

# OPPOSITION MOVEMENTS IN BURMA: THE QUESTION OF RELEVANCY

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## INTRODUCTION

Since Burma's independence from British rule in 1948, the Burmese polity has been fraught with contentious politics ranging from armed insurgencies to non-violent movements against the state. The history of Burma's opposition movements, originating from the colonial period, can be understood as five different forms of struggle—legal political means, armed insurrections, underground (clandestine) activities, above-ground engagements (through civil society groups and the domestic media), and international advocacy (through lobbying, grassroots campaigns, and the foreign media including Burmese language broadcasts).

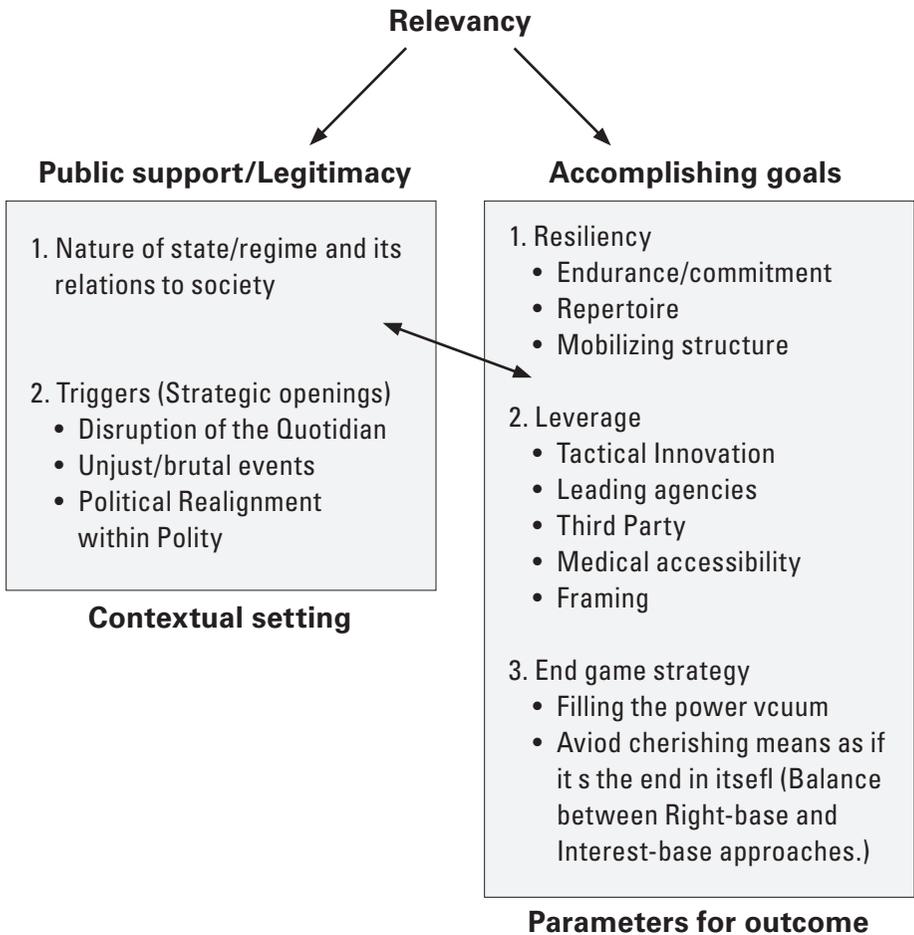
This paper will examine how opposition movements since 1988 have played out until now and how they will remain relevant after the 2010 elections. Generally, relevancy is defined as a means to increase the likelihood of accomplishing the professed goal,<sup>1</sup> treating the goal more in terms of consequence (the actual outcome as opposed to the morality of intention). Public support or legitimacy plays a key role in determining relevancy. However, in the context of opposition movements in Burma, we must consider their moral ground. This paper will probe the question of relevancy for Burmese opposition movements from two perspectives—legitimacy and outcome.

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Legitimacy is closely associated with the prevailing political environment because it allows opposition movements to rally public support for their causes. This paper will examine opposition movements in three contextual settings—in the conceptualization of the Burmese state, in the state’s relation to society, and in the state’s responses to opposition movements. The conceptualization of state–society relations is a macro-framework attempting to explain the grievances of society and public support for opposition movements. Later, I will argue for the need to

Table 1: Frame of Analysis



distinguish between the “political opportunities structure” theory of social movements and strategic openings (or “triggers”). The nature of the state and triggering factors as parts of the contextual setting along with the commitment, courage, and sacrifice of opposition groups allow opposition movements to remain relevant in terms of public support and legitimacy.

