

Myanmar — Va-PoReg Country Report

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01/01/1886 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]: On 01/01/1886 the remnant of the Kingdom of Awa was annexed to British Burma (Moscotti 1950).¹ The previous regime was the Third Burmese Empire an autocratic monarchy. This Empire existed between 1752 and 01/01/1886. It had previously been independent and was slowly annexed and incorporated into British India over the course of three separate Anglo-Burmese wars. Following the First Anglo-Burmese War, 03/05/1824 – 02/14/1826, and the Treaty of Yandabo, Burma had to cede Assam, Manipur, Arakan (today: Rakhine) and Tenasserim (today: Taninthayi), which were then incorporated into British India.² Following the Second Anglo-Burmese War (04/05/1852–01/20/1853, Lower Burma was annexed into British India.³ The Third Anglo-Burmese War, 11/07/1885 – 11/29/1885, ends the existence of the Empire when the remaining territory of Upper Burma was annexed into British India. According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period and universal suffrage was absent. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and ambiguous according to V-Dem's PCLI. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. Here is a draft justification: "Although Burma was formally administered as part of British India from 1886 to 1937, Va-PoReg treats it as a separate colonial unit throughout this period for several reasons. First, Burma retained a distinct administrative identity within British India, culminating in its formal separation as a Crown Colony in 1937, an act that presupposes continuous institutional distinctiveness rather than the emergence of a new entity. Second, Burma possessed a clearly identifiable pre-colonial statehood in the form of the Konbaung Dynasty, whose sequential annexation across three Anglo-Burmese Wars constitutes a coherent colonial history that is analytically inseparable from the post-1937 period.

11/21/1922 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom]: On this day the first election for the Legislative Council were held. 80 of the 103 were elected. The 21 Party won the elections. In 1922 universal suffrage was introduced.⁴ However, the Rohingya, a Muslim minority, was disenfranchised.⁵

04/01/1937 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy, as Part of British India]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: Burma retained its status as an Indian province until 1937 when it was established as a distinct colony (Moscotti 1950).⁶ On 04/01/1937 the Burma province was separated from British India by the British Colonial Regime, given a new constitution which called for a fully elected assembly. This decision was met with mixed reactions, as some Burmese felt this was a tactic to exclude them from reforms, and others felt it was preferable to be removed from Indian control.⁷ According to LIED only multiparty legislative elections were held. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and ambiguous according to V-Dem's PCLI.

08/01/1942 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Japan, Constitutional Monarchy]: In 1942 Japan successfully expelled the United Kingdom from all but the most remote parts of the country. While a British colony, Burma was perennially restless, but the war threw it into chaos and a vicious cycle of score-settling, especially between the Barmars,

who generally cooperated with the Japanese occupiers until Aung San's uprising in March 1945, and many of the ethnic minorities such as the Karens, Chins and Kachins who remained loyal to the British. The surrender of Japan in August 1945 and the repatriation of Japanese troops did not bring an end to fighting inside Myanmar. When the Japanese invaded Burma, nearly the entire British administration, along with its Indian contingent that had previously held sway in the civil service and private bureaucracy, managed to flee to India. Consequently, the Burmese populace was left to govern themselves, and they formed a subordinate administration under Japanese control in August 1942. A year later, on 08/01/1943, Burma was proclaimed by Japan to be an independent nation, and a national government led by former Prime Minister Dr. Ba Maw was established (Selth 1986). The government of Ba Maw pursued a distinctly pro-Japanese orientation. According to LIED only multiparty legislative elections were held. LIED lists universal suffrage as absent during this period. Besides, for this timeframe, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, whereas V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as showing that political liberties are not really present. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited 1943-1944 but otherwise moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited 1942-1945 but otherwise absent.

