

Myanmar Unresolved Political Development: A Threat to ASEAN Unity and Democracy

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Abstract. This research aims to explain current Myanmar political instability due to the recent military coup d'état on February 1, 2021, led by General Senior Min Aung Hlaing follow with Aung San Suu Kyi and other pro-democracy elite leaders arrests. Domestically, up to present time, after the military coup, most Burmese supporters of Myanmar's democratization such medical doctors, teachers, engineers, traders, civilian political leaders, and university students balked and staged massive demonstrations against the military coup and demanded the return of civilian government authority by the military junta government. Indonesia and other ASEAN countries will never allow the Myanmar military junta to rule until elections are held to bring the country back to the democratic path, one of which is by having a representative government. This research revealed that this unexpected Myanmar phenomenal political situation has impact on Southeast Asia regional security and ASEAN Unity.

Keywords: Myanmar, democracy, political instability, regional security, ASEAN, unity

Introduction

The world is in the midst of the same pandemic wave: COVID-19. However, each country in the Southeast Asian region is navigating the world's geopolitical oceans with different ships and leadership, including Myanmar. Without collaborative cooperation and solidarity, in fact, the ASEAN unity agenda may never truly survive the current global pandemic disaster. Up to mid-May 2021, Myanmar's military junta is currently unwilling to accept the visit of the ASEAN special envoy (Kompas, 2021, p. 4). The leaders of the Myanmar military regime have prioritized maintaining stability and domestic security. Protests and demonstrations against the military junta leadership continue on the main streets, both in Yangon and various other small cities. Meanwhile, conditions in the country of Myanmar are also increasingly erratic and threatened with civil war.

Southeast Asian countries must need to respond effectively and appropriately to various changes in foreign policy taken by major powers in the Asia Pacific. ASEAN's main priority is to Southeast Asia peace and security maintenance. ASEAN unity, centrality and neutrality have become important concerns for regional policy-makers, especially in addressing the various geopolitical competitions of major countries in the region and how to adapt to the regional security context. Amid the escalation of the US and China rivalries, ASEAN countries together with Indonesia and the Asia Pacific major powers are expected to give contribution positively to maintaining peace and security stability in Southeast Asia.

Henceforth, to understanding the contextualization of the broader dynamics of security stability in Southeast Asia through the perspective of shifting the global balance of major powers in Asia Pacific. During the last ten years, these Asia Pacific major powers, such as the US, China, Russia, and India have tended intentionally to focus on bilateral approaches and establish and strengthen cooperation with various countries in Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific.

Further, this is related to how the efforts of Southeast Asian countries that are members of the ASEAN regional organization to create and maintain a new regional security order addressing the domestic political situation of Myanmar following the military coup 1 February 2021.



Figure 1: Myanmar in ASEAN

Source: Association of Southeast Asian Nations (2019)

The political changes that have occurred in Myanmar so far have produced results that have been appreciated positively by the international community. Although, the 2010 Election which was won by the Union Solidarity and Development Party received protests from the opposition party, the National League for Democracy, but under Thein Sein's government, who was appointed President after the 2010 election victory, major changes continued to occur. From the release of political prisoners, including the leader of the opposition, Aung San Suu Kyi, to the opening of Myanmar to the international community, one of which was marked by the visit of the US State Secretary, Hillary Clinton, in December 2011. The latest in such a political transition was the NLD's major victory in the by-election held in March 2012 as major progress would lead Myanmar to a long-hoped-for era of freedom. This paper discusses the changes that have occurred in Myanmar, their impact on the political map in the Southeast Asian region, especially with regard to ASEAN as an existing regional organization which also participates actively in the process of pursuing this liberal democracy agenda.

In 2011, however, Myanmar was in the midst of democratic reforms that completely changed the foreign policy landscape for the previously-isolated nation. Giving Myanmar's 2014 chairmanship was clearly intended as both a reward for its progress and an impetus for continued reforms (Tiezzi, 2014).

Myanmar's 2010 elections unfortunately did not necessarily provide room for the democratic transformation that took place in the country. ASEAN and the United Nations are two external parties who view positively on the elections held in Myanmar, however, in contrast to the opposition, a number of Western countries, the EU, and various groups supporting human rights and democracy that are skeptical of this (KOMPAS, 2020, p. 4). Moreover, prior to the arrival of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to visit Myanmar and Indonesia in January 2021, China and Myanmar had signed a memorandum of understanding on a railroad feasibility study between Mandalay and the port city of Kyaukphyu on the edge of the Indian Ocean. China initiated the development of various infrastructure projects in Myanmar along with the implementation of China's Belt and Road Initiative in Southeast Asia.

