

New Political Space, Old Tensions: History, Identity and Violence in Rakhine State, Myanmar

ADAM BURKE

Violence in Rakhine State of Myanmar in 2012 and 2013 caused up to 1,000 deaths and forced the long-term displacement of entire communities. Using evidence from interviews, media coverage and secondary literature, this article explores recent events and considers contextual factors behind the unrest. The conflict is a symptom of long-term historical tensions between Rakhine Buddhists and Muslims, and contemporary political changes that reinvigorated anti-Muslim sentiment across Myanmar. Rigid ethnic classifications that are enshrined in Myanmar's laws and political system have encouraged territorial attitudes and furthered discrimination against Muslims and others perceived as migrants. This environment generates incentives for local politicians to strengthen group identity and present themselves as the guardians of their electorate. Raised tensions and a background of violence made it easier for Rakhine politicians to promote identity-based voting and to ensure that most Muslim voters in Rakhine State were disenfranchised, paving the way for some local success in the national elections of November 2015. Following the elections,

ADAM BURKE is an independent consultant and researcher working on conflict and related concerns in Myanmar and across Southeast Asia. Postal address: 172/51 Homeplace, Soi Pridi 20, Sukhumvit Soi 71, Wattana, Bangkok 10110, Thailand; email: adam.burke@thepolicypractice.com; website: <<https://independent.academia.edu/AdamBurke1>>.

Aung San Suu Kyi's new government indicated that past policies would continue, disappointing those hoping for rapid change and demonstrating the entrenched nature of Rakhine State's problems.

Keywords: Myanmar, Burma, conflict, ethnicity, identity, politics, political violence, Rakhine, Rohingya.

Repeated violent attacks and arson campaigns perpetrated by organized gangs targeted Muslim communities in Rakhine State of Myanmar in 2012 and 2013. The attacks came after decades of tension between the Muslim minority and the Rakhine Buddhist majority. Many Muslims — mainly those often known as Rohingya — in Rakhine State are effectively stateless, having failed to attain any form of citizenship.¹

Campaigns against Muslims in Rakhine State, who make up around one third of the State's overall population of about 3.2 million,² have been described by Human Rights Watch as "ethnic cleansing".³ In 2012, groups of local Rakhine activists razed communities to the ground in central districts of the State as part of a concerted effort to change the area's ethnic composition. Further violent clashes have been attributed to perpetrators from both the minority and majority communities, but reputable sources agree that the main aggressors were affiliated with Rakhine Buddhist networks.⁴ Casualty figures are unreliable, but up to 1,000 people, the majority of them Muslim, are thought to have died in inter-communal violence during 2012. In two waves of attacks, most of the Muslims living in central parts of Rakhine State were displaced from their communities and relocated to isolated camps. Their freedom of movement remained restricted after the violence subsided.⁵

In most instances, a similar pattern of violence evolved. A specific and emotive flashpoint, such as allegations of offences committed by Muslim men against Rakhine women, was seized as a rallying call for a violent response by groups of mostly young Rakhine men. Tensions remained high and in 2015 most of the 140,000 Muslims who had fled from their homes were still confined to camps.⁶

Individuals associated with the 2012 violence appear to have close ties to ethnic Rakhine politicians such as Kyaw Zaw Oo, a political activist who published an outspoken revisionist tract alleging that Muslims in Rakhine State were aliens. Despite having been arrested for his role in the communal violence of 2012, he stood successfully for a parliamentary seat in Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine State in the November 2015 general elections.⁷

This article explores the reasons behind the outbreak of violence in Rakhine State in 2012. It considers patterns identified in comparative analyses of communal and ethnic violence, and identifies the main factors that affect this specific case. The research approach uses primary data, consisting mainly of interviews by the author with key informants in Rakhine State and Yangon during several periods in 2013 and 2014. Secondary sources were also consulted, including media coverage, official government statements, reports from humanitarian agencies, online blogs and published academic work.⁸ Taken together, these sources cover the circumstances and the wider context of the violence in Rakhine State at that time. The findings also take account of the outcome of the elections of 8 November 2015, an important landmark for politicians in Rakhine State and for all of Myanmar.

In addressing the reasons behind ethnic conflicts, researchers have considered specific aspects of violence, focusing on identifiable political and social factors that can be observed across recent conflicts. Empirical studies suggest that the risk of violence is greater among populations with high levels of stratification along ethnic lines whereby certain ethnic groups are more privileged than others. Frances Stewart's work builds on earlier literature addressing multi-ethnic societies and finds that disparities between ethnic groups or "horizontal inequalities" increase the likelihood of conflict.⁹ Michael Mann states that in areas inhabited by different ethnic groups, a high level of nationalism defined along ethnic lines tends to justify extreme standpoints, enable leaders to create scapegoats out of minorities and reduce the scope to manage inter-group tensions. Relatively recent and rapid transitions from authoritarian to democratic government create space for "ethnic entrepreneurs" to drum up and exploit group animosities.¹⁰ Other assessments have considered at length the importance of government responses to local conflicts and the instrumental role of local politicians in provoking violence.¹¹ These sources draw on case studies from India, Indonesia and other multi-ethnic countries of Southeast Asia that share some similarities with Rakhine State.

Rather than isolating a single factor or theory, this article emphasizes the specific context of the case study, encompassing the multiple causes and complex interactions that lead to violent conflict. Any single incident of ethnic violence stems from an interplay of economic, social and political dynamics that lead to immediate actions and define underlying causes.¹² The aim is to avoid

reducing a complex reality to a narrower set of factors that may further comparative analysis, but then risk obscuring the subtleties and contradictions of real-world situations.

The term “ethnicity” is employed here in the constructivist sense, recognizing that ethnic groups are socially created. Their ascribed properties and the boundaries between them are chiefly the result of human interaction.¹³ Definitions of, and the boundaries between, ethnic groups are flexible, yet they often endure over many generations. This definition avoids a primordial sense of ethnicity, in which the term takes on a meaning far closer to that of the word “race”, implying permanence grounded in physical difference or immutable cultural properties

However, the widespread and persistent — even if inaccurate — belief that ethnic characteristics are somehow indelibly embedded in genes remains a significant factor in many societies. Ethnic identity is typically defined in Myanmar and across most of Southeast Asia in primordial terms, playing up the rights of a defined group of people (or a supposedly pure “race”) to ancestral land.¹⁴ State nationalism, and many independence movements, are built on a similar basis.¹⁵ The term “race”, or its equivalent in different languages, is still regularly used across Southeast Asia, for example on citizen identity cards.

The following sections explain how the violence in Rakhine State that flared up in 2012 can be linked both to broader trends across Myanmar and to the specific circumstances of the conflict-affected area. Information is presented under several subheadings: the historical roots of ethnic tensions; the minority status of both main groups of antagonists; recent political changes and their impact; local political processes; and international elements.

