

Myanmar Political Parties at a Time of Transition:

Political party dynamics at the national and local level

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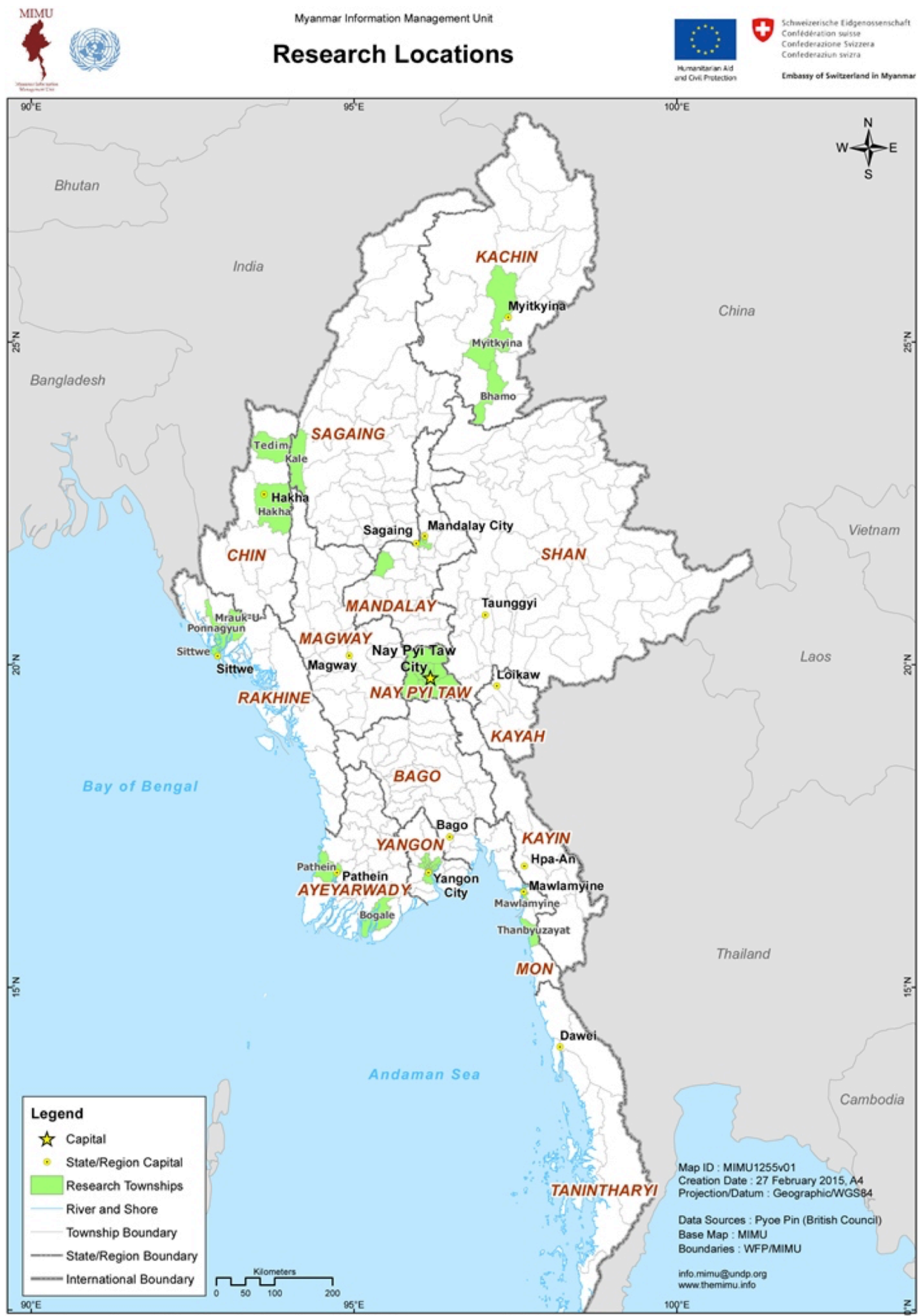
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Figure 1: Map of Research Locations for 'Myanmar Political Parties at a Time of Transition'



Abbreviations

ALD	Arakan League for Democracy
AMDP	All Mon Region Democracy Party
ANP	Arakan National Party
CNF	Chin National Front
CNP	Chin National Party
CPP	Chin Progressive Party
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DHRP	Democracy and Human Rights Party
DNOP	Danu National Organization Party
DP	Democratic Party (Myanmar)
EAG	Ethnic Armed Group
ENDP	Ethnic National Development Party
FDA	Federal Democracy Alliance
FUP	Federal Union Party
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INGO	International Non-Government Organisation
IOC	Islamic Organisation for Cooperation
IRI	International Republican Institute
KDP	Kachin Democratic Party
KIO	Kachin Independence Organisation
KNCD	Kachin State National Congress for Democracy
KNDCP	Kachin National Democracy Congress Party
KSDP	Kachin State Democracy Party
KMNDP	Kha Mee National Development Party
KPP	Kayin People's Party
LNDP	Lisu National Development Party
MNDF	Mon National Democratic Front
MNP	Mon National Party
MNDP	Mro National Development Party
MKNDO	Mro/Khami National Development Organization
MFDP	Myanmar Farmers' Development Party
MPP	Modern People's Party
NBF	Nationalities Brotherhood Federation
NDF	National Democratic Force
NDPHR	National Democracy Party for Human Rights
NDPP	National Development and Peace Party
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NLD	National League for Democracy
NMSP	New Mon State Party
NDPD	National Democratic Party for Development
NUP	National Unity Party
NNDP	New National Democracy Party
PDP	Peace and Diversity Party
PDP	People Democracy Party
PSDP	Phalon-Sawaw Democratic Party

PSSDP	Public Service Students' Democracy Party
RNDP	Rakhine Nationalities Development Party
RSNF	Rakhine State National Force
SNLD	Shan Nationalities League for Democracy
SNDP	Shan Nationalities Democratic Party
TNDP	Tai-Leng (Red Shan) Nationalities Development Party
UEC	Union Election Commission
UNA	United Nationalities Alliance
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party
UDPKS	Unity and Democracy Party of Kachin State
WDP	Wunthanu Democratic Party [former <i>Wunthanu NLD</i>]
ZCD	Zomi Congress for Democracy

List of contents

Preamble:

Acknowledgements
Map of research locations
Abbreviations
List of content
Executive summary

Section 1: Introduction

Section 2: Scope of work and methodology

Section 3: Research findings

3.1. Overview and background of Myanmar political parties

- 3.1.1. Political party landscape
- 3.1.2. Ideology, policy platform and key issues
- 3.1.3. Main activities
- 3.1.4. Internal party linkages
- 3.1.5. Political party strengths and weaknesses

3.2. Engagement between political parties and constituencies

- 3.2.1. Outreach to communities by political parties
- 3.2.2. Local constituencies' view of and engagement with political parties
- 3.2.3. Knowledge and sources of information about politics

3.3. Relationship between political parties, civil society and local authorities

- 3.3.1. Cooperation between political parties
- 3.3.2. Cooperation between political parties and civil society
- 3.3.3. Cooperation between political parties and local government authorities
- 3.3.4. Other cooperation – EAGs and the private sector

3.4. Election preparations

- 3.4.1. Campaign methods
- 3.4.2. Campaign issues
- 3.4.3. Candidate selection
- 3.4.4. Campaign challenges
- 3.4.5. Risks of ethnic or religious-motivated election violence

3.5. Potential election outcome scenarios

- 3.5.1. Expectations of free and fair elections
- 3.5.2. Voter behaviour
- 3.5.3. Possible election outcome scenarios

Section 4: Conclusion

Section 5: Recommendations

Appendices

Executive summary

The 2015 elections in Myanmar are expected to be a significant watershed in the country's democratic development. Following more than sixty years of military-dominated rule, there is hope that they could usher in a new democratic era overseen by a government representing the interests of the majority and respecting the rights of minorities. The elections are also associated with significant risks. After years of repression, mistrust remains high between both the political parties and towards the state. Divisions along ethnic lines remains a defining feature of the country's political landscape - while nationalist and religious sentiments are on the rise. Successful elections and transition towards democracy will ultimately depend on a negotiated accommodation of powerful and often divergent interests.

The political party landscape: ideology, structure and activities

Since 2010, 73 political parties have registered or re-registered (while at least an additional 14 are awaiting registration approval). The parties can be divided into three broad categories: nationwide parties (3), ethnic minority parties (48) and smaller Bamar parties (22). Few of these parties are based on political ideologies, rather they tend to centre on dominant political leaders and, in the case of the ethnic parties, ethnic affiliations. For almost all parties the focus is first on attaining power and then dealing with the development of policies later; political goals tend to be expressed in generic terms, such as 'development', 'democracy', 'unity', 'rule of law' or 'federalism'. Despite this, the parties are not averse to taking positions on issues that matter to them such as the electoral system, constitutional change, federalism and the peace process. The ethnic parties have strong support in their communities, while nationwide parties struggle to assert in what ways they promote ethnic aspirations. Although the nationwide parties have much larger networks across the country, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and National Unity Party (NUP) struggle with their image because of their association with the former military regime while the National League for Democracy (NLD)'s association with Aung San Suu Kyi remains the party's key strength. In four of the seven states ethnic parties have been in merger talks, often due to pressure from respected social and religious leaders, but the mergers have proven largely unsuccessful and there is a consequent risk of the ethnic vote being split.

With the exception of the USDP (and partly the NLD), the parties generally lack effective organisational structures. There is a tendency of hierarchical and centralised decision making along with limited tolerance for internal differences of opinion, which results in a disconnect between the local level and the centre along with party fragmentation. In order to bridge these gaps, respondents identified a need to improve party organisation, internal party structures and communication lines.

Engagement between political parties and local constituencies

Parties have yet to build strong relationships with local communities and lack strategies that ensure local priorities are reflected in national and subnational party politics. Few parties make efforts to appeal to specific constituency groups – with the exception of a focus on the interests of ethnic communities. At the local level the parties tend to focus on specific issues such as land confiscation, small-scale infrastructure development, and in the case of ethnic parties the promotion of ethnic culture and rights. Activities centre on party strengthening and election preparation, and on development and social welfare. The majority of sub national activities take place at the township and state/region levels, while village level offices function mainly as a symbolic manifestation of party presence. Parties and members of parliament (MPs) stress that they regularly undertake village visits to listen to the needs of their constituencies, but local communities say they rarely see representatives from political parties except during election time and they had difficulty identifying in what ways the parties could improve their daily lives. Few parties make use of large public meetings but some have joined local protests against large infrastructure projects with potentially negative environmental impacts. The most common manner in which the political parties support constituencies is by assisting individual persons and communities with referring specific cases to local or higher government authorities. Most cases are

about land confiscation, but lack of basic service delivery and of local infrastructure are also issues. Due to its better financial position, the USDP plays a stronger role than other parties in providing direct assistance to communities.

Cooperation between political parties, civil society and local government authorities

At the local level, the relationship between Myanmar political parties is distant and cautious. While many party members know each other personally, and often focus on the same local issues, cooperation between parties in any structured or strategic form is almost entirely absent. Cooperation between MPs within state/region parliaments and in relation to township level local development funds is more common. At the national level, the main cooperation between political parties is through the four party alliances: the Nationalities Brotherhood Federation (NBF); the Federal Democracy Alliance (FDA); the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA); and a recently established alliance of small Bamar parties. Engagement between MPs within the Union parliament seems relatively close.

Cooperation between political parties and civil society organisations (CSOs) is limited at the local level despite both entities being involved in very similar issues, while engagement between political parties and local government authorities mainly takes place when the parties submit claims, complaints or issues to government offices on behalf of constituencies. Cooperation also takes place between party MPs and township level committees in relation to constituency development funds. Overall, local government office staff tend to keep a large distance from the parties, with the possible exception of the ruling party. Formal cooperation between political parties and ethnic armed groups (EAGs) is hindered by the legal prohibitions against parties having contact with 'illegal groups' but many of the ethnic parties and EAGs have personal relationships. Overall, EAGs have generally refrained from backing particular ethnic parties, awaiting a political dialogue and a change to the constitution. Currently the EAGs and the ethnic parties are not in direct competition with each other but this may change as the peace process progresses.

Election preparations

Of the 73 parties registered thus far, 53 will contest nationwide in the general election, and 20 in only states and/or regions. By late 2014, political parties at the local level were still in the early stages of election planning preparation, although the USDP seemed to be more advanced in its planning than other parties and following the 2012 by-elections has sought to rectify a number of its weaknesses. With the exception of the USDP, the key challenge that all political parties express is lack of financial resources. Lack of effective party structures and volunteers are also issues, particularly among newer parties. In ethnic areas, NLD and USDP party representatives view the strong focus on ethnicity among the electorate as a key challenge.

Campaign plans are formulated in a centralized manner leaving limited scope for direct input from the local level, where intention is to focus on generic issues such as promoting democracy, working for development - and in the case of ethnic parties support for federalism. This suggests a disconnect between campaigning and the local issues the parties engage in on a day-to-day basis. Surprisingly, given the huge focus on land confiscation across the country, this issue was mentioned only by one party as a key campaign issue.

Direct engagement with the electorate is the main campaign strategy for all parties. The USDP local party representatives (and in some cases also the NLD) stressed that their on-going provision of local development support and social assistance is part of their longer-term efforts to build support for the party ahead of elections. Radio is the main source of information about politics, along with TV in some areas, while the internet is gaining ground among youth in urban areas. Newspapers, journals and acquaintances also serve as a source of information. Reach is limited, and in particular women at the village level display very little knowledge of or interest in politics.

The township party offices play a key role in identifying and nominating preferred local candidates – one of the few areas where they have a degree of autonomy over campaign related issues. Across party lines there is a preference for candidates who are educated, have knowledge of

politics, are capable and understand local issues. With the exception of NLD, the parties do not have any measures to encourage candidates from a diversity of backgrounds.

The perception among political parties of risks of violence related to ethnic or religious issues differs significantly between areas. Overall, particularly where communal violence has not occurred in recent years, the respondents appear to underestimate the risk of election related communal violence and do not have mitigation strategies in place. Observers did, however, highlight the risk of a protracted political crisis, public demonstrations and possible unrest if the election results are viewed as flawed, particularly by the opposition.

Potential election outcome scenarios

Parties at the local level across Myanmar - with the exception of USDP - express strong concerns as to whether the 2015 elections will be free and fair. Fears include lack of impartiality of the Union Election Commission (UEC), inaccurate voter lists, manipulation of advance voting, fraudulent vote counting, possible cancellations due to security issues, voters not having ID cards, and the USDP using its position as the ruling party to influence results. However all agree that the 2015 elections will be more free and fair than the 2010 elections, due mainly to increased international attention and the stronger role of local media.

Accurate predictions of voter behaviour are difficult due to the almost total absence of regular opinion polling, the lack of research into voter behaviour during the few previous multi-party elections, and a number of new factors including rising religious and nationalist sentiments and the influence of social media. Previous elections such as the 1990 elections and the 2012 by-elections (less so the flawed 2010 elections) do, however, indicate some trends. These include the importance of having a charismatic leader, a tendency to reject parties associated with previous military regimes, and strong support for ethnic parties in ethnic areas. A key factor will be whether voter preferences for a change in government and the mass appeal of the opposition overrides the perceived strengths of the USDP. Overall the research indicates that:

- NLD continues to enjoy widespread support in the regions and in the non-ethnic areas of the states due to the popular image of its leader. It is in a strong position to become the largest party.
- The USDP is well financed, well organized and thus far appears better-prepared for the elections than the other parties - but its strong association with the former regime limits its support.
- The ethnic parties are in a strong position to win a large proportion of seats in the ethnic areas but this may be reduced due to vote-splitting between the many ethnic parties and the relatively high number of voters who do not belong to the dominant local ethnic group.
- Smaller Bamar parties and the NUP stand a chance of winning a few seats in specific constituencies but face very strong competition from the NLD, USDP and ethnic parties.

The fact that 25% of seats in the Union and the state/region parliaments are reserved for the military means that any political party not associated with the military needs to win *more than two thirds* of the *contested seats* to gain a majority within parliament(s). The research points towards three main election outcome scenarios:

Scenario 1: The NLD wins more than two thirds of the contested seats and thus a majority in the Union level parliament. It can then select the president and pass legislation on its own.

Scenario 2: The NLD wins less than two thirds of the contested seats but enters an alliance with one or more ethnic or smaller parties. Combined, they hold more than two thirds of the contested seats. The alliance can then select the president and pass legislation.

Scenario 3: The USDP wins more than a third of the contested seats and thus together with the military can then select the president and pass legislation. This scenario is similar to the situation from 2011-2015, although it is unlikely that the USDP will dominate the parliament to the same extent.

Other possible scenarios include the USDP winning less than one third of the contested seats but forming an alliance with one or more smaller (ethnic or non-ethnic) parties to gain a majority, or neither the NLD nor the USDP winning an outright majority but forming an alliance together to gain a majority of seats. However, there is no grand tradition for coalition building in Myanmar.

The possible implications of the different scenarios are significant but difficult to assess in advance. The post-election environment depends to a great extent on two things: whether the elections are accepted as credible, transparent and inclusive by all the major actors; and what formal or informal agreement, if any, the USDP, the NLD and the ethnic parties can reach which will accommodate the interests of all three groups while also not threatening the key interests of the military and the ethnic armed groups. Furthermore, any ruling government needs the support of parliament, the president and the military to govern effectively, which will be a challenge. Thus it is likely that the outcome of the 2015 elections will be followed by a period of uncertainty and possible protracted political instability.

Recommendations

The ways forward are ultimately up to local stakeholders and international influence is limited. Opportunities do exist, however, for both local and international agencies to engage with and support the democratic process in cooperation with key Myanmar stakeholders such as the political parties, the UEC and CSOs. Such initiatives should seek to:

- Improve the ability of political parties to represent the priorities of local communities.
- Strengthen capacities for electoral management, support election observation and implement measures to mitigate election violence.
- Improve party organisations, communication and policies.
- Enhance multi-party dialogue and cooperation between parties and CSOs.

1. Introduction

Myanmar is facing an historic election which is likely to set political events in motion that will impact the future of the country in significant ways. The elections scheduled for early November 2015 provide probably the best opportunity in sixty years for political parties and Myanmar citizens to bring about a more democratic government. Yet there are also many risks. Buddhist nationalist sentiments are on the rise, and the country's peace process aimed at ending fifty year's of armed conflict has only just begun. Many questions remain unanswered and will only unfold after the elections. Within this context, the report examines the dynamics of political parties in Myanmar in the run up to the elections. The research and analysis considers both the national and the subnational level, with important insights into how the parties function at the local level – something which has rarely been covered in previous analyses of political parties in Myanmar.

2. Scope of work and methodology

Scope of work

This research is aimed at informing local and international agencies engaged in the field of political parties, parliamentary support and elections about the nature of political party dynamics and of the possible outcomes for the 2015 elections.

It includes both the nation and subnational levels but focuses specifically on the dynamics and scenarios at the local level in the six selected localities: Mon State, Rakhine State, Chin State, Kachin State, Mandalay Region and Ayeyawaddy Region. Interviews have also been carried out in Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw. The localities have been selected with a view to covering different political landscapes, ensuring that different ethnic and religious dynamics are represented, and with a view to both understanding the local and the national perspectives.

The key research questions guiding the research were:

1. *What is the nature of the key political parties likely to contest the elections:* their background; ideology or policy platform; the links between different levels within them; and what do they view as their strengths and weaknesses?
2. *In what ways do the parties relate to their different constituencies and how do constituencies relate to the parties?* Who are their constituencies and to what extent are priorities/needs/issues of constituencies reflected in party policy platforms or in other on-going party work? How do constituencies view and relate to the parties, what is their level of understanding of political parties and how may this influence voting perceptions and patterns?
3. *What are the existing and emerging party alliances and party mergers* including the interests (personal, political or other), incentives and disincentives, and barriers for cooperation between parties and with other entities?
4. *How are key political parties preparing for elections*, what are their key campaign plans and on what basis are these formulated? What key challenges and opportunities are they facing in relation to elections? In what ways does election campaigning risk fuelling local conflicts and underlying social, ethnic or religious divisions?
5. *What are the potential elections outcome scenarios* and what are the risks and opportunities associated with them?

