



# **Another Side of the Arakan Political Story**

## **The Marginalization of Once-Dominant Rakhine Political Actors in the Shadow of the Arakan Army**

**(2010 to 2026)**

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Photo - Flags of the once-dominant Rakhine political actors mentioned in this paper

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## Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name
AA	Arakan Army (the current armed wing of the ULA)
AFP	Arakan Front Party
ALP	Arakan Liberation Party
ALA	Arakan Liberation Army (armed wing of the ALP)
ALPR	Army for Liberation and Peace of Rakhine (breakaway faction of ALP)
ALD	Arakan League for Democracy
ANC	Arakan National Council
ANP	Arakan National Party (merged party of RNDP and ALD)
ANUO	Arakanese National Unity Organisation
APA	Arakan People's Authority
APLP	Arakan People's Liberation Party
ARSA	Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army
CEC	Central Executive Committee
CPA	Communist Party of Arakan
DKBA	Democratic Karen Benevolent Army
HTS	Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (Syrian case study)
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICJ	International Court of Justice
KNU	Karen National Union
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front (Philippines case study)
MP	Member of Parliament
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NLD	National League for Democracy

NUFA	National United Front of Arakan
PDF	People's Defense Force (Myanmar)
RNDP	Rakhine Nationalities Development Party
RNP	Rakhine Nationalities Party
SAC	State Administration Council (junta)
TDF	Tigray Defense Forces (Ethiopia case study)
UEC	Union Election Commission
ULA	United League of Arakan (political wing of AA)
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party

# Key Political Timelines

## Key Political Timelines - Part 1

● Political ● Military ● Peace Negotiation ● Violence ● Elections

### PRE-2000 FOUNDATIONS

- Apr 9, 1967 ● Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) formally formed.
- 1974 ● ALP reestablished in Karen National Union (KNU) controlled areas.
- 1977 ● ALP's long march fails; group's activities cease.
- 1981 ● ALP reorganized under Khaing Ray Khaing's leadership.
- 1990 ● Arakan League for Democracy (ALD) wins elections.

### 2000S - NEW ACTORS EMERGE

- 2004 ● Arakan National Council (ANC) founded.
- Apr 10, 2009 ● The current Arakan Army (AA) – now ULA/AA – was born.
- Jan, 2010 ● ALP strength reported as 400 troops.
- 2010 ● ANC/AA's armed wing reportedly established.
- May 6, 2010 ● Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNNDP) founded.
- 2010 ● RNNDP wins 37 out of 44 contested seats in general elections.
- Late 2010 ● ALP conducts attacks on Lat Bar Wa Camp (Light Infantry Battalion 55).

### 2011-2014: POLITICAL SHIFTS

- Mar 30, 2011 ● President U Thein Sein inaugurated.
- Early 2011 ● ALP adopts a more moderate political stance.
- Apr 2012 ● ALP signs a five-point peace agreement with the government.
- Jun & Oct 2012 ● Two waves of communal violence between Rakhine and Rohingya.
- Aug 2012 ● Government suspends ALP liaison office opening; 14 RNNDP MPs block a presidential review.
- Sep 2013 ● ALP peace negotiation in Chiang Mai ends with no agreement.
- Jan 13, 2014 ● RNNDP and ALD merged to form the Arakan National Party (ANP).
- April 10, 2014 ● The Arakan Army chief announces the Way of Rakhita (WOR) philosophy.
- Apr 27 – May 1, 2014 ● 'Arakan National Conference' held in Kyaukphyu.
- May 2014 ● ALP reports negotiating with AA about combining forces.
- 2014 ● ULA/AA moves its troops into Arakan and claims over 1,500 troops.

### 2015-2018: ESCALATION

- 2015 ● ALP signs the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA).
- Nov 2015 ● General elections held; ANP won 23 out of 47 state seats.
- Late Mar 2016 ● NLD appoints Chief Minister; ANP lawmakers walk out in protest.
- Jan 16, 2016 ● United League of Arakan (ULA) established as AA's political wing.
- 2016 ● ARSA emerges (approx. starting 2014, growing 2016).
- Late 2016 – Late 2017 ● Security crisis in northern Arakan (Buthidaung, Maungdaw) involving ARSA attacks.
- Early 2017 ● ANP first split with the reformation of ALD.
- Mar 2017 ● ANP internal clashes; ALD faction dismissed.
- May 2017 ● AA issues a warning letter accusing ALP of extortion.
- Aug 2017 ● ANP meets Min Aung Hlaing; AA raids ALP post in Paletwa.
- Oct 2017 ● Final ANP split; ALD re-registers as separate party.
- Nov 27, 2017 ● Dr. Aye Maung resigns from ANP.
- Late 2017 ● Myanmar military conducts "clearance operations"; ICJ genocide case later filed.
- Jan 2018 ● Dr. Aye Maung arrested.
- Mar 2018 ● ALP, ANP, and civil society groups dissolve political dialogue committees.
- Oct 2018 ● Arakan Front Party (AFP) formed by Dr. Aye Maung's followers.
- Late 2018 ● Almost daily clashes in Kyauktaw, Ponnagyun, Rathedaung, Buthidaung.

## Key Political Timelines - Part 2

● Political   
 ● Military   
 ● Peace Negotiation   
 ● Violence   
 ● Elections

### 2019-2020: AA ASCENDANT

- 2019 ● AA claims 681 clashes with the Myanmar military.
- Mar 2019 ● AA attacks police posts in Mrauk-U; ANP forms civilian casualty commission.
- Jun 2019 ● The government imposes an internet shutdown in nine townships.
- July 2019 ● ULA/AA declared the Arakan Dream to which many understand the restoration of lost Arakanese sovereignty.
- Sep 2019 ● AA captures an artillery battery in Myebon Township.
- Dec 2019 ● AA announces "Arakan People's Authority" (APA) in Mrauk-U.
- Mar 23, 2020 ● AA was designated a 'terrorist group' by the NLD government.
- Aug 2020 ● Nearly 200,000 people have been displaced from northern Rakhine since late 2018.
- Nov 2020 ● Informal bilateral ceasefire between Myanmar military and AA, the latter's strength reportedly grows between 10,000 and 15,000.
- 2020, Elections ● ANP wins 15 seats; ALD 0; AFP 3.

### 2021 - COUP AND AFTERMATH

- Feb 1, 2021 ● Military coup against the NLD government.
- Mar 2021 ● Junta removes AA from terrorist list.
- May 2021 ● ANP suspends cooperation with junta.
- Aug 2021 ● U Pe Than resigns from ANP, declares "party politics is dead."
- Sep 29, 2021 ● ANP condemns junta artillery shelling.

### 2022-2023: NEW FACTIONS, NCA COLLAPSE

- Jan 6, 2022 ● ALP announces new 40-member political team.
- Jan 25, 2022 ● ALP expels several senior figures.
- Mar 5, 2023 ● Saw Mra Razar Lin establishes a separate ALP faction.
- Sep 1, 2023 ● ALP Chairman declares the group no longer recognizes the NCA.

### 2024 - OPERATION 1027 AND TERRITORIAL CONTROL

- 2024 ● ANP faces registration denial under junta's 2023 Political Parties Registration Act.
- Late 2023 – Early 2024 ● ULA/AA launches Operation 1027, capturing the majority of townships.

### 2025-2026: NEAR-TOTAL AA CONTROL

- 2025 ● Junta-led elections held (restricted); USDP dominates
- Jan 2026 ● AA presses offensives toward Sittwe and Kyaukphyu.
- Mar 2026 ● RNP suffers a public split over leadership and finances.
- Apr 2026 ● Maj-Gen Tun Myat Naing declares the full liberation of Arakan as a goal.  
(17<sup>th</sup> AA anniversary)
- As of Mid-2026 ● ULA/AA controls >90% of Arakan's territory with >50,000 troops.

## Executive Summary

This report examines the marginalization of once-dominant Rakhine political actors—including the ALP, ANC, ALD, RNDP, ANP, AFP, and RNP—in the shadow of the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA). Using a qualitative methodology based on secondary sources, the study analyzes how these actors lost political relevance while the ULA/AA rose from a marginal force to control over 90 percent of Arakan's territory with more than 50,000 troops by mid-2026. The central framework focuses on how military power and legitimacy reinforced each other: the ULA/AA succeeded by building both, while non-ULA actors experienced fragmentation, collaboration, and strategic failure.

Between 2010 and 2015, electoral politics dominated Arakan, with the RNDP winning 37 of 44 contested seats and the ALP representing armed struggle through its NCA signing. The ULA/AA remained marginal, building forces externally. However, the 2012 communal violence created profound insecurity, and the failure of electoral parties and ceasefire groups to provide protection opened a legitimacy gap. The ANP (formed in 2014) fractured internally by 2017, while the ALP's NCA status appeared as co-optation rather than resistance.

From 2018 to 2020, armed struggle became the key alternative. The ULA/AA escalated operations (681 clashes in 2019), captured major positions, and established the Arakan People's Authority (APA) in December 2019, providing taxation, dispute resolution, and public services. This governance capacity transformed military power into political legitimacy. Meanwhile, the ANP's direct alliance with Myanmar military leadership (August 2017) damaged its credibility, and the ALP was militarily outmatched with its dialogue requests denied.

The February 2021 coup was a critical juncture. As parliamentary politics collapsed, the ULA/AA consolidated governance. From late 2023, Operation 1027 saw AA forces capture most of Arakan's townships. By mid-2026, the ULA/AA controlled over 90 percent of the territory with parallel judicial and administrative systems. Non-ULA actors fragmented further: the ANP was denied registration, the AFP and RNP lost sham elections, and the ALP split into rival factions, one collaborating openly with the junta.

The future for non-ULA actors is irrelevant or extinction. Electoral parties have no parliamentary space; armed groups lack capacity and face ULA/AA's policy that "Arakan needs only one armed force." The ULA/AA must now transition from revolutionary movement to governing entity, addressing economic development and ethnic inclusion. The marginalization of once-dominant Rakhine actors resulted from internal divisions and strategic miscalculations, while the ULA/AA succeeded by building military power and legitimacy in a mutually reinforcing cycle decisive in post-coup Arakan.