While, previously in 2014, Myanmar's economy achieved high growth, and foreign direct investment increased, and revealed in its role as ASEAN chair and host for Barack Obama's visit (Than, 2015, p. 184). This phenomenon is natural, because Myanmar has been under military rule since 1962 and experienced elections that were canceled in 1990 when the military regime rejected the election results won by the NLD (Krisman, 2012). Even in the 2010 election, upheaval continued because the opposition and political observers stated that cheating was still happening, where in the election, the USDP won the most seats of 883 out of 1,154 seats in Parliament (The Irrawaddy, 2010, November 18).

In addition, related to the unstable political and security stability in Myanmar related to the military coup 1 February 2021, ASEAN relations with its various partner countries still

need to be activated continuously, especially in strengthening economic cooperation based on health protocols and optimizing various existing economic potentials. Furthermore, it is expected that there will be a boosting in trade and investment inflows between the both sides.

The global political competition and economic influence dominance ambitions involve the US and China in Southeast Asia is also a major concern of various ASEAN leaders. Competition from major powers in Southeast Asia is the current reality that ASEAN countries are challenging. The Southeast Asian countries that are affiliated with ASEAN want the progress and common prosperity created between ASEAN and various external partners through a regional cooperation mechanism initiated and led by ASEAN. The goal is for Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific to be the scope of collaborative synergic cooperation between ASEAN and external partner countries in various fields, including: politics, economy, connectivity and maritime security, transnational crime eradication, and the 2030 sustainable development agenda (Pakpahan, 2020, p. 6).

Furthermore, ASEAN as an existing regional organization for more than five decades is also able to invite cooperation from its external partner countries in handling, such as: China, India, Russia and the US in handling the COVID-19 pandemic in Southeast Asia. This can be done by inviting cooperation that contributes to the formation of The ASEAN COVID-19 Response Fund. There is also a new ASEAN initiation which was discussed during a meeting of senior health officials in the ASEAN region from 22 to 23 July 2020, related to the establishment of The ASEAN Center for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases, which in the future can be supported by external ASEAN partners. Since the turn of the millennium, the ASEAN region has been affected by epidemics and public health emergencies such as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome in 2003, the Avian Influenza AH5N1 and New Influenza AH1N1 pandemic in the 2000s, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome in 2012, Zika Virus Disease in 2015-2016, and most recently, the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (ASEAN, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented disruption to economies, livelihoods, and strain to health systems.

Admitted, a global recession and a weakening Southeast Asian economy perceived as major regional threats has implications for ASEAN (except Vietnam), major powers (except China), and the world. ASEAN together with its external partner countries are currently facing this collective challenge and are working together to find solutions aimed at supporting the economic recovery process of ASEAN and the world.

While, in Southeast Asia, Indonesia as ASEAN largest country with its 272 million populations also faces domestic economic problems related to still uncontrolled global pandemic nationally. Indonesia's first annual economic contraction since the 1998 Asian financial crisis may have a long-term impact on the country, pushing back the government's efforts to escape from the middle-income trap by 2045 (Rahman, 2021a). Consequently, Indonesia's GDP per capita, a universal measure of a country's prosperity, fell by around 3.7 percent to IDR 56.9 million (US\$3,911) in 2020 from IDR 59.1 million in 2019, according to BPS (Rahman, 2021b). Indonesia and other ASEAN countries will never allow the Myanmar military junta to rule until elections are held to bring the country back to the democratic path, one of which is by having a representative government (CNN Indonesia, 2021).

Myanmar Political Instability

The skepticism built by those who do not believe in the 2010 elections is based on the reasons behind the holding of these elections, which are not entirely based on efforts to uphold democracy in Myanmar. So far, Myanmar is a country with an authoritarian military regime that should not worry about democratic freedom in its society, which is suppressed through various forms of repression and repression at home. The 2010 election itself was triggered by the desire of the military regime to curb minority actions which have always been a problem,

which has been added to the 17 ceasefires between the military regime and military groups from ethnic minorities (Steinberg, 2010, p. 35).

Early civilizations in Myanmar included the Tibeto-Burmese speaking population in Northern Burma and the Mon Empire in Southern Burma (O'Reilly, 2007, p. 6). In the 9th century, the Bamar people entered a valley above the Irrawaddy River, followed by the establishment of the Pagan Empire in the 1050s. Since then, Burmese languages, including Theravada culture and Buddhism, have slowly become dominant in the country. Myanmar, which is predominantly Buddhist, has seven ethnic minorities, namely Shan, Karen, Kayah, Chin, Kachin, Mon, and Rakhine, scattered all over Myanmar, especially in the border areas. This minority population also lives under the repression of the military regime and their internal differences often cause friction between themselves. So it is not surprising that the military regime claims it is necessary to accommodate the interests of these minority groups.