Methodology

This research paper is based on qualitative, semi-structured key informant and focus group interviews, as well as desk-based research. The research team was composed of one international

consultant and two local consultants with logistics support from one local assistant and the Pyoe Pin team and its partners. Where needed, local interpreters were used (mainly in Chin State).

The field research was conducted between 2 July 2014 and 5 December 2014 in Mon State, Rakhine State, Chin State, Kachin State, Mandalay Region and Ayeyawaddy Region - with follow up interviews in Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw during the period December 2014 to February 2015. The duration of each field visit was around 12 days with interviews in the state/region capital including nearby villages and in a township located away from the state/region capital. For a full list of locations see appendix 4.

The research team conducted 194 interviews with a total of 680 persons, and met with 30 of the 73 registered Myanmar political parties. Of these interviews, 103 interviews were with political parties (including three with political party alliances and 15 with MPs), 34 with CSOs, 9 with local media, 36 with local villagers and 12 with others such as the private sector and religious organisations. Most of the interviews with political parties were with senior members of the party township and/or state/region office. Only 27 of the 338 political party respondents were women, reflecting the low participation and representation of women in mid-level and senior positions in Myanmar political parties. The duration of each interview was around one and a half to two hours. In the case of political parties, usually two to five people participated, while for village interviews it was normally between six and eight. When interviewing in villages, the team met with separate groups of women and men. The researchers followed a set of key questions focusing on five thematic areas, plus a range of optional sub-questions (see appendix 2 for the full list of interview questions). The interviews at the local level yielded significantly more in-depth and informative responses than those conducted at the national level where the party representatives were more cautious about sharing information and spoke in more general terms.

3. Research findings

3.1. Overview and background of Myanmar political parties

3.1.1. Political party landscape

The Myanmar political party landscape is vibrant and complex, yet with some clear characteristics. It is also emerging after years of repression and is thus still plagued by mistrust between the parties and towards the state. New alliances are slowly forming but they are fragile and the politics of the next few years may result in significant changes.

Historically the first Myanmar parties were established in the 1920s as part of the anti-colonial, nationalist movement. Following independence, Myanmar experienced a nascent democratic period from 1948 until 1958, and again during 1960-62 in the form of a parliamentary democracy. A military caretaker government took over during 1958-1960 proceeded by one-party, military dominated rule from 1962 till 1988. In 1990 new multi-party elections were held and won by the opposition but the military refused to hand over power. The deeply flawed 2010 elections ushered in a military-dominated reformist government. The experiment with parliamentary democracy in the 1950s was mixed and did not have the full support of the ethnic minorities – many which did not view themselves as members of the new Union of Burma but preferred greater autonomy. As a result a large number of ethnic opposition groups took up arms as a form of ‘politics by other means’. This divide between the ethnic representatives and the Bamar majority parties is still playing out in Myanmar politics today and ethnicity is a key defining feature of the country’s political landscape. Another defining characteristic of Myanmar politics is the proliferation of many different groups and parties within and outside of parliament, which is largely a result of a political culture dogged by absence of trust following colonial rule and almost sixty years of one-party and army rule. Finally, it is important to note that Myanmar political parties are dominated by charismatic leaders through personal and ethnic identity politics, and less so by ideologies and policies. This does not mean that the parties hesitate to take political positions but rather that these are often not elaborated in detailed policies and party programmes.

Since 2010, when the most recent political party law was enacted, 73 political parties have registered or re-registered thus far.¹ At least an additional 14 are awaiting registration approval.² Of the 73 parties, six were registered after the 2010 elections and 31 after the 2012 by-elections and thus about half have not contested recent elections, although some competed in 1990. The parties can be grouped into three broad categories: nationwide parties, ethnic minority parties and smaller Bamar parties.³

There are three nationwide parties:

- The ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), which emerged from the mass-organisation Union Solidarity and Development Association (established in 1993) in 2010 and dominated by the former military government (1990-2011). The USDP won 58% of the vote and 76% of the seats in the 2010 elections⁴, which were heavily criticized for not being free and fair and were boycotted by the National League for Democracy (NLD);
- The leading opposition party, the NLD, established in 1989, is led by the charismatic Aung San Suu Kyi. It won a landslide victory in the 1990 elections but was never allowed to take up seats in parliament and form a government.⁵ Most of the party's leading members were under house arrest, in exile or imprisoned until 2010-2011 – and the party was largely inactive during this period. It contested and won the 2012 by-elections and retains widespread popularity;
- The National Unity Party (NUP) was established by the former Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), the army dominated one party which ruled Myanmar from 1962 till 1988. It fielded a large number of candidates in the 1990 and the 2010 elections but won relatively few seats.⁶

The category of ethnic minority parties now consists of 48 parties. Most of the ethnic parties that contested in elections 1990 did not contest in 2010 - they either boycotted the elections or had been disbanded. However, many new ethnic parties were established and contested in 2010, with relative success in some areas (despite the rigged polls) – particularly in Shan State, Rakhine State, Chin State and Mon State. After the 2010 elections, and particularly after the 2012 by-elections, many of the 1990 ethnic parties re-registered. In addition many new ethnic or sub-ethnic parties have been established in the last few years. They will all compete in the 2015 elections, often in direct competition with each other.

The final group is made up of 22 smaller Bamar parties, based mainly in Yangon and Mandalay. Among these, the national Democratic Force (NDF), which splintered from the NLD in the run up to the 2010 elections, is the most prominent and with the largest number of seats in parliament among the smaller Bamar parties. The Myanmar Farmers' Development Party (MFDP) is one of the most recent Bamar parties but already has a large membership base.

Of the 73 parties, 21 are represented in the current parliaments, which are heavily dominated by the USDP at the Union level but less overwhelmingly so at state level. Given Myanmar's first-past-the-post election system, it is unlikely that the 2015 elections will result in a large number of parties being represented in sizeable numbers in parliament – and even less so in government. Historically in Myanmar one large nationwide party dominates in the Union parliament and multi-party coalition building is rare. The establishment of state/region parliaments as part of the 2008 constitution provides an opportunity for ethnic parties to have greater influence at this level, at least in the ethnic states.

The union level parliament (the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw) has two chambers: the Pyithu Hluttaw (the lower house / house of representatives) with 440 members and the Amyotha Hluttaw (the upper

¹ As per 30 April 2015. See appendix 1 for a detailed list.

² As per 30 April 2015, an additional 14 parties have sought registration but are awaiting approval by the UEC as it closed the deadline for party registration for the 2015 elections on 30 April 2015. Source: Lun Min Mang (1 May 2015). "Fourteen new parties wait on UEC approval", Myanmar Times. <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/14217-fourteen-new-parties-wait-on-uec-approval.html>

³ Bamar is the ethnicity of the majority of the population in Myanmar.

⁴ In 2010 the USDP won 883 seats out of 1100 contested. Source: ALTSEAN-Burma, <http://www.altsean.org/Research/2010/Key%20Facts/Results/Overall.php>.

⁵ In 1990, the NLD won 392 of the 492 seats it contested. Source: Nohlen, D, Grotz, F & Hartmann, C (2001) *Elections in Asia: A data handbook, Volume I*, p611 ISBN 0-19-924958-X

⁶ In 1990 NUP won 10 seats out of 492 contested. In 2010, NUP won 63 seats out of 996 contested. Source: ALTSEAN-Burma, <http://www.altsean.org/Research/2010/Key%20Facts/Results/Overall.php>.

house / the house of nationalities) with 224 members. A quarter of the members are appointed by the military while the rest are elected. The elected members of the Pyithu Hluttaw are elected per township constituencies (no matter the population size resulting in malapportionment) while the Amyotha Hluttaw has an equal number of representatives (12) elected from each of the states/region. This system favours ethnic states, which are over-represented in the legislature in proportion to population size.⁷ Voters have to cast a vote for three candidates i.e. the Pyithu Hluttaw, the Amyotha Hluttaw and the state/region Hluttaw. Some voters must cast an additional vote for one of the current 29 seats reserved for minorities in the state/region parliaments.⁸

Myanmar political party politics continue to be influenced by strong personalities rather than ideologies with a strong competition and some antagonism between the two dominant nationwide parties, the USDP and the NLD. The ethnic parties constitute a very diverse third entity, which shares a common goal in terms of federalism and promotion of ethnic rights but which lacks unity. A fourth important factor is the Armed Forces, which are allocated 25% of the seats in the union and state/region parliaments, and which appoints three key ministers and the Commander in Chief of the army (who is not under the authority of either the President or the parliament).

Detailed area-specific political party landscapes for Mon State, Rakhine State, Chin State, Kachin State, Mandalay Region and Ayeyawaddy Region are outlined in Appendix 4.

3.1.2. Ideology, policy platform and key issues

Few of the current Myanmar political parties are based on political ideologies in the manner known in western democracies. Unlike the parliamentary period in the 1950s and the one-party socialist system from 1962-1988, they do not explicitly adhere to ideologies such as socialism, liberalism and communism. Nor are their political agendas based on class interests or socio-economic groups (such as the rural poor, the middle class, the business sector, government staff, or unskilled workers), with the exception of perhaps the NUP and the MFDP who base their agenda on the interests of farmers - and in the case of NUP also workers. The ethnic parties explicitly seek to represent the interests of ethnic minority communities while the larger national parties emphasize that they are for all citizens. In ethnic areas the latter stress that they are composed by people from ethnic backgrounds, are inclusive (in contrast to some of the ethnic parties who focus on a particular ethnicity) and represent local interests and ethnicities. Instead the parties are centred around dominant political leaders and focus on lofty generic political goals. In the case of the ethnic parties, these tend to be 'self-determination', 'equal rights', 'genuine democracy' and a generalised notion of federalism, while non-ethnic opposition parties stress 'development', 'democracy', 'unity' and in the case of NLD 'rule of law'. Most parties also adhere to promoting 'market-economy' but do not explain what form this should take.

For almost all parties the focus is first on attaining power (in the form of seats in parliament, posts in government and the position of President) and then dealing with the development of policies later, if at all. Few parties have developed policy platforms setting out in detail what their overall political goals entail and in what ways they intend to achieve them. They rather remain as stand-alone political slogans, with an absence of sector-specific policies.

While the current USDP-dominated government has developed a framework for social and economic reform and prioritised specific areas, almost all new laws have been passed without reference to sector policies (which rarely exist), although the USDP does seem to have developed slightly more detailed positions on a range of sectors than other parties. In an interesting move, the NLD has initiated a policy development process during which different committees (such as youth, environment, farmers, workers and health care) are developing sector specific policies, which are

⁷ Richard Horsey, "Ethnicity and Elections in Myanmar" (24 February 2015), Report for the International Management Group in Myanmar funded by the European Union Instruments or Stability mechanism (IfS-RRM/2013/315-564)

⁸ These 29 "ethnic" seats refer to section 161 of the Constitution, which allows ethnic minority groups of more than 0.1% in a given state/region the right to elect a representative to the state/region parliament. However, it is not clear according to what criteria for ethnicity and population figures these seats are defined.

to be approved by the party's Central Committee ahead of the elections. A set of economic policies has already been approved but not yet made public.

Despite the general absence of policies, the parties are not averse to taking political positions on issues that matter to them such as the electoral system, constitutional change, federalism and the peace process but these are generally not developed into fully-fledged policies. In the case of the latter, in a rare joint initiative a large number of primarily but not exclusively ethnic parties are developing a collective framework for political dialogue as part of the peace process.

At the local level, political parties focus on specific issues such as land confiscation and small-scale infrastructure development, and in the case of ethnic parties also the promotion of ethnic language and culture; both they and the NLD and smaller Bamar parties also oppose abuses of local power and human rights violations. However, these localised issues are rarely reflected in the political party platforms at the higher level.

3.1.3. Main activities

The activities of the political parties at the local level centre on party strengthening and election preparation; development and social welfare; and a range of other activities. The latter range from campaigns to change the constitution and celebrating the 100 year anniversary of the birth of Bogyoke Aung San (NLD), promotion of local languages, ethnicity and culture (the ethnic parties), and organising local workers (NUP), to engaging in local campaigns protesting at large-scale infrastructure projects with potentially negative social and environmental impacts. Very few parties devote time at the local level to conduct systematic research about citizen priorities. However, many conduct general awareness raising workshops or public talks on broad political issues, such as federalism, democracy and civic engagement. The MFDP is also engaged in establishing micro loan schemes for farmers. These activities are all in addition to regular internal party meetings, which take up perhaps the majority of the time party members' time at the local level.

Party strengthening

While the USDP and the NUP already have relatively well-structured organisations (more effective and active in the case of USDP than NUP), both NLD and several of the ethnic parties (particularly those who have merged or semi-merged) are engaged in improving or restructuring the internal party organisations (in terms of the composition and size of leadership bodies, departments for specific affairs, lines of communication, areas of responsibility etc.). Many of the ethnic parties have also devoted significant time to merger talks, which in most cases have semi-failed.

Parties are also undertaking capacity development and training on political awareness, party functioning and campaigning. These are conducted internally by the parties or in cooperation with local or international NGOs. Party strengthening also includes expanding party presence at the village level, recruitment of volunteers and a number of activities related to election preparations, which are outlined in section 3.4.

Development and social welfare affairs:

Political parties across Myanmar contribute to social welfare activities, particularly at the township level, in the form of organising blood donations and donations of oxygen tanks to local health clinics and participation or donations to free funeral service organisations. In the case of Rakhine and Kachin States, the parties also provide direct assistance to IDPs. The NLD runs a network of small education centres across the country (with more than 100 private schools for 10,000 students in Yangon only) and set up the Daw Khin Kyi Foundation, which carries out social activities. The NUP provides some vocational training (for example in hair dressing and make up, computers and English) but none of this is on a large scale. A few parties also run legal aid clinics/departments, sometimes in collaboration with local CSOs.

As outlined in detail in section 3.2, all parties claim they take time to visit communities while the communities express a lack of local party presence. The parties stress that they seek to assist communities through:

- a) Providing direct contributions for small-scale infrastructure development (improvements to schools or health clinics, access to drinking water, roads and bridges) for which USDP is the only party with the financial resources to assist on any scale;
- b) Providing advice on how and where community members can best direct their claims related to land confiscation, small-scale infrastructure, abuses of power (forced recruitments, rape etc.) in relation to government departments;
- c) Direct provision of emergency assistance to IDPs;
- d) Referral of a range of cases to local and higher authorities (see section 3.2.1).

3.1.4. Internal party linkages

Generally, Myanmar parties have a hierarchical structure with decision-making centralized at the top level and communicated downwards through party structures to the state/region and township level. The information passed from the higher levels of the party to the local level seems to mainly be in the form of instructions. Information does flow from the local level party offices upwards to the central level of the party but it is very unclear how this is then dealt with. Local party offices report that they submit individual cases (in writing) to the higher levels of the party, for example on land confiscation, but they do not necessarily receive or expect any response. The central levels of the larger parties have special departments for labour, youth, farmers' issues etc. but were not able to clearly articulate how they manage the information submitted from the local party levels, or if this is collated in any systematic manner to inform policy or election campaign issues. Many of the local party leaders of the larger parties stress that they experience a large disconnect between the state/region level and the central level of the party. Respondents from NLD stressed this more explicitly than members of other large parties. In some ways the connection between local and higher party offices is stronger in the case of the smaller parties, but with the ethnic parties (particularly the Chin parties) there is a tendency for internal party politics to be split between 'Yangon politics', where a few of the top leaders reside, and local level party politics. Overall, the party leaders show low tolerance for internal differences and divergent opinions, and often party members fail to resolve ideational differences from within party structures. This results in the fragmentation of parties and expulsion of members (such as has been the case within the NLD).

With the exception of the USDP and partly the NLD, the parties generally lack clear and effective organisational structures where the active party members at different levels know who is responsible for particular areas and to whom they should communicate about specific issues. Within the NLD, party linkages have been weakened in some areas due to changes in local leadership and internal conflicts.

In terms of the village-township-district-state/region linkages, most parties hold regular meetings at all but the village level. The frequency ranges from once a week to once a quarter. The few parties with active village level volunteers (particularly the USDP but in a few areas also the NLD and other parties) meet with them at the township level on a frequent basis.

MPs express close relationships with their constituencies including frequent visits and raising specific local issues in the state/region and union level parliaments. However, several also point to a gap between the MPs and their respective party leadership. They cite distance and a lack of time as a hindrance for regular interaction as well as unclear communication channels. This is less so the case for parties whose top leadership is represented as MPs. Many MPs also experience insufficient support from the party in terms of preparation for and input into law making.

3.1.5. Political party strengths and weaknesses

The following key aspects stand out in terms of the political parties' strengths and weaknesses. Some of these aspects are acutely recognized by the parties themselves while others are not.

1. *All the parties have yet to build strong relationships with local communities* Community respondents rarely express any engagement in or attachment to particular parties. That said, all the parties interviewed stressed their desire to improve their links with communities.
2. *The lack of policy platforms* in general and specifically policies or strategies, which reflect the issues that are of importance to local communities and in which the parties are engaged at the local level. The party respondents did not themselves highlight this as a problem.
3. *The need for strengthening party organisations, internal party structures and effective and responsive lines of communication* between different levels of the party (see section 3.1.4. for further detail). Many parties have initiated steps to improve this but seem not to be able to implement this fully. This point is of less relevance to the USDP as respondents both inside and outside of the party expressed that the party is well structured with direct lines of communication between the different levels and well-trained and skilled party members.
4. *Lack of financial resources.* All parties except the USDP (and its sister party in Kachin State, the Unity and Democracy Party of Kachin State (UDPKS)) stressed that this is their major constraint, which has a strong negative impact on their ability to carry out activities such as visiting communities, organising public events and training courses, covering the costs of volunteers and staff, office rent, print material and also provide direct assistance to local communities.
5. *Ethnic parties believe they have strong support by ethnic communities and view this as their major strength, while non-ethnic parties, including the bigger ones such as USDP and NLD, struggle to assert in what ways their parties promote ethnic aspirations.* The parties are keenly aware of this and seek to emphasize their ability at the national stage to promote the interests of all citizens including those with an ethnic background. In addition, they stress that at the local level they are represented by people from different ethnic backgrounds.
6. *The public image of the USDP and NUP is influenced negatively by the fact they are associated with the former military regime(s).* Party members recognize this weakness but struggle to overcome this and cannot match the widely popular image of the NLD associated with Aung San Suu Kyi, nor that of some of the ethnic parties. That said, the NLD's popularity has decreased among parts of the population, particularly in Rakhine State, due to the perception that the party does not fully support the cause of Buddhist nationalists who view the country's Muslim population as a threat.⁹ It has also lost some support in Kachin State where many wanted the party to take a stronger pro-Kachin stand after the breakdown of the ceasefire in 2011.
7. *The smaller Bamar parties risk being annihilated in the upcoming elections* due to being largely unknown by the wider public, dwarfed by the popularity of the NLD, lacking resources to expand their parties' reach, and being largely ignored by the media. They are very aware of these weaknesses but struggle to overcome them. The NUP (which has a countrywide party office network but is generally viewed as not very active a party of the past by respondents) suffers from inability to attract a younger generation of party members, which the party acknowledges as its main weakness.
8. *The fact that few parties have well-developed campaign plans that target and appeal to different specific constituency groups* in different ways is not viewed as a significant weakness by the parties - but may result in them not attracting as many members and voters as they may otherwise have.
9. *Almost all parties have distant relations with CSOs but do not view this as a problem or a weakness.* They seem to overlook the potential opportunity gain in capitalizing on the sway some CSOs have over public opinion, obtain a better understanding of development needs

⁹ The party states that the communal conflict between Buddhists and Muslims, which has resulted in numerous attacks on and displacement of mainly Muslims, should be solved through rule of law. In the absence of the party taking a pro-Buddhist stand, parts of the population and the media are concerned that it is pro-Muslim.

informed by the work of CSOs and miss out on potential resources (in terms of training for example) that CSOs may be able to provide or attract.

