of the conversations I conducted. Some interviewees remained entirely unflustered by this, but many others would reformulate statements once somebody had walked past (more candidly this time) or would relativise a statement once they realised that someone else had listened to the conversation. In some ways, the interviews at the MP Guesthouse in Naypyidaw thus mirrored the hierarchical group mentality that influences the party¹¹.

2.6. Introduction to the sample

As noted above, 53 interviews were conducted with a total of 48 unique interviewees.

Pyithu Hluttaw MPs	Yangon Region MPs	Amyotha Hluttaw MPs	Observers (Informants)	Leaders of Other Parties (Informants)	Government Representatives	Party Leaders (no elected office)
16	8	6	6	5	4	3

Table 1: affiliation of respondents

¹¹ It's also interesting to note that the MP Guesthouse features several beer stations (pubs), without a doubt some of the best places to pick up political gossip in the country.

Out of these 53 interviews, eleven were conducted with observers of the NLD (informants). This group of eleven was separated in two sub-groups. Firstly, the group of observers *from within* the party. In this sub-group, all observers had an affiliation with the NLD in some way or another. Three of the observers were members of the NLD at the time of the interview while the other three had been closely associated with the party. The motivation for including this subgroup into the sample was twofold. I calculated that active long-time members who had witnessed the party's development first-hand, but had not pursued a career within the party, and those who had been closely associated with the party but were similarly not trying to advance a career within it, would provide answers distinct from those who had an active career in the NLD. Secondly, the group of observers *from outside* the party, constituted by leaders of other political parties. Specifically, the group included leaders of the most popular political parties (Union Solidarity and Development Party – USDP; Shan Nationalities League for Democracy – SNLD), leaders of parties who had either split from the NLD (National Democratic Force – NDF) or had sought inclusion in the NLD but were rejected and became contenders (People's Party – PP) and of one ethnic minority party representative of the dozens of smaller ethnic minority parties that exist in Myanmar and which only operate in extremely limited, ethnically-bound, political domains (Zomi Congress for Democracy – ZCD).

Importantly, I only interviewed respondents who were or had been in leadership positions in the respective parties because I assumed that the seniority ensured that the respondents had engaged with the NLD at the highest level. Interviewees in this category included Ko Ko Gyi, the Chairperson of the People's Party, Sai Nyunt Lwin, the Vice-Chairman of the SNLD, and Pu Gin Kam Lian, the Secretary-General of the ZCD.

The largest group in the sample is made up by Members of Parliament and is divided into three sub-groups. The largest group are MPs of the Pyithu Hluttaw, the House of

Representatives or Lower House in Myanmar's bicameral legislature, of whom there are 16. The second largest group are MPs of the Yangon Region Parliament, of whom there are eight. The third largest group are MPs of the Amyotha Hluttaw, the House of Nationalities or Upper House of Myanmar's parliament, of whom there are six. The number of interviews with upper- and lower house MPs closely, if not perfectly, follows the size of the houses, with the Lower House being nearly double the size of the Upper House (440 vs 224). Yet, the prominent feature of Yangon Region Parliament MPs might be surprising.

Yet, Yangon is a significant political domain because it generates one fifth of Myanmar's GDP while also being by far the largest city in the country (more than double the size of Myanmar's second largest city – Mandalay). Secondly, and more importantly, despite having lost the status as capital in 2006 the city remains a political melting pot. The NLD's party headquarters remains in Yangon and other political parties maintain offices in the city too (even if electoral success is elusive for them in its constituencies). Most embassies remain in Yangon and so do most political think tanks, INGOs and research centres. Finally, many of the NLD's senior politicians live in Yangon, have a residence in the city or pass through it frequently on party business. This state of affairs renders Yangon Region MPs somewhat more influential than their counterparts from other state and region parliaments. At the same time, because they work in Yangon and not in Naypyidaw, Yangon Region Parliament MPs are under less rigid supervision than their Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (National Assembly of the Union, the combination of upper and lower house of parliament). Thus, Yangon Region MPs were ideal interviewees because they were deeply embedded in the party but more likely to voice opinions that were not strictly following the party line.

The sample also contains interviews with four members of the government, including three state and region chief ministers and the minister of information. It would

have been desirable to have more interviews with members of the government, but it proved impossible. Much of this came down to the NLD's own understanding of the responsibilities of ministries towards researchers. Specifically, based on my research topic the party decided that the minister of information was the only minister suitable to provide answers to my questions.

It is also important to note the value of the sample group. Regardless of how small it may seem; it contains some of the most interesting and influential politicians in Myanmar. Nan Khin Htwe Myint, the Chief Minister of Kayin State, for example, made significant contributions to understanding the development of the NLD and exemplified specific characteristics that allowed the study of important elements of the party. Specifically, she is one of only two female chief ministers and allowed me to learn much about the gender dynamics in the party. More importantly still, she is representative of a particularly interesting group of politicians in the NLD: politicians with an ethnic-minority background who work for the NLD in an ethnic minority state. Her insights on a party that has had a rapidly changing relationship with ethnic minorities in a country where the periphery can be central (Jones 2014) were invaluable. Some of the most senior party politicians requested complete anonymisation¹² but their responses shaped this research project in important ways.

Finally, the sample also includes interviews with three party leaders who do not hold an elected office. These include two members of the party's Central Executive Committee (CEC), of which one belongs to the rank of the most senior functionaries in the party, belonging to the five-person strong Secretariat that forms a circle within the CEC, and the other serving as the party's official spokesperson. Moreover, it includes interviews with

¹² I sometimes avoid stating the name of a respondent while offering characteristics that might identify him or her. This corresponds to three options provided to interviewees in the consent form: quoted with name, quoted with identifiable characteristics without name, and fully anonymised. The full consent form can be found Appendix I.

Monywa Aung Shin, a member of the NLD's Central Committee, but more importantly the Secretary of the Central Information Committee, the editor of D-Wave (the NLD's party journal) and the unofficial historian of the party. Monywa Aung Shin has witnessed the party's development first-hand and has remained active within the party throughout his life. Moreover, he is the author of two publications on the history of the NLD (the only such publications in existence).

Monywa Aung Shin is an excellent example of the purposive sampling that was used for the selection of interviewees. For although I made sure that my sample would reflect the different party faces of the NLD, the guiding principle for the selection of interviewees was neither their mode of affiliation to the party nor their rank, but my calculation of how much they could speak to the interview questions I had prepared. Therefore, someone like Monywa Aung Shin, who does not hold an elected office and has little influence when compared to more senior members of the party, was treated with preference over politicians who were more senior in rank but less knowledgeable about the party's development. In fact, while I did use snowballing techniques at times, I ultimately ended up not pursuing some possibilities for contact in favour of more detailed preparation of interviews with respondents who had a profile that afforded them unique capacities to speak to the party's development.

Nonetheless, it might be worth noting a few summarised data points about the sample and to briefly consider their effects to conclude this section. Only one fourth of the interviewees were female (12 female to 36 male). This somewhat mirrors the gender imbalance in the political domain in Myanmar. Eight of the 48 interviewees are not members of the NLD, providing testament to the sample's focus on respondents from within the party. The sample contains six respondents who belong to the NLD's highest

party organ, the Central Executive Committee, thus representing more than one third of the entire CEC. This added significant explanatory power to the sample.

2.7. Ethical considerations

Prior to conducting field work the research framework was examined by the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) and ethical clearance was given to the proposed project. However, it is useful to revisit the situation in which this field work was conducted and the ethical considerations it ultimately posed.

Fieldwork was conducted between July 2018 and August 2019. The year was politically volatile as the aftermath of the military campaign against the Rohingya minority continued to affect the regional and international relations of Myanmar. The severity of the campaign fostered a political climate that was decidedly different even from other moments of humanitarian catastrophe, like the 2012 Rakhine crisis, and is therefore significant. Continued fighting between the Myanmar military and ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) added further to a sense of volatility. These broader political dynamics affected the research project in general but had no implications for the ethical considerations because the project neither specifically engages with these developments nor does it interview the vulnerable groups affected by them. More relevant to the case at hand was the fact that the NLD had increasingly come under greater scrutiny of the public and sought to do everything in its power to centralise the party and show a united front. This meant that many of the party's politicians were more closely watched by senior party officials. In short, the party became stricter in policing its members. Politicians who spoke out against the party line or openly disagreed with Aung San Suu Kyi were ousted from the party. Indeed, two Yangon Region

Parliament MPs who were interviewed for this study were later expelled from the party because they had repeatedly criticised the party's leadership publicly¹³.

I always asked for explicit consent to conduct the interview, to record the interview and the choice for citation. The consent form was five pages long and very detailed. Yet, cases that posited ethical considerations did materialise. At times, interviewees who had decided to speak on the record and to be quoted directly said something so controversial (from the perspective of the NLD) or so opposed to the party line that I imagine the quote would severely curtail the prospects of a further career within the party if it were to be published and read by someone senior in the party. While these statements often contained intriguing points of information and were, thus, valuable to my research, I made the decision to take a proactive stance in offering the omission of the statement. In such instances I would repeat a statement that had just been rendered and ask explicitly whether the interviewee would like to keep the statement on or off the record.

This may be controversial. I realise that I might have misjudged statements and they might not have been as controversial as I thought. Even if they were, it is not my responsibility to protect the career of a politician from his own words. But only very few NLD politicians look back at a life in politics. Most MPs have either moved from activism to politics or entered the political arena recently. In this light, my move to double-verify consent even during interviews should not be interpreted as a lack of objectivity but simply as a product of what I deemed to be appropriate academic conduct.

¹³ For a more detailed look at the ways in which the party leadership tried to control NLD MPs see Appendix H.

2.8. Analysing data: from observations to evidence

I have introduced the two most widely used types of data of this study. This section will briefly explore some aspects of data analysis and discuss the validity and reliability of the data.

As noted, I was able to record all but one interview and all interviews were later transcribed and translated. All the document-based primary sources I collected were scanned and later translated. It should be noted at this point that I do not possess Burmese-language skills that would allow me to conduct interviews or translate any of the material. Consequently, I relied on the work of research assistants. I use the word research assistant rather than translator to reflect that I never worked with translators in the technical sense. Rather, I worked with a small team of five political science students who all had a grounding in the relevant literature and who were knowledgeable about Burmese politics and the terminology surrounding politics. Moreover, the close working relationship ensured that translations were not simply rendered but discussed and deliberated. Translations from English to Burmese and vice versa are not easy, especially in the domain of politics and I believe that the time-intensive translation mechanism that would often engage several rounds of confirming the choice of translation generated the best translations possible. Lastly, all interpretation during interviews was carried out by a single research assistant. Working closely together for a year contributed to the quality of the interviews as it minimised the risk of meaning getting lost due to faulty interpretation.

Once the sources were translated, the initial data analysis process was similar for both interviews and document sources. All transcripts were imported into NVivo where I coded them for further analysis. My coding scheme went through several iterations. I started by creating nodes for important individual NLD members, places, and specific time periods, but soon realised that this was not conducive to investigating the mechanisms I was

analysing. In a second stage, I moved on to creating nodes for significant historic events, like the different party splits, for specific political positions, like the party's stance on Article 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law that relates to freedom of speech, and various relationships, like the one between Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD or the relationship between the NLD and the military. This was a helpful step because it allowed me to find fingerprints of the causal mechanisms I was trying to analyse. This served as the basis for the next group of nodes I created, grouping sources around certain ideas and feelings, for example the concept of undemocratic democrats or the feeling of disillusion with the party. These nodes were crucial for substantiating the mechanisms I had previously theorised. Once I had a clearer understanding of the mechanisms I was observing, I began thinking about revising the structure of my thesis. I revised the structure of the thesis to reflect important mechanisms and then began coding anew to gather information on one mechanism in a central node and some auxiliary nodes. For example, I grouped all information on the changing nature of the party's factions under the node "faction", which I analysed in conjunction with the nodes on specific historical events – like the Aung Gyi faction split or the 2010 party split – that I had created earlier.

Grouping and regrouping the empirical data I had gathered in this way was essential for generating an understanding of the processes that generated the outcome I was observing. It was also helpful for testing whether my explanations were sufficient because categorising the vast amount of empirical data I had allowed me to navigate it much more effectively and identify possible conflicting data points or alternative explanations. However, the codebook does also reflect a simpler strategy of data categorisation. Due to the lack of documentation, I spent a long time trying to work out how the NLD was organised. This was extremely challenging because there was a stark difference between official party regulations and the NLD's practice in reality. The main node "NLD Internal Processes and Structures" features 23 sub-nodes that each address a different party organ

or party process. Codings like these were necessary to comprehend how the NLD functioned and were, thus, necessary for all further analysis although they did not necessarily generate new theories about specific mechanisms. The full codebook can be found in appendix E.

During the process of analysing the data, questions of internal reliability were continuously considered. Or simply put, I evaluated whether the empirical observations constituted empirical evidence. Internal validity is used to determine whether or not “you are observing, identifying or measuring what you say you are” (Mason 2002, p. 39). This necessitates careful vetting of empirical data, establishing which biases exist in the gathered data and how they affect its capacity to serve as evidence for a given outcome. A clearer understanding of evidence in the setting of process-tracing is vital here. Observations, understood in terms of raw empirical data, are only transformed into evidence if they are analysed based on deep case-specific knowledge. Only evidence generated in this way might then be used to trace the causal steps that link together a causal process, thereby, assessing whether the evidence increases or decreases confidence in an element of the causal mechanism. Yet rather than focusing on evaluating empirical findings through contextual knowledge alone, the study also employed triangulation techniques to ensure validity. Triangulation entails using more than one method or source of data in the study of social phenomena (Bryman 2008). This means exposing the observations from one data source to the findings and stipulations from other sources and thus avoiding conclusions based on a single document or interview.

2.9. Researcher positionality

Process-tracing establishes a comparatively rigorous framework for qualitative work, and I believe that the causal mechanisms I describe are built on solid evidence that has been verified with the aid of the methodology that I have described in this chapter. Nonetheless,

the product of this research project is influenced by my own positionality in some important ways. Especially since explaining-outcome process-tracing requires so much detailed knowledge of the context in which the causal mechanism takes place, the way of moving through the “realm of this context” warrants consideration.

Regarding basic information: I am a white male, educated in Germany and the UK, and an atheist. These features together play into the privilege that grounded my ability to conduct this research, for example by way of constituting my financial ability to spend an extended period in Myanmar and to employ research assistants to help with translations. Naturally, my education in the broader sense of the socio-cultural environment that forms my own “context” influences the way I think about the world. I try to be reflective of this and to recognise the personal biases that might shape my work. By way of an example, while I try to not automatically assume a euro-centric (or Global-North focused) view of the theoretical dimensions of politics, such views still inform the way I think in large parts. This is reflected throughout this thesis. One example is the way I discuss understandings of democracy within the NLD in chapter five. There, I argue that there exist different nuanced understandings of democracy in the NLD although these understandings do not conform with Western definitions of democracy. This is important because accepting these alternative understandings as genuine conceptualisations of democracy is the first step in analysing their effects on the party. I could make a much simpler argument, refuting the validity of the political thought of my respondents on the grounds that they do not match existing definitions of the concept. Yet, such an approach would lead to significantly more shallow and ultimately misguided analysis.

Notably, some stations in my CV affected my research. The reputation of the University of Oxford (the alma mater of Aung San Suu Kyi) opened many doors that might have remained closed had I been associated with a different university. Also relevant to my

positionality is the fact that I have worked intermittently in Myanmar for ten years (five at the start of this project). Initially, it was my earlier work experience in Myanmar that inspired my academic work on Myanmar. This has benefits as well as disadvantages and both affected my work. It was beneficial that I knew the country, its history, and traditions well. This allowed me to always behave courteously, and I believe it played a significant role in the success of my interviews. On the other hand, “Myanmar” or more specifically politics in Myanmar are not simply research topics for me but they constitute a significant part of my life. This “life in Myanmar” has generated its own conceptions about the dynamics of political developments and I had to be vigilant in questioning the origins of the first iterations of arguments that I constructed.

The development of my research question illustrates this well. When I set out on this project, I was convinced that the development I would be describing was one of change. In other words, I believed that the NLD had transformed from a democratic party to a partially authoritarian one. This belief reflected two things. Firstly, it reflected a lack of knowledge of the party’s development that was in some sense natural for the beginning of the research project. Secondly, it also reflected my own experience in Myanmar. I began working in Myanmar in 2012, a year in which the mood in the country was still very cautious but decidedly optimistic. Different from many other foreigners in the country I was always embedded with local civil society organisations, and it was among local civil society that the mood shifted most drastically between 2012 and 2016, from sheer optimistic excitement to resignation. The people and organisations I worked with could not make sense of the NLD’s political performance that seemed to contravene the party they had known for decades. This experience, more than my lack of knowledge, shaped the idea that the NLD must have changed but we simply did not understand how. It took me two years and considerable research to reflect that the first iteration of my research project had been shaped by my own experiences rather than facts. However, episodes like this one initiated

an iterative process of probing, testing, and re-evaluating my own ideas and arguments that ultimately benefitted this project.

A detailed empirical narrative of party development: the NLD 1988-2015

“A 20-year long journey was in vain. This is why I keep repeating that we have only been able to run the party effectively for ten years although the party has existed for 30 years” (Anonymous member of the NLD CEC 2019, AI).

3.1. Introduction to the history of the NLD

Identifying the mechanisms that have shaped the NLD’s development requires knowledge of the history of the NLD. In this chapter I will expand on some of the central historical junctures in the party’s development. Specifically, I highlight ten critical moments in the party’s development up until the 2015 general elections that are important for understanding the mechanisms I analyse in the following sections. I aim to describe what we know about the NLD and what we do not know, drawing on secondary sources, primary data, and interviews I conducted during field research. Consequently, the ambition of this chapter is not to advance specific arguments about the party but to highlight specific aspects of the NLD’s development that form the basis for the subsequent analysis of the mechanisms that made the NLD a party of undemocratic democrats. This defines the scope of this chapter. This chapter does not present a complete history of the NLD. Rather it presents a historical account of those junctures in the party’s development that can help us make sense of the NLD as a political party that combines support and opposition to democracy. This narrative is, thus, the first step in the application of the explaining-outcome process-tracing method and does not unfold along the lines of arguments but closely tracks historical developments of the party to identify possible arguments.

This is also important because many aspects of the NLD's development remain contested, not solely in an academic sense but also within the party. In this context, the account of what we can safely assume to be facts of the party's history provides the foundation for all subsequent analysis of the NLD's development.

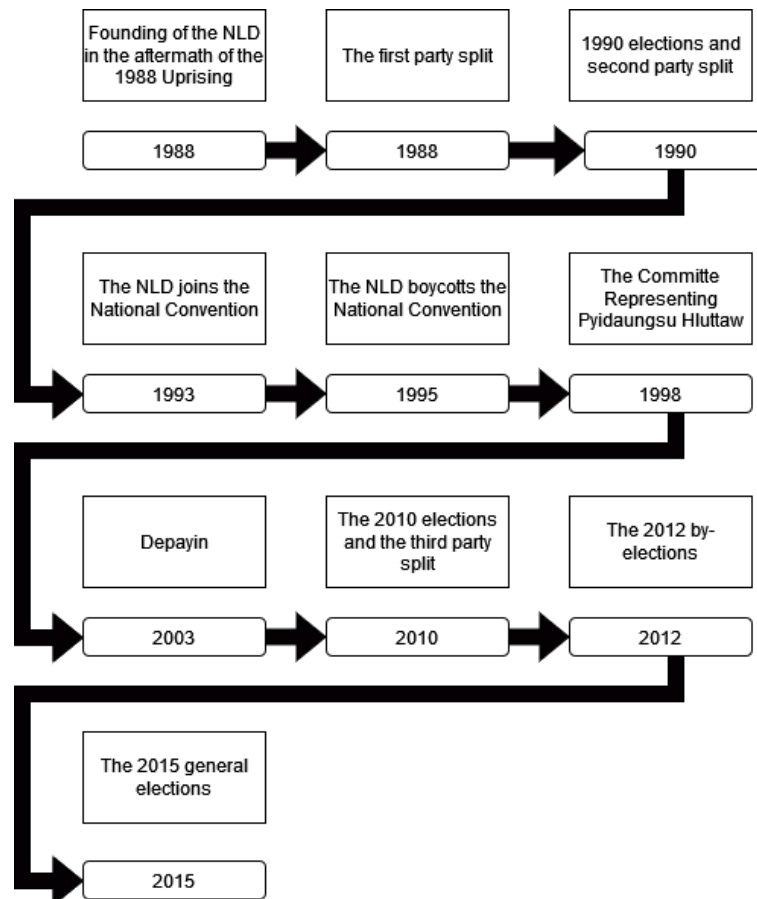


Figure 6: important junctures in the NLD's development

3.2. The founding of the NLD in the aftermath of the 1988 Uprising

The NLD was founded on 27 September 1988. Its founding was a result of the 1988 Uprising and the moment of authoritarian regime break down the uprising had triggered. The 1988 Uprising was caused by severe discontent with the regime of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). This discontent had been stoked by the BSPP's sudden decision to demonetise 25-, 35, and 75-kyat notes without compensation in 1987, effectively rendering 75% of the country's currency worthless (Haseman 1988). The same year, the

UN granted Burma the status of 'Least Developed Country', allowing the country to access further aid funds (Brown 2013). In March the following year, a letter by Aung Gyi, a former brigadier general, who had been forced to resign from Ne Win's Revolutionary Council in 1963, fanned the flames of discontent. Aung Gyi had addressed the letter to Ne Win, calling for economic reforms, warning about the impending collapse of the economy and the possibility of famine (Aung Gyi 1988a) but also had the letter distributed among members of the social elite (Htay Htay Win 2018). It was subsequently copied, became public and was widely read. However, the trigger for the wave of protests that swept over Myanmar in 1988 was a brawl at a teashop between students and youths in Yangon on 12 March 1988. The police first arrested one young man for injuring a student but later released him, prompting student protests at the local police department the following day. At the protest the police shot and killed one of the students. The protests subsequently intensified, spreading to different universities across Yangon and eventually the whole country. Initially, the protests in 1988 were student-led protests but they soon included people from all walks of life.

In July 1988 Ne Win, who had ruled Myanmar since 1962, announced his resignation and recommended a referendum on the introduction of a multi-party system (Sein Win 1988). In the following months two successive military governments emerged as senior military generals were fighting for control before the military managed to bring the country back under its control in a coup that saw the newly formed State Law Order Restoration Council (SLORC) come to power on 18 September 1988. Although the SLORC was eventually able to violently suppress the protests but encouraged the formation of political parties and guaranteed it would hold free and fair elections.

The NLD was founded as a result of the political opening the 1988 Uprising had created on 27 September 1988. On the day of its foundation the NLD was first and

foremost the product of an alliance between three factions. Firstly, Aung Gyi, the retired brigadier-general who had fanned the flames of the 1988 Uprising through his criticism of the BSPP regime, represented the so-called military faction, often referred to as Aung Gyi faction. Secondly, Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of independence hero Aung San and the newly risen star of the protest movement, represented the intellectual faction. Third, Tin Oo, a former commander-in-chief of the armed forces, represented the faction of the patriotic comrades. Like the Aung Gyi faction, this group was made up mostly of former military officers, albeit belonging to a different generation. Aung Gyi, Aung San Suu Kyi, and Tin Oo each had their group of supporters who founded and joined the NLD together with them and it was these factions that defined the NLD upon its foundation. Soon, the founding trio was referred to as AungSuuTin by party members and NLD sympathisers. As Dr May Win Myint, a member of the NLD central executive committee explained “There was only a cooperation of three groups: AungSuuTin” (Dr May Win Myint, 2019, AI).

The making of AungSuuTin was not without friction, the alliance was borne out of the necessity to form a broad political coalition that would be able to unite public support rather than by a deep sense of allegiance. The three leaders had been in contact with each other through their supporters and had appeared on different stages at the same venues. As the plans for a party evolved each group worried that the other would try to win the upper hand in the new party. To keep an even balance when the NLD was founded, its Central Executive Committee consisted of four members of each faction¹. NLD chronologist and spokesperson Monywa Aung Shin recalls “These three groups came together and formed a party. Hence, National *League* [emphasis added]. League means an umbrella association of groups” (Aung Shin 2019, AI).

¹ For the intellectual faction: Aung San Suu Kyi, Win Tin, Myint Myint Khin, and Aung Lwin; for the faction of Patriotic Old Comrades: Tin Oo, Aung Shwe, Lwin, Chit Khine; for the Aung Gyi faction: Aung Gyi, Kyi Maung, Kyi Han, and Ba Shwe.

A series of political beliefs that went beyond the goal to establish democracy united the three factions. Firstly, each faction was popular with the student movement and had won their support throughout 1988. While Aung San Suu Kyi, Tin Oo, and Aung Gyi all tried to find a political response to the political crisis that manifested outside of protests, they understood that the protests would continue to be indispensable tools for pressuring the military but that they would eventually have to found a political organisation to challenge it effectively. Moreover, they realised early on that there would be competition between numerous political parties if elections were to be held. All three realised that the students' mobilising power could to some extent be redirected to campaigning if needed. Secondly, the POCL, and Aung Gyi understood that any "winning" coalition would have to feature the daughter of Myanmar's independence hero Aung San, who had gained popularity so swiftly that calling it a meteoric rise would have been an understatement.

Third, and crucially, Aung Gyi, Tin Oo, and Aung San Suu Kyi, had a similar view of the armed forces. They shared the belief that the armed forces were generally a respected institution that should continue to play an important role in Myanmar as the guardian of the people but not as their ruler. In fact, all three espoused the view that the army had somehow been corrupted and was not its true self. Thus, in the view of AungSuuTin, discontent should not be levied at the armed forces as an institution but rather at a series of its leaders who had not only wronged Myanmar's people but the military itself. While Aung San Suu Kyi, Tin Oo, and Aung Gyi, shared this view it set them apart from many other protest groups who had much more critical views of the armed forces, notably student protest groups and strike committees.

3.3. The first party split and rising tensions ahead of the 1990 elections

Despite the popularity of the party and the common enemy that served to unite it, the NLD faced its first major crisis less than two months after its foundation². On 25 November 1988, Aung Gyi, leader of the eponymous founding faction of the party and an influential figure in the 1988 Uprising, sent an open letter to Aung San Suu Kyi in which he accused eight NLD central executive committee members of being communists and demanded their expulsion from the party. The accusation had far-reaching consequences not only because it led to the first party split but also because the public accusation that “The number of communists and communist supporter groups grows within the NLD” (Aung Gyi 1988b, OT) played into the propagandistic narrative that the SLORC tried to establish to discredit the NLD³. The matter was eventually resolved by a vote in the central committee of the party in a meeting on 3 December 1988 with 13 votes in favour of the dismissal of the eight accused CEC members and 28 against. Aung Gyi was thus expelled from the NLD and all members of his faction but one resigned. The NLD consequently changed fundamentally from a league of three groups to an alliance of just two. The change was reflected in the subsequent reshuffle of the CEC and CC with the leader of the Patriotic Old Comrade Faction, Tin Oo, assuming Aung Gyi’s role of chairman of the NLD. The split of the Aung Gyi faction marked the first instance of a series of party splits that would consolidate who oversaw the management of the party and transform the NLD from a movement-like political league with several important leaders to a highly centralized party under the control of a single leader.

The period between the foundation of the NLD in September 1988 and the general elections in May 1990 was marked by uncertainty. In an interview with *Asiaweek* in January

² For more details on the first party split see chapter four.

³ Through Aung Gyi’s letter it also became clear that he had already founded another political party, the Union National Democracy Party (UNDP), in defiance of the NLD’s party regulation.

1989 General Saw Maung held out on providing a date for the election but gave a candid answer to question what he was going to do after the elections, responding “I’ll retire” (Asiaweek 1989). On 16 February 1989 the election commission published a draft schedule for the elections that indicated that the elections would take place in May 1990. However, on 2 June 1989 the SLORC announced that power would not be handed over after the elections. Instead, the SLORC suggested that a government would have to be formed based on a constitution. Only if the newly elected parliament were to unanimously vote in favour of the 1947 or the 1974 constitution a government could be formed, and power be transferred. The parties understood that the SLORC might try to find an excuse to hold on to its power. They continued to make suggestions to the election commission. The election commission, however, paid little heed to the suggestions it received.

When Aung San Suu Kyi was interviewed by Asiaweek a day after the publication of the election rules on 1 July 1989 she commented “I went through them quite carefully. They haven’t paid any attention to all the suggestions that must have poured in. We made a large number which were totally ignored. We have also asked for special provisions to do with the transfer of power, and they haven’t touched on that at all” (Aung San Suu Kyi 1991, p. 224). Some observers of the 1990 elections have argued that the NLD largely disregarded the SLORC’s announcement that the 1990 elections would not lead to a transfer of power by default (Tonkin 2007), but such assessments are misplaced. In the same interview Aung San Suu Kyi shared her concerns over the military’s intentions, noting that “Some people think that if we just sit tight and wait until the elections, we’re bound to be elected. But it’s not as simple as that. Day by day we’re losing more and more of our basic political rights – whatever political rights we had” (ibid). When Dominic Faulder of Asiaweek asked her what she thought would happen after the elections, Aung San Suu Kyi admitted:

“We don’t know; this is the problem. Whoever is elected will first have to draw up a constitution that will have to be adopted before the transfer of power. They haven’t said how the constitution will be adopted. It could be through a referendum, but that could mean months and months, if not years. That’s why provisions for the transfer of power are so important. [...]” (ibid, pp. 224-225)

It was these provisions that the NLD had suggested to the election commission but that had been ignored. Aung San Suu Kyi was aware that a potential response to the demands of the military would have to be a unified decision on a constitution by all campaigning political parties but noted that “With more than two hundred parties it’s not easy to draw up a constitution acceptable to everybody...Why can’t the SLORC begin a dialogue instead?” (ibid, p. 225).

Nonetheless, the NLD and other political parties tried hard to build alliances. On 3 July 1989 Aung San Suu Kyi became the representative of a group of political parties that continued to call for dialogue with the military because they were concerned that “the chances for elections in May 1990 were “in danger of fading away” because of what they described as the “repressive actions of the SLORC”” (Aung San Suu Kyi 1991, p. 345). In the following weeks tensions between the NLD and the SLORC continued to build. On 10 July 1989 Aung San Suu Kyi addressed an estimated 30,000 people near Shwedagon Pagoda, declaring that her party would continue its campaign of “civil disobedience against what she described as “unjust laws”” (Aung San Suu Kyi 1991, p. 348).

Eight days later, on 18 July 1989, the military began establishing military tribunals in Yangon, in the region of the central command, and the north-west command, that were to act based on martial law. Aung San Suu Kyi and Tin Oo, then chairman of the NLD, were placed under house arrest two days later, on 20 July 1989. A SLORC spokesperson explained at a press conference a day later that “Action has been taken against Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo [...] under the Law Protecting the State from Danger of

Disruptive and Destructive Elements, as of July 20. They are accordingly Elements, as of July 20 (BPS 1989).

The first house arrest of Tin Oo, and more importantly Aung San Suu Kyi, was a litmus test for the young party and a taste of the challenges that the NLD would have to face for most of the party's existence. Communication between the CEC and the party's leadership became impossible, and its most popular politician was removed from the public eye. The party's popularity with the electorate did not, however, diminish. Despite the house arrest Aung San Suu Kyi filed an application to stand for election in her home township of Bahan in Yangon but the application was turned down in January 1990⁴.

3.4. The 1990 election and the second party split

As the election preparations progressed the SLORC left no doubt that it sought to shape the election outcome in its favour by tightly controlling the competing parties. On 23 February 1990, the SLORC published a list of election procedures in Order 3/90, that noted:

“Security forces shall “render assistance” to “safeguard against disturbances” [...] [and] Parties may not attack national sovereignty or integrity; against the unity and solidarity of national races; promote disaffection towards the SLORC or impair its dignity; impair the dignity of or cause disintegration of the Armed Forces; undermine security, peace, and tranquillity; incite racial or religious conflict; impair education; or interfere with security forces. Violators are subject to K 5,000 fine and/or 3 years imprisonment” (BPS 1990a).

Despite major concerns the 1990 elections on 27 May 1990 were generally considered to be free and fair⁵. The NLD won 392 of the 485 seats and 59,9 % of the vote⁶.

⁴ On the same day Tin Oo was sentenced to three years imprisonment for sedition.

⁵ The fears of major vote rigging were dispelled not by analysis but rather by the NLD's decisive victory at the polls that suggested that there had been little, if any, foul play.

⁶ A majority voting system was applied following the adoption of the British electoral system after independence. As one of the consequences, the party that won the second greatest number of seats (23) in parliament after the NLD, the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, received only 1.68% of the total vote (Zöllner 2012, p. 155). Furthermore, “Due to the first-past-the-post election system adopted from the British the NUP, successor to the BSPP, won even fewer seats than the Shan National League of

The military aligned NUP, the successor to the BSPP, won 10 seats with 21,7% of the vote.

Three days later the election commission announced that the elections had been free and fair but also warned:

“[the military] would never let the reoccurrence of situation as in 1988, that till the power has been handed over to a strong government that would come into being in accordance with law, that they would carry on implementing the first three tasks... [rule of law and tranquillity; transportation; food, clothing and shelter] and that they would always put in the fore the three main causes of non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of national solidarity, and for perpetuation of national sovereignty” (BPS 1990b).

Once more, the junta was sending mixed signals, on one hand acknowledging the results and confirming that it viewed the election process as fair while on the other hand suggesting that the election should not give way to the feeling of democratic empowerment that had been palpable during the 1988 Uprising. Hopes for a quick transfer of power diminished further with the SLORC press conference on 1 June 1990. Answering questions of attendants, the SLORC spokesperson noted that the SLORC would

“carry on with the duties and responsibilities till a strong government is formed according to the constitution and that the SLORC would also continue to carry out the three main tasks. A constitution would be drawn up by the representatives of the parties elected, that power would be handed over, according to law, to the strong government formed in accordance with the constitution thus drawn up and that it could not be said how long the drafting of the constitution would take⁷” (BPS 1990b).

Consequently, the SLORC did nothing to initiate a transfer of power or even considered releasing the leader of the majority-winning party from house arrest. The BSPP-regime and its successor the SLORC had envisioned these elections might allow them to

Democracy (SNLD), even though it received far more votes than the latter, which had only contested seats in Shan State (10 versus 23)” (Zöllner 2012, p. 164).

⁷ Furthermore, the spokesperson quelled the hopes for a referendum on the constitution that would be drawn up and refused to provide a date for a meeting between the SLORC and representatives of the elected political parties. He also informed those present that “the State [LORC] would hand over the responsibilities only to the strong government that would come into being according to law in accordance with the Constitution drawn up and approved by the Hluttaw representatives elected, and that this was said not only now and that the State [LORC] Chairman and Secretaries had told this time and time again, long before the election was held” (BPS 1990b).

retain power in some way because the vote would be split between the hundreds of political parties that competed for the opposition vote. They had likely anticipated that this situation would benefit the military-aligned party that – at least – could count on the support of a fairly large bloc of voters affiliated in some way or other with the military. When it became clear that the electorate was united behind Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD despite a fragmented opposition movement, the SLORC reneged the terms of the elections prior to the vote and began to claim that the elections would not be for the formation of a new government but rather for the formation of a body that would oversee the drafting of a new constitution. Their hopes were pinned on the idea that the different victorious parties would struggle finding enough common ground to draft and ratify a new constitution, providing ample opportunity for the military to insert itself in this process. The NLD and other political parties had long realised that the SLORC would not transfer power to them, but they had been legitimised as elected representatives by the votes cast in the general election. Thus, many MP-elects felt that it was their right and responsibility to form an interim government that would then draft and ratify a new constitution. Discussions grew steadily more intense during the following weeks and the NLD was searching for a unified party line, which it wanted to decide on during a meeting on 28 July 1990.

The NLD's meeting had been approved by the authorities who were, thus, fully aware that 28 July might turn into a watershed moment that could unite elected law-makers of the NLD and other parties behind the idea to form an interim government without the involvement of the military. The SLORC, thus, issued a declaration on 27 July 1990 (SLORC 1990) in which it pre-emptively addressed the idea that the NLD was debating at the time:

“There will be no necessity to clarify the fact that a political party cannot automatically get the three aspects of State Power - the legislative power, the executive power, and the judicial power - just because a Pyithu Hluttaw has come into being and that they can only be

obtained on the basis of a constitution. The Constitution of 1947 was accepted and approved by the Constituent Assembly on 24 September 1947” (SLORC 1990).

Further, the SLORC declared that despite the elections it would exercise martial law as a military government and that it would continue to exercise legislative, executive, and judicial powers. The SLORC noted the role of the elected representatives as “those who have the responsibility to draw up the constitution of the future democratic state” (SLORC Declaration 1990) but also declared that the SLORC would “in no way accept the drawing up of a temporary constitution for forming a government to take over State Power and that it will take effective action if it is done so [...]” (SLORC 1990).

The SLORC’s Declaration 1/90 was considered by many to be the nail in the coffin of the democratic aspirations that had been borne out of the 1988 Uprising. Still, the NLD opted for dialogue rather than open confrontation, refrained from forming a parliament and instead called on the SLORC to convene the Pyithu Hluttaw (parliament) in September 1990. The call was made in the NLD’s Gandhi Hall Declaration, that was issued after two days of debate in Yangon from 28 to 29 July 1990. In the declaration the NLD noted that

“Only the Pyithu Hluttaw constituted of Pyithu Hluttaw representatives who have been elected with the confidence of the people will be able to solve, in accordance with the wishes of the people, the political, economic, and social crises faced by the people today. Therefore, in accordance with Article (3), chapter (2) of the Pyithu Hluttaw Elections Law, which states: “The Pyithu Hluttaw shall be formed with the Hluttaw representatives who have been elected according to this law from the constituencies,” it is of vital importance to convene the Pyithu Hluttaw expeditiously” (NLD 1990).

It also became clear that the NLD had already begun working on a draft constitution. Yet while the Gandhi Hall Declaration presented a unified position, the SLORC’s Declaration 1/90 had split the party into three different factions: soft-liners,

moderates, and hardliners⁸. The soft-liners were the most open for cooperation with the SLORC, while moderates advocated for dialogue and some shared responsibility between the NLD and the military, and hardliners sought to establish their own parliament, made-up of elected lawmakers. The late Monywa Aung Shin, NLD spokesperson and party historian, remembered the conundrum of these days clearly:

“They issued Declaration 1/90 declaring that the election had not been held to call forth a parliament but only to draft the constitution. Therefore, 1) the winning party of the 1990 elections, the NLD, was not allowed to call forth the Hluttaw. 2) It was not allowed to form a government. 3) The NLD was allowed to draft the constitution. 4) Daw Aung San Suu Kyi would not be released. That was it. The NLD leaders were forced to sign a letter stating that they agreed with this declaration. Otherwise, 1) the party leaders were going to be arrested. The party CEC was going to be arrested. 2) the party would be declared an illegal association; the party would be abolished. All the winning parties had to sign it but essentially it was made for the NLD. If the NLD did not agree with the declaration, they would abolish the party” (Aung Shin 2019, AI).

After the SLORC’s Declaration 1/90 the NLD was, thus, faced with a difficult choice, disobeying the given orders based on its election victory and risking the dissolution of the party or obeying the orders and forsaking its political ambitions. With the Gandhi Hall Declaration the NLD tried a balanced approach, accepting that the SLORC should be the one to call the parliament into existence while continuing to make a case for the NLD and elected law-makers from other parties to form a government or at least be in charge of the constitution building process. The SLORC did, however, not respond to the Gandhi Hall Declaration. The NLD had, thus, little room for manoeuvre and many members of the party, especially the MP-elects, grew increasingly concerned that they would never be able to form a parliament and wield any degree of power. As a result, the idea of a “revolutionary” parliament, a parliament called into existence not by the SLORC but by elected law-makers gained considerable traction in the NLD.

⁸ These terms are used by NLD politicians to refer to the factions that emerged. For more information on these factions see chapter four.

On 14 August 1990 many of the NLD MP-elects met in Amarapura, near Mandalay, to discuss the revolutionary parliament. Several weeks later, on 6 September 1990, Kyi Maung, then the leader of the NLD, and Acting Party Secretary Chit Khaing were arrested. Despite the SLORC continuing to exert pressure on the party, around 100 elected members of the parliament met again in Amarapura on 29 September 1990 to form a parallel government. Dr Sein Win, a cousin of Aung San Suu Kyi, was designated as the prime minister of the parallel government and promptly went with his followers to Manerplaw on the Myanmar-Thai border where the headquarters of the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) were located. Sein Win had won a seat in the constituency of Bago, not for the NLD but for the National Democratic Party that was politically close to the NLD. The National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) was formally announced on 18 of December 1990. Sein Win's party was dissolved by the SLORC a mere two days later, on 20 December 1990.

Khin Maung Swe, who had become a NLD CEC member in July 1990, a hardliner, who was offered the role of deputy prime minister in the NCGUB, remembered the time leading up to the formation of the parallel government:

“The Gandhi Hall Declaration was not an ultimatum. [...] The Gandhi Hall Declaration was meant like this: “you call forth the parliament. The NLD – the winning party – will attend the parliament. The SLORC will hold executive power, but hand over the legislative power.” It was a proposal for a kind of power sharing. There was also a draft constitution we had drawn up and submitted. But they used it [the Gandhi Hall Declaration] as an excuse to claim that the NLD was demanding the transfer of power and for capturing us and forcing us into jail. After Gandhi Hall when the government refused to have a meeting, dialogue, or negotiation with the NLD, some determined people inside the party tried to form a parallel government and fled to foreign lands. Because they would not readily call forth the parliament most of us were forced behind bars in the aftermath” (Khin Maung Swe 2019, AI).

Indeed, the law-makers who identified as hardliners or who had attended the meeting in Amarapura were persecuted by the SLORC with cruel determination and almost all either fled to the jungle (with some taking up arms), abroad, or were handed long prison

sentences⁹. The NLD leadership, now with Aung Shwe at the helm, had not been able to convince all hardliners to get in line behind the party's course of dialogue with the SLORC. The NLD, thus, had to face a party split but also had to find an adequate response to the increased persecution of some of their trusted officials and MP-elects. The NLD leadership stuck to its moderate course and distanced itself from its hard-line faction in a quest for the survival of the party. When two members of the CEC were called on by the election commission and confronted with the formation of the NCGUB, Aung Shwe wrote a letter to the commission, distancing the NLD from Dr Sein Win and those NLD members who had joined him (BPS 1991).

In the following year, the SLORC embarked on a purge of political parties and select members. As Hans-Bernd Zöllner notes “Many parties were deemed to have no proper “democratic” structure; most of the ousted parliamentarians were found guilty of a variety of offences, mostly related to endangering state security. The “Sein Win case” was further used for a series of denouncements of his step by parties and individuals, starting in late August 1991” (Zöllner 2012, p. 169). When the SLORC had completed its purge in April 1992 just ten parties of over 200 remained. As one of the ten parties that had managed to remain legal, the NLD had been successful in achieving a singular objective: the survival of the party.

3.5. Party survival is the only game in town: the NLD joins the National Convention

The time up until the convening of the National Convention, the constituent assembly that the SLORC propagated as the result of the 1990 elections, in January 1993 was a time of hibernation for the NLD as a party. On 10 December 1991 Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The prize illustrated that Aung San Suu Kyi commanded strong

⁹ Many served well over 15 years.

support not only in Myanmar but abroad and that this support had become stronger still due to the stolen election. Although Aung San Suu Kyi was already under house arrest and barred from communicating with the NLD, the SLORC sought to disenfranchise her further. Thus, the party's new leader Aung Shwe was confronted with a choice: if Aung San Suu Kyi remained in the NLD the party would be criminalised and disbanded like the countless other parties in the months prior. If the party wished to safeguard its existence it would have to expel Aung San Suu Kyi. The senior leadership of the NLD decided that the party's survival was the most important objective and Aung Shwe reluctantly expelled Aung San Suu Kyi from the NLD on 11 December 1991. This caused considerable discontent among the younger members of the NLD. The expulsion of Aung San Suu Kyi carried the risk of further party fragmentation, but the NLD managed to unite behind Aung Shwe's decision although he was heavily criticised for it at the time. Aung Kyi Nyunt, who would go on to become a CEC member explained:

“This did not cause a split between soft-liners and hard-liners, but a split between senior-, and junior- and middle-aged members. [...] No matter the conditions, the juniors could not accept the sacking of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. In fact, the youths – including myself– were convinced that the position of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was in the party, and since she was a leader of the party, it was not appropriate to expel her from the party. [...] The seniors thought that we could simply not let the party be abolished. On the other hand, middle-aged and junior members thought we should not go that far. When we took the whole political situation back then into account, we came to realise that it was a trap: by arresting Aung San Suu Kyi they forced the seniors of the party to make this decision, which would automatically split the party. No further action [against the party] would be required. We noticed the possibility of such a trap then. For this reason, we organised and bounded together by the need to prevent the party from being broken up. The advantages of this unity last to this day (Aung Kyi Nyunt 2019, AI).

Viewing the military's order to dismiss Aung San Suu Kyi as a trap and responding to it while maintaining party cohesion illustrates how party unity became an important value for the NLD in the face of oppression¹⁰. Yet, while the party managed to avoid another

¹⁰ For more information on the way in which oppression shaped the NLD's values in general and elevated the importance of party cohesion in particular see chapter five.

split, Aung San Suu Kyi had now been completely removed from the NLD and remained isolated from the party until her release from house arrest on 10 July 1995. As the late Monywa Aung Shin, party spokesperson, put it to me “For six long years, during the first house arrest, she was not allowed to contact the party once” (Aung Shin 2019, AI).

A few months later, on 24 April 1992, Saw Maung was replaced as the SLORC chairman in a palace coup orchestrated by Than Shwe who took his place. On the same day the SLORC released Declaration 11/92 in which it outlined the steps it would take to convene the National Convention that was to come together for the first time six months later. The military invited delegates from eight political parties, including the NLD, to make suggestions for the composition of the convention. Yet, when the commission for the convening of the National Convention was formed on 2 October 1992, the SLORC expanded the pool of eligible National Convention members to reduce the influence of the NLD. The composition of the National Convention ensured that representatives elected in the 1990 elections could not steer the constitution drafting process¹¹. Moreover, enshrining a political role for the military had been made a “duty” of the National Convention¹².

Unsurprisingly, the National Convention became a show process that made less than little progress in formulating a constitution¹³. Up until 1995 the result of the National Convention was limited to the compilation of 104 basic principles for a future constitution drafting process that were added to six principles that had been published by the National Convention Committee before. The new constitution was eventually adopted in 2008. The NLD knew that it had no influence over the National Convention. Kyaw Aung, an NLD

¹¹ The 702 delegates were made up of 49 members of political parties, chosen by the parties; 107 persons elected in the 1990 elections; 215 representatives of ethnic minorities; 93 peasants; 48 workers; 42 intellectuals and academics; 92 government employees; and 57 various invited persons (Taylor 2009, p. 490).

¹² “Participation of the Tatmadaw in the leading role of national politics of the State in the future” (BPS 1992).

¹³ It convened for the first time from 9-11 January 1993 and subsequently from 1 February to the 7 April 1993; 7 June to 16 September 1993; 18 January to 9 April 1994; and 2 September 1994 to 7 April 1995.

politician and the Chairman of the Win Tin Foundation told me “They [the SLORC] said that according to Declaration 1/90, the MP-elects were supposed to draft the constitution. However, when they called forth the National Convention, the elected MPs were not involved in the constitution drafting process but their own people [the SLORC’s people] (Kyaw Aung 2019, AI). Nonetheless, the NLD leadership tried to engage with the process of the National Convention, repeatedly sending letters to the National Convention Holding Working Committee voicing the party’s concerns over the structure and processes of the National Convention¹⁴. Yet, the NLD’s appeals bore no fruit.

At the same time there were moments of dialogue between Aung San Suu Kyi and senior military leaders. Than Shwe and Khin Nyunt met with Aung San Suu Kyi on 20 September 1994. Khin Nyunt met her again on 28 October 1994. We do not know what was discussed at these meetings, but the timing coincided with the SLORC’s consolidation of its control over Myanmar. On 31 October Khin Nyunt announced that ceasefire agreements with 13 insurgent groups had been reached. On 27 January 1995, Manerplaw, host to the headquarter of the Karen National Union (KNU) and other groups opposing the central government, was taken by military forces¹⁵. NLD leaders Tin Oo and Kyi Maung were released from house arrest and prison in March 1995. Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest several months later, on 10 July 1995. The fact that the SLORC opted to release Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest shows how confident the military was of its own power and the extent of its control. The NLD had continued to exist as a party but

¹⁴ For example, on 9 April 1994 the party sent a letter to the Chairman of the National Convention Holding Working Committee to enter into a dialogue over “The Opinion of the National League for Democracy on the Review of the Periodical Patron Team of the National Convention Assembly Regarding the State, Organising the State and President of the State Chapters for Drafting the Constitution and Establishing Basic Principles” (NLD 1994, OT).

¹⁵ The fall of Manerplaw was the result of a split in the Karen National Union (KNU) that had occurred in December 1994. The split resulted in the formation of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) which split from the military branch of the KNU, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). The DKBA then betrayed the KNU and the KNLA and allied itself to the Burmese military. The DKBA guided the military troops through the jungle and provided intelligence on positions of the KNLA. Manerplaw was thus indefensible.

had been forcibly transformed from a powerful contender to a skeletal party trapped in a meaningless constitution-building process which it could not influence.

The five years between 1990 and 1995 put the NLD under enormous pressure. The years defined the party because it showed that it was able to adapt to the radically changed political landscape that emerged after the 1990 elections. From its inception, the NLD had been popular with would-be voters due to its founding leaders. The party had drawn enormous strength from the support it had generated through public appearances of its leaders and large political rallies. Neither were possible between 1990 and 1995 and yet the NLD managed to ensure that the party as a political entity survived so it could be revived at a later point, a strategy that the party would rely on several times in the future. Notably, the NLD managed to do so directly after a second party split. A pattern had emerged from the splits, which did not split the party into several competing factions but rather took the form of political groups splintering away from the party. Being able to retain a broad unity despite this splintering is a characteristic early strength of the NLD that influenced the party throughout its existence: intra-party unity became a guiding ambition of the political conduct of the NLD.

3.6. Rebuilding the party: the NLD boycotts the National Convention

Since the SLORC felt secure enough to ease the oppression of the party, the NLD faced the challenge to revive a party that had been forced into a near comatose state. The NLD faced a threefold challenge. The party needed to find a place in a political arena that was not only dominated by the SLORC but characterised by the lack of a clear path for potential political change. Second, the NLD needed to find a new role in the National Convention as the party's inability to influence the work of the convention was undermining its political profile. Third, the party itself was in dire need of rejuvenation and reorganisation. There

were only seven CEC members left, the youngest being 69 years old¹⁶ (Zöllner 2012, p. 243). A significant amount of members had left the NLD because they had been pressured or incentivised by the SLORC to do so¹⁷.

The NLD needed to show that it was still an important political actor who had not been subdued by the military. To do this the NLD had to get out of the deadlocked National Convention process. Six days before the National Convention was set to reconvene, on 22 November 1995, the NLD published a declaration titled “The National League for Democracy’s stance regarding the National Convention” (NLD 1995, OT). In the declaration the NLD argued that

“If the National Convention will continue to be held in the same way, it cannot support a) national reconciliation; b) the emergence of genuine multi-party democracy; and c) the emergence of a constitution which can be accepted by the people. Therefore, the National League for Democracy firmly believes that the solution for the realisation of the above objectives can be achieved only through dialogue” (NLD 1995, OT).

The party reiterated this point in another letter to the chairman of the working committee for the holding of the National Convention, Aung Toe, but neither the declaration nor the letter elicited a response. The NLD, thus, decided to boycott the National Convention and when it reconvened on 28 November 1995, the 86 NLD delegates walked out after the opening session. The party was expelled from the National Convention two days later.

The NLD’s decision to confront the National Convention and, thus, the SLORC, so directly is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it showed clearly that the needs of the party had changed. Previously, the NLD had done everything to keep the party alive in a

¹⁶ Zöllner further notes that “Allegedly, the Election Commission did not approve replacements of EC [Executive Committee] members. Consequently, the members allegedly greeted one another saying “You are not allowed to die”. A party was dissolved if the number of EC members fell below five (Zöllner 2012, p. 243).

¹⁷ See chapter five for details.

legal sense. Yet, the NLD's acquiescence had seriously undermined the party's power. Now, the NLD needed to revive itself by showing that it still maintained a principled stance against the military. Secondly, the episode shows just how important Aung San Suu Kyi had become for the NLD. Aung San Suu Kyi was still her father's daughter but had accrued significant political acumen of her own¹⁸. She was immensely popular abroad and was thus able to generate support for her party in the international arena, but she had also proven her commitment to the NLD and so had gained greater authority within the party. Other party leaders were caretakers of the party while she was forcibly absent, but they did not lead the party in the same sense as her, focusing on the aversion of harm to the party rather than formulating an active course for action. Third, with Aung San Suu Kyi back in the driver seat, enough political room for manoeuvre, and no way to influence the National Convention through dialogue, the party – for the first time in years – had the capacity for a new strategy. The NLD's boycott of the National Convention, thus, marked a turning point for the party, ultimately making it considerably more confrontative in the pursuit of its objectives.

3.7. Rising tensions and the founding of the Committee Representing the People's Parliament

Following the boycott of the National Convention the NLD began looking inward for the first time since its foundation. The NLD consequently tried to hold a party congress at Aung San Suu Kyi's house from 26 May to 29 May 1996, but many NLD members were arrested in the days prior. The "congress" thus took the form of a rather small meeting that reached only one resolution, urging the party's CEC to draft a new constitution. Despite its limited size and scope the meeting was nonetheless significant because it allowed Aung San Suu Kyi to meet with some of the NLD representatives that had been elected in 1990 for

¹⁸ For more details on Aung San Suu Kyi's rise in the NLD see chapter four.

the first time. In response to the NLD's repeated criticism of the National Convention the SLORC published Law 5/96 on 7 June 1996 which outlawed very specifically "disturbing, destroying, obstructing, inciting, delivering speeches, making oral or written statements and disseminating in order to undermine, belittle and make people misunderstand the functions being carried out by the National Convention for the emergence of a firm and enduring Constitution¹⁹" (SLORC 1996). Despite this the NLD continued to try and hold a party congress on 27 of September 1996 at Aung San Suu Kyi's residence, but her road was sealed off the night before (Aung San Suu Kyi 1997).

The NLD held its first genuine party congress with around 700 delegates from all over Myanmar in attendance from 28 to 29 September 1997. The party congress successfully convened this time because the NLD had sought permission from the authorities. A similar party meeting, again with the permission of the government, took place in May 1998 (Zöllner 2012). The party used each meeting to reiterate its demand for the formation of a parliament based on the 1990 election results. Yet, the calls for parliament elicited no response. The SLORC had been renamed (and reshuffled) on 15 November 1997 and a new Minister of Home Affairs had been appointed but the State Peace and Development Council's (SPDC as the SLORC was now called) stance towards the NLD's demands did not differ from the one of the SLORC because it was essentially still the same military council. Throughout 1998 tensions between the NLD and the SPDC began to rise again but did not escalate. A series of stand-offs occurred but were resolved without severe measures against the party²⁰. Yet, despite the successful party congresses, the reorganisation of the party, and overwhelming public support, the NLD did not manage to pressure the SPDC to give in to any of its demands.

¹⁹ Offenses against the law became punishable by prison terms of five to twenty years.

²⁰ For detailed reference, Hans-Bernd Zöllner dedicated an entire chapter to these standoffs in his 2012 book *The Beast and the Beauty*, pp. 253-272.

