

# Understanding Democracy, Security, and Change in Post-2015 Myanmar

By Moe Thuzar



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## Myanmar Today

**D**evelopments in Myanmar, epitomized by images of long-oppressed Nobel Peace Prize recipient Aung San Suu Kyi, now in high office, have recently attracted great interest in how the country is emerging from decades of slow decline under authoritarian rule. When the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) government initiated wide-ranging reforms in 2011, a number of potential foreign investors began to conceptualize Myanmar as a “last frontier” market replete with promise. Political analysts noted the dynamics of an evolving polity in the country that might be a sign of the end to longstanding internal conflicts. Economists saw the opportunity for long-overdue structural reforms to revive a moribund economy in desperate need of regional and global networks. The interest has grown stronger since November 2015, when a resounding mandate was handed to the National League for Democracy (NLD), the major opposition party to authoritarian rule, with Suu Kyi as de facto national political leader seemingly accelerating positive political and economic changes.

Regional and world leaders welcomed the NLD administration and reaffirmed support for Myanmar's journey of change. Even with Myanmar's impressive recent economic growth rates, much improvement is still needed, including the physical and institutional infrastructure to connect growth areas within the country, the provision of a steady supply of electricity, the creation of a regulatory environment conducive for investors, a modernized financial system, and a competitive workforce.

The path to continuing political and especially democratic change appears much more difficult in critical ways than continuing economic development. The USDP started the move toward a more consultative and participatory style of governing but realized



March 28, 2017, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi (center) meets with displaced Kachin people at an Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camp outside of Myitkyina, Kachin State, Myanmar. Source: *The Global New Light of Myanmar* website at <https://tinyurl.com/lg6fmt2>. Photo: MNA (Myanmar News Agency).

March 30, 2016, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar. Myanmar's President U Htin Kyaw and Chairperson of Myanmar's ruling Nation League for Democracy (NLD) Aung San Suu Kyi arrive to attend a session of Myanmar Union Parliament. © 2016 U Anug/Xinhau/Alamy Live News.

only limited success. Although there was some “awakening” to the country’s needs, the USDP was mainly motivated by a somewhat-desperate need to gain credibility and legitimacy with both national stakeholders and the international community. With this as its main objective, it is not surprising that the USDP’s pursuit of reforms lagged in the latter part of that administration. Many unsolved legacy issues were inherited by the new NLD government, which was sworn in on March 30, 2016.

The NLD government remains focused on nationwide issues of trust and reconciliation. But despite an overwhelming popular mandate, the NLD’s biggest challenge will be in maintaining political and economic stability while moving ahead with its agenda for change. There are high domestic and international expectations of the current government with a range of different interests and priorities, including further economic development, resolution of ethnic conflict, and improvement in the status of women. There is still overwhelming popular support for the NLD, although broad agreement on the need for clearer communication of government policies.<sup>1</sup> Yangon’s intelligentsia is now more critical in expressing the views of the transition.<sup>2</sup> Still, there is almost universal public agreement about the importance of Myanmar’s democratization, within the country and among its partners. While all this provides a stronger foundation for the government to pursue various options in tackling the many legacy issues, the nature of these issues is not of the “quick-win” kind. Myanmar’s transition will thus be consequential not only for the country itself, but also as an example of a peaceful transition to civilian control of the government, somewhat akin to post-Suharto Indonesia and in contrast to post-Thaksin Shinawatra Thailand, although not directly comparable.

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Despite the NLD's victory, the military's influence in political life lingers on in parliament, government, and business institutions. In a country that has been subject to the centralized command of military rule for decades, this has both advantages and disadvantages. The military-backed USDP move of facilitating the NLD's reentry into the political process and opening up the economy to more external partners made the first steps of the current transition possible. But there are continued uncertainties for the new civilian government on how to share power with the military, which still retains appointment of 25 percent of parliamentary seats and three ministerial portfolios (home affairs, defense, and border affairs). U Myint Swe, one of Myanmar's two Vice Presidents, is a former military general.