05/03/1945 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Japan, Constitutional Monarchy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]: The Allies reoccupied the country, recapturing Yangon (Rangoon), the colonial capital, in May 1945. The surrender of the Japanese brought a military administration to Burma. After the war ended, the British governor, Colonel Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, returned. The restored government established a political program that focused on the physical reconstruction of the country and delayed discussion of independence.⁸ Negotiations on independence lasted from 1945 until 1947. According to LIED only multiparty legislative elections were held. LIED lists universal suffrage as absent during this period. Moreover, in this timeframe, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is categorized by us as ambiguous regarding the status of political liberties, indicating an intermediate state between present and absent. The period is a borderline case between occupation and colony. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

04/09/1947 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by United Kingdom, Liberal Democracy]/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On 04/09/1947 pre-independence general elections for a constituent assembly were held.⁹ On 01/04/1948 independence as the Union of Burma outside the Commonwealth was declared (McIntyre 1999). Burman leaders assumed the responsibility for governing their country and promoting the welfare of their people (Moscotti 1950). A bicameral parliament was established, comprising a Chamber of Deputies and a Chamber of Nationalities, with multi-party elections occurring in 1951-1952, 1956, and 1960.¹⁰ BMR, CVG, GWF, LIED, PRC and MCM all coded the regime as democratic and solely RoW as an electoral autocracy. The Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) were accused of voter intimidation and corruption by the opposition, but the elections 1947 were generally characterized as free and fair.¹¹ The AFPFL won every election until 1960. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. According to LIED the 1947 election was not competitive. But since 1948, competitiveness is scored. V-Dem's CEI indicates no cleanliness until 1950. Since 1951, not real cleanliness is provided. The overall election conditions were somewhat free and fair in 1947. For the following three years no elections were held. Since 1951 somewhat electoral freedom and fairness is given again (V-Dem EF&FI). Furthermore, LIED declares the absence of political liberties, whereas V-Dem's PCLI scores a somewhat presence of political liberties. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or subordination. The disregard for ethnic minority rights led to armed clashes. Until 2023, many ethnic conflicts in Myanmar have their roots in this period.¹² For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is

classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

09/26/1958 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: Amidst internal strife within the ruling party, AFPFL, Premier U Nu, with the agreement of both factions, decided to hand over power to General Ne Win and the military. The military would take on a caretaker role to stabilize the nation and facilitate new elections. Ne Win was officially confirmed as prime minister by parliament on 10/28/1958 (Trager 1959: 318, Feit 1973: 92-97, Callahan 2003: 187-89, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 79). The military junta announced to hold an election in 1960. According to LIED multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. Moreover, for the relevant period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are somewhat present. Based on our observations we would argue that V-Dem's PCLI is an outlier and not reliable for this regime period. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive's constraints were categorized as Intermediate Category 2, between slight and substantial limitations. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

02/06/1960 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Electoral Democracy: On this date, competitive elections signaled a shift from military to elected civilian governance (Bigelow 1960: 70, Butwell/Von der Mehden 2008: 144-50, Feit 1973: 97, Cady 1974: 119, Callahan 2003: 197, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 79). BMR, CVG, GWF, LIED, PRC and MCM all coded the regime as democratic and solely RoW as an electoral autocracy. During the elections 1960 some minor irregularities occurred.¹³ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. However, LIED classifies the election as competitive. V-Dem's CEI underlined ambiguous cleanliness and the overall election conditions were somewhat free and fair (V-Dem EF&FI). In addition, political liberties remained absent according to LIED. Whereas V-Dem's PCLI declares them as somewhat present. As per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was significantly constrained by institutional checks during this time. The ethnic tensions and disregards of minority rights persisted. The armed clashes increased.¹⁴ For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

03/02/1962 End Electoral Democracy/Start Military Autocracy: Military coup led by General Ne Win aiming to stabilize the country ousted the civilian government and established a mostly military junta, the Revolutionary Council, headed by Ne Win. Parliament was dissolved (Macmillan 2022, Cook 1970: 259-60, Badgley 1962: 24, Cady 1974: 120, Callahan 2003: 202-208, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 79-80). According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. However, following the proclamation of the Burmese Way to Socialism, the Burma Socialist Programme Party was established on 04/30/1962. Political liberties were absent in this period (see also LIED and V-Dem's PCLI). Based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, The executive operated in this period with unlimited authority, facing no institutional checks on power (see also Polity5 and V-Dem's JCE & LCE).