Notably, the NLD adopted a different tone in 1998, shifting from requests for dialogue to a policy of ultimatums. After the party congress on 27 of May 1998, the NLD followed up on its resolutions. In the letter to Than Shwe sent on 23 June 1998, Chairman Aung Shwe urged “the authorities in accordance with the decision of the party conference held on the 8th anniversary of the multi-party democratic elections, to call forth the Hluttaw [...] before 20 August 1998” (Aung Shwe 1998, OT). In response Aung San Suu Kyi was threatened with persecution under Law 5/96 that had criminalised acts against the National Convention. Furthermore, the SPDC issued an order that required all NLD representatives that had been elected in the 1990 elections to sign a pledge restricting their movement and mandating them to report to their respective township authorities twice a day. Anyone who refused to sign the pledge would risk imprisonment.

The increased repression of the party soon yielded results. As Gustaaf Houtman notes “This [the calling for parliament with an ultimatum] resulted in a spate of repressive moves in which virtually all elected NLD members were arrested, and NLD offices of one township after another were dissolved in the final months of 1998 and January 1999” (Houtman 1999, p. 4). The ultimatum policy did not show any effect on the SPDC. When the date the NLD had set for the convening of parliament came closer, the party issued an appeal to all citizens of Burma on 18 August 1998, stating that the

“The emergence of the Pyithu Hluttaw means the emergence of democracy. Therefore, we would like to make a serious request to all people from all ethnicities, all classes, all walks of life, all religions, and all genders to support the Pyithu Hluttaw representatives of the National League for Democracy and other parties as well as the independent representatives with determination, courage, metta, and good intentions” (NLD 1998a, OT).

Three days later, one day after the deadline the party had set, the NLD again issued a statement, but this time it closed with following sentence: “The National League for Democracy will call forth the Pyithu Hluttaw, which will include Pyithu Hluttaw representatives from all nationalities, in the coming days” (NLD 1998b, OT).

On 17 September 1998 a statement was released, not by the NLD, but by a novel alliance that the NLD had formed in the previous weeks: the Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP). The announcement noted

“A total of 485 Pyithu Hluttaw representatives were elected in the 1990 multi-party democratic general election. 26 of them have passed away and 459 are left. The number of representatives out of Pyithu Hluttaw representatives from the National League for Democracy and its allied parties, who gave their mandate [to the CRPP] is 251 and therefore they have the legal right to act instead of the Pyithu Hluttaw” (CRPP 1998a, OT).

The statement concluded that “This committee shall work on behalf of the Hluttaw until the convening of the Hluttaw is realised, according to the framework for convening the Hluttaw, in accordance with the 1990 multi-party democratic general election” (CRPP 1998, OT). The foundation of the CRPP heralded a tectonic shift in the NLD's stance towards the military and the method of achieving its political goals. The foundation of the CRPP signalled an end to the focus on dialogue with the SPDC and the NLD's new willingness to oppose the military openly, not with words but with actions. In its first statement the CRPP boldly announced that “laws, by laws, regulations, orders and announcements which were issued since 18 September 1988 are not legal” (CRPP 1998, OT).

Yet the CRPP was also significant because it was not made up of NLD members alone but instead represented several larger and smaller ethnic political parties. Pu Gin Kam Lian, a founding member of the Zomi National Congress, an ethnic political party with a constituent base in Chin State and a member party of the CRPP, was present in the meetings leading up to the formation of the CRPP and recalled:

“We went to meet her [Aung San Suu Kyi] at U Lwin's house, their party secretary at that time. There were the ZNC party [Zomi National Congress], the SNLD party [Shan Nationalities League for Democracy], the Mon party [Mon National League for Democracy] and the Rakhine party [Arakan League for Democracy] at the meeting. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said that we should not stay put like that and it was time to form a working committee” (Pu Gin Kam Lian 2019, AI).

The SPDC's response was severe. Pu Gin Kam Lian remembered:

“Afterwards, the leaders of the parties that were illegal at that time - of the ZNC, the Mon party and the Rakhine party - were arrested. They did not arrest the leaders of the NLD and the SNLD because they still had a party registration. The chairpersons of the [other] parties were detained. It was not imprisonment though, just detainment. They were detained at Nine Mile, Ye Mon's military intelligence branch, for a very long time. They were escorted home once a month, for example on Saturday. On Sunday, they [military intelligence] arrested them again” (Pu Gin Kam Lian 2019, AI).

The increased oppression prevented the CRPP from working effectively and it took the committee two years to announce the drafting of a new constitution. Following another standoff with the military over her freedom of movement, Aung San Suu Kyi was put under *de facto*²¹ house arrest again in September 2000. Having re-established control over Aung San Suu Kyi and suppressed the CRPP's work, the following years were characterised by easing tensions between the NLD and the SPDC.

3.8. From easing tensions to the assault at Depayin

Razali Ismail, who had been appointed the UN special envoy to Myanmar in April 2000, made a concerted effort to broker a “truce” between the two parties²². Hans-Bernd Zöllner notes that “in legal terms, her situation had not changed. No new order imposing house arrest was issued. However, her telephone line was cut, and her movements were increasingly restricted. She was allowed to leave the house only on special occasions” (Zöllner 2012, p. 364). In contrast to her previous period of house arrest, Aung San Suu Kyi was also able to retain communication with the NLD through intermediaries. After the combative decision to form the CRPP in open defiance of the SPDC, Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD seemed to be back on the track of dialogue.

²¹ I use the term “*de facto*” here because in contrast to the earlier period of house arrest there was no legal order for the measure.

²² Razali Ismail's work was complemented by the work of other diplomats, like Paulo Sergio Pinheiro who served as the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar.

The NLD's recommitment to dialogue was rewarded by the SPDC. Attacks on the party in the state media ceased in January 2001 and some NLD offices in Yangon were allowed to reopen. Party leaders Tin Oo and Aung Shwe were released from house arrest in August 2001 and Aung San Suu Kyi was released the following year, on 6 May 2002. This time Aung San Suu Kyi enjoyed freedoms that were considerable in comparison to earlier periods. At the time there were high expectations for an actual dialogue between the SPDC and the NLD that would manifest in some concrete steps towards political reform or at least the integration of the NLD into select processes of the state. The diplomatic efforts of the previous years suggested as much, as did the comparatively diplomatic tone between the NLD and the SPDC. Yet, during Aung San Suu Kyi's trip to Chin State in April 2003, concerns grew over a stalled dialogue process since the NLD and the SPDC had not met since Aung San Suu Kyi's release in May 2002. These concerns were amplified by reports of state-sanctioned obstructions during Aung San Suu Kyi's latest trips (Paulo Pinheiro 2003).

As the SPDC did not suggest a roadmap for further talks or any other concrete steps towards dialogue with the NLD, Aung San Suu Kyi reverted to criticising the SPDC. During a press conference on 24 April 2003, she argued "I do not think there has been any progress. In fact, I would have thought that there has been some kind of regression. We have been forced to question the integrity of the SPDC and their sincerity in achieving national reconciliation. National reconciliation is change. They don't want change, but change is inevitable" (AP 2003, cited in Zöllner 2012, p. 431).

In light of the resurgence of open criticism and the disturbances during Aung San Suu Kyi's latest trips, her next trip to the Sagaing Division and the border of Kachin State was anticipated tensely. Those who remained hopeful for further dialogue between the SPDC and the NLD viewed the trip as a litmus test. The trip began on 6 May 2003, the first

anniversary of Aung San Suu Kyi's release from house arrest. Aung San Suu Kyi and her entourage first travelled through the Sagaing Division via Mandalay from 6 to 12 May, then spent nearly two weeks in Kachin State and the area around Mogoke in the Mandalay Region before returning to the Sagaing Division, reaching the state's capital, Monywa, on 29 May 2003. The trip had been far from smooth and intimidation of attendees of NLD rallies had been frequent.

On 30 May 2003, the convoy was set to travel to Depayin but never reached its destination. On the way it was attacked by a group of thugs, allegedly members of the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), the junta's political mass organisation. Reports of the incident vary widely with significant differences not only apparent in the versions of the NLD and the government but also in the stories told by different NLD members and the media reporting by different outlets²³. It is, however, well documented that at least four people were killed, while dozens were severely wounded. Aung San Suu Kyi managed to escape the violent attack rather swiftly, but she was arrested shortly thereafter. Tin Oo was arrested on the spot, as were several other party members. The SPDC government tried to downplay the attack as a brawl between NLD supporters and demonstrators, alleging that the convoy had tried to force its way through a crowd of five thousand protesters. UN Special Envoy Razali Ismail reflected on the events leading up to Depayin in an interview with *The Irrawaddy* in 2007:

“When she was to be released from detention in 2002, one of the understandings was that she would not go out and demonstrate or speak badly of Myanmar outside. She was to help the government bring about good things for the people. But you are talking about an icon—you release her, everybody flocks to see her. She was always particular about not creating demonstrations, but after a while she could see that there was so much to be done yet so little was actually being done. With people pleading to her to help, her visits took on political overtones. She became more of a politician and started traveling farther outside of Yangon [Rangoon]. Everywhere she went, tens of thousands followed. The military leaders were disturbed. I made the point to a minister I knew for some time that it would be a mistake

²³ Within the NLD the incident is referred to as the “Depayin Massacre” and many people I talked to spoke of dozens – some spoke of 100 – people who had been killed. Hans-Bernd Zöllner illustrates the different version of the incident in his book *The Beast and the Beauty* on pages 440-444.

to let Suu Kyi travel around and not begin the critical talks between the government and the NLD. Then Depayin happened and she was nearly killed. She was unceremoniously clapped into prison” (Ismail 2007).

The period between 1995 and 2003 illustrates two essential characteristics of the NLD. Firstly, the period illustrates the flexibility of the NLD’s stance towards the military. The party continuously re-assessed its position and the stance of the SLORC/SPDC to determine whether to aim for dialogue or risk open confrontation. After striking reconciliatory notes following Aung San Suu Kyi’s release from house arrest, the party decided to boycott the National Convention and continued to escalate the conflict between the military in the party to the point of forming its own shadow parliament and declaring the SLORC’s laws void. When the military exerted increasing pressure on the party, the NLD adopted again, resuming a dialogue-focused position, and regaining greater freedom only to lose it again when the dialogue failed. The NLD’s ability to alternate between pressure politics and reconciliation ensured the party’s survival and shaped the approach to politics that the party later adopted while in government.

Secondly, the period between 1995 and 2003 is significant because the NLD became synonymous with Aung San Suu Kyi. From the foundation of the NLD up until her release from house arrest Aung San Suu Kyi had been the single political beacon of the NLD but she had only been one of several leaders. Yet, the aftermath of the 1990 elections had shown that the party was unable to develop in a structural or programmatic sense without her. Considering this, it is also noteworthy that the NLD reintegrated her into the party following her forced expulsion. A likely alternative scenario would have been for another senior NLD leader, for example Aung Shwe or Tin Oo, to retain or assume control of the NLD out of personal ambition. Yet, Aung San Suu Kyi had already become the single greatest source of the NLD’s power since it was her who, more than anyone else, commanded the support of the electorate. Thus, when party building resumed through

party congresses and the setting up of NLD branches throughout Myanmar, it was under the direct control of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Reviewing this section, it is remarkable how much of it details the actions and decisions of Aung San Suu Kyi and how little of it addresses the NLD as an entity. This is not the result of an emphasis I have put on Aung San Suu Kyi but rather due to the dearth of substantive action on the part of the party and of other figures in the party. The NLD existed as the opposition party in an authoritarian regime without a multi-party system. There was no parliament in which a larger group of NLD politicians could have made a profile for themselves in the opposition. There was also hardly any existing party structure that had survived the years of oppression between 1990 and 1995 that could have facilitated the work of the party through local or regional party offices. The NLD thus became intricately intertwined with Aung San Suu Kyi and institutionalised the personalistic and top-down leadership style that ensured the party's continued survival. This too had a significant effect on the way the party would later conduct its affairs in government. It also meant that with increased oppression and Aung San Suu Kyi's arrest following the assault at Depayin, the party was once again forced into hibernation.

3.9. Forced hibernation until the 2010 elections

The assault at Depayin immediately forced the party into hibernation. Its leader was first imprisoned and then once more put under house arrest from which she would not be freed until 2010. With Depayin all of the NLD's political options evaporated, and all of its initiatives failed at once. The CRPP, although not dissolved, halted its work. The dialogue with the SPDC government, facilitated by UN diplomats from 2000 onwards, stopped entirely and the NLD largely lost the ability to organise itself as a party, effectively reversing the party building it had been able to do throughout the country since Aung San Suu Kyi's

release from house arrest in 2002. Dr Myo Nyunt, a CEC member, and spokesperson of the NLD, described the limited capacity of the party after Depayin:

“The most we could do was to hold regular meetings with our colleagues, conduct social gatherings – such as alms donation ceremonies or funerals – and that was all. But the main thing was that we were able to maintain the signpost of the NLD. We were showing our people that we were resisting, remaining, and maintaining [the party]. That is all” (Dr Myo Nyunt 2019, AI).

A senior NLD politician and member of the party’s secretariat, echoed Dr Myo Nyunt’s assessment in a more nuanced way, telling me

“After Depayin, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi could not provide leadership. U Aung Shwe was still there but Kyi Maung had left the party in 1998 and died in 2004. U Win Tin and U Tin Oo were in prison. So, only U Aung Shwe and U Lwin were leading the party. And frankly the strategy was only for survival. So, what we were doing at that time was what everybody called “manifesto politics”. On different occasions, for example Labour Day, we would publish manifestos and then called it “The Declaration of the NLD on the occasion of Labour Day” or something like this. And sometimes, like on the NLD’s anniversary, we gathered our people and gave statements. So, people referred to our politics as “statement politics” (Anonymous 2019, AI).

The NLD was excluded from all political processes in Myanmar. To understand the development of the party it is nonetheless necessary to outline some key political developments that created the conditions that enabled the party’s resurgence from 2010 onwards. On 30 August 2003 Khin Nyunt announced the ‘Roadmap to Discipline-flourishing Democracy’, that laid out seven steps that should put Myanmar on the path of democratisation. In line with the roadmap, the National Convention was revived and convened again for the first time on 17 May 2004. The NLD was invited to participate again but turned down the offer. The National Convention convened regularly throughout the following years, concluding the constitution deliberation process during its final session on 18 July 2007.

In August 2007, the Saffron Revolution²⁴, a series of economic and political protests, swept across Myanmar, putting considerable pressure on the regime. The NLD, however, played only a minor role in the protests since the party leadership did not officially endorse them²⁵. This did not prevent the state media to blame the NLD for masterminding the protests and arresting scores of NLD members. Especially younger NLD members were disappointed in their leadership for failing to utilise the protests to contest the power of the SPDC. Eventually, the protests were suppressed with increasing violence and came to an end by the end of September 2007. The suppression of the protest was aided by the transfer of the seat of government from Yangon, the country's largest city, to Naypyidaw, a newly constructed ghost-town, in 2006. Opinions differ over the effect of the Saffron Revolution on the process of regime change in Myanmar. Some argue that it had little effect since the SPDC had followed its own roadmap for regime change for many years (Zöllner 2009). Yet, interviewees who had been active in the Saffron Revolution argued that it had pressured the SPDC to ratify the new constitution. The SPDC announced a constitutional referendum to ratify the new constitution in February 2008, with the referendum announced for May the same year. Zayar Thaw, a founder of Generation Wave, a protest movement that arose during the Saffron Revolution, and later an NLD MP, told me: "My point of view is that they already announced the seven-step roadmap in 2003 but they never followed through. After the Saffron Revolution over 14 years of Union Assembly were finished. Also, had we not had the Saffron Revolution, they would not have held a referendum that included polls" (Zeyar Thaw 2019, AI).

²⁴ The term Saffron revolution is contested but widely accepted. See Zöllner, H-B. (2009), 'Neither Saffron Nor Revolution', *Südostasien Working Papers*, No. 36. Available at [<https://www.iaaw.hu-berlin.de/de/region/suedostasien/publikationen/working-papers/soa-wp-036-neither-saffron-nor-revolution.-a-commentated-and-documented-chronology-of-the-monks-demonstrations-in-myanmar-in-2007-and-their-background-part-i-hans-bernd-zollner.pdf>].

²⁵ Although there were no official statements of support it is widely accepted that Aung San Suu Kyi implicitly endorsed the demonstrations. On 22 September 2007, around 2000 monks and civilians walked to her house, where she greeted them and prayed with them, marking the first time she had been seen in public since 2003.

The 2008 constitution was, however, deeply problematic and elicited fierce criticism from members of the wider democracy movement and the NLD. It did mandate elections, the formation of a parliament and other key aspects of a democratic government but also enshrined far-reaching powers for the military. The 2008 constitution ensured that the military would receive 25% of seats in parliament by default and that future constitutional changes would require a 75% majority, thus ensuring that its own powers could not be retrenched and that it would not face transitional justice mechanisms. It also gave the military perpetual oversight over the three key ministries of home affairs, defence, and borders. Moreover, a section had been included that precluded anyone who had been married to someone with non-Myanmar citizenship or who had children with foreign citizenship from becoming president, thus ensuring that Aung San Suu Kyi could not become president²⁶.

The NLD tried to mobilise its supporters to influence the referendum vote. Aung Moe Nyo, a CEC member and later Chief Minister of the Magway Region, told me

“So, we tried to go against the regime as much as we could. We were using RFA, DVB and other media organisations as our platform at the time. For example, we criticised the 2008 Constitution by arguing that the constitution did not truly represent the people of our country. We commented on the constitution on DVB around 2008 and 2009 because we knew that the constitution had been approved with fake votes and lies. At the time, I swore that if the 2008 Constitution truly represented the people and if my statement is false, may I suffer bad things for the rest of my life and in the afterlife, may I face a horrible death, for such lies. I made this vow on the DVB channel” (Aung Moe Nyo 2019, AI).

Despite the NLD’s efforts the constitution was approved in the referendum. Two factors contributed to the approval of the 2008 constitution. Firstly, the proper conduct of the referendum was strongly contested with widespread allegations of a rigged vote. Aung Moe Nyo, later Chief Minister of the Magway Region, told me

²⁶ Aung San Suu Kyi was married to the British citizen Michael Aris until his death in 1999 and had two sons with him who hold British citizenship.

“This [the result] was impossible. Our neighbours went to the polling station during the referendum and asked if everything was fine with the voting [process]. They said that the officer at the station gave them a ready-made paper and they only needed to sign the paper. The polling station officer then ticked a box on the paper and put it into the ballot box. The regime lied to the whole country” (Aung Moe Nyo 2019, AI).

Kyaw Tote, who had joined the NLD on the day it was founded, explained further “People came to vote in wards and villages but they [wards and villages] were not allowed to publish the results. Townships? No announcement. Divisions? No announcement. The union level made an announcement but only announced the percentage of for and against votes. [...] That was it. They just totally made it up. It was arbitrary” (Kyaw Tote 2018, AI).

Indeed, considering the support the NLD still commanded and the party’s open criticism of the constitution, the result the SPDC announced - 93.82% of votes in support of the constitution - was likely made up. Yet, there was no opportunity to protest the result since cyclone Nargis had hit Myanmar a week before the referendum, leading to one of the worst humanitarian tragedies of the 2000s as the death toll rose in the tens of thousands and the government initially blocked foreign assistance. The outcome of the referendum was criticised by the NLD but there was simply no capacity for protest-based opposition in the aftermath of Nargis.

Although the NLD played no active part in it, the years of 2009 and 2010 were a time of deep political changes in Myanmar. The 2008 constitution had formalised the Roadmap to Discipline-flourishing Democracy and provided a clearer timeline for the next steps, including a general election in 2010. On 8 March 2010 the SPDC government issued a political party registration law that defined which parties could (or could not) be registered with the election commission. The law entailed a section that mandated that parties who had members “who are convicts” could not be registered. This made a registration for the NLD nearly impossible since it would have had to expel Aung San Suu Kyi and an estimated

430 members from the party who were at the time still in prison (Human Rights Watch 2010).

3.10. The 2010 elections and the third party split

The NLD faced a difficult decision. Not contesting in the elections would have led the party further down the path of political irrelevance. Accepting the government's terms would have legitimised them and confirmed that the NLD was willing to play by the rules of the 2008 Constitution. This stood in stark contrast to the NLD's own political objectives, which the party had published in the Shwegondaing Declaration on 29 April 2009. The Shwegondaing Declaration marked a juncture for the NLD as it detailed the party's position vis-à-vis a military that was evidently pushing ahead with its own transformation agenda. The NLD opposed the 2008 Constitution calling it a "draft constitution" and argued that it "contains provisions which are not in accordance with democratic principles" (NLD 2009, OT). The party once again called for the recognition of the 1990 election results and called for political dialogue with the military.

The NLD also expanded on the possibility of future elections "informing the people" that "the League accepts that elections are the landmarks to be passed on the journey to democracy. The NLD will not abandon the struggle for democracy. The League will stand by the people in all circumstances" (NLD 2009, OT). However, the NLD made it clear that its support for- and participation in future elections was contingent on the release of political prisoners, the amendment of the undemocratic provisions in the 2008 constitution and presence of international election observers during the elections. The NLD had tried to make demands but had had no leverage. Now that the party regulation law had been published the party would either have to break with the political line it had established a little more over a year before and lose face or accept the military's terms to have a chance to resume an active role in Myanmar's political arena.

The issue was debated fiercely within the party. The NLD issued a statement on the matter on 6 April 2010, following a CEC meeting on the previous day. The statement was addressed to the public, informing it that

“[...] the 2008 constitution is a violation of democratic principles and human rights. Those laws are preventing inclusive elections which have been demanded by the Secretary General of the United Nations and the international family. Therefore, according to the meeting of the Central Committee of the National League for Democracy, it was decided without any objection that the League will not *re-register* [emphasis added] since the laws regarding elections issued by the State Peace and Development Council are not fair at all” (NLD 2010a, OT).

The statement concluded with an apology to all supporters of the NLD. Yet, despite this decision the issue was far from resolved and continued to fester inside the party where two camps emerged: the *Pyin Win* camp (changing the constitution and then join the election) and *Win Pyin* camp (joining the election and then change the constitution). One NLD chief minister recalled

“After we opened our party office [again] in 2010, we thought deeply about the NLD’s future. Did we have the right to enter into the 2010 general election or not. This was a very important step for the NLD. [...] They [those who wanted to contest in the election] thought that if the NLD did not enter in the 2010 general election, the government would ban the NLD forever” (Anonymous 2019, AI).

The Pyin-Win advocates were eventually able to bring most of the party in line behind them because Aung San Suu Kyi endorsed the position. The decision to not contest in the 2010 elections, however, cost the party dearly as several senior NLD politicians and members of the CEC left²⁷ the NLD to found their own party, the National Democratic Force (NDF) in June 2010. The NLD acknowledged the split in a party statement on 25 October 2010:

“[...] It was decided not to register again since the League has been registered under the Political Party Registration Act (Law No. 4/88) and it continues to stand officially. While standing so, some members of the League said that the NLD was not a political party

²⁷ For more details see chapter four.

anymore and founded the National Democratic Force (NDF) without following the unequivocal decision which is democratic practice. [...] There have been reports from the state/region and township organising committees that some people have been conducting political campaigns by spreading the propaganda that the National Democratic Force (NDF) is a branch party of the National League for Democracy; and that some people have been lying that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is their leader. Therefore, we would like to announce clearly that the leader of the National Democratic Force (NDF) party is not Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's party; that party is not the lifeboat party of the National League for Democracy [...]" (NLD 2010b, OT).

The NDF went on to win 16 seats in parliament at the 2010 polls and thus had no influence on policy making but the split changed the NLD. The first party split, when Aung Gyi and his faction left the NLD, had occurred right after the party's foundation, the Amarapura Split had for the most part involved MPs-elect, not senior party leaders. The 2010 split was different because those who left were some of the most senior and influential NLD politicians. Khin Maung Swe, the leader of the Win-Pyin camp, had been a member of the party's CEC since 1990. The split illustrated - and at the same time reinforced - the single leader dynamic that had emerged ever more strongly in the party. The party had voted on whether to contest in the 2010 elections, but the vote had been meaningless because by this time Aung San Suu Kyi's decision was the only thing that determined the party's course of action.

The NLD campaigned to discourage its supporters from voting in the 2010 elections. Nyi Nyi Min, an NLD youth wing organiser, told me "Especially our youth wing fought against competing in the 2010 election. You know, we campaigned urging people not to vote [...] Our campaign was that citizens have the right not to vote" (Nyi Nyi Min 2018, AI). The elections took place on 7 November 2010 and turnout was reported to be low although the information was difficult to verify since the government had not allowed an independent election observation mission (The New York Times 2010).

The elections were criticised by many Western countries (BBC 2010) and several political parties, among them the NDF, reported voting irregularities, alleging that seats had

been stolen from them. NDF Chairman Khin Maung Swe told me “The result was not announced on the following day but on the day after. Furthermore, there were cases where we were ordered to go back home at night while we were winning by like 3000 votes but the next morning, we lost by about 200 votes. Votes were stolen this way” (Khin Maung Swe 2019, AI). When the final results were announced by the election commission on 17 November 2010, the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) had won with a landslide, securing 80% of all seats in parliament. The USDP formed a government under the leadership of Thein Sein, who had been handpicked by Than Shwe as his successor. The new government was inaugurated on 30 March 2011. On the same day the SPDC was officially dissolved.

3.11. The 2012 by-elections

Aung San Suu Kyi was released shortly after the elections, on 13 November 2010, the date her house arrest officially ended. The military had not tried to extend it yet again, emboldened, no doubt, by the successful election process. In a stroke of crass irony Myanmar experienced a partial democratisation, transitioning the country from fully authoritarian to a hybrid regime, but the major democratic opposition force in the country, the NLD, played no part in it. Thein Sein’s government ushered in a wave of unprecedented political and economic reforms. The NLD was thus forced to reconsider whether the party should continue to adhere to the Shwegondaing Declaration of 2009 or whether it should accept the terms of the 2008 Constitution and try to become an active part of the political process again.

After her release from house arrest in November 2010, Aung San Suu Kyi had immediately resumed working on and with the NLD. Yet, since the party had not registered for the 2010 elections it was no longer a legitimate party in the eyes of the military and the USDP government. In June 2011 the party received a letter from the new Home Minister

Lieutenant General Ko Ko in which he reprimanded the NLD for conducting itself like a political party and argued that the NLD would need to register as a political party – and renounce the 1990 elections result and accept the legitimacy of the 2008 Constitution – to carry on with its activities (Martin and Mix 2011). The NLD, however, was not yet willing to make concessions but requested meetings with the new government to start a dialogue.

Aung San Suu Kyi subsequently met with the USDP Labour Minister Aung Kyi²⁸ to discuss “possibilities for co-operating in the interests of the people” (BBC 2011a). Following a second meeting on 12 August, Aung Kyi invited Aung San Suu Kyi to a Naypyidaw where Aung San Suu Kyi met President Thein Sein for the first time on 19 August 2011. The meeting reportedly went well with “frank and friendly discussions” to “find ways and means of cooperation” (The New York Times 2011). Win Htein, an influential senior NLD leader and advisor to Aung San Suu Kyi, recalls the topics of the meeting in his autobiography. According to Win Htein, Aung San Suu Kyi and Thein Sein agreed that

“The clause in the political party registration law, which banned former political prisoners from joining political parties and contesting in elections, would be removed. Also, the clause, which required the political parties to “preserve and safeguard” the 2008 Constitution, would be amended to read “respect and observe”. In view of the aforementioned concessions, the NLD was being invited to re-register as a political party and participate in the upcoming by-elections and future elections” (Win Htein 2021, p 326).

Thein Sein followed through with the promises he had made. By mid-October 2011 about 200 political prisoners had been released (BBC 2011b). More significantly, the Thein Sein government amended the political party registration law by the end of October 2011 (Wai Moe 2011a). Less than a month later, on 18 November 2011, the NLD announced that it would re-register as a political party (BBC 2011c) and that it would contest in the

²⁸ Aung Kyi had previously served as the liaison officer between the SPDC and Aung San Suu Kyi.

next by-elections that were expected to take place in 2012. The NLD formally re-registered as a political party on 23 December 2011 (Wai Moe 2011b).

The NLD realised that it would have to break with its principled stand to have a chance at taking part in the political process again. Similar to previous moments of policy change, the party also exhibited a comparatively great deal of unity and cohesion, avoiding a further party split. Aung Moe Nyo, later NLD chief minister of the Magway Region, told me: “I have to acknowledge that the political stance of our leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi changed a little according to the situation. We are in office at the moment because of the management and the stance of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Otherwise, we would not be in office at all” (Aung Moe Nyo 2019, AI).

Indeed, the 2012 by-elections became a major turning point for the NLD²⁹. The date for the by-elections was announced by the Election Commission on 30 December 2011 and set for 1 April 2012. The NLD decided to contest in 43 of the 44 seats and won 43. This time international observers had been allowed to assess the elections, which were deemed free and fair. In contrast to the 1990 elections, Aung San Suu Kyi ran for a seat and won. In total, the NLD won four seats in the Amyotha Hluttaw (House of Nationalities), thirty-seven seats in the Pyithu Hluttaw (House of Representatives), and two seats in State and Region Hluttaws. Beside Aung San Suu Kyi, three other members of the party’s CEC were able to win seats (Tin Maung Maung Than 2013, p. 210). The NLD became the third largest group in parliament, after the USDP and the group of military representatives.

²⁹ By-elections are necessary in Myanmar under the 2008 Constitution due to article 232(i) that states “if the Union Minister is a representative of a Hluttaw [i.e., MP or member of parliament], it shall be deemed that he has resigned from the day he is appointed as a Union Minister” (2008 Constitution, p. 86). The same applies to the deputy minister, article 234 (f), and the attorney-general, article 237(f) (2008 Constitution, p. 89 and 92). Moreover, the chairman and members of the Election Commission cannot be representatives of parliament, article 398(b)(8) (2008 Constitution, p. 160). Thus, when President Thein Sein appointed his government from the pool of elected USDP lawmakers, their seats became vacant and had to be filled by means of a by-election.

Despite this major success, the party had little power in parliament. In the campaign for the by-elections the NLD had promised to establish the rule of law and to make Myanmar more democratic, but it was clear that the party had few tools to fulfil its campaign promises. Alas, the power of the NLD at the time was just in part defined by the seats it occupied in parliament. Rather, it was defined by Aung San Suu Kyi's popularity both in Myanmar and abroad and the signalling effect that the party's entering of parliament had had. The NLD's reintegration into the political sphere with the permission of a military-backed government was viewed as proof that Myanmar was on the path to becoming a democracy. Economic sanctions were first suspended and later lifted, contributing to accelerated economic growth in the following years. Heads of state from the European Union were eager to visit Myanmar and to endorse the NLD. Thus, the NLD was highly influential not because it now occupied 43 seats in parliament but because it was a major player in the foreign relations of Myanmar.

The party's rewon legitimacy in the eyes of the military-backed government and its election victory also allowed the NLD to focus on party building again. One CEC member told me

“During the middle period between 2012 and 2015, the NLD gradually started growing. [...] We could recruit new party members. We could open new township party offices. We could extend our offices at the ward and village levels. We tried to launch offices in all 330 townships during this period. We were able to establish offices in all townships of central Burma apart from a few where it was not possible due to security reasons. We were able to firmly gather our strength” (Anonymous 2019, AI).

While the party expanded its organisational structure and its member base between 2012 and 2015, the NLD also underwent changes that were a direct result of the 2012 by-election victory. 43 NLD politicians were now members of parliament. Two of them were members of regional parliaments but the remaining 41 politicians now spent considerable time in Naypyidaw where a new “party within the party” developed. Similarly to the period

following Aung San Suu Kyi's release from the first period of house arrest in 1995 when the power centre of the party shifted from the NLD's headquarter to Aung San Suu Kyi's residence and influence was determined by access to the inner circle at the residence, influence was now determined by access to the circle of NLD politicians in Naypyidaw. One senior NLD leader explained:

“She [Aung San Suu Kyi] has sort of total control of this party. So, when she was in parliament the other 42 MPs around her met with her regularly. And a gap emerged between the people who were left behind in the party and the people who were attending parliament in Naypyidaw. Our thinking and our behaviour became a little bit different” (Anonymous 2018, AI).

When I asked the senior NLD politician and member of the party's secretariat, about the differences between the party members in Naypyidaw and those at the headquarter in Yangon he replied

“They were dealing with the military directly and they were dealing with the USDP directly. [...] They were only forty and there were nearly 600 people there and their behaviour changed, and their thinking also changed. They are thinking about ruling, we are thinking about opposition. When we thought about nominating people for the 2015 election we thought quite differently. The people who were left behind in the party and the people who were with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi began thinking quite differently” (Anonymous 2018, AI).

3.12. The 2015 general election

The different viewpoints became apparent in the months leading up to the 2015 general elections as the party leadership made several controversial decisions that had far-reaching consequences for the NLD. Several influential student leaders from the 1988 Uprising who had grouped together in the Generation 88 were seeking an entry into electoral politics. Considering the close alliance between the student movement and the NLD that by now had spanned nearly three decades it seemed likely that prominent student leaders like Ko Ko Gyi would become members of the NLD and run for seats in the 2015 elections. Despite suggestions to this effect from inside the party, the NLD leadership around Aung

San Suu Kyi turned down the request, prompting the 88 Generation to form their own political party, the People's Party (PP).

One senior NLD politician told me “I proposed Ko Ko Gyi as one of our candidates for South Okkalapa. I was scolded by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi: “why are you so foolish?” I thought only about the movement. They thought about power, you see. This is quite different” (Anonymous 2018, AI). When I asked whether the reason for Aung San Suu Kyi's decision was a fear that Ko Ko Gyi might become too influential in the NLD due to his popularity the senior NLD politician explained “[...] they thought about controlling Ko Ko Gyi. You see, they wanted to control everybody. They believe that they have seniority. They wanted to control everybody in parliament. But Ko Ko Gyi, you cannot control people like Ko Ko Gyi” (Anonymous 2018, AI).

The decision led to a split between the NLD and the influential student movement in Myanmar. One former student activist who had been a strong supporter of the NLD and served time in prison due to his political engagement told me

“There was a big split between the student groups and the NLD when they refused to let the 88 students join the party ahead of the 2015 election, especially Ko Ko Gyi. At that time, many student activists felt frustrated and very angry. They decided to join the NLD, but the NLD rejected them. They were humiliated [...] I think they do not have a good relationship with the NLD anymore” (Anonymous 2018, AI).

The NLD had long drawn considerable strength from its alliances with ethnicity-based political parties. When the NLD was founded, Myanmar had already been ravaged by decades of civil war between ethnic armed groups and the military. From the beginning the NLD had taken care to portray itself as the political party that – in contrast to the military – would be able to pacify the tensions and support a greater degree of ethnic self-determination. The United Nationalities League for Democracy (UNLD), a coalition of 21 ethnicity-based parties had supported the NLD after the 1990 elections. Together with the

NLD the UNLD had published the Bo Aung Kyaw Declaration and echoed the demands of the Gandhi Hall Declaration. When the NLD's position shifted from dialogue to direct confrontation it did not form a parliamentary representative committee by itself – despite winning over 50% of the vote in the 1990 election – but had formed the CRPP together with a host of ethnic parties.

Yet, when the UNLD requested a formal alliance for the 2015 elections the NLD did not respond. In Myanmar's first-past-the-post electoral system the ethnic parties had wanted to avoid a vote split in their home constituencies, no doubt realising that there were some constituencies in which the majority of voters were members of an ethnic minority and in which the NLD could not win while also trying to increase their chances in some electoral districts with sizeable numbers of ethnic minority voters where the NLD did stand a chance to win. After not responding to the UNLD's request the NLD opted to field candidates in all constituencies where voting was expected to take place (Ye Mon 2015).

Apart from breaking up the old alliances with ethnic minority parties and the student movement, the NLD's policy did not change much in the run-up to the 2015 elections. Although the party had legitimised the 2008 Constitution by contesting in the 2012 by-elections and contesting again in 2015, in its campaign the central promises of the NLD were a process of constitution amendment and consequently not merely a change of government but a change to the form of government, aimed at making Myanmar more democratic. For the NLD the years in parliament from 2012 and 2015 had been good because the party had had the chance to extend its party structure and to re-establish its political profile as an actor that mattered without having any responsibility for policy. The popularity of the party was sky-high and there was thus little surprise when the party won a landslide victory at the polls. The party won 79% of the elected seats, affording it a majority of 59% – 60% in the Amyotha Hluttaw and 59% in the Pyithu Hluttaw (ICG 2015,

p. 3). Moreover, the NLD won three-quarters of all elected seats in Myanmar's seven Burman-majority regions and the seven ethnic states (ICG 2015, p. 4). One NLD CEC member looked back at the 2015 election, telling me

“All the people voted for us in 2015. In the 2015 election the people put all their expectations in no party but the NLD. They had compassion for the NLD. They voted for the NLD with the great expectation that the NLD can still perform. Because of the compassion and the vigorous support of the people we now possess administrative power. We could form the government. Had the people lost their trust in us, the NLD would have disappeared when we were in prison. [...] But to use a quote “energy is neither destroyed nor created.” In democracy, the NLD is like energy because it cannot be destroyed nor created. It can only be transformed. Similarly, the NLD's role in democracy cannot be destroyed, nor can a new NLD be created. The NLD is the NLD” (Anonymous 2019, AI).

The quote illustrates the high the NLD and its politicians experienced during the 2015 election and shows that the party perceived itself as the single essential organisation that could advance democracy in Myanmar. As I will show in this thesis the reality that unfolded in the following five years was, however, quite different³⁰.

The period between 2010 and 2015 changed the NLD substantially. A politically destitute shell party without influence or significant party structures in 2010, the NLD revived itself yet again in the span of a mere two years. As at earlier junctures the party performed a policy U-turn and tacitly approved the 2008 Constitution that the junta had created without input from the NLD. On the other hand, the party also managed to wrest concessions from the quasi-civilian military-backed USDP government which is astonishing considering the party's lack of formal political power. This episode, possibly more than anything else, illustrates one of the great strengths of the NLD: over the course of several decades the party had firmly established itself as the single most important opposition party to the military. It was therefore almost irrelevant that the NLD did not have any formal power, did not have a proper party structure or a significantly large member base when the

³⁰ For a detailed look at the party's time in government see chapter six.

party entered negotiations with the Thein Sein administration. The party's status in Myanmar and abroad meant that the military's reform process would only be perceived as credible if the NLD was a part of this process. Therein lay the NLD's bargaining power. Much of the NLD's reputation was at this point solely based on the charisma and the political legacy of Aung San Suu Kyi. Her move to parliament as an ordinary MP following the NLD's victorious by-election campaign in 2012 finally cemented Aung San Suu Kyi's image not as a mere political leader but as a saint-like political icon. Within Myanmar and abroad, Aung San Suu Kyi's formal re-entry into Myanmar politics was perceived as a tectonic shift that would set Myanmar on the course of democracy. However, as I will show in the subsequent chapters, this perception was based on her struggle against an authoritarian regime rather than an understanding of her political stances or the NLD's approach to politics.

Therefore, it is unsurprising that first cracks in the image of the NLD and its leader began to appear as the party was preparing for the 2015 general elections. At the time, however, the decision of the NLD to repudiate the 1988 Generation, the rebuttal of former ethnic allies or the exclusion of Muslim candidates (Fisher 2015) were viewed as individual errors of judgment rather than as the symptoms of party culture that was profoundly at odds with the image of the NLD. Yet, these decisions mattered little for the party's voter base in the general euphoria that surrounded the NLD. They were, however, a sign of the way the NLD would govern and the values the party would espouse in the following five years.

3.13. Chapter conclusions

Before I examine some of the processes, I touched on in this chapter in greater detail I want to highlight some broader trends of party development that materialised during the NLD's time as an opposition party. As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, the NLD's existence

was a tight-rope act. This tight-rope act followed a pattern of confrontation and reconciliation with the military. From the very beginning the NLD was dependent on the military and this dependency and the continued, at times brutal, oppression shaped the NLD in several important ways.

The continued oppression of the party meant that the NLD had no chance to institutionalise structurally. The party expanded its structure and organisational mechanisms in the run-up to the 1990 elections and after Aung San Suu Kyi's release from house arrest in 1995 but each time renewed oppression of the party meant that any gains in party organisation and member recruitment were lost. The NLD did push for party institutionalisation once more, following Aung San Suu Kyi's release from house arrest in 2010, and the structures and processes the party implemented at this point shaped the NLD's time in government between 2016 and 2021³¹. One CEC member of the party succinctly summarised the fate of NLD institutionalisation telling me "A twenty-year long journey was in vain. That is why I keep repeating that we have only been able to run the party effectively for ten years although the party has existed for 30 years" (Anonymous 2019, AI). Rather than growing over time, the structures, and processes that the NLD implemented thus reflected the hierarchy and the power dynamic that existed at the point in time when the party could afford to re-organise itself. This is important because the dynamics of control and power in the NLD shifted significantly over time.

The NLD was founded as a league, not a party, modelled on the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League that had shaped Burmese politics under the leadership of Aung San and Nu between 1945 and 1958. While the NLD was clearly registered as a political party with the aim to field candidates in the 1990 elections and form a government many of its founding members thought of it as a political umbrella organisation - a league - not a

³¹ Arguably, however, these gains were once more destroyed by the military through the military coup on 1 February 2021 that led to the renewed persecution and criminalisation of the NLD.

party. This notion was reflected in the party's make-up, a combination of three dominant factions with different political backgrounds and ideas. Over time, however, the NLD turned from a party of political heterogeneity into one of homogeneity. The first split that led to the NLD losing one of its founding factions in 1988 was not caused by military oppression but rather by party infighting. All subsequent party splits and the resulting change of the make-up of party factions were in some way influenced by the military's oppression of the NLD. Splits in the party between 1990 and 2010 emerged exclusively over differences over how to respond to the NLD-focused policies of the military. Factions therefore no longer based on political or ideological differences but on whether one supported confrontation or reconciliation with the military and, more importantly, whether one supported the decision of the NLD leadership.

A strong focus on unity emerged within the NLD as a result of the continued oppression and the party splits. This strengthened the NLD, which suffered comparatively little from infighting. It also made the NLD increasingly resilient to external shocks. On the other hand, it led to the institutionalisation of a party culture around unity and support for the party leadership at all costs rather than policy-based culture. Since the party could not organise itself politically for most of its existence, could not hold regular party congresses or even maintain continuous channels of communication between the leadership, the broader executive and the party representatives and members across Myanmar, it was virtually impossible for the NLD to develop a political ideology or even just adopt political views that went beyond opposition to the military and the support for democracy as a broad rallying call. Political views that the party did adopt as its own and that came to form a part of the NLD's identity as a political party were mostly infused top-down by the party's leaders, most importantly Aung San Suu Kyi, and shaped by the experience of oppression that all NLD politicians shared. Yet, the NLD's identity developed along several other lines

too. Some of these, like the party's stance vis-à-vis ethnic political parties, were born largely from within the NLD

The continued oppression also exacerbated the single-leader dynamic that had existed in the NLD from the inception of the party. The stand-offs between the NLD and the military in general, and Aung San Suu Kyi and the military specifically, fostered the creation of a near mythical status of both party and leader. Especially the early stand-offs between Aung San Suu Kyi and representatives of the military elevated her political authority and ensured that she was able to unite the party and large parts of the electorate behind her, the ability that was her single most important source of power. Neither the NLD nor Aung San Suu Kyi as a political icon were, however, "military-made". Both the party and its leader were shaped by their relationship to the military but independently developed important characteristics and tools that afforded the party leverage vis-à-vis the military. Notably, the party's international popularity played an important role here too. Arguably, besides the party's political flexibility and its unity the quality that ensured the NLD's survival more than anything else was that the party had managed to become the "only game in town" in its own right – as the single relevant opposition party. The NLD was better than any other party or political movement at gaining and maintaining public support, international support and at building coalitions with ethnic minority parties.

In the following chapters I will examine the development of the NLD in greater detail. Firstly, by looking at the transformation of the party's factions and the rise of Aung San Suu Kyi within the NLD (chapter four) and subsequently, by considering the development of the NLD's political culture (chapter five) and its term in government (chapter six).

Factions in the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi's rise

“A party will always have disagreements, sometimes more, sometimes less. One important thing we can observe in our party is that we have always followed the decision of the majority however great the disagreement was. This is democracy” (NLD Lower House MP Phyu Phyu Thin 2018, AI).

4.1. On the relevance of factions

Considering the empirical narrative of the NLD's development, the changing character of the party's factions is striking. The NLD was founded as a league, a cooperative project of three factions, but in the following decades the party continuously became more homogenous. Factions based on diverging political backgrounds and – to some extent – ideas about how to govern were replaced by factions that were based on whether a party member's approach to the military was reconciliatory or confrontative. Yet, these factions too disappeared in time. They were, however, not replaced by new factions but rather by the allegiance to the NLD's leader, Aung San Suu Kyi.

The transformation of the party's factions was – in part – caused by the oppression of the NLD at the hands of the government. As such, episodes of faction formation and disintegration illustrate how the NLD was shaped by exogenous conditions. Yet, they were also the result of internal features that the NLD had exhibited since its foundation.

In this chapter I will illustrate junctures of faction formation and disintegration in more detail and assess what the transformation of the NLD's factions can tell us about the party. I argue that the transformation of the party's factions went hand in hand with Aung San Suu Kyi's rise to supreme leader of the NLD. Moreover, I argue that both processes can help us understand how the NLD was able to make policies that seemed to contravene its party platform without falling apart. In the first section of this chapter, I introduce the

relevant mechanisms in greater detail. I then analyse the role of factions in the early NLD. In the following sections I take a closer look at the party's first two splits and their consequences for the NLD. I then analyse how external and internal factors contributed to Aung San Suu Kyi's rise to supreme leader of the NLD. I illustrate some of the effects of Aung San Suu Kyi's unparalleled position in the party by investigating the NLD's third party split in 2010. In the final section I summarise the effects of the transformation and eventual disintegration of the NLD's factions and Aung San Suu Kyi's rise to supreme leader of the party on the NLD and highlight the relevance of these developments for the research question.

In chapter one I argued that to understand why the NLD, a party founded to end military rule in Myanmar and introduce democracy, made political decisions that contravened democracy it is necessary to analyse several mechanisms that governed the development of the party. In this chapter I analyse two of these mechanisms: the mechanism that led to the disintegration of the NLD's factions and the mechanism that gave way to Aung San Suu Kyi's rise to supreme leader of the NLD. Both mechanisms and their outcomes have their origin in external effects on the NLD and internal features of the party. Figure seven illustrates these sub-mechanisms of the amalgamated mechanism I introduced in chapter one.

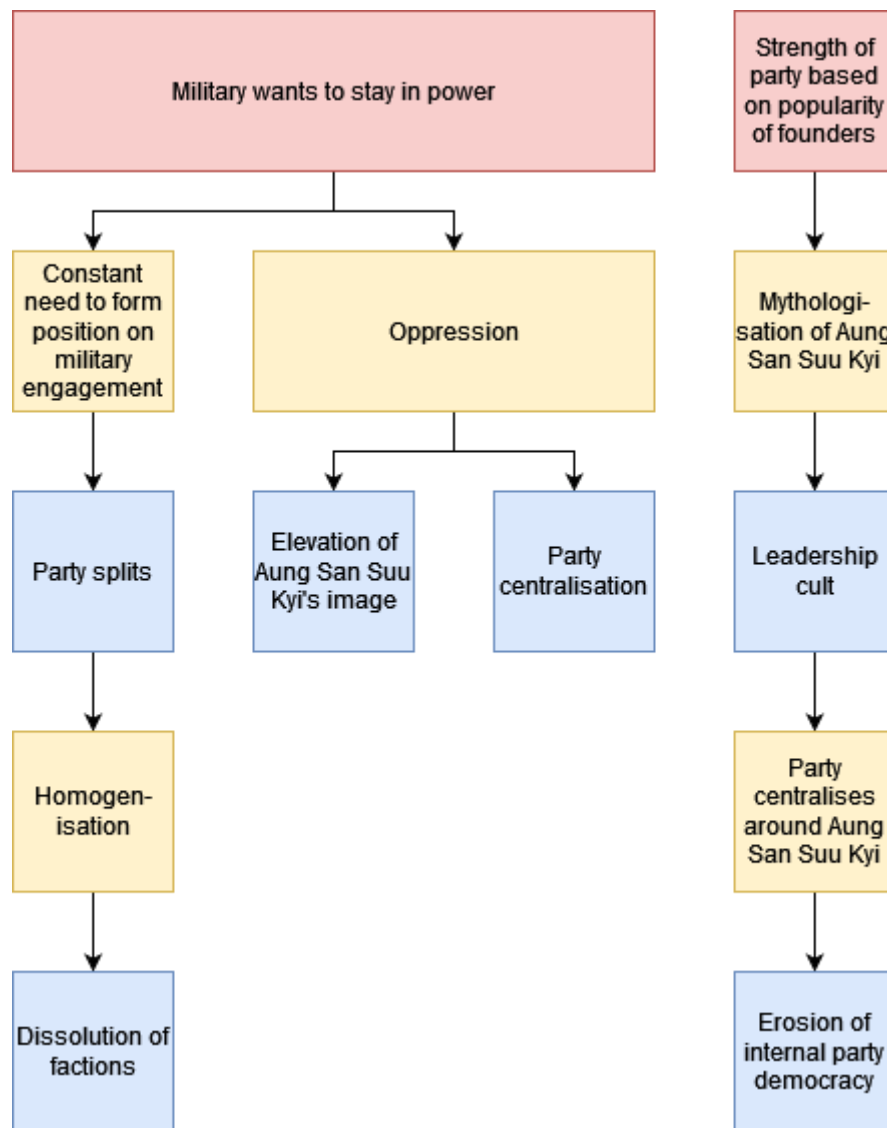


Figure 7: mechanisms governing Aung San Suu Kyi's rise to supreme leader and the disintegration of factions. Causes in red, causal processes in yellow, and outcomes in blue.

Figure seven also shows why these developments are important since the internal and external factors that contributed to Aung San Suu Kyi's rise to supreme leader ultimately had a negative impact on intra-party democracy. As I have pointed out in chapter one, the illustrations of these mechanisms are simplified. None of the mechanisms exist in isolation. Rather, they are characterised by a strong interconnectivity.

Moreover, while I have so far framed the elimination of factions as a major factor that contributed to the NLD's policy of reconciliation over confrontation with the military,

the disintegration of factions enabled Aung San Suu Kyi to bring the party under her control entirely. The single leader dynamic within the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi's role as the party's supreme leader significantly increased the party's cohesion. In chapter six I will analyse how the mechanisms I analyse here lowered levels of internal-party democracy and fostered an approach to engagement with the military that seemed to contravene the party's political platform and its *raison d'être*. The contribution of this chapter is therefore twofold. Firstly, providing an important steppingstone for analysis in the following chapters and secondly, showing *how* the NLD was able to make politics that contravened its political platform without falling apart.

4.2. Factions in the early NLD

As I described in chapter three the NLD was the result of the alliance between three popular political leaders and their supporters. The Aung Gyi faction, the intellectual faction under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi, and the faction of patriotic comrades, under the leadership of Tin Oo, differed significantly, mostly due to the respective backgrounds of their members. At the same time, the NLD had just been established and none of the three groups had a clearly formulated political agenda that ventured beyond the rallying-calls of their leaders' speeches at protests. To understand why I have opted to designate them as party factions rather than wings or tendencies I need to introduce my definition of the term faction and assess whether the early NLD factions fit the bill. For decades, scholars of political parties have pointed out that factions have received comparatively little attention. Indeed, classic works in the field, like Panebianco's *Political Parties: Organization and Power* (1988) or Sartori's *Parties and Party Systems* (1976) paid attention to factions in political parties only in passing. Since then, however, several works have tried to fill the existing gap and

have introduced several typologies of party factionalism¹. In this chapter, I adopt the definition of factions introduced by Patrick Köllner and Matthias Basedau (2005), who in turn based the definition on the work of Raphael Zariski (1960) and Frank Belloni and Dennis Beller (1976).

Köllner and Basedau define the term faction as designating every intra-party group which a) exists for a certain period of time; b) possesses a minimum of organisation; exhibits a common group-consciousness; c) actively pursues political goals, these policy-, or group-specific ones, within a party, and which thus d) can be discerned as a bloc within the party (Basedau and Köllner 2005, pp. 8-9). As such, Köllner and Basedau suggest a definition that retains its value for analysis while deliberately broadening the scope of the category. Many definitions of the term faction hold little explanatory value for cases characterised by non-existent or unconsolidated party systems that can often be found in autocracies, hybrid regimes, and young democracies. For example, Richard Rose (1964) and David Hine (1982) argue that factions are characterised by a shared identity, a binding agreement on common goals and a level of organisation that is higher than that of party wings, single-issue groups, or tendencies. Many definitions also view longevity as a central mark of factions. Andreas Ufen and Paul Chambers, who authored one of the few publications on factions in political parties in Southeast Asia, however, point out that the degree of faction institutionalisation found in parties in countries with long consolidated democracies is extremely rare in Southeast Asia (Chambers and Ufen 2020). In consequence, factions in parties in less

¹ See for example Belloni, F. P. and Beller, D. C. (1976) 'The Study of Party Factions As Competitive Political Organizations' *Western Political Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 4, pp. 531-549; Boucek, F. (2009), 'Rethinking Factionalism: Typologies, Intra-Party Dynamics and Three Faces of Factionalism' *Party Politics*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 455-485; Hine, D. (1982), 'Factionalism in West European Parties: A Framework for Analysis', *West European Politics*, vol. 5, pp. 36-53; Köllner, P. and Basedau, M. (2005), 'Factionalism in Political Parties: An Analytical Framework for Comparative Studies' *GIGA Working Papers No. 12*; Rose, R. (1964), 'Parties, Factions and Tendencies in Britain' *Political Studies*, vol. 12, pp. 33-46; Zariski, R. (1960), 'Party Factions and Comparative Politics: Some Preliminary Observations' *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 27-51.

developed party systems have often fallen through the cracks of definitions that were based on findings from parties in firmly established party systems.

Alternative categories for the political groupings in the NLD would have been “wings” or “tendencies”. Yet, neither provides an adequate category for the political groups in the early NLD. Tendencies are chiefly understood as changing coalitions within a party that unite behind a shared goal (Rose 1964) whereas wings are generally understood to be intra-party associations that are based on a shared ideology or a shared political belief. The three founding factions of the NLD were not changing coalitions but made up of a set group of members. They also did not reflect political cleavages on a spectrum of left to right as is often the case for political wings. Notably, the factions in the early NLD existed before the party was founded. The three political groups had emerged as a direct response to the political juncture of 1988 and banded together to maximise their influence on the course of history. Due to the conditions surrounding the formation of the NLD and its role as an opposition party², the NLD’s factions could not distribute government positions to their members, a function often associated with factions in more institutionalised parties. Yet, the factions in the NLD were initially still essential for the advancement of the political careers of their members inside the NLD. Membership to the party’s highest organ, the central executive committee, was contingent on a quota that gave each faction an equal number of seats at the table. Moreover, factions in the NLD were not formed to pursue a political goal that was substantially different from the party line but rather existed to ensure the continued influence of the faction within the party. This further set the political groupings in the early NLD apart from political wings that advocate for policies based on their members’ political leanings. Considering the lack of an extensive party organisation,

² See chapter three for details.

one might say that the NLD was initially nothing but its factions before the party expanded in the months following its formation.

4.3. A faction leaves: the first party split

The three founding factions of the NLD defined the early party. Hundreds of parties were founded in late 1988 and early 1989, but the NLD was immediately relevant due to its factions and their leaders. Aung San Suu Kyi, Tin Oo, and Aung Gyi had managed to create a mass-organisation precisely because they had created a party that was far more heterogenous than any other political party at the time. The league character of the party was initially a core strength. Aung Kyi Nyunt, who would go on to become a member of the NLD's CEC, explained this appeal to me

“At that time, after 88, many parties were founded in 1989, including the party established by U Nu. However, the main thing was that among the many parties that were founded, the organisation of the NLD was a like a league, like the *Pha Sa Pa La* (AFPFL³). Therefore, it involved former military officers, like U Aung Gyi, and also Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as a leader of the intellectuals” (Aung Kyi Nyunt 2019, AI).