Historical Precedents, Ethnicity and Religious Nationalism

Recent violence in Myanmar builds on the past, including the legacy of colonialism. British imperial authority was gradually extended eastwards from India during the nineteenth century. Many Indians — Muslims, Hindus and others — followed in the same direction, moving to towns and cities across Burma. The colonial civil service, the police and the army were largely staffed by Indians.¹⁶ Partly as a legacy of this colonial history, contemporary colloquial Burmese ethnic classifications do not distinguish clearly between Hindus or Muslims, or between those Muslims whose families have lived in Myanmar for generations and more recent immigrants.¹⁷

Even before independence in 1947, Burmese nationalists looked to assert the dominance of ethnic Burmans.¹⁸ In 1930, anti-Muslim and anti-Hindu riots in Burma killed hundreds. Racial categories applied by colonial authorities were adapted to suit the needs and vision of post-independence rulers in a multi-ethnic state; they have been barely altered since. Common sentiments of identity are based on an ethnically defined concept of nationalism: 135 ethnic groups are accorded official status and grouped into eight indigenous “races”. People perceived as descendants of migrants rather than indigenous are not recognized as a category, and mixed heritage is not included in the classifications.¹⁹

After the 1962 military takeover led by General Ne Win, around 300,000 Indians and their descendants fled the country.²⁰ A 1982 law formally restricted citizenship to people whose descendants lived in Myanmar before 1823, effectively disenfranchising many Indians who had remained. Muslims in northern Rakhine State were also affected by local and national travel regulations that limited their ability to leave their local township.

Ethnic identity is central to Myanmar's subnational politics. The country is organized into seven regions, in which ethnic Burmese are the majority, and seven states, each of which is associated with the ethnic group considered to be a majority in that area. Smaller areas where an ethnic group makes up the majority, yet does not have its own state, have been classified as Special Administrative Zones. Minority populations beyond a stated threshold are also entitled to special political representation within state and regional parliaments. Resistance against the government of Myanmar has been waged for over seventy years by armed ethnic groups, most ethnicities being represented by one or more of these groups as well as formal political parties.

This complex system and the long legacy of conflict have enshrined ethnic categories in the political system. As a result, population estimates and concerns over how ethnic groups are classified are highly contentious. With the advent of more open democratic competition, such a system is likely to generate major political tensions. Unsurprisingly, compilers of data for the 2014 national census decided that information on religion and ethnicity was considered too sensitive to release until tensions subsided in Rakhine State and nationally.²¹

Those people outside the 135 recognized ethnic groups are regarded as immigrants, have achieved only limited political status in Myanmar and commonly attain only partial citizenship

status. In particular, many people of South Asian descent, and Muslims from all backgrounds, are widely perceived as a threat to the Myanmar nation, not only by hardliners but also among the general public, Buddhist monks, politicians and social activists. Attacks on local Muslim communities over several decades have often been associated with political leaders appearing to encourage violence.²² Deeply bigoted anti-Muslim sentiment is commonplace. For instance, many people in Myanmar believe that Muslims in all countries have large families, thereby exacerbating their own state of poverty. They fear that this will threaten the status of Buddhists as the majority. In reality, Myanmar is overwhelmingly Buddhist and Muslims account for only a few per cent of the population.²³ What is more, the birth rate of neighbouring Muslim-majority Bangladesh is similar to that of Myanmar.

Communal violence in Rakhine State is affected by tensions across the rest of the country. In 2001, Muslims were attacked in towns across Myanmar, including Sittwe and Maungdaw in Rakhine State.²⁴ In March 2013, following the unrest in Rakhine State, anti-Muslim riots erupted again across central Myanmar. In repeated cases, government security forces stood by as attacks took place. Further outbreaks continued into 2014, when riots shook central districts of the city of Mandalay.²⁵

Long-held negative stereotypes have been reinvigorated since 2011. Nationalist, identity-based movements led by Buddhist monks including the 969 Movement and the Association for the Protection of Race and Religion (or MaBaTha) encouraged boycotts of Muslim-owned businesses and repeatedly depicted Muslims as a dangerous threat. They promoted their cause widely, using mass media and the internet as well as political connections.²⁶

A Minority within a Minority State

Both Muslims and ethnic Rakhines feel that they are persecuted minorities in Myanmar. The Rakhine, like Myanmar's other ethnic minorities, complain of longstanding discrimination perpetrated primarily by the central state and particularly the military. Leaders express concern over human rights abuses, arbitrary land confiscation, restrictions on language and cultural expression, economic marginalization, and lack of political control. Poverty is widespread in Rakhine communities. According to a widely used estimate from

2011, Rakhine State is among the two poorest states and regions in the country with a poverty rate of 78 per cent, compared to the national average of 38 per cent.²⁷

Ethnic Rakhines were prominent in the fight against colonial authorities. They continued to challenge national leaders after independence and Rakhine ethnic armed groups maintained an insurgency for many decades.²⁸ Over time, this struggle increasingly shifted to focus on the concerns of the Muslim minority. The widespread belief that immigration and higher birth rates are rapidly increasing the Muslim population fed what has been described as a “siege mentality”.²⁹ Many Rakhines fear becoming a minority within their own state, just as political reforms have finally generated opportunities to gain some authority over their own affairs.³⁰

Rakhine activists can point to separatist claims to territory made by Muslims in northern parts of the State, where Muslims comprise a majority of the population. These claims date back to the 1950s, when Rakhine separatists were also seeking territorial control. The government of Myanmar suppressed both groups.³¹ There is no evidence that any separatist group — or international terror cell — has existed in recent years within Muslim communities in Rakhine State, but the historical memory feeds current Rakhine fears and sustains propaganda.³² Ethnic Rakhines and others across Myanmar also refer to a massacre allegedly perpetrated by Muslims in 1942 following intense ethnic polarization amid anarchic local conditions during the Second World War.³³

With ethnic affiliations central both to longstanding local political claims and to the military’s efforts to build national identity, Muslim leaders in Rakhine State, and among the international diaspora, have looked to strengthen their own group solidarity. They have promoted the use of the term “Rohingya” to describe themselves as part of their assertion of rights along ethnic lines. Some vocal leaders, especially among expatriate groups outside Myanmar, have employed virulent rhetoric, including unsourced allegations of atrocities.³⁴

Muslim leaders in Rakhine State have had some success in defining group identity. They have attracted international attention from journalists, diplomats, human rights advocates and humanitarian agencies, and helped self-appointed representatives to gain recognition. The term Rohingya is universally used in international human rights campaigning and diplomacy. Yet many

Muslims in Rakhine State do not regularly refer to themselves as Rohingya.³⁵ Although the term is an old one, and Rakhine State has had a minority Muslim population for centuries, it is likely that its widespread use to define most Muslims in Rakhine State is a recent phenomenon.³⁶

Disputes over ethnic nomenclature have become a proxy for competing versions of history and wider tensions. Most ethnic Rakhines and the Myanmar government insist on using the term Bengali instead of Rohingya to describe the largest group of Muslims in Rakhine State. The word Bengali emphasizes historical origins in neighbouring Bangladesh or India, and therefore implicitly categorizes Muslims in Rakhine State as migrants. It is resented by Muslims in Rakhine State, many of whom believe (probably accurately, although no definitive survey exists) that their families have been in Myanmar for generations.³⁷ Muslim leaders refused to cooperate with the national census that would have defined their ethnicity as Bengali.³⁸

The refusal of the national government and many of Myanmar's Buddhists — ethnic Rakhines and others — to recognize the term Rohingya can be explained through the logic of ethnic territorial politics. The use of an ethnic label in Myanmar implies a claim to land along with an identity. This makes it threatening to politicians who are attempting to assert authority over their own perceived Rakhine homeland and to religious nationalists who associate the present territory of Myanmar with Buddhism alone.