## Part-I

### Introduction

#### A. Background Information

Arakan is a land of multi-ethnic and religious groups with Arakanese (Rakhine Buddhists) forming the largest majority with more than 70 percent of the total around 3 million people. Other ethnic groups are Rohingya, Mro, Thet, Khami, Daingnet (Chakama), Maramagyi, Chin, Kaman and Hindus. However, among all these groups, the political movements in the region are mainly led by Rakhine and Rohingya groups, only distantly to be followed by Chin and others. ([see more](#))

Rakhine's political movements normally began after the fall of their kingdom in 1784 CE, and the post-colonial era produced both electoral and armed struggle paths for them. Thus, the ultimate objective of the Rakhine political movement is to restore the lost sovereignty and 'independence' in historical terms despite not all groups explicitly demanding for a 'sovereign and independent state'. For the Rohingya, as the majority of them are immigrants during the British colonial era and concentrated in northern Arakan, their demands for political rights and ethnic recognition mainly [began](#) in the post-colonial period in around 1950s.

Unlike Rakhine, the Rohingya in northern Arakan keenly asked for 'identity recognition' of their 'Rohingya' identity and history compounded with political and territorial autonomy in northern Arakan townships like Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung ([see more](#)). Other smaller minority groups in Arakan also have their respective political struggles, but unlike Rakhine and Rohingya, their demands are also mostly about cultural and ethnic rights not explicitly about territorial-based political autonomy.

Since the independence of Burma, various Rakhine political actors have emerged and most of them have disappeared. The prominent groups include Arakanese National Unity Organisation (ANUO)<sup>1</sup>, Arakan People's Liberation Party (APLP)<sup>2</sup>, Communist Party of Arakan (CPA)<sup>3</sup>, Arakan Independence Organisation (AIO)<sup>4</sup>, National United Front of Arakan (NUFA)<sup>5</sup> and Khaing Raza's Arakan Army (AA)<sup>6</sup>, etc. However, some are still alive in various forms and the

<sup>1</sup> An early political party, established in 1955. It won six seats in the 1956 elections and retained them in 1960, campaigning on a platform of greater political recognition for Arakan.

<sup>2</sup> Formed in 1946 with the objective of forming a separate Arakan state within the Union.

<sup>3</sup> Founded in 1962 with a strong emphasis on Arakanese self-determination and explicitly called for an "independent Marxist-Leninist Arakan.

<sup>4</sup> Formed around 1968 with the objective of national self-determination of Arakan.

<sup>5</sup> Formed in 1988 as a rebel alliance uniting several smaller Arakanese resistance groups.

<sup>6</sup> Established in 1991 with the purpose of national self-determination and its political wing is National United Party of Arakan (NUPA), a coalition of ALP/ALA, AIO/AIA, CPA (faction), and NUFA built in 1994.

Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), Arakan League for Democracy (ALD), Arakan National Council (ANC) which were formed before the establishment of today's United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA). Moreover, when the Myanmar regime launched a new quasi-democratic reform in 2010 under the newly drafted constitution, new electoral parties such as Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP), Arakan National Party (ANP), Arakan Front Party (AFP) emerged. Then, when the Myanmar junta led by Senior General Min Aung reinstated elections in 2024-25 after the military coup in 2021, another new Rakhine party called Rakhine Nationalities Party (RNP) was established.

## **B. Background of the Paper**

The key objective of this paper is to study another side of the Arakan political story: The marginalization of once-dominant Rakhine political actors in the shadow of the ULA/AA. Rakhine political actors here mean Arakan Liberation Party/Arakan Liberation Army (ALP/ALA), Arakan National Council/Arakan Army (ANC/AA) in armed politics, and Arakan League for Democracy (ALD), Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP), Arakan National Party (ANP), Arakan Front Party (AFP) and Rakhine Nationalities Party (RNP).

AA was born on April 10, 2009 and its political wing, ULA, was established on January 16, 2016. Before 2009, ALP, ANC were dominant actors in armed politics while ALD was a key actor of electoral political representation. ALP was formally [formed](#) on April 9, 1967 but shortly after founding, its key leaders Khaing Moe Linn, Khaing Ye Khaing and Khaing Soe Naing were arrested. Then, again, the group was reestablished in 1974 in the Karen National Union (KNU) controlled areas. At that time, when its legendary leader Khaing Moe Lun's long march from Karen to Arakan (via Karenni, Shan, Kachin, Sagaing, and Chin) failed in 1977, the group's activities [ceased](#) to exist. Nevertheless, this revolutionary adventure is still well-known among the patriotic Rakhine population and ALP's popularity despite its failure remained strong in the 1980s. Then, the group was reorganized under Khaing Ray Khaing's leadership in 1981 but its military strength was not increasing enough to challenge the Myanmar military nor establish a strong foothold in Arakan. In records, the group only had 7 clashes in 2008, 9 clashes in 2009 with Myanmar military and as of 2010, the total strength was [reported](#) to be 400 in Triangular border of India, Bangladesh and Myanmar, and 200 in Karen near Thailand border. It was basically a small-scale guerrilla movement.

Another group, ANC, was [founded](#) in 2004 as an umbrella organization consisting of the Arakan Liberation Party, the All Arakan Students Youth Congress (AASYC), the Arakan Women's Welfare Association (AWWA), the National United Party of Arakan (NUPA), the Rakhine Women's Union (RWU) and the Democratic Party of Arakan (DPA) and was chaired by Dr. Khin Maung.<sup>7</sup> Its armed wing, Arakan Army, was reportedly [established](#) in 2010 headquartered

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<sup>7</sup> Later, membership and commitment of these parties in ANC became minimal.

in Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) controlled areas or [KNU Brigade-5 Territory](#). Different sources estimate the strength of ANC/AA front 100 to over 300 troops but one thing is very sure since its founding that it was militarily almost non-existent in Arakan.

Until the prominent emergence of ULA/AA after 2018-2019, electoral politics in Arakan was relatively more active and stronger than its armed counterpart. After 2010, RNDP emerged as the most democratically representative organization via 2010 general elections and ANP formed in 2014 as a merged party of RNDP and ALD, became a more legitimate actor representing the majority will of the local population in Arakan after 2015 general elections (see more in Part-II). At that time, ULA/AA was not just a marginal actor in Arakan politics but also excluded from many nationwide formal platforms such as peace negotiation and Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) process. However, with the ANP experiencing multiple splits, first with the reformation of ALD in early 2017 and second, its chairman, Dr. Aye Maung's resignation in late 2017 and formation of its own Arakan Front Party.

Gradually, all these turning points and circumstances mentioned above in Arakan politics gave a pathway for the rise of ULA/AA not just militarily but also politically. In just a decade, all previously dominant Rakhine political actors in Arakan have been reduced to marginal roles. While the ULA leadership's attempts and achievements tell part of the story, the other side is shaped by the missteps, mistakes, and failures of other actors—including the Myanmar military, the USDP, and the NLD—who also play central roles in Arakan's political landscape. As of mid-2026, the ULA/AA has controlled more than 90 percent of Arakan's territory with its more than 50,000 troops and its own administration and justice system over 2 [million people](#). This report is an effort to study and explain why and how this dynamic military political change took place in Arakan.

### **B.1 Theoretical Analysis**

There is no one single theory which can explain the rise of the ULA/AA as the single dominant actor in Arakan's politics within 10 years. Some international case studies showed the rise of once-smaller, weaker, or marginalized armed actors over the existing actors from the ethnic community or region. These include groups such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in Syria, Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the Philippines, Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) in Ethiopia, etc. However, none of these phenomena can explain the rise of ULA/AA as the dominant force in Arakan politics during the past decade.

On another side, there are some pieces of conceptual framework and theories from political science, social psychology and identity politics which can be applied to understand the rise of ULA/AA in Arakan politics. Framework of 'political voice' by Aidan McGarry said that the Autonomy, Representation, Constitution (ARC) triangle framework can explain how

marginalized groups articulate political agency outside traditional or formal structures.<sup>8</sup> Then, Schneider and Ingram's theory of social construction and policy design (SCPD) also stated that political marginalization is not accidental, it is also built through stories, labels, and policies over time. While Sina Kramer's "Excluded Within" framework argues that political communities are constituted through acts of exclusion and Some actors become "unintelligible" within that imagined framework, critical actor theory proposed by Ng, Yew, and Oliver said that When democracy is weak, who speaks for the marginalized matters enormously, and the best voice often comes from an unusual person or entity.

However, any of these theories can hardly and fully explain the whole phenomenon of ULA/AA's rise and other political actors' fall. Thinking outside of these boxes, the study can apply two 'established' concepts such as legitimacy<sup>9</sup> and military power<sup>10</sup>. The key questions behind this research, therefore, are how the ULA/AA had tried to achieve both legitimacy and military power over other political actors to become the dominant actor in Arakan and vice versa, how non-ULA/AA Rakhine actors and central Myanmar forces like Myanmar military lost these two political assets over time.

## **B.2 Method and Methodology**

This report employs a qualitative research methodology, appropriate for examining the complex, historically embedded process by which once-dominant Rakhine political actors—including the ALP/ALA, ANC/AA, ALD, RNDP, ANP, AFP, and RNP—became marginalized in the shadow of the ULA/AA. Qualitative methodology enables an interpretive analysis of political trajectories, internal factionalism, strategic missteps, and shifting power relations that quantitative methods cannot capture. This approach is well-suited to the report's objective: uncovering the "other side" of Arakan's political story, focusing on failures and contingencies rather than merely the ULA/AA's rise.

Consistent with this methodology, the study relies exclusively on secondary resources. Data is drawn from news sources, articles, research papers, (e.g., International Crisis Group), United Nations documents, Myanmar-focused research institute publications, and verified news archives. The analysis is organized thematically, comparing armed groups and electoral actors to systematically trace how internal fragmentation, state co-optation, and ULA/AA's strategic

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<sup>8</sup> Autonomy: The capacity of marginalized groups to act independently and define their own political identity. Representation: How groups claim to speak for communities when formal representative channels are blocked. Constitution: The process through which political voice creates new political subjects and arenas.

<sup>9</sup> Legitimacy is the belief that a ruler, institution, or political actor has the *right* to rule or exercise power. It's not about force or legality alone, it is about acceptance.

<sup>10</sup> Military power is the ability to use organized armed force—or the credible threat of force—to achieve political objectives, control territory, coerce opponents, or protect a group's interests.

consolidation reconfigured Arakan's political landscape. Limitations include potential gaps in source availability, which are acknowledged in the findings.