Considering the rapid development of the NLD as a political party and the need to adapt to constantly changing external political conditions it is, however, not surprising that the factions and their role soon changed too. The transformation of the party's factions was necessary for the NLD to survive as a party, something that would have been a difficult feat as a mere amalgamation of three different factions with different leaders and different political perspectives. Especially under the conditions of the new SLORC government party unity became a virtue necessary for survival. When Aung Gyi accused eight members of the

³ The Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) was a political alliance that was borne out the resistance against the Japanese occupation of Burma during WWII. The league included the Communist Party of Burma, the Burma National Army, and the People's Revolutionary Party. In 1947 an AFPFL delegation under the leadership of Aung San led the negotiations for Burma's independence from Britain and – following a win in the 1947 elections for the constitutional assembly – drafted the new constitution for independent Burma. Although the AFPFL was a broad political alliance it eventually operated in many ways like a political party and shaped politics in Burma until 1958 when it split into two different organisations, the Clean AFPFL and the Stable AFPFL.

intellectual faction of being communists in November 1988 to increase his influence on the party, the SLORC jumped at the opportunity to echo his criticisms and portray the party as a disorganised (and communist) bunch. This highlighted the importance of party unity early on. The first faction split also illustrated the true allegiances in the early NLD.

On 25 November 1988, less than two months after the founding of the NLD, the party's chairman, Aung Gyi, sent an open letter to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi accusing eight of the NLD's members of the party, all members of Aung San Suu Kyi's intellectual faction, including three of the faction's CEC members, of being communists and demanding their dismissal from the party. In his letter, Aung Gyi expressed two major concerns. Firstly, that communists were likely to undermine the principles of the party, which he defined as "1. To fight for democracy with democratic means without holding arms. 2. To contest in multi-party elections. 3. To proceed with nation-building through a democratic constitution after the election" (Record of U Aung Gyi's Resignation from the NLD 1988, OT). Secondly, he was afraid that the party could be banned from competing in the election if the military perceived it to be under a strong communist influence. He noted, "There are possibilities that the NLD itself will be in danger because the suspicions are evolving not directly but indirectly around this matter" (ibid 1988, OT). This sentence is somewhat ambiguous, but Aung Gyi soon became more direct. On 29 November 1988, he released a statement to the public in which he reiterated his issues with the NLD and announced the foundation of a new party, the Union National Democratic Party (UNDP).

"According to the current situation, the communist and communist supporter groups grow within the NLD. Overground and underground activities are being detected at the base of the National League for Democracy. Therefore, (1) Overground and underground activities and the communist movement could be used as the reason for potentially denying the NLD's right to contest in the election. (...) Accordingly, the retirement [resignation] of communists and those who are assumed to be pro-communist within the Aung – Suu – Tin group shall be requested. In order to have the legs ready when the hands are not and vice versa, a backup organisation is needed in case the NLD is rejected" (ibid 1988, OT).

In his statement Aung Gyi envisioned the UNDP as a backup, in case the NLD was not allowed to compete in the elections, noting that it “is under the flag of the National League for Democracy. We must try very hard to prevent the disintegration of the National League for Democracy for any reason” (ibid 1988, OT). Whatever the intention, the statement, and the fact that it had been made public destabilised the party and gave the SLORC new grounds for propaganda claiming that the NLD was undercut by communists seeking to harm the nation⁴. Until today the interpretation of Aung Gyi’s motives is disputed. Of the eight NLD members, Aung Gyi accused of being communist only one had been a member of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) in the past. All others had had no formal affiliation to the CPB. However, all eight were undoubtedly politically left, and Aung Gyi’s faction was considered right-wing. Party historian Monywa Aung Shin explained:

“They were right-wing politicians. They, including U Aung Shwe and U Aung Gyi, were inclined towards right-wing ideologies. [...] Here we define left-wing as those people who admire communism and socialism and [right-wing] as people who do not. For instance, most of the people who were in Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s group had also been involved in the Yangon University Student Union when they were college students. Moreover, they supported the opposition groups that had stood against the government after Burma had achieved independence. [...] They were more inclined to support the cause of the armed groups. Most of them sympathised with the people in the armed struggles. But they never got deeply involved in the matter. [...] The people from the other group, who were former military personnel, disliked it [communism]. Why was that? Because since Burma’s independence, they had been fighting with the communists. [...] Despite the [mutual] repugnance, they unified in their quest for democracy because both groups despised the military dictatorship. [...] And people from the other group who called themselves leftists were not real leftists either⁵. They were only sympathisers” (Monywa Aung Shin 2019, AI).

Monywa Aung Shin dismissed the notion that there were “real” communists within the party. However, his account might be coloured by his own allegiances. It is also worth remembering that many NLD members and supporters, albeit younger ones who had no

⁴ For an informative and somewhat humorous account of how the SLORC manufactured propaganda on this and similar themes see Allot, A. J. (1994), ‘Letting the Cat Out’, *Index on Censorship*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 102-105.

⁵ For a closer look at political ideologies in the NLD see chapter five.

influence on the party at the time, did flee to the jungle and sought to organise an armed struggle against the SLORC after the regime started to crack down ever more strongly in the last months of 1988, showing a more radical approach to politics that mirrored the approach of the CPB. Other observers of the party are less decisive in their judgment of the existence of communist factions within the party. One former NLD supporter and ex-political prisoner pointed out: “Some people think that since the communists failed in the revolution, they tried to cooperate with the NLD, trying to shape the party’s politics” (Anonymous 2018, AI).

In any case, it is worth remembering that Aung Gyi had been ousted from Ne Win’s cabinet because he lost an internal struggle in which he advocated for capitalist economic policy over socialist doctrine. Consequently, it is likely that he felt that the intellectual faction presented a challenge to the political ideas he stood for. Although nothing in Aung San Suu Kyi’s speeches suggested that she was sympathetic to leftist political ideology Aung Gyi likely worried that she was just a figurehead for more radical members of her faction, an argument that was often put forward by the military at the time. The fear that Aung San Suu Kyi might be instrumentalised is illustrated in the fact that Aung Gyi never tried to remove her from the party, but only some of her closest supporters.

Another interpretation of the confrontation is that the issue of communism was a front to cover up the real cleavage between the factions – how to engage with the military and Ne Win, who continued to have some influence in the military. As CEC member Aung Kyi Nyunt explained: “The U Aung Gyi way was to build a good relationship with U Ne Win. [...] The other principle [way] was that since we were in fact receiving the support from the people, we had to go with the people. These were the two different principles” (Aung Kyi Nyunt 2019, AI). An even more simple explanation would interpret Aung Gyi’s

challenge as a move for more power. Party spokesperson and historian Monywa Aung Shin was certain that

“Actually, U Aung Gyi was not concerned about communists. The people he accused of being communists were the people who strongly supported Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Had he been able to kick these people out of the party, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi would have been deprived of strong and influential supporters. Then, he single handedly would have been able to manipulate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi” (Monywa Aung Shin 2019, AI).

In the light of the gravity of Aung Gyi’s accusations it is astonishing how structured the party’s response to the challenge was. Aung San Suu Kyi decided that the motion on the accused’s dismissal was to be discussed at the next regular central committee meeting⁶ on 3 December 1988. Ahead of the meeting, another proposal was accepted by the CEC. Win Tin (one of the accused) suggested using a vote to determine whether the accusations were valid. Furthermore, the CEC agreed that if the accusations were found to be valid, the accused should be dismissed from the party and if they were found to be false, the accuser should be dismissed from the party. The protocol for the procedure notes:

“b) The eight accused should take 10-15 minutes each, no more than two hours in total, to provide adequate explanations and rebuttal. c) Each member shall provide their decision through secret votes. d) If the majority votes are for the “accusations are valid”, the eight accused shall resign all together and if they are for the “accusations are invalid”, Chairperson U Aung Gyi shall step down from the NLD” (Record on U Aung Gyi’s Resignation from the NLD 1988).

What followed was a well-mannered exchange of opinions, with the accused and the accuser presenting their statements before those gathered at the meeting. After all ballots had been taken from the silver cup in which they had been cast 13 votes supported Aung Gyi’s motion and 28 were against it. Win Tin’s move had been calculated. He had deliberately upped the stakes because the intellectual faction knew that it had the support

⁶ At the time the central committee meetings comprised the members of the Central Committee as well as the Central Executive Committee.

of the patriotic old comrades and thus could dominate the vote. Win Tin's motion allowed the party to immediately pacify the tensions and regain a united front since it simply pushed out Aung Gyi's faction⁷. The split of the Aung Gyi faction was an important step in the transformation from league to party. Allegiances within the party were consolidated and party unity was established at this early juncture. Significantly, this early split would remain the only faction split not prompted by external shocks until 2012.

4.4. External shocks: factions in the NLD in 1990

The NLD experienced further faction splits in 1990 and 2010. The preceding intra-party fights were, however, not the result of ideological differences or moves for advancing the influence of a faction within the party. Rather, the splits arose over questions of confrontational or reconciliatory approaches to the military. This reflects the changing nature of factions within the NLD. Aung Gyi's faction had been expelled from the NLD and in the quest for party unity the boundaries between the patriotic old comrades and the intellectuals began to fade. As the NLD began building a party structure ahead of the 1990 general election, factional affiliation along the original lines began to matter less and less. In the run up to the 1990 elections Aung San Suu Kyi consolidated her role as the indispensable leader of the party. Looking back, all NLD politicians I talked to assured me that the patriotic old comrades had had no desire to maximise their influence within the party, for example by trying to oust Aung San Suu Kyi because they accepted her as the party's leader due to her qualities as a politician and her personal qualities. It remains unclear, however, whether the increasing support for Aung San Suu Kyi was the result of genuine loyalty or a result of the understanding that the party was dependent on her due to

⁷ Aung Gyi, however, did not leave without a fight. He refused to step down and tried to take over NLD branches in Yangon and Mandalay, effectively occupying the NLD's branch office on Pansodan road in Yangon. The NLD consequently issued a public statement dismissing him from the party. All members of his faction but one left the NLD. The exception was Kyi Maung who would go on to play an increasingly important role in the NLD, at some point assuming the role of chairman of the party.

her popularity. In any case, following the Aung Gyi split the NLD exhibited a high degree of cohesion that was only broken by external shocks.

The first major shock came in the aftermath of the 1990 elections when the SLORC not only refused to transfer power based on the election results but also did not allow the NLD and other successful parties to form an assembly that could oversee the formation of a new constitution⁸. The NLD thus found itself between a rock and a hard place. It had the popular mandate but no power to enforce it. Stepping back from its aspirations to form a government or at least oversee the constitution building process would have meant ceding any potential for further political influence. Open confrontation with the military on the other hand, for example through the formation of a parliament of its own, would have risked a wave of arrests and the dissolution of the party. In the process of trying to find a response, the NLD split into three different factions, soft-liners, moderates (sometimes referred to as the principled line), and hardliners. Notably, affiliation to the factions that had previously existed played no role in the allegiances to the new factions for two reasons. Firstly, the founding factions had always been elite factions and as the party expanded most new functionaries or election candidates did not join an existing faction. Secondly, the split in the party now occurred between the leadership of the party on one hand and the MP-elects on the other hand.

By and large, the leadership of the party favoured a measured approach whereas many MP-elects were calling for a stronger line of opposition to the military's decisions. The consequent juxtaposition of the three categories soft-liners, hardliners, and moderates with the two binary categories of the measured approach and the stronger opposition line makes the categorisation of factional allegiances difficult. Moreover, the meaning of the terms soft-liner, hardliner and moderate was not fixed but remained in flux. Some people

⁸ For more details see chapter three.

that were once proud hardliners argued that they had really been moderates. Some soft-liners became hardliners while some hardliners became soft-liners. For many the term “soft-liner” became a swear word that was equated with someone who was too sympathetic to the military although many NLD leaders had clearly endorsed a soft-liner approach at one point or another.

Interviewees diverged strongly on their views of the factions when I discussed the topic with them. In the cases of those who had been active in the party in 1990, their characterisation of the factions reflected their own political stance at the time. The description by party historian Monywa Aung Shin was one of the more neutral accounts:

“The first line [group] was made up of those who wanted to call forth the Hluttaw and form a government on their own if the SLORC would not call for the formation of the Hluttaw. The second group was made up of those who said that they would pressure the SLORC government with the help of the international community. The last group was made up of those who wanted to discuss with the SLORC regime no matter what. These groups were called hard-liners, moderates, and soft-liners” (Monywa Aung Shin 2019, AI).

One hardliner passed a harsher judgment of the soft-liners that was echoed by other interviewees, saying “They were not merely soft; they were much too soft. They colluded with the military and got benefits from the military. They were made up of those who said, “following the military government is a very good idea and we can share power with the military and get some government posts or some parliament posts”” (Anonymous 2019, AI).

When I asked who belonged to the soft-liners, I often received evasive responses, noting that many of them had left the party and that it was not clear who belonged to them. Over time, it became clear, however, that many NLD politicians simply preferred to forget that they had once been soft-liners. An exception was Nan Khin Htwe Myint, who was the NLD Chief Minister of Kayin State when I interviewed her in 2019, who told me “I can

say I was a soft-liner. Our leader always guided us to negotiate at the table, not to call on the people to march on the road and use the people's power unnecessarily. I was not like the radical hard-liners. We stood on the side of the soft way. Despite this, our beliefs were firm" (Nan Khin Htwe Myint 2019, AI).

She went on to explain that many senior NLD leaders came to adopt the soft-line approach with a focus on dialogue with the military in the time after the 1990 elections, arguing that the hardliners had only been a small group within the party. The NLD leadership had in fact mostly been comprised of soft-liners and moderates, leading to a split between the party leadership and its MP-elects. Monywa Aung Shin told me

"The party CEC and the elected representatives split. They divided into two camps. The party CEC was made up of moderates and soft-liners and the elected MPs were quite radical. So, they split up into two sides. At this time, the CEC issued Statement 5/90. The elected representatives did not approve of the statement because 5/90 was an edited version of the Gandhi Hall Declaration. The Gandhi Hall Declaration stated that the SLORC should call forth the Hluttaw, the NLD should form a government and draft the constitution and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi must be released. Only then dialogue should begin. Statement 5/90 put dialogue first. [...] They [the MP-elects] did not like it and no longer approved the CEC. They decided not to follow the CEC and convened in Amarapura" (Monywa Aung Shin 2019, AI).

Importantly, the factions that emerged were not based on ideology but on strategy of how to engage the military. The term soft-liner became a swear word for many in the NLD over the years. At the same time some NLD politicians, like the later Chief Minister of Kayin State, Nan Khin Htwe Myint, continued to identify themselves as soft-liners because they had a different understanding of the term.

In any case, the split that took place was severe. This became clear when some of those MP-elects that had met in Amarapura fled to the border of Thailand where they formed a parallel government, the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma. The split had been caused by the challenge posed by the military, which refused to hand over any shred of power. Yet, the increasing persecution by the military also prevented the

entrenchment of the new factions in the party and prevented an even deeper party split.

CEC member Aung Kyi Nyunt told me

“After the Gandhi Hall meeting, the military intelligence had lists of those who were hard-liners and those who were soft-liners and they attempted to eliminate those members of the NLD who they assumed to be hard-liners. From then on, we faced excessive repression. Because of this repression – with the party leadership under arrest and the entire party in chaos – we were in no condition to say who was in the majority. [...] In fact, because of the persecution we were consolidated as a party” (Aung Kyi Nyunt 2019, AI).

NLD MP Myint Lwin reflected on the turbulent times after the meeting at Amarapura and the intensity of the persecution:

“Those people [hard-liners] were sentenced to 25 years. [...] It was complete chaos back then. Some fled to exile, some to the jungle, some were put into jail, some kept a low profile. We were confused and could not figure out who believed what. But for me I am sure that I was a hard-liner if I had to choose between these three lines. However, the plan of the hard-liners was never realised, and all had to flee. I was also in Mandalay [Amarapura is on the outskirts of Mandalay], but only one day after the meeting. Very shortly afterwards, the news leaked, and U Maung Ko was arrested. He died at the interrogation camp. All fled then, to the jungle. So, we have three lines and there are still some who are hard-liners. Some are in exile, some in Myanmar” (Myint Lwin 2019).

The persecution of the hardliners was a brutal experience for the NLD; at the same time the party no longer had to patch up the rupture that had emerged in its midst. Since the hardliners had either been arrested, fled to internal or international exile, or had to keep a low profile, the NLD was now dominated by the moderate faction who advocated for dialogue with the military. Some former hardliners have remained in the NLD and became active politicians after their release from prison, with some eventually taking up high-ranking positions in the legislature and the government. Yet, these hardliners came to adopt the moderate perspective that had become the dominant faction within the NLD. Until Aung San Suu Kyi’s release from house arrest in 1995, the moderate faction continued to dominate the NLD.

Following Aung San Suu Kyi's release, the influence of the moderate faction waned but not because its approach to engagement with the military were thrown out of the window on ideological grounds but rather because Aung San Suu Kyi resumed her role as leader of the party and her approach shifted between confrontation and appeasement. During her first house arrest, the NLD's leaders could not communicate with Aung San Suu Kyi, and she never commented on the hardliners and their fate after she was released. Aung San Suu Kyi's own stance was always context dependent as NLD MP Myint Lwin explained

"Daw Suu, as far as we can see, is conditional on the given situation. Sometimes she is a hard-liner, sometimes she is a moderate and sometimes she is a soft-liner. She changes depending on the situation. [...] For instance, on Martyrs' Day 1989, she had initially planned to march together with the people although the military did not allow it. This was on the 19th of July 1989. However, she changed her plan very abruptly that morning and announced that she should no longer be marching with the people. All of a sudden, she changed from hard-liner to soft-liner. Later on, she became a hard-liner again when she adopted the rhetoric to resist all orders which are against the people's desires. [...] At the same time, she also offered the dialogue. I think we can only label her as a hard-liner, soft-liner or moderate according to each individual occasion" (Myint Lwin 2019, AI).

In the aftermath of the 1990 elections, the nature of party factions in the NLD had transformed. The founding factions continued to exist but as elite factions they lost some of their relevance as the party grew larger. They remained as pathways for careers in the party, i.e., "coming up" in one of the two remaining original factions, but they did not serve as foundations for subsequent factional splits, nor did they constitute separate entities in terms of political strategy. Moreover, their alliance grew so close that there remained little to distinguish them from one another, and they effectively disintegrated. The fact that the next factional split emerged between the leaders of the NLD, no matter whether they belonged to the intellectual faction or the POC faction, and the broader party base, notably the MP-elects of the 1990 elections, underscores the closeness of the two factions. The new factions that emerged were based on their members' stance on engagement with the

military. Yet, because the radical faction was oppressed so heavily by the military the NLD did not split as a political party. It became a comparatively unitary party again, one that was focused on dialogue with the military and the party's survival at all costs. To the latter end, Aung Shwe, then chairman of the NLD, expelled Aung San Suu Kyi from the party in 1991 after the SLORC had threatened the NLD with the criminalisation of the party should the leadership fail to expel Aung San Suu Kyi.

4.5. Aung San Suu Kyi's rise to supreme leader

In the following years the NLD existed in a state of near hibernation as it could not effectively organise the party or political activity and could also not influence the National Convention in any meaningful way⁹. The years between 1990 and 1995 showed that the party without Aung San Suu Kyi lacked the leadership to decide on any political move that went beyond preserving the status quo. The NLD had become tightly bound to Aung San Suu Kyi as a leader. Her status as a rising icon in the fight against an oppressive regime gave her the power to mobilise citizens and international support. Her status and the fact that she was the daughter of Myanmar's independence hero, General Aung San, also provided her with tools to deal with the military in ways other people could not. Being locked away in her house she had paid a high price for her political activities, but she was spared from the long stints in prison and the torture most of her fellow party functionaries had to endure. The military was simply more reluctant to harm her.

It is important to recall here that Aung San Suu Kyi's rise to political icon was in no way pre-ordained. In his diary that details observations made in Yangon during 1988, anthropologist Ward Keeler describes the sentiment that people shared with him when he brought up Aung San Suu Kyi following her speech in front of the Shwedagon Pagoda:

⁹ For more details on the NLD's role in the National Convention see chapter 3.

“Ko A points out, first, that the woman can’t know much about Burma, having grown up in England, second, that what he had read of the things she has written or said since the 8th [August 1988] have been vague and rather empty, and finally, that she’s married to an Englishman, so forget it” (Ward Keeler 1997, p. 19). Keeler also notes that it was Aung San Suu Kyi’s brother, Aung San Oo, whom people initially looked to for leadership.

Aung San Suu Kyi had gained considerable popularity during the 1988 Uprising and her status as a political icon would continue to grow in the following decades. However, her first political campaigns in the run-up to the 1990 elections were the corner stone of her authority as a political leader, even more so because they granted her authority within the NLD and with the electorate rather than with foreign observers. Soon after the foundation of the NLD Aung San Suu Kyi, by then already clearly established as the figurehead of the party, began campaigning all over Myanmar. While campaigning for the upcoming elections was theoretically legal, it could in practice not be done without disregard for the SLORC’s laws, announcements, and orders. Outdoor gatherings of more than four people had been outlawed (SLORC 1988c) and the SLORC reminded all registered political parties that “[...] it is forbidden to organize and agitate, give talks, spread false and malicious rumours and write such materials with the intention of bringing about disintegration of the Tatmadaw” (SLORC 1988d).

It was clear that no party that hoped to gain any votes would be able to comply with the directives of the military and, thus, the pre-election period was from the beginning marked by tension. The military’s approach of selective repression did, however, not work in its favour. In fact, it proved to be fertile soil for the further fostering of a hero narrative that revolved around the NLD and its secretary general, Aung San Suu Kyi. Despite the risk associated with attendance, Aung San Suu Kyi drew large crowds on her first campaign trip in “more than fifty towns in Pegu, Magwe, Mandalay and Sagaing districts, and Shan

State” (Aung San Suu Kyi 1991, p. 335). Defiance quickly became a central asset of the NLD’s political profile and strengthened the existing David vs. Goliath narrative. During a trip to Mawlamyine and Southeast Burma between 8 and 18 December 1988 “army vehicles with loudspeakers warned the public not to receive her, but many people defied the order and welcomed her. 13 local organisers of the party are arrested” (New York Times 1989, cited in Zöllner 2012, p. 89). The constant stand-off between the military and Aung San Suu Kyi facilitated the creation of the NLD as a myth, imbuing the practical narrative of democratisation with dramatic elements and enabling the creation of a hero. When Aung San Suu Kyi embarked on a 13-day tour of the Irrawaddy Division, Asiaweek reported:

“At Myaungmya [the birthplace of Aung San Suu Kyi’s mother], deep in the Delta, troops fired three shots in the air as her riverboat approached the pier. Disembarking, she coolly asked the soldiers: “Only three shots? Why not 21?” Insiders say that before leaving Rangoon, she left written instructions in case of her assassination. [...] During Suu Kyi’s Irrawaddy campaign, about 35 of her retinue were apprehended under Section 5. All told, some 50-60 NLD members have been detained, the party says” (Asiaweek 1989).

But the incident that cemented Aung San Suu Kyi’s popularity and left no doubt of her commitment in the eyes of her supporters took place on 5 April 1989 in Danubyu in the Irrawaddy delta, where the legendary General Maha Bandoola had been killed in 1825 during the first Anglo-Burmese war. Win Htein who would go on to become an NLD CEC member and power centre in the party was present on the day and remembers:

“Roughly 20 of us were marching with her when we encountered Captain Myint Oo at the turn of a road. He ordered us not to pass through. Daw Suu ignored his order and entered the road. She also told us to walk on. Before I knew it, five or six soldiers were pointing their rifles at us at their captain’s order. If I recall correctly, she told us to keep on walking. She walked at the centre of the road while we continued at the side. Captain Myint Oo pulled out his pistol and aimed at Daw Suu. She did not stop. I thought he was really going to shoot her at point-blank range. Suddenly, the captain’s superior, Major Maung Tun, a district authority, appeared and ordered everyone to lower his gun. Captain Myint Oo did not listen. The major then tried to grab the gun from the captain who resisted. For a brief moment, the major appeared to be wresting the pistol out of the captain’s hands. Daw Suu was surely walking on the brink of death. And, she narrowly escaped. Walking beside me, U Kyi Maung heaved a sigh of relief and said, “Just in the nick of time, Bo Htein! If Daw Suu actually got killed, we would all have to leave the country and join the armed groups at

the borders.” Widely covered in international news, the incident instantly elevated Daw Suu to a global icon” (Win Htein 2021, pp. 173-174).

This episode is illustrative of the way in which acts of oppression at the hands of the military helped recast Aung San Suu Kyi as a hero and as a political persona that superseded the notion that she was a normal activist or politician. Although Aung San Suu Kyi had become immensely popular during the 1988 Uprising, she was still a political newcomer. Moreover, she was a woman in a deeply patriarchal society, married to a foreigner and had been educated abroad, characteristics that were met with reservation by many Burmese. The constant fights with the military gave Aung San Suu Kyi the opportunity to quickly accrue political capital of her own and expand on her existing popularity. If there had been doubts before, the ability Aung San Suu Kyi showed in gaining the support of the electorate during her first campaign tours made clear that she would be the centre of power in the newly founded NLD.

4.5.1. Symbolic politics of statehood

As I have noted in chapter one and at the beginning of this chapter many outcomes that can help us understand the NLD are the result of interconnected processes that developed in response to external factors and internal processes. This is also true in the instance of the creation of the hero Aung San Suu Kyi. The stand-offs with the military contributed to the transformation of Aung San Suu Kyi’s image but the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi also took great care to cleverly orchestrate her image as a hero and super-human politician. The legacy of Aung San Suu Kyi’s father provided the NLD with political capital that extended far beyond the popularity of Aung San Suu Kyi. It imbued Aung San Suu Kyi with a moral political authority that allowed her to perform key rituals such as funerals or anniversaries that would normally have been the under the auspice of the government. She used this capacity intelligently to draw legitimacy for the political campaign of the NLD and support

for the party and herself, inevitably exacerbating the tensions between the NLD and the military. When Aung San Suu Kyi's mother, Khin Kyi, passed away on 27 December 1989 it was clear that her funeral would become a major political event. On the day Khin Kyi was laid to rest an estimated 100,000 people took to the streets around Shwedagon Pagoda to witness the entombment of the former ambassador to India and wife of Burma's independence hero near the mausoleums of the national poet Thakin Kodaw Hmine and the former UN Secretary General Thant. Aung San Suu Kyi was by virtue of her role as daughter of Khin Kyi at the helm of a national day of mourning and remembrance.

In the following months of the NLD's campaign Aung San Suu Kyi repeatedly led rallies and ceremonies commemorating historic anniversaries, thus generating a picture of herself as a stately leader. She consciously ritualised many of these events. When she attended a rally at Rangoon University on 13 March 1989 commemorating the deaths of students that had ignited the 1988 Uprising, the NLD seized the opportunity to declare the day "Burma Human Rights Day" (Aung San Suu Kyi, p. 338). Aung San Suu Kyi intertwined the remembrance of historic events with the NLD and the party's political message. On 26 June 1989 Aung San Suu Kyi held a press conference in which she announced plans for a whole series of commemorations of important days in Burmese history:

"July 7, when, in 1962, the government blew up the building housing the Rangoon Students Union; July 19, Martyrs' Day, when in 1947, her father was assassinated ... August 8, when, last year, the army opened fire on unarmed demonstrators, and unleashed a week of military slaughter; September 18, when, last year, the military officially assumed power amid a wave of shootings" (Aung San Suu Kyi 1991, p. 343).

All of these dates were certainly worthy of commemoration and the state was not providing any forum for remembrance, but the tight timeline of the commemorations suggests that the NLD was aware that commemorations provided a distinct political platform that served to consolidate the moral authority of the party and the support for it. The practice of commemoration became an integral part of the NLD's rituals as a political

party. For decades, the commemorations would provide an opportunity for the party to move back into the political arena, to issue statements, and gather members¹⁰.

The stand-offs with the military and the ways in which the NLD advanced the creation of Aung San Suu Kyi as a super-human political saviour not only influenced the way Myanmar's population (and international observers) came to see Aung San Suu Kyi but also affected her perception within the NLD. In the party the perception grew that she was more knowledgeable about topics like democracy than many of her fellow party leaders. When Aung San Suu Kyi was released from her first period under house arrest in 1995, she immediately resumed the leadership of the NLD and it was clear that she was making the important decisions, such as the NLD's walk-out from the National Convention in 1995 and the foundation of the Committee Representing People's Parliament (CRPP) in 1998. Increasingly, both supporters of Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD and the military portrayed the complex political developments in Myanmar as a contest between good and evil. Depending on the perspective Aung San Suu Kyi was elevated to a political saint (her supporters) or vilified (the military) (Hans-Bernd Zöllner 2012, pp. 5-7). Yet, in reality the NLD in the mid-1990s was still far from being a monolithic party centred around Aung San Suu Kyi. As chairman of the party, Aung Shwe continued to wield extensive influence. After her release Aung San Suu Kyi had told her followers that Aung Shwe's decision to dismiss her from the party to safeguard the NLD's legal status had been right. Aung Shwe, who belonged to the faction of patriotic old comrades had been a Brigadier-General and served as ambassador to Spain, France, Australia, New Zealand, and Egypt between 1961 and

¹⁰ Indeed, while these commemorations initially played an important role in the shaping of Aung San Suu Kyi's image, they became a lifeline for the party throughout the 2000s when the NLD lingered in forced hibernation. Aung Moe Nyo, who won a seat in the 1990 elections and much later became the chief minister of the Magway Region government explained "there were a lot of activities focused on the survival of the party. So, we always went to Yangon on the Revolutionary Day, the Martyr's Day, and the National Day" (Aung Moe Nyo 2019, AI). When the oppression of the NLD was fiercest the commemoration ceremonies had only a limited political effect, but they had an almost ontological purpose for the NLD by providing a thread that held the party together. See also chapter three.

1975. His experience made him a skilled political operator. As chairman he sent dozens of letters to General Than Shwe, detailing the persecution of the NLD, calling for dialogue and for the establishment of a parliament based on the 1990 election results¹¹. He served as a counterweight to Aung San Suu Kyi within the party and yet Aung San Suu Kyi made the important strategic decisions in the party. Aung San Suu Kyi was also the NLD's connection to international actors, foreign politicians and diplomats who advocated on behalf of the party.

Over time, Aung San Suu Kyi became the supreme leader of the NLD, someone who few people inside the party dared to question. This was not only the result of her stand-offs with the military or her role during the first commemoration ceremonies but also influenced by her simply being by far the youngest NLD leader. By 2000, Aung San Suu Kyi was 55 years old whereas Aung Shwe was 81. Consequently, many senior NLD leaders simply became too old to continue in their existing capacities or died. Similarly important is the fact that Aung San Suu Kyi was never imprisoned. While she had not been able to communicate with the party during her first house arrest, this was not the case during the subsequent years confined to her residence. She was thus able to pass messages to the free CEC members while many senior leaders were confined to prison.

4.6. The 2010 split and Aung San Suu Kyi's increased control over the party

The effect of Aung San Suu Kyi's status as supreme leader of the party on the level of internal party democracy became clear in 2010 when the NLD underwent its third party split. In preparation of the 2010 election the military government had issued a political party registration law that stipulated that parties who had members who were convicts could not

¹¹ The letters Aung Shwe sent between 1995 and 1997 were smuggled out of Myanmar and compiled by the All Burma Students' Democratic Front who published them in English in 1997. See ABSDF (1997), *Letters to a Dictator: Correspondence from NLD Chairman Aung Shwe to the SLORC's Senior General Than Shwe*, Bangkok: ABSDF.

partake in the election¹². To stand for election, the NLD would have had to expel Aung San Suu Kyi and an estimated 430 members of the party who were at the time still in prison. Two camps emerged in the party that debated the issue fiercely before the party ultimately put the matter to a vote. However, the vote hardly mattered. Khin Maung Swe, a long-time CEC member and the leader of those who wanted to contest in the elections, recalled:

“The majority was not important. The NLD members followed the party leaders. So, the decision not to register the party: If we register, we can run for the election, If we do not register, we cannot run for the election. We were standing on the side to register. In the CEC, we were winning. Of the 15 CEC members, nine were in favour of the reregistration of the party, including U Aung Shwe. Six members on U Win Tin’s side were against it. The first CEC meeting made this clear. Ko Win Myint, who is currently president, was also on our side at this time. [...] Dr Thein Nyein and I conducted a poll on whether to participate or not. When we collected the results from the central committee members in the states and regions, we learned that about 60% agreed with us. But later on, U Nyan Win was allowed to meet Daw Aung San Suu Kyi alone. At the time, four foreign media organisations were against [the reregistration] and she knew the issue only through them. U Win Tin then reported that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi had independently said that she could not participate in the election. [...] From the beginning, there had been an agreement that the party would only make a decision that both Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and U Aung Shwe agreed to. Previously, she [Aung San Suu Kyi] had said that she would agree with the decision of the CEC. But then she overruled it. She delivered her decision through U Nyan Win. U Nyan Win then immediately revealed the decision directly to the media. Consequently, the 60% consensus became irrelevant. We then convened a meeting of about a 100 members of the Central Committee because the CEC could not decide. When the members learned that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was against participating, everyone was against it too. As I said before, people had no political sense but rather based their thinking and their decision on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. This was the fate of the country (Khin Maung Swe 2019, AI).

Khin Maung Swe along with several other senior NLD members consequently left the NLD to found the National Democratic Force, which ran in the 2010 elections with some minor success. There is little doubt that his account is coloured by the defeat he experienced within the party at the time, but his account was confirmed to me by several sources. It also illustrates Aung San Suu Kyi’s political flexibility. While Aung San Suu Kyi favoured dialogue and reconciliation with the military her approach changed intermittently,

¹² See chapter three for more details.

adjusting the degree of acceptance and rejection of the military's provisions. NLD MP Myint Lwin described this flexibility, telling me

“She passed on her opinion that the NLD should not participate in the 2010 elections via U Nyan Win, not directly to the party of course. We can call her stance the stance of the hard-liners. Every soft-liner would have wanted to participate in the election [...] When she was released from house arrest in 1995, the NLD was still attending the National Convention under the leadership of U Aung Shwe. She said clearly “it is not the right way, why must we attend this convention?” Consequently, all of our attendees were withdrawn. This can also be identified as a hard-liner stance. Now that she is appeasing the military too much and did not say a word to deter the military from its actions and there is no control on its actions, we could call her a very soft soft-liner. Some people are not happy with Daw Suu because she is too focused on national reconciliation, turns a blind eye to the military's activities and says nothing about them. It is difficult to label [her]. It always depends on the particular situation” (Myint Lwin 2019, AI).

The episode of the 2010 party split also shows that by 2010 opinions on how to respond to the political conditions the military created still differed. The NLD was not monolithic. Considering the definition of factions put forward by Köllner and Basedau as intra-party groups, which a) exist for a certain period of time; b) possess a minimum of organisation; exhibit a common group-consciousness; c) actively pursue political goals, be these policy-, or group-specific ones, within a party, and which thus d) can be discerned as a bloc within the party, we could characterise the group of NLD politicians who advocated participating in the 2010 elections as a faction within the NLD. Yet, the 2010 soft-liners resembled the factions that emerged in the NLD following the 1990 elections. They were a single-issue faction that emerged suddenly and without a fixed membership base. This ultimately limited their ability to decide political votes in their favour. Moreover, the vote was affected directly by the limitations that characterised it. During the 1988 split of the Aung Gyi faction all NLD leaders and party functionaries casting votes were in the same room together, arguing their case. In 2010, Aung San Suu Kyi could only pass notes to her party confidantes. This may seem insignificant, but it shows that the NLD adapted its internal processes to the conditions of oppression. The political conditions in 1988 had still

permitted democratic processes within the party. In 2010 an open dialogue among all leaders was not possible. Considering how flexible Aung San Suu Kyi was in her approach to dealing with the military and the political conditions it created for the NLD it is not far-fetched to assume that a proper party congress might have yielded an altogether different outcome, could have prevented the split that did occur and could possibly have caused a wholly different fractionalisation within the NLD¹³.

The 2010 split demonstrated how the NLD had transformed from a heterogeneous league with several relevant senior leaders, to a homogenous political party dominated by a single leader over the course of three decades. By 2010, proximity and access to Aung San Suu Kyi had long become the central markers of influence and power within the NLD. Following Aung San Suu Kyi's release from house arrest in 1995, her private compound became the de-facto headquarter of the NLD. Party business was chiefly conducted there rather than at the party's headquarters¹⁴. The party was thus divided between those with access to the compound and those working "outside" for the party. One long-time observer of the party told me "*From the compound* [emphasis added] meant everything. Someone would come to the office, the headquarters or the CEC meeting and say, "this is from the compound". And then, done. You had to obey it. You just needed to say *from the compound* [emphasis added]" (Anonymous 2018, AI). Members of the NLD's Central Executive Committee automatically had access to the compound but over time the compound became more important than the CEC. The long-time observer told me "CEC members could visit the compound more openly than others, but what I mean is that Aung San Suu Kyi's words were more important than the CEC's decisions. Even the CEC had to listen and comply with the orders from the compound" (Anonymous 2018, AI).

¹³ In chapter five I will take a closer look at the way in which the external conditions of oppression undermined democratic practices in the NLD and informed a party culture that was built on loyalty.

¹⁴ After 1995 this only changed during times when Aung San Suu Kyi's compound was sealed off to visitors by the military and after her release from house arrest in 2010.

Aung San Suu Kyi's success in securing a parliamentary seat in the 2012 by-elections¹⁵ also produced the by-product of a second compound in Naypyidaw. This led to significant infighting between the two compounds. It also produced a more general differentiation in the party as there was now a group of 43 NLD MPs that coordinated closely with one another and formed a new faction within the party whose power was shaped by its members' role as lawmakers but more importantly determined by their proximity to Aung San Suu Kyi.

4.7. Chapter conclusions

The disintegration of the NLD's factions and Aung San Suu Kyi's rise to supreme leader had several effects on the NLD between 2016 and 2021. The strong personalisation of party politics had trickled down and now permeated every part of the party's hierarchy. Someone who had Aung San Suu Kyi's ear could now perform a gate keeper function and increase her or his own influence. As I have previously described, this was not a sudden occurrence but had also been true for much of the late 1990s and 2000s. However, this dynamic became more pertinent because the NLD now was an immensely popular political party in a system that included regular elections. New positions of power now emerged in the party. One leader was tasked with closely overseeing the elected MPs and their activity in parliament while another was responsible for the vetting of candidates for the 2015 elections or for internal party communication. The party could also field hundreds of candidates for the general election, many of which would win their seat simply because they ran for the NLD¹⁶. Thus, personalistic bottle necks of power emerged in the party on all levels. The NLD's landslide victory in the 2015 elections added a further layer. Now that the party had formed

¹⁵ For more information on the 2012 by-election see chapter 3.

¹⁶ Candidates were selected based on various criteria, but trust was the most important one. This favoured people who had a long history in the NLD and who were known to the party's senior leaders. It is telling, for example, that members of the Tricolour Student Group and SS20, two groups that had acted as security detail for Aung San Suu Kyi as early as 1988, and whose members later often helped in the compound, secured attractive spots as candidates. For more details see chapter five.

a government a complex relationship emerged between the party in government, the party central office, the party base, and the party in parliament. Since the party had long ceased to be a heterogenous pool of different factions, the NLD operated in an extremely centralised way with key decisions being made by Aung San Suu Kyi and the CEC of the party¹⁷.

The personalistic politics style of the NLD and its highly centralised structure were the result of the disintegration of the heterogenous factions in the NLD and the ascendancy of Aung San Suu Kyi to the status of supreme leader in the NLD. The root of these developments was embedded within the NLD itself. As I noted at the beginning of this chapter the party had always relied on the personalisation of politics and had also actively fostered party unity following the Aung Gyi split in 1988. At the same time, the need to constantly position itself vis-à-vis the military caused further party splits that served to unite the party behind Aung San Suu Kyi and a policy that was chiefly focused on dialogue and reconciliation rather than more open confrontation. Moreover, the stand-offs with the military contributed to the creation of a hero narrative around Aung San Suu Kyi that depicted her as a super-human political saviour, a characterisation that also reflected inwards and elevated Aung San Suu Kyi's standing within the NLD.

In chapter six I take a closer look at the way the NLD leadership centralised the party further between 2016 and 2020 and how this affected levels of internal party democracy. This high level of control, however, was only possible because the party had transformed so fundamentally since its foundation in 1988. The transformation of party groups, from factions that operated alongside each other, to ever closer integration and the rise of new factions in response to military oppression, the dissolution of some of these new factions due to military persecution and the need for party unity, and finally the

¹⁷ In chapter 6 I take a closer look at the way the party centralised its structure between 2012 and 2020.

increasing irrelevance of factions in the face of the rise of a single leader with total control over the party, fostered the institutionalisation of the deeply personalistic and control-based approach to politics that characterised the NLD between 2016 and 2021.

Thus, the transformation of the party's factions, their eventual disintegration, and the single leader dynamic are essential for understanding not *why* the NLD engaged in politics that contravened democracy but *how* it was able to do so without falling apart as a party. The transformation of the NLD's factions is one of the central components of party change. In connection to the rise of Aung San Suu Kyi to single leader of the party it shows how the party's development gave rise to conditions that enabled the NLD's approach to politics. The NLD was never a monolithic party in which all members shared the same political ideas and as I will show in the following chapters this also became apparent during the party's time in office. In other words, there was considerable discontent in the party over its political decisions. Yet, the transformation of the party's factions and Aung San Suu Kyi's rise to single leader allowed the party leadership to deviate so substantially from the party's political platform without risking the fragmentation of the party. Secondly, the successive party splits served to unify the party behind Aung San Suu Kyi's approach of dialogue and reconciliation with the military since those that advocated for a more radical approach had left the party early on¹⁸. Over time, the idea that political change could only be fostered through cooperation with the military, rather than confrontation became thus

¹⁸ Critics might argue that the 2010 split shows an instance where the opposite is true because Aung San Suu Kyi decided against competing in the 2010 elections and those that had sought to participate in the elections – arguably a position that emphasised support for the cooperation with the military – left the party. However, such a criticism would miss the point I am trying to make. Many junctures in Aung San Suu Kyi's political life illustrate that she did not shy away from confrontation. This is evident in the stand-offs with soldiers that created her hero image early on, in her frequent criticisms of the military prior to 2010, and also in her role in the CRPP (see chapter three for more details on the CRPP). Yet, for Aung San Suu Kyi these individual confrontations were ways to pressure the military into dialogue. In chapter five I take a closer look at Aung San Suu Kyi's approach to reconciliation. For this chapter it suffices to say that Aung San Suu Kyi did not seek to dismantle the military or even remove it completely from power, something student protesters and supporters of the NLD advocated for. Measured confrontation was a tool for Aung San Suu Kyi but she used it to advance an agenda of reconciliation between the NLD and the military and eventual cooperation.

ever more entrenched in the NLD. I will explore this notion in greater depth in chapter five, where I analyse the NLD's political culture, but it is important to note how the structural changes that came with the transformation of the party's factions abetted the creation of an understanding of reconciliation that was not based on transitional justice mechanisms but rather on genuine cooperation with the military.

Political culture in the NLD

“Democracy without freedom is dictatorship. But freedom without control is anarchy” (NLD Lower House MP Myint Lwin 2019, AI).

5.1. On the relevance of political culture

In chapter three I provided a timeline of the NLD’s development up until 2015, highlighting the party’s conflict with the military and its shifts in political strategy. In chapter four I took a closer look at the transformation of the party’s factions and the rise of Aung San Suu Kyi to supreme leader of the NLD. Chapter four, thus, analysed the mechanisms of structural transformation of the NLD and assessed their effect on the NLD’s purported transformation from leading pro-democracy party in an authoritarian system to a party of undemocratic democrats in government. However, the NLD’s political decisions were not only the result of structural changes but also strongly influence by a distinct political culture and a specific understanding of democracy informed by this political culture.

Lucian Pye and Sidney Verba defined political culture of societies as consisting “of the system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols, and values which defines the situation in which political action takes place. It provides the subjective orientation to politics” (Verba 1965, ch. 12, p. 7). I adopt this understanding of political culture but apply it to the political sub-culture of the NLD. This understanding of political culture is broad but as such adequately mirrors the broad scope of the NLD’s party culture that consists of a web of different empirical beliefs and values. Untangling this complex web is complicated but necessary because it allows me to assess how the political culture of the NLD contributed to creating a party of undemocratic democrats. Moreover, analysing the political culture of

the NLD shows how external and internal conditions governed the development of the party

I will begin by taking a closer look at external conditions, defining what I mean when I write about *oppression* as a condition of party development. Subsequently, I will proceed with the analysis according to three categories of relationships with political objects. Firstly, I will explore aspects of the NLD's party culture that were strongly shaped, if not made, by the conditions of the authoritarian political system in which the NLD developed, i.e., created through the condition of near-permanent political persecution. Here, I analyse the development of political principles, capacity issues and personalistic politics. Secondly, I will look at aspects of political culture that have their origin in the party itself but that were in some way shaped by the conditions of the authoritarian political system. Here, I will focus chiefly on the NLD's understanding of democracy. Third, I will analyse aspects of party culture that developed with little or no influence of the authoritarian system, notably the NLD's view of the military, its understanding of national reconciliation, and its understanding of ethnic grievances. Importantly, these categories are not isolated groups of political orientations but are subject to considerable interplay, which I will illustrate. Nor are these categories a definitive list of all aspects of the NLD's political culture. Yet, they constitute those aspects of the NLD's political culture that served as the most important reference points for the NLD politicians I interviewed.

5.2. Oppression as a condition of party development

In chapter four, I analysed how the transformation of the NLD's factions and Aung San Suu Kyi's rise to supreme leader were influenced by external shocks and general conditions of authoritarianism. For example, I highlighted how the refusal to transfer power after the 1990 elections and the subsequent absence of elections from the political system influenced the NLD. In this chapter, these broader conditions of authoritarianism still play a role, but

I chiefly analyse how the oppression of the NLD at the hands of the military created or shaped aspects of the party's political culture. As I have noted in chapter one, the military tried to oppress the NLD as a party, for example through propaganda in state media, but the military's strategy of oppression focused chiefly on the oppression of the NLD's individual parts, that is, its politicians.

Oppression of NLD politicians took many forms¹. The most prevalent forms of oppression were state-sponsored violence, for example during rallies, party meetings, and on campaign trips, the frequent and prolonged imprisonment and physical as well as psychological torture at interrogation camps and prisons, extensive surveillance, the social and economic alienation and destruction of party members and their families, public disinformation campaigns, and the practice of trying to threaten or otherwise incentivise members to leave the party². The military government's central objective for the forceful oppression of the NLD was the dissolution of the party and to this extent it tried to pressure individual NLD members to leave the party. NLD Chief Minister Aung Moe Nyo believed that after the NLD won a landslide victory in the 1990 elections "there were up to 25% of MPs who gave up their positions due to threats or incentives by the military junta" (Aung Moe Nyo 2019, AI). Aung Moe Nyo explained how these threats and incentives worked, telling me

"They [the military] could give building contracts, liquor licences or licences to open a brothel. If someone needed capital for a business, they could provide it too. All they needed to do was resign from the elections. In some cases, the father was a member of the NLD, and his sons and daughters were bureaucrats. Then, the military would provide incentives like helping to send the children to a foreign country or through a state scholarship. [...] If they [the MPs] did not give up their position, they were arrested" (Aung Moe Nyo 2019, AI).

¹ For a fascinating story-telling based account of how the NLD operated under the military dictatorship, including detailed accounts of oppression and the personal reflections of NLD members see Schrank, D. (2015), *The Rebel of Rangoon*, New York: Nation Books.

² Recounting the harrowing tales of oppression that my interviewees shared with me is impossible in the scope of this section, but I believe that the reader will benefit from the perspectives of my respondents and find them useful for contextualising the arguments in this chapter. Consequently, I have grouped a series of experiences of oppression in appendix F.

When I asked about the direct effects of the military-sponsored oppression Dr May Win Myint, a member of the NLD CEC, told me

“Some people that were imprisoned came from humble economic backgrounds. They lost their family; they had to give up their business. Some people thought that their family members could only survive if they ran businesses once they would be released from prison. This means they did not give up their political beliefs, but they gave up their political life. Some could not withstand the torture in prison, but they were few. It was mostly the heads of the family who changed. There are some people like that among those who are close to me. Say the head of the household was arrested, the family lived in government housing, and they could not afford to buy a house. Their children and grandchildren were in a government school. They knew their family would be evicted from the housing. So, although it pained them, they had to give up their political life” (Dr May Win Myint 2019, AI).

The constant pressure influenced the social life of NLD members considerably. NLD Chief Minister Aung Moe Nyo told me that in the 2000s “My siblings did not dare to sit together with me at the tea shop. Nobody dared to communicate with me because the military regime threatened us. There were no patients in my clinic because a policeman waited in front of my house. So, no patients came to me or talked with me because they were afraid of the regime” (Aung Moe Nyo 2019, AI). Disinformation campaigns, discreditation, and false accusations played a vital role in the military’s campaign to destroy the NLD. From the time of the founding of the party, the military continuously published derogatory commentaries and accusations about the NLD widely in state media, trying to alienate the party from potential supporters. Often the military also accused individual NLD members of illegal activities as a justification for putting them into prison. CEC member Dr Myo Nyunt recalled how the military first imprisoned him in the early 1990s, telling me

“I set up a small factory producing tablets such as paracetamol, burplex and some three or four other items. I applied to the jury of the township medical officer and the central food and drug administration for the examination of my factory. I was issued a certificate stating that I could extend my factory [in line with the production of these tablets] but then the military accused me of producing [illicit] drugs. My factory was seized, and I was put into prison for seven years” (Dr Myo Nyunt 2019, AI).

5.2.1. Prison

Indeed, time in prison was a specific condition of oppression that all NLD politicians I interviewed and who had been active in the NLD before Myanmar's political transformation process of the 2010s shared. Prolonged time in prison had severe consequences for NLD members. The physical trauma caused by malnourishment and torture caused medical conditions that some NLD members had to endure long after they had been released. Several NLD members told me that the psychological trauma had been severe and continued to haunt them. Yet, beyond the physical and psychological trauma, prison experiences had several other important effects.

Firstly, prison had a filtering effect on the party. As NLD Yangon Region MP Sandar Min told me "There were people who after three years of imprisonment were so done with politics that they didn't even want to think about it" (Sandar Min 2018, AI). Yet, the fact that most of my interviewees were NLD politicians in 2018 and 2019 meant that they had continued to be active NLD politicians. This obvious fact had the effect that I mostly talked politicians who maintained that their time in prison had increased their understanding of politics and their commitment to the NLD. Sandar Min explained

"Our souls became stronger and our minds more determined. [...] We were not allowed to read books in prison. Nor were we allowed access to television, news, and the outside world. We happened to live with our seniors and experienced politicians. Thus, our souls that were longing for politics were not weakened but rather fed, enriched, and lifted up by their discussions of history and politics. [...] Thus, I can now firmly stand as a politician without a doubt, having enriched my soul and mind with determination through the severe experiences I had in prison" (Sandar Min 2018, AI).

Sandar Min's assessment was shared widely among the politicians I interviewed. NLD MP Zayar Thaw thought of his time in prison as "sharpening your knife" (Zayar Thaw 2019, AI).

For NLD politicians who remained committed to the party throughout their time in prison, prison had a socialisation and education effect. Political prisoners were often, although not always, kept in the same ward. This fostered the formation of strong personal bonds, social networks, and the exchange of ideas. Jieun Baek studied the effect of prison on political prisoners in Myanmar in greater depth and notes that “Political philosophy, politics, political science and comparative politics were popular subject matters that were informally whispered about throughout prison cells” (Baek 2020, p. 133). She also highlights how student teacher relationships developed as “veteran dissenters — especially the professors and politicians — had the ideal captive audience of junior dissenters with whom to share their experiences, lessons, and reflections” (Baek 2020, pp. 132-133). Hla Htay, an NLD MP in the Yangon Region Hluttaw told me about his teacher in prison, Thakin Ohn Myint, who had worked together with General Aung San: “I took the duty to take care of him and lived with him closely. Therefore, I received his guidance and instructions. [...] There were many others like him” (Hla Htay 2018, AI). Hla Htay’s experience illustrates what Christina Fink called “life university”, a dynamic where prisoners perceived prison as their “university” because despite the horrible conditions it was a place of learning and personal growth (Fink 2001, p. 163). Hla Htay’s experience illustrates that the informal education that took place in prison not only served to build capacity but also helped NLD politicians build or strengthen relationship with other political dissidents. Most importantly, however, prison consolidated relationships of trust within the NLD.

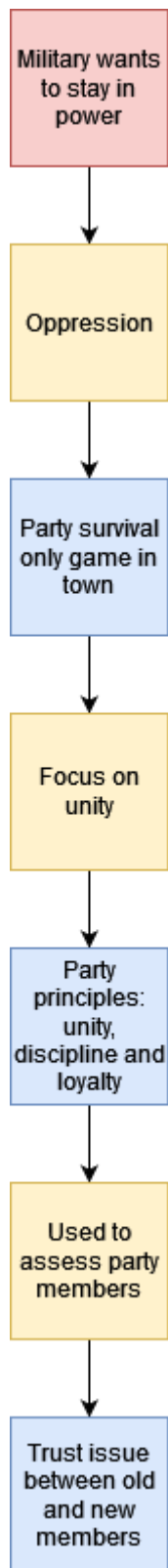
In her research on the creation of first movers in Myanmar, Baek argues that “political prisoner status gained dissenters “membership” into an exclusive network of some of the most radicalized dissenters in the country. Once a dissenter was arrested and imprisoned, s/he “got a promotion” in the eyes of activists because imprisonment signalled one’s serious commitment to dissent” (Baek 2020, p. 129). Baek concludes that prison was one form of repression that created “devoted dissenters”, effectively increasing the

commitment to political opposition for some prisoners (Baek 2020). As I illustrated above with the words of Sandar Min and Zayar Thaw, I found this dynamic to apply strongly in the case of imprisoned NLD politicians. In the following sections I will explore the effects of the oppression of individual NLD politicians on development of the party's political culture. In this context, the socialisation in prison plays an important role

5.3. Three principles of opposition and the divide between seniors and newcomers

One of the mechanisms I highlighted as important for understanding why the NLD, a party founded to end military rule and introduce democracy in Myanmar, made political decisions that contravened democracy, was the mechanism that led to the development of unity, discipline, and loyalty as the central political values of the NLD. Figure eight illustrates this sub-mechanism of the amalgamated mechanism I introduced in chapter one.

To ensure the survival of the NLD in the face of oppressive tactics that were often aimed at dividing the party and the renunciation of the party by individual politicians, party unity became the central political value of the NLD. To safeguard party unity, discipline and loyalty emerged as the political principles on which the NLD was built internally. I refer to unity, discipline, and loyalty as the principles of opposition because they allowed the party to survive despite military oppression. The importance of unity was instilled into NLD members early in the existence of the party and it remained a guiding principle when I talked to senior NLD politicians in 2018 and 2019.