Rakhine nationalists' anger against those using the term Rohingya is not easily distinguished from discrimination against Muslims in general, as is shown by the plight of Kaman Muslims. Members of a distinct and numerically small minority which, unlike the Rohingya, is recognized by the government as one of the 135 national ethnic groups, Kaman Muslims are typically full citizens by birth. However, they were also violently displaced from their communities and forced into camps across central parts of Rakhine State in 2012 and 2013.³⁹ Non-Muslim minorities, including ethnic Chin who make up an estimated 10 per cent of the state's population, were not targeted.⁴⁰

In this polarized environment, there is little space to promote shared values or common goals. Conceptions of equal rights or notions of plural governments that accommodate diverse groups within the same territory are not only of little concern to Rakhine nationalists but are also seen to undermine the Rakhine cause.⁴¹

New Political Space and Economic Change

Rapid political change, especially an increase in democratic space, has changed conditions in Rakhine State and across Myanmar, enabling new political movements to take hold. Following decades of rule by an opaque military junta, President Thein Sein introduced political and economic reforms after assuming office in 2011. Opposition parties were given permission to operate and most political prisoners were released. Some authority was passed from the central government to local governments.⁴² Economic and development policies became a little more responsive to the needs of Myanmar's ethnically varied and predominantly poor population of around 51 million. Expenditure on social services and essential infrastructure slowly increased. Faster economic growth, partly fuelled by foreign investment, began to generate new job opportunities in the larger cities.⁴³

The new environment created both opportunities and threats for Rakhine State. A less oppressive approach to law and order increased the space for local violence. The partial withdrawal of the military may have reduced incidents of forced labour, extortion and land confiscation but also adversely affected local security. In many violent incidents across Rakhine State during 2012 and 2013, the military were reluctant to intervene. Local police, ethnic Rakhine themselves, generally showed limited interest and in some cases participated in the violence against Muslims.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, greater freedom of association and of information generated new space to promote ethnic hatred and violence. Websites became popular tools across Myanmar for spreading propaganda and mobile phone ownership made it easier to organize rapid collective action.⁴⁵

A combination of decentralization and new resource flows has also raised the local political stakes. The establishment of state level parliaments with elected representatives offered local politicians new opportunities and generated expectations of further devolution towards federalism. However, local parliaments have little administrative capacity or budget control and have not been able to do more than pass minor local bylaws.

Rising economic and political expectations have yet to be met. In addition to national level reforms and faster national economic growth, the recent exploitation of offshore natural gas near the Rakhine coastline has generated a major revenue stream for the national, and potentially local, government.⁴⁶ The gas is piped directly to China

under a long-term concession, and local politicians want Rakhine State to see a share of the profits.⁴⁷ However, the national government did not concede to their demands and retained all of the proceeds.

Reflecting the long-term trend of Myanmar's national rulers and their business associates extracting profit from economic activity and offering meagre returns to the local population,⁴⁸ Rakhine businessmen and politicians showed little confidence that their marginal status would be redressed. Plans for industrial development in a new special economic zone near Kyaukphyu had not moved ahead. Even if the plans were to be realized, local entrepreneurs feared losing out to larger national companies.⁴⁹ This pattern had already been seen in Ngapali, a beach resort in southern Rakhine State, where local business leaders complained that they were overwhelmed by national and international investors.

Confidence in the rural economy of Rakhine State was low. Job creation and rising wages in central parts of Myanmar adversely affected local rice farmers and wholesalers. Increased labour costs for harvesting and transportation meant that they struggled to compete with more efficient farms elsewhere in the country.⁵⁰ The fishing industry also suffered from mismanaged common resources. An unpopular quota system that gave influential operators undue control and loaded excessive costs onto local fishermen was revoked by the national government following repeated complaints. This reform occurred soon after the marine ecosystem along the Rakhine coastline collapsed with local fishermen reporting a decline in catch size of up to 80 per cent between 2000 and 2012.⁵¹ Despite this resource crisis, the quota system was not replaced by an alternative resource management plan. Fishing is a key economic activity in Rakhine State and these problems increased tensions. Ethnic Rakhine and Muslim communities are both involved in the sector, with local Rakhine fishermen claiming that Muslim fishing interests habitually infringed informal agreements.⁵²

These economic and political trends have fuelled frustration and tensions, furthering local politicians' interests in both wresting control from the central government and ensuring that opportunities to gain local authority are not undermined by a Muslim minority.

Political Interests and Violence

Political networks, often fostered by democratic competition, can play a key role in ethnic violence. Strong and loyal local support networks

are a common component of an electoral candidate's strategy. This encourages many leaders to pander to, or to manipulate, ethnic inter-group tensions in order to promote affiliation with an ethnic support base and to strengthen group identity by stressing the threat that a different ethnic group presents.⁵³

Although Myanmar's reforms transferred little genuine power to the local level, they did create space for new political life. Local and national elections, and greater freedom to organize networks, invigorated politics in Rakhine State. The main beneficiary was the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP). Formed for the 2010 general election, it won 35 of 44 available national seats and secured 18 out of 35 seats in the state parliament.⁵⁴

In 2013, the older and smaller Arakan League for Democracy merged with the RNDP to form a single party, the Arakan National Party (ANP). The ethnic nationalist ANP coalition has no Muslim support base and its leaders had a clear interest in limiting the electoral rights of Muslims. The ANP's primary political opposition in most of Rakhine State before the 2015 elections was thought to be the military-affiliated Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), while Aung Sang Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) had a strong presence in southern parts of the State. These two national parties could have gained support from Muslims in Rakhine State if their voting rights had been upheld. Meanwhile, smaller parties with a foothold in northern townships of Rakhine State where Muslims make up a majority of the population campaigned unsuccessfully for the right to be registered as a separate ethnic category.⁵⁵

The ANP raised the twin fears of domination by the central government and the supposed threat presented by the Muslim minority to increase their appeal and castigate their opponents. As an extension of the same national government that in 2010 extended voting rights to Muslims in Rakhine State, the USDP in particular was depicted by Rakhine nationalists as an enemy of the Rakhine people. It made simple electoral sense for ANP leaders to raise ethnic tensions in order to make it harder for the government to offer voting rights to Muslims, many of whom held temporary citizenship. By fomenting anti-Muslim sentiment, ANP leaders ensured that the government would lose Buddhist support nationally if it extended voting rights to Muslims with temporary citizenship status — as it had done in previous votes in 2008 and 2010.

Virulent rhetoric and extreme anti-Muslim attitudes were expressed by ANP leaders. During interviews conducted in 2013 and

2014, ANP representatives repeatedly stated that they would not concede any political role for Muslims in Rakhine State and hoped that Muslims would migrate to other parts of Myanmar or abroad.⁵⁶

The ANP alliance stood for the 2015 election on a ticket that stressed: “First, Arakan [i.e. Rakhine] nationalism. Second, solidarity. Third, development.”⁵⁷ ANP politicians phrased these concerns as intrinsic to the territorial rights of ethnic Rakhines. The key political priority for the ANP was to gain authority over the Rakhine State parliament and then to push for more decentralized powers including a share of the revenues from offshore natural gas exploitation.