10. *The fact that the ethnic parties have largely failed to merge comes at considerable risk of them splitting the vote in ethnic areas* and thus become weakened vis-à-vis the larger nationwide parties. The ethnic parties interviewed are reluctant to enter into alliances with each other by which they agree not to compete in specific constituencies.¹⁰

3.2. Engagement between political parties and local constituencies

3.2.1. Outreach to communities by political parties

This section is based on interviews with the political parties and describes their views on how they engage with citizens. The following section is based mainly on interviews with local communities and describes their perceptions of how they engage with the political parties. It is noticeable that there is a large gap between the perceptions of the parties and those of their constituents.

Types and issues of engagement

The majority of political party activities at the sub-national level take place at the township level. While many parties have party offices in villages, these often function more as a symbolic manifestation of the party's presence at the village level. None of the respondents referred to party meetings taking place at the village level – with the exception of the opening event of the village party office, which township level party representatives use as an opportunity to explain the party's background and its policy. That said, the USDP – and to some extent other parties – do have village level volunteers who sometimes communicate issues of concern to villagers to the township representatives. These village volunteers do not seem to be particularly active.

The most common way for parties to engage with citizens is through field visits to villages undertaken by MPs and township level party representatives. All parties explain that they undertake visits on a regular basis to listen to the issues and needs of their constituencies. In the case of Pyithu Hluttaw MPs, this includes consideration of small-scale projects for the constituency development funds. "It is the party's objective to help communities and at the same time we can secure good public relations."¹¹ The parties also stress that local citizens approach the township offices with specific cases they want the party to address.

Few parties make use of larger public meetings but the NLD has done so in the case of the signature campaign to change the constitution. This also included also going from house to house to explain why constitutional changes are important. In the case of Mon State, Kachin State and Chin State, political parties have also engaged with the public through joint activism with CSOs aimed at stopping a coal-fired power plant, a large hydro-electric power plant and larger mining projects respectively – but these actions were exceptions. In Kachin State the parties also referred to outreach to communities through local media.

Case referrals

The most important and common manner in which the political parties support constituencies is by assisting individual persons and communities with referring specific cases to local government authorities. This is done on a case-by-case basis. In some cases the parties advise the community members which local government departments to approach and how to do this – while in other cases the parties assist with writing referral and complaint letters and submit these together or on behalf of the individual in question to the government department offices. It is important to stress

¹⁰ With the possible exception of SNDP who expresses that they will enter into an agreement with TNLP to support its election activities in areas where the SNDP do not intend to contest. The Chin parties have also discussed the possibility of an election alliance aimed at preventing splitting of the ethnic vote.

¹¹ USDP party member. Hakha (20 Aug 2014). Field notes.

that it is rare that the parties at the local level compile a larger number of cases and submit these jointly to the local authorities - or that they raise the cases as a broader issue in the state/region parliament. However, they do sometimes submit individual cases to the state/region parliaments and governments in an attempt to have them resolved.

The main type of case where the parties assist with referrals is land confiscation. Other cases deal with lack of basic service delivery and of local infrastructure (lack of teachers, repairs of schools, a broken bridge, need for a health clinic and - in the case of Chin State - lack of irrigation and drinking water) and human rights issues such as forced recruitment and rape (in Kachin State and Ayeyawaddy Region). In Mandalay Region and in Bhamo in Kachin State the parties also mentioned that they engage with local communities and township authorities on municipal affairs issues through referring cases (for example lack of electricity or a bad road) to the respective government departments. The parties occasionally follow up on the claims and complaints submitted to the local authorities and report a mixed response in terms of the cases being resolved. The parties have had some success in reclaiming land on behalf of communities but less so on other issues. While the party offices sometimes report the cases to higher levels of the party, it is unclear how these are dealt with at that level (see section 3.1.4.)

The parties in Chin and Rakhine States seem less engaged in referring cases to local authorities than in other states/regions. In general, when referring cases, the USDP tend to make use of their more direct connections with the Chief Minister rather than going through line ministries at the township level, which is most common for the other parties. The USDP also plays a stronger role in providing direct assistance to communities on small-scale infrastructure due to its better financial position - but it tends to stay away from human rights related cases.

3.2.2. Local constituencies' view of and engagement with political parties

Contrary to the perception of the political parties, community members interviewed in villages across the six field areas almost uniformly expressed that they rarely see representatives from political parties in their villages except during election time. "We know that they come to visit us for votes. We are out of touch with them most times."¹² "Prior to the elections, parties come to visit us to get our votes, and now we invited them to come see our projects to check if they can help us anyway. Unfortunately, they usually don't come."¹³ "They always want to get our votes, and they say we can get schools, clinic or road etc. if we vote for them."¹⁴

A few villages had experienced visits by political parties and/or their MPs. In the Ayeyawaddy Region this was particularly the case for the MFDP who had recently offered loan schemes to many villages. In one village in Mon State, MPs had visited several times and allocated local development funds for a road, and a minister had donated funds for renovation of a village pond. In another village, the community had complained to their local MP during his visit about siltation of an irrigation channel leading to flooding. In Rakhine State, one village reported that the MP visits once a year, while a nearby village never has visits from MPs. In Chin State, in one village, the villagers had asked several parties for assistance with fertilizer for their poor soil, in addition to requests for improved drinking water and other livelihoods issues. Apart from these scattered examples, respondents across the villages visited by the field team (three to four villages in each of the six states/regions) did not recall any engagement with the political parties except in a few places where they had passed on their needs and requests to USDP village volunteers.

The villagers very rarely refer to the village party offices as representing the party, maybe because these are often empty and consist only of a signboard and perhaps a local volunteer whom they don't rely on for information and only occasionally use as a channel to pass on requests for assistance to higher levels of the party. Many say that they do not know how to contact the party offices at the township level.

¹² A group of villagers. Myingyan (23 Oct 2014). Field notes.

¹³ Paung Daw Oo Monastery School. Mandalay (15 Oct 2014). Field notes.

¹⁴ Groups of villagers. Hakha (23 Aug 2014). Field notes.

Village respondents have difficulty identifying in what ways the parties have an ability to improve their lives. While ethnic minority communities in ethnic areas express a preference for supporting ethnic parties they, along with communities in Bamar-majority areas, do not expect this to lead to improvements in their own lives. In this respect, they view the parties as rather powerless and instead refer to the government or that they rely on themselves. “We just rely upon ourselves in solving our case even with government authority and don’t know what parties are doing”.¹⁵ That said, some communities still express an interest in requesting assistance from the parties, but few expressed high expectations that their needs would be met: “We have a lack of water for our plantation, we need loans, we need good roads, and want to ask for those from parties.” Overall, the community respondents did not describe the political parties as corrupt, power-hungry or ignorant when asked about their perceptions but simply as absent in their communities and without particular relevance to their daily lives. Interestingly, in some areas (such as Chin State and Kachin State) respondents expressed higher trust in CSOs to improve their lives than political parties.

Few respondents expressed a knowledge of party policies or how their vote may influence politics. There were very rare exceptions to this, such as in one village near Myitkyina, Kachin State where people articulated their different political party preferences in terms of larger political goals: “We will vote for KSPD at local level so as to form a Kachin government, and for the union elections, we’ll vote for NLD to have better impact on democratization.”¹⁵

3.2.3. Knowledge and sources of information about politics

Interviews with village respondents show that the main source of information about politics is radio while in some areas TV is also a source. The main secondary source of information is through local or national newspapers and magazines (weekly, bi-weekly or monthly). The local magazines in ethnic areas have been gaining ground in recent years as a source of knowledge about local politics, although they do not reach more remote areas, which rely for information on local people who travel to and return from bigger towns. In village interviews women in particular displayed very little knowledge of and interest in politics, and in general in poor rural communities most villagers said their focus was on daily living and survival and that they don’t have a time to follow news.¹⁶ In areas of Chin State near India with better mobile telephone connections, in the greater Mandalay area and in Ayeyawaddy, respondents also referred to mobile telephones and internet as a growing source of news about politics, particularly for urban youth. “This is a quick information channel now.”^{17, 18} Despite the fact that communities rely on different forms of media, many political parties do not engage proactively with the media locally or make wide use of social media.

3.3. Cooperation between political parties, civil society and local government authorities

3.3.1. Cooperation between political parties

Local level cooperation between political parties

At the local level, the relationship between Myanmar political parties can be characterised as distant and cautious. In both the ethnic and majority Bamar areas, political parties almost uniformly expressed that the main engagement they have with other parties is meeting at ceremonial events (such as important state days) and attending joint training courses or workshops, most frequently organised by local or international CSOs. In ethnic areas, the parties also attend ethnic or cultural functions. While many party members know each other personally and have amicable relations at

¹⁵ A group of villagers. Myitkyina (24 Sep 2014). Field notes.

¹⁶ A group of villagers. Patheingyi (21 Nov 2014). Field notes.

¹⁷ A group of villagers. Myingyan (23 Oct 2014). Field notes.

¹⁸ See also: The Asia Foundation, Myanmar 2014: Civic Knowledge and Values in a Changing Society (11 December 2014). <http://asiafoundation.org/publications/pdf/1445>

the local level, this only occasionally results in engagement between the parties as political entities. Cooperation between parties in any structured or strategic form, for example sustained political dialogue on local issues or longer-term joint action on local issues, is very limited despite the fact that the parties often focus on similar issues. The lack of interaction and cooperation applies to both parties with a nation-wide reach and those, which are more locally and/or ethnic-based. Larger Bamar parties (NLD, USDP, NUP) tend to operate more independently while smaller parties in some cases seek more cooperation – but this is not uniform.

Most parties are not opposed to dialogue and cooperation per se but a number of barriers limit this including:

- a) No prior experience, tradition or political culture of multi-party cooperation;
- b) Lack of trust between parties and in some cases long-held animosity resulting in an entrenched 'us versus them' attitude, along with concerns that other parties will take credit for joint initiatives;
- c) Personal and ideological differences (for example, accepting the 2008 constitution or not);
- d) No or few policies, political frameworks or strategic goals at the local level around which to identify joint interests;
- e) Lack of permission from the top level of the party for local party offices to engage with each other. The latter is particularly the case for the larger parties including the NLD.

Overall, the parties at the local level seem not to have identified incentives for closer cooperation that outweigh the above concerns. The absence of local alliances and strategic political cooperation at the local level does not, however, completely exclude some limited engagement between the parties. The engagement they do have centres on specific local issues and tends to be focused on a singular event rather than sustained over time. It does, though, show that there is a potential for more joint local action between parties to address issues, particular in relation to local development. No major differences between ethnic and non-ethnic areas were observed. Examples of key issues that have brought the parties together in a few localities include cultural events (particularly promoting local culture and literacy in ethnic states), public talks on political issues or social ills (such as drug abuse in Kachin State and Mon State), opposition to larger development projects with potentially negative environmental impacts (for example a mining project in Chin State and a coal-fired power plant in Mon State), joint statements on peace (in Kachin State), proactive engagement on the risk of communal violence (in Kachin State and partly in Mandalay Region), land confiscation (across the country) and child soldiers among others. For further details, see the area-specific sections in Appendix 6.

It appears that while most state/region parliaments are heavily dominated by the USDP and the military, cooperation *within* parliament or between MPs does not extend to significant multi-party engagement between parties *outside* of state/region parliaments. That said, the local MPs interviewed (particularly in Mon State) described a much stronger cooperative atmosphere, closer relationships with members of other parties and a sense of joint purpose (beyond party affiliation) than non-MP party representatives. Some Pyithu Hluttaw MPs also cooperate at the local level on the issue of allocating local constituency development funds.

National level cooperation between political parties

While this research focuses primarily at the local level of Myanmar political parties, the research team also carried out a number of interviews with political parties in Yangon to understand cooperation between parties at this level.

Political party alliances: The main cooperation between political parties at the national level in Myanmar (outside of parliament) is through the four party alliances: the Nationalities Brotherhood Federation (NBF) composed of 22 ethnic parties¹⁹; the Federal Democracy Alliance (FDA)

¹⁹ The NBF has 22 member parties at present: Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP), Chin National Democratic Party, Arakan National Party, All Mon Regions Democracy Party, Phlone-Sqaw Democratic Party, Pao National Organization, Ta'ang (Palaung) National Party, Wa Democratic Party, Inn National Development Party, Danu National Democracy Party, Ethnic National Development Party, Asho Chin National Party, Taileng Nationalities Development Party, Wa National Unity Party, Kayah Unity Democracy Party, Lisu National Development Party, Dawei Nationalities Party, Federal Union Party, Kachin Democratic Party, Mro National Party, Khami National Development Party and Kokang Democracy and Unity Party.

composed of 11 smaller Bamar parties including some ethnic parties²⁰; the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) composed of eight ethnic parties that contested the 1990 elections and are aligned with the NLD;²¹ and a fourth alliance composed of smaller Bamar parties that was established in 2014 under the name of the Working Group Committee.²² While the UNA has existed since 2002, it was largely inactive until 2012 due to government repression. The NBF and the FDA were formed in 2012; both have since been re-constituted. The alliances have come about as a result of many of the smaller parties realizing that they have common objectives and stand stronger as a group. They tend to have revolving chairs and seek agreement and common positions on larger political issues such as the constitution and the peace process. Mostly activities have been joint meetings and public position statements. The NBF has taken a lead in proposing a framework for the political process associated with the peace negotiations and has sought to draw in other parties. The NBF has also established the Federal Union Party (FUP) to represent ethnic minority interests in Bamar majority areas. The UNA views itself as a forum where 'pre-political dialogue' can be carried out and common positions sought as part of the political transition process in Myanmar. It also discusses internal issues of shared interest such as the regulation for political party financing. While some of the alliances such as FDA have discussed the four laws to 'protect Buddhism', parties generally do not use the alliances to form joint policies on different sectors, such as education or health, or to initiate joint action on development issues. The individual party alliances have not yet formed agreements to not contest the same constituencies, although the NBF has indicated that it intends to do so. The larger parties such as the USDP, the NLD and the NUP have refrained from joining these alliances but the UNA and NLD have strategic political cooperation on the holding of free and fair elections, political dialogue and pushing the need for amendment of the constitutional, and meet on a monthly basis. In a surprising move, each of the three established party alliances were allocated a seat at the President's controversial 14 party talks in October 2014. This was the first time the multi-party alliances had been called upon in a formal manner to represent their members at such a high level. Thus far the party alliance structure only exists among the parties at the union level and has not been replicated at the local level of the parties.

Other cooperation: Cooperation between MPs within parliament seems significantly closer than between political parties outside of parliament. Members of the Union level parliaments and of the state/region parliaments with a mixed representation of parties (such as for example Mon State) stress that they mainly focus on issues rather than party affiliation and seek to solve problems as colleagues rather than adversaries. The committee system at the Union level parliament is a key forum for discussion and cooperation among the MPs on particular issues, such as land and education. This does not (yet) necessarily result in party alliance building or joint voting on particular issues but nevertheless is one of the few platforms where cross-party engagement takes place on political issues. Cooperation between political parties at the union level outside of parliament and outside of the alliances is rather limited, although the parties will meet at official functions hosted by the government, meetings by the UEC or seminar and workshops hosted by local and or international organisations.

Political party mergers: In four of the seven states, ethnic parties have been in merger talks. In three of these the talks have been between the dominant ethnic parties contesting respectively the 1990 and the 2010 elections. The push for the mergers has in most cases come from respected local social and religious leaders, with broad public support. However, it has proved difficult mainly due to personal differences at the leadership level, disputes over whether parties should have joined the 2010 elections, and the relative importance of changing or rejecting the 2008 constitution. Only in Rakhine State has an actual merger taken place. In Mon and Chin states, new merger parties have been established but large sections of the previous parties have not joined. In Kachin State merger talks have failed and in Shan and Kayin States divisions of the different ethnic

²⁰ FDA member parties include: Democratic Party (Myanmar), National Democratic Force, Democracy and Peace Party, Party of Unity and Peace, Union Democratic Party, United Democratic Party, Diversity and Peace Party, Democratic Party for Myanmar New Society, Kayin People's Party, Chin Progressive Party and Kayin Democratic Party.

²¹ UNA member parties include: Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, Zomi Congress for Democracy, Arakan League for Democracy, Mon Democracy Party, Shan State Kokang Democratic Party, Kachin State National Congress Party, Kayin National Congress for Democracy, Kayan National Party.

²² Working Group Committee members include: Modern People Party, People Democracy Party, Wuthanu NLD, Mro or Khami National Solidarity Organization, Rakhine State National United Party, The Union of Myanmar Federation of National Politics, The 88 Generation Student Youth, National Political Alliance League, Myanmar National Congress.

parties make mergers unlikely (although still possible) at a time where more local parties have been established over the last few years. In Shan State, the dominant SNDP has seen 12 MPs defect to SNLD (the dominant party in the 1990 elections which did not compete in the 2010 elections) along with the emergence of the Tai-Leng (Red Shan) Nationalities Development Party. Meanwhile the number of ethnic parties continues to increase across ethnic areas.

3.3.2. Cooperation between political parties and civil society

At the local level engagement between political parties and CSOs is much more limited than one would expect, given that both entities are engaged on very similar matters (land grabbing, environmental protection and improving basic services). It can generally be described as a distant relationship – with some notable exceptions. Generally, local CSOs say that the parties are neither interested nor effective in resolving local concerns, have limited influence and resources and are mainly concerned with ‘party issues’ rather than ‘people’s issues’. CSOs see little need for approaching parties for policy changes, for example through MPs, as they don’t view MPs as effective agents of change. They also worry that political parties will use them for political gain.

Parties expressed limited interest in engagement with CSOs and have generally not identified ways in which it may benefit the party or resolve local concerns to pro-actively engage with CSOs, and have limited confidence in their work. An age gap also plays a role, with CSOs being dominated by younger activists and most parties having a strong presence of older people who view themselves as more experienced. While both entities are strong in identifying the weaknesses of the other, few have focused on ways in which strategic cooperation can be beneficial. That said, many political party members have personal relationships with CSO members and some may participate in activities on an individual basis. The parties have more contact with social welfare organisations that, for example donate blood, sponsor oxygen and assist with free funeral services, than the more activist CSOs. In ethnic areas, some contact takes place through cultural events. Overall, the main contact between CSOs and political parties are through the varied workshops that CSOs (international and local) hold on a number of issues. The few examples of joint action between political parties and CSOs focus on opposition to mining projects (Chin State), a coal-fired power plant (Mon State), and natural resource revenue sharing (Rakhine State). Only in Rakhine State, did respondents mention a collaborative process between political parties and CSOs on formulation of local laws such as in the fisheries sector. The relationship between CSOs and parties appear to be relatively stronger in Ayeyawaddy Region and Rakhine State than elsewhere. In some areas smaller ethnic parties and NLD have stronger CSO relations than other parties.

The scope of the research does not cover cooperation between political parties and CSOs at the union level or in Yangon specifically. However, it is worth stressing that several CSOs engage more closely with political parties, and particularly MPs, at this level, on both formulation of laws and issues such as peace, education reform, land confiscation, and CSO regulation.

3.3.3. Cooperation between political parties and local government authorities

Overall, the relationship can be described as distant and limited. The main engagement between political parties and local government authorities takes place when the parties submit claims, complaints and issues to government offices on behalf of constituencies. These mostly centre on land confiscation but also provision of water, local roads, health clinics or schools along with forced recruitment (in Kachin State and Ayeyawaddy Region) and some criminal cases. This is mainly done in written form to the individual government departments and on a case-by-case basis as outlined in detail in section 3.2. Apart from this, contact is generally limited to official ceremonies such as the state/union day celebrations and is rarely for consultations on policy or local development issues. Political parties say that local government office staff keep a large distance from the parties and blame ingrained perceptions of politics being ‘dangerous and dirty’. The USDP tend to have better relations with local government officials given their position as the ruling party but stress that they distinguish clearly between their role as a party and their role as government. The NLD in some places (for example Mon State) have more confrontational relations

with local government officials, partly as the party sometimes act as watchdog scrutinizing the behaviour of government staff. The greatest cooperation between party MPs and township level committees takes place in relation to constituency development funds, which they allocate jointly.