The paper will also explore the parameters for outcomes that would allow opposition movements greater likelihood of accomplishing their goals. Within the parameters, I will examine three factors—resilience, leverage,<sup>2</sup> and endgame strategy<sup>3</sup> to explain the relevancy of opposition movements in terms of outcome. Resilience is not just about the psychological factors of endurance and commitment, but more about the strength of the movement’s repertoire and mobilizing structure. Leverage consists of tactics, leading agencies, the role of the third party, media accessibility, and the framing of issues. Thus, resilience and leverage contribute to a recasting of the political context. For the movement’s endgame strategy, this paper will examine the need for filling the power vacuum that usually emerges at the center of popular upheavals and for avoiding the conflation between means and ends in contentious politics. I will argue for the need to balance (human) rights-based approaches (also known as “principle-based” approaches) with interest-based approaches to end the conflicts. By pulling all these factors together, this paper will develop a framework of analysis to explain the relevancy of opposition movements.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Since the start of Burma’s independence struggle from British colonial rule in the 1920s, university student leaders had played a major role in Burmese politics, some of whom include Burma’s independence heroes like Aung San, the national martyr and father of Aung San Suu Kyi. Buddhist monks who were inspired by Gandhi’s non-violent strategy accelerated the momentum of the struggle that was further supported by civil society associations, political parties, and the independent media.

But the opposition movements also showed a strong tendency toward radical nationalism and violent armed struggle. Communists who did not believe in negotiating for independence with the government launched an

armed rebellion in March 1948 which led to civil war, motivating some ethnic groups to take up arms. In 1949, when the Burmese government rejected the Karen people's demand for territory, the latter started an armed insurrection. Weapons collected from the Second World War fueled the armed resistance. So even though insurgencies in central Burma died down in the 1970s, armed struggles have become the order of the day in areas with high concentrations of ethnic minorities.

At the same time, the experience of mass mobilization that Burma had acquired under the British and Japanese occupations enriched the Burmese with a unique sense of political resistance. The acronym "UG" (underground) refers to activists who engage in clandestine political activities to oppose or aim to remove the existing power structure. UG activists were trying to find ways to combine an organized mass movement with armed struggle to overthrow the government. Since the 1990s, however, the concept and practice of UG have focused more on using non-violence.<sup>4</sup> Today, the "UG" still inspires awe and respect among the Burmese.<sup>5</sup>

When the military junta seized power in 1962, it clamped down on all political parties and civil society. Under one-party rule, the country had no legal platform for other political parties. Some parties were thus co-opted by the military-backed party while many others either engaged in UG-style politics or joined the armed struggle of the Communist party. During the 26 years of military-led socialist rule, students together with Buddhist monks, workers, and city dwellers often took part in street protests. Despite ruthless crackdowns, the frequent protests organized by UG student activists eventually led to a nation-wide public uprising on August 8, 1988 (known as "8888" or the "Four Eight Movement") against socialist rule. The clandestine student union came above ground and its chairman Min Ko Naing (whose name in Burmese means the "conqueror of kings") played a major role in initiating the Four Eight Movement that eventually brought Aung San Suu Kyi into the spotlight. But the military regained control by killing several thousand unarmed protesters.<sup>6</sup> After the crackdown, the military allowed the formation of above-ground political parties and promised to hold multi-party elections in 1990 which led to a landslide victory for the National League for Democracy (NLD)—a result nullified by the junta. Protests, boycotts, and several public acts led by students and monks resumed in 1991, 1996, and 2007.

In Burma today, few organizations and political parties have legal standing or basic democratic rights like free speech or free assembly. Those barred from politics became UG activists while legal political parties faced limitations. Thus, any organization or political party that wishes to uphold its political beliefs and pursue its objectives chooses to combine UG-style activism with legal activities as its *modus operandi*.

Armed insurgencies, on the other hand, have been contained from the collapse of the communist party in 1989 and from the ceasefire agreements brokered between the military and the ethnic resistance groups. However, international advocacy movements have grown stronger because of the political and moral appeal of Aung San Suu Kyi and the widespread influence of the global Burmese diaspora.