Many Muslims in Rakhine State and elsewhere in Myanmar believe that the ANP has been directly involved in encouraging violence. Anecdotal evidence from interviews on the ground points to complicity but is hard to verify. The ANP typically denies all such charges.⁵⁸ Virulent ethnic nationalism promoted by the ANP often targets Muslims, deploying terms such as: “the present Bengali [i.e. local Muslim] population causes threats for the whole Arakan people and other ethnic groups”.⁵⁹ In late 2012, the national government’s election commission reprimanded the RNDP (before the party helped to form the ANP) for publishing a calendar containing pictures of a man allegedly killed by Muslims, part of a concerted campaign to incite anger among the Rakhine electorate.⁶⁰ Following violence in the town of Thandwe in late 2013, the government arrested local ANP activists and other ringleaders who had been accused of inciting unrest.⁶¹

On 25–26 September 2012, at the height of the communal tensions, around 2,000 Rakhine leaders including local politicians met at a public meeting in Rathidaung, twenty miles north of Sittwe. The meeting passed a series of resolutions calling for, among other measures, special birth control laws for Muslim Bengalis, the formation of armed militia in border villages and other steps to stop perceived migration from Bangladesh, further monitoring of Muslim schools, resettlement of Muslim Bengalis to a third country, and the return of all land allegedly taken during communal rioting in 1942.⁶²

Only several weeks after this meeting, a further bout of riots broke out across Rakhine State. The impressive size and public nature of the meeting suggests that, while local politicians encouraged violence, they did not act alone but alongside other representatives of ethnic Rakhine society.

Patterns of violence appear to have benefitted the ANP. Waves of unrest in 2012, instigated largely by organized groups of local

ethnic Rakhine men, affected townships in central parts of Rakhine State. The groups appeared to target electoral constituencies where the chances of ANP success were compromised by a large Muslim minority, practically none of whom were expected to vote for them. Violently evicted from rural and urban communities into displacement camps, Muslim residents became isolated as a result.

In order to hold sway in the Rakhine State parliament under Myanmar's complex electoral rules, thereby controlling local territory regarded as an ethnic homeland, the ANP alliance needed to win two-thirds of the constituencies in the 2015 elections. With some constituencies in the south likely to be won by the NLD, some in the north potentially falling to local candidates, and the inland township of Ann being dominated by the USDP, winning the populous constituencies of central Rakhine state was vital for the ANP.

In early 2015, after protracted local protest whenever the issue of Muslim people's rights was raised, the government eventually decided to withdraw temporary citizenship status and in doing so disenfranchised around 700,000 people nationally. Most of these were Muslims in Rakhine State.⁶³ In addition, local Muslim-led candidates were barred by the Election Commission from standing for office.⁶⁴ These steps significantly boosted the ANP's chances of electoral success.

This withdrawal of voting rights for Muslims occurred shortly before the 2015 elections. At the same time, a national campaign promoted the passage through parliament of four laws ostensibly aimed at "protecting race and religion".⁶⁵ ANP politicians including their leader, Dr Aye Maung, actively supported the passage of the laws through parliament. The laws were roundly condemned by human rights and pro-democracy groups as a shallow effort to incite fear by implying that minorities, notably Myanmar's Muslim population, were a threat to Myanmar's Buddhist majority.⁶⁶

Neither of the two main political parties contesting the 2015 election — the USDP and the NLD — fielded any Muslim candidates anywhere in Myanmar. Prominent figures such as former USDP leader Shwe Mann openly affiliated themselves during campaigning with nationalist Buddhist movements.⁶⁷ The NLD felt obliged to refute accusations that they were insufficiently aligned with the Buddhist cause and to avoid criticizing the chauvinism of the incumbent government and nationalist campaigners. In Rakhine State, the NLD aimed to deflect criticism of their allegedly weaker nationalist credentials by focusing on the past mistreatment of Buddhist monks by the military during earlier popular protests.⁶⁸

With many Muslims ineligible to vote or run for public office, few respected community representatives were able to engage in dialogue. Some leaders were arrested in 2012, and others were confined to displacement camps along with the rest of the Muslim population.⁶⁹

The 2015 Election Results

The ANP prospered in the elections of 8 November 2015, winning 12 seats from Rakhine State in the lower house of the national parliament and ten in the upper house. The USDP fared poorly, as they did across most of Myanmar, leaving them with only one seat from Rakhine State in each house. The remaining national seats from Rakhine State constituencies went to the NLD, one in the upper house and four in the lower house.

The ANP became easily the largest party in Rakhine State and the third-largest in the country. The seats that the ANP did not hold were mainly in areas that are seen as culturally close to central Myanmar and have relatively low proportions of Muslims. Southern parts of Rakhine State followed the national trend of an NLD landslide. As expected, the USDP won in Ann, where a military garrison and very few Muslim residents limited the attraction of the ANP's core messages. These trends suggest that the ANP's appeal was weaker where its call for Rakhine ethnic solidarity and its trenchant anti-Muslim stance resonated less strongly with the local population.

Despite some internal tension, the ANP held together as a coalition, giving them an unchallenged mantle as the political representatives of the Rakhine people. In other states, ethnic parties competed against each other, undermining their credibility and splitting votes. This enabled the NLD to prosper in many of Myanmar's ethnic minority areas. As well as taking advantage of communal tensions in Rakhine State to strengthen ethnic affiliation and deny voting rights to many Muslims, the ANP also campaigned effectively and formed strong support networks. For instance, ANP candidates were selected through a ballot of local party members, a consensual process that contrasts with the top-down management style of most other parties in Myanmar.⁷⁰

Elections for state parliaments were held along with the national vote. The ANP fared well at that level too, winning 22 of the 35 elected seats for Rakhine State. However, under Myanmar's hybrid system, 25 per cent of seats are automatically reserved for military

representatives in all parliament chambers, meaning that the ANP still fell just short of an overall majority on the house floor.

ANP leaders' domination of the politics of Rakhine State appeared to give them a strong basis to maintain ethnic Rakhine superiority over the Muslim population and to pursue further devolution of power. However, ultimate authority still rested at the national level and in March 2016 the new NLD-led government announced that the key post of Chief Minister for Rakhine State would not be given to an ANP politician. Instead, the most senior NLD politician from Rakhine State, Nyi Pu, was appointed. ANP chairman Aye Maung, who was rumoured to have coveted the Chief Minister position, failed even to be re-elected to the national parliament, losing his constituency to an NLD candidate.