Several NLD politicians retold the Quarrel of the Quails from the Jātaka tales to explain why unity mattered for the party. Aung Shwe, then secretary general of the NLD, had included the story in his speech on the 13th Anniversary of the NLD, on 27 September 2001:

“In relation to unity, I would like to briefly present the Sammodamāna Jātaka from the 550 Jātaka Tales. While King Brahmadatta was reigning over the Vārāṇasī land, Buddha-to-be-quail³ was living with thousands of quails around him in the jungle. When a hunter came there, he disguised himself by using the sound of the quail and enmeshed the quails. One day, the Buddha-to-be-quail summoned the quails and said, “a lot of our relatives have perished because of this hunter. When the hunter enmeshes you, you have to soar up all at once, thus raising the net, and then land on a bush. After casting off the net you have to escape under the bush.” The hunter was not able to catch any quails anymore because the quails practised in the abovementioned way. Two or three days later when the quails came to a pasture one of the quails accidentally hit the head of another quail. The latter was offended. Eventually, they fought each other, even over how to raise the net. Two or three days later the hunter came again to enmesh the quails after calling them to one place. But the quails did not soar up against the net uniformly. The hunter caught them all because they did not move in harmony with each other. Hence, it should be noted that unity is strength, and that the disintegration of unity leads to destruction.

Therefore, it is especially important to fulfil our duties in collective and uniform ways, rather than on the basis of individual orientations. When implementing the reorganisation of district committees and country committees that the National League for Democracy has embarked upon, it is important to work with our beliefs in democracy by holding on to unity. [...] Unity is supposed to mean organisational unity, ideological unity, and unity in our political strategy and tactics, all of which have to be in conformity with the ideas of our leaders. It is highly important not to organise sub-groups which could lead to the disintegration of unity. We should stand in accordance with the policies and principles of the League. Cliques and the separation into groups are unpropitious [for the party]” (Aung Shwe 2001, OT).

Figure 8: the emergence of the three principles of opposition. Causes in red, causal processes in yellow, and outcomes in blue.

³ The “Buddha-to-be quail” is an incarnation of Siddhartha Gautama in one of his previous lives.

To safeguard the party against division, the NLD established disciplinary procedures to control potential contrarian forces inside the party. Aung San Suu Kyi had warned the party's members in the 1990s, informing them that "Those who deliberately want to disintegrate the League and attempt to disturb the struggle for democracy shall be handled according to the disciplinary policy" (Aung San Suu Kyi 1997, OT). Party members were called on showing their discipline in toeing the line of the party executive. Discipline in the context of the NLD must, thus, be understood as the discipline to submit any individual concerns to the broader goal of party unity⁴.

The understanding of discipline rendered criticism and critical exchanges in the party difficult. To be able to engage critically with the party's politics required the ability to show that one had adhered to the third guiding principle of opposition, loyalty. NLD MP Myint Lwin explained that to Aung San Suu Kyi "The most important criteria are loyalty to the party and patriotism" (Myint Lwin 2019, AI). A record of loyalty to the party, exemplified through active long-term membership and shared suffering (for example through an extended prison sentence), served as the basis for trust in the NLD. This further entrenched the divide between seniors and newcomers. I asked Yangon Region NLD MP Sandar Min, who was known for critical remarks about the NLD, how she managed to say what other members could not without fearing for their position inside the party. She explained "I do not have this problem because I understand what can be criticised and to what extent. Moreover, the seniors of the party and I, see eye to eye. We have equal years of service; we only differ in age. We are comrades and we have been in prison together" (Sandar Min 2018, AI).

⁴ One former NLD supporter and close observer of the party told me how disciplinary measures were put into effect: "108 NLD youth party members held a strike in front of the NLD headquarters against U Aung Shwe's management style. They were dismissed from the party. When Aung San Suu Kyi was released, U Khin Tun, who was the leader of this movement, was very close to Aung San Suu Kyi. She was very friendly with him, but she did not take him back [into the party] because he had said negative things about the party in the media" (Anonymous 2018, AI).

The NLD's emphasis on unity was reasonable. During the time of military authoritarianism, the party had been much like the quails in the Jātaka Tales, drawing its strength chiefly from its ability to unite many different groups that were opposed to the military regime in support of the NLD. Unity, however, became more difficult to maintain when the party came into government following the 2015 election, partly because the active party apparatus was much larger but also because the degree of unity necessary for the party was questioned by some MPs. Phyu Phyu Thin, a NLD MP in the lower house, told me “The tasks are no longer the same. We cannot be unified in some matters. If MPs and the government are too unified, it would be shaking hands behind closed doors. [...] But our responsibilities and authorities are different. An MP's responsibility is to check and balance the government” (Phyu Phyu Thin 2018, AI).

Moreover, loyalty became an increasingly problematic principle when the NLD came to power since many of its new politicians had no way of showing their loyalty in the manner the party imagined. Hence, there was a lack of trust within the party, which fostered a stricter hierarchy. The shared experience of persecution and specifically prison created an exceptionally high level of trust between NLD politicians who shared this experience. Yet, this particular pattern of political socialisation eventually created a strong cleavage between seniors and newcomers in the party, especially after the NLD won a landslide victory in the 2015 elections. With the revitalisation⁵ of the party ahead of the 2012 by-elections and especially before the 2015 general election the party expanded considerably. Not only did the party gain thousands of new active members it also had to find election candidates, many of whom were expected to win their constituency and thus take an active role in the politics of the party.

⁵ See chapter three for details.

Senior NLD leaders, however, found it difficult to trust their new recruits. Dr Myo Nyunt, the NLD's spokesperson and a CEC member, told me "They [newcomers] are not loyal to the party's policy. They want to show off as national heroes or technical experts. They want to outshine their colleagues, so we have difficulties" (Dr Myo Nyunt 2019, AI). Pyone Kathy Naing, an NLD MP who joined the party prior to the 2015 election, confirmed the rift between seniors and newcomers. She told me "People are very suspicious. Newcomers, people like me, never made sacrifices in our life. We went abroad, learned things, made money and once the election came, we got in. So, it is quite normal human nature that those who sacrificed their whole life, endured long prison sentences, and lost everything, look at us and ask, "where were you"" (Pyone Kathy Naing 2018, AI). One influential NLD lawmaker in the Yangon Region Parliament outlined the steps the party needed to take to integrate the newcomers:

"1) We have to guide them, so they know the history of the party. [...] We have to direct them, so they see that the existence of the party did not come about in an easy way. 2) We have to teach them about the rules and regulations of the party. These two things are essential. If we can do this, we can stay in control. If we cannot, we will not manage well" (Anonymous 2018, AI).

Like most other senior NLD politicians, the MP was worried that the party would suffer due to the newcomers. He added "We planted the tree ourselves, so we love it as much as our own children and worry about it being destroyed" (Anonymous 2018, AI).

The assumption that the party needed to tighten the control of NLD politicians through the party leadership following the party's move from opposition party to party in government illustrates several key dynamics that shape the political culture of the NLD. The principles that guided internal party interactions and the members' code of conduct were the direct result of conditions under which the NLD developed. In the face of constant oppression, a strict focus on unity, discipline and loyalty not only made sense but allowed the party to persist in extremely adverse conditions. As I have shown at the

beginning of this section and in the sub-section on prison experiences, authoritarian oppression also created a set of unique (if also objectively terrible) experiences that served as a social identifier of belonging and commitment in the NLD. Yet, in the context of the hybrid-system that existed in Myanmar between 2010 and 2021 the principles of opposition and the focus on shared experiences of suffering as proof of political commitment served to make the party less democratic because it motivated the senior leadership to enforce a stricter party hierarchy and lower levels of intra party democracy.

5.4. Political capacity and party dependency

However, criticism between seniors and newcomers went both ways. While the seniors criticised the lack of will to show loyalty and discipline, to preserve party unity, and bemoaned the lack of “proper” political understanding on the basis of the “right” political socialisation (the socialisation of oppression), the newcomers found that many seniors in the party lacked capacity precisely because they had endured oppression for most of their political lives. Moreover, several newer party members I spoke to suggested that their more senior colleagues were not being “disciplined” or focused on “unity” but that they simply did not engage in debates with the party leadership because military oppression had left them with little chance to make a living outside the NLD, making them dependent on the party.

Indeed, most NLD politicians I spoke to agreed that the party was suffering from a lack of capacity that was the result of decades of oppression. Figure nine illustrates the mechanism that led from a lack of capacity to dependency and an internal political environment that strengthened the power of the party leadership and its ability to centralise the party further.

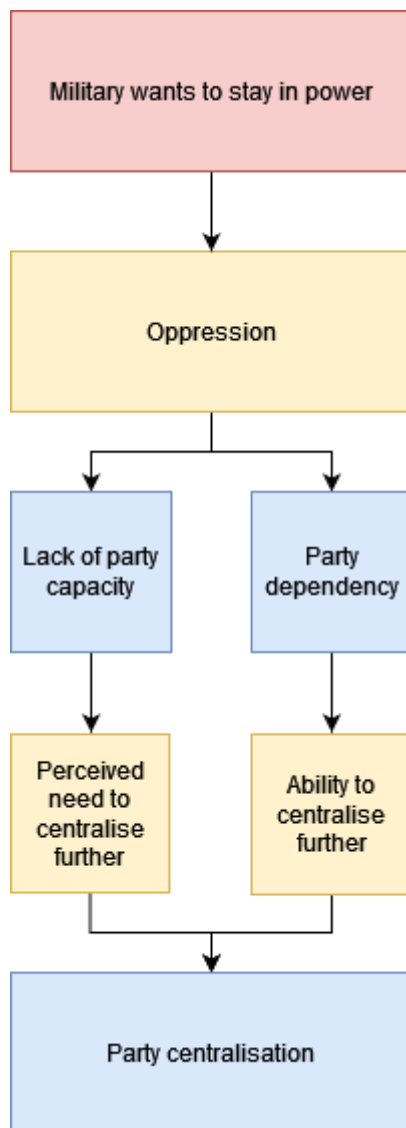


Figure 9: the development of a lack of party capacity and dependency on the party

However, before taking a closer look at the ways in which a lack of capacity created dependency it is important to note how the lack of capacity manifested within the NLD. At various times in its history the NLD was unable to operate like a political party. This was especially true for the period between 2003 and 2010. One senior NLD politician explained “[...] frankly the strategy was only for survival. So, what we were doing at that time was what everybody called “manifesto politics”. On different occasions, for example Labour Day, we would publish manifestos and then called it “The Declaration of the NLD on the occasion of Labour Day” or something like this.” (Anonymous 2019, AI). Near constant oppression also meant that it was at times difficult for the party to recruit new members. Several NLD politicians told me that it was easy for them to recruit new members before the 1990 elections because people believed that the SLORC would transfer power. Similarly, it was easy for the NLD to recruit new members from 2012 on because people believed that the persecution of the NLD would cease, and the party would bring political opportunities.

In the 22 years between 1990 and 2012 it was however challenging for the party to recruit talented members. NLD Chief Minister Aung Moe Nyo concluded that “The party lacks a lot of intellect because of the military’s various strategies of annihilation” (Aung Moe Nyo 2019, AI).

The forced state of paralysis made it difficult for the NLD to perform basic tasks like informing its own members of the party's newest undertakings or the positions of its leaders. Many party functionaries I talked to highlighted how difficult it had been to find out what was going on in the NLD if you were not in Yangon. A cleavage between the headquarter of a party and the branches across the country is to some extent natural but the threat of surveillance and the general oppression of the party made communication between the party centre and its periphery even more challenging. The inability to function as a political party for extended periods of times led to substantial problems around the competency of NLD members. One NLD MP told me "Many of our party members do not even know the party's visions, our missions, structures, our rights, and responsibilities. [...] We need to educate them first on the basic principles of human rights and democracy and on the role of political parties in democratic regimes and systems" (Anonymous 2018, AI).

The continued oppression of the party had ensured that the party's history could only be told and learned mouth to mouth. Kyaw Aung, chairman of the Win Tin Foundation and an NLD politician, told me "In the old days, we had to make the documents disappear no matter how much we tried to maintain them. We could not save some documents after reading them because we could be imprisoned for them" (Kyaw Aung 2019, AI). Monywa Aung Shin, at times acting as a party spokesperson and the party historian, wrote a massive two-volume tome on the history of the NLD. He explained how difficult this process had been: "I had problems finding valid data. [...] I put so much effort into finding [party] documents. I have been in the party since the start but every so often I got arrested and in every single arrest the military intelligence confiscated the statements, notes, and remarks of the NLD I had collected over the years" (Aung Shin 2019, AI). This

episode illustrates how difficult it was for the NLD to educate its politicians about the party⁶, let alone discuss policy matters or form a political ideology.

More importantly still, NLD politicians had no opportunity to perform tasks that we would normally associate with politicians until 2012, with the only exceptions being the election campaign for the 1990 election, its own party congresses, and the party's exchanges with the military and foreign representatives. For much of the NLD's existence its members were not politicians but rather activists. NLD Yangon Region MP Sandar Min drew a clear line between activists and politicians, telling me

“An activist and a politician are different. A politician, especially when we are engaging in political processes in the Hluttaw, must shape policies drafted in parliament. [...] They [activists] just revolt against what is not right and just. This was our spirit when we were activists: to fight against oppression and injustice. We did not have any twist, nor did we play with policies and tricks. But as true politicians, we had to learn about policies and tricks. We had to learn to develop policies for the betterment of the country and also to persuade the people at the same time. So, the nature is very different” (Sandar Min 2018, AI).

When NLD functionaries finally became lawmakers for the first time in 2012, the NLD had already existed for more than 20 years, 20 years in which every member had made experiences in being an activist but almost no one had made experiences with being a politician. This influenced the NLD in several ways. Firstly, although the NLD leadership had become very cautious of protest, NLD politicians across the country continued to use protests as a tool to build political pressure and to take influence where the party otherwise could not⁷. In several other interviews NLD politicians argued that the key to solving issues like water management or traffic jams would be the creation of political movements that

⁶ It also had the effect that the views of the NLD within the NLD were shaped significantly by narratives from abroad. When I asked Monywa Aung Shin how he had managed to find the data for his substantial volumes on the party he explained that he had been able to gather some documents from individual party members but that “There were foreign news agencies at that time inside the country where Burmese people worked. I acquired information sources from them. There were also diplomats who conducted interviews with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. I got information from their narratives and interview documents” (Monywa Aung Shin 2019, AI).

⁷ MPs told me, for example, how they had organised protests in favour of the construction of a bridge that would have connected tens of thousands of citizens directly to Yangon but that was allegedly vetoed by powerful businessmen with ties to the military.

would both emphasise the importance of these reforms but also actively participate in their implementation through volunteering. On the uneven playing field that Myanmar's military-led transformation had yielded, protest and fostering civic engagement remained tools that NLD politicians were well acquainted with.

Secondly, the experience of NLD politicians as activists meant that they had for decades viewed political ideas through the lens of being an activist. As NLD lawmaker Pyone Kathy Naing put it "The just know democracy as activists" (Pyone Kathy Naing 2018, AI). The implication was that they had little understanding of the term. Although there were some party members who felt that both senior's and newcomers lacked political capacity, the majority of the time either seniors argued that the newcomers did not have the right understanding of "what politics was all about" or newcomers suggested that the more senior politicians did not have enough experience due to having been pressed to the fringes of society by military oppression. Newcomers also often suggested that oppression had made their seniors in the NLD dependent on the party.

One Yangon Region MP and party newcomer was frustrated with many of her senior colleagues:

"Consider upper house MP [name redacted]. He was in jail for 19 years and three months. He did not get married. He did not get a business background. Now he has to totally rely on the party to have some position. [...] He needs to be an MP because this how he earns money, this is his livelihood. He cannot say anything. He might be loyal to democracy, but he cannot be vocal now" (Anonymous 2018, AI).

Many NLD politicians acknowledged that long-time NLD members had had a hard time making a living outside the party. A prison sentence precluded them from a range of jobs, including any job in a public institution. NLD central committee member Kyaw Thiha, for example had been a tutor at the Department of History at Mandalay University before he was arrested in 1988. After his arrest he could not return to teaching and had to make a

living driving lorries. Yangon Region MP Khin Maung Win told me how his party work caused his wife to lose her job as a teacher and the loss of his mechanic business. The couple then earned a living selling fried rice at the local market. Their financial situation was so dire that they could only afford a single plate in their household (for a detailed account see appendix F). Yangon Region MP Sandar Min was able to build a successful business despite her time in prison, eventually employing some 300 employees. She was proud of this achievement and argued that

“I stand as a person who dares to criticise [the party] without fear in my mind because I built something for myself. [...] Some people built nothing for themselves and depend on someone else. At last, when they have no one to turn to, they go to the party. They aim for material support from the party and approach party leaders personally for positions. And they take pleasure in the profits they wrongfully gained” (Sandar Min 2018, AI).

The lack of capacity in the NLD due to military oppression is a multifaceted issue. It emerged along the lines of the lack of education and experience, created dependency, and came to light more strongly in the divide between newcomers and seniors. It is also an important piece of the NLD’s self-perception and its identity. Maybe most significantly, the capacity dimension had a direct influence on how the party was governed. The general lack of capacity was frequently cited as a justification for a firmer hierarchy and a more centralised decision-making structure. Yangon Region MP Sandar Min told me

“I think Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is making all these decisions because maybe she cannot yet completely believe in the party’s competency. Maybe she is worried that people in the party would make bad decisions. [...] The people should be trained to become competent CEC members. Then they should be allowed to make some decisions by themselves, and they should be granted some authority over certain things” (Sandar Min 2018, AI).

A common self-perception of the NLD was that the party was very much a work in progress that needed to be carefully institutionalised in a top-down process. Notably, this perception was not shared solely by those who would arguably sit at the top of this top-down process but was emphasised by several more junior NLD politicians I interviewed.

Thus, there was a prevalent understanding that the NLD needed a strong leader with complete authority over the party.

5.5. Aung San Suu Kyi and personalistic politics in the NLD

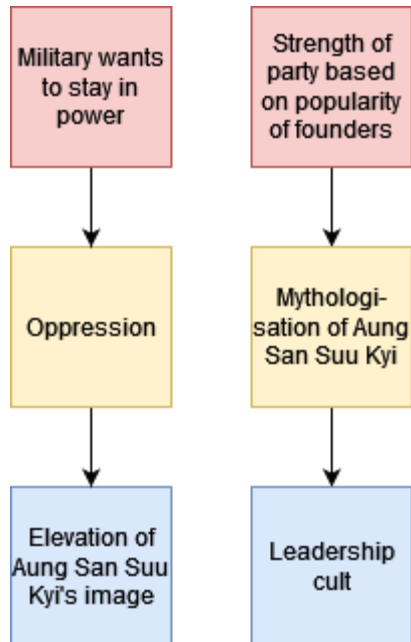


Figure 10: internal and external factors shaping the NLD's leadership cult. Causes in red, causal processes in yellow, and outcomes in blue.

In chapter four, I analysed how the transformation and disintegration of the NLD's factions fostered an ever-stronger leadership cult around Aung San Suu Kyi. Moreover, I examined the role the military played in creating the myth of Aung San Suu Kyi. Both in chapter one and four I noted, however, that the leadership cult was not only the product of external conditions but something that the NLD was in part founded on. In this section I dedicate some time to unpacking the ways in which the Aung San Suu Kyi cult manifested within the party and analyse what effects it had on personalistic politics in the NLD. Figure ten illustrates the

combination of external and internal mechanisms that created the leadership cult around Aung San Suu Kyi.

NLD MP Ei Ei Pyone captured the reverence that existed for Aung San Suu Kyi in the NLD:

“Most of the party members love Mother Suu. They love Mother Suu so much that even ordinary party members take off their party emblem when they are going to do something wrong. When they are going to drink, as is the nature of young people, they are going to take of their Pinni shirt [uniform of the NLD lawmaker] and the party emblem” (Ei Ei Pyone 2019, AI).

When I asked NLD politicians who decided on the norms and values of the party and its policies the response was always Aung San Suu Kyi⁸. Many NLD politicians I talked to were total in their commitment to Aung San Suu Kyi. Kyaw Tote, who joined the party in 1988, told me “It is very rare to be filled with a feeling you cannot express when you see a person. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is one of these people. You see her and you are overwhelmed with unknown feelings, not sure whether you are about to cry or laugh. She is clothed in immense personal power” (Kyaw Tote 2019, AI).

Another Yangon Region MP echoed this commitment:

“The confidence in our leader never decreased. When I was in prison and also in the forest [in an area in Myanmar under the control of an armed group, not under the control of the army] I met many political leaders. I never met a leader like Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. I believe in her with no exception. [...] Occasionally I do not understand some of her moves. But her way of doing things exceeds my understanding and her solutions are better than what I can think of” (Anonymous 2018, AI).

Many NLD politicians cited Aung San Suu Kyi’s achievements, her skill, and her commitment to the cause of the NLD as reasons for their admiration. Yet, there was also another layer to their dedication, a deep bond that they felt to their leader. Party historian Monywa Aung Shin tried to explain this bond to me:

“They [the military] captured people, shot them, imprisoned them for nearly 30 years. Nothing happened. They could never break the spirit. The fact that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was put under house arrest made people sympathise more with her and her cause. [...] The same happened to the NLD politicians. They have suffered a lot more than the people. They were put in prison. They were murdered in prison. They had to run away from the country to foreign lands. Especially the NLD members inside the country: the more they encountered oppression and torture, the more courageous they became. This is very special. It is because they believe in their leader. This leader always stands in front of them and shields them. This leader does not run away. With her presence, people began believing in democracy more and more and endured the pain” (Monywa Aung Shin 2019, AI).

⁸ It is no coincidence that the NLD’s party history, written by Monywa Aung Shin, starts with a prologue by the influential NLD leader Win Tin titled “What did our Daw Suu beat?” and ends with a short section by Monywa Aung Shin titled “I am the follower of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi” (Monywa Aung Shin 2016).

Viewed through a Western lens Aung San Suu Kyi's perception inside the party was at times not dissimilar from the perceptions Christians have of Jesus Christ. They viewed her as a leader who had taken the suffering of all unto herself and in doing so had given them strength. Monywa Aung Shin called this "the basic foundation of Myanmar's democracy struggle" (Monywa Aung Shin 2019, AI).

The NLD politicians I talked to were conscious of the suffering of ordinary citizens under the military regime and they were also aware of the dire situation of ethnic minority groups in the country. At the same time, Aung San Suu Kyi's suffering was highlighted with a particular significance partially because she was still perceived as somewhat of an outsider. She had had a husband and two sons in Britain, and she had had a life there. In the eyes of many NLD politicians I talked to it was her decision to return to Myanmar - whereas everyone else had little alternative to being there - that elevated her. It added a dimension of selflessness that was revered by Aung San Suu Kyi's followers. Yet, Aung San Suu Kyi's perception in the party also illustrated that political parties are not unitary actors. Several NLD members I talked to were conscious of how military oppression had left a hole in the party that the NLD substituted with a leadership cult and when I conducted my interviews in 2018 and 2019 some had become critical of the immense control that their leader wielded over the party.

One Yangon Region MP explained to me how the lack of capacity that resulted from military oppression facilitated Aung San Suu Kyi's role in the party.

"Even our leaders in the party, not all of them but some, rely too heavily on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in decision making and her words are final. [...] Because we were oppressed quite severely, we could not focus on party building. We just had to survive. Consequently, we could not organise around a strong [party] constitution and the party is not institutionalised" (Anonymous 2018, AI).

The MP told me that there was a growing consensus in the NLD about the need to prepare the party for a time after Aung San Suu Kyi. Even among those who were cautious about Aung San Suu Kyi's role there was agreement that since the party had been institutionalised so little any reforms would take time. NLD MP Aye Mya Mya Myo told me "I do not like these personalised politics and hero-narratives. But we need it now although I am sorry about the situation to say the truth" (Aye Mya Mya Myo 2019, AI).

Most party members were convinced that Aung San Suu Kyi knew what she was doing but there was also some growing worries in the party over her understanding of democracy. NLD MP Aye Mya Mya Myo went on to explain "She is our leader, and she was imprisoned for fighting against the dictatorship. She wants to make our country democratic, but she does not understand other people's rights" (Aye Mya Mya Myo 2019, AI). Several NLD politicians had been taken by surprise by their leader's political decisions after forming a government and argued that Aung San Suu Kyi had changed her political approach too much⁹. Critical voices from inside the party cited her approach to freedom of speech and cooperation with ethnic minority groups as signs that Aung San Suu Kyi's understanding of democracy was problematic. Still, everyone in the NLD, even those critical of her, remained deeply loyal to Aung San Suu Kyi. This was not surprising as personalistic politics had by now been deeply entrenched in the NLD. One Yangon Region MP argued that it was not the comparatively undemocratic structure of the NLD¹⁰ that caused the high degree of personalisation but rather the mindsets of people who knew little else: "People here follow norms that dictate that you should respect the elders and never

⁹ Former allies of the NLD were also taken aback. SNLD Vice-Chairman Sai Nyunt Lwin told me "She is the key in the NLD to complete all things. No matter how the cabinet decides, her agreement decides everything. Nothing can happen if she disagrees. Everyone is under her control. [...] First, we thought that she has a proper understanding of democracy but later we realised that we had been wrong. She has gone astray. [...] She is not the one we hoped for, she transformed herself" (Sai Nyunt Lwin 2019, AI). Sai Nyunt Lwin illustrated the transformation with Aung San Suu Kyi's lack of support for the two Reuters journalists Kyaw Soe Oo and Wa Lone. For more information on the NLD's response to the arrest of Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo see chapter six.

¹⁰ See chapter six for more details.

go against the leader. This is a problem. The party structure is not the problem, but the party would run more smoothly if the mindsets of some people changed” (Anonymous 2018, AI). Another MP highlighted the political socialisation in protests and protest movements as an underlying cause of the prevalent personalisation of politics inside the NLD, noting that protests in a dictatorship can only function if they are organised without democratic structures and with a clear hierarchy. However, personalistic politics had become entrenched in the NLD in other ways too. The continued oppression of the party and the NLD’s subsequent dogma of unity, discipline, and loyalty, combined with the personalistic nature of the NLD’s origin (founded as the alliance of three leader-focused factions) fostered the creation of personalistic patronage networks inside the NLD.

Adhering to the principles of opposition was a way to generate trust, the key to being accepted within a party that was under constant surveillance and under threat of its members being imprisoned. Hence, trust made careers in the NLD. When I discussed the alleged lack of capacity of NLD politicians in positions of government some NLD members argued that their colleagues did not have the capacity to do their jobs but were chosen because they had proven that they could be trusted in matters of unity, discipline, and loyalty. NLD Yangon Region MP Kyaw Zeya told me “Take our Yangon Region chief minister for example. He made a great deal of sacrifices [for the party]. He was in prison. He was only a second-year undergraduate student, but it does not matter. [...] The party leadership appoints people they have known for a long time” (Kyaw Zeya 2018, AI). I often encountered stories of drivers or personal assistants who were later promoted to influential political positions. Immediately after the founding of the NLD Aung San Suu Kyi’s security was a major concern of the NLD. She was consequently guarded by two successive groups of students and NLD followers. The first security detail was the Tricolour Students; when they had all been arrested, a new group called SS20 took over. Several members of these security details became MPs in the 2010s. The careers of these NLD politicians, from

security detail to MP, illustrate the personalistic patronage networks that had developed in the NLD.

In chapter four I noted how access to Aung San Suu Kyi's compound was everything and how individual members sought to support their stance by saying "this is from the compound." I also analysed how the importance of proximity to the centre of power was still extremely relevant when the party was able to function again ahead of the 2012 by-elections¹¹. In this light, it is not surprising that NLD members who worked in ostensibly low-tier party service jobs, like security or as drivers, were in an ideal position to move up in the party because by virtue of their assignments few people were closer to the party's leadership than them.

I also encountered several family networks in the party. I spoke to several 2nd generation NLD family members, lawmakers who had followed in the footsteps of their parents. They cited the role of their parents as role models but also the intense alienation and oppression of the family as reasons for eventually joining the party. NLD MP Sa Khin Zaw Linn told me "When my father passed away, I accepted his political heritage. I follow in his footsteps to this day" (Sa Khin Zaw Linn 2019, AI). Yangon Region MP Khin Maung Win was proud to tell me that "In the party I am in the regional executive committee. My wife is in the township executive committee and my son is a representative in the NLD youth wing" (Khin Maung Win 2019, AI).

I must note, however, that I am uncertain over the extent to which family ties and personal patronage networks amounted to clientelism. The case of the Tricolour students and the SS20 shows that promotion within the party did not necessarily depend on the network someone was able to build but on representing the key values of the NLD, loyalty,

¹¹ Following the by-elections there was a divide between the party central office which remained in Yangon and the elected lawmakers who were close to Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar's capital, Naypyidaw. For more information see chapter three.

discipline, and an understanding of the need for party unity. Several members of SS20 and the Tricolour students had not been members of the party before they became candidates in the 2012 by-election and the 2015 general election¹². Moreover, they had been imprisoned, which precluded them from actively participating in party activities. Yet, as I have described above their time in prison served as proof of their loyalty to the cause and, thus, made them ideal candidates in the eyes of the party leadership. In other instances, clientelist practices were more apparent. For example, the NLD itself uncovered that its selection process for MP candidates in the 2015 election had been undermined by corruption and quid pro quo at nearly all party levels¹³.

The political culture in the NLD was, thus, strongly influenced by personal relationships but they were not necessarily a free ride for promotion inside the party. I talked to several long-time party members who felt that their commitment to the party throughout the years of oppression had been overlooked when the NLD won the 2012 by-elections and the 2015 general elections respectively, in favour of newcomers to the party. These people had the necessary connections within the party, but the leadership had not made them candidates for the election because it feared that they lacked the capacity to fill the role. This is interesting because the reverence for Aung San Suu Kyi shows that politics was deeply personalistic in the NLD and power was determined by access to Aung San Suu Kyi. Yet, at the same time this condition did not seem to spur extensive clientelist networks. The effect of the personal patronage networks on clientelist career advancement are therefore ambiguous. However, the deep commitment to Aung San Suu Kyi can help us explain why there was little protest in the party over the increased top-down centralisation of the NLD that I describe in chapter six. Moreover, it is an important piece of the puzzle of democracy inside the NLD. The normalisation of personality-based politics inside the

¹² For an example of one such career trajectory see Appendix F, Section 6.

¹³ For more information see chapter six.

party enabled an understanding of democracy that combined the support for democracy with an almost authoritarian leadership structure.

5.6. The NLD's understanding of democracy

Democracy in Myanmar has been explored in numerous articles but almost always in the context of democratisation. Prior to 2010 these publications assessed the prospect for democracy in Myanmar. Following the 2010 general elections and the establishment of a quasi-civilian government under Thein Sein, many researchers focused on the state of democracy in the country and explored whether Myanmar would be likely to democratise further in light of the many challenges¹⁴. Due to the framing of these articles within the context of democratisation or the broader transformation literature, the authors often used established conceptualisations of various democracy types and sub-types as the lens through which they assessed democracy in Myanmar. Yet, I argue that in the more than 30 years since the 1988 Uprising, including ten years under a hybrid regime, democracy has come to be understood in several interconnected ways within Myanmar that at times link to Western understandings of democracy but are distinct in many ways. This is evident in Aung San Suu Kyi's conceptualisation of democracy, which influenced the understanding of democracy in the NLD.

Aung San Suu Kyi's understanding of democracy has been described as a hybrid form democracy consisting of three different notions: disciplined democracy, rights-based democracy, and moral democracy (Walton 2017). The idea of disciplined democracy is based on the fear of political disorder. Moreover, it is consistent with the common Burmese perspective on the political participation of constituents: "sceptical of the ability of the average person (*pu htu zin*, a word that denotes a human being with all of his moral imperfections, Pāli *puthujjana*) to participate in politics and wary of the results of

¹⁴ For a detailed literature overview on these topics see chapter two.

participation” (Walton 2017, p. 170). Then, as the term suggests, disciplined democracy requires someone to “discipline” the constituents. Aung San Suu Kyi frequently brought up discipline together with unity in her speeches. She concluded her famous address to an enormous crowd at Yangon’s Shwedagon Pagoda in August 1988, calling for “unity and discipline” (Aung San Suu Kyi 1991, p. 198). The second conception, rights-based democracy, is the Burmese conception of the democracy that might relate most seamlessly to Western conceptions of democracy. Aspects of it, such as the idea that human rights are birth-rights of all people (Shin Daza 2007, in Walton 2017), connect it effortlessly to liberalism. Walton cites one Burmese writer stating that “People are creatures who create their own conditions through their own actions (kan kyama), who want to be free, and who have a strong desire to be free. People have a nature and ability that opposes repression and control. That nature is democratic” (Hti La Aung 2007, in Walton 2017, pp. 174-175). Aung San Suu Kyi often echoed this sentiment. In one of the essays published by her husband Michael Aris in “Freedom from Fear” Aung San Suu Kyi noted that the Burmese citizens had little experience in democracy but that it “appealed to their common-sense notions of what was due to a civilized society” (Aung San Suu Kyi 1991, p. 168).

Aung San Suu Kyi’s understanding of democracy also incorporated what Walton calls “moral democracy.” (Walton 2017) This framing of democracy was developed by the monastic community of Myanmar, circling around the relationship between individual, moral improvement, and democratic governance. In this conception, democracy is equated with acting in accordance with *taya* (Burmese for truth, i.e., truth of the dhamma, the teaching of the Buddha). This notion was integrated by Aung San Suu Kyi into her understanding of democracy, saying in one of her “conversations with the people”, “when asked what aspect of the Burmese culture contradicts democracy, there is no answer. In our Buddhist culture, one of the ten royal codes of ethics is thou shall not oppose your people. It’s a democratic concept” (Aung San Suu Kyi 1995).

When I began my interviews, I wondered whether Aung San Suu Kyi's hybrid understanding of democracy had proliferated inside the NLD and whether I would encounter understandings of democracy that would draw on the notions of discipline, rights, and morality. I discussed democracy at length with most interviewees. The answers I received all fell into three categories. In this order: rights-based aspects such as freedom, especially freedom from harm; process-based aspects, such as elections, a system of checks and balances, and the rule of law; and performance-based aspects, namely the idea that democracy would advance economic prosperity. For many interviewees the rights associated with democracy were the defining characteristic of democracy¹⁵. As the then Minister of Information Pe Myint said when I asked how the NLD understood democracy: "rule of the people, civil liberty, justice" (Pe Myint 2019, AI). The focus on rights as the central tenet of democracy was not surprising considering Myanmar's recent history and the personal experiences of most of my respondents as members of the opposition in an autocracy who had suffered injustice personally. For almost all NLD politicians I talked to democracy was defined by its protective capacities. Aung Kyi Nyunt, NLD CEC member, told me "Democracy is the only political system in which people in power, who are strong, cannot arbitrarily rule over those without power who are weak" (Aung Kyi Nyunt 2019, AI).

However, I soon realised that there was a stark difference between the way NLD politicians conceptualised democracy in an abstract sense and the way they thought about implementing democracy practically. I argue that the same rift is apparent in the way Aung San Suu Kyi understands democracy. On paper, Aung San Suu Kyi integrated the aspect of rights in her understanding of democracy. Similarly, when conceptualising democracy NLD

¹⁵ Consequently, my findings were rather different from those of Tamas Wells who argues that NLD politicians understand democracy through a narrative that focuses on *sedana* (benevolence) (Wells 2021). While I found traces of some of the dynamics Wells observed in the understanding of democracy in the NLD, the picture of the understanding of democracy that emerged on the basis of my interviews was altogether different.

politicians highlighted rights aspects and the procedural dimension of democracy. In practice, however, both Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD espoused a view of democracy that was built chiefly on the notion of discipline that the party justified with the continued influence of the military and the effect of military rule on the population.

5.6.1. Disciplined democracy in the NLD

In my interviews I probed the understanding of democracy in the NLD by contrasting my interviewees' emphasis on rights with some of the more controversial political decisions the party had made between 2016 and 2019¹⁶, touching on the NLD's stance on freedom of speech and human rights. In explaining the ostensible contradiction between the support for democratic rights and the party's political decisions the interviewees at times touched on the notions of rights-based democracy and morality-based democracy Walton had observed but the responses were most of all characterised by the importance of discipline. The term disciplined democracy has long been associated with the military and its "Roadmap to Discipline-Flourishing Democracy" which governed the top-down political reforms that culminated in the hybrid regime that existed in Myanmar between 2010 and 2021. The roadmap itself illustrates how the military understood disciplined democracy. The seven steps it laid out, from convening the National Convention to write a new constitution to forming a new parliament, provided a strict framework in which partial democracy was to unfold¹⁷.

The key difference between the version of disciplined democracy of the armed forces and the NLD is that the army required discipline to remain in control of a politically and ethnically highly fragmented country whose citizens did not want the armed forces in government. For the NLD, on the other hand, discipline was central because of the

¹⁶ For more details see chapter six.

¹⁷ Walton notes that the military "frequently contrasted the dangerous, divisive elements of Western-style democracy with disciplined democracy" (Walton 2017, p. 169).

continued need to provide a united front against the armed forces and to overcome an alleged lack of understanding of democracy in the population. NLD CEC member Dr May Win Myint told me

“Under the military regime, people were fed totally different ideas about democracy. They thought that democracy would be the absolute freedom to do whatever they wanted. So, when the people were actually given freedom, they were lacking principles and discipline and misused the term. Making them understand this concept is the biggest challenge in Myanmar” (Dr May Win Myint 2019, AI).

The sentiment among many NLD politicians was that Myanmar’s people had to be told how to be free and how to behave in a democracy, necessitating a disciplining approach. One NLD politician contrasted this use of discipline with the approach of the military. He told me

“The army wanted to strengthen their executive mechanism and control people by arbitrarily disciplining them and putting them into a cage. We [the NLD] want a disciplined and systematic society where people understand ethics and civil conduct. People must dare to speak out for what is right. People must dare to do what is right. But we do not want people to say or do what is not right. If they do, we must have some constraints that prevent them from speaking or doing what is not right” (Anonymous 2019, AI).

The idea that citizens needed to be disciplined for democracy to work has several roots. Aung Kyi Nyunt argued that one of the key reasons that discipline was so important in the context of democracy in Myanmar was the citizens unfamiliarity with rights. He told me that “Western democracy is based on rights, especially human rights. But in the case of the East, in Burma, we have not been familiar with rights. We are familiar with obligations” (Aung Kyi Nyunt 2019, AI). I was surprised by the contrast between rights and explanations and asked him to explain. He told me:

“Consider the cases of husband and wife or employer and employee. Each of them has their rights. [...] But in Burma we work with *witayar* (obligations). In our society the woman’s rights are given to the man as an obligation. The rights of children are the obligation of the parents. [...] We are working based on what we need to do for others, according to the obligations in our culture, rather than based on what we believe we are entitled to as rights” (Aung Kyi Nyunt 2019, AI).

The notion of obligation over rights as the foundation of the NLD's version of democracy was evident in many conversations I had with NLD politicians. It also illuminated the importance they attributed to discipline. In short, we would think it odd to discipline people to enjoy their rights but would find it natural to discipline people to perform according to their obligations. In the NLD's understanding of democracy, adapting to the party's version of democracy became the obligation of constituents and party members and both had to be disciplined by the party if they failed to honour this obligation. I asked several long-time observers how they explained the party's focus on discipline. One Myanmar analyst told me "There is this understanding that if there is no political order there will be no stability and there will be no democracy. Their minds were subconsciously shaped by the narratives in curriculums, the teaching style, and extracurricular activities in the school environment" (Anonymous 2018, AI). These school curricula were of course drawn up under the control of the military. The analyst told me "After 1993, you could see the "Spirit, Discipline, and Wisdom" logo in every school" (Anonymous 2018, AI). There were different voices in the party too. NLD MP Myint Lwin, for example told me that he agreed in principle that discipline was important but that the NLD should not enforce but rather encourage it. Sandar Min, an NLD MP in the Yangon region parliament told me that she "hated the authoritarian nature that I observe now in the party" (Sandar Min 2018, AI). She also told me "I long for a habit of collective decision making which is fair and impartial" (Sandar Min 2018, AI).

5.6.2. Delayed democracy, the immature population, and the fear of a military coup

The majority of NLD politicians I spoke to were fully aware that the party's approach to democracy was not in fact democratic, but they advocated for delaying democracy. In their thinking, the version of democracy they were currently working on was a mere

steppingstone to a much better, fuller democracy they would advance in the future. There were two reasons for the NLD's focus on delayed democracy. Firstly, NLD politicians argued that Myanmar's population was not ready for "proper" democracy. Secondly, even had they been, "proper" democracy would, in the eyes of NLD politicians, only be possible once the military had been put under civilian oversight.

The NLD looked at the political capacity of the population in much the same way it looked at the capacity of its own politicians and members. One NLD MP raised the example of the Rohingya genocide (see chapter six for details on the NLD's role), telling me

"She [Aung San Suu Kyi] knows that our public is not mature yet. Regarding the Rakhine affair, our people, the citizens of Myanmar we cannot accept them. The majority of us cannot accept the Rohingya yet. Not because of the military but because of electoral politics. [...] Even though we want democracy, we cannot accept human rights one hundred percent yet" (Anonymous 2018, AI).

Another NLD lawmaker asked me where I was from before answering my question about reconciling the "democracy" in National League for *Democracy* with the political decisions of the party. He then replied:

"You are from Germany. A fully democratic country like yours has been consolidated for so many years. The political system is firmly established. Everyone [in Germany] values and practises individual and organisational ethics, also when it comes to the image of the national leaders. Thus, they [Germans] have a situation where citizens can be allowed freedom of speech and freedom of expression. In our country, we have to take a certain period for transitioning. The community in which we were raised and the society in which we have grown up did not nurture and teach us systematically. 26 years of the BSPP government plus over twenty years of military dictatorship, nearly fifty years, not one but two generations were miserable and were not in touch with democratic practices. [...] If we adapt to [the level of] already consolidated democracies right away, we might end up with unintended consequences" (Anonymous 2019, AI).

Hearing arguments like these was surprising to me because this line of reasoning had been well-established in Myanmar for several decades. Only in the past it had been the military who argued that the population was simply not yet ready for democracy. I did meet

several NLD politicians who had a realistic perception of the democratic practice in consolidated democracies and the many issues that plagued countries like the US or Germany. However, for many NLD politicians established democracy remained an almost comically pure fantasy¹⁸. Perfectly normal occurrences, such as strong criticism of Aung San Suu Kyi on social media, were thus viewed as further proof that the population was not mature enough for “proper” democracy.

There was, however, another important reason why NLD politicians advocated for delaying “proper” democracy: the military’s continued influence. Possibly one of the most significant ways in which military oppression shaped the political culture in the NLD was the fear of a new military coup it instilled in the party. Writing in 2022, over one year after the military coup of 2021, this fear was justified. Yet, between 2010 and 2021 NLD politicians afraid of a new military take-over were part of a tiny group of politicians, observers and foreign representatives who shared this concern. The vast majority of NLD politicians justified the party’s focus on discipline by arguing that unity was essential for the party’s survival and the retrenchment of the military. NLD Chief Minister Aung Moe Nyo told me “The current situation in Myanmar cannot be called a democracy because we have 25% of military lawmakers in parliament. Because of these constraints, when the League decides on a position, everyone must follow suit. We do not vote” (Aung Moe Nyo 2019). Although the NLD was in government between 2016 and 2021, at the time of my interviews, most politicians I talked to argued that the fight for democracy would not be won through law-making within the constraints of the 2008 constitution that enshrined the military’s privileges but by retrenching the military’s political privileges before making

¹⁸ Many were convinced that leaders like Angela Merkel, then the chancellor of Germany, did not have to put up with the kind of ridicule and anti-government propaganda that Aung San Suu Kyi faced in Myanmar and of course Angela Merkel did not have to face propaganda from an independent military complex. Yet, many lawmakers I talked to also seemed to believe that she was free from ridicule or defamatory comments on social media by virtue of her position in a consolidated democracy. One or two times I told lawmakers about depictions of Angela Merkel during the carnival in Cologne which traditionally includes large Papier-mâché caricatures of politicians. This led to perplexed disbelief among the interviewees.

democratic politics. This approach informed the party's understanding of democracy: disciplined democracy was necessary as long as the military continued to wield political influence because the party had to remain united. The time for "proper" democracy would only come once the military had been pushed out.

This line of thinking is essential to understanding the NLD's approach to democracy and its endorsement of undemocratic practices and policies while in office. All observers of Myanmar politics - including journalists, academics (myself included), civil society leaders, representatives of foreign governments, and INGOs, and many Myanmar politicians – thought that the military would not retake more power than it had secured for itself through the 2008 constitution. In other words, almost nobody expected a military coup. The military's position simply seemed too good. It had effectively protected itself against civilian oversight, had enshrined its political influence in the new hybrid system, had protected all its streams of revenue and ensured that it would not get under the wheels of a transitional justice mechanism. But many senior NLD politicians were worried about a future military coup. Consequently, there was a considerable chasm between the NLD leadership and most politically minded constituents, observers, and members of civil society¹⁹.

¹⁹ On the condition that I would not quote them directly several NLD leaders told me different versions of the same story, namely that the military had initially planned to undermine the 2015 general election in a fashion like the 1990 elections (see chapter three for details) and there was a persistent threat of new military coup. One NLD leader told me that the military had initially planned to not allow for oversight of the ballots, which would have enabled it to falsify the results. Another senior NLD politician told me that there had been a military plan to not accept the election results in case the NLD won too many votes. Contrary to the common understanding of Myanmar's political development at the time, which posited that the NLD was subject only to the constraints of the 2008 constitution, many NLD politicians thought that the NLD's ability to perform as a political party was not the result of the top-down reform process but rather of a secret pact between the military and Aung San Suu Kyi. Yangon Region MP Kyaw Zeya, an ex-military officer, told me "My thinking is they [the military and ASSK] must have made a pact. I do not know exactly. I think they made an agreement since the beginning. And I think they are going forward in accord with this agreement" (Kyaw Zeya 2018, AI). Despite the fear of a military coup not all NLD members thought that a coup would be possible. Party historian Monywa Aung Shin told me "The military is no longer capable of destroying the party. This is certain. [...] The Hluttaw [parliament] has been installed and the NLD won a landslide victory in the 2015 election. Therefore, the Tatmadaw can no longer destroy the party and according to the constitution it cannot stage a coup" (Aung Shin 2019, AI). NLD lawmaker Aye Mya Mya Myo agreed, explaining "I do not worry about a military coup. I am worried about civil war in

Within the NLD, there was a strong sentiment that the re-entry of the NLD into the political arena was not the result of a country that was generally becoming more democratic but the product of a secret deal between the military and Aung San Suu Kyi. Although nobody I interviewed could (or wanted to) provide information on the details of this alleged deal, it was used frequently to justify the NLD's approach of delaying democracy²⁰.

One MP told me "The military violates human rights many times. But there is a problem: we cannot talk about that openly and publicly" (Anonymous 2018, AI). NLD politicians were also convinced that the military attacked the party through intermediaries, especially through military-linked media outlets and ultra-nationalist Buddhist groups. NLD MP Tint Lwin echoed the sentiment of many of his colleagues when he argued that because

Shan- and especially in Rakhine State" (Aye Mya Mya Myo 2019, AI). There were several members of the NLD, especially senior party leaders who thought differently but I cannot quote them directly. Talking about the possibility of a future military takeover was sensitive as the party officially maintained that it was on the path of reconciliation with the military. But in 2019 Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing made a statement that spurred concern in the party. Kyaw Zeya, the ex-military NLD MP, explained "Min Aung Hlaing claims that he will bring peace in 2020. 2020 is supposed to be a very special year for our country politically and for our military affairs" (Kyaw Zeya 2018, AI). There were also reports that the military had sent out officers to all townships in Myanmar to conduct conversations with the local population. At the time, this move was viewed as a tactic to enhance the military's political influence. It was also interpreted as indicating that the military might have lost trust in its own proxy-party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), due to its poor election performance and was preparing to enter electoral politics directly in some other way. I was, however, never able to ascertain what the military was doing and even after the 2021 military coup it is unclear whether these steps were part of an extensive preparation period. It is possible but I cannot verify it.

²⁰ One lawmaker bemoaned the appointment of Zaw Htay, a deeply racist ex-military man, who had been appointed as the spokesperson of Aung San Suu Kyi, and who made frequent inhumane and degrading remarks in his capacity: "I am very disappointed in the appointment of people like Zaw Htay in this position. It should be someone else. Truly speaking, it is not right that persons who are loyal to the military were appointed in key positions. But it might be due to the dialogues [between the military and Aung San Suu Kyi] and trade-offs behind the curtain." (Anonymous 2018, AI). Zaw Htay was by no means the only person with a military background in a leading role in the NLD. Several NLD lawmakers looked back on a career in the military, as did several members of the NLD cabinet. Some NLD leaders, on the request of not being quoted directly, went as far as claiming that these appointments had been forced onto the NLD by the military. The answers to what the NLD had allegedly received in return varied. The release of political prisoners was brought up frequently but either no one I talked to knew about the alleged deal or did not want to tell me. For now, it remains impossible to know whether this deal existed and whether it established secret red tape that constrained the NLD. But whether true or not, the perception of being at the mercy of the army fostered the notion that the NLD had to be controlled tightly and could not advance "proper" democracy for fear of upsetting the military.

of the continued attacks on the NLD, the party had to refrain from repealing repressive legislation fully.

“We know that they [the military] have already formed a technician group to systematically attack us online. These groups are still active, and it is not possible to identify and expose them. Therefore, we need it [Article 66(d)]. [...] The change cannot be brought about right away. We also do not like having this article. But there is a side effect and we have been seeing photoshopped pictures used to distort who we are. We cannot press any charges by tracing the accounts [on Facebook], usually three or more accounts used by a single person. Owing to this situation, it is hard to blame people who have concerns about abolishing Article 66(d)²¹” (Tint Lwin 2019, AI).

Consequently, the NLD did not focus on democratic policy making, but on finding workarounds to retrench military influence. This approach was manifest in the creation of the role of state counsellor that was swiftly accepted as the status quo but was in fact the party’s first major political victory in office. Rather than altering the constitution, the NLD created a new political position that rendered the constitutionally mandated position of president moot. The legal legwork behind the creation of the role of state counsellor was largely credited to the lawyer Ko Ni who was assassinated in January 2017 in broad daylight at Yangon airport. The assassination is widely believed to have been sponsored by the armed forces. Several NLD politicians told me that Ko Ni’s assassination had been a signal for the NLD. Ko Ni had allegedly been working at finding further loopholes in the 2008 constitution that would allow the NLD to retrench the military’s influence without amending the constitution²², a process the military could have vetoed. Following Ko Ni’s

²¹ For more information on the controversy around Article 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law see chapter six.

²² Allegedly Ko Ni was assassinated because he found a specific loophole that would have allowed the NLD to alter the constitution amendment process and the composition of army representatives in the Pyithu Hluttaw, Myanmar’s lower house of parliament. Section 109 of the constitution provides “The Pyithu Hluttaw shall be formed with a maximum of 440 representatives as follows: a) not more than 330 Pyithu Hluttaw representatives elected prescribing electorate in accord with law on the basis of township as well as population or combining with an appropriate township which is contiguous to the newly-formed township if it is more than 330 townships; b) not more than 110 Pyithu Hluttaw representatives who are the Defence Services personnel nominated by the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services in accord with the law” (2008 Constitution).

Section 141 stipulates “The Amyotha Hluttaw [the upper house] shall be formed with a maximum of 224 Hluttaw representatives as follows: a) 168 Amyotha Hluttaw representatives elected in an equal number of 12 representatives from each Region or State inclusive or relevant Union territories and including one

assassination, the NLD leadership knew that trying to reduce the military's influence through loopholes in the constitution would be crossing a red-line. Consequently, the party did not come forward with ideas for the exploitation of other constitutional loopholes. Yet, neither did it change tactics. Towards the end of its term in government the NLD embarked on a futile constitution amendment process inside parliament that predictably failed to deliver results due to the military's veto power. The party did not, however, change tactics to make more democratic policies, for example by passing legislation that would have protected democratic rights. Instead, the party remained firm on its stance of delaying "proper" democracy.

Interestingly, the party was fully aware that its approach to democracy was not in fact fully democratic. While I characterise the NLD as a party of undemocratic democrats so did many NLD politicians. Dr Myo Nyunt, a CEC member and then the spokesperson of the NLD, told me "When the country is fully democratic the ethnic people will gain their federal rights, we will become a fully democratic party and we will be able to rely on our leaders even if our supreme leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has retired from political activities" (Dr Myo Nyunt 2019, AI). NLD lawmaker Pyone Kathy Naing told me about the low levels of party institutionalisation:

"We need to institutionalise all the weak institutions in the country, including the NLD. I would never want to hide this fact or refuse to acknowledge this if someone criticises the NLD. [...] The NLD also needs to care about its actions. Each and every action that the

representative from each Self-Administered Division or Self-Administered Zone; b) 56 Amyotha Hluttaw representatives who are the Defence Services personnel nominated by the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services in accord with the law, four representatives from each Region or State inclusive of relevant Union territories; c) in forming the Amyotha Hluttaw as mentioned in Sub-Sections (a) and (b), the relevant Union Territory mean the Union Territories, prescribed under the Constitution, or prescribed by law of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, which are inclusive in State or Division, Region or State for the purpose of electing the Amyotha Hluttaw representative" (2008 Constitution).

The loophole Ko Ni allegedly found becomes clear in the contrast between section 109, sub-section b), and section 141, sub-section b). The upper house must have exactly 56 military MPs while the lower house cannot have *more than* 110 military MPs, meaning that technically the number of military MPs in the lower house could have been reduced to one without triggering section 436 of the constitution, which would require a 75% majority in a joint sitting of both houses of parliament. Had the number of military representatives in the lower house been reduced to one, the military would have lost its veto power over constitutional change.

NLD has taken needs to be in line with democratic practices. There may be some practices which are not in line with democratic practices, but we must correct them” (Pyone Kathy Naing 2018, AI).

Long-time party member and MP Thein Myint was even more blunt, telling me that “Most people from the party cannot work fully based on democratic practices. There are party members who tell others to be more democratic although they themselves are not” (Thein Myint 2019, AI).

In summary, the NLD’s understanding of democracy drew on the Myanmar-specific interpretations based on morality and rights that Walton observed in theory, but in practice discipline and delaying “proper” democracy were the most important characteristics of the NLD’s approach to democracy. This in turn was strongly influenced by military oppression and the military’s continued influence over the political system in Myanmar. Military oppression had led to the perception inside the NLD that both NLD members and normal citizens lacked the grasp of democracy that was necessary to implement full democracy. The continued influence of the military led the NLD to delay “proper” democracy in favour of a limited, disciplined version of democracy that was heralded as a tool for keeping the party united and thus ensuring the party’s continued survival. Only this survival, so the perception in the NLD, would enable the introduction of “proper” democracy in the future, but only at a point when the military’s influence over the political system had been sufficiently retrenched.

This approach to democracy is important because it explains how party members reconciled their commitment to democracy with the politics of the NLD in office. The party’s understanding of democracy both shaped and was shaped by the party’s culture. It was borne, in part, from the importance party members attributed to loyalty, unity and discipline and fostered these principles of political conduct within the party. In the context of the NLD’s understanding of democracy Aung San Suu Kyi’s authority is relevant because

it allowed her to unite the party behind her despite criticism over delaying “proper” democracy and the strong focus on discipline from inside and outside the party. It is also important to keep in mind Aung San Suu Kyi’s authority in questions of democracy in the NLD, which was strengthened by her iconisation, which was in turn amplified through her persecution by the military.

Importantly, however, Aung San Suu Kyi’s authority over the interpretation of democracy specifically and the NLD in general did not lead to a diffusion of her understanding of democracy in the sense that it was adopted unquestioningly as true democracy within the party. Rather, although many NLD politicians were aware that the party was at times acting undemocratically, espousing undemocratic norms, and criticised the party for its focus on disciplined democracy, Aung San Suu Kyi’s authority allowed her to maintain party unity.