### C. Short Profiles of Rakhine Political Actors

#### Electoral Parties:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Arakan League for Democracy (ALD)</b>
Date Founded	September 27, 1989 (Reestablished on April 6, 2012)
Objectives	1) Federal System 2) Ethnic Equality 3) Self-determination
Key Leaders	Dr. Saw Mra Aung, Aye Thar Aung, Thar Ban, Oo Kyaw Myint, Oo Myo Kyaw
Strength	Number of seats won- Out of 25 seats contested in the 1990 general elections, the party won 11. However, ALD achieved none of the seats in the 2020 general elections.
Remark	ALD in the post-1990 elections acted as the key democratic voice for ethnic Rakhine population.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Rakhine National Development Party (RNDP)</b>
Date Founded	May 6, 2010 (Dissolved in January 13, 2014)
Objectives	1) Economic Development 2) Political Autonomy 3) Ethnic Equality
Key Leaders	Dr. Aye Maung, U Hla Saw, Khaing Pray Soe
Strength	Number of seats won- Out of 44 seats contested in the 2010 general elections, the party won 35. These included 7 in the upper house, 9 in the lower house, and 18 in state house.
Remark	RNDP in the post-2010 elections performed as the key voice for ethnic Rakhine population.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Arakan National Party (ANP)</b>
Date Founded	March 6, 2014
Objectives	1) Development of Rakhine State and Rakhine people 2) Equality for all ethnic groups 3) Proliferating democracy 4) Emergence of a genuine federal Union
Key Leaders	Dr. Aye Maung, Oo Hla Saw, Khaing Pray Saw, Pe Than, Thar Tun Hla, Aye Nu Sein

Strength	<p>Number of seats won-</p> <p>In 2015 general elections, the party achieved 44 seats combined in all state, upper and lower houses.</p> <p>In 2020 general elections, the party achieved 15 seats combined in all state, upper and lower houses.</p>
Remark	<p>In both elections the group participated, the party performed as the best party in Arakan region and history. ANP was also the most electoral representative, one acting as the dominant group in Arakan as well as one of the key stakeholders in Myanmar politics amidst compounding crises.</p>

<b>Name</b>	<b>Arakan Front Party (AFP)</b>
Date Founded	October 11, 2018
Objectives	<p>1) Federal Union and Democratic Rights:</p> <p>2) Unify Rakhine Nationals and Ensure Clean Governance</p> <p>3) Border Stability, Security and Regional Development</p>
Key Leaders	Dr. Aye Maung, Kyaw Soe Oo, Soe Win, Tin Maung Win
Strength	<p>Number of seats won-</p> <p>In 2020 general elections, out of 42 seats contested, the group achieved only 3.</p> <p>In the 2025-26 general elections, out of 49 seats contested, the group occupied only 8.</p>
Remark	<p>In the early days after its establishment, AFP was one of the key representative platforms for the Rakhine population. Most of its followers are also those who personally like its leader, Dr. Aye Maung. But, after the military coup in 2021 and its leader's pro-junta stance caused its followers to believe that leader and party are not truly representative to Rakhine interests.</p>

<b>Name</b>	<b>Rakhine Nationalities Party (RNP)</b>
Date Founded	August 4, 2025
Objectives	<p>1) Federal Union and Peacebuilding</p> <p>2) Inter-Ethnic Cooperation and Rehabilitation</p> <p>3) Rule of Law, Democracy and Rights Implementation</p>
Key Leaders	U Ba Shein, U Hla Wai
Strength	<p>Number of seats won-</p> <p>Out of 14 constituencies contested in the 2025-26 general elections, the party won 6.</p>
Remark	<p>RNP is a newer party in Rakhine politics and its U Ba Shein, a native of Kyaukphyu, was a former central executive member of ANP. He founded this party to contest in the 2025-26 general elections as ANP was not allowed by the military regime. Rather than standing firmly, the party also experienced a change of leadership in 2016 due to power struggle and clash of interests among its leaders.</p>

## Armed Parties:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Arakan Liberation Party/Arakan Liberation Army (ALP/ALA)</b>
Date Founded	April 9, 1967 (Reestablished on June 1, 1974, and later in 1981)
Objectives	1) Federalism 2) Ethnic Equality 3) Self-determination
Key Leaders	Khaing Moe Lun, Khaing Pray Thein, Khaing Ray Khaing, Khaing Soe Naing Aung, Soe Mra Raza Linn
Strength	Around 300 troops in 1973-74, 120 in 1977, 300 in 2013, 200 in 2024
Remark	Until recent years, ALP/ALA was a popular force among ethnic Rakhine nationalists. But, its inability to expand and consolidate in Arakan before 2010 was its biggest weakness. After that, since its bi-lateral agreement with the central government, the group failed to proceed with its military build-up, and after 2021 the military became more politically irrelevant.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Arakan National Council/Arakan Army (ANC/AA)</b>
Date Founded	ANC in 2004, AA in 2010
Objectives	1) Self-determination for all ethnic groups in Arakan 2) Protect cultural identity 3) Overthrow authoritarian rule in Myanmar.
Key Leaders	Dr. Khin Maung, Min Zan Wai (Min Tun), Tun Zaw
Strength	Between 100 and 300 troops since its founding
Remark	Though the ANC started with a big promise to be the political front of united Rakhine movement, its leadership and membership are not consolidated enough to provide a common and cohesive platform for diverse interests among the existing groups. Its armed wing, AA based in Karen, also failed to expand its strength beyond its original stage. Thus, ANC/AA has hardly been a popular and credible body for the Rakhine population since its foundation.

## Part-II

### The Arakan Army as A Marginal Actor (2010-2015)

#### A. Arakan Politics Before Arakan Army's Rise

It is correct to say that the politics of Arakan between 2010 and 2015 was mainly dominated by non-ULA/AA Rakhine actors such as ALP/ALA in armed politics, RNDP, ALD and ANP in electoral counterparts. ALP, reestablished in 1981, served as a symbol of the continued Arakanese armed struggle despite its limited achievements compared to other ethnic nationalist movements in Karen, Kachin and Shan. Situated along the triangle border with Bangladesh, India and Myanmar, ALP already had frequent clashes with the Myanmar junta in 2010. With around 400 fighters [headquartered](#) in the upper part of Paletwa, it was also the ALP which conducted swift military attacks on Lat Bar Wa Camp Light Infantry Battalion 55 in Paletwa resulting in the killing of four Myanmar soldiers just [three months](#) before U Thein Sein's inauguration on March 30, 2011 as the president of the country.

At that time, the ULA/AA was still unable to establish a foothold in Arakan, and the current spokesperson of the ULA/AA, Khaing Thukha, then joint-secretary 2 of ALP, [said that](#) they started their plan that year by fighting an army camp on the western Burmese border and their party decided to increase war during that period. It seemed ALP leadership thought that they must show their presence towards not just Naypyidaw but also general Rakhine people in Arakan.

However, in early 2011, ALP turned its political stance into a more moderate ground. The group signed a five-points agreement with the government on April 2012 and these include 1) a cessation of hostilities, 2) permission for the ALP to open liaison offices, 3) not to cross each other's territory with prior negotiation 4) free travel for ALP members across the country, and 5) a commitment to continued peace and development talks. The background of the meeting was quite positive for the ALP leaders. Media [reported](#) that thousands of local residents in Sittwe were hoisting the ALP's flags, holding banners and placards that read with good wishes and support for the ALP and playing the Arakanese traditional drums, received the ALP's peace delegation led by U Khine Soe Naing Aung when they arrived at the town from Rangoon by plane.

However, ALP faced a challenging political turning point in just two months, the outbreak of communal violence between Rakhine and Rohingya communities in many parts of the state. Two waves of communal violence took place in June and October of 2012. The immediate trigger of the first violence was the raping and killing of a Rakhine Buddhist woman in Rambree in May and as a result, mob attacks and counter-attacks resulted in the killing of at least 78 people and, 87 more were injured. Nearly 4,800 homes were also [destroyed](#). In the same month, president U

Thein Sein announced a state of emergency for Rakhine state, and government troops were deployed to quell the unrest. The incidents already had negative impacts on ALP's position and expectation from the recent agreement. In August 2012, the government suspended the planned opening of an ALP liaison office in Kyauktaw due to "instability and strife between Arakanese and Bengali Muslims" (referring to communal riots) in the region.

However, another wave of violence followed in October. Although there are no immediate triggers for this wave, communities were occupied with fear and hatred, and a more organized form of violence and attacks emerged resulting in the killing, injuring and destruction of more people and properties. Sources [reported](#) 89 people killed, 136 injured, and 5,351 homes destroyed, leaving 32,231 people homeless from both communities.

The outbreak of 2012 communal violence will shape the politics of Arakan for years to come. Under this complex situation, one thing is very clear that all communities in Arakan felt insecure and uncertain about their future compounded by the increasing fake news and disinformation campaign on social media platforms. For Rakhine Buddhists, they need protection from the increasing 'Muslim threat' and the Myanmar military is not the primary answer for that. On the other hand, ALP was just in ceasefire with the Myanmar government, and the group was not absorbing the increasing (more radical) political mobilization within the community.

On another front, the electoral Rakhine party, RNDP, dominated Arakan politics within the constitutional framework. Founded on May 6, 2010, RNDP entered the electoral politics in a state of political vacuum left by ALD, a winning party of 1990 elections. The party participated in 2010 general elections and [achieved](#) 37 out of 44 contested seats comprising 7 in upper house, 9 in lower house, and 18 in state house. The party won all parliamentary seats in nine townships: Rathidaung, Sittwe, Ponnagyun, Kyauktaw, Mrauk-U, Pauktaw, Minbya, Myebone, and Kyaukphyu. But, seats in other northernmost and southernmost townships were occupied by the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). Key Leaders of RNDP are Dr. Aye Maung, Oo Hla Saw and Khaing Pray Soe. The party's low-key political objectives are 1) economic development, 2) political autonomy, and 3) ethnic equality.

Party leader's remark before the 2010 elections was also an obvious point that political opening in Myanmar was occupied with uncertainty not just for the nationwide environment but also for Rakhine people. Dr. Aye Maung warned that ethnic parties would likely boycott the results if the USDP used government resources to secure a landslide victory [highlighting](#) a possibility of military-based USDP's bullying and monopolizing all seats in the region. In fact, nine RNDP MPs (Member of Parliament) also experienced election fraud lawsuits by USDP. Reports [said that](#) the USDP have charged the nine Arakanese elected MPs with many allegations, such as rigging ballots, organizing people to support the RNDP candidates with false accusations against

the past military government and USDP, and illegally getting ballots with the cooperation of polling officers during the election. Finally, one out of nine RNDP MPs [was dismissed](#) later.