Tensions rose between the two parties that comprise the ANP coalition over whether or not to work with the new government. RNDP leaders wanted to maintain a policy of non-cooperation, while leaders of the smaller party in the alliance, the Arakan League for Democracy, did not agree. The appointment of Aye Thar Aung, former leader of the Arakan League for Democracy, as deputy speaker of the national parliament's upper house caused particular tension. RNDP leaders complained about shady backdoor deals and hinted that further unrest could follow. Overall, despite a strong election showing, Rakhine politicians had made only partial steps towards their objectives, with their alliance well and truly fractured.⁷¹

International Factors

Local concerns connect with international actions and information flows. These trends can be seen in Buddhist nationalist movements. In Sri Lanka, as in Myanmar, longstanding fears over proselytization and religious domination have been encouraged by networks of Buddhist monks.⁷² Strident speeches depict Islam as a bellicose religion bent on expansion, presenting evidence including the destruction of the Buddhist statues at Bamiyan, Afghanistan, in 2001. One of the most prominent and virulent monks in Myanmar, Ashin Wirathu, fostered links with anti-Muslim campaigns led by monks in Sri Lanka, proclaiming that they would combine efforts to defend the Buddhist religion.⁷³ Alarmist statements over the supposed spread of Islam reach a global audience. They appeal to Western extremists and are associated with ethnic violence from Sri Lanka to the Central African Republic. The internet plays a part

in rapid information transfer. For instance, Rakhine activists refer approvingly to xenophobic literature found on the websites of extremist European nationalist organizations.⁷⁴

A very different field of international engagement, humanitarian assistance, has also interacted with conflict dynamics in Rakhine State.⁷⁵ Until the reforms implemented under President Thein Sein, foreign sanctions and the military government's own restrictions limited international agency operations in Myanmar. The UN's World Food Programme and High Commission for Refugees gained permission to provide aid to villages in northern parts of Rakhine State in the early 1990s following conflict and displacement of Muslims.⁷⁶ The 2012 and 2013 violence in central parts of Rakhine State led many other international agencies to provide support for the first time, resulting in a prominent international presence in the state capital, Sittwe, and in smaller towns.⁷⁷

Assistance has been offered primarily on the basis of humanitarian need. The vast majority of recipients are Muslim, many of them restricted to isolated displacement camps. Little attention was given to ethnic Rakhines who may not have qualified for emergency assistance yet still struggle with the daily grind of entrenched poverty. The sight of aid trucks passing by ethnic Rakhine villages in order to provide assistance to Muslim communities made aid agencies an easy target for Rakhine activists.⁷⁸

With activists depicting them as an enemy, the UN and international agencies belatedly recognized that they had a serious image problem among the Rakhine population.⁷⁹ In March 2014, international aid agency offices in Sittwe were ransacked. The violence appeared to be carefully managed, prior warnings having enabled staff to leave before gangs of armed men arrived to destroy property, vehicles and supplies.⁸⁰ By sending a clear and aggressive signal without causing injury or death, the ringleaders were able to offer an uncompromising message while avoiding a strong central government security crackdown and worldwide condemnation.

International efforts to safeguard human rights in Rakhine State and across Myanmar were commonly derided as an unwelcome attack on national sovereignty.⁸¹ For decades, the military-led government had regularly depicted foreign interests as threats to national identity and territorial integrity. Efforts to discredit foreign agencies in Rakhine State were able to take advantage of this well-established national discourse. International isolation and the lack of rule-based domestic institutions meant that Rakhine activists were

cynical of the notion that any institution acts according to principles of neutral humanitarianism.

International agencies gradually recognized that arguments over humanitarian need and global standards were ineffective.⁸² The violence directed against their offices pushed international agency staff to consult Rakhine leaders and offers of long-term international development assistance for Rakhine communities then followed.⁸³

Conclusions

Many of the key indicators identified in international research on the causes of ethnic conflict are found in Rakhine State. The concept of horizontal inequalities can be applied there on two levels: first between Muslims and ethnic Rakhines in Rakhine State; and second between ethnic Rakhines and Burmese nationally.⁸⁴ The significance of the government response to rising tensions is clearly seen.⁸⁵ Patterns of violence, in particular the roles of local politicians and networks in stimulating conflict, share common features with other instances of ethnic conflict across the region and more widely.⁸⁶

However, above all, an understanding of violence in Rakhine State requires reference to the local history of inter-ethnic relations, along with processes of identity construction and political change across Myanmar. A historical perspective shows that ethnic violence in Rakhine State follows long-term patterns characterized by a potent mix of tense inter-group relations and combative politics. Both Muslim and ethnic Rakhine activists feel that they are oppressed minorities and interpret the history of Rakhine State to fit their perceptions. These trends interact with events across Myanmar, where anti-Muslim sentiment is widespread. In particular, national identity has been intricately defined along ethnic and religious lines, contributing to tensions between majority and minority groups and denying full citizenship to many people. Muslims in Rakhine State confront discrimination from society and the state at the national level in addition to the specific resentment of ethnic Rakhines. Conflict tensions in Rakhine State have persisted through recent decades, framed by a dominant perception that Muslims are predominantly illegal immigrants. For example, in 1998 General Khin Nyunt wrote in a letter to the UN: "These people are not originally from Myanmar but have illegally migrated to Myanmar because of population pressures in their own country. ... They are racially, ethnically, culturally different from the other national races in our country."⁸⁷ In 2012, President Thein Sein suggested to the

UN High Commissioner for Refugees that his government would resolve the problem by deporting Muslims in Rakhine State to any country that would accept them.⁸⁸

Recent political trends and associated violence in Rakhine State can be seen as a contemporary manifestation of these long-term dynamics. The concern over numbers and their association with legitimate territorial control is a primary long-term driver of conflict. Public statements by Rakhine leaders increasingly tended to mask this perspective as they sought to distance themselves from the violence. In a press interview following the November 2015 elections, the recently appointed Speaker of the Rakhine State Parliament, San Kyaw Hla, chose to emphasize the need to stem ethnic Rakhine migration out of the state, thereby addressing the core concern to maintain a clear numerical majority while avoiding the salient issue, the plight of the Muslim minority.⁸⁹

Political reforms undertaken since 2010 invigorated local politics in Rakhine State. Local parties formed along ethnic lines and the ANP coalition enjoyed considerable electoral success in the 2015 elections. Muslim parties, meanwhile, were progressively denied space to operate just as their support base was denied the right to vote.

The national success of Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD, despite their liberal stance and emphasis on protecting human rights, did not guarantee a better future for Muslims in Rakhine State. In May 2016, Myanmar's new leaders maintained the rhetoric of their military-affiliated predecessors by refusing to recognize the name "Rohingya" and by criticizing its use by US diplomats.⁹⁰ The new government remained caught between different interests: military and security concerns; national chauvinist sentiments that discourage sympathetic treatment of Muslims; Rakhine claims for power and control of territory; and international concern over the plight of the state's Muslims.⁹¹

This longstanding pattern, and the intensity of violence in 2012–13, supports the comparative observation made by Donald Horowitz that electoral systems which facilitate the formation of ethnic parties serve to help deepen and extend pre-existing ethnic conflict.⁹² Increased ethnic tensions appear to have served the interests of Rakhine politicians seeking to gather popular support and maintain their own party unity. Violent attacks displaced and supported the disenfranchisement of Muslim voters from constituencies in central parts of Rakhine State that were critical to the ANP's electoral aims.

