The Myanmar Military Coup in 2021 and the Future of Democracy

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Abstract

The coup that was again carried out by the Myanmar military junta brought Myanmar a flashback from the coup that had previously occurred. The democracy that the Burmese people hope for is always hampered due to the coups that keep happening again. This study aims to analyze the future of Myanmar's democracy. The research method used in this paper is a descriptive qualitative method using data collection through documents which will then be drawn from all the data obtained.

Keywords

Myanmar military coup; government; future of democracy



I. Introduction

The Myanmar military junta staged a coup against the civilian government of Myanmar by arresting civilian leaders such as Aung San Suu Kyi and President Wint Myint on February 1, 2021 (Utomo, 2021). In addition, the Myanmar military junta also arrested a number of figures from the National League for Democracy (NLD) Party. The arrests occurred before the parliament held its first post-election meeting on November 8, 2020 (Roza, 2021).

A few days after the arrest of the civilian government by the military, the people of Myanmar staged a massive protest. It can be seen that less than 72 hours after the arrest of the civilian government, the people of Myanmar are using technology as a tool to express anger and frustration to the military through the popular social media in Myanmar, namely *Facebook*. After the protests through social media, people took to the streets accompanied by workers who went on strike throughout the country after entering the three-day coup period (BBC Indonesia, 2021; detik.com, 2021).

The people of Myanmar witnessed the coup on February 1, 2021 through social media, namely *Facebook*. Social media is a forum for the Myanmar people to call/invite and support the anti-coup action. Therefore, many people took to the streets to protest against the coup act carried out by the Myanmar military. Seeing this, 3 days later the Myanmar military ordered internet providers to block access *Facebook* for reasons of stability. Knowing this, thousands of *Twitter* and *Instagram users used* hashtags to oppose the coup action, but on Friday 5 February 2021 at 22:00 local time, *Twitter* and *Instagram* have also been blocked (BBC Indonesia, 2021).

The coup act carried out by the Myanmar Military was caused by the military's distrust of the results of the Myanmar General Election on November 8, 2020 which resulted in Aung San Suu Kyi from the party (NLD) winning the election in November 2020. The military believed that there was fraud in the 2020 election (seconds .com, 2021). The armed forces demanded a re-vote and claimed Aung San Suu Kyi's victory was a fraud. However, the General Elections Commission said that there was no evidence to support the claim. Min Aung Hlaing, who is the commander of the Myanmar military,

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stated that the military will be in control of the government for the next one year until the current state of emergency is over (Aida, 2021).

The coup carried out by the Myanmar military at this time is not the first event that has occurred in Myanmar. In March 1962 Myanmar experienced a military coup, in which the military was led by General Ne Win. The coup was carried out against the first civilian government since Myanmar gained its independence. The military coup that was carried out at that time was reasonable if the government under the leadership of Prime Minister U Nu failed to maintain the integrity of the country because of the ethnic rebellion at that time which was feared to cause national divisions against the newly formed nation state. Besides that, other problems such as corruption and the failure to maintain economic stability were also a factor in the coup carried out by the Myanmar military at that time (Ivana, Dewi T, & Rahmatina. N, 2021).

After the coup, Myanmar just became a democracy in 2012 after the recognition of the election results at that time. The current coup is seen as undermining Myanmar's burgeoning democracy. Myanmar civil society really expects the return of democracy to civilian government (Ivana, Dewi T, & Rahmatina. N, 2021). However, if we look at the military coup which was repeated several years ago, it can be used as material for analysis on the future of Myanmar's democracy. This paper will discuss the analysis of the Myanmar military coup in 2021 on the future of Myanmar's democracy.

II. Review of Literature

The writing of this article will use the theories and concepts of a military coup and democracy which will be explained in more detail below:

2.1 A military

A coup is a seizure of power in a regime carried out by the military. Usually this is done because the military is dissatisfied with the civilian government and sees that the civilian government has failed to solve various problems so that it cannot bring the country to be much better. However, this military coup is also often carried out by the military intentionally to seize power for its political interests. The military classifies itself as a major nationalist group, primarily identifying itself with the state, and vice versa where the state is also a military. Something that is considered good by the military will also be good for the country, therefore a coup according to the military is part of protecting the country's constitution (Eric, 1990).