An analyst has described the government's current power-sharing situation with the military as "an uneasy division of labor."<sup>3</sup> Due to more pressing issues for national reconciliation, the NLD has placed its objective of amending the 2008 Constitution to promote more civilian control of the military on the back burner. A 2008 Constitutional clause made NLD leader Suu Kyi ineligible for the country's presidency since it prohibits Burmese with immediate family members who are foreign citizens from holding the office. But in a move that cleverly circumvented this restriction, the NLD administration managed to push through a law creating an overarching State Counsellor role for Suu Kyi in its first week after assuming power.<sup>4</sup> She also holds concurrent cabinet responsibilities as Minister in the President's Office and for Foreign Affairs. Suu Kyi made her Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) debut in July 2016 as Foreign Minister and represented Myanmar at the ASEAN Summits in September 2016 in her capacity as State Counsellor. She has also traveled to neighboring countries and the United States in the latter capacity. Her role as State Counsellor requires her to be accountable to the Myanmar parliament in promoting multiparty democracy, boosting a market-oriented economy, and promoting peace and development in the country. These three main requirements have also set the tone for the NLD government's priorities in its first year of administration.

When the NLD assumed governing responsibilities in April 2016, Suu Kyi instructed ministries to prepare "100-day plans" with the goal of developing concrete policies and substantive programs. Among the various initiatives, several plans to reinvigorate the economy have been highlighted as points of interest for investors.<sup>5</sup> These include the Ministry of Electricity and Energy's plans to promote private investment in renewable energy development; the Ministry of Construction's interest to partner with private developers in the rollout of low-cost housing projects; the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation's announcement to boost wood-based industries while tackling illegal logging and making the mining sector more attractive for investment; the Ministry of

Agriculture, Livestock, and Irrigation's overhauling of the property registration system to lower barriers to land-use rights and land leases; and the Department of Investment and Companies Administration under the newly formed Ministry of Planning and Finance's revision of registration fees for listed and private companies to encourage more small and medium enterprise (SME) participation.

On the legislative front, the new government sought to strengthen or amend laws pertaining to public administration and human rights/security. A popular measure during the 100-day period was Suu Kyi's issuance of guidelines to all civil servants limiting the acceptable value of gifts to not more than 25,000 kyats (about US \$20).<sup>6</sup>

Implementation of the 100-day plans and projects had mixed results and reviews, mainly due to constraints in the flow of information to produce necessary policies and uneven rollout of ministerial or departmental plans that focused either on low-hanging fruit or continuing with ongoing processes. The constraints were caused by a legacy of the military's tight control of security sector information, as well as the erosion of statistical and other

policy-relevant information under the military government.<sup>7</sup> A long-awaited economic policy plan was announced at the end of July 2016, and Suu Kyi has prioritized promoting this package to business audiences at home and abroad, actively seeking for and leading discussions with members of the business community in the United States, Japan, and Singapore when visiting these countries.<sup>8</sup>



Aung San Suu Kyi arrives in Laos for the ASEAN Summits in September 2016. Source: *The Republic of the Union of Myanmar State Counsellor Office* website at <https://tinyurl.com/meeuwbk>.

The NLD government now seems to have combined centralized power and populist strategies in pushing forward with its agenda of change. The role of nascent democratic institutions, necessary for governance and stable democracy, is as yet unclear. Thus, while some progress has been made in the country's democratization, the daunting policy challenges may test the talents of the current government and, ultimately, the patience of the people. At the same time, there is an emergence of different narratives for the country's future development. This bodes well for further "democratizing" changing understanding of democracy in Myanmar and allows for more creative approaches to engaging both polity and populace in change. One such approach will be in addressing challenges of personal safety and security for Burmese. An emerging rationale for pursuing human security can be found in the context of socioeconomic development toward political stability.