Regardless of the upheaval and reasons for holding the 2010 elections, the release of Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest on November 13, 2010, has brought a new spirit for the growth of democracy in Myanmar. Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest since 1989, is an important figure in the growth of democracy in Myanmar, who is also the daughter of General Aung San, a prominent Myanmar freedom fighter from colonial Britain. The release of Suu Kyi, who won the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, was also highly appreciated by the international community, through the visit of Hillary Clinton, to Myanmar in December 2010, which specifically held meetings and talks with Aung San Suu Kyi. Main point's discussion between the two was regarding the political situation in Myanmar where Clinton expressed his support for Suu Kyi to return to Myanmar national politics by participating in the Parliamentary elections.

Hillary Clinton's visit, apart from being filled with a meeting with Suu Kyi, included an agenda for the meeting with Myanmar President Thein Sein, and members of the Myanmar Parliament, which became a separate historical note, because of the last visit of the US Foreign Minister to Myanmar in 1955 by John Foster Dulles. Most political observers understand Clinton's visit to Myanmar as an effort to strengthen ties involving Myanmar and the US because so far Myanmar is known to have close and strategic relations with China. Since increasing China's position as an economic and military power in international politics, making the United States under President Obama, focus on hegemony in the Asia Pacific region, so that the region is not fully controlled by Beijing. The 2010 elections in Myanmar became a momentum for the United States to represent itself through providing sustainable support for the democratic transition in Myanmar by embracing the Myanmar military junta which has been known to be close to China.

For Myanmar, Hilarry Clinton's visit has a big meaning for the process of opening Myanmar to international politics, because so far Myanmar has always closed itself off to foreign visits. A few years ago the process of opening Myanmar to international politics was impossible due to the Nargis cyclone disaster in 2008 killed 138,000 people and destroyed the Irrawady Delta, which is the largest rice field in Myanmar, still made the military regime not accept foreign humanitarian aid.

Thus, given the magnitude of the disaster and what Myanmar did in the 2012 elections by allowing foreign observers to enter and directly participate in the electoral process in the country, this is a very significant sign for the country's democratic transition. This opportunity is not wasted by countries that have been worried about the political conditions in Myanmar by taking part, including Indonesia, through the Indonesian Ambassador for Myanmar, Sebastianus Sumarsono, to observe first-hand the 2012 elections to elect members of Parliament in that country (Kompas, 2012).

Before President Obama's historic visit to Burma, the U.S. government announced that Washington DC is easing trade restrictions on the government in Rangoon, allowing for Burmese goods to enter the USA for the first time in almost a decade (Madhani, 2012). While,

they agreed to suspend nearly all of its punitive sanctions against Myanmar even as a political dispute over the wording of a clause in the country's Constitution kept Suu Kyi, the leader of the opposition, from attending her first day in Parliament (Fuller & Geitner, 2012).

An important step in opening Myanmar to international politics was carried out in early 2012 through the release of a total of 651 political prisoners consisting of students, minority leaders, democracy fighters and other prisoners, who had been imprisoned since 2004 (Nelson, 2012). However, the release of a number of political prisoners treated the disappointment of political activists who were dissatisfied with the amnesty given to the 32 political prisoners given on Myanmar's independence day a few days earlier (BBC, 2012).

The release of political prisoners by national military regime reinforces Myanmar's steps towards a democratic transition. So far, Myanmar, under the rule of the military junta, has always used violence in dealing with every attempt to shake power; even this was done without caring for whoever became its opponent, including Buddhist priests. Myanmar's tough stance has been criticized by the international community in the aftermath of the 2007 Saffron Revolution, an anti-government action organized by a group of Buddhist priests that left eight people dead and 300 priests and protesters arrested through the military junta's repressive actions (Krisman, 2012).