The economic condition of the population is a condition that describes human life that has economic score (Shah et al, 2020). There are several military motives for carrying out a coup. The first is political interests, where military officers think about their future, both their political future and their future careers. Second, the military has a solid and autonomous bureaucracy, it is believed that the military can build a good economy to improve the country's economy which is considered bad when it is under government control (Horowitz, 1985). Third, the front line in protecting the country from physical threats. Where when a physical threat, both from outside and within the country, causes a big riot, the military will act. Thus, the military believes it can maintain the integrity of the country's sovereignty from any aspect. Fourth, state chaos caused by the government's actions, both because of taking actions that are prohibited by the constitution and military estimates that consider the government's inability to lead the country (Eric, 1990).

2.2 Democracy

Democracy according to the origin of the word means the people in power or government by the people. In Greek, democracy consists of 2 words, namely demos means the people, kratos/kratein which means power/rule (Budiardjo, 2017). In a democratic ideology, the state has an obligation to provide opportunities and opportunities for its citizens to: "(1) Formulate their preferences, (2) Show their preferences to citizens and the government through personal and collective actions and (3) give equal weight to their preferences, made by citizens". These three points can run optimally if there are a number of institutional guarantees, while these guarantees include: "(1) freedom to form and become members of an organization, (2) freedom of expression, (3) the right to vote, (4) the opportunity to become an official. government, (5) the right for political leaders to compete for support, (6) the right for political leaders to compete for votes, (7) alternative sources of information, (8) institutions that make government policies dependent on voting and disclosure of other preferences" (Nugroho, 2012).

Democracy in its most substantial praxis is that the state is obliged to protect its people, especially in representing their citizenship and most importantly in implementing the basic rights of a decent life (Nugroho, 2012). Joseph Schumpeter in 1942 defined classical democratic theory that the term "the will of the people" as the source and "the common good" as the goal which later changed the method to the "democratic method" where the democratic method is an institutional procedure for reaching political decisions in which there are individuals who obtain the power to make a decision or policy competitively in order to gain votes from the people (Ivana, Dewi T, & Rahmatina. N, 2021).

This democratization grew starting with the revolutionary process of a country that has an authoritarian nature and then changed the country to a more open direction with a democratic system. Democratization can be interpreted as a transitional stage from an authoritarian government to a democratic government. Democracy and democratization cannot be separated, where democracy is a process towards the values that exist in democracy (Ivana, Dewi T, & Rahmatina. N, 2021).

III. Research Method

In this paper the author uses a descriptive qualitative approach. The qualitative method is a method that will describe a research phenomenon based on empirical reality (Prayuda & Sundari, 2019). The data collection that the author uses in this research is a literature study technique in the form of documents. The documents in question are books, online articles, scientific journals, trusted news sources and official government reports. The data that has been collected will then be analyzed by the author to then draw a common thread from the existing problems.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 Political Travel in Myanmar

Myanmar has political dynamics that have various faces. Governments in the form of kingdoms, British colonies, military systems to democracy have been passed. This can be seen from its journey, namely that since 1948 Myanmar has only just received official independence from Britain (Irewati, 2016). After independence from the British Empire, power was held by the prime minister named U Nu. The reign of U Nu adhered to a democratic system, besides that his reign was divided into 2 periods, namely in 1948-1958

and 1960-1962. However, his leadership always failed (Maiwan, 2014) so that Myanmar's leadership returned to military rule under the leadership of General Ne Win, where Myanmar was again a closed country from the outside world (Maiwan, 2014; Ivana, Dewi T, & Rahmatina. N, 2021).). In 1985 General Ne Win gave power to General Saw Maung who implemented economic openness and made little progress, but did not also make the country better (Irewati, 2016) thus triggering chaos on August 8, 1988 which was known as "The Uprising of 8888" (Nilasari, 2016).