3.3.4. Other cooperation – EAGs and the private sector

Cooperation between political parties and ethnic armed groups (EAGs)

Political parties were generally very cautious in commenting on engagement and relationships between themselves and EAGs at the local level due to legal prohibitions against contact with ‘illegal groups’ and this makes analysis difficult.²³ Despite the fact that ethnic parties do not have formal cooperation with the EAGs at the local level many of them have personal relationships. The parties and the EAG leaderships occasionally meet each other at official ceremonial events. The larger nation-wide parties have much less contact. In Mon State and in Chin State the dominant EAGs clearly have better relations with some ethnic parties than others, due to personal and historic relationships. In Kachin State none of the four local Kachin parties have the direct support of the dominant and influential ethnic armed group (Kachin Independence Army/Organization (KIA/KIO)), while some of the smaller parties from other ethnicities have tense relations due to complaints of forced recruitment. At the union level, the parties and the EAGs have had more contact over the last year than previously due to multi-stakeholder discussions over a possible political framework for the peace process.

EAGs have generally refrained from converting themselves into political parties or publicly backing particular ethnic parties, partly because they do not recognize the 2008 constitution (and thus by default the current political system) and partly because they to some extent view themselves as legitimate representatives of their communities. Some EAGs do though make use of a two-pronged strategy, being involved both through armed struggle and political party connections.

While the ethnic political parties and the EAGs both claim to represent ethnic constituencies and share many common visions (federalism, rights of ethnic communities, sharing of revenue from natural resources etc.) they are currently not in direct competition with each other as they play different roles and engage in different spheres: The EAGs are administering areas under their direct control and are engaged in peace negotiations, while the political parties engage in parliamentary politics and in resolving cases within the existing government and constitutional system – and mainly in areas under direct government control. However, it is very possible that this may change and two scenarios are likely. The first is that as the peace process moves forward they become increasingly be drawn into the State apparatus and mainstream politics. Relations will normalize and the EAGs will need to reconfigure their institutions and identify a new role for themselves as ‘protectors’ of their constituencies through political means. This may bring them into opposition with existing ethnic political parties who already engage in party politics representing the same constituency groups. On the other hand, it may force the EAGs into closer cooperation, incorporating or merging with established ethnic political parties. In a potentially more peaceful future Myanmar, ethnic populations are likely to demand more accountability and transparency in terms of how the EAGs select their leaderships, which will affect how the EAGs decide to position and constitute themselves. Alternatively, if the peace process stalls or breaks down the EAGs may maintain control of pockets of territory but risk becoming increasingly alienated from mainstream politics; they may then cede influence to a range of ethnic parties that are reasserting their influence and are viewed as legitimate representatives of ethnic populations by the state.

Cooperation between political parties and the private sector

In the case of the ethnic parties, the main engagement between political parties and the private sector is through donations by successful local businessmen, while almost all of the Bamar parties stated that they had no cooperation with the private sector. The USDP (and in Kachin State,

²³ Representatives of EAGs were generally not interviewed for this research.

UDPKS) is an exception to this pattern with many respondents noting that successful businesses stayed in regular contact with local USDP leaders, given that they are ‘the winning party’. It was not possible to gauge if the connections between the parties and the private sector had resulted in the private sector asserting influence over party affairs or how voters cast their ballots (except in the jade-rich Hpakant area where mining workers had been instructed by employers whom to vote for in the 2010 elections). A hindrance to potential local engagement on pro-business friendly policies or to management of natural resources (where the private sector is heavily involved in resource rich areas such as Kachin State), is that these decisions are generally under the union government, rather than region/state governments, and thus not viewed as an area of influence for political parties at the local level. In addition, the overall lack of party policies on economic development and private sector limits such engagement. While political parties in Myanmar are allowed to run businesses as a revenue-making source for party activities, few do so.

3.4. Election preparations

Of the 73 parties that have registered thus far, 53 will contest nationwide in the general election, and 20 in only states and/or regions.²⁴ During the second half of 2014, Myanmar political parties at the local level were either in the very early stages of election planning preparation or had not yet started. Many, particularly the larger nation-wide parties, were awaiting instructions from the top level of their parties, as campaign plans are formulated in a centralized manner at the CEC/CC level leaving limited scope for direct input from the local level. This is particularly the case in the USDP and the NLD, while the NUP requests inputs from local party offices to changes to the party’s manifesto as part of early campaign planning. Importantly, there is no tradition of local party offices adjusting campaign messages to their local area or of developing localised campaign messages. Most of the ethnic parties were planning party conferences for late 2014 and early 2015, which would decide on the overall frameworks for election campaigns. In the meantime, most of the state/region and township party offices had made preliminary decisions on which constituencies they would compete in and had begun to reach out to potential candidates. In addition, almost all parties at the local level were in the process of expanding their membership numbers through canvassing. Overall, the USDP seemed to be more advanced in its campaign planning than other parties; the party has throughout 2014 been conducting election campaign trainings in Nay Pyi Taw which local party members attend and it has recruited village volunteers in some areas.

At the national level, the NLD has recently announced the formation of its election campaign committee but has not fully formulated its campaign strategy. It plans to educate between 70,000 and 80,000 volunteers and members to be its representatives at the polling stations.²⁵ Following the 2012 by-elections (and the almost absolute defeat of the USDP by the NLD), the USDP identified a number of weaknesses including, importantly, its image as “the army’s party” and, according to high level members of the party interviewed for this report, decided to transform itself into a “people-centred” party so as to be in better position for the 2015 elections. This includes selecting leading party members through a bottom-up approach, expanding and deepening capacity development initiatives, “taking people’s needs seriously and assisting them”, changing the party’s slogan from “unity, spirit, discipline and prosperity” to “fulfil the people’s needs, assist the people and serve the people”, and holding fora on issues related to farmers, land, workers, youth and women. In preparation for the 2015 elections, the USDP has also conducted a survey into the needs of potential voters.²⁶

3.4.1. Campaign methods

Direct engagement with the electorate is the key campaign strategy by all parties. The party representatives cite the use of canvassing by visiting villages and going door to door as one of the

²⁴ Lun Min Mang (1 May 2015). “Fourteen new parties wait on UEC approval”, Myanmar Times.

<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/14217-fourteen-new-parties-wait-on-uec-approval.html>

²⁵ NLD, three CEC members and one member of the NLD Farmers’ Committee, Yangon (19 February 2015). Field notes

²⁶ USDP, one CEC member and three CC members, Nay Pyi Taw (24 Feb 2015). Field notes.

main methods in combination with flyers, pamphlets and posters. Many parties also plan to develop campaign songs; and in ethnic areas also specific dances which they will use throughout the election campaign in combination with distribution of VCDs about the party. Few specifically refer to large public campaign rallies but based on previous election campaigns this should be expected, particularly by the NLD. The USDP local party representatives, and also in some cases the NLD, stressed that their longer term provision of local development support (construction and repair of schools, clinics, road and bridges) and social assistance (emergency health care assistance, free funeral service, IDP support, education classes etc.) is a means to demonstrate that the party can deliver ‘for the people’ – and thus is part of their longer-term efforts to build support for the party ahead of elections. Only in Kachin State, many parties referred to the use of local media as a key campaign strategy. CSOs commented that in this respect the newly established ethnic parties in the area seem to be ahead of the more well-established parties. Very few parties referred to the use of social media as a campaign method despite mobile and internet connectivity having drastically improved in the country. Only one party, the MFDP specifically stressed the importance of the party logo – the face of the well-known Saya San, who led nationwide peasant revolt against the British rule - as a central part of their campaign strategy.

3.4.2. Campaign issues

Given that campaign plans at the party central levels have not yet been fully developed within the parties, the campaign issues are not yet known. However, overall the issues the political parties at the local level say they will focus on are very generic such as promoting democracy, working for development, and support for federalism (in the case of ethnic parties). There seems to be a disconnect between overall campaign issues - and local issues of importance to the electorate which the parties engage in on a day-to-day basis (as documented in section ‘3.2.’) as the latter are not reflected directly in the campaign issues. The local party offices don’t expect to focus on local issues (such as cases of land confiscation or environmental protection in the particular area) – or ‘localize’ the generic campaign issues as part of their campaigns. This is particularly the case for the larger nation-wide parties but also for the ethnic parties. Surprisingly, given the huge focus on land confiscation in the engagement between parties and local constituencies and local authorities, this issue was not mentioned by any of the parties as a campaign issue – except the MFDP.

The USDP party leaders at the local level are awaiting the detailed election campaign implementation plans from the top of the party: “The elders [top leadership of the party] cannot sleep well because they are busy drafting a campaign plan. [...] They will ensure a grand campaign plan that can overwhelm the strength [of the NLD] that lies in being a daughter of Bogyoke Aung San.”²⁷ During the campaign, local USDP representatives expect to highlight the party’s position as a well-financed party, with a good network and capability to make critical political decisions. In ethnic areas the party intends to stress that its candidates also have an ethnic background and that the party’s large size is an advantage vis-à-vis smaller ethnic parties. As noted by one USDP local representative in Chin State with reference to smaller parties: “A small dog’s jump doesn’t matter much.”²⁸ The local party leaders also expect to stress the track record of the party and its future plans in terms of improved infrastructure and basic services, such as education and health. In contrast to other parties, the leadership of the USDP explicitly stressed that while its election manifesto will cover many areas, local levels of the party are free to modify their campaign plans according to the respective local issues and needs in different states/regions and townships.²⁹

Most NLD local party leaders had no comments on campaign issue as they were awaiting instructions from the CEC. However, they did expect a focus on rule of law, democracy, peace and constitutional amendments. In Rakhine State the local NLD leaders expect the rule of law focus to be a challenge given that “a sense of ethnic belonging” dominates the discourse in the state and is valued higher than democratic principles.³⁰ In Chin State, leaders expect to highlight the

²⁷ USDP. Patheingyi (19 Nov 2014). Field notes.

²⁸ USDP, Hakha (20 August 2014). Field notes.

²⁹ USDP, 1 CEC member and 3 CC members, Nay Pyi Taw (24 Feb 2015). Field notes.

³⁰ NLD. Sittway (26 July 2014). Field notes.

personality of Aung San Suu Kyi and to stress that NLD is also an ethnic party in support of ethnic interests along with the advantages of its big party for development in Chin State.

The multiple ethnic parties share very similar campaign issues focused on a) federalism, self-determination, constitutional changes, equal opportunities for ethnic minority populations – including natural resource revenue sharing; b) improvements in socio-economic development (livelihoods, education, environment, health, transportation); c) revitalization of their culture, traditions and literature. These are all expressed in very generic ways and with direct reference to representing and promoting the interests of the specific ethnic minority group in question. There appear to be no major differences between the different ethnic states.

The NUP intends to target its campaign issues to farmers and workers based on its party manifesto, while MFDP will focus on the prosperity of farmers, a change to mechanized farming, and ensuring the return of confiscated land.³¹ Other smaller Bamar parties did not yet know what their campaign issues would be.

3.4.3. Candidate selection

The township party offices play a key role in identifying and nominating preferred local candidates – one of the few areas where they have a degree of autonomy over campaign-related issues. These are usually selected by the township party leadership, either through secret voting or through discussions, with no involvement of the general rank and file members of the party.^{32, 33} In most parties the township office then submits its list of preferred candidates to the state/region party office, which makes the final selection and submits this to the top level of the party for approval. At the end of 2014 the vast majority of parties had not yet made their selection but had informally reached out to potential candidates to gauge their interest and suitability. Across party lines there is a preference for candidates who are educated, have knowledge of politics, are capable and understand local issues. With the exception of NLD, the parties do not have any measures to encourage candidates from a diversity of backgrounds or promote those typically excluded.³⁴ The NLD stated a preference for female candidates along with younger persons, in addition to the above criteria. Local NLD party offices emphasized that if potential candidates had similar qualifications a woman has preference over a man, a younger person over an older person and (in the case of Ayeyawaddy Region) an ethnic person over a Bamar candidate. The USDP party offices expressed no clear criteria for candidate selection but stressed a preference for those with good local knowledge and from the local area (in contrast to the 2010 elections where this was not always the case). They should also have a good chance of winning: “We will contest the elections with the candidates who have potential for gaining support from the public.”³⁵ The ethnic parties expressed similar sentiments in terms of candidate criteria, saying also that they should be, local to the area and with a good personality. None of the ethnic parties had specific measures to favour women, candidates from a diversity of backgrounds or those who are often marginalized, although some prefer younger candidates i.e. between 25 years and mid-40s.

3.4.4. Campaign challenges

The key challenge that political parties across the different geographic areas cite in relation to elections is lack of financial resources. This issue was raised consistently and repeatedly by all the different political parties with the exception of the USDP, and to lesser extent the NLD. The

³¹ MFDP. Patheingyi (20 Nov 2014). Field notes.

³² This with the exception of one ethnic party in Mon State who wants to test the ability of potential candidates to engage with the public by organising village meetings after which the villagers convey their preferred choice based on the candidates performance.

³³ The selection of NLD candidates for the 2012 by-elections caused some conflict between local party offices and the top level of the party as the top leadership in many cases chose different (often younger and female candidates) over those nominated by the local party offices. It is not yet clear to how this issue will be resolved for the 2015 elections.

³⁴ The NDF recently announced that it plans to include 20% female candidates for the 2015 elections. Source: San Yamin Aung, (22 April 2015). “NDF to Contest 400 Seats in Nationwide 2015 Poll”, the Irrawaddy. <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/ndf-to-contest-400-seats-in-nationwide-2015-poll.html>

³⁵ Union Solidarity and Development Party, Patheingyi (19 Nov 2014) Field notes.

difficulties in financing campaign activities have resulted in many parties competing only in constituencies where they perceive they have a good chance of winning a seat. This also includes the NUP, which contested all seats in the 2010 elections but will not do so in 2015.

In ethnic areas, NLD and USDP party representatives also view the strong focus on ethnicity among the electorate, combined with the perception of their parties as 'non-ethnic', as a key challenge, which they will seek to overcome by selecting local candidates and stressing their ethnic credentials. Unsurprisingly, the NLD and USDP view each other and the ethnic parties as their biggest competitors, disregarding the NUP and other smaller Bamar-dominated parties. Parties in ethnic areas expressed concern that elections may be cancelled in some constituencies under the pretext of insecurity (particularly in Kachin State) or that the USDP may misuse its position as the ruling party to influence decisions made by the UEC and local authorities in relation to campaigning. The ethnic parties refer to that many among the electorate are still fearful of politics. This hinders their ability to discuss political issues and affects people's interest in politics, and ultimately they fear it will result in lower voter turn out and less support for their parties. On the other hand, the ethnic parties express much confidence in their ability to attract ethnic minority voters based on their credentials as representatives of specific ethnic constituencies.

Lack of knowledge of politics among the electorate was also cited as a challenge during the campaigning. In Kachin State, several of the newly established parties identified lack of party structures and offices to support their upcoming campaigns as a weakness, combined with the problem that voters do not yet know about their parties. In Ayeyawaddy Region, the issue of not having enough party agents to represent the parties at the polling stations was also brought up.

3.4.5. Risks of ethnic or religious-motivated election violence

The perception among political parties of risks of violence related to ethnic - and particularly religious - issues differs significantly between the different states and regions. In most areas, particularly where communal violence has not occurred in recent years, the respondents appear to significantly underestimate the risk of communal and election-related violence and do not have mitigation strategies in place. In Kachin, Mon and Chin States, which have thus far not been subject to clashes between Buddhists and Muslims in recent years, the political party representatives viewed the risk as very little or non-existent. In Mandalay Region and Rakhine State respondents had some concerns but generally expressed confidence that any tensions would not result in violence and that community leaders and the security forces would be able to control the situation. In Ayeyawaddy Region, there was increasing concern related to the increased visibility and importance of the *Ma Bha Tha* and their connections with certain parties. For more detailed descriptions of the situation in the six different states/regions, see appendix 8.

National level issues are likely to play into local dynamics in ways that are hard to ascertain. For example, the early 2015 decision to strip holders of temporary registration certificates (white cards) from membership of political parties, as well as the expiry of the cards by end of March 2015, effectively disenfranchises many potential voters. This may lower hostility among groups such as the Rakhine nationalists, who oppose allowing temporary citizens voting rights (which they have had in the past) but may also store up hostility among those disenfranchised, which includes people in remote ethnic areas. In the same way, discussions of the four nationalist bills in parliament (the interfaith marriage bill, the religious conversion bill, the monogamy bill and the population control bill) can enflame tensions. Some parties or organisations may also seek to play up nationalist tendencies (against for example China) to gather support. It is not yet clear how the more than 250,000 people officially recognized as IDPs in Myanmar (in Rakhine, Kachin and northern Shan States) will be able to vote, as well as IDPs in the South Eastern part of the country residing outside of official camps. Voting may be cancelled in some ethnic areas for security reasons, which may be perceived as politically motivated and thus exacerbate ethnic tensions at a time where the peace process between the ethnic armed groups, the army and the government will

be unfinished at best.³⁶ At worst, tensions over elections will spill into the battlefield and political negotiations.

Another area of potential conflict is if the election results are perceived as manipulated, particularly if the ability to form a majority in parliament is dependent on a small number of seats. If the leading opposition parties dispute or reject the results, it is likely to lead to a protracted political crisis and possibly large public protests, which may be counteracted by the security forces.

At the local and union level, the parties have taken very few steps to actively mitigate the risk of ethnic or religious divisions being used during campaigning, including associated violence. Such steps could include:

- instructing party members and candidates to not emphasize ethnic or religious divisions or incite hatred or violence during election campaigning;
- ensuring there are repercussions if these instructions are violated;
- having a multi-party code of conduct;
- holding discussions within the party and/or among parties on how to deal with this challenge;
- developing mitigation and response strategies for how to handle potential outbreak of election-related violence.

3.5. Potential election outcomes scenarios

Predicting voter behaviour and election results is a risky undertaking in most countries – even more so in Myanmar. Accurate predictions are made difficult by the almost total absence of regular polling providing an indication of where voters would cast their votes in the event of elections. This is compounded by the lack of research into voter behaviour during previous elections. In the last 50 years Myanmar has only experienced one relatively fair multi-party election, which took place in 1990³⁷; the 2012 by-elections, which were generally viewed as free and fair, only covered 45 seats and the 2010 elections were seriously flawed. While past elections indicate some trends in voter behaviour, Myanmar is now in the midst of an uncertain transition process where factors that played a smaller role in previous elections may play a much stronger role. These include religious sentiments (particularly a perceived fear of Muslims gaining further influence), the use of social media, and the status of ceasefires between the government and ethnic armed groups – that in turn influence broader majority-minority relations). The possibility of changes to the electoral system, although increasingly unlikely before the elections, and the possible cancellations of elections in parts of the country prone to insecurity may also have an impact on the overall results.

This report does not seek to predict election results but outline possible scenarios based on the perceptions of the stakeholders interviewed for this research and independent analysis.

3.5.1. Expectations of free and fair elections

Parties at the local level across Myanmar – with the exception of USDP - express strong concerns as to whether the 2015 elections will be free and fair. Their concerns relate mainly to the role of the UEC, to potential irregularities in advance voting and to fraudulent vote counting. These concerns are about the UEC at the central level as well as at the state/region and townships levels. Respondents questioned whether the government would accept the election results if the current ruling party faced heavy losses. Almost all respondents refer to the 2010 elections and the manipulation of the results that took place at that time as their reason for concern, while also stressing that they find it problematic that the UEC chairman has strong links with the USDP. Overall, the parties are concerned that the USPD will use its position as the ruling party to influence campaigning and results “We feel like a soccer team with 11 players matching another team with biased referees.”³⁸ Respondents did not refer to the efforts of the UEC to improve the

³⁶ For further, see Richard Horsey, Ethnicity and Elections in Myanmar, Report for the International Management Group in Myanmar funded by the European Union Instruments or Stability mechanism (24 February 2015).