Further, some of these changes made by Myanmar government have showed regionally and internationally, that the ruling military junta is showing an attempt to bring about changes in domestic politics. Myanmar expects for the good results of these changes through the end of sanctions from the United States and the European Union, which have been an obstacle for Myanmar to make contact with the international community. However in February 2021, the European Union has imposed sanctions on a number of military leaders in Myanmar (DW, 2021). The European Union announces that it is ready to adopt restrictive measures and target those directly responsible for the military coup and Myanmar's economic interests, besides, the EU will use all diplomatic means to ensure an end to the conflict in Myanmar. The sanctions for Min Aung Hlaing are in the form of asset freezing, visa blacklisting and travel ban (Manurung, 2021, p. 1). Additionally, EU citizens and companies are forbidden from making funds available to the listed individuals and entities. Further, ten of the eleven persons targeted belong to the highest ranks of the Myanmar Armed Forces, known as Tatmadaw, including the Tatmadaw's Commander-in-Chief, Min Aung Hlaing, and Deputy-Commander-in-Chief, Soe Win. The other is the new Chairperson of the Union Election Commission for his role in cancelling the results of the 2020 elections in Myanmar. The EU-27 makes it clear that nine other top military officers, as well as the head of Myanmar's electoral commission, are on the sanctions list as well.

The US sanctions take various forms of prohibitions such as an arms embargo, investment in Myanmar, financial services, and part of Myanmar's imported products, while the EU sanctions take various forms of restrictions including arms exports, investment to Myanmar, restrictions on visas to Myanmar, freezing of assets of power holders, including the export of precious stones, wood and metal. Apart from the United States and the European Union, Canada and Australia have also imposed a number of sanctions against Myanmar but there has been no follow-up to remove these sanctions as an implication of the enactment of a democratic transition in Myanmar (BBC, 2012, April 5).

While, in June 2012, violence related to ethnic, religious, racial and inter-group differences occurred again in Myanmar, this time in the cities of Meiktila and Yangon (Ghafur, 2013). The United Nations and the Organization for Islamic Cooperation condemned the attacks on mosques, madrassas and massacres carried out by Buddhist groups against the Muslim minority. At last, during that time, the national reform and enforcement of human rights agendas in Myanmar are even further away from expectations.

The conflict was motivated by a feud between some Buddhists and Muslim gold shop owners in the city of Meiktila which led to the burning of several mosques, schools and people's

homes by a group of people acting on behalf of Buddhist extremists. The rioting is also inseparable from the anti-Islam campaign that is often echoed frequently by Buddhist monks, especially after the Rohingya conflict erupted in June 2012.

According to Manurung, in 2011, Myanmar proposed to take the 2014 Chairmanship by swapping their turn with Laos (Manurung, 2015, p. 149). He writes, as follows:

“This is a deviation to ASEAN Charter Article 31 which says that the Chairmanship of ASEAN shall rotate annually based on the alphabetical order of the English names of Member States. Fortunately, by default, Myanmar’s Chairmanship would have to be in 2016 after Malaysia in 2015. Despite this and also considering year 2014 is crucial as it is only a year before the plan of the realization of ASEAN Economic Community on 31st January 2015, ASEAN approved Myanmar’s 2014 Chairmanship proposal.”

Furthermore, another thing that awaits Myanmar is the 2014 ASEAN Chairmanship, in which Myanmar must serve as a central country which will become the center of ASEAN activities in the same year in the form of annual meetings, ministerial level meetings, and other high official ranks meetings. Although the United States doubts giving the 2014 ASEAN Chairmanship to Myanmar, the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Marty Natalegawa, stated that granting the 2014 ASEAN Chairmanship position to Myanmar would in fact maintain the democratic momentum being pioneered in the country so that it continues and ASEAN countries can pay more attention to overseeing the process (Jakarta Post, 2011, November 18).

Since February 2012, Myanmar government has campaigned that the Irrawaddy Delta area be developed as the next ‘*Rice Bowl*’ of the world (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2012). ASEAN Chairmanship 2014 is a crucial period of chairmanship because in 2015 ASEAN will declare the ASEAN Community era in which the 2014 Chairmanship of Myanmar must be able to guarantee these steps and support the steps that have been taken by the previous chairmanship to ensure the realization of the ASEAN Community 2015. If Myanmar succeeds in taking steps and even making new breakthroughs, it will provide high political credibility to strengthen Myanmar's position in ASEAN and internationally. The NLD's victory was predictable, despite speculation that the deterioration of its ties to ethnic minority-based parties, which had collaborated in Myanmar's 2015 elections, could reduce its total number of seats in the central and regional parliaments (Pristiandaru, 2020).

But among her fellow countrymen, Suu Kyi has managed to maintain the image she has built over the decades as a fighter for democracy against the dictatorship and military regime authoritarianism. Outside Myanmar, its reputation has plummeted over its failure to defend the human rights of the country's Rohingya Muslim minority. In fact, her supporters from abroad are shocked that Suu Kyi did nothing about Myanmar's 2017 campaign of military action forcing some 740,000 Rohingya to flee across the border into neighboring Bangladesh. However, the issue is only a minor issue for most voters, because of the deep prejudice against the Rohingya ethnicity. Most of the people of Myanmar still perceive the Rohingya as a group of illegal immigrants from South Asia. Though, their family has lived in Myanmar for generations.