Then, the government formed *the State Law and Order Restoration*Council (SLORC) led by General than Shwe. At the same time the name Burma was changed to Myanmar with the intention of giving the world the impression that Myanmar wants to start its state life with something new and clean, in other words the government will continue economic reforms and will make changes to the 1974 constitution with plans to hold general elections based on a multi-party system in 1990 (Irewati, 2016)

The 1990 election was won by Aung San Suu Kyi because she received a lot of support from the people of Myanmar, where the great desire of the Myanmar people is to live with a democratic government system. However, the military did not expect that it would lose to Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD). The military did not recognize the election results and even detained several members of the NLD party including Aung San Suu Kyi. The government returned to the hands of the military (Ivana, Dewi T, & Rahmatina. N, 2021). Since the government returned to military rule in 1990, the military has become increasingly brutal to society (Ivana, Dewi T, & Rahmatina. N, 2021) and has again restricted the development of civil society.military junta also changed the name of *The State Law and Order Restoration Council* (SLORC) to *The State Peace and Development Council* (SPDC). All general regulations are controlled by the military junta so that reforms or amendments and freedoms cannot be implemented in Myanmar. Public complaints regarding the weakness of the Myanmar economy at that time were accepted by the military junta government, but the public was strictly prohibited from criticizing the military junta government (Bawana, 2021).

Then another big demonstration took place in 2007, this movement was not only carried out by students but monks as religious leaders also took part in this rebellion, even monks became leaders in this rebellion movement. This demonstration in 2007 can be called the "Saffron Revolution". Many victims fell when this incident occurred, although not as many as the 1988 demonstrations. Nevertheless, this incident became a hot topic of discussion among the international community (Nilasari, 2016). This has further encouraged the public's desire to support the NLD party led by Aung San Suu Kyi because this party is considered to be a forum for people's aspirations in the democratic system that it advocates (Bawana, 2021).

Then elections were held again in 2010, but Aung San Suu Kyi was only released from house arrest a week after the elections were held. The regulations made for this election also include a ban on people who have been prisoners. Before the election takes place, political parties who run in the election are allowed to campaign, but prior to campaigning, political parties must send campaign scripts to KPS. Political parties from the opposition camp get tighter security from the military. In the 2010 election the USDP party won the election and Thein Sein served as President of Myanmar. In Thein Sein's leadership, the majority of those occupying government seats came from the military, while only a few civilians. The international community imposed sanctions on Myanmar, this made Thein Sein freed political prisoners. Then in 2012 a by-election was held where the NLD party registered itself in the election arena after being unable to participate in the 2010 election. Aung San Suu Kyi from the NLD won 43 seats out of 44 seats, this became

the starting point for democracy in Myanmar which was then followed by her re-election in 2015 and 2020 (Ivana, Dewi T, & Rahmatina. N, 2021).

4.2 The Dynamics of Myanmar's Democracy in the Aung San Suu Kyi Period Aung San

Suu Kyi became an icon of democracy in Myanmar because of the values of freedom and democracy that she echoed in the midst of military rule in the country which later led her to become an international symbol of peaceful resistance against military dictatorships (BBC Indonesia, 2021).). This can be seen from the award he received in 1991, where he received the Nobel Peace Prize while he was under house arrest (BBC News, 2021). As the daughter of General Aung San, a Myanmar independence hero who was assassinated when Suu Kyi was 2 years old and just before Myanmar gained its independence from Britain in 1948, Suu Kyi feels she has a great responsibility to continue her father's struggles even though the enemies they face are different. Indonesia, 2021). In addition, Suu Kyi was also inspired by the non-violent campaign of India's Mahatma Gandhi and the US civil rights leader Martin Luther King. Being the son of a national hero, witnessing the country's turmoil and getting inspiration about freedom, then made Aung San Suu Kyi echo democratic reforms for all Myanmar people (BBC News, 2021).

After the big demonstrations in 1988, Aung San Suu Kyi began calling for democratic reforms to the people of Myanmar and founded the *National League for Democracy* (NLD) party and pushed the military junta government to hold democratic elections in 1990. After the 1990 elections won by Aung San Suu Kyi with the democratic reform system that she brought and attracted the attention of the public made the military not accept her victory so the military junta arrested several party members and Aung San Suu Kyi (Bawana, 2021). Then Suu Kyi was released in July 1995, but this did not last long because in September 2000 she was again detained for violating travel restrictions by traveling to the city of Mandalay. Suu Kyi was subsequently released unconditionally in May 2002, but after more than a year of her release she was again detained after government-backed groups attacked groups that supported her (BBC News, 2021).