When Rakhine state's government was formed under chief-minister Hla Maung Tin (a former colonel), RNDP was offered three ministerial positions in 1) fishery, livestock, mining and energy, 2) Industry, Labour, Sports, 3) Culture, Social Welfare and Relief. There were a total of nine ministries at the state level, and the rest critical posts like border affairs, health and education were occupied by USDP members. Besides, RNDP leaders were well aware of the fact that their objectives of political autonomy and economic development cannot be realized under the existing situations. General Secretary, Oo Hla Saw [spelt out](#):

*“The RNDP was given three ministerial posts in state government, ‘but we still don’t know yet how much power and authority we will get. Fulfilling the election promises given to our people depends on this. If central government officials control all power despite the existence of state governments, there will be no difference.”*

When communal violence broke out in June 2012, a new dynamic emerged in the state. RNDP spokesperson Khaing Pyi Soe provided firsthand accounts of the destruction in Sittwe, reporting that hundreds of houses had been [burned](#) and demanding more security forces to protect Rakhine residents. The group also publicly backed President Thein Sein's controversial proposal to resettle Muslims in third-country refugee camps, a plan rejected by the UNHCR. Dr. Aye Maung cited the 1982 Citizenship Law to [argue that](#) those who entered the country illegally should live in camps.

On the negative side, during the July unrest, security forces arrested two RNDP members in Mrauk-U for urging Rakhine rice mill owners [to sell](#) only to Rakhine buyers. They were released after being warned not to incite further riots—marking the third time RNDP members had been detained since the violence began. More importantly, in August 2012, 14 RNDP MPs successfully blocked the reading of a presidential review in parliament. They objected to a section alleging that some Rakhine individuals had incited "extreme racial hatred" and supported violence against "Bengali Muslims." Dr. Aye Maung later [stated](#); *"We can't stand the allegation that says we are violent people."*

The politics of Arakan up to this point was dominated by ALA/ALP and RNDP in which the former had a promising start, but unfulfilled promises and growing mistrust with the government became the key defining characteristics of the time. For RNDP, it was like early cooperation, alignment with the government policy in communal violence and later, growing tension. Meanwhile ANC/AA had very minimal footsteps in Arakan politics and ULA/AA [was just](#) on the path of army-building such as recruitment, training and fund raising while joining in the newly active Kachin war.

## B. Common Crisis to Unity Effort

The outbreak of 2012 communal violence increased insecurity for all communities in Arakan. While Muslims saw that they are largely discriminated against by the actions of ‘Buddhist’ government, Rakhine felt that they need to provide their own security as the ‘Bamar’ ethnic government cannot be relied on when their ethnic community members are in need of help from from what they perceived as a growing ‘Muslim Rohingya’ threat.

That incident also marked another turning point for both Muslim and Rakhine politics. For the Muslim community, the emergence of Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) in approximately starting from 2014 and growing activity in 2016 could be seen as a response to the 2012 violence. For Rakhines, the demand for national unity among diverse political actors was an outstanding voice. There were efforts of unity in both armed and electoral politics. These include merging of RNDP and ALD into Arakan National Party (ANP) on January 13, 2014. During a meeting held in six months ago, RNDP’s chair [stated](#);

*“The ALD is our elder, for they have been fighting for the Rakhine people since 1988, and RNDP has dreamed of uniting the Rakhine people and achieving national unity. Finally, we can now realize our dream.”*

On another front, ALP’s peace negotiation with the government made little progress. A meeting in September 2013 in Chiang Mai ended with no agreement and ALP accused the government of stalling on demands made during previous meetings (business privileges, opening a liaison office, demarcation agreement), [citing](#) the 2012 communal violence as a reason to delay. In May 2014, reports highlighted the group’s interest in patrolling the Bangladeshi border to stop illegal immigration, but said the government had rejected requests to cooperate outside of its "Border Guard Force" arrangements. More importantly, its leaders [stated](#) that ALP was negotiating with the Arakan Army (AA) about potentially combining forces.

Gradually, in 2014, ULA/AA was expanding its reach into Arakan and claimed to have over 1500 troops, the largest number among all existing Rakhine armed groups. During the movement’s 5th Anniversary on 10 April 2014, AA leader General Twan Mrat Naing [delivered](#) his first recorded speech, in which he introduced the ‘Way of Rakhita’ (WOR) philosophy, a doctrine intended to steer the group’s military, political, and diplomatic strategy through the complicated terrain of Myanmar politics. As a culminating event of Rakhine national unity, ‘Arakan National Conference’ [was held](#) in Kyaukphyu from April 27 to May 1, 2014. The organization committee members of the event were ALD Chairman Thar Ban; RNDP’s Central Committee Member Zaw Aye Maung; ALP’s Secretary Khine Thukha; and Arakan Army leader Kyaw Han. A key demand of the conference was [a call](#) to form ‘Arakan National Defense Army’ (ANDA) to protect Rakhine from external threats. While ANP prepared for the upcoming elections in November 2015 in full speed, ALP signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement

(NCA) as one of the eight signatory members. AA, on another front, was rejected and not recognized by the Myanmar government and military to be an equal participant in the ongoing peace process.

Phase 1: Marginal Actor (2010–2015)

Dimension	AA/ULA Status	Non-ULA/AA Actors Status
Military Power	Minimal presence in Arakan; focused on recruitment, training, fundraising; active in Kachin and northern Shan war, not Arakan. Estimated 1,500 troops by 2014 but not yet operational inside Arakan.	ALP: 400–600 troops; active clashes with Myanmar military; signed NCA in 2015. ANC/AA: 100–300 troops but militarily non-existent in Arakan.
Legitimacy	Largely unknown to the Rakhine population; excluded from NCA and formal peace process; not recognized by the Myanmar government.	RNDP/ANP: High electoral legitimacy (37 seats in 2010). ALP: Historical revolutionary legitimacy but compromised by ceasefire.

## Part-III

### Age of Arakan National Party and Emergence of the ULA/AA (2015-2020)

#### A. Unsuccessful Unity Effort and Failure of Electoral Politics

After the 2015 general elections held in November of that year, the general political expectations were quite high in both Arakan and nationwide politics. The turning point was considered the first to produce a civilian-led government after the 1962 military coup in decades. The ANP [achieved](#) electoral victory in local state's elections with 23 out of 47 elected seats and the hope of forming a state government was very high. The National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory at the union level but there was no clear pre-election political understanding between NLD and ANP.

However, tension rose when the NLD claimed that under the 2008 Constitution, the President (from the NLD) had the sole right to appoint Chief Ministers, regardless of state election results and [nominated](#) its own parliamentarian, Nyi Pu, for the post, a decision largely unpopular among the Rakhine population. This move by NLD pushed the ANP-dominated Rakhine parliament into another extreme and in a final show of defiance, about two dozen ANP lawmakers walked out of the state legislature session when Nyi Pu was [appointed](#) in late March 2016. Some lawmakers wore black armbands as a symbol of sadness, and supporters [held](#) large-scale protests in Sittwe and other townships. In fact, ANP had already threatened to be a "strong opposition" to the NLD if its demand was not met and even [announced](#) it would boycott all cross-party collaboration.

However, ANP was far from being a single and collective opposition to the NLD. One of its mergers, ALD, was a more friendly party with NLD since the 1990s and its soft stance on NLD's policy and grievances against the RNDP faction caused the split of ANP. For instance, the NLD individually invited and appointed U Aye Thar Aung, a key leader of ALD to be deputy speaker of the upper house in Naypyidaw and the RNDP faction could see it as an act of betrayal. On another front, he was also not selected as a key leader in ANP's top leadership. Thus, by early 2016, members of the former ALD complained that the RNDP faction held a "superior hand" in internal politics and [was "oppressing"](#) them. In March 2016, six prominent ALD members of the ANP's Central Executive Committee (CEC) publicly objected to the party's direction, warning that the ANP would "collapse" if they were fired.

In turn, the RNDP faction responded decisively. On March 13, 2016, after a meeting that the ALD members were not invited to, the party leadership dismissed all six dissenting CEC members. A leader from the RNDP side stated the faction [had been](#) "completely annihilated". However, the clash was far from over. In April 2016, with the central committee dissolving the Sittwe executive committee for "unsatisfactory performance", six members from Kyauktaw Township [resigned](#) in protest over the dismissal of their preferred local leaders.

One year later, in October 2017, the split became final. Following months of simmering tensions, three sitting ALD factions of ANP lawmakers resigned in quick succession over three days and one of them cited that the "two parties have different paths," [making cooperation](#) impossible. Then, the ultimate consequence of the split came out with the ALD faction officially moving to re-register the party as a separate political party in late 2017.

The unity effort in Rakhine armed politics was already a failure. Despite reaching three official negotiations and an agreement to establish a coordination committee in 2014, with increasing AA's presence in Paletwa and ALP's signatory in NCA in 2015, the negotiations ended in nowhere.<sup>11</sup> In historical records, the United League of Arakan (ULA) was formed on January 16, 2016 as the political wing of AA showing a sign that unity efforts were not reaching nowhere and AA leaders decided to go on their own path. Consequently, news of mutual accusations and confrontations emerged in mid-2016. By June, tensions erupted into a public dispute. AA spokesman Lt-Col Kyaw Han claimed that his forces had detained an ALA soldier who stole military armor, weapons, and other supplies from them in Paletwa Township. The ALP [denied](#) the accusation, with Joint Secretary Khaing Aung Soe Than stating, "How could we rob the Arakan Army? That's funny. Impossible"

Tensions continued to rise, and by May 2017, the AA issued a "warning letter" on its official Facebook page, alleging that 30 ALA soldiers had posed as AA soldiers and extorted money from locals near the Bangladeshi border. The AA also accused ALA troops of pretending to be Myanmar Army soldiers collecting "protection money." The letter [warned](#) that "the AA will respond with appropriate action" Three months later in August, a major attack broke out and nearly 70 AA soldiers raided an ALP front-line post in Paletwa Township, Chin State, near the intersecting borders of Myanmar, Bangladesh, and India. The ALP [confirmed](#) that:

- Two ALA soldiers were killed
- Three were severely wounded
- Two went missing
- The ALP unit had just 20 soldiers and withdrew as AA forces surrounded them

At that time, AA with around 3,000 troops [was already](#) a stronger military than the signatory ALP. While the latter continued to engage in ceasefire negotiation in Naypyidaw, it was the AA who occupied territory on the ground. ALP being a signatory member of NCA enjoyed the political and economic privileges whereas AA being excluded from the peace process resulted in more open and increased armed confrontation with the Myanmar military. From the perspective

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<sup>11</sup> Some sources claimed that the failed combination idea included merging ALA soldiers into AA while ALP remained as the political leadership body.

of the Rakhine population, the one recognized by Naypyidaw authority was less representative of their will.