Myanmar's reforms also brought greater freedom of expression and association, enabling local activists to operate in ways that would not previously have been possible. At the same time, the spread of the internet and increasing mobile phone penetration offered new, and largely unregulated, scope for spreading information and mobilizing crowds.

This new political space probably contributed to the timing and the severity of the 2012–13 violence, confirming a pattern observed more widely where ethnic conflict, often involving both state and non-state actors, can flourish in unchecked democratic environments.⁹³ The long history of violent tensions in Rakhine State and across Myanmar under decades of military dictatorship shows, however, that the increased freedom enjoyed by Rakhine activists offers only a partial explanation.

Several reasons why the conflict did not escalate further towards genocide can be proposed. First, the key initial objectives of the violence — to remove Muslims from territory in central parts of Rakhine State and to hinder their chances of being able to vote — were achieved. Second, with Muslims restricted to isolated camps, any planned revenge attacks would have failed and the cycle of violence was broken. Third, ethnic Rakhine politicians have aimed to present themselves as responsible and reasonable on the domestic and international stage. Further violence would have undermined those aspirations. Fourth, most of the violent incidents were conducted by a fairly small number of relatively disciplined participants. The clearest example was the carefully managed attacks on international agency offices in March 2014.

Fifth, and perhaps most significantly, the national government eventually acted to limit the violence. This fits the wider analysis that stresses the critical role of the state in either abetting or stifling conflict. In this case, government action was not initially evident. On repeated occasions from 2012, both the local police and national military units failed to prevent attacks. While civil and military government bodies may have initially turned a blind eye, there is little if any evidence that they lent institutional support. Measured assessments of the unrest are careful to distinguish between the violent protagonists and state actors.

Over time, the national government responded to unrest in Rakhine State with increased vigilance. In 2014, the Chief Minister was replaced following further violent incidents. His successor, Maung Maung Ohn, had previously served as a deputy to the

Minister of Border Affairs and was well placed to maintain central government control.

Despite increased space for political action at the local level across Myanmar, the central government has remained dominant and is still characterized by strong military involvement. The possibility of direct intervention through the enactment of emergency legislation generated a clear incentive for Rakhine activists to avoid escalating violence to a level that would antagonize national leaders. Maintaining law and order, and upholding an international reputation, were major concerns for national leaders whose reforms had enabled them to gain an air of legitimacy, to end decades of trade sanctions, and in 2014 to assume for the first time the regionally important rotating chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The overall position of the central government has been ambiguous and human rights organizations have catalogued many laws and practices that discriminate against Muslims.⁹⁴ At the same time, the limited extent of local autonomy and continued lack of economic opportunities in Rakhine State generated strong reasons for ethnic Rakhines to regard the central government as an enemy rather than an ally.

These complex dynamics offer many opportunities for further research in Rakhine State. If further power is devolved from the centre to states and regions in future years, then the actions of local politicians, their relationship with the central government, and the incentives that guide them will become even more important factors in determining the potential for violence. The scope for civil society bodies to reduce conflict tensions, an issue analysed in depth elsewhere, is also of direct relevance to peace-builders in Rakhine State.⁹⁵ Understanding these local patterns and relating them to wider changes across Myanmar will provide useful insights for academics and policymakers. Meanwhile, the lack of common ground over the rights to which Muslims in Rakhine State are entitled means that their plight looks set to endure for many more decades to come.

NOTES

- ¹ The broader and less controversial term “Muslim” is used here. Some Muslim communities in Rakhine State affected by violence in 2012–13 are classified as “Kaman” or other sub-groups rather than Rohingya. The dispute over names is addressed later in the article.

- ² Department of Population, *Population and Housing Census of Myanmar, Provisional Results* (Naypyidaw: Government of Myanmar, 2014). Ethnic and religious disaggregation of the census data is not yet available but estimates can be extrapolated from other sources. See for example International Crisis Group, *Myanmar: The Politics of Rakhine State*, Asia Report 261, 22 October 2014, footnote 1, available at <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/burma-myanmar/261-myanmar-the-politics-of-rakhine-state.pdf>>.
- ³ Human Rights Watch, “‘All You Can Do is Pray’: Crimes Against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Burma’s Arakan State”, 22 April 2013, available at <<https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/04/22/all-you-can-do-pray/crimes-against-humanity-and-ethnic-cleansing-rohingya-muslims>>.
- ⁴ Following common nomenclature, ethnic Rakhine Buddhists are referred to in this article as ethnic Rakhines, or simply Rakhines.
- ⁵ An estimated 70 per cent of victims were Muslim. “969: How Burma’s Buddhist Monks Turned on Islam”, BBC World Service, 3 September 2013, available at <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01fnz3d>>.
- ⁶ UNHCR, *Myanmar Fact Sheet — August* (2015), available at <<http://www.unhcr.org/50001cf99.html>>.
- ⁷ Kayleigh Long, “In Sittwe, an Independent Candidate in Name Only Tells of a Split Within His Party”, *Myanmar Times*, 3 November 2015, available at <<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/17332-in-sittwe-an-independent-candidate-in-name-only-tells-of-a-split-within-his-party.html>>.
- ⁸ Non-refereed sources are only referenced where information can be separately verified (i.e. triangulated).
- ⁹ Frances Stewart, “Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: An Introduction and Some Hypotheses”, in *Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: Understanding Group Violence in Multiethnic Societies*, edited by Frances Stewart (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 3–24.
- ¹⁰ Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge: University Press, 2004), Chapter 1, pp. 1–33.
- ¹¹ Ward Berenschot, *Riot Politics: India’s Hindu–Muslim Violence and the Indian State* (London: Hurst, 2011); Paul Brass, *The Production of Hindu–Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2003); Steven Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- ¹² Mann, *The Dark Side*, op. cit., pp. 30–31.
- ¹³ Susan Henders, “Political Regimes and Ethnic Identities in East and Southeast Asia: Beyond the ‘Asian Values’ Debate”, in *Democratization and Identity: Regimes and Ethnicity in East and Southeast Asia*, edited by Susan Henders (Plymouth, UK: Lexington, 2004), p. 6.
- ¹⁴ More subtle academic uses of the term “primordial” may recognize some constructed properties of ethnicity. Clifford Geertz, “The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States”, in *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa* (New York: Free Press, 1963), pp. 107–13.