³⁷ The pre-election environment was far from free due to detentions of opposition members but vote counting did not face manipulation.

³⁸ NLD. Myitkyina (18 Sep 2014). Field notes.

system, its approach and capacity during the last few years.³⁹ Concerns over other political parties hindering free and fair elections were rarely raised during the interviews.

Respondents also raised other issues that may act against free and fair elections. These include inaccurate voter lists, insufficient voter education, parts of the population not holding NRC cards (and thus unable to vote) which is particularly a problem in remote and conflict-affected areas, lack of party representatives present at polling stations and lack of well-trained, unbiased polling staff. In Kachin and Rakhine State, the parties also brought up the issue of persons with temporary registration cards or those who have newly moved to the area holding the right to vote. Civil society groups, particularly in Mandalay Region and in Ayeyawaddy Region also stressed the risk that the *Ma Ba Tha* and other populist movements will be used by political parties. All that said, respondents agreed that the 2015 elections would be more free and fair than the 2010 elections, due mainly to increased international attention and the stronger role of local media.

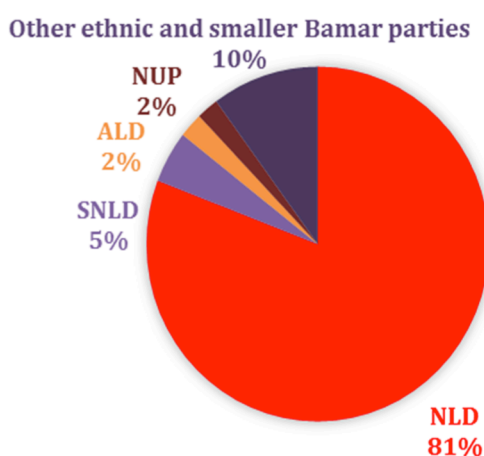
3.5.2. Voter behaviour

Voter behaviour based on the 1990 and 2012 by-elections

This analysis is based mainly on the 1990 elections and 2012 by-elections. While the 2010 elections are the most recent national elections, widespread voting irregularities took place and the main opposition party did not participate, which makes them a poor guide to future results. However, the fact that ethnic minority parties did relatively well in the 2010 elections, gaining around 31% of the seats indicates that these parties have a strong following in ethnic minority areas.⁴⁰ However, these results do not indicate how the ethnic parties will fare in direct competition with the leading opposition party, the NLD, nor the re-registered and the new ethnic parties, which did not compete in 2010.

In the 1990 election, 93 out of the 235 political parties fielded candidates. Elections were held in 485 of the 493 constituencies and 27 parties gained seats. The opposition party, the NLD, won a landslide with 392 seats (about 81% of the seats), followed by the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) with 23 seats, the Arakan League for Democracy (ALD) with 11 seats, the NUP with 10 seats, and other ethnic parties and smaller Bamar parties. The NLD did particularly well in the regions, while the SNLD was the largest winning party in Shan State and the ALD won the majority in Rakhine State.⁴¹ The NUP's resounding loss was spectacular given its prominent leaders, many candidates and large networks based on the one-party BSPP (1962-1988).

Figure 2: 1990 Election Results



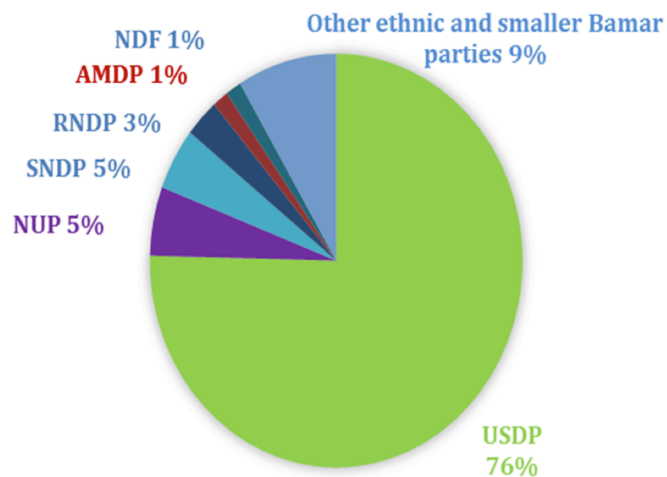
³⁹ See International Crisis Group, "Myanmar's political landscape" (28 April 2015).

⁴⁰ ALTSEAN-Burma; Source: <http://www.altsean.org/Research/2010/Key%20Facts/Results/Overall.php>.

⁴¹ Democratic Voice of Burma, 1990 Multi-party democracy general elections, compiled by Khin Kyaw Han, MP-NLD, Yenangyaung (2), (undated). Available from http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs4/1990_multi-party_elections.pdf. Last accessed 18 March 2015

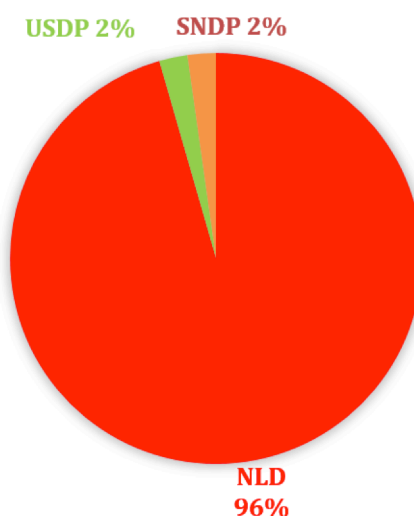
In 2010, 37 parties contested the elections. The USDP contested all 1,154 seats and won 882 seats amounting to 76% of the seats, according to the official results, which likely masked a much greater share for other parties, particularly the NDF. The USDP's election victory was particularly high in constituencies in the regions and much lower in the ethnic states, particularly in Rakhine, Shan, Mon and Chin States, where the ethnic parties won many seats. Overall, the NUP came second in the 2010 elections with 63 seats followed by the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP) with 57 seats, Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP) with 35 seats, All Mon Region Democracy Party (AMDP) with 16 seats and NDF with 16 seats. Ethnic parties and smaller Bamar parties won the remaining seats.⁴⁰

Figure 3: 2010 Election Results



The 2012 by-election saw 17 parties participating and the NLD won 43 out of 45 vacant seats (it contested 44) with USDP and the SNDP each winning one seat. The vast majority of the contested seats were in the (Bamar) regions and not the ethnic states. The result indicates an almost complete lack of support for the USDP, even in military and government-dominated constituencies such as in Nay Pyi Taw.

Figure 4: 2012 By-election Results



While the above is only a very brief summary, previous election patterns in Myanmar show that:

- a) It is a strong advantage that a party has a charismatic leader who has mass appeal, while it is seemingly less important what actual policies and individual candidates the party puts forward (as exemplified by the NLD in 1990 and 2012).
- b) Myanmar voters tend to vote for the opposition and reject the incumbent party if it is associated with the previous regime, even if it is well organized and has strong financial backing (as was the case with NUP in 1990 and USDP in 2012).
- c) In ethnic areas, ethnic parties have support based on ethnic affiliation among voters and will gain some - but far from all - of the vote. What is often overlooked is that while ethnic minorities may dominate a particular state, the ethnic states are also populated by large segments who belong to ethnic groups other than the dominant one, and that the electorate does not always vote along ethnic lines (as reflected in the 1990 and 2010 voting results).
- d) The Myanmar electoral system (first-past-the-post) favours the winning party and disadvantages parties with less support, particularly if this support is not geographically concentrated. Because of this, even parties that gain a relatively high percentage of the votes may only gain a few seats. Hence smaller and less popular parties run a real risk of not being represented or having only a very few seats in parliament.⁴²

Voter behaviour based on respondents

Respondents in the ethnic states indicated that they think that voters from ethnic minority groups are likely to vote along ethnic lines i.e. for ethnic based parties. It is their view that the ethnic party candidates can represent the interest of their communities better than nation-wide parties with a mainly Bamar leadership. "People are not well informed of politics so, they usually make choices according to the sense of ethnic identity," said the director of a CSO in Rakhine State.⁴³ A group of women from Shan villages near Myitkyina in Kachin said they would vote for an ethnic Shan party as: "[We] prefer that it is our own dogs fighting if it is a fight between dogs."⁴⁴ The respondents suggest that voting along ethnic lines will be stronger in rural areas where people are less educated than in urban areas. The nation-wide parties shared this perception at the local level but stressed that they would emphasize that they are ethnic parties too and would field candidates with an ethnic background. They will also stress that they are better at advancing minority views at the national stage given their position, size, resources and networks. The ethnic parties in ethnic areas have clearly marked out the constituencies where they think they have the highest chance of winning and therefore will field candidates. The selection of these constituencies is entirely based on the concentration of ethnic minority voters. Likewise, the nationwide parties such as NLD, USDP, and NUP view their chances of winning as much higher in the parts of the states with a large presence of Bamar voters and where a single ethnic minority group does not dominate.

Interviews with respondents in the Bamar-dominated regions did not indicate clear voting behaviour patterns. Most view the elections as mainly a competition between the NLD and the USDP – with voters focusing more on the party than the individual candidates. Many rural respondents indicated that they had little information about the different parties and said they may just vote as others in their community do. The NLD is a clear favourite among those local respondents with an interest and understanding of politics. This is due to the strong popular image of the party and its previous landslide election wins, combined with the USDP's unpopular image associated with the former regime. However, they also stressed that the USDP should not be underestimated due to its financial and organisational resources.

Overall, the respondents did not rate persuasion by local leaders, intimidation and/or vote buying as major factors influencing voter behaviour.

⁴² For example, in 1990 the NUP gained 22% of the vote but only 5% of the seats (10 seats out of 492 available) while the NLD gained 65% of the vote but gained 82% of the seats (392 out of 492 available). In the 2010 elections other parties than the USDP gained 41-42 % of the vote in the union parliaments (according to the official results) but only 22-23 % of the total seats. Source: Sarah John, "Ethnic Minorities and Proportional Representation in Myanmar" (5 September 2014).

⁴³ Arakan Human Rights and Development Organization, Sittway (26 July 2014). Field notes.

⁴⁴ A group of villagers. Myitkyina (24 Sep 2014). Field notes.

3.5.3. Possible election outcomes

The election outcome result scenarios presented for the union and state/region levels are associated with the risks outlined above and based on the assumptions that a) the election system remains unchanged, b) the elections are generally conducted in a free and fair manner and c) all the main parties will contest (and not boycott) the elections.

Overall the research and analysis indicates that:

- NLD continues to enjoy widespread support in the regions and in the non-ethnic areas of the states due to the popular image of its leader – and is well-placed to become the largest party.
- The USDP is well-financed, well-organized and appears better-prepared for the elections than the other parties - but its strong association with the former regime limits its support.
- The ethnic parties are in a strong position to win a large proportion of seats in the ethnic areas but that this may be reduced due to vote-splitting between the many ethnic parties and the relatively high number of voters who do not belong to the dominant local ethnic group.
- Smaller Bamar parties and the NUP stand a chance of winning a few seats in specific constituencies but face very strong competition from the NLD, USDP and ethnic parties.

The union-level scenarios are informed by the trends emerging from analysis of the six selected states/regions, which are unlikely to differ significantly from the remaining eight states/regions not covered by the field research.

Possible election outcome scenarios at the union level

It is important to take into account that 25% of seats in the union and state/region parliaments are reserved for the military and not contested during the elections. This means that opposition parties need to win more than two thirds of the *contested* seats to gain a majority in the Union level parliament. While the USDP and the army representatives have not followed the same voting patterns within parliament during the 2011-2015 period, the USDP still has a stronger alliance with the army than any of the other parties, and can thus form a majority in the parliament together with the military if it gains more than one third of the *contested* seats.

In thinking about what might unfold after the election results are in, it is important to take into consideration the powers that the majority in the parliament will hold. Myanmar's quasi-presidential system gives parliament the authority to pass legislation and importantly select the President, who forms the cabinet by choosing the ministers for all but three ministries (the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, and the Ministry of Border Affairs are chosen by the military). Under the current constitution, a super majority of more than 75% is needed to change the constitution (along with a referendum), which means that some of the military MPs would need to support such a move. This is important in relation to the selection of the President as the provisions in the current constitution effectively bar the leading opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi from becoming President. If this provision is not changed it has direct implications for the political calculations that the NLD has to make in relation to selecting the president (and indirectly forming a government), if it wins the majority. As it has no obvious alternative presidential candidate from inside its party, it may have to choose one from outside, possibly from the USDP.

While the possible election outcome scenarios points towards that a level of coalition building between parties after the elections may be required, Myanmar does not have a strong tradition of this. Thus far before the elections, the parties have not entered into electoral alliances or agreements not to contest in constituencies where like-minded parties are fielding candidates in order not to split the vote.

Union-level election outcome scenarios

Scenario 1: The NLD wins more than two thirds of the contested seats and thus an outright majority in the Union level parliament*. It can then select the president and pass legislation on its own.

Scenario 2: The NLD wins less than two thirds of the contested seats but enters into an alliance with one or more (ethnic and/or smaller) parties. Combined they hold more than two thirds of the contested seats. The alliance can then select the president and pass legislation.

Scenario 3: The USDP wins more than a third of the contested seats and thus together with the military in the Union parliament it can then select the president and pass legislation. This scenario is similar to the situation from 2011-2015 (although it is unlikely that the USDP will dominate the parliament to the same extent).

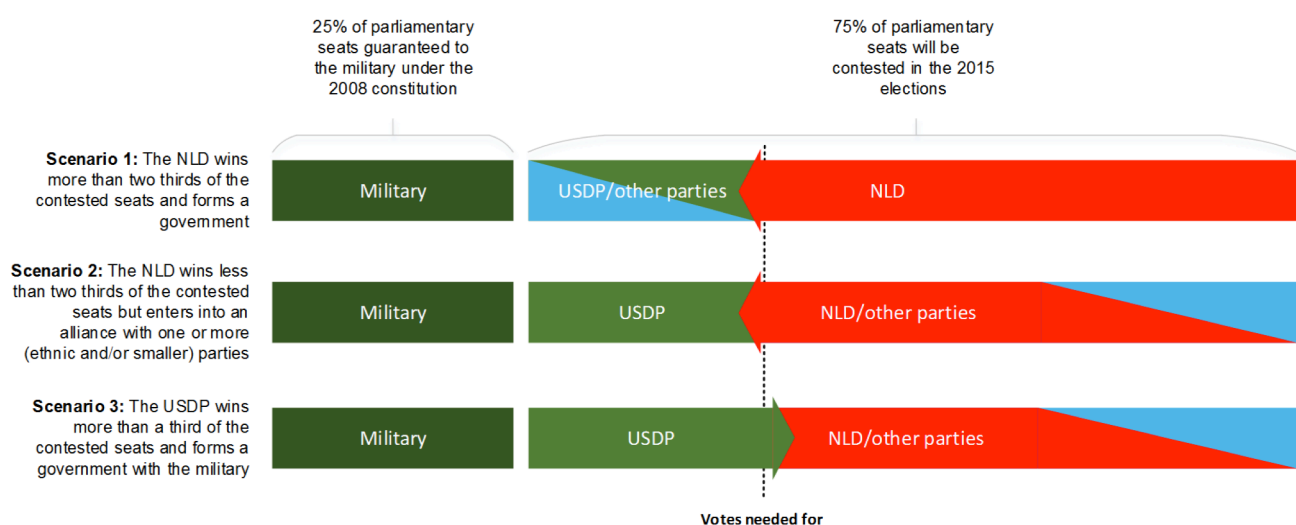
Other possible scenarios include the USDP winning less than one third of the contested seats but forming an alliance with one or more ethnic and/or smaller parties along with the military to gain a majority, or neither the NLD nor the USDP winning an outright majority but forming an alliance with each other to gain a majority.

* The Union parliament (Pyidaungsu Hluttaw) is made up of its two chambers, the Amyotha Hluttaw and the Pyithu Hluttaw. These scenarios are based on the total combined number of seats in the Union parliament.

Several important factors influence, which scenario is most likely:

- Will real or perceived improvements in delivery of basic services and political freedoms translate into votes for the incumbent party?
- To what extent will better-organised and well-financed election campaigns matter more than the popular mass appeal of opposition parties?
- In what ways will rising nationalist sentiments in relation to religion influence voter behaviour?

Figure 5: Myanmar 2015 Election Scenarios



Several long-term observers of Myanmar politics emphasize that the 2015 are transitional elections with voters favouring change above and beyond any other factors; they stress the popularity of the NLD and ethnic parties. The 1990 and 2012 results, and many respondent interviews, support the sentiment that the Myanmar electorate rejects an incumbent party associated with the former regime no matter how well-organised. However, others with expertise in elections suggest that the

influence, resources and demonstrated results of the USDP will attract many voters.^{45,46} The relative importance of the various factors is likely to remain unclear until the elections results are announced.

Possible election outcome scenarios at the state/region level

This section briefly summarises the likely scenarios in the six selected states/regions, which informs the three union-level scenarios above. A more detailed overview of the past election results in each of the six states/regions is included in Appendix 9. Overall, the findings suggest continued support for the NLD in the Mandalay and Ayeyawaddy Regions, in competition with the USDP. In Rakhine and Chin States the respective ethnic parties are likely to win the majority of the seats, while in Mon State the ethnic parties have strong support in about one third to a half of the state. In Kachin State the election results are very unpredictable. The remaining seats in the ethnic states that are not won by the ethnic parties are likely to go to a mix of the NLD (strong in Mon and Chin States) and the USDP. The smaller Bamar parties and NUP are likely to gain a few seats across the six locations.

⁴⁵ See for example the below reports, which documents that a majority the population thinks the country is moving in the right direction and that basic services have improved: "Myanmar 2014: Civic Knowledge and Values in a Changing Society" by The Asia Foundation (12 November 2014), <http://asiafoundation.org/publications/pdf/1445> - and UNDP Myanmar's local governance mapping reports available at: http://www.mm.undp.org/content/myanmar/en/home/operations/projects/poverty_reduction/LocalGovernancePillar1/local-governance-mapping.html

⁴⁶ Interviews, Yangon (March 2015). Field notes.

Possible election outcome scenarios at the state/region level

Mon State: In the 1990 and 2012 elections the NLD won the majority of the seats, with 20% won by MNDF (an ethnic Mon party) in 1990. The ethnic AMDP won less than a quarter of the seats in the 2010 elections. For the 2015 elections, ethnic Mon parties have strongholds in the constituencies with large ethnic Mon populations (in the south) but risk splitting the vote. The NLD stands a stronger chance of winning in the northern constituencies in competition with the USDP and the NUP.

Rakhine State: In the 1990 and 2010 elections, the ethnic Rakhine parties won the majority of the seats followed by the NLD in 1990 and the USDP in 2010. In the run up to the 2015 elections the two dominant Rakhine parties have merged, which is likely to further consolidate the Rakhine vote. The NLD is unpopular in large parts of the state (less so in the southern constituencies) as it is perceived to not support strong Rakhine nationalist/anti-Muslim sentiments. While the USDP and the NUP may win a few seats, the ethnic ANP is likely to win the majority of the vote.

Chin State: In the 1990 and the 2010 elections three different Chin ethnic parties won a majority of the seats, with the NLD winning about a third of the seats in 1990 and USDP just less than half in 2010. Respondents predict that voters in most of the state will continue to vote along ethnic and sub-ethnic lines i.e. securing a majority win by Chin ethnic parties. However, the large number of Chin parties risk splitting the vote to the advantage of the NLD and the USDP.

Kachin State: The election results in 1990 in Kachin State indicate that the NLD was very popular and gained around two thirds of the seats in competition with the NUP and several Kachin ethnic parties. While the NUP and the USDP did well in the 2010 elections this was in the absence of the NLD and the ethnic Kachin parties, which were not allowed to contest. The fact that no Kachin ethnic party has contested elections since 1990, the emergence of many new parties, the waning popularity of the NLD (due to the perception that the party has not spoken out strongly enough in favour of ethnic aspirations) and the fact that up to half of the state is populated by people with other ethnic backgrounds than Kachin (mainly Shan and Bamar) means there is great uncertainty as to the election results.