### Post-2015 Opportunities and Challenges for Change

Myanmar in the post-2015 scenario, under a civilian government, is afforded both an opportunity and a challenge to tackle personal safety and security for citizens in its new policy framework for change. The priority in ensuring human security to address freedom from fear and want should resonate with Suu Kyi's principles and values, and also provide an additional impetus for the NLD government's election manifesto of "freedom and security to prosper."

The question that has beset successive administrations in Burma/Myanmar over the decades, however, is whether human security takes precedence over national security priorities. National interests or interests of the state, which were later equated with the interests of the regime in power, have traditionally been the core concerns of those in power. Myanmar's long-existing problems point to the reality that many of these priorities continue to be relevant locally. Ethnic political viability, vested national or local economic interests, intrastate conflict, and the negative cycle of ethno-nationalism and insurgency delay socioeconomic development in parts of Myanmar.

Rebuilding trust is now the key to understanding Myanmar's path to democracy and change. This is probably the single-most important priority for the country to bridge the polarizing tensions of ethnic or economic origin. Animosity resulting from economic distortions and the politics of polarization have flamed communal tensions and conflicts, as illustrated by the violence in Rakhine following militant attacks on police posts in October 2016, the clashes in northern Myanmar between government security forces and ethnic armed groups, and ongoing concerns for personal and community security.

### The Rakhine Issue

Building trust takes on even greater significance in the light of ongoing tensions between the Rakhine and Rohingya communities, where negative socialization, entrenched over decades, lies at the core of the issue. In order to understand this problem that has attracted international attention, some context is needed. In the early nineteenth century, the English placed the Rakhine region, extending to the Bay of Bengal, into British India. Today, Rakhine is a state in Myanmar. Although some Rohingya (primarily South Asian Muslims) had lived in Rakhine for a long time under British rule, large numbers of Rohingya moved to majority Buddhist Rakhine, especially during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 and the years after. There has been sporadic violence between the Rohingya community and the Buddhist majority ever since.

The Myanmar government is currently under international scrutiny over the recent crackdown by the military in Rakhine, leading to an exodus of the Rohingya in November 2016 and widespread reports of abuse and violence.<sup>9</sup> Many of Suu Kyi's supporters defend her silence, arguing she is constrained from speaking out because of the possible reaction from the military, which further fuels both speculation and condemnation.

Within Myanmar, attitudes toward Rohingya have continued the narrative of past authoritarian regimes that insist the Rohingya communities are not citizens but rather Bengali immigrants. In fact, earlier verification processes for citizenship were bogged down over the Rohingya/Bengali identification issue. The Rohingya wish to retain their self-identification, while for the Rakhine population, the term "Rohingya" brings up political implications from past violent Rohingya uprisings in the 1940s–1950s

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Screen capture from *The Rohingya People*, a ten-minute Press TV documentary. Source: YouTube, posted January 7, 2017 at <https://tinyurl.com/lj4dcqg>.



1995–present conflict zones in Myanmar.  
Source: Wikimedia Commons at <https://tinyurl.com/md4g4aa>.

era—particularly in 1948, when militant Muslims in north Rakhine bordering then-East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) declared *jihād* with the objective of seceding to join East Pakistan. Questions of citizenship also fuel tensions on both sides about local control and property ownership. Other than the rule of law, the rise of ethnic nationalism is also important for the Rakhine issue. Since the prior USDP government did not pay attention to promoting an all-inclusive national identity, the new government is now faced with this issue of identity in Rakhine, as well as the nationwide peace process.