## CONTEXTUAL SETTING FOR PUBLIC SUPPORT OR LEGITIMACY: THE NATURE OF THE STATE AND ITS RELATION TO SOCIETY

According to Max Weber, the state as a sovereign entity claims “the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order”<sup>7</sup> within a given territory. The Burmese concept of state adheres with Weber’s view, seeing the state in terms of its deployment and exercise of the means of coercion and physical force. In the Burmese language, the term for the state is *Naingngantaw*, derived from the verb *naing* (to win; prevail; overcome),<sup>8</sup> the verb *ngan* (archaic form of “to be complete,”<sup>9</sup> and *taw* (royalty or of religious sanctity). In the mid-20th century, *naingngan* came to mean “nation,” and thus in contemporary Burma, the notions of “state” and “nation” have been conceptually linked.<sup>10</sup> According to the traditional administrative view, there are seven elements of state (*naingngan*): 1) the king or government, 2) civil servants, 3) expansive territory, 4) army/military might, 5) defense line or fort city, 6) reserve of wealth and other essentials including foods and medicines, and 7) allied states.<sup>11</sup>

Since 1962, the military has ruled the country in different guises. It blurs the distinction between the state, the regime, and the incumbent government. This has led to a reification of the state—its conflation with the regime and the military that claims to be the guardian of the state.<sup>12</sup> As current military leaders see identities and security interests of the state,

the regime, and the military as inseparable from one another, they do not tolerate any challenge to their state-building efforts. Whenever the military regime refers to the Four Eight Movement or the 2007 Saffron Revolution, it characterizes them as “anarchy,” “disorder,” “perilous unrest,” “disturbances,” or “evil and horrifying mob rule” while describing actors of ethnic resistance movements as “terrorists,” “insurgents,” and “destroyers of the Union.”

The successive regimes’ state-building strategies have three essential and non-negotiable goals: to ensure 1) military supremacy; 2) Burman-Buddhist domination of the nation; and 3) preparation to fight against direct foreign invasion or invasion by proxy. They use three key policy instruments to enforce these strategic goals—coercion, containment, and co-optation. Though state-building goals have been carried through by the regime since the 1950s, these efforts encountered constraints from societal and ethnic resistance, and geopolitical/international conditions. The regime lacks legitimacy as a state in the eyes of citizens not only because it is authoritarian, but also because it has yet to achieve a sense of nationhood. Therefore, in spite of enforcing the law, the state’s capacity to govern has fallen short.

## THE TRIGGERS (STRATEGIC OPENINGS)

Sidney Tarrow has defined political opportunity as “consistent—but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national—dimensions of the political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics.”<sup>13</sup> He has elaborated that it is the political environment “that provide(s) incentive for collective action by affecting people’s expectation(s) for success or failure.”<sup>14</sup> The most cited consensus is McAdam’s four dimensions of political opportunity: 1) the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system, 2) the stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergird a polity, 3) the presence or absence of elite allies, and 4) the state’s capacity and propensity for repression.<sup>15</sup>

This paper questions the need to distinguish between the political opportunity structure and strategic openings since researchers tend to conflate these two variables. Political opportunities are consistent and stable while strategic openings are fleeting and situational. For instance, the sudden economic deprivation that reaches beyond people’s coping capacity,

or shockingly brutal and unjust events, or a combination of both could well trigger contentions and lead to sustained social movements. Jonathan Hassid suggests that grievances can inspire action when they 1) relate to interference with everyday routines (disruption of the quotidian), 2) have a specific, visible target or targets, and 3) can easily be framed as a moral rights claim to maximize external support.<sup>16</sup> Hassid's synthetic model explains the emergence and the nature of Burma's contentious politics. The demonetization in 1987 and the 500 percent fuel price hike in 2007 combined with police brutality against students and Buddhist monks sparked the contentions and social movements in 1988 and 2007, respectively, even though the activists did not experience most of the conditions that the political opportunity structure model describes.