- ¹⁵ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- ¹⁶ Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (London: Zed, 1999), pp. 40, 43.
- ¹⁷ The derogatory term “kalar” refers to all people of South Asian origin in Myanmar.
- ¹⁸ The Dobama Asiayone movement of the early 1930s, a precursor of the successful independence movement, urged boycotts of Indian and Chinese shopkeepers. Shelby Tucker, *Burma, the Curse of Independence* (London: Pluto Press, 2001).
- ¹⁹ The 2014 national census applied these categories.
- ²⁰ Smith, *Burma: Insurgency*, op. cit., p. 219.
- ²¹ International Crisis Group, “Counting the Costs: Myanmar’s Problematic Census”, Asia Briefing 144, Yangon/Brussels, 2014, available at <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/burma-myanmar/b144-counting-the-costs-myanmar-s-problematic-census.pdf>>.
- ²² Juliane Schober, “Buddhism, Violence and the State in Burma (Myanmar) and Sri Lanka”, University of Passau conference paper (1997), p. 7, available at <http://www.phil.uni-passau.de/fileadmin/group_upload/45/pdf/conferences/paper_j_schober.pdf>.
- ²³ The precise number of Muslims in Myanmar is unknown.
- ²⁴ Human Rights Watch, “Crackdown on Burmese Muslims”, July 2002, available at <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/asia/burmese_muslims.pdf>.
- ²⁵ Matthew Walton and Susan Hayward, *Contesting Buddhist Narratives: Democratization, Nationalism, and Communal Violence in Myanmar*, East-West Center Policy Study 71 (2014), pp. 6–8, available at <<http://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/ps071.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=34800>>.
- ²⁶ Walton and Hayward, *Contesting*, op. cit., pp. 12–16.
- ²⁷ UNDP, *Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey in Myanmar (2009–10)* (Yangon: UNDP, 2011).
- ²⁸ Smith, *Burma: Insurgency*, op. cit., p. 239.
- ²⁹ International Crisis Group, *Myanmar*, op. cit., p. i.
- ³⁰ Ibid., p. 14.
- ³¹ Anthony Ware, “Secessionist Aspects to the Buddhist–Muslim Conflict in Rakhine State, Myanmar”, in *Territorial Separatism and Global Politics*, edited by Damien Kingsbury and Costas Laoutides (Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 2015), pp. 5–6, available at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281102667_Secessionist_Aspects_to_the_Buddhist-Muslim_Conflict_in_Rakhine_State_Myanmar>.
- ³² Republic of the Union of Myanmar, *Final Report of Inquiry Commission on Sectarian Violence in Rakhine State*, 8 July 2013, p. iii, available at <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs15/Rakhine_Commission_Report-en-red.pdf>.
- ³³ The Chief Minister of Rakhine State mentioned this incident as a justification for current fears. “Outlook Interviews Maung Maung Ohn”, *Outlook India*, 13 July 2015, available at <<http://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/theres-no-persecution-just-that-govt-will-not-use-rohingya-in-official-nation/294782>>.

- ³⁴ Habib Siddiqui, "The Rohingya Problem: Why and How to Move Forward", paper presented at "Contemplating Burma's Rohingya People's Future in Reconciliation and (Democratic) Reform", Thammasat University, Bangkok, 15 August 2012, available at <<http://www.kaladanpress.org/seminar-and-event-mainmenu-38/69-on-rohingya/3817-the-rohingya-problem-why-and-how-to-move-forward>>.
- ³⁵ Author interviews with Muslim community leaders, Kyauk Phyu and Sittwe townships, October 2013.
- ³⁶ Jacques Leider, "Rohingya: The Name, the Movement, the Quest for Identity", in *Nation Building in Myanmar* (Yangon: EGRESS and Myanmar Peace Center, 2014), pp. 204–55.
- ³⁷ Max Beauchamp, "Beyond Bigotry: Unravelling Ethnic Violence in Rakhine", *New Mandala*, 19 December 2013, available at <<http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2013/12/19/beyond-bigotry-unravelling-ethnic-violence-in-rakhine/>>. Also Ware, "Secessionist Aspects", op. cit., pp. 3–6.
- ³⁸ Jared Ferrie, "Why Myanmar's Rohingya are Forced to say they are Bengali", *Christian Science Monitor*, 2 June 2013, available at <<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-Pacific/2013/0602/Why-Myanmar-s-Rohingya-are-forced-to-say-they-are-Bengali>>.
- ³⁹ International Crisis Group, *Myanmar*, op. cit., p. 23.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 1.
- ⁴¹ Author interview, with leaders of the Yangon Rakhine Thahaya Association, October 2014.
- ⁴² For an overview see Hamish Nixon and Cindy Joeline, *Fiscal Decentralization in Myanmar: Towards a Roadmap for Reform* (Yangon: MDRI and The Asia Foundation, 2014), available at <<http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/FiscalDecentralizationinMyanmarTowardsARoadmaptoReform.pdf>>.
- ⁴³ World Bank, *Myanmar Economic Monitor* (Yangon: World Bank, October 2015), p. 5, available at <http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSPContentServer/WDSP/IB/2015/10/04/090224b083120090/1_0/Rendered/PDF/Myanmar0economic0monitor.pdf>.
- ⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch, "All You Can Do", op. cit., p. 15.
- ⁴⁵ Hereward Holland, "Facebook in Myanmar: Amplifying Hate Speech?", Al Jazeera English online, 14 June 2014, available at <<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/06/facebook-myanmar-rohingya-amplifying-hate-speech-2014612112834290144.html>>.
- ⁴⁶ World Economic Forum, *New Energy Architecture: Myanmar* (World Economic Forum, Asian Development Bank and Accenture, June 2013) p. 19, available at <http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_EN_NewEnergyArchitecture_Myanmar_2013.pdf>.
- ⁴⁷ Maung Tintone and Kay Zue, "Arakan National Conference calls for Rakhine to get 50% of Oil and Gas Revenues", *Mizzima*, 29 April 2013, available at <<http://archive-3.mizzima.com/mizzima-news/development/item/11125-arakan-national-conference-calls-for-rakhine-to-get-50-of-oil-and-gas-revenues>>.
- ⁴⁸ Thet Aung Lynn and Mari Oye, *Natural Resources and Subnational Governments in Myanmar: Key Considerations for Wealth Sharing* (Yangon: The Asia

Foundation, 2014), available at <<https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/NaturalResourcesandSubnationalGovernmentsinMyanmar.pdf>>.

- 49 Author interviews with several local businessmen (land, fishing, hotels) in Kyaukphyu, October 2013; with local businessmen (fish processing) and politicians (RNDP, USDP and NLD) in Sittwe, October 2013; and with local businessmen (trade, wholesale rice) in Sittwe, June 2014.
- 50 Author interview with rice entrepreneur, Sittwe, June 2014, and farmer groups, Ann, May 2014. The changes also reflected the removal of Muslims from the workforce following violent displacement.
- 51 Pyoe Pin, "Political Economy of Rakhine with a Focus on the Fishery", unpublished, 2013, Annex 4.
- 52 Author interviews with Rakhine fishermen, Sittwe, October 2013.
- 53 Various accounts of ethnic violence and local political networks cover this process. See Berenschot, *Riot Politics*; Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence*; Mann, *The Dark Side*, op. cit.
- 54 A quota of military appointees meant that the RNDP did not hold a majority.
- 55 Lawi Weng, "Muslim Political Parties Seek Rohingya Census Recognition", *The Irrawaddy*, 10 January 2014, available at <<http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/muslim-political-parties-seek-rohingya-census-recognition.html>>.
- 56 Author interviews with Buddhist monks and women's network leaders, Sittwe, October 2013.
- 57 Kyaw Zaw Oo quoted in Kayleigh Long, "In Sittwe", op. cit.
- 58 Republic of the Union of Myanmar, *Final Report*, op. cit., pp. 16–17.
- 59 RNDP Press Statement, 26 July 2012. Quoted in Human Rights Watch, "All You Can Do", op. cit., p. 26.
- 60 EMG, "Union Election Commission Has Warned RNDP Not to Publish any 'Racist' Article", *Democracy for Burma*, 28 December 2012, available at <<http://democracyforburma.wordpress.com/2012/12/28/union-election-commission-has-warned-rakhine-nationalities-development-party-rndp-not-to-publish-any-racist-article/>>.
- 61 Those charged were later released on bail. "11 Arakanese Charged for Thandwe Violence Released on Bail", *The Irrawaddy*, 5 December 2013, available at <<http://www.irrawaddy.org/latest-news/11-arakanese-charged-thandwe-violence-released-bail.html>>.
- 62 Narinjara News Agency, "Arakan Public Meeting Successfully Concludes in Rathidaung", 29 September 2012, available at <<http://narinjara.com/arakan-public-meeting-successfully-concludes-in-rahindaung/>>.
- 63 Lawi Weng, "White Cards Expire, Rohingya to Enter Citizenship Verification Process", *The Irrawaddy*, 1 April 2015, available at <<http://www.irrawaddy.org/election/news/white-cards-expire-rohingya-to-enter-citizenship-verification-process>>.
- 64 Philip Sherwell, "Burma Launches Electoral Adventure with Muslim Politicians Excluded", *The Telegraph*, 8 September 2015, available at <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/burmayanmar/11850271/Burma-launches-electoral-adventure-with-Muslim-politicians-excluded.html>>.

