

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MYANMAR JOURNALISM AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE BEFORE 2009

Lu Seng

PhD Scholar,

Department of Journalism & Mass Communication,
North-Eastern Hill University, Umshing Mawkynroh
Shillong, Meghalaya - 793022. India.

Dr. Barath N.

Assistant Professor,

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication
North-Eastern Hill University, Umshing Mawkynroh
Shillong, Meghalaya - 793022. India.

Corresponding Author: Lu Seng

PhD Scholar,

*Department of Journalism & Mass Communication,
North-Eastern Hill University, Umshing Mawkynroh
Shillong, Meghalaya - 793022. India.*

Abstract

This research examines media coverage in Myanmar in 2009 via a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), with a focus on articles published in the "7 Day Weekly Journal" from February to December 2009. The media's portrayal of different democratic ideals and dictatorship ideologies is analyzed in this study. Topics covered in the study include popular sovereignty, political equality, rule of law, pluralism, political freedom, transparency and accountability, civil liberties, and authoritarian ideas such as centralized power, suppression of opposition, controlled participation and propaganda, restrictions on civil liberties, rule by decree and weak rule of law, cult of personality, use of force, corruption, and nepotism. The purpose of this study is to use CDA to examine how the articles published in the "7 Day Weekly Journal" between February and December present and frame democratic values and authoritarian ideologies. Furthermore, using Critical Discourse Analysis as a prism, it assesses how the media in Myanmar impacted public opinion and political debate prior to 2009. Results show how Myanmar's media steered clear of authoritarian governments and toward democratic principles in the country's complicated political climate. This study sheds light on a pivotal era in Myanmar's political history by demonstrating how the media influenced popular opinion and political debate.

Keywords: Myanmar, Media Representation, Democratic Principles, Authoritarian Ideologies and Public Perception.

1. Introduction

Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, has a convoluted political history characterized by coups, colonial rule, and subsequent democratic reforms. After declaring independence from Britain in 1948, the country rebranded itself as the Union of Burma.

There was a parliamentary administration at the outset, but ethnic insurgencies and political competition swiftly caused instability and internal turmoil (Steinberg, 2010). It was in 1962 that the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) was established, with General Ne Win at the helm, as the military administration. Until 1988, the "Burmese Way to Socialism," which included the nationalization of businesses, the suppression of political dissent, and the nationalization of companies, all contributed to the economic collapse of the country and its subsequent isolation from the rest of the world (Callahan, 2003).

In Myanmar's history, 1988 was a critical year, according to Lintner (1990). Pro-democracy demonstrations calling for an end to military rule broke out across the country in what is known as the 8888 Uprising, but the military brutally suppressed them, killing hundreds of people. Following this, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) assumed control, renaming itself the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). The SPDC had a firm hold on power in the face of economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure. But in 2008, they drew up a new constitution, which was accepted in a contentious referendum and resulted in the general elections of 2010 that were widely regarded as neither free nor fair (Taylor, 2009). But despite the military's continued stronghold, these elections signaled a formal shift to civilian government. According to Kyaw (2012), the governing elite in Myanmar has maintained strict control over the media landscape throughout the country's history. Throughout Ne Win's reign, the government used the media to spread socialist ideas and suppress opposition.

Since all media were subject to stringent government censorship, independent journalism was all but nonexistent. The SLORC/SPDC stepped increased media censorship after the 1988 revolt, creating the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD) to closely monitor and control radio, television, and print media. Press freedom was severely restricted, and any information unfavorable of the government was quickly banned (Cheesman, 2002). Violations of this policy frequently resulted in incarceration, harassment, and violence against journalists. A number of underground and exiled media outlets appeared during this time to present opposing viewpoints and reveal the excesses of the administration. Notably, the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) sent news into Myanmar without restriction, operating from Norway and Thailand (Larkin, 2010). Significant restrictions remained to be imposed by the quasi-civilian administration, and the media was still subject to state control and monitoring, even if some of the restrictions were loosened after the 2010 elections (Simpson & Farrelly, 2011).

According to Selth (2010), although Myanmar's legislative framework for the media has changed throughout time, it is nevertheless frequently utilized to stifle and restrict media freedom rather than to

uphold it. For instance, the 1962 Printers and Publishers Registration Law established a system for official censorship and control by requiring all presses and publications to register with the government. Broadcast programming was subject to stringent regulation under the 1996 Television and Video Law, which mandated that media outlets seek licenses from the Ministry of Information. The Ministry had the authority to cancel these licenses and levy penalties (Brooten, 2004). Although the Electronics Transactions Law of 2004 was intended to regulate electronic communications, it was frequently used to criminalize online dissent and government criticism. Users who used electronic media to "detract, defame, disturb, or influence the state" faced harsh penalties (Walton, 2008). Although the 2008 constitution contained provisions for press and expression freedom, it also included wide exceptions that allowed the government to limit these rights in the name of public order, national security, and morality. This gave the authorities a lot of room to justify media control and censorship (Jones, 2014).

Although the News Media Law of 2014 kept in place a number of substantial prohibitions that may be interpreted broadly to include anything that incites unrest or violates public morals, it also attempted to defend media freedom and provide criteria for ethical journalism (Lall, 2016).