With increasing tension between ALP and AA, confrontation between the NLD-led government and ANP leadership reached another level. A security crisis in northern Arakan townships of Buthidaung and Maungdaw emerged starting from late 2016 to late 2017 with a new Muslim armed group (then known as Harakah al-Yaqin), ARSA, attacking both security forces and local non-Muslim villagers. Reports [said that](#) 34 civilians were killed and 22 abducted by ARSA between October 2016 and June 2017.

To address this newly increasing crisis, ANP being at odds in many cases needed a new, more powerful ally to influence the region's security policy. They turned to the leader of the Myanmar military, Min Aung Hlaing, bypassing the NLD-led civilian government entirely. In August 2017, frustrated that the NLD was unresponsive to their security concerns, an ANP delegation led by Dr. Aye Maung [met directly](#) with the Commander-in-Chief and explicitly requested military intervention, citing insufficient security forces .

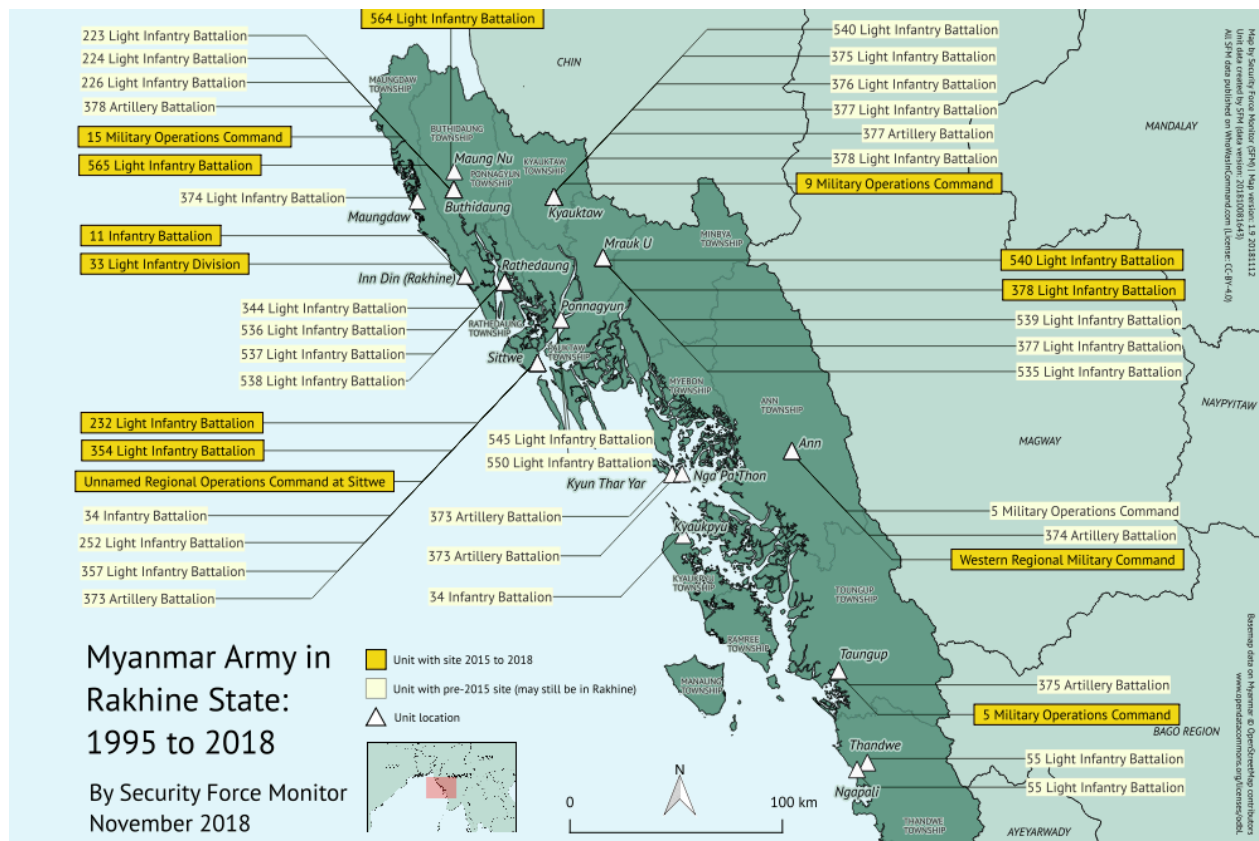
The Military responded immediately in less than 48 hours after the meeting by airlifting a fully equipped army battalion to Sittwe, publicly confirming the deployment [was made](#) "at the request of the ANP". The ANP used this direct channel to push for policies the NLD was hesitant to adopt, specifically requesting the military to "segregate ethnic communities" and designate "No-Bengali zones" in Maungdaw Township.

This alliance was solidified by their mutual opposition to international involvement. The ANP rejected the Kofi Annan-led Rakhine Advisory Commission adopted by NLD, viewing it as pro-Rohingya. Similarly, the NLD's inability to control the military's "clearance operations" in 2017, which the ANP supported, [further cemented](#) the perception that the military, not the civilian government, was the ultimate arbiter of power in the state.

Clearance operations [conducted](#) by the Myanmar military in late 2017 resulted in many civilians killed and injured while many thousands of Rohingya fleeing into Bangladesh. Consequently, Myanmar will be charged by Gambia, a small west African Muslim country, under Genocide convention at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at the Hague. This incident also showed a phenomenon how popular electoral parties were not able to come to a common understanding and how independent and autonomous military without the control of civilian political leadership can make irreversible changes having enormous negative consequences for the country's future path.

The year of 2017 produced several turning points in Arakan politics. The failure of unity efforts among Rakhine political actors, growing tension between NLD and ANP, closer ties between Myanmar military and ANP on border security and instability and insecurity in northern Arakan

along the border with Bangladesh. Among all these changes, few might have been aware of the growing military preparation by AA producing another fundamental change in Arakan's politics.



*Map Showing Positions of Myanmar Military in Arakan (source@securityforcemonitor)*

### Phase 2: Legitimacy Gap Opens (2015–2017)

Dimension	AA/ULA Status	Non-ULA/AA Actors Status
Military Power	Growing presence in Paletwa and northern Arakan; estimated 3,000 troops by 2017; began direct clashes with Myanmar military.	ALP: Declining military relevance; signatory to NCA, which restricted military build-up. ANC/AA: Still marginal.

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Legitimacy	Still excluded from the peace process, the Rakhine population began viewing AA as the only group <i>actively fighting</i> the Myanmar military rather than negotiating with it.	ANP: Severe legitimacy erosion due to: (a) internal splits (ALD faction dismissed in March 2016; final split October 2017); (b) Dr. Aye Maung's resignation (Nov 2017); (c) alliance with Myanmar military (Aug 2017 meeting with Min Aung Hlaing) – seen as collaboration. ALP: Legitimacy damaged by NCA signatory status; viewed as co-opted.
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### **B. Armed Struggle As the Only Alternative**

A series of crises experienced in 2017 of Arakan politics had less geographical and physical impacts on the daily lives of the ordinary people. With the failure of electoral politics to bring real changes in Arakan’s autonomy, the AA’s call for a military path became the key rallying ground for the Arakan political movement. A looming and increasing armed struggle by powerful AA will bring another round of military and political change for at least all townships in northern and central Arakan. With the internal splits and external clashes of Rakhine political actors in 2017, it was also a test for AA’s growing military and political domination in the state.

While the AA built its military capacity and conducted strategic positioning, the group also began to establish its political voice and strategic direction, setting the stage for the larger conflict to come. Being aware of the growing AA’s activities, Myanmar military deployed ten battalions to counter their movements in townships like Paletwa, Kyauktaw and Mrauk-U. ULA’s political stance on ARSA’s attacks in the north was highly nationalistic and hardline while putting the blame onto Myanmar government and military failing to protect Arakan’s boundary and territory.

Then, with the conflict spreading southward from the Chin State border area and into the heart of Rakhine State by late 2018, almost daily clashes were reported in Kyauktaw, Ponnagyun, Rathedaung, and Buthidaung townships. With the use of helicopters and jet fighters by the Myanmar military, the conflict marked a significant intensification of the conflict and by December 2018, the armed clashes [displaced](#) approximately 600 people, a number that would grow exponentially in the following years.

The year 2019 saw the conflict escalate dramatically, with the AA frequently holding the strategic initiative and engaging in some of the most intense fighting [since](#) Myanmar's independence . 2019 was also a year of intense warfare and the AA claimed that its forces [clashed with](#) the Myanmar military 681 times throughout the year—more than twice the number of engagements in 2018 . They also claimed to have killed or injured 3,562 military soldiers .

The group demonstrated its growing conventional capability by overrunning several major military positions. In March, they [attacked](#) a police post in Mrauk-U, killing nine policemen and seizing a dozen weapons . Armed clashes rose in many areas of northern and central townships and the government [imposed internet shutdown](#) in nine conflict-affected townships in June 2019. Just one month later, they raided a tactical military base on Lin Mway Taung Hill near Mrauk-U, reportedly killing at least 30 soldiers, occupying the base, and [confiscating](#) mortars and ammunition. Subsequently, in the same month, at a time of heightened confrontations, ULA/AA leader Twan Mrat Naing [offered](#) the populace an expanded elaboration on the political slogan of the ‘Arakan Dream In September, they [captured](#) an artillery battery from the military's camps in Myebon Township, seizing heavy weapons and ammunition.