Mandalay Region: The 1990 and 2012 election results in Mandalay Region indicate that the NLD is in a very strong position in this region (winning all but one seat in 1990 and all six seats in 2012). Local respondents, including some from the ruling USDP, uniformly agree that NLD are likely to win the vast majority of the 2015 vote in this region. That said, the popularity of the party has decreased somewhat due to the party being perceived to not speaking out in favour of the Buddhist majority during the violent attacks on mainly Muslims in July 2014.

Ayeyawaddy Region: As in the other regions, the NLD was overwhelmingly successful in the 1990 elections (winning 48 out of 51 seats) and in the 2012 by-elections (winning all six seats). The USDP won the 2010 elections. Local respondents stress that three parties will dominate the 2015 elections in the area: the NLD, USDP and the MFDP. The NLD is viewed as the favourite to win the majority of the seats. The relative popularity of the MFDP is difficult to assess given that the party is very new in the area but it has established a large number of party offices and attracted an impressive number of members. The USDP enjoys the support of the *Ma Ba Tha* - and the President and four union level ministers are from Ayeyawaddy Region, which may attract some votes. The Kayin ethnic party, the Kayin People's Party (KPP), has a chance of winning a few seats in the constituencies dominated by Kayin communities.

4. Conclusion

While Myanmar political parties still have much ground to cover to fully play their role as effective democratic representatives of the citizens - mediating between different shades of political opinion, aggregating public opinion and providing policy options for governing – they have come a long way in a remarkably short time. However, the political party landscape is characterized by a continued focus on dominant political leaders and ethnic affiliations. The parties take political positions on specific issues but rarely develop these into more detailed policies. The relationship between the parties and constituencies is still weak and the centralized manner in which campaigns are formulated leaves little space for a focus on local issues and citizens' priorities. Multiparty dialogue and engagement with CSOs could be strengthened while a lack of financial resources and effective party organisations are the main obstacle to parties carrying out regular party and campaign activities.

There are essentially three main political configurations likely to take power in the 2015 elections – in addition to the military (which retains 25% of the seats in parliament): the USDP, the NLD and the ethnic parties. While the NLD retains broad-based popular support and is in a good position to become the dominant party, it is unclear if this is enough to win the required majority. The incumbent USDP is well-financed and well-organised but its association with the former regime remains a disadvantage. While strong in ethnic areas, the ethnic parties risk splitting the ethnic vote in the absence of mergers and tactical alliances. Nevertheless, they are likely to dominate state/region parliaments and may also end up playing a crucial role determining the balance of power in parliament - along with perhaps other smaller parties - if neither of the two dominant parties gain the required seats to form an outright majority. The question of who will become president, and ultimately appoint government ministers, remains wide open. As there is no grand tradition for coalition rule in Myanmar, the post-election environment also depends on whether the elections are perceived as credible, transparent and inclusive by all the major actors - and on what formal or informal agreement, if any, the USDP, NLD and ethnic parties can reach that will accommodate the main interests of all three groups while also not threatening the key interests of the military and the ethnic armed groups. Any ruling party or coalition needs the support of all three elements of power - parliament, the president and the military - to govern effectively, which will be a challenge no matter who wins. It is thus likely that the outcome of the 2015 elections will be followed by a period of uncertainty and possibly protracted instability. At a time when the public have high hopes of a democratic future and when different political, military and economic actors will be jockeying for positions and seeking to maintain or expand their spheres of influence, the rules of the game will be in flux.

Concerns continue to exist regarding the possible manipulation of the elections but the parties underestimate the possibility of ethnic and/or religiously motivated election violence. This results in a worrying lack of mitigation strategies, and combined with the uncertainty of the post-election landscape could threaten the democratic progress that Myanmar has been making.

5. Recommendations

This report points to some important areas where international and local organisations can engage with the Myanmar government, political parties and civil society to enhance the role of political parties in Myanmar at the local and national level, in both the short and long-term.

1. Improve the ability of political parties to represent the priorities of local communities.

It is clear that the engagement between the parties and their constituencies – the citizens that they are supposed to represent - can be strengthened. Communities do not experience the parties as being in close enough contact with them and are unable to articulate what role the parties play in improving their lives. The main concerns of many communities - related to land confiscation, improvement of basic services and improved incomes - do not seem to figure highly in the party campaign plans, at least as perceived by the local party offices. Moreover, very little is known about voter priorities and behaviour, which makes it difficult for parties to target campaigns to local constituencies and for observers to analyse underlying dynamics and possible results. The parties would, therefore benefit from conducting surveys, interviews or community meetings at the local level to gauge what matters to local citizens. This then needs to be communicated to the higher levels of the party and integrated the findings into election campaign platforms in the short-term, and into policies in the long-term. This should be complemented by further research into voter behaviour. Many parties are calling for assistance to conduct awareness raising activities among citizens on politics, civic engagement and voter education and this is an area where local and international organisations are well positioned to provide support before and after the elections.

2. Strengthen capacities for electoral management, support election observation and implement measures to mitigate election violence.

Given the very real concerns among the parties and the public about the extent to which the elections will be credible, transparent and inclusive, both voter education and election monitoring and observation are crucial. This must be complemented by the on going initiatives to improve the regulatory frameworks for the elections, as well as the capacity of the UEC to manage the elections - such as provision of accurate voter lists, minimizing the risk of advance voting being manipulated, and correct tallying of votes. In this context, it is very worrying that the parties – at least at the local level – significantly underestimate the risk of election related violence, particularly as this could be inflamed by religious tensions and the rapid spread of rumours through the expanded access to mobile telephones and social media. It is paramount that the parties take this risk seriously and implement mitigation measures (such as instructions to candidates to not use inflammatory language, advice on how to deal with heightened tensions, local multi-party rapid response committees, effective warning systems etc.). This is an area where both international organisations and local CSOs need to work closely with the parties.

3. Improve party organisations, communication and policies.

Beyond the elections, many challenges remain for the parties to not just engage more effectively with citizens but also in building strong and responsive party structures. Second tier leadership including youth and women needs to be cultivated, and effective lines of communications built. Importantly, party policies that reflect citizen and party priorities need to be developed. A prerequisite for such changes to be effective is that parties delegate more decision making to the local level and more responsibility to emerging new leaders. Capacity development supported by external agencies can complement the parties' own efforts but must have a longterm focus.

4. Enhance multi-party dialogue and cooperation between parties and CSOs.

Many of the parties would benefit from working more closely with each other, both at the national and particularly the local level. A pooling of limited resources around shared concerns and citizens' issues - which the parties are already engaged in but in separate ways - will make them much more effective in relation to furthering local development. Cooperation with CSOs should be enhanced but this requires both CSOs and the parties to recognize not just each others weaknesses but also their strengths and the possible benefits of joint action. While it will take time to overcome underlying legacies of distrust and fragmentation in Myanmar political society, external agencies can play an important role in facilitating platforms and linkages where dialogue and action among parties and between parties and other key stakeholders can be take place.

List of appendices

- Appendix 1: List of Myanmar political parties
- Appendix 2: List of interview questions
- Appendix 3: Overview of field research locations
- Appendix 4: Political party landscapes (area-specific)
- Appendix 5: Cooperation between political parties (area-specific)
- Appendix 6: Cooperation between political parties and CSOs (area-specific)
- Appendix 7: Cooperation between political parties and local government authorities (area-specific)
- Appendix 8: Risks of ethnic or religious-motivated election violence (area-specific)
- Appendix 9: Detailed 1990, 2010 and 2012 election and by-election results (area-specific)

Appendix 1: List of Myanmar political parties (30 April 2015)

No	Party (full name)	Abb.	Date registered	Reg. no.	Party Interviewed	Nationwide Party	Small Bamar Party	Ethnic Party
1	88 Generation Student Youths (Union of Myanmar)	88 GSY	26/5 2010	17			✗	
2	All Mon Region Democracy Party	AMDP	24/5 2010	13	✓			✗
3	All Nationalities Democracy Party (Kayah State)	ANDP	1/8 2013	64				✗
4	Arakan (Rakhine) National Party	ANP	6/3 2014	74	✓			✗
5	Asho Chin National Party	ACNP	5/6 2012	55				✗
6	Bamar People's Party	BPP	14/10 2011	46			✗	
7	Chin League for Democracy	CLD	15/7 2014	75				✗
8	Chin National Democracy Party	CNP	27/5 2010	21	✓			✗
9	Chin Progressive Party	CPP	1/6 2010	26	✓			✗
10	Danu National Democracy Party	DNDP	3/7 2012	57				✗
11	Dawei Nationalities Party	DNP	17/12 2013	70				✗
12	Democracy and Human Rights Party	DHRP	12/3 2013	63	✓			✗
13	Democracy and Peace Party	DPP	24/5 2010	14			✗	
14	Democratic Party (Myanmar)	DPM	29/5 2010	6	✓		✗	
15	Peace and Diversity Party	PDP	1/6 2010	25			✗	
16	Ethnic National Development Party	ENDP	16/6 2010	33	✓			✗
17	Federal Union Party	FUP	24/12 2013	71	✓			✗
18	Inn National Development Party	INDP	1/6 2010	27				✗
19	Kachin Democratic Party	KDP	13/1 2014	72	✓			✗
20	Kachin National Democracy Congress Party	KNDCP	11/12 2013	68				✗
21	Kachin State Democracy Party	KSDP	10/12 2013	67	✓			✗
22	Kaman National Progressive Party	KNPP	5/6 2010	36				✗
23	Kayah National Race Democracy Party (Kayah Unity Democracy Party)	KNRDP	9/8 2013	65				✗
24	Kayan National Party	KNP	20/5 2010	7				✗
25	Kayin Democratic Party	KDP	1/2 2012	51				✗
26	Kayin National Party	KNP	24/10 2014	78				✗
27	Kayin People's Party	KPP	21/5 2010	9	✓			✗
28	Kayin State Democracy and Development Party	KSDDP	19/8 2010	41				✗
29	Khami National Development Party	KNDP	9/7 2010	37	✓			✗
30	Kokang Democracy and	KDUP	7/5 2010	4				✗

	Unity Party							
31	Khumi (Khami) National Party	KNP	16/7 2014	76				x
32	Lahu National Development Party	LNDP	29/4 2010	3				x
33	Lisu National Development Party	LNDP	17/12 2013	69	✓			x
34	Mon National Party	MNP	10/7 2012	58	✓			x
35	Mro Nationalities Party	MNP	28/2 2012	52				x
36	Mro National Development Party (aka) <i>Mro (Khami) National Solidarity Organization</i>	MNDP	28/4 2010	1	✓			x
37	Mro National Democracy Party	MNDP	9/2 2015	80				x
38	Myanmar Farmers' Development Party	MFDP	6/11 2012	61	✓		✗	
39	Myanmar National Congress Party	MNCP	23/1 2012	50			✗	
40	Myanmar New Society Democratic Party	MNSDP	16/1 2012	49			✗	
41	Myanmar Peasant, Worker, People's Party	MPWPP	9/12 2014	79			✗	
42	National Democratic Force	NDF	9/7 2010	38	✓		✗	
43	National Democratic Party for Development	NDPD	4/6 2010	31	✓			x
44	National Development and Peace Party	NDPP	24/8 2010	42	✓			x
45	National League for Democracy	NLD	5/1 2012	47	✓	✗		
46	National Political Alliance	NPAL	27/5 2010	19			✗	
47	National Unity Congress Party	NUCP	13/2 2012	62			✗	
48	National Unity Party	NUP	29/4 2010	2	✓	✗		
49	Modern People's Party	MPP	28/5 2010	23	✓		✗	
50	New National Democracy Party	NNDP	4/10 2011	44			✗	
51	Democratic Party for a New Society	DPNS	24/10 2014	77	✓		✗	
52	PaO National Organization	PNO	13/5 2010	5				x
53	Party for Unity and Peace	PUP	14/10 2011				✗	
54	People Democracy Party	PDP	23/9 2011	43	✓		✗	
55	Phalon-Sawaw Democratic Party	PSDP	4/6 2010	30				x
56	Rakhine State National Force Party	RSNF	20/5 2010	8	✓			x
57	Shan Nationalities League for Democracy	SNLD	12/6 2012	56	✓			x
58	Shan Nationalities Democratic Party	SNDP	26/5 2010	15	✓			x
59	Shan State Kokang Democratic Party	KDP	31/8 2012	60				x
60	Ta-arng (Palaung) National Party	TPNP	24/5 2010	12				x
61	Tai-Leng (Red Shan) Nationalities Development Party	TNDP	10/5 2012	53				x
62	Union Democracy Party	UDP	28/5 2010	24			✗	

63	Union of Myanmar Federation of National Politics	UMFNP	26/5 2010	18			✖	
64	Union Pa-O National Organization	UPNO	23/1 2014	73				✕
65	Union Solidarity and Development Party	USDP	8/6 2010	32	✓	✖		
66	United Democratic Party	UDP	26/5 2010	16			✖	
67	Unity and Democracy Party of Kachin State	UDPKS	2/8 2010	40	✓			✕
68	Wa Democratic Party	WDP	2/6 2010	29				✕
69	Wa National Unity Party	WNUP	21/6 2010	10				✕
70	Wunthanu Democratic Party [former <i>Wunthanu NLD</i>]	WNLD	27/5 2010	22	✓		✖	
71	Zomi Congress for Democracy	ZCD	17/8 2012	59	✓			✕
72	Danu National Organization Party	DNOP	27/4 2015	81				✕
73	Public Service Students' Democracy Party	PSSDP	28/4 2015	82			✖	
	Total	73				3	22	48

In addition 14 parties have applied for registration by the 30 April 2015 advisory deadline for parties to register for the 2015 elections.

Appendix 2: List of interview questions

1. Who are the key political parties likely to contest the elections?

- 5.1. What is their background?
- 5.2. What's their ideology, policy platform, and issues they focus on?
- 5.3. What are the links between different parts/levels within the parties?
- 5.4. What do they view as their strengths/weaknesses?
- 5.5. How can the above be improved (what plans do they have already – what is needed from outside)?

2. In what ways do the parties relate to their different constituencies and how do constituencies relate to the parties?

- 2.1. Who are their constituencies?
- 2.2. How do they relate to the different constituency groups?
- 2.3. What issues from constituencies have they taken up during the last three years – and in what ways?
- 2.4. To what extent are priorities/needs/issues of constituencies reflected in party policy platforms and in plans for elections?
- 2.5. What is the main source of information about politics for local communities?
- 2.6. How do constituencies view the parties?
- 2.7. What level/kind of contact do constituencies have with parties? With whom, in what ways and on what issues?
- 2.8. What is the level of understanding of local constituencies of elections/political parties?
- 2.9. How can the above be improved (what plans do they already have – what is needed from outside)?

3. What are the relationships between parties – and with others?

- 1.1. In what ways and on what issues do parties cooperate at the local level?
- 1.2. Who cooperates with whom, on what and why?
- 1.3. Who do not cooperate with whom and why?
- 1.4. What is the process, status and barriers/opportunities for party mergers?
- 1.5. How can cooperation between parties be enhanced (what plans do they have already – what is needed from outside)?
- 1.6. In what ways and on what issues do parties and government authorities engage with each other? [probe on the role of the constituency development funds]
- 1.7. In what ways and on what issues do parties and EAGs engage with each other?
- 1.8. In what ways and on what issues do parties and CSOs engage with each other?
- 1.9. In what ways and on what issues do parties and the private sector engage with each other?
- 1.10. How can any of the above be improved (what plans do they have already – what is needed from outside)?

4. How are key political parties preparing for elections?

- 4.1. What are their key campaign plans (methods, candidates, canvassing etc.)?
- 4.2. Who/where/how are these formulated?
- 4.3. What are their key campaign issues?
- 4.4. Who/where/how are these formulated?
- 4.5. How and according to what criteria do they select candidates?
- 4.6. What key challenges and opportunities are they facing in relation to elections (both internal and external)? [This includes financing, organising, identifying candidates, canvassing, campaigning and vote casting (internal), as well as external such as campaign environment, campaign regulations, competition with other parties etc.]

- 4.7. Do they plan to campaign on ethnic, identity and religious issues – if so which ones and in what ways?
- 4.8. How do they view the risk of election campaigning fuelling local conflicts and underlying social, ethnic or religious divisions?
- 4.9. How can the above be improved (what plans do they have already – what is needed from outside)?

5. What are the potential elections outcome scenarios and what are the risks and opportunities associated with them?

- 5.1. How free and fair do they expect the 2015 elections to be?
- 5.2. What do they expect will be the most likely problems?
- 5.3. On what basis will voters cast their votes (demonstrated results, image of party vs. image of local MP, party policies, likability of top leaders, focus on issues of importance to voters, due to recommendations of local leaders, those who provide financial or in-kind contributions to voters, other reasons)?
- 5.4. What do they view as the most likely election outcome scenario at the union level – and why? What factors should be taken into account?
- 5.5. What do they see as the risks and opportunities of the different scenarios at the union level?
- 5.6. What is their preferred scenario?
- 5.7. What do they view as the most likely election outcome scenario at the state level – and why? What factors should be taken into account?
- 5.8. What do they see as the risks and opportunities of the different scenarios at the state level?
- 5.9. What is their preferred scenario?

Appendix 3: Overview of field research locations

State/Region	Township	Dates
Mon State	Mawlamyine, Thanbyuzayut	2-10 July 2014
Rakhine State	Sittwe, Ponnagyun, Mrauk-U	21 July - 1 August 2014
Chin State	Kale, Hakha, Tedim	18-27 August 2014
Kachin State	Myitkyina, Bhamo	16-24 September 2014
Mandalay Region	Mandalay, Myingyan	15-24 October 2014
Ayeyarwaddy Region	Pathein, Bogale	17 November – 5 December 2014
Interviews were also carried out in Yangon during December 2014 till February 2015, and in Nay Pyi Taw in February 2015		

Appendix 4: Political party landscapes (area-specific)

This section briefly outlines the political party landscapes in the six state/regions covered by the field research including a very brief description of the local parties not already described in the report. It gives an indication of the more complex situation at the local level, particularly in the states with many ethnic parties vying for power. For further information about the dynamics and relative strengths of the parties in the respective state/regions in the run up to the 2015 elections, please see section '3.5.. Further details on the background of individual parties are available from the area field reports submitted as separate appendices to this report.

Mon State: In Mon State, five political parties are particularly active: USDP, NLD, NUP, Mon National Party (MNP) and All Mon Region Democracy Party (AMDP). MNP originates from the Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF), which gained 5 seats in the 1990 elections but was later disbanded. It re-registered as the Mon Democratic Party after the 2010 elections but changed its name to the MNP in 2014 after it reunited with a few MPs from the AMDP. AMDP was formed in 2010, contested the 2010 elections and gained 16 parliamentary seats.

Rakhine State: In Rakhine State, there are three key political parties: USDP, NLD, and Arakan National Party (ANP). The ANP is a result of the 2014 merger of the Arakan League for Democracy (ALD) and the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP). The ALD came third nation-wide the 1990 elections but was dissolved by the military regime. It re-registered in 2012 after boycotting the 2010 elections. The RNDP contested the 2010 elections and came third, dominating the Rakhine State parliament with 18 seats. In addition there are 7 other parties: NUP, Democratic Party (DP), Kha Mee National Development Party (KMNDP), Mro National Development Party (MNDP) (formerly known as Mro or Khami National Solidarity Organization), Rakhine State National Force (RSNF), and the three Rohingya parties: the National Democratic Party for Development (NDPD), the Democracy and Human Rights Party (DHRP) and National Development and Peace Party (NDPP).