The NLD government did start tackling the issue of reestablishing trust through socioeconomic development in Rakhine in the early months of its administration. Suu Kyi established a national committee to address this issue in late May 2016 and requested that former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan chair a subsequent Advisory Commission on Rakhine that was created in August 2016. The Annan Commission clearly signals the NLD government’s willingness to accept international advice on this critical national problem. The Annan Commission, concerned with such issues as the assurance of basic services, development, and legal protection for all peoples in Rakhine, will submit a final report and recommendations to the Myanmar government sometime in the latter part of 2017.<sup>10</sup> This is a significant departure from past practice. In 2012, the USDP government established a similar high-level national committee following the investigations into widespread violence in Rakhine, but drew the line at international advice. Currently, the NLD government’s national committee’s efforts are supported by several working committees to deal with immigration and citizenship issues. But a pilot process to verify (and grant) citizenship is now in limbo, as Myanmar once again finds itself in the spotlight over the Rohingya issue. The NLD government, with Suu Kyi as its public face, has to contend with mounting criticism and frustration from the international community and media.

In an unprecedented move, Myanmar called a special meeting of the ASEAN foreign ministers in Yangon on December 19, 2016, to discuss international and regional concerns over the military crackdown in Rakhine. The disproportionate military retaliation was reportedly in response to a nascent insurgency funded by a Mecca-based Rohingya group.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, a humanitarian crisis is looming for the displaced Rohingya communities in need of emergency assistance. But the community in need of assistance is one with which the majority of the populace does not feel any affinity. Using the term “Rohingya” raises red flags because, since 1948, this issue has been conflated with state security. There has been purposeful entrenching of polarization on the part of past Myanmar central governments. Deep-seated prejudices have created mistrust toward international reporting on the issue.

The NLD government also faces constraints in negotiating with the military, which continues to be a powerful institution in the country. The political dialogue over a nationwide peace process is ongoing, and rebel clashes in northern Myanmar near China’s border turned deadly after four ethnic armed groups attacked Myanmar security forces on November 20, 2016.<sup>12</sup> Public sentiment now seems to be rising in support of the armed forces taking on a more “effective” security role in response to the attacks in Rakhine and reinforced by the conflict in northern Shan State, which borders China.

Understanding these constraints may help find pathways toward a solution. But any solution to this decades-old dilemma will not yield overnight results and will require sustained monitoring. The Annan Commission and a separate investigation commission appointed by Myanmar’s President U Htin Kyaw on December 1, 2016, have started work to identify and recommend measures to avoid future violence. Their respective recommendations are due later in 2017. There may now be an added option to work within the ASEAN context to address the immediate humanitarian needs of communities in Rakhine and start the long-term process of capacity- and bridge-building toward peaceful coexistence among the communities in conflict.

## Peace

There are emerging concerns that the peace process may now require more attention from Suu Kyi, especially after the November 2016 clash.

The inclusion of all political groups is cited by analysts as one of the main accomplishments of the USDP's political and security reforms, as are the agreements reached with ethnic armed insurgent factions toward a nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) in October 2016. However, the NCA only included half the projected sixteen signatories, and the NLD government has inherited the task of continuing negotiations with the remaining groups. Resettlement, rehabilitation, and reintegration for citizens affected by ethnic conflict and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) for armed groups to rejoin the political process all require substantial capacity-building and assistance from partners. Civil society organizations (CSOs) and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have also taken part in facilitating meetings and discussions with the ethnic groups.

In the continued efforts to achieve nationwide peace and reconciliation, the current administration is confronted with both a positive legacy and almost-insurmountable problems left behind by the previous government. One of these problems is trust in the peace processes, which, in Myanmar, is premised primarily on the extent of personal relations established by principal negotiators. This has been so since the 1947 Panglong Peace Conference initiated by General Aung San (Suu Kyi's father) to agree on a unified stance by Burmese and ethnic groups on independence from the British. The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) managed to forge an understanding with ethnic leaders for a ceasefire and some autonomous rule, but trust was broken when the ethnic armed groups were required to accept Burmese commanders and serve as border guard forces. Under the USDP, several political assurances were made to reestablish some modicum of personal trust, but the peace negotiations never managed to win the hearts and minds of people. Suu Kyi's tremendous political legitimacy and the trust that many ethnic leaders have in her provided a good starting point for the second Panglong Peace Conference as she follows in her father's footsteps. Still, past experience has made many ethnic groups wary of both political compromises and the role of the military under the new NLD administration.