On 7 November 2010 Myanmar held elections again after the last 2 decades (BBC News, 2021). However, Suu Kyi was unable to run for elections in 2010, this was due to a regulation made by the military junta government prior to the election that prohibited religious leaders and people who had served time in detention from running for representatives of the people, prohibiting Myanmar citizens who married foreign nationals from running for representatives. running for elections, as well as the high cost of registering a candidate's name of 500,000 kyat for just a short period. If you look at it, this seems to be deliberately preventing Aung San Suu Kyi from participating in the election because she is married to a British citizen. In addition, the military junta government's efforts to hinder Suu Kyi in the general election were also carried out by releasing Suu Kyi from house arrest one week after the election took place (Ivana, Dewi T, & Rahmatina. N, 2021).

After 2 decades of not being able to participate in the general election due to regulations and house arrest, finally in the April 2012 midterm elections, Suu Kyi and her party, the NLD, won 43 seats out of 45 seats, the 43 seats obtained included 37 lower house seats, 4 upper house seats. and 2 seats in the regional assembly (BBC News, 2021; Nilasari, 2016). After being elected, Suu Kyi promised to make amendments to the military junta government, to bring peace to rebellious minority groups and to accelerate the democratic reform process (Sari, 2015). Then Myanmar held elections again in 2015 which

was also won by the NLD party under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi (Bawana, 2021).

Judging from her successive victories and her good image in the eyes of the international community, Aung San Suu Kyi strongly adheres to democracy. However, the good image that had been attached to him seemed to crumble when Aung San Suu Kyi was deemed not to have defended in the name of justice against the massacre of her Rohingya Muslim minority by the military. In an international tribunal the actions carried out by the Myanmar military are referred to as genocide. At the international tribunal held in The Hague, Aung San Suu Kyi gave a statement in defense of the military who carried out this action. This became a new turning point for his international reputation (BBC News, 2021).

Although Aung San Suu Kyi as the leader of the NLD is under criticism from the world for her response to the case of the Rohingya Muslim minority, the NLD remains popular in Myanmar. Then, in 2020 Myanmar held elections again and again won by Aung San Suu Kyi and her party. However, the credibility of the results of the election was questioned by observers because of the revocation of citizenship rights of Rohingya Muslims so they could not participate in the election. (BBC Indonesia, 2020). In addition, the military junta said there was fraud in the election results. His disapproval led to a coup against the civilian government, in which the military arrested state officials such as President Wint Myint and de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi (CNN Indonesia, 2022).

4.3 Military Coup and Future of Democracy

In November 2020 Myanmar again held general elections which were later won by Aung San Suu Kyi. The NLD party won 346 seats in parliament, which is more than the number needed to form a government. The military junta saw this as fraud and urged reelection. (BBC Indonesia, 2020). On February 1, 2021, the military junta overthrew the civilian government by arresting Myanmar's leaders, Aung San Suu Kyi and President Wint Myint (Utomo, 2021). In addition, several figures from the NLD party were also arrested (Roza, 2021). Another reason for the military coup was the alleged corruption case against Aung San Suu Kyi. The military said that Suu Kyi received a bribe of 600,000 dollars and 11 kg of gold bullion from Phyo Min Thein as a member of the NLD and former chief minister of Yangoon (VOA Indonesia, 2022). The military has declared this state of emergency to the public and said that this will only be temporary until the next election is held, after which the military will return power to the elected leader and temporarily take power over by General Min Aung Hlaing (Utomo, 2021).