In addition to the disruption of quotidian life and the occurrence of unjust and brutal events, I would add one more factor that could create a conducive environment for the opposition movements' legitimacy. Tarrow specified that the second point of MacAdam's "political opportunities" list has two dimensions—the evidence of political realignment within the polity and emerging splits within the elite. In Burma's case, the prospect of possible political realignment emboldens the public to rally behind opposition movements. The internal peace movements in 1960s followed by Ne Win's unexpected resignation, and the country's switch from one-party rule to a multi-party system in 1988 demonstrated how opposition movements had managed to rally public support behind their causes. Whether or not and to what extent the political environment surrounding the 2010 elections could give strategic openings for opposition movements to expand political space remains to be seen. Overall, the nature of state, its goals and policy instruments, and the consequential triggering factors have created the political environment that compels the public to support opposition movements. The endurance, commitment, courage, and sacrifices of the activists strengthen the legitimacy of the movement.

What about the prospects for the opposition movements' relevancy after the 2010 elections? This paper examines the issue in three ways: 1) antagonizing civil-military relations, 2) key issues such as human rights violations, corruption, and economic mismanagement all associated with military's unchecked power, and 3) changes in governance style.<sup>17</sup>

The incompatible goals of the military elites and the opposition movements, including ethnic minorities, will change under the new constitution

and the 2010 elections. On the other hand, the unjust process and one-sided imposition of 2008 constitution and the 2010 elections will not minimize the costs of conflict for the military. The most visible costs will be the continuation of international isolation and further damage to the country's economy. As a result, opposition movements will have to pursue alternative courses of action such as public mobilization and international advocacy. As the generals will use the same method of coercion against the people after 2010, existing grievances and public hostility toward the military will build up. Antagonistic civil-military relations will continue. Apart from its inability to transform, the new post-2010 regime will not resolve problems still confronting the country's human rights violations and corruption—which have earned Burma its pariah status.

According to the new constitution, a military chief will independently administer military affairs, including the recruitment and expansion of troops, promotions, troop deployment, military-owned businesses, and the purchasing and manufacturing of weapons. The issues of political prisoners, child soldiers, forced relocations, forced labor, land mines, internally displaced persons, flow of refugees to neighboring countries, rape, and other rights violations—all associated with the military's unchecked power—will remain unresolved. Since the elected parliament's legislative power will be restricted, no civilian mechanisms are available to redress these political and economic dilemmas.

The 2010 elections could, however, contribute to changes in governance, at least on a nominal level, during the initial stage. The military has had extensive experiences of single-handed dictatorial rule and one-party rule. However, the governing format post-2010 will be an experiment that will be more or less hybrid. Two power centers will be created—the military and the government. Aside from the 25 percent of parliamentary seats reserved for the military and their power to appoint the three most important cabinet ministers (defense, home, and border area affairs), the generals are determined to fill the remaining government and parliamentary seats with members of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). The upcoming elections are sure to be marked by vote rigging, intimidation, and bullying attacks orchestrated by the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) and its affiliates. Still, the government's operation with two centers of power—no matter who pulls the strings—could lead to either a serious internal split or a miserable inefficiency of the

ruling body. In other words, tensions will build between the regime (i.e. military supremacy) and the new procedures (a hybrid system) with the latter possibly weakening the former. These changes could be a prospect for political realignment within the polity, emboldening the general public to rally behind the opposition groups.

In brief, the repressive nature of state–society relations and strategic openings will continue to allow opposition movements to rally the public against the military-backed hybrid regime, and make them relevant. However, McAdam stated emphatically that “Movement may be largely born of environmental opportunities, but their fate is heavily shaped by their own actions.”<sup>18</sup>

## ACCOMPLISHING PROFESSED GOALS

### **Resilience**

Another dimension of the relevancy question could be measured by actual outcomes. Parameters for outcome are measured by degrees of resilience, leverage, and endgame strategy. Kurt Schock’s concepts of resilience and leverage, and my own writing on the importance of endgame strategy will explain the trajectories and outcome of Burma’s contentious politics.

Resilience refers to the capacity of contentious actors to continue mobilizing collective action in spite of the actions of opponents aimed at constraining or inhibiting their activities.<sup>19</sup> As I said in the introduction, resilience contains more than psychological qualities such as endurance, commitment, and courage. It is also about the strength of the movement’s repertoire and mobilizing structure. According to Tarrow, all repertoires—no matter how they vary in the forms of violence, disruption, and conventional protest—share a common thread: “all are to some degree public performance.”<sup>20</sup>

In Burma’s case, the dominant repertoires post-1988 have been executed via political and legal means (i.e. political parties, mainly the NLD), UG, and civil society engagements. Due to the ceasefire agreements between the military and the ethnic resistance groups, armed insurgencies have mostly been contained. However, international advocacy movements have become unprecedentedly stronger.