With Section 66(d) criminalizing defamation and specifically targeting people who criticize the government and military on social media, the 2013 Telecommunications Law has been heavily utilized to arrest and prosecute journalists and activists (Horse, 2017). International media outlets have also had several difficulties in Myanmar, frequently having to operate in challenging circumstances. The military government has regularly thwarted the efforts of organizations like Reporters Without Borders and the Committee to Protect Journalists by denying access, expelling representatives, and characterizing their reports as foreign interference.

These organizations have brought attention to the predicament of journalists in Myanmar and have campaigned for greater press freedom (Reporters Without Borders, 2016). To further isolate the Burmese people from outside viewpoints, the government has also obstructed access to foreign news websites and limited the dissemination of foreign news publications (Freedom House, 2018).

When covering sensitive subjects like military operations or ethnic disputes, foreign journalists face strict visa requirements and run the possibility of being detained or deported (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

The media is extremely important in influencing public opinion and political dialogue. The media frequently acts as a propaganda weapon in authoritarian regimes like Myanmar, supporting the narratives that the ruling class wants to propagate. The government may stifle opposition, shape public opinion, and hold onto power by regulating the flow of information (McCargo, 2012). The "7 Day Weekly Journal" offers insightful information about how authoritarian and democratic ideals are portrayed in the media.

In my article, I will use the terms 'media' and 'press' interchangeably, where 'media' refers specifically

to press. This study uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore the underlying ideologies, power structures, and discourses that influence how political events and topics are portrayed in the media. This study examines how the media presents authoritarian and democratic ideologies by examining the language, stories, and themes in the "7 Day Weekly Journal" articles. It also looks at how the media supports or undermines the legitimacy of the ruling regime and affects public opinion and political discourse. This thorough approach to CDA will offer a sophisticated knowledge of how the media represents Myanmar and how it influences public opinion and political debate at a pivotal juncture in the nation's history.

2. Myanmar's Media: Freedom, Control, and Revival

There have been eras of relative freedom and periods of heavy censorship in Myanmar's media landscape since the nation's independence. At first, following independence, there was a vibrant and free media that greatly influenced public opinion (Zaw, 2016). But this openness didn't last. In an effort to consolidate power, the government used state-run outlets as propaganda and drastically limited journalistic independence after the 1962 military takeover (Phan, 2018). During the student revolt of 1988, a pivotal event in Myanmar's media history, the effects of tight media control were greatly felt. During this time, independent journalism briefly flourished because of underground periodicals and booklets that spread news that state-run media refused to cover. Independent journalism came to a standstill, and many journalists were either imprisoned or driven into exile, as a result of the military's subsequent crackdown on the media (Oo, 2018).

In 2010, a major change happened as the government started to hand over power to civilians. Private newspapers and online media outlets emerged as a result of this era's easing of media restrictions. Another turning point came in 2012, when pre-publication censorship was lifted, giving media organizations more autonomy to publish without interference from the government (Hughes, 2016; Thein, 2017). The media in Myanmar continued to confront formidable obstacles notwithstanding these gains. Voters were able to make better informed choices in the 2015 general election because, for the first time in decades, the media covered the elections extensively. The fact that journalists were still facing threats, both legal and physical, showed that press freedom was still not completely achieved (Owen, 2019; Burrett, 202).

The media freedom in Myanmar was exposed to the full force of the military coup in 2021. Reinstating strict media censorship, the dictatorship effectively halted the democratic transition by redising harsh restrictions, closing publications and internet platforms, and detaining journalists (UN News, 2017). According to this setback, the media just as tightly controls Myanmar as it had been a decade ago, undoing all of the progress that had been achieved. Over the course of these epochs, the media's dual function has grown more obvious. Public opinion has been swayed in support of official policies and the ruling elite have been legitimized through the promotion of official narratives.

However, opposition groups, civil society, and disadvantaged communities have been able to use media

platforms to challenge the political status quo, demand democratic reforms, and advocate for human rights, thanks to the rise of digital media and increased global attention (Walton, 2008). Finally, reflecting larger political changes in the country, Myanmar's media landscape has evolved from a highly controlled system to a more diverse and partially liberated society. Amidst Myanmar's complicated political transition, the media persists in playing a key part in sculpting public discourse and political power, demonstrating its capacity to promote a more democratic approach and a more inclusive political discourse.

3.Methods

This study relies on the 7Days Weekly newspaper as a dataset for assessing political news stories due to its extensive coverage of 2009 political events from February 2009 to December 2009. In all, we looked at 68 news pieces that had some sort of political leaning and divided them into two groups: those that supported democratic principles and those that supported dictatorship ideologies. The newspaper's presentation of various political viewpoints might be studied in depth thanks to this categorization. The fundamental objectives of this research are to examine how news outlets portray democratic principles and authoritarian ideologies, and to determine how these portrayals influence public opinion and political discourse.

Hence, we proceeded to categorize the publications into several categories to enable a comprehensive study. Democratic ideologies encompass a broad spectrum of subjects, such as popular sovereignty, Political Equality, Rule of law, pluralism, political freedom, Transparency and Accountability and Regular, Free, and Fair Elections. Dictatorship ideologies encompass a variety of aspects, including the concentration of power, Absence of Democratic processes, Suppression of Opposition, Controlled Participation and Propaganda, Restrictions on civil liberties, Decree and weak rule of law, cult of personality and intolerance of Dissent, Use of force and Militarization and Corruption and Nepotism.

