

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

There is no other system of government that guarantees good governance and liberty besides democracy. Such a claim indicates how democracy establishes ideals and upholds the principles of fundamental freedom and human rights, allowing individuals to exercise their freely expressed will. People can only hold decision-makers accountable for their actions in the public sphere in democratic countries where there is greater political participation. In its core values, the introduction of the United Nations Charter (UN Charter) embodies the fundamental premise of democracy, "We the People," which asserts that the will of the people is the source of legitimacy of sovereign states.¹ Clause three of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) Article 21 stipulates that the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government.² The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) develops them even further and lays down the legal basis for the principles of democracy in international law.³

Recognizing the essential elements of democracy as stated in the UN Charter, Article 21 of the UDHR and the ICCPR, nearly over half of the countries in the world are democratic today. According to the Pew Research

¹United Nations. 1945. "United Nations Charter." United Nations. 1945. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>.

² United Nations. 1948. "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." United Nations. United Nations. 1948. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

³"International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights." n.d. OHCHR. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>.

Center, 96 out of 167 countries are considered democracies, 21 are autocracies, and 46 are a mix of democracy and autocracy, with the remaining four countries remaining unidentified.⁴ The ratio translates to tracking the quality of democracy around the world with the majorities adopting representative democracy, with 78 percent of people in the 38 countries agreeing that representative elected governments are a decent approach to govern.⁵ Within the context of today's International Relations norms, democracy has become a prominent international political system and there is a strong urge for country to become more democratic in order to be respected and accepted in International relations.

In countries with well-functioning democracies, public commitment to representative democracy appears to be highest. The Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) Democracy Index for 2021 shows that Nordic countries (Norway, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, and Denmark) dominate the top tier of global democracy rankings, while Afghanistan, Myanmar, North Korea, and two war-torn African countries (the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic) fill the bottom five slots.⁶ This indicates that countries regarded as full democratic have a larger percentage of public commitment to representative democracy which considered all upper-income countries. On the

⁴ DeSilver, Drew. 2019. "Despite Global Concerns about Democracy, More than Half of Countries Are Democratic." Pew Research Center. May 14, 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/14/more-than-half-of-countries-are-democratic/>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "Democracy Index 2021: The China Challenge." Economist Intelligence Unit, 2021. https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2021/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=democracy-index-2021&gclid=Cj0KCCQiAyracBhDoARIsACGFcS5-PujmPTEwjoVU050nsHv98i-XwKgwr4f_wlGYJoB64x3_RdY6UZcaAt-UEALw_wcB

contrary, some Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) struggle more in implementing democratic principles.

As one of developed countries and holding position as current hegemon, the United States (U.S) has maintained its commitment to promoting liberal democracy to other nation-states, particularly those associated to authoritarianism since the Cold War. For the time being, the U.S has set an example for the rest of the world by advocating liberal democracy, which protects human rights and encourages good governance. The U.S has always been eager to encourage political reforms by providing sustainable democracy assistance that builds local capacity and nurtures a democratic culture. Not only has it promoted American values, democracy promotion seeks to create a more secure, stable and prosperous global arena in which the U.S can advance its national interest.⁷

The U.S efforts to promote democracy are reflected in selected countries and regions that are considered as repressive regimes and facing most serious human rights violations issues. Its democracy strategy focuses on three core components of a functioning democracy: One – a free and fair elections process, with a level playing field to ensure genuine competition; Two – good governance, with representative, transparent and accountable institutions operating under the rule of law, including independent legislatures and judiciaries; and Three – a robust civil society and independent media that can

⁷ Department Of State. The Office of Electronic Information, Bureau of Public Affairs. 2007. "Democracy." 2001-2009.State.gov. May 10, 2007. <https://2001-2009.state.gov/g/drl/democ/index.htm>.

keep government honest, keep citizens engaged, and keep reforms on track.⁸ Given the core components of democracy promotion that the U.S has supported, the situation in Myanmar – being one of bottom five of Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) Democracy Index for 2021 countries – remains far dire.

Myanmar remains one of the world's most repressive countries, governed by an authoritarian military regime that maintains its tight grip on power often without any respect for democratic and human rights. The people do not have the right to hold accountable for their government, nor do they have the ability to alter political regimes. For instance, in the general parliamentary election of 1990, the regime entirely ignored the absolute election success of the political party National League for Democracy (NLD), which won more than 80% of the seats.⁹ Furthermore, the government imposed restrictions on freedom of expression, press, assembly, association, religion, and movement. For the worst, ethnic minorities faced violence and societal prejudice, as did human trafficking, which included state-sponsored forced labour and extensive sexual exploitation of women and children.

Realizing the deplorable conditions in Myanmar, international pressure and internal dissent continually growing. In response, the military government initiated a series of political reforms in the early 2000s. These initial steps included the release of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest in 2010 and the formation of a nominally civilian government. Furthermore in 2011, Myanmar initiated a series of democratic reforms aimed

⁸ U.S Department of State. 2006. "Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The U.S. Record" <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/80699.pdf>.

⁹ Ibid.

at achieving "discipline-flourishing democracy," including the formation of a civilian parliament for a transitional phase, during which former army official, Thein Sein was appointed president.¹⁰ After a fifty-year occupation by the Junta military in controlling the country (1962–2011), this occasion commemorates the birth of "restored freedom" for this nation. As Myanmar continues on its road of democratic reform, the period from 2011 to 2014 place a great flickers of once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Myanmar's progress in enhancing the political system's openness and a prospect for the US worked to nurture as the promoter of democracy.