One of the key weaknesses might be the opposition movements’ unwillingness or incapacity to diversify their repertoires. The NLD announced

that it would not register because the election laws were “unfair and unjust,” barring more than 2,000 political prisoners including party leader Aung San Suu Kyi from taking part in the elections. It declared that it would continue the democracy struggle as a “mass movement” or as “grass-roots social works.” However, the NLD leadership, instead of allowing (or even encouraging) those to set up political parties to remain in the 2010 elections, tended to vilify the moderates within the group. It seems that the NLD lacks the strategic vision to be aware of the advantages it could gain by franchising rather than by centralizing its repertoires.

Broadly speaking, however, it would not be fair to assume such policy decision as merely an outcome of the NLD leadership’s independent choice—it could be viewed as a matter of political culture in Burma. The NLD’s responses have been shaped not only by grievances and repression but also by the cultural environment. The illiberal environment strengthens such value-loaded or principle-centric cultural norms. To be fair, I would caution that even the NLD leaders were strategically savvy and attempting to diversify the repertoires, yet the positive result is not guaranteed. For instance, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO)’s attempts to diversify its repertoires by forming “proxy” Kachin parties—the Kachin State Progressive Party, Northern Shan State Progressive Party, and the United Democracy Party (Kachin State)—has, so far, turned out to be unsuccessful because the regime’s election commission has delayed the approval of those parties.

Another element in the resilience factor is mobilizing structure. Usually, mobilizing structures in opposition movements are hierarchical. When Aung San Suu Kyi was released from her first house arrest in 1995, she traveled to the provinces and empowered local and grass-roots party members. In fact, she introduced civil society initiatives by helping youth and women leaders of her party set up volunteer groups for wide-ranging issues such as assisting HIV/AIDS patients and providing legal protection for the victims of forced labor and child soldiers. When Min Ko Naing and other 88 generation student leaders were released from prison in 2004–2005, they also broadened such civil society practice within a nonviolent repertoire. They reached out to Buddhist monks, human right advocates, lawyers, journalists, local NGOs, intellectuals, and the artistic community to strengthen the informal network of the movement. As Schock suggests, the organizational template they employed was “network-oriented rather than hierarchical.”<sup>21</sup>

In Tarrow's language, the mobilization structure they organized around was "the connective structure."<sup>22</sup> However, the military responded with harsh repression by using crowds of civilian thugs to assault the activists. Before the activists had sufficient time to strengthen their organizational muscle, the 2007 protests broke out. Though the opposition movements' initiatives contributed to the emergence of the Saffron Revolution in 2007, the lack of necessary leverage led to the movements' breakdown.

### **Leverage**

Leverage refers to the ability of contentious actors to mobilize the withdrawal of support from opponents or invoke pressure against them through the networks upon which opponents depend for their power.<sup>23</sup> According to Gene Sharp, a government's power over its subjects is based on the latter's obedience and cooperation. This "relational" view of power suggests that power is derived from sources within society, in contrast to a monolithic theory of power that assumes that power is imposed on people by the state from above, due to the state's ability to enforce sanctions and apply repression.<sup>24</sup> Thus, one of the potential effects of leverage is to sever the dependence relation between the ruler and the ruled.

Sharp classifies the methods of nonviolent action into three broad categories: methods of protest and persuasion, methods of noncooperation, and methods of nonviolent intervention. The ability to implement tactics of nonviolent action is constrained by repression, but the mix of tactics implemented may nevertheless influence the extent to which the activists weather repression. The more diverse tactics and methods implemented, the more diffuse the state's repressive operation becomes, thus potentially lessening its effectiveness. Schock employed Robert Burrowes' methods of concentration and methods of dispersion, which cover Sharp's three methods to explain the benefit of incorporating multiple methods and shifting emphasis in non-violent action. According to Burrowes, the ability to shift from methods of concentration, in which a large number of people are concentrated in a public place (e.g., in a protest demonstration), to methods of dispersion, in which cooperation is withdrawn such as a strike, or boycott, or providing creative alternatives to state-controlled institutions.<sup>25</sup> The activists in Burma relied to a large degree on methods of concentration (protests, persuasion, marches, and demonstrations), and on methods of disruptive nonviolent intervention, such as the occupation

of public places. These methods may be effective in mobilizing members of the aggrieved population and the support of third parties, but they are less effective in directly undermining state power unless used in tandem with methods of dispersion/non-cooperation. Schock contends that “The methods of concentration were not resilient in the face of violent repression, and the lack of sustained campaigns of noncooperation limited the leverage that the challengers could generate.”<sup>26</sup>