While fighting for territory, the AA also focused on winning the "hearts and minds" of the Rakhine people by establishing governance structures where the Myanmar state had a weak presence. In December 2019, the AA announced the formation of a new administrative body called “Arakan People’s Authority’ (APA) to govern areas under its control, based in the historic former Arakanese capital of Mrauk-U . The International Crisis Group (ICG) noted this [was "more important](#) as a demonstration of the group’s de facto authority and territorial control and assertion of its legitimacy" than as a pure revenue-generating exercise . Consequently, the ULA/AA began performing standard state functions, including collecting taxes from local businesses, policing streets, and arresting drug users and criminals. This [created](#) a situation where, according to one resident, "we can almost say that the government’s civil administration no longer exists" in some rural areas. In fact, armed actions by AA became an issue when State Counsellor, Aung San Suu Kyi, delivered her opening statement in defense of Myanmar on December 11, 2019, [describing](#) it as "an organised Buddhist armed group with more than 5,000 fighters" that "seeks autonomy or independence for Rakhine"

By 2020, the AA had expanded its operations southward and consolidated its grip on large portions of the state, even as the military [launched new counter-offensives](#). After expanding from its northern strongholds, the AA began launching attacks in the central areas of Rakhine state by early 2020. Myanmar military conducted a new strategy of introducing unilateral ceasefires in May and August except Arakan. AA [was designated](#) as a ‘terrorist group’ by the NLD government on March 23, 2020.

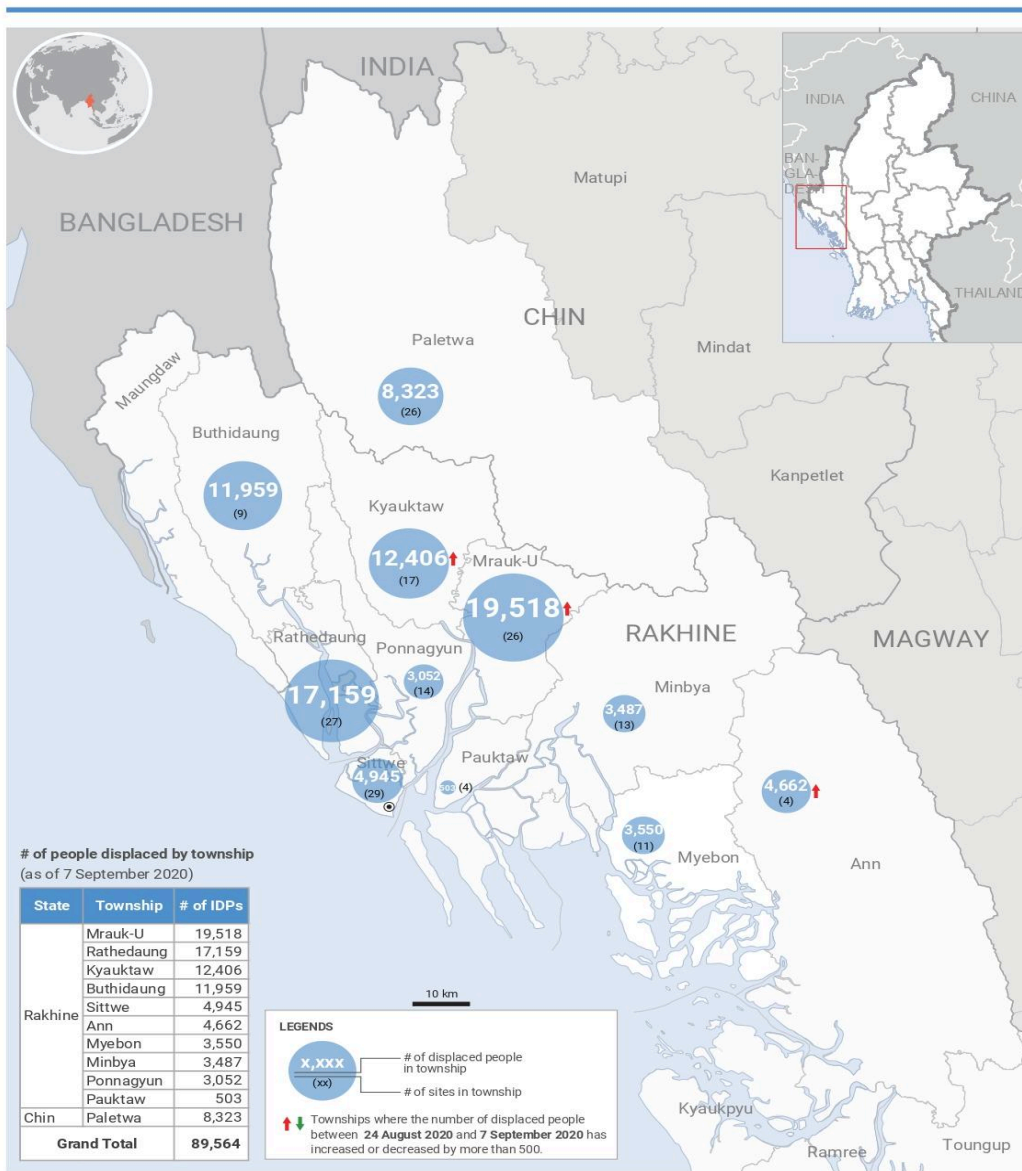
In August 2020, one source claimed that nearly 200,000 people had been displaced from northern Rakhine State and Paletwa Township since the conflict intensified in late 2018. The military's response was to launch new "clearance operations" in Rathedaung Township in June, which displaced tens of thousands of civilians but [failed to dislodge](#) the AA. By the end of the year, the military was blockading roads and waterways in towns like Ann to try and starve the AA of supplies, a tactic that [created severe food shortages](#) for over 12,000 local civilians.

The military reinforced its Western Regional Command with 42 locally based battalions, [supported](#) by mobile battalions from six Light Infantry Divisions. However, analysis suggested the AA was still holding its ground and effectively contesting the rural flatlands of north-central Rakhine. The ongoing fighting severely [hampered](#) COVID-19 containment efforts, leading to widespread criticism from analysts and local politicians. Making the matter worse, the government maintained a strict internet shutdown in nine townships, allowing only limited 2G service, which hindered communication and aid efforts.



## MYANMAR

Myanmar Armed Forces & Arakan Army conflict-generated displacement in Rakhine and Chin States (As of 7 September 2020)



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.  
 Creation date: 7 September 2020 Sources: Rakhine State Government & Humanitarian partners.

### C. Politics As A Show of Multiple Splits and Tensions

With growing armed confrontations between Myanmar military and AA throughout 2018, 2019 and 2020, political words of war continued among other key political actors in Arakan. After the split of ALD from ANP in late 2017, party chair Dr. Aye Maung unilaterally announced his resignation from the party on November 27, 2017 [citing](#) “disunity among the leaders of the party”. This led to the second split of ANP resulting in the formation of another party led by Dr. Aye Maung’s followers, Arakan Front Party (AFP) in [October 2018](#). However, Dr. Aye Maung was arrested in January 2018 for a speech he gave that [was deemed](#) to advocate for armed struggle to restore Arakan sovereignty.

On another side, ANP under a new leadership continued to show its commitment towards Rakhine interests. Amidst facing multiple internal splits and external challenges, ANP leaders initiated assertive political moves. This included launching a parliamentary investigation on the police's use of [lethal force](#) during Mrauk-U’s crackdown in January 2018, [dissolution](#) of political dialogue working committee<sup>12</sup> citing government and military interference in March 2018, openly criticizing the government’s [handling of Rakhine issues](#) especially human rights violations against civilians in July 2018, refusing the Union Election Commission (UEC)’s request to change usage from “Rakhine nationality” to [“ethnic Rakhine”](#) in August, [2018](#). Its political struggles continued and accelerated in 2019 with the formation of a nine-member commission to investigate the [growing number](#) of civilian casualties, property damage, and destruction of heritage sites in townships like Buthidaung and Kyauktaw in March 2019. This [was clearly a shot](#) against the Myanmar military reconfirming its objectives in [October 2019](#). The party experienced mounting challenges in 2020 with the arrest of at least six ANP members in Taungup Township, [charged under](#) the Counter-Terrorism Law for alleged ties to the AA.

Besides, disunity continued among Rakhine political parties despite facing common challenges from government suppression and armed clashes in the region. A prominent incident was the [AFP’s rejection of ALD’s](#) invitation to join a political dialogue organized by the latter to discuss Arakan affairs. Thus, between 2018 and 2020, Arakan politics was a show of internal splits between Rakhine political parties and external tensions with both NLD and Myanmar military.

However, being a front runner for Rakhine people and under relatively organized and stable leadership, ANP’s efforts paid off when 2020 elections were held fully only four southern townships<sup>13</sup> such as Thandwe, Manaung, Gwa, and Rambree and partially in another four such as Ann, Kyaukphyu, Taungup, and Sittwe townships. ANP still achieved the largest share of seats

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<sup>12</sup> This committee included other Rakhine political actors like ALP, and civil society groups.

<sup>13</sup> ANP leaders accused the NLD of using the conflict as an excuse to cancel elections in areas where the ANP was popular and the NLD was weak.

(15 seats) among all [competing parties](#) including NLD<sup>14</sup>. Other two Rakhine parties such as ALD won [no seat](#) whereas AFP secured three.

Another key armed party, ALP, also experienced increased marginalization of its role in Arakan politics. The ALP, alongside the Arakan National Party (ANP) and civil society groups, dissolved their working committee on national-level political dialogue in March 2018. ALP secretary Saw Mra Razar Lin expressed deep disappointment, noting that despite signing the NCA, the government's restrictions were [denying them democracy](#) and a federal system. Besides, Throughout 2019, Myanmar's formal peace process largely stalled, with formal talks only recommencing towards the end of the year. The military's unilateral ceasefire, extended several times during 2019, notably [did not cover](#) the Western Command in Rakhine State, where the ALP also symbolically operated.

In early 2020, when the ALP made a formal request to the government to be allowed to hold a "national-level political dialogue" for the Rakhine people as a part of NCA from 2017, the government [cited regional instability](#) as the reason for denial. Meanwhile, ALP's tension with powerful AA increased. In [July](#) and [August](#) 2020, ALP accused AA of killing three of its members first, and abducting five members separately. The AA, for its part, denied responsibility for the killings, claiming that any detentions were for "misbehavior" such as being drunk and disorderly, not for their ALP [affiliation](#). In fact, not even in an active war, ALP's dignity was largely damaged by both marginalization of government and military due to its less powerful status and suppression by AA in an increasingly dangerous armed environment.

Therefore, although the increasing military confrontations between Myanmar military and AA overshadowed politics among other actors in Arakan between 2018 and 2020, all these internal splits and external tensions paved the way for increasing AA's domination. In other words, AA's war against Myanmar military created a difficult political environment indirectly producing a better political setting in which ULA can take a leading position more effectively. While increasing military tension in the state minimized political space for other actors, it also increased political space for the leading military actors like ULA/AA. The situation reached another level when the Myanmar military agreed to have an informal bilateral ceasefire in November 2020, a sign of de facto recognition of AA's presence in the region. At that time, the total number of AA's troops [was reported](#) to be between 10,000 and 15,000. Three months later, ULA/AA experienced another golden opportunity when Myanmar military leaders staged a coup against the NLD government, a move that will change the country's politics for decades to come.