5.7. Internal aspects of party culture

So far, I have analysed aspects of the NLD’s political culture that were shaped significantly by military oppression of the party. However, some aspects of the NLD’s culture developed more independently of the military. For the purpose of this thesis – understanding how the NLD could become a party that combined a commitment to democracy with opposition to it – it is helpful to consider three further aspects of the NLD’s political culture: the party’s perception of the military, its understanding of national reconciliation, and its approach to the cooperation with ethnic minorities. Considering the NLD’s time in office²³, all three aspects present an ostensible contradiction which could be summarised as 1) Why was the major opposition party to the military not more critical of the military when it came to power? 2) Why did it interpret national reconciliation narrowly as the reconciliation of army and NLD, thus sparing the military from the threat of potential transitional justice

²³ See chapter six for more details.

mechanisms? 3) Why did the party that had been able to make strong and long-lasting alliances with ethnic parties make such little progress in the peace process?

In chapter six I consider how the answers to these questions are influenced by the constraints of *realpolitik* in the setting of Myanmar's hybrid regime. Yet, while the politicians I spoke to initially highlighted practical political constraints in their answers to the questions above, through the ensuing conversations I realised that these ostensible contradictions cannot be explained by the circumstances of the transitional period between 2010 and 2021 alone. Rather, there are underlying perceptions of the army, of ethnic minorities, values, and a certain self-image that form an ideational component that needs to be considered when answering the above questions.

5.7.1. The NLD's view of the military

In chapter three I discussed how the perception of the army as an inherently good institution that had simply suffered from being under bad leadership was a view that united the three founding factions of the NLD. Although the NLD campaigned against the military it never sought to dismantle it. In its own perception, the party did not fight against the military but against military dictatorship. Kyaw Aung, long-time NLD member and chairman of the Win Tin foundation, explained:

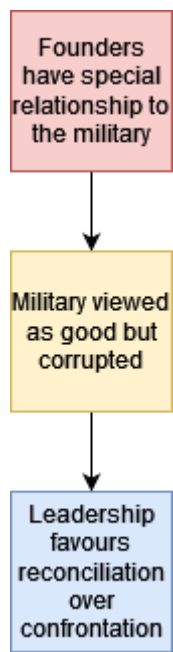


Figure 11:
NLD leaders’
view of the
military.
Causes in red,
causal processes
in yellow,
outcomes in
blue.

“Some historians and political scientists argue that the country has suffered because of the military. [...] However, the military is not the culprit. It is not the Tatmadaw’s fault but that of the generals that commanded the Tatmadaw. The main culprit is the commander-in-chief. The Tatmadaw carried out what the commander-in-chief ordered. Superficially, you can say that the military carried out the coup in 1962. But it was U Ne Win who actually took over state power. It was not the Tatmadaw that pushed the country to its downfall. [...] Also in late 1988, it was not actually the military that committed the coup. People would conveniently argue that it was the military that took over, but it was not. It was Senior General Saw Maung who commanded the military. The military is not to be blamed for the subsequent years either. It was Senior General Than Shwe who continued to use the military’s strength, consolidated the military dictatorship, and caused a great deal of trouble for the country. The Tatmadaw is not actually to blame. Now again, the provision that the military will have a leadership role in politics for a long time is included in the constitution. This is the work of the senior generals who command the military to preserve their power and the resources they have accumulated by using the military. [...] Please do not write that the military did this or that. When we use the term “military” negatively, we have to keep in mind that we are referring to the generals who control and command the military. The root cause of the country’s trouble are the military autocrats. They claim that we [the NLD] are going against the military. But essentially, we are not going against the military” (Kyaw Aung 2019, AI).

Not all NLD members I interviewed shared Kyaw Aung’s view to this extent but most emphasised that they did not hate the military but rather took issue with the military in government. There was a strong belief in the party that the military as an institution had been led astray by a series of bad leaders. Aung San Suu Kyi spoke of *her father’s army* in the late 1980s and propagated the idea that the military was essentially good but had been corrupted (Aung San Suu Kyi 1991). Unsurprisingly, this view was shared by most other members of the NLD’s founding factions since the faction of the Patriotic Old Comrades and Aung Gyi’s faction were led by former high-ranking military officers. Consequently, the dualistic perception of the army became an integral aspect of the NLD’s political culture. Kyaw Aung echoed the sentiment of the party’s leadership when he told me “[the army’s] ups and downs depend on the leadership of the military. General Aung San was the founding father of the Myanmar Tatmadaw. While he was leading it, the Tatmadaw was on the right track” (Kyaw Aung

2019, AI). The party's leadership had detailed this line of thinking time and time again in announcements and resolutions²⁴ and thereby propagated an understanding of the army that had little to do with the reality of its structure, culture, and objectives. The NLD's leadership failed to comprehend that the army had long established itself as a society within society with its very own ideology that bore no resemblance to the perception of the army in the NLD.

The NLD's simplistic view of the military failed to consider the way the military had developed after independence and more importantly, in the decades after 1962 when it had not been a mere army but rather the centre of state power in Myanmar. The NLD's perception of the military contributed to party's reconciliatory approach to the military but also explains why the NLD was not able to improve its relationship with the army despite this approach. The NLD believed that through reconciliation it could unearth the "true" form of the army and "free" the institution from the leadership that it perceived to be solely responsible for the decades of dictatorship, human rights violations, and the continued influence of the military over politics. Thus, the NLD not only negated a more realistic view of the military it also negated the military's view of itself.

5.7.2. No revenge: national reconciliation in the NLD

Although NLD politicians immediately pointed towards the power of the military and the lack of control over the military in explaining the party's reconciliatory approach to its former oppressor there was also a somewhat surprising sentiment of forgiveness. Reconciliation with the military was not merely a policy borne out necessity it was part of a broader culture in the NLD. One NLD MP reflected on the oddity of this culture of forgiveness that was based on the dichotomous view of the military I described above, telling me "It is very surprising that the majority of us [NLD politicians] has made great

²⁴ For an example see Appendix G.

sacrifices until today, yet during the transition period we are emphasizing reforms rather than revenge with the guidance of the NLD leadership” (Anonymous 2019, AI). NLD MP Phyu Phyu Thin explained

“We were imprisoned not because of Zaw Htay [controversial spokesperson of the state counsellor’s office and ex-military officer] or the military. We were imprisoned because of authoritarianism. A prison warden could be regarded as our enemy as they kept us under lock the whole time we were in prison. Yet, we were fine with them and even the police when they were arresting us because of the way we wanted to change the system. [...] Nothing can be changed if we embark on our long journey hating others” (Phyu Phyu Thin 2018, AI).

Other NLD politicians were less forgiving but still reconciliatory. One NLD lawmaker, whose family in her own words had been “destroyed” by the military and whose father had been imprisoned by the junta, told me “I do not forgive but I do not want to punish them” (Anonymous 2019, AI).

The NLD’s embrace of the military meant that ex-military officers were part of the party’s cabinet²⁵ and some of the party’s lawmakers elected in the 2015 election looked back on careers in the military. This was more contentious in the party. Yangon Region MP

²⁵ For an overview see Htet Khaung Linn (2018), “The outsiders: who are the NLD’s military-linked leaders?”, *Myanmar Now*, 10 December. Available at [<https://www.myanmar-now.org/en/news/the-outsidere-who-are-the-nlds-military-linked-leaders>].

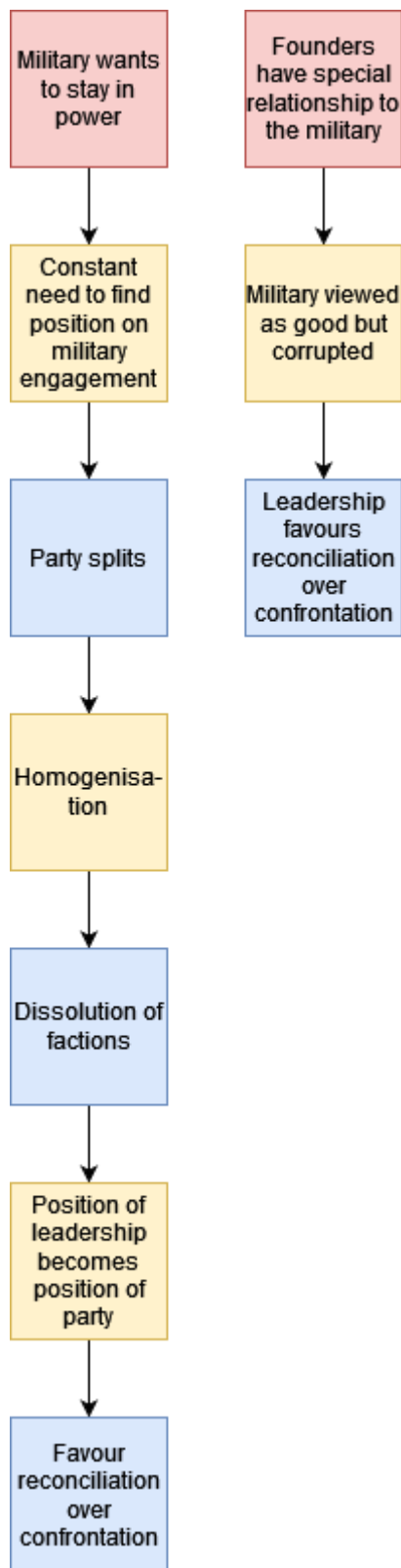


Figure 12: the development of the NLD's position on reconciliation. Causes in red, causal processes in yellow, and outcomes in blue.

Sandar Min told me “This is Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s national reconciliation policy. I personally do not like it. People from the other side were offered positions in the cabinet over our comrades. I do not appreciate this kind of reconciliation, nor do I believe in it. You can win a battle only if you fight with your own people” (Sandar Min 2018, AI). Although nearly all NLD politicians I talked to supported the party’s reconciliatory approach to the military, several NLD members argued that the party’s approach had shifted significantly.

Long-time party member Myat Kyaw Kyaw explained that the NLD had initially pursued a more confrontative approach but that “When the revolution in the country lasted longer, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi adopted the principle of national reconciliation as the best way to reconstruct the nation” (Myat Kyaw Kyaw 2018, AI). One NLD MP specified how the changing conditions in which the party operated had required a change of tactics: “The position of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD changed. The NLD stood as an opposition party and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was an opposition leader. And the objective was the collapse of the military dictatorship. Nowadays they [NLD and military] both form the government. [...] Consequently, the NLD has to build a relationship with the military

instead of fighting against it as before as an opposition” (Anonymous 2018, AI).

The NLD was heavily criticised for what observers and former political allies perceived to be a tectonic shift in the party’s approach to the military. I found, however, that the changed approach to the military had not occurred suddenly between 2012 and 2016 but instead was the natural result of an emphasis on reconciliation between the NLD and the military that had found its way into the party when the military refused to honour the results of the 1990 elections results by letting the NLD form a parliament or a constitutional assembly. The NLD cited national reconciliation as one of its objectives for talks with the junta in the Gandhi Hall Declaration that the party had issued after it became clear that the junta had no intention of transferring power²⁶. National reconciliation was then not clearly defined. For example, it was not clear whether the NLD’s understanding of national reconciliation meant that the junta would remain unpunished after a transfer of power. Yet, even at this early juncture the mention of national reconciliation reflected a political stance of the party that was borne out of the conviction of the NLD leadership that dialogue with the military rather than confrontation would yield political change.

In 1989 and 1990 the party slogan had been “according to your duty disobey any unjust order and authority” but the party soon abandoned this motto. In chapter four I analysed how this change in tactics resulted in a considerable party split between the NLD leadership and many of the elected NLD candidates. However, the shift also laid the foundation for an important ideational component of the NLD’s political culture. Reflecting on the party split is important because it illustrates that the NLD’s decision to focus on dialogue was not simply the result of external conditions. Many NLD politicians at the time advocated for a more radical approach, with some even taking up arms. Although the party oscillated between confrontation and dialogue with the military in the

²⁶ See chapter three for details.

following decades, national reconciliation became a central objective of the party not because the party was forced to adopt this approach but because it elected to do so. In a speech in 1997 Aung San Suu Kyi called for a meeting between the SLORC and the NLD noting that “It is the democratic mechanism to negotiate and to have to deal with those having different dispositions and opinions” (Aung San Suu Kyi 1997, OT). She argued that only such a meeting could “initiate national reconciliation to establish an authentic democratic nation [...]” (ibid) and that it was the NLD’s “essential scheme” for the future (ibid).

In the view of the NLD, only national reconciliation based on a dialogue between the army and the NLD could lead to national unity, a term that designated peace and stability. In a party announcement from 2004 in which the NLD published a letter that Aung Shwe had written to the chairman of the SPDC, General Than Shwe, the CEC pointed out the shared objectives of the party and the military. The CEC argued that since both the NLD and the SPDC wanted national unity: “It is obvious that the National League for Democracy and the State Peace and Development Council both have the right intention and good objectives for the state and all the ethnic citizens” (NLD 2004, OT). Reiterating earlier party statements, the CEC argued that “We believe that the future of the Union of Myanmar depends on the good results of the problem-solving approach through dialogue” (ibid). A little over a year after the attack on an NLD convoy on its way to Depayin by a military sponsored mob²⁷ the CEC statement with Aung Shwe’s letter illustrates the NLD’s commitment to national reconciliation as a dialogue between the NLD and the military.

These statements also show that the NLD’s interpretation of national reconciliation as dialogue with the military did not emerge suddenly after the party formed a government but that it had been an integral part of the party’s political culture for decades. With this

²⁷ See chapter three for more information.

knowledge we can make more sense of the ostensible contradictions I highlighted at the beginning of this section. The NLD was not more critical of the military when it came to power and did not entertain the possibility of transitional justice mechanisms not only because of the external constraints of the military's continued political power but also because NLD politicians firmly believed that reconciliation between the military and the NLD was the key to further democratic progress. This explains also why Aung San Suu Kyi never used her moral authority to attack or undermine the military after 2012, an avenue that was open to her even within the constraints of the 2008 constitution. The party's understanding of national reconciliation is also a piece in the puzzle of the NLD's inability to make meaningful progress in the peace process. I will address the NLD's perspective on ethnic grievances further down in this chapter, but it is important to highlight that while the NLD emphasised the need for peace and stability the party believed that achieving this objective would only be possible through dialogue and cooperation with the military. Hence, the party established a sequence based on priority: reconciliation with the military first, everything else second.

Importantly, the NLD's focus on dialogue with the military did little, if anything at all, to improve the relationship between the party and the military. Indeed, despite the emphasis on forgiveness and cooperation, military representatives still perceived the NLD as too confrontational. Ye Htut, a USDP politician and former minister of information in Thein Sein's cabinet, told me

“The problem is the NLD suffered a lot under the military. So, naturally they hate the military. This is the problem. Think about Mandela. He suffered a lot, but he never tried to remove white people. The problem is that Aung San Suu Kyi is not Mandela. She sometimes uses hate to support her leadership. [...] Their [the NLD's] mindset is to always go against. Yes, the military did bad things but if you are becoming a politician you have to have a clear strategy for cooperation with them because whether you like it or not, the military has played an important role in Myanmar's politics since 1948” (Ye Htut 2019, AI).

This quote illustrates an important distinction between the approach of the NLD and its result. Between 2015 and 2021 many commentators suggested that the NLD “cosied up to the generals” (Jagan 2016) but this is a misrepresentation. More accurately, the NLD tried to build a cooperative relationship with the military but failed.

5.7.3. The NLD’s myth of Panglong

The distortion of reality that characterised the NLD’s view of the military was also evident in the party’s perception of ethnic minority groups, ethnic political parties, and ethnic armed groups. As with the perception of the military, the NLD’s understanding of the grievances of ethnic minority groups and the peace process was not the result military oppression but was borne out of the political universe of the party itself. The party’s perception of ethnic minority groups in the country is important because it explains why the party was able to build meaningful and close alliances with ethnic political parties from its foundation up until the 2015 general elections, but promptly abandoned the established relationships in favour of a hegemonic approach that had a detrimental effect on the peace process. Prior to the 2015 elections the view of the NLD as a democratic party had in part been based on its ability to foster strong relationships with ethnic minority groups. This approach seemed to signify that democratic values like equality and universal rights were not hollow values that the party paid lip service to but rather that the party was actively trying to fight for a better society for all citizens in Myanmar.

As I have noted in the section on national reconciliation in this chapter, the NLD’s inflexibility in addressing the grievances of ethnic minorities in Myanmar can partly be explained by the NLD’s priorities. The party focused on reconciliation with the military first while everything else came second. Consequently, there was an underlying assumption among NLD politicians that addressing ethnic grievances could not be successful before a successful reconciliation with the military. When I asked NLD politicians about their

perspectives on the rights, the representation, and the grievances of ethnic minority groups, I realised, however, that the party's approach was characterised not only by its political priorities and the notion of delayed democracy but also by a profoundly misguided understanding of the role of ethnic minority groups in the peace process and the role of the NLD.

While the NLD was oppressed it had been relatively easy for the party to build alliances with ethnic minority parties. This was partly due to the fact that many political leaders in ethnic political parties trusted Aung San Suu Kyi but more importantly because the NLD made clear statements of support for the rights of ethnic minorities, their self-determination, and the introduction of a federal system. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s the NLD argued that the key for protecting the rights of ethnic minorities and the introduction of a federal union would be the acceptance of the 1990 election results. There was no talk of how ethnic rights might be protected or what a federal union should look like. This was a comfortable position for the NLD because it was able to build alliances with ethnic political parties who joined in the call for the acceptance of the 1990 election results – the central political objective of the NLD - without having to detail what the NLD would do specifically to advance ethnic rights if it came to power. The NLD agreed however that the advancement of ethnic rights would have to occur alongside the fight for democracy:

“These problems [democratic rights of the people and the self-determination and rights of ethnic people] might appear like two distinct problems but they are closely interconnected with each other. Like it is impossible to build a free and developed country without democratic rights, it is impossible to build a peaceful, democratic, and advanced country without resolving ethnic conflict. Therefore, it is necessary to solve democratic problems and ethnic conflict simultaneously” (CRPP 2003, OT).

Yet, in the context of the 2008 constitution this narrative no longer worked. The 1990 election results were never used as the basis for a transfer of power and when the

NLD came to power in 2016 it had few means to develop a democratic federal union within the constraints of the 2008 constitution. While the NLD still viewed democratisation and ethnic rights as interlinked the idea that both had to occur simultaneously began to fade. The NLD needed to find a strategy for advancing ethnic minority rights in the setting of the existing political system, but this change proved too difficult for the party. In part, the reason for this was the prevalent perception of ethnic grievances through the lens of what Walton called the “Myths of Panglong” (Walton 2008). These myths of Panglong are narratives that retell the 1947 meeting of General Aung San, Myanmar’s independence hero, with leaders of several ethnic minority groups that led to the signing of the Panglong Agreement, which was to “pave the way for a new constitution and, eventually, independence” (Walton 2008, p. 889). The agreement was never realised and subsequently a multitude of myths emerged over what had happened at Panglong. These myths established different perceptions of the possibility of ethnic unity, the future of ethnic minorities in Myanmar, and the roles that Aung San and ethnic minority leaders had played. The NLD had its very own myth of Panglong, reifying the role of General Aung San - which in reality was limited - and highlighting the “spirit of Panglong”, the emergence of ethnic unity that would bring peace, stability, and prosperity to Myanmar. The NLD’s version of the narrative argued that the military had betrayed the Panglong agreement and thus destroyed the spirit of ethnic unity, paying little attention to the fact that only three of the major ethnic groups of Myanmar were present at the meeting and that even those groups present were not fully united (Walton 2008). The NLD believed that ethnic unity, and therefore peace, could be achieved by a change of government, specifically – of course – if the new government was under the leadership of the NLD, which in turn was under the leadership of Aung San’s daughter. Party historian Monywa Aung Shin echoed this sentiment in his history of the NLD, writing in section 454 titled “The Panglong Agreement and Ethnic Nationalities”:

“The Panglong Agreement is the dream and spirit of all ethnic people in Myanmar. It is the representation of all ethnic groups. It is a contract that includes self-administration, self-determination, and the basic essence of the genuine federal democratic union that people are seeking nowadays. Successive dictators neglected the Panglong Agreement written under the leadership of General Aung San. They even made some criticisms and mocked it” (Monywa Aung Shin 2016, section 454, OT).

The NLD thus internalised an extremely simplified view of addressing ethnic grievances that relied on three misconceptions. Firstly, even leading NLD politicians did not have a nuanced understanding of the different ethnic minority groups, their histories, cultures, ambitions, grievances, and their relationships with one another. Secondly, NLD politicians believed that a strong leader like Aung San Suu Kyi would be able to bring forth “ethnic unity” simply by the virtue of being a great leader as this echoed the party’s understanding of Aung San’s role at Panglong. Third, the NLD argued that this would only work if Aung San Suu Kyi had the authority to lead a new Panglong process, in other words if the NLD was in government. This simplified perception of the peace process inevitably fostered extreme cleavages between the reasons and expectations for the peace process in the NLD and in ethnic political parties respectively. Ethnic political parties and ethnic armed groups stressed the need for more federal rights that would give them greater control over their states and regions. The NLD wanted to establish peace but viewed this as a necessary step towards greater economic development rather than as a way of improving ethnic minority rights.

Yangon Region MP Khin Maung Win told me “No country invests in a country with turmoil. No tourist will visit such a place. Therefore, domestic peace is critical for our country’s economic development” (Khin Maung Win 2019, AI). While the perceptions of the peace process and the question of ethnic minority rights were diverse in the NLD there was a frequent sentiment that framed ethnic minority groups as unruly children that had to be protected by their parent, the NLD. NLD MP Hla Htay told me

“They [ethnic people] hate the Bamar. [...] They think that they have been oppressed, discriminated against, and murdered and that this continues to this day. We are trying to counter these prejudices and our leader is also trying to celebrate by holding the 21st century Panglong conference. But while we are trying there are attempts to ruin the current achievements based on existing prejudices” (Hla Htay 2019, AI).

This sentiment that ethnic minority groups were undermining the peace process the NLD was fighting for was often supplemented by blaming ethnic minority groups for not being organised homogenously. NLD MP Aye Mya Mya Myo argued

“In Mon [State] there are four Mon ethnic parties. In Rakhine [State] also. They want to cooperate with each other. But now they are also divided into two parties. It is the same everywhere, take Shan State, there are so many armed groups, and they are themselves divided. How can our party welcome every party, every divided party? In Shan State there are two Shan parties, SNLD and SNDP. Although they are the same ethnicity they cannot work together” (Aye Mya Mya Myo 2019, AI).

After the 2015 election, the NLD realised, maybe for the first time, how diverse and fragmented ethnicity was lived in practice in Myanmar. Overwhelmed by this realisation the party blamed ethnic minority groups for their lack of unity. Often this criticism was accompanied by suggestive comments that questioned the commitment of ethnic minority groups to democracy. One NLD MP told me “They [ethnic minority parties] are saying that they aim for democracy, and they claim to be democrats. But are they really cooperating with the NLD, the democratic party? No, they are not” (Anonymous 2019, AI).

As I have noted above perceptions of ethnic minorities and ethnic minority parties in the NLD were diverse. Some NLD politicians I talked to wanted stronger alliances with ethnic parties and were frustrated with their party leadership’s decision to refrain from joining an alliance with ethnic political parties ahead of the 2015 elections (see chapter three for more details). Yet, the understanding of the term “alliance” was contested in the party. For some NLD politicians an alliance did not mean partnership but rather the integration of ethnic political parties into the NLD. One NLD CEC member told me:

“We wanted ethnic groups to join and function within the NLD because the NLD has been a league since its foundation. We think of ourselves as a pearl necklace. We want Rakhine, Kachin, and all others to join the NLD and demand ethnic rights as members of the NLD. [...] Therefore, we never had any collaboration with other alliances [referring to the United Nationalities Alliance, an alliance of ethnic minority parties that was allied with the NLD] and we do not have an intention to have them in the future” (Anonymous 2019, AI).

This sentiment was insulting to the leaders of ethnic minority parties who had supported the NLD after the 1990 elections, who had formed the CRPP together with the NLD, and who had supported the party when it decided not to contest in the 2010 elections. Sai Nyunt Lwin, vice-chairman of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy told me “He [name redacted by author, referring to the person who made the statement in the previous quote] forgot about the CRPP, about the Bo Aung Kyaw street statement. There is nothing in his head, it creates many difficulties for all ethnic parties” (Sai Nyunt Lwin 2019, AI). I asked ethnic party leaders whether they had thought of their alliance with the NLD as a partnership or whether they had realised that for some NLD politicians an alliance would ultimately mean the integration of ethnic political parties into the NLD. Pu Gin Kam Lian, secretary general of the Zomi Congress for Democracy, affirmed that the NLD had at times suggested party integration. He explained to me why this had never been an option for his party: “If we integrated into the NLD, we would have to follow its policy. If we stand as our own party, we raise our voices by ourselves. [...] We never intended to entirely integrate our parties into the NLD” (Pu Gin Kam Lian 2019, AI). Pu Gin Kam Lian was, however, not surprised that some NLD politicians thought about alliances as a means of party integration. He noted “We formed an alliance back when we were fighting against a common enemy, like Russia and the United States formed an alliance when they fought the Nazis during WWII. After that they went on with their own policies. This is how it is” (Pu Gin Kam Lian 2019, AI).

However, a shift seemed to occur in the NLD when I interviewed party members in 2018 and 2019. Many NLD politicians I talked to realised that ethnic grievances were

important in their own right and that addressing them was not just necessary in the pursuit of economic development. These NLD politicians understood that the NLD could not create the mythical spirit of Panglong unity that I described above but that the NLD would have to engage in meaningful cooperation with ethnic political parties. Nan Khin Htwe Myint, the NLD Chief Minister of Kayin State, told me “Who would want to come if we say join our party and run [for the election]. We must understand that ethnic people want to join elections by representing their ethnic party” (Nan Khin Htwe Myint 2019, AI). Especially younger NLD politicians often had more nuanced understandings of ethnicity in Myanmar and the political objectives of ethnic minority groups. The approach of the party’s leadership, however, continued to be influenced not only by the political prioritisation of reconciliation with the military over the advancement of ethnic rights but also informed by the NLD’s myth of Panglong and the notion that alliances were of little use if they did not lead to greater unity in the form integrating ethnic political parties into the NLD.

5.8. Chapter conclusions

In this chapter I have analysed the empirical beliefs and values that constitute the framework of the NLD’s political actions as a party. My aim here was twofold. Firstly, I wanted to show how the values and empirical beliefs of the NLD contributed to creating a party of undemocratic democrats. Secondly, I assessed how the empirical beliefs and values that the NLD holds were shaped by the condition of oppression by the military regime²⁸ and internal features of the party. I have pursued these aims bearing in mind that political

²⁸ These two objectives have also defined the scope of this chapter. Importantly, I did not try and present a comprehensive account of the NLD’s culture. Such an account would have touched on many other aspects, including the role religion plays inside the party, the party’s perception of Buddhist nationalism, and cleavages that we can assume to exist in any larger political organisation, such as potential divides between young and old members or between men and women. However, I have opted not to discuss these aspects here because they did not play a role in the answers my interviewees gave when I explored the questions of values and beliefs in the NLD, the coexistence of democratic and undemocratic ideas and the role of the military regime in shaping political culture in the NLD. This is not to suggest that they might not very well be relevant for these questions. Indeed, I expect them to speak to these questions in different ways but exploring these themes of political culture in the NLD was beyond the scope of this work.

parties are not unitary actors. NLD MP Lwin Ko Latt highlighted the way experiences differed among NLD members, telling me “There were many people [in the NLD] that were imprisoned but the experiences we had in prison were different” (Lwin Ko Latt 2019, AI). I have tried my best to showcase the nuances of the different values and empirical beliefs that exist in the NLD although I must expect to have failed in doing all the nuances justice.

Oppression shaped the party significantly by creating a specific set of experiences that characterised the political socialisation of NLD politicians. NLD politicians who remained with the party throughout the 1990s and 2000s had to weather social and economic isolation and in most instances long prison sentences. The constant fear of these dire consequences paired with the threat of the criminalisation of the party led to the development of a set of values that became central to the NLD: unity, discipline, and loyalty. I have called these values the principles of opposition because the party institutionalised them as their core values to ensure the NLD’s survival in the authoritarian system. These values in turn had an important impact on the NLD’s understanding of democracy, that focused on unity and discipline rather than on the notion of rights. I showed that the NLD’s understanding of democracy would be aptly characterised as delayed democracy. The party’s propagation of delaying “proper” democracy in favour of a discipline-centric understanding of democracy is a direct result of the political conditions of the hybrid political system. In short, the NLD argued that proper democracy could only be implemented after the influence of the military had been curtailed further rather than advancing democracy through the propagation of “full” democracy. This line of thinking was also strongly influenced by the self-perception that the NLD lacked the political capacity for “proper” democracy because it had not been able to focus on party and capacity building under the military regime. The NLD advanced a similar argument in relation to the general population, positing that Myanmar’s citizens were not yet ready to be granted full democratic rights

because they lacked the discipline that the party deemed necessary for what it considered proper civic conduct.

These beliefs illustrate what is possibly the central effect of military authoritarianism on the development of a pro-democratic party, namely the idea that democracy needed to be advanced by – in part – undemocratic means. This idea manifested itself in the NLD in a multitude of ways. To advance democracy the NLD fostered principles that ensured the survival of the party, conscious of the fact that principles such as unity and discipline were not in line with the internal democratic practices many in the party found desirable. In its fight for democracy the NLD also relied on a leadership cult around Aung San Suu Kyi to compensate a perceived lack of capacity in the party and in the general population. The duality of the NLD's political culture is also evident in its approach of democracy, which combines a theoretical understanding that highlights liberal rights with the belief that limiting these rights is necessary in the short term. For the NLD, combining support and opposition to democracy was therefore natural.

Internal features of the party are often characterised by a similarly perplexing duality. The NLD fought for decades to retrench military influence while upholding a favourable view of the military as an institution. Throughout the NLD's existence the party called for the removal of the military from government, yet at the same time it propagated dialogue and reconciliation rather than punitive justice. To achieve its political goals the NLD had built meaningful alliances with ethnic political parties and advocated on their behalf, yet it had a very limited understanding of ethnic grievances. These aspects of the NLD's political culture were not created through external conditions but have their origin in the party itself. In line with the analysis in chapter four this confirms the idea that an explanation of the genesis of the NLD as a party of undemocratic democrats cannot rely

on accounting for external factors alone but rather must involve the consideration of the interplay of internal and external factors.

Undemocratic democrats in government: the NLD 2016-2021

“I used to hate the authoritarian nature I now observe in the party, and I still do. Therefore, democracy means freedom to me. But I do not want freedom that harms others. I do not mean the discipline-flourishing freedom that we know in Myanmar. [...] Daw Aung San Suu Kyi often says that she dislikes that decisions are made by one single person in the Tatmadaw despite the three million people that belong to it. We are facing a similar situation in the party. I do not like it” (NLD MP in the Yangon Region Parliament Sandar Min 2019, AI).

6.1. The NLD in government

In the run up to the 2015 general election, the NLD campaigned on a broad platform. In her message to the electorate – included at the very beginning of the NLD’s election manifesto – Aung San Suu Kyi asserted that “our people know that despite facing many difficulties, persecution and dangers, the NLD has always stood firmly for democracy, human rights and the establishment of a federal union” (NLD 2015). Despite the apparent lack of the ability to do so, even as a majority government, the NLD vowed to change the constitution, a programmatic point that was deemed unrealistic by observers, even in the euphoric setting of the run-up to the 2015 general election (Emont 2015; Fisher 2015; Lintner 2015). In contrast to the NLD’s later political decisions the party aimed to change the constitution “to be in accordance with basic human rights and democratic standards [...] [and] to defend and protect the equal rights of citizens” (NLD 2015).

The NLD secured a landslide victory, winning 77.9% of the 327 seats it contested in the Lower House and 80% of the 168 seats it contested in Upper House¹ (Maung

¹ The Lower House has 440 seats, and the Upper House has 224 seats in total. The military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won just 9% of seats in the Lower House and 7% in the Upper House. Furthermore, the NLD won majorities in eleven of the 14 regional and state assemblies (Maung Thawngmung 2016).

Thawngmung 2016). Due to a provision in the constitution that prohibited the spouses of partners with a foreign nationality and/or with children with a foreign nationality to become president, Aung San Suu Kyi could not assume what the constitution deemed the highest political office in the country. A close confidante of Aung San Suu Kyi, Htin Kyaw, was thus selected as president and it was widely expected that Aung San Suu Kyi would make policy “through him”. Htin Kyaw was elected as the president by 360 of a total 652 MPs in the Union Parliament on 15 March 2016. Two days later he introduced his cabinet, notably with Aung San Suu Kyi assuming control of four ministries, the Ministry of the President’s Office, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Electric Power and Energy.

However, in its first act of business the newly formed NLD government introduced a bill to create the position of state counsellor², a political office above the president that would not be bound by the constitution. The bill passed both houses of parliament at the beginning of April 2016 and became a law on 6 April 2016. The law explicitly mentioned Aung San Suu Kyi and outlined a number of key priorities such as the cultivation of a multi-party democratic system, the establishment of a federal union, the establishment of domestic peace and development, and the implementation of a market economy system (Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Law No. 26/2016).

Aung San Suu Kyi consequently relinquished her roles as minister of education and minister of electric power and energy and could now lead the government openly. The setup was as perfect as it could have been under the 2008 constitution, as Carlos Sardiña Galache noted in his 2020 book *The Burmese Labyrinth*: “As state counsellor, Suu Kyi had to report

² The bill was the brainchild of Ko Ni, a lawyer who by then had served as a legal advisor to Aung San Suu Kyi for several years. He was subsequently tasked by the party with finding ways to circumvent those sections of the constitution that made constitutional amendment – and further retrenchment of military influence – impossible and was assassinated in broad daylight on 29 January 2017. For more information see chapter five.

to the parliament instead of the president, and thus she served as a bridge between the executive and the legislature; and by retaining control over the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, she guaranteed that she would have a seat on the eleven-member National Defence and Security Council” (Sardiña Galache 2020, p. 233). The creation of the position was a major success for the NLD but antagonised the military, which was forced to accept that its power had been undermined to some extent (Holmes 2016; McLaughlin 2016).

Despite the NLD’s strong position, most importantly including a majority in both houses of parliament, that allowed the NLD to make and unmake legislation at the party’s leisure as long as the new legislation did not touch on the constitution, the party’s image changed rapidly soon after the NLD took office³. This change was the result of several political decisions that defined the NLD’s term in office. Firstly, the NLD turned away from human rights and vocally supported the Rohingya genocide the military committed. Secondly, the NLD developed an increasingly difficult relationship with freedom of speech and refrained from repealing legislation that limited it. Third, the NLD continued the military’s approach to the peace process, alienating many of its former allies. Fourth, while the hybrid regime had made Myanmar more democratic, the NLD became less democratic, centralising its structure and reducing levels of intra-party democracy.

In the previous chapters, I have highlighted how external conditions of party development – most importantly military oppression – and internal features shaped particular intermediary outcomes. These intermediary outcomes are vital for understanding the party’s commitment to democracy and its opposition to democracy. However, so far, I

³ However, it is important to note that this shift did not occur in Myanmar. Until 2016 the view of the NLD within Myanmar and abroad was the same, regarding the party as the democratic opposition to a violent military regime that would thus naturally make Myanmar more democratic once it rose to power. This view persisted in Myanmar throughout the party’s term in office from 2016 to 2021 except for critical voices from ethnic and religious minority groups, some party of Myanmar’s civil society, and journalists. When reading the following passages about the defining moments of the NLD between 2016 and 2021 it is therefore useful to keep in mind that the party eventually still won 83% of the seats in both houses of parliament in the 2020 elections.

have not explicitly focused on the “final” outcomes⁴ in terms of party development and the “final” outcomes of party development up until 2021.

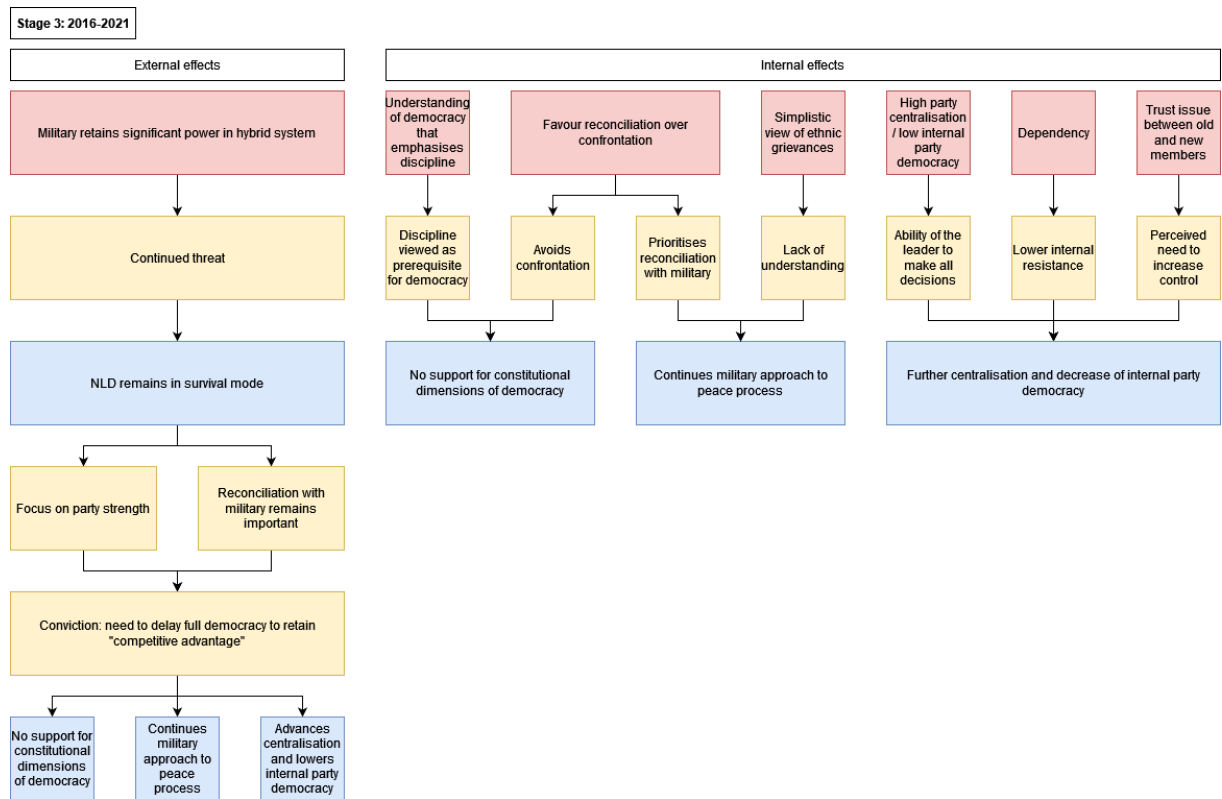


Figure 13: the government stage. Causes in red, causal processes in yellow, and outcomes in blue.

By 2016 the NLD was characterised by several important features. The NLD had developed its own understanding of democracy. This understanding of democracy had been advanced by the party’s leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, and was rooted in the context of Buddhist political thought (Walton 2017). Initially, it combined the importance of rights with the need for discipline and the party propagated both aspects throughout the late 1990s and the 2000s. Until the party came to power its penchant for discipline had remained relatively unobserved. However, the principles by which the party had survived throughout its time in opposition – unity, discipline, and loyalty⁵ – left their mark on the NLD’s

⁴ The term “final” refers to the final outcomes that I am observing in this thesis due to its research design. Naturally, these outcomes are not the final outcomes in the NLD’s development as the party continues to exist and develop.

⁵ See chapter five for details.

understanding of democracy⁶. In the view of the NLD, discipline and unity became preconditions for democracy much in the same way they had been the preconditions for the party's survival. As I have shown in chapter five, many NLD leaders viewed their fellow party politicians and the Myanmar's population as too immature for full democracy. In other words, the NLD viewed them as lacking the necessary discipline.

Reconciliation over confrontation had long been established as the party's guiding principle for engagement with the military due to several party splits and the rise of Aung San Suu Kyi to supreme leader of the party. Military oppression and the focus on a single leader had also increasingly centralised the NLD. Moreover, oppression had made some NLD members dependent on the party and the party's principles for assessing its own members – formed in response to military oppression – caused a lack of trust between old members and new members in a party that was growing exponentially ahead of the 2015 elections. The NLD's alliances with ethnic political parties had fostered the impression that the NLD had a good grasp of ethnic grievances and would advance a more effective approach to building peace in the country, but simplistic views of ethnic concerns⁷ had continued to exist unchallenged in the party.

At the same time, the military's continued power in the hybrid system it had created posed a threat to the NLD. The party consequently remained in survival mode, focusing on increasing the party's strength and advancing reconciliation with the military. In this setting, the NLD argued that delaying full democracy constituted a competitive advantage. In other words, the NLD argued that advance democracy in the future, it would have to be undemocratic in the present.

⁶ See chapter five for details.

⁷ See chapter five for details.

Protecting and expanding freedom of speech would have made it harder to counter criticism of the party and a more democratic internal structure would have made the NLD harder to control, so the party argued. Moreover, the NLD concluded that defending human rights might weaken the support for the party in the population and antagonise the military.

The different external and internal causes shaped the politics of the NLD in government, determining its approach to freedom of speech, human rights, and the organisation of the party itself. In the following sections I will analyse the NLD's position on human rights, freedom of speech, the peace process, and the organisation of the party during its time in government. I will then show that the party's actions do not present a radical shift in NLD's platform but constitute explainable outcomes of the party's development since the NLD had become a party of undemocratic democrats who believed that undemocratic decisions were necessary to advance democracy.

6.2. No place for human rights: the NLD's response to the Rohingya genocide

Despite the party's continuous popularity with voters the defining moment in the NLD's term in government was the party's stance on the Rohingya genocide, which was carried out by the armed forces in Western Rakhine State between October 2016 and September 2017. On 9 October 2016 Rohingya insurgents under the banner of the newly formed Harakah Al-Yakin (Faith Movement)⁸ attacked the headquarters of the Border Guard Police⁹ (BGP) near the town of Maungdaw and two positions of security forces in the townships of Maungdaw and Rathedaung. Nine members of the security forces were killed in the attack and dozens of insurgents were shot. The armed forces immediately responded with brute force, declaring the three northernmost townships of Rakhine State "military

⁸ Later also referred to as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA)

⁹ The Border Guard Police is under the control of the military.

operation areas” and launching a “clearance operation”. During the operations, the military and the BGP committed a string of atrocities, “including burning whole villages to the ground, arbitrary detentions, execution of civilians, and the gang rape of Rohingya women. Within just a few weeks, 80,000 Rohingya had fled to Bangladesh” (Sardiña Galache 2020, p. 249). Over 700,000 Rohingya fled to neighbouring Bangladesh before the military’s clearance operations were concluded in January 2017 and remain in camps there at the time of writing.

It was clear that the NLD government had no responsibility for the military’s scorched-earth campaign since the military is not under civilian oversight. However, politicians in the West, many of whom had endorsed the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi strongly up until now, hoped that the NLD government would facilitate aid, help international organisations with their investigations, and repeal laws that had marginalised the Rohingya in Myanmar for decades.

The NLD, however, reiterated the talking points of the military and defended the “clearance operations”. On 19 September 2016, when approximately 430,000 Rohingya had already fled to Bangladesh, Aung San Suu Kyi tried to smooth over the atrocities in a speech to foreign diplomats and the media. She echoed the military’s claim that the “clearance operations” had been concluded on 5 September despite contradicting satellite images that showed villages that had been burned after (Sardiña Galache 2020, p. 262). Aung San Suu Kyi’s official Facebook page with over 2,000,000 followers also reiterated many of the military’s talking points, going as far as publishing a post titled “Fake Rape” that tried to “rebuke” the stories of Rohingya rape survivors (Fisher 2017). The NLD’s role in the Rohingya genocide came into increased focus when Aung San Suu Kyi decided to personally lead the delegation of Myanmar in the court proceedings that had been brought against Myanmar in front of the International Court of Justice by The Gambia in 2019.

Few Myanmar scholars were surprised by the NLD's decision to publicly support the genocide perpetrated at the hands of the military. The deep seated anti-Rohingya and anti-Muslim sentiment in Myanmar, born in colonial times and entrenched for nearly a hundred years, meant that any move that could be interpreted to be in support of the minority was politically deeply unpopular¹⁰. The NLD had taken this into account before when the party had decided to not field any Muslim candidates in the 2015 elections to pacify ultra-nationalist Buddhists. Consecutive military governments had nurtured a strand of Burman-nationalism that had considerable influence on Myanmar's society. While the NLD was condemned in the West for failing to speak up for the Rohingya, in Myanmar the party's stance was often considered not hard enough. Media outlets that supported the military would, for example, reprint pictures of Aung San Suu Kyi visiting Muslim businesses to generate the perception that the NLD was close to the religious minority and thus to lessen the party's popularity with voters. Interestingly, the NLD's support of the military's genocidal campaigns also did not bring it closer to the military, which was not pleased at the NLD's increased popularity (Roewer 2019a).

Another important factor informing the party's stance was the deep seated anti-Rohingya sentiment that several senior NLD leaders harboured. In 2017, Radio Free Asia journalist Khin Maung Soe interviewed Nyan Win, an influential NLD politician about the persecution of the Rohingya. When asked what he thought of the events in Rakhine State Nyan Win argued that the "Bengalis came to live and work in Rakhine State. But they were not merely living, they began to terrorise" (Nyan Win in Khin Maung Soe 2017, OT). By referring to the Rohingya as Bengali, Nyan Win negated the groups' ethnic identity and

¹⁰ The general anti-Rohingya sentiment is mirrored in the term national race (*taingyintha*), which is used in Myanmar as a general category for the 135 distinct ethnicities that the Myanmar government officially recognises as belonging to Myanmar. The Rohingya belong to one of the ethnic groups that are not recognised as a "national race", a status that has fuelled the persecution of the minority. For more information see Cheesman, N. (2017) "How in Myanmar "National Races" Came to Surpass Citizenship and Exclude Rohingya," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol. 47, no. 3, pp. 461-483.

painted them as migrants rather than natives of Arakan¹¹, that they are. When asked what he thought about the term Rohingya Nyan Win responded

“The Rohingya are proposed to be an ethnicity. This is not totally right. This is not an emotional response. [...] There is no such kind of Bengali, with that kind of face and complexion, in Myanmar. You can clearly see it. Thus, I think that the use of the word “Rohingya” is violating our local affairs and sovereignty” (Nyan Win in Khin Maung Soe 2017, OT).

Although the NLD was not responsible for the atrocities the military committed in Rakhine State, the party’s stance was not limited to echoing the military’s propaganda. It also blocked the discussion of legislative reform that could have alleviated some of the Rohingya’s problems. When Khin Maung Soe asked Aung San Suu Kyi whether it would be possible to amend the 1982 citizenship law – a law that greatly contributes to the criminalisation of the Rohingya – Aung San Suu Kyi responded “Whether a law should be amended or not is only concerned with the parliament. The parliament is made up of representatives who were elected by the people so they must make this decision” (Aung San Suu Kyi in Khin Maung Soe 2017, OT). The real position of the party was quite different. One MP told me “We cannot touch the Rakhine case in parliament, we cannot ask questions, we cannot discuss it” (Anonymous 2019, AI).

When I asked NLD members to explain the NLD’s course of action vis-à-vis the party’s democratic platform and its focus on human rights I was often given two explanations. One cited the electorate and the importance of continuing to win elections, echoing the statement the military had made for decades in the state media. One MP told me that “she [Aung San Suu Kyi] knows that our public is not mature yet. [...] Myanmar citizens, the majority of us, we cannot accept the Rohingya yet. [Her actions] are not because of the military but because of electoral politics” (Anonymous 2018, AI). The other

¹¹ Arakan denotes the cultural and historic zone that includes contemporary Rakhine State.

explanation hinted at the restrictions the party faced in a setting in which the military continued to hold significant power. Pyone Kathy Naing, an NLD lawmaker and part of the Myanmar delegation that briefed the Human Rights Council in Geneva on Myanmar's perspective in the Rakhine crisis, explained

“Countries in the West [...] feel that the NLD and the lady [Aung San Suu Kyi] are reluctant to talk these days after the Rakhine crisis. [...] It is not that she [Aung San Suu Kyi] tried to soften the blow against those who may be responsible for engaging in human rights abuses in Rakhine State. [...] But sometimes she has very little room for play. Democratic transition, economic transition, the peace process, and the Rakhine crisis are all part of the same balance. Myanmar must be able to move on all at the same time” (Pyone Kathy Naing 2018, AI).

The Rohingya genocide shaped the NLD in two ways. Firstly, the party became a pariah in the West. This is significant because the party had always enjoyed strong support in democratic countries around the world and was not used to criticism. This resulted in a reorientation of the NLD, which now increasingly courted India and China as partners (Chan Mya Htwe 2019; Kipgen 2019; Mazumdar 2017; Shoon Naing and Lewis 2019), much like the military had done when stiff economic sanctions had been in place. Secondly, the Rohingya genocide provided the first opportunity for the NLD to put its human rights rhetoric into practice while in government but showed clearly that the party's commitment to human rights was extremely limited. As I have shown in the previous chapters, the lack of commitment was not the result of a sudden political change but the result of the party's approach to advancing democracy, which rested on preserving its own power and the retrenchment of military power rather than the strengthening of individual rights. The fierce criticism the NLD and its leader received in the wake of the Rohingya genocide prompted the party to double down on its approach to democratisation, further entrenching the idea that the NLD at times had to be undemocratic to advance democracy, a dynamic I will explore in depth in section six of this chapter.

6.3. Freedom of speech no more

The narrow focus on democracy as retrenching military influence became apparent in the party's stance on other issues too. The Thein Sein administration (2010-2015) had been lauded for increasing freedom of speech through a series of measures, most importantly fading out pre-publication censorship, which had previously mandated all publications to be submitted for government approval before publication. The USDP had also pushed through a new telecommunications law to regulate private telecommunications companies that were increasing significantly in number and reach as the mobile network was expanded and the ownership of SIM cards was deregulated (and the price significantly reduced). When the parliament passed the new law in 2013 it made few headlines (Soe Than Lynn 2013). Yet, the law contained a provision that became a litmus test for the NLD's commitment to free speech. Article 66(d) stipulates that "Anyone found guilty of extorting, coercing, restraining wrongfully, defaming, disturbing, causing undue influence or threatening any person by using any telecommunications network shall be punished with a maximum three years in prison, a fine or both" (Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Law No. 31/2013). The broad provision, likely included to allow for silencing critics of the government, was exploited comparatively little under the USDP administration, with a total of 11 cases. After the NLD took office cases for defamation suits began to spike, no doubt influenced by the exponential increase of cell phone ownership and social media use in Myanmar. Within the first year of the NLD's term, the article had been put to use 62 times¹²(Htike Nanda Win 2017).

Most suits were filed on the grounds of defamation and 100% of cases led to a conviction (saynoto66d 2019). A report found that "51% of complaints are closely related to government, at least 31% of complainants receive salaries as state employees and 23%

¹² Between 2016 and 2019, Article 66(d) was used 210 times.

are public officials [...]” (Htike Nanda Win 2017). Article 66(d) became a pressing political issue for the NLD that had campaigned for free speech for decades. As the party was slow to respond, individual NLD lawmakers tried to voice their concerns in parliament but were blocked by their own party (The Irrawaddy 2017). In August 2017, the party moved to amend the law but did not repeal it. The amendment ensured that judges were permitted to release accused parties on bail and that only those directly affected by an offence or those with permission of an affected person could press charges under the law. The maximum sentence of three years in prison was reduced to two years. The article thus remained far from toothless, and the numbers of charges continued to rise.

Senior members of the party explained the party’s decision not to repeal the law with the NLD’s difficult relationship with the armed forces; a relationship which would increasingly determine the party’s actions during its time in government¹³.

“We did not want to create a direct opposition to the military because we are in the middle of the national reconciliation process. When I say the military, I am not only referring to the armed forces. It has the supervision of everything: the police force; the prison department; and the military has businesses and some industrial muscles. The banknotes are made by the military, and we [the civilian government] cannot exactly know how many notes are printed” (Dr Myo Nyunt 2019, AI).

Yet, the move to refrain from repealing the law and the fact that several NLD politicians used Article 66(d) to silence critics of their own¹⁴ surprised even some of the party’s own lawmakers. One NLD lawmaker told me “When they [the NLD] came to power I thought the first thing, the first law, they would eradicate in 2016 would be the Telecommunications Law [Article 66(d)]. But they were silent again. [...] We [the lawmaker

¹³ I am analysing this dynamic in greater detail further down in this chapter.

¹⁴ For example, NLD Chief Minister for the Yangon Region Phyo Min Thein sued Than Htut Aung, the Chief Executive Officer of Eleven Media Group, and Wai Phyo, the Chief Editor of the Daily Eleven newspaper, over a column that had suggested that Phyo Min Thein had received a designer watch in exchange for approving a development project. For more examples see Abrahamian, A. (2017), ‘Article 66(d): A menace to Myanmar’s democracy’, *Lowry Institute*, 1 August. Available at: [<https://www.lowryinstitute.org/the-interpreter/article-66d-menace-myanmar-s-democracy>].

and some like-minded lawmakers] did not agree. [...] But we are party members, so we have to obey” (Anonymous 2019, AI). Another NLD lawmaker echoed the frustration: “Even though we did not like it, we unhappily still passed the motion in the Hluttaw. Burmese politics is very confusing. Even as an MP, I cannot understand it. Sometimes we cannot do what we believe in. [...] I do not like many politicians, including MPs, using that article to sue members of the public” (Anonymous 2018, AI).

The NLD’s decision to refrain from repealing Article 66(d) illustrates the increasingly difficult relationship with freedom of expression and the right to alternative information that characterised the NLD’s term in office. The difficult relationship of the party with an ideal that had once been one of the NLD’s guiding principles was reflected in an answer Pe Myint, then Minister of Information in the NLD’s government, gave when I asked him about his stance on the matter:

“I believe in freedom of expression, always. [...] [But] people are not used to having freedom of expression because they did not have it for several decades. Now that they got freedom, and especially with the tools of social media [...] some people are exposing themselves, and some people are saying things they would not usually say. So, the negative effects of this freedom have negative effects on other people as well as on those people who enjoy this freedom. That is why there has been litigation against people [...]” (Pe Myint 2019, AI).

Pe Myint’s statement was not unreasonable. After all, freedom of expression does not exist in a legal vacuum in any democratic country and there are considerable differences in its implementation across consolidated democracies. The NLD, however, had for decades campaigned for freedom of speech, highlighting time and time again how the SLORC and the SPDC government were lying to the public and infantilising constituents. The party had espoused a principled stand that it changed rapidly after it formed a government. Moreover, it justified its actions in much the same way the military had done, by infantilising Myanmar’s population.

The NLD's unease with protecting freedom of expression also became apparent through the arrest of the two Reuters journalists, Kyaw Soe Oo and Wa Lone, in December 2017. The duo had been investigating the Inn Din massacre, during which military soldiers had executed ten Rohingya. Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were arrested after police officers had presented them with documents supposedly relevant to their investigation. The two reporters were charged with possessing classified documents in violation of the colonial-era Official Secrets Act and sentenced to seven years in prison. Despite international attention and the NLD's legacy, the party and its leadership made no statements of support for the two journalists. Staying true to form, the NLD's stance on its failure to protect freedom of expression rested on pointing the finger at the military's influence. "Considering the military cooperation, we have to be careful [...]. In the case of the Reuters' reporters, I explained that they should not pressure us to release them soon. The more they pressured us, the more difficult the release got" (Dr Myo Nyunt 2019, AI). President Win Myint eventually did provide a pardon, albeit only in May 2019. It is not clear what motivated the party's decision. In any case, few things made the NLD's increasing disregard for media freedom as clear as the party's own most recent election manifesto, published ahead of the 2020 general election. In its new manifesto, the party made no mention of the commitments to information and media freedom that were a cornerstone of its previous manifestos (Liu and Kyaw Soe Htet 2020).