Most of the people of Myanmar chose the NLD because it was based on the popularity of its leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. Suu Kyi has ruled Myanmar since being sworn in in 2016 with the title of State Counsel. Suu Kyi's government record is very mixed, with national economic growth that is still far from expectations and ongoing armed clashes for decades with ethnic minorities who demand to be granted special autonomy.

However, Myanmar's 2020 elections are held amid the coronavirus pandemic and mark the second election the NLD has participated in under the current constitution. Suu Kyi's NLD won elections in 2015 before taking over the government the following year (Sekarwati, 2020). Myanmar's citizens voted to choose their leaders for the next five years in an election on

Sunday, with the National League for Democracy led by State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi is on track for a big win (Nitta, Htway, & Diamond, 2020).

So it is not surprising that many parties are waiting for Myanmar's next step after the NLD victory. The Myanmar government itself has officially announced the victory of the NLD party over 40 of the 45 seats contested (WSJ, 2012, April 2). This government recognition erases tensions over the repeating history of 1990 when the military junta did not recognize the election results that had been held. However, there are several other home-works that must be done by ASEAN, including fixing the problem of human rights violations, providing a balanced portion for civilians and the military to maintain a stable civilian government, handling conflicts with ethnic groups, preparing infrastructure for investment that will enter post policy reforms, currency, and overcoming poverty which is still a problem in ASEAN, which is one of the countries with the highest poverty rates in the region.

ASEAN Unity

Democracy is a form of government in which all citizens have equal rights in making decisions that can change their lives. Democracy allows citizens to participate, either directly or through representation, in the formulation, development and making of laws. Democracy includes social, economic, and cultural conditions that allow the practice of political freedom freely and equally. Democracy is also a set of ideas and principles about freedom and its practices and procedures. Democracy implies respect for human dignity (Sumodiningrat & Agustian, 2008, p. 44). Meanwhile, representative democracy is a form of democracy in which the people elect representatives who then vote on a number of policy initiatives, in contrast to direct democracy where the people directly vote for policy initiatives (Clarke & Foweraker, 2001, p. 15).

These ASEAN member-states responded to Myanmar coup which took place on 1 February 2021 differently. Several ASEAN leaders expressed concern and asked all parties to exercise restraint. However, there are those who keep their distance and choose to wait for the situation to develop. The governments of the Philippines, Cambodia and Thailand has viewed the military coup in Myanmar as a domestic problem and did not comment further, even though all three had experienced military coups and felt a struggle to form a democratic government.

Philippine Foreign Minister Teodoro Locsin Jr., said he was monitoring developments in Myanmar after the arrest of a number of civilian leaders, including de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen and Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan also followed Manila's political stance.

On the other hand, Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia expressed deep concern, calling on all parties to exercise restraint and strive for a peaceful solution. Meanwhile, Vietnam, Brunei Darussalam and Laos have not issued any statements.

ASEAN member countries seem to be shackled by the principle of not interfering in domestic affairs. The decision-making mechanism based on mutual consensus also eventually led each member country to state its own position. This is in line with understanding ASEAN's stance regarding that it is in accordance with the ASEAN Charter Article 2 Paragraph 2 letter e.

Meanwhile, the US, the United Kingdom together with the European Union will certainly condemn the previous military coup government's actions due to the power transitioning transfer was not carried out democratically.

Indonesia does not need to make any provocative statements that Myanmar coup government taken can perceive as interference. It is enough for Indonesia to observe developments in Myanmar and to give warnings about the situation in the country both to Indonesians living there and those who will travel. The coup is a process of taking over the government which is unconstitutional, but, obviously Indonesia cannot interfere in Myanmar's internal affairs.

Highlighting the principle of not interfering in the domestic affairs of ASEAN member countries over the Myanmar military coup, of course it is necessary to remember that this principle is often misinterpreted by doing nothing and being soft on violating ASEAN provisions, even though there are various mechanisms to ensure the confidentiality of negotiations between countries-member. It would be very unfortunate if Indonesia did not take advantage of this momentum to invite ASEAN, considering that this shared identity once encouraged fellow member countries to listen to one another instead of covering their ears. All statements must have consequences, both positive and negative. What matters is the intention and follow-up.