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<sup>14</sup> The NLD only achieved 8 seats in Rakhine state.

Phase 3: Armed Struggle as the Only Alternative (2018–2020)

Dimension	AA/ULA Status	Non-ULA/AA Actors Status
Military Power	Dramatic escalation: 681 clashes in 2019; captured major military positions (Lin Mway Taung Hill, Myebon artillery battery); expanded southward; estimated between 10,000 and 15,000 troops by late 2020.	ALP: Accused AA of killing three members (July-Aug 2020); militarily outmatched. ANC/AA: Still marginal.
Legitimacy	Gained legitimacy through: (a) December 2019: formation of Arakan People's Authority (APA) in northern Arakan – demonstrated governance capacity; (b) tax collection, policing, dispute resolution – provided services where state absent; (c) nationalist framing – fighting for Arakanese sovereignty, not just ethnic Rakhine interests. External validation: Aung San Suu Kyi described AA in Dec 2019 as an "organised Buddhist armed group" seeking autonomy/independence – tacit recognition of its significance.	ANP: Continued legitimacy loss: (a) multiple arrests of ANP members under Counter-Terrorism Law for alleged AA ties (2020); (b) still seen as ineffective opposition. ALP: Further marginalization: government denied its request for national-level political dialogue (2020), citing "regional instability." AFP/ALD: Minimal popular support.

## Part-IV

### Another Period of Failed Negotiated Politics: Age of the ULA Dominance (2021-2026)

#### A. Myanmar Military's Strategic Missteps and the ULA's Growing Chance

The military coup of 1 February 2021 constituted a critical juncture in Myanmar's protracted crisis, with its impact felt nowhere more starkly than in Arakan. The coup suspended parliament, imposed junta rule under the State Administration Council (SAC), and dramatically contracted the space for civilian negotiation. The post-coup context, along with the Spring Revolution, has also favored armed revolution against the Myanmar military. Its atrocities, including artillery shelling of villages, targeting civilians, further discredited the negotiation. Public sentiment shifted decisively. Young people and civil society organizations increasingly embraced the ULA/AA's broader vision of liberty and Arakanese sovereignty restoration, viewing armed revolution as the only viable path beyond constitutional limits.

[Public sentiment surveys](#) reflected widespread opposition to Rakhine parties participating in junta-led elections, with many deferring to the ULA's stance. Meanwhile, the post-coup political dynamics fundamentally altered the strategic landscape: the NCA process lost much of its appeal, while the de facto legitimacy of armed revolution surged. [The junta-led 2025 elections](#), both nationwide and in Arakan, did not function as mechanisms of political representation but as instruments of authoritarian consolidation under conditions of active conflict. In this context, legitimacy flowed to those providing security and services rather than those petitioning in hollow institutions.

In the years that followed, the ULA movement rapidly consolidated unprecedented territorial, administrative, and symbolic power. This ascent significantly accelerated the decline of once-dominant non-ULA political actors, who were progressively exposed as weaker and politically irrelevant. This marginalization occurred for two primary reasons. First, internal weaknesses among non-ULA actors, and ineffective strategic responses, further undermined their relevance in the new power landscape. Second, the post-coup political dynamics dramatically enhanced the de facto legitimacy of armed resistance, enabling the ULA/AA to position itself as the leading force of Rakhine self-determination within a nationwide revolutionary context. This chapter frames the 2021–2026 period as yet another failed epoch of negotiated politics in Myanmar's ethnic peripheries.

## B. Electoral Parties in Arakan: Between A Rock and A Hard Place

The ANP, despite its strong 2020 electoral performance, quickly unraveled under the pressures of the post-2021 coup environment due to deep internal weaknesses and poor strategic adaptation. Initially, the group attempted pragmatic engagement with the junta, with figures like Daw Aye Nu Sein accepting positions in SAC structures in pursuit of concessions such as key administrative posts, prisoner releases, and the delisting of AA in terrorist groups. This provoked widespread criticism as collaboration, alienating the party's youth base and broader Rakhine public who increasingly saw any alignment with the coup regime as a betrayal of national aspirations.

By May 2021, after most demands went unmet, the [ANP suspended](#) cooperation, but the damage was already done. In August 2021, veteran politician U Pe Than resigned to pursue independent activism, declaring that [“party politics is dead”](#) because proposals under the 2008 Constitution were ignored and the post-coup context offered no parliamentary space. On 29 September 2022, [the ANP issued a statement](#) condemning junta artillery shelling that caused civilian deaths and property destruction, while urging both sides to avoid residential areas and calling for the lifting of travel bans on humanitarian NGOs. [The junta's UEC responded by summoning party officials](#) and warning them against “one-sided claims”. Compounding these issues, the ANP faced registration denial under the junta's stringent [2023 Political Parties Registration Act](#) under Article 7 in 2024.

This fragmentation extended beyond the ANP. The AFP under Dr. Aye Maung and the Rakhine Nationalities Party (RNP) under U Ba Shein (a former CC of ANP) emerged, yet both struggled with limited appeal and internal problems. [The AFP operated](#) exclusively within the shrinking junta-controlled enclaves and participated in the regime's restricted electoral processes, which severely limited its relevance and popular appeal to gain legitimacy. Its engagement with junta structures reinforced public skepticism and failed to translate into meaningful influence. [In the restricted 2025 elections](#) (held primarily in Sittwe, Kyaukphyu, and Manaung), the military-proxy USDP dominated through advance ballots and institutional advantages, while AFP and RNP candidates, including its leaders Dr. Aye Maung and U Ba Shein, suffered defeats. [The RNP, meanwhile, suffered internal splits](#) over financial transparency, decision-making, and leadership by 2026, leading to leadership replacements and competing factions.

In March 2026, Chairman U Ba Shein and Vice-Chairman U Tin Nyo were suspended from executive roles and relegated to ceremonial patron positions. New leadership was installed, but U Ba Shein rejected the decisions and formed a rival faction, resulting in competing claims, parallel announcements, and further confusion over party legitimacy. Meanwhile, [the ALD took a clearer stance](#) of principled rejection by refusing to field candidates or fully engage with the junta's electoral framework. An ALD official stated bluntly: “If we contest the junta's election, we become a pillar for perpetuation of dictatorship.” This position highlighted a growing divide

even among existing Rakhine political parties: some sought limited survival through engagement, while others opted for non-participation, highlighting how the post-coup environment forced individual side-choosing over collective strategy, further diminishing party legitimacy.

### C. Fragmentation or Marginalization: Little Choice for ALP and ANC

The ALP and its armed wing, the Arakan Liberation Army (ALA), exhibited more and more limited military capacity and [weaker political legitimacy](#) in the aftermath of the 2021 military coup. The ALP commands only a small armed force estimated at 60–100 troops, lightly equipped and lacking meaningful military capabilities. Since signing the NCA in 2015, the party has maintained cooperative relations with the Myanmar military, benefiting from logistical support. This alignment with the junta has substantially eroded its legitimacy among the broader Rakhine population, which increasingly views the ALP as being weak and co-opted.

The military and political relevance has been further undermined by persistent internal fragmentation. Its limited forces are nominally active [across three zones](#), the ‘northern’ sector along the Indian border, the ‘central’ area around Sittwe township, and an ‘eastern’ base in KNU-controlled territory near the Thailand border, yet these factions suffer from internal rivalry. On 6 January 2022, [the ALP attempted to revitalize](#) its leadership by announcing a new 40-member political team, with Khaing Ray Khaing as Chairman and Saw Mra Razar Lin as Vice-Chairman. The party initially expressed willingness to cooperate with other Arakan armed groups, including the AA and ANC/AA, while pursuing its goals through multiple channels, including armed struggle. However, serious internal divisions soon emerged. On 25 January 2022, [the ALP expelled several senior figures](#), including Khaing Soe Naing Aung, Khaing Kyaw Hlaing, and Khaing Linn Khaing, on grounds of disciplinary violations and leadership disagreements.

A more significant split occurred on 5 March 2023, when [Saw Mra Razar Lin established a separate faction](#) that pursued engagement with the military junta. The main ALP leadership, through its General Secretary, [rejected](#) the legitimacy of this new faction, accusing Saw Mra Razar Lin of serious misconduct, including allegedly requesting the Myanmar military to arrest ALA members. [In a 2026 interview](#), Saw Mra Razar Lin defended her position and announced the renaming of the armed wing to the “Army for Liberation and Peace of Rakhine (ALPR)” to reflect its shift toward peace after the ceasefire and its unwillingness to initiate armed fighting. Reports have emerged of [ALP members wearing Myanmar military uniforms](#) bearing party emblems and actively collaborating with junta forces in security operations. These activities have reportedly included the arrest and torture of civilians suspected of supporting the ULA/AA in Sittwe, where Saw Mra Razar Lin’s faction is based.

While this faction has aligned itself with the junta, the remaining ALP factions took a different direction. On 1 September 2023, Chairman Khaing Ray Khaing, who leads the ‘northern’ and

‘eastern’ factions, declared that [his group no longer recognized the NCA](#) and expressed willingness to cooperate with other anti-junta forces in Arakan. Despite these contrasting declarations, the ALP remains profoundly divided, with little prospect of meaningful reunification. Such persistent factional fragmentation has further eroded the party’s already fragile legitimacy within the Rakhine community and severely diminished its already limited political space.

Similarly, another once-prominent non-ULA/AA Rakhine armed actor, [the ANC](#), with an estimated 350 fighters operating primarily from bases in Karen State, has maintained a resistance-oriented posture in alliance with the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and PDFs. However, it remains largely marginal within Rakhine due to its exclusion from key coordination mechanisms, negligible territorial presence, and lack of a meaningful popular base inside Arakan. Both the ALP and ANC/AA have pursued ineffective strategic responses ranging from reliance on the now-defunct NCA to limited and inconsistent alliances. These internal weaknesses, including chronic fragmentation, leadership rivalries, limited military capacity, and failure to adapt to the militarized post-coup reality, have severely undermined the relevance of non-ULA/AA armed actors in Arakan.