6.4. The stalled peace process and the NLD's approach to national reconciliation

When the NLD formed a government in 2016, Aung San Suu Kyi's administration inherited a recent peace effort by the USDP government. The USDP government had managed to sign on eight ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) to its Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) on 15 October 2015¹⁵. The NCA was deeply problematic primarily because only

¹⁵ For the full text of the NCA see:
[https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/MM_151510_NCAAgreement.pdf].

two signatory groups, the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) were major EAOs with considerable fighting power. Two further small groups, the New Mon State Party, and the Lahu Democratic Union, were permitted to join the agreement in 2018. Yet, this did not alter the fact that the agreement was anything but nationwide. As veteran journalist Bertil Lintner put it “Ten ethnic groups signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. More than 80 percent of Burma’s ethnic combatants, however, have not” (Lintner 2020). The second problem of the NCA was that it did not establish an effective process for extending and consolidating peace. As Myanmar observer David Mathieson pointed out, “The actual text of the NCA isn’t problematic. It was the implementation that doomed the agreement, the skeins of committees, procedures, sequencing, the impossibility of having so many diverse armed groups with quixotic leaders and questionable legitimacy, within a milieu of so many other rapid changes in Myanmar” (Mathieson 2021). The NCA did not provide effective avenues for discussing, let alone implementing, the changes - many centred around issues of federalism - that would have compelled more EAOs to lay down their arms.

The NLD had included establishing peace as a primary objective of its future administration in its 2015 election manifesto. Among other things, the manifesto stated that “The following actions will be taken for ethnic affairs and internal peace: [...] 2. Strive for the establishment of a genuine federal democratic union based on the principles of freedom, equal rights, and self-determination” (NLD 2015). The NLD’s legacy as the major political opponent of the military and the way the party had talked about future peace efforts gave the impression that the NLD would break with the USDP’s approach; that it would move beyond striving for the absence of violence towards a genuine national reconciliation process that would address the grievances of Myanmar’s ethnic minorities¹⁶. In reality the

¹⁶ In her foreword to the 2015 election manifesto, Aung San Suu Kyi wrote “In establishing a democratic federal union, the NLD will hold firmly to the goal of national reconciliation” (NLD 2015).

NLD's approach did not reflect these nuances. The party did not alter the peace process but simply opted to rebrand it as the 21st Century Panglong Process to connect the party's undertaking with the efforts by General Aung San prior to Burmese independence. The move highlighted the party's Bamar-centrism and displayed a surprising degree of tone-deafness considering that General Aung San's significance in the initial Panglong conference remains disputed (Walton 2008) and that he is chiefly revered by Bamar citizens. Mathieson summarised the development of the NLD's approach to peace, stating that "on gaining power, she [Aung San Suu Kyi] talked peace as a priority and then failed to articulate a credible plan, barely met with ethnic leaders or their counties, and very soon her approach to peace was one in synchronicity with the military: capitulate and sign, with no negotiations or concessions" (Mathieson in O'Connor 2018).

Adopting the military's approach was especially damning in the face of excessive fighting between the military and EAOs in several states during the NLD's time in office. Yanghee Lee, then at the end of her tenure as UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, wrote in her report

"Conflict has continued to be waged at different times in Kachin, Shan, Kayin, Chin and Rakhine States, with devastating impacts on civilians and the alleged commission of international crimes. This has included armed conflict between the Tatmadaw and ethnic armed organizations, including those who are signatories to the ceasefire agreement, and between ethnic armed organizations. The number of militias allied to or under the command of the Tatmadaw has also grown over the course of the mandate. The prospects for national peace appear to be elusive" (Lee 2020).

The NLD, did not have any words of sympathy for the victims and did not condemn the military for the offences it waged. The party was striving for national reconciliation but approached it as two separate processes. Pe Myint, then minister of information in the NLD's government, explained how he viewed these two paths of national reconciliation:

“My opinion is that we have two reconciliation processes in our country. [...] We are making one reconciliation with the ethnic groups, some of which are armed while others are unarmed. This is federal reconciliation. Another is the reconciliation with the previous regime. Both are necessary for the peaceful progress of our country. Both are essential for building a democratic federal union” (Pe Myint 2019, AI).

However, the NLD focused chiefly on reconciliation with the military, which it viewed as a precondition for any other reconciliation processes¹⁷. This meant that the 21st Century Panglong Process was doomed to remain shallow as the NLD was not willing to make concessions before advancing its reconciliation with the military. The alliances with ethnic political parties that had defined the NLD’s political profile for decades were based on a shared approach to unseating the military rather than a genuine understanding of ethnic concerns on the part of the NLD. When the NLD altered its approach to the military after the 2012 by-elections, the NLD saw little use in alliances with ethnic parties. Moreover, as I detailed in chapter five, the NLD’s time in government showed that the party had a simplistic understanding of ethnic grievances that was coloured by the party’s own version of the myth of Panglong (Walton 2008). Ethnic issues and working together with ethnic representatives overwhelmed the NLD, which had neither the capacity for- nor the interest in a genuinely cooperative relationship¹⁸.

The NLD’s unwillingness to engage cooperatively with ethnic political parties was also evident in the party’s constitution amendment process. Although the amendment process was doomed to fail¹⁹ due to the military’s veto power, the Union Parliament formed the 45-member Joint Parliamentary Committee for Constitutional Amendment (JPCCA) with members of all political parties on 29 January 2019. The committee was tasked with

¹⁷ See chapter five.

¹⁸ See chapter five for details on the NLD’s perception of alliances with ethnic political parties.

¹⁹ The entire process only resulted in three minor constitutional amendments. For a detailed overview of the amendments proposed in bills and the vote on them see https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/Myanmar%202008%20Constitution%20Amendment%20Proposals%20and%20Voting%20Results%20of%20Union%20Parliament_436%20B_Eng.pdf.

producing a report with suggestions for constitution amendments, which eventually included more than 3000 amendment proposals (Zulueta-Fülscher 2020). The committee, however, had been set-up with a majoritarian voting system which meant that the NLD, with the support of small parties, could dismiss or approve proposals as it saw fit.

Neither the USDP nor the military representatives had made any proposals but the vast majority of the over 3000 suggestions had been filed by ethnic political parties. Rather than engaging with these proposals in the committee, the NLD only approved its own 114 proposals for amendment, rendering the committee process obsolete. The JPCCA provided an opportunity for the NLD to build meaningful coalitions and to show, even if just symbolically, that the party viewed ethnic political parties advocating for the rights of ethnic minorities, as equal and valuable partners. Significantly, some of the parties in the JPCCA, like the SNLD, had been members of the Committee Representing People's Parliament²⁰ that the NLD had spearheaded in the late 1990s to form a parallel parliament in the existing military autocracy. The NLD, however, was no longer seriously interested in meaningful partnerships and coalition building²¹ and this negatively influenced the party's approach to ethnic grievances inside and outside the peace process.

6.5. Party organisation and internal party democracy, 2016-2021

In chapter four I analysed how the transformation of the NLD's factions and simultaneous rise of Aung San Suu Kyi to supreme leader of the party made the NLD increasingly monolithic. In this section I will examine how these processes advanced an increasing centralisation of the party that manifested after the NLD's re-entry into politics ahead of the 2012 by-elections. The NLD's centralisation mattered because it enabled the party

²⁰ See chapter three for details.

²¹ See chapter five for details.

leadership to quell dissent over the party's policies and because it lowered the party's level of internal party democracy (IPD).

Several scholars have dismissed the importance of IPD for democratic political parties. Maurice Duverger argued that democratic decision-making processes would weaken political parties because they are less efficient: "Democratic principles demand that leadership at all levels be elective, that it be frequently renewed, collective in character, weak in authority. Organized in this fashion, a party is not well armed for the struggles of politics" (Duverger 1954, p. 134). Other researchers have argued that IPD is important for improving state level democracy. Inge Amundsen argued that political parties ought to be "schools of democracy", "aiming at enhancing citizens' civic skills through voice and participation" (Amundsen 2013, p. 50). Gabriela Borz and Kenneth Janda have noted that "Reduced legitimacy is invoked as the main reason why more attention is given to party internal democracy. This is why various parties make efforts to repair the broken links with the electorate and party members and activists" (Borz and Janda 2020, p. 5).

The NLD's landslide victory in the 2015 election shows that the party did not suffer from broken links with the electorate. However, legitimacy and a close connection to its party members and activists were central concerns of the party. The single-leader dynamic and the way the NLD was operating internally seemed to undermine its stated mission of advancing democracy. Amundsen's arguments that political parties should be "schools of democracy" is of particular importance for the NLD which tried to advance democracy in a setting where most politicians and constituents were not acquainted with its processes and structures, a condition many NLD politicians highlighted as detrimental to the democratisation process²². Where should you learn about democracy if not in the party advocating for it?

²² See chapter five for details.

Yet, rather than strengthening IPD, the NLD leadership deliberately reduced IPD levels in the party between 2016 and 2020. This is evident when considering the three criteria for assessing IPD put forward by Aurel Croissant and Paul Chambers: candidate selection, policy selection, and coalition formation (Croissant and Chamber 2010). The criteria can help us understand a party's inclusiveness and its decentralisation.

6.5.1. The organisational structure of the NLD

Assessing the party's level of IPD requires an understanding of the party's organisation²³. The party's set-up has changed remarkably little since its foundation. The Central Executive Committee (CEC) is the most important organ of the party and usually has between 15 and 21 members. Up to five people belong to the Secretariat that used to be responsible for administering the affairs of the CEC although according to NLD politicians it had no clearly defined function during the party's term in government. Between 2016 and 2021²⁴, the CEC was led by a chairperson, Aung San Suu Kyi, a vice-chairman, Win Myint, and a second vice-chairman, Zaw Myint Maung. The CEC, in combination with a series of topical committees and departments chaired by CEC members, constitutes the central office of the NLD.

²³ The following section draws on Roewer, R. (2019), 'Three Faces of Party Organisation in the National League for Democracy', *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 286-306.

²⁴ The organisation of the party I introduce here refers to the period of the NLD government. Following the 2021 military coup, the party leaders continue in their positions despite their arrests although the task of leading the party currently falls into other hands.

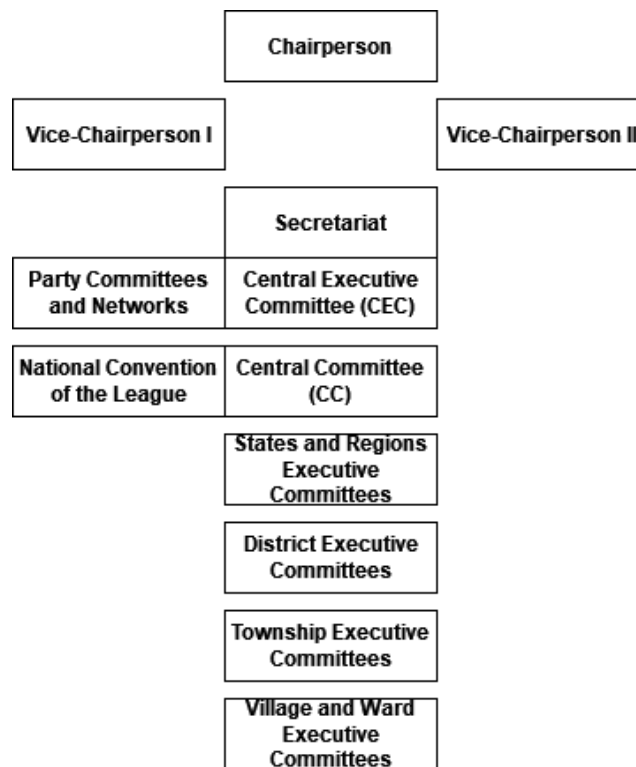


Figure 14: the structure of the NLD

As the hierarchy in the illustration of the party's structure in figure 14 shows, power was concentrated in the positions of the chairperson, the vice-chairpersons, and the CEC. However, their power was strengthened significantly not by the structure enshrined in the party's constitution but by informal rules and procedures. Technically, the 120 members of the Central Committee (CC) should be elected by delegates of the party's township executive committees at the National Convention of the League (NCL), the NLD's party congress. In 2013 this process was still functional, but it was not repeated in 2018 when the party's leadership opted to avoid an election and simply filled the vacant seats itself.

This is significant because the CC can suggest and vote on changes to the party's constitution and because it is tasked with nominating and electing members of the CEC. However, when all of the then 15 seats on the CEC were empty in 2013, candidates for seven of the 15 positions were filled by Aung San Suu Kyi. Since then, all new CEC members have been selected by the party's leadership. These diversions from the party's

own constitution illustrate how the party leadership extended its control over the party between 2012 and 2020²⁵.

6.5.2. Candidate selection

A similar dynamic was evident in the NLD's processes for candidate selection. Finding candidates for internal party positions, parliamentary seats, and government positions was a challenging task for the NLD ahead of the 2015 elections. For years the party had not been able to recruit new members or maintain its party offices across the country because it had been forced into a state of hibernation by the military government.

The party's central office nominated candidates for seats in the two houses of the union parliament and the houses of the state and region parliaments, but its selection was dependent on suggestions from local party offices due to the immense numbers of candidates the party had to field and due to its unparalleled electoral success. At the same time, the central office's capacity for oversight and control was limited, with the office often remaining unresponsive even when complaints were filed at the local level. This semi-guided and semi-controlled space left much room for political manoeuvring that bred a diverse range of possible paths from ordinary NLD member to member of the party in public office. Often the party's central office had no fixed suggestion for the nomination of a candidate. In such cases, it asked the Regional and State Executive Committees, who in turn acted on recommendations from the Township Executive Committee. Moreover, the chairman of a TEC could lobby the party's central office for a candidature effectively. Firstly, because the position serves as a reference that signalled the support of the local electorate since the chairman is elected by the committee. Secondly, because only a handful

²⁵ These practices do not violate the NLD's party constitution because it includes a deliberate loophole to allow these kinds of practices. The relevant section notes "although the elements of this hierarchy must be elected democratically in principle, if required by the circumstances, they shall be formed through democratic negotiation" (Constitution of the NLD).

of people at the central office are responsible for the vetting and selection of candidates, thus elevating the effect of carefully constructed interpersonal relationships.

At times, the candidate selection process amounted to plain corruption. MPs and NLD functionaries told me on request of anonymity that there had been many instances in which someone with the necessary funds had simply bribed his candidacy through all the relevant NLD levels. The party CEC realised that something needed to change. Dr May Win Myint a CEC member told me in 2019

“This is our weak point. We let the township executive committee nominate the representatives. Some people who participate out of self-interest formed groups in the party. [...] Another weakness is the funding of the party. If a person at the township level can support [the party] financially, this person will be popular there. Then they can be selected at the township level and then again at the district level” (Dr May Win Myint, 2019, AI).

The party responded to these issues by centralising the candidate selection process further and the CEC took complete control of the selection process ahead of the 2020 election²⁶. Interestingly, by virtue of the initial combination of bottom-up suggestions and top-down supervision, the candidate selection process was one of the more inclusive processes in the NLD, involving party functionaries on various levels of the party. When challenges arose, however, the party leadership responded with increased centralisation rather than the improvement of more inclusive processes, for example through clearer candidate selection guidelines and regulations. The change in candidate selection significantly decreased the level of internal party democracy and shows that top-down control remained the most important tool of the party leadership to govern the NLD. The

²⁶ Aung San Suu Kyi defined the characteristics for the selection of candidates. MP Myint Lwin told me “Since the constitution does not specify criteria, the criteria of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi are central. She wants people who love the country and who have the capacity for the role but most of all she wants those people who are loyal to the party” (Myint Lwin 2019, AI). This was in line with the party principles that had emerged in response to the oppression of the party at the hands of the military. See chapter five for details.

NLD between 2016 and 2020 was thus increasingly characterised by a low level of inclusiveness and decentralisation and consequently a low level of internal party democracy.

6.5.3. Policy selection and coalition formation

Most CEC members were also members of the executive and legislative branches. This caused significant overlap between the party central office and the party in office. As per the 2008 Constitution, members of the union level executive must refrain from involvement in party business. The constitution makes no mention of the state counsellor since the position did not exist in 2008. Yet, since the state counsellor was the de-facto head of state, the NLD considered the provisions to apply to the position regardless²⁷. However, chief ministers of the states and regions could freely influence their party's business. Since the chief ministers are accountable to the union government, that is, the president and the state counsellor, they also received recommendations and instructions from them that they passed on to the party. CEC member and Upper House MP Aung Kyi Nyunt explained that "The union level executive party leaders do not have the right to engage in party business and party management, but they can influence the party through the chief ministers, thus influencing the party passively" (Aung Kyi Nyunt, 2019, AI). Thus, they influenced the decisions made at the party's monthly CEC meetings although they were never in attendance. "In a way, he [Zaw Myint Maung, Chief Minister of the Mandalay Region, CEC Member and 2nd Vice-Chairperson of the CEC] is the most powerful and critical man in the party" (Aung Kyi Nyunt, 2019, AI).

This created a juxtaposition of power in which the highest functionaries of the party's central office served as the highest executives of the party in public office but

²⁷ Article 64 in Chapter 3 of the constitution that reads: "If the President or the Vice-Presidents are members of a political party, they shall not take part in its party activities during their term of office from the day of their election" (Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2008, Chapter 3, Article 64).

influenced party business through the proxy of the chief ministers, who were themselves members of the party in public office, albeit only on the state and region level. This might suggest that the true source for policy selection in the NLD rested with the party in public office, but Zaw Myint Maung begged to differ, stating that “both the parliament and the government are below the party. I am in this position [Chief Minister of the Mandalay Region] because the party assigned me in this way. Who assigned me? The party. So, the party is above all of us. Below the party is the parliament. Below the party is the government” (Zaw Myint Maung in M Bwe, 2019).

The notion that most of the party’s power is concentrated at the party’s central office was also reinforced by the communication channels that the party used to guide its MPs. CEC member U Aung Kyi Nyunt explained:

“We have party whips, three for each house. Since we have two houses, we have six party whips. Then we have state and regional deputies for the union parliament. We have 14 states and regions, and we have two houses, so we get 28 state and regional deputies. In the CEC we have five members who are also in the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw – U Aung Kyi Nyunt, Daw May Win Myint, U Inn Htone Khar Naw Sam, U Htun Htun Hein and U Aung Soe. Those five CEC MPs meet with the 6 party whips and the 28 state and regional deputies every Monday to deliver the party leadership’s line. The 28 deputies meet with their respective state and regional MPs [and inform them]. [...] We [also] have a committee which reviews motions... It reviews the questions and proposals of the NLD MPs and influences the agenda of the Hluttaw. The six party whips advise the Motion Review Committee and make sure that they are in line with the decisions of the party leadership, although they are not in this committee” (Aung Kyi Nyunt, 2019, AI).

Policy selection in the NLD was thus both centralised and exclusive. As a result, the party leadership was criticised for its inability to delegate. One MP told me “No, she [Aung San Suu Kyi] does not delegate. She does not trust other people and she purposefully chose people who will say “yes” to her” (Anonymous 2018, AI). Many functionaries defended their leader. Yet, most conceded that she made the important decisions. NLD MP Myint Lwin told me “The supreme leader of the NLD is Daw Suu. She enjoys full authority. Her spoken word is policy” (Myint Lwin 2019, AI).

This highly centralised and exclusive dynamic, producing low levels of IPD, was evident in the NLD's coalition choices. Here, even the CEC had little say in the matter. The defining alliances were made by Aung San Suu Kyi. Aung San Suu Kyi also had the final say about alliances that other NLD leaders suggested and blocked, for example, the coalition with the 88 Generation that several senior NLD leaders had favoured²⁸. Especially younger parliamentarians and those MPs from ethnic minority states also would have liked to cooperate more closely with ethnic political parties but hit a wall inside their own party.

6.6. Undemocratic democrats: why a pro-democratic party engaged in undemocratic politics

The aim of this thesis is to explain the political decisions I have analysed in this chapter. Why did the NLD, a pro-democratic party founded to end military authoritarianism, deliberately lower levels of IPD, dismiss human rights, refrain from protecting and extending freedom of speech, and end political alliances that had established the NLD as a party that was willing to govern with others rather than just “govern them”? Based on the analysis in the previous chapters, I argue that the NLD's decisions can be explained by the NLD's development. For the NLD its political decisions in office did not stand in conflict with its political mission of advancing democracy.

Assessors of this project at Oxford and listeners at talks where I presented my findings often asked whether I had any concrete evidence beyond the party's actions, whether any of the NLD politicians I had interviewed had ever acknowledged the undemocratic character I alleged the party had. At the early stages of my project, I was warned that I might come up empty handed as politicians would likely be unwilling to indulge a theory that painted their party in an undemocratic light. In reality, the exchanges I had with NLD politicians over the undemocratic character of the party were some of the

²⁸ See chapter three for details.

most illuminating conversations I had. Many NLD politicians were acutely aware of the party's democratic shortcomings and presented me with an explanation that I came to term "undemocratic democrats", arguing that the party had to be undemocratic to advance democracy. Indeed, it was these statements that sparked the idea that the NLD might be best understood as a party of undemocratic democrats who simultaneously support and oppose democracy.

6.6.1. Centralisation

The NLD believed that centralisation ensured the party's survival and, thus, protected its continued ability to advance democracy. The need to find responses to military policy caused all but the first party split. The party splits led to a transformation and eventual disintegration of the NLD's factions and united the party behind its leadership. Military oppression and NLD hagiography elevated Aung San Suu Kyi's image inside and outside the party and fostered an ever increasing personalisation of politics that had already been inherent to the NLD from the very beginning. Over time, the NLD internalised the idea that only a strong leader with absolute power over the party could protect party unity which had emerged as a central principle within the NLD due to military oppression and the fear of party splits. Military oppression had also forced the party to organise itself around single leaders rather than democratic structures and processes which it could not maintain before 2012. Moreover, the party argued it had to rely on centralisation as long as its members and the general population did not have a sufficient understanding of democracy, mirroring the military's rhetoric and emphasising discipline as a prerequisite for democracy in line with the NLD's own political culture that placed a high value on discipline. The lack of trust within the party, fostered by assessing new members based on their loyalty, which the party found difficult to determine, further enhanced the perception that greater control was

necessary while the dependency of old party members on the party contributed to the leadership's ability to implement centralisation measures.

The NLD's decision to centralise the party further between 2015 and 2020 was, thus, the natural course of action for the party based on the continued external threat of the military and the internal party culture that had developed in the previous decades. NLD CEC member and party whip, Aung Kyi Nyunt, told me how undemocratic party structures and processes had been a necessary evil under the military regime and remained of vital importance in the hybrid regime that existed in Myanmar between 2010 and 2020.

“We have been practising those [democratic practices] since the beginning. The party was founded in 1988. The party convention was held in 1990 with representatives from ward/village and township levels. [...] Back then, it was just an experimental period, a chaotic period as well, with so many complexities. Then, I was in Mon state. We were holding a convention, democratically, with elections. But we were under military rule, and we could not do the same everywhere. The party had been registered and we were about to run for the 1990 election. In 1989, when we started choosing people, we aimed to hold conventions. But we could not do it in every township or every state. We managed it in Mon state though. In Mon state, we could organise both ward, village, and township level convention. There was voting [for representatives]. Through the township level votings, we elected state level representatives. There we got, *Pyinal Ooozi Aphwae* (State Administration Committees) and *Pyinal Alote Ahmusaung Aphwae* (State Executive Committees). In many different places apart from Mon state, they could not do such experiments. In such places, *See* (Organisation Committees) were formed. Those who were elected through conventions were called *Alote Ahmusaung* (Executives). Those who were elected by a handful of active members were called [members of] *See* (Organisation Committees). So, only certain states or divisions could elect executives. Those places where we could not organise conventions, such as Mandalay, Sagaing and Magway divisions, members at the ward/village levels would convene at the township level and formed Township Organisation Committees with those who were selected according to their prominences in the 1988 uprising. Those would become state or division representatives. There had been votes of course. But these were not systematic [inclusive] elections. So, if you ask me when is the best time to start fully practising democratic practices, it depends on the competitiveness and history. What I mean is: in the situation like nowadays, where the military still plays a role as a constitutional actor and still has its influence in the politics, can still strike effective blows to the opposition, we have to be cautious. Another thing, the second factor, is the history, or the maturity of the party organisation. The third factor has to do with how deep democratic practices are embedded in the population. I cannot say on which day we will begin [adhering to democratic practices]. I cannot even say which year. It just depends on these three factors. It also depends on when we can amend the constitution. [our] Democracy is not genuine yet” (Aung Kyi Nyunt 2019, AI).

Many NLD politicians were worried about the danger of retaining undemocratic party structures in the long-term. One NLD MP had voiced his concerns over the lack of a party constitution in a letter to Aung San Suu Kyi before the 2015 elections, noting that

“It has been almost one and a half year since the nation-wide convention of the NLD has been held for the first time. It is surprising, yet difficult to understand that the major opposition party with party offices in almost all the townships, wards, and villages, operates with a humble constitution of 2 mm thickness” (Anonymous in letter to Aung San Suu Kyi, 2015, OT).

The lack of a detailed party constitution allowed the NLD leadership greater control of the party because it ensured that there were no provisions that would halt the party’s centralisation²⁹. However, many NLD politicians felt that the single leader dynamic would become problematic when Aung San Suu Kyi would no longer be able to lead the party. NLD MP Myint Lwin told me:

“The supreme leader is Daw Suu. She enjoys full authority. Her spoken word is policy. However, it is not the way it should be done in a democracy party. Currently the supermajority of the NLD members are accepting that, including me. We accept that Daw Suu enjoys supreme power. In the light of the current situation in Myanmar, we agree that only she should have supreme power. We should not ask for party democracy yet. That is why we do not speak out loud. Daw Suu’s decision is the party’s decision. Daw Suu’s spoken word is the party’s policy. It seems that we prioritise person over the principle. However, it is needed for the country. We agree with that since it is a necessity in the current situation” (Myint Lwin 2019, AI).

NLD CEC member Aung Moe Nyo too worried about the party’s future beyond Aung San Suu Kyi, telling me “It is true that if the party continues to do things as Daw Aung San Suu Kyi does beyond Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, it will just be a weak, useless, and opportunistic democracy. The party would be in trouble if it adopted Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s model beyond her period and the party democracy would be ruined” (Aung Moe Nyo 2019, AI).

²⁹ For an impression of just how far the control of the leadership over the party went consult Appendix H, which details some instances of control over party politicians.

These concerns illustrate both the democratic and the undemocratic aspects of the NLD. Party politicians defended the undemocratic structures within the NLD, but they did not pass them off as democratic. More democratic processes and structures remained an ambition of many NLD politicians who were convinced that introducing them would only be possible if the party retained undemocratic structures for the time being.

6.6.2. Human rights, freedom of speech, and the peace process

The NLD's approach to human rights and freedom of speech followed a similar dynamic. On one hand NLD politicians often highlighted the importance of human rights while simultaneously justifying the party's decision to refrain from defending them. Dr Myo Nyunt, the spokesperson of the NLD at the time, argued that the NLD's response to the Rohingya genocide was shaped by the need to prioritise stability and national reconciliation over human rights. This was a common way of thinking in the NLD. NLD MP Sa Khin Zaw Linn argued "What has happened in Rakhine is widely criticised in relation to human rights. But if you pry on it, you will see it is because of the constitution. As simple as that. I do not want to say the NLD is not responsible. The NLD is maybe partly responsible" (Sa Khin Zaw Linn 2019, AI).

The NLD's argument was that external pressure had forced the party into the position of having to defend the military. Many lawmakers cited disinformation campaigns that sought to undermine the NLD's popularity with voters. Pyone Kathy Naing, an NLD lawmaker and a member of the Myanmar delegation that briefed the Human Rights Council in Geneva on Myanmar's perspective in the Rakhine crisis, told me "Some groups³⁰ mobilise against the NLD. During my campaign I found that in most of the villages, ethnic minorities

³⁰ Here Pyone Kathy Naing is referring to groups such as Ma Ba Tha, the Organisation for the Protection of Race and Religion, which is an ultranationalist Buddhist organisation whose foundation was guided in some ways by successive military regimes, incited anti-Muslim riots and campaigned against the NLD with support of the military.

are very simple and honest people who lack an education. They thought that if the NLD wins the election, the whole nation would be transformed into an Islamic nation. We must be very careful” (Pyone Kathy Naing 2018, AI).

The notion that the NLD was under attack and needed to make undemocratic political choices was prevalent among interviewees when I asked them to comment on matters like freedom of speech, the freedom of assembly or the party’s stance on human rights. NLD MP Sa Khin Zaw Linn told me:

“We have dissolved lots of laws. But people see only what is undissolved yet. The Peaceful Assembly and Procession Law is left unnullified. This law was not enacted by the NLD government but by the previous government. [...] We did try to amend the Peaceful Assembly and Procession Law. But the opposition was so great in our country. Frankly speaking, there were not just political parties but lots of organisations backed by the military such as Ma Ba Tha as well. At the moment, one of our comrades is unjustly accused of a rape which he has not committed. How can it be possible that a 70/80 years old has committed it? And the testimony of the woman is not logical. We have many cases like this. My point essentially here is that we are facing a lot of threats now. You will not know these things. We, who are working, happen to know a great deal about the attempts of our rival forces. All right, we would like to amend this and that law as well as you do. But please consider the real political situation. This is all I want to say” (Sa Khin Zaw Linn 2019, AI).

Often NLD politicians interspersed these arguments with the notion that Myanmar was not ready for greater individual rights, an idea that was in line with the party’s understanding of democracy I analysed in chapter five. Although the NLD had been campaigning for democracy since its foundation it had internalised an understanding of democracy promotion that rested on the principles of upholding party, unity, discipline, and loyalty – to ensure the survival of the party - and compromise and reconciliation with the military rather than the promotion of individual rights, which might undermine the power of the party and lead to conflict with the military. Thus, NLD politicians cited personal freedoms as the most important aspects of democracy but simultaneously made the case for curtailing them. Moreover, NLD politicians made the case for curtailing individual freedom by using the same rhetoric successive military regimes had used to discredit

democracy as a political system. Many NLD politicians argued that discipline was a prerequisite for greater freedom. One NLD MP argued that

“For the time being, the reason why we still need to maintain Article 66(d) is that there are some people who are abusing the media, agitate the country, and defame the NLD. Therefore, this law still has to prevail as a form of constrain. When someone utters freedom of this and that, yes, I agree to freedom of this and that. I want to provide democratic rights within the framework of democracy. But we need have some way to constrain undisciplined conduct. I mean we need a situation where we can manage and handle these conducts” (Anonymous 2019, AI).

NLD MP Sa Khin Zaw Linn explained how the conduct of citizens needed to be managed by drawing on the case of the two Reuters journalists Kyaw Soe Oo and Wa Lone.

“We do not want any human rights violated. We want people to comply with humanism. We want to support and encourage freedom of speech. Let us take the issue of the two journalists for example. I am not a stranger to them. They have taken classes at the US embassy, like me. I can safely say that they are brothers to me. The crime they have committed, to be crystal clear, is treason. It is not a trivial matter. They should receive some punishment, it is treason. My friends in journalism told me they [Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo] were sentenced to seven years in prison. I told my friends that they [Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo] should be happy with seven years because they committed national treason. They were sentenced to seven years in prison only because it happened in our [the NLD’s] time. In previous times, they would have been sentenced to 40, 50, or 60 years” (Sa Khin Zaw Linn 2019, AI).

Although the military and the NLD were competitors, between 2016 and 2020, it at times seemed like the balance of the political system no longer existed. For decades, the NLD had campaigned for democracy but now that it was in power it behaved undemocratically, endorsing policies and procedures of its authoritarian competitors. A similar dynamic characterised the NLD’s approach to national reconciliation and the peace process. The alliances the NLD had made with ethnic political parties during its time in opposition had added to the NLD’s image as a party that embraced Myanmar’s pluralism and wanted to work cooperatively with the diverse ethnic groups to extend their rights and improve their representation.

Yet, when the NLD came to power it continued the military's approach to peace building. Moreover, the NLD viewed reconciliation with and between ethnic minority groups as a process that was separate from the reconciliation process between the party and the military, which it emphasised. As I have analysed in chapter five, the party's stance was not chiefly the result of external factors but rather the product of internal party features, including a simplified and Bamar-centric view of ethnic grievances and an understanding of cooperation as a mechanism to inspire integration into the NLD. Younger NLD politicians I interviewed perceived the NLD's decisions on alliances with ethnic political parties and its approach to the peace process as a change of policy. Yet, for many older NLD politicians, the party's decisions were the natural course of action because they corresponded to the NLD's political culture.

As I have pointed out before, the NLD is not monolithic. Perceptions of the party and opinions on its decisions varied between party politicians, often reflecting their own socio-political socialisation and their experiences in the NLD. Yet, the vast majority of NLD politicians I interviewed were bound together by the firm conviction that the party's undemocratic structures and decisions were necessary for advancing democracy. They shared being undemocratic democrats because they had the genuine ambition to advance democracy and (in most instances) had been willing to endure oppression and prison sentences to achieve their goal while advocating for delaying democracy.

This approach was informed by the interplay of external and internal factors of party development that I have sought to untangle in this thesis. Consequently, while the NLD's political decisions might seem surprising we can explain them by considering factors like the transformation of the party's factions, the rise of Aung San Suu Kyi to supreme leader of the party, the effects of military oppression, the development of party principles and a specific understanding of democracy, and the NLD's perception of the military and

other important political actors in the country. These factors created a party that both supported and opposed democracy.

I have noted in chapters one and two that explaining-outcome process-tracing does not allow us to build general theories that travel across multiple cases. Rather, the methodology is a tool for explaining complex historical outcomes in a single case. In this setting it can be challenging to determine whether an explanation is sufficient. In their seminal work on process-tracing Derek Beach and Rasmus Brun Pedersen note that

“There is no fool proof answer to this question in the pragmatic understanding of research. Instead, the decision that an explanation is sufficient is based on an assessment of whether all the relevant facets of the outcome have adequately been accounted for and whether the evidence is best explained by the developed explanation rather than plausible alternatives” (Beach and Brun Pedersen 2019, pos. 5127).

Importantly, building the explanation I have presented in this thesis has been an iterative process that followed the theory-building path of explaining-outcome process-tracing³¹. Consequently, the arguments I have presented in each chapter of this thesis have been formed on the basis of the analysis of primary data. The arguments I have introduced for each building block of the explanation I have put forward in this thesis have therefore already been tested with the empirical data I collected. This has been an extraordinarily time-consuming process and I acknowledge that this process is not reflected in this thesis in all its depth. The reason for this lies in the complexity of the process I examined. Including accounts of the considerations and tests of all alternative explanations at each stage of the process of the NLD’s development would have rendered this thesis very tough to read (and follow) and would have far exceeded the maximum length of a DPhil thesis. The arguments and theories I used for building each part of the explanation in this thesis are, however, those that provided a sufficient explanation for their respective part. More

³¹ See chapter two for details.

importantly still, together they form an explanation that accounts for all outcomes I sought to explain.

6.7. Chapter conclusions

In this thesis I have investigated why the NLD, a pro-democratic party founded and maintained to end military authoritarianism and to introduce democracy in Myanmar, engaged in politics that contravened democratic norms and processes. I argued that the NLD became a party of undemocratic democrats, who simultaneously support and oppose democracy because they believe that they have to – at times – behave undemocratically to advance democracy. Moreover, I argued that this position was not the result of a sudden change in the party's politics but the result of the party's specific development process. This development process was characterised by a range of internal factors, such as the initial composition of the party, the political socialisation of its leaders and their corresponding views on various matters of politics. Yet, it was also characterised by a series of external conditions that arose from the NLD's special position as a pro-democratic party in a dictatorship.

Military oppression shaped the structure of the NLD, the image of its leaders, and the party's political culture. In many instances, the party's development was not shaped by internal and external factors independently but by their interplay and the specific outcomes it yielded. The party's understanding of democracy, for example, is both the product of internal features, like the political thought of Aung San Suu Kyi, and a response to the external condition of military authoritarianism. In many ways, the NLD was perfectly set-up for maintaining itself in the face of continued oppression in an authoritarian system but ill-prepared for its role in a hybrid system. Yet, the seemingly surprising political decisions the party made while in office were rational choices for the undemocratic democrats who made them. Rather than representing a sudden political change the party's decisions were

the outcome of a long development process that had yielded a party to which these decisions were in line with the promotion of democracy³².

The NLD's performance in government could have potentially had dire consequences if the party had been able to proceed as the political ruling party in successive future governments. The military, however, staged a coup on 1 February 2021, following the NLD's landslide victory in the 2020 elections. The NLD's senior leaders were arrested³³ and remain in detention or in prison while the military began waging a brutal campaign against Myanmar's population following large-scale public protests. The military coup highlights the central error in the NLD's political strategy while in government and the party's most significant failure vis-à-vis the advancement of democracy in Myanmar.

The undemocratic structure of the NLD and its low-levels of IPD were in some sense understandable and indeed reasonable in the setting of Myanmar's hybrid regime. Yet, the NLD's undemocratic policies, its anti-Muslim rhetoric and failure to facilitate even a modicum of accountability, its decision to refrain from repealing repressive legislation and the party's failure to support individuals on the grounds of protecting human rights and democratic values had severe consequences, limiting the democratic space for many of Myanmar's citizens while the party was in office. Importantly, it also posed a danger of institutionalising undemocratic norms and practices in the newly formed hybrid-regime.

NLD MP Myint Lwin described this danger perfectly:

“If you want to teach a person to swim, you cannot teach him on land. Only instructing him in the water will allow him to learn how to swim. Democracy is just like that; we need to provide democratic rights to foster an understanding of democracy. The worry is that if we provide democratic rights, the population might be in chaos because it cannot use the rights correctly yet. Such reasoning could be sincere. But that reason has been exploited. The advent of military dictatorship in Myanmar was based on the same worry. They reasoned that the Myanmar public does not deserve democracy yet. Myanmar people do not obey the rules. Myanmar people still need to practice democracy and overcome their

³² It should be clear that this is not a justification but merely an explanation of the party's decisions.

³³ See chapter seven for details.

insufficient understanding of democracy so therefore they still need to be controlled. I do not agree with this view. Only providing democratic rights will allow people to learn how to use these rights. If we hope to be able to swim one day, we need to be in the water” (Myint Lwin 2019, AI).

Conclusion

“At the moment, the military is no longer capable of destroying the party. That is certain. It could not do it anymore because so much has changed nowadays. The Hluttaw has been installed and the NLD has won a landslide victory in the 2015 election” (Party historian Monywa Aung Shin 2019, AI).

7.1. Summary

In this thesis I discussed why the National League for Democracy, a pro-democracy party founded to bring an end to Myanmar’s military dictatorship and to introduce democracy, engaged in politics that contravened democracy after it came to power. Specifically, I have sought to explain why a pro-democratic party would defend excessive human rights violations, consciously refrain from protecting and expanding freedom of speech, follow in the military’s footsteps in a failed peace process and deliberately limit internal party democracy. These questions seemed especially puzzling considering the lived experience of the majority of the NLD’s politicians who endured severe oppression and long prison sentences in their quest for democratisation. To answer these questions, I have presented the first study of the National League for Democracy and one of the most detailed studies of an opposition-successor party, a political party borne from the opposition to an authoritarian regime. I used explaining-outcome process-tracing (EOPT) to construct an empirically detailed explanation for this specific outcome based largely on empirical data I collected during an extensive field research period. This data included translations of party documents I collected and, more importantly, in-depth interviews with NLD politicians.

7.2. Main findings

I found that the NLD’s political choices in government were not the result of sudden change of its political platform, but the result of the party’s development, which created a

party of undemocratic democrats. Undemocratic democrats simultaneously support and oppose democracy because they believe that advancing democracy is only possible through temporarily contravening democracy. While this might at first appear nonsensical this approach is the result of the party's development process that was shaped significantly by the NLD's experience of being a pro-democratic opposition party in an authoritarian state. The interplay of external and internal conditions produced a party that was extremely resilient to external shocks. In other words, the interplay created a party that was in many ways perfectly adapted to operating as the opposition to an authoritarian regime in a dictatorship but ill equipped for its new role as governing party in a hybrid regime.

In chapter three, I presented a detailed historical narrative of the NLD's development between 1988 and 2015 and identified ten important junctures. The chapter provided a look into the party's history and served as a point of departure for the subsequent chapters because it revealed the historical fingerprints of key stages in the NLD's development, including the changing character of the party's factions, the increasing extent of the single-leader dynamic within the party, and the party's response to oppression.

In chapter four, I analysed the transformation and eventual disintegration of the NLD's factions and Aung San Suu Kyi's simultaneous rise to supreme leader of the party. I argued that these processes are vital for understanding not *why* the NLD engaged undemocratic politics in office but *how* it was able to do so without falling apart. Despite the disintegration of the party's factions, the NLD was still far from monolithic and there was considerable discontent within the party over several of the leadership's decisions while the NLD was in government between 2016 and 2021. Only the unparalleled control that Aung San Suu Kyi had over the party and the extent of the reverence for her inside and outside the NLD enabled her and the leadership to make politics that contravened the NLD's previous political platform.

In chapter five, I analysed the NLD's political culture. In this extensive piece of analysis, I took a closer look at how oppression shaped the NLD as an external condition of party development. I argued that oppression fostered the creation of the principles of unity, discipline, and loyalty that henceforth guided the party's conduct and were used to assess its members. I called them the principles of opposition because they were implemented to ensure the survival of the party in the face of oppression. These principles also shaped the prevalent understanding of democracy in the NLD. This understanding was shaped significantly by Aung San Suu Kyi but also strongly influenced by the importance of the principles of opposition. Unity and discipline were vital to the NLD because they allowed the party to function. Following a similar line of thought, the NLD advanced an understanding of democracy in which discipline was an essential prerequisite for democracy.

The importance the NLD attributed to discipline is essential because the NLD maintained that the experience of military authoritarianism had bereft the electorate and many of the party's own functionaries of the capacity to conduct themselves in the disciplined manner a democracy required. This led the NLD to advocate for delaying democracy, a central facet for understanding the NLD's decisions while in government.

I also argued that the NLD had a very particular view of the military, of national reconciliation, and of ethnic grievances. These views were, however, only marginally influenced by the external condition of oppression. Rather, they were the result of internal features of the NLD. All three of the party's founders had had a close affiliation with the military. Aung San Suu Kyi's father, the independence hero Aung San, is credited with founding the modern Myanmar military while Aung Gyi and Tin Oo were both senior officers in the military. This set them apart from other segments of the opposition because they maintained that the military was at its core a good institution that had simply been led

astray by a series of bad leaders. This approach of separating the military as an institution and its leaders became entrenched in the NLD and fostered an approach that favoured reconciliation with the military over confrontation. The make-up of the NLD also affected the party's approach to the peace process and to addressing ethnic grievances. As a majority Bamar-party the NLD espoused a heavily simplified and reductionist view of ethnic politics, a fact that had a detrimental effect on the NLD-led peace process.

In chapter six, I analysed the effects of the processes, structures, norms, and values the party had institutionalised through its specific development trajectory on the party's political decisions in government. I first took a closer look at the NLD's decision to support the military's genocide of the Rohingya minority to illustrate the party's approach to human rights in practice. I then examined the party's decision to refrain from repealing legislation that limited freedom of speech and its increasingly problematic relationship with free expression. Moreover, I illustrated how the NLD continued the military's approach to the peace process and failed to make any meaningful progress. I also provided a detailed account of the NLD's structure and the efforts of the party to limit democratic processes internally.

I then analysed how the NLD rationalised these political decisions and how it reconciled them with its stated mission of advancing democracy and its self-characterisation as a democratic party. I argued that for the NLD these political decisions did not stand opposed to advancing democracy. On the contrary, while the party acknowledged that they were not in line with democratic norms and processes it argued that these decisions were necessary to advance democracy. This juxtaposition of the genuine ambition to advance democracy and the sincere belief that the party's decisions served this goal while acknowledging that they were not democratic is the result of the party's development

process. The NLD equated the strength of the party with its capacity for advancing democracy and, thus, subordinated everything else to this goal.

Consequently, while we might very well criticise the decisions of the NLD, they are nonetheless comprehensible. This is by no means an attempt to justify the NLD's political choices, but it is important to acknowledge that they were the rational choice for the party the NLD had become.

In the view of the NLD, the party's high degree of centralisation and the cult around its leader, did not contradict the party's mission to advance democracy because these dynamics and structures had allowed the party to operate at a time when democratic processes were not feasible due to military oppression. Moreover, the party believed that centralisation was necessary because military oppression had limited the professional capacity of many of the party's members. The growth of the party ahead of the 2015 elections and the lack of trust between old and new members also contributed to the perception that greater control over the party by the leadership was essential for preserving the NLD's strength.

The party maintained that human rights were an essential part of democracy yet abandoned their protection and promotion when it came to office because it feared another course of action might endanger reconciliation between the military and the party and have an adverse effect on the popularity of the party with voters, thus reducing the party's strength. The latter was especially true in the context of the Rohingya genocide.

Freedom of speech, once a corner stone of the party's platform, became a thorn in the party's side because extending it would have limited the NLD's ability to control criticism. Moreover, since the NLD viewed Aung San Suu Kyi as the arbiter over what constituted the kind of disciplined conduct the party deemed necessary for democracy any

criticism of the party and its leader was viewed as a sign of lacking the capacity for political engagement and should, thus “rightly” be curtailed.

7.3. Contributions

This thesis makes contributions to our understanding of political party development in authoritarian states and specifically, the development of opposition-successor parties, i.e., parties borne out of the opposition to an authoritarian regime. More specifically, it contributes to our understanding of the National League for Democracy and politics in Myanmar since the 1988 Uprising.

The thesis makes two primary contributions. Firstly, it explains an extraordinary case of a political party that was formed and maintained to end military authoritarianism and to introduce democracy in Myanmar, but whose decisions in government contravened democratic norms and principles. Secondly, it introduces a new concept – undemocratic democrats – that allows us to analyse how and why political actors combine support and opposition to democracy.

Following the 2010 general election, Myanmar’s transformation process garnered considerable interest across the world. Partly this was due to the personification of the transformation process I have described at length in this thesis. People across the world might know little about Myanmar but they know who Aung San Suu Kyi is. More importantly, for a short time Myanmar’s transformation seemed to show that the end of history might come after all. Myanmar was an outlier in a region of autocracies and hybrid regimes. Heads of Western states started pouring into the country after Aung San Suu Kyi had secured a seat in parliament in 2012 not so much because they had a profound interest in this comparatively small Southeast Asian country but because its trajectory seemed to affirm Western policy. It was a success story, but like many success stories it was too good to be true. The response to the NLD’s role in shielding the military from grave human

rights abuses and its increasingly autocratic government style was, thus, correspondingly stark in the West. In a 180 degree turn, Aung San Suu Kyi was now referred to as a “fallen icon”.

This episode illustrates the misconceptions we still have about the kind of political parties that emerge from the opposition to authoritarian regimes and a plain lack of understanding. By now, we have a good grasp of several types of parties that emerge in post-authoritarian settings. We know that economic-elite parties are essentially opportunistic party organisations that are formed to ensure the continued existence of privileges of previous elites or to establish privileges for new economic elites (Albertus and Menaldo 2017). We know that authoritarian successor parties can serve as tools for autocrats to regain power after introducing elections (Ziblatt 2017) and that they might have a political advantage in a newly introduced democratic system because they have performed well economically in the past (Slater and Wong 2013) or because they are firmly rooted in existing social structures (Riedl 2014). Work on these kinds of parties has been conducted in a multitude of contexts, shedding light on the dynamics in post-communist countries (Grzymala-Busse 2002; Kitschelt et al. 1999), in Asia (Hicken and Martinez Kuhonta 2011; Slater and Wong 2013), in Latin America (Levitsky et al. 2016), and in Africa (LeBas 2018).

Yet, we have precious little knowledge of opposition-successor parties, i.e., political parties that are borne out of the opposition to an authoritarian regime. Understanding these parties has implications not only for the analysis of political parties but also for the analysis of processes of regime transformation. A better understanding of the NLD might have led some scholars to revise their projections of Myanmar’s transformation process and the NLD’s role in it. As such, understanding the case of the NLD as a single case in a universe of other opposition-successor parties also has practical implications, for example for international development cooperation and democracy

support. I am conscious that a single-case study of the NLD is not a comprehensive account of opposition-successor parties. Yet, I believe that charting the trajectory of an opposition-successor party in this single case is an important contribution because it illustrates a path of party development that differs so substantially from other political parties and cases studied thus far. Future research might well reveal that the case of the NLD is not as unique as it seems right now.

The same might be true for the concept of undemocratic democrats. While I have introduced this concept to make sense of a single case, the fact that a single case of undemocratic democrats exists expands our understanding of the politics that parties can pursue vis-à-vis democracy. Conceptualising the NLD's simultaneous support and opposition to democracy was one of the most challenging aspects of this thesis. When I began working on this project, I was convinced that the party had transformed and had become less democratic over time. When I began my field work it sometimes seemed like the NLD was a party of limited liberals, who supported some aspects of democracy while opposing others (Holliday and David 2018). When the comprehensive analysis of my collected data showed that this was not the case and that NLD politicians were convinced that their undemocratic politics stood in the service of democracy it remained difficult to adequately frame this finding. This highlights the limitations that deeply entrenched categorisations can have on our ability to adequately understand political actors. Introducing the concept of undemocratic democrats allows a much closer approximation of the political platform of the NLD and its political beliefs and therefore makes an important contribution to the way we think about the political orientation of political parties.

7.4. Limitations and directions for future research

Just as it shapes the contributions of this project, the research design also defines its limitations. Producing an extremely detailed single-case study came at the cost of generalisability. Initially, I had planned to conduct a comparative study that would have allowed for some cross-case comparisons and, thus, would have strengthened the generalisability of my findings. However, as I have described in depth in chapter two, there was remarkably little literature, I could draw on to make sense of the case of the NLD. Consequently, I had to establish many facts of the case for the first time, which took considerable time. Furthermore, the data collection process was extremely time-intensive. I spent more than 15 months in Myanmar trying to track down original documents pertaining to the party and setting up interviews. The consequence of focusing on a single case is reflected in the language of this thesis. Rather than introducing a *theory* of party development, I present an *explanation*. I believe that the research I conducted has the potential to speak to other cases, but I did not have the capacity to confirm this suspicion.

Despite these limitations I believe that this thesis is useful for academics and practitioners in the field of political cooperation and development and that it opens fascinating new avenues for future research. Such research might explore whether the findings of this case study speak to other cases. Whereas I have used the theory-building path of explaining-outcome process-tracing to generate an explanation of a complex case other researchers could use my findings to test hypotheses about political parties in hybrid regimes in general or opposition-successor parties in particular. Should such research reveal that there are parties that have undergone similar development processes it stands to reason that such findings would have implications for the analysis of political transformation processes. If – for whatever reason – pro-democratic parties advance undemocratic politics, we can expect this to have an effect on the transformation process in the respective case.

Ironically, despite the depth of this thesis I acknowledge that its characterisation of the party and its development remains an approximation. I believe I found out more about the NLD than any researcher before me and still there are parts of the party's history I would have liked to illuminate more thoroughly. Yet, for some junctures in the party's development there were simply too few sources and too few interviewees who could speak to the details.

Due to its scope this thesis does also not reflect on the effects of the 2021 military coup on the NLD. Following the coup, the party has once again assumed the role of opposition party in a dictatorship. Many of the NLD's senior leaders, notably Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint, are held captive by the military, which installed itself as the new government in the form of the State Administrative Council (SAC). By July 2022, almost 50 NLD politicians had been killed by the military while over 900 had been arrested (RFA 2022). Many of the NLD politicians I interviewed for this project are imprisoned, have gone underground, or have fled to exile, either in one of the areas in Myanmar under the control of ethnic armed groups who oppose the SAC or abroad. Monywa Aung Shin, the NLD's party historian was arrested on the day of the coup and held at a military interrogation facility without charges until 18 October 2021. He died of a heart attack on 28 November 2021. Zayar Thaw, an NLD lawmaker I interviewed, was executed by the military in July 2022 (Beech 2022).

Following the arrest of the party's leaders several younger NLD politicians took control of the party. The NLD was comparatively slow to respond to the coup and had not formulated a clear position while student unions, labour unions and strike committees were already leading large crowds to protest the military coup. Four days after the coup, Phyu Phyu Thin, a NLD MP I interviewed for this project, spearheaded the formation of the Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) in a move that mirrored the

formation of the CRPP¹ over two decades earlier. The CRPH was formed to represent the lawmakers elected in the 2020 election who had been ousted by the military coup. Rather than organising protests and dissent activities the CRPH focused on building consensus and finding a political response to the coup.

Although the CRPH was (and is at the time of writing) chiefly made up of NLD lawmakers, the NLD moved into the background as a result of the founding of the CRPH. It was not the NLD that was coordinating the political response but NLD lawmakers through the CRPH, a small but important difference. In the months after the coup, the CRPH began forming the National Unity Government (NUG), a parallel government to the SAC, which now coordinates the political response to the military coup and increasingly tries to perform government functions in areas not under the military's control. The NUG includes several NLD politicians (some of whom I interviewed for this thesis) but also members of other political parties and independent politicians. Although NLD politicians shape the NUG significantly, the founding of the NUG further moved the NLD in the background of the current political processes.

The NLD remains, however, the decisive actor in Myanmar's opposition since it is able to mobilise the greatest support. In the context of this thesis and when considering avenues for future research, it is interesting to note that the coup led the NLD to abandon several of its central political positions. In a stark contrast to the politics of reconciliation I analysed in this thesis, the NLD now supports the armed opposition against the military and has called for a new federal constitution.

However, it is unclear whether the NLD is making concessions because it has to entertain broad alliances once more or whether the new policies of the party reflect a truly reformed political agenda. This uncertainty is also mirrored in the open question over the

¹ See chapter three.

party's leadership. As in previous times, the party upholds Aung San Suu Kyi as its leader although she cannot perform any role in the party due to her arrest. The move helps the party maintain popular support but also creates the potential for future conflict as the party continues to endorse policies that stand in direct opposition to her decisions in office. Moreover, the NLD actively shapes the political response to the military coup rather than resorting to the "manifesto politics" of the previous decades, another sign that the party might have moved on from some of its erstwhile political positions.

At the time of writing, the SAC has considerable difficulty establishing control over the country while the NUG is increasing its international support. Should the revolution be successful, the military regime fall, and democratic elections be held again, the NLD would be in a very advantageous position by virtue of being the most popular political party in the country. While the trajectory of the party remains uncertain, we might be witnessing the party at a juncture that ultimately transforms the NLD from a party of undemocratic democrats to a party of democrats. The direction the NLD takes will have a considerable impact on the political future of Myanmar.

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This bibliography refers only to works cited in this thesis. All works mentioned in this thesis are included in this bibliography. It is divided into two sections: a) secondary literature, including books, articles, media contributions, and reports; b) documents, including internal documents of the NLD, announcements by the military, laws, declarations, and letters. The interviews cited in this thesis are not featured in the bibliography. For a full overview see appendix D. For a full list of all documents collected for this thesis see appendix C.