The study employed Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model, together with Norman Fairclough's CDA approach, to examine the chosen news stories. We employed Content Discourse Analysis (CDA) to reveal the narrative structure, prejudices, hidden propaganda, and individuals implicated in the news articles. Fairclough's method highlights the correlation between language and social activities, with a specific focus on three aspects: text, discursive practice, and social practice. The use of CDA in this study allowed for a thorough analysis of the language, discourse, and narrative structures in the news reports. This analysis facilitated the identification of ideological biases and the construction of political narratives.

The researcher obtained qualitative data by gathering materials from several sources, including the Myanmar National Library, the Yangon University Library, newspaper publication houses, and newspaper agencies. The meticulous data gathering procedure guaranteed a comprehensive and unbiased selection of news articles that were pertinent to the study's investigation of political beliefs.

We utilized a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies to examine the data, specifically focusing on detecting patterns, trends, and discursive practices present in the news reports. This analytical approach conducted a thorough examination of political news articles in the 7Days Weekly newspaper, which helped to comprehend the impact of media representation on popular views of political ideologies and the overall political discussion.

4.Finding

The journal's articles, which portray Myanmar's political environment during a critical juncture of transition, carefully weave together narratives of authoritarian and democratic ideologies. These articles' language frequently combines authoritarian undertones with democratic ideals; this is especially noticeable when covering events like the 2008 constitutional referendum. This referendum was held under military rule after Cyclone Nargis, which suggests strong public participation despite the high voter turnout of 92.48%. These factors suggest that democratic rhetoric was deliberately used to support an authoritarian agenda. This nuanced depiction highlights how the regime skillfully exploits democratic ideals to support its own legitimacy while disguising more coercive actions.

Furthermore, the portrayal of Myanmar's contacts with foreign personalities, like Mr. Tomas Ojea Quintana, highlights the government's seeming willingness to engage in discussion on human rights matters. The aforementioned portrayal functions to reinforce the government's global reputation as open and cooperative, despite a clear disconnect with accounts of persistent political persecution and violations of human rights. Additionally Furthermore By emphasizing specific events and themes, the journal modifies the narrative in a significant way regarding the legitimacy of the ruling regime in Myanmar. An alignment with democratic processes and responsiveness to international norms, for instance, is suggested by the repeated emphasis on high voter turnout and interactions with international human rights advocates. Although concurrent reports of restricted civil liberties and controlled political participation complicate this portrayal, they subtly undermine the regime's claims to legitimacy.

Media coverage of legal reforms and discussions with human rights organizations presents the regime as seemingly responding to international criticism. Still, the selective reporting here and the lack of oppositional voices indicate that the journal is also vital in controlling public opinion about the legitimacy of the regime. This is apparent both at home, where it could sway public opinion by presenting a picture of responsibility and change, and abroad, where it seeks to deflect criticism by displaying flimsy interactions. Furthermore, the portrayal of these reforms as significant modifications shapes public opinion by implying governmental responsibility. However, the authenticity and extent of the ostensible changes are called into question by the lack of a comprehensive implementation plan for these reforms and the persistence of authoritarian practices.

In conclusion, the 2009 articles in the "7 Day Weekly Journal" serve as a tactical passageway for the Burmese government, allowing it to move between the projection of democratic governance and authoritarian control. In addition to supporting the regime's claims to legitimacy, the media's framing

of these ideologies is crucial in influencing public opinion. The journal has a significant impact on how domestic and international audiences perceive the political realities in Myanmar through selective reporting and emphasis on specific themes.

Extract 1: 7days weekly News Journal, Feb to Dec 2009, “Popular Sovereignty”

1. During his 6-day trip from February 14 to 19, which was the second time he visited Myanmar, he presented recommendations to the government.
 2. He said that he received positive reactions.
 3. The government also plans to make changes from time to time has already been announced.
 4. Democracy held in May and June 2008 a referendum on a constitution for a new nation 92.48% of the vote in the poll is proof.
 5. The submitter of the special human rights report on Myanmar, Mr. Tomas Ojea Quintana, arrived in Yangon by air.
-

Here from Extract 1, the text begins by discussing an international advisor's interactions with the Myanmar government (Line 1). This line emphasizes sustained engagement and commitment to advisory rather than directive involvement, reflecting a government opens to external insights a fundamental aspect of democratic transparency and international cooperation. Thus, the representation implies that the government not only listens but also responds to external advice, in line with democratic principles where feedback influences governance.

Following this, on Line 3, the story reveals the government's strategy for changes, which suggests a dedication to progressive, although slow, transformation. This reflects a democratic approach that suggests careful leadership by striking a balance between innovation and stability. In the Line 4, we see a pivotal moment in democratic history: the large voter participation during a referendum, which is cited as proof of the legitimacy and support of the people. This exemplifies strong public participation and endorsement, which are cornerstones of popular sovereignty.

Line 5 discusses how the country's human rights issue has been brought to worldwide notice through the facilitation of a visit to Myanmar by a prominent human rights figure. This suggests that Myanmar is willing to be examined by foreign organizations, which is an important part of a transparent democratic society.

Through these lines, the work paints a diverse picture of Myanmar as actively participating in democratic processes that are inclusive, responsive, and rooted in people sovereignty. This strategy not only asserts governmental legitimacy but also emphasizes an active participation culture among people, demonstrating a larger commitment to democratic ideas and practices.