This lack of tactical innovation in contentious Burmese politics has been compounded by the weak leverage of leading agencies in the movement such as students and monks. In many other successful nonviolent movements such as in Poland, the workers who could sever dependent relations with the state played a critical role in bringing change. But the movement in Burma is spearheaded by students and Buddhist monks who have less potential leverage than workers or peasants in terms of the state’s sources of power and survival, in spite of their iconic status. No organization has emerged in Burma that is capable of effectively forging ties between students, monks, workers, and peasants.

In Burma’s case, the crucial role of the third party should be given serious consideration. Sharp omitted the role of third parties in mediating conflict between challengers and the state. The power of the state is not always dependent on the cooperation and obedience of the ruled and sometimes may derive from sources outside of society, like foreign states or international capital.<sup>27</sup> China’s diplomatic support and political protection in the international arena such as the U.N. Security Council, or its provisions of economic and military supplies for the Burmese military junta are some of the most challenging constraints for the movement. However, if the movement manages to sustain its resilience and leverage, China will likely change its unconditional support for the military and actively promote the goal of national reconciliation since it is increasingly aware of the risks posed by its opportunistic policy toward Burma.

Media access plays a crucial role in strengthening leverage of opposition movements. In spite of severe news blackouts and censorship in the domestic media, the Burmese still have access to foreign short-wave radio stations. In the run-up to the 1988 uprising, BBC and VOA Burmese services disseminated information on the riot police’s brutality against students and on the country’s economic crisis. The foreign broadcasts even announced the target date of 8-8-88 set by the student groups for the mass

uprising. Millions of people across the country who heard of the protest updates took part in the movement. In the 2007 Saffron Revolution, the protesters gained immediate media access to information technology (IT) and managed to spread the protests. In this case, the radio stations of BBC Burmese, VOA Burmese, Radio Free Asia Burmese, and the Democratic Voice of Burma played an indispensable role in distributing the news and delivering the protesters' messages to the world.<sup>28</sup> Activist networks inside and in exile coordinated together effectively to initiate the IT campaign and drew international attention and support. Thousands of formerly apolitical Burmese students who were studying abroad joined this IT campaign via blogging and fund-raising.

According to the prospect theory in cognitive psychology, individuals are especially averse to loss and therefore, will endure considerably more risk to preserve what they already have than what they will to gain something new. In other words, individuals are said to be more risk-seeking in the context of loss because losses are felt more keenly as disutility than gains are felt as utility. If quotidian disruptions trigger contentious politics, loss must be a vitalizing device for the movement activists to spark emotional outrage among the public. Snow, Cress, Downey, and Jones contend that losses in the form of quotidian interruptions are especially likely to generate social movement activity.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, this model helps refine and contextualize the effective framing processes in relation to social movements. Snow et al. also argue that "inasmuch as individuals are likely to be especially risk-seeking in the context of loss, we would agree that framing situations in terms of loss may be a necessary precondition for some collective action."<sup>30</sup> In both the 1988 and 2007 movements, Burmese activists "amplified"<sup>31</sup> the loss frame and the injustice frame,<sup>32</sup> attributing responsibility to the military regime, and proposed solutions in the form of democracy in the 1988 uprising and national reconciliation in the 2007 protests.

Given the repressive condition and primacy of daily survival for the general public, if activists failed to emphasize the "loss" frame and not link it to the broader goal, the public would remain detached from politics. When the opposition activists focus too much on their political demands (such as the transfer of power to the NLD in 1990, or conduct political dialogue perceived not to be directly related to people's daily lives), people would be indifferent, leaving activists to achieve their demands on their own.

## **Endgame Strategy**

Despite popular support for opposition movements, the struggle remains a failure in achieving its professed goal. The required critical assessment for examining history is to acknowledge that history is to be learned and not to be copied. However, most activists view the Four Eight Movement as the only model for victory and have always vowed to replicate it. Sadly, this is nostalgia, not strategy.