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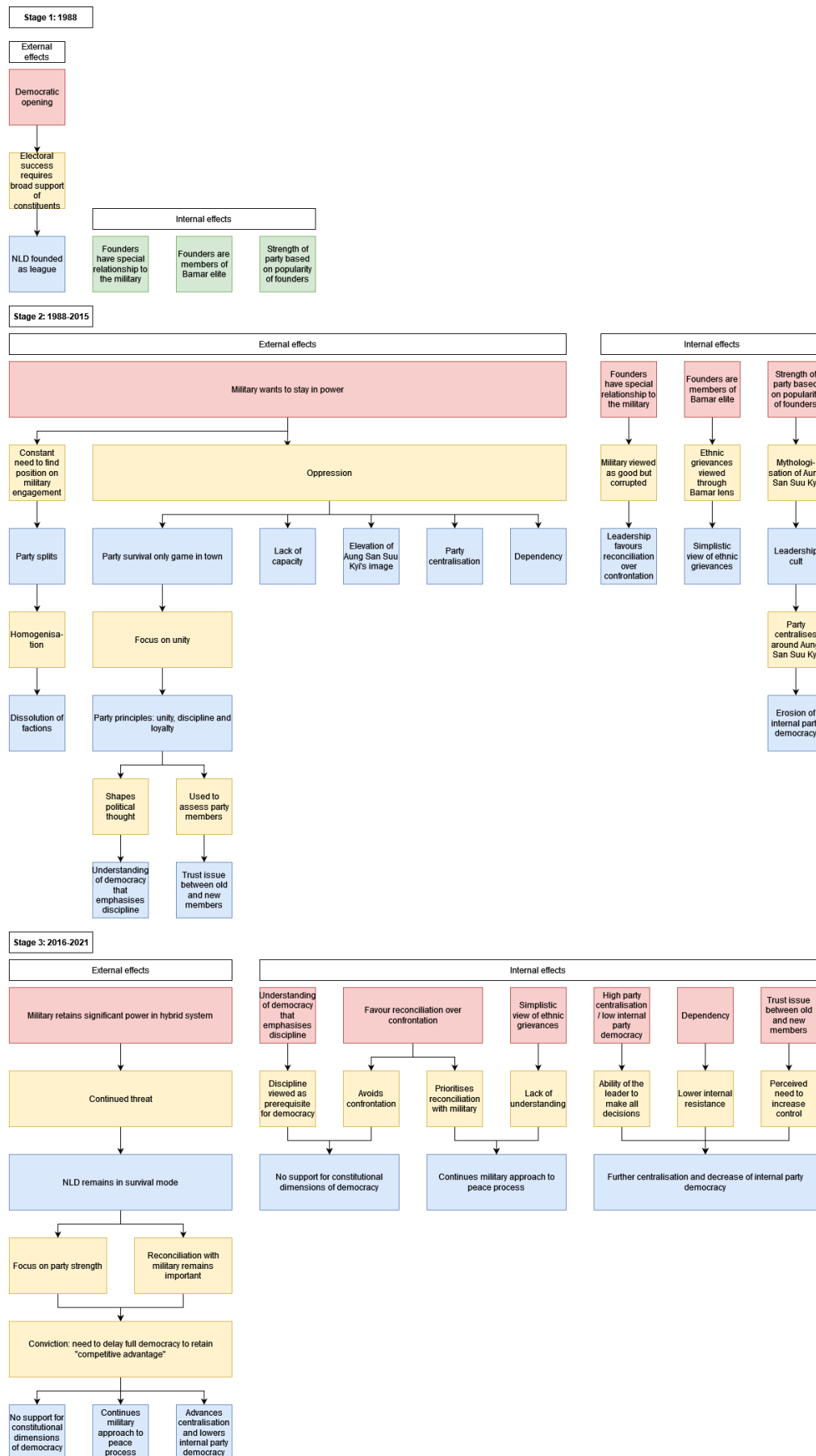
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Appendix A: combined figures pertaining to the development of the NLD



Appendix B: interview guide

Introduction:

- Introduce myself. Ensure that interviewee understands consent form.
- Explain the interview's purpose, format, and expected time.

Personal profile:

- Please introduce yourself and tell me about the work you do.
- How long have you been a member of the National League for Democracy (NLD)?
- How long have you held the (dependent on individual) position?
- Were you imprisoned and if so, why?
- How, if in any way, has the Tatmadaw (the Myanmar Military) affected your personal life between 1988 and 2012 and how has that changed after 2012?

NLD history:

- In your opinion, what led to the formation of the NLD?
- What was your perception of Aung San Suu Kyi in 1988?
 - o How important was she for the party back then and in what way?
- What defines the NLD?
 - o Have the defining characteristics changed over time?
- What have been the defining moments for the NLD?
- How was the NLD influenced by forming and developing in a de-facto authoritarian state?
- Some of the NLD's founders previously had close ties to the military. How important were those connections in the late 80s and 90s.
 - o Moreover, have these early ties to the military had any influence on the party in the 2000s and today?
 - o How do you feel about the close cooperation of the party with the military, especially in regard to important positions?
 - o If military background: what made you switch from the military/military-backed party to the NLD?

NLD structure:

- Would you describe the structure of the NLD as somewhat centralised, centralised or highly centralised and how do you evaluate the effect of your answer?
- How do you feel about the high age level in the party?
- How would the NLD cope with a passing of ASSK and how might such an event impact the policies of the party?
- If you could change one thing about the way the party is organised, what would you change?

Ideology and state building:

- What does democracy mean to you and what does it mean to the NLD?
- Would you say that the NLD has an ideology? If so, how would you describe it?
- How has that ideology influenced the party's political decisions?
- Please outline the party's position on key policy domains (education, healthcare, international relations, democratic values – freedom of assembly, freedom of press, freedom of movements, freedom of speech -, etc.)

- How have the political positions of the party changed over the years in regard to key policy domains?
- Has the performance of the party in its first two years in office met your expectation?
- Can there be constitutional change in Myanmar? If so, how?
- How would you describe the NLD's relationship with the military?
- Is a government without military personnel desirable for the NLD?
- Why did the NLD chose to contest in the 2012 by-elections under the 2008 constitution (after rejecting it in 2010)?
- Comparing the Thein Sein government from 2010-2015 and the NLD government from 2016 until today, where do the main differences lie in regard to policy, other than the opinion on the 2008 constitution?

Appendix C: collected documents

The documents in this appendix are organised in several ways. Documents noted with the prefix D are classified broadly as documents, whereas the prefix B denotes books. Both prefixes are used to classify material from a single source and are listed in the order I gained access to them. This may seem odd but has been beneficial to my work because it corresponds to my own memories of seeing and assessing the documents for the first time. A third category of documents is classified with the prefix O for “other” although the prefix denotes documents as well as books. This is to classify that the material comes from various sources. They do not occur in any particular order.

The last column of the table notes the translation status. T denotes material that was translated from Burmese to English for the purpose of this research, i.e. for the first time. E denotes texts that were given to me in English, they are still listed here to maintain an accurate overview of the material that was given to me because they shed light on what the source deemed valuable. NT denotes material that has not been translated. It also includes some unimportant documents or texts that are featured in other translations (see for example: D6). Most documents have been dated but establishing a date of creation has not been possible for all documents

<i>No.</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Content Origin</i>	<i>Type of Document</i>	<i>Pages (Original Document)</i>	<i>Date of content</i>	<i>T</i>
1	D1. Aung San Suu Kyi's Speech on the anniversary of Pyithu Hluttaw Representative Committee 16.9.1999	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi	Speech	4	16.09.1999	T
2	D2. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's Speech on the 50th Union Day 1997	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi	Speech	3	12.02.1997	T
3	D3. The Inquiries of those who attended and the answers of Daw	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi	Public Meeting	7	21.02.2000	NT

	Aung San Suu Kyi 21.2.2000					
4	D4. The Inquiries of those who attended on and the answers of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi 17.1.2000	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi	Public Meeting	10	17.01.2000	NT
5	D5. General Secretary Speech on the 9th Anniversary of the NLD 27.7.1997	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi	Speech	2	27.7.1997	T
6	D6. Kyar Ye (The Brave Tiger) Poem by U Win Tin 1990	U Win Tin	Poem	1	1990	NT
7	D7. Daw.Aung San Suu Kyi's Speeches During Her India Trip	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi	Speech	6	2012	E
8	D8. Dialogue at the White House- Aung San Suu Kyi and Obama 14.9.2016	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Obama	Meeting Minute	4	14.9.2016	E
9	D9. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's Speech at the NCA	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi	Speech	4		NT
10	D10. The NLD's Letter to the 2757th Kayin New Year Day 2017	NLD	Message	2	18.12.2017	NT
11	D11. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's Speech at the meeting of ASEAN Trade and Investment Meeting 2017	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi	Speech	4	12.11.2017	E
12	D12. Our Leader, Interviews with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi 2010	Aung San Suu Kyi	Interview	30	Dec-10	NT
13	D13. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's Letter to the 78th Kayin New Year Day 10.1.2016	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi	Message	1	10.1.2016	T
14	D14. The Record, NLD Periodical, 9/1990	NLD	Periodical	3	1990	T
15	D15. Sculptures and Works on Paper 2018		Pamphlet	3	2018	NT
16	D16. Boycotting the Election, Daw	Daw Khin Ma Ma Myo	Article	13	09.09.2010	NT

	Khin Ma Ma Myo 9.9.2010					
17	D17. Choices are ours and the Law of Brahmayihārā and Social Development, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi 1998	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi	Booklet	16	1997-1998	T
18	D18. The Record on U Aung Gyi's Resignation from the NLD 1988	NLD	Record	56	1988	T
19	D19. Announcement Urging to Release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, U Tin Oo and Other Political Prisoners	CEC, NLD	Announcement	1	30.05.2004	T
20	D20. Announcement on the Release of Political Prisoners	CEC, NLD	Announcement	1	20.11.2004	T
21	D21. Announcement Disclosing the Letter of the NLD to the Chairman of the SLORC and Expressing Party's Stand on the National Reconciliation	CEC, NLD	Announcement	5	09.12.2004	T
22	D22. Announcement on a Legal Dispute Regarding the Release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi	CEC, NLD	Announcement	3	18.08.2004	NT
23	D23. Announcement Regarding the Demands of the NLD as Prerequisites of the Party to Attend the National Convention	CEC, NLD	Announcement	2	14.05.2004	T
24	D24. Letter of Thakhin Thein Phay to U Than Shwe, General Recommendations	Thakhin Thein Phay	Letter	3	10.02.2003	NT
25	D25. Lifting of EU Sanctions and Burma's Struggle for Democracy	Igor Blazevic	Article	4	24.04.2013	E

26	D26. Announcement Confirming the Extension of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's House Arrest for One More Year	CEC, NLD	Announcement	1	01.12.2004	T
27	D27. Resolution on the 13th Anniversary of the NLD	NLD	Resolution	1		T
28	D28. Announcement Regarding the Pyithu Hluttaw	CEC, NLD		7	27.05.2004	T
29	D29. Directive Letter to the Divisions and States and Township Recruitment Teams	Chairman, NLD	Directive	8	29.01.2003	T
30	D30. Opening Speech of the Chairman of the Committee for Holding the Preliminary Discussion for Holding the National Convention	Chairman of the Committee	Speech	11		NT
31	D31. Letter of the Chairman of the NLD to the Chairman of the Working Committee for Holding the National Convention Regarding the National Convention	Chairman, NLD	Letter	19	27.11.1995	T
32	D32. Letter of the Chairman of the NLD to the Chairman of the Working Committee for Holding the National Convention	Chairman, NLD	Letter	8	09.09.1993	T
33	D33. Letter of the Chairman of the NLD to the Chair of the Working Committee for Holding the National Convention	Chairman, NLD	Letter	2	27.11.1995	T

34	D34. Directive Letter to the Divisions, States and Township Advocacy Teams Regarding the NLD's Letters to the SLORC	Chairman, NLD	Directive	1	04.04.1997	T
35	D35. Letter of the Chairman of the NLD to the Chairman of the Working Committee for Holding the National Convention Regarding the Party's Opinion on the Analysis of the Periodical Patron Team	Chairman, NLD	Letter	7	09.04.1994	T
36	D36. Letter of the Chairman of the NLD to the Chairman of the Working Committee for Holding the National Convention Regarding the National Convention	Chairman, NLD	Letter	2	28.11.1995	T
37	D37. The NLD's Stand Regarding the National Convention	CEC, NLD	Declaration	8	22.11.1995	T
38	D38. Letter of the Chairman of the NLD to Senior General Than Shwe	Chairman, NLD	Letter	2	03.06.1997	T
39	D39. Letter of the Chairman of the NLD to Senior General Than Shwe regarding Pyithu Hluttaw	Chairman, NLD	Letter	7	25.03.1996	T
40	D40. Letter of the Convention Representatives from the NLD to the Chairman of the Commission for Holding the National Convention regarding the News Release of the Commission	Convention Representatives from the NLD	Letter	6	30.11.1995	BT

41	D41. Announcement of the Working Committee for Holding the National Convention, Expelling Absent Members from the Convention	Chairman of the Committee	Announcement	10	30.11.1995	T
42	D42. Inner-party Announcement of the National League for Democracy regarding the Survival of the party, Kalay Declaration*, Announcements Regarding the 2010 election, the Formation of the NDF	CEC, NLD and Multiple Stakeholders including Ethnic Leaders for the Kalay Declaration	Announcements and Declaration	8	2010	T
43	D43. Pyithu Hluttaw Representative Committee's Declaration for 56th Union Day	Pyithu Hluttaw Representative Committee	Declaration	15		T
44	D44. The NLD's Declaration for 55th Anti-Facist Revolution Day	CEC, NLD	Declaration	5	27.03.2000	T
45	D45. The NLD's Declaration for the 58th Anti-Fascist Revolution Day	CEC, NLD	Declaration	13	27.03.2003	T
46	D46. The NLD's Vice-Chairman's Speech for 52nd Anti-Facist Revolution Day	Vice-Chairman, NLD	Speech	4	27.03.1997	T
47	D47. Report of the Yangon Division Advocacy Team on the Re-formation of Township Teams	Yangon Division Advocacy Team	Report	3	27.09.2001	T
48	D48. Declaration on the 13th Anniversary of 1990 Election	CEC, NLD	Declaration	13	27.05.2003	T
49	D49. Declaration of the Silver Jubilee of the 8888 Uprising and Political Discussion		Declaration	33	07.08.2013	T

50	D50. Speech of Chairman U Aung Shwe on the 13th Anniversary of the NLD	U Aung Shwe, Chairman, NLD	Speech	5	27.09.2001	T
51	D51. Informing the People	CEC, NLD	Announcement	3	06.04.2010	T
52	D52. Declaration for the 13th Anniversary of the NLD	CEC, NLD	Declaration	6	27.09.2001	T
53	D53. Discussion from the Meeting of the Working Committee for Holding the National Convention and the Patrons	The Committee and the Patrons	Meeting Report	2	25.03.1993	T
54	D54. Announcement on the 9th Anniversary of the NLD	CEC, NLD	Announcement	8	27.09.1997	T
55	B1. In the Name of The People Memo 4 Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's Politics of Love and Faith	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi	Memo	80	2016	NT
56	B2. In the Name of The People Memo 7 Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's Choices Are Ours and U Tin Oo's The Country Has Suffered	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, U Tin Oo	Memo	51	2016	NT
57	B3. In the Name of The People Memo 2-Aung San Suu Kyi's Civics to the People	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi	Memo	40	2015	NT
58	B4. U Tin Oo, U Win Tin, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and U Myat Khaing-Interviews	U Tin Oo, U Win Tin, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi	Interview	160		NT
59	B5. Brave Speeches of People's Leader by Linn Thet Khaing	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi	Speech	254		NT
60	B6. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's Interviews with Ko Khin Maung Soe from RFA	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi	Interview	112		T
61	O1. Anonymous letter to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi	Anonymous	Letter	5		T

62	O2. The Chronological History of the NLD	Mon Ywa Aung Shin	Book	243	2016	T
63	O3. Guidelines for District Executive Members	NLD	Guidelines	15	2018	T
64	O4. Guideline for Township Executive Members	NLD	Guidelines	13	2017	T
65	O5. NLD Election Manifesto 2015	NLD	Manifesto	25	2015	T
66	O6. NLD Party Regulations and Constitution / Political Ideology and Program	NLD	Constitution	9		T
67	O7. NLD Party Constitution	NLD	Constitution	7		T
68	D55. Letter of the chairs of three ceasefire EAOs to Than Shwe on national reconciliation	Shan State All Ethnicities People's Liberation Front / New Kayan State Party / Karenni State All Ethnicities People's Liberation Front	Letter	2	14.08.1998.	T
69	D56. Report to the people regarding the convening of the Pyithu Hluttaw	CEC, NLD	Announcement	4	18.08.1998	T
70	D57. Announcement 35 (8/89)	CEC, NLD	Announcement	2	21.08.1998	T
71	D58. ASSK's request to Myanmar's soldiers	Aung San Suu Kyi	Statement	2	28.08.1998	T
72	D59. The first announcement of the CRPP	Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw	Announcement	4	17.09.1998	T
73	D60. Letter of NLD Chairman Aung Shwe to Than Shwe on forming the Pyithu Hluttaw	Aung Shwe	Letter	1	23.06.1998	T

74	D61. Aung San Suu Kyi's request to the people	Aung San Suu Kyi	Message	2	28.07.1998	T

Appendix D: list of interviewees (in alphabetical order)

Name	Organisation	Position ¹	Date of interview	Place of interview
Anonymous	NLD	Yangon Region MP	19.12.2018	Yangon
Anonymous	NLD	Yangon Region MP	19.12.2018	Yangon
Anonymous	NLD	Yangon Region MP	26.12.2018	Yangon
Anonymous	Civil Society	Civil society leader and former political prisoner	27.12.2018	Yangon
Anonymous	NLD	Yangon Region MP	08.01.2019	Yangon
Anonymous	Civil Society	Former political prisoner and civil society leader	23.01.2019	Yangon
Anonymous	NLD	Yangon Region MP	18.02.2019	Yangon
Anonymous	NLD	Lower House MP / Popular human rights activist	19.02.2019	Naypyidaw
Anonymous	NLD	Upper House MP	20.02.2019	Naypyidaw
Anonymous	NLD	Lower House MP	21.02.2019	Naypyidaw
Anonymous	NLD	Upper House MP	21.02.2019	Naypyidaw
Anonymous	NLD	Chief Minister / Member of the CEC	09.07.2019	Redacted for anonymity
Aung Kyi Nyunt	NLD	Upper House MP / Member of the CEC	08.07.2019; 21.07.2019	Naypyidaw

¹ The position refers to the position held at the time of the interview.

Aung Moe Nyo	NLD	Chief Minister of Magway Region	21.07.2019	Naypyidaw
Aye Mya Mya Myo	NLD	Lower House MP	22.02.2019	Naypyidaw
Ei Ei Pyone	NLD	Upper House MP	21.02.2019	Naypyidaw
Hla Htay	NLD	Yangon Region MP	25.01.2019	Yangon
Khin Maung Win	NLD	Yangon Region MP / Member of the Yangon Region CEC	25.01.2019	Yangon
Ko Ko Gyi	People's Party	Chairman	27.12.2018	Yangon
Kyaw Aung	Win Tin Foundation / NLD	Chairman Win Tin Foundation / Vice-Chairman of the NLD Botahtaung Township CEC	07.05.2019	Yangon
Kyaw Swa Linn	NLD (from 2012) and New Society Democratic Party (1989 – unclear)	Political Writer and Commentator / NLD functionary	01.02.2019	Yangon
Kyaw Thiha	NLD	Central Committee Member	19.02.2019	Yangon
Kyaw Tote	NLD	Long-time party member active in various roles since 1988	20.02.2019	Yangon
Kyaw Zeya	NLD	Yangon Region MP	27.01.2019	Yangon
Lwin Ko Latt	NLD	Lower House MP	22.07.2019	Naypyidaw
Dr May Win Myint	NLD	Lower House MP / Member of the CEC	09.07.2019	Naypyidaw

Monywa Aung Shin	NLD	Party Historian / Party Spokesperson	12.03.2019; 12.03.2019	Yangon
Myat Kyaw Kyaw	NLD	Active in the party in various positions since 1989	28.12.2018	Yangon
Myint Lwin	NLD	Lower House MP	18.02.2019; 21.02.2019; 10.07.2019	Naypyidaw and Twante
Myo Aung Htwe	Civil Society	Researcher / Former political prisoner	27.12.2018	Yangon
Dr Myo Nyunt	NLD	Spokesperson / Member of the CEC	13.05.2019	Yangon
Nan Khin Htwe Myint	NLD	Chief Minister of Kayin State	18.07.2019	Hpa-An
Nyi Nyi Min	NLD	Central Research Committee Member	24.01.2019	Yangon
Pe Myint	Independent	Writer / Minister of Information in the NLD cabinet	08.07.2019	Naypyidaw
Zayar Thaw	NLD	Lower House MP	21.07.2019	Naypyidaw
Phyu Phyu Thin	NLD	Lower House MP	26.12.2018	Yangon
Pu Gin Kam Lian	Zomi Congress for Democracy	General Secretary	22.07.2019	Naypyidaw
Pyone Kathy Naing	NLD	Lower House MP	29.12.2018	Yangon
Sai Nyunt Lwin	Shan Nationalities League for Democracy	Vice-Chairman	23.07.2019	Yangon
Sa Khin Zaw Linn	NLD	Upper House MP	23.02.2019	Naypyidaw

Sandar Min	NLD	Yangon Region MP	01.02.2019; 04.02.2019	Yangon
Thaung Tun aka Nyein Thit		Member of the Central Committee	18.02.2019	Yangon
Thein Myint	NLD	Yangon Region Parliament	28.01.2019	Yangon
Tint Lwin	NLD	Yangon Region MP	24.01.2019	Yangon
Yan Aung	NLD	Yangon Region MP	26.12.2018	Yangon
Ye Htut	USDP	Former Minister of Information in Thein Sein's cabinet.	12.08.2019	Yangon

Appendix E: NVivo Codebook (nodes in alphabetical order)

Name	Description	Files	References
1982 Citizenship Law	Mentions of the 1982 Citizenship Law.	1	2
1988 Uprising	References to the 1988 Uprising, also referred to as 8888 Uprising.	14	18
1990 Elections	References to the 1990 elections.	7	21
2008 Constitution	References to the 2008 Constitution.	2	2
2008 Constitution Approval Vote	Statements specifically referencing the approval vote for the 2008 Constitution.	2	2
2010 Elections	References to the 2010 general election.	4	4
2010 Split	Responses in reference to the 2010 NLD party-split.	7	11
2012 By-elections	References to the 2012 by-elections.	3	3
2015 Election	References to the 2015 general election.	3	3
2020 Election	References to the 2020 general election.	2	3
A League Not a Party	Specific reference to the notion that the NLD was not founded as a political party but as a broad political league.	3	3
Alliances	References to party alliances.	2	3
Amarapura	References to the series of meetings in Amarapura that consolidated the 1990 party split.	7	12
Article 66(d)	References to Article 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law.	16	27
ASSK and NLD	Statements speaking to the relationship between Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD.	4	13
ASSK Discipline	References to Aung San Suu Kyi's emphasis on discipline.	1	3

Name	Description	Files	References
ASSK Expulsion	References to Aung San Suu Kyi's expulsion from the NLD in the 1990s.	2	2
ASSK Governance Style	References to Aung San Suu Kyi's governance style.	11	20
ASSK on Good Governance	Aung San Suu Kyi's references to good governance.	1	3
ASSK Reverence	Statements that speak to the reverence of Aung San Suu Kyi and that exemplify the reverence for Aung San Suu Kyi.	17	31
ASSK Selection	References addressing the idea that Aung San Suu Kyi was "recruited" or "selected" for the NLD.	2	2
ASSK Undemocratic	References to conduct and decisions that respondents deemed undemocratic or that could be considered undemocratic.	11	27
Aung Gyi Split	References to the split of the Aung Gyi faction.	4	6
Aung San Oo	Reference to Aung San Suu Kyi's brother.	1	1
AungSuuTin	Statements speaking to the early NLD being an alliance of three factions and the common practice of referring to them as AungSuuTin.	6	6
Authority of Chief Ministers	Reference to the authority of Chief Ministers.	2	2
Ba Ka Ta	References to the All Burma Federation of Student Unions	2	2
Bogyoke Bridge Mon State	References to the arguments that arose over the NLD's decision to name a bridge in Mon State after General Aung San.	4	5

Name	Description	Files	References
Calls to Respect the 1990 Election	Examples of the frequent calls to respect the 1990 election issued by the NLD throughout the 1990s.	2	2
Centralisation	References to party centralisation.	8	12
Chronology of the NLD (MYAS) Background	Specific sections of Monywa Aung Shin's History of the NLD, noted as important for background information.	1	3
Citizenship	References to issues of citizenship.	2	2
Communication with Electorate	Specific mention of the communication with the electorate.	1	1
Communist	References to communist ideology and communists in the NLD.	3	7
Constitutional Assembly	References to the Constitutional Assembly.	2	2
Constitutional Change	References to constitutional change.	11	14
Control in the NLD	References to control dynamics in the NLD, hierarchies and practices of control in the party.	28	61
Corruption	References to corruption in general. Includes references to corruption in the party, in government and in the military.	12	20
Coup	References to the fear of a new military coup and fear of a military coup at past junctures.	10	11
CRPP	References to the Committee Representing the People's Parliament.	5	14
Data Problems	Statements that speak to data collection and data quality problems in the context of Myanmar.	4	6
Defining Moments	Moments highlighted as defining moments for the NLD.	5	5

Name	Description	Files	References
Definition of Aung Sans Tatmadaw in the Eyes of the NLD	Reference to a party statement that expands on the way the NLD viewed the military through the lens of General Aung San's legacy.	1	1
Democracy in Myanmar	References to democracy in Myanmar in general. Includes references to state of democracy, understanding of democracy, and challenges to democracy.	22	46
Democracy in the NLD	References to perceptions of democracy within the NLD. Includes understandings, accounts of processes and procedures, and challenges.	31	82
Depayin	References to the assault of an NLD convoy near Depayin.	2	2
Disillusion	Statements that exemplify disillusion with the NLD.	9	19
D-Wave	References to D-Wave, the NLD's party newspaper.	2	2
Election Competition in Ethnic Areas	Reference to the NLD's decision to contest for electoral seats in ethnic areas.	1	2
Election Manifesto	Reference to a specific issue with the 2015 election manifesto.	1	1
Excellent Single Quotes	Highlighting a series of excellent statements for use in the thesis.	12	18
Ex-military in NLD	References to- and accounts by ex-military officers in the NLD.	20	31
Factions	References generally speaking to the transformation of the NLD's factions over time.	31	84
Fear of the NLD	References to fears of the party.	2	2
Freedom of Speech	References to freedom of speech.	15	26

Name	Description	Files	References
Funny MP Work Anecdote	Reference to a long but amusing anecdote that illustrates some of the difficulties MPs face when representing their constituents.	1	3
GAD Transfer	References to the transfer of the General Administration Department from the oversight of the military-controlled Ministry of Home Affairs to the oversight of the NLD government.	2	4
Gandhi Hall	References to the 1990 NLD meeting at Gandhi Hall in Yangon that led to the Gandhi Hall Declaration. References to the Gandhi Hall Declaration.	9	14
Global NLM	References to the Global New Light for Myanmar, a government-run newspaper used almost exclusively for propaganda.	2	3
HIV	References to the HI-Virus and combatting it in Myanmar.	2	2
Hluttaw Joint Coordination Committee	References to the Joint Coordination Committee at parliament.	1	2
Human Rights	References to human rights.	4	5
Ideology of Opposition	References to particular values that were cultivated to sustain the party in opposition.	7	9
Influence of Authoritarianism on NLD	References that broadly speak to the influence of authoritarianism on the NLD.	40	99
Information Officer	References to the role of information officer in the party.	1	2
International Media	References to international media and its effect on discourse in Myanmar.	4	4
International Support	References to international support for the party.	6	6

Name	Description	Files	References
Law Amendment 2012-2015	References to law amendment processes before the NLD's term in government.	2	3
Left Right	Reference to exchanges about the meaning of the political categories "left" and "right" in the NLD.	2	6
Legacy of Aung San	References to the effect of the legacy of General Aung San on Myanmar politics.	2	3
Loyalty	References to the importance of loyalty.	1	3
Ma Ba Tha	References to the the ultra-nationalist Buddhist organisation.	1	1
Ma Ka Ta	References to the All Myanmar Students Union	2	2
Manifesto Politics	Statements using the term "manifesto politics" to refer to the limited political capacity the NLD had at various times during its existence.	2	2
Military Business	References to military businesses	2	7
Military Conditions	References to political conditions while the military was ruling the country.	2	7
Military Perception of NLD	Perceptions of the NLD inside the military.	1	11
Ministry of Information	References to the Ministry of Information	3	9
MPs Working Culture	Accounts that provide insights into the work culture of NLD MPs.	8	16
Myanmar Special Case	Interviewees argue that Myanmar is a special case.	2	7
National Convention	References to the National Convention.	10	15
National Reconciliation	References to national reconciliation, includes the understanding of national reconciliation and the approach to it.	18	34

Name	Description	Files	References
NCA	References to the National Ceasefire Agreement.	2	7
NDF NLD Difference	On the difference between the NLD and the National Democratic Force which was created by former NLD members after the 2010 split.	1	2
NLD Aims	Accounts of the aims of the NLD as a political party.	16	24
NLD and Media	References to the relationship between the NLD and the media.	4	19
NLD and Social Media	References to the NLD's perspective on social media and problems that arise from it.	5	11
NLD Approach to Government	References that speak to the NLD's approach to government or that specifically address it.	16	30
NLD Capacity Building	References to the NLD's approach to capacity building and the perception of a need for it.	7	14
NLD CSO	References to the relationship between the NLD and civil society organisations.	3	8
NLD Economic Outlook	References to projections on the economy by NLD politicians.	3	9
NLD Ethnic Armed Groups	References to the relationship between the NLD and ethnic armed groups.	3	8
NLD Ethnic Relations	On the relationship between the NLD and ethnic minority groups.	26	50
NLD Family	References to families in which several members are active in the NLD.	4	10
NLD Future	References to the future of the party, focused on concerns.	4	9

Name	Description	Files	References
NLD in Parliament	Statements illuminating the NLD's approaches to parliamentary work.	4	10
NLD Internal Communication	References speaking to the way the party communicates internally.	15	29
NLD Internal Processes and Structures	References to internal processes and structures.	17	53
Becoming a Member	Accounts that illustrate how one can become a member of the NLD.	4	9
Funding	References to party funding.	10	18
Gatekeepers	Statements that illustrate who performs gate keeper functions in the party.	6	11
Gov-Elect-On Ground Rel	References that illuminate the relationship between the party in government, the elected lawmakers, and the party on the ground.	9	13
Hierarchy	Statements that illustrate the hierarchy of the NLD.	10	19
Misconduct	References to what the party perceives as misconduct and how it responds to it.	3	5
NLD in Government	Statements providing insights on the NLD's approach to government.	8	14
NLD Party Constitution	References to the NLD's party constitution.	7	9
NLD Party Office	References to the main party office.	1	1
Party Organs	References to a series of party organs.	1	1
Bill Committee	References to the work of NLD politicians on the bill committee in parliament.	3	8
CEC	References to the Central Executive Committee.	12	18

Name	Description	Files	References
Central Committee	References to the party's central committee.	7	12
Committee Election Process	Statements illustrating the way committee members are selected and elected.	2	4
Committee General	General references to the work of committees.	3	5
Complains Committee	Reference to the internal complains committee.	3	4
Economic Committee	References to the party's economic committee.	2	3
Finance and Commerce Development Committee	References to the finance and commerce development committee.	3	8
Hluttaw Labour Committee	References to the work of NLD politicians in the parliamentary labor committee.	3	8
Hluttaw Local and Foreign Labour Committee	References to the work of NLD politicians in the parliamentary local and foreign labour committee.	3	8
Hluttaw Women Committee	References to the work of NLD politicians on the parliamentary women committee.	3	8
Information Committee	References to the information Committee.	3	4
MP Review Committee	Accounts of the work of the party's MP review committee.	5	9
Party Conference	References to NLD party conferences.	1	1
Party Disciplinary Committee	References illustrating the work of the party disciplinary committee.	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Planning and Development Committee	References to the planning and development committee.	3	8
Rules and Regulations Committee	References explaining the work of the party's rules and regulations committee.	2	4
Social and Management committee	References to the social and management committee.	1	1
Yangon Region Finance Planning and Economic Affairs Committee	References to the Yangon Region committee on finance, planning, and economic affairs.	4	9
Party Whip	References to the work of the party whips.	1	1
Rising in Rank	References to the promotion processes inside the party.	2	3
Selection of Candidates	Accounts that illustrate the procedures for the selection of candidates.	17	29
Voicing Critique	Statements speaking to the avenues that exist for voicing criticism inside the party.	4	4
Women	References to the role of women in the NLD and gender dimensions of party politics.	5	6
NLD Members Belonging to an Ethnic Minority	References to the experiences of NLD members who are not Bamar.	3	3
NLD Military Relations	References to the relationship between the NLD and the military.	32	72
NLD's Soft Approach to the Military Since Coming to Power	References to the perception that the NLD softened its approach to the military after coming to power.	5	6

Name	Description	Files	References
NLD Old Young	References that illustrate the divide between old and new members but also between old and young members.	5	8
NLD Party Culture	References that provide insights into what shapes the NLD's culture.	34	72
NLD Perception	Statements of how the NLD is perceived in Myanmar by non-members.	5	7
NLD Propaganda	References to the NLD using propaganda.	2	5
NLD USDP Relations	References to the relationship between the NLD and the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party.	4	4
Nu	References to former Prime Minister Nu.	1	1
Off the Record Background	Statements that were made off the record, but which can be used for background with the explicit permission of the interviewee.	7	8
Opposition Outside the NLD	References to opposition activities by NLD politicians that were not conducted under the auspices of the party.	1	1
Overall Development 2010 - 2015	References to the overall political development of Myanmar between 2010 and 2015.	1	1
Panglong	References to the meeting at Panglong in 1947 that resulted in the Panglong Declaration.	1	1
Party Change	References to broad dynamics of party change.	27	61
Party Dependency	References to NLD politicians becoming dependent on the party.	2	2
Party Newcomers	References to politicians who joined the party ahead of the 2015 general election	9	12

Name	Description	Files	References
	(and in rarer cases ahead of the 2012 by-elections).		
Party Splits	References to party splits.	5	7
Patriots and Technicians	References to a set of particular classifications for NLD politicians.	1	1
Peace Process	References to the peace process.	2	2
Peoples Party NLD	References to the relationship between the People's Party and the NLD.	1	1
Perception of the Military in the NLD	References to the perception of the military in the NLD.	2	2
Perception of the West	References to the perception of the "West" in the NLD.	1	1
Phyo Min Thein	References to the NLD chief minister for the Yangon Region in relation to scandals.	4	7
Pleas to Release NLD Politicians	References to the frequently stated requests and pleas to release political prisoners.	1	1
Political Challenges	References to broad political challenges in Myanmar.	3	3
Political Party	References to the understanding of the term political party.	1	1
Political Prisoner Definition	References that illustrate the NLD's understanding of the term political prisoner.	1	1
Politician Activist	References that illustrate the prevalent understanding in the NLD that activists and politicians are different. Includes accounts of transformation from activist to politician.	9	17

Name	Description	Files	References
Pre-NLD	Some accounts of political engagement of later NLD members before the founding of the party.	1	2
Prison Effects	References to the effects of prison on individual members and the party as a whole.	19	27
Prison Experience	Accounts of prison experiences by NLD members.	6	11
Prison Waves	Accounts highlighting that there were "waves" of arrest, a lot of arrests at one point followed by fewer arrests thereafter and a subsequent new "wave" of arrests. Repeating cycle.	2	2
Pro-Democracy - Against Authoritarianism	Statements illustrating the difference between being an advocate for democracy and being an advocate against authoritarianism.	1	1
Protest	General references to protest activities.	3	3
Protest Politics	Statements illustrating how the party used protest to make politics.	1	2
Protest Pre 1988	References to protests that occurred prior to 1988.	2	2
Public Approval Ceremonies	References to public approval ceremonies conducted by the military.	1	1
Rakhine	References to Rakhine State and the Rohingya genocide.	11	34
Reason for Joining the NLD	Each interviewee's reason for joining the party.	29	43
Religion	References to the role of religion for the party.	1	1
Resource Based Leadership	References to the ability of a limited number of NLD politicians to financially	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
	contribute directly to the work of their respective office.		
Revolutionary Spirit	References to the revolutionary spirit that was present in the NLD at certain junctures.	1	1
Revolution-Compromise	References to the friction between the "revolutionary spirit" and the need for compromise.	1	1
Roadmap to Democracy	References to the military's roadmap for discipline-flourishing democracy.	1	3
Rumour	References to political rumours.	1	1
Saffron Revolution	References to the 2007 Saffron Revolution.	3	6
Fuel Price	References to the role of the fuel price in the Saffron Revolution.	1	1
Sanctions	References to sanctions by foreign governments.	1	2
Sean Turnell	References to Aung San Suu Kyi's economic advisor Sean Turnell.	1	2
Security Detail	References to Aung San Suu Kyi's security detail.	2	5
SS20	References to the SS20 that was responsible for Aung San Suu Kyi's security for some time in the 1990s.	1	2
Tricolour	References to the Tricolour students who were responsible for ASSK's security for a brief time.	1	4
Sein Win	References to the former Chairman of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma.	1	1
Senior Politicians Group	References to a group outside the NLD that advised the party.	2	4

Name	Description	Files	References
Shwe Mann	References to USDP politician Shwe Mann and the relationship with Aung San Suu Kyi.	2	2
Shwegondaing Statement	References to the NLD's Shwegondaing statement.	2	2
SNLD NLD Relations	References to the relationship between the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy and the NLD.	1	9
Source of Political Party Identity	References to specific sources of party identity.	4	5
Student Protest	References to student protest.	3	4
Student Support NLD	References to the ways in which student protesters supported the NLD.	2	2
Student Union	References to the political influence of student unions.	5	9
Surveillance in the NLD	Statements illustrating the way surveillance was used within the NLD.	2	2
Surveillance of NLD	References to the surveillance of the NLD.	2	2
Survival of the Party	Some accounts highlighting the importance of the survival of the party.	3	3
Swetaw Bomb	Reference to the 1996 bomb explosion at Swetaw Pagoda.	1	1
Tale of Old Glory	Accounts that espouse the common ahistorical perspective that Myanmar was al almost perfect country prior to the military coup.	2	2
Tanintharyi Chief Minister	References to the corruption scandal around the Tanintharyi chief minister.	1	1
Telecommunications Law	References to the Telecommunications Law in general.	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
The Record	References to the NLD periodical "The Record", published in the 1990s.	1	1
Tin Oo	References to NLD founder Tin Oo.	2	2
Torture	References to torture.	1	1
Transformation Military	References to the transformation of the military.	1	1
Typical 2000s NLD Statement	A typical example of "manifesto politics".	1	1
UEC	References to the Union Election Commission.	1	1
UMFCCI	References to the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry.	1	1
UN	References to the UN.	1	1
Undemocratic Democrats	References speaking to the category of undemocratic democrats.	18	37
Unity	Statement highlighting the importance of unity.	1	1
UNLD	References to the United Nationalities League for Democracy.	1	2
USDP Military Relations	References to the relationship between the USDP and the military.	1	2
Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo	References to the two Reuters journalists.	5	6
What Does Democracy Mean to You	Collection of responses to the question what democracy means to you.	16	18
What Does the NLD Stand for	Statements with interesting summary of what the NLD stands for.	2	2

Name	Description	Files	References
When to Break with Authoritarian Modes	Specific reference on when the NLD should break with authoritarian politics.	1	1
Win Htein	References to influential NLD politician Win Htein, including his purge from party positions.	1	5
Win Tin	References to the influential NLD politician Win Tin.	1	1
Ya Ka Ta	References to the Yangon Students Union.	1	1
Yangon General Hospital	References to Yangon General Hospital.	1	1
Yangon Petrol	References to the Yangon Petrol scandal.	1	1
YBS	References to the Yangon Bus Service scandal.	1	1
Youth Wing	References to the NLD youth wing.	2	2

Appendix F: experiences of oppression in the NLD

1) Dr May Win Myint, Member of the NLD CEC and MP, 2019:

“I will talk about the prison experience. I only spent a week in Aung Tha Byay interrogation camp. They did not torture me like they did the students. I think it was because of the party background and being an MP elect. They only did mental torture. They asked me questions the whole night. When I got sleepy, they started questioning. My fellow detainee with the same case was arrested in Mandalay. My head was covered in cloth. There were some staff members who sympathised with me. In the morning of the day, I was sent to the prison, some fried rice was given to me to eat. I could not eat that. A female officer bought me some noodles instead as she was afraid that I would be hungry in prison. I did not know I was going to be sent to prison. The [interrogation] camp was in our township, and they knew me. After that they told me to put my stuff away. Then they covered my head with black cloth. I could see the feet of the people. I knew that there were four boys and three girls who had been arrested together with me. We were eight in total. When I arrived at the prison, the cloth over my head was changed, from blue to black.

When we entered the prison, all went silent. We were put into cells. There was a curtain at the entrance of my cell. They then removed the cloth from my head. I spent a month there. Male and female detainees were placed separately. So, we could no longer know where the boys were. Near my cell was a prison shop that sold curries. I was starving. I think they were torturing me mentally. In a month's time, I only ate two things apart from the prison meal, a stick of wafer and Shwe Pazun Dried Cake. A girl who distributed the hot water ration fed me stealthily. Normally, we were served in a dog bowl. There was an awful bean soup. I did not eat for three days, and they forced me to sign a statement saying that not eating was my own decision. I became pale. Another thing was the toilet. There was a big bowl without any cover in the cell. There was some water in it. I had to use it to

wash my face. The dirt was floating in it. How could I eat my meal? Soon, I became depressed. Something was written with red ink on the wall of my cell. “Basic Education High School No. 1, Bahan. I am here executing my duty.” I asked myself, “why am I depressed? That one [the author of the writing on the wall] was a young student. He had been moved from here [the cell] because I was moved here. I must not be depressed.” “I am here executing my duty” encouraged me a lot. I got sick. The prison doctor came and looked at me. He ordered to give me an egg and a spoon of sugar daily. The medical officer actually was not a doctor. She was just one of the prison staff. Her assistant was a female prisoner. The medical officer sent the assistant away, telling her to get some water. When the assistant was away, the medical officer told me that the [NLD] headquarter had approached her and asked about me. She told me that my guys wondered if I was ok. I was so happy and felt energetic.

I shared the egg with my fellow inmates in the next cell. I peeled the shell off. I cut the egg in half with my hair and gave one half to [Redacted], who was next door. She was not sick and did not receive an egg. We had not been to the court yet. So, we had not received any guests or parcels from outside. She only got bean soup and fish paste. I did not eat fish paste because it troubled my stomach. After I got the egg privilege, a thin girl showed up at my cell door. She offered me an egg. We were not allowed to speak to each other. I told her that I had already received my one. [...] And she admitted that the sentence on the wall was written by her. She was not the age of a student. She must have been around 30. “Do you know what the ink was?”, she said, “it was my period blood, and my name is [Redacted]” I was surprised to learn this. I had been thinking that it must be real blood, taken by cutting a body part. At that point, a warden shouted at us not to speak. “You fool [Redacted], you must not speak!”, she shouted at us. [...]

Only when I was sentenced at the court, I could speak to my guys outside. I was placed in the ward reserved for those who have received a death sentence. I was sent there with a black cloth over my head. [There] we had to use only eight cups of water for a shower. We could walk outside for 45 minutes in the morning and 30 minutes in the afternoon. We received a proper pooping bowl for babies made of plastic. I ordered it from my home. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was about to come. The year was 1999. [...]

The prison personnel told us to pack our belongings. We thought we were going to be moved. They covered my head with the cloth. The car went around so that we could not have a sense of where we were going. Only when we heard dog sounds, we learned that we had been moved to a military dog kennel. We were not all the political prisoners of the prison. Only five of us were moved there. We had to walk in a row and hold on to the shoulder of the person in front of us. We were like six blind people. Only later, did we learn that we had been hidden because the ICRC was about to come. Some female prisoners were with us as well. They [the prison personnel] lied to the ICRC telling them it [the dog kennel where they had been moved] was an unused garage. The ICRC never learned the truth.

When they [the ICRC] came the next time, they renovated our building. They installed wires and recorders. We knew this in advance because some prison staff had informed us. Finally, the ICRC official met us, they talk with us in the east ward. The intelligence personnel was right beside us. I signalled them with my eyes. Finally, I ask for a paper and wrote down “recording”. And I pointed upwards. The ICRC delegate told them to remove them. The intelligence guy refused to do so. Later, a senior intelligence person told his men to remove the recorder. They could not refuse my request for a paper. I wrote when I got one. We had only been sentenced to seven-years imprisonment. They did not show the people who had been sentenced to 42 years like [Redacted]. I informed the ICRC

that there were some people here with longer sentences. They asked how long these sentences were. I explained that if you were sued under only one article you got seven years. If there were six [articles under which you were sued], you got 42 years. The prison only exposed people like [Redacted] and me. The ones with the longer sentences were in another room.

I found out that the prison was cheating the delegates. I used my eyes to communicate as well. Later the delegates asked for whoever they wanted to meet and talked with them under a tree away from prying eyes. We complained about how dirty the toilets were. After ICRC's second visit, the toilet and meals became better. We were given opportunities to read. They often sent us to the interrogation camp. If I had signed a statement assuring them that I would not engage in politics in the future, I would have been released at once, but I did not.

In 2004, after seven years of imprisonment, I was taken to military intelligence and they read a statement stating that I was released, but that my release would interfere with the peace of the state. So, I was imprisoned a second time for four years without even having to step outside the prison. Before I was arrested in 1991, my husband had been forced to retire after 24 years in service at PPE [a government publishing department], and my son had been sent to prison. Even though my whole family had to sacrifice a lot for the involvement in politics, my husband supported me all the way. My father is also a party member, so until now, no one in my family stops us from doing politics" (Dr May Win Myint 2019, AI).

2) Dr Myo Nyunt, Party Spokesperson, and member of the CEC, 2019:

"I have been a medical practitioner since my graduation in 1977. I started my practice in my native town, Dedaye, in 1979. I also worked in the township co-operative clinic for five years. When the 1988 uprising broke out, all the young students took part in the

demonstration. I had experienced such demonstrations being crushed violently by the military. I saw that they were beaten up and I became sad and sorry for the students.

So, I decided to organise township medical doctors to take part in the demonstration. I was taken to stages to give speeches. I said that we must unite and not make aggressive moves although we want to change the current administration. When the military coup took place, I had to go to the rural areas, and hide for two months. [...]

When our leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo were put under house arrest in 1989, I joined the NLD in my township. Then I became a township executive member, and in 1990 I ran for constituency number 1 in Dedaye township, and I was elected. There was no parliament after the 1990 elections, but I was charged with a criminal act, under the national pharmaceutical act. I had set up a small factory producing tablets such as paracetamol, burplex and some three or four other items. I had applied to the jury of the township medical officer and the central food and drug administration for the examination of my factory. I was issued a certificate stating that I could extend my factory [in line with the production of these tablets] but then the military accused me of producing [illicit] drugs. My factory was seized, and I was put into prison for seven years” (Dr Myo Nyunt 2019, AI).

3) Hlat Htay, NLD MP in the Yangon Region Parliament, 2019:

“Back in 1988, I was a final year student majoring in chemistry at Yangon University. I had been involved in the student movement related to the Phone Maw case at the university from the beginning. At the time of the 8888 uprising, I served as a central executive member in charge of information and communication in the Yangon University Student’s Union. While I was serving as the one in charge of information and communication, I was arrested by the military government in 1989. After I had been interrogated at Yae Kyi Ai interrogation camp for about three months, I was released. In 1990, I was arrested again

for organising a commemoration of Phone Maw. For this event I was sentenced to four years imprisonment by a military court. During the time of imprisonment, they sent me to Insein prison, a special prison, and Theyat prison. After enduring severe torture in every prison, I was sent to, I was finally released alive. At the time of U Nu's funeral, I was arrested again due to the [involvement in] the student movement and was released after having been interrogated for about one month. Later, when the 1996 student movement occurred, they chased me, but I could successfully abscond for about eight months. After eight months I went back home. At the time of the Saffron Revolution, I absconded for about three months. [...]

One important thing was the brutal and unfair treatment of prisoners by the wardens. If you were a political prisoner, you faced more oppressive actions than the ordinary inmates. [...] I revolted against such unfairness inside the prison. We resisted and campaigned for the rights of political prisoners inside the prison. I was punished several times for such activities. Among other things, I was consigned to solitary confinement twice and was beaten savagely. The second time – the worst time – my state was so bad that I could not even urinate, but I passed blood in my urine. Fortunately, I was released from prison alive. We have suffered these kinds of oppressive and cruel experiences. But we only had political convictions in our mind even when we were in prison. Because of breathing with these convictions in mind, because of seeing other sophisticated old senior politicians, we had a chance to polish our political skills and our understanding” (Hla Htay 2019, AI).

4) Khin Maung Win, NLD MP in the Yangon Region Parliament, 2019:

“As I said before we did not engage in political activism out of self-interest but for the well-being of everyone, for the benefit of our own country, and our nationality. Such an endeavour takes time. We need to be patient, we need perseverance. We were arrested often and kept at police stations or in prisons. We had to face torture in prison. [...] But our

beliefs as politicians were not shaken by such acts. It encouraged us to be brave. To bring about development in our country and to create a nice place to live it is not enough to just talk and criticise the process. We have to participate in the process. Only our own work will lead to a successful transformation. Consequently, we have been working for 30 years since the establishment of the NLD. My wife was sacked from her position as a teacher 20 long years ago. My whole business was also ruined. I finished my school with [a focus on] physics and I used to perform mechanical tasks like setting up different kinds of machines, mostly lathes. I could fix and build these kinds of machines.

But they [the military] did cunning things to me, shutting down the electricity, frightening my customers with investigations into our relationship. Eventually, my business gradually dissolved. I had to sell on the street. For example, to receive 100 kyats¹, my wife needed to go to Pazundaung market four times. We spiralled down to this life from having been factory owners. To receive 100 kyats, first we had to go there [the market] and ask, “do you want to eat something?” Then we deliver the plate the next time. Then we went back to take the empty plate because we did not have enough plates. The next time we went back again to ask for money. Sometimes we received cash immediately but sometimes we did not. [...] Our life was hard like that. We sold rice, fried-rice, noodle salad and such things. They cost 100 kyats back then. Anyway, even though we had a hard time we persisted and worked. [...] Not only I but also my friends who are politicians suffered from the detention in prison. Some passed away, some got very bad health conditions due to the experiences in prison. I had a stroke when I was freed from prison” (Khin Maung Win 2018, AI).

¹ While I know the exact time Khin Maung Win is referring to, 100 Kyats is a small amount of money by the standards of a developed country. When I interviewed Khin Maung Win on 25 January 2019, 100 Kyats were worth approximately 0,06 USD.

5) Kyaw Aung, NLD politician and chairman of the Win Tin Foundation, 2019:

“I have been interested in politics and got involved about fifty years ago when I was 14-15 years old and a high school student. During my final academic year of high school, I got involved in politics and was detained afterwards for the first time in my life. I became the youngest student political prisoner under the BSPP government [...]. Since then, I have been interested in politics and by politics I mean essentially the BSPP era. People had been suffering from the BSPP military dictatorship under the leadership of U Ne Win. I had also suffered both as a citizen and a student. I was not happy about it. From that time on I was revolting against the BSPP military autocrats. [...] Around 1974, 1975, 1976 significant social movements against the BSPP emerged. By the time of the 1974 Workers’ Uprising, the U Thant Uprising and the Thakin Kodaw Hmaing Centennial Uprising I had already become a senior student at university. [...] I was involved in these uprisings actively at the front as a student leader. [...] In consequence, I was detained for the second time in 1975 when I was 21 because of my involvement in the Shwedagon Uprising, also referred to as the Anniversary Uprising. I was arrested and sentenced to nine years in prison. [...]

Student activists were imprisoned for a maximum of seven to nine years. I was sentenced to nine years in prison by an arbitrary military court. I continued to engage in politics in prison. I was organising political movements inside prison. [...] In 1980 my release was ordered under a presidential amnesty. [...] Between my release from prison in 1980 and the 1988 People’s Uprising I was involved in underground politics. [...] In 1988 I was again actively involved at the front of the movement together with student leaders. [...] After the military coup, the political forces came together and discussed. They started founding political parties with their own political groups [...]. There were PPP, Ma Na Ta, and other political parties my friends had founded. They offered me top level positions in their parties, but I declined them all. But I joined the NLD.

I thought that we needed to be united under one party. It was AungSuuTin at that time. [...] I started working in the NLD in 1989. [...] Back then I was living in Thingankyun township. So, I started working in the recruiting committee of the Thingankyun NLD, recruiting committee. [...] After the 1990 general election, I helped the MP elects move to foreign lands and work there. To hide them, I had built a basement in my house. I helped them go abroad while working for the NLD, helping them to reach liberated areas [...] so that they could avoid arrest and form a government over there. I also created nests [safe houses] for them. [...] I was arrested again around 1991 or 1992, only for a few days though. Since 1988 I have never been in prison for very long. We made sure that I would not be arrested. We cleverly avoided dangers and arrests. If the military intelligence had noticed our moves, we would have been sentenced to 20 years in prison on account of the gravity of our actions (Kyaw Aung 2019, AI).

6) Sandar Min, NLD MP in the Yangon Region Parliament, 2018:

“I am going to give you a briefing. Wait a second; I am going to close the door. In 1988 a revolution broke out in our country. I was a third year university student at that time. All the university students got involved in the 1988 transition period. I was one of them and took part in the revolution. One distinctive factor was that there were students who acted through unions as well as students who carried out their tasks in collaboration with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. I was in a student group that collaborated with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. It was called the Tricolour Student group. Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, Ko Mya Aye and Ko Htay Kywel formed the All Burma Federation of Student Unions. I did not participate in the union but in the Tricolour student group associated with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. This group as its main function assisted her in her public speeches inside and outside of her house and was in charge of security tasks and her safety. In 1989, when Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was put under house arrest, the thirty Tricolour students who were associated with her

were also arrested. The date we were arrested was 19 July and we were marching to the martyr's mausoleum to pay a salute. All the student unions and groups cooperated, met at Shwegondaing, and launched a protest there where we were blocked and arrested. We were put into Insein prison, and the military tribunal sentenced us to three years in prison. I went back to college after I was released from prison and my first degree was a BSc in chemistry.

On that day the flame of politics had been ignited in our hearts. Our country was under the reign of a military dictatorship. Therefore, we continued to embark on our revolutionary road while sitting in our classes. The road was full of obstacles and troubles. The revolution turned into an underground [struggle] as it was impossible to undertake overt resistance. Therefore, some students went to the jungle to participate in armed struggles. We remained in the city and joined the underground. But it was a time when a lot of students were imprisoned, and open resistance was barely an option. Therefore, we did not officially identify ourselves as NLD members but only as a student group. At the time, the NLD was in a very difficult position. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was under house arrest. [...] The years were going by and in 1996 students got arrested again. [...] We were out of prison in 1996 but rearrested in relation to the bomb blast at Swetaw Pagoda. The truth is that it was not the students who were behind the bomb blast, but nobody knows who it was. We were put into prison at this time and released after a month of detention. We waited until 2004. The students who had been serving long prison sentences since 1989 were gradually set free from late 2002 and by 2004 they were quite organised. We, the Tricolour students, the All Burma Federation of Student Unions, the All Myanmar Student Union, the Yangon Student Union, and the Democratic Party for a New Society.

We students decided to cooperate with other students who had the same mindset and vision to act under the roof of only one organisation after putting away the flags of our respective mother organisations. For this purpose, we formed the 88 generation group. [...]

The 88 generation group was watched very closely by all kinds of intelligence, including military intelligence. Our political movement became more and more serious, and we founded cells all over the country. [...]