Extract 2: 7days weekly News Journal , Feb to Dec 2009 , “Political Equality”

-
1. The Chief Justice also responded to a query from 7-Day News saying that it was good news that the suggestion had been accepted.
 2. He suggested that laws that conflict with the Constitution and international human rights laws be reviewed.
 3. He said legal staff from the Attorney General’s Office has started conducting studies on human rights in 80 townships and international treaties signed by Myanmar.
 4. Received a positive response from the Burmese government to make progress on human rights.
 5. The national government has allowed Mr. Tomas Ojea Quintana's trip to be convenient from all sides.
-

Promoting political equality via analyzing current legislation is clearly the focus of the aforementioned clause. In line 2, we see some proactive recommendations to evaluate laws that might be at odds with the Constitution of Myanmar and human rights norms throughout the world. All laws must promote justice and not discriminate against any person, and this dedication to legal examination is crucial for that. Calls for these reviews have been made time and time again, and they show that people are serious about changing the law so that it follows democratic ideals of equality and fairness.

A methodical strategy to strengthen political equality is shown by the narrative's emphasis on legal change. Using consultative language, such "suggested," shows that the democratic type of government prioritizes open communication and everyone's opinion when making changes. Legal reforms are given more legitimacy when this method is used as it promotes openness and confidence among the public.

These endeavors are not only empty promises; they are fundamental to larger political and social movements in Myanmar that seek to infuse the country's legal and judicial institutions with democratic principles. This conversation highlights a social movement towards making sure laws are up to par with global norms and that lawyers may practice freely. This combination of supporting independent judiciary and legal review presents Myanmar as a progressive nation working towards political equality. Inspiring people to take part in building a more equitable and just society, these stories do double duty as sources of information and motivation.

Extract 3: 7days weekly News Journal , Feb to Dec 2009 , “Rule of Law”

-
1. The interactions included a significant engagement with government and judicial officials to address human rights concerns, showing an initiative for reform and transparency."
 2. Engagements aimed at legal reform and enhancement of judiciary independence show efforts to establish rule of law, which is fundamental to democratic governance.
 3. The first time we see it, we will take it away. The store will be recorded. If the shop (or person) commits the offense a second time, legal action will be taken," he noted.
-

4. Selling cooking oil that is declared unfit for consumption can be imprisoned for 3 years," said Brigadier General Aung Thein Lin, chairman of the Yangon City Municipal Development Committee.
-

In the above passage, emphasizes the importance of law enforcement in upholding the rule of law and ensuring justice and equality. It highlights the need for a judiciary that operates free from external pressures, including political influences, and operates firmly in the law. The independence of the judiciary is crucial for ensuring equal access to justice and ensuring legal decisions are grounded in the law (line 1,2,3,4).

The text also discusses a structured approach to handling violations concerning public health and safety, such as selling unfit cooking oil. These punitive approaches are not arbitrary but structured with clear responses to first-time and repeat offenses. This systematic enforcement is crucial to upholding the rule of law, reinforcing the commitment to apply the law consistently and predictably. It also discusses a concrete example where specific legal consequences are tied to unlawful actions, such as imprisonment for selling unfit cooking oil.

This demonstrates the government's capacity and willingness to enforce the rule of law effectively.

The text stresses the importance of weaving the rule of law into governance through open discussions about judicial independence and clear examples of law enforcement. This approach aims to update legal systems and ensure order and the protection of everyone's rights.

Extract 4: 7days weekly News Journal, Feb to Dec 2009, "Pluralism" and "Political Freedom"

1. Officials from various organizations answered the UN team's open and honest questions clearly.
 2. According to them, I believe that the people of Karen State know and understand the difference between the development of peaceful regions and regions that are not yet peaceful.
 3. Every Karen soldier wants peace; All peace organizations are working together to make peace sustainable and strong.
 4. A press conference was held with members of the Myanmar Foreign Correspondents Association and local magazines, promoting transparency and openness.
 5. The submitter of the special human rights report actively engaged with multiple stakeholders to gather a comprehensive view of the human rights situation, showing an open and inclusive approach.
 6. Open discussions about human rights issues with various governmental and non-governmental stakeholders highlight a commitment to democratic processes.
-

Line 1 opens with a demonstration of open communication as officials from various organizations answered the UN team's open and honest questions clearly. This transparency in interactions highlights a key aspect of pluralism: open dialogue, which allows for a multitude of voices to be heard and acknowledged. Such engagement is essential for a society that values diverse perspectives and seeks to

integrate them into its governance and policy-making processes.

Karen State residents comprehend regional inequities (Line 2). To address unique needs and promote policies that respect and represent regional diversities, the public must have a comprehensive grasp of their local realities. All peace organizations collaborate to maintain peace (Line 3). This partnership between parties shows pluralism at its best, as diverse entities work together to improve society and promote peace building.

The use of terms such as "transparency," "openness," "inclusive approach," "commitment to democratic processes," and "independent judiciary" emphasizes a positive outlook on political freedom. The passages highlight authoritative actions such as holding press conferences and engaging in discussions, which indicate the institutional control of discourse around political freedom (lines 1 2 3).

These articles concern political freedom. It believes democratic procedures, transparent and inclusive governance, and independent judicial systems improve political freedom. The "Political Freedom" clause promotes openness, inclusivity, democratic engagement, and legislative reform. The texts emphasize Myanmar's socio-political power dynamics and ideological convictions, implying a responsive and accountable government.