Chin State: In the ethnically diverse Chin State at least seven key parties likely to contest the 2015 elections but several other smaller parties also exist (resulting in a total of 10 ethnic Chin parties). The most prominent parties are: USDP, NLD, NUP, Chin National Development Party (CNDP), Chin Progressive Party (CPP), Zomi Congress for Democracy (ZCD), and the Ethnic National Development Party (ENDP) (formerly Mara People's Party). The CNDP was based on the Chin National Party (CNP), following semi-failed merger negotiations with the CPP. Both the CNP and CPP were set up immediately before the 2010 election, which both parties contested with some success. The ZCD seeks to represent the Chin ethnic sub-group self-identifying as Zomi and contested the 1990 elections as part of an alliance with the NLD – but did not contest the 2010 elections and the 2012 by-elections. The ENDP secured one seat in the 2010 elections and has changed its name to reflect the fact that it seeks to represent a broader constituency than its traditional Mara sub-ethnic group.

Kachin State: Kachin State has 11 political parties: USDP, NLD, NUP, NDF, and the ethnic parties: Shan Nationalities Party (SNDP), Tai-Leng (Red Shan) Nationalities Development Party (TNDP), Lisu National Development Party (LNDP), Unity and Democracy Party of Kachin State (UDPKS), Kachin State Democracy Party (KSDP), Kachin Democracy Party (KDP), Kachin State National Congress for Democracy (KNCD). All of them are likely to contest the 2015 elections. It is particular to Kachin State that almost all of the ethnic parties have been formed very recently and none contested the 2010 elections. The SNDP is a large Shan State based party, which was established in 2010 and came third in the 2010 elections nation-wide. The SNDP won 3 out of 38 seats in the Kachin State parliament in 2010 despite the state having a large Shan population - although many of them self-identify as the sub-group Shanni (Red Shan/Tai-Leng). The TNLP was formed in late 2013 to represent Shanni interests. The LNDP focuses on the ethnic sub-group of the Lisu, of which a large proportion lives in Kachin State, and was established in late 2012. Among the four Kachin ethnic parties that seek to represent the Kachin ethnic group and/or all residents of Kachin State the UDPKS is the only one that contested the 2010 elections (and won 4

seats).⁴⁷ It is closely affiliated with the USDP and most Kachins do not view it as an 'ethnic' party. The KSDP is probably the most prominent of the Kachin parties and was established by former KIO top member Dr Tu Ja in late 2013. The smaller KDP is formed by civil society organisers, while the KNCD has links back to the 1990 elections and closer connections with the NLD.

Mandalay Region: While seven parties are likely to contest the 2015 elections in the Mandalay region very few of them stand a chance of gaining seats in a region where the NLD had a landslide win in the 1990 elections and the 2012 by-election. The USDP dominated the flawed 2010 election. Apart from the USDP, NLD and NUP, the other parties are all smaller Bamar parties such as the National Democratic Force (NDF), Wuthanu Democratic Party (WDP), Democratic Party-Myanmar (DP), and People Democracy Party (PDP). The WDP is local to Mandalay, focuses on one township, is founded by two former NLD members and doesn't accept Muslims as members. The DPM is founded by three daughters of prominent Myanmar politicians and focuses on municipal issues in Mandalay. The PDP is a very small Mandalay party with very few activities; its chairman is currently in jail.

Ayeyawaddy Region: In Ayeyawaddy Region seven political parties are likely to contest the 2015 elections: USDP, NLD, NUP, NDF, the Myanmar Farmers' Development Party (MFDP), the Kayin People's Party (KPP), and the Modern People's Party (MPP). The KPP was established in 2010 by leading Yangon-based Kayins – many with a former background in the Armed Forces - and focuses mainly on Yangon and Ayeyawaddy Regions. The MPP has links back to its famous founder U Thankin Soe, who was known as a Marxist and a teacher of general Aung San in the 1930s and 1940s. The party focuses on Ayeyawaddy Region only, contested one seat in the 1990 elections, re-registered in 2009 but didn't win any seats in the 2010 elections.

⁴⁷ The UEC did not allow the Kachin State Progressive Party (KSPP) whose leading members had resigned from the KIO to establish the party to register as a party or as independent candidates.

Appendix 5: Cooperation between political parties (area-specific)

Mon State: Generally cooperation between political parties in Mon State is very limited, and with respect to cooperation outside of parliament almost non-existent. The only engagement with other parties that party members based in Mawlamyeine referred to was attending ceremonial events and visiting the NLD office to sign on the campaign for amending the constitution. The township of Thanbyuzayat is somewhat of an exception as four parties have met on a regular basis to discuss local development issues (which they view as strictly separate from ‘political issues’) and had close cooperation in securing land for establishing a primary school. Several parties in Mon State have been engaged in opposing a planned coal-fired power plant in Ye Township but have done so on an individual basis. Within the Mon State Region parliament, MPs from the different parties work fairly closely together but they seem to do so more in their role as individual MPs than party-to-party engagement based on policies or longer-term plans.

Barriers to closer party engagement in Mon State include animosity between the two Mon parties and instructions from higher levels of the party (such as NLD) to be cautious about official cooperation.

Prominent leaders of the *Sangha* in Mon State have pushed for a merger between the two leading Mon parties, the MDP and AMDP, based on the principle that the Mon people should only be represented by one party. This process was set in motion during 2013 with a series of meetings between the two parties. Eventually the process soured and resulted in some members of AMDP - including its chairman and some elected politicians - joining MNP, which reconstituted itself as MDP; the remainder of AMDP has not joined the MNP. Further discussions for a merger seem to have broken down, relations between the two parties are tense and most leading members have resigned themselves to awaiting the result of the 2015 elections as the people’s verdict on which Mon party should be dominant. As expressed by the MNP vice president: “If the merger process is not complete before the 2015 elections, we will just accept the choice of the people” [between MNP and AMDP]⁴⁸. The barriers to the merger are both long-held personal grievances, disputes over which party have taken the right decision in the near past (to accept or boycott the 2008 constitution and the 2010 elections), who should occupy leadership positions and to some degree ideological. The general public in Mon State and many regular party members are confused as to the current state of the merger process and would prefer one ethnic Mon party.

Rakhine State: With the exception of the merger between ALD and RNDP to form the ANP, engagement between the political parties in Rakhine State also appears limited. The parties meet at special occasions such as the honouring of important Rakhine historical figures (for example, the monk U Ottama who rose to prominence during the anti-colonial struggle or Rakhine laureate U Oo Thar Tun). Occasionally they meet at workshops where the township administration explain the situation with respect to communal violence in Rakhine State, at the opening ceremony of training courses held by a government aligned organizations (such as for example the township Maternal and Child’s Welfare Association) or at training courses held by CSOs ranging from topics such as education or electoral systems to crop and animal husbandry. While individual party members have personal contacts, according to the leading local party members interviewed the engagement does not go further than what is outlined above. Of the three Rohingya parties, NDPD, DHRP and NDPP, the NDPP has some cooperation with the USDP and refers some of the local issues of its constituencies to its MPs. Neither has much contact with the ANP. As expressed by the NDPP chairman: “We feel comfortable being socially associated with all other races such as Mon, Myanmar and Shan, but the Rakhine are different. They are likely to treat us as subordinate.”⁴⁹ The two Rohingya parties do have regular contact with government authorities and the Myanmar Human Rights Commission, which they regularly inform about local rights violations.

CSOs (particularly the *Rakhine Thahaya Association*) and local prominent monks have played a key role in facilitating the merger of ALD and RNDP into one party, which officially took place on 13

⁴⁸ Mon National Party, Mawlamyaing (5 July 2014). Field notes.

⁴⁹ Chairman of National Development and Peace Party (NDPP), Yangon (22 December 2014). Field notes.

January 2015. The merger was made easier by shared political goals ideologies of the two parties. While the merger is official some members of the parties have been reluctant to unify and joint campaign plans were still to be decided on at the time of the interview (August 2014).

Chin State: Cooperation on political issues between the political parties in Chin State is very limited. The local ethnic parties have personal linkages, often through ethnic, religious and cultural associations, but this does not extend to the political or development domains. While the NLD is linked to the ZCD through the UNA strategic partnership at the union level, it has not resulted in any significant engagement between the two parties at the local level. The only engagement between political parties referred to by party members in Chin State was in relation to the campaign against the Chinese-backed mining projects. None of the parties expressed any further plans for multi-party engagement. That said, most of the leading party members, particularly the ethnic ones, know each other on a personal level and/or meet regularly through church-based networks. The USDP stressed that in relation to law making within parliament all MPs have equal opportunities and public interest takes precedence over party and ethnic background, allowing for more cooperation. Other parties complain that the USDP MPs usually win the votes in parliament (13 USDP vs. 11 other.) The barriers for closer cooperation between the parties include lack of experience and of a culture of strategic cooperation or joint action on particular issues; an entrenched ideology of 'us versus them'; ethnic fragmentation; and personal and ideological differences, for example whether or not they accept the 2008 constitution.

The two leading ethnic parties, the CNP and CPP, have held a series of meetings that has resulted in a partial merger of the two parties. The push for this merger seems to have originated from members of the Chin State parliament who were concerned about the political divisions following the 2010 election. They brought the issue to the party leaders, who were also concerned about the risk of the two Chin parties splitting the Chin vote. The two parties have very similar agendas and most members know each other and have even been part of the same parties previously, for example the NLD but long-held personal grievances among the leadership have made a genuine merger difficult. During 2014 the CNP was dissolved and its leading members as well as some members of CPP, registered as the CNDP. However, due to a number of issues - particularly personal grievances - the CPP still exists and retains party offices, especially in the Teddim region. The turmoil associated with the merger discussions also resulted in the formation of a third Chin party known as Chin League for Democracy: "So it is quite discouraging that while two parties were trying to find a way for a merger issue, three parties come out as a result!" explained U No Htan Kap, Chairman of CPP and Minister of Chin Affairs for Sagaing Regional Government.⁵⁰

Kachin State: Generally, the political parties in Kachin State have limited interaction with each other and cooperation in any structured or strategic form, for example sustained political dialogue on local issues or longer-term joint action to solve local issues, is almost non-existent. The lack of interaction and cooperation applies to both parties with a nation-wide reach and those who are more locally and/or ethnically based. The parties are not opposed to dialogue and cooperation per se but a number of factors limit this. The exception to this is the UDPKS and the USDP, particularly in Myitkyina, who have a quite close relationship, sharing some resources and ideology. (The UDPKS is viewed by many as a proxy of USDP and thus not seen as a genuine local party – which is at odds with the UDPKS's own view). Political parties in Bhamo Township seem in general to have had more cooperation than in Myitkyina. The interaction that does take place happens when parties are invited to official ceremonial events by the government (such as for example Kachin State Day) or at the joint training courses organised by external international organisations or local CSOs. At these events the party members meet each other but the interaction does not seem to extend beyond this. Several parties host in-house training on political topics but these are limited party members only, with the exception of the LNPD and TNPD who have held joint training.

Key issues that have brought the political parties together for specific semi-joint events (but not longer term joint action) initiated by the political parties, sometimes in cooperation with CSOs or the government, are: awareness raising events about the ills of drug abuse (organisers include NDF, USDP, NLD and LNPD); fund raising events for assistance to IDPs (initiated by UDPKS); the

⁵⁰ U No Htan Kap, Chairman of CPP and Minister of Chin Affairs for Sagaing Regional Government, Yangon (15 December 2014). Field notes.

peace process (six parties signed a joint statement calling for peace); cultural events (particularly promoting Shan culture and literacy); a joint statement between NDF, NLD and USDP calling for an end to arrest of jade mining workers; and, in the case of Bhamo Township, several parties have cooperated to prevent religious inter-communal violence. The latter is one of the very few places where political parties have been proactive in this respect and undertaken joint activities (see section 3.4.5 for further details). In relation to the allocation of constituency development funds by the Pyithu Hluttaw, MPs (from USDP, UDPKS and NUP) – but not ordinary party members – undertake joint village visits and discussions. There has thus far been no political party cooperation on a number of issues that the parties say are their focus, such as promoting federalism and ethnic rights, nor issues which have been raised by communities such as land confiscation, forced recruitment etc. (See also section 3.2)

Some of the barriers to further cooperation between the parties include a) the parties not having identified a need or a reason to engage in a closer manner; b) no existing structural framework or tradition for closer cooperation; c) mutual suspicion of other party's intentions and/or personal and political disagreements; d) limited existence of policies where they may have shared interests; e) lack of a political culture of strategic cooperation; f) an expressed concern that other parties will take credit for joint party initiatives.

On the issue of possible political party mergers, prominent church leaders with support for the community have called for closer cooperation or even a merger among the five locally based parties: the KDP, KSDP, KNCD, LNDP and SNDP. The church leaders have called for Kachin State unity and expressed a concern that multiple local parties may split the vote for the benefit of non-Kachin State based parties. Three meetings have been held among the parties during 2014; but the KNCD did not attend and several parties dropped out. The parties could not find common ground for a merger and finally decided to postpone further discussions until after the 2015 elections.

Mandalay Region: In Mandalay, there is also very limited engagement between political parties beyond attendance at a few workshops organised by CSOs, or in some cases the parties themselves, or special official occasions, such as a dinner party marking Independence Day. Some party members have personal connections and occasionally attend the same social events. The engagement does not extend to political or development affairs or joint action. The NDF has somewhat closer relationships with some of the smaller political parties in the area through organizing joint talks on contemporary politics and related issues. A few of the Shan parties have met on the issue of promoting Shan culture and literacy. The barriers to closer engagement include the lack of a culture of multi-party engagement, lack of party policy promoting cooperation, and different political or personal convictions that create a distance between the parties.

Ayeyawaddy Region: The interaction between the officials from the different parties mainly takes place on individual basis at cultural, social and religious ceremonies. There is no significant structured cooperation between the political parties in the region on development or political issues. However, in comparison to some other areas interaction between some of the parties on a few specific issues seem more frequent, particularly in Bogale Township. For example, USDP in Bogale Township said that officials from the NLD, NUP and KPP have contacted the party to gain assistance in resolving land confiscation cases. The KPP cooperates with the NDF to resolve cases of child soldiers, with the NDF taking a lead in contacting authorities and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The KPP has also sought assistance from the NDF in a rape case and in instances of land confiscation.

The barriers to cooperation are similar to other areas, including for the larger parties where the hierarchical party structure seems to limit engagement at the local level. This was particularly articulated in relation to the NLD.

Appendix 6: Cooperation between political parties and CSOs (area-specific)

Mon State: Generally, there is little cooperation between CSOs and political parties in Mon State. The political parties tend to participate in workshops organised by CSOs but do not proactively engage with them. At the same time, apart from inviting the parties to workshops the CSOs do not engage with them in any significant or sustained way. The only exceptions to this are some instances where the parties have assisted CSOs in obtaining permits for workshops; two individual cases that a political party has referred to a legal aid clinic; and more importantly in the case of opposition to a coal-fired power plant in Ye Township some of the parties joined forces with local CSOs. Many members of CSOs and parties stressed that they have personal relationships, but not institutional ones.

Although some respondents from CSOs admit that political parties are addressing the issues brought by people, they criticize their poor engagement with CSOs. CSO activists argued that the parties are “busy with their own works.”⁵¹ “They are only interested in gaining power.”⁵² The ideological gap between old and young generations in parties may be one of the determinants of such poor engagement. An insightful local representative from the media explained that contrary to the views of younger generation the parties’ elders do not accept the idea of the importance of CSOs⁵³. He commented that it reflects how differently each group has lived its political life: when the elders were struggling to survive past threats to the party and themselves, there was no growth of CSOs. The elders have faith in the capacity of political parties to bring about national interests and believe that CSOs will be getting less and less important if the party gains more strength.

Rakhine State: The engagement between political parties and CSOs seems to be a bit closer in Rakhine State than in most other areas, particularly in the case of the ANP. The ANP and CSOs have jointly organised or attended a number of meetings and workshops on natural resource protection in the state, including joint inputs into the drafting of a local fisheries law. Moreover the party has engaged with CSOs requesting feedback on a fair redistribution of wealth derived from the extraction of the natural resources from Kyaukpyu’s gas project, as well as public protests against the current lack of redistribution. CSOs also played a facilitation role in the political party merger that resulted in ANP. Political party members from various parties attend various workshops organised by CSOs, but the CSOs complain that while offered seats often the parties don’t send participants. The most important event where the parties, CSOs and other Rakhine stakeholders participated jointly was the Kyaukpyu Conference in late April 2014, which brought several hundred people together to discuss Rakhine affairs. Apart from this the main engagement between parties and CSOs is attendance at state level ceremonial events.

Chin State: While political parties in Chin State recognize that CSOs play an important role, most of the parties do not have any strong links to them. However, several parties – particularly the local ethnic ones – are seeking closer cooperation with CSOs in the areas such as voter education, research, party training and opposing a China-backed mining project. Links between the local parties and religious networks are relatively strong, with a high level of trust as several leading party members originate from the church. Many CSOs claim that the parties don’t have any good strategies to achieve their political goals, such as networking with CSOs and media. Some CSOs have used personal networks to approach ethnic parties, especially those who are in state parliament, to lobby for laws or licenses (particularly for the CSOs legal registration process) but with disappointing results.

Kachin State: CSOs are generally quite active in Kachin and understand that their roles are critical to development issues in the state. However, they are focusing mainly on implementing their own activities and rarely engage with the political parties. The parties generally do not have good links with the CSOs, and while they recognize they play a key role for development affairs they do not seem to view their role as important in relation to political affairs. The parties comment that the CSOs lack a large backing and they tend to view themselves as better organised, more

⁵¹ A group of people from CSOs, Thanbyuzayat (8 July 2014) Field notes.

⁵² Paung-se Arman, Mawlamyine (2 July 2014) Field notes.

⁵³ Salween Time, Mawlamyine (3 July 2014) Field notes.

established and with older and more experienced leaders than CSOs. As one party leader said: “We believe that political parties have much higher role than CSOs. That’s why we’ve formed the party.”⁵⁴

At the same time, CSOs view parties as not working for the interests of the people but just for the party and are worried that they may be ‘used’ by party interests if they cooperate more closely. They also tend to have younger and more activist members than the parties. However, many parties are well connected with local social associations working on funeral services and blood donations - and ethnic parties are also well connected with culture-based CSOs on promoting ethnic literature, languages and cultural events. In addition, some cooperation has taken place between parties and CSOs on assisting IDPs. The parties have attended political training organized by mainly international CSOs on party building and management. Several parties expressed plans for seeking closer cooperation with CSOs, such as identifying CSOs can assist with information sharing on development issues and how the parties can assist CSOs on advocacy issues.

Local media, such as journals focusing on Kachin State affairs, are also expanding but the parties don’t understand how to use the media well and don’t seem to have good public relations strategies.

Mandalay Region: The main engagement between political parties and CSOs is largely limited to party members attending workshops organized by local and international CSOs on issues such as electoral process and elections, party strengthening, youth affairs, women empowerment, rural livelihoods, human rights and legal procedures. Cooperation beyond this or in any strategic or sustained manner is very limited – with the exception of the NLD who have close relations with political CSOs such as the ‘88 generation and with social activists. The NLD carries out activities with the local CSOs both on a party and an individual basis on, for example, environmental issues, release of an imprisoned activist, peace-restoring activities following communal violence in Mandalay, and commemoration of historic pro-democracy and peace events. The parties generally seem uninterested in identifying issues where stronger engagement with CSOs may be advantageous. However, the parties appear to have friendly relations with media in the area.

Ayeyawaddy Region: In Ayeyawaddy Region, relations between political parties and CSOs appear relatively stronger than in most other local areas – partly due to CSOs being more active there. Most of the political parties have engagement with local social welfare organizations on issues such as assistance for flood victims, responding to emergency health problems, and donating blood and providing oxygen for the hospital. Some political parties work together with the politically active organizations in addressing the issues of rape and child soldiers. Most of the engagement between the political parties and CSOs, however, takes place at the workshops and training courses organized by local CSOs and international NGOs. MPs from the USDP and NLD bring issues to the regional parliament when the CSOs ask them for assistance, such as for land confiscation cases. The NLD cooperates with CSOs locally in carrying out the nationwide activities such as amendment to the 436 section of the constitution and the 100th Anniversary of Bogyoke Aung San.

⁵⁴ KSDP. Myitkyina (16 Sep 2014). Field notes.