Looking at the leadership composition of Brunei Darussalam and the interests of each ASEAN member country, it will be difficult to achieve due to the time consuming to reaching a consensus within limited time. Therefore, it is not surprising that member countries choose to respond separately. Jakarta asked all parties in Myanmar to exercise restraint and promote constructive dialogue instead of ASEAN confronting and blaming Myanmar current military regime leadership (Mazrieva, 2021).

Myanmar still wants to listen to Indonesia, but if the way it is presented is like a 'public relations campaign' for a moment's sake, it will certainly be rejected. It takes President Joko Widodo's commitment to bridge diplomatic efforts at the procedural and technical levels to develop. There are a number of diplomatic ways to make a statement and be accepted positively.

This is not the first time ASEAN has been criticized for issues related to Myanmar. Previously several human rights groups also criticized the state bloc in Southeast Asia for not responding to Myanmar's military violence against the Muslim-Rohingya minority group. The United Nations (UN) and even the United States describe the actions of the Myanmar military regime as direct examples of ethnic cleansing.

Unlike the 2015 election, the expectation for running the general election in 2020 is not too high and is not the best interest for Myanmar people to participate in direct and free democracy without pressure from the military regime.

Before the November 8, 2020 elections were held, there was disappointment with the civilian government of the National League for Democracy led by Aung San Suu Kyi. At least, there are three reasons why the Myanmar people's disappointment emerged and this disappointment can be understood. First, instead of laying a strong foundation for democratization, the five years of NLD rule since 2015 have moved the other way round. For example, press freedom was highlighted in connection with the arrest of journalists and activists who opposed the government, silencing critical voices against the ruling government, and the absence of protection for minority citizens from violence by the military apparatus or Myanmar's armed groups;

Second, the NLD was criticized by some people, because it tended to choose to make peace and ally with the military regime, and seemed to agree with the various human rights violations they had intentionally committed. This is inseparable from the Myanmar constitution which was deliberately drafted by the armed forces prior to the transition of power to civilian government. As a result, in the Myanmar constitution, a quarter of the seats in the national and regional parliaments are given a special allocation for the Tatmadaw, known as the Myanmar military. In addition, Tatmadaw also has the right to the post of minister of defense, minister of interior and minister of borders. It is Myanmar's military power that controls the majority of seats in the National Defense and Security Council; and

Third, the 2020 elections cannot be held in all regions of Myanmar, for reasons of internal security. Election organizers argued that the cancellation of elections in a number of areas of Myanmar was due to the prone to violence and dangerous to the security of civilians. However, in fact, not all areas that were canceled to hold the election were prone to violence.

The restriction resulted in the loss of citizens' voting rights. Human Rights Watch said there were 1.5 million people who could not vote because they were deprived of their voting rights. This does not include the hundreds of thousands of Rohingya who are not recognized as citizens. Indeed, through the 2020 Myanmar elections, Suu Kyi's NLD was able to restore civil power and control the sovereign, just and prosperous Myanmar government.

ASEAN, Myanmar and Indonesia

Coinciding with the Myanmar military coup on February 1, 2021, Indonesia immediately urged all parties in Myanmar to refrain (Indonesia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). At least 4 (four) decisions were made by the Indonesian government responding to the Myanmar military coup, namely: 1) Indonesia is very concerned about the latest political developments in Myanmar; 2) Indonesia calls on the use of principles contained in the ASEAN Charter, including a commitment to law, good governance, democratic principles and constitutional governance; 3) Indonesia also underlines that disputes related to the results of general elections can be resolved by the available legal mechanisms; 4) Indonesia urges all parties in Myanmar to exercise restraint and put forward a dialogue approach in finding a way out of the various challenges and problems that exist so that the situation does not worsen.

Asia Pacific regions implies a competition of agendas, such threats to the integrity of borders and human security threats such as natural disasters, airliner crashes, and displacement by man-made pollution and food scarcity (Chong, 2017, p. 3). Conversely, polycentrism could also imply a return to a more neo-realist oriented international order where great powers ignore ASEAN and steer regional order according to their perceived interests and relative military superiority. ASEAN represents the fundamental political institutional dynamics that are in play within the region and the interplay between regional forces and national norms. It can result in inefficiencies and incoherency in state positions, which makes regional integration negotiations and decision-making difficult in this area (Holzhacker & Tan, 2021, p. 7).

According to the 2019 Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index, democracy in some ASEAN countries is in the imperfect category, some of which are even classified as authoritarian countries (KOMPAS, 2021). Therefore, the ASEAN community still needs to learn together to be democratic, not only at the procedural level. However, the transformation of the country's authoritarian political system towards democracy needs to be continuously encouraged and guarded by ASEAN in order to achieve the stability and security of the Southeast Asian region that it aspires to. According to the democracy index by the Economist Intelligence Unit (2020), the highest score covers five categories (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2021): 1) electoral process and pluralism; 2) civil liberties; 3) the functioning of government; 4) political participation, and 5) political culture (Table 1).