Extract 5: 7days weekly News Journal , Feb to Dec 2009 , “Transparency and Accountability” and “Regular, Free, and Fair Elections”

-
1. Democracy held in May and June 2008 A referendum on a constitution for a new nation 92.48% of the vote in the poll is proof.
 2. The world has set the standard President and government four times according to democracy and constitution Changed management.
 3. Discussed the findings of his visit.
 4. The interactions included a significant engagement with government and judicial officials to address human rights concerns, showing an initiative for reform and transparency."
 5. The release of political prisoners was also reported to the Minister of the Interior, General Maung U.
 6. Received a positive response from the Burmese government to make progress on human rights.
-

The use of terms such as "referendum," "engagement," "reform," "transparency," and "positive response" emphasizes a commitment to democratic norms, specifically focusing on transparency, accountability, and the conduct of elections. The repetition of concepts related to democratic processes and human rights indicates an underlying theme of evolving political norms in Myanmar. The texts highlight authoritative actions such as holding referendums and engaging with international standards, indicating the institutional control of discourse around political transparency and accountability.

Transparency and accountability are essential and valued aspects of governance and societal function

(Lines 4, 5, 6). Implicitly, in these statements is the notion that political processes such as referendums and elections are currently under evaluation or in need of improvement, as evidenced by the calls for reform, transparency, and the release of political prisoners.

Myanmar's human rights and political transparency are under criticism in the books' sociopolitical environment. References to the referendum and international norms reflect global and domestic concerns for governance openness and accountability (lines 1, 2). The writings show state-civil society power dynamics. The state promotes change and transparency to appear accountable to its citizens and the international world (lines 4, 6). These texts present ideological transparency and accountability rhetoric. It believes democratic values must be safeguarded and strengthened by regular free and fair elections, transparency, and human rights compliance.

Extract 6: 7days weekly News Journal, Feb to Dec 2009, "Centralization of Power"

-
1. The ruling government the sovereign powers are united and become a country.
 2. The strict enforcement and severe penalties for food safety violations highlight authoritarian control over consumer goods.
 3. Head of State Major General Than Shwe returned from Sri Lanka," emphasizing the role of military leadership in governance.
 4. The meeting focused on tightening existing policies on foreign workers and reducing dependence on foreign workers," reflecting an authoritarian approach to labor control.
-

Above texts emphasis on centralized government and stringent state control when terms like "sovereign powers," "authoritarian control," and "military leadership" are used. Line 1, which states "The ruling government and the sovereign powers unite and become a country," perfectly encapsulates the idea of power being concentrated. The consolidation of sovereign powers within the ruling government is essential for the development and stability of any nation, and this type of government is based on centralized authority.

A prime example of authoritarian control over consumer products is the regulations enforcement and harsh punishments for food safety infractions (line 2). As a result of a centralized form of government, the state is able to regulate and manage public behavior through the imposition of rigid rules and the maintenance of tight monitoring over consumer activities. It is clear that military officers have a substantial impact on politics as stated in line 3 "Head of State Major General Than Shwe returned from Sri Lanka," emphasizing the significance of military leadership in administration. The concept of concentrated authority in the hands of a chosen few is reinforced by the strong link between military power and state control as is seen here. Ultimately, the examination of these texts uncovers a language that highlights the consolidation of authority via stringent enforcement, military leadership, labor control, economic independence, and migratory controls. Such policies and acts demonstrate the concentration of power by the current government and military leadership, drawing attention to the

dynamics of power and the extent to which the state controls society.

Extract 7: 7days weekly News Journal, Feb to Dec 2009, "Absence of Democratic Processes" and "Suppression of Opposition"

-
1. The self-elected Tatmadaw government has promised to make changes for all citizens, as well as paving the way for this change to be personally managed, showing a controlled transition rather than democratic spontaneity.
 2. The prohibition against meeting with U Win Tin, despite previous arrangements, highlights a direct interference in diplomatic efforts and a suppression of political dialogue.
 3. Democracy held in May and June 2008, a referendum on a constitution for a new nation 92.48% of the vote in the poll is proof, reflecting the controlled nature of political processes.
 4. The government's control over the meetings and agendas during Mr. Quintana's visit indicates a managed and restrictive approach to international inspections.
 5. The controlled nature of political changes and the selective allowance of international dialogue suggest an orchestrated attempt to present a facade of cooperation.
 6. Statements about the inevitability of change juxtaposed with controlled political narratives indicate a rhetoric used to placate public demand for genuine reform while maintaining tight control.
 7. The description of dialogue and negotiation without preconditions as unrealistic reflects an authoritarian stance that conditions and controls how political discourse is conducted.
 8. Characterizations of past political transitions as 'dangerous' or 'sad' without acknowledging the democratic aspirations of the populace reflect a dismissive attitude towards democratic processes.
-

The statement "The self-elected Tatmadaw government has promised to make changes for all citizens as well as paving the way for this change to be personally managed, showing a controlled transition rather than democratic spontaneity" directly reflects the absence of democratic processes (line 1). This indicates changes orchestrated by the ruling military government without public involvement, highlighting a top-down approach.