Appendix 7: Cooperation between political parties and local government authorities (area-specific)

Mon State: As in other states/regions, the main engagement between parties and local government authorities take place when the parties take issues to the government on behalf of constituencies (see section '3.2.'). In addition to this, some parties such as the NLD view themselves as watchdogs that monitor whether government officials take appropriate actions and abide by laws and regulations. In general the relationship is distant and sometimes tense. Some political parties criticize government staff for staying too far away from the parties due to "government brainwashing them into believing that public servants should not get involved in politics."⁵⁵ The relationships with the government officials do, however, vary from party to party. USDP (unsurprisingly given it is the ruling party) has better and closer relations. The party's main engagement with government authorities takes place through the State Parliament, dominated by USDP MPs. Whereas the NLD's main engagement is submitting complaints letters on behalf of the people who have grievances against authorities and who believe their rights have been violated. The party says that the government officials see them as troublemakers or as always finding something wrong with public offices. According to the NLD, in some cases the government departments have not invited the NLD's township and state representatives to meetings. The ethnic parties in Mon State tend to have more distant relations with the government authorities (although relatively closer in the case of AMDP, which has a significant presence in the State parliament). One area of the more cooperative engagements is the case of constituency development funds, where MPs from different parties cooperate in scrutinizing local development projects together with township committees comprised of township government officials and elected local people. All the members of the committees are entitled to make decisions on the allocation of the parliamentary development funds for local projects.

Rakhine State: As in other states/regions the main engagement between the parties and local authorities takes place when political parties refer individual cases or village-level development issues to the authorities on behalf of citizens. Beyond this important engagement there is no significant contact between the parties and government authorities. Political party representatives attend meetings, particularly for ceremonial events and significant state/union days, when invited by the government but do otherwise not engage. It is rare that meetings take place on public policy or development issues of local concern. Government officials express awareness of the government's regulation that public servants must restrain themselves from party politics, which is used as a reason for them not to proactively engage with the political parties (although some have existing linkages through prior party affiliation). In the case of the USDP the State Secretary said that they "do not take advantage of their position" as ruling party to influence the government offices.⁵⁶

Chin State: There is little engagement between the political parties and the government authorities. Partly this is due to many of the parties viewing the USDP dominated government as very centralized and believing that their suggestions will therefore not be taken into account (which includes the issue of constituency development funds). Some refrain from engaging, perceiving it as being influenced too much by cronyism and nepotism. However, the ethnic party members have closer relations with the few state ministers who are from the ethnic parties.

Kachin State: As in other areas, in Kachin State the main engagement between the parties and the government authorities is when the parties bring up issues on behalf of constituencies. Otherwise, the parties' engagement is limited to cooperation with the township authorities on constituency development funds (MPs mainly) and some engagement on drug abuse issues and forced recruitment. In addition, the parties have participated in meetings on the peace process with Union Minister Aung Min. One party mentioned that sometimes some ministries invite them to policy discussions on education, municipal affairs and taxation issues. The USDP engages mainly with local authorities by bringing the issue to the Chief Minister, who is also the head of the party in

⁵⁵ All Mon Regions Development Party, Thanbyuzayat (7 July 2014) Field notes.

⁵⁶ USDP. Sittwe (28 July 2014). Field notes.

Kachin State. The NUP referred to their engagement with the authorities as normally going through their MPs. While the relationship of all parties is overall somewhat distant it is not confrontational.

Mandalay Region: The cooperation between the political parties and government authorities in the region is poor. The engagement only takes the form of causes of public grievance presented by most of the political parties to the relevant public offices and attendance of the political parties at government organized occasions and meetings. Most of the political parties submit complaint cases on behalf of the public to the relevant government offices, and in some cases they present them to government authorities in person. Occasionally, the government invites the political parties to meetings where it presents its agendas and plans, but according to the political parties it does not seek input from the attendees. The management of constituency development funds is heavily dominated by the USDP, which cooperate with township level committees on this - so unlike in many other areas this is not a forum for engagement between MPs from different parties and local authorities.

Ayeyawaddy Region: Most of the political parties deal first with the relevant local government offices to solve the problems facing local communities before presenting the cases to the party's higher authorities and Union level government officials. The issues that the political parties refer to the local government authorities are land confiscation, disputes between farming and fishing communities, child soldiers, emergency assistance for flood victims, social infrastructure projects, and assistance for farmers and fishermen. Other forms of engagement between the political parties and government authorities take place when the government offices invite them to workshops that focus on the discussion on peace and land use policies. In terms of constituency development funds, three of the four township level committees (the Township Management Committee, Township Development Support Committee and Township Municipal Committee) discuss with the relevant MPs to prioritize the infrastructure projects and allocate the development funds. The officials of political parties attend the events on special occasions - such as Independence Day, Union Day, cultural festivals and sports competitions - when invited by the government authorities.

Appendix 8: Risks of ethnic or religious-motivated election violence (area-specific)

Mon State, Kachin State and Chin State:

In Kachin and Chin States respondents noted that the population of Muslims is very low and that they therefore did not see there is any risk of communal violence in the run up to elections. In Mon State representatives from both political parties and CSOs stressed that Buddhist and Muslim communities have lived peacefully together for centuries as evidence that the risk of religiously associated violence is low. Village informants shared this perception: “I am 45 years old now. I have never experienced conflict based on religion here.”⁵⁷ If outsiders instigated violence, party representatives believed that in cooperation with elders and religious leaders they would be able to control the situation.

These perceptions tend to ignore the fact that tensions have been heightened in Kachin State during the last two years, with rumours about potential clashes between the two groups in the capital of Myitkyina. This has resulted in concern among the Muslim population, and in one instance, local Muslim youth arming themselves at a mosque fearing an attack. Likewise, interviews with representatives of the Muslim community in Mawlamyeine revealed a huge discrepancy between their perception of the situation and that of Buddhist co-citizens. They referred to that community relations have been strained and communities tend to no longer attend each others religious and cultural ceremonies, that Muslims are experiencing discrimination, and that Buddhists have displayed more distance or fear in their relations with Muslims over the last two years. They expressed appreciation of what they viewed as Aung San Suu Kyi’s unbiased stance on the previous clashes across the country between Buddhists and Muslims⁵⁸.

The only example from in Chin, Kachin and Mon States of multi-party action to mitigate potential violence is from Bhamo, Kachin State where several parties gathered together at the height of communal violence in other parts of the country during 2013-14, discussed what action they could take; visited villages, particularly those with Muslim communities, to discuss the problem; warned against the risks and assisted with security issues, such as setting up groups of watchmen.

Ayeyawaddy Region:

In Ayeyawaddy Region, some of political parties and CSOs are concerned that religious based violence may break out in the run up to the 2015 elections. They refer to that the “fuel is ready to be thrown at the fire”⁵⁹ and “It is difficult to predict how and when conflict will take place if it originates outside the area and spreads to it.”⁶⁰ The CSOs in particular refer to the role of the *Ma Ba Tha*, which has been increasingly active in the area during 2013-2014, chiefly in Patheingyi. The activities of the *Ma Ba Tha* in Patheingyi have included holding prayer sessions in support of the interfaith marriage bill, advocating that the future President of Myanmar should be Buddhist, accusing NLD’s senior member Htin Lin Oo of blasphemy against Buddhism, organizing a protest march against the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation opening an office in Myanmar, supporting lawsuits where Muslims are accused of molesting Buddhist women and posting rumours on Facebook, which some local actors view as attempts to instigate violence.

While the *Ma Ba Tha* has been less active in Bogale Township, one violent clash between local Buddhist and Muslim youth took place during 2014, during which stones were thrown at the local mosque, rumours circulated of attacks and local Muslims hid inside. It was about to escalate into a larger incident but was contained by a quick deployment of a large police presence. In Patheingyi Township local respondents referred to perceived links between the USDP and the *Ma Ba Tha*. For example leading local USDP party representatives have attended *Ma Ba Tha* public events wearing party uniforms - and the local USDP party offices are seen to support local Buddhist *Zi Wi*

⁵⁷ Village Administration Office, Nyung Pin Sate village, Kyaikmaraw (6 July 2014). Field notes.

⁵⁸ A group of Muslim people, Mawlamyeine (6 July 2014). Field notes.

⁵⁹ NLD. Bogale (3 Dec 2014). Field notes.

⁶⁰ USDP. Patheingyi (19 Nov 2014). Field notes.

Ta organizations, which are linked to the *Ma Ba Tha*. The *Zi Wi Ta* work to save the lives of animals by inspecting slaughter houses, mainly run by Muslims, to ensure that they do not kill more animals than their quota allows. Many of the CSOs in Ayeyawaddy are opposed to the activities of the *Ma Ba Tha* and view them as a force that can be “easily used to disturb or postpone the upcoming elections if the election result seems likely not to meet its intended outcome.”⁶¹

In response to the tensions, some religious leaders have set up a multi-ethnic committee comprising Buddhist, Muslims and Hindus to ensure peace and cooperation with government authorities. They have discussed a plan for how to respond in the case of communal riots. In addition, Muslim leaders held a ceremony offering alms to the Buddhist monks at the monastery. It is unclear if the political parties played any role in establishing this committee but some of them refer to the Buddhist monks as capable of mediating conflicts among the different ethnic groups – and therefore believe that tensions are unlikely to develop into violence.

Mandalay Region:

With the exception of the small Wunthanu Democratic Party (WDP), which will emphasize the importance of Buddhism, none of the parties present in the Mandalay Region plan to campaign on religious issues. Most of the parties specifically ordered their members not to participate in the communal violence that took place in Mandalay in July 2014. The parties generally view the risks of violence in relation to the election as relatively low, saying that the government will ensure stability and that stakeholders “have already learned from the previous experiences to some extent.”⁶² However, this view is not entirely shared by the NLD and CSOs, which stress that there is a real risk while also criticizing the government response during the previous riots. Their criticism centres on the police not taking action early enough and in a comprehensive manner. They are also of the opinion that the communal violence in Mandalay in 2014 was instigated to divert attention from NLD’s campaign to change the constitution. CSOs and individual NLD members have been actively participating in peace-restoring activities carried out by CSOs in the wake of the violence and aimed at mediating between different groups and mitigating further outbreaks.

Rakhine State:

Surprisingly, also in Rakhine State the political parties (with the exception of the Rohingya parties interviewed) generally view the risk of violence during the upcoming elections as low: *“There will not be communal violence in Mrauk-U. If there are instigators, we will be capable of restoring peace collectively.”*⁶³ However, they do stress that a pilot for citizen verification by the Ministry of Immigration (possibly leading to temporary citizenship holders gaining citizenship and thus the right to vote) and debate over if citizens holding temporary citizenship cards (‘white cards’) are able to vote⁶⁴ are issues that are causing tensions and may lead to conflict. In addition, the perception that international agencies favour Muslims for assistance was also raised by political party representatives as a contentious issue. “They often go to “Kalar” [colloquial and derogatory term for people of South Asian descent] refugee camps and support them rather than the Rakhine people having nothing to eat in Kyaukpyu and Ramree.”⁶⁵

The political parties appear to significantly underestimate the risk of election-related violence, given the on-going high tensions in the state and the numerous outbreaks of violence in Rakhine during 2012-14, which resulted in 140,000 Rohingya Muslims living in IDP camps.

⁶¹ National Democracy Network. Patheingyi (18 Nov 2014). Field notes.

⁶² NUP. Mandalay (17 Oct 2014). Field notes.

⁶³ NLD. Mrauk-U (31 July 2014). Field notes.

⁶⁴ Interviews in Rakhine State were carried out prior to the President’s decision in early 2015 to withdraw the white cards and thus indirectly deny temporary citizenship holders the right to vote.

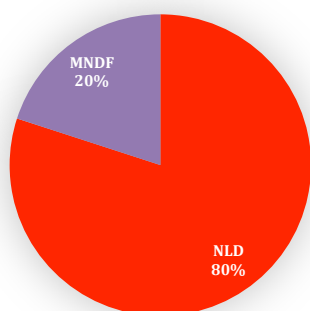
⁶⁵ ANP. Yangon (21 July 2014). Field notes.

Appendix 9: Detailed 1990, 2010 and 2012 election and by-election results (area-specific)

The below outlines the number of seats and the parties who contested the 1990 and 2010 elections and the 2012 by-elections along with the election results for the six locations covered by this report.

Table 1: Mon State Election Results		
1990⁶⁶	Seats	20
	Parties	3: NLD, MNDF (later MDP), and NUP
	Results	16 NLD, 4 MNDF
2010⁶⁷	Seats	45
	Parties	6: USDP, NUP, AMDP, KPP, Democratic Party (DP), Phalon-Sawaw Democratic Party (PSDP)
	Results	28 USDP, 13 AMDP, 4 NUP
2012⁶⁸	Seats	1
	Parties	NLD, USDP, AMDP and NUP
	Results	1 NLD

Mon Electoral Results 1990



Mon Electoral Results 2010

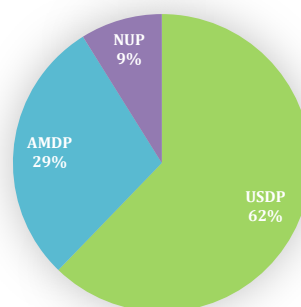


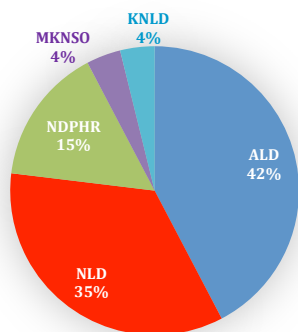
Table 2: Rakhine State Election Results		
1990⁶⁶	Seats	26
	Parties	6: ALD, NLD, NUP, Kamans National League for Democracy (KNLD), Mro or Khami National Solidarity Organization (MKNSO), National Democracy Party for Human Rights (NDPHR)
	Results	11 ALD, 9 NLD, 4 NDPHR, 1 MKNSO, 1 KNLD
2010⁶⁷	Seats	64
	Parties	9: USDP, NUP, RNDP, Rakhine State National Force (RSNF), DP, Kaman National Progressive Party (KNPP), Mro/Khami National Development Organization (MKND), National Democratic Party for Development (NDPD) and National Development and Peace Party (NDPP)
	Results	34 RNDP, 27 USDP, 2 NPDP, 1 NUP
2012⁶⁸	Seats	0
	Parties	0
	Results	0

⁶⁶ Han, Kyaw. (27 May 2006). "Record of the 1990 multiparty elections." NCGUB

⁶⁷ Burma Fund UN Office. (31 January 2011). "Burma's 2010 Elections: comprehensive report." New York.

⁶⁸ Myanmar Alin (2 April 2014) "Elections Results Announcement by Union Elections Commission".

Rakhine Electoral Results 1990



Rakhine Electoral Results 2010

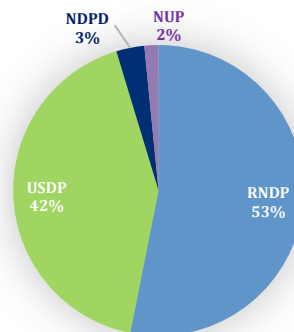
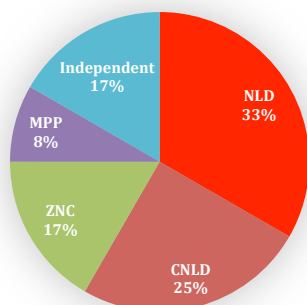


Table 3: Chin State Election Results

1990⁶⁶	Seats	13
	Parties	4: Chin National League for Democracy (CNLD), NLD, NUP, Zomi National Congress (ZNC), Mara People's Party (MPP)
	Results	4 NLD, 3 CNLD, 2 ZNC, 1 MPP, 2 independent candidates
2010⁶⁷	Seats	39
	Parties	5: USDP, Chin People's Party (CPP), Chin National Party (CNP), Ethnic National Development Party (ENDP), NUP
	Results	18 USDP, 11 CPP, 9 CNP, 1 ENDP
2012⁶⁸	Seats	0
	Parties	0
	Results	0

Chin Electoral Results 1990



Chin Electoral Results 2010

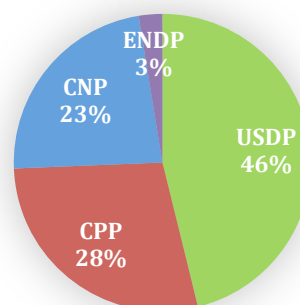
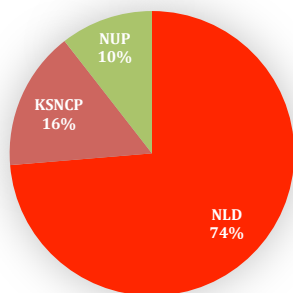


Table 4: Kachin State Election Results

1990⁶⁶	Seats	20
	Parties	NLD, Kachin National Democracy Congress Party (KSNCP), NUP, Kachin State National Democratic Party (KSNDP), Union of Kachin Youth led by Kachin University Students (UKYKUS), Kachin National Congress (KNC)a.o.
	Results	14 NLD, 3 KSNCP, 2 NUP ⁶⁹
2010⁶⁷	Seats	67
	Parties	USDP, Unity and Democracy Party of Kachin State (UDPKS), NUP, Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP)
	Results	40 USDP, 16 NUP, 4 UDPKS, 6 SNDP, 1 independent
2012⁶⁸	Seats	Cancelled for security reasons
	Parties	-
	Results	-

⁶⁹ One remaining seat is unaccounted for in the reference material.

Kachin Electoral Results 1990



Kachin Election Results 2010

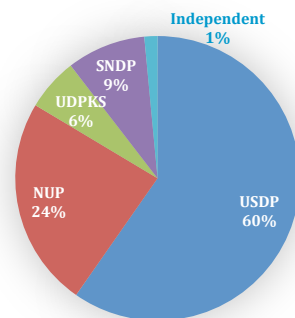
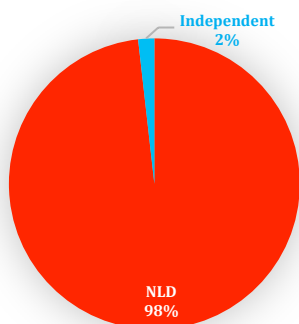


Table 5: Mandalay Region Election Results		
1990⁶⁶	Seats	56
	Parties	NLD, NUP a.o.
	Results	55 NLD, 1 independent candidate
2010⁶⁷	Seats	106
	Parties	8: USDP, NUP, 88 Generation Student Youths (Myanmar) (88GSY), Democratic Party (Myanmar) (DPM), Wuthanu NLD (WNLD), Union of Myanmar Federation of National Politics (UMFNP), (NDF), (SNDP)
	Results	104 USDP, 1 SNDP, 1 DPM
2012⁶⁸	Seats	6
	Parties	3: NLD, USDP, NUP
	Results	6 NLD

Mandalay Electoral Results 1990



Mandalay Electoral Results 2010

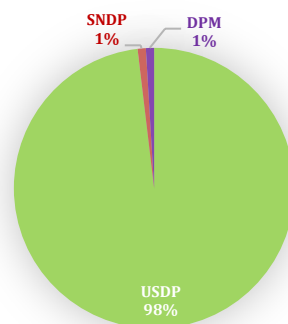
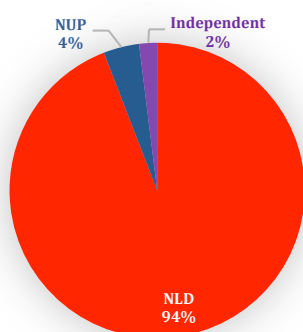


Table 6: Ayeyawaddy Region Election Results		
1990⁶⁶	Seats	51
	Parties	NLD, NUP a.o.
	Results	48 NLD, 2 NUP, 1 independent
2010⁶⁷	Seats	92
	Parties	USDP, NDF, KPP, NUP a.o.
	Results	85 USDP, 7 NUP
2012⁶⁸	Seats	6
	Parties	3: NLD, USDP, NUP
	Results	6 NLD

Ayeyawaddy Electoral Results 1990



Ayeyawaddy Electoral Results 2010

