

Mexico's Andrea Meza Crowned Miss Universe 2021

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Andrea Meza beat more than 70 contestants from around the globe in the contest held in Hollywood, Florida.

Washington: Miss Mexico was crowned Miss Universe on Sunday in Florida, after fellow contestant Miss Myanmar used her stage time to draw attention to the bloody military coup in her country.

Sunday night marked the Miss Universe competition's return to television, after the pageant was cancelled in 2020 for the first time due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Andrea Meza, 26, finished first ahead of the Brazilian and Peruvian finalists in a flashy televised event, hosted by American actor Mario Lopez and television personality Olivia Culpo.

Former Miss Universe contestants Cheslie Kryst, Paulina Vega and Demi-Leigh Tebow (who won the title in 2017) served as competition analysts and commentators, and a panel of eight women determined the winner.

Dressed in a sparkling red evening gown, Meza tearfully walked the catwalk as Miss Universe for the first time, before rushing back for a group hug with the other competitors.

Meza beat more than 70 contestants from around the globe in the 69th installment of Miss Universe, which was held at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Hollywood, Florida.

In the days leading up to the final competition, Miss Myanmar Thuzar Wint Lwin, who made the top 21, made waves when she used her time in the spotlight to bring attention to the coup in her country.

"Our people are dying and being shot by the military every day," she said during her biographical video, which showed photos of her taking part in the anti-coup protests. "Therefore I would like to urge everyone to speak out about Myanmar."

She also won the award for best national costume: during that competition segment on Thursday, she wore an outfit beaded in traditional Burmese patterns and held up a sign that said, "Pray for Myanmar."

Myanmar has been in uproar since February 1, when the army ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

At least 796 people have been killed by security forces since then, according to a local monitoring group, while nearly 4,000 people are behind bars.

Miss Singapore Bernadette Belle Ong -- who did not make the top 21 -- also used the national costume portion to make a political statement.

Dressed in a glittering red bodysuit and matching thigh-high boots, she turned around to reveal her cape -- in the colors of the Singaporean flag -- was painted with the words "Stop Asian Hate."

"What is this platform for if I can't use it to send a strong message of resistance against prejudice and violence?" she wrote on Instagram alongside pictures of her outfit.

The United States in particular has seen a surge in anti-Asian violence in the past year, which activists have blamed on former president Donald Trump's rhetoric, especially his repeated description of Covid-19 as the "China virus."

The pageant has also drawn criticism in the past for objectifying the contestants.

In recent years, the competition has shifted image, focusing more on female empowerment and activism.

- AFP

Miss Mexico Andrea Meza crowned Miss Universe 2021 as engineer, 26, wins after Covid cancelled last year's pageant

Miss Mexico has been crowned the winner of Miss Universe 2021

This year's ceremony came after the 2020 pageant was cancelled

Andrea, who is of Chinese-Mexican heritage, continued to pursue modelling alongside her career as a software engineer. In 2020 she was crowned Mexicana Universal. (Source: Miss Universe/Instagram)

Meza, a graduate of the Autonomous University of Chihuahua, defeated 74 other contestants

Andrea Meza, a model and software engineer, wore a dazzling red gown as she accepted the award

Meza won this year's Miss Universe crown

Designer Edgar Lozano said the dress was created to represent Andrea's vision of the universe, how the universe allows everything to shine, just like the dress. (Source: Andrea Meza/Instagram)

Andrea in a picture with her fellow contestants from Aruba and Venezuela. The competition saw over 70 participants this year. (Source: Andrea Meza/Instagram)

During a Q&A round, Meza was asked about beauty standards amid the rise of social media

The swimsuit and evening gowns contest was the first round before contestants moved on to the final segments. Out of 74 participants, only 21 managed to go ahead to the final rounds. (Photo: Andrea Meza/Instagram)

Meza is a software engineer and model

She won this year's Miss Universe after last year's was cancelled

- The Sun, TIE