Saturday, March 27, 2021, was the bloodiest day since the Myanmar military coup on February 1, 2021. Myanmar military forces opened fire in more than 40 locations in Myanmar, such as in Yangon, Kachin in the north to Taninthartharyi in the far south, Mandalay and so on. It is estimated that nearly 100 people were reported killed that day, there are even sources who reported that the number of shooting victims was higher than that figure. The crackdown by the Myanmar military was caused by protesters opposing the Commemoration of Armed Forces Day. The previous Friday night, a state-owned television station stated that the people of Myanmar must learn from the previous terrible tragedy and that they were threatened with being shot in the head and back (BBC Indonesia, 2021).

Demonstrators of the military coup took to the streets in various cities. The Myanmar military also shot and held children hostage, it was reported by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child that 75 children had been killed and about 1,000 children arrested in Myanmar since February 1 (Liputan6, 2021). In the evening on that bloody day, the leader

of the coup, General Min Aung Hlaing and officials celebrated Armed Forces Day by holding a party (BBC Indonesia, 2021). The killings continued until the week of March 28, 2021. Security forces opened fire at the funeral of a 20 year old student in Bago City (Puspaningrum, 2021). In addition, the military also burned 200 houses in Kin Ma Village, but state television said the incident was carried out by a terrorist group (CNN Indonesia, 2021).

Civil society is still struggling from military violence where around 1,500 civilians died as a result of clashes between the military junta and people who opposed the military regime. Meanwhile, at least 3,000 soldiers also died due to the battle with the People's Defense Forces at the end of October 2021. The military coup is getting worse, in fact, every day people are always thinking about how to survive instead of thinking about their ideals. In early January 2022, the military junta government carried out airstrikes against coup rebels in several areas of eastern Myanmar. Meanwhile, in big cities, economic centers such as Yangon, the situation has recovered. However, the military junta government still prohibits and imposes sanctions on residents who carry out anti-coup actions by honking their horns and hitting pots and pans on the street like the start of the coup (CNN Indonesia, 2022). Since the start of the 2021 coup, Suu Kyi has been held in a detention center in Yangon and she is accompanied by staff and her pet dog. However, currently Suu Kyi's detention has been moved to an isolated place in the Naypyidaw prison complex. In addition, the trial of Aung San Suu Kyi will also be transferred to Naypyidaw and Suu Kyi's lawyers are prohibited from speaking to the media (CNN Indonesia, 2022)

Initially Suu Kyi had been sentenced to 6 years in prison by the military junta on charges of violating the Covid-19 regulations, the telecommunications laws and electoral fraud. But accusations against Suu Kyi are growing, including allegations of corruption and violating the state secrets law. If Suu Kyi is found guilty, she will be jailed for more than 100 years on all these charges. During the investigation, Suu Kyi will remain in detention. For all the coup actions carried out by the Myanmar military, the international community including ASEAN opposes these actions and pressures Myanmar to stop the coup and restore the country's democracy (CNN Indonesia, 2022).

The international community, including ASEAN, continues to pressure the military junta to stop its actions and immediately restore democracy in Myanmar. The first ASEAN effort is to hold an ASEAN Summit in April 2021 and be attended by General Min Aung Hlaing as the commander-in-chief who led the Myanmar coup and is the interim leader to date (VOA Indonesia, 2021). The meeting discussed the political crisis in Myanmar. The meeting resulted in 5 points of consensus, the first being the emphasis on Myanmar to stop all coup actions including acts of violence. The second is to press for dialogue between the disputing parties in order to reach a point of peace in the face of political turmoil in the country. The third is that ASEAN agreed to provide a special envoy to assist the dialogue. Fourth, ASEAN agreed to provide humanitarian assistance to Myanmar and lastly, ASEAN leaders agreed to send a special delegation team that will visit Myanmar to meet with interested parties so that the political turmoil will end soon because until now there has been no sign that the military will re-run elections and return power to the elected rulers (BBC Indonesia, 2021).

According to the Prime Minister of Malaysia, after General Min Aung Hlaing attended the ASEAN Summit, his party agreed to the consensus that his troops should reduce violence and killings of civilians (Pristiandanu, 2021). However, at the ASEAN Summit held on October 26, 2021, Myanmar was not invited to attend the summit. ASEAN only invites non-political representatives from Myanmar. This is because the

Myanmar military junta did not show its commitment to the consensus that had been agreed at the ASEAN Summit which was held on April 24, 2021 (CNN Indonesia, 2021).