The prohibition against meeting with U Win Tin despite previous arrangements highlights a direct interference in diplomatic efforts and a suppression of political dialogue (line 2). This interference signifies an active effort to prevent opposition voices from participating in meaningful discourse. The controlled nature of political processes is further emphasized in the line "Democracy held in May and June 2008, a referendum on a constitution for a new nation, 92.48% of the vote in the poll is proof, reflecting the controlled nature of political processes" (line 3). The high approval in the referendum suggests manipulation or control over the electoral process, undermining the legitimacy of democratic engagement.

The government's control over meetings and agendas during Mr. Quintana's visit indicates a managed

and restrictive approach to international inspections (line 4). This management reflects an attempt to control the narrative and limit external scrutiny, suppressing transparency and genuine democratic processes. The controlled nature of political changes and the selective allowance of international dialogue suggest an orchestrated attempt to present a facade of cooperation (line 5). This facade is designed to placate international observers while maintaining tight control over domestic political activities.

Line 6 identifies statements regarding the inevitability of change as language meant to satisfy public demand for reform while keeping control, as contrasted with controlled political narratives. While real democratic procedures are heavily regulated, this language gives the impression of progress. Line 7's portrayal of unfettered discussion and compromise as impractical betrays an authoritarian attitude that governs and dictates the terms of political debate. By establishing conditions that are advantageous to the prevailing administration, this attitude stifles dissent. Saying previous political shifts were "dangerous" or "sad" without mentioning the hopes for democracy reveals a callousness towards the democratic process (line 8). This disregard strengthens the grip of the authoritarians and erodes democratic hopes.

Extract 8: 7days weekly News Journal, Feb to Dec 2009, "Controlled Participation" and "Restrictions on Civil Liberties"

-
1. The government's control over the meetings and agendas during Mr. Quintana's visit indicates a managed and restrictive approach to international inspections.
 2. The controlled nature of political changes and the selective allowance of international dialogue suggest an orchestrated attempt to present a facade of cooperation.
 3. Dialogue and negotiation intentions without preconditions are completely unrealistic in the actual situation, suggesting a suppression of open dialogue and a preconditioned narrative by the authorities.
 4. It has been reported that the price of salt is falling due to the large amount of salt coming into the country from Thailand.
 5. Myanmar Telecommunication Company has started selling applications for CDMA 800 MHz phones worth 500,000 kyats," reflecting state control over technological distribution.
 6. This trade fair is jointly organized by the Government of Vietnam and the Ministry of Economy and Commerce of Myanmar.
 7. The prohibition against meeting with U Win Tin, despite previous arrangements, highlights a direct interference in diplomatic efforts and a suppression of political dialogue.
-

The phrases "state control," "suppression of open dialogue," "orchestrated attempt," and "managed and restrictive approach" all point to a more centralized government and less freedom for the people.

During Mr. Quintana's visit, the government regulated meetings and agendas, indicating a limited and controlled approach to foreign inspections (line 1). This exemplifies the government's controlled

participation efforts by attempting to restrict external scrutiny and manipulate the narrative given to foreign observers. There appears to be a coordinated effort to put on a show of collaboration, given the controlled nature of political reforms and the limited authorization of foreign engagement (line 2). This shows that there isn't any real democratic involvement but it appeases foreign concerns by keeping political processes under tight supervision. Line 3 implies that the authorities are proposing the suppression of open discussion and a preconditioned narrative when they say that dialogue and negotiating aims without preconditions are absolutely unfeasible. The goal of this repression is to limit actual involvement in political debate and regulate it. State agencies supervise economic operations, as shown in the orchestration of a trade exhibition by the Government of Vietnam and Myanmar's Ministry of Economy and Commerce (line 7).

This further demonstrates the limitation of autonomous involvement and the concentration of authority. Finally, the research shows that there is a language that promotes regulated political involvement, stifles free speech, and limits civil rights by centralizing power in the state and limiting individual agency in the economy and communication. By consolidating power in this way, the current administration is aiming to stifle civil rights and political participation.

Extract 9: 7days weekly News Journal, Feb to Dec 2009, "Rule by Decree and Weak Rule of Law"

1. The self-elected Tatmadaw government has promised to make changes for all citizens, as well as paving the way for this change to be personally managed.
2. The government will take care of anyone who adheres to the party's organizing principles and maintains them.
3. The government will not extend the license to a company that cannot deliver at all."
4. Section 22(a) of the said crime is punishable by 3 years in prison. A fine of 30,000 kyats or imprisonment and a fine of both.
5. The government will take care of the leaders of the mature party, Than Shwe said.
6. Land areas were designated for cultivation, electricity, digging canals to provide irrigation water; The government has given their group as much support as they need.
7. The government welcomed me warmly like a member of my own family.

The self-elected Tatmadaw government's vow to create improvements for all citizens and personally oversee these changes (line 1) demonstrates centralized control over political processes and a lack of democratic dynamism. This model represents government by decree in which the governing power takes decisions unilaterally without extensive public engagement or clear legal foundations. The phrase "The government will take care of anyone who adheres to the party's organizing principles and maintains them" (line 2) shows a loyalty-based governance structure. This means that legal and political support is determined by the ruling party's allegiance rather than fair legal norms, with commitment to party beliefs taking precedence over the rule of law. The government's reluctance to renew licenses for enterprises that cannot deliver (line 3) and the defined punishment for violations under Section 22(a) (reinforce 4) demonstrate a punitive and discretionary approach to governance.

