



Civil Wars with Ethnic Minorities

There are 135 ethnic groups in Burma, and 68% of people are Bamar. In the 1960s, Burma's ruling elite began a process of "Burmanization" in which minority cultures were forcefully assimilated into the majority Bamar culture. Minority groups remain subject to a lack of government representation and Burma has experienced recurrent ethnic conflicts. Burma's army, the **Tatmadaw**, has been accused of war crimes and acts of ethnic cleansing, specifically against ethnic minority groups from the northeast and western regions.

Ongoing Democratic Reforms

Burma's transition from a military dictatorship to a mixed civilian-military government has been rife with corruption. During the 2015 election, a new police force was established to prevent civil disorder, but ultimately resulted in increased military control. Additionally, concerns of electoral corruption, vote-buying, and threats to political opponents continue. A constitutional amendment also bolsters the Tatmadaw's influence by allocating 25% of parliamentary seats to the junta, regardless of who wins the majority vote. Thus, the Tatmadaw holds veto power over constitutional change, safeguarding their grip on power. Many countries, including the U.S., have recently normalized ties with Burma, which has also improved diplomatic ties with China and Australia.

Ethnic Cleansing of the Rohingya

The Rohingya are a predominantly Muslim ethnic group living in Burma's western Rakhine State. They are effectively stateless, being denied citizenship and civil rights in both Burma and Bangladesh. The United Nations describes them as one of the world's most persecuted groups. Buddhist fundamentalist and Islamophobic sentiments have intensified in Burmese politics in the past few years, particularly in Mon and Rakhine states, exacerbating tensions. Nobel laureate and current Chair of the National League for Democracy, Aung San Suu Kyi, has been criticized for her silence on the Rohingya issue. In 2015, Fortify Rights and Yale Law School released a report that found strong evidence that genocide is being committed against the Rohingya, and recommended that the UN Human Rights Council establish an inquiry into the human rights situation in Rakhine state.

Timeline

- 1948:** Burma gains independence, establishes constitutional democracy
- 1962:** Democratic government overthrown; military dictatorship established
- 1988:** Student-led pro-democracy marches violently suppressed and thousands killed
- 1990:** National League for Democracy (NLD) wins elections, results ignored by ruling junta
- 2007:** Peaceful anti-government protests initiated by Buddhist monks and violently suppressed
- 2008:** Constitutional referendum held and overwhelmingly passes; mixed civilian-military government established
- 2010:** Elections held, Thein Sein becomes President
- 2012:** Parliamentary election; NLD participates, winning 43 of 45 available seats
- 2015:** First contested general election in 25 years is held; NLD wins majority



*"Burma" was the name given to the country by the British; it was renamed "Myanmar" in 1989 by the military junta. Choosing to use the name "Burma" is a political statement that many Burmese diaspora and human rights organizations use to discredit the government. STAND tends to use "Burma" when referring to the country and "Myanmar" when referring to the government. Some wonder if the use of "Burma" will change now that there is a popularly elected government in place.