On February 1, 2022, the people of Myanmar staged a silent protest to commemorate the one year anniversary of the coup. This silent action did not mean the end of the resistance to the coup, but they carried out the resistance sporadically. But on the same day, the silence was broken by the sound of explosions coming from the town of Tachileik, eastern Myanmar. And the explosion killed 2 people dead and 30 people injured, but no party has yet claimed responsibility for the explosion. In addition, state media said that General Min Aung Hlaing extended Myanmar's state of emergency for another 6 months. According to the United Nations Human Rights office, 11,787 people have been detained and 1,500 civilians have died as a result of attacks by military forces to date and Myanmar has not yet realized any consensus on the ASEAN Summit on April 24, 2021 (Pristiandaru, 2022).

After one year, the coup carried out by the Myanmar military since February 1, 2021 is still continuing. The military's statement that it will hold re-election and return power to the elected leader until now there has been no sign of the military to do so. This illustrates that the future of Myanmar's democracy is still very far away, in fact it is no longer stagnant but is moving backwards because military coups and detentions of civilian governments often occur in Myanmar. So the future of Myanmar's democracy is difficult to achieve and most likely Myanmar's authoritarian government system will continue as before the presence of democracy in the country.

V. Conclusion

Myanmar is one of the countries in Southeast Asia that is struggling to implement democratic reforms in that country. Since the 2012 election, which was won by Aung San Suu Kyi from the NLD party, Myanmar seems to have found a bright spot for implementing democracy. The people of Myanmar continue to support Aung San Suu Kyi because of the struggle and spirit of democracy that is in Aung San Suu Kyi and Aung San Suu Kyi has also received awards from the international community. In fact, many of the people of Myanmar still support Aung San Suu Kyi even though Aung San Suu Kyi's good image has been tarnished because of the response she has given to the Rohingya Muslim minority. In the next elections held in 2015 and 2020, Suu Kyi still won the election. However, because the Myanmar military junta considered that the 2020 elections contained fraud and accusations of corruption and violations of Covid-19 regulations by Aung San Suu Kyi, the military junta staged a coup against the civilian government by detaining state officials and state leaders, namely President Wint Myint and other leaders of the state. Aung San Suu Kyi facto.

The charges against Aung San Suu Kyi were then added to the present and are being investigated. During the investigation process, Aung San Suu Kyi continued to live in the detention house, which was transferred from the detention house located in Yangon to the solitary prison located in Naypyidaw. Initially the military junta sanctioned Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest for 6 years, but if all these accusations are proven true then Aung San Suu Kyi will be imprisoned for more than 100 years. This coup was opposed by the people of Myanmar so that there were often clashes between the military junta and the people of Myanmar which ended in many casualties. Even the international community strongly condemns the actions taken by the Myanmar military, including ASEAN to ASEAN discussing the political turmoil in Myanmar at the ASEAN Summit 24 April 2021 so that

its troops reduce violence and killings of civilians. Myanmar's military junta agrees on these consequences.

Myanmar's military junta said this was a state of emergency and would only last until elections were held again and the military junta would return power to an elected leader. During the state of emergency claimed by the military junta, Myanmar's power was temporarily taken over by General Min Aung Hlaing. At the ASEAN Summit in October 2021, the Myanmar military junta was not invited to it, ASEAN only invited non-political representatives. This is because the military junta has not shown its commitment to the ASEAN Summit agreement on April 24, 2021. This is very clear, counting for more than 1 year, the coup has been carried out, but the elections promised by the military junta have not yet been carried out. Even the consensus that has been agreed previously has not yet been carried out by the Myanmar military junta. The people of Myanmar are still fighting against the coup act, but the resistance is carried out sporadically. This coup seemed to bring Myanmar a flashback to the previous military coups. If we look at Myanmar's political history to the current coup, democracy has always been hampered by the actions of the military junta which overthrew the civilian government and detained state leaders and officials. The things above illustrate that Myanmar's democracy is getting backwards, no longer stagnant or even advancing.

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