Instead of fair and uniform legal standards, this system allows the ruling authority to decide on economic opportunities and legal outcomes. Examples of the arbitrary allocation of resources and assistance based on political affiliation include statements such as "The government will take care of the leaders of the mature party" (line 5) and the supply of agricultural subsidies and the assignment of land areas (line 6). In this system, the rule of law is undermined because those associated with the ruling party receive preferential treatment.

The government's warm reception of select individuals (line 7) emphasizes the personal and discretionary aspect of public support. This depicts a government approach that is based on personal decrees and preference rather than transparent and uniform legal structures. Finally, the examination of these texts indicates a language that prioritizes government by decree and a weak rule of law through centralized decision-making, loyalty-based institutions, punitive measures, and arbitrary resource allocation. The governing government focuses authority on these acts and policies, emphasizing the interplay of power dynamics and the state's efforts to preserve control via decrees and discretionary assistance within its sociopolitical framework.

Extract 10: 7days weekly News Journal, Feb to Dec 2009, "Cult of Personality and Intolerance of Dissent" and Use of Force and Militarization"

-
1. The best and most complete change is a one-time change, a rhetoric often used to justify swift and unilateral government actions that may bypass democratic processes.
 2. I am disappointed in the destructiveness of a group of people who are negative about everything about the current situation, indicating a dismissal of dissenting voices.
 3. Being able to make the decision to sleep with the enemy.
 4. For the security of the refugee camp, KNU carried out terrorist acts in the other country.
 5. We have given up our weapons because we don't need security.
 6. Due to the destruction of the salt fields in Irrawaddy due to storm Nargis, Rakhine State has become a major salt exporting region to Roma East.
-

The statement "The best and most complete change is a one-time change" reflects a rhetoric often used to justify swift and unilateral government actions that may bypass democratic processes (line 1). This rhetoric supports the establishment of a cult of personality by promoting decisive authoritarian actions without public deliberation or dissent.

The expression of disappointment in the "destructiveness of a group of people who are negative about everything about the current situation" indicates a dismissal of dissenting voices (line 2). This reflects an intolerance of dissent, portraying those who oppose the current regime as destructive and unconstructive, thereby delegitimizing their criticisms. The phrase "Being able to make the decision to sleep with the enemy" (line 3) and the assertion that "we have given up our weapons because we don't need security" (line 5) suggest internal conflicts and compromises within militarized contexts. These statements reflect the use of force and the strategic decisions made by military or paramilitary groups,

indicating the pervasiveness of militarization in governance and societal issues.

The reference to "KNU carried out terrorist acts in the other country for the security of the refugee camp" (line 4) directly highlights the use of force and militarized actions justified under the guise of security. This underscores the normalization of military actions and the portrayal of violence as necessary for maintaining security. The mention of the destruction of salt fields due to storm Nargis and the subsequent rise of Rakhine State as a major salt-exporting region (line 6) provides a contextual backdrop of environmental disaster, which can exacerbate militarization and authoritarian responses. The state's control over resource distribution in the aftermath of a natural disaster further illustrates the consolidation of power.

Extract 11: 7days weekly News Journal, Feb to Dec 2009, "Corruption and Nepotism"

1. The leaders are prospering and prospering in Thailand with their own businesses, and they are commanding to make the battles happen in the country without bullets."
 2. Ms. B.M.Khor said that if she dies because of bad living conditions, only the body will be sent back to Myanmar without paying any compensation.
 3. Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Tan Sri Mai Hidin said that foreign nationals, including Myanmar, will only be allowed to work for 5 years, except for domestic workers.
 4. Malaysia's decision to limit the tenure of foreign workers and the requirement for re-application after 5 years.
 5. Export to Singapore Malay Post If you can show a list of Middle East exporters, you can renew your license.
-

There seems to be a striking disparity between the leaders' personal wealth and the suffering of their nation, as stated in line 1, that they are thriving in Thailand with their own enterprises while leading conflicts at home without using bullets. This demonstrates a degree of corruption when influential officials put their personal wealth and power ahead of the welfare of their nation. Line 2 of Ms. B.M. Khor's reply, in which she states that her body would be sent to Myanmar without compensation in the event that she dies as a result of her living circumstances, emphasizes the abuse and neglect that workers endure. This is a reflection of a system in which the powerful do not look out for the interests of the people, thus the people have to put up with terrible conditions without any help or responsibility from above.

The exploitation of foreign labor is shown in the remark by Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister on the limitation of foreign worker tenure to five years, with re-application necessary afterward (lines 3 and 4). While offering very little in the way of job security or stability, this strategy can be viewed as a means to control and manipulate the workforce for economic gain. Line 5, which discusses the return to military and economic stability after almost 60 years, suggests a storyline that is being utilized to rationalize the persistence of power dynamics. If this is the case, it's possible that the powerful are concealing corrupt behaviors that benefit themselves behind an appearance of stability in order to keep

control.

