

The Coup in Myanmar – Joining Hands in the Worldwide Struggle Against Autocracy

These notes are presented to cover for the absence of our intended Philosophy Club speaker for today, who was forced to be absent due to a family tragedy. We hope to see her back to present on Wednesday, May 5th.

Some brief video presentations regarding the recent coup d'état:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQ8y66wD0g8>

Myanmar coup news footage.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7bTx51-N8I>

Myanmar Coup: contrasting views from two Buddhist monks.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLL1s3I5Hsw>

Myanmar Coup put into historical context.

1. A military coup was initiated on February 1, 2021, the day before newly elected members of Parliament were due to be sworn in.
2. The coup was carried out by the military branch of government, the Tatmadaw, led by General Min Aung Hlaing. This includes the Army, Navy, Air Force, and National Police Force. As per the Myanmar Constitution of 2008, the Tatmadaw is guaranteed 25% of the seats in Parliament.
3. The coup was preceded by the national elections of November 8th, 2020, in which the National League for Democracy (NLD) won in a landslide victory, winning 315 of 440 seats in the House of Representatives and 164 of 224 seats in the House of Nationalities.
4. The pretext for the coup was voter fraud, the claims of which had already been debunked in the courts by the time of the coup. The extent of the landslide victory for the NLD makes concerns of voter fraud logistically moot from the point of view of disinterested observers.
5. The NLD was cofounded by 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi and in existence since 1988. She has been its chair since its founding.
6. Aung San Suu Kyi is the daughter of Aung San, known as the Father of the Nation, who was assassinated in 1947 along with a number of other newly elected leaders of government due to be sworn in as the first independent government to end colonial rule.
7. Aung San Suu Kyi had been mostly under house arrest or in exile from 1989 to 2010 until being elected to government in 2015 in the first general election in Myanmar since 1990. This had been another landslide victory for the NLD. Incidentally, that earlier election in 1990, though nullified by the Tatmadaw, had also been a landslide victory, with 81% of the seats going to the NLD.

8. Since February 1, Aung San Suu Kyi, whose official elected position is State Counsellor, has been under house arrest, as have been many other leaders of government, including President Win Myint.
9. According to the Myanmar Constitution of 2008, Aung San Suu Kyi is not allowed to hold the Position of President, which is the chief executive office. The position of State Counsellor was created especially for this reason, as a concession for the peculiar ad hoc prohibition.
10. Since taking office in 2015, Aung San Suu Kyi has fallen from grace in the eyes of many in the international human rights community due to her unresponsiveness to and inaction regarding the persecution of the Rohingya minority in the country especially since 2017, presided over and largely carried out by the Tatmadaw in purported response to sporadic rebel violence by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army.
11. It is speculated that one of the motives for the recent takeover by the Tatmadaw was to avoid facing criminal charges for atrocities committed against the Rohingya. Another purported motive was control of the emergency COVID-19 funds totaling almost four hundred million USD received from international charity organizations.
12. The official position of the Myanmar government is that the Rohingya are not Myanmar compatriots, but a refugee population from Bangladesh. By force of a law enacted in 1982, they are not permitted Myanmar citizenship and are excluded from many other economic and political opportunities. The Myanmar government does recognize other Muslim ethnicities within its borders as compatriots, but not the Rohingyas.
13. Before the return to democratic leadership in 2015, most of the attention for Tatmadaw human rights atrocities focused not on the western part of the country abutting Bangladesh, where the Rohingyas are, but on the eastern border with Thailand, where a tradition of violent oppression against the Karen has festered since 1949. Although this never quite went away, it has recently come back in full force since the coup. The Karen have been pushing for autonomy or independence since 1949, backed by the Karen National Liberation Army.
14. Ethnically, Myanmar is 68% Bamar, a Sino-Tibetan group, from which both the names 'Burma' and 'Myanmar' are derived. Myanmar is an attempt to de-westernize the Pronunciation of the name. Burma is an anglicized derivative of the Portuguese "Birmania", whereas Myanmar appears to derive from 'Mnama' a more phonetic rendering of the ethnic label.
15. The largest minority of Myanmar are the Shan, a Tai people closely related to the Thai of Thailand. Largely of Shan State, they make up close to 10% of the population.
16. The second-largest minority are the Karen, also Sino-Tibetan, who make up about 7% of the population.

17. For the rest, ethnic Chinese make up about 4%, ethnic Indian about 2%, Mon (Austroasiatic) 2%, Rohingya 2% (as of 2017, after which more than a million were forced into exile!), and many other smaller groups.

18. Religiously, Myanmar is 88% Buddhist, 6% Christian, 4% Muslim.