- ⁶⁵ Thusitha Perera, “Ma Ba Tha and the Vote”, *New Mandala*, 4 November 2015, available at <<http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2015/11/04/ma-ba-tha-and-the-vote/>>.
- ⁶⁶ See for example “Burma: Discriminatory Laws Could Stoke Communal Tensions”, *Human Rights Watch*, 23 August 2015, available at <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/08/23/burma-discriminatory-laws-could-stoke-communal-tensions>>.
- ⁶⁷ Laignee Barron and Lun Min Mang, “U Shwe Mann Struggles to Woo the Voters of Pyu”, *Myanmar Times*, 6 November 2015, available at <<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/17414-u-shwe-mann-struggles-to-woo-the-voters-of-pyu.html>>.
- ⁶⁸ Swe Win, “NLD Takes on Nationalists in Southern Arakan”, *The Irrawaddy*, 6 November 2015, available at <<http://www.irrawaddy.org/election/news/nld-takes-on-nationalists-in-southern-arakan>>.
- ⁶⁹ Accurate information on detainees is limited. Most sources agree that many more Muslims than Buddhists have been imprisoned as a result of the violence.
- ⁷⁰ “ANP Chooses Candidates”, *Eleven Myanmar* (undated, 2015), available at <<http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/anp-chooses-candidates>>.
- ⁷¹ Nyan Lynn Aung, “ANP Leader Warns of ‘Crisis’ as Party Quits Ethnic Alliance”, *Myanmar Times*, 19 February 2016, available at <<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/nay-pyi-taw/19077-anp-leader-warns-of-crisis-as-party-quits-ethnic-alliance.html>>.
- ⁷² “The Hardline Buddhists Targeting Sri Lanka’s Muslims”, *BBC Online*, 25 March 2013, available at <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-21840600>>.
- ⁷³ Krishan Francis, “Burma’s Wirathu and Sri Lankan Nationalist Monks Sign Agreement”, *Associated Press/The Irrawaddy*, 1 October 2014, available at <<http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/burmas-wirathu-sri-lankan-nationalist-monks-sign-agreement.html>>.
- ⁷⁴ Author interview with leaders of the Yangon Rakhine Thahaya Association, October 2014.
- ⁷⁵ Data on international aid is based on extensive author interviews with international aid agency staff in Maungdaw, Sittwe, Kyauk Phyu, Yangon and elsewhere during 2014.
- ⁷⁶ Author interviews with UNHCR officers in Maungdaw and Sittwe, May 2014; and in Yangon, June 2014.
- ⁷⁷ Author interview with field staff of international aid agencies in Sittwe and Kyauk Phyu, October 2013.
- ⁷⁸ Author interviews with UNHCR officers, Sittwe, May 2014.
- ⁷⁹ Field reports had warned about negative local perceptions over aid distribution as far back as 2009. CDA, *Listening Project: Field Visit Report Myanmar/Burma, August–December 2009*, December 2009, available at <<http://www.alnap.org/resource/8309>>.
- ⁸⁰ Fiona MacGregor and Shwe Yee Saw Myint, “Foreign Aid Workers to be Evacuated from Sittwe”, *Myanmar Times*, 27 March 2014, available at <<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/9978-foreigners-evacuated-from-sittwe-and-violent-tensions-erupt-in-rakhine-state.htm>>.

- ⁸¹ Author interview with RNDP activists, Sittwe, October 2013.
- ⁸² Author interviews with local government officials in Sittwe, October 2013 and May 2014.
- ⁸³ The UN appointed Christopher Carter as senior adviser for Rakhine State in 2015.
- ⁸⁴ Stewart, "Horizontal Inequalities", op. cit.
- ⁸⁵ Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence*, op. cit.
- ⁸⁶ Berenschot, *Riot Politics*, op. cit.,
- ⁸⁷ Quoted in Chris Lewa, "Issues to be Raised Concerning the Situation of Rohingya Children in Myanmar (Burma): Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child", unpublished, 2003, available at <www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/Lewa-CRC2004.doc>.
- ⁸⁸ "Call to put Rohingya in Refugee Camps", *Radio Free Asia*, 12 July 2012, available at <<http://www.rfa.org/english/news/rohingya-07122012185242.html>>.
- ⁸⁹ Nyan Lynn Aung, "We Will Not Be Adversarial, Insists New ANP Speaker", *Myanmar Times*, 12 February 2016, available at <<http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/18967-we-will-not-be-adversarial-insists-new-anp-speaker.html>>.
- ⁹⁰ Richard Paddock, "Aung San Suu Kyi asks U.S. Not to Refer to 'Rohingya'", *New York Times*, 6 May 2016, available at <<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/07/world/asia/myanmar-rohingya-aung-san-suu-kyi.html>>.
- ⁹¹ See for example Alex Bookbinder, "Rakhine State, Myanmar's Gordian Knot", *Migrant Report*, 7 April 2006, available at <<http://migrantreport.org/rakhine-state-myanmars-gordian-knot/>>.
- ⁹² Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (London: California University Press, 2000).
- ⁹³ Mann, *The Dark Side*, op. cit., pp. 4, 504.
- ⁹⁴ Among other sources see Fortify Rights, *Policies of Persecution: Ending Abusive State Policies Against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar*, 25 February 2014, available at <http://www.fortifyrights.org/downloads/Policies_of_Persecution_Feb_25_Fortify_Rights.pdf>.
- ⁹⁵ For an example of the literature on civil society and peacebuilding practice, see Martina Fischer, "Civil Society in Conflict Transformation: Strengths and Limitations", in *Advancing Conflict Transformation: The Berghof Handbook II*, edited by Beatrix Austin, Martina Fischer and Hans Giessman (Opladen/Framington Hills: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2011), available at <http://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Articles/fischer_cso_handbookII.pdf>.