[In 2007] the price of petrol and other commodities increased. Therefore, we decided to initiate protest [...]. Back then it was super difficult to march on the streets and protest. Besides, the military intelligence knew that we were organising the protests and started arresting 88 generation leaders at midnight. Four leaders were captured in a single day, and we decided to move forward with the revolution in a more systematic way. That is to say that we planned and decided who was going to be arrested and who was going to evade arrest and continue organising the protest. [...] We decided that women would be the first to march on the streets. [Name redacted], who recently died in an accident, [Name redacted] and I started protesting on the streets. [...] We contacted the BBC and [Voice of] America on mobile and proceeded to give interviews throughout the protest.

The situation was very awful. They cracked down on the protest, we were split up and beaten. Nonetheless, we decided to keep on protesting in the coming days. The public was in fear at first but later they joined in [...]. Some of the participants were arrested and yet we tried to continue to march on the coming days. I was captured at midnight the next day. I was sent all the way up to Insein prison. [...] I was arrested first and the responsibility to carry on the protest without fear and hesitation fell on the rest. And that is exactly what they did. [...]

Only six months after our arrests, the Saffron Revolution broke out. [...] We were in prison when the Saffron Revolution took place. [...] After a six-month trial in 2008, I was sentenced to 65 years in prison. I was charged [and sentenced] under the Electronics Act to 60 years in prison and sentenced to five years in prison for joining the 88 Generation which they had declared an unlawful association. Twelve student leaders, including myself,

Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, Ko Mya Aye and Ko Htay Kywel were sentenced to 65 years in prison. The rest of the members were sentenced to twenty years and less in prison. We had been charged under the Electronics Act due to an action in 2006. In 2006 there had been a vote on the persecution of our country at the UN Security Council. China and Russia vetoed the decision to proceed with the persecution at the UN Security Council. [...] So, we sent two letters to China's President Hu Jintao, and to the Russian President Putin, stating that they were responsible for the consequences our people might encounter in the future due to their vetoes.

They informed our government of these letters. The government considered this act a defamation of the state. We had also sent letters to the UN and the military government, so there was a total of four letters. We were sentenced to 60 years in prison, 15 years for each letter. We had sent the letters via email, so it fell under the Electronics Act. Our group of 40 was separated and sent to about 40 different prisons throughout the country. I was sent to Myaung Mya prison. I was released on 13 January 2012, during the reign of the Thein Sein government, under a presidential amnesty. [...] All of the 88 generation students were released from prison in the 2012 presidential amnesty. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi invited me over and met with me on the day I was freed. She told me that she was going to run for office in the 2012 by-election and urged me to compete in the Zabuthiri constituency in Naypyidaw, which had become vacant after U Thein Sein had been elected president. I replied that I was ready to take the task she gave me. Only then did I join the NLD.

I had been cooperating with the party and undertaking political tasks since I was eighteen. I had not been a party member though. I only became a party member in 2012 as I was going to hold an office through the party. I won and became the Pyithu Hluttaw representative for the Zabuthiri constituency. My MP career started there. In the 2015

election, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi thought the Yangon and Mandalay Regions were very important and that she needed qualified senior people to compete in these regions. Therefore, she asked me to compete in the Yangon region. I therefore switched from my national position to a regional one. I ran for office in the Seikkyi Kanaungto district. Its population is the second smallest in the Yangon Region, second only to the Coco Island. The USDP is rooted in Coco Island. [...] I achieved a landslide victory and became representative of No. 1 Seikkyi Kanaungto Township, Yangon Region. We formed committees in the regional parliament, and I became the president of the Finance, Planning and Economic Affairs Committee. That is all. This is my history” (Sandar Min 2018, AI).

7) Zayar Thaw, NLD MP and co-founder of Generation Wave, 2019:

“At the time of the 1988 Uprising, I was only eight years old. So, I do not know too much. I do not remember too many things about protesting and so on, you know. But I know the place where I lived in 1988, which was in front of the Rangoon General Hospital. The Rangoon General Hospital was very important place for the protest movement. It was like a protest base camp or something like that. That is why I saw so many things, like the military cracking down on protestors brutally and so on.

During my high school years, I wrote some poems and so on. At that time, they were not against the government or something like that. It was more the expression of a young man’s dreams, hopes, and anger. But the funny thing was that most of the magazines, most of the magazine publishers, did not want to publish my poems. I was a little bit surprised because I was not deeply involved, I was not deeply touched, by politics. But they were reluctant to publish my poems.

In 1996, the student uprisings occurred again at Rangoon University. At that time, I was not a university student yet. I was involved in protesting but not in a leading role.

When the government cracked down on the protests, most of the prominent leaders were put behind bars.

Around 2004 or 2005, the 88 Generation student leaders were released from prison. At that times, I contacted them and got involved in small campaigns, like the White Campaign. The White Campaign meant wearing white shirts to show sympathy for the political prisoners behind bars.

When the Saffron Revolution began in 2007, I was deeply involved. Before that, I had been in contact with some of the NLD members. But at that time our party – which was then not my party – could not recruit new members because the government had banned it. So, we could only support it and participate in its work as sympathisers. That was the most you could do. My colleagues and I were deeply involved in the movement during the 2007 Saffron Revolution. After that, we founded a political activist group called Generation Wave.

The thing is we were involved in politics not because of our knowledge or because of what we had learned. We were involved in politics because of our emotions because we did not want this kind of government, we did not want their oppression. We said, “enough is enough”, we wanted to get rid of this kind of government. [...] In early 2008, the government arrested my colleague and me and they sentenced me to six years. Now, I had a lot of time to think about what I wanted to do. Being a political activist, the most you can do is form a pressure group. If you want to change the country or change its policy, you need to become a politician. If you want to become a politician, you need to set up your own party or join a party. The NLD is the only one we can trust. [...] So, when I got out [of prison in 2011] I went straight to the NLD office and started working with them. [...]

The thing is, neither our party nor our country are fully democratic yet. My point of view is that I tried to become an MP because we had been fighting for democracy and

human rights on the streets, but we did not reach our goals. Now, I am trying to fight for democracy and human rights in parliament” (Zeyar Thaw² 2019, AI).

² Zayar Thaw was arrested in the aftermath of the 2021 military coup, charged under the Terrorism Act, and executed in July 2022. For more information see Beech, H. (2022), ‘Phyo Zeya Thaw, Burmese Pro-democracy Rapper, 41, Is Executed’, *The New York Times*, 28 July. Available at: [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/27/world/asia/27phyo-zeya-thaw-dead.html>].

Appendix G: NLD declaration on the occasion of the 58th Anti-Fascist Revolution Day, on the “true” military.

National League for Democracy

No. 97 B, West Shwegondaing Road,

Bahan Township, Yangon.

Anti-Facist Revolution Day Declaration on the 27th of March 2003

Announcement No. 3(3/03)

The people of a nation which once had sovereignty and enjoyed independence would not submit to the colonial rule of a foreign nation. Colonizing Britain occupied our nation, Myanmar in 1885. We lost our independence. However, the ethnic brothers of Myanmar have never been content or submitted to the colonial power. Whenever the circumstances allowed, they fought so that the colonists would leave our soil. They invested maximum intellectual and physical efforts to reassume the lost independence. These intellectual and physical efforts include resisting the colonial power with arms as well as resisting them with political means.

As such, the ‘We the Burmans Association’ (တို့ဗမာအစည်းအရုံး - Dobama Asiayone), which was leading the nation at the time decided at the pro-independence Year 1300 Uprising that we could only achieve independence by means of an armed revolution. In leading roles of the Dobama Association were young students and patriotic Thakin youths including Thakin Aung San. Furthermore, the Year 1300 Uprising was an undertaking to resist colonial power in the way of the people. Because of this people’s struggle, [political aspirations like] workers’ issue, farmers’ issue and students’ issue became issues of national liberation and complete independence.

Since the resolution was to employ the armed struggle to liberate the nation, military training, personal recruitment, weapons and ammunition procurement, unity among the political parties and unity among the people became critically important tasks. In particular for procurement, recruitment, and training efforts, the ‘Bamar Liberation Association’ (ဗမာ့ထွက်ရပ်ဂိုဏ်း - Bamar Htwat Yat Gaine) was founded in October 1939. The purpose of the foundation was to achieve the necessary unity among political parties. The association got in contact with Japan and the Thirty Comrades including young students and Thakins from the Dobama Association, led by Thakin Aung San, who would later on become General Aung San, received military training provided by the Japanese.

After the training, the genuine patriotic leaders of our country had to cooperate with Japan to acquire arms for independence. On the 27th of December 1941, the Burma Independence Army (BIA) was founded in Bangkok, the capital of Yutthaya (Now Thailand), under the leadership of General Aung San. The primary Burma Independence Army penetrated in different campaigns into Myanmar and fought the colonizing British. Some detachments from the BIA entered the country before the main forces did, informed the people and recruited and trained them as people's guerrilla forces. In March 1942, the BIA captured the capital Rangoon and by late May, it managed to reoccupy the entire country.

What were the convictions of the Burma Independence Army? It was a great Tatmadaw [glorious army] which precisely followed the directions, orders and teachings of its leader, the martyrous General Aung San.

In the founding days of the BIA in 1941, General Aung San made the following brave speech.

“Comrades, if you are not able to abandon your wives, children, homes and material wealth, I do not want you to serve in the Burma Independence Army...”

It created a spirit of selflessness.

“The nature of war dictates that we cannot say for sure whether we will win or lose. We have no way of knowing whether we will live or die. We cannot have a say...”

“In cases where we capture prisoners of war alive, be those Japanese or English, there is no protocol to exterminate them. We have to treat them well without torturing or killing them.”

It was an instruction to be kind to others even if they are the enemy. It reveals the kind-heartedness of the General.

“...Comrades, we will not have anything to eat during the battle or any extra clothes to wear. Therefore, throughout the war, all we will have is the ground to sleep on and rocks and sands to eat. This is all I can provide for. Don't you ever expect that by joining the BIA, you would get ranks and privileges, or get rich. The largest prize for you is death.”

This is a speech which is worth remembering for its martyrous spirit. Among the soldiers, it instilled a firm conviction, resilience, and bravery.

With that firm spirit and conviction, the BIA fought back the colonizing British. The BIA was a selfless, adventurous, and patriotic armed organization. An army with love and protection for the nation was born under the leadership of General Aung San.

But had the country achieved freedom? No, unfortunately our country was handed from the colonizers to fascist militarism. The first colonizers were democracies. The fascists mixed fascism and militarism to create an ideal to be followed without any deviations.

Therefore, we had to drive out those forces with fascist militarism from our soil. The Japanese granted us a sham independence, with a puppet government. Our people could not accept such arrangements. As such, General Aung San and other patriotic leaders had to develop plans to stage a revolution against the fascists. In order for a revolution to be successful, it has to include the following things:

- The presence of an armed organization or an army. At that time, there was the Burma National Army (BNA) which was restructured from the Burma Independence Army (BIA). Moreover, people's guerrilla forces had been organized as well to wage a civil war.
- As much military training as there could be.
- Adequate amount of weapons and ammunition.
- Unity among political parties.

Therefore, the Tatmadaw, the Communist Party and the People's Revolutionary Army joined forces under the leadership of General Aung San and formed the Anti-Fascist Revolutionary League (later Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League - AFPFL) between 4th and 7th of August 1944. In the League, General Aung San was supposed to take responsibility for military affairs and Thakin Soe from the Communist Party was supposed to take responsibility for political affairs.

The primary task of the league was to make the revolution successful with the overwhelming support from all the people (including all the ethnicities). Therefore, people from all classes and walks of life joined in the anti-fascist revolution which began on the 27th of March 1945. The great anti-fascist revolution was successful because people followed the leadership under the flag of the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) precisely.

Today is the 27th of March 2003, marking the 58th anniversary of the anti-fascist revolution, a great event of Myanmar's history. It is the most significant and unrivalled struggle of the people in Myanmar's history. We should be proud of that. "The task of independence never resembles a child longing for its mother's milk", said General Aung San and we fought in that spirit. A revolution against fascism inevitably necessitated an armed struggle.

The success of the revolution was the outcome of people working shoulder to shoulder with the Tatmadaw, which is an armed organization. Moreover, that revolutionary Tatmadaw won against fascists only because it precisely followed the orders, teachings and directions of General Aung San. In other words, the soul of the Tatmadaw is the desire of the people.

As such, the Tatmadaw was born out of an anti-colonist struggle, an anti-fascist revolution and [out of] the history of national liberation. We learned a valuable lesson: that the causes in the interest of the people will only be successful if we cooperate with the people.

There is a need to evaluate what sort of armed organization the Tatmadaw that was involved in the anti-fascist revolution (The Patriotic Tatmadaw as we now call it) was. This patriotic army evolved from the Burma Independence Army, the Burma Defence Army, and the Burma National Army inheriting their virtuous spirit, resilience, diligence and discipline. Therefore, the Tatmadaw is significant in Myanmar's history because General Aung San raised the spirit of genuine endeavor and diligence, that of resilience, that of activeness, that of bravery, that of attention, and that of public service, and those spirits continued to live on.

Moreover, the following speech of General Aung San on the 13th of March 1944 instructs how the Tatmadaw should treat the people. It is a lesson for the Tatmadaw.

“The Tatmadaw is not for oppressing the people. It is not to wage power with the help of arms. The army must be the servant of the country. The country must not be the servant of the army... We do not engage in injustice although we are armed. We are not the enemy of the country. We are friends of the country. I want to make this clear...”

In this country or in any other country, soldiers are not the only people who love the country. There are those who serve the country and make sacrifices for it although they are not soldiers. So, we must get rid of the prejudices soldiers hold...”

General Aung San also made the following speech on the 4th January 1944 to unify the Tatmadaw and the people.

“...Please be reminded that our forces are your (the people’s) forces. You are also among our forces. Our forces are not for torturing you. These [forces] do not exist to oppress all the people who were born in Myanmar including Shan, Karen, Kachin, and Chin... Look carefully and you will see we are a family...”

Furthermore, General Aung San also made the following speech on how he wanted the Tatmadaw and the sons of Tatmadaw to be, at a sergeant training graduation ceremony on the 3rd of January 1944.

“It is an army to really protect the country and the nation... Every member of Tatmadaw should be willing to give their lives to achieve stability and independence for Burma. If the Tatmadaw is bad, the country will be bad. And, if it is so, independence is useless.”

“When you deal with people, be polite and be genuine. Make sure that they (the people) want to rely on you, comrades... When you are with them, do not be like a soldier, but just a Burmese. Be careful with that. Do not ever let the people think that we are bullying them because we have arms. Make them think that “This is our army. They are our people. We can rely on them...”

He also made the following speech.

“Our Tatmadaw is for the interest of the entire nation, the entire country. So, understand that the Tatmadaw which is supposed to protect the interest of the country is for the entire country and nation. The Tatmadaw has not been founded for a person, but for the entire country, entire nation. This is not for a group of people or a party, but for the entire country, entire nation...”

“This Tatmadaw is not a mercenary like under British rule. It exists to make the country and the people better. The Tatmadaw always has to be faithful to the people and the country. And, that faith has to be genuine, not superficial...”

“The Tatmadaw is not for oppressing the people. It is not to wage power with the help of the arms. The army must be the servant of the country. The country must not be the servant of the army...”

“What is nationalism? Is that to love your people and to hate others? No. It is entirely wrong to say that nationalism entails hating others. There is no need to hate others. In our country as well, we do not need to divide who is Bamar, who is Shan, Karen or Chin.”

“Try to be patriotic in a good way. Love your country. Do not make the world think that the Burmese are failures, cowards, useless, rude, difficult, or unjust. Prove that we are not like that and be proud.”

Regarding the strength of the Tatmadaw, General Aung San made the following speech on the 7th of October 1944.

“By strength, we mean being reliable and strong in quality. What does that quality look like?

Well trained officers and soldiers.

Being sufficient with weapons and ammunition.

Those two factors will make us strong in quality. Between those two, well trained and experienced officers and soldiers are more important...”

Those speeches of the martyrous leader, the father of the Tatmadaw, explained the attributes of every army which exists to fulfil its task to protect the country and the people. These used to be the attributes of the people’s revolutionary Tatmadaw which joined hands with all the people during the anti-fascist revolution. The people and the armed Tatmadaw used to be one. The people loved, respected, and valued the Tatmadaw led by the General [Aung San].

General Aung San set out the attributes of a Tatmadaw as its policies and principles. He made the following speech on the 19th of May 1942 when he had decided to get into politics as a leader of the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League after leaving the Tatmadaw. It is a historic speech which included [the notion] that there is a line between the army and politics.

“...I am not going to be biased. The Burma Defence Army that I lead shall not be affiliated with any party. It will just be affiliated with the country...”

Therefore, the National League for Democracy has a sincere conviction that the future Tatmadaw of Myanmar has to be in precise conformity with the policies and objectives laid out for a Tatmadaw by General Aung San. Moreover, since we are building Myanmar as a democratic country, the future Tatmadaw of Myanmar should abide by the above-mentioned policies and objectives. Only then, will we live up to the speech of General Aung San at the 4th meeting of the nation’s leader in August 1945:

“...We should only make democracy popular. We must try to build an independent Myanmar only in accordance with this ideology. If we fail to do so, our people will suffer...Only democracy is compatible with independence. Only democracy promotes peace. We will only aim for democracy...”

“In my view the country should not be led by just one person but by a form of collective leadership. The leadership should not be arbitrary but in accordance with the group’s decision. It has to be under the control of the group.”

“When Myanmar gains independence, if we want to build the country according to the people’s will, we have to be democratic. We have to start things with democracy...”

“Nationalism should be the kind which promotes peaceful co-existence among the countries in the world where they serve each other’s interest...In order not to have a military dictator like in Japan where the parliament could not control anything, the military affairs must be under the control of the parliament...”

This speech instructed the Tatmadaw to live up to democratic principles.

Furthermore, General Aung San also made a speech regarding ‘leadership’.

“A leader must be able to say what they believe to citizens. They must be able to explain. They must be able to sacrifice their lives. They must be able to manoeuvre when needed. They must act in time. When they just follow the crowd and do not know what they are leading to, they are not leaders anymore. A person who does not believe in himself does not believe in others. As for me, I believe in myself, I believe in you. I believe in Burma’s independence. Whatever we do will be judged right or wrong by history.

Therefore, the future Myanmar Tatmadaw should be the one which promotes the people’s and the democratic country’s democratic economic, democratic social and democratic educational affairs among others. The Tatmadaw has to be open-minded. It must not be narrow-minded. The Tatmadaw must be able to protect the country and the people in just ways, without being involved in politics. Only then, it would become ‘the patriotic Tatmadaw, the solid Tatmadaw, the Tatmadaw which ensures rule of law, the well-trained and experienced Tatmadaw’ which General Aung San spoke about. Tatmadaw should not be a mercenary army. It should be equipped with all necessary qualities to protect the country.

The National League for Democracy well understands that there will be difficulties in building a Tatmadaw furnished with such qualities to protect the country.

There must be a genuine unity among all the people. If all the ethnicities are divided in a country, no Tatmadaw would be able to protect that country.

The Tatmadaw should be composed of all the ethnicities without any barriers on the grounds of ethnicity, religion, or gender.

The Tatmadaw must excel in handling the weapons it has, through practice.

In order to protect the country and the people, privates, sergeants, and officers must be well-trained and well-spirited.

There must be a guarantee that members of Tatmadaw from all ranks and their families should be able to live among others with dignity, in a democratic union.

Only a Tatmadaw which fulfils such requirements would be the Tatmadaw which General Aung San envisioned and in accordance with the revolutionary spirits. Only if we could

maintain the spirit of revolution, the sovereignty will be protected, and the country will be stable. May the true spirit of revolution live forever!

Central Executive Committee

National League for Democracy

Yangon

27 March 2003

Appendix H: a note on how the party leadership controlled NLD politicians between 2016 and 2021

Between 2015 and 2020 there were stark differences of the levels of control that party officials were subjected to, depending on where they worked and in what capacity. Chief Ministers of the states and regions were under more limited control due to their comparatively high standing and because they were not based in Naypyidaw. State and region MPs were under much tighter control but still much freer than their counterparts in Naypyidaw who resided in the MP guesthouse, a sprawling complex that provides housing for all elected MPs in Naypyidaw and that functions like a town within a town.

The activity of upper and lower house MPs in parliament was tightly controlled by the party leadership. This extended to their dress code as one MP explained “We have the Pinni, the red dress, our [party] uniform. [...] Everybody has to have a matching Pinni shawl. On the very first day of parliament, 1st of February 2016, I did not use that shawl. I wore the Pinni, the Pinni dress, but I matched it with another shawl that had the same colour but was not made from the same material. [...] The next day the whip called me and admonished me” (Anonymous 2018, AI). A formal complaint against the MP had been filed and she was eventually forced to sign an admission of wrongdoing. This practice extended into the private lives of MPs too. Another MP told me that women were not allowed to wear black clothes, trousers, or high heels and how she was disciplined by a member of the CEC for returning to her home at a time that her party superiors deemed unsuitable for a woman. When I asked her how the CEC had known when she had come home, she alleged that the CEC had minders in the MP guest house, other MPs who were informing on the behaviour of the others. Another MP told me how she was repeatedly urged to refrain from wearing Thanaka, a white paste made from tree bark that protects against sunlight and is commonly worn on the face by women and children throughout the

country, by party superiors. Although these episodes do not directly pertain to politics, they show just how entrenched the idea of complete control had become in the NLD.

The political work of NLD MPs was shaped by this culture of control too. Several MPs told me how they experienced issues when wanting to attend political meetings or capacity building exercises abroad. By regulation, MPs travel abroad on diplomatic visas and their visa process is under the oversight of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was under the direct leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi. Yet, the ministry would often simply not process the visa applications of NLD members. One MP explained the rationale of the party leadership to me “If you [a foreign organisation] want to invite me you can try to invite me as an “available appropriate person”, but you cannot invite me personally. [...] This way, the party can make the decision who they will send. [...] They will not make their decision based on suitability but on rotation, the selection is very biased” (Anonymous 2019). Several younger NLD politicians I interviewed also faced backlash when taking political initiative. One NLD MP told me how he tried to build a network with representatives of ethnic minority groups but was promptly ordered to “stop forming groups” (Anonymous 2019, AI).

Public criticism of the party line or Aung San Suu Kyi’s politics could lead to the expulsion from the party but even criticism within the party could lead to punishment. An NLD MP told me how he had been put under review for six months because he criticised the NLD’s plan to name a newly constructed bridge over the Thanlwin River in Mawlamyine after General Aung San. The plan grew into a considerable political controversy as the bridge was in Mon State, the home of the Mon, many of whom felt that their identity was being erased by the naming of a bridge after an ethnic Bamar leader¹. The

¹ For more information see Lu Min Mang (2017), ‘Bogyoke Aung San Bridge opens amidst controversy over name’, *Myanmar Times*, 28 April. Available at: [<https://www.mmmtimes.com/national-news/25776-bogyoke-aung-san-bridge-opens-amidst-controversy-over-name.html>]

MP had not made a statement or written a letter but voiced his concern over the move on a bus to colleagues. He told me “Even on the bus, they had a spy. I could not talk freely. At the time I said that I really appreciate Bogyoke Aung San and that I hold his name in high regard. But at the time the Mon people they do not like the name. I said that we should consult with the people and that I do not like the way the decision had been made, that it had been done in a very autocratic way. This was clearly a matter for the state and region level, why bring it to the union level. Then I was called by the CEC, and I had to attend a hearing. [...] So, I made my case and then the leader at the time said, “you are still young, you do not understand it”” (Anonymous 2019, AI). As punishment the MP was barred from participating in party activities and performing his duties for six months.

Appendix I: information and consent form (English)

Department of Politics and International Relations
University of Oxford



Supervisor: Professor Matthew Walton
Researcher: Richard Roewer (Doctoral Student)
Oxford email: richard.roewer@sant.ox.ac.uk

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Project Name: Democratic Regime Change and the Consequences of Democratic Party Formation under Authoritarian Rule in Myanmar and Beyond

Research Ethics Approval: SSH_DPIR_C1A_18_025

Please read this document and sign the consent form right before the interview with the researcher present.

1. What is the purpose of this study?

This doctoral dissertation seeks to explain how democratic political parties emerge in authoritarian states and analyse how they are impacted by their development history. The case study is the National League for Democracy in Myanmar.

2. Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part because you are a member of the National League for Democracy.

3. Do I have to take part?

No, you can ask questions about the research before deciding whether to participate. If you agree to participate, you may withdraw yourself from the study at any time, without giving a reason, by advising the researcher of this decision.

4. What will happen to me if I take part in the research?

If you are happy to take part in the research, you will be asked to meet with me at least once for an interview. If you have the time, I might ask you to schedule 1-2 follow-up interviews.

If you consent, your interview will be audio-recorded and Richard will take hand-written notes during the interview. The transcripts and audio recording of the interviews will be confidential and only Richard and other researchers will have private access to the data.

5. Are there any potential risks in taking part?

There are no significant risks in taking part. However, you should consider whether the statements you are making can compromise your career or draw any negative response from the press, if quoted. Therefore, it is important that you consider whether you want to make statements on the record or not and whether you would like to be quoted directly.



Supervisor: Professor Matthew Walton
Researcher: Richard Roewer (Doctoral Student)
Oxford email: richard.roewer@sant.ox.ac.uk

6. Are there any benefits in taking part?

There will be no material benefits from taking part in this interview.

7. What happens to the data provided?

The information you provide as part of the study is the research data. Any research data from which you can be identified, is known as personal data. It does not include data where the identity has been removed (anonymous data).

We will minimise our use of personal data in the study as much as possible.

The research data will be stored confidentially using separate encrypted hard drives. Your responses will be pseudonymised. This means that all information that identifies you in the statement you made will be removed and stored in a separate file on a separate hard drive.

If you give the interview in English, then I will be the only one with access to the data. If you have given the interview in Burmese a translator will have access to the data at times but only under my supervision.

All research data and records will be stored for at least 5 years after publication or public release of the work of the research. I may retain and store your personal data for an additional period as necessary for the purposes of the study, and for further research.

I would like to ask your permission for direct quotes. Please indicate your choice.

8. Will the research be published?

The research may be published as a monograph after completion. Moreover, some parts of the research will be published in academic journals.

The University of Oxford is committed to the dissemination of its research for the benefit of society and the economy and, in support of this commitment, has established an online archive of research materials. This archive includes digital copies of student theses successfully submitted as part of a University of Oxford postgraduate degree programme. Holding the archive online gives easy access for researchers to the full text of freely available theses, thereby increasing the likely impact and use of that research.

The research will be written up as a thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives, to facilitate its use in future research. The thesis will be openly accessible.

9. Who is organising and funding this research?

Richard organises this research with the support of the University of Oxford and the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA).

Department of Politics and International Relations
University of Oxford



Supervisor: Professor Matthew Walton
Researcher: Richard Roewer (Doctoral Student)
Oxford email: richard.roewer@sant.ox.ac.uk

10. Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee (Reference number: SSH_DPIR_C1A_18_025).

11. Who do I contact if I have a concern about the study or wish to complain?

If you have concerns about the study or wish to complain you can contact the supervisor for this study, Dr. Matthew Walton, via matthew.walton@sant.ox.ac.uk or contact the chair of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee, Ezequiel Gonzales-Ocantos via Ezequiel.gonzales@nuffield.ox.ac.uk

Of course, you can also direct any complaints directly towards me, either via telephone (0044 7810 3860 96), via skype (Richard.roewer) or via email (Richard.roewer@sant.ox.ac.uk). I will do my best to respond to your concern within 10 working days and will give you an indication of how I intend to deal with it.

12. Further Information and Contact Details

If you would like to discuss the research with someone beforehand (or if you have questions afterwards), please contact:

Richard Roewer
Department of Politics and International Relations
Manor Road, OX1 3UQ, Oxford, UK
Tel: 0044 7810 3860 96
Email: Richard.roewer@sant.ox.ac.uk



Supervisor: Professor Matthew Walton
Researcher: Richard Roewer (Doctoral Student)
Oxford email: richard.roewer@sant.ox.ac.uk

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Ethics Approval Reference: SSH_DPIR_C1A_18_025

**Project Name: Democratic Regime Change and the Consequences of Democratic Party Formation
under Authoritarian Rule in Myanmar and Beyond**

Please initial each box. Boxes for items 8-11 are optional.

1	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or penalty.	☐
2	I understand that research data collected during the study may be looked at by designated individuals from the University of Oxford where it is relevant to my taking part in this study. I give permission for these individuals to access my data.	☐
3	I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.	☐
4	I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored, and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	☐
5	I understand how this research will be written up and published.	☐
6	I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.	☐
7	I understand how audio recordings will be used in research outputs.	☐
8	I consent to being audio recorded.	☐
9	I give permission to be quoted directly in the research publication with my name.	☐
10	I would like my interview to be fully anonymized.	☐
11	I would like my identity and my identifiable characteristics to be recorded in the interview, the researcher's findings, and in the final publications of the research.	☐

Department of Politics and International Relations
University of Oxford



Supervisor: Professor Matthew Walton
Researcher: Richard Roewer (Doctoral Student)
Oxford email: richard.roewer@sant.ox.ac.uk

12 I agree to take part in the study.

☐

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____
Name of person taking consent	Date	Signature

Appendix J: information and consent form (Burmese)

နိုင်ငံရေးနှင့် နိုင်ငံတကာဆက်ဆံရေးပညာဌာန
အောက်စဖို့တက္ကသိုလ်



သုတေသနကြီးကြပ်သူ။ ။ ပါမောက္ခ မက်သူးဝေါ်လ်တန်
သုတေသီ။ ။ ရစ်ချက်ရိုဝါ (ပါရဂူဘွဲ့ကျောင်းသား)
အီးမေးလ်။ ။ richard.roewer@sant.ox.ac.uk

အင်တာဗျူးတွင်ပါဝင်ဖြေကြားသူ သိရှိရန်အချက်များ
စာတမ်းအမည်။ ။ ဒီမိုကရက်တစ်အစိုးရ အပြောင်းအလဲနှင့် မြန်မာနှင့် အခြားနိုင်ငံများရှိ
အာဏာရှင်စနစ်အောက်တွင် ဒီမိုကရက်တစ်ပါတီ တည်ထောင်ခြင်း၏ အကျိုးဆက်များ

သုတေသနကျင့်ဝတ်ထောက်ခံချက်။ ။ SSH_DPIR_C1A_18_025

အင်တာဗျူးမပြုလုပ်မီ အောက်ပါအချက်အလက်များကို သေချာစွာဖတ်ရှုပြီး ခွင့်ပြုချက်ပုံစံကို
သုတေသီ၏ ရှေ့မှောက်တွင် လက်မှတ်ထိုးပါ။

၁။ ဤလေ့လာချက်၏ ရည်ရွယ်ချက်က အဘယ်နည်း။
ဤပါရဂူဘွဲ့ စာတမ်းသည် အာဏာရှင်နိုင်ငံများတွင် ဒီမိုကရက်တစ်နိုင်ငံရေးပါတီများ မည်သို့မည်ပုံ
ပေါ်ပေါက် လာသည်ကို ရှင်းပြနိုင်ရန် ကြိုးပမ်းသွားမည်ဖြစ်ပြီး ထိုပါတီများအပေါ် ၎င်းတို့၏ ဖွံ့
ဖြိုးတိုးတက်မှု ဖြစ်စဉ်သမိုင်းမှ မည်ကဲ့သို့ သက်ရောက်မှု ရှိမည် ကို လေ့လာသွားမည် ဖြစ်ပါသည်။
အထူးပြု လေ့လာသွားမည့် အကြောင်းအရာမှာ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံမှ အမျိုးသားဒီမိုကရေစီ အဖွဲ့ချုပ်ပင်
ဖြစ်ပါသည်။

၂။ အင်တာဗျူးတွင် ပါဝင်ဖြေကြားရန် အဘယ်ကြောင့် ဖိတ်ကြားခံရသနည်း။
အမျိုးသားဒီမိုကရေစီ အဖွဲ့ချုပ်၏ အဖွဲ့ဝင်တစ်ဦးဖြစ်နေခြင်းကြောင့် သင့်အား ပါဝင်ဖြေကြားရန်
ဖိတ်ကြားခြင်းဖြစ်ပါသည်။

၃။ မဖြစ်မနေ ပါဝင်ရမည်လား။
မဖြစ်မနေပါဝင်ရန် မလိုပါ။ ပါဝင်ရန် မဆုံးဖြတ်မီ သုတေသနအကြောင်း မေးခွန်းများ
မေးမြန်းနိုင်ပါသည်။ ပါဝင်ရန် သဘောတူညီပြီးလျှင်လည်း ဤလေ့လာမှုမှ မည်သည့်
အကြောင်းပြချက်မှ ပေးရန်မလိုဘဲ သုတေသီအား ထွက်ခွာလိုကြောင်း အသိပေးပြီး အချိန်မရွေး
ထွက်ခွာနိုင်ပါသည်။

နိုင်ငံရေးနှင့် နိုင်ငံတကာဆက်ဆံရေးပညာဌာန
အောက်စဖို့တက္ကသိုလ်



သုတေသနကြီးကြပ်သူ။ ။ ပါမောက္ခ မက်သူးဝေါ့လ်တန်
သုတေသီ။ ။ ရစ်ချက်ရိုဝါ (ပါရဂူဘွဲ့ကျောင်းသား)
အီးမေးလ်။ ။ richard.roewer@sant.ox.ac.uk

၄။ ဤသုတေသနတွင် ပါဝင်လျှင် မည်သို့ဖြစ်မည်နည်း။

ဤသုတေသနတွင် ပါဝင်ရန် သင့်အတွက် အဆင်ပြေလျှင် အနည်းဆုံး အင်တာဗျူးတစ်ခု အတွက် ကျွန်ုပ်တို့နှင့် တွေ့ဆုံရန် တောင်းဆိုမည်ဖြစ်ပြီး သင့်အချိန်ရသေးသည်ဆိုလျှင် နောက်ထပ် အင်တာဗျူး တစ်ခု သို့မဟုတ် နှစ်ခုအတွက် ချိန်းဆိုကောင်းချိန်းဆိုမည် ဖြစ်ပါသည်။

သင့်ခွင့်ပြုမည်ဆိုလျှင် သင့်၏အင်တာဗျူးအား အသံဖမ်းထားမည်ဖြစ်ပြီး အင်တာဗျူးအချိန်အတွင်း ရစ်ချက်မှလည်း လက်ရေးဖြင့် လိုက်လံမှတ်သားမည် ဖြစ်ပါသည်။ စာဖြင့်၊ အသံဖိုင်ဖြင့် အင်တာဗျူးအား မှတ်တမ်းတင်မှုများကို လျှို့ဝှက်စွာ သိမ်းဆည်းထားမည်ဖြစ်ပြီး ရစ်ချက်နှင့် အခြားသုတေသီများသာ ထိုအချက်အလက်များကို အထူးအသုံးပြုခွင့်ရှိမည် ဖြစ်ပါသည်။

၅။ သုတေသနတွင် ပါဝင်သည့်အတွက် အန္တရာယ်တစ်ခုတရာ ကျရောက်နိုင်ပါသလား။

သုတေသနတွင် ပါဝင်ခြင်းအတွက် အထွေအထူးကျရောက်နိုင်သည့် အန္တရာယ်မရှိပါ။ သို့တစေ အင်တာဗျူးအတွင်း သင်၏ ပြောဆိုချက်များကို အမည်နှင့်တကွ ဖော်ပြပါက သင်၏ အသက်မွေးဝမ်းကျောင်းအား ထိခိုက်နိုင်ခြင်းနှင့် သတင်းစာ၊ ဂျာနယ်များမှ မလိုလားအပ်သော တုံ့ပြန်မှုများ ရရှိနိုင်ခြင်းတို့ ရှိနိုင်၊ မရှိနိုင်ကို စဉ်းစားသင့်ပါသည်။ ထို့ကြောင့် သင်၏ ပြောဆိုချက်များကို အသံသွင်းမည် မသွင်းမည်၊ အမည်နှင့်တကွ တိုက်ရိုက် ဖော်ပြခံမည် မခံမည်ကို စဉ်းစားရန် အရေးကြီးပါသည်။

၆။ သုတေသနတွင် ပါဝင်ခြင်းအတွက် မည်သည့် အကျိုးကျေးဇူးများ ရရှိမည်နည်း။

ဤအင်တာဗျူးတွင် ပါဝင်ခြင်းအတွက် ရုပ်ဝတ္ထုအကျိုးကျေးဇူးရှိမည်မဟုတ်ပါ။

၇။ ပေးလိုက်သည့် သတင်းအချက်အလက်များကို မည်သို့ပြုလုပ်မည်နည်း။

ဤလေ့လာမှု၏ အစိတ်အပိုင်းအဖြစ် သင်ပေးလိုက်သည့် သတင်းအချက်အလက်များမှာ သုတေသန အချက်အလက်များဖြစ်ပါသည်။ သင့်အား မည်သူမည်ဝါ ဖြစ်ကြောင်း သိရှိနိုင်မည့်

နိုင်ငံရေးနှင့် နိုင်ငံတကာဆက်ဆံရေးပညာဌာန
အောက်စဖို့တက္ကသိုလ်



သုတေသနကြီးကြပ်သူ။ ။ ပါမောက္ခ မက်သူးဝေါ့လ်တန်
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မည့်သည့်သုတေသန အချက်အလက်ကိုမဆို ပုဂ္ဂိုလ်ရေး အချက်အလက်ဟု ခေါ်ပါသည်။
ထိုအရာများတွင် မည်သူမည်ဝါဖြစ်ကြောင်း သိရှိနိုင်မည့် အမှတ်အသားများ ဖယ်ရှားထားသည့်
အချက်အလက်များ (အမည်မသိ အချက်အလက်များ) မပါဝင်ပါ။

သုတေသနတွင် ပုဂ္ဂိုလ်ရေးအချက်အလက်များအား တတ်နိုင်သမျှအနည်းဆုံး အသုံးပြု သွားမည်
ဖြစ်ပါသည်။

သုတေသန အချက်အလက်များကို ကုဒ်နံပါတ်များနှင့် ထားရှိသော သီးသန့် Hard drive များဖြင့်
လျှို့ဝှက်စွာ သိမ်းဆည်းထားမည်ဖြစ်ပါသည်။ သင်၏ တုံ့ပြန်မှုများကို အမည်တပ်များဖြင့်
သိမ်းဆည်းမည် ဖြစ်ပါသည်။ ဆိုလိုသည်မှာ သင်၏ပြောဆိုချက်များ အတွင်းရှိ သင့်အား
မည်သူမည်ဝါဖြစ်ကြောင်း သိရှိစေနိုင်မည့် အချက်အလက်များ အားလုံးကို သီးသန့် Hard drive
တစ်ခုထဲတွင် သီးသန့်ဖိုင်ဖြင့် ထားရှိမည်ဖြစ်ပါသည်။ အင်တာဗျူးအား အင်္ဂလိပ်ဘာသာဖြင့်
ဖြေကြားမည် ဆိုပါက အချက်အလက်များကို ကျွန်ုပ်တစ်ဦးတည်းသာလျှင် ရရှိအသုံးပြုနိုင်မည်
ဖြစ်ပြီး မြန်မာဘာသာဖြင့် ဖြေကြားမည်ဆိုပါက အချိန်တချို့တွင် ဘာသာပြန်တစ်ဦးမှလည်း
အချက်အလက်များကို ကျွန်ုပ်၏ ကြီးကြပ်မှုအောက်တွင်သာလျှင် ကြည့်ရှုခွင့်ရှိမည်ဖြစ်ပါသည်။
သုတေသနအချက်အလက်များ နှင့် မှတ်တမ်းများအားလုံးကို သုတေသနအား ပုံနှိပ်ထုတ်ဝေပြီး
သို့မဟုတ် အများပြည်သူအား ဖြန့်ဝေပြီးသည့် အချိန်မှစ၍ အနည်းဆုံး၅နှစ်အထိ
သိမ်းဆည်းထားမည် ဖြစ်ပါသည်။ သင်၏ ပုဂ္ဂိုလ်ရေး အချက်အလက်များအား လေ့လာမှု၏
ရည်ရွယ်ချက်များ အတွက်နှင့် နောက်ထပ်သုတေသနများအတွက် လိုအပ်လျှင် လိုအပ်သလို
ဆက်လက်သိမ်းဆည်းထားမည် ဖြစ်ပါသည်။

အမည်နှင့်တကွ တိုက်ရိုက်ဖော်ပြရန်အတွက် သင်၏ ခွင့်ပြုချက်အား တောင်းခံမည်ဖြစ်ပါသည်။
ကျေးဇူးပြု၍ သင်၏ဆုံးဖြတ်ချက်အကြောင်း အသိပေးပါ။

၈။ သုတေသနအား ပုံနှိပ်ထုတ်ဝေပါမည်လား။

သုတေသနပြီးဆုံးလျှင် ဘာသာရပ်ဆိုင်ရာ လေ့လာမှုစာတမ်း တစ်စောင်အဖြစ် ထုတ်ဝေမည်
ဖြစ်ပါသည်။ ထို့အပြင် သုတေသန၏ အချို့ အစိတ်အပိုင်းများ ကိုလည်း ပညာရပ်ဆိုင်ရာ
ဂျာနယ်များတွင် ထည့်သွင်းဖော်ပြသွားမည် ဖြစ်ပါသည်။ အောက်စဖို့တက္ကသိုလ်သည်
လူ့အဖွဲ့အစည်းနှင့် လူ့အဖွဲ့အစည်း၏ စီးပွားရေးအကျိုးကျေးဇူး အတွက် ၎င်း၏ သုတေသနများအား

နိုင်ငံရေးနှင့် နိုင်ငံတကာဆက်ဆံရေးပညာဌာန
အောက်စဖို့တက္ကသိုလ်



သုတေသနကြီးကြပ်သူ။ ။ ပါမောက္ခ မက်သူးဝေါ့လ်တန်
သုတေသီ။ ။ ရစ်ချက်ရိုဝါ (ပါရဂူဘွဲ့ကျောင်းသား)
အီးမေးလ်။ ။ richard.roewer@sant.ox.ac.uk

ဖြန့်ဝေနိုင်ရန် အစဉ်တစိုက် ကြိုးပမ်းဆောင်ရွက်လျက် ရှိသည်နှင့် အားလျော်စွာ သုတေသနပစ္စည်းများ အတွက် အွန်လိုင်းမော်ကွန်းတိုက် ထားရှိပါသည်။ ဤမော်ကွန်းတိုက်တွင် အောက်စဖို့တက္ကသိုလ်ရှိ ဘွဲ့လွန်သင်တန်းများ၏ အစိတ်အပိုင်းအဖြစ် အောင်မြင်စွာ တင်သွင်းနိုင်ခဲ့သော ကျောင်းသားများ၏ သုတေသန စာတမ်းများကို ထားရှိပါမည်။

ထို့ကဲ့သို့ မော်ကွန်းတိုက်ကို ထားရှိခြင်းအားဖြင့် လွတ်လပ်စွာရရှိနိုင်သော သုတေသနစာတမ်းများကို သုတေသီများမှ လွယ်ကူအဆင်ပြေ ချောမွေ့စွာ ဖတ်ရှုလေ့လာနိုင်စေလျက် သုတေသနစာတမ်းများ၏ အသုံးဝင်မှုနှင့် အကျိုးသက်ရောက်မှုကို မြှင့်တင်ပေးလျက်ရှိပါသည်။ ဤလေ့လာတွေ့ရှိချက်များကို သုတေသနစာတမ်း တစ်စောင်အဖြစ် ရေးသားပြုစုမည် ဖြစ်ပါသည်။ စာတမ်းတင်သွင်းမှု အောင်မြင်ခဲ့လျှင် ဤစာတမ်းကို အနာဂတ် သုတေသနများတွင် ပြန်လည် အသုံးပြုရန်အတွက် ပုံနှိပ်ပုံစံ အနေဖြင့် လည်းကောင်း၊ အွန်လိုင်းတွင် လည်းကောင်း တက္ကသိုလ်မော်ကွန်းတိုက်များတွင် သိမ်းဆည်းထားရှိမည် ဖြစ်ပါသည်။ ဤစာတမ်းကို မည်သူမဆို လေ့လာဖတ်ရှုနိုင်မည် ဖြစ်ပါသည်။

၉။ ဤသုတေသနကို မည်သူများက ထောက်ပံ့စီစဉ်ပါသနည်း။

ရစ်ချက်သည် ဤသုတေသနကို အောက်စဖို့တက္ကသိုလ်နှင့် ဂျာမန်ကမ္ဘာလုံးဆိုင်ရာနှင့် နယ်မြေလေ့လာမှုဆိုင်ရာ အင်စတီကျုတို့၏ အကူအညီဖြင့် စီစဉ်ပါသည်။

၁၀။ ဤလေ့လာမှုကို မည်သူများက စီစစ်သုံးသပ်ထားသနည်း။

ဤလေ့လာမှုအား အောက်စဖို့တက္ကသိုလ်၊ ဗဟိုတက္ကသိုလ် သုတေသန ကျင့်ဝတ်ကော်မတီ (ရည်ညွှန်းချက်အမှတ်။ ။ SSH_DPIR_C1A_18_025) မှ စီစစ်သုံးသပ်ထားပြီး ကျင့်ဝတ်ဆိုင်ရာ ထောက်ခံချက်ရရှိပြီး ဖြစ်ပါသည်။

၁၁။ ဤလေ့လာမှုနှင့် ပတ်သတ်၍ ပြောဆိုဝေဖန်စရာ တစ်ခုခုရှိလျှင် သို့မဟုတ် အဆင်မပြေမှု ရှိလျှင် မည်သူ့ကို ဆက်သွယ်ရမည်နည်း။

နိုင်ငံရေးနှင့် နိုင်ငံတကာဆက်ဆံရေးပညာဌာန
အောက်စဖို့တက္ကသိုလ်



သုတေသနကြီးကြပ်သူ။ ။ ပါမောက္ခ မက်သူးဝေါ့လ်တန်
သုတေသီ။ ။ ရစ်ချက်ရိုဝါ (ပါရဂူဘွဲ့ကျောင်းသား)
အီးမေးလ်။ ။ richard.roewer@sant.ox.ac.uk

သင့်အနေဖြင့် ဤလေ့လာမှုနှင့် ပတ်သတ်၍ ပြောဆိုဝေဖန်စရာ တစ်ခုခုရှိလျှင် သို့မဟုတ် အဆင်မပြေမှု ရှိလျှင် ဤစာတမ်း၏ ကြီးကြပ်သူ ဒေါက်တာမက်သူးဝေါ့လ်တန် matthew.walton@sant.ox.ac.uk သို့လည်းကောင်း၊ ဌာနကျင့်ဝတ် ကော်မတီ၏ ဥက္ကဋ္ဌ အက်ဇီကွီရယ်လ် ဂွန်ဇေး-အော့ကန်တိုး ezequiel.gonzales@nuffield.ox.ac.uk သို့လည်းကောင်း ဆက်သွယ်ပြောဆိုနိုင်ပါသည်။ သင်၏ ပြောဆိုဝေဖန်စရာရှိသည်များကို ကျွန်ုပ်ဆီသို့လည်း တယ်လီဖုန်း (0044 7810 3860 96) (သို့) Skype (Richard.roewer) (သို့) အီးမေးလ် richard.roewer@sant.ox.ac.uk ဖြင့်လည်း တိုက်ရိုက်ဆက်သွယ်နိုင်ပါသည်။ သင်၏ ပြောဆိုဝေဖန်စရာ ရှိသည်များနှင့် ပတ်သတ်၍ ကျွန်ုပ် မည်သို့မည်ပုံ ကိုင်တွယ်မည်ကို အသိပေးနိုင်ရေးအတွက် အလုပ်လုပ်ရက် ၁၀ရက်အတွင်း သင့်အား အကြောင်းပြန်နိုင်ရန် အတတ်နိုင်ဆုံး ကြိုးပမ်းသွားမည် ဖြစ်ပါသည်။

၁၂။ ထပ်မံသိရှိလိုသည်များနှင့် ဆက်သွယ်ရန် အသေးစိတ်အချက်အလက်များ သင့်အနေဖြင့် ဤသုတေသန အကြောင်း တစ်စုံတစ်ယောက်နှင့် ဦးစွာတိုင်ပင်လိုပါက (သို့မဟုတ် အင်တာဗျူးအပြီးတွင် မေးခွန်းများထပ်မံ ပေါ်ပေါက်လာပါက အောက်ပါလိပ်စာအတိုင်း ဆက်သွယ်နိုင်ပါသည်။

ရစ်ချက်ရိုဝါ
နိုင်ငံရေးနှင့် နိုင်ငံတကာဆက်ဆံရေးပညာဌာန
Manor Road, OX1 3UQ, Oxford, UK
ဖုန်း။ 0044 7810 3860 96
အီးမေးလ်။ richard.roewer@sant.ox.ac.uk

နိုင်ငံရေးနှင့် နိုင်ငံတကာဆက်ဆံရေးပညာဌာန
အောက်စဖို့တက္ကသိုလ်



သုတေသနကြီးကြပ်သူ။ ။ ပါမောက္ခ မက်သူးဝေါ့လ်တန်
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အင်တာဗျူးတွင် ပါဝင်ဖြေကြားသူ၏ ခွင့်ပြုချက်ပုံစံ
ကျင့်ဝတ်ထောက်ခံချက်အတွက် ရည်ညွှန်းချက်။ ။ SSH_DPIR_C1A_18_025

စာတမ်းအမည်။ ။ ဒီမိုကရက်တစ်အစိုးရ အပြောင်းအလဲနှင့် မြန်မာနှင့် အခြားနိုင်ငံများရှိ
အာဏာရှင်စနစ်အောက်တွင် ဒီမိုကရက်တစ်ပါတီ တည်ထောင်ခြင်း၏ အကျိုးဆက်များ

အောက်ပါ လေးထောင့်ကွက်များတွင် အမှန်ခြစ်ပါ။ အမှတ် ၈ မှ ၁၁အထိကို မိမိသဘော
ဆန္ဒအလျောက် ရွေးချယ်ဆုံးဖြတ်နိုင်ပါသည်။

၁။ ကျွန်ုပ်၏ ပါဝင်မှုသည် မိမိသဘောဆန္ဒအရ သာဖြစ်ပြီး မည်သည့်အကြောင်းပြချက်မျှ မပေးဘဲ၊
မလိုလားအပ်သည့် မည်သည့် အကျိုးဆက် (သို့မဟုတ်) မည်သည့် ပြစ်ဒဏ်မျှ မရှိဘဲ အချိန်မရွေး
လွတ်လပ်စွာ ထွက်ခွာနိုင်သည်ကို သိရှိနားလည်ထားပြီး ဖြစ်ပါသည်။ ☐

၂။ ကျွန်ုပ်သည် သုတေသန ပြုလုပ်စဉ်ကာလအတွင်း ရရှိစုဆောင်း ထားသော သုတေသနဆိုင်ရာ
အချက်အလက်များအား အောက်စဖို့တက္ကသိုလ်ရှိ တာဝန်ရှိသူများက ၎င်းလေ့လာမှုနှင့်
ပတ်သက်သည့် အခြားသော လေ့လာမှုများအတွက် တရားဝင်ကြည့်ရှုခွင့်ပြုထားသည်ကို
နားလည်ထားပြီးဖြစ်ပါသည်။ ကျွန်ုပ်သည် ၎င်းတစ်ဦးချင်းကို မိမိ၏ အချက်အလက်များအား
ဝင်ရောက်ကြည့်ရှုရန် ခွင့်ပြုပါသည်။ ☐

၃။ ဤသုတေသနစာတမ်းငယ်သည် အောက်စဖို့တက္ကသိုလ် ဗဟိုသုတေသနကျင့်ဝတ်ဆိုင်ရာ
ကော်မတီမှ ကျင့်ဝတ်ဆိုင်ရာ ရှင်းလင်းချက်များကို ရရှိထားပြီးသည်ကို နားလည်ထားပြီး ဖြစ်ပါ
သည်။ ☐

၄။ ကျွန်ုပ်ထံမှ ပုဂ္ဂိုလ်ရေးဆိုင်ရာ အချက်အလက်များကို ဘယ်သူရရှိမည်၊
၎င်းအချက်အလက်များကို မည်သို့ သိမ်းဆည်းမည်နှင့် ၎င်းသုတေသနစာတမ်းငယ် ပြီးသည့်အခါ

နိုင်ငံရေးနှင့် နိုင်ငံတကာဆက်ဆံရေးပညာဌာန
အောက်စဖို့တက္ကသိုလ်



သုတေသနကြီးကြပ်သူ။ ။ ပါမောက္ခ မက်သူးဝေါ့လ်တန်
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အီးမေးလ်။ ။ richard.roewer@sant.ox.ac.uk

ထိုအချက်အလက်များ ဘယ်သို့ ဖြစ်သွားမည် ဆိုသည်နှင့် ပတ်သက်၍ နားလည်ထားပြီး ဖြစ်ပါသည်။ ☐

၅။ ကျွန်ုပ်သည် ဤသုတေသနစာတမ်းကို မည်သို့ ရေးသားဖော်ပြမည် နှင့် ဘယ်လိုထုတ်ဝေမည်ကို နားလည်ထားပြီး ဖြစ်ပါသည်။ ☐

၆။ ကျွန်ုပ်အနေဖြင့် စိုးရိမ်ပူပန်မှု တစုံတရာ ရှိပါက မည်သို့မည်ပုံ အကြောင်းကြားနိုင်သည် သို့မဟုတ် တိုင်ကြားနိုင်သည်ကို နားလည်ထားပြီး ဖြစ်ပါသည်။ ☐

၇။ အသံသွင်းထားသော အချက်အလက်များအား နောက်ဆုံးသုတေသန ရလဒ်တွင် မည်သို့၊ မည်ပုံ အသုံးပြုမည် ကို နားလည်ထားပြီး ဖြစ်ပါသည်။ ☐

၈။ သုတေသနစာတမ်း အတွက် မေးမြန်းမှုလုပ်နေစဉ် အသံသွင်းမှုကို ပြုလုပ်ရန် သဘောတူပါသည်။ ☐

၉။ သုတေသနစာတမ်း ထုတ်ဝေသောအခါ ကျွန်ုပ်၏အမည်ဖြင့် တိုက်ရိုက်ကိုးကား ဖော်ပြရန် ခွင့်ပြုပါသည်။ ☐

၁၀။ ဖြေကြားချက်များကို ဖော်ပြရာတွင် ကျွန်ုပ်၏ အမည်ကို ထိန်ချန်ထားစေလိုပါသည်။ ☐

၁၁။ မိမိမည်သူ မည်ဝါ ဖြစ်သည်နှင့်၊ မည်သူမည်ဝါ ဖြစ်ကြောင်းသိရှိနိုင်စေမည့် အမှတ်အသားများအား မေးမြန်းမှု၊ သုတေသီ၏ တွေ့ရှိချက်များနှင့် နောက်ဆုံးသုတေသန စာတမ်း ထုတ်ဝေခြင်းများတွင် မှတ်တမ်းတင်ရန် ခွင့်ပြုပါသည်။ ☐

၁၂။ ကျွန်ုပ်အနေဖြင့် ဤလေ့လာမှုတွင် ပါဝင်ရန် သဘောတူပါသည်။ ☐

နိုင်ငံရေးနှင့် နိုင်ငံတကာဆက်ဆံရေးပညာဌာန
အောက်စဖို့တက္ကသိုလ်



သုတေသနကြီးကြပ်သူ။ ။ ပါမောက္ခ မက်သူးဝေါ့လ်တန်
သုတေသီ။ ။ ရစ်ချက်ရိုဝါ (ပါရဂူဘွဲ့ကျောင်းသား)
အီးမေးလ်။ ။ richard.roewer@sant.ox.ac.uk

ပါဝင်သူ၏ အမည်

နေ့ရက်

လက်မှတ်

သဘောတူညီမှုယူသောသူ၏အမည်

နေ့ရက်

လက်မှတ်