Table 1. 2020 Top 5 Countries Democracy Index

No	Country	Score
1	Norway	9.81
2	Iceland	9.37
3	Sweden	9.26
4	New Zealand	9.25
5	Canada	9.24

Table 2. 2020 Bottom 5 Countries Democracy Index

No	Country	Score
163	Chad	1.55
164	Syria	1.43
165	Central African Republic	1.32
166	Dem. Republic of Congo	1.13
167	North Korea	1.08

From data presented above, there are five developed countries such Norway, Iceland, Sweden, New Zealand and Canada which have the world highest indexed score, while most developing countries such Chad, Syria, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo and North Korea lay down at the bottom countries democracy index. The ten Southeast Asian countries are also illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Democracy Index 2020 in SE Asia

Countries	Overall Score	Rank	Electoral process & pluralism	Functioning of government	Political Participation	Political Culture	Civil Liberties
Flawed democracy							
Malaysia	7.19	39	9.58	7.86	6.67	6.25	5.59
Philippines	6.56	55=	9.17	5.00	7.78	4.38	6.47
Indonesia	6.30	65=	7.92	7.50	6.11	4.38	5.59
Thailand	6.04	73	7.00	5.00	6.67	6.25	5.29
Singapore	6.03	74	4.83	7.86	4.44	6.25	6.76
Authoritarian							
Cambodia	3.10	130=	0.00	3.93	3.89	5.63	2.06
Myanmar	3.04	135	1.75	3.93	2.78	4.38	2.35
Vietnam	2.94	137	0.00	2.86	3.89	5.63	2.35
Laos	1.77	161	0.00	2.86	1.67	3.75	0.59
Brunei Darussalam	unknown	unknown	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Source: EIU Democracy Index (2020)

Unfortunately, none of SE Asian countries is having full democracy regime type. Five of ASEAN member-states categorized, i.e.: Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore as applying flawed democracy, while, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Laos categorized as under authoritarian regime. Brunei Darussalam is still unknown for its democracy index result in 2020.

AOIP envisages ASEAN Centrality as the underlying principle for promoting closer cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, with ASEAN-led mechanisms, such as the East Asia Summit, as platforms for dialogue and implementation of the Indo-Pacific cooperation, while preserving their formats. Furthermore, ASEAN may also seek to develop, where appropriate, cooperation with other regional and sub-regional mechanisms in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions on specific areas of common interests to complement the relevant initiatives. AOIP provides a guide for ASEAN's engagement in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. Thus, accordance with the AOIP, ASEAN strives optimally keep Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific into peaceful, stable and safe regions.

In early November 2020, Myanmar held elections for the second time during the era of civilian government. The process of transition to democracy in developing countries needs the attention of decision makers in Southeast Asian countries. As one of the elements to measure democracy in a country, organizing regular elections every five years, such as the one that took

place in Myanmar on November 8, 2020, is an important note for democracy activists. The 2020 election activities took place amid the COVID-19 pandemic and allegations of human rights violations against the Rohingya ethnic minority by the military junta, which the Myanmar government has yet to deal with (KOMPAS, 2020, p. 6).

ASEAN chairman for period 2020-2021, Brunei Darussalam has been asked by Indonesian President Joko Widodo and Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin in Jakarta to immediately hold a special meeting aimed at overcoming the increasing political situation in Myanmar after the military coup 1 February 2021. Such special meetings are not common for ASEAN, which operates according to principles of mutual non-interference and tiptoes around anything that could be construed as interference in member states' internal affairs (Strangio, 2021). Demonstrations and civil disobedience and spread against the Myanmar military still continued. The military junta decision to extending the detention and prosecution of Suu Kyi contributed to heating up tensions between the wider community and the military junta in Myanmar's various cities and towns (KOMPAS, 2021). The military junta continues to generate its repression of the freedom of Myanmar's civil society, barring people from gathering, arresting pro-democracy politicians and activists, enforcing a curfew, closure of communication access, shutting down all internet and telecommunication networks for the third time since February 1 coup, 2021.

On February 12, 2021, as reported by the Associated Press News Agency, Myanmar's military coup leader General Min Aung Hlaing has urged the Myanmar people to cooperate with the military junta if they want democracy. Hlaing stated (KOMPAS, 2021, p. 4): "I will seriously urge the whole nation to join hands with the Tatmadaw (the official designation for the Myanmar military) for the successful realization of Myanmar democratization."