01/03/1974 End Military Autocracy/Start One-Party Autocracy: On 03/01/1974, the new constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma entered into force and formally replaced direct military rule with an institutionalized one-party system. The Burmese Way to Socialism had been introduced by the Union Revolutionary Council, the military junta established by Ne Win and his allies in the Tatmadaw after overthrowing the democratically elected government (Zurcher). Until 1988, the country operated under a one-party system, with the general and other military officers resigning from their formal military positions in order to govern through the BSPP. The BSPP-led Socialist Economy Construction Committee (hsa sa ta ka) nationalized major sectors of the economy. All government employees across various sectors, including doctors, teachers, engineers, scientists, managers of nationalized industries, and civil administrators, were required to complete a three-month political indoctrination program combined with basic military training at the Hpaunggyi Central People's Services Training School (Taylor 2009). In this period non-competitive

one-party executive and legislative elections were held (see also LIED). Political liberties were absent in this period (see also LIED and V-Dem's Political Civil Liberties Index). Polity5 characterizes the executive as exercising unlimited authority without institutional checks on power. For the relevant period, V-Dem's indicators on judicial constraints (JCE) and legislative constraints (LCE) on the executive both indicate the absence of effective checks. Freedom House scores ranging from 12 to 14 classify the regime as not free. Despite socialist rhetoric and extensive state control, this period does not qualify as Communist Ideocracy under the codebook criteria because Marxism-Leninism did not function as the operative doctrine structuring authority and elite recruitment. Instead, the regime institutionalized a constitutionally entrenched single-party monopoly justified through nationalist and developmentalist narratives. Since sovereign authority after 03/01/1974 was organized through the BSPP as the sole legal party rather than through an overt corporate military junta structure, the regime from 03/01/1974 to 09/18/1988 is most appropriately classified as One-Party Autocracy.

09/18/1988 End One-Party Autocracy/Start Military Autocracy: On this date the armed forces seized power and set up the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). Following the civil unrest, thousands of deaths were reported. Saw Maung took power as the chairman of the military junta (Bradley 1997: 21).¹⁵ The post-September 1988 period is considered a new regime because before September 1988, top leadership was dominated by Ne Win and retired officers who ruled through a single party with extensive societal penetration. In September 1988, the military disengaged from the ruling party and abolished all the governing institutions of the one-party autocracy (Guyot/Badgley 1990: 187-189, Brooker 1995: 169, Callahan 2003: 210-212, Min 2008: 1018). The post-1988 regime is described by Brooker as an „old-fashioned military regime under a junta” (1995: 168) and has been controlled by active-duty officers in the military and security service. Civilians who had been part of the old ruling party were subsequently incorporated into a renamed party to support the regime but lost much of their influence” (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 80). On 06/19/1989, the government officially changed the country's English name to the Union of Myanmar. Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD), was placed under house arrest in July 1989. Despite her prolonged detention, her party secured a landslide victory in the 1990 election. However, the military junta refused to acknowledge the results. In 1992, Shwe assumed leadership at the national level, initiating 19 years of authoritarian rule until his resignation in 2011. Aung San Suu Kyi was released from detention in July 1995 but was subsequently detained on multiple occasions before her most recent release in November 2010 (Macmillan 2022). On 04/23/1992 Saw Maung was the victim of a palace coup by military hardliners who felt Maung was too eager for the country to return to civilian rule. Then Shwe took control of the junta. On 07/25/1998 an uprising eventually enveloped the entire country and Ne Win was forced to step down. Sein Lwin took over as the executive party secretary. In 2008, a new constitution was adopted which enshrines army prerogatives. The military-backed government introduced a „Roadmap to Discipline-flourishing Democracy“ in 1993, but progress seemed to halt on multiple occasions until 2008. During that year, the government released a new draft, national constitution and orchestrated a flawed national referendum that led to its adoption. The new constitution outlined the election of a national assembly with authority to appoint a president, effectively securing military control across all levels.¹⁶ According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held until 2000, from 2001 onward only executive elections were held. In this period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is likewise classified by us as showing that political liberties are absent. From 1989 to 2003, as per Polity5's categorization, the executive experienced minimal limitations on decision-making, placing it in the first intermediate category. In 2004, the executive wielded unrestricted authority without any formal limitations during this time. Between 2005 and 2010, as per Polity5's categorization, the executive experienced minimal limitations on decision-making, placing it in the first intermediate category. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are absent. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. As per FH's classification for the regime period from 1988 to 2010, the country is considered not