Suu Kyi has embarked on a revival of the spirit of Panglong by bringing ethnic groups and civil society organizations together in political dialogue. Held in early September 2016, the planned four-day conference concluded on the third day without any concrete recommendations on the way forward, but with a renewed recognition of the scale and scope of the ceasefire negotiations. Suu Kyi's political legitimacy brought ethnic armed groups that had earlier resisted the USDP's ceasefire overtures, but did not manage to assuage the sensitivities of armed groups "actively clashing" with the Myanmar armed forces.<sup>13</sup> The Wa people—whose self-administered region borders China—stormed out of the conference, angered by a misunderstanding over their registration status. Three armed groups, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and the Arakan Army (AA), did not attend the conference, mainly due to their disagreement with the military over language in a draft statement to be issued by these three armed groups on committing to give up arms.<sup>14</sup> When this issue of *EAA* went to press, a second peace conference was scheduled for May 24, 2017. Discussions at the May conference were to include inputs from regional dialogues with various stakeholder groups.<sup>15</sup>

### Personal, Community, and Political Security

Personal and community security issues also remain largely gray areas in Myanmar. President Htin Kyaw's repeal of the 1975 law to "Safeguard the State Against the Dangers of Those Desiring to Cause Subversive Acts" that had been used in the past to detain political activists is considered by many groups to be a positive move.

There are now more vocal advocacy opportunities and policy frameworks to ensure protection from domestic violence and coercive crimes such as human trafficking, with active, visible implementation to tackle the latter. But many people are still victimized,

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Aung San Suu Kyi with members of the United Wa State Army (UWSA) after a meeting of armed ethnic groups in Naypyitaw, Myanmar, July 29, 2016. Source: *Voice of America* website at <https://tinyurl.com/m8z2c5c>.



Buddhist nuns celebrate the passage of the race and religion laws at a Ma- Ba-Tha rally in Mandalay on September 21, 2015. Source: *Frontier Myanmar* website (Phyo Maung Maung / AFP) at <https://tinyurl.com/kxw8gmd>.

with women and young children especially vulnerable. Child rape cases surged by 40 percent in 2016, causing the Myanmar community in Singapore to ask Suu Kyi to explain what her government was doing about this issue during her official visit to that country in December 2016.<sup>16</sup>

While strengthening law enforcement is important, it is also crucial to address social conditions that exacerbate certain crimes. A victim-blaming culture pervades societal attitudes toward domestic or sexual violence cases, and media coverage is either nonexistent or tends to border on sensationalism with a lack of respect for the victims' rights to privacy.<sup>17</sup> Currently, Myanmar lacks specific legislation addressing child sexual abuse, and USDP legislation limiting women's rights regarding interfaith marriages has caused some controversy.<sup>18</sup> The USDP enacted four pieces of legislation on "race and religion protection" in 2015: the Monogamy Law, the Religious Conversion Law, the Myanmar Buddhist Women's Special Marriage Law (referred to as the Interfaith Marriage Law), and the Population

Control Law.<sup>19</sup> There were criticisms that the USDP had given in to pressure by the ultra-right-wing nationalist Association for the Protection of Race and Religion (more popularly known by its Burmese acronym Ma-Ba-Tha) in enacting these restrictive laws, which also targeted Muslim communities in Myanmar.<sup>20</sup> Under the NLD government, however, implementation or enforcement of these laws has not taken center stage, although in July 2016, the UN committee tasked with fighting discrimination against women criticized NLD government representatives regarding the human rights implications of the four "race and religion" laws.<sup>21</sup> Women's rights organizations continue to push for their repeal. Former House Speaker U Shwe Mann, ousted from the USDP in August 2015, now heads a parliamentary committee assessing legal affairs and special issues. Any repeal or revision of the legislation would first come under this committee's consideration.