In the end, these works reveal a vocabulary that promotes corruption and favoritism by putting an emphasis on worker exploitation, personal gain, and favoritism. Within its sociopolitical context, these lines reflect a governance structure that maintains authority through corrupt practices, highlighting power relations and the state's attempts to control and manipulate resources and opportunities for the benefit of a select few.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis of the "7 Days Weekly News Journal" from 2009 explores how "Popular Sovereignty" was portrayed in Myanmar, a crucial period of democratic transition and international engagement. This review delves into the complexities of interpreting state-controlled media narratives amid human rights concerns. The interactions documented between the Myanmar government and international leaders, like Mr. Tomas Ojea Quintana, showcase a willingness to engage in global human rights discussions, purportedly reflecting governmental transparency and accountability—key democratic attributes. However, these interactions demand careful scrutiny to determine their depth and genuineness, especially given the ongoing political oppression.

The 2008 constitutional referendum, cited by critics as evidence of popular sovereignty and democratic legitimacy, occurred under problematic conditions—immediately after Cyclone Nargis and under strict military oversight. The context raises questions about the authenticity of the reported high voter turnout and approval ratings, suggesting that state media might have crafted a narrative to enhance the government's domestic and international image, possibly masking a more complex reality. Furthermore, the government's narratives about its readiness to implement changes and its interactions with human rights advocates seem crafted to affirm a commitment to reform and transparency. While these narratives might indicate positive developments, they also align with the regime's strategy to mitigate international criticism regarding human rights abuses and authoritarian practices. The portrayal of external scrutiny as a move towards greater openness appears aimed at bolstering government credibility while potentially obscuring ongoing governance issues.

The media depiction of "Popular Sovereignty" in Myanmar in 2009, facilitated by the *7Days Weekly News Journal*, prompts reflection on the interplay between government propaganda, media representation, and the authenticity of democratic processes. Despite promoting an image of progressing toward greater democratic involvement and transparency, the actual political dynamics and historical context suggest a more nuanced reality. The timing and conditions of the referendum, managed by a regime known for stifling dissent and manipulating public sentiment, cast significant doubts on the government's true democratic intentions. It's crucial to critically assess the actual impact and depth of international human rights engagements, as they may not fully reflect the experiences of all citizens, particularly ethnic minorities and political dissidents. The analysis of "Popular Sovereignty" should be viewed as part of a broader strategy by the Myanmar government to manage its image while addressing

both domestic and international pressures.

References

- Brooten, L. (2004). Media, Ethnicity, and State: Myanmar's Ceasefire Process and Media Reforms. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 34(2), 163-180.
- Burrett, T. (2021). Journalism in Myanmar: Freedom, Facebook and fake news. In *The Routledge Companion to Political Journalism* (pp. 131-141). Routledge.
- Callahan, M. P. (2003). *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*. Cornell University Press.
- Cheesman, N. (2002). Seeing 'Karen' in the Union of Myanmar. *Asian Ethnicity*, 3(2), 199-220.
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51-58.
- Freedom House. (2018). *Freedom in the World 2018: Myanmar*. Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org>
- Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Sage.
- Horse, R. (2017). Myanmar in 2016: new government, old problems. *Asian Survey*, 57(1), 188-195.
- Hughes, J. (2016). Myanmar in transition: Media's role in democracy.
- Human Rights Watch. (2018). *World Report 2018: Myanmar*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org>
- Jones, L. (2014). The Political Economy of Myanmar's Transition. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 44(1), 144-170.
- Kyaw, A. M. (2012). State, Society and Ethnicity in Myanmar. *Institute of Southeast Asian Studies*.
- Lall, M. (2016). *Understanding Reform in Myanmar: People and Society in the Wake of Military Rule*. London: Hurst & Company.
- Larkin, E. (2010). *Everything is Broken: The Untold Story of Disaster Under Burma's Military Regime*. Granta Books.
- Lawi Weng. (2022). *Myanmar's Media Crackdown Post-Coup*. The Irrawaddy.
- Lintner, B. (1999). *Burma in revolt: Opium and insurgency since 1948*. Silkorm books.
- Lintner, B. (1990). *Outrage: Burma's Struggle for Democracy*. White Orchid Press.
- Smith, M. (1991). *State of Fear: Censorship in Burma (Myanmar)*. Article 19.
- McCargo, D. (2012). *Mapping National Anxieties: Thailand's Southern Conflict*. NIAS Press.
- McCombs, M., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176-187.
- Myint-U, T. (2008). *The River of Lost Footsteps: Histories of Burma*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Owen, J. (2019). *Press freedom under fire in Myanmar*.
- Radoli, L. (2011). Media influence on public policy processes: A case of agenda setting and framing. *Media Studies Journal*, 25(1), 85-104.
- Reporters Without Borders. (2016). *2016 World Press Freedom Index: Myanmar*. Retrieved from <https://rsf.org>
- Selth, A. (2010). *Modern Burma Studies: A Survey of the Field*. ISEAS Publishing.
- Steinberg, D. I. (2013). *Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford University Press.

UN News. (2017). *Democracy incomplete without free press, says UN envoy*.

Walton, M. J. (2008). *Ethnicity, Conflict, and History in Burma: The Myths of Panglong*. Asian Survey.

Zaw, A. (2021). *Myanmar's media crackdown: Reporting from the shadows*. The Irrawaddy.

Authors Details:

1st Author:

Lu Seng

Research Scholar,

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication

North-Eastern Hill University, Umshing Mawkynroh

Shillong, Meghalaya - 793022. India.

2nd Author:

Dr. Barath N.

Assistant Professor,

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication

North-Eastern Hill University, Umshing Mawkynroh

Shillong, Meghalaya - 793022. India.