free with a score of 14, which we also interpret as not free in our framework.

11/07/2010 End Military Autocracy/Start Electoral (Military) Autocracy: On this date the pro-government Union Solidarity and Development Party won the first elections for 20 years. The oppositional National League for Democracy boycotted the elections. The United Nations were concerned regarding the fairness of the elections, while western nations labeled them as fraudulent.¹⁷ Thein Sein assumed the presidency, guiding the country towards civilian governance, although the military retained considerable influence within the government. Following a series of by-election victories in April 2012, including Aung San Suu Kyi's parliamentary seat win, the NLD garnered sufficient seats in the November 2015 general election to form the subsequent government. Htin Kyaw took office as president on 04/01/2016, with Aung San Suu Kyi effectively leading the NLD administration (Macmillan 2022). He was the first president since U Nu's overthrow in 1962 to have no ties to the military.¹⁸ On 03/30/2011, the military junta was officially dissolved, following a 2010 general election, and a nominally civilian government was installed.¹⁹ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. However, the elections were not competitive (LIED). V-Dem's CEI scores no cleanliness in 2010 and 2011. In 2012 not real cleanliness was given. Since 2013 ambiguous cleanliness is given. According to V-Dem's EF&FI not real freedom and fairness were achieved in 2010 and 2011. Since 2012 the elections are considered as somewhat free and fair. However, political liberties were absent for this time (LIED). According to V-Dem's PCLI not real political liberties were present. Since 2012 an ambiguous presence is stated. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent in 2011 but otherwise limited, and V-Dem's LCE is interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate in 2011 but otherwise. During the relevant time period, the FH score improved from 13 to 11. However, this is still categorized as not free by both FH and our framework.

11/08/2015 End Electoral (Military) Autocracy/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On 11/08/2015, Myanmar experienced a partial voluntary exit from military rule. In the first openly contested general elections since 1990, the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) won a supermajority of seats in the combined national parliament, and on 04/01/2016 the first civilian president was elected.²⁰ The transfer of authority to the opposition proceeded peacefully, but the exit was highly limited: under the 2008 Constitution, the military retained extensive institutional prerogatives, including 25 percent of all parliamentary seats, control over key ministries, and veto power through the National Defence and Security Council. This regime change event is therefore best coded as a borderline case of voluntary exit, since the handover of power was only partial and embedded in an institutional framework designed to safeguard continued military dominance. For the period after 2015, the regime is most accurately classified as an electoral hybrid regime rather than a democracy. President Htin Kyaw resigned on 03/21/2018 due to health reasons, after which First Vice President Myint Swe served as acting president. On 03/23, Win Myint, the speaker of the house from the NLD, resigned to contest the presidency and was elected as vice president with 273 votes, defeating Thaung Aye from the USDP, who obtained 27 votes. Win Myint was subsequently elected president on 03/28 by the Electoral College with 403 votes, ahead of Myint Swe with 211 votes and Henry Van Thio with 18 votes, and he was inaugurated on 03/30. Myint Swe resumed his role as vice president (Lansford 2021). In the elections for the House of Representatives on 11/08/2020, the NLD under Aung San Suu Kyi secured 258 of 330 elected seats (Macmillan 2022). Throughout this period, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held, consistent with LIED's classification of these contests as competitive. According to V-Dem's CEI, electoral cleanliness was rated as ambiguous for the entire time, while its PCLI indicates that political liberties were present to some extent. According to Polity5, during this period the executive was either equal to or subordinate to other institutions, suggesting strong constraints on decision-making authority. This assessment, however, must be considered a misclassification: it overstates institutional constraints in light of the entrenched prerogatives of the armed forces. In practice, the military's reserved parliamentary seats, control over key ministries, and veto