The U.S has long been committed to promoting democracy around the world. This stems from the belief that democratic systems foster stability, human rights, and economic prosperity, which align with American values and interests. By encouraging democracy, the U.S aims to ensure a world order that safeguards individual freedoms, promotes fair governance, and discourages authoritarianism. Additionally, democratic nations are more likely to cooperate with the U.S on issues such as security, trade, and addressing global challenges, leading to stronger international partnerships. Furthermore, promoting democracy can help reduce the risk of violent conflicts, terrorism, and extremism, thereby enhancing global security. The United States' pursuit of democracy promotion reflects its desire for a peaceful and prosperous world that upholds fundamental rights and shared democratic principles.

¹⁰ Gunia, Amy. 2021. "How Myanmar's Fragile Push for Democracy Collapsed in a Military Coup." Time. January 31, 2021. <https://time.com/5934896/myanmar-aung-san-su-kyi-detained-coup/>.

The U.S along with its partners and allies recognizes the importance of cooperating together to encourage meaningful political transformation by increasing international pressure on the regime. It was intended to inspire Myanmar's leaders to take meaningful steps toward greater freedom and better humanitarian conditions for the country's people. The US worked aggressively and engaging in active bilateral and multilateral efforts with key partners and players in the Asia region, even placing Myanmar on the permanent agenda of the UN Security Council.¹¹ Furthermore, the US with its allies have put a range of sanctions on the military junta, signalling the world community's disapproval while exerting pressure on the regime and enabling for true democracy. The US, therefore, simultaneously advancing the core objectives of promoting democracy and respect for human rights by enforcing multiple democracy strategies.

Fulfilling the values and principles of democracy has been an unresolved international norm for an extended period. Particularly in lower-to-middle income countries such as Myanmar, issues in implementing the claimed right are accentuated due to its limited political willingness and capabilities. Despite the US' substantial support for democracy promotion, the issue is still present as the will of the Myanmar people are still deprived and the existing government repression continues to lead to poor governance. Understandably, upholding democratic principles and pursuing political reform is a complex matter where the progress is gradual, impossible to attain overnight, and exerting an impact on foreign relations. Therefore, this research perceives assessing the US

¹¹ Ibid.

democracy promotion to Myanmar as an significance matter to explore, in order to determine the impact on Myanmar's long-term democratization and how it affects the U.S-Myanmar bilateral relations.

1.2 Research Question

Recognizing the United States efforts in promoting democracy, this research focuses on their inclusive assistance of democracy strategy and programs to Myanmar. In accordance with core components of democracy promotion, the democratic principles highlighted in this research includes good governance and human rights. This research limits its scope to analyse the role of US democracy promotion to Myanmar as lower-to-middle income countries from 2011 to 2014. Thus, based on the previously described background and scope, this research intends to answer following research questions:

1. In what ways the US promote democracy in Myanmar?
2. How did the US promotion of democracy influence the bilateral relations between The United States and Myanmar?

1.3 Research Objective

Following the formulated research questions, the objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To assess the ways of United States promote democracy in Myanmar from 2011 to 2014 and also the background reasons and interest of U.S in promoting democracy.

2. To identify and analyze the United States promotion of democracy in influencing the U.S-Myanmar bilateral relations.

This research will result in a thorough assessment of the United States democracy promotion to Myanmar that aims to build sustainable democratic values and principles within the scopes explained above.

1.4 Research Significance

This research aims to emphasise the importance of implementing democratic principles for good governance and human rights. It focuses on the efforts made by developed countries, particularly the United States, in promoting democratic values in repressive countries like Myanmar. By addressing the limited understanding of Myanmar's political culture and its post-colonial nature, this research seeks to enhance scholarly knowledge on the complexities of Myanmar's oppressive governance. Additionally, it explores the influence of U.S democracy promotion assistance on bilateral relations between the United States and Myanmar. As a result, this research hopes to enlighten and supplement scholarly studies on the complexity of Myanmar's internal oppressive governance and how US democracy promotion assistance influence bilateral relations between the two countries.

Considering the scope of this research in assessing the U.S democracy promotion agenda to Myanmar and impacts on bilateral relations, this research places great importance on the role of state actors such as the United States but not limited to aspires other non-state actors such as IGOs, NGOs, and the public initiatives word pursuing sustainable democratic values and principles in their

respective fields. I hope that the findings of the research will serve as a source of knowledge for readers, particularly those interested in U.S foreign policy and the study of democracy. At last, the outcome of this research is also expected to be valuable for the readers and can be utilized as a credible source of reference for future research on related themes.

1.5 Structure of Writing

The research is divided into five chapters. The research's primary questions, as well as the research boundary, aims, and significance, will be outlined in the first chapter, which also explains the problem and its connection to international relations. The theoretical framework, which makes up the second chapter, includes an examination of the literature as well as an explanation of the theory and concepts that will be employed in the research. The literature review divides the relevant literature into five categories: Democratic Movements in Myanmar, U.S. Democracy Promotion in Southeast Asia, U.S. Democracy Promotion Efforts in Myanmar, U.S. and Myanmar Bilateral Relations, and Democracy Promotion as an Instrument of U.S. Foreign Policy. Following the literature review, one theory and four concepts of international relations will be used as the analytical framework to answer the research questions.

The third chapter discusses the methodology, research technique, collecting data, and data analysis utilized to create the fourth chapter, analysis, which includes the data collection and findings arrangement. In addition to the research design, the fourth chapter is the analysis, which combines the data collection and results with the analytical framework in accordance with theory and concepts to

provide answers to the research questions. The final chapter summarizes and wraps up this investigation while providing a number of recommendations. As the structure of writing has been laid out, the next chapter will be the second chapter of this research, covering the theoretical framework that will be used in this research.