The negotiations for peace and reconciliation also have an underlying human security subtext, which includes community security concerns; conservation of tradition, cultures, languages, and commonly held values; abolishment of ethnic discrimination; prevention of ethnic conflicts; the issue of sexual violence in armed conflict; and the protection of indigenous people. These have become important elements of the ethnic groups' aspirations for federalism.

The case is similar for political security. While political security is about protection of human rights, the well-being of all people, and the promotion of the freedoms of press, speech, and voting, it also involves bringing groups together and an information/advocacy role by mediating institutions (e.g., CSOs). While there is potential for local civil society organizations to take on a larger bridge-building role in postconflict peace-building and reconciliation efforts, and participate in national, bilateral, and regional discussions on cross-border migrant labor issues, the government's preference for direct engagement with the people has caused many CSOs to feel that their intermediary role has diminished. This perception, conflated with the personalization of politics around Suu Kyi, presents an interesting twist to popular consensus, as the broad-based support for the NLD and Suu Kyi does not appear tolerant of alternative policy views. Even those with nuanced opinions of the current pace and progress of change are in broad agreement that there is no alternative to the NLD government.

The new government's engagement with a broad set of stakeholders, including political parties, civil society groups, and the media, is also still evolving, particularly in the setting of "OB markers," a term used in Singapore to describe the topics that are "out of bounds" for the media. The term best describes the paradoxical existence of significant elements of both freedom and authoritarianism in Myanmar's evolving polity. Under the USDP, media in Myanmar were warned not to raise race and religion issues, and a censorship body (dissolved in 2013) scrutinized the content of publications before going to print. In the much freer media landscape of Myanmar today, journalists maintain an attitude of preferring to be sued rather than silenced. In 2012, two local Burmese language weeklies, the *Voice* and *Envoy*, were suspended for reports that speculated on a USDP cabinet

reshuffle. The *Voice* was also battling a defamation suit from which it emerged practically scot-free. But even in the era of reforms and relaxed restrictions, Section 66d (which deals with spreading information of a defamatory nature) of the 2013 Telecommunications Law has been in use to repress criticism of key figures of the USDP government and the military chief, with even members of the ruling NLD party subjected to prosecution.<sup>22</sup> Reporting on Rakhine has its own pitfalls.<sup>23</sup>

### Patience Is A Virtue

With more voices clamoring for priority attention, progress will be slower than expected, and may even be distracted from nationwide priorities. In the aftermath of the landmark 2015 elections, there seems to be a widespread assumption that local and international actors are all aligned in their understandings of democratization. But society seems to be emerging in a polarized manner, and popular authoritarianism, especially on social media, is adding to existing divides.

It is too early to determine whether the NLD government will take a progressive, liberal, or a more conservative and traditional approach to human security issues as the country continues along the path of democratization. It also remains to be seen whether current human security—and the more immediate humanitarian needs—following the clashes in Rakhine State and the ethnic armed conflict issues will be addressed in a liberal spirit. It is also uncertain whether regional cooperation mechanisms such as ASEAN can play a role in helping address human security priorities in Myanmar. The recent appointment of a career diplomat as National Security Adviser with the mandate to advise the President and the Cabinet on strategic issues related to national security also indicates that the government is seeking to limit—or at the very least manage—the military’s influence on security issues.<sup>24</sup>

Together with ensuring security (at multiple levels), the success of Myanmar’s agenda of change will be in delivering results for improved socioeconomic conditions in the country. This will help build, reestablish, or strengthen trust in the NLD government and entrench its popular sovereignty. There are positive steps—often overlooked when attention swerves to new headlines—and most of them are in the economic sphere. Under Suu Kyi’s watch, the NLD government has facilitated the lifting of economic sanctions. This will help improve the business and investment potential of the country, which remains an attractive frontier even amidst a gloomy global economic outlook. There is now more government investment and attention paid to important basic social services such as health and education. A renewed focus on vocational and technical training recognizes the importance of skills and talent development to participate in regional economic integration, as well as to boost competitiveness of the country’s workforce. A new Investment Law was passed in October 2016, streamlining approval requirements and procedures for both foreign and local investors.<sup>25</sup> Rural development is being encouraged through greater access to credit for small landholders.