power meant that civilian institutions remained structurally dependent. More consistent with the evidence are V-Dem's indicators, which point to only moderate judicial constraints (JCE) and moderate, though in 2020 more robust, legislative constraints (LCE). As per FH between 2015 and 2021 the country is classified as (partly) free, fluctuating between 10 and 11 and thus moving between our categories rather not free and not free.

02/01/2021 End Electoral Hybrid Regime/Start Military Autocracy: On this date, in reaction to the victory of the ruling party, National League for Democracy, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, at the November 2020 parliamentary elections, the Tatmadaw (Armed Forces) declared a state of emergency. They removed Win Myint's government and transferred the power to General Min Aung Hlaing (Macmillan 2022). Commander-in-chief of the armed forces, Min Aung Hlaing, as the leader of the country, serving as the Chairman of the State Administrative Council, took on a new title as prime minister of a newly formed caretaker government. This episode constitutes a clear military coup. In 2023 the regime extended the state of emergency postponing elections due in July 2023.²¹ As of now, no election has taken place however, as the military junta points to the ongoing civil war as justification for continually postponing elections. They have also hinted at maybe holding an election that is not nationwide.²² The civil war is in the meantime picking up intensity, as rebel forces make sizeable advances and take control over large parts of territory along Myanmar's borders.²³ LIED offers no information on this period, except for 2021, during which no multiparty executive or legislative elections took place. It remains to be seen, if the military junta can hold on to control over the country but for now, we continue to list it as a military autocracy. For the given timeframe, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is also classified by us as indicating that political liberties are absent. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, and V-Dem's LCE is interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited and without value in 2023 due to the absence of any parliament. As per FH, from 2021 onwards, the country is classified as not free, with scores between 13 and 14.

Military Autocracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional Sources (Bieber 2010, Stöver/Gallenkamp 2010)

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Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_rule_in_Burma

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Anglo-Burmese_War

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Anglo-Burmese_War

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1922_Burmese_general_election

⁵ <https://time.com/5910739/myanmar-election-rohingya/>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_rule_in_Burma

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Myanmar

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_rule_in_Burma

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1947_Burmese_general_election#Campaign

¹⁰ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myanmar#Military_rule_\(1962%E2%80%932011\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myanmar#Military_rule_(1962%E2%80%932011))

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1947_Burmese_general_election

¹² <https://minorityrights.org/country/myanmarburma/>

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1960_Burmese_general_election

¹⁴ <https://minorityrights.org/country/myanmarburma/>

¹⁵ <http://www.burmawatch.org/aboutburma.html>

¹⁶ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myanmar#Military_rule_\(1962%E2%80%932011\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myanmar#Military_rule_(1962%E2%80%932011))

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010_Myanmar_general_election

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Htin_Kyaw

¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_Peace_and_Development_Council

²⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2015_Myanmar_general_election

²¹ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/b175-road-nowhere-myanmar-regimes-stage-managed-elections>

²² <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/myanmars-next-election-may-not-be-nationwide-junta-chief-says-2024-03-25/>

²³ <https://www.dw.com/en/myanmar-civil-war-of-many-against-many-tearing-country-up/a-68938965>

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