One of the crucial reasons for the failure of the Four Eight Movement was that opposition movements could not provide strategic leadership to end the endgame. When street protests reached the highest peak in late August through September 18, 1988, the government was deadlocked. However, the opposition leadership failed to take advantage of the emerging power vacuum. They were not unified to undertake regime change or a negotiated transition. When former prime minister U Nu attempted to advance leverage by forming a parallel government on September 9 and by contacting diplomatic missions in Rangoon to seek recognition, opposition leaders including Aung San Suu Kyi failed to rally behind him. Instead, the ruling Burma Socialist Program Party was well aware of the gravity of this challenge. A special party congress, originally planned for September 12, was immediately rescheduled and held on September 10 instead. The authorities decided to hold a general election under a multi-party system within three months as a clear demonstration of their counteroffensive against U Nu's strategic move. Military commanders were allowed to relinquish their party duties, and military chief General Saw Maung made an announcement in September 12 on television that he promised to help hold free and fair multi-party general elections. The government's political offensive was quite bold. Again, the opposition movements failed to seize this promise as a strategic opportunity. They kept on calling for an interim government. The prolonged street protests resulted in fatigue and frustration among the public. The opposition movements' failure to break political deadlock allowed the hardliners within the ruling body to make a justification and preparatory time to shift from their indecisive wait-and-see approach to a swift crackdown on the protests. The military staged a coup on September 18.

The opposition movement's strategic blunder in lacking an endgame strategy was repeated in the 2007 Saffron Revolution. Thousands of

Buddhist monks led the marches in several major cities, chanting loving-kindness (*metta*) phrases of Buddhist canon and praying for the peace of country. When students and the general public joined the monks, the numbers of protesters reached up to 200,000 in Rangoon. The movement kept calling for national reconciliation yet its message could not go beyond Naypyidaw directly or indirectly (via third parties such as the United Nations or China).

The voices of the protests were heard only through the narratives of exile's media and radio stations in which opposition leaders gave rhetorical interviews and public statements. Instead of playing the role of bridging the junta and the demonstrators, the NLD took up its own banner to join the street protests. Though the United Nations sent its special envoy to Burma, it was long overdue as the junta cracked down on the protesters, resulting in at least 160 deaths and arrests.

Burma's opposition leadership has always been enthusiastic to mobilize mass movements but failed to get any intended results out of it whenever the protests reached their peak. It always tries hard to achieve its means (mass movements) as if they are the ends (victory). From the Four Eight Movement to the Saffron Revolution, opposition movements have failed to learn from the mass mobilizations but have continued to copy them. Even though public pressure alone can challenge the status quo, whether or not it can lead to a genuine political transition has all to do with its effective endgame strategy.<sup>33</sup>

This paper recognizes that opposition movements have miserably failed in accomplishing their goals. The NLD also officially apologized to the public for its failed policies in the struggle for democracy.<sup>34</sup> However, this paper would like to contend that it is necessary to disaggregate three factors (resilience, leverage, and endgame strategy) when we consider the outcome. If the opposition movements strive to work on some weak aspects of these factors such as diversification of repertoires, tactical innovation, third-party persuasion, broadening the leading agencies, and achieving a balance between rights-based and interests-based approaches to strategize the endgame, they will find themselves more relevant in increasing the likelihood of their professed goals.

## CONCLUSION

This paper looked into the question of relevancy for the Burmese opposition movements from two perspectives: legitimacy and outcome. The repressive nature of the state, its goals and policy instruments, and the consequential triggering factors (strategic openings) have created the political environment that helps the opposition movements rally public support for their causes. The endurance, commitment, courage, and sacrifices of the activists strengthen the legitimacy of the movements in public eyes. Since the 2008 constitution and 2010 elections are not likely to yield any significant changes in civil-military relations, or on key issues such as rights violations, corruption, and governance style, opposition movements will continue to rally public support for their causes, and make themselves relevant.

The paper has also probed the parameters for the outcome that could allow the opposition movements to increase the likelihood of accomplishing their goals. It examined three factors—resilience, leverage, and endgame strategy—to explain the relevancy of the opposition movements in terms of outcome. Although this paper acknowledges the prevailing general impression that the opposition movements have failed miserably in accomplishing its goals, it suggests disaggregating the constituting elements of resilience, leverage, and endgame. This paper cautions against making any sweeping statement without dissecting and evaluating each element of those three factors.