Furthermore, any successful negotiation or compromise among the Rakhine armed groups has not been observed. Instead, relations between the groups have been marked by mutual accusations, arrests, and deadly confrontations. [The ALP has repeatedly accused the ULA/AA](#) of assassinating its senior leaders, including the killing of Commander-in-Chief Khaing Soe Mya, Lieutenant Colonel Khaing Kyaw Soe, and Captain Khaing Thuri Na happened on January 4, 2023, in Sittwe, as well as a July 1 ambush that killed ALP Vice Chairman Khaing Ni Yaung and Battalion 101 Commander Khaing Kyaw Min, and Comrade Kyaw Kyaw Naing. [The AA has denied](#) all involvement in these incidents, dismissing the allegations as baseless and attributing the violence to the ALP’s internal divisions or local resentment.

This deepening mistrust is rooted in fundamentally opposing visions. [In an August press conference](#), ULA/AA spokesperson Khaing Thukha declared that Arakan needs only one armed force, stating it as official defense policy and noting past unsuccessful attempts to unify other groups under its banner. In response, both the ANC/AA and ALP/ALA rejected this position as an unacceptable and authoritarian stance within the Arakan revolutionary movement. [ANC/AA military chief Major General Min Tun criticized](#) the ULA/AA for insisting solely on dissolution and integration rather than genuine political negotiation. These repeated denial of successful negotiation, combined with escalating armed tensions, have further diminished the legitimacy and strategic relevance of non-ULA/AA actors in Arakan.

Meanwhile, the ULA/AA has steadily increased its military power while gaining significant territorial and political control through the establishment of revolutionary governance structures and expanded territorial control in the post-coup environment. This dynamic has not only

accelerated the marginalization of non-ULA/AA actors but has also reinforced the perception that only those armed organizations possessing credible military power and a coherent strategy gaining legitimacy can meaningfully shape Arakan's political future.

#### **D. From Strategic Patience to Hegemonic Position**

The ULA/AA has transformed from a relatively marginal player into the dominant force in Arakan. This shift has been driven by the co-constitution of military power and legitimacy-building, especially after the 2021 military coup. A key dimension of this hegemony is the ascending power of the ULA/AA as the main political actor, along with the relative marginalized space of non-ULA/AA actors.

Following the November 2020 ceasefire with the Myanmar military and the February 2021 coup, [the ULA leadership capitalized](#) on a period of relative calm in Arakan while violence escalated elsewhere in Myanmar. The junta removed the AA from its terrorist list in March, granting the latter a greater operational space and a veneer of legitimacy. This de-listing, combined with the junta's focus on anti-coup resistance in other parts of Myanmar, allowed the AA to avoid major clashes and systematically expand its governance apparatus. During this window, the ULA/AA established parallel judicial and administrative systems, handling disputes, taxation, and criminal cases and projected a relatively inclusive governance, extending its reach from Bangladeshi and Indian borders to southern Rakhine. This [“fight while building; build while fighting” doctrine](#) enabled the ULA/AA to demonstrate proto-state capacity. Local support grew because residents viewed ULA institutions as more responsive and representative of public interests than junta courts or fragmented alternatives.

In late 2023, the ULA/AA launched a major military offensive that dramatically accelerated its rise to hegemony in Arakan. Coordinated as part of [Operation 1027](#) alongside the Three Brotherhood Alliance (3BTAs), AA rapidly captured junta positions across northern and central Rakhine. In December 2024, it was [reported](#) that AA had captured 15 townships in the Arakan military front leaving only three townships of Sittwe, Kyaukphyu and Manaung. These victories not only expanded territorial control but also allowed the ULA/AA to further institutionalize its governance system, collecting taxes, running courts, and providing public services in liberated areas. Furthermore, this success elevated the AA from a regional actor to a nationwide player, extending operations into Magway, Bago, and Ayeyarwaddy regions. [The surge in congratulatory statements for the AA's founding Anniversary](#) from 2 groups in 2021 to 32 in 2025 signalled broadening acceptance of ULA/AA as a legitimate leading revolutionary actor. This external validation reinforces internal hegemony, making it riskier for smaller local actors to challenge or operate independently without AA's endorsement.

By January 2026, AA continued its pressing [offensives toward Sittwe and Kyaukphyu](#), capturing junta outposts, inflicting heavy casualties, and prompting soldier desertions. Concurrently, the

ULA/AA continued consolidating governance through new regulations on drugs, traffic, health, and security. On the AA's 17th anniversary in April 2026, Maj-Gen Tun Myat Naing declared that his forces would fight ["until the end of the sky and earth"](#) to fully liberate Arakan, rejecting any compromise with the junta. The speech elicited solidarity messages from over 30 revolutionary organizations, further reinforcing the group's hegemonic position in Arakan. These developments illustrate the co-constitutive relationship between military power and legitimacy: battlefield gains created space for deeper administrative control, while successful governance and nationalist framing justified further military expansion.

The marginalization of non-ULA/AA actors emerged as a consequence of this intertwined military and legitimacy construction. While internal splits and fragmentation continued among non-ULA political actors, effective security and service provision, and local representation became key currencies of authority. The ULA/AA's ability to channel resources and direct local administration reduced opportunities for alternative service-provision models. Groups or individuals not aligned with the ULA/AA found their space progressively constricted. As one set of institutions gained traction and popular acceptance, competing claims to legitimacy became less viable, pushing non-aligned actors toward subordination, irrelevance, or operation from shrinking junta-controlled pockets.

Phase 4: Post-Coup Consolidation and Hegemony (2021–2026)

Dimension	AA/ULA Status	Non-ULA/AA Actors Status
Military Power	<p>2021–2023 (Ceasefire period): Removed from terrorist list (March 2021); avoided major clashes; expanded governance systems. Late 2023–2024 (Operation 1027): Captured at least 15 townships; control over Bangladesh and Indian border trade routes; extended operations into Magway, Bago, Ayeyarwaddy. By mid-2026: more than 50,000 troops; controls more than 90% of Arakan's territory.</p>	<p>ALP: Reduced to 60–100 troops; internally fractured (Saw Mra Razar Lin faction aligned with junta; Khaing Ray Khaing faction rejects NCA). ANC/AA: around 350 troops, operating from Karen State, no presence in Arakan proper.</p>
Legitimacy	<p>Governance legitimacy: (a) parallel judicial and administrative systems; (b) drug, traffic, health, and security regulations; (c) tax collection and dispute resolution. Symbolic legitimacy: Congratulatory messages for ULA/AA anniversary grew from 2 groups (2021) to 32 groups (2025) – broadening acceptance as legitimate revolutionary actors. Nationalist legitimacy: 17th anniversary declaration (April 2026) – "fight until the end of the sky and earth" – reinforced uncompromising sovereignty narrative.</p>	<p>ANP: Registration denied under junta's 2023 Political Parties Act (2024). AFP/RNP: Participated in restricted 2025 elections; lost to USDP; seen as junta collaborators. ALD: Principled non-participation but powerless. ALP: Collaboration with junta (members wearing Myanmar military uniforms, arresting AA supporters) – legitimacy destroyed.</p>

## **Part-V**

### **Conclusion**

#### **What Future Holds For These Political Actors**

The trajectory of Arakan's political landscape over the past decade reveals a clear and irreversible shift: the era of fragmented, non-ULA/AA political actors—whether electoral parties or armed groups—has effectively ended. The ULA/AA has not only achieved military dominance but has also constructed a parallel governance system that provides security, justice, and services to over 2 million people across more than 90% of Arakan's territory. For the other Rakhine political actors, the future appears constrained to three possible pathways: irrelevance, subordination, or extinction.

For Electoral Parties (ANP, AFP, RNP, ALD): The future is bleak. The 2021 coup extinguished any meaningful parliamentary space, and the junta's restricted 2025 elections exposed these parties as hollow instruments incapable of delivering autonomy or even basic representation. The ANP has already fractured irretrievably, the AFP operates only in shrinking junta-controlled enclaves, the RNP is consumed by internal leadership battles, and the ALD has chosen principled but powerless non-participation. Unless a genuine federal democracy emerges in Myanmar—a distant prospect—these parties will continue their descent into political irrelevance. Their only remaining utility may be as symbolic historical footnotes or as minor interlocutors in any future internationally brokered dialogue, where they will speak without military leverage.

For Armed Actors (ALP/ALA, ANC/AA): The future is one of subordination or dissolution. The ALP is internally fractured, militarily negligible (60-100 troops), and politically compromised by its alignment with the junta. Its breakaway factions cannot unite, and its cooperation with Myanmar military forces has fatally undermined its legitimacy among the Rakhine population. The ANC/AA, while maintaining an anti-junta posture, lacks any meaningful territorial presence inside Arakan and operates from bases in Karen State. The ULA/AA's declared policy that Arakan needs only one armed force leaves little room for coexistence. For these groups, the choices are stark: accept integration into the ULA/AA's military and political structures under terms dictated by the dominant force, or continue as irrelevant, marginalized actors operating in foreign territories or junta-held pockets. The ALP's attempted rebranding as the ALPR signals a desperate search for relevance, but without popular support or military capacity, it will not succeed.

For the ULA/AA: The future is one of continued consolidation and potential state-building. Having achieved military hegemony and de facto administrative control, the ULA/AA faces two major challenges. First, transitioning from a revolutionary armed movement to a governing entity capable of delivering long-term economic development, public services, and political inclusion for all ethnic groups in Arakan, including Rohingya and other minorities. Second, navigating its relationship with the broader Myanmar revolutionary forces and post-junta political

arrangements. The ULA/AA's 2026 anniversary declaration—to fight "until the end of the sky and earth"—suggests no compromise with the junta. However, the group's ultimate political objective—whether full independence, enhanced autonomy within a federal Myanmar, or a form of revolutionary confederation—remains to be defined. What is certain is that the ULA/AA will be the primary architect of Arakan's political future, and all other actors will operate, if at all, within the parameters it sets.

**Final Assessment:** The marginalization of once-dominant Rakhine political actors was not merely a consequence of ULA/AA's military rise. It was also a product of their own internal fragmentation, strategic missteps, and failure to adapt to a rapidly changing political environment. The ANP's inability to maintain unity, the ALP's compromised ceasefire alignment, and the electoral parties' continued reliance on a defunct constitutional framework all contributed to their decline. In the brutal calculus of civil war, legitimacy flows to those who provide security and govern effectively—not to those who petition powerless institutions or collaborate with an unpopular junta. For the non-ULA/AA actors, the future holds neither revival nor relevance. Their story in Arakan politics has reached its final chapter.