Another effort made by General Hlaing aims to show the national public and the international community that the military supports democracy, through his letter to Thai Prime Minister General Prayuth Chan-ocha on 10 February 2021 (KOMPAS, 2021, p. 4). Prayuth said General Hlaing asked the Thai government for support for the transition process democracy formed by the military regime in Myanmar. Most likely the request for a transitional government to the military regime was due to Thailand's political situation which was not far different. Prayuth is the leader of the Thai military junta that overthrew the government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra in 2014. Through the 2019 Thai election, which was widely criticized mostly by international communities for allegedly being fraudulent, Prayuth succeeded in maintaining his regime power.

Some Burmese citizens and the international community have absolutely no sympathy for General Hlaing's call. The protests of Myanmar citizens both at home and abroad against the military regime's government prove this. Amnesty International also scoffed at the release of prisoners by the military regime, which according to their assessment, was carried out as an undercover agenda of the armed forces in order to divert attention from the arbitrary detention of pro-democracy activists by Myanmar's security forces recently.

Meanwhile, Tatmadaw claimed they had to intervene, because the Myanmar government failed to investigate allegations of fraud in the November 2020 elections. However, the Tatmadaw also ignores the existence of the Myanmar National Election Commission, which is constitutionally authorized to resolve election disputes, as stipulated in Article 399 Letter G of the 2008 Constitution. Some Myanmar people do not believe General Hlaing's call for the people to cooperate with the military for democratic advancement. Ironically, on the one hand the Tatmadaw calls for democracy, but on the other hand, the Myanmar military has violated democratic principles and distrusts democratic mechanisms.

Hlaing's persuasive efforts to ask Prayuth for help regarding the political turmoil in Myanmar might be an entry point for a number of concerning parties, including ASEAN and Indonesia. In the ASEAN Charter, among others in the Preamble, it is clearly stated that the people of ASEAN member countries comply with the principles of democracy, the rule of law

and good governance, respect and protection of human rights, as well as various fundamental freedoms.

Indeed, it will not be possible to impose these principles on just one member country when at the same time ASEAN also upholds the principle of not interfering with each other or intervening in the domestic affairs of each member. However, there are a number of mechanisms that might be considered, among others, through a consultative mechanism, either through the Human Rights Commission of ASEAN member countries (AICHR) and various other regional forums. Indonesia, which is known to be flexible and patient with diplomacy that does not oppress and oppress, can share experiences, especially in relation to how the democratic transition has been experienced to this day, including a commitment to develop and maintain civil supremacy in a democratic system.

Public expectation on the growth of democratic countries is generating. However, on the other hand, the challenge to the existence of a democratic system is also more widespread in developing countries. In general, in developed countries, such as the issue of the guarantee of freedom of expression and speech no longer is the only one basic fundamental problem. However, there are still other issues that pose a threat to the sustainability of democracy, namely, economic inequality and the use of economic issues as a pressure factor for the ruling government.

Conclusion

It is very concerning about Myanmar's recent political events. The reported detention of Myanmar civilian leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and his political allies following the elections in November 2020 is a definite dramatic step back in consolidating Myanmar's already difficult democracy in recent years.

The Myanmar military coup led by General Min Aung Hlaing is totally unjustified and has violated international norms and law and threatens ASEAN unity. The international community hopes fully that the civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi will return sooner or later in future, so that in the years ahead it will have concrete steps in laying the foundation for the democratization process in Southeast Asia, taking a firm stand on the military junta, and more importantly presenting stability and domestic security, protection for the Rohingya ethnic-minority, and bring economic prosperity to the people of Myanmar.

Take-over of government or military coup and the imposition of a state of emergency for one year do not have any credible legal basis, thus creating a bad president for Myanmar's nation-building process. Election processes around the world that implement it are indeed imperfect, because there are elements of mutual distrust, election irregularities, and so on. However, electoral differences must not be resolved by any form of military intervention decision, and solutions should be left to the electoral commission and the constitutional court, so that the military in Myanmar should not be the judge and arbitrator of the elections. Additionally, it should be remembered that Indonesia social-political situation in May 1998, like Myanmar, also faced painful challenges in the early years of democratic transition, such as financial crises, separatism, weak government institutions, political instability, social conflicts, and even terrorism incidents happened.

Therefore, in responding to current situation in Myanmar due to the military coup d'état, ASEAN and Indonesia urgently should be able to act as a unified bloc on regional crises instead of by only allowing these regional issues of Myanmar political turmoil to rolling out without a comprehensive resolution and advancing dialogue between ASEAN countries.

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