In closing, this paper concludes that the opposition movements will remain relevant in public support and legitimacy, but they will have to improve their performances in resilience, leverage, and endgame strategy to make themselves relevant in increasing the likelihood of accomplishing their goals.

## NOTES

1. Birger Hjørland and F. Sejer Christensen, “Work tasks and socio-cognitive relevance: A specific example,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 53 (11) (September 2002): 960–965.

2. Kurt Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 142–143.

3. Min Zin, “Where’s the ‘End Game’ Strategy?” *The Irrawaddy Magazine* 16 (8) (August 2008).

4. Min Zin, "Working Underground to Plant the Seeds of Civil Society" *The Irrawaddy Magazine* 7 (5) (June 1999).

5. Many UG activists have been killed or imprisoned with long-term sentences (in some cases, exceeding 100 years) after being severely tortured. Student union activist Bo Min Yu Ko was given a 104-year prison sentence in January 2009. He is only in his early twenties. See the documents compiled by Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma), <http://aappb.org/>.

6. An independent observer claims that 10,000 people were killed during 1988 popular uprising. Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1999): 16.

7. Max Weber, *The Theory Of Social And Economic Organization* (New York: Free Press, 1997).

8. Department of the Myanmar Language Commission, Ministry of Education, Union of Myanmar, *Myanmar-English Dictionary* (Yangon: Ministry of Education, Union of Myanmar, 1994), 234.

9. *Ibid.*, 94.

10. Robert Taylor, *The State in Myanmar* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 2. Nations are communities of shared values, traditions, and historical memory. Some scholars firmly claim that nations are never built. Rather, they evolve out of an unplanned historical-evolutionary process. State-building is constructing political institutions, or else, promoting economic development. See Francis Fukuyama, ed., *Nation-Building: Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 3). This paper assumes this differentiation. Also see Benedict Anderson, "Old State, New Society: Indonesia's New Order in Comparative Historical Perspective," *Journal of Asian Studies* 42 (3) (May 1983): 477–496. Anderson argues that the state finds in the nation its modern legitimation.

11. U Maung Maung Tin, *Myanmar Min Okchokpon Sadan*, vol. 1 [Royal Administration of the Burmese Kings] (Yangon: Revolutionary Council of the Union of Burma, 1963), 129. Burmese scholar U Hpo Hlaing offered an alternative version of seven elements of the state. But his version only differs from the original by replacing the army/military might (#4 element) with "enforcement or punishment." Maung Htin, ed., *Biography of Yaw Mingyi U Hpo Hlaing and Raja-Dhama-Singaha-Kyan*, 4th ed. (Leicester, United Kingdom: Unity Press, 2002), 249–251.

12. Tin Maung Maung Than, "Myanmar: Preoccupation with Regime, Survival, National Unity, and Stability," in *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa, 394 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

13. Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 19.

14. *Ibid.*, 76.

15. Doug McAdam, "Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Directions," in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, ed. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, 27 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
16. Jonathan Hassid, "China's Contentious Journalists: Reconceptualizing the Media," *Problems of Post-Communism* 55 (4) (July/August 2008): 52.
17. Min Zin, "The 2010 Election Challenges," *Bangkok Post*, July 27, 2008.
18. McAdam, "Conceptual Origins," 15.
19. Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections*, 142.
20. Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 93.
21. Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections*, 50.
22. Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 124.
23. Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections*, 143.
24. *Ibid.*, 37.
25. *Ibid.*, 51.
26. *Ibid.*, 152.
27. *Ibid.*, 46.
28. The junta appeared unprepared on how to deal with the internet phenomenon. The protest started gaining momentum on September 22, but the military blocked all access to the internet only by September 28—two days later than the imposition of "dusk-till-dawn curfews" in the country's two largest cities (Rangoon and Mandalay) on September 26.
29. D. Snow, D. Cress, L. Downey, and A. Jones, "Disrupting the Quotidian: Reconceptualizing the Relationship between Breakdown and the Emergence of Collective Action," *Mobilization: An International Journal* 3 (1998): 2–3.
30. *Ibid.*, 18.
31. Frame amplification is a part of the four-frame alignment process that Snow et al. proposed. See Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 110.
32. *Ibid.*, 111.
33. Min Zin, "Where's the 'End Game' Strategy?"
34. Saw Yan Naing, "NLD Apologizes for Failed Struggle," *The Irrawaddy*, April 6, 2010.