

## MEDIA MONITORING REPORT – NOVEMBER 2015

### MYANMAR GENERAL ELECTION

Millions of voters went to the polls in Myanmar on Sunday 8 November 2015 to vote for their representatives. This is the first election since a nominally civilian government was introduced in 2011. A total of 91 parties are contesting, including many representing Myanmar's ethnic minorities. However, the main fight is between National League for Democracy (NLD) and the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).<sup>1</sup>



Credit: Global Risk Insight



Credit: Voice of America

An estimated 32 million Myanmar citizens are eligible to vote. Each voter will receive a minimum of three ballot papers to vote for their representatives in (1) House of Nationalities (2) House of Representatives (3) state and regional governments and if they have an ethnic group listed on their identification card, they will also be entitled to a fourth ballot paper, which will help them select their respective ethnic member of parliament in their state and region.<sup>2</sup>

Approximately 150 election observers visited more than 500 polling stations across the country and reported very positively on the voting process. Polling stations around the country were well organised and voters had a real choice between different candidates and the counting of votes, which is ongoing, is reportedly transparent.<sup>3</sup>



Credit: BBC

## The National Parliament

The Assembly of the Union (Pyidaungsu Hluttaw) is the national-level legislature of Myanmar established by the 2008 National Constitution. The *Pyidaungsu Hluttaw* is made up of two houses, the *Amyotha Hluttaw* (House of Nationalities), a 224-seat upper house and the *Pyithu Hluttaw*, a 440-seat lower house (House of Representatives), which 330 are directly elected and 110 appointed by the Myanmar Armed Forces. Each of the fourteen major administrative regions and states has its own local Region Assembly and State Assembly.<sup>4 5</sup> Notably, the constitution guarantees 25 percent of national parliamentary seats for military officers and this also applies to regional and state parliaments.<sup>6</sup>

After the vote, a Presidential Electoral College (PEC) will be formed from three groups—the lower and upper houses of the new parliament and the defense services. Each group will nominate one presidential candidate.

All members of the PEC will vote for the candidate of their choice. The candidate with the majority of votes becomes president, while the others become vice presidents.<sup>7</sup>

## Unofficial results

- The election outcome has sent shockwaves through Myanmar’s political establishment, with the opposition NLD winning more than 80 percent of Union Parliament seats. An official result of the vote has yet to be announced.<sup>8</sup>
- Members of various ethnic armed groups have congratulated the NLD on its landslide victory, urging the party’s chairwoman Aung San Suu Kyi to prioritize peace when the next government assumes office. Several of Myanmar’s ethnic rebel groups are eager to start peace negotiations with the next government.<sup>9</sup>



Credit: Straits Times



Credit: Mizzima

- President Thein Sein confirmed that both the military and the government will accept the outcome of the historic election, and that he would work with opposition parties to ensure a stable transition.<sup>10</sup>

## Controversy on the electoral process

Although the government promised free and fair election, it is criticized that certain religious and ethnic minorities, including Rohingya were disfranchised in the lead-up to the election. Besides, internal migrants are

required to provide certification that verifies their current residence for a minimum of 180 days, reinforcing their vulnerability to exploitation and intimidation by local authorities. Thus some critics suggested that the electoral process is undermined by systematic and structural problems including the lack of an independent election commission and discriminatory voter registration laws.<sup>11</sup>

### Transition of power and the peace process

- President Thein Sein urged the leaders of Myanmar’s next government to continue the course of reforms that the USDP set in motion four years ago, and he highlighted that the country is still in a very beginning of the peace process. He encourages all political parties to do their part to ensure a stable transition period, while reaffirming his commitment to respect the poll’s outcome.<sup>12</sup>
- Nonetheless, the President appears to have delayed a meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi to discuss the transfer of power to a new government following her party’s landslide election victory. It is explained that talks with the NLD leader will not happen until all complaints about election results have been resolved by the Union Election Commission (UEC). The disclosure contrasts sharply with initial responses by U Thein Sein, when he appeared gracious in defeat and keen to promote steps toward reconciliation<sup>13</sup>
- The process could take months and go beyond the transition period running up to the convening of the new parliament in late January and its election of the president in February.<sup>14</sup>



Credit: BBC



Credit: BBC



Credit: BBC



Credit: Myanmar Times

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<sup>1</sup> Radio Free Asia, “Millions Turn Out for Myanmar's First Free Nationwide Vote since 1990”, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/myanmar-election-11082015104002.html>

<sup>2</sup> Voice of America, “Millions Vote in Historic Myanmar Election”, <http://www.voanews.com/content/us-britain-amnesty-international-fair-myanmar-burma-vote/3042085.html>

<sup>3</sup> Channel News Asia, “Vote counting is transparent: EU observers on Myanmar Election”, <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/vote-counting-is/2250190.html>

<sup>4</sup> Wikipedia, Assembly of the Union, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assembly\\_of\\_the\\_Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assembly_of_the_Union)

<sup>5</sup> Wikipedia, House of Representatives (Myanmar), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House\\_of\\_Representatives\\_%28Myanmar%29](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Representatives_%28Myanmar%29)

<sup>6</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Burma Elections: In the Mon Battleground”, <https://www.hrw.org/blog-feed/burma-elections-2015>, paragraph 2

<sup>7</sup> Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 2015, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/04/30/myanmar-s-2015-election-basics/i80p>

<sup>8</sup> Dpa International, 15 November 2015, “Myanmar's rebel groups welcome election victory of opposition NLD”, <http://www.dpa-international.com/news/asia/myanmars-rebel-groups-welcome-election-victory-of-opposition-nld-a-47167019.html>

<sup>9</sup> The Irrawaddy, 12 November 2015, “Ethnic Armed Groups Call on Suu Kyi to Prioritize Peace”, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/election/news/ethnic-armed-groups-call-on-suu-kyi-to-prioritize-peace>

<sup>10</sup> Democratic Voice of Burma, 7 November 2015, “Military, govt will accept election result, says president”, <http://www.dvb.no/news/military-govt-will-accept-election-result-says-president-myanmar/58838>

<sup>11</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Burma: Election Fundamentally Flawed”, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/11/04/burma-election-fundamentally-flawed>, paragraph 1

<sup>12</sup> The Irrawaddy, 15 November 2015, “President Thein Sein urges a continuation of reforms that his party set in motion four years ago, one week after suffering a crushing election defeat”, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/election/news/thein-sein-tells-next-govt-peace-reconciliation-are-key>

<sup>13</sup> Myanmar Times, 18 November 2015, “Delayed post-election talks put transition in doubt”, <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/content/delayed-post-election-talks-myanmar-put-transition-doubt>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

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