Challenges notwithstanding, it is clear that the NLD and Suu Kyi are determined to make a difference in a country that has languished under decades of mismanagement. And with the hard experience gained during the NLD’s opposition years, the new government is alive to the risks that come with the job. A delicate balancing of priorities will thus be necessary, as well as continued negotiations among principal groups.

This takes time, effort, and patience. ■

### NOTES

1. For an analysis, see “Moving Beyond ‘100 days’ in Myanmar,” *My Pilar*, accessed February 28, 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/ze39tth>.
2. For example, in a December 15, 2016, panel discussion on the topic “Re-thinking Myanmar Political Transition and the Future” organized by Tagaung Institute of Political Studies in Yangon, seventeen of eighteen panelists expressed critical views about the transition thus far.
3. Morten Pedersen, speaking on the challenges for Myanmar’s new government, at the 2017 Regional Outlook Forum, held on January 9, 2017, by the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore. Event highlights at “Regional Outlook Forum 2017: Debating Tomorrow’s Issues Today,” *Institute of South-east Asian Studies (ISEAS)—Yusof Ishak Institute*, last modified January 9, 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/gqq7okx>.
4. The NLD government was sworn in on March 30, 2016. On April 1, a bill proposing a State Counsellor role for Aung San Suu Kyi was passed by the upper house of Myanmar’s parliament, followed by the lower house’s approval on April 5, despite protests from the military members of parliament. The NLD’s overwhelming majority in parliament (80 percent of the seats) made the speedy passage of this bill possible. On April 6, it was signed into law by President Htin Kyaw. See “Myanmar’s President Signs Bill Appointing Aung San Suu Kyi to New Role as Special Adviser,” *The Straits Times*, last modified April 6, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/hgokgv>.

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5. Legal advisory firms such as Allen and Overy, and Berwin, Leighton and Paisner have highlighted and contextualized pertinent measures from the 100-day plans by various economic ministries. See “Myanmar Ministries Announce ‘100-Day’ Plans,” *Allen and Overy*, last modified June 15, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/j2s8c8a>; and “100-Day Plans of Various Myanmar Ministries,” *Berwin, Leighton, and Paisner Law*, last modified May 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/gmcl8mz>.
6. The author has learned through personal interviews that this guideline apparently draws from similar measures observed in Singapore, a country several Myanmar technocrats admire. See Kyaw Phyo Tha, “NLD Issues ‘Guidelines’ on Gifts for Civil Servants,” *The Irrawaddy*, last modified April 4, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/hqgkqb3>.
7. A pertinent point shared at the Myanmar Forum 2016, held by the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute on May 20, 2016, in Singapore. For a summary of the forum discussions, see “Myanmar Forum 2016,” ISEAS—Yusof Ishak Institute, accessed February 2, 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/z7jyolt>.
8. Main thrusts of the twelve-point policy were summarized for the press, but there were no appendices detailing policy implementation. See Aye Thidar Kyaw and Clare Hammond, “Government Reveals Twelve-Point Economic Policy,” *The Myanmar Times*, last modified July 29, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/ha43etu>.
9. Hunter Marson, “The Long View on Burma,” *Foreign Policy*, last modified November 29, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/z4hqzdn>.
10. The Annan Commission’s website explains its main advisory role. See “Advisory Commission on Rakhine State,” *Rakhine Commission*, accessed February 28, 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/je84v38>.
11. Tim Johnston and Anagha Neelakantan, “The World’s Newest Muslim Insurgency Is Being Waged in Burma,” *Time*, last modified December 13, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/zpavpz8>.
12. “Fresh Crisis in Myanmar after Ethnic Armies Attack Military,” *The Straits Times*, last modified November 21, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/hgco2qq>.
13. AFP, “Myanmar’s Twenty-First Panglong Peace Conference Ends With Long Road Ahead,” *Mizzima*, last modified September 3, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/jz88406>; and Ye Htut, “Myanmar’s Long Journey to Peace Starts in Panglong,” *The Straits Times*, last modified August 31, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/hrjvrm8>.
14. Nan Lwin Hnin Pwint and Htet Naing Zaw, “Three Armed Groups Barred from Peace Conference,” *The Irrawaddy*, last modified August 29, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/jdpof8>.
15. Tian Shaohui, “Aung San Suu Kyi Attends Joint Implementation Coordinaton Meeting,” *Xinhuanet*, last modified April 24, 2017, <http://tinyurl.com/n6uz34b>.
16. Three-hundred and eighty child molestation cases were reported by October 2016, 150 more than in 2015. See Samuel Osborn, “Child Rape Cases Surge 40 Percent in Burma,” *The Independent*, last modified December 1, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/z54term>.
17. Cherry Thein, “Lifting the Lid on Child Sex Abuse,” *Frontier Myanmar*, last modified October 18, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/j73hm4f>.
18. Win Naung Toe, Khet Mar, and Roseanne Gerin, “Myanmar’s Parliament Approves Controversial Interfaith Marriage Law,” *Radio Free Asia*, last modified July 7, 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/nuurhs6>.
19. Shameema Rahman and Wendy Zeldin, “Burma: Four ‘Race and Religion Protection Laws’ Adopted,” *Library of Congress*, last modified September 14, 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/hc6gzlt>.
20. The impact of the four laws on “race and religion” on women and minority communities (such as the Muslims) was analyzed in an article appearing in the local journal *Eleven Myanmar* in July 2015 and a paper by Chloé White written for the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security in December 2015. See Nay Htun Naing, “A Trap Law for Married Men and Women,” *Eleven Myanmar*, last modified September 7, 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/j7beesq>; and Chloé White, “Protection for Whom? Violations of International Law in Myanmar’s New ‘Race and Religion Protection’ Laws,” *Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security*, accessed February 2, 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/z4g9dfc>.
21. “Fiona Macgregor and Thu Thu Aung, “New Govt. to Defend ‘Race and Religion’ Laws at UN Meeting,” *The Myanmar Times*, last modified July 6, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/jq8pta2>.
22. Section 66d is usually invoked for critical comments on social media toward the former president and/or the military chief. Interestingly, Section 66d was recently used to bring into custody the Chief Editor of *Eleven Myanmar* for insinuating that the Yangon Chief Minister was corrupt. See Lun Min Mang, “Section 66(d), the Newest Threat to Freedom of Expression in Myanmar?” *The Myanmar Times*, last modified November 23, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/zlk3bx>; and Shoon Naing and Ye Mon, “Yangon Govt. Sues Eleven Over Story Implying Chief Minister Took Bribe,” *The Myanmar Times*, last modified November 10, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/hfpu5ah>.
23. The challenges of reporting on Rakhine are compounded by lack of or restricted access to the areas, and a heightened sensitivity by both the public and the government on reports that put security forces and the government in a critical light. See “Myanmar Obstructs Reporters from Covering Crisis in Rakhine State,” *Committee to Protect Journalists*, last modified November 3, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/jy7wrq7>.
24. Order 1/2017 from the Office of the President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, January 10, 2017, carried in the *New Light of Myanmar* English edition and in Burmese-language editions of the same date.
25. Daniel de Carteret, “New Investment Law Will Make It Easier to Do Business in Myanmar: MIC,” *The Myanmar Times*, last modified October 14, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/